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A DETECTIVE STORY

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# SILKEN THREADS.

**GEORGE AFTEREM is the appropriate name or *nom de plume* of an author who has written a very clever, original and entertaining detective story, called 'Silken Threads.'** (Cupples, Upham & Co.) **It is one of the best of the many we have had lately, not being in the least an imitation of successful French methods, but having original 'threads' of its** own to be disentangled after being ingeniously interwoven to a web of circumstantial evidence which goes far to criminate three different persons. The only flaw in the management of the story is that the author tacitly, and quite needlessly, 'gives himself away' in the seventh chapter. It must be a very inexperienced reader, indeed, who does not foresee then the real criminal, though not the means by which the crime was accomplished. It would have been perfectly easy to deepen the mystery a little by omitting the incident of Margaret Fullerton's meeting Dalton on the street; but in spite of this mistake, one's interest in the story does not slacken.

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# SILKEN THREADS.

## A Detective Story.

BY

GEORGE AFTEREM.

BOSTON:
CUPPLES, UPHAM, AND COMPANY.
Old Corner Bookstore.
1885.

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# SILKEN THREADS.

## CHAPTER I.

### SUNSET.

IN Dashford, where the club-houses are more numerous and magnificent than the churches, and infinitely better attended, there is one club-house conspicuous beyond all the others for the beauty of its building, the splendor of its equipment, and the wealth and fashionable standing of its members. It is called the Epicurean Club. Hither the gilded youth of Dashford betake themselves at certain hours, — at certain hours, I say, because at other times the club-house is populated by the "old fogies," — the worn-out old beaux who read their papers, smoke their cigars, drink their brandy-and-sodas, and tell their time-worn stories in contemptuous oblivion of the world beyond.

Two o'clock in the afternoon was evidently one of the hours when the young men were accustomed to congregate there; for at two

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o'clock on Tuesday, the 22d of May, 1883, the spacious rooms of the Epicurean Club-house were liberally furnished — I cannot say decorated — by several groups of men, all of whom were young and fashionably dressed. One group, collected together in a window of the morning-room, which looked out upon the avenue, was particularly noticeable, being composed of three young men, each of whom was remarkable in his way.

Dr. Sedgwick, the shortest and stoutest of the group, was the speaker. He was an unusually stout man for his years, which seemed to be not more than seven-and-twenty, with a fine clear skin and brilliant color; his upper lip was surmounted by a flaxen mustache which curled upward at either end after the fashion then in vogue amongst the members of the Epicurean Club. He was speaking slowly, in a melodious bass voice which seemed to issue from the very bottom of his deep, broad chest.

"Yes," Sedgwick was saying. "He's put his foot in it at last; the engagement is to be announced to-day."

"I never was more surprised in my life than when I got Barclay's letter announcing the fact," said Thurston Prose, a youthful lawyer,

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who, smoking a cigarette with a languid grace, was gazing from the window with his back half turned towards Algernon Sedgwick. "Barclay wrote me of his engagement last night. He is to meet me here at two o'clock to-day."

"It must have been kept awfully quiet, you know," said Reginald Candage, a supercilious, inquisitive-looking man, slightly younger than either of his companions, but dressed with the same faultless precision. Reginald Candage was chiefly known among the frequenters of the club-house as a collector of etchings and a retailer of gossip, in both of which specialities he had acquired a well-deserved reputation. "Why, I never heard that Barclay was attentive to Miss Fullerton, you know; much less that he was devoted to her."

"What are you three fellows discussing?" asked a tall, dark man, with flashing eyes and nervous manner, who now sauntered across the room and joined the group. He was a handsome man except for the pale, sickly complexion which seemed to betoken either over-work or extraordinary dissipation.

"A new titbit of gossip, eh, Candage?" remarked the new-comer. And with these words he turned his flashing eyes upon Candage.

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"Yes," responded Reginald Candage, swelling with importance, "Bryce Barclay is engaged to Miss Margaret Fullerton;" and Reginald Candage looked steadily at Hubert Dalton as he spoke, for Candage never forgot a bit of gossip, and Rumor had at some former time connected the name of Hubert Dalton with that of Margaret Fullerton, or Candage was very much mistaken.

Dalton, however, did not manifest the least uneasiness at the other's look. He merely showed surprise. "Indeed!" he exclaimed, "I had not heard of it before! When did it come out?"

"To-day," Candage eagerly responded; and he was about to regale Dalton with the particulars he had gleaned, when Prose, who had been an amused spectator of the scene, now suddenly sprang from his seat in the window.

"Here comes Barclay now!" he cried; "and ten minutes late too!" he continued, glancing at his watch. "Yet Barclay used to be the most punctual man in Dashford before he was engaged."

A deep silence now settled itself over the group in the window, as Bryce Barclay ran up the steps of the club-house and entered the

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crowded room. Barclay had always been the hero of the hour because of his great wealth, his dignified bearing, and his extraordinary physical beauty. Now he was more than ever conspicuous because of the fact of his engagement to Miss Fullerton, the reigning belle of the last winter's season; and there was an air of self-consciousness about the man as he entered the room, not to be wondered at, perhaps, under the circumstances, yet none the less apparent in spite of the cause.

Barclay was accused by his enemies of studying effects. If, indeed, effects had been the sole study of his life he could not have made a more effective entrance into a room than was the case in this present instance, as with dignified strides and stately bearing he majestically made his way through the sumptuous apartment; his broad-brimmed silk hat set back upon his curly black head, his silver shepherd's-crook cane under his arm, and one of his neatly gloved hands thrust deep into his trousers' pocket. Bowing to the right hand and to the left with arrogant composure, like a king dispensing his patronage, Barclay crossed the morning-room of the club-house, and approached the group that awaited him in the window.

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As he joined his friends his manner lost something of its air of haughtiness, and he frankly held out his hand to each of the four men in his turn, accepting the congratulations that were offered him with the self-satisfied air of one who believes that everything he does is right. Prose he greeted last. "I trust I have not kept you waiting," he said, smiling down upon his friend.

"Only ten minutes," Prose answered. "Time is money, I know," he continued quickly, with a deprecatory gesture as Barclay was about to speak; "but ten minutes is not a fortune even to a poor work-a-day beggar like me."

Yet Barclay knew that it was no light favor he had asked of his friend that he should relinquish an hour in the busiest portion of his day in order to meet him. Barclay's appointment with Prose, however, partook of the nature of business. Prose was his legal adviser, and Barclay felt no more hesitation in sending for his lawyer than he would have experienced in summoning his harness-maker or his groom. It made no difference to him that he was a lawyer; or that being a lawyer he happened to be his best friend. He was none the less his servant so long as he chose to employ him.

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"Have you brought the document?" he asked abruptly.

"No," Prose answered, "I must have a half hour's conversation with you before I can draw it up. Your directions were not sufficiently explicit. Where are you going now?"

"Home," laconically replied Barclay.

"Then I will walk down the street with you. You can give me your instructions on the way."

Barclay, nodding his assent to the lawyer's proposal, now turned to address Candage, who was regarding him with open admiration, and a brisk general conversation ensued, after which the two young men prepared themselves to go; when Sedgwick, who had not participated in the conversation, now roused himself from the reverie in which he had been plunged, and suddenly rang the hand-bell which stood on the table by his side.

"Look here, fellows," he said quickly, "we can't let Barclay leave us without drinking his health." And then, when the waiter appeared in answer to his summons, he continued with praiseworthy brevity: "What will you take?"

Each of the young men expressed his preference, and as the waiter disappeared to fill their orders, Barclay laid his hand on Sedg-

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wick's arm and drew him into the shadow of the deep bay-window.

"Algernon," he said stiffly, "I think it only right for me to say that I am about to execute a will in favor of Miss Fullerton. Of course only half my property is at my own disposal; the other half must go to you in the case of my dying without issue. But one half of my father's estate, you will remember, was left to me outright. This portion of my property I propose to bequeath to Miss Margaret Fullerton."

Barclay spoke pompously, in tones which were loud enough to be distinctly audible to the others of the group, and a meaning glance passed between the three listeners as they noticed the expression of embarrassment which came over Sedgwick's flushed face while he listened to his cousin's words. After Barclay had left the club-house, this speech of his was universally condemned as being in execrable taste, — not only as unnecessary, but also since it was delivered in a condescending manner which must have been extremely distasteful and galling to Sedgwick.

Sedgwick, however, was relieved from answering his cousin's remark, by the entrance of the waiter with the tray of glasses, and by the flip-

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pant voice of Reginald Candage, who said in rather loud tones, —

"Come, fellows, select your poisons."

Sedgwick stood nearest to the table upon which the waiter had placed his tray.

"What did you order, Bryce?" he questioned, looking at his cousin with an expression of discomfiture and embarrassment evident to all.

"Sherry and bitters," Barclay answered, unconscious of all but his own perfection; and the young man stretched out his gloved hand for the glass his cousin held.

"Wait a moment, there is a piece of cork in it," said Sedgwick quickly, and he set the glass down upon the tray again, and with the handle of a spoon awkwardly removed the offending particle before he handed the glass to his cousin. The four young men took their glasses and clinked them against that which Barclay held.

"Health and long life to Bryce Barclay!" Sedgwick cried, and in the echo of the sentiment the toast was drunk, and Prose and Barclay prepared themselves to go.

Before they were fairly clear of the clubhouse, however, another episode occurred.

As the two young men lingered on the marble

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steps of the building, — a time-honored custom amongst the Epicureans, instituted, no doubt, in order that the uninitiated might thus identify its members with this haunt of fashion, — a tall, thin, wiry man came rapidly up the street, and recognizing Prose and Barclay, paused irresolute on the sidewalk before them, confronting them face to face. The costume of the young man upon the sidewalk presented a forcible contrast to the fashionable attire of the two men on the step above. His worn and shiny black coat was ill brushed and spotted; his loose trousers, projecting at the knee, seemed to have shrunk away from the square-toed unblacked boots below; and his black silk hat, drawn down over his eyes, seemed roughened by the storms of by-gone summers. In short, it was evident from his whole aspect that he was not a member of the Epicurean Club. He appeared the picture of respectable poverty, while Barclay and his companion might have represented wealth. Barclay looked down upon the new-comer for a moment with insolent curiosity. Then he spoke.

"How do you do, Mr. Edgerton?" he said in formal accents. The new-comer did not answer. He looked at his interrogator with an

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expression in which fear, hatred, melancholy, and indecision were strangely blended, and his lips moved, though not in audible reply. Then suddenly he turned his back on Barclay, and with an excited nod at Prose, he continued on his way up the street.

"Surly beggar!" Barclay remarked to Prose as they leisurely sauntered down the street. "A man who cannot control his temper better than Edgerton deserves to be horsewhipped."

"It seems to me you have made a bitter enemy in Masters Edgerton most unnecessarily," Prose answered, with a shade of sorrow in his voice. "They say down town that Miss Dane has jilted him because of your attentions to her."

Barclay laughed; not loudly, but with an air of insufferable self-conceit. He was a vain man, and Prose's remark seemed to him of compliment rather than reproach.

"Nonsense," he lightly answered. "I can't refuse to speak to a pretty girl because Masters Edgerton happens to be engaged to her."

"No," Prose gravely answered, "you certainly can't refuse to speak to her, but you might reasonably be expected to consider the possible effect of what you say."



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Barclay laughed again; but this time with a slight contraction of the muscles about the eyes, which showed that his anger was aroused. Barclay was not the man to submit quietly to rebuke. "Now let me give you my instructions about the will," he said, with a haughty twirl of his dark mustache. "If I pay you for advice," he continued, with a cold smile, "I must at least reserve to myself the privilege of asking for it. I propose to leave everything at my disposal to Miss Margaret Fullerton." Thus in the discussion of the will the two men proceeded amicably down the street together. As the pair reached Barclay's door, Prose halted, in spite of his friend's earnest solicitation that he should enter. Barclay's house was a large corner mansion, built of brown sandstone, with a short flight of steps leading from the sidewalk to the door.

Before the steps Prose halted. "I shall not have time to come in," he answered, in reply to the invitation of the other. "It is now three o'clock. If I am to be back here at five with the will I must go to work at once. Who will act as witnesses?"

"Three of the servants," Barclay answered.

