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THE MASTER DETECTIVE

BY PERCY JAMES BREBNER

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTOPHER QUARLES."

1916

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THE MASTER DETECTIVE

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGE CASE OF SIR GRENVILLE RUSHOLM

Sir Grenville Rusholm, Baronet, was dead. The blinds were down at the Lodge, Queen's Square. For the last few days lengthy obituary notices had appeared in all the papers, innumerable wreaths and crosses had arrived at the house, and letters of sympathy and condolence had poured in upon Lady Rusholm. The dead man had filled a considerable space in the social world, although politically he had counted for little. Politics were not

his metier, he had said. He had consistently refused to stand for parliament, his wealth had supported neither party, and perhaps his social success was due more to his wife's charm than to his own importance.

To-day the funeral was to take place. By his own desire his body was not being taken to Moorlands, the family seat in Gloucestershire, but was to be buried at Woking. The family chapel did not appeal to him. Indeed, he had never spent much of his time at Moorlands, preferring his yacht or the Continent when he was not at Queen's Square.

Last night the coffin had been brought downstairs and placed in the large drawing-room, the scene of many a brilliant function, although by day it was a somewhat dreary apartment. The presence of the coffin there added to the depression, and the scent of the flowers was almost overpowering.

Many of the mourners were going direct to Woking, but there was a large number of guests at the house who were received by the young baronet. Naturally, Sir Arthur was of a sunny disposition, and his personality and expectations had made him a favorite in society since he had left Cambridge a year ago. To-day his face was more than grave. It was drawn as if he were in physical pain, and it was evident how keenly he felt his father's death. Lady Rusholm did not appear until the undertakers entered the house. She came down the wide stairs, a pathetic figure in her deep mourning, heavier than present-day fashion has made customary. She spoke to no one, but went straight to the drawing-room and, standing just inside the doorway, watched the men whose business is with death, as if she feared some indignity might be offered to her dear one. In a few moments her husband must pass out of that room for ever, and it was hardly wonderful if she visualized for an instant the many occasions on which he had been a central figure there.

The bearers stooped to lift the coffin from the trestles on to their shoulders, then they straightened themselves under their burden, but they did not move, at least only to start slightly, while their faces changed from gravity to horror. Lady Rusholm uttered a short cry, and there was consternation in the faces of the guests in the hall. There could be no mistake; the sound, though dull and muffled, was too loud for that. It was a knock from inside the coffin.

The man in charge whispered to the bearers. No, none of them had inadvertently caused the sound. The coffin was replaced on the trestles, and for a moment there was silence. No one moved; every one was waiting for that knock again. It did not come.

The chief man stood looking at the coffin, then at the carpet, and, after some hesitation, he crossed the room to Sir Arthur, who stood in the doorway beside his mother.

"Was--was anything put into the coffin?" he whispered. "Something which Sir Grenville wished buried with him, something which may have slipped?"

"No."

"I think--I think the coffin should be opened," whispered Dr. Coles, the family physician.

"But he is dead! You know he is dead, doctor!"

"A trance--sometimes a mistake may happen, Sir Arthur. It was a distinct knock. The coffin should certainly be opened."

"And quickly--quickly!"

It was Lady Rusholm who spoke, in a strained and unnatural voice.

Sir Arthur tried to persuade his mother to leave the room while this was done, but she would not go. With a great effort she calmed herself and remained with her son, the doctor, and two or three guests while the coffin was unscrewed. The lid was lifted off, and for a moment no one spoke.

"Empty!" the doctor cried.

As he spoke Lady Rusholm swayed backwards, and would have fallen had not her son caught her.

There were two masses of lead in the coffin. There was no body.

Sir Arthur Rusholm immediately communicated with Scotland Yard, and the utter confusion which followed this gruesome discovery had only partially subsided when I, Murray Wigan, entered the house to enquire into a mystery which was certainly amongst the most remarkable I have ever had to investigate.

Some of those invited to the funeral had left the house before I arrived, but the more personal friends were still there, and the story as I have set it down was corroborated by different people with a wealth of detail which seemed to leave nothing unsaid. Besides interviewing Sir Arthur and the doctor, I saw Lady Rusholm for a few moments. She was exceedingly agitated, as was natural, and I only asked her one or two questions of a quite unimportant nature, but I was glad to see her. I like to get into personal touch with the various people connected with my cases as soon as possible.

I was in the house two hours or more, questioning servants, examining doors and windows, and, to be candid, my investigations told me little. When I left Queen's Square I knew I had a complex affair to deal with, and it was natural my thoughts should fly to the one man who might help me. If I could only interest Christopher Quarles in the case!

I remember speaking casually of a well-known person once and being met with the question: Who is he? It may be that some of you have never heard of Christopher Quarles, professor of philosophy, and one of the most astute crime investigators of this or any other time. It has been my privilege to chronicle some of our adventures together, and his help has

been of infinite benefit to me. Without it, not only should I have failed to elucidate some of those mysteries the solving of which have made me a power in the detective force, but I should never have seen his granddaughter, Zena, who is shortly to become my wife.

For some months past the professor had given me no assistance at all. He would not be interested in my cases, and would not enter the empty room in his house in Chelsea where we had had so many discussions. It was a fad of his that he could think more clearly in this room, which had only three chairs and an old writing table in it, yet perhaps I ought not to call it a fad, remembering the results of some of our consultations there.

Months ago we had investigated a curious case in which jewels had been concealed in a wooden leg. The solution had brought us a considerable reward, and upon receiving the money Quarles had declared he would investigate no more crimes. He had kept his word, had locked up the empty room, and although I think I had sorely tempted him to break his vow on more than one occasion, I had never quite succeeded.

As I got into a taxi I considered how very seldom it is that the ruling passion ever dies. The Queen's Square mystery ought to shake Quarles's resolution if anything could.

Zena was out when I got to Chelsea, but the professor seemed pleased to see me.

"Are you out of work, Wigan?" he asked, looking at the clock.

I did not want him to think I had come with any deliberate intention, so I answered casually:

"No. As a fact I am rather busy. I came out to Chelsea to think. Chelsea air is rather good for thinking, you know."

"It used to be," he answered. "I'm glad I have given up criminal hunting, Wigan."

"I still find excitement in it," I answered carelessly, "and really I think criminals have grown cleverer since your time."

He looked at me sharply. I thought the remark would pique his curiosity.

"That means you have had some failures lately."

"On the contrary, I have been remarkably successful."

"Glad to hear it," he returned. "What makes you say criminals are more clever then?"

"The Queen's Square Mystery."

"I don't read the papers as carefully as I did," he remarked.

"It only happened this morning," I answered. "I daresay you noticed that Sir Grenville Rusholm died the other day. Some one has stolen his body, that is all."

"Stolen his--"

"Yes, it is rather a curious case, but we won't talk about it. I know that sort of thing doesn't interest you now."

I talked of other things--anything and everything--but I noted that he was restless and uninterested.

"What did Sir Grenville die of?" he asked suddenly.

"A sudden and most unexpected collapse after influenza."

"And the body has been stolen?"

"Yes."

"I should like to hear about it, Wigan."

I hesitated until he began to get angry, and then I told him the story as I have told it here. I had just finished when Zena came in.

"You, Murray! What has brought you here at this hour of the day?" she asked in astonishment.

"Two pieces of lead," murmured Quarles.

"A case! Have you got interested in a case, dear? I am glad. What is the mystery, Murray?"

"Where is the key of my room, Zena?" Quarles asked.

She took it from the drawer in a cabinet.

"I am not going to begin again," said the professor, "but this--this is an exception. Come with us, Zena. Come and ask some of your absurd questions. I wonder whether my brain is atrophied. There are cleverer criminals than there used to be in my time, are there, Wigan? We shall see."

He led the way to the empty room at the back of the house, muttering to himself the while, and Zena and I smiled at each other behind his back as we followed him. He was like an old dog on the trail again, and I did not believe for a moment this case would be an exception.

"Tell the story, Wigan," he said when we were seated. "All the details, mind, great and small."

So I went through the facts again.

"I made a careful study of the house and garden," I went on. "The Lodge is a corner house, the garden is small, and a garage with an opening into the other road--Connaught Road--has been built there. A 'Napier' car was in the garage."

"Did you see the chauffeur?" asked Quarles.

"Yes. The car had not been used for a week. I could find no trace of an entry having been made from the garden, but the latch of one of the French windows of the drawing-room was unfastened. When I saw it this window could be pushed open from outside. No one seems to have undone it that morning, so the fact is significant."

Quarles nodded.

"Besides the servants only five people slept in the house that night--Lady Rusholm, her son, two elderly ladies--cousins of Sir Grenville's who had come from Yorkshire for the funeral--and a Mr. Thompson, a friend of the family who was staying in the house when Sir Grenville died."

"Who closed the windows after the body was taken to the drawing-room?" asked Quarles.

"One of the undertaker's men."

"Is he positive he fastened them?"

"He is, but under the circumstances he is not anxious to swear to it."

"And the door of the room, had that been kept locked?"

"Yes. The key was in Sir Arthur's possession."

"Who first entered the room this morning?"

"Sir Arthur when he took in two or three wreaths which arrived late last night. The room was just as it had been left on the previous day. The wreaths and crosses were not disarranged in any way."

"And there were only two pieces of lead in the coffin when it was opened?" queried Zena.

"A large lump and a small one," I answered.

"Couldn't they have been packed in such a way that they would not have slipped?"

"Of course they could. No doubt that was the intention, but the work was badly done because the thieves did it hurriedly," I answered.

"One of your foolish questions, Zena," said Quarles, looking keenly at

her. He always declared that her foolish inquiries put him on the right road.

"It is a good thing the lead did slip, or the gruesome theft might never have been discovered," she said.

"Was the coffin a very elaborate one?" Quarles asked, after nodding an acquiescence to Zena's remark.

"No, quite a plain one."

"Has the drawing-room more than one door?"

"Only one into the hall. There is a small room out of the drawing-room--a small drawing-room in fact. Lady Rusholm does her correspondence there. It can only be reached by going through the large room, and the door between the rooms was locked. Sir Arthur got the key from his mother and opened the door for me."

"What could any one want with a dead body?" asked Zena.

"If we could answer that question we should be nearing the end of the affair," said Quarles. "Years ago there were two men--Burke and Hare--who--"

"Oh, the day of resurrectionists is past," I said.

"Don't be so dogmatic," returned Quarles sharply. "A corpse has been stolen; can you suggest any use a corpse can be put to if it is not to serve some anatomical or medical purpose? Remember, Wigan, that mentally and materially there is always a tendency to move in a circle. What has been will be again--altered according to environment--but practically the same. Always start with the assumption that a similar case has happened before. Our difficulties would be much greater if Solomon had been wrong, and there were constantly new things under the sun. Undoubtedly there are some interesting points in this case. Have you arrived at a theory?"

"No, at least only a very vague one. Sir Arthur seems certain that his father had no enemies, and my theory would require an enemy; some one who, having failed to injure him in life, had found an opportunity of wreaking vengeance on the dead clay by preventing the body having Christian burial."

"That is a very interesting idea, Wigan; go on."

"I daresay you remember that the Rusholm baronetcy caused some excitement about twenty years ago. The papers have recalled it in connection with Sir Grenville's death. Sir John Rusholm--the baronet at that time--was a very old man, and during the two years before his death several relations died. He had no son living, so the heir was a nephew, the son of a much younger brother who had gone to Australia and died there. This nephew had not been heard of for a long time, and as soon as he became the heir, Sir John advertised for him in the Australian papers. There was no answer,



and the Yorkshire Rusholms, who are poor, expected to inherit. Then at the very time when Sir John was on his death-bed news came of the nephew. He had been in India for some years, had proposed there, had married and had a son. There had been so many lives between him and the title that he had thought nothing about it until a chance acquaintance had shown him the advertisement in an old Australian paper. He wrote that he was starting for England at once, but Sir John was dead when he arrived. That is how Sir Grenville came into the property."

"Was his claim disputed?" asked Zena.

"Oh, no, there was no question about it. He had family papers which only the nephew could possibly have, and you may depend the Yorkshire Rusholms would have found a flaw in the title if they could. Their disappointment must have been great, and if I could discover that Sir Grenville had an enemy amongst them--some relation he had refused to help, for instance--I should want to know all about him."

"Yours is a very interesting idea," said Quarles. "Do you happen to know who Lady Rusholm was?"

"The daughter of a tea planter in Ceylon. Her social success here has been very great, as you know."

"A very charming woman I should say," said the professor. "I saw her once--not many months ago. She was distributing the prizes at a technical institute in North London. I remember how well she spoke, and what an exceedingly poor second the chairman was in spite of his being a Member of Parliament. You have got a constable at The Lodge, I suppose?"

"Two. I have given instructions that no one is to be allowed in the room, on any pretext whatever."

"Good. You and I will go there to-morrow. I'll be your assistant, Wigan--say an expert in finger prints. I'll meet you outside The Lodge at ten o'clock. There are so many clues in this case, the difficulty is to know which one to follow, I must have a few quiet hours to decide."

I smiled. It was like Quarles to make such a statement, especially after I had declared that criminals were becoming cleverer. Never were clues more conspicuous by their absence, I imagine. I was, however, delighted to have the professor's help. It was like old times.

The next morning I met Quarles in Queen's Square, and his appearance was proof of his enthusiasm. He posed as rather a feeble, inquisitive old man who could talk of nothing but finger prints and their significance. Sir Arthur was evidently not impressed with his ability to solve any mystery. When we entered the drawing-room he seemed lost in admiration of the apartment, and did not even glance at the open coffin which stood on the trestles. He walked to the window, drew aside the blind, and looked into the garden. Then he looked into the small room.

"No other exit here but the window. An entrance might have been made by

that window."

"The door between the two rooms was locked," said Sir Arthur. "I had to get the key from my mother when Mr. Wigan wanted to go in. It is my mother's special room, but she had been so occupied in nursing my father that she had not used it for more than a week."

Then Quarles looked at the wreaths, wanted to know which ones had been left near the coffin when the room was locked for the night, and the wreaths which Sir Arthur pointed out he examined carefully. Then he pointed to a large cross lying on an armchair.

"Has that one been there all the time?"

Sir Arthur explained that two or three wreaths had come late in the evening. He had himself brought them into the room on the morning of the funeral. That cross was one of them.

"Ah, it is a pity you didn't bring them in that night. You might have surprised the villains at work."

"We were in bed by eleven. Do you imagine they began before that?"

"Possibly," said Quarles, as he turned his attention to the coffin. He examined the lid with a lens, for the finger marks, he said, which one might expect to find near the screw holes. Then he studied the sides of the coffin. The two pieces of lead did not appear to interest him very much, but he asked me to push the smaller piece from the foot of the coffin. He examined the lining, felt the padding, tried its thickness with the point of a penknife, and in doing so he slit the lining.

"Sorry," he said. "My old hands are not as steady as they used to be. Quite a thick padding, and quite a substantial coffin."

He had brought out some of the padding with his knife, and this left part of the floor of the coffin near the foot visible. This he tapped with the handle of his penknife to test its thickness.

"Quite an ordinary coffin--plain but good," he went on, looking at the brass fittings.

"It was my father's wish that it should be so," said Sir Arthur.

"Strange what a lot of trouble some men take about their funerals, while others never trouble at all," said the professor, looking round the room again. "I suppose, Sir Arthur, like the rest of us your father had enemies."

"Not that I know of."

"An old rival, for instance, in your mother's affections."

"There was nothing of the kind. Mr. Thompson, who is still in the

house--you saw him yesterday, Mr. Wigan--will endorse this. He knew my mother before her marriage."

"Still, some people must have envied your father. But for him, another branch of the family would have inherited the estates, I understand. Has he always been on friendly terms with this branch of the family?"

"Always, and has helped them considerably."

"Experience teaches us that it is often the most difficult thing to forgive those who do us favors," said Quarles sententiously.

"Do you believe that some one out of wanton cruelty has stolen the body with no purpose beyond mere revenge?"

"It looks like it, Sir Arthur. The body will probably be discovered presently. Possibly the thief will furnish you with a clue so that you may know he or she has taken revenge. I am afraid there is nothing to be done but to wait. I feel greatly for Lady Rusholm."

"The waiting will be dreadful. I am trying to persuade my mother to go away at once."

"Why not? You will remain in London, of course. Your father's papers may throw some light on the mystery."

"I have interviewed lawyers, and I have already gone through some of his private papers. I do not think any light will come that way. Do you want to look at anything else in the house?"

"I think not," I said.

"My specialty is finger prints," said Quarles, "nothing else. In this case my specialty has proved useless." When we left the house Quarles turned toward Connaught Road.

"Is it your real opinion that the only thing to do is to wait?" I asked.

"Let's go and see if we can find any more finger prints," he chuckled.

The garage was shut. Cut into the big gates was a small door.

"Not a difficult lock," said Quarles. "I may have a key that will fit it. We must get in somehow."

"There is a door into the garage from the garden. We could have gone that way."

"And advertised ourselves to the servants. I wanted to avoid that."

He found a key to open the door, and he made no pretense of looking for finger prints now. He examined the car. It was a big one--open--with a cape hood--capable of carrying five or six persons besides the driver.

He was interested in the seating accommodation, and the make of the car generally. There was a window which had a shutter to it high up in the garage looking into the side road, and a small window at the back looking into the garden which had no shutter. Quarles got on a stool to examine the frame of this window, and then inspected the cloths for cleaning and the towels which were in the garage.

"Come on. The interest of this place is soon exhausted," he said.

In less than a quarter of an hour we were walking along Connaught Road again.

"By the way, what is Dr. Coles's address?" asked Quarles.

I gave it to him. It was a turning off Connaught Road.

"I shall go and see him, and then I have a call to make elsewhere. Come to Chelsea to-night, Wigan. Take my word for it, criminals are no cleverer than they used to be."

When I went to Chelsea that evening I found the professor and Zena waiting for me in the empty room. He was evidently impatient to talk.

"My brain may possibly require oiling, Wigan, but Zena's questions are just as absurd as they ever were," he began. "She wanted to know why the lead had been packed so carelessly, and what use a dead body could be to any one. No bad points of departure for an inquiry. Now, when the coffin was opened after the knock had been heard, a little sawdust from the screw holes fell on the carpet. It was there when we went into the room this morning. We may reasonably argue that some sawdust must have fallen when the coffin was opened during the night. But no one seems to have noticed it."

"It might easily have escaped casual notice even if the thieves neglected to remove it, which is unlikely," I returned.

"It would not be so easy to remove, for the carpet is a thick one, and the thieves would be in a hurry, you know. Also there were wreaths about and I could find no trace of sawdust in them. But further, the screw holes show a clear, perfect thread which one would hardly expect if the coffin had been opened and closed again. Small points, but they promote speculation. Yesterday, before I met you in Queen's Square, I went to see the undertakers, and the man who was in charge of the arrangements says emphatically that there was no sign of the coffin having been opened. A little sawdust was the first thing he looked for."

"Are you trying to prove that the lead was already in the coffin when it was taken to the drawing-room?" I asked.

"No. I am only trying to show that it is doubtful whether the coffin was opened in the drawing-room."

"The change could not have been made in the bedroom, or the lead would

have slipped during the journey downstairs," I said.

"I agree, and we are therefore forced to the assumption that the body was actually carried to the drawing-room, yet we are doubtful whether the coffin was opened there."

"I have no doubt," I returned.

"That is a mistake on your part, Wigan. Doubts are often the forerunners of convictions. My doubt led me to a curious discovery. When I went to the undertaker's I saw the men who actually made the coffin. It was a very plain coffin, less expensive than might have been expected for a man in Sir Grenville's position. Now one of the men, in answer to a careful question or two, mentioned a curious fact. In the floor of the coffin, close to the foot of it, there was a wart in the wood. This morning you saw me slit the lining and remove some of the padding. There was no wart in the floor of the coffin, Wigan."

"You mean the coffins were changed?" said Zena.

"I do. One with the body in it was removed, and another with lead in it was placed on the trestles in its stead. The plainer the coffin the easier it would be to duplicate it by description. The makers of the second coffin would not have the original before them to copy, you must remember."

"But only Lady Rusholm and her son could possess the necessary knowledge to give such a duplicate order," I said.

"You forget Mr. Thompson. He was an intimate friend, and staying in the house at the time."

"I do not understand why the lead was not packed securely," said Zena.

"It puzzles me," said Quarles. "I could only find one answer. It was such an obvious blunder that it must have been intentional. The lumps of lead endorsed this idea. Whilst the large piece was flat and difficult to move, the small piece was like a ball and meant to roll and strike the side the moment the coffin was moved. It was presumably necessary that the theft should be discovered, and your ingenious idea of a revengeful enemy appealed to me, Wigan. I elaborated the idea to Sir Arthur, you will remember."

I had nothing to say--no fault to find with his argument so far. Quarles rather enjoyed my silence, I fancy.

"Sir Arthur unconsciously gave me a great deal of information," he went on. "First, it was curious that the wreaths which came that night should be left in the hall. It would have been more natural to place them in the drawing-room. Why were they not put there? It looked as if there were a desire not to open the room again. Another wreath might have come later when it would have been very inconvenient to open the door, and not to have put the other wreath into the room might have caused comment in the

light of after events. Again, influenza is a fairly common complaint, and Sir Grenville died of a sudden and unexpected collapse; yet Sir Arthur said it was by his father's desire that the coffin was plain. A man suffering from influenza does not expect to die, and it seemed strange to me that he should arrange details of his funeral. By itself it is not a very important point, since Sir Grenville's wishes may have been known for a long time, but almost in the same breath, emphasis was laid on the fact that Lady Rusholm had not used the small room out of the drawing-room for more than a week. Why not? There was absolutely no reason why she should not continue to do her correspondence there, since her husband was not seriously ill and could not require constant nursing. I think an excuse was wanted for locking up that room, and I believe you will find that none of the servants have entered the room during this period, and that the blind has been down all the time. I believe the duplicate coffin was hidden there."

"But how was the duplicate coffin got into the house?" asked Zena.

"In much the same way as the real coffin was got out of it, I imagine. You remember the arrangement of the motor, Wigan; its size and swivel seats give ample room to put the coffin on the floor of the car. In the dead of night the coffin was carried across the garden, placed in the car and driven away. On some previous night the same car had driven away and brought back the duplicate coffin."

"The chauffeur said the car had not been out for a week," I said.

"So far as he knew," Quarles returned. "It was cleaned afterwards. There is a shutter to the window in Connaught Road, and over the window looking into the garden one of the towels had been nailed, clumsily, and with large nails which were still on a shelf. I found the towel with the nail holes in it."

"Where was the body taken?" asked Zena.

"That I do not know."

"And what was the use of it to any one?"

"Ah, I think I can answer that," said Quarles. "I had an interesting talk with Dr. Coles after I left you to-day, Wigan. He told me he was not altogether surprised at Sir Grenville's sudden collapse. The attack of influenza was comparatively slight, but when Mr. Thompson arrived unexpectedly from India it was evident to the doctor that he had brought bad news. Both Sir Grenville and his wife were worried. Coles says Sir Grenville was a man of a nervous temperament, who would have been utterly lost without his wife. The doctor believes the sudden worry occasioned the collapse."

"He had no suspicion of suicide, I suppose?"

"As a matter of form I put the question to him. I even suggested the possibility of foul play. He scouted both ideas, and enlarged upon the

affectionate relations which existed between husband and wife. He imagined the trouble had something to do with financial affairs. To-day, you will remember, Wigan, Sir Arthur spoke about his mother going away. That is not quite in keeping with the rest of her actions. We have ample testimony and proof that Lady Rusholm is courageous and resourceful. Dr. Coles is greatly impressed with her character; her personality appealed to me when I heard her speak at the technical institute. She would be present when the undertakers were removing the body, which is not customary. She remained while the coffin was opened, and although she apparently fainted--it was her son who caught her, remember--she saw you soon afterwards. It seems to me two questions naturally ask themselves. What was the ill news Mr. Thompson brought from India? Was Lady Rusholm prepared for that knock from the coffin?"

"We are becoming speculative, indeed," I said.

"Are we? Consider for a moment the amount of evidence we have that the theft of the body could only be contrived with the knowledge and help of Lady Rusholm, her son, or Mr. Thompson; or, which is more likely, by the connivance of all three. Then try to imagine their purpose. What use could they make of a dead body? Why take such trouble that the theft should be discovered?"

"We have not accumulated enough facts to tell us," I answered.

"I think we may indulge in a guess," said Quarles. "Sir Grenville, on his own showing, had not expected to come into the title. Has it occurred to you, Wigan, how exceedingly complete his claim was? Every possible doubt seems to have been considered and arranged for. It was almost too complete. Now, supposing Sir Grenville was not really Sir Grenville Rusholm, supposing he had acquired the family knowledge and papers from the real man--when that man was dying, perhaps--and in due time used them to claim the estates. For about twenty years he has enjoyed the result of his fraud, his intimate friend, Mr. Thompson, being in his confidence, and very likely receiving some of the spoil. Suddenly Mr. Thompson learns that some one else knows the secret, and hurries to England to warn Sir Grenville."

"But why steal the body?" asked Zena.

"On leaving Dr. Coles, Wigan, I went to see Professor Sayle, who, with the exception of the German physician Hauptmann, probably knows more about oriental diseases and medicine than any man living. He proved to me that it is possible by means of a certain vegetable drug to produce apparent death. Fakirs often use it. The ordinary medical man would certainly be deceived. Ultimately actual death would ensue were not the antidote to the drug administered, but the suspension of life will continue for a considerable time."

"It is pure speculation," I said.

"We have got to explain the theft of a dead body. I explain it by saying there was no dead body," said Quarles sharply, as if I were denying a

self-evident fact. "I go still further. Judging by Coles's description of the man calling himself Sir Grenville, I doubt his courage for carrying through either the original fraud or the plan of escape. I believe his wife was the moving spirit throughout, and it is quite possible the drug was administered without her husband's knowledge."

"And where is the body now?" asked Zena.

"I do not know, but you tempt me to guesswork. Sir Grenville was a keen yachtsman, and probably he is on board his yacht still resting in his coffin, waiting for his wife to bring the antidote to the drug. His son and Mr. Thompson took the body that night in the car. There must have been two of them to deal with the burden, for I imagine the yacht had no crew on her at the time. They would hardly take others into their confidence. As everything had to be accomplished between eleven o'clock at night and before dawn the next day, I imagine the yacht was lying somewhere in the Thames estuary. I grant this is guesswork, Wigan."

"I do not see why it was necessary the theft should become known," I said.

"It would occasion delay in the settlement of the estate. It placed difficulties in the way of the rightful heir, it would help to throw a distinct doubt whether, in spite of all the evidence that might be forthcoming, Sir Grenville had committed fraud. There was even a possibility that the son might be left in possession after all. I daresay we shall learn more when we tackle Lady Rusholm and her son to-morrow."

When we went to Queen's Square next morning we found that Lady Rusholm was gone. She had, in fact, already gone when her son told us he was trying to persuade her to go. Mr. Thompson had left later in the day.

We found that even Quarles's guesswork was very near the actual facts, although he had hardly given Lady Rusholm sufficient credit for the working out of the scheme. The real heir, Sir John's nephew, had died in Ceylon before Baxter--that was Sir Grenville's real name--had married. On his death-bed he had entrusted his papers to Baxter to send to England, and Baxter had shown them to his future wife. The scheme came full grown into her head. They left Ceylon to meet again in India, and there they were married, Baxter giving his name as Grenville Rusholm. Thompson was their only confidant. He could not be left out because he had known all about Rusholm. There was one other who knew, but they believed him to be dead. He was a wanderer, somewhat of a ne'er-do-well, and to Thompson's consternation, after twenty years, he had turned up in Calcutta very much alive. He was going to England to expose the fraud. He did not suspect Thompson, who came to England first.

All this we heard from the son who for a short hour or two had called himself Sir Arthur Rusholm. He was able to prove quite conclusively that he was in entire ignorance of the fraud until Thompson's arrival. His mother confessed everything to him then. It was she who had planned how to get out of the difficulty. The duplicate coffin had been made at Harwich, for a yachtsman who was to be taken abroad to be buried, they



had explained, but it was brought to Queen's Square and hidden in the small drawing-room as Quarles had surmised. It was only to spare his mother and father that the son had entered into the scheme, and I fancy Quarles was a little annoyed that he had not suspected this.

Mrs. Baxter was not caught. Indeed, there were many people who disbelieved the whole story of the fraud, even when the man who knew arrived from India--a very strong proof of Mrs. Baxter's charm and personality. I have heard from her son that she is in South America, and that her husband is not dead. So far as I am aware the new baronet has taken no steps to bring them to justice.

As Quarles says, she is a genius, and it would be a thousand pities if she were in prison.

## CHAPTER II

### THE KIDNAPING OF EVA WILKINSON

The Queen's Square affair seemed to have exhausted Quarles's enthusiasm. I tried to interest him in several cases without success, and I began to think we really had done our last work together, when on his own initiative he mentioned Ewart Wilkinson to me. He had a personal interest in the man; I had only just heard his name.

The multi-millionaire is not such a figure in this country as he is in America, but Ewart Wilkinson was undoubtedly on the American scale. He had made his money abroad, how or exactly where remained matters of uncertainty, and if one were inclined to believe the stories told in irresponsible journals, there must have been much in the past which he found it wiser not to talk about. With such tales I have nothing to do. I never met the millionaire, was, in fact, quite uninterested in him until his wealth was concerned in a case which came into my hands.

With Christopher Quarles it was different. For a few days on one occasion he had stayed in the same house with the millionaire in Scotland, and had been impressed with him. Wilkinson was rough, but a diamond under the rough, according to Quarles. He may have had his own ideas of what constituted legitimate business, but whatever his shortcomings, the professor found in him a vein of sentiment which was attractive. He had a passion for his only daughter which appealed to Quarles, partly, no doubt, because it made him think of Zena, and there was a strain of melancholy in him which made him apprehensive that his wealth would not be altogether for his daughter's good. He had talked in this way to Quarles. For all we knew to the contrary, conscience may have been pricking him, but the fact remained that he was prophetic.

Wherever and in whatever way Ewart Wilkinson made his money, he undoubtedly had it. He rented a house in Mayfair, and purchased

Whiteladies in Berkshire. The Elizabethan house, built on to the partial ruins of an old castle, has no doubt attracted many of you when motoring through South Berkshire. Having bought a beautiful home, he looked for a beautiful wife to put in it. Perhaps she was in the nature of a purchase, too, for he married Miss Lavory, the only daughter of Sir Miles Lavory, Bart., who put his pride in his pocket when he consented to an alliance with mere millions. It was said that Miss Lavory was driven into the match, but however this may be, Ewart Wilkinson proved a devoted husband, and his wife had ten years of a happy married life in the midst of luxury. She died when her daughter was eight.

For ten years after her mother's death Eva Wilkinson and her father were hardly ever separated, and then Ewart Wilkinson died suddenly. He left practically the whole of his vast fortune to his daughter; and her uncle, Mrs. Wilkinson's brother Michael, who had recently succeeded his father in the baronetcy, was left her guardian. There was a curious clause in the will. Wilkinson, possibly because one or two cases had happened in America at the time the will was made--half a dozen years before his death--seemed particularly afraid that the heiress might be kidnaped, and her guardian was enjoined to watch over her in this respect especially. Within six months of his death the very thing he feared happened. Eva Wilkinson was at Whiteladies at the time with her companion, Mrs. Reville. After dinner one evening she went alone on to the terrace, and from that moment had entirely disappeared. A telegram was sent that night to Sir Michael, who was in London, Scotland Yard was informed, and the mystery was given me to solve.

I had commenced my inquiries when on going to Chelsea in the evening Quarles told me he had met Ewart Wilkinson about three years before, and under the circumstances he was very interested in the mystery.

"The fact that he was afraid of something happening to his daughter suggests that he had some reason for his fear," I said.

"It does, Wigan--it does! He mentioned this very thing to me three years ago, and I thought then there was some one in his past of whom he was afraid."

"And his past seems to be a closed book," I returned.

"Eva Wilkinson must be between eighteen and nineteen," Zena remarked. "Kidnaping a girl of that age is a different thing from kidnaping a child."

"True!" said Quarles.

"Isn't it more probable that she went away willingly?" said Zena.

"You don't help me, my dear," said the professor with a frown, and the suggestion seemed to irritate him. It stuck in his mind, however, for when we went to see Sir Michael the idea was evidently behind his first question.

"Is there any love affair?" asked Quarles. "Any reason which might possibly induce the girl to go away of her own accord?"

The suggestion seemed to bring a ray of hope into Sir Michael's despair.

"I think she is too sensible a girl to do anything of the kind, but there was a little affair, not very serious on her side, I fancy, and there was probably a desire for money on the man's part. Young Cayley has seen Eva at intervals since they were children, but in her father's lifetime there was no question of love. Directly after Wilkinson's death, however, Edward Cayley came prominently on the scene. I talked to Eva about him, and although she was inclined to be angry, I think it was rather with herself than at my interference."

"Cayley is quite a poor man, I presume?" said Quarles.

"Yes; but that did not influence me. He is not the kind of man I should like my niece to marry. Oh! I have nothing definite against him."

"May I ask whether, as guardian, you have control over your niece's choice?" I asked.

"Until she is twenty-one, after that none at all," he answered. "If she marries without my consent before she is of age, I am empowered to distribute a million of money to certain specified hospitals and charities. She has only to wait until she is twenty-one to do exactly as she likes. It was my brother-in-law's way of ensuring that his daughter should not act with undue haste. Perhaps, for my own sake, I ought to explain that in no way, nor under any circumstances, can I benefit under the will. When my sister married Mr. Wilkinson, he behaved very generously to my father, paying off the mortgages on our estate; in short, delivered us from a very difficult position. Naturally, we never expected any place in the will, but I hear the omission has caused some people to speculate, and now that this has happened there may be people who will speculate about me personally."

"You certainly have a very complete answer," I returned. "What is your own opinion of your niece's disappearance?"

"I think she has been kidnaped, possibly for the sake of ransom, possibly because--" and then he paused for a moment. "You know Mr. Wilkinson was afraid of this very thing?"

"Three years ago he mentioned it to me," said Quarles.

"You knew him, then?"

"I was staying in the same house with him in Scotland; his daughter was not there. Such a fear, Sir Michael, suggests something in the past, something Mr. Wilkinson kept to himself."

"I do not know of anything," was the answer. "Of course, I have seen paragraphs in scandalous journals concerning his wealth, but I knew Ewart

Wilkinson extremely well. He was, and always has been, I am convinced, a perfectly straightforward man."

This conversation took place early on the morning following the night of Eva Wilkinson's disappearance, and afterwards Sir Michael journeyed down with us to Whiteladies. The local police were already scouring the country, and under intelligent supervision had accomplished a great deal of the spade work. I may just state the facts as far as they were known.

Mrs. Reville, who was in the drawing-room when the girl went out on the terrace, had heard nothing. A quarter of an hour or twenty minutes later she went out herself with the intention of telling Eva that she ought to put on a wrap. The girl was nowhere to be seen, and calling brought no answer. Becoming alarmed, Mrs. Reville summoned the servants, and their search proving fruitless, she had a telegram sent to Sir Michael. When I questioned her with regard to Cayley, she was sure there was nothing serious in the affair. He certainly could have had nothing to do with Eva's disappearance, she declared, for he had gone to Paris two days before. Since Sir Michael had spoken to Eva about him he had hardly visited Whiteladies at all.

The servants had searched everywhere--in the house, in the grounds, and in the ruins, and later the police had gone over the same ground, and had searched everywhere on the estate; not a sign of the missing girl had been found. A footman, however, said he had heard a motor-car in the road about the time of the disappearance. He had listened, wondering who was coming to Whiteladies at that hour. The house stood in one corner of the estate, and there was a public road quite close to it, but it was a road little frequented. The marks of a car, which had stopped and turned at a point near the house, were plainly visible, and so far this was the only clue forthcoming. It proved an important one, because a tramp was found by the police who had seen a closed car traveling at a great speed toward the London road. The time, which he was able to fix very definitely, was about a quarter of an hour after Eva Wilkinson had gone on to the terrace.

"Has the tramp been detained?" Quarles asked, and being answered in the negative, said he ought to have been.

The professor examined the marks of the car minutely. There were two cars at Whiteladies, but neither of the tire markings were those of the car which had turned in the road.

It is only natural, I suppose, that when a number of persons are brought in contact with a mystery their behavior should tend to become unnatural. It is one of a detective's chief difficulties to determine between innocent and suspicious actions, the latter being often the result of temperament or of a desire to emphasize innocence. I never found a decision more difficult than in the case of Eva Wilkinson's maid, a girl named Joan Perry; and because I could not decide in her case I was also suspicious of her young man Saunders, a gamekeeper on the estate. Joan Perry, a little later in the day, claimed to have made a remarkable discovery. A coat and skirt and a pair of walking shoes had been removed

from her mistress's wardrobe.

"What made you inspect her wardrobe?" I asked.

The question seemed to confuse her, but she finally said it was because she wondered whether Miss Eva had gone away on purpose. According to Perry the affair with Edward Cayley was a serious one. To some extent her young mistress had confided in her, she declared.

"Then she would hardly have gone away without letting you into the secret," I said.

"That is what I cannot understand," she answered.

Quarles agreed with me that this lent color to the idea that Eva Wilkinson had gone of her own accord.

"It is possible--even probable," he said, "but if she did, I take it she has been deceived and walked into a trap. If we can find that car we shall be on the right road."

When we set out on this quest in one of the motors at Whiteladies we had considerable success. The car had taken the direct road to London. We heard of it at an inn on the outskirts of Beading. It had stopped there, and a man had had his flask filled with brandy. A lady who was with him was not very well, he said. Chance helped us farther. The car had stopped by a roadside cottage. A man had come to the door full of apologies, but seeing a light in the window he ventured to ask if they could oblige him with a box of matches. He was quite a gentleman--young, dark, and very merry--the woman told us. He had led her to suppose that he and a lady were making a runaway match of it, because he had declared that there would certainly be a chase after them, but they had got a good start. The car had been drawn up on the side of the road at a little distance from the cottage, and it was undoubtedly the car we were after. The tire markings were quite distinct in the damp ground. At Hounslow we found the car itself. There had been an accident. Two men had walked into a garage, saying they had left the car on the roadside. Would the garage people have it brought in and repaired? The car should be sent for in a day or two. One man made a payment on account, and gave his name as Julius Hoffman, staying at the Langham Hotel.

The car was of an old type, but the man at the garage said the engines were in good condition. The tires were burst, otherwise there was nothing much the matter with the car beyond its age.

"Was anything found in the car?" I asked.

"An old glove and a handkerchief," and the man took them out of a drawer.

The glove told us nothing, but the handkerchief was a lady's, and had "E. W." embroidered on it.

"This is a police matter," I told the man. "A watch will be kept on the

premises in case the car is claimed, which is very unlikely, I fancy."

Quarles was perplexed.

"I don't understand it, Wigan. That car looks to me as if it had been purposely abandoned. Had they another car waiting, or was Hounslow their destination? Of course you must warn the police here, but--well, I do not understand it. I am going straight back to Chelsea."

"I will see the Hounslow police, and then go on to the Langham," I returned.

"Of course, that's just ordinary detective work, and out of my line," Quarles said somewhat curtly, "but I don't suppose your inquiries will lead anywhere."

In this surmise he was perfectly correct. No one of the name of Julius Hoffman was known at the Langham. The Hounslow police made no discovery, and the car was not claimed.

Later, the press circulated a description of Eva Wilkinson, with the result that scores of letters were received, most of them obviously written by amateur detectives, or by those peculiar kind of imbeciles whose imagination is so vivid that any person seems to fit the description of the person missing. The information in a few of these letters seemed definite enough to follow up, but in every case I drew blank. I gave my chief attention to learning the recent movements of known gangs who might be concerned in an enterprise of this sort, and at the end of two days this persistency brought a result. I received a letter posted in the West-central district, written, or rather scrawled, in printed letters. It was as follows:

"You may be on the right scent or you may not, but take warning. If you got to know anything, it would be the worse for E.W. We are in earnest, and our advice is, leave the job alone. No harm will come to the old devil's daughter, if you mind your own business. She'll turn up again all right. If you don't mind your own business you'll probably find her presently, and can bury her. You'll find her dead,--THE LEAGUE."

With this letter I went to Chelsea, and the professor met me with a letter in his hand. He had received a like communication--word for word the same.

"An exact copy shows a barrenness of ideas," said I.

"But they have begun to move, Wigan. That is a great thing, and what I have been waiting for. Come and talk it over. For once Zena is no help. All she says is that this is not an ordinary case of kidnaping. Well, it certainly is a little out of the ordinary. That car, Wigan, the tramp who saw it, the stoppages it made, the handkerchief in it--does anything strike you?"

"Since we picked up the trail so easily to begin with, I do not quite

understand the subsequent difficulty," I said. "From Hounslow a much more astute person must have taken charge of the enterprise."

"A booby trap, Wigan. It was prepared for us, and we walked into it, I am a trifle sick at having done so, but perhaps it will serve us a good turn in the end. The tramp no doubt was in the business. His definite information to the police started us. If that car had wanted to escape notice, do you suppose it would have pulled up outside Reading, or at a cottage, where it obligingly left its imprint on the roadside? Why should the man explain the filling of a flask at a public house? Why should he talk of a runaway match to the woman at that cottage? He was laying a trail. Miss Wilkinson's handkerchief was found in that car, but I wager she was never in the car herself."

"I think you are right, but it doesn't help us to the truth, does it?"

"Every possibility proved impossible helps us," Quarles answered. "This is a case for negative argument, so we next ask whether Eva Wilkinson left the terrace willingly. I think we must say 'no.'"

"Do not forget the missing coat and skirt," I said.

"That is one of the reasons why I say 'no,'" he returned. "If she had intended to go away she would have arranged to take more than a coat and skirt. Besides, Eva Wilkinson is evidently not a fool. The only person one can imagine her going away with is Cayley, and why should she go away with him? If she married him before she was twenty-one, she forfeited a million of money; well, she knew the penalty. Even if she would not wait until she was of age, there is still no conceivable reason why she should run away. We are forced, therefore, to the assumption that she was kidnaped."

"I have never doubted it," I answered.

"I confess to some uncertainty," said Quarles, "but these letters put a new complexion on the affair, I admit. Some one is out for money, Wigan, and that fact is--"

He stopped short as a servant entered the room saying that I was wanted on the telephone. I had left word that I was going to Chelsea. I was informed that Sir Michael Lavory had telephoned for me to go and see him at once. He said he had received a letter which was of the gravest importance.

"Similar to ours, no doubt," said the professor when I repeated the message to him. "We will go at once, Wigan, but I do not think there is anything to be done until the scoundrels have made a further move. It won't be many hours before they do so."

In the taxi he did not continue his negative arguments, and he was not restless, as he usually was when upon a keen scent. No doubt he had a theory, but I was convinced he was not satisfied with it himself.

Sir Michael, who had a flat in Kensington, was not alone. A young man was with him, and Sir Michael introduced Mr. Edward Cayley.

"He has just arrived--came in ten minutes after I had received this letter."

Cayley's presence there was rather a surprise, but I noted that his appearance did not correspond with the woman's description of the young man who had asked for a box of matches.

"I came as soon as I heard the news about Miss Wilkinson," Cayley said in explanation.

"How did you hear it?" Quarles asked.

"There was a paragraph in *Le Gaulois*. I left Paris at once and came to Sir Michael, thinking it a time when any little disagreement between us would be easily forgotten."

"You can quite understand that I agree with Mr. Cayley," Sir Michael said, "especially in the face of this letter."

"I can guess the contents of it," I said. "We have had letters too."

But I was mistaken. This communication was scrawled in the same printed letters, was signed in the same way, but its purport was entirely different.

"Sir,--Your niece is in our hands, and you may be sure that she is securely hidden. Every move you take on her behalf increases her danger. There is only one means of rescue--ransom. Within forty-eight hours you shall pay to the credit of James Franklin with the Credit Lyonnais, Paris, the sum of a quarter of a million sterling, a small sum when Wilkinson's wealth is considered, and the means he used to amass it. The moment the money is in our hands, and you may be sure we have left open no possibility of your tricking us, your niece shall be set at liberty. Delay or refuse, and your niece dies. In case you should deceive yourself and think this is not genuine, that we are powerless to carry out our threat, your niece herself has endorsed this letter."

Quarles looked at the endorsement.

"Is that Miss Wilkinson's signature?" he asked.

"It is," Sir Michael answered.

"I could swear to it anywhere," said Cayley. "The money is a small matter when Eva has to be considered. We may succeed in tricking the scoundrels later, but the money must be paid."

"If it is, you may depend they will get clear off," said Quarles. "They have made their arrangements cleverly enough for that."



"But you forget--"

"I forget nothing, Mr. Cayley."

"I feel that it must be paid," said Sir Michael. "If you can devise any way of tripping up the villains, do, but Eva's signature--"

"Look at it, Sir Michael," said Quarles. "I do not doubt that it is her signature, but I think it was scribbled on that piece of paper before the letter was written, and certainly a different ink was used."

Sir Michael took the letter and looked at it carefully.

"Yes--yes, I think you are right," he said after a pause. "What do you advise?"

"Delay," said the professor promptly. "They are out for money, for a quarter of a million. They will not hurt Miss Wilkinson while there is any chance of their getting the money."

"How long would you make the delay?" Cayley asked.

"At least until after Mr. Wigan and I have visited Whiteladies again. We propose to go there to-morrow."

"I was going down to-morrow after seeing the solicitors about this money," said Sir Michael.

"That will be excellent," said Quarles. "You will be able to assist us in a little investigation we want to make at Whiteladies. May I suggest that you should arrange preliminaries with the solicitors so as not to waste time, but tell them to await your instructions before taking final steps? There may be nothing in our idea, but there may be a great deal in it."

"You do not wish to tell me what it is?"

"Not until to-morrow evening."

I was watching Cayley. I saw the ghost of a smile on his lips for a moment. He evidently saw through Quarles's reticence, and knew that the professor would not speak before him.

"It will be evening before we reach Whiteladies," Quarles went on, "because there is an important inquiry we must make in London first."

"Very well," said Sir Michael. "I will delay until to-morrow night."

"There can be no harm in that," Cayley said. "We are given forty-eight hours. I should like to do the scoundrels, but I cannot forget that revenge may be as much a motive as money."

"I am not losing sight of that fact," said Quarles, "but I have little doubt it is the money."

As we drove back to Chelsea the professor was silent, but when we were in the empty room he began to talk quickly.

"I am puzzled, Wigan. Before we went out I was saying some one was out for money, and the letter Sir Michael has received proves it. We were engaged upon a negative argument, and I should have gone on to show why it was unlikely Cayley had had anything to do with the affair. I confess that his sudden appearance to-night tends to knock holes in the argument I should have used. He comes from Paris, the money is to be paid to the Credit Lyonnais, Paris. He is keen that the money should be paid, had evidently been persuading Sir Michael that it ought to be paid. This tends to confuse me, and I cannot forget Zena's remark about the girl's age and that this is not an ordinary kidnaping case. If Cayley had met her on the terrace she would naturally stroll away with him if he asked her to do so. At a safe distance from the house he, and a confederate, perhaps, may have secured her."

"But why?" I asked.

"He may want a quarter of a million of money and yet have no desire to marry. It is a theory, but unsatisfactory, I admit. One thing, however, we may take as certain. Eva Wilkinson was not driven away in that car. We have no news of any suspicious car being seen in any other direction, nor of any suspicious people being seen about, and it seems obvious that a false trail was laid for us. Wigan, it is quite possible that the girl never left Whiteladies at all, that she is hidden there now, in fact. Doesn't the disappearance of that coat and skirt tend to corroborate this? She was in evening dress at the time. It would be natural to get her another dress."

"That would mean confederates in the house," I said.

"Exactly. This girl Perry, perhaps, in league with her lover, the gamekeeper; or it may be Mrs. Reville herself. We are going down to Whiteladies to-morrow to try and find out, and we are going circumspectly to work, Wigan. You shall go to the house in the ordinary way, while I stroll across to the ruins. They are a likely hiding place. It will be dark, and I may chance upon some one keeping watch. In a few words you can explain our idea to Sir Michael, and then, without letting the servants know, you can come and find me in the ruins."

It was nearly dark when we arrived at Whiteladies on the following day, and as arranged, I left Quarles before we reached the lodge gates--in fact, helped him over a fence into the park before I went on to the house alone. Near the front door I found Mrs. Reville giving a couple of pug dogs a run. She told me Sir Michael was expecting me, and led the way into the hall.

