

a lunatic would do. And they say that in a sleepy sickness case, if it turns to homicidal mania, the creature may go for the nearest relations. Just what's happened at Whistlefield! And it was he who put on the loud-speaker last night and so covered any noise he might have made in getting into position outside the window. I hadn't thought of that before. And it was his air-gun that I found in the rhododendrons."

This time, Sir Clinton did not smile.

"I don't mind admitting to you, Squire, that young Hawkhurst is one of my difficulties."

Wendover returned to his original charge.

"Well, I can't understand what you're driving at, Clinton. On the face of things, it seems to me that you've gambled away that poor girl's life merely to get a case that you can prove: and now you're no nearer it than you were before."

Sir Clinton's face grew very grave.

"You've touched a sore spot there, Squire. But did it never occur to you that I didn't expect an attack on Miss Hawkhurst? What I did expect was something quite different. Didn't it strike you as peculiar that I angled for that invitation to play bridge when it obviously wasn't the sort of thing that one expects? I had to put on a pretty tough hide to wangle that with a straight face."

"Yes," Wendover confirmed, "it was a piece of rank bad taste and I was surprised at your doing it."

"It was. And I'm not usually celebrated for that kind of thing. Don't you see what I was driving at, Squire. I expected the next attack to be made on myself—and I took good care to make an opportunity for it by going on to the murderer's own ground. The whole bridge-party affair was a plant of mine to make myself a good target for the air-gun expert."

"My godfathers!" Wendover ejaculated in surprise, "I never thought that was what you were after. You've got fair nerves, Clinton, to offer yourself up like that to be shot at."

"I'd rather take it when I was ready for it than have it unexpectedly—hence the bridge-party. I felt he'd hardly be able to resist the chance of a sitting shot."

"H'm! I don't know that I'd have been able to screw myself up to that point."

"Of course you would! You didn't hesitate over the risk of going after the fellow, through the window."

"Yes," Wendover admitted, "but that was in hot blood, which is rather different."

Sir Clinton brushed this aside.

"The trouble is that I didn't get what I wanted, after all. Miss Hawkhurst was hit. But you may remember that just when the brute pulled the trigger, she leaned slightly forward and put out her hand, whilst I happened to lean back. The dart went past you, and it struck her arm; but I can't for the life of me be sure whether that was an accident or not. If I knew whether that shot was meant for me or for her, I'd know rather more about the case than I do; and I'd be in an easier frame of mind, I can tell you."

A fresh point seemed to occur to him.

"By the way, Squire, your surmise about the fate of the air-gun in the first attacks turns out to be correct. My men have been dragging the river near the bank at the boat-house; and we've got the air-gun that killed the two Shandons. The murderer must have pitched it into the water just as you suggested."

Wendover was distinctly pleased at this tribute to his acuteness.

"Is there anything identifiable about it?" he demanded.

"It seems to have come from the Whistlefield armoury," Sir Clinton replied. "Confound them, I wish they hadn't gone in so strong for air-guns. It makes things more difficult."

Chapter XIV

SIR CLINTON had yet another surprise in store for his host. Just before dinner, he apparently made up his mind to ring up Whistlefield; and to Wendover's astonishment he suggested that the Squire should accompany him to the telephone.

"You'll hear only one side of the conversation," he said, with a rather grim expression, "but I think it may interest you. And perhaps it will be just as well to have a witness to testify about my end of the wire. I wish we had two receivers, for then you would have heard the whole thing."

He got the connection in a moment or two and then astounded Wendover by asking for Ernest Shandon instead of Ardsley. After a few minutes, Wendover heard the beginning of the conversation.

"Sir Clinton Driffeld speaking. Mr. Shandon, you must treat this as absolutely confidential. . . . Absolutely for yourself. Not a breath of it to anyone else, you understand? . . . I want you to keep an eye on your secretary. . . . Yes, Stenness. I want him kept under observation. If you see him leave the house, ring me up immediately. . . . Yes, at once. . . . It won't be for long. I'm coming across very shortly. . . . I didn't catch that. . . . Yes, you weren't far out in your suspicions. Most fortunate you mentioned the matter of the cheque. . . . Anything further? Do you mean about the murderer? Oh, I think I'll have him

to-morrow, quite possibly—if he doesn't bolt. . . If he doesn't bolt, I said. That's the only thing I'm afraid of. . . . Yes, I'm sure that would interest you. After all, one's skin is one's dearest possession. Good-night. We shall be across shortly after dinner."

Wendover had been able to gather the gist of the conversation from the side which he had heard.

"You're afraid of Stenness doing a bolt? And you think he's the man you're after?"

"Really, Squire, you must take a reef in your questions," Sir Clinton said, reproachfully. "I stretched a point to let you hear that talk; and I certainly didn't intend to stand a cross-examination about it. You must make what you can out of it for yourself. And that reminds me, I'm afraid you can't be present when I interview Master Stenness. You'll just have to be a private caller this evening and wait for results till later."

Wendover was not particularly pleased with this last news. He had evidently counted on hearing what Sir Clinton had to say to the secretary. However, he realised that he was in the hands of the Chief Constable and must do as he was told; so when they arrived at Whistlefield, he asked for Ernest Shandon while Sir Clinton went into the study to interview Stenness.

The secretary arrived in a few moments. He was still looking very anxious, perhaps even more anxious than in the morning. Sir Clinton wasted no time but came to grips with the subject at once.

"Now, Mr. Stenness, I've one or two questions to put to you. I may as well caution you that anything you say may be used against you if you are put on your trial."

Stenness's face betrayed less surprise than might have been expected.

"You say 'if,' but perhaps you mean 'when'?"

"I'm picking my words with some care," Sir Clinton assured him. "I mean 'if.' The point's still in doubt; but I want to play the game with you and take no improper advantage."

The imperturbable face of the secretary showed neither relief nor depression.

"It's very good of you," he said in a colourless voice.

Sir Clinton considered for a moment. Stenness moved over to a chair and sat down.

"I think I can put my cards on the table in your case, Stenness," the Chief Constable said at length. "Nothing I'm going to tell you will be news to you; and there seems no reason why I shouldn't say it."

Stenness looked up indifferently. His mind seemed to be occupied with something quite apart from the affair in hand.

"Go on," he said, apathetically.

"Here are the facts, then," Sir Clinton began. "You were employed here as Roger Shandon's secretary. In that capacity, you seem to have had access to his cheque-books. It's not a usual thing; but I have sound reasons for supposing that it was so in your case."

Stenness nodded his assent.

"I don't deny that," he admitted.

"You have the key of the safe, haven't you? Would you mind seeing if you can find the cheque-book that Roger Shandon used last?"

Stenness walked over to the safe, opened it, and after a few moment's search he unearthed the cheque-book.

"Now," Sir Clinton went on, "would you mind turning up the counter-foil numbered 60073?"

Stenness looked up without showing any emotion on his features.

"There's no such counterfoil in the book," he admitted.

" But you find 60072 and 60074 there ? "

" Yes."

" Rather a peculiar state of affairs, isn't it ? "

" It is."

Sir Clinton turned to another subject.

" There's a bundle of returned cheques in that drawer of the writing-desk, isn't there ? "

" There is. Do you want it ? "

Sir Clinton seemed to disregard the question.

" Would it surprise you, Stenness, if you learned that one of these cheques has been abstracted and that it can't be found ? The bank returned it in due course for all that."

Stenness gazed stonily at his interlocutor.

" It wouldn't surprise me in the slightest."

Sir Clinton paused for a moment before continuing. When he spoke again it was in a different vein.

" These are all plain facts. Now we come to hypothesis ; and of course the ground's not quite so firm. I think, if you don't mind, we might put it in the form of one of these John Doe and Richard Roe cases, lest you should think. . . ."

He left the sentence incomplete.

" Now," he began briskly, " let's suppose that John Doe is a rich man who has made his money in rather peculiar ways—like the late Roger Shandon, for example. He employs a secretary. I think one may reasonably suppose that a secretary in that case would need to be somebody who could shut his eyes when necessary, and who wouldn't be apt to judge things too rigidly. In fact, Stenness, he would need to be a fairly unscrupulous fellow himself."

Stenness nodded indifferently.

" Go on."

" I'm putting a hypothetical case, remember," Sir

Clinton cautioned him. "This is what might be said—I don't necessarily accept it myself. I'm only trying to show you how it could be made to look, you understand? Well, then, this secretary, Richard Roe, sooner or later sees the chance which Providence has thrown in his way. His employer is in the habit of drawing bearer cheques for large amounts—some thousands—from time to time. And, rather carelessly, he has dropped into the way of getting his secretary to cash them for him and bring him the money. So the bank is accustomed to paying over these things to the secretary, and no questions asked."

Stenness gave no sign of special interest. His normal reserve was sufficient to veil his thoughts.

"The secretary, we may assume, is an acute fellow. I think we may take it that he can see a chance when it comes his way. But forgery requires a certain amount of manual skill if it is carried out in some ways; and possibly the secretary is sufficiently acute to distrust his powers as a forger. But it's always possible to trace a signature."

Sir Clinton pulled out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette before going on. He seemed determined to infuse informality into the proceedings.

"It's always possible to trace a signature," he continued. "But one needs a model signature for that—a signature from a cheque, of course, because sensible people don't use their letter signature on their cheques. They have a special one with some specific trick in it—the position of a dot, or something of the sort. I hope I'm not boring you with these elementary things."

"Not at all," said Stenness, with a certain show of polite interest.

"The model, in the case of the secretary Richard

Roe," went on Sir Clinton, " could easily be chosen from one of the old cheques returned by the bank. He had access to these, we may suppose. But then comes in a point which is sure to strike his acute mind. A man never writes his signature twice in precisely the same way ; there's always a faint difference between any two signatures. Hence, if two cheques turn up with identical signatures, a sharp detective might suspect something wrong. You follow me ? "

Stenness nodded in silence.

" The acute secretary, Richard Roe, therefore traces his employer's signature from one of these old cheques. And to cover his trail, to make certain that the thing cannot be shown to be a traced signature, he then destroys the old cheque. Thus there are not two identical signatures in existence ; and the only thing missing is a cancelled cheque—not a thing anyone is likely to make a fuss about at the worst, even if its disappearance is noted. I make myself clear ? "

" Quite," said Stenness, still with his air of formal interest.

" So far, then," Sir Clinton went on, " all is plain sailing. But now comes a sticky bit. In fact, *the* sticky bit of the whole affair. Every cheque has its counterfoil ; and Mr. John Doe, the employer, has had an awkward habit of always filling in his counterfoils. Hence when Mr. Richard Roe traces his employer's signature on, let us say, cheque No. 60073, he has to do something about the counterfoil of that cheque. If he leaves it blank, it will catch the attention of the good Mr. Doe the next time he uses the cheque-book. If the acute secretary fudges an entry on counterfoil No. 60073, then Mr. Doe, who is by no means a dull fellow, may spot the thing and cause trouble. What is to be done ? The obvious thing is to remove counterfoil No. 60073 from

the cheque-book and trust that its absence will not be noticed. I think that is the course I'd have followed myself if I had got into that fix."

Sir Clinton seemed for a moment to lose interest in his narrative. He sat for a time in silence, eyeing the secretary as though he hoped to surprise something. But Stenness showed no sign of either guilt or confusion.

"I congratulate you on your nerves, Stenness," Sir Clinton began once more. "Now that's an hypothesis which I should not be very loath to adopt as an explanation of this affair of the cheques. It seems to me to cover the ground neatly. In fact, I'm quite convinced that it's a good hypothesis so far as it goes. But some people might be prepared to carry it a stage further. I'll just sketch out what they would say."

At this point Stenness seemed to find some interest in the matter. He sat up and looked across at the Chief Constable.

"Please go on," he requested.

"We have assumed that Richard Roe is an acute person. Now an alert mind might quite conceivably see a further step which would bring him on to safer ground. If things took their course, the forgery would be spotted in a very short time. One can't take thousands out of a man's account without raising inquiry. So, normally, the reasonable thing to do would be to bolt and chance getting out of the country with the cash. That's what would occur to most people at once. But there's another way of making sure of things."

Sir Clinton's voice took on a graver tone.

"Let us suppose that immediately the cheque has been cashed, the employer happens to die. What evidence of forgery is left then? None whatever, if

the tracing of the signature has been decently executed. The supposed writer is dead ; and no one else can deny his signature. And the cheque, we assume, has been cashed before the death takes place. On that basis, there would be no need for any flight on the part of the forger. He would simply have to sit tight and behave normally."

Sir Clinton surprised a fresh look on Stenness's face. It was only a fleeting change ; but it was quite unmistakable. But the secretary remained obstinately mute and waited for the rest of the argument.

" That's assuming a natural death of the employer. But such coincidences are rather rare. An acute mind would not count on a chance like that. However, rare as such coincidences may be, they are not beyond possibility, if a human agent should happen to take a hand in the business. Suppose that the acute Richard Roe perceived this, and decided that it was worth his while to produce that coincidence by murdering his employer. . . ."

