

“ ‘ That you were overwrought, and imagined—or else dreamt—the murder scene.’

“ Wickley’s voice sank.

“ ‘ I went back to that wood, very cautiously, and taking care that nobody was about—and there was a freshly filled-in grave there. Some one had been buried, very roughly and hurriedly, and not very deep. Who was it?’

“ I thought he was going to answer the question himself, but instead he waited for me to speak.

“ ‘ Do you mean to say you never discovered?’

“ He shook his head.

“ ‘ It’s an absolute mystery to me ! Nobody in the neighbourhood apparently was missing. Nothing was ever said, or whispered, or rumoured, of a murder. Nothing more ever happened. I couldn’t possibly live on in that place. I let the house, but not the shooting—because I didn’t want people to be going through that wood, and I’ve been a wanderer for eight years. Last week I came to London and met a cousin who persuaded me to go to the Devorset dinner last night. And there I saw Spencer again, for the first time since we parted in the Metropole. That started the whole thing again in my mind. And then when I heard you were a private inquiry agent, I suddenly decided to end the suspense and come to you. I want you to find out what happened—who that man was.’

“ I thought for a minute or two.

“ ‘ You have only mentioned three people,’ I said. ‘ It obviously wasn’t yourself, and it wasn’t Spencer. The third was his wife.’

“ ‘ It certainly wasn’t her. It was a man. Besides, she is still alive.’

“ ‘ Then I have absolutely nothing to start upon. What made you think it was Spencer?’

“ ‘ I knew his overcoat and his felt hat.’

“ ‘ That was all you had to go upon?’

“ ‘ It was a man of the same height. Besides, who else would be in that spot wearing Spencer’s coat and hat?’

“ ‘ Or a coat and hat like them.’

“ ‘ Identically the same ! I can still see them quite distinctly.’

“ ‘ You say it was getting dark?’

“ ‘ Dusky ; but then I was within a yard of him.’

“ I was silent for a little longer, and then I said—

“ ‘ I must think it over, Mr. Wickley. Leave me your address.’

“ He left me thinking very hard, I can assure you.”

II

THE STOCKBROKER'S WIFE

Carrington lit a fresh cigarette and began the second part of his story.

"Wickley left my office only a little before my usual lunch hour, and I sat on over my fire for some time, thinking, but not seeing a ray of light. That made me rather late in getting back after lunch, and when I came in my clerk handed me a card and told me a gentleman was waiting in my room. On the card I read the name, 'Mr. A. D. Spencer.'

"When I glanced up from it and caught my clerk's eye, I could see that he evidently thought I had done myself too well at lunch. I suppose I had been standing for the whole of five minutes gazing at that card. The appearance of Mr. Spencer immediately on top of Mr. Wickley seemed a thing hardly in the course of nature. I began to wonder whether there was some sort of a conspiracy between the two men. I tried to see in advance what line this man Spencer was going to take. And then I recovered my wits and walked into my room.

"I found a heavy-looking man of rather above middle height, clean-shaved, with a blue chin, baggy eyes, and very black hair. He had the skin of a man who, as Wickley said, did himself a little too well, and I could also quite believe that he could be a sulky ill-tempered devil if things went wrong.

"'We didn't exactly meet last night, Mr. Carrington,' he began, and there was quite a dash of geniality about the man when he made the effort, 'but I was at the Devorset dinner and heard you speak. I also came across an old acquaintance there. Meeting him set me worrying about an old problem, and seeing you put it into my head to come and consult you on the matter.'

"And then I realised that there was no conspiracy at all, nor even any very extraordinary coincidence, but, as I told you at the start, just a series of quite natural events that had produced this startling result. My second thought was—'What a bit of luck! The solution to the insoluble problem walks into my office!' However, you'll see how far out I was there.

"'Of course you'll understand that this is strictly confidential,' said he.

"'Naturally,' I said; and I noted that though he was evidently

keen on secrecy, he didn't show the same extreme anxiety as Wickley.

" 'Well,' he said, 'I'll begin my story eleven years back. Or perhaps I should first mention that some years before that I had purchased an estate in Devorset. I'm a stockbroker, by the way: Spencer, Spencer, & Luderman is my firm, and I'm the senior partner. Eleven years ago an old fellow in the neighbourhood called Wickley died, and his nephew came into the property and settled down next door to me. By next door I mean rather under a couple of miles away; but we had no other neighbours—of that class, I mean—within six or seven miles, and we didn't know them either. Consequently Wickley and I saw a lot of one another and became very friendly.'

" 'What sort of a fellow was he?' I inquired, with my most truth-seeking expression.

" 'I wish you had noticed him at the dinner last night,' said he, 'and you'd have understood better what kind of a proposition he was. A reddish-haired, heavy-chinned sort of fellow, with queer eyes, and the word "past" stamped all over him.'

" 'What do you mean exactly?'

" 'Well, I mean that he *had* a past, and I soon began to guess as much from his very appearance and manner, though at first I only felt vaguely that there was something unusual about him. I may mention that he isn't the kind of person one would naturally suspect of a shady record, for the Wickleys are a very good old Devorset family, and if family pride would keep people straight, well, it ought to have kept him. He didn't show that feature either to begin with, but you'll see in a minute the sort of too-good-for-a-damned-stockbroker gentleman he was. My place was about twice the size of his, I may add, and he was deuced glad to have as many days shooting with me as he could get. Some precious rotten days he gave me in exchange; but of course shooting with a two-penny-halfpenny squire was always an honour!'

" This speech naturally didn't prejudice me much in favour of Mr. Spencer. Little though he realised it, he was making me look at things more and more from Wickley's point of view—bad hat though Mr. W. may have been, and respectable as Mr. S. no doubt was.

" 'I am coming to a very painful part of my story now, Mr. Carrington,' he continued. 'In fact it's so infernally unpleasant that it has kept me from telling the facts to a living soul up to this

moment. I had a wife, in fact she's legally my wife still, and I was very fond of her. I can assure you on that point—I was desperately fond of her! She was an uncommonly beautiful girl. She was on the stage at one time, I may say, and might have gone very far on her looks alone, but I married her and took her away from it. She was a lady by birth, but she hadn't a penny, and it was a love marriage pure and simple—love marriage on my part at least, for I don't believe she ever really loved me. We had no children, either, and that was a fatal mistake.'

"He paused and stared moodily at my fire. I was much more in sympathy with Mr. Spencer now.

"Well, to get over an unpleasant business as quickly as possible, we began to drift apart pretty fast. I still loved her to distraction—in a way; but we both had tempers and she led me the devil of a dance, and it was cat and dog half the time. When I bought this place in Devorset she kicked at living there permanently—too slow for her. She'd stay for some months and we'd have house parties and so on, and then back to town again. And then all of a sudden she quite changed round. Perfectly agreeable to living all the year in the country she became now, so we gave up our flat in town and settled in Devorset; even though it meant her being quite a good bit by herself, for I generally had to spend part of my week in town for business reasons.'

"Then, like a thunderclap, came the suspicion that there was something behind this change of tune. One needn't go into all the details, but several little things made me morally certain that Elise was being unfaithful to me. We were having worse rows than usual at that time, and in one shindy I charged her with it. In order to hit me back hard she actually admitted it!'

"In order to hit you hard?' I interrupted. 'Are you sure she meant it?'

"Perfectly, because she got in a funk afterwards, when her temper cooled, and tried to unsay it and back out. Besides, the little things on which I had based my suspicions had convinced me already. And now I had her word for it!'

"Spencer was quite carried away by his own story by this time, and I could judge exactly the kind of dangerous revengeful man he was.

"The only question was, who was the man? And there couldn't be any question about that either. Wickley was the only possibility!'

“ ‘ Ah ! ’ I exclaimed, and he looked at me sharply. ‘ Go on,’ I said, ‘ I begin to see the position now.’ ”

“ I saw it a lot clearer than he had any notion of. This of course accounted for Wickley’s first mystery—the sudden hatred of Spencer for his neighbour.

“ ‘ There could be no doubt about it,’ said he. ‘ He was the only man in the neighbourhood of our own position in life whom we knew in the very least intimately. And he lived inside of two miles from us. Six miles away there was a fat fellow of fifty with a wife and large family—a dull bore of a fellow. Seven miles away were two maiden ladies. Nine miles away was an invalid of seventy. Those were the only alternatives, and we scarcely ever saw any of them. Besides, I had grown more and more convinced that Wickley had something shady in the background. I knew him now to be a blackguard ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Knew ? ’ I repeated. ‘ But had you any proof ? ’ ”

“ ‘ When there are no possible alternatives, that’s proof enough ! Besides, I soon got proof of his character. I made inquiries about him—set an agency on to his track, and I discovered ’—he paused and hesitated for an instant—‘ well, I need only say that he would never have been received in any decent society if people knew what I found out. It had happened abroad—he had done it—’ Again he broke off and the scowl lifted a little from his face. ‘ But the man had suffered for his sins, and it had really nothing to do with my story except that it gave me a hold over him. I was mad with anger and I determined to use it.’ ”

“ ‘ Had nothing else passed between you ? ’ I ventured to ask, for I remembered Wickley’s version and I suspected Spencer was skipping a bit.

“ ‘ Oh, well,’ he admitted, ‘ I may as well allow that I had shown him pretty plainly that I didn’t want to have anything more to do with him. We had one open row, and that was when he showed me what a damned high and mighty aristocratic snob he was. “ Gentlemen aren’t grown in two days out of dirty stock-broking mushrooms ! ” Those were his actual words ! ’ ”

“ I must confess that I had scarcely given Mr. Wickley credit for such powers of invective, and I realised now to what a pitch of fury the two of them had roused one another.

“ ‘ As I was saying,’ he went on, ‘ I was quite beside myself with rage by this time, and I did a damned silly thing. I wrote to him threatening to show him up if he didn’t clear out of the

place. I even went the length of telling him he must sell me his property. That was simply to crush his pride, of course.'

"'You called it "silly,"' I said. 'That seems hardly the adjective.'

"'Wait a bit and you'll see why,' said he. 'I must tell you first that I was trying hard to catch my wife all this time. Having to go up to town two or three days a week and leave her to play the devil with that fellow nearly drove me demented. On the other hand, it gave me a chance of catching her napping. One of my servants was watching her for me, but I think Elise must have suspected him. . . .'

"'Him'? I said. 'Do you mean your butler?'

"'It was my chauffeur as a matter of fact; a smart young fellow. He came to me one day and told me he suspected what was up and offered to watch her. I paid him well for it, but though he said Wickley was often hanging round my place, he never found anything definite against my wife. I tried my own hand at it too, by coming back from town when she didn't expect me, but they were cunning as Satan. I never caught them.

"'But to come to the climax of the affair: I wrote that letter to Wickley from my London office, and then the sudden thought struck me that I would come straight home myself. He wouldn't expect me, seeing the address on the letter, and he would probably see my wife at once about it. That's how I argued. When I got home my wife was out, nobody knew where. My suspicions became a practical certainty. I took my gun and I set out in the direction of his house. I'm telling you everything quite candidly, Mr. Carrington. I was just approaching the boundary of the two properties when I saw him coming towards me, as I thought. I slipped behind a tree and watched him. He turned into a wood that lies just on the boundary, and I stood for a short while like a man in hell!'

"Mr. Spencer took out his handkerchief and passed it across his face. As for me, I never was more fascinated in my life. To think of hearing the other half of Wickley's story like this! In a moment Spencer went on—

"'I yielded to temptation, Mr. Carrington. I felt sure that he and my wife were in that wood, and I meant to kill one or both—Wickley certainly. I made a little detour, entered the wood, crossed a stream that forms the boundary, and suddenly I saw

him. He was lying dead on his face, with a huge blood stain all over his back !'

" 'Wickley was ?' I exclaimed.

" 'I had just seen him go into the wood. Who else could it be ? But I didn't go near the body. I simply turned tail and hurried home as fast as I could walk. It took me all my time to keep at a walk and not to run ! And now do you see what a silly performance that threatening letter was ? It had come on top of other foolishness, for I had used my tongue pretty freely about the fellow. And now he was lying murdered and I had been seen leaving my house with a gun, and probably had been seen going in that very direction ! Also, I knew in my heart I had meant to kill him. Lord, what a shock I got ! You may think me a fool to have felt like that. . . .'

" 'I don't in the very least,' I assured him in all sincerity.

" 'Well, that's how I did feel. I may add as some excuse for my next performance that this trouble had been leading me to drink a bit too much, and my nerve wasn't at its best. Anyhow when I got home I didn't wait in the house longer than to order the car ; and then as a finishing touch, the chauffeur couldn't be found, and so I couldn't get to the station in time to catch the last train that evening ! I had hired from the station when I arrived, so as to give no warning of my coming, but the car had gone back, and there I was landed. However, I didn't wait in my house—I simply couldn't do it. I tramped off to a little local pub, slept the night there, and went back to town in the morning. And now comes a bit of the story that you probably won't believe, Mr. Carrington.'

" 'I believe everything you tell me,' I said.

" 'I had a room at the Hotel Metropole at that time. On the same afternoon, soon after I had got back to London, I was sitting in the hall with a bundle of evening papers, looking for some news of Wickley's murder, when what do you think ? Wickley himself stepped out of the lift and walked across the hall under my nose !'

" 'He looked at me expectantly, and I tried to seem dumb-founded. I must have succeeded pretty well, for he seemed quite satisfied.

" 'It is absolute gospel truth,' he said. 'Just as he was passing, he spotted me, and do you know, the extraordinary thing was that all signs of enmity seemed to have left the man ! As for me,

I was so thankful to see him alive, I could have embraced him. We exchanged a few ordinary remarks in a perfectly friendly way, and then he walked out of the hotel. I haven't seen him from that moment till last night at the dinner, and it was meeting him again that tuned me up to doing what of course I always should have done. I want this mystery cleared up, Mr. Carrington. I want to know who that man was I saw lying dead in the wood.'

"He stopped, and I realised with a shock that Spencer's story had done absolutely nothing to solve Wickley's mystery. I had counted confidently on its cracking the nut, but instead it simply presented me with the same mystery over again.

" 'You never discovered who it was?'

"He shook his head.

" 'Never to this day. I can only tell you that nobody is known to have been murdered, or even missing, in Devorset at that time. But I'm afraid that won't help you very much.'

" 'Tell me what you did, and your wife did, immediately afterwards.'

" 'I funked going back for three or four days. My nerves were utterly rattled. When I got home, my wife had left, cleared right out, and we have never lived together again since. Before leaving she told our housekeeper that she sacked Martin, the chauffeur—no, Marwell, that was his name. Presumably she sacked him because she had discovered he had been spying on her. Of course she had no business to do it on her own account, but I didn't care by that time. In fact I was rather glad to be rid of him; He knew too much about the miserable business. She left a short note for me, only a line or two. I can remember it by heart. "This is absolutely the end of it. We must never meet again. I have done my best for you. Be grateful to me for that."

" 'What did she mean?' I asked.

"He shook his head.

" 'I haven't the least idea. A woman's way of getting in the last word and claiming to be in the right, I suppose.'

" 'And have you ever met again?'

" 'Never.'

"I fell very thoughtful. Dim ideas were beginning to float across my mind, but very mistily and tentatively.

" 'Have you lived there at all since then?'

" 'No. I let the place at once. And Wickley let his too. Neither of us have lived in Devorset since.'

“ ‘ Did you by any chance lose an overcoat about that time ? ’ ”

“ Spencer stared at me very hard.

“ ‘ Lose an overcoat ? ’ he repeated. ‘ No—or rather yes, now I come to think of it. I used to have rather a nice Burberry, which must have gone missing just about that time. I remember wondering what had become of it, though such trifles didn’t worry me much then.’ ”

“ ‘ And a felt hat ? ’ ”

“ He stared again and then thought again.

“ ‘ Possibly ; but I had several felt hats, and one might have gone astray without my noticing it, especially in the state of mind I was in. Why do you ask ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Just a vague idea I had. It was getting towards dusk, you say, when you saw the body in the wood ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I don’t think I said so, but it was.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, I’ll think over the whole story,’ I told him, and Mr. Spencer shook hands and walked off.”

III

THE LOST ENGINEER

“ Now,” said Carrington, “ we come to the one really remarkable coincidence. There was present at that Devorset dinner a man with an unsolved riddle lying on a dusty shelf at the back of his memory, and he wasn’t a Devorset man either, but a guest like myself. He was a fellow Tuke, a London solicitor ; he knew the man who was acting as my own host that night, and so I made his acquaintance at the dinner and had quite a yarn with him. Furthermore, Tuke’s host knew Spencer and introduced Tuke to him. It was Tuke’s two meetings with Spencer and myself that brought him to my office a couple of days later, and one can trace cause and effect just as in the cases of Wickley’s and of Spencer’s visits to me. But it was an extraordinary chance that Tuke, with that riddle on the dusty shelf, should have happened to be at the dinner at all. Here you get the work of the sprite who seemed to be acting for Destiny.”

“ He was a nice, gentlemanly, solid-looking man was Tuke, and didn’t suggest anything very exciting when he sat down and

told me he had come to see me professionally. But when he said that it was the meeting with Spencer which had reminded him of an unsolved, half-forgotten mystery, I assure you I pricked up my ears.

“About nine years ago,” he began, “a poor girl came to me with a very queer story, and a very sad story too it was. She was a Mrs. Borham, or thought she was—a pretty slender young thing of barely twenty-one, full of pluck, but with the marks of pain and worry stamped too clearly on her face for any one with any observation to miss. And this was the story she told me.

“She was the daughter of an impecunious half-pay Naval Officer and was staying with some relatives at Dover when she met Reginald Borham, if that was his real name, which I should think is very doubtful. He was a man of about twenty-five or twenty-six, a mechanical engineer by profession, remarkably good-looking, with the manners and address of a gentleman, and a most romantic tale of high-born relations who had disowned him owing to his refusal to marry an heiress whom he did not love. It was a cock-and-bull story if ever there was one, but as he professed to having fallen in love with this poor girl, and as she certainly fell in love with him, she swallowed it whole, and to make a long story short, married him.

