NEDL TRANSFER
HN 291E N

The Golden Slipper

and Other Problems for Violet Strange

Anna Katharine Green

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD C2154

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Bauer

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE GROTTO SPECTER

"Outlined in supernatural light,
it faces them with uplifted arms"

Drawn by A. I. Keller

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE GOLDEN SLIPPER

And Other Problems for Violet Strange

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN
(Mrs. Charles Rohlfs)

AUTHOR OF

"A Strange Disappearance," "That Affair Next Door,"
"The House of the Whispering Pines," Etc.

With Frontispiece in Colors
By A. I. KELLER

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers New York

Published by Arrangements with G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD 62154

COPYRIGHT, 1915
BY
ANNA KATHARINE ROHLFS

Third Impression

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

The Leavenworth Case.
A Strange Disappearance.
The Sword of Damocles.
Hand and Ring.
The Mill Mystery.
Behind Closed Doors.
Cynthia Wakeham's Money.
Marked "Personal."
To the Minute.
Miss Hurd: An Enigma.
Dr. Izard.
That Affair Next Door.
Lost Man's Lane.
Agatha Webb.
The House of the Whispering Pines.
The Golden Slipper and Other Problems for Violet Strange.

This edition is issued under arrangement with the publishers
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK AND LONDON

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE GOLDEN SLIPPER	1
THE SECOND BULLET	30
THE INTANGIBLE CLEW	63
THE GROTTO SPECTRE	99
THE DREAMING LADY	139
THE HOUSE OF CLOCKS	184
THE DOCTOR, HIS WIFE, AND THE CLOCK	247
MISSING: PAGE THIRTEEN	336
VIOLET'S OWN	400

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Golden Slipper
And Other Problems for Violet Strange

PROBLEM I

THE GOLDEN SLIPPER

"SHE'S here! I thought she would be. She's one of the three young ladies you see in the right-hand box near the proscenium."

The gentleman thus addressed—a man of middle age and a member of the most exclusive clubs—turned his opera glass toward the spot designated, and in some astonishment retorted:

"She? Why those are the Misses Pratt and ——"

"Miss Violet Strange; no other."

"And do you mean to say——"

"I do——"

"That yon silly little chit, whose father I know, whose fortune I know, who is seen everywhere, and who is called one of the season's belles is an agent of yours; a—a——"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"No names here, please. You want a mystery solved. It is not a matter for the police—that is, as yet,—and so you come to me, and when I ask for the facts, I find that women and only women are involved, and that these women are not only young but one and all of the highest society. Is it a man's work to go to the bottom of a combination like this? No. Sex against sex, and, if possible, youth against youth. Happily, I know such a person—a girl of gifts and extraordinarily well placed for the purpose. Why she uses her talents in this direction—why, with means enough to play the part natural to her as a successful débutante, she consents to occupy herself with social and other mysteries, you must ask her, not me. Enough that I promise you her aid if you want it. That is, if you can interest her. She will not work otherwise."

Mr. Driscoll again raised his opera glass.

"But it's a comedy face," he commented. "It's hard to associate intellectuality with such quaintness of expression. Are you sure of her discretion?"

"Whom is she with?"

"Abner Pratt, his wife, and daughters."

"Is he a man to entrust his affairs unadvisedly?"

"Abner Pratt! Do you mean to say that she is anything more to him than his daughters' guest?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Judge. You see how merry they are. They were in deep trouble yesterday. You are witness to a celebration."

"And she?"

"Don't you observe how they are loading her with attentions? She's too young to rouse such interest in a family of notably unsympathetic temperament for any other reason than that of gratitude."

"It's hard to believe. But if what you hint is true, secure me an opportunity at once of talking to this youthful marvel. My affair is serious. The dinner I have mentioned comes off in three days and——"

"I know. I recognize your need; but I think you had better enter Mr. Pratt's box without my intervention. Miss Strange's value to us will be impaired the moment her connection with us is discovered."

"Ah, there's Ruthven! He will take me to Mr. Pratt's box," remarked Driscoll as the curtain fell on the second act. "Any suggestions before I go?"

"Yes, and an important one. When you make your bow, touch your left shoulder with your right hand. It is a signal. She may respond to it; but if she does not, do not be discouraged. One of her idiosyncrasies is a theoretical dislike of her

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

work. But once she gets interested, nothing will hold her back. That's all, except this. In no event give away her secret. That's part of the compact, you remember."

Driscoll nodded and left his seat for Ruthven's box. When the curtain rose for the third time he could be seen sitting with the Misses Pratt and their vivacious young friend. A widower and still on the right side of fifty, his presence there did not pass unnoted, and curiosity was rife among certain onlookers as to which of the twin belles was responsible for this change in his well-known habits. Unfortunately, no opportunity was given him for showing. Other and younger men had followed his lead into the box, and they saw him forced upon the good graces of the fascinating but inconsequent Miss Strange whose rapid fire of talk he was hardly of a temperament to appreciate.

Did he appear dissatisfied? Yes; but only one person in the opera house knew why. Miss Strange had shown no comprehension of or sympathy with his errand. Though she chatted amiably enough between duets and trios, she gave him no opportunity to express his wishes though she knew them well enough, owing to the signal he had given her.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This might be in character but it hardly suited his views; and, being a man of resolution, he took advantage of an absorbing minute on the stage to lean forward and whisper in her ear:

"It's my daughter for whom I request your services; as fine a girl as any in this house. Give me a hearing. You certainly can manage it."

She was a small, slight woman whose naturally quaint appearance was accentuated by the extreme simplicity of her attire. In the tier upon tier of boxes rising before his eyes, no other personality could vie with hers in strangeness, or in the illusive quality of her ever-changing expression. She was vivacity incarnate and, to the ordinary observer, light as thistledown in fibre and in feeling. But not to all. To those who watched her long, there came moments—say when the music rose to heights of greatness—when the mouth so given over to laughter took on curves of the rarest sensibility, and a woman's lofty soul shone through her odd, bewildering features.

Driscoll had noted this, and consequently awaited her reply in secret hope.

It came in the form of a question and only after an instant's display of displeasure or possibly of pure nervous irritability.

"What has she done?"

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Nothing. But slander is in the air, and any day it may ripen into public accusation."

"Accusation of what?" Her tone was almost pettish.

"Of—of *theft*," he murmured. "On a great scale," he emphasized, as the music rose to a crash.

"Jewels?"

"Inestimable ones. They are always returned by somebody. People say, by me."

"Ah!" The little lady's hands grew steady,—they had been fluttering all over her lap. "I will see you to-morrow morning at my father's house," she presently observed; and turned her full attention to the stage.

Some three days after this Mr. Driscoll opened his house on the Hudson to notable guests. He had not desired the publicity of such an event, nor the opportunity it gave for an increase of the scandal secretly in circulation against his daughter. But the Ambassador and his wife were foreign and any evasion of the promised hospitality would be sure to be misunderstood; so the scheme was carried forward though with less *éclat* than possibly was expected.

Among the lesser guests, who were mostly young and well acquainted with the house and its hospitality, there was one unique figure,—that of

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the lively Miss Strange, who, if personally unknown to Miss Driscoll, was so gifted with the qualities which tell on an occasion of this kind, that the stately young hostess hailed her presence with very obvious gratitude.

The manner of their first meeting was singular, and of great interest to one of them at least. Miss Strange had come in an automobile and had been shown her room; but there was nobody to accompany her down-stairs afterward, and, finding herself alone in the great hall, she naturally moved toward the library, the door of which stood ajar. She had pushed this door half open before she noticed that the room was already occupied. As a consequence, she was made the unexpected observer of a beautiful picture of youth and love.

A young man and a young woman were standing together in the glow of a blazing wood-fire. No word was to be heard, but in their faces, eloquent with passion, there shone something so deep and true that the chance intruder hesitated on the threshold, eager to lay this picture away in her mind with the other lovely and tragic memories now fast accumulating there. Then she drew back, and readvancing with a less noiseless foot, came into the full presence of Captain Holliday drawn up in all the pride of his military rank beside

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Alicia, the accomplished daughter of the house, who, if under a shadow as many whispered, wore that shadow as some women wear a crown.

Miss Strange was struck with admiration, and turned upon them the brightest facet of her vivacious nature all the time she was saying to herself: "Does she know why I am here? Or does she look upon me only as an additional guest foisted upon her by a thoughtless parent?"