Sir Clinton swung round in his chair, surprised by the opening of the door. Ardsley stood on the threshold, and a glance at his face showed that something serious had happened.

" It's all up, Sir Clinton. They can pull down the blinds."

" Miss Hawkhurst ? " was all Sir Clinton could say.

Ardsley made a gesture of despair.

" Some things are beyond us," he said despondently.

Chapter XV

SIR CLINTON received Ardsley's news almost as if he had feared that the end was inevitable. He made no attempt to express his feelings, however.

"I think you'd better let the others know," he suggested.

Ardsley agreed, with a faint grimace of reluctance for the task, and left the room.

Stenness had listened to the interchange between the two with an air of a man trying to persuade himself that he is in a dream and that by a violent effort he may be able to shake off his nightmare. At last he seemed to master his feelings.

"It's all over, is it?" he asked in a choked voice, as though hoping even at the last moment to be reassured by good news.

"It's all over," Sir Clinton admitted, gravely.

Stenness seemed to pull himself together.

"Then in that case," he said, "there seems to be no reason why I shouldn't make a clean breast of things. Nothing matters much, now; and you may as well get the true story. It'll make no difference to me."

Sir Clinton made a vague gesture of assent, but refrained from speaking. After a moment or two, Stenness began.

"This is how it happened. Not so long ago, I was a cub with no near relations to look after me and keep me

straight. I'm not whining ; I'm simply explaining. I had a few thousands of capital ; and naturally a good deal of it got frittered away. I learned something about the world in the process, so perhaps it wasn't a total loss."

Sir Clinton noticed that even at this stage Stenness retained his conciseness and stuck to the main facts. The secretary was sparing him useless details ; and, as he had said, he was not whining over his losses.

" When I had been at it for a year or two, I had run myself down to a little over five thousand pounds. That's a good enough nest-egg. But I hadn't the sense to see it in that light. I wanted a good deal more than three or four hundred a year. So I looked about for some way of increasing my capital."

A faintly contemptuous expression crossed his face.

" I must have been a very green hand in those days. I had a sort of trustfulness which I've lost since then. To make a long story short I was swindled out of that five thousand. I was so green that at the time I didn't realise who was at the back of the swindle. All I met were agents of the big fish in the background. They cleaned me out, almost completely."

He shifted slightly in his chair as though the recollection made him uncomfortable.

" I had to do something for a living ; and somehow I dropped into secretarial work—the kind where it's more important that a man should have a decent appearance than that he should know his work. But by that time I realised that I'd have to work for a living, and I sobered up. I took things seriously and picked up all I could. I turned into quite a decently-efficient secretary."

Sir Clinton nodded. It was no more than Stenness's due.

"I drifted about from post to post, until a couple of years ago I dropped into Roger Shandon's place. I learned a lot with him. It was a perfect education—on certain lines."

"I can quite imagine that," Sir Clinton interjected.

"He was a damned scoundrel," Stenness pronounced, without heat. "But I picked up a lot about the seamy side of affairs from things that passed through my hands. It was interesting, even at first. And then, it got more interesting."

He shifted again in his chair so as to look Sir Clinton in the face.

"I came across a name in his correspondence, the name of one of the fellows who had helped to rook me of that last five thousand. That put me on the alert. I began to hunt things up. It took me a good while; and none of it was in any way explicit, you understand; but I had sense enough to put two and two together and fill up the blanks. My late employer was the man who had been behind the ramp that cleared me of the last of my cash."

"You couldn't have expected me to guess that," Sir Clinton said, as though defending himself. "I knew there was more behind this business than appeared on the surface, but naturally I'd no inkling of anything of that sort."

Stenness paid no attention to the interruption.

"I suppose my training under Roger Shandon had taken the refined edge off any honesty I had. Or else it had left the honesty but blunted my respect for the conventions, if you like it better that way. It seemed to me, anyhow, a simple enough state of affairs. This fellow Shandon had picked my pocket—at least that was what it amounted to in practice, though I doubt

if I could have charged him with fraud and brought it home to him. Well, I saw no particular reason why he should get away with my money. He'd taken advantage of my stupidity or trustfulness, or whatever you like to call it. I decided to pay him back in his own coin. I might have milked him of a fair extra sum as a fine; but that didn't suit my book. I've got a peculiar brand of conscience; and I made up my mind that I'd take precisely the cash that he cheated me out of. No doubt the odd figures on the cheque surprised you."

"No," Sir Clinton objected. "I simply took it that Shandon wasn't in the habit of drawing cheques for round thousands and that you filled in an odd figure so as not to make the cheque look uncommon."

"I'd have done that in any case, of course," Stenness explained, "but as it happened, the exact sum he took from me originally made a likely enough figure; and I stuck to it. I didn't even fine him a sovereign for his swindling. I contented myself with taking back exactly what I'd lost. I saw nothing wrong in it; and I see nothing wrong in it now. My conscience doesn't trouble me a rap in the matter. Legally, of course, it's quite a different question."

"Quite," said Sir Clinton, but his tone gave no clue to his views on the matter.

"As to the actual business, I needn't go over it; for you put your finger on it quite correctly up to a point, not ten minutes ago. I forged his signature, destroyed the cancelled cheque, cut the counterfoil out of the cheque-book, and cashed the forged cheque. Nobody suspected anything."

"There was no reason why they should—at the time."

"No. But now I come to the point where you made

a further suggestion. You brought out the idea that I'd murdered Shandon to cover the trail."

"I suggested it as an hypothesis that some people might be inclined to put forward," corrected Sir Clinton. "If you remember, I refrained from supporting it myself."

Stenness reflected for a moment.

"That's true. But murder never entered into my plans at all. Bear in mind that I don't feel a criminal in this affair. All I've done is to take my own money out of the hand of a fellow who had picked my pocket. You'd recover your own purse if you caught a thief red-handed with it; and you wouldn't call yourself a robber for doing so. Well, no more do I."

"Go on," said Sir Clinton, in unconscious plagiarism

"That being so," Stenness continued, "murder was the last thing that would have entered my mind. Why should I murder him? I'd squared the account; I'd got my money back again. What would be the point in putting my neck into a noose? None whatever! All I needed was a clean get-away. I planned that carefully enough."

"That's no particular business of mine at present," Sir Clinton reminded him. "But one might ask what you're doing here, since it's evidently not according to plan."

"It's easy to account for that. I had planned to get away on the evening of the day when the Shandons were murdered. I was in the middle of clearing up preparatory to a bolt . . . and suddenly came the affair in the Maze. Could I bolt then? Not likely. I'd have been marked down as the murderer if I'd stirred a step. And look what face would have been on things if I'd cleared out. It would have added the last touch of substance to the very hypothesis you put forward.

The whole forgery business would have been raked up to furnish a motive. I couldn't have faced it—for I hadn't an alibi. Nobody could swear that I was in my room—I was packing up—at the time the murders were done. It would have been a clear enough case for any jury."

Sir Clinton's face showed that he agreed with this reading.

"There's one point that hasn't come out, though," he said. "What's the meaning of this sudden collapse on your part? If your conscience is clear—and I don't doubt your account of it—why do you throw up the sponge like this? That's not very clear."

Stenness's face showed that Sir Clinton had touched him on the raw. He had some difficulty with his voice as he replied.

"I may as well put all the cards on the table. You know what Miss Hawkhurst was like? Any man might have fallen in love with her. I did, at any rate."

"Were you engaged?"

"No. I've got some sort of pride, even if I am a forger. Miss Hawkhurst had an income of her own. What had I? Nothing. Anyone might have supposed I was after her money."

"Hardly the money alone, surely—Miss Hawkhurst herself would account for the attraction without that."

"Well, I'm not that sort," said Stenness, abruptly. "I'm not the kind of man who can live on his wife's money. I can't explain it. It is so."

"Your conscience is a rum contrivance," Sir Clinton commented, not unkindly.

"It's in good working order, at any rate," Stenness retorted. "Now, isn't the thing clear enough to you? I meant to recover my money, clear out, work hard and make enough for my purposes. I reckoned that a

couple of years would do it, if I took risks. And before I went, I was going to take the biggest risk of all. I was going to tell Sylvia the whole story and see what she had to say."

Sir Clinton could not repress his surprise.

"You're a rum card, Stenness. Be thankful I've had a large experience of liars and know when a man's speaking the truth; for that yarn wouldn't be believed by one person in a hundred."

"It's the truth for all that," returned Stenness, doggedly. "I've told you before that I see nothing wrong in what I've done—nothing morally wrong, I mean. He swindled me. I take my money back again. What's wrong in that?"

"I wish I had your simple way of looking at things."

Sir Clinton sat in silence for a few moments, evidently pondering over the case.

"You're a problem, Stenness," he said at last. "I don't really know what to do with you."

"Oh, arrest me!" Stenness exclaimed, bitterly.

"Nothing matters now. She's dead. It's all over; and I don't much care what happens."

"Pull yourself together, man," said Sir Clinton, curtly. "That sort of chatter does all right on the stage. Nobody with a backbone takes a knock like that. If you wake up three years hence in a prison cell, you'll look at things in a different light, and be very fed-up that you've lost your liberty as well as other things. Some things are inevitable. Others aren't. Don't behave like a child."

Stenness took the rebuke sullenly.

"Well, what does it matter?" he demanded.

"You have enough in your hands to convict me if you want to—and I don't care. Do as you like. I'll

write it out for you now, if you think it'll save you trouble. I'm not inclined to wriggle at the last moment."

Sir Clinton gave no sign that he had heard him. Instead, he seemed engrossed on some problem. At last he lifted his head.

"I can't follow that intricate conscience of yours, Stenness. It's beyond me. But I can sympathise to some extent with your analogy of the pickpocket caught red-handed. That was very apt. I'm going to give you a chance. I know well enough that you're speaking the truth about this business. Besides, I can get it checked if necessary. On the basis of ethics, I think you've some right to that money. You have it here in notes, I suppose?"

"It's upstairs."

"Very well. Bring it down. Put it in the safe. Seal it up in an envelope with your name on it before putting it away. I'll see what's to be done about it to-morrow. Now, do that at once. Don't argue."

"The money means nothing much to me now," said Stenness angrily.

"Then hand it back to the people it legally belongs to," Sir Clinton said coolly. "If you don't want it, other people may have a use for it. It's a fair test of all that high falutin' stuff you laid off a minute or two ago."

Stenness made no reply, but rose and went towards the door.

"Oh, just another thing, Stenness. Meet me at the front of the house here at . . . at . . . Have you a time-table?"

Stenness produced the ABC from a shelf and Sir Clinton turned over its pages before continuing.

"The first train's at 7.10 a.m.," he said. "Meet me out at the house-door at half-past six sharp to-morrow morning. Now don't fail!"

Stenness was plainly bewildered, and in his astonishment he gave a grudging assent.

"That'll do, then," Sir Clinton went on. "Just put that cash in the safe, now. And, by-the-by, send Ardsley to me as you go out."

Stenness nodded dully and moved towards the door. Now that he had made a clean breast of things, his mind seemed to have gone back to his loss; and his whole bearing was eloquent of his utter despair. Sir Clinton watched him leave the room.

"A tough bullet for the poor devil to bite on," he thought to himself. "Well, 'joy cometh in the morning,' it says somewhere or other. Perhaps he'll find it so."

He lit a fresh cigarette and seemed to dismiss Stenness from his mind.

"I wonder if that devil is wound up far enough to make a final effort?" he reflected in some perplexity. "I believe he is. At any rate, I'll take the chance of it. He's had it all his own way so far, and this ought to encourage him."

Ardsley came into the room and smiled on seeing that Sir Clinton was alone.

"I'm in a hurry, Ardsley. Stenness has taken up a lot of valuable time with his woes. What I wanted is this. Will you be at the house-door here at half-past six o'clock to-morrow morning without fail? I'll need you, perhaps."

He paused, then as an after-thought apparently, he added:

"I don't suppose you could give a death certificate in the case of a death by misadventure, could you?"

Ardsley shook his head.

"I'd need to know something about the case before I could venture on that sort of thing. The Coroner would want to have a say in business of that kind."

Sir Clinton reluctantly agreed.

"Now suppose we pick up Wendover in the other room. No one will want to see Miss Hawkhurst to-night?"

"I'll see to that," Ardsley assured him. "Another doctor will need to be called in, and so forth. Until he turns up, I think no one need go into that room."

Chapter XVI

WHEN Ardsley and the Chief Constable entered the other room they found Wendover with Ernest Shandon and Arthur. In the stress of his emotion, Ernest seemed to have flown to his usual comforter, for he had a decanter and a syphon at his elbow. Arthur Hawkhurst seemed to be endeavouring to restrain his feelings to the best of his ability ; but it was obvious at a glance that his nerves were all on edge.