"I think he is in the library," she said, and opened a door. "Oh, I am sorry, I thought you were alone, Sir Michael. It is Mr. Wigan."

He called out for me to enter. He was standing by a writing table,

talking to a young farmer, apparently a tenant on the estate because Sir Michael was dismissing him with a promise to consider certain repairs to some outbuildings. As the farmer passed me on his way to the door Sir Michael held out his hand.

"You are later than I expected, and I thought Mr. Quarles--"

Then he laughed. I had been seized from behind, a rope was round me, binding my arms to my side, a sudden jerk had me on my back. In that instant Sir Michael was upon me, and I was gagged and trussed almost before I realized what had happened. Never did the veriest tyro walk more innocently into a trap.

"That's well done," said Sir Michael to the farmer. "You had better go and see that the other has been taken as successfully."

Alone with me, he removed the revolver from my hip pocket and placed it in a drawer, which he locked.

"Rather a surprise for you, Mr. Wigan. I am afraid Scotland Yard is likely to lose an officer, and your friend Quarles is an old man who has had a very good inning. I do not know exactly where he is at the present moment, but somewhere about the grounds he has been caught and is in a similar condition to yourself. You have both been very carefully shadowed to-day. The quarter of a million will be paid, Mr. Wigan, and my niece will reappear. She will be none the worse for her adventure--will thank me for all the trouble I have taken to rescue her from the kidnapers her father dreaded so much--and she will never suspect that the bulk of the ransom money has gone into my pocket. It is money sorely needed, I can assure you. I shall probably give my consent to her marriage with Cayley; her marriage will make my guardianship less irksome. He will be as unsuspecting of me as Eva. I prevailed upon him not to come to Whiteladies until to-morrow by suggesting that you were foolish enough to suspect him. I think it has all been rather cleverly managed. The only regrettable thing will be the death of two--two brilliant detectives. It may interest you to know that you will be found dead--shot--which will account for my having waited for you in vain at Whiteladies to-night. You have helped me greatly by being secretive to-day and not arriving here until after dark. Your death will be a nine days' wonder, but it will be a mystery which will not be solved, I fancy."

His cold-blooded manner left no doubt of his sinister intention, and I felt convinced that Quarles had been trapped just as I had been. Sir Michael laughed again as he bent over me to make sure that my bonds were secure. Then he stood erect suddenly.

"Don't move," said a voice, "or I shall fire."

He did move, and a bullet ripped into a picture just behind him. With an oath he stood perfectly still. A door had opened across the room and a girl stood there. It was Joan Perry.

"I missed you on purpose," she said. "I shall not miss a second time. Cut

those ropes."

For a moment he stood still, then he moved again, but not with the intention of setting me free; the next instant he stumbled, as if his leg had suddenly given way, and he let out a savage oath.

"To show you I do not miss," said the girl. "Cut those ropes, or the third bullet finds your heart."

Sir Michael took a knife from his pocket, and the girl came a little closer, but not near enough to give him a chance of grabbing at her. Her calm deliberation was wonderful.

"Do more than cut the ropes and you are a dead man," she said.

The instant my arms were free I had the gag from my mouth and could do something in my own defense. I was quickly on my feet.

"Keep him covered," I said to Perry. "I think we change places, Sir Michael."

Physically he was not a powerful man, and with Joan Perry near him he seemed to have lost his nerve. Her courage had shaken him badly, and he made no resistance. I was not long in having him bound and handcuffed.

"I have to thank you," I said, turning to the girl.

"Not yet. There is more to do. Mrs. Reville is in it, and Mr. Quarles has no doubt been caught in the grounds, as he said. I will ring. The servants are honest, and I expect Mr. Saunders is in the house by now. He usually comes up in the evening."

Fortunately Mrs. Reville had not heard the revolver shots, or she might have given the alarm to the two men who had secured the professor in the ruins, and they would very probably have killed him. I took the lady by strategy. I sent a servant to tell her that Sir Michael wished to speak to her, a summons which she had evidently been expecting, and I secured her as she came down the stairs. Then, leaving her and Sir Michael in charge of Perry and Saunders and a footman, I went with other servants to rescue Quarles. We took the confederates in the ruins by surprise, but in my anxiety that no harm should come to the professor, who was bound just as I had been, they managed to get away.

Now that he was captured, Sir Michael Lavory's pluck entirely deserted him, and he told us where to find his niece. She was in a secret chamber under a tower in the ruins. She had been caught that night at the end of the terrace by Sir Michael's accomplices, had been rendered unconscious by chloroform, and taken to the tower.

Quarles's deductions so far as they went were right, but they had not gone nearly far enough. Neither of us had thought of Sir Michael as the criminal, and had it not been for the maid Perry I have little doubt that this would have been our last case. Perry herself had not suspected Sir

Michael until that day, but she had always been suspicious of Mrs. Reville. That morning, however, when Sir Michael arrived at Whiteladies, she had chanced to overhear a conversation. She heard Sir Michael tell Mrs. Reville there would be visitors that evening, and suggested that she should be near the front door at the time to admit them, as it would be well if they were not seen by the servants. Perry did not understand who the visitors were to be, but she thought such secrecy might be connected with her young mistress, and she had hidden herself earlier in the evening in the small room adjoining the library.

"It is fortunate Saunders taught me how to use a revolver," she said, when Quarles thanked and complimented her.

"A narrow escape, Wigan," the professor said to me. "One of our failures, eh? The fear expressed in the will, the fact that Sir Michael could not benefit by the death of his niece, confused me. He is a very clever scoundrel, making no mistake, making no attempt to implicate any one. His treatment of Cayley on his sudden return from Paris was a masterpiece of diplomacy; so was his handling of us from the first. He concocted no complicated story, so ran no risk of contradicting himself. He was simple and straightforward, and when a villain is that a detective is practically helpless. I was thoroughly deceived, Wigan, I admit it, and it is certain that had it not been for Joan Perry I should not be alive to say so, and you would not be here to listen. Do you know, I should not be surprised if it was the fear expressed in the will which gave Sir Michael the idea of kidnaping his niece and putting the ransom into his own pocket."

At his trial Sir Michael confessed that the will had given him the idea. Personally I think he got far too light a sentence.

As I hear that Cayley and Miss Wilkinson are to be married shortly, I suppose her guardian's consent to her marriage has been obtained; at any rate, it will be a good thing for her to have a husband to protect her from such a guardian. I hear, too, that Saunders and Perry are to be married on the same day as their mistress, and I am quite sure of one thing, two of the handsomest wedding presents Joan Perry receives will come from Christopher Quarles and myself.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DELVERTON AFFAIR

After our experience at Whiteladies Christopher Quarles went into Devonshire. He declared that excitement of that kind was a little too much for a man of his years and he must take a long rest to recuperate and get his nerves in order. Under no circumstances whatever was I to bother him with any problems. Had I been able to do so I should have gone away too. Sir Michael Lavory had succeeded in giving me the jumps. In her

letters Zena told me the professor was playing golf, and knowing something of him as a golfer, I rather pitied the men he induced to play with him. It was not so much that he was a very bad player, it was the peculiar twist in his brain which convinced him that he was a good one. To give him a hint was to raise his anger at once.

One morning I received a letter from him, two pages of golf talk, in which he opined he was playing at about five handicap--pure imagination, of course, because he never kept a card and didn't count his fozzled shots--and then he came to the *\_raison d'Être\_* of his letter.

"I want you to look up a case," he wrote. "It happened about three years ago. A man named Farrell, partner in the firm of Delverton Brothers of Austin Friars, was found dead in his office. An open verdict was returned. It may have been a case of suicide. Get all the facts you can. If you can obtain any information from some who were interested in the tragedy, do. I am not sure that the result of your inquiries will interest me, but it may. Send me along a full report, it may bring me back to Chelsea, but I am so keen to put another fifty yards on to my drive that I may remain here for three months. Why live in Chelsea when there is such a place as Devonshire?"

I remembered that the Delverton case had caused a considerable amount of excitement at the time, and had remained an unsolved mystery, but I knew no more than this. Three years ago I had been away from London engaged on an intricate investigation, with neither time nor inclination to think of anything else.

As it happened there was little difficulty in getting a very full account of the affair. It had been in the hands of Detective Southey, since retired, and it was a persistent grievance with him that this case had beaten him. He was delighted to talk about it when I went to see him in his little riverside cottage at Twickenham.

Delverton Brothers were foreign bankers, and at the time of the tragedy consisted of three partners, John and Martin Delverton, who were brothers, and Thomas Farrell, their nephew. John Delverton was an invalid, and for a year past had only come to the office for an hour once or twice a week. He had died about six months after the tragedy.

One day during a Stock Exchange settlement Thomas Farrell left the office early, and Martin Delverton was there until seven o'clock. When he left the only clerks remaining in the outer office were Kellner, the second in seniority on the staff, and a junior named Small.

These two left the office together ten minutes after Mr. Delverton had gone. Next morning when the housekeeper went to the offices he found Thomas Farrell sitting at the table in his private room, his head fallen on his arms, which were stretched across the table. He had died from the effects of poison, yet the tumbler beside him showed no traces of poison.

Medical evidence proved that he had been dead some hours, but there was nothing to show at what time he had returned to the office.

"In view of the doctor's statement it must have been between ten minutes past seven and midnight," Southey told me. "The poison would produce intense drowsiness, then sleep from which there was no waking. The time of its action would vary in different individuals. I am inclined to think it was late when he returned. He was a well-known figure in Austin Friars and Throgmorton Street, and had he been about earlier in the evening some one would almost certainly have seen him. That part of the world is alive to a late hour during a Stock Exchange settlement. The offices consist of a large outer room, which accommodates seven or eight clerks, and two private rooms opening into one another, but opening into the outer office only from the first room. This first room, which is the larger of the two, the brothers Delverton occupied, Farrell having the smaller inner room. From this there is a side door which gives on to a short passage leading into Austin Friars. The partners used this side door constantly, each of them having a key to the Yale lock, and we know from Mr. Delverton that Farrell went out by the side door that afternoon. Presumably he returned by it. Everything seemed to point to suicide, and possibly had there been a shadow of a motive for Farrell taking his own life, a verdict of suicide would have been returned. Apparently there was no motive. His affairs were in perfect order, he was shortly to be married, and the only person who suggested that he had looked in any way worried recently was the junior clerk, Small."

"What of the woman he was to have married?"

"She was a Miss Lester, and she introduces a complication. Her people were comparatively poor, her father being a clerk in a City bank. Mr. Farrell, according to Miss Lester, had helped her father out of some difficulty, and it was undoubtedly parental persuasion which had arranged the marriage. It was a case of gratitude rather than love. But that is not all. At the Lesters' house there was another constant visitor, a young doctor named Morrison, and he and Farrell became friends in spite of the fact that they were two angles of a triangle, Ruth Lester being the third angle. The position was this: Morrison was in love with the girl, but remained silent because he was too poor to marry; the girl loved him, but, thinking that he was indifferent, consented to marry Farrell. Whether Farrell was aware of this it is impossible to say. Now on the very day of Farrell's death, Dr. Morrison called and asked for him at the offices in Austin Friars. The clerk took in his name, and was told by Mr. Delverton that Mr. Farrell had left for the day. This was the first intimation the clerks had that he had left, and seems an indirect proof that no one in the office could have had anything to do with the tragedy. Farrell had been gone about an hour then. Morrison left no message, merely asked that Mr. Farrell should be told he had called."

"What was Morrison's explanation?" I asked.

"He said Farrell had requested him to call. He was going to give him a tip for a little flutter in the mining market."

"Is it known where Farrell went that afternoon?"

"I see you think the doctor's explanation thin, just as I did. Farrell told his partner that he had an appointment with Miss Lester; Miss Lester says there was no appointment. Naturally I at once speculated whether Farrell and Morrison had met later in the afternoon. I followed that trail every inch of the way. The doctor was poor and somewhat in debt, and--"

"And Farrell, who died by poison, which is significant, was his rival?" I said.

"I thought of all that," Southey returned. "Fortunately for him the doctor could account for every hour of his time. Of course, the man in the street was suspicious of him--is still, perhaps, to some extent, but it hasn't prevented his getting on. He married Ruth Lester, and I hear is getting a good practise together."

"What conclusion did you come to?"

"I am inclined to think there was some international reason at the back of the mystery, some difficulty with a foreign government, it may be. If Farrell had become mixed up in such an affair suicide might be the way out. I suggested this to Mr. Delverton, and he did not scout it as altogether a ridiculous idea. These foreign bankers are sometimes very much behind the scenes in European politics."

"Do you know whether the invalid brother was at the office that day?" I asked.

"He was not. He was quite incapacitated at the time."

I hunted up one or two points which occurred to me, and then went to Austin Friars to call upon Mr. Delverton.

He was out of town, yachting, but his partner came into the clerks' office to see me. I told him that my business with Mr. Delverton was private.

This partner, I discovered, was Kellner, who had formerly been a clerk in the firm. He was the man who, with the junior, had been the last to leave the office on the night of the tragedy. He was worth a little attention, and I spent two days making inquiries about him. He was as smart a man of business as could be found within a mile radius of the Royal Exchange, I was informed, a wonderful linguist, with a profound knowledge of financial matters. Now he was a wealthy man, but three years ago he had been in very low water.

This discovery sent me to Twickenham again. I said nothing about Kellner having become a partner in Delverton Brothers'; I merely asked Southey whether he had satisfactorily accounted for his time on the fatal night.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Southey. "Oh, yes, he had an absolute alibi; so had the youth Small. I made them my first business."



I did not call on Dr. Morrison, but I went to his neighborhood, and asked a few questions. Everybody spoke well of the doctor, which, of course, might mean much or little, and I was fortunate enough to see him with his wife in a motor. He looked like a doctor, a forceful and self-reliant man, not one to lose his head or give himself away. He would be likely to carry through any enterprise he set his mind to. His wife, without being beautiful, was attractive, the kind of woman you begin to call pretty after you have known her a little while.

That night I wrote a full report to Christopher Quarles with my own comments in the margin, and three days later I had a wire from Zena, saying they were returning to Chelsea at once.

There was no need to ask the professor whether the case interested him or not. He began by being complimentary about my report, praised my astuteness in not calling upon the doctor, and he made me give him a verbal description of Morrison and his wife.

"Of course, Wigan, looks count for nothing, but they are often misleading evidence, and we are told to beware of that man of whom every one speaks well. The most saintly individual I ever knew had a strong likeness to a notorious criminal I once saw, and on a slight acquaintance you and I would probably have trusted Cleopatra or Helen of Troy, neither of them very estimable women, I take it. Now apparently this doctor and his wife are near the center of this mystery."

"It seems so, but--"

"Believe me, I am making no accusation," he interrupted; "indeed, I am more inclined to argue that they occupy an eccentric point within the circle rather than the true center. Still, we must not overlook one or two facts which you have duly emphasized in your report. The rivalry between Morrison and Farrell does supply, as you say, a motive for the crime, if crime it was, and it is the only motive that is apparent.

Again, a doctor could obtain and make use of poison with less risk than most men. And, again, it is curious the doctor should call on Farrell on that particular day. The visit might be a subtle move to establish his innocence. True, according to Southey, his time after the visit was accounted for, but how about the time before the visit? Farrell had already left the office an hour, and might have met Morrison."

"Do you suggest he was poisoned then, and came back hours afterwards to die in the office?"

"You think that unlikely?"

"I do."

"Still, we must recollect the action of this particular poison," said Quarles. "It produces drowsiness, the time necessary to get to this condition varying in different persons, and the doctor, knowing Farrell, might be able to gage how long it would take in his case. Of course, we labor under difficulties. Three years having passed, we cannot rely on

direct investigation. Purposely I gave you no bias when I asked you to gather up the known facts, and from your report I judge you have come to the conclusion that Farrell committed suicide, possibly driven into a corner by some international complication."

"Yes, on the whole, I lean to that idea."

"It is not the belief of Mr. Delverton himself."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I met Martin Delverton in Devonshire. He was yachting round the coast and came ashore for golf. We played together several times, and became quite friendly. It was not until he began to talk about it that I remembered there had ever been a Delverton mystery. Practically he gave me the same history of the case as your report does, missing some points certainly, but enlarging considerably on others. That the villain had escaped justice seemed to rankle in his mind, and he was contemptuous of the intelligence of Scotland Yard. The tragedy, he said, had hastened his brother's end, and I judged he had no great love for the Morrisons."

"He knew who you were, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; and included my intelligence in the sneer at Scotland Yard. He argued the point with me until he forced me to admit that there was a large element of luck in most of my successes."

"You admitted that?" I exclaimed.

"I did. I had just beaten him three up and two to play, so was in an angelic frame of mind. Even then he would not let me alone. He wanted to know how I should have gone to work had the case been in my hands. To his evident delight I gave him arguments on the lines of our empty room conferences, making one thing especially clear, that I should have enquired far more closely about the Morrisons than had been done. This interested him immensely, and he did not attempt to hide from me the fact that his suspicions lay in the same direction. He became keen that I should look into the mystery; indeed, he challenged my skill. I am taking up that challenge, and I am going to tell the world the truth about Farrell's death."

"You know it?"

"Not yet, but the key to it is in this report of yours. Do you know what has become of the junior clerk, Small?"

"No. He left the firm to go abroad, I understand."

"I should like to have asked him whether John Delverton, the invalid partner, had seemed worried when he was last at the office."

"He was not at the office that day. I asked that question, and Southey is certain upon the point."

"Farrell might have left early to see him."

"Of course, we might question Kellner," I suggested.

"Kellner has the interests of the firm at heart, and is not personally connected with the affair. I don't suppose he will be pleased to have the old mystery raked up; naturally he will fear damage to the firm. I do not think he would be inclined to help us in any way, and I can imagine his being angry with Delverton for mentioning the affair to me."

"Still, I think there is something that wants explaining about Mr. Kellner," said Zena, "You evidently thought so too, Murray, since you made such minute inquiries about him."

"I do not think there is anything against him," I answered.

"I am not very interested in Kellner's past," said the professor, "and as we cannot get hold of Small we must do a little guessing."

"Is there anything further for me to do?" I asked.

"One thing. I want you to get hold of some stockbroker you know, and get him to tell you whether there was any kind of panic here, or on the Continent, with regard to any foreign securities between three and four years ago. Find out, if you can, the names of any members of the House who were hammered during that period, and the names of any firms considered shaky at the time. I am not hoping for much useful information, but we may learn something to assist our guesswork."

The information I obtained on the following day amounted to little. As my friend in Threadneedle Street said, three years on the Stock Exchange are a lifetime. In the different markets there had been several crises during the period I mentioned, and certain men, chiefly small ones, had gone under. As for shaky firms, it was impossible to speak unless you were closely interested. A good firm, under temporary stress, would probably be bolstered up, and a week or two might find it in affluence again.

I went to Chelsea with the information, such as it was, but only saw Zena. Quarles was out, and I did not see him for nearly a week. Then he 'phoned to me to call for him one evening and to come in evening dress.

"I am dining with Mr. Delverton to-night," he said, "and I asked him if I might bring you. He returned to town at the beginning of the week, and I have seen him two or three times, once at the office in Austin Friars. I did not see Kellner, he happened to be away that day."

Martin Delverton lived in Dorchester Square, rather a pompous house, and he was rather a pompous individual. Of course he wasn't a bit like Quarles in appearance, yet I was struck by a certain characteristic resemblance between them. They both had that annoying way of appearing to mean more than they said, and of watering down their arguments to meet the requirements of your inferior intellect.

I had become accustomed to it in Quarles, but in a stranger I should have resented it had not the professor told me of the peculiarity beforehand, and warned me not to be annoyed.

He gave us an excellent dinner, and our conversation for a time had nothing to do with the mystery.

"Well, Mr. Quarles, have you brought this affair to a head?" Mr. Delverton asked at last.

"I think so."

"Sufficiently to bring the criminal to book?"

"If not, I could hardly claim success, could I?"

"You might claim it," laughed Delverton, "but I should not be satisfied. Possibly I have my own opinion, but I trust nothing I have said has influenced you and led you to a wrong conclusion. I do not want you to get me into trouble by saying that I suggested who the criminal was."

"Not if I could prove that the solution was correct?"

"That might be a different matter, of course."

"It would prove your astuteness, Mr. Delverton," said Quarles. "Mine would be only the spade work which any one can do when he has been told how. Perhaps you will let me explain in my own way, and I will go over the old ground as little as possible, since we three are aware of the main facts and the investigations which originally took place. First, then, the manner of Mr. Farrell's death. Now, since he was found in his own private office, sitting at his own desk, with a tumbler beside him, it is evident that if he did not commit suicide it was intended that it should appear as if he had done so. To believe it a case of suicide is the simplest solution. He could enter the office by the side door at his will, he could poison himself there at his leisure, and it would never occur to him to imagine that any one would afterwards suspect he had met his death in any other way. The one thing missing is the motive. The only person even to suggest that Farrell had looked worried was the junior clerk, Small, and his uncorroborated opinion does not count for much. Besides, his affairs were in order, and he was about to be married. You must stop me, Mr. Delverton, if I make any incorrect statements."

"Certainly. So far you have merely repeated what every one knows."

"Except in one minor particular," said Quarles. "I lay special emphasis on the desire of some one to show that it was a case of suicide. If we deny suicide this becomes an important point, for we have to enquire when and how the poison was administered. Did Farrell at some time before midnight bring some one back to the office with him? For what purpose was he brought there? How was the poison administered? We have evidence that it was not drunk out of the glass on the table, no trace of poison being

found, and we can hardly suppose that Farrell would swallow a tablet at any one's bidding. Since there was an evident desire to make it appear a case of suicide, we should expect to find traces of poison in the glass; it would have made it appear so much more like suicide. But we are denying that it was suicide, so we are forced to the conclusion that some one was present with Farrell in the office, and also that the somebody ought to have allowed traces of the poison to remain in the glass. That innocent tumbler is a fact we must not lose sight of. You see, Mr. Delverton, I am not working along quite the same line as the original investigation took."

"No; and I am very interested. Still, I think a man might take a tablet were it offered by one he looked upon as a friend. It might be for headache."

"Did Mr. Farrell suffer from headaches?" Quarles inquired.

"Not that I am aware of. I am only putting a supposititious case."

"Ah, but we are bound to stick to what we know, or we shall find ourselves in difficulties," the professor returned. "Now, I understand that when you left the office that evening only two of the clerks were there, and they left the office together about ten minutes afterwards. The junior clerk we may dismiss from our minds, but Kellner merits some attention. It appears that his subsequent movements that evening are accounted for; still, it is a fact that he directly profited by Mr. Farrell's death. Shortly afterwards he became a partner in the firm."

"He had no reason at the time to suppose he would be a partner," said Delverton.

"And would not have become one but for Farrell's death, I take it?"

"He might. It is really impossible to say. Left alone, I took in Kellner because he was the most competent man I knew. I may add that I have not regretted it."

"Had the detective who had the case in hand known that Kellner was to become a partner, he would undoubtedly have given him more attention," said Quarles. "He does not seem to have discovered that Kellner was in financial straits at the time."

"Was he?" said Delverton.

"I have found that it was so," I answered.

"I am surprised to hear it; but, after all, a clerk's financial difficulties--" And he laughed as a man will who always thinks in thousands.

"We come to another person who profited by Farrell's death, Dr. Morrison," said Quarles. "He married Miss Lester not long afterwards. It is known that he was friendly, or apparently friendly, with his

rival, for such Farrell was, although he may not have been aware of the fact; and, curiously enough, Morrison called at the office in Austin Friars on the fatal day, and wanted to see Farrell an hour or so after he had left."

"Yes; I thought it was curious at the time."

"He was able to account for his subsequent doings that day," Quarles went on; "so it seems impossible that he could have been the person Farrell brought back to the office that night. I think we must say positively he was not. At the same time we must not overlook the fact that in his case there was a motive for the crime. Forgetting for a moment our conclusion that some one must have been in the office with Farrell in order to make the death appear like suicide, we ask whether in any way it was possible for Morrison to administer poison to Farrell. Supposing Farrell had met Morrison immediately upon leaving the office, could the doctor possibly have given him poison in such a manner that it would not take effect for hours after?"

"Stood him a glass of wine somewhere, you mean?"

"Or induced him to swallow a tablet," said Quarles.

"It is really a new idea," said our host.

"It is a possibility, of course," Quarles answered; "but not a very likely one, I fancy. It might account for the tumbler. Farrell might have felt ill and drunk some plain water, but why was he in the office at all? I find the whole crux of the affair in that question. Why should he come back when he had left for the day?"

"Then you are inclined to exonerate Morrison?"

"On the evidence, yes."

"You speak with some reservation, Mr. Quarles."

"I want to bring the whole argument into focus, as it were," the professor went on. "It was a settlement day on the Stock Exchange. I believe a point was made three years ago that it was curious no one had seen Farrell return, since many people who knew him would be about Austin Friars late that night. This does not seem to me much of an argument. If he returned between nine and ten he might easily escape notice. What does seem to me curious is that he should choose such a day to leave the office early, and tell a lie about it into the bargain. He said he had an appointment with Miss Lester, and we know he had not."

"Ought we not to say that we know she says he had not?" Delverton corrected. "I do not wish to be captious, but--"

"You are quite right," said Quarles; "we must be precise. You knew Miss Lester, of course?"

"I did not see her until after Farrell's death, then I saw her several times. She seemed rather a charming person."

"You have not seen her since her marriage?"

"No."

"I saw her the other day," said Quarles, "and I quite endorse your opinion. She is charming, and I do not think she is the kind of woman to tell a deliberate falsehood. If Farrell had had an appointment with her I think she would have said so."

"I am making no accusation against her," was the answer. "I was only sticking to the actual evidence."

"And that does not tell us where Farrell went that day," said Quarles. "It seems strange that he did not meet any of the scores of people who knew him as he left the office that afternoon."

"Undoubtedly he did meet many."

"They didn't come forward to say they had seen him."

"I can see no reason why they should do so. There was no question of fixing the time he left. I was able to give definite information on that point."

"Well, we seem to have used up our facts," said Quarles, "and are forced to theorize."

Delverton smiled.

"You must not jump to the conclusion that I have failed," said the professor quickly. "I did not promise to tell you the name of the murderer to-night. Let me theorize for a few moments. You told me you believed that Farrell's tragic end had hastened your brother's death. Did your brother chance to come to the office that day?"

"No."

"Perhaps he came that night after you had left. I suppose you cannot bring evidence that he did not?"

"No; but--"

"Or it might have been with him that Farrell had an appointment that day, which was connected with some affair you were not intended to know anything about. That would account for his telling you a lie."

"I assure you--"

"Let me follow out my idea to the end," said Quarles, leaning over the table, and emphasizing his words by patting the cloth with his open hand.

"Three years ago things were rather bad on the Stock Exchange, one or two men in the House were hammered, and several respected firms were shaky. Now supposing Farrell had been playing with the firm's money unknown to his partners, or perchance unknown only to one of them--yourself. Your brother may have--"

"Really, Mr. Quarles, you are getting absurd."

"I was going to say--"

"Oh, please, let me stop you before you say anything more foolish," said Delverton. "At that time my brother was very ill and as weak as a rat. How could he have administered poison to Farrell?"

"It requires no strength to administer poison, only subtlety," said Quarles. "A glass of wine, perhaps by your brother's bedside, and the thing would be accomplished. Or there is another alternative. Your brother may have been playing with the firm's credit, and Farrell may have found him out."

"Any other alternative, Mr. Quarles? Your fertile brain must hold others."

"Yes, one more, and two opinions which lead up to it," was the quick reply.

Delverton laughed.

"It is not so absurd as the others, I trust."

"The two opinions may lead you to change your ideas concerning this mystery. First, I believe Kellner was made a partner because he knew too much."

"I am inclined to think the discussion of a glass of my best port will be more profitable than these speculations," said our host with a smile, and he took up the cradle which the servant had placed beside him. "I offered you a glass in the office the other day, but it was not such good wine as this."

"And I was shocked at the idea of port in the middle of the morning," said Quarles.

"But not now, eh?" And Delverton filled our glasses and his own.

"Of course not. My second belief is that Farrell did not leave the office at all that day. We have only your word for it, you know."

"Shall we drink to your clearer judgment?" said Delverton.

I had raised my glass when Quarles cried out and tossed a spoon across the table at me.



"So you don't drink, Mr. Quarles," said Delverton, putting down his emptied glass.

"Not this vintage. It is too strong for me, and also for my friend Wigan."

"Your judgment of a vintage leaves something to be desired. That glass of port has made me curious to hear the other alternative."

"I think it was you who had been playing with the firm's money, and your nephew found you out," said Quarles very deliberately. "That Stock Exchange settlement was a crisis for you. I think you induced Farrell to drink a glass of port with you, which was so doctored that he soon fell into a sleep from which he never woke. Perchance you smiled at his drowsiness, and suggested he should have half an hour's sleep in his room. You would look after things in the meanwhile. You did so, and when a clerk came in to say Dr. Morrison had called, you said Mr. Farrell had left for the day. You took care to wash the wine glass, but it seemed a good point to you to leave a tumbler with a little water in it on the table. You did not leave the office until you knew that the last of the clerks was ready to leave, and I imagine you waited somewhere in Austin Friars to see them safely off the premises. You had no doubt that a verdict of suicide would be returned. Later you were surprised to find that your clerk, Kellner, knew of your money difficulties, and to silence him he was taken into partnership. Whether the firm of Delverton Brothers is running straight now I have no means of knowing, nor can I say whether Mr. Kellner has any suspicion that the death of Mr. Farrell was more opportune than natural. You are the kind of man who is much impressed by his own cleverness, and when you met me in Devonshire it occurred to you to throw down a challenge, to pit your wits against mine. I suspected you then, for you overdid certain things, and a sinister intention had entered into your head. You confessed yourself charmed with Miss Lester, yet your whole attitude suggested that you believed Dr. Morrison guilty of murder. You became something more than an ordinary criminal who takes life to save himself from the consequence of his actions, you crossed the line and became devilish. Mrs. Morrison believes you would have asked her to marry you almost directly after Farrell's death had she not very plainly shown you her loathing of such a union. So you planned to be revenged when you threw down the challenge to me, and having failed, you now attempt to be wholesale in your destruction."

"I end by cheating you," said Delverton.

"Not me, but the hangman. I will warn your butler that the port is poisoned, and tell him to telephone for the doctor."

"You can go to the devil," said Delverton.

He died that night, and the following day the Delverton mystery filled columns of the papers. It was a dull season, and the press made the most of it. It is only right to say that Kellner was not generally believed to have known that Farrell had been done to death by his uncle. Quarles believes he was absolutely innocent in this respect. I am doubtful on the

point, I admit.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE IN MANLEIGH ROAD

The dramatic suicide of Martin Delverton, and the solution of a mystery which had been relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes produced a sensation. The public clamored for intimate particulars concerning Christopher Quarles, the house in Chelsea was besieged by hopeful interviewers, and the professor could only escape their attentions by going out of town. It was an excellent excuse for golf, he declared, and an opportunity to improve on his five handicap. I am bound to say that while I was with him he never went round in less than twenty over bogey, and when he only took twenty over he had luck.

This sudden enthusiasm on the part of the public was the cause of some difficulty and not a little annoyance so far as I was personally concerned.

As I have said elsewhere, I have constantly received the credit of unmasking a scoundrel simply because Quarles chose to remain in the background, but I have never claimed any credit to which I was not entitled. It was distinctly hard, therefore, when all the praise for bringing a series of crimes to light was given to him when justly it should have been accorded to me. I had been engaged on the work at the time the case of Eva Wilkinson had cropped up, my investigations had prevented my accompanying Quarles and Zena to Devonshire. He would be the first to deny that he had any part in solving these problems. I daresay I mentioned certain points about them to him, he may possibly have made a suggestion or two, but it is only because he had really nothing to do with them that they have found no place in his chronicle. I admit I was much annoyed, because I rather prided myself on the astuteness I had displayed.

Curiously enough, it was not only the public who persisted in giving him the credit, but the victims of my ingenuity as well, and the mistake was destined to bring peril to both of us in a most unexpected manner.

I was at breakfast one morning about a week after our little golfing holiday, when Quarles telephoned for me to go to him at once. He would give me no information, except that it was an urgent matter, and it was like him to ignore the possibility that I might have another engagement. As it happened I was free that morning, and was soon on my way to Chelsea.

I found him studying some pamphlets and letters which had apparently come altogether in the big envelope which was lying on the table.

"Have you seen the paper this morning?" he asked.

"I had just opened it when you 'phoned to me."

"Did you read that?"

He pointed to a paragraph headed, "Strange Affair in Savoy Street," and I read as follows:

"Last night, just after twelve o'clock, an elderly gentleman was walking down Savoy Street, and was approaching the Embankment end, when a man stepped from a doorway and deliberately fired at him. This was the old gentleman's story told to half a dozen pedestrians who came running to the spot. He seemed rather dazed, as well he might be, at the sudden attack, and his assailant had disappeared. None of those who were first upon the scene saw him, and although there is no doubt that a revolver was fired, and that the gentleman's description of the assailant's position was so exact that the bullet was found embedded in a door on the opposite side of the street, the denouement casts some doubt on the story. Quite a small crowd had collected by the time the police arrived, and then the old gentleman was not to be found. In the excitement he had slipped away without any one seeing him go. We understand that the police theory is that there was no attempt at murder, but that the old gentleman, having fired a revolver for a lark, or perhaps for a wager, told a tale to save himself from the consequences of his folly, and then, seizing his opportunity, quietly slipped away. Those who were first upon the spot say his dazed condition may have been the result of too much to drink. We cannot say the explanation is altogether satisfactory to us."

"Well?" said Quarles when he saw I had finished.

"I agree with the writer of the paragraph," I answered. "The explanation is far from satisfactory. Such a story and such a smart disappearance do not suggest drunkenness."

"Perhaps not, although it is wonderful how Providence seems to watch over the drunken man. However, the elderly gentleman was not drunk and his story was strictly true. I was the elderly gentleman."

"You! And your assailant?"

Quarles got up and walked slowly to the window and back again.

"It was a very near thing, Wigan, and it has got on my nerves a bit. You know that I am held chiefly responsible for the solution of these robbery cases with which you have been busy lately. That belief is at the bottom of this attempt, I fancy. You remember the fellow who got off over the first affair. There was little doubt of his guilt, but you had insufficient evidence to bring it home to him. He was the man who fired at me last night."

"Had you no chance of capturing him?"

"No, and the moment I saw his face clearly by the light of a street lamp as he turned to run away, I made up my mind not to give information. I should have got away at once, only people were on the spot too quickly; so I told the simple truth, and slipped away at the first opportunity to avoid being recognized by the police. It was rather neatly done, I think."

"But I do not see why you should withhold information," I said.

"I didn't want my name mentioned in connection with the affair, and I did not want the man to know I had recognized him. I think there is bigger game to go for. All along I have believed that in these cases of yours there was a connecting-link, a subtle personality in the background. I believe you have only succeeded in bringing some of the tools to justice."

"And you want to get at the central scoundrel?"

"I must, or he will get at me. Without knowing it I have probably escaped other traps he has set. The fact that I am only your scapegoat does not alter the position. He means to have me if he can. We, or rather you, have come very near to unmasking him, I imagine, and his fear has made him desperate."

"What is to be done?"

"I want you to go very carefully through those cases, treating them as though they were all part of one problem. If necessary, you could get an interview with one or two of the men who are doing time. When a man is undergoing punishment, and believes that an equally guilty person has got off scot-free, he is likely to become communicative."

"All this will take time, and in the meanwhile--"

"I am chiefly concerned with the meanwhile," said Quarles, "and it happens rather fortunately that I have something to interest me and take my mind off the matter. These letters and pamphlets were sent to me a few days ago by Dr. Randall. You have heard of him, no doubt."

"I don't think so."

"He is a specialist in nervous diseases, so is naturally interested in psychological matters. An article of mine in a psychological review attracted his attention, and through a mutual friend--a barrister in the Temple--we were introduced last night. To-night I am dining with Randall at a little restaurant in Old Compton Street, and--well, I want you to come too, Wigan."

"But--"

"Oh, I can make it all right. I shall send him a note, asking if I can bring a friend who is much interested in these matters."

"But I am not, and directly I open my mouth I shall show my ignorance."

"Then obviously you must keep your mouth shut," said Quarles. "The fact is, Wigan, last night has got on my nerves. I am--I may as well be quite honest--I am a little afraid of going about alone. I want you to call for me and go with me."

"Of course I will. But surely, with your nerves on edge, it would be wiser to keep away from psychological problems. What is the particular problem?"

"Randall will explain to-night, and you must at least pretend to be interested. As regards my nerves, I can assure you this kind of thing is a relief after the other. I do not think I am a coward as a rule, but I am afraid of this unknown scoundrel. I have a presentiment that I am in very real danger."

"You probably exaggerate it," I said.

"Maybe. But I never ignore a strong presentiment, and I--I slept with a loaded revolver under my pillow last night, Wigan."

There was no doubt as to his nervous condition; he showed it in his restlessness, in his acute consciousness of sounds in the house and in the street. He expected to be brought suddenly face to face with danger, and was afraid he would not be ready to meet it.

He certainly was not himself. Zena had gone to stay with friends in the country for a few days, or I should have got her to persuade the old man to give up this psychological business--at least until he was in a normal condition again.

The restaurant, where we found Dr. Randall waiting for us, was one of those excellent little French places which cannot be beaten until they have become too successful and popular, when they almost invariably deteriorate. Randall said he was delighted the professor had brought me, and dinner was served at once at a cozy table in a corner.

"A patient of mine originally brought me here," said the doctor. "It is rather a discovery, I think, and personally I prefer dining where I am unlikely to come in contact with a lot of people I know. In recent years we have improved, of course; but in England we still eat, while in France they dine. Here we are practically in France."

Certainly more French was spoken than English, and the doctor spoke in French to the waiter. Quarles's nervousness, which had been apparent during the drive from Chelsea, disappeared as dinner progressed, and I did not suppose a stranger like Randall would notice it. He would probably form rather a wrong impression of the professor, would look upon him as a highly-strung man, and would not realize that he was not in a normal condition this evening. Randall carried his profession in his face, but for the time being his medical manner was laid aside; nor did he speak of the business which had brought us together until we had got

to the coffee and liqueur stage.

"I suppose you read the papers I sent you, Professor?"

"Yes, but rather cursorily," Quarles answered. "I think if you told the whole story I should understand it better; besides, my friend here knows nothing of it, and will bring an unbiased mind to bear upon it."

"And may give us a new idea," said the doctor. "I don't know whether you are acquainted with Manleigh Road, Bayswater. There are about fifty houses in it--a terrace, in fact, on either side. The houses are sixty or seventy years old, I daresay, ugly but roomy, and some few years ago a lot of money was spent in bringing them up to date, putting in bath-rooms, modernizing them, and redecorating them thoroughly. In spite of this, however, they have not attracted the kind of tenant they were intended for. Many of them have apartments to let. The house we have to do with is No. 7. The even numbers are on one side of the road, the odd on the other. No. 5 is a boarding-house of a very respectable kind, frequented by young fellows in business chiefly. No. 9 is occupied by a man who, after retiring from business comparatively wealthy, had financial losses. His four daughters have had to go out and work. I mention these facts to show that the surroundings are entirely commonplace. The owner of No. 7 went abroad some years ago, owing to the death of his wife, I understand, and left the house in the hands of an agent. It was to be let furnished, but, except for a caretaker, it remained empty for several months. It was then taken by a newly-married couple. They could not remain in it. The house was haunted, they said, and I believe the agent threatened them with legal proceedings if they spread such an absurd report. He seemed to think they said so only to repudiate their bargain. It was then let to a man named Greaves, about whom nothing was known. He paid the rent in advance, and lived there alone with a housekeeper and a young servant. One morning he was found dead in his bed, in the large room on the first floor at the back. A piece of cord was fastened tightly round his neck. There seemed little doubt that he had committed suicide, for when he did not come down to breakfast the housekeeper went to his room and found the door locked on the inside. It had to be broken open. Perhaps you heard of the case?"

Quarles shook his head.

"Well, the door was locked on the inside, the window was shut and fastened, there was no sign that any one had entered the room, and nothing was missing. Foul play was out of the question, but the doctor who was called in was troubled about the affair. It was from him that I had these particulars. Dr. Bates had become acquainted--not professionally, I believe--with the young couple who had lived in the house for a time, and they had told him the place was haunted. In bringing his judgment to bear upon Greaves' death, it is only right to remember that his mind had received a bias."

"I take it he did not believe it was a case of suicide," said Quarles.

"His reason told him it must be, yet something beyond reason told him

it wasn't."

"He thought it was murder?" I asked.

"No, not ordinary murder," Randall answered. "He thought it was a supernatural death."

"I have read the letter he wrote to you; there is nothing very definite in it," said Quarles.

"It was his indefinite state of mind which caused him to relate the whole story to me. When the police failed to make any discovery, he thought some one interested in psychological research might solve the mystery."

"What, exactly, were the experiences of this young couple?" I asked.

"Chiefly noises, footsteps echoing through a silent house. Once the shadow of a man, or so it seemed, was thrown suddenly upon the wall by a ray of moonlight, and once the curtains and sheets of a bed were found torn, as if hands, finding nothing else to destroy, had taken vengeance upon them. Of course, this all comes second-hand from Dr. Bates."

"And is probably unconsciously exaggerated," said Quarles. "The ordinary man is almost certain to overstate and to emphasize unduly one part of the evidence."

"That was my feeling exactly," returned Randall, "so I spent a night in that haunted room myself. The result was disappointing."

"Did nothing happen?" I asked.

"There was no direct manifestation--at least I saw nothing, and I do not think I heard anything, but I am sure that I felt something. It was very vague. You know it is my theory," Randall went on, addressing me, "that different individuals are sensitive to different influences. For example, let us suppose a certain spot is haunted, a spot where something particularly desperate has taken place in the past. Now I believe that A, B, and C, all sensitive to supernatural influences, may watch there and seeing nothing, but that D, being sensitive to that particular influence, or moving on that particular plane, may be successful. In another case, where D fails, A, B, or C may be successful. I think it is this fact which accounts for the comparatively small number of experiences which we are able to authenticate. It was an article of the professor's, setting forth similar views, which made me anxious to make his acquaintance."

"Are you suggesting that he should spend a night in this house?" I asked.

"I do not think I suggested such a thing," said Randall with a smile, "but I believe that is the professor's intention."

"It is," said Quarles.

"When?" I asked.

"On Friday night."

"Greaves died on a Friday night," said Randall. "It is a small point, perhaps, but, like myself, the professor believes in small details."

"I suppose the agent will let me have the key," said Quarles.

"I do not know the agent. I got the key through Dr. Bates, and I can give you a card of introduction to him."

"It will be a very interesting experiment," I said, looking as learned as I could. I thought I had kept my end up very well, and far from having to pretend to be interested, as Quarles had suggested, I was profoundly interested, not in the psychological discussion, but in the Bayswater mystery. I had heard of it before, and remembered that Martin, one of the oldest members of the force, had said that it was no more a case of suicide than he was a raw recruit. I am far from saying that no mystery is to be accounted for by the supernatural, but I always want to test it in every other way first.

Quarles was pleased to jeer at me for a skeptic as we drove back to Chelsea. He did not consider me altogether a fool as a detective, but he had no use for me as a psychological student.

"Anyway, it is a pity you are undertaking this business in your present nervous state," I said. "At least let me be with you on Friday night."

"Nonsense, that would make the experiment useless. You clear up the mystery of this subtle scoundrel who has tried to get me shot and my nervous state will soon disappear."

As a matter of fact, I couldn't settle to a careful study of my recent cases, as the professor had suggested. I tried and failed. I could not forget the experiment which was to be made on Friday night, and on Wednesday morning I took action. First of all, I arranged that a special constable should be on duty in Manleigh Road, and from his appearance no one would have supposed that anything in the way of a genius had been introduced into the neighborhood. He looked a fool; he was one of the smartest men I knew. Strangely enough, on the Thursday night No. 7 was burgled quite early in the evening as soon as it was dusk. Two men got in at a basement window, and the constable was quite close at the time. He had instructions, in fact, to give warning to the burglars if there was any danger of their being seen.

I had not burgled the house alone; I had taken a young detective named Burroughs with me. Of course, I might say it was because I wanted to give him a chance, or because I thought we might encounter desperate characters in the house; but as a fact, it was the supernatural element which decided me. I do not like the idea of the supernatural; my nerves, excellent in their way and in their own sphere, are inclined to get jumpy under certain conditions.



We went up from the basement cautiously, and it would have needed keen ears to have heard our movements.

Without showing a light, we went into every room in the house. Those in front had some light in them from a street lamp outside, but those at the back were dark, although, after a while, we got accustomed to the dark, and could see to some extent. None of the blinds was drawn, and although there was no moon, it was a clear, starlit night.

Our special attention was devoted to the room where Greaves had been found dead. It was substantially furnished, mid-Victorian in character. The lock on the door, which had been broken open, had been mended, and the window was fastened. Systematically we examined every article of furniture and the innocent-looking cupboard. The walls were substantial, but we did not subject them to tapping. I did not want to arouse the neighbors to the fact that No. 7 was not empty to-night.

"We have a long vigil before us, Burroughs," I said.

"What do you expect to discover, sir?"

"I don't know, nothing most likely; but if anything does happen it is going to happen in this room. I am going to take up my position in this chair by the bed, and I want you to keep watch on the landing. If you hear any one about the house come in to me at once, but if you only hear me move don't come in unless I call. I shall not fasten the door, but I shall put it to. If in some way it is possible to find out that this room is occupied, I want to appear as if I were quite alone. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

I saw Burroughs settled in a chair on the landing; then I entered the room and closed the door without latching it, and there was a certain feeling down my spine, in spite of the knowledge that I had a comrade near at hand.

It was quite beyond me how Quarles could undertake to stay there all alone. I could have done it had I been convinced that danger could only come from a material foe; it was the idea of the supernatural which beat me. I was not skeptic enough to be unmoved.

I had determined to sit beside the bed; but remembering that Greaves had been found on the bed I first of all lay down for a minute or two. The bed was not made up, but the mattresses were there with blankets over them, and the hangings were in place. The key to the mystery might lie in some hidden mechanism in the bed. Then I settled myself in the chair beside the bed, my hand in my pocket on my revolver.

This kind of waiting is always a trial. The silence, the bodily inactivity while the mind is strained to be keenly alert, have a sort of hypnotic influence. An untrained man will certainly fancy he hears and sees things, and even a trained man has to fight hard against the desire

to sleep. There comes a longing for something, anything, to happen. I think I got into a condition at last in which I should have welcomed a ghost. There was no church clock near to break the monotony with its striking; time seemed non-existent.

Once I thought I heard Burroughs shift his position on the landing outside, and there presently came to me an uncontrollable desire to move. I stood up. Just to walk to the window and back would make all the difference.

My journey across the room was noiseless, and, coming back, I stopped suddenly.

To my left there was movement, movement without sound. In an instant my revolver was ready, and then I felt a fool. In a recess there was a glass fixed to the wall, we had noticed it when we examined the room, and I had caught the dim reflection of my head and shoulders in it. The glass was just at that height from the floor.

I went to it and called myself a fool to my reflection. I could only see myself very dimly, so I cannot say whether the incident had driven any color from my face.

It had the effect of quieting my restlessness, at any rate. I returned to my chair refreshed, feeling capable of keeping a vigil, however long it might last.

Almost unconsciously I began to consider how many deceptions looking-glasses were responsible for, and remembered some of the illusions I had seen at the Egyptian Hall. No doubt looking-glasses had played a large part in some of them.

And then I began to wonder why the mattresses had been left upon the bed. Was the agent expecting to let the house again at once, or had they been put there for Quarles's convenience to-morrow night?

How long my mind slid from one thing to another I cannot say; but gradually my ideas seemed to dwindle away into nothingness, and it is easy to imagine that I slept. I do not think I did, however.

Although my mind was a blank for a time, I am convinced I never lost consciousness of that room or of the business I had in hand. There was absolutely no sensation of waking, only another sudden desire to move.

Again I walked to the window, and as I came back I glanced in the direction of the glass. This time my own reflection did not startle me; not because I was ready for it, but because I did not see it.

I must have crossed the room at a different angle, or my eyes--

I went to the glass, and then I started. There was no reflection. I was not in the glass.