"Good," said Prose. "Then it is understood

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that you are to provide the witnesses, and that I am to return with the will at five o'clock?"

"Yes."

Bidding his friend *au revoir*, Prose hurried down the street. As he glanced back over his shoulder, he saw Barclay ascending the steps of his house, preceded by a stout man carrying a large paper parcel under his arm.

At five o'clock punctually, true to his appointment, Prose hurried up the steps of Barclay's mansion. His ring at the bell was answered by Parsley, the English butler, who stood aside for the visitor to enter.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Barclay," Prose explained.

"Yes, sir," responded the butler. "Mr. Barclay is hup in his studio, sir. He left horders that you was to be shown hup, sir."

Barclay's house was peculiar. No one would have imagined its unusual internal arrangement from the staid appearance of its conventional exterior. Barclay, as I have said, was a bachelor and rich. He had rearranged this house to suit the eccentricities of his own luxurious tastes. The ground floor, which had been entirely remodelled when the house was purchased, was now devoted to the servants' quarters;

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comprising, besides, a reception-room, a hall, a staircase, and an elevator, which latter ran to the studio and picture-gallery in the roof. By this arrangement of his house, Barclay, alone and undisturbed, dwelt in the upper four stories. Moreover, the highest story of the building, with its wealth of sun, was thus rescued from the menials to be devoted to the picture-gallery and the studio, for Barclay was not only a collector of paintings, and an artist of no mean talent, but also he was an amateur photographer, an occupation which demanded the co-operation of the sun.

Prose entered the elevator, followed by the obsequious butler, and had hardly seated himself in the smoothly running vehicle before it came to a stand-still at the highest story of the house. The butler, with his ever-ready apology, preceded his master's guest through the richly carpeted hall, by the broad staircase, and knocked at the door of the room which Barclay had converted into his studio. There was no answer.

"Very hextraordinary," muttered the servant. "Mr. Barclay left special hinstructions, sir, he would be at 'ome at five o'clock, sir."

"Perhaps he is in the gallery," Prose suggested.

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Acting upon this suggestion, the butler led the way across the hall again and knocked at the door of the gallery, which occupied the front of the house. But here again there was no answer, and the man paused and looked at Prose as if in doubt as to what should next be done.

Prose, knowing Barclay's habitual severity with his servants, now took the matter into his own hands. If any one should incur blame, let it be himself; and motioning to the butler to stand aside, he opened the door of the picture-gallery and peered in. The room was empty except for the wealth of art displayed upon its walls and easels.

Prose quickly closed the door, now showing surprise and agitation for the first time.

"I will look in the studio," he said, and hurrying across the hall, he softly opened the door of Barclay's atelier. Then he stood upon the threshold of the open door, almost blinded by the blaze of light which issued from the work-room of the amateur. The rays of the setting sun were magnified and concentrated by the thick glass of the crystal roof. But presently his eyes became accustomed to the flood of light, and he descried Barclay, sitting with his back to the door, beside a large oil painting of

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Miss Fullerton. At the further end of the room the camera stood, draped with its sable cloth. Barclay appeared to have been photographing the picture which his hands had wrought.

"He is asleep," Prose said in a low voice to the servant at his side, and with an expression of intense relief upon his face, he noiselessly entered the room, and came forward in order to awake his friend. Barclay had an engagement to dine with the Fullertons that night; he would arouse him.

But as Thurston Prose laid his hand upon that other hand, which rested on the crimson velvet of the chair, he felt that it was cold and lifeless. Bryce Barclay was indeed asleep. But his sleep was the sleep of death.

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# CHAPTER II.

## THE HEIR-AT-LAW.

WHEN the truth dawned upon Thurston Prose that Bryce Barclay was indeed dead, he was overcome with horror. He started back from the touch of that dead hand with a shudder that pervaded every fibre of his body. Two hours before he had left Bryce Barclay alive and apparently well, — animated with all the hopes of á brilliant and happy future. Now he found him cold and lifeless, having passed through that awful change which neither the philosopher nor the cynic can contemplate without awe. Speechless for a moment with surprise and horror, Prose stood before the body of his dead friend. Then the realization of the terrible fact came upon him. He sank down into a chair and covered his face with his hands. "Send for the doctor," he gasped at last, and the butler, shrinking noiselessly away, left the lawyer alone with the dead man.

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Thurston Prose was a man of peculiarly excitable temperament and active mind. He had sustained a shock in the discovery of his friend's sudden death which for a time completely incapacitated his mind from action. He was so dazed and bewildered that he could not think. But Prose was also a man accustomed to self-control, and reason soon regained its mastery over his emotions. He withdrew his hands from his face, and sitting upright, with that alertness which often follows mental shock, he began to review the affairs of the afternoon. Barclay was dead; there could be no doubt of that. But why should he have died? Two hours before he had left him strong and well. Now he was dead; and it seemed incomprehensible to the lawyer that in this brief time so terrible a change should have been wrought. What was the cause of this sudden death? Could it be possible that Barclay had been foully dealt with? Had Barclay died from some assassin's act? As thoughts like these flashed through the lawyer's mind his active intellect became more than usually alert. He rose nervously from his chair, and began to make a careful inspection of the room, taking care not to disturb the position of the various objects it contained. Nothing should be moved until witnesses were at hand.

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Prose was thoroughly conversant with Barclay's studio. It was a large, rectangular room, slightly narrower than the main body of the house. It comprised the rear part of the upper story, which Barclay had altered to suit the exigencies of his *dilettante* occupation. The entire roof of the room was of glass, as was necessary for the use of the camera; but a greater contrast could not be imagined than the contrast between this play-room of the amateur and the atelier of a working photographer, so luxurious and costly were the apparatus and furniture of the apartment. The studio was panelled with carved pine wood painted white, and there were two doors: one leading into the hall where the stairs and elevator were situated; the other opening into a closet which Barclay used as the *dark room* for the development of his negatives and the preparation of his plates. In the studio there were four windows: two looking out upon an open space in the rear of the building; and two with iron galleries, looking down upon the side street. These latter windows were open. Before the door which opened into the dark closet stood the camera covered with a sable cloth; a cloth which Prose observed with a shudder. It seemed to him like a pall. Opposite the camera, in a chair of

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crimson velvet, Barclay sat with his back towards the entrance door of the studio ; while beside the dead man stood the easel from which the fair face of Margaret Fullerton smiled softly down, with a smile in fearful inconsistency with the scene about her. Barclay was reclining rather than sitting in his chair, with his legs extended, his head resting upon the crimson velvet of the chair back, and with his face upturned. His eyes were shut. The attitude of his position and the expression of his face were those of a sleeping man. Nothing about the room indicated violence. Everything was orderly and in its usual place. It seemed as if Barclay had fallen asleep there in his chair beside the picture of his beloved, and that death had come upon him while he dreamed of her. This would account for the smiling expression of the dead man's face.

Prose looked about the room and then upon his friend. It seemed to him impossible that Barclay should have died from violence. His face was too serene and calm for that. Suddenly Prose bethought himself of the dark closet. Acting upon the thought he opened the door and peered in. The closet was dark as Erebus. Most men would have been daunted by that Stygian gloom in the presence of death, — in the

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presence of the victim of a possible murder, — but Prose was made of sterner stuff. He knew where the gas-jet was, and being a smoker he produced a match and lighted the gas. The closet was totally empty. Nothing was there but the sink, with a shelf above containing a row of chemicals in bottles, and the step-ladder leading to the trap-door in the roof. The emptiness of the place seemed to exclude the only vestige of Prose's lurking suspicions. He turned down the gas and was about to shut the door again, when he was startled by the sound of voices in the hall outside. Starting back, Prose withdrew himself into the shadow of the door, and saw Parsley enter the room closely followed by Algernon Sedgwick.

For some reason or other not clearly defined to Prose's mind, the presence of Sedgwick seemed singularly inopportune. Why should he of all others come there at this time, — he, the heir-at-law, the person most interested in Barclay's death? Had he come to take possession of the fortune which had so unexpectedly fallen to his lot? And Prose involuntarily shrank back into the shadow of the door again as the scene at the club-house recurred to him, and Candage's flippant remark flashed through

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his mind. Had Barclay in truth died from poison?

While Sedgwick rapidly advanced to Barclay's side and was making a hurried examination of the dead man, Prose was absorbed in the conjectures which had forced themselves upon him. The lawyer had forgotten that he, in his own perturbation, had ordered the butler to summon *the doctor*, and that *the doctor* to the well-trained servant could indicate no other than his master's cousin.

Sedgwick, having concluded his examination, turned to address the butler, when his eye fell upon Prose, who had now come forward.

"It is all over," he hastily remarked in the hushed voice that people use in the presence of the dead. Prose thought the physician's eye fell as he spoke the words; but if Prose had owned a brother, and that brother had been before him, he would have regarded him with suspicion, so great was the excitement under which he labored.

For a moment a deep silence reigned. Then Sedgwick spoke.

"Parsley," he said, in the same hushed voice, but with the authoritative tone of a master, a tone which jarred against every feeling in the

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lawyer's breast, — "Parsley, I shall require your assistance to move Mr. Barclay. We must carry him downstairs to his own chamber." Sedgwick was strangely like his cousin, and spoke in the same authoritative manner that Barclay used. He seemed to ignore the lawyer's presence, but the lawyer would not be ignored.

"Is it wise to disturb the position of the body before the coroner arrives?" he asked in a warning voice.

"Coroner!" exclaimed Sedgwick in surprise. "Why coroner?"

"Because Barclay's death was so sudden," Prose replied with hesitation.

"A coroner is not summoned in every case of sudden death," Sedgwick coldly answered. "My own certificate is all the law requires."

Prose wondered at the other's blindness, if blindness indeed it was. Such absence of formality as Sedgwick proposed must inevitably invite the uncharitable criticism of the world. He was about to reply, when suddenly he hesitated. Perhaps, after all, in his own ignorance, he had misjudged Sedgwick. Perhaps this death which seemed to him so mysterious and unaccountable was in plain truth simplicity itself to the practised eye of the trained physician.

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"What is the cause of death?" he mildly questioned.

Sedgwick hesitated, and Prose saw by his face that the physician was at fault. That glance confirmed him in his determination to act with firmness. He turned to the butler, who had been looking in surprise from one gentleman to the other, and said calmly, —

"Mr. Parsley, will you be kind enough to leave us. I desire to speak with Dr. Sedgwick alone." As the door closed behind the man, Prose advanced nearer to the other and said in a low voice, —

"Dr. Sedgwick, what do you think the world would say if it became known that the heir-at-law signed the death certificate of the man who stood between him and fortune?"

Sedgwick started as if he had been struck, and a ghastly pallor spread itself over his twitching features.

The lawyer could not help pitying the distress he had caused, although in his heart he distrusted the man before him.

Presently Sedgwick regained his self-possession.

"Perhaps you are right," he said uncertainly. "Perhaps it is better that we should summon

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another physician. I had not thought of the construction which might be placed upon my acting in this case. At all events," he continued, after a short pause, "there is no necessity for summoning a coroner. That would merely give rise to unpleasant discussion and disagreeable details. No, it will not be necessary to summon a coroner."

Prose had expected that the suggestion of a scandal would disarm the opposition of the other. This continued unwillingness surprised him, and he became more than ever determined to persist. "It is better the discussion should come now than later," he answered, with a warning in his voice that the other could not fail to notice. "I was your cousin's lawyer, Dr. Sedgwick; let me act in this matter according to my own judgment."

But Sedgwick was not disposed to yield to the arguments of the other. "You must admit," he said, "that I, a doctor, am better qualified to judge whether a death is suspicious than are you, a lawyer. You are familiar with crime, therefore suspicious. I am familiar with death, therefore accustomed to its insidious approach. I consider the summoning of a coroner in this case a very unnecessary step. There is

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nothing in my cousin's death that is suspicious; neither is there a motive for murder."

Prose, however, did not agree with him. He thought of the scene at the club; he thought of Sedgwick's persistent opposition. Barclay's great wealth seemed to him a sufficient cause. In short, the death seemed to him too aptly timed not to suggest human hands, and he was well aware that people die from other violence than external force. "Could not Barclay have died by poison?" he asked.