"Miss Forrest isn't here?" Sir Clinton inquired, though the question was needless.

"No," Ernest hastened to explain. "She's not here. I think she must be somewhere else—upstairs in her own room, perhaps, or else somewhere about the house. Or she may have gone out with Torrance. He's gone for a walk. Quite possibly she went out with him. Very thoughtful of them to leave us to our grief, very thoughtful. I don't know how we'll get over this ; I really don't know. Sylvia was so useful about the place—made things run so smoothly, you know. We'll miss her terribly."

He drank some of his whiskey and soda.

"Where's Stenness?" demanded Arthur, as though to show that he had himself under control.

"He's busy," Sir Clinton explained.

"He's lucky to have something to be busy with," Arthur commented. "I wish I'd something to do to take my mind off this business just now."

Ernest drank some more whiskey and soda thoughtfully, then put his hand into his pocket and seemed to feel for something.

"I've lost my cigar-case," he announced disconsolately. "Really, everything seems to be going wrong together, these last few days."

Wendover opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again as he caught Sir Clinton's frown and remembered the Chief Constable's caution to him about the case.

"Lost your case?" Sir Clinton inquired. "That's a nuisance."

Ernest was still feeling vaguely in his pocket as though he expected to unearth the cigar-case in some remote corner.

"It's been missing for a day or two," he complained. "I can't think what's become of it. I've hunted through all my other suits, and it isn't there. And I've searched all over the house, too; and yet I can't find it. I suppose I'll have to buy another. And that's such a nuisance, you know. One gets accustomed to the thing one uses. A new one won't feel the same for long enough."

"You can't remember where you put it down last, I suppose?" Sir Clinton asked. "It's always a good plan to go back to the time you can remember using it last. If I'm not mistaken, you had it with you in the Maze when you were attacked. You told me you took out a cigar then. Does that suggest anything? You may be able to pick up the thread now and remember using it again after that."

Ernest Shandon's face lighted up with a certain dull satisfaction.

"No. Now I remember quite well. You've reminded me of it. Isn't it funny how one can forget a thing and then, if one gets a jog to one's memory, the whole

thing comes back again? I often find that, quite often."

"So you know where it is now? Well, that's always a relief."

Ernest's face fell again.

"Yes, I remember where I dropped it. But I can't get it to-night, that's the worst of it. I dropped it in the Maze when I was shot at. I was sitting there in Helen's Bower, and when I jumped up the thing fell off my knee. It must be lying there yet. I'd forgotten all about it. These cigars won't be much good now," he ended, regretfully.

"Why not go and get it," Wendover asked, with a tinge of malice. He had not forgiven Ernest for his pusillanimous display on the night that Sylvia was shot.

Ernest looked round at him, wide-eyed in astonishment. He took off his glasses, polished them carefully, replaced them on his nose, and continued his staring examination of Wendover.

"Well, really," he managed to say at last, "that's a very strange suggestion, Wendover, very strange. Do you imagine that I'd go out in the dark, down to the Maze, and hunt about for my case? Why, it would be foolhardy, positively tempting Providence, to that. This murderer fellow may be lurking outside the house door, for all we can tell; and you calmly propose that I should walk straight out and put myself in his way! Well, really . . ."

He turned to the decanter at his side and poured out a fresh stiff glass.

Arthur Hawkhurst had listened to his uncle's exhibition of caution with unconcealed contempt; and he now broke in with all the brutality of youth.

"Cold feet, eh?"

Ernest seemed to resent the imputation with a certain dull animosity.

"It seems to me only commonsense, Arthur. Why should I run any risks? I've been attacked once; and since they didn't succeed in damaging me then, they'll obviously be waiting for another chance. I think it would be a stupid move to put myself in the way, a very stupid move indeed. And I think most sensible people would agree with me. If you don't, and if you want something to do, you might go down to the Maze and get me my cigar-case yourself. That would be better than sitting there, sneering at your elders."

He assumed the air of one who has just administered a well-merited rebuke; but his dignity was slightly diminished by the necessity of putting his glasses straight. Arthur seemed to take his uncle's protest as a taunt.

"Think I'm in a funk, too? I'll go and get your case if you like."

Ernest appeared to be horrified at the suggestion.

"I couldn't think of it!" he exclaimed, almost with animation. "Why, anything might happen out in the dark there. You're not to go, Arthur. I forbid it."

Arthur's lips shut tight for a moment as he looked at his uncle.

"It doesn't matter a damn to me whether you forbid it or not. I've offered to go; and I'm not going to draw back now and let people think I was only bragging. Besides, how do you know anyone's after me? They're after you all right; they've attacked you already. But that's no reason why they should worry about me, is it? I guess you're the one they've marked down, uncle."

"Oh, indeed, do you think so?" said Ernest, un-

comfortably. "I don't think that's a very nice thing to say, Arthur. It's one of these things that may have too much truth in them to be altogether a joke, you know. I wish you wouldn't say them. I don't like them, I really don't. And I don't want you to go out of the house to-night. Suppose anything were to happen to you!"

He paused for a moment, then added as a final argument :

"We've got trouble enough on our hands just now."

Sir Clinton was watching Arthur keenly ; and the boy turned round in time to catch the expression on the Chief Constable's face.

"You think I was just bragging? All right, you'll see. I'll take one of the cars down to the Maze and I'll be back in ten minutes."

He turned on his heel and walked out of the room. To Wendover's surprise, Sir Clinton made no attempt to detain him. Ernest's face showed marked annoyance. Evidently he could not help seeing that his super-caution had been brought into the limelight once again.

"I think that's a silly trick," he complained. "What's the good of running unnecessary risks? I can get along without my cigar-case till to-morrow. And here he goes off, posing to himself as a young hero—while really, you know, he's only a foolhardy young ass. But he was always like that. I wish Sylvia had been here ; she could manage him. I never seemed to have any influence with him, somehow."

Ardsley, obviously bored, rose and left the room. Sir Clinton took the opportunity of changing the subject.

"While your nephew's away, Mr. Shandon, I think I'd better take the opportunity of giving you some information. You remember telling me something about a cheque and a missing counterfoil?"

"Yes," Ernest admitted, apparently not averse to the fresh subject. "I thought I ought to tell you about that! It may not have been important; but I thought you ought to have all the information about everything, even if it didn't seem to be anything very vital, you understand? One never knows how one thing may hinge on to another, if you see what I mean? And it certainly seemed a strange thing to me—very rum."

"I've looked into the matter," Sir Clinton went on, "and I think I've succeeded in doing what's probably the most important thing from your point of view. I've recovered a few thousand pounds, which somebody might have got away with. You'll find it in your safe to-night. It will be in notes. You'd better take the numbers of them. I haven't had time to do that; and it might be as well to know them."

Ernest's eyes lighted up when he heard the result of Sir Clinton's work; but the brief illumination died out and was followed by a depressed expression.

"Does this mean there'll be a prosecution; and I'll have to give evidence? That'll be a troublesome business."

Sir Clinton reassured him with a gesture.

"Well, perhaps we'd better not start crossing bridges till we come to them. Let's leave the matter for the present. It's not for me to advise you whether to force on a case or not. I'll even refrain from mentioning the name of the man who took the money."

"Oh, I've a pretty good notion of that," Ernest protested, with a certain air of low cunning which sat ill on his dull features. "I may not be very clever, you know; but I can put two and two together all right."

"Then we'll leave it at that," said Sir Clinton, and his tone closed the discussion on that point.

For a time they sat in silence. Wendover could not quite understand Sir Clinton's manœuvres. Quite obviously he had given Arthur the last spur which had driven him into this expedition to the Maze; and Wendover was inclined to agree with Ernest that it was a foolhardy business. He waited with some anxiety for the boy's return.

All at once they heard the sound of hasty footsteps in the hall, the door was flung open, and Arthur hurried into the room. Wendover noticed that, though excited, he was in no panic.

"You were right enough, uncle!" he exclaimed, still standing with the handle of the door in his hand. "The beggar had a shot at me just at the entrance to the Maze."

Ernest nodded his head with an attempt at sapience.

"I told you so," he said. "I told you so! But of course you wouldn't believe me. No, you knew more about it than I did. But you see now . . ."

"Come along, the lot of you," Arthur cried. "We'll nab the beggar this time. He can't be far away yet."

"Sit down!" Sir Clinton ordered calmly. "He's had any amount of time to get clear away. We'd never catch him in the dark, I must hear how it happened, first of all. Now give me every detail you can think of."

Arthur seemed sobered by the matter-of-fact air of the Chief Constable. He sat down and began his story without more ado.

"I took out the two-seater from the garage," he explained, "and bucketted down to the Maze as quick as I could. It's a dark night outside, not even a star showing. I left the headlights on when I stopped the car; and I left the engine running as well. It wasn't going to take me any time to get to Helen's Bower. I got out, and crossed over to the entrance to the Maze

that's nearest the road. It was pretty dark ; but I could find my way all right."

" You heard nobody about ? " asked Wendover.

" Nothing but the beat of the engine. Just as I got to the entrance and was going inside, I heard an air-gun go off quite close to me—no distance at all, I should say—and I felt something hit me about the breast-pocket."

Sir Clinton leaned forward.

" Don't touch! " he said, pointing to the side of Arthur's dinner-jacket. " You hadn't a coat on, I see ? "

Arthur looked down. The feathering of one of the lethal darts was protruding from his jacket.

" Oh, it stuck, did it ? " he said. " I thought it had failed to get through the cloth. It's driven into my leather cigar-case, I expect."

Sir Clinton made a rapid examination and then cautiously withdrew the dart. Inspection of the cigar-case showed that the point of the missile had embedded itself in one of the cigars.

" That saved you a nasty prick," was all the comment the Chief Constable made. " Let's hear the rest."

" I was just going to start after the beggar," Arthur went on, " when suddenly there was a yell from the road. When I looked round, there was old Mrs. Thornton having a fit of hysterics or something over on the road, right in the beam of the headlights."

" Who is Mrs. Thornton ? " inquired Sir Clinton.

" She's the wife of the lodge-keeper at the East Gate."

" There's nothing wrong with the Thornton's," Wendover hastened to interject. " I've known them for twenty years and a decenter old couple you couldn't find anywhere."

Sir Clinton made a gesture as though brushing aside the interruption.

"And then?" he demanded.

"Well, there she was, screaming her head off," Arthur continued. "She'd heard the sound of the air-gun; and of course air-guns aren't liked hereabouts nowadays. So she'd just started to yell at once. She thought it was meant for her, it seems. I hustled her into the car and drove her home, full tilt. Then when I'd got rid of her, I put up the hood and side-curtains and came back here again, hell-for-leather. I guessed that the side-curtains would stop anything, if the beggar had another try; and I had the throttle about full open as I passed the Maze, so he hadn't much of a mark, anyway."

Wendover's opinion of Arthur went up considerably during this narrative. The youngster seemed to have had sense enough to take precautions, once he was convinced of the reality of the danger. And there was no doubt about the attack. Wendover had seen the depth to which the dart had penetrated the cigar-case and its contents. It must have been fired at very close range indeed.

"H'm!" said Sir Clinton. "Now I think we'll take your advice and get down to the Maze."

Much to the surprise of them all, Ernest got to his feet with the rest. He evidently saw their expressions, for he seemed rather shamefaced.

"I think I'll come along with you," he said, diffidently. Then, with an assumption of confidence he added: "I know you've all been sneering at me for taking care of my skin. I'll just show you that it was caution and not because I was afraid. I can take the same risks as the rest of you!"

On reflection, Wendover was hardly so much impressed by this offer. Obviously, the murderer, having made his attack, would at once set about getting away from the neighbourhood of the Maze; and by this time he would probably be far enough away to avoid pursuit. Ernest, therefore, was risking very little by joining the party.

"Take out the limousine, Arthur," he suggested. "It'll hold the lot of us—and the glass will give us good cover."

Wendover smiled at the return of Ernest's caution, though he admitted that the choice was sound enough. They hurried to the garage and Arthur drove them down to the Maze.

Once there, Ernest seemed to feel that he had perhaps been over-courageous.

"Somebody ought to look after the car," he suggested. "If we leave it here the fellow may steal up and go off with it, suppose he's lurking about. And where should we be then? He'd have got clean away and left us standing. I think I'd better sit in the car while you hunt about, and then we'll know. . . ."

At the sight of the open contempt on Sir Clinton's face, he let his proposal die away before it was completed, and crawled reluctantly out of the car with the others. He even made a show of eagerness and led the way to the Maze entrance.

"You're off the line a bit, uncle," Arthur pointed out.

"I can't see very well in the dark," Ernest complained. "And this grass is simply soaked with dew. I've got my feet all wet. Such a nuisance. . . ."

He tripped over something and came heavily to the ground. A heart-felt oath reached their ears.

"I'm wet all down the front, now," Ernest wailed.