“Reading between the lines of her story, and interpreting it by what I was able to pick up about the man, he seems to have married her simply because she wouldn’t succumb to his advances otherwise. She was unusually attractive, and he was evidently carried away by her for the moment very completely, for it wasn’t his usual procedure with women by any means. As a rule he specialised in married ladies, and lived either on their bounty or on blackmail. In fact he was the worst type of animal that goes about on two legs, a creature vicious to the core, without a rag of honour to cover him or an ounce of compunction in his heart. Such animals ought to be shot at sight!

“He actually had an engineer’s training, plenty of brains, and considerable aptitude for mechanical work, and at the moment was connected with some Admiralty job at Dover, but within three months of his marriage he deserted his work and his wife and vanished into space. I traced another woman in connection with his flight, but she lost sight of him too, and as his employers strongly suspected his honesty, they didn’t make any effort to trace him. In fact every man he has been connected with

has been thankful to see the last of him, and every woman has bitterly regretted she ever met him.

“ ‘ The poor young wife came up to London and determined to make her own living. She had no money, her people had strongly disapproved of the marriage, and things weren’t pleasant at home. Having no business training of any kind and being passionately fond of children, she took on the job of nursemaid in the house of some people she knew, and there she was in a dark-blue uniform and bonnet, wheeling a perambulator about the Park and the streets of Bayswater when I made her acquaintance.

“ ‘ Well, now I’m coming to the part where I want your detective mind to follow me very closely, Mr. Carrington. Just ask any questions you like if things don’t seem clear. It was about a year after her marriage, and she had been nearly nine months on this job, when she was wheeling her pram one day along a quiet street in the neighbourhood of the Edgware Road. Suddenly on the opposite pavement she spied her husband walking rather quickly in the opposite direction, with a lady at his side ! They never glanced across the street, and of course it would never have entered the blackguard’s head to suspect that a nursemaid wheeling a pram could be his wife ; but she, on the other hand, studied them carefully and described them to me exactly.

“ ‘ Borham himself was got up immaculately as the young man about town—silk hat fashionably tilted backwards, morning coat, black and white striped trousers, patent boots with yellow tops, and all the rest of it. The lady had extremely golden hair, a face which even her rival admitted was remarkably pretty, with long eyelashes and very red lips, decidedly of the actress type. Mrs. Borham described her ; and as for her dress and hat, she portrayed those so exactly that we were able to identify the lady afterwards through them alone. Of course I can’t remember a single item, but anyhow she was very smartly and extremely expensively rigged out.

“ ‘ Mrs. Borham stopped short on the opposite pavement and bent over her charge as a nurse might naturally do, but her eyes were following the couple across the way, and she was prepared to wheel round and follow them when they were safely past. However, they didn’t go very much farther. There was a quiet hotel in this street, one of that type which probably does a pretty mixed sort of business, but with a very large smart-looking

motor-car standing in front of it. She was struck at once, she said, with the contrast between the car and the hotel. Borham and the lady glanced over their shoulders as if to see that the coast was clear, and then turned into the hotel.

"Imagine the poor girl's feelings as she watched this performance! Fortunately she had heaps of pluck and resource and she determined to see the affair through, so she crossed the street and paced backwards and forwards for about half an hour, taking care never to come near enough to the hotel to be seen from the windows. Unfortunately she was just about at the farther end of her beat when the lady reappeared, and she didn't even see her actually come out of the hotel. In fact, when Mrs. Borham looked round, the lady was on the pavement just about to get into the car that was standing by the kerb, and the only person with her was the chauffeur, who was just at her back. He opened the door of the car, she got in, and then off they went."

"And Borham himself?" I asked.

"Never came out at all. His wife waited and waited in that street, but there was not a sign of him."

"Could he have come out before the lady, while his wife happened to be walking away from the hotel?"

"She declared it was quite impossible, for she kept constantly glancing over her shoulder. No; for some reason or other he must have remained in the hotel till after his wife went away. Conceivably he had spotted her."

"Was the chauffeur with the car before the lady came out?"

"It seemed a curious thing, but Mrs. Borham declared that there was no one with the car. Presumably the man was in the hotel having a drink. You see he would have a long wait, and his mistress would hardly be in a position to wig him for it, considering that he could scarcely help seeing what she was up to."

"I see. Well, what happened next?"

"Just before leaving, Mrs. Borham wheeled her pram right past the hotel, and when she was passing the door her eye was caught by an envelope lying in the gutter immediately opposite. On the off chance that the lady had dropped it while getting into the car, she picked it up. It turned out to be empty, but on the outside was written, "Mr. J. Marwell, c/o A. D. Spencer, Esq.," and then followed an address at some well-known Kensington flats. Next morning she came to me with her story and the envelope."

"Dropped by the chauffeur, I suppose?"

“ ‘ By Jove, you’re quite right ! I put the matter into the hands of an inquiry agent, and found that Mrs. Spencer corresponded to the account of the mysterious lady, and one of her costumes tallied exactly with Mrs. Borham’s description. Also Spencer’s chauffeur was named Marwell.’

“ ‘ And Borham ? ’

“ ‘ Ah, now we come to the most mysterious and extraordinary part of the whole business. Not a single trace was ever seen or heard of Borham again ! I admit there were difficulties in the way of tracing him. There was obviously no use in tackling Mrs. Spencer direct, for she would simply have denied everything. We might have threatened her with exposure, but Mrs. Borham wouldn’t hear of a public scandal, for in all probability exposure would have meant the Divorce Court for Mrs. Spencer, with Borham’s name and history brought into the business. The people at the hotel denied all knowledge of the whole affair. It was that sort of an hotel, you see. My agent tried Marwell, but he was like a clam. And nobody connected with the Spencers, whom we could get hold of, seemed to have even heard of Mr. Borham.

“ ‘ As a final and complete checkmate, the Spencers very shortly afterwards gave up their flat in town, and settled down on an estate he had purchased in Devorset. Our only remaining chance of getting at Borham had been by watching Mrs. Spencer, and now, of course, that was gone.’

“ ‘ Has Mrs. Borham never heard anything of her husband again ? ’

“ ‘ Not from that day to this. I heard from her about six months ago. Apparently some other man was wanting to marry her, but that vanished blackguard, Borham, stood in the way. She asked what I should advise ? Well, I gave her the best advice I could, but I had to confess that the man had beaten us completely. And now, Mr. Carrington, can you suggest any possible step that might be taken ? ’

“ ‘ I thought for a minute or two, and then I said—

“ ‘ You can tell Mrs. Borham that her husband has been dead for eight years.’

“ ‘ Tuke stared at me very hard indeed.

“ ‘ But—how do you know ? ’ he exclaimed.

“ ‘ Borham was Marwell,’ I said, ‘ and Marwell met the fate he deserved—very suddenly.’ ”

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"After Tuke left me I made certain other inquiries, and here's the true history of the vanished Borham, *alias* Marwell, from the time he went down to Devorset with the Spencers.

"Mrs. Spencer was infatuated with the scoundrel, and the scoundrel had Mrs. Spencer under his thumb. His latest enterprise, just before he first met her, had been in connection with a fraudulent motor company. You'll remember, of course, that he was a useful engineer, and he was a man who would stoop to anything, and stick at nothing. He applied for the job of Spencer's chauffeur, and Mrs. S. saw that he got the billet, without raising the faintest suspicion in her husband's mind. Then he started this double life of young blood and chauffeur, always changing clothes at that hotel.

"The next thing was the warning given them by the efforts of Tuke's agent (who must have been a bit of an ass) to bribe Marwell to give away Borham! Hence the move to Devorset, where they thought they would have an absolutely free hand, and in a very short time the scoundrel found himself in clover. Mrs. Spencer had her scene with her husband, and knew he suspected Wickley. She told Marwell *alias* Borham, whereupon the man—without telling her—hit upon the ingenious device of going to Spencer and offering to shadow his wife. He thus had three sources of income: his pay as chauffeur, together with various perquisites that he didn't stick at picking up—honestly or otherwise, his payments from Spencer for acting as spy, and any amount of odd sums from the infatuated woman. Also he lived in comfort, and had a beautiful woman devoted to him. And with Spencer's suspicions all directed at the wrong man (and Marwell assisted in this) the game seemed safe as houses.

"After a time, however, one small fly got into the ointment—though it seemed only a trifle. Under yet a third name, he started an intrigue with the daughter of a respectable farmer some miles away, and then began to get in a funk of driving his mistress about in the car more than he could help. He belonged to that class of man who seems able to tell an infatuated woman anything without breaking the spell, and he actually had the audacity to tell her this, and suggest meetings in the woods about the place, instead of taking her afield. She provided him with a coat and hat of her husband's, so that he might pass as Spencer himself if any one caught a glimpse of them; for Spencer was known to come and go constantly between London and his country house,

and was also known to be often wandering about his woods when he was at home. And now Destiny prepared at last to clear the earth of this pest."

Carrington rose and planted himself before the fire, looking down upon the three of us who were listening to him; and suddenly and very impressively came to the *dénoûment* of his tale.

"One evening at dusk she came a little late to a rendezvous in a certain wood. It was just across the boundary, so as to add to the chances of not being interrupted—Destiny had seen to that. There she found him stark dead on his face, with the handle of a pruning-knife sticking out of his back. She had thought her husband was in town, but guessed instantly he had come back—and guessed rightly. She thought she recognised his pruning-knife (he had bought two, and given one to Wickley, you'll remember)—and this time she guessed wrong.

"She hurried back to the house half demented, and found her husband had actually been home, and now had fled. And then she was quite certain who had done the deed. What should she do? Hide her own shame, save her husband's neck, and smother the scandal! That woman actually took a spade, and in the dark, in that lonely wood, found a bit of loose soil, and got the body hidden somehow. The next evening, she had the nerve to go down again and pile more earth on top, and meanwhile she told the housekeeper that Marwell had been sacked. Nobody else in the house had liked him, and nobody worried what had become of him. And then she wrote that note to her husband—'I have done my best for you. Be grateful to me for that,' and left the house and him for ever."

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"How did you find all those details?" we asked.

"Well, to begin by giving myself a little pat on the back, I came to a pretty correct conclusion at the end of Spencer's story. One man alone had disappeared from the neighbourhood, and that was the chauffeur Marwell. He was said to have been sacked within the next day or two, but he couldn't be found immediately after the murder when his master wanted the car. I judged him to be an obvious rascal from his offer to spy upon the wife. Also I knew that there was nobody in her own station of life who could possibly have been Mrs. Spencer's lover. Finally, I had learnt that one of Spencer's coats had been abstracted, which not only

accounted for the unknown victim being mistaken for Spencer, but pointed to his having been a member of the household. I suspected something very like the truth, but of course one needed more facts."

"Then came Tuke with his story which confirmed my suspicion, and told me almost everything. And finally, I hunted down Mrs. Spencer, and made her tell me the rest of the story."

"And did you tell any of them the whole truth?"

"Only Wickley. I couldn't give his secret away to anybody else. But I told him everything. Whether it consoled the poor devil or not I don't know, but I assured him he was simply the instrument selected by Fate to rid the world of an unspeakable black-guard."

Ernest Bramah

THE GHOST

AT MASSINGHAM MANSIONS

from THE EYES OF MAX CARRADOS

Grant Richards, 1923

"Do you believe in ghosts, Max?" inquired Mr. Carlyle.

"Only as ghosts," replied Carrados with decision.

"Quite so," assented the private detective with the air of acquiescence with which he was wont to cloak his moments of obfuscation. Then he added cautiously: "And how don't you believe in them, pray?"

"As public nuisances—or private ones for that matter," replied his friend. "So long as they are content to behave as ghosts I am with them. When they begin to meddle with a state of existence that is outside their province—to interfere in business matters and depreciate property—to rattle chains, bang doors, ring bells, predict winners, and to edit magazines—and to attract attention instead of shunning it, I cease to believe. My sympathies are entirely with the sensible old fellow who was awakened in the middle of the night to find a shadowy form standing by the side of his bed and silently regarding him. For a few minutes the

disturbed man waited patiently, expecting some awful communication, but the same profound silence was maintained. 'Well,' he remarked at length, 'if you have nothing to do, I have,' and turning over went to sleep again."

"I have been asked to take up a ghost," Carlyle began to explain.

"Then I don't believe in it," declared Carrados.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a pushful, notoriety-loving ghost, or it would not have gone so far. Probably it wants to get into the *Daily Mail*. The other people, whoever they are, don't believe in it, either, Louis, or they wouldn't have called you in. They would have gone to Sir Oliver Lodge for an explanation, or to the nearest priest for a stoup of holy water."

"I admit that I shall direct my researches towards the forces of this world before I begin to investigate any other," conceded Louis Carlyle. "And I don't doubt," he added, with his usual bland complacency, "that I shall hale up some mischievous or aggrieved individual before the ghost is many days older. Now that you have brought me so far, do you care to go on round to the place with me, Max, to hear what they have to say about it?"

Carrados agreed with his usual good nature. He rarely met his friend without hearing the details of some new case, for Carlyle's practice had increased vastly since the night when chance had led him into the blind man's study. They discussed the cases according to their interest, and there the matter generally ended so far as Max Carrados was concerned, until he casually heard the result subsequently from Carlyle's lips or learned the sequel from the newspaper. But these pages are primarily a record of the methods of the one man whose name they bear and therefore for the occasional case that Carrados completed for his friend there must be assumed the unchronicled scores which the inquiry agent dealt capably with himself. This reminder is perhaps necessary to dissipate the impression that Louis Carlyle was a pretentious humbug. He was, as a matter of fact, in spite of his amiable foibles and the self-assurance that was, after all, merely an asset of his trade, a shrewd and capable business man of his world, and behind his office manner nothing concerned him more than to pocket fees for which he felt that he had failed to render value.

Massingham Mansions proved to be a single block of residential flats overlooking a recreation ground. It was, as they afterwards

found, an adjunct to a larger estate of similar property situated down another road. A porter, residing in the basement, looked after the interests of Massingham Mansions ; the business office was placed among the other flats. On that morning it presented the appearance of a well-kept, prosperous enough place, a little dull, a little unfinished, a little depressing perhaps ; in fact faintly reminiscent of the superfluous mansions that stand among broad, weedy roads on the outskirts of overgrown seaside resorts ; but it was persistently raining at the time when Mr. Carlyle had his first view of it.

"It is early to judge," he remarked, after stopping the car in order to verify the name on the brass plate, "but, upon my word, Max, I really think that our ghost might have discovered more appropriate quarters."

At the office, to which the porter had directed them, they found a managing clerk and two coltish youths in charge. Mr. Carlyle's name produced an appreciable flutter.

"The governor isn't here just now, but I have this matter in hand," said the clerk with an easy air of responsibility—an effect unfortunately marred by a sudden irrepressible giggle from the least overawed of the colts. "Will you kindly step into our private room?" He turned at the door of the inner office and dropped a freezing eye on the offender. "Get those letters copied before you go out to lunch, Binns," he remarked in a sufficiently loud voice. Then he closed the door quickly, before Binns could find a suitable retort.

So far it had been plain sailing, but now, brought face to face with the necessity of explaining, the clerk began to develop some hesitancy in beginning.

"It's a funny sort of business," he remarked, skirting the difficulty.

"Perhaps," admitted Mr. Carlyle ; "but that will not embarrass us. Many of the cases that pass through my hands are what you would call 'funny sorts of business.'"

"I suppose so," responded the young man, "but not through ours. Well, this is at 11 Massingham. A few nights ago—I suppose it must be more than a week now—Willett, the estate porter, was taking up some luggage to 75 Northanger for the people there when he noticed a light in one of the rooms at 11 Massingham. The backs face, though about twenty or thirty yards away. It struck him as curious, because 11 Massingham is empty and

locked up. Naturally he thought at first that the porter at Massingham or one of us from the office had gone up for something. Still it was so unusual—being late at night—that it was his business to look into it. On his way round—you know where Massingham Mansions are?—he had to pass here. It was dark, for we'd all been gone hours, but Willett has duplicate keys and he let himself in. Then he began to think that something must be wrong, for here, hanging up against their number on the board, were the only two keys of 11 Massingham that there are supposed to be. He put the keys in his pocket and went on to Massingham. Green, the resident porter there, told him that he hadn't been into No. 11 for a week. What was more, no one had passed the outer door, in or out, for a good half-hour. He knew that, because the door 'springs' with a noise when it is opened, no matter how carefully. So the two of them went up. The door of No. 11 was locked and inside everything was as it should be. There was no light then, and after looking well round with the lanterns that they carried they were satisfied that no one was concealed there."

"You say lanterns," interrupted Mr. Carlyle. "I suppose they lit the gas, or whatever it is there, as well?"

"It is gas, but they could not light it because it was cut off at the meter. We always cut it off when a flat becomes vacant."

"What sort of a light was it, then, that Willett saw?"

"It was gas, Mr. Carlyle. It is possible to see the bracket in that room from 75 Northanger. He saw it burning."

"Then the meter had been put on again?"

"It is in a locked cupboard in the basement. Only the office and the porters have keys. They tried the gas in the room and it was dead out; they looked at the meter in the basement afterwards and it was dead off."

"Very good," observed Mr. Carlyle, noting the facts in his pocket-book. "What next?"

"The next," continued the clerk, "was something that had really happened before. When they got down again—Green and Willett—Green was rather chipping Willett about seeing the light, you know, when he stopped suddenly. He'd remembered something. The day before the servant at 12 Massingham had asked him who it was that was using the bathroom at No. 11—she of course knowing that it was empty. He told her that no one used the bathroom. 'Well,' she said, 'we hear the water running and splashing almost every night and it's funny with no one

there.' He had thought nothing of it at the time, concluding—as he told her—that it must be the water in the bathroom of one of the underneath flats that they heard. Of course he told Willett then and they went up again and examined the bathroom more closely. Water had certainly been run there, for the sides of the bath were still wet. They tried the taps and not a drop came. When a flat is empty we cut off the water like the gas."

"At the same place—the cupboard in the basement?" inquired Carlyle.

"No; at the cistern in the roof. The trap is at the top of the stairs and you need a longish ladder to get there. The next morning Willett reported what he'd seen and the governor told me to look into it. We didn't think much of it so far. That night I happened to be seeing some friends to the station here—I live not so far off—and I thought I might as well take a turn round here on my way home. I knew that if a light was burning I should be able to see the window lit up from the yard at the back, although the gas itself would be out of sight. And, sure enough, there was the light blazing out of one of the windows of No. 11. I won't say that I didn't feel a bit home-sick then, but I'd made up my mind to go up."

