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MADELYN MACK DETECTIVE

BY

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William Henson
from
Cora Grant,

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MISS MADELYN MACK, DETECTIVE

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"AS THE DOOR CLOSED, I SAW THAT MADELYN WAS STILL BALANCING RALEIGH'S PIPE." (*See page 22*)

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Miss Nancy Drew, Detective

By

Hugh C. Weir

Illustrated

The Page Company
Boston Mdcccxxiv

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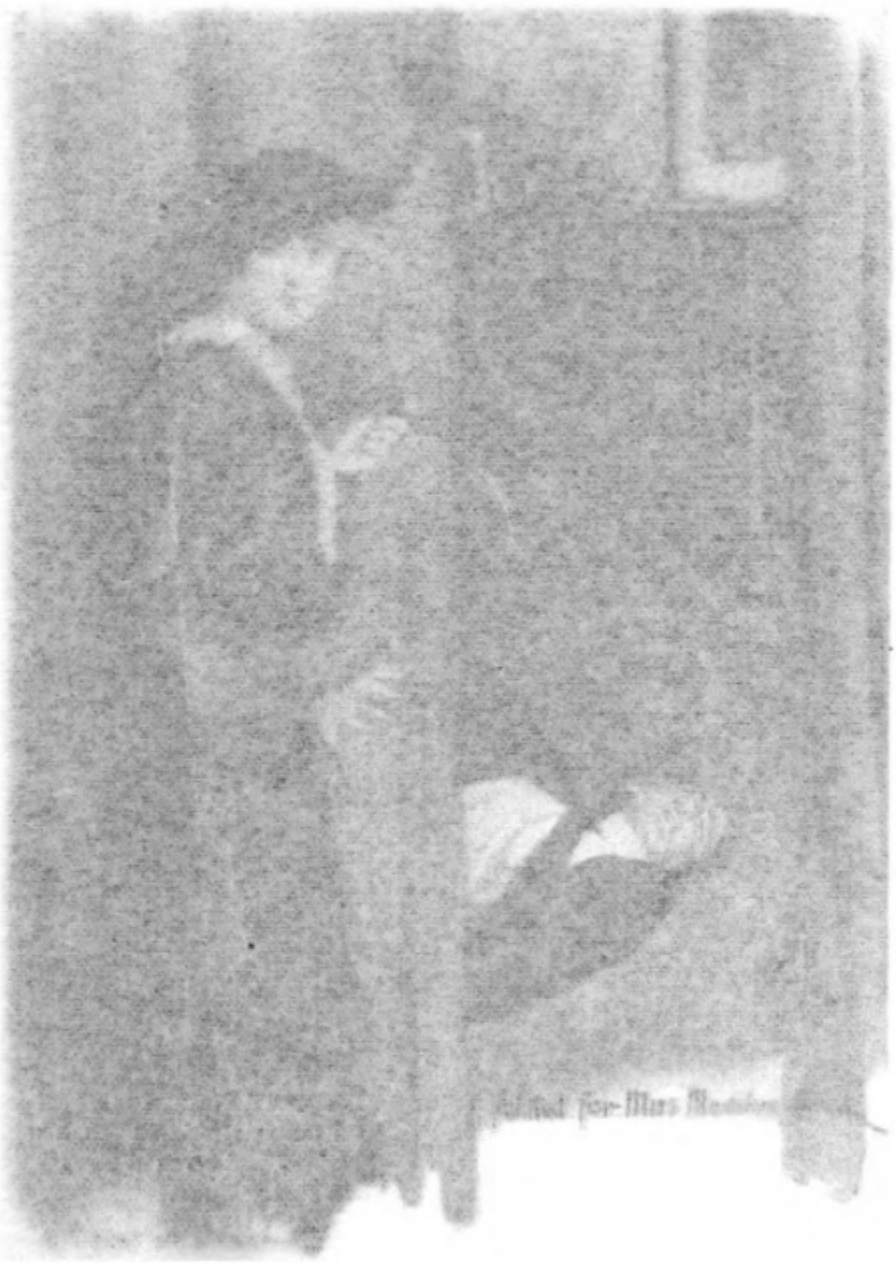

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Miss Madelyn Mack, Detective

By

Hugh C. Weir

Illustrated

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TO

MARY HOLLAND

THIS IS YOUR BOOK. IT IS YOU, WOMAN DETECTIVE OF REAL LIFE, WHO SUGGESTED MADELYN. IT WAS THE STORIES TOLD ME FROM YOUR OWN NOTE-BOOK OF MEN'S KNAVERY THAT SUGGESTED THESE EXPLOITS OF MISS MACK. NONE SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN YOU THAT THE RIDDLES OF FICTION FALL EVER SHORT OF THE RIDDLES OF TRUTH. WHAT PLOT OF THE NOVELIST COULD EQUAL THE GROTESQUENESS OF YOUR AFFAIR OF THE MYSTIC CIRCLE, OR THE SUBTLENESS OF YOUR CHICAGO UNIVERSITY EXPLOIT OF THE EGYPTIAN BAR? I PRAY YOU, HOWEVER, IN THE FULLNESS OF YOUR GENEROSITY TO GIVE MADELYN WELCOME — NOT AS A RIVAL BUT AS A STUDENT. H. C. W.

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The publishers wish to acknowledge the courtesy of The Kalem Moving Picture Company in allowing the use as illustrations of the photographs of Miss Alice Joyce in the character of " Madelyn Mack."

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MISS MADELYN MACK, DETECTIVE

I

THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES

I

Now that I seek a point of beginning in the curious comradeship between Madelyn Mack and myself, the weird problems of men's knavery that we have confronted together come back to me with almost a shock.

Perhaps the events which crowd into my memory followed each other too swiftly for thoughtful digest at the time of their occurrence. Perhaps only a sober retrospect can supply a properly appreciative angle of view.

Madelyn Mack! What newspaper reader does not know the name? Who, even among the most casual followers of public events, does not recall the young woman who found the missing heiress,

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Virginia Denton, after a three months' disappearance; who convicted "Archie" Irwin, chief of the "fire bug trust;" who located the absconder, Wolcott, after a pursuit from Chicago to Khartoom; who solved the riddle of the double Peterson murder; who —

But why continue the enumeration of Miss Mack's achievements? They are of almost household knowledge, at least that portion which, from one cause or another, have found their way into the newspaper columns. Doubtless those admirers of Miss Mack, whose opinions have been formed through the press-chronicles of her exploits, would be startled to know that not one in ten of her cases has ever been recorded outside of her own file cases. And many of them — the most sensational from a newspaper viewpoint — will never be!

It is the woman, herself, however, who has seemed to me always a greater mystery than any of the problems to whose unraveling she has brought her wonderful genius. In spite of the deluge of printer's ink that she has inspired, I question if it has been given to more than a dozen persons to know the true Madelyn Mack.

I do not refer, of course, to her professional career. The salient points of that portion of her life, I presume, are more or less generally known

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— the college girl confronted suddenly with the necessity of earning her own living; the epidemic of mysterious "shop-lifting" cases chronicled in the newspaper she was studying for employment advertisements; her application to the New York department stores, that had been victimized, for a place on their detective staffs, and their curt refusal; her sudden determination to undertake the case as a free lance, and her remarkable success, which resulted in the conviction of the notorious Madame Bousard, and which secured for Miss Mack her first position as assistant house-detective with the famous Niegel dry-goods firm. I sometimes think that this first case, and the realization which it brought her of her peculiar talent, is Madelyn's favorite — that its place in her memory is not even shared by the recovery of Mrs. Niegel's fifty-thousand-dollar pearl necklace, stolen a few months after the employment of the college girl detective at the store, and the reward for which, incidentally, enabled the ambitious Miss Mack to open her own office.

Next followed the Bergner kidnapping case, which gave Madelyn her first big advertising broadside, and which brought the beginning of the steady stream of business that resulted, after three years, in her Fifth Avenue suite in the Maddox Building, where I found her on that — to me — memorable

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afternoon when a sapient Sunday editor dispatched me for an interview with the woman who had made so conspicuous a success in a man's profession.

I can see Madelyn now, as I saw her then — my first close-range view of her. She had just returned from Omaha that morning, and was planning to leave for Boston on the midnight express. A suitcase and a fat portfolio of papers lay on a chair in a corner. A young woman stenographer was taking a number of letters at an almost incredible rate of dictation. Miss Mack finished the last paragraph as she rose from a flat-top desk to greet me.

I had vaguely imagined a masculine-appearing woman, curt of voice, sharp of feature, perhaps dressed in a severe, tailor-made gown. I saw a young woman of maybe twenty-five, with red and white cheeks, crowned by a softly waved mass of dull gold hair, and a pair of vivacious, grey-blue eyes that at once made one forget every other detail of her appearance. There was a quality in the eyes which for a long time I could not define. Gradually I came to know that it was the spirit of optimism, of joy in herself, and in her life, and in her work, the exhilaration of doing things. And there was something contagious in it. Almost unconsciously you found yourself *believing* in her and in her sincerity.

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Nor was there a suggestion foreign to her sex in my appraisal. She was dressed in a simply embroidered white shirt-waist and white broadcloth skirt. One of Madelyn's few peculiarities is that she always dresses either in complete white or complete black. On her desk was a jar of white chrysanthemums.

"How do I do it?" she repeated, in answer to my question, in a tone that was almost a laugh. "Why — just by hard work, I suppose. Oh, there isn't anything wonderful about it! You can do almost anything, you know, if you make yourself really *think* you can! I am not at all unusual or abnormal. I work out my problems just as I would work out a problem in mathematics, only instead of figures I deal with human motives. A detective is always given certain known factors, and I keep building them up, or subtracting them, as the case may be, until I know that the answer *must* be correct.

"There are only two real rules for a successful detective, hard work and common sense — not uncommon sense such as we associate with our old friend, Sherlock Holmes, but common, *business* sense. And, of course, imagination! That may be one reason why I have made what you call a success. A woman, I think, always has a more acute imagination than a man!"

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"Do you then prefer women operatives on your staff?" I asked.

She glanced up with something like a twinkle from the jade paper-knife in her hands.

"Shall I let you into a secret? All of my staff, with the exception of my stenographer, are men. But I do most of my work in person. The factor of imagination can't very well be used second, or third, or fourth handed. And then, if I fail, I can only blame Madelyn Mack! Some day," — the gleam in her grey-blue eyes deepened, — "some day I hope to reach a point where I can afford to do only consulting work or personal investigation. The business details of an office staff, I am afraid, are a bit too much of routine for me!"

The telephone jingled. She spoke a few crisp sentences into the receiver, and turned. The interview was over.

When I next saw her, three months later, we met across the body of Morris Anthony, the murdered bibliophic. It was a chance discovery of mine which Madelyn was good enough to say suggested to her the solution of the affair, and which brought us together in the final melodramatic climax in the grim mansion on Washington Square, when I presume my hysterical warning saved her from the fangs of Dr. Lester Randolph's hidden cobra. In any event, our acquaintanceship crystal-

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lized gradually into a comradeship, which revolutionized two angles of my life.

Not only did it bring to me the stimulus of Madelyn Mack's personality, but it gave me exclusive access to a fund of newspaper "copy" that took me from scant-paid Sunday "features" to a "space" arrangement in the city room, with an income double that which I had been earning. I have always maintained that in our relationship Madelyn gave all, and I contributed nothing. Although she invariably made instant disclaimer, and generally ended by carrying me up to the "Rosary," her chalet on the Hudson, as a cure for what she termed my attack of the "blues," she was never able to convince me that my protest was not justified!

It was at the "Rosary" where Miss Mack found haven from the stress of business. She had copied its design from an ivy-tangled Swiss chalet that had attracted her fancy during a summer vacation ramble through the Alps, and had built it on a jagged bluff of the river at a point near enough to the city to permit of fairly convenient motoring, although, during the first years of our friendship, when she was held close to the commercial grindstone, weeks often passed without her being able to snatch a day there. In the end, it was the gratitude of Chalmers Walker for her remarkable work

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which cleared his chorus-girl wife from the seemingly unbreakable coil of circumstantial evidence in the murder of Dempster, the theatrical broker, that enabled Madelyn to realize her long-cherished dream of setting up as a consulting expert. Although she still maintained an office in town, it was confined to one room and a small reception hall, and she limited her attendance there to two days of the week. During the remainder of the time, when not engaged directly on a case, she seldom appeared in the city at all. Her flowers and her music — she was passionately devoted to both — appeared to content her effectually.