"I fell over some damned thing or other and I've hurt my toe. I hope it hasn't split the nail. What is this thing, damn it?"

He seemed to be feeling about in the dark.

"Why! It's the air-gun!"

Sir Clinton's flash-lamp suddenly shot out its glare; and in the cone of illumination they saw the grotesque figure of Ernest kneeling on the ground with the air-gun clutched in his hand. He rose to his feet laboriously.

"I'm soaking with that dew. Very heavy it's been to-night. Wasn't it a godsend that I had a spot of whiskey just before coming out? That'll keep a cold away. I'll have another one—a whiskey hot—when I get back again."

Sir Clinton paid no attention to Ernest's babble. He took the air-gun gingerly from its discoverer's hand and held it out to Arthur in the glare of the flash lamp.

"One of the local armoury, I suppose?"

Arthur examined it for a moment.

"Yes, that's one of ours."

The honours of discovery, however, seemed destined to fall to Ernest.

"Here," he demanded, "turn that light over this way, will you? There's something round my foot."

They could hear him kicking in the obscurity. Sir Clinton swung the beam round and stooped down.

"It's a bit of black thread you've got tangled up in. Wait a jiffy."

He freed Ernest from the fibre and began to trace along the thread with his light. It seemed to be merely the end of a long tentacle extending out from the entrance to the Maze.

"Ariadne's clue!" exclaimed Wendover, when he saw the direction in which the filament lay.

Sir Clinton nodded briefly.

"You people had better get back to the car," he said. "I don't want the ground trampled here. We can look at it in the morning. I'm just going to follow up this thread. I'll be back in a minute or two."

Holding his light low, he disappeared into the intricacies of the Maze, while Wendover shepherded the others back to the car. Once round a corner or two and well out of sight of the rest, Sir Clinton ceased to trouble about the thread and made his way direct to one centre of the Maze. He sought about for a time, evidently fruitlessly; and then made his way to the other centre. Here his search was more successful. Among some bushes in the enclosure, he unearthed a suit-case.

"Well, *that* was a long shot," he admitted to himself, though with evident satisfaction. "He's evidently not too sure that he's taken me in with his soft sawder, and he's provided for contingencies. Let's see."

He opened the suit-case and scrutinised one or two of the garments in it.

"Complete change of clothes and no marking on so much as a handkerchief. Quite right!"

He re-closed the suit-case and put it back into the hiding-place in which he had found it. Then he retraced his steps in the Maze until he came to the black thread which he proceeded to follow to the end.

"Now we'll go back to the house," he proposed, when he rejoined the others at the car. "That thread led me to the boat-house."

"So the attack was made from the river?" Wendover asked.

"It's strange that he didn't pitch his gun into the water, isn't it?" Sir Clinton said. "One might have expected him to get rid of it in the easiest way."

"I expect he got a bit of a shock," Arthur suggested. "He must have known he'd hit me squarely and yet nothing happened. That would be a bit of a surprise to him, wouldn't it. Perhaps he got rattled."

"Lucky for you there wasn't a second shot," was Sir Clinton's comment. "You could hardly expect your cigar-case to save you twice running."

When they reached Whistlefield again, they found Ardsley talking to Torrance, who had returned from his walk. He had been out alone, it appeared. Vera had gone to her own room when Ardsley had given his news about Sylvia and had not reappeared again.

Sir Clinton took Ardsley aside for a moment.

"You've got a nurse upstairs in that room?"

Ardsley assented.

"One of them's going to watch all night. There's a superstition some people have that one shouldn't leave a dead person alone. I don't mind being superstitious for once, if it's in a good cause."

"No one must get into the room, of course."

"No one shall," said Ardsley, definitely.

Sir Clinton seemed to be satisfied; and Ardsley left the room. The Chief Constable had one more private conversation still to carry through. He took Ernest Shandon into the study and closed the door.

"I can put my hand on the murderer now, Mr. Shandon, so you needn't be nervous about that. But I'm rather troubled about one point. This is going to lead to the devil of a scandal if I arrest him. Are you anxious for that?"

Ernest seemed staggered by this way of looking at things.

"Well, really, I don't quite see what you mean. It's a bit obscure, isn't it? I must confess I don't quite follow you, if you understand me?"

"I'll put it this way. I could arrest the fellow to-night. I know where he is. I'd have no trouble over that. But I think I can make surer of him if I wait till to-morrow morning. I've got to risk his bolting. I've got that possibility in view. He might get away. But if he got away, would you worry much? Think of the scandal it would save—and it's going to be a big one. And the trial will be a most laborious affair, too. What do you think? Shall I arrest him now, or wait till the morning and risk his getting away?"

Ernest pondered over the problem, but he seemed incapable of giving any help.

"I really don't know," he said. "You're too deep for me, really. I can't make out what you're driving at."

Sir Clinton's face showed disappointment.

"There are some things that a police official can't put into plain words, you know. I can't say outright that I'd be glad to see the beggar off the premises. Can't you see what I mean?"

But Ernest shook his head dully; and Sir Clinton gave up the effort.

"Oh, very well," he said. "The responsibility's mine in any case. I'll wait till to-morrow and chance it. But I can't say I've got much help from you, Mr. Shandon. When the scandal comes, you needn't blame me."

He seemed to consider something for a moment, then he added:

"By the way, I suppose you won't mind putting me up for the night? I'm taking all the responsibility I've any use for, as it is; and I think I ought to be able to say I was here to-night."

Ernest seemed to be rendered completely owlsh by this last request; but he assented willingly enough.

"And Wendover, too, of course," added Sir Clinton.

He paused for a moment as though in doubt, before speaking again.

"I think I'd better ring up the police-station, if you don't mind, Mr. Shandon. I'll do it now."

Ernest, with a shameless curiosity, followed him to the instrument and waited until he got the connection.

"Sir Clinton Driffield speaking. Sergeant, will you be good enough to buy me another tin of Navy Cut—same as the last you got—first thing to-morrow morning? I've run out of tobacco. Send a man up with it, will you? Yes, Navy Cut. Thanks."

Sir Clinton turned away from the instrument and noticed his host hovering close beside him.

"It's a handy thing to be a Chief Constable, isn't it? I'd run out of tobacco and I won't have time to go down to the village to-morrow morning. I shall arrest that fellow first thing after breakfast; and the formalities may take some time, you know."

Chapter XVII

WENDOVER was awakened next morning in an unfamiliar bedroom to find Sir Clinton at his side. The Chief Constable's eyes were tired, as though he had had very little sleep ; but otherwise he seemed as alert as usual.

"Come on, Squire!" he said. "Dress as quick as you can. You needn't mind shaving, for once. You've been clamouring for the arrest of the murderer for long enough now, so I thought you'd like to be in at the death. I've got an appointment with him this morning ; so you'd better hurry up if you want to see the last scenes in the Whistlefield dramatic entertainment."

Wendover had been rubbing his eyes rather sleepily when he awoke ; but Sir Clinton's words stimulated him into activity.

"Go on with your dressing and don't talk," Sir Clinton replied to his questions. "I haven't time to explain things just now. There'll be a good deal of explaining to be done in the end," he added, gloomily, "so we may as well make one bite at it!"

Wendover hurried over his toilet and soon he and Sir Clinton descended the stair and made their way to the front door. The figure of Stenness was plainly visible in the light of the early morning.

"So it was Stenness? Somehow I thought it might have been he," Wendover whispered, while they were still at a distance.

"I've got appointments with several people this morning," Sir Clinton said, sharply. "Ardsley's another of them. You needn't start suspecting everyone, Squire, or you'll have a busy time. No! No questions till later!"

He stepped forward and greeted the secretary.

"Where's the gun-room, Stenness? It may be as well to pick up something useful!"

The secretary led them down some passages. If he was surprised by Sir Clinton's methods, he showed no visible sign. When they reached the gun-room, each selected a shot-gun and ammunition under Sir Clinton's orders. Wendover noticed that the Chief Constable picked out a couple himself.

"One's for Ardsley," he explained in answer to Wendover's glance of surprise. "Come along! He'll be waiting for us outside, I expect."

When they reached the front door again, Ardsley was just stepping out of his car. Sir Clinton motioned him back into the driving-seat and directed the others to get into the motor.

"The Maze, if you please, Ardsley," he said, when they had seated themselves.

Wendover was completely at sea for a few moments. It was plain that both Ardsley and Stenness must be regarded as cleared in the eyes of the Chief Constable, or he would not have brought them there and taken the trouble to arm them. But if they were excluded, the murderer must belong to a very small group. And suddenly Wendover saw his way through the whole intricacy of the Whistlefield case.

"Of course! Young Torrance! He's the man!"

But he was careful not to utter his views aloud, fearing to draw the fire of Sir Clinton, who was sitting

beside him with drawn brows. Wendover felt it better to pursue his line of thought silently.

"What an ass I've been! Young Torrance was in the Maze when the two Shandons were killed. He was somewhere or other about, probably, when Ernest was attacked. Clinton has most likely tracked him down without saying anything about it. And when Sylvia was shot, he wasn't with us in the room; they said he was playing billiards by himself. Quite likely he sneaked out of the billiard room window, crept round, did the shooting, and got back under cover while we were all too taken aback by the business to do anything. If I'd been a shade quicker, that night, I'd have got him! And last night, when Arthur was attacked, Torrance had gone for a walk alone. It's obvious! And like an idiot, I didn't see it. All one needed was a pencil and paper and a list of the people who were actually on hand on each occasion; and then, by elimination, one was bound to get at him straight away."

He pondered over his own obtuseness for a time, while the car ran down the road towards the Maze; but his train of thought was interrupted by Ardsley pulling up at a word from Sir Clinton. A uniformed constable stepped forward from the shelter of a clump of bushes, and Wendover saw with surprise that he had a revolver at his belt.

"Everything all right?" demanded Sir Clinton, as the constable saluted.

"Yes, sir. It went exactly as you told us. About a quarter of an hour ago we saw him hurrying along the road."

"Just so," Sir Clinton interrupted. "I watched him leaving the house."

"He went into the Maze, sir; and as soon as he was

well inside, we followed your orders and put the padlocks on all the gates. He's tried to get out once, sir ; but as soon as he saw us he ran back into the Maze."

" You didn't try to catch him, of course ? "

" No, sir. Your orders were strict about that ; and we kept to them."

" Quite right. Now you've got the stuff up, haven't you ? "

" It's over there, sir."

" Well, bring me the megaphone. We'll need to talk to him before we can do anything further."

While the constable was fetching the instrument, they got out of the car. Wendover, when he found himself on the road, gazed across at the green barriers of the Maze, behind which the murderer was lurking. Sir Clinton's tactics were plain enough in their final phase, though Wendover could not understand how the Chief Constable had been so sure of running the miscreant down in the particular way he had chosen.

He turned at the sound of steps, to find the constable had come back with the megaphone, a battered instrument which had probably seen service at police sports in the past. Sir Clinton took it from his subordinate and then called the attention of the group about the car.

" I want you people to take careful note of what happens, from now onwards. You may have to give evidence about it, so please pay attention to everything that happens."

Wendover noticed that Sir Clinton's voice had lost its usual tinge of humour. Quite obviously he regarded the situation as grave ; and his tone was that of a man who sees difficulties ahead, but means to overcome them if possible. As soon as he was certain that all the group were on the alert, the Chief Constable raised the megaphone and spoke towards the Maze.

"Ernest Shandon! I have a warrant here for your arrest. I call on you to surrender. Come to the gate nearest the road within five minutes and give yourself up."

"He's got a pistol, sir," the constable hastened to add to his previous report, "and an air-gun, too. He had them in his hands as he went into the Maze."

Sir Clinton raised the megaphone again.

"Before you come to the gate, you must throw your weapons over the hedge. You can't get away, Shandon, you may as well come out quietly."

His voice echoed across the lawns, but from the recesses of the Maze came no reply.

"Five minutes from now," Sir Clinton said finally, and put down the megaphone. He glanced at his wrist-watch as he did so.

"He won't come out, of course; but I'm anxious to do everything in a justifiable way," he explained. "He's had fair warning."

They stood uneasily about, furtively consulting their watches until the five minute period had elapsed; but no sign came from the Maze. Wendover was completely puzzled by the turn of events. How could Ernest Shandon be the murderer? When the attempt had been made on Arthur, Ernest Shandon had been sitting within ten feet of Wendover himself, under the eye of Sir Clinton; and the attack had been carried out here, at the entrance to the Maze. Then, floating through his mind, came a recollection of Sir Clinton's hint that a man might be "on both halves of the map simultaneously." But that was impossible! No man could be in two places at once. The whole affair seemed to verge on a nightmare inconsistency. And yet, Sir Clinton had evidently foreseen the attempt to escape and had taken precautions to prevent it being successful. And un-

doubtedly it must be Ernest Shandon in the Maze, for the local constables must have recognised him from their hiding-places as he went in.