"Good man," murmured Mr. Carlyle approvingly.

"Wait a bit," recommended the clerk, with a shame-faced laugh. "So far I had only had to make my mind up. It was then close on midnight and not a soul about. I came here for the keys, and I also had the luck to remember an old revolver that had been lying about in a drawer of the office for years. It wasn't loaded, but it didn't seem quite so lonely with it. I put it in my pocket and went on to Massingham, taking another turn into the yard to see that the light was still on. Then I went up the stairs as quietly as I could and let myself into No. 11."

"You didn't take Willett or Green with you?"

The clerk gave Mr. Carlyle a knowing look, as of one smart man who will be appreciated by another.

"Willett's a very trustworthy chap," he replied, "and we have every confidence in him. Green also, although he has not been with us so long. But I thought it just as well to do it on my own, you understand, Mr. Carlyle. You didn't look in at Massingham on your way? Well, if you had you would have seen that there is a pane of glass above every door, frosted glass to the hall doors

and plain over each of those inside. It's to light the halls and passages, you know. Each flat has a small square hall and a longish passage leading off it. As soon as I opened the door I could tell that one of the rooms down the passage was lit up, though I could not see the door of it from there. Then I crept very quietly through the hall into the passage. A regular stream of light was shining from above the end door on the left. The room, I knew, was the smallest in the flat—it's generally used for a servant's bedroom or sometimes for a box-room. It was a bit thick, you'll admit—right at the end of a long passage and midnight, and after what the others had said."

"Yes, yes," assented the inquiry agent. "But you went on?"

"I went on, tiptoeing without a sound. I got to the door, took out my pistol, put my hand almost on the handle and then——"

"Well, well," prompted Mr. Carlyle, as the narrator paused provokingly, with the dramatic instinct of an expert raconteur, "what then?"

"Then the light went out; while my hand was within an inch of the handle the light went out, as clean as if I had been watched all along and the thing timed. It went out all at once, without any warning and without the slightest sound from the beastly room beyond. And then it was as black as hell in the passage and something seemed to be going to happen."

"What did you do?"

"I did a slope," acknowledged the clerk frankly. "I broke all the records down that passage, I bet you. You'll laugh, I dare say, and think you would have stood, but you don't know what it was like. I'd been screwing myself up, wondering what I should see in that lighted room when I opened the door, and then the light went out like a knife, and for all I knew the next second the door would open on me in the dark and Christ only knows what come out."

"Probably I should have run also," conceded Mr. Carlyle tactfully. "And you, Max?"

"You see, I always feel at home in the dark," apologised the blind man. "At all events, you got safely away, Mr. ——?"

"My name's Elliott," responded the clerk. "Yes, you may bet I did. Whether the door opened and anybody or anything came out or not I can't say. I didn't look. I certainly did get an idea that I heard the bath water running and swishing as I snatched at the hall door, but I didn't stop to consider that either, and if

it was, the noise was lost in the slam of the door and my clatter as I took about twelve flights of stairs six steps at a time. Then when I was safely out I did venture to go round to look up again, and there was that damned light full on again."

"Really?" commented Mr. Carlyle. "That was very audacious of him."

"Him? Oh, well, yes, I suppose so. That's what the governor insists, but he hasn't been up there himself in the dark."

"Is that as far as you have got?"

"It's as far as we can get. The bally thing goes on just as it likes. The very next day we tied up the taps of the gas-meter and the water cistern and sealed the string. Bless you, it didn't make a ha'peth of difference. Scarcely a night passes without the light showing, and there's no doubt that the water runs. We've put copying ink on the door handles and the taps and got into it ourselves until there isn't a man about the place that you couldn't implicate."

"Has anyone watched up there?"

"Willett and Green together did one night. They shut themselves up in the room opposite from ten till twelve and nothing happened. I was watching the window with a pair of opera-glasses from an empty flat here—85 Northanger. Then they chucked it, and before they could have been down the steps the light was there—I could see the gas as plain as I can see this ink-stand. I ran down and met them coming to tell me that nothing had happened. The three of us sprinted up again and the light was out and the flat as deserted as a churchyard. What do you make of that?"

"It certainly requires looking into," replied Mr. Carlyle diplomatically.

"Looking into! Well, you're welcome to look all day and all night too, Mr. Carlyle. It isn't as though it was an old baronial mansion, you see, with sliding panels and secret passages. The place has the date over the front door, 1882—1882 and haunted, by gosh! It was built for what it is, and there isn't an inch unaccounted for between the slates and the foundation."

"These two things—the light and the water running—are the only indications there have been?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"So far as we ourselves have seen or heard. I ought perhaps to tell you of something else, however. When this business first started I made a few casual inquiries here and there among the tenants.

Among others I saw Mr. Belting, who occupies 9 Massingham—the flat directly beneath No. 11. It didn't seem any good making up a cock-and bull story, so I put it to him plainly—had he been annoyed by anything unusual going on at the empty flat above?

“ ‘If you mean your confounded ghost up there, I have not been particularly annoyed,’ he said at once, ‘but Mrs. Belting has, and I should advise you to keep out of her way, at least until she gets another servant.’ Then he told me that their girl, who slept in the bedroom underneath the little one at No. 11, had been going on about noises in the room above—footsteps and tramping and a bump on the floor—for some time before we heard anything of it. Then one day she suddenly said that she'd had enough of it and bolted. That was just before Willett first saw the light.”

“It is being talked about, then—among the tenants?”

“You bet!” assented Mr. Elliott pungently. “That's what gets the governor. He wouldn't give a continental if no one knew, but you can't tell where it will end. The people at Northanger don't half like it either. All the children are scared out of their little wits and none of the slaveys will run errands after dark. It'll give the estate a bad name for the next three years if it isn't stopped.”

“It shall be stopped,” declared Mr. Carlyle impressively. “Of course we have our methods for dealing with this sort of thing, but in order to make a clean sweep it is desirable to put our hands on the offender *in flagranti delicto*. Tell your—er—principal not to have any further concern in the matter. One of my people will call here for any further details that he may require during the day. Just leave everything as it is in the meanwhile. Good-morning, Mr. Elliott, good-morning. . . . A fairly obvious game, I imagine, Max,” he commented as they got into the car, “although the details are original and the motive not disclosed as yet. I wonder how many of them are in it?”

“Let me know when you find out,” said Carrados, and Mr. Carlyle promised.

Nearly a week passed and the expected revelation failed to make its appearance. Then, instead, quite a different note arrived:

“MY DEAR MAX,—I wonder if you formed any conclusion of that Massingham Mansions affair from Mr. Elliott's refined narrative of the circumstances?”

"I begin to suspect that Trigget, whom I put on, is somewhat of an ass, though a very remarkable circumstance has come to light which might—if it wasn't a matter of business—offer an explanation of the whole business by stamping it as inexplicable.

"You know how I value your suggestions. If you happen to be in the neighbourhood—not otherwise, Max, I protest—I should be glad if you would drop in for a chat.

"Yours sincerely,

"LOUIS CARLYLE."

Carrados smiled at the ingenuous transparency of the note. He had thought several times of the case since the interview with Elliott, chiefly because he was struck by certain details of the manifestation that divided it from the ordinary methods of the bogy-raiser, an aspect that had apparently made no particular impression on his friend. He was sufficiently interested not to let the day pass without "happening" to be in the neighbourhood of Bampton Street.

"Max," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, raising an accusing forefinger, "you have come on purpose."

"If I have," replied the visitor, "you can reward me with a cup of that excellent beverage that you were able to conjure up from somewhere down in the basement on a former occasion. As a matter of fact, I have."

Mr. Carlyle transmitted the order and then demanded his friend's serious attention.

"That ghost at Massingham Mansions——"

"I still don't believe in that particular ghost, Louis," commented Carrados in mild speculation.

"I never did, of course," replied Carlyle, "but, upon my word, Max, I shall have to very soon as a precautionary measure. Triggett has been able to do nothing and now he has as good as gone on strike."

"Downed—now what on earth can an inquiry man down to go on strike, Louis? Note-books? So Trigget has got a chill, like our candid friend Elliott, eh?"

"He started all right—said that he didn't mind spending a night or a week in a haunted flat, and, to do him justice, I don't believe he did at first. Then he came across a very curious piece

of forgotten local history, a very remarkable—er—coincidence in the circumstances, Max.”

“I was wondering,” said Carrados, “when we should come up against that story, Louis.”

“Then you know of it?” exclaimed the inquiry agent in surprise.

“Not at all. Only I guessed it must exist. Here you have the manifestation associated with two things which in themselves are neither usual nor awe-inspiring—the gas and the water. It requires some association to connect them up, to give them point and force. That is the story.”

“Yes,” assented his friend, “that is the story, and, upon my soul, in the circumstances—well, you shall hear it. It comes partly from the newspapers of many years ago, but only partly, for the circumstances were successfully hushed up in a large measure and it required the stimulated memories of ancient scandalmongers to fill in the details. Oh yes, it was a scandal, Max, and would have been a great sensation too, I do not doubt, only they had no proper pictorial Press in those days, poor beggars. It was very soon after Massingham Mansions had been erected—they were called Enderby House in those days, by the way, for the name was changed on account of this very business. The household at No. 11 consisted of a comfortable, middle-aged married couple and one servant, a quiet and attractive young creature, one is led to understand. As a matter of fact, I think they were the first tenants of that flat.”

“The first occupants give the soul to a new house,” remarked the blind man gravely. “That is why empty houses have their different characters.”

“I don’t doubt it for a moment,” assented Mr. Carlyle in his incisive way, “but none of our authorities on this case made any reference to the fact. They did say, however, that the man held a good and responsible position—a position for which high personal character and strict morality were essential. He was also well known and regarded in quiet but substantial local circles where serious views prevailed. He was, in short, a man of notorious ‘respectability.’

“The first chapter of the tragedy opened with the painful death of the prepossessing handmaiden—suicide, poor creature. She didn’t appear one morning and the flat was full of the reek of gas. With great promptitude the master threw all the windows open

and called up the porter. They burst open the door of the little bedroom at the end of the passage, and there was the thing as clear as daylight for any coroner's jury to see. The door was locked on the inside and the extinguished gas was turned full on. It was only a tiny room, with no fireplace, and the ventilation of a closed well-fitting door and window was negligible in the circumstances. At all events the girl was proved to have been dead for several hours when they reached her, and the doctor who conducted the autopsy crowned the convincing fabric of circumstances when he mentioned as delicately as possible that the girl had a very pressing reason for dreading an inevitable misfortune that would shortly overtake her. The jury returned the obvious verdict.

"There have been many undiscovered crimes in the history of mankind, Max, but it is by no means every ingenious plot that carries. After the inquest, at which our gentleman doubtless cut a very proper and impressive figure, the barbed whisper began to insinuate and to grow in freedom. It is sheerly impossible to judge how these things start, but we know that when once they have been begun they gather material like an avalanche. It was remembered by someone at the flat underneath that late on the fatal night a window in the principal bedroom above had been heard to open, top and bottom, very quietly. Certain other sounds of movement in the night did not tally with the tale of sleep-wrapped innocence. Sceptical busybodies were anxious to demonstrate practically to those who differed from them on this question that it was quite easy to extinguish a gas-jet in one room by blowing down the gas-pipe in another ; and in this connection there was evidence that the lady of the flat had spoken to her friends more than once of her sentimental young servant's extravagant habit of reading herself to sleep occasionally with the light full on. Why was nothing heard at the inquest, they demanded, of the curious fact that an open novelette lay on the counterpane when the room was broken into ? A hundred trifling circumstances were adduced—arrangements that the girl had been making for the future down to the last evening of her life—interpretable hints that she had dropped to her acquaintances—her views on suicide and the best means to that end ; a favourite topic, it would seem, among her class—her possession of certain comparatively expensive trinkets on a salary of a very few shillings a week, and so on. Finally, some rather more definite and important piece of evidence

must have been conveyed to the authorities, for we know now that one fine day a warrant was issued. Somehow rumour preceded its execution. The eminently respectable gentleman with whom it was concerned did not wait to argue out the merits of the case. He locked himself in the bathroom, and when the police arrived they found that instead of an arrest they had to arrange the details for another inquest."

"A very convincing episode," conceded Carrados in response to his friend's expectant air. "And now her spirit passes the long winter evenings turning the gas on and off, and the one amusement of his consists in doing the same with the bath-water—or the other way, the other way about, Louis. Truly, one half the world knows not how the other half lives!"

"All your cheap humour won't induce Trigget to spend another night in that flat, Max," retorted Mr. Carlyle. "Nor, I am afraid, will it help me through this business in any other way."

"Then I'll give you a hint that may," said Carrados. "Try your respectable gentleman's way of settling difficulties."

"What is that?" demanded his friend.

"Blow down the pipes, Louis."

"Blow down the pipes?" repeated Carlyle.

"At all events try it. I infer that Mr. Trigget has not experimented in that direction."

"But what will it do, Max?"

"Possibly it will demonstrate where the other end goes to."

"But the other end goes to the meter."

"I suggest not—not without some interference with its progress. I have already met your Mr. Trigget, you know, Louis. An excellent and reliable man within his limits, but he is at his best posted outside the door of a hotel waiting to see the co-respondent go in. He hasn't enough imagination for this case—not enough to carry him away from what would be his own obvious method of doing it to what is someone else's equally obvious but quite different method. Unless I am doing him an injustice, he will have spent most of his time trying to catch someone getting into the flat to turn the gas and water on and off, whereas I conjecture that no one does go into the flat because it is perfectly simple—ingenious but simple—to produce these phenomena without. Then when Mr. Trigget has satisfied himself that it is physically impossible for anyone to be going in and out, and when, on the

top of it, he comes across this romantic tragedy—a tale that might psychologically explain the ghost, simply because the ghost is moulded on the tragedy—then, of course, Mr. Trigget's mental process is swept away from its moorings and his feet begin to get cold."

"This is very curious and suggestive," said Mr. Carlyle. "I certainly assumed—— But shall we have Trigget up and question him on the point? I think he ought to be here now—if he isn't detained at the Bull."

Carrados assented, and in a few minutes Mr. Trigget presented himself at the door of the private office. He was a melancholy-looking middle-aged little man, with an ineradicable air of being exactly what he was, and the searcher for deeper or subtler indications of character would only be rewarded by a latent pessimism grounded on the depressing probability that he would never be anything else.

"Come in, Trigget," called out Mr. Carlyle when his employee diffidently appeared. "Come in. Mr. Carrados would like to hear some of the details of the Massingham Mansions case."

"Not the first time I have availed myself of the benefit of your inquiries, Mr. Trigget," nodded the blind man. "Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, sir," replied Trigget with gloomy deference. "It's very handsome of you to put it in that way, Mr. Carrados, sir. But this isn't another Tarporley-Templeton case, if I may say so, sir. That was as plain as a pikestaff after all, sir."

"When we saw the pikestaff, Mr. Trigget; yes, it was," admitted Carrados, with a smile. "But this is insoluble? Ah, well. When I was a boy I used to be extraordinarily fond of ghost stories, I remember, but even while reading them I always had an uneasy suspicion that when it came to the necessary detail of explaining the mystery I should be defrauded with some subterfuge as 'by an ingenious arrangement of hidden wires the artful Muggles had contrived,' etc., or 'an optical illusion effected by means of concealed mirrors revealed the *modus operandi* of the apparition.' I thought that I had been swindled. I think so still. I hope there are no ingenious wires or concealed mirrors here, Mr. Trigget?"

Mr. Trigget looked mildly sagacious but hopelessly puzzled. It was his misfortune that in him the necessities of his business and the proclivities of his nature were at variance, so that he

ordinarily presented the curious anomaly of looking equally alert and tired.

"Wires, sir?" he began, with faint amusement.

"Not only wires, but anything that might account for what is going on," interposed Mr. Carlyle. "Mr. Carrados means this, Trigget: you have reported that it is impossible for anyone to be concealed in the flat or to have secret access to it——"

"I have tested every inch of space in all the rooms, Mr. Carrados, sir," protested the hurt Trigget. "I have examined every board and, you may say, every nail in the floor, the skirting-boards, the window frames and in fact wherever a board or a nail exists. There are no secret ways in or out. Then I have taken the most elaborate precautions against the doors and windows being used for surreptitious ingress and egress. They have not been used, sir. For the past week I am the only person who has been in and out of the flat, Mr. Carrados, and yet night after night the gas that is cut off at the meter is lit and turned out again, and the water that is cut off at the cistern splashes about in the bath up to the second I let myself in. Then it's as quiet as the grave and everything is exactly as I left it. It isn't human, Mr. Carrados, sir, and flesh and blood can't stand it—not in the middle of the night, that is to say."

"You see nothing further, Mr. Trigget?"

"I don't indeed, Mr. Carrados. I would suggest doing away with the gas in that room altogether. As a box-room it wouldn't need one."

"And the bathroom?"

"That might be turned into a small bedroom and all the water fittings removed. Then to provide a bathroom——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Carlyle impatiently, "but we are retained to discover who is causing this annoyance and to detect the means, not to suggest structural alterations in the flat, Trigget. The fact is that after having put in a week on this job you have failed to bring us an inch nearer its solution. Now Mr. Carrados has suggested"—Mr. Carlyle was not usually detained among the finer shades of humour, but some appreciation of the grotesqueness of the advice required him to control his voice as he put the matter in its baldest form—"Mr. Carrados has suggested that instead of spending the time measuring the chimneys and listening to the wall-paper, if you had simply blown down the gas-pipe——"

Carrados was inclined to laugh, although he thought it rather too bad of Louis.

"Not quite in those terms, Mr. Trigget," he interposed.

"Blow down the gas-pipe, sir?" repeated the amazed man.

"What for?"

"To ascertain where the other end comes out," replied Carlyle.