There was nothing in the manner of her cordial but composed young hostess to show, and Miss Strange, with but one thought in mind since she had caught the light of feeling on the two faces confronting her, took the first opportunity that offered of running over the facts given her by Mr. Driscoll, to see if any reconcilement were possible between them and an innocence in which she must henceforth believe.

They were certainly of a most damaging nature.

Miss Driscoll and four other young ladies of her own station in life had formed themselves, some two years before, into a coterie of five, called The Inseparables. They lunched together, rode together, visited together. So close was the bond and their mutual dependence so evident, that it came to be the custom to invite the whole five whenever the size of the function warranted it. In

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

fact, it was far from an uncommon occurrence to see them grouped at receptions or following one another down the aisles of churches or through the mazes of the dance at balls or assemblies. And no one demurred at this, for they were all handsome and attractive girls, till it began to be noticed that, coincident with their presence, some article of value was found missing from the dressing-room or from the tables where wedding gifts were displayed. Nothing was safe where they went, and though, in the course of time, each article found its way back to its owner in a manner as mysterious as its previous abstraction, the scandal grew and, whether with good reason or bad, finally settled about the person of Miss Driscoll, who was the showiest, least pecuniarily tempted, and most dignified in manner and speech of them all.

Some instances had been given by way of further enlightenment. This is one: A theatre party was in progress. There were twelve in the party, five of whom were Inseparables. In the course of the last act, another lady—in fact, their chaperon—missed her handkerchief, an almost priceless bit of lace. Positive that she had brought it with her into the box, she caused a careful search, but without the least success. Recalling certain whispers

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

she had heard, she noted which of the five girls were with her in the box. They were Miss Driscoll, Miss Hughson, Miss Yates, and Miss Benedict. Miss West sat in the box adjoining.

A fortnight later this handkerchief reappeared—and where? Among the cushions of a yellow satin couch in her own drawing-room. The Inseparables had just made their call and the three who had sat on the couch were Miss Driscoll, Miss Hughson, and Miss Benedict.

The next instance seemed to point still more insistently toward the lady already named. Miss Yates had an expensive present to buy, and the whole five Inseparables went in an imposing group to Tiffany's. A tray of rings was set before them. All examined and eagerly fingered the stock out of which Miss Yates presently chose a finely set emerald. She was leading her friends away when the clerk suddenly whispered in her ear, "I miss one of the rings." Dismayed beyond speech, she turned and consulted the faces of her four companions who stared back at her with immovable serenity. But one of them was paler than usual, and this lady (it was Miss Driscoll) held her hands in her muff and did not offer to take them out. Miss Yates, whose father had completed a big "deal" the week before, wheeled round upon the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

clerk. "Charge it! charge it at its full value," said she. "I buy both the rings."

And in three weeks the purloined ring came back to her, in a box of violets with no name attached.

The third instance was a recent one, and had come to Mr. Driscoll's ears directly from the lady suffering the loss. She was a woman of uncompromising integrity, who felt it her duty to make known to this gentleman the following facts: She had just left a studio reception, and was standing at the curb waiting for a taxicab to draw up, when a small boy—a street arab—darted toward her from the other side of the street, and thrusting into her hand something small and hard, cried breathlessly as he slipped away, "It's yours, ma'am; you dropped it." Astonished, for she had not been conscious of any loss, she looked down at her treasure trove and found it to be a small medallion which she sometimes wore on a chain at her belt. But she had not worn it that day, nor any day for weeks. Then she remembered. She had worn it a month before to a similar reception at this same studio. A number of young girls had stood about her admiring it—she remembered well who they were; the Inseparables, of course, and to please them she had slipped it from its chain. Then something had happened,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

—something which diverted her attention entirely, —and she had gone home without the medallion; had, in fact, forgotten it, only to recall its loss now. Placing it in her bag, she looked hastily about her. A crowd was at her back; nothing to be distinguished there. But in front, on the opposite side of the street, stood a club-house, and in one of its windows she perceived a solitary figure looking out. It was that of Miss Driscoll's father. He could imagine her conclusion.

In vain he denied all knowledge of the matter. She told him other stories which had come to her ears of thefts as mysterious, followed by restorations as peculiar as this one, finishing with, "It is your daughter, and people are beginning to say so."

And Miss Strange, brooding over these instances, would have said the same, but for Miss Driscoll's absolute serenity of demeanour and complete abandonment to love. These seemed incompatible with guilt; these, whatever the appearances, proclaimed innocence—an innocence she was here to prove if fortune favoured and the really guilty person's madness should again break forth.

For madness it would be and nothing less, for any hand, even the most experienced, to draw attention to itself by a repetition of old tricks on

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

an occasion so marked. Yet because it would take madness, and madness knows no law, she prepared herself for the contingency under a mask of girlish smiles which made her at once the delight and astonishment of her watchful and uneasy host.

With the exception of the diamonds worn by the Ambassadress, there was but one jewel of consequence to be seen at the dinner that night; but how great was that consequence and with what splendour it invested the snowy neck it adorned!

Miss Strange, in compliment to the noble foreigners, had put on one of her family heirlooms—a filigree pendant of extraordinary sapphires which had once belonged to Marie Antoinette. As its beauty flashed upon the women, and its value struck the host, the latter could not restrain himself from casting an anxious eye about the board in search of some token of the cupidity with which one person there must welcome this unexpected sight.

Naturally his first glance fell upon Alicia, seated opposite to him at the other end of the table. But her eyes were elsewhere, and her smile for Captain Holliday, and the father's gaze travelled on, taking up each young girl's face in turn. All were contemplating Miss Strange and her jewels, and the cheeks of one were flushed and those of the others

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

pale, but whether with dread or longing who could tell. Struck with foreboding, but alive to his duty as host, he forced his glances away, and did not even allow himself to question the motive or the wisdom of the temptation thus offered.

Two hours later and the girls were all in one room. It was a custom of the Inseparables to meet for a chat before retiring, but always alone and in the room of one of their number. But this was a night of innovations; Violet was not only included, but the meeting was held in her room. Her way with girls was even more fruitful of result than her way with men. They might laugh at her, criticize her or even call her names significant of disdain, but they never left her long to herself or missed an opportunity to make the most of her irrepressible chatter.

Her satisfaction at entering this charmed circle did not take from her piquancy, and story after story fell from her lips, as she fluttered about, now here now there, in her endless preparations for retirement. She had taken off her historic pendant after it had been duly admired and handled by all present, and, with the careless confidence of an assured ownership, thrown it down upon the end of her dresser, which, by the way, projected very close to the open window

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Are you going to leave your jewel *there?*" whispered a voice in her ear as a burst of laughter rang out in response to one of her sallies.

Turning, with a simulation of round-eyed wonder, she met Miss Hughson's earnest gaze with the careless rejoinder, "What's the harm?" and went on with her story with all the reckless ease of a perfectly thoughtless nature.

Miss Hughson abandoned her protest. How could she explain her reasons for it to one apparently uninitiated in the scandal associated with their especial clique.

Yes, she left the jewel there; but she locked her door and quickly, so that they must all have heard her before reaching their rooms. Then she crossed to the window, which, like all on this side, opened on a balcony running the length of the house. She was aware of this balcony, also of the fact that only young ladies slept in the corridor communicating with it. But she was not quite sure that this one corridor accommodated them all. If one of them should room elsewhere! (Miss Driscoll, for instance). But no! the anxiety displayed for the safety of her jewel precluded that supposition. Their hostess, if none of the others, was within access of this room and its open window. But how about the rest? Perhaps the lights would

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tell. Eagerly the little schemer looked forth, and let her glances travel down the full length of the balcony. Two separate beams of light shot across it as she looked, and presently another, and, after some waiting, a fourth. But the fifth failed to appear. This troubled her, but not seriously. Two of the girls might be sleeping in one bed.

Drawing her shade, she finished her preparations for the night; then with her kimono on, lifted the pendant and thrust it into a small box she had taken from her trunk. A curious smile, very unlike any she had shown to man or woman that day, gave a sarcastic lift to her lips, as with a slow and thoughtful manipulation of her dainty fingers she moved the jewel about in this small receptacle and then returned it, after one quick examining glance, to the very spot on the dresser from which she had taken it. "If only the madness is great enough!" that smile seemed to say. Truly, it was much to hope for, but a chance is a chance; and comforting herself with the thought, Miss Strange put out her light, and, with a hasty raising of the shade she had previously pulled down, took a final look at the prospect.