"No," Sedgwick answered eagerly; too eagerly, Prose thought, as he watched his changing color. It was a peculiarity of Sedgwick's transparent skin that his color came and went with every changing emotion. "There is no poison which could have killed like this. Nothing but prussic acid could have done it, and that is impossible from the nature of the case. We should have detected its characteristic odor with absolute certainty. Come, Prose," he continued, speaking almost persuasively, "I cannot bear to have my cousin's name in every mouth as the victim of suspicious death. You do not realize the horrible formalities that an inquest must involve. You must admit that your suspicions are ill-founded.

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A coroner's inquest is totally uncalled for. You must agree with me that it is best to let the matter quietly pass."

Sedgwick stopped for breath; he had been speaking rapidly; but as Prose saw his growing earnestness his own determination increased. "No," he answered firmly.

"Then," continued Sedgwick, "we will send for Dr. Gales, my father's physician, and be guided by his judgment."

But Prose was not disposed to accept the compromise. Sedgwick's objections seemed to him insufficient, and his opposition was suspicious in itself. Besides, if he, Prose, was unable to discover evidence of violence, it did not follow that others must also fail. Neither did a friend of Sedgwick's seem to him the suitable person to appeal to. No, it was manifestly his duty to adhere to his point until the affair should be placed in the hands of competent authority. "Dr. Sedgwick," he said after a pause, in which deliberation had only served to strengthen his determination, "I shall consider it my duty to report your cousin's death to the coroner of the district. It is for him to judge the necessity of an examination, not for you or me. I shall send one of the servants, if you will permit



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it; otherwise I shall go myself. In this latter case, if you should see fit to alter the position of the body, or to remove any papers or letters during my absence, I warn you that you will subject yourself to most disagreeable insinuation."

Sedgwick frowned heavily as the lawyer concluded his speech. "I do not thank you for this officious interference," he sternly answered, gazing steadily in Prose's face. "Still, if you persist, I suppose you must have your way;" and without vouchsafing the least attention to the apology which had sprung to Prose's lips, he turned his back upon him and seated himself by the window.

Prose, nothing daunted by the other's manner, summoned the butler, and after a brief whispered conversation despatched him in search of Dr. Horace P. Judd, the coroner of the district. Then settling himself down in the opposite window, he began to review the circumstances of the day.

Thus sitting in opposite windows and furtively eying each other, the two young men waited in silence for the advent of the coroner.

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# CHAPTER III.

## MR. CORONER JUDD.

DR. HORACE P. JUDD, to whom Parsley had applied, was a by no means unusual type of the Dashford coroner. He had received his appointment to the position he held, not so much because of his professional acquirements as because of the influence he was able to exert in municipal elections. He knew little of law, and less of physic, and could conduct a caucus better than an autopsy. He was nevertheless quite as good for a coroner as the coroner's system is for the administration of justice; and if he made use of his official position for his own private gain, he did no greater wrong than many other coroners are in the habit of doing.

Dr. Judd was a short, thick-set man, with a large frame and an enormous head. His head was so large, indeed, that its probable contents was a source of constant speculation among his acquaintances. His cheeks were fat, pendulous,

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and very red. His thick upper lip was charitably concealed from view by a heavy reddish mustache, tinged with gray. I say charitably, because it not only concealed the sensuous mouth, but also the huge tobacco-stained teeth through which Dr. Judd had the habit of whistling. The projection of his chin was exaggerated by a Napoleonic tuft, which was twisted between the thumb and finger of the coroner when he was absorbed in thought, and which was used for toilet purposes when he was not. Taken as a whole, Dr. Judd was not a pleasant object to gaze upon; but, as I have said before, he was by no means more objectionable than is the system of which he was an exponent.

Dr. Judd obeyed the summons he had received with feverish haste. He was as excited by the suggestion of a murder as is a hound which has slipped its leash. He had sniffed the possibility of gain upon the air. A possible murder in Gainesboro' Avenue! His heart bounded at the thought. Think of the notoriety he might gain! Indeed, Judd had almost made up his mind that an inquest would be necessary before he had become acquainted with the facts of the case.

On his arrival in Barclay's studio, Coroner

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Judd's face was redder than ever from the haste he had shown upon the road. He sank down into a chair, panting heavily; his labored respiration was plainly audible in every corner of the room. He was a strange picture as he sat there struggling for breath, and endeavoring to look wise under these distressing circumstances, and it was a long time before he could regain his breath sufficiently "to take a view," as the law expresses it. This silence upon the part of the coroner, Prose seized upon for an explanation of his own position. He described how he had left Barclay at three P. M., in order to draw up his will, and how on his return, at five o'clock, he had found him dead. Of the incidents which had occurred at the club and of his own suspicions, the lawyer made no mention. He felt that he must do nothing to prejudice justice.

Dr. Judd's waistcoat was rising and falling with its accustomed regularity when Prose concluded his recital, and he spoke with a solemnity becoming his high official position.

"Who may that gentleman be?" he asked abruptly, pointing with his short, thick forefinger at Dr. Sedgwick, who still remained in his place at the window.

"Dr. Sedgwick," Prose responded, — "Dr. Al-

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gernon Sedgwick, Mr. Barclay's nearest relative. We thought it best to send for Dr. Sedgwick as soon as we discovered his cousin's death."

"Quite right, quite right, too," murmured the other, and crossing the room, he laid his fat hand on Sedgwick's shoulder.

"Happy to meet you, Doc.," he said familiarly. "Happy to meet you, though it ain't exactly what one might call a cheerful occasion." Then, as Sedgwick did not respond, he continued, as if by way of explaining his pleasure, "I 'm always glad to meet a fellow doctor. I don't stop to inquire whether he 's a homeopath, or an allopath, I don't. So long as he 's a doctor, devotin' himself to sufferin' humanity, that 's enough for me. I 'm glad to have the benefit of your science if you are young. Give us your hand."

Sedgwick haughtily withdrew himself from the other's touch.

"Sir," he stiffly said, "I have no wish for your acquaintance nor your presence. It was contrary to my desire that you were summoned. Now that you are here, I beg you will conclude your examination as speedily as possible."

A shade of sullen anger swept across Judd's heavy features as Sedgwick uttered these ill-judged words.

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"As you please," he said with clumsy dignity, and turning abruptly from Sedgwick, he began the task before him without further preliminaries, applying to Prose, from time to time, for such information as he desired.

In spite of the evident illiteracy of the man, the duties of his position were very familiar to him. Nothing seemed to escape his notice, and an hour was consumed in taking notes and asking questions. At last Judd shut his note-book and turned to Prose.

"Let nothing be disturbed," he said. "I shall deem it my duty to summon a jury."

Sedgwick, who had been sitting in his chair by the window, a silent spectator of the scene before him, now sprang to his feet.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"I shall hold an inquest," Judd shortly answered.

"Why?"

"I don't feel called upon to give you my reasons. However, if it's any satisfaction to you to know, then I will say that in my opinion Mr. Barclay has died under suspicious circumstances."

Sedgwick had now become composed. His manner towards the coroner was civil although

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curt. It seemed as if he regretted his former hasty anger and wished to atone for it.

"My cousin's death was sudden, I admit," he said slowly, "sudden, but not suspicious. I see no circumstances which suggest a suspicion of foul play."

"There I differ from you," answered Judd imperturbably. He saw that Sedgwick regretted his former rudeness, and was not sorry to profit by this opportunity for galling him.

"What do you suspect to be the cause of death?" Sedgwick demanded after a short pause.

"Poison," Judd answered shortly.

"What poison?"

"Opium —"

"But," interrupted Sedgwick eagerly, "that is impossible. In opium poisoning we should expect the pupils to be contracted, the skin to be discolored. There would be some signs of —"

"Perhaps it was aconite," suggested Judd, watching the other.

"That is also impossible. The position of the body, the absence of convulsions, the —"

"Or strychnine," again interrupted Judd.

"Which is also impossible," again returned Sedgwick. "In poisoning by strychnia there is convulsion. We should expect a countenance

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of distress, distortion of the face, some signs of a struggle. Instead of that my cousin was found sitting in his chair, with a smile on his face like a person in his sleep."

"You seem to be pretty well up on the action of poisons for a practising physician," dryly remarked the coroner, now regarding Sedgwick with ill-disguised suspicion.

"It is my specialty," Sedgwick quickly answered. "I am a toxicologist and medical chemist."

"Whew!" whistled Judd, now showing his fangs and whistling through them after his habit. "Then if you are a toxicologist I dare say you can tell Mr. Prose, here, what your cousin died of better than I can," and without waiting for Sedgwick to reply he turned his back upon him and began to issue such orders as were necessary for the prosecution of his duty.

Perhaps the prospect of personal gain, and the opportunity for revenge upon Sedgwick for the slight he had put upon him, had actuated Judd in the course he had pursued; but as Prose walked down the street, with his hands behind him and his head bowed down upon his chest, his innermost conviction told him that Bryce Barclay had been foully dealt with.

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# CHAPTER IV.

## MARGARET FULLERTON.

THE report of Bryce Barclay's death, gaining in substance and detail by every repetition, spread like wildfire through the city. Barclay's wealth and display had made him a person of prominence; the story of his sudden death was in every mouth, and the so-called suspicious circumstances had become greatly exaggerated.

Charles Fullerton, stock-broker, the father of Barclay's *fiancée*, was upon the point of leaving his office when the rumor came to him. At first he was incredulous. He had seen Barclay the night before, when he had estimated the probable value of the diamond in the engagement ring which Barclay had presented to his daughter. He had seen him glowing with the glory of his robust manhood; he had admired his stalwart figure and sunburnt face, his broad shoulders and powerful frame. He had envied

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him for his wealth and he had admired him for his beauty, although in his heart he had never liked the man. But to say that Barclay was dead! That was ridiculous! and the stock-broker gave so little credence to the report that he decided not to call at the house of his future son-in-law on his way up town. Besides, it was now nearly seven o'clock, Fullerton further reflected, and Barclay was to dine with him in half an hour. It surely was not worth his while that he should go out of his way when he should see Barclay in so short a time. So, thinking of this and many other things, — of the stringency of the money market and the pertinacity of the bears; of the mutability of human affairs, and the unexpected fall of a certain stock in which he was deeply interested, — the stock-broker hurried home, made a hasty toilet, and came downstairs. His daughter was already in the parlor. It was now half-past seven, their usual dinner hour; Mr. Fullerton's business had detained him at his office frequently of late.

Margaret Fullerton was a superb creature, more than commonly tall and mature for a girl of seventeen years, with a noble head and queenly presence. Unlike her father, she was

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dark, with lustrous brown eyes and glowing cheeks. She might have represented Cleopatra or Medea, as, with her hand resting on a chair, she stood in the luxurious room, waiting for her father.

"Mr. Barclay is late," she said impatiently, as Fullerton entered the room.

"No," replied her father, "it is not dinner-time yet. Mr. Barclay is not late. It is only your anxiety to see your lover that makes you thus impatient."

Margaret Fullerton answered only by an impatient tap of her slipper on the floor. There was little sympathy between the father and his daughter. The girl had lost her best friend when her mother died.

Mr. Fullerton was a cold and worldly man. His was a stern, hard nature, accustomed to make all things subservient to his own ambitious dreams. Margaret, on the contrary, was a creature of the emotions, passionate and impulsive. It was not strange that the two should always be at variance.

Fullerton affected to ignore his daughter's petulance. Casting a furtive glance upon the girl, he seated himself by the table, and with a careful regard as to the disposition of the light,

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he began to scan the finance columns of the "Evening Times." Money and stocks seemed to him the only things worthy the attention of human intelligence; art and culture, benevolence and fame, he heartily despised. Money would buy them all; money, after all, was the frame-work that all was reared upon.

"You know perfectly well that Mr. Barclay is not my lover," said Margaret, at length, who, after looking coldly at her father, had now seated herself at the opposite side of the table.

"On the contrary, I thought him the very model of a lover," Fullerton replied, looking up from his paper, and smiling upon his daughter in such a manner as to display his fine white teeth to great advantage.

"But you know that I do not love Mr. Barclay," retorted his daughter.

"That may be," Fullerton answered, again smiling, and again showing his teeth. "That may be, my dear. Young girls seldom do love the men they marry, *at first*. But you will love him in time."

"Never!" the girl cried passionately. "I shall never love him! I shall marry him because I have promised, — because you have persuaded me, — but I can never love him, never!"