"But don't you see, sir, that that is a detail until you ascertain how it is being done? The pipe may be tapped between the bath and the cistern. Naturally, I considered that. As a matter of fact, the water-pipe isn't tapped. It goes straight up from the bath to the cistern in the attic above, a distance of only a few feet, and I have examined it. The gas-pipe, it is true, passes through a number of flats, and without pulling up all the floors it isn't practicable to trace it. But how does that help us, Mr. Carrados? The gas-tap has to be turned on and off; you can't do that with these hidden wires. It has to be lit. I've never heard of lighting gas by optical illusions, sir. Somebody must get in and out of the flat or else it isn't human. I've spent a week, a very trying week, sir, in endeavouring to ascertain how it could be done. I haven't shirked cold and wet and solitude, sir, in the discharge of my duty. I've freely placed my poor gifts of observation and intelligence, such as they are, sir, at the service——"

"Not 'freely,' Trigget," interposed his employer with decision.

"I am speaking under a deep sense of injury, Mr. Carlyle," retorted Mr. Trigget, who, having had time to think it over, had now come to the conclusion that he was not appreciated. "I am alluding to a moral attitude such as we all possess. I am very grieved by what has been suggested. I didn't expect it of you, Mr. Carlyle, sir; indeed I did not. For a week I have done everything that it has been possible to do, everything that a long experience could suggest, and now, as I understand it, sir, you complain that I didn't blow down the gas-pipe, sir. It's hard, sir; it's very hard."

"Oh, well, for heaven's sake don't cry about it, Trigget," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle. "You're always sobbing about the place over something or other. We know you did your best—God help you!" he added aside.

"I did, Mr. Carlyle; indeed I did, sir. And I thank you for that appreciative tribute to my services. I value it highly, very highly indeed, sir." A tremulous note in the rather impassioned delivery made it increasingly plain that Mr. Trigget's regiment

had not been confined entirely to solid food that day. His wrongs were forgotten and he approached Mr. Carrados with an engaging air of secrecy.

"What is this tip about blowing down the gas-pipe, sir?" he whispered confidentially. "The old dog's always willing to learn something new."

"Max," said Mr. Carlyle curtly, "is there anything more that we need detain Trigget for?"

"Just this," replied Carrados after a moment's thought. "The gas-bracket—it has a mantle attachment on?"

"Oh no, Mr. Carrados," confided the old dog with the affectation of imparting rather valuable information, "not a mantle on. Oh, certainly no mantle. Indeed—indeed, not a mantle at all."

Mr. Carlyle looked at his friend curiously. It was half evident that something might have miscarried. Furthermore, it was obvious that the warmth of the room and the stress of emotion were beginning to have a disastrous effect on the level of Mr. Trigget's ideas and speech.

"A globe?" suggested Carrados.

"A globe? No, sir, not even a globe, in the strict sense of the word. No globe, that is to say, Mr. Carrados. In fact nothing like a globe."

"What is there, then?" demanded the blind man without any break in his unruffled patience. "There may be another way—but surely—surely there must be some attachment?"

"No," said Mr. Trigget with precision, "no attachment at all; nothing at all; nothing whatsoever. Just the ordinary or common or penny plain gas-jet, and above it the whayoumaycallit thingamabob."

"The shade—gas consumer—of course!" exclaimed Carrados. "That is it."

"The tin thingamabob," insisted Mr. Trigget with slow dignity. "Call it what you will. Its purpose is self-evident. It acts as a dispirator—a distributor, that is to say——"

"Louis," struck in Carrados joyously, "are you good for settling it to-night?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, if you can really give the time."

"Good; it's years since I last tackled a ghost. What about——?" His look indicated the other member of the council.

"Would he be of any assistance?"

"Perhaps—then."

"What time?"

"Say eleven-thirty."

"Trigget," rapped out his employer sharply, "meet us at the corner of Middlewood and Enderby Roads at half-past eleven sharp to-night. If you can't manage it I shall not require your services again."

"Certainly, sir; I shall not fail to be punctual," replied Trigget without a tremor. The appearance of an almost incredible sobriety had possessed him in the face of warning, and both in speech and manner he was again exactly the man as he had entered the room. "I regard it as a great honour, Mr. Carrados, to be associated with you in this business, sir."

"In the meanwhile," remarked Carrados, "if you find the time hang heavy on your hands you might look up the subject of 'platinum black.' It may be the new tip you want."

"Certainly, sir. But do you mind giving me a hint as to what 'platinum black' is?"

"It is a chemical that has the remarkable property of igniting hydrogen or coal gas by mere contact," replied Carrados. "Think how useful that may be if you haven't got a match!"

To mark the happy occasion Mr. Carlyle had insisted on taking his friend off to witness a popular musical comedy. Carrados had a few preparations to make, a few accessories to procure for the night's work, but the whole business had come within the compass of an hour and the theatre spanned the interval between dinner at the Palm Tree and the time when they left the car at the appointed meeting-place. Mr. Trigget was already there, in an irreproachable state of normal dejection. Parkinson accompanied the party, bringing with him the baggage of the expedition.

"Anything going on, Trigget?" inquired Mr. Carlyle.

"I've made a turn round the place, sir, and the light was on," was the reply. "I didn't go up for fear of disturbing the conditions before you saw them. That was about ten minutes ago. Are you going into the yard to look again? I have all the keys, of course."

"Do we, Max?" queried Mr. Carlyle.

"Mr. Trigget might. We need not all go. He can catch us up again."

He caught them up again before they had reached the outer door.

"It's still on, sir," he reported.

"Do we use any special caution, Max?" asked Carlyle.

"Oh, no. Just as though we were friends of the ghost, calling in the ordinary way."

Trigget, who retained the keys, preceded the party up the stairs till the top was reached. He stood a moment at the door of No. 11 examining, by the light of the electric lamp he carried, his private marks there and pointing out to the others in a whisper that they had not been tampered with. All at once a most dismal wail, lingering, piercing, and ending in something like a sob that died away because the life that gave it utterance had died with it, drawled forebodingly through the echoing emptiness of the deserted flat. Trigget had just snapped off his light and in the darkness a startled exclamation sprang from Mr. Carlyle's lips.

"It's all right, sir," said the little man, with a private satisfaction that he had the diplomacy to conceal. "Bit creepy, isn't it? Especially when you hear it by yourself up here for the first time. It's only the end of the bath-water running out."

He had opened the door and was conducting them to the room at the end of the passage. A faint aurora had been visible from that direction when they first entered the hall, but it was cut off before they could identify its source.

"That's what happens," muttered Trigget.

He threw open the bedroom door without waiting to examine his marks there and they crowded into the tiny chamber. Under the beams of the lamps they carried it was brilliantly though erratically illuminated. All turned towards the central object of their quest, a tarnished gas-bracket of the plainest description. A few inches above it hung the metal disc that Trigget had alluded to, for the ceiling was low and at that point it was brought even nearer to the gas by corresponding with the slant of the roof outside.

With the prescience so habitual with him that it had ceased to cause remark among his associates Carrados walked straight to the gas-bracket and touched the burner.

"Still warm," he remarked. "And so are we getting now. A thoroughly material ghost, you perceive, Louis."

"But still turned off, don't you see, Mr. Carrados, sir," put in Trigget eagerly. "And yet no one's passed out."

"Still turned off—and still turned on," commented the blind man.

"What do you mean, Max?"

"The small screwdriver, Parkinson," requested Carrados.

"Well, upon my word!" dropped Mr. Carlyle expressively. For in no longer time than it takes to record the fact Max Carrados had removed a screw and then knocked out the tap. He held it up towards them and they all at once saw that so much of the metal had been filed away that the gas passed through no matter how the tap stood. "How on earth did you know of that?"

"Because it wasn't practicable to do the thing in any other way. Now unhook the shade, Parkinson—carefully."

The warning was not altogether unnecessary, for the man had to stand on tiptoes before he could comply. Carrados received the dingy metal cone and lightly touched its inner surface.

"Ah, here, at the apex, to be sure," he remarked. "The gas is bound to get there. And there, Louis, you have an ever-lit and yet a truly 'safety' match—so far as gas is concerned. You can buy the thing for a shilling, I believe."

Mr. Carlyle was examining the tiny apparatus with interest. So small that it might have passed for the mummy of a midget hanging from a cobweb, it appeared to consist of an insignificant black pellet and an inch of the finest wire.

"Um, I've never heard of it. And this will really light the gas?"

"As often as you like. That is the whole bag of tricks."

Mr. Carlyle turned a censorious eye upon his lieutenant, but Trigget was equal to the occasion and met it without embarrassment.

"I hadn't heard of it either, sir," he remarked conversationally.

"Gracious, what won't they be getting out next, Mr. Carlyle!"

"Now for the mystery of the water." Carrados was finding his way to the bathroom and they followed him down the passage and across the hall. "In its way I think that this is really more ingenious than the gas, for, as Mr. Trigget has proved for us, the water does not come from the cistern. The taps, you perceive, are absolutely dry."

"It is forced up?" suggested Mr. Carlyle, nodding towards the outlet.

"That is the obvious alternative. We will test it presently." The blind man was down on his hands and knees following the lines of the different pipes. "Two degrees more cold are not conclusive, because in any case the water has gone out that way. Mr. Trigget, you know the ropes, will you be so obliging as to go up to the cistern and turn the water on."

"I shall need a ladder, sir."

"Parkinson."

"We have a folding ladder out here," said Parkinson, touching Mr. Trigget's arm.

"One moment," interposed Carrados, rising from his investigation among the pipes; "this requires some care. I want you to do it without making a sound or showing a light, if that is possible. Parkinson will help you. Wait until you hear us raising a diversion at the other end of the flat. Come, Louis."

The diversion took the form of tapping the wall and skirting-board in the other haunted room. When Trigget presented himself to report that the water was now on Carrados put him to continue the singular exercise with Mr. Carlyle while he himself slipped back to the bathroom.

"The pump, Parkinson," he commanded in a brisk whisper to his man, who was waiting in the hall.

The appliance was not unlike a powerful tyre pump with some modifications. One tube from it was quickly fitted to the outlet pipe of the bath, another trailed a loose end into the bath itself, ready to take up the water. There were a few other details, the work of moments. Then Carrados turned on the tap, silencing the inflow by the attachment of a short length of rubber tube. When the water had risen a few inches he slipped off to the other room, told his rather mystified confederates there that he wanted a little more noise and bustle put into their performance, and was back again in the bathroom.

"Now, Parkinson," he directed, and turned off the tap. There was about a foot of water in the bath.

Parkinson stood on the broad base of the pump and tried to drive down the handle. It scarcely moved.

"Harder," urged Carrados, interpreting every detail of sound with perfect accuracy.

Parkinson set his teeth and lunged again. Again he seemed to come up against a solid wall of resistance.

"Keep trying; something must give," said his master encouragingly. "Here, let me——" He threw his weight into the balance and for a moment they hung like a group poised before action. Then, somewhere, something did give and the sheathing plunger "drew."

"Now like blazes till the bath is empty. Then you can tell the others to stop hammering." Parkinson, looking round to acquiesce,

found himself alone, for with silent step and quickened senses Carrados was already passing down the dark flights of the broad stone stairway.

It was perhaps three minutes later when an excited gentleman in the state of disrobement that is tacitly regarded as falling upon the *punctum cæcum* in times of fire, flood, and nocturnal emergency shot out of the door of No. 7 and bounding up the intervening flights of steps pounded with the knocker on the door of No. 9. As someone did not appear with the instantaneity of a jack-in-the-box, he proceeded to repeat the summons, interspersing it with an occasional "I say!" shouted through the letter-box.

The light above the door made it unconvincing to affect that no one was at home. The gentleman at the door trumpeted the fact through his channel of communication and demanded instant attention. So immersed was he with his own grievance, in fact, that he failed to notice the approach of someone on the other side, and the sudden opening of the door, when it did take place, surprised him on his knees at his neighbour's doorstep, a large and consequential-looking personage as revealed in the light from the hall, wearing the silk hat that he had instinctively snatched up, but with his braces hanging down.

"Mr. Tupworth of No. 7, isn't it?" quickly interposed the new man before his visitor could speak. "But why this—homage? Permit me to raise you, sir."

"Confound it all," snorted Mr. Tupworthy indignantly, "you're flooding my flat. The water's coming through my bathroom ceiling in bucketfuls. The plaster'll fall next. Can't you stop it. Has a pipe burst or something?"

"Something, I imagine," replied No. 9 with serene detachment. "At all events it appears to be over now."

"So I should hope," was the irate retort. "It's bad enough as it is. I shall go round to the office and complain. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Belting: these mansions are becoming a pandemonium, sir, a veritable pandemonium."

"Capital idea; we'll go together and complain: two will be more effective," suggested Mr. Belting. "But not to-night, Mr. Tupworthy. We should not find anyone there. The office will be closed. Say to-morrow——"

"I had no intention of anything so preposterous as going there to-night. I am in no condition to go. If I don't get my feet into hot water at once I shall be laid up with a severe cold. Doubtless

you haven't noticed it, but I am wet through to the skin, saturated, sir."

Mr. Belting shook his head sagely.

"Always a mistake to try to stop water coming through the ceiling," he remarked. "It will come, you know. Finds its own level and all that."

"I did not try to stop it—at least not voluntarily. A temporary emergency necessitated a slight rearrangement of our accommodation. I—I tell you this in confidence—I was sleeping in the bathroom."

At the revelation of so notable a catastrophe Mr. Belting actually seemed to stagger. Possibly his eyes filled with tears; certainly he had to turn and wipe away his emotion before he could proceed.

"Not—not right under it?" he whispered.

"I imagine so," replied Mr. Tupworthy. "I do not conceive that I could have been placed more centrally. I received the full cataract in the region of the ear. Well, if I may rely on you that it has stopped, I will terminate our interview for the present."

"Good-night," responded the still tremulous Belting. "Good-night—or good-morning, to be exact." He waited with the door open to light the first flight of stairs for Mr. Tupworthy's descent. Before the door was closed another figure stepped down quietly from the obscurity of the steps leading upwards.

"Mr. Belting, I believe?" said the stranger. "My name is Carrados. I have been looking over the flat above. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"What, Mr. Max Carrados?"

"The same," smiled the owner of the name.

"Come in, Mr. Carrados," exclaimed Belting, not only without embarrassment, but with positive affection in his voice. "Come in by all means. I've heard of you more than once. Delighted to meet you. This way. I know—I know." He put a hand on his guest's arm and insisted on steering his course until he deposited him in an easy-chair before a fire. "This looks like being a great night. What will you have?"

Carrados put the suggestion aside and raised a corner of the situation.

"I'm afraid that I don't come altogether as a friend," he hinted.

"It's no good," replied his host. "I can't regard you in any

other light after this. You heard Tupworthy? But you haven't seen the man, Mr. Carrados. I know—I've heard—but no wealth of the imagination can ever really quite reconstruct Tupworthy, the shoddy magnifico, in his immense porcine complacency, his monumental self-importance. And sleeping right underneath! Gods, but we have lived to-night! Why—why ever did you stop?"

"You associate me with this business?"

"Associate you! My dear Mr. Carrados, I give you the full glorious credit for the one entirely successful piece of low comedy humour in real life that I have ever encountered. Indeed, in a legal and pecuniary sense, I hold you absolutely responsible."

"Oh!" exclaimed Carrados, beginning to laugh quietly. Then he continued: "I think that I shall come through that all right. I shall refer you to Mr. Carlyle, the private inquiry agent, and he will doubtless pass you on to your landlord, for whom he is acting, and I imagine that he in turn will throw all the responsibility on the ingenious gentleman who has put them to so much trouble. Can you guess the result of my investigation in the flat above?"

"Guess, Mr. Carrados? I don't need to guess: I *know*. You don't suppose I thought for a moment that such transparent devices as two intercepted pipes and an automatic gas-lighter would impose on a man of intelligence? They were only contrived to mystify the credulous imagination of clerks and porters."

"You admit it, then?"

"Admit! Good gracious, of course I admit it, Mr. Carrados. What's the use of denying it?"

"Precisely. I am glad you see that. And yet you seem far from being a mere practical joker. Does your confidence extend to the length of letting me into your object?"

"Between ourselves," replied Mr. Belting, "I haven't the least objection. But I wish that you would have—say a cup of coffee. Mrs. Belting is still up, I believe. She would be charmed to have the opportunity—No? Well, just as you like. Now, my object? You must understand, Mr. Carrados, that I am a man of sufficient leisure and adequate means for the small position we maintain. But I am not unoccupied—not idle. On the contrary, I am always busy. I don't approve of any man passing his time aimlessly. I have a number of interests in life—hobbies, if you like. You should appreciate that, as you are a private criminologist. I am—among other things which don't concern us now—

a private retributionist. On every side people are becoming far too careless and negligent. An era of irresponsibility has set in. Nobody troubles to keep his word, to carry out literally his undertakings. In my small way I try to set that right by showing them the logical development of their ways. I am, in fact, the sworn enemy of anything approaching sloppiness. You smile at that?"

"It is a point of view," replied Carrados. "I was wondering how the phrase at this moment would convey itself, say, to Mr. Tupworthy's ear."

Mr. Belting doubled up.

"But don't remind me of Tupworthy or I can't get on," he said. "In my method I follow the system of Herbert Spencer towards children. Of course you are familiar with his treatise on 'Education'? If a rough boy persists, after warnings, in tearing or soiling all his clothes, don't scold him for what, after all, is only a natural and healthy instinct overdone. But equally, of course, don't punish yourself by buying him other clothes. When the time comes for the children to be taken to an entertainment little Tommy cannot go with them. It would not be seemly, and he is too ashamed, to go in rags. He begins to see the force of practical logic. Very well. If a tradesman promises—promises explicitly—delivery of his goods by a certain time and he fails, he finds that he is then unable to leave them. I pay on delivery, by the way. If a man undertakes to make me an article like another—I am painstaking, Mr. Carrados: I point out at the time how exactly like I want it—and it is (as it generally is) on completion something quite different, I decline to be easy-going and to be put off with it. I take the simplest and most obvious instances; I could multiply indefinitely. It is, of course, frequently inconvenient to me, but it establishes a standard."

"I see that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Belting," remarked Carrados. "If most men were like you our national character would be undermined. People would have to behave properly."

"If most men were like me we should constitute an intolerable nuisance," replied Belting seriously. "A necessary reaction towards sloppiness would set in and find me at its head. I am always with minorities."

"And the case in point?"