Its aspect made her shudder. A low fog was rising from the meadows in the far distance, and its ghostliness under the moon woke all sorts of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

uncanny images in her excited mind. To escape them she crept into bed where she lay with her eyes on the end of her dresser. She had closed that half of the French window over which she had drawn the shade; but she had left ajar the one giving free access to the jewels; and when she was not watching the scintillation of her sapphires in the moonlight, she was dwelling in fixed attention on this narrow opening.

But nothing happened, and two o'clock, then three o'clock struck, without a dimming of the blue scintillations on the end of her dresser. Then she suddenly sat up. Not that she heard anything new, but that a thought had come to her. "If an attempt is made," so she murmured softly to herself, "it will be by—" She did not finish. Something—she could not call it sound—set her heart beating tumultuously, and listening—listening—watching—watching—she followed in her imagination the approach down the balcony of an almost inaudible step, not daring to move herself, it seemed so near, but waiting with eyes fixed, for the shadow which must fall across the shade she had failed to raise over that half of the swinging window she had so carefully left shut.

At length she saw it projecting slowly across the slightly illuminated surface. Formless, save

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

for the outreaching hand, it passed the casement's edge, nearing with pauses and hesitations the open gap beyond through which the neglected sapphires beamed with steady lustre. Would she ever see the hand itself appear between the dresser and the window frame? Yes, there it comes,—small, delicate, and startlingly white, threading that gap—darting with the suddenness of a serpent's tongue toward the dresser and disappearing again with the pendant in its clutch.

As she realizes this,—she is but young, you know,—as she sees her bait taken and the hardly expected event fulfilled, her pent-up breath sped forth in a sigh which sent the intruder flying, and so startled herself that she sank back in terror on her pillow.

The breakfast-call had sounded its musical chimes through the halls. The Ambassador and his wife had responded, so had most of the young gentlemen and ladies, but the daughter of the house was not amongst them, nor Miss Strange, whom one would naturally expect to see down first of all.

These two absences puzzled Mr. Driscoll What might they not portend? But his suspense, at least in one regard, was short. Before his guests

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

were well seated, Miss Driscoll entered from the terrace in company with Captain Holliday. In her arms she carried a huge bunch of roses and was looking very beautiful. Her father's heart warmed at the sight. No shadow from the night rested upon her.

But Miss Strange!—where was she? He could not feel quite easy till he knew.

"Have any of you seen Miss Strange?" he asked, as they sat down at table. And his eyes sought the Inseparables.

Five lovely heads were shaken, some carelessly, some wonderingly, and one, with a quick, forced smile. But he was in no mood to discriminate, and he had beckoned one of the servants to him, when a step was heard at the door and the delinquent slid in and took her place, in a shamefaced manner suggestive of a cause deeper than mere tardiness. In fact, she had what might be called a frightened air, and stared into her plate, avoiding every eye, which was certainly not natural to her. What did it mean? and why, as she made a poor attempt at eating, did four of the Inseparables exchange glances of doubt and dismay and then concentrate their looks upon his daughter? That Alicia failed to notice this, but sat abloom above her roses now fastened in a great bunch upon her

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

breast, offered him some comfort, yet, for all the volubility of his chief guests, the meal was a great trial to his patience, as well as a poor preparation for the hour when, the noble pair gone, he stepped into the library to find Miss Strange awaiting him with one hand behind her back and a piteous look on her infantile features.

"O, Mr. Driscoll," she began,—and then he saw that a group of anxious girls hovered in her rear—"my pendant! my beautiful pendant! It is gone! Somebody reached in from the balcony and took it from my dresser in the night. Of course, it was to frighten me; all of the girls told me not to leave it there. But I—I cannot make them give it back, and papa is so particular about this jewel that I'm afraid to go home. Won't you tell them it's no joke, and see that I get it again. I won't be so careless another time."

Hardly believing his eyes, hardly believing his ears,—she was so perfectly the spoiled child detected in a fault—he looked sternly about upon the girls and bade them end the jest and produce the gems at once.

But not one of them spoke, and not one of them moved; only his daughter grew pale until the roses seemed a mockery, and the steady stare of her large eyes was almost too much for him to bear.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The anguish of this gave asperity to his manner, and in a strange, hoarse tone he loudly cried:

"One of you did this. Which? If it was you, Alicia, speak. I am in no mood for nonsense. I want to know whose foot traversed the balcony and whose hand abstracted these jewels."

A continued silence, deepening into painful embarrassment for all. Mr. Driscoll eyed them in ill-concealed anguish, then turning to Miss Strange was still further thrown off his balance by seeing her pretty head droop and her gaze fall in confusion.

"Oh! it's easy enough to tell whose foot traversed the balcony," she murmured. "It left *this* behind." And drawing forward her hand, she held out to view a small gold-coloured slipper. "I found it outside my window," she explained. "I hoped I should not have to show it."

A gasp of uncontrollable feeling from the surrounding group of girls, then absolute stillness.

"I fail to recognize it," observed Mr. Driscoll, taking it in his hand. "Whose slipper is this?" he asked in a manner not to be gainsaid.

Still no reply, then as he continued to eye the girls one after another a voice—the last he expected to hear—spoke and his daughter cried:

"It is mine. But it was not I who walked in it down the balcony."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Alicia!"

A month's apprehension was in that cry. The silence, the pent-up emotion brooding in the air was intolerable. A fresh young laugh broke it.

"Oh," exclaimed a roguish voice, "I knew that you were all in it! But the especial one who wore the slipper and grabbed the pendant cannot hope to hide herself. Her finger-tips will give her away."

Amazement on every face and a convulsive movement in one half-hidden hand.

"You see," the airy little being went on, in her light way, "I have some awfully funny tricks. I am always being scolded for them, but somehow I don't improve. One is to keep my jewelry bright with a strange foreign paste an old Frenchwoman once gave me in Paris. It's of a vivid red, and stains the fingers dreadfully if you don't take care. Not even water will take it off, see mine. I used that paste on my pendant last night just after you left me, and being awfully sleepy I didn't stop to rub it off. If your finger-tips are not red, you never touched the pendant, Miss Driscoll. Oh, see! They are as white as milk.

"But some one took the sapphires, and I owe that person a scolding, as well as myself. Was it you, Miss Hughson? You, Miss Yates? or—"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and here she paused before Miss West, "Oh, you have your gloves on! You are the guilty one!" and her laugh rang out like a peal of bells, robbing her next sentence of even a suggestion of sarcasm. "Oh, what a sly-boots!" she cried. "How you have deceived me! Whoever would have thought you to be the one to play the mischief!"

Who indeed! Of all the five, she was the one who was considered absolutely immune from suspicion ever since the night Mrs. Barnum's handkerchief had been taken, and she not in the box. Eyes which had surveyed Miss Driscoll askance now rose in wonder toward hers, and failed to fall again because of the stoniness into which her delicately-carved features had settled.

"Miss West, I know you will be glad to remove your gloves; Miss Strange certainly has a right to know her special tormentor," spoke up her host in as natural a voice as his great relief would allow.

But the cold, half-frozen woman remained without a movement. She was not deceived by the banter of the moment. She knew that to all of the others, if not to Peter Strange's odd little daughter, it was the thief who was being spotted and brought thus hilariously to light. And her eyes grew hard, and her lips grey, and she failed to

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

unglove the hands upon which all glances were concentrated.

"You do not need to see my hands; I confess to taking the pendant."

"Caroline!"

A heart overcome by shock had thrown up this cry. Miss West eyed her bosom-friend disdainfully.

"Miss Strange has called it a jest," she coldly commented. "Why should you suggest anything of a graver character?"

Alicia brought thus to bay, and by one she had trusted most, stepped quickly forward, and quivering with vague doubts, aghast before unheard-of possibilities, she tremulously remarked:

"We did not sleep together last night. You had to come into my room to get my slippers. Why did you do this? What was in your mind, Caroline?"

A steady look, a low laugh choked with many emotions answered her.

"Do you want me to reply, Alicia? Or shall we let it pass?"

"Answer!"

It was Mr. Driscoll who spoke. Alicia had shrunk back, almost to where a little figure was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cowering with wide eyes fixed in something like terror on the aroused father's face.

"Then hear me," murmured the girl, entrapped and suddenly desperate. "I wore Alicia's slippers and I took the jewels, because it was time that an end should come to your mutual dissimulation. The love I once felt for her she has herself deliberately killed. I had a lover—she took him. I had faith in life, in honour, and in friendship. She destroyed all. A thief—she has dared to aspire to *him!* And *you* condoned her fault. You, with your craven restoration of her booty, thought the matter cleared and her a fit mate for a man of highest honour."

