MURDER IN THE MAZE

J. J. CONNINGTON

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Books by J. J. Connington.

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BY

J. J. CONNINGTON

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"The Dangerfield Talisman," etc.

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NOTE

The characters, places, and events described in this book are entirely imaginary and have no connection, either direct or indirect, with any real persons, places, or events.

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MURDER IN THE MAZE

Chapter I

NEVILLE SHANDON stood at the window of his brother's study, gazing contentedly out over the Whistlefield grounds. This was a good place to recuperate in, he reflected, especially when one could only snatch a couple of days at a time from the grinding pressure of a barrister's practice. His eye travelled slowly over the prospect of greenery which lay before him, lawn beyond lawn, down to where a glint of silver showed where the river cut across the estate. Beyond that came the stretches of the Low Meadows, intersected here and there by the darker green of the hedges ; then the long curve of the main road ; and at last, closing the horizon, the gentle slope of Longshoot Hill surmounted by its church spire. A bee hummed lazily at the open window ; then, startled by a movement, it shot away, the note of its wings growing higher and fainter as it receded in the sunlight. The King's Counsel let his attention wander for a moment to the rooks sailing in their effortless flight around the tree-crests by the river ; then, with something more than apparent reluctance, he turned away from the landscape.

" You did pretty well when you bought Whistlefield, Roger," he commented as he moved back into the room. " It's as restful a place as I know. If it weren't that I

can get down here from time to time, I'd be hard put to it to keep fit for my work. Think of the Law Courts on a day like this! And that Hackleton case has been a bit of a strain, a bigger business than usual."

His twin brother nodded a general assent, but made no audible reply. There was more than the normal family resemblance between the two men. In height and build they were much alike; both were grey-haired and clean-shaven; and even the hard lines at the corners of the barrister's mouth found their counterparts in the deeply-chiselled curves which made Roger Shandon's face a slightly forbidding one. Whether deliberately or not, the twins accentuated their physical resemblance by a similarity in their dress.

"We have the same tailor," Roger once explained. "When I go to him, I say: 'Make me a suit like my brother's last one.' I believe Neville says the same. The fellow has our measurements, so there's no more needed on that visit. Neville and I have much the same taste in shades, so it generally comes out all right."

The likeness between the twins went even deeper than the surface. Both owed their success in life to a certain hardness of character coupled with an abundance of energy. Neville, going to the Bar, had made himself feared from the first as a brutal and domineering cross-examiner; and his criminal practice had done little to soften his professional manners. Roger's rise to prosperity had been more mysterious. It was vaguely known that he had made money in South Africa and South America; but the exact methods which had led to his fortune were never discussed by him. He had come home at the age of forty-five to find his brother one of the leading lights of the Bar. The purchase of the little Whistlefield estate had

followed, and Roger had apparently been content to settle down in the country-side and make a clean break with the interests of his past.

The third brother, Ernest, seemed hardly to belong to the same family as the twins. Though five years younger, he had none of the vitality and energy which were so manifest in his elders ; and the contrast was accentuated by the weakness of his eyes, which gazed incuriously at the world from behind the concave lenses of his pince-nez. Left to fend for himself by the time he was twenty, and with a couple of hundred a year of his own, he had simply vegetated without even attempting to go into any business ; and when his brothers had made their fortunes, he had slipped into the role of parasite without a thought, had transferred himself to Whistlefield, and had continued to live there ever since. Roger had fallen into the habit of giving him a fluctuating allowance, which he eked out as best he could by betting on a small scale.

" What's this Hackleton case that you were talking about ? " he inquired with a certain dull interest.

Neville looked at his brother with an expression half quizzical and half contemptuous. For days the Hackleton case had extended in sordid detail over a good many columns of most daily newspapers, for its intricacy had been enlivened by frequent dramatic interchanges between witnesses and counsel. It had shown Neville Shandon at his best, relentlessly driving the defendants into one damaging admission after another.

" Do you never read the newspapers, Ernest ? " the barrister demanded, quite unnettled by his brother's ignorance of one of the greatest cases in which he himself had taken a leading part. Ernest's interests were limited, as Neville knew ; and it was useless to expect him to go outside his normal range merely from family

concern. Wide-ranging curiosity was the last quality one could expect from him.

Ernest blinked, took off his glasses and cleaned them, then replaced them carefully before replying.

"No. At least, not all of them (Confound these glasses, they won't grip my nose to-day, somehow. This is the fifth time they've fallen off.) I often look at the newspapers, Neville. I glance through the sporting news every day. I never read the law column, though. I can't understand it, usually; and when I do understand it, it seems so damned dull. At least, it's dull to me; so I don't look at it, usually."

The barrister shrugged his shoulders slightly. He was above petty vanity, and he felt no sting from his brother's lack of interest in his work.

"Just as well you left the Hackleton case alone, then," he said. "It's an infernal tangle. It's taken me months of work to see my way through it; and if I happened to break down before it comes to a finish, I doubt if a junior could take it on with anything like success. But I think this week will see the end of it."

Roger had listened to the dialogue without moving a muscle. Ernest's complete incuriosity was no surprise to him. He could almost have predicted it. The youngest brother had never had the slightest interest in anything which did not touch himself. Family triumphs meant nothing to him, except that indirectly they contributed to his welfare.

The barrister moved again to the window and looked out over the landscape. A cloud of rooks caught his eye, sailing together and then breaking up into a mass of wheeling individuals.

"After this sort of thing, the very thought of the air in the Law Courts makes one sick," he said at last.

" Hackleton's coming up for the rest of your cross-examination the day after to-morrow, isn't he? " Roger asked.

" Yes. He's a clever devil—sees a concealed point as well as I do myself, and generally manages to skate round it more or less. He's just scraped through, so far ; but I'll have him yet. It'll be a bad business for him if he makes a slip. This civil suit for breach of contract is only a preliminary canter, if things turn out as I expect. One single breach in his case, and the Public Prosecutor will be down on Hackleton instanter. There's ever so much in the background which we can't bring to light in this particular suit, but it would all come out if the thing were to be transferred to the Criminal Court. Then we could really get to the bottom of the business."

" So I gathered, by reading the case. Anyone could see that there was a lot in the background that you couldn't touch on."

" Once it all comes out, it'll be the end of Hackleton. Five years penal is the least he could look forward to. Pleasant prospect for a man who lives on champagne. He's an amazing fellow : drinks like a fish and yet has almost as good a brain as I have."

" And you think you'll get him? Does he realise that? "

" I expect he does."

" From all I've heard of him he hasn't much to boast of in the way of scruples. He started his career by speculations in coffin ships, didn't he? I seem to remember some trouble with the insurance companies in more than one case."

The barrister nodded :

" Constructive murder, simply. But that would be a trifle to Hackleton. He'd do anything for money."

Roger seemed to turn this over in his mind for a moment or two before he spoke again.

"If he's as hard a case as all that, I think I'd put on my considering-cap if I were in your shoes, Neville. It seems to me that you're the weak joint in the harness."

"I? How do you make that out? I've got this case at my finger-ends, I tell you. No one knows it inside out as I do."

"That's precisely what I mean. Suppose he loosed a gang of roughs on you before this cross-examination comes off? A good sand-bagging would put you out of action for just the time necessary to keep you out of the case; and that's all he needs. You say yourself that you have all the strings in your hands, and I don't suppose you've brought every card out of your sleeve even for the benefit of your junior. It wouldn't be like you if you have. You were always one to keep a good deal in reserve."

"That's true enough," Neville conceded with a grim smile. "No one could handle Hackleton in just the way that I shall this week. But I'm not particularly afraid of sand-bags or that sort of thing. No one could tackle me here, so far as I can see. One can't do that kind of business in broad daylight on the Whistlefield lawns. And there won't be much chance of getting at me on the way up to town or in London itself. I quite admit the possibility of the thing when one's dealing with Hackleton. It's quite on the cards; and because it's never been done before, there's no reason why it shouldn't be done sometimes. I'm not nervous, of course; but I'm not likely to run any risks by going about much after dark until this affair is squared up."

Roger Shandon's face reflected the grimness of his brother's smile.

"I quite understand what you feel about it. In fact,

I'm in much the same boat myself. That's what turned my mind to the possibility in your case."

The barrister glanced at him keenly.

" Some more of your disreputable past cropping up, eh ? I don't care much for some of your old acquaintances. Who's this fresh one ? "

Roger grinned shamelessly. His brother knew something of the way in which he had made his money ; for at times it had been useful to Roger to take legal advice without bringing an outsider into problems which came too near the edge of the law.

" It's another gentleman with a grievance—from Cape Town this time," he explained. " He *says* he acted as my agent in some I.D.B. business when I was out there. He *says* that I got the profit out of it and that the profit was big enough to split comfortably into two. According to him, I gave him away to the authorities later on ; and he spent a period of retirement, on the Breakwater or some such health resort. The cure took some years in the sanatorium ; and he hated the treatment. Too much open-air exercise with plain food ; and too many uniforms about for his taste. That part's true enough—he's just out of gaol. As to the rest, he needn't expect me to corroborate it on oath."

" Blackmail, I suppose ? " asked the barrister, perfunctorily. " I'll have a talk with him, if you like. Perhaps my persuasive style "—the harsh lines about his mouth deepened—" would help to convert him to honesty. It'll be no trouble."

Roger nodded his thanks.

" I'll turn you on if necessary ; but it's hardly likely. He seems to me a vapouring sort of beast. ' Your money or your life ' style of thing, you know. When I naturally refused point-blank to pay him a stiver, he frothed over at once with threats to do me in. ' Tim

Costock, the Red-handed Avenger '—and all that sort of thing. I left him frothing. He didn't seem to me the sort of type that would do more than froth—and he can prove nothing."

"I don't suppose he can," Neville agreed, knowing from past experience that his brother left very little behind him for enemies to pick up. "Well, I want to run over my notes for the Hackleton case this afternoon. Where can I find a place where I'll be free from interruption. With these youngsters in the house, one can never be sure of having a room to oneself for half an hour at a time; and even if one retires to one's bedroom, somebody's sure to start a duel with the piano. I thought piano-playing had gone out of fashion; but I've heard it every day since I came here."

"That's Arthur," Roger Shandon interjected, irritably. "No one else touches the damned thing."

Ernest had apparently been cogitating deeply. He now turned a dull eye on his elder brother.

"Try the Maze," he advised.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Neville. "Try the Maze? It sounds like an advertisement for tea or one of these riddles, like: 'Why is a hen?'"

Ernest elaborated his suggestion.

"I mean the Maze," he explained laboriously. "The thing like the one at Hampton Court, down by the river, close to the boat-house. None of the visitors is likely to find a way to either of the centres; and none of us is likely to disturb you. We don't usually go there; at least, I don't myself."

Neville's face had shown enlightenment at the first sentence.

"Oh, our Maze, you mean? We were talking about the piano when you burst in, Ernest, and I didn't quite take the connection. That's not a bad notion. As you

say, nobody's likely to bother me if I plant myself in either of the centres. Besides, I want all the fresh air I can get just now ; it'll be better out there than anywhere inside the house. Right. I'll go to Helen's Bower."

He moved towards the door as he spoke ; but before he reached it a piano sounded not far off, and the opening bars of Sinding's *Frühlingsrauschen* came to their ears. Neville turned back with his hand on the door-handle.

" By the way, Roger, what about that young nephew of ours ? He seems all right—a bit moody, perhaps, but nothing out of the common. What does the doctor say ? "

Roger's face clouded.

" Arthur ? He's a young pest. About thrice a week he takes a fancy to the piano, and then he spends the whole day playing one piece over and over again, like an automatic machine—except for the mistakes. Damnable. You don't know how I hate the sound of the *Spring Song* and *Frühlingsrauschen*. You must have heard him at it this morning ; and now he's starting all over again."

The barrister nodded.

" Yes, but what about his general tone ? " he asked. " Has he got over that encephalitis completely ? Did the Harley Street man find anything permanently wrong ? "

Roger's face betrayed little satisfaction.

" Oh, the specialist looked devilish wise the last time he examined him ; but that was about all it amounted to. It seems they know next to nothing about sleepy sickness. I understood him to say that the brain cells are all churned up with the inflammation ; and the result may be anything you please. Of course Arthur

was lucky to get off with no physical damage—his eyesight and hearing and all that are quite all right. But it seems one can never tell what changes may have taken place in the brain structure—things that don't normally show at all. He may be all right, for all one can tell. Or again, he might turn into a homicidal maniac any day; and then, as like as not, he'd go for the nearest relation handy. A nice sort of fellow to have in one's neighbourhood."

The barrister evidently considered this prophecy exaggerated.

"He seems quite normal to me," he said.

"Oh, I don't worry much over him," Roger admitted. "It's just that he's got on my nerves so much that I can hardly see him without snapping at him. I'll have to get rid of him, I think; send him on a sea-voyage or something of that sort."

"Perhaps you get on his nerves, just the same way as he gets on yours," Ernest began in his low voice. "That's what usually happens. When one starts it, the other takes it up. Usually that's the way these things go. I shouldn't wonder—hullo, Sylvia! I didn't expect you just yet; not for quite a while. I'm not quite ready."

A girl in her early twenties had come into the room and now stood looking at her uncle with a fair pretence of indignation.

Sylvia Hawkhurst, the sister of the piano-playing Arthur, had been left an orphan before she came of age; and as her uncles were her trustees, she and her brother had been brought to Whistlefield by Roger Shandon. She liked "to play at house-keeping," as she put it; and Roger soon learned that she could run his small establishment better than any paid housekeeper. Things went like clockwork after she had taken com-

mand; and he soon realised that the secret of her management was that everyone in the house adored her. One thing she had set her face against: "We'll have no men-servants, if you please, uncle; at least, not in the house itself. I don't mind a chauffeur, of course. But I know what a girl can do, and I'd prefer to keep within my limitations, if it's all the same to you." Her uncle had let her have her way, and he had never found any reason to complain of the results.

Sylvia's housekeeping, however, occupied very little of her time. She hunted in the season, drove her own car, played tennis well and golf better still, and was reckoned one of the best dancers in the neighbourhood. Most characteristic of all, in spite of her looks, she was as popular with girls as with men.

As she came into the room, Ernest got out of his chair with his usual deliberation and began a faintly shamefaced apology for his unpreparedness; but she cut him short in mock irritation.

"He hasn't even got his boots on!" she complained. "How is it that I can run everything to time in this house except you? Are you *ever* in time for anything, Uncle Ernest?"

"I always seem to have so much to do, Sylvia, usually. It's been a very busy day."

The corners of Sylvia's mouth quivered a little in spite of her effort to look indignant.

"Very busy! I remember exactly what you did. You played tennis for precisely thirty-five minutes this morning. Then you organised a grand shooting tournament with the air-guns and bored everyone stiff with it except Arthur, who happens to be able to beat everyone else. Then you came into the house; and I suppose you looked at the newspapers till lunch. And since then, you've sat and smoked. You must be dog-tired,

poor thing. Do you think you could wrestle with your boots now; or shall I have them brought here on a silver salver and give you a hand with them myself? I'd rather not; so if you can manage by yourself, I'll go and bring the car round. Put your watch in front of you and pinch yourself once a minute. Then you won't fall quite asleep. Do hurry up, uncle," she concluded, more seriously, "I want to get off as soon as I can."

"Where are you taking him?" asked Roger.

"I'm going over to Stanningleigh village to do some shopping first of all. Then I'm going to the Naylands to ask them to come across and play tennis. When Uncle Ernest heard that he begged me to take him along part of the way and drop him at the East Gate, so that he could walk along the main road to the bridge and have a look at the river."

"I thought I'd like to see if it was worth fishing, just at present," Ernest added, in further explanation. "I've been thinking about it for a day or two, but I've never found time, somehow. Usually, just when I was starting out something always seemed to come in the way. So to-day, since Sylvia was going that way in the car anyhow, I thought . . ."

He broke off, observing Sylvia's indignant eyes fastened upon him.

"Boots!" she said, scathingly, and held the door open for him to go out.

"I'll be ready in a minute or two," he assured her hastily as he left the room.

"Men are a wonderful lot, aren't they?" she said confidentially to her two remaining uncles, as the door closed. "It seems to me high time Uncle Ernest got married. He's simply incapable of looking after himself. You two are at least able to cross the street for

yourselves ; but Uncle Ernest really gives me a lot of worry. I think I saw a fresh wrinkle when I was brushing my hair this morning."

" I wondered what made you look peculiar at lunch-time," Neville admitted. " Now you mention it, I see it on your brow. About as deep as this."

He touched one of the deep-scored lines running down to the side of his own mouth.

Sylvia laughed.

" You alarm me, uncle. I must have a look at the ravages in a mirror before I venture out. Good-bye! "

She hurried out of the room. Neville looked at his watch.

" Time I was moving," he said. " I think I'll take Ernest's advice and try the Maze for seclusion. It's hardly likely that anyone will bother to go into it this afternoon ; and I can't stand this piano-playing of Arthur's. It grows irritating, as you say. I'll go now. But I must get my notes first."

A thought seemed to strike Roger as the barrister opened the door.

" I think I'll try the Maze myself this afternoon. I feel a bit sleepy ; and it's quiet in there. I shan't disturb you. But if it's all the same to you, I'll take Helen's Bower myself. I'm used to a chair there ; it suits me. You can go to Narcissus's Pool instead. There's nothing to pick and choose between them, since they're both in the Maze."

" Very good," the barrister agreed. " It's all the same to me, so long as no one interrupts me."

He nodded abruptly and left the room.

When his brother had gone, Roger Shandon went over to his writing-table and busied himself with some papers. The distant piano seemed to have become more

intrusive now that he was left alone. It repeated *Frühlingsrauschen* with brain-wearying persistence and a reiterated error in one particular chord. Roger frowned irritably as he busied himself with the documents before him, jotting down a note from time to time on a scribbling-block.

" Damn that young whelp! I must talk to him about this. One can't concentrate one's attention when half one's mind's wondering if he's going to make that same slip for the hundred and first time."

He continued his work for a few minutes, then rose and rang the bell.

" Send Mr. Stenness, if you can find him," he ordered when the maid appeared.

In Ivor Stenness, Roger had secured an ideal private secretary. Stenness not only had the efficiency of a machine, but he possessed a full measure of qualities hardly less important. If his employer was out of sorts, even the gruffest order failed to ruffle the secretary's temper. He was capable of taking just the right amount of responsibility in emergencies without ever going a hair's breadth over the score. And his especial recommendation in Roger's eyes was that he could keep his mouth shut. He never asked for explanations which might have been difficult to give ; and he never betrayed the slightest surprise when, as sometimes happened, he opened threatening letters.

" If I ever have a confession of murder to put on paper," Roger used to say, " Stenness will take it down in shorthand, type it out, and get my signature, without turning a hair. So far as he was concerned, it would be just a letter."

Stenness's other qualities were more in demand among the remainder of the household. He had good natural manners ; and he could play games well enough

to make him useful where someone was often needed to make up a golf foursome or a bridge table. A casual glance at him would have suggested that he must employ a first-class valet; for his clothes always looked new and he had the knack of carrying them well.

With all this, he was a perfectly safe person to have in a house with a young girl. He was, somehow, too inhumanly efficient, to be attractive to girls younger than himself; and he showed not the slightest desire to attract. Sylvia treated him as a good friend, but she had dozens of friends whom she treated in exactly the same fashion.

"Ah, Stenness!" Roger looked up as the secretary came in. "I've gone over these letters and jotted down some notes. You might get them off sometime to-day. There's only one of them that needs any explanation. Here it is. . . ."

Neville Shandon's grim face appeared at the door for a moment. In his hand was a sheaf of papers. Seeing his brother engaged with the secretary, he nodded without saying anything and closed the door behind him.

Roger continued his explanation of the matter in hand while the secretary took a note or two. As the instructions ended, the whirr of a car leaving the front of the house attracted Roger's attention and he crossed the room to look out of the window. Sylvia was driving, and beside her was Ernest Shandon. They glanced up as they passed under the study window, and Sylvia waved her hand. Roger watched the car swing sharply off the main avenue on its way to the East Gate, and soon it vanished behind a belt of rhododendrons.

"They might have given Neville a lift," Roger reflected as he turned back into the room again. "They'll be passing the Maze on the road to the East Gate."

The sound of the piano re-asserted itself in the com-

parative silence which followed the passing of the car. Roger made a gesture of impatience.

"I suppose that's my nephew playing?" he demanded.

"He was shooting darts at a target in the garden, a short time ago," Stenness explained, "but I think he came in a few minutes ago."

"It sounds like him. Since he had that attack of sleepy sickness he always fumbles a bit in his chords—doesn't seem able to manage his fingers perfectly. That makes this din all the harder to bear."

Stenness refrained from any comment. Roger, after a pause, continued irritably.

"Where are the visitors, Stenness? I wish they'd attract him out of the house. Some days he's all right and one never sees him. Other days he sits and pounds that piano till one's head rings with it."

"I noticed Miss Forrest and Mr. Torrance going towards the rose garden a few minutes ago."

Stenness confined himself to answering the direct question and quietly ignored Roger's exasperation. It was no business of his to intervene in family squabbles.

"Well, that's all I have for you at present, Stenness. As you're passing the door, send my nephew to me, will you? I must put a stop to this nuisance. It's gone on quite long enough."

The secretary made a gesture of assent, then gathered up his papers and left the room. A few seconds later, the piano-playing stopped abruptly in the middle of a bar, and Roger's ear caught the clang of the keyboard lid being carelessly slammed. After a moment or two, his nephew entered the study.

In order to give his irritation time to cool down, Roger refrained from speaking immediately. He

motioned his nephew to sit down, whilst he himself pulled out his cigar-case and became busy with the preparations for a smoke. Having got his cigar well alight, he turned round.

"Must you hammer that piano for hours at a time, Arthur? I hate to interfere with your simple pleasures, of course; but the infernal din you make has had quite a long enough run. You've played *Frühlingsrauschen* at least two dozen times to-day; and that's just twenty-four times oftener than I want to hear it. You can cut it out of the bill, after this. In fact, you can leave the piano alone, once for all. I'm sick of hearing you play. You're a nuisance to everyone, raising Pandemonium at all hours of the day. Find some quieter amusement, or clear out of the house."

Arthur Hawkhurst's eyebrows rose in mild surprise at his uncle's complaint.

"I'd no idea it worried you, uncle."

"Well, drop it."

"Perhaps I have been overdoing *Frühlingsrauschen* a bit. I hadn't thought of that. Somehow I never seem to get through it without a mistake in one or two chords, and I want to make a clean job of it, once at least."

"I've got a pair of quite good ears. You needn't think I missed your mistakes. They make it more irritating, that's all."

Arthur hastened to admit his errors.

"Well, no more *Frühlingsrauschen*, then. What about the *Barcarolle*? Offenbach's, I mean. Any objection to that?"

"Yes. Will you be good enough to understand that you're not to bang on that piano again."

"Oh, you mean it? I thought it was just your fun, uncle. But I like the piano. Surely you'll let me use it sometimes."

"No. I've had enough of it."

"But . . ."

Roger's face had been darkening.

"That's enough! I've more important things to talk to you about. What age are you nowadays? Twenty-two or twenty-three, isn't it? And you've never done a stroke of work in your life, so far? A pretty record, isn't it?"

He paused, and paced over to the window and back again.

"That's got to stop. I've had to support one loafer—your Uncle Ernest. But if you imagine that I have a fad for collecting loafers, you're mistaken. I've got your uncle on my hands permanently, I suppose; but I don't propose to increase my stock of parasites for your benefit. You'll have to find something to do. I'm not going to let you hang around Whistlefield for ever."

Arthur's good-natured face had darkened in its turn.

"You might increase your stock of politeness without overdoing things, it seems to me. I'm not altogether a loafer. I'm an invalid."

Roger took no notice of the plea.

"Whistlefield isn't an hospital."

"Or an asylum—I suppose that's what you mean? You'd better take care, uncle. There are some things a fellow doesn't forget, once they're said."

Roger's temper, never very far below the surface, boiled up at his nephew's remark.

"That's enough, Arthur. I'll give you three months more. After that, you can fend for yourself. You won't starve. You've got enough money to keep you alive even if the worst comes to the worst. Anyhow, I wash my hands of you."

Arthur Hawkhurst's control was no better than his

uncle's when once the point had penetrated through the skin.

" A pretty specimen of an uncle! The kind one meets in the ' Babes in the Wood,' eh? Go out into the world and starve, Arthur dear. The little dicky-birds will put leaves on you—*and I'll get the money your mother left you*! That's the scheme, I suppose. It's a wonder a thing like you is allowed to live."

The flagrant absurdity of the charge checked Roger for a moment. After all, the boy was off his balance. One shouldn't take him seriously.

" You're an ass, Arthur! " was all he vouchsafed in reply.

But Arthur's disturbed brain had tilted out of its normal equilibrium, and his rage found vent in a wild threat as he flung himself out of the room.

" I've a good mind to get in first myself ; and do for you, before you can do me any more harm. Look out for yourself! "

As the door slammed behind his nephew, Roger settled himself back into his chair. Arthur's outbreak had come as a complete surprise. Since his illness, the boy had given the impression that he merely needed a firm hand. He had loafed about the house in a condition not far from melancholia ; and at first it had required steady pressure to bring him to take any interest in normal affairs. Gradually he had improved and had passed over into a state of cheerful irresponsibility. And now, just as the specialists were taking an optimistic view of the future, had come this collapse into something which seemed little short of mania, absolutely without warning.

" I'll have to get this looked into," Roger reflected. " He's evidently not so far on the road to recovery as we thought."

Arthur's threat had left him completely indifferent. He had almost forgotten it when he rose again from his chair. In itself it seemed unimportant, merely some wild words flung out in a brain-storm. He left the house and took the road to the Maze.

Stenness saw his figure pass into the belt of rhododendrons; and as soon as it had disappeared, the secretary made his way to Roger's study. An ABC time table was on one of the shelves; and Stenness, taking it down, began to study the times of trains.

"I can't leave it later than that," he said to himself at last. "The next one wouldn't get me into London in time for the boat-train."

His eye turned to the window and ranged over the lawns.

"Well, it'll be a hard wrench to leave here, no matter what happens. And I wish I saw to-night over and knew where I stand."

He passed to a fresh line of thought.

"At the worst, nothing will matter much if I don't pull it off."

He replaced the ABC on its shelf and went up to his own room. First locking the door, he began deliberately to pack his razors and other toilette articles in an attaché case. When he had completed this task, he glanced round the room.

"Nothing else? No, all the rest of the stuff is waiting for me in London."

Chapter II

HOWARD TORRANCE fidgeted a little and then turned to the girl beside him.

" A bit feeble, just sitting about like this and doing nothing. Care to go down to the tennis courts and play a single ? "

Vera Forrest knew the symptoms well. A good many men would have been glad enough of the chance to monopolise her and would have asked nothing better than to sit there in the shade in her company. But Howard had a surplus of physical energy which could be worked off only by continual exercise. " What'll we do next ? " was a phrase which ran through his talk like a reiterated battle-cry ; and he seemed to have exalted Sloth to the premier position in his private catalogue of the mortal sins. She glanced at him mischievously and decided to tease him a little before letting him have his way.

" No, thank you," she said, sedately.

Howard had a second suggestion ready.

" Want to go over to the links and play a few holes ? "

" No, thanks."

" What about taking the car to Stanningleigh. I need some cigarettes and I'll stand you a box of chocolates."

" No."

Howard looked at her suspiciously.

"Is this a new game? 'No, thank you. . . No, thanks. . . . No.' Trying to make it shorter each time, is that it? Well, you've got to the bottom of the bag this shot. This is where the master-brain says 'Checkmate!' Ahem! Like to take a boat out on the river for a while? You can't say No in less than two letters."

Vera made no audible response, but she shook her head in refusal. Her companion admitted his defeat gracefully.

"Didn't think you'd manage it. You win. Will you have a sauce-pan or a cheap alarm clock? All the other prizes have been awarded already."

Then, as though dismissing trifles and becoming serious:

"What's to be done? We can't sit around like this the whole day. Time's on the wing, and all that."

Vera looked at the shadows on the grass.

"It's getting on certainly. We really haven't time to do much before tea."

"It couldn't miss that, I suppose? It wants its tea?"

"It wants its tea," Vera admitted, gravely.

Howard looked at his watch.

"Pity we wasted the best part of the afternoon just sitting round and loafing," he commented disconsolately.

For a few moments he remained silent, evidently turning various projects over in his mind.

"Tell you what," he suggested at last, "Ever been in the old Maze down there by the boat-house? No? Neither have I. What about dashing over and trying our luck with it? Part at the entrance; and the first that gets to the centre wins the game. They say it's a grand puzzler."

"Well, if it will make you happy, I don't mind.

But wait a moment. Hasn't the Maze got two centres? Somebody told me that once."

Howard brushed the objection aside.

"The first one to reach either centre scores a win. If you get there, sing out. I'll trust to your native honesty to keep you from cheating."

It was comfortable under the trees, and Vera attempted to put off the evil moment of departure even by a few seconds.

"How many entrances has the Maze?"

"Oh, don't know, exactly. Four or five, I think. Nothing in that. Take the first one we come to, whichever it is. Then you go to the right and I'll go to the left, or t'other way about if you like; and the best man wins. I'll risk a box of chocolates or a tin of cocoa on it, if you insist. Come along, don't let's decay here any longer; I see a bit of moss has grown on my toe since we sat down—and no wonder."

Vera gave in and rose from her seat with feigned reluctance.

"Bit stiff in the joints with sitting so long?" Howard inquired, sympathetically. "It'll wear off at once."

As they sauntered across the stretches of turf which led down to the Maze, Vera was struck by the quietness of the grounds.

"Whistlefield's a lovely place, isn't it, Howard?"

"Top-hole," he agreed, cordially. "First-class tennis courts; good golf-course only a quarter of an hour away; the river's quite decent for punting; plenty of room in the house to dance; and I believe they run a pack of otter-hounds somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"I didn't know you were a house-agent."

Howard saw the dig, but took no offence.

"Sounds a bit like their patter, doesn't it? 'Company's water, gas, and electric light. Telephone. Main drainage.' Well, nothing to be ashamed of, is it? Whistlefield's all right."

"Sylvia's lucky to be here. By the way, where has she gone to this afternoon, do you know? I haven't seen her since lunch."

"Off in the car to see some people and arrange for some tennis to-morrow. I must say Sylvia looks after one well when one comes to stay. Always on the go."

"Where are the rest of the villagers?"

"One uncle's off with Sylvia. The other two were in the study when I saw them last. Stenness is somewhere around. I met young Arthur when you sent me up to the house a few minutes ago. He was coming out of the gun-room with a nasty look in his eyes and an air-gun in his hand. Gave him a cheery hail and got a grunt in reply. Seemed peevish about something or other, quite fretful, even. Wished him Good Hunting and asked him if he was going to shoot rabbits in the spinney. All I got was a growl that he was going to shoot something sitting if he couldn't shoot it any other way. Seemed determined to work off bad temper by slaughtering something, no matter what?"

Vera's face betrayed sympathy.

"Poor Arthur! It's hard lines on that boy, Howard. He's been changed a good deal by that beastly illness he had."

Howard's expression showed that he shared her feelings.

"Pity. Used to be a bright lad. All right, even yet; but not quite the same, somehow. Moody at times; and apt to loaf about doing nothing for half the day. No real go about him. A queer temper, too, some days. When I met him just now, for instance, he looked

ready to bite me in the gizzard. Not at all the society man."

Vera dismissed the subject, which threatened to throw a gloom over them both. They liked Arthur Hawkhurst, in spite of the occasional flashes of abnormality which he had shown since the attack of encephalitis lethargica.

