

radiation with the facts of interference, and of overcoming the inconsistencies inherent in Einstein's hypothesis. His research had already led him to an abandonment of causal space-time coordination of atomic phenomena, and to its replacement by a statistical description. (24) . . . Would have revolutionized physics — made him famous. Shame he was told off before he'd put his data in shape.'

'Do you happen to know where Drukker kept the records of these computations?'

'In a loose-leaf note-book — all tabulated and indexed. Methodical and neat about everything. Even his chirography was like copperplate.'

'You know, then, what the note-book looked like?'

'I ought to. He showed it to me often enough. Red limp-leather cover — thin yellow pages — two or three clips on every sheet holding notations — his name gold-stamped in large letters on the binding. . . . Poor devil! *Sic transit. . . .*'

'Where would this note-book be now?'

'One of two places — either in the drawer of his desk in the study or else in the escritoire in his bedroom. In the daytime, of course, he worked in the study; but he fussed day and night when wrapped up in a problem. Kept an escritoire in his bedroom, where he put his current records when he retired, in case he got an inspiration to monkey with 'em during the night. Then, in the morning, back they'd go to the study. Regular machine for system.'

Vance had been gazing lazily out of the window as Arnesson rambled on. The impression he gave was that he had scarcely heard the description of Drukker's habits; but presently he turned and fixed Arnesson with a languid look. 'I say,' he drawled; 'would you mind toddling upstairs and fetching Drukker's note-book? Look in both the study and the bedroom.'

I thought I noticed an almost imperceptible hesitation on Arnesson's part; but straightway he rose.

'Good idea. Too valuable a document to be left lying round.' And he strode from the room.

Markham began pacing the floor, and Heath revealed his uneasiness by puffing more energetically on his cigar. There was a tense atmosphere in the little drawing-room as we waited for Arnesson's return. Each of us was in a state of expectancy, though just what we hoped for or feared would have been difficult to define.

In less than ten minutes Arnesson reappeared at the door. He shrugged his shoulders and held out empty hands.

'Gone!' he announced. 'Looked in every likely place — couldn't find it.' He threw himself into a chair and relighted his pipe. 'Can't understand it. . . . Perhaps he hid it.'

'Perhaps,' murmured Vance.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE NEMESIS

*(Saturday, April 16; 1 p. m.)*

IT WAS past one o'clock, and Markham, Vance and I rode to the Stuyvesant Club. Heath remained at the Drukker house to carry on the routine work, to draw up his report, and to deal with the reporters who would be swarming there shortly.

Markham was booked for a conference with the Police Commissioner at three o'clock; and after lunch Vance and I walked to Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery and spent an hour at an exhibition of Georgia O'Keeffe's floral abstractions. Later we dropped in at Aeolian Hall and sat through Debussy's G-minor quartette. There were some Cézanne water-colours at the Montross Galleries; but by the time we had pushed our way through the late-afternoon traffic of Fifth Avenue the light had begun to fail, and Vance ordered the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club, where we joined Markham for tea.

'I feel so youthful, so simple, so innocent,' Vance complained lugubriously. 'So many things are happening,

and they're being manipulated so ingeniously that I can't grasp 'em. It's very disconcerting, very confusing. I don't like it — I don't at all like it. Most wearing.' He sighed drearily and sipped his tea.

'Your sorrows leave me cold,' retorted Markham. 'You've probably spent the afternoon inspecting arquebuses and petronels at the Metropolitan Museum. If you'd had to go through what I've suffered —'

'Now, don't be cross,' Vance rebuked him. 'There's far too much emotion in the world. Passion is not going to solve this case. Cerebration is our only hope. Let us be calm and thoughtful.' His mood became serious. 'Markham, this comes very near being the perfect crime. Like one of Morphy's great chess combinations, it has been calculated a score of moves ahead. There are no clues; and even if there were, they'd probably point in the wrong direction. And yet . . . and yet there's something that's trying to break through. I feel it: sheer intuition — that is to say, nerves. There's an inarticulate voice that wants to speak, and can't. A dozen times I've sensed the presence of some struggling force, like an invisible ghost trying to make contact without revealing its identity.'

Markham gave an exasperated sigh.

'Very helpful. Do you advise calling in a medium?'

'There's something we've overlooked,' Vance went on, disregarding the sarcasm. 'The case is a cipher, and the key-word is somewhere before us, but we don't recognize it. 'Pon my soul, it's dashed annoying. . . . Let's be orderly. Neatness — that's our desideratum. First, Robin is killed. Next, Sprigg is shot. Then Mrs. Drukker is frightened with a black bishop. After that, Drukker is shoved over a wall. Making four distinct episodes in the murderer's extravaganza. Three of 'em were carefully planned. One — the leaving of the bishop at Mrs. Drukker's door — was forced on the murderer, and was therefore decided on without preparation. . . .'

'Clarify your reasoning on that point.'

'Oh, my dear fellow! The conveyor of the black bishop

was obviously acting in self-defence. An unexpected danger developed along his line of campaign, and he took this means of averting it. Just before Robin's death Drukker departed from the archery-room and installed himself in the arbour of the yard, where he could look into the archery-room through the rear window. A little later he saw some one in the room talking to Robin. He returned to his house, and at that moment Robin's body was thrown on the range. Mrs. Drukker saw it, and at the same time she probably saw Drukker. She screamed — very natural, what? Drukker heard the scream, and told us of it later in an effort to establish an alibi for himself after we'd informed him that Robin had been killed. Thus the murderer learned that Mrs. Drukker had seen something — how much, he didn't know. But he wasn't taking any chances. He went to her room at midnight to silence her, and took the bishop to leave beside her body as a signature. But he found the door locked, and left the bishop outside, by way of warning her to say nothing on pain of death. He didn't know that the poor woman suspected her own son.'

'But why didn't Drukker tell us whom he saw in the archery-room with Robin?'

'We can only assume that the person was some one whom he couldn't conceive of as being guilty. And I'm inclined to believe he mentioned the fact to this person and thus sealed his own doom.'

'Assuming the correctness of your theory, where does it lead us?'

'To the one episode that wasn't elaborately prepared in advance. And when there has been no preparation for a covert act there is pretty sure to be a weakness in one or more of the details. — Now, please note that at the time of each of the three murders any one of the various persons in the drama could have been present. No one had an alibi. That, of course, was cleverly calculated: the murderer chose an hour when all of the actors were, so to speak, waiting in the wings. But that midnight visit! Ah! That was a different matter. There was no

time to work out a perfect set of circumstances — the menace was too immediate. And what was the result? Drukker and Professor Dillard were, apparently, the only persons on hand at midnight. Arnesson and Belle Dillard were supping at the Plaza and didn't return home until half past twelve. Pardee was hornlocked with Rubinstein over a chess-board from eleven to one. Drukker is now of course eliminated. . . . What's the answer?

'I could remind you,' returned Markham irritably, 'that the alibis of the others have not been thoroughly checked.'

'Well, well, so you could.' Vance lay back indolently and sent a long regular series of smoke-rings towards the ceiling. Suddenly his body tensed, and with meticulous care he leaned over and put out his cigarette. Then he glanced at his watch and got to his feet. He fixed Markham with a quizzical look.

'*Allons, mon vieux.* It's not yet six. Here's where Arnesson makes himself useful.'

'What now?' expostulated Markham.

'Your own suggestion,' Vance replied, taking him by the arm and leading him towards the door. 'We're going to check Pardee's alibi.'

Half an hour later we were seated with the professor and Arnesson in the Dillard library.

'We've come on a somewhat unusual errand,' explained Vance; 'but it may have a vital bearing on our investigation.' He took out his wallet, and unfolded a sheet of paper. 'Here's a document, Mr. Arnesson, I wish you'd glance over. It's a copy of the official score-sheet of the chess game between Pardee and Rubinstein. Very interesting. I've toyed with it a bit, but I'd like your expert analysis of it. The first part of the game is usual enough, but the play after the adjournment rather appeals to me.'

Arnesson took the paper and studied it with cynical amusement.

'Aha! The inglorious record of Pardee's Waterloo, eh?'

'What's the meaning of this, Markham?' asked Profes-

essor Dillard contemptuously. 'Do you hope to run a murderer to earth by dilly-dallying over a chess game?'

'Mr. Vance hoped something could be learned from it.'

'Fiddlesticks!' The professor poured himself another glass of port and, opening a book, ignored us completely.

Arnesson was absorbed in the notations of the chess score.

'Something a bit queer here,' he muttered. 'The time's askew. Let's see. . . . The score-sheet shows that, up to the time of adjournment, White — that is, Pardee — had played one hour and forty-five minutes, and Black, or Rubinstein, one hour and fifty-eight minutes. So far, so good. Thirty moves. Quite in order. But the time at the end of the game, when Pardee resigned, totals two hours and thirty minutes for white, and three hours and thirty-two minutes for Black — which means that, during the second session of the game, White consumed only forty-five minutes whereas Black used up one hour and thirty-four minutes.'

Vance nodded.

'Exactly. There were two hours and nineteen minutes of play beginning at 11 p. m., which carried the game to 1.19 a. m. And Rubinstein's moves during that time took forty-nine minutes longer than Pardee's. — Can you make out what happened?'

Arnesson pursed his lips and squinted at the notations.

'It's not clear. 'I'd need time.'

'Suppose,' Vance suggested, 'we set up the game in the adjourned position and play it through. I'd like your opinion on the tactics.'

Arnesson rose jerkily and went to the little chess table in the corner.

'Good idea.' He emptied the men from the box. 'Let's see now. . . . Oho! A black bishop is missing. When do I get it back, by the way?' He gave Vance a plaintive leer. 'Never mind. We don't need it here. One black bishop was swapped.' And he proceeded to arrange the men to accord with the position of the game at the time of adjournment. Then he sat down and studied the set-up.

'It doesn't strike me as a particularly unfavourable position for Pardee,' ventured Vance.

'Me either. Can't see why he lost the game. Looks drawish to me.' After a moment Arnesson referred to the score-sheet. 'We'll run through the play and find out where the trouble lay.' He made half a dozen moves; then, after several minutes' study, gave a grunt. 'Ha! This is rather deep stuff of Rubinstein's. Amazing combination he began working up here. Subtle, by Gad! As I know Rubinstein, it took him a long time to figure it out. Slow, plodding chap.'

'It's possible, isn't it,' suggested Vance, 'that the working out of that combination explains the discrepancy in time between Black and White?'

'Oh, undoubtedly. Rubinstein must have been in good form not to have made the discrepancy greater. Planning the combination took him all of forty-five minutes — or I'm a duffer.'

'At what hour, would you say,' asked Vance carelessly, 'did Rubinstein use up that forty-five minutes?'

'Well, let's see. The play began at eleven: six moves before the combination started. . . . Oh, say, somewhere between half past eleven and half past twelve. . . . Yes, just about. Thirty moves before the adjournment: six moves beginning at eleven — that makes thirty-six: then on the forty-fourth move Rubinstein moved his pawn to Bishop-7-check, and Pardee resigned. . . . Yes — the working out of the combination was between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty.'

Vance regarded the men on the board, which were now in the position they had occupied at the time of Pardee's resignation. (25)

'Out of curiosity,' he said quietly, 'I played the game through to the checkmate the other night. — I say, Mr. Arnesson; would you mind doing the same. I could bear to hear your comment on it.'

Arnesson studied the position closely for a few minutes. Then he turned his head slowly and lifted his eyes to Vance. A sardonic grin overspread his face.

'I grasp the point. Gad! What a situation! Five moves for Black to win through. And an almost unheard-of finale in chess. Can't recall a similar instance. The last move would be Bishop to Knight-7, mating. Pardee was beaten by the black bishop! Incredible!' (26)

Professor Dillard put down his book.

'What's this?' he exclaimed, joining us at the chess table. 'Pardee was defeated by the bishop?' He gave Vance a shrewd, admiring look. 'You evidently had good reason, sir, for investigating that chess game. Pray overlook an old man's temper.' He stood gazing down at the board with a sad, puzzled expression.

Markham was frowning with deep perplexity.

'You say it's unusual for a bishop alone to mate?' he asked Arnesson.

'Never happens — almost unique situation. And that it should happen to Pardee of all people! Incomprehensible!' He gave a short ironic laugh. 'Inclines one to believe in a nemesis. You know, the bishop has been Pardee's *bête noire* for twenty years — it's ruined his life. Poor beggar! The black bishop is the symbol of his sorrow. Fate, by Gad! It's the one chessman that defeated the Pardee gambit. Bishop-to-Knight-5 always broke up his calculations, disqualified his pet theory, made a hissing and a mocking of his life's work. And now, with a chance to break even with the great Rubinstein, the bishop crops up again and drives him back into obscurity.'

A few minutes later we took our departure and walked to West End Avenue, where we hailed a taxicab.

'It's no wonder, Vance,' commented Markham, as we rode down-town, 'that Pardee went white the other afternoon when you mentioned the black bishop's being at large at midnight. He probably thought you were deliberately insulting him — throwing his life's failure in his face.'

'Perhaps. . . .' Vance gazed dreamily out into the gathering shadows. 'Dashed queer about the bishop being his incubus all these years. Such recurring discouragements affect the strongest minds sometimes; create a



desire for revenge on the world, with the cause of one's failure exalted to an Astraean symbol.'

'It's difficult to picture Pardee in a vindictive rôle,' objected Markham. Then, after a moment: 'What was your point about the discrepancy in time between Pardee's and Rubinstein's playing? Suppose Rubinstein did take forty-five minutes or so to work out his combination. The game wasn't over until after one. I don't see that your visit to Arnesson put us ahead in any way.'

'That's because you're unacquainted with the habits of chess players. In a clock game of that kind no player sits at the table all the time his opponent is figuring out moves. He walks about, stretches his muscles, takes the air, ogles the ladies, imbibes ice-water, and even indulges in food. At the Manhattan Square Masters Tournament last year there were four tables, and it was a common sight to see as many as three empty chairs at one time. Pardee's a nervous type. He wouldn't sit through Rubinstein's protracted mental speculations.'

Vance lighted a cigarette slowly.

'Markham, Arnesson's analysis of that game shows that Pardee had three-quarters of an hour to himself around midnight.'

## CHAPTER XXI

### MATHEMATICS AND MURDER

*(Saturday, April 16; 8.30 p. m.)*

LITTLE was said about the case during dinner, but when we had settled ourselves in a secluded corner of the club lounge-room Markham again broached the subject.

'I can't see,' he said, 'that finding a loophole in Pardee's alibi helps us very much. It merely complicates an already intolerable situation.'

'Yes,' sighed Vance. 'A sad and depressing world. Each step appears to tangle us a little more. And the amazing part of it is, the truth is staring us in the face; only, we can't see it.'

‘There’s no evidence pointing to any one. There’s not even a suspect against whose possible culpability reason doesn’t revolt.’

‘I wouldn’t say that, don’t y’ know. It’s a mathematician’s crime; and the landscape has been fairly cluttered with mathematicians.’

