

THE
CANARY MURDER CASE

VAN DINE



THE CANARY MURDER
CASE

By the Same Author

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THE BENSON MURDER CASE

THE GREENE MURDER CASE

The Canary
Murder Case

by S. S. Van Dine

LONDON

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The CANARY MURDER CASE

Chapter I

THE "CANARY"

IN the offices of the Homicide Bureau of the Detective Division of the New York Police Department, on the third floor of the Police Headquarters building in Center Street, there is a large steel filing cabinet; and within it, among thousands of others of its kind, there reposes a small green index-card on which is typed: "ODELL, MARGARET. 184 West 71st Street. Sept. 10. Murder: Strangled about 11 p.m. Apartment ransacked. Jewellery stolen. Body found by Amy Gibson, maid."

Here, in a few commonplace words, is the bleak, unadorned statement of one of the most astonishing crimes in the police annals of this country—a crime so contradictory, so baffling, so ingenious, so unique, that for many days the best minds of the Police Department and the District Attorney's office were completely at a loss as to even a method of approach. Each line of investigation only tended to prove that Margaret Odell could not possibly have been murdered. And yet, huddled on the great silken

davenport in her living-room lay the girl's strangled body, giving the lie to so grotesque a conclusion.

The true story of this crime, as it eventually came to light after a disheartening period of utter darkness and confusion, revealed many strange and bizarre ramifications, many dark recesses of man's unexplored nature, and the uncanny subtlety of a human mind sharpened by desperate and tragic despair. And it also revealed a hidden page of passional melodrama which, in its essence and organisms, was no less romantic and fascinating than that vivid, theatrical section of the *Comédie Humaine* which deals with the fabulous love of Baron Nucingen for Esther van Gobseck, and with the unhappy Torpille's tragic death.

Margaret Odell was a product of the bohemian *demi-monde* of Broadway—a scintillant figure who seemed somehow to typify the gaudy and spurious romance of transient gaiety. For nearly two years before her death she had been the most conspicuous and, in a sense, popular figure of the city's night life. In our grandparents' day she might have had conferred upon her that somewhat questionable designation, "the toast of the town"; but to-day there are too many aspirants for this classification, too many cliques and violent schisms in the Lepidoptera of our café life, to permit of any one competitor being thus singled out. But, for all the darlings of both professional and lay press-agents, Margaret Odell was a character of unquestioned fame in her little world.

Her notoriety was due in part to certain legendary tales of her affairs with one or two obscure potentates in the back-washes of Europe. She had spent two years abroad after her first success in "The Bretonne Maid"—a popular musical comedy in which she had been mysteriously raised from obscurity to the rank of "star"—and, one may cynically imagine, her press-agent took full advantage of her absence to circulate vermilion tales of her conquests.

Her appearance went far toward sustaining her somewhat

equivocal fame. There was no question that she was beautiful in a hard, flamboyant way. I remember seeing her dancing one night at the Antlers Club—a famous rendezvous for post-midnight pleasure-seekers, run by the notorious Red Raegan.¹ She impressed me then as a girl of uncommon loveliness, despite the calculating, predatory caste of her features. She was of medium height, slender, graceful in a leonine way, and, I thought, a trifle aloof and even haughty in manner—a result, perhaps, of her reputed association with European royalty. She had the traditional courtesan's full, red lips, and the wide, mongoose eyes of Rosetti's "Blessed Damozel." There was in her face that strange combination of sensual promise and spiritual renunciation with which the painters of all ages have sought to endow their conceptions of the Eternal Magdalene. Hers was the type of face, voluptuous and with a hint of mystery, which rules man's emotions and, by subjugating his mind, drives him to desperate deeds.

Margaret Odell had received the sobriquet of Canary as a result of a part she had played in an elaborate ornithological ballet of the "Follies," in which each girl had been gowned to represent a variety of bird. To her had fallen the rôle of canary; and her costume of white-and-yellow satin, together with her mass of shining golden hair and pink-and-white complexion, had distinguished her in the eyes of the spectators as a creature of outstanding charm. Before a fortnight had passed—so eulogistic were her press notices, and so unerringly did the audience single her out for applause—the "Bird Ballet" was changed to the "Canary Ballet," and Miss Odell was promoted to the rank of what might charitably be called *première danseuse*, at the same time having a solo waltz and a song² interpolated for the special display of her charms and talents.

¹ The Antlers Club has since been closed by the police; and Red Raegan is now serving a long term in Sing Sing for grand larceny.

² Written especially for her by B. G. De Sylva.

She had quitted the "Follies" at the close of the season, and during her subsequent spectacular career in the haunts of Broadway's night life she had been popularly and familiarly called the Canary. Thus it happened that when her dead body was found, brutally strangled, in her apartment, the crime immediately became known, and was always thereafter referred to, as the Canary murder.

My own participation in the investigation of the Canary murder case—or rather my rôle of Boswellian spectator—constituted one of the most memorable experiences of my life. At the time of Margaret Odell's murder John F.-X. Markham was District Attorney of New York, having taken office the preceding January. I need hardly remind you that during the four years of his incumbency he distinguished himself by his almost uncanny success as a criminal investigator. The praise which was constantly accorded him, however, was highly distasteful to him; for, being a man with a keen sense of honour, he instinctively shrank from accepting credit for achievements not wholly his own. The truth is that Markham played only a subsidiary part in the majority of his most famous criminal cases. The credit for their actual solution belonged to one of Markham's very close friends, who refused, at the time, to permit the facts to be made public.

This man was a young social aristocrat, whom, for purposes of anonymity, I have chosen to call Philo Vance.

Vance had many amazing gifts and capabilities. He was an art collector in a small way, a fine amateur pianist, and a profound student of æsthetics and psychology. Although an American, he had largely been educated in Europe, and still retained a slight English accent and intonation. He had a liberal independent income, and spent considerable time fulfilling the social obligations which devolved on him as a result of family connections; but he was neither an idler nor a dilettante. His manner was cynical and aloof; and

those who met him only casually, set him down as a snob. But knowing Vance, as I did, intimately, I was able to glimpse the real man beneath the surface indications; and I knew that his cynicism and aloofness, far from being a pose, sprang instinctively from a nature which was at once sensitive and solitary.

Vance was not yet thirty-five, and, in a cold, sculptural fashion, was impressively good-looking. His face was slender and mobile; but there was a stern, sardonic expression to his features, which acted as a barrier between him and his fellows. He was not emotionless, but his emotions were, in the main, intellectual. He was often criticised for his asceticism, yet I have seen him exhibit rare bursts of enthusiasm over an æsthetic or psychological problem. However, he gave the impression of remaining remote from all mundane matters; and, in truth, he looked upon life like a dispassionate and impersonal spectator at a play, secretly amused and debonairly cynical at the meaningless futility of it all. Withal, he had a mind avid for knowledge, and few details of the human comedy that came within his sphere of vision escaped him.

It was as a direct result of this intellectual inquisitiveness that he became actively, though unofficially, interested in Markham's criminal investigations.

I kept a fairly complete record of the cases in which Vance participated as a kind of *amicus curiæ*, little thinking that I would ever be privileged to make them public; but Markham, after being defeated, as you remember, on a hopelessly split ticket at the next election, withdrew from politics; and last year Vance went abroad to live, declaring he would never return to America. As a result, I obtained permission from both of them to publish my notes in full. Vance stipulated only that I should not reveal his name; but otherwise no restrictions were placed upon me.

I have related elsewhere¹ the peculiar circumstances

¹ "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribner's, 1926).

which led to Vance's participation in criminal research, and how, in the face of almost insuperable contradictory evidence, he solved the mysterious shooting of Alvin Benson. The present chronicle deals with his solution of Margaret Odell's murder, which took place in the early fall of the same year, and which, you will recall, created an even greater sensation than its predecessor.¹

A curious set of circumstances was accountable for the way in which Vance was shouldered with this new investigation. Markham for weeks had been badgered by the anti-administration newspapers for the signal failures of his office in obtaining convictions against certain underworld offenders whom the police had turned over to him for prosecution. As a result of prohibition a new and dangerous and wholly undesirable kind of night life had sprung up in New York. A large number of well-financed cabarets, calling themselves night clubs, had made their appearance along Broadway and in its side streets; and already there had been an appalling number of serious crimes, both passionnal and monetary, which, it was said, had had their inception in these unsavory resorts.

At last, when a case of murder accompanying a hold-up and jewel robbery in one of the family hotels up-town was traced directly to plans and preparations made in one of the night clubs, and when two detectives of the Homicide Bureau investigating the case were found dead one morning in the neighbourhood of the club, with bullet wounds in their backs, Markham decided to pigeonhole the other

¹The Loeb-Leopold crime, the Dorothy King case, and the Hall Mills murder came later; but the Canary murder proved fully as conspicuous a case as the Nan Patterson—"Cæsar" Young affair, Durant's murder of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams in San Francisco, the Molineux arsenic-poisoning case, and the Carlyle Harris morphine murder. To find a parallel in point of public interest one must recall the Borden double-murder in Fall River, The Thaw case, the shooting of Elwell, and the Rosenthal murder.

affairs of his office and take a hand personally in the intolerable criminal conditions that had arisen.¹

¹ The case referred to here was that of Mrs. Elinor Quiggly, a wealthy widow living at the Adlon Hotel in West 96th Street. She was found on the morning of September 5th suffocated by a gag which had been placed on her by robbers who had evidently followed her home from the Club Turque—a small but luxurious all-night cafe at 290 West 48th Street. The killing of the two detectives, McQuade and Cannison, was, the police believe, due to the fact that they were in possession of incriminating evidence against the perpetrators of the crime. Jewellery amounting to over \$50,000 was stolen from the Quiggly apartment.

Chapter II

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

(Sunday, September 9th)

ON the day following his decision, Markham and Vance and I were sitting in a secluded corner of the lounge-room of the Stuyvesant Club. We often came together there, for we were all members of the club, and Markham frequently used it as a kind of unofficial up-town headquarters.¹

"It's bad enough to have half the people in this city under the impression that the District Attorney's office is a kind of high-class collection agency," he remarked that night, "without being necessitated to turn detective because I'm not given sufficient evidence, or the right kind of evidence, with which to secure convictions."

Vance looked up with a slow smile, and regarded him quizzically.

"The difficulty would seem to be," he returned, with an indolent drawl, "that the police, being unversed in the exquisite abracadabra of legal procedure, labour under the notion that evidence which would convince a man of ordin'ry intelligence, would also convince a court of law. A silly notion, don't y' know. Lawyers don't really want evidence: they want erudite technicalities. And the average policeman's brain is too forthright to cope with the pedantic demands of jurisprudence."

"It's not as bad as that," Markham retorted, with an attempt at good nature, although the strain of the past few

¹ The Stuyvesant was a large club, somewhat in the nature of a glorified hotel; and its extensive membership was drawn largely from the political, legal, and financial ranks.

weeks had tended to upset his habitual equanimity. "If there weren't rules of evidence, grave injustice would too often be done innocent persons. And even a criminal is entitled to protection in our courts."

Vance yawned mildly.

"Markham, you should have been a pedagogue. It's positively amazin' how you've mastered all the standard oratorical replies to criticism. And yet, I'm unconvinced. You remember the Wisconsin case of the kidnapped man whom the courts declared presumably dead. Even when he reappeared, hale and hearty, among his former neighbours, his status of being presumably dead was not legally altered. The visible and demonstrable fact that he was actually alive was regarded by the court as an immaterial and impertinent side-issue.¹ . . . Then there's the touchin' situation—so prevalent in this fair country—of a man being insane in one State and sane in another. . . . Really, y' know, you can't expect a mere lay intelligence, unskilled in the benign processes of legal logic, to perceive such subtle *nuances*. Your layman, swaddled in the darkness of ordin'ry common sense, would say that a person who is a lunatic on one bank of a river would still be a lunatic if he was on the opposite bank. And he'd also hold—erroneously, no doubt—that if a man was living, he would presumably be alive."

"Why this academic dissertation?" asked Markham, this time a bit irritably.

"It seems to touch rather vitally on the source of your present predicament," Vance explained equably. "The police, not being lawyers, have apparently got you into hot water, what? . . . Why not start an agitation to send all detectives to law school?"

"You're a great help," retorted Markham.

Vance raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Why disparage my suggestion? Surely you must perceive that it has merit. A man without legal training.

¹ The case to which Vance referred, I ascertained later, was *Shatterham v. Shatterham*, 417 Mich., 79—a testamentary case.

when he knows a thing to be true, ignores all incompetent testimony to the contr'ry, and clings to the facts. A court of law listens solemnly to a mass of worthless testimony, and renders a decision not on the facts but according to a complicated set of rules. The result, d' ye see, is that a court often acquits a prisoner, realising full well that he is guilty. Many a judge has said, in effect, to a culprit: 'I know, and the jury knows, that you committed the crime, but in view of the legally admissible evidence, I declare you innocent. Go and sin again.'"

Markham grunted. "I'd hardly endear myself to the people of this county if I answered the current strictures against me by recommending law courses for the Police Department."

"Permit me, then, to suggest the alternative of Shakespeare's butcher: 'Let's kill all the lawyers.'"

"Unfortunately, it's a situation, not a utopian theory, that has to be met."

"And just how," asked Vance lazily, "do you propose to reconcile the sensible conclusions of the police with what you touchingly call correctness of legal procedure?"

"To begin with," Markham informed him, "I've decided henceforth to do my own investigating of all important night-club criminal cases. I called a conference of the heads of my departments yesterday, and from now on there's going to be some real activity radiating direct from my office. I intend to produce the kind of evidence I need for convictions."

Vance slowly took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the arm of his chair.

"Ah! So you are going to substitute the conviction of the innocent for the acquittal of the guilty?"

Markham was nettled; turning in his chair he frowned at Vance.

"I won't pretend not to understand your remark," he said acidulously. "You're back again on your favourite theme of the inadequacy of circumstantial evidence as

compared with your psychological theories and æsthetic hypotheses."

"Quite so," agreed Vance carelessly. "Y' know, Markham, your sweet and charmin' faith in circumstantial evidence is positively disarming. Before it, the ordin'ry powers of ratiocination are benumbed. I tremble for the innocent victims you are about to gather into your legal net. You'll eventually make the mere attendance at any cabaret a frightful hazard."

Markham smoked a while in silence. Despite the seeming bitterness at times in the discussions of these two men, there was at bottom no animosity in their attitude toward each other. Their friendship was of long standing, and, despite the dissimilarity of their temperaments and the marked difference in their points of view, a profound mutual respect formed the basis of their intimate relationship.

At length Markham spoke.

"Why this sweeping deprecation of circumstantial evidence? I admit that at times it may be misleading; but it often forms powerful presumptive proof of guilt. Indeed, Vance, one of our greatest legal authorities, has demonstrated that it is the most powerful actual evidence in existence. Direct evidence, in the very nature of crime, is almost always unavailable. If the courts had to depend on it, the great majority of criminals would still be at large."

"I was under the impression that this precious majority had always enjoyed its untrammelled freedom."

Markham ignored the interruption.

"Take this example: A dozen adults see an animal running across the snow, and testify that it was a chicken; whereas a child sees the same animal, and declares it was a duck. They thereupon examine the animal's footprints and find them to be the web-footed tracks made by a duck. Is it not conclusive, then, that the animal was a duck and not a chicken, despite the preponderance of direct evidence?"

"I'll grant you your duck," acceded Vance indifferently.

"And having gratefully accepted the gift," pursued Markham, "I propound a corollary: A dozen adults see a human figure crossing the snow, and take oath it was a woman; whereas a child asserts that the figure was a man. Now, will you not also grant that the circumstantial evidence of a man's footprints in the snow would supply incontrovertible proof that it was, in fact, a man, and not a woman?"

"Not at all, my dear Justinian," replied Vance, stretching his legs languidly in front of him; "unless, of course, you could show that a human being possesses no higher order of brains than a duck."

"What have brains to do with it?" Markham asked impatiently. "Brains don't affect one's footprints."

"Not those of a duck, certainly. But the brains might very well—and, no doubt, often do—affect the footprints of a human being."

"Am I having a lesson in anthropology, Darwinian adaptability, or merely metaphysical speculation?"

"In none of those abstruse subjects," Vance assured him. "I'm merely stating a simple fact culled from observation."

"Well, according to your highly and peculiarly developed processes of reasoning, would the circumstantial evidence of those masculine footprints indicate a man or a woman?"

"Not necessarily either," Vance answered: "or, rather, a possibility of each. Such evidence, when applied to a human being—to a creature, that is, with a reasoning mind—would merely mean to me that the figure crossing the snow was either a man in his own shoes, or a woman in man's shoes; or perhaps, even, a long-legged child. In short, it would convey to my purely unlegal intelligence only that the tracks were made by some descendant of the *Pithecanthropus erectus* wearing men's shoes on his nether limbs—sex and age unknown. A duck's spoor, on the other hand, I might be tempted to take at their face value."

"I'm delighted to observe," said Markham, "that, at

least, you repudiate the possibility of a duck dressing itself up in the gardener's boots."

Vance was silent for a moment ; then he said :

"The trouble with you modern Solons, d' ye see, is that you attempt to reduce human nature to a formula ; whereas the truth is that man, like life, is infinitely complex. He's shrewd and tricky—skilled for centuries in all the most diabolical chicaneries. He is a creature of low cunning, who, even in the normal course of his vain and idiotic struggle for existence, instinctively and deliberately tells ninety-nine lies to one truth. A duck, not having had the heaven-kissing advantages of human civilisation, is a straightforward and eminently honest bird."

"How," asked Markham, "since you jettison all the ordinary means of arriving at a conclusion, would you decide the sex or species of this person who left the masculine footprints in the snow ? "

Vance blew a spiral of smoke toward the ceiling.

"First, I'd repudiate all the evidence of the twelve astigmatic adults and the one bright-eyed child. Next, I'd ignore the footprints in the snow. Then, with a mind unprejudiced by dubious testimony and uncluttered with material clues, I'd determine the exact nature of the crime which this fleeing person had committed. After having analysed its various factors, I could infallibly tell you not only whether the culprit was a man or a woman, but I could describe his habits, character, and personality. And I could do all this whether the fleeing figure left male or female or kangaroo tracks, or used stilts, or rode off on a velocipede, or levitated without leaving tracks at all."

Markham smiled broadly. "You'd be worse than the police in the matter of supplying me legal evidence, I fear."

"I, at least, wouldn't procure evidence against some unsuspecting person whose boots had been appropriated by the real culprit," retorted Vance. "And y' know, Markham, as long as you pin your faith to footprints you'll inevitably

arrest just those persons whom the actual criminals want you to—namely, persons who have had nothing to do with the criminal conditions you're about to investigate."

He became suddenly serious.

"See here, old man; there are some shrewd intelligences at present allied with what the theologians call the powers of darkness. The surface appearances of many of these crimes that are worrying you are palpably deceptive. Personally, I don't put much stock in the theory that a malevolent gang of cut-throats have organised an American camorra, and made the silly night clubs their headquarters. The idea is too melodramatic. It smacks too much of the gaudy journalistic imagination: it's too Eugène Sue-ish. Crime isn't a mass instinct except during war-time, and then it's merely an obscene sport. Crime, d' ye see, is a personal and individual business. One doesn't make up a *parti carré* for a murder as one does for a bridge game. . . . Markham, old dear, don't let this romantic criminological idea lead you astray. And don't scrutinise the figurative footprints in the snow too closely. They'll confuse you most horribly—your'e far too trustin' and literal for this wicked world. I warn you that no clever criminal is going to leave his own footprints for your tape-measure and calipers."

He sighed deeply, and gave Markham a look of bantering commiseration.

"And have you paused to consider that your first case may even be devoid of footprints? . . . Alas! What, then, will you do?"

"I could overcome that difficulty by taking you along with me," suggested Markham, with a touch of irony. "How would you like to accompany me on the next important case that breaks?"

"I am ravished by the idea," said Vance.

Two days later the front pages of our metropolitan press carried glaring headlines telling of the murder of Margaret Odell.

Chapter III

THE MURDER

(Tuesday, September 11th; 8.30 a.m.)

It was barely half-past eight on that momentous morning of September the 11th when Markham brought word to us of the event.

I was living temporarily with Vance at his home in East 38th Street—a large remodelled apartment occupying the two top floors of a beautiful mansion. For several years I had been Vance's personal legal representative and adviser, having resigned from my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis and Van Dine to devote myself to his needs and interests. His affairs were by no means voluminous, but his personal finances, together with his numerous purchases of paintings and *objets d'art*, occupied my full time without burdening me. This monetary and legal stewardship was eminently congenial to my tastes; and my friendship with Vance, which had dated from our undergraduate days at Harvard, supplied the social and human element in an arrangement which otherwise might easily have degenerated into one of mere drab routine.

On this particular morning I had risen early and was working in the library when Currie, Vance's valet and major-domo, announced Markham's presence in the living-room. I was considerably astonished at this early morning visit, for Markham well knew that Vance, who rarely rose before noon, resented any intrusion upon his matutinal slumbers. And in that moment I received the curious impression that something unusual and portentous was toward.

I found Markham pacing restlessly up and down, his hat and gloves thrown carelessly on the centre-table. As I entered he halted and looked at me with harassed eyes. He was a moderately tall man, clean-shaven, grey-haired, and firmly set up. His appearance was distinguished, and his manner courteous and kindly. But beneath his gracious exterior there was an aggressive sternness, an indomitable, grim strength, that gave one the sense of dogged efficiency and untiring capability.

"Good morning, Van," he greeted me, with impatient perfunctoriness. "There's been another half-world murder—the worst and ugliest thus far. . . ." He hesitated and regarded me searchingly. "You recall my chat with Vance at the club the other night? There was something damned prophetic in his remarks. And you remember I half promised to take him along on the next important case. Well, the case has broken—with a vengeance. Margaret Odell, whom they called the Canary, has been strangled in her apartment; and from what I just got over the 'phone, it looks like another night-club affair. I'm headed for the Odell apartment now. . . . What about rousing out the sybarite?"

"By all means," I agreed, with an alacrity which, I fear, was in large measure prompted by purely selfish motives. The Canary! If one had sought the city over for a victim whose murder would stir up excitement, there could have been but few selections better calculated to produce this result.

Hastening to the door, I summoned Currie, and told him to call Vance at once.

"I'm afraid, sir——" began Currie, politely hesitant.

"Calm your fears," cut in Markham. "I'll take all responsibility for waking him at this indecent hour."

Currie sensed an emergency and departed.

A minute or two later Vance, in an elaborately embroidered silk kimono and sandals, appeared at the living-room door.

"My word!" he greeted us, in mild astonishment, glancing at the clock. "Haven't you chaps gone to bed yet?"

He strolled to the mantel, and selected a gold-tipped *Régie* cigarette from a small Florentine humidor.

Markham's eyes narrowed: he was in no mood for levity.

"The Canary has been murdered," I blurted out.

Vance held his wax vesta poised, and gave me a look of indolent inquisitiveness. "Whose canary?"

"Margaret Odell was found strangled this morning," amended Markham brusquely. "Even *you*, wrapped in your scented cotton-wool, have heard of her. And you can realise the significance of the crime. I'm personally going to look for those footprints in the snow; and if you want to come along, as you intimated the other night, you'll have to get a move on."

Vance crushed out his cigarette.

"Margaret Odell, eh?—Broadway's blonde Aspasia—or was it Phryne who had the *coiffure d'or*? . . . Most distressing!" Despite his offhand manner, I could see he was deeply interested. "The base enemies of law and order are determined to chivvy you most horribly, aren't they, old dear? Deuced inconsiderate of 'em! . . . Excuse me while I seek habiliments suitable to the occasion."

He disappeared into his bedroom, while Markham took out a large cigar and resolutely prepared it for smoking, and I returned to the library to put away the papers on which I had been working.

In less than ten minutes Vance reappeared, dressed for the street.

"*Bien, mon vieux*," he announced gaily, as Currie handed him his hat and gloves and a malacca cane. "*Allons-y!*"

We rode up-town along Madison Avenue, turned into Central Park, and came out by the West 72nd Street entrance. Margaret Odell's apartment was at 184 West 71st Street, near Broadway; and as we drew up to the curb, it was necessary for the patrolman on duty to make a passage

for us through the crowd that had already gathered as a result of the arrival of the police.

Feathergill, an assistant District Attorney, was waiting in the main hall for his Chief's arrival.

"It's too bad, sir," he lamented. "A rotten show all round. And just at this time! . . ." He shrugged his shoulders discouragingly.

"It may collapse quickly," said Markham, shaking the other's hand. "How are things going? Sergeant Heath phoned me right after you called, and said that, at first glance, the case looked a bit stubborn."

"Stubborn?" repeated Feathergill lugubriously. "It's downright impervious. Heath is spinning round like a turbine. He was called off the Boyle case, by the way, to devote his talents to this new shocker. Inspector Moran arrived ten minutes ago, and gave him the official imprimatur."

"Well, Heath's a good man," declared Markham. "We'll work it out . . . Which is the apartment?"

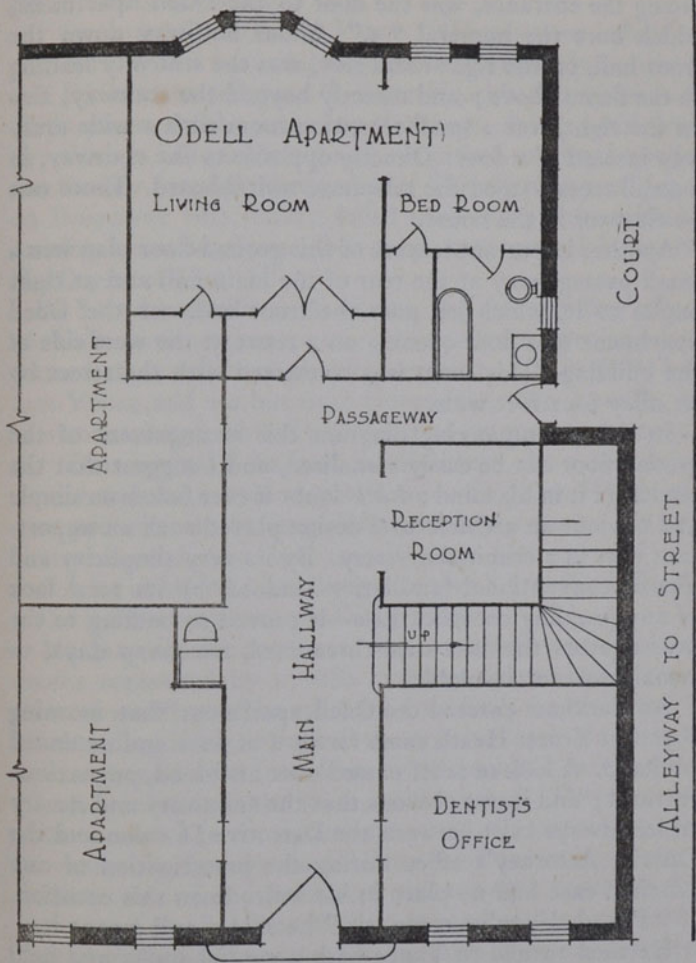
Feathergill led the way to a door at the rear of the main hall.

"Here you are, sir," he announced. "I'll be running along now. I need sleep. Good luck!" And he was gone.

It will be necessary to give a brief description of the house and its interior arrangement, for the somewhat peculiar structure of the building played a vital part in the seemingly insoluble problem posed by the murder.

The house, which was a four-storey stone structure originally built as a residence, had been remodelled, both inside and outside, to meet the requirements of an exclusive individual apartment dwelling. There were, I believe, three or four separate suites on each floor; but the quarters upstairs need not concern us. The main floor was the scene of the crime, and here there were three apartments and a dentist's office.

The main entrance to the building was directly on the street, and extending straight back from the front door was



WEST SEVENTY-FIRST STREET

a wide hallway. Directly at the rear of this hallway, and facing the entrance, was the door to the Odell apartment, which bore the numeral "3." About half-way down the front hall, on the right-hand side, was the stairway leading to the floors above; and directly beyond the stairway, also on the right, was a small reception-room with a wide archway instead of a door. Directly opposite to the stairway, in a small recess, stood the telephone switchboard. There was no elevator in the house.

Another important feature of this ground-floor plan was a small passage-way at the rear of the main hall and at right angles to it, which led past the front walls of the Odell apartment to a door opening on a court at the west side of the building. This court was connected with the street by an alley four feet wide.

In the accompanying diagram this arrangement of the ground floor can be easily visualised, and I suggest that the reader fix it in his mind; for I doubt if ever before so simple and obvious an architectural design played such an important part in a criminal mystery. By its very simplicity and almost conventional familiarity—indeed, by its total lack of any puzzling complications—it proved so baffling to the investigators that the case threatened, for many days, to remain forever insoluble.

As Markham entered the Odell apartment that morning Sergeant Ernest Heath came forward at once and extended his hand. A look of relief passed over his broad, pugnacious features; and it was obvious that the animosity and rivalry which always exist between the Detective Division and the District Attorney's office during the investigation of any criminal case had no place in his attitude on this occasion.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," he said; and meant it.

He then turned to Vance with a cordial smile, and held out his hand.¹

¹ Heath had become acquainted with Vance during the investigation of the Benson murder case two months previous.

“So the amachoor sleuth is with us again!” His tone held a friendly banter.

“Oh, quite,” murmured Vance. “How’s your induction coil working this beautiful September morning, Sergeant?”

“I’d hate to tell you!” Then Heath’s face grew suddenly grave, and he turned to Markham. “It’s a raw deal, sir. Why in hell couldn’t they have picked some one besides the Canary for their dirty work? There’s plenty of Janes on Broadway who could’a faded from the picture without causing a second alarm; but they gotta go and bump off the Queen of Sheba!”

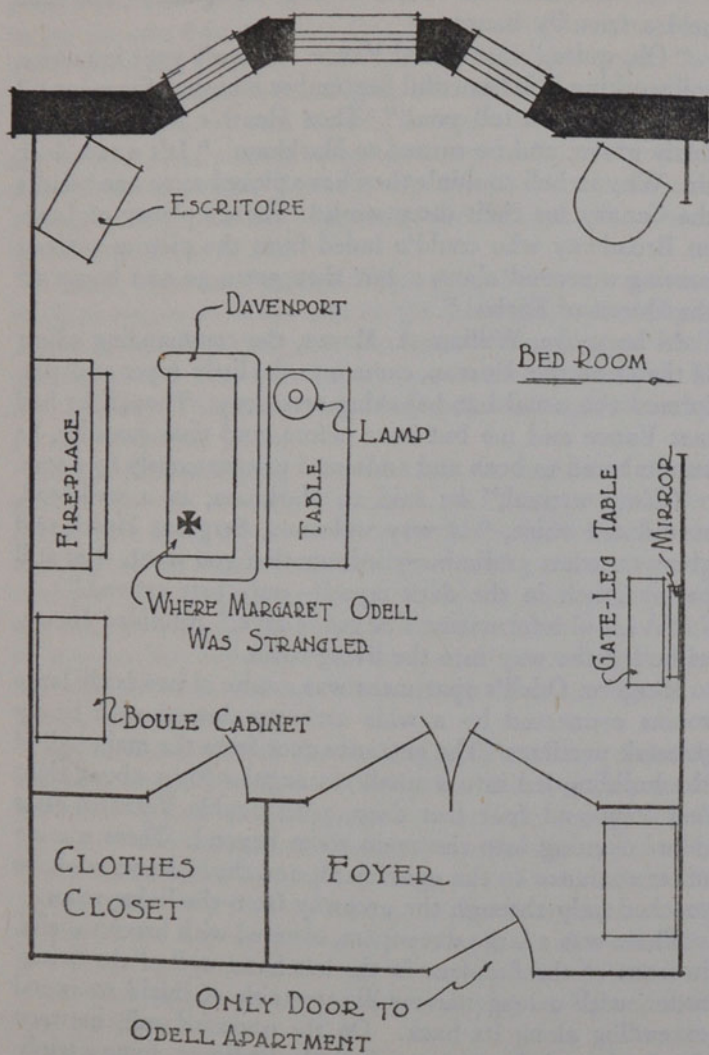
As he spoke, William A. Moran, the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau, came into the little foyer and performed the usual hand-shaking ceremony. Though he had met Vance and me but once before, and then casually, he remembered us both and addressed us courteously by name.

