young ladies really shouldn't throw their cigarettes in tiled, gas-log fireplaces, should they, now?"

The woman regarded him uncertainly; she suspected him of jesting.

"Did she do that?" She leaned over and looked into the fireplace. "I didn't see any cigarettes there this morning."

"No, you wouldn't have," Vance informed her. "One of the District Attorney's sleuths, d'ye see, cleaned it all up nicely for you yesterday."

She shot Markham a questioning glance. She was not sure whether Vance's remark was to be taken seriously; but his casualness of manner and pleasantness of voice tended to put her at ease.

"Now that we understand each other, Mrs. Platz," he was saying, "was there anything else you particularly noticed when the young lady was here? You will be doing her a good service by telling us, because both the District Attorney and I happen to know she is innocent."

She gave Vance a long, shrewd look, as if appraising his sincerity. Evidently the results of her scrutiny were favourable, for her answer left no doubt as to her complete frankness.

"I don't know if it'll help, but when I came in with the toast, Mr. Benson looked like he was arguing with her. She seemed worried about something that was going to happen, and asked him not to hold her to some promise she'd made. I was only in the room a minute, and I didn't hear much. But just as I was going out, he laughed and said it was only a bluff, and that nothing was going to happen."

She stopped, and waited anxiously. She seemed to fear that her revelation might, after all, prove injurious rather than helpful to the girl.

"Was that all?" Vance's tone indicated that the matter was of no consequence.

The woman demurred.

"That was all I heard; but . . . there was a small blue box of jewellery sitting on the table."

"My word—a box of jewellery! Do you know whose it was?"

"No, sir, I don't. The lady hadn't brought it, and I never saw it in the house before."

"How did you know it was jewellery?"

"When Mr. Benson went upstairs to dress, I came in to clear the tea things away, and it was still sitting on the table."

Vance smiled.

"And you played Pandora and took a peep—eh, what? Most natural—I'd have done it myself."

He stepped back and bowed politely.

"That will be all, Mrs. Platz. . . . And you needn't worry about the young lady. Nothing is going to happen to her."

When she had left us, Markham leaned forward and shook his cigar at Vance.

"Why didn't you tell me you had information about the case unknown to me?"

"My dear chap!" Vance lifted his eyebrows in protestation. "To what do you refer specifically?"

"How did you know this St. Clair woman had been here in the afternoon?"

"I didn't; but I surmised it. There were cigarette butts of hers in the grate; and, as I knew she hadn't been here on the night Benson was shot, I thought it rather likely she had been here earlier in the day. And since Benson didn't arrive from his office until four, I whispered into my ear that she had called some time between four and the hour of his departure for dinner. . . . An element'ry syllogism, what?"

"How did you know she wasn't here that night?"

"The psychological aspects of the crime left me in no doubt. As I told you, no woman committed it—my metaphysical hypotheses again; but never mind. . . . Furthermore, yesterday morning I stood on the spot

where the murderer stood, and sighted with my eye along the line of fire, using Benson's head and the mark on the wainscot as my points of coinc'dence. It was evident to me then, even without measurements, that the guilty person was rather tall."

"Very well. . . . But how did you knew she left here that afternoon before Benson did?" persisted Markham.

"How else could she have changed into an evening gown? Really, y'know, ladies don't go about *décolletées* in the afternoon."

"You assume, then, that Benson himself brought her gloves and handbag back here that night?"

"Someone did—and it certainly wasn't Miss St. Clair."

"All right," conceded Markham. "And what about this Morris chair—how did you know she sat in it?"

"What other chair could she have sat in, and still thrown her cigarettes into the fireplace? Women are notoriously poor shots, even if they were given to hurling their cigarette stubs across the room."

"That deduction is simple enough," admitted Markham. "But suppose you tell me how you knew she had tea here unless you were privy to some information on the point?"

"It pos'tively shames me to explain it. But the humiliating truth is that I inferred the fact from the condition of your samovar. I noted yesterday that it had been used, and had not been emptied or wiped off."

Markham nodded with contemptuous elation.

"You seem to have sunk to the despised legal level of material clues."

"That's why I'm blushing so furiously. . . . However, psychological deductions alone do not determine facts *in esse*, but only *in posse*. Other conditions must, of course, be considered. In the present instance the indications of the samovar served merely as the basis for an assumption, or guess, with which to draw out the housekeeper."

"Well, I won't deny that you succeeded," said Markham. "I'd like to know, though, what you had in mind

when you accused the woman of a personal interest in the girl. That remark certainly indicated some pre-knowledge of the situation."

Vance's face became serious.

" Markham, I give you my word," he said earnestly, " I had nothing in mind. I made the accusation, thinking it was false, merely to trap her into a denial. And she fell into the trap. But—deuce take it !—I seemed to hit some nail squarely on the head, what ? I can't for the life of me imagine why she was frightened. But it really doesn't matter."

" Perhaps not," agreed Markham, but his tone was dubious. " What do you make of the box of jewellery and the disagreement between Benson and the girl ? "

" Nothing yet. They don't fit in, do they ? "

He was silent a moment. Then he spoke with unusual seriousness.

" Markham, take my advice and don't bother with these side-issues. I'm telling you the girl had no part in the murder. Let her alone—you'll be happier in your old age, if you do."

Markham sat scowling, his eyes in space.

" I'm convinced that you *think* you know something."

" *Cogito, ergo sum,*" murmured Vance. " Y'know, the naturalistic philosophy of Descartes has always rather appealed to me. It was a departure from universal doubt and a seeking for positive knowledge in self-consciousness. Spinoza, in his pantheism, and Berkeley, in his idealism, quite misunderstood the significance of their precursor's favourite enthymeme. Even Descartes' errors were brilliant. His method of reasoning, for all its scientific inaccuracies, gave new signif'cation to the symbols of the analyst. The mind, after all, if it is to function effectively, must combine the mathematical precision of a natural science with such pure speculations as astronomy. For instance, Descartes' doctrine of Vortices—— "

" Oh, be quiet," growled Markham. " I'm not insisting that you reveal your precious information. So why

burden me with a dissertation on seventeenth-century philosophy?"

"Anyhow, you'll admit, won't you," asked Vance lightly, "that, in elim'nating those disturbing cigarette butts, so to speak, I've elim'nated Miss St. Clair as a suspect?"

Markham did not answer at once. There was no doubt that the developments of the past hour had made a decided impression upon him. He did not underestimate Vance, despite his persistent opposition; and he knew that, for all his flippancy, Vance was fundamentally serious. Furthermore, Markham had a finely developed sense of justice. He was not narrow, even though obstinate at times; and I have never known him to close his mind to the possibilities of truth, however opposed to his own interests. It did not, therefore, surprise me in the least when, at last, he looked up with a gracious smile of surrender.

"You've made your point," he said; "and I accept it with proper humility. I'm most grateful to you."

Vance walked indifferently to the window and looked out.

"I am happy to learn that you are capable of accepting such evidence as the human mind could not possibly deny."

I had always noticed, in the relationship of these two men, that whenever either made a remark that bordered on generosity, the other answered in a manner which ended all outward show of sentiment. It was as if they wished to keep this more intimate side of their mutual regard hidden from the world.

Markham, therefore, ignored Vance's thrust.

"Have you perhaps any enlightening suggestions, other than negative ones, to offer as to Benson's murderer?' he asked.

"Rather!" said Vance. "No end of suggestions."

"Could you spare me a good one?" Markham imitated the other's playful tone.

Vance appeared to reflect.

"Well, I should advise that, as a beginning, you look for a rather tall man, cool-headed, familiar with firearms, a good shot, and fairly well-known to the deceased—a man who was aware that Benson was going to dinner with Miss St. Clair, or who had reason to suspect the fact."

Markham looked narrowly at Vance for several moments.

"I think I understand. . . . Not a bad theory, either. You know, I'm going to suggest immediately to Heath that he investigates more thoroughly Captain Leacock's activities on the night of the murder."

"Oh, by all means," said Vance carelessly, going to the piano.

Markham watched him with an expression of puzzled interrogation. He was about to speak when Vance began playing a rollicking French café song which opens, I believe, with

"Ils sont dans les vignes, les moineaux."

Les moineaux sont dans les vignes,
Ils ont mangé tout les raisins
Ils ont chié tous les pépins!

Chapter XI

A MOTIVE AND A THREAT

(*Sunday, June* 16 ; *afternoon.*)

THE following day, which was Sunday, we lunched with Markham at the Stuyvesant Club. Vance had suggested the appointment the evening before ; for, as he explained to me, he wished to be present in case Leander Pfyfe should arrive from Long Island.

" It amuses me tremendously," he had said, " the way human beings delib'rately complicate the most ordin'ry issues. They have a downright horror of anything simple and direct. The whole modern commercial system is nothing but a colossal mechanism for doing things in the most involved and roundabout way. If one makes a ten-cent purchase at a department store nowadays, a complete history of the transaction is written out in triplicate, checked by a dozen floor-walkers and clerks, signed and countersigned, entered into innum'rable ledgers with various coloured inks, and then elab'rately secreted in steel filing cabinets. And not content with all this superfluous *chinoiserie*, our business men have created a large and expensive army of efficiency experts whose sole duty is to complicate and befuddle this system still further. . . . It's the same with everything else in modern life. Regard that insup'rable mania called golf. It consists merely of knocking a ball into a hole with a stick. But the devotees of this pastime have developed a unique and distinctive livery in which to play it. They concentrate for twenty years on the correct angulation of their feet and the proper method of entwining their fingers about the stick. More-

over, in order to discuss the pseudo-intr'cacies of this idiotic sport, they've invented an outlandish vocabulary which is unintelligible even to an English scholar."

He pointed disgustedly at a pile of Sunday newspapers.

"Then here's this Benson murder—a simple and incons'-quential affair. Yet the entire machinery of the law is going at high pressure and blowing off jets of steam all over the community, when the matter could be settled quietly in five minutes with a bit of intelligent thinking."

At lunch, however, he did not refer to the crime; and, as if by tacit agreement, the subject was avoided. Markham had merely mentioned casually to us as we went into the dining-room that he was expecting Heath a little later.

The Sergeant was waiting for us when we retired to the lounge-room for our smoke, and by his expression it was evident he was not pleased with the way things were going.

"I told you, Mr. Markham," he said, when we had drawn up our chairs, "that this case was going to be a tough one. . . . Could you get any kind of a lead from the St. Clair woman?"

Markham shook his head.

"She's out of it." And he recounted briefly the happenings at Benson's house the preceding afternoon.

"Well, if you're satisfied," was Heath's somewhat dubious comment, "that's good enough for me. But what about this Captain Leacock?"