"You're playing quite fair, aren't you, Howard? You've never been inside the Maze at all?"

"You don't suppose that I'd cheat for the sake of winning a tin of cocoa, do you? It's amazing what a low view of mankind some girls have. Soured from the cradle, what? And born in suspicion, belike. Shake it off, or it'll grow on you, Vera. Go and dig in the garden when you feel an attack coming on."

"Oh, don't rub it in! I know your motto well enough; 'Perspiration is better than cure,' or something like that, isn't it? I only asked out of idle curiosity. No reflections on your honesty really intended."

"Your apology of even date duly received and filed. Sounds like the house-agent vein again, that, doesn't it? Come on, I'll race you this last hundred yards and give you a start to that rhododendron. Half a tin of cocoa on the event, since you're so mercenary."

Vera rejected his offer; and they walked over the last lawn to the nearest entrance to the Maze.

The Maze at Whistlefield was a relic of earlier days when such things were fashionable; but it had been kept in good repair, and Roger Shandon's gardeners spent a considerable amount of labour in clipping its topiary hedges into the semblance of green walls. Somewhat irregular in outline, it covered about half an acre of ground; but into that limited space there was compressed more than half a mile of pathways; and the shortest route to either of the centres was at least two hundred and fifty yards in length. But few except

experts could have found their way to either Helen's Bower or the Pool of Narcissus by walking a mere two hundred and fifty yards. The Whistlefield Maze was a labyrinth far exceeding in complexity its kindred at Hatfield and Hampton Court. Its twelve-foot hedges were impenetrably thick ; and in its design it followed the " island-pattern " to such an extent that incautious explorers might wander by the hour through its tiny archipelago without gaining a foot towards the innermost recesses or even realising that they were simply coasting round and round the outline of some detached hedge.

So many people had got temporarily lost in the labyrinth and, being so far away from the house, had been unable to get help even by shouting, that at last precautions had been taken to avoid mishaps of the kind in future.

As Vera and her companion reached the tall iron gate in the outer hedge which marked one of the entrances, they found themselves confronted with a small notice-board to which an old-fashioned horn was suspended.

VISITORS ENTERING THE MAZE ARE ADVISED TO TAKE THIS HORN WITH THEM SO THAT THEY CAN SUMMON ASSISTANCE IF NECESSARY. ON LEAVING THE MAZE, KINDLY HANG THE HORN IN ITS PLACE AGAIN.

Howard went up to the board and read the notice with obvious contempt.

" Nice lot of incompetents they seem to have about the house! " he commented in a scathing tone. " I wonder they don't provide a bath-chair and a man to push you to the centre, and be done with it. As if any person of ordinary intelligence couldn't find his way through a thing about the size of a washing-green."

" Ever been in a maze before? " Vera inquired.

" No, not that I can remember."

" Ah, then kindly unhook the horn and give it to me. I'm not proud."

Howard took the horn from its place and handed it over.

" What's the good of one horn, since we're not going in together? "

Vera looked him over coldly.

" When I get lost, I shall blow the horn and get someone to show me the way out. When you get lost, you'll be able to practise breathing exercise in yelling for help. You see, you've got a much louder and harsher voice than I have. You'll be all right, I'm sure. But if you think you can't come up to the lung-power needed, you might go round to the next entrance and see if there isn't a horn there. I should think there's sure to be one at each entrance."

Howard was put on his metal.

" Oh, I shan't get lost. Don't fret too much about me. Now then, who's for the centre? "

" Come along, then. I'll take the left-hand path here, and you can go to the right. Whoever gets first to the centre can shout: " I win! " and then start for the exit door. If it's a tie at the centre, then the first one out is the winner. Keep a tight hold on your honesty and don't shout unless you get to the centre! These are all the directions necessary, I think. Now, go! "

Vera hurried along a straight corridor for some twenty yards and then turned sharply to the right as the path altered its direction. On again, until a promontory of hedge forced her to diverge into a recess in the greenery, from which she emerged again into the main track. Another corner to the right was turned and now she seemed to have come into a cul-de-sac.

" Rather a sell if I've chosen a blind alley at the very start," she thought to herself. " Howard would jubilate over that when he found out about it."

However, on reaching the wall of hedge which seemed to bar her way, she came upon a concealed turning to the right.

" And after walking all that distance, I'm still on the very outer rim of this Maze! However, this turn's going to take me in towards the centre."

Up to that point her progress had been simplicity itself; but now alternative paths began to open up every few yards. The tall hedges cut off everything but the sky; and soon she found that she had completely lost her bearings and was wandering at random. For a time she hurried forward, choosing always those turnings which seemed likely to bring her nearer to where she supposed the centre to lie; but at last the continual windings confused her so much that she could not even tell in which direction to walk in order to reach the inner reaches of the labyrinth. Long zig-zag corridors ended, time after time, in blank walls; and in traversing them forwards and back again she grew more and more doubtful of her bearings. When she thought of taking the sun as a reference-point, it was too late; for by that time she had lost all notion of her whereabouts.

" I'm sure I've seen that patch of withered leaves in the hedge more than once before," she said to herself, halting to examine it more carefully. " Yes, I'm certain I passed it a few minutes ago. I must be coming back in my tracks and just going over the same ground again and again."

With the dying out of her own footfalls, the silence of the Maze impressed itself on her; and she strained her ears to catch the sound of Howard as he moved

somewhere beyond these impenetrable green living walls.

" If I really get stuck in here," she reflected, " I can always blow the horn and bring someone who knows the place to lead me out."

She listened again, more intently. Then, suddenly there was no need to strain her ears.

First came a dull thud, which unconsciously she recognised as familiar, though she could not identify it at the moment. Then, almost in the same instant, a man's voice gave an inarticulate cry in which surprise, pain, and anger seemed to be mingled. A moment of silence, then a peculiar metallic grating reached her ears, followed by a second thud and a fresh cry of pain. Again came the peculiar metallic rasping, yet another of these familiar dull concussions, and then, lower this time, a last cry. Then there was silence once more.

Vera stood paralysed by what she had heard. In a flash of enlightenment she guessed that behind these inexplicable events some tragedy was in progress; something dreadful was happening quite close at hand, though screened from her by the high green walls which shut her in. She had never heard that note in a man's voice before. Utterly shocked by the unexpected revelation of violence, she stood for a moment with her knees trembling under her, while her pulse beat in her throat so heavily as to prevent her uttering a sound. Then, with an effort, she found her voice.

" Howard! Are you there? What's happened? Oh, what's happened? "

" I'm here."

She could not make out from which direction his shout came. The towering hedges seemed to deflect sound so that it was impossible to determine even approximately the position of a speaker.

"What were these cries, Howard? What's happened?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Somebody hurt. But I can't get to the place. Stay where you are, Vera. I'll see if I can find my way to you."

She listened intently in the silence that followed. Feet moved in the Maze; evidently Howard was doing his best to make in her direction. But beyond this she could detect no other noise, though she strained her ears to the utmost. She had expected to hear groans from the wounded man, but nothing broke the stillness until Howard called to her again. His voice seemed further off than before.

"Shout, will you, Vera? I've lost your direction."

She called again; and he replied. But as she listened, his footsteps seemed to recede and die away in the distance. Evidently he had found that the direct path was blocked and had had to retreat up some long alley to try a fresh start.

Then, with surprise at her previous forgetfulness, she bethought herself of the horn in her hand. That would bring assistance. She ought to have remembered it before. The shock had put it out of her mind. She was in the act of lifting it to her lips when again her nerves were shaken by a new cry from the inner recesses of the Maze.

"Murder!"

She recognised Howard's voice, tinged with horror. It was a loud-voiced ejaculation rather than a cry for assistance, she felt with relief. Howard hadn't run into a trap. Before she could pull herself together, he shouted again, this time with the full strength of his lungs:

"Murder! See that no one gets away from the Maze!"

Vera's nerves were almost attuned to the shock of the discovery. A picture of some swift and terrible act of violence crossed her mind. It must have been soon over, for she remembered that after the three cries she had heard no sound of any sort. Not twenty yards from her, it might be, a human being had been battered out of existence ; and but for these cries she would have known nothing whatever.

She raised her voice again.

" Howard! I'm frightened. What's happened ? "

" One of the Shandons has been killed. I blundered into the centre, trying to get to you. There's blood on his coat."

He broke off for a moment, evidently gathering his breath, then again he shouted :

" Murder! Help! Here in the Maze ! Murder! "

Vera held her breath, listening eagerly for some answering cry from the outer world which now seemed so peaceful and unattainable. Then in the silence, she heard the sound of a man running hard in the alleys of the Maze.

" Is that you, Howard ? " she called. " I hear someone running not far from where I am."

No sooner had she spoken than the noise of running footfalls ceased abruptly.

" Is that you, Howard ? " she called again, nervously.

There came a sound of rustling and tearing, then Howard's voice sounded across the labyrinth.

" I'm here. I'm trying to get to you. I tried climbing the hedge, but it's no good. What did you say ? I didn't catch it."

" There's somebody moving about in the Maze, Howard. I heard his footsteps."

Howard Torrance's voice replied with that baffling

indeterminateness in direction which the Maze seemed to impart.

"Can you hear me, Vera?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't utter another sound. Don't use the horn. Keep absolutely quiet and try to make your way out of the Maze. If anyone comes round the corner, yell your head off; but unless you see something, keep silent and step softly. There's someone in the Maze, and I don't want him to know where you are."

Vera leaned against the high hedge for a minute or two, trying to overcome the panic into which Howard's last words had plunged her. He had been careful not to put the thing to her nakedly; but she saw what lay behind his directions. The murderer was still in the Maze, and on his way out he might come upon her. If he did, she would be too dangerous a witness to leave alive. She need expect no mercy. And what hope of escape would she have? There, shut in among these towering walls, isolated from all help in the intricacies of the Maze, it would be an easy business to silence her finally.

She listened intently once more; but no sound came to her ears. The murderer seemed to have made his way into some remoter part of the Maze. Suddenly a clatter at her feet startled her into an agony of terror. It was the horn which she had allowed to slip from her hand in the intensity of her concentration upon the sounds about her. She stooped to pick it up again; then, thinking that it would merely hamper her, she let it lie where it had fallen.

But at once came the realisation that the sound of its clash upon the path must have betrayed her position, if the murderer were lurking at hand. She tried to

listen again ; but her heart was hammering and the pulsing of the blood in her ears drowned all external sounds. A lump seemed to gather in her throat and she felt as though she would choke. With a physical effort she fought down her difficulties.

" Hysteria ! " she told herself. " If I give way to it, I'll be putting myself straight into the brute's hands."

At last the rustle in her ears subsided and she was able to listen again. For a few instants she heard nothing. Then, quite close at hand, a dry twig cracked as though someone had set his foot on it. The murderer had not left the Maze.

She felt almost unable to stir ; but at last she forced herself into motion. Anything was better than staying in the place where the assassin might have heard her drop the horn. Softly she stole down the corridor. Once she had begun to move, all her impulse was to break into a run ; but she fought hard against it.

" If I begin to run, I'm done for," she thought. " I'd go on running. I wouldn't be able to stop at a corner ; and it's at the corners I must be careful, or I may run full tilt into him."

And then her mind, despite herself, conjured up vivid pictures of that meeting. She could see a vague figure rising to block her passage. With an almost physical shrinking she thought of it with a knife in its hand, the blade dripping with the blood of the earlier victim. It came over her how safe and peaceful the normal world was—and now, in pursuit of an aimless piece of amusement, she had come into the slaughter-house. The Minotaur was afoot in the labyrinth.

At the end of the alley she forced herself to halt and peeped cautiously round the corner. No one was in sight, so she ventured into a fresh avenue. Then came

a fork in the path, and she took the passage which seemed to offer the longest clear view ahead. Then another corner, and more precautions.

She was moving at random now, all her attention concentrated on avoiding the unseen assassin. Once she heard steps, someone walking on the opposite side of the hedge against which she was crouching. She held her breath, pictured that terrific figure which she had conjured up. He was stepping lightly like herself; and she almost feared that he would hear the beating of her heart, so near did he come. Then, when she thought she could bear it no longer, the footfalls receded softly into the distance.

"If that happens again, I'll shriek," she said to herself. "I simply couldn't go through it twice."

Two more corners rounded in safety, then in a straight alley a metallic object glittered at the foot of the hedge; and with a sinking heart she recognised it as the horn she had dropped.

"I'm back again at the same place. I'll never get out of this trap!"

Again she started, stepping as softly as possible; but to her strained ears the sound of her footsteps seemed to echo and re-echo along the green-walled corridors.

"What a fool I am! I ought to have taken off my shoes long ago. Then I could go as quick as I please, without making any noise."

She slipped off her shoes, and some of her confidence came back when she found how silently she could move.

"Now I must keep things in my head and get off the track I followed last time."

At one remembered turning, she took a fresh track and stole along it with every precaution. Again she heard the sound of steps; but they were further off

this time, and after halting for a few seconds she felt safe to go on her way once more.

"If I don't get out soon, I'll faint."

But she refused to give in. The thought of lying helpless in one of these tenantless corridors at the mercy of the hidden murderer, kept her on her feet.

"He'd think I was shamming, and he'd make sure of me."

The thought of that fate was just sufficient to nerve her to a desperate attempt to extricate herself from the labyrinth; but now her self-control gave way. She began to hurry along the interminable corridors, and before many seconds had passed she had broken into a run. Soon she was flying headlong down the alleys, slipping as she turned corners in full flight, dashing blindly into hedges which blocked her path in culs-de-sac, and striving only to outstrip the phantom murderer whom she felt at her heels. All thought of caution or direction had gone to the winds as she fled at haphazard down the tortuous paths.

Just as she felt that she could force herself no further, a wider gap than usual appeared in one of the green walls, and she flung herself into it in the hope that it might be one of the exits. But instead of the broad lawns of Whistlefield, she found before her a tiny open space shut in on all sides by greenery.

A few garden chairs were scattered about it, under the shade of the hedges. One of them had been overturned, and beside it lay, face upwards, the body of a man in grey flannel clothes. Vera had never seen a dead man before; but it needed no second glance to tell her that she had stumbled upon the victim of the tragedy.

"It's Roger Shandon!"

Almost subconsciously she noted that the body

showed no visible signs of violence. Roger seemed to have collapsed as he rose from his chair. She could see no pool of blood which might have pointed to the manner of his death.

Vera's nerves could withstand the strain no longer. The glimpse of the body proved to be the final touch which was more than she could bear. Almost incuriously she noticed the blue sky darken, turn violet, and then go black. She retreated a couple of paces, only to go down in a faint.

When she came to her senses again, it was to hear the sound of her own name in her ears ; but when she looked round she could see no one standing beside her.

" Vera! Are you there ? Why don't you answer ? "

Slowly she came back to normal consciousness and the realisation that it was Howard Torrance's voice continually calling.

" Vera! Answer if you can. What made you shriek like that ? "

So she must have uttered some involuntary cry before she fainted. She turned this over in her mind mechanically, hardly yet knowing where she was. Then all at once things came back to her and she rose to her knees. Roger Shandon's body was close to her, and she turned away her head so as not to see the dead man.

" Vera! "

She pulled herself together and answered with a faint call.

" Thank God you're all right," she heard Howard answer. " Where are you ? "

" I've come to the centre where the body is. Oh, Howard, what am I to do ? "

" The murderer's gone, I think," came the reply. " Can you walk at all ? Get away from that place at once. No wonder you shrieked when you came upon

it. If you'll call as often as you can manage it, I'll try to find my way to you."

With an effort she forced herself to her feet once more. Her strength seemed to be almost gone; but by sheer will-power she succeeded in making her way out of the tiny enclosure into the green corridor. Anything to get away from the sight of the body! It was too grim a reminder of the perils of the Maze.

For a time she leaned against the hedge just outside the centre, trying to gather up enough energy to launch once more into the labyrinth. One horror had at least been banished. Howard said the murderer had escaped from the Maze; she need have no fear of meeting that demon in her wanderings. It seemed hours since she and Howard had come so light-heartedly into that daedalian web. She had no idea how long she had been unconscious; and when she looked back, she seemed to have spent an eternity in the paths of the Maze before she had blundered into the centre.

At last she pulled herself together and called again to Howard.

"Howard! I'm going to try for the way out now."

"All right! Give me a call occasionally, so that I'll know you're all right. By the way, why don't you blow the horn?"

"I've lost it. I dropped it when I thought the murderer was chasing me."

"I wondered why you didn't use it, after I'd told you he'd cleared out. Shouting's no good. I've been yelling at the pitch of my voice for long enough, but there's no one within earshot, evidently."

Vera set off again. The rest had done her good. Now that the immediate terror of the murderer in the Maze was removed, she felt a different person. The horror through which she had passed began somehow to take

on a tinge of unreality. Had she actually seen Roger Shandon's body lying on the grass, or had it been a mere hallucination sweeping over her when she was on the verge of fainting? She had the feeling that the whole thing might be some waking nightmare which had passed.

And now, by that curious hazard which sometimes happens in mazes, she hit upon the shortest route to the exit. When she was least expecting it, a sudden turn in the corridor revealed one of the iron gates in the outermost hedge.

"Howard! I've come to the gate. What a relief!"

"Wait before you go," Howard's voice came to her over the intervening partitions. "Listen to me. Once you get outside, run to the house. If you meet anyone on the way, send him down to get me out of this tangle; I seem to have no luck. When you get to the house, find Stenness or one of the other men. Send the lot, if they're there. Tell them about the murder and tell them to get the police on the 'phone at once. And get yourself some brandy or something. You'll need it, poor thing!"

Vera made a careful note of his orders.

"I'll see to that. I'm going now, Howard. Good-bye."

She ran out of the iron gate and saw with immense relief the broad prospect of the lawns before her. Out at last! Then she hurried off in the direction of the house.

Chapter III

As she took short cuts across the lawns, Vera kept a sharp look-out ; but no one was in sight. She had expected this ; for if anyone had been in the vicinity of the Maze they would assuredly have been attracted by Howard's shouts for assistance. She wasted no time in seeking in the gardens for help, but hurried at her best speed to the house, where she could at least get in touch with the police by means of the telephone.

When, breathless with the last spurt she had made, she entered the hall, she found it empty. The whole place seemed deserted and silent. For a moment she thought of searching from room to room ; but she changed her mind almost immediately.

" I must keep my head," she impressed on herself. " I know nothing about the servants' quarters and I'd lose time if I begin hunting. That last sprint took it out of me ; and I'm not fit to rush about. Someone else must do that instead."

She passed into the nearest room and rang the bell, keeping her finger pressed down on the button.

" That ought to bring them quick enough."

In a few moments she heard steps, and one of the maids appeared. The sight of her amazed face reminded Vera of the picture she herself must present : dishevelled, breathless, and without shoes on her feet.

" Are there any men in the house, Shelton ? Quick, don't waste time."

The maid stared at the haggard girl before her as

though in this strange figure she could hardly recognise the cool and graceful Miss Forrest of normal life.

"What's come to you, miss?" she asked, without replying to the question.

"Mr. Shandon's been murdered. Is Mr. Stenness here, or Mr. Hawkhurst? Or anyone else? Go and find them immediately, if they're anywhere about."

Then, as the girl still seemed dazed by the news:

"Can't you do as I tell you? Hurry! There's no time to lose."

A picture rose in her mind of the murderer returning to the Maze and coming upon the defenceless Howard. Unlikely, of course, but after this afternoon she would be slow to call anything unlikely. The maid's slowness irritated her overwrought nerves.

"*Will* you go?"

But by this time the idea of murder had penetrated the dull mind of Shelton and produced a reaction which Vera had not foreseen.

"Mr. Shannon murdered, and the man creeping about the place! I'd never dare to go out of this room, miss. He might be in the hall now, waiting for me. Oh, oh!"

Her voice rose in hysteria. Vera looked at her wearily.

"Want to scream, Shelton? Perhaps it's the easiest way after all. I'd have done it myself if I'd had any breath left. Come along with me."

And taking the hysterical girl with her, she made her way to the front door.

"Now scream as loud as you like."

Shelton had not waited for the suggestion. Already she was shrieking at the top of her voice.

"Anybody in the house or near it ought to hear that," Vera said to herself contentedly, as Shelton continued

to screech. " Now, that'll do. Will you be quiet ? I want to listen if anyone has heard you."

It proved more difficult to stop the outcry than it had been to start it. The screams passed into a serious attack of hysteria. But they had served their purpose. From the back of the house appeared two panic-stricken maids, while almost simultaneously Stenness, the secretary, hurried down the main staircase.

" Thank goodness, a man at last! " Vera said, in relief.

Handing over the hysterical Shelton to the care of the other maids, she led Stenness into the nearest room and gave him the state of affairs in the fewest words. He listened intently without interrupting her with a single question. From his unruffled manner, one might have supposed that murders were all in the day's work. And his calmness had the effect of soothing Vera's nerves, which had been jarred afresh by the maid's outbreak. When she had completed her narrative he nodded in comprehension and left the room for a few moments. On his return he had a tumbler in his hand.

" Drink this, Miss Forrest. You'll need something to pull you together. I've sent one of the maids to ring the bell in the stable-yard. That'll bring up a couple of gardeners fairly soon. They'll think it's a fire, you know."

He persuaded her to sit down, then went to the bell and rang it. It was some time before any answer was made ; and finally Shelton and another maid appeared together, evidently clinging to each other for company.

" Go up and get fresh shoes and stockings for Miss Forrest. Can't you see she needs them ? "

When the two girls had gone he turned to Vera.

" Nothing like making them do something, otherwise we'd have the whole lot down with their nerves."

He glanced at his wrist-watch, and seemed to be making some rather intricate mental calculation which dissatisfied him.

" You'll be safe enough here, Miss Forrest. I must get off to telephone for the police and put them on the alert. Then I'll go down and get Mr. Torrance out of the Maze. You want nothing else ? "

Vera made a negative gesture, and he hurried out of the room. The telephone occupied him for only a very short time ; and in a few minutes Vera, through the window, saw him setting off in the direction of the Maze, accompanied by one of the gardeners. Both, she noticed, were armed with shot-guns. She began to admire the efficiency of Stenness. Hitherto she had looked upon him as the sort of man whose life was spent in pure routine ; and it was a mild surprise to find how competently he had risen to this emergency. He had wasted neither words nor time ; everything essential had been done without hesitation. He had even noticed her feet and had thought of sending for shoes and stockings for her.

When the maids brought her fresh outfit she took the opportunity of questioning them.

" Was Mr. Stenness the only man in the house when I came back ? "

" Yes, miss. Miss Sylvia took her uncle away with her in the car—Mr. Ernest, I mean. And Mr. Neville went out of the house before poor Mr. Shandon did. And Mr. Hawkhurst, he went out quite early on. I saw him passing the window with his air-gun in his hand."

Vera had ceased to listen. The word " air-gun " had linked up in her mind with the memory of the dull concussions which she had heard in the Maze. That was the noise she had heard—the dull report of an air-rifle! And the metallic rasping was the grating of the spring

as the murderer recharged his weapon. But the recognition of the noises left her even more perplexed.

"Of course, one can kill a rabbit with an air-gun; but one couldn't kill a man with it even at close range. And yet I'm certain it was an air-gun that I heard. I'd have recognised it at once if it hadn't been that I was so shaken up by the way things happened."

She puzzled over the problem for a time without success; and at last dismissed it from her mind and began to make arrangements which she thought might be necessary when the men returned to the house.

Meanwhile Stenness, accompanied by the gardener, had made his way to the Maze. As they came in sight of it, they saw the figure of Howard Torrance emerge from one of the entrances and gaze in their direction. Recognising the secretary, he came rapidly towards them.

"Seen Miss Forrest, Stenness?" he demanded as soon as he reached speaking distance. "Is she all right?"

"She fetched us," Stenness explained. "She's completely done in, of course. That's natural. But I don't think she'll come to any harm. I left two maids with her, just in case; though it looked more as if the maids would collapse before she did."

Howard nodded without replying, and Stenness continued:

"We'd better get into the Maze now and stand guard over the body till the police turn up. They'll be here shortly."

Howard hesitated a moment.

"Sure you know how to get about in that Maze, Stenness? You won't get tangled up? Got bogged in it myself once already. No desire to have another dose, you know."

"There's no danger of that. Both Skene and I know every inch of it. He cuts the hedges."

This seemed to allay Howard's doubts, and he led the way to the entrance. But here Stenness displaced him.

"I'll take the lead, I think. I know the path. Besides, one never can tell. Somebody may be in there yet."

He tapped his shot-gun in explanation of his full meaning, and Howard acquiesced.

"Right! In you go!"

They entered the labyrinth, Stenness in advance with his gun ready, Howard and the armed gardener bringing up the rear. For a minute or two they walked in silence along the intricate corridors, Stenness taking turning after turning without the slightest hesitation.

"I wish I had had the thing by heart as he seems to have," Howard reflected, as he noted the easy way in which the secretary seemed to hold to his route. "It would have been a different business, then."

All at once, Stenness halted abruptly and made a gesture of caution to his companions. His quick ears had caught something which they had missed.

"There's somebody moving in the next corridor," he whispered. "Wait here. I'll fix him."

With his gun ready he stepped suddenly round the corner of the alley and immediately they heard his curt command:

"Hands up!"

When they in turn had rounded the corner they found the secretary covering with his shot-gun an unattractive stranger. The reddish hair, the ugly mouth, made worse by a ragged and untidy moustache, the peculiar vulpine expression, and the flashy clothes, all combined to produce a bad impression even at the

first glance. As he stood, hands in air, in front of Stenness's gun, his eyes wandered from one face to to another with something of the expression of a rat at bay.

" Run over this fellow, Torrance," said the secretary. " He may be armed."

Howard searched the man methodically and extracted from one pocket a heavy automatic pistol. Beyond that, the man had no other weapon.

" See if it's been fired," suggested Stenness.

" Fully loaded, and hasn't been fired," Howard reported.

" Good ! Now, my man, how do you come to be here ? "

" I was rowing on the river ; and as I was coming near here, I heard someone yelling blue murder, so I came up. What would you have done, eh ? Kept away, I expect. Then I came inside this monkey-puzzle to give a hand. And I've stuck here ever since. That satisfy you ? "

" Nothing to do with me. The police will be here shortly. You can explain to them. Meanwhile, you'll come along with us. Skene, take charge of this fellow. If he tries to run, empty your gun into his legs. Now come along."

Again taking the van, Stenness continued on his way, and in a very short time he brought them to one of the centres of the Maze.

Howard Torrance followed him into the tiny precinct ; but his first glance led him to protest.

" This isn't the place where I found the body. It must be in the other centre."

Stenness's shoulders blocked the view for a moment ; but almost at once he stepped aside.

"There's a body here, at any rate," he said, going forward as he spoke. "It's Roger Shandon."

"Roger!" exclaimed Howard in blank surprise. "It was Neville Shandon's body that I found."

"Then they've both been murdered," Stenness pointed out coldly. "That's obvious."

"But what I heard sounded like a single attack," protested Howard.

Stenness shrugged his shoulders.

"That's for the police to explain," he said. "No use barking yourself when you keep a dog."

He went forward and covered the face of the body with his handkerchief.

"It's Roger, obviously; and stone dead. Nothing more to do here. Let's try the other centre next. Skene, you needn't come. Keep your eye on this fellow till we come back."

He led Howard through the alleys once more and in a short time they entered the second centre of the Maze.

"This is Neville Shandon, true enough," the secretary reported. The identification had taken longer, since the body lay on its face. "Mustn't disturb anything, Torrance. The police may be able to make something out of it if we leave things alone."

He rose from his knees and mechanically dusted his trousers as he spoke. Howard was struck by the extraordinary matter-of-fact way in which Stenness had treated the whole affair. One might have expected some sign of emotion, surprise at the very least; but Stenness had gone through the whole business without showing the slightest disturbance. But as Howard reflected on the matter, he was forced to admit that, after all, it was much what one might have anticipated.

Stenness, he remembered, had always been chary of showing any emotion whatever. Probably this was just a case of carrying the normal to an extreme where it became noticeable. Stenness, doubtless, took a pride in that mask of coolness.

The secretary stooped for a moment over Neville Shandon's body and examined the left hand which lay clenched on the grass.

" There's a piece of paper there. It looks as if it had been wrenched out of his hand and a scrap left in his grip. Let's see what one can make of it without touching it."

He knelt down and scrutinised the fragment painfully.

" Some of his notes on the Hackleton case, perhaps. I can read ' Hackl . . .' on it plain enough."

Howard did not trouble to look at the paper at close range.

" What do you make of it ? " he demanded, as the secretary rose to his feet again.

" I ? Nothing much. It might be someone trying to put Neville Shandon out of business while the Hackleton case is on. That might account for the notes being taken. Or it might be someone with a grudge against Roger. He had some enemies. A threatening letter came from a man only the other day."

Howard digested these suggestions for a few moments without speaking ; then he offered an objection.

" But d'you think it's likely that two murderers would choose an identical moment for their attacks. Two simultaneous crimes is a bit of a record, it seems to me."

" Think so ? " the secretary responded, carelessly. " It's happened this time, for all that."

Howard had to admit the truth of this.

Stenness looked at his watch.

"I must be getting off to the outside of the Maze. The police will be here very soon, and they'll need a guide. I'll take you back to Skene, if you like."

Howard nodded assent and once more Stenness led the way through a tangle of alleys.

"Here's Helen's Bower," he said, nodding towards its entrance. "You can sit down there till I bring the police."

Howard watched his figure disappear round a corner of the corridor and then turned his steps to the entrance of the little enclosure where Roger Shandon's body lay. As he entered it, he was surprised to see Skene on his knees at the foot of the hedge, evidently collecting some small objects.

"What are you after, Skene?" he demanded. "I thought you were supposed to be watching this fellow."

Skene rose to his feet, rather sulky at being reproved.

"He ain't escaped yet. I'm 'tween him and the door."

Howard acknowledged the truth of both statements.

"What are you grubbing in the hedge for?" he continued, after he had made his apology.

Skene extended an earthy palm on which rested some small objects.

"'Tis the lid of a tin box—one o' these round 'uns. And here's some darts that Mr. Hawkhurst uses for that air-gun o' his when he's shootin' at a target. Let's see . . . one . . . two . . . three . . ."

He laboriously counted up to seven and held out his hand for confirmation.

"Put 'em in the box-lid, Skene, and lay 'em down somewhere safe. You found them where I saw you searching?"

"Just in there, among the roots o' the hedge. Like

enough the other bit o' the box'll be outside in the alley. I'll have a look."

"Don't bother, Skene. We mustn't disturb anything till the police get here, you know. If there's anything more, they'll prefer to hunt for it themselves. What you've got to remember is that you found these seven things—seven, remember— at that point in the hedge. Better mark it with a stick or something, so that you'll know the exact spot again."

The sight of the darts had put a thought into his mind. He went over to Roger Shandon's body and examined it carefully. But so far as the exposed portions were concerned, he found no trace of the thing for which he was searching; and he did not care to take the responsibility of altering the posture of the corpse.

As he rose to his feet once more he heard the note of a motor horn in the distance.

"The police, I expect," he said to Skene. "They'll be here in a minute or two. Mr. Stenness has gone to lead them in through the Maze."

Chapter IV

As Stenness picked his way through the convolutions of the Maze, his face showed that his mind was at work on some puzzling problem.

"Things haven't worked out quite according to plan," he commented to himself as he walked along. "I've missed that train, now; and I may as well see the business through on the spot. If only I'd aimed for the earlier train, I might have pulled it off."

His frown of annoyance faded out suddenly, as a new idea crossed his mind.