When the five minutes' grace elapsed, Sir Clinton turned round ; but as he did so, his eye was caught by a new figure which was advancing over the lawns.

" Oh, damnation ! " he exclaimed, angrily. " Here's the very thing I wanted to avoid."

Wendover, following Sir Clinton's glance, recognised Arthur Hawkhurst hurrying towards them ; and as he approached, the Squire could see that he was carrying a sporting rifle in his hand.

" You gave me the slip," Arthur said reproachfully, as he came up to them. " But I spotted what you were after. Heard you moving about and dressed in next to no time. I'm a bit out of breath with the hurry."

Sir Clinton looked at him sternly.

" If you come here at all, Mr. Hawkhurst, you come under my orders. If you can't agree to that, I'll have to see that you're sent back to the house."

Arthur frowned heavily ; then, after a moment's thought, he evidently made up his mind to accept the inevitable.

" Very well, then. If you put it like that, there's no more to be said. But if the beggar attempts to escape, I suppose I may wing him ? "

He touched his rifle as he spoke.

" You'll do exactly as you're told."

Sir Clinton evidently had no wish to be distracted from his main problem. His voice had a ring in it which impressed even Arthur.

" What's it all about ? " he demanded from Wendover, in a lowered tone.

" Your uncle's the murderer, it seems ; and Sir Clinton's got him trapped in the Maze."

Arthur looked at him in amazement.

"I say, you know, Wendover, that'll take a bit of thinking over, won't it?"

He said no more; and Wendover could believe that Arthur, like himself, was conning over the whole of the Whistlefield case, and being brought up against the apparent impossibilities of the Chief Constable's solution of the problem. At length Arthur lifted his head again.

"Well, if he didn't do it, he has only to come out and say so. If he did do it. . . ."

His voice died away into silence. Then he added:

"I promised myself to square up for Sylvia, and I'll do that, no matter who the man is."

He dropped his rifle to the order and waited patiently for the next move, keeping his eyes fixed on the impenetrable hedges of the Maze.

Sir Clinton waited for a few minutes longer. Then he seemed to have exhausted the limit which he had set for himself.

"You see the situation?" he demanded, turning to the others. "He's in there. He refuses to come out. We've got to get him."

"I suppose you're going to starve him out?" Wendover inquired, as Sir Clinton stopped short.

"Too risky. He might get away in the dark when night comes on. I don't say he could; but I'm going to take no risks."

"Then I suppose we'll need to go into the Maze and dig him out," Wendover suggested, philosophically.

Sir Clinton dissented with a nod.

"I'm responsible for the lives of my constables," he said. "I can take some brands of responsibility quick enough; but I won't shoulder the liability of sending good men to hunt armed vermin through a maze like

that. They know nothing about its paths. He knows every inch of it. It would be sheer murder if I gave orders of that sort. No, there's a better way. But bear in mind that I gave him the chance of surrender, first of all."

Arthur fidgetted with his rifle.

"I know the Maze as well as he does," he pointed out. "I could get him easily enough if you'd let me take on the job."

Sir Clinton negatived the suggestion curtly :

"I've got a better ferret than you, my boy. If he gets driven out into the open and looks like escaping, I'll let you wing him. But that's all you're to do."

He wetted his finger and held it up in the air.

"Couldn't be better. There's just a faint drift in the air. You've got the stuff over by the boat-house?" he added, turning to the constable. "Right. We'll go across, then. But keep well away from the Maze as we go; for the beast may be hiding behind the outermost hedge trying to draw a bead on us as we pass."

Considerably mystified, Wendover followed Sir Clinton towards the river bank. When they reached the neighbourhood of the boat-house, he was still more astonished to find a number of sacks lying on the grass, evidently filled with some material. Three spades were grouped close by. Again Sir Clinton held up his moistened finger and gauged the direction of the light airs that were blowing. Then, seeing the surprised faces of his companions, he pointed to the sacks :

"My ferret!"

Ardsley had gone over and inspected one of the bags. He rubbed his finger on the outside of one and then inspected the skin with interest. Then, suddenly, he laughed grimly :

"Sulphur! That's a cute notion. A ferret!"

Sir Clinton acknowledged the discovery with a smile that had more than a touch of the sinister in it.

"Simple, isn't it?"

"Quite the Mikado touch," Ardsley commented.

Sir Clinton said no more, but busied himself with giving orders to his subordinates. Wendover had grasped the meaning of the interchange between Ardsley and the Chief Constable. Sir Clinton meant to use the simplest poison gas of all—the fumes of burning sulphur. The light air-currents would drift them over the Maze; and Ernest Shandon would soon find his fastness converted into a death-trap. He would have to come out into the open; and by that time he would be in such a state that he could be easily captured.

Sir Clinton had issued his directions, posting his constables at points from which they could converge on the various entrances to the Maze if necessary.

"Take no risks," he added, finally. "I don't want any fancy exploits to-day. The man who gets Shandon and suffers no damage in getting him, will be the man who gets a good mark from me. I'll not have anyone hurt, understand!"

He dismissed the constables to carry his orders to their comrades, and then swung round to the rest of the group.

"You can get over yonder, to that clump of rhododendrons, Hawkhurst. If he shows up anywhere within your zone of fire, you're to wing him. You're not to kill him. I'm trusting you to play the game, remember."

Arthur nodded, and betook himself to his post.

"Two more guns will cover all but this side of the Maze," Sir Clinton went on. "You go over to the road, Wendover. From there," he pointed, "you can cover young Hawkhurst's dead ground. I'll do the same on

the other side. But first of all, we've got to get this stuff spread around a bit."

He cut the twine at the mouths of the sacks, tilted out the sulphur, and began to distribute it with a spade. The others hurried to assist him, and spread the yellow lumps under his directions.

"Now we can light up," Sir Clinton said, at last, when things had been completed to his satisfaction. "These fireworks will give the thing a good start if you spray the sparks to and fro over the surface of the stuff."

He produced some fireworks from a paper parcel as he spoke and set an example to his companions. Soon the sulphur caught fire; and Wendover, incautiously working on the leeward side, began to cough violently.

"Keep to the windward of the stuff," Sir Clinton advised. "Get it alight here and there. The flame will soon spread over the whole surface. Now, I'm off."

He picked up his shot-gun and skirted the Maze at a respectful distance as he made his way to his post. For a minute or two Wendover stolidly continued to tend the "ferret"; but he could not help wondering whether this method of criminal-hunting really came within permitted bounds. His mind inclined more readily to active measures; and this devil's cookery was, as he phrased it to Ardsley, "hardly the game."

The toxicologist showed no sympathy with his point of view.

"Driffild's quite right. Suppose to-night found him with a dead constable on his hands—perhaps a widow and some fatherless children to face? Would you care to be in his shoes? I wouldn't! Play the game? Bosh! It's not playing the game to chuck away your men's lives unnecessarily."

He dug up some burning sulphur and distributed it over an unkindled patch.

"Whew! This is a suffocating job! If it's like this now it'll be fairly stifling on the lee side in half an hour."

Stenness said nothing. Wendover, who was not in the secret of the secretary's love affairs, could not understand why Stenness looked almost as grim as Sir Clinton. The Squire woke up all at once to the fact that he ought to be elsewhere ; and he made his way to his appointed post.

As he reached it, the report of the sporting rifle came from the clump of rhododendrons.

"It's all right," he heard Arthur's voice raised in a shouted explanation. "I saw him at the gate, trying to climb over ; so I let him have it above his head. That scared him. He's gone away now, back into the Maze. He's got a pistol in his hand."

Almost at once they heard Sir Clinton's shot-gun fired.

"Trying the entrances one by one to see if he can slip out," commented Arthur, with a certain malicious glee in his tone.

Some minutes passed, then, to Wendover's astonishment, he heard the crack of the automatic pistol, and a bullet sang past him.

"Not much sign of surrender about that," he admitted, as he got hurriedly under cover. "The beggar must have marked me down and tried a long shot through the hedge."

Time flowed slowly on. Occasionally, with a slight change in the faint wind, some of the sulphur fumes drifted down to Wendover and caught his lungs.

"It must be pretty thick in the Maze, if a mere whiff of it gives one gyp like that," he reflected. "The beggar must be half-dead with the fumes by this time, for he gets the full blast of it."

Another interval of quietness gave Wendover time to think over the situation. Up to that point, he had gone through the business almost without trying to bring the morning's work into touch with normal life. The whole affair had had an impersonal quality ; for from start to finish he had not set eyes on the man they were hunting. But that peculiarity had enhanced the rather unreal character of the adventure, lending it a touch of the fantastic in his mind. And the extraordinarily methodical procedure which had governed the transactions helped in some way to accentuate his feelings. It had all been as logical as a nightmare seems to be while one lives through it.

Yet another shot-gun report—from the sulphur station this time—showed that the murderer was still making attempts to slip away. After that, another period elapsed without any further alarms. The sulphur fumes were now so dense that Wendover, though out of the main line of drift, was becoming seriously troubled by them. He could hear Arthur coughing continuously in the rhododendron clump ; but the muzzle of the rifle was never lowered even in the worst paroxysm. Quite obviously Arthur meant to miss no chance of squaring the account for Sylvia.

As that thought crossed his mind, Wendover seemed to see the whole Whistlefield case in a fresh light. Instead of the mysterious murderer lurking behind the green walls of the Maze, his mental vision threw up a picture of the real personality, Ernest Shandon. He could see him with his mind's eye wandering along the paths of the Maze, choking, desperate, seeking for some outlet to safety and beaten back each time by the warning of the guns. And minute by minute the poison-cloud was growing denser over his place of refuge, bringing nearer the inevitable end of the drama.

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And as this picture forced itself upon Wendover, he began to feel the nightmare growing more intense. It seemed almost incredible that Ernest Shandon, a creature despised by everyone for his shiftlessness and futility, could have planned and carried through this murderous work. Wendover, since he had been brought into intimate contact with Ernest, had felt nothing but boredom and derision. The man's dullness, his cowardice, his selfishness, had all impressed themselves strongly on the Squire; and had produced a definite feeling of repulsion and contempt. Now he had to readjust his ideas. The dullness must have been merely an exaggeration; the cowardice had been a sham, since the murderer had no reason to fear anything for his own skin; and the selfishness—why, that was only a manifestation of callousness without which no planned murder could be carried through. Instead of the insignificant figure which he had hitherto encountered, Wendover began to see instead a fresh personality hidden behind the mask: something going coldly to its deadly work, unrestrained by any normal feelings of humanity or even kinship, a modern Minotaur in the labyrinth of the Maze.

Almost appalled by the vividness of the portrait which his mind had conjured up, Wendover stared across the grass at the wall of greenery which concealed from his eyes the actual form of the murderer. Then, as he gazed, there came once more the report of the automatic pistol—a single shot.

And once more the waiting recommenced, unbroken by any incident.

At last Sir Clinton appeared, with his gun at the trail, round the corner of the Maze. He signalled to Wendover and Arthur to rejoin him.

"I think that's the end of the business," he said with

stern satisfaction, as they came up. "If I'm not much mistaken, that last shot was for himself. The game was up; and he must have been half-dead with the fumes by now."

He turned to Arthur.

"Do you see now why I wouldn't let you touch him? If you had, then we'd have had all the bother of a trial for manslaughter at the least; and I won't guarantee that things would have gone smoothly in it. As it is, he's suicided; and no one's to blame but himself. And if you wanted to put the screw on him, could you have given it a harder turn than this?"

He pointed towards the sulphur station.

Arthur saw the point.

"I expect you're right," he admitted, coughing as a fresh cloud of fumes drifted down upon them. "He must have had his dose before he gave in. You think that there's no doubt that he's shot himself?"

Sir Clinton's face showed what he thought.

"Well, I tell you what," Arthur proposed. "There's a tree near the river-bank which overlooks part of the Maze if one gets high enough in it. Suppose I swarm up it and see if I can spot anything? Now that he's out of action, it's safe enough."

Sir Clinton welcomed the idea.

"That's a good scheme. He might be shamming, after all; and I won't take any risks by sending anyone into the Maze till I'm sure. If you keep well inside the leaves you'll be safe enough in any case. And if you find he's dead, it'll save us a long wait."

Arthur dropped his rifle and went off to put his project into execution. After he had gone Sir Clinton turned to Wendover.

"Not much family affection left in the Whistlefield circle, Squire. But can you wonder, after all. Friend

Ernest wasn't the sort of man who'd attract much liking at the best ; and that boy was very keen on his sister, undoubtedly. I have a certain sympathy with his feelings. And I can tell you I've been on pins and needles for some time back lest young Hawkhurst should find out who the murderer really was and take the law into his own hands at once. He wouldn't have been hanged, of course ; that mental instability of his would have saved him. But it would have been a case for Broadmoor ; and that's not much better than the drop in his state. It's a relief to get it all over as easily as we have done."

In a few minutes, Arthur came back with his report.