"That's what I asked you here to talk about," Markham told him. "There's no direct evidence against him, but there are several suspicious circumstances that tend to connect him with the murder. He seems to meet the specifications as to height; and we mustn't overlook the fact that Benson was shot with just such a gun as Leacock would be likely to possess. He was engaged to the girl, and a motive might be found in Benson's attentions to her."

"And ever since the big scrap," supplemented Heath, "these army boys don't think anything of shooting people. They got used to blood on the other side."

"The only hitch," resumed Markham, "is that Phelps,

who had the job of checking up on the Captain, reported to me that he was home that night from eight o'clock on. Of course, there may be a loop-hole somewhere, and I was going to suggest that you have one of your men go into the matter thoroughly and see just what the situation is. Phelps got his information from one of the hall-boys ; and I think it might be well to get hold of the boy again and apply a little pressure. If it was found that Leacock was not at home at twelve-thirty that night, we might have the lead you've been looking for."

" I'll attend to it myself," said Heath. " I'll go round there to-night, and if this boy knows anything, he'll spill it before I'm through with him."

We had talked but a few minutes longer when a uniformed attendant bowed deferentially at the District Attorney's elbow and announced that Mr. Pfyfe was calling.

Markham requested that his visitor be shown into the lounge-room, and then added to Heath :

" You'd better remain, and hear what he has to say."

Leander Pfyfe was an immaculate and exquisite personage. He approached us with a mincing gait of self-approbation. His legs, which were very long and thin, with knees which seemed to bend slightly inward, supported a short bulging torso ; and his chest curved outward in a generous arc, like that of a pouter-pigeon. His face was rotund, and his jowls hung in two loops over a collar too tight for comfort. His blond sparse hair was brushed back sleekly ; and the ends of his narrow, silken moustache were waxed into needle-points. He was dressed in light-grey summer flannels, and wore a pale turquoise-green silk shirt, a vivid foulard tie, and grey suède Oxfords. A strong odour of oriental perfume was given off by the carefully arranged batiste handkerchief in his breast pocket.

He greeted Markham with viscid urbanity, and acknowledged his introduction to us with a patronising bow. After posing himself in a chair the attendant placed for him, he began polishing a gold-rimmed eyeglass which he wore on a ribbon, and fixed Markham with a melancholy gaze.

"A very sad occasion, this," he sighed.

"Realising your friendship for Mr. Benson," said Markham, "I deplore the necessity of appealing to you at this time. It was very good of you, by the way, to come to the city to-day."

Pfyfe made a mildly deprecating movement with his carefully manicured fingers. He was, he explained with an air of ineffable self-complacency, only too glad to discommode himself to give aid to servants of the public. A distressing necessity, to be sure; but his manner conveyed unmistakably that he knew and recognised the obligations attaching to the dictum of *noblesse oblige*, and was prepared to meet them.

He looked at Markham with a self-congratulatory air, and his eyebrows queried: "What can I do for you?" though his lips did not move.

"I understand from Major Anthony Benson," Markham said, "that you were very close to his brother, and therefore might be able to tell us something of his personal affairs, or private social relationships, that would indicate a line of investigation."

Pfyfe gazed sadly at the floor.

"Ah, yes. Alvin and I were very close—we were, in fact, the most intimate of friends. You cannot imagine how broken up I was at hearing of the dear fellow's tragic end." He gave the impression that here was a modern instance of Æneas and Achates. "And I was deeply grieved at not being able to come at once to New York to put myself at the service of those that needed me."

"I'm sure it would have been a comfort to his other friends," remarked Vance, with cool politeness. "But in the circumst'nces you will be forgiven."

Pfyfe blinked regretfully.

"Ah, but I shall never forgive myself—though I cannot hold myself altogether blameworthy. Only the day before the tragedy I had started on a trip to the Catskills. I had even asked dear Alvin to go along; but he was too busy." Pfyfe shook his head as if lamenting the incom-

prehensible irony of life. "How much better—ah, how infinitely much better—if only——"

"You were gone a very short time," commented Markham, interrupting what promised to be a homily on perverse providence.

"True," Pfyfe indulgently admitted. "But I met with a most unfortunate accident." He polished his eyeglass a moment. "My car broke down, and I was necessitated to return."

"What road did you take?" asked Heath.

Pfyfe delicately adjusted his eyeglass, and regarded the Sergeant with an intimation of boredom.

"My advice, Mr.—ah—Sneed——"

"Heath," the other corrected him surlily.

"Ah, yes—Heath. . . . My advice, Mr. Heath, is, that if you are contemplating a motor trip to the Catskills, you apply to the Automobile Club of America for a road-map. My choice of itinerary might very possibly not suit you."

He turned back to the District Attorney with an air that implied he preferred talking to an equal.

"Tell me, Mr. Pfyfe," Markham asked: "did Mr. Benson have any enemies?"

The other appeared to think the matter over.

"No-o. Not one, I should say, who would actually have killed him as a result of animosity."

"You imply nevertheless that he had enemies. Could you not tell us a little more?"

Pfyfe passed his hand gracefully over the tips of his golden moustache, and then permitted his index-finger to linger on his cheek in an attitude of meditative indecision.

"Your request, Mr. Markham"—he spoke with pained reluctance—"brings up a matter which I hesitate to discuss. But perhaps it is best that I confide in you—as one gentleman to another. Alvin, in common with many other admirable fellows, had a—what shall I say?—a weakness—let me put it that way—for the fair sex."

He looked at Markham, seeking approbation for his extreme tact in stating an indelicate truth.

"You understand," he continued, in answer to the other's sympathetic nod, "Alvin was not a man who possessed the personal characteristics that women hold attractive." (I somehow got the impression that Pfyfe considered himself as differing radically from Benson in this respect.) "Alvin was aware of his physical deficiency, and the result was—I trust you will understand my hesitancy in mentioning this distressing fact—but the result was that Alvin used certain—ah, methods in his dealings with women, which you and I could never bring ourselves to adopt. Indeed—though it pains me to say it—he often took unfair advantage of women. He used underhand methods, as it were."

He paused, apparently shocked by this heinous imperfection of his friend, and by the necessity of his own seemingly disloyal revelation.

"Was it one of these women whom Benson had dealt with unfairly, that you had in mind?" asked Markham.

"No—not the woman herself," Pfyfe replied; "but a man who was interested in her. In fact, this man threatened Alvin's life. You will appreciate my reluctance in telling you this; but my excuse is that the threat was made quite openly. There were several others besides myself who heard it."

"That, of course, relieves you from any technical breach of confidence," Markham observed.

Pfyfe acknowledged the other's understanding with a slight bow.

"It happened at a little party of which I was the unfortunate host," he confessed modestly.

"Who was the man?" Markham's tone was polite but firm.

"You will comprehend my reticence. . . ." Pfyfe began. Then, with an air of righteous frankness, he leaned forward. "It might prove unfair to Alvin to withhold the gentleman's name. . . . He was Captain Philip Leacock."

He allowed himself the emotional outlet of a sigh.

"I trust you won't ask me for the lady's name."

"It won't be necessary," Markham assured him. "But I'd appreciate your telling us a little more of the episode."

Pfyfe complied with an expression of patient resignation.

"Alvin was considerably taken with the lady in question, and showed her many attentions which were, I am forced to admit, unwelcome. Captain Leacock resented these attentions; and at the little affair to which I had invited him and Alvin, some unpleasant and, I must say, unrefined words passed between them. I fear the wine had been flowing too freely, for Alvin was always punctilious—he was a man, indeed, skilled in the niceties of social intercourse; and the Captain, in an outburst of temper, told Alvin that, unless he left the lady strictly alone in the future, he would pay with his life. The Captain even went so far as to draw a revolver half-way out of his pocket."

"Was it a revolver, or an automatic pistol?" asked Heath.

Pfyfe gave the District Attorney a faint smile of annoyance, without deigning even to glance at the Sergeant.

"I mis-spoke myself; forgive me. It was not a revolver. It was, I believe, an automatic army pistol—though, you understand, I didn't see it in its entirety."

"You say there were others who witnessed the altercation?"

"Several of my guests were standing about," Pfyfe explained; "but, on my word, I couldn't name them. The fact is, I attached little importance to the threat—indeed, it had entirely slipped my memory until I read the account of poor Alvin's death. Then I thought at once of the unfortunate incident, and said to myself: Why not tell the District Attorney . . .?"

"Thoughts that breathe and words that burn," murmured Vance, who had been sitting through the interview in oppressive boredom.

Pfyfe once more adjusted his eye-glass, and gave Vance a withering look.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

Vance smiled disarmingly.

"Merely a quotation from Gray. Poetry appeals to me in certain moods, don't y'know. . . . Do you, by any chance, know Colonel Ostrander?"

Pfyfe looked at him coldly, but only a vacuous countenance met his gaze.

"I am acquainted with the gentleman," he replied haughtily.

"Was Colonel Ostrander present at this delightful little social affair of yours?" Vance's tone was artlessly innocent.

"Now that you mention it, I believe he was," admitted Pfyfe, and lifted his eyebrows inquisitively.

But Vance was again staring disinterestedly out of the window.

Markham, annoyed at the interruption, attempted to re-establish the conversation on a more amiable and practical basis. But Pfyfe, though loquacious, had little more information to give. He insisted constantly on bringing the talk back to Captain Leacock, and, despite his eloquent protestations, it was obvious he attached more importance to the threat than he chose to admit. Markham questioned him for fully an hour, but could learn nothing else of a suggestive nature.

When Pfyfe rose to go Vance turned from his contemplation of the outside world and, bowing affably, let his eyes rest on the other with ingenuous good-nature.

"Now that you are in New York, Mr. Pfyfe, and were so unfortunate as to be unable to arrive earlier, I assume that you will remain until after the investigation."

Pfyfe's studied and habitual calm gave way to a look of oily astonishment.

"I hadn't contemplated doing so."

"It would be most desirable—if you could arrange it," urged Markham; though I am sure he had no intention of making the request until Vance suggested it.

Pfyfe hesitated, and then made an elegant gesture of resignation.

"Certainly I shall remain. When you have further need of my services, you will find me at the Ansonia."

He spoke with exalted condescension, and magnanimously conferred upon Markham a parting smile. But the smile did not spring from within. It appeared to have been adjusted upon his features by the unseen hands of a sculptor; and it affected only the muscles about his mouth.

When he had gone Vance gave Markham a look of suppressed mirth.

"'Elegancy, facility and golden cadence.' . . . But put not your faith in poesy, old dear. Our Ciceronian friend is an unmitigated fashioner of deceptions."

"If you're trying to say that he's a smooth liar," remarked Heath, "I don't agree with you. I think that story about the Captain's threat is straight goods."

"Oh, that! Of course, it's true. . . . And, y'know, Markham, the knightly Mr. Pfyfe was frightfully disappointed when you didn't insist on his revealing Miss St. Clair's name. This Leander, I fear, would never have swum the Hellespont for a lady's sake."