I charged her with growing old, to which she replied with a shrug. I upbraided her as a cynic, and she smiled inscrutably. But the manner of her life was not changed. In a way I envied her. It was almost like looking down on the world and watching tolerantly its mad scramble for the rainbow's end. The days I snatched at the "Rosary," particularly in the summer, when Madelyn's garden looked like nothing so much as a Turner picture, left me with almost a repulsion for the grind of Park Row. But a workaday newspaper woman cannot indulge the dreams of a genius whom fortune has blessed. Perhaps this was why Madelyn's invitations came with a frequency and a subtleness that could not be resisted. Somehow they always

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reached me when I was in just the right receptive mood.

It was late on a Thursday afternoon of June, the climax of a racking five days for me under the blistering Broadway sun, that Madelyn's motor caught me at the *Bugle* office, and Madelyn insisted on bundling me into the tonneau without even a suitcase.

"We'll reach the Rosary in time for a fried chicken supper," she promised. "What you need is four or five days' rest where you can't smell the asphalt."

"You fairy godmother!" I breathed as I snuggled down on the cushions.

Neither of us knew that already the crimson trail of crime was twisting toward us — that within twelve hours we were to be pitchforked from a quiet week-end's rest into the vortex of tragedy.

II

We had breakfasted late and leisurely. When at length we had finished, Madelyn had insisted on having her phonograph brought to the rose-garden, and we were listening to Sturveysant's matchless rendering of "The Jewel Song" — one of the three records for which Miss Mack had sent the harpist her check for two hundred dollars the day before.

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I had taken the occasion to read her a lazy lesson on extravagance. The beggar had probably done the work in less than two hours!

As the plaintive notes quivered to a pause, Susan, Madelyn's housekeeper, crossed the garden, and laid a little stack of letters and the morning papers on a rustic table by our bench. Madelyn turned to her correspondence with a shrug.

"From the divine to the prosaic!"

Susan sniffed with the freedom of seven years of service.

"I heard one of them Dago fiddling chaps at Hammerstein's last week who could beat that music with his eyes closed!"

Madelyn stared at her sorrowfully.

"At your age — Hammerstein's!"

Susan tossed her prim rows of curls, glanced contemptuously at the phonograph by way of retaliation, and made a dignified retreat. In the doorway she turned.

"Oh, Miss Madelyn, I am baking one of your old-fashioned strawberry shortcakes for lunch!"

"Really?" Madelyn raised a pair of sparkling eyes. "Susan, you're a dear!"

A contented smile wreathed Susan's face even to the tips of her precise curls. Madelyn's gaze crossed to me.

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"What are you chuckling over, Nora?"

"From a psychological standpoint, the pair of you have given me two interesting studies," I laughed. "A single sentence compensates Susan for a week of your glumness!"

Madelyn extended a hand toward her mail.

"And what is the other feature that appeals to your dissecting mind?"

"Fancy a world-known detective rising to the point of enthusiasm at the mention of strawberry shortcake!"

"Why not? Even a detective has to be human once in a while!" Her eyes twinkled. "Another point for my memoirs, Miss Noraker!"

As her gaze fell to the half-opened letter in her hand, my eyes traveled across the garden to the outlines of the chalet, and I breathed a sigh of utter content. Broadway and Park Row seemed very, very far away. In a momentary swerving of my gaze, I saw that a line as clear cut as a pencil-stroke had traced itself across Miss Mack's forehead.

The suggestion of lounging indifference in her attitude had vanished like a wind-blown veil. Her glance met mine suddenly. The twinkle I had last glimpsed in her eyes had disappeared. Silently she pushed a square sheet of close, cramped writing across the table to me.

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"My Dear Madam:

"When you read this, it is quite possible that it will be a letter from a dead man.

"I have been told by no less an authority than my friend, Cosmo Hamilton, that you are a remarkable woman. While I will say at the outset that I have little faith in the analytical powers of the feminine brain, I am prepared to accept Hamilton's judgment.

"I cannot, of course, discuss the details of my problem in correspondence.

"As a spur to quick action, I may say, however, that, during the past five months, my life has been attempted no fewer than eight different times, and I am convinced that the ninth attempt, if made, will be successful. The curious part of it lies in the fact that I am absolutely unable to guess the reason for the persistent vendetta. So far as I know, there is no person in the world who should desire my removal. And yet I have been shot at from ambush on four occasions, thugs have rushed me once, a speeding automobile has grazed me twice, and this evening I found a cunning little dose of cya-

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nide of potassium in my favorite cherry pie!

"All of this, too, in the shadow of a New Jersey skunk farm! It is high time, I fancy, that I secure expert advice. Should the progress of the mysterious vendetta, by any chance, render me unable to receive you personally, my niece, Miss Muriel Jansen, I am sure, will endeavor to act as a substitute.

"Respectfully Yours,

"WENDELL MARSH."

"THREE FORKS JUNCTION, N. J.,
June 16."

At the bottom of the page a lead pencil had scrawled the single line in the same cramped writing:

"For God's sake, hurry!"

Madelyn retained her curled-up position on the bench, staring across at a bush of deep crimson roses.

"Wendell Marsh?" She shifted her glance to me musingly. "Haven't I seen that name somewhere lately?" (Madelyn pays me the compliment of saying that I have a card-index brain for newspaper history!)

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"If you have read the Sunday supplements," I returned drily, with a vivid remembrance of Wendell Marsh as I had last seen him, six months before, when he crossed the gang-plank of his steamer, fresh from England, his face browned from the Atlantic winds. It was a face to draw a second glance — almost gaunt, self-willed, with more than a hint of cynicism. (Particularly when his eyes met the waiting press group!) Some one had once likened him to the pictures of Oliver Cromwell.

"Wendell Marsh is one of the greatest newspaper copy-makers that ever dodged an interviewer," I explained. "He hates reporters like an upstate farmer hates an automobile, and yet has a flock of them on his trail constantly. His latest exploit to catch the spot-light was the purchase of the Bainford relics in London. Just before that he published a three-volume history on 'The World's Great Cynics.' Paid for the publication himself."

Then came a silence between us, prolonging itself. I was trying, rather unsuccessfully, to associate Wendell Marsh's half-hysterical letter with my mental picture of the austere millionaire. . . .

"For God's sake, hurry!"

What wrenching terror had reduced the ultra-reserved Mr. Marsh to an appeal like this? As I

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look back now I know that my wildest fancy could not have pictured the ghastliness of the truth!

Madelyn straightened abruptly.

"Susan, will you kindly tell Andrew to bring around the car at once? If you will find the New Jersey automobile map, Nora, we'll locate Three Forks Junction."

"You are going down?" I asked mechanically.

She slipped from the bench.

"I am beginning to fear," she said irrelevantly, "that we'll have to defer our strawberry shortcake!"

III

The sound eye of Daniel Peddicord, liveryman by avocation, and sheriff of Merino County by election, drooped over his florid left cheek. Mr. Peddicord took himself and his duties to the tax-payers of Merino County seriously.

Having lowered his sound eye with befitting official dubiousness, while his glass eye stared guilelessly ahead, as though it took absolutely no notice of the procedure, Mr. Peddicord jerked a fat, red thumb toward the winding stairway at the rear of the Marsh hall.

"I reckon as how Mr. Marsh is still up there, Miss Mack. You see, I told 'em not to disturb the body until —"

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Our stares brought the sentence to an abrupt end. Mr. Peddicord's sound eye underwent a violent agitation.

"You don't mean that you haven't — heard?"

The silence of the great house seemed suddenly oppressive. For the first time I realized the oddity of our having been received by an ill-at-ease policeman instead of by a member of the family. I was abruptly conscious of the incongruity between Mr. Peddicord's awkward figure and the dim, luxurious background.

Madelyn gripped the chief's arm, bringing his sound eye circling around to her face.

"Tell me what has happened!"

Mr. Peddicord drew a huge red handkerchief over his forehead.

"Wendell Marsh was found dead in his library at eight o'clock this morning! He had been dead for hours."

Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Through my daze beat the rhythm of a tall, gaunt clock in the corner. I stared at it dully. Madelyn's hands had caught themselves behind her back, her veins swollen into sharp blue ridges. Mr. Peddicord still gripped his red handkerchief.

"It sure is queer you hadn't heard! I reckoned as how that was what had brought you down. It — it looks like murder!"

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In Madelyn's eyes had appeared a greyish glint like cold steel.

"Where is the body?"

"Up-stairs in the library. Mr. Marsh had worked —"

"Will you kindly show me the room?"

I do not think we noted at the time the crispness in her tones, certainly not with any resentment. Madelyn had taken command of the situation quite as a matter of course.

"Also, will you have my card sent to the family?"

Mr. Peddicord stuffed his handkerchief back into a rear trousers' pocket. A red corner protruded in jaunty abandon from under his blue coat.

"Why, there ain't no family — at least none but Muriel Jansen." His head cocked itself cautiously up the stairs. "She's his niece, and I reckon now everything here is hers. Her maid says as how she is clear bowled over. Only left her room once since — since it happened. And that was to tell me as how nothing was to be disturbed." Mr. Peddicord drew himself up with the suspicion of a frown. "Just as though an experienced officer wouldn't know *that* much!"

Madelyn glanced over her shoulder to the end of the hall. A hatchet-faced man in russet livery stood staring at us with wooden eyes.

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Mr. Peddicord shrugged.

"That's Peters, the butler. He's the chap what found Mr. Marsh."

I could feel the wooden eyes following us until a turn in the stairs blocked their range.

A red-glowing room — oppressively red. Scarlet-frescoed walls, deep red draperies, cherry-upholstered furniture, Turkish-red rugs, rows on rows of red-bound books. Above, a great, flat glass roof, open to the sky from corner to corner, through which the splash of the sun on the rich colors gave the weird semblance of a crimson pool almost in the room's exact center. Such was Wendell Marsh's library — as eccentrically designed as its master.

It was the wreck of a room that we found. Shattered vases littered the floor — books were ripped savagely apart — curtains were hanging in ribbons — a heavy leather rocker was splintered.

The wreckage might have marked the death-struggle of giants. In the midst of the destruction, Wendell Marsh was twisted on his back. His face was shriveled, his eyes were staring. There was no hint of a wound or even a bruise. In his right hand was gripped an object partially turned from me.

I found myself stepping nearer, as though drawn by a magnet. There is something hypnotic in such

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horrible scenes! And then I barely checked a cry.

Wendell Marsh's dead fingers held a pipe — a strangely carved, red sandstone bowl, and a long, glistening stem.

Sheriff Peddicord noted the direction of my glance.

"Mr. Marsh got that there pipe in London, along with those other relics he brought home. They do say as how it was the first pipe ever smoked by a white man. The Indians of Virginia gave it to a chap named Sir Walter Raleigh. Mr. Marsh had a new stem put to it, and his butler says he smoked it every day. Queer, ain't it, how some folks' tastes do run?"

The sheriff moistened his lips under his scraggly yellow moustache.

"Must have been some fight what done this!" His head included the wrecked room in a vague sweep.

Madelyn strolled over to a pair of the ribboned curtains, and fingered them musingly.

"But that isn't the queerest part." The chief glanced at Madelyn expectantly. "There was no way for any one else to get out — or in!"

Madelyn stooped lower over the curtains. They seemed to fascinate her. "The door?" she hazarded absently. "It was locked?"

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"From the inside. Peters and the footman saw the key when they broke in this morning. . . . Peters swears he heard Mr. Marsh turn it when he left him writing at ten o'clock last night."

"The windows?"

"Fastened as tight as a drum — and, if they wasn't, it's a matter of a good thirty foot to the ground."

"The roof, perhaps?"

"A cat *might* get through it — if every part wasn't clamped as tight as the windows."

Mr. Peddicord spoke with a distinct inflection of triumph. Madelyn was still staring at the curtains.

"Isn't it rather odd," I ventured, "that the sounds of the struggle, or whatever it was, didn't alarm the house?"

Sheriff Peddicord plainly regarded me as an outsider. He answered my question with obvious shortness.

"You could fire a blunderbuss up here and no one would be the wiser. They say as how Mr. Marsh had the room made sound-proof. And, besides, the servants have a building to themselves, all except Miss Jansen's maid, who sleeps in a room next to her at the other end of the house."