In a moment the knowledge that this room was haunted came to me in full force. There was the glass, plainer than I had seen it before, my eyes were not at fault. Indeed, as I stared into it, there was a dim outline of images in the glass, the furniture of the room, but of me no reflection at all. Was I bewitched? Surely I must be in my chair, sleeping, dreaming, for suddenly in the glass, moving as in a mist, there were shadows--a bed and a man lying on it, and bending over him was another man whose hands were twisting about his companion.

I tried to call out to stop him, then I drew back, and the next moment I was at the door, speaking to Burroughs in a whisper.

"What is it?" he asked, coming swiftly into the room.

"Look!" and I seized him by the arm and drew him to the looking-glass.

"Well, what is it?" he asked again.

His reflection and mine were looking out at us, one scared face, mine; one full of questioning, his.

I told him what I had seen.

"You dropped off to sleep, Mr. Wigan, that's what it was."

Had I? It couldn't have been a dream, and yet faith in myself was shaken. It was possible I had only walked across the room a second time in my dreams. One thing is certain, I did not fall asleep again that night.

I had arranged with the constable in Manleigh Road that he should keep a careful watch at dawn. We should leave then by the same way as we had entered, and he was to signal to us if the coast was clear.

It was an essential part of my plan that no one should know the house had been occupied that night. I had kept watch, thinking that if harm were intended to Quarles the trap would be made ready previously. How and by whom I had not fully considered. Now I determined not to leave the house during the day.

I would be there when Quarles came that night.

I scribbled a note to him, explaining what I was doing, and I said that if the agent should accompany him to the house I would remain hidden until the agent had gone. This note I gave to Burroughs, and instructed him to explain matters to the constable.

I had provided myself with a flask and some dry biscuits in case of contingencies, and prepared to pass the day as comfortably as I could. It is needless to say that in daylight I examined that haunted room again, especially the looking-glass.

It was in an ornamental wooden frame fixed on the wall, formed, in fact, a finish to a wooden dado. It was like the fixed overmantel one finds

sometimes in small modern villas, only it wasn't over the mantelpiece.

I think there was nothing in the room which I did not examine carefully, but I did not sit there; I preferred the front room.

It was an immense relief when I saw Quarles and another man, the agent, come through the gate.

It was between eight and nine, and I retired to the basement to be out of the way. The agent stayed about half an hour, and they were chiefly in the haunted room together.

"I sincerely hope your report will set at rest this silly idea that the house is haunted," I heard the agent say as they came down to the hall. "When my client returns he will be pretty mad about it."

"When does he return?" asked Quarles.

"I don't know. I haven't had a line from him since he went away, but the sum I have received for him in rent doesn't amount to much, I can tell you."

I expected to find the professor rather ill-tempered at my interference, but I found him inclined to raillery.

"Are you hunting a murderer or a ghost, Wigan?" he asked.

"I am not quite sure, but I think at the back of my mind there is an idea to keep you out of the clutches of the subtle personality of whom you are afraid. Come up to the haunted room; we will talk there, but it must be in whispers. If I have had any success it is believed that you are in this house alone to-night."

"A foolish old man alone, eh?"

"In this instance I am inclined to answer yes."

"You are quite right to say exactly what you think," he returned.

"Have you considered the possibility that some one is trading on your known enthusiasm for psychological research?" I asked.

"Surely you do not mean Randall?"

"No, but he may have been used as a tool. Frankly now, would you have undertaken this business just at the present time had it not been for Dr. Randall?"

"Probably not."

"So if you are being deceived it is being managed very subtly."

"You are full of supposition. Let us get to work. You speak in your

letter of an experience you had last night. What was it?"

"You will say no doubt that my fear of the supernatural got the better of me."

I told him the story of the looking-glass as we stood in front of it, our two faces looking out at us dimly.

"Come away from it now, Wigan," he said when I had finished. "Burroughs thought you had fallen asleep, did he? You are convinced you were not dreaming, I presume?"

"At the time I confess Burroughs rather shook my faith in myself, but during the day I have become certain that I did not sleep."

Sitting on the other side of the bed--Quarles was very particular where he sat in the room--he questioned me closely about the actions of the shadows, and I answered him as well as I could. Only a very vague picture was in my mind.

"It may astonish you to know, Wigan, that it was only your note this morning which brought me to this house at all to-night, I 'phoned to you at least a dozen times yesterday."

"Why?"

"I was afraid of to-night. Perhaps for the time being I have lost my grip a little on account of my nervous condition. I have had a long talk with Dr. Bates, and he tried to persuade me to give up the idea of spending a night here alone. He was rather doubtful about a supernatural solution to the mystery. Then I didn't like the agent when I went to him to arrange about the key. I shouldn't have entered the house with him to-night had I not known you were here."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Always that strong presentiment of danger," he answered. "Were these hangings on the bed last night?"

"It was exactly as you see it now."

"The agent said the mattress and blankets had been put here for my convenience."

"Did he say when they were put here?"

"I thought he meant to-day," said Quarles.

"No one has entered the house to-day," I answered.

"Yet, if Greaves was murdered, some one must have gained access to this room somehow, in spite of the locked door and fastened window."

"You have dropped the idea of the supernatural, then?"

"I am keeping an open mind."

"Shall we give it up and go, Professor?"

"Certainly not. I am supposed to be alone in the house, so we will await events. On the other side of that wall where the glass hangs is No. 5, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"That is the boarding-house. Keep still a minute while I get an idea of the furniture against this opposite wall. Randall said a man and his four daughters lived at No. 9, didn't he?"

I whispered an affirmative, and could dimly see the professor going slowly along the wall. He began tapping things, apparently with a pocket knife.

I warned him not to make a noise.

"I am known to be here," he answered, coming back to me. "A man who undertakes to investigate the supernatural would be expected to take precautions that no tricks were likely to be played upon him. It would be suspicious if I didn't make a little noise. Now we will settle ourselves. I shall lie on the bed. You move a chair under that glass and sit there. I have an electric torch with me. Don't fall asleep to-night, Wigan."

"I didn't last night," I answered.

After that we were silent, and the vigil began. In one way it was a repetition of the previous night. I lost count of time, and had sudden desires to move, but managed to control them.

Certainly I did not sleep, and I fought successfully against the hypnotic influence which silence and darkness exert. Not a sound of movement came from Quarles, not a murmur from the world outside.

More than once I wanted to ask the professor whether he was all right, but did not do so.

It seemed that this utter silence had lasted for hours, when it was broken, not suddenly, but gradually. It was not a sound so much as a movement which broke it. Some one or something was near us. At first it did not seem to be in the room, but as if it were trying to get in. I could not tell where it was, but for a time it was outside, and then just as certainly I knew that it was in.

I cannot say positively that I heard a footfall on the carpet, but I think I did, and then came an unmistakable sound; the swish of the bed hangings suddenly drawn back.

"Quarles!"

Whether I shouted his name or whispered it, I do not know, but the next moment a ray from the electric torch cut the darkness like a long sword.

There was a low, almost inarticulate cry, then a light thud upon the floor--so light it might have been some clothes falling from the bed.

"Don't move, Wigan!" Quarles said, and a second afterwards he fired--downwards it must have been, although he had warned me to keep still, in case he should hit me.

There was an unearthly yell, and something rushed past my feet--a man on all fours, a little man, a--

"The glass, Wigan! Quick!"

I sprang up. For just an instant I saw my own reflection, then it was gone; instead, I was looking into a luminous mist out of which there suddenly flashed a face looking into mine.

I saw it quite clearly, and then it went as quickly as it had come. It appeared to have been jerked away.

"Look!"

Quarles was behind me, and in the glass, almost as I had seen them last night, were the shadows, only now they struggled and twisted first; it was afterwards that one lay still across the bed.

"An ape, Wigan!" Quarles said excitedly. "An ape, trained to imitate, and now--did some one look through the glass?"

"Yes."

"Was it Dr. Randall?"

Directly he asked the question I knew that it was the doctor's face which had been there.

"The subtle personality, Wigan."

"When did you guess?"

"I didn't guess--I didn't think it possible. Bates' disbelief in the supernatural made me a little suspicious, but I didn't think it possible. To-night--that ape--the whole plot--I could only think of Randall. There was no one else."

We left the house at once, both of us in an excited state.

The constable I had on special duty soon had several others with him, and before dawn No. 5 Manleigh Road was raided.

It was only a garbled statement which got into the papers, and probably the whole truth will never be known; but I gradually gathered the main facts, partly from the doctor's confederates, partly from some of his victims.

Dr. Randall, posing as a nerve specialist, and fully qualified to do so, had lived a double life. As a doctor he was respected and was fairly successful; as the head and organizer of a small army of miscreants he had been eminent for years.

Under the guise of a respectable boarding-house, No. 5 had been used as the headquarters of the gang, and the operations had been so widespread, so all-embracing in the field of crime, that after the raid many mysteries which the police had failed to unravel were credited to Randall. Many of these he could have had nothing to do with, but he had quite enough to answer for. He seems to have exercised a kind of terrorism over his subordinates, or he would surely have been betrayed before.

Exactly at what point my investigations had jeopardized his secret I could not find out, but he evidently thought it was in danger, and believing Quarles was responsible, he determined to get rid of him.

I was told that he had made two attempts upon his life before the night he was introduced to him in the Temple. That night Quarles was followed when he left the Temple, and, as we know, was shot at in Savoy Street.

This attempt failing, the doctor, who had already asked Quarles to dinner on the following night as an extra precaution, determined to use a method which had already proved successful.

Quarles's enthusiasm for psychological research could hardly fail to tempt him into the trap.

No. 7 Manleigh Road belonged to a man in the doctor's employment. It had been prepared for eventualities some time before--probably tragedies had occurred in the house which had never been heard of. The house agent was one of the gang, and when, either by mistake or because he could not help himself without causing undesirable comment, he let the house to the young married couple, they were frightened away. The house was then let to Greaves, a man who had become a danger to the doctor, and in due course he was found dead in his bed.

Between the fireplace of the haunted room and that of the corresponding room in No. 5 part of the chimney wall had been removed, so that there was sufficient space for the ape to get from one room to the other.

This ape, some four feet in height, was exceedingly powerful and more than usually imitative, but was not naturally vicious. Any action done in its presence the animal would be certain to repeat at the first opportunity; but having done so, it did not repeat it again unless the action was performed again. The action of strangling a man in his sleep



by means of a cord was performed before the ape, and afterwards the animal was allowed to steal through the hole in the chimney. The result was that Greaves was found dead.

It was intended that Quarles should die in a like manner, and special pains were taken with the ape to insure success. The action was performed before the animal in every detail more than once, and it was kept in strict confinement until the right moment came.

The ape was out of my sight, but I chanced to see the imitation in progress on the Thursday night through the glass, which had unaccountably been left open for some minutes after it had been tried to see that it was in working order. I saw only dimly because the imitation was being done by the light of a single candle, and that shaded as much as possible, to suggest to the ape the gloomy conditions of the room in which it was to repeat its lesson. Let into the wall of the room in the boarding-house there was a glass backing on to the one in the haunted room. A small handle swung aside the back, which was common to both, and the looking-glass became a window from one room to the other.

When he fired Quarles evidently hit the ape. Mad with pain, the animal dashed back through the hole in the chimney and attacked the doctor, who was probably taken entirely unawares, as he was looking through the glass to see what the revolver shot might mean.

The ape went through its part of the performance, and the doctor fell a victim to his own diabolical ingenuity. The wounded animal had to be shot before any one could get near the body.

Some people have declared that Dr. Randall was a madman, but I think Quarles' answer hit the truth.

"Of course, in a sense, all criminals are mad," he said, "but Randall was the sanest criminal I ever came in contact with."

## CHAPTER V

### THE DIFFICULTY OF BROTHER PYTHAGORAS

Whether it was my statement that criminals had grown cleverer than they used to be which aroused Quarles's interest so effectually, or whether it was that success made him thirst for further fields to conquer, I do not know. I do know, however, that he grew restless if any considerable time elapsed without my having a clue worthy of his powers.

As it happened we had two or three cases close together which stretched his powers to the utmost, and the extremely subtle manner in which he solved them shows him at his best.

When I sent him a telegram from Fairtown, merely requesting him to join me there, I felt certain he would come by the first available train, and was at the station to meet him.

"Fine, invigorating air this, Wigan," he remarked. "Is there really a case for us to deal with, or did you merely telegraph for the purpose of giving me a holiday?"

"The case is for you rather than for me. I am still--"

"Still waiting for something to turn up in the Beverley affair?" he asked.

"Were I answering a layman, or even a rival detective, I should look very wise and talk indefinitely of clues; to you I will admit a blank ten days, not a forward step in any direction whatever."

"So you send for me."

"Upon a different matter altogether," I returned.

I had come to Fairtown ten days ago on the lookout for a man named Beverley. His friends were anxious about him, and said they believed he was suffering from a loss of memory; the police had reason to suspect that he was implicated in some company-promoting frauds, and thought the family only wanted to find him to get him out of the country. His people were certainly not aware that I was looking for him in Fairtown, and I need not go into the reasons which made me expect to run my quarry to earth in this particular spot; they were sound ones, or I should not have spent ten days on the job.

To describe Fairtown would be superfluous. Every one knows this popular seaside resort. This year, I believe for the first time, a large tent had been erected behind the sea-baths building, which was occupied each week by a different company of entertainers. In my second week a troupe of pierrots was there, the "Classical P's," they were called, and hearing from some one in the hotel that they were quite out of the ordinary, I went on the Thursday evening. At the opening of the performance the leader of the troupe announced that Brother Pythagoras, after the performance on the previous evening, had been obliged to go to town, and unfortunately had not yet returned, so they would be without his services that night. There was some disappointment; he had a charming tenor voice, my neighbor told me. The full troupe numbered six, described on the program as Brothers Pluto, Pompey, and Pythagoras, and Sisters Psyche, Pomona, and Penelope; that night, of course, they were only five, but the entertainment was excellent.

Sister Pomona was altogether an exceptional pianist, her interpretation of items by Schumann and Mendelssohn being little short of a revelation. She was pretty, too, and her scarlet dress with its white pompons, and her pierrot's hat to match, suited her to perfection.

I was amongst the last left in the tent after the performance, partly

owing to the position of my seat, partly, at least so Zena would have it later, and I did not contradict her, because I was lingering in the hope of getting another glimpse of Pomona. As I moved toward the exit there came a short scream, a terrified scream it seemed to me, from behind the stage. I turned back and waited, and in a minute or two Brother Pluto came from behind the curtains.

"Are you a doctor?" he asked.

"No, but--"

"I am a doctor," said a voice behind me.

I was not invited, but I followed the doctor. The space available for the artistes was very small. There was little more than passageway between the tent wall and the stage built up some three feet from the ground, and we had to step over the various paraphernalia which was necessary for the performance. What had happened was this. A projecting piece of woodwork had caught Pomona's dress as she passed, tearing off one of the white pompons, which had rolled underneath the platform. She saw it, as she supposed, lying in a dark corner, and stooped to reach it. What she had caught sight of, and what she caught hold of, was a man's hand, a cold hand. Brothers Pluto and Pompey were beside her a moment afterwards, and had dragged a body from under the stage. It was Brother Pythagoras, the performer who was supposed to have gone to London on the previous night. He was dressed in his pierrot costume, but had been dead some hours, the doctor said, death being due to a blow on the head, from a stick, probably.

I told the story to Quarles as we walked to the hotel.

"Does the doctor suggest an accident?" he asked.

"No."

"How long, in his opinion, had the man been dead?"

"Some hours."

"Twenty-four?"

"I particularly asked that question," I answered. "He thought death had taken place that day."

"It may be an interesting case," said Quarles doubtfully. "I suppose I can see the body."

"I have arranged that."

"Who are these brothers and sisters?"

"Pluto and Psyche are husband and wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Watson. She is a Colonial, and he has been in the Colonies for a year or two. It is their

second season of entertaining in this country. Pompey, whose name is Smith, and Penelope, otherwise Miss Travers, have been with them from the first. Pomona, otherwise Miss Day, only joined them this season, and is evidently a lady. The dead man, Henley by name, joined them after the season had commenced, taking the place of a man who fell ill. He has been very reticent about himself."

"According to Watson, I suppose?" said Quarles.

"They were all agreed upon that point," I answered.

"On what points were they not agreed?" Quarles asked quickly.

"Well, although they all spoke in the warmest terms of their comrade, it struck me they were not all so fond of him as they made out."

"What makes you think that?"

"The way they looked at the dead man. Naturally, I was watching them rather keenly as the doctor made his examination."

"That is rather an interesting idea, Wigan, and has possibilities in it; still, a murdered man is not a pleasant sight, and the artistic temperament must be taken into consideration."

We went to the mortuary that afternoon. The dead man was still in the pierrot's dress--I had arranged this should be so, wishing to afford the professor every facility in his investigation. He was more interested in the dress than in the man, examining it very carefully with his lens. The stockings and shoes came in for close inspection, also the comical pierrot's hat, which he fitted to the dead man's head for a moment.

"Had he his hat on when he was pulled from under the platform?" he asked.

"No. It was found after the doctor's examination, close to where the body had been."

"Who found it?"

"Watson--Brother Pluto."

"Who first thought of looking for it?" Quarles asked.

"I think Watson just stooped down and saw it. He would naturally think of it, since it was part of the dress."

The professor nodded, as if the explanation satisfied him. Then he looked at the head, neck, and hands.

"He was a singer, you say?"

"Yes--a tenor."

"What instrument did he play?"

"I don't know."

"Ah, a sad end. Henley, you say his name was--I see there is 'H' marked in pencil in his hat."

"He called himself Henley," I answered; "it may not have been his real name. As I said, his companions know very little about him."

"So his friends, if he has any, cannot be advised of the tragedy. This company of mummers is alone in its mourning for him. I should like to examine this hat more closely, Wigan. Can I take it away with me?"

I arranged for him to do so, and we went back to the hotel.

"Do you find it an interesting case, Professor?" I asked.

"It certainly presents some difficulties which are interesting. The clue may lie in Henley's unknown past, and that might be a difficulty not to be overcome; or we may find the clue in jealousy."

"You surely are not thinking that--"

"Oh, I have not got so far as suspecting Watson or any of his companions," said Quarles, "but certain facts force us to keep an open mind, Wigan. To begin with, there was apparently no struggle before death. The blow was not so severe that a comparatively weak arm might not have delivered it, a woman's, for the sake of argument. We may, therefore, deduct two theories at once. He probably had no suspicion or fear of the person in whose company he was, and I think the doctor will endorse our statement if we affirm that he was not in a healthy condition. Personally, I should credit Henley with a fairly rapid past, which may account for his companions not looking upon the body with any particular kindness, as you noticed."

"You seem to have built more on that idea of mine than I intended," I said.

"I have built nothing at all on it," he answered. "I argue entirely from the appearance of the dead man. Another point. I looked for some sign that the dress had been put on after the man was dead. The signs all point to an opposite conclusion."

"The dress puzzles me," I said.

"Of course, if the doctor were not so certain that death had occurred during the day, we might place the murder at some time on the previous night, after the performance, when Henley would naturally be in his pierrot's dress, but why should he put it on during the day. There was no rehearsal, I suppose?"

"Nothing was said about it; besides, Henley was supposed to be in town."

"Yes, I know. That is one of our difficulties. I take it that neither Watson nor any of his company have offered any explanation of the tragedy?"

"I believe not. I saw the local inspector this morning, and he said nothing further had transpired, nor had any clue been found amongst the dead man's effects. Of course, if his companions had any guilty knowledge they would have made some explanation."

"Why?"

"To mislead us."

"My dear Wigan, there are times when you jump as far to a conclusion as a woman."

"I am arguing from a somewhat ripe experience," I retorted somewhat hotly.

"Strengthened by an interest in Sister Pomona, eh? Something of the old-fashioned school lingers about you, which is picturesque but always a handicap in these days. The methods of crime have changed just as the methods of other enterprises have changed. Your bungling villain has no chance nowadays; to succeed a criminal must be an artist, a scientist even, and he does not fall into the error of accusing himself by excusing himself. And since increased knowledge tends to simplify those explanations with which we have sought to explain away difficulties in the past, I think we shall be wise to apply modern methods to any difficulty with which we are confronted."

Naturally, I argued the point, endeavoring to justify myself, and in the process we nearly quarreled.

That night we went to the entertainment. It was an exceedingly full house, showing the commercial wisdom of the proprietors of the sea-baths in not canceling the engagement. The verve and go in the performance astonished me. One would not have supposed that a tragedy had happened in this little company of players. I felt that they ought to be horribly conscious of the ghastly thing which had been found under that platform only a few hours since. I said something of the kind to Quarles.

"Don't forget the artistic temperament," he answered.

"Surely it would be the very temperament to be influenced," I said.

"Presently we shall find out, perhaps," he whispered as Sister Pomona went to the piano.

It was Chopin she played to-night, and Quarles, who had been more interested in her than in the rest of the company, immediately lost himself in the music. He applauded as vociferously as any one in the audience, and after the performance would talk of nothing but music. It

pleased him to become learned on harmony and counterpoint; at least, I suppose it was learned; I could not understand him.

I had suggested that he should make the acquaintance of the pierrots as soon as the curtain was down, but this he would not do.

"To-morrow will be time enough; besides, I want to see them with the paint off."

We called on them on the following morning. They had rooms in a quiet street in Fairtown. The landlady was accustomed to have strolling companies as lodgers, and evidently had the knack of making them comfortable. Quarles had a word or two with her before seeing her visitors, and learnt that they were the nicest and quietest people she had ever had. The poor gentleman who was dead was the quietest of the company.

"Perhaps he was in love," laughed Canaries.

"I shouldn't be surprised," the landlady answered.

"With whom?"

"He seemed to spend most of his time looking at Miss Day when he didn't think she would notice him. I don't wonder. She is well worth looking at."

"Admiration is not necessarily love," remarked the professor. "By the way, have you been to the mortuary to see the body?"

"Me!" exclaimed the landlady in horror. "No. I am not one of those who take a morbid pleasure in that kind of thing. Nothing would induce me to go."

"Very sensible of you," Quarles said.

We were then taken to the Watsons' sitting-room, and I explained the reason of our call, speaking of Quarles as a brother detective. He did not at once act up to his part. Mr. and Mrs. Watson were alone when we first entered, but the others joined us almost at once, and I fancy they were prepared for a visit from me; the local inspector may have said it was likely. Quarles began to talk of music, and judging by Miss Day's interest I concluded that he knew what he was talking about; in fact, all of them were immensely interested in the old man, and for at least half an hour the real reason of our being there was not mentioned.

"Bach, no, I am not an admirer of Bach," said the professor, in answer to a question from Miss Day. "Bad taste, no doubt, but I always think musical opinion is particularly difficult to follow. By the way, I suppose Mr. Henley played some instrument?"

The sudden question seemed to change the whole atmosphere. Watson, I fancy, had been ready to enter upon a defense of Shaw, and Miss Day to

convert Quarles to Bach worship; in fact, I firmly believe that every one except myself had forgotten all about the dead man until that moment.

"Why do you ask!" Watson inquired after a pause.

"You are such a musical set, it would be strange if one of your company could not play any instrument at all. I am told he sang tenor songs, and was wondering whether that was all he could do."

"As a fact he played the banjo and the guitar," said Watson, "but he has not done so in Fairtown. The people here are high-class people, and we have to vary our performance to suit our audiences. At Brighton, where we go next week, Henley's banjo playing might have been the most popular item on the program."

"I can understand that. You know very little about Mr. Henley, I am told," and he waved his hand in my direction to show where he had got his information.

"Very little," Watson replied. "He told us he had no relations, and he received very few letters, which seemed to be from agents and business people. I did not question him very closely when he applied to me. I judged that he was down on his luck, but he fitted my requirements, and my wife was favorably impressed with him."

"And you have no reason to regret taking him into your company?"

"On the contrary, he proved a great acquisition, a far better man than the one whose place he took."

"That is not quite what I meant," said Quarles. "Companies of entertainers vary, not only in ability, but in individual tastes, in personnel. By engaging Mr. Henley you were obliged to admit him into your private circle, and I imagine--"

"That is what I meant by saying my wife approved of him," said Watson. "I wouldn't engage the finest tenor in the world unless he were a decent fellow. It wouldn't be fair to the rest of us."

Quarles nodded his appreciation of such an attitude.

"Of course, as long as he behaves decently I am satisfied," Watson went on. "I don't make my enquiries too particular. For instance, I shouldn't bar a man because he had got into trouble."

"Have you any reason to suppose that Henley had done so?" Quarles asked. "That might account for his mysterious death."

"I have no such suspicion," Watson answered; "indeed, he was not that kind of man. It is my way--my clumsy way of explaining what I mean by decent. Many a decent man has seen the inside of a prison. By being there he pays his debt, and afterwards, in common justice, he should be free, really free, free from his fellow-man's contempt."



"You have started my husband on his pet hobby," laughed Mrs. Watson. "He always declares that our prisons hold some of the best men in the world."

"Some of the strongest and most potential," corrected her husband.

"I am inclined to agree with him," said Quarles.

"But I am taking up your time and not asking the one or two questions I came especially to ask. You dress for the performance in the tent, I suppose?"

"The men do. The ladies dress here and go down with cloaks over their costumes."

Quarles undid a small brown paper parcel--I had wondered what he had brought with him--and produced the pierrot's hat.

"That is Henley's, I suppose?"

Watson looked at it.

"Undoubtedly. There is an 'H' in it, you see. We all put our initial in like that so that we should know our own."

"Now, can you suggest why Henley was wearing his dress?" asked Quarles.

"That has puzzled us all," Watson answered. "I am inclined to think the doctor is wrong as regards the time he had been dead. The last we saw of Henley was when we left the tent that night. He was not coming back with us, he was going straight to the station. He was a long time changing, and I told him he would have to hurry to catch his train."

"Is there such a late train up?"

"Only during the summer."

"And none of you went down to the tent until the evening of the next day?"

They all replied in the negative.

"We are perhaps fortunate in being able to substantiate the denial," said Watson. "We all drove to Craybourne and spent the day there, starting soon after ten and not getting back until six."

"And in the ordinary way Henley would have gone with you?"

"Certainly. It was only just before the performance that evening that he announced his journey to town. He said it was a matter of business."

"One more question," said Quarles, "a delicate one, but you will forgive it because you are as desirous of clearing up this mystery as any one."

Have you any reason to suppose poor Henley was in love?"

"I have no reason to think so," said Watson.

"Nor you, Miss Travers?" said Quarles, turning to Sister Penelope.

"He certainly was not in love with me."

"I ask the question just to clear the ground," said the professor after a short pause, and rising as he spoke. "The man whose place Henley took might have fallen in love with one of you young ladies, and if he thought Henley had supplanted him he might have taken a mad revenge. Such things do happen."

"There was nothing of that sort," said Mrs. Watson. "Russell, that was the other man, has gone on a voyage for his health. Only a week ago I had a picture postcard from him from a port in South America."

"That absolutely squashes the very germ of the theory," said the professor with a smile. "Sometime I hope to enjoy your charming entertainment again, and to hear you play, Miss Day. I hope it won't be Bach. Good-by."

As we walked back to the hotel I asked Quarles why he had not suggested that Henley might be in love with Miss Day instead of Miss Travers.

"My dear Wigan, you have yourself said she is undoubtedly a lady. Can you imagine her allowing a man like the dead man to have anything to do with her?"

"Circumstances have thrown them into each other's company," I answered. "In such a small circle she could hardly avoid him."

"I am inclined to think the company will get on better without him," he answered.

To my astonishment the professor insisted on going back to town that afternoon. No, he was not giving up the case, but he wanted to be in Chelsea to think it out, and to see if Zena had got any foolish questions to ask. This was Saturday, and on Monday I received a telegram from him, requesting me to come to town. It was important. Of course I went, and the three of us adjourned to the empty room.

"I am sorry to bring you off the Beverley affair, Wigan, but I think we ought to settle this pierrot business."

"Then you have formed a theory?"

"Oh, yes, and it is for you to prove whether I am right or wrong. If my theory be correct, it is rather a simple case, although it appears complicated. We will accept the doctor's statement that the man had been murdered that day, and not on the previous night. He was done to death, therefore, during the morning probably, when for some reason he had

visited the tent, and for some reason had put on his pierrot's dress. Watson is inclined to think that the doctor is wrong as regards time, but we may dismiss his opinion. The dead man's face had no make-up on it; had the murder been committed on the previous night before he had got out of his costume, the grease paint would have been still on him."

"I think that conclusion is open to argument," I said.

"I base the conclusion rather on the doctor's opinion than on the paint," said Quarles. "Now, it seems to follow that Henley's tale about being called to town was false, was apparently told for the purpose of getting out of the excursion with his comrades; and we may fairly assume that his visit to the tent was for some purpose which he did not want his companions to know anything about."

"Why did he put on the dress?" said Zena.

"That is her persistent question, Wigan, and she also asks another almost as persistently: Why, in spite of friendly words concerning Henley, should they look upon the dead body with such repugnance?"

"You make too much of that idea of mine, as I have said before," I objected.

"Let me put it another way," said Quarles. "How was it possible for them to show so little concern about a comrade they liked! They might screw themselves up to go through their performance and hide their sorrow from the public, but in private one would have expected to find them depressed. I hardly think they showed great sorrow while we were with them."

"They did not, certainly."

"May I say that Watson and Miss Day seemed the least concerned, and even venture a step further and guess that they were the two who seemed to you to look upon the dead man with repugnance?"

I admitted that this was the case, and it was then that Zena, having heard the whole story from her grandfather, accused me of lingering in the tent that night for the purpose of seeing Sister Pomona again.

"Now, two points as we go," said Quarles, interrupting our little side-spar. "Miss Day volunteered no statement when I talked of love. Could she have made an unqualified denial I think she would have done so. I did not ask her a direct question on purpose; I thought she would be more likely to answer an indirect one. Her silence, I fancy, was the answer. In view of what the landlady told us, I think we are safe in assuming that Henley admired her, and that she was aware of the fact. The second point is Watson's defense of the men who had been in prison, his hobby, as his wife called it. We will come back to both these points in a moment. Let us consider the dead man first. The face was evidently that of a fast liver, not that of a decent man such as Watson spoke of; the throat and neck were not of the kind one expects in a singer, but, of

course, we must not argue too much from this; the hands showed breed, certainly, but they had never been used to twang the strings of a banjo or guitar."

"But Watson distinctly said--"

"And the hat with 'H' in it had never fitted the dead man," said Quarles.

"Oh, I remember perfectly what Watson said, and, moreover, I believe I heard a good many of his thoughts which were not put into words--you can hear thoughts, you know, only it is with such delicacy that the very idea of hearing seems too heavy and materialistic to describe the sensation. Watson said the hat was Henley's, he also said that Henley played these instruments; but the pierrots all wore hats that fitted, well-made hats, and for this reason each of them marked his hat, and the skin at the finger tips of a banjo player always hardens. The dead man was certainly not Brother Pythagoras, and so far the deduction is simple."

I made no comment.

"Now it is obvious since these entertainers agreed that it was the body of their comrade, they are in a conspiracy to deceive. Why? More than one complicated reason might be found, but let us remain simple. They knew who the dead man was, and because of what they knew of him concluded that their comrade was responsible for his death. Have you any fault to find with that deduction, Wigan?"

"I don't think it follows," I said.

"If they did not know the dead man, if they had nothing to conceal, why did they allow it to be supposed that the dead man was Henley?" said Queries. "There would be no object. They were running a risk for nothing. As it was, their action protected Henley. No one was likely to question their identification. The dead man would be buried as Henley, and there would be an end of the matter."

"But the dead man might be identified by his friends," I said.

"Evidently they thought it worth while to run that risk, knowing perhaps that it was not a very great one. Apparently it was not, for up to now no one has made anxious inquiries for the dead man."

"But some of the people about the sea-baths and the tent attendants would know it was not Henley," said Zena.

"We have evidence that he was a very quiet, reticent man," said Quarles.

"They probably hardly saw him in the daytime, and at night he would have a painted face, and the fact that he was wearing the dress would go a long way to convince any one who chanced to see him in the dim light at the back of the stage that night."

"And who do you suppose he was?" I asked.

"We will go back to Watson and Miss Day," said Quarles. "Miss Day was

silent on the question of love, fearful, I take it, that her natural repugnance to the man might serve to betray the conspiracy. I believe the conspiracy was formed on the spur of the moment, just before Watson came from behind the curtains that evening and asked whether you were a doctor. I should say the dead man had pestered her, and that she was relieved by his death. I find some confirmation of this in Watson's attitude. He talks of some of the best men having been in prison, in such a way, in fact, that his wife hastens to laugh at his hobby, afraid that he will betray himself. Now he could hardly have been referring to the dead man; he declared himself that he was not thinking of Henley; I suggest that he was thinking of himself."

"And you accused me of jumping to a conclusion!" I exclaimed.

"I haven't finished yet," answered the professor. "Here is my complete theory. The dead man knew something of Watson's past, and was holding that knowledge over him, blackmailing him, in fact, and I think the company knew it. At the same time he pesters Miss Day with his attentions, which Henley, more than half in love with Miss Day himself, resents and determines to rid the troupe of a blackguard. He begins by pretending some friendship for his victim, and after giving out that he is going to town, suggests to the dead man that his absence may be an opportunity for the other to get into Miss Day's good graces. Why should he not dress up and take his place on the following evening? I have little doubt that Henley expected him to come to try on the dress that night after the performance, which would account for his being such a long time changing. The victim did not come; by the look of him in death I should say he had not been sober, which would account for his not coming. Next morning Henley goes to find him, takes him to the tent, not through the door, which would be fastened probably in some way, but surreptitiously, through some weak spot in the pegging down very likely."

"But why should he wait until the man had got into the pierrot's dress before murdering him?" said Zena.

"Because, my dear, he hoped the body would not be discovered until another troupe took possession of the tent. A dead pierrot would be discovered, and the troupe at Brighton would be communicated with. In the meanwhile Henley would have warned them, and the same tale would have been told, and the body been identified as Henley's. There would be no hue and cry after the murderer. Had it not been for Miss Day's pompon being torn off, I have no doubt this would have been the course of events. You will have to travel to Brighton, Wigan, and put one or two questions to our friend Watson."

"And who was the man?" I asked.

"Since no one seems to have missed him I should say he was a man not too anxious to have inquiries made about him, one careful to cover up his tracks, perhaps one not altogether unknown in criminal circles, a man of the type of your Beverley, for instance. By the way, have you ever seen Beverley?"

"No."

"How were you to know him, then?"

"By the man in whose company he would be."

"And you have good reasons for expecting to run him to earth at Fairtown?"

"Excellent reasons," I answered.

"Wigan, get some one who knows Beverley to go and look at the dead pierrot. The result might be interesting."

It was. Quarles admitted that the idea was a leap in the dark, but he pointed out that the dead man was the type he imagined Beverley to be. The fact remains he was right. The dead man was Beverley. And, moreover, the professor's deduction was right throughout as far as we were able to verify it. Watson had been in prison, quite deservedly he admitted, but having paid the debt for his fall, he was facing the world bravely. Then came Beverley, who knew of the past, and Watson admitted that his death was a thing that he could not help rejoicing over. He had heard nothing from Henley, who had no doubt read of the discovery in the paper, and thought it wiser to obliterate himself altogether.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TRAGEDY IN DUKE'S MANSIONS

I believe Beverley's exit from this life was a relief to his family. Whether any very strenuous efforts were made to find Henley, I do not know. Possibly the "Classical P's" are interrogated concerning him from time to time, for they are still appearing at well-known watering places, though whether Miss Day is still of the company, I cannot say.

I quickly forgot all about Henley, being absorbed in a new case, which created considerable attention. At the outset it brought me in contact with rather a fascinating character, a man whose personality sticks in your memory.

He was an Italian by birth, cosmopolitan by circumstances, and by nature something of an artist. Fate had ordained that he should be man-servant to an English M.P.; he would have looked more at home in a Florentine studio or in a Tuscany vineyard, but then Fate is responsible for many incongruities.

In well-chosen words, and in dramatic fashion, he drew the picture for me.

"The little dinner was over," he said, using his hands to illustrate his speech. "I had removed everything but the wine. It had not been a merry party, no; it was all business, I think, and serious. When I enter the room to bring this or take that, they pause, say something of no consequence--evidently I am not to hear anything of what they are talking. They talk English, though only my master was English. One of his guests was German, the other a countryman of my own, but not of Tuscany, no, I think of the South. So there was only the wine on the table, and cigars, and the silver box of cigarettes. My master had in his hand a sheet of paper, and the German had taken a map from his pocket, and my countryman was laughing at something which amused him. I can see it all just as it was."

He paused, closed his eyes, as if he would impress for ever on his memory what he had seen.

"And now--this," he said, throwing out his arms. "This, and not two hours afterwards."

This was certainly tragic enough. A shaded electric light hanging over the table left the corners of the room in shadow. The wine, the cigars, the silver cigarette box were still on the table, the smoke was heavy in the atmosphere. A tray contained cigar and cigarette ends. On either side of the table was a chair pushed back as it would be by a man rising from it. At the end was a chair, with arms, also pushed back a little, but it was not empty. In it was a man in evening dress, leaning back, his head fallen a little to one side, his arms hanging loosely. But for the arms of the chair he would have fallen to the floor. He was dead. How he had died was uncertain. A casual examination told nothing, and I had not moved him. I had arrived first and was expecting the doctor every moment. I happened to be in my office when the telephone message came through that Arthur Bridwell, M.P., had been found dead under suspicious circumstances in his flat at Duke's Mansions, Knightsbridge. I went there at once and found a constable in possession. It was barely half-past nine now, and the Italian manservant said he had last seen his master alive at seven o'clock.

"He dined early to-night?" I said.

"Yes, at six. He was going to the House afterwards. It was important, I heard him say so to his guests."

"And you went out at seven?"

"About seven. It is my custom to go for a walk after serving my master," was the answer. "I came back just before nine. I looked into this room, not expecting to find any one here, but to put the wine away and take the glasses, and I find this. I have moved nothing, I have touched nothing. I called to the porter, and he fetched the police, and the policeman used the telephone to call you."

The Italian, whose name was Masini, was the only servant. Duke's Mansions, as you probably know, is a set of flats, varying in

accommodation, with a central service. There is a general dining-room, and there are smoking rooms and lounges which all the tenants may use; or meals are served in the various flats from the central kitchen. To-night Mr. Bridwell had had dinner served for three at an early hour in his flat.

The telephone was in the corner of the room, and I was going to it to call up Christopher Quarles, convinced this was a case in which I should need all the assistance I could get, when the telephone bell rang.

"Hallo!" I said. "Who's that?"

"I left my bag on the Chesterfield," came the answer. "Better not send it. Keep it until I come again."

"When?" I asked.

There was a pause.

"Is that you, Arthur?" came the question.

"About the bag," I said, then paused. "Are you there?"

No answer. My voice had evidently betrayed me. The woman at the other end had discovered that she was speaking to the wrong man. I looked at the Chesterfield. There was no bag of any kind upon it now. Then I telephoned to Quarles, telling him there was a mysterious case for him to investigate.

"Had your master any other visitors to-day?" I asked casually, turning to Masini.

"Not to my knowledge. All the afternoon I was out."

"Where were you?"

"Out for my master. I took a parcel to a gentleman at Harrow."

"To whom?"

"It was to a Mr. Fisher. It was a small parcel, a big letter rather, for it was in an envelope that--that size. There was no answer. I just told my master that Mr. Fisher said it was all right."

"So Mr. Bridwell might have had visitors while you were out?"

"Certainly."

"Did he have many visitors as a rule?"

"Sometimes from what you call his constituency."

"Any ladies?"



"Ah, no, signore; my master was of the other kind. He did not like the vote for women."

"And you say you have moved nothing in this room?"

"Nothing at all."

Quarles arrived soon after the doctor had begun to examine the dead man, so I could not then give him the particulars as far as I knew them. It chanced that the doctor, a youngish man, was acquainted with the professor, and was quite ready to listen to his suggestions.

"What do you make of it, Professor?" he asked.

"Is it poison!" said Quarles interrogatively.

The doctor had already examined the glasses on the table.

"I can find no signs of poison," he said. "And two hours ago the man was alive."

"That is according to the servant," I said. Masini was not in the room at this time.

"There is no reason to doubt the statement, is there?" the doctor asked.

"No, but we have not yet corroborated it," I returned.

Quarles was already busy with his lens examining the dead man's shirt front.

"You, have begun trying to find out who killed him before I have pronounced upon the cause of death," said the doctor. "I am inclined to think it is poison, but--"

"He didn't inject a drug, I suppose!" said Quarles.

"Not in his arm, you can look and satisfy yourself on that point. It is just possible that he made an injection through his clothes. It requires a more careful investigation than I can make to-night before I can give a decided opinion."

"Quite so, but you do not mind my looking at the body rather closely? A little thing so often tells a big story, and the little things are sometimes difficult to find once the body has been moved."

The doctor watched Quarles's close investigation with some amusement. The shirt front came in for a lot of attention, and the collar was examined right round to the back of the neck. It was a long time before Quarles stood erect and put the lens in his pocket. I got the impression that he had prolonged the investigation for the purpose of impressing the doctor.

"It would be virulent poison which would kill a man so quickly and while he sat in his chair," Quarles said reflectively.

"It would, indeed," the doctor returned.

"You have formed no idea what the poison was?"

"Not yet."

"No hypodermic syringe has been found, I suppose?" said Quarles, turning to me.

"No."

"You see, doctor," he went on, "if the glasses there show no evidence of poison, and nothing has been moved, and you decide that poison was the cause of death, one might jump to the conclusion that it had been self-administered with a syringe; that is why I ask about a syringe."

"There are such things as tablets," said the doctor, "or the poison may have been in the food he has eaten to-night."

"Exactly," Quarles snapped irritably.

The doctor smiled; he had certainly scored a point and was evidently pleased.

"Besides, Professor, you are a little previous with your questions. This isn't the inquest, you know; we haven't got through the post-mortem yet."

"I generally form an opinion before the inquest," said Quarles as he looked at each glass in turn and stirred the contents of the ash-tray with a match.

"You must often make mistakes," remarked the doctor. "I propose having the body moved to the bedroom; there is nothing else you would like to look at before I do so?"

"Thanks, doctor, nothing," said Quarles with a smile which showed that he had recovered his lost temper.

After the removal of the body the doctor departed, fully convinced, I believe, that the professor was a much overrated person.

"Well, Wigan, shall I tell you what the result of the post-mortem is likely to be?" said Quarles.

"If you can. Remember you have not heard what I have to say yet."

"No sign of poison will be found. No sign of violence will be discovered anywhere upon the body. Sudden heart failure--that will be apparent. The cause obscure. Organs seemingly healthy; no discernible disease. Muscular failure. Death from natural causes. A case interesting to the medical

world, perhaps, but with no suggestion of foul play about it. Now let me have your tale."

"But surely you--"

"I assure you I have formed no definite theory yet. How can I until I have your story!"

I repeated what Masini had told me, and I told him about the telephone message.

"It was a woman. You are quite sure it was a woman?"

"Quite certain."

He went to the telephone.

"There is a directory here, I see; did you touch it?"

"No."

"It wasn't open?"

"It was just as you see it now."

He took a piece of paper and made one or two notes.

"I imagine that particular call would be difficult to trace," he said.

"Duke's Mansions has a number, and from the office in the building the particular flat required is switched on. There must have been scores of calls during the evening. I don't remember anything particular about Arthur Bridwell's parliamentary career, do you?"

"No, beyond the fact that he is Member for one of the divisions of Sussex."

Quarles looked slowly round the room.

"A bag," he mused; "one of those small chain or leather affairs which women carry, I suppose; a purse in it, a handkerchief, perhaps a letter or two. Bridwell would see it in all probability after the lady had left, and he would--he would put it on a side table or slip it into a drawer out of the way. Shall we just have Masini in and ask him a question or two?"

Instead of questioning the Italian the professor got him to repeat the story as he had told it to me. It was exactly the same account.

"You know nothing about these two visitors?"

"Nothing, signore. I had never seen them before, but I should know them again."

"No names were mentioned in your presence?"

"No."

"Have you ever taken parcels to this Mr. Fisher before?" asked Quarles.

"Never."

"Was the parcel hard; something of metal or leather?"

"Oh, no, signore; it was papers only."

"And you saw Mr. Fisher?"

"Yes."

"What was he like? Was he English?"

Masini said he was, and gave a description which might have fitted any ten men out of the first dozen encountered in the street. He also described the two visitors, but the portraits drawn were not startling.

"What did Mr. Fisher say when you gave him the packet? What were his exact words, I mean?"

"He said: 'All right, tell Mr. Bridwell I shall start at once'."

"How long have you been in Mr. Bridwell's service?"

"Three years," was the answer. "He was traveling in Italy, and I was a waiter in an hotel at Pisa. He liked me and made me an offer, and I became his servant. I have traveled much with him in all parts of Europe."

"Are you sure you never saw either of the men who dined here to-night while you were traveling with your master in Italy?"

"I am sure, but on oath--it would be difficult to take an oath. His friends were of a different kind. My master was writing a book on Italy; he is still at work on it. Ah, signore, I should say he was at work on it. Shall I show you his papers in the other room?"

The voluminous manuscripts proved that Bridwell was engaged upon a monumental work dealing with the Italian Renaissance.

"Most interesting," said Quarles. "I should like to sit down at once and spend hours with it. This is valuable. Mr. Bridwell's business man ought to take charge of these papers. Do you know the name of his solicitors?"

"Mr. Standish, in Hanover Square," Masini answered.

The Italian declared he knew nothing about a lady's bag, and we searched for it in vain. Then Quarles and I interviewed the hall porter. He knew

that Bridwell had had two gentlemen to dine with him that evening, but he had not taken any particular notice of them. They left soon after eight, he said. He corroborated the Italian's statement that he had gone out at seven, and had returned just before nine.

"You didn't see a lady go up to Mr. Bridwell's flat?"

"No, sir, but I was not in the entrance hall at the time from eight to nine. It is usually a slack time with me."

"I did not mean then," said Quarles. "I meant at any time during the day."

"I do not remember a lady calling on Mr. Bridwell at anytime."

It was early morning when the professor and I left Duke's Mansions.

"There are two obvious things to do, Wigan," said Quarles. "First, we must know something of this man Fisher. I think you should go to Harrow as soon as possible. Then we want to know something of Bridwell's parliamentary record. You might get an interview with one or two of his colleagues, and ask their opinion of him as a public man and as a private individual. Come to Chelsea to-night. You will probably have raked up a good many facts by then, and we may find the right road to pursue. I will also make an inquiry or two. At present I confess to being puzzled."

"You told the doctor that you usually formed an opinion before the inquest," I reminded him with a smile.

"And he immediately talked of tablets and poisoned foods, and looked horribly superior. He is a young man, and I knew his father, who once did me a good turn. I shall have to repay the debt and prevent the son making a fool of himself."

"You have no doubt that it was murder?" I asked.

"Why, you told me it was yourself when you rang me up on the 'phone," he answered.

As had often happened before, Quarles's manner of shutting me up annoyed me, but when you have to deal with an eccentric it is no use expecting him to travel in an ordinary orbit.

To obviate unnecessary repetition I shall give the result of my inquiries as I related it to Quarles and Zena when I went to Chelsea that night.

"You look satisfied and successful, Wigan," said the professor.

"I am both," I answered. "Whether we shall catch the actual criminal is another matter. We may at least lay our hands on one of his accomplices. Will it surprise you to learn that I am having the Italian Masini carefully watched?"

"It is a wise precaution."

"I am inclined to adopt the method you do sometimes, professor, and begin at the end," I went on. "First, as regards Mr. Bridwell's parliamentary friends and acquaintances, and his political career. Although he is a Member whose voice is not often heard in the House, his intimate knowledge of Europe, its general history and politics, gives him importance. He is constantly consulted by the Government, and his opinion is always considered valuable. His colleagues are unanimous on this point, and generally he seems to be respected."

"But the respect is not unanimous, you mean?"

"It is not."

"And in his private life?"

"I have not found any one who was intimate with him in private."

"I see; kept politics and his private life entirely separate," said Quarles.