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and Margaret Fullerton pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

Fullerton laid aside his paper and glanced at his watch. It was now quarter before eight. Strange, he thought, that Barclay did not come. Perhaps, after all, there might be some truth in that rumor he had heard down-town; perhaps Barclay might be ill. Such reports seldom arose without some foundation. But, no; there could be nothing in it. Of course he would have been notified if anything had happened to his prospective son-in-law. No, Barclay would come; but when he did come, it must not be that he should find his *fiancée* in tears.

Fullerton took up his paper again, and neatly folded it with a careful regard to its former creases. It was a peculiarity of Fullerton that he thought first of his own comfort. Later on he would need the paper, he thought to himself, when the communion of the lovers should leave him to his own resources. So he folded his paper and laid it aside; and thus having provided for his own comfort, he directed his attention to his daughter, who still was sobbing.

"Margaret," he said in a smooth metallic voice which contained no trace of sympathy or

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emotion, "do not give way to your feelings in that childish way. No one attains success in this world without making many little sacrifices. You may not love Mr. Barclay now, but you will love him in due time. And think what you gain by sacrificing your inclinations, — wealth, position, and a grand old name! There is not a woman in Dashford who will not envy you your conquest. Come, my child, dry your tears, and be a brave girl. You ought to have sufficient self-respect not to let Mr. Barclay find you in tears."

Margaret Fullerton dried her eyes and looked up bravely at her father. She was intensely proud. Mr. Fullerton had touched the right chord when he had appealed to that pride, although it was not, as her father believed, the pride of conquest that had moved her. She was more beautiful than ever as she looked up at her father with the dew of tears still lingering upon her long eyelashes; and there was an expression of feminine softness and sweetness upon her face strangely at variance with the mercenary sentiments uttered by her father. Indeed, her face seemed the countenance of patient resignation. Toying with her handkerchief and striving to master her sobs, Margaret sat with downcast eyes, when suddenly she started as the door-bell

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rang, and Fullerton hastened out into the hall to meet his delinquent guest.

But it was Thurston Prose her father greeted. Margaret recognized his voice, although he spoke in guarded tones.

"I am the bearer of unhappy tidings," she overheard Prose say in hushed conversation with her father.

"What!" rang out the metallic voice of Fullerton.

"I have just come from Barclay's house," Prose explained. "I am the bearer of painful tidings."

"Barclay is not dead?"

"Yes. He died very suddenly this afternoon."

"Then he has been murdered!" Fullerton cried in an outburst of sudden fury; and Prose heard a low cry, followed by a soft fall. Margaret Fullerton had fainted; and yet she had declared that she did not love Bryce Barclay.

Fullerton paid no heed to his daughter's cry. Indeed, it was a cry so faint and low that it might easily have escaped his notice, for Fullerton was now intensely excited. Nervously clutching his visitor by the arm, he drew him into the reception-room on the opposite side of the hall, and slammed the door with angry violence.

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"Barclay has been murdered!" he fiercely cried. There was no smile now on the cold, complacent face. Nothing was there but the hard, firm lines of rage and disappointment.

"He died very suddenly," Prose conceded; and wondering at the expression of the other's face, he began briefly to acquaint Fullerton with such details of Barclay's death as had come to his knowledge. When Prose in his narrative came to the subject of the will Fullerton ground his teeth together in an access of rage and disappointment.

"That Sedgwick has murdered him!" he cried, —"murdered him for his money. Sedgwick has robbed my daughter, and he shall swing for it as sure as there 's a God in Heaven!" and Prose shuddered as he looked upon the malignant countenance before him. There he could read no mercy for the murderer, if a murder there had been.

"I cannot think there has been violence," he slowly answered, gazing upon Fullerton with distrust and fear.

"I know it!" Fullerton cried. "I am sure of it! It is too opportune for mere coincidence. Who did you say the coroner was?"

Prose answered; and Fullerton, barely spar-



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ing a moment to acquaint his daughter with the fact of her lover's death, hurried off in quest of Judd.

He would pursue the man who had robbed his daughter of her lover, to the very death.

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# CHAPTER V.

## THE INQUEST.

DURING the short time which elapsed between the finding of Barclay's body and the convening of the coroner's jury Horace P. Judd had not been idle. He had considered the matter of Barclay's death in every light which presented itself to his narrow vision. He had come to the honest conviction that Bryce Barclay was the victim of a tragedy, and he had made up his mind that he would leave no stone unturned until he should probe the mystery of this sudden death to its very bottom.

Aided and seconded by Charles Fullerton, Judd had worked the livelong night; and by the morning of the following day the two men had collected a mass of evidence of the utmost importance.

The coroner's jury was assembled at Barclay's house, and enacted its judicial farce in the picture gallery, opposite the studio in which the

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dead man had been found. Rembrandts and Raphaels, Dolces and Dürers, in golden frames, looked down with angelic surprise upon the strange scene which desecrated their hallowed ground.

Judd, acting upon the advice of Charles Fullerton, had determined to summon many witnesses; the picture gallery was consequently crowded, and with a motley throng. Like two fates, at the opposite ends of a long table, sat Horace P. Judd and Charles Fullerton. By facing each other in this wise they looked in opposite directions, and nothing which occurred in the room could escape the attention of one or the other of the two men.

Thurston Prose was the first witness.

Prose described how he had left Barclay at three o'clock in order to prepare his will; how upon his return at five o'clock he had found him sitting in his chair, dead.

"What was the character of Mr. Barclay's intended will?"

"He proposed to leave his property to the lady to whom he was engaged."

"Was that property large?"

"It was in the neighborhood of three quarters of a million."

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"Was it Mr. Barclay's entire fortune?"

"No, it was half his property. The remaining portion was left to him in trust."

"But such of his property as was at his disposal he proposed to leave away from his heir-at-law?"

"Yes."

"Who was his heir-at-law?"

"His cousin, Dr. Algernon Sedgwick."

"Was Dr. Sedgwick acquainted with the intention of the deceased?"

"Yes, Mr. Barclay announced his intention to him in my presence."

"Were there other witnesses?"

"Yes."

"Did you observe anything peculiar in Dr. Sedgwick's manner when the deceased announced his intention to him?"

"Dr. Sedgwick was embarrassed, but his confusion seemed to arise from the publicity of his cousin's announcement rather than from regret;" and Prose explained at some length how Barclay had spoken before the group of men at the club.

"What did Mr. Barclay do after this conversation?"

"He left the club-house in my company."

"Immediately?"

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"We drank his health first."

"At what time was this?"

"At about half-past two."

"Did the deceased drink anything?"

"Yes, he drank a glass of sherry and bitters."

"That is to say, the deceased partook of sherry and bitters less than three hours before his death?"

"Yes."

"Did he mix the sherry and bitters himself?"

"No. Mr. Barclay's glass was brought into the room on a tray with the others, and placed upon a table."

"Did the deceased take his glass from the tray himself?"

"No, it was handed him by Dr. Sedgwick."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, I am positive upon this point, because there was a piece of cork in the glass. Dr. Sedgwick removed this cork before he handed the glass to his cousin."

"Did you see the cork?"

"No. I was not sufficiently near the table to have seen it."

"Did you notice anything peculiar in Dr. Sedgwick's behavior when he removed the cork?"

"No. He was embarrassed, but I attributed

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that embarrassment to Barclay's open declaration about the will. Sedgwick seemed to be conscious that we were thinking of it."

Judd now abandoned the scene at the clubhouse to interrogate Prose upon Sedgwick's behavior when he had at first become acquainted with his cousin's death.

"Did Dr. Sedgwick seem surprised or grieved when he knew of his cousin's death?"

"Yes."

In his secret soul Prose thought that Sedgwick had displayed a terrible indifference at Barclay's death; but he did not feel called upon to say so. His testimony was damaging enough against Sedgwick as it was. After all, Sedgwick was a physician, and familiar with scenes of sudden death. Perhaps if he, Prose, had been a physician too, he would have displayed no greater feeling than had Sedgwick.

After several unimportant questions Prose was permitted to withdraw, and Messrs. Candage and Dalton were examined, both of whom corroborated Prose's testimony, although they established no new facts.

Parsley, the butler, was the next witness.

Parsley testified that Mr. Barclay had let himself into his house at three o'clock on the

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previous afternoon; that he was attended by Mr. Brown, a photographer, who had accompanied Mr. Barclay up to his studio and had remained there for half an hour. Parsley had met him as he came downstairs and had opened the door for him. He was sure it was no longer than half an hour because he had noticed the clock when Mr. Edgerton called. At the mention of Mr. Edgerton's name the jurymen pricked up their ears. If any violence had been directed against Barclay that previous afternoon it must have been during the hour and a half intervening between the departure of the photographer and the return of Prose.

"Who is Mr. Edgerton?" demanded the coroner.

"Mr. Masters Hedgerton."

"Was he a friend to Mr. Barclay?"

"No, sir. Mr. Barclay knew Mr. Hedgerton, but I can't say as they was hexactly friends."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I don't think there was hany love lost between Mr. Barclay and Mr. Hedgerton, sir."

"What makes you think that?"

"What makes servants halways think such things, sir? They sees and they listens."

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"Did Mr. Edgerton see Mr. Barclay?"

"No, sir. I hexplained to Mr. Hedgerton as 'ow I 'ad positive horders no one was to be shown hup, sir."

"Did Mr. Edgerton then leave the house?"

"No, sir. He seemed hangry, sir, when I refused to tell Mr. Barclay he was waiting, sir. He hargued with me, and when I told him my horders were positive he said he would come in and write to Mr. Barclay. He came into the reception-room, sir."

"Did you remain with Mr. Edgerton while he wrote his letter?"

"No, sir. I went off to speak to one of the lads, and when I came back Mr. Hedgerton was gone."

"Did you not consider it strange that Mr. Edgerton should leave the house without summoning you?"

"No, sir. People hoften do that, sir. Why, that very same morning a young woman stepped in and waited for Mr. Barclay, and then went off without me seeing her."

"At what time was that?"

"About one o'clock, sir."

"How long a time elapsed before you returned to the reception-room?"

"I beg parding, sir."

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"How long was it before you came back to Mr. Edgerton?"

"It might 'ave been ten minutes, sir."

"Not longer?"

"No, sir."

After some beating about the bush Mr. Parsley averred that it could not have been longer than fifteen minutes at the very most. This, then, brought them up to quarter to four.

"You can swear that it was not longer than fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you take Mr. Edgerton's letter immediately up to Mr. Barclay?"

"There was n't hany letter, sir."

"What?"

"There was no letter, sir. When I came back and saw Mr. Hedgerton was gone I looked about for the letter. I ransacked the whole room and looked in the 'all, sir; but I could n't find hany letter."

"Did that surprise you?"

"No, sir. Mr. Hedgerton was very much excited when he came in, sir. I thought maybe while he was writing he had cooled down like and made hup his mind to leave the 'ouse without writing."

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"Why did you think he had left the house?"

"What helse would the gentleman do, sir?"

"Could he not have gone upstairs while you were speaking with the lad?"

"Why, yes, sir, I suppose he could. There was nobody there to hinder him."

"What did you do when you found that Mr. Edgerton was no longer in the reception-room?"

"I sat down in the 'all, sir."

"So that Mr. Edgerton could not have come downstairs without your seeing him?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"And you remained in the hall until Mr. Prose arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do while you sat in the hall?"

"I read, sir."

"You did not fall asleep?"

"No, sir, I was reading all the time."

"Could you not have become so absorbed in your book that some one might have come down the stairs and passed out without your seeing him?"

"No, sir; I was reading 'Sweet Peas,' by the critic of the 'Daily News,' sir."

The coroner seemed to consider this answer conclusive and pursued this theme no longer.

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"And no one came to the house between the visit of Mr. Edgerton and the return of Mr. Prose?"

"No, sir."

Here Mr. Parsley stood down and wiped the perspiration from his face with the napkin he carried in his hand, greatly relieved that the trying ordeal was over.

Algernon Sedgwick was the next witness. He was dressed in deep mourning, and his face was extremely pale. He seemed conscious that he was regarded with suspicion, and his manner was aggressive, the most unfortunate deportment for a witness.

"You are the nearest relative of the deceased?"