My eyes circled back to Wendell Marsh's knotted figure — his shriveled face — horror-frozen eyes — the hand gripped about the fantastic pipe. I think

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it was the pipe that held my glance. Of all incongruities, a pipe in the hand of a dead man!

Maybe it was something of the same thought that brought Madelyn of a sudden across the room. She stooped, straightened the cold fingers, and rose with the pipe in her hand.

A new stem had obviously been added to it, of a substance which I judged to be jessamine. At its end, teeth-marks had bitten nearly through. The stone bowl was filled with the cold ashes of half-consumed tobacco. Madelyn balanced it musingly.

"Curious, isn't it, Sheriff, that a man engaged in a life-or-death struggle should cling to a heavy pipe?"

"Why — I suppose so. But the question, Miss Mack, is what became of that there other man? It isn't natural as how Mr. Marsh could have fought with himself."

"The other man?" Madelyn repeated mechanically. She was stirring the rim of the dead ashes.

"And how in tarnation was Mr. Marsh killed?"

Madelyn contemplated a dust-covered finger.

"Will you do me a favor, Sheriff?"

"Why, er — of course."

"Kindly find out from the butler if Mr. Marsh had cherry pie for dinner last night!"

The sheriff gulped.

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"Che-cherry pie?"

Madelyn glanced up impatiently.

"I believe he was very fond of it."

The sheriff shuffled across to the door uncertainly. Madelyn's eyes flashed to me.

"You might go, too, Nora."

For a moment I was tempted to flat rebellion. But Madelyn affected not to notice the fact. She is always so aggravatingly sure of her own way! — With what I tried to make a mood of aggrieved silence, I followed the sheriff's blue-coated figure. As the door closed, I saw that Madelyn was still balancing Raleigh's pipe.

From the top of the stairs, Sheriff Peddicord glanced across at me suspiciously.

"I say, what I would like to know is what became of that there other man!"

IV

A WISP of a black-gowned figure, peering through a dormer window at the end of the second-floor hall, turned suddenly as we reached the landing. A white, drawn face, suggesting a tired child, stared at us from under a frame of dull-gold hair, drawn low from a careless part. I knew at once it was Muriel Jansen, for the time, at least, mistress of the house of death.

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"Has the coroner come yet, Sheriff?"

She spoke with one of the most liquid voices I have ever heard. Had it not been for her bronze hair, I would have fancied her at once of Latin descent. The fact of my presence she seemed scarcely to notice, not with any suggestion of aloofness, but rather as though she had been drained even of the emotion of curiosity.

"Not yet, Miss Jansen. He should be here now."

She stepped closer to the window, and then turned slightly.

"I told Peters to telegraph to New York for Dr. Dench when he summoned you. He was one of Uncle's oldest friends. I — I would like him to be here when — when the coroner makes his examination."

The sheriff bowed awkwardly.

"Miss Mack is up-stairs now."

The pale face was staring at us again with raised eyebrows.

"Miss Mack? I don't understand." Her eyes shifted to me.

"She had a letter from Mr. Marsh by this morning's early post," I explained. "I am Miss Noraker. Mr. Marsh wanted her to come down at once. She didn't know, of course — couldn't know — that — that he was — dead!"

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"A letter from — Uncle?" A puzzled line gathered in her face.

I nodded.

"A distinctly curious letter. But — Miss Mack would perhaps prefer to give you the details."

The puzzled line deepened. I could feel her eyes searching mine intently.

"I presume Miss Mack will be down soon," I volunteered. "If you wish, however, I will tell her —"

"That will hardly be necessary. But — you are quite sure — a letter?"

"Quite sure," I returned, somewhat impatiently.

And then, without warning, her hands darted to her head, and she swayed forward. I caught her in my arms with a side-view of Sheriff Peddicord staring, open-mouthed.

"Get her maid!" I gasped.

The sheriff roused into belated action. As he took a cumbersome step toward the nearest door, it opened suddenly. A gaunt, middle-aged woman, in a crisp white apron, digested the situation with cold, grey eyes. Without a word, she caught Muriel Jansen in her arms.

"She has fainted," I said rather vaguely. "Can I help you?"

The other paused with her burden.

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"When I need you, I'll ask you!" she snapped, and banged the door in our faces.

In the wake of Sheriff Peddicord, I descended the stairs. A dozen question-marks were spinning through my brain. Why had Muriel Jansen fainted? Why had the mention of Wendell Marsh's letter left such an atmosphere of bewildered doubt? Why had the dragon-like maid — for such I divined her to be — faced us with such hostility? The undercurrent of hidden secrets in the dim, silent house seemed suddenly intensified.

With a vague wish for fresh air and the sun on the grass, I sought the front veranda, leaving the sheriff in the hall, mopping his face with his red handkerchief.

A carefully tended yard of generous distances stretched an inviting expanse of graded lawn before me. Evidently Wendell Marsh had provided a discreet distance between himself and his neighbors. The advance guard of a morbid crowd was already shuffling about the gate. I knew that it would not be long, too, before the press-siege would begin.

I could picture frantic city editors pitchforking their star men New Jerseyward. I smiled at the thought. The *Bugle*, the slave-driver that presided over my own financial destinies, — was assured of a generous "beat" in advance. The next train from New York was not due until late afternoon.

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From the staring line about the gate, the figure of a well-set-up young man in blue serge detached itself with swinging step.

"A reporter?" I breathed, incredulous.

With a glance at me, he ascended the steps, and paused at the door, awaiting an answer to his bell. My stealthy glances failed to place him among the "stars" of New York newspaperdom. Perhaps he was a local correspondent. With smug expectancy, I awaited his discomfiture when Peters received his card. And then I rubbed my eyes. Peters was stepping back from the door, and the other was following him with every suggestion of assurance.

I was still gasping when a maid, broom in hand, zigzagged toward my end of the veranda. She smiled at me with a pair of friendly black eyes.

"Are you a detective?"

"Why?" I parried.

She drew her broom idly across the floor.

"I — I always thought detectives different from other people."

She sent a rivulet of dust through the railing, with a side glance still in my direction.

"Oh, you will find them human enough," I laughed, "outside of detective stories!"

She pondered my reply doubtfully.

"I thought it about time Mr. Truxton was appearing!" she ventured suddenly.

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"Mr. Truxton?"

"He's the man that just came — Mr. Homer Truxton. Miss Jansen is going to marry him!"

A light broke through my fog.

"Then he is not a reporter?"

"Mr. Truxton? He's a lawyer." The broom continued its dilatory course. "Mr. Marsh didn't like him — so they *say!*"

I stepped back, smoothing my skirts. I have learned the cardinal rule of Madelyn never to pretend too great an interest in the gossip of a servant.

The maid was mechanically shaking out a rug.

"For my part, I always thought Mr. Truxton far and away the pick of Miss Jansen's two steadies. I never could understand what she could see in Dr. Dench! Why, he's old enough to be her — "

In the doorway, Sheriff Peddicord's bulky figure beckoned.

"Don't you reckon as how it's about time we were going back to Miss Mack?" he whispered.

"Perhaps," I assented rather reluctantly.

From the shadows of the hall, the sheriff's sound eye fixed itself on me belligerently.

"I say, what I would like to know is what became of that there other man!"

As we paused on the second landing the well-set-up figure of Mr. Homer Truxton was bending toward a partially opened door. Beyond his

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shoulder, I caught a fleeting glimpse of a pale face under a border of rumpled dull-gold hair. Evidently Muriel Jansen had recovered from her faint.

The door closed abruptly, but not before I had seen that her eyes were red with weeping.

Madelyn was sunk into a red-backed chair before a huge, flat-top desk in the corner of the library, a stack of Wendell Marsh's red-bound books, from a wheel-cabinet at her side, bulked before her. She finished the page she was reading — a page marked with a broad blue pencil — without a hint that she had heard us enter.

Sheriff Peddicord stared across at her with a disappointment that was almost ludicrous. Evidently Madelyn was falling short of his conception of the approved attitudes for a celebrated detective!

"Are you a student of Elizabethan literature, Sheriff?" she asked suddenly.

The sheriff gurgled weakly.

"If you are, I am quite sure you will be interested in Mr. Marsh's collection. It is the most thorough on the subject that I have ever seen. For instance, here is a volume on the inner court life of Elizabeth — perhaps you would like me to read you this random passage?"

The sheriff drew himself up with more dignity than I thought he possessed.

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"We are investigating a crime, Miss Mack!"

Madelyn closed the book with a sigh.

"So we are! May I ask what is your report from the butler?"

"Mr. Marsh did *not* have cherry pie for dinner last night!" the sheriff snapped.

"You are quite confident?"

And then abruptly the purport of the question flashed to me.

"Why, Mr. Marsh, himself, mentioned the fact in his letter!" I burst out.

Madelyn's eyes turned to me reprovingly.

"You must be mistaken, Nora."

With a lingering glance at the books on the desk, she rose. Sheriff Peddicord moved toward the door, opened it, and faced about with an abrupt clearing of his throat.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Mack, have — have you found any *clues* in the case?"

Madelyn had paused again at the ribboned curtains.

"Clues? The man who made Mr. Marsh's death possible, Sheriff, was an expert chemist, of Italian origin, living for some time in London — and he died three hundred years ago!"

From the hall we had a fleeting view of Sheriff Peddicord's face, flushed as red as his handkerchief, and then it and the handkerchief disappeared.

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I whirled on Madelyn sternly.

"You are carrying your absurd joke, Miss Mack, altogether too —"

I paused, gulping in my turn. It was as though I had stumbled from the shadows into an electric glare.

Madelyn had crossed to the desk, and was gently shifting the dead ashes of Raleigh's pipe into an envelope. A moment she sniffed at its bowl, peering down at the crumpled body at her feet.

"The pipe!" I gasped. "Wendell Marsh was poisoned with the pipe!"

Madelyn sealed the envelope slowly.

"Is that fact just dawning on you, Nora?"

"But the rest of it — what you told the —"

Madelyn thrummed on the bulky volume of Elizabethan history.

"Some day, Nora, if you will remind me, I will give you the material for what you call a Sunday 'feature' on the historic side of murder as a fine art!"

V

In a curtain-shadowed nook of the side veranda Muriel Jansen was awaiting us, pillowed back against a bronze-draped chair, whose colors almost startlingly matched the gold of her hair. Her re-

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semblance to a tired child was even more pronounced than when I had last seen her.

I found myself glancing furtively for signs of Homer Truxton, but he had disappeared.

Miss Jansen took the initiative in our interview with a nervous abruptness, contrasting oddly with her hesitancy at our last meeting.

"I understand, Miss Mack, that you received a letter from my uncle asking your presence here. May I see it?"

The eagerness of her tones could not be mistaken.

From her wrist-bag Madelyn extended the square envelope of the morning post, with its remarkable message. Twice Muriel Jansen's eyes swept slowly through its contents. Madelyn watched her with a little frown. A sudden tenseness had crept into the air, as though we were all keying ourselves for an unexpected climax. And then, like a thunder-clap, it came.

"A curious communication," Madelyn suggested. "I had hoped you might be able to add to it?"

The tired face in the bronze-draped chair stared across the lawn.

"I can. The most curious fact of your communication, Miss Mack, is that *Wendell Marsh did not write it!*"

Never have I admired more keenly Madelyn's remarkable poise. Save for an almost imperceptible

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ble indrawing of her breath, she gave no hint of the shock which must have stunned her as it did me. I was staring with mouth agape. But, then, I presume you have discovered by this time that I was not designed for a detective!

Strangely enough, Muriel Jansen gave no trace of wonder in her announcement. Her attitude suggested a sense of detachment from the subject as though suddenly it had lost its interest. And yet, less than an hour ago, it had prostrated her in a swoon.

"You mean the letter is a forgery?" asked Madelyn quietly.

"Quite obviously."

"And the attempts on Mr. Marsh's life to which it refers?"

"There have been none. I have been with my uncle continuously for six months. I can speak definitely."

Miss Jansen fumbled in a white-crocheted bag.

"Here are several specimens of Mr. Marsh's writing. I think they should be sufficient to convince you of what I say. If you desire others —"

I was gulping like a truant school-girl as Madelyn spread on her lap the three notes extended to her. Casual business and personal references they were, none of more than half a dozen lines. Quite enough, however, to complete the sudden chasm at

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our feet — quite enough to emphasize a bold, aggressive penmanship, almost perpendicular, without the slightest resemblance to the cramped, shadowy writing of the morning's astonishing communication.