“Your arrival,” he said to Markham, in a well-bred, modulated voice, “is very welcome. Sergeant Heath will give you what preliminary information you want. I’m still pretty much in the dark myself—only just arrived.”

“A lot of information *I’ve* got to give,” grumbled Heath, as he led the way into the living-room.

Margaret Odell’s apartment was a suite of two fairly large rooms connected by a wide archway draped with heavy damask portières. The entrance door from the main hall of the building led into a small rectangular foyer about eight feet long and four feet deep, with double Venetian-glass doors opening into the main room beyond. There was no other entrance to the apartment, and the bedroom could be reached only through the archway from the living-room.

There was a large davenport, covered with brocaded silk, in front of the fireplace in the left-hand wall of the living-room, with a long narrow library-table of inlaid rosewood extending along its back. On the opposite wall, between the foyer and the archway into the bedroom, hung a tripliate Marie Antoinette mirror, beneath which stood a mahog-



any gate-legged table. On the far side of the archway, near the large oriel window, was a baby grand Steinway piano with a beautifully designed and decorated case of Louis-Seize ornamentation. In the corner to the right of the fireplace was a spindle-legged escritoire and a square hand-painted waste-paper basket of vellum. To the left of the fireplace stood one of the loveliest Boule cabinets I have ever seen. Several excellent reproductions of Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau hung about the walls. The bedroom contained a chest of drawers, a dressing-table, and several gold-leaf chairs. The whole apartment seemed eminently in keeping with the Canary's fragile and evanescent personality.

As we stepped from the little foyer into the living-room and stood for a moment looking about, a scene bordering on wreckage met our eyes. The rooms had apparently been ransacked by some one in a frenzy of haste, and the disorder of the place was appalling.

"They didn't exactly do the job in dainty fashion," remarked Inspector Moran.

"I suppose we oughta be grateful they didn't blow the joint up with dynamite," returned Heath acridly.

But it was not the general disorder that most attracted us. Our gaze was almost immediately drawn and held by the body of the dead girl, which rested in an unnatural, semi-recumbent attitude in the corner of the davenport nearest to where we stood. Her head was turned backward, as if by force, over the silken tufted upholstery; and her hair had come unfastened and lay beneath her head and over her bare shoulder like a frozen cataract of liquid gold. Her face, in violent death, was distorted and unlovely. Her skin was discoloured; her eyes were staring; her mouth was open, and her lips were drawn back. Her neck, on either side of the thyroid cartilage, showed ugly dark bruises. She was dressed in a flimsy evening gown of black Chantilly lace over cream-coloured chiffon, and across the arm of the

davenport had been thrown an evening cape of cloth-of-gold trimmed with ermine.

There were evidences of her ineffectual struggle with the person who had strangled her. Besides the dishevelled condition of her hair, one of the shoulder-straps of her gown had been severed, and there was a long rent in the fine lace across her breast. A small corsage of artificial orchids had been torn from her bodice, and lay crumpled in her lap. One satin slipper had fallen off, and her right knee was twisted inward on the seat of the davenport, as if she had sought to lift herself out of the suffocating clutches of her antagonist. Her fingers were still flexed, no doubt as they had been at the moment of her capitulation to death, when she had relinquished her grip upon the murderer's wrists.

The spell of horror cast over us by the sight of the tortured body was broken by the matter-of-fact tones of Heath.

"You see, Mr. Markham, she was evidently sitting in the corner of this settee when she was grabbed suddenly from behind."

Markham nodded. "It must have taken a pretty strong man to strangle her so easily."

"I'll say!" agreed Heath. He bent over and pointed to the girl's finger, on which showed several abrasions. "They stripped her rings off, too; and they didn't go about it gentle, either." Then he indicated a segment of fine platinum chain, set with tiny pearls, which hung over one of her shoulders. "And they grabbed whatever it was hanging round her neck, and broke the chain doing it. They weren't overlooking anything, or losing any time. . . . A swell, gentlemanly job. Nice and refined."

"Where's the Medical Examiner?" asked Markham.

"He's coming," Heath told him. "You can't get Doc Doremus to go anywheres without his breakfast."

"He may find something else—something that doesn't show."

"There's plenty showing for me," declared Heath.

"Look at this apartment. It wouldn't be much worse if a Kansas cyclone had struck it."

We turned from the depressing spectacle of the dead girl and moved toward the centre of the room.

"Be careful not to touch anything, Mr. Markham," warned Heath. "I've sent for the finger-print experts—they'll be here any minute now."

Vance looked up in mock astonishment.

"Finger-prints? You don't say—really! How delightful!—Imagine a johnnie in this enlightened day leaving his finger-prints for you to find."

"All crooks aren't clever, Mr. Vance," declared Heath combatively.

"Oh, dear, no! They'd never be apprehended if they were. But, after all, Sergeant, even an authentic finger-print merely means that the person who made it was dallying around at some time or other. It doesn't indicate guilt."

"Maybe so," conceded Heath doggedly. "But I'm here to tell you that if I get any good honest-to-God finger-prints outa this devastated area, it's not going so easy with the bird that made 'em."

Vance appeared to be shocked. "You positively terrify me, Sergeant. Henceforth I shall adopt mittens as a permanent addition to my attire. I'm always handling the furniture and the teacups and the various knickknacks in the houses where I call, don't y' know."

Markham interposed himself at this point, and suggested they make a tour of inspection while waiting for the Medical Examiner.

"They didn't add anything much to the usual methods," Heath pointed out. "Killed the girl, and then ripped things wide open."

The two rooms had apparently been thoroughly ransacked. Clothes and various articles were strewn about the floor. The doors of both clothes-closets (there was one in

each room) were open, and to judge from the chaos in the bedroom closet it had been hurriedly searched; although the closet off of the living-room, which was given over to the storage of infrequently used items, appeared to have been ignored. The drawers of the dressing-table and chest had been partly emptied on to the floor, and the bedclothes had been snatched away and the mattress turned back. Two chairs and a small occasional table were upset; several vases were broken, as if they had been searched and then thrown down in the wrath of disappointment; and the Marie Antoinette mirror had been broken. The *escritoire* was open, and its pigeonholes had been emptied in a jumbled pile upon the blotter. The doors of the *Boule* cabinet swung wide, and inside there was the same confusion of contents that marked the interior of the *escritoire*. The bronze-and-porcelain lamp on the end of the library-table was lying on its side, its satin shade torn where it had struck the sharp corner of a silver *bonbonnière*.

Two objects in the general disarray, particularly attracted my attention—a black metal document-box of the kind purchasable at any stationery store, and a large jewel-case of sheet steel with a circular inset lock. The latter of these objects was destined to play a curious and sinister part in the investigation to follow.

The document-box, which was now empty, had been placed on the library-table, next to the overturned lamp. Its lid was thrown back, and the key was still in the lock. In all the litter and disorganisation of the room, this box seemed to be the one outstanding indication of calm and orderly activity on the part of the wrecker.

The jewel-case, on the other hand, had been violently wrenched open. It sat on the dressing-table in the bedroom, dented and twisted out of shape by the terrific leverage that had been necessary to force it, and beside it lay a brass-handled, cast-iron poker which had evidently been brought

from the living-room and used as a makeshift chisel with which to prize open the lock.

Vance had glanced but casually at the different objects in the rooms as we made our rounds, but when he came to the dressing-table, he paused abruptly. Taking out his monocle, he adjusted it carefully, and leaned over the broken jewel-case.

"Most extr'ordin'ry!" he murmured, tapping the edge of the lid with his gold pencil. "What do you make of that, Sergeant?"

Heath had been eyeing Vance with narrowed lids as the latter bent over the dressing-table.

"What's in your mind, Mr. Vance?" he, in turn, asked.

"Oh, more than you could ever guess," Vance answered lightly. "But just at the moment I was toying with the idea that this steel case was never torn open by that wholly inadequate iron poker, what?"

Heath nodded his head approvingly. "So you, too, noticed that, did you? . . . And you're dead right. That poker might've twisted the box a little, but it never snapped that lock."

He turned to Inspector Moran.

"That's the puzzler I've sent for 'Prof.' Brenner to clean up—if he can. The jimmying of that jewel-case looks to me like a high-class professional job. No Sunday-school superintendent did it."

Vance continued for a while to study the box, but at length he turned away with a perplexed frown.

"I say!" he commented. "Something devilish queer took place here last night."

"Oh, not so queer," Heath amended. "It was a thorough job, all right, but there's nothing mysterious about it."

Vance polished his monocle and put it away.

"If you go to work on that basis, Sergeant," he returned carelessly, "I greatly fear you'll run aground on a reef. And may kind Heaven bring you safe to shore!"

Chapter IV

THE PRINT OF A HAND

(Tuesday, September 11th ; 9.30 a.m.)

A FEW minutes after we had returned to the living-room Doctor Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner, arrived, jaunty and energetic. Immediately in his train came three other men, one of whom carried a bulky camera and a folded tripod. These were Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, finger-print experts, and Peter Quackenbush, the official photographer.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Doctor Doremus. "Quite a gathering of the clans. More trouble, eh? . . . I wish your friends, Inspector, would choose a more respectable hour for their little differences. This early rising upsets my liver."

He shook hands with everybody in a brisk, businesslike manner.

"Where's the body?" he demanded breezily, looking about the room. He caught sight of the girl on the davenport. "Ah! A lady."

Stepping quickly forward, he made a rapid examination of the dead girl, scrutinising her neck and fingers, moving her arms and head to determine the condition of *rigor mortis*, and finally unflexing her stiffened limbs and laying her out straight on the long cushions, preparatory to a more detailed necropsy.

The rest of us moved toward the bedroom, and Heath motioned to the finger-print men to follow.

"Go over everything," he told them. "But take a special look at this jewel-case and the handle of this poker, and give that document-box in the other room a close up-and-down."

"Right," assented Captain Dubois. "We'll begin in here while the Doc's busy in the other room." And he and Bellamy set to work.

Our interest naturally centred on the Captain's labours. For fully five minutes we watched him inspecting the twisted steel sides of the jewel-case and the smooth, polished handle of the poker. He held the objects gingerly by their edges, and, placing a jeweller's glass in his eye, flashed his pocket-light on every square inch of them. At length he put them down, scowling.

"No finger-prints here," he announced. "Wiped clean."

"I mighta known it," grumbled Heath. "It was a professional job, all right." He turned to the other expert. "Found anything, Bellamy?"

"Nothing to help," was the grumpy reply. "A few old smears with dust over 'em."

"Looks like a wash-out," Heath commented irritably; "though I'm hoping for something in the other room."

At this moment Doctor Doremus came into the bedroom and, taking a sheet from the bed, returned to the davenport and covered the body of the murdered girl. Then he snapped shut his case, and putting on his hat at a rakish angle, stepped forward with the air of a man in great haste to be on his way.

"Simple case of strangulation from behind," he said, his words running together. "Digital bruises about the front of the throat; thumb bruises in the sub-occipital region. Attack must have been unexpected. A quick, competent job, though deceased evidently battled a little."

"How do you suppose her dress became torn, Doctor?" asked Vance.

"Oh, that? Can't tell. She may have done it herself—instinctive motions of clutching for air."

"Not likely though, what?"

"Why not? The dress was torn and the bouquet was ripped off, and the fellow who was choking her had both hands on her throat. Who else could've done it?"

Vance shrugged his shoulders, and began lighting a cigarette.

Heath, annoyed by his apparently inconsequential interruption, put the next question.

"Don't those marks on the fingers mean that her rings were stripped off?"

"Possibly. They're fresh abrasions. Also, there's a couple of lacerations on the left wrist and slight contusions on the thenar eminence, indicating that a bracelet may have been forcibly pulled over her hand."

"That fits O. K.," pronounced Heath, with satisfaction. "And it looks like they snatched a pendant of some kind off her neck."

"Probably," indifferently agreed Doctor Doremus. "The piece of chain had cut into her flesh a little behind the right shoulder."

"And the time?"

"Nine or ten hours ago. Say, about eleven-thirty—maybe a little before. Not after midnight, anyway." He had been teetering restlessly on his toes. "Anything else?"

Heath pondered.

"I guess that's all, Doc," he decided. "I'll get the body to the mortuary right away. Let's have the post-mortem as soon as you can."

"You'll get a report in the morning." And despite his apparent eagerness to be off, Doctor Doremus stepped into the bedroom, and shook hands with Heath and Markham and Inspector Moran before he hurried out.

Heath followed him to the door, and I heard him direct the officer outside to telephone the Department of Public Welfare to send an ambulance at once for the girl's body.

"I positively adore that official archiater of yours," Vance

said to Markham. "Such detachment! Here are you stewing most distressingly over the passing of one damsel fair and frail, and that blithe *medicus* is worrying only over a sluggish liver brought on by early rising."

"What has he to be upset over?" complained Markham. "The newspapers are not riding him with spurs. . . . And by the way, what was the point of your questions about the torn dress?"

Vance lazily inspected the tip of his cigarette.

"Consider," he said. "The lady was evidently taken by surprise; for, had there been a struggle beforehand, she would not have been strangled from behind while sitting down. Therefore, her gown and corsage were undoubtedly intact at the time she was seized. But—despite the conclusion of your dashing Paracelsus—the damage to her toilet was not of a nature that could have been self-inflicted in her struggle for air. If she had felt the constriction of the gown across her breast, she would have snatched the bodice itself by putting her fingers inside the band. But, if you noticed, her bodice was intact; the only thing that had been torn was the deep lace flounce on the outside; and it had been torn, or rather ripped, by a strong lateral pull; whereas, in the circumstances, any wrench on her part would have been downward or outward."

Inspector Moran was listening intently, but Heath seemed restless and impatient; apparently he regarded the torn gown as irrelevant to the simple main issue.

"Moreover," Vance went on, "there is the corsage. If she herself had torn it off while being strangled, it would doubtless have fallen to the floor; for, remember, she offered considerable resistance. Her body was twisted sideways; her knee was drawn up, and one slipper had been kicked off. Now, no bunch of silken posies is going to remain in a lady's lap during such a commotion. Even when ladies sit still, their gloves and hand-bags and handkerchiefs and

programmes and serviettes are forever sliding off of their laps on to the floor, don't y' know."

"But if your argument's correct," protested Markham, "then the tearing of the lace and the snatching off of the corsage could have been done only after she was dead. And I can't see any object in such senseless vandalism."

"Neither can I," sighed Vance. "It's all devilish queer."

Heath looked up at him sharply. "That's the second time you've said that. But there's nothing what you'd call queer about this mess. It is a straight-away case." He spoke with an overtone of insistence, like a man arguing against his own insecurity of opinion. "The dress might've been torn almost any time," he went on stubbornly. "And the flower might've got caught in the lace of her skirt so it couldn't roll off."

"And how would you explain the jewel-case, Sergeant?" asked Vance.

"Well, the fellow might've tried the poker, and then, finding it wouldn't work, used his jimmy."

"If he had the efficient jimmy," countered Vance, "why did he go to the trouble of bringing the silly poker from the living-room?"

The Sergeant shook his head perplexedly.

"You never can tell why some of these crooks act the way they do."

"Tut, tut!" Vance chided him. "There should be no such word as 'never' in the bright lexicon of detecting."

Heath regarded him sharply. "Was there anything else that struck you as queer?" His subtle doubts were welling up again.

"Well, there's the lamp on the table in the other room."

We were standing near the archway between the two rooms, and Heath turned quickly and looked blankly at the fallen lamp.

"I don't see anything queer about that."

"It has been upset—eh, what?" suggested Vance.

"What if it has?" Heath was frankly puzzled. "Damn near everything in this apartment has been knocked crooked."

"Ah! But there's a reason for most of the other things having been disturbed—like the drawers and pigeonholes and closets and vases. They all indicate a search; they're consistent with a raid for loot. But that lamp, now, d' ye see, doesn't fit into the picture. It's a false note. It was standing on the opposite end of the table to where the murder was committed, at least five feet away; and it couldn't possibly have been knocked over in the struggle. . . . No, it won't do. It's got no business being upset, any more than that pretty mirror over the gate-legged table has any business being broken. That's why it's queer."

"What about those chairs and the little table?" asked Heath, pointing to two small gilded chairs which had been overturned, and a fragile tip-table that lay on its side near the piano.

"Oh, they fit into the ensemble," returned Vance. "They're all light pieces of furniture which could easily have been knocked over, or thrown aside, by the hasty gentleman who rifled these rooms."

"The lamp might've been knocked over in the same way," argued Heath.

Vance shook his head. "Not tenable, Sergeant. It has a solid bronze base, and isn't at all top-heavy; and being set well back on the table, it wasn't in any one's way. . . . That lamp was upset deliberately."

The Sergeant was silent for a while. Experience had taught him not to underestimate Vance's observations; and, I must confess, as I looked at the lamp lying on its side on the end of the library-table, well removed from any of the other disordered objects in the room. Vance's argument seemed to possess considerable force. I tried hard to fit it into a hasty reconstruction of the crime, but was utterly unable to do so.

"Anything else that don't seem to fit into the picture?" Heath at length asked.

Vance pointed with his cigarette toward the clothes-closet in the living-room. This closet was alongside of the foyer, in the corner near the Boule cabinet, directly opposite to the end of the davenport.

"You might let your mind dally a moment with the condition of that clothes-press," suggested Vance carelessly. "You will note that, though the door's ajar, the contents have not been touched. And it's about the only area in the apartment that hasn't been disturbed."

Heath walked over and looked into the closet.

"Well, anyway, I'll admit that's queer," he finally conceded.

Vance had followed him indolently, and stood gazing over his shoulder.

"And my word!" he exclaimed suddenly. "The key's on the inside of the lock. Fancy that, now! One can't lock a closet door with the key on the inside—can one, Sergeant?"

"The key may not mean anything," Heath observed hopefully. "Maybe the door was never locked. Anyhow, we'll find out about that pretty soon. I'm holding the maid outside, and I'm going to have her on the carpet as soon as the Captain finishes his job here."

He turned to Dubois, who, having completed his search for finger-prints in the bedroom, was now inspecting the piano.

"Any luck yet?"

The Captain shook his head.

"Gloves," he answered succinctly.

"Same here," supplemented Bellamy gruffly, on his knees before the *escritoire*.

Vance, with a sardonic smile, turned and walked to the window, where he stood looking out and smoking placidly, as if his entire interest in the case had evaporated.

At this moment the door from the main hall opened, and

a short thin little man, with grey hair and a scraggly grey beard, stepped inside and stood blinking against the vivid sunlight.

"Good morning, Professor," Heath greeted the newcomer. "Glad to see you. I've got something nifty, right in your line."

Deputy-Inspector Conrad Brenner was one of that small army of obscure, but highly capable, experts who are connected with the New York Police Department, and who are constantly being consulted on abstruse technical problems, but whose names and achievements rarely get into the public prints. His speciality was locks and burglars' tools; and I doubt if, even among those exhaustively painstaking criminologists of the University of Lausanne, there was a more accurate reader of the evidential signs left by the implements of house-breakers. In appearance and bearing he was like a withered little college professor.¹ His black, unpresed suit was old-fashioned in cut; and he wore a very high stiff collar, like a *fin-de-siècle* clergyman, with a narrow black string tie. His gold-rimmed spectacles were so thick-lensed that the pupils of his eyes gave the impression of acute belladonna poisoning.

When Heath had spoken to him, he merely stood staring with a sort of detached expectancy; he seemed utterly unaware that there was anyone else in the room. The Sergeant, evidently familiar with the little man's idiosyncrasies of manner, did not wait for a response, but started at once for the bedroom.

"This way, please, Professor," he directed cajolingly, going to the dressing-table, and picking up the jewel-case. "Take a squint at this, and tell me what you see."

Inspector Brenner followed Heath, without looking to right or left, and, taking the jewel-case, went silently to

¹ It is an interesting fact that for the nineteen years he had been connected with the New York Police Department, he had been referred to, by his superiors and subordinates alike, as "the Professor."

the window and began to examine it. Vance, whose interest seemed suddenly to be reawakened, came forward and stood watching him.

For fully five minutes the little expert inspected the case, holding it within a few inches of his nyopic eyes. Then he lifted his glance to Heath and winked several times rapidly.

"Two instruments were used in opening this case." His voice was small and high-pitched, but there was in it an undeniable quality of authority. "One bent the lid and made several fractures on the baked enamel. The other was, I should say, a steel chisel of some kind, and was used to break the lock. The first instrument, which was blunt, was employed amateurishly, at the wrong angle of leverage; and the effort resulted only in twisting the overhang of the lid. But the steel chisel was inserted with a knowledge of the correct point of oscillation, where a minimum of leverage would produce the counteracting stress necessary to displace the lock-bolts."

"A professional job?" suggested Heath.

"Highly so," answered the Inspector, again blinking. "That is to say, the forcing of the lock was professional. And I would even go so far as to advance the opinion that the instrument used was one especially constructed for such illegal purposes."

"Could this have done the job?" Heath held out the poker.

The other looked at it closely, and turned it over several times.

"It might have been the instrument that bent the cover, but it was not the one used for prying open the lock. This poker is cast iron and would have snapped under any great pressure; whereas this box is of cold rolled eighteen-gauge steel plate, with an inset cylinder pin-tumbler lock taking a paracentric key. The leverage force necessary to distort the flange sufficiently to lift the lid could have been made only by a steel chisel."

"Well, that's that." Heath seemed well satisfied with Inspector Brenner's conclusion. "I'll send the box down to you, Professor, and you can let me know what else you find out."

"I'll take it along, if you have no objection." And the little man tucked it under his arm and shuffled out without another word.

Heath grinned at Markham. "Queer bird. He ain't happy unless he's measuring jimmy marks on doors and windows and things. He couldn't wait till I sent him the box. He'll hold it lovingly on his lap all the way down in the subway, like a mother with a baby."

Vance was still standing near the dressing-table, gazing perplexedly into space.

"Markham," he said, "the condition of that jewel-case is positively astounding. It's unreasonable, illogical—insane. It complicates the situation most damnably. That steel box simply couldn't have been chiselled open by a professional burglar . . . and yet, don't y' know, it actually was."

Before Markham could reply, a satisfied grunt from Captain Dubois attracted our attention.

"I've got something for you, Sergeant," he announced.

We moved expectantly into the living-room. Dubois was bending over the end of the library-table almost directly behind the place where Margaret Odell's body had been found. He took out an insufflator, which was like a very small hand-bellows, and blew a fine light-yellow powder evenly over about a square foot of the polished rosewood surface of the table-top. Then he gently blew away the surplus powder, and there appeared the impression of a human hand distinctly registered in saffron. The bulb of the thumb and each fleshy hummock between the joints of the fingers and around the palm stood out like tiny circular islands. All the papillary ridges were clearly discernible. The photographer then hooked his camera to a

peculiar adjustable tripod and, carefully focussing his lens, took two flash-light pictures of the hand-mark.

"This ought to do." Dubois was pleased with his find. "It's the right hand—a clear print—and the guy who made it was standing right behind the dame. . . . And it's the newest print in the place."

"What about this box?" Heath pointed to the black document-box on the table near the overturned lamp.

"Not a mark—wiped clean."

Dubois began putting away his paraphernalia.

"I say, Captain Dubois," interposed Vance, "did you take a good look at the inside door-knob of that clothes-press?"

The man swung about abruptly, and gave Vance a glowering look.

"People ain't in the habit of handling the inside knobs of closet doors. They open and shut closets from the outside."

Vance raised his eyebrows in simulated astonishment.

"Do they, now, really?—Fancy that! . . . Still, don't y' know, if one were inside the closet, one couldn't reach the outside knob."

"The people *I* know don't shut themselves in clothes-closets." Dubois's tone was ponderously sarcastic.

"You positively amaze me!" declared Vance. "All the people I know are addicted to the habit—a sort of daily pastime, don't y' know."

Markham, always diplomatic, intervened.

"What idea have you about that closet, Vance?"

"Alas! I wish I had one," was the dolorous answer. "It's because I can't, for the life of me, make sense of its neat and orderly appearance that I'm so interested in it. Really, y' know, it should have been artistically looted."

Heath was not entirely free from the same vague misgivings that were disturbing Vance, for he turned to Dubois and said:

“You might go over the knob, Captain. As this gentleman says, there’s something funny about the condition of that closet.”

Dubois, silent and surly, went to the closet door and sprayed his yellow powder over the inside knob. When he had blown the loose particles away, he bent over it with his magnifying-glass. At length he straightened up, and gave Vance a look of ill-natured appraisal.

“There’s fresh prints on it, all right,” he grudgingly admitted; “and unless I’m mistaken they were made by the same hand as those on the table. Both thumb-marks are ulnar loops, and the index-fingers are both whorl patterns. . . . Here, Pete,” he ordered the photographer, “make some shots of that knob.”

When this had been done, Dubois, Bellamy, and the photographer left us.

A few moments later, after an interchange of pleasantries, Inspector Moran also departed. At the door he passed two men in the white uniform of internes, who had come to take away the girl’s body.

Chapter V

THE BOLTED DOOR

(Tuesday, September 11th; 10.30 a.m.)

MARKHAM and Heath and Vance and I were now alone in the apartment. Dark, low-hanging clouds had drifted across the sun, and the grey spectral light intensified the tragic atmosphere of the rooms. Markham had lighted a cigar, and stood leaning against the piano, looking about him with a disconsolate but determined air. Vance had moved over to one of the pictures on the side wall of the living-room—Boucher's "La Bergère Endormie" I think it was—and stood looking at it with cynical contempt.

"Dimpled nudities, gambolling Cupids, and woolly clouds for royal cocottes," he commented. His distaste for all the painting of the French decadence under Louis XV was profound. "One wonders what pictures courtesans hung in their boudoirs before the invention of these amorous eclogues, with their blue verdure and beribboned sheep."

"I'm more interested at present in what took place in this particular boudoir last night," retorted Markham impatiently.

"There's not much doubt about that, sir," said Heath encouragingly. "And I've an idea that when Dubois checks up those finger-prints with our files, we'll about know who did it."

Vance turned towards him with a rueful smile.

"You're so trusting, Sergeant. I, in turn, have an idea that, long before this touchin' case is clarified, you'll wish

the irascible Captain with the insect-powder had never found those finger-prints." He made a playful gesture of emphasis. "Permit me to whisper into your ear that the person who left his sign-manuals on yonder rosewood table and cut-glass door-knob had nothing whatever to do with the precipitate demise of the fair Mademoiselle Odell."

"What is it you suspect?" demanded Markham sharply.

"Not a thing, old dear," blandly declared Vance. "I'm wandering about in a mental murk as empty of sign-posts as interplanetary space. The jaws of darkness do devour me up; I'm in the dead vast and middle of the night. My mental darkness is Egyptian, Stygian, Cimmerian—I'm in a perfect Erebus of tenebrosity."

Markham's jaw tightened in exasperation; he was familiar with this evasive loquacity of Vance's. Dismissing the subject, he addressed himself to Heath.

"Have you done any questioning of the people in the house here?"

"I talked to Odell's maid and to the janitor and the switchboard operators, but I didn't go much into details—I was waiting for you. I'll say this, though: what they did tell me made my head swim. If they don't back down on some of their statements, we're up against it."

"Let's have them in now, then," suggested Markham; "the maid first." He sat down on the piano-bench with his back to the keyboard.

Heath rose, but instead of going to the door, walked to the oriel window.

"There's one thing I want to call your attention to, sir, before you interview these people, and that's the matter of entrances and exits in this apartment." He drew aside the gold-gauze curtain. "Look at that iron grating. All the windows in this place, including the ones in the bathroom, are equipped with iron bars just like these. It's only eight or ten feet to the ground here, and whoever built this

house wasn't taking any chances of burglars getting in through the windows."

He released the curtain, and strode into the foyer.

"Now, there's only one entrance to this apartment, and that's this door here opening off the main hall. There isn't a transom or an air-shaft or a dumb-waiter in the place, and that means that the only way—the *only way*—that anybody can get in or out of this apartment is through this door. Just keep that fact in your mind, sir, while you're listening to the stories of these people. . . . Now, I'll have the maid brought in."

In response to Heath's order a detective led in a mulatto woman about thirty years old. She was neatly dressed, and gave one the impression of capability. When she spoke it was with a quiet, clear enunciation which attested to a greater degree of education than is ordinarily found in members of her class.

Her name, we learned, was Amy Gibson; and the information elicited by Markham's preliminary questioning consisted of the following facts:

She had arrived at the apartment that morning a few minutes after seven and, as was her custom, had let herself in with her own key, as her mistress generally slept until late.

Once or twice a week she came early to do sewing and mending for Miss Odell before the latter rose. On this particular morning she had come early to make an alteration in a gown.

As soon as she had opened the door she had been confronted by the disorder of the apartment, for the Venetian-glass doors of the foyer were wide open; and almost simultaneously she had noticed the body of her mistress on the davenport.

She had called at once to Jessup, the night telephone operator then on duty, who, after one glance into the living-room had notified the police. She had then sat down in the public reception-room and waited for the arrival of the officers.

Her testimony had been simple and direct and intelligently stated. If she was nervous or excited, she managed to keep her feelings well under control.

"Now," continued Markham, after a short pause, "let us go back to last night.—At what time did you leave Miss Odell?"

"A few minutes before seven, sir," the woman answered, in a colourless, even tone which seemed to be characteristic of her speech.

"Is that your usual hour for leaving?"

"No; I generally go about six. But last night Miss Odell wanted me to help her dress for dinner."

"Don't you always help her dress for dinner?"

"No, sir. But last night she was going with some gentleman to dinner and the theatre, and wanted to look specially nice."

"Ah!" Markham leaned forward. "And who was this gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir—Miss Odell didn't say."

"And you couldn't suggest who it might have been?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"And when did Miss Odell tell you that she wanted you to come early this morning?"

"When I was leaving last night."

"So she evidently didn't anticipate any danger, or have any fear of her companion."

"It doesn't look that way." The woman paused, as if considering. "No, I know she didn't. She was in good spirits."

Markham turned to Heath.

"Any other questions you want to ask, Sergeant?"

Heath removed an unlighted cigar from his mouth, and bent forward, resting his hands on his knees.

"What jewellery did this Odell woman have on last night?" he demanded gruffly.

The maid's manner became cool and a bit haughty.

"Miss Odell" she emphasised the "Miss," by way of reproaching him for the disrespect implied in his omission—"wore all her rings, five or six of them, and three bracelets

—one of square diamonds, one of rubies, and one of diamonds and emeralds. She also had on a sunburst of pear-shaped diamonds on a chain round her neck, and she carried a platinum lorgnette set with diamonds and pearls."

"Did she own any other jewellery?"

"A few small pieces, maybe, but I'm not sure."

"And did she keep 'em in a steel jewel-case in the bedroom?"

"Yes—when she wasn't wearing them." There was more than a suggestion of sarcasm in the reply.

"Oh, I thought maybe she kept 'em locked up when she had 'em on." Heath's antagonism had been aroused by the maid's attitude; he could not have failed to note that she had consistently omitted the punctilious "sir" when answering him. He now stood up and pointed loweringly to the black document-box on the rosewood table.

"Ever see that before?"

The woman nodded indifferently. "Many times."

"Where was it generally kept?"

"In that thing." She indicated the Boule cabinet with a motion of the head.

"What was in the box?"

"How should I know?"

"You don't know—huh?" Heath thrust out his jaw, but his bullying attitude had no effect upon the impassive maid.

"I've got no idea," she replied calmly. "It was always kept locked, and I never saw Miss Odell open it."

The Sergeant walked over to the door of the living-room closet.

"See that key?" he asked angrily.

Again the woman nodded; but this time I detected a look of mild astonishment in her eyes.

"Was that key always kept on the inside of the door?"

"No; it was always on the outside."

Heath shot Vance a curious look. Then, after a moment's

frowning contemplation of the knob, he waved his hand to the detective who had brought the maid in.

"Take her back to the reception-room, Snitkin, and get a detailed description from her of all the Odell jewellery. . . . And keep her outside ; I'll want her again."