"I am not prepared to say that," I answered. "I have not had time to hunt up anybody on the private side yet, and I do not think it will be necessary. One of the men I saw was Reynolds, of the War Office. I was advised to go and see him, as he was supposed to know Bridwell well. He did not have much good to say about him. It seems that for some time past there has been a leakage of War Office secrets, that in some unaccountable way foreign powers have obtained information, and suspicion has pointed to Bridwell being concerned. So far as I can gather, nothing has been actually proved against him, and I pointed out that his intimate knowledge of European affairs made him rather a marked man. Reynolds, however, was very definite in his opinion, spoke as if he possessed knowledge which he could not impart to me. He was not surprised to hear of Bridwell's death. When I spoke of murder he was rather skeptical, remarked that in that case Bridwell must have been double-dealing with his paymasters, and had paid the penalty; but it was far more likely to be suicide, he thought, and said it was the best thing, the only thing, in fact, which Bridwell could do. I have no doubt Reynolds knew that some action had been taken which could not fail to show Bridwell that he was suspected."

Quarles nodded, evidently much interested.

"This view receives confirmation from the movements of Fisher," I went on. "He left Harrow last night--must have gone almost directly after he received the packet. He only occupies furnished rooms in Harrow, and the landlady tells me that during the year he has had them he has often been away for days and even weeks at a time. Announcing his return, or giving her some instructions, she has received letters from him from Berlin, Madrid, Rome, and Vienna. That is significant, Professor."

"It is. Did she happen to mention any places in England from which she has heard from him?"

"Yes, several--York, Oakham, Oxford, and also from Edinburgh."

"She did not mention any place in Sussex?"

"No, I think not."

"It would appear then that Fisher could have had nothing to do with Bridwell's legitimate political business or he would certainly have spent some time in the constituency. Well, Wigan, what do you make of the case?"

"I think it is fairly clear in its main points," I answered. "Bridwell has been selling information to foreign powers, and would naturally deal with the highest bidders. Fisher is a foreign agent, and having received valuable information yesterday, left England with it at once. The two men who came to dinner represented some other power, came no doubt by appointment to receive information, but probably knew that their host was dealing doubly with them. Bridwell's commercial ingenuity in the matter has been his undoing, hence his death. Whether Masini was attached to Fisher, or to the schemes of the other two, it is impossible to say, but I believe he was an accomplice on one side or the other."

"I built up a similar theory, Wigan; not with the completeness you have, of course, because I knew nothing of the suspicions concerning Bridwell, but when I had made it as complete as I could, I began to pick it to pieces. It fell into ruins rather easily, and you do not help me to build it again."

"It seems to me the main facts cannot be got away from," I said.

"Zena assisted in the ruining process by saying, 'Cherchez la femme.'"

"You see, Murray, you do not account for the woman and the bag," said Zena.

"They are extraneous incidents belonging to his private life. It is remarkable how distinct he kept his private from his political life."

"Very remarkable," Quarles said. "Yet the woman is also a fact, and she seems to me of the utmost importance. We must account for her, and your explanation brings me no sense of satisfaction. Let me tell you how I began to demolish my theory, Wigan. I started with Masini. Now, he seemed honest to me. He was very ready to repeat Fisher's exact words, and the very fact of my asking for them would have made him suspicious and put him on his guard had he possessed any guilty knowledge, whether it concerned Fisher or the two visitors. Further, had he been in league with the two visitors and knew they had murdered his master, he would hardly have been so ready to block suspicion in other directions. He would not have said his master's visitors came chiefly from his constituency, and he certainly would not have scouted the idea of a woman caller. He would

have welcomed such a suggestion, fully appreciating how valuable a woman would be in starting an inquiry on a false trail."

"But you mustn't attribute to an Italian servant all the subtlety you might use under similar circumstances," I said.

"I am showing you how I picked my own theory to pieces," he answered. "I next considered the visitors. I assumed they were there for an unlawful purpose--your facts go to show that my assumption was right--and I asked myself why and how they had murdered Bridwell. If he were a schemer with them, there would be no need to murder him, no need to silence him; were he to talk afterwards he would only injure himself, not them. If they were there to force papers from their host, it seems unlikely that he would be so unsuspecting of them that he would have asked them to dinner, and, even if he were, a moment must have come during, or after dinner, when they must have shown their hand. A man who deals in this kind of commerce does not easily trust people. Bridwell's suspicions would certainly have been aroused; he would in some measure, at any rate, have been prepared, and we should have found some signs of a struggle."

"I admit the soundness of the argument," I answered. "For my part I incline to Reynolds' opinion that it was suicide after all."

"Oh, no; it was murder," said Quarles.

"A tablet--" I began.

"I know it was murder," returned the professor sharply, "and the manner of it has presented the chief difficulty I have found in demolishing my theory altogether. Bridwell was poisoned by an injection. The hypodermic needle was inserted under the hair at the back of the head, here in the soft part of the base of the skull, the hair concealing the small mark it made. I believe the secret of the poison used is forgotten, but you may read of it in books relating to the Vatican of old days and concerning the old families of Italy. I might mention the Borgias particularly. So you see my difficulty, Wigan. The crime literally reeked of Italy, and we had two Italians amongst our dramatis personæ"

"A significant fact," I said.

"Of course I am letting the doctor know of my discovery; that is the good turn I shall do him. He will be considered quite smart over this affair. Now consider this point. It would surely have been very difficult, once the host's suspicions had been aroused, to make the injection without a struggle on the victim's part."

"No suspicion may have been aroused," I said. "Masini has told us of a map. The murderer might have been leaning over his victim examining it."

"That is true. You pick out the weak point," said Quarles.

"Even then there would have been some sort of struggle, surely," said Zena. "The poison can hardly act instantaneously."



"Practically it does," Quarles answered. "I have read of it, of the different methods of its administration, and of its results, and no doubt any one acquainted with old Italian manuscripts would be able to get more detailed information than I have; but it produces almost instant paralysis, acts on the nerve centers, and stops the heart's action, leaving no trace behind it. What straggle there was could be overcome by the pressure of a man's hand upon the victim's chest, to keep him from rising from his seat, for instance. I found signs of such a detaining hand on Bridwell's shirt front. Of course, Wigan, while pulling my theory to pieces I knew nothing of your facts about Bridwell, but now that I do know them, the theory is not saved from ruin. Have you ever watched trains rushing through a great junction--say Clapham Junction?"

"Yes; often."

"And haven't you noticed how the lines, crossing and recrossing one another, seem to be alive, seem to be trying to draw the train to run upon them, to deviate it from its course, until you almost wonder whether the train will be able to keep its right road? There seems to be great confusion; yet we know this is not so. We know those many lines are mathematically correct. If you want to keep your eye on the main line, you mustn't be misled by the lines which touch and cross it, which seem to belong to it, until they suddenly sweep off in another direction. In this Bridwell affair we have to be careful not to be misled by cross lines, and I grant there are many. You say the woman is an extraneous episode; but is she? She left a bag, which is not to be found. Had Masini known of her existence I do not think he would have denied all knowledge of her, for the reasons I have already given, and I argue that her visit to the flat was timed to occur when the servant was out, so that he should know nothing about her. The hall porter knew nothing; about a lady visiting the flat at any time, so we must assume the woman was not a constant visitor. Moreover, we know that she had something to hide, some secret, or she would not have ceased speaking directly she found she was addressing a stranger. She probably belonged to Bridwell's private life. Now Zena says, 'Cherchez la femme,' but there is no need to look for her; she forces herself upon our notice. We know that Bridwell was alive at seven o'clock: we know his visitors did not leave him until eight. It is hardly conceivable that the woman came to the flat after that to commit a crime, impossible to believe that she would leave her bag there to be evidence against her, and then telephone about it to a man she knew to be dead. We may dismiss from our minds any idea that she committed murder."

"I can see a possibility of immense subtlety on her part," I said.

"That is to be deceived by a crossing line, which ought not to deceive you, which leads only into a siding," said Quarles. "We have to remember that there was a bag, and that it has disappeared"

"She may have made a mistake and left it somewhere else," said Zena.

"I think we may be sure it was left there, because she states distinctly where it was left--on the Chesterfield. There was something in her mind

to fix the place. Moreover, she says, 'Better not send it.' Very significant, that. Bridwell is to keep it until she comes again. Therefore there was some person she would not have know of her visit to the flat, some person who might possibly find out if the bag were returned. I suggest that person was her husband."

"I think you have struck the side line," I remarked.

"Let me continue to build on the private life of Mr. Bridwell," Quarles went on. "I find a foundation in his literary work--no mean work, absorbing a great part of his life. There would be constant need to refer to libraries, to pictures and other works of art, some of them in private collections. A great deal of this work could be done by an assistant. Shall we say the name of this assistant was Fisher? I observe you do not think it likely."

"I certainly do not."

"But a secret agent engaged in stealing Government information would hardly advertise his movements to his landlady; he would surely have been more secret than that. On the other hand, the places Fisher mentions have famous libraries and picture galleries. What would a secret agent want at Oxford? A man bent on research would be going to the Bodleian. Country seats with famous works of art in their galleries would account for Fisher's presence in other places mentioned by the landlady."

"Is it not strange the Italian servant knew nothing about this wonderful assistant?" I said.

"No doubt Bridwell usually saw him in town, at his club, or elsewhere, or communicated with him through the post; but on this occasion Masini was purposely sent to be out of the way when the lady came. We know there was some need for secrecy, and I suggest that Bridwell was in love with another man's wife. In passing, I would point out that the answer Fisher sent back bears out my idea of the assistantship."

"It may," I answered.

"Now Bridwell's work on the Italian Renaissance no doubt has much information concerning the Vatican, and much to say about the prominent Italian families. As a student, Bridwell would be likely to know all about the romances of poisoned bouquets, gloves, prepared sweetmeats, and the rest of the diabolical cunning which existed."

"But we know that he didn't kill himself," I said.

"Exactly. We have to find some one who shared the knowledge with him. Let me go back to the missing bag for a moment. Since it was on the Chesterfield, Bridwell must have seen it. What would he do with it? What would you have done with it, Wigan? I think you would have just put it on a side table or in a handy drawer; yet it had gone. The fact of its disappearance stuck in my mind from the first, although I did not at once see the full significance of it. On the cover of the telephone directory

there were two or three numbers scribbled in pencil; I made a note of them with the idea that the woman might be traced that way. However, arguing that a man would be likely to know the telephone number of a woman he was in love with, and have no necessity to write it down, I took no trouble in this direction. I went to see Bridwell's solicitor instead.

I led him to suppose that I was interested in the study of the Renaissance, and asked him if Bridwell had had a companion during his wanderings in Italy three years ago. For part of the time, at any rate, he had--a partner rather than a companion, a man named Ormrod--Peter Ormrod. I knew the name at once, because Ormrod has written many articles for the reviews, and all of them have been about Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Ormrod's telephone number is 0054 Croydon, and he is married, and I think it was his wife who spoke to you over the telephone. My theory is that Ormrod had discovered that his wife was in love with his friend, and used his knowledge of this poisoning method, which could not be detected, remember, to be revenged. I think he came to the flat that evening after Bridwell's guests had gone, perhaps he expected to find his wife there. I do not think he quarreled with his false friend. I think he showed great friendliness, talked a little of the past perhaps; and then, in examining some book or paper, leant over his friend as he sat at the table, and the deed was done. If the bag was lying on a side table he saw it and took it away; if it was lying in a drawer no doubt he found it while he was looking for letters from his wife to Bridwell, or for her photograph--anything which would connect her name with Bridwell. Somehow, he found it and took it away. There is no one else who would be likely to take it."

This was the solution. It was proved beyond all doubt that Bridwell had been dealing in Government secrets, and changes had to be made to ensure that the information he had sold should be useless to the purchasers; but this crime had nothing to do with his murder. The dØnouement was rather startling. When we went to Ormrod's house next day we found that he had gone. His wife, after fencing with us a little, was perfectly open. She had arranged to go away with Bridwell and had visited him that day to talk over final arrangements. It was the first time she had ever been to the flat. Yesterday, a telegram had come for her husband. He opened it in her presence, and told her he was going away at once, and for good. Then he gave her the bag, saying he had found it in Bridwell's rooms on the previous evening. Bridwell was dead, that was why he was going away.

The solicitor Standish was a friend of Ormrod's, and after Quarles had gone had suddenly realized what the inquiry might mean, so had telegraphed a warning.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STOLEN AEROPLANE MODEL

It was probably on account of the acumen he had shown in solving the

mystery of Arthur Bridwell's death that the government employed Quarles in the important inquiry concerning a stolen model. For political reasons nothing got into the papers at the time, but now there is no further need of secrecy.

You would have been astonished, I fancy, had you chanced upon us in the empty room at Chelsea on a certain Friday afternoon. No trio of sane persons could have looked more futile. On a paper pad the professor was making odd diagrams which might have represented a cubist's idea of an aeroplane collision; Zena was looking at her hands as if she had discovered something new and unfamiliar about them; and I was turning the leaves of my pocket book, hoping to get an inspiration.

"The man-servant," said Zena, breaking the silence, which had lasted a long time.

"You have said that a dozen times in the last twenty-four hours," Quarles returned rather shortly, adding after a moment's pause, as if he were giving us valuable information, "and to-day is Friday."

"It is simply impossible that the servant should know so little," she persisted. "His ignorance is too colossal to be genuine. He doesn't know whether he was attacked by one person or by half-a-dozen; he is not sure that it wasn't a woman who seized him; he has no idea what his master kept in the safe or in the cupboard. Well, all I can say is, I do not believe him."

I was inclined to agree with her, but in silence I went on looking through the notes I had made concerning the extraordinary case which must be solved quickly if the solution were to be of any benefit to the country. Quarles was also silent, continuing his work as an amateur cubist.

He had expressed no definite opinion since the case had come into his hands, nor had he laughed at any speculation of mine, a sure sign that he was barren of ideas. I had never known him so reticent.

It was his case entirely, not mine, and the fact that the government had considered he was the only man likely to get to the bottom of the mystery was a recognition of his powers, which pleased him no doubt. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since he had been put in possession of the facts, and although they had been spent in tireless energy by both of us--for he had immediately sent for me--we seemed as far from the truth as ever.

On the previous Tuesday Lady Chilcot had given a dance in her house in Mayfair. Her entertainments always had a political flavor, and on this particular evening her rooms seemed to have been full of conflicting influences.

There was considerable political tension at the time, consequent upon one of those periodical disturbances in the Balkans, and people remarked upon the coolness between the Minister for War and certain ambassadors who were all present at Lady Chilcot's.

Imagination may have had something to do with this conclusion, but two apparently trivial incidents assumed importance as regards the case in hand. The Silesian ambassador was seen in very earnest conversation with a young man attached to the Silesian Embassy; and the Minister of War had buttonholed young Lanning.

Of course, we did not know what the Silesians had talked about, but to Lanning the minister had remarked that, in view of the political situation, the experiments which had been witnessed that day might prove to be of supreme importance. Lanning expressed gratification that the experiments had been found convincing, and ventured to hope the government would not delay getting to work.

With the minister's assurance that the government was keen, Richard Lanning went to find Barbara Chilcot, Lady Chilcot's daughter, but not to talk about the Minister of War or about any experiments. He was in love with her, and had every reason to believe that she liked him.

She was, however, very cool to him that evening, and sarcastically inquired why he was not in attendance upon Mademoiselle Duplaix as usual. She only laughed at his denials, and when he suggested that she should ask his friend, Perry Nixon, whether there was any ground for her suspicions, said that when she danced with Mr. Nixon later in the evening she hoped to find something more interesting to talk about than Mademoiselle Duplaix.

Lanning comforted himself with the reflection that if Barbara were indifferent to him she would have said nothing about Yvonne Duplaix, and as he had another dance with her at the end of the program hoped to make his peace then.

When this dance came, however, he could not find her, and afterwards discovered that she had sat it out with the young Silesian. He was angry and felt a little revengeful, but he did not mention Barbara to Perry Nixon when they left the house together and walked to Piccadilly.

He left Nixon at the corner of Bond Street and went to his flat in Jermyn Street.

He found his man, Winbush, lying on the dining-room floor, gagged and half unconscious. The safe in his bedroom had been broken open, important papers had been stolen from it, and a wooden case, which he had locked in a cupboard there, had been taken away.

Fully alive to the gravity of the loss, and oblivious of the fact that neglect would be attributed to him, he immediately telephoned to the Minister of War.

Then he phoned to Nixon's rooms in Bond Street, and Nixon came round at once. Up to that time Lanning had said nothing about the experiments to his friend; now he told him the whole story.

Richard Lanning belonged to the Army Flying Corps, and was not only a good airman, but was an authority upon flying machines. For some time past there had been secret trials of various types of stabilizers, and one invention, somewhat altered at Lanning's suggestion, had proved so successful that safety in flight seemed assured in the near future.

Detailed plans had been prepared, a working model constructed, and only that afternoon these had been secretly exhibited by Lanning in London to a few members of the government and some War Office officials.

Only four men at the works knew anything about the secret, and even their knowledge was not complete, so it seemed impossible that information could leak out, yet the plans and the working model had been stolen.

Of course Lanning was blamed for having them at his flat; he ought to have taken them back to the works. The fact that this would have meant missing Lady Chilcot's dance was an added mark against him, and suggested a neglect of duty.

Under the circumstances publicity was not desirable, and Christopher Quarles was asked to solve the mystery. Instructions were telegraphed to the various ports with a view to preventing the model and the plans being taken out of the country, and, as I have said, the professor and I entered upon a strenuous time.

All our preliminary information naturally came from Lanning, who appeared quite indifferent to his own position so long as the stolen property was recovered.

The man Winbush could throw little light upon the affair. He was in his own room when he had heard a noise in the passage and supposed his master had returned earlier than he expected. To make sure, he had gone to the dining-room, but before he could switch on the light he had been seized from behind, a pungent smell was in his nostrils, and he was only just beginning to recover consciousness when his master found him.

He had not seen his assailants, he could not say how many there were, and he was inclined to think one of them was a woman, he told Quarles, because when he first entered the dining-room there was a faint perfume which suggested a woman's presence.

"It was like a woman when she is dressed for a party," he said in explanation.

He had seen his master bring in the wooden case that afternoon, but he did not know what it contained.

As Zena said, it sounded a lame story, but Lanning believed it. Winbush had been connected with the family all his life, was devoted to him, and it was not likely he would know what the case contained. Lanning could only suppose that some man at the works had turned traitor, while Mr. Nixon gave it as his opinion that either France or Germany had pulled the strings of the robbery.

Acting under Quarles's instructions, I had an interview with Miss Chilcot. She corroborated Lanning's story in every detail so far as she was concerned, and incidentally I understood there was no more than a lover's quarrel between them. She had sat out with the young Silesian on purpose to annoy Richard. Certainly they had talked of aeroplaning; it was natural, since two days before she had seen some flying at Ranelagh, but Lanning's name had not been mentioned. Miss Chilcot knew nothing about the experiments which had taken place, nor was she aware that her lover was responsible for some of the improvements which had been made in stabilizers. Rather inconsequently she was annoyed that he had not confided in her. Miss Chilcot carried with her a faint odor of Parma violets. Quarles had told me to note particularly whether she used any kind of perfume.

I was convinced of two things; first, that she was telling the truth without concealing anything, and, secondly, that Mr. Lanning was likely to marry a very charming but rather exacting young woman. When I said so to Quarles he annoyed me by remarking that some women were capable of making lies sound much more convincing than the truth.

I did not attempt to get an interview with Mademoiselle Duplaix, but I made inquiries concerning her, and had a man watching her movements.

Apparently she was the daughter of a good French family, and was making a prolonged stay with the Payne-Kennedys, who moved in very good society. You may see their name constantly in the Morning Post. It was whispered that they were not above accepting a handsome fee for introducing a protØgØe into society, a form of log-rolling which is far more prevalent than people imagine. Whether the girl's entrance into London society had been paid for or not I am unable to say, but she had quickly established herself as a success. It was generally agreed that she was both witty and charming, the kind of girl men easily run after, but not the sort they usually marry.

She had evidently managed to cause dissension in various directions, so the suggestion that there was something of the adventuress about her might be nothing more than a spiteful comment. It justified us in keeping a watch upon her, but I had no definite opinion in the matter, not having seen the lady, and, as Quarles said, a fascinating foreigner is easily called an adventuress.

I also made careful inquiries concerning the young Silesian, and had him pointed out to me. He had recently come from his own capital, and was remaining in London only for a short time. He was a relative of the ambassador, and was not here in any official capacity, it was stated. This might be true so far as it went, but at the same time he might be connected with the secret service.

The professor said very little about his investigations, and I concluded he had met with no success. He had spent some hours with Lanning at the works, I knew, but if he had tapped any other sources of information he did not mention them.

He was still engaged in his cubist's drawings when the telephone bell rang.

"I'll go," he said as Zena jumped up; "I am expecting a message."

He went into the hall, and when he returned told us that Lanning and Nixon were on their way to Chelsea.

"I told them to 'phone me if anything happened," he said.

"And you expected to hear from them?" I asked.

"My name is Micawber when I am in a hole, and I wait for something to turn up. Waiting is occasionally the best way of getting to the end of the journey. We will hear what they have to say, Wigan, and then we shall possibly have to get a move on."

Evidently he had a theory, but he would say nothing about it. He amused himself by explaining that mechanical action, such as drawing meaningless lines and curves, as he had been doing, had the effect of giving the brain freedom to think, and declared that it was during times of this sort of freedom that inspiration most usually came.

He was still engrossed with the subject when Lanning and Nixon arrived.

Quarles introduced them to Zena, saying that she always helped him in his investigations.

"Oh, no, not as a clairvoyant," he said with a smile as both men looked astonished. "She just uses common sense, a very valuable thing in detective work, I can assure you."

"Are you any nearer a solution?" Lanning asked.

"I thought you had come to give me some information," Quarles returned.

"I have, but--"

"Sit down, then, and to business. I am still wanting facts, which are more useful than all my theories."

"Mademoiselle Duplaix telephoned to me this morning," said Lanning. "A man called on her to-day, a mysterious foreigner. He gave no name, but she thinks he was a Silesian, although he spoke perfect French. He talked to her in French, his English being of a fragmentary kind. He asked her to give him the plans of the new aeroplane. You can imagine her surprise. When she said she had got no plans he expressed great astonishment and plunged into the whole story of how I had been robbed. Until that moment Mademoiselle knew nothing of what had happened in my flat, but this foreigner had evidently got hold of the whole story."

"Who had told him to call upon her?" Quarles asked.



"In the course of an excited narrative he mentioned two or three names entirely unknown to her, but the man seemed to think that I should have sent her the plans."

"Very curious," Quarles remarked.

"He then became apologetic," Lanning went on, "but all the same left the impression that he did not believe her; in fact, she describes his attitude as rather threatening. It wasn't until after he had gone that she thought she ought to have him followed, and then it was too late. He was out of the street. Probably he had a motor waiting for him. Then she telephoned to me, but I was out, and have only just received her message. What do you make of it?"

"It gives a new turn to the affair," said Quarles reflectively. "It leaves an unpleasant doubt whether Mademoiselle Duplaix is as innocent as she ought to be, doesn't it?"

"I don't think so."

"Would she have telephoned to Lanning if she were guilty?" said Nixon.

"My experience is that where women are concerned it is very difficult to tell what line of action will be followed. Women are distinctly more subtle than men."

Then after a pause the professor went on: "It is difficult to understand how this foreigner could have made such a mistake. You have told us, Mr. Lanning, that there is nothing between you and this lady, but Miss Chilcot had her suspicions, remember, which suggests that, without intending to do so, you have paid her attentions which other people have misunderstood. Now, do you think you have given Mademoiselle Duplaix a wrong impression, made her believe, in short, that you cared for her, and so caused her to be jealous and perhaps inclined to be revengeful?"

"I am sure I have not."

"Think well, it is a very important point. For instance, has she ever given you any keepsake, a glove, a handkerchief, something--some trifle she was wearing at a dance when--when you flirted with her? Girls do that kind of thing, so my niece there has told me."

Zena smiled and made no denial.

"Nothing of the kind has happened between Mademoiselle and myself," said Lanning.

"And yet there seems to be a distinct attempt on some one's part to implicate you."

"That is true, and I am quite at a loss to understand it."

"I have wondered whether it is not a clever device to put us off the trail," said Nixon. "Your investigations may have led you nearer the truth than you imagined, Mr. Quarles, and this may be an attempt to set you off on a wrong scent. It seems such an obvious clue, doesn't it? They would guess that Lanning would communicate with you."

"That hardly explains why they went to Mademoiselle Duplaix, does it?"

"But the fact that she is French may," Nixon answered. "Perhaps I am prejudiced, but I believe Silesia has pulled the strings of this affair, and that would be a very good reason for trying to implicate France. It has occurred to Lanning whether the plot might not be frustrated at the other end of it, so to speak. Lanning thinks it would be a good idea if we went to Silesia."

"What do you think of the idea?" Lanning asked. "I should have our Embassy there behind me, and I should probably manage to get in touch with the men who are active in Silesia's secret service. I mentioned it to my chief this morning, and he thought there was a great deal in it, but advised a consultation with you first."

"I think it is a good idea," said Quarles, "and it suggests another one. I am still a little doubtful about Mademoiselle Duplaix, and I have a strong impression that she could at least tell us more if she would, but that she is afraid of hurting you."

"It is most unlikely."

"Well, let me put it to the test, Mr. Lanning. Just write--let me see, how will it be best to word it? 'I am going to Silesia--' By the way, when will you go?"

"I thought to-night."

"It is as well not to waste time," said Quarles. "Then write, 'I am going to Silesia to-night. I want you to be perfectly open with the bearer of this note and do whatever he advises. If you would be a true friend to me, tell him everything.' Put your ordinary signature to it. With that in my possession I will get to work at once, and if I discover anything of importance, and it should be necessary to stop your journey, I will meet your train to-night."

"It seems like an impertinence," Lanning said as he wrote the note.

"When there is so much at stake I shouldn't let that worry you," said Nixon.

No sooner had they gone than Quarles became alert.

"Now we move, Wigan. First of all, we have an appointment in Kensington, at the Blue Lion, near the church, quite a respectable hostelry."

"Not to meet Mademoiselle Duplaix, surely?"

"No, she can wait. Respectable as it is, I do not suppose Mademoiselle frequents the Blue Lion, but we may find there the man who called upon her this morning."

We took a taxi to Kensington. Every moment seemed to be bursting with importance for Quarles now.

The first person I caught sight of at the Blue Lion was Winbush, evidently waiting for some one. He recognized us, and Quarles went to him.

"You are waiting for Mr. Lanning."

The man hesitated.

"I know," Quarles went on, "because I have just left your master. He is in trouble."

"In trouble!"

"Oh, we shall get him out of it all right. There is some mistake. \_I\_ have a message for you. Come inside."

We found a corner to ourselves, and the professor, having ordered drinks, showed Winbush the note which Lanning had written to Mademoiselle Duplaix. It was not addressed to her, and was so worded that it might be meant for any one. Winbush read it and looked at Quarles.

"While your master is in Silesia I have certain work to do here, and to do it I must have your complete story," said the professor. "You appreciate the fact that Mr. Lanning looks upon you as a friend and wishes you to tell me all you know."

"I do, sir, only I don't see how my story is going to help him."

"It is going to help us to put our hand on the man who is really guilty."

"It has all been very mysterious," said Winbush, "and I have not been able to understand my master at all. What I have said about hearing a noise in the passage and being seized before I could switch on the light in the dining-room is all true, but the stuff which was put into my face and made me unconscious wasn't there before I had time to call out."

"You called out, then?"

"No, I didn't, because the man spoke to me."

"Oh, it was a man--not a woman?"

"It was Mr. Lanning himself," said Winbush.

This was so unexpected that I nearly exclaimed at it, but Quarles just

watched the speaker as if he would make certain that he was telling nothing but the truth.

"He spoke quickly and excitedly," Winbush went on. "Said it was necessary that the flat should appear to have been robbed. I should presently be discovered bound. I was to say that I had been attacked in the dark and that I did not know by whom nor by how many. I was not to speak about the matter to him again under any circumstances, and even if he questioned me alone or before others I was to stick to my story of utter ignorance. I had just said that I understood and heard him say that he would probably question me to prove my faithfulness, when he put the stuff over my mouth and nose, and I knew no more until he found me there later on."

"Has he questioned you since?"

"Not since he first found me lying on the floor. He did then, and I obeyed his instructions just as I did when you talked to me afterwards."

"Did he suggest you should say a woman was present?"

"No, sir."

"That was a little extra trimming of your own, eh?"

"No, it was a bit of truth that crept in. I thought a woman was there."

"By the perfume?"

"Yes, sir."

Quarles brought from the depth of a pocket a tissue-paper parcel, from which he took a handkerchief.

"Was that the perfume?"

Winbush smelt it.

"It may have been. It was the perfume that hangs about a woman in evening dress."

"That's Parma violets, Wigan," said the professor, waving the handkerchief towards me. It was one of his own, so had evidently been specially prepared for this test. "I wonder what percentage of women use the scent? It is not much of a clue for us, I am afraid."

He put the handkerchief away, and then from another pocket produced a second handkerchief, also wrapped in tissue paper.

This time it was a fragile affair of lawn and lace.

"Smell that, Mr. Winbush."

"That's it!" the man exclaimed; no hesitation this time.

"You can swear to it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rather a pleasant scent but peculiar, Wigan. I do not know what it is."

Nor did I, but the handkerchief interested me. Worked in the corner were the letters "Y.D."

"I can get to work now, Mr. Winbush," said Quarles. "Your master tells you to do whatever I advise. Of course, I understand that in keeping these facts to yourself you were acting in your master's interests, but were it generally known that you had suppressed the truth you might get into trouble. Have you any relatives in town?"

"I have a married nephew out Hampstead way."

"Most fortunate. You go straight off and see him, get him to put you up for the night, but whatever you do keep away from Jermyn Street until to-morrow morning. You will spoil my efforts on your master's behalf if you turn up at the flat before then."

Winbush promised to obey these instructions, and Quarles and I left the Blue Lion.

"After hearing that Lanning was coming to see me this afternoon, I telephoned a telegram to Winbush," explained the professor when we were outside. "He thought it came from his master telling him to meet him at the Blue Lion. Lanning will have to do his own packing for once. Winbush's story is rather a surprising one, eh, Wigan?"

"And most unexpected," I said.

"Well, no, not quite unexpected," he answered in that superior manner which is so exasperating at times. "I got that note from Lanning for the purpose of getting the man to tell me the truth."

"At any rate, you were mistaken in supposing that Mademoiselle's mysterious foreigner would be at the Blue Lion," I returned.

"Not at all. He was there."

"Winbush!" I exclaimed.

"No, Christopher Quarles. I called on Mademoiselle Duplaix this morning. I thought she would communicate directly or indirectly with Lanning; that is why I was expecting a message from him. I was also fortunate enough to appropriate her handkerchief. To-night I become the distinguished foreigner again; you had better be an elderly gentleman with a stoop. We are traveling to Harwich. Don't forget a revolver; it may be useful. We must get to Liverpool Street early; we shall want plenty of time at the station."

He left me without waiting to be questioned. I was annoyed, and was pretty certain that he had overlooked one important fact. Surely Lanning must have realized how dangerous it was to give such a note to Quarles? Knowing the story Winbush could tell, he would not have been deceived by the statement that the letter was intended for Mademoiselle Duplaix. He was far too clever for that. He and Winbush were no doubt working together, and the man's story was no doubt part of an arranged scheme. It seemed to me that the immediate recognition of the second scent was suspicious. The man was probably prepared for the test.

I thought it likely that Quarles had met his match this time, and I did not expect to see Richard Lanning at the station.

However, he was there with Mr. Nixon.

"Are they both in it?" I asked Quarles as we watched them.

"No, I don't think so," was his doubtful answer.

We were still watching them as they spoke to the guard, when I started and called the professor's attention to a tall, military-looking man who was hurrying along the platform.

"That is the young man at the Silesian Embassy," I said. "He is evidently going back. Are we to see Mademoiselle Duplaix come along next?"

"We are only concerned with Lanning for the present," Quarles answered, "and we have got to travel in the same carriage with him and Nixon. I expect they have tipped the guard to get a carriage to themselves. You must use your authority with him, Wigan, and show him that we are Scotland Yard men. Suggest that he put us into the carriage at the last moment with many apologies because there is no room elsewhere. In these disguises they will not recognize us."

The two Englishmen and the Silesian did not approach each other, and apparently were quite ignorant of the fact that they were traveling by the same train. I made the necessary arrangements with the guard, and just as the train was starting we were bundled into the carriage, Quarles blowing and puffing in a most natural manner.

"Sorry," he panted, speaking in broken English; "it is a train quite full, and I say to the man I must go. He put us in here. I am grieved to disturb you."

Nixon said it didn't matter, but Lanning looked annoyed.

Quarles talked to me chiefly about a wife he was returning to at Bohn. He became almost maudlin in his sentiment, and at intervals he raised his voice sufficiently to allow our traveling companions to overhear the conversation.

Presently Quarles leaned towards me in a confidential manner, and said in

a whisper which was intentionally loud enough for the others to hear:

"From Bohn I go to Silesia to see the new flying machine."

"What flying machine?" I asked.

"Ah, it was a secret what Silesia have got hold of. It was wonderful. I myself tell you so, and I know. I--"

"What do you know about it?"

Lanning was leaning from his corner looking at Quarles.

"Steady," said the professor. "If your hand does not from your pocket come in one blink of an eye you are a dead man. This is a big matter."

Quarles had covered him with a revolver, and following his lead I covered Nixon.

For a moment it was a tableau, not a sound nor a movement in the carriage.

"As you say, it is a big matter," said Lanning, taking his hand from his pocket.

He was for diplomacy rather than force, or perhaps he was a coward at heart. Nixon showed more courage and was quicker in his movements. His revolver was halfway out before I had slid along the seat and had my weapon at his head.

"It is of no use," said Quarles. "It is not by accident we are here. We know, no matter how, but we know for certain that the plans of a wonderful aeroplane which cannot come to harm, and a model of it, are traveling by this train to-night. We came here to take them. We are sorry to disturb you, but it is necessary."

Lanning laughed.

"Would it astonish you to hear we are after the very same things?"

"It would, because I tell you they are in this carriage."

"Where?" asked Lanning, still laughing.

"There, in that big portmanteau." And Quarles pointed to one on the rack above Nixon's head.

I was only just in time to bring my weapon down on Nixon's wrist as he whipped out his revolver.

"Hold him, Wigan; he is dangerous," said Quarles, speaking in his natural voice. "We will have a look in that portmanteau, Mr. Lanning."

The plans and the model in its wooden case were there. Lanning was too dumbfounded to ask questions, and Nixon offered no explanation just then. I had wrested the revolver from him, and he sat there in silence.

"It was very cleverly thought out, Mr. Nixon," said Quarles. "You see, Mr. Lanning, your friend, having stolen these things, intended to allow time to elapse before attempting to get them out of the country, but his hand was forced when Mademoiselle Duplaix telephoned to you. The foreigner who called upon her for the plans puzzled him. There was something in the plot he did not understand. Two things were clear to him, however; first, that he must act without delay, and secondly, that mademoiselle's visitor would implicate her and cause us to make minute inquiries in her direction--that a false trail was laid, in fact. So, aware that he would find difficulty at the ports, he carefully suggested to your mind that a journey to Silesia would be a useful move. Your mission would be known at the ports, and you and your friend would pass through without special examination."

"That is so," said Lanning.

"And you would have been cleverly fooled," said Quarles, "As for Mademoiselle Duplaix, I confess I should have watched her keenly had I not been the mysterious foreigner."

"But my note to her?" said Lanning.

"Was exceedingly useful, but I used it to get the truth out of Winbush," and Quarles told the man-servant's story in detail. "Winbush, you see, was in a dazed condition, and was deceived. In the dark Nixon pretended to be you. I suppose it was a sudden inspiration when he found himself disturbed, and his instructions to Winbush stopped your servant from questioning you. Had he done so a suspicion concerning your friend might have been aroused in your mind. Winbush, however, went a little beyond his instructions, and said he thought a woman was present, because of a perfume he noticed when he first entered the room. That particular perfume is used by Mademoiselle Duplaix, and I should hazard a guess that Mr. Nixon had stolen her handkerchief that evening, not a criminal offense, but a matter of flirtation."

"But he was at Lady Chilcot's, and left there with me," said Lanning.

"If he has kept his program. I expect you will find some consecutive places in it blank. Until this afternoon, Mr. Lanning, I confess that I was uncertain whether you had been your own burglar or not, for it was evident to me that your man knew something. I was convinced you were innocent when you wrote that note for me, I rather wonder Mr. Nixon did not realize the danger, but I suppose he felt confident that Mademoiselle's visitor had entirely put me on the wrong trail. I do not think Mademoiselle Duplaix is in any way a party to the theft, but I think it is up to Mr. Nixon to make this quite clear."

It is only doing Perry Nixon justice to say that he did clear up this point, but not by word of mouth.



At Harwich he ingeniously gave us the slip, but in a letter to Lanning, received from Paris a week later, he said that he alone was responsible for the theft, and that neither Mademoiselle Duplaix nor any one else had any hand in it, nor any knowledge of it.

From some remarks Lanning had let fall he concluded that some important development had occurred in the stabilizing of flying machines--a matter his employers were interested in--and he had watched his friend's movements. He guessed that secret experiments had been tried that day when he saw Lanning take the wooden case to his flat, and during the evening he had slipped away from Lady Chilcot's dance, returning when he had deposited the model and the plans in a safe place.

He did not say where this safe place was, and since he had persistently suggested that either France or Germany had pulled the strings of the robbery, he was probably working for neither of these countries.

Shortly afterwards Richard Lanning's engagement to Miss Chilcot was announced, and I imagine he is still working to perfect a stabilizer, for, although the model appears to have done all that was required of it, the actual machine proved defective, I understand.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE AFFAIR OF THE CONTESSA'S PEARLS

I think it was when talking about the stolen model that Quarles made the paradoxical statement that facts are not always the best evidence. I argued the point, and remained entirely of an opposite opinion until I had to investigate the case of a pair of pearl earrings, and then I was driven into thinking there was something in Quarles's statement. It was altogether a curious affair, and showed the professor in a new light which caused Zena and myself some trouble.

The Contessa di Castalani occupied rooms at one of the big West End hotels, a self-contained suite, consisting of a sitting-room, two bedrooms, and vestibule. She had her child with her, a little girl of about three years old, and a French maid named Angølique.

Returning to the hotel one afternoon unexpectedly, she met, but took no particular notice of, two men in the corridor which led to her suite. Hotel servants she supposed them to be, and, as she entered the little vestibule Angølique came from the contessa's bedroom. There was no reason why she should not go in there; in fact, she carried a reason in her hand. She had been to get a clean frock for the child. The one she had worn on the previous day was too soiled to put on.

That evening the contessa wished to wear a special pair of pearl

earrings, but when she went to get the little leather case which contained the pearls, it was missing.

Although her boxes and drawers were not much disarranged, it was quite evident to her that they had been searched, but nothing else had been taken apparently.

It did not occur to her to suspect the maid, partly, no doubt, because she remembered the men in the corridor, and she immediately sent for the manager.

The police were called in. The men in the corridor could not be accounted for, but a search resulted in the finding of the leather case under the bed. The earrings had gone.

Naturally police suspicion fell on the French maid, but the contessa absolutely refused such an explanation. AngØlique, who was passionately fond of her and of the child, would not do such a thing.

The case looked simple enough, but it proved to be one in which facts did not constitute the best evidence. Indeed, they proved somewhat misleading.

Beautiful, romantic, eccentric, superstitious, and most unfortunate according to her own account, the Contessa di Castalani was the sensation of a whole London season.

As a dancer of a bizarre kind, she had set Paris nodding to the rhythm of her movements and raving about the beauty of her eyes and hair. Her reputation had preceded her to London, and when she appeared at the Regency it was universally admitted that she far surpassed everything that had been said about her.

The press had duly informed the public that Castalani was one of the oldest and most honored names in Italy. There had been a Castalani in the Medici time, a close friend of the magnificent Lorenzo, it was asserted. One paper declared that a Castalani had worn the triple tiara, which a learned don of Oxford took the trouble to write and deny. And it would appear that no one who had ever borne the name had been altogether unimportant.

How the family, resident in Pisa, liked this publicity, I do not know. They made no movement to repudiate this daughter of their house, and I have no reason whatever to doubt that the lady had a perfect right to her title. I never heard any scandalous tale about her which even seemed true, and if she and her husband were happier going each their own way, it was their affair.

So much mystery was woven round her during her appearances in the European capitals, that I do not guarantee the correctness of my statements when I say she was of humble origin, a Russian gipsy, I have heard, seen in a Hungarian village by young Castalani, who immediately fell in love with her and married her.

Although in the course of this investigation I saw her many times and she talked a great deal about herself, she was always vague when she was dealing with facts.

I am only concerned with her appearance in London. She attracted overflowing houses to the Regency. A real live countess performing bizarre and daring dances was undoubtedly the attraction to some, the woman's splendid beauty charmed others, while a third section could talk of nothing but her wonderful jewelry.

At least two foolish young peers were said to be in love with her, and there were tales of a well-known Cabinet Minister constantly occupying a stall at the Regency when he ought to have been in his seat in the House.

Had I not taken Christopher Quarles and Zena to the Regency one evening I should probably never have known anything further of the contessa, but it so happened that the professor was very much attracted by her.

He went to the Regency three times in one week to study the inward significance of her dances, he declared. He treated me to a learned discourse concerning them, and was furious when one journal, slightly puritanical in tone, perhaps, said that they were generally unedifying, and in one case, at any rate, immodest.

Zena and I began by laughing at the professor, but he did not like it. He was quite serious in his admiration, and declared that nothing would afford him greater pleasure than an introduction to the dancer.

To his delight he got what he wanted, and incidentally solved one of the most curious cases we have ever been engaged in together.

In the ordinary way the case would never have come into my hands. It was at Quarles's instigation that I asked to be employed upon it, and since small and insignificant affairs are sometimes ramifications of big mysteries, no surprise was caused by my request.

I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that it was the introduction to the woman which interested Quarles rather than her pearls. Indeed, he appeared to think of nothing else beyond making himself agreeable.

It seemed to me she was just as interested in him, talked about herself in a naive kind of way, and was delighted when her little girl, Nella, took a tremendous fancy to the professor, demanding to be taken on his knee and to have his undivided attention.

Christopher Quarles, in fact, presented quite an unfamiliar side of his character to me, and I do not think he would have bothered about the pearls at all but for the fact that the contessa was superstitious about them.

"They were given to me by a Hungarian count," she said in her pretty

broken English; "just two pearls. I had them made into earrings. It was the best way I could wear them. They are perfect, and they have a history. They were a thank-offering to some idol in Burmah, but were afterwards sold or stolen--I do not know which. It does not matter; it was a very long time ago; but what does matter is that they bring good luck. I shall be nothing without them, do you see?"

"That I will not believe! You will always be--"

"Beautiful," she said before Quarles could complete the sentence. "Ah, yes, I know that. I have been told that when I cease to be beautiful I shall cease to live. A gipsy in Budapest told me so. But what is beauty if you have no luck?"

"When were they given to you?" Quarles asked.

"A year after I married. Listen, I will tell you a secret. It was the beginning of the little difference with my husband. He was jealous."

"It was natural."

"No, it was not," she answered. "My Hungarian friend, he loved me of course. That is the natural part. I was born like that. Some women are. It is not their fault. It just is so, and yet people think evil and say, shocking! It is in their own mind--the evil--and nowhere else, and I say 'basta,' and go my way, caring not at all. Why, every night in my dressing room at the Regency there is a pile of letters--like that, and flowers. The room is full of them--all from people who love me--and I do not know one of them. I like it, but it makes no difference to me. I told my husband that it was nothing, but no, he went on being jealous. He was very foolish, but I think some day he will grow sensible. Then I shall very likely say it is too late. The world has said it loves me, and that is better than one Castalani. You do not know the Castalanis?"

"No."

"Ah, they are what you call thoughtful for themselves, very high, and very few people are quite as good, so we had little quarrels, and then a big one, because he said he would throw my pearls into the Arno. I hid them, and he could not find them. If he had found them and thrown them away I would have killed him."

Quarles nodded, as if such a tragedy would have been the most natural thing possible.

"His mother made it worse," the contessa went on, "so we have one fierce quarrel and I speak my mind. I say a great deal when I speak my mind, and I am not nice then. I went away with my little girl. It was very unfortunate, but what could I do? I love dancing, so I go on the stage, and--and I have lost my pearls. See, there is the case, but it is empty."

Quarles looked at it, but I was sure he was not thinking of what he was doing, and he did not even ask the most obvious questions.

I did that, and received scant answers. She was not a bit interested in me.

"My pearls," she went on, "I want my pearls. There are some women pearls love. I am one. When I wear them a little while they are alive. The colors in them glow and palpitate. They are never dull then. I do not wear them always, only on certain days--on feasts, and when I am very happy."

"We must find them," said Quarles.

"Of course. That is why I come to know you, isn't it?"

The professor was full of her as we left the hotel.

"A most charming woman," he said.

"I doubt if you will find her so when you fail to restore her pearls."

"I shall restore them," he said, with that splendid confidence which sometimes characterized him, but, having no faith in his judgment on this occasion, I went my own way. I searched the maid's boxes and found that she had purloined many of the contessa's things--garments which had hardly been worn, silk scarves, laces--in fact, anything which took her fancy, and which her mistress would not be likely to miss. Of the two men in the corridor I could find no trace. The manager said there were no workmen about the hotel at that time, and the only description I could get from the contessa was so vague that it would have fitted anybody from the Prime Minister to the old bootlace-seller at the end of the street. One of the hotel servants was confident that he had seen the French maid speak to a man in the street outside the hotel on more than one occasion, but he was not inclined to swear to anything. However, the French maid was finally arrested on suspicion.

I knew that Quarles had been to see the contessa once or twice by himself, and when I went to the Brunswick Hotel on the day after AngØlique's arrest, I found him there.

"Ah, you have taken an innocent woman," the contessa exclaimed.

"I think not."

"What you think does not matter at all, it is what I know. I asked her, and she said she had not taken the pearls. Voila! She would not tell me anything that was not true."

"But, contessa--"

"I say there is no evidence against her. You just find two or three of my stupid things in her room, but that is nothing. French maids always take things like that--one expects it. But I am not angry. You think what is quite--quite silly, but you do something which is quite right." And

then, turning to the professor, she went on, "But you--you do nothing at all. You come to tea. You come and look at me, and think me very beautiful, which is quite nice and very well, but it does not give me back my pearls."

"It will," said Quarles.

"I have no opinion. I only know I have not the pearls. I gave you the empty case. I want it back with the earrings in it. I have heard that Monsieur Quarles is very clever--that he finds out everything, but--"

"It takes time, contessa," he said, rising. "There is one thing I want to see before I go."

"What is that?" she asked.

"The dress the maid was wearing that afternoon, and if she wore an apron I want to see that too."

The contessa fetched them, and for some minutes Quarles examined them closely.

I did not think he had started a theory. I thought the contessa's words had merely stung him into doing something. He had probably come to the conclusion that he had been making rather a fool of himself.

However, he was theoretical enough that night in the empty room at Chelsea.

"I think the arrest was a mistake, Wigan," he began.

"Surely you are not influenced by the contessa's opinion?"

"Well, she probably knows more about French maids than you do. I am inclined to trust a woman's intuition sometimes. The contessa is delightfully vague. It is part of her great charm, and it is in everything she does and says. She tells you something, but her real meaning you can only guess at. She dances, but the steps she ought to do and doesn't are the ones which really contain the meaning."

"Can she possibly be more vague, dear, than you are at the present moment?" laughed Zena.

"I think this is a case in which one must try to get into the contessa's atmosphere before any result is possible. You will agree, Wigan, that her point of view is peculiar."

"I should call it idiotic," I answered.

"Your opinion is all cut and dried, I presume?"

"Absolutely," I answered. "I believe the maid took the jewels and handed them to her confederates who were waiting in the corridor."

"It is possible," said Quarles, "but it seems curious that the contessa should return just in time to see, not only the men in the corridor, but also the maid leaving her room. Have you considered why only the earrings were stolen?"

"There was nothing else to steal," I answered.

"Why, everybody has talked of her jewels!" Zena exclaimed.

"All sham."

"Who told you so?" asked Quarles.

"The maid."

"She didn't suggest the pearls were sham?"

"No."

"That was thoughtless of her, since suspicion rests upon her. I am not much surprised to hear that the much-talked-of jewelry is sham. There is a vein of wisdom in the contessa, and we shall probably find she has put her jewelry into safe keeping, and wears paste because it has just as good an effect across the footlights. I should judge her wise enough not to take risks, and to have an eye for the future. It was only her superstition, and the fact that she wore the earrings fairly constantly, which prevented her depositing them in a safe place too. Zena asked me yesterday whether I should consider her a careless person. What do you think, Wigan?"