Madelyn rose from her chair, smoothing her skirts thoughtfully. For a moment she stood at the railing, gazing down upon a trellis of yellow roses, her face turned from us. For the first time in our curious friendship, I was actually conscious of a feeling of pity for her! The blank wall which she faced seemed so abrupt — so final!

Muriel Jansen shifted her position slightly.

"Are you satisfied, Miss Mack?"

"Quite." Madelyn turned, and handed back the three notes. "I presume this means that you do not care for me to continue the case?"

I whirled in dismay. I had never thought of this possibility.

"On the contrary, Miss Mack, it seems to me an additional reason why you should continue!"

I breathed freely again. At least we were not to be dismissed with the abruptness that Miss Jansen's maid had shown! Madelyn bowed rather absently.

"Then if you will give me another interview, perhaps this afternoon —"

Miss Jansen fumbled with the lock of her bag.

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For the first time her voice lost something of its directness.

"Have — have you any explanation of this astonishing — forgery?"

Madelyn was staring out toward the increasing crowd at the gate. A sudden ripple had swept through it.

"Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Orlando Julio, Miss Jansen?"

My own eyes, following the direction of Madelyn's gaze, were brought back sharply to the veranda. For the second time, Muriel Jansen had crumpled back in a faint.

As I darted toward the servants' bell Madelyn checked me. Striding up the walk were two men with the unmistakable air of physicians. At Madelyn's motioning hand they turned toward us.

The foremost of the two quickened his pace as he caught sight of the figure in the chair. Instinctively I knew that he was Dr. Dench — and it needed no profound analysis to place his companion as the local coroner.

With a deft hand on Miss Jansen's heart-beats, Dr. Dench raised a ruddy, brown-whiskered face inquiringly toward us.

"Shock!" Madelyn explained. "Is it serious?"

The hand on the wavering breast darted toward a medicine case, and selected a vial of brownish

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liquid. The gaze above it continued its scrutiny of Madelyn's slender figure.

Dr. Dench was of the rugged, German type, steel-eyed, confidently sure of movement, with the physique of a splendidly muscled animal. If the servant's tattle was to be credited, Muriel Jansen could not have attracted more opposite extremes in her suitors.

The coroner — a rusty-suited man of middle age, in quite obvious professional awe of his companion — extended a glass of water. Miss Jansen wearily opened her eyes before it reached her lips.

Dr. Dench restrained her sudden effort to rise.

"Drink this, please!" There was nothing but professional command in his voice. If he loved the grey-pallored girl in the chair, his emotions were under superb control.

Madelyn stepped to the background, motioning me quietly.

"I fancy I can leave now safely. I am going back to town."

"Town?" I echoed.

"I should be back the latter part of the afternoon. Would it inconvenience you to wait here?"

"But, why on earth —" I began.

"Will you tell the butler to send around the car? Thanks!"

When Madelyn doesn't choose to answer ques-

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tions she ignores them. I subsided as gracefully as possible. As her machine whirled under the porte-cochere, however, my curiosity again overflowed my restraint.

"At least, who is Orlando Julio?" I demanded.

Madelyn carefully adjusted her veil.

"The man who provided the means for the death of Wendell Marsh!" And she was gone.

I swept another glance at the trio on the side veranda, and with what I tried to convince myself was a philosophical shrug, although I knew perfectly well it was merely a pettish fling, sought a retired corner of the rear drawing room, with my pad and pencil.

After all, I was a newspaper woman, and it needed no elastic imagination to picture the scene in the city room of the *Bugle,* if I failed to send a proper accounting of myself.

A few minutes later a tread of feet, advancing to the stairs, told me that the coroner and Dr. Dench were ascending for the belated examination of Wendell Marsh's body. Miss Jansen had evidently recovered, or been assigned to the ministrations of her maid. Once Peters, the wooden-faced butler, entered ghostily to inform me that luncheon would be served at one, but effaced himself almost before my glance returned to my writing.

I partook of the meal in the distinguished com-

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pany of Sheriff Peddicord. Apparently Dr. Dench was still busied in his grewsome task up-stairs, and it was not surprising that Miss Jansen preferred her own apartments.

However much the sheriff's professional poise might have been jarred by the events of the morning, his appetite had not been affected. His attention was too absorbed in the effort to do justice to the Marsh hospitality to waste time in table talk.

He finished his last spoonful of strawberry ice-cream with a heavy sigh of contentment, removed the napkin, which he had tucked under his collar, and, as though mindful of the family's laundry bills, folded it carefully and wiped his lips with his red handkerchief. It was not until then that our silence was interrupted.

Glancing cautiously about the room, and observing that the butler had been called kitchenward, to my amazement he essayed a confidential wink.

"I say," he ventured enticingly, leaning his elbow on the table, "what I would like to know is what became of that there other man!"

"Are you familiar with the Fourth Dimension, Sheriff?" I returned solemnly. I rose from my chair, and stepped toward him confidentially in my turn. "I believe that a thorough study of that subject would answer your question."

It was three o'clock when I stretched myself in

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my corner of the drawing-room, and stuffed the last sheets of my copy paper into a special-delivery-stamped envelope.

My story was done. And Madelyn was not there to blue-pencil the Park Row adjectives! I smiled rather gleefully as I patted my hair, and leisurely addressed the envelope. The city editor would be satisfied, if Madelyn wasn't!

As I stepped into the hall, Dr. Dench, the coroner, and Sheriff Peddicord were descending the stairs. Evidently the medical examination had been completed. Under other circumstances the three expressions before me would have afforded an interesting study in contrasts — Dr. Dench trimming his nails with professional stoicism, the coroner endeavoring desperately to copy the other's *sang froid*, and the sheriff buried in an owl-like solemnity.

Dr. Dench restored his knife to his pocket.

"You are Miss Mack's assistant, I understand?"

I bowed.

"Miss Mack has been called away. She should be back, however, shortly."

I could feel the doctor's appraising glance dissecting me with much the deliberateness of a surgical operation. I raised my eyes suddenly, and returned his stare. It was a virile, masterful face — and, I had to admit, coldly handsome!

Dr. Dench snapped open his watch.

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"Very well then, Miss, Miss —"

"Noraker!" I supplied crisply.

The blond beard inclined the fraction of an inch.

"We will wait."

"The autopsy?" I ventured. "Has it —"

"The result of the autopsy I will explain to — Miss Mack!"

I bit my lip, felt my face flush as I saw that Sheriff Peddicord was trying to smother a grin, and turned with a rather unsuccessful shrug.

Now, if I had been of a vindictive nature, I would have opened my envelope and inserted a retaliating paragraph that would have returned the snub of Dr. Dench with interest. I flatter myself that I consigned the envelope to the Three Forks post-office, in the rear of the Elite Dry Goods Emporium, with its contents unchanged.

As a part recompense, I paused at a corner drug store, and permitted a young man with a gorgeous pink shirt to make me a chocolate ice-cream soda. I was bent over an asthmatic straw when, through the window, I saw Madelyn's car skirt the curb.

I rushed out to the sidewalk, while the young man stared dazedly after me. The chauffeur swerved the machine as I tossed a dime to the Adonis of the fountain.

Madelyn shifted to the end of the seat as I clambered to her side. One glance was quite enough to

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show that her town-mission, whatever it was, had ended in failure. Perhaps it was the consciousness of this fact that brought my eyes next to her blue turquoise locket. It was open. I glared accusingly.

"So you have fallen back on the cola stimulant again, Miss Mack?"

She nodded glumly, and perversely slipped into her mouth another of the dark, brown berries, on which I have known her to keep up for forty-eight hours without sleep, and almost without food.

For a moment I forgot even my curiosity as to her errand.

"I wish the duty would be raised so high you couldn't get those things into the country!"

She closed her locket, without deigning a response. The more volcanic my outburst, the more glacial Madelyn's coldness — particularly on the cola topic. I shrugged in resignation. I might as well have done so in the first place!

I straightened my hat, drew my handkerchief over my flushed face, and coughed questioningly. Continued silence. I turned in desperation.

"Well?" I surrendered.

"Don't you know enough, Nora Noraker, to hold your tongue?"

My pent-up emotions snapped.

"Look here, Miss Mack, I have been snubbed by Dr. Dench and the coroner, grinned at by Sheriff

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Peddicord, and I am not going to be crushed by you! What is your report, — good, bad, or indifferent?"

Madelyn turned from her stare into the dust-yellow road.

"I have been a fool, Nora — a blind, bigoted, self-important fool!"

I drew a deep breath.

"Which means — "

From her bag Madelyn drew the envelope of dead tobacco ashes from the Marsh library, and tossed it over the side of the car. I sank back against the cushions.

"Then the tobacco after all — "

"Is nothing but tobacco — harmless tobacco!"

"But the pipe — I thought the pipe — "

"That's just it! The pipe, my dear girl, killed Wendell Marsh! But I don't know how! *I don't know how!*"

"Madelyn," I said severely, "you are a woman, even if you are making your living at a man's profession! What you need is a good cry!"

VI

Dr. Dench, pacing back and forth across the veranda, knocked the ashes from an amber-stemmed meerschaum, and advanced to meet us as we

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alighted. The coroner and Sheriff Peddicord were craning their necks from wicker chairs in the background. It was easy enough to surmise that Dr. Dench had parted from them abruptly in the desire for a quiet smoke to marshall his thoughts.

"Fill your pipe again if you wish," said Madelyn. "I don't mind."

Dr. Dench inclined his head, and dug the mouth of his meerschaum into a fat leather pouch. A spiral of blue smoke soon curled around his face. He was one of that type of men to whom a pipe lends a distinction of studious thoughtfulness.

With a slight gesture he beckoned in the direction of the coroner.

"It is proper, perhaps, that Dr. Williams in his official capacity should be heard first."

Through the smoke of his meerschaum, his eyes were searching Madelyn's face. It struck me that he was rather puzzled as to just how seriously to take her.

The coroner shuffled nervously. At his elbow, Sheriff Peddicord fumbled for his red handkerchief.

"We have made a thorough examination of Mr. Marsh's body, Miss Mack, a most thorough examination —"

"Of course he was not shot, nor stabbed, nor strangled, nor sand-bagged?" interrupted Madelyn crisply.

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The coroner glanced at Dr. Dench uncertainly. The latter was smoking with inscrutable face.

"Nor poisoned!" finished the coroner with a quick breath.

A blue smoke curl from Dr. Dench's meerschaum vanished against the sun. The coroner jingled a handful of coins in his pocket. The sound jarred on my nerves oddly. Not poisoned! Then Madelyn's theory of the pipe —

My glance swerved in her direction. Another blank wall — the blankest in this riddle of blank walls!

But the bewilderment I had expected in her face I did not find. The black dejection I had noticed in the car had dropped like a whisked-off cloak. The tired lines had been erased as by a sponge. Her eyes shone with that tense glint which I knew came only when she saw a befogged way swept clear before her.

"You mean that you *found* no trace of poison?" she corrected.

The coroner drew himself up.

"Under the supervision of Dr. Dench, we have made a most complete probe of the various organs, — lungs, stomach, heart —"

"And brain, I presume?"

"Brain? Certainly not!"

"And you?" Madelyn turned toward Dr.

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Dench. "You subscribe to Dr. Williams' opinion?"

Dr. Dench removed his meerschaum.

"From our examination of Mr. Marsh's body, I am prepared to state emphatically that there is no trace of toxic condition of any kind!"

"Am I to infer then that you will return a verdict of — natural death?"

Dr. Dench stirred his pipe-ashes.

"I was always under the impression, Miss Mack, that the verdict in a case of this kind must come from the coroner's jury."

Madelyn pinned back her veil, and removed her gloves.

"There is no objection to my seeing the body again?"

The coroner stared.

"Why, er — the undertaker has it now. I don't see why he should object, if you wish —"

Madelyn stepped to the door. Behind her, Sheriff Peddicord stirred suddenly.

"I say, what I would like to know, gents, is what became of that there other man!"

It was not until six o'clock that I saw Madelyn again, and then I found her in Wendell Marsh's red library. She was seated at its late tenant's huge desk. Before her were a vial of whitish-grey

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powder, a small, rubber, inked roller, a half a dozen sheets of paper, covered with what looked like smudges of black ink, and Raleigh's pipe. I stopped short, staring.

She rose with a shrug.

"Finger-prints," she explained laconically. "This sheet belongs to Miss Jansen; the next to her maid; the third to the butler, Peters; the fourth to Dr. Dench; the fifth to Wendell Marsh, himself. It was my first experiment in taking the 'prints' of a dead man. It was — interesting."