When Snitkin and the maid had gone out, Vance lay back lazily on the davenport, where he had sat during the interview, and sent a spiral of cigarette smoke toward the ceiling.

"Rather illuminatin', what ?" he remarked. "The dusky demoiselle got us considerably forrader. Now we know that the closet key is on the wrong side of the door, and that our *fille de joie* went to the theatre with one of her favourite *inamorati*, who presumably brought her home shortly before she took her departure from this wicked world."

"You think that's helpful, do you ?" Heath's tone was contemptuously triumphant. "Wait till you hear the crazy story the telephone operator's got to tell."

"All right, Sergeant," put in Markham impatiently. "Suppose we get on with the ordeal."

"I'm going to suggest, Mr. Markham, that we question the janitor first. And I'll show you why." Heath went to the entrance door of the apartment, and opened it. "Look here for just a minute, sir."

He stepped out into the main hall, and pointed down the little passageway on the left. It was about ten feet in length, and ran between the Odell apartment and the blank rear wall of the reception-room. At the end of it was a solid oak door which gave on the court at the side of the house.

"That door," explained Heath, "is the only side or rear entrance to this building ; and when that door is bolted nobody can get into the house except by the front entrance. You can't even get into the building through the other apartments, for every window on this floor is barred. I checked up on that point as soon as I got here."

He led the way back into the living-room.

"Now, after I'd looked over the situation this morning," he

went on, "I figured that our man had entered through that side door at the end of the passageway, and had slipped into this apartment without the night operator seeing him. So I tried the side door to see if it was open. But it was bolted on the inside—not locked, mind you, but bolted. And it wasn't a slip-bolt, either, that could have been jimmed or worked open from the outside, but a tough old-fashioned turn-bolt of solid brass. . . . And now I want you to hear what the janitor's got to say about it."

Markham nodded acquiescence, and Heath called an order to one of the officers in the hall. A moment later a stolid, middle-aged German, with sullen features and high cheekbones, stood before us. His jaw was clamped tight, and he shifted his eyes from one to the other of us suspiciously.

Heath straightway assumed the role of inquisitor.

"What time do you leave here at night?" He had, for some reason, assumed a belligerent manner.

"Six o'clock—sometimes earlier, sometimes later." The man spoke in a surly monotone. He was obviously resentful at this unexpected intrusion upon his orderly routine.

"And what time do you get here in the morning?"

"Eight o'clock, regular."

"What time did you go home last night?"

"About six—maybe quarter past"

Heath paused and finally lighted the cigar on which he had been chewing at intervals during the past hour.

"Now, tell me about that side door," he went on, with undiminished aggressiveness. "You told me you lock it every night before you leave—is that right?"

"Ja—that's right." The man nodded his head affirmatively several times. "Only I don't lock it—I bolt it."

"All right, you bolt it, then." As Heath talked his cigar bobbed up and down between his lips; smoke and words came simultaneously from his mouth. "And last night you bolted it as usual about six o'clock?"

"Maybe a quarter past," the janitor amended, with Germanic precision.

"You're sure you bolted it last night?" The question was almost ferocious.

"*Ja, ja*. Sure, I am. I do it every night. I never miss."

The man's earnestness left no doubt that the door in question had indeed been bolted on the inside at about six o'clock on the previous evening. Heath, however, belaboured the point for several minutes, only to be reassured doggedly that the door had been bolted. At last the janitor was dismissed.

"Really, y'know, Sergeant," remarked Vance with an amused smile, "that honest Rheinlander bolted the door."

"Sure, he did," spluttered Heath; "and I found it still bolted this morning at quarter to eight. That's just what messes things up so nice and pretty. If that door was bolted from six o'clock last evening until eight o'clock this morning, I'd appreciate having someone drive up in a hearse and tell me how the Canary's little playmate got in here last night. And I'd also like to know how he got out."

"Why not through the main entrance?" asked Markham. "It seems the only logical way left, according to your own findings."

"That's how I had it figured out, sir," returned Heath. "But wait till you hear what the 'phone operator has to say."

"And the 'phone operator's post," mused Vance, "is in the main hall half-way between the front door and this apartment. Therefore, the gentleman who caused all the disturbance hereabouts last night would have had to pass within a few feet of the operator both on arriving and departing—eh, what?"

"That's it!" snapped Heath. "And, according to the operator, no such person came or went."

Markham seemed to have absorbed some of Heath's irritability.

"Get the fellow in here, and let me question him," he ordered.

Heath obeyed with a kind of malicious alacrity.

Chapter VI

A CALL FOR HELP

(Tuesday, September 11 ; 11 a.m.)

JESSUP made a good impression from the moment he entered the room. He was a serious, determined-looking man in his early thirties, rugged and well built ; and there was a squareness to his shoulders that carried a suggestion of military training. He walked with a decided limp—his right foot dragged perceptibly—and I noted that his left arm had been stiffened into a permanent arc, as if by an unreduced fracture of the elbow. He was quiet and reserved, and his eyes were steady and intelligent. Markham at once motioned him to a wicker chair beside the closet door, but he declined it, and stood before the District Attorney in a soldierly attitude of respectful attention. Markham opened the interrogation with several personal questions. It transpired that Jessup had been a sergeant in the World War,¹ had twice been seriously wounded, and had been invalided home shortly before the Armistice. He had held his present post of telephone operator for over a year.

“Now, Jessup,” continued Markham, “there are things connected with last night’s tragedy that you can tell us.”

“Yes, sir.” There was no doubt that this ex-soldier would tell us accurately anything he knew, and also that, if he had any doubt as to the correctness of his information, he would

¹ His full name was William Elmer Jessup, and he had been attached to the 308th Infantry of the 77th Division of the Overseas Forces.

frankly say so. He possessed all the qualities of a careful and well-trained witness.

“First of all, what time did you come on duty last night?”

“At ten o’clock, sir.” There was no qualification to this blunt statement; one felt that Jessup would arrive punctually at whatever hour he was due. “It was my short shift. The day man and myself alternate in long and short shifts.”

“And did you see Miss Odell come in last night after the theatre?”

“Yes, sir. Everyone who comes in has to pass the switch-board.”

“What time did she arrive?”

“It couldn’t have been more than a few minutes after eleven.”

“Was she alone?”

“No, sir. There was a gentleman with her.”

“Do you know who he was?”

“I don’t know his name, sir. But I have seen him several times before when he has called on Miss Odell.”

“You could describe him, I suppose.”

“Yes, sir. He’s tall and clean-shaven except for a very short grey moustache, and is about forty-five, I should say. He looks—if you understand me, sir—like a man of wealth and position.”

Markham nodded. “And now, tell me: did he accompany Miss Odell into her apartment, or did he go immediately away?”

“He went in with Miss Odell, and stayed about half an hour.”

Markham’s eyes brightened, and there was a suppressed eagerness in his next words.

“Then he arrived about eleven, and was alone with Miss Odell in her apartment until about half past eleven. You’re sure of these facts?”

“Yes, sir, that’s correct,” the man affirmed.

Markham paused and leaned forward.

"Now, Jessup, think carefully before answering: did anyone else call on Miss Odell at any time last night?"

"No one, sir," was the unhesitating reply.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I would have seen them, sir. They would have had to pass the switchboard in order to reach this apartment."

"And don't you ever leave the switchboard?" asked Markham.

"No, sir," the man assured him vigorously, as if protesting against the implication that he would desert a post of duty. "When I want a drink of water, or go to the toilet, I use the little lavatory in the reception-room; but I always hold the door open and keep my eye on the switchboard in case the pilot-light should show up for a telephone call. Nobody could walk down the hall, even if I was in the lavatory, without my seeing them."

One could well believe that the conscientious Jessup kept his eye at all times on the switchboard lest a call should flash and go unanswered. The man's earnestness and reliability were obvious; and there was no doubt in any of our minds, I think, that if Miss Odell had had another visitor that night, Jessup would have known of it.

But Heath, with the thoroughness of his nature, rose quickly and stepped out into the main hall. In a moment he returned, looking troubled but satisfied.

"Right!" he nodded to Markham. "The lavatory door's on a direct unobstructed line with the switchboard."

Jessup took no notice of this verification of his statement, and stood, his eyes attentively on the District Attorney, awaiting any further questions that might be asked him. There was something both admirable and confidence-inspiring in his unruffled demeanour.

"What about last night?" resumed Markham. "Did you leave the switchboard often, or for long?"

"Just once, sir; and then only to go to the lavatory for a minute or two. But I watched the board the whole time."

“And you’d be willing to state on oath that no one else called on Miss Odell from ten o’clock on, and that no one, except her escort, left her apartment after that hour?”

“Yes, sir, I would.”

He was plainly telling the truth, and Markham pondered several moments before proceeding.

“What about the side door?”

“That’s kept locked all night, sir. The janitor bolts it when he leaves, and unbolts it in the morning. I never touch it.”

Markham leaned back and turned to Heath.

“The testimony of the janitor and Jessup here,” he said, “seems to limit the situation pretty narrowly to Miss Odell’s escort. If, as seems reasonable to assume, the side door was bolted all night, and if no other caller came or went through the front door, it looks as if the man we wanted to find was the one who brought her home.”

Heath gave a short mirthless laugh.

“That would be fine, sir, if something else hadn’t happened around here last night.” Then, to Jessup: “Tell the District Attorney the rest of the story about this man.”

Markham looked toward the operator with expectant interest; and Vance, lifting himself on one elbow, listened attentively.

Jessup spoke in a level voice, with the alert and careful manner of a soldier reporting to his superior officer.

“It was just this, sir. When the gentleman came out of Miss Odell’s apartment at about half past eleven, he stopped at the switchboard and asked me to get him a Yellow Taxicab. I put the call through, and while he was waiting for the car, Miss Odell screamed and called for help. The gentleman turned and rushed to the apartment door, and I followed quickly behind him. He knocked; but at first there was no answer. Then he knocked again, and at the same time called out to Miss Odell and asked her what was the matter. This time she answered. She said everything was all right, and told him to go home and not to worry. Then he walked back with

me to the switchboard, remarking that he guessed Miss Odell must have fallen asleep and had a nightmare. We talked for a few minutes about the war, and then the taxicab came. He said good-night, and went out, and I heard the car drive away."

It was plain to see that this epilogue of the departure of Miss Odell's anonymous escort completely upset Markham's theory of the case. He looked down at the floor with a baffled expression, and smoked vigorously for several moments. At last he asked :

"How long was it after this man came out of the apartment that you heard Miss Odell scream ?"

"About five minutes. I had put my connection through to the taxicab company, and it was a minute or so later that she screamed."

"Was the man near the switchboard ?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, he had one arm resting on it."

"How many times did Miss Odell scream ? And just what did she say when she called for help ?"

"She screamed twice, and then cried 'Help! Help!'"

"And when the man knocked on the door the second time, what did he say ?"

"As near as I can recollect, sir, he said : 'Open the door, Margaret! What's the trouble ?'"

"And can you remember her exact words when she answered him ?"

Jessup hesitated, and frowned reflectively.

"As I recall, she said : 'There's nothing the matter. I'm sorry I screamed. Everything's all right, so please go home, and don't worry.' . . . Of course, that may not be exactly what she said, but it was something very close to it."

"You could hear her plainly through the door, then ?"

"Oh, yes. These doors are not very thick."

Markham rose and began pacing meditatively. At length, halting in front of the operator, he asked another question :

"Did you hear any other suspicious sounds in this apartment after the man left?"

"Not a sound of any kind, sir," Jessup declared. "Someone from outside the building, however, telephoned Miss Odell about ten minutes later, and a man's voice answered from her apartment."

"What's this!" Markham spun round, and Heath sat up at attention, his eyes wide. "Tell me every detail of that call."

Jessup complied unemotionally.

"About twenty minutes to twelve a trunk-light flashed on the board, and when I answered it, a man asked for Miss Odell. I plugged the connection through, and after a short wait the receiver was lifted from her 'phone—you can tell when a receiver's taken off the hook, because the guide-light on the board goes out—and a man's voice answered 'Hello.' I pulled the listening-in key over, and, of course, didn't hear any more."

There was silence in the apartment for several minutes. Then Vance, who had been watching Jessup closely during the interview, spoke.

"By the by, Mr. Jessup," he asked carelessly, "were you yourself, by any chance, a bit fascinated—let us say—by the charming Miss Odell?"

For the first time since entering the room the man appeared ill at ease. A dull flush overspread his cheeks.

"I thought she was a very beautiful lady," he answered resolutely.

Markham gave Vance a look of disapproval, and then addressed himself abruptly to the operator.

"That will be all for the moment, Jessup."

The man bowed stiffly and limped out.

"This case is becoming positively fascinatin'," murmured Vance, relaxing once more upon the davenport.

"It's comforting to know that someone's enjoying it." Markham's tone was irritable. "And what, may I ask, was

the object of your question concerning Jessup's sentiments toward the dead woman?"

"Oh, just a vagrant notion struggling in my brain," returned Vance. "And then, y'know, a bit of *boudoir racontage* always enlivens a situation, what?"

Heath, rousing himself from gloomy abstraction, spoke up.

"We've still got the finger-prints, Mr. Markham. And I'm thinking that they're going to locate our man for us."

"But even if Dubois does identify those prints," said Markham, "we'll have to show how the owner of them got into this place last night. He'll claim, of course, they were made prior to the crime."

"Well, it's a sure thing," declared Heath stubbornly, "that there was some man in here last night when Odell got back from the theatre, and that he was still here until after the other man left at half-past eleven. The woman's screams and the answering of that 'phone call at twenty minutes to twelve prove it. And since Doc Doremus said that the murder took place before midnight, there's no getting away from the fact that the guy who was hiding in here did the job."

"That appears incontrovertible," agreed Markham. "And I'm inclined to think it was someone she knew. She probably screamed when he first revealed himself, and then, recognising him, calmed down and told the other man out in the hall that nothing was the matter. . . . Later on he strangled her."

"And, I might suggest," added Vance, "that his place of hiding was that clothes-press."

"Sure," the Sergeant concurred. "But what's bothering me is how he got in here. The day operator who was at the switchboard until ten last night told me that the man who called and took Odell out to dinner was the only visitor she had."

Markham gave a grunt of exasperation.

"Bring the day man in here," he ordered. "We've got to straighten this thing out. *Somebody* got in here last night, and before I leave I'm going to find out how it was done."

Vance gave him a look of patronising amusement.

"Y'know, Markham," he said, "I'm not blessed with the gift of psychic inspiration, but I have one of those strange, indescribable feelings, as the minor poets say, that if you really contemplate remaining in this bestrewn boudoir till you've discovered how the mysterious visitor gained admittance here last night, you'd do jolly well to send for your toilet access'ries and several changes of fresh linen—not to mention your pyjamas. The chap who engineered this little *soirée* planned his entrance and exit most carefully and perspicaciously."

Markham regarded Vance dubiously, but made no reply.

Chapter VII

A NAMELESS VISITOR

(Tuesday September 11th ; 11.15 a.m.)

HEATH had stepped out into the hall, and now returned with the day telephone operator, a sallow thin young man who, we learned, was named Spively. His almost black hair, which accentuated the pallor of his face, was sleeked back from his forehead with pomade ; and he wore a very shallow moustache which barely extended beyond the alæ of his nostrils. He was dressed in an exaggeratedly dapper fashion, with a dazzling chocolate-coloured suit cut very close to his figure, a pair of cloth-topped buttoned shoes, and a pink shirt with a stiff turn-over collar to match. He appeared nervous, and immediately sat down in the wicker chair by the door, fingering the sharp creases of his trousers, and running the tip of his tongue over his lips.

Markham went straight to the point.

"I understand you were at the switchboard yesterday afternoon and last night until ten o'clock. Is that correct ?"

Spively swallowed hard, and nodded his head. "Yes, sir."

"What time did Miss Odell go out to dinner ?"

"About seven o'clock. I'd just sent to the restaurant next door for some sandwiches——"

"Did she go alone ?" Markham interrupted his explanation.

"No. A fella called for her."

"Did you know this ' fella ' ?"

"I'd seen him a couple of times calling on Miss Odell, but I didn't know who he was."

"What did he look like?" Markham's question was uttered with hurried impatience.

Spively's description of the girl's escort tallied with Jessup's description of the man who had accompanied her home, though Spively was more voluble and less precise than Jessup had been. Patently, Miss Odell had gone out at seven and returned at eleven with the same man.

"Now," resumed Markham, putting an added stress on his words, "I want to know who else called on Miss Odell between the time she went out to dinner and ten o'clock when you left the switchboard."

Spively was puzzled by the question, and his thin arched eyebrows lifted and contracted.

"I—don't understand," he stammered. "How could anyone call on Miss Odell when she was out?"

"Someone evidently did," said Markham. "And he got into her apartment, and was there when she returned at eleven."

The youth's eyes opened wide, and his lips fell apart.

"My God, sir!" he exclaimed. "So that's how they murdered her!—laid in wait for her! . . ." He stopped abruptly, suddenly realising his own proximity to the mysterious chain of events that had led up to the crime. "But nobody got into her apartment while I was on duty," he blurted, with frightened emphasis. "Nobody! I never left the board from the time she went out until quitting time."

"Couldn't anyone have come in the side door?"

"What! Was it unlocked?" Spively's tone was startled. "It never is unlocked at night. The janitor bolts it when he leaves at six."

"And you didn't unbolt it last night for any purpose? Think!"

"No, sir, I didn't!" He shook his head earnestly.

"And you are positive that no one got into the apartment through the front door after Miss Odell left?"

"Positive! I tell you I didn't leave the board the whole time, and nobody could've got by me without my knowing it. There was only one person that called and asked for her——"

"Oh! So someone did call!" snapped Markham. "When was it? And what happened?—Jog your memory before you answer."

"It wasn't anything important," the youth assured him, genuinely frightened. "Just a fella who came in and rang her bell and went right out again."

"Never mind whether it was important or not." Markham's tone was cold and peremptory. "What time did he call?"

"About half-past nine."

"And who was he?"

"A young fella I've seen come here several times to see Miss Odell. I don't know his name."

"Tell me exactly what took place," pursued Markham. Again Spively swallowed hard and wetted his lips.

"It was like this," he began, with effort. "The fella came in and started walking down the hall, and I said to him: 'Miss Odell isn't in.' But he kept on going, and said: 'Oh, well, I'll ring the bell anyway to make sure.' A telephone call came through just then, and I let him go on. He rang the bell and knocked on the door, but of course there wasn't any answer; and pretty soon he came on back and said: 'I guess you were right.' Then he tossed me half a dollar, and went out."

"You actually saw him go out?" There was a note of disappointment in Markham's voice.

"Sure, I saw him go out. He stopped just inside the front door and lit a cigarette. Then he opened the door and turned toward Broadway."

“ ‘One by one the rosy petals fall,’ ” came Vance’s indolent voice. “ A most amusin’ situation! ”

Markham was loath to relinquish his hope in the criminal possibilities of this one caller who had come and gone at half-past nine.

“ What was this man like ? ” he asked. “ Can you describe him ? ”

Spively sat up straight, and when he answered, it was with an enthusiasm that showed he had taken special note of the visitor.

“ He was good-looking, not so old—maybe thirty. And he had on a full-dress suit and patent-leather pumps, and a pleated silk shirt——”

“ What, what ? ” demanded Vance, in simulated unbelief, leaning over the back of the davenport. “ A silk shirt with evening dress! Most extr’ordin’ry! ”

“ Oh, a lot of the best dressers are wearing them,” Spively explained, with condescending pride. “ It’s all the fashion for dancing.”

“ You don’t say—really! ” Vance appeared dumbfounded. “ I must look into this. . . . And, by the by, when this Beau Brummel of the silk shirt paused by the front door, did he take his cigarette from a long flat silver case carried in his lower waistcoat pocket ? ”

The youth looked at Vance in admiring astonishment.

“ How did you know ? ” he exclaimed.

“ Simple deduction,” Vance explained, resuming his recumbent posture. “ Large metal cigarette-cases carried in the waistcoat pocket somehow go with silk shirts for evening wear.”

Markham, clearly annoyed at the interruption, cut in sharply with a demand for the operator to proceed with his description.

“ He wore his hair smoothed down,” Spively continued, “ and you could see it was kind of long ; but it was cut in the latest style. And he had a small waxed moustache ; and

there was a big carnation in the lapel of his coat, and he had on chamois gloves. . . ."

"My word!" murmured Vance. "A gigolo!"

Markham, with the incubus of the night clubs riding him heavily, frowned and took a deep breath. Vance's observation evidently had launched him on an unpleasant train of thought.

"Was this man short or tall?" he asked next.

"He wasn't so tall—about my height," Spively explained.

"And he was sort of thin."

There was an easily recognisable undercurrent of admiration in his tone, and I felt that this youthful telephone operator had seen in Miss Odell's caller a certain physical and sartorial ideal. This palpable admiration, coupled with the somewhat *outré* clothes affected by the youth, permitted us to read between the lines of his remarks a fairly accurate description of the man who had unsuccessfully rung the dead girl's bell at half-past nine the night before.

When Spively had been dismissed, Markham rose and strode about the room, his head enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke, while Heath sat stolidly watching him, his brows knit.

Vance stood up and stretched himself.

"The absorbin' problem, it would seem, remains *in statu quo*," he remarked airily. "How, oh how, did the fair Margaret's executioner get in?"

"You know, Mr. Markham," rumbled Heath sententially, "I've been thinking that the fellow may have come here earlier in the afternoon—say, before that side door was locked. Odell herself may have let him in and hidden him when the other man came to take her to dinner."

"It looks that way," Markham admitted. "Bring the maid in here again, and we'll see what we can find out."

When the woman had been brought in, Markham questioned her as to her actions during the afternoon, and learned that she had gone out at about four to do some shopping, and had returned about half-past five.

"Did Miss Odell have any visitor with her when you got back?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. "She was alone."

"Did she mention that any one had called?"

"No, sir."

"Now," continued Markham, "could any one have been hidden in this apartment when you went home at seven?"

The maid was frankly astonished, and even a little horrified.

"Where could any one hide?" she asked, looking round the apartment.

"There are several possible places," Markham suggested: "in the bathroom, in one of the clothes-closets, under the bed, behind the window draperies. . . ."

The woman shook her head decisively. "No one could have been hidden," she declared. "I was in the bathroom half a dozen times, and I got Miss Odell's gown out of the clothes-closet in the bedroom. As soon as it began to get dark I drew all the window-shades myself. And as for the bed, it's built almost down to the floor; no one could squeeze under it." (I glanced closely at the bed, and realised that this statement was quite true.)

"What about the clothes-closet in this room?" Markham put the question hopefully, but again the maid shook her head.

"Nobody was in there. That's where I keep my own hat and coat, and I took them out myself when I was getting ready to go. I even put away one of Miss Odell's old dresses in that closet before I left."

"And you are absolutely certain," reiterated Markham, "that no one could have been hidden anywhere in these rooms at the time you went home?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Do you happen to remember if the key of this clothes-closet was on the inside or the outside of the lock when you opened the door to get your hat?"

The woman paused, and looked thoughtfully at the closet door.

"It was on the outside, where it always was," she announced, after several moments' reflection. "I remember because it caught in the chiffon of the old dress I put away."

Markham frowned and then resumed his questioning.

"You say you don't know the name of Miss Odell's dinner companion last night. Can you tell us the names of any men she was in the habit of going out with?"

"Miss Odell never mentioned any names to me," the woman said. "She was very careful about it, too—secretive, you might say. You see, I'm only here in the daytime, and the gentlemen she knew generally came in the evening."

"And you never heard her speak of any one of whom she was frightened—any one she had reason to fear?"

"No, sir—although there was one man she was trying to get rid of. He was a bad character—I wouldn't have trusted him anywhere—and I told Miss Odell she'd better look out for him. But she'd known him a long time, I guess, and had been pretty soft on him once."

"How do you happen to know this?"

"One day, about a week ago," the maid explained, "I came in after lunch, and he was with her in the other room. They didn't hear me, because the portières were drawn. He was demanding money, and when she tried to put him off, he began threatening her. And she said something that showed she'd given him money before. I made a noise, and then they stopped arguing; and pretty soon he went out."

"What did this man look like?" Markham's interest was reviving.

"He was kind of thin—not very tall—and I'd say he was around thirty. He had a hard face—good-looking, some would say—and pale blue eyes that gave you the shivers. He always wore his hair greased back, and he had a little yellow moustache pointed at the ends."

"Ah!" said Vance. "Our gigolo!"

"Has this man been here since?" asked Markham.

"I don't know, sir—not when I was here."

"That will be all," said Markham; and the woman went out.

"She didn't help us much," complained Heath.

"What!" exclaimed Vance. "I think she did remarkably well. She cleared up several moot points."

"And just what portions of her information do you consider particularly illuminating?" asked Markham, with ill-conceived annoyance.

"We now know, do we not," rejoined Vance serenely, "that no one was lying *perdu* in here when the *bonne* departed yester evening."

"Instead of that fact being helpful," retorted Markham, "I'd say it added materially to the complications of the situation."

"It would appear that way, wouldn't it, now? But then—who knows?—it may prove to be your brightest and most comfortin' clue. . . . Furthermore, we learned that some one evidently locked himself in that clothes-press, as witness the shifting of the key, and that, moreover, this occultation did not occur until the abigail had gone, or let us say, after seven o'clock."

"Sure," said Heath with sour facetiousness; "when the side door was bolted and an operator was sitting in the front hall, who swears nobody came in that way."

"It is a bit mystifyin'," Vance conceded sadly.

"Mystifying? It's impossible!" grumbled Markham.

Heath, who was now staring with meditative pugnacity into the closet, shook his head helplessly.

"What I don't understand," he ruminated, "is why, if the fellow was hiding in the closet, he didn't ransack it when he came out, like he did all the rest of the apartment."

"Sergeant," said Vance, "you've put your finger on the crux of the matter. . . . Y' know, the neat, undisturbed aspect of that closet rather suggests that the crude person

who rifled these charming rooms omitted to give it his attention because it was locked on the inside and he couldn't open it."

"Come, come!" protested Markham. "That theory implies that there were two unknown persons in here last night."

Vance sighed. "Harrow and alas! I know it. And we can't introduce even one into this apartment logically. . . . Distressin', ain't it?"

Heath sought consolation in a new line of thought.

"Anyway," he submitted, "we know that the fancy fellow with the patent-leather pumps who called here last night at half-past nine was probably Odell's lover, and was grafting on her."

"And in just what recondite way does that obvious fact help to roll the clouds away?" asked Vance. "Nearly every modern Delilah has an avaricious *amoroso*. It would be rather singular if there wasn't such a chap in the offing, what?"

"That's all right, too," returned Heath. "But I'll tell you something, Mr. Vance, that maybe you don't know. The men that these girls lose their heads over are generally crooks of some kind—professional criminals, you understand. That's why, knowing that this job was the work of a professional, it don't leave me cold, as you might say, to learn that this fellow who was threatening Odell and grafting on her was the same one who was prowling round here last night. . . . And I'll say this, too: the description of him sounds a whole lot like the kind of high-class burglars that hang out at these swell all-night cafés."

"You're convinced, then," asked Vance mildly, "that this job, as you call it, was done by a professional criminal?"

Heath was almost contemptuous in his reply. "Didn't the guy wear gloves, and use a jimmy? It was a yeggman's job, all right."

Chapter VIII

THE INVISIBLE MURDERER

(Tuesday, September 11th, 11.45 a.m.)

MARKHAM went to the window and stood, his hands behind him, looking down into the little paved rear yard. After several minutes he turned slowly.

"The situation, as I see it," he said, "boils down to this: The Odell girl has an engagement for dinner and the theatre with a man of some distinction. He calls for her a little after seven, and they go out together. At eleven o'clock they return. He goes with her into her apartment and remains half an hour. He leaves at half-past eleven and asks the phone operator to call him a taxi. While he is waiting the girl screams and calls for help, and, in response to his inquiries, she tells him nothing is wrong and bids him go away. The taxi arrives, and he departs in it. Ten minutes later some one telephones her, and a man answers from her apartment. This morning she is found murdered, and the apartment ransacked."

He took a long draw on his cigar.

"Now, it is obvious that when she and her escort returned last night, there was another man in this place somewhere; and it is also obvious that the girl was alive after her escort had departed. Therefore, we must conclude that the man who was already in the apartment was the person who murdered her. This conclusion is further corroborated by Doctor Doremus's report that the crime occurred between eleven and twelve. But since her escort did not leave

till half-past eleven, and spoke with her after that time, we can put the actual hour of the murder as between half-past eleven and midnight. . . . These are the inferable facts from the evidence thus far adduced."

"There's not much getting away from 'em," agreed Heath.

"At any rate, they're interestin'," murmured Vance.

Markham, walking up and down earnestly, continued:

"The features of the situation revolving round these inferable facts are as follows: There was no one hiding in the apartment at seven o'clock—the hour the maid went home. Therefore, the murderer entered the apartment later. First, then, let us consider the side door. At six o'clock—an hour before the maid's departure—the janitor bolted it on the inside, and both operators disavow emphatically that they went near it. Moreover, you, Sergeant, found it bolted this morning. Hence, we may assume that the door was bolted on the inside all night, and that nobody could have entered that way. Consequently, we are driven to the inevitable alternative that the murderer entered by the front door. Now, let us consider this other means of entry. The phone operator who was on duty until ten o'clock last night asserts positively that the only person who entered the front door and passed down the main hall to this apartment was a man who rang the bell and, getting no answer, immediately walked out again. The other operator, who was on duty from ten o'clock until this morning, asserts with equal positiveness that no one entered the front door and passed the switchboard coming to this apartment. Add to all this the fact that every window on this floor is barred, and that no one from upstairs can descend into the main hall without coming face to face with the operator, and we are, for the moment, confronted with an impasse."

Heath scratched his head, and laughed mirthlessly.

"It don't make sense, does it, sir?"

"What about the next apartment?" asked Vance, "the one with the door facing the rear passageway—No. 2, I think?"

Heath turned to him patronisingly. "I looked into that the first thing this morning. Apartment No. 2 is occupied by a single woman; and I woke her up at eight o'clock and searched the place. Nothing there. Anyway, you have to walk past the switchboard to reach her apartment the same as you do to reach this one; and nobody called on her or left her apartment last night. What's more, Jessup, who's a shrewd sound lad, told me this woman is a quiet lady-like sort, and that she and Odell didn't ever know each other."

"You're so thorough, Sergeant!" murmured Vance.

"Of course," put in Markham, "it would have been possible for someone from the other apartment to have slipped in here behind the operator's back between seven and eleven, and then to have slipped back after the murder. But as Sergeant Heath's search this morning failed to uncover anyone, we can eliminate the possibility of our man having operated from that quarter."

"I dare say you're right," Vance indifferently admitted.

"But it strikes me, Markham old dear, that your own affectin' recapitulation of the situation jolly well eliminates the possibility of your man's having operated from any quarter. . . . And yet he came in, garroted the unfortunate damsel, and departed—eh, what? . . . It's a charmin' little problem. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

"It's uncanny," pronounced Markham gloomily.

"It's positively spiritualistic," amended Vance. "It has the caressin' odour of a séance. Really, y' know, I'm beginnin' to suspect that some medium was hovering in the vicinage last night doing some rather tip-top materialisations. . . . I say, Markham, could you get an indictment against ectoplasmic emanation?"

"It wasn't no spook that made those finger-prints," growled Heath, with surly truculence.

Markham halted his nervous pacing and regarded Vance irritably.

"Damn it ! This is rank nonsense. The man got in some way, and he got out, too. There's something wrong somewhere. Either the maid is mistaken about someone being here when she left, or else one of those phone operators went to sleep and won't admit it."

"Or else one of em's lying," supplemented Heath.

Vance shook his head. "The dusky *fille de chambre*, I'd say, is eminently trustworthy. And if there was any doubt about any one's having come in the front door unnoticed, the lads on the switchboard would, in the present circumstances, be only too eager to admit it. . . . No, Markham, you'll simply have to approach this affair from the astral plane, so to speak."

Markham grunted his distaste of Vance's jocularly.

"That line of investigation I leave to you with your metaphysical theories and esoteric hypotheses."