"It occurred to me that she might have put the case away when it was empty and carelessly put the pearls somewhere else," said Zena.

"Such, a vague kind of person is capable of anything," I returned. "But there is no doubt that a search in her room was made, and it is significant that things were not tossed about anyhow, as one would expect had a stranger made that search."

"True," said Quarles, "but if the maid took them there would have been no disarrangement at all. She would have known where to look. If she had wanted to suggest ordinary thieves she would have thrown things into disorder on purpose."

"Naturally she did not know exactly where to look," I said.

"Why not? The contessa evidently trusts her implicitly. In any case, I fancy we are drawn back to the supposition that the contessa is careless. When Zena asked the question, I was reminded of one or two inconsistencies in her surroundings. I should not call her orderly. Her carelessness must form part of my theory."

"I am surprised to hear you have formed one," I said.

"I have found the woman far more interesting than the pearls," he admitted, "but I am pledged to return the earrings, Wigan. You will find her smile of delight an excellent reward."

I shrugged my shoulders a little irritably.

"Now I will propose three propositions against yours. First, the jewels belonged to an idol, and were either sold or stolen--the contessa does not know which. Such things are not usually sold, so we may assume they were stolen. Their disappearance from the hotel may mean that they have merely been recovered. The idea is romantic, but such happenings do occur. Your French maid may have been pressed into the plot either through fear or by bribery."

"My facts would fit that theory," I said.

"Secondly, the husband may be concerned," Quarles went on. "There may be real love underlying his jealousy, he may think that if he can obtain possession of the pearls his wife will return to him. Again, your French maid may have been employed to this end."

"That theory would not refute my facts," I returned.

"Thirdly, the contessa herself. It is conceivable that for some reason she wished to have the pearls stolen, perhaps for the sake of advertisement--such things are done--or for the sake of insurance money, or for some other reason which is not apparent. This supposition would account for the contessa refusing to believe anything against the maid. It would also account for the men in the corridor, seen only by the contessa, remember, and therefore, perhaps, without any real existence."

"Of the three propositions, I most favor the last," I said.

"So do I," Quarles answered. "The first one is possible, but I fail to trace anything of the Oriental method in the robbery, the supreme subtlety which one would naturally expect. The second, which would almost of necessity require the help of the maid, would in all likelihood have been carried out before this, since the contessa has always had the pearls at hand. If she had only just got them out of the bank I should favor this second proposition. You remember the contessa suggested that her husband might at some time become more sensible. I should hazard a guess that she is still in communication with him. The death of the strife-stirring mother may bring them together again."

"That is rather an ingenious idea," I admitted.

"Now, the third proposition would appeal to me more were I not so interested in the woman," Quarles said. "Is she the sort of woman, for vain or selfish reasons, to enter into such a conspiracy with her maid? I grant the difficulty of plumbing a woman's mind--even Zena's there; but there are certain principles to be followed. A woman is usually thorough if she undertakes to do a thing, and had the contessa been concerned in



such a conspiracy, we should have had far more detail given to us in order to lead us in another direction. This third proposition does not please me, therefore."

"It seems to me we come back to the French maid," said Zena.

"We do," said Quarles. "That is the leather case, Wigan. Does it tell you anything?"

I took it and examined it.

"You seem to have got some grease on it, Professor."

"It was like that. Greasy fingers had touched it--recently, I judge--although, of course, the case may be an old one, and not made especially for the earrings. It is only a smear, but it could not have got there while the case was lying in a drawer amongst the contessa's things. Now open it. You will find a grease mark on the plush inside, which means that very unwashed fingers have handled it. That does not look quite like a dainty French maid--for she is dainty, Wigan."

"That is why you examined her dress, I suppose."

"Exactly! There was no suspicion of grease upon it. Facts have prejudiced you against AngØlique. I do not see a thief in her, but I do see a certain watchfulness in her eyes whenever we meet her. She knows something, Wigan, and to-morrow I am going to find out what it is. I think a few judicious questions will help us."

Quarles had never been more the benevolent old gentleman than when he saw the French maid next day.

He began by telling her that he was certain she was innocent, that he believed in her just as much as her mistress did.

"Now, when did you last see the pearls?" Quarles asked.

"The day before they were stolen."

"Your mistress was wearing them?"

"No, monsieur, but the case was on the dressing table. It was the case I saw, not the pearls."

"So for all you know to the contrary, the case may have been empty?"

"I do not see why you should think that," she answered, and it was quite evident to me that she was being careful not to fall into a trap.

"Just in the same way, perhaps, as you speak of the day before they were stolen. We do not know they are stolen. Were the pearls very valuable?"

"I do not know. The contessa valued them."

"She wears one or two good rings, I noticed," said Quarles, "but I understand the jewels she wears on the stage are paste."

"Yes, monsieur, all of it."

"Her real jewelry being at the bank!"

"That is so, monsieur."

"It is possible that the contessa has deceived us," Quarles went on, "and wants to make us believe the earrings are stolen."

"Oh, no, monsieur!"

"Why not?"

"I am sure."

"Come, now, why are you so sure? Tell me what you know, and we will soon have you back at the Brunswick Hotel. Had you told the men in the corridor that all the contessa's jewelry was sham?"

"I know nothing of--"

"Wait!" said Quarles. "Think before you speak. You do not realize how much we know about the men in the corridor. The contessa saw them, remember."

The girl began to sob.

Very gently Quarles drew the story from her. One of the men was her brother. She had been glad to come to England to see him, but she found he had got into bad hands. She had helped him a little with money. She had talked about the contessa, and when he had spoken about her wonderful jewels she had told him they were sham.

"Did he believe you?"

"No, monsieur, he laughed at me because I did not know the real thing from paste. I said I did, and, to prove it, mentioned the pearls."

"Was this before you knew he had fallen into bad hands?"

"Yes, monsieur. On the afternoon the pearls were stolen he came to see me at the hotel with a friend. How they got to our rooms I do not know. I opened the door, thinking it was the contessa. My brother laughed at my surprise, and said he and his friend wanted to see whether the contessa's pearls were real--they had a bet about them. He thought I was a fool, but I was quickly thinking what I must do. 'She is here,' I said. 'Come in five minutes, when she is gone.' This was unexpected for them, and they stepped back, and I shut the door. To get the door shut was all I could think of. I was afraid. I waited; then I went to the bell, but I

did not ring. After all, he was my brother. Then Nella called out from my room; I was on my way to fetch a clean frock for her from the contessa's room when my brother came. Now I fetched it, and as I came out of the room the contessa came in. It was a great relief."

"Did she say anything about the men in the corridor?"

"Not then--not until afterwards, when she found the pearls had been stolen."

"And you said nothing?"

"No, it was wrong, but he was my brother. How he got the pearls I do not know."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"But you are sure he stole the pearls?"

"Who else?" and she began to sob again.

"Perhaps when he hears you have been arrested, he will tell the truth."

"No, no, he has become bad in this country. I do not love England."

"Anyhow, we will soon have you out of this," said Quarles, patting her shoulder in a fatherly manner. "I am afraid your brother is not much good, but perhaps the affair is not so bad as you imagine."

We left her sobbing.

"A woman of resource," said Quarles.

"Very much so," I answered. "You do not think the arrest was a mistake now, I presume?"

"Perhaps not; no, I am inclined to think it has helped us. It is not every woman who would have got rid of two such blackguards so dexterously."

"It is the very thinnest story I have ever heard," I laughed.

We walked on in silence for a few moments.

"My dear Wigan, I am afraid you are still laboring under the impression that she stole the pearls."

"I am, and that she handed them to the men in the corridor, one of whom may have been her brother or may not."

"She didn't steal them," said Quarles.

"Why, how else could the men have got in?" I said. "You are not likely to see that rewarding smile on the contessa's face which you talked about."

"I think I shall, but first I must face the music and explain my failure. We will go this afternoon. Perhaps she will give us tea, Wigan."

I am afraid I murmured, "There's no fool like an old fool," but not loud enough for Quarles to hear.

When we entered the contessa's sitting-room that afternoon the child was playing on the floor with a small china vase, taken haphazard from the mantelpiece, I imagine.

Whether our entrance startled her, or whether she was in a destructive mood, I cannot say, but she dashed down the vase and broke it in pieces.

"Oh, Nella! Naughty, naughty Nella!" exclaimed her mother.

The child immediately went to Quarles.

"I want to sit on your knee," she said.

"If mother will give you such things to play with, Nella, why, of course, they get broken, don't they?" said Quarles.

"I thought you had brought my pearls," said the contessa.

"I have come to talk about them."

"That will not help--talk."

"It may."

"Will it bring AngØlique back? I am lost without AngØlique."

"She will soon be back."

I smiled at his optimism.

"We saw her to-day," Quarles went on; and he told the girl's story in detail, and in a manner which suggested that my mistake in having her arrested was almost criminal.

The contessa seemed to expect me to apologize, but when I remained silent she became practical.

"Still, I do not see my pearls, Monsieur Quarles."

"Contessa, your maid says you were looking at the earrings on the day before the robbery. She saw the case on your dressing-table."

"Yes, I remember."

"Do you remember putting the case back in your drawer?"

"Of course."

"I mean, is there any circumstance which makes you particularly remember doing so?"

"No."

"Was Nella crawling on the floor?"

"Why, yes. How did you guess that?"

"Didn't you meet the maid coming out of your room on the next afternoon? She had gone to fetch a clean frock."

"Ah! yes, Nella got her frock dirty," said the contessa.

"Pretty frock," said the child.

"Was she playing with anything--anything off the mantelpiece?" asked Quarles.

"No."

"Are you sure? You give her queer things to play with," and he pointed to the fragments on the floor.

"It does not matter," said the contessa, a little angry at his criticism.

"I shall pay for it."

"Pretty frock," said the child again.

"Is it, Nella? I should like to see it."

The child slipped from his knee.

"Where are you going?" asked the contessa.

"To fetch my dirty, pretty frock."

"Don't be silly, Nella."

"I should like to see it," said Quarles.

"I wish you would take less interest in the child and more in my pearls."

"Humor the child and let her show me the frock, then we will talk about the pearls."

With a bad grace the contessa went with Nella into the maid's room.

Quarles looked at me and at the fragments of the vase on the floor.

"Do you find them suggestive?"

"I am waiting to see the contessa in a real temper," I answered.

The child came running in with the frock, delighted to have got her own way.

"Aye, but it is dirty," said Quarles, and he became absorbed in the garment, nodding to the prattling child as she showed him tucks and lace.

"And now about my pearls," said the contessa.

Quarles put down the frock and stood up.

"There is the case," he said, taking it from his pocket; "we have got to put the pearls into it, Contessa, may I look into your bedroom?"

The request astonished her, and it puzzled me.

"Why, yes, if you like."

She went to the door, and we all followed her.

"A dainty room," said the professor. "It is like you, contessa."

She laughed at the absurdity of the remark, and yet there was some truth in it. The room wasn't really untidy, but it was not the abode of an orderly person. A hat was on the bed, thrown there apparently, a pair of gloves on the floor.

"I can always tell what a woman is like by seeing where she lives," said Quarles. "There is no toy on the mantelpiece which Nella could break. A pretty dressing-table, contessa."

He crossed to it and began examining the things upon it--silver-mounted bottles and boxes.

He lifted lids and looked at the contents--powder in this pot, rouge in that--and for a few moments the contessa was too astonished to speak.

Then there came a flash into her eyes resenting the impertinence.

"Really, monsieur--"

"Ah!" exclaimed Quarles, turning from the table with a pot in his hand.

"I want it," said the child, stretching herself up for it.

"Evidently Nella has played with this before, contessa. A French preparation for softening the skin, I see. I should guess she was playing with it as she crawled about the floor that afternoon. You didn't notice

her. I can quite understand a child being quiet for a long time with this to mess about with. There was grease on her frock, and look! the smoothed surface of this cream bears the marks of little fingers, if I am not mistaken. It is quite a moist cream, readily disarranged, easily smoothed flat again. Let us hope there is no ingredient in it which will hurt--pearls."

He had dug his fingers into the stuff and produced the earrings.

"You will find a grease mark on the case," he went on. "It is evident you could not have put the case away. Nella possessed herself of it when your back was turned, and, playing with this cream, amused herself by burying the pearls in it--just the sort of game to fascinate a child."

"I remember she was playing with that pot. I did not think she could get the lid off."

"She did, and somehow the case got kicked under the bed."

"Naughty Nella!" said the contessa.

"Oh, no," said Quarles. "Natural Nella. May I wash my hands?"

Well, we had tea with the contessa, and I saw the smile which rewarded Christopher Quarles.

I suppose he had earned it.

"When did you first think of the child?" I asked him afterwards.

"From the first," he answered; "but I was too interested in the mother to work out the theory."

How exactly in accordance with the truth this answer was I will not venture to say. That he was interested in the woman was obvious, and continued to be obvious while she remained in London.

Zena and I were rather relieved when her professional engagements took her to Berlin.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MADAME VATROTSKI

I firmly believe the contessa had succeeded in fluttering the professor's heart, and I think it was fortunate that he was soon engaged upon another case. The fact that it was also connected with theatrical people may have made him go into it with more zest. The contessa had given him a taste for the theater.

The three of us were in the empty room, and after a lot of talk which had led nowhere, had been silent for some time.

"I never believe in any one's death until I have seen the body, or until some one I can thoroughly trust has seen it," said Quarles, suddenly breaking the silence.

"You have said something like that before," I answered.

"It still remains true, Wigan."

"Then you think she is alive?" Is it the advertisement theory you cling to, or do you suppose she is a Nihilist?"

"I suppose nothing, and I never cling; all I know is that I have no proof of death," said the professor, and he launched into a discourse concerning the difficulties of concealing a body, chiefly, I thought, to hide the fact that he had no ideas at all about the strange case of Madame Vatrotski.

The rage for the tango, the sensational revue, for the Russian ballet, was at its height when Madame Vatrotski's name first appeared on the hoardings in foot-long letters.

The management of the Olympic billed her extensively as a very paragon of marvels, but most of the critics refused to endorse this opinion. Perhaps they were anxious to do a good turn to the home artistes who had been rather thrust aside by the foreign invasion of the boards of the variety theaters; at any rate, they declared her dancing was a mere pose, not always in the best of taste, and that her beauty was nothing to rave about.

I had not seen this much-advertised dancer, but the Olympic management could have had no reason to regret the expense they had gone to. Whether her dancing was good or bad, whether her beauty was real or imaginary, the great theater was full to overflowing night after night; her picture, in various postures, was in all the illustrated papers, and paragraphs concerning her were plentiful.

From beginning to end actual facts about her were difficult to get; but allowing for all journalistic exaggeration, the following statement is near the truth.

She was an eccentric rather than a beautiful dancer, and if she was not actually a beautiful woman there was something irresistibly attractive about her. Her origin was obscure, possibly she was not a Russian, and if she had any right to the title of madame, no husband was in evidence. She was quite young; upon the surface she was a child bent on getting out of life all life had to give, and underneath the surface she was perhaps a cold, calculating woman, with no other aim but her own gratification, utterly callous of the sorrow and ruin she might bring to others.



All other statements concerning her must at least be considered doubtful. Her friends may have been too generous, her enemies unnecessarily bitter. Personally I do not believe she was in any way connected with one of the royal houses of Europe, as rumor said, nor that she was the morganatic wife of an Austrian archduke.

I have said that I had never seen her. I may add that I was not in the least interested in her.

Even when I read the headline in the paper, "Mysterious disappearance of Madame Vatrotski," I remained unmoved; indeed, I had to think for a moment who Madame Vatrotski was, and when the paragraph concluded that the disappearance was probably a smart advertisement I thought no more about the matter.

Before the end of the week, however, I was obliged to think a great deal about this woman. It was a tribute to the dancer's popularity that her disappearance caused widespread interest not only in London, but in the provinces, and it speedily became evident that her friends were legion.

She had dined, or had had supper, at various times, with a score of well-known men; she had received presents and offers of marriage from them; she had certainly had two chances of becoming a peeress, she might have become the wife of a millionaire, and half a dozen younger sons had kept their families on tenter-hooks.

It was said the poet laureate had dedicated an ode to her--that Lovet Forbes, the sculptor, was immortalizing her in stone, and Musgrave had certainly painted her portrait.

From all sides there was a loud demand that the mystery must be cleared up, and the investigation was entrusted to me.

From the outset it was apparent that Madame Vatrotski had played fast and loose with her many admirers. She had not definitely refused either of the coronets offered her, nor the millions. I say her behavior was apparent, but I ought to say it was apparent to me, because many of those who knew her personally would not believe a word against her.

This was the case with Sir Charles Woodbridge, a very level-headed man as a rule, and also with Paul Renaud, the proprietor of the great dress emporium in Regent Street, an astute individual, not easily deceived by either man or woman.

Both these men were pleased to believe themselves the serious item in Madame Vatrotski's life, and Sir Charles in hot-headed fashion, and Renaud, in cold contempt, told me very plainly what they thought of me when I suggested that the lady might not be so innocently transparent as she seemed.

Up to a certain point it was comparatively easy to follow Madame's movements. After the performance on Monday evening she had gone to supper with Sir Charles at a smart restaurant, and many people had seen her

there. His car had taken her back to her rooms, and he had arranged to fetch her next morning at half-past eleven and drive her down to Maidenhead for lunch.

When Sir Charles arrived at her rooms next morning he was told she had gone out and had left no message. He was annoyed, but he had to admit it was not the first time she had broken an appointment with him.

It transpired that she had gone out that morning soon after ten, and half-an-hour afterwards was at Reno's. Paul Renaud did not see her there and had no appointment with her.

She made some trivial purchases--a veil, some lace and gloves, which were sent to her rooms later in the day, and she left the shop about eleven. The door-porter was able to fix the time, and was quite sure the lady was Madame Vatrotski. She would not have a taxi, and walked away in the direction of Piccadilly Circus. Since then she had disappeared altogether.

A taxi-driver came forward to say he believed he had taken her to a restaurant in Soho, but after inquiry I came to the conclusion that the driver was mistaken.

She sent no message to the theater that night, she simply did not turn up. To appease the audience it was announced that she was suffering from sudden indisposition; but, as a fact, the management did not know what had become of her, and the maid at her rooms confessed absolute ignorance concerning her mistress's whereabouts. I have no doubt the maid would have lied to protect Madame, but on this occasion I think she was telling the truth.

It was after I had told Quarles the result of my inquiries, and we had argued ourselves into silence, that he burst out with his remark about the body, and of course what he said was true enough. Still, I was inclined to think that Madame Vatrotski was dead. I did not believe she had disappeared as an advertisement: there was no earthly reason why she should, since her popularity had shown no signs of being on the wane, and to attribute the mystery to a Nihilist plot was not a solution which appealed to me.

"She may have returned to her rooms and met Sir Charles," Zena suggested, after a pause. "Perhaps she found him waiting in his car at the door and went off at once."

"Why do you make such a suggestion?" asked Quarles.

"She had plenty of time to keep the appointment; indeed, it almost looks as if she had arranged her morning on purpose to keep it. If she had gone with him at once her maid would not know she had returned."

Quarles looked at me.

"The same idea occurred to Paul Renaud," I said. "I can find no evidence

that Sir Charles went to Maidenhead that day, and at three o'clock in the afternoon he was certainly at his club."

"Did he telephone to madame or attempt to communicate with her in any way?" Quarles asked.

"He says not."

"But you do not altogether believe him, eh?"

"My opinion is in abeyance," I returned. "It is only fair to say that Sir Charles suggested that Paul Renaud may have seen her at the shop in Regent Street. They are suspicious of each other. Renaud was certainly on the premises at the time she was there. Personally I do not attribute much weight to these suspicions. I believe both men are genuine lovers, and would be the last persons in the world to do the dancer any harm."

"Or the first," said Zena quickly. "Jealousy is a most usual motive for crime."

"I think the child strikes a true note there, Wigan," said Quarles. "We must keep the idea of jealousy before us--that is, if we are compelled to believe there has been foul play. Now, one would have expected Sir Charles to telephone to madame; that he did not do so is strange."

"His disappointment had put him in a temper."

"That hardly appeals to me as a satisfactory explanation," Quarles returned; "but there is indirect evidence in Sir Charles's favor. Had Madame Vatrotski intended to return to her rooms at once she would almost certainly have taken such a small parcel as her purchases made with her. That she did not do so suggests she had another appointment to keep. Have you a list of madame's admirers, Wigan?"

"I am only human, professor, and you ask for the impossible," I said, smiling. "I have a few names here, and I think they may be dismissed from our calculations. One of the strangest points in the case is the lack of reticence amongst her dupes."

"Dupes!" said Zena.

"I think the term is justified," I went on. "They all seem quite proud of having been allowed to pay for sumptuous dinners and expensive presents. Usually one expects a shrinking from publicity in these affairs, but in this case there is nothing of the kind. I have never seen Madame Vatrotski, but she must have had a peculiar fascination."

"I have not seen her either," said Quarles; "but I was at the Academy yesterday, and saw Musgrave's portrait of her. Go and see it, Wigan. I consider Musgrave the greatest portrait painter we have, or ever have had, perhaps. His opinion of the dancer might be useful. Judging from his canvases he must have a strange insight into character."

My opinion of pictures is worth nothing, and, to speak truthfully, I saw little remarkable in Musgrave's portrait of Madame Vatrotski. The mystery had caused a large number of people to linger round the portrait, and so far as I could gather the general impression was that it did not do her justice. Some even called it a caricature.

"You never can tell what a woman is really like across the footlights," I overheard one man say to his companion.

"Perhaps not," was the answer; "but I have seen her out of the theater. I dropped in at Forbes's studio the other day. He was finishing a bust of her, and she was giving him a sitting. It is a jolly good bust, but the woman--"

"Is she pretty?" asked the other.

"Upon my word, I don't know; what I do know is that I wanted to look at her all the time, and when she had gone life seemed to have left the studio."

I did not know the speaker, but I did not lose sight of him until I had tracked him to a club in Piccadilly and discovered that his name was Tenfield, and that he was a partner in a firm of art dealers in Bond Street.

When I repeated this conversation to Quarles he wondered why I had taken so much trouble over the art dealer.

"Looking for a clue," I answered.

Quarles shrugged his shoulders.

"What did you think of the portrait?"

"Frankly, not much."

"But you got an impression of Madame Vatrotski's character."

"I cannot say I got any great enlightenment. It made me wonder why she had made such a great reputation."

"The fact that it made you wonder at all shows there is something in the portrait," said Quarles. "Let us argue indirectly from the picture. You will agree that the lady was fascinating, since she had so many admirers, but in the portrait you discern nothing to account for that fascination. We may conclude that the painter saw the real woman underneath the superficial charm. She could not hide herself from him as she did from others. Now in that portrait I see rather a commonplace woman, essentially bourgeoisie and vulgar, not naturally artistic. I can imagine her the wife of a small shopkeeper, or a girl given to cheap finery on holidays. I think she would be capable of any meanness to obtain that finery. Her face shows a decided lack of talent, but it also shows tremendous greed. The critics have said that her dancing was a pose and

not in good taste."

I nodded.

"They are practically unanimous on this point. It was beyond her to appeal to the artistic sense, so she appealed to the lower nature, and therein lay her fascination. Just consider who the men are to whom she appealed. A millionaire with an unsavory reputation. To two or three peers who, even by the wildest stretch of imagination, cannot be considered ornaments of their order. To some younger sons of the Nut description who are ready to pay anything to be seen with a popular actress, and to the kind of fools who are always ready to offer marriage to a divorcee, or to a husband murderer when she comes out of prison. She appeals to a man like Paul Renaud, whose outlook upon life is disgusting, and who would not be able to keep a decent girl on his premises were it not for the fact that the whole management of the business is in the hands of his two partners. Sir Charles Woodbridge I do not understand. He is a decent man. I could easily imagine his killing her in a revulsion of feeling after being momentarily fascinated. Honestly, I have wondered whether this may not be the solution of the case."

"You are suspicious of Sir Charles?" I asked.

"I do not give that as my definite opinion. She may not be dead. Perchance some particularly mean exploit has made her afraid and she has gone into hiding; but if she is dead, I think we must look for her murderer--I had almost said her executioner--amongst the decent men who have been caught for a while in her toils."

"The only decent man seems to be Sir Charles," said Zena.

"And I am convinced he was genuinely in love with her," I said.

"Well, we are at a dead end," said Quarles. "I think I should go and see Musgrave and ask his opinion of her. It may help us."

I went simply because there was nothing else to do, and I felt that I must be doing something. The authorities seemed to think that I was making a great muddle over a very ordinary affair, possibly because rather contemptuous comments in the press had annoyed them, while the letters from amateur detectives had been more abundant than usual. Oh, those amateur detectives!

I found Musgrave quite willing to talk about Madame Vatrotski, and before I had been with him ten minutes I discovered that his opinion of her very nearly coincided with Quarles's.

He put it differently, but it came to the same thing.

"To tell you the truth, she rather appealed to me when I first saw her," he said. "It was at an artists' affair in Chelsea. She came there with a man named Renaud, who has a big shop in Regent Street, and had spent money on her, I imagine. She was interesting because she was something

new in the way of vulgarity. It was for this man Renaud that I did the portrait, but when it was finished he repudiated the bargain. He said it wasn't a bit like her. You see, I was not looking at her with his eyes"

"Had she no beauty, then?"

"I cannot say that," Musgrave answered. "She had a beautiful figure, and her face--well, I painted it as I saw it. Renaud said it wasn't in the least like her, and I am bound to admit that most of the people who knew her and have seen the portrait in the Academy agree with him."

"You claim that you show her character, I suppose?"

"No; I merely say I painted what I saw."

"Can you account for the fascination she exerted?" I asked.

"I answer that question by asking you another. Can you account for the fascination which sin exerts over a vast number of people in the world? See sin as it really is, and it repels you; but sin seldom lets you see the reality, that is why it is so successful. A man requires grace to see sin as it really is, and that is his salvation. I was in a detached position when I painted Madame Vatrotski's portrait, and you have seen the result; had I been under her spell the result would undoubtedly have been different. I should have painted only the mask of the moment, and that would have satisfied her admirers, I imagine. I suppose you know that my ideas of the true functions of art have caused many people to call me a crank?"

"I know little of the artistic world," I answered; "but any man who takes himself seriously always appeals to me."

Musgrave smiled. I fancy he was about to favor me with his ideas, but concluded I was not worth the trouble. I had not got much out of my visit beyond the knowledge that Quarles was not alone in his estimate of Madame Vatrotski.

The professor's opinion combined with the artist's influenced me, and gave me a kind of rough theory. A man might be fascinated, then repelled, the repulsion being far stronger than the attraction.

To make this possible the man must normally be decent, and because Sir Charles Woodbridge seemed the only person who fitted all the conditions I gave his movements a considerable amount of my attention during the next few days. He had certainly been amongst the most assiduous of her admirers, and I discovered that he had put a private detective on to the business who was chiefly concerned in shadowing Paul Renaud.

Sir Charles was evidently convinced that Renaud was at the bottom of the mystery.

Nearly a month went by, and, except to those chiefly concerned, interest in the dancer's disappearance was fading out, when it was suddenly

revived by the notice of a picture exhibition in Bond Street, at the gallery belonging to the firm in which Tenfield was a partner.

The pictures were the work of French artists of the cubist school, but also on view was a portrait bust of Madame Vatrotski by Lovet Forbes. It was evidently the bust I had overheard Tenfield speak about that day in the Academy, and I discovered that his firm had bought it as a speculation.

Lovet Forbes had been only a vague name until a few days ago, when a symbolic group of his had been placed in the entrance hall of the Agricultural Institution, and had at once attracted attention. The critics spoke of him as a new force in art, and a bust of the famous dancer by him was therefore, under the circumstances, an event.

"People will go to see it who wouldn't cross the road to look at a cubist's picture," said Quarles. "It is for sale, no doubt, and the dealers may clear a very nice little profit over it. Not a bad speculation, I should say; I wonder how much they paid the artist. We will go and have a look at it, Wigan."

The three of us went on the opening day. Zena in a dress I had not seen before, which suited her to perfection. She was much more interesting to me than Forbes's bust of Madame Vatrotski.

Quarles was right in his prophecy; the gallery was full, and the cubists were not the attraction. Sir Charles was there, so was Renaud, and many others whose names had been mentioned more or less prominently in this case, including the managing director of the Olympic; and before I got a view of the bust I heard whispers of the prices which had been offered for it; rather fabulous prices they were.

"But she is perfectly beautiful!" Zena exclaimed, when at last we stood before the bust.

She was right, and there was evidently something wrong somewhere. The difference between Musgrave's picture and Forbes's marble was tremendous, and yet they were unmistakably the same woman.

Where the essential likeness was I cannot say, nor can I explain where the difference lay, but the marble was charming, while the painting was horrible.

"Rather a surprise, eh, Wigan?" said the professor.

"Very much so."

"I hear Forbes is about somewhere. I should like to see him. He is one of the lucky ones; this mystery has helped him to fame."

"But his work is good, isn't it?"

"Yes; slightly meretricious, perhaps. I shall want to see more of his

work before I express a definite opinion. I think we must go and see what he has done for the Agricultural Institute."

We not only saw Forbes, but had a talk with him. He was a man well on in the forties, carelessly dressed, a Bohemian, and not particularly elated at his success apparently. He smiled at the prices which were being offered for his work.

"It is the dancer they are paying for, not my genius," he said. "She seems to have fooled men in life; she is fooling them in death, if she is dead."

"Ah, that is the question," said Quarles. "I have my doubts."

"She is safer dead, at any rate, if only half they say of her is true," Forbes returned.

"How came she to sit for you?" I asked.

"Vanity. I was introduced to her one night at an Artists' Ball--the Albert Hall affair, you know--and I told her she had the figure of a Venus. I was consciously playing on her vanity for a purpose. In the thing I have done for the Agricultural Institute there is a recumbent figure, and I wanted the perfect model for it. The right woman is more difficult to get than you would imagine. Of course she agreed with me as to the perfectness of her figure, and then I began to doubt it. That settled the business. She fell into my trap and agreed to be the model."

"Posing in the nude?" I asked.

"Oh, that did not trouble her at all," answered Forbes. "I shouldn't be surprised if she had been a model in Paris studios before she blossomed out as a dancer. She spoke Russian, but I am inclined to think France had the honor of giving her birth. In return for her complaisance I promised to do a portrait bust of her for herself. That is it. If she is alive and comes to claim it I shall have to do her another one."

"She was evidently a very beautiful woman," said Quarles, glancing in the direction of the bust.

"Beautiful and bad, I fancy. Curiously enough, I did not hear of her disappearance until I telephoned to her flat two days after it had happened. She had broken an appointment to give me a final sitting, and I wanted to know why she hadn't come."

"Was the final sitting for the Agricultural group?" Quarles asked.

"No; for the bust there. I had to leave it as it was, but there is something in the line of the mouth which does not please me. What has become of her, do you suppose?"

"Possibly some one or something she is afraid of has caused her to go into hiding," said Quarles.



"Afraid! I doubt if she had any fear of devil or man. Have you seen Musgrave's portrait of her?"

The professor nodded, and I thought it was curious that the Academy picture should be referred to so persistently.

"She was like that," said Forbes. "Musgrave's is a wonderful piece of work."

Involuntarily I glanced at the bust, and he noticed my surprise.

"Oh, she was like that too at times," he said.

"I should doubt if Musgrave ever saw her as you have represented her," said Quarles.

"Perhaps not. He claims to paint character; possibly I might succeed in chiseling character, but give me a beautiful model, and as a rule I am content to show the surface only. Besides, the bust was for her, and I made the best of my subject."

"And in the Agricultural piece?" asked Quarles.

"Naturally I idealized her."

"I suppose he is not the born artist that Musgrave is?" I said, when Forbes had left us.

"I don't know," returned Quarles. "We will go and have another look at the bust, and I think on the way home we might drop in and have another look at Musgrave's picture."

"That portrait bothers me," I said. "One might suppose it was the key to the mystery."

"I am not sure that it isn't," Quarles answered.

Further acquaintance with the Academy picture had rather a curious effect upon me. I do not think I lost anything of my original sense of repulsion, but I was strangely conscious that there was something attractive in the face. I was astonished to find what a likeness there was between the portrait and the bust. The impression created by one became mingled with the impression made by the other.

I said as much to Quarles.

"That is tantamount to saying they are both fine pieces of work," he answered.

"And means, I suppose, that the real woman was somewhere between the two," said Zena.

"Possibly, but with Musgrave's idea the predominant truth," said Quarles.

"Why?" asked Zena.

Quarles shrugged his shoulders. He had no answer to give.

"The day after to-morrow, Wigan, we will go to the Agricultural Institute."

"Why not to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I am busy. Did you know I was writing an article for a psychological review?"

On the following evening I took Zena to a theater--to the Olympic. I suppose I chose the Olympic with a sort of idea that I was keeping in touch with the case I had in hand, that if any one chanced to see me there they would conclude that I was following up some clue. It is hateful to feel that there is nothing to be done, more hateful still that people should imagine you are beaten or are neglecting your work.

Zena told me the professor had been out all day, but she did not know what business he was about. He was certainly not engaged in writing his article.

The Olympic was by no means full that night; the disappearance of the dancer was evidently having a disastrous effect upon the receipts.

The next day I went to the Agricultural Institute with Quarles. He had got a card of introduction to the secretary.

The building had recently been enlarged, and at the top of the first flight of the staircase stood a group representing the triumph of modern methods.

Standing or crouching, and full of energy, were figures symbolic of science and machinery, while in the foreground was a recumbent figure from whose hands the sickle had fallen.

The woman was sleeping, her work done; yet she suggested that there was beauty in those old methods which, for all their utility, was lacking in the new.

"It is probably the best work that Lovet Forbes has done," said the secretary, who came round with us.

"He is the coming man, they say," Quarles remarked.

"He has surely arrived," was the answer, "for the critics are unanimous as to the beauty of this."

"Yes, it is remarkable in idea and execution. I am told the famous dancer, who has recently disappeared, was the model for the

recumbent figure."

"So I understand. The figure is the gem of the whole composition."

Quarles was not inclined to endorse this opinion, and the secretary was nothing loath to argue the point.

The discussion led to a close examination of the figure, Quarles arguing that it was out of proportion in comparison with the standing figures, a comment which the secretary met with some learned words on the laws relating to perspective.

They were both a little out of their depth, I thought, and after a few moments I did not pay much attention to them. My thoughts had gone back to Musgrave's picture and to Forbes's bust of Madame Vatrotski. Zena had said that the real woman was probably somewhere between the two, and as I looked at the figure for which the dancer had been the model I felt she was right.

I suppose the limbs were perfect, but it was the face which chiefly interested me. It was like Musgrave's picture, but it was more like Forbes's bust, with something in it which differed entirely from the bust and from the picture.

It was a beautiful figure, and I think the face was beautiful, but I am not sure.

The secretary had just measured the figure, and the result seemed to have established the fact that Quarles's contention was right. This evidently pleased him, and he was inclined to give way on minor points of difference.

"No doubt the sculptor's perspective has something to do with it," he said; "but we must not forget that the group is symbolic. I should not be surprised if the figure in the foreground is larger to illustrate the fact that modern methods are of yesterday, while the sickle has reaped the harvests of the world from old time. The sickle is not broken, you observe, and the artist may mean that it will be used again in the time to come."

"You may be right," said the secretary. "I shall take an early opportunity of asking Forbes."

Soon afterwards, we left, and had got a hundred yards from the building when the professor suddenly found he had left his gloves behind in the library.

"I shall only be a minute or two, Wigan. Stop a taxi in the meantime."

He was longer than that, but he came back triumphant, waving the gloves, an old pair hardly worth returning for. He seemed able to talk of nothing but the symbolism of the group, finding many points in it which had escaped me entirely.

"It has given me an idea, Wigan."

"About Madame Yatrotski?"

"Yes; but we will wait until we get home."

We went straight to that empty room. Zena could not persuade the old man to have some tea first.

"Tea! I am not taking tea to-day. Bring me a little weak brandy and water, my dear."

"Don't you feel well?"

"Yes, but I am a little exhausted by talking to a man who thinks he understands art and doesn't."

"Oh, Murray doesn't pretend to understand it."

"Murray is not such a fool as he pretends to be, even in art; but I was thinking of the secretary, not Murray."

The brandy was brought, and then the professor turned to me.

"You suggested that perhaps Forbes was not the born artist that Musgrave is. What is your opinion now, Wigan?"

"I am chiefly impressed with the fact that Zena was right when she said the real woman was probably between Forbes's bust and Musgrave's picture."

"And I am chiefly impressed with the fact that they are both great artists," said Quarles. "I said Musgrave was, but I reserved my opinion of Forbes until I had seen this group. It has convinced me. Now, for my idea concerning the dancer. The first germ was in the notion that in Musgrave's picture lay the key to the mystery. Knowing something of the painter's power and ideals, I felt that the portrait must be true from one point of view. What was his standpoint? He explained it to you. He was detached, unbiased, putting on to his canvas that which he saw behind the mere outer mask. When I saw Forbes's bust, one of two things was certain: either he was incapable of seeing below the surface, or in this particular case he was incapable of doing so. I could not decide until I had seen other work of his. To-day I know he is as capable with his chisel as Musgrave is with his brush. You have only to study the standing and crouching figures in the group to see how virile and full of insight he can be."

"But the recumbent figure--" I began.

"You remember that he said it was idealized," Quarles said. "It is undoubtedly full of--of strength, but for the moment I am more interested in the bust. Why does it differ so widely from Musgrave's portrait? Well,

I think Forbes was only capable of seeing Madame Vatrotski like that, and we have to discover the reason."

"Temperament," I suggested. "He said himself he was content as a rule to show the beautiful exterior."

"He also said one or two other interesting things," said Quarles, "For instance, he was certain she was dead, or he would hardly have sold the bust he had executed specially for her. Why was he so certain? Again, he suggested she was French and not Russian, scorned the idea of her being afraid of any one, and altogether he showed rather an intimate knowledge of her, which makes one fancy that she had been more open with him than she had been with others."

"The fact that she was sitting to him might account for that," said Zena.

"One would also expect that it would have made him come forward and give what help he could in clearing up the mystery." Quarles answered; "but he does nothing of the kind. We do not hear that he has used her as a model for his Agricultural group until we hear it casually on the day the bust was exhibited, and he tells us that he did not know of her disappearance until he telephoned to her rooms two days afterwards. Does that sound quite a likely story, Wigan?"

"I think you are building a theory on a frail foundation, Professor."

"It has served its purpose; I have built my theory--the artistic mind fascinated and becoming revengeful in a moment of repulsion. I think Madame Vatrotski had an appointment with Forbes that day, and more, that she kept it."

"Where?"

"At his studio. It may have been to give him a final sitting, or it may have been a lovers' meeting. Forbes could only see her beauty and fascination; he put what he saw into the bust. He loved her with all the unreasoning power that was in him; it is possible that in her limited way she loved him, that he was more to her than all the rest. Then came the sudden revulsion, perhaps because stories concerning her had reached Forbes, stories he was convinced were true. She was alone with him in the studio, and--well, I do not think she left it alive."

"But the body?" I said.

"Always the great difficulty," Quarles returned. "Yesterday I spent an interesting day in Essex, Wigan, watching the various processes used in making artificial stone, from its liquid and plastic state to its setting into a hard block. I was amazed at what can be done with it."

"You mean that--"

"It is impossible!" Zena exclaimed.

"It is not a very difficult matter to treat a body so as to preserve it, but to cover it with a preparation and with such precision that when it is set you shall see nothing but a stone figure is, of course, only possible to an artist."

"But she had sat for him, the figure must have been far advanced before--before she disappeared."

"I have no doubt it was, Wigan; but, far advanced as it was, that stone figure was removed and replaced by one that only superficially was stone."

"I do not believe it. It is absurd."

"Measurement proved that the recumbent figure was out of proportion in comparison with the other figures, accounted for by the stone casing. Of course with the secretary there I could not look too closely."

"No, or you would have found--"

"You seem to forget that I went back for my gloves," said Quarles. "I left them on purpose. I ran up to the library; no one was about. I had a chisel and hammer with me. By this time some one may have discovered that the group has been chipped. There are the pieces."

He took from his pocket some fragments of stone, pieces of a stone mold, in fact.

"Whether they will realize what it is that is disclosed where that piece is missing is another matter, but we know, Wigan. It is the body of Madame Vatrotski. Can you wonder, my dear Zena, that I felt more like a little brandy and water than tea?"

How far Quarles was right in his idea of the relations between Forbes and the dancer no one will ever know. When the police went to arrest him he was found dead in his studio. He had shot himself. How had he heard of Quarles's discovery? How did he know that his ingenious method of concealing the body had been found out?

It was so strange that I asked Quarles whether he had warned him.

"Do you think I should be likely to do such a thing?" was his answer.

He would give me no other answer, and all I can say positively is that he has never actually denied it.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MYSTERY OF THE MAN AT WARBURTON'S

Two days later Zena went to visit friends in the country, and for some weeks I did not go near Chelsea. Quarles was busy with some Psychological Society which was holding a series of meetings in London, and was quite pleased, no doubt, to be without my society for a while.

Except when I have a regular holiday, my leisure hours are limited, but I was taking a night off. It was not because I had nothing to do, but because I had so many things to think of that my brain had become hopelessly muddled in the process, and a few blank hours seemed to be advisable. When this kind of retreat becomes necessary, I invariably find my way to Holborn, to a very plain-fronted establishment there over which is the name Warburton. If you are a gastronomic connoisseur in any way you may know it, for Warburton's is a restaurant where you can get an old-fashioned dinner cooked as nowhere else in London, I believe, and enjoy an old port afterwards which those delightful sinners, our grandfathers, would have sat over half the night, and been pulled out from under the table in the morning perchance. I am not abnormally partial to the pleasures of the table, but I have found a good dinner in combination with first-rate port, rationally dealt with, an excellent tonic for the brain.

I do not suppose any one knew my name at Warburton's, and I have always prided myself on not carrying my profession in my face. The man who dined opposite to me that night possibly began by taking me for a prosperous city man, to whom success had come somewhat early, or perhaps for a barrister, not of the brilliant kind, but of the steady plodders who get there in the end by sheer force of sticking power. I was not in the least interested in him until he spoke to me--asked me to pass the Worcester sauce, in fact. His voice attracted me, and his hands. It was a voice which sounded out of practise, as if it were seldom used, and his hands were those of an artist. I made some casual remark, complimentary to Warburton's, and we began to talk. He seemed glad to do so, but he spoke with hesitation, not as one who has overcome an impediment in his speech, but as one who had forgotten part of his vocabulary. The reason leaked out presently.

"I wonder whether there is something--how shall I put it?--\_simpatica\_ between us?" he said suddenly.

"Why the speculation?" I asked.

"Otherwise I cannot think why I am talking so much," he said with a nervous laugh. "I live alone, I hardly know a soul, and all I say in the course of a week could be repeated in two minutes, I suppose."

"Not a healthy existence," I returned.

"It suits me. I dine here most nights; the journey to and fro forms my daily constitutional. You are not a regular customer here?"

"No, an occasional one only. I should guess that you are engaged in artistic work of some kind."

"Right!" he said with a show of excitement. "And when I tell you I live in Gray's Inn do you think you could guess what kind of work it is?"

"That is beyond me," I laughed. "Gray's Inn sounds a curious place for an artist."

"I am an illuminator, not for money, but for my own pleasure. Do you know Italy?"

"No."

"At least you know that some of the old monks spent their hours in wonderful work of this kind, carefully illuminating the texts of works with marvelous design and color. Now and then some special genius arose and became a great fresco painter. Fra Angelico painted pictures for the world to marvel over, while some humbler brother pored over his illuminating. You will find some of this work in the British Museum."

Evidently my newly acquired friend was an eccentric, I thought.

"Pictures have no particular interest for me," he went on; "these illuminated texts have. I am an expert worker myself. First in Italy, now in Gray's Inn."

"And there is no market for such work?" I enquired.

"I believe not. I have never troubled to find out. I have no need of money, and if I had I could not bring myself to part with my work."

"You interest me. I should like to see some of your work."

"Why not? It is a short walk to Gray's Inn. To me you are rather wonderful. I have not felt inclined to talk to a stranger for years, and now I am anxious to show you what I have done. We will go when you like."

I had not bargained for this. Had I foreseen that I should have a conversation forced upon me to-night I should have avoided Warburton's; even now I was inclined to excuse myself, but curiosity got the upper hand. I finished my wine and we went to Gray's Inn.

On the way, I told him my name, but, apparently, he had never heard it, nor did he immediately tell me his. I purposely called him Mr. ---- and paused for the information.

"Parrish," he said. "Bather a curious name," and then he went on talking about illuminating, evidently convinced that I was intensely interested. It was the man who interested me, not his work, and the interest was heightened when I entered his rooms. He occupied two rooms at the top of a dreary building devoted to men of law. The rooms were well enough in themselves, but the furniture was in the last stage of dilapidation, there were holes in the carpet, and everything looked forlorn and poverty-stricken. I glanced at my companion. Certainly, his clothes were



a little shabby, but quite good, and he was oblivious to the decayed atmosphere of his surroundings. He drew me at once to a large table, where lay the work he was engaged upon. Of its kind, it was marvelous both in design and execution, reproducing the color effects of the old illuminators so exactly that it was almost impossible to tell it from that of the old monks. This is not my opinion, but that of the expert from the British Museum when he pronounced upon the work later.

"Wonderful," I said. "And there is no sale for it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. Environment seemed to have an effect upon him, for his conversation was mostly by signs after we entered his room. Without a word he took finished work from various drawers and put it on the table for my inspection. I praised it, asked questions to draw him out, but failed to get more than a lift of the eyebrows, or an occasional monosyllable. It was not exhilarating, and as soon as I could I took my leave.

"Come and see me again soon," he said, parting with me at the top of the stairs.

"Thanks," I answered, as I went down, but I made no promise as I looked up at him silhouetted against the light from his open door. Little did I guess how soon I was to climb those stairs again.

Next morning I was conscious that the night off, although not spent exactly as I had intended, had done me good. Some knotty points in a case I was engaged upon had begun to unravel themselves in my mind, and I reached the office early to find that the chief was already there and wanted to see me.

"Here is a case you must look after at once, Wigan," he said, passing me the report of the murder of a man named Parrish, in Gray's Inn.

Now, one of the essentials in my profession is the ability to put the finger on the small mistakes a criminal makes when he endeavors to cover up his tracks. I suppose nine cases out of ten are solved in this way, and more often than not the thing left undone, unthought of, is the very one, you would imagine, which the criminal would have thought of first. I fancy the reason lies in the fact that the criminal does not believe he will be suspected. I said nothing to my chief about my visit to Gray's Inn last night. Experience has shown me the wisdom of a still tongue, and knowledge I have picked up casually has often led to a solution which has startled the Yard. The Yard was destined to be startled now, but not quite in the way I hoped.

When I arrived at Gray's Inn, a small crowd had collected before the entrance door of the house, as if momentarily expecting some information from the constable who stood on duty there--a man I did not happen to know.

"That's him! That's him!"

A boy pointed me out excitedly to the constable, who looked at me quickly. I smiled to find myself recognized, but I was laboring under a mistake.

"Yes, that's the man," said a woman standing on the edge of the crowd.

The explanation came when the constable understood who I was.

"Both of them declare they saw the dead man in company with another man last night, described him, and now--"

"I saw you with him," said the boy. "I never saw him with any one before, that's why I took particular notice."

The woman nodded her agreement.

"Better take the names and addresses, constable."

"I've already done that, sir."

I entered the house inclined to smile, but the inclination vanished as I went upstairs. No doubt these two had seen me last night, and it was fortunate, perhaps, that I was a detective, and not an ordinary individual. And yet a detective might commit murder. It was an unpleasant thought, unpleasant enough to make me wish I had mentioned last night's adventure to the chief.

A constable I knew was on the top landing, and entered the rooms with me. Parrish had not been moved. He was lying by the table; had probably fallen forward out of his chair.

A thin-bladed knife had been driven downwards, at the base of the neck, apparently by some one who had stood behind him. I judged, and a doctor presently confirmed my judgment, that he had been dead some hours; must have met his death soon after I had left him. As far as I could tell, the papers on the table were in exactly the same position as I had seen them, and the finished work which he had taken out of his drawers to show me had not been replaced. The fact seemed to add to the awkwardness of my position.