"Perhaps it's all for the best after all. I never thought of that point. Nobody can swear to it: and it leaves me absolutely on velvet—safer than ever."

His face cleared completely as he considered the fresh situation which had presented itself.

"This is worth a dozen of the other notion. All I have to do now is to sit tight and keep a straight face."

The secretary soon reached the outskirts of the Maze. Then, taking up a position which commanded the road to the East Gate, he sat down on the grass and awaited the arrival of the police.

Before long, a motor-horn sounded, and he rose to his feet as a big car came tearing up the narrow private road. In the front seats were two civilians, whilst the back held three uniformed policeman. Long before the motor reached him, Stenness had recognised the man at the wheel as the owner of a neighbouring estate.

"That's Wendover of Talgarth Grange. I wonder what he's doing here."

Going out into the roadway, the secretary signalled them to stop and the long car drew up as it came level with him. Wendover jumped down from the driving seat and came forward while the others were getting out of the motor.

"Sad business, this, Stenness! Terrible affair! Is poor Shandon really dead? Why, I saw him yesterday, poor chap."

Stenness was watching the remainder of the party, and he noticed that there had been a dog in the car. It was now fawning on the second civilian, evidently delighted to get out of its cramped quarters in the motor. Stenness turned back to his interlocutor.

"It's worse than we supposed when I telephoned. Two of the Shandons have been murdered in the Maze, here."

He nodded in the direction of the high green hedges.

Wendover was completely taken aback.

"Two of them! My godfathers! Here, Clinton!" he called to the second civilian. "Terrible business, this. There's been a second murder."

Then, as the man with the dog came up to them, Wendover turned back to the secretary.

"This is the Chief Constable, Sir Clinton Driffield. Clinton, this is Mr. Stenness, secretary to Roger Shandon."

Stenness examined the Chief Constable with what seemed more than common interest. Sir Clinton was a slight man who looked about thirty-five. His sun-tanned face, the firm mouth under the close-clipped moustache, the beautifully-kept teeth and hands, might have attracted a second glance in a crowd; but to counter this there was deliberate ordinariness about his appearance. Had a stranger, meeting him casually, been asked later on to describe him, it would have been

difficult; for Sir Clinton designedly refrained from anything characteristic in his dress. Only his eyes failed to fit in with the rest of his conventional appearance; and even then he had disciplined as far as possible. Normally, they had a bored expression; but at times the mask slipped aside and betrayed the activity of the brain behind them. When fixed on a man they gave a curious impression as though they saw, not the physical exterior of the subject, but instead the real personality concealed below the facial lineaments.

"A second case? H'm! You seem to be starting a wholesale trade at Whistlefield, Mr. Stenness."

Stenness was not impressed by the cheerfulness of the tone. He had felt those keen eyes sweep over him; and though it had been anything but a stare, he had the sensation of being appraised and catalogued for future reference. He disliked the turn of the Chief Constable's phrase, too. Whether intentionally or not, it seemed to verge on the macabre.

"What about starting, eh?" Wendover demanded. "Get on the track while the scent's hot, Clinton? Every minute may count, you know."

Sir Clinton assented with a nod and snapped his fingers to call his dog to heel.

"Suppose you show us the bodies, Mr. Stenness."

Without replying, Stenness led the way into the Maze, followed closely by the whole party. The Chief Constable scanned the corridors as he passed along, but made no comment. Wendover evidently felt that some explanation of his presence was due, for as they traversed the alleys he overtook the secretary.

"Curious coincidence, this, Stenness. Sir Clinton's a friend of mine, and he happened to be staying with me just now for a few days. Most fortunate affair!

When you 'phoned down to the police station, they rang him up at once at the Grange. I got out the car, of course ; and we picked up the constables at the station as we passed. Couldn't have been better planned, could it ? "

Then, passing to a new line of thought, he added :

" Terrible affair for the family! Dreadful business! It'll be a frightful shock for Miss Hawkhurst, won't it ? "

Before Stenness could reply, they came to the entrance of one of the centres of the Maze. The secretary turned to the Chief Constable.

" This is what they call the Pool of Narcissus, Sir Clinton. We found Neville Shandon's body here. Roger Shandon's body is lying in the other centre of the Maze."

Sir Clinton nodded without replying, took off his hat, and entered the enclosure. The body lay just as Stenness had seen it last ; and the Chief Constable made no attempt to touch it, though he subjected it to a most minute inspection.

" I forgot to tell you," whispered Wendover. " We 'phoned for a doctor to come and examine the body. He'll be here very soon."

The Chief Constable rose lightly to his feet.

" Two or three small wounds, apparently ; but not much bleeding. Once the doctor's overhauled him, we can make a fuller examination. In the meantime, things had better be left as they are. Will you take us to the other body, now, Mr. Stenness ? "

Leaving one of the constables on guard over the corpse, the party made its way, under Stenness's guidance, to the second centre of the Maze. On the road, Wendover gave Stenness some further information.

" Most fortunate that Driffield was on the spot,

wasn't it? He'll get to the bottom of things quick enough; trust him for that. He used to be out in South Africa; a big post in the police there. Then he came home for family reasons and dropped into the Chief Constableship here. Much too good a man for the place, you know; but it gives him enough to keep him busy. By the way, he knew something about Roger Shandon out at the Cape."

"I believe Shandon made part of his money there," Stenness volunteered in confirmation.

As they entered Helen's Bower, Stennes saw a momentary upward twitch of Sir Clinton's eyebrows as his glance lighted on the stranger whom they had encountered in the Maze.

"Ah! Mr. Timothy Costock?"

The captive showed much more surprise.

"Why, it's Driffield, so it is! Well, if that isn't the damnedest luck. There's no keepin' out o' the way o' you busies, it seems. But you're on the wrong track this shot. I never laid a finger on this fellow."

He indicated Roger Shandon's body as he spoke.

"Nobody's accused you of laying a finger on him. Or of anything else—yet," said Sir Clinton, curtly. "I'll listen to your story later on. Don't waste time elaborating it. You'll find the plain truth's best. This is more serious than illicit diamond buying."

He paused for an instant, then continued:

"Now I think of it, you were Shandon's cat's paw that time I got my hands on you at Kimberley."

Then, as Costock opened his mouth in protest, Sir Clinton cut him short abruptly:

"I'd keep my mouth shut, if I were you. Nobody's asking you to incriminate yourself."

The hint was sufficient for the ex-I.D.B. expert. His protest died on his lips. Sir Clinton paid no further

attention to him, but set about a careful examination of the body of Roger Shandon. As he rose to his feet again, Stenness came forward.

" This is Mr. Howard Torrance, Sir Clinton, a guest at the house. He was in the Maze at the moment when the murder was done. Torrance, this is the Chief Constable."

He turned to the gardener.

" This is Skene, Sir Clinton, one of the gardeners on the estate. He came with me here as soon as we learned what had happened."

Sir Clinton nodded a brief appreciation of Stenness's explanations. The secretary had wasted no words over the business, and yet had given all the information necessary at the moment.

Howard Torrance, thus brought to the front, seized the opportunity offered to him.

" Some darts here. Skene found them at the foot of the hedge. Lid of a tin box was lying beside them as well."

Sir Clinton picked up the lid and inspected the tiny missiles which had been collected.

" Air-gun darts, evidently," he commented.

Characteristically enough, he did not call attention to the equally obvious fact that they were not ordinary air-gun darts. The woollen feathering, instead of showing the usual gaudy colours, was stained brown ; and a rusty powder seemed to cling to the fibre. A tiny patch of the same pigment showed on the metal jackets of the darts, near the points. Sir Clinton put the collection down again carefully.

" Now, Skene," he said, turning to the gardener, " that was a good piece of work of yours. Can you show me exactly where you found these things ? "

Obviously delighted with the Chief Constable's com-

pliment, Skene was only too ready to indicate the precise position where he had picked up the darts and the box-lid.

" You got the lot, I suppose ? At least all you could see from here ? "

Howard Torrance, watching the Chief Constable, was surprised to see that his eyes, instead of searching the ground, seemed to be ranging over the surface of the hedge ; and when Skene answered the question, Sir Clinton's thoughts appeared to be elsewhere. He turned to Stenness.

" Can you take us to the other side of this hedge at that point ? "

Stenness led the way once more into the Maze ; and Sir Clinton found that quite a considerable distance had to be traversed before they reached the required position.

" This is the place? " he inquired, as Stenness came to a halt. " That's clear enough," he added, as he stooped to pick something from the side of the path. When he held it out, they recognised it as the bottom of the tin box of which the lid had already been found. Sir Clinton turned to the constables.

" Hunt about and see if you can find any more of these darts. You mustn't miss a single one, remember. And handle them carefully. They're deadly things, evidently."

Then, as Stenness and Howard Torrance showed signs of joining in the search, the Chief Constable stopped them with a gesture.

" I think we'll leave the officials to do the work," he said with a certain finality in his tone.

Again he appeared to be more interested in the hedge itself than in the roots where more darts might be hidden ; and after a moment or two he went forward

and seemed to peer closely into the greenery at one particular point. When he stepped back again, Howard moved forward in curiosity; and Sir Clinton made way for him. As he brought his eye to the position in which he had seen the Chief Constable's, he looked into a concealed loop-hole. The twigs had been trimmed away to form a tunnel, the ends of which had been left covered with a thin screen of leafage; and a glance through the aperture showed that it bore directly on the chair in which Roger Shandon had been killed.

But already Sir Clinton seemed to have lost interest in the matter. He whistled; and the dog which had been left behind in Helen's Bower came running to him.

"Have a sniff," he invited the animal, holding out to it the part of the tin box which he still held in his hand. "Now see what you can make of it."

He turned to his companions.

"It's a poor chance. Don't blame the animal if it fails."

Part of Sir Clinton's character was revealed in the whimsical apology. He was always noted for his loyalty to his subordinates and his readiness to recognise the impossibility of some tasks. It was the complement to his sternness when he had to deal with inefficiency.

"That's right! Good dog! He's on to something!" Wendover announced unnecessarily.

The beast had apparently picked up some scent or other, for it hurried off along the alleys, followed by Sir Clinton and the other three men. The constables were left to their search among the hedge roots.

It was anything but a simple route along which the dog led them; for it seemed to wind backwards and forwards almost at haphazard.

" Nobody who knew the Maze would have tried to get out this way," Stenness commented at last.

His remark was hardly needed ; for already the dog had more than once halted in the middle of an open alley and then retraced its course for no obvious reason. It was Howard Torrance who saw the meaning of these intricate tracings before the remainder of the party.

" Of course! " he explained. " The murderer didn't go straight out of the Maze immediately. Probably he found Miss Forrest and myself blocking the road again and again as we wandered about. And he'd got to avoid being seen by us. That's why he had to turn and wind about like this."

At last the dog led them to the edge of the Maze, passed out through the iron gate, and went on eagerly across the grass. The track had brought them to the river side of the labyrinth, where a tiny clump of trees had been planted ; and into this the dog plunged. A few paces further on it halted for a moment at the foot of a tree.

" Perhaps he climbed that," Wendover suggested, going up and examining the trunk. " Look! There's a faint mark here on the trunk, just about the height that a man could reach with his foot."

Sir Clinton examined the mark, which was very slight indeed. Then he looked at the dog, which had set off in a fresh direction.

" I suppose he must have got tired of the view and come down again, in that case. One usually does come down. One rarely climbs higher than the top."

He set off after the dog, which was now making for the road running past the Maze. But here it seemed to go astray. It snuffed about with the utmost eagerness, casting wider and wider in its attempt to recapture the

scent ; but soon it was clear that it had lost the track. Sir Clinton took it back to the tree once more and allowed it to start afresh. This time he followed closely on its track ; and his companions noticed that he had pulled some paper from his pocket and was scattering tiny fragments on the grass to mark the animal's route. But this attempt also ended in failure. Beyond the road, the trail seemed to be lost.

" We may as well give it up," Sir Clinton admitted. " One can't expect infallibility from a dumb animal."

As he called the beast off, a motor-horn sounded, and they saw a car coming from the direction of the house.

" That's our doctor, I expect," Sir Clinton surmised ; and Stenness confirmed the guess.

In a few minutes they had all made their way to Helen's Bower, under Stenness's guidance. Once there, the doctor proposed to begin his examination of the bodies ; but the Chief Constable intervened.

" Just a moment, doctor. Before you shift anything, I want to take one or two photographs. Nothing like a permanent record for future reference."

He took a case which one of the constables had carried and produced from it one of the largest-sized Kodaks. Then, by the marks of the feet in the grass, he replaced the overturned chair in its proper position ; and finally he marked the position of the loophole in the hedge by means of a scrap of paper.

" I want something to give the scale," he explained, at the last moment. " Would you mind sitting in the chair, Mr. Stenness ? And perhaps you'd stand by the loophole, Mr. Torrance."

He looked round the enclosure for an instant.

" And here, Costock, you get over into that corner. It'll give some notion of the distance."

When they had placed themselves, he took several photographs from various positions.

" Now, doctor, you can get to work if you like."

The doctor made only a cursory examination.

" I think it would be best to shift the body up to the house. The light's not very good here, now the sun's going down. Besides, I'll need to do more than I can do in this place."

" There's a second body waiting for you," Sir Clinton explained. " We've the whole thing to do over again."

The doctor, a taciturn man, shrugged his shoulders without making any audible comment ; and they made their way, guided by Stenness, to the Pool of Narcissus. Sir Clinton gave some directions to his constables and despatched the gardener to the house to bring down something on which the bodies could be carried. Then the photographic procedure was repeated ; and the doctor made his examination of Neville Shandon's corpse.

" There must be a loophole in this hedge as well," the Chief Constable mused aloud, " but it's not worth while hunting for it at present. It won't run away."

The constables reported the discovery of several fresh darts which had fallen either into the hedge itself or among the roots on the outer side. Skene, it appeared, had secured all those on the inner border. Sir Clinton counted the tiny projectiles carefully, dropped them into the tin box, and put the box in his pocket.

" That's eleven altogether. Go back and hunt for anything more. I must have every one of these darts if you have to finish the search by lamplight. Make absolutely certain that you miss nothing."

Skene arrived shortly afterwards with two other gardeners carrying hurdles ; and the two bodies were transported to the cars and so conveyed to the house.

Two more constables had arrived, and these were put under the guidance of Skene and given instructions to search the whole of the Maze for anything suspicious.

When the bodies had been taken up to a bedroom, Sir Clinton and the doctor carried out a minute examination. Each victim had been struck by three darts. In the case of Neville Shandon, the wounds suggested that the shots had been fired from the front and rather to one side. Roger's body, on the other hand, contained one dart imbedded in the back of the neck, and two in the upper part of the rear surface between the spine and the shoulder on the left side. Beyond the punctures made by the darts, neither victim showed a trace of either wound or struggle.

" Poison, obviously," Sir Clinton concluded.

The doctor agreed, adding in confirmation :

" None of these darts came near a vital spot. Alone, they'd never have killed a man."

" Can you guess what poison was used ? "

The doctor shook his head.

" Not my line. Some of these Indian arrow-poisons, perhaps. Ardsley could tell you something about them, most likely."

" Who's Ardsley ? Could one get hold of him quickly ? "

" He lives less than a mile from here. He's a medical ; but he doesn't practise. Curiously enough, toxicology is his line, more or less. He's a bit of a physiologist, too. I know he has a vivisection license. You might do worse than look him up. He might be able to give you a hint."

Sir Clinton looked thoughtful for a moment.

" What worries me is that a man can't be in two places at once. I'm going to take over this case myself,

and there's enough work on hand in the next hour to keep two men busy. It's time I'm up against at present."

The doctor, reflecting on the conflicting calls of a country practice, was inclined to think that Sir Clinton seemed to make a fuss about very little.

Chapter V

WHEN the doctor had completed his work and left the room, Sir Clinton pulled the tin box of darts from his pocket and went over to the window to examine it. The box itself suggested nothing in the way of a clue; it was of a common pattern. He turned from it to the darts themselves.

"That brown stuff on the feathering is evidently the poison, whatever it may be," he reflected. "It doesn't seem much of a dose to kill a man, especially if one assumes that it was a quick death. Even ordinary snake poison would hardly do the trick quick enough. And yet these fellows didn't seem to have moved much after they were hit, to judge by the look of the ground."

He took a Coddington lens from his pocket and scanned one of the darts carefully; then with a pin he probed a dark spot near the point of the projectile.

"So that's it? He's drilled a hole clean through the metal and filled up the hollow with poison. That would mean a fair quantity driven well home under the skin; and the blood would soon wash the stuff out of the cavity, since both ends are open. An ingenious devil, evidently."

He thoughtfully replaced the dart in the box; but before putting the tin back into his pocket he counted the missiles carefully.

"Eleven of them here; and six more in the two bodies."

He glanced at the open box again, trying to estimate its probable capacity.

"That must have been the lot."

The doctor had extracted the six fatal darts from the bodies and left them lying on a piece of lint on the dressing-table. Sir Clinton rolled them up cautiously; took his cigarette-case from his pocket; emptied out the contents; and inserted the packet of darts instead.

"I'm not likely to get pricked now, short of a big smash."

After putting both the cigarette-case and the tin box containing the darts into his pockets, he left the room and went downstairs. The windows throughout the house had been darkened; but Sir Clinton found his way in the semi-obscurity to Roger Shandon's study; and here he came upon Wendover, the two guests, and the secretary. Costock had been left in the hall in charge of a constable.

"Now," Sir Clinton said, as he sat down, "I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you for information. What I want first of all are the plain facts—nothing else. We'll come to suspicions afterwards. Which of you saw the Shandons alive last?"

"I believe I did," the secretary volunteered. "At about ten minutes past three this afternoon, Roger Shandon sent one of the maids for me, and I came straight to this room. He gave me some directions about letters. While he was doing this, Neville Shandon looked into the room. He had some papers in his hand. Seeing us engaged, he went away again. That would be about twenty-five past three, approximately. Almost immediately after that, Roger Shandon dismissed me; and I noticed him from the window, going towards the Maze. That was the last I saw of either of them, till I found their bodies in the Maze."

Sir Clinton went to the writing-table and made a note.

"You saw Neville Shandon last at about 3.25 p.m., and Roger at, say, 3.30 p.m.?"

"As near as I can gauge the times," Stenness confirmed.

Sir Clinton considered for a moment.

"I judge that it would take a man walking at an ordinary pace at least ten minutes—say eleven or twelve—to reach the Maze from the house. That means that Neville Shandon could have reached the Maze at 3.37; and Roger might have got there at 3.42. But possibly they were some minutes later than that; and quite possibly, also, they may have arrived in a different order, since no one seems to have seen them actually enter the Maze, so far as we have gone with the story."

The secretary indicated assent to this with a nod. Sir Clinton turned next to Torrance.

"I take it that you can carry our information further?"

Howard Torrance gave his version of the events up to the moment when he discovered the body of Neville Shandon in the enclosure by the Pool of Narcissus.

"Exact times are what we want," Sir Clinton reminded him when he had completed his narrative.

"Can't give you anything except two. I happened to look at my watch while Miss Forrest and I were sitting under the trees. It was sometime after three, then—I think it was twenty past three, but I couldn't swear to it. I took the time when I found Neville Shandon's body. It was 3.52. I could swear to that, for I particularly noted it, knowing it might be wanted."

Sir Clinton jotted down these figures also.

"Now, Miss Forrest, I know you've had a very trying time. I don't want to worry you unnecessarily, but it's essential to get your evidence as to what hap-

pened in the Maze. Take your time, and don't let yourself get excited. It's all over now."

Vera gave him her account, to which he listened without putting any questions until she had finished.

" Thanks very much, Miss Forrest. There's just one point. You heard steps in the Maze several times : a man running at one period and going on tiptoe at other times. You're sure of that ? "

" Quite sure. I'm not likely to forget it soon."

" I can quite understand that," said Sir Clinton, soothingly, for the girl was evidently affected by the mere remembrance of what she had gone through. " I'm merely asking these questions to make sure of my ground, you know. You couldn't have mistaken Mr. Torrance's footsteps for those of the murderer by any chance ? "

At this question, the secretary's face showed a gleam of enlightenment, as though he had detected a point which he had previously missed. He glanced at Howard Torrance for an instant as though trying to read his face ; then he looked again at the girl.

" I hadn't thought of that," Vera admitted frankly. " But I don't think I did."

" You heard Mr. Torrance's voice from time to time," Sir Clinton continued. " I'm trying to suggest that he may have called from a distance at the same time as you heard the steps near at hand. You see, it's essential to find out exactly when the murderer left the Maze if possible ; and we can only do that by checking his movements in the Maze."

Vera thought for a moment or two before she replied.

" I can't recall it. You know, Sir Clinton, I was nearly out of mind with panic. I didn't take note of things. I couldn't. And there's another thing—I did notice that I couldn't make out the directions from

which sounds came. The Maze seemed to shift them about anyhow. I really couldn't tell where Mr. Torrance was at any time when he shouted to me."

Sir Clinton nodded.

"I'd rather have you say that than try to strain your memory to make things fit. Now, just to make sure: You really did hear the murderer's steps—or at any rate some steps—quite close to you—on the other side of the hedge, once? And that was before you found Roger Shandon's body?"

Vera nodded assent to both questions. To her relief, Sir Clinton turned to Stenness.

"Did you note the time when Miss Forrest got back to the house again?"

"I looked at my watch when she was telling me her story. It was then 4.42. I reached the Maze myself at 5.16."

"You were in your own room upstairs when Miss Forrest came to the house?"

"Yes. My room is at the back, so I could not have seen her coming in, even if I'd been looking out of my window. My first warning of the whole affair was when the maid began to scream."

Sir Clinton added a jotting to his notes; then he turned to the company with a relaxation of his official air.

"These are the facts, then—the things you could swear to in the witness-box. I take it that you've told me all that's relevant. But, candidly, these facts don't take us far. The police don't profess to know the details of people's private lives; but when an affair of this sort crops up we have to poke our noses in, whether we like it or not. Hitherto we've kept to the facts; but now I'd like, if possible, to get your personal views of the meaning of the facts. You probably have intimate

knowledge of affairs at Whistlefield which I haven't got. Does it suggest anything to you in connection with this case ? "

He glanced from face to face without putting a direct question to any of his hearers. Vera Forrest was the first to speak.

" I know almost as little as you do yourself, Sir Clinton. I'm a friend of Sylvia, of course ; but I know no more about her uncles' affairs than a casual visitor might pick up in a few days' stay at the house. The whole thing is an absolute mystery so far as I'm concerned."

Howard Torrance had the same story to tell.

" I'm in much the same state as Miss Forrest. Neville Shandon I met for the first time a few days ago. Roger was only a casual acquaintance ; and I never felt inclined to force myself into his intimacy. I'm really a guest of Miss Hawkhurst, just as Miss Forrest is."

Sir Clinton turned to the secretary.

" You've perhaps had better opportunities, Mr. Stenness ? "

The secretary admitted this with a nod.

" I've been secretary to Mr. Roger Shandon for the last two years—nearly three. Do you expect me to divulge anything about his private affairs ? "

" Anything that seems useful. It can't hurt him now."

" Then I needn't conceal that from time to time he received threatening letters. The last one came only a few days ago. It was written by this man Costock who's outside in the hall. I can produce it if necessary."

Sir Clinton contented himself with saying : " I know something about Costock's career." He looked

at Stenness as though he expected more, but the secretary seemed to have nothing to add on that subject.

" Perhaps you could tell us about the relations between the various members of the family. That must have come under your notice," Sir Clinton suggested.

Stenness considered for a moment as though arranging his facts.

" The three brothers always seemed to me to be on good enough terms. I never noticed any ill-feeling amongst them. Neville was rather a bully—in his manner, I mean. He always treated one as if one were a hostile witness; but probably that was just a mannerism. Roger was hot-tempered at times. He didn't hit it off with his nephew somehow. But so far as I saw, the feeling was all on one side. Young Hawkhurst seems a harmless boy—rather moody since he had that attack of sleepy sickness."

Sir Clinton seemed to prick up his ears at the words.

" He had sleepy sickness, had he? Any ill-effects? "

" Nothing that one could see, except this instability —moodiness or whatever you like to call it. Very cheery one day and rather depressed soon afterwards, I noticed at times."

Sir Clinton did not pursue the subject.

" Have you heard of any ill-feeling locally? " he asked. " I mean friction with the maids, or the gardeners, or the neighbours? "

Stenness racked his memory for a moment or two.

" No, nothing that I can recall. There was some slight disagreement with Dr. Ardsley over fishing rights not long ago; and a few angry letters passed between him and Roger Shandon. But it wasn't an important matter—rather a squabble, but nothing to leave real ill-feeling."

"Do you know anything about money-matters? They were both well-off?"

"Neville was believed to make enormous fees in some cases. Roger, I know, had plenty of money. He often sent me to cash bearer cheques on his account and some of them ran into thousands."

"And he took cash for these? Rather unusual."

"My impression was that he gambled a good deal—roulette and that sort of thing—for high stakes. I've often paid in large sums in notes on his behalf."

Sir Clinton seemed to make a mental note of this.

"Now what about the third brother—Ernest, I think his name is?"

A faint expression of contempt crossed Stenness's face at the mention of Ernest's name.

"He's not like his brothers."

Then the disdain of the efficient man for his inefficient fellow broke out.

"He seems never to have done anything, so far as I know. His brothers kept him going. He spends his time loafing about: fishing, shooting, or just hanging round. It was his fishing, as a matter of fact, that led to the row with Dr. Ardsley."

Sir Clinton leaned forward in his chair and looked at the secretary keenly.

"All this is very interesting," Mr. Stenness; but I have an idea that there's something in your mind that you haven't told us. What is it?"

The secretary gave him look for look before replying.

"I don't think this is a local affair at all. The evidence points away from that, entirely."

"Ah! Now this is what I really wanted, Mr. Stenness."

Thus encouraged Stenness wasted no time.

"When Neville Shandon looked into the room before

going to the Maze, he had a sheaf of papers in his hand. When I examined his body I noticed a scrap of paper—a torn bit. I could read 'Hackl . . .' on it in Neville's writing, and a few other words as well."

"That's quite correct," interrupted Sir Clinton, "I have it in my pocket-book. And you infer . . . ?"

"I infer that that scrap is all that remains of his notes for his cross-examination of Hackleton which was to come off this week."

"In other words, you think someone in Hackleton's pay is the murderer; and the intention was to put Neville Shandon out of the case finally?"

"That's your statement, not mine," said Stenness, suddenly becoming cautious. "But it's been done before now."

Sir Clinton nodded.

"You're thinking of the shooting of Labori in the Dreyfus case, I suppose?"

"That would be a parallel case to the one you sketched."

"And the notes might be useful to Hackleton's side as showing the probable line of attack beforehand?"

Stenness maintained his caution.

"That's your suggestion, not mine."

"But assuming that," demanded Sir Clinton, "why was Roger Shandon murdered at all? He had nothing to do with the case."

Stenness had his answer ready.

"Assume that twin brothers resemble each other closely and even dress alike. Mightn't a stranger mistake one for the other and kill him? Obviously. And then he might find that he'd made an error if the second brother turned up. The second man is the man he's been paid to put out of the way. Wouldn't he finish his job?"

"That's an ingenious theory, Mr. Stenness," commented Sir Clinton, but he refrained from saying anything further.

Howard Torrance had listened carefully.

"Hardly think that'll fit, though. Neville was dead when I came across him; and I'd just heard Roger shouting . . . at least, . . . at anyrate," he stumbled for a moment, then recanted. "No, you may be right. I was confusing the order of finding the bodies with the order of the murders."

"There's no proof of the order of the murders," Stenness pointed out. "Both of them were dead when they were found, and that's all we know."

At this moment steps sounded outside, the door opened noisily, and Sir Clinton saw a stranger enter the room. At the sight of the air-gun in the newcomer's hand, Vera Forrest gave a slight exclamation.

"This is Sir Clinton Driffield, Mr. Hawkhurst," Stenness hastened to explain. "The Chief Constable."

Arthur Hawkhurst leaned his air-gun against the wall and came forward.

"D'you usually travel with an escort, sir?" he inquired with a boyish grin. "A bobby and a plain clothes man in the hall outside, I see."

Then, turning to Stenness, he went on:

"Uncle Roger anywhere about? I owe the old man an apology. He's rather peevish with me over the piano, you know; and I must smooth him down. Not let the sun go down to his wrath, et cetera."

Stenness threw an interrogative glance at Sir Clinton. Getting the answer he expected, he broke the news to Arthur.

"What! Both of 'em killed! Nonsense!"

Then the sight of the Chief Constable and the recol-

lection of the uniformed man outside seemed to convince him.

" Of course! That accounts for the bobby. And they're both gone, you say ? Poor old birds! Poor old birds! "

It was hardly the requiem which might have been expected ; but it seemed sincere enough in tone if not in words. He added thoughtfully :

" And now I'll never get that apology off my chest, after brooding over it all afternoon. I owed him that."

Sir Clinton crossed the room and picked up the air-gun.

" This seems pretty strong. Can you kill anything with it ? "

Arthur's grief seemed to pass away with the opening up of a fresh subject.

" I was out with it in the spinney this afternoon, potting rabbits. It makes less noise than a rook-rifle. Scares the bunnies less when you fire. But I only got a couple of brace in the whole afternoon."

Sir Clinton made no reply. He tried the spring of the air-gun ; looked to see that the weapon was unloaded ; and then pulled the trigger. For a weapon of its size the report was not loud. He was about to try it a second time when his ear was caught by a sound of limping footsteps in the passage. Again the door of the room opened, and Sir Clinton hastily put the air-gun back against the wall.

Ernest Shandon shuffled into the room and blinked round the assembled group in dull surprise.

" I've had a devil of a time," he said grumpily, " I've been walking miles with a nail in my boot."

Stenness stepped into the breach once more and explained the state of affairs. At first, Ernest seemed frankly incredulous.

"This must be a joke of yours, Stenness. What I mean to say is, the thing's impossible. Murders don't happen to people like us, you know. It's the kind of thing one finds among the lower classes."

He peered from face to face, as if expecting to see a smile on one of them; but the seriousness of the company at last appeared to bring the truth home to him.

"You really mean it?"

He sank into a chair and gazed round the company once more as though dazed by the realisation of the tragedy.

"Both of 'em? Why, I was talking to them both not three hours ago. We were talking about that Shackleton case—or is it Hackleton? I remember Neville asking if I read the newspapers, and Roger . . . What was it Roger said? . . . Oh, yes, now I remember. Roger was giving Neville a hint that Shackleton might find it worth his while to sandbag him or something like that. I can't think why; but Roger was very strong about that, I remember. And then I went off and left them together. And now you say they're both dead! I can't believe it, Stenness. Why, I was talking to them not three hours ago, or even less, it may be, here in this very room."

"It's unfortunately true, Mr. Shandon," Howard Torrance assured him. "I found the body of Mr. Neville Shandon myself."

Ernest paid no attention to him. He seemed to be quite thunderstruck, now that the news had penetrated his mind. At last he roused himself sufficiently to ask for some details, to which he listened with a sort of heavy interest.

"And they were killed by poisoned darts, you say? And I've got a nail in my boot myself. I might get

blood-poisoning from it, if I'm not careful. I never thought of that till now."

Sir Clinton had allowed a decent interval to elapse before entering the conversation; but he now glanced at his watch and put a question.

"Can you tell us when you last saw your brothers alive, Mr. Shandon?"

Ernest reflected for some moments as though trying to fix the time. Then he shook his head regretfully:

"I'd arranged to go in the car with Sylvia—my niece, you know—but she said I was late and she hurried me off to get ready. I was a bit hustled at the last moment. But Sylvia could tell you, most likely. She's always punctual and she'd remember when we left."