"But, consider," protested Vance banteringly. "You've proved conclusively—or, rather, you've demonstrated legally—that no one could have entered or departed from this apartment last night ; and, as you've often told me, a court of law must decide all matters, not in accord with known or suspected facts, but according to the evidence ; and the evidence in this case would prove a sound alibi for every corporeal being extant. And yet, it's not exactly tenable, d' ye see, that the lady strangled herself. If only it had been poison, what an exquisite and satisfyin' suicide case you'd have ! . . . Most inconsiderate of her homicidal visitor not to have used arsenic instead of his hands !"

"Well, he strangled her," pronounced Heath. "Furthermore, I'll lay my money on the fellow who called here last night at half-past nine and couldn't get in. He's the bird I want to talk to."

"Indeed?" Vance produced another cigarette. "I shouldn't say, to judge from our description of him, that his conversation would prove particularly fascinating."

An ugly light came into Heath's eyes.

"We've got ways," he said through his teeth, "of getting damn interesting conversation out of people who haven't no great reputation for repartee."

Vance sighed. "How the Four Hundred needs you, my Sergeant!"

Markham looked at his watch.

"I've got pressing work at the office," he said, "and all this talk isn't getting us anywhere." He put his hand on Heath's shoulder. "I leave you to go ahead. This afternoon I'll have these people brought down to my office for another questioning—maybe I can jog their memories a bit. . . . You've got some line of investigation planned?"

"The usual routine," replied Heath drearily. "I'll go through Odell's papers, and I'll have three or four of my men check up on her."

"You'd better get after the Yellow Taxicab Company right away," Markham suggested. "Find out, if you can, who the man was who left here at half-past eleven last night, and where he went."

"Do you imagine for one moment," asked Vance, "that if this man knew anything about the murder, he would have stopped in the hall and asked the operator to call a taxi for him?"

"Oh, I don't look for much in that direction." Markham's tone was almost listless. "But the girl may have said something to him that'll give us a lead."

Vance shook his head facetiously. "O welcome pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope, thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!"

Markham was in no mood for chaffing. He turned to Heath, and spoke with forced cheeriness.

"Call me up later this afternoon. I may get some new

evidence out of the outfit we've just interviewed. . . . And," he added, "be sure to put a man on guard here. I want this apartment kept just as it is until we see a little more light."

"I'll attend to that," Heath assured him.

Markham and Vance and I went out and entered the car. A few minutes later we were winding rapidly across town through Central Park.

"Recall our recent *conversazione* about footprints in the snow?" asked Vance, as we emerged into Fifth Avenue and headed south.

Markham nodded abstractedly.

"As I remember," mused Vance, "in the hypothetical case you presented there were not only footprints but a dozen or more witnesses—including a youthful prodigy—who saw a figure of some kind cross the hibernal landscape. . . . *Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie!* Here you are in a most beastly pother because of the disheartenin' fact that there are neither footprints in the snow nor witnesses who saw a fleeing figure. In short, you are bereft of both direct and circumstantial evidence. . . . Sad, sad."

He wagged his head dolefully.

"Y' know, Markham, it appears to me that the testimony in this case constitutes conclusive legal proof that no one could have been with the deceased at the hour of her passing, and that, *ergo*, she is presumably alive. The strangled body of the lady is, I take it, simply an irrelevant circumstance from the standpoint of legal procedure. I know that you learned lawyers won't admit a murder without a body; but how, in sweet Heaven's name, do you get around a *corpus delicti* without a murder?"

"You're talking nonsense," Markham rebuked him, with a show of anger.

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance. "And yet, it's a distressin' thing for a lawyer not to have footprints of some kind, isn't it, old dear? It leaves one so up in the air."

Suddenly Markham swung round. "You, of course, don't

need footprints, or any other kind of material clues," he flung at Vance tauntingly. "*You* have powers of divination such as are denied ordinary mortals. If I remember correctly, you informed me, somewhat grandiloquently, that, knowing the nature and conditions of a crime, you could lead me infallibly to the culprit, whether he left footprints or not. You recall that boast? . . . Well, here's a crime, and the perpetrator left no footprints coming or going. Be so good as to end my suspense by confiding in me who killed the Odell girl."

Vance's serenity was not ruffled by Markham's ill-humoured challenge. He sat smoking lazily for several minutes; then he leaned over and flicked his cigarette ash out of the window.

"'Pon my word, Markham," he rejoined evenly, "I'm half inclined to look into this silly murder. I think I'll wait, though, and see whom the nonplussed Heath turns up with his inquiries."

Markham grunted scoffingly, and sank back on the cushions.

"Your generosity wrings me," he said.

Chapter IX

THE PACK IN FULL CRY

(Tuesday, September 11th ; afternoon)

ON our way down-town that morning we were delayed for a considerable time in the traffic congestion just north of Madison Square, and Markham anxiously looked at his watch.

"It's past noon," he said. "I think I'll stop at the club and have a bite of lunch. . . . I presume that eating at this early hour would be too plebeian for so exquisite a hothouse flower as you."

Vance considered the invitation.

"Since you deprived me of my breakfast," he decided, "I'll permit you to buy me some eggs *Bénédictine*."

A few minutes later we entered the almost empty grill of the Stuyvesant Club, and took a table near one of the windows looking southward over the tree-tops of Madison Square.

Shortly after we had given our order a uniformed attendant entered and, bowing deferentially at the District Attorney's elbow, held out an unaddressed communication sealed in one of the club's envelopes. Markham read it with an expression of growing curiosity, and as he studied the signature a look of mild surprise came into his eyes. At length he looked up and nodded to the waiting attendant. Then, excusing himself, he left us abruptly. It was fully twenty minutes before he returned.

"Funny thing," he said. "That note was from the man

who took the Odell woman to dinner and the theatre last night. . . . A small world," he mused. "He's staying here at the club—he's a non-resident member and makes it his headquarters when he's in town."

"You know him?" Vance put the question disinterestedly.

"I've met him several times—chap named Spotswoode." Markham seemed perplexed. "He's a man of family, lives in a country house on Long Island, and is regarded generally as a highly respectable member of society—one of the last persons I'd suspect of being mixed up with the Odell girl. But, according to his own confession, he played around a good deal with her during his visits to New York—'sowing a few belated wild oats,' as he expressed it—and last night took her to Francelle's for dinner and to the Winter Garden afterwards."

"Not my idea of an intellectual, or even edifyin', evening," commented Vance. "And he selected a deuced unlucky day for it. . . . I say, imagine opening the morning paper and learning that your *petite dame* of the preceding evening had been strangled! Disconcertin', what?"

"He's certainly disconcerted," said Markham. "The early afternoon papers were out about an hour ago, and he'd been phoning my office every ten minutes, when I suddenly walked in here. He's afraid his connection with the girl will leak out and disgrace him."

"And won't it?"

"I hardly see the necessity. No one knows who her escort was last evening; and since he obviously had nothing to do with the crime, what's to be gained by dragging him into it? He told me the whole story, and offered to stay in the city as long as I wanted him to."

"I infer, from the cloud of disappointment that enveloped you when you returned just now, that his story held nothing hopeful for you in the way of clues."

"No," Markham admitted. "The girl apparently never

spoke to him of her intimate affairs ; and he couldn't give me a single helpful suggestion. His account of what happened last night agreed perfectly with Jessup's. He called for the girl at seven, brought her home at about eleven, stayed with her half an hour or so, and then left her. When he heard her call for help he was frightened, but on being assured by her there was nothing wrong, he concluded she had dozed off into a nightmare, and thought no more of it. He drove direct to the club here, arriving about ten minutes to twelve. Judge Redfern, who saw him descend from the taxi, insisted on his coming upstairs and playing poker with some men who were waiting in the Judge's rooms for him. They played until three o'clock this morning."

"Your Long Island Don Juan has certainly not supplied you with any footprints in the snow."

"Anyway, his coming forward at this time closes one line of inquiry over which we might have wasted considerable time."

"If many more lines of inquiry are closed," remarked Vance dryly, "you'll be in a distressin' dilemma, don't y' know."

"There are enough still open to keep me busy," said Markham, pushing back his plate and calling for the check. He rose ; then pausing, regarded Vance meditatively. "Are you sufficiently interested to want to come along ?"

"Eh, what ? My word ! . . . Charmed, I'm sure. But, I say, sit down just a moment—there's a good fellow!—till I finish my coffee."

I was considerably astonished at Vance's ready acceptance, careless and bantering though it was, for there was an exhibition of old Chinese prints at the Montross Galleries that afternoon, which he had planned to attend. A Riokai and a Moyeki, said to be very fine examples of Sung painting, were to be shown ; and Vance was particularly eager to acquire them for his collection.

We rode with Markham to the Criminal Courts building

and, entering by the Franklin Street door, took the private elevator to the District Attorney's spacious but dingy private office which overlooked the grey-stone ramparts of the Tombs. Vance seated himself in one of the heavy leather-upholstered chairs near the carved oak table on the right of the desk, and lighted a cigarette with an air of cynical amusement.

"I await with anticipat'ry delight the grinding of the wheels of justice," he confided, leaning back lazily.

"You are doomed not to hear the first turn of those wheels," retorted Markham. "The initial revolution will take place outside of this office." And he disappeared through a swinging door which led to the judge's chambers.

Five minutes later he returned, and sat down in the high-backed swivel chair at his desk, with his back to the four tall narrow windows in the south wall of the office.

"I just saw Judge Redfern," he explained—"it happened to be the midday recess—and he verified Spotswoode's statement in regard to the poker game. The Judge met him outside of the club at ten minutes before midnight, and was with him until three in the morning. He noted the time because he had promised his guests to be back at half-past eleven, and was twenty minutes late."

"Why all this substantiation of an obviously unimportant fact?" asked Vance.

"A matter of routine," Markham told him, slightly impatient. "In a case of this kind every factor, however seemingly remote to the main issue, must be checked."

"Really, y' know, Markham"—Vance laid his head back on the chair and gazed dreamily at the ceiling—"one would think that this eternal routine, which you lawyer chaps worship so devoutly, actually got one somewhere occasionally; whereas it never gets one anywhere. Remember the Red Queen in 'Through the Looking-Glass——'"

"I'm too busy at present to debate the question of

routine *versus* inspiration," Markham answered brusquely, pressing a button beneath the edge of his desk.

Swacker, his youthful and energetic secretary, appeared at the door which communicated with a narrow inner chamber between the District Attorney's office and the main waiting-room.

"Yes, Chief?" The secretary's eyes gleamed expectantly behind his enormous horn-rimmed glasses.

"Tell Ben to send me in a man at once."¹

Swacker went out through the corridor door, and a minute or two later a suave, rotund man, dressed immaculately and wearing a *pince-nez*, entered, and stood before Markham with an ingratiating smile.

"Morning, Tracey." Markham's tone was pleasant but curt. "Here's a list of four witnesses in connection with the Odell case that I want brought down here at once—the two phone operators, the maid, and the janitor. You'll find them at 184 West 71st Street: Sergeant Heath is holding them there."

"Right, sir." Tracey took the memorandum, and with a priggish, but by no means inelegant, bow went out.

During the next hour Markham plunged into the general work that had accumulated during the forenoon, and I was amazed at the man's tremendous vitality and efficiency. He disposed of as many important matters as would have occupied the ordinary business man for an entire day. Swacker bobbed in and out with electric energy, and various clerks appeared at the touch of a buzzer, took their orders, and were gone with breathless rapidity. Vance, who had sought diversion in a tome of famous arson trials, looked up admiringly from time to time, and shook his head in mild reproach at such spirited activity.

It was just half-past two when Swacker announced the return of Tracey with the four witnesses; and for two hours

¹ "Ben" was Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, the commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office.

Markham questioned and cross-questioned them with a thoroughness and an insight that even I, as a lawyer, had rarely seen equalled. His interrogation of the two phone operators was quite different from his casual questioning of them earlier in the day; and if there had been a single relevant omission in their former testimony, it would certainly have been caught now by Markham's gruelling catechism. But when, at last, they were told they could go, no new information had been brought to light. Their stories now stood firmly grounded: no one—with the exception of the girl herself and her escort, and the disappointed visitor at half-past nine—had entered the front door and passed down the hall to the Odell apartment from seven o'clock on; and no one had passed out that way. The janitor reiterated stubbornly that he had bolted the side door a little after six, and no amount of wheedling or aggression could shake his dogged certainty on that point. Amy Gibson, the maid, could add nothing to her former testimony. Markham's intensive examination of her produced only repetitions of what she had already told him.

Not one new possibility—not one new suggestion—was brought out. In fact, the two hours' interlocutory proceedings resulted only in closing up every loophole in a seemingly incredible situation. When, at half-past four, Markham sat back in his chair with a weary sigh, the chance of unearthing a promising means of approach to the astonishing problem seemed more remote than ever.

Vance closed his treaties on arson, and threw away his cigarette.

"I tell you, Markham, old chap," he grinned, "this case requires umbilicular contemplation, not routine. Why not call in an Egyptian seeress with a *flair* for crystal-gazing?"

"If this sort of thing goes on much longer," returned Markham dispiritedly, "I'll be tempted to take your advice."

Just then Swacker looked in through the door to say that

Inspector Brenner was on the wire. Markham picked up the telephone receiver, and as he listened he jotted down some notes on a pad. When the call had ended, he turned to Vance.

"You seem disturbed over the condition of the steel jewel-case we found in the bedroom. Well, the expert on burglar tools just called up; and he verifies his opinion of this morning. The case was pried open with a specially made cold chisel such as only a professional burglar would carry or would know how to use. It had an inch-and-three-eighths bevelled bit and a one-inch flat handle. It was an old instrument—there was a peculiar nick in the blade—and is the same one that was used in a successful house-break on upper Park Avenue early last summer. . . . Does that highly exciting information ameliorate your anxiety?"

"Can't say that it does." Vance had again become serious and perplexed. "In fact, it makes the situation still more fantastic. . . . I could see a glimmer of light—eerie and unearthly, perhaps, but still a perceptible illumination—in all this murkiness if it wasn't for that jewel-case and the steel chisel.

Markham was about to answer when Swacker again looked in and informed him that Sergeant Heath had arrived and wanted to see him.

Heath's manner was far less depressed than when we had taken leave of him that morning. He accepted the cigar Markham offered him, and seating himself at the conference table in front of the District Attorney's desk, drew out a battered note-book.

"We've had a little good luck," he began. "Burke and Emery—two of the men I put on the case—got a line on Odell at the first place they made inquiries. From what they learned, she didn't run around with many men—limited herself to a few live wires, and played the game with what you'd call *finesse*. . . . The principal one—the

man who's been seen most with her—is Charles Cleaver.”

Markham sat up.

“I know Cleaver—if it's the same one.”

“It's him, all right,” declared Heath. “Former Brooklyn Tax Commissioner; been interested in a pool-room for pony-betting over in Jersey City ever since. Hangs out at the Stuyvesant Club, where he can hobnob with his old Tammany Hall cronies.”

“That's the one,” nodded Markham. “He's a kind of professional gay-dog—known as Pop, I believe.”

Vance gazed into space.

“Well, well,” he murmured. “So old Pop Cleaver was also entangled with our subtle and sanguine Dolores. She certainly couldn't have loved him for his *beaux yeux*.”

“I thought, sir,” went on Heath, “that, seeing as how Cleaver is always in and out of the Stuyvesant Club, you might ask him some questions about Odell. He ought to know something.”

“Glad to, Sergeant.” Markham made a note on his pad. “I'll try to get in touch with him to-night. . . . Anyone else on your list?”

“There's a fellow named Mannix—Louis Mannix—who met Odell when she was in the ‘Follies’; but she chucked him over a year ago, and they haven't been seen together since. He's got another girl now. He's the head of the firm of Mannix and Levine, fur importers, and is one of your night-club rounders—a heavy spender. But I don't see much use of barking up that tree—his affair with Odell went cold too long ago.”

“Yes,” agreed Markham; “I think we can eliminate him.”

“I say, if you keep up this elimination much longer,” observed Vance, “you won't have anything left but the lady's corpse.”

“And then, there's the man who took her out last night,” pursued Heath. “Nobody seems to know his name—he

must've been one of those discreet, careful old boys. I thought at first he might have been Cleaver, but the descriptions don't tally. . . . And by the way, sir, here's a funny thing: when he left Odell last night he took the taxi down to the Stuyvesant Club, and got out there."

Markham nodded. "I know all about that, Sergeant. And I know who the man was; and it wasn't Cleaver."

Vance was chuckling.

"The Stuyvesant Club seems to be well in the forefront of this case," he said. "I do hope it doesn't suffer the sad fate of the Knickerbocker Athletic."¹

Heath was intent on the main issue.

"Who was the man, Mr. Markham?"

Markham hesitated, as if pondering the advisability of taking the other into his confidence. Then he said: "I'll tell you his name, but in strict confidence. The man was Kenneth Spotswoode."

He then recounted the story of his being called away from lunch, and of his failure to elicit any helpful suggestions from Spotswoode. He also informed Heath of his verification of the man's statements regarding his movements after meeting Judge Redfern at the club.

"And," added Markham, "since he obviously left the girl before she was murdered, there's no necessity to bother him. In fact, I gave him my word I'd keep him out of it for his family's sake."

"If you're satisfied, sir, I am." Heath closed his notebook and put it away. "There's just one other little thing. Odell used to live on 110th Street, and Emery dug up her former landlady and learned that this fancy guy the maid told us about used to call on her regularly."

¹ Vance was here referring to the famous Molineaux case, which, in 1898, sounded the death-knell of the old Knickerbocker Athletic Club at Madison Avenue and 45th Street. But it was commercialism that ended the Stuyvesant's career. This club, which stood on the north side of Madison Square, was razed a few years later to make room for a skyscraper.

"That reminds me, Sergeant." Markham picked up the memorandum he had made during Inspector Brenner's phone call. "Here's some data the Professor gave me about the forcing of the jewel-case."

Heath studied the paper with considerable eagerness. "Just as I thought!" He nodded his head with satisfaction. "Clear-cut professional job, by somebody who's been in the line of work before."

Vance roused himself.

"Still, if such is the case," he said, "why did this experienced burglar first use the insufficient poker? And why did he overlook the living-room clothes-press?"

"I'll find all that out, Mr. Vance, when I get my hands on him," asserted Heath, with a hard look in his eyes. "And the guy I want to have a nice quiet little chat with is the one with the pleated silk shirt and the chamois gloves."

"*Chacun à son goût*," sighed Vance. "For myself I have no yearning whatever to hold converse with him. Somehow, I can't just picture a professional looter trying to rend a steel box with a cast-iron poker."

"Forget the poker," Heath advised gruffly. "He jimmed the box with a steel chisel; and that same chisel was used last summer in another burglary on Park Avenue. What about *that*?"

"Ah! That's what torments me, Sergeant. If it wasn't for that disturbin' fact, d' ye see, I'd be lightsome and *sans souci* this afternoon, inviting my soul over a dish of tea at Claremont."

Detective Bellamy was announced, and Heath sprang to his feet.

"That'll mean news about those finger-prints," he prophesied hopefully.

Bellamy entered unemotionally, and walked up to the District Attorney's desk.

"Cap'n Dubois sent me over," he said. "He thought you'd want the report on those Odell prints." He reached

into his pocket and drew out a small flat folder which, at a sign from Markham, he handed to Heath. "We identified 'em. Both made by the same hand, like Cap'n Dubois said, and that hand belonged to Tony Skeel."

"'Dude' Skeel, eh?" The Sergeant's tone was vibrant with suppressed excitement. "Say, Mr. Markham, that gets us somewhere. Skeel's an ex-convict and an artist in his line."

He opened the folder and took out an oblong card and a sheet of blue paper containing eight or ten lines of type-writing. He studied the card, gave a satisfied grunt, and handed it to Markham. Vance and I stepped up and looked at it. At the top was the familiar rogues'-gallery photograph showing the full face and profile of a regular-featured youth with thick hair and a square chin. His eyes were wide-set and pale, and he wore a small, evenly trimmed moustache with waxed, needle-point ends. Below the double photograph was a brief tabulated description of its sitter, giving his name, aliases, residence, and Bertillon measurements, and designating the character of his illegal profession. Underneath were ten little squares arranged in two rows, each containing a finger-print impression made in black ink—the upper row being the impressions of the right hand, the lower row those of the left.

"So that's the *arbiter elegantiarum* who introduced the silk shirt for full-dress wear! My word!" Vance regarded the identification card satirically. "I wish he'd start a craze for gaiters with dinner-jackets—these New York theatres are frightfully draughty in winter."

Heath put the card back in the folder, and glanced over the typewritten paper that had accompanied it.

"He's our man, and no mistake, Mr. Markham. Listen to this: 'Tony (Dude) Skeel. Two years Elmira Reformatory, 1902 to 1904. One year in the Baltimore County Jail for petty larceny, 1906. Three years in San Quentin for assault and robbery, 1908 to 1911. Arrested Chicago for

house-breaking, 1912; case dismissed. Arrested and tried for burglary in Albany, 1913; no conviction. Served two years and eight months in Sing Sing for house-breaking and burglary, 1914 to 1916." He folded the paper and put it, with the card, into his breast-pocket. "Sweet little record."

"That dope what you wanted?" asked the imperturbable Bellamy.

"I'll say!" Heath was almost jovial.

Bellamy lingered expectantly with one eye on the District Attorney; and Markham, as if suddenly remembering something, took out a box of cigars and held it out.

"Much obliged, sir," said Bellamy, helping himself to two *Mi Favoritas*; and putting them into his waistcoat pocket with great care, he went out.

"I'll use your phone now, if you don't mind, Mr. Markham," said Heath.

He called the Homicide Bureau.

"Look up Tony Skeel—Dude Skeel—*pronto*, and bring him in as soon as you find him," were his orders to Snitkin. "Get his address from the files, and take Burke and Emery with you. If he's hopped it, send out a general alarm and have him picked up—some of the boys'll have a line on him. Lock him up without booking him, see? . . . And, listen. Search his room for burglar tools: he probably won't have any laying around, but I specially want a one-and-three-eighths-inch chisel with a nick in the blade. . . . I'll be at Headquarters in half an hour."

He hung up the receiver and rubbed his hands together.

"Now we're sailing," he rejoiced.

Vance had gone to the window, and stood staring down on the "Bridge of Sighs," his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Slowly he turned, and fixed Heath with a contemplative eye.

"It simply won't do, don't y' know," he asserted.

"Your friend, the Dude, may have ripped open that bally

box, but his head isn't the right shape for the rest of last evening's performance."

Heath was contemptuous.

"Not being a phrenologist, I'm going by the shape of his finger-prints."

"A woeful error in the technique of criminal approach, *sergente mio*," replied Vance dulcetly. "The question of culpability in this case isn't so simple as you imagine. It's deuced complicated. And this glass of fashion and mould of form whose portrait you're carryin' next to your heart has merely added to its intricacy."

Chapter X

A FORCED INTERVIEW

(Tuesday, September 11th; 8 p.m.)

MARKHAM dined at the Stuyvesant Club, as was his custom, and at his invitation Vance and I remained with him. He no doubt figured that our presence at the dinner-table would act as a bulwark against the intrusion of casual acquaintances; for he was in no mood for the pleasantries of the curious. Rain had begun to fall late in the afternoon, and when dinner was over it had turned into a steady down-pour which threatened to last well into the night. Dinner over, the three of us sought a secluded corner of the lounge-room, and settled ourselves for a protracted smoke.

We had been there less than a quarter of an hour when a slightly rotund man, with a heavy, florid face and thin grey hair, strolled up to us with a stealthy, self-assured gait, and wished Markham a jovial good evening. Though I had not met the new-comer I knew him to be Charles Cleaver.

"Got your note at the desk saying you wanted to see me." He spoke with a voice curiously gentle for a man of his size; but, for all its gentleness, there was in it a timbre of calculation and coldness.

Markham rose and, after shaking hands, introduced him to Vance and me—though, it seemed, Vance had known him slightly for some time. He took the chair Markham indicated, and, producing a *Corona Corona*, he carefully cut the end with a gold clipper attached to his heavy watch-

chain, rolled the cigar between his lips to dampen it, and lighted it in closely cupped hands.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Cleaver," began Markham, "but, as you probably have read, a young woman by the name of Margaret Odell was murdered last night in her apartments in 71st Street. . . ."

He paused. He seemed to be considering just how he could best broach a subject so obviously delicate; and perhaps he hoped that Cleaver would volunteer the fact of his acquaintance with the girl. But not a muscle of the man's face moved; and, after a moment, Markham continued.

"In making inquiries into the young woman's life I learned that you, among others, were fairly well acquainted with her."

Again he paused. Cleaver lifted his eyebrows almost imperceptibly, but said nothing.

"The fact is," went on Markham, a trifle annoyed by the other's deliberately circumspect attitude, "my report states that you were seen with her on many occasions during a period of nearly two years. Indeed, the only inference to be drawn from what I've learned is that you were more than casually interested in Miss Odell."

"Yes?" The query was as non-committal as it was gentle.

"Yes," repeated Markham. "And I may add, Mr. Cleaver, that this is not the time for pretences or suppressions. I am talking to you to-night, in large measure *ex officio*, because it occurred to me that you could give me some assistance in clearing the matter up. I think it only fair to say that a certain man is now under grave suspicion, and we hope to arrest him very soon. But, in any event, we will need help, and that is why I requested this little chat with you at the club."

"And how can I assist you?" Cleaver's face remained blank; only his lips moved as he put the question.

"Knowing this young woman as well as you did," explained Markham patiently, "you are no doubt in possession of some information—certain facts or confidences, let us say—which would throw light on her brutal, and apparently unexpected, murder."

Cleaver was silent for some time. His eyes had shifted to the wall before him, but otherwise his features remained set.

"I'm afraid I can't accommodate you," he said at length.

"Your attitude is not quite what might be expected in one whose conscience is entirely clear," returned Markham, with a show of resentment.

The man turned a mildly inquisitive gaze upon the District Attorney.

"What has my knowing the girl to do with her being murdered? She didn't confide in me who her murderer was to be. She didn't even tell me that she knew anyone who intended to strangle her. If she'd known she most likely could have avoided being murdered."

Vance was sitting close to me, a little removed from the others, and, leaning over, murmured in my ear *sotto voce* :

"Markham's up against another lawyer—poor dear! . . . A crumplin' situation."

But however inauspiciously this interlocutory skirmish may have begun, it soon developed into a grim combat which ended in Cleaver's complete surrender. Markham, despite his suavity and graciousness, was an unrelenting and resourceful antagonist; and it was not long before he had forced from Cleaver some highly significant information.

In response to the man's ironically evasive rejoinder, he turned quickly and leaned forward.

"You're not on the witness-stand in your own defence, Mr. Cleaver," he said sharply, "however much you appear to regard yourself as eligible for that position."

Cleaver glared back fixedly without replying; and

Markham, his eyelids level, studied the man opposite, determined to decipher all he could from the other's phlegmatic countenance. But Cleaver was apparently just as determined that his *vis-à-vis* should decipher absolutely nothing; and the features that met Markham's scrutiny were as arid as a desert. At length Markham sank back in his chair.

"It doesn't matter particularly," he remarked indifferently, "whether you discuss the matter or not here in the club to-night. If you prefer to be brought to my office in the morning by a sheriff with a subpoena, I'll be only too glad to accommodate you."

"That's up to you," Cleaver told him hostilely.

"And what's printed in the newspapers about it will be up to the reporters," rejoined Markham. "I'll explain the situation to them and give them a verbatim report of the interview."

"But I've nothing to tell you." The other's tone was suddenly conciliatory; the idea of publicity was evidently highly distasteful to him.

"So you informed me before," said Markham coldly. "Therefore I wish you good evening."

He turned to Vance and me with the air of a man who had terminated an unpleasant episode.

Cleaver, however, made no move to go. He smoked thoughtfully for a minute or two; then he gave a short, hard laugh which did not even disturb the contours of his ace.

"Oh, hell!" he grumbled, with forced good nature. "As you said, I'm not on the witness-stand. . . . What do you want to know?"

"I've told you the situation." Markham's voice betrayed a curious irritation. "You know the sort of thing I want. How did this Odell girl live? Who were her intimates? Who would have been likely to want her out of the way? What enemies had she?—Anything that might lead us to

an explanation of her death. . . . And incidentally," he added, with tartness, "anything that'll eliminate yourself from any suspected participation, direct or indirect, in the affair."

Cleaver stiffened at these last words, and started to protest indignantly. But immediately he changed his tactics. Smiling contemptuously, he took out a leather pocket-case and, extracting a small folded paper, handed it to Markham.

"I can eliminate myself easily enough," he proclaimed, with easy confidence. "There's a speeding summons from Boonton, New Jersey. Note the date and the time: September the 10th—last night—at half-past eleven. Was driving down to Hopatcong, and was ticketed by a motorcycle cop just as I had passed Boonton and was heading for Mountain Lakes. Got to appear there in court to-morrow morning. Damn nuisance, these country constables." He gave Markham a long, calculating look. "You couldn't square it for me, could you? It's a rotten ride to Jersey, and I've got a lot to do to-morrow."

Markham, who had inspected the summons casually, put it in his pocket.

"I'll attend to it for you," he promised, smiling amiably. "Now tell me what you know."

Cleaver puffed meditatively on his cigar. Then, leaning back and crossing his knees, he spoke with apparent candour.

"I doubt if I know much that'll help you. . . . I liked the Canary, as she was called—in fact, was pretty much attached to her at one time. Did a number of foolish things; wrote her a lot of damn-fool letters when I went to Cuba last year. Even had my picture taken with her down at Atlantic City." He made a self-condemnatory grimace. "Then she began to get cool and distant; broke several appointments with me. I raised the devil with her, but the only answer I got was a demand for money. . . ."

He stopped and looked down at his cigar ash. A venomous hatred gleamed from his narrowed eyes, and the muscles of his jowls hardened.

"No use lying about it. She had those letters and things, and she touched me for a neat little sum before I got 'em back. . . ."

"When was this?"

There was a momentary hesitation. "Last June," Cleaver replied. Then he hurried on: "Mr. Markham"—his voice was bitter—"I don't want to throw mud on a dead person; but that woman was the shrewdest, coldest-blooded blackmailer it's ever been my misfortune to meet. And I'll say this, too: I wasn't the only easy mark she squeezed. She had others on her string. . . . I happen to know she once dug into old Louis Mannix for a plenty—he told me about it."

"Could you give me the names of any of these other men?" asked Markham, attempting to dissemble his eagerness. "I've already heard of the Mannix episode."

"No, I couldn't." Cleaver spoke regretfully. "I've seen the Canary here and there with different men; and there's one in particular I've noticed lately. But they were all strangers to me."

"I suppose the Mannix affair is dead and buried by this time?"

"Yes—ancient history. You won't get any line on the situation from that angle. But there are others—more recent than Mannix—who might bear looking into, if you could find them. I'm easy-going myself; take things as they come. But there's a lot of men who'd go red-headed if she did the things to them that she did to me."

Cleaver, despite his confession, did not strike me as easy-going, but rather as a cold, self-contained, nerveless person whose immobility was at all times dictated by policy and expediency.

Markham studied him closely.

"You think, then, her death may have been due to vengeance on the part of some disillusioned admirer?"

Cleaver carefully considered his answer.

"Seems reasonable," he said finally. "She was riding for a fall."

There was a short silence; then Markham asked:

"Do you happen to know of a young man she was interested in—good-looking, small, blond moustache, light blue eyes—named Skeel?"

Cleaver snorted derisively.

"That wasn't the Canary's specialty—she let the young ones alone, as far as I know."

At this moment a page-boy approached Cleaver, and bowed.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there's a phone call for your brother. Party said it was important and, as your brother isn't in the club now, the operator thought you might know where he'd gone."

"How would I know?" fumed Cleaver. "Don't ever bother me with his calls."

"Your brother in the city?" asked Markham casually.

"I met him years ago. He's a San Franciscan, isn't he?"

"Yes—rabid Californian. He's visiting New York for a couple of weeks so he'll appreciate Frisco more when he gets back."

It seemed to me that this information was given reluctantly; and I got the impression that Cleaver, for some reason, was annoyed. But Markham, apparently, was too absorbed in the problem before him to take notice of the other's disgruntled air, for he reverted at once to the subject of the murder.