The first thing I did was to telegraph to Christopher Quarles. I do not remember ever being more keen for his help. I occupied the time of waiting in a careful examination of the rooms and the stairs, and in making enquiries in the offices in the building.

The first thing I told Quarles, on his arrival, was my adventure last night, and the awkward fact that two people had recognized me this morning.

"Then we mustn't fail this time, Wigan," he said gravely. "It is a pity you did not mention the adventure to your chief."

"Yes, but--"

"You'd suspect a man with less evidence against him," Quarles answered quickly. "We'll look at the rooms, and the dead man, then you had better go back to the Yard and tell your chief all about it."

Our search revealed very little. It was evident that Parrish had lived a lonely life, as he had told me. His evening dinner at Warburton's appeared to have been his only real meal of the day. There was a half-empty tin of biscuits in the cupboard, and some coffee and tea, but no other food whatever, nor evidence that it was ever kept there. I have said the clothes he was wearing were shabby, but there was a shabbier suit still lying at the bottom of a drawer, and his stock of shirts and underclothing reached the minimum. Practically, there were no papers, only a few receipted bills for material for his work, a few advertisements still in their wrappers, and two letters which had not been opened.

"We will examine these later, Wigan," said Quarles. "I want to get an impression before anything definite puts me on the wrong road. What about his work?" and the professor examined it with his lens. "Good, of its kind, I should imagine, and what is more to the point, requiring expensive materials. These bills show a good many pounds spent in less than four months. He was not poverty-stricken, in spite of shabby clothes, and holes in the carpet. Where did he get his money from? There is no check book here, no money except a few shillings in his pocket. That is a point to remember."

"The murderers may have taken it," I said.

"This doesn't look like a place ordinary thieves would come to."

There was a shelf in one corner, with books on it, perhaps a score in all. Quarles took down every one of them, and opened them.

"John Parrish. Did you know his name was John?"

"No. He didn't mention his Christian name."

"Here it is, written in every book," said Quarles as he deliberately tore a fly-leaf out of one and began to put down on it the titles of some of the books. "Evidently he did not read much, the dust here is thick. Did he open his door with a key when you came in with him last night?"

"I couldn't swear to it."

"You see it does not lock of itself. He might have left it merely closed. Did he go into the bedroom while you were here?"

"No."

"Then the murderer may have been there while you were with him. You have made enquiries about him in this building, of course?"

"Yes."

"About his personal appearance and habits, I mean. You see, Wigan, your own idea of him is not sufficient. He may have deceived you entirely regarding his character, assuming eccentricity for some purpose. Think the affair out from that point of view, and when you have been to the Yard, come to Chelsea. If you do not mind I will take these two unopened letters. We will look at them together presently."

As a matter of fact, Quarles had opened them before I saw him; indeed, their contents took him out of town, and I did not see him for three days. They were very trying days for me, for the chief took me off the case when he had heard my story. He could not understand why I had not mentioned at once that I had been with the dead man on the previous night, and his manner suggested that my being the criminal was well within the bounds of possibility. I suppose every one likes to have a cut at a successful man occasionally, but I am bound to admit he had some reason for his action. He showed me a halfpenny paper in which an enterprising scribbler, under the headline "Murder in Gray's Inn," had heightened the sensation by another headline, "Strange recognition of a well-known detective by a woman and a boy."

"We mustn't give the press any reason to suppose that we want to thwart justice for the purpose of shielding an officer," the chief said. "Cochran will take charge of the case, and I am letting the press know this."

There was nothing to be said, and I left him feeling very much like a criminal, and very conscious of being in an awkward position. Unless the case were satisfactorily cleared up there would be plenty of people to suspect me.

Quarles, when at last we foregathered in the empty room, was sympathetic but not surprised; Zena, who had come back to town immediately on receiving a letter from me, was furious that I should be suspected.

"I have been busy," said the professor. "I opened those letters, Wigan. Of course Zena's first question on her arrival was why Mr. Parrish had not opened them. Her second question was: Why did he live the life of a recluse in Gray's Inn? How would you answer those questions?"

"I see no reason why a recluse should not live in Gray's Inn," I answered, "and an eccentric person, obsessed with one idea in life, might throw letters aside without opening them."

"Quite a good answer," said Quarles. "Now, here are the letters. This one is dated eighteen months ago, postmark Liverpool, written at Thorn's Hotel, Liverpool. 'Dear Jack,--Back again like the proverbial bad penny. Health first class; luck medium. Pocket full enough to have a rollick with you. Shall be with you the day after to-morrow.--Yours, C.M.' Your friend Parrish was not a man you would expect to rollick, I imagine?"

"No."

"So either he entirely deceived you or had changed considerably since 'C.M.' had seen him. Here is the other letter. Postmark Rome, dated three years ago, but no address. Just a message in indifferent English: 'Once more you do me good and I repay in interest. B. knows and comes to you. Beware.--Emanuele.'"

"Parrish told me he was in Italy for some time," I said.

"The first letter took me to Liverpool," Quarles went on. "Thorn's Hotel is third-rate, but quite good enough for a man who does not want to burn money. 'C.M.' stands for Claude Milne. That was the only name with those initials in the hotel books on that date. He had come from New York, and he left an address to which letters were to be forwarded, an hotel in Craven Street. I traced him there. He stayed a week, and, I gather, spent a rollicking time, mostly returning to bed in the early hours not too sober. No friends seem to have looked him up. He appears to have gone abroad again."

"And it is eighteen months ago," I said.

"Exactly. We will remember that," said Quarles. "The other letter is older still. It is evidently a warning. The writer believed Parrish to be in danger from this 'B.' who was coming to England. Now, was it B. who found him the other night after three years' search?"

"The name is on the door and in the directory," I answered.

"That is another point to remember, Wigan. Now, I daresay you have learnt from your inquiries in the building that very little was known about Parrish. Some of the tenants did not remember there was such a name on the door. I have interviewed the agents who receive the rent, and they tell me that until about three years ago they received Parrish's rent by check, always sent from Windsor, and on a bank at Windsor; but since then they have received it in cash, promptly, and sent by messenger boy, the receipt always being waited for. They inform me that at one time, at any rate, Parrish did not use his chambers much, was a river man in the summer, and in the winter was abroad a great deal. The letter sent with the cash was merely a typed memorandum. There was no typewriter in Parrish's chambers, I think?"

"No."

Quarles took from some papers the fly-leaf he had torn from one of the books.

"That is Parrish's signature," said Quarles. "The agents recognize it, the bank confirms it; the account is not closed, but has not been used for three years. The rooms he occupied in Windsor are now in other hands, and nothing is known of him there. Inspector Cockran made these inquiries at Windsor. You see, as you are off the case I am helping him. Having no official position in the matter I must attach myself to some one to facilitate my investigation. Cockran thinks I am an old fool with lucid

moments, during which I may possibly say something which is worth listening to."

"He is generally looked upon as a smart man," I said.

"Oh, perhaps he is right in his opinion of me, also in his judgment of you."

"What has he got to say about me?"

"He says very little, but as far as I can gather his investigations are based on the assumption that you killed Parrish. Don't get angry, Wigan. It is really not such an outrageous point of view, and for the present I am shaking my head with him and am inclined to his opinion."

"It is a disgraceful suspicion," said Zena.

"Those who plead not guilty always say that, but it really does not count for much with the judge," Quarles answered. "We will get on with the evidence. I jotted down on this fly-leaf the names of some of the books on that shelf, Wigan. Nothing there, you see, bears any reference to his illuminating work."

"Are you suggesting it was a blind?"

"No, I haven't got as far as that yet, but it is curious that none of his books should relate to his hobby in any way. I have ascertained that he always bought his materials personally, never wrote for them. From the postman I discover that it was seldom they had to go to the top floor; the advertisements and letters we have found may be taken to be all the communications he has received through the post. At the same time we have evidence that he had command of money, since he paid his rent promptly, bought expensive materials, and dined every night at Warburton's. Since he did not sell his work, where did the money come from?"

"Some annuity," I suggested.

"Exactly, which he must have collected himself, since he received no letters, and taken away in cash, since he had given up using a banking account. Cockran has made inquiries at the insurance offices, and in the name of Parrish there exists no such annuity, apparently. It was, therefore, either in another name or came from a private source."

"So we draw blank," I said.

"In one sense we do, in another we do not," returned Quarles. "We come back to the letters and to Zena's questions. First, why did he live the life of a recluse in Gray's Inn? The answer does not seem very difficult to me. He had something to hide, something which made him cut himself off from the world, and that something had its beginning about three years ago, when he ceased paying his rent by check, when he gave up his rooms at Windsor; in short, when he entirely became a changed character. We may take 'C.M.'s' letter, with its talk of rollicking, as confirming

this view."

"But he did not open either letter. He did not see Emanuele's warning," I said.

"True, but I believe, Wigan, the first two words in Emanuele's letter should stand by themselves; that the letter should read thus: 'Once more. You do me good, I repay, etc,' I think there was a previous letter which Parrish did see."

"A far-fetched theory," I returned.

"The key to it is in Zena's question: Why didn't Parrish open his letters?"

"Why, indeed?" I said. "He might throw 'C.M.'s' letter aside, but if there had been a previous letter warning him that danger threatened him from Italy, do you imagine he would have failed to open one with the Rome postmark on it?"

"That does seem to knock the bottom out of my argument," said Quarles.

"I am afraid the theory is too elaborate altogether," I went on. "Parrish was an eccentric. I was not deceived. I am astonished there should ever have been an episode in his life which should necessitate a warning from Emanuele. Probably the Italian exaggerated the position. That B. is stated to have come to England three years ago, and the murder has only just occurred, would certainly confirm this view."

"It does, but you throw no light on the mystery, and the fact remains that Parrish was murdered. You have not knocked the bottom out of my theory, and with Cockran's help I am going to put it to the test. For the moment there is nothing more to be done. I must wait until I hear from Cockran. I will wire you some time to-morrow. You must meet me without fail wherever I appoint. I think Cockran is fully persuaded that I am helping him to snap the handcuffs on to your wrists. The capture of a brother detective would be a fine case to have to his credit, wouldn't it?"

"I hope you are not doing anything risky, dear," said Zena.

"What! Is your faith in Murray growing weak, too?" laughed Quarles.

I was not in the mood to enjoy a joke of this kind--my position was far too serious--and I left Chelsea in a depressed condition. Perhaps it was being so personally concerned in the matter which made me especially critical of Quarles's methods, but it certainly did not seem to me that his arguments had helped me in the least. They only served to emphasize how poor our chance was of finding the criminal.

Next afternoon I received a wire from the professor telling me to meet him at the Yorkshire Grey. I found him waiting there and thought he looked a little anxious.

"We are going to have a tea-party at a quiet place round the corner in Gray's Inn Road," he said; "at least Cockran and I are, while you are going to look on. You are going to be conspicuous by your absence, and under no circumstances must you attempt to join us. When it is all over and we have gone, then you can leave your hiding-place and come to Chelsea."

He would answer no questions as we went to the third-rate tea-rooms, but he was certainly excited. The woman greeted him as an old friend. He had evidently been there before.

"This is the gentleman I spoke of," said Quarles, and then the woman led us into a back room.

"Ah, you've put the screen in that corner, I see. An excellent arrangement; couldn't be better. You quite understand that this room is reserved for me and my guests for as long as I may require it. Good. Now, Wigan, your place is behind this screen. There is a chair, so you can be seated, and there is also a convenient hole in the screen which will afford you a view of our table yonder. It is rather a theatrical arrangement, but I have a score to settle with Cockran if I can. He thinks I am an old fool, and when it does not suit my purpose I object to any one having that idea."

When Cockran arrived it so happened that I had some little difficulty in finding the slit in the screen; when I did I saw that he had a woman with him. By the time I had got a view of the room she had seated herself at the tea-table and her back was toward me. It did not seem to me the kind of back that would make a man hurry to overtake to see what the face was like.

Quarles talked commonplaces while the tea was being brought in, and then, when the proprietress had gone out, he said, leaning toward the woman:

"Do you constantly suffer from the result of your accident?"

"Accident!" she repeated.

"I notice that you limp slightly."

"Oh, it was a long time ago. I don't feel anything of it now."

Quarles handed her some cake.

"It is very good of you to come," he went on, "and I hope you are going to let us persuade you to be definite."

She nodded at Cockran.

"I have told him that I am not sure. I am going to stick to that."

"The fact is, we are especially anxious to solve this mystery," Quarles



went on, "and I believe you are the only person who can help us. Now, from certain inquiries which I have been making I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Parrish is not dead."

"Not dead!" the woman exclaimed.

I saw Cockran look enquiringly at Quarles, but he did not say anything. The professor had evidently persuaded the inspector to let him carry out this investigation in his own way.

"Of course, a man has been killed," he went on, "but it wasn't Parrish, I fancy. He lived in Parrish's chambers; was a lonely man with a hobby, and if the people who saw him about liked to think his name was Parrish, well, it didn't trouble him. You didn't happen to know the real Parrish, I suppose?"

"Of course not."

"No, I didn't expect you would," said Quarles, "but tell me how it was you so promptly recognized the man we are after."

"I am not sure it was the same man."

"But you were when the boy recognized him."

"I say now I am not sure."

"Oh, but you are," returned Quarles. "You could not possibly be mistaken. From the inner room of Parrish's chambers you must have watched both the men for the best part of an hour."

A teaspoon clattered in a saucer as the woman sprang to her feet, and I saw she was the woman who had pointed me out to the constable when I had entered Gray's Inn on the morning after the murder. Cockran's face was a study.

"You made a mistake," Quarles went on quietly. "I have worked it all out in my own mind and I daresay there are some details missing. I will tell you how I explain the mystery. Parrish, when in Italy, wronged some one dear to you. You only heard of it afterwards. Personally you did not know Parrish, but you found out what you could about him: that he was connected with the law, that he lived in London, in one of the places where lawyers do live. You determined to come to England for revenge. I do not say you were not justified. I do not know the circumstances. That was three years ago. An accident--was it the one at Basle, which occurred about that time?--detained you, laid you aside for some months, perhaps. You had not much money, you had to live, so your arrival in England was delayed. When you got here, you took a post as waitress in Soho. Only in your leisure time could you look for Mr. Parrish. At first, probably, you knew nothing about the London Directory, and when you did, looked for the name in the wrong part of it, and, of course, you would not ask questions of any one. That might implicate you later on. At last you found him; saw the name on the door. Possibly you have been waiting your opportunity for

some little time, but the other night it came. Of course, you could not know there was a mistake. You heard Parrish speak of Italy, and when the other man had departed you crept from your hiding place and struck your blow; but you did not kill Parrish. Three years ago he was warned of his danger, and got out of your way. He was warned that you had started for England by Emanuele. Do you know him?"

The woman had stood tense and rigid, listening to this story of the crime; now she collapsed.

"Emanuele!" she cried.

"I see you do know him," Quarles said. "You have my sympathy. It is possible that the man Parrish deserved his fate, only it happens that another has suffered in his place."

"It was my sister he wronged," said the woman.

"Was it fear that some evidence might be found against you which made you point out a man whom you knew was innocent?" said Quarles.

She nodded, still sobbing.

"The rest is for you to manage," said Quarles, turning to the inspector. "I suppose you are not likely to make any further mistakes. This would all have been cleared up days ago if Wigan had not been taken off the job."

I suppose Cockran felt a fool, as the professor intended he should.

There was little to be explained when I went to Chelsea later. Quarles's reconstruction of the crime had showed me the lines along which he had worked. The unopened letter from Rome had set him speculating with a view to proving that the dead man was not Parrish; and whilst I had only considered the change in character, he had had before him the possibility of a separate identity.

"Still, I do not understand how you came to suspect the woman," I said.

"Her recognition of you was too prompt to carry conviction under the circumstances," he answered. "The boy, who is in an office in Gray's Inn, might have met you together. I have no doubt he did; but since the woman had no business there, and if my theory were right, was concealed in Parrish's chambers at the time, she could not have seen you, except in the way I explained to her. Poor soul! I feel rather a cur for trapping her, but you were in a tight hole, Wigan, and I had to get you out."

Evidence showing that Parrish was a heartless scoundrel, the jury found extenuating circumstances for the woman, in spite of the fact that she had murdered an innocent man, so she escaped the extreme penalty. I was glad, although the strict justice of the verdict may be questioned. From Italy, from Emanuele, who was the woman's cousin, we learnt that when Parrish was in Italy he had a friend with him, an eccentric artist named

Langford. We found that an insurance company had an annuity in this name which was not afterwards claimed. This fact, and the officials' description of the man, left no doubt that the murdered man was Langford. Emanuele had written two letters, as Quarles had surmised, and the first had caused Parrish to get out of harm's way. Wishing to keep up his chambers, he allowed Langford to occupy them; had perhaps left him the money to pay the rent, the idea of danger to his friend probably never occurring to him.

Naturally, Langford had not opened his letters, and, being an eccentric and a recluse, had allowed people to call him Parrish without denying the name when it happened that any one had to call him anything.

Since Parrish has never returned, even though the danger is past, it is probable, I think, that he died abroad.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE STRANGE CASE OF DANIEL HARDIMAN

Not infrequently I am put in charge of cases which are of small importance and might well be left to a less experienced man. I thought the mystery of Daniel Hardiman was such a case. I even went further and imagined that it was given to me because I was a bit under a cloud over the Parrish affair. Quarles jeered at my imagination and was interested from the outset, perhaps because he had had rather more of the Psychological Society than was good for him. Anyway, he traveled north with me to meet the liner *Slavonic*.

On the passenger list was the name Daniel Hardiman. He had come on board at Montevideo in company with his man, John Bennett, who appeared to be half servant, half companion. They had only a small amount of personal luggage, one trunk each, but several stout packing-cases of various sizes had been stored away in the hold. Hardiman had a first-class cabin to himself; his man traveled second-class, but spent much of his time in his master's cabin; indeed, for the first few days of the voyage Hardiman was not seen except at meal times.

It was said amongst the crew--probably the servant had mentioned the fact--that they were returning to England after an absence of many years, during which time they had lived much alone; and amongst the passengers it was agreed that there was something curious about the pair. There was speculation upon the promenade deck and in the smoking-room; the gossip was a pleasant interlude in the monotony of a long voyage. At the end of a week, however, Mr. Hardiman no longer stayed in his cabin. At first he paced the deck, thoughtfully, only in the early morning or late in the evening, but later was to be found in a deck-chair, either gazing fixedly at the horizon or interested in the games of the children on board. One sturdy youngster, when recovering a ball which had rolled to Hardiman's

feet, spoke to him. All the answer he got was a nod of the head, but the boy had broken the ice, and two men afterwards scraped acquaintance with the curious traveler. One was a Mr. Majendie, who was going to England on business; the other Sir Robert Gibbs, a Harley Street specialist, who had broken down with hard work, and was making the round trip for the benefit of his health.

By wireless, when the ship was two days from Liverpool, came the news that Hardiman had been murdered by his man-servant, and it was in consequence of this message that Christopher Quarles and I had gone north to meet the boat on its arrival.

When we went on board the captain gave us the outline of Hardiman's behavior during the voyage as I have here set it down. Quarles asked him at once whether he thought that all the passengers, after landing, could be traced if necessary. The captain seemed to consider this rather a tall order, but thought all those who could possibly have had access to Mr. Hardiman might be traced.

"It is a pity we cannot forbid any one to land until we like," said the professor.

"There is not so much mystery about it as all that," said the captain, "although it isn't quite plain sailing. One of our passengers, a swell doctor, who examined the body with our ship's doctor directly after the discovery, will give you the benefit of his opinion, and I am detaining another passenger, a Mr. Majendie."

"Then there is some doubt as to the servant's guilt?" I said.

"I don't think so, but you shall hear the whole story."

"First, we should like to see the body," said Quarles. "We might be influenced unconsciously by your tale. It is well to come to the heart of the matter with an open mind."

The captain sent for the ship's doctor and a stewardess, and with them we went to the cabin, which had been kept locked.

The body, which lay in the berth where it had been found, an upper berth with a porthole, had been washed and attended to by the stewardess. The lower berth had been used by the traveler for some of his clothes--they were still there, neatly folded. The dead man's trunk was on a sofa on the opposite side of the cabin, a sofa which could be made into a third berth if necessary. Except that the body had been attended to, the cabin was just as it had been found.

"I took the stained sheets away," said the stewardess, "but I thought it would be wiser not to move him from the upper berth."

"It is a pity he couldn't have been left just as he was," Quarles answered; "you have no doubt washed away all the evidence."

He was a long time examining the wound, a particularly jagged one in the neck, a stab rather than a cut, but with something of both in it.

"Has the--the knife been found?" Quarles asked.

"No," answered the captain. "You hesitate in your question a little. You are certain it was a knife, I suppose?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"His man says it was a bullet."

"A bullet!" and Quarles looked back at the wound.

"The servant Bennett does not deny that he killed his master," said the doctor; "but he persists in saying that he had no knife."

"Has a revolver been found?" I asked.

"No, and no one heard any report," said the captain. "I cannot make this fellow Bennett out. He seems to me rather mad. Besides, there are one or two curious points. Would you like to hear them now?"

"Please," said Quarles.

With sailor-like directness the story was told in a straightforward narrative, destitute of trimmings of any kind. A steward had gone to Mr. Hardiman's cabin to take him a weak brandy-and-water; he had done the same first thing every morning during the voyage. He saw Hardiman lying with his face toward the cabin, one arm hanging over the side of the berth. There was no sign of a struggle. The clothes were not thrown back, but there was a considerable quantity of blood. Curiously enough, the porthole had been unscrewed and was open. The steward fetched Dr. Williams, the ship's doctor, who said death had probably occurred five or six hours previously, a statement Sir Robert Gibbs corroborated. There was no knife anywhere.

"The time of death is important," the captain went on. "Bennett has occupied a second-class cabin with a man named Dowler, and on the night of the murder Dowler, having taken something which disagreed with him, was awake all night, and he declares that Bennett never stirred out of his bunk. If the doctors are right, then Dowler's evidence provides Bennett with an alibi, of which, however, he shows no anxiety to take advantage. This cabin trunk, Mr. Quarles"--and the captain lifted up the lid as he spoke--"this trunk is all Mr. Hardiman's cabin luggage. There are some papers, chiefly in a kind of shorthand, which you will no doubt examine presently, and these stones, merely small chunks of rock, as far as I can see, although Sir Robert Gibbs suggests they may have value. There are similar stones in Bennett's trunk. There is a curious incident in connection with these bits of stone. On the night after the murder one of the middle watch saw a man come on deck and hastily fling something overboard. At least, that was the intention, apparently, but as a fact, either through agitation or a bad aim, the packet did not go overboard,

but landed on a coil of rope on the lower deck forward. It proved to be a small canvas bag containing seven of these bits of rock, or, at any rate, pieces like them. Now, the man on the watch is not inclined to swear to it, but he believes the thrower was Majendie. Majendie denies it."

"You are an excellent witness, Captain," said Quarles as he took up two or three of the bits of rock and looked at them. "Is Mr. Majendie annoyed at not being allowed to land at once?"

"On the contrary, he is keen to give us all the help in his power. He is a fairly well-known man on the other side, has means and position, and, personally, I have little doubt that the watch was mistaken. You see, the servant does not deny his guilt."

"Would Bennett be likely to be in the place where the watch saw this man?" I asked.

"Not under ordinary circumstances, but if he had been trying to get into the locked cabin he would be."

"I think if we could have a few words with Sir Robert Gibbs it would be useful," said Quarles. "Have you the canvas bag of stones?"

"Yes, locked up in my cabin. I will send and ask Sir Robert to join us there."

"And could you get a knife?" asked the professor. "Any old knife will do, a rusty one for preference."

A few minutes later we were in the captain's cabin, and on the table was the bag of stones and a rusty and much-worn table-knife. Dr. Williams had just explained to us his reasons for fixing the time of death when Sir Robert entered. He was a man with a pronounced manner, inclined to take the lead in any company in which he found himself, and was very certain of his own opinion. On the way to the cabin Quarles had whispered to me to take the lead in asking questions, and to leave him in the background as much as possible, so after the captain's short introductions I began at once:

"I may take it, Sir Robert, that you agree with Dr. Williams as to the time Hardiman had been dead when you saw the body?"

"Certainly."

"And in your opinion the wound could not, under any circumstances, have been caused by a bullet?"

"Certainly not," and he smiled at the futility of the question.

"The bullet might have been a peculiar one," I suggested, "different from any with which we are familiar. The servant, who does not deny his guilt, says it was a bullet."

"And I say it was not," Sir Robert answered. "No kind of bullet could make such a wound. A knife with a point to it was used. The action would be a stab and a pull sideways. I am of the opinion that the blow was struck while the victim was in a deep sleep. I think Dr. Williams agrees with me."

Williams nodded.

"You would otherwise have expected to find some signs of a struggle?" I said.

"I should. It is quite possible, I think, that at times Mr. Hardiman had recourse to a draught or a tablet to induce sleep."

"I understand that you had some conversation with Mr. Hardiman during the voyage, Sir Robert. Were you struck by any peculiarity in him?"

"He was an eccentric man, but a man of parts undoubtedly. He told me very little about himself, but I gathered that he had traveled extensively, and out of the beaten track. I put down his difficulty in sustaining a conversation to this fact. He seemed in good health--one of those wiry men who can stand almost anything."

"Sir Robert, could it possibly have been a case of suicide?" Quarles asked, suddenly leaning forward.

"Have you examined the wound carefully?" asked the doctor.

"I have."

"If you will try to stab yourself like that you will see how impossible it is. Besides, you forget that no knife has been found, and in a case of suicide it would have been. I may add that the knife used was not in the least like the one I see on the table there."

"It must have had a point, you think?" said Quarles.

"I do not think--I am certain."

"Did Mr. Hardiman ever say anything about these bits of rock to you?"

"Never," answered the doctor. "I think I suggested to the captain that they might be valuable. I have no knowledge on the point, but I cannot conceive a man like Hardiman carrying them about unless they were of value."

"I take it he is a geologist," Quarles said carelessly.

Sir Robert would like to have been present throughout our inquiry, but the professor firmly but courteously objected. He said it would not be fair to those chiefly concerned, and he appealed to me to endorse his opinion. The doctor had raised a spirit of antagonism in him. They were both too dogmatic to agree easily.

The sailor of the watch was next interviewed, a good, honest seaman who evidently had a wholesome dread of the law in any form. He thought it was Mr. Majendie he had seen on the deck that night, but he would, not swear to it.

"Are you sure it wasn't Bennett?" I asked.

"Ay, sir, I'm pretty sure of that."

"What is it that particularly makes you think it was Mr. Majendie?"

"I just think it, sir; I can't rightly say why."

"What did he do, exactly?" said Quarles. "Just show me--show me his action. Here are the bits of rock in the bag; take the bag up and pretend to pitch it into the sea, as he did."

The sailor took up the bag and did so. His pantomime was quite realistic.

"I note that you turn your back to us," said Quarles.

"Ay, sir, because his back was turned to me. It wasn't until he made the action of throwing--just like that, it was--that I knew he had anything in his hand."

"Did you call out to him?"

"No; he was there and gone directly."

"It was a bad throw, too?"

"Ay, sir, it was; he did it awkward, something like women throws when they ain't used to throwing."

"That good fellow would feel far more uncomfortable in the witness-box than most criminals do in the dock," said Quarles when the sailor had gone. "He is as certain that it was Mr. Majendie as he is certain of anything, but he is not going to commit himself. Shall we have a talk with Mr. Majendie next? Let me question him, Wigan."

Majendie's appearance was in his favor. He might be a villain, but he didn't look it. There was Southern warmth in his countenance and temper in his dark eyes, but his smile was prepossessing.

"A sailor's absurd mistake has put you to great inconvenience, I fear," said Quarles.

"The inconvenience is nothing," was the answer. "I court enquiry."

"Of course you were not on the deck that night?"

"No."



"It is Mr. Hardiman's past I want to get at," said the professor. "You had some talk with him during the voyage; what did you think was his business in life?"

"He was a traveler. I think he had been where no other civilized man has been. He did not directly tell me so, but I fancy he had wandered in the interior of Patagonia."

"Should you say he was a geologist?"

"No," said Majendie with a smile. "He showed me some pieces of rock he had with him; indeed, I am suspected of flinging some of these bits of rock away in that canvas bag I see there. Is it likely I should do anything so foolish? It is part of my business to know something of bits of rock and blue clay and the like, and unless I am much mistaken those bits of rock are uncut diamonds."

"Diamonds!" I exclaimed.

"Yellow diamonds of a kind that are very rarely found," Majendie answered. "I may be mistaken, but that is my opinion. If I am right, the actual gem, when cut, would be comparatively small. It is enclosed, as it were, in a thick casing of rock."

"Did Hardiman know this?" Quarles asked.

"I am not sure. In the course of conversation I told him that I knew something about diamonds, and he asked me into his cabin to show me some bits of rock he had in his trunk. He spoke of them as bits of rock, but he may have known what they really were."

"Did he give you this invitation quite openly?" asked Quarles.

"Oh, yes. There were others sitting near us who must have overheard it. I went with him, and gave him my opinion as I have given it to you. Of course, there may not be a jewel at the heart of every bit of rock; no doubt there are a great many quite useless bits in Hardiman's collection."

"This is very interesting," said Quarles. "Would you look at the pieces in that bag and tell us if any of them are useless."

Majendie spent some minutes in examining them, and then gave it as his opinion that they all contained a jewel.

"Now that knife--"

"I thought no knife had been found," said Majendie.

"That has just been found on the ship," said Quarles. "It is an absurd question, but as a matter of form I must ask it. Have you ever seen that knife before?"

Majendie took it up and looked at it.

"Hardiman was apparently stabbed with a rusty knife," Quarles remarked.

"Stabbed! You could not stab any one with this, and certainly I have never seen it before."

I did not understand why Quarles was passing this off as the real weapon. He took it up, grasped it firmly, and stabbed the air with it.

"I don't know, it might--"

He shook his head and put the knife on the table again. Majendie took it up and in his turn stabbed the air with it.

"Utterly impossible," he said. "This could not have been the knife used; besides, there would surely be stains on it."

"I am inclined to think you are right," said Quarles. "You must forgive the captain for detaining you, Mr. Majendie, and of course you can land this afternoon. The captain wishes us to lunch on board; perhaps you will join us?"

"With pleasure. So long as I am in London to-night no harm is done."

When he had gone Quarles turned to the captain.

"Pardon my impudence, but we must not lose sight of Majendie. You must follow him this afternoon, Wigan, and locate him in London. You must have him watched until we get to the bottom of this affair. Now let us see Bennett."

The man-servant proved to be a bundle of nerves, and it was hardly to be wondered at if the story he told was true. A question or two set him talking without any reticence apparently.

Time seemed to have lost half its meaning for him. He could not fix how long he and his master had been away from England; many years was all he could say. They had traveled much in South America, latterly in the wilds of Patagonia. There they had fallen into the hands of savages, and for a long time were not sure of their lives from hour to hour. Always Mr. Hardiman seemed able to impress their captors that he was a dangerous man to kill; fooled them, in fact, until they came to consider him a god. Master and man were presently lodged in a temple, and were witnesses of some horrible rites which they dared not interfere with. Finally, at a great feast, Hardiman succeeded in convincing them that he was their national and all-powerful deity, and that he had come to give them victory over all their enemies. By his command the wooden figure of one of their gods was taken from the temple, and, together with two curious drums used for religious purposes, and other sacred things, was carried through the forest to a certain spot which Hardiman indicated. The whole company was then to go back three days' march, spend seven days in

religious feasting, and return. In the meanwhile he and his servant must be left quite alone with these sacred things.

"I suppose they returned," Bennett went on, "but they did not find us. They did not find anything. The spot my master had fixed upon was within a day's march of help. We set out as soon as those devils had left us, and, having got assistance, my master would go back and fetch the wooden figure and the other things. They are in the cases in this ship."

"What was the main object of your master's travels?" I asked.

"He was writing a book about tribes and their customs."

"And he took a great interest in stones and bits of rock?"

"That was only recently, and I never understood it, sir. He put some in my trunk and some in his own, but what they were for I do not know. I don't suppose he did himself. He was always peculiar."

"Always or recently, do you mean?" Quarles asked.

"Always, but more so lately. Can you wonder after all we went through? You can't imagine the horrors that were done in that heathen temple."

He told us some of them, but I shall not set them down here. It is enough to say that human sacrifices were offered. The mere remembrance of Bennett's narrative makes me shudder.

"It is a wonder it did not drive you both mad," said Quarles.

"That is what the master was afraid of," was the answer, "and it is the cause of all this trouble. He did not seem to think it would affect me, but he was very much afraid for himself."

"He told you so?"

"He did more than that. He said that if I saw he was going mad I was to shoot him, and so--"

"Wait a minute," said Quarles, "when did he say this to you?"

"The first time was when we got those things from the place in the forest where they had been left. Then he said it two or three times during the voyage. The last time was when I was cutting his nails."

"Cutting his nails?" I said.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hardiman could never cut the nails on his right hand. He was very helpless with his left hand in things like that, always was. On this particular day he said his hand was growing stronger, and declared it all was because of will-power. He was quite serious about it, and then he was suddenly afraid he was growing mad. 'Shoot me if I am going mad, Bennett.' That is what he said."

"And how were you to know?" asked Quarles.

"He said I should know for certain when it happened, and I did. The next evening he began telling me that we were bringing a lot of diamonds back to England. He promised me more money than I had ever heard of. I should have shot him then, only I wasn't carrying a revolver."

"So you did it later in the evening?"

"I cannot tell you exactly when I did it," the man answered. "I knew the time had come, but I do not remember the actual doing of it. Only one thing I am certain of--I didn't use a knife. He was always particular to tell me to shoot him."

"You are sure you did kill him?" I said.

"Shot him--yes. I did not stab him. That is a mistake."

"Do you know that your cabin companion says you did not leave your bunk at all that night?" said Quarles.

"That must be another mistake," was the answer.

When he had gone the professor remarked that John Bennett was far nearer an asylum than a prison.

"If Hardiman had been shot I should think the servant had shot him, but he was not shot. You see, Captain, the case is not so easy. These bits of rock complicate it, and we must keep an eye on Majendie."

There was a man I knew well attached to the Liverpool police, and I was fortunate enough to get hold of him to follow Majendie to London that afternoon. Bennett, having virtually confessed to the crime, was kept in custody, and I was free to remain with Quarles and examine the cases which Hardiman had brought to England. After certain formalities had been complied with, we carried out this examination in one of the shipping company's sheds. There were many things of extreme interest of which I could write a lengthy account, but they had no bearing on our business. The things which concerned us were the Patagonian relics.

The two drums did not interest the professor much, but the figure of the god did. It was about three-quarters life size, roughly carved into a man's shape. The wood was light in weight and in color, but had been smeared to a darker hue over the breast and loins. One arm hung by the figure's side, was, indeed, only roughly indicated; but the other, slightly bent, was stretched out in front of the figure. There was nothing actually horrible about the image, but, remembering Bennett's description of some of the rites performed in that temple, it became sinister enough. Quarles's inspection took a long time, and during it I do not think he uttered a word.

"I think we may go back to Chelsea, Wigan," he said at last.

Late on the following night we were in the empty room. At the professor's suggestion I repeated the whole story for Zena's benefit, although I fancy Quarles wanted to have a definite picture before his mind, as it were, and to find out whether any particular points had struck me. Zena's comment when I had finished was rather surprising.

"This Mr. Majendie must be a clumsy thrower," she said.

Quarles sat up in his chair as if his interest in the conversation had only become keen at that moment.

"She hits the very heart of the mystery, Wigan."

"There is no certainty that it was Majendie," I replied.

"Whether it was or not is immaterial for the moment. The fact remains that some one who was anxious to get rid of incriminating evidence was so clumsy that he threw it where any one could pick it up. Not one man in a thousand would have done that, no matter what state of agitation he was in. The packet was deliberately thrown away, remember; it was not done in a moment of sudden fear."

"I am all attention to hear what theory you base upon it," I returned.

"We will begin with the wound," said Quarles. "Sir Robert Gibbs and Dr. Williams agree that it could not have been self-inflicted. Sir Robert suggested that I should try to stab myself in the same way and see how impossible it was. Remember it was a stab and a pull of the blade to one side. It was impossible for a right-handed man, difficult even for a left-handed one, but not impossible. That was the first point I made a mental note of."

"Why did you not speak of the possibility?"

"Chiefly, I think, because I was convinced that Sir Robert expected me to do so, was waiting for me to do so, in fact. He is far too cute a man not to have considered the possibility, and was prepared to prove that Hardiman was a right-handed man, as we know he was from his servant. In all probability Sir Robert knew that Bennett had to cut his master's nails. I was not disposed to give the doctor such an opening as that, although no doubt he thought me a fool for not thinking of it."

"Then we do away with the theory of suicide?" I said.

"Well, the absence of any weapon appears to do that," said Quarles. "What was the weapon? A knife of some kind, a rusty knife and rather jagged, I fancy. The wound suggested that it was jagged, and in spite of the washing my lens revealed traces of rust. Rather a curious knife to commit murder with. That was my second mental note. We had to be prepared for a curious personality somewhere in the business."

"Mr. Majendie," I said.

"He is hardly such an abnormal individual as the servant Bennett. We will consider Bennett first. His story is a straightforward one, nervously told, dramatically told. We might easily assume that imagination had much to do with that story were it not for the contents of those packing-cases. They are corroborative evidence. We may grant that the man's recent experiences have had their effect upon him, have laid bare his nerves, as it were, but since the most unlikely part of his story is true we may assume that the rest of it is. We need not go over it again in detail. The man was evidently attached to his master, and was prepared to shoot him if he exhibited signs of madness. Considering the state of his own nerves, I can believe that Bennett watched for these signs, and felt convinced of his master's madness when he spoke of a wealth of diamonds. Bennett knew they had no diamonds in their possession. He only knew of those bits of rock. So he determined to shoot Hardiman. However, I am convinced that he did not leave his cabin that night. Sleep prevented his carrying out the intention, but when in the morning he found that his master was dead--murdered--he immediately translated his intention into action, and concluded that he had done it. There was no one else who would be likely to murder him. That he should do it was natural under the circumstances. He would not look upon it as a crime. He had only carried out his instructions to the letter, as I have little doubt he has been accustomed to do for years."

"It is a theory, of course, but--"

"Oh, it is more than a theory now," said Quarles, interrupting me. "He admits his guilt, yet we know that Hardiman was stabbed, not shot. We conclude, therefore, that Bennett, although he fully intended to kill his master, did not do so."

"So we come to Majendie," I said.

"Yes, and to the yellow diamonds which Bennett knew nothing about. I admit that Majendie was a distinct surprise to me. He had to prove that the sailor of the watch was mistaken, that he was not the person who threw the stones away. How does he do it? By asking whether he, an expert in diamonds, would be likely to throw away what he knew to be valuable. This was a very ingenious argument. He did not deny that he knew Hardiman had these stones in his possession, because he believed that people must have seen him go into Hardiman's cabin. We have his statement that Hardiman invited him to do so, and that the invitation was given in the hearing of others. So he asked a perfectly simple question to show that the sailor was mistaken."

"Evidently you do not believe that the sailor was mistaken."

"We will go on considering Majendie," said Quarles. "Now, when he took up the knife and imitated my action of stabbing the air with it I made a discovery. He did so with his left hand. Since my first mental note concerned a left-handed man the coincidence is surprising. The sailor in his pantomime had used the right hand. Majendie's action was unexpected, and for a time I did not see its significance. But let us suppose for a

moment that Majendie did throw the bag of stones away. He might argue that some one might possibly see the action, and would note that it was done by a left-handed man, so used his right hand to deceive any one who might be there. Hence his bad aim."

I shook my head.

"Wait," said Quarles. "Some one had stolen those bits of rock, else how came they in that canvas bag, and why were they thrown away? Majendie told us that only certain of those stones had at the heart of them a diamond, yet he also said that all those in the bag had. That looks as if they had been picked out and stolen by an expert, and when we remember that Hardiman had shown him the contents of the trunk suspicion points very strongly to Majendie as the thief. Of course, when Hardiman was found dead, he would get rid of evidence which must incriminate him. We must see Majendie, Wigan, and ask him a few questions."

"Then he did not kill Hardiman?" said Zena.

"I do not think so."

"Who did?"

"Nobody. Hardiman was mad and committed suicide, and in a particular way. Think of Bennett's description of that Patagonian temple, Wigan. Those savages were persuaded that Hardiman was a god; possibly human sacrifices were offered to him, and he dared not interfere. That was sufficient to start a man on the road to madness. That wooden god he brought home tells us something. It was the left arm which was stretched out, and in the closed fist was a hole into which a knife had been fixed, a symbol of vengeance and sacrifice, a symbol, mind you, not a weapon which was actually used. I imagine that time had caused it to become rusty and jagged. Now, I think Hardiman removed that knife before packing the figure, kept it near him, because obsessed with it; went mad, in short. We know from Bennett that he believed his left hand was becoming stronger, and I believe his madness compelled him to practise his left hand until it became strong enough to grasp the knife firmly and strike the blow. Since the god was left-handed, his priests were probably so too, and the victims would be slain with the left hand. There was some religious significance attached to the fact, no doubt, and Hardiman's madness would compel him to be exact."

"But what became of the knife?" I asked.

"The porthole was found open," said Quarles. "I think he deliberately put it out of the porthole, his madness suggesting to him that no one should know how he died. He would have strength enough to do this, for he died quietly, bled to death, in fact, and gradually fell into a comatose condition, hence no sign of a struggle. It is impossible to conceive what devilish power may lurk about those things which have been used for devilish purposes. I am very strong on this point, as you know, Wigan."

Of course it was quite impossible to prove whether Quarles was right

about the knife, but he was correct as regards Majendie, who had hoped to get possession of a few of these stones without Hardiman missing them, and then, when the unexpected tragedy happened, had tried to get rid of them, using his right hand to throw them away. Amongst the dead man's papers there was a will providing amply for his servant Bennett--who, I may add, recovered his normal health after a time--and leaving his relics to different museums, and any other property he was possessed of to charities. I believe the yellow diamonds proved less valuable than Majendie imagined, but at any rate the various charities benefited considerably.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CRIME IN THE YELLOW TAXI

One's last adventure is apt to assume the place of first importance, the absorption in the details is so recent and the gratification at solving the problems still fresh. Used to his methods as I had become, Quarles's handling of the Daniel Hardiman case was constantly in my mind until I had become acquainted with the yellow taxi. I will not say his deductions in the taxi affair were more clever--you must judge that--but I am sure they were more of a mental strain to him, for he lost his temper with Zena.

We had been arguing various points, and seemed to have exhausted all our ideas.

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him," said Zena, breaking the silence which had seemed to indicate that our discussion was at an end.

"I repeat that had he been in a different position he would have been arrested at once," said Quarles testily; "but because he happens to be a prominent Member of Parliament, goes everywhere which is anywhere, and knows everybody who is anybody, it suits people to forget he is a blackguard and it suits Scotland Yard to neglect its duty."

An inquest in connection with a very extraordinary case had taken place that day, and had been adjourned.

On the previous Monday, between seven and eight in the evening, the traffic had become congested at Hyde Park Corner, chiefly owing to the fog, and the attention of a gentleman standing on the pavement--a Mr. Lester Williams--had been drawn suddenly to the occupant of a taxi. Possibly a street lamp, or the light on an adjacent motor, picked out the lady's face particularly, and he had opened the door before he called to the driver.

The lady was leaning back in the corner, but he saw at once that something was wrong, and when he touched her the horrible truth



became apparent.

She was dead.

He called to the driver to draw up to the curb and then called a policeman. Williams jumped at once to the conclusion that a crime had been committed, and the police took the same view.

There was no difficulty as regards identification. She was Lady Tavener, wife of Sir John Tavener, M.P. The driver, Thomas Wood, had come from the other side of Twickenham and had taken up Sir John and his wife at their own front door. He had constantly driven them up to town and elsewhere, sometimes separately, sometimes together. On this occasion he had driven to a house on Richmond Green, where Sir John had got out. Lady Tavener was going on to the Piccadilly Hotel. Wood had got as far as Hyde Park Corner when a gentleman called to him. He had not seen the gentleman open the door of the taxi, knew nothing in fact until he was told to drive up to the curb and Lady Tavener was taken out dead.

At the inquest the evidence took rather a curious turn. It was common knowledge that Sir John had married Lady Tavener after her divorce from a Mr. Curtis, since dead, and Sir John's reputation was none of the best.

Veiled accusations were constantly made against him in those would-be smart journals catering for that public interested in this kind of scandal, and several questions founded on this knowledge were put to him at the inquest.

He came out of the ordeal very well, and gave his evidence in a straightforward manner. He did not pretend that he and his wife did not quarrel at times, sometimes rather severely he admitted, but he maintained there was no reason why his wife should commit suicide. He ignored altogether the idea that he was in any way responsible for her death. She seemed in perfect health when he had left her that evening. She was dining with some people called Folliot, and was going on to the theater with them afterwards. He also believed that a crime had been committed.

The medical evidence threw some doubt on this opinion, however. True, there were slight marks on Lady Tavener's throat, but it was possible she had caused them herself by catching hold of her own throat in some spasm. She was addicted to drugs, a fact which she had concealed from her husband apparently, and her general condition was such that a shock or some sudden excitement might very easily prove fatal. Two doctors were agreed upon this point, and said that she was in a condition known as status lymphaticus.

After the inquest I had gone to see Quarles, and his one idea was that Sir John should have been arrested. Zena's sarcastic suggestion that her grandfather would hang him merely because of his reputation, had made the old man lose his temper altogether.

As I was the representative of Scotland Yard in that empty room at Chelsea, I felt compelled to say something in its defense.

"Have you read the evidence given to-day carefully?" I asked.

"I was there," he snapped.

I had not seen him and was astonished.

"Arrest Tavener," he went on, "and then you may be able to solve the problem. There may be extenuating circumstances, but they can be dealt with afterwards. Let us go into another room."

He got up and brought the discussion to a close. He was in one of those moods in which there was no doing anything with him.

Although I was at the inquest, I had had little to do with the case up to this point; now it came entirely into my hands, and it may be that Quarles's advice was at the back of my mind during my inquiries.

I made one or two rather interesting and significant discoveries. The Folliotics, with whom it was said Lady Tavener was dining that night, did not know Sir John, and moreover, they had no appointment with Lady Tavener that evening, nor were they dining at the Piccadilly Hotel. The people on Richmond Green, with whom Sir John had dined, admitted that he was in an excited condition. He made an expected division in the House of Commons an excuse for leaving early, directly after dinner in fact, but he had not gone to the House and did not arrive home until after midnight, when he found a constable waiting for him with the news of his wife's death.

These facts were given in evidence at the next hearing, but it was less due to them than to public feeling, I fancy, that a verdict of murder against Sir John Tavener was returned.

That night I went again to Chelsea.

"I see that you have arrested him, Wigan," was the professor's greeting.

"I don't believe he is guilty," I answered.

"Why not? Let us have the reasons. But tell me first, what was his demeanor when he heard the verdict? Was he astonished?"

"He seemed to be pitying a body of men who could make such a mistake."

"Ah, he will play to the gallery even when death knocks at his door. Why do you think he is not guilty, Wigan?"

"Intuition for one reason."

"Come, that is a woman's prerogative."

"That sixth sense, which is usually denied to men," corrected Zena.

"Then for tangible reasons," I said; "if he killed his wife he committed the crime between Twickenham and Richmond Green, knowing perfectly well that her death must be discovered at the end of her journey. He would know that suspicion would inevitably fall upon him."

"That seems a good argument, Wigan, but, as a fact, suspicion did not immediately fall upon him. He has only been arrested to-day, and even now you think he has been wrongly arrested. The very daring of the crime was in his favor."

"My second reason is this," I went on. "If he were guilty, would he deliberately have closed the door of escape open for him by the doctors and declare that he did not believe his wife committed suicide? Would he not have jumped at the idea?"

"That also sounds a good argument," said Quarles, "but is it? He could not deny that he and his wife quarreled rather badly at times, but he wanted to justify his position, and he felt confident the opinion of the doctors would stand, no matter what he might say. If no other facts come to light, suicide will be the line of defense, Wigan, and it will be exceedingly hard to get any judge and jury to convict him. Nothing carries greater weight than medical evidence, and you will find the doctors sticking to their opinion no matter what happens. No, Wigan, your reasons do not prove that he is not an exceedingly clever and calculating rascal. On the present evidence I think he would escape the hangman, but the public will continue to think him guilty unless some one else stands in the dock in his place."