"It was just before I saw Mr. Neville Shandon look in that door that I heard your car leaving, Mr. Shandon," Stenness volunteered. "That would be about ten minutes past three."

Ernest nodded vaguely.

"I remember she sent me to put my boots on. That reminds me, my foot's very sore. I hope it isn't blood-poisoning."

Quite regardless of the company he began to unlace his boot and finally examined a slight tear in his sock. He was busily engaged in feeling inside his boot for the nail before he spoke again.

"That nail came up just after Sylvia dropped me outside the grounds. I walked on for a bit, but it began to hurt. You know how a nail in your boot hurts? So I sat down for a bit by the roadside; and luckily the postman came along in his cart and gave me a lift after a while, or I don't know what I'd have done. I'd nothing to hammer it flat with, you see."

He returned to an inspection of his foot.

Sir Clinton glanced at his watch and even his impassive face showed a trace of impatience.

" I'm sorry, Mr. Shandon, but I must get some facts from you before I go. It's essential, or I should not trouble you at this time."

Ernest looked up with a long-suffering expression.

" Oh, ask any questions you please. If I can give any information you want, I'll be glad to do it, quite glad. It's a sad affair for me, for all of us. Anything I can do, of course. By the way, do you mind if I ring for tea ? I've had nothing since lunch-time and I feel a bit tired. One misses one's tea. It would brighten me up, I think."

Quite oblivious of the astonishment of the company he rang the bell and gave his order.

" Now, Mr. Shandon, perhaps you'll give me your attention. I understand that your family consisted of yourself, your two brothers, and the late Mrs. Hawkhurst, your sister. Am I right, or have you any relations except your nephew and niece ? "

Ernest blinked for a moment or two as if considering.

" Nobody nearer than a second cousin once removed. At least, I think that's what you call it. She's the daughter of a second cousin. Lives in Bath, I think."

" Another point," continued Sir Clinton. " Can you tell me if anyone could get the opportunity of learning the Maze without being noticed ? The gardeners know the paths of course ; but can you think of anyone else ? "

Ernest again blinked for some seconds while he thought over the matter.

" Ardsley took an interest in it at one time—that was before he made such a fuss over the fishing. He hasn't been here since that row. Not that I bore any grudge over it, you understand, far from it. One may differ

from a man without letting bad feeling come in, I always think, don't you ? "

Sir Clinton refused to follow him into this by-path.

" Nobody else ? "

" No, I can remember nobody who ever took the slightest interest in it. It's not, somehow, the sort of thing that does interest people. What I mean to say is, there's not much use in it, is there ? "

Sir Clinton diverged for an instant from his usual reticence.

" It's strange the murderer didn't leave some trace, then. I'd have expected to find him using a thread to guide him out of the Maze—like Theseus in the labyrinth."

He paused for a moment, then added :

" But perhaps he rolled it up as he went out, so as to leave nothing behind."

He rose as he spoke and put his last questions :

" Do you suspect anyone in this matter, Mr. Shandon ? Was there anyone in the background whom we haven't heard about ? A woman, for instance ? "

Ernest Shandon seemed to ponder these queries in his dull way.

" No," he said at last, " I don't think so. Not to my knowledge, at least. Of course my brothers had their own affairs ; but that's to be expected in families, isn't it ? I mean, they didn't tell me everything, of course. But bar this Shackleton business, I can't say I ever heard anything that would fit the case. No, I can't remember ever hearing anything of the sort."

The Chief Constable wasted no further time.

" I shall have to come back again, Mr. Shandon. Will you think over the matter meanwhile and take a note of anything you think likely to help us. And you also," he added, turning to the rest of the group.

As the door was closing behind him and Wendover, he heard Ernest's verdict, delivered in a disconsolate tone :

" This'll be an infernal bother ! "

In the hall, they found Costock in charge of a constable and apparently resigned to his detention. When questioned, he added but little to the story which he had told earlier in the day to Stenness.

" What brought you to this neighbourhood at all ? " Sir Clinton demanded. " You don't expect us to believe that you came here by pure chance, do you ? "

" No," Costock admitted. " If I was pitchin' a yarn to a flattie or to an ordinary busy, I'd say that ; an' I'd stick to it. But you know a bit too much about me, Driffield; an' it wouldn't take with you. So I'll just take an' tell you the truth, so I will."

Sir Clinton's smile showed more than a touch of unbelief.

" Make it the whole truth, when you're at it," he advised, " and begin by explaining how you happen to be here at this particular period."

" Well, you see, this Shandon man—Roger—he owed me something, so he did. He didn't play straight with me out at Kimberley."

" So you came home, as soon as you got out, to blackmail him ? That's obvious. You needn't protest, Costock. It's really not of any importance, for I'm quite convinced that you didn't reach the stage of negotiations, so there's no harm done. You put up in the village, waiting for a chance to see him alone, I suppose ? "

Costock nodded.

" And now explain how you came to be in at the death, please."

"It was this way. As I was going through the village I came on a boatman. It's a hot day, so I thought I'd go on the river for a row."

"And perhaps spy out the land, seeing that the grounds are easily accessible from the river-bank?"

"Well, I don't say yes and I don't say no. It might have come in handy."

"And you took a pistol with you on your outing?"

Costock had his explanation ready.

"I thought as perhaps I'd run across Shandon and we might get talking. He's a violent-tempered swine—leastways, he was so. And 't seemed to me best to have a quietener in my pocket; for I'd have stood no chance at all against him, man to man. He could ha' licked me with one hand."

"When did you leave the boat-house in the village?"

"'Bout three o'clock, as near as I can remember. But the boatman could tell you. He took the time for hirin' the boat."

"You came up the river fairly slowly, then; and what happened after that?"

"As I came along, I noticed a little private boat-house and a landing-stage. I knew that would be Shandon's place, for I'd asked the boatman about it. Just as I was coming abreast of it, I heard some yells; so I stopped rowing and let the boat drift. Then I heard someone squalling "Murder" at the pitch of his voice, behind some hedges nearby the water. So I pulled in, hitched up my boat, and ran through the nearest hole in the hedge. And then I got tangled up in that fandango of a thing they have there—what they call the Maze."

"You didn't see anyone running away from the Maze before you got in?"

"No."

"Did you run about in the Maze or did you walk?"

Costock considered for a moment or two.

"I walked. Once I was inside, I got tangled up, as I told you; and I didn't want to be running round corners slap into a murderer."

"And then?"

"Oh, after that I heard a lot o' shoutin' and a girl screamin' an' all that sort o' thing. But I was that tangled up I could get nowhere. I'd got fair lost in that infernal monkey-puzzle."

Sir Clinton turned to Wendover.

"This fellow was searched, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Nothing on him but the pistol, and we took that away."

Sir Clinton turned back to Costock.

"You can go now; but you'll have to stay in the village for a day or two. You'll be wanted at the inquest. I may as well tell you that you'll be watched, so it's no use trying to bolt."

He dismissed the ex-I.D.B. with scant ceremony; handed his dog over to the care of the constable with orders to take it to the Grange; and then went down the steps to Wendover's car.

Chapter VI

"THE next port of call, Squire, will be Dr. Ardsley's," Sir Clinton informed his companion as they seated themselves in the car. "And you can put a bit of hurry into it, if you like."

Wendover's appearance had earned him the kindly nickname which the Chief Constable used. He was one of those red-faced hearty country gentlemen who, on first acquaintance, give an entirely erroneous impression of themselves. Met casually, he might quite easily have appeared to be a slightly fussy person of very limited intellect and even more restricted interests; but behind that facade lived a fairly acute brain which took a certain sly delight in exaggerating the misleading mannerisms. Wendover was anything but a fool, though he liked to pose as one.

"All right," he said, as the pace of the car increased. "It won't take long to get there. But what do you know about Ardsley? Never mentioned him to you, so far as I can remember."

"Well, don't put off any longer. Tell me something about him now," suggested Sir Clinton. "All I know is that he's an expert in poisons or something of that sort."

Wendover pricked up his ears.

"'Poisons,' sez you? You don't think . . ."

But Sir Clinton was not to be drawn so easily.

"You're quite right, Squire. I don't think. I never caught the knack of it, somehow. Just tell me all

about Ardsley, will you, and put it in a nutshell, for we haven't much time."

"Ardsley?" Wendover ruminated, "Ardsley's one of these damned vivisectionists. Doesn't even need to do it for a living, either; just cuts up dogs and cats for pleasure, I suppose, since he's got a private income. He's one of these cold-blooded beggars, all brains and no emotions, and that sort of thing. Swarms up mountains for amusement, they say—quite good at it, too. Member of Alpine Club, I believe. He's a good fisherman; got an eye like a hawk and seems to have the devil's own luck in clearing the streams round about here. He had a row with Roger Shandon over that, I remember."

He pondered for a moment.

"That seems all about Ardsley."

A fresh subject occurred to him.

"Not arresting anybody yet, Clinton? Seems funny to have two murders and no arrests. Aren't you afraid of letting the fellow slip through your fingers?"

"Not very," the Chief Constable reassured him. "I'm having Costock shadowed—I gave instructions to the constable about it. The rest of the Whistlefield people can't budge either; for they'll be wanted at the inquest to give evidence."

"But the fellow might bolt in the meanwhile."

"He may—assuming he's one of the house crowd. But if he's one of them, he'll have to be fairly smart. I've got photographs of all the ones who were at the Maze—took them under pretence of needing someone to give the scale in the pictures. A photograph's better than a description, you know."

Wendover was silent for a few seconds.

" I suppose you're going to Ardsley about the poison on the darts ? "

" Partly that, partly to gather impressions, if you must know."

" Oh, well, he ought to be able to spot the thing for you. They say he's written a book on poisonology or whatever they call it."

" Toxicology is the word you're dredging for, I think."

" Well, toxicology, then. That reminds me, do you think . . ."

" Never. Quite against my strictest principles. To-morrow I shall spend a penny on the local paper. I shall read up what the crime expert in it has got to say. Then I shall know all about it. Why should I bother to think ? "

Wendover thought that he had surprised the Chief Constable's subject of speculation. In spite of the hints he had received, he persisted in his probing.

" Then you think that Ardsley may be . . ."

" There's a law of libel, Squire ; and you're just twittering on the edge of it at present. I tell you bluntly that I have no definite ideas just now ; and you'll get nothing by all this hydraulic pump business that you're trying. If I ever get to the bottom of this affair, I promise you I'll spout like an Artesian well of information. Till then, the borings will show no results."

Wendover accepted the rebuff placidly. Sir Clinton was grateful, and showed it by his next words.

" The fact is, Squire, I'm keeping an open mind and I don't want to be prejudiced. It's as clear as print that you dislike this man Ardsley. Hence it wouldn't pay me to listen to you unconsciously discrediting him beforehand. I tell you what. We'll discuss the thing to-night when I've got my mind cleared up a bit ; and then you can say what you like. But I don't promise to

give you much information, remember. I'm paid to keep my mouth shut so long as a quiet tongue is necessary ; and I've got to earn my pay, you see."

Wendover's face cleared when this point of view was put before him.

" You can't put it fairer than that, Clinton," he admitted. " I hadn't looked at it quite in that light, you know."

He said no more at the time, and soon the car reached the entrance to the toxicologist's grounds. At the house they learned that Dr. Ardsley was at home ; and they were shown into a room. He did not keep them waiting long.

As he came forward to meet them, Sir Clinton saw a man of about fifty. Ardsley's hair was silvered, and his face showed heavy lines ; but his step was light and he was obviously in perfect condition. From below heavy eyebrows his grey eyes seemed to examine the world coldly ; and the set of his mouth was sufficient to show more than a little toughness in the disposition which had moulded it.

Sir Clinton rapidly explained the cause of his visit ; and producing the box of darts, he handed one of them to the toxicologist.

" I'm not sufficiently ignorant to expect you to tell me what this stuff is on the spur of the moment, Dr. Ardsley ; but I'm really trusting to luck that you may be able to make a guess at what the thing might be. If you can do even that, it may be of great importance to us."

Ardsley took the dart and examined it for a moment or two. Then he put questions about the state of the bodies and the times, which Sir Clinton was able to furnish.

" H'm! " he said at last. " I think, from what you

say, that I might make a guess at it. It's obviously one of these arrow-poisons or something of that sort; perhaps a strophanthus derivative or a member of the strychnos group."

"Can you give me anything more definite?" Sir Clinton demanded, rather anxiously. "Time's the main factor with me just now. I know these vegetable things are the very devil to spot; but it's honestly a matter of life or death, and I want something definite if you can give me it."

Ardsley frowned slightly as he examined the dart.

"Can you spare me this? I mean, to examine it, chemically—and otherwise. I can't promise to let you have it back intact, you know."

"Give me information, that's all I ask."

"Very good."

He paused for a moment.

"You won't want to let this out of your sight, I suppose. Then you'd better come along to my laboratory. Luckily I have a guinea-pig in stock."

He glanced under his eyebrows at Wendover.

"You'd rather stay here, I should think, Wendover. You dislike vivisection. I'm only going to put a needle into the little beast—quite painless; but you needn't come and get your feelings rasped."

It was phrased politely enough; but it was quite evident from the way in which it was said that Ardsley had no desire to let Wendover into his laboratory. Leaving the Squire to kick his heels, the toxicologist led Sir Clinton through the house to the research department.

"We'd better see exactly what phenomena the poison produces, first of all. I'll get the guinea-pig."

He washed some of the poison from the dart with liquid, and introduced the solution into a hypodermic

syringe, by means of which he injected a minute amount of the fluid under the guinea-pig's skin.

"Dead already?" Sir Clinton asked in some astonishment. "It's like a thunderbolt."

Ardsley had been experimenting on the animal and watching closely. His face showed that he had found something definite.

"I think I can make a guess," he said. "It happens to be something with which I'm fairly familiar. Let's confirm it."

He made another extraction of the poison which he placed in a test-tube. To this he added a few drops of solution from a bottle which he took down from a shelf.

"Sulphovanadic acid," he explained. "Just watch."

On the addition of the reagent, the liquid in the test-tube turned black.

"It ought to change to dark blue, and then to red after a time."

"What do you make of it?" Sir Clinton demanded.

"Curare. I'm pretty sure of it. I've used it a lot and I feel fairly safe in saying that. Of course, if you want me to swear to it, that's a different matter. This is only a rough test. I'd need to do a lot more before I could go into the box and testify about it."

Sir Clinton nodded.

"Of course, I know it by name," he said. "South American arrow poison, isn't it? Can you tell me anything more about it?"

Ardsley was engaged in writing some notes. He looked up apologetically for a moment.

"I have to enter up details of each experiment I carry out, you know, Sir Clinton—even if it's only a case of pricking a beast with a needle. If you don't mind, I'll finish this entry. I like to have things always

ship-shape in that line, and the more so since I've got the police on the premises."

He smiled, not altogether pleasantly, as he turned again to his writing. When he had finished, he suggested that they should rejoin Wendover.

"I'm not going to give you a lecture on curare," he said, when they had returned to the other room, "but one or two points may be of use to you. It's a South American arrow-poison, as you said. Its physiological effect is a powerful paralysing action on the motor nerve endings supplying striated muscle, but it has no action on the excitability of the muscle. You saw the actual results in that experiment."

"I guessed something of the sort from the state of the two bodies," Sir Clinton explained. "It was pretty clear that neither of them had struggled much before they died. I put that down to the swift action of the poison; but from what you say, they must have been paralysed when the stuff got into the blood-stream."

Ardsley made no comment, but continued his exposition.

"It wouldn't require a large dose to kill a man. Curare contains various alkaloids. Paracurarine and protocurine are amongst them. A quarter of a grain of protocurarine would kill a ten-stone man quite easily. There was far more than a fatal dose of curare on that dart."

"Can you tell us anything about how the stuff comes on the market?" Sir Clinton inquired.

"There are three brands of it to be had," the toxicologist explained. "Para curare you can buy in bamboo tubes; calabash curare is packed in gourds; and what they call pot curare is sold in earthenware pots. The stuff's a crude product, you understand.

One specimen differs from another to some extent, though not materially for most purposes."

"You have some of it in stock yourself for your experiments, perhaps?"

Ardsley smiled rather grimly.

"A man isn't required to incriminate himself, is he? But I don't mind admitting that I have some of the stuff. You could have found that out for yourself by examining my returns under the Act, you know, so I lose nothing by frankness."

Sir Clinton acknowledged the underlying meaning of Ardsley's words by a faint shrug of his shoulders, a completely non-committal gesture.

"You practically told me you had it, there in the laboratory," he reminded the toxicologist. "What's more important at present is to know if anyone else could have had access to it."

Ardsley reflected for a moment or two before speaking again.

"There's another source of supply close at hand," he said, as though the point had just come to his memory. "Roger Shandon had a sort of museum up at Whistlefield—stuff he had picked up on his travels—rubbish mostly. But I remember he had a pot of curare amongst it."

"Ah! That's what I wanted to get at," Sir Clinton broke in. "You're sure about that?"

"Quite. It slipped my memory at the time; but I'm quite certain about it. It's the real stuff, undoubtedly. I remember that once, a while ago, I ran short of curare and I borrowed Roger's specimen and took some of it. I returned it to him at once, of course; and I only took a trace for use. But it's real curare all right, without any doubt."

"And that stuff's lying up at Whistlefield now? Is it under lock and key?"

"No," Ardsley explained, "It's just lying loose in an open museum-case. Anyone could lay their hands on it."

Sir Clinton's face showed perplexity.

"It's time that we're up against," he repeated; and he seemed to be making some unsatisfactory calculation. "I wish I'd known about that stuff an hour ago."

He turned to Wendover.

"Look here, you must do this for me. I've other things to attend to which must be put through immediately. Will you take Dr. Ardsley up in your car to Whistlefield. He'll identify the pot of curare for you; you couldn't be sure of it yourself. And then take charge of it. Quote me, if anyone raises objections. And make a note of who objects, if anyone does. Now it's a matter of hurry, and more hurry. You must get that stuff into your hands without a second's delay, Wendover."

The toxicologist wasted no time.

"I'll get my coat now," he said, going towards the door.

"We must stop any chance of further supplies at once, just in case of more trouble," Sir Clinton said, when their host had left the room.

Wendover was plainly astonished.

"Do you expect another crime? Surely two's enough?"

"One never knows," Sir Clinton affirmed, with a hint of trouble in his tone. "I'd never forgive myself if I neglected the possibility—even though it's a very remote one. One can't bring dead men back to life with a few regrets, you know."

Ardsley put his head in at the door.

"I'm ready."

"Then let's get off," said Sir Clinton. "Drop me in the village as we pass, Wendover, I've something to do there. I'll join you at Whistlefield as quick as I can. Wait for me there. Now, drive for all you're worth."

As they came into the village, Sir Clinton gave a sigh of relief.

"Shops still open, I see. That's all right!"

He got down from the car.

"Now, off you go. Don't waste a moment!"

As the car moved off, the Chief Constable glanced along the street and then, with deliberate restraint, he lounged over to the door of the local ironmonger. All traces of hurry had disappeared. He seemed merely a casual purchaser.

"Good evening," he said pleasantly to the man behind the counter. "You seem to stock a fairly wide selection of things, to judge by your window. I'm looking for a small drill, if you have one on the premises. Could you let me see one or two?"

The ironmonger, it seemed, kept such things in stock.

Sir Clinton examined them.

"This seems to be what I want," he said at last. "Have you a brace to fit it?"

He fitted the drill to the brace, took out a penny and tried the drill. Then, with the hole half-bored, he seemed to lose interest in the matter.

"You don't stock air-gun slugs, do you?"

"As a matter of fact, we do, sir. Mr. Hawkhurst of Whistlefield uses a lot of them, and he persuaded me to keep a stock of them. Nobody else has any need for them; but he buys quite a lot from time to time."

"Perhaps you keep darts, too?"

"Yes, I've got some in stock."

Sir Clinton considered for a moment.

"Let's see. I'll take a hundred slugs and a couple of dozen darts. You might put the whole lot in one parcel—I'll take the brace and drill as well."

While the man was packing up the articles, Sir Clinton made inquiries as to the position of the druggist's shop in the village; and on leaving the ironmonger's he made his way to it.

"Let's see," he reflected aloud, after he had had a few words with the druggist on local gossip. "I'll have a pennyworth of Condy's Fluid crystals. They're a good antiseptic, aren't they? And about threepence worth of some carbolic solution, too. Have you any litmus, by any chance—the solid stuff is what I want."

It happened that the druggist had all these in stock.

"That will be all to-night, sir?" he inquired, as Sir Clinton took the packets and paid for his purchases.

"That will be all for the present," said the Chief Constable absent-mindedly; and he left the shop after saying good-evening.

He made his way to the police station, where the sergeant-in-charge, recognising him, came forward at once.

"Have you a room here that I can have to myself for ten minutes or so, sergeant?"

"Yes, Sir Clinton. This way."

"This will do all right," the Chief Constable said, after a glance at the place. "By the way, sergeant, send a man out at once to get me a small table vice—you know these portable things—at the ironmongers. I saw one in the window as I passed. And wait a moment—can you smoke Navy Cut? Good. Then get a couple of small tins of it as well."

Considerably mystified, the sergeant executed his orders; and when the various articles had been pro-

cured, Sir Clinton closed the door behind him and set to work. His task took him rather longer than he expected, but at last it was done to his satisfaction. He called his subordinate in again.

"A glass of water, sergeant, if you please."

When this was brought, he shut the door again. Some minutes later he came out and called the sergeant.

"Here's your Navy Cut, sergeant. I'm sorry I can't give you the tins."

The sergeant, completely at a loss to understand these proceedings, thanked him in a dazed fashion and began to sweep the tobacco from the table into his pouch.

"How far is it to Whistlefield?" Sir Clinton inquired.

On learning the distance he borrowed a bicycle from one of the constables.

"Send up to Whistlefield for it to-morrow—or in an hour, if you like. I'll leave word that you're to get it."

And with that the Chief Constable mounted the machine and rode off. The sergeant watched him out of sight and then returned into the police-station. He entered the room which Sir Clinton had been using and looked at the debris of the unknown experiment.

"He's had something clipped in that vice, I suppose. And there's a drill; I wonder where he picked that up. And he's got some pinky stuff in that glass of water, too. And he takes away the tins and he leaves the tobacco to me. This is a rum kind of Chief Constable to have, for sure. What's he getting at?"

Chapter VII

AFTER leaving the Chief Constable in the village, Wendover took the road to Whistlefield. Sir Clinton's obvious anxiety had impressed him; and he drove fast. He was not altogether pleased at having Ardsley thrust upon him as a companion; for he disliked the toxicologist. Whenever he saw Ardsley's grim, clean-shaven face he had a vision of tortured animals, and a spasm of repugnance attacked him. His knowledge of the Vivisection Act was negligible, and his imagination pictured helpless beasts strapped to tables and writhing under the knife of the vivisector. For politeness's sake, he forced himself to make conversation.

"It's to be hoped we can manage this for Driffield without a hitch," he said. "He seems to be afraid of leaving the stuff lying loose. You can find it all right, I suppose?"

"I can go straight to the place where it used to be kept," Ardsley assured him coldly, paying no attention to the speculative part of Wendover's speech.

He seemed to feel no desire to continue the conversation; and Wendover felt that he had suffered a snub.

"Surly devil!" he commented inwardly. "He won't even meet one half-way."

He had no time to brood over the matter, however, for very soon they reached Whistlefield.

"You'd better do the talking," Ardsley advised, as they got out of the car and approached the door of the house. Wendover nodded in agreement and rang the bell. When the maid appeared he asked if Ernest

Shandon was disengaged. The maid seemed doubtful.

"He's in the study, sir, and he left word that he wasn't to be disturbed."

Wendover thought of asking for the secretary; but it struck him that since they had come to commandeer the drug, it would be best to see one of the family. After all, it was private property, even if it was dangerous stuff.

"Is Mr. Hawkhurst at home?"

The maid showed them into a room and asked them to wait until she could find him.

"If he isn't there, then ask Miss Hawkhurst to see us for a moment if she can," Wendover directed.

In a few moments, Arthur Hawkhurst entered the room, looking rather surprised when he saw who his visitors were.

"Fairly travelling round and seeing the country, aren't you, Wendover? Morbid curiosity, I think, haunting the scene of crime like this."

He nodded to Ardsley. Quite obviously the double murder had not affected his spirits to any extent. Wendover was not much surprised. The boy had never been a favourite with either of his uncles; and though he seemed lacking in decent respect for the victims, Wendover put it down to Arthur's slightly unbalanced mentality.

"I'd have preferred a shade less cheeriness, I must say," he thought to himself, "but I suppose it would have been mere hypocrisy in his case, and one must make some allowance for his brain being a bit abnormal just now."

He came to the point at once.

"We've been sent up by Sir Clinton Driffield to see if something is in that museum of your uncle's. He wants to know if it's been removed by any chance."

" What the devil does he know about the museum ? " demanded Arthur. " He never saw it when he was here in the afternoon. What does he want with it anyway. And what is it that he does want ? Does he think one of the blokes upstairs had offended one of the Mayan idols and got a settler by way of squaring the account ?"

" No," Wendover said, hastily. " Nothing of that sort."

" Well, what is it then ? I'll get it for you."

" Don't trouble, please. Dr. Ardsley knows the look of it and it will be easiest for us to go to the museum and look round ourselves."

" Oh, indeed! " Arthur grew distinctly hostile. " You seem to take a good deal on yourselves. Why not wait till you're asked, before wandering about in people's houses ? "

Wendover felt that the matter was becoming awkward. The boy seemed to have flown into a passion, one of these storms of emotion to which he had been subject since his illness. And then another thought crossed Wendover's mind, though he tried to dismiss it. Why should Arthur be so anxious to prevent them entering the museum ? Curare had not been mentioned. Surely young Hawkhurst could have no suspicion of what they wanted ; and yet he seemed determined to put difficulties in the way. It was with great relief that he saw Sylvia come into the room. After greeting her, he turned away from Arthur and explained the matter to the girl.

" Of course. Come along at once," she invited them, ignoring Arthur's lowering face. " Anything we can do to clear up this miserable affair ought to be done."

She led them through the house to the museum. It was, as Ardsley had said, mainly filled with rubbish—odds and ends which might possibly call up recollections

in the mind which had gathered the stuff, but of very little interest to a casual visitor. It was a miscellany of souvenirs rather than a museum; and the items seemed to be lying on the shelves without any system whatever.

Ardsley evidently knew exactly where to go. Leaving the others, he moved across to one of the cases on the wall, opened it, and took down from a shelf a little pot of unbaked earthenware.

Arthur had followed him suspiciously.

"What's that you're doing?" he demanded, abruptly.

"The Chief Constable asked me to find this for him," Ardsley replied, examining the material in the pot as he spoke.

"You're not taking any of it are you?"

Young Hawkhurst put the question with obvious distrust. He had his eyes fixed on the toxicologist's hands, as though he feared that Ardsley might remove some of the stuff under their very eyes.

"No," Ardsley retorted, with a certain sharpness in his tone. "I've nothing further to do with it."

He handed the little vessel to Wendover as he spoke; and seemed to dissociate himself from any further connection with the matter. Arthur's eyes fixed themselves on the pot. He was still, apparently, disturbed by the way things were going.

"I don't care about this way of doing things," he complained. "Here you come along. For all we know you've no authority whatever behind you. And you go straight to this stuff and want to take it away with you, by the look of it. I know what it is. It's curare—Indian arrow-poison. And you propose calmly to walk off with it! We can't have that sort of thing. It's dangerous stuff. You've no right to take it: I object."

Wendover tried to throw oil on the waters.

"We aren't going to take it away," he explained, turning to Sylvia. "Sir Clinton asked us to pick it out—that's all. He'll be here shortly and you can learn from himself what he intends to do. But in any case, I think it ought to be in a safer place than this. As you say"—he turned again to Arthur—"it's dangerous stuff."

Sylvia agreed immediately.

"It was rather careless to leave it about like that if it's poisonous," she confirmed.

Wendover's mind had been busy in the meanwhile. He had noted for Sir Clinton's benefit that Arthur evidently knew the nature of the stuff, although there was no label on the specimen. If Arthur knew, then the chances were that other people knew also. He glanced at the contents of the pot in his hand, and he thought he could detect that some of the stuff had been removed. The original surface seemed to have been disturbed. Then he remembered that Ardsley had volunteered an account of how he had run short of curare and had taken some of Roger's specimen. That might account for the disturbance. Another thought occurred to him, and he asked permission to inspect the museum.

"Do you mind if I looked round the shelves?" he asked Sylvia. "I've never been in this place before, you know. Your uncle seems to have collected a lot of specimens."

Sylvia accompanied him in his tour of inspection; but she could throw little light on the various objects.

"Hardly anything's labelled, as you see," she pointed out. "Once or twice I offered to label them all for Uncle Roger; for it seems so silly to have a lot of things there with no explanation, doesn't it?"

They moved down the room, scanning the shelves. Ardsley remained near the door, grimly aloof from the rest of the group. Arthur hovered uncertainly about the room, evidently keeping his eye on the visitors as though troubled by suspicions of their motives.

"This is a dreadful business about my uncles," Sylvia said in a low voice, when she and Wendover had moved away from the others. "I was terribly shocked when I got back here and heard what had happened. I'm not going to pretend I was very fond of either of them—they always seemed to me different from the rest of us, somehow—but I liked them in a way; and it was horrible to come back and find that while I'd been enjoying myself in the afternoon, they'd been . . ."

She hesitated, evidently disliking the word—"murdered."

Wendover nodded understandingly. He quite appreciated her feelings. Neither of the dead men had been of the type that would attract the admiration or even the respect of a girl like Sylvia. Their disappearance would leave no real gap in her world. But after all, they were relations of hers and the sudden incursion of violence and death into her family was bound to leave its impression.

"You're not frightened, are you?" he asked.

"No, of course not. But it seems a frightful affair, doesn't it? It leaves one dazed, somehow—like a bad dream. Only one doesn't wake up. We all seem to be going about trying to persuade ourselves that the world's just the same as ever; but somehow I don't seem to succeed. It's too horrible for that."

Wendover did his best to soothe her. Behind the pretence of indifference he could see that she was badly shaken. Quite obviously she was trying to minimise her feelings so as not to make him uncomfortable.

They continued their tour of the collection, and she tried to interest herself in explaining to him the various objects in it.

When they had completed their inspection, Wendover suppressed a sigh of relief.

"Well," he said to himself, "there are no poisoned arrows there, at any rate. This pot of stuff seems to be the only danger-point in the whole lot."

He bent his efforts to infusing at least a semblance of harmony into the company, but it was not a very successful attempt. Sylvia seconded him to the best of her ability; but Arthur still maintained his suspicious attitude; and Ardsley seemed disinclined to emerge from his state of unfriendly neutrality. It was a relief to them all when the door of the museum opened and Ernest Shandon ushered in the Chief Constable. Stenness followed close on their heels.

"This is Sir Clinton Driffield, Miss Hawkhurst," Wendover hastened to say, when he remembered that they had not met in the afternoon. Sir Clinton bowed to the girl and then, with a word of apology, he turned to Wendover.

"Got the stuff?" he demanded; and his face cleared when Wendover held up the little earthenware pot. A glance at Ardsley confirmed that it was the right thing; and Sir Clinton seemed to pay no further attention to it at the moment.

"I'm afraid I disturbed your uncle, Miss Hawkhurst. He was busy in the study, and I was rather loath to interrupt him; but he very kindly came out at once."

Ernest, in the background, fumbled for a moment with his eyeglasses.