"He's lying on the ground in Helen's Bower. I couldn't see very clearly ; but from the way he's lying, I think he's done for."

"Well," said Sir Clinton, "I'd better get into the Maze and make sure of things."

He reflected for a moment, then added :

"I think perhaps it would be as well if all of us went in together. It's quite safe ; I'm pretty sure of that. And there's something there, I suspect, that I shall want witnesses for."

He summoned Ardsley and Stenness and explained the state of affairs to them.

"If we douse the sulphur, the wind will clear away the fumes fairly soon. We can get water from the river and put it out. There's sure to be something in the boat-house which we can use for bringing water—a bucket or a bailer of some sort !"

When it seemed safe, they entered the Maze and soon reached Helen's Bower. No danger awaited them. Ernest's body lay sprawling on the grass with a bullet wound in the head and the automatic pistol still

clutched in the hand. Sir Clinton crossed over and knelt down beside the corpse.

"We'd better search the body now and be done with it," he said, beginning the task as he spoke.

"Here's something bulky in the breast-pocket," he explained as he extracted it. "H'm! An envelope with your name written on it, Stenness. Your property, perhaps?"

Stenness glanced at the paper, and a look of intelligence passed between him and Sir Clinton.

"That's mine," he confirmed. "It ought to have notes in it!"

The Chief Constable thrust his fingers into the envelope and, pulling out some of the contents, exhibited them to the company.

"It's full of notes—must be a fair sum. I'll keep this for the present, Stenness. You don't mind? It's best to do things formally; and you can always have it later on when you want it."

"Oh, keep it, certainly," Stenness agreed, with a certain dull indifference.

Sir Clinton continued his search; but the only thing of interest was a tin box which he opened carefully and held out for inspection.

"More of these darts, you see?"

He counted them rapidly.

"Yes, that's right. This represents the balance of the lot after deducting the ones he used in the attack on Miss Hawkhurst and last night."

He replaced the cover on the box and transferred the thing to his pocket.

"That's all we need do. You'd better have a look at the body, Ardsley. We'll need your evidence at the inquest. I'll send a constable in here to look after things until we can get the body removed."

When Ardsley had finished his examination, they left the Maze.

"Go back to the house now," Sir Clinton directed, as they emerged from the entrance gate. "I'll have to pilot my men in to the centre, you know. You can send the car down to meet me if you like."

He turned back with the constables, while the rest of the party got into the motor. No one seemed inclined to talk, as they made their way up to the house. The events of the morning had been too bizarre to merge easily into everyday affairs. To Wendover, it seemed as though he had spent the last hour or two in some world lying far beyond the normal bounds of probability—already the siege of the Maze was passing into the realm of the unreal in his mind; and he had difficulty in forcing himself to remember that it had cost the life of a man.

But even while he reflected on this, a fresh surprise came upon him. As the car swept round in sight of the main entrance to Whistlefield, he heard a sharp intake of breath from Stenness and a suppressed exclamation from Arthur.

He raised his eyes, and for a moment could hardly believe what he saw. There, at the top of the steps stood Torrance and Vera Forrest, while between them was Sylvia, safe and sound except for the sling which supported her right arm.

"Rather a surprise, I suppose," said Ardsley drily, as he pulled up the car at the front door.

Chapter XVIII

WENDOVER brought out cigars and cigarettes, and endeavoured to make his guests as comfortable as possible without too much fuss. It was some days after the affair at the Maze which had ended in Ernest Shandon's suicide ; and Sir Clinton had asked his host to invite Stenness and Ardsley to dinner. The Squire had at first objected to the toxicologist, for his prejudices were quite unabated ; but Sir Clinton had made it clear that Ardsley's presence was essential from his point of view, and Wendover had given way without too much argument. Dinner had passed off without any friction, for the Squire was not the sort of person to abuse his position as a host.

Sir Clinton picked out a cigar and cut it with some care.

" I hear we may congratulate you on your engagement, Stenness," he said. " I suppose it's rather early to ask when you're going to be married ? "

Stenness looked across the room, rather as though he were in doubt about the intention behind the question.

" I'll have to make some money first," he answered. " One can't live on somebody else's income."

Sir Clinton laughed.

" Some people don't seem to find it so hard as all that. But if that's your difficulty, perhaps I could do something for you. I've some small influence in South Africa, and it so happens that a man out there asked

me to look round for someone to fill a post. The pay's good enough to marry on. I'll come across to-morrow to Whistlefield in the morning and talk to you about it. My impression is that it would suit you. And it has one big advantage. It would take you both out of your old surroundings and make a clean break with all this affair, which would hang round your neck if you stayed in this country. People will talk, no matter what happens ; and Miss Hawkhurst couldn't help knowing they were talking, if she stayed on here."

He paused to light his cigar before he continued.

"And that brings me to my reason for getting you people together to-night. None of you are likely to talk ; but you'd be hardly human if you didn't think about this Whistlefield affair. And it's on the cards that you might fall into misapprehensions over it, which might lead to difficulties. I've come to the conclusion that it will be better if you know all that I know myself about it ; and I think that will clear the whole thing up and let you get it out of your minds. Once a puzzle's solved, no one troubles about it any more ; but even a trace of mystery will keep one worrying spasmodically and so one can't put the matter aside for good."

He glanced round the group and he could see that his suggestion met with the approval of them all.

"Very well. You must bear in mind, first of all, that I'm going to give you a mixture of facts and theories. I can't guarantee that every detail will be absolutely accurate, for some of it's guess-work on my part."

"Go ahead," said Wendover, "We understand that well enough."

"One thing that most people forget when they read about a police case in the papers," continued Sir Clinton, "is the handicap of local knowledge. On the face of it,

anyone of you three had a better chance than I had of getting to the bottom of the Whistlefield affair. All of you had some knowledge of the characters of the people involved; each of you at any rate knew his own part in the business: but a detective coming in from the outside sees nothing before him but a group of strangers with totally unpredictable qualities. He has all that lee-way to make up before he even starts level with you—and he hasn't much time to pick up his information."

"That's true," said Stenness, thoughtfully. "I'd never looked at it in that light. The police have a harder job than I thought."

"There's a countervailing advantage of course," Sir Clinton hastened to admit. "A detective comes to a case with no preconceived ideas about character. The actors are all strangers to him; and he has to depend on his wits and his judgement entirely. That was my position when I came into the Whistlefield case. I knew none of you personally, and I was quite free from prejudices about you."

"Facts are more important than opinions in a case of this sort, so that really leaves a balance in your favour," Ardsley suggested.

"Quite true—once you've got your facts," Sir Clinton agreed. "Now let's take the facts in the order that they presented themselves. The things I saw when I was called to the Maze were plain enough. An air-gun had been used to fire poisoned darts. Roger Shandon had been hit in the shoulders and the neck; Neville Shandon had been struck rather lower down in the body. There had been no attempt at robbery, except for the tearing away of the sheet of notes in Neville's hand. Loopholes had been cut in the hedge, evidently beforehand—for no one would start cutting loopholes

with his victim a few yards away. A box of darts had been spilt at the loophole from which Roger Shandon was shot. The murderer had managed to dodge either Miss Forrest or young Torrance, or both of them, as he made his way out of the Maze. Finally, my dog proved that the murderer had followed a very round-about track in leaving the Maze. He got out near the river bank. He went across to a clump of trees, on one of which there was a mark about three feet off the ground. Then he had gone across the grass to the road. And when he reached the road, his trail stopped short."

"Yes," Wendover interjected, "you talked a lot of rot about the murderer getting into his private aeroplane and flying away, I remember."

Sir Clinton smiled slightly.

"I was near enough for all practical purposes, as you'll see, Squire. Now we come to what I thought it reasonable to infer from the facts. First of all, an air-gun can be fired by either a man or a woman, so the weapon didn't even suggest the sex of the criminal. The poison was obviously going to be a good clue; for it made the crime abnormal, so to speak; and the more uncommon the method is in a murder, the more you limit the possibilities in the identity of the murderer. Next, it was clear enough that Roger had been shot while he was sitting in his chair with his back to the murderer. In that position, only his shoulders and neck would be exposed as targets and it was there that he was hit. Neville, on the other hand, had been shot from the front or slightly to the side. That suggested the possibility that Roger might have been killed in mistake for Neville, whereas Neville could not have been mistaken for Roger, since the murderer, shooting from the front or side, could see his face as he fired."

" Did you lay much stress on that in your mind ? " Stenness asked.

" Not much at the time. It suggested that Roger might have been killed first of all, by mistake, and that Neville was the man the murderer was really after. But alone, it amounted to very little. Then comes the fact that nothing seemed to have been removed from either body, except the notes torn out of Neville's hand. Of course, I'd been following the Hackleton case ; and it was clear enough that Neville Shandon might have been put out of the way to keep him from examining Hackleton. That's been done before—remember how Maitre Labori was shot in the back as he was going into Court to examine General Mercier during the Dreyfus case. I merely docketed that in my memory and kept an open mind on the point. I hadn't enough data to make it worth while doing more.

" The next point was the discovery of the loopholes. That established premeditation—the crime had been thought out and prepared for beforehand. And that meant, further, that the murderer was someone who knew that one or other of the Shandons was likely to be in the Maze that afternoon or at least at some time thereabouts. That looked like a local criminal at first sight. But one has to be judicial ; and it was clear enough that a premeditated crime might have been preceded by a good deal of quiet spying ; and thus an outsider might have got to know the Shandons' habits. One couldn't lay much stress on that."

" So at that point you didn't know whether the Hackleton case came in or not ? " Stenness asked.

" No. I simply kept an open mind on the point. Now the next thing was the box of darts which Skene found scattered about. That was easy enough to read. The murderer must have fumbled while he was shooting

Roger—because the box was at Roger's loophole. He was in a deadly hurry, or he'd have picked them up then. Evidently he'd something else to do in a hurry and he meant to come back for the darts. Isn't it clear enough that when he'd shot Roger, he saw the face after he'd fired; and he realised he'd hit the wrong man. Neville had still to be reckoned with—and it looks to me as if the murderer had counted on Neville being in the Maze just then. I expect he had private information. So he grabbed three darts from the ground and rushed off to finish Neville, which he did. Neville may have been alarmed by something, which would account for his standing up when he was shot at. Then the murderer proposes to go back for his lost darts. But now he finds someone else in the Maze. He hears voices. Probably he finds his road back to Helen's Bower blocked by these strangers. So he runs as hard as he can to get rid of his air-gun, which is the deadly evidence against him. But he gets into difficulties in avoiding these unknown people in the Maze and it takes him some time to get out."

"Did you suspect anyone in particular at that point?" Wendover interrupted.

"It might have been young Torrance, of course," Sir Clinton admitted. "He might have doubled his own part with that of the murderer. I kept an open mind."

"I suppose it might have been Miss Forrest, if you take everyone into account," Ardsley commented.

"I didn't speculate much at the time," Sir Clinton answered. "What really started me thinking definitely was the clue that my dog gave us. He led us, you remember, by a very winding track through the Maze—evidently the turnings and windings were due to the murderer dodging someone in the alleys. Then we came

near the river—that suggested that he flung away his air-gun into the water as he passed. Then the dog led us to a tree in a small clump near by. Wendover noticed a mark on the trunk of the tree, about three feet off the ground and he suggested that it had been made by the boot of the murderer while he was trying to climb the tree. But after that the trail went on and reached the road—and there it stopped dead. The dog simply baulked there ; it found nothing further.”

Sir Clinton paused for a moment to let this point sink in.

“ A trail can only stop dead in that way for either of two reasons. First, a man may stand still and wait. But since the man wasn’t there he obviously hadn’t waited. The only other way in which a thing like that could happen is by the man getting into the air off the road at that point.”

“ Ha! The private aeroplane, I suppose,” said Wendover sarcastically.

Sir Clinton’s retort crushed the Squire slightly.

“ Or the private motor—or even the humble push-bike. If you step into a car or get on to a bicycle your trail will stop so far as footsteps are concerned.”

Wendover admitted the hit.

“ What an ass I was not to see that at once. And of course the road was bone-hard and had no dust on it, so he left no track of his tyres ? ”

“ None that I could swear to. Now that bicycle settled a good deal. It cleared at once Torrance, Miss Forrest, and most probably Costock as well. I may say at once that I never took Costock seriously. He’s a miserable creature who couldn’t screw himself up to murder if he tried. I had him watched ; but I never really suspected him of anything beyond a futile attempt at blackmailing Roger Shandon. He hadn’t even

the nerve for that. His pistol was really for self-defence against Shandon, I'm sure, just as he said it was."

Wendover harked back to the problem of the track.

"You seem very sure it was a bicycle and not a motor car."