"The present trouble centres round the kitchen sink. It is cracked and leaks. A trivial cause for so elaborate an outcome, you may say, but you will doubtless remember that two men

quarrelling once at a spring as to who should use it first involved half Europe in a war, and the whole tragedy of *Lear* sprang from a silly business round a word. I hadn't noticed the sink when we took this flat, but the landlord had solemnly sworn to do everything that was necessary. Is a new sink necessary to replace a cracked one? Obviously. Well, you know what landlords are: possibly you are one yourself. They promise you heaven until you have signed the agreement and then they tell you to go to hell. Suggested that we'd probably broken the sink ourselves and would certainly be looked to to replace it. An excellent servant caught a cold standing in the drip and left. Was I to be driven into paying for a new sink myself? Very well, I thought, if the reasonable complaint of one tenant is nothing to you, see how you like the unreasonable complaints of fifty. The method served a useful purpose too. When Mrs. Belting heard that old tale about the tragedy at No. 11 she was terribly upset; vowed that she couldn't stay alone in here at night on any consideration.

"My dear," I said, "don't worry yourself about ghosts. I'll make as good a one as ever lived, and then when you see how it takes other people in, just remember next time you hear of another that someone's pulling the string." And I really don't think that she'll ever be afraid of ghosts again."

"Thank you," said Carrados, rising. "Altogether I have spent a very entertaining evening, Mr. Belting. I hope your retaliatory method won't get you into serious trouble this time."

"Why should it?" demanded Belting quickly.

"Oh, well, tenants are complaining, the property is being depreciated. The landlord may think that he has legal redress against you."

"But surely I am at liberty to light the gas or use the bath in my own flat when and how I like?"

A curious look had come into Mr. Belting's smiling face; a curious note must have sounded in his voice. Carrados was warned and, being warned, guessed.

"You are a wonderful man," he said with upraised hand. "I capitulate. Tell me how it is, won't you?"

"I knew the man at No. 11. His tenancy isn't really up till March, but he got an appointment in the north and had to go. His two unexpired months weren't worth troubling about, so I got him to sublet the flat to me—all quite regularly—for a nominal consideration, and not to mention it."

"But he gave up the keys?"

"No. He left them in the door and the porter took them away. Very unwarrantable of him; surely I can keep my keys where I like? However, as I had another. . . . Really, Mr. Carrados, you hardly imagine that unless I had an absolute right to be there I should penetrate into a flat, tamper with the gas and water, knock the place about, tramp up and down——"

"I go," said Carrados, "to get our people out in haste. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Carrados. It's been a great privilege to meet you. Sorry I can't persuade you . . ."

F. A. M. Webster

THE SECRET OF THE SINGULAR CIPHER

from OLD EBBIE RETURNS

Chapman & Hall, 1925

"Modern murders are merely disgusting." The exclamation burst involuntarily from my lips, as I threw down the morning paper. I had been reading the account of a more than usually revolting case, in which the murderer, a married man, had killed a wretched girl, who had trusted to him and whose condition would have made it awkward for him to face the consequences of their infatuation without breaking up his normal home life.

Old Ebbie regarded me with a quizzical smile. It was evident that he had already studied the column which had attracted my interest.

"I fancy that case cuts deeper than you imagine," he said. "Later on it will undoubtedly transpire that the man was in financial difficulties and had exhausted the resources of the girl he killed. You may remember that he was already in touch with another young woman, who had money of her own, even before he had disposed of the body of his first victim."

"All that you say may be perfectly true," I argued, "but it

does not alter the fact that those elements of mystery and unexpected motive, such as came to light in the case of *The Man Who Sold Jewels*, have been lacking from the affairs which have come our way of late."

Before my companion could answer, the telephone bell rang sharply from the hall. A moment later Jenkin entered the room.

"Inspector Wilson would like to speak to you on the telephone, sir."

Old Ebbie's smile broadened as he left the room.

"Get your hat and coat, Hicks," he called presently ; "there's a job for us in Mayfair."

At the entrance to Bulstrode Mansions a big constable received us.

"The inspector will be pleased if you will go up to No. 16, gentlemen," he said.

We found our old friend Wilson seated at a small table in the dining-room, tapping his teeth with the butt end of his pencil and staring at a queer assortment of odds and ends. A note-book was open before him. In the corner of the room was a sinister-looking shape covered with a sheet. A number of playing-cards were scattered across the dinner-table, and there was an empty glass beside a half-empty decanter of whisky.

"Good of you to come along so promptly," he greeted us. "I was just cataloguing the contents of the dead man's pockets."

"Anything interesting?" queried Old Ebbie.

"Oh, I don't know. At first sight the whole case looks clear enough. And yet there are one or two unusual features. The tenant of this flat is a fellow called Gilmour; he seems to have arrived from abroad a few months back, but nothing whatever is known of his antecedents or present business in England. Judging from his name, I should say the dead man, Christiernsson, was a Swede."

"If you know his name the Swedish Consulate ought to be able to help you."

"Yes, if Christiernsson really is his name."

"Why the doubt?"

Wilson stroked his chin reflectively. "Well, you see, the tenant of No. 17, across the landing, who called himself Humphries, committed suicide a week ago with a shot-gun; which, it is true, rendered his face pretty well unrecognisable, and now a dead man, who has not been dead more than twelve hours, turns up here in Gilmour's flat with a knife struck through his heart."

"But why the confusion about the names?" asked Ebbie.

"The caretaker is prepared to swear that the man over there under the sheet is Humphries, but just take a look at his visiting-cards."

He picked up a small silver card-case from among the odds and ends on the table and handed it to Ebbie. Each card bore the fantastic inscription, "Linka Dobrowolski Christiernsson." Old Ebbie slipped one into his pocket before handing back the card-case.

"Well, let me hear your theory," he said.

The inspector indicated the whole room with a comprehensive gesture of his hand.

"You see the playing-cards," he said, "the empty glass and the half-empty decanter, the contents of which I will have analysed as soon as possible. Doesn't it occur to you that Gilmour lured Humphries, or Christiernsson, or whatever his name was, here, fleeced him—perhaps drugged him—and then made an end of him?"

"Humph, and where is the man with the many names supposed to have hidden himself during the week that has gone?"

"Ah, there you have me!" admitted Wilson.

"I rather thought as much," smiled Ebbie. "Well, let's have a look round the place, anyway."

"But won't you examine the dead man first?"

"No, I'd rather sense the atmosphere before I see the victim."

For the best part of half an hour Ebbie prowled about the flat. He looked into linen-baskets and drawers, examined bedding and furniture, and paid particular attention to the larder and kitchen. From time to time he shot out a trite sentence.

"Now why the deuce should a man use four sets of pyjamas and two pairs of sheets in a week?" he ejaculated, as he peered from the full linen-basket to the open laundry-book he had taken from a hook on the kitchen dresser. Or, again, "Doesn't it strike you, Wilson, that someone has been searching pretty hard for something in this flat? Surely Gilmour wouldn't be put to the necessity of ransacking his own place so thoroughly?"

"That's as may be," replied Wilson bluntly; "the fact remains that Gilmour has bolted."

"And since he is not here to excuse himself, he must, *ipso facto*, be held to accuse himself, eh?"

Ebbie crossed the room and pulled back the sheet which

covered the body. The countenance was serenely calm and there was not the slightest sign that a struggle had taken place. Ebbie opened the man's coat, vest, and shirt and scrutinised the wound.

"Whoever did this deed held the knife flat on the palm of his hand and thrust it forward," he said. "Englishmen never use a knife that way and seldom kill a man in cold blood with steel; any criminologist will tell you that."

He examined the dead man's features with close attention.

"This fellow," he said, "was neither Tcheco-Slovakian, Pole, nor Swede."

"Why the mix-up of nationalities?" asked Wilson.

Ebbie brought the visiting-card out of his pocket.

"All these three names are surnames," he said. "Linka is Tcheco-Slovakian, Dobrowolski is Polish, and, as you yourself pointed out, Christiernsson is Swedish. Now let us see if we can find what the murderer wanted so badly and which we can only hope he failed to secure."

Through and through that flat we hunted, long after the body had been removed. When every possible hiding place had been exhausted Old Ebbie turned his attention to the very food in the larder and there, in the centre of a loaf of bread which I would have sworn had never been tampered with, he discovered a tiny note-book. It was filled with a jumble of apparently incoherent phrases and meaningless words.

Wilson, after one glance through the pages, made no objection to Ebbie taking charge of the book for the time being.

Twice during that night I awakened and went through into the dining-room of our flat in Victoria. My comrade was still seated at the table, the little note-book, a pencil and writing-pad were before him and all the floor was littered with sheets of paper, upon which he had inscribed figures and characters which to me appeared to have no meaning.

Once he looked up and spoke to me.

"I reckon Humphries, or whatever his name was, knew that he was near his end when he hid his note-book in the loaf," he said, "and the careful way he did it proves that he wasn't hurried. I've been all night working on every sort of possible and impossible cipher. I fancy this case would come a whole lot clearer if we could understand what is written in the pages of this note-book."

"Perhaps Humphries had a drink and played patience with those cards we saw on the table, to help keep his nerves steady, while he waited," I suggested.

Ebbie turned that over in his mind for some moments before he spoke.

"No, I don't think Humphries drank the whisky," he said, at last ; "but you've set me thinking about those cards. Did you notice there were no ash-trays on the table and no tobacco ash on the carpet or in the hearth ? There was a cigarette-case in the dead man's pocket, and his nicotine-stained fingers testify that he was a heavy smoker. I fancy he'd have smoked had he played cards with Gilmour, or even by himself."

At breakfast-time Wilson arrived.

"By gad, Mr. Entwistle," he exclaimed ; "this business is getting devilish deep and sinister. We have traced Gilmour to Paddington ; he left there, dressed in rough clothing, by the five o'clock train yesterday morning. Last night he hid in a Portsmouth doss-house. When the police went there this morning, they learned that there had been a most unholy fight in the night, and that the man who had shared Gilmour's room was dead ; they thought it was Gilmour at first ; because, by some chance, he had changed beds with the other fellow, who was knifed."

"That strikes me as being very significant," said Old Ebbie. "And what became of Gilmour ?"

"He's vanished again. We don't think he could have got aboard a ship, but a motor-cycle has been stolen, and we are hoping to catch him somewhere out on the open moors."

"I'd dearly like a few words with him when he does turn up," said Old Ebbie. "In the meantime, I think you are barking up the wrong tree, Wilson, if you imagine that Gilmour did the murder. Everything I have seen so far points to the fact that he had probably given Humphries, *alias* Christiernsson, shelter since the night upon which the former is supposed to have committed suicide."

"But why on earth should the man wish to practise such a deception ?" I interrupted.

"I fancy friend Humphries was pretty hard pressed ; he probably had a secret that certain people were anxious to prevent him from passing on. Of course, the suicide would provide a perfect blind. No doubt he hoped that his persecutors would believe they had scared him into doing it."

"But surely it would be very difficult to arrange?"

"Difficult, yes, but not impossible. Have you forgotten the Bouverie Case, and our visit to the Surrey side of the Thames? I showed you then how easily a dead body can be procured, if you know how to go about it."

"Come out into the open, Mr. Entwistle," invited the inspector. "What's at the back of your mind?"

"I hate to theorise," Old Ebbie answered, "but, for once in a way, I'm willing to humour you. My own feeling is that Humphries, or Christiernsson, was up against some secret force, and that, having arranged his own apparent death, he either went to Gilmour for shelter, or the latter stumbled into the business and offered him protection, or at any rate a hiding place. Gilmour, of course, continued to go out and about in the normal way, while his strange guest lay hid. One night, I fancy, Gilmour came home to his flat and found Humphries dead on the floor, and evident signs that the whole place had been pretty thoroughly searched. He must then have found himself in a remarkably awkward situation. He would see at once that, with all due deference to you, Wilson, no C.I.D. man would believe his fantastic story. He may, therefore, have cleared out to avoid arrest. On the other hand, I have a sort of feeling that he probably knew something of the causes that led up to Humphries' murder, and he would, equally of course, appreciate how dangerous was the knowledge he had acquired."

"And those playing-cards on the table, and the empty whisky glass?"

"I fancy Gilmour would have needed a peg to steady his nerves after the shock of finding the dead body; but I frankly admit that I do not at present see the significance of the cards scattered all over the table. I'm certain someone left them there for a specific purpose. What that purpose was we should probably know if we could find the key to the pages of that little note-book that was hidden in the loaf of bread."

Wilson hesitated a moment.

"I'm bound to admit," he said, "that the bottom has rather fallen out of the fleecing theory. I've got on to Gilmour's bankers, through the owners of Bulstrode Mansions, and it seems that he is, comparatively speaking, a rich man."

"Good," answered Ebbie. "By the way, can you furnish me with a photograph of Humphries?"

"A post-mortem one," said Wilson ; "we had it taken to compare with others in the Black Museum."

"And you could not find its counterpart, eh ? "

"No ; neither his features nor his finger-prints are recorded with us."

"Let me have a copy of the portrait," said Ebbie, "perhaps I may have better luck."

When the picture came he studied it for a long time.

"You'd hardly believe that chap was dead," he said at last. "Just look at those eyes, Hicks. Is it only my imagination, or is there in them the light of the certain knowledge of success ? By heavens, there's something about this little fellow's face that appeals enormously to me."

Next morning, as we walked down to the Foreign Office, my companion dropped his hand on my arm.

"We're going to try a very long shot in the dark, my friend," he said ; "but, as you ought to know by this time, no chance is so small that one can afford to overlook it. I was up at Bulstrode Mansions again last night ; the porter tells me some queer, foreign-looking customers have been trying to get permission to look over Gilmour's flat, and he is half inclined to think that an attempt was made to force the lock yesterday afternoon when he was off duty."

At the Foreign Office Lord Arlen of Ashurst granted us an immediate interview. He listened attentively to all that Old Ebbie had to say, then touched a bell.

"This is a bit out of my depth, Mr. Entwistle," he said, as we waited ; "but I fancy the Permanent Secretary will be very glad to have a chat with you."

Sir Claude Ducane made no effort to conceal his interest. At the sight of the photograph which Ebbie laid down on the table a gasp escaped him.

"This man was one of the best of our Secret Service agents," he said. "You say he is dead ? We had lost sight of him for months. His one bad fault was that he would always work alone. More often than not he found things out, but he never let us have a hint of what was going on until he had the whole thing cut and dried and ready to place before us complete in every detail. God alone knows what he was after this time ; but, as you say, I very much doubt if Gilmour killed him."

"Do you happen to have the key to the cipher he used, Sir Claude ? "

"No, that was another of his mysteries. He absolutely refused to employ any of the conventional ciphers, or to give us the key to the one he had himself invented."

"But surely he must have foreseen the possibility of just such a tragedy as has occurred?"

"He most certainly did. In fact, he told me more than once that if ever he was caught out before he could communicate with us he would leave a hint, that any clever man could read, as to the key to the cipher. But why do you ask?"

Old Ebbie produced the little note-book and laid it on the table beside the photograph. For a while the Permanent Secretary turned over the pages before handing the book back with a hopeless gesture.

"I can make absolutely nothing of it," he said.

That night, as Old Ebbie sat poring over the pages of the note-book, and covering sheet after sheet of notepaper with figures, I suddenly interrupted him.

"Do you know, Ebbie," I said, "I can't get out of my mind the picture of that poor devil sitting there in the silent flat, terrified to go outside to meet his fate, but yet man enough to play a game of patience while death stole nearer to him step by step."

"How the devil do you know he did play patience?" asked Old Ebbie, thoroughly irritated by my thoughtless interruption of his work.

"Well, what on earth else did he put the cards on the table for?" I answered with equal acerbity.

Old Ebbie got slowly to his feet, staring at me with fascinated eyes.

"What else did he put the cards on the table for?" he repeated very slowly, and his hand stole up to his waistcoat pocket, from which he withdrew Christiernsson's visiting-card. "Lord, what a blind fool I've been! And now, for goodness sake, Hicks, stop chattering. I've got some hard thinking and ciphering to do."

Upon this very pointed hint I left him and took myself off to bed. About four o'clock in the morning he awakened me. By the light of the candle he carried I saw that his eyes were blazing with excitement.

"Come into the dining-room," he said eagerly. "I've just about got this business straightened out at last."

"Do you mean that you've found the key to the cipher?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, I think you found it," he answered ; " but I've worked it out. You kept on harping on about the playing-cards on the table, and that set me thinking of the visiting-cards in the silver case. I remembered what Sir Claude had told us about Humphries having promised to leave a clue that a clever man could follow ; but, somehow, I couldn't envisage your picture of the poor chap playing patience. Then, again, the three names on the visiting-card neither hung together, because they are all surnames belonging to different nationalities, nor seemed to fit the dead man. We knew, indeed, from Sir Claude that they were not his. I began to wonder if they were the key to the cipher. It looked likely, but the letters in those three names number thirty, and there are only twenty-six letters in the English alphabet. On the other hand, it did not appear likely that so subtle a fellow as the dead Humphries would be satisfied with a simple, corresponding alphabetical-numerical cipher.

"For hours on end I puzzled over the orthographical aspect of the business. I was pretty well sure that the grammar of letters wasn't going to help me very much ; so I turned my attention to the grammar of sounds. It struck me quite suddenly that the vowels are five in number, and the consonants twenty-five, the latter divided roughly into eleven mutes and fourteen spirants. If you look at this paper, you will see how I have set out the three names which are engraved on the visiting card.

L — a	D — g	C — y
I — e	O — j	H — zh
N — i	B — d	R — z
K — o	R — b	I — th (as in bathe)
A — u	O — k	S — v
	W — ch (as in	T — w
	O — t church)	I — h
	L — p	E — sh
	S — ng	R — s
	K — n	N — th (as in bath)
	I — m	S — f
		S — wh
		O — r
		N — l

"It took a bit of working out, but finally I got at it by grading the mutes into flat, sharp, and nasal sounds, and the spirants into

flat, sharp, and trilled sounds. Even so, deciphering the writing in the note-book was a terrible job, because the same letters occur several times in the code words ; but the difficulty was not insuperable, only laborious ; one had to leave blanks and try all possible corresponding letters to get the complete words."

So far his keen eyes had shone with the artist's joy of accomplishment, but now they took on a haunted, desperate look.

"The Bolsheviks are at the back of this business, Hicks," he said. "There is a plot to wreck the big power station at Alton Heath, thereby creating more unemployment and stirring up further trouble among the labouring classes. There is also mention of a plan to dispose of the people's leader, in such a way that it must inevitably appear that the assassination was planned in a high quarter.