"Yes."

"You are also aware that your cousin proposed executing a will which should leave such property as was at his disposal away from you?"

"Yes."

"When did you first become aware of the deceased's intention?"

"At two o'clock yesterday."

"What was your feeling when this intention became known to you?"

"Annoyance. I was annoyed that my cousin should speak of so private a matter in so public a way."

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"You were not disappointed when you learned that the deceased proposed leaving to Miss Fullerton a large fortune, which must otherwise have come to you?"

"No. I never expected that my cousin's fortune would come to me. I was simply annoyed that he should have been guilty of such a breach of good breeding as to declare his intention in the presence of others."

"You are a physician?"

"Yes."

"By specialty a toxicologist and medical chemist?"

"Yes."

"May I examine your ring?"

Sedgwick, becoming slightly paler than before, withdrew a large seal ring from his finger and handed it to the coroner, who turned it about carefully in his hands endeavoring to displace the seal.

"Does this ring open?" he asked at length, when his efforts to displace the stone had proved unavailing.

"Yes. If you press the knob at the side, the stone can be made to swing outward upon a hinge."

The coroner, following Sedgwick's direction,

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pressed the knob and swung the stone outwards. Its displacement disclosed a small cavity beneath the setting. This enclosed space was empty.

"What is the purpose of this secret chamber?"

"It was made for a picture."

"Have you always used it for this purpose?"

"No. It is no secret that I was foolish enough when a medical student to carry a small quantity of aconitine in the space originally intended for a picture, and that I boastingly showed the poison to my friends. It is needless to say, however, that there has been no aconitine there for the past four years."

"Nor any other poison?"

"Nor any other poison."

"How did you acquire this aconitine?"

"I extracted it myself."

"And you could extract it again?"

"Certainly."

"And you have other and various poisons at your disposal?"

"Certainly. As is the custom among medical chemists I have in my laboratory a sample of nearly every known poison."

"Could this ring contain sufficient aconitine to cause the death of an adult?"

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"Yes, it could contain aconitine enough to cause the death of four men."

"Is it not possible that some of its former contents might have adhered to the sides and fallen into your cousin's glass when you removed the cork?"

The coroner asked this question firmly.

Sedgwick answered as firmly, "No. There has been no aconitine nor any other poison in the ring for several years."

"You are sure?"

"Absolutely."

"And the receptacle has been cleaned?"

"Thoroughly."

"So that upon analysis it would reveal the traces of no poison?"

"So that upon analysis it would reveal the traces of no poison. It was cleaned with acid four years ago. It is impossible that it should contain any poison."

"Is death by aconitine discoverable by chemical analysis or by any *post-mortem* appearances?"

"No, I believe not."

"Have you ever remarked that it was in your power to cause death in such a manner that the cause of death could not be discovered? You

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may decline to answer these questions if you desire."

"I have no wish to decline. If I have ever said anything of the kind it would simply have been what almost every physician must sometime have said."

"And would such a statement have been true?"

"Yes. It is possible that a man might die from a disease which had been caused by the administration of some poison, but in such a case there must be an illness. I know of no poison which could cause sudden death, and yet leave no trace of its presence."

"And yet you say that aconitine cannot be detected by chemical analysis or by *post-mortem* appearances?"

"The administration of aconitine is followed by convulsions. The absence of convulsion would absolutely exclude it in the present case."

"Is the same thing true of prussic acid?"

"No, not necessarily. But prussic acid has a strong permeating odor, and the absence of this odor in the present case would be almost conclusive evidence against its employment. Of course it is conceivable that my cousin may have died from the fumes of the strong acid, administered

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to him in his sleep, or during unconsciousness, but that I consider extremely improbable."

"Is there no poison which can cause sudden death without convulsions?"

"Yes. It is possible that woorara might cause such a death, though I doubt it. I do not believe that woorara could cause death in three hours; certainly not in a shorter period. Yet my cousin had been dead some time when he was discovered by Prose and the butler."

"Do you recall to mind any cases of poisoning by woorara?"

"No."

Masters Edgerton was the next witness. In response to the questions of the coroner he admitted that he knew Barclay, but that they were not friends.

"Were you then enemies?"

"No."

"You visited Mr. Barclay at his house at 3.30 on the 22d of May."

"Yes."

"What was the object of that visit."

"Business of a private nature."

"Do you decline to inform the gentlemen of the jury of the nature of this business?"

"Yes."



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Edgerton's manner was nervous and excited, and this denial upon the part of the witness created no little surprise. He was the first witness who had declined to answer a question which had been put to him. As the bad impression caused by his denial seemed to dawn upon him, he continued, —

"My business with Mr. Barclay was of a private nature, having no bearing whatever upon the present case. I should regret extremely to speak of it, unless the occasion should absolutely demand it."

"Your business with the deceased was of importance?"

"Yes."

"So important that when you were told you could not see the deceased you entered the house in order to write to him?"

"Yes."

"What became of this letter?"

"I put it in my pocket before it was finished. I decided not to write to Mr. Barclay. I decided to wait until I could see him personally."

"What did you do after you had decided not to write to the deceased?"

"I left the house."

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"Immediately?"

"Yes."

"How long a time had you remained in Mr. Barclay's house?"

"Five minutes perhaps. Certainly not more."

"Had you ever been in the house of the deceased previous to the 22d of May?"

"Yes."

"Many times?"

"Yes."

"You were familiar with the peculiarity of its arrangement?"

"Yes."

"You say that latterly your relations with the deceased had not been friendly?"

"Yes. Mr. Barclay and I ceased to be friends six months ago."

"Report says that you quarrelled about a lady. Is this true?"

Edgerton was now greatly excited. He shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other and looked at the coroner with indecision. Finally he hesitated no longer.

"Yes, we quarrelled about a lady."

"And it was in regard to this quarrel that you called upon the deceased upon the afternoon of the 22d of May?"

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"Yes."

"Why did you not say so before?"

"Because this was a private matter which could have no possible bearing upon the present case."

The following witnesses were the medical experts who had conducted the autopsy. These gentlemen, in the voluble technical language at their command, testified that Barclay had died of no organic disease; that his death had resulted from shock or paralysis of the heart. To what this shock or paralysis was due they could not say. The chemical expert testified that he had made a preliminary chemical examination, but with negative results. He could detect no traces of any poison. All that had been said by Sedgwick he fully corroborated. He was of the opinion that woorara or concentrated prussic acid were the only poisons which could have caused the death of Bryce Barclay. Of woorara, he testified, little was known. It was a substance prepared by certain tribes of Indians for poisoning arrows. It was equally poisonous whether administered by the mouth or under the skin. In the former case its action would be less rapid. It could not be detected by chemical analysis by any method known at that time.

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It was possible, he admitted, that the deceased had come to his death by some unknown poison. In answer to the question of the coroner, the witness was of the opinion that the taste of woorara or aconitine in wine would be disguised by the addition of bitters.

No other evidence of importance was adduced, and after the examination of several unimportant witnesses the jury withdrew. No decision, however, was arrived at. As is usually the case among coroners' juries, its members disagreed, five believing that the deceased had come to his death by poison, the remaining seven attributing his death to natural causes. The true cause of their disagreement, however, was the testimony of Sedgwick. Seven of the jurymen believed that Sedgwick was unhappily surrounded by a net-work of circumstantial evidence. The dissenting five believed that he had been too frank in his admissions. They believed that he had administered some mysterious poison to his cousin in order to obtain his fortune.

The verdict rendered was "Cause of death unknown," and the evidence obtained and the report of the inquest were handed over to the district attorney.

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# CHAPTER VI.

## DAVID KEENE.

THAT night Algernon Sedgwick was arrested for the murder of his cousin, though it was by no means certain that Barclay had in truth been murdered. The presumption of murder, however, was very strong. The autopsy had proved that Barclay had suffered from no organic disease. It had shown that he died from shock or paralysis of the heart. Now nothing, it was claimed, could cause a man of robust health, and without organic disease, to die of shock or paralysis of the heart unless it should have been poison or external violence of some sort. Sudden fright or fear, or in fact any violent emotion, might cause a heart to pause forever in its rhythmical march; but this, it was contended, was a very unlikely thing to happen to a man of Barclay's temperament; still more unlikely when one recalled to mind the smiling expression of the dead man's face. On the whole, the

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weight of opinion favored the theory of poison. Barclay had drunk of sherry and bitters less than three hours before his death; bitters which the expert had testified would disguise the taste of almost every vegetable poison. The glass containing the suspected potion had been taken from the hand of Sedgwick; an opportunity being thus afforded to the latter to administer poison to his cousin had he been so disposed. Sedgwick, the heir-at-law, was the person most interested in Barclay's death. Sedgwick, familiar with all poisons, had a complete supply of them at his disposal. Sedgwick had been averse to the inquest, and had boasted that he could cause death without incurring risk of detection. Thus the evidence was strong against him, and he had a relentless pursuer in Charles Fullerton, who could ascribe no motive as sufficient for a murder other than the desire for gain. So Algernon Sedgwick had been arrested on suspicion and committed to jail.

At this time David Keene, of the firm of Keene and Eley, was the most prominent detective in Dashford. Keene was not a detective of the conventional type. Having received an excellent education, he had begun life as a newspaper reporter. At the age of twenty-two he

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had been detailed by his employers to write up the circumstances of a mysterious murder which had set the city agog some eight years previous to the opening of our story. In the pursuance of this task Keene had become imbued with an irresistible desire to penetrate the secret of the crime. He had relinquished a lucrative position on the staff of the newspaper, and had devoted himself body and soul, as the saying is, to solving the problem of the murder. This effort had been crowned with success. In the face and eyes of the most noted detectives in the city, David Keene, newspaper reporter, while but twenty-two years of age, had discovered the assassin and caused him to pay the penalty of his crime. The success of this venture had opened up a new field for the young newspaper reporter. He had adopted this new calling, bringing to bear so much of energy and sagacity that in a short time he had come to the front ranks of his new associates; and two years previous to the present time, he had entered into partnership with Willis Eley, a veteran detective of the old school.

Willis Eley was a man of a different stamp from his partner Keene. Bred up in the ranks of the Dashford police, Eley had passed his youth among the outcasts of society and offenders

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against the laws, rising slowly in his work by the regular promotion until, at the age of forty, he stood foremost among the detectives employed by the State. At that time he became acquainted with Keene; and the two men, utterly different from each other both in nature and education, had joined hands in a mutual admiration and friendship. Of this friendship and admiration the detective bureau of Keene and Eley was the eventual outgrowth. Eley was a rough-and-ready detective. Keene was a genius of the highest stamp.

Such, then, was the detective, David Keene, whom we must now introduce to the reader as the smaller of the two men sitting in the snug private office of the district attorney. He was a man rather below the medium height, thin and wiry, of sandy complexion, and with a face which must have been insignificant had it not been for the penetrating glance of its small gray eyes. His companion, Alford D. Bailey, district attorney of Dashford County, was a burly man, with thoughtful face and deep bass voice.

"Well, Mr. Keene," the lawyer was saying, in a voice which seemed much too deep and full for the small, low room, — "well, Mr. Keene, have you finished the report?"

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"Yes," replied the other, laying the report of the coroner's inquest upon the table before him, and drawing his chair up nearer to the desk at which the lawyer sat, "I have finished it. The evidence is certainly strong against Sedgwick; but it is purely circumstantial. You could never convict a man of murder upon *that* proof;" and Keene laid his hand upon the report of the inquest with a gesture of infinite scorn.

"No," Mr. Bailey replied. "But we rely upon you to furnish us with stronger proofs."

"But there is no evidence here to show that a murder has been committed."

"No," Mr. Bailey answered again. "But we trust to you to clear the matter up. Popular prejudice has become so strong against Sedgwick that I have been obliged to consent to his arrest. I shall rely upon you to clear up the mystery."

"A coroner's inquest is a great thing for the criminals," remarked the detective. "It acts as a warning to a murderer to cover up his tracks."

"That is true," the lawyer assented dryly. It was particular information he desired from the lips of David Keene. Generalities might wait until some more favorable time.

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"It has done more harm than usual in the present case," Keene continued, looking thoughtfully at his companion. "I have seldom seen an inquest conducted in so bungling a manner."