"But what has that to do with a case of this kind?" I demanded.

Madelyn picked up the sixth sheet of smudged paper.

"We have here the finger-prints of Wendell Marsh's murderer!"

I did not even cry my amazement. I suppose the kaleidoscope of the day had dulled my normal emotions. I remember that I readjusted a loose pin in my waist before I spoke.

"The murderer of Wendell Marsh!" I repeated mechanically. "Then he *was* poisoned?"

Madelyn's eyes opened and closed without answer.

I reached over to the desk, and picked up Mr. Marsh's letter of the morning post at Madelyn's elbow.

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"You have found the man who forged this?"

"It was *not* forged!"

In my daze I dropped the letter to the floor.

"You have discovered then the other man in the death-struggle that wrecked the library?"

"There was no other man!"

Madelyn gathered up her possessions from the desk. From the edge of the row of books she lifted a small, red-bound volume, perhaps four inches in width, and then with a second thought laid it back.

"By the way, Nora, I wish you would come back here at eight o'clock. If this book is still where I am leaving it, please bring it to me! I think that will be all for the present."

"All?" I gasped. "Do you realize that —"

Madelyn moved toward the door.

"I think eight o'clock will be late enough for your errand," she said without turning.

The late June twilight had deepened into a somber darkness when, my watch showing ten minutes past the hour of my instructions, I entered the room on the second floor that had been assigned to Miss Mack and myself. Madelyn at the window was staring into the shadow-blanketed yard.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Your book is no longer in the library!" I said crossly.

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Madelyn whirled with a smile.

"Good! And now if you will be so obliging as to tell Peters to ask Miss Jansen to meet me in the rear drawing-room, with any of the friends of the family she desires to be present, I think we can clear up our little puzzle."

VII

It was a curious group that the graceful Swiss clock in the bronze drawing-room of the Marsh house stared down upon as it ticked its way past the half hour after eight. With a grave, rather insistent bow, Miss Mack had seated the other occupants of the room as they answered her summons. She was the only one of us that remained standing.

Before her were Sheriff Peddicord, Homer Truxton, Dr. Dench, and Muriel Jansen. Madelyn's eyes swept our faces for a moment in silence, and then she crossed the room and closed the door.

"I have called you here," she began, "to explain the mystery of Mr. Marsh's death." Again her glance swept our faces. "In many respects it has provided us with a peculiar, almost an unique problem.

"We find a man, in apparently normal health, dead. The observer argues at once foul play; and yet on his body is no hint of wound or bruise. The

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medical examination discovers no trace of poison. The autopsy shows no evidence of crime. Apparently we have eliminated all forms of unnatural death.

"I have called you here because the finding of the autopsy is incorrect, or rather incomplete. We are not confronted by natural death — but by a crime. And I may say at the outset that I am not the only person to know this fact. My knowledge is shared by one other in this room."

Sheriff Peddicord rose to his feet and rather ostentatiously stepped to the door and stood with his back against it. Madelyn smiled faintly at the movement.

"I scarcely think there will be an effort at escape, Sheriff," she said quietly.

Muriel Jansen was crumpled back into her chair, staring. Dr. Dench was studying Miss Mack with the professional frown he might have directed at an abnormality on the operating table. It was Truxton who spoke first in the fashion of the impulsive boy.

"If we are not dealing with natural death, how on earth then was Mr. Marsh killed?"

Madelyn whisked aside a light covering from a stand at her side, and raised to view Raleigh's red sand-stone pipe. For a moment she balanced it musingly.

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"The three-hundred-year-old death tool of Orlando Julio," she explained. "It was this that killed Wendell Marsh!"

She pressed the bowl of the pipe into the palm of her hand. "As an instrument of death, it is *almost* beyond detection. We examined the ashes, and found nothing but harmless tobacco. The organs of the victim showed no trace of foul play."

She tapped the long stem gravely.

"But the examination of the organs did *not* include the brain. And it is through the brain that the pipe strikes, killing first the mind in a nightmare of insanity, and then the body. That accounts for the wreckage that we found — the evidences apparently of *two* men engaged in a desperate struggle. The wreckage was the work of only one man — a maniac in the moment before death. The drug with which we are dealing drives its victim into an insane fury before his body succumbs. I believe such cases are fairly common in India."

"Then Mr. Marsh was poisoned after all?" cried Truxton. He was the only one of Miss Mack's auditors to speak.

"No, not poisoned! You will understand as I proceed. The pipe, you will find, contains apparently but one bowl and one channel, and at a superficial glance is filled only with tobacco. In reality,

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there is a lower chamber concealed beneath the upper bowl, to which extends a second channel. This secret chamber is charged with a certain compound of Indian hemp and dhatura leaves, one of the most powerful brain stimulants known to science — and one of the most dangerous if used above a certain strength. From the lower chamber it would leave no trace, of course, in the ashes above.

"Between the two compartments of the pipe is a slight connecting opening, sufficient to allow the hemp beneath to be ignited gradually by the burning tobacco. When a small quantity of the compound is used, the smoker is stimulated as by no other drug, not even opium. Increase the quantity above the danger point, and mark the result. The victim is not poisoned in the strict sense of the word, but literally *smothered to death by the fumes!*"

In Miss Mack's voice was the throb of the student before the creation of the master.

"I should like this pipe, Miss Jansen, if you ever care to dispose of it!"

The girl was still staring woodenly.

"It was Orlando Julio, the medieval poisoner," she gasped, "that Uncle described —"

"In his seventeenth chapter of 'The World's Great Cynics,'" finished Madelyn. "I have taken the liberty of reading the chapter in manuscript

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form. Julio, however, was not the discoverer of the drug. He merely introduced it to the English public. As a matter of fact, it is one of the oldest stimulants of the East. It is easy to assume that it was not as a stimulant that Julio used it, but as a baffling instrument of murder. The mechanism of the pipe was his own invention, of course. The smoker, if not in the secret, would be completely oblivious to his danger. He might even use the pipe in perfect safety — until its lower chamber was loaded!"

Sheriff Peddicord, against the door, mopped his face with his red handkerchief, like a man in a daze. Dr. Dench was still studying Miss Mack with his intent frown. Madelyn swerved her angle abruptly.

"Last night was not the first time the hemp-chamber of Wendell Marsh's pipe had been charged. We can trace the effect of the drug on his brain for several months — hallucinations, imaginative enemies seeking his life, incipient insanity. That explains his astonishing letter to me. Wendell Marsh was not a man of nine lives, but only one. The perils which he described were merely fantastic figments of the drug. For instance, the episode of the poisoned cherry pie. There was no pie at all served at the table yesterday.

"The letter to me was not a forgery, Miss Jansen, although you were sincere enough when you

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pronounced it such. The complete change in your uncle's handwriting was only another effect of the drug. It was this fact, in the end, which led me to the truth. You did not perceive that the dates of your notes and mine were *six months apart!* I knew that some terrific mental shock *must* have occurred in the meantime.

"And then, too, the ravages of a drug-crazed victim were at once suggested by the curtains of the library. They were not simply torn, but fairly *chewed* to pieces!"

A sudden tension fell over the room. We shifted nervously, rather avoiding one another's eyes. Madelyn laid the pipe back on the stand. She was quite evidently in no hurry to continue. It was Truxton again who put the leading question of the moment.

"If Mr. Marsh was killed as you describe, Miss Mack, *who* killed him?"

Madelyn glanced across at Dr. Dench.

"Will you kindly let me have the red leather book that you took from Mr. Marsh's desk this evening, Doctor?"

The physician met her glance steadily.

"You think it — necessary?"

"I am afraid I must insist."

For an instant Dr. Dench hesitated. Then, with a shrug, he reached into a coat-pocket and extended

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the red-bound volume, for which Miss Mack had dispatched me on the fruitless errand to the library. As Madelyn opened it we saw that it was not a printed volume, but filled with several hundred pages of close, cramped writing. Dr. Dench's gaze swerved to Muriel Jansen as Miss Mack spoke.

"I have here the diary of Wendell Marsh, which shows us that he had been in the habit of seeking the stimulant of Indian hemp, or 'hasheesh' for some time, possibly as a result of his retired, sedentary life and his close application to his books. Until his purchase of the Bainford relics, however, he had taken the stimulant in the comparatively harmless form of powdered leaves or 'bhang,' as it is termed in the Orient. His acquisition of Julio's drug-pipe, and an accidental discovery of its mechanism, led him to adopt the compound of hemp and dhatura, prepared for smoking — in India called 'charas.' No less an authority than Captain E. N. Windsor, bacteriologist of the Burmese government, states that it is directly responsible for a large percentage of the lunacy of the Orient. Wendell Marsh, however, did not realize his danger, nor how much stronger the latter compound is than the form of the drug to which he had been accustomed.

"Dr. Dench endeavored desperately to warn him of his peril, and free him from the bondage of the

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habit as the diary records, but the victim was too thoroughly enslaved. In fact, the situation had reached a point just before the final climax when it could no longer be concealed. The truth was already being suspected by the older servants. I assume this was why you feared my investigations in the case, Miss Jansen."

Muriel Jansen was staring at Madelyn in a sort of dumb appeal.

"I can understand and admire Dr. Dench's efforts to conceal the fact from the public — first, in his supervision of the inquest, which might have stumbled on the truth, and then in his removal of the betraying diary, which I left purposely exposed in the hope that it might inspire such an action. Had it *not* been removed, I might have suspected another explanation of the case — in spite of certain evidence to the contrary!"

Dr. Dench's face had gone white.

"God! Miss Mack, do you mean that after all it was not suicide?"

"It was not suicide," said Madelyn quietly. She stepped across toward the opposite door.

"When I stated that my knowledge that we are not dealing with natural death was shared by another person in this room, I might have added that it was shared by still a third person — ***not in the room!***"

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With a sudden movement she threw open the door before her. From the adjoining ante-room lurched the figure of Peters, the butler. He stared at us with a face grey with terror, and then crumpled to his knees. Madelyn drew away sharply as he tried to catch her skirts.

"You may arrest the murderer of Wendell Marsh, Sheriff!" she said gravely. "And I think perhaps you had better take him outside."

She faced our bewildered stares as the drawing-room door closed behind Mr. Peddicord and his prisoner. From her stand she again took Raleigh's sand-stone pipe, and with it two sheets of paper, smudged with the prints of a human thumb and fingers.

"It was the pipe in the end which led me to the truth, not only as to the method but the identity of the assassin," she explained. "The hand, which placed the fatal charge in the concealed chamber, left its imprint on the surface of the bowl. The fingers, grimed with the dust of the drug, made an impression which I would have at once detected had I not been so occupied with what I might find *inside* that I forgot what I might find *outside!* I am very much afraid that I permitted myself the great blunder of the modern detective — lack of thoroughness.

"Comparison with the finger-prints of the vari-

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ous agents in the case, of course, made the next step a mere detail of mathematical comparison. To make my identity sure, I found that my suspect possessed not only the opportunity and the knowledge for the crime, but the motive.

"In his younger days Peters was a chemist's apprentice; a fact which he utilized in his master's behalf in obtaining the drugs which had become so necessary a part of Mr. Marsh's life. Had Wendell Marsh appeared in person for so continuous a supply, his identity would soon have made the fact a matter of common gossip. He relied on his servant for his agent, a detail which he mentions several times in his diary, promising Peters a generous bequest in his will as a reward. I fancy that it was the dream of this bequest, which would have meant a small fortune to a man in his position, that set the butler's brain to work on his treacherous plan of murder."

Miss Mack's dull gold hair covered the shoulders of her white *peignoir* in a great, thick braid. She was propped in a nest of pillows, with her favorite romance, "The Three Musketeers," open at the historic siege of Porthos in the wine cellar. We had elected to spend the night at the Marsh house.

Madelyn glanced up as I appeared in the doorway of our room.

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"Allow me to present a problem to your analytical skill, Miss Mack," I said humbly. "Which man does your knowledge of feminine psychology say Muriel Jansen will reward — the gravely protecting physician, or the boyishly admiring Truxton?"

"If she were thirty," retorted Madelyn, yawning, "she would be wise enough to choose Dr. Dench. But, as she is only twenty-two, it will be Truxton."

With a sigh, she turned again to the swashbuckling exploits of the gallant Porthos.