"Miss West,"— no one had ever heard that tone in Mr. Driscoll's voice before, "before you say another word calculated to mislead these ladies, let me say that this hand never returned any one's booty or had anything to do with the restoration of any abstracted article. You have been caught in a net, Miss West, from which you cannot escape by slandering my innocent daughter."

"Innocent!" All the tragedy latent in this peculiar girl's nature blazed forth in the word. "Alicia, face me. Are you innocent? Who took the Dempsey corals, and that diamond from the Tiffany tray?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It is not necessary for Alicia to answer," the father interposed with not unnatural heat. "Miss West stands self-convicted."

"How about Lady Paget's scarf? I was not there that night."

"You are a woman of wiles. That could be managed by one bent on an elaborate scheme of revenge."

"And so could the abstraction of Mrs. Barnum's five-hundred-dollar handkerchief by one who sat in the next box," chimed in Miss Hughson, edging away from the friend to whose honour she would have pinned her faith an hour before. "I remember now seeing her lean over the railing to adjust the old lady's shawl."

With a start, Caroline West turned a tragic gaze upon the speaker.

"You think me guilty of all because of what I did last night?"

"Why shouldn't I."

"And you, Anna?"

"Alicia has my sympathy," murmured Miss Benedict.

Yet the wild girl persisted.

"But I have told you my provocation. You cannot believe that I am guilty of her sin; not if you look at her as I am looking now."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

But their glances hardly followed her pointing finger. Her friends—the comrades of her youth, the Inseparables with their secret oath—one and all held themselves aloof, struck by the perfidy they were only just beginning to take in. Smitten with despair, for these girls were her life, she gave one wild leap and sank on her knees before Alicia.

"O speak!" she began. "Forgive me, and——"

A tremble seized her throat; she ceased to speak and let fall her partially uplifted hands. The cheery sound of men's voices had drifted in from the terrace, and the figure of Captain Holliday could be seen passing by. The shudder which shook Caroline West communicated itself to Alicia Driscoll, and the former rising quickly, the two women surveyed each other, possibly for the first time, with open soul and a complete understanding.

"Caroline!" murmured the one.

"Alicia!" pleaded the other.

"Caroline, trust me," said Alicia Driscoll in that moving voice of hers, which more than her beauty caught and retained all hearts. "You have served me ill, but it was not all undeserved. Girls," she went on, eyeing both them and her father with the wistfulness of a breaking heart, "neither Caroline nor myself are worthy of Captain

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Holliday's love. Caroline has told you her fault, but mine is perhaps a worse one. The ring—the scarf—the diamond pins—I took them all—took them if I did not retain them. A curse has been over my life—the curse of a longing I could not combat. But love was working a change in me. Since I have known Captain Holliday—but that's all over. I was mad to think I could be happy with such memories in my life. I shall never marry now—or touch jewels again—my own or another's. Father, father, you won't go back on your girl! I couldn't see Caroline suffer for what I have done. You will pardon me and help—help——"

Her voice choked. She flung herself into her father's arms; his head bent over hers, and for an instant not a soul in the room moved. Then Miss Hughson gave a spring and caught her by the hand.

"We are inseparable," said she, and kissed the hand, murmuring, "Now is our time to show it."

Then other lips fell upon those cold and trembling fingers, which seemed to warm under these embraces. And then a tear. It came from the hard eye of Caroline, and remained a sacred secret between the two.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You have your pendant?"

Mr. Driscoll's suffering eye shone down on Violet Strange's uplifted face as she advanced to say good-bye preparatory to departure.

"Yes," she acknowledged, "but hardly, I fear, your gratitude."

And the answer astonished her.

"I am not sure that the real Alicia will not make her father happier than the unreal one has ever done."

"And Captain Holliday?"

"He may come to feel the same."

"Then I do not quit in disgrace?"

"You depart with my thanks."

When a certain personage was told of the success of Miss Strange's latest manœuvre, he remarked:

"The little one progresses. We shall have to give her a case of prime importance next."

END OF PROBLEM I

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PROBLEM II

THE SECOND BULLET

"YOU must see her."

"No. No."

"She's a most unhappy woman. Husband and child both taken from her in a moment; and now, all means of living as well, unless some happy thought of yours—some inspiration of your genius—shows us a way of re-establishing her claims to the policy voided by this cry of suicide."

But the small wise head of Violet Strange continued its slow shake of decided refusal.

"I'm sorry," she protested, "but it's quite out of my province. I'm too young to meddle with so serious a matter."

"Not when you can save a bereaved woman the only possible compensation left her by untoward fate?"

"Let the police try their hand at that."

"They have had no success with the case."

"Or you?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Nor I either."

"And you expect——"

"Yes, Miss Strange. I expect *you* to find the missing bullet which will settle the fact that murder and not suicide ended George Hammond's life. If you cannot, then a long litigation awaits this poor widow, ending, as such litigation usually does, in favour of the stronger party. There's the alternative. If you once saw her——"

"But that's what I'm not willing to do. If I once saw her I should yield to her importunities and attempt the seemingly impossible. My instincts bid me say no. Give me something easier."

"Easier things are not so remunerative. There's money in this affair, if the insurance company is forced to pay up. I can offer you——"

"What?"

There was eagerness in the tone despite her effort at nonchalance. The other smiled imperceptibly, and briefly named the sum.

It was larger than she had expected. This her visitor saw by the way her eyelids fell and the peculiar stillness which, for an instant, held her vivacity in check.

"And you think I can earn that?"

Her eyes were fixed on his in an eagerness as honest as it was unrestrained.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

He could hardly conceal his amazement, her desire was so evident and the cause of it so difficult to understand. He knew she wanted money—that was her avowed reason for entering into this uncongenial work. But to want it *so much!* He glanced at her person; it was simply clad but very expensively—how expensively it was his business to know. Then he took in the room in which they sat. Simplicity again, but the simplicity of high art—the drawing-room of one rich enough to indulge in the final luxury of a highly cultivated taste, viz.: unostentatious elegance and the subjection of each carefully chosen ornament to the general effect.

What did this favoured child of fortune lack that she could be reached by such a plea, when her whole being revolted from the nature of the task he offered her? It was a question not new to him; but one he had never heard answered and was not likely to hear answered now. But the fact remained that the consent he had thought dependent upon sympathetic interest could be reached much more readily by the promise of large emolument,—and he owned to a feeling of secret disappointment even while he recognized the value of the discovery.

But his satisfaction in the latter, if satisfaction it

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

were, was of very short duration. Almost immediately he observed a change in her. The sparkle which had shone in the eye whose depths he had never been able to penetrate, had dissipated itself in something like a tear and she spoke up in that vigorous tone no one but himself had ever heard, as she said:

"No. The sum is a good one and I could use it; but I will not waste my energy on a case I do not believe in. The man shot himself. He was a speculator, and probably had good reason for his act. Even his wife acknowledges that he has lately had more losses than gains."

"See her. She has something to tell you which never got into the papers."

"You say that? You know that?"

"On my honour, Miss Strange."

Violet pondered; then suddenly succumbed.

"Let her come, then. Prompt to the hour. I will receive her at three. Later I have a tea and two party calls to make."

Her visitor rose to leave. He had been able to subdue all evidence of his extreme gratification, and now took on a formal air. In dismissing a guest, Miss Strange was invariably the society belle and that only. This he had come to recognize.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The case (well known at the time) was, in the fewest possible words, as follows:

On a sultry night in September, a young couple living in one of the large apartment houses in the extreme upper portion of Manhattan were so annoyed by the incessant crying of a child in the adjoining suite, that they got up, he to smoke, and she to sit in the window for a possible breath of cool air. They were congratulating themselves upon the wisdom they had shown in thus giving up all thought of sleep—for the child's crying had not ceased—when (it may have been two o'clock and it may have been a little later) there came from somewhere near, the sharp and somewhat peculiar detonation of a pistol-shot.

He thought it came from above; she, from the rear, and they were staring at each other in the helpless wonder of the moment, when they were struck by the silence. The baby had ceased to cry. All was as still in the adjoining apartment as in their own—too still—much too still. Their mutual stare turned to one of horror. "It came from there!" whispered the wife. "Some accident has occurred to Mr. or Mrs. Hammond—we ought to go——"

Her words—very tremulous ones—were broken by a shout from below. They were standing in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

their window and had evidently been seen by a passing policeman. "Anything wrong up there?" they heard him cry. Mr. Saunders immediately looked out. "Nothing wrong here," he called down. (They were but two stories from the pavement.) "But I'm not so sure about the rear apartment. We thought we heard a shot. Hadn't you better come up, officer? My wife is nervous about it. I'll meet you at the stair-head and show you the way."