Throughout the entire investigation no one had been indicated by name as the possible murderer. Yet each of us realized in his own heart that one of the persons with whom we had talked was guilty; and so hideous was this knowledge that we instinctively shrank from admitting it. From the first we had cloaked our true thoughts and fears with generalities.

‘A mathematician’s crime?’ repeated Markham. ‘The case strikes me as a series of senseless acts committed by a maniac running amuck.’

Vance shook his head.

‘Our criminal is supersane, Markham. And his acts are not senseless: they’re hideously logical and precise. True, they have been conceived with a grim and terrible humour, with a tremendously cynical attitude; but within themselves they are exact and rational.’

Markham regarded Vance thoughtfully.

‘How can you reconcile these Mother-Goose crimes with the mathematical mind?’ he asked. ‘In what way can they be regarded as logical? To me they’re nightmares, unrelated to sanity.’

Vance settled himself deeper in his chair, and smoked for several minutes. Then he began an analysis of the case, which not only clarified the seeming madness of the crimes themselves, but brought all the events and the characters into a uniform focus. The accuracy of this analysis was brought home to us with tragic and overwhelming force before many days had passed. (27)

‘In order to understand these crimes,’ he began, ‘we must consider the stock-in-trade of the mathematician, for all his speculations and computations tend to emphasize the relative insignificance of this planet and the unimportance of human life. — Regard, first, the mere scope

of the mathematician's field. On the one hand he attempts to measure infinite space in terms of parsecs and light-years, and, on the other, to measure the electron which is so infinitely small that he has to invent the Rutherford unit — a millionth of a millimicron. His vision is one of transcendental perspectives, in which this earth and its people sink almost to the vanishing point. Some of the stars — such as Arcturus, Canopus and Betelgeuse — which he regards merely as minute and insignificant units, are many times more massive than our entire solar system. Shapleigh's estimate of the diameter of the Milky Way is 300,000 light-years; yet we must place 10,000 Milky Ways together to get the diameter of the universe — which gives us a cubical content a thousand milliard times greater than the scope of astronomical observation. Or, to put it relatively in terms of mass: — the sun's weight is 324,000 times greater than the weight of the earth; and the weight of the universe is postulated as that of a trillion (28) — a milliard times a milliard — suns. . . . Is it any wonder that workers in such stupendous magnitudes should sometimes lose all sense of earthly proportions?"

Vance made an insignificant gesture.

'But these are elementary figures — the every-day facts of journeyman calculators. The higher mathematician goes vastly further. He deals in abstruse and apparently contradictory speculations which the average mind can not even grasp. He lives in a realm where time, as we know it, is without meaning save as a fiction of the brain, and becomes a fourth co-ordinate of three-dimensional space; where distance also is meaningless except for neighbouring points, since there are an infinite number of shortest routes between any two given points; where the language of cause and effect becomes merely a convenient shorthand for explanat'ry purposes; where straight lines are non-existent and insusceptible of definition; where mass grows infinitely great when it reaches the velocity of light; where space itself is characterized by curvatures; where there are lower and higher orders

of infinities; where the law of gravitation is abolished as an acting force and replaced by a characteristic of space — a conception that says, in effect, that the apple does not fall because it is attracted by the earth, but because it follows a geodesic, or world-line. . . .

‘In this realm of the modern mathematician, curves exist without tangents. Neither Newton nor Leibnitz nor Bernoulli even dreamed of a continuous curve without a tangent — that is, a continuous function without a differential co-efficient. Indeed, no one is able to picture such a contradiction — it lies beyond the power of imagination. And yet it is a commonplace of modern mathematics to work with curves that have no tangents. — Moreover,  $\pi$  — that old friend of our school-days, which we regarded as immutable — is no longer a constant; and the ratio between diameter and circumference now varies according to whether one is measuring a circle at rest or a rotating circle. . . . Do I bore you?’

‘Unquestionably,’ retorted Markham. ‘But pray continue, provided your observations have an earthly direction.’

Vance sighed and shook his head hopelessly, but at once became serious again.

‘The concepts of modern mathematics project the individual out of the world of reality into a pure fiction of thought, and lead to what Einstein calls the most degenerate form of imagination — pathological individualism. Silberstein, for instance, argues the possibility of five- and six-dimensional space, and speculates on one’s ability to see an event before it happens. The conclusions contingent on the conception of Flammarion’s Lumen — a fictive person who travels faster than the velocity of light and is therefore able to experience time extending in a reverse direction — are in themselves enough to distort any natural and sane point of view. (29) But there is another conceptual Homunculus even weirder than Lumen from the standpoint of rational thinking. This hypothetical creature can traverse all worlds at once with infinite velocity, so that he is able

to behold all human history at a glance. From Alpha Centauri he can see the earth as it was four years ago; from the Milky Way he can see it as it was 4,000 years ago; and he can also choose a point in space where he can witness the ice-age and the present day simultaneously! . . .'

Vance settled himself more deeply in his chair.

'Toying with the simple idea of infinity is enough to unhinge the average man's mind. But what of the well-known proposition of modern physics that we cannot take a straight and ever-advancing path into space without returning to our point of departure? This proposition holds, in brief, that we may go straight to Sirius and a million times further without changing direction, but can never leave the universe: we at last return to our starting-point *from the opposite direction!* Would you say, Markham, that this idea is conducive to what we quaintly call normal thinking? But however paradoxical and incomprehensible it may seem, it is almost rudimentary when compared with other theorems advanced by mathematical physics. Consider, for example, what is called the problem of the twins. One of two twins starts to Arcturus at birth — that is, with accelerated motion in a gravitational field — and, on returning, discovers that he is much younger than his brother. If, on the other hand, we assume that the motion of the twins is Galilean and that they are therefore travelling with uniform motion relative to each other, then each twin will find that his brother is younger than himself! . . .

'These are not paradoxes of logic, Markham: they're only paradoxes of feeling. Mathematics accounts for them logically and scientifically. (30) The point I'm trying to make is that things which seem inconsistent and even absurd to the lay mind, are commonplaces to the mathematical intelligence. A mathematico-physicist like Einstein announces that the diameter of space — of *space*, mind you — is 100,000,000 light-years, or 700 trillion miles; and considers the calculation abecedarian. When we ask what is beyond this diameter, the answer

is: "There is no beyond: these limitations include everything." To wit, infinity is finite! Or, as the scientist would say, space is unbounded but finite. — Let your mind meditate on this idea for half an hour, Markham, and you'll have a sensation that you're going mad.'

He paused to light a cigarette.

'Space and matter — that's the mathematician's speculative territory. Eddington conceives matter as a characteristic of space — a bump in nothingness; whereas Weyl conceives space as a characteristic of matter — to him empty space is meaningless. Thus Kant's noumenon and phenomenon become interchangeable; and even philosophy loses all significance. But when we come to the mathematical conceptions of finite space all rational laws are abrogated. De Sitter's conception of the shape of space is globular, or spherical. Einstein's space is cylindrical; and matter approaches zero at the periphery, or "border condition". Weyl's space, based on Mach's mechanics, is saddle-shaped. . . . Now, what becomes of nature, of the world we live in, of human existence, when we weigh them against such conceptions? Eddington suggests the conclusion that there are no natural laws — namely, that nature is not amenable to the law of sufficient reason. Alas, poor Schopenhauer! (31) And Bertrand Russell sums up the inevitable results of modern physics by suggesting that matter is to be interpreted merely as a group of occurrences, and that matter itself need not be existent! . . . Do you see what it all leads to? If the world is non-causative and non-existent, what is a mere human life? — or the life of a nation? — or, for that matter, existence itself? . . .'

Vance looked up, and Markham nodded dubiously.

'So far I follow you, of course,' he said. 'But your point seems vague — not to say esoteric.'

'Is it surprising,' asked Vance, 'that a man dealing in such colossal, incommensurable concepts, wherein the individuals of human society are infinitesimal, might in time lose all sense of relative values on earth, and come to have an enormous contempt for human life? The com-

paratively insignificant affairs of this world would then become mere petty intrusions on the macrocosmos of his mental consciousness. Inevitably such a man's attitude would become cynical. In his heart he would scoff at all human values, and sneer at the littleness of the visual things about him. Perhaps there would be a sadistic element in his attitude; for cynicism is a form of sadism. . . .'

'But deliberate, planned murder!' objected Markham.

'Consider the psychological aspects of the case. With the normal person, who takes his recreations daily, a balance is maintained between the conscious and the unconscious activities: the emotions, being constantly dispersed, are not allowed to accumulate. But with the abnormal person, who spends his entire time in intense mental concentration and who rigorously suppresses all his emotions, the loosening of the subconscious is apt to result in a violent manifestation. This long inhibition and protracted mental application, without recreation or outlet of any kind, causes an explosion which often assumes the form of deeds of unspeakable horror. No human being, however intellectual, can escape the results. The mathematician who repudiates nature's laws is nevertheless amenable to those laws. Indeed, his rapt absorption in hyperphysical problems merely increases the pressure of his denied emotions. And outraged nature, in order to maintain her balance, produces the most grotesque fulminations — reactions which, in their terrible humour and perverted gaiety, are the exact reverse of the grim seriousness of abstruse mathematical theories. The fact that Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge — both great mathematical physicists — became confirmed spiritists, constitutes a similar psychological phenomenon.'

Vance took several deep inhalations on his cigarette.

'Markham, there's no escaping the fact: these fantastic and seemingly incredible murders were planned by a mathematician as forced outlets to a life of tense abstract speculation and emotional repression. They fulfil all the indicated requirements: they are neat and precise, beautifully worked out, with every minute factor fitting snugly

in place. No loose ends, no remainders, apparently no motive. And aside from their highly imaginative precision, all their indications point unmistakably to an abstrusely conceptive intelligence on the loose — a devotee of pure science having his fling.'

'But why their grisly humour?' asked Markham 'How do you reconcile the Mother-Goose phase of them with your theory?'

'The existence of inhibited impulses,' explained Vance, 'always produces a state favourable to humour. Dugas designates humour as a "*détente*" — a release from tension; and Bain, following Spencer, calls humour a relief from restraint. The most fertile field for a manifestation of humour lies in accumulated potential energy — what Freud calls *Besetzungsenergie* — which in time demands a free discharge. In these Mother-Goose crimes we have the mathematician reacting to the most fantastic of frivolous acts in order to balance his superserious logical speculations. It's as if he were saying cynically: "Behold! This is the world that you take so seriously because you know nothing of the infinitely larger abstract world. Life on earth is a child's game — hardly important enough to make a joke about." . . . And such an attitude would be wholly consistent with psychology; for after any great prolonged mental strain one's reactions will take the form of reversals — that is to say, the most serious and dignified will seek an outlet in the most childish games. Here, incidentally, you have the explanation for the practical joker with his sadistic instincts. . . .

'Moreover, all sadists have an infantile complex. And the child is totally amoral. A man, therefore, who experiences these infantile psychological reversals is beyond good and evil. Many modern mathematicians even hold that all convention, duty, morality, good, and the like, could not exist except for the fiction of free will. To them the science of ethics is a field haunted by conceptual ghosts; and they even arrive at the disintegrating doubt as to whether truth itself is not merely a figment of the imagination. . . . Add to these considerations the sense



of earthly distortion and the contempt for human life which might easily result from the speculations of higher mathematics, and you have a perfect set of conditions for the type of crimes with which we are dealing.'

When Vance had finished speaking Markham sat silent for a long time. Finally he moved restively.

'I can understand,' he said, 'how these crimes might fit almost any of the persons involved. But, on the basis of your argument, how do you account for the notes to the press?'

'Humour must be imparted,' returned Vance. "'A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him who hears it.'" Also, the impulse towards exhibitionism enters into the present case.'

'But the "Bishop" alias?'

'Ah! That's a most vital point. The *raison d'être* of this terrible orgy of humour lies in that cryptic signature.'

Markham turned slowly.

'Does the chess player and the astronomer fulfil the conditions of your theory as well as the mathematical physicist?'

'Yes,' Vance replied. 'Since the days of Philidor, Staunton and Kieseritzki, when chess was something of a fine art, the game has degenerated almost into an exact science; and during Capablanca's régime it has become largely a matter of abstract mathematical speculation. Indeed, Maroczy, Doctor Lasker and Vidmar are all well-known mathematicians. . . . And the astronomer, who actually views the universe, may get an even more intense impression of the unimportance of this earth than the speculative physicist. Imagination runs riot through a telescope. The mere theory of existing life on distant planets tends to reduce earthly life to secondary consideration. For hours after one has looked at Mars, for instance, and dallied with the notion that its inhabitants outnumber and surpass in intelligence our own population, one has difficulty in readjusting oneself to the petty affairs of life here on earth. Even a reading of Percival Lowell's romantic book (32) temporarily takes away from the im-

aginative person all consciousness of the significance of any single planetary existence.'

There was a long silence. Then Markham asked: 'Why should Pardee have taken Arnesson's black bishop that night instead of one from the club where it would not have been missed?'

'We don't know enough of the motive to say. He may have taken it with some deliberate purpose in view. — But what evidence have you of his guilt? All the suspicions in the world would not permit you to take any step against him. Even if we knew indubitably who the murderer was, we'd be helpless. . . . I tell you, Markham, we're facing a shrewd brain — one that figures out every move, and calculates all the possibilities. Our only hope is to create our own evidence by finding a weakness in the murderer's combination.'

'The first thing in the morning,' declared Markham grimly, 'I'm going to put Heath to work on Pardee's alibi that night. There'll be twenty men checking it up by noon, questioning every spectator at that chess game, and making a door-to-door canvass between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Drukker house. If we can find some one who actually saw Pardee in the vicinity of the Drukkers' around midnight, then we'll have a very suspicious piece of circumstantial evidence against him.'

'Yes,' agreed Vance; 'that would give us a definite starting-point. Pardee would have considerable difficulty in explaining why he was six blocks away from the club during his set-to with Rubinstein at the exact hour that a black bishop was being left at Mrs. Drukker's door. . . . Yes, yes. By all means have Heath and his minions tackle the problem. It may lead us forward.'

But the Sergeant was never called upon to check the alibi. Before nine o'clock on the following morning Markham called at Vance's house to inform him that Pardee had committed suicide.

CHAPTER XXII  
THE HOUSE OF CARDS

(*Sunday, April 17; 9 a.m.*)

THE astounding news of Pardee's death had a curiously disturbing effect on Vance. He stared at Markham unbelievably. Then he rang hastily for Currie and ordered his clothes and a cup of coffee. There was an eager impatience in his movements as he dressed.

'My word, Markham!' he exclaimed. 'This is most extr'ordin'ry. . . . How did you hear of it?'

'Professor Dillard phoned me at my apartment less than half an hour ago. Pardee killed himself in the archery-room of the Dillard home some time last night. Pyne discovered the body this morning and informed the professor. I relayed the news to Sergeant Heath, and then came here. In the circumstances I thought we ought to be on hand.' Markham paused to light his cigar. 'It looks as if the Bishop case was over. . . . Not an entirely satisfactory ending, but perhaps the best for every one concerned.'