"How so?" the lawyer queried. "It seems to me that Coroner Judd has collected an extraordinary mass of evidence against Sedgwick in a surprisingly short time. He has certainly brought out the main facts in a masterly manner."

"The facts you speak of should have been reserved," objected the detective. "They should have been elicited from witnesses, not from the suspected party. Sedgwick's frankness at the inquest weakens the evidence against him. That testimony about the ring, elicited from third parties, would be strong evidence against him; as an admission of the accused it is valueless. No man as conversant with murder trials as Sedgwick must be, would have made such an admission as that if he had been guilty."

"How do you account for his opposition to the inquest?"

"I don't consider that strange. Many physicians are peculiarly averse to *post-mortem* examinations of their relatives. Sedgwick is a

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gentleman. Probably the idea of Judd's approaching his cousin was extremely distasteful to him."

"You believe him innocent?"

"Yes."

"And you think Barclay died a natural death?"

"No. On the contrary, I believe he was murdered."

The district attorney heaved a heavy sigh. He had feared lest his action of causing the arrest of Sedgwick had been too precipitate. Now that so experienced a person as David Keene also suspected that a murder had been committed, he felt that he had acted rightly. His face brightened and his manner became more animated. "Whom do you suspect?" he eagerly asked.

"I have not decided," Keene slowly answered; "but I certainly feel the utmost doubt as to Sedgwick's guilt."

"But consider his motive," argued the lawyer.

"True," Keene answered. "But Fullerton has the same motive. Barclay intended to sign his will at two o'clock. He went to the club-house for that express purpose, and Fullerton was probably acquainted with his intention. If he had signed the will at that time it would

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have placed the bulk of his fortune at Fullerton's disposal, since Miss Fullerton is still a minor. Mind you, I don't say Fullerton did it. I merely say that he had the same motive for Barclay's murder as Sedgwick."

"I had not thought of that," replied the other meditatively.

The detective laughed softly to himself, a peculiar, silent laugh; low and insinuating. "Then there is Masters Edgerton," he continued. "Edgerton and Barclay had quarrelled about a woman. What is more likely than that Edgerton should desire to be revenged upon his rival? What time so suitable for the destruction of an enemy as the moment when his happiness is supreme?"

As the lawyer made no reply to this suggestion, the detective again continued, with the same silent laugh. "Then there is the photographer," he said. "How do we know that Mr. Brown did not murder Mr. Barclay for the money on his person? The inquest shows nothing to the contrary. Then again," continued the detective, with his sharp gray eyes still bent upon the other's face, "how do we know that no one came to the house while Edgerton was writing his letter, and while the butler was conversing with the lad? How

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do we know that this person did not go up-stairs, kill Mr. Barclay, and then come down and make his escape during the fifteen minutes that elapsed while the butler was away? How do we know that the young woman who waited for Mr. Barclay at one o'clock did not secrete herself in the house, murder the victim, and make her escape while the butler was talking with the lad? How do we know that Mr. Barclay was not poisoned before he went to the club-house? There are many possibilities."

"That is true," the lawyer answered, staggered by the list of hypotheses enumerated by his glib companion. "You have a vivid imagination, Mr. Keene."

"I have need," the detective briskly answered. Then, permitting his voice to relapse into a more business-like and respectful tone, he continued, "I will undertake this case, Mr. Bailey. I will sift it to the very bottom. If you will furnish me with the necessary papers, I will begin at once."

The district attorney drew his chair up to his desk and wrote out the credentials which the other had demanded. When he had finished, Keene examined them carefully before consigning them to his pocket. Then, taking the report

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of the coroner's inquest and bowing respectfully to the lawyer, he left the room; and the district attorney again heaved a deep sigh of relief: in having intrusted the mystery of Bryce Barclay's death to the man who had left him he felt that he had done all that human power could accomplish.

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# CHAPTER VII.

## A WAGER.

IT must not be supposed that the members of the Epicurean Club had permitted the mysterious death of Bryce Barclay to pass without discussion. On the contrary, it had constituted the principal theme of conversation, in the same way that sherry and bitters had become the popular drink. Every detail of Barclay's death had been insisted upon and embellished; and the affair had given rise to so much talk and comment that several of the more timid Epicureans had been forced to abandon the blood-curdling though aristocratic atmosphere of the club-house, to take their refreshments and seek more congenial companionship in the restaurants down-town.

It was the prevailing opinion among the Epicureans that Sedgwick had poisoned his cousin. Some few of the members of the club, to be sure, more loyal to their confrere, had

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scorned the idea "that a gentleman could be guilty of such a crime, and for money too!" But they were in the minority, and were soon forced to keep their opinions to themselves, in self-defence against the storm of proofs which was raised against them. Every member of the club had become learned in toxicological science; hypnotics and analgesics, depressor motors and cardiac sedatives, were familiar subjects of conversation; and Sedgwick's supporters strove in vain to stem the tide of scientific evidence which was setting against them.

The betting upon the murder had assumed vast proportions at the club-house. Wagers of various kinds and of as varying magnitudes had been freely offered and as freely taken. It was even money that a murder had been committed, and five to one that Sedgwick would be held upon suspicion. Then Sedgwick's supporters had backed their favorite against the field. They did not dare openly to defend him. He was too unpopular among the frequenters of the club-house for open defence. His taciturn manners and retiring disposition had made him unpopular even before suspicion had rested upon him. Now he was more than ever disliked, and his friends had abandoned all attempt



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at open vindication. But they staked their money upon their comrade. That, after all, seemed to be all that was consistent with true fellowship.

The day after the inquest Reginald Candage and Hubert Dalton lunched together at the club-house. Their lunch was finished; the two men had pushed their chairs back from the table and were engaged in discussing a bottle of wine over the all-absorbing topic.

Candage was the speaker.

"It seems so awfully odd, you know," the young man was saying, "that you should have lived next door to Barclay and not have known anything about it."

"Not exactly next door," Dalton answered.

"Well, it's much the same thing, you know," Candage persisted: "you live in the same block, and there are only four doors between you."

"Four house-lots at ten dollars the foot make considerable difference," Dalton said, with a slight laugh.

Candage joined in the laugh. He held a small Russia leather betting-book in his hand, and was recording a wager he had made with his friend.

"Five to one, I believe you said," the young

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man remarked, looking up questioningly at Dalton, after he had fairly recovered from the effects of his friend's witticism.

"Yes," Dalton answered with a smile. "I give you five to one that no murder is proved."

"In three months?" added Candage.

"In three months," Dalton assented.

"Goddesses?" inquired Candage.

"Goddesses," Dalton again assented.

"Goddesses" were twenty-dollar gold-pieces, so called from the jaundiced face of the Goddess of Liberty, which frowns from its tawny background upon sporting young America.

Candage sipped his wine, meditatively regarding the betting-book before him. Betting and gossip were the chief business of his life, and life was very pleasant to him when he could indulge freely in these simple pastimes. Barclay's death had proved a godsend to Reginald Candage. He had never appeared in better spirits. Not so, however, was it with Hubert Dalton. He, on the contrary, seemed morose and moody. Perhaps he was bored by the flippancy of the other.

"Come, finish your wine, Candage," Dalton said impatiently. "It's time we were starting."

Candage and Dalton were on their way up

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town together, to pay a visit to a mutual acquaintance who was about to sail for Europe on the following day.

Candage, consigning his betting-book to one of his waistcoat pockets, reluctantly finished his wine; and the two men were soon on their way up town together, walking abreast and three feet apart, with elbows rigidly extended and with their silver-headed canes thrust behind their right shoulders, after the manner of the guns of soldiers who accompany a fallen comrade to the grave.

Conversation there was none. Candage was too much absorbed in form for that, and Dalton seemed moody and preoccupied. Suddenly Candage broke the silence. "By Jove! you know," he exclaimed in suppressed tones, "there is Margaret Fullerton in colors! Does n't it seem to you awfully odd that she should n't be in mourning for Barclay?"

Dalton's dark brows came together in a heavy frown as, following the direction of the other's glance, his eye fell upon the fine figure of Margaret Fullerton advancing towards them; and an expression of scorn flitted across the young man's handsome features. "She was not his wife," he said shortly.

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"No," Candage admitted, "but she was the next thing to it, you know."

"There 's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," Dalton muttered in a low voice.

Miss Fullerton was very near them now, and Candage was already engaged in making extensive preparations for consummating such a bow as would be of credit to him. Not only must that bow express sorrow, sympathy, admiration, and esteem, but it must also be effected after the conventional manner. It was, indeed, a task of no slight difficulty, yet Reginald Candage felt that he was equal to it.

Margaret Fullerton had evidently recognized Candage and Dalton as quickly as they had seen her, for as she drew nearer to them, the young men could perceive that her color came and went with evident embarrassment, and that her eyes were fixedly bent upon the ground. Nearer she came with downcast eyes, until she was almost abreast of them, when timidly and deprecatingly she raised her eyes to Dalton's face. But they only dwelt there for an instant. It was evident that she did not see what she had looked for in those stern, set features. She looked at Dalton wistfully for an instant, and then transferred her glance to his companion, to whom

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she sweetly but sadly inclined her head. And as Candage returned her salutation with all the grace of a youthful Chesterfield, Margaret Fullerton passed them by and continued on her way.

When the girl passed beyond hearing, Candage turned to his companion. "She cut you dead!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

"Yes," Dalton composedly replied.

Candage laughed weakly to himself. He longed to pursue the subject and to banter his friend upon the slight which the girl had put upon him; but there was that in Dalton's face which warned him to forbear, and he pursued his way in silence.

This little episode served, however, to make the gossip somewhat more thoughtful than was his wont. Was it possible after all, he thought to himself, that Miss Fullerton had jilted Dalton for the richer Barclay? Perhaps so. Perhaps this little event, however trifling in itself, might be the means of raising him to the proud distinction of becoming the originator of a scandal.

"Yet I wish it was anybody but Dalton," he thought again, as he ambled along by the side of his friend. "Dalton can be so devilish disagreeable when he tries."

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# CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SILKEN THREADS.

KEENE'S first act after leaving the lawyer's office was to seek out his partner Eley and to lay before him the coroner's report, that Eley might become acquainted with the circumstances of the case while Keene should examine the premises upon which the supposed crime had been committed. It was agreed upon by both men that no time should now be lost, and Eley forthwith settled himself down to study out the circumstances of Barclay's sudden death, while Keene made his way to the house on Gainsboro' Avenue, showed the order he had received from the district attorney, and began a systematic inspection of the premises.

In this tour of inspection, Keene was accompanied by the butler Parsley. Every detail and peculiarity of the house was thoroughly investigated; even the servants' quarters were carefully examined and their occupants interrogated and

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critically reviewed. When the pair had laboriously reached the highest story of the building, the heart of the butler was completely won; there was no service he was not willing to perform in behalf of his genial companion. Keene had the rare gift of adapting himself to the people with whom he happened to be associated, and he had exercised this gift to such advantage that he had completely ingratiated himself into the good graces of the old servant.

But all that the butler could tell him, Keene had now absorbed. It was essential to his method that he should examine the scene of the murder alone; his attention must not be distracted by the commonplace remarks of another observer. It now became necessary for him to dismiss the loquacious Parsley, but without offending him. In this matter, as in all others, the butler was ready to acquiesce in the detective's desire. Indeed, such was the superstitious dread which pervaded the whole being of the old servant, as, for the first time since that memorable afternoon, he stood by the door of Barclay's studio, that he was greatly relieved when Keene expressed to him his desire to be left alone. And Parsley, having assured the detective that nothing had been disturbed in the apartment, and having

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silently pointed out the chair in which his master had been found sitting, incontinently fled. Keene was left alone in the studio.

The detective shut the door and locked it, and then proceeded to seat himself in the window, in order to take a general survey of the room. He pictured to himself Barclay, sitting in his chair; he noted the position of the different articles of furniture; and he took a good look at Miss Fullerton's picture. Nothing in the room escaped his anxious scrutiny. This preliminary survey being completed, the detective rose and began the exact study of the details.

The peculiarity of Keene's method, as he often explained to his subordinates, lay chiefly in the fact that it was a method. It was a routine, composed of a preliminary examination, an analysis, a synthesis, and lastly, of deductions. This routine was applied by Keene to every case he investigated, and he never permitted himself to neglect the whole for a single part, no matter how promising or important that part might at first sight appear.