"Whether he's a swimmer or not," said Heath impatiently, "he's given us something to go on."

Markham agreed that Pfyfe's recital had added materially to the case against Leacock.

"I think I'll have the Captain down to my office tomorrow, and question him," he said.

A moment later Major Benson entered the room, and Markham invited him to join us.

"I just saw Pfyfe get into a taxi," he said, when he had sat down. "I suppose you've been asking him about Alvin's affairs. . . Did he help you any?"

"I hope so, for all our sakes," returned Markham kindly. "By the way, Major, what do you know about a Captain Philip Leacock?"

Major Benson lifted his eyes to Markham's in surprise.

"Didn't you know? Leacock was one of the captains in my regiment—a first-rate man. He knew Alvin pretty well, I think; but my impression is they didn't hit it off

very chummily . . . Surely you didn't connect him with this affair?"

Markham ignored the question.

"Did you happen to attend a party of Pfyfe's the night the Captain threatened your brother?"

"I went, I remember, to one or two of Pfyfe's parties," said the Major. "I don't, as a rule, care for such gatherings, but Alvin convinced me it was a good business policy."

He lifted his head, and frowned fixedly into space, like one searching for an elusive memory.

"However, I don't recall—By George! Yes, I believe I do. . . . But if the instance I am thinking of is what you have in mind, you can dismiss it. We were all a little moist that night."

"Did Captain Leacock draw a gun?" asked Heath.

The Major pursed his lips.

"Now that you mention it, I think he did make some motion of the kind."

"Did you see the gun?" pursued Heath.

"No, I can't say that I did."

Markham put the next question.

"Do you think Captain Leacock capable of the act of murder?"

"Hardly," Major Benson answered with emphasis. "Leacock isn't cold-blooded. The woman over whom the tiff occurred is more capable of such an act than he is."

A short silence followed, broken by Vance.

"What do you know, Major, about this glass of fashion and mould of form, Pfyfe? He appears a rare bird. Has he a history, or is his presence his life's document?"

"Leander Pfyfe," said the Major, "is a typical specimen of the modern young do-nothing—I say young, though I imagine he's around forty. He was pampered in his upbringing—had everything he wanted, I believe; but he became restless, and followed several different fads till he tired of them. He was two years in South Africa hunting big game, and, I think, wrote a book recounting his

adventures. Since then he has done nothing that I know of. He married a wealthy shrew some years ago—for her money, I imagine. But the woman's father controls the purse-strings, and holds him down to a rigid allowance. . . . Pfyfe's a waster and an idler, but Alvin seemed to find some attraction in the man."

The Major's words had been careless in inflection and undeliberated, like those of a man discussing a neutral matter ; but all of us, I think, received the impression that he had a strong personal dislike for Pfyfe.

"Not a ravishing personality, what ? " remarked Vance. "And he uses far too much *Jicky*."

"Still," supplied Heath, with a puzzled frown, "a fellow's got to have a lot of nerve to shoot big game. . . . And, speaking of nerve, I've been thinking that the guy who shot your brother, Major, was a mighty cool-headed proposition. He did it from the front when his man was wide awake, and with a servant upstairs. That takes nerve."

"Sergeant, you're pos'tively brilliant ! " exclaimed Vance.

Chapter XII

THE OWNER OF A COLT-.45

(*Monday, June* 17 ; *forenoon.*)

THOUGH Vance and I arrived at the District Attorney's office the following morning a little after nine, the Captain had been waiting twenty minutes ; and Markham directed Swacker to send him in at once.

Captain Philip Leacock was a typical army officer, very tall—fully six feet two inches—clean-shaven, straight and slender. His face was grave and immobile ; and he stood before the District Attorney in the erect, earnest attitude of a soldier awaiting orders from his superior officer.

"Take a seat, Captain," said Markham, with a formal bow. "I have asked you here, as you probably know, to put a few questions to you concerning Mr. Alvin Benson. There are several points regarding your relationship with him, which I want you to explain."

"Am I suspected of complicity in the crime?" Leacock spoke with a slight Southern accent.

"That remains to be seen," Markham told him coldly. "It is to determine that point that I wish to question you."

The other sat rigidly in his chair and waited.

Markham fixed him with a direct gaze.

"You recently made a threat on Mr. Alvin Benson's life, I believe."

Leacock started, and his fingers tightened over his knees. But before he could answer, Markham continued :

"I can tell you the occasion on which the threat was made—it was at a party given by Mr. Leander Pfyfe."

Leacock hesitated ; then thrust forward his jaw.

"Very well, sir; I admit I made the threat. Benson was a cad—he deserved shooting. . . . That night he had become more obnoxious than usual. He'd been drinking too much—and so had I, I reckon."

He gave a twisted smile, and looked nervously past the District Attorney out of the window.

"But I didn't shoot him, sir. I didn't even know he'd been shot until I read the paper next day."

"He was shot with an army Colt—the kind you fellows carried in the war," said Markham, keeping his eyes on the man.

"I know it," Leacock replied. "The papers said so."

"You have such a gun, haven't you, Captain?"

Again the other hesitated.

"No, sir." His voice was barely audible.

"What became of it?"

The man glanced at Markham, and then quickly shifted his eyes.

"I—I lost it . . . in France."

Markham smiled faintly.

"Then how do you account for the fact that Mr. Pfyfe saw the gun the night you made the threat?"

"Saw the gun?" He looked blankly at the District Attorney.

"Yes, saw it, and recognised it as an army gun," persisted Markham, in a level voice. "Also, Major Benson saw you make a motion as if to draw a gun."

Leacock drew a deep breath, and set his mouth doggedly.

"I tell you, sir, I haven't a gun. . . . I lost it in France."

"Perhaps you didn't lose it, Captain. Perhaps you lent it to someone."

"I didn't, sir!" the words burst from his lips.

"Think a minute, Captain. . . . Didn't you lend it to someone?"

"No—I did not!"

"You paid a visit—yesterday—to Riverside Drive. . . . Perhaps you took it there with you?"

Vance had been listening closely.

"Oh—deuced clever!" he now murmured in my ear.

Captain Leacock moved uneasily. His face, even with its deep coat of tan, seemed to pale, and he sought to avoid the implacable glance of his questioner by concentrating his attention upon some object on the table. When he spoke, his voice, heretofore truculent, was coloured by anxiety. "I didn't have it with me. . . . And I didn't lend it to anyone."

Markham sat leaning forward over the desk, his chin on his hand, like a minatory graven image.

"It may be you lent it to someone prior to that morning."

"Prior to . . .?" Leacock looked up quickly and paused, as if analysing the other's remark.

Markham took advantage of his perplexity.

"Have you lent your gun to anyone since you returned from France?"

"No, I've never lent it——" he began, but suddenly halted and flushed. Then he added hastily: "How could I lend it? I just told you, sir——"

"Never mind that!" Markham cut in. "So you had a gun, did you, Captain? . . . Have you still got it?"

Leacock opened his lips to speak, but closed them again tightly.

Markham relaxed, and leaned back in his chair.

"You were aware, of course, that Benson had been annoying Miss St. Clair with his attentions?"

At the mention of the girl's name the Captain's body became rigid; his face turned a dull red, and he glanced menacingly at the District Attorney. At the end of a slow, deep inhalation he spoke through clenched teeth.

"Suppose we leave Miss St. Clair out of this." He looked as though he might spring at Markham.

"Unfortunately, we can't." Markham's words were sympathetic but firm. "Too many facts connect her with the case. Her handbag, for instance, was found in Benson's living-room the morning after the murder."

"That's a lie, sir!"

Markham ignored the insult.

"Miss St. Clair herself admits the circumstance." He held up his hand, as the other was about to answer. "Don't misinterpret my mentioning the fact. I am not accusing Miss St. Clair of having anything to do with the affair. I'm merely endeavouring to get some light on your own connection with it."

The Captain studied Markham with an expression that clearly indicated he doubted these assurances. Finally he set his mouth, and announced with determination:

"I haven't anything more to say on the subject, sir."

"You knew, didn't you," continued Markham, "that Miss St. Clair dined with Benson at the Marseilles on the night he was shot?"

"What of it?" retorted Leacock sullenly.

"And you knew, didn't you, that they left the restaurant t midnight, and that Miss St. Clair did not reach home until after one?"

A strange look came into the man's eyes. The ligaments of his neck tightened, and he took a deep, resolute breath. But he neither glanced at the District Attorney nor spoke.

"You know, of course," pursued Markham's monotonous voice, "that Benson was shot at half-past twelve?"

He waited; and for a whole minute there was silence in the room.

"You have nothing more to say, Captain?" he asked at length; "no further explanations to give me?"

Leacock did not answer. He sat gazing imperturbably ahead of him; and it was evident he had sealed his lips for the time being.

Markham rose.

"In that case, let us consider the interview at an end."

The moment Captain Leacock had gone, Markham rang for one of his clerks.

"Tell Ben to have that man followed. Find out where

he goes and what he does. I want a report at the Stuyvesant Club to-night."

When we were alone Vance gave Markham a look of half-bantering admiration.

"Ingenious—not to say artful. . . . But, y'know, your questions about the lady were shocking bad form."

"No doubt," Markham agreed. "But it looks now as if we were on the right track. Leacock didn't create an impression of unassailable innocence."

"Didn't he?" asked Vance. "Just what were the signs of his assailable guilt?"

"You saw him turn white when I questioned him about the weapon. His nerves were on edge—he was genuinely frightened."

Vance signed.

"What a perfect ready-made set of notions you have, Markham! Don't you know that an innocent man, when he comes under suspicion, is apt to be more nervous than a guilty one, who, to begin with, had enough nerve to commit the crime, and, secondly, realises that any show of nervousness is regarded as guilt by you lawyer chaps? 'My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure' is a mere Sunday school pleasantry. Touch almost any innocent man on the shoulder and say 'You're arrested,' and his pupils will dilate, he'll break out in a cold sweat, the blood will rush from his face, and he'll have tremors and dyspnœa. If he's a *hystérique*, or a cardiac neurotic, he'll probably collapse completely. It's the guilty person who, when thus accosted, lifts his eyebrows in bored surprise and says 'You don't mean it, really—here, have a cigar.'"

"The hardened criminal may act as you say," Markham conceded; "but an honest man who's innocent doesn't go to pieces, even when accused."

Vance shook his head hopelessly.