Vance made no immediate comment. He sipped his coffee abstractedly, and at length got up and took his hat and stick.

'Suicide . . .,' he murmured, as we went down the stairs. 'Yes, that would be wholly consistent. But, as you say, unsatisfact'ry — dashed unsatisfact'ry. . . .'

We rode to the Dillard house, and were admitted by Pyne. Professor Dillard had no more than joined us in the drawing-room when the door-bell rang, and Heath, pugnacious and dynamic, bustled in.

'This'll clean things up, sir,' he exulted to Markham, after the usual ritualistic handshake. 'Those quiet birds. . . you never can tell. Yet, who'd've thought. . .?'

'Oh, I say, Sergeant,' Vance drawled; 'let's not think. Much too wearing. An open mind — arid like a desert — is indicated.'

Professor Dillard led the way to the archery-room.

The shades at all the windows were drawn, and the electric lights were still burning. I noticed, too, that the windows were closed.

'I left everything exactly as it was,' explained the professor.

Markham walked to the large wicker centre-table. Pardee's body was slumped in a chair facing the range door. His head and shoulders had fallen forward over the table; and his right arm hung at his side, the fingers still clutching an automatic pistol. There was an ugly wound in his right temple; and on the table beneath his head was a pool of coagulated blood.

Our eyes rested but a moment on the body, for a startling and incongruous thing diverted our attention. The magazines on the table had been pushed aside, leaving an open space in front of the body; and in this cleared area rose a tall and beautifully constructed house of playing cards. Four arrows marked the boundaries of the yard, and matches had been laid side by side to represent the garden walks. It was a reproduction that would have delighted a child's heart; and I recalled what Vance had said the night before about serious minds seeking recreation in children's games. There was something unutterably horrible in the juxtaposition of this juvenile card structure and violent death.

Vance stood looking down at the scene with sad, troubled eyes.

'*Hic jacet* John Pardee,' he murmured, with a sort of reverence. 'And this is the house that Jack built . . . a house of cards. . . .'

He stepped forward as if to inspect it more closely; but as his body struck the edge of the table there was a slight jar, and the flimsy edifice of cards toppled over.

Markham drew himself up and turned to Heath.

'Have you notified the Medical Examiner?'

'Sure,' The Sergeant seemed to find it difficult to take his eyes from the table. 'And Burke's coming along, in case we need him.' He went to the windows and threw up the shades, letting in the bright daylight. Then he

returned to Pardee's body and stood regarding it appraisingly. Suddenly he knelt down and leaned over.

'That looks to me like the .38 that was in the tool-chest,' he remarked.

'Undoubtedly,' nodded Vance, taking out his cigarette-case.

Heath rose and, going to the chest, inspected the contents of its drawer. 'I guess that's it, all right. We'll get Miss Dillard to identify it after the doc has been here.'

At this moment Arnesson, clothed in a brilliant red-and-yellow dressing-gown, burst excitedly into the room.

'By all the witches!' he exclaimed. 'Pyne just told me the news.' He came to the table and stared at Pardee's body. 'Suicide, eh? . . . But why didn't he choose his own home for the performance? Damned inconsiderate of him to muss up some one else's house this way. Just like a chess player.' He lifted his eyes to Markham. 'Hope this won't involve us in more unpleasantness. We've had enough notoriety. Distracts the mind. When'll you be able to take the beggar's remains away? Don't want Belle to see him.'

'The body will be removed as soon as the Medical Examiner has seen it,' Markham told him in a tone of frosty rebuke. 'And there will be no necessity to bring Miss Dillard here.'

'Good.' Arnesson still stood staring at the dead man. Slowly a look of cynical wistfulness came over his face. 'Poor devil! Life was too much for him. Hypersensitive — no psychic stamina. Took things too seriously. Brooded over his fate ever since his gambit went up in smoke. Couldn't find any other diversion. The black bishop haunted him; probably tipped his mind from its axis. By Gad! Wouldn't be surprised if the idea drove him to self-destruction. Might have imagined he was a chess bishop — trying to get back at the world in the guise of his nemesis.'

'Clever idea,' returned Vance. 'By the by, there was a house of cards on the table when we first saw the body.'

'Ha! I wondered what the cards were doing there. Thought he might have sought solace in solitaire during

his last moments. . . . A card house, eh? Sounds foolish. Do you know the answer?"

'Not all of it. "The house that Jack built" might explain something.'

'I see.' Arnesson looked owlish. 'Playing children's games to the end — even on himself. Queer notion.' He yawned cavernously. 'Guess I'll get some clothes on.' And he went upstairs.

Professor Dillard had stood watching Arnesson with a look at once distressed and paternal. Now he turned to Markham with a gesture of annoyance.

'Sigurd's always protecting himself against his emotions. He's ashamed of his feelings. Don't take his careless attitude too seriously.'

Before Markham could make a reply Pyne ushered Detective Burke into the room; and Vance took the opportunity of questioning the butler about his discovery of Pardee.

'How did it happen you entered the archery-room this morning?' he asked.

'It was a bit close in the pantry, sir,' the man returned, 'and I opened the door at the foot of the stairs to get a little more air. Then I noticed that the shades were down —'

'It's not customary to draw the shades at night, then?'

'No, sir — not in this room.'

'How about the windows?'

'I always leave them slightly open from the top at night.'

'Were they left open last night?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very good. — And after you opened the door this morning?'

'I started to put out the lights, thinking Miss Dillard had forgotten to turn the switch last night; but just then I saw the poor gentleman there at the table, and went straight up and informed Professor Dillard.'

'Does Beedle know about the tragedy?'

'I told her of it right after you gentlemen arrived.'

‘What time did you and Beedle retire last night?’

‘At ten o’clock, sir.’

When Pyne had left us Markham addressed Professor Dillard.

‘It might be well for you to give us what details you can while we’re waiting for Doctor Doremus. — Shall we go upstairs?’

Burke remained in the archery-room, and the rest of us went to the library.

‘I’m afraid there’s little I can tell you,’ the professor began, settling himself and taking out his pipe. There was a noticeable reserve in his manner—a kind of detached reluctance. ‘Pardee came here last night after dinner, ostensibly to chat with Arnesson, but actually, I imagine, to see Belle. Belle, however, excused herself early and went to bed — the child had a bad headache — and Pardee remained until about half past eleven. Then he went out; and that was the last I saw of him until Pyne brought me the terrible news this morning. . . .’

‘But if,’ put in Vance, ‘Mr. Pardee came to see your niece, how do you account for his staying so late after she had retired?’

‘I don’t account for it.’ The old man exhibited perplexity. ‘He gave the impression, though, that there was something on his mind and that he desired a sense of human contact. The fact is, I had to hint rather broadly about being tired before he finally got up to go.’

‘Where was Mr. Arnesson during the evening?’

‘Sigurd remained here talking with us for an hour or so after Belle had retired, and then went to bed. He’d been busy with Drukker’s affairs all afternoon, and was played out.’

‘What time would that have been?’

‘About half past ten.’

‘And you say,’ continued Vance, ‘that Mr. Pardee impressed you as being under a mental strain?’

‘Not a strain exactly.’ The professor drew on his pipe, frowning. ‘He appeared depressed, almost melancholy.’

‘Did it strike you that he was in fear of something?’

‘No; not in the least. He was more like a man who had suffered a great sorrow and couldn’t shake off the effects of it.’

‘When he went out did you go with him into the hall — that is, did you note which direction he took?’

‘No. We always treated Pardee very informally here. He said good-night and left the room. I took it for granted he went to the front door and let himself out.’

‘Did you go to your own room at once?’

‘In about ten minutes. I stayed up only long enough to arrange some papers I’d been working on.’

Vance lapsed into silence — he was obviously puzzled over some phase of the episode; and Markham took up the interrogation.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘that it is useless to ask if you heard any sound last night that might have been a shot.’

‘Everything in the house was quiet,’ Professor Dillard replied. ‘And anyway no sound of a shot would carry from the archery-room to this floor. There are two flights of stairs, the entire length of the lower hall and a passage-way, and three heavy doors between. Moreover, the walls of this old house are very thick and solid.’

‘And no one,’ supplemented Vance, ‘could have heard the shot from the street, for the archery-room windows were carefully closed.’

The professor nodded and gave him a searching look.

‘That is true. I see you, too, noticed that peculiar circumstance. I don’t quite understand why Pardee should have shut the windows.’

‘The idiosyncrasies of suicides have never been satisfactorily explained,’ returned Vance casually. Then, after a short pause, he asked: ‘What were you and Mr. Pardee talking about during the hour preceding his departure?’

‘We talked very little. I was more or less engaged with a new paper of Millikan’s in the *Physics Review* on alkali doublets, and I tried to interest him in it; but his mind, as I’ve said, was noticeably preoccupied, and he amused himself at the chess-board for the best part of the hour.’



‘Ah! Did he, now? That’s most interesting.’

Vance glanced at the board. A number of pieces were still standing on the squares; and he rose quickly and crossed the room to the little table. After a moment he came back and reseated himself.

‘Most curious,’ he murmured, and very deliberately lighted a cigarette. ‘He was evidently pondering over the end of his game with Rubinstein just before he went downstairs last night. The pieces are set up exactly as they were at the time he resigned the contest — with the inevitable black-bishop-mate only five moves off.’

Professor Dillard’s gaze moved to the chess table wonderingly.

‘The black bishop,’ he repeated in a slow tone. ‘Could that have been what was preying on his mind last night? It seems unbelievable that so trivial a thing could affect him so disastrously.’

‘Don’t forget, sir,’ Vance reminded him, ‘that the black bishop was the symbol of his failure. It represented the wreckage of his hopes. Less potent factors have driven men to take their own lives.’

A few minutes later Burke informed us that the Medical Examiner had arrived. Taking leave of the professor we descended again to the archery-room, where Doctor Doremus was busy with his examination of Pardee’s body.

He looked up as we entered and waved one hand perfunctorily. His usual jovial manner was gone.

‘When’s this business going to stop?’ he grumbled. ‘I don’t like the atmosphere round here. Murders — death from shock — suicides. Enough to give any one the creeps. I’m going to get a nice uneventful job in a slaughter house.’

‘We believe,’ said Markham, ‘that this is the end.’

Doremus blinked. ‘So! That’s it, is it? — the Bishop suicides after running the town ragged. Sounds reasonable. Hope you’re right.’

He again bent over the body, and, unflexing the fingers, tossed the revolver to the table.

‘For your armoury, Sergeant.’

Heath dropped the weapon in his pocket.

‘How long’s he been dead, doc?’

‘Oh, since midnight, or thereabouts. Maybe earlier, maybe later. — Any other fool questions?’

Heath grinned. ‘Is there any doubt about it being suicide?’

Doremus glared passionately at the Sergeant.

‘What does it look like? A black-hand bombing?’ Then he became professional. ‘The weapon was in his hand. Powder marks on the temple. Hole the right size for the gun, and in the right place. Position of the body natural. Can’t see anything suspicious. — Why? Got any doubts?’

It was Markham who answered.

‘To the contrary, doctor. Everything from our angle of the case points to suicide.’

‘It’s suicide all right, then. I’ll check up a little further, though. — Here, Sergeant, give me a hand.’

When Heath had helped to lift Pardee’s body to the divan for a more detailed examination, we went to the drawing-room where we were joined shortly by Arnesson.

‘What’s the verdict?’ he asked, dropping into the nearest chair. ‘I suppose there’s no question that the chap committed the act himself.’

‘Why should you raise the point, Mr. Arnesson?’ Vance parried.

‘No reason. An idle comment. Lots of queer things going on hereabouts.’

‘Oh, obviously,’ Vance blew a wreath of smoke upward. ‘No; the Medical Examiner seems to think there’s no doubt in the matter. Did Pardee, by the by, impress you as bent on self-destruction last night?’

Arnesson considered. ‘Hard to say,’ he concluded. ‘He was never a gay soul. But suicide? . . . I don’t know. However, you say there’s no question about it; so there you are.’

‘Quite, quite. And how does this new situation fit into your formula?’

‘Dissipates the whole equation, of course. No more need for speculation.’ Despite his words, he appeared uncertain. ‘What I can’t understand,’ he added, ‘is why

he should choose the archery-room. Lot of space in his own house for a *felo-de-se*.'

'There was a convenient gun in the archery-room,' suggested Vance. 'And that reminds me: Sergeant Heath would like to have Miss Dillard identify the weapon, as a matter of form.'

'That's easy. Where is it?'

Heath handed it to him, and he started from the room.

'Also' — Vance halted him — 'you might ask Miss Dillard if she kept playing cards in the archery-room.'

Arnesson returned in a few minutes and informed us that the gun was the one which had been in the tool-chest drawer, and that not only were playing cards kept in the table drawer of the archery-room but that Pardee knew of their presence there.

Doctor Doremus appeared soon afterwards and iterated his conclusion that Pardee had shot himself.

'That'll be my report,' he said. 'Can't see any way out of it. To be sure, lots of suicides are fakes — but that's *your* province. Nothing in the least suspicious here.'

Markham nodded with undisguised satisfaction.

'We've no reason to question your findings, doctor. In fact, suicide fits perfectly with what we already know. It brings this whole Bishop orgy to a logical conclusion.' He got up like a man from whose shoulders a great burden had been lifted. 'Sergeant, I'll leave you to arrange for the removal of the body for the autopsy; but you'd better drop in at the Stuyvesant Club later. Thank Heaven to-day is Sunday! It gives us time to turn round.'

That night at the club Vance and Markham and I sat alone in the lounge-room. Heath had come and gone, and a careful statement had been drawn up for the press announcing Pardee's suicide and intimating that the Bishop case was thereby closed. Vance had said little all day. He had refused to offer any suggestion as to the wording of the official statement, and had appeared reluctant even to discuss the new phase of the case. But now he gave voice to the doubts that had evidently been occupying his mind.

'It's too easy, Markham — much too easy. There's an aroma of speciousness about it. It's perfectly logical, d' ye see, but it's not satisfying. I can't exactly picture our Bishop terminating his debauch of humour in any such banal fashion. There's nothing witty in blowing one's brain out — it's rather commonplace, don't you know. Shows a woeful lack of originality. It's not worthy of the artificer of the Mother-Goose murders.'

Markham was disgruntled.

'You yourself explained how the crimes accorded with the psychological possibilities of Pardee's mentality; and to me it appears highly reasonable that, having perpetrated his gruesome jokes and come to the end of his rope, he should have done away with himself.'

'You're proably right,' sighed Vance. 'I haven't any coruscating arguments to combat you with. Only, I'm disappointed. I don't like anticlimaxes, especially when they don't jibe with my idea of the dramatist's talent. Pardee's death at this moment is too deuced neat — it clears things up too tidily. There's too much utility in it, and too little imagination.'

Markham felt that he could afford to be tolerant.