The officer nodded and stepped in. The young couple hastily donned some wraps, and, by the time he appeared on their floor, they were ready to accompany him.

Meanwhile, no disturbance was apparent anywhere else in the house, until the policeman rang the bell of the Hammond apartment. Then, voices began to be heard, and doors to open above and below, but not the one before which the policeman stood.

Another ring, and this time an insistent one;—and still no response. The officer's hand was rising for the third time when there came a sound of fluttering from behind the panels against which he had laid his ear, and finally a choked voice uttering unintelligible words. Then a hand began to struggle with the lock, and the door,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

slowly opening, disclosed a woman clad in a hastily donned wrapper and giving every evidence of extreme fright.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, seeing only the compassionate faces of her neighbours. "You heard it, too! a pistol-shot from there—*there*—my husband's room. I have not dared to go—I—I—O, have mercy and see if anything is wrong! It is so still—so still, and only a moment ago the baby was crying. Mrs. Saunders, Mrs. Saunders, why is it so still?"

She had fallen into her neighbour's arms. The hand with which she had pointed out a certain door had sunk to her side and she appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

The officer eyed her sternly, while noting her appearance, which was that of a woman hastily risen from bed.

"Where were you?" he asked. "Not with your husband and child, or you would know what had happened there."

"I was sleeping down the hall," she managed to gasp out. "I'm not well—I—Oh, why do you all stand still and do nothing? My baby's in there. Go! go!" and, with sudden energy, she sprang upright, her eyes wide open and burning, her small well-featured face white as the linen she sought to hide.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The officer demurred no longer. In another instant he was trying the door at which she was again pointing.

It was locked.

Glancing back at the woman, now cowering almost to the floor, he pounded at the door and asked the man inside to open.

No answer came back.

With a sharp turn he glanced again at the wife.

"You say that your husband is in this room?"

She nodded, gasping faintly, "And the child!"

He turned back, listened, then beckoned to Mr. Saunders. "We shall have to break our way in," said he. "Put your shoulder well to the door. *Now!*"

The hinges of the door creaked; the lock gave way (this special officer weighed two hundred and seventy-five, as he found out, next day), and a prolonged and sweeping crash told the rest.

Mrs. Hammond gave a low cry; and, straining forward from where she crouched in terror on the floor, searched the faces of the two men for some hint of what they saw in the dimly-lighted space beyond.

Something dreadful, something which made Mr. Saunders come rushing back with a shout:

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Take her away! Take her to our apartment, Jennie. She must not see——"

Not see! He realized the futility of his words as his gaze fell on the young woman who had risen up at his approach and now stood gazing at him without speech, without movement, but with a glare of terror in her eyes, which gave him his first realization of human misery.

His own glance fell before it. If he had followed his instinct he would have fled the house rather than answer the question of her look and the attitude of her whole frozen body.

Perhaps in mercy to his speechless terror, perhaps in mercy to herself, she was the one who at last found the word which voiced their mutual anguish.

"Dead?"

No answer. None was needed.

"And my baby?"

O, that cry! It curdled the hearts of all who heard it. It shook the souls of men and women both inside and outside the apartment; then all was forgotten in the wild rush she made. The wife and mother had flung herself upon the scene, and, side by side with the not unmoved policeman, stood looking down upon the desolation made in one fatal instant in her home and heart.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

They lay there together, both past help, both quite dead. The child had simply been strangled by the weight of his father's arm which lay directly across the upturned little throat. But the father was a victim of the shot they had heard. There was blood on his breast, and a pistol in his hand.

Suicide! The horrible truth was patent. No wonder they wanted to hold the young widow back. Her neighbour, Mrs. Saunders, crept in on tiptoe and put her arms about the swaying, fainting woman; but there was nothing to say—absolutely nothing.

At least, they thought not. But when they saw her throw herself down, not by her husband, but by the child, and drag it out from under that strangling arm and hug and kiss it and call out wildly for a doctor, the officer endeavoured to interfere and yet could not find the heart to do so, though he knew the child was dead and should not, according to all the rules of the coroner's office, be moved before that official arrived. Yet because no mother could be convinced of a fact like this, he let her sit with it on the floor and try all her little arts to revive it, while he gave orders to the janitor and waited himself for the arrival of doctor and coroner.

She was still sitting there in wide-eyed misery,

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

alternately fondling the little body and drawing back to consult its small set features for some sign of life, when the doctor came, and, after one look at the child, drew it softly from her arms and laid it quietly in the crib from which its father had evidently lifted it but a short time before. Then he turned back to her, and found her on her feet, upheld by her two friends. She had understood his action, and without a groan had accepted her fate. Indeed, she seemed incapable of any further speech or action. She was staring down at her husband's body, which she, for the first time, seemed fully to see. Was her look one of grief or of resentment for the part he had played so unintentionally in her child's death? It was hard to tell; and when, with slowly rising finger, she pointed to the pistol so tightly clutched in the other outstretched hand, no one there—and by this time the room was full—could foretell what her words would be when her tongue regained its usage and she could speak.

What she did say was this:

"Is there a bullet gone? Did he fire off that pistol?" A question so manifestly one of delirium that no one answered it, which seemed to surprise her, though she said nothing till her glance had passed all around the walls of the room to where a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

window stood open to the night,—its lower sash being entirely raised. "There! look there!" she cried, with a commanding accent, and, throwing up her hands, sank a dead weight into the arms of those supporting her.

No one understood; but naturally more than one rushed to the window. An open space was before them. Here lay the fields not yet parcelled out into lots and built upon; but it was not upon these they looked, but upon the strong trellis which they found there, which, if it supported no vine, formed a veritable ladder between this window and the ground.

Could she have meant to call attention to this fact; and were her words expressive of another idea than the obvious one of suicide?

If so, to what lengths a woman's imagination can go! Or so their combined looks seemed to proclaim, when to their utter astonishment they saw the officer, who had presented a calm appearance up till now, shift his position and with a surprised grunt direct their eyes to a portion of the wall just visible beyond the half-drawn curtains of the bed. The mirror hanging there showed a star-shaped breakage, such as follows the sharp impact of a bullet or a fiercely projected stone.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"He fired two shots. One went wild; the other straight home."

It was the officer delivering his opinion.

Mr. Saunders, returning from the distant room where he had assisted in carrying Mrs. Hammond, cast a look at the shattered glass, and remarked forcibly:

"I heard but one; and I was sitting up, disturbed by that poor infant. Jennie, did you hear more than one shot?" he asked, turning toward his wife.

"No," she answered, but not with the readiness he had evidently expected. "I heard only one, but that was not quite usual in its tone. I'm used to guns," she explained, turning to the officer. "My father was an army man, and he taught me very early to load and fire a pistol. There was a prolonged sound to this shot; something like an echo of itself, following close upon the first ping. Didn't you notice that, Warren?"

"I remember something of the kind," her husband allowed.

"He shot twice and quickly," interposed the policeman, sententiously. "We shall find a spent bullet back of that mirror."

But when, upon the arrival of the coroner, an investigation was made of the mirror and the wall behind, no bullet was found either there or any-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

where else in the room, save in the dead man's breast. Nor had more than one been shot from his pistol, as five full chambers testified. The case which seemed so simple had its mysteries, but the assertion made by Mrs. Saunders no longer carried weight, nor was the evidence offered by the broken mirror considered as indubitably establishing the fact that a second shot had been fired in the room.

Yet it was equally evident that the charge which had entered the dead speculator's breast had not been delivered at the close range of the pistol found clutched in his hand. There were no powder-marks to be discerned on his pajama-jacket, or on the flesh beneath. Thus anomaly confronted anomaly, leaving open but one other theory: that the bullet found in Mr. Hammond's breast came from the window and the one he shot went out of it. But this would necessitate his having shot his pistol from a point far removed from where he was found; and his wound was such as made it difficult to believe that he would stagger far, if at all, after its infliction.