"My dear fellow, Crile and Voronoff might have lived in vain for all of you. Manifestations of fear are the result of glandular secretions—nothing more. All they prove is

that the person's thyroid is undeveloped or that his adrenals are subnormal. A man accused of a crime, or shown the bloody weapon with which it was committed, will either smile serenely, or scream, or have hysterics, or faint, or appear disint'rested—according to his hormones, and irrespective of his guilt. Your theory, d'ye see, would be quite all right if everyone had the same amount of the various internal secretions. But they haven't. . . . Really, y'know, you shouldn't send a man to the electric chair simply because he's deficient in endocrines. It isn't cricket."

Before Markham could reply, Swacker appeared at the door and said Heath had arrived.

The Sergeant, beaming with satisfaction, fairly burst into the room. For once, he forgot to shake hands.

"Well, it looks like we'd got hold of something workable. I went to this Captain Leacock's apartment house last night, and here's the straight of it: Leacock was at home the night of the thirteenth all right; but shortly after midnight he went out, headed west—get that!—and he didn't return till about quarter of one!"

"What about the hall-boy's original story?" asked Markham.

"That's the best part of it. Leacock had the boy fixed. Gave him money to swear he hadn't left the house that night. What do you think of that, Mr. Markham? Pretty crude—huh? . . . The kid loosened up when I told him I was thinking of sending him up the river for doing the job himself." Heath laughed unpleasantly. "And he won't spill anything to Leacock, either."

Markham nodded his head slowly.

"What you tell me, Sergeant, bears out certain conclusions I arrived at when I talked to Captain Leacock this morning. Ben put a man on him when he left here, and I'm to get a report to-night. To-morrow may see this thing through. I'll get in touch with you in the morning, and if anything's to be done, you understand, you'll have the handling of it."

When Heath left us, Markham folded his hands behind his head and leaned back contentedly.

"I think I've got the answer," he said. "The girl dined with Benson and returned to his house afterward. The Captain, suspecting the fact, went out, found her there, and shot Benson. That would account not only for her gloves and handbag, but for the hour it took her to go from the Marseilles to her home. It would also account for her attitude here Saturday, and for the Captain's lying about the gun. . . . There, I believe, I have my case. The smashing of the Captain's alibi about clinches it."

"Oh, quite," said Vance airily. "'Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing.'"

Markham regarded him for a moment.

"Have you entirely forsworn human reason as a means of reaching a decision? Here we have an admitted threat, a motive, the time, the place, the opportunity, the conduct, and the criminal agent."

"Those words sound strangely familiar," smiled Vance. "Didn't most of 'em fit the young lady also? . . . And you really haven't got the criminal agent, y'know. But it's no doubt floating about the city somewhere—a mere detail, however."

"I may not have it in my hand," Markham countered. "But with a good man on watch every minute, Leacock won't find much opportunity of disposing of the weapon."

Vance shrugged indifferently.

"In any event go easy," he admonished. "My humble opinion is that you've merely unearthed a conspiracy."

"Conspiracy? . . . Good Lord! What kind?"

"A conspiracy of circumst'nces, don't y'know."

"I'm glad, at any rate, it hasn't to do with international politics," returned Markham good-naturedly.

He glanced at the clock.

"You won't mind if I get to work? I've a dozen things to attend to, and a couple of committees to see. . . . Why don't you go across the hall and have a talk with Ben Hanlon, and then come back at twelve-thirty?

We'll have lunch together at the Bankers' Club. Ben's our greatest expert on foreign extradition, and has spent most of his life chasing about the world after fugitives from justice. He'll spin you some good yarns."

"How perfectly fascinatin'!" exclaimed Vance, with a yawn.

But instead of taking the suggestion, he walked to the window and lit a cigarette. He stood for a while puffing at it, rolling it between his fingers, and inspecting it critically.

"Y'know, Markham," he observed, "everything's going to pot these days. It's this silly democracy. Even the nobility is degen'rating. These *Régie* cigarettes, now; they've fallen off frightfully. There was a time when no self-respecting potentate would have smoked such inferior tobacco."

Markham smiled.

"What's the favour you want to ask?"

"Favour? What has that to do with the decay of Europe's aristocracy?"

"I've noticed that whenever you want to ask a favour which you consider questionable etiquette, you begin with a denunciation of royalty."

"Observin' fella," commented Vance drily. Then he, too, smiled. "Do you mind if I invite Colonel Ostrander along to lunch?"

Markham gave him a sharp look.

"Bigsby Ostrander, you mean? . . . Is he the mysterious colonel you've been asking people about for the past two days?"

"That's the lad. Pompous ass and that sort of thing. Might prove a bit edifyin', though. He's the papa of Benson's crowd, so to speak; knows all parties. Regular old scandalmonger."

"Have him along, by all means," agreed Markham.

Then he picked up the telephone.

"Now I'm going to tell Ben you're coming over for an hour or so."

Chapter XIII

THE GREY "CADILLAC"

(*Monday, June* 17 ; 12.30 *p.m.*)

When, at half-past twelve, Markham, Vance and I entered the Grill of the Bankers' Club in the Equitable Building, Colonel Ostrander was already at the bar engaged with one of Charlie's prohibition clam-broth-and-Worcestershire-sauce cocktails. Vance had telephoned him immediately upon our leaving the District Attorney's office, requesting him to meet us at the Club ; and the Colonel had seemed eager to comply.

"Here is New York's gayest dog," said Vance, introducing him to Markham (I had met him before) ; "a sybarite and a hedonist. He sleeps till noon, and makes no appointment before tiffin-time. I had to knock him up and threaten him with your official ire to get him down town at this early hour."

"Only too pleased to be of any service," the Colonel assured Markham grandiloquently. "Shocking affair! Gad! I couldn't credit it when I read it in the papers. Fact is, though—I don't mind sayin' it—I've one or two ideas on the subject. Came very near calling you up myself, sir."

When we had taken our seats at the table Vance began interrogating him without preliminaries.

"You know all the people in Benson's set, Colonel. Tell us something about Captain Leacock. What sort of chap is he?"

"Ha! So you have your eye on the gallant Captain?" Colonel Ostrander pulled importantly at his white

moustache. He was a large pink-faced man with bushy eyelashes and small blue eyes ; and his manner and bearing were those of a pompous light-opera general.

"Not a bad idea. Might possibly have done it. Hot-headed fellow. He's badly smitten with a Miss St. Clair—fine girl, Muriel. And Benson was smitten, too. If I'd been twenty years younger myself—— "

"You're too fascinatin' to the ladies, as it is, Colonel," interrupted Vance. "But tell us about the Captain."

"Ah, yes—the Captain. Comes from Georgia, originally. Served in the war—some kind of decoration. He didn't care for Benson—disliked him, in fact. Quick-tempered, single-track-minded sort of person. Jealous, too. You know the type—a product of that tribal etiquette below the Mason and Dixon line. Puts women on a pedestal—not that they shouldn't be put there, God bless 'em! But he'd go to jail for a lady's honour. A shielder of womanhood. Sentimental cuss, full of chivalry ; just the kind to blow out a rival's brains :—no questions asked—*pop*—and it's all over. Dangerous chap to monkey with. Benson was a confounded idiot to bother with the girl when he knew she was engaged to Leacock. Playin' with fire. I don't mind sayin' I was tempted to warn him. But it was none of my affair—I had no business interferin'. Bad taste."

"Just how well did Captain Leacock know Benson?" asked Vance. "By that I mean : how intimate were they?"

"Not intimate at all," the Colonel replied.

He made a ponderous gesture of negation, and added :

"I should say not! Formal, in fact. They met each other here and there a good deal, though. Knowing 'em both pretty well, I've often had 'em to little affairs at my humble diggin's."

"You wouldn't say Captain Leacock was a good gambler—level-headed and all that?"

"Gambler—huh!" The Colonel's manner was heavily contemptuous. "Poorest I ever saw. Played

poker worse than a woman. Too excitable—couldn't keep his feelin's to himself. Altogether too rash."

Then, after a momentary pause:

"By George! I see what you're aimin' at. . . . And you're dead right. It's rash young puppies just like him that go about shootin' people they don't like."

"The Captain, I take it, is quite different in that regard from your friend, Leander Pfyfe," remarked Vance.

The Colonel appeared to consider.

"Yes and no," he decided. "Pfyfe's a cool gambler—that I'll grant you. He once ran a private gambling place of his own down on Long Island—roulette, monte, baccarat, that sort of thing. And he popped tigers and wild boar in Africa for a while. But Pfyfe's got his sentimental side, and he'd plunge on a pair of deuces with all the betting odds against him. Not a good scientific gambler. Flighty in his impulses, if you understand me. I don't mind admittin', though, that he could shoot a man and forget all about it in five minutes. But he'd need a lot of provocation. . . . He may have had it—you can't tell."

"Pfyfe and Benson were rather intimate, weren't they?"

"Very—very. Always saw 'em together when Pfyfe was in New York. Known each other years. Boon companions, as they called 'em in the old days. Actually lived together before Pfyfe got married. An exacting woman, Pfyfe's wife; makes him toe the mark. But loads of money."

"Speaking of the ladies," said Vance: "what was the situation between Benson and Miss St. Clair?"

"Who can tell?" asked the Colonel sententiously. "Muriel didn't cotton to Benson—that's sure. And yet . . . women are strange creatures——"

"Oh, no end strange," agreed Vance, a trifle wearily. "But really, y'know, I wasn't prying into the lady's personal relations with Benson. I thought you might know her mental attitude concerning him."

"Ah—I see. Would she, in short, have been likely to

take desperate measures against him? . . . Egad! That's an idea!"

The Colonel pondered the point.

"Muriel, now, is a girl of strong character. Works hard at her art. She's a singer, and—I don't mind tellin' you—a mighty fine one. She's deep, too—deuced deep. And capable. Not afraid of taking a chance. Independent. I myself wouldn't want to be in her path if she had it in for me. Might stick at nothing."

He nodded his head sagely.

"Women are funny that way. Always surprisin' you. No sense of values. The most peaceful of 'em will shoot a man in cold blood without warnin'——"

He suddenly sat up, and his little blue eyes glistened like china.

"By Gad!" He fairly blurted the ejaculation. "Muriel had dinner alone with Benson the night he was shot—the very night. Saw 'em together myself at the Marseilles."

"You don't say really!" muttered Vance incuriously. "But I suppose we all must eat. . . . By the bye; how well did you yourself know Benson?"

The Colonel looked startled, but Vance's innocuous expression seemed to reassure him.

"I? My dear fellow! I've known Alvin Benson fifteen years. At least fifteen—maybe longer. Showed him the sights in this old town before the lid was put on. A live town it was then. Wide open. Anything you wanted. Gad—what times we had! Those were the days of the old Haymarket. Never thought of toddlin' home till breakfast——"

Vance again interrupted his irrelevancies.

"How intimate are your relations with Major Benson?"

"The Major? . . . That's another matter. He and I belong to different schools. Dissimilar tastes. We never hit it off. Rarely see each other."