'Perhaps his imagination was exhausted on the murders. His suicide might be regarded merely as a lowering of the curtain when the play was over. In any event, it was by no means an incredible act. Defeat and disappointment and discouragement — a thwarting of all one's ambitions — have constituted cause for suicide since time immemorial.'

'Exactly. We have a reasonable motive, or explanation, for his suicide, but no motive for the murders.'

'Pardee was in love with Belle Dillard,' argued Markham; 'and he probably knew that Robin was a suitor for her hand. Also, he was intensely jealous of Drukker.'

'And Sprigg's murder?'

'We have no data on that point.'

Vance shook his head. 'We can't separate the crimes as to motive. They all sprang from one underlying impulse: they were actuated by a single urgent passion.'

Markham sighed impatiently.

'Even if Pardee's suicide is unrelated to the murders, we're at a dead end, figuratively and literally.'

'Yes, yes. A dead end. Very distressing. Consoling for the police, though. It lets them out — for a while, anyway. But don't misinterpret my vagaries. Pardee's death is unquestionably related to the murders. Rather intimate relationship, too, I'd say.'

Markham took his cigar slowly from his mouth and scrutinized Vance for several moments.

'Is there any doubt in your mind,' he asked, 'that Pardee committed suicide?'

Vance hesitated before answering.

'I could bear to know,' he drawled, 'why that house of cards collapsed so readily when I deliberately leaned against the table —'

'Yes?'

'— and why it didn't topple over when Pardee's head and shoulders fell forward on the table after he'd shot himself.'

'Nothing to that,' said Markham. 'The first jar may have loosened the cards —' Suddenly his eyes narrowed. 'Are you implying that the card-house was built *after* Pardee was dead?'

'Oh, my dear fellow! I'm not indulging in implications. I'm merely giving tongue to my youthful curiosity, don't y' know.'

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A STARTLING DISCOVERY

(Monday, April 25; 8.30 p.m.)

EIGHT days went by. The Drukker funeral was held in the little house on 76th Street, attended only by the Dillards and Arnesson and a few men from the university who came to pay a last tribute of respect to a scientist for whose work they had a very genuine admiration.

Vance and I were at the house on the morning of the

funeral when a little girl brought a small cluster of spring flowers she had picked herself, and asked Arnesson to give them to Drukker. I almost expected a cynical response from him, and was surprised when he took the flowers gravely and said in a tone almost tender.

'I'll give them to him at once, Madeleine. And Humpty Dumpty thanks you for remembering him.' When the child had been led away by her governess, he turned to us. 'She was Drukker's favourite. . . . Funny fellow. Never went to the theatre. Detested travel. His only recreation was entertaining youngsters.'

I mention this episode because, in spite of its seeming unimportance, it was to prove one of the most vital links in the chain of evidence that eventually cleared up, beyond all question of doubt, the problem of the Bishop murders.

The death of Pardee had created a situation almost unique in the annals of modern crime. The statement given out by the District Attorney's office had only intimated that there was a possibility of Pardee's being guilty of the murders. Whatever Markham may have personally believed, he was far too honourable and just to cast any direct doubt on another's character without overwhelming proofs. But the wave of terror arising from these strange murders had reached such proportions that he could not, in view of the duty he owed to the community, refrain from saying that he believed the case to be closed. Thus, while no open accusation of guilt was made against Pardee, the Bishop murders were no longer regarded as a source of menace to the city, and a sigh of relief went up from all quarters.

In the Manhattan Chess Club there was probably less discussion of the case than anywhere else in New York. The members felt perhaps that the club's honour was in some way involved. Or there may have been a sense of loyalty towards a man who had done as much for chess as Pardee. But whatever the cause of the club's avoidance of the subject, the fact remained that its members attended, almost to a man, Pardee's funeral. I could

not help admiring this tribute to a fellow chess player; for, whatever his personal acts, he had been one of the great sustaining patrons of the royal and ancient game to which they were devoted. (33)

Markham's first official act on the day after Pardee's death was to secure Sperling's release. The same afternoon the Police Department moved all its records of the Bishop murders to the file marked 'shelved cases', and withdrew the guards from the Dillard house. Vance protested mildly against this latter step; but, in view of the fact that the Medical Examiner's *post-mortem* report had substantiated in every particular the theory of suicide, there was little that Markham could do in the matter. Furthermore, he was thoroughly convinced that the death of Pardee had terminated the case; and he scoffed at Vance's wavering doubts.

During the week following the finding of Pardee's body Vance was restive and more distraught than usual. He attempted to interest himself in various matters, but without any marked success. He showed signs of irritability; and his almost miraculous equanimity seemed to have deserted him. I got the impression that he was waiting for something to happen. His manner was not exactly expectant, but there was a watchfulness in his attitude amounting at times almost to apprehension.

On the day following the Drukker funeral Vance called on Arnesson, and on Friday night accompanied him to a performance of Ibsen's 'Ghosts' — a play which, I happened to know, he disliked. He learned that Belle Dillard had gone away for a month's visit to the home of a relative in Albany. As Arnesson explained, she had begun to show the effects of all she had been through, and needed a change of scene. The man was plainly unhappy over her absence, and confided to Vance that they had planned to be married in June. Vance also learned from him that Mrs. Drukker's will had left everything to Belle Dillard and the professor in the event of her son's death — a fact which appeared to interest Vance unduly.

Had I known, or even suspected, what astounding and

terrible things were hanging over us that week, I doubt if I could have stood the strain. For the Bishop murder case was not ended. The climactic horror was still to come; but even that horror, terrific and staggering as it proved, was only a shadow of what it might have been had not Vance reasoned the case out to two separate conclusions, only one of which had been disposed of by Pardee's death. It was this other possibility, as I learned later, that had kept him in New York, vigilant and mentally alert.

Monday, April 25, was the beginning of the end. We were to dine with Markham at the Bankers Club and go afterwards to a performance of 'Die Meistersinger' (34); but we did not witness the triumphs of *Walther* that night. I noticed that when we met Markham in the rotunda of the Equitable Building he seemed troubled; and we were no more than seated in the club grill when he told us of a phone call he had received from Professor Dillard that afternoon.

'He asked me particularly to come to see him to-night,' Markham explained; 'and when I tried to get out of it he became urgent. He made a point of the fact that Arnesson would be away the entire evening, and said that a similar opportunity might not present itself until it was too late. I asked him what he meant by that; but he refused to explain, and insisted that I come to his house after dinner. I to'd him I'd let him know if I could make it.'

Vance had listened with the intensest interest.

'We must go there, Markham. I've been rather expecting a call of this kind. It's possible we may at last find the key to the truth.'

'The truth about what?'

'Pardee's guilt.'

Markham said no more, and we ate our dinner in silence.

At half past eight we rang the bell of the Dillard house, and were taken by Pyne direct to the library.

The old professor greeted us with nervous reserve.



'It's good of you to come, Markham,' he said, without rising. 'Take a chair and light a cigar. I want to talk to you — and I want to take my time about it. It's very difficult. . . .' His voice trailed off as he began filling his pipe.

We settled ourselves and waited. A sense of expectancy invaded me for no apparent reason, except perhaps that I caught some of the radiations of the professor's obviously distraught mood.

'I don't know just how to broach the subject,' he began; 'for it has to do, not with physical facts, but with the invisible human consciousness. I've struggled all the week with certain vague ideas that have been forcing themselves upon me; and I see no way to rid myself of them but by talking with you. . . .'

He looked up hesitantly.

'I preferred to discuss these ideas with you when Sigurd was not present, and as he has gone to-night to see Ibsen's "Pretenders" — his favourite play, by the way — I took the opportunity to ask you here.'

'What do these ideas concern?' asked Markham.

'Nothing specifically. As I have said, they're very vague; but they have nevertheless grown fairly insistent. . . . So insistent, in fact,' he added, 'that I thought it best to send Belle away for a while. It's true that she was in a tortured state of mind as a result of all these tragedies; but my real reason for shipping her north was that I was beset by intangible doubts.'

'Doubts?' Markham leaned forward. 'What sort of doubts?'

Professor Dillard did not reply at once.

'Let me answer that question by asking another,' he countered presently. 'Are you wholly satisfied in your mind that the situation in regard to Pardee is exactly as it appears?'

'You mean the authenticity of his suicide?'

'That and his presumptive culpability.'

Markham settled back contemplatively.

'Are *you* not wholly satisfied?' he asked.

'I can't answer that question.' Professor Dillard spoke almost curtly. 'You have no right to ask me. I merely wanted to be sure that the authorities, having all the data in their hands, were convinced that this terrible affair was a closed book.' A look of deep concern came over his face. 'If I knew that to be a fact, it would help me to repulse the vague misgivings that have haunted me day and night for the past week.'

'And if I were to say that I am not satisfied?'

The old professor's eyes took on a distant, distressed look. His head fell slightly forward, as if some burden of sorrow had suddenly weighed him down. After several moments he lifted his shoulders and drew a deep breath.

'The most difficult thing in this world,' he said, 'is to know where one's duty lies; for duty is a mechanism of the mind, and the heart is forever stepping in and playing havoc with one's resolutions. Perhaps I did wrong to ask you here; for, after all, I have only misty suspicions and nebulous ideas to go on. But there was the possibility that my mental uneasiness was based on some deep hidden foundation of whose existence I was unaware. . . . Do you see what I mean?' Evasive as were his words, there was no doubt as to the disturbing mien of the shadowy image that lurked at the back of his mind.

Markham nodded sympathetically.

'There is no reason whatever to question the findings of the Medical Examiner.' He made the statement in a forced matter-of-fact voice. 'I can understand how the proximity of these tragedies might have created an atmosphere conducive to doubts. But I think you need have no further misgivings.'

'I sincerely hope you're right,' the professor murmured; but it was clear he was not satisfied. 'Suppose, Markham —' he began, and then stopped. 'Yes, I hope you're right,' he repeated.

Vance had sat through this unsatisfactory discussion smoking placidly; but he had been listening with unwonted concentration, and now he spoke.

'Tell me, Professor Dillard, if there has been any-

thing — no matter how indefinite — that may have given birth to your uncertainty.'

'No — nothing.' The answer came quickly and with a show of spirit. 'I have merely been wondering — testing every possibility. I dared not be too sanguine without some assurance. Pure logic is all very well for principles that do not touch us personally. But where one's own safety is concerned the imperfect human mind demands visual evidence.'

'Ah, yes.' Vance looked up, and I thought I detected a flash of understanding between these two disparate men. Markham rose to make his adieu; but Professor Dillard urged him to remain a while.

'Sigurd will be here before long. He'd enjoy seeing you again. As I said, he's at "The Pretenders", but I'm sure he will come straight home. . . . By the way, Mr. Vance,' he went on, turning from Markham; 'Sigurd tells me you accompanied him to "Ghosts" last week. Do you share his enthusiasm for Ibsen?'

A slight lift of Vance's eyebrows told me that he was somewhat puzzled by this question; but when he answered there was no hint of perplexity in his voice.

'I have read Ibsen a great deal; and there can be little doubt that he was a creative genius of a high order, although I've failed to find in him either the aesthetic form or the philosophic depth that characterizes Goethe's "Faust", for instance.'

'I can see that you and Sigurd would have a permanent basis of disagreement.'

Markham declined the invitation to stay longer, and a few minutes later we were walking down West End Avenue in the brisk April air.

'You will please take note, Markham old dear,' observed Vance, with a touch of waggishness, as we turned into 72nd Street and headed for the park, 'that there are others than your modest collaborator who are hag-ridden with doubts as to the volition of Pardee's taking-off. And I might add that the professor is not in the least satisfied with your assurances.'

'His suspicious state of mind is quite understandable,' submitted Markham. 'These murders have touched his house pretty closely.'

'That's not the explanation. The old gentleman has fears. And he knows something which he will not tell us.'

'I can't say that I got that impression.'

'Oh, Markham — my dear Markham! Weren't you listening closely to his halting, reluctant tale? It was as if he were trying to convey some suggestion to us without actually putting it into words. We were supposed to guess. Yes! That was why he insisted that you visit him when Arnesson was safely away at an Ibsen revival —'

Vance ceased speaking abruptly and stood stockstill. A startled look came in his eyes.

'Oh, my aunt! Oh, my precious aunt! So that was why he asked me about Ibsen! . . . My word! How unutterably dull I've been?' He stared at Markham, and the muscles of his jaw tightened. 'The truth at last?' he said with impressive softness. 'And it is neither you nor the police nor I who has solved this case: it is a Norwegian dramatist who has been dead for twenty years. In Ibsen is the key to the mystery.'

Markham regarded him as though he had suddenly gone out of his mind; but before he could speak Vance hailed a taxicab.

'I'll show you what I mean when we reach home,' he said, as we rode east through Central Park. 'It's unbelievable, but it's true. And I should have guessed it long ago; but the connotation of the signature on those notes was too clouded with other possible meanings. . . .'

'If it were midsummer instead of spring,' commented Markham wrathfully, 'I'd suggest that the heat had affected you.'

'I knew from the first there were three possible guilty persons,' continued Vance. 'Each was psychologically capable of the murders, provided the impact of his emotions had upset his mental equilibrium. So there was nothing to do but to wait for some indication that would focus suspicion. Drukker was one of my three suspects,

but he was murdered; and that left two. Then Pardee to all appearances committed suicide, and I'll admit that his death made reasonable the assumption that he had been the guilty one. But there was an eroding doubt in my mind. His death was not conclusive; and that house of cards troubled me. We were stalemated. So again I waited, and watched my third possibility. Now I know that Pardee was innocent, and that he did not shoot himself. He was murdered — just as were Robin and Sprigg and Drukker. His death was another grim joke — he was a victim thrown to the police in the spirit of diabolical jest. And the murderer has been chuckling at our gullibility ever since.'

'By what reasoning do you arrive at so fantastic a conclusion?'

'It's no longer a question of reasoning. At last I have the explanation for the crimes; and I know the meaning of the "Bishop" signature to the notes. I'll show you a piece of amazing and incontrovertible evidence very soon.'

A few minutes later we reached his apartment, and he led us straight to the library.

'The evidence has been here within arm's reach all the time.'

He went to the shelves where he kept his dramas, and took down Volume II of the collected works of Henrik Ibsen. (35) The book contained 'The Vikings at Helgeland' and 'The Pretenders'; but with the first of these plays Vance was not concerned. Turning to 'The Pretenders' he found the page where the *dramatis personae* were given, and laid the book on the table before Markham.

'Read the cast of characters of Arnesson's favourite play,' he directed.

Markham, silent and puzzled, drew the volume towards him; and I looked over his shoulder. This is what we saw:

HAKON HAKONSSON, *the King elected by the Birchlegs.*

INGA OF VARTEIG, *his mother.*

EARL SKULE.