Yet, because the coroner was both conscientious and alert, he caused a most rigorous search to be made of the ground overlooked by the above mentioned window; a search in which the police joined, but which was without any result save that

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of rousing the attention of people in the neighbourhood and leading to a story being circulated of a man seen some time the night before crossing the fields in a great hurry. But as no further particulars were forthcoming, and not even a description of the man to be had, no emphasis would have been laid upon this story had it not transpired that the moment a report of it had come to Mrs. Hammond's ears (why is there always some one to carry these reports?) she roused from the torpor into which she had fallen, and in wild fashion exclaimed:

"I knew it! I expected it! He was shot through the window and by that wretch. He never shot himself." Violent declarations which trailed off into the one continuous wail, "O, my baby! my poor baby!"

Such words, even though the fruit of delirium, merited some sort of attention, or so this good coroner thought, and as soon as opportunity offered and she was sufficiently sane and quiet to respond to his questions, he asked her whom she had meant by *that wretch*, and what reason she had, or thought she had, of attributing her husband's death to any other agency than his own disgust with life.

And then it was that his sympathies, although

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

greatly roused in her favour began to wane. She met the question with a cold stare followed by a few ambiguous words out of which he could make nothing. Had she said *wretch?* She did not remember. They must not be influenced by anything she might have uttered in her first grief. She was well-nigh insane at the time. But of one thing they might be sure: her husband had not shot himself; he was too much afraid of death for such an act. Besides, he was too happy. Whatever folks might say he was too fond of his family to wish to leave it.

Nor did the coroner or any other official succeed in eliciting anything further from her. Even when she was asked, with cruel insistence, how she explained the fact that the baby was found lying on the floor instead of in its crib, her only answer was: "His father was trying to soothe it. The child was crying dreadfully, as you have heard from those who were kept awake by him that night, and my husband was carrying him about when the shot came which caused George to fall and overlay the baby in his struggles."

"Carrying a baby about with a loaded pistol in his hand?" came back in stern retort.

She had no answer for this. She admitted when informed that the bullet extracted from her

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

husband's body had been found to correspond exactly with those remaining in the five chambers of the pistol taken from his hand, that he was not only the owner of this pistol but was in the habit of sleeping with it under his pillow; but, beyond that, nothing; and this reticence, as well as her manner which was cold and repellent, told against her.

A verdict of suicide was rendered by the coroner's jury, and the life-insurance company, in which Mr. Hammond had but lately insured himself for a large sum, taking advantage of the suicide clause embodied in the policy, announced its determination of not paying the same.

Such was the situation, as known to Violet Strange and the general public, on the day she was asked to see Mrs. Hammond and learn what might alter her opinion as to the justice of this verdict and the stand taken by the Shuler Life Insurance Company.

The clock on the mantel in Miss Strange's rose-coloured boudoir had struck three, and Violet was gazing in some impatience at the door, when there came a gentle knock upon it, and the maid (one of the elderly, not youthful, kind) ushered in her expected visitor.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You are Mrs. Hammond?" she asked, in natural awe of the too black figure outlined so sharply against the deep pink of the sea-shell room.

The answer was a slow lifting of the veil which shadowed the features she knew only from the cuts she had seen in newspapers.

"You are—Miss Strange?" stammered her visitor; "the young lady who——"

"I am," chimed in a voice as ringing as it was sweet. "I am the person you have come here to see. And this is my home. But that does not make me less interested in the unhappy, or less desirous of serving them. Certainly you have met with the two greatest losses which can come to a woman—I know your story well enough to say that—; but what have you to tell me in proof that you should not lose your anticipated income as well? Something vital, I hope, else I cannot help you; something which you should have told the coroner's jury—and did not."

The flush which was the sole answer these words called forth did not take from the refinement of the young widow's expression, but rather added to it; Violet watched it in its ebb and flow and, seriously affected by it (why, she did not know, for Mrs. Hammond had made no other appeal

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

either by look or gesture), pushed forward a chair and begged her visitor to be seated.

"We can converse in perfect safety here," she said. "When you feel quite equal to it, let me hear what you have to communicate. It will never go any further. I could not do the work I do if I felt it necessary to have a confidant."

"But you are so young and so—so——"

"So inexperienced you would say and so evidently a member of what New Yorkers call 'society.' Do not let that trouble you. My inexperience is not likely to last long and my social pleasures are more apt to add to my efficiency than to detract from it."

With this Violet's face broke into a smile. It was not the brilliant one so often seen upon her lips, but there was something in its quality which carried encouragement to the widow and led her to say with obvious eagerness:

"You know the facts?"

"I have read all the papers."

"I was not believed on the stand."

"It was your manner——"

"I could not help my manner. I was keeping something back, and, being unused to deceit, I could not act quite naturally."

"Why did you keep something back? When

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you saw the unfavourable impression made by your reticence, why did you not speak up and frankly tell your story?"

"Because I was ashamed. Because I thought it would hurt me more to speak than to keep silent. I do not think so now; but I did then—and so made my great mistake. You must remember not only the awful shock of my double loss, but the sense of guilt accompanying it; for my husband and I had quarrelled that night, quarrelled bitterly —that was why I had run away into another room and not because I was feeling ill and impatient of the baby's fretful cries."

"So people have thought." In saying this, Miss Strange was perhaps cruelly emphatic. "You wish to explain that quarrel? You think it will be doing any good to your cause to go into that matter with me now?"

"I cannot say; but I must first clear my conscience and then try to convince you that quarrel or no quarrel, *he* never took his own life. He was not that kind. He had an abnormal fear of death. I do not like to say it but he was a physical coward. I have seen him turn pale at the least hint of danger. He could no more have turned that muzzle upon his own breast than he could have turned it upon his baby. Some other hand shot

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

him, Miss Strange. Remember the open window, the shattered mirror; and *I think I know that hand.*"

Her head had fallen forward on her breast. The emotion she showed was not so eloquent of grief as of deep personal shame.

"You think you know the *man?*" In saying this, Violet's voice sunk to a whisper. It was an accusation of murder she had just heard.

"To my great distress, yes. When Mr. Hammond and I were married," the widow now proceeded in a more determined tone, "there was another man—a very violent one—who vowed even at the church door that George and I should never live out two full years together. We have not. Our second anniversary would have been in November."

"But——"

"Let me say this: the quarrel of which I speak was not serious enough to occasion any such act of despair on his part. A man would be mad to end his life on account of so slight a disagreement. It was not even on account of the person of whom I've just spoken, though that person had been mentioned between us earlier in the evening, Mr. Hammond having come across him face to face that very afternoon in the subway. Up to this

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

time neither of us had seen or heard of him since our wedding-day."

"And you think this person whom you barely mentioned, so mindful of his old grudge that he sought out your domicile, and, with the intention of murder, climbed the trellis leading to your room and turned his pistol upon the shadowy figure which was all he could see in the semi-obscurity of a much lowered gas-jet?"

"A man in the dark does not need a bright light to see his enemy when he is intent upon revenge."

Miss Strange altered her tone.

"And your husband? You must acknowledge that he shot off his pistol whether the other did or not."

"It was in self-defence. He would shoot to save his own life—or the baby's."

"Then he must have heard or seen——"

"A man at the window."

"And would have shot there?"

"Or tried to."

"Tried to?"

"Yes; the other shot first—oh, I've thought it all out—causing my husband's bullet to go wild. It was his which broke the mirror."

Violet's eyes, bright as stars, suddenly narrowed.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"And what happened then?" she asked. "Why cannot they find the bullet?"

"Because it went out of the window;—glanced off and went out of the window."

Mrs. Hammond's tone was triumphant; her look spirited and intense.

Violet eyed her compassionately.

"Would a bullet glancing off from a mirror, however hung, be apt to reach a window so far on the opposite side?"

"I don't know; I only know that it did," was the contradictory, almost absurd, reply.

"What *was* the cause of the quarrel you speak of between your husband and yourself? You see, I must know the exact truth and all the truth to be of any assistance to you."

"It was—it was about the care I gave, or didn't give, the baby. I feel awfully to have to say it, but George did not think I did my full duty by the child. He said there was no need of its crying so; that if I gave it the proper attention it would not keep the neighbours and himself awake half the night. And I—I got angry and insisted that I did the best I could; that the child was naturally fretful and that if he wasn't satisfied with my way of looking after it, he might try his. All of which was very wrong and unreason-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

able on my part, as witness the awful punishment which followed."

"And what made you get up and leave him?"

"The growl he gave me in reply. When I heard that, I bounded out of bed and said I was going to the spare room to sleep; and if the baby cried he might just try what he could do himself to stop it."

"And he answered?"

"This, just this—I shall never forget his words as long as I live—'If you go, you need not expect me to let you in again no matter what happens.'"

"He said that?"

"And locked the door after me. You see I could not tell all that."