"Isn't it fairly certain?" Sir Clinton asked. "If the murderer had used a car, he'd have been seen by the lodge-keepers if he left the grounds—at least he'd have run that risk. But a bicycle can be carried off the road by hand and taken through a gap in a hedge quite easily. Since the murderer evidently would not want to be seen, the bicycle is the obvious thing. Call it a bicycle, anyway, for convenience just now. My trouble was that I couldn't prove which way the bicycle went: whether it went towards the house or towards the East Gate. I left the matter alone for the time, hoping for something else to turn up. Of course, I set my men at work to hunt for any bicycle that had been concealed in the grounds; but they failed to find it."

"Why didn't you make inquiries about bicycles at Whistlefield?" Wendover demanded.

"Because I wanted to keep my thumb on the bicycle question. I didn't want to get the name of being too clever—so far as the murderer was concerned. It was far better to let him think his method was undetected."

"So at that point," Stenness put in, "you didn't know whether the murderer had gone back to the house or had gone outside the grounds?"

"No," Sir Clinton admitted. "I didn't. The next thing, if you remember, was my visit to the house and my interviews with various people, yourself included. Bear in mind that at that time, I didn't know whether the murderer was one of the house group or had come in like a bolt from the blue from outside. I had to get

that point cleared up as soon as possible; and it offered a good deal of difficulty.

"When I came to interview the various people at the house, it was simply a case of meeting a number of strangers for the first time. I had to pick up what I could, and at the same time take care not to be prejudiced by initial impressions. That's more difficult than you'd think. Torrance and Miss Forrest were cleared already, so I did not need to pay much attention to them, apart from their evidence. You, Stenness, gave me a bit of trouble, I admit. I couldn't quite make you out at that time."

Stenness acknowledged this with a faint smile. Sir Clinton hastened on with his narrative without giving either of the others a chance of interrupting.

"Arthur Hawkhurst caused me some thought, though. Stenness gave me a hint about his attack of sleepy sickness. He came in with an air-gun in his hand. He seemed an irresponsible sort of boy. But that was all. There's a big chasm between that and homicidal mania. I simply docketed him in my memory and left the matter there."

At this point Sir Clinton seemed to find his narrative growing more interesting to himself. He pulled himself up in his chair and glanced round his audience before taking up the next part of his subject.

"Ernest Shandon was the final figure—for, of course, I dismissed Miss Hawkhurst at once. Now at first sight, friend Ernest was an unattractive fellow. First, he was obviously callous in the extreme. He didn't seem sorry about his brothers' deaths; his sore toe bulked far more prominently in his conversation. That seemed a bit grotesque to me at the time. It stuck in my memory on that account alone. Then, second, he seemed absolutely selfish. His ego seemed

to be the only thing that really interested him. He wanted his tea ; and he meant to have it, too. That seemed a bit abnormal, though one can't hang a man for wanting his tea, of course. Third, he gave me the impression of being one of the dullest and stupidest men that one could wish to meet. Altogether, one would say, there wasn't much to be got out of a person of that type : dull, selfish, callous, and stupid. And yet, if you look back now, you'll see that the whole basis of the Shandon tragedies lies in just those qualities. It'll be quite clear when we come to it.

" I've pointed out that my difficulty was to fix as soon as possible whether this was ' an inside job ' or one carried through by an outsider. Also, quite possibly there might be more trouble at Whistlefield. Now I'd taken particular care to note that the murderer knew the Maze thoroughly. So as a wild shot I dropped the hint about Ariadne's clue—the thread which would guide a man through the Maze if he didn't know it very well. I flung that down casually. I hadn't really much hope of doing much with it ; for I hardly believed in further trouble then. But it would do no harm, so I dropped the suggestion in presence of some of the possible criminals."

" H'm! Now I begin to see some light," Wendover commented.

" The next point was the nature of the poison," Sir Clinton went on. " The local doctor suggested you, Ardsley, as an expert ; so I went over at once to get your views. Once I knew it was curare, I felt I'd got something definite enough to go on. That isn't a common stuff. Of course you probably had a stock yourself ; and I didn't feel inclined to interfere with you. I thought it fairly clear that if you had gone on the murder tack you'd have avoided a stuff which could

be traced to you directly. So I asked about any other local source, and you put me on to the pot in the Whistlefield museum.

"That put a different complexion on the whole case. It was evidently essential to get hold of that supply immediately. If the murderer had drawn a private stock from the pot, we couldn't help that. If he had just used enough to poison his darts, then we could stop further supplies by confiscating the pot. So I packed you and Wendover off to secure it."

"Wendover being to watch me, I suppose?" Ardsley put in with a grim smile.

"I won't deny it. You'd have done the same in my place," Sir Clinton pointed out.

"Why didn't you come yourself?" Wendover inquired.

"Because I'd something else on hand that had to be done in a hurry. I must confess frankly that I'd nothing definite to go on. It was mere intuition, if you like; or you can call it a case of taking precautions against eventualities which one doesn't expect to occur. It was rather like the business of Ariadne's clue—a long shot which might come off. And I thought it had more chance of bearing fruit. These poisoned darts were clues of a sort. They were also weapons. So if the murderer got a chance of grabbing them, I thought he might be tempted. But I wasn't going to let him have the real things, not likely. I gave him a substitute, quite similar in appearance, but really quite harmless. Then if he tried any more of his games, the chances were that he'd use the darts I gave him; and do no great harm with them. Even if he had one or two deadly darts left, he'd be sure to mix the lot together, and that reduced the risk of poison in a dart chosen at random from the mixture of deadly and harmless ones.

"So, when we were passing through the village, I got you to drop me, Wendover; and I bought some darts, drilled them like the deadly ones, faked them to match with Condry's fluid, put some litmus in so as to make my lot easily recognisable by a simple test, and then I was ready. Incidentally, I think I got the reputation of being quite mad. I needed a tin to keep the deadly darts in—I wasn't going to have them loose in my pocket—and I had to leave the real tin for the murderer to pick up if he wanted. So I sent out for some Navy Cut, used the tins for the lethal darts, and staggered the sergeant down there by presenting him with the tobacco. He's still puzzling over it, I guess.

"You know what happened next. I left the sham darts on the mantelpiece of the museum purposely; and the murderer lifted them. Now as Ardsley didn't touch them—he went out of the room in front of me and they were still lying there—and as Wendover wasn't the murderer, that left only you, Stenness, and Miss Hawkhurst, young Hawkhurst and Ernest Shandon, as possible thieves. If the tin vanished, then I had got down to pretty narrow limits."

"I see you'd ruled me out by that time," Ardsley said.

"Oh, practically," Sir Clinton agreed. "Of course my convictions were quite fluid still. I was quite prepared to reconsider things at any time. The next point was to go over the alibis as well as I could. Wendover gave me a hand with that. Once one got into that matter, it was clear enough that the only possible suspects were yourself, Stenness, young Hawkhurst, you, Ardsley—because I knew nothing about your doings that day—and finally, somebody with a bicycle. But once you bring in the bicycle, Ernest Shandon's alibi falls to bits. I'll show you how.

" This is my reconstruction of the murders in the Maze: I don't say it's correct in every detail—only the main outlines are really important. Ernest Shandon went off with Miss Hawkhurst in the car. I suspect that he knew his brothers were going to the Maze that afternoon. He'd already taken his bicycle along and concealed it in a little plantation near the East Gate; and he'd hidden the air-gun there as well.

" He got off the car at the East Gate, walked along the road quickly, and got through the hedge into the plantation. He took out his bicycle and the air-gun and pedalled as hard as he could go for the Maze. His one risk was meeting someone on the road. If he'd done that, he'd have had to postpone his affair until another day. He met no one—it's a road hardly anyone walks on, I believe. He got to the Maze, went in to his loophole commanding Helen's Bower. There he saw someone whom he took to be Neville Shandon. I suspect that he had the Hackleton case at the back of his mind during the planning; and he meant to make it appear that Neville had been killed on that account. You know yourselves what a troublesome false trail it turned out to be at the start.

" My belief is that he was sweating like a pig owing to his sprint up to the Maze—you must remember that his whole alibi depended in the time factor and he hadn't a moment to waste. Very likely his nose was greasy and he had trouble with his glasses. You remember they were always going askew or falling off? However, it happened, he didn't recognise Roger from behind and he shot him first of all. He shot him in the neck; and I am led to suppose that Roger didn't cry out, because the heavy dose of curare paralysed his vocal muscles almost immediately.

" Then, as Roger fell, Ernest recognised that he'd

blundered. He'd killed the wrong man; and the Hackleton business wouldn't serve to complicate this case. I expect he got flustered—and no great wonder. I suppose he dropped the darts, his glasses fell off, and altogether he was in a pretty state of confusion. And there was still Neville to finish off.

"At that moment, he'd no idea that the Maze wasn't empty except for Neville in the other centre. So he abandoned his darts after grabbing three from the ground; and he went off to kill his other brother before anything more happened. Bear in mind that speed was everything to him, and you'll get some idea of the flurry he must have been in. I expect he meant to come back for the spilt darts and the tin as soon as he'd finished Neville.

"We know from the evidence of Torrance and Miss Forrest that the first murder passed unnoticed so far as they were concerned. They didn't even pay any attention to the reports of the air-gun in Roger's case. Considering the queer acoustics of the Maze, there's nothing wonderful in that. But I think it's likely enough that Neville Shandon had heard something; and Ernest just got him as he was standing up and wondering if he shouldn't hunt about for the cause of the funny noise he had heard.

"Whatever the details were, Ernest got him all right; but he shot him in the body and Neville was able to give a yell or two before he collapsed. That accounts for the cries that Miss Forrest heard and also for the air-gun noises. And with that, friend Ernest's little troubles suddenly increased; for he heard voices in the Maze as these two called to each other, and he must have known he was up against it."

Sir Clinton's voice became grave.

"It was a bit of sheer luck that he came across neither of those two on his way out. He'd have shot them without any hesitation if he could. My reading of it is that he was hindered in two ways. First, he'd used up all his darts and daren't waste time and risk detection by going back for those that he'd spilt. Secondly, he was losing time—and time was the essence of his alibi. So he dodged about, no doubt suffering agonies of terror, and at last he got out of the Maze safely, undetected. He pitched his gun into the water at once and went for his bicycle. In lifting it, he scraped the tree with the brake-handle, I think. He wouldn't be in a state to do things cautiously. That was the mark Wendover noticed. He carried his bicycle across the grass so as not to leave the track of crushed stems that he'd have made if he'd wheeled it. And then, once on the road, he mounted—and his trail stopped, so far as the dog was concerned.

"He sprinted down the road to near the East Gate, carried his machine into the plantation, and concealed it. I set my men to hunt for it; but they didn't find it. It's pure theory; but I think it's quite likely he had some tackle ready and hoisted the thing up into a tree. No ordinary country constable would ever think of looking up into the air for a bicycle, and it would be well hidden among the leaves. But that's mere conjecture.

"Once clear of the bicycle, he got through the hedge again on to the public road, hurried along it as far as he could and then sat down by the wayside to wait for the postman's cart, which he knew was due to pass along at a fixed time. When the postman came, he had his yarn ready about his sore toe and all the rest of it."

"That's remarkably neat," said Ardsley. "But

if I'd been in your shoes I wouldn't have given Ernest Shandon credit for as much brains as all that."

"You must remember that I knew nothing about his brains," Sir Clinton pointed out. "I'd only seen him in circumstances where one doesn't expect brains to come out very strong in most cases. I kept an open mind about him. All I admitted to myself was that Ernest Shandon hadn't a cast-iron alibi after all."

"Very sound," Ardsley commended. "You ought to be in the scientific line, Driffield. Some of us aren't so cautious."

"Then came the burglary," Sir Clinton went on. "On the face of it, it was possibly genuine, possibly a fake. It might have been a real attempt to get at something connected with the Hackleton case; or it might have been the usual blunder of a murderer trying to strengthen the case against someone else. I didn't know at the moment. But when Miss Hawkhurst gave me back the tin of darts that morning and when I'd found by testing them that they weren't my faked darts, then I had a pretty fair notion how things stood. The murderer had been careful not to steal the tin of darts outright. He'd given me back some *darts* right enough; they had been faked like mine, only they hadn't my litmus in them."

"That told me two things straight away. The murderer was one of the people in the museum that night and—much more important than that—he had work still to do, for he wanted those darts at any price. That gave me some worry, I can tell you; for I couldn't be absolutely certain that his teeth were drawn. He might have had a deadly dart or two in reserve for all I knew. It was a stiff business to be up against; and really I didn't feel comfortable."

"Was that the time you were so perplexed?" Wendover asked.

"Yes."

"I don't wonder at it now."

Sir Clinton brushed this aside.

"Now I'm coming to Ernest Shandon's first big mistake. In telling me the story of the burglary, he dragged in a tale about some transactions relating to his late brother."

Stenness showed no outward sign of perturbation, but Sir Clinton could see he was uneasy as to the next stage of the narrative. With a glance, the Chief Constable reassured him. Stenness, realising that his affairs would not be brought in, leaned back again in his chair.