LADY RAGNHILD, *his wife.*

SIGRID, *his sister.*  
MARGRETE, *his daughter.*  
GUTHORM INGESSON.  
SIGURD RIBBUNG.  
NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*  
DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *Hakon's marshal.*  
IVAR BODDE, *his chaplain.*  
VEGARD VAERADAL, *one of his guard.*  
GREGORIUS JONSSON, *a nobleman.*  
PAUL FLIDA, *a nobleman.*  
INGEBORG, *Andres Skialdarband's wife.*  
PETER, *her son, a young priest.*  
SIRA VILIAM, *Bishop Nicholas's chaplain.*  
MASTER SIGARD OF BRABANT, *a physician.*  
JATGEIR SKALD, *an Icelander.*  
BARD BRATTE, *a chieftain from the Trondhjem district.*

But I doubt if either of us read beyond the line:

NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*

My eyes became riveted on that name with a set and horrified fascination. And then I remembered. . . . *Bishop Arnesson* was one of the most diabolical villains in all literature — a cynical, sneering monster who twisted all the sane values of life into hideous buffooneries.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE LAST ACT

(*Tuesday, April 26; 9 a. m.*)

WITH this astounding revelation the Bishop murder case entered its final, most terrible phase. Heath had been informed of Vance's discovery; and it was arranged that we should meet in the District Attorney's office early the following day for a counsel of war.

Markham, when he took leave of us that night, was more troubled and despondent than I had ever seen him.

'I don't know what can be done,' he said hopelessly. 'There's no legal evidence against the man. But we may

be able to devise some course of action that will give us the upper hand. . . . I never believed in torture, but I almost wish we had access to-day to the thumbscrew and the rack.'

Vance and I arrived at his office a few minutes after nine the next morning. Swacker intercepted us and asked us to wait in the reception room for a little while. Markham, he explained, was engaged for the moment. We had no more than seated ourselves when Heath appeared, grim, pugnacious and sullen.

'I gotta hand it to you, Mr. Vance,' he proclaimed. 'You sure got a line on the situation. But what good it's going to do us I don't see. We can't arrest a guy because his name's in a book.'

'We may be able to force the issue some way,' Vance rejoined. 'In any event, we now know where we stand.'

Ten minutes later Swacker beckoned to us and indicated that Markham was free.

'Sorry to have kept you waiting,' Markham apologized. 'I had an unexpected visitor.' His voice had a despairing ring. 'More trouble. And, curiously enough, it's connected with the very section of Riverside Park where Drukker was killed. However, there's nothing I can do about it. . . .' He drew some papers before him. 'Now to business.'

'What's the new trouble in Riverside Park?' asked Vance casually.

Markham frowned.

'Nothing that need bother us now. A kidnapping, in all likelihood. There's a brief account of it in the morning papers, in case you're interested. . . .'

'I detest reading the papers,' Vance spoke blandly, but with an insistence that puzzled me. 'What happened?'

Markham drew a deep breath of impatience.

'A child disappeared from the playground yesterday after talking with an unknown man. Her father came here to solicit my help. But it's a job for the Bureau of Missing Persons; and I told him so. — Now, if your curiosity is appeased —'

'Oh, but it isn't,' persisted Vance. 'I must hear the details. That section of the park fascinates me strangely.'

Markham shot him a questioning glance through lowered lids.

'Very well,' he acquiesced. 'A five-year-old girl, named Madeleine Moffat, was playing with a group of children at about half past five last evening. She crawled up on a high mound near the retaining wall, and a little later, when her governess went to get her, thinking she had descended the other side, the child was nowhere to be found. The only suggestive fact is that two of the children say they saw a man talking to her shortly before she disappeared; but, of course, they can give no description of him. The police were notified, and are investigating. And that's all there is to the case so far.'

'"Madeleine".' Vance repeated the name musingly. 'I say, Markham; do you know if this child knew Drukker?'

'Yes!' Markham sat up a little straighter. 'Her father mentioned that she often went to parties at his house. . . .'

'I've seen the child.' Vance rose and stood, hands in pockets, gazing down at the floor. 'An adorable little creature . . . golden curls. She brought a handful of flowers for Drukker the morning of his funeral. . . . And now she has disappeared after having been seen talking with a strange man. . . .'

'What's going on in your mind?' demanded Markham sharply.

Vance appeared not to have heard the question.

'Why should her father appeal to you?'

'I've known Moffat slightly for years — he was at one time connected with the city administration. He's frantic — grasping at every straw. The proximity of the affair to the Bishop murders has made him morbidly apprehensive. . . . But see here, Vance; we didn't come here to discuss the Moffat child's disappearance. . . .'

Vance lifted his head: there was a look of startled horror on his face.

'Don't speak — oh, don't speak. . . .' He began pacing



up and down, while Markham and Heath watched him in mute amazement. 'Yes — yes; that would be it,' he murmured to himself. 'The time is right . . . it all fits. . . .'

He swung about, and going to Markham seized his arm.

'Come — quickly! It's our only chance — we can't wait another minute.' He fairly dragged Markham to his feet and led him towards the door. 'I've been fearing something like this all the week —'

Markham wrenched his arm free from the other's grip.

'I won't move from this office, Vance, until you explain.'

'It's another act in the play — the last act! Oh, take my word for it.' There was a look in Vance's eyes I had never seen before. 'It's "Little Miss Muffet" now. The name isn't identical, but that doesn't matter. It's near enough for the Bishop's jest; he'll explain it all to the press. He probably beckoned the child to the tuffet, and sat down beside her. And now she's gone — frightened away. . . .'

Markham moved forward in a sort of daze; and Heath his eyes bulging, leapt to the door. I have often wondered what went on in their minds during those few seconds of Vance's importunate urgings. Did they believe in his interpretation of the episode? Or were they merely afraid not to investigate, in view of the remote possibility that another hideous joke had been perpetrated by the Bishop? Whatever their convictions or doubts, they accepted the situation as Vance saw it; and a moment later we were in the hall, hastening towards the elevator. At Vance's suggestion we picked up Detective Tracy from the branch office of the Detective Bureau in the Criminal Courts Building.

'This affair is serious,' he explained. 'Anything may happen.'

We emerged through the Franklin-Street entrance, and in a few minutes were on our way up-town in the District Attorney's car, breaking speed regulations and

ignoring traffic signals. Scarcely a word was spoken on that momentous ride; but as we swung through the tortuous roads of Central Park Vance said:

'I may be wrong, but we will have to risk it. If we wait to see whether the papers get a note, it'll be too late. We're not supposed to know yet; and that's our one chance. . . .'

'What do you expect to find?' Markham's tone was husky and a little uncertain.

Vance shook his head despondently.

'Oh, I don't know. But it'll be something devilish.'

When the car drew up with a lurch in front of the Dillard house Vance leapt out and ran up the steps ahead of us. Pyne answered his insistent ring.

'Where's Mr. Arnesson?' he demanded.

'At the university, sir,' the old butler replied; and I imagined there was fright in his eyes. 'But he'll be home for an early lunch.'

'Then take us at once to Professor Dillard.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' Pyne told him; 'but the professor is also out. He went to the Public Library —'

'Are you alone here?'

'Yes, sir. Beedle's gone to market.'

'So much the better.' Vance took hold of the butler and turned him towards the rear stairs. 'We're going to search the house, Pyne. You lead the way.'

Markham came forward.

'But, Vance, we can't do that!'

Vance wheeled round.

'I'm not interested in what you can do or can't do. I'm going to search this house. . . . Sergeant, are you with me?' There was a strange look on his face.

'You bet your sweet life!' (I never liked Heath as much as at that moment.)

The search was begun in the basement. Every hallway, every closet, every cupboard and waste space was inspected. Pyne, completely cowed by Heath's vindictiveness, acted as guide. He brought keys and opened doors for us, and even suggested places we might otherwise

have overlooked. The Sergeant had thrown himself into the hunt with energy, though I am sure he had only a vague idea as to its object. Markham followed us disapprovingly; but he, too, had been caught in the sweep of Vance's dynamic purposefulness; and he must have realized that Vance had some tremendous justification for his rash conduct.

Gradually we worked our way upward through the house. The library and Arnesson's room were gone over carefully. Belle Dillard's apartment was scrutinized, and close attention was given to the unused rooms on the fourth floor. Even the servants' quarters on the fourth floor were overhauled. But nothing suspicious was discovered. Though Vance suppressed his eagerness I could tell what a nervous strain he was under by the tireless haste with which he pushed the search.

Eventually we came to a locked door at the rear of the upper hall.

'Where does that lead?' Vance asked Pyne.

'To a little attic room, sir. But it's never used —'

'Unlock it.'

The man fumbled for several moments with his bunch of keys.

'I don't seem to find the key, sir. It's supposed to be here. . . .'

'When did you have it last?'

'I couldn't say, sir. To my knowledge no one's been in the attic for years.'

Vance stepped back and crouched.

'Stand aside, Pyne.'

When the butler had moved out of the way Vance hurled himself against the door with terrific force. There was a creaking and straining of wood; but the lock held.

Markham rushed forward and caught him round the shoulders. 'Are you mad!' he exclaimed. 'You're breaking the law.'

'The law!' There was scathing irony in Vance's retort. 'We're dealing with a monster who sneers at all law. You may coddle him if you care to, but I'm going to search

that attic if it means spending the rest of my life in jail.  
— Sergeant, open that door!’

Again I experienced a thrill of liking for Heath. Without a moment’s hesitation he poised himself on his toes and sent his shoulders crashing against the door’s panel just above the knob. There was a splintering of wood as the lock’s bolt tore through the moulding. The door swung inward.

Vance, freeing himself from Markham’s hold, ran stumbling up the steps with the rest of us at his heels. There was no light in the attic, and we paused for a moment at the head of the stairs to accustom our eyes to the darkness. Then Vance struck a match and, groping forward, sent up the window shade with a clatter. The sunlight poured in, revealing a small room, scarcely ten feet square, cluttered with all manner of discarded odds and ends. The atmosphere was heavy and stifling, and a thick coating of dust lay over everything.

Vance looked quickly about him, and an expression of disappointment came over his face.

‘This is the only place left,’ he remarked, with the calmness of desperation.

After a more careful scrutiny of the room, he stepped to the corner by the little window and peered down at a battered suit-case which lay on its side against the wall. I noticed that it was unlatched and that its straps hung free. Leaning over he threw the cover back.

‘Ah! Here, at least, is something for you, Markham.’

We crowded about him. In the suit-case was an old Corona typewriter. A sheet of paper was in the carriage; and on it had already been typed, in pale-blue *élite* characters, the two lines:

*Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on a tuffet*

At this point the typist had evidently been interrupted, or for some other reason had not completed the Mother-Goose rhyme.

'The new Bishop note for the press,' observed Vance. Then reaching into the suit-case he lifted out a pile of blank paper and envelopes. At the bottom, beside the machine, lay a red-leather note-book with thin yellow leaves. He handed it to Markham with the terse announcement:

'Drukker's calculations on the quantum theory.'

But there was still a look of defeat in his eyes; and again he began inspecting the room. Presently he went to an old dressing-table which stood against the wall opposite to the window. As he bent over to peer behind it he suddenly drew back and, lifting his head, sniffed several times. At the same moment he caught sight of something on the floor at his feet, and kicked it towards the centre of the room. We looked down at it with astonishment. It was a gas-mask of the kind used by chemists.

'Stand back, you chaps!' he ordered; and holding one hand to his nose and mouth he swung the dressing-table away from the wall. Directly behind it was a small cupboard door about three feet high, set into the wall. He wrenched it open and looked inside, then slammed it shut immediately.

Brief as was my view of the interior of the cupboard, I was able to glimpse its contents clearly. It was fitted with two shelves. On the lower one were several books lying open. On the upper shelf stood an Erlenmeyer flask clamped to an iron support, a spirit-lamp, a condenser tube, a glass beaker, and two small bottles.

Vance turned and gave us a despairing look.

'We may as well go: there's nothing more here.'

We returned to the drawing-room, leaving Tracy to guard the door to the attic.

'Perhaps, after all, you were justified in your search,' acknowledged Markham, studying Vance gravely. 'I don't like such methods, however. If we hadn't found the typewriter —'

'Oh, that!' Vance, preoccupied and restless, went to the window overlooking the archery range. 'I wasn't hunting for the typewriter — or the note-book, either.'

What do they matter?' His chin fell forward on his breast, and his eyes closed in a kind of lethargy of defeat. 'Everything's gone wrong — my logic has failed. We're too late.'

'I don't pretend to know what you're grumbling about,' said Markham. 'But at least you've supplied me evidence of a sort. I'll now be able to arrest Arnesson when he returns from the university.'

'Yes, yes; of course. But I wasn't thinking of Arnesson, or the arrest of the culprit, or the triumph of the District Attorney's office. I was hoping —'

He broke off and stiffened.

'We're *not* too late! I didn't think far enough. . . .' He went swiftly to the archway. 'It's the Drukker house we must search. . . . Hurry!' He was already half-running down the hall, Heath behind him, and Markham and I bringing up the rear.

We followed him down the rear stairs, across the archery-room, and out on the range. We did not know, and I doubt if any of us even guessed, what was in his mind; but some of his inner excitation had been communicated to us, and we realized that only a vital urgency could have shaken him so completely out of his usual attitude of disinterest and calm.

When we came to the screen-porch of the Drukker house he reached through the broken wire-netting and released the catch. The kitchen door, to my astonishment, was unlocked; but Vance seemed to expect this, for he unhesitatingly turned the knob and threw it open.

'Wait!' he directed, pausing in the little rear hallway. 'There's no need to search the entire house. The most likely place. . . . Yes! Come along . . . upstairs . . . somewhere in the centre of the house . . . a closet most likely . . . where no one could hear. . . .' As he spoke he led the way up the rear stairs, past Mrs. Drukker's room and the study, and thence to the third floor. There were but two doors on this upper hall — one at the extreme end, and a smaller door set midway in the right wall.

Vance went straight to the latter. There was a key

protruding from the lock, and, turning it, he drew open the door. Only a shadowy blackness met our eyes. Vance was on his knees in a second, groping inside.

‘Quick, Sergeant. Your flash-light.’

Almost before he had uttered the words a luminous circle fell on the floor of the closet. What I saw sent a chill of horror over me. A choked exclamation burst from Markham; and a soft whistle told me that Heath too was appalled by the sight. Before us on the floor, in a limp, silent heap, lay the little girl who had brought flowers to her broken Humpty Dumpty on the morning of his funeral. Her golden hair was dishevelled; her face was deathly pale, and there were streaks down her cheeks where the futile tears had welled forth and dried.

Vance bent over and put his ear to her heart. Then he gathered her tenderly in his arms.

‘Poor little Miss Muffet,’ he whispered, and rising went towards the front stairs. Heath preceded him, flashing his light all the way so there would be no chance of his stumbling. In the main lower hall he paused.

‘Unbolt the door, Sergeant.’

Heath obeyed with alacrity, and Vance stepped out on the sidewalk.

‘Go to the Dillard’s and wait for me there,’ he flung back over his shoulder. And with the child clasped closely to his breast he started diagonally across 76th Street to a house on which I could make out a doctor’s brass name-plate.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE CURTAIN FALLS

*(Tuesday, April 26; 11 a. m.)*

TWENTY minutes later Vance rejoined us in the Dillard drawing-room.