"It might have been better if you had. It was such a natural quarrel and so unprovocative of actual tragedy."

Mrs. Hammond was silent. It was not difficult to see that she had no very keen regrets for her husband personally. But then he was not a very estimable man nor in any respect her equal.

"You were not happy with him," Violet ventured to remark.

"I was not a fully contented woman. But for all that he had no cause to complain of me except

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

for the reason I have mentioned. I was not a very intelligent mother. But if the baby were living now—O, if he were living now—with what devotion I should care for him."

She was on her feet, her arms were raised, her face impassioned with feeling. Violet, gazing at her, heaved a little sigh. It was perhaps in keeping with the situation, perhaps extraneous to it, but whatever its source, it marked a change in her manner. With no further check upon her sympathy, she said very softly:

"It is well with the child."

The mother stiffened, swayed, and then burst into wild weeping.

"But not with me," she cried, "not with me. I am desolate and bereft. I have not even a home in which to hide my grief and no prospect of one."

"But," interposed Violet, "surely your husband left you something? You cannot be quite penniless?"

"My husband left nothing," was the answer, uttered without bitterness, but with all the hardness of fact. "He had debts. I shall pay those debts. When these and other necessary expenses are liquidated, there will be but little left. He made no secret of the fact that he lived close up

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to his means. That is why he was induced to take on a life insurance. Not a friend of his but knows his improvidence. I—I have not even jewels. I have only my determination and an absolute conviction as to the real nature of my husband's death."

"What is the name of the man you secretly believe to have shot your husband from the trellis?"

Mrs. Hammond told her.

It was a new one to Violet. She said so and then asked:

"What else can you tell me about him?"

"Nothing, but that he is a very dark man and has a club-foot.

"Oh, what a mistake you've made."

"Mistake? Yes, I acknowledge that."

"I mean in not giving this last bit of information at once to the police. A man can be identified by such a defect. Even his footsteps can be traced. He might have been found that very day. Now, what have we to go upon?"

"You are right, but not expecting to have any difficulty about the insurance money I thought it would be generous in me to keep still. Besides, this is only surmise on my part. I feel certain that my husband was shot by another hand than

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

his own, but I know of no way of proving it. Do you?"

Then Violet talked seriously with her, explaining how their only hope lay in the discovery of a second bullet in the room which had already been ransacked for this very purpose and without the shadow of a result.

A tea, a musicale, and an evening dance kept Violet Strange in a whirl for the remainder of the day. No brighter eye nor more contagious wit lent brilliance to these occasions, but with the passing of the midnight hour no one who had seen her in the blaze of electric lights would have recognized this favoured child of fortune in the earnest figure sitting in the obscurity of an uptown apartment, studying the walls, the ceilings, and the floors by the dim light of a lowered gas-jet. Violet Strange in society was a very different person from Violet Strange under the tension of her secret and peculiar work.

She had told them at home that she was going to spend the night with a friend; but only her old coachman knew who that friend was. Therefore a very natural sense of guilt mingled with her emotions at finding herself alone on a scene whose gruesome mystery she could solve only by identify-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing herself with the place and the man who had perished there.

Dismissing from her mind all thought of self, she strove to think as he thought, and act as he acted on the night when he found himself (a man of but little courage) left in this room with an ailing child.

At odds with himself, his wife, and possibly with the child screaming away in its crib, what would he be apt to do in his present emergency? Nothing at first, but as the screaming continued he would remember the old tales of fathers walking the floor at night with crying babies, and hasten to follow suit. Violet, in her anxiety to reach his inmost thought, crossed to where the crib had stood, and, taking that as a start, began pacing the room in search of the spot from which a bullet, if shot, would glance aside from the mirror in the direction of the window. (Not that she was ready to accept this theory of Mrs. Hammond, but that she did not wish to entirely dismiss it without putting it to the test.)

She found it in an unexpected quarter of the room and much nearer the bed-head than where his body was found. This, which might seem to confuse matters, served, on the contrary to remove from the case one of its most serious

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

difficulties. Standing here, he was within reach of the pillow under which his pistol lay hidden, and if startled, as his wife believed him to have been by a noise at the other end of the room, had but to crouch and reach behind him in order to find himself armed and ready for a possible intruder.

Imitating his action in this as in other things, she had herself crouched low at the bedside and was on the point of withdrawing her hand from under the pillow, when a new surprise checked her movement and held her fixed in her position, with eyes staring straight at the adjoining wall. She had seen there what he must have seen in making this same turn—the dark bars of the opposite window-frame outlined in the mirror—and understood at once what had happened. In the nervousness and terror of the moment, George Hammond had mistaken this reflection of the window for the window itself, and shot impulsively at the man he undoubtedly saw covering him from the trellis without. But while this explained the shattering of the mirror, how about the other and still more vital question, of where the bullet went afterward? Was the angle at which it had been fired acute enough to send it out of a window diagonally opposed? No; even if the pistol had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

been held closer to the man firing it than she had reason to believe, the angle still would be oblique enough to carry it on to the further wall.

But no sign of any such impact had been discovered on this wall. Consequently, the force of the bullet had been expended before reaching it, and when it fell——

Here, her glance, slowly travelling along the floor, impetuously paused. It had reached the spot where the two bodies had been found, and unconsciously her eyes rested there, conjuring up the picture of the bleeding father and the strangled child. How piteous and how dreadful it all was. If she could only understand— Suddenly she rose straight up, staring and immovable in the dim light. Had the idea—the explanation —the only possible explanation covering the whole phenomena come to her at last?

It would seem so, for as she so stood, a look of conviction settled over her features, and with this look, evidences of a horror which for all her fast accumulating knowledge of life and its possibilities made her appear very small and very helpless.

A half-hour later, when Mrs. Hammond, in her anxiety at hearing nothing more from Miss

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Strange, opened the door of her room, it was to find, lying on the edge of the sill, the little detective's card with these words hastily written across it:

I do not feel as well as I could wish, and so have telephoned to my own coachman to come and take me home. I will either see or write you within a few days. But do not allow yourself to hope. I pray you do not allow yourself the least hope; the outcome is still very problematical.

When Violet's employer entered his office the next morning it was to find a veiled figure awaiting him which he at once recognized as that of his little deputy. She was slow in lifting her veil and when it finally came free he felt a momentary doubt as to his wisdom in giving her just such a matter as this to investigate. He was quite sure of his mistake when he saw her face, it was so drawn and pitiful.

"You have failed," said he.

"Of that you must judge," she answered; and drawing near she whispered in his ear.

"No!" he cried in his amazement.

"Think," she murmured, "think. Only so can all the facts be accounted for."

"I will look into it; I will certainly look into it," was his earnest reply. "If you are right— But never mind that. Go home and take a horseback ride in the Park. When I have news in regard to this

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I will let you know. Till then forget it all. Hear me, I charge you to forget everything but your balls and your parties."

And Violet obeyed him.

Some few days after this, the following statement appeared in all the papers:

"Owing to some remarkable work done by the firm of ——&——, the well-known private detective agency, the claim made by Mrs. George Hammond against the Shuler Life Insurance Company is likely to be allowed without further litigation. As our readers will remember, the contestant has insisted from the first that the bullet causing her husband's death came from another pistol than the one found clutched in his own hand. But while reasons were not lacking to substantiate this assertion, the failure to discover more than the disputed track of a second bullet led to a verdict of suicide, and a refusal of the company to pay.

"But now that bullet has been found. And where? In the most startling place in the world, viz.: in the larynx of the child found lying dead upon the floor beside his father, strangled as was supposed by the weight of that father's arm. The theory is, and there seems to be none other, that the father, hearing a suspicious noise at the window, set down the child he was endeavouring to soothe and made for the bed and his own pistol, and, mistaking a reflection of the assassin for the assassin himself, sent his shot sidewise at a mirror just as the other let go the trigger which drove a similar bullet into his breast. The course of the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

one was straight and fatal and that of the other deflected. Striking the mirror at an oblique angle, the bullet fell to the floor where it was picked up by the crawling child, and, as was most natural, thrust at once into his mouth. Perhaps it felt hot to the little tongue; perhaps the child was simply frightened by some convulsive movement of the father who evidently spent his last moment in an endeavour to reach the child, but, whatever the cause, in the quick gasp it gave, the bullet was drawn into the larynx, strangling him.

"That the father's arm, in his last struggle, should have fallen directly across the little throat is one of those anomalies which confounds reason and misleads justice by stopping investigation at the very point where truth lies and mystery disappears.