He seemed to think that some explanation was necessary, for before Vance could speak again, he added:

"The Major, you know, was never one of the boys, as we say. Disapproved of gaiety. Didn't mix with our little set. Considered me and Alvin too frivolous. Serious-minded chap."

Vance ate in silence for a while, then asked in an off-hand way:

"Did you do much speculating through Benson and Benson?"

For the first time the Colonel appeared hesitant about answering. He ostentatiously wiped his mouth with his napkin.

"Oh—dabbled a bit," he at length admitted airily. "Not very lucky, though. . . . We all flirted now and then with the Goddess of Chance in Benson's office."

Throughout the lunch Vance kept plying him with questions along these lines; but at the end of an hour he seemed to be no nearer anything definite than when he began. Colonel Ostrander was voluble, but his fluency was vague and disorganised. He talked mainly in parentheses, and insisted on elaborating his answers with rambling opinions, until it was almost impossible to extract what little information his words contained.

Vance, however, did not appear discouraged. He dwelt on Captain Leacock's character, and seemed particularly interested in his personal relationship with Benson. Pfyfe's gambling proclivities also occupied his attention, and he let the Colonel ramble on tiresomely about the man's gambling house on Long Island and his hunting experiences in South Africa. He asked numerous questions about Benson's other friends, but paid scant attention to the answers.

The whole interview impressed me as pointless, and I could not help wondering what Vance hoped to learn. Markham, I was convinced, was equally at sea. He pretended polite interest, and nodded appreciatively during the Colonel's incredibly drawn-out periods; but his eyes wandered occasionally, and several times I saw him give Vance a look of reproachful inquiry. There was no doubt, however, that Colonel Ostrander knew his people.

When we were back in the District Attorney's office, having taken leave of our garrulous guest at the subway entrance, Vance threw himself into one of the easy chairs with an air of satisfaction.

"Most entertainin', what? As an elim'nator of suspects the Colonel has his good points."

"Eliminator!" retorted Markham. "It's a good thing he's not connected with the police; he'd have half the community jailed for shooting Benson."

"He *is* a bit bloodthirsty," Vance admitted. "He's determined to get somebody jailed for the crime."

"According to that old warrior, Benson's coterie was a camorra of gunmen—not forgetting the women. I couldn't help getting the impression, as he talked, that Benson was miraculously lucky not to have been riddled with bullets long ago."

"It's obvious," commented Vance, "that you overlooked the illuminatin' flashes in the Colonel's thunder."

"Were there any?" Markham asked. "At any rate, I can't say that they exactly blinded me by their brilliance."

"And you received no solace from his words?"

"Only those in which he bade me a fond farewell. The parting didn't exactly break my heart. . . . What the old boy said about Leacock, however, might be called a confirmatory opinion. It verified—if verification had been necessary—the case against the Captain."

Vance smiled cynically.

"Oh, to be sure. And what he said about Miss St. Clair would have verified the case against her, too—last Saturday. Also, what he said about Pfyfe would have verified the case against that Beau Sabreur, if you had happened to suspect him—eh, what?"

Vance had scarcely finished speaking when Swacker came in to say that Emery from the Homicide Bureau had been sent over by Heath, and wished, if possible, to see the District Attorney.

When the man entered I recognised him at once as the

detective who had found the cigarette butts in Benson's grate.

With a quick glance at Vance and me, he went directly to Markham.

"We've found the grey Cadillac, sir; and Sergeant Heath thought you might want to know about it right away. It's in a small, one-man garage on Seventy-fourth Street near Amsterdam Avenue, and has been there three days. One of the men from the Sixth-eighth Street Station located it and 'phoned in to Headquarters; and I hopped up town at once. It's the right car—fishing-tackle and all, except for the rods; so I guess the ones found in Central Park belonged to the car after all: fell out probably . . . It seems a fellow drove the car into the garage about noon last Friday, and gave the garage-man twenty dollars to keep his mouth shut. The man's a wop, and says he don't read the papers. Anyway, he came across *pronto* when I put the screws on."

The detective drew out a small notebook.

"I looked up the car's number. . . . It's listed in the name of Leander Pfyfe, 42 Elm Boulevard, Port Washington, Long Island."

Markham received this piece of unexpected information with a perplexed frown. He dismissed Emery almost curtly, and sat tapping thoughtfully on his desk.

Vance watched him with an amused smile.

"It's really not a madhouse, y'know," he observed comfortingly. "I say, don't the Colonel's words bring you any cheer, now that you know Leander was hovering about the neighbourhood at the time Benson was translated into the Beyond?"

"Damn your old Colonel!" snapped Markham. "What interests me at present is fitting this new development into the situation."

"It fits beautifully," Vance told him. "It rounds out the mosaic, so to speak. . . . Are you actu'lly disconcerted by learning that Pfyfe was the owner of the mysterious car?"

"Not having your gift of clairvoyance, I am, I confess, disturbed by the fact."

Markham lit a cigar—an indication of worry.

"You, of course," he added, with sarcasm, "knew before Emery came here that it was Pfyfe's car."

"I didn't know," Vance corrected him; "but I had a strong suspicion. Pfyfe overdid his distress when he told us of his breakdown in the Catskills. And Heath's question about his itiner'ry annoyed him frightfully. His hauteur was too melodramatic."

"Your *ex post facto* wisdom is most useful!"

Markham smoked a while in silence.

"I think I'll find out about this matter."

He rang for Swacker.

"Call up the Ansonia," he ordered angrily; "locate Leander Pfyfe, and say I want to see him at the Stuyvesant Club at six o'clock. And tell him he's to be there."

"It occurs to me," said Markham, when Swacker had gone, "that this car episode may prove helpful, after all. Pfyfe was evidently in New York that night, and for some reason he didn't want it known. Why, I wonder? He tipped us off about Leacock's threat against Benson, and hinted strongly that we'd better get on the fellow's track. Of course, he may have been sore at Leacock for winning Miss St. Clair away from his friend, and taken this means of wreaking a little revenge on him. On the other hand, if Pfyfe was at Benson's house the night of the murder, he may have some real information. And now that we've found out about the car, I think he'll tell us what he knows."

"He'll tell you something anyway," said Vance. "He's the type of congenital liar that'll tell anybody anything as long as it doesn't involve himself unpleasantly."

"You and the Cumæan Sibyl, I presume, could inform me in advance what he's going to tell me."

"I couldn't say as to the Cumæan Sibyl, don't y'know," Vance returned lightly, "but speaking for myself, I rather fancy he'll tell you that he saw the impetuous Captain at Benson's house that night."

Markham laughed.

"I hope he does. You'll want to be on hand to hear him, I suppose."

"I couldn't bear to miss it."

Vance was already at the door, preparatory to going, when he turned again to Markham.

"I've another slight favour to ask. Get a *dossier* on Pfyfe—there's a good fellow. Send one of your innumerable Dogberrys to Port Washington and have the gentleman's conduct and social habits looked into. Tell your emiss'ry to concentrate on the woman question. . . . I promise you, you shan't regret it."

Markham, I could see, was decidedly puzzled by this request, and half inclined to refuse it. But after deliberating a few moments, he smiled, and pressed a button on his desk.

"Anything to humour you," he said. "I'll send a man down at once."

Chapter XIV

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

(*Monday, June* 17 ; 6 *p.m.*)

VANCE and I spent an hour or so that afternoon at the Anderson Galleries looking at some tapestries which were to be auctioned the next day, and afterward had tea at Sherry's. We were at the Stuyvesant Club a little before six. A few minutes later, Markham and Pfyfe arrived ; and we went at once into one of the conference rooms.

Pfyfe was as elegant and superior as at the first interview. He wore a rat-catcher suit and Newmarket gaiters of unbleached linen, and was redolent of perfume.

"An unexpected pleasure to see you gentlemen again so soon," he greeted us, like one conferring a blessing.

Markham was far from amiable, and gave him an almost brusque salutation. Vance had merely nodded, and now sat regarding Pfyfe drearily as if seeking to find some excuse for his existence, but utterly unable to do so.

Markham went directly to the point.

"I've found out, Mr. Pfyfe, that you placed your machine in a garage at noon on Friday, and gave the man twenty dollars to say nothing about it."

Pfyfe looked up with a hurt look.

"I've been deeply wronged," he complained sadly. "I gave the man fifty dollars."

"I am glad you admit the fact so readily," returned Markham. "You knew, by the newspapers, of course, that your machine was seen outside Benson's house the night he was shot."

"Why else should I have paid so liberally to have its

presence in New York kept secret?" His tone indicated that he was pained at the other's obtuseness.

"In that case, why did you keep it in the city at all?" asked Markham. "You could have driven it back to Long Island."

Pfyfe shook his head sorrowfully, a look of commiseration in his eyes. Then he leaned forward with an air of benign patience: he would be gentle with this dull-witted District Attorney, like a fond teacher with a backward child, and would strive to lead him out of the tangle of his uncertainties.

"I am a married man, Mr. Markham." He pronounced the fact as if some special virtue attached to it. "I started on my trip for the Catskills Thursday after dinner, intending to stop a day in New York to make my adieux to someone residing here. I arrived quite late—after midnight—and decided to call on Alvin. But when I drove up, the house was dark. So, without even ringing the bell, I walked to Pietro's in Forty-third Street to get a night-cap—I keep a bit of my own pinch-bottle Haig and Haig there—but, alas, the place was closed, and I strolled back to my car. . . . To think, that while I was away poor Alvin was shot!"

He stopped and polished his eye-glass.

"The irony of it. . . . I didn't even guess that anything had happened to the dear fellow—how could I? I drove, all unsuspecting of the tragedy, to a Turkish bath, and remained there the night. The next morning I read of the murder; and in the later editions I saw the mention of my car. It was then I became—shall I say worried? But no. 'Worried' is a misleading word. Let me say, rather, that I became aware of the false position I might be placed in if the car were traced to me. So I drove it to the garage and paid the man to say nothing of its whereabouts, lest its discovery confuse the issue of Alvin's death."

One might have thought, from his tone and the self-righteous way he looked at Markham, that he had bribed

the garage-man wholly out of consideration for the District Attorney and the police.

"Why didn't you continue on your trip?" asked Markham. "That would have made the discovery of the car even less likely."

Pfyfe adopted an air of compassionate surprise.

"With my dearest friend foully murdered? How could one have the heart to seek diversion at such a sad moment? . . . I returned home, and informed Mrs. Pfyfe that my car had broken down."

"You might have driven home in your car, it seems to me," observed Markham.

Pfyfe offered a look of infinite forbearance for the other's inspection, and took a deep sigh, which conveyed the impression that, though he could not sharpen the world's perceptions, he at least could mourn for its deplorable lack of understanding.