"I happen to know one man who has been interested in the Odell woman recently; he may be the same one you've seen her with—tall, about forty-five, and wears a gray, close-cropped moustache." (He was, I knew, describing Spotswoode.)

"That's the man," averred Cleaver. "Saw them together only last week at Mouquin's."

Markham was disappointed.

"Unfortunately, he's checked off the list. . . . But there must be somebody who was in the girl's confidence. You're sure you couldn't cudgel your brains to any advantage?"

Cleaver appeared to think.

"If it's merely a question of some one who had her confidence," he said, "I might suggest Doctor Lindquist—first name's Ambrose, I think; and he lives somewhere in the Forties near Lexington Avenue. But I don't know that he'd be of any value to you. Still, he was pretty close to her at one time."

"You mean that this Doctor Lindquist might have been interested in her otherwise than professionally?"

"I wouldn't like to say." Cleaver smoked for a while as if inwardly debating the situation. "Anyway, here are the facts: Lindquist is one of those exclusive society specialists—a neurologist he calls himself—and I believe he's the head of a private sanitorium of some kind for nervous women. He must have money, and, of course, his social standing is a vital asset to him—just the sort of man the Canary might have selected as a source of income. And I know this: he came to see her a good deal oftener than a doctor of his type would be apt to. I ran into him one night at her apartment, and when she introduced us he wasn't even civil."

"It will at least bear looking into," replied Markham unenthusiastically. "You've no one else in mind who might know something helpful?"

Cleaver shook his head.

"No—no one."

"And she never mentioned anything to you that indicated she was in fear of any one, or anticipated trouble?"

"Not a word. Fact is, I was bowled over by the news. I never read any paper but the morning *Herald*—except of course, *The Daily Racing Form* at night. And as there was

no account of the murder in this morning's paper, I didn't hear about it until just before dinner. The boys in the billiard-room were talking about it, and I went out and looked at an afternoon paper. If it hadn't been for that, I might not have known of it till to-morrow morning."

Markham discussed the case with him until half-past eight, but could elicit no further suggestions. Finally Cleaver rose to go.

"Sorry I couldn't give you more help," he said. His rubicund face was beaming now, and he shook hands with Markham in the friendliest fashion.

"You wangled that viscid old sport rather cleverly, don't y' know," remarked Vance, when Cleaver had gone. "But there's something deuced queer about him. The transition from his gambler's glassy stare to his garrulous confidences was too sudden—suspiciously sudden, in fact. I may be evil-minded, but he didn't impress me as a luminous pillar of truth. Maybe it's because I don't like those cold, boiled eyes of his—somehow they didn't harmonise with his gushing imitation of open-hearted frankness."

"We can allow him something for his embarrassing position," suggested Markham charitably. "It isn't exactly pleasant to admit having been taken in and blackmailed by a charmer."

"Still, if he got his letters back in June, why did he continue paying court to the lady? Heath reported he was active in that sector right up to the end."

"He may be the complete amorist," smiled Markham.

"Some like Abra, what?—"

Abra was ready ere I call'd her name;
And, though I call'd another, Abra came.'

Maybe—yes. He might qualify as a modern Cayley Drummle."

"At any rate, he gave us, in Doctor Lindquist, a possible source of information."

"Quite so," agreed Vance. "And that's about the only point of his whole passionate unfoldment that I particularly put any stock in, because it was the only point he indicated with any decent reticence. . . . My advice is that you interview this Æsculapius of the fair sex without further delay."

"I'm dog-tired," objected Markham. "Let it wait till to-morrow."

Vance glanced at the great clock over the stone mantel.

"It's latish, I'll admit, but why not, as Pitticus advised, seize time by the forelock ?

'Who lets slip fortune, her shall never find:
Occasion once past by, is bald behind.'

But the elder Cato anticipated Cowley. In his 'Disticha de Moribus' he wrote: *Fronte capillata*—"

"Come!" pleaded Markham rising. "Anything to dam this flow of erudition."

Chapter XI

SEEKING INFORMATION

(Tuesday, September 11th ; 9 p.m.)

TEN minutes later we were ringing the bell of a stately old brownstone house in East 44th Street.

A resplendently caparisoned butler opened the door, and Markham presented his card.

"Take this to the doctor at once, and say that it's urgent.

"The doctor is just finishing dinner," the stately seneschal informed him ; and conducted us into a richly furnished reception-room, with deep comfortable chairs, silken draperies, and subdued lights.

"A typical gynecologist's seraglio," observed Vance, looking around. "I'm sure the pasha himself is a majestic and elegant personage."

The prediction proved true. Doctor Lindquist entered the room a moment later inspecting the District Attorney's card as if it had been a cuneiform inscription whose import he could not quite decipher. He was a tall man in his late forties, with bushy hair and eyebrows, and a complexion abnormally pale. His face was long, and, despite the asymmetry of his features, he might easily have been called handsome. He was in dinner clothes, and he carried himself with the self-conscious precision of a man unduly impressed with his own importance. He seated himself at a kidney-shaped desk of carved mahogany, and lifted his eyes with polite inquiry to Markham.

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this call?"

he asked in a studiously melodious voice, lingering over each word caressingly. "You are most fortunate to have found me in," he added, before Markham could speak. "I confer with patients only by appointment." One felt that he experienced a certain humiliation at having received us without elaborate ceremonial preliminaries.

Markham, whose nature was opposed to all circumlocution and pretence, came direct to the point.

"This isn't a professional consultation, doctor; but it happens that I want to speak to you about one of your former patients—a Miss Margaret Odell."

Doctor Lindquist regarded the gold paper-weight before him with vacantly reminiscent eyes.

"Ah, yes. Miss Odell. I was just reading of her violent end. A most unfortunate and tragic affair. . . . In just what way can I be of service to you?—You understand, of course, that the relationship between a physician and his patient is one of sacred confidence——"

"I understand that thoroughly," Markham assured him abruptly. "On the other hand, it is the sacred duty of every citizen to assist the authorities in bringing a murderer to justice. And if there is anything you can tell me which will help toward that end, I shall certainly expect you to tell me."

The doctor raised his hand slightly in polite protestation.

"I shall, of course, do all I can to assist you, if you will but indicate your desires."

"There's no need to beat about the bush, doctor," said Markham. "I know that Miss Odell was a patient of yours for a long time; and I realise that it is highly possible, not to say probable, that she told you certain personal things which may have direct bearing on her death."

"But, my dear Mr.—" —Doctor Lindquist glanced ostentatiously at the card—"ah—Markham, my relations with Miss Odell were of a purely professional character."

"I had understood, however," ventured Markham, "that,

while what you say may be technically true, nevertheless there was an informality, let me say, in that relationship. Perhaps I may state it better by saying that your professional attitude transcended a merely scientific interest in her case."

I heard Vance chuckle softly; and I myself could hardly suppress a smile at Markham's verbose and orbicular accusation. But Doctor Lindquist, it seemed, was in no wise disconcerted. Assuming an air of beguiling pensiveness, he said:

"I will confess, in the interests of strict accuracy, that during my somewhat protracted treatment of her case, I came to regard the young woman with a certain—shall I say, fatherly liking? But I doubt if she was even aware of this mild sentiment on my part."

The corners of Vance's mouth twitched slightly. He was sitting with drowsy eyes, watching the doctor with a look of studious amusement.

"And she never at any time told you of any private or personal affairs that were causing her anxiety?" persisted Markham.

Doctor Lindquist pyramided his fingers, and appeared to give the question his undivided thought.

"No, I can't recall a single statement of that nature." His words were measured and urbane. "I know, naturally, in a general way, her manner of living; but the details, you will readily perceive, were wholly outside my province as a medical consultant. The disorganisation of her nerves was due—so my diagnoses led me to conclude—to late hours, excitement, irregular and rich eating—what, I believe, is referred to vulgarly as going the pace. The modern woman, in this febrile age, sir—"

"When did you see her last, may I ask?" Markham interrupted impatiently.

The doctor made a pantomime of eloquent surprise.

"When did I see her last? . . . Let me see." He could,

apparently, recall the occasion only with considerable difficulty. "A fortnight ago, perhaps—though it may have been longer. I really can't recall. . . . Shall I refer to my files?"

"That won't be necessary," said Markham. He paused, and regarded the doctor with a look of disarming affability. "And was this last visit a paternal or merely a professional one?"

"Professional, of course." Doctor Lindquist's eyes were impassive and only mildly interested; but his face, I felt, was by no means the unedited reflection of his thoughts.

"Did the meeting take place here or at her apartment?"

"I believe I called on her at her home."

"You called on her a great deal, doctor—so I am informed—and at rather unconventional hours. . . . Is this entirely in accord with your practice of seeing patients only by appointment?"

Markham's tone was pleasant, but from the nature of his question I knew that he was decidedly irritated by the man's bland hypocrisy, and felt that he was deliberately withholding relevant information.

Before Doctor Lindquist could reply, however, the butler appeared at the door, and silently indicated an extension telephone on a taboret beside the desk. With an unctuously murmured apology, the doctor turned and lifted the receiver.

Vance took advantage of this opportunity to scribble something on a piece of paper and pass it surreptitiously to Markham.

His call completed, Doctor Lindquist drew himself up haughtily, and faced Markham with chilling-scorn.

"Is it the function of the District Attorney," he asked distantly, "to harass respectable physicians with insulting questions? I did not know that it was illegal—or even original, for that matter—for a doctor to visit his patients."

"I am not discussing *now*"—Markham emphasised the adverb—"your infractions of the law; but since you sug-

gest a possibility which, I assure you, was not in my mind, would you be good enough to tell me—merely as a matter of form—where you were last night between eleven and twelve?”

The question produced a startling effect. Doctor Lindquist became suddenly like a tautly drawn rope, and, rising slowly and stiffly, he glared, with cold intense venom, at the District Attorney. His velvety mask had fallen off; and I detected another emotion beneath his repressed anger: his expression cloaked a fear, and his wrath but partly veiled a passionate uncertainty.

“My whereabouts last night is no concern of yours.” He spoke with great effort, his breath coming and going noisily.

Markham waited, apparently unmoved, his eyes riveted on the trembling man before him. This calm scrutiny completely broke down the other's self-control.

“What do you mean by forcing yourself in here with your contemptible insinuations?” he shouted. His face, now livid and mottled, was hideously contorted; his hands made spasmodic movements; and his whole body shook as with a tremor. “Get out of here—you and your two myrmidons! Get out, before I have you thrown out!”

Markham, himself enraged now, was about to reply, when Vance took him by the arm.

“The doctor is gently hinting that we go,” he said. And with amazing swiftness he spun Markham round, and led him firmly out of the room.

When we were again in the taxicab on our way back to the club, Vance sniggered gaily.

“A sweet specimen, that! Paranoia. Or, more likely, manic-depressive insanity—the *folie circulaire* type: recurring periods of maniacal excitement alternating with periods of the clearest sanity, don't y' know. Anyway, the doctor's disorder belongs in the category of psychoses—associated with the maturation or waning of the sexual instinct. He's just the right age, too. Neurotic degenerate—that's what

this oily Hippocrates is. In another minute he would have attacked you. . . . My word! It's a good thing I came to the rescue. Such chaps are about as safe as rattle-snakes."

He shook his head in a mock discouragement.

"Really, y' know, Markham, old thing," he added, "you should study the cranial indications of your fellow man more carefully—*vultus est index animi*. Did you, by any chance, note the gentleman's wide rectangular forehead, his irregular eyebrows, and pale luminous eyes, and his outstanding ears with their thin upper rims, their pointed tragi and split lobes? . . . A clever devil, this Ambroise—but a moral imbecile. Beware of those pseudo-pyriiform faces, Markham; leave their Apollonian Greek suggestiveness to misunderstood women."

"I wonder what he really knows?" grumbled Markham irritably.

"Oh, he knows something,—rest assured of that! And if only we knew it, too, we'd be considerably further along in the investigation. Furthermore, the information he is hiding is somewhat unpleasantly connected with himself. His euphoria is a bit shaken. He frightfully overdid the grand manner; his valedict'ry fulmination was the true expression of his feeling toward us."

"Yes," agreed Markham. "That question about last night acted like a petard. What prompted you to suggest my asking it?"

"A number of things—his gratuitous and obviously mendacious statement that he had just read of the murder; his wholly insincere homily on the sacredness of professional confidences; the cautious and Pecksniffian confession of his fatherly regard for the girl; his elaborate struggle to remember when he had last seen her—this particularly, I think, made me suspicious; and then, the psychopathic indicants of his physiognomy."

"Well," admitted Markham, "the question had its

effect. . . . I feel that I shall see this fashionable M.D. again."

"You will," iterated Vance. "We took him unawares. But when he has had time to ponder the matter and concoct an appealin' tale, he'll become downright garrulous. . . . Anyhow, the evening is over, and you can meditate on buttercups till the morrow."

But the evening was not quite over as far as the Odell case was concerned. We had been back in the lounge-room of the club but a short time when a man walked by the corner in which we sat, and bowed with formal courtesy to Markham. Markham, to my surprise, rose and greeted him, at the same time indicating a chair.

"There's something further I wanted to ask you, Mr. Spotswoode," he said, "if you can spare a moment."

At the mention of the name I regarded the man closely, for, I confess, I was not a little curious about the anonymous escort who had taken the girl to dinner and the theatre the night before. Spotswoode was a typical New England aristocrat, inflexible, slow in his movements, reserved, and quietly but modishly dressed. His hair and moustache were slightly grey—which, no doubt, enhanced the pinkness of his complexion. He was just under six feet tall, and well proportioned, but a trifle angular.

Markham introduced him to Vance and me, and briefly explained that we were working with him on the case, and that he had thought it best to take us fully into his confidence.

Spotswoode gave him a dubious look, but immediately bowed his acceptance of the decision.

"I'm in your hands, Mr. Markham," he replied, in a well-bred but somewhat high-pitched voice, "and I concur, of course, with whatever you think advisable." He turned to Vance with an apologetic smile. "I'm in a rather unpleasant position, and naturally feel a little sensitive about it."

"I'm something of an antinomian," Vance pleasantly

informed him. "At any rate, I'm not a moralist; so my attitude in the matter is quite academic."

Spotswoode laughed softly.

"I wish my family held a similar point of view; but I'm afraid they would not be so tolerant of my foibles."

"It's only fair to tell you, Mr. Spotswoode," interposed Markham, "that there is a bare possibility I may have to call you as a witness."

The man looked up quickly, his face clouding over, but he made no comment.

"The fact is," continued Markham, "we are about to make an arrest, and your testimony may be needed to establish the time of Miss Odell's return to her apartment, and also to substantiate the fact that there was presumably someone in her rooms after you had left. Her screams and calls for help, which you heard, may prove vital evidence in obtaining a conviction."

Spotswoode seemed rather appalled at the thought of his relations with the girl becoming public, and for several minutes he sat with averted eyes.

"I see your point," he acknowledged at length. "But it would be a terrible thing for me if the fact of my delinquencies became known."

"That contingency may be entirely avoided," Markham encouraged him. "I promise you that you will not be called upon unless it is absolutely necessary. . . . And now what I especially wanted to ask you is this: do you happen to know a Doctor Lindquist who, I understand, was Miss Odell's personal physician?"

Spotswoode was frankly puzzled. "I never heard the name," he answered. "In fact, Miss Odell never mentioned any doctor to me."

"And did you ever hear her mention the name of Skeel . . . or refer to anyone as Tony?"

"Never." His answer was emphatic.

Markham lapsed into a disappointed silence. Spotswoode, too, was silent; he sat as if in a reverie.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, after several minutes, "I ought to be ashamed to admit it, but the truth is I cared a good deal for the girl. I suppose you've kept her apartment intact. . . ." He hesitated, and a look almost of appeal came into his eyes. "I'd like to see it again if I could."

Markham regarded him sympathetically, but finally shook his head.

"It wouldn't do. You'd be sure to be recognised by the operator—or there might be a reporter about—and then I'd be unable to keep you out of the case."

The man appeared disappointed, but did not protest; and for several minutes no one spoke. Then Vance raised himself slightly in his chair.

"I say, Mr. Spotswoode, do you happen to remember anything unusual occurring last night during the half-hour you remained with Miss Odell after the theatre?"

"Unusual?" The man's manner was eloquent of his astonishment. "To the contrary. We chatted a while, and then, as she seemed tired, I said good night and came away, making a luncheon appointment with her for to-day."

"And yet, it now seems fairly certain that some other man was hiding in the apartment when you were there."

"There's little doubt on that point," agreed Spotswoode, with the suggestion of a shudder. "And her screams would seem to indicate that he came forth from hiding a few minutes after I went."

"And you had no suspicion of the fact when you heard her call for help?"

"I did at first—naturally. But when she assured me that nothing was the matter, and told me to go home, I attributed her screams to a nightmare. I knew she had been tired, and I left her in the wicker chair near the door, from where her screams seemed to come; so I naturally concluded she had

dozed off and called out in her sleep. . . . If only I hadn't taken so much for granted!"

"It's a harrowin' situation." Vance was silent for a while; then he asked: "Did you, by any chance, notice the door of the living-room closet? Was it open or closed?"

Spotswoode frowned, as if attempting to visualise the picture; but the result was a failure.

"I suppose it was closed. I probably would have noticed it if it had been open."

"Then you couldn't say if the key was in the lock or not?"

"Good Lord, no! I don't even know if it ever had a key."

The case was discussed for another half-hour; then Spotswoode excused himself and left us.

"Funny thing," ruminated Markham, "how a man of his upbringing could be so attracted by the empty-headed, butterfly type."

"I'd say it was quite natural," returned Vance. . . .

"You're such an incorrigible moralist, Markham."

Chapter XII

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

(Wednesday, September 12th; 9 a.m.)

THE following day, which was Wednesday, not only brought forth an important and, as it appeared, conclusive development in the Odell case, but marked the beginning of Vance's active co-operation in the proceedings. The psychological elements in the case had appealed to him irresistibly, and he felt, even at this stage of the investigation, that a final answer could never be obtained along the usual police lines. At his request Markham had called for him at a little before nine o'clock, and we had driven direct to the District Attorney's office.

Heath was waiting impatiently when we arrived. His eager and covertly triumphant expression plainly indicated good news.

"Things are breaking fine and dandy," he announced, when we had sat down. He himself was too elated to relax, and stood before Markham's desk rolling a large black cigar between his fingers. "We got the Dude—six o'clock yesterday evening—and we got him right. One of the C. O. boys, named Riley, who was patrolling Sixth Avenue in the Thirties, saw him swing off a surface car and head for McAnerny's Pawn-Shop. Right away Riley wigwags the traffic officer on the corner, and follows the Dude into McAnerny's. Pretty soon the traffic officer comes in with a patrolman, who he's picked up; and the three of 'em nab our stylish friend in the act of pawning this ring."

He tossed a square solitaire diamond in a filagreed platinum setting on the District Attorney's desk.

"I was at the office when they brought him in, and I sent Snitkin with the ring up to Harlem to see what the maid had to say about it, and she identified it as belonging to Odell."

"But, I say, it wasn't a part of the *bijouterie* the lady was wearing that night, was it, Sergeant?" Vance put the question casually.

Heath jerked about and eyed him with sullen calculation.

"What if it wasn't? It came out of that jimmed jewel-case—or I'm Ben Hur."

"Of course, it did," murmured Vance, lapsing into lethargy.

"And that's where we're in luck," declared Heath, turning back to Markham. "It connects Skeel directly with the murder and the robbery."

"What has Skeel to say about it?" Markham was leaning forward intently. "I suppose you questioned him."

"I'll say we did," replied the Sergeant; but his tone was troubled. "We had him up all night giving him the works. And the story he tells is this: he says the girl gave him the ring a week ago, and that he didn't see her again until the afternoon of day before yesterday. He came to her apartment between four and five—you remember the maid said she was out then—and entered and left the house by the side door, which was unlocked at that time. He admits he called again at half-past nine that night, but he says that, when he found she was out, he went straight home and stayed there. His alibi is that he sat up with his landlady till after midnight playing Khun Khan and drinking beer. I hopped up to his place this morning, and the old girl verified it. But that don't mean anything. The house he lives in is a pretty tough hang-out, and this landlady, besides being a heavy boozer, has been up the river a couple of times for shoplifting."

"What does Skeel say about the finger prints?"

"He says, of course, he made 'em when he was there in the afternoon."

"And the one on the closet door-knob?"

Heath gave a derisive grunt.

"He's got an answer for that, too—says he thought he heard someone coming in, and locked himself in the clothes-closet. Didn't want to be seen and spoil any game Odell mighta been playing."

"Most considerate of him to keep out of the way of the *belles poires*," drawled Vance. "Touchin' loyalty, what?"

"You don't believe the rat, do you, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath, with indignant surprise.

"Can't say that I do. But our Antonio at least spins a consistent yarn."

"Too damn consistent to suit me," growled the Sergeant.

"That's all you could get out of him?" It was plain that Markham was not pleased with the results of Heath's third degree of Skeel.

"That's about all, sir. He stuck to his story like a leech."

"You found no chisel in his room?"

Heath admitted that he hadn't.

"But you couldn't expect him to keep it around," he added.

Markham pondered the facts for several minutes.

"I can't see that we've got a very good case, however much we may be convinced of Skeel's guilt. His alibi may be thin, but taken in connection with the phone operator's testimony, I'm inclined to think it would hold tight in court."

"What about the ring, sir?" Heath was desperately disappointed. "And what about his threats, and his finger-prints, and his record of similar burglaries?"

"Contributory factors only," Markham explained. "What we need for a murder is more than a *prima facie* case. A good criminal lawyer could have him discharged

in twenty minutes, even if I could secure an indictment. It's not impossible, you know, that the woman gave him the ring a week ago—you recall that the maid said he was demanding money from her about that time. And there's nothing to show that the finger-prints were not actually made late Monday afternoon. Moreover, we can't connect him in any way with the chisel, for we don't know who did the Park Avenue job last summer. His whole story fits the facts perfectly; and we haven't anything contradictory to offer."

Heath shrugged helplessly: all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"What do you want done with him? he asked desolately.

Markham considered—he, too, was discomfited.

"Before I answer I think I'll have a go at him myself."

He pressed a buzzer, and ordered a clerk to fill out the necessary requisition. When it had been signed in duplicate, he sent Swacker with it to Ben Hanlon.

"Do ask him about those silk shirts," suggested Vance. "And find out, if you can, if he considers a white waistcoat *de rigueur* with a dinner-jacket."

"This office isn't a male millinery shop," snapped Markham.

"But, Markham dear, you won't learn anything else from this Petronius."

Ten minutes later a Deputy Sheriff from the Tombs entered with his handcuffed prisoner.

Skeel's appearance that morning belied his sobriquet of Dude. He was haggard and pale: his ordeal of the previous night had left its imprint upon him. He was unshaven; his hair was uncombed; the ends of his moustache drooped; and his cravat was awry. But despite his bedraggled condition, his manner was jaunty and contemptuous. He gave Heath a defiant leer, and faced the District Attorney with swaggering indifference.

To Markham's questions he doggedly repeated the same

story he had told Heath. He clung tenaciously to every detail of it with the ready accuracy of a man who had painstakingly memorised a lesson and was thoroughly familiar with it. Markham coaxed, threatened, bullied. All hint of his usual affability was gone: he was like an inexorable dynamic machine. But Skeel, whose nerves seemed to be made of iron, withstood the vicious fire of his cross-questioning without wincing; and, I confess, his resistance somewhat aroused my admiration despite my revulsion toward him and all he stood for.

After half an hour Markham gave up, completely baffled in his efforts to elicit any damaging admissions from the man. He was about to dismiss him when Vance rose languidly and strolled to the District Attorney's desk. Seating himself on the edge of it, he regarded Skeel with impersonal curiosity.

"So you're a devotee of Khun Khan, eh?" he remarked indifferently. "Silly game, what? More interestin' than Conquain or Rum, though. Used to be played in the London clubs. Of East Indian origin, I believe. . . . You still play it with two decks, I suppose, and permit round-the-corner matting?"

An involuntary frown gathered on Skeel's forehead. He was used to violent district attorneys, and familiar with the bludgeoning methods of the police, but here was a type of inquisitor entirely new to him; and it was plain that he was both puzzled and apprehensive. He decided to meet this novel antagonist with a smirk of arrogant amusement.

"By the bye," continued Vance, with no change in tone, "can anyone hidden in the clothes-press of the Odell living-room see the davenport through the keyhole?"

Suddenly all trace of a smile was erased from the man's features.

"And I say," Vance hurried on, his eyes fixed steadily on the other, "why didn't you give the alarm?"

I was watching Skeel closely, and, though his set expression did not alter, I saw the pupils of his eyes dilate. Markham, also, I think, noted this phenomenon.

"Don't bother to answer," pursued Vance, as the man opened his lips to speak. "But tell me: didn't the sight shake you up a bit?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Skeel retorted with sullen impertinence. But, for all his sang-froid, one sensed an uneasiness in his manner. There was an overtone of effort in his desire to appear indifferent, which robbed his words of complete conviction.

"Not a pleasant situation, that." Vance ignored his retort. "How did you feel, crouching there in the dark, when the closet door-knob was turned and someone tried to get in?" His eyes were boring into the man, though his voice retained its casual intonation.

The muscles of Skeel's face tightened, but he did not speak.

"Lucky thing you took the precaution of locking yourself in—eh, what?" Vance went on. "Suppose he'd got the door open—my word! Then what? . . ."

He paused and smiled with a kind of silky sweetness which was more impressive than any glowering aggression.

"I say, did you have your steel chisel ready for him? Maybe he'd have been too quick and strong for you—maybe there would have been thumbs pressing against your larynx too before you could have struck him—eh? . . . Did you think of that, there in the dark? . . . No, not precisely a pleasant situation. A bit gruesome, in fact."

"What are you raving about?" Skeel spat out insolently. "You're balmy." But his swagger had been forgotten, and a look akin of horror had passed across his face. This slackening of pose was momentary, however; almost at once his smirk returned, and his head swayed in contempt.

Vance sauntered back to his chair and stretched himself

in it listlessly, as if all his interest in the case had again evaporated.

Markham had watched the little drama attentively, but Heath had sat smoking with ill-concealed annoyance. The silence that followed was broken by Skeel.

"Well, I suppose I'm to be railroaded. Got it all planned, have you? . . . Try and railroad me!" He laughed harshly. "My lawyer's Abe Rubin, and you might phone him that I'd like to see him."¹

Markham, with a gesture of annoyance, waved to the Deputy Sheriff to take Skeel back to the Tombs.

"What were you trying to get at?" he asked Vance, when the man was gone.

"Just an illusive notion in the depths of my being struggling for the light." Vance smoked placidly a moment. "I thought Mr. Skeel might be persuaded to pour out his heart to us. So I wooed him with words."

"That's just bully," jibed Heath. "I was expecting you any minute to ask him if he played mumbly-peg or if his grandmother was a hoot-owl."

"Sergeant, dear Sergeant," pleaded Vance, "don't be unkind. I simply couldn't endure it. . . . And really, now, didn't my chat with Mr. Skeel suggest a possibility to you?"

"Sure," said Heath, "—that he was hiding in the closet when Odell was killed. But where does that get us? It lets Skeel out, although the job was a professional one, and he was caught red-handed with some of the swag."

He turned disgustedly to the District Attorney.

"And now what, sir?"

"I don't like the look of things," Markham complained. "If Skeel has Abe Rubin to defend him, we won't stand a chance with the case we've got. I feel convinced he was

¹ Abe Rubin was at that time the most resourceful and unscrupulous criminal lawyer in New York. Since his disbarment two years ago, little has been heard from him.

mixed up in it; but no judge will accept my personal feelings as evidence."

"We could turn the Dude loose, and have him tailed," suggested Heath grudgingly. "We might catch him doing something that'll give the game away."

Markham considered.

"That might be a good plan," he acceded. "We'll certainly get no more evidence on him as long as he's locked up."

"It looks like our only chance, sir."

"Very well," agreed Markham. "Let him think we're through with him: he may get careless. I'll leave the whole thing to you, Sergeant. Keep a couple of good men on him day and night. Something may happen."

Heath rose, an unhappy man.

"Right, sir. I'll attend to it."

"And I'd like to have more data on Charles Cleaver," added Markham. "Find out what you can of his relations with the Odell girl.—Also, get me a line on Doctor Ambrose Lindquist. What's his history?—what are his habits?—you know the kind of thing. He treated the girl for some mysterious or imaginary ailment; and I think he has something up his sleeve. But don't go near him personally—yet."

Heath jotted the name down in his note-book without enthusiasm.

"And before you set your stylish captive free," put in Vance, yawning, "you might, don't y' know, see if he carries a key that fits the Odell apartment."

Heath jerked up short, and grinned.

"Now, that idea's got some sense to it. . . . Funny I didn't think of it myself." And shaking hands with all of us, he went out.

Chapter XIII

AN ERSTWHILE GALLANT

(Wednesday, September 12th ; 10.30 a.m.)

SWACKER was evidently waiting for an opportunity to interrupt, for, when Sergeant Heath had passed through the door, he at once stepped into the room.

"The reporters are here, sir," he announced, with a wry face. "You said you'd see them at ten-thirty."

In response to a nod from his Chief, he held open the door, and a dozen or more newspaper men came trooping in.

"No questions, please, this morning," Markham begged pleasantly. "It's too early in the game. But I'll tell you all I know. . . . I agree with Sergeant Heath that the Odell murder was the work of a professional criminal—the same who broke into Arnheim's house on Park Avenue last summer."

Briefly he told of Inspector Brenner's findings in connection with the chisel.

"We've made no arrests, but one may be expected in the very near future. In fact, the police have the case well in hand, but are going carefully in order to avoid any chance of an acquittal. We've already recovered some of the missing jewellery. . . ."

He talked to the reporters for five minutes or so, but he made no mention of the testimony of the maid or the phone operators, and carefully avoided the mention of any names.

When we were again alone, Vance chuckled admiringly.

"A masterly evasion, my dear Markham! Legal training

has its advantages—decidedly, it has its advantages. . . . 'We've recovered some of the missing jewellery!' Sweet wingèd words! Not an untruth—oh, no!—but how deceivin'! Really, y' know, I must devote more time to the caressin' art of *suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri*. You should be crowned with an anadem of myrtle."

"Leaving all that to one side," Markham rejoined impatiently, "suppose you tell me, now that Heath's gone, what was in your mind when you applied your verbal voodooism to Skeel. What was all the conjurer-talk about dark closets, and alarums, and pressing thumbs, and peering through keyholes?"

"Well, now, I didn't think my little chit-chat was so cryptic," answered Vance. "The *recherché* Tony was undoubtedly ambuscaded *à la sourdine* in the clothes-press at some time during the fatal evening; and I was merely striving, in my amateurish way, to ascertain the exact hour of his concealment."

"And did you?"

"Not conclusively." Vance shook his head sadly. "Y' know, Markham, I'm the proud possessor of a theory—it's vague and obscure and unsubstantial; and it's downright unintelligible. And even if it were verified, I can't see how it would help us any, for it would leave the situation even more incomprehensible than it already is. . . . I almost wish I hadn't questioned Heath's Beau Nash. He upset my ideas frightfully."

"From what I could gather, you seem to think it possible that Skeel witnessed the murder. That couldn't, by any stretch of the imagination, be your precious theory?"

"That's part of it, anyway."

"My dear Vance, you do astonish me!" Markham laughed outright. "Skeel, then, according to you, is innocent; but he keeps his knowledge to himself, invents an alibi, and doesn't even tattle when he's arrested. . . . It won't hold water."

"I know," sighed Vance. "It's a veritable sieve. And yet, the notion haunts me—it rides me like a hag—it eats into my vitals."

"Do you realise that this mad theory of yours presupposes that, when Spotswoode and Miss Odell returned from the theatre, there were *two* men hidden in the apartment—two men *unknown to each other*—namely Skeel and your hypothetical murderer?"

"Of course I realise it; and the thought of it is breaking down my reason."