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II

THE MISSING BRIDEGROOM

I

Two million dollars and the most beautiful girl in the county were to be Norris Endicott's in another twenty-five minutes.

He was emphatically in love with Bertha Van Sutton, but cared nothing for her millions, in spite of the remembrance of his own uncertain income as a struggling architect. The next half hour was to bring him all that a reasonable man could ask in this uncertain world.

This was his position and outlook at the Van Sutton home at seven-forty P. M. Some one has said that a moment can change the course of a battle. Also it can revolutionize a man's life — perhaps end it altogether — and pitchfork him into another. At five minutes past eight — the hour that Endicott was to have made Bertha Van Sutton his wife — he had vanished from "The Maples"

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as completely and mysteriously as though the balmy earth outside had opened and swallowed him. The expectant bridegroom literally had been whisked into oblivion.

At twenty minutes before eight o'clock, Willard White, glancing into his room, found Endicott pacing the floor, his tall, closely knit figure showing to excellent advantage in his evening clothes, a quiet smile, as of anticipation, on his face as he held a match to his cigarette.

"Nervous, old man?" White called banteringly, holding the door a-jar.

Endicott turned with a laugh. "Nervous? When the best girl in the world is about to be mine — all mine? Of course I'm nervous, but it's because I am so happy I can hardly keep my feet on the ground!" (Which was a somewhat hysterical, but thoroughly human remark, you would agree, had you ever worshipped at the shrine of Bertha Van Sutton!)

At five minutes past eight the orchestra shifted the music of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" to their racks, the leader cleared his throat in expectation of the signal to raise his baton, and the chattering throngs of guests, scattered through the lavishly decorated house from the conservatory to the veranda, swept into the long red-and-gold drawing-room, with the bower of palms and orchids

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at the end drawing admiring exclamations even from the most cynical dowagers. Adolph Van Sutton's millions assuredly had set a fit stage for the most talked-of wedding of the season.

Outside, Adolph, himself, was fumbling nervously with his cuffs as the bridal party ranged itself in whispering ranks for the entry. Bertha Van Sutton had just appeared with Ethel Allison, her chief bridesmaid and chum since boarding-school days. As she took the arm of her father, she made a picture to justify the half-audible sighs of envy from the bevy of attendants. With the folds of her long veil reaching almost to the hem of her gown and the sweep of her train, her figure looked almost regal in spite of her girlish slenderness. Her dark hair, piled in a great, loose coil, heightened the impression, which might have given her the suggestion of haughtiness had it not been for the magnetism of her smile.

The smile was bubbling in her eyes as she glanced around with the surprised question, "Where's Norris?"

Her father looked up quickly, but it was Ethel Allison who answered, "Willard White has just gone after him, Bert. Here he comes now!"

The best man came hurriedly through the door. As he paused, he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

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"Where's Norris, Willard?" Miss Allison asked impatiently.

"He's gone!"

"Gone!" The bridesmaid's voice rose to a shrill falsetto.

The best man shook his head in a sort of blind bewilderment. "He's gone," he repeated, mechanically.

The bride whirled. Adolph Van Sutton strode forward and seized White by the arm.

"What, under Heaven, are you giving us, man?"

White stiffened his shoulders as though the sharp grasp had awakened him from his daze.

"Norris Endicott is not in this house, sir!" he cried, as if realizing for the first time the full import of his announcement.

In the drawing-room, the orchestra-leader, with a final look at the empty door, lowered his baton with a snort of disgust and plumped sullenly back in his chair. The jewel-studded ranks of the crowding guests elevated their eyebrows in polite wonder. In the corner, the palms that were to have sheltered the bride beckoned impatiently.

On the velvet carpet, outside, lay a white, silent figure. It was Bertha Van Sutton who had fallen, an unconscious heap in the folds of her wedding finery.

Up-stairs in the groom's apartment, a circle of

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disheveled men were staring at one another in tongue-tied bewilderment. Norris Endicott might have vanished into thin air, evaporated. The man who was to wed the Van Sutton heiress had been blotted out, eliminated.

As the group edged uneasily toward the door, a stray breeze, fragrant with the evening odors of the flower-lined lawn below, swept through the open window. A small object, half-buried in the curtain folds, fell with a soft thud to the floor. The nearest man stooped toward it almost unconsciously. It was a silver ball, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. With a shrug, he passed it to Adolph Van Sutton. The latter dropped it mechanically into his pocket.

II

THE five o'clock sun was splashing its waning glow down on to the autumn-thinned trees when I pushed open the rustic gate of "The Rosary" the next afternoon to carry the somber problem that was beyond me to the wizard skill of Madelyn Mack.

I was frankly tired after the day's buffetings. And there was a soothing restfulness in the velvet green of the close-cropped lawn, with its fat box hedges and the scarlet splashes of its canna beds,

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that brought me to an almost involuntary pause lest I break the spell. Madelyn Mack's rose garden beyond was a wreck of shrivelled bushes, but my pang at the memory of its faded glories was softened by the banks of asters and cosmos marshalled before it as though to hide its emptiness. The snake-like coil of a black hose was pouring a playful spray into a circle of scarlet sage at the side of the gravelled path, with the gaunt figure of Andrew Bolton crouching, hatless, near it, trimming a ragged line of grass with a pair of long shears.

With a sigh I turned toward the quaint chalet nestling ahead. I might have been miles from the rumble of the work-a-day world.

I smiled — somewhat cynically, I will confess — as I pulled the old-fashioned knocker. There were few persons yet who knew, as I did, the shadows surrounding the wedding-night vanishing of Norris Endicott. Could Madelyn solve the problem that had already taken rank as the most baffling police case of five years?

The sphinx-like face of Susan Bolton greeted me on the other side of the door. She was dressed for the street in her prim bonnet and black silk gown.

"Miss Madelyn said you would be here, Miss Noraker," she greeted me. "I thought I might meet you on my way to the Missionary Tea."

Crime and a Missionary Tea! I smiled at the

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incongruity as I protested, "But I never told her I was coming! How in the world—"

Susan threw up her mittened hands. "Law, child, don't you know she has a way of finding out things?"

A sudden laugh and the friendly bark of a dog sounded from the end of the hall. A slight figure in black stepped toward me with her two hands extended. At her heels, Peter the Great trotted lazily.

"I am glad you came before six!" she said, as she seized and held both of my hands, a distinctively Madelyn Mack habit. "I was afraid you would be delayed. The trolley service to the Van Sutton place is abominable!"

"But why did you want me before six?" I cried. "And how did you know I was coming at all? And how—"

Madelyn released my hands with a smile. "Really, you must give me time to catch my breath! Come into the den with Peter the Great, and toast yourself while we cross-examine each other."

It was not until she was drawn up before the crackling log in the great open fireplace, with the dog curled contentedly on the jaguar skin at her feet, that she spoke again, and then it was in the rapid-fire fashion that showed me she was "hot on a winding trail," as she would express it.

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"I will answer your questions first," she began, as she rested her chin on her left hand in her favorite attitude and peered across at me, her eyes glowing with the restless energy of her mood. "I telephoned the *Bugle* office this morning and was told that you had just left for 'The Maples.' Of course I knew that Nora Noraker, the star reporter, would be put on the Van Sutton case at once, and I had a shrewd idea from past experience that you would bring the problem to me before night. As I am to meet Adolph Van Sutton here at six, I was anxious to review the field with you before his arrival. I was retained in the case this afternoon, as I rather expected to be, after I had read the early editions of the papers and saw that the police would have to abandon their obvious theory."

I raised my eyebrows. "What is that?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Murder! I had not read half a dozen paragraphs before I saw that this, of course, was absurd, and that even the police would have to admit as much before night."

"But they haven't!" I cut in triumphantly. "Detective Wiley gave out an interview just before I left — said there was no doubt that Endicott had been made away with!"

"Then the more fool he!" Madelyn stirred the gnarled log in the fireplace until a shower of yellow

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sparks went dancing up the chimney. "I could show him his mistake in three sentences."

For a moment she sat staring at me, with her long lashes veiling a slow smile.

"Do they use gas or electricity at 'The Maples'?" she asked, abruptly.

I thought for a moment. "Both," I answered. "Why?"

"Was either burning in Endicott's room at the time of his disappearance?"

I shook my head with a helpless smile.

Madelyn rubbed her hands gently through the long, shaggy hair of Peter the Great. We both sat staring into the fire for quite five minutes. "Did Endicott dress at 'The Maples' for the ceremony?" she demanded suddenly. "Or did he dress before he appeared at the house?" I could feel her eyes studying me as I pondered the question.

I looked up finally with an expression of rueful bewilderment.

"Oh, Nora! Nora!" she cried, with a little stamp of her foot. "Where are your eyes and your ears? And you at the house all day!"

"I rather flattered myself that I had found out all there was to find," I answered somewhat petulantly.

Madelyn reached over to the divan by her elbow

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and selected a copy of the *Bugle* from the stack of crumpled papers that it contained. It was not until she had read slowly through the five-column report of the Van Sutton mystery — two columns of which I had contributed myself — that she looked up. "I presume you have mentioned here everything of importance?"

I nodded. "Norris Endicott was above suspicion — morally and financially. He had few friends — that is, close friends — but no enemies. There was absolutely no one who wished him ill, no one who might have a reason for doing so, unless —"

Madelyn noted my hesitation with a swift flash. "You mean his defeated rivals for Miss Van Sutton's hand?"

"You have taken the words out of my mouth. There were two of them, and both were present at the wedding — that didn't take place. Curiously enough, one of the two was Endicott's best man, Willard White. The other he also knew more or less intimately — Richard Bainbridge, the civil engineer." I gazed across at her as I paused. To my disappointment, she was studying the carpet, with her thoughts obviously far away. "That is all, I think," I finished rather lamely.

The log in the fireplace fell downward with a shower of fresh sparks. Peter the Great growled

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uneasily. Madelyn took the dog's head in her lap, and was silent so long I thought she had forgotten me.

Suddenly she leaned back in her chair and her eyes half closed.

"One more question, Nora, if you please. I believe you said in your report that, when the group of searchers were leaving Endicott's vacant room, a small, silver ball rolled from the sill to the floor. Do you happen to know whether the ball is solid or hollow?"

I smiled. "It is hollow. I examined it this afternoon. But surely such a trivial incident —"

Madelyn pushed back her chair with a quick gesture of satisfaction. "How often must I tell you that nothing is trivial — in crime? That answer atones for all of your previous failures, Nora. You may go to the head of the class! No, not another word!" she interrupted as I stared at her. "I don't want to think or talk — now. I must have some music to clear my brain if I am to scatter these cobwebs!"

I sank back with a sigh of resignation and watched her as she stepped across to the phonograph, resting on the cabinet of records in the corner. I knew from experience that she had veered into a mood in which I would have gained an instant rebuke had I attempted to press the case

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farther. Patiently or impatiently, I must await her pleasure to reopen our discussion.

"What shall it be?" she asked almost gaily, with her nervous alertness completely gone as she stooped over the record-case. "How would the quartet from 'Rigoletto' strike your mood? I think it would be ideal, for my part."

From Verdi we circled to Donizetti's "Lucia," and then, in an odd whim, her hand drew forth a haphazard selection from "William Tell." It was the latter part of the ballet music, and the record was perhaps half completed when the door opened — we had not heard the bell — and Susan announced Adolph Van Sutton.

Madelyn rose, but she did not stop the machine. Mr. Van Sutton plumped nervously into the seat that she extended to him, gazing with obvious embarrassment at her radiant face as she stood with her head bent forward and a faint smile on her lips, completely under the sway of Rossini's matchless music.

She stopped the machine sharply at the end of the record. When she whirled back toward us, "William Tell" had been forgotten. She was again the sharp-eyed, sharp-questioning ferret, with no thought beyond the problem of the moment. I think the transformation astonished our caller even more than the glimpse of her unexpected mood at

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his entrance. I could imagine that his matter-of-fact, commercial mind was floundering in the effort to understand the remarkable young woman before him.

Madelyn changed her seat to one almost directly opposite her nervous client. She was about to speak when she noted his eyes turned questioningly in my direction.

"This is my friend, Miss Noraker, Mr. Van Sutton," she announced formally. "I believe you have met before."

Mr. Van Sutton polished his glasses with his handkerchief as he responded somewhat dubiously. "Miss Noraker is a — a reporter, I believe? Don't you think, Miss Mack, that our conversation should be, er — private?"