"If I had been in the Catskills away from any source of information, where Mrs. Pfyfe believed me to be, how would I have heard of Alvin's death until, perhaps, days afterward? You see, unfortunately I had not mentioned it to Mrs. Pfyfe that I was stopping over in New York. The truth is, Mr. Markham, I had reason for not wishing my wife to know I was in the city. Consequently, if I had driven back at once, she would, I regret to say, have suspected me of breaking my journey. I therefore pursued the course which seemed simplest."

Markham was becoming annoyed at the man's fluent hypocrisy. After a brief silence he asked abruptly:

"Did the presence of your car at Benson's house that night have anything to do with your apparent desire to implicate Captain Leacock in the affair?"

Pfyfe lifted his eyebrows in pained astonishment, and made a gesture of polite protestation.

"My dear sir!" His voice betokened profound resentment of the other's unjust imputation. "If yesterday you detected in my words an undercurrent of suspicion against Captain Leacock, I can account for it only by the

fact that I actually saw the Captain in front of Alvin's house when I drove up that night."

Markham shot a curious look at Vance; then said to Pfyfe:

"You are sure you saw Leacock?"

"I saw him quite distinctly. And I would have mentioned the fact yesterday had it not involved the tacit confession of my own presence there."

"What if it had?" demanded Markham. "It was vital information, and I could have used it this morning. You were placing your comfort ahead of the legal demands of justice; and your attitude puts a very questionable aspect on your own alleged conduct that night."

"You are pleased to be severe, sir," said Pfyfe with self-pity. "But having placed myself in a false position, I must accept your criticism."

"Do you realise," Markham went on, "that many a district attorney, if he knew what I now know about your movements, and had been treated the way you've treated me, would arrest you on suspicion?"

"Then I can only say," was the suave response, "that I am most fortunate in my inquisitor."

Markham rose.

"That will be all for to-day, Mr. Pfyfe. But you are to remain in New York until I give you permission to return home. Otherwise, I will have you held as a material witness."

Pfyfe made a shocked gesture in deprecation of such acerbities, and bade us a ceremonious good afternoon.

When we were alone, Markham looked seriously at Vance.

"Your prophecy was fulfilled, though I didn't dare hope for such luck. Pfyfe's evidence puts the final link in the chain against the Captain."

Vance smoked languidly.

"I'll admit your theory of the crime is most satisfyin'. But alas, the psychological objection remains. Everything fits, with the one exception of the Captain; and he

doesn't fit at all. . . . Silly idea, I know. But he has no more business being cast as the murderer of Benson than the bisonic Tetrazzini had being cast as the phthisical *Mimi*."*

"In any other circumstances," Markham answered, "I might defer reverently to your charming theories. But with all the circumstantial and presumptive evidence I have against Leacock, it strikes my inferior legal mind as sheer nonsense to say, 'He just couldn't be guilty because his hair is parted in the middle and he tucks his napkin in his collar.' There's too much logic against it."

"I'll grant your logic is irrefutable—as all logic is, no doubt. You've prob'bly convinced many innocent persons by sheer reasoning that they were guilty."

Vance stretched himself wearily.

"What do you say to a light repast on the roof? The unutt'rable Pfyfe has tired me."

In the summer dining-room on the roof of the Stuyvesant Club we found Major Benson sitting alone, and Markham asked him to join us.

"I have good news for you, Major," he said, when we had given our order. "I feel confident I have my man; everything points to him. To-morrow will see the end, I hope."

The Major gave Markham a questioning frown.

"I don't understand exactly. From what you told me the other day, I got the impression there was a woman involved."

Markham smiled awkwardly, and avoided Vance's eyes.

"A lot of water has run under the bridge since then," he said. "The woman I had in mind was eliminated as soon as we began to check up on her. But in the process I was led to the man. There's little doubt of his guilt. I felt pretty sure about it this morning, and just now I learned that he was seen by a credible witness in front of your brother's house within a few minutes of the time the shot was fired."

* Obviously a reference to Tetrazzini's performance in *La Bohème* at the Manhattan Opera House in 1908.

"Is there any objection to your telling me who it was?" The Major was still frowning.

"None whatever. The whole city will probably know it to-morrow. . . . It was Captain Leacock."

Major Benson stared at him in unbelief.

"Impossible! I simply can't credit it. That boy was with me three years on the other side, and I got to know him pretty well. I can't help feeling there's a mistake somewhere. . . . The police," he added quickly, "have got on the wrong track."

"It's not the police," Markham informed him. "It was my own investigations that turned up the Captain."

The Major did not answer, but his silence bespoke his doubt.

"Y'know," put in Vance, "I feel the same way about the Captain that you do, Major. It rather pleases me to have my impressions verified by one who has known him so long."

"What, then, was Leacock doing in front of the house that night?" urged Markham acidulously.

"He might have been singing carols beneath Benson's window," suggested Vance.

Before Markham could reply he was handed a card by the head waiter. When he glanced at it, he gave a grunt of satisfaction, and directed that the caller be sent up immediately. Then, turning back to us, he said:

"We may learn something more now. I've been expecting this man Higginbotham. He's the detective that followed Leacock from my office this morning."

Higginbotham was a wiry, pale-faced youth with fishy eyes and a shifty manner. He slouched up to the table and stood hesitantly before the District Attorney.

"Sit down and report, Higginbotham," Markham ordered. "These gentlemen are working with me on the case."

"I picked up the bird while he was waiting for the elevator," the man began, eyeing Markham craftily. "He went to the subway and rode up town to Seventy-

ninth and Broadway. He walked through Eightieth to Riverside Drive and went in the apartment house at No. 94. Didn't give his name to the boy—got right in the elevator. He stayed upstairs a coupla hours, come down at one-twenty, and hopped a taxi. I picked up another one, and followed. He went down the Drive to Seventy-second, through Central Park, and east on Fifty-ninth. Got out at Avenue A, and walked out on the Queensborough Bridge. About half way to Blackwell's Island he stood leaning over the rail for five or six minutes. Then he took a small package out of his pocket, and dropped it in the river."

"What size was the package?" There was repressed eagerness in Markham's question.

Higginbotham indicated the measurements with his hands.

"How thick was it?"

"Inch or so, maybe."

Markham leaned forward.

"Could it have been a gun—a Colt automatic?"

"Sure it could. Just about the right size. And it was heavy, too—I could tell by the way he handled it, and by the way it hit the water."

"All right." Markham was pleased. "Anything else?"

"No, sir. After he'd ditched the gun, he went home and stayed. I left him there."

When Higginbotham had gone, Markham nodded at Vance with melancholy elation.

"There's your criminal agent. . . . What more would you like?"

"Oh, lots," drawled Vance.

Major Benson looked up, perplexed.

"I don't quite grasp the situation. Why did Leacock have to go to Riverside Drive for his gun?"

"I have reason to think," said Markham, "that he took it to Miss St. Clair the day after the shooting—for safe-keeping probably. He wouldn't have wanted it found in his place."

"Might he not have taken it to Miss St. Clair's before the shooting?"

"I know what you mean," Markham answered. (I, too, recalled the Major's assertion the day before that Miss St. Clair was more capable of shooting his brother than was the Captain.) "I had the same idea myself. But certain evidential facts have eliminated her as a suspect."

"You've doubtlessly satisfied yourself on the point," returned the Major; but his tone was dubious. "However, I can't see Leacock as Alvin's murderer."

He paused, and laid a hand on the District Attorney's arm.

"I don't want to appear presumptuous, or unappreciative of all you've done; but I really wish you'd wait a bit before clapping that boy into prison. The most careful and conscientious of us are liable to error: even facts sometimes lie damnably; and I can't help believing that the facts in this instance have deceived you."

It was plain that Markham was touched by this request of his old friend; but his instinctive fidelity to duty helped him to resist the other's appeal.

"I must act according to my convictions, Major," he said firmly, but with a great kindness.

Chapter XV

"PFYFE—PERSONAL"

(*Tuesday, June* 18 ; 9 *a.m.*)

THE next day—the fourth of the investigation—was an important and, in some ways, a momentous one in the solution of the problem posed by Alvin Benson's murder. Nothing of a definite nature came to light, but a new element was injected into the case ; and this new element eventually led to the guilty person.

Before we parted from Markham after our dinner with Major Benson, Vance had made the request that he be permitted to call at the District Attorney's office the next morning. Markham, both disconcerted and impressed by his unwonted earnestness, had complied ; although, I think, he would rather have made his arrangements for Captain Leacock's arrest without the disturbing influence of the other's protesting presence. It was evident that, after Higginbotham's report, Markham had decided to place the Captain in custody, and to proceed with his preparation of data for the Grand Jury.

Although Vance and I arrived at the office at nine o'clock Markham was already there. As we entered the room, he picked up the telephone receiver, and asked to be put through to Sergeant Heath.

At that moment Vance did an amazing thing. He walked swiftly to the District Attorney's desk, and, snatching the receiver out of Markham's hand, clamped it down on the hook. Then he placed the telephone to one side, and laid both hands on the other's shoulders. Markham was too astonished and bewildered to protest ; and before

he could recover himself, Vance said in a low, firm voice, which was all the more impelling because of its softness:

"I'm not going to let you jail Leacock—that's what I came here for this morning. You're not going to order his arrest as long as I'm in this office and can prevent it by any means whatever. There's only one way you can accomplish this act of unmitigated folly, and that's by summoning your policemen and having me forcibly ejected. And I advise you to call a goodly number of 'em, because I'll give 'em the battle of their bellicose lives!"

The incredible part of this threat was that Vance meant it literally. And Markham knew he meant it.

"If you do call your henchmen," he went on, "you'll be the laughing stock of the city inside of a week; for, by that time, it'll be known who really did shoot Benson. And I'll be a popular hero and a martyr—God save the mark!—for defying the District Attorney and offering up my sweet freedom on the altar of truth and justice and that sort of thing . . ."

The telephone rang, and Vance answered it.

"Not wanted," he said, closing off immediately. Then he stepped back and folded his arms.

At the end of a brief silence, Markham spoke, his voice quavering with rage.

"If you don't go at once, Vance, and let me run this office myself, I'll have no choice but to call in those policemen."

Vance smiled. He knew Markham would take no such extreme measures. After all, the issue between these two friends was an intellectual one, and though Vance's actions had placed it for a moment on a physical basis, there was no danger of its so continuing.

Markham's belligerent gaze slowly turned to one of profound perplexity.

"Why are you so damned interested in Leacock?" he asked gruffly. "Why this irrational insistence that he remain at large?"

"You priceless, inexpressible ass!" Vance strove to

keep all hint of affection out of his voice. " Do you think I care particularly what happens to a Southern army captain? There are hundreds of Leacocks, all alike—with their square shoulders and square chins, and their knobby clothes, and their totemistic codes of barbaric chivalry. Only a mother could tell 'em apart. . . . I'm int'rested in *you*, old chap. I don't want to see you make a mistake that's going to injure you more than it will Leacock."