The first article in the room which invited the detective's investigation was the carpet, every inch of which was carefully explored. Two small pieces of mud were picked up; also a pebble,

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so small as to be little more than a fragment of gravel. This search occupied half an hour, and was not concluded until the detective had cast himself at full length upon the floor, and surveyed the surface of the carpet in every direction. A second fragment of gravel rewarded this search. Of these two fragments, one was found behind the chair in which Barclay sat, and the other near the door of the dark closet.

The dark closet was the next subject to claim the detective's attention, and was inspected in every possible detail. Keene even found it necessary to climb the ladder, to open the trap-door, and mount upon the roof. Then he came down the ladder again, and extinguished the gas, which he had previously lighted. As the light from above flooded down through the open trap upon the ladder below, a yellow object upon one of the top rounds of the ladder caught the detective's eye. It was a fragment of yellow silk thread, less than a sixteenth of an inch long. Close inspection showed that this fragment of silk was slightly twisted. "It has been woven," thought the detective to himself; and as he turned it about in his nervous hands in the bright sunlight from above, he detected a black fibre mingled with the yellow threads.

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This black fibre seemed to him of a coarser material than the silk enclosing it. Up the ladder again, examining every step, the detective crept, but nothing was found to reward his efforts excepting a second fragment of the silk, caught upon the ledge above the trap. This second fragment was exactly similar to the one he had previously found, except that the black fibre was more plainly discernible in the second specimen. The detective now closed the trap-door and descended the ladder. An hour and a half had now been consumed, and yet nothing had been found but the mud, the gravel, and the two fragments of silk. But Keene appeared by no means discouraged. He systematically consigned his trophies to three small boxes which he drew from his pocket. Then he returned to his search again.

The detective was now deeply absorbed, and was whistling softly to himself. Nothing similar to the silk was to be found in the room. The detective could find no possible source from which it could have been derived. It must have come from outside, he thought to himself. Perhaps, after all, he had found in this silk a clew of some value. Renewed investigation convinced him that nothing similar to this silk was to be found

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in the apartment, and contenting himself that such was the fact, Keene abandoned his search, and directed his attention to the camera.

The camera stood opposite the picture of Miss Fullerton, and was covered with a black cloth. The detective carefully raised the cloth, and looked through the aperture from behind, throwing the drapery over his head with the awkward gesture of an amateur. Nothing was to be seen; some dense medium was opposed between the lenses and his eye. The detective withdrew his head, replaced the cloth, and gazed at the instrument with a puzzled air. There was a brass disk lying upon the ledge of the tripod. This disk Keene placed over the lenses as he had seen photographers do. He was not an adept at photography, and he now felt he was treading upon dangerous ground. Presently a thought struck him. Back into the dark closet he turned like a flash; Mr. Brown, the photographer, had testified that he had brought Barclay negatives on the afternoon of the supposed murder. If one of these plates was in the camera, it would almost positively exclude Brown from complicity in the crime, supposing a crime had indeed been committed. There were twenty-three plates in the box, with a vacant place at

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the end, which seemed to show that the box had originally contained twenty-four. Keene thoughtfully shut down the cover of the box, and returned to the camera. This fact, trifling in itself, had completely exonerated the photographer, in the detective's opinion. He could now interrogate Mr. Brown, he thought, with the view of fixing the probable time of the murder. The detective shut the slide in the camera and took out the frame which contained the negative.

"It will serve as a letter of introduction to Mr. Brown," he said to himself with a silent laugh, and laying it aside, he now set himself to work to examine the legs of the tripod upon which the camera rested. A third fragment of silk rewarded his effort.

Thus every article in the room was examined after the same critical fashion. Every letter in the writing-desk in the corner was carefully perused; the names and addresses of all Barclay's correspondents were noted down, and a packet of letters, tied with a blue ribbon, was consigned to the detective's pocket. There were many letters in the angular handwriting of fashionable women in the desk in the corner, but the letters in the packet tied with the blue ribbon were by far the most numerous. They were

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written in a round, smooth hand, and were signed by the name, "Leslie Dane."

With the examination of the writing-desk, the detective's work was finished, — his analysis was complete; and Keene gathered together his trophies and sank down into Barclay's chair. He would piece together the meagre material he had gleaned.

But judging from the detective's face as he roused himself from his short dream, inspiration had not come to him. Perhaps the data were too meagre, or perhaps his imagination was not sufficiently aroused. At all events, the process of synthesis consumed a much shorter time than had the process of analysis. Gathering up his trophies, Keene started down the stairs. He would discuss the affair with Eley before deciding upon any definite line of action.

On his way to the detective bureau, Keene paused at the photographer's.

"Is Mr. Brown in?" he inquired of the stout man who greeted him in the odorous parlor in which the photographer received his patrons.

"I am Mr. Brown," responded the stout man, rubbing his hands and bowing to his visitor with an obsequious smile. "What is your pleasure, sir?"

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"I have a picture I wish to have brought out," Keene replied, in profound ignorance of the technical terms of the art of photography. "It is an experimental study, and I want it carefully done. Can you attend to it yourself?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the photographer.

Keene produced the frame which contained the negative, and handed it to the other. The photographer gave a perceptible start as he took it in his hands. Then he regarded it narrowly.

"This frame is exactly similar to one which belonged to the late Mr. Barclay," he remarked in accents of surprise.

"Indeed?" inquired Keene. "The Mr. Barclay who died so suddenly?"

"Yes," explained the other, "Mr. Bryce Barclay."

"You must have known him intimately to recognize a resemblance in a little piece of wood like that," remarked the detective.

"I did," Brown answered with a sigh. "I was with the young gentleman on the very afternoon of his death."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, with a fine show of surprise. "Mr. Barclay was taking photographs on the very afternoon that he died?"

"No," Brown answered, sighing again. "I left

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the unhappy young gentleman but two hours and a half before his dead body was discovered by his friend. At that time the camera was leaning against the wall. But I have no doubt he intended to photograph a lovely oil painting he had made of the lady of his choice. In fact, the unhappy young gentleman confessed as much to me as I stood there talking with him."

"How very sad!" Keene remarked, looking at the other with affected sympathy.

"Sad, indeed," reiterated the photographer, with a drooping of the corners of his capacious mouth. "It was one of those awful visitations of Divine Providence."

"Then you do not believe that Mr. Barclay was poisoned?" Keene inquired with a show of deference.

"No," replied the photographer, shaking his head and rolling up his eyes, "I cannot think so. Mr. Prose testified that he was dead and cold when he found him at five o'clock, so that death must have come upon him an hour at the most after I had left him. Now, sir, don't you agree with me, that if Mr. Barclay had drunk of a poisonous cup, he must have shown some signs of the insidious drug that was working at his vitals, while he was talking with me?"

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"Yes," Keene answered. "I think you must be right."

"So does my wife," said Mr. Brown. "Mrs. Brown agrees with me in every particular." Here Mr. Brown looked at Keene and sighed again; and as Keene looked at Mr. Brown, he observed that the photographer's mouth was drawn down at the corners in such a manner that it strongly resembled the perfect crescent of the new, young moon. It must have been a wet moon, according to ancient tradition. But so was Mr. Brown's mouth a wet mouth; and as Keene feared lest his eyes should follow suit, he hastened to observe,—

"What you have said is very interesting; and now, Mr. Brown, when may I call for my picture?"

"To-morrow," replied the photographer. "To-morrow afternoon the *negative* shall be ready."

"Before I leave you," Keene continued, "I should like to ask if there is any sign by which you can identify one of your own negatives."

"No," answered the photographer.

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# CHAPTER IX.



WILLIS ELEY had finished his study of the coroner's report, and was standing by the "ticker" in his private office when Keene returned from his examination of the studio. Eley was a tall, large man, with a short, thick neck, broad, sloping shoulders, and a heavy frame. His face, which was intelligent, was calm and thoughtful; but it was a face which suggested judgment and determination rather than unusual brilliance of the perceptive faculties. Eley turned from the "ticker" and greeted his partner. "Good news!" he cried, in a bluff, jovial voice. "Duncan and Paddock have cleared up the Easton robbery, and will lodge the criminals in jail to-night. On top of that comes a despatch from Badger saying that he has bagged his man, and will have him in the Tombs before six o'clock. This new business comes just in the nick of time."

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"Good!" exclaimed Keene heartily. "That is indeed good news. We shall need these three men at least in this new case of ours. Come, sit down, Eley, and let us talk this new affair over."

Eley seated himself in compliance with Keene's request, while Keene drew up a chair to the other side of the table, opposite his partner. Both men looked anxious and somewhat excited.

Keene was the first to break the silence.

"In the first place," he said positively, "I am convinced that Bryce Barclay has been murdered."

"So am I," chimed in Eley.

"Everything points that way," Keene continued. "At all events, we will assume it to be a fact as the best means of clearing up the mystery."

"There I 'm with you," said Eley with cordiality.

"So far, so good. Now the first question to be settled is: How was he murdered? What was the cause of death?"

"There I differ with you," broke in Eley quickly. "The first question, to my view, is: Who done it?"

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Keene and Eley always differed from each other in their methods of research, agreeing only in the main details. To this difference of method they were indebted for their eminence.

"There it is!" cried Keene, triumphantly. "Here we are differing at the very outset. I tell you, Eley, we have got in hand a case of the most extraordinary difficulty."

"I believe you," assented the other, "and that brings me to a proposition I 'm goin' to make."

"Good! Let 's hear it."

"I don't know how you feel," continued Eley with deliberation, "but I ain't satisfied with our assistants. They 're good young men as far as they go, but they ain't what they should be. There 's that Paddock, for instance. He 's so careful and wary there 's no bearing with him. Every time I see him I have to tell him he 's got to cultivate more dash."

"Yes," said Keene, "so do I. Besides that, he 's always making theories with nothing at all to base them on."

"Then again, there 's Duncan," continued Eley with a snarl. "I don't say he ain't smart enough, for he is. He 's smarter than chain lightning. But he 's careless. He don't half look."

"I know it," assented Keene. "He 'll grab

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the first thing he sees and make off with it, without hunting round to see if there is n't something better. Still, he 's the best man we 've got."

"True for you, partner," Eley answered. "All these young men are the best detectives in the city, but still they ain't what they 'd orter be. Now I vote that you and me learn 'em how an affair oughter be worked up. I 've been hanging back for a starchy case, and now the time has come. My plan is, that we leave Paddock and Badger in charge of the office, and work up this case ourselves."

"It 's a good scheme," said Keene, thoughtfully, excited by the prospect of the intricate search which the affair promised. "It 's a good scheme, and there is nothing on hand but what they can manage. Yes, I agree with you, Eley. I believe we can teach these young men a lesson they won't forget in a hurry."

After some further debate, it was settled that Keene and Eley should conduct the affair in person, with the assistance of Duncan, while Paddock and Badger should be made conversant with the circumstances of the case, and should be left in charge of the detective bureau. By this means the two principals promised themselves a triumph over their subordinates.

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This having been agreed upon, the two detectives set themselves to work to decide upon their plan of action. Eley was for approaching the solution of the mystery from the standpoint of "Who done it?" Keene still adhered to his original question, "What was done?" Upon this matter the two men soon arrived at an open issue.

"I 'll take my tack, you take yours," Eley cried at last, when it had become evident that no conclusion was likely to be reached.

"All right," Keene acceded. "Tell me your plan, and I 'll tell you mine."

Eley settled himself back in his chair, and cleared his throat with a portentous "hem." Now that he was on the war-path again he had fallen back into his old detective habits, and his eyes shone like diamonds. "Bryce Barclay was murdered," he said impressively, "either by his cousin, Dr. Sedgwick, for money, or by Charles Fullerton, also for money, or by Masters Edgerton, for revenge. Them 's my ideas."

"It is absolutely necessary that each of these men should be regarded in the light of a possible assassin," Keene assented noncommittally; "but for my part I believe that the crime was committed by some person hitherto unsuspected.

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I suspect it was committed by a woman, either directly or by connivance."

Eley started and opened his eyes. This view seemed to him almost too visionary even for his imaginative partner.

"Why?" he breathlessly inquired.