‘She’s going to be all right,’ he announced, sinking into a chair and lighting a cigarette. ‘She was only unconscious, had fainted from shock and fright; and she

was half-suffocated.' His face darkened. 'There were bruises on her little wrists. She probably struggled in that empty house when she failed to find Humpty Dumpty; and then the beast forced her into the closet and locked the door. No time to kill her, d' ye see. Furthermore, killing wasn't in the book. "Little Miss Muffet" wasn't killed — merely frightened away. She'd have died, though, from lack of air. And *he* was safe: no one could hear her crying. . . .'

Markham's eyes rested on Vance affectionately.

'I'm sorry I tried to hold you back,' he said simply. (For all his conventionally legal instincts, there was a fundamental bigness to his nature.) 'You were right in forcing the issue, Vance. . . . And you, too, Sergeant. We owe a great deal to your determination and faith.'

Heath was embarrassed.

'Oh, that's all right, sir. You see, Mr. Vance had me all worked up about the kid. And I like kids, sir.'

Markham turned an inquisitive look on Vance.

'You expected to find the child alive?'

'Yes; but drugged or stunned perhaps. I didn't think of her as dead, for that would have contravened the Bishop's joke.'

Heath had been pondering some troublous point.

'What I can't get through my head,' he said, 'is why this Bishop, who's been so damn careful about everything else, should leave the door of the Drukker house unlocked.'

'We were expected to find the child,' Vance told him. 'Everything was made easy for us. Very considerate of the Bishop, what? But we weren't supposed to find her till to-morrow — after the papers had received the Little-Miss-Muffet notes. They were to have been our clue. But we anticipated the gentleman.'

'But why weren't the notes sent yesterday?'

'It was no doubt the Bishop's original intention to post his poetry last night; but I imagine he decided it was best for his purpose to let the child's disappearance attract public attention first. Otherwise the relationship



between Madeleine Moffat and little Miss Muffet might have been obscured.'

'Yeh!' snarled Heath through his teeth. 'And by tomorrow the kid woulda been dead. No chance then of her identifying him.'

Markham looked at his watch and rose with determination.

'There's no point in waiting for Arnesson's return. The sooner we arrest him the better.' He was about to give Heath an order when Vance intervened.

'Don't force the issue, Markham. You haven't any real evidence against the man. It's too delicate a situation for aggression. We must go carefully or we'll fail.'

'I realize that the finding of the typewriter and the note-book is not conclusive,' concurred Markham. 'But the identification by the child —'

'Oh, my dear fellow! What weight would a jury attach to a frightened five-year-old girl's identification without powerful contributory evidence? A clever lawyer could nullify it in five minutes. And even assuming you could make the identification hold, what would it boot you? It wouldn't connect Arnesson in any way with the Bishop murders. You could only prosecute him for attempted kidnapping — the child's unharmed, remember. And if you should, through a legal miracle, get a doubtful conviction, Arnesson would receive at most a few years in the bastille. That wouldn't end this horror. . . . No, no. You mustn't be precipitate.'

Reluctantly Markham resumed his seat. He saw the force of Vance's argument.

'But we can't let this thing go on,' he declared ferociously. 'We must stop this maniac some way.'

'Some way — yes.' Vance began pacing the room restlessly. 'We may be able to wangle the truth out of him by subterfuge: he doesn't know yet that we've found the child. . . . It's possible Professor Dillard could assist us —' He halted and stood looking down at the floor. 'Yes! That's our one chance. We must confront Arnesson with what we know when the professor is present. The

situation is sure to force an issue of some kind. The professor now will do all in his power to help convict Arnesson.'

'You believe he knows more than he has told us?'

'Undoubtedly. I've told you so from the first. And when he hears of the Little-Miss-Muffet episode, it's not unlikely he'll supply us with the evidence we need.'

'It's a long chance.' Markham was pessimistic. 'But it can do no harm to try. In any event, I shall arrest Arnesson before I leave here, and hope for the best.'

A few moments later the front door opened and Professor Dillard appeared in the hall opposite the archway. He scarcely acknowledged Markham's greeting — he was scanning our faces as if trying to read the meaning of our unexpected visit. Finally he put a question.

'You have thought over what I said last night?'

'Not only have we thought it over,' said Markham, 'but Mr. Vance has found the thing that was disturbing you. After we left here he showed me a copy of "The Pretenders".'

'Ah!' The exclamation was like a sigh of relief. 'For days that play has been in my mind, poisoning every thought. . . .' He looked up fearfully. 'What does it mean?'

Vance answered the question.

'It means, sir, that you've led us to the truth. We're waiting now for Mr. Arnesson. — And I think it would be well if we had a talk with you in the meantime. You may be able to help us.'

The old man hesitated.

'I had hoped not to be made an instrument in the boy's conviction.' His voice held a tragic paternal note. But presently his features hardened; a vindictive light shone in his eyes; and his hand tightened over the knob of his stick. 'However, I can't consider my own feelings now. Come; I will do what I can.'

On reaching the library he paused by the sideboard and poured himself a glass of port. When he had drunk it he turned to Markham with a look of apology.

'Forgive me. I'm not quite myself.' He drew forward the little chess table and placed glasses on it for all of us. 'Please overlook my discourtesy.' He filled the glasses and sat down.

We drew up chairs. There was none of us, I think, who did not feel the need of a glass of wine after the harrowing events we had just passed through.

When we had settled ourselves the professor lifted heavy eyes to Vance, who had taken a seat opposite to him.

'Tell me everything,' he said. 'Don't try to spare me.' Vance drew out his cigarette-case.

'First, let me ask you a question. Where was Mr. Arneson between five and six yesterday afternoon?'

'I — don't know.' There was a reluctance in the words. 'He had tea here in the library; but he went out about half past four, and I didn't see him again until dinner time.'

Vance regarded the other sympathetically for a moment, then he said:

'We've found the typewriter on which the Bishop notes were printed. It was in an old suit-case hidden in the attic of this house.'

The professor showed no sign of being startled.

'You were able to identify it?'

'Beyond any doubt. Yesterday a little girl named Madeleine Moffat disappeared from the playground in the park. There was a sheet of paper in the machine, and on it had already been typed: "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet."''

Professor Dillard's head sank forward.

'Another insane atrocity! If only I hadn't waited till last night to warn you — !'

'No great harm has been done,' Vance hastened to inform him. 'We found the child in time: she's out of danger now.'

'Ah!'

'She had been locked in the hall-closet on the top floor of the Drukker house. We had thought she was here

somewhere — which is how we came to search your attic.'

There was a silence; then the professor asked:

'What more have you to tell me?'

'Drukker's note-book containing his recent quantum researches was stolen from his room the night of his death. We found this note-book in the attic with the typewriter.'

'He stooped even to that?' It was not a question, but an exclamation of incredulity. 'Are you sure of your conclusions? Perhaps if I had made no suggestion last night — had not sowed the seed of suspicion. . . .'

'There can be no doubt,' declared Vance softly. 'Mr. Markham intends to arrest Mr. Arnesson when he returns from the university. But to be frank with you, sir: we have practically no legal evidence, and it is a question in Mr. Markham's mind whether or not the law can even hold him. The most we can hope for is a conviction for attempted kidnapping through the child's identification.'

'Ah, yes . . . the child would know.' A bitterness crept into the old man's eyes. 'Still, there should be some means of obtaining justice for the other crimes.'

Vance sat smoking pensively, his eyes on the wall beyond. At last he spoke with quiet gravity.

'If Mr. Arnesson were convinced that our case against him was a strong one, he might choose suicide as a way out. That perhaps would be the most humane solution for every one.'

Markham was about to make an indignant protest, but Vance anticipated him.

'Suicide is not an indefensible act *per se*. The Bible, for instance, contains many accounts of heroic suicide. What finer example of courage than Rhazis', when he threw himself from the tower to escape the yoke of Demetrius? (36) There was gallantry, too, in the death of Saul's sword-bearer, and in the self-hanging of Ahithophel. And surely the suicides of Samson and Judas Iscariot had virtue. History is filled with notable suicides — Brutus and Cato of Utica, Hannibal, Lucretia, Cleopatra, Seneca. . . . Nero killed himself lest he fall into the hands of Otho and the Pretorian guards. In Greece

we have the famous self-destruction of Demosthenes; and Empedocles threw himself into the crater of Etna. Aristotle was the first great thinker to advance the dictum that suicide is an anti-social act, but, according to tradition, he himself took poison after the death of Alexander. And in modern times let us not forget the sublime gesture of Baron Nogi. . . .’

‘All that is no justification of the act,’ Markham retorted. ‘The law —’

‘Ah, yes — the law. In Chinese law every criminal condemned to death has the option of suicide. The Codex adopted by the French National Assembly at the end of the eighteenth century abolished all punishments for suicide; and in the *Sachsenspiegel* — the principal foundation of Teuton law — it is plainly stated that suicide is not a punishable act. Moreover, among the Donatists, Circumcellions and Patricians suicide was considered pleasing to the gods. And even in More’s Utopia there was a synod to pass on the right of the individual to take his own life. . . . Law, Markham, is for the protection of society. What of a suicide that makes possible that protection? Are we to invoke a legal technicality, when, by so doing, we actually lay society open to continued danger? Is there no law higher than those on the statute books?’

Markham was sorely troubled. He rose and walked the length of the room and back, his face dark with anxiety. When he sat down again he looked at Vance a long while, his fingers drumming with nervous indecision on the table.

‘The innocent of course must be considered,’ he said in a voice of discouragement. ‘As morally wrong as suicide is, I can see your point that at times it may be theoretically justified.’ (Knowing Markham as I did, I realized what this concession had cost him; and I realized, too, for the first time, how utterly hopeless he felt in the face of the scourge of horror which it was his duty to wipe out.)

The old professor nodded understandingly.

‘Yes, there are some secrets so hideous that it is well

for the world not to know them. A higher justice may often be achieved without the law taking its toll.'

As he spoke the door opened, and Arnesson stepped into the room.

'Well, well. Another conference, eh?' He gave us a quizzical leer, and threw himself into a chair beside the professor. 'I thought the case had been adjudicated, so to speak. Didn't Pardee's suicide put *finis* to the affair?' Vance looked straight into the man's eyes.

'We've found little Miss Muffet, Mr. Arnesson.'

The other's eyebrows went up with sardonic amusement.

'Sounds like a charade. What am I supposed to answer: "How's little Jack Horner's thumb?" Or, should I inquire into the health of Jack Sprat?'

Vance did not relax his steady gaze.

'We found her in the Drukker house, locked in a closet,' he amplified, in a low, even tone.

Arnesson became serious, and an involuntary frown gathered on his forehead. But this slackening of pose was only transient. Slowly his mouth twisted into a smirk.

'You policemen are so efficient. Fancy finding little Miss Muffet so soon. Remarkable.' He wagged his head in mock admiration. 'However, sooner or later it was to be expected. — And what, may I ask, is to be the next move?'

'We also found the typewriter,' pursued Vance, ignoring the question. 'And Drukker's stolen notebook.'

Arnesson was at once on his guard.

'Did you really?' He gave Vance a canny look. 'Where were these tell-tale objects?'

'Upstairs — in the attic.'

'Aha! Housebreaking?'

'Something like that.'

'Withal,' Arnesson scoffed, 'I can't see that you have a cast-iron case against any one. A typewriter is not like a suit of clothes that fits only one person. And who can say how Drukker's note-book found its way into our attic? — You must do better than that, Mr. Vance.'

'There is, of course, the factor of opportunity. The Bishop is a person who could have been on hand at the time of each murder.'

'That is the flimsiest of contributory evidence,' the man countered. 'It would not help much towards a conviction.'

'We might be able to show why the murderer chose the sobriquet of Bishop.'

'Ah! That unquestionably would help.' A cloud settled on Arnesson's face, and his eyes became reminiscent. 'I'd thought of that, too.'

'Oh, had you, now?' Vance watched him closely. 'And there's another piece of evidence I haven't mentioned. Little Miss Muffet will be able to identify the man who led her to the Drukker house and forced her into the closet.'

'So! The patient has recovered?'

'Oh, quite. Doing nicely, in fact. We found her, do you see, twenty-four hours before the Bishop intended us to.'

Arnesson was silent. He was staring down at his hands which, though folded, were working nervously. Finally he spoke.

'And if, in spite of everything, you were wrong. . . .'

'I assure you, Mr. Arnesson,' said Vance quietly, 'that I *know* who is guilty.'

'You positively frighten me!' The man had got a grip on himself, and he retorted with biting irony. 'If, by any chance, I myself were the Bishop, I'd be inclined to admit defeat. . . . Still, it's quite obvious that it was the Bishop who took the chessman to Mrs. Drukker at midnight; and I didn't return home with Belle until half past twelve that night.'

'So you informed her. As I recall, you looked at your watch and told her what time it was. — Come, now: what time was it?'

'That's correct — half past twelve.'

Vance sighed and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

'I say, Mr. Arnesson; how good a chemist are you?'

‘One of the best,’ the man grinned. ‘Majored in it. — What then?’

‘When I was searching the attic this morning I discovered a little wall-closet in which some one had been distilling hydrocyanic acid from potassium ferrocyanide. There was a chemist’s gas-mask on hand, and all the paraphernalia. Bitter-almond odour still lurking in the vicinity.’

‘Quite a treasure-trove, our attic. A sort of haunt of Loki, it would seem.’

‘It was just that,’ returned Vance gravely, ‘— the den of an evil spirit.’

‘Or else the laboratory of a modern Doctor Faustus. . . . But why the cyanide, do you think?’

‘Precaution, I’d say. In case of trouble the Bishop could step out of the picture painlessly. Everything in readiness don’t y’ know.’

‘Quite a correct attitude on his part. Really decent of him, in fact. No use putting people to unnecessary bother if you’re cornered. Yes, very correct.’

Professor Dillard had sat during this sinister dialogue with one hand pressed to his eyes, as though in pain. Now he turned sorrowfully to the man he had fathered for so many years.

‘Many great men, Sigurd, have justified suicide — ’ he began; but Arnesson cut him short with a cynical laugh.

‘Faugh! Suicide needs no justification. Nietzsche laid the bugaboo of voluntary death. “*Auf eine stolze Art sterben, wenn es nicht mehr möglich ist, auf eine stolze Art zu leben. Der Tod unter den verächtlichsten Bedingungen, ein unfreier Tod, ein Tod zur unrechten Zeit ist ein Feiglings-Tod. Wir haben es nicht in der Hand, zu verhindern, geboren zu werden; aber wir können diesen Fehler — denn bisweilen ist es ein Fehler — wieder gut machen. Wenn man sich abschafft, tut man die achtungswürdigste Sache, die es giebt; man verdient beinahe damit, zu leben.*” (37) — Memorized that passage from “Götzen-Dämmerung” in my youth. Never forgot it. A sound doctrine.’