Markham's eyes lost their hardness; he understood Vance's motive, and forgave him. But he was still firm in his belief of the Captain's guilt. He remained thoughtful for some time. Then, having apparently arrived at a decision, he rang for Swacker and asked that Phelps be sent for.

" I've a plan that may nail this affair down tight," he said. " And it'll be evidence that not even you, Vance, can gainsay."

Phelps came in, and Markham gave him instructions.

" Go and see Miss St. Clair at once. Get to her some way, and ask her what was in the package Captain Leacock took away from her apartment yesterday and threw in the East River." He briefly summarised Higginbotham's report of the night before. " Demand that she tell you, and intimate that you know it was the gun with which Benson was shot. She'll probably refuse to answer, and will tell you to get out. Then go downstairs and wait developments. If she 'phones, listen in on the switchboard. If she happens to send a note to anyone, intercept it. And if she goes out—which I hardly think likely—follow her and learn what you can. Let me hear from you the minute you get hold of anything."

" I get you, Chief." Phelps seemed pleased with the assignment, and departed with alacrity.

" Are such burglarious and eavesdropping methods considered ethical by your learned profession? " asked Vance. " I can't harmonise such conduct with your other qualities, y'know."

Markham leaned back and gazed up at the chandelier.

"Personal ethics don't enter into it. Or, if they do, they are crowded out by greater and graver considerations—by the higher demands of justice. Society must be protected, and the citizens of this county look to me for their security against the encroachments of criminals and evil-doers. Sometimes, in the pursuance of my duty, it is necessary to adopt courses of conduct that conflict with my personal instincts. I have no right to jeopardise the whole of society because of an assumed ethical obligation to an individual. . . . You understand, of course, that I would not use any information obtained by these unethical methods unless it pointed to criminal activities on the part of that individual. And in such a case I would have every right to use it for the good of the community."

"I dare say you're right," yawned Vance. "But society doesn't int'rest me particularly. And I inf'nitely prefer good manners to righteousness."

As he finished speaking Swacker announced Major Benson, who wanted to see Markham at once.

The Major was accompanied by a pretty young woman of about twenty-two with yellow, bobbed hair, dressed daintily and simply in light blue *crêpe de Chine*. But for all her youthful and somewhat frivolous appearance she possessed a reserve and competency of manner that immediately evoked one's confidence.

Major Benson introduced her as his secretary, and Markham placed a chair for her facing his desk.

"Miss Hoffman has just told me something that I think is vital for you to know," said the Major; "and I brought her directly to you."

He seemed unusually serious and his eyes held a look of expectancy coloured with doubt.

"Tell Mr. Markham exactly what you told me, Miss Hoffman."

The girl raised her head prettily and related her story in a capable, well-modulated voice.

"About a week ago—I think it was Wednesday—Mr.

Pfyfe called on Mr. Alvin Benson in his private office. I was in the next room, where my typewriter is located. There's only a glass partition between the two rooms, and when anyone talks loudly in Mr. Benson's office I can hear them. In about five minutes Mr. Pfyfe and Mr. Benson began to quarrel. I thought it was funny, for they were such good friends; but I didn't pay much attention to it, and went on with my typing. Their voices got very loud, though, and I caught several words. Major Benson asked me this morning what the words were: so I suppose you want to know, too. Well, they kept referring to a note; and once or twice a cheque was mentioned. Several times I caught the word 'father-in-law,' and once Mr. Benson said 'nothing doing.' . . . Then Mr. Benson called me in and told me to get him an envelope marked 'Pfyfe—Personal' out of his private drawer in the safe. I got it for him, but right after that our book-keeper wanted me for something, so I didn't hear any more. About fifteen minutes later, when Pfyfe had gone, Mr. Benson called me to put the envelope back. And he told me that if Mr. Pfyfe ever called again, I wasn't, under any circumstances, to let him into the private office unless he himself was there. He also told me that I wasn't to give the envelope to anybody—not even on a written order. . . . And that is all, Mr. Markham."

During her recital I had been as much interested in Vance's action as in what she had been saying. When first she had entered the room, his casual glance had quickly changed to one of attentive animation, and he had studied her closely. When Markham had placed the chair for her, he had risen and reached for a book lying on the table near her; and, in doing so, he had leaned unnecessarily close to her in order to inspect—or so it appeared to me—the side of her head. And during her story he had continued his observation, at times bending slightly to the right or left to better his view of her. Unaccountable as his actions had seemed, I knew that some serious consideration had prompted the scrutiny.

When she finished speaking Major Benson reached in his pocket, and tossed a long manilla envelope on the desk before Markham.

"Here it is," he said. "I got Miss Hoffman to bring it to me the moment she told me her story."

Markham picked it up hesitantly, as if doubtful of his right to inspect its contents.

"You'd better look at it," the Major advised. "That envelope may very possibly have an important bearing on the case."

Markham removed the elastic band, and spread the contents of the envelope before him. They consisted of three items—a cancelled cheque for $10,000 made out to Leander Pfyfe and signed by Alvin Benson; a note of $10,000 to Alvin Benson signed by Pfyfe, and a brief confession, also signed by Pfyfe, saying the cheque was a forgery. The cheque was dated March 20th of the current year. The confession and the note were dated two days later. The note—which was for ninety days—fell due on Friday, June 21st, only three days off.

For fully five minutes Markham studied these documents in silence. Their sudden introduction into the case seemed to mystify him. Nor had any of the perplexity left his face when he finally put them back in the envelope.

He questioned the girl carefully, and had her repeat certain parts of her story. But nothing more could be learned from her; and at length he turned to the Major.

"I'll keep this envelope a while, if you'll let me. I don't see its significance at present, but I'd like to think it over."

When Major Benson and his secretary had gone, Vance rose and extended his legs.

"*A la fin!*" he murmured. "All things journey: sun and moon, morning, noon, and afternoon, night and all her stars.' *Videlicet:* we begin to make progress."

"What the devil are you driving at?" The new complication of Pfyfe's peccadilloes had left Markham irritable.

"Int'restin' young woman, this Miss Hoffman—eh, what?" Vance rejoined irrelevantly. "Didn't care

especially for the deceased Benson. And she fairly detests the aromatic Leander. He has prob'bly told her he was misunderstood by Mrs. Pfyfe, and invited her to dinner."

"Well, she's pretty enough," commented Markham indifferently. "Benson, too, may have made advances —which is why she disliked him."

"Oh, absolutely," Vance mused a moment. "Pretty —yes; but misleadin'. She's an ambitious gel, and capable too—knows her business. She's no ball of fluff. She has a solid, honest streak in her—a bit of Teutonic blood, I'd say." He paused meditatively. "Y'know, Markham, I have a suspicion you'll hear from little Miss Katinka again."

"Crystal-gazing, eh?" mumbled Markham.

"Oh, dear no!" Vance was looking lazily out of the window. "But I did enter the silence, so to speak, and indulged in a bit of craniological contemplation."

"I thought I noticed you ogling the girl," said Markham. "But since her hair was bobbed and she had her hat on how could you analyse the bumps?—if that's the phrase you phrenologists use."

"Forget not Goldsmith's preacher," Vance admonished. "Truth from his lips prevailed, and those who came to scoff remained *et cetera*. . . . To begin with, I'm no phrenologist. But I believe in epochal, racial and heredit'ry varieties in skulls. In that respect I'm merely an old-fashioned Darwinian. Every child knows that the skull of the Piltdown man differs from that of the Cromagnard; and even a lawyer could distinguish an Aryan head from a Ural-Altaic head, or a Maylaic from a Negrillo. And, if one is versed at all in the Mendelian theory, herdit'ry cranial similarities can be detected. . . . But all this erudition is beyond you, I fear. Suffice it to say that, despite the young woman's hat and hair, I could see the contour of her head and the bone structure in her face; and I even caught a glimpse of her ear."

"And thereby deduced that we'd hear from her again," added Markham scornfully.

"Indirectly—yes," admitted Vance. Then, after a pause: "I say, in view of Miss Hoffman's revelation, do not Colonel Ostrander's comments of yesterday begin to take on a phosph'rescent aspect?"

"Look here!" said Markham impatiently. "Cut out these circumlocutions, and get to the point."

Vance turned slowly from the window, and regarded him pensively.

"Markham—I put the question academically—doesn't Pfyfe's forged cheque, with its accompanying confession and its shortly-due note, constitute a rather strong motive for doing away with Benson?"

Markham sat up suddenly.

"You think Pfyfe guilty—is that it?"

"Well, here's the touchin' situation: Pfyfe obviously signed Benson's name to a cheque, told him about it, and got the surprise of his life when his dear old pal asked him for a ninety-day note to cover the amount, and also for a written confession to hold over him to insure payment. . . . Now consider the subs'quent facts: First, Pfyfe called on Benson a week ago and had a quarrel in which the cheque was mentioned: Damon was prob'bly pleading with Pythias to extend the note, and was vulgarly informed that there was 'nothing doing.' Secondly, Benson was shot two days later, less than a week before the note fell due. Thirdly, Pfyfe was at Benson's house the hour of the shooting, and not only lied to you about his whereabouts, but bribed a garage owner to keep silent about his car. Fourthly, his explanation, when caught, of his unrewarded search for Haig and Haig was, to say the least, a bit thick. And don't forget that the original tale of his lonely quest for nature's solitudes in the Catskills—with his mysterious stop-over in New York to confer a farewell benediction upon some anonymous person—was not all that one could have hoped for in the line of plausibility. Fifthly, he is an impulsive gambler, given to taking chances; and his experiences in South Africa would certainly have familiarised him with firearms. Sixthly, he was rather

eager to involve Leacock, and did a bit of caddish tale-bearing to that end, even informing you that he saw the Captain on the spot at the fatal moment. Seventhly—but why bore you? Have I not supplied you with all the factors you hold so dear—what are they now?—motive, time, place, opportunity, conduct? All that's wanting is the criminal agent. But then, the Captain's gun is at the bottom of the East River; so you're not very much better off in his case, what?"

Markham had listened attentively to Vance's summary. He now sat in rapt silence gazing down at the desk.

"How about a little chat with Pfyfe before you make any final move against the Captain?" suggested Vance.

"I think I'll take your advice," answered Markham slowly, after several minutes' reflection. Then he picked up the telephone. "I wonder if he's at his hotel now."

"Oh, he's there," said Vance. "Watchful, waitin' and all that."

Pfyfe was in; and Markham requested him to come at once to the office.