"Furthermore, they must have entered the apartment separately, and hidden separately. . . . How, may I ask, did they get in? And how did they get out? And which one caused the girl to scream after Spotswoode had left? And what was the other one doing in the meantime? And if Skeel was a passive spectator, horrified and mute, how do you account for his breaking open the jewel-case and securing the ring—?"

"Stop! Stop! Don't torture me so," Vance pleaded. "I know I'm insane. Been given to hallucinations since birth; but—Merciful Heaven!—I've never before had one as crazy as this."

"On that point at least, my dear Vance, we are in complete and harmonious agreement," smiled Markham.

Just then Swacker came in and handed Markham a letter.

"Brought by messenger, and marked 'immediate,'" he explained.

The letter, written on heavy engraved stationery, was from Doctor Lindquist, and explained that between the hours of 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. on Monday night he had been in attendance on a patient at his sanatorium. It also apologized for his actions when asked regarding his whereabouts, and offered a wordy, but not particularly convincing, explanation of his conduct. He had had an unusually trying day, it seemed—neurotic cases were trying, at best—and the suddenness of our visit, together with the apparently

hostile nature of Markham's questions, had completely upset him. He was more than sorry for his outburst, he said, and stood ready to assist in any way he could. It was unfortunate for all concerned, he added, that he had lost his temper, for it would have been a simple matter for him to explain about Monday night.

"He has thought the situation over calmly," said Vance, "and hereby offers you a neat little alibi which, I think, you will have difficulty in shaking. . . . An artful beggar—like all these unbalanced pseudo-psychiatrists. Observe: he was with a patient. To be sure! What patient? Why, one too ill to be questioned. . . . There you are. A *cul-de-sac* masquerading as an alibi. Not bad, what?"

"It doesn't interest me overmuch." Markham put the letter away. "That pompous professional ass could never have got into the Odell apartment without having been seen; and I can't picture him sneaking in by devious means." He reached for some papers. . . . "And now, if you don't object, I'll make an effort to earn my \$15,000 salary."

But Vance, instead of making a move to go, sauntered to the table and opened a telephone directory.

"Permit me a suggestion, Markham," he said, after a moment's search. "Put off your daily grind for a bit, and let's hold polite converse with Mr. Louis Mannix. Y' know, he's the only presumptive swain of the inconstant Margaret, so far mentioned, who hasn't been given an audience. I hanker to gaze upon him and hearken to his rune. He'd make the family circle complete, so to speak. . . . He still holds forth in Maiden Lane, I see; and it wouldn't take long to fetch him here."

Markham had swung half round in his chair at the mention of Mannix's name. He started to protest, but he knew from experience that Vance's suggestions were not the results of idle whims; and he was silent for several moments weighing the matter. With practically every other avenue

of inquiry closed for the moment, I think the idea of questioning Mannix rather appealed to him.

"All right," he consented, ringing for Swacker; "though I don't see how he can help. According to Heath, the Odell girl gave him his *cong e* a year ago."

"He may still have hay on his horns, or, like Hotspur, be drunk with choler. You can't tell." Vance resumed his chair. "With such a name, he'd bear investigation *ipso facto*."

Markham sent Swacker for Tracey; and when the latter arrived, suave and beaming, he was given instructions to take the District Attorney's car and bring Mannix to the office.

"Get a subpoena," said Markham, "and use it if necessary."

Half an hour or so later Tracey returned. "Mr. Mannix made no difficulty about coming," he reported. "Was quite agreeable, in fact. He's in the waiting-room now."

Tracy was dismissed, and Mannix was ushered in.

He was a large man, and he walked with the forced elasticity of gait which epitomises the silent struggle of incipiently corpulent middle age to deny the onrush of the years and cling to the semblance of youth. He carried a slender wanghee cane; and his checkered suit, brocaded waistcoat, pearl-grey gaiters, and gaily beribboned Homburg hat gave him an almost foppish appearance. But these various indications of sportiveness were at once forgotten when one inspected his features. His small eyes were bright and crafty; his nose was bibative, and appeared disproportionately small above his thick sensual lips and prognathous jaw. There was an oiliness and shrewdness in the man's manner which were at once repulsive and arresting.

At a gesture from Markham he sat down on the edge of a chair, placing a podgy hand on each knee. His attitude was one of alert suspicion.

"Mr. Mannix," said Markham, an engaging note of

apology in his voice, "I am sorry to have discommoded you; but the matter in hand is both serious and urgent. . . . A Miss Margaret Odell was murdered night before last, and in the course of our inquiries we learned that you had at one time known her quite well. It occurred to me that you might be in possession of some facts about her that would assist us in our investigation."

A saponacious smile, meant to be genial, parted the man's heavy lips.

"Sure, I knew the Canary—a long time ago, y' understand." He permitted himself a sigh. "A fine, high-class girl, if I do say so. A good looker and a good dresser. Too damn bad she didn't go on with the show business. But"—he made a repudiative motion with his hand—"I haven't seen the lady, y' understand, for over a year—not to speak to, if you know what I mean."

Mannix clearly was on his guard, and his beady little eyes did not once leave the District Attorney's face.

"You had a quarrel with her perhaps?" Markham asked the question incuriously.

"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as to say we quarrelled. No." Mannix paused, seeking the correct word. "You might say we disagreed—got tired of the arrangement and decided to separate; kind of drifted apart. Last thing I told her was, if she ever needed a friend she'd know where to find me."

"Very generous of you," murmured Markham. "And you never renewed your little affair?"

"Never—never. Don't remember ever speaking to her from that day to this."

"In view of certain things I've learned, Mr. Mannix"—Markham's tone was regretful—"I must ask you a somewhat personal question. Did she ever make an attempt to blackmail you?"

Mannix hesitated, and his eyes seemed to grow even smaller, like those of a man thinking rapidly

"Certainly not!" he replied, with belated emphasis. "Not at all. Nothing of the kind." He raised both hands in protest against the thought. Then he asked furtively: "What gave you such an idea?"

"I have been told," explained Markham, "that she had extorted money from one or two of her admirers."

Mannix made a wholly unconvincing grimace of astonishment.

"Well, well! You don't tell me! Can it be possible?" He peered shrewdly at the District Attorney. "Maybe it was Charlie Cleaver she blackmailed—yes?"

Markham picked him up quickly.

"Why do you say Cleaver?"

Again Mannix waved his thick hand, this time deprecatingly.

"No special reason, y' understand. Just thought it might be him. . . . No special reason."

"Did Cleaver ever tell you he'd been blackmailed?"

"Cleaver tell me? . . . Now, I ask you, Mr. Markham: why should Cleaver tell me such a story—why should he?"

"And you never told Cleaver that the Odell girl had blackmailed you?"

"Positively not!" Mannix gave a scornful laugh which was far too theatrical to have been genuine. "Me tell Cleaver I'd been blackmailed? Now, that's funny, that is."

"Then why did you mention Cleaver a moment ago?"

"No reason at all—like I told you. . . . He knew the Canary; but that ain't no secret."

Markham dropped the subject.

"What do you know about Miss Odell's relations with a Doctor Ambrose Lindquist?"

Mannix was now obviously perplexed.

"Never heard of him—no, never. She didn't know him when I was taking her around."

"Whom else besides Cleaver did she know well?"

Mannix shook his head ponderously.

"Now, that I couldn't say—positively I couldn't say. Seen her with this man and that, same as everybody saw her; but who they were I don't know—absolutely."

"Ever hear of Tony Skeel?" Markham quickly leaned over and met the other's gaze inquiringly.

Once more Mannix hesitated, and his eyes glittered calculatingly.

"Well, now that you ask me, I believe I did hear of the fellow. But I couldn't swear to it, y' understand. . . . What makes you think I heard of this Skeel fellow?"

Markham ignored the question.

"Can you think of no one who might have borne Miss Odell a grudge, or had cause to fear her?"

Mannix was volubly emphatic on the subject of his complete ignorance of any such person; and after a few more questions, which elicited only denials, Markham let him go.

"Not bad at all, Markham old thing—eh, what?" Vance seemed pleased with the conference. "Wonder why he's so coy? Not a nice person, this Mannix. And he's so fearful lest he be informative. Again, I wonder why. He was so careful—oh, so careful."

"He was sufficiently careful, at any rate, not to tell us anything," declared Markham gloomily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know." Vance lay back and smoked placidly. "A ray of light filtered through here and there. Our fur-importing philogynist denied he'd been blackmailed—which was obviously untrue—and tried to make us believe that he and the lovely Margaret cooed like turtle-doves at parting.—Tosh! . . . And then, that mention of Cleaver. That wasn't spontaneous—dear me, no. Brother Mannix and spontaneity are as the poles apart. He had a reason for bringing Cleaver in; and I fancy that if you knew what that reason was, you'd feel like flinging roses riotously, and that sort of thing. Why Cleaver? That *secret-de-Polichinelle* explanation was a bit weak. The orbits of these two paramours cross somewhere. On that point,

at least, Mannix inadvertently enlightened us. . . . Moreover, it's plain that he doesn't know our fashionable healer with the satyr ears. But, on the other hand, he's aware of the existence of Mr. Skeel, and would rather like to deny the acquaintance. . . . So—*voilà l'affaire*. Plenty of information; but—my word!—what to do with it?”

“I give it up,” acknowledged Markham hopelessly.

“I know: it's a sad, sad world,” Vance commiserated him. “But you must face the olla podrida with a bright eye. It's time for lunch, and a fillet of sole *Marguéry* will cheer you no end.”

Markham glanced at the clock, and permitted himself to be led to the Lawyers' Club.

Chapter XIV

VANCE OUTLINES A THEORY

(Wednesday, September 12th ; evening)

VANCE and I did not return to the District Attorney's office after lunch, for Markham had a busy afternoon before him, and nothing further was likely to transpire in connection with the Odell case until Sergeant Heath had completed his investigations of Cleaver and Doctor Lindquist. Vance had seats for Giordano's "Madame Sans-Gêne," and two o'clock found us at the Metropolitan. Though the performance was excellent, Vance was too *distract* to enjoy it; and it was significant that, after the opera, he directed the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club. I knew he had a tea appointment, and that he had planned to motor to Longue Vue for dinner; and the fact that he should have dismissed these social engagements from his mind in order to be with Markham showed how intensely the problem of the murder had absorbed his interest.

It was after six o'clock when Markham came in, looking harassed and tired. No mention of the case was made during dinner, with the exception of Markham's casual remark that Heath had turned in his reports on Cleaver and Doctor Lindquist and Mannix. (It seemed that, immediately after lunch, he had telephoned to the Sergeant to add Mannix's name to the two others as a subject for inquiry.) It was not until we had retired to our favourite corner of the lounge-room that the topic of the murder was brought up for discussion.

And that discussion, brief and one-sided, was the beginning of an entirely new line of investigation—a line which, in the end, led to the guilty person.

Markham sank wearily into his chair. He had begun to show the strain of the last two days of fruitless worry. His eyes were a trifle heavy, and there was a grim tenacity in the lines of his mouth. Slowly and deliberately he lighted a cigar, and took several deep inhalations.

“Damn the newspapers!” he grumbled. “Why can’t they let the District Attorney’s office handle its business in its own way? . . . Have you seen the afternoon papers? They’re all clamouring for the murderer. You’d think I had him up my sleeve.”

“You forget, my dear chap,” grinned Vance, “that we are living under the benign and upliftin’ reign of Democritus, which confers upon every ignoramus the privilege of promiscuously criticising his betters.”

“I don’t complain about criticism: it’s the lurid imagination of these bright young reporters that galls me. They’re trying to turn this sordid crime into a spectacular Borgia melodrama, with passion running rampant, and mysterious influences at work, and all the pomp and trappings of a mediæval romance. . . . You’d think even a schoolboy could see that it was only an ordinary robbery and murder of the kind that’s taking place regularly throughout the country.”

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette, and his eyebrows lifted. Turning, he regarded Markham with a look of mild incredulity.

“I say! Do you really mean to tell me that your statement for the press was given out in good faith?”

Markham looked up in surprise.

“Certainly it was. . . . What do you mean by ‘good faith’?”

Vance smiled indolently.

“I rather thought, don’t y’ know, that your oration to

the reporters was a bit of strategy to lull the real culprit into a state of false security, and to give you a clear field for investigation."

Markham contemplated him a moment.

"See here, Vance," he demanded irritably, "what are you driving at?"

"Nothing at all—really, old fellow," the other assured him affably. "I knew that Heath was deadly sincere about his belief in Skeel's guilt, but it never occurred to me, d' ye see, that you yourself actually regarded the crime as one committed by a professional burglar. I foolishly thought that you let Skeel go this morning in the hope that he would lead you somehow to the guilty person. I rather imagined you were spoofing the trusting Sergeant by pretending to fall in with his silly notion."

"Ah, I see! Still clinging to your weird theory that a brace of villains were present, hiding in separate clothes-closets, or something of the kind." Markham made no attempt to temper his sarcasm. "A sapient idea—so much more intelligent than Heath's!"

"I know it's weird. But it happens not to be any weirder than your theory of a lone yeggman."

"And for what reason, pray," persisted Markham, with considerable warmth, "do you consider the yeggman theory weird?"

"For the simple reason that it was not the crime of a professional thief at all, but the wilfully deceptive act of a particularly clever man who doubtless spent weeks in its preparation."

Markham sank back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Vance, you have contributed the one ray of sunshine to an otherwise gloomy and depressing case."

Vance bowed with mock humility.

"It gives me great pleasure," was his dulcet rejoinder, "to be able to bring even a wisp of light into so clouded a mental atmosphere."

A brief silence followed. Then Markham asked:

"Is this fascinating and picturesque conclusion of yours regarding the highly intellectual character of the Odell woman's murderer based on your new and original psychological methods of deduction?" There was no mistaking the ridicule in his voice.

"I arrived at it," explained Vance sweetly, "by the same processes of logic I used in determining the guilt of Alvin Benson's murderer."

Markham smiled.

"*Touché!* . . . Don't think I'm so ungrateful as to belittle the work you did in that case. But this time, I fear, you've permitted your theories to lead you hopelessly astray. The present case is what the police call an open-and-shut affair."

"Particularly shut," amended Vance dryly. "And both you and the police are in the distressin' situation of waiting inactively for your suspected victim to give the game away."

"I'll admit the situation is not all one could desire." Markham spoke morosely. "But even so, I can't see that there's any opportunity in this affair for your recondite psychological methods. The thing's too obvious—that's the trouble. What we need now is evidence, not theories. If it wasn't for the spacious and romantic imaginings of the newspaper men, public interest in the case would already have died out."

"Markham," said Vance quietly, but with unwonted seriousness, "if that's what you really believe, then you may as well drop the case now; for you're foredoomed to failure. You think it's an obvious crime. But let me tell you, it's a subtle crime, if ever there was one. And it's as clever as it is subtle. No common criminal committed it—believe me. It was done by a man of very superior intellect and astounding ingenuity."

Vance's assured, matter-of-fact tone had a curiously con-

vincing quality; and Markham, restraining his impulse to scoff, assumed an air of indulgent irony.

"Tell me," he said, "by what cryptic mental process you arrived at so fantastic a conclusion."

"With pleasure." Vance took a few puffs on his cigarette and lazily watched the smoke curl upward.¹

"Y' know, Markham," he began, in his emotionless drawl, "every genuine work of art has a quality which the critics call *élan*—namely, enthusiasm and spontaneity. A copy, or imitation, lacks that distinguishing characteristic; it's too perfect, too carefully done, too exact. Even enlightened scions of the law, I fancy, are aware that there is bad drawing in Botticelli and disproportions in Rubens, what? In an original, d' ye see, such flaws don't matter. But an imitator never puts 'em in: he doesn't dare—he's too intent on getting all the details correct. The imitator works with a self-consciousness and a meticulous care which the artist, in the throes of creative labour, never exhibits. And here's the point: there's no way of imitating that enthusiasm and spontaneity—that *élan*—which an original painting possesses. However closely a copy may resemble an original, there's a vast psychological difference between them. The copy breathes an air of insincerity, of ultra-perfection, of conscious effort. . . . You follow me, eh?"

"Most instructive, my dear Ruskin."

Vance meekly bowed his appreciation, and proceeded pleasantly.

"Now, let us consider the Odell murder. You and Heath are agreed that it is a commonplace, brutal, sordid, unimaginative crime. But, unlike you two bloodhounds on the trail, I have ignored its mere appearances, and have analysed its various factors—I have looked at it psychologically, so to speak. And I have discovered that it is not a genuine and

¹ I sent a proof of the following paragraphs to Vance, and he edited and corrected them; so that, as they now stand, they represent his theories in practically his own words.

sincere crime—that is to say, an original—but only a sophisticated, self-conscious and clever imitation, done by a skilful copyist. I grant you it is correct and typical in every detail. But just there is where it fails, don't y' know. Its technic is too good, its craftsmanship too perfect. The *ensemble*, as it were, is not convincing—it lacks *élan*. Æsthetically speaking, it has all the earmarks of a *tour de force*. Vulgarly speaking, it's a fake." He paused and gave Markham an engaging smile. "I trust this somewhat oracular peroration has not bored you."

"Pray continue," urged Markham, with exaggerated politeness. His manner was jocular, but something in his tone led me to believe that he was seriously interested.

"What is true of art is true of life," Vance resumed placidly. "Every human action, d' ye see, conveys unconsciously an impression either of genuineness or of spuriousness—of sincerity or calculation. For example, two men at table eat in a similar way, handle their knives and forks in the same fashion, and apparently do the identical things. Although the sensitive spectator cannot put his finger on the points of difference, he none the less senses at once which man's breeding is genuine and instinctive and which man's is imitative and self-conscious."

He blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling, and settled more deeply into his chair.

"Now, Markham, just what are the universally recognised features of a sordid crime of robbery and murder? . . . Brutality, disorder, haste, ransacked drawers, cluttered desks, broken jewel-cases, rings stripped from the victim's fingers, severed pendant chains, torn clothing, tipped-over chairs, upset lamps, broken vases, twisted draperies, strewn floors, and so forth. Such are the accepted immemorial indications—eh, what? But—consider a moment, old chap. Outside of fiction and the drama, in how many crimes do they *all* appear—all in perfect ordination, and without a single element to contradict the general

effect? That is to say, how many actual crimes are technically perfect in their settings? . . . None! And why? Simply because nothing actual in this life—nothing that is spontaneous and genuine—runs to accepted form in every detail. The law of chance and fallibility invariably steps in."

He made a slight indicative gesture.

"But regard this particular crime: look at it closely. What do you find? You will perceive that its *mise-en-scène* has been staged, and its drama enacted, down to every minute detail like a Zola novel. It is almost mathematically perfect. And therein, d'ye see, lies the irresistible inference of its having been carefully premeditated and planned. To use an art term, it is a tickled-up crime. Therefore, its conception was not spontaneous. . . . And yet, don't y' know I can't point out any specific flaw; for its great flaw lies in its being flawless. And nothing flawless, my dear fellow, is natural or genuine."

Markham was silent for a while.

"You deny even the remote possibility of a common thief having murdered the girl?" he asked at length; and now there was no hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"If a common thief did it," contended Vance, "then there's no science of psychology, there are no philosophic truths, and there are no laws of art. If it was a genuine crime of robbery, then, by the same token, there is no difference whatever between an old master and a clever technician's copy."

"You'd entirely eliminate robbery as the motive, I take it."

"The robbery," Vance affirmed, "was only a manufactured detail. The fact that the crime was committed by a highly astute person indicates unquestionably that there was a far more potent motive behind it. Any man capable of so ingenious and clever a piece of deception is obviously a person of education and imagination; and he most certainly would not have run the stupendous risk of killing a

woman unless he had feared some overwhelming disaster—unless, indeed, her continuing to live would have caused him greater mental anguish, and would have put him in greater jeopardy, even than the crime itself. Between two colossal dangers, he chose the murder as the lesser.”

Markham did not speak at once: he seemed lost in reflection. But presently he turned and, fixing Vance with a dubious stare, said:

“What about that chiselled jewel-box? A professional burglar’s jimmy wielded by an experienced hand doesn’t fit into your æsthetic hypothesis—it is, in fact, diametrically opposed to such a theory.”

“I know it only too well.” Vance nodded slowly. “And I’ve been harried and hectorred by that steel chisel ever since I beheld the evidence of its work that first morning. . . . Markham, that chisel is the one genuine note in an otherwise spurious performance. It’s as if the real artist had come along at the moment the copyist had finished his faked picture, and painted in a single small object with the hand of a master.”

“But doesn’t that bring us back inevitably to Skeel?”

“Skeel—ah, yes. That’s the explanation, no doubt; but not the way you conceive it. Skeel ripped the box open—I don’t question that; but—deuce take it!—it’s the only thing he did do: it’s the only thing that was left for him to do. That’s why he got only a ring which La Belle Marguerite was not wearing that night. All her other baubles—to wit, those that adorned her—had been stripped from her and were gone.”

“Why are you so positive on this point?”

“The poker, man—the poker! . . . Don’t you see? That amateurish assault upon the jewel-case with a cast-iron coal-prodder couldn’t have been made *after* the case had been prised open—it would have had to be made *before*. And that seemingly insane attempt to break steel with cast iron was part of the stage-setting. The real culprit didn’t

care if he got the case open or not. He merely wanted it to look as if he had *tried* to get it open ; so he used the poker and then left it lying beside the dented box."

"I see what you mean." This point, I think, impressed Markham more strongly than any other Vance had raised ; for the presence of the poker on the dressing-table had not been explained away either by Heath or Inspector Brenner. . . . "Is that the reason you questioned Skeel as if he might have been present when your other visitor was there?"

"Exactly. By the evidence of the jewel-case I knew he either was in the apartment when the bogus crime of robbery was being staged, or else had come upon the scene when it was over and the stage-director had cleared out. . . . From his reactions to my questions I rather fancy he was present."

"Hiding in the closet?"

"Yes. That would account for the closet not having been disturbed. As I see it, it wasn't ransacked, for the simple and rather grotesque reason that the elegant Skeel was locked within. How else could that one clothes-press have escaped the rifling activities of the pseudo-burglar? He wouldn't have omitted it deliberately, and he was far too thorough-going to have overlooked it accidentally.—Then there are the finger-prints on the knob. . . ."

Vance lightly tapped on the arm of his chair.

"I tell you, Markham, old dear, you simply must build your conception of the crime on this hypothesis, and proceed accordingly. If you don't, each edifice you rear will come toppling about your ears."

Chapter XV

FOUR POSSIBILITIES

(Wednesday, September 12th ; evening)

WHEN Vance finished speaking, there was a long silence. Markham, impressed by the other's earnestness, sat in a brown study. His ideas had been shaken. The theory of Skeel's guilt, to which he had clung from the moment of the identification of the finger-prints, had, it must be admitted, not entirely satisfied him, although he had been able to suggest no alternative. Now Vance had categorically repudiated this theory and at the same time had advanced another which, despite its indefiniteness, had nevertheless taken into account all the physical points of the case ; and Markham, at first antagonistic, had found himself, almost against his will, becoming more and more sympathetic to this new point of view.

"Damn it, Vance!" he said. "I'm not in the least convinced by your theatrical theory. And yet, I feel a curious undercurrent of plausibility in your analyses. . . . I wonder——"

He turned sharply, and scrutinised the other steadfastly for a moment.

"Look here! Have you any one in mind as the protagonist of the drama you've outlined?"

"'Pon my word, I haven't the slightest notion as to who killed the lady," Vance assured him. "But if you are ever to find the murderer, you must look for a shrewd, superior man with nerves of iron, who was in imminent danger of

being irremediably ruined by the girl—a man of inherent cruelty and vindictiveness; a supreme egoist; a fatalist more or less; and—I'm inclined to believe—something of a madman."

"Mad!"

"Oh, not a lunatic—just a madman, a perfectly normal, logical, calculating madman—same as you and I and Van here. Only, our hobbies are harmless, d'ye see. This chap's mania is outside your preposterously revered law. That's why you're after him. If his aberration were stamp-collecting, or golf, you wouldn't give him a second thought. But his perfectly rational *penchant* for eliminating *déclassées* ladies who bothered him, fills you with horror: it's not *your* hobby. Consequently, you have a hot yearning to flay him alive."

"I'll admit," said Markham coolly, "that a homicidal mania is my idea of madness."

"But he didn't have a homicidal mania, Markham old thing. You miss all the fine distinctions in psychology. This man was annoyed by a certain person, and set to work, masterfully and reasonably, to do away with the source of his annoyance. And he did it with surpassin' cleverness. To be sure, his act was a bit grisly. But when, if ever, you get your hands on him, you'll be amazed to find how normal he is. And able, too—oh, able no end."

Again Markham lapsed into a long thoughtful silence. At last he spoke.

"The only trouble with your ingenious deductions is that they don't accord with the known circumstances of the case. And facts, my dear Vance, are still regarded by a few of us old-fashioned lawyers as more or less conclusive."

"Why this needless confession of your shortcomings?" inquired Vance whimsically. Then, after a moment: "Let me have the facts which appear to you antagonistic to my deductions."

"Well, there are only four men of the type you describe

who could have had any remote reason for murdering the Odell woman. Heath's scouts went into her history pretty thoroughly, and for over two years—that is, since her appearance in the 'Follies'—the only *personæ gratae* at her apartment have been Mannix, Doctor Lindquist, Pop Cleaver, and, of course, Spotswoode. The Canary was a bit exclusive, it seems; and no other man got near enough to her even to be considered as a possible murderer."

"It appears, then, that you have a complete quartet to draw on." Vance's tone was apathetic. "What do you crave—a regiment?"

"No," answered Markham patiently. "I crave only one logical possibility. But Mannix was through with the girl over a year ago; Cleaver and Spotswoode both have watertight alibis; and that leaves only Doctor Lindquist, whom I can't exactly picture as a strangler and meretricious burglar, despite his irascibility. Moreover, he, too, has an alibi; and it may be a genuine one."

Vance wagged his head.

"There's something positively pathetic about the child-like faith of the legal mind."

"It does cling to rationality at times, doesn't it?" observed Markham.

"My dear fellow!" Vance rebuked him. "The presumption implied in that remark is most immodest. If you could distinguish between rationality and irrationality you wouldn't be a lawyer—you'd be a god. . . . No; you're going at this thing the wrong way. The real factors in the case are not what you call the known circumstances, but the unknown quantities—the human *x's* so to speak—the personalities, or natures, of your quartet."

He lit a fresh cigarette, and lay back, closing his eyes.

"Tell me what you know of these four *cavalieri serventi*—you say Heath has turned in his report. Who were there *mammas*? What do they eat for breakfast? Are they

susceptible to poison-ivy? . . . Let's have Spotswoode's *dossier* first. Do you know anything about him?"

"In a general way," returned Markham. "Old Puritan stock, I believe—governors, burgomasters, a few successful traders. All Yankee forbears—no intermixture. As a matter of fact, Spotswoode represents the oldest and hardiest of the New England aristocracy—although I imagine the so-called wine of the Puritans has become pretty well diluted by now. His affair with the Odell girl is hardly consonant with the older Puritans' mortification of the flesh."

"It's wholly consonant, though, with the psychological reactions which are apt to follow the inhibitions produced by such mortification," submitted Vance. "But what does he do? Whence cometh his lucre?"

"His father manufactured automobile accessories, made a fortune at it, and left the business to him. He tinkers at it, but not seriously, though I believe he has designed a few appurtenances."

"I do hope the hideous cut-glass olla for holding paper bouquets is not one of them. The man who invented that tonneau decoration is capable of any fiendish crime."

"It couldn't have been Spotswood then," said Markham tolerantly, "for he certainly can't qualify as your potential strangler. We know the girl was alive after he left her, and that, during the time she was murdered, he was with Judge Redfern. . . . Even you, friend Vance, couldn't manipulate those facts to the gentleman's disadvantage."

"On that, at least, we agree," conceded Vance. "And that's all you know of the gentleman?"

"I think that's all, except that he married a well-to-do woman—a daughter of a Southern senator, I believe."

"Doesn't help any. . . . And now, let's have Mannix's history."

Markham referred to a typewritten sheet of paper.

"Both parents immigrants—came over in the steerage.

Original name Mannikiewicz, or something like that. Born on the East Side; learned the fur business in his father's retail shop in Hester Street; worked for the Sanfrasco Cloak Company, and got to be factory foreman. Saved his money, and sweetened the pot by manipulating real estate; then went into the fur business for himself, and steadily worked up to his present opulent state. Public school, and night commercial college. Married in 1900 and divorced a year later. Lives a gay life—helps support the night clubs, but never gets drunk. I suppose he comes under the head of a spender and wine-opener. Has invested some money in musical comedies, and always has a stage beauty in tow. Runs to blondes."

"Not very revealin'," sighed Vance. "The city is full of Mannixes. . . . What did you garner in connection with our *bon-ton* medico?"

"The city has its quota of Doctor Lindquists, too, I fear. He was brought up in a small Middle-West bailiwick—French and Magyar extraction; took his M.D. from the Ohio State Medical, practised in Chicago—some shady business there, but never convicted; came to Albany and got in on the X-ray-machine craze; invented a breast-pump and formed a stock company—made a small fortune out of it; went to Vienna for two years——"

"Ah, the Freudian motif!"

"—returned to New York, and opened a private sanatorium; charged outrageous prices, and thereby endeared himself to the *nouveau riche*. Has been at the endearing process ever since. Was defendant in a breach of promise suit some years ago, but the case was settled out of court. He's not married."

"He wouldn't be," commented Vance. "Such gentry never are. . . . Interestin' summary, though—yes, decidedly interestin'. I'm tempted to develop a psycho-neurosis and let Ambrose treat me. I do so want to know him better. And where—oh, where—was this egregious

healer at the moment of our erring sister's demise? Ah, who can tell, my Markham: who knows—who knows?"

"In any event, I don't think he was murdering anyone."

"You're so prejudicial!" said Vance. "But let us move reluctantly on.—What's your *portrait parlé* of Cleaver? The fact that he's familiarly called Pop is helpful as a starter. You simply couldn't imagine Beethoven being called Shorty, or Bismarck being referred to as Snookums."

"Cleaver has been a politician most of his life—a Tammany Hall 'regular.' Was a ward-boss at twenty-five; ran a Democratic club of some kind in Brooklyn for a time; was an alderman for two terms, and practised general law. Was appointed Tax Commissioner; left politics, and raised a small racing-stable. Later secured an illegal gambling concession at Saratoga; and now operates a pool-room in Jersey City. He's what you might call a professional sport. Loves his liquor."

"No marriages?"

"None on the records.—But see here: Cleaver's out of it. He was ticketed in Boonton that night at half-past eleven."

"Is that, by any chance, the water-tight alibi you mentioned a moment ago?"

"In my primitive legal way I considered it as such." Markham resented Vance's question. "The summons was handed him at half-past eleven; it's so marked and dated. And Boonton is fifty miles from here—a good two hours' motor ride. Therefore, Cleaver unquestionably left New York about half-past nine; and even if he'd driven directly back, he couldn't have reached here until long after the time the Medical Examiner declared the girl was dead. As a matter of routine, I investigated the summons, and even spoke by phone to the officer who issued it. It was genuine enough—I ought to know: I had it quashed."

"Did this Boonton Dogberry know Cleaver by sight?"

"No, but he gave me an accurate description of him. And naturally he took the car's number."

Vance looked at Markham with open-eyed sorrow.

"My dear Markham—my very dear Markham—can't you see that all you've actually proved is that a bucolic traffic Nemesis handed a speed-violation summons to a smooth-faced, middle-aged, stout man who was driving Cleaver's car near Boonton at half-past eleven on the night of the murder? . . . And, my word! Isn't that exactly the sort of alibi the old boy would arrange if he intended taking the lady's life at midnight or thereabouts?"

"Come, come!" laughed Markham. "That's a bit too far-fetched. You'd give every law-breaker credit for concocting schemes of the most diabolical cunning."

"So I would," admitted Vance apathetically. "And—d'ye know?—I rather fancy that's just the kind of schemes a law-breaker would concoct, if he was planning a murder, and his own life was at stake. What really amazes me is the naïve assumption of you investigators that a murderer gives no intelligent thought whatever to his future safety. It's rather touchin', y' know."

Markham grunted.