'Nietzsche had many famous predecessors who also upheld suicide,' supplemented Vance. 'Zeno the Stoic left us a passionate dithyramb defending voluntary death. And Tacitus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Cato, Kant, Fichte, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, all wrote apologies for suicide. Schopenhauer protested bitterly against the fact that suicide was regarded as a crime in England. . . . And yet, I wonder if the subject can be formulated. Somehow I feel that it's too personal a matter for academic discussion.'

The professor agreed sadly.

'No one can know what goes on in the human heart in that last dark hour.'

During this discussion Markham had been growing impatient and uneasy; and Heath, though at first rigid and watchful, had begun to unbend. I could not see that Vance had made the slightest progress; and I was driven to the conclusion that he had failed signally in accomplishing his purpose of ensnaring Arnesson. However, he did not appear in the least perturbed. I even got the impression that he was satisfied with the way [things were going. But I did notice that, despite his outer calm, he was intently alert. His feet were drawn back and poised; and every muscle in his body was taut. I began to wonder what the outcome of this terrible conference would be.

The end came swiftly. A short silence followed the professor's remark. Then Arnesson spoke.

'You say you know who the Bishop is, Mr. Vance. That being the case, why all this palaver?'

'There was no great haste.' Vance was almost casual. 'And there was the hope of tying up a few loose ends — hung juries are so unsatisfactory, don't y' know. . . . Then again, this port is excellent.'

'The port? . . . Ah yes.' Arnesson glanced at our glasses, and turned an injured look on the professor. 'Since when have I been a teetotaller, sir?'

The other gave a start, hesitated, and rose.

'I'm sorry, Sigurd. It didn't occur to me . . . you never drink in the forenoon.' He went to the sideboard and,

filling another glass, placed it, with an unsteady hand, before Arnesson. Then he refilled the other glasses.

No sooner had he resumed his seat than Vance uttered an exclamation of surprise. He had half risen and was leaning forward, his hands resting on the edge of the table, his eyes fixed with astonishment on the mantel at the end of the room.

‘My word! I never noticed that before. . . . Extr’ordinary!’

So unexpected and startling had been his action and so tense was the atmosphere, that involuntarily we swung about and looked in the direction of his fascinated gaze.

‘A Cellini plaque!’ he exclaimed. ‘The Nymph of Fontainebleau! Berenson told me it was destroyed in the seventeenth century. I’ve seen its companion piece in the Louvre. . . .’

A red flush of angry indignation mounted to Markham’s cheeks; and for myself I must say that, familiar as I was with Vance’s idiosyncrasies and intellectual passion for rare antiques, I had never before known him to exhibit such indefensible bad taste. It seemed unbelievable that he would have let himself be distracted by an *objet-d’art* in such a tragic hour.

Professor Dillard frowned at him with consternation.

‘You’ve chosen a strange time, sir, to indulge your enthusiasm for art,’ was his scathing comment.

Vance appeared abashed and chagrined. He sank back in his seat, avoiding our eyes, and began turning the stem of his glass between his fingers.

‘You are quite right, sir,’ he murmured. ‘I owe you an apology.’

‘The plaque, incidentally,’ the professor added, by way of mitigating the severity of his rebuke, ‘is merely a copy of the Louvre piece.’

Vance, as if to hide his confusion, raised his wine to his lips. It was a highly unpleasant moment: every one’s nerves were on edge; and, in automatic imitation of his action, we lifted our glasses too.

Vance gave a swift glance across the table and, rising went to the front window, where he stood, his back to the room.

So unaccountable was his hasty departure that I turned and watched him wonderingly. Almost at the same moment the edge of the table was thrust violently against my side, and simultaneously there came a crash of glassware.

I leapt to my feet and gazed down with horror at the inert body sprawled forward in the chair opposite, one arm and shoulder flung across the table. A short silence of dismay and bewilderment followed. Each of us seemed momentarily paralysed. Markham stood like a graven image, his eyes fastened on the table; and Heath, staring and speechless, clung rigidly to the back of his chair.

*'Good Gad!'*

It was Arnesson's astonished ejaculation that snapped the tension.

Markham went quickly round the table and bent over Professor Dillard's body.

*'Call a doctor, Arnesson,'* he ordered.

Vance turned wearily from the window and sank into a chair.

*'Nothing can be done for him,'* he said, with a deep sigh of fatigue. *'He prepared for a swift and painless death when he distilled his cyanide. — The Bishop case is over.'*

Markham was glaring at him with dazed incomprehension.

*'Oh, I've half-suspected the truth ever since Pardee's death,'* Vance went on, in answer to the other's unspoken question. *'But I wasn't sure of it until last night when he went out of his way to hang the guilt on Mr. Arnesson.'*

*'Eh? What's that?'* Arnesson turned from the telephone.

*'Oh, yes,'* nodded Vance. *'You were to pay the penalty. You'd been chosen from the first as the victim. He even suggested the possibility of your guilt to us.'*

Arnesson did not seem as surprised as one would have expected.

'I knew the professor hated me,' he said. 'He was intensely jealous of my interest in Belle. And he was losing his intellectual grip — I've seen that for months. I've done all the work on his new book and he's resented every academic honour paid me. I've had an idea he was back of all this devilry; but I wasn't sure. I didn't think, though, he'd try to send me to the electric-chair.'

Vance got up and, going to Arnesson, held out his hand.

'There was no danger of that. — And I want to apologize for the way I've treated you this past half hour. Merely a matter of tactics. Y' see, we hadn't any real evidence, and I was hoping to force his hand.'

Arnesson grinned sombrely.

'No apology necessary, old son. I knew you didn't have your eye on me. When you began riding me I saw it was only technique. Didn't know what you were after, but I followed your cues the best I could. Hope I didn't bungle the job.'

'No, no. You turned the trick.'

'Did I?' Arnesson frowned with deep perplexity. 'But what I don't understand is why he should have taken the cyanide when he thought it was I you suspected.'

'That particular point we'll never know,' said Vance. 'Maybe he feared the girl's identification. Or he may have seen through my deception. Perhaps he suddenly revolted at the idea of shouldering you with the onus. . . . As he himself said, no one knows what goes on in the human heart during the last dark hour.'

Arnesson did not move. He was looking straight into Vance's eyes with penetrating shrewdness.

'Oh, well,' he said at length; 'Oh, well, let it go at that. . . . Anyway, thanks!'

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HEATH ASKS A QUESTION

*(Tuesday, April 26; 4 p.m.)*

WHEN Markham and Vance and I departed from the Dillard house an hour later, I thought the Bishop affair was over. And it was over as far as the public was concerned. But there was another revelation to come; and it was, in a way, the most astounding of all the facts that had been brought to light that day.

Heath joined us at the District Attorney's office after lunch, for there were several delicate official matters to be discussed; and later that afternoon Vance reviewed the entire case, explaining many of its obscure points.

'Arnesson has already suggested the motive for these insane crimes,' he began. 'The professor knew that his position in the world of science was being usurped by the younger man. His mind had begun to lose its force and penetration; and he realized that his new book on atomic structure was being made possible only through Arnesson's help. A colossal hate grew up in him for his foster son; Arnesson became in his eyes a kind of monster whom he himself, like Frankenstein, had created, and who was now rising to destroy him. And this intellectual enmity was augmented by a primitive emotional jealousy. For ten years he had centred in Belle Dillard the accumulated affection of a life of solitary bachelorhood — she represented his one hold on every-day existence — and when he saw that Arnesson was likely to take her from him, his hatred and resentment were doubled in intensity.'

'The motive is understandable,' said Markham. 'But it does not explain the crimes.'

'The motive acted as a spark to the dry powder of his pent-up emotions. In looking about for a means to destroy Arnesson, he hit upon the diabolical jest of the Bishop murders. These murders gave relief to his repressions; they met his psychic need for violent expression;

and at the same time they answered the dark question in his mind how he could dispose of Arnesson and keep Belle Dillard for himself.

‘But why,’ Markham asked, ‘didn’t he merely murder Arnesson and have done with it?’

‘You overlook the psychological aspects of the situation. The professor’s mind had disintegrated through long intense repression. Nature was demanding an outlet. And it was his passionate hatred of Arnesson that brought the pressure to an explosion point. The two impulses were thus combined. In committing the murders he was not only relieving his inhibitions, but he was also venting his wrath against Arnesson, for Arnesson, d’ ye see, was to pay the penalty. Such a revenge was more potent, and hence more satisfying, than the mere killing of the man would have been — it was the great grim joke behind the lesser jokes of the murders themselves. . . .

‘However, this fiendish scheme had one great disadvantage, though the professor did not see it. It laid the affair open to psychological analysis; and at the outset I was able to postulate a mathematician as the criminal agent. The difficulty of naming the murderer lay in the fact that nearly every possible suspect was a mathematician. The only one I knew to be innocent was Arnesson, for he was the only one who consistently maintained a psychic balance — that is, who constantly discharged the emotions arising from his protracted abstruse speculations. A general sadistic and cynical attitude that is volubly expressed, and a violent homicidal outburst, are psychologically equivalent. Giving full rein to one’s cynicism as one goes along produces a normal outlet and maintains an emotional equilibrium. Cynical, scoffing men are always safe, for they are farthest removed from sporadic physical outbreaks; whereas the man who represses his sadism and accumulates his cynicism beneath a grave and stoical exterior is always liable to dangerous fulminations. This is why I knew Arnesson was incapable of the Bishop murders and why I suggested your letting him help us with the investigation. As he admitted, he

suspected the professor; and his request to assist us was, I believe, actuated by a desire to keep posted so that he could better protect Belle Dillard and himself in case his suspicions should prove correct.'

'That sounds reasonable,' acceded Markham. 'But where did Dillard get his fantastic ideas for the murders?'

'The Mother-Goose motif was probably suggested to him when he heard Arnesson jestingly tell Robin to beware of an arrow from Sperling's bow. He saw in that remark a means of venting his hatred against the man who had made it; and he bided his time. The opportunity to stage the crime came shortly after. When he saw Sperling pass up the street that morning, he knew that Robin was alone in the archery-room. So he went below, engaged Robin in conversation, struck him over the head, drove a shaft into his heart, and shoved him out on the range. He then wiped up the blood, destroyed the cloth, posted his notes at the corner, put one in the house letter-box, returned to the library, and called up this office. One unforeseen factor cropped up, however:— Pyne was in Arnesson's room when the professor said he went out on the balcony. But no harm came of it, for though Pyne knew something was amiss when he caught the professor lying, he certainly didn't suspect him of being a murderer. The crime was a decided success.'

'Still and all,' put in Heath, 'you guessed that Robin hadn't been shot with a bow and arrow.'

'Yes. I saw from the battered condition of the nock of the arrow that it had been hammered into Robin's body; and I concluded therefore that the chap had been killed indoors, after having first been stunned with a blow on the head. That was why I assumed that the bow had been thrown to the range from the window — I didn't know then that the professor was guilty. The bow of course was never on the range. — But the evidence on which I based my deductions cannot be held as an error or oversight on the professor's part. As long as his Mother-Goose joke was accomplished, the rest didn't matter to him.'

‘What instrument do you think he used?’ Markham put the question.

‘His walking stick, most likely. You may have noticed it has an enormous gold knob perfectly constructed as a lethal weapon. (38) Incidentally, I’m inclined to think he exaggerated his gout to attract sympathy and to shunt any possible suspicion from himself.’

‘And the suggestion for the Sprigg murder?’

‘After Robin’s death he may have deliberately looked about for Mother-Goose material for another crime. In any event, Sprigg visited the house the Thursday night preceding the shooting; and it was at that time, I imagine, that the idea was born. On the day chosen for the gruesome business he rose early and dressed, waited for Pyne’s knock at half past seven, answered it, and then went to the park — probably through the archery-room and by way of the alley. Sprigg’s habit of taking daily morning walks may have been casually mentioned by Arnesson, or even by the lad himself.’

‘But how do you explain the tensor formula?’

‘The professor had heard Arnesson talking to Sprigg about it a few nights before; and I think he placed it under the body to call attention — through association — to Arnesson. Moreover, that particular formula subtly expressed the psychological impulse beneath the crimes. The Riemann-Christoffel tensor is a statement of the infinity of space — the negation of infinitesimal human life on this earth; and subconsciously it no doubt satisfied the professor’s perverted sense of humour, giving added homogeneity to his monstrous conception. The moment I saw it I sensed its sinister significance; and it substantiated my theory that the Bishop murders were the acts of a mathematician whose values had become abstract and incommensurable.’

Vance paused to light another cigarette, and after a moment’s thoughtful silence continued.

‘We come now to the midnight visit to the Drukkers’. That was a grim *entr’acte* forced on the murderer by the report of Mrs. Drukker’s scream. He feared the woman



had seen Robin's body thrown on the range; and when, on the morning of Sprigg's murder, she had been in the yard and met him returning from the kill, he was more worried than ever that she would put two and two together. No wonder he tried to prevent our questioning her! And at the earliest opportunity he attempted to silence her for all time. He took the key from Belle Dillard's handbag before the theatre that night, and replaced it the next morning. He sent Pyne and Beedle to bed early; and at half past ten Drukker complained of fatigue and went home. At midnight he figured that the coast was clear for his grisly visit. His taking the black bishop as a symbolic signature to the contemplated murder was probably suggested by the chess discussion between Pardee and Drukker. Then again, it was Arnesson's chessman, and I even suspect him of telling us of the chess discussion to call attention to Arnesson's chess set in case the black bishop should fall into our hands.'

'Do you think he had any idea of involving Pardee at that time?'

'Oh, no. He was genuinely surprised when Arnesson's analysis of the Pardee-Rubinstein game revealed the fact that the bishop had long been Pardee's nemesis. . . . And you were undoubtedly right about Pardee's reaction to my mention of the black bishop the next day. The poor chap thought I was deliberately ridiculing him as a result of his defeat at Rubinstein's hands. . . .'

Vance leaned over and tapped the ashes from his cigarette.

'Too bad,' he murmured regretfully. 'I owe him an apology, don't y' know.' He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and, settling back in his chair, took up his narrative. 'The professor got his idea for Drukker's murder from Mrs. Drukker herself. She expressed her imaginative fears to Belle Dillard, who repeated them at dinner that night; and the plan took shape. There were no complications to its execution. After dinner he went to the attic and typed the notes. Later he suggested a walk to Drukker,

knowing Pardee wouldn't remain long with Arnesson; and when he saw Pardee on the bridle path he of course knew Arnesson was alone. As soon as Pardee had walked away, he struck Drukker and tipped him over the wall. Immediately he took the little path to the Drive, crossed to 76th Street, and went to Drukker's room, returning by the same route. The whole episode couldn't have occupied more than ten minutes. Then he calmly walked past Emery and went home with Drukker's note-book under his coat. . . .'

'But why,' interposed Markham, 'if you were sure that Arnesson was innocent, did you make such a point of locating the key to the alley door? Only Arnesson could have used the alley on the night of Drukker's death. Dillard and Pardee both went out by the front door.'