"You may quite well argue that the plant and the man can be protected, and that, in any case, no one would believe that MacReady had been deliberately put out of the way at the instigation of the leaders of the accredited government ; but the notes make no mention of the dates upon which these tragedies are to occur. Nor is there any indication of the names or whereabouts of the real conspirators. We may save the power station and MacReady, but what guarantee is there that, even if we prevent these disasters, more serious measures will not be taken against us ?"

"Yes, I see all that," I answered, "and you will, of course, hand over this information to Scotland Yard and the Foreign Office ; but it still does not account for the disappearance of Gilmour."

"No," agreed Old Ebbie. "I'm very anxious to meet that young gentleman. I fancy he must be a pretty far-seeing sort of person. He may, as I suggested to Wilson, have bolted in a panic when he realised that, firstly, no police official would believe what, on the face of it, must have appeared a highly improbable story, and, secondly, he undoubtedly shared some of the dead Secret Service man's knowledge. He would, therefore, be well aware that his life is in danger at the hands of the men who did not hesitate to kill Humphries and who, I shrewdly suspect, tried to do away with Gilmour himself in the Portsmouth doss-house to which he fled.

"If we can find Gilmour I rather fancy we shall get those missing dates we want ; and it's just possible he may be able also to tell

us something about the people who are at the back of this hellish plot. Anyway, we'll lodge such information as we have in the right quarters and then get down to Portsmouth. We may be able to pick up his trail. If my deductions are correct he will not have left the country."

The owner of the Portsmouth doss-house turned out to be an old chanty man, who had sailed the Seven Seas when wind-jammers were in fashion ; and a very shrewd old fellow he proved himself to be.

"The man who was here the night of the big fight, when Jake was killed ; what sort of a man was he, you ask ? Well, I'd say just an or'nary sailorman, sir. A gentleman ? No, not by any manner of means ; just an or'nary fo'castle sort of fellow, such as I've sailed with hundreds an' hundreds o' voyages."

"Humph," growled Old Ebbie, "we're up against a pretty tough proposition. I'll bet you this chap Gilmour knows all about camouflage and has hunted big game more than half his life. According to what that old sailorman said he hasn't bothered to change his appearance, only his circumstances. He's literally faded into his new atmosphere, just as a wild creature fades into its natural background. If we do find him you'll see that he is not playing his assumed part, he'll be actually living it. Do you see what I mean ? The real secret of disguise is not make-up or anything of that sort, but the ability to convince yourself that you actually are, for the time being, what you wish other people to take you for. This chap won't slip up anywhere, and I can tell you that it is going to be devilish hard to find him. Personally I'm going to keep my eyes skinned for the opposition, they probably know more than we do and may lead us to our man."

For the next week we hung around Portsmouth, hired a motor-car and journeyed farther afield ; but had no luck at all. Then, by a strange chance, we heard of some curious happenings over Devon way. The whole story was so unusual that a local correspondent had sent it up to one of the London papers, and the editor had given it a paragraph and a catchy headline.

It appeared that a tramp had come to the back door of a moorland farm and had begged a night's shelter. He had, however, offered to pay for his supper. The farmer was away from home, but his wife had given the man a jug of cider, half a loaf and some cheese, and had told him that he might sleep in an empty hay-loft. Half-way through the night the woman was awakened by a

terrific explosion and had rushed to the window to discover the barn where the tramp had slept going up to the sky in lurid flames.

"It's another long shot," said Old Ebbie, as he handed me the paper, "but that reads to me remarkably as though our man had transferred himself to Devonshire."

The car we were using was a big, powerful Bentley, which would make short work of the distance. Before we started Ebbie sent a wire to Wilson.

At Moretonhampstead, close to the farm-house where the barn had been destroyed, it seemed to me that we were at last getting on to a fairly hot trail.

The landlord joined us in a glass of punch after supper and Old Ebbie handled him admirably.

"I see from the papers you've had quite a sensation in these parts," said my comrade.

"So a lot of volks seems to think," answered the old fellow, as he treated us to a shrewd stare.

"Um ! Half the town's been out to see the farm, I suppose," said Ebbie.

"Oh that, that's nuthin'. It's the likes of you vurriners that comes pryin' an' questionin' that we'm don't like," said the landlord.

"We're not asking questions, my good man," said Ebbie indifferently. "I happened to read about the explosion in the morning paper and naturally thought the matter, being of a purely local nature, would interest you."

"Aye, an' a lot of other volks besides, seemin'ly," grumbled the innkeeper. "Girt big car cooms here to-day and a rare vine lot of questions I did have to answer before I could satisfy the gentlemen. Real vurriners they was, I raickon, an' no Englishmen at all, by that same token."

"I think," said Old Ebbie to me, as we sought our rooms that night, "that we will go to the high beacons to-morrow morning, taking with us our field-glasses. I wonder what sort of a car our host's 'vurriners' were driving."

"That should be easy enough to ascertain," I answered, and so it proved.

Soon after dawn Old Ebbie roused me out, and long before breakfast time we were hidden on a high hill, with our own car safe from observation in a sheltered glen. Our glasses paralleled the landscape ; but for a long time no sign of human movement

was to be seen. Then suddenly we sighted a solitary man moving, as much in cover as possible, across the moorland. Presently a row of widely-separated figures, spaced for all the world like game-beaters, appeared above the horizon of a far ridge, approaching also in our direction.

Old Ebbie shut his glasses with a snap.

"If that is our man and he follows his present route," he said, "he will reach us before the hunt overtakes him."

For myself, I lay flat on my stomach, with the binoculars screwed to my eyes and an ever-increasing thrill of excitement running through me. At last Old Ebbie dropped his hand on my shoulder.

"Slip down and get the engine running," he said. "Turn the car round ready to break for the open road as soon as I've got Gilmour."

Another quarter of an hour passed before I heard them stumbling down the hillside towards me. At the same moment a shout rang out from the crest of the tor, followed quickly by the sharp whip of a revolver shot, but the range was extreme, and no whine of a passing bullet followed.

For a second the rough-looking fellow clad in home-spun hesitated.

"You've got to take us on trust, Mr. Gilmour," said Old Ebbie. "If you won't do that, then your attentive friends on the sky-line are bound to get you, and I fancy the information you have is going to be pretty badly needed at Scotland Yard."

With a weary gesture the man climbed into the back seat, followed by Ebbie, and I opened up my throttle. The great car leaped forward, just as the pursuit came pouring down the hill.

Next day we found ourselves once more in Sir Claude Ducane's luxurious office, where Inspector Wilson and the Permanent Secretary were eagerly awaiting us, but long before that Gilmour had told us his story.

"I got your wires, Mr. Entwistle," the inspector greeted us; "the second one set things buzzing, and we caught the whole bunch as they were making for the coast. Bolsheviks they were, and I fancy that what Mr. Gilmour is going to tell us will serve to keep them out of mischief for some time to come. Can you tell us, sir, who actually committed the murder at your flat?"

"I'm afraid not," Gilmour answered. "Mr. Entwistle has told me his theories, and all I can do is to confirm them. It is

true that I did shelter poor Humphries, but he told me very little of what was going on. I knew that he was in great danger ; I had, moreover, caught a glimpse of the ruffians who were hanging around the mansions, and I knew that some terrible thing was planned for the end of the month.

"When I came home that night and found Humphries dead, and myself likely to be arrested for his murder, I made up my mind to get on the track of those fellows and to find out what was going forward. I found their headquarters in the very heart of the most desolate part of Devon. I got the fullest sort of proofs necessary. Here they are." He threw a wallet on the table. "But when I tried to break back for London I found myself ringed in whichever way I tried to get out, and I'm convinced they'd have got me and settled me but for the luck of Mr. Entwistle being there to pull me out yesterday morning."

"Luck, eh?" muttered Wilson beneath his breath. "I only wish I'd got half his sort of luck!"

C. E. Bechhofer Roberts

THE ENGLISH FILTER

from THE STRAND MAGAZINE, 1926

I am unlikely ever to forget the visit that my friend, A. B. C. Hawkes, the scientist, and I paid to Rome. "A. B. C.," as I always call him, had let only one man know we were coming—his old acquaintance, Professor Castagni, the bacteriologist. We were astonished, therefore, to find at least a hundred people awaiting us at the station.

Castagni introduced many of them, a lengthy business, and I was amused to discover that his instinctive Italian love of pageantry had apparently caused him to marshal representatives of every branch of learning in the city. I found myself, for example, walking to the hotel with an elderly historian on one side, who knew a little French and less English, and delivered himself of an uninterrupted flow of words in both languages, while at the other car was a still older professor of philosophy who spoke only

Italian—of which tongue I am ignorant, although this did not seem to prevent his addressing me in it.

Hawkes, in the inevitable grey frock-coat and sponge-bag trousers, with a rose in his buttonhole, was submerged in an excited crowd, from whom there arose a Babel of welcome and congratulation. Our arrival was a comic triumph.

The moment we reached our hotel, however, they all bowed, shook our hands, and withdrew.

"What a nerve-racking experience, A. B. C.," I commented, as my friend and I reached our rooms.

"And, of course, the one man I do want to meet wasn't there," Hawkes replied.

I asked who this was.

"Ribotta, the physicist," A. B. C. said. "He must be an old man now, and, I confess, I had never rated him very highly. But just lately he's published some really very remarkable papers on atomic magnetism. How he's managed to make up fifty years leeway in his work, I don't pretend to know. But that is what I've come to Rome to find out."

There was a tap at the door, and a young Italian entered.

"My name is Dorsi, Professor Castagni's assistant," he said in perfect English. "The professor wishes me to act as your guide here in Rome."

"That is most kind of you both," said Hawkes with assumed gratification. "But really, I mustn't trouble you."

"It is truly a pleasure. I appreciate the honour of coming into contact with so famous a man of science. Of course, if you wish to rest now after your journey, I will wait for you downstairs."

A. B. C. smiled resignedly.

"What my friend Johnstone and I really want," he said, "is an early lunch. I see it's just twelve—perhaps we may indulge our appetites. You will lunch with us, Mr. Dorsi, I trust?"

Our guest proved a sympathetic and intelligent young man. Educated partly in England, he had a sound knowledge of our language and tastes. I could see that Hawkes liked him as well as I did.

"Now, Mr. Dorsi," said A. B. C., as the waiter served the coffee and we lit our cigars. "You tell me that I may expect to be able to pay my formal call on Professor Castagni at three o'clock. Right! The only other visit I am anxious to make is to Professor Ribotta. His latest work interests me profoundly."

"That will be very simple," said Dorsi. "If you like, we can go there now—he is sure to be in his laboratory. And while you are there, gentlemen, I should advise you to talk to his assistant as well."

"You are trying to tell me something," remarked A. B. C., with a shrewd glance.

The Italian smiled.

"The facts are these, professor," he commenced.

"Holy Darwin! Don't call me 'professor'!" cried A. B. C. "Anything but that! The word suggests all the academic foibles I most detest—vanity, pedantry, untidiness, petty jealousies, and tyranny!"

"You must excuse this outburst, Mr. Dorsi," I laughed. "It is a form of address that always rouses his tempestuous nature."

Dorsi stole a humorous glance at the scientist's flaming red hair and smiled more broadly.

"Well, then, Mr. Hawkes," he began again—"That's better!" murmured A. B. C.)—"I am perhaps being indiscreet, but your time is too valuable to be wasted. Professor Ribotta—I emphasise the title in this case—is not responsible for the theories you speak of. He takes the credit for them, but it is due to his assistant, Mr. Lavorello. You know the stupid system we have in our Continental universities—promotion goes by seniority, and a position may be held for life, or at least to a very advanced age, by any old man who does not wish to retire on a pension. That is the case of Professor Ribotta. He holds a chair for which, however well he may have filled it thirty years ago, he is to-day quite unqualified. You will see this for yourselves. But Lavorello—ah, there is a young man of the first quality, an experimenter without rival in all Italy, a scientific genius."

"I have heard of such cases before," said A. B. C. "I shall make a point of getting into touch with him. Thank you for your friendly advice. Shall we be going?"

The three of us set out for Ribotta's laboratory, which we found in an old part of the city, near the Pantheon. The entrance was remote from the main portion of the institute, and Dorsi told us that it led to Ribotta's and his assistant's rooms only.

The porter inside took off his cap to us and led us into a small room which, Dorsi told me, was the preserve of the laboratory attendant. It was dark and confined; the remains of a meal lay

on the table and a couple of dirty overalls hung on a hook on the wall.

We stopped before another door, on which the porter knocked.

It was opened to us by Ribotta himself, to whom Dorsi swiftly explained who we were. The professor, an old man with a flowing beard and piercing eyes, then invited us to enter. He greeted A. B. C. effusively, led us to his desk, and motioned to us to sit down. He leaned forward in his chair, holding a hand to his ear.

"You speak not Italian, I think, Professor Hawkes?" he said in a broken English that I shall not attempt to reproduce exactly.

"You do? Well, no matter; I prefer to speak English. Oh, I am very fond of England. Forty years ago I was at Cambridge under your great professors." He mentioned some famous names.

"They taught me much—but I see you are too young to know them. I have not been in England since then, but I still have my great love for English things. I have many beautiful English things in my laboratory. I will call my assistant; he shall show them to you. Lalorello! Lalorello! Ah, he does not hear me. No matter, I will send the attendant to him. Carlo!" he called.

"That wretched attendant," the garrulous old man went on, "I cannot make him obey me. He attends only to Mr. Lalorello's work; he leaves my laboratory dirty. When he comes, he will hear from me. And now I will call my assistant myself."

He pounded on a door at the other side of the room. We heard a chair pushed back and the slamming of a door. Through an unglazed, barred window that gave on to a corridor—apparently the only ventilation of the room, for all the other windows were tightly closed—we saw a man pass.

Ribotta tittered. "You think it odd, perhaps," he said. "My assistant is in the next room, but he cannot come in through the connecting door. Ah, this is done on purpose. I do not want anybody to come into the room. So I locked that door twenty years ago, and it has remained locked ever since. He must come in the way you came, the only entrance. And that has a Yale lock, so that nobody can come in except myself and the attendant, unless I let them in myself. Only he and I have keys. Even the porter I never allow to enter. I want quiet, and in this way I get it. Ah, there must be Lalorello!"

He motioned to Dorsi, and our guide slipped across to unfasten the door. A young man entered, keen and dark, but very fleshy for his age—a point, we afterwards discovered, on which

he was rather sensitive. I looked at him with interest, for he was the brilliant youth whose work had brought Hawkes to Rome.

"Sit down, Lavorello, sit down," cried Ribotta. "But no, I want you to show my English guests the great things that have come here from their country. First give them a glass of water from my filter."

Without a word the young man went over to a large glass tank, uncovered at the top and with some kind of filter and tap attached. It was one of the most noticeable objects in the peculiarly bare room. He filled a glass from it and brought this to us. Ribotta held it under Hawkes's nose.

"Taste!" he said. "What beautiful clear water! Rome water is not good to drink, but out of my English filter—ah, then one may drink with pleasure and safety. Lavorello, empty this ash-tray and give me some matches!"

Expressionlessly Lavorello obeyed. Then Ribotta told him to get the cigars out of a drawer, and the old man offered them to A. B. C., Dorsi, and me—we refused them—and lit one of the rank things himself. He did not trouble to offer one to Lavorello, I noticed.

"Now you have seen the filter," he rattled on. "Next you must see the English microscope. Lavorello, bring the microscope and show it to Professor Hawkes."

It was, even as I could see, a very ordinary piece of laboratory apparatus, but the old man gloated over it as if it were a marvel.

"Very interesting indeed," murmured A. B. C.; "but have you any new results in your work on magnetism, sir?"

"No, I have not them here at the moment. I do not make the experiments myself these days; I leave them to the young men. Lavorello shall show you them in his laboratory. It is good work—I showed him how it should be done. The brains are mine; the hand is his. That is how it should be, is it not?"

For politeness' sake, we agreed.

"Do have another glass of water. Professor Hawkes. No? Ah, but it is good, thanks to my English filter. Your friend, then? Oh, you must! Lavorello, bring another glass of water! Quickly! If you drank more of this water, Lavorello, you would not be so fat! There is no water like this in Rome."

It tasted to me like any other water, but I thought it incumbent on me to express loud admiration.

"We must not take up any more of your time, sir," said Hawkes,

rising from his chair. "With your permission, we shall just glance at Mr. Lavorello's work, and then we must be going away."

"Delighted to have seen you, professor," said Ribotta, shaking our hands. "I am always glad to welcome foreign scientists to my laboratory, especially from England. Lavorello, you are to show these gentlemen your work—*our* work—so that they may see that we old men can still keep pace with the young. Ah, but first give me some more matches."

As we left the laboratory through the little ante-room, the attendant hurried in. He was, I noticed, a sinister-looking fellow, the sort of man one would instinctively avoid on a dark night. He went past us into the professor's room, the door of which he opened with his pass-key, and we heard the old man greet him with a storm of angry words.

The corridor led us round towards Lavorello's room. Dorsi in a whisper called my attention to the cupboards and bookcases that were placed against the doors leading to the rest of the building—another example of Ribotta's insistence upon isolation. As we passed the barred window, we saw the attendant standing by the desk, gazing at the professor with a malicious glance. The old man was shouting and gesticulating, but, as he heard us go by, he turned and waved.

We reached Lavorello's laboratory, the whole atmosphere of which was very different from the old professor's, and A. B. C. and he were soon bent in eager interest over note-books and curves, with an occasional reference to some proof-sheets that lay on the table.

They forgot all about Dorsi and myself. The subject was far beyond either of us and we passed the time chatting.

"It's pretty clear," Dorsi said, after a long and bitter attack upon the old man in the next room, "with whom Mr. Hawkes finds himself more at home."

I sympathised with his denunciation of Ribotta's selfishness, his ridiculous pride in the very ordinary filter and microscope, and his bullying treatment of Lavorello, but, as a stranger, I thought it best not to be drawn into the expression of an opinion, and I looked round for an opportunity to change the subject.

"Hallo," I said, thankfully, "here is something I do understand a little about."

I walked over to a cabinet in the corner of the room, in which were ranged objects that I recognised as Italian and Greek-Italian

antiques. There were coins and little statuettes and rings and toys and other trifles.