I had already risen when Madelyn motioned to me to pause. "Miss Noraker is not here in her newspaper capacity. She is a personal friend who has accompanied me in so many of my cases that I look upon her almost as a lieutenant. You can rest assured that nothing which you or I would wish kept silent will be published!"

Mr. Van Sutton's face cleared, and he bowed to me as if in apology. "Very well, Miss Mack. I am sure I can rely upon your discretion perfectly."

I resumed my chair at a sign from Madelyn, and our visitor stared out into the grey dusk, with the

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lines of his clean-shaven face showing the uneasiness and worry of the past twenty-four hours.

Madelyn was the first to speak. "Will you tell me candidly, Mr. Van Sutton, why you objected so persistently to your daughter's marriage?"

Our caller swung around in his chair as though a shot had been fired at his elbow. "What do you mean, young woman?"

Madelyn dropped her chin on to her hand and the fleeting twinkle I know so well flashed into her eyes. "Six months ago, you positively refused to consider Norris Endicott as your daughter's suitor. Three months ago he approached you again and you refused him a second time. It was only four weeks ago, that you gave your consent — a somewhat grudging one, if I must be plain — and the date of the wedding was fixed almost immediately."

Adolph Van Sutton stared across at Madelyn with widening eyes. The flush faded from his cheeks, leaving them a dull white.

"I employed you, Miss Mack, to trace Norris Endicott, not to burrow into my personal affairs!"

Madelyn stepped toward the door. "I will send in the bill for my services within the week, Mr. Van Sutton. Did you leave your hat in the hall?"

"Am I to understand that you are throwing up the case?"

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"Yes, sir."

Adolph Van Sutton thrust his hands restlessly into his pockets. "I — I beg your pardon, Miss Mack! Please sit down, and overlook a nervous man's excitability. You can hardly understand the strain I am under. You were asking me — what was it you were asking me? Ah, you were inquiring into my relations with young Endicott!"

Mr. Van Sutton rolled his handkerchief into a ball between his hands as Madelyn coldly resumed her chair. "There is really nothing to tell you. You are a woman of the world, Miss Mack. I objected to Mr. Endicott as a husband for my daughter because, frankly, he was a poor man — and Bertha has hardly been raised in a manner that would teach her economy. Have I made myself clear?" He dropped his handkerchief into his pocket and his lips tightened. "Bertha had her own way in the end — as she generally does — and I gave in. Is there anything more?"

"I believe that personally you preferred Willard White as a son-in-law. Am I right?"

"What of it?"

Madelyn gave a little sigh. "Nothing — nothing! You have been very patient, Mr. Van Sutton. I am going to ask you just one question more — before we leave for 'The Maples.' Does the sec-

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ond story veranda under Mr. Endicott's window extend along the entire side of the house?"

I think that we both stared at her.

"The second story veranda?" repeated Mr. Van Sutton. "I thought you told me that you had never been to my home!"

Madelyn snapped her fingers with a suggestion of impatience. "I know there *must* be such a veranda! There could be no other way —" She bit her sentence through as though checking an unspoken thought. "Unless I am mistaken, it extends from the front entirely to the rear. Am I correct?"

"You are, but —"

Madelyn pressed the bell at her elbow. "I see you have brought your automobile. I will take the liberty of asking you to share our dinner here. Then we can start for 'The Maples' immediately afterward. With luck we should reach there shortly after eight. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Really, Miss Mack —"

But Madelyn waved her hand, and the matter was settled.

III

The clock was exactly on the stroke of eight when our machine whirled through the broad gate of "The Maples," after an invigorating dash

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through the New Jersey shadows. At the end of the driveway we saw the colonial mansion, whose wedding night festivities had been so abruptly shattered.

If we had expected a house buried in the gloom of mystery we were disappointed. "The Maples" was a blaze of light from cellar to attic. It was not until the automobile stopped at the front veranda, and the solemn face of the butler presented itself with its mutely questioning glance, that we found our first hint of crime or tragedy.

Mr. Van Sutton conducted us at once to the library — a long, high, massively furnished room toward the end of the central hall extending entirely through the house. At the door, he turned with a short bow.

"It is needless to say, of course, that the house and its inmates are at your service. I am completely ignorant of your methods, Miss Mack. If you will let me know — "

He stopped, for Madelyn had walked over to one of the long dormer windows and stood staring out into the darkness, with her hands beating a low tattoo on the glass.

"Is Mr. Endicott's room on this side?" she asked without turning.

"Almost directly overhead."

"And the drawing-room — where the ceremony

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"MADELYN . . . STOOD STARING OUT INTO THE DARKNESS."

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was to have been performed — I take it, is on the other side?"

There was a faraway note in her voice, which told me that she hardly heard Mr. Van Sutton's formal assent.

For perhaps three minutes she remained peering out into the shadowy lawn, as oblivious to our presence as though she had been alone. Our host was pacing back and forth over the polished floor when she whirled.

"Will you take me up to Mr. Endicott's room now, please?"

Mr. Van Sutton strode to the door with an air of relief. "I, myself, will escort you."

Madelyn did not speak during the ascent to the upper floor. Once Mr. Van Sutton ventured a remark, but she made no effort to reply, and he desisted with a shrug. She did not even break her silence when he threw open the door of a chamber at the end of the corridor, and we realized that we were in the room of the missing bridegroom.

For a moment we paused at the threshold, as our guide found the switch and turned on the electric lights. It was a large, airy apartment, with a small alcove at one end containing a bed, and a door at the other end opening into a marble-tiled bathroom. An effort had been made to preserve the contents exactly as they had been found on the previous

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evening. The dressing table was still strewn with a varied assortment of toilet articles, as though they had just been dropped. The curtain of one window was jerked to the top, while its companion hung decorously to the sill.

Madelyn darted merely a cursory glance at the room. Stepping across to the writing-table, she seized the waste paper basket leaning against its side. It was empty. In spite of this fact, she lifted it to the table and whipped out a small magnifying glass from her hand-bag. For fully five minutes she bent over it, studying the woven straw with as much eagerness as a miner searching for gold dust.

When she straightened, her eyes flashed uncertainly around the walls. Directly opposite was an asbestos grate of gas logs. She sank on to her knees before it, the magnifying glass again to her eyes.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Mack?" Mr. Van Sutton asked impatiently.

She did not even glance in our direction. Rising to her feet, she stepped back to the writing-table where two ash trays were resting. "Were these Mr. Endicott's?"

"I — I suppose so. Why?"

Madelyn carried the trays nearer to the light. One held a litter of ashes; the second tray both

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ashes and crumbling cigarette stubs. I caught a curious flicker of satisfaction in her eyes.

"Mr. Endicott must have been something of a smoker, wasn't he?" she asked, as though mentioning a self-evident fact.

"On the contrary, he was not!" retorted Mr. Van Sutton.

"Good!" she cried so heartily that we both stared at her. As she returned the trays, her abstraction vanished. I even caught the fragment of a tune under her breath when she threw open the door of the roomy closet at the other side of the room. It was Schumann's "Traumerei."

A man's light grey street suit was hanging from the row of clothes hooks on the wall. On the floor, a pair of shoes had been tossed. It did not need our host's terse comment to tell us that they belonged to Norris Endicott.

"You will find nothing there, Miss Mack," he volunteered. "The police have had the pockets inside out half a dozen times!"

A cry from Madelyn interrupted him. She had passed the suit with a shrug and had seized the discarded shoes.

"What is it?" Mr. Van Sutton demanded, pressing forward.

Madelyn tossed the shoes back to the floor. Closing the door, she stood tapping her jade brace-

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let. Again I thought that I heard the strains of "Traumerei." "I was once asked to name a detective's first rule of guidance," she said irrelevantly. "I answered to remember always that nothing is trivial — in crime." She paused. "Every day I find something new to prove the correctness of my rule!"

"But surely you have discovered nothing — "

Madelyn gazed at the owner of "The Maples" with her peculiar twinkle. "There are two persons in this house with whom I would like a few moments' conversation. They are the butler and Miss Van Sutton's maid. Could you have them sent to the library?"

"Certainly. Is there anything else?"

Madelyn reached absently across to the ash trays again. There seemed a peculiar fascination for her in their prosaic litter.

"Could I also have the honor of a short interview with your daughter?"

Mr. Van Sutton inclined his head and stepped into the hall. As I followed him, the door was closed sharply behind us. I whirled around and heard the key turn. Madelyn had locked herself in.

Mr. Van Sutton straightened with a frown. Then, without a word, he spun about on his heels and strode toward his daughter's boudoir. I descended the stairs alone.

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"AS SHE SPREAD IT OPEN IN HER LAP, APPARENTLY FOR THE FIRST TIME SHE RECALLED THE BUTLER."

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It was almost a quarter of an hour later that Madelyn rejoined me. She nodded briefly to the butler, who was sitting on the edge of a chair as stiffly erect as a ramrod. But she did not pause. Hardly deigning a glance at me, she stepped over to the long shelves of books, built higher than her arms could reach, and her hand zigzagged along the rich leather bindings and gilt letters. Selecting a massive morocco volume from one of the central rows, she dropped into the nearest seat. The book was an encyclopedia, extending from the letter "H" to the letter "N."

As she spread it open in her lap, apparently for the first time she recalled the butler. She glanced up.

"You will excuse me?"

"Yes, madam!"

"I will be through in a moment!"

"Yes, madam!"

Jenkins' face resumed its stolidness, and Madelyn's gaze dropped to her book. She could not have read a dozen lines, however, when she closed it and sprang to her feet. She paced across the library, her hands behind her back.

"I have only one question to ask, Jenkins."

"Yes, madam!"

"I wish to know whether Mr. Endicott ordered a tray of ashes brought up to his room last night?"

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Jenkins' eyes widened and his hands dropped to his sides. "A tray of ashes?" he stammered.

"I believe that is what I said!"

With a visible effort Jenkins recovered his composure. His twenty years' training had not been in vain. "No, madam!" he answered in a rather dubious tone.

"Are you absolutely sure? I may tell you that a great deal depends upon your answer!"

Jenkins' voice recovered its steadiness. "I am quite sure!"

"Is it possible that you would not know?"

"I am confident that I would know!"

Madelyn sank into the leather rocker by her side, with an expression of the most genuine disappointment that I have ever seen her exhibit. In the silence that followed, the ticking of the colonial clock in the corner sounded with harsh distinctness. Outside in the hall I fancied I heard a repressed cough. Miss Van Sutton's maid evidently was awaiting her turn. Madelyn's slight, black-garbed figure had fallen back in her chair, and her right hand was pressed over her eyes.

"Would you mind leaving the room for a few moments, Nora? No, Jenkins, I wish that you would stay. I find that I have another question for you."

Annette, the maid, was walking back and forth

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in the hall as I opened the door. She glanced toward me, but did not speak. I had hardly noted the details of her figure, however, when the door of the library opened again and the butler followed me. Dull wonder was written on his face as he nodded shortly to the girl to take his place.

My thoughts were broken by the swish of skirts on the stairs. The next moment I faced Adolph Van Sutton and his daughter. This was the first time during the day that I had seen the latter. She had remained locked in her room since morning, denying all interviewers, and only giving Detective Wiley a scant five minutes after his third request. I had expected to find evidences of a pronounced strain after her prostration of the previous evening, but I was startled by her pallor as her father took her arm and led her down the hall.

Of all the heart-broken women, whether of cottage or mansion, with whom my newspaper career has brought me in contact, there was no figure more pathetic than that of the heiress of the Van Sutton millions as she swayed toward me on that eventful night.

Bertha Van Sutton crossed wearily into the library as the maid emerged, "I have one favor to request, Miss Mack, and if you have ever suffered in your life-time, you will grant it. Please be as brief as possible!"

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"Do you want me here?" her father asked.

Madelyn had walked over to the book shelves, and was again delving into the pages of the morocco encyclopedia. "I would prefer not!" she answered without looking up.

It was well toward half-past nine (I had glanced at my watch a dozen times) when the two women in the library emerged. The form of Bertha Van Sutton was bent even more than before, and it was evident at a glance that the strain of the interview had brought her almost to the point of a collapse.

As I started forward, the light flashed for an instant on a round gleaming object in Madelyn Mack's hand. It was the small silver ball that had been found in Norris Endicott's room.

At that moment, the front bell tinkled through the house. There was a short conversation in the vestibule, and then Jenkins ushered a tall, loosely jointed figure into the hall. It was Detective Wiley of the Newark headquarters. (Of course the affair at "The Maples" had come under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey police.)