"Because of the silk; because of the wealth and standing of Fullerton and Sedgwick; because the murder came on the very day of Barclay's engagement; because he had jilted Leslie Dane. I believe the murder was committed either by this same Leslie Dane, or by Masters Edgerton, or by both together."

"How do you think they got in?" Eley demanded.

"If it was Edgerton, that he came in by the door and crept up the stairs after the butler had left him. If it was Leslie Dane, that she came in through the trap-door in the roof."

"Or," interpolated Eley, "she might have been the young woman who came at one o'clock, spoken of in the butler's evidence. She might have gone upstairs and hid herself in the picture gallery. It was never used."

"That is true," Keene admitted. "But that would not account for the silk on the ladder."

Eley looked at Keene incredulously. He evi-

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dently placed but little stress upon fragments of silk and pieces of gravel.

"At all events," he said slowly, "the bulk of the evidence is against Sedgwick. He has been arrested, and it won't do for us to let him slide."

"No; but then there is nothing more to be gained by following him up. The inquest brought out all that could be found against him. Nothing remains but to investigate the club-house, his own house, and his laboratory; to see if the piece of cork can be found; if there was a cork in the sherry bottle, or in the bottle of bitters; to examine into the habits of his life, and to investigate his financial circumstances; all of this Duncan can do as well as you or I. Sedgwick has already been arrested; consequently Duncan can follow him up openly."

"All right," said Eley, with ready acquiescence.

"Then, when he has finished this work, which ought not to consume much time, he can turn his attention to Edgerton or Fullerton."

"Fullerton!" Eley eagerly exclaimed. "I shall take up Edgerton myself."

"Good!" said Keene again. This time there was a sparkle in his small gray eyes, which he

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in vain had striven to repress. Everything was working exactly as he could have wished. He was anxious to pursue the case from his own standpoint, unimpeded by the interference of his partner. "That will leave me free to follow out my own theory. You and I will probably end by playing into each other's hands."

The afternoon had now become far advanced, and it was long past the hour for closing the detective bureau. As everything was now settled, Keene took leave of his partner, charging Eley to draw up his instructions for the assistant Duncan, a task which was quickly accomplished by the experienced detective; after which, Willis Eley closed the office, and directed his steps toward home. Keene's Eley had temporarily ceased to exist, and a very different Eley was now on his way homeward. For the reader must know that Willis Eley had a wife, a woman in whose hands the sturdy detective might be likened to a vessel in a storm. To this wife it was his failing to apply for counsel and advice upon the affairs of the detective bureau, unbeknown to his partner Keene. But Mrs. Eley, though a woman of excellent judgment so far as domestic affairs were concerned, had by no means deserved the influence she had acquired

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over her better portion. Her influence over her husband was like the influence of a pain. If he yielded, it became more bearable. That she was a woman of unusual shrewdness, was indeed true; and her powers of observation were something remarkable. What Mehitable Eley did not see, it is safe to affirm that no human eye could possibly detect. But even if her cold blue eyes were as keen as they were near together, her mental vision, on the contrary, was strangely distorted. Nothing had ever been known to please her. She was at war with all existing customs; she criticised the fashions and those who bowed to them; she looked down upon her husband, and she despised Mr. Keene. Her views of life were sombre in the extreme, and she was a victim to dyspepsia. With this martyr Mr. Eley dwelt in a Genteel Boarding-house in Snug Alley.

Mr. and Mrs. Eley were childless; and as Mrs. Eley was much alone, in consequence of her husband's frequent absences, the worthy couple had recently given up house-keeping and taken up their quarters at the Genteel Boarding-house (for as such it was advertised), where they were received with much reserve by its more pretentious inmates. In discarding her

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less aristocratic quarters, Mrs. Eley had discarded her former friends; and as the "genteel boarders" were what Mrs. Eley described as "kind o' standoffish," she found herself more than ever alone in her new dwelling-place, in consequence of which her dyspepsia had become her principal resource.

To this Genteel Boarding-house Eley therefore betook himself, and after supper had been concluded, and the worthy couple had retired to their own quarters, — after Mrs. Eley had tied a white cambric apron over her smart silk dress, and Eley had filled and lighted his brown meerschaum pipe, — after these and other preliminaries had been completed, the worthy couple settled themselves down for a quiet evening, and the detective proceeded to make his wife acquainted with the affairs of the day. Mrs. Eley sat in her chair by the side of the marble-topped centre-table, rocking with a violence which was only exceeded by the violence of her sighs. When her husband had finished his recital, she pressed her thin right hand to that portion of her dress which the upper section of her apron protected, and with a tragic gesture of the other hand, she said, with more force than regard for English, —

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"It's my belief you and Keene is two fools together."

"Is it so bad?" inquired the detective, with affectionate sympathy.

"It's more than bad," Mehitable Eley responded, with a groan. "It's dreadful! It's tremenjous! I hope, Willis Eley, that you may never know the agony and sufferin' your poor wife endures at this blessed minute. If you was to pour me chock full of red-hot molten iron you could n't burn me worse than my vittles does. Willis Eley, I feels as though a fiend was clawing at my vitals."

"Take a little sody," suggested her husband.

"No," said Mehitable, with a sigh so long and deep that it seemed to have come up from the cellar and gone out the roof of the Genteel Boarding-house, — "no, Willis Eley. Sody is not suited to my constitution. Mineral compounds burns my blood; they makes it feel like it was Jamaica ginger burnin' and jumpin' in my system. No, Willis, sody will not do it. Your poor wife is worn most to the grave, and that's what's the matter. The doctor says my nervous system is completely unstrung."

Eley, mentally blessing the dear doctor who had encouraged his wife in her idle folly, strove

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in vain to reassure her and to suggest measures to assuage her pain. But Mehitable would not be consoled, until the detective at last was driven to the old expedient of searching the evening paper for some of those new and hitherto untried remedies for all human ills.

Mehitable Eley, with an expression of hopeless interest on her face, with one hand jealously pressed against her apron, sat in her rocking-chair watching her husband, as he, with the newspaper spread out upon the marble-topped table, searched the "doctors' column" of the "Evening Times." Presently the detective's descending forefinger came to a standstill, and Eley, clearing his throat, read in a voice which passed deprecatingly over the long hard words, —

"'Bandero's Magic Compound! Dr. Bandero's Wonderful Medical Discovery! Nature's own Remedy for Those suffering with the Torments of Dyspepsia! One hundred dollars' reward paid to any dyspeptic who can resist its magic effects.'

"How will that do, Hitty?"

"Let me gaze upon it with my own eyes," Mehitable cried; and catching the paper from her husband's hands with a feverish gesture, she began to peruse the advertisement with eager

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interest. "Wonderful indeed!" Mehitable exclaimed, when she had read the advertisement from its beginning to its very end. "Wonderful indeed! Here is one poor lady suffering just like I do cured in three bottles! Perfectly harmless too. Nothin' but simple vegetables. Willis Eley, I must try this Magic Compound before I die. You shall buy me a bottle of it before you 're an hour older."

Eley, obedient to his wife's request, departed in search of the "Magic Compound." There was no demur on the part of the detective. Scenes like this were of almost weekly occurrence in the two-flight front chamber of the Genteel Boarding-house.

After a teaspoonful of the "Magic Compound" had been administered to Mehitable Eley; after the yellow wrapper of the magic bottle had been carefully perused, and the taste and smell of the remarkable compound had been commented and remarked upon; after endless guesses as to its component parts, and much speculative wonderment upon the great cures it had effected, — the conversation slowly drifted back to the subject of Barclay's death.

"I did n't say as *you* was a fool," Mehitable replied in answer to her husband's question.

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"I simply passed that remark about Mr. Keene."

"What 's the use of sayin' that about Keene?"

"Because it 's the truth," retorted Mehitable. "Because the young gent was n't murdered at all. He died of dyspepsy, — that 's what he died of. When you come home, Willis Eley, and see your poor wife layin' dead on the floor, then you 'll know what dyspepsy is, if not before."

Eley saw that a storm was coming, and hastened to avert it.

"Keene thinks there was a woman in it," he mildly remarked.

"Just like his foolery," indignantly returned Mehitable. "Woman indeed! If the young gent was murdered at all, as I have my doubts, it was that Edgerton as done it."

Now this opinion exactly coincided with his own view of the case; and Willis Eley — who, as I have said, had great confidence in his wife's judgment — rubbed his hands together, secretly delighted by his own sagacity.

Noticing her husband's satisfaction, Mehitable Eley hastened to define her own opinion somewhat more precisely.

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"Mind you," she tartly observed, "I don't say as the young gent was murdered at all. But I do say, if he was murdered, that that Edgerton done it. Mark my words."

"My own opinion," echoed her complacent husband.

"As for Mr. Keene," continued Mehitable, snapping her fingers in derision at the imaginary figure of her rival, — "that for your Mr. Keene! He 's too keen by half. I have no opinion of your Mister Keenses. I often wonder at you, Willis Eley, for leaguing yourself with a newspaper man."

That this was the truth there could be no doubt. Since the formation of the firm Mehitable had hardly permitted a day to pass by without thus assuring her husband. It is needless to say that she was jealous of the influence Keene had acquired over Eley, and that deriding her rival was the method she chose for combating that influence. "Mark my words," she said again in tones as nearly oracular as a voice like a door-squeak could ever assume, — "mark my words: David Keene will come to grief. You and me will learn him."

And with this prophecy Mehitable Eley prepared herself for rest; and taking a second

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teaspoonful of the Magic Compound by way of inviting slumber, she drew the bedclothes over her tortured frame, and her shrill voice was still. Fortune had not been kind to Willis Eley, but she had vouchsafed him one blessing when she had decreed that Mehitable's slumber ever should be sound.



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# CHAPTER X.

## A DISCOVERY.

AT noon the following day, as Paddock and Badger were engaged in the prosecution of their new duties, Duncan entered the general office of the detective bureau clad in the uniform of the police. The assistant had already accomplished the task allotted to him. He was a tall, stalwart man of vigorous build, and the uniform of the police sat becomingly upon his handsome figure. Like his employer Keene, Duncan had adopted his present vocation with no other qualification than a natural aptitude. He was a man by nature far above the position in which we are accustomed to rank detectives, — a man of excellent education and polished address; and the refinement of his face was enhanced, rather than detracted from, by the coarse leather helmet which surmounted his fair white temples and curling auburn hair.

As Duncan entered the office he was greeted with a cordiality that showed him to be popular

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among his colleagues, and the three young detectives were soon plunged in animated discourse.

"Sedgwick is the murderer fast enough," Duncan easily remarked, as sitting upon a table he communicated to the agents the result of his morning's work. "The club-room has not been swept since May 22, yet no piece of cork was to be found on the floor; the sherry was drawn from a cask into a decanter with a glass stopper; in the same way the bitters. Originally the bottle of bitters had a cork; but on the day of the murder the cork had been removed, and the bottle was stoppered with glass.

"When I left the club-house I went to Sedgwick's lodgings. Why, fellows, I tell you I could n't live in such rooms myself! They 're as bare as bare can be! Hardly any furniture in them. I could find nothing there of the slightest use as evidence. When I had searched the lodgings I went down to his laboratory and looked that over. There were poisons and drugs there of every description, enough to poison the whole police force. The poison bottles were mostly locked up in cases by themselves. I opened the cases and found all the shelves dusty. None of the bottles had recently been

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touched excepting three; these were labelled *aconitine*, *woorara*, and *delphinine*. All of these three had been taken down within a day or two and all of 'em were half empty. After the laboratory, I called on the chemical expert. He told me that the ring had been washed and the water analyzed, and that it was found to contain a trace of lead. This lead, he said, was probably from the acid which Sedgwick had used in cleaning his ring; but I believe it was put there to cover up the traces of some poison; those chemists all stand together. While I was talking with him I asked him what would be the effect of mixing *aconitine*, *woorara*, and *delphinine* all together, and he said he did n't know. That shows you the kind of man he was. I asked him no end of questions, but could get nothing out of him. All he would say was: 'Such a mixture as you mention might cause death in the manner you describe.'" And here the detective imitated the professor of chemistry in a manner highly amusing to his professional brothers.

"When I left the professor," Duncan continued, pursuing his narrative, "I went down to see old Abrahams, Paddock's crony. It seems the old rascal knows Sedgwick, but has had no

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