Lavorello happened to see us gazing at his collection. He smiled and unlocked the door of the cabinet.

"A hobby of mine," he said to me. "My country—I am a Sicilian, you know—is especially rich in such things."

"What are these?" asked Dorsi, pointing to some small white objects, which were familiar enough to me.

"Knucklebones," answered Lavorello, "with which I suppose our ancestors used to play. The queer glasses behind them are for another game, *cottabos*; and those square things on the same shelf are *tesseræ*, the counterparts of modern dice."

A. B. C. called him back to the papers and Dorsi and I discussed the customs of the ancients and their survivals in modern times.

It was a long time before Hawkes was ready to leave. Then the three of us took leave of Lavorello and tip-toed along the corridor so as not to attract Ribotta's attention, for we had no desire to be called in to hear another harangue. We glanced in through the barred opening, and saw him at his desk, with his beloved filter beyond him underneath the clock. Fortunately he was absorbed in a newspaper and did not notice us pass.

"Shades of Cavendish!" whispered A. B. C. "It's three o'clock already!"

We hurried past the porter's lodge, to whose occupant the laboratory attendant was declaiming fiercely.

"The attendant's opinion of Ribotta," A. B. C. said to me when we got outside, "is not much higher than our own, I'm afraid. If my knowledge of Italian, or at least of the Roman dialect, is not in error, he was expressing a wish that the old professor might be devoured by hungry wolves. He added that, if they or some similar agents of destiny did not perform this necessary action, he himself would have to attend to it. I must confess, after comparing Ribotta's and Lavorello's capacity, I have some sympathy with the attendant's desire."

"Lavorello is a good man, is he?" I said.

"First-rate," said my friend. "A brilliant, ingenious brain with a magnificent grasp of scientific possibilities! If he has a fault, it's a tendency to rush at conclusions, to go the short way to a result when a longer and more patient method would be more suitable. But he'll go far! It's a crying shame that he should be held back

by that old charlatan. And for the latter to steal the credit of Lavorello's researches is an insult to science."

For a moment Hawkes's round, good-natured face looked quite angry, but his usual smile soon reappeared.

We made a short call on Castagni, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the Forum. Not only did we visit the usual sights there, but, as honoured guests, we were invited to view various collections and excavations not open to the general public.

For once I was able to display more knowledge than Hawkes, and, to his mock awe, I traced resemblances between some of the exhibits and various specimens I had unearthed on the more successful of my archæological expeditions in England. A. B. C. was in his element, however, with some ancient scientific instruments, and his identification of their uses has now, I understand, been officially adopted. I learned from the director of the excavations that Lavorello had performed a similar service at the time of some earlier discoveries.

We were to meet Dorsi for dinner at the "Ulpia," which he recommended as the most picturesque restaurant in the city. We found it in an ancient basilica, whose curved brick walls, arching to the roof, made a curious and sombre background for the bright napery and electric lights. The blend of old and new—so typical of Rome—was carried down to the smallest details; the lamps, for example, were fixed in amphoræ of antique form, and the menu was rolled like an old parchment scroll. The place amused us, and we settled down patiently to await our guest.

An hour after the agreed time we despaired of his arrival and decided to begin. At ten o'clock, just as we were about to leave, he came in.

"Forgive my absence," he said, "but a terrible thing has happened. Professor Ribotta has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" I exclaimed.

"He was found poisoned in his laboratory this afternoon," Dorsi went on. A pallid smile flickered on his lips as he added, "The poison was apparently administered in the filter of which he was so proud."

"Who did it?" A. B. C. asked.

"The attendant has disappeared, and the police are in search of him. The chief of police is in the laboratory now, and, as you were among the last people to see the professor alive, he wishes

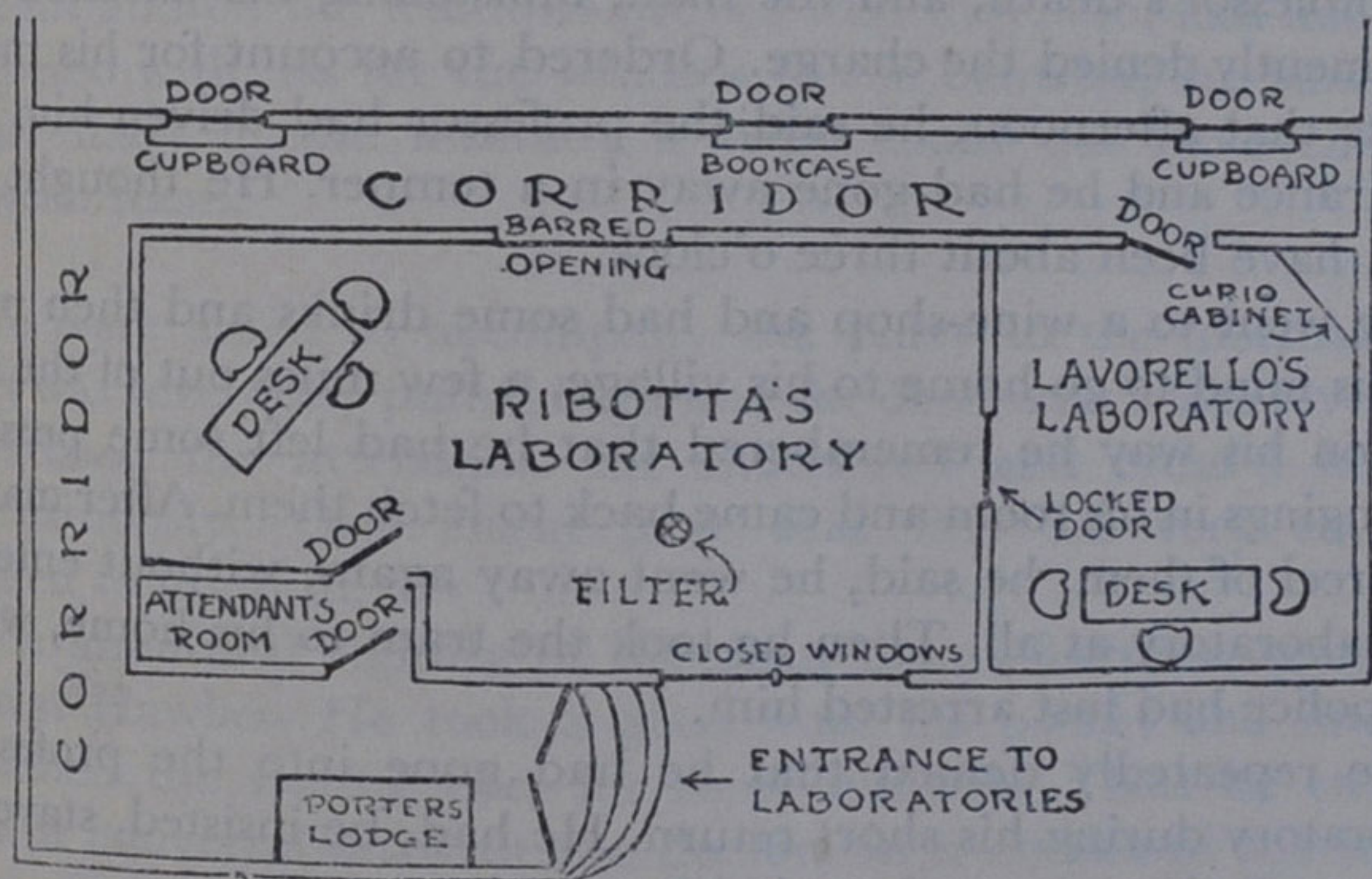
to interrogate you. He was going to send to your hotel, but I volunteered to come here and fetch you."

We called for the bill and left the restaurant in silence. We walked through the warm night to the laboratory, and found it ablaze with lights. A group of men were standing in the dead man's room, among them Lavorello and the porter, both much moved.

The body had been removed to a neighbouring mortuary for examination. They told us that the professor had been found sitting upright at his desk, just as we had seen him as we tip-toed out that same afternoon. Tightly grasped in his hand was a glass of water, of which he had drunk perhaps a half; and his eyes were fixed in a rigid stare.

The chief of police asked Hawkes a string of questions, writing the replies in a note-book.

"There seems no doubt," Dorsi said to me, "that the attendant is the villain. We all heard the quarrel and the threats he uttered



PLAN OF PROFESSOR RIBOTTA'S LABORATORY

against the old man. He, the attendant, was seen to leave the building a few minutes after three o'clock; in fact, he did not go back into the laboratory after we left. Lavorello says that at a quarter past five, on his way out to the baths that he visits every afternoon to try to reduce his weight, he spoke to Ribotta through the barred window from the corridor. The porter confirms that Lavorello went out at that time. Now comes the important

evidence : at half-past five the attendant came in—not too sober, the porter thinks, and still muttering threats against the old man—and entered his little room, through which alone, as you know, it is possible to enter this laboratory.

“He came out ten minutes later and has not been seen since. At six o’clock, twenty minutes after the attendant went away, the porter knocked on the inner door to give the professor a message. Alarmed at receiving no reply, he went round to the barred window and called to him. When he saw that the old gentleman did not move, he called some students who were passing by. They had, of course, to smash down the door to enter, and they discovered old Ribotta dead with the glass in his hand.”

I was considering these facts when a stir outside was followed by the appearance of a couple of policeman with the attendant.

The villain was even more unprepossessing than before ; he was both drunk and frightened.

The chief of police told him that he was suspected of causing the professor’s death, and the man, moistening his parched lips, vehemently denied the charge. Ordered to account for his movements that afternoon, he said the professor had driven him past endurance and he had gone away in a temper. He thought this must have been about three o’clock.

He went to a wine-shop and had some drinks and then made up his mind to go home to his village, a few miles out of the city, but on his way he remembered that he had left some personal belongings in his room and came back to fetch them. After making a parcel of them, he said, he went away again, without entering the laboratory at all. Then he took the tram to his home, where the police had just arrested him.

He repeatedly denied that he had gone into the professor’s laboratory during his short return. He had, he insisted, stayed in his own little room and made his parcel.

Asked whether he had not uttered threats against the professor’s life earlier in the afternoon, he at first said he had not. But, confronted with the evidence of the porter and ourselves, he had to admit that in the heat of his anger he might have done so.

His account in other respects certainly tallied with the previous statements. But the damning facts remained that only he and the dead man had keys to the laboratory and that he had admittedly been in the ante-room between the time Ribotta was last seen

alive—by Lavorello, at a quarter past five—and the time of his being found dead at six o'clock.

Suddenly the chief turned to the porter. "And you?" he said. "Did you enter the laboratory during that period?" A. B. C. interpreted all this to me.

"The professor never permitted me inside," answered the porter. "And I had no key. No one had a key, not even Signor Lavorello, except the professor and the attendant."

"Perhaps the professor opened the door to somebody else, or the murderer had provided himself with a third key?"

"Even so," was the reply, "my lodge is opposite the door of the ante-room, and I should have seen anyone enter it. Nobody did. There is no other entrance to the laboratory."

The chief went round the room examining it. As he showed us, there was indeed no other entrance than by the door from the attendant's room. The door to Lavorello's room was still bolted, and it was clear that it had not been opened. The dust on the skylight and on the windows proved that they, too, had not been tampered with. As for the window to the corridor, the bars were firmly fixed in the mortar; a baby could not have climbed between them.

We were asked to accompany the party to the mortuary. A sheet was reverently pulled back and the dead man's face revealed. I watched the attendant. He shuddered and crossed himself surreptitiously. One might have said that his very emotion testified to his guilt.

The unnatural rigidity of the dead man's features seemed to interest Hawkes. He took a glass from his pocket and intently examined the staring eyes for some minutes. Then he entered upon a conversation with the doctors in a corner of the room, where they were working.

When the rest of us went out, glad to leave the presence of death, A. B. C. did not immediately follow. Dorsi and I waited outside, after seeing the prisoner removed, protesting violently, by the police. My friend came out at last.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you must excuse me. Johnstone, take Mr. Dorsi back to the hotel and entertain him—and Mr. Lavorello too, if he will accompany you. I am going to help with the medical examination."

"What a gruesome idea!" I said.

"My erudite friend," he replied, "you ought to know my interest in the border-line between physics and physiology. Good night." And he hurried back inside the mortuary.

We walked to the hotel, discussing the terrible event.

"I suppose," I said, "it is certain the poor man was poisoned?"

"Of that there is no doubt," said Dorsi. "The doctors suspected it from the first, and Mr. Hawkes, who seems to know everything, agrees with them. They all think it is a poison of the strychnine class, although probably not strychnine itself."

"It ought to be easy to find where the attendant procured it," I suggested.

"In England it might be," smiled Lavorello, "but not, I fear, in Rome. However, as no one but the attendant could possibly have entered and dropped it in the filter, the question where he obtained it hardly seems to matter."

"Can it possibly have been introduced through the walls or the roof or the windows?" I asked.

"Impossible," said Dorsi. "Stupid and deaf as the old man was, he was very keen-sighted, and, sitting at his desk with the filter right in front of him, he would have noticed any attempt to tamper with it. Besides, how on earth could anyone have done so, when it was in the very middle of the room?"

I had to admit that they were right.

They would not come in with me, and we parted at the entrance to my hotel. I sat in my room for some time, but I saw nothing to shake my conviction that the attendant was guilty. This seemed established beyond the possibility of doubt.

Hawkes did not return all that night, nor was he in the hotel when I left it the next morning to visit St. Peter's and one of the Vatican galleries. I lunched in a little restaurant near the Cathedral and returned to the hotel in the middle of the afternoon.

I found A. B. C. waiting for me. From his look I guessed that he had spent the whole night on his researches.

"Well, what news?" he asked.

"I look to you for that, A. B. C.," I replied. "Has the attendant confessed?"

"Not yet; but things are very black against him."

"You look tired," I said. "Why don't you lie down for a while?"

"I am a little fatigued," he admitted. "Between you and me,

Ribotta dead presents more scientific interest than he did alive, but he is equally wearying in both states. I fear you will think that remark in bad taste. I don't think I'll lie down, however. What would you say to taking a Turkish bath—a Roman bath, I suppose I ought to call it here? Our full-bodied friend Lavorello patronizes the baths every afternoon, it seems, like the lover of antique Roman customs that he is, and I have arranged to visit one of them with him to-day. I hope you will accompany us."

I readily agreed, and we drove off to the laboratory and picked up Lavorello. We took the opportunity to glance in at the dead man's room, and I confirmed my impressions of the case. Nobody could possibly have entered it except through the attendant's room.

The three of us were soon in the baths enjoying the delights that Lavorello, lying on a slab near us, assured us were the daily pleasures of the ancient Romans. His admiration for my friend was so evident, and he addressed his conversation so exclusively to him, that A. B. C. seemed to fear that I was being unduly relegated to the background.

"Cease to emulate the modest violet, friend Johnstone," he smiled. "Discourse to us upon topics suitable to the occasion. An archæologist like you ought to welcome the society of a fellow-enthusiast like Mr. Lavorello—Professor Lavorello, I suppose his friends will call him now. Expound to us, my able adjutant, the pastimes of antique Roman society in the baths they frequented."

"Surely, A. B. C.," I said, "Mr. Lavorello is better qualified than I? His collection shows him to be a specialist."

"I doubt it," said Hawkes. "He has been too busy, I am sure, adequately to interest himself in the subject; is that not so, Lavorello?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Lavorello; "I have found time in my leisure moments to study it with a certain thoroughness."

"Theory, theory, all is theory!" A. B. C. scoffed. "I'll wager for example, that you, Lavorello, couldn't even tell me the right way to hold those old knucklebones that are in your cabinet."

"Surely knucklebones are played to-day pretty much as they ever were?" said the Italian. "The simplest and yet the most difficult game is to toss them one after the other in the air and to endeavour to catch the whole set—three or five—on the back of your hand. It is difficult, but after long practice I found I could do it."

"So you have joined practice to theory after all," said A. B. C. "I apologise for my unworthy doubts. Now, Johnstone, I give you one more chance to retrieve your reputation as an archæologist. Tell me some other game that the ancients played on such occasions as these—and in such prodigious heat as this."

"That's easy," I said. "I was reminded of it yesterday. Mr. Lavorello has the instruments in his cabinet. It is the old game of *cottabos*."

"Oh, how do you play that, friend Lavorello?"

"I am afraid," replied he, laughing, "my knowledge stops short at knucklebones. As you hinted, I am not a universal genius."

"Now, splendid Johnstone, cover yourself with glory! Tell us how the royal and ancient game of *cottabos* was played."

"As far as I remember," I said, "the players amused themselves with it at drinking parties. The aim of the game was to throw wine from a specially-shaped glass in such a way that the liquid travelled through the air without scattering. This was done, according to German scholars, who know everything about everything, by a particular twirling movement imparted to the glass. The object was to sink a little metal saucer floating in a sunken tank by casting the wine into it. Isn't that right, Mr. Lavorello?"

Just at that moment Dorsi entered, smiling at the sight of us three in our scanty attire.

"What stifling heat!" he said. "You sent for me, Mr. Hawkes?"

"Yes," said A. B. C. "I wanted you to know that I have discovered the murderer of Professor Ribotta."

"You have?" we exclaimed, in one breath.

"I thought, sir, the police arrested him yesterday," said Dorsi.

"No, dear Dorsi, no. The attendant had no hand in the crime."

"But it was proved——" I began.

"It was proved, my intelligent compatriot, that the attendant entered the building at half-past five for a few minutes. The corpse was not discovered till six, and so it was taken for granted that the man had entered the professor's room and dropped the poison in the filter."

"Exactly," I said.

"But when I saw the corpse," A. B. C. went on, "I was struck at once by the peculiar red discoloration of the eyes. There is a certain obscure poison of the strychnine class which produces this effect. It also produces almost instantaneous death. As you know,

the eye is like a camera, with the retina at the back like a sensitive plate, on which the different pictures are continually formed. Now, this poison makes the lens lose its transparency, with the result that no light enters, and the eyeball becomes like a camera with the shutter closed.

"It occurred to me, therefore, that the picture that was cast on the retina at the moment of death might have persisted. Of course, we should not perceive this picture direct. I thought, however, that it might be possible, as it were, to develop the image. The doctors agreed to allow me to try. I will not give you details of the method, for they are not particularly pleasant to hear. We were not successful with the first eye; the work was more difficult than I had suspected. But from the second I got a blurred picture—not a studio photograph, perhaps, but sufficient for our purpose. That picture told me all I wanted to know."