The detective's ruddy face, with its stubble of beard, was flushed with an unusual excitement, and his stiff, sandy moustache stood out in two bristling lines from his mouth. He received Madelyn's bow with a short, half contemptuous nod, as he snapped

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out, "I'm right after all, Mr. Van Sutton! It's murder — nothing more nor less!"

"Murder!" The gasp came from Bertha Van Sutton. For an instant I thought she was about to faint.

Wiley glanced around the group with a suggestion of conscious importance which did not leave him, even in the tension of the moment.

"We have found Mr. Endicott's clothes in Thompson's Creek — and the coat is covered with blood!"

Madelyn Mack gently led Bertha Van Sutton to the chair I had vacated. One hand was stroking the girl's temples as she turned.

"You are wrong, Mr. Wiley!" she said quietly. "For the peace of mind of this household, I am willing to stake my reputation that you are wrong."

Detective Wiley whirled with a sneer. "Really, you astound me, my lady policeman! May I humbly inquire how your pink tea wisdom deduces so much?"

Madelyn smoothed the folds of her coat as she straightened. "I have promised Miss Van Sutton that if she and her father will call at 'The Rosary' to-morrow afternoon at four, I will give them a complete explanation of this unfortunate affair! You may call also if you are interested, Mr. Wiley

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— and don't arrest the murderer in the meantime! Will you kindly loan us your motor for the trip back to town,' Mr. Van Sutton?"

IV

I CONFESS that I approached Madelyn Mack's chalet the next day with pronounced skepticism. The morning papers of both New York and Newark had been crammed with the discovery of Norris Endicott's blood-stained garments, and were full of hysterical praise for the "masterly work" of Detective Joseph Wiley.

Some one had found that Madelyn Mack had also been retained in the case, and the reporters had tried in vain to obtain an interview. In the face of her silence, the applause for the police had become even more emphasized.

She was alone when I entered; but, as I pointed to the clock just on the verge of four, she held up her hand. The bell sounded through the house, and the next moment Susan conducted Adolph Van Sutton and his daughter into the room.

In the confusion of the greeting, the signs of nervous strain on Madelyn's face struck me sharply. It did not need her weary admission to tell me that she had spent a racking day, nor that she had had frequent recourse to the stimulant of her cola ber-

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ries. Even her hair, about whose arrangement she generally was precise to the point of nervousness, was dishevelled, and once, when Peter the Great thrust his nose into her lap, she ordered him impatiently away.

The Van Suttons had hardly seated themselves when there was a step in the hall and the last guest of the afternoon made his appearance. There was not the slightest hint of ill humor in Madelyn's greeting as Detective Wiley somewhat awkwardly took the hand that she extended to him.

"Have you traced the murderer yet, Mr. Wiley?"

"No, but I expect to have him in custody within the next twenty-four hours!" Detective Wiley dropped heavily into his chair and crossed his knees.

"May I ask if you have found the body?"

"I can't say that we have, but we have certain information which —"

Madelyn walked over to the end of the room where she could face the entire group. She was the only one of us who was standing.

"Then I am more fortunate than you are!"

The detective bounded from his seat, his sandy moustache — the barometer of his emotions — bristling. "I am not a man to trifle with, Miss Mack. Do you mean to tell me —"

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"That I have discovered the body of Norris Endicott? You have caught my meaning exactly!"

Wiley stood staring at her in a sort of tongue-tied amazement. A gasp recalled me to the other occupants of the room. Bertha Van Sutton was devouring Madelyn's face as though pleading with her to end her suspense. Her father was stroking her hand.

Madelyn stepped to the door and threw it open. On the threshold stood a young man in a brown tweed suit, with a purple lump showing just at the edge of his hair. He stared at us as though he were dazed by a sudden light.

Bertha Van Sutton darted across the room, with a cry, and threw herself into his arms.

It was Norris Endicott.

Madelyn sprang to her side, with a query intensely practical — and intensely feminine. "Has she fainted?"

"I — I think so." Norris Endicott stood gazing down at his burden helplessly.

"We must carry her into the next room then — take hold of her shoulders, please! No, the rest of you stand back! It needs a woman to take care of a woman!"

Detective Wiley strode over to the desk telephone and called police headquarters. He had just turned

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from the instrument when the door opened and Madelyn returned.

"She is all right, I assure you!" she cried hastily, as Adolph Van Sutton started from his chair. "I have left her with Mr. Endicott. On the whole, he is the best nurse we could find. Sit down, Mr. Wiley. You will find that rocker more comfortable, Mr. Van Sutton. It is not a long story that I have to tell, but it contains its tragedy — and we have to thank Providence that it isn't a double one!"

She paused, as though marshalling her thoughts. Detective Wiley surveyed her uneasily.

"I am sorry to inform you, Mr. Van Sutton, that your daughter is a widow! Or perhaps — as I wish to be entirely frank — I should say that I am glad to convey this announcement to you!" Her slight, black figure bent forward. "Your daughter's husband was one of the greatest scamps that ever went unpunished!"

"But my daughter never had a husband, Miss Mack! You forget — "

"I forget nothing! Has it ever occurred to you that there might be a chapter in Miss Van Sutton's life unknown to you? Pray keep your seat, my dear sir! You are a man of the world and a father. You have the knowledge of the one and the heart of the other. When I tell you that during your

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daughter's college days — Nora, will you kindly pour Mr. Van Sutton a little of that brandy? Thank you!"

Madelyn did not change her position as the owner of "The Maples" gulped down the liquor. She waited until he had finished, her chin still on her hand, her eyes never shifting.

"Let me give you the explanation of our mystery in a few words, Mr. Van Sutton. The wedding ceremony of Wednesday night was not performed — because your daughter was already a wife! Norris Endicott disappeared from 'The Maples' — eliminated himself — to save her from one of the most agonizing alternatives that ever confronted a woman!"

Behind me, I heard Detective Wiley give a cry of sudden comprehension.

"Incredible, impossible as it may seem, Miss Van Sutton did not know of the barrier to her marriage until the ceremony was less than an hour distant. What she would have done under other circumstances I don't know. It was the man, who was waiting to lead her to the altar, who came to her rescue!"

Madelyn spoke in as emotionless a tone as though she were discussing the weather. There was even a bored note in her voice as though the glamour of the problem had left her — with its solution.

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"To understand the situation, we must go back quite five years. When Miss Van Sutton was a senior at Vassar she fell in love with the matinee idol of a New York stock company. Reginald Winters was a man with a character as shallow as his heart. Bluntly, he knew of your wealth, and schemed to gain a part of it. You don't find the situation unusual, do you? In the end, he persuaded Miss Bertha to elope with him. But he made a slight error. He did not investigate your disposition until after the marriage.

"He was too shrewd to risk an open avowal and a paternal storm. Rather a canny villain, as a matter of fact! He set on foot a series of inquiries which showed him, too late, that, rather than accept him in your house, you would lose your daughter.

"A disinherited heiress did not appeal to him. Less than a week after the elopement, your daughter awoke to the fact that she was deserted. Mr. Van Sutton, you must calm yourself! I warn you I will not relate the sequel unless you do!

"Fate plays us queer pranks. Or is it Fate? I come now to the first suggestion of the fantastic. A year later, Miss Van Sutton read in a report of a wreck — somewhere in the West, I believe — that Reginald Winters had been killed. I don't know what her emotions were. I imagine she was

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like the prisoner who inhales his first breath of freedom.

"I think you can guess the next chapter? Am I verging too much on the lines of the woman novelist? It was not until the evening which was to have made her the bride of Norris Endicott, that she discovered her ghastly mistake — which another hour would have made still more ghastly.

"Reginald Winters not only was living, but he had followed her to her father's door. To make our melodrama complete, in a characteristic note he reminded her of the disagreeable fact that she was his wife."

Madelyn's eyes closed wearily. When she opened them, the lines of strain on her face seemed more intense than ever — in contrast to her light tone.

"In a novel, the bride, driven to desperation, would have killed her Nemesis. But women of real life seldom have the desperation of those of romance. Bertha Van Sutton turned to the last refuge in the world that the woman in the novel would have sought. She carried her burden and her problem to the man who was waiting to place his wedding ring on her finger.

"She dismissed her maid, bolted the door of her room, and stepped out on to the veranda below, with a dark cloak thrown over her white dress. Once at Norris Endicott's apartment, it was a

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matter of only an instant to bring him to the window.

" He comprehended the situation in a flash. Of course, it was obvious enough — after the first shock. The marriage could not take place. But how could it be prevented? The girl could have told the truth, of course. Was there no other way? And then Endicott made his decision. He must disappear — until he could find and reckon with the man who was threatening her. A Don Quixotic plan? Could you have made a better one? He sent Miss Van Sutton back to her room, and made his preparations for flight.

" It was not until the clock struck eight, however, that he nerved himself to the crucial step, and swung out from the veranda to the lawn below. It was a drop of perhaps twelve feet, and he made it without accident. While Willard White was calling his name through the room, he was watching him from the shadows of the yard.

" Now we come again to the unkindness of Fate. He was threading his way through the shrubbery adjoining Thompson's Creek when his foot caught in a vine and he was thrown to the ground. His head struck on a stone and for nearly an hour he lay unconscious. When he struggled to his feet, his coat and collar were matted with blood.

" Without a thought of possible consequences, he

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dropped them into the water. I believe that is where you found them, Mr. Wiley. It was nearly daylight when he reached his rooms, almost exhausted.

"He had but one coherent thought. He must find Reginald Winters — without delay and without publicity. The note, which the actor had written to Miss Van Sutton, contained the address of his hotel — an obscure Fourth Avenue boarding-house in New York. It was easy enough to find the hotel — but the man was out.

"All of that day and night he watched the building, like a hungry dog watches a bone. It was not until this morning that Winters returned. Then he reappeared in the street so quickly that Endicott had no time to follow him up to his room.

"The actor swung off toward Broadway, with Endicott stubbornly following him. At Thirty-fourth Street and Sixth Avenue, there was a tie-up of the surface cars, and the crossing was jammed. I see you are anticipating what followed! Well — the wheel of fortune turned abruptly. Winters plunged into the swarm of vehicles, absorbed in his thoughts. Just before he reached the curb, a dray swayed before him. He dodged — too late. The rearing team crushed him to the pavement.

"When they picked him up he was quite dead.

"It was over his body that Norris Endicott and

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I met for the first time — with the realization that Bertha Van Sutton was free.

"As a matter of fact, I had been 'shadowing' Mr. Endicott, as you would express it, Mr. Wiley, for several hours." Madelyn pushed back her chair and walked across the room, drawing long, deep breaths.

"Have I made myself quite clear?"

"Are you a woman or a wizard?" gasped Adolph Van Sutton.

Detective Wiley sprang to his feet. "I'm doing what I never thought I would have to do, Miss Mack." He held out his hand. "Apologizing to a petticoat detective! But I don't see how on earth you did it!"

Madelyn shrugged. "Now we are descending to the commonplace." She leaned against the mantel with a yawn. Adolph Van Sutton thrust an unlighted cigar nervously into his mouth.

"Have you done me the honor to remember a certain maxim of mine — that nothing is trivial in crime? But — this is not a lecture on deduction!

"Miss Van Sutton's connection with the affair really was plain after that first newspaper report. By the way, Nora, did you write the description of the bride's wedding dress? I thought I recognized your style. May I congratulate you? From the viewpoint —"

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"Aren't we veering from the subject, Miss Mack?" Detective Wiley broke in impatiently.

"Do you think so?" Madelyn's eyes rested on his florid face. "I was particularly interested, Nora, in your account of the bride's coiffure. I agree with you that it was decidedly becoming. I remember that you mentioned that her *point d'esprit* veil was fastened by two long pins, each with a sterling silver ball as a head."

A sudden light broke over me. "And the silver ball that was found in Norris Endicott's room was one of those, of course!"

Madelyn smiled. "Your penetration amazes me! It was your own report of the case that gave me my first and most important clue before we left this house.

"I think you will agree that my inference was plain enough. Miss Van Sutton had visited Norris Endicott's room after she was dressed for the ceremony — and consequently just before his disappearance. She had kept the fact secret — and she was so agitated that she did not miss the loss of a valuable hair ornament. Why?

"There was another question that I put to myself. How had she reached the room? The discovery of the silver ball on the sill suggested, of course, the window. What was under the window? Here I found that a second-story veranda extended

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