"I needn't go into details about the thing," Sir Clinton continued. "All I need say is that it would take a pretty smart man to spot what Ernest had spotted. And so, naturally, I reconsidered my ideas about friend Ernest. He wasn't an ass after all—not by any means. That set me thinking hard. And what made me think harder was his evident desire to throw suspicion on you, Stenness. He tried to persuade me—indirectly—that he was in fear of his life from you."

"From me?" Stenness asked in amazement.

"I'm telling you the facts," Sir Clinton contented himself with pointing out. "Well, the next business was the news that Ernest himself had been attacked in the Maze. And at that point I began to feel pretty sure of my ground. It was the most obvious line he could have taken to divert suspicion from himself. And, what made me more uneasy, it was a possible preliminary to an attack on someone else. He'd killed his two brothers. If a third attack was made, he might come under suspicion—and a breath of suspicion might be enough. So he boldly faked up an attack

on himself next. Then, if still another attempt was made, who would suspect the poor victim who had nearly lost his life just a few days earlier ? ”

“ One has to admit he showed some acuteness,” Ardsley said, drily.

“ At that point the case began to clear up a little in my mind. Assuming Ernest to be the murderer, what was he after ? The more I thought about it the clearer it seemed that cash must be at the bottom of the affair. He wanted money. He’d never worked in his life. How could he lay his hands on cash ? And of course it was as plain as anything then. If he could kill off his brothers he’d inherit part of their money—I learned that pretty easily from the fact that there were no near relations except himself, Arthur and Miss Hawkhurst. But the craving for money isn’t easily satisfied. Obviously, if he could eliminate his nephew and niece, he’d be left with not only the whole of his two brothers’ fortunes, but the Hawkhurst money as well.

“ If you look into criminology, you’ll find that the murderer for money reasons is a fairly definite type. He’s usually clever enough to devise a fresh method of murder, or of disposing of the body. Apart from that, he’s not a very brainy type. And he has a terrible knack of repeating the same method in successive crimes. Suppose you have to cross a boiling torrent by stepping from stone to stone. You get across the first time in safety. If you have to cross again, you’ll choose the same stones as before. You’ve proved them to be safe. Any other stones may be insecure and may bring you down. Now that’s the state of mind of the mass-murderer when he goes in for his work. He carries out his first crime by a novel method. He isn’t detected. So when he tries his hand again he follows his first

procedure slavishly in all its mean details. These are the safe stepping-stones for him. Look at the case of Smith, how he repeated all the minutiae of his bath-business time after time. Deeming used to put down a fresh cement floor in a room to cover the bodies of his victims. He did that more than once. He'd found it safe the first time, you see. If you read up Burke and Hare's doings, you'll find them a steady repetition of the same method applied without variation. It's the mark of the mass-murderer.

"So naturally, I expected the poisoned darts and the air-gun to come into play again, if Ernest carried his work to a further stage. And I made up my mind that I'd choose his next victim for him. He made two deadly slips in that interview he had with us, Wendover. Perhaps you noticed them?"

Wendover shook his head.

"You told me after our talk with him that I ought to know who the murderer was; but I didn't guess it. What slips did he make?"

"The first slip was when he volunteered that he had a bicycle and had used it to get down to the Maze. Once I had information that he owned a bicycle, his alibi with the sore toe disappeared instantaneously from my mind. His second slip was a worse one. He said to us that he hadn't been down to the Maze since the murders. And then he let out that he knew the position of the loophole through which Roger Shandon was shot. Speaking of his mythical assailant he said: 'He was at the same loophole as he'd used when he killed Roger.' If he'd never been near the Maze, how could he have known where that loophole was? Perhaps you think he might have picked up the information from those who were there. But if he had, I doubt if he'd have phrased the thing as he did. He seemed to me to pitch on that

description of its position simply because it was the easiest that came to hand—which meant that it conveyed something definite to his own mind.

“That finished him, so far as I was concerned. But I took the trouble to go down to the Maze, just for my own satisfaction. I’d been there that morning; and I’d noticed gossamer all over the hedge at the loophole—some of it actually stretching across the hole in the hedge. When I went down, after interviewing friend Ernest, those gossamer threads were still there. No gun could possibly have been shoved into the hole without snapping them. I put my hand in, just to see; and of course I got it covered with spider’s web.”

“So that was why you cleaned your hand on the hedge and made such a fuss about spiders!” Wendover exclaimed. “I thought you were simply fooling——”

“I was certainly in high spirits,” Sir Clinton confessed blandly. “I think I’d every right to be. I’d got complete confirmation of my suspicion—though really I didn’t need the confirmatory evidence. Let’s get on with the story. We picked up friend Ernest’s cigar-case there; and I kept it. I had a notion that he hadn’t left it there without some ulterior purpose. And besides, I thought his finger-prints might come in useful some time. We didn’t need them, as it turned out. It was merely a precaution on my part. You see, there was very little to be done with finger-prints on these air-guns. It seems friend Ernest had carefully organised a grand air-gun shooting competition on the morning of the day he killed his brothers. He’d had the guns passed from hand to hand, so that the finger-marks of nearly everyone were printed on them in addition to his own. Of course, I had the tin box containing the spurious darts. He’d handled that. But I hardly

troubled to examine it for finger-marks. I was sure he'd use gloves in touching it.

"Then I found another thing which I half-expected. I'd dropped the hint about Ariadne's clue and the possibility of an outsider having to resort to something of the kind. Well, Wendover and I found some yards of black thread carefully placed where we couldn't help seeing it. No black thread was found when the Shandons were murdered. But after I'd dropped that hint in Ernest Shandon's presence, behold! we get the clue which is meant to suggest an outside murderer. Wasn't that evidence, on the whole, quite enough to raise some suspicions about him?

"Wendover, I may tell you, thought I treated our friend Ernest rather brutally in our interview after the mythical attack on him. I certainly told Wendover afterwards that I thought Ernest had had a bad half-hour. What I meant, Squire, was the bad half-hour he had when he was laying off his tale to us and wasn't sure what I thought about it. That was a stiff time for him. As a matter of fact, I took no pains to conceal from friend Ernest that I thought his yarn was a mere pack of lies. I wanted him to feel afraid of me, afraid of what I was getting at in the Whistlefield case. Then, I felt sure, he'd have a shy at knocking me out before I became really dangerous.

"To help on that good work, I arranged to play bridge one night at Whistlefield, so as to let him operate on his own ground. In case of accidents, I had arranged that Ardsley should come over and take charge of the casualty. I'd taken most things into account—I had to—and in case friend Ernest hit anyone else in his flurry, I arranged with Ardsley that the injured person was to 'die' nominally; so that friend Ernest might be convinced of the efficacy of the faked darts I'd

put into his hands, and might go on to further crimes.

"I needn't go into that affair. I'm not proud of it. I never intended to risk Miss Hawkhurst in that way. Of course, I knew at once she hadn't been poisoned with curare. But though I'd done my best to sterilise the faked darts, I was afraid of blood-poisoning setting in. I spent a bad time over it, I can tell you. One can never be sure in a case like that.

"Well, there we were. He'd managed to nip back into the winter-garden before Wendover got after him. He believed Miss Hawkhurst was dead and only Arthur's life stood between him and the whole of the Shandon-Hawkhurst money. By this time, like all successful mass-murderers, he'd begun to feel a complete contempt for the risk of detection. See Burke and Hare.

"So young Hawkhurst was marked down. And this time, friend Ernest meant to have a perfect alibi. He must have guessed that I suspected his other one; and he'd made up his mind to avert even a shadow of suspicion. He'd stay under my eye at the very time that murder was being done in the Maze; nearly a mile away. That was a master-stroke, I admit."

"He used his cigar-case to bait the trap—got Arthur's back up very skilfully on the point of cowardice. And beforehand he'd set a booby-trap. He'd fixed the air-gun in position to shoot at the right level; and he'd arranged a thread to the trigger. When young Hawkhurst came to the entrance to the Maze he stepped against the thread stretched across the opening; the gun went off; and the dart hit him near the heart. So simple! And then Ernest came down with us; stumbled 'accidentally' over the air-gun; tore away the thread from the trigger before handing the gun to us. And then he 'found' Ariadne's clue for us—the

thread he'd laid down as a blind, to make us think it was a stranger at work, someone operating from the river."

"He was cleverer than I gave him credit for," Stenness confessed, rather grudgingly. "I always thought him a dull brute."

"The contents of Roger Shandon's will took away my last doubts," Sir Clinton went on. "Besides that, I'd tested the dart he'd used against Miss Hawkhurst and found it was one of the faked lot stolen from the museum that night. So by then the only question was: 'What should be done with friend Ernest?'"

Sir Clinton paused and lit a fresh cigar before going on to the end of his narrative. When he spoke once more his audience was rather surprised by his theme.

"There's always a good deal of talk in the newspapers from time to time about 'unexplained mysteries,' 'unsolved crimes,' 'police inefficiency,' and so forth. Now I'll put a case to you. Suppose you were a detective engaged on some beastly case like the Jack-the-Ripper business. And suppose you discovered in the end that the criminal was a lunatic—as Jack-the-Ripper obviously was. And, finally, suppose that his insanity has been discovered and that he's been put into an asylum since his latest crime. What would you do? Would you publish your results? Even if he weren't already in an asylum, what could you do? Try him, and get him sent to Broadmoor? For you couldn't hang him, since he's insane. Would you do that? If you did, the net result would be that you'd spatter all his innocent relations with the mud of his crime; and you'd do no good at all. There are some sleeping dogs that are best left lying. Mind, I'm giving you merely my own private view. I don't mean that you can take

that to represent police procedure. I'm simply telling you how I feel about the business."

Ardasley nodded in agreement.

"So long as a brute gets his deserts, it doesn't seem to me to matter how he gets them. And I agree with you about making an innocent family suffer through no fault of their own."

Sir Clinton acknowledged Ardsley's support.

"That's how I looked at the Shandon case," he said. "I could have arrested the brute. Then we'd have had a trial. And the Hawkhursts would have been branded as relatives of a murderer. I thought things could be done just as efficiently by making Ernest Shandon his own executioner. In fact, my method was a stiffer one than mere hanging, as you know. And if it failed—well, the law would take its normal course."

"I'd found a suit-case packed ready in the Maze on the night that young Hawkhurst was attacked. I expected something of the sort and went specially to look for it. I'd a notion that he wouldn't care to sneak out of the house with a suit-case in his hand at the last moment, if he bolted. He'd have it cached somewhere, so that he could leave with empty hands, quite unsuspecting, you know. I knew he'd need a complete change of clothes so as to be able to alter his appearance and put the hue and cry off his track. He'd shown a penchant for the Maze all along. He'd even dragged it into his story of the attack on himself; so it was clear he had it very much in mind. I banked on that when I looked there for his suit-case. It was a good enough choice. He could sneak out of the house, pick up the suit-case, go across to the boat-house, and row himself down to the village without having to be seen carrying the bag on the public road at all—quite a good plan, if you ask me."

"I hadn't seen why he went to the Maze, I admit," said Stenness. "It seemed rather like a bit of magic on your part to have foreseen that."

"Once I'd found the suit-case," Sir Clinton went on, "all that remained was to arrange the moment for his bolt, so that I could grip him. There was no use waiting on his good pleasure to fix the time. I gave him a plain hint that I'd be glad to see him go—let him think I wanted to avoid the scandal of a trial. There was no lying in that. I certainly did want to avoid putting him in the dock."

"Now as it happened, Stenness had been realising some capital at that time; so I got him to put his cash into the study safe that night. And I told friend Ernest that the money was there—a good round sum. That gave him the sinews of war for his bolt, free of charge, you see? He'd only to grab it in passing. And as soon as I felt he was nibbling, I telephoned a code-message to the police-station: some rot about Navy Cut tobacco. From that prearranged message, they knew they'd only to open an envelope and carry out their sealed orders which I'd left with them. They came up to the Maze during the night; watched Ernest into it about 6 a.m.—I'd been keeping an eye on his room during the night, so he couldn't have given us the slip anyhow. Then, as soon as he went into the Maze my men closed the gates behind him—and the game was up!

"You know the rest. We had to hold an inquest, of course; but you must have seen that we gave the bare legal minimum of evidence: just enough to prove suicide. Of course there's sure to be some talk. One can't help that. But we've stifled it as far as we possibly could; and the reporters got so little that the thing was hardly talked about in the papers."

Sir Clinton smiled with a tingle of sardonic amusement.

"I wonder what they'd have made of it if they'd known all about our methods! Perhaps I wasn't quite orthodox. Perhaps I ought to have got him nicely hanged—and incidentally run the public in for a big bill for his prosecution. I can only say that my conscience is quite clear; it doesn't give me a twinge. Consciences are weird things."

He glanced across at Stenness with a glint of humour in his eye which the rest failed to see.

"And now, what about some bridge?"

THE END.