'I wasn't interested in the key from the standpoint of Arnesson's guilt. But if the key was gone, d' ye see, it would have meant that some one had taken it in order to throw suspicion on Arnesson. How simple it would have been for Arnesson to slip down the alley after Pardee had gone, cross the Drive to the little path and attack Drukker after the professor had left him. . . . And, Markham, that is what we were supposed to think. It was, in fact, the obvious explanation of Drukker's murder.'

'What I can't get through my head, though,' complained Heath, 'is why the old gent should have killed Pardee. That didn't throw any suspicion on Arnesson, and it made it look like Pardee was guilty and had got disgusted and croaked himself.'

'That spurious suicide, Sergeant, was the professor's most fantastic joke. It was at once ironical and contemptuous; for all during that comic interlude plans were being made for Arnesson's destruction. And, of course, the fact that we possessed a plausible culprit had the great advantage of relaxing our watchfulness and causing the guards to be removed from the house. The murder, I imagine, was conceived rather spontaneously. The professor invented some excuse to accompany Pardee to the archery-room, where he had already closed the windows

and drawn the shades. Then, perhaps pointing out an article in a magazine, he shot his unsuspecting guest through the temple, placed the gun in his hand, and, as a bit of sardonic humour, built the house of cards. On returning to the library he set up the chessmen to give the impression that Pardee had been brooding over the black bishop. . . .

‘But, as I say, this piece of grim grotesquerie was only a side-issue. The Little-Miss-Muffet episode was to be the *dénouement*; and it was carefully planned so as to bring the heavens crashing down on Arnesson. The professor was at the Drukker house the morning of the funeral when Madeleine Moffat brought the flowers for Humpty Dumpty; and he undoubtedly knew the child by name — she was Drukker’s favourite and had been to the house on numerous occasions. The Mother-Goose idea being now firmly implanted in his mind, like a homicidal obsession, he very naturally associated the name Moffat with Muffet. Indeed, it’s not unlikely that Drukker or Mrs. Drukker had called the child “Little Miss Muffet” in his presence. It was easy for him to attract her attention and summon her to the mound by the wall yesterday afternoon. He probably told her that Humpty Dumpty wanted to see her; and she came with him eagerly, following him under the trees by the bridle path, thence across the Drive, and through the alley between the apartment houses. No one would have noticed them, for the Drive is teeming with children at that hour. Then last night he planted in us the seed of suspicion against Arnesson, believing that when the Little-Miss-Muffet notes reached the press we would look for the child and find her, dead from lack of air, in the Drukker house. . . . A clever, devilish plan?’

‘But did he expect us to search the attic of his own home?’

‘Oh, yes; but not until to-morrow. By then he would have cleaned out the closet and put the typewriter in a more conspicuous place. And he would have removed the note-book, for there’s little doubt that he intended

to appropriate Drukker's quantum researches. But we came a day too soon, and upset his calculations.'

Markham smoked moodily for a time.

'You say you were convinced of Dillard's guilt last night when you remembered the character of *Bishop Arnesson*. . . .'

'Yes — oh, yes. That gave me the motive. At that moment I realized that the professor's object was to shoulder Arnesson with the guilt, and that the signature to the notes had been chosen for that purpose.'

'He waited a long time before he called our attention to "The Pretenders",' commented Markham.

'The fact is, he didn't expect to have to do it at all. He thought we'd discover the name for ourselves. But we were duller than he anticipated; and at last, in desperation, he sent for you and beat cleverly round the bush, accentuating "The Pretenders".'

Markham did not speak for several moments. He sat frowning reproachfully, his fingers tapping a tattoo on the blotter.

'Why,' he asked at length, 'did you not tell us last night that the professor and not Arnesson was the Bishop? You let us think —'

'My dear Markham! What else could I do? In the first place, you wouldn't have believed me, and would most likely have suggested another ocean trip, what? Furthermore, it was essential to let the professor think we suspected Arnesson. Otherwise, we'd have had no chance to force the issue as we did. Subterfuge was our only hope; and I knew that if you and the Sergeant suspected him you'd be sure to give the game away. As it was, you didn't have to dissemble; and lo! it all worked out beautifully.'

The Sergeant, I noticed, had, for the past half hour, been regarding Vance from time to time with a look of perplexed uncertainty; but for some reason he had seemed reluctant to give voice to his troubled thoughts. Now, however, he shifted his position uneasily and, taking his cigar slowly from his mouth, asked a startling question.

‘I ain’t complaining about your not putting us wise last night, Mr. Vance, but what I would like to know is: why, when you hopped up and pointed at that plate on the mantel, did you switch Arnesson’s and the old gent’s glasses?’

Vance sighed deeply and gave a hopeless wag of the head.

‘I might have known that nothing could escape your eagle eye, Sergeant.’

Markham thrust himself forward over the desk, and glared at Vance with angry bewilderment.

‘What’s this!’ he spluttered, his usual self-restraint deserting him. ‘You changed the glasses? You deliberately —’

‘Oh, I say!’ pleaded Vance. ‘Let not your wrathful passions rise.’ He turned to Heath with mock reproach. ‘Behold what you’ve got me in for, Sergeant.’

‘This is no time for evasion.’ Markham’s voice was cold and inexorable. ‘I want an explanation.’

‘Oh, well. Attend. My idea, as I’ve explained to you, was to fall in with the professor’s plan and appear to suspect Arnesson. This morning I purposely let him see that we had no evidence, and that, even if we arrested Arnesson, it was doubtful if we could hold him. I knew that, in the circumstances, he would take some action — that he would try to meet the situation in some heroic way — for the sole object of the murders was to destroy Arnesson utterly. That he would commit some overt act and give his hand away, I was confident. What it would be I didn’t know. But we’d be watching him closely. . . . Then the wine gave me an inspiration. Knowing he had cyanide in his possession, I brought up the subject of suicide, and thus planted the idea in his mind. He fell into the trap, and attempted to poison Arnesson and make it appear like suicide. I saw him surreptitiously empty a small phial of colourless fluid into Arnesson’s glass at the sideboard when he poured the wine. My first intention was to halt the murder and have the wine analysed. We could have searched him and

found the phial, and I could have testified to the fact that I saw him poison the wine. This evidence, in addition to the identification by the child, might have answered our purpose. But at the last moment, after he'd refilled all our glasses, I decided on a simpler course —'

'And so you diverted our attention and switched the glasses!'

'Yes, yes. Of course. I figured that a man should be willing to drink the wine he pours for another.'

'You took the law in your own hands!'

'I took it in my arms — it was helpless. . . . But don't be so righteous. Do you bring a rattlesnake to the bar of justice? Do you give a mad dog his day in court? I felt no more compunction in aiding a monster like Dillard into the Beyond than I would have in crushing out a poisonous reptile in the act of striking.'

'But it was murder!' exclaimed Markham in horrified indignation.

'Oh, doubtless,' said Vance cheerfully. 'Yes — of course. Most reprehensible. . . . I say, am I by any chance under arrest?'

The 'suicide' of Professor Dillard terminated the famous Bishop murder case, and automatically cleared Pardee's reputation of all suspicion. The following year Arnesson and Belle Dillard were married quietly and sailed for Norway, where they made their home. Arnesson had accepted the chair of applied mathematics at the University of Oslo; and it will be remembered that two years later he was awarded the Nobel prize for his work in physics. The old Dillard house in 75th Street was torn down, and on the site now stands a modern apartment house on whose façade are two huge terracotta medallions strongly suggestive of archery targets. I have often wondered if the architect was deliberate in his choice of decoration.

## NOTES

(1) Mr. Joseph A. Margolies of Brentano's told me that for a period of several weeks during the Bishop murder case more copies of 'Mother Goose Melodies' were sold than of any current novel. And one of the smaller publishing houses reprinted and completely sold out an entire edition of those famous old nursery rhymes.

(2) The book Vance referred to was that excellent and comprehensive treatise, 'Archery', by Robert P. Elmer, M. D.

(3) Though Laplace is best known for his 'Mécanique Céleste', Vance was here referring to his masterly work, 'Théorie Analytique des Probabilités', which Herschel called 'the ne plus ultra of mathematical skill and power'.

(4) Heath was referring to Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.

(5) The book referred to by Professor Dillard was the great work which appeared two years later, 'The Atomic Structure of Radiant Energy,' a mathematical emendation of Planck's quantum theory refuting the classical axiom of the continuity of all physical processes, as contained in Maximus Tyrius' Οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα ἡ φύσις μεταπηδᾷ ἀθρόως.

(6) The American chess master — sometimes confused with Doctor Emanuel Lasker, the former world champion.

(7) Mae Brenner will still be remembered by Continental music lovers. Her début was made at the unprecedented age of twenty-three as *Sulamith* in 'Die Königin von Saba' at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna; although her greatest success was perhaps her *Desdemona* in 'Othello' — the last rôle she sang before her retirement.

(8) The name was, of course, originally spelled Drucker. The change — possibly some vague attempt at Americanization — was made by Mrs. Drukker when she settled in this country.

(9) He gave me very much the same impression as did General Homer Lee when I visited him at Santa Monica shortly before his death.

(10) Saturday was a 'half day' at the District Attorney's office. Swacker was Markham's secretary.

(11) The old anonymous nursery rhyme, 'The Death and Burial of Cock Robin', is not, as is commonly supposed, one of the original 'Mother Goose Melodies', although it has often been included in modern editions of that famous work.

(12) Inspector William M. Moran, who died two years ago was, at the time of the Bishop case, the Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.

(13) This expression was actually developed by Christoffel for a problem on the conductivity of heat, and published by him in 1869 in the 'Crelle Journal für reine und angewandte Mathematik'.

(14) A similar state of panic obtained in London in 1888 when Jack the Ripper was engaged in his grisly, abnormal debauch; and again in Hanover in 1923 when Haarmann, the werewolf, was busy with his antropophagous slaughter. But I can recall no other modern parallel for the atmosphere of gruesome horror that settled over New York during the Bishop murders.

(15) Chief Inspector O'Brien was then in command of the entire Police Department.

(16) Captain Hagedorn was the fire-arms expert of the New York Police Department. It was he who, in the Benson murder case, gave Vance the data with which to establish the height of the murderer; and who made the examination of the three bullets fired from the old Smith & Wesson revolver in the Greene murder case.

(17) Akiba Rubinstein was then, and is to-day, the chess champion of Poland and one of the great international masters of the game. He was born in Stavisk, near Lodz, in 1882 and made his début in international chess at the Ostend tournament in 1906. His recent visit to America resulted in a series of new triumphs.

(18) Since this discussion took place Professor Pickering has posited from the perturbations of Uranus two other outer planets beyond Neptune: *P* and *S*.

(19) Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office.

(20) 'Louise' was Vance's favourite modern opera, but he greatly preferred Mary Garden to Farrar in the title rôle.

(21) It may be recalled that the *World's* accounts of the Bishop case were the envy of the other metropolitan newspapers. Sergeant Heath, though impartial in his statements of facts to the press, nevertheless managed to save several picturesque *bonnes bouches* for Quinan, and permitted himself certain speculations which, while having no news value, gave the *World's* stories an added interest and colour.

(22) Guilfoyle, it may be remembered, was one of the detectives who shadowed Tony Skeel in the Canary murder case.

(23) Hennessey had kept watch with Doctor Drumm over the Greene mansion from the Narcoss Flats, in the Greene murder case. Snitkin also had taken part in the Greene investigation, and had played a minor rôle in both the Benson and the Canary case. The dapper Emery was the detective who had unearthed the cigarette stubs from beneath the fire-logs in Alvin Benson's living-room.



(24) An important step towards the solution of these complex problems was taken a few years later by the de Broglie-Schrödinger theory as laid down in de Broglie's 'Ondes et Mouvements' and Schrödinger's 'Abhandlungen zur Wellenmechanik'.

(25) For the benefit of the expert chess-player who may be academically interested I append the exact position of the game when Pardee resigned: — WHITE: King at QKt5; Rook at QB8; Pawns at QR2 and Q2. BLACK: King at Q5; Knight at QKt5; Bishop at QR6; Pawns at QKt7 and QB7.

(26) The final five unplayed moves for Black to mate, as I later obtained them from Vance, were: — 45. RxP; KtxR. 46. KxKt; P — Kt8 (Queen). 47. KxQ; K — Q6. 48. K — R5; K — B7. 49. P — Q3; B — Kt7 mate.

(27) I am obviously unable to set down Vance's exact words, despite the completeness of my notes; but I sent him a proof of the following passages with a request that he revise and edit them; so that, as they now stand, they represent an accurate paraphrase of his analysis of the psychological factors of the Bishop murders.

(28) Vance was here using the English connotation of 'trillion', which is the third power of a million, as opposed to the American and French system of numeration which regards a trillion as a mere million millions.

(29) Lumen was invented by the French astronomer to prove the possibility of the reversal of time. With a speed of 250,000 miles per second, he was conceived as soaring into space at the end of the battle of Waterloo, and catching up all the light-rays that had left the battlefield. He attained a gradually increasing lead, until at the end of two days he was witnessing, not the end, but the beginning of the battle; and in the meantime he had been viewing events in reverse order. He had seen projectiles leaving the objects they had penetrated and returning to the cannon; dead men coming to life and arranging themselves in battle formation. Another hypothetical adventure of Lumen was jumping to the moon, turning about instantaneously, and seeing himself leaping from the moon to the earth backwards.

(30) Vance requested me to mention here A. d'Abro's recent scholarly work, 'The Evolution of Scientific Thought', in which there is an excellent discussion of the paradoxes associated with space-time.

(31) Vance's M. A. thesis, I recall, dealt with Schopenhauer's 'Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde'.

(32) I do not know whether Vance was here referring to 'Mars and Its Canals' or 'Mars as the Abode of Life'.

(33) Pardee left in his will a large sum for the furtherance of chess and in the autumn of that same year, it will be remembered, the Pardee Memorial Tournament was held at Cambridge Springs.

(34) Of the Wagnerian operas this was Vance's favourite. He always asserted that it was the only opera that had the structural form of a symphony; and more than once he expressed the regret that it had not been written as an orchestral piece instead of as a conveyance for an absurd drama.

(35) Vance's set was the William Archer copyright edition, published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

(36) I admit that the name of Rhazis was unfamiliar to me; and when I looked it up later I found that the episode to which Vance referred does not appear in the Anglican Bible, but in the second book of Maccabees in the Apocrypha.

(37) 'One should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. The death which takes place in the most contemptible circumstances, the death that is not free, the death which occurs at the wrong time, is the death of a coward. We have not the power to prevent ourselves from being born; but this error — for sometimes it is an error — can be rectified if we choose. The man who does away with himself, performs the most estimable of deeds; he almost deserves to live for having done so.'

(38) It was discovered later that the large weighted gold handle, which was nearly eight inches long, was loose and could be easily removed from the stick. The handle weighed nearly two pounds and, as Vance had observed, constituted a highly efficient 'black jack'. Whether or not it had been loosened for the purpose to which it was put, is of course wholly a matter of conjecture.

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