"There's another thing I wish you'd do for me," said Vance, when the other had finished telephoning. "The fact is, I'm longing to know what everyone was doing during the hour of Benson's dissolution—that is, between midnight and one a.m. on the night of the thirteenth, or to speak pedantically, the morning of the fourteenth."

Markham looked at him in amazement.

"Seems silly, doesn't it?" Vance went on blithely. "But you put such faith in alibis—though they do prove disappointin' at times, what? There's Leacock, for instance. If that hall-boy had told Heath to toddle along and sell his violets, you couldn't do a blessed thing to the Captain. Which shows, d'ye see, that you're too trustin'. . . . Why not find out where everyone was? Pfyfe and the Captain were at Benson's; and they're about the only ones whose whereabouts you've looked into. Maybe there were others hovering around Alvin that night. There may have been a crush of friends and acquaintances on

hand—a regular *soirée*, y'know. . . . Then, again, checking up on all these people will supply the desolate Sergeant with something to take his mind off his sorrows."

Markham knew, as well as I, that Vance would not have made a suggestion of this kind unless actuated by some serious motive; and for several moments he studied the other's face intently, as if trying to read his reason for this unexpected request.

"Who, specifically," he asked, "is included in your 'everyone'?" He took up his pencil and held it poised above a sheet of paper.

"No one is to be left out," replied Vance. "Put down Miss St. Clair—Captain Leacock—the Major—Pfyfe—Miss Hoffman——"

"Miss Hoffman!"

"Everyone! . . . Have you Miss Hoffman? Now jot down Colonel Ostrander——"

"Look here!" cut in Markham.

"——and I may have one or two others for you later. But that will do nicely for a beginning."

Before Markham could protest further, Swacker came in to say that Heath was waiting outside.

"What about our friend Leacock, sir?" was the Sergeant's first question.

"I'm holding that up for a day or so," explained Markham. "I want to have another talk with Pfyfe before I do anything definite." And he told Heath about the visit of Major Benson and Miss Hoffman.

Heath inspected the envelope and its enclosures, and then handed them back.

"I don't see anything in that," he said. "It looks to me like a private deal between Benson and this fellow Pfyfe. Leacock's our man; and the sooner I get him locked up, the better I'll feel."

"That may be to-morrow," Markham encouraged him. "So don't feel downcast over this little delay. . . . You're keeping the Captain under surveillance, aren't you?"

"I'll say so," grinned Heath.

Vance turned to Markham.

" What about that list of names you made out for the Sergeant ? " he asked ingenuously. " I understood you to say something about alibis."

Markham hesitated, frowning. Then he handed Heath the paper containing the names Vance had called off to him.

" As a matter of caution, Sergeant," he said morosely. " I wish you'd get me the alibis of all these people on the night of the murder. It may bring something contributory to light. Verify those you already know, such as Pfyfe's ; and let me have the reports as soon as you can."

When Heath had gone Markham turned a look of angry exasperation upon Vance.

" Of all the confounded trouble-makers —— " he began.

But Vance interrupted him blandly.

" Such ingratitude ! If you only knew it, Markham, I'm your tutelary genius, your *deus ex machina*, your fairy godmother."

Chapter XVI

ADMISSIONS AND SUPPRESSIONS

(*Tuesday, June* 18 ; *afternoon*)

An hour later, Phelps, the operative Markham had sent to 94, Riverside Drive, came in radiating satisfaction.

"I think I've got what you want, Chief." His raucous voice was covertly triumphant. "I went up to the St. Clair woman's apartment and rang the bell. She came to the door herself, and I stepped into the hall and put my questions to her. She sure refused to answer. When I let on I knew the package contained the gun Benson was shot with, she just laughed and jerked the door open. 'Leave this apartment, you vile creature,' she says to me."

He grinned.

"I hurried downstairs, and I hadn't any more than got to the switchboard when her signal flashed. I let the boy get the number, and then I stood him to one side, and listened in. . . . She was talking to Leacock, and her first words were : 'They know you took the pistol from here yesterday and threw it in the river.' That must 've knocked him out, for he didn't say anything for a long time. Then he answered, perfectly calm and kinda sweet : 'Don't worry, Muriel ; and don't say a word to anybody for the rest of the day. I'll fix everything in the morning." He made her promise to keep quiet until to-morrow, and then he said good-bye."

Markham sat a while digesting the story.

"What impression did you get from the conversation ? "

"If you ask me, Chief," said the detective, "I'd lay ten to one that Leacock's guilty and the girl knows it."

Markham thanked him and let him go.

"This sub-Potomac chivalry," commented Vance, "is a frightful nuisance. . . . But aren't we about due to hold police converse with the genteel Leander?"

Almost as he spoke the man was announced. He entered the room with his habitual urbanity of manner, but, for all his suavity, he could not wholly disguise his uneasiness of mind.

"Sit down, Mr. Pfyfe," directed Markham brusquely. "It seems you have a little more explaining to do."

Taking out the manilla envelope, he laid its contents on the desk where the other could see them.

"Will you be so good as to tell me about these?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Pfyfe; but his voice had lost its assurance. Some of his poise, too, had deserted him, and as he paused to light a cigarette I detected a slight nervousness in the way he manipulated his gold match-box.

"I really should have mentioned these before," he confessed, indicating the papers with a delicately inconsequential wave of the hand.

He leaned forward on one elbow, taking a confidential attitude, and as he talked, the cigarette bobbed up and down between his lips.

"It pains me deeply to go into this matter," he began; "but since it is in the interests of truth, I shall not complain. . . . My—ah—domestic arrangements are not all that one could desire. My wife's father has, curiously enough, taken a most unreasonable dislike to me; and it pleases him to deprive me of all but the meagrest financial assistance, although it is really my wife's money that he refuses to give me. A few months ago I made use of certain funds—ten thousand dollars, to be exact—which, I learned later, had not been intended for me. When my father-in-law discovered my error, it was necessary for me to return the full amount to avoid a misunderstanding between Mrs. Pfyfe and myself—a misunderstanding which might have caused my wife's great unhappiness. I regret

to say, I used Alvin's name on a cheque. But I explained it to him at once, you understand, offering him the note and this little confession as evidence of my good faith. . . . And that is all, Mr. Markham."

"Was that what your quarrel with him last week was about?"

Pfyfe gave him a look of querulous surprise.

"Ah, you have heard of our little *contretemps*? . . . Yes—we had a slight disagreement as to the—shall I say terms of the transaction?"

"Did Benson insist that the note be paid when due?"

"No—not exactly." Pfyfe's manner became unctuous. "I beg of you, sir, not to press me as to my little chat with Alvin. It was, I assure you, quite irrelevant to the present situation. Indeed, it was of a most personal and private nature." He smiled confidingly. "I will admit, however, that I went to Alvin's house the night he was shot, intending to speak to him about the cheque; but, as you already know, I found the house dark and spent the night in a Turkish bath."

"Pardon me, Mr. Pfyfe,"—it was Vance who spoke—"but did Mr. Benson take your note without security?"

"Of course!" Pfyfe's tone was a rebuke. "Alvin and I, as I have explained, were the closest friends."

"But even a friend, don't y'know," Vance submitted, "might ask for security on such a large amount. How did Benson know that you'd be able to repay him?"

"I can only say that he did know," the other answered, with an air of patient deliberation.

Vance continued to be doubtful.

"Perhaps it was because of the confession you had given him."

Pfyfe rewarded him with a look of beaming approval.

"You grasp the situation perfectly," he said.

Vance withdrew from the conversation, and though Markham questioned Pfyfe for nearly half an hour, nothing further transpired. Pfyfe clung to his story in every detail, and politely refused to go deeper into his quarrel

with Benson, insisting that it had no bearing on the case. At last he was permitted to go.

"Not very helpful," Markham observed. "I'm beginning to agree with Heath that we've turned up a mare's nest in Pfyfe's frenzied financial deal."

"You'll never be anything but your own sweet trusting self, will you?" lamented Vance sadly. "Pfyfe has just given you your first intelligent line of investigation—and you say he's not helpful! . . . Listen to me and *nota bene*. Pfyfe's story about the ten thousand dollars is undoubtedly true: he appropriated the money and forged Benson's name to a cheque with which to replace it. But I don't for a second believe there was no security in addition to the confession. Benson wasn't the type of man—friend or no friend—who'd hand over that amount without security. He wanted his money back—not somebody in jail. That's why I put my oar in, and asked about the security. Pfyfe, of course, denied it; but when pressed as to how Benson knew he'd pay the note, he retired into a cloud. I had to suggest the confession as the possible explanation; which showed that something else was in his mind—something he didn't care to mention. And the way he jumped at my suggestion bears out my theory."

"Well, what of it?" Markham asked impatiently.

"Oh, for the gift of tears!" moaned Vance. "Don't you see that there's someone in the background—someone connected with the security? It must be so, y'know; otherwise Pfyfe would have told you the entire tale of the quarrel, if only to clear himself from suspicion. Yet, knowing that his position is an awkward one, he refuses to divulge what passed between him and Benson in the office that day. . . . Pfyfe is shielding someone—and he is not the soul of chivalry, y'know. Therefore I ask: Why?"

He leaned back and gazed at the ceiling.

"I have an idea, amounting to a cerebral cyclone," he added, "that when we put our hands on that security, we'll also put our hands on the murderer."

At this moment the telephone rang, and when Markham

answered it a look of startled amusement came into his eyes. He made an appointment with the speaker for half-past five that afternoon. Then, hanging up the receiver, he laughed outright at Vance.

"Your auricular researches have been confirmed," he said. "Miss Hoffman just called me confidentially on an outside 'phone to say she has something to add to her story. She's coming here at five-thirty."

Vance was unimpressed by the announcement.

"I rather imagined she'd telephone during her lunch hour."

Again Markham gave him one of his searching scrutinies.

"There's something damned queer going on around here," he observed.

"Oh, quite," returned Vance carelessly. "Queerer than you could possibly imagine."

For fifteen or twenty minutes Markham endeavoured to draw him out; but Vance seemed suddenly possessed of an ability to say nothing with the blandest fluency. Markham finally became exasperated.

"I'm rapidly coming to the conclusion," he said, "that either you had a hand in Benson's murder, or you're a phenomenally good guesser."

"There is, y'know, an alternative," rejoined Vance. "It might be that my æsthetic hypotheses and metaphysical deductions—as you call 'em—are working out—eh, what?"

A few minutes before we went to lunch Swacker announced that Tracy had just returned from Long Island with his report.

"Is he the lad you sent to look into Pfyfe's *affaires du cœur*?" Vance asked Markham. "For, if he is, I am all a-flutter."

"He's the man. . . . Send him in, Swacker."

Tracy entered, smiling silkily, his black note-book in one hand, his *pince-nez* in the other.

"I had no trouble learning about Pfyfe," he said. "He's well known in Port Washington—quite a character