"I wonder whether the Folliotics have told the truth," said Zena.

"Intuition, Wigan," laughed Quarles, "jumps to the end of the journey and wants to argue backwards."

"Do you not often do the same, dear?"

"Perhaps, but not this time. I think you said the taxi had been in charge of the police?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I should like to see it."

"We can go to-morrow."

I had already spent a couple of hours with that taxi, and I was rather anxious to see how Quarles would go to work with it.

He began with the metal work and the lamps, nodded his admiration at the way they were kept, and remarked that but for the vehicle number and the registering machine it might be a private car. He examined the engine and the tires, using his lens; seemed to be particularly interested in the

texture of the rubber, and picked out some grains of soil which had stuck in the tire. All four tires came in for this close inspection.

Inside the taxi his lens went slowly over every inch of the upholstery, and with the blade of a penknife he scraped up some soil from the carpet. This he put on a piece of white paper and spent a long time investigating it. He opened and shut the door half a dozen times, and shook his head. Then he seated himself in the driver's seat, and in pantomime drove the car for a few moments. Afterwards, he stood back and regarded the car as a whole.

"Well, Wigan, it is a very good taxi; let us go and have a ride in another one."

He did not hail the first we encountered, and when he did call one it was for the sake of the driver, I fancy. He explained that he wanted to drive to Richmond Green by Hammersmith and Kew Bridge.

"And we don't want to go too fast," said Quarles.

"Don't you be afraid, guv'nor, I shan't run you into anything; you won't come to no harm with me."

"It isn't that," said Quarles, "but I'm out to enjoy myself. I'll add a good bit to what that clock thing says at the end of the run."

"Thank you, guv'nor."

"Now just get down and open this thing to let me have a look at the works."

The driver looked at me, and I nodded. No doubt he thought I was the old man's keeper.

Quarles looked at the engine.

"It isn't new," he remarked.

"No, guv'nor."

"How long has it been running?"

"I couldn't say. I'm not buying this on the hire system."

"You fellows do that sometimes, eh?"

"Yes, guv'nor, there are several of us chaps own their own taxi."

"That's good. Now for Richmond, and go slowly from Hyde Park Corner."

I never remember a more tedious journey. Quarles hardly spoke a word the whole way, but sat leaning forward, looking keenly from one side of the road to the other, as if he were bent on obtaining a mental picture of

every yard of the way. Arriving at Richmond Green he did no more than just glance at the house where Sir John had dined that night, and then told the man to drive to Twickenham as fast as he liked to go.

"Stop him when we reach Tavener's house, Wigan. You know it, I suppose?"

I did, and stopped the driver when we got there. Quarles had the car turned round, then he got out and examined the tires with his lenses. The driver winked at me, and I nodded to assure him that I knew the eccentric gentleman I had to deal with, and that he was quite harmless.

We then drove back to Richmond rapidly, and from there went toward town, but more slowly. By Kew Gardens along to Kew Bridge Quarles did not seem particularly interested in the journey, but as we drew near Hammersmith he became alert again.

We were going slowly past St. Paul's school when he told the driver to take the second turning to the left. It was a narrow street, a big warehouse, which was being enlarged, on one side, and a coal yard on the other. About fifty yards down this street, the driver was instructed to stop.

"We will get out for a minute and look at the view," said Quarles facetiously.

I confess I found nothing whatever to interest me, but Quarles seemed to find the blank walls of the warehouse and coal yard attractive.

"Now, driver, you can turn round and get us back to Hyde Park Corner as quickly as you like," said the professor as we got into the taxi again.

Arriving at our destination he told the driver to go into the park, and there stopped him. Again he examined the tires and the texture of them, picking some soil from the rubber, and he scraped up some dust from the floor of the taxi with a penknife and put it in an envelope.

"Thank you, my man," he said, paying a substantial fare.

"You're welcome, guv'nor," said the driver with a grin.

"He is fully persuaded that he has been driving a lunatic and his keeper," Quarles said as he walked away. "I suppose you can find the driver of the other taxi, Wigan."

"We might have found him this morning. He lives at Twickenham."

"I want you to see him and ask him two questions. First, was the fog in Hammersmith, or elsewhere on the journey, thick enough to bring him to a standstill before he reached Hyde Park Corner? Secondly, is he quite sure that the man who opened the door and called to him had not just got out of the taxi?"

"But--"

"You ask him these two questions and get him to answer definitely," said Quarles in that aggravating and dictatorial manner he sometimes has. "To-morrow night come to Chelsea. I am not prepared to talk any more about the Tavener case until then."

Without another word he went off in the direction of Victoria, leaving an angry man behind him. I am afraid I swore. However, I hunted up the driver of the taxi, and went to Chelsea the following night, still somewhat out of temper.

Quarles and Zena were already in the empty room waiting for me.

"Well, what did the man say?" asked the professor.

"The fog did not stop him anywhere until he got to Hyde Park Corner, and he is sure Lady Tavener was alone after leaving Richmond."

"He stuck to that?"

"He did, but after some consideration he said that he had almost come to a standstill in Hammersmith Broadway on account of the trams. I suggested that some one might have got into the taxi then, but while admitting the bare possibility, he did not think it likely."

"Did he give you the impression that he believed Tavener guilty?"

"Yes. He seemed to consider his arrest a proof of it."

"Naturally," said the professor.

"Your whole investigation seems to be for the purpose of proving Sir John innocent," I said. "Why were you so anxious to have him arrested?"

"Pardon me, my one idea is to get at the truth. Always be careful of your premises, Wigan. That is the first essential for a logical conclusion. Zena has said that because a dog has a bad name I want to hang him. Well, she gave me an idea; started a theory, in fact. Let us go through the case. First there is the question of suicide. It must come first, because if we are logical--the law is not always logical, you know--if we are logical, it is obvious no man could be hanged while the doctors stuck tight to their opinion. However, I have reason for leaving the question of suicide until last. Therefore we investigate the question of murder. Had Sir John disappeared after visiting the house on Richmond Green, I suppose not one person in ten thousand would have believed him innocent."

"But he didn't," I said.

"No," said Quarles. "But he behaved in a most peculiar manner. He left immediately after dinner, did not reach home until after midnight, and has not yet attempted to account for his time. He was in an abnormal condition. We will make a mental note of that, Wigan."

I nodded.

"We will assume that when he left her Lady Tavener was alive," Quarles went on. "At Hyde Park Corner she was dead, and the driver Wood was entirely ignorant that anything had happened. Yet, if murder was done, some one must have joined Lady Tavener during the journey. Wood says he was not held up by the fog, but on being pressed a little, speaks of coming nearly to a standstill in Hammersmith Broadway. There, or somewhere else, because we must remember Wood may have forgotten nearly coming to other stoppages, since driving in a fog must have required the whole of his attention--somewhere, somebody must have joined her. The driver, again under pressure, admits the bare possibility, but does not think it likely. However, we must assume that some one at some place did enter the taxi."

Zena was leaning forward eagerly, and I waited quietly for Quarles to continue.

"It follows that whoever it was must have been known to Lady Tavener," he said slowly. "Otherwise she would have called out to the driver or to people passing."

"You mean that he left it at Hyde Park Corner after the murder," said Zena. "You think it was Lester Williams."

"There is the possibility that he was getting out of the taxi instead of rushing to it, because he noticed the occupant looked peculiar," Quarles admitted.

"In that case would he have called the driver's attention?" I asked. "Your theory seems to demand actions which no man would be fool enough to commit."

"You can never tell upon what lines a criminal's brain will work, Wigan. I maintain that the same arguments I have used with regard to Sir John would apply in Lester Williams's case. Still, there are one or two points to consider. If you go to Hyde Park Corner you will find it difficult to pitch on any lamp which could throw sufficient light upon the face of the occupant leaning back in the corner as to cause alarm to any one on the pavement. I am taking into consideration the position of the taxi in the roadway and the angle at which the light would have to be thrown. And, since motor lights are in the front of cars, and Lady Tavener was facing the way her taxi was going, it is very improbable that the lights of another car would serve this purpose. Besides, it was a foggy night."

"Then you believe Williams was getting out of the taxi?" I asked.

"Let me talk about the contents of this first," said Quarles, separating an envelope from some papers on the table. "You will admit that I examined the taxi fairly thoroughly."

"You certainly did."

"And I came to one or two very definite conclusions, Wigan. The engine is practically new, very different from that of the taxi we took to Twickenham, which was of exactly the same make. I took some trouble in my choice of a taxi, you remember. I grant, of course, this may not be a very reliable proof, but the tires told the same story, I think."

"The first taxi might just have had new tires," I suggested.

"I do not fancy the whole four would have been renewed at the same time," he returned. "It is not usual. My conclusion was that the taxi had not been used very much."

"I must confess I do not see where this is leading us," I said.

"It led us to Twickenham, Wigan. In our down journey we covered the road taken by the taxi that night if it came direct to Hyde Park Corner. At Twickenham I examined the tires, and they satisfied me that so far there was nothing to negative a theory I had formed. On the return journey we turned into that side street--I had noted it on the way down--and at the end of our journey I examined the tires again and the floor of the taxi. I preserved what I found then in this envelope, and it is perfectly clear that our taxi had been driven over a road strewn with brick dust and coal dust, and that persons treading on such a road had entered the taxi."

"Of course, we both got out," I remarked.

"To admire the view," said Quarles. "And you may have noticed that there were few windows from which an inquisitive person could have told what we were doing. At night the place would be quite lonely unless the bricklayers and coal porters were working overtime. Now, Wigan, on the tires of the first taxi, and on its carpet, was dust exactly corresponding to that which I found on the tires and floor of our taxi. That is significant. Brick dust and coal dust together, remember. They are not a usual combination on a main road out of London."

I did not answer, I had no comment to make.

"If we have no very definite facts," Quarles went on, "we have many peculiar circumstances, and I will try and reconstruct the tragedy for you. Sir John and his wife have quarreled at times we know, and to some extent at any rate have gone each their own way recently. The fact that Sir John was the cause of her divorce, and married her, may be taken as proof that he was fond of his wife. A reformed rake constantly is, and often develops a strong vein of jealousy besides. That Lady Tavener was supposed by her husband to be dining with the Folliotics, who, as a fact, had no appointment with her that night, shows that she did not always explain her going and coming to her husband. I suggest that Sir John had begun to suspect his wife, and that his reason for leaving Richmond early was to ascertain whether she was going to the theater with the Folliotics as she had told him."

"It is an ingenious theory," I admitted.



"We follow Lady Tavener," said Quarles. "It is not likely she was going to spend the evening alone, or the Folliotics would never have been mentioned. She was going to meet some one. I suggest it was Lester Williams who had arranged to meet her at Hyde Park Corner. Whether the idea was to join her in the taxi, or that she should leave the taxi there with orders that the driver should meet her after the theater, I cannot say. I am inclined to think it was the former, and I hazard a guess that Lady Tavener had not known Williams very long. Of course, his explanation goes by the board. He was on the lookout for the taxi. From the pavement he only saw the taxi, but when he opened the door he found a tragedy."

"But why should you think he was a new acquaintance of Lady Tavener's?" asked Zena.

"Since he hurried to the door instead of waiting for the taxi to draw to the curb, I conclude he was taking advantage of the stoppage to join Lady Tavener in the taxi. Had she intended to leave the taxi there, he would have waited until it came to the pavement. But my theory demands that he should have been on the watch for the taxi, therefore he must have known it. Had Lady Tavener often used the taxi when she met Williams, Wood, the driver, would have recognized Williams. This does not appear to have been the case, therefore I conclude they were comparatively new friends."

"Do we come back to the theory of suicide, then?" I asked.

"Not yet," Quarles answered. "At present we merely find a reason why Sir John and Lester Williams have said so little, the one concerning his suspicions, the other about his knowledge of Lady Tavener. Since his wife was dead, why should Sir John say anything to cast a reflection upon her. For the same reason, why should Williams implicate himself in any way. From their different viewpoints they are both anxious to shield Lady Tavener's name. Therefore, Wigan, since we wanted to learn the truth, it was a good move to put Sir John in such a position that, to save himself, he must speak. Had we left him alone I have little doubt he would have ended by accepting the doctor's opinion and, rather than explain anything, would have remained silent."

"And allowed suspicion to rest on his name?" said Zena.

"It wouldn't. The doctor's evidence would have made people sympathize with him and regret that he should ever have been under suspicion. I am not saying he had made a deep calculation on these chances, but he was content to wait and let things take their course. He is still doing so. His arrest has not brought any explanation from him."

"But he has said he believes his wife met with foul play," persisted Zena. "Do you believe he would do nothing to bring the murderer to justice?"

"I think not. I think he would value his wife's name more than his revenge. If Sir John knew that his wife was meeting Williams that night, he might presently lose his temper and cause a scandal."

"And he will know later, if your theory is right?" I said.

"Perhaps not," said Quarles. "Let us get back to the contents of this envelope. The driver would have us believe that the first taxi came direct from Richmond to Hyde Park Corner. We have strong reasons for believing it did not. Therefore, either he went out of his way, by Lady Tavener's orders, to call for some one, or some one got into the taxi without his knowledge. I sat on the driver's seat, Wigan, and I admit that, if fully occupied with driving, as he would be on a foggy night, entrance might have been made without his knowledge, but on one condition. The door must have been easy to open. The door of that taxi isn't easy. I tried it. It is exceedingly stiff, difficult to open, and impossible to close without a very considerable noise. Therefore Wood knows that some one entered, and we know that that some one must have walked on a road covered with brick dust and coal dust."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Wood himself. He turned into the road we turned into. If Lady Tavener noticed that he had done so, she would not think anything of it. She would imagine the road was up and a detour necessary. As a matter of fact, she would not have time to think much, and I do not think she was alarmed, not even when Wood opened the door. As he did so I imagine he said something of this sort: 'I think it only right to warn your Ladyship that Sir John is suspicious.' He had to give some excuse for stopping the taxi and going to his fare. Whether he knew that Sir John was suspicious or not is immaterial. He had constantly driven Lady Tavener, and was probably aware that some of her friends were not her husband's. At any rate, some remark of this kind would allay her suspicions, and then--"

"He murdered her?" asked Zena sharply.

"Well, I fancy this is where we come to the question of suicide," said Quarles. "He intended to murder her, had his fingers on her throat, in fact, but the sudden excitement saved him. I think she actually died of shock, as the doctors declare. I think he was able to say something to her which caused that shock."

"I can hardly believe--"

"Wait, Wigan," the professor said, interrupting me. "You will agree that, from the first, Wood's evidence would naturally accuse Sir John. When you saw him and pressed him with the two questions I suggested he still sought to leave the impression upon you that Sir John was guilty; but since your questions showed there was a doubt in your mind, he admitted, to safeguard himself, the possibility of some one having entered the taxi surreptitiously. One other point which counts, I think. One of the lamps of the taxi, and only one of them, had recently been removed from its socket. I imagine he took it to make quite sure that Lady Tavener was dead."

"But he had often driven Lady Tavener. Why had he waited so long?" said Zena.

"And what reason had he for the murder?" I asked.

"It was probably the first time he had driven them together, when Sir John had left his wife during the journey, and he wanted to implicate Sir John. In short, this was his first opportunity for the double revenge he was waiting for. I have shown, at least I think I have, that the taxi was not often used. We shall find it is his own taxi, I think, bought outright or being purchased on the hire system. I should say he rarely hired himself out except to Sir John and Lady Tavener. He was not an ordinary driver, but a very clever schemer, and, like a clever schemer, I think one little point has given him away altogether. Curtis, from whom Lady Tavener was divorced, died shortly afterwards, you may remember, of a broken heart, his friends said, which means that he grieved abnormally at the breaking up of his happiness. It is natural that his friends and relations should hate the Taveners, and one of them conceived the idea of revenge. It is curious that several of the Curtises are called Baldwood Curtis. Baldwood is a family name. It was easy to assume the name of Wood. It would be likely to jump into the mind if one of them wanted to assume a name."

"What a horrible plot," said Zena, with a shudder.

"Horrible and clever," said Quarles.

"I wonder if you are right, dear."

"I have no doubt, but Wigan will be able to tell us presently."

He was right, I think, practically in every particular. I am not sure what would have happened to Wood. Technically he had not actually killed Lady Tavener, but he solved the difficulty of his punishment himself. Expecting the worst, I suppose, he managed to hang himself in his cell.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE AFFAIR OF THE JWELED CHALICE

The yellow taxi must still have been a topic of conversation with the public when Quarles and I became involved in two cases which tried us both considerably, and in which we ran great risk.

The reading of detective tales imagined by comfortable authors who show colossal ignorance regarding my profession, has often amused, me. Pistols usually begin the string of impossibilities and a convenient pair of handcuffs is at the end. These are the tales of fiction, not of real life as a rule, yet in the two cases I speak of the reality was certainly as strange as fiction and very nearly as dangerous.

There had been a series of hotel robberies in London, so cleverly conceived and carried out that Scotland Yard was altogether at fault. I had had nothing to do with this investigation, being engaged on other cases, but one Friday morning my chief told me I must lend my colleagues a hand. Within an hour of our interview I was making myself conversant with what had been done, and on Friday afternoon and during the whole of Saturday I was busy with the affair.

On Monday morning, however, I was called to the chief's room and told to devote myself to the recovery of a jeweled chalice which had been stolen from St. Ethelburga's Church, Bloomsbury, on the previous day. Since the vicar, the Rev. John Harding, was an intimate friend of the chief's, there was a sort of compliment in my being taken from important work to attend to this case, but I admit I did not start on this new job with any great enthusiasm, and was rather annoyed at being switched off the hotels, as it were, and put on to the church.

I went with the vicar to Bloomsbury in a taxi, and gathered information on the way. The chalice had been given to the church about eighteen months ago by an old lady, a Miss Morrison, who had since died. She had possessed some remarkable jewelry, diamonds and pearls, and these had been set in the chalice which she had presented to St. Ethelburga's, where she had attended regularly for six or seven years. The chalice was insured for £5,000, but this was undoubtedly below its actual value. It was not used constantly, only on the great festivals, and on certain Saints' days specified by Miss Morrison when she made the gift. The previous day happened to be one of these Saints' days, and the chalice had been used at the early celebration. The vicar had put it back into its case and locked it in the safe himself. The key of the safe had not been out of his possession since, yet this morning the safe was found open and the chalice gone.

"You have no suspicion?" I asked.

"None," he answered, but not until after a momentary pause.

"You do not answer very decidedly, Mr. Harding."

"I do, yes, I do really. In a catastrophe of this kind all kinds of ideas come into the mind, very absurd ones some of them," and he laughed a little uneasily.

"It would be wise to tell me even the absurd ones," I said.

"Very well, but perhaps you had better examine the vestry and the safe first," he said as the taxi stopped.

I found the vestry in charge of a constable, and as we entered a clergyman joined us. The vicar introduced me to the Rev. Cyril Hayes, his curate. The vestry and the safe were just as they had been found that morning; nothing had been moved. Yesterday had been wet, and the flooring of wooden blocks in the choir vestry bore witness to the fact that neither men nor boys had wiped their feet too thoroughly. Even in the

clergy vestry, which was carpeted, there were boot marks, so it seemed probable that the weather had rendered abortive any clue there might have been in this direction. There were two safes in the clergy vestry, a large one standing out in the room and a small one built into the wall. It was in the latter that the chalice had been kept, and the door was open. Apparently two or three blows had been struck at the wall with a chisel, or some sharp instrument, and there were several scratches on the edge of the door and around the keyhole; but it was quite evident to me that the safe had been opened with a key. I asked the vicar for his key, but it would not turn in the lock.

"Was anything besides the chalice stolen?" I asked.

"No," the vicar returned. "As you see, there is another chalice and two patens in the safe, one paten of gold, but it was not taken, not even touched, I fancy. It was the chalice and the chalice only that the thieves came for."

"It seems foolish to keep such a valuable chalice in the vestry," I said.

"It is kept in the bank as a rule," the vicar answered. "I got it from the bank on Saturday and it would have gone back this morning. Of course it was not possible to keep such a gift a secret. The church papers had paragraphs about it, which some of the daily papers copied."

"Every gang in London knew of its existence then," I said.

"True," said the curate, "and you might go further than that and remember that much of our work here lies in some very poor and some very disreputable neighborhoods."

"It does," said the vicar. "Amongst our parishioners we must have many thieves, I am afraid."

"There are thieves and thieves," said Mr. Hayes, "and I fancy there are many who would not meddle with the sacred vessels of a church. Superstition perhaps, but a powerful deterrent."

The vicar shook his head, evidently not agreeing with this opinion.

"Probably I have had more to do with thieves than you have, vicar," he said with a smile, and turning to me he went on: "I am very interested in a hooligans' club we have. They are a rough lot I can assure you. Many of them have seen the inside of a jail, some of them will again possibly; but there's a leaven of good stuff in them. Saints have been reared from such poor material before now."

"When do you meet?" I asked.

"Mondays and Thursdays."

"To-night. I'll look in to-night."

"But--"

"I may find the solution to the theft at your club," I said. The suggestion seemed to annoy him.

That the safe had been opened with a key and not broken open indicated that some one connected with the church was directly or indirectly responsible for the theft, and this idea was strengthened by the fact that it was impossible to tell how the robbers had entered the church. The verger had come in as usual that morning by the north door which he had found locked, and it was subsequently ascertained that all the other doors were locked. Some of you may know the church and remember that it is rather dark, its windows few and high up; indeed, only by one of the baptistry windows could an entry possibly have been effected, and I could find nothing to suggest that this method had been used. A few keen questions did not cause the verger to contradict himself in the slightest particular, and his fifteen years' service seemed to exonerate him.

"Is it possible that you left the door unlocked last night by mistake?" I queried.

"I should have found it open this morning," he said, as if he were surprised at my overlooking this point.

I had not overlooked it. I was wondering whether he had found it open and was concealing the fact, fearing dismissal for his carelessness.

A little later I had a private talk with the vicar.

"I think you had better tell me your suspicions," I said.

"There is nothing which amounts to a suspicion," he answered reluctantly. "It does not take a skilled detective, Mr. Wigan, to see that some one connected with the church must have had a hand in the affair. It is not the work of ordinary thieves. Therefore, as I said, absurd ideas will come. It happens that my curate, Mr. Hayes, is much in debt, and has had recourse to money lenders. He has said nothing to me about it; indeed, it was only last week that I became aware of the fact, and I decided not to speak to him until after Sunday. I was going to talk to him this morning. It was a painful duty, and naturally--"

"Naturally you cannot help thinking about it in connection with the chalice."

The vicar nodded as though words seemed to him too definite in such a delicate matter. That the two things had become connected in his mind evidently distressed him, and he was soon talking in the kindest manner about his curate, anxious to impress me with the excellent work Mr. Hayes was doing in the parish.

"The hooligans' club, for instance?" I said.

"That amongst other things," he answered.

"Miss Morrison was one of your rich parishioners, I presume."

"She was not a parishioner at all," said Mr. Harding. "She lived at Walham Green. She came to St. Ethelburga's because she liked our services, drove here in a hired fly every Sunday morning. I visited her, at her request, when she was ill some three years ago, but I really knew little of her. To be quite truthful I thought her somewhat eccentric, and never supposed she was wealthy. The presentation of the chalice came as a great surprise."

"Have you a photograph of the chalice?"

"No; but Miss Morrison's niece might have. I know Miss Morrison had one taken, a copy of it appeared in the church papers. The niece, Miss Belford, continues to live at Walham Green--No. 3 Cedars Road."

"Does she attend the church?" I asked, as I made a note of the address.

"Oh, yes. She used to come with her aunt, and since Miss Morrison's death she has taken up some parish work. I know her much better than I did her aunt."

"Of course she has not yet heard of the theft?"

"No, I have not talked about it to any one. I thought silence was the best policy."

I quite agreed with him and suggested he should keep the theft a secret for the next few hours.

With Mr. Hayes and his hooligans' club at the back of my mind, I made one or two enquiries in the neighborhood, and then started for Walham Green. On my way to the Underground I met Percival, one of the men engaged upon the hotel robberies, and stood talking to him for a few minutes. He was rather keen on a clue he had got hold of, but I was now sufficiently interested in the stolen chalice not to be envious.

No. 3 Cedars Road was quite a small house--forty pounds a year perhaps, and Miss Belford was a more attractive person than I expected to find. I don't know why, but I had expected to see a typical old maid; instead of which I was met by a young woman who had considerable claims to beauty. She opened the door herself, her maid being out, and was astonished when I said the Vicar of St. Ethelburga's had sent me.

She asked me in to a small but tastefully appointed dining-room, and when I told her my news, seemed more concerned on her aunt's account than at the loss of the chalice.

"Poor auntie!" she exclaimed. "Whilst she had the jewels she was always afraid some one would steal them, and now--now some one has."

"Mr. Harding thought you would have a photograph of the chalice," I said.

"I am sorry, I haven't. There were two or three, but I don't know what auntie did with them. She was a dear, but had funny little secretive ways."

"Mr. Harding led me to suppose she was eccentric," I said. "It is often the way with wealthy old ladies."

"Wealthy!" she laughed. "She left me all she had, and I shall not be able to afford to go on living here."

"How came she to give the jewels to the church then?"

"I hardly know, and I will confess that I was a little disappointed when she did so. Does that sound very ungrateful in view of the fact that she left me everything else!"

"No. It is natural under the circumstances."

"She was very fond of me, but as I have said, she was secretive and she certainly did not give me her entire confidence. I fancy the jewels were connected with some romance in her past life, and for that reason she did not wish any one else to possess them."

"You can't give me any idea of the nature of this romance, Miss Belford?"

"No."

"It might possibly help me."

"There is one thing I could do," she said. "My aunt had a very old friend living in Yorkshire. She would be likely to know, and under the circumstances might tell. If you think it would be any use I will write to her."

"I wish you would."

"If a romance in my aunt's life had something to do with the robbery, it seems strange that the jewels have been safe so long. They were always kept in the house. I should have thought it would have been easier to steal them from here than from the church."

"I do not think we can be sure of that," I said.

"Besides, the jewels have been quite safe at St. Ethelburga's for eighteen months," she added.

"That is a point I admit. I understand that you work in Mr. Harding's parish, so you know Mr. Hayes, of course."

"I have not been brought much in contact with him. I have sung once or twice at his hooligan club entertainments. He has made a great success of the club."



"Regenerating ruffians and drafting them into church work, eh?"

"I believe he has had great influence with them."

"I am going to visit that club to-night."

"You will find he is doing a great work. You will--surely you are not thinking--"

"That reformation may be only skin deep? I am, Miss Belford. The daily environment of these fellows makes it easy for them to slip back into their old ways."

From Walham Green I went to Chelsea. I wanted to see Zena Quarles, and there was nothing more to be done in the chalice case until I had visited the hooligan club. Not for a moment would I appear to sneer at the regenerating work which may be accomplished by such institutions, but experience has taught me that it is often the cakes and ale, so to speak, which attract, while character remains unchanged, or at the best very thinly veneered. There are always exceptions, of course. It is difficult for the uninitiated to realize that men go in for crime as a means of livelihood, and are trained to become expert even as others are trained to succeed in respectable professions. Many grades go to make up a successful gang, and I had great hope of recognizing some youngster's face at the club which would give me a clue to the gang which had worked this robbery.

"You're the very man I was thinking about," said Quarles when I was shown into the dining-room. "You have come to tell me that you are on these hotel robberies. Sit down, Wigan. How goes the inquiry?"

"You are wrong, professor. I was on the job for a day and a half, but I'm off it again. I am investigating the theft of a jeweled chalice."

"Left in a cheap safe in an insecure vestry, I suppose," he said in a tone of disgust. "Serves them right. Such things should be kept in a bank."

I explained that it was only kept in the vestry safe until it could be returned to the bank, but the fact did not seem to impress him.

He made no suggestion that we should adjourn to that empty room, where we had discussed so many cases. I told him the story, although I was not seeking his help, and he was not interested enough to ask a single question when I had finished. He only wanted to discuss the hotel robberies.

"I am going to that club this evening," I went on.

"The fact doesn't interest me," he returned snappishly.

"Fortunately I didn't come for your help; I wanted to see Zena."

"She's out and won't be home until late."

"And your temper's gone out, too, eh, Professor?"

"What do you mean?"

"That you are simply lusting to be on the warpath," I laughed. "It might do you good to come and see the hooligans with me to-night. Besides, if we could settle the chalice case promptly we might be investigating the hotel robberies before the end of the week."

This suggestion clinched the matter. He came, believing possibly that I congratulated myself upon having drawn him into the affair, which was not a fact. I was glad of his company, but I did not want his help.

Knowing something of such places, this hooligans' club astonished me. The raw material was rough enough, but Mr. Hayes had worked wonders with it. His personality had made no particular impression on me that morning, but his achievement proved him a man of force and character. Quarles was evidently interested in him and his work. If what the vicar had told me about his curate had left even a faint speculation regarding his integrity in my mind, it was dissipated.

Visitors to the club were not an infrequent occurrence, Mr. Hayes told us. He was rather proud that the institution had served as a type on which to form others.

"There mustn't be too much religion," he said. "The flotsam and jetsam of life have to learn to be men and women first. Some of them are learning to be men here."

While I listened to him I had been eagerly scanning the faces before me. There was not one I recognized. I wandered about the room, feigning interest in the game of bagatelle which was going forward with somewhat noisy excitement, and stood by chess and draught players for a few moments to study their faces closely. I looked keenly at each new arrival, but my clue was yet to seek.

Suddenly a young fellow entered, rather smarter than most of them, and I recognized him at once. Possibly the hooligans' club had been his salvation, but he had been bred amongst thieves, thieves I knew and had handled at times.

"I began to think you weren't coming to-night, Squires."

"Just looked in to say I can't come, sir," was the answer. "Got a chance of a place, sir, and going to look after it."

"That's right. Good luck to you. You can refer to me, you know."

"Thank you, sir."

With a careless word to two or three of the youths as he passed down the room, Squires sauntered out.

"That's our man," I whispered to Quarles, and without waiting to take leave of Mr. Hayes, I hastened to the door. Squires was going slowly down the street, no evidence of alarm about him, no desire apparently to lose himself in the crowd. He had not got very far when Quarles joined me, keen now there was a trail to follow.

"I know the gang he used to be friendly with," I said as we began to follow, "although I've got nothing definite against this youngster. It was this gang, I believe, that worked the series of frauds on jewelers three years ago, although we never brought it home to them. Just the men to deal with a jeweled chalice, eh, professor? I expect young Squires recognized me and guesses I am after it."

Our object was to track young Squires to his destination. Since he was connected with St. Ethelburga's through the hooligan club, it was quite likely he had had a direct hand in the robbery, but it was certain others were the prime movers, and I guessed he was on the way to warn them that I was on the trail.

At the corner of a street he stopped to speak to a man and a woman, and we were obliged to interest ourselves in a convenient shop door. He stood at the corner talking for at least ten minutes. Quarles thought he was having words with the woman, but it could not have been much of a quarrel for none of the passersby took any particular notice of them. Presently the man and woman crossed the street arm in arm, and Squires sauntered round the corner. We were quickly at the corner, afraid of losing sight of him. He was still in sight, still walking slowly. Once he turned to light a cigarette, and after that he increased his pace a little.

"It's evident he lied when he said he was going to look for a job," I remarked.

"But it's not so evident that one of us ought not to have followed the man and woman," said Quarles. "They may have gone to do the warning."

"I think not," I answered. "If you have noted our direction you will find we have traveled a pretty circuitous route. He'll wait until he thinks he is safe from pursuit, and then take a bee line for his destination."

As if he would prove my words Squires mended his pace, swinging down one street and up another as if he had suddenly become definite. At corners he gained on us, I think he must have run the moment he was out of sight, and in one short street we were only just in time to see him disappear round a corner.

"I'm going to give this up soon, Wigan," said Quarles as we hurried in pursuit. "I don't care how many jewels the chalice had in it."

We were round the corner. Squires had disappeared, but we could hear running feet in the distance.

"That settles it," said Quarles, coming to halt a dozen yards from the corner. "Go on if you like, Wigan, but--"

I heard no more. Something struck me, enveloped me, and there was an end. I am not very sure when a new beginning happened. Perhaps it is only an after consideration which makes me remember a whirring sound in my ears, and a certain swinging motion, and a murmur which was soothing. I am quite sure of the pain which subsequently came to me. My head was big with it, my limbs twisted with it. I was conscious of nothing else for a period to which I cannot place limits. Then there was fire in my throat.

I was sitting in the angle of a wall, on the floor; at a little distance from me was a light which presently resolved itself into a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. There were moving shadows--I saw them, I think, before I was conscious of the man and woman who made them. The man had just poured brandy down my throat, the girl, with her arms akimbo, watched him.

"He'll do now," said the man.

"Can't see why we take such trouble to keep death away," was the woman's answer.

"Are you in love with the hangman?"

The girl laughed, caught up the bottle, making the shadows dance like a delirium, then I slipped back into darkness again.

All kinds of things came into my mind after that, disordered dreams, and then I heard my name.

"Wigan! Wigan!"

I was still sitting in an angle of a wall, trussed like a fowl, but I was awake.

"Is that you, Professor?"

"No more hooligan clubs, Wigan."

"What happened?"

"I remember turning a corner," Quarles answered, "and I woke up here. We were sandbagged, or something of the kind, and serves us right. If we wanted to follow any one we ought to have followed the man and woman. Can you drag yourself over to this corner? We can talk quietly then."

It was rather a painful and lengthy operation, but I fancy the effort did me good. My brain was clearer, I began to grip things again.

"Where are we?" I said.

"Locked in a cellar, but where I do not know. We're lucky to be no worse off, and probably I'm especially lucky in not having been sandbagged by the man who dealt with you. He would probably have closed my account, for he must have hit you a tremendous blow. I had come to myself before the man and woman brought you brandy. I just moved to show I wasn't dead and watched them."

"You'll know them again."

"They both wore masks. About this chalice, Wigan."

"No doubt we've hurried it into the melting pot," I returned.

"I've been half asleep since our friend left us, but I've done some thinking, too. Reminded of my empty room by this cellar, I expect. There are one or two curious points about this chalice."

"Are they worth considering--now?"

"I think so. It will serve to pass the time. I didn't take any interest in your story at the time, but I think I remember the facts. You must correct me if I go wrong. First, then, we may take it as certain that the church was not broken into in an ordinary way. We assume, therefore, that some one connected with the church had a hand in the robbery. You satisfied yourself that an entry was not effected by the only possible window, we therefore ask who had keys of the church. The answer would appear to be the vicar, the verger, and possibly, even probably, Mr. Hayes. Had keys been in the possession of any other person for any purpose, either temporarily or otherwise, the vicar--I am assuming his integrity--would have mentioned it. Now the vicar does not suggest that he has any suspicion against the verger, nor do you appear to have entertained any, but Mr. Harding does suggest a suspicion of his curate by mentioning his debts and his dealings with money lenders."

"It was under pressure. I am convinced he has no real suspicion."

"At any rate his story influenced you. You made some inquiries concerning Mr. Hayes. That is an important point. Had you not heard at the same time of this hooligan club, you would probably have made further inquiries about the curate. I think you missed something."

"Oh, nonsense. You've seen the man and must appreciate--"

"His worth," said Quarles. "I do, but he leads to speculation. Let us consider the safe for a moment. There were marks from a blow of the chisel on the wall, scratches on the safe door, and by the keyhole, but you are satisfied that the safe was opened with a key, yet the vicar's key will not turn the lock. Why should an expert thief trouble to make these marks or to suggest that the safe had been broken open, even to the extent of jamming the lock in some way? The only possible explanation would be that the expert wished to leave the impression that an amateur had been at work. I can see no reason why he should wish to do so, and at any rate he failed. You were not deceived; you looked for

the expert at once."

"And the hunter has been trapped. We were hotter on the trail than I imagined."

"It is a warning to me to keep out of cases in which I feel no interest," said Quarles. "Still, circumstances have aroused my interest now. There is no doubt, Wigan, that there was every reason to look for an amateur in this business, and in spite of the hooligan club, you seem to have been half conscious of this fact. You would have been glad to know what the romance connected with the jewels was. Not idle curiosity, I take it, but a grasping for a clue in that direction. Miss Belford cannot help you beyond writing to her aunt's old friend in Yorkshire, yet had it not been for the hooligans' club, I fancy you would have followed this trail more keenly. According to Miss Belford, apart from the jewels, her aunt had not left sufficient to enable the niece to go on living in Cedars Road, yet while Miss Morrison was alive it was sufficient, apparently. Of course the niece may have more expensive tastes, but under the circumstances it was rather a curious statement. She believes that a past romance was the reason why the jewels were left to the church, and she admits that she was disappointed they were not left to her. It seems possible, doesn't it, that at one time she hoped to have them after her aunt's death? That would mean there was no valid reason why she shouldn't, and I think you might reasonably have speculated that she knew more of the romance than she admitted."

"You wouldn't have thought so if you had talked with her."

"Possibly not," returned Quarles. "I started handicapped in this case, I was not interested in it; Zena was not at hand to ask one of her absurd questions, which have so often put me on the right road. The road we have traveled has landed us here, and I have been thinking of another road we might have traveled. We will forget the hooligans' club. We start with the assumption that the robbery was the work of an amateur, we have ample reasons for thinking so. We do not suspect the vicar, we are inclined to exonerate the verger, and we finally decide that Mr. Hayes is innocent. We are met with a difficulty at once. How was the church entered? We may assume that some person in the Sunday evening congregation remained hidden in the church, committed the burglary, opening the safe with a duplicate key, marking the wall and the door, and giving a wrench to the lock to suggest ordinary thieves. Had it not been for the hooligan club, these efforts to mislead would not have been very successful, I fancy. They show that the amateur had small knowledge of the ways of experts. The thief, having secured the chalice, is still locked in the church. How to escape? It is a case of an all night vigil. When the verger arrives on Monday morning and passes through the church towards the vestry, the thief slips out. Now it is obvious that to make this possible the thief must have known a great deal about the church and its working, must have come in contact with the vicar constantly, or it would have been impossible to get an impression of the safe key. We therefore look amongst the church workers for the thief."

"Your deductions would be more interesting were we not lying trussed in

this cellar," I said. "I am trying to wriggle some of these knots loose."

"That's right," said Quarles, "When you are free you can undo me. My dear Wigan, it is the fact that we are in this cellar which makes these deductions so interesting. The chalice was stolen for the sake of the jewels, that is evident, or the thief would have taken the gold paten as well; and the jewels have a romance attached to them. We don't know what that romance is, but we have an eccentric old lady the possessor of the jewels; we have reason to suppose that she was not otherwise rich, and we have a niece apparently ignorant of her aunt's past. She admits disappointment that the jewels were left to the church; she complains that her own circumstances are straitened. In spite of the fact that she lives in Walham Green, she becomes, after her aunt's death, a worker in St. Ethelburga's parish in Bloomsbury. We have in Miss Belford one who knows the general working of the church, one who has been brought in contact with the vicar--Mr. Harding said he knew her very well, remember; and moreover she is closely connected with the jewels. It is possible, even, that she knows the romance behind the jewels and feels that they are hers by right and ought never to have been given to the church. This would account entirely for such a woman turning thief."

"The fact remains we are in this cellar," I said.

"It is a very interesting fact," said Quarles. "Of course I cannot be sure that the man and woman who were in this cellar were the same young Squires met, but I believe they were. The woman stood with her arms akimbo in each case, the position was identical. They learnt from young Squires that we were following and went off to warn some of their fellows who waited for us, Squires leading us into the trap by arrangement. The gang has beaten us, Wigan."

"And the chalice is in the melting pot," I remarked.

"I don't believe the gang knows anything about the chalice," said the professor quietly.

"Not know! Why--"

"Wigan, you stopped to speak to a colleague engaged on the hotel robberies this morning. You were seen, I believe. It was immediately assumed that you were on that job, and when Squires saw you to-night at the club he thought you were after the hotel robbers. Without being aware of it we were probably hot on their track."

"It is impossible," I said.

"Why should it be?" Quarles asked. "Once get a fixed idea in the mind, and it is exceedingly difficult to give opposing theories their due weight. The hooligan club got into your mind. There were many reasons why it should, especially with Mr. Hayes as the connecting link; you could not believe him guilty so you fell back upon the club. One other point, a very important one. The chalice was only used on great festivals and certain Saints' days. There are several reasons why the robbery would be

difficult on a great festival. The church would not be in its normal condition, owing to decorations or increased services, perhaps; besides, the thief--a church worker we assume--might be missed from some function connected with the church which would cause suspicion. On the other hand, many Saints' days occur in the week when there is no late evening service, perhaps, and if there is, only a small congregation. It would be remembered who was present. The chalice was stolen on a Saints' day which happened to fall on a Sunday, and must therefore remain in the church all night. How many people do you suppose know which Saints' days were specified by Miss Morrison? Very few. I warrant you were not far from the chalice when you were talking to Miss Belford. How are you getting on with your knots, Wigan?"

"I am not tied so tightly as I might be."

"Good. With luck you may yet be in time to prevent Miss Belford getting away."

"I don't believe she has anything to do with the chalice," I answered.

"All the same, I should take another journey to Walham Green," said Quarles. "When one is dealing with a woman it is well to remember that she is more direct than a man, is inclined to use simpler methods, and is often more thorough. Witness the man and woman in this cellar. The man gave you brandy to revive you: the woman didn't see any reason why you shouldn't die. She interested me. A woman like that is a source of strength to a gang. I fancy there is a glimmer of daylight through a grating yonder."

I got free from my bonds after a time, and I undid Quarles. The cellar door was a flimsy affair, my shoulder against the lock burst it open at once. No one rushed to prevent our escape. The house was as silent as the grave.

"Our captors have decamped," said Quarles. "We must have been hot upon the trail last night, Wigan."

The house was empty apparently, but we did not search it thoroughly then. Escape was our first thought. I could give instructions to the first constable we met to keep a watch on the house. We left by an area and found ourselves at the end of a blind road in Hampstead. The house was detached, and fifty yards or more from its nearest neighbor.

"Reserved for future investigation," Quarles remarked. "Our first business is the jeweled chalice."

Only a dim light had found its way through the cellar grating, but the day had begun. There was the rumble of an early milk cart. In spite of aching head and stiff limbs, only one idea possessed us; and the first taxi we found took us to Walham Green.

Miss Belford had gone. She must have left the house yesterday within half an hour of my leaving it. Inquiry subsequently proved that her servant



had left on the Saturday, and that during the last week Miss Belford had disposed of her furniture just as it stood.

Quarles was right, although we had no actual proof until some months later, when we had almost forgotten the jeweled chalice.

Miss Belford wrote to Mr. Harding. The jewels were left to Miss Morrison, she said, by an old lover. Why they had not married she could not say, but from old letters it appeared there had been a quarrel, and the man had married elsewhere. Miss Belford was the daughter of that marriage. She was not really Miss Morrison's niece, although she had always called her aunt. The jewels were left to Miss Morrison absolutely, to sell or do as she liked with, but Miss Belford declared that, in a letter which was with the jewels when Miss Morrison received them after Mr. Belford's death, and which she afterwards found amongst her papers, her father evidently expected that his daughter would ultimately benefit. The letter went on to explain how the theft had been accomplished, and the letter concluded:

"Had I known my aunt contemplated giving the jewels to the church, I should have taken them before, because I had always expected them to come to me. They were presented before I knew anything about it. I could do nothing, I was dependent upon her. When I found my father's letter I knew I had been robbed--that is the word, Mr. Harding, robbed. In taking the chalice I have only taken what belongs to me. On reflection you will probably consider that I was quite justified."

I can affirm that the vicar of St. Ethelburga's did not think so, and since Miss Belford's letter, which came from America, did not give any address I imagine she was not sure what attitude Mr. Harding would take up. What became of the gems, or how they were disposed of, I do not know; I only know that there is no jeweled chalice at St. Ethelburga's now, and I fancy the vicar thinks that, as a detective, I was a ghastly failure.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE FORTY-TON YAWL

Brilliant sunshine and a sufficient breeze, a well-appointed forty-ton yawl, nothing to do but lie basking on the warm deck, conscious of a very pretty woman at the helm--well, you may go a long way before you find anything to beat it for pure enjoyment.

How I came to be spending my time under such enviable circumstances requires some explanation, especially when I state that the exceedingly pretty woman was not Zena Quarles.

It will be remembered that to attend to the jeweled chalice case, which proved to be an affair of a day and a night only, I had been taken off a

job concerning a series of hotel robberies, and I was particularly glad to be put back upon this case, because Quarles was so intensely interested in it. Although the chalice case was not actually cleared up satisfactorily for some months, it was practically certain that the attack made upon us had nothing to do with the theft of the chalice.

The professor was convinced that, unconsciously, we had been hot upon the trail of the hotel robberies, that the trails of the two cases had, in fact, crossed each other. It seemed to me that he had jumped to this conclusion upon insufficient evidence, but I determined to make a thorough investigation of the house at Hampstead at once.

The house was in charge of a caretaker named Mason, who lived there in one sparsely furnished room, but on the night of our capture he had absented himself without leave. This looked suspicious, but the man was able to prove that he had told the truth as to his whereabouts, and further inquiry elicited nothing against him. Quarles also declared emphatically that Mason was not the masked man he had seen in the cellar.

I next managed to get an interview with the owner of the house, a Mr. Wibley. He had lived in it himself for a time, but it had now been empty for about two years. It was a good house, but old-fashioned. People did not like basements, and as the house was in a neighborhood which was deteriorating he had not felt inclined to spend money upon it. He knew nothing about the caretaker who had been put there by the house agent, but he was very keen to give me any help in his power, for he had himself been a victim of one of the hotel robberies. Business occasionally brought him to town from his house in Hampshire, and while staying in an hotel a big haul had been made, and a necklace which he had bought for his daughter only that day was amongst the property stolen.

All these robberies, which had occurred over a period of six months, had been carried out with a success which entirely baffled the authorities.

Apparently rooms were rifled during the table d'hôte; at least, it was always late in the evening that the robberies were discovered. In no case had a guest or a servant left suddenly or suspiciously, and drastic search had discovered nothing. There could be little doubt that a clever gang was at work, but during this period not a single stolen article had been traced. Scotland Yard had any number of men engaged upon the case; known thieves were watched, and fences kept under observation; but as a fact there had been no clue at all until Quarles and I had been kidnaped.

Of course, there was no certainty that our capture had anything to do with these robberies. Quarles based his conviction on the fact that I had spoken to another detective, Percival, who was known to have the case in hand. He believed that I had been seen, that it was concluded that the case was in my hands, that in hunting for the chalice I had stumbled on the other trail, was so hot upon it, in fact, that prompt action on the thieves' part was absolutely necessary.

It was obvious that our capture must be a clue to something; it was natural, perhaps, to jump to the conclusion that it concerned these

robberies, but Quarles's arguments did not altogether convince me. I had half a dozen men hunting for young Squires, who had almost certainly led us into an ambush that night and who had disappeared completely. His old haunts had not known him for a long time; his old companions had lost sight of him. It was generally understood that he had cut his old ways and had turned pious, an evident reference to the hooligan club. At one time he had certainly been friendly with some of the members of a gang I knew of, a gang quite likely to be responsible for these robberies, but inquiries went to show that this gang had practically ceased to exist as an organization.

For nearly a week I was busy morning, noon, and night collecting evidence and facts which were retailed to Quarles, and then I broke down. Nervous energy had kept me going, I suppose, but the blow I had received was not to be ignored. The doctor ordered rest, and I went to Folkestone. I suppose I looked ill, and, perchance, a little interesting; at any rate, I was the recipient of quite a lot of sympathy, and it was on the third afternoon of my stay in the hotel that Mrs. Selborne spoke to me. She had heard me telling some one that I was recovering from an accident.

She had a yacht in the harbor. She had great faith in the recuperating power of yachting. She would have her skipper up that evening, if I would make use of the yacht next day. I hesitated to accept her kind offer. She evidently meant me to go alone; said she had not intended to use the yacht on the following day; but it was finally arranged that she should take me for a sail. It was the first of several. On the first occasion she also took a lady staying in the hotel, and on the second a lad who was there with his parents, but as they were both bad sailors we went by ourselves the third time.

"It spoils the pleasure to see other people ill," said Mrs. Selborne. "I think we might really go alone without unduly shocking people."