"I was very busy," he admitted. "But of course I wasn't so busy that I couldn't stop. In fact, I was just turning over papers and going through the safe with

Stenness. It wasn't really important, or at least not so important that it couldn't be put aside for a time, and Sir Clinton said he wasn't going to stay more than a few minutes. So I just left things, of course. I'd just been looking over Roger's will. We happened to come across it on the top of a pile of things in the safe. I couldn't understand it—to tell you the truth. These lawyers are terrible fellows for putting in long words—like 'hereinafter' and 'heritable' and 'moveable' and 'accretion,' and so on. And all about 'survivor or survivors' and 'beneficiaries' and a lot of complicated things besides. If it hadn't been for Stenness I don't think I could have made out what it was all about."

He blinked helplessly at the group, and then continued with a tinge of pride in his tone.

"Roger made me one of his trustees. Neville was another of them. And there's a third, the head of his firm of lawyers, I think, or at any rate a lawyer."

Then, in a rather discouraged voice:

"I suppose that'll mean a lot of bother—signing papers and all that sort of thing."

Sir Clinton waited patiently for the end of Ernest's speech; and then he came to the point at once.

"If you're an executor that simplifies matters, Mr. Shandon. I want to take away this article here"—he indicated the pot in Wendover's hand—"but only for a day or two, probably. You'll get it back again in due course. It's only a loan, you understand."

Ernest evidently felt the dignity of his new position. He put out his hand for the pot, examined it carefully through his glasses, then handed it over to Sir Clinton, though with a certain reluctance.

"Have I any right to part with it, Stenness? You know what the will says."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't, Mr.

Shandon," the secretary reassured him. " Besides, if the Chief Constable wants it in connection with this afternoon's affair "—he glanced interrogatively at Sir Clinton— " I've no doubt he could get power to take it, whether you want to give it up or not."

Ernest seemed to feel that he had got into deeper waters than he cared about.

" Well, if Stenness says that, I suppose it's all right. He understood the will and he ought to know. He explained it all to me very carefully just a few minutes ago, so he knows what's what. I could understand him all right. Why can't lawyers use plain language like Stenness, instead of wrapping it all up in ' hereinafters ' and ' aforesaids ' ? It's a stupid sort of way to write. I can't think what they do it for."

Rather to Wendover's surprise, Sir Clinton showed no great eagerness to be gone. He pulled from his pocket the tin box which had been found in the Maze and slowly removed the cover.

" You're an expert with air-guns, I think, Mr. Hawkhurst ? " he asked pleasantly, as though appealing to an authority. " Would you mind having a look at these things and telling me what you make of them ? Don't touch the points," he added quickly. " They're very dangerous."

Arthur Hawkhurst had been listening with a frown to Sir Clinton's negotiations for the pot of curare ; but he seemed to be flattered by the Chief Constable's direct appeal to him. He came forward, took the box in his hand, and examined the contents minutely.

" May I take one out to look at it ? "

" Of course—but be careful," Sir Clinton agreed.

Arthur removed one of the darts and inspected it.

" They seem to be just ordinary-pattern air-gun darts. They'd fit any of the guns we have. But some-

one seems to have been monkeying with them—boring holes in them and filling up with some dirt or other. And the feathering's all filthy, too."

He completed his examination and handed the box back to Sir Clinton.

"Anybody else claim to be an expert?" asked the Chief Constable.

Sylvia looked at the tiny missiles with a shudder.

"They're just ordinary darts so far as I can see," she said. "And was it one of these things that killed my uncles? They seem such harmless little things. I've fired them often and often at targets myself. One would never dream they could be deadly."

Sir Clinton closed the box and put it down on the mantelpiece behind him. He seemed suddenly to have been struck by a fresh idea.

"You said 'any of the guns we have,' Mr. Hawkhurst. I'd like to know how many air-guns you have on the premises."

Arthur looked at him distrustfully.

"I can't tell you on the spot," he admitted, grudgingly. "We have half a dozen that I could lay my hands on; but we've got more than that lying about somewhere or other. They get left in odd places. The gardeners sometimes use them for shooting rats for amusement and so on, and one never knows where the guns are till one asks for them."

Sir Clinton seemed rather taken aback.

"You seem to have a regular armoury," he said.

"I'm keen on air-guns," Arthur explained. "You're not going to take *them* away, are you?"

Sir Clinton waved the suggestion aside at once.

"Of course not. I only asked out of curiosity. I knew you were interested."

Arthur seemed to be relieved by this.

" Oh, that's all right," he said in a much more cordial tone. " So long as you leave me one of them, it'll do all I want."

" Now, Dr. Ardsley, if you'll just show me where this pot used to stand, I think we shall be able to go," Sir Clinton said, turning to another matter and dismissing the air-gun question.

At this, Ernest came forward.

" I think I can show you where it stood," he volunteered. " I remember Roger bringing it back from South Africa. He used to keep it on a shelf in his study in his last house, I remember ; the third shelf from the top, to the right of the door. Then when he came here, he had such a lot of stuff that he'd collected that he found he'd got to make a museum of it ; so he put it all together in this room. I've been over it all with him—I helped him to arrange it, I remember. But it seemed to me very dull. Not a bit interesting. But, of course, if you like, I could show it to you and tell you all about it Perhaps it might interest you, though I found it dull. People's tastes differ so much. One never can tell, can one ? "

Ardsley had paid no attention to Ernest's flood of information. He had gone down to the proper shelf and now he pointed out the empty space to Sir Clinton. The Chief Constable examined the place carefully, but said nothing.

At length he went to the windows of the room and inspected the catches.

" Anyone could have got in here without much trouble," he commented. " You don't seem much afraid of burglars, Mr. Shandon."

" No," Ernest admitted, refixing his eyeglasses with

care and looking wisely at the window-fastenings. " You see, we've never had any burglary here. It may seem strange, for of course Whistlefield's a bit isolated and it might be a good place to burgle. I never burgled myself, you know, so I don't really know about these things. There's a lot of silver, of course," he added. " Perhaps it is strange that we never had a burglary. Now I come to think of it, it would be quite an easy house to get into. We ought to have burglar alarms put on. Really, things are an awful bother. Can you recommend a good burglar-alarm, Sir Clinton ? "

The Chief Constable deprecated the proposed task with a smile.

" Really, Mr. Shandon, I've had no particular experience. You'd better have a look at a few and choose the one you think most satisfactory."

Ernest's face expressed as clearly as print his inward comment : " More trouble ! "

" I don't know, Sir Clinton ; perhaps I'd better get some. But then, you know," he added with a touch of relief, " we've never had a burglary yet. Hardly worth while fitting alarms, perhaps. It's such a nuisance getting the things, and then getting workmen up to fit them—turn the whole place upside-down and all that—and then having to remember to set them at night before one goes to bed. You don't think it's worth while, do you ? " he ended, hopefully.

Sir Clinton shook his head.

" You're in charge now, Mr. Shandon, you know. You must do what you think best yourself."

He turned to Ardsley and Wendover.

" I think we must be getting on the road again."

They took their leave and got into Wendover's car again.

" We'll drop you at your house," said Sir Clinton to the toxicologist. " It was very good of you to take all this trouble to help us. I feel a good deal easier in my mind now that I've got this."

He tapped the little jar of curare which he had brought away with him.

Chapter VIII

WENDOVER picked up the decanter and poured out some whiskey for his guest.

"You can't complain that I've worried you with questions, Clinton, but I think you might tell me something about this business at the Maze. You seem to have definite ideas, and I'd like to know what they are."

He glanced at the tumbler as he spoke, then added: "'*In vino veritas*, you know."

Sir Clinton looked up with a quizzical expression on his face:

"Truth at the bottom of the decanter, eh?" he inquired. "Well, if that's the method you can give me just two fingers and all the soda. The truth's sometimes dangerous when it's undiluted. And, remember, I warned you frankly that it might not be convenient to tell you very much just at present. The arrangement was that you were to give your views and I was to say what I thought of them."

Wendover acknowledged the accuracy of this.

"At least you might give me something in the way of general principles, though. They aren't hush-hush matters, at any rate."

Sir Clinton came over, lifted his tumbler, and went back again to his seat before replying.

"That's true enough," he admitted. "But I don't think general principles are likely to take you far in this case. I can make you a present of them without giving much away."

Wendover poured out his own whiskey and soda and returned to his chair.

"Go on," he said. "Make a lecture of it, if you like. The night's still young."

"I've a good mind to take you at your word, and you'll have only yourself to thank if it bores you. To begin with, then, there are three basic points on which a prosecutor has to satisfy the judge—or the jury, if it's a jury case. These are: opportunity, method, and motive. It isn't absolutely necessary to prove motive; but one does what one can to establish it if possible. A jury might be chary of convicting unless they saw something of the sort."

"You might expand that a bit," Wendover suggested. "All you've given me is three words."

"Take them one by one," Sir Clinton went on. "First of all, opportunity. The accused man must be somebody who had a real chance of committing the crime—somebody who isn't excluded by ordinary physical impossibilities. If a body with its throat freshly cut were to fall into this room at the present moment, it would be no use trying to bring a case against the Mikado or the President of the United States. We know that they're thousands of miles away at this time. It would be physically impossible for them to have done the trick."

"That's self-evident," said Wendover. "A murderer's bound to have been on the spot when he committed his murder."

"Not necessarily," Sir Clinton contradicted at once. "A poisoner needn't be near his victim when the victim dies. He might have sent poisoned chocolates by post or something like that. But he must have had the opportunity of committing the crime, whether he was on the spot or not. You couldn't have accused Robin-

son Crusoe in a poisoned chocolates case ; he was outside the postal radius."

Wendover nodded in agreement.

" But in this particular case at the Maze," he commented, " it's pretty plain that the murderer was on the spot all right. The person who killed the Shandons was somebody who was in or near the Maze between three and four o'clock this afternoon."

Sir Clinton passed to his second point.

" Method is the next thing. It's an axiom that the more ordinary the method of killing is, the more difficult it is to spot the murderer. Suppose you find a body in a by-street and it turns out that the man has been stabbed to death. What have you to go on ? Not much. But if you find somebody poisoned with some fairly out-of-the-way alkaloid, then you limit the number of possible murderers very considerably. You remember the Crippen case. Divergence from the normal is the weakest link in a murderer's chain-mail."

" Well, you ought to be happy in this affair. You've got a sufficiently out-of-the-way method."

" That's so," Sir Clinton admitted. " But what you gain on the swings you sometimes lose on the roundabouts, you know. The method in this case was one that either a man or a woman could have used. Even a child can pull a trigger. That extends the range a bit."

" But a child would need to have had the chance of getting at the curare."

" And the curare has been lying open to anyone for the last year or two. Don't forget that."

" Then you think it was the stuff up at the house that was used ? "

" I don't think anything about it at present. All I wanted was to shut off that possible source of supply."

" Then you must be expecting more murders ? "

Sir Clinton appeared not to hear the query.

"Suppose we come to motives now. Barring very exceptional cases, there are really only five motives that make it worth while to commit murder: women, money, revenge, fear, and homicidal mania. And I should think that in most cases if you go deep enough you'd find either women or money at the back of the business."

Wendover reflected for a time, evidently conning over the possibilities.

"It doesn't seem to be women this time, so far as things have gone," he suggested at last.

Sir Clinton refused to be drawn.

"I must confess," he said, "that I have a sneaking admiration for the Shandons' murderer—at least so far as his brains go. Could you imagine a better place for murder than the Maze? Absolute privacy guaranteed by the nature of the affair. No one could see through those hedges. The murderer can creep up to within lethal distance, come almost face to face with his victim, and yet remain absolutely invisible. And when the job's done, he can sneak off in perfect safety. No one can swear to seeing him. If he's found in the Maze, he can explain that he heard a cry for help and rushed to assist. It was a brainy lad who hit on that *locale* for his crime."

Wendover thought he had put his finger on a weak spot.

"But that limits the number of possible murderers still further, surely. It would need to be a fellow who knew the Maze intimately, otherwise he'd have got tied up in it."

Sir Clinton smiled a trifle derisively.

"Didn't you hear me inquire about that at Whistlefield? The Maze is open day and night. Anyone could

learn all about it, and no one would be much the wiser, since it's in an out-lying part of the grounds. A man could come up the river in a boat, drop into it, and cut a whole series of private marks on the hedges to guide him to the centre—bend twigs or something like that, which wouldn't give away the fact that he'd been at work. Or he could even bring in a thread and trail it behind him to help him out again, and roll it up as he retreated. No, you can't bank much on that point, Squire."

"Well, who did it, then?" demanded Wendover, exasperated by the upsetting of his idea.

Sir Clinton looked up with something suspiciously like a grin on his face.

"It might have been anybody," he said, oracularly. "But it seems more likely that it was somebody, if you catch my meaning."

Wendover betrayed no pique at this indirect discomfiture.

"One doesn't get much out of you, that's clear," he responded ruefully.

Sir Clinton seemed to feel that he might say something further without breaking through his self-imposed limitations.

"What's wrong with your outlook on the business, Squire, is that you want to treat a real crime as if it were a bit clipped out of a detective novel. In a 'tec yarn, you get everything nicely sifted for you. The author puts down only things that are relevant to the story. If he didn't select his materials, his book would be far too long and no one would have the patience to plough through it. The result is that the important clues are thrown up as if they had a spotlight on them, if the reader happens to have any intelligence."

He paused to light a cigarette before he continued.

" In real life," he went on, " there isn't any of this kind of simplification. You get a mass of stuff thrown at your head in the way of evidence ; and in the end nine-tenths of it usually turns out to be completely irrelevant. You've got to sift the grain from the chaff yourself, with no author to do the rough work for you. Do you remember the Map-game ? "

Wendover shook his head.

" I don't recognise it from the title."

" You must have played it sometime or other when you were a kid," Sir Clinton continued. " One player chooses a name on a map ; the other player's got to find out which name it is. He can ask any questions he likes, provided that the first player can answer them by a plain " Yes " or a " No." Now that game is something like detective work, though the problem's much easier to solve. Curiously enough, the really clever player doesn't choose a name in tiny type—only the beginner does that. The expert picks out some name like France, or Germany, or Czecho-Slovakia—something that stretches half-way across the map. Then when the opponent asks : ' Is it on this half of the map ? ' the expert answers ' No,' quite truthfully ; and the beginner at once assumes that it must be in the other half and proceeds accordingly, quite forgetting that it may be on both halves simultaneously. That's the kind of thing that may turn up in criminal-hunting. The fellow you're after may be—in fact he generally is—playing two parts simultaneously. He's not only a criminal ; he's a normal member of society as well—at least in murder cases he usually is. He stretches over both halves of the map, you see ? And if you insist on looking at one half only, you miss him completely."

" That's a long suit of talk you had in your hand," Wendover commented. " You seem very flush of information on some points."

Sir Clinton laughed, admitting the hit.

" You asked for a lecture, and now it seems you don't care for it when you get it. Well, try your hand yourself. Let's hear what you've made of the case. I'm not afraid of prejudice now."

Wendover glanced at his friend with some suspicion ; but he seemed reassured by what he saw. Sir Clinton appeared to be quite anxious to hear his ideas.

" If you're not pulling my leg, I don't mind," he said. " I've taken in most of what you said, and that limits things down a good deal. I'll take the possibles, one by one, and consider them. The bother is that it's difficult to find any one person who will fit into your three classes—I mean someone who had an opportunity, the method, and a motive strong enough."

Sir Clinton knocked the ash from his cigarette.

" Go on," he said. " Let's see how you get round that snag. I'll represent a jury of average intelligence, if I can screw myself up to that pitch."

" Well, first of all," Wendover suggested, " there's this Hackleton case looming in the background. Now that Neville Shandon's done for, Hackleton stands to win. It was a fight between them. Shandon was depending more on his brains than on his witnesses, I take it ; and now that he's out of it Hackleton will get off scot-free. There's your motive all right."

Sir Clinton nodded his assent to this, and Wendover continued with rather more confidence.

" The method used was obviously a sound one, no matter where the murder was done. An air-gun's fairly silent ; and that curare evidently kills quickly. It's not the sort of thing an ordinary rough would think of.

Even if he did think of it he couldn't get the poison. But Hackelton's got money enough to buy some unscrupulous fellow with brains; and this gone-under intellectual might have hit on the trick. Or Hackleton himself may have devised it and passed it on to his tool."

"That's so. And then?"

"The fact that the murder was done in the Maze may have been mere accident. They may have intended to get at Neville Shandon anywhere they could; and it just happened that he went into the Maze and gave them the best chance there."

"You assume, of course, that they would have got up the topography of the estate, Maze included, beforehand?"

"I'd have done so myself if I'd been put to that job; so I suppose they'd have had enough sense to do it, too."

"But why was it a double murder, then?" demanded Sir Clinton. "How did Roger come into the business?"

Wendover pondered for a moment; then he seemed to see a solution.

"Perhaps they had two murderers at work and each of them imagined he'd got the right man in front of him. The two Shandons were very much alike, you know."

Sir Clinton nodded without committing himself.

"Pass along to the next caravan! What's the next animal on show in your menagerie?"

"I'm a bit doubtful about young Hawkhurst, to tell you the truth. I hardly like to think that he did it; and yet after that attack of sleepy sickness he certainly did turn very queer in his temper. You'd have seen a fine outburst if you'd been with us when we went up

for the curare. And there's no disguising the fact that he and Roger didn't get on together at all. Given an unbalanced mind and that state of affairs, one has to admit that queer results might turn up."

"What do you make of the opportunity factor in his case?"

"All we have is his own word that he was up at the spinney shooting rabbits. For all we know, he may have been in the Maze. He knows it thoroughly. All the family do, of course."

He thought in silence for a moment or two, then added:

"And of course he's very keen on air-guns; and he knew of the store of curare in the house."

"You've made out quite a fair case against both Hackleton and young Hawkhurst *as suspects*, Squire; but there isn't a tittle of evidence there that a jury would look at, you know."

"Oh, I see that well enough," Wendover admitted. "But the case against other people isn't half as strong. Ardsley's a possible suspect. He has possession of curare; he knows the Maze intimately. .. . ."

"And he's had a squabble with Roger Shandon over some trifling fishing rights. I'm afraid even Izaak Walton would hardly have thought the matter was a sufficient ground for murder, Squire."

Wendover could think of no reply to this on the spur of the moment and to cover his defeat he hurried on to a fresh group of suspects.

"Now we come to the people who were actually in the Maze at the time of the murder or whom we know to have been in it immediately afterwards: Torrance, Miss Forrest, and that fellow Costock, your I.D.B. friend. I can't see how Miss Forrest had anything to

do with it. As to Costock, you know about him and I don't."

"Yes," said Sir Clinton, "I know all about Costock."

But he volunteered no further information and waited for Wendover to proceed.

"That leaves Torrance, then. It's as plain as print that Torrance might have been the murderer. He was in the Maze at the time. He arranged to part from the girl at the entrance. He's had plenty of time to learn the Maze while he's been down here at Whistlefield. He might have been the person Vera Forrest heard running in the Maze just after the murder—quite easily."

"He didn't take an air-gun into the Maze with him," Sir Clinton objected.

Wendover had his answer ready this time.

"No, but he might have had it hidden there beforehand."

"And no air-gun was found afterwards."

"He may have chucked it on to the top of one of the hedges. Your constables couldn't have spotted it there without ladders."

"That's quite true," said Sir Clinton. "Well?"

Wendover seemed to have a flash of illumination. His face lit up.

"Now I see what you meant by your map-analogy! Of course, the snag is that on the face of it young Torrance had no motive. But suppose he was Hackleton's tool? Suppose he was in the pay of Hackleton to do this job for him. Then it would all fit in. But it'll be the devil of a business to prove it, if it is true."

Glancing across at his friend he detected a peculiar expression on Sir Clinton's face. It was only a fleeting one, for almost immediately the Chief Constable resumed his normal mask.

"Go on," he said again.

Wendover had to confess that he had reached the end of his list.

"There's nobody else that I can think of. Sylvia Hawkhurst was paying a visit to some people in the afternoon and didn't get home till it was all over. Ernest Shandon was off the premises, too, probably sitting by the roadside and cursing the nail in his boot at the very time his brothers were being murdered. And then there's Stenness. He was up at the house when the affair took place. Miss Forrest found him there when she went to give the alarm."

"Stenness," said Sir Clinton reflectively. "Stenness is a very efficient fellow."

Wendover thought he detected something behind the phrase.

"What do you think?" he demanded.

Sir Clinton looked at him mildly.

"I think it's about time we were going to bed, Squire. We may have to be up early to-morrow. At least, I may."

Chapter IX

WHEN Sir Clinton came down to breakfast on the following morning, Wendover thought that he looked tired and worried, though he was doing his best to show his normal composure.

"You look as if you'd been up all night, Clinton; and yet you cleared me off to bed fairly early."

The Chief Constable forced a smile, but it was obvious that he had something on his mind which was troubling him.

"Not *all* night," he said, qualifying Wendover's suggestion by a slight emphasis. "But I've certainly lost a good deal of sleep over this Whistlefield business."

"I can't see what you've got to worry about just now," his host retorted. "Until one gets more evidence than we have just now, there's nothing that can be done, so far as I can see. You practically admitted as much yourself, last night."

"Last night and this morning are two different things," Sir Clinton pointed out, rather gloomily. "A lot may happen in six hours."

"Well, if they have happened, they have happened; and you couldn't have prevented them happening."

"That sounds like a truism," the Chief Constable commented, "and I wish it were one. But it isn't."

He seemed almost on the verge of a confidence at last; but to Wendover's disappointment he contented himself with adding:

"I've taken a big risk in this affair, Squire; and if

the game goes against me, I'd never be able to forgive myself. It's as serious as that."

From his tone, it was evident that he was gravely perturbed; and Wendover could find nothing to say which seemed likely to be helpful.

In a moment or two, Sir Clinton broke the silence.

"They're on the 'phone at Whistlefield, aren't they?"

"Yes. Are you expecting a message?"

"One never can tell," was all that Sir Clinton would vouchsafe. "Can you hear your telephone bell from this room?"

"Oh, yes, the machine's just down the passage from here, as it happens."

Sir Clinton went on with his breakfast; but Wendover could see that he was listening for the ringing of the bell. Just as they had finished, it rang sharply.

"I'll go," said Sir Clinton. "It's almost certain to be Whistlefield ringing up."

As he rose from the table Wendover could see a look of acute anxiety on his face. He left the door open as he went out, and the sound of his voice at the telephone came back into the room.

"Driffield speaking. . . . Did you say burglar or burglars? . . . All right, don't bother to tell me any more now. I'm coming across at once. Good-bye."

Sir Clinton came back to Wendover. The anxiety on his face was as deeply-marked as ever; but the prospect of action seemed to have raised his spirits slightly.

"Come on, Wendover. Get the car out, will you? There's been a burglary at Whistlefield last night. I'll need to go across and look into the affair."

When they reached Whistlefield, they were shown into the study where they found Ernest Shandon and Stenness waiting for them.

"Now you might give me the whole story, Mr. Shandon," Sir Clinton requested as soon as he had greeted the two. "It may be a case where time means a good deal; and we want to get our hands on these fellows at once, if we can."

Ernest pulled out his cigarette-case. He seemed to be in very nervous condition.

"D'you mind if I smoke?" he demanded, perfunctorily. "It soothes one, I always think; gives you a better chance of putting things calmly and not getting mixed up in your story."

He peered thoughtfully into his case for a second or two before he could make up his mind which cigarette to take; but at last he found one to his mind and set it alight. Wendover fidgeted slightly, but Sir Clinton evidently recognised the uselessness of trying to hasten Ernest in his operations.

"There's been a burglary here last night," he announced at last. "Or rather, when I say last night, I really mean this morning, because it was a good deal after midnight when it happened."

"Can you give me the exact time?" Sir Clinton asked.

Ernest looked at him owlishly, reflected for a moment or two, and then shook his head in a care-worn fashion.

"No, I don't think so. I didn't look at the clock, you know. It was after midnight, that's all I can remember."

"Begin at the beginning, then, Mr. Shandon, and give us all the details you can. Anything may turn out to be useful for all we can tell."

"I usually go to bed quite early," Ernest began, "but last night, after you went away, I thought I would have another look over Roger's papers. You

interrupted me, you remember," he said, as though in explanation of his activity. " I got quite interested in some of them. Roger had so many irons in the fire. I hadn't realised before what an amount of energy he must have had. You've no idea of the amount of things he was mixed up in."

" Yes ? " said Sir Clinton, trying to hasten the slow progress of the narrative.

" Such an amount of things," Ernest went on. " It took me all my time to make head or tail of the papers I looked at. I must have been hours and hours, turning them over and reading bits here and there—files of correspondence and that sort of thing. His cheque-book stubs were there, too, and I looked at them. I'd no idea so much cash passed through his hands, no idea at all. By the way, I noticed something funny about his last cheque-book. I'll tell you about that again, though. It was rum, I thought ; but I'd better be getting on with the story."

Sir Clinton nodded patiently and waited for more.

" I'd just been looking over the cheque-book when I heard a noise," Ernest pursued. " Of course, in an old house like this one often hears sounds at night, furniture cracking and doors rattling, and all that sort of thing ; so I didn't pay any attention to it at the time. It was only afterwards that I remembered I'd heard it ; and perhaps it had nothing to do with the burglary at all. I just mention it, because you said I was to give you all the details I could, you know."

" What sort of sound was it ? " Sir Clinton asked.

Ernest looked bewildered.

" What sort of sound was it ? " he repeated. " Oh, a noise, you know. A . . . a . . ." he seemed to find the English language too limited. " It was a sound, you understand ? "

"A voice?" suggested Sir Clinton.

"No, not a voice. A sound, just like a snick or a rap or something of that sort, if you see what I mean."

"And then?"

"Oh, I paid no attention to it. In a house like this one often hears queer noises at night. It didn't really draw my attention. I was interested in this thing about the cheque-book. So I didn't trouble about the sound."

Wendover was surprised at Sir Clinton's patience, for no sign of boredom appeared on his face. In fact, he seemed keenly interested.

"The next thing I remember," Ernest continued, "was feeling sleepy. I put away the papers, put them all back in the safe again and locked it up. Then I thought I'd go to bed. I always go out for a breath of fresh air before I go to my room at night—if it isn't raining—so I went to the window and looked out. It was quite dry; so I made up my mind to go for my usual stroll. I don't go far, you know, just up and down a little near the house. It seems to me that a breath of fresh air clears your lungs and makes you sleep better after you've had it. I'm a great believer in fresh air. I hate sitting in a stuffy room—must have the windows open always."

"So you went out?"

"Yes. I put on a light overcoat and a cap and I opened the front door. It was locked when I found it—I suppose that's important?"

Sir Clinton made no audible comment.

"I went out into the garden and strolled round the house. That took me under the window of the room where Neville—my brother—had been sleeping during his stay here. And, d'you know? I found a ladder sticking up against the wall there and resting against

Neville's window-sill. And when I looked up, there was the window open!"

Sir Clinton interrupted him.

"Was there a light in the room?"

Ernest blinked hopelessly for a moment or two.

"Was there a light? There may have been. Did I say anything about a light to you, Stenness, when I waked you up? No? Well, I don't think there was a light. There may have been, but now I come to think of it I don't remember seeing a light. No, I'm almost sure the electric light wasn't on in the room. I'd have noticed that. I'd have seen that at once. No, there was no light."

Wendover intervened with a suggestion.

"Perhaps the burglars heard you coming and switched off."

Sir Clinton had evidently heard all he wished to know about the light.

"And what happened next, Mr. Shandon?"

"When I came to the bottom of the ladder, I said to myself: 'Burglars.' You remember you'd been talking about how easy it would be to get into Whistlefield, that very night, in the museum. Then I had an idea. I took away the ladder as quietly as I could. That would prevent them getting out of the window again, you see? And then I went off back to the front door, let myself in, and roused Stenness and young Torrance. I was very nervous, you understand. Anyone might be, after getting a surprise like that."

He took a fresh cigarette and lighted it with care. As he was about to continue his narrative, Sir Clinton arrested him and turned to Stenness.

"Perhaps you could give us your experiences, Mr. Stenness."

"I'd gone to bed at the usual time, and fell asleep. I

was waked up by someone knocking at my door ; and when I got up I found it was Mr. Shandon. He said there were burglars in the room that Mr. Neville Shandon's body was lying in. Mr. Shandon had on a cap and a light overcoat. As soon as he had waked me, he went off to wake Mr. Torrance. I looked at my watch. It was 2.35 a.m. I picked up the poker from my fireside and went out of my room. Mr. Torrance was there, too, by that time. I suggested that he had better get a poker as well, or else go down to the gun-room and get something better. He got a poker. Then all three of us went to Neville Shandon's room. The door was locked ; but we burst it in without making much of a noise. It's an old door, and the lock fitted very poorly. There was no light on in the room when I got to it."

" I'm almost sure, now I think over it, that there wasn't any light at the window," Ernest began again. " I couldn't have helped seeing it, could I ? Of course, all the rest of the house was dark, so if that window was dark it wouldn't catch my eye and I wouldn't remember about it. But if it had been lit up, I'd have noticed it at once."

Stenness took no notice of the interruption.

" Somebody had evidently been in the room. Everything was upside down. All the drawers had been ransacked and their contents had been thrown about. Neville Shandon's attaché case had been treated in the same way. The whole place was in confusion."

" Did you make out what the thieves had been searching for ? "

" Well, his writing-case had been torn open and most of the contents had been strewn about the floor. They'd been in a great hurry over their work. And his pocket-book was pitched over into one corner of the

room as if someone had been through the contents and had chucked it away."

"What about money? His note-case was lying on the dressing-table. I put it there myself when I searched his body yesterday."

"Some notes were lying on the floor amongst the rest of the stuff. I didn't count them. In fact I didn't touch anything. I thought you'd better see things as they were."

"The window was still open?"

"Yes."

"It looks as though the burglar (or burglars) had got away before Mr. Shandon saw the ladder, then. They'd cleared out and left the ladder in position. What about the key of the door?"

"It hasn't turned up."

"And what happened after that? Why didn't you ring up the police at once?"

Stenness suppressed a sardonic smile with evident difficulty.

"Mr. Shandon was to look after that part. I went back to my room, put on some clothes, and kept myself awake by reading till the morning. We hadn't roused the rest of the people in the house."

Sir Clinton turned to Ernest.

"Couldn't you get through to the police-station, Mr. Shandon? I must see about this. It's a serious matter for my subordinates."

Ernest seemed completely taken aback by this view of the question.

"Well, Sir Clinton, I suppose I ought to have rung up the police; but it was very late, you know. I was awfully sleepy; and as I was walking along, I turned into my own bedroom. I was very shaken up by the whole affair. It hadn't happened to me before, you

see. And somehow, I must have begun to undress quite without thinking about it—you know how one does things unconsciously . . ."

Then, with disarming frankness, he admitted the truth :

" I went to bed. And after a minute or two, I remembered I ought to have rung up the police. But that would have meant getting out of bed again and putting on some clothes to go down to the 'phone. It would have been a lot of trouble. And it didn't seem to me that it mattered very much really. So while I was thinking about it, I fell asleep. But I rang you up as soon as I got up this morning."

Sir Clinton made no comment on Ernest's methods. He had got all the information he needed, apparently, for now he turned to Stenness and suggested that they should go upstairs and look at the scene of the burglary.

Neville Shandon's room bore out Stenness's description of it. Everything seemed to have been turned over and left higgledy-piggledy. The floor was littered with a confused mass of clothes, papers, contents of drawers, and other things. It seemed as though the whole place had been searched in frantic haste for some object or other ; but whether the seeker had succeeded or not was apparently an insolvable problem.