"Well, you can take it from me, it was Cleaver himself who got that summons."

"I dare say you're right," Vance conceded. "I merely suggested the possibility of deception, don't y' know. The only point I really insist on is that the fascinatin' Miss Odell was killed by a man of subtle and superior mentality."

"And I, in turn," irritably rejoined Markham, "insist that the only men of that type who touched her life intimately enough to have had any reason to do it are Mannix, Cleaver, Lindquist, and Spotswoode. And I further insist that not one of them can be regarded as a promising possibility."

"I fear I must contradict you, old dear," said Vance serenely. "They're all possibilities—and one of them is guilty."

Markham glared at him derisively.

"Well, well! So the case is settled! Now, if you'll but indicate which is the guilty one, I'll arrest him at once, and return to my other duties."

"You're always in such haste," Vance lamented. "Why leap and run? The wisdom of the world's philosophers is against it. *Festina lente*, says Cæsar; or, as Rufus has it, *Festinitio tarda est*. And the Koran says quite frankly that haste is of the Devil. Shakespeare was constantly belittling speed:

'He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;'

and

'Wisely, and slow; they stumble that run fast.'

Then there was Molière—remember 'Sganarelle'?—: '*Le trop de promptitude à l'erreur nous expose*.' Chaucer also held similar views. 'He hasteth wel,' said he, 'that wysely can abyde.' Even God's common people have embalmed the idea in numberless proverbs: 'Good and quickly seldom meet'; and 'Hasty men never want woe——' "

Markham rose with a gesture of impatience.

"Hell! I'm going home before you start a bed-time story," he growled.

The ironical aftermath of this remark was that Vance did tell a "bedtime story" that night; but he told it to me in the seclusion of his own library; and the gist of it was this:

"Heath is committed, body and soul, to a belief in Skeel's guilt; and Markham is as effectively strangled with legal red tape as the poor Canary was strangled with powerful hands. *Eheu, Van!* There's nothing left for me but to set forth to-morrow *a capella*, like Gaboriau's Monsieur Le Coq, and see what can be done in the noble cause of justice. I shall ignore both Heath and Markham, and become as a pelican of the wilderness, an owl of the desert, a sparrow alone upon the housetop. . . . Really, y' know, I'm no avenger of society, but I do detest an unsolved problem."

Chapter XVI

SIGNIFICANT DISCLOSURES

(Thursday, September 13th; forenoon)

GREATLY to Currie's astonishment Vance gave instructions to be called at nine o'clock the following morning; and at ten o'clock we were sitting on his little roof-garden having breakfast in the mellow mid-September sunshine.

"Van," he said to me, when Currie had brought us our second cup of coffee, "however secretive a woman may be, there's always someone to whom she unburdens her soul. A confidant is an essential to the feminine temperament. It may be a mother, or a lover, or a priest, or a doctor, or, more generally, a girl chum. In the Canary's case we haven't a mother or a priest. Her lover—the elegant Skeel—was a potential enemy; and we're pretty safe in ruling out her doctor—she was too shrewd to confide in such a creature as Lindquist. The girl chum, then, remains. And to-day we seek her." He lit a cigarette and rose. "But, first, we must visit Mr. Benjamin Browne of Seventh Avenue."

Benjamin Browne was a well-known photographer of stage celebrities, with galleries in the heart of the city's theatrical district; and as we entered the reception-room of his luxurious studio later that morning my curiosity as to the object of our visit was at the breaking-point. Vance went straight to the desk, behind which sat a young woman with flaming red hair and mascaro-shaded eyes, and bowed in his most dignified manner. Then, taking a small unmounted photograph from his pocket, he laid it before her.

"I am producing a musical comedy, *mademoiselle*," he said, "and I wish to communicate with the young lady who left this picture of herself with me. Unfortunately I've misplaced her card; but as her photograph bore the imprint of Browne's, I thought you might be good enough to look in your files and tell me who she is and where I may find her."

He slipped a five-dollar bill under the edge of the blotter and waited with an air of innocent expectancy.

The young woman looked at him quizzically, and I thought I detected the hint of a smile at the corners of her artfully rouged lips. But after a moment she took the photograph without a word and disappeared through a rear door. Ten minutes later she returned and handed Vance the picture. On the back of it she had written a name and address.

"The young lady is Miss Alys La Fosse, and she lives at the Belafield Hotel." There was now no doubt as to her smile. "You really shouldn't be so careless with the addresses of your applicants—some poor girl might lose an engagement." And her smile suddenly turned into soft laughter.

"*Mademoiselle*," replied Vance, with mock seriousness, "in the future I shall be guided by your warning." And with another dignified bow, he went out.

"Good Lord!" he said, as we emerged into Seventh Avenue. "Really, y' know, I should have disguised myself as an impresario, with a gold-headed cane, a derby, and a purple shirt. That young woman is thoroughly convinced that I'm contemplating an intrigue. . . . A jolly smart *tête-rouge*, that."

He turned into a florist's shop at the corner, and selecting a dozen American Beauties, addressed them to "Benjamin Browne's Receptionist."

"And now," he said, "let us stroll to the Belafield, and seek an audience with Alys."

As we walked across town Vance explained.

"That first morning, when we were inspecting the Canary's rooms, I was convinced that the murder would never be solved by the usual elephantine police methods. It was a subtle and well-planned crime, despite its obvious appearances. No routine investigation would suffice. Intimate information was needed. Therefore, when I saw this photograph of the xanthous Alys half hidden under the litter of papers on the *escritoire*, I reflected: 'Ah! A girl friend of the departed Margaret's. She may know just the things that are needed.' So, when the Sergeant's broad back was turned, I put the picture in my pocket. There was no other photograph about the place, and this one bore the usual sentimental inscription, 'Ever thine,' and was signed 'Alys.' I concluded, therefore, that Alys had played Anactoria to the Canary's Sappho. Of course I erased the inscription before presenting the picture to the penetrating sibyl at Browne's. . . . And here we are at the Belafield, hopin' for a bit of enlightenment."

The Belafield was a small, expensive apartment-hotel in the East Thirties, which, to judge from the guests to be seen in the Americanised Queen Anne lobby, catered to the well-off sporting set. Vance sent his card up to Miss La Fosse, and received the message that she would see him in a few minutes. The few minutes, however, developed into three-quarters of an hour, and it was nearly noon when a resplendent bell-boy came to escort us to the lady's apartment.

Nature had endowed Miss La Fosse with many of its arts, and those that Nature had omitted, Miss La Fosse herself had supplied. She was slender and blonde. Her large blue eyes were heavily lashed, but though she looked at one with a wide-eyed stare, she was unable to disguise their sophistication. Her toilet had been made with elaborate care; and as I looked at her, I could not help

thinking what an excellent model she would have been for Chéret's pastel posters.

"So you are Mr. Vance," she cooed. "I've often seen your name in *Town Topics*."

Vance gave a shudder.

"And this is Mr. Van Dine," he said sweetly, "—a mere attorney, who, thus far, has been denied the pages of that fashionable weekly."

"Won't you sit down?" (I am sure Miss La Fosse had spoken the line in a play: she made of the invitation an impressive ceremonial.) "I really don't know why I should have received you. But I suppose you called on business. Perhaps you wish me to appear at a society bazaar, or something of the kind. But I'm so busy, Mr. Vance. You simply can't imagine how occupied I am with my work. . . . I just love my work," she added, with an ecstatic sigh.

"And I'm sure there are many thousands of others who love it too," returned Vance, in his best drawing-room manner. "But unfortunately I have no bazaar to be graced by your charming presence. I have come on a much more serious matter. . . . You were a very close friend of Miss Margaret Odell's—"

The mention of the Canary's name brought Miss La Fosse suddenly to her feet. Her ingratiating air of affected elegance had quickly disappeared. Her eyes flashed, and their lids drooped harshly. A sneer distorted the lines of her cupid's-bow mouth, and she tossed her head angrily.

"Say, listen! Who do you think you are? I don't know nothing, and I got nothing to say. So run along—you and your lawyer."

But Vance made no move to obey. He took out his cigarette-case and carefully selected a *Régie*.

"Do you mind if I smoke?—And won't you have one? I import them direct from my agent in Constantinople. They're exquisitely blended."

The girl snorted, and gave him a look of cold disdain. The doll-baby had become a virago.

"Get yourself outa my apartment, or I'll call the house detective." She turned to the telephone on the wall at her side.

Vance waited until she had lifted the receiver.

"If you do that, Miss La Fosse, I'll order you taken to the District Attorney's office for questioning," he told her indifferently, lighting his cigarette and leaning back in his chair.

Slowly she replaced the receiver and turned.

"What's your game, anyway? . . . Suppose I did know Margy—then what? And where do you fit into the picture?"

"Alas! I don't fit in at all." Vance smiled pleasantly. "But, for that matter, nobody seems to fit in. The truth is, they're about to arrest a poor blighter for killing your friend, who wasn't in the tableau, either. I happen to be a friend of the District Attorney's; and I know exactly what's being done. The police are scouting round in a perfect frenzy of activity, and it's hard to say what trail they'll strike next. I thought, don't y' know, I might save you a lot of unpleasantness by a friendly little chat. . . . Of course," he added, "if you prefer to have me give your name to the police, I'll do so, and let them hold the audition in their own inimitable but crude fashion. I might say, however, that, as yet, they are blissfully unaware of your relationship with Miss Odell, and that, if you are reasonable, I see no reason why they should be informed of it."

The girl had stood, one hand on the telephone, studying Vance intently. He had spoken carelessly and with a genial inflection; and she at length resumed her seat.

"Now, won't you have one of my cigarettes?" he asked, in a tone of gracious reconciliation.

Mechanically she accepted his offer, keeping her eyes on him all the time, as if attempting to determine how far he was to be trusted.

"Who are they thinking of arresting?" She asked the question with scarcely a movement of her features.

"A johnny named Skeel—Silly idea, isn't it?"

"Him!" Her tone was one of mingled contempt and disgust. "That cheap crook? He hasn't got nerve enough to strangle a cat."

"Precisely. But that's no reason for sending him to the electric chair, what?" Vance leaned forward and smiled engagingly. "Miss La Fosse, if you will talk to me for five minutes, and forget I'm a stranger, I'll give you my word of honour not to let the police or the District Attorney know anything about you. I'm not connected with the authorities, but somehow I dislike the idea of seeing the wrong man punished. And I'll promise to forget the source of any information you will be kind enough to give me. If you will trust me, it will be infinitely easier for you in the end."

The girl made no answer for several minutes. She was, I could see, trying to estimate Vance; and evidently she decided that, in any case, she had nothing to lose—now that her friendship with the Canary had been discovered—by talking to this man who had promised her immunity from further annoyance.

"I guess you're all right," she said, with a reservation of dubiety; "but I don't know why I should think so." She paused. "But, look here: I was told to keep out of this. And if I don't keep out of it, I'm apt to be back hoofing it in the chorus again. And that's no life for a sweet young thing like me with extravagant tastes—believe me, my friend!"

"That calamity will never befall you through any lack of discretion on my part," Vance assured her, with good-natured earnestness. . . . "Who told you to keep out of it?"

"My—fiancé." She spoke somewhat coquettishly. "He's very well known, and he's afraid there might be

scandal if I got mixed up in the case as a witness, or anything like that."

"I can readily understand his feelings." Vance nodded sympathetically. "And who, by the by, is this luckiest of men?"

"Say! You're good." She complimented him with a coy *moue*. "But I'm not announcing my engagement yet."

"Don't be horrid," begged Vance. "You know perfectly well that I could find out his name by making a few inquiries. And if you drove me to learn the facts elsewhere, then my promise to keep your name a secret would no longer bind me."

Miss La Fosse considered this point.

"I guess you could find out all right . . . so I might as well tell you—only I'm trusting to your word to protect me." She opened her eyes wide and gave Vance a melting look. "I know you wouldn't let me down."

"My dear Miss La Fosse!" His tone was one of pained surprise.

"Well, my fiancé is Mr. Mannix, and he's the head of a big fur-importing house. . . . You see"—she became clingingly confidential—"Louis—that is, Mr. Mannix—used to go round with Margy. That's why he didn't want me to get mixed up in the affair. He said the police might bother him with questions, and his name might get into the papers. And that would hurt his commercial standing."

"I quite understand," murmured Vance. "And do you happen to know where Mr. Mannix was Monday night?"

The girl looked startled.

"Of course I know. He was right here with me from half-past ten until two in the morning. We were discussing a new musical show he was interested in; and he wanted me to take the leading rôle."

"I'm sure it will be a success." Vance spoke with disarming friendliness. "Were you home alone all Monday evening?"

"Hardly." The idea seemed to amuse her. "I went to the 'Scandals'—but I came home early. I knew Louis—Mr. Mannix—was coming."

"I trust he appreciated your sacrifice." Vance, I believe, was disappointed by this unexpected alibi of Mannix's. It was, indeed, so final that further interrogation concerning it seemed futile. After a momentary pause, he changed the subject.

"Tell me; what do you know about a Mr. Charles Cleaver? He was a friend of Miss Odell's."

"Oh, Pop's all right." The girl was plainly relieved by this turn in the conversation. "A good scout. He was certainly gone on Margy. Even after she threw him over for Mr. Spotswoode, he was faithful, as you might say—always running after her, sending her flowers and presents. Some men are like that. Poor old Pop! He even phoned me Monday night to call up Margy for him and try to arrange a party.—Maybe if I'd done it, she wouldn't be dead now. . . . It's a funny world, isn't it?"

"Oh, no end funny." Vance smoked calmly for a minute; I could not help admiring his self-control. "What time did Mr. Cleaver phone you Monday night—do you recall?" From his voice one would have thought the question of no importance.

"Let me see. . . ." She pursed her lips prettily. "It was just ten minutes to twelve. I remember that the little chime clock on the mantel over there was striking midnight, and at first I couldn't hear Pop very well. You see I always keep my clock ten minutes fast so I'll never be late for an appointment."

Vance compared the clock with his watch.

"Yes, it's ten minutes fast.—And what about the party?"

"Oh, I was too busy talking about the new show, and I had to refuse. Anyway, Mr. Mannix didn't want to have a party that night. . . . It wasn't my fault, was it?"

"Not a bit of it," Vance assured her. "Work comes before pleasure—especially work as important as yours. . . . And now, there is one other man I want to ask you about, and then I won't bother you any more.—What was the situation between Miss Odell and Doctor Lindquist?"

Miss La Fosse became genuinely perturbed.

"I was afraid you were going to ask me about him." There was apprehension in her eyes. "I don't know just what to say. He was wildly in love with Margy; and she led him on, too. But she was sorry for it afterward, because he got jealous—like a crazy person. He used to pester the life out of her. And once—do you know!—he threatened to shoot her and then shoot himself. I told Margy to look out for him. But she didn't seem to be afraid. Anyway, I think she was taking awful chances. . . . Oh! Do you think it could have been—do you really think—?"

"And wasn't there anyone else," Vance interrupted, "who might have felt the same way?—anyone Miss Odell had reason to fear?"

"No." Miss La Fosse shook her head. "Margy didn't know many men intimately. She didn't change often, if you know what I mean. There wasn't anybody else outside of those you've mentioned, except, of course, Mr. Spotswoode. He cut Pop out—several months ago. She went to dinner with him Monday night, too. I wanted her to go to the 'Scandals' with me—that's how I know."

Vance rose and held out his hand.

"You've been very kind. And you have nothing whatever to fear. No one shall ever know of our little visit this morning."

"Who do you think killed Margy?" There was genuine emotion in the girl's voice. "Louis says it was probably some burglar who wanted her jewels."

"I'm too wise to sow discord in this happy ménage by even questioning Mr. Mannix's opinion," said Vance half

banteringly. "No one *knows* who's guilty; but the police agree with Mr. Mannix."

For a moment the girl's doubts returned, and she gave Vance a searching look.

"Why are you so interested? You didn't know Margy, did you? She never mentioned you."

Vance laughed.

"My dear child! I only wish I knew why I am so deuced concerned in this affair. 'Pon my word, I can't give you even the sketchiest explanation. . . . No, I never met Miss Odell. But it would offend my sense of proportion if Mr. Skeel were punished and the real culprit went free. Maybe I'm getting sentimental. A sad fate, what?"

"I guess I'm getting soft, too." She nodded her head, still looking Vance squarely in the eyes. "I risked my happy home to tell you what I did, because somehow I believed you. . . . Say, you weren't stringing me, by any chance?"

Vance put his hand on his heart, and became serious. . .

"My dear Miss La Fosse, when I leave here it will be as though I had never entered. Dismiss me and Mr. Van Dine here from your mind."

Something in his manner banished her misgivings, and she bade us a kittenish farewell.

Chapter XVII

CHECKING AN ALIBI

(Thursday, September 13th; afternoon)

"My sleuthing goes better," exulted Vance, when we were again in the street. "Fair Alys was a veritable mine of information—eh, what? Only, you should have controlled yourself better when she mentioned her beloved's name—really, you should, Van old thing. I saw you jump and heard you heave. Such emotion is most unbecoming in a lawyer."

From a booth in a drug-store near the hotel he telephoned Markham: "I am taking you to lunch. I have numerous confidences I would pour into your ear." A debate ensued, but in the end Vance emerged triumphant; and a moment later a taxicab was driving us down-town.

"Alys is clever—there are brains in that fluffy head," he ruminated. "She's much smarter than Heath; she knew at once that Skeel wasn't guilty. Her characterisation of the immaculate Tony was inelegant but how accurate—oh, how accurate! And you noticed, of course, how she trusted me. Touchin', wasn't it? . . . It's a knotty problem, Van. Something's amiss somewhere."

He was silent, smoking, for several blocks.

"Mannix. . . Curious he should crop up again. And he issued orders to Alys to keep mum. Now, why? Maybe the reason he gave her was the real one. Who knows?—On the other hand, was he with his *chère amie* from half-past ten till early morning? Well, well. Again, who knows?"

Something queer about that business discussion. . . . Then Cleaver. He called up just ten minutes before midnight—oh, yes, he called up. That wasn't a fairy-tale. But how could he telephone from a speeding car? He couldn't. Maybe he really wanted to have a party with his recalcitrant Canary, don't y' know. But then, why the brummagem alibi? Funk? Maybe. But why the circuitousness?—why didn't he call his lost love direct? Ah, perhaps he did! Someone certainly called her by phone at twenty minutes to twelve. We must look into that, Van. . . . Yes, he may have called her, and then when a man answered—who the deuce was that man, anyway?—he may have appealed to Alys. Quite natural y' know. Anyway, he wasn't in Boonton.—Poor Markham! How upset he'll be when he finds out! . . . But what really worries me is that story of the doctor. Jealous mania: it squares with Ambroise's character perfectly. He's the kind that does go off his head. I knew his confession of paternalism was a red herring. My word! So the doctor was making threats and flourishing pistols, eh? Bad, bad. I don't like it. With those ears of his, he wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger. Paranoia—that's it. Delusions of persecution. Probably thought the girl and Pop—or maybe the girl and Spotswoode—were plotting his misery and laughing at him. You can't tell about those chaps. They're deep—and they're dangerous. The canny Alys had him sized up—warned the Canary against him. . . . Taken by and large, it's a devilish tangle. Anyway, I feel rather bucked. We're moving—oh, undoubtedly we're moving—though in what direction I can't even guess. It's beastly annoyin'."

Markham was waiting for us at the Bankers' Club. He greeted Vance irritably.

"What have you got to tell me that's so damned important?"

"Now, don't get ratty," Vance was beaming. "How's your lode-star, Skeel, behaving?"

"So far he's done everything that's pure and refined except join the Christian Endeavour Society."

"Sunday's coming. Give him time. . . . So you're not happy, Markham dear?"

"Was I dragged away from another engagement to report on my state of mind?"

"No need. Your state of mind's execrable. . . . Cheerio! I've brought you something to think about."

"Damn it! I've got too much to think about now."

"Here, have some brioche." Vance gave the order for lunch without consulting either of us. "And now for my revelations. *Imprimis*: Pop Cleaver wasn't in Boonton last Monday night. He was very much in the midst of our modern Gomorrah, trying to arrange a midnight party."

"Wonderful!" snorted Markham. "I lave in the font of your wisdom. His *alter ego*, I take it, was on the road to Hopatcong. The supernatural leaves me cold."

"You may be as pancosmic as you choose. Cleaver was in New York at midnight Monday, craving excitement."

"What about the summons for speeding?"

"That's for you to explain. But if you'll take my advice you'll send for this Boonton catchpole, and let him have a look at Pop. If he says Cleaver is the man he ticketed, I'll humbly do away with myself."

"Well! That makes it worth trying. I'll have the officer at the Stuyvesant Club this afternoon, and I'll point out Cleaver to him. . . . What other staggering revelations have you in store?"

"Mannix will bear looking into."

Markham put down his knife and fork and leaned back.

"I'm overcome! Such Himalayan sagacity! With that evidence against him, he should be arrested at once. . . . Vance, my dear old friend, are you feeling quite normal? No dizzy spells lately? No shooting pains in the head? Knee-jerks all right?"

"Furthermore, Doctor Lindquist was wildly infatuated

with the Canary, and insanely jealous. Recently threatened to take a pistol and hold a little pogrom of his own."

"That's better." Markham sat up. "Where did you get this information?"

"Ah! That's my secret."

Markham was annoyed.

"Why so mysterious?"

"Needs must, old chap. Gave my word, and all that sort of thing. And I'm a bit quixotic, don't y' know—too much Cervantes in my youth." He spoke lightly, but Markham knew him too well to push the question.

In less than five minutes after we had returned to the District Attorney's office Heath came in.

"I've got something else on Mannix, sir; thought you might want to add it to the report I turned in yesterday. Burke secured a picture of him, and showed it to the phone operators at Odell's house. Both of 'em recognised it. He's been there several times, but it wasn't the Canary he called on. It was the woman in Apartment 2. She's named Frisbee, and used to be one of Mannix's fur models. He's been to see her several times during the past six months, and has taken her out once or twice; but he hasn't called on her for a month or more. . . . Any good?"

"Can't tell." Markham shot Vance an inquisitive look. "But thanks for the information, Sergeant."

"By the by," said Vance dulcetly, when Heath had left us, "I'm feeling tophole. No pains in the head; no dizzy spells. Knee-jerks perfect."

"Delighted. Still, I can't charge a man with murder because he calls on his fur model."

"You're so hasty! Why should you charge him with murder?" Vance rose and yawned. "Come, Van. I'd rather like to gaze on Perneb's tomb at the Metropolitan this afternoon. Could you bear it?" At the door he paused. "I say, Markham, what about the Boonton bailiff?"

Markham rang for Swacker.

"I'll see to it at once. Drop in at the club around five, if you feel like it. I'll have the officer there then, as Cleaver is sure to come in before dinner."

When Vance and I returned to the club late that afternoon, Markham was stationed in the lounge-room facing the main door of the rotunda; and beside him sat a tall, heavy-set, bronzed man of about forty, alert but ill at ease.

"Traffic Officer Phipps arrived from Boonton a little while ago," said Markham, by way of introduction. "Cleaver is expected at any moment now. He has an appointment here at half-past five."

Vance drew up a chair.

"I do hope he's a punctual beggar."

"So do I," returned Markham, viciously "I'm looking forward to your *felo-de-se*."

"Our hap is loss, our hope but sad despair," murmured Vance.

Less than ten minutes later Cleaver entered the rotunda from the street, paused at the desk, and sauntered into the lounge-room. There was no escaping the observation point Markham had chosen; and as he walked by us he paused and exchanged greetings. Markham detained him a moment with a few casual questions; and then Cleaver passed on.

"That the man you ticketed, officer?" asked Markham, turning to Phipps.

Phipps was scowling perplexedly.

"It looks something like him, sir; there's a kind of resemblance. But it ain't him." He shook his head. "No, sir; it ain't him. The fellow I hung a summons on was stouter than this gent, and wasn't as tall."

"You're positive?"

"Yes, sir—no mistake. The guy I tagged tried to argue with me, and then he tried to slip me a fiver to forget it. I had my headlight on him full."

Phipps was dismissed with a substantial *pourboire*.

"*Væ misero mihi!*" sighed Vance. "My worthless

existence is to be prolonged. Sad. But you must try to bear it. . . . I say, Markham, what does Pop Cleaver's brother look like?"

"That's it," nodded Markham. "I've met his brother; he's shorter and stouter. . . . This thing is getting beyond me. I think I'll have it out with Cleaver now."

He started to rise, but Vance forced him back into his seat.

"Don't be impetuous. Cultivate patience. Cleaver's not going to do a bunk; and there are one or two prelimin'ry steps strongly indicated. Mannix and Lindquist still seduce my curiosity."

Markham clung to his point.

"Neither Mannix nor Lindquist is here now, and Cleaver is. And I want to know why he lied to me about that summons."

"I can tell you that," said Vance. "He wanted you to think he was in the wilds of New Jersey at midnight Monday.—Simple, what?"

"The inference is a credit to your intelligence! But I hope you don't seriously think that Cleaver is guilty. It's possible he knows something; but I certainly cannot picture him as a strangler."

"And why?"

"He's not the type. It's inconceivable—even if there were evidence against him."

"Ah! The psychological judgment! You eliminate Cleaver because you don't think his nature harmonises with the situation. I say, doesn't that come perilously near being an esoteric hypothesis?—or a metaphysical deduction? . . . However, I don't entirely agree with you in your application of the theory to Cleaver. That fish-eyed gambler has unsuspected potentialities for evil. But with the theory itself I am wholly in accord. And behold, my dear Markham; you yourself apply psychology in its abecedarian implications, yet ridicule my application of

it in its higher developments. Consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds, y' know, but it's none the less a priceless jewel. . . . How about a cup of tea ? ”

We sought the Palm Room, and sat down at a table near the entrance. Vance ordered oolong tea, but Markham and I took black coffee. A very capable four-piece orchestra was playing Tchaikovsky's *Casse Noisette* Suite, and we sat restfully in the comfortable chairs without speaking. Markham was tired and dispirited, and Vance was busy with the problem that had absorbed him continuously since Tuesday morning. Never before had I seen him so preoccupied.

We had been there perhaps half an hour when Spotswoode strolled in. He stopped and spoke, and Markham asked him to join us. He, too, appeared depressed, and his eyes showed signs of worry.

“I hardly dare ask you, Mr. Markham,” he said diffidently, after he had ordered a ginger ale, “but how do my chances stand now of being called as a witness ? ”

“That fate is certainly no nearer than when I last saw you,” Markham replied. “In fact, nothing has happened to change the situation materially.”

“And the man you had under suspicion ? ”

“He's still under suspicion, but no arrest has been made. We're hoping, however, that something will break before long.”

“And I suppose you still want me to remain in the city ? ”

“If you can arrange it—yes.”

Spotswoode was silent for a time ; then he said :

“I don't want to appear to shirk any responsibility—and perhaps it may seem wholly selfish for me even to suggest it—but, in any event, wouldn't the testimony of the telephone operator as to the hour of Miss Odell's return and her calls for help be sufficient to establish the facts, without my corroboration ? ”

“I have thought of that, of course ; and if it is at all possible to prepare the case for the prosecution without

summoning you to appear, I assure you it will be done. At the moment, I can see no necessity of your being called as a witness. But one never knows what may turn up. If the defence hinges on a question of exact time, and the operator's testimony is questioned or disqualified for any reason, you may be required to come forward. Otherwise not."

Spotswoode sipped his ginger ale. A little of his depression seemed to have departed.

"You're very generous, Mr. Markham. I wish there was some adequate way of thanking you." He looked up hesitatingly. "I presume you are still opposed to my visiting the apartment. . . . I know you think me unreasonable and perhaps sentimental; but the girl represented something in my life that I find very difficult to tear out. I don't expect you to understand it—I hardly understand it myself."

"I think it's easily understandable, don't y' know," remarked Vance, with a sympathy I had rarely seen him manifest. "Your attitude needs no apology. History and fable are filled with the same situation, and the protagonists have always exhibited sentiments similar to yours. Your most famous prototype, of course, was Odysseus on the citron-scented isle of Ogygia with the fascinatin' Calypso. The soft arms of sirens have gone snaking round men's necks ever since the red-haired Lilith worked her devastatin' wiles on the impressionable Adam. We're all sons of that racy old boy."

Spotswoode smiled.

"You at least give me an historic background," he said. Then he turned to Markham. "What will become of Miss Odell's possessions—her furniture and so forth?"

"Sergeant Heath heard from an aunt of hers in Seattle," Markham told him. "She's on her way to New York, I believe, to take over what there is of the estate."

"And everything will be kept intact until then?"

"Probably longer, unless something unexpected happens. Anyway, until then."

"There are one or two little trinkets I'd like to keep," Spotswoode confessed, a bit shamefacedly, I thought.

After a few more minutes of desultory talk he rose, and, pleading an engagement, bade us good afternoon.

"I hope I can keep his name clear of the case," said Markham, when he had gone.

"Yes; his situation is not an enviable one," concurred Vance. "It's always sad to be found out. The moralist would set it down to retribution."

"In this instance chance was certainly on the side of righteousness. If he hadn't chosen Monday night for the Winter Garden, he might now be in the bosom of his family, with nothing more troublesome to bother him than a guilty conscience."

"It certainly looks that way." Vance glanced at his watch. "And your mention of the Winter Garden reminds me. Do you mind if we dine early? Frivolity beckons me to-night. I'm going to the 'Scandals.'"

We both looked at him as though he had taken leave of his senses.

"Don't be so horrified, my Markham. Why should I not indulge an impulse? . . . And, incidentally, I hope to have glad tidings for you by lunch-time to-morrow."

Chapter XVIII

THE TRAP

(Friday, September 14th ; noon)

VANCE slept late the following day. I had accompanied him to the "Scandals" the night before, utterly at a loss to understand his strange desire to attend a type of entertainment which I knew he detested. At noon he ordered his car, and instructed the chauffeur to drive to the Belafield Hotel.

"We are about to call again on the allurin' Alys," he said. "I'd bring posies to lay at her shrine, but I fear dear Mannix might question her unduly about them."

Miss La Fosse received us with an air of crestfallen resentment.

"I might've known it!" She nodded her head with sneering perception. "I suppose you've come to tell me the cops found out about me without the slightest assistance from you." Her disdain was almost magnificent. "Did you bring 'em with you? . . . A swell guy *you* are!—But it's my own fault for being a damn fool."

Vance waited unmoved until she had finished her contemptuous tirade. Then he bowed pleasantly.

"Really, y' know, I merely dropped in to pay my respects, and to tell you that the police have turned in their report of Miss Odell's acquaintances, and that your name was not mentioned in it. You seemed a little worried yesterday on that score, and it occurred to me I could set your mind wholly at ease."

The vigilance of her attitude relaxed.

"Is that straight? . . . My God! I don't know what would happen if Louis'd find out I'd been blabbing."

"I'm sure he won't find out, unless you choose to tell him. . . . Won't you be generous and ask me to sit down a moment?"

"Of course—I'm so sorry. I'm just having my coffee. Please join me." She rang for two extra services.

Vance had drunk two cups of coffee less than half an hour before, and I marvelled at his enthusiasm for this atrocious hotel beverage.

"I was a belated spectator of the 'Scandals' last night," he remarked in a negligent, conversational tone. "I missed the *revue* earlier in the season.—How is it you yourself were so late in seeing it?"

"I've been so busy," she confided. "I was rehearsing for 'A Pair of Queens'; but the production's been postponed. Louis couldn't get the theatre he wanted."

"Do you like *revues*?" asked Vance. "I should think they'd be more difficult for the principals than the ordin'ry musical comedy."

"They are." Miss La Fosse adopted a professional air. "And they're unsatisfactory. The individual is lost in them. There's no real scope for one's talent. They're breathless, if you know what I mean."

"I should imagine so." Vance bravely sipped his coffee. "And yet there were several numbers in the 'Scandals' that you could have done charmingly; they seemed particularly designed for you. I thought of you doing them, and—d'ye know?—the thought rather spoiled my enjoyment of the young lady who appeared in them."

"You flatter me, Mr. Vance. But, really, I have a good voice. I've studied very hard. And I learned dancing with Professor Markoff."