So it happened that I was enjoying the breeze and the sunshine under ideal circumstances and with as charming a companion as a man could wish to have.

I told Zena so in one of my letters; so convincingly, I regret to say, that the dear girl did not like it. There was really no cause for jealousy, but bring a man in close contact with a pretty and charming woman, especially on a yacht, and he is almost certain to flirt with her a little.

It was very mild and harmless in my case, and indeed Mrs. Selborne, jolly and somewhat unconventional as she was, would have resented any liberty. We frankly enjoyed each other's society, and at the end of a few days might have known each other for years.

Certainly I owed her a debt of gratitude, for the yacht did me worlds of good. I told her so that afternoon.

"You certainly look better," she said.

"You will send me back to work sooner than I expected."

"When?"

"At the end of the week."

"And I expect my husband to-morrow."

I don't suppose she meant it, but she said it as if she regretted his coming.

"Is he fond of yachting?" I asked.

"It bores him to tears," she laughed. "Most of the things which I like do. Still, he is very good to me. I am an old man's darling, you know."

It was the first time she had mentioned her husband, and she had not shown the slightest curiosity in my affairs. She was just a good pal for the time being. That was how she had impressed me, but this afternoon she was--how shall I put it?--she was rather more of a woman than usual. I might easily imagine she had given me an opening for a serious flirtation. Her manner might suggest that I had become more to her than she had intended. I put the idea away from me, mentally kicking myself for allowing it to get into my head at all.

"We shall sail as usual to-morrow," she told her skipper when we landed.

"Very good, ma'am."

"Mr. Selborne arrives to-morrow night. Let some one go up for his luggage. Half past ten."

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Selborne and I walked back to the hotel and stood on the lawn talking for a little while before going to dress for dinner.

"To-morrow will be our last cruise, I am afraid," she said, looking across the Leas. "I hope it will be fine."

"I hope so."

"It would really be a terrible disappointment to me if it were not. I would go--Ah, now I am being tempted to talk foolishly."

She turned from me a little defiantly. She was certainly very attractive, and naturally fell into poses which showed her off to the best advantage. A man, sitting on the lawn, paused in the act of taking a cigarette from his case to look at her. His interest pleased me. I was human, and it flattered my vanity to know that I counted with this woman.

"What desperate thing were you going to say?" I asked.

"You will laugh at me."

"I am more likely to match you in desperation."

"I was going to say I would go to-morrow, wet or fine, wind or sunshine, rather than miss our last day."

Could I do less than make a compact that it should be so? If I admit there was no sign of a coming change in the weather it must not be supposed that I am trying to make out that her beauty and personality did not affect me. They did.

"I could almost pray for bad weather just to see that you are a man of your word," she laughed. "Is it a promise?"

"It is."

She went in to dress, and I smoked a cigarette before doing likewise.

As I entered my room and closed the door, a man stepped from behind the wardrobe. It was the man who had been interested in Mrs. Selborne on the lawn.

"Pardon. I wished to speak to you alone, and this seemed the only method."

"I'll hear what you have to say before I hand you over to the management," I answered.

"It is a delicate matter," he returned, with a simper, which made me desire to kick him. "It concerns a lady. You are Mr. James Murray; at least, that is the name you entered in the hotel books."

"It is my name," I answered.

"Part of it, I think, part of it. You are usually called Murray Wigan, I believe, and you are engaged to Miss Quarles--Miss Zena Quarles, the granddaughter of a rather stupid professor."

"What has this to do with you?"

"I said it was a delicate matter," he went on. "My client has reason to believe that you are--shall I say enamored of a lady staying in this hotel? You may have noticed me on the lawn just now when you were talking to the lady--I judge it was the lady. Your taste, sir, appeals to me, but I am bound to say--"

"Are you a private detective?"

"Just an inquiry agent; helpful in saving people trouble sometimes."

"Do you mean to tell me that Miss Quarles--"

"No, not exactly, but, my dear Wigan--"

It was Quarles. He changed his voice, seemed to alter his figure, but of course the make-up remained. He was a perfect genius in altering his appearance.

"Was that the lady?" he asked. "Zena mentioned you were yachting with a Mrs. Selborne down here. I don't think she quite liked it. She was woman enough to read between the lines of your letter."

"Oh, nonsense!" I exclaimed.

"Quite so; still the lady is decidedly attractive, and Murray Wigan is a man. The man who holds himself barred from admiring one woman just because he happens to be engaged to another is not a very conspicuous biped. I am not reproaching you, I should probably do the same myself, but Zena will take you to task no doubt, and you will explain and promise not to do it any more, and--"

"I haven't done anything which requires explanation," I said irritably.

"Of course not, but that may not be Zena's view, and I daresay Mrs. Selborne believes you are more than half in love with her. I happened to overhear part of your conversation. She was putting your admiration to the test, rather a severe test, by the way, since you are an invalid. Probably she is smiling to herself in the glass as she dresses for dinner, which reminds me you have none too much time to dress, and you must not be late to-night."

"Why not? I am feeling quite fit again. If there is anything to be done I am quite capable of doing it."

"Dress, Wigan, while I talk. Since you broke down at a crucial point I have been helping Percival. I daresay he will get the kudos in this case, but you mustn't grudge him that."

"I don't."

"We have progressed," Quarles went on. "I will give you my line of argument and the result so far. We start with Squires. He led us into a trap, but the gang with which he was formerly connected has practically ceased to exist. His old companions have seen nothing of him; he is supposed to have turned good, and I find he has been a member of that hooligan club for over a year with an irreproachable record during that time. Two conclusions seem to arise; either Squires is connected with another gang, or some compulsion was put upon him to betray us. I incline to the second idea, and if I am correct there must have been a strong incentive to persuade Squires to do what he did. Perhaps he wished to protect some one."

"What did Percival say to that?" I asked as I put the links into my shirt.

"He jeered at it, of course, as you are inclined to do; indeed, it was quite a long time before Percival awoke to the fact that I was not quite a fool. Now the machinery of Scotland Yard seems to have proved that these robberies are not the work of a known gang; we may therefore assume that persons unknown to the police are at work. The methods adopted are clever. The property is stolen, yet no one has disappeared from the hotel, neither guest nor servant, and in no case has any of the property been found in the possession of any one in the hotel. Shall we suppose that it has been carefully lowered from a bedroom window to an accomplice without? None of this property has been traced, which leads us to two hypotheses; either it has been got out of the country and disposed of abroad, or the thieves can afford to bide their time. When you consider the worth of the jewels stolen, it seems remarkable that nothing should have been traced in the known markets abroad, and I am inclined to think the thieves can afford to wait. Having arrived at this point--"

"Without a scrap of evidence," I put in.

"Without any evidence," said Quarles imperturbably. "I began to suspect that my arch villain, for of course there is a leading spirit, must be in command of wealth; and, remembering the short period during which the robberies have happened, I ventured a guess that, once a sufficient fortune were acquired, he would disappear, that his great coup being accomplished he would retire from business, and become a respectable citizen of this or some other country--a gentleman who had acquired wealth by speculation."

"Once a man has known the excitement of crime he does not give it up," I said. "That's the result of experience, Professor, not guesswork."

"Quite so, but I had visualized an extraordinary personality. Where was I to find such a man and the efficient confederates who were helping him in his schemes? One or more of them must have been present at each robbery, and would no doubt be amongst those who had lost property. Theory, of course, but we now come to something practical--the house at Hampstead. If my theory of crossed trails were correct, if you were thought to be engaged on this investigation, then that house was in some way linked with the robberies. I may mention incidentally the value of having such a place of retreat; the spoil could be deposited there until it could safely be removed to a better hiding place.

"This, of course, would inculpate the caretaker Mason. He has been carefully watched; he has done nothing to give himself away, the result of careful training, I fancy. Through this house we get another link--the owner, Mr. Wibley. He has been a sufferer in these robberies, losing a necklace he had just purchased for his daughter. Certainly a man to know under the circumstances. As you are aware, he lives in Hampshire, and I had a sudden desire to see that part of the country. I didn't call upon Mr. Wibley, although he was at home.

"His daughter was away--it was quite true he has a daughter. I took rather elaborate precautions not to encounter Mr. Wibley; he might be curious about a stranger in the country, but he would have been

astonished to know how much I saw of him. No, there was nothing suspicious about him, except that on two occasions a man met him on a lonely road, evidently with important business to transact. On the day after the second meeting Mr. Wibley departed and came to Hythe. No later than this morning he was playing golf there with this same man he met in Hampshire. The golf was poor, but they talked a lot."

"Still, I do not see--"

"One moment, Wigan. The other man is staying in your hotel."

"You think--"

"I think it was intended to rob this hotel, but I believe the idea has been abandoned," said Quarles. "However, I have put the manager on his guard."

"And pointed out the man you suspect!"

"Yes."

"That was foolish. If the thief is as clever as you imagine, he will probably notice the manager's interest in him. I should say you have warned him most effectually."

"I don't think so. You see, it was you I pointed out to the manager."

I paused with one arm in my waistcoat to stare at him.

"I have arranged that he shall not interfere with you," said Quarles.

"You will be able to go yachting to-morrow. I was obliged to fix matters so that I could come and go as I chose, and it was safer to draw the manager's attention to one man rather than allow him to suspect others, amongst them the very man we want to hoodwink, perhaps. The fact is, Wigan, I believe the gang know you are here, and think you are here on business. Plans will have been made accordingly, and it is therefore absolutely necessary that you should go on just as you have been doing. I don't think the hotel will be robbed now, but I am not sure. Sunshine or storm, go with Mrs. Selborne to-morrow. Exactly what is going to happen I do not know, but at the end of your cruise to-morrow you may want all your wits about you."

"Are you staying in the hotel?" I asked.

"No, at Hythe, and I spend some of my time on Romney Marsh. I am interested in a lonely house there. You must go; there is the gong. I must tell you about the house another time."

"When shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow night. Leave me here. I will sneak out after you have gone."

It was natural my eyes should wander round the dining-room that night,



trying to discover by intuition which was the man who might engineer a robbery at the hotel.

Once the manager entered the room, and, knowing what I did, I could not doubt he wanted to satisfy himself that I was there. It did not worry me that Quarles had made use of me in this way; I was quite prepared to be arrested if the robbery did take place, but I was annoyed that the professor had told me so little.

It was his way; I had had experience of it before, but it was treatment I had never been able to get used to.

After dinner Mrs. Selborne joined me in the lounge for a little while, and talked about our sail next day, and then I was asked to make up a bridge table.

Remembering Zena's attitude, according to Quarles, I was rather glad to get away from Mrs. Selborne. She played bridge, too, but not at my table.

There was no burglary that night, and the following morning was as good for yachting as one could desire. However, we could not start at our usual time. The crew consisted of the skipper and two hands, and one of the hands came up to say that it was necessary to replace some gear, which would take until midday. Mrs. Selborne was very angry.

"We shall have to kill time until twelve o'clock," she said, turning to me. "It is a pity, but we'll get our sail somehow if all the gear goes wrong. It is very likely only an excuse to get a short day's work, but I am not expert enough to challenge my skipper."

When we got aboard soon after noon, however, she had a great deal to say to the skipper; would have him point out exactly what had gone wrong, and showed him quite plainly she did not believe there need have been so long a delay; but she soon recovered her temper when she took the helm, and her good spirits became infectious.

I was on holiday, and was not inclined to bother my head with problems. If for a moment I wondered what Quarles was doing, I quickly forgot all about him.

I repeat, when you have got a pretty woman on a yacht, and she is inclined to be exceedingly gracious, nothing else matters much for the time being.

We had lunch, and Mrs. Selborne smoked a cigarette before we returned to the deck. The skipper was at the tiller, but she did not relieve him. She was in a lazy mood, and I arranged some cushions to make her comfortable. We were standing well out from Dungeness.

Mrs. Selborne seemed a little surprised at our position.

"We must get back to dinner," she said to the skipper.

"That'll be all right, ma'am," he answered.

"We must pay some attention to the conventions," she laughed, speaking to me in an undertone. "We couldn't plead foul weather as an excuse for being late, could we?"

"We started late, and it is our last sail," I said.

The skipper did not alter his course, and Mrs. Selborne lapsed into silence.

The comfort and laziness made her drowsy, I expect. I know they did me. I caught myself nodding more and more.

Suddenly there was a jerk, effectually rousing me from my nodding condition. I thought we had struck something. The next instant I rolled on my back. A rope was round my arms and legs. The skipper was still at the helm, and he smiled as one of the hands tied me up. The other hand was doing the same to Mrs. Selborne.

There was fear in her face; she tried to speak, but could not.

"What the devil is--"

"A shut mouth, mister, is your best plan," said the skipper. "Get her down below, Jim. Chuck her on one of the bunks; she'll be out of the way there."

"Help me! Save me!" she said as they lifted her up and carried her down.

"Now see here," said the skipper, slipping a hand into his pocket and showing me a revolver, "if you feel inclined to do any shouting, you suppress it, or this is going to drill a hole in your head. It's a detail that you might shout yourself hoarse and no one would pay any attention."

"What's the game?" I said. "For the sake of the lady I might come to terms."

"That's not the game, anyway, and I don't want any conversation."

Quarles! I thought of him now. The hotel gang was at work, and this was one of the moves. How it was going to serve their ends I did not see, unless--unless I was presently dropped overboard.

It was an unpleasant contemplation, and I am afraid I cursed Quarles. If he had only told me a little more I might at least have been prepared and made a fight for it. What about Mrs. Selborne? Would they drown her, too? They might put her ashore somewhere.

The coast about Dungeness is desolate enough. It would be easy to slip in after dark and leave her. Not a sound came from the cabin, and the two hands returned to the deck. By the skipper's orders they lashed me in a sitting position to a skylight.

We were still standing out to sea, and one of the hands took the tiller; the other received instructions to kick the wind out of me if I shouted or began asking questions. Then the skipper went below.

I listened, but I could not hear him speak to Mrs. Selborne.

It was fine sunset that evening. When we presently came round and stood in towards shore I got a feast of color over Romney Marsh. Watching the ever-changing colors as the night crept out of the sea, I remembered that Quarles was interested in Romney Marsh, in a lonely house there about which he had had no time to tell me last night; had this lonely house an interest for me? I tried to work out the plot in a dozen ways, endeavoring to understand how the thieves could secure themselves if I were allowed to live.

That gorgeous sunset was depressing. The coming night might be so full of ominous meaning for me.

It was dark by the time we drew in towards the shore. A light or two marked Dymchurch to our left, to our right were the lights of Hythe.

By what landmark the skipper chose his position I do not know, but presently the anchor was let go and we swung round. The tide must have been nearly at the full. A few minutes later the dinghy was got into the water, and the steps let down.

Everything was accomplished as neatly and deliberately as I had seen it done each time I had gone sailing in the yacht.

Then the skipper came over to me and tried my bonds to make sure I had not worked them loose under cover of the darkness.

"All right," he said. "You can get her up."

Evidently they were going to take Mrs. Selborne ashore.

She came up on deck, she was not brought up. She was not bound in any way.

"Half past ten," said the skipper. "Sure you will be all right alone?"

I could not tell to which of the hands he spoke; at any rate, he got no answer except by a nod, perhaps. Half past ten; that was the time Mrs. Selborne's husband was to arrive.

Then came a surprise. The three men got into the dinghy and pulled towards the shore.

I was left alone with Mrs. Selborne.

"Caught, Mr. Murray--Wigan."

She laughed as she paused between my two names, and seated herself on a corner of the skylight with a revolver in her lap.

"We can talk," she went on, "but a shout would be dangerous. I am used to handling firearms. Our last sail together, a notable one, and not yet over. You're a more pleasant companion than I expected to find you, but you are not such a great detective as I had been led to suppose."

I was too astonished to make any kind of answer. She was quite right. I had never detected a criminal in her. All her kindness was an elaborate scheme to get me in her power. Did Quarles know? Surely not, or he would have put me on my guard.

"Posing as an invalid was an excellent notion," she went on, "and you are not altogether a failure. You have prevented a haul being made at the Folkestone Hotel because we could not discover what men you had at work. I wonder how you got on my track?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her I hadn't, to say that my being there was chance, that I really was an invalid, but I kept the confession back. I remembered Quarles saying I might want all my wits about me at the end of this cruise. This seemed to be the end as far as I was concerned.

"I don't suppose you are going to tell me how these robberies have been managed," I said, "so you cannot expect me to give away my secrets."

"I will tell you one thing," she answered; "there will be no more robberies by us. From to-night we begin to enjoy the proceeds."

"That is interesting."

"And you will quite appreciate that, although you are not so clever as people imagine, you are a difficulty."

"It is no use my petitioning you to let me go for the sake of--of our friendship?"

"I am afraid not."

"What then?"

"Dead men tell no tales," she said.

It was an uncomfortable answer. It was the only way out of the difficulty I had been able to conceive.

"Pardon me, they do," I returned quietly. "In watching me so carefully, and beating me at the game, you have advertised your interest in me to scores of people. You have forged a link between us. My death will mean a quick search for you and your confederates. I am likely to be more dangerous to you dead than alive."

"Do you suppose that has not been considered and arranged for?"

"And do you suppose a detective values his life if by his death he can bring notorious criminals to justice?" I asked.

"What exactly do you mean?"

We might have been discussing some commonplace question across a tea table.

"For the sake of argument, let us suppose one or two of your confederates have not hoodwinked me so completely as you have done. You can understand the possibility and appreciate the probable result."

"Do I look like a woman to be frightened by such a thin story?" she asked.

"Certainly not. You are so reckless a person you have, no doubt, courage to face any unpleasant consequence which may arise."

"I have wit enough to know that prevention is better than cure," she returned. "Within an hour, Mr. Wigan, my confederates and all who could possibly witness against me will be on board this yacht. How long some of them will remain on board I have not yet decided."

She was evidently not afraid. Her plans must be very complete.

"As I cannot be allowed to live, a sketch of your career would interest me. It would serve to pass the time."

"The past does not concern me, the future does," she answered. "You may appreciate my general idea of making things safe. I fancy this yacht will be cast away on a lonely spot on the French coast. I know the spot, and I expect one or two persons will be drowned. That will be quite natural, won't it? Should the accident chance to be heard of at Folkestone, it will be surmised that I am drowned. Bodies do not always come ashore, you know. One thing is quite certain; Mrs. Selborne and all trace of her will have disappeared."

"It is rather a diabolical scheme," I said.

"I regret the necessity. I daresay you have sometimes done the same when a victim of your cleverness has come to the gallows."

She got up and walked away from me, but she did not cease to watch me. I wondered if she would fire should I venture to shout.

It was a long hour, but presently there came the distinct dip of oars. In spite of my unenviable position I felt excited. I thought there were two boats. Naturally there would be. The dinghy was small; crew and confederates could not have got into it.

There was the rattle of oars in the rowlocks, then a man climbed on deck,

others coming quickly after him, and in that moment Mrs. Selborne swung round and fired. The bullet struck the woodwork of the skylight close to my head. I doubt if I shall ever be so near death again until my hour actually sounds.

Her arm was struck up before she could fire again, and a familiar voice was shouting:

"It's all right, Wigan. The lady completes the business. We have got the lot."

Christopher Quarles had come aboard with the police, those in the dinghy wearing the coats and caps the crew had worn, so that any one watching on the yacht for their return might be deceived.

The prisoners were left in the hands of the police, and a motor took Quarles and myself back to Folkestone. He told me the whole story before we slept that night.

The lonely house on Romney Marsh had been bought by Wibley some months ago in the name of Reynolds. He had let it be known that, after certain alterations had been made, he was coming to live there, so it was natural that a couple of men, looking like painters, should presently arrive and be constantly about the place. If three or four men were seen there on occasion no one was likely to be curious.

Watching Wibley when he came down to Hythe, Quarles found he had a liking for motoring on the Dymchurch Road. He saw him pull up one morning to speak to a man on the roadside. He did the same thing on the following morning, but it was a different man, and Quarles recognized young Squires.

Squires afterwards went to this empty house, and Quarles speedily had men on the Marsh watching it night and day. It looked as if the house were the gang's meeting-place. Either another coup was being prepared, or an escape was being arranged.

During a hurried visit to town the professor had seen my letter to Zena, and this had given him a clue.

"It was the name Selborne," Quarles explained. "I told you, Wigan, that Wibley's daughter--or supposed daughter--was not with him in Hampshire. Her whereabouts worried me. I could not forget that a woman had taken part in our capture during the chalice case. While I was in Hampshire I spent half a day in Gilbert White's village. His 'Natural History of Selborne' has always delighted me. Selborne. If you were going to take a false name, Wigan, and your godfathers had not called you Murray, only James, what would you do? As likely as not you would take the name of some place with which you were familiar. In itself the idea was not convincing, but it brought me to your hotel at Folkestone, and then I was certain. Do you remember the woman Squires spoke to on the night he led us into that trap?"

"It was too dark to see her face," I said.

"I mean the way she stood," said Quarles, "with her arms akimbo; so did the masked woman in the cellar, and when I saw Mrs. Selborne on the lawn she did the same. The pose is peculiar. When a woman falls into this attitude you will find she either rests her knuckles on her hips, or grasps her waist with open hands, the thumbs behind the four finger in front. This woman doesn't. She grasps her waist with the thumbs in front, a man's way rather than a woman's. Her presence there suggested, another hotel robbery; the yacht suggested a means of escape for the gang, apparently gathering at the empty house. Since Mrs. Selborne had paid you so much attention, I guessed she knew who you were, and thought you were on duty, posing as an invalid. I thought it likely your presence would prevent the robbery, but she took every precaution that you should go with her to-day, storm or shine, eh, Wigan? We have had the glasses on the yacht all day, and when the crew landed to-night we caught them. Then we went to the house, Wigan. Got them all, and I believe the whole of the six months' spoil."

"Why didn't you put me on my guard?" I asked.

"Well, Wigan, I think you would have scouted the idea. You were fascinated, you know. In any case, you could not have helped watching her for confirmation or to prove me wrong; she would have noted the change in you, grown suspicious, and might have ruined everything at the eleventh hour. Unless I am much mistaken we shall discover that the woman was the brains of the gang."

So it proved when the trial came on, and in another direction Quarles was correct.

Squires was Mason's son. The lad had cut himself loose from his old companions, and had only meant to warn his father. He knew where he was likely to find him, but meeting the man and woman unexpectedly, he was frightened into trapping us.

There can be little doubt that it was intended to cast away the yacht as Mrs. Selborne had explained to me, and to drown those who were not meant to share in the spoil, but who knew too much to be allowed to go free. I should certainly have been amongst the missing, and young Squires, too, probably.

I shall always remember this case because--no, Zena and I did not quarrel exactly, but she was very much annoyed about Mrs. Selborne.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SOLUTION OF THE GRANGE PARK MYSTERY

I really had some difficulty in convincing Zena that I had not fallen in love with Mrs. Selborne, and Quarles seemed to think it humorous to also express doubt on the subject. The professor is unconsciously humorous on occasion, but when he tries to be funny he only succeeds in being pathetic.

I got so tired of his humor one evening that I left Chelsea much earlier than usual, telling Zena that I should not come again until I heard from her that she was ready to go and choose furniture, I heard next day.

We were to be married in two months' time and had taken a house near Grange Park, and I have always thought it curious that my first introduction to the neighborhood, so to speak, should be as a detective, and not in the role of a newly married man.

It happened in this way.

Just before two o'clock one morning Constable Poulton turned into Rose Avenue, Grange Park. He was passing Clarence Lodge, the residence of Mrs. Crosland, when the front door opened suddenly and a girl came running down the drive, calling to him.

"The burglars," she said, "and I am afraid my brother has shot one of them."

He certainly had. Poulton found the man lying crumpled up at the bottom of the stairs. He blew his whistle to summon another officer, and after searching the house they communicated with headquarters.

Grange Park, as many of you may know, is an estate which was developed some years ago in the Northwest of London, on land belonging to the Chisholm family. It got into the hands of a responsible firm of builders, and artistic, well-built houses were erected which attracted people of considerable means. It wasn't possible to live in Grange Park on a small income.

A few months ago the sedate tranquillity of the neighborhood had been broken by an astonishing series of burglaries, which had occurred in rapid succession. Half a dozen houses were entered; valuables, chiefly jewelry, worth many thousands of pounds, had been taken, and not a single arrest, even on suspicion, had been made. The known gangs had been carefully shadowed without results, and not a trace of the stolen property had been discovered. The thieves had evidently known where to go for their spoil, not only the right houses but the exact spot where the spoil was kept. There had been no bungling; indeed, in some cases, it was doubtful how an entrance had been effected. Not in a single instance had the inmates been aroused or alarmed, no thief had been seen or heard upon the premises, nor had the police noticed any suspicious looking persons about the estate.

The investigation of these robberies was finally entrusted to me, and I suppose the empty room in Chelsea had never been used more often and with less result than over the Grange Park burglaries. It was not only one



chance we had had of getting at the truth, for half a dozen houses had been broken into; and it was not the lack of clues which bothered us so much as the number of them. The thieves seemed to have scattered clues in every direction, yet not one of them led to any definite result.

Like the rest of us, Christopher Quarles had his weaknesses. Whenever he failed to elucidate a mystery he was always able to show that the fault was not his, but somebody else's; either too long a time had elapsed before he was consulted, or some meddlesome fool had touched things and confused the evidence, or even that something supernatural had been at work. Once, at least, according to the professor, I had played the part of meddlesome fool, and one of my weaknesses being a short temper, it had required all Zena's tact to keep us from quarreling on that occasion. It came almost as a shock, therefore, when, after a long discussion one evening, he suddenly jumped up and exclaimed: "I'm beaten, Wigan, utterly beaten," and did not proceed to lay the responsibility for his failure on any one.

Upon the receipt of Constable Poulton's message, I was sent for at once, and it was still early morning when I roused Quarles and we went to Grange Park. I do not think I have ever seen the professor so excited.

Mrs. Crosland had a son and daughter and a nephew living with her. It was the daughter who had run down the drive and called Poulton. There were four servants, a butler and two women in the house and a chauffeur who lived over the garage. There was besides a nurse, for Mrs. Crosland was an invalid, often confined to her bed and even at her best only able to get about with difficulty. She suffered from some acute form of rheumatism and was tied to her bed at this time.

The son's version of the tragedy was simple and straightforward. Hearing a noise, he had taken his revolver--always kept handy since the burglaries--and had reached the top of the stairs when his sister Helen came out of her room. She had also heard some one moving. They went down together to the landing at the angle of the staircase. He did not see any one in the hall, nor was there any sound just then. He called out "Who's there?" The answer was a bullet, which struck the wall behind them. Then Crosland fired down into the hall, but at random. He saw no one, but as a fact he shot the man through the head.

"Do you think the man was alone?" I asked.

"In the hall, yes; but I feel convinced there was some one else in the house who escaped," Crosland answered. "My sister and I had not moved from the landing when Hollis, the butler, and one of the women servants came hastily from their rooms. Then I went down and switched on the light. The man was lying just as the constable found him. I never saw him move. When my sister realized he was dead she became excited, and before I knew what she was doing, she had opened the front door and run down the drive. The constable happened to be passing the gate at the moment."

"What time elapsed between the firing of the shots and the entrance of the constable?" I asked.

"A few minutes; I cannot be exact. It took me some little time to realize that I had actually killed the man, and I don't think Helen fully understood the extent of the tragedy until I said, 'Good God, I've killed him,' or something of that kind. I was suddenly aware of my awkward position in the matter."

"He had fired at you," I said.

"I think I forgot that for the moment," Crosland answered. "As a matter of fact we had a marvelous escape. You will see where the bullet struck the wall of the landing. It must have passed between us."

"Did your mother hear the shots?"

"They roused her out of a deep sleep, but she did not realize they were shots. The nurse came onto the landing whilst we were in the hall. I told her to say that something had fallen down. My mother is of an extremely nervous temperament, and I am glad she cannot leave her bed just now."

Helen Crosland had nothing to add to her brother's narrative. When she rushed out of the house her idea was to call the police as quickly as possible, not so much because of the burglars, but on her brother's account. She had the horrible thought of her brother being accused of murder.

Quarles asked no questions. He was interested in the bullet mark on the landing wall, and very interested in the dead man. A doctor had seen him before our arrival, and the body had been removed to a small room off the hall. Quarles examined the head very closely, also the hands; and casually looked at the revolver, one chamber of which had been discharged.

"A swell mobster, Wigan, not accustomed to work entirely on his own, I should imagine. As Mr. Crosland says, there may have been others in the house who escaped."

"We may get some information from the servants presently," I answered.

"I doubt it. In all these burglaries, Wigan, we have considered the possibility of the servants being implicated, and in no case has it led us anywhere. More than once there have been clues which pointed to such a conclusion, merely clever ruses on the thieves' part. No, our clue is the dead man."

Quarles questioned Constable Poulton closely. The constable had not heard the shots. About half an hour earlier in the evening he had passed Clarence Lodge. There was no light in the house then. Just before one o'clock he had met Mr. Smithers who lived in the next house to Clarence Lodge; he was coming from the direction of the station and said good night. Since then he had seen no one upon his beat. Poulton described the position of the dead man graphically and minutely. He had no doubt he had been shot a few minutes before he saw him.

"I searched the house with Griffiths, the officer who came when I blew my whistle; we saw no sign of the others."

"How did they get in?" I asked.

"A window in the passage there was open," said Poulton. "That's the only way they could have come unless they fastened some window or door again when they had entered."

I examined this window carefully. There was no sign that any one had entered this way, no mark upon the catch. Outside the window was a flower bed, and I pointed out to Quarles that if any one had left the house in a hurry, as they would do at the sound of firearms, they would inevitably have left marks upon the flower bed.

Quarles had nothing to say against my argument.

"I don't believe either exit or entrance was made by this window," I declared.

"Have you still got servants in your mind, Wigan?"

"I have, to tell the truth I always have had."

"The body is our best clue, Wigan. If we can identify that we shall be nearing the end." And then Quarles turned to Poulton. "Isn't there a nephew in the house? We haven't seen him."

"I'm told he is abroad, sir," the constable answered.

"Do you happen to know him?"

"Quite well by sight, sir."

Quarles nodded, but the nephew was evidently not disposed of to his Satisfaction.

I interviewed the servants closely, including the chauffeur who had heard nothing of the affair until aroused by the police. Hollis was certain that all the doors and windows were securely fastened. Quarles rather annoyed me by suggesting that the thieves might have entered by an upstairs window or even by the front door.

"If you look at the upstairs windows I think you will find that impossible," said Hollis.

"We will look, and also at the front door."

The professor made a pretense of examining the front door rather carefully.

"You're sure this was locked and bolted last night?"

"Quite, sir."

"It looks substantial and innocent."

The only window which interested Quarles upstairs was that of a small room in the front of the house overlooking the drive, but, as the butler pointed out, no one could have got in there without a ladder.

"No, no, I suppose not," and Quarles did not say another word until we saw Mr. Crosland again. Then he immediately inquired about the nephew.

"George is in Paris, at least he was three days ago," and Crosland produced a picture postcard sent to his mother. "We are expecting him back at the end of the week."

"I suppose, Mr. Crosland, you have no suspicions regarding this affair?"

"I don't quite understand what you mean."

"Let me put it in another way," said the professor, "and please do not think that I am suggesting you fired too hastily. Immediately you heard the noise, you remembered the burglars who have caused a sensation in Grange Park recently. It was quite natural, but it seems to me rather strange that so astute a gang should commence operations in the same neighborhood again. For the sake of argument, let us suppose this gang had nothing to do with the affair. Now can you think of any one who might have something to gain by breaking into Clarence Lodge?"

"No, I cannot; and yet--"

"Well," said Quarles.

"I can think of no one; I recall no family skeleton, but there is one curious fact. This gang seemed to know exactly where to go for their spoil--jewels mostly, and there is nothing of that kind worth taking at Clarence Lodge."

"That goes to support my argument, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"That is the reason I asked particularly about your cousin."

"George Radley is like a brother," laughed Crosland, "our interests are identical."

"Oh, it was only a point that occurred to me as an outsider," Quarles returned. "We can leave him out of the argument and yet not be convinced there is no family skeleton. You might perhaps question your mother without explaining the reason, although I suppose she will have to know about this affair presently."

"I hope not."

"Acute rheumatism, isn't it? I wonder if she has ever heard of a quack who made a new man of me. What was his name now?"

"Was it Bush?" Crosland asked.

"No, but it was a commonplace name."

"As a matter of fact a man named Bush has been to see my mother. I dare not tell Dr. Heathcote; at one time I fancy Bush did her good, or she got better naturally, but she believes in him. He hasn't been for some time now, but she was speaking of him the other day."

"I'll look up my man's card and send it on to you," said Quarles. "You get Mrs. Crosland to see him, never mind Dr. Heathcote."

"I didn't know you had suffered from rheumatism," I said to Quarles as we left the house.

"Didn't you! Have it now sometimes. Well, Wigan, what do you make of this affair? Do you think the burglars are responsible?"

"I want time to think."

"We'll just call in and see Dr. Heathcote," said Quarles.

The doctor was a young man rather overburdened with his own importance. He was inclined to think that Crosland had done Grange Park a service by shooting one of the burglar gang.

"I only hope the authorities won't get sentimental and make it needlessly unpleasant for him."

"I shouldn't think so," I returned. "I may take it, doctor, that the man had been dead only a short time when you saw him?"

"Quite. Death must have been practically instantaneous."

"Oh, there is no doubt about Crosland's narrative, it is quite straightforward," said Quarles, "but I shouldn't be surprised if he found the inquiry awkward. I think his mother ought to know the truth."

"Why not?" asked Heathcote.

"He seems to think it would be bad for her in her state of health."

"I'll talk to him," said the doctor. "The old lady is not so bad as he supposes. To tell you the truth I think the nurse is rather a fool and frightens her. I tried to get them to change her, but she seems to be a sort of relation."

"That's the worst of relations, they're so constantly in the way,"

said Quarles.

We left the doctor not much wiser than when we went, it seemed to me, but Quarles appeared to find considerable food for reflection. He was silent until we were in the train.

"Wigan, you must see that a watch is kept upon Clarence Lodge day and night. Have half a dozen men drafted into the neighborhood. You want to know who goes to the house, and any one leaving it must be followed. Poulton's a good man, I should keep him there, and let him be inquisitive about callers. Then telegraph at once to the Paris police. Ask if George Radley is still at the Vendôme Hotel. If he is tell them to keep an eye on him. Now, here's my card. Take it to Schuster, 12 Grant Street, Pimlico, and ask him if he knows anything of a man named Bush, a quack specialist in rheumatism. Find out all you can about Bush. To-morrow morning you must go to Grange Park again, and see young Crosland. He may complain about the watch which is being kept over the house. If he does, spin him the official jargon about information received, etc., intimate your fear that the gang may attempt reprisals, and tell him you are bound to take precautions. After that come on to Chelsea. We ought to be able to arrive at some decision then. Oh, and one other thing, you might see if you have any one resembling the dead man in your criminal portrait gallery at the Yard."

"A fairly full day's work," I said with a smile.

"I am going to be busy, too, with a theory I have got. To-morrow we will see if your facts fit in with it."

To avoid repetition I shall come to the results of my inquiries as I related them to Quarles next day. I got back from Grange Park soon after two o'clock, had a couple of sandwiches and a glass of wine in the Euston Road, and then took a taxi to Chelsea. Zena and the professor were already in the private room, Zena doing nothing. Quarles engaged in some proposition of Euclid, apparently. On the writing table were a revolver and some cartridges.

"I have told Zena the whole affair as far as we know it," said Quarles, putting his papers on the table, "and she asks me a foolish question, Wigan. 'Why didn't the butler run for the police instead of Miss Crosland?' Have you got any information which will help to answer it?"

"It doesn't seem to me very strange that she went," I returned. "I have been busy, but there is not very much to tell. I have got the house watched as you suggested. The Paris police telegraph that an Englishman named George Radley is at the Hotel Vendôme, a harmless tourist apparently, going about Paris seeing the sights. Schuster was able to give me Bush's address, and I called upon him, but did not see him. He had gone to a case in Yorkshire, but may be back any time. He lives in Hampstead, in quite a pleasant flat overlooking the Heath."

"Is he married?"

"No, he has a housekeeper, rather a deaf old lady who speaks of him as the doctor."

"You didn't chance to see a portrait of him?"

"No, there were no photographs about of any kind. His hobby seems to be old prints, of which he has some good specimens. I should say his temperament is artistic."

"That is an interesting conclusion," said the professor. "You didn't get any idea of his age?"

"No. This morning I went to Clarence Lodge and find you are by no means liked there."

"Indeed."

"An old gentleman called there yesterday afternoon saying you had asked him to go and see Mrs. Crosland about her rheumatism--a Mr. Morrison."

"The silly old ass!" exclaimed the professor. "He is the man I told Crosland of, the man who cured rheumatism so marvelously. I suppose Morrison misread my letter and went at once instead of waiting to be sent for."

"Crosland appears to have given him a piece of his mind," I laughed, "and called you a meddlesome fool."

"Poor old Morrison, but it serves him right."

"He managed to see Mrs. Crosland," I said. "When the old lady heard he was there she would see him. As the son was anxious his mother shouldn't know of the tragedy, it was arranged that she should be told that Morrison's visit was the outcome of a casual remark Crosland had dropped to a friend concerning Mrs. Crosland's suffering. The old lady appears to have put the old man through his paces, but ended by being convinced that Morrison knew what he was talking about. He has been asked to call again."

"Then I appear to have done the old lady a good turn after all," said Quarles. "Did you see Mrs. Crosland, Wigan?"

"No. The butler opened the door, and I only saw young Crosland besides. I explained to him the necessity of having the house watched, and I think he believes I am afraid he will attempt to run away. He is a little nervous about his position in the affair. I reassured him."

"It's a pity you didn't manage to see the old lady. Don't you think it would be interesting to know what she is like?"

"I can't say I am very interested on that point."

"Well, we can ask old Morrison," said Quarles. "I daresay his quackery

has made him a close observer. You don't succeed as a quack unless you have a keen appreciation of the foibles and weaknesses of human nature."

"You have my facts, Professor; now, have you progressed with your theory; has revolver practise had something to do with it?"

And I pointed to the writing table.

"Let's go back to the Grange Park burglaries for a moment," Quarles began slowly. "We have investigated them under the impression that they were the work of a gang, but it is possible they were worked by one man. The gang may have attacked Clarence Lodge, Crosland's chance though excellent marksmanship accounting for one of the members while the rest escaped; but on the whole the evidence seems to suggest that this man was alone, and we might conclude that the burglaries were the work of one man."

"I shall never believe that," I said.

"Still, you cannot disprove it by direct evidence. You may show it to be unlikely, but you cannot prove it impossible. Indirectly we can go a little further. There were several features about these burglaries to make them remarkable. The right house was chosen, the thieves were never heard or seen, there were always plenty of misleading clues left about, there was no bungling, in the case of Clarence Lodge the wrong house was chosen--Crosland himself told us that it contained no jewelry or particular valuables. The thieves, or rather thief, was heard, the sound must have been considerable to arouse both Crosland and his sister; the thief makes no attempt to conceal himself and fires the moment he is spoken to; in short, there was a considerable amount of bungling, quite unlike the experts we have been thinking of. We are safe, therefore, I fancy, in considering that the Clarence Lodge affair is not to be reckoned as one of the Grange Park burglaries."

I shook my head doubtfully.

"Since experts may at times make mistakes, I grant that my negative evidence is not as convincing as it might be," said Quarles, "but I want the point conceded. I want, as it were, a base line upon which to build my theoretical plan. I want to forget the burglaries, in fact, and come to the Clarence Lodge case by itself. So we have a dead man and we first ask who shot him. Crosland says he did, and tells us the circumstances, his sister confirms his statement, and the butler, the woman servant and the nurse, who are quickly upon the stage in this tragedy, see no reason to disbelieve the statement. We burrow a little deeper into the evidence, and we discover one or two interesting facts. The man was shot on the left side of the head, a clean wound above the left ear. Crosland says he fired after he had been fired at, so the man, directly he had fired, must deliberately have turned his head to the right, which at least is remarkable. Further, to hit the wall of the landing in the place he did the man must have stood in the very center of the stairs to fire. His body was found some feet away from this central position, and a bullet so fired and striking where it did could not have missed two people standing on that landing. I have made a rough plan here," and Quarles



took up the papers from the table, "giving the position of the dead man, the position of the walls and stairs. The lines show where the bullet would have hit if fired from a spot nearer where the dead man was found."

I examined his diagram closely.

"A man shot through the brain might fall several feet away from where he was standing," I said.

"Yes, behind where he was standing, or perhaps forward, but hardly to one side. However, we burrow again, and we try and answer Zena's question why it was Helen Crosland who ran for the police. Why not? we may ask. Her close association with her brother in the affair, her anxiety on his account, make it natural that she should dash out not only for help but to make it certain that they had nothing to hide. Her words to Poulton, 'The burglars, and I am afraid my brother has shot one of them,' are significant. They tell the whole story in a nutshell. Crosland's statement merely elaborates it, over-elaborates it, in fact. The bolts on the front door, Wigan, were very stiff; I tried them. Helen Crosland would certainly have had difficulty in drawing them back, and it is an absurdity for her brother to declare that she had gone before he knew what she was doing."

I had no comment to make, and Zena leaned forward in her chair, evidently excited.

"It is a point to remember that she ran out exactly at the moment Poulton was passing, which may have been chance, of course, but from that room over the hall one can see down the drive and, by the light of a street lamp, some way down the road. Had any one watched there he could have prompted the girl when to start."

"You seem to be overloading the theory too much," I said, "and I do not see many real facts yet."

"I am coming to some facts presently," said Quarles. "I am showing you my working. Now, having done away with the gang of burglars, we ask how did the man get into the house. Your argument that no one could have escaped through that window in the passage was sound, I think, Wigan, and considering the immaculate condition of the latch and the lack of signs on the sill and the flower bed, I doubt if any one got in that way, either. On the whole, I am inclined to think he came through the front door, which was opened for him by Hollis the butler or by one of the servants."

"Still no facts," I said.

"Still theory," admitted Quarles. "By my theory it follows that the dead man was known to the Croslands. We will assume that in some family quarrel he was killed that night. The death--the murder--had to be concealed, so they pitched on the idea of the burglars, put the body in the hall, fired a shot into the landing wall, and threw open the passage window. It was smartly conceived, but, of course, took some little time,

which had to be accounted for. Crosland could only say that he could not tell how long a time elapsed between the firing and the arrival of Poulton. Everything had to be thought of before Helen Crosland rushed out for the police."

"You assume that the whole household was in the conspiracy?" I asked.

"Yes, and that they are exceedingly clever. What do you think of the theory?"

"As a theory rather interesting, but I am still waiting for a fact or two."

"Here's one," said Quarles, taking up the revolver. "This is Crosland's; I purloined it. It is a very good weapon by a small maker. Curiously enough the thief's weapon was exactly like it."

"That may be a coincidence," said Zena.

"It may be, but I prefer to think it a significant fact," the professor returned; "but we'll go back to the theory again for the moment. I was very interested in Crosland and his sister, they were not exceedingly unlike each other. There was no portrait of Mrs. Crosland about, so I could not tell which of them took after the mother. Had you told me that Helen Crosland was the butler's daughter I should have believed you. Did you notice the likeness, Wigan?"

"No," I said with a smile. It seemed to me that the theory had got altogether out of hand.

"Well, it made me curious about the nephew," Quarles went on. "I wondered whether the dead man was the nephew and so I asked Crosland about a family skeleton, showed him that I had no belief in the burglar theory, and he quickly responded by saying there was nothing in the house worth stealing. I helped him out of a difficulty, and it was easy to talk about his mother and her rheumatism. So we got to the specialist Bush. You see the chief point was to find out the identity of the dead man. Now we get to two facts. He isn't the nephew who is still in Paris, and Bush is supposed to be in Yorkshire."

"Do you mean--"

"I am still theorizing," said Quarles. "There are no portraits at Clarence Lodge; you noticed a lack of portraits in Bush's flat, and you conclude by external evidence that his temperament is artistic. The dead man's hands were curiously capable and artistic. It struck me the moment I looked at them."

"I am not convinced, Professor."

"Nor was I," said Quarles, "so I mentioned the rheumatic specialist who had cured me."

"You, grandfather!" Zena exclaimed.

"Ah, you have evidently forgotten how I used to suffer," was the smiling answer. "I allowed Morrison to make a mistake on purpose and go to Clarence Lodge, his one idea to get an interview with Mrs. Crosland."

"And you have seen him since?" I asked.

"Came home with him from Grange Park," answered Quarles. "He was roundly abused to begin with, but, as you were told, he saw Mrs. Crosland. It was an interesting interview. The first thing that struck him was that the old lady was totally unlike her children, a different type altogether. She is a hard, masculine kind of woman, not at all of the nervous temperament he had been led to expect; and he was convinced that she had only consented to see him to make sure that he was no more than he had proclaimed himself--a specialist in rheumatism. My friend Morrison came to the conclusion that the nurse, as a nurse, was incompetent, and that the room he entered would not have been the one constantly occupied by the invalid. He was exceedingly interested in Mrs. Crosland, seeing in her a woman of extraordinary force of character and intellectual capacity, and he came to the conclusion that there was nothing whatever the matter with her."

"No rheumatism?" said Zena.

"About as much as I suffer from," said Quarles. "In short, Morrison was rather glad to get safely out of the house. He was certain that the old lady had a revolver under her pillow, and would certainly have shot him had she suspected that he was any one else but a specialist in rheumatism."

I was looking at Quarles as he turned to me.

"What do you make of my theory now, Wigan?"

"Were you Morrison?" I asked.

"Of course, and it was a trying ordeal. Do you think we have enough facts to go on?"

"Not facts, exactly, but evidence," I admitted.

"I think we shall find that the dead man is Bush," said the professor. "Inquiry will probably show that he has a record for quackery and has probably sailed fairly close to the wind at times. His connection with the Crosland family was not professional, but had other aims, and his profession was used merely as a reason for not having a doctor for Mrs. Crosland, who found it convenient to pose as an invalid. A quarrel resulted in Bush's being shot that night. I hazard a guess that it was the old lady who shot him, and that it was her brain which conceived the way out of the difficulty."

"That is guessing with a vengeance," I said.

"Yes, but not without some reason," Quarles went on. "Let's go back to the Grange Park burglaries for a moment, and suppose that a gang of expert thieves under the name of Crosland took Clarence Lodge. An invalid mother, son and daughter so called, butler, servants--a most respectable family apparently, in the midst of people worth plundering, able by friendly intercourse to collect the necessary information and plan their raids. Bush is the outside representative of the firm, so to speak, and the nephew who travels abroad occasionally sees to the selling of the spoil. It was the plot of a master mind--the old lady's, which has entirely beaten us until they quarrel between themselves. Now what do you think of my theory?"

"It takes me back to Grange Park without unnecessary delay," I said, getting up quickly.

"I thought it would. You have got the men waiting for you there, and I should raid the house forthwith. But caution, Wigan. I don't think they have any suspicion of Morrison, but the moment they tumble to your intentions they'll show fight, and probably put up a hot one. And don't forget the nephew in Paris. Take him, too."

The raid upon Clarence Lodge took place that evening, and was so managed that the servants and the chauffeur were taken before Crosland and his sister, who proved to be no relation as Quarles had surmised, were aware of the fact. Faced with the inevitable they made no fight at all, but the old lady was made of entirely different metal. She barricaded herself in her room, and swore to shoot the first man who forced the door. She had the satisfaction of wounding me slightly in the shoulder, and then before we could stop her she had turned the weapon upon herself and shot herself through the head.

The nephew was taken in Paris, and with the rest of the gang was sent to penal servitude. The evidence at the trial proved Quarles's theory to be very much as the tragedy had happened. The dead man was Bush, and it was his threat to give the burglaries away unless he had a larger share of the spoil than had been assigned to him which made the old lady shoot him in an ungovernable fit of rage.

"A master mind, Wigan," Quarles remarked, "and it is just as well not to have her as a neighbor. Your wound is not likely to put off your wedding?"

"No."

"A little better aim and she would have put it off altogether."

"Don't be so horrible," said Zena.

"A fact, my dear. Murray has been very keen about getting hold of facts in this case, so I mention one. The Grange Park burglaries beat me because there was no clue to build on, but with a dead body--well, it really wasn't very difficult, was it?"

"Quite easy," I answered as if I really meant it, and then turned to discuss carpets with Zena.

It was not always wise to let the old man know you thought him clever.

THE END

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