Sir Clinton stepped over to the still open window and examined the sill.

" The marks of the ladder-ends are there, clear enough," he pointed out to Wendover, " and there's the ladder itself down on the ground."

He beckoned Stenness to his side.

" One of your own ladders, I suppose ? "

Stenness examined it.

" Yes, I happen to recognise it. The gardeners use it and it's kept somewhere about the place."

"Some soil on the window-sill," Sir Clinton pointed out. "They must have picked it up on their boots from the flower-bed where the end of the ladder rests."

"There's some on the floor here, as well," Stenness pointed out.

"So I see," Sir Clinton confirmed, "but that might have been brought up by Mr. Shandon when you and he came in here. One can't attach much importance to it."

He said nothing more and contented himself with a careful inspection of the room.

"I think I've seen all I want to see," he said at last. "By the way, you haven't a key of the Maze, have you? I noticed the iron gates at each entrance had locks on them. I want to go down there now and look round."

"I can get you a key, I think," Stenness said, doubtfully, "but the place is always left open. It's never been locked at any time, to my knowledge."

"Oh, that's all right, then," Sir Clinton hastened to say. "Now, Wendover, I think we'll be getting along."

A thought seemed to strike him at the last moment.

"If you're afraid of being worried by any more burglars, Mr. Shandon, I'll detach a couple of constables to look after Whistlefield. But I really don't think it's the least likely that you'll have any further attempts of the sort. They seem to have made a thorough business of this one, to judge by the state they left the place in."

Ernest seemed rather shamefaced at the Chief Constable's proposal. Quite obviously he recognised that he had not shone as a hero in the business of the night.

"No," he replied, "I don't think we need them, Sir

Clinton. I think we'll manage without them, really. Of course, one feels a little nervous. I think it's quite understandable, when things have been happening all together like this. But still, I don't think we really need a guard. If you think it's not likely to happen again, I'm quite ready to take your view of it, quite ready, I assure you. As you say, there's no reason why they should come back at all. They must have got what they wanted. They're sure to have got it, I think. No, they're hardly likely to come back again."

As they made their way downstairs Sylvia Hawkhurst met them.

"I've been looking for you, Sir Clinton. Guess what you left behind you last night."

Sir Clinton shook his head doubtfully.

"I never succeed in these guessing competitions, Miss Hawkhurst. What was it?"

"The box of darts! You put it down on the mantelpiece of the museum; and I happened to notice it this morning when I went in."

Sir Clinton's face betrayed his annoyance at his blunder. It was so obvious that no one cared to say anything on the subject.

"I'll get it for you in a moment," Sylvia said, as she hurried off.

Stenness looked at the Chief Constable, and it seemed as if his estimate of Sir Clinton was undergoing revision. Wendover was completely taken aback by the turn of events.

"Here it is," Sylvia said, as she came back to them again. "It was just where you left it. You'd better count the darts to make sure I haven't lost any—though I haven't opened the box at all. I was too much afraid of them."

Sir Clinton obeyed and found the total correct. He

shut the box carefully and stowed it away in his pocket.

"Thanks, Miss Hawkhurst. It was very careless of me. But there's no harm done, since you've taken care of them for me."

And after a few words about the affairs of the night, he took his leave.

"Take the road to the East Gate, Squire," he requested, as Wendover let in the clutch.

"*You're* a bright detective," his friend retorted scornfully. "Here you've been racing and chasing to cut off a possible source of curare; and in the middle of the job you leave a whole tin of lethal darts lying about for Tom, Dick or Harry to pick up. The limit, I'd call it!"

"It was very careless," Sir Clinton admitted, biting his lip.

"Careless!" Wendover echoed, contemptuously. "I can't think how you managed to do it. My godfathers! Leaving stuff like that on a mantelpiece!"

Sir Clinton flushed.

"Look here, Squire, I can say 'You're a damned fool,' just as often as I need to hear it just now, without your help. You can't guess how I feel about it. Don't rub it in, there's a good chap."

Wendover had never seen his friend so disturbed before. He stopped his denunciations at once. In a few moments they reached the Maze, and both left the car. Sir Clinton led the way to the entrance through which they had gone on the previous afternoon.

"I'd better take the lead," said Wendover. "I know the Maze and you don't. Just follow me."

Sir Clinton paid no attention but kept in front. To Wendover's surprise he showed no hesitation, but

threaded his way through the labyrinth without difficulty. When he reached the centre he turned to his companion.

"That's merely to show you that anyone can find their way through here if they keep their heads. I memorised the thing as Stenness was guiding us yesterday—first right, third left, and so on. So you see the murderer could have got it up easily enough if he had someone to show him the ropes at the start."

He glanced into the centre and then passed round to the position of the loophole in the outer hedge. As he did so he gave an exclamation of disgust and passed his hand over his face.

"Ugh! Spider's web got across my mouth! There's any amount of gossamer about here. These hedges must be full of spiders. Beastly things!"

Coming to the loophole, he examined it carefully as though to discover the range of view from it. Then he made his way to the loophole commanding the second centre, which he inspected with equal interest.

"Now we'll go outside and have another look at the track my dog picked up," he announced, curtly.

Wendover followed him once more, and they emerged from the entrance near the river. Sir Clinton walked over to the tree to which the dog had led them; and then, using the scraps of paper scattered on the previous day as his guide, he crossed the grass. Once on the road, he stopped and turned to Wendover. He seemed to be still smarting under the annoyance of his blunder with the darts.

"That's the murderer's route, you see? He came out of the Maze obviously. Then he climbed that tree, I think you said. No doubt he was well out of danger there. No one would think of looking for him up amongst the leaves. And after that he came over here,

got into his private aeroplane, and flew off—since the trail stops short."

He glanced up and down the road.

"Just the one place where he could have done it, notice. This bit of the road is concealed from nearly every direction by these banks of rhododendrons round about."

Wendover took no notice of the irony. He sympathised with Sir Clinton's feelings; it required no great stretch of imagination to appreciate how a man would feel after making a mistake like that. They walked over to the car and took the road to the East Gate.

As he drove, Wendover began to fit together the new facts in the Whistlefield case. The more he recalled the state of Neville Shandon's room, the more obvious it grew that the burglar had been searching for a document of some sort. This linked itself in his mind with the torn fragment of Neville's notes which had been found in his hand after death. And Roger's room had not been burgled.

"It looks like Hackleton at work," he uttered, half-unconsciously.

Sir Clinton seemed to come out of a savage reverie at the words.

"Hackleton? Oh, you mean the burglary? It fits neatly in, doesn't it?"

Then, in a more friendly voice than he had used since the dart incident:

"I'm sorry if I rubbed you on the raw, Squire. But you know how I hate to look like a fool; and that's exactly what I do look like just now."

Wendover was eager to accept the advance. He had no desire to irritate his friend. After all, everyone makes mistakes sooner or later. But as they fell into talk

again a fresh idea shot through his mind; and this time he did not utter it aloud:

"Clinton hustled me off early to bed last night. He was washed-out-looking this morning. He hinted he'd done something or other that was risky. What if he was the burglar himself?"

But though he puzzled over this view of the case, it yielded very little help to him. At last he put it to the back of his mind, ready for future reference if needed.

Sir Clinton had one further surprise for him as they reached the Grange:

"Would you mind, Squire, if somebody brings a glass of boiling water, some vinegar, and some washing soda to my room as soon as possible? I'd like to have them now."

Chapter X

WHEN Sir Clinton came down from his room Wendover noticed that he had mastered his vexation. During lunch, both of them avoided the Whistlefield case by tacit consent ; but the Squire was relieved to see that his friend's face showed less anxiety in its expression than had been obvious at the breakfast table. Sir Clinton usually had complete control of his features and showed no more than he wished the world to see ; and Wendover guessed that behind the mask the Chief Constable was still too sensitive to make the affair at Whistlefield a safe subject of conversation.

When lunch was over Sir Clinton smoked a cigarette for a minute or two in silence. Then he turned to his host.

" You might lend me your car, Squire. I ought to go down to the police station this afternoon and get some reports from the man in charge. It isn't worth your while to come with me. They'll only be formal affairs, I suspect ; and if there's anything striking, I'll tell you about it when I get back."

Wendover consented. His tact suggested that Sir Clinton would probably prefer to be alone until the first edge of his irritation had worn off.

When the Chief Constable returned, however, he had little news of importance.

" There's no sign of the burglars so far," he admitted.

" I rang up the police from Whistlefield in the morning and put them on the alert ; but they've picked up nothing that looks like the shadow of a clue. One could hardly expect it. Thanks to friend Ernest's lethargic habits, a burglar could have got to the Midlands before my men even knew of the Whistlefield affair."

" I suppose they've done all they can ? "

" For a local lot handling a thing of this sort, they've really done very well. They've made inquiries at all the railway stations in the neighbourhood and drawn blank. No suspicious person can be traced there. They've done their best in the matter of motors, too ; but that, of course, was rather a wash-out. One can't expect them to keep tally of every car that might pass along the road. And they've had a regular hunt through the Whistlefield gardens to find out how the burglary was done. But there again they struck a blank end "

" Footmarks on the flower-bed ? " inquired Wendover.

" One or two beautifully rectangular impressions—that's all. The fellow evidently tied bits of cardboard under his shoes. One hasn't even an idea of the size of his foot. And of course friend Ernest had been stamping about all over the bed in his efforts to remove the ladder with least trouble to himself. He didn't exaggerate when he said he was nervous. It seems he just gave the thing a push and let it fall anyhow—smashed some flowers to bits in the collapse. If the burglars were still in the room above the row must have put them on the alert at once."

" You think they may have got away into the house and been hidden there while Stenness and Co. were breaking into the room ? "

"Well, you can lock a door from either side, can't you?"

Wendover reflected for a moment.

"It's a pity Stenness didn't think of searching the house when they found no one in the room."

"Much too late by that time, Squire. No hunted burglar would wait on the premises a second longer than he could help. He'd be off downstairs at once and get out of the ground floor windows on the opposite side of the house."

"But then he'd leave an unlatched window behind him."

"So he may have done. No one can swear that all the windows were made fast yesterday evening. They're a careless lot up at Whistlefield."

Wendover's mind fastened upon the thing which seemed to him of most importance.

"What did the burglar want? What was he after, Clinton?"

Sir Clinton's face became inscrutable, though Wendover could not help seeing irony in his reply:

"'What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling questions are not beyond all conjecture,'" he quoted. "Sir Thomas Browne knew what he was talking about. What thing the burglar sought, though puzzling is not beyond conjecture, Squire. The field's open, if you wish to enter for the competition."

Wendover accepted the irony as a proof that Sir Clinton had got over his fit of annoyance completely.

"Well, then, I conjecture that the burglar was in Hackleton's pay—like the murderer—and that he was hunting for more of Neville Shandon's notes for

the case. Look how everything was turned upside down. Look at the fact that the money was left intact. That wasn't what one expects from a normal burglar."

"No, it wasn't," Sir Clinton agreed. "But I'm not going to be drawn. Go on with your conjecturing, Squire; and if that fails you might take to surmising or speculating as a change of occupation. Thinking exercises the brain, so you won't really lose in the end."

"You're an exasperating beast at times, Clinton," Wendover affirmed, without a trace of irritation.

"If that's the first result of thinking, I don't think I'd take it up as a hobby," Sir Clinton responded cheerfully. "It might lead to peevishness among the neighbours."

He walked over to the window, possibly to conceal his expression, before communicating his next piece of information.

"I had time to drop in on your friend Ardsley, too, on my way home."

Wendover rose to the bait at once.

"Oh, indeed! I hope he showed you his best specimens; a pithed frog, perhaps, or a mangled dog? It's no good lifting these eyebrows of yours, Clinton. I don't like the fellow."

"One could almost guess it from the way you talk. But bear in mind, Squire, that even the meanest of God's creatures may have its uses. I've got a use for Ardsley," he added carelessly, "so don't go making things too unpleasant if you come across him any time."

Wendover gave a half-suppressed growl.

"One rubs up against a lot of queer fish when one begins mixing with the police, it seems," he complained, half in fun and half in earnest.

Before Sir Clinton could reply, the bell of the telephone rang sharply.

"Bet you nine to four that's Whistlefield ringing up," the Chief Constable offered. "Here, I'll go myself."

He left the room and Wendover waited uneasily for the result of the conversation. It took a minute or two, and he knew from this that it must be something relating to Whistlefield, for Sir Clinton had no friends in the neighbourhood. When the Chief Constable returned, Wendover looked up with a certain foreboding. News from Whistlefield of late had never been encouraging; and he feared that something more might have happened.

"Did you take that bet?" inquired Sir Clinton. "If so, you owe me a note or two. It was Whistlefield at the other end of the line, just as I expected. If this goes on, we may as well tell the Exchange to leave their plug in our hole permanently and save bother to all hands."

"What's happened now?" demanded Wendover, anxiously.

"An attempted murder this time. Your friend Ernest rang up to tell me about it. They've tried to get him next; but he fled like a lamb from the slaughter and seems to have saved his bacon. But he's in a pitiable state," Sir Clinton went on, a tingle of contempt coming into his tone. "Quite blue with funk, I should judge. He nearly wept into the mouth-piece, and I could hear him gasping for breath at the other end of the wire. Quite a shock to his nerves, it appears. We'll have to go across and comfort him. Come along."

"You don't seem much worried over his troubles," Wendover commented.

"I've no great use for a cowardly little beast. You should have heard him on the 'phone, Wendover. Sounded like one of those things they used to run in the Grand Guignol."

"Even the meanest of God's creatures may have its uses," Wendover quoted, sarcastically.

Sir Clinton's temporary cheerfulness seemed to have passed away.

"That's a true word spoken in jest, no doubt. You're perhaps right after all. We may find a use for even friend Ernest before we're done. But on the face of it, it doesn't look probable, does it?"

When they reached Whistlefield they were shown at once into the study where they found Ernest in a state of nervous collapse. A syphon and a decanter stood on a tray at his elbow; and the moving surface of the whiskey showed that he had just finished pouring out a drink. As they came in, he poured some more liquor into his empty tumbler.

"I think I'd leave it at that, Mr. Shandon," Sir Clinton suggested, coolly. "We'd better not run any risk of your memory getting confused."

Ernest took his hand away from the tumbler obediently. Wendover could see that he was trembling, and he seemed to be in a condition bordering on panic.

"Now, let's have the story as briefly as possible, if you please," Sir Clinton requested.

Ernest looked helplessly round the room for a moment.

"I can hardly believe I'm safe," he explained. "I've had such a time, such a time. Dreadful!"

"Yes, tell us about it."

"After dinner, I thought I'd go down and have a look

at the Maze," Ernest continued. "I hadn't been there, you know, since the affair happened; and I thought I might as well go down and look round the place. I wish I'd never had the idea. Such a time I've had."

His eyeglasses slipped askew on his nose and he laboriously set them right before continuing.

"Damn these things! I must get a new pair. They're always dropping off."

"Yes?" Sir Clinton repeated, patiently. All his levity had vanished, Wendover noticed, now that he had come to real business.

"After lunch I thought I'd go down to the Maze; but it seemed a lot of trouble, going all that distance; and I very nearly gave up the idea. I wish I had. But then I thought of the push-bike I keep in the garage. It would be easy enough to pedal down on it. So I got it out and went off by the road that leads to the East Gate."

He put out his hand tentatively towards the tumbler, but drew it back again at the sight of Sir Clinton's frown. He looked like an overgrown baby caught in the act of mischief.

"Yes?" Sir Clinton repeated once more.

"I went into the Maze, you know, never thinking that anything could possibly happen there. I never dreamed of anything happening, you understand? And I walked through it to Helen's Bower—the place where my brother Roger was murdered, you remember? And when I got there I sat down. I'd come a good way, you see? And I felt that I'd like to sit down."

"Did you see anyone in or near the Maze up to that moment?" asked Sir Clinton.

Ernest pondered for a moment or two. His trepidation, far from brightening him, seemed to have made him look duller than ever.

"No," he said, hesitatingly at last, "I can't say I did. I don't remember seeing anyone."

"And then?"

"Where was I? Oh, yes, I sat down. It was rather hot; and I thought I'd like a seat. I meant to sit there and smoke a cigar before looking round the Maze. I sat there for a while, I don't quite know how long. Some time, at least. And then I may have fallen into a doze. The sun was very hot, even when I was in the shade of the hedge, you understand? It makes you sleepy. I suppose I dozed off. Perhaps I was asleep for quite a while."

"You can't give me anything more exact than that, can you, Mr. Shandon?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't. It was quite a while, though, I feel pretty sure of that."

He put out his hand towards the tumbler again.

"I really think I'd get on better if I had another drink."

Sir Clinton looked at him with unconcealed distaste. Then he picked up the tumbler himself.

"Two fingers, then."

He went across to the window and poured away the surplus from Ernest's generously-filled glass.

"Now, come along, Mr. Shandon. The sooner we get your story the sooner I can get to work. You must pull yourself together."

Ernest Shandon drank off his whiskey neat and then gave a sigh of relief.

"I feel better now. I've really had a terrible time! Where was I? Oh, yes, I woke up."

"Thrilling!" said Sir Clinton, brutally. "And what next?"

Wendover could not help seeing that Sir Clinton's temper was wearing thin under the strain of listening

to this out-pouring of rambling narrative. And this time there was no Stenness who could be turned on to complete the tale. They were dependent entirely on the terror-stricken creature before them.

"I woke up," Ernest repeated, staring at them with wide-opened eyes as though chronicling some vast convulsion of Nature. "And just after I woke up I seemed to hear steps somewhere near me. I wasn't very wide awake, you understand? and I sat listening for a moment or two—or it may have been for a little longer than that," he added with an evident effort at exactitude. "And I thought to myself it might be young Torrance or Stenness. It couldn't have been the girls, you see? because they had taken the car and gone off to do some shopping in Ambledown. I know that, because they said they were going there and I wondered why they didn't go to Stanningleigh, which is nearer. But I suppose they wanted to go to some special shop in Ambledown. There are better shops in Ambledown . . ."

A glimpse of the expression on Sir Clinton's face brought him suddenly back to his direct narrative.

"So I called out: 'Who's there?' just like that, you know. But nobody replied. So I was wondering who it could be; and I was just going to call again when suddenly I heard the noise of an air-gun going off; and something whizzed past me as close as that!"

He indicated a track almost grazing his cheek.

"I jumped up. I didn't wait to hear any more. I can take the right decision as quick as most people, I assure you, Sir Clinton. I ran as fast as I could to the entrance; and then I heard the fellow re-loading the gun! It was dreadful! My blood didn't freeze or anything like that, but I suffered agonies—agonies!"

"Quite so," said Sir Clinton soothingly. "You were in a blue funk. We quite understand. An alarming situation. And what happened after that?"

"I ran out into the Maze. Luckily I'd spotted where the fellow was. He was at the same loophole that he'd used when he killed Roger. Oh, I had all my wits about me; I was really very cool, considering the state of affairs."

"And then?"

"Then I ran through the Maze as hard as I could. Such a time! Fancy having the fellow after me with those darts!"

"He followed you, then?"

"It would be what he *would* do, wouldn't it?"

"You mean that you didn't actually hear him?"

"No, I didn't hear him. I didn't wait to hear anything. I was so busy getting out of the Maze. Of course, I know the Maze well, but it's difficult to keep your head in a case like that, very difficult. But I did it," he ended proudly. "I got away from the fellow. Never as much as saw him."

His glasses slipped off again in the excitement of his peroration; and he adjusted them painfully.

"These things do give one a lot of bother," he complained. "I expect it's the perspiration on my nose, with all that running. I haven't run for years."

"You got out of the Maze safely, then. What next?"

"I got on to my bicycle and rode away as hard as I could. What a blessing I had that machine there, eh? If I hadn't, he might have run me down in the open quite easily. I was quite out of breath."

"Then?"

"Then I went to the telephone and rang you up at

the Grange. I had an idea you'd be there. If you hadn't been, I'd have tried the police-station."

"Quite right, Mr. Shandon. Now there are one or two points I must have cleared up. First of all, it seems you met no one either going to the Maze or coming back from it. Did you shout or call for assistance at all on your way to the house?"

"I couldn't," Ernest admitted, simply. "I hadn't any breath left to shout with. You don't understand what it was like, I assure you."

"Was there no one about?"

"No," Ernest answered after a pause. "Arthur had gone off somewhere. He generally seems to go off by himself, quite often one doesn't see him for hours. I don't know where he was. And Torrance was out of the road, too. I can't tell you where he was. Perhaps he'd walked over to Stanningleigh. Or perhaps he'd gone somewhere else. I haven't seen him since lunch-time."

"And Mr. Stenness?"

To Wendover's surprise the sound of Stenness's name seemed to galvanise Ernest. His terror appeared to increase again, just when it had seemed to be dying down.

"Stenness!" he repeated. "Oh, Stenness . . ."

He broke off short, as though afraid he had been heard.

"Just a moment," he muttered, and rose from his chair.

Wendover could see that the man's knees were trembling. Ernest walked across to the door, opened it gently, and peered out with a caution which had in it a touch of the ludicrous.

"Nobody there," he explained, as he came back again. "You never know."

"What's behind this, Mr. Shandon?" Sir Clinton demanded, impatiently. "If you've any information, it's your duty to give it to me at once. Have you anything to tell me about Mr. Stenness?"

Ernest made a gesture, appealing piteously for a lowering of Sir Clinton's voice.

"You remember," he continued, almost in a whisper, "that the other night—I mean last night, the night of the burglary—I was going through Roger's papers. I think I told you before that I was doing that, didn't I? And amongst his papers I came across his chequebooks and some stubs. I was looking through these, just to see what things he'd been spending money on—the firms he'd been dealing with, and so forth, you understand? And quite by accident, I noticed something funny. The counterfoil of the last missing cheque had been cut out of the book. I'd never have noticed it if it hadn't been that I was looking at the numbers. It was cut away very carefully, very neatly indeed, you know? But there was the counterfoil for the cheque before it numbered something like 60072 and the next one in the book was numbered 60074 or some figures like these. There was a missing number in the series. And there was another funny thing. I happened to look at the last bundle of returned cheques in Roger's drawer. He hadn't destroyed them, it seems, for some reason or other. I can't think why, myself. But there they were. And one of them was missing from the series."

"There's nothing mysterious in that," Wendover objected. "It may have been a cheque that went abroad, and hasn't been returned to the bank yet. Your brother had interests overseas."

Ernest's dull eyes brightened slightly in triumph.

"That's where you're wrong, Wendover. That's a

mistake. I was curious about the thing, it seemed to me so funny. So I looked up at the counterfoil of that missing cheque in Roger's stub ; and it was a cheque for some hundreds and it was made payable to his stock-brokers. That seemed funnier than ever, didn't it ? A cheque like that would go right back to the bank with no delay. It would be paid in immediately, I'm sure it would. Wouldn't it ? Of course, sure to be, you know ? "

Sir Clinton had been following this with keen interest.

" And where does Mr. Stenness come in ? " he asked.

Ernest looked round the room again as though he feared that Stenness might be concealed somewhere.

" Well," he said, reluctantly, " Stenness had access to Roger's papers. He could have got at this cheque-book, I'm sure. Roger was a bit careless, sometimes. I've seen his cheque-book lying about on the table often. I remember I saw it last Tuesday, was it ? Or was it Wednesday ? It was in the morning, I know that."

Sir Clinton's face showed uncommon interest now.

" And you think . . .? " he prompted.

Ernest poured out another stiff glass of whiskey, this time unchecked by anyone.

" I can't say I think anything, really. I shouldn't like to go so far as that, you understand. That might be going too far. But I let slip to you that I'd found something funny amongst the cheques, last night. I mean I told you this morning what I'd found last night. Or rather . . ."

" I understand," said Sir Clinton, rescuing him from his tangle. " And . . . ? "

" And Stenness was there when I mentioned it. He knew I'd found some hankey-pankey."

Sir Clinton leaned back in his chair and thought for a moment or two.

"I see what's in your mind, Mr. Shandon," he said at length. "Well, that can be put straight easily enough. So long as you were the only person who knew of this affair, you might be a danger to the fellow who was responsible for what you call the hankey-pankey. It might be worth his while to put you out of the way—silence you, eh? and cover the business up."

Ernest's starting eyes showed that he had no liking for such plain discourse.

"Then," continued Sir Clinton, "the remedy's simple. Just tell whoever it is—we needn't drag in names, need we?—that you've mentioned the matter to me. Then there will be no point in disturbing you further, you see? You'll be quite safe, once you've done that. Doubly safe, in fact, for any further attack on you would be a bit too suspicious. That's your best course."

"I never thought of that," said Ernest, gratefully. "It's a relief, I can tell you. Such a relief! And you think there'll be no chance of another attack on me?"

"I'd take almost any odds against it," Sir Clinton reassured him.

"Well, I shall stay inside the house altogether for a week or two, at any rate," Ernest decided, his fears returning suddenly. "That ought to be safe enough."

He applied himself again to the decanter.

Sir Clinton had one last question to put.

"Where was Stenness while you were down at the Maze?"

Ernest stood with his tumbler arrested on the road to his mouth while he pondered over the matter.

"I don't know," he admitted finally. "I really can't say. I left him here, working at Roger's papers; and I told him I was going to Helen's Bower. But when I came back again he wasn't here. He'd put the papers away. I don't know where he'd gone."

"Ah, indeed?" said Sir Clinton ruminatively. But he made no further comment.

Chapter XI

" We'll have another look at the Maze, Squire, if you don't mind stopping there."

Wendover nodded. He had expected the suggestion.

" You didn't seem to overflow with sympathy for Shandon," he commented.

" Friend Ernest raises my gorge," admitted Sir Clinton, frankly. " Did you ever see a man in such a state ? I never could stand that sort of thing."

Then, as though he felt he had been too hard on Ernest, he added perfunctorily :

" Of course, he'd had rather a bad half hour of it."

" I admire the restraint of your language," said Wendover with a smile. " But, you know, Clinton, I think you're a bit hard on the beggar. What could he do but run ? I'd have run myself, and I make no bones about it either."

" Oh, so would I," Sir Clinton conceded carelessly. " It wasn't the running that put my back up."

" You mean that there's running *and* running, so to speak ? "

" Exactly. Look at the case of that girl who was in the Maze when the murders were done—Miss Forrest, I mean. She had just as much right as Ernest to get hysterical. I won't say she was as cool as a cucumber when we saw her ; one couldn't expect that. But she kept her nerves in order. She didn't arrive at the house afterwards in a state of whimpering panic."

"No, that's true," Wendover confirmed. "She's worth a dozen of Ernest Shandon at a pinch, that girl. She kept her head and did exactly what was wanted."

"Quite so. She wasn't thinking of her own skin all the time like Friend Ernest."

"What's all this about Stenness?" Wendover demanded. "Is it merely some rot that Ernest's squirted out in the middle of his funk, or is there anything in it?"

"Here's the Maze," Sir Clinton interrupted, cutting him short. "Suppose we postpone discussion till after dinner to-night, Squire. I don't want to be distracted for the next few minutes, if you don't mind."

They entered the Maze and made their way towards Helen's Bower. Near the door into it Wendover stopped suddenly and pointed to the pathway at their feet.

"Hullo! Look, Clinton! There's a bit of black thread lying on the ground."

They stooped over it and examined the fibre.

"Ordinary sewing-silk off a reel, obviously," was all that Sir Clinton vouchsafed.

Wendover thought he had seen more in the matter.

"Don't you see what it is, Clinton? Ariadne's clue! It's a thread that the murderer must have been using to find his way out of the Maze in a hurry."

"I showed you before that there's no difficulty in the Maze if you've once been taken to the centre."

Wendover had his answer in readiness.

"Yes. But suppose you were the murderer, you would have to get out in a hurry, wouldn't you? And you might lose your head. Anybody might get confused in the flurry. So he took the precaution of laying the thread to the exit; and all he had to do was to follow it and reel it up as he went. And this time a bit of it caught somewhere—see, this end's tangled in the hedge

—and so it broke off and he had to leave it behind. When the Shandons were murdered he probably managed to reel up the whole of it and so left no trace behind him."

"Sounds plausible," Sir Clinton commented curtly. "We may as well collect the specimen, though really there's nothing distinctive about it. One bit of thread's very much like another."

"Sherlock Holmes might have made more out of it than that," said Wendover, rather resentful at the way his discovery had been treated.

"Doubtless. But as he isn't here, what can we do? Just bumble along to the best of our poor abilities. That's what I'm doing, Squire."

They entered the tiny enclosure of Helen's Bower, and Wendover's eye was at once caught by a sparkle from the grass near one of the chairs. He stepped across and picked up a silver cigar-case. Sir Clinton held out his hand for it and glanced at the outside.

"It's got a monogram, E.S., engaved on it," he said. "This is obviously friend Ernest's. You remember he said something about smoking a cigar here. He may have laid the case on his knee and jerked it off without noticing it when he started on his Marathon for safety."

He held the case in his hand and seemed to give careful consideration to some point. At last he came to a decision and turned to Wendover.

"I think we'll say nothing about this for a day or two, Squire. I may want to send this case up to London to have it examined, perhaps. I can't say yet. But in the meanwhile we'll not mention that we found it. Friend Ernest can take his cigars from the box, in the meantime. That's no great hardship for him."

"You think the murderer may have picked it up, and you'll get his finger-prints from it? It's a nice smooth surface."

Sir Clinton looked up from the case with a gleam of amusement on his features.

"You're in charge of the Speculation, Surmise, and Conjecture Department of this firm, Squire. I'm only a humble clerk in the Mum and Dumb Section—telegraphic address: 'Tongue-tied.'"

Wendover accepted the tacit rebuke without protest.

"Oh, have it your own way," he said, "I forgot I wasn't to expect anything from you."

Sir Clinton wrapped the cigar-case carefully in his handkerchief and stowed it in his pocket before doing anything further.

"Now I think we'd better go and have a look at the loophole again," he suggested. "Though I hardly think it's likely to have changed much since I saw it last. But I have a sort of feeling that Sherlock would have found something there, and perhaps you might be able to spot it, even if I can't. That's the worst of this detective business: one needs an eye for detail, and I never had it."

With an air of deep solemnity he led the way to the outer side of the hedge, approached the loophole, and peered into it for a time.

"No," he admitted finally with a crestfallen air, "it seems just the same as it was when I saw it last."

He put his hand into the hole.

"Not even a bird's nest or any little thing of that kind," he announced disconsolately. "Ah, we need Sherlock; we need Sherlock. He'd have found some cigar-ash or something of that sort, no doubt. I can't see it. Have a look yourself, Squire."

Rather irritated by the chaff, Wendover stooped

and stared into the loophole. He had to confess, however, that he saw nothing in the slightest degree suggestive.

"No broken twigs where the murderer rested his air-gun?" Sir Clinton inquired. "Have a good look; the price is the same for two peeps as for one. Special terms by the hour, if you care to . . . Ugh! Damn these spiders! That gossamer's all over the place—filthy, filmy stuff!"

He rubbed his hand on the hedge while Wendover grinned at his annoyance.

"Serves you right, Clinton! It'll take your mind off all this persiflage business."

Sir Clinton seemed engrossed in removing the remaining filaments from his hand.

"Pity Sherlock isn't here," he let fall in a regretful tone. "He turned into an entomologist of sorts when he retired. Perhaps he could tell us what earthly use spiders can be."

"They keep down flies," said Wendover, instructively.

"So they do. Illuminating idea! I wish I'd thought of it myself. They keep down flies!"

"When you're quite finished being funny, perhaps you'll get on with your job, Clinton. You're supposed to be detecting murderers, not delivering lectures on insects."