"Indeed!" (I'm sure Vance had never heard the name before, but his exclamation seemed to imply that he regarded Professor Markoff as one of the world's most renowned

ballet-masters.) "Then you certainly should have been starred in the 'Scandals.' The young lady I have in mind sang rather indifferently, and her dancing was most inadequate. Moreover, she was many degrees your inferior in personality and attractiveness. . . . Confess: didn't you have just a little desire last Monday night to be singing the 'Chinese Lullaby' song?"

"Oh, I don't know." Miss La Fosse carefully considered the suggestion. "They kept the lights awfully low; and I don't look so well in cerise. But the costumes were adorable, weren't they?"

"On you they certainly would have been adorable. . . . What colour are you partial to?"

"I love the orchid shades," she told him enthusiastically; "though I don't look at all bad in turquoise blue. But an artist once told me I should always wear white. He wanted to paint my portrait, but the gentleman I was engaged to then didn't like him."

Vance regarded her appraisingly.

"I think your artist friend was right. And, y' know, the St. Moritz scene in the 'Scandals' would have suited you perfectly. The little brunette who sang the snow song, all in white, was delightful; but really, now, she should have had golden hair. Dusky beauties belong to the southern climes. And she impressed me as lacking the sparkle and vitality of a Swiss resort in midwinter. You could have supplied those qualities admirably."

"Yes; I'd have liked that better than the Chinese number, I think. White fox is my favourite fur, too. But, even so, in a *revue* you're on in one number and off in another. When it's all over, you're forgotten." She sighed unhappily.

Vance set down his cup, and looked at her with whimsically reproachful eyes. After a moment he said:

"My dear, why did you fib to me about the time Mr. Mannix returned to you last Monday night? It wasn't a bit nice of you."

"What do you mean!" Miss La Fosse exclaimed in frightened indignation, drawing herself up into an attitude of withering hauteur.

"You see," explained Vance, "the St. Moritz scene of the 'Scandals' doesn't go on until nearly eleven, and it closes the bill. So you couldn't possibly have seen it and also received Mr. Mannix here at half-past ten.—Come. What time did he arrive here Monday night?"

The girl flushed angrily.

"You're pretty slick, aren't you? You should've been a cop. . . . Well, what if I didn't get home till after the show? Any crime in that?"

"None whatever," answered Vance mildly. "Only a little breach of good faith in telling me you came home early." He bent forward earnestly. "I'm not here to make you trouble. On the contrary, I'd like to protect you from any distress or bother. You see, if the police go nosing round, they may run on to you. But if I'm able to give the District Attorney accurate information about certain things connected with Monday night, there'll be no danger of the police being sent to look for you."

Miss La Fosse's eyes grew suddenly hard and her brow crinkled with determination.

"Listen! I haven't got anything to hide, and neither has Louis. But if Louis asks me to say he's somewhere at half-past ten, I'm going to say it—see? That's my idea of friendship. Louis had some good reason to ask it, too, or he wouldn't have done it. However, since you're so smart, and have accused me of playing unfair, I'm going to tell you that he didn't get in till after midnight. But if anybody else asks me about it, I'll see 'em in hell before I tell 'em anything but the half-past ten story. Get that?"

Vance bowed.

"I get it; and I like you for it."

"But don't go away with the wrong idea," she hurried on, her eyes sparkling with fervour. "Louis may not have

got here till after midnight, but if you think he knows anything about Margy's death, you're crazy. He was through with Margy a year ago. Why, he hardly knew she was on earth. And if any fool cop gets the notion in his head that Louis was mixed up in the affair, I'll alibi him—so help me God!—if it's the last thing I do in this world."

"I like you more and more," said Vance; and when she gave him her hand at parting he lifted it to his lips.

As we rode down-town Vance was thoughtful. We were nearly to the Criminal Courts Building before he spoke.

"The primitive Alys rather appeals to me," he said. "She's much too good for the oleaginous Mannix. . . . Women are so shrewd—and so gullible. A woman can read a man with almost magical insight; but, on the other hand, she is inexpressibly blind when it comes to *her* man. Witness sweet Alys's faith in Mannix. He probably told her he was slaving at the office Monday night. Naturally, she doesn't believe it; but she knows—*knows*, mind you—that her Louis just couldn't have been concerned in the Canary's death. Ah, well, let us hope she's right and that Mannix is not apprehended—at least not until her new show is financed. . . . My word! If this being a detective involves many more *revues*, I shall have to resign. Thank Heaven, though, the lady didn't attend the cinema Monday night!"

When we arrived at the District Attorney's office we found Heath and Markham in consultation. Markham had a pad before him, several pages of which were covered with tabulated and annotated entries. A cloud of cigar-smoke enveloped him. Heath sat facing him, his elbows on the table, his chin resting in his hands. He looked pugnacious but disconsolate.

"I'm going over the case with the Sergeant," Markham explained, with a brief glance in our direction. "We're trying to get all the salient points down in some kind of order, to see if there are any connecting links we've overlooked. I've told the Sergeant about the doctor's infatua-

tion and his threats, and of the failure of Traffic Officer Phipps to identify Cleaver. But the more we learn, the worse, apparently, the jumble grows."

He picked up the sheets of paper and fastened them together with a clip.

"The truth is, we haven't any real evidence against anybody. There are suspicious circumstances connected with Skeel and Doctor Lindquist and Cleaver; and our interview with Mannix didn't precisely allay suspicions in his direction, either. But when we come right down to it, what's the situation?—We've got some finger-prints of Skeel, which might have been made late Monday afternoon.—Doctor Lindquist goes berserk when we ask him where he was Monday night, and then offers us a weak alibi. He admits a fatherly interest in the girl, whereas he's really in love with her—a perfectly natural bit of mendacity.—Cleaver lent his car to his brother and lied about it, so that I'd think he was in Boonton Monday at midnight.—And Mannix gives us a number of shifty answers to our questions concerning his relations with the girl. . . . Not an embarrassment of riches."

"I wouldn't say your information was exactly negligent," observed Vance, taking a chair beside the Sergeant. "It may all prove devilish valuable if only it could be put together properly. The difficulty, it appears to me, is that certain parts of the puzzle are missing. Find 'em, and I'll warrant everything will fit beautifully like a mosaic."

"Easy enough to say 'find 'em,'" grumbled Markham. "The trouble is to know where to look."

Heath relighted his dead cigar and made an impatient gesture.

"You can't get away from Skeel. He's the boy that did it, and, if it wasn't for Abe Rubin, I'd sweat the truth out of him.—And by the way, Mr. Vance, he had his own private key to the Odell apartment, all right." He glanced at Markham hesitatingly. "I don't want to look as if I was

criticising, sir, but I got a feeling we're wasting time chasing after these gentlemen friends of Odell—Cleaver and Mannix and this here doctor."

"You may be right." Markham seemed inclined to agree with him. "However, I'd like to know why Lindquist acted the way he did."

"Well, that might help some," Heath compromised. "If the doc was so far gone on Odell as to threaten to shoot her, and if he went off his head when you asked him to alibi himself, maybe he could tell us something. Why not throw a little scare into him? His record ain't any too good, anyway."

"An excellent idea," chimed in Vance.

Markham looked up sharply. Then he consulted his appointment book.

"I'm fairly free this afternoon, so suppose you bring him down here, Sergeant. Get a subpoena if you have to—only see that he comes. And make it as soon after lunch as you can." He tapped on the desk irritably. "If I don't do anything else, I'm going to eliminate some of this human flotsam that's cluttering up the case. And Lindquist is as good as any to start with. I'll either develop these various suspicious circumstances into something workable, or I'll root them up. Then we'll see where we stand."

Heath shook hands pessimistically and went out.

"Poor hapless man!" sighed Vance, looking after him. "He giveth way to all the pangs and fury of despair."

"And so would you," snapped Markham, "if the newspapers were butchering you for a political holiday.—By the way, weren't you to be a harbinger of glad tidings this noon, or something of the sort?"

"I believe I did hold out some such hope." Vance sat looking meditatively out of the window for several minutes. "Markham, this fellow Mannix lures me like a magnet. He irks and whirrets me. He infests my slumbers. He's the raven on my bust of Pallas. He plagues me like a banshee."

“Does this jeremiad come under the head of tidings?”

“I sha’n’t rest peacefully,” pursued Vance, “until I know where Louis the furrier was between eleven o’clock and midnight Monday. He was somewhere he shouldn’t have been. And you, Markham, must find out. Please make Mannix the second offensive in your assault upon the flotsam. He’ll parley, with the right amount of pressure. Be brutal, old dear; let him think you suspect him of the throttling. Ask him about the fur model—what’s her name?—Frisbee—” He stopped short and knit his brows. “My eye—oh, my eye! I wonder. . . . Yes, yes, Markham; you must question him about the fur model. Ask him where he saw her last; and try to look wise and mysterious when you’re doing it.”

“See here, Vance”—Markham was exasperated—“you’ve been harping on Mannix for three days. What’s keeping your nose to that scent?”

“Intuition—sheer intuition. My psychic temperament, don’t y’ know.”

“I’d believe that if I hadn’t known you for fifteen years.” Markham inspected him shrewdly; then shrugged his shoulders. “I’ll have Mannix on the tapis when I’m through with Lindquist.”

Chapter XIX

THE DOCTOR EXPLAINS

(Friday, September 14th ; 2 p.m.)

WE lunched in the District Attorney's private sanctum ; and at two o'clock Doctor Lindquist was announced. Heath accompanied him, and, from the expression on the Sergeant's face, it was plain he did not at all like his companion.

The doctor, at Markham's request, seated himself facing the District Attorney's desk.

"What is the meaning of this new outrage?" he demanded coldly. "Is it your prerogative to force a citizen to leave his private affairs in order to be bullied?"

"It's my duty to bring murderers to justice," replied Markham, with equal coldness. "And if any citizen considers that giving aid to the authorities is an outrage, that's *his* prerogative. If you have anything to fear by answering my questions doctor, you are entitled to have your attorney present. Would you care to phone him to come here now and give you legal protection?"

Doctor Lindquist hesitated. "I need no legal protection, sir. Will you be good enough to tell me at once why I was brought here?"

"Certainly ; to explain a few points which have been discovered regarding your relationship with Miss Odell, and to elucidate—if you care to—your reasons for deceiving me, at our last conference, in regard to that relationship."

"You have, I infer, been prying unwarrantably into my private affairs. I had heard that such practices were once common in Russia. . . ."

"If the prying was unwarranted, you can, Doctor Lindquist, easily convince me on that point; and whatever we may have learned concerning you will be instantly forgotten.—It is true, is it not, that your interest in Miss Odell went somewhat beyond mere paternal affection?"

"Are not even a man's sacred sentiments respected by the police of this country?" There was insolent scorn in the doctor's tone.

"Under some conditions, yes; under others, no." Markham controlled his fury admirably. "You need not answer me, of course; but, if you choose to be frank, you may possibly save yourself the humiliation of being questioned publicly by the People's attorney in a court of law."

Doctor Lindquist winced and considered the matter at some length.

"And if I admit that my affection for Miss Odell was other than paternal—what then?"

Markham accepted the question as an affirmation.

"You were intensely jealous of her, were you not, doctor?"

"Jealousy," Doctor Lindquist remarked, with an air of ironic professionalism, "is not an unusual accompaniment to an infatuation. Authorities such as Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Freud, Ferenczi, and Adler, I believe, regard it as an intimate psychological corollary of amatory attraction."

"Most instructive," Markham nodded his head appreciatively. "I am to assume, then, that you were infatuated with—or, let us say, amorily attracted by—Miss Odell, and that on occasions you exhibited the intimate psychological corollary of jealousy?"

"You may assume what you please. But I fail to understand why my emotions are any of your affair."

"Had your emotions not led you to highly questionable and suspicious acts, I would not be interested in them. But I have it on unimpeachable authority that your emotions so reacted on your better judgment that you threatened to

take Miss Odell's life and also your own. And, in view of the fact that the young woman has since been murdered, the law naturally—and reasonably—is curious."

The doctor's normally pale face seemed to turn yellow, and his long splay fingers tightened over the arms of his chair; but otherwise he sat immobile and rigidly dignified, his eyes fixed intently on the District Attorney.

"I trust," added Markham, "you will not augment my suspicions by any attempt at denial."

Vance was watching the man closely. Presently he leaned forward.

"I say, doctor, what method of extermination did you threaten Miss Odell with?"

Doctor Lindquist jerked round, thrusting his head toward Vance. He drew in a long rasping breath, and his whole frame became tense. Blood suffused his cheeks; and there was a twitching of the muscles about his mouth and throat. For a moment I was afraid he was going to lose his self-control. But after a moment's effort he steadied himself.

"You think perhaps I threatened to strangle her?" His words were vibrant with the intensity of his passionate anger. "And you would like to turn my threat into a noose to hang me?—Paugh!" He paused, and when he spoke again his voice had become calmer. "It is quite true I once inadvisedly attempted to frighten Miss Odell with a threat to kill her and to commit suicide. But if your information is as accurate as you would have me believe, you are aware that I threatened her with a revolver. It is the weapon, I believe, that is conventionally mentioned when making empty threats. I certainly would not have threatened her with thuggee, even had I contemplated so abominable an act."

"True," nodded Vance. "And it's a rather good point, don't y' know."

The doctor was evidently encouraged by Vance's attitude. He again faced Markham and elaborated his confession.

"A threat, I presume you know, is rarely the forerunner of a violent deed. Even a brief study of the human mind would teach you that a threat is *prima facie* evidence of one's innocence. A threat, generally, is made in anger, and acts as its own safety valve." He shifted his eyes. "I am not a married man; my emotional life has not been stabilised, as it were; and I am constantly coming in close contact with hypersensitive and overwrought people. During a period of abnormal susceptibility I conceived an infatuation for the young woman, an infatuation which she did not reciprocate—certainly not with an ardour commensurate with my own. I suffered deeply; and she made no effort to mitigate my sufferings. Indeed, I suspected her, more than once, of deliberately and perversely torturing me with other men. At any rate, she took no pains to hide her infidelities from me. I confess that once or twice I was almost distracted. And it was in the hope of frightening her into a more amenable and considerate attitude that I threatened her.—I trust that you are a sufficiently discerning judge of human nature to believe me."

"Leaving that point for a moment," answered Markham non-committedly, "will you give me more specific information as to your whereabouts Monday night?"

Again I noted a yellow tinge creep over the man's features, and his body stiffened perceptibly. But when he spoke it was with his habitual suavity.

"I considered that my note to you covered that question satisfactorily. What did I omit?"

"What was the name of the patient on whom you were calling that night?"

"Mrs. Anna Breedon. She is the widow of the late Amos H. Breedon of the Breedon National Bank of Long Branch."

"And you were with her, I believe you stated, from eleven until one?"

"That is correct."

"And was Mrs. Breedon the only witness to your presence at the sanatorium between those hours?"

"I am afraid that is so. You see, after ten o'clock at night I never ring the bell. I let myself in with my own key."

"And I suppose that I may be permitted to question Mrs. Breedon?"

Doctor Lindquist was profoundly regretful.

"Mrs. Breedon is a very ill woman. She suffered a tremendous shock at the time of her husband's death last summer, and has been practically in a semi-conscious condition ever since. There are times when I even fear for her reason. The slightest disturbance or excitement might produce very serious results."

He took a newspaper cutting from a gold-edged letter-case and handed it to Markham.

"You will observe that this obituary notice mentions her prostration and confinement in a private sanatorium. I have been her physician for years."

Markham, after glancing at the cutting, handed it back. There was a short silence broken by a question from Vance.

"By the by, doctor, what is the name of the night nurse at your sanatorium?"

Doctor Lindquist looked up quickly.

"My night nurse? Why—what has she to do with it? She was very busy Monday night. I can't understand. . . . Well, if you want her name I have no objection. It's Finckle—Miss Amelia Finckle."

Vance wrote down the name and, rising, carried the slip of paper to Heath.

"Sergeant, bring Miss Finckle here to-morrow morning at eleven," he said, with a slight lowering of one eyelid.

"I surewill, sir. Good idea." His manner boded no good for Miss Finckle.

A cloud of apprehension spread over Doctor Lindquist's face.

"Forgive me if I say that I am insensible to the sanity of your cavalier methods." His tone betrayed only contempt. "May I hope that for the present your inquisition is ended?"

"I think that will be all, doctor," returned Markham politely. "May I have a taxicab called for you?"

"Your consideration overwhelms me. But my car is below." And Doctor Lindquist haughtily withdrew.

Markham immediately summoned Swacker and sent him for Tracy. The detective came at once, polishing his *pince-nez* and bowing affably. One would have taken him for an actor rather than a detective, but his ability in matters requiring delicate handling was a byword in the department.

"I want you to fetch Mr. Louis Mannix again," Markham told him. "Bring him here at once; I'm waiting to see him."

Tracy bowed genially and, adjusting his glasses, departed on his errand.

"And now," said Markham, fixing Vance with a reproachful look, "I want to know what your idea was in putting Lindquist on his guard about the night nurse. Your brain isn't at par this afternoon. Do you think I didn't have the nurse in mind? And now you've warned him. He'll have until eleven to-morrow morning to coach her in her answers. Really Vance, I can't conceive of anything better calculated to defeat us in our attempt to substantiate the man's alibi."

"I did put a little fright into him, didn't I?" Vance grinned complacently. "Whenever your antagonist begins talking exaggeratedly about the insanity of your notions, he's already deuced hot under the collar. But, Markham old thing, don't burst into tears over my mental shortcomings. If you and I both thought of the nurse, don't you suppose the wily doctor also thought of her? If this Miss Finckle were the type that could be suborned, he would have enlisted her perjurious services two days ago, and she would have been mentioned, along with the comatose Mrs.

Breedon, as a witness to his presence at the sanitorium Monday night. The fact that he avoided all reference to the nurse shows that she's not to be wheedled into swearing falsely. . . . No, Markham, I deliberately put him on his guard. Now he'll have to do something before we question Miss Finckle. And I'm vain enough to think I know what it'll be."

"Let me get this right," put in Heath. "Am I, or am I not, to round up the Finckle woman to-morrow morning?"

"There'll be no need," said Vance. "We are doomed, I fear, not to gaze upon this Florence Nightingale. A meeting between us is about the last thing the doctor would desire."

"That may be true," admitted Markham. "But don't forget that he may have been up to something Monday night wholly unconnected with the murder, that he simply doesn't want known."

"Quite—quite. And yet, nearly every one who knew the Canary seemed to have selected Monday night for the indulgence of *sub-rosa* peccadilloes. It's a bit thick, what? Skeel tries to make us believe he was immersed in Khun Khan. Cleaver was—if you take his word for it—touring the countryside in Jersey's lake district. Lindquist wants us to picture him as comforting the afflicted. And Mannix, I happen to know, has gone to some trouble to build up an alibi in case we get nosy. All of 'em, in fact, were doing something they don't want us to know about. Now, what was it? And why did they, of one accord, select the night of the murder for mysterious affairs which they don't dare mention, even to clear themselves of suspicion? Was there an invasion of efreets in the city that night? Was there a curse on the world, driving men to dark bawdy deeds? Was there Black Magic abroad? I think not."

"I'm laying my money on Skeel," declared Heath stubbornly. "I know a professional job when I see it. And you can't get away from those finger-prints and the Professor's report on the chisel."

Markham was sorely perplexed. His belief in Skeel's guilt had, I knew, been undermined in some measure by Vance's theory that the crime was the carefully premeditated act of a shrewd and educated man. But now he seemed to swing irresolutely back to Heath's point of view.

"I'll admit," he said, "that Lindquist and Cleaver and Mannix don't inspire one with a belief in their innocence. But since they're all tarred with the same stick, the force of suspicion against them is somewhat dispersed. After all, Skeel is the only logical aspirant for the rôle of strangler. He's the only one with a visible motive; and he's the only one against whom there's any evidence."

Vance sighed wearily.

"Yes, yes. Finger-prints—chisel marks. You're such a trustin' soul, Markham. Skeel's finger-prints are found in the apartment; therefore, Skeel strangled the lady. So beastly simple. Why bother further? A *chose jugée*—an adjudicated case. Send Skeel to the chair, and that's that! . . . It's effective, y' know, but is it art?"

"In your critical enthusiasm you understate our case against Skeel," Markham reminded him testily.

"Oh, I'll grant that your case against him is ingenious. It's so deuced ingenious I just haven't the heart to reject it. But most popular truth is mere ingenuity—that's why it's so wrong-headed. Your theory would appeal strongly to the popular mind. And yet, y' know, Markham, it isn't true."

The practical Heath was unmoved. He sat stolidly, scowling at the table. I doubt if he had even heard the exchange of opinions between Markham and Vance.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, like one unconsciously voicing an obscure line of thought, "if we could show how Skeel got in and out of Odell's apartment we'd have a better case against him. I can't figure it out—it's got me stopped. So, I've been thinking we ought to get an architect to go over those rooms. The house is an old-timer

—God knows when it was originally built—and there may be some way of getting into it that we haven't discovered yet."

"'Pon my soul!" Vance stared at him in satirical wonderment. "You're becoming downright romantic! Secret passageways—hidden doors—stairways between the walls. So that's it, is it? Oh, my word! . . . Sergeant, beware of the cinema. It has ruined many a good man. Try grand opera for a while—it's more borin' but less corruptin'."

"That's all right, Mr. Vance." Apparently Heath himself did not relish the architectural idea particularly. "But as long as we don't know how Skeel got in, it's just as well to make sure of a few ways he didn't get in."

"I agree with you, Sergeant," said Markham. "I'll get an architect on the job at once." He rang for Swacker, and gave the necessary instructions.

Vance extended his legs and yawned.

"All we need now is a Favourite of the Harem, a few blackamoors with palm-leaf fans, and some *pizzicato* music."

"You will joke, Mr. Vance." Heath lit a fresh cigar. "But even if the architect don't find anything wrong with the apartment, Skeel's liable to give his hand away 'most any time."

"I'm pinnin' my childish faith on Mannix," said Vance. "I don't know why I should; but he's not a nice man, and he's suppressing something.—Markham, don't you dare let him go until he tells you where he was Monday night. And don't forget to hint mysteriously about the fur model."

Chapter XX

A MIDNIGHT WITNESS

(Friday, September 14th; 3.30 p.m.)

IN less than half-an-hour Mannix arrived. Heath relinquished his seat to the newcomer, and moved to a large chair beneath the windows. Vance had taken a place at the small table on Markham's right where he was able to face Mannix obliquely.

It was patent that Mannix did not relish the idea of another interview. His little eyes shifted quickly about the office, lingered suspiciously for a moment on Heath, and at last came to rest on the District Attorney. He was more vigilant even than during his first visit; and his greeting to Markham, while fulsome, had in it a note of trepidation. Nor was Markham's air calculated to put him at ease. It was an ominous, indomitable Public Prosecutor who motioned him to be seated. Mannix laid his hat and cane on the table, and sat down on the edge of his chair, his back as perpendicular as a flag-pole.

"I'm not at all satisfied with what you told me Wednesday, Mr. Mannix," Markham began, "and I trust you won't necessitate me to take drastic steps to find out what you know about Miss Odell's death."

"What I know!" Mannix forced a smile intended to be disarming. "Mr. Markham—Mr. Markham!" He seemed oilier than usual as he spread his hands in hopeless appeal. "If I knew anything, believe me, I would tell you—positively I would tell you."

"I'm delighted to hear it. Your willingness makes my task easier. First, then, please tell me where you were at midnight Monday."

Mannix's eyes slowly contracted until they looked like two tiny shining discs, but otherwise the man did not move. After what seemed an interminable pause, he spoke.

"I should tell you where I was Monday? Why should I have to do that? . . . Maybe I'm suspected of the murder—yes?"

"You're not suspected now. But your apparent unwillingness to answer my question is certainly suspicious. Why don't you care to have me know where you were?"

"I got no reason to keep it from you, y' understand." Mannix shrugged. "I got nothing to be ashamed of—absolutely! . . . I had a lot of accounts to go over at the office—winter-season stocks. I was down at the office until ten o'clock—maybe later. Then at half-past ten——"

"That'll do!" Vance's voice cut in tartly. "No need to drag anyone else into this thing."

He spoke with a curious significance of emphasis, and Mannix studied him craftily, trying to read what knowledge, if any, lay behind his words. But he received no enlightenment from Vance's features. The warning, however, had been enough to halt him.

"You don't want to know where I was at half-past ten?"

"Not particularly," said Vance. "We want to know where you were at midnight. And it won't be necess'ry to mention anyone who saw you at that time. When you tell us the truth, we'll know it." He himself had assumed the air of wisdom and mystery that he had deputed to Markham earlier in the afternoon. Without breaking faith with Alys La Fosse, he had sowed the seeds of doubt in Mannix's mind.

Before the man could frame an answer, Vance stood up and leaned impressively over the District Attorney's desk.

"You know a Miss Frisbee. Lives in 71st Street; accu-

rately speaking—at number 184; to be more exact—in the house where Miss Odell lived; to put it precisely—in Apartment Number 2. Miss Frisbee was a former model of yours. Sociable girl: still charitable to the advances of her erstwhile employer—meanin' yourself.—When did you see her last, Mr. Mannix? . . . Take your time about answering. You may want to think it over.”

Mannix took his time. It was a full minute before he spoke, and then it was to put another question.

“Haven't I got a right to call on a lady—haven't I?”

“Certainly. Therefore, why should a question about so obviously correct and irreproachable an episode make you uneasy?”

“Me uneasy?” Mannix, with considerable effort, produced a grin. “I'm just wondering what you got in your mind, asking me about my private affairs.”

“I'll tell you. Miss Odell was murdered at about midnight Monday. No one came or went through the front door of the house, and the side door was locked. The only way anyone could have entered her apartment was by way of Apartment 2; and nobody who knew Miss Odell ever visited Apartment 2 except yourself.”

At these words Mannix leaned over the table, grasping the edge of it with both hands for support. His eyes were wide and his sensual lips hung open. But it was not fear that one read in his attitude; it was sheer amazement. He sat for a moment staring at Vance, stunned and incredulous.

“That's what you think, is it? No one could've got in or out except by Apartment 2, because the side door was locked?” He gave a short vicious laugh. “If that side door didn't happen to be locked Monday night, where'd I stand then—huh? Where'd I stand?”

“I rather think you'd stand with us—with the District Attorney.” Vance was watching him like a cat.

“Sure I would!” spat Mannix. “And let me tell you

something, my friend: that's just where I stand—absolutely!" He swung heavily about and faced Markham. "I'm a good fellow, y' understand, but I've kept my mouth shut long enough. . . . *That side door wasn't locked Monday night. And I know who sneaked out of it at five minutes to twelve!*"

"*Ca marche!*" murmured Vance, reseating himself and calmly lighting a cigarette.

Markham was too astonished to speak at once; and Heath stood stock-still, his cigar half-way to his mouth.

At length Markham leaned back and folded his arms.

"I think you'd better tell us the whole story, Mr. Mannix." His voice held a quality which made the request an imperative.

Mannix, too, settled back in his chair.

"Oh, I'm going to tell it—believe me, I'm going to tell it.—You had the right idea. I spent the evening with Miss Frisbee. No harm in that, though."

"What time did you go there?"

"After office hours—halfpast five, quarter to six. Came up in the subway, got off at 72d, and walked over."

"And you entered the house through the front door?"

"No. I walked down the alleyway and went in the side door—like I generally do. It's nobody's business who I call on, and what the telephone operator in the front hall don't know don't hurt him."

"That's all right so far," observed Heath. "The janitor didn't bolt the side door until after six."

"And did you stay the entire evening, Mr. Mannix?" asked Markham.

"Sure—till just before midnight. Miss Frisbee cooked the dinner, and I'd brought along a bottle of wine. Social little party—just the two of us. And I didn't go outside the apartment, understand, until five minutes to twelve. You can get the lady down here and ask her. I'll call her up now and tell her to explain the exact situation about

Monday night. I'm not asking you to take my word for it—positively not.”

Markham made a gesture dismissing the suggestion.

“What took place at five minutes to twelve?”

Mannix hesitated, as if loath to come to the point.

“I'm a good fellow, y' understand. And a friend's a friend. But—I ask you—is that any reason why I should get in wrong for something I didn't have absolutely nothing to do with?”

He waited for an answer, but receiving none, continued.

“Sure, I'm right.—Anyway, here's what happened. As I said, I was calling on the lady. But I had another date for later that night; so a few minutes before midnight I said good-bye and started to go. Just as I opened the door I saw someone sneaking away from the Canary's apartment down the little back hall to the side door. There was a light in the hall, and the door of Apartment 2 faces that side door. I saw the fellow as plain as I see you—positively as plain.”

“Who was it?”

“Well, if you got to know, it was Pop Cleaver.”

Markham's head jerked slightly.

“What did you do then?”

“Nothing, Mr. Markham—nothing at all. I didn't think much about it, y' understand. I knew Pop was chasing after the Canary, and I just supposed he'd been calling on her. But I didn't want Pop to see me—none of his business where I spend my time. So I waited quietly till he went out—”

“By the side door?”

“Sure.—Then I went out the same way. I was going to leave by the front door, because I knew the side door was always locked at night. But when I saw Pop go out that way, I said to myself I'd do the same. No sense giving your business away to a telephone operator if you haven't got to—no sense at all. So I went out the same way I came in. Picked up a taxi on Broadway, and went—”

"That's enough!" Again Vance's command cut him short.

"Oh, all right—all right." Mannix seemed content to end his statement at this point. "Only, y' understand, I don't want you to think——"

"We don't."

Markham was puzzled at these interruptions, but made no comment.

"When you read of Miss Odell's death," he said, "why didn't you come to the police with this highly important information?"

"I should get mixed up with it!" exclaimed Mannix in surprise. "I got enough trouble without looking for it—plenty."

"An exigent course," commented Markham with open disgust. "But you nevertheless suggested to me, after you knew of the murder, that Cleaver was being blackmailed by Miss Odell."

"Sure I did. Don't that go to show I wanted to do the right thing by you—giving you a valuable tip?"

"Did you see anyone else that night in the halls or alleyway?"

"Nobody—absolutely nobody."

"Did you hear anyone in the Odell apartment—anyone speaking or moving about, perhaps?"

"Didn't hear a thing." Mannix shook his head emphatically.

"And you're certain of the time you saw Cleaver go out—five minutes to twelve?"

"Positively. I looked at my watch, and I said to the lady: 'I'm leaving the same day I came; it won't be to-morrow for five minutes yet.'"

Markham went over his story point by point, attempting by various means to make him admit more than he had already told. But Mannix neither added to his statement nor modified it in any detail; and after half-an-hour's cross-examination he was permitted to go.

"We've found one missing piece of the puzzle, at any rate," commented Vance. "I don't see now just how it fits in with the complete pattern, but it's helpful and suggestive. And, I say, how beautifully my intuition about Mannix was verified, don't y' know!"

"Yes, of course—your precious intuition." Markham looked at him sceptically. "Why did you shut him up twice when he was trying to tell me something?"

"*O, tu ne sauras jamais,*" recited Vance. "I simply can't tell you, old dear. Awfully sorry, and all that."

His manner was whimsical, but Markham knew that at such times Vance was at heart most serious, and he did not press the question. I could not help wondering if Miss La Fosse realised just how secure she had been in putting her faith in Vance's integrity.

Heath had been considerably shaken by Mannix's story.

"I don't savvy that side door being unlocked," he complained. "How the hell did it get bolted again on the inside after Mannix went out? And who unbolted it after six o'clock?"

"In God's good time, my Sergeant, all things will be revealed," said Vance.

"Maybe—and maybe not. But if we do find out, you can take it from me that the answer'll be Skeel. He's the bird we got to get the goods on. Cleaver is no expert jimmy artist; and neither is Mannix."

"Just the same, there was a very capable technician on hand that night, and it wasn't your friend the Dude—though he was probably the Donatello who sculptured open the jewel-case."

"A pair of 'em, was there? That's your theory, is it, Mr. Vance? You said that once before; and I'm not saying you're wrong. But if we can hang any part of it on Skeel, we'll make him come across as to who his pal was."

"It wasn't a pal, Sergeant. It was more likely a stranger."