"What did it show?" I asked.

"Just the clock on the wall, on which, as I took the trouble to observe this afternoon, the rays of the afternoon sun fall. Now that photograph on the dead man's retina, which was the last thing he saw in this life, showed with clearness that, at the moment of his death, the hands of the clock stood at exactly five o'clock!"

"Five o'clock," cried Dorsi. "Then the attendant had not yet returned!"

"Before he came back on that unfortunate visit to his room," said A. B. C. solemnly, "the professor was already dead."

"But nobody else had entered the laboratory," I objected.

"And nobody had!" said A. B. C. "That's what made me so curious about the game of *cottabos*. You see, a really skilled player, standing in the corridor with the proper kind of glass, might well throw the poison through the barred window into the filter. It would be difficult, I admit, but a practised hand could achieve it. The professor at his desk would not notice the liquid passing across the room."

A choking sound came from the slab where Lavorello lay. He was gasping as if unable to draw his breath. A. B. C. strode across to him and spoke softly but distinctly in his ear, while Dorsi and I watched with a terrible suspicion in our minds.

"Lavorello," said Hawkes, sternly, "*you understand!*"

The young scientist groaned and fought for air. Then a sudden agitation of his body threw him off the slab on to the floor. Dorsi and I rushed to raise him, but A. B. C. waved us back.

"It's too late," he said. "I knew his heart was weak—he was foolish to use these hot rooms. The heat of the bath, the strain of his recent crime, and the knowledge that it had been detected have killed him. I must confess that this was my reason for staging this little scene here. We may now be able to avert a very nasty scandal ; whereas, if it had come to a public trial——" He shook his head. "Yes, he was a great experimenter, was young Lavorello, but his ambition was too great for him. A true scientist should await results, not force them, even when a stupid, vain old man stands in the way."

E. C. Bentley

THE CLEVER COCKATOO

from THE STRAND MAGAZINE, 1914

"Well, that's my sister," said Mrs. Lancey, in a low voice. "What do you think of her, now you've spoken to her?"

Philip Trent, newly arrived from England, stood by his hostess within the loggia of an Italian villa looking out upon a prospect of such loveliness as has enchanted and enslaved the Northern mind from age to age. Before the villa lay a long paved terrace, and by the balustrade of it a woman stood looking out over the lake and conversing with a tall, grey-haired man.

"Ten minutes is rather a short acquaintance," Trent replied. "Besides, I was attending rather more to her companion. Mynheer Scheffer is the first Dutchman I have met on social terms. One thing about Lady Bosworth is clear to me, though. She is the most beautiful thing in sight, which is saying a good deal."

Mrs. Lancey laughed.

"But I want you to take a personal interest in her, Philip ; it means nothing, I know, when you talk like that. I care a great deal about Isabel ; she is far more to me than any other woman. That's rather rare between sisters, I believe. And it makes me wretched to know that there's something wrong with her."

"With her health, do you mean ? One wouldn't think so."

"Yes, but I fear it is that."

"Is it possible ?" said Trent. "Why, Edith, the woman has

the complexion of a child and the step of a racehorse and eyes like jewels. She looks like Atalanta in blue linen."

"Did Atalanta marry an Egyptian mummy?" enquired Mrs. Lancey.

"It is true," said Trent thoughtfully, "that Sir Peregrine looks rather as if he had been dug up somewhere. But I think he owes much of his professional success to that. People like a great doctor to look more or less unhealthy."

"Perhaps they do; but I don't think the doctor's wife enjoys it very much. Isabel is always happiest when away from him—if he were here now she would be quite different from what you see. You know, Philip, their marriage hasn't been a success—I always knew it wouldn't be."

Trent shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us drop the subject, Edith. Tell me why you want me to know about Lady Bosworth having something the matter with her. I'm not a physician."

"No; but there's something very puzzling about it, as you will see; and you are clever at getting at the truth about things other people don't understand. Now, I'll tell you no more. I only want you to observe Bella particularly at dinner this evening, and tell me afterwards what you think. You'll be sitting opposite to her, between me and Agatha Stone. Now go and talk to her and the Dutchman."

"Scheffer's appearance interests me," remarked Trent. "He has a face curiously like Frederick the Great's, and yet there's a difference—he doesn't look quite as if his soul were lost for ever and ever."

"Well, go and ask him about it," suggested Mrs. Lancey.

When the party of seven sat down to dinner that evening, Lady Bosworth had just descended from her room. Trent perceived no change in her; she talked enthusiastically of the loveliness of the Italian evening, and joined in a conversation that was general and lively. It was only after some ten minutes that she fell silent, and that a new look came over her face.

Little by little all animation departed from it. Her eyes grew heavy and dull, her red lips were parted in a foolish smile, and to the high, fresh tint of her cheek there succeeded a disagreeable pallor.

All charm, all personal force had departed. It needed an effort

to recall her quaint, vivacious talk of an hour ago, now that she sat looking vaguely at the table before her, and uttering occasionally a blank monosyllable in reply to the discourse that Mr. Scheffer poured into her ear. It was not, Trent told himself, that anything abnormal was done. It was the staring fact that Lady Bosworth was not herself, but someone wholly of another kind, that opened a new and unknown spring of revulsion in the recesses of his heart.

An hour later Mrs. Lancey carried Trent off to a garden-seat facing the lake.

"Well?" she said quietly.

"It's very strange, and rather ghastly," he answered, nursing his knee. "But if you hadn't told me it puzzled you, I should have thought it was easy to find an explanation."

"Drugs, you mean?" He nodded. "Of course everybody must think so. George does, I know. It's horrible!" declared Mrs. Lancey, with a thump on the arm of the seat. "Agatha Stone began hinting at it after the first few days. Gossiping cat! She loathes Isabel, and she'll spread it round everywhere that my sister is a drug-fiend. Philip, I asked her point blank if she was taking anything that could account for it. She was much offended at that; told me I had known her long enough to know she never had done and never would do such a thing. And though Isabel has her faults, she's absolutely truthful."

Trent looked on the ground. "Yes; but you may have heard——"

"Oh, I know! They say that kind of habit makes people lie and deceive who never did before. But, you see, she is so completely herself, except just at this time. I simply couldn't make up my mind to disbelieve her. And, besides, if Bella is peculiar about anything, it's clean, wholesome, hygienic living. She has every sort of carbolic idea. She never uses scent or powder or any kind of before-and-after stuff, never puts anything on her hair; she is washing herself from morning till night, but she always uses ordinary yellow soap. She never touches anything alcoholic, or tea, or coffee. You wouldn't think she had that kind of fad to look at her and her clothes; but she has; and I can't think of anything in the world she would despise more than dosing herself with things."

"How long has it been going on?"

"This is the seventh evening. I entreated her to see a doctor;

but she hates the idea of being doctored. She says it's sure to pass off and that it doesn't make any difference to her general health. George, who has always been devoted to her, only talks to her now with an effort. Randolph Stone is just the same ; and two days before you arrived the Illingworths and Captain Burrows both went earlier than they had intended—I'm certain, because this change in Isabel was spoiling their visit for them."

"She seems to get on remarkably well with Scheffer," remarked Trent.

"I know—it's extraordinary, but he seems more struck with her than ever."

"Well, he is ; but in a lizard-hearted way of his own. He and I were talking just now after you left the dining-room. He spoke of Lady Bosworth in a queer, semi-scientific sort of way, saying she was very interesting to a medical man like himself. You didn't tell me he was one."

"I didn't know. George calls him an anthropologist, and disagrees with him about the races of Farther India. It's the one thing George does know something about, having lived there twelve years governing the poor things. They took to each other at once when they met last year, and when I asked him to stay here he was quite delighted. He only begged to be allowed to bring his cockatoo, as it could not live without him."

"Strange pet for a man," Trent observed. "He was showing off its paces to me this afternoon. Well, it seems he's greatly interested in these attacks of hers. He has seen nothing quite like them. But he is convinced the thing is due to what he calls a toxic agent of some sort. As to what, or how, or why, he is absolutely at a loss."

"Mr. Scheffer really is a wonderful person," the lady said. "He's lived for years among the most appalling savages in Dutch New Guinea, doing scientific work for his Government, and according to George they treat him like a sort of god. He's most attractive and quite kind really, I think, but there's something about him that makes me afraid of him."

"What is it ?"

"I think it is the frosty look in his eyes," replied Mrs. Lancey, drawing her shoulders together in a shiver.

"Perhaps that is the feeling about him in Dutch New Guinea," said Trent. "Did you tell me, Edith, that your sister began to be like this the very first evening she came here ?"

"Yes. And it had never happened before, she declares."

"She came out from England with the Stones, didn't she?"

"Only the last part of the journey. They got on the train at Lucerne."

Trent looked back into the drawing-room at the wistful face of Mrs. Stone, who was playing piquet with her host. She was slight and pretty, with large, appealing eyes that never lost their melancholy, though she was always smiling.

"You say she loathes Lady Bosworth," he said. "Why?"

"Well, I suppose it's mainly Bella's own fault," confessed Mrs. Lancey, with a grimace. "You may as well know, Philip—you'll soon find out, anyhow—the truth is she *will* flirt with any man that she doesn't actively dislike. She's so brimful of life she can't hold herself in—or she won't, rather; she says there's no harm in it, and she doesn't care if there is. Several times she has practised on Randolph, and, although he's a perfectly safe old donkey if there ever was one, Agatha can't bear the sight of her."

"She seems quite friendly with her," Trent observed.

Mrs. Lancey produced through her delicate nostrils a sound that expressed a scorn for which there were no words.

"Well, what do you make of it, Philip?" his hostess asked, at length. "Myself, I simply don't know what to think. These queer fits of hers frighten me horribly. There's one dreadful idea, you see, that keeps occurring to me. Could it, perhaps, be"—Mrs. Lancey lowered her already low tone—"the beginning of insanity?"

He spoke reassuringly. "Oh, I shouldn't cherish that fancy. There are other things much more likely and much less terrible. Look here, Edith, will you try to arrange certain things for to-morrow, without asking me why? And don't let anybody know I asked you to do it—not even George. Until later on, at least. Will you?"

"How exciting!" Mrs. Lancey breathed. "Yes, of course, mystery-man. What do you want me to do?"

"Do you think you could manage things to-morrow so that you and I and Lady Bosworth could go out in the motor-boat on the lake for an hour or two in the evening, getting back in time to change for dinner—just the three of us and the engineer?"

She pondered. "Then the three of us could run down in the boat to San Marmette—it's a lovely little place—and be back

before seven. In this weather it's really the best time of day for the lake."

"That would do admirably, if you could work it. And one thing more—if we do go as you suggest, I want you privately to tell your engineer to do just what I ask him to do—no matter what it is."

Mrs. Lancey worked it without difficulty. At five o'clock the two ladies and Trent, with a powerful young man of superb manners at the steering-wheel, were gliding swiftly southward, mile after mile, down the long lake. They landed at the most picturesque, and perhaps the most dilapidated and dirtiest, of all the lakeside villages, where, in the tiny square above the landing-place, a score of dusky infants were treading the measures and chanting the words of one of the immemorial games of childhood. While Mrs. Lancey and her sister watched them in delight, Trent spoke rapidly to the young engineer, whose gleaming eyes and teeth flashed understanding.

Soon afterward they strolled through San Marmette, and up the mountain road to a little church, half a mile away, where a curious fresco could be seen.

It was close on half-past six when they returned, to be met by Giuseppe, voluble in excitement and apology. It appeared that while he had been fraternising with the keeper of the inn by the landing-place certain *triste individui* had, unseen by anyone, been tampering maliciously with the engine of the boat, and had poured handfuls of dust into the delicate mechanism. Mrs. Lancey, who had received a private nod from Trent, reproved him bitterly for leaving the boat, and asked how long it would take to get the engine working again.

Giuseppe, overwhelmed with contrition, feared that it might be a matter of hours. Questioned, he said that the public steamer had arrived and departed twenty minutes since ; the next one, the last of the day, was not due until after nine. Their excellencies could at least count on getting home by that, if the engine was not ready sooner. Questioned farther, he said that one could telephone from the post-office, and that food creditably cooked was to be had at the *trattoria*.

Lady Bosworth was delighted. She declared that she would not have missed this occasion for anything. She had come to approve highly of Trent, who had made himself excellent company, and

she saw her way to being quite admirable, for she was in dancing spirits.

It was a more than cheerful dinner that they had under a canopy of vine-leaves on a tiny terrace overlooking the lake. Twilight came on unnoticed, and soon afterwards appeared the passenger-boat, by which, Giuseppe advising it, they decided to return. It was as they sought for places on the crowded upper deck that Mrs. Lancey put her hand on Trent's arm. "There hasn't been a sign of it all the evening," she whispered. "What does that mean?"

"It means," murmured Trent, "that Lady Bosworth was prevented, by the merest accident, from dining at home in the ordinary way."

It was not until the following afternoon that Trent found an opportunity of being alone with his hostess in the garden.

"She is perfectly delighted at having escaped it last night," said Mrs. Lancey. "She says she knew it would pass off, but she hasn't the least notion how she was cured. Nor have I."

"She isn't," replied Trent. "Last night was only a beginning, and we can't get her unexpectedly stranded for the evening every day. The next move can be made now, if you consent to it. Lady Bosworth will be out until this evening, I believe?"

"She's gone shopping in the town. What do you want to do?"

"I want you to take me up to her room, and there I want you to look very carefully through everything in the place—in every corner of every box and drawer and bag and cupboard—and show me anything you find that might——"

"I should hate to do that!" Mrs. Lancey interrupted him, her face flushing.

"You would hate much more to see your sister again this evening as she was every evening before last night. Look here, Edith; the position is simple enough. Every day, about seven, Lady Bosworth goes into that room in her normal state to dress for dinner. Every day she comes out of it apparently as she went in, but turns queer a little later. Now is there any other place than that room where the mischief could happen?"

Mrs. Lancey frowned dubiously. For a few moments she stood carefully boring a hole in the gravel with one heel. Then, "Come along," she said, and led the way toward the house.

"Unless we take the floor up," said Mrs. Lancey, seating herself emphatically on the bed in her sister's room twenty minutes later, "there's nowhere else to look. I've taken everything out and pried into every hole and corner. There isn't a single lockable thing that is locked. There isn't a bottle or phial or pill-box of any sort to be found. So much for your suspicions. What interests you about that nail-polishing pad? You must have seen one before, surely."

"This ornamental design on hammered silver is very beautiful and original," replied Trent, abstractedly. "I have never seen anything quite like it."

"The same design is on the whole of the toilet-set," Mrs. Lancey observed tartly, "and it shows to least advantage on the manicure things. You are talking rubbish; and yet," she added slowly, "you are looking rather pleased with yourself."

Trent turned round slowly. "I'm only thinking. Whose are the rooms on each side of this, Edith?"

"This side, the Stones's; that side, Mr. Scheffer's."

"Then I will go for a walk all alone and think some more. Good-bye."

Trent was not in the house when, three hours later, a rousing tumult broke out on the upper floor. Those below in the loggia heard first a piercing scream, then a clatter of feet on parquet flooring, then more sounds of feet, excited voices, other screams of harsh, inhuman quality, and a lively scuffling and banging. Mr. Scheffer, with a volley of guttural words of which it was easy to gather the general sense, headed the rush of the company upstairs.

"Gisko! Gisko!" he shouted, at the head of the stairway. There was another ear-splitting screech, and the cockatoo came scuttling and fluttering out of Lady Bosworth's room, pursued by three vociferating women servants. The bird's yellow crest was erect and quivering with agitation; it screeched furious defiance again as it leapt upon its master's outstretched wrist.

"Silence, devil!" exclaimed Mr. Scheffer, seizing it by the head and shaking it violently. "I know not how to apologise, Lancey," he declared. "The accursed bird has somehow slipped from his chain away. I left him in my room secure just before we had tea."

"Never mind, never mind!" replied his host, who seemed rather pleased than otherwise with this small diversion. "I don't suppose he's done any harm beyond frightening the women."

Anything wrong, Edith ? ” he asked, as they approached the open door of the bedroom, to which the ladies had already hurried. Lady Bosworth’s maid was telling a voluble story.

“ When she came in just now to get the room ready for Isabel to dress,” Mrs. Lancey summarised, “ she suddenly heard a voice say something, and saw the bird perched on top of the mirror, staring at her. It gave her such a shock that she dropped the water-can and fled ; then the two other girls came and helped her, trying to drive it out. They hadn’t the sense to send for Mr. Scheffer.”

“ Apologise, carrion ! ” commanded Gisko’s master. The cockatoo uttered a string of Dutch words in a subdued croak. “ He says he asks one thousand pardons, and he will sin no more,” Mr. Scheffer translated. “ Miserable brigand ! Traitor ! ”

Lady Bosworth hurried out of her room.

“ I won’t hear the poor thing scolded like that,” she protested. “ How was he to know my maid would be frightened ? He looks so wretched ! Take him away, Mr. Scheffer, and cheer him up.”

It was half an hour later that Mrs. Lancey came to her husband in his dressing-room.

“ I must say Bella was very decent about Scheffer’s horrid bird,” she began. “ Do you know what the little fiend had done ? ”

“ No, my dear. I thought he had confined himself to frightening the maid out of her skin.”

“ Not at all. He had been having the time of his life. Bella saw at once that he had been up to mischief, but she pretended there was nothing. Now it turns out he has bitten the buttons off two pairs of gloves, chewed up a lot of hair-pins, and spoiled her pretty little manicure set. He’s torn the lining out of the case, the silver handles are covered with beak-marks, two or three of the things he seems to have hidden somewhere, and the polishing-pad is a ruin.”

“ It’s too bad ! ” declared Mr. Lancey, bending over a shoe.

“ I believe you’re laughing, George,” said his wife coldly.

He began to do so audibly. “ You must admit it’s funny to think of the bird going solemnly through a programme of mischief like that. I wish I could have seen the little beggar at it. Well, we shall have to get Bella a new nail-outfit. I’m glad she held her tongue about it just now.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because, my dear, we don’t ask people to the house to make them feel uncomfortable—especially foreigners.”