Sir Clinton dropped his jesting tone at once.

"Quite right. We ought to be getting along to the police-station now."

"Aren't you going to do any more here?"

"No."

"What about bringing up that dog of yours and seeing if it can do anything?"

"The dog could do nothing in this case," said Sir Clinton, definitely. "It would be a mere waste of time."

"Well, you seem to know your own mind about that," Wendover said, rather wonderingly. "I suppose you know best. But I'd have thought it worth trying."

Sir Clinton made no reply, but led the way through the Maze to the car.

"We'll call at the police-station on the road home, Squire, if you'll run us round there. I'm expecting some more reports. And some men must come up here and search for anything left about—not that it really matters. By the way" he added, casually, "I suppose you know who the murderer is by this time?"

Wendover could only express astonishment at the question.

"Well, you've had every chance," was all that Sir Clinton would vouchsafe.

"If you know who he is, why don't you arrest him at once?" Wendover demanded.

"There's a big gap between knowing a thing and proving it," said Sir Clinton, cautiously.

At the police-station the Chief Constable got out of the car and went in to interview his subordinates. In a minute or two he was back again, with some papers in his hands; and they drove on to the Grange.

"I've just time to ring up Ardsley before going upstairs," he said, when they arrived; and he disappeared in the direction of the telephone. Wendover noticed that this time Sir Clinton closed the door of the room behind him, instead of leaving it ajar as he had done on the previous occasions; so that no sound came out during the conversation.

"I wonder what he's up to with that confounded Jack-the-Ripper," Wendover speculated uneasily, as

he went upstairs to dress. "Well, perhaps he'll tell me something after dinner."

But when they had settled themselves in their easy chairs after dinner, he found that Sir Clinton evidently intended to reverse the rôles.

"Now then, Squire, *you're* under no restraint of official secrecy. What do you make of the affair so far?"

"I see. I'm to be Watson, and then you'll prove what an ass I am. I'm not over keen."

Sir Clinton hastened to reassure him.

"I'm not going to poke fun at you merely for the sake of making you uncomfortable, Squire. It would really be some help if I could see the thing from a fresh point of view. Lord knows, I'm not infallible; and you may quite easily hit on something that'll put a new light on things and prevent me making a bad mistake."

The obvious sincerity of this was enough to placate Wendover. He had been cogitating deeply over the Whistlefield affair, and he felt that if he could not suggest a provable solution of the mystery, at least he could bring a reasonable amount of criticism to bear on the available evidence.

"What we have to account for," he began, "are; first, the murder of the two Shandons; second, the burglary; third, the attack on Ernest Shandon; and, fourth, the so-called hankey-pankey with the cheque."

"That's correct," Sir Clinton agreed. "But suppose we leave out the cheque affair at present. We really know nothing definite about it yet."

Wendover was dissatisfied with this ruling.

"It seems to me an essential part in the scheme of things. Let me put the case as I see it. Hackleton is at the back of the whole affair, I take it; but he's been employing an agent; and that agent has been going beyond Hackleton's instructions and has been operating

on his own to a certain extent. I think that fits everything in the case."

Sir Clinton seemed inclined to dispute this conclusion, but he restrained himself and merely nodded to Wendover to continue.

"I see your objection, I think," the Squire went on. "You meant to say: 'Why were *both* the Shandons murdered when it was only Neville's death that was essential to Hackleton?' But there's quite a plausible explanation of that. You can't hang a man twice. So if a man decides to commit a single murder, he might as well commit two. The punishment's the same for a quantity. And if he can commit two with equal impunity—as in the Maze—mightn't it occur to him that two murders would be a stiffer problem than one murder, in these particular circumstances? Isn't it the double murder that's giving all the difficulty? Of course it is. If either Shandons had been murdered solus, we'd know at once the line to look up. But at present we don't. Now why shouldn't the murderer have seen that very point and utilised it?"

Sir Clinton nodded.

"That's ingenious, Squire. I'm not ironical."

"I'd rather choose that solution than any of the other possible ones. If you reject it, you've got to assume that two independent murderers, both using the same out-of-the-way method, chose to operate simultaneously. The chances against that are miles too big. Or else you have to believe that two co-operating murderers were at work and that each of them thought he had the right victim in front of him. I can't quite swallow the notion that this was a co-operative affair. The third solution is that the murderer mistook one brother for the other, killed Roger first, and then had to kill Neville to carry out his instructions.

He might have had only a general description of Neville Shandon to go on and may have made a mistake in identity."

"I doubt if Hackleton would have left any loophole of that sort." Sir Clinton interrupted. "Neville's portrait could easily have been bought and given to the murderer. But it's not worth while arguing the point. The murderer knew the two Shandons perfectly well by sight. I'm sure of my ground there."

"You mean the murderer was a local man?" demanded Wendover. "How did you find that out?"

"I'm not going to tell you at present, Squire. Sorry to play the mystery-man, and all that sort of stuff; but it has to be done."

Wendover was plainly distrustful of this point.

"If it *was* a local affair, what was the black silk thread, then? The thread we found in the Maze not a couple of hours ago."

Sir Clinton closed his eyes as though pondering deeply.

"Yes, indeed," he said oracularly, "what was the silk thread?"

He sat up suddenly and beamed on Wendover.

"I should say it was a clue."

"Damn your leg-pulling," the Squire broke out. "I shan't go on, if you're going to make the whole thing into a farce."

Sir Clinton apologised.

"Sorry. You took a wrong meaning out of what I said. But don't let's waste time over it. Please go ahead, Squire."

Only partly molified, Wendover continued his analysis.

"The next thing is the burglary. That was obviously a case of getting at some document belonging to

Neville Shandon. You remember the fragment of notes for his cross-examination that was found in his hand? They got some of his stuff, but clearly they suspected that he might have more notes. So they burgled his room to see if they could find anything further."

This time Sir Clinton showed no desire to criticise.

"Right! On the face of it, the burglary and the murder of Neville Shandon fit together. But the trouble is that the commission of the burglary would show that it was Neville they were after, and hence make the murder of Roger useless as a blind. I merely point out the snag. I'm not trying to carp, Squire."

Wendover thought for a minute or more in silence. Then he produced a reply.

"The two murders were part of a pre-devised scheme, as I suggested. But afterwards, the murderer found he hadn't got the documents complete. He had to get them if possible. So he took the risk of the burglary giving the show away."

Sir Clinton admitted the possibility of such a case.

"But now what about the attack on Ernest Shandon. How does that fit in?"

"What's one murder more or less to a man who has two on his soul already? The attack on Ernest may have been an extra blind, simply, like the murder of Roger Shandon. Suppose they'd got Ernest this afternoon, wouldn't that have tangled the business up still further?"

"Admitted, of course. And really friend Ernest would hardly have been missed. Is that all the theory you have on the point?"

Wendover was rather doubtful about putting forward his second choice.

"It might have been a practical joke, of course. Someone with a sense of humour rather out of gear might have had a grudge against the little beast and, knowing he was an arrant coward, they might have stirred him up without meaning to do him any real harm —just used an ordinary air-gun dart."

He looked at Sir Clinton suspiciously.

"You yourself didn't waste much worry over him, it seemed to me. I thought at the time that you were taking it as a practical joke, somehow."

"A very practical joke," Sir Clinton said, but he kept every tinge of expression out of his voice when he made the comment.

"Now we can go on to the identity of Hackleton's agent," Wendover resumed. "You say it was someone who knew the Shandons by sight. It must have been someone who had leave to come and go at will through the Whistlefield grounds, or else someone who landed on the river-bank. That limits things down a good deal. Roger Shandon didn't encourage strangers to roam about his place. The gardeners had orders to turn out anyone who ventured in, unless they were going up to the house on business. No stranger or neighbour—bar Costock—was on the premises so far as is known. I came across one of the gardeners and he told me that."

Sir Clinton had no hesitation in confirming this.

"That agrees with all my men have been able to make out."

"Then," Wendover proceeded, "we're limited down to the people at the house, the staff of the place, and Costock."

"Go on," Sir Clinton encouraged him.

Wendover pulled a notebook from his pocket and

consulted some figures which he had jotted down at the time he heard the original evidence.

"If you take the facts as we know them," he went on, "It's clear that Neville Shandon could not have reached the Maze before 3.37 p.m.; and the second murder was over before 4.5 p.m. As a matter of fact, the times really allow less margin than that, for Neville's body was found at 3.52 p.m. and both were probably dead by that time."

"I think that's quite demonstrable on Torrance's evidence," Sir Clinton admitted.

"That means then that the murderer left the Maze at some time not much earlier than four o'clock, since Miss Forrest heard him in the Maze after Neville's body was found by Torrance at 3.52 p.m."

"Most probable on the face of it."

"Then if you find someone in such a position that they could not have been in the Maze at 4 p.m., they're cleared."

"True."

Wendover produced from a cupboard an Ordnance Survey map of the district.

"Let's take each person in turn and see if we can establish their positions during the afternoon."

"I can help you there," Sir Clinton volunteered. "I got most of it in the police reports. They were busy on that very point."

Wendover nodded and began without more ado.

"Sylvia Hawkhurst. She was out paying a call, wasn't she?"

"Yes," Sir Clinton explained. "She and friend Ernest went off in the car from the house at about eighteen minutes past three. At a quarter to four—just about the moment when the murders occurred—she was in a shop buying shoe-laces. That precludes any

chance of her having used the car to get back to the Maze at the critical time. After that she paid a call on some friends and stayed with them until she came back home after six o'clock."

"What about Ernest Shandon?"

Sir Clinton smiled

"Miss Hawkhurst dropped him at the East Gate as she passed out. It's about two-and-a-half miles to the East Gate, and she says she was driving about fifteen miles an hour—it's a narrow road, you remember. That means she dropped him at the East Gate at about 3.30. It's the best part of two miles back to the Maze. Friend Ernest could hardly have walked it in fifteen minutes, could he? And he's not much of a runner, to judge by his condition this morning. As a matter of fact, his story's completely confirmed by other evidence. My men interviewed the driver of the post-cart. At 4.20 he came upon Ernest squatting by the roadside, about a mile along the public road, into which the East Gate leads. It's a place where there's a little wood, easily identifiable. Friend Ernest was sitting there with his boot off, damning the nail that had hurt him."

Wendover looked at his map.

"That clears him. I can see the wood; it's the only one that abuts on the road in that stretch. Now what about Arthur?"

"We've only his own word for his movements. He certainly set out for the spinney; but that's all one can say."

Wendover scanned his map once more.

"The spinney's only a mile from the Maze in a direct line. He might have cut across and got away again; and no one would be any wiser. He had all the afternoon for the affair."

His face clouded.

"Somehow, I don't think he was responsible, Clinton."

Sir Clinton made no direct reply.

"He was hardly a likely agent for Hackleton to fix on, at any rate," he observed.

"Well, let's get on. What about the gardeners?"

"Two of them were working in a field about a mile from the Maze all afternoon. Each clears the other."

"And the third gardener who was on the spot that day—the man Skene?"

"His story is that he was working in the kitchen-garden near the house. There's no evidence against that."

"The maids? And the chauffeur?"

"All accounted for. They had nothing to do with the affair."

"And Stenness?"

Wendover looked keenly at Sir Clinton as he brought out the secretary's name; but the Chief Constable showed no sign of special interest.

"Stenness?" he repeated, "Stenness was undoubtedly at the house at twenty to five, or thereabouts, for Miss Forrest saw him when she came back."

"Then he'd plenty of time to be down at the Maze at the critical period and get home to the house again while Torrance and Miss Forrest were wandering about in the labyrinth?"

"He had," Sir Clinton agreed, gravely.

"He'd have been the ideal agent for Hackleton," Wendover pursued. "And if Ernest's not got the wind up about nothing—which is always possible, of course—Stenness would be worth watching."

"He is being watched," Sir Clinton assured him, and then seemed to regret his confidence.

Wendover, however, seized on the point at once.

"Ah! So after all your criticisms it seems you believe in my original theory!"

"I've forgotten which that was, by this time," Sir Clinton admitted. "What was it?"

The Squire was rather nettled.

"You poured scorn on it at the time. What I said was this: Suppose Hackleton hired a man to put Neville Shandon out of the way. You say that was a local man, according to some evidence which you haven't divulged to me. Very good. If he was a local man, he might have had access to Roger Shandon's private papers, his cheque-book, and so forth. When he was hired for the Neville Shandon business, he may have decided to make a bit extra by forgery, and cover it up by the second murder. Two murders are as cheap as one, when it comes to pay for them; and Roger's murder has confused the trail very considerably. It's only a question of identifying the man who could have managed all that without going too much out of his way and attracting attention."

Sir Clinton had been listening carefully to Wendover's exposition.

"That's very neat indeed," he conceded. "It would certainly hold water, if it fitted all the facts that you know, Squire; but unfortunately it leaves out of account the most interesting fact of all."

"And that is?" Wendover demanded, with some asperity. He was annoyed to find that he had overlooked something.

"That is the most interesting fact of all," Sir Clinton assured him blandly. Then, with a change of tone: "And that's all I'm able to say just now, Squire. I've no fault to find with your reasoning. It hangs together beautifully. But sometimes the human mind,

if you follow me, is apt to assume connections where no such things exist in Nature. We've got an instinctive craving to trace associations between sets of phenomena —and at times we kid ourselves that there is some relationship when really it's only a case of simultaneity."

"You've been reading one of these shilling manuals lately," said Wendover, suspiciously. "'How to be a Philosopher in Ten Minutes,' or something like that. All this gay talk about simultaneity and phenomena and association comes straight from there. You can't deceive me with a veneer of learning."

"Well, I won't dazzle you with further extracts. Let's get back to business. Go on with your list."

"Young Torrance," Wendover continued. "He's a possible agent. I don't know about his financial circumstances; he may be hard up, for all I know, and amenable to the cash bait that Hackleton could offer. It would be a pretty big one. Young Torrance was the person who proposed that game in the Maze to Miss Forrest. That would give him a reasonable excuse for being in the Maze at that particular time; and further, it would ensure that he was free from the girl's supervision at the critical moment. Could you have invented a neater dodge yourself if you'd been set to it?"

"No," Sir Clinton admitted, frankly, "I doubt if I could."

"Take another point," Wendover pursued his line of reasoning with increased interest. "What evidence have we that there ever was a third individual in the Maze at all? Torrance's statements: but if Torrance was the murderer himself, of course he'd insist that a third person was present. Miss Forrest's story of someone running in the Maze: but that may have been Torrance himself. You remember that she found it

most difficult to tell the direction from which sounds came when she was in the Maze."

"That's a theory that might take some upsetting, Squire, if you can explain just one point. What did Torrance do with his air-gun after he'd finished with it. No air-gun was found in the Maze after the business. The murderer got rid of it somehow."

"I see no great difficulty there," Wendover pointed out at once. "Look at the time Miss Forrest spent in wandering up and down in the Maze, unable to find her way out. If Torrance knew the labyrinth, he could easily make his way through it, get out to the river bank, chuck his gun into the water, and sprint back again into the Maze before she noticed his absence."

He thought for a moment before adding:

"In fact, I don't see why he mayn't have got rid of the gun in the interval between the last murder and the moment he gave the alarm—the time when he shouted out that he'd found the body."

He paused again. Then a further flash of insight threw a fresh light on the case.

"Why, of course, that would account for the running man. He would be rushing to the river bank and back again as quick as he could go, for the essential thing would be to get rid of the gun before anyone met him in the Maze."

Sir Clinton had dropped all his air of superior criticism.

"That's remarkably neat, Squire. I shouldn't be surprised if it doesn't touch the root of the business—at one or two points, at the least."

Curiously enough, the Chief Constable's comment produced a complete change in Wendover's mental outlook. He had fallen upon the Whistlefield case with all the enthusiasm of the irresponsible amateur. The

mystery of it had caught his imagination, and he had thrown himself into the chase for a solution with an eagerness which he had hardly realised himself. He felt no more responsibility than if he had been attempting to follow the clues in a detective story. Even the characters involved in the affair failed to give him any particular emotional background. He had never been intimate with the Shandon group; and some of the party he had not so much as seen before the tragedy occurred. Consequently, though he had used the real names of the various people concerned in the affair, they had borne no more significance than if he had said "Mr. X" or "Mr. Y." The atmosphere in which he had worked had been that of a chess problem rather than an affair in real life.

And now, at Sir Clinton's change of attitude, he caught a glimpse of a fresh side. It seemed that the line of thought which he had suggested might lead to something definite. It was no longer a case of idle speculation about the criminality of Mr. X or the guilt of Mr. Y. Instead, it was a question whether that rather decent young fellow Howard Torrance was going to find his neck in a noose one of these fine mornings. His own speculations might be the starting-point for a fresh line of detection. It came upon him with something of oppression that in his position with regard to Sir Clinton, his speculations might be put to practical use. Situated as he was, it was hardly so irresponsible a position as he had supposed.

But at this point in his train of thought a fresh idea occurred to him.

"Clinton said he knew who the murderer is. So my speculations don't matter much. But it would have been a bad business if I'd turned suspicion on young Torrance. He might have had a lot of difficulty

in clearing himself, if Clinton had taken up that line."

Sir Clinton broke in at this moment.

"You don't suspect Miss Forrest, I suppose!"

"No."

All the amusement had gone out of the game, so far as Wendover was concerned; but Sir Clinton seemed to have no inkling of this, and pursued his way through the list.

"Then that leaves Costock," he pointed out.

"I don't think Costock did it," Wendover declared. He felt inclined to turn his criticism into the other camp now. "What have you against Costock? Can you bring any evidence to show that he had curare in hand. Or that he had an air-gun? Or even that he was in the Maze at all at the time of the murders?"

"If that's your line," said Sir Clinton, with a non-committal gesture, "we'll say no more about it. I'll look after Costock. Now there's one name left—Ardsley. You'd better leave Ardsley to me, Squire. You're far too apt to see red on that subject. You couldn't produce an unbiassed view of him if you tried."

"Have you any evidence about his movements that afternoon?" Wendover asked, perfunctorily.

Sir Clinton also seemed to have grown tired of the business.

"You'll find Ardsley's name pretty prominent in the Whistlefield business when it's all cleared up, I think. But I'm not prepared at present to say exactly what his part in the affair may turn out to be in the end."

Wendover was only too glad to let the matter rest at this point. Irresponsible speculation is one thing; speculation which may lead up to a death sentence is

something quite different. Suppose his ingenious reasoning—he had to admit that some of it was ingenious—were to lead to a wrongful conviction? He hadn't quite seen it in that light before. It was all very well for Clinton to go in for theorising. It was his job to find the criminal and convict him. But Wendover had begun to feel that it was hardly for an amateur to step in and take a hand. Why, already he had light-heartedly thrown out suspicions against several people; and obviously some, at least, of these suspicions must be baseless. He would keep out of the field in future, he resolved.

But there was still one point in connection with the Whistlefield case which had given him a good deal of perplexity. It threw no suspicion on anyone. He decided to clear it up if possible.

"There's one thing I've been thinking over," he began. "Why did you pretend you'd forgotten those darts on the museum mantelpiece, when all the time you'd left them there deliberately? You acted the part pretty well, Clinton. You took me in completely at the first rush. I thought it was real vexation over a genuine mistake. But when I'd had time to think about it, I saw plainly enough that you'd done it on purpose. You're not the sort that makes silly mistakes of that kind."

Sir Clinton came out of his reserve at once.

"I'm not fooling now, Squire," he said gravely; "I'm absolutely serious. I've staked my main case on that affair. I'm not able to tell you how or why at present. But you mustn't breathe a word about it to a living soul, *no matter what happens next.*"

Wendover, in that moment, had a glimpse of a rarely-displayed side of Sir Clinton's character. It convinced him, without further argument.

"Very good. Nobody will learn it from me."

"You may find it pretty difficult to hold your tongue Squire; but I trust you to do it. The temptation will probably be very strong before long. I'm hoping for the best; but I warn you that I'm expecting some pretty black work at Whistlefield before we're through with this business. I couldn't help seeing the funny side of Ernest Shandon's affair; but the next one may not have much fun about it. You can take my word for it that Tragedy's in the wings, now, waiting for its cue. So, *no matter what happens*, keep a tight grip on your tongue. You're the only one who could spot that I was acting then. Nobody at Whistlefield knows anything about me. They took me for a blundering idiot. And that's precisely what I wanted."

Chapter XII

"I SEE the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown," Wendover remarked. "I suppose it's the only verdict that would fit the case. They seemed to think you'd been rather slack in not having it all cut and dried for them, Clinton. Quite obviously they wanted the murderer's head on a charger, and they were disappointed when you couldn't produce the article."

"I think they were disappointed that we hadn't given them more evidence than we did," Sir Clinton suggested with a certain indifference in his tone. "They seemed to imagine that the whole affair had been got up for their amusement—so that half of them could take on the post of Sherlock-on-the-Pounce. They can pounce away to their heart's content if they wish. I'm not stopping them. But it isn't my business to supply them with spring-boards, though they seemed to think so. All I wanted was to get the formalities through without too much jaw. And the coroner, decent man, saw to that for me.'

"What about your own swoops and pounces, before you wax ironical about these unfortunate yokels? It doesn't seem to me that you've got very much further than they've done, after all. What about it, Clinton?"

Sir Clinton laughed teasingly.

"The Hackleton case is dragging along still," he said, with the obvious intention of changing the subject. "Shandon's junior isn't making much out of it, so far

as I can see. Old man Hackleton has every reason to be content with the removal of Neville Shandon. He's having it all his own way in the case now—far too clever for the poor barrister. He'll get off scot-free, or I'm much mistaken."

Wendover refused to be led away on this fresh trail.

"Seriously," he said, "you don't seem to be doing much on this Whistlefield case. You've just been loafing about, these last few days."

Sir Clinton did not defend himself. In fact, he went out of his way to underline Wendover's complaint.

"And to-night I'm actually dragging you off to play bridge at Whistlefield, eh? Well, the invitation didn't originate with me. It came from Miss Hawkhurst. I admit that I angled for it in a somewhat unprincipled way—gave her to understand that the company of a sour old bachelor was getting on my nerves here, that I'd welcome a little bright feminine society, and that the society of herself and Miss Forrest had just the very kind of brightness that the case needed."

"She must have felt flattered!" Wendover commented ironically.

"Oh, of course it was put in my most delicate vein."

Then Sir Clinton became suddenly serious.

"I'm not very happy in my mind about things, Squire; and I want to get a footing in that house apart from purely professional visits. Hence the angling. Otherwise, the thing would be in the worst of taste, I quite admit."

Wendover pricked up his ears.

"Are you expecting more trouble even now? Nothing's happened. . . ."

"Since the last time? No, it's rather a curious point which you may have noticed, Squire. Nothing ever does happen between the last time and the next time.

That I should say was an almost invariable rule in life."

"You evidently lost the chance of a good job when the Sibyls went out of business," said Wendover in a disappointed tone. "You could have written up their books for them in the very best style. You're a past master in the art of seeming to say something important and really saying nothing whatever."

"It often comes in useful," said Sir Clinton. "But why say anything at all? It seems just about the time when we ought to be starting for Whistlefield. Suppose we take the hint."

He refused to discuss the Whistlefield case during the drive across, or even to give Wendover an inkling of why he wished to get a footing in the house at all. The Squire was not quite satisfied. To him, it appeared rather like a breach of hospitality for them to go there with anything in their minds beyond the game for which they had been invited. He disliked the idea of Sir Clinton Driffield introducing his *alter ego* the Chief Constable into a neighbour's house by this indirect method.

When they arrived they found only four of the Whistlefield party awaiting them. Arthur Hawkhurst was busy with the loud-speaker, from which he was evoking weird oscillation-notes in the course of his endeavours to pick up different stations. Ernest Shandon was sitting drowsily in a corner of the room; and Wendover noticed with distaste that he had a spirit decanter and syphon on a table beside him. As the Chief Constable and Wendover were announced, Sylvia came forward.

"So glad you've come, Sir Clinton. We're looking forward to some decent bridge. . . ."

A weird howl from the loud-speaker drowned the

remainder of her words. Ernest lifted himself from his chair with an effort and approached them.

"Are you much of a bridge-player?" he inquired apathetically. "I never cared enough for the game to do much good. It's such a lot of trouble, you know. All this business of struggling for the declaration, and all that. And if one gets keen on it one's apt to get very keen; and perhaps then one spends a lot of time over it. And one might spend that time in other ways, perhaps better, don't you think? But perhaps you like it? Some people do."

"Uncle was never a rap of good at it," Sylvia explained with a faint suspicion of a smile. "So naturally he doesn't like it. Same as the non-dancing man who can't dance, you know."

"Now Stenness is a good player," Ernest went on. "And I can't think why he finds it amusing. He's got all the cards docketed in his head, you know, just like a lot of papers in pigeon-holes. That seems to me too much like work—making a toil of pleasure and all that sort of thing. But to-night he won't be playing. He's busy in the study with some papers I asked him to look over. And Torrance is practising shots in the billiard room, so he won't be playing, either. Arthur! Are you going to play?"

Arthur looked up crossly from his task.

"No!" he snapped. "Can't you see this affair's gone out of gear and I'm trying to put it right?"

Another shriek from the instrument emphasised his words. Sylvia put her hands to her ears.

"Will you be long over it, Arthur?" she demanded. "These howls are terrible."

"Can't you see I'm doing the best I can?" her brother retorted snappishly. "There's nothing so aggravating as to have someone standing over one the

whole time asking : ' Will it be all right soon ? ' and ' When d'you think you'll have it in order ? ' or ' D'you know what's wrong with it ? ' I'm doing the best I can with the thing."

Sylvia was evidently used to her brother's outbreaks of temper. With a slight gesture she reassured Arthur that he would not be interrupted again ; and then she turned to getting the bridge-table arranged. She and Wendover were to play Sir Clinton and Vera Forrest.

" I don't care much for this room at this time of the evening," she said, as she took the cards from their box. " The window's almost level with the ground, and that bank of rhododendrons is so close that it blocks the best part of the view."

" Not much view left at this time of night, Miss Hawkhurst," Wendover said, glancing out. " The dusk's so deep that one can hardly see anything in it now."

Ernest who had been shuffling about the room in an aimless fashion for a few moments suddenly uttered a complaint.

" It's very stuffy in here. Don't you find it so, Sir Clinton ? And you, Miss Forrest ? It's a rather hot night. Very close. I do like fresh air ; they sometimes laugh at me and call me a fresh air fiend, you know ; but I do like a breath of fresh air. Anybody object to the window being opened a bit from the bottom ? Let some cooler air in here, then."

Sylvia looked up from her game.

" We're right in front of the window, uncle. Perhaps some of us might object to possible draughts."

But Ernest refused to allow his desires to be side-tracked in this way.

" You don't object, Miss Forrest ? No ? And you

people don't, either? You see, Sylvia, nobody minds. I'll just open it a bit."

He went forward and threw open the lower sash to its highest range.

"There! That's much better!" he ejaculated, as he retired to his corner again. "It won't get so stuffy now. That'll be a great improvement, you'll see. I never could stand stuffy rooms. I remember . . ."

Whatever he remembered was drowned by the loud-speaker. Arthur had at last completed his repairs and the jazz music of the machine filled the room.

"There! That's all right now," the mechanic announced at the pitch of his voice in an endeavour to make himself heard. "I'll just leave it on, if you don't mind. I want to see if it's properly fixed up."

He left the room unobserved by the bridge-players, who were intent on their game. Ernest gave a sour look at the loud-speaker; and after bearing it with obvious distaste for some minutes, he also rose.

"I'm going into the winter-garden," he explained, as he passed the bridge-table. "I can't stand the racket that machine makes. It makes my head ache; it gives me a regular piercing pain in the ear to sit near it. I'll just rest quietly in the winter-garden and come back again when Arthur's finished with his tinkering at the affair."

He stooped over Sir Clinton's shoulder and added in an undertone:

"I've been very careful lately. I've taken your advice and kept inside the house as much as possible—so as to run no unnecessary risks, you know."

He nodded with the air of one who confirms a weighty decision and lumbered off out of the room, leaving Sir Clinton staring after him.

"My advice!" the Chief Constable reflected with a

certain dry amusement. "Well, I like his cheek in foisting that on to my shoulders!"

Wendover was glad that bridge precluded much conversation. He felt that Sir Clinton had drawn him into a false position that evening; and he had to exert himself so as not to betray his feelings in the matter. Once they sat down, however, the play turned out very even; and he had not much mental energy left for anything beyond his game, which tended to reconcile him to his visit. Both the girls played better than the average; and he was beginning to forget his dissatisfaction as time went on.

"That's game and rubber," said Sir Clinton, at length, as he looked up from the marker lying beside him.

Sylvia glanced at her wrist-watch."

"Shall we play another?" she asked. "There's plenty of time, unless you wish to get away early."

As she spoke she stretched out her arm to lift the marker; but in the middle of the gesture she gave a sharp cry of pain and started up from her chair. Then, as she mechanically brought her hand down again on to the table, Wendover saw a spurt of blood from her right wrist and, at its source, the brown feathering of one of the poisoned darts embedded in her white skin.

For an instant the group around the bridge-table was stricken into immobility, while the blood jetted from Sylvia's wrist and stained the cards across which her hand had fallen. The swift incursion of tragedy upon the scene had taken them unawares. A moment or two earlier they had been sitting in safety, intent upon their game. Then, out of the night the tiny missile had sped to its mark; and the King of Terrors had come among them. There had not even been the warning of the air-gun's report; for it must have been drowned

by the noise of the loud-speaker which still continued to pour out its incongruous flood of dance music.

Wendover, frozen in his chair, took in the scene almost without knowing that he was observing it ; the pain-shot face of Sylvia, the horror in Vera Forrest's eyes, the trickle of blood across the littered cards, and the cool visage of Sir Clinton as he leaned over the table towards the wounded girl. Then, as he watched, Sylvia's expression changed. She had seen the poisoned dart in her wrist and now she understood what it meant. Her lips opened as though saying something, then her face grew suddenly white, and she slipped back in her chair.

Sir Clinton rose swiftly and lifted the unconscious girl across the room to one of the couches. Wendover noticed that, even in the haste, the Chief Constable took care to use his own body as a shield, keeping it between Sylvia and the window until he had reached a point which seemed out of range of the assassin.

" After the brute, Wendover! " Sir Clinton ordered, raising his voice above the clamour of the loud-speaker. " You may be able to spot him before he gets clear away. And shut that window behind you."

Galvanised into action by the curt directions, Wendover suddenly ceased to be a mere spectator. Without a word he swung himself through the open window and out into the darkness. Somewhere in the gloom, the unknown murderer must be lurking, waiting perhaps to make sure of his victim with a second shot. Wendover was filled with an anger wholly alien to his usual temperament, and he peered eagerly into the obscurity around him in the hope of glimpsing a shadow moving among the shades.

The murder of the two Shandons and the attack upon Ernest had left him emotionally untouched to any

real extent. The two Shandons had been hard men, from all he knew of them; and the fate which had overtaken them did not seem altogether out of keeping with the people of their type. The attempt on Ernest had been unsuccessful and had made little impression on Wendover's feelings. But this latest outrage was in a different category. Even yet he could hardly realise that a deadly effort had been made to injure Sylvia. Sylvia! It was hardly possible for him to feel sure that anyone would attempt to bring down a girl in that terrible fashion. A man, somehow, was different; but he revolted against the idea of cutting short a life like Sylvia's. The aimlessness of it seemed appalling to his mind; and his anger against the hidden assassin rose to a white heat.

He moved forward in the direction from which he supposed the shot had come; but in a few steps he ran right into the belt of rhododendrons which stretched parallel with the house on this front. As he did so, the loud-speaker was suddenly shut off; and he halted to listen for sounds of movement. Nothing seemed to be stirring. He circled about the rhododendrons, but found no one there.

He retraced his steps towards the window. A single dim light shone at the other end of the winter-garden, but except for it the house-front was dark. The bridge-table showed every detail under the lamps of the room beyond the window—an ideal target for the eye of any-one posted in the darkness.

Suddenly Wendover's eyes were dazzled by a blaze of light as the whole of the winter-garden lamps were switched on.

"I say," demanded a cautious voice, "what does all this mean? What's all this about, I say? Who are you, out there?"

Wendover's eyes, after an instant or two, grew accustomed to the glare. Looking towards the speaker, he saw Ernest Shandon's figure at the nearest door of the winter-garden. Ernest evidently meant to run no risks; for he was holding the door almost closed and had taken shelter behind it while he called out his demand for explanations. Wendover's lips curled contemptuously as he noted the shrinking figure under the lights.

" I'm Wendover," he announced.

Ernest opened the door another inch, though with manifest reluctance.

" What's it all about ? " he reiterated, with almost pathetic anxiety. " Is there any danger ? What are you running around like this for ? Where's Driffield ? What's happened ? Can't you answer, man ? "

Wendover was still more disgusted by the obvious poltroonery of the man who was, nominally at least, his host.

" Miss Hawkhurst has been shot with one of those poisoned darts. Come along and see if there's anything we can do."

Ernest was quite evidently reduced to the last stage of moral prostration by the news. He had not even sufficient nerve left to cover up his cowardice.

" Eh ? What's that ? Come out there and be shot at myself ? I won't! "

" Well, stay there, then! " Wendover growled, continuing his way back to the window through which he had come.

" I tell you what I'll do," he heard Ernest's voice again. " I'll go into the house by the other door of the winter-garden and come round to where you are. I'll be under cover the whole way if I do that."

The sound of the winter-garden door closing and the turning of the key in the lock came to Wendover's

ears as he reopened the window and climbed through, shutting it behind him.

Sylvia was still lying on the couch, evidently unconscious. Sir Clinton was beside her and, much to Wendover's surprise, some lint and bandages had been laid out on the bridge-table which had been pulled across the room.

"Miss Forrest," the Chief Constable said curtly, "Will you bring some warm water? Get it yourself. These maids are no use in an emergency. And tell them to get Miss Hawkhurst's room ready for her—immediately. A hot-water bottle as quick as they can—and some brandy."

Vera was so quick that she had to pause at the door for his last directions.

"You, Wendover," went on Sir Clinton, "get Ardsley on the 'phone at once. Tell him I want him here at Whistlefield."

Wendover halted for a moment.

"Hadn't I better tell him what he's wanted for? He may be able to bring something with him."

"It's all arranged. Damnation, man! *Will* you hurry up!"

Wendover, electrified by the vehemence of the tone, hurried off without a word. When he returned he found that Vera Forrest had carried out her instructions and had come back to see if anything more could be done. Ernest had also found his way into the room and stood staring vacantly at the form of his niece lying so limply on the couch. He was evidently about to open his mouth when Sir Clinton looked up.

"Everything all right? Thanks, Miss Forrest. You got Ardsley, Wendover? Good so far, then."

He was busy bathing the wound with warm water as he spoke.

" There's just a chance we may be able to do something," he explained going on with his task. " By the merest luck, the dart hit the chain of her watch-bracelet. It got down between the links and made a nasty wound all the same; but it didn't quite embed itself in the flesh. So there's just the chance that the dose of poison injected may not reach the fatal amount. I can't say. Ardsley will know better when he arrives."

He bathed the wound again, then turned to Wendover.

" You saw no one ? "

Wendover shook his head.

" It's practically pitch dark to-night. I could see nothing."

Sir Clinton thought for a moment.

" You'll find a flash-lamp in my overcoat pocket. Get it, Wendover, and hunt round that bank of rhododendrons to see if you can find the air-gun. The brute may have dropped it in the hurry, this time. Don't mind if you make a mess—the gun's more important than any tracks you may obscure in your search."

As Wendover moved towards the door, Ernest seemed to come to life.

" I suppose I ought to help," he said, " but it seems to me taking a needless risk, sending anyone out into the dark like that. For all we know the fellow may be out there yet, with his gun. I don't think anyone should go. I'm not going," he concluded simply.

Sir Clinton glanced up for a moment and scanned Ernest with eyes which made no effort to conceal their contempt.

"I didn't ask you to volunteer. Go on, Wendover. I'll come and give you a hand as soon as Ardsley arrives."

As Wendover turned to leave the room Stenness's figure appeared at the door. It was evident that the secretary had been put on the alert by the hurrying to and fro in the house, and had come to see what was amiss; but apparently he had had no inkling of the real state of affairs. Wendover saw him glance from one to another in the room until at last his eyes lighted upon the limp figure of Sylvia stretched on the couch. Then a flash of expression crossed his features, something which betrayed an intense emotion; but Wendover, at the moment, was unable to interpret it. He stored it up in his memory for future consideration, and then left the room.

"And now," said Sir Clinton, "I think we'd better take Miss Hawkhurst up to her room. We can manage it well enough; and she'd better be there rather than here when she comes to herself again."

Under his directions this was carried out. On reaching Sylvia's room, Sir Clinton looked round and then, going over to the window, he endeavoured to scan the surroundings; but it was obviously too dark to see much.

"I think we'll shift this bed," he suggested, when he came back. "It had better be brought over into this corner. Then there will be no possibility of any shot reaching it from the window. One never knows . . ."

He paused for a moment.

"Now I think Miss Forrest and I had better wait here till Miss Hawkhurst comes out of her faint; or at anyrate till Dr. Ardsley turns up. But we mustn't have a crowd here just now."

His manner, rather than his words, cleared the room

of his late assistants; and he and Vera Forrest were left alone. Sir Clinton, after feeling Sylvia's pulse, succeeded in giving her a few drops of brandy. Soon she stirred faintly. Sir Clinton left the bedside and returned to the window. Down below, at a short distance, he could see Wendover busy with the flash-lamp. Quite obviously he had not yet found anything.

As Sir Clinton turned away from the window Vera Forrest beckoned him aside.

"What do you think, Sir Clinton? Is there any chance of her getting over it?"

Sir Clinton's grave face showed the anxiety which was at work in his mind.

"I really can't say anything, Miss Forrest, for I don't know anything. The wound isn't as deep as in the other cases. That's always something. She hasn't collapsed immediately, as her uncles did. That's something also. But we'll need to wait for Dr. Ardsley; and even when he comes, I doubt if we shall learn much. He'll at least be able to give her any special treatment that there is. We can only hope for the best."

It was clear from his tone that he did not take a light view of the case. He had hardly ceased speaking when they heard the sound of someone racing up the stair. The door was opened brusquely; and Sir Clinton had just time to interpose himself when Arthur Hawkhurst came into the room. The boy was evidently in high excitement. He had learned of the affair downstairs and had rushed up on the spur of the moment.

"'Sh!" said Sir Clinton, angrily. "Don't break in here like a wild bull!"

He led the boy gently outside into the hall.

"Your sister has been shot at like your uncles," he explained. "So far, the thing hasn't killed her; but you needn't take any optimistic view. I've sent for

Dr. Ardsley. He knows about that poison ; and perhaps he may be able to do something."

Arthur seemed unable to control his excitement.

" But who'd do a thing like that ? " he demanded.

" Don't make a row," Sir Clinton ordered, bluntly. " We can't stand here holding a committee meeting. There's plenty of time for discussion later on. She's just coming out of a faint—at least it looks like that. Shock of seeing what had hurt her, no doubt, was what sent her off. Nothing to be done now until Ardsley comes. . . . Ah, here he is. Now, Hawkhurst, we'll go ; and leave the expert to the business."

Ardsley was ascending the stair, carrying a bag with him. He nodded a curt greeting to the two at the head of the stair, gave another interrogative nod as if inquiring which room he should enter, and then disappeared, closing the door behind him. Arthur seemed amazed that Sir Clinton had said nothing as the doctor passed.

" Aren't you going to tell him about it ? " he demanded anxiously.

" He knows all about it," Sir Clinton assured him, but he added no explanations. " One moment, before we go."

He waited for a minute or two, then the door of Sylvia's room reopened and Ardsley came out. His ordinarily impassive face had an expression of unusual gravity ; and in answer to Sir Clinton's interrogation he shook his head doubtfully.

" One can't tell," was all he would vouchsafe. " Get these nurses at once."

And with this he turned on his heel and re-entered the room.

Sir Clinton put his hands into his pockets and stood for a moment or two as though lost in thought. Then

suddenly coming to life again, he made his way to the telephone box, where he shook himself free from Arthur on the plea of an urgent call.

When he had given his message through the telephone, the Chief Constable returned to the room in which the attack had been made. Wendover was apparently still busy with his search among the rhododendrons; Vera Forrest was with Sylvia; but the rest of the Whistlefield group were there, waiting to hear the latest news of the victim.

Ernest Shandon's nerves had evidently suffered severely from this fresh shock. He was sitting in his original seat at the back of the room, his head sunk forward and his eyes staring apathetically at the carpet before him; whilst in his hand he held a glass of neat whiskey which he had just poured out from the decanter beside him. Sir Clinton noticed that the curtains had been drawn in front of the window through which the attack had been made; and he was not far out in believing that this precaution was due to Ernest. It was, in fact, the first thing he had done, once he had found leisure for it.

Howard Torrance and Stenness were standing together near the fire-place. Howard, manifestly, was still in ignorance of some details of the tragedy; and he was endeavouring to extract them from Stenness by a series of eager questions. But the secretary, for once, seemed to have lost his efficiency. He was obviously replying almost at random; and his whole bearing was that of a man disturbed by a trivial interruption, while in the midst of some intense preoccupation with another subject. His appearance suggested that of a man suddenly oppressed by an unexpected and intolerable calamity. Sir Clinton's eyes narrowed as he swept his glance over the secretary's face.

"He seems to be the most anxious of the lot," he commented to himself.

Arthur Hawkhurst had been standing at the window with his back to the room, but as Sir Clinton came in, he swung round. His face seemed disfigured by a tumult of emotions: anger, distrust, and anxiety were clearly written on it.

"Well," he demanded sharply, "can you tell us any more?"

"You heard what Ardsley said yourself," Sir Clinton pointed out. "I haven't seen him since then."

Arthur glared at him with unconcealed fury.

"It's easy enough to see that it isn't *your* sister that's lying at death's door! You mightn't be so cool about it then."

He turned back to the window again, and stared out into the night.

"What *has* happened?" Howard Torrance demanded. "You're the only one here who saw it all, Sir Clinton."

"Someone took advantage of the music from the loud-speaker to steal up close to the window, there, which Mr. Shandon insisted on opening. An air-gun dart was fired into the room and struck Miss Hawkhurst. Luckily, it happened to hit her wrist just where there was some protection—the chain of her watch-bracelet; and that prevented it from going as deep as it might. But if any poison has got into the wound, it may be a serious matter—most serious. That's all I know, except that I got Dr. Ardsley over immediately, and he has her in his charge."

"Is there any hope that it won't be fatal this time?" Howard Torrance asked, anxiously.

Sir Clinton shook his head.

"I know as little as you do. I got the dart out almost

immediately, so perhaps the poison hadn't time to get in its work. That seems to offer some chance of escape. But you'll need to wait for the expert's views. I really know nothing."

"And you don't seem to be doing anything," snarled Arthur from the window.

Before Sir Clinton needed to reply, the door opened and Wendover hurried into the room. He was dishevelled, his tie was loose, and his dinner-jacket showed in some places smears of green and brown which he had evidently picked up during his prolonged search. But in his hand he carried the thing Sir Clinton wanted —the air-gun.

"Good man!" the Chief Constable commented, as his eyes rested on the weapon.

At the exclamation Arthur turned back towards the room. His face changed as he caught sight of the thing that Wendover carried.

"Where did you get that, eh? That's my best air-gun!"

"That's the thing that may have killed your sister, then," said Wendover, looking mistrustfully at Arthur's disturbed face. "I found it in that clump of rhododendrons out there. It had been jammed right into the middle of the bushes; that's why it took so long to find."

He looked Arthur up and down for a moment; then, disregarding the owner's outstretched hand, he passed the air-gun to Sir Clinton, who took it from him without a word. Arthur stepped forward angrily as though to recover his property; but at that moment a fresh interruption occurred. Again the door opened, but this time the grim figure of Ardsley appeared on the threshhold. He waited for a moment until he saw that he had secured the attention of

them all, then he turned towards Sir Clinton and gave him his verdict.

"This is a bad business! Of course, she's still alive; and there's a chance yet. It's a pity you didn't think of a tourniquet at the moment—prevent any risk of the stuff spreading, since it's in an isolated limb. But there's no use grumbling now. We can only wait and see if she pulls through. It's a bad business!"

Sir Clinton nodded.

"Have you everything you need? The nurses will be here as soon as possible."

"Miss Forrest will do in the meantime. One thing—there must be absolute quietness in the house. I can't have my patient disturbed in the slightest degree. She's unconscious again; but there must be no risk of disturbing her later on. Complete quiet, or I won't answer for anything."

He turned and left the room without waiting for any questions. The gravity of his expression was enough to show them that he had no great hope for Sylvia's safety.

Chapter XIII

THE period immediately following the attack upon Sylvia was one of intense inquietude in Wendover's mind. Up to that point he had persuaded himself that the affairs at Whistlefield would eventually prove to be linked up in some way with the Hackleton case. The connection of some of the incidents—the attack on Ernest Shandon, for one—had certainly been obscure ; but Wendover had nursed an irrational belief that in the end all the threads would lead back to Hackleton, and that the whole mystery would find a simple explanation which would bring it within the borders of normal motives and sane sequences of actions.

The latest tragedy, however, could not be squared with any of his preconceived ideas. What possible relationship could exist between Hackleton and Sylvia which would make her removal essential to the financier ? It was hardly likely that either she or Ernest had been the repository of Neville Shandon's secrets.

But if Hackleton dropped out of the piece, then the whole affair seemed to lose any thread of purpose and to become a mere massacre perpetrated by some being urged on by motives which lay outside the bounds of reason. Instead of a coldly calculating criminal, Wendover seemed to find himself confronted by a creature beyond the pale of humanity, a thing that slew at random out of sheer lust for death. His own

normal mind revolted from such a monster; and he strove hard to piece the evidence together again in some way which would eliminate this nightmare figure and replace it by a criminal actuated by motives which sane intellects could grasp.

As soon as he got Sir Clinton alone after the tragedy at Whistlefield, he had done his best to extort information; but in this he had failed completely. Everyone of his inquiries was met by a curt denial of any ulterior knowledge, though it was manifest that Sir Clinton was concentrating his whole mind on the latest developments in the Whistlefield affair. Despite this blank negation, however, the Squire got the impression that the Chief Constable's anxiety centred round Sylvia rather than the Whistlefield case as a whole. From an unguarded word he inferred that Sir Clinton had, somehow or other, taken a risk; and that the results had been very different from what he had expected. Something had cut across Sir Clinton's schemes and had shaken his confidence.

Even when he abandoned his fruitless inquisition and went to bed, Wendover was unable to free himself from the latest tragedy. His mind insisted on conjuring up pictures: some of them memories, others imaginary scenes in which the unknown murderer played his part. He saw the bridge-table at the end of the rubber, with the cards of the last trick lying still ungathered, Sir Clinton putting down the marker, a cigarette smouldering on the ash-tray, Vera Forrest shuffling the pack for the next deal. Nothing could have been more peaceful. Then, in a flash, came the transformation scene. He lived again through the nightmare moment when the lethal dart sped in upon them from the outer dark, changing their fancied security

into a thing of horror and peril. And from this his imagination passed to that lurking monster in the gloom beyond the window: a vague, featureless figure, crouching among the rhododendrons, lifting the thin barrel of the air-gun in search of the appointed victim. In uneasy visions such as these, his night dragged slowly on.

Morning brought Wendover no release from his anxiety. Before he had come downstairs, Sir Clinton had been busy with the telephone; and his face was sufficient to show that he had had bad news. Wendover hardly dared to ask what it was; for his guest's features plainly betrayed that the worst might be expected.

"Ardsley's been telephoning," Sir Clinton explained briefly. "She's much worse. There was a bad collapse in the early morning, and they just managed to pull her through. Luckily the nurses were on the spot, so everything was done that could be done. But Ardsley seems to have very little hope now. He thinks the dose of the poison must have been bigger than we thought."

He bit his lip, seemed on the verge of saying something else, then ended by changing his mind and choosing other words:

"We must go across there after breakfast, Squire. I must see Ardsley. You've no idea how this affair worries me."

"I think I have a fair notion," Wendover replied. "I've had a pretty bad night over it myself. It's a damnable affair."

Sir Clinton nodded absent-mindedly. He was evidently lost in his thoughts. By the set of his mouth, Wendover could guess that they were anything but pleasant.

Though he hardly admitted it to himself, Sir Clinton's behaviour was another factor which had loosened Wendover's grip on the normal world. Hitherto the Chief Constable had seemed so sure of his case that he had treated it almost lightly ; but now it was self-evident that something had gone wrong. Things had not worked out according to plan. The tragedy which he had predicted had forced itself into being ; but now that it had come he appeared unable to act the part of the *deus ex machina* which he seemed to have meant to play. This sudden change disturbed Wendover deeply. The man on whom he had been relying to clear up the mystery appeared to be perplexed and anxious instead of cool and resolute.

When they reached Whistlefield, Ernest Shandon was the first person who came to meet them.

" This is a terrible business ! " he lamented, as he came into the study where they were. " It's a dreadful affair, really. A dreadful affair ! Ardsley's very down about it, very down. You know, he wouldn't do for a doctor in practice. He's most unsympathetic. Most doctors are careful ; they don't blurt things out in the callous sort of way that Ardsley does. He doesn't think about one's feelings in the slightest. One expects a little decent circumlocution from a doctor ; but there's none of that about him. I asked him this morning if Sylvia had passed a good night ; and he just glared at me and snarled that she was lucky to be alive at all ; snarled it out as if she had been one of the dogs he cuts up. Is that the way to break bad news to a relation ? I call it beastly. He never thinks of what it means to us. It's just a case to him, I suppose. But look what it means to us. Sylvia runs the house so well. I don't know what we'll do without her."

Sir Clinton had let him run on ; but quite evidently

he had no intention of wasting much time listening to Ernest's lamentations.

"Miss Forrest must be resting just now, I suppose?"

"Yes," Ernest assured him, "she was up helping Ardsley until the nurses came; and after that she didn't seem able to sleep, so she sat up for a while. Ardsley came down and found her in the early morning, so he sent her off to bed. So he told me. I had gone to bed myself some time before."

Sir Clinton made no comment and Ernest proceeded with his complaints.

"What I feel is that the police aren't doing anything. Why haven't you arrested somebody? My nerves are beginning to wear thin under this strain, I tell you. Here we have some murderer haunting the neighbourhood. He kills my brothers; he attacks me; he brings my niece to death's door—and all the time the police look on with their hands in their pockets. What are they paid for? That's what I ask you. Why don't they lay hands on the fellow? What sort of a life do you think I'm leading just now? Every time I go outside the house I have the feeling that the scoundrel may be lurking behind the next bush, getting his gun ready. That's a pretty state of things. And not a finger do you lift to help!"

"I offered you a guard of constables for Whistlefield not so long ago, Mr. Shandon. You refused it then. I'm sorry it isn't available now. I have other work for my men at present."

Ernest was somewhat taken aback by this reminder.

"So you did, so you did. I'd forgotten that."

Sir Clinton seemed inclined to accept this as an apology.

"I should like to see Mr. Stenness for a moment in private, if you don't mind, Mr. Shandon. Could you send him to me?"

Ernest evidently felt that he had let his tongue run away with him. Possibly some faint realisation of the display of cowardice which he had made was dawning upon his mind. At any rate, he hastened to meet Sir Clinton's wish.

"I'll hunt him up and send him to you," he announced with surprising conciseness; and he left the room without further talk.

While they were waiting for Stenness the door opened and Arthur Hawkhurst came in. Rather to Wendover's surprise he showed no trace of the ill-feeling which he had displayed so strongly on the previous night. Instead, he seemed rather shamefaced; and he opened in an unexpected vein.

"I behaved like a young cub last night, Sir Clinton," he admitted frankly. "I daresay I said a lot of things that I shouldn't have said. But you know quite well" —his teeth showed in an engaging smile—"I was badly upset. Anyone might be, I think. Poor Sylvia! I'm deuced fond of her, you know. She's about the only person in the world that matters a tinker's curse to me. So naturally I wasn't quite level-headed; and I daresay I said things I shouldn't have said."

"That's all right," Sir Clinton assured him. "I understood perfectly how you felt. Forget it, and don't worry. You've trouble enough without bothering about trifles just now."

Arthur nodded a gloomy acquiescence.

"Have you any notion why the thing was done?"

Sir Clinton was careful not to give a direct answer.

"We're doing our best."

Arthur's eye lighted up.

"I wish you'd let me take a hand. Perhaps I could be of some use?"

"Not just at present, I'm afraid."

Arthur took the rejection badly.

"Nothing to hinder my working on my own, then, is there? You can't prevent that. And if I come across the brute you needn't expect to be allowed to butt in then, you know. I'll tackle him myself. Hanging's too good for him."

"I agree with you there," Sir Clinton said unguardedly. Then he added with a faint smile: "We're speaking quite unofficially, of course."

Arthur looked up suspiciously.

"I'm not quite sure what you mean. But what *I* mean's quite plain and can be put into plain English. If I can lay my hands on the man who tried to murder Sylvia, he'll wish for a decent hanging before I'm done with him. I'll . . ."

"That's enough, Mr. Hawkhurst," Sir Clinton interrupted sharply. "We don't want to hear about it."

Arthur's temper boiled up at the words. Wendover glancing at his face, saw the features contorted in hardly-restrained fury. With an effort, the boy fought down his anger until he could speak.

"If anything happens to Sylvia I'll get the brute yet; and then he'll wish he'd never been born. That's that!"

He swung round on his heel and left the room.

Sir Clinton sighed slightly as the door closed.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed softly, as if to himself. "I hadn't reckoned on *that*. This is growing devilishly complicated."

Wendover had pricked up his ears.

"What's the trouble now?"

Sir Clinton seemed to realise that he had spoken his thoughts aloud.

" It's another factor that I hadn't allowed for," he admitted. But he refused to divulge anything further ; and Wendover had to content himself with the cryptic phrase.

Stenness did not keep them waiting long. When he came into the study, Wendover was surprised to see the change which the night seemed to have made in the secretary's appearance. He was heavy-eyed ; and his features had a drawn expression as though he had passed through some great strain.

" I suppose we all look a bit like that, after this affair," Wendover commented to himself. " Clinton's half-killing himself with anxiety ; young Hawkhurst's far from normal ; and I suppose I must look a bit white about the gills myself. It's only to be expected."

Sir Clinton wasted no time in preliminaries, but came to the point at once.

" Mr. Shandon told us that you knew the contents of Roger Shandon's will. Can you give me the gist of it ? It's not a confidential document now, of course."

" There's a copy of it in the safe here," Stenness explained. " You can look it over if you like."

" Thanks. But if you can remember the main points it may save me the trouble of reading through it."

" Stenness took a key from his pocket and went across to open the safe which was built into the wall of the study.

" The will's simple enough. All the property is to be divided equally between Neville Shandon, Ernest Shandon, Miss Hawkhurst, and Arthur Shandon. There's the usual provision about heirs and survivors of that group."

" What I particularly want to know is whether there's any residuary legatee mentioned, anybody who takes the remainder of the estate after all other legacies have been paid in full."

" I don't remember any provision of that sort," Stenness admitted, searching among the papers in the safe. " Here's the copy of the will if you'd care to look at it."

He handed it over to Sir Clinton who unfolded it and began to read.

" He left you nothing, did he ? " the Chief Constable asked casually, as he continued his study of the document.

Stenness was plainly surprised by the question.

" No. Why should he ? I've only been with him a year or two. I'm not an old family retainer who's earned a pension. As a matter of fact, there are no bequests of the kind."

" So I see," Sir Clinton agreed when he had finished his reading. " It's a very short will, not complicated by any of the provisions they often put into these things."

He seemed to ponder over the matter for a moment or two.

" I had rather expected to find a residuary legatee in the thing somewhere ; but you're quite right, there's nothing of the sort mentioned. You don't happen to know anything about Neville Shandon's will, do you ? It wouldn't fall into your province."

Stenness shook his head.

" I never read it. But I witnessed it, as it happens. And the impression I got from a glance at the last page was that it may have run on the same lines as Roger's. You can easily get a copy of it once it's filed, if you need it."

Sir Clinton handed back the will and rose to his feet as the secretary restored the document to the safe.

"I see you have a key of that thing?"

Stenness closed the safe and put the key back into his pocket.

"Yes, Mr. Shandon told me to keep this one. I've been arranging the papers for him and it was more convenient that I should have the key. It saved him the bother of always handing it over when I needed it."

"You hadn't a key in Roger Shandon's time?"

"No, Roger was rather a different sort of person."

"By the way, Mr. Stenness, are you staying on here as secretary to Ernest Shandon?"

Stenness seemed slightly taken aback by the question.

"There's no definite arrangement, so far. I'm staying until the estate affairs have been cleared up; but after that I doubt if I shall remain here. I can do better than this."

"I suppose you could," Sir Clinton agreed indifferently.

He looked at his watch.

"I want to see Dr. Ardsley now. I'm rather in a hurry at present; but there are one or two more questions I want to put to you sometime, Mr. Stenness. Will you be free after dinner to-night? Very well, I'll come across then. Now, if you could let Dr. Ardsley know I'm here."

Stenness was evidently a prompt messenger, for Ardsley appeared almost at once. Wendover scanned his face eagerly as he came into the room. Here was the person who might be able to set their minds at ease. But Ardsley's countenance gave him no cause for raising his spirits. It betrayed nothing but gloom and anxiety.

"She's much worse. I'd hoped for a rally after

that attack in the night, but she hasn't pulled herself together."

"Tell us plainly what you think," demanded Sir Clinton. "You needn't beat about the bush where we're concerned."

Ardsley's face seemed to grow, if anything, graver than before.

"I can hold out no great hope. Frankly, I think it will be all up soon—to-night, perhaps."

No one seemed inclined to speak. Wendover was trying to force himself to face what now seemed inevitable. Death often came swiftly; but the circumstances of Sylvia's tragedy gave it a quality which ordinary deaths do not possess. He could hardly assure himself that the whole thing was not a nightmare. There seemed to be something so aimless in the whole business, the killing of a young girl against whom no one could conceivably harbour any personal grudge. The inhuman purposelessness which had cut Sylvia down on the threshhold of her life seemed more terrible to him than any planned scheme would have done; for a calculated crime would imply a motive whereas this deed seemed to have arisen out of mere chaos—something outside normal things.

Sir Clinton took a step towards the door and then seemed to change his mind.

"Do you think you could get some vinegar and some washing soda?" he asked, turning to Ardsley. "There's something I'd like to be sure about; and it might be as well that an expert should see it."

Ardsley had no difficulty in procuring what was wanted. As the doctor in charge of Sylvia, he had only to ask for anything. A couple of tumblers and a water-carafe were brought as well, at Sir Clinton's request.

"Now you can put your back against the door, Squire. We don't want any visitors."

From a tiny glass bottle which he drew from his pocket, the Chief Constable extracted one of the ill-omened darts.

"This is the one which wounded Miss Hawkhurst," he explained, as he dropped it into a glass of water. "Now we'll need to give it time."

He stirred it round occasionally; and gradually a faint bluish tinge communicated itself to the water. Ardsley was scrutinising the glass with deep interest, but his face showed nothing of the thoughts in his mind.

"Now we add a drop of vinegar, Squire," said Sir Clinton, suiting the action to the word.

As the vinegar mixed with the solution, Wendover saw a change in the tint—a pale red replaced the original blue.

"Now some washing soda, for a change," said Sir Clinton, dropping in a crystal and swirling the liquid round in the glass. As he did so, the blue tinge returned to the solution.

Ardsley nodded approvingly.

"Litmus, obviously. That clinches it. You must be a bit of a chemist to have hit on that tip."

Sir Clinton made no reply, but he cautioned Wendover to bear the test in mind.

"If that's all you want, I'll go back to Miss Hawkhurst," Ardsley said, as soon as Sir Clinton ceased speaking.

"We're going back to the Grange, now," Sir Clinton explained. "If you need me, you've only to ring up."

"I thought you were in a hurry," Wendover said in some surprise when he found that Sir Clinton seemed to have nothing on hand after their return to the Grange. "You broke off your talk with Stenness on that excuse.

Why not have finished it at the time, instead of trailing over there again later in the day ? "

" I'm worried about Miss Hawkhurst, Squire ; and I prefer to get my news direct from Ardsley rather than over the 'phone."

" You didn't get much out of him this morning," Wendover complained. " And I can't think why you put that man into the business at all. It seems to me tempting Providence. Why, he's quite possibly the source of the original curare, for all you know ; he's one of the suspects."

" He's not on my list of suspects, Squire ; and if he's on yours, you may score him off straight away. That's definite. As to my using him, who could do the work better ? What would a country G.P. make of Miss Hawkhurst's case ? Nothing whatever ! You can't expect rural medicos to be the last word in the study of out-of-the-way poisons. It's not reasonable to ask it."

Wendover's increasing disquietude found its relief in speech at last.

" I can't think what your aim is in this affair, Clinton. You say you know the murderer. Why don't you arrest him at once. You claimed to know him days ago ; and yet you did nothing. And now you've let things drift ; and the result has been this attack on Sylvia Hawkhurst. Why, you're responsible for that ! You were criminally careless with these poison darts, leaving them lying about for anyone to pick up."

Sir Clinton made no defence. Instead, he turned Wendover's vehemence into another channel.

" It's easy to say ' Arrest somebody ! ' Suppose you were in my shoes, Squire, and you wanted to be absolutely on the safe side ; whom would you arrest at this very moment ? "

Under the spur of the direct question, Wendover had a flash of illumination :

" Ernest Shandon," he said. " I've just been thinking over things, and I've seen one or two points in a fresh light. Who was it opened the window last night and so made it possible for the murderer to shoot into the room ? Ernest Shandon ! Who was out of the room when the shot was fired ? Ernest Shandon ! Where was he ? In the winter-garden, which has a door opening close to the bank of rhododendrons in which the murderer hid himself. Who had access to that stock of curare in the museum ? Ernest Shandon ! "

Sir Clinton failed to repress a smile, though he did his best.

" And who was attacked himself, in the Maze ? Ernest Shandon ! And who was sitting with a nail in his boot on the public highway that afternoon when his brothers were killed ? Ernest Shandon ! Let's complete the tale, you know, before we begin to talk about arrests. The real truth of the matter is that Ernest Shandon has annoyed you by his cowardice and his general selfishness, and, therefore, you think he'd be all the better for a hanging. You're beginning to see red here, just as you saw red in Ardsley's case."

Wendover sullenly admitted his blunder.

" But there's another person who ought to be under observation—young Hawkhurst," he continued. " That young beggar seems to me hardly sane at times. Look at him this morning ! That cerebro-spinal affair has affected him far more than I supposed. . . "

He broke off, struck by a fresh idea.

" Is he the person you have your eye on, Clinton ? I never thought of that ! Now that might account for the thing that's been puzzling me—the damned aimlessness of all the Whistlefield affair. It's just the sort of thing