"Mrs. Hammond is to be congratulated that there are detectives who do not give too much credence to outward appearances."

We expect soon to hear of the capture of the man who sped home the death-dealing bullet.

END OF PROBLEM II

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PROBLEM III

AN INTANGIBLE CLUE

"HAVE you studied the case?"

"Not I."

"Not studied the case which for the last few days has provided the papers with such conspicuous headlines?"

"I do not read the papers. I have not looked at one in a whole week."

"Miss Strange, your social engagements must be of a very pressing nature just now?"

"They are."

"And your business sense in abeyance?"

"How so?"

"You would not ask if you had read the papers."

To this she made no reply save by a slight toss of her pretty head. If her employer felt nettled by this show of indifference, he did not betray it save by the rapidity of his tones as, without further preamble and possibly without real excuse, he proceeded to lay before her the case in question.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Last Tuesday night a woman was murdered in this city; an old woman, in a lonely house where she has lived for years. Perhaps you remember this house? It occupies a not inconspicuous site in Seventeenth Street—a house of the olden time?"

"No, I do not remember."

The extreme carelessness of Miss Strange's tone would have been fatal to her socially; but then, she would never have used it socially. This they both knew, yet he smiled with his customary indulgence.

"Then I will describe it."

She looked around for a chair and sank into it. He did the same.

"It has a fanlight over the front door."

She remained impassive.

"And two old-fashioned strips of parti-coloured glass on either side."

"And a knocker between its panels which may bring money some day."

"Oh, you do remember! I thought you would, Miss Strange."

"Yes. Fanlights over doors are becoming very rare in New York."

"Very well, then. That house was the scene of Tuesday's tragedy. The woman who has lived there in solitude for years was foully murdered. I have since heard that the people who knew her

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

best have always anticipated some such violent end for her. She never allowed maid or friend to remain with her after five in the afternoon; yet she had money—some think a great deal—always in the house."

"I am interested in the house, not in her."

"Yet, she was a character—as full of whims and crotchets as a nut is of meat. Her death was horrible. She fought—her dress was torn from her body in rags. This happened, you see, before her hour for retiring; some think as early as six in the afternoon. And"—here he made a rapid gesture to catch Violet's wandering attention—"in spite of this struggle; in spite of the fact that she was dragged from room to room—that her person was searched—and everything in the house searched—that drawers were pulled out of bureaus—doors wrenched off of cupboards—china smashed upon the floor—whole shelves denuded and not a spot from cellar to garret left unransacked, no direct clue to the perpetrator has been found—nothing that gives any idea of his personality save his display of strength and great cupidity. The police have even deigned to consult me,—an unusual procedure—but I could find nothing, either. Evidences of fiendish purpose abound—of relentless search—but no clue to the man him-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

self. It's uncommon, isn't it, not to have *any* clue?"

"I suppose so." Miss Strange hated murders and it was with difficulty she could be brought to discuss them. But she was not going to be let off; not this time.

"You see," he proceeded insistently, "it's not only mortifying to the police but disappointing to the press, especially as few reporters believe in the No-thoroughfare business. They say, and we cannot but agree with them, that no such struggle could take place and no such repeated goings to and fro through the house without some vestige being left by which to connect this crime with its daring perpetrator."

Still she stared down at her hands—those little hands so white and fluttering, so seemingly helpless under the weight of their many rings, and yet so slyly capable.

"She must have queer neighbours," came at last, from Miss Strange's reluctant lips. "Didn't they hear or see anything of all this?"

"She has no neighbours—that is, after half-past five o'clock. There's a printing establishment on one side of her, a deserted mansion on the other side, and nothing but warehouses back and front. There was no one to notice what took place in her

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

small dwelling after the printing house was closed. She was the most courageous or the most foolish of women to remain there as she did. But nothing except death could budge her. She was born in the room where she died; was married in the one where she worked; saw husband, father, mother, and five sisters carried out in turn to their graves through the door with the fanlight over the top—and these memories held her."

"You are trying to interest me in the woman. Don't."

"No, I'm not trying to interest you in her, only trying to explain her. There was another reason for her remaining where she did so long after all residents had left the block. She had a business."

"Oh!"

"She embroidered monograms for fine ladies."

"She did? But you needn't look at me like that. She never embroidered any for me."

"No? She did first-class work. I saw some of it. Miss Strange, *if* I could get you into that house for ten minutes—not to see her but to pick up the loose intangible thread which I am sure is floating around in it somewhere—wouldn't you go?"

Violet slowly rose—a movement which he followed to the letter.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Must I express in words the limit I have set for myself in our affair?" she asked. "When, for reasons I have never thought myself called upon to explain, I consented to help you a little now and then with some matter where a woman's tact and knowledge of the social world might tell without offence to herself or others, I never thought it would be necessary for me to state that temptation must stop with such cases, or that I should not be asked to touch the sordid or the bloody. But it seems I was mistaken, and that I must stoop to be explicit. The woman who was killed on Tuesday might have interested me greatly as an embroiderer, but as a victim, not at all. What do you see in me, or miss in me, that you should drag me into an atmosphere of low-down crime?"

"Nothing, Miss Strange. You are by nature, as well as by breeding, very far removed from everything of the kind. But you will allow me to suggest that no crime is low-down which makes imperative demand upon the intellect and intuitive sense of its investigator. Only the most delicate touch can feel and hold the thread I've just spoken of, and *you* have the most delicate touch I know."

"Do not attempt to flatter me. I have no fancy for handling befouled spider webs. Besides, if I had—if such elusive filaments fascinated me—

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

how could I, well-known in person and name, enter upon such a scene without prejudice to our mutual compact?"

"Miss Strange"—she had reseated herself, but so far he had failed to follow her example (an ignoring of the subtle hint that her interest might yet be caught, which seemed to annoy her a trifle), "I should not even have suggested such a possibility had I not seen a way of introducing you there without risk to your position or mine. Among the boxes piled upon Mrs. Doolittle's table—boxes of finished work, most of them addressed and ready for delivery—was one on which could be seen the name of—shall I mention it?"

"Not mine? You don't mean mine? That would be too odd—too ridiculously odd. I should not understand a coincidence of that kind; no, I should not, notwithstanding the fact that I have lately sent out such work to be done."

"Yet it was your name, very clearly and precisely written—your whole name, Miss Strange. I saw and read it myself."

"But I gave the order to Madame Pirot on Fifth Avenue. How came my things to be found in the house of this woman of whose horrible death we have been talking?"

"Did you suppose that Madame Pirot did such

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

work with her own hands?—or even had it done in her own establishment? Mrs. Doolittle was universally employed. She worked for a dozen firms. You will find the biggest names on most of her packages. But on this one—I allude to the one addressed to you—there was more to be seen than the name. These words were written on it in another hand. *Send without opening*. This struck the police as suspicious; sufficiently so, at least, for them to desire your presence at the house as soon as you can make it convenient."

"To open the box?"

"Exactly."

The curl of Miss Strange's disdainful lip was a sight to see.

"You wrote those words yourself," she coolly observed. "While someone's back was turned, you whipped out your pencil and——'

"Resorted to a very pardonable subterfuge highly conducive to the public's good. But never mind that. Will you go?"

Miss Strange became suddenly demure.

"I suppose I must," she grudgingly conceded. "However obtained, a summons from the police cannot be ignored even by Peter Strange's daughter."

Another man might have displayed his triumph

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

by smile or gesture; but this one had learned his rôle too well. He simply said:

"Very good. Shall it be at once? I have a taxi at the door."

But she failed to see the necessity of any such hurry. With sudden dignity she replied:

"That won't do. If I go to this house it must be under suitable conditions. I shall have to ask my brother to accompany me."

"Your brother!"

"Oh, he's safe. He—he knows."

"Your *brother knows?*" Her visitor, with less control than usual, betrayed very openly his uneasiness.

"He does and—*approves*. But that's not what interests us now, only so far as it makes it possible for me to go with propriety to that dreadful house."

A formal bow from the other and the words:

"They may expect you, then. Can you say when?"

"Within the next hour. But it will be a useless concession on my part," she pettishly complained. "A place that has been gone over by a dozen detectives is apt to be brushed clean of its cobwebs, even if such ever existed."

"That's the difficulty," he acknowledged; and

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

did not dare to add another word; she was at that particular moment so very much the great lady, and so little his confidential agent.

He might have been less impressed, however, by this sudden assumption of manner, had he been so fortunate as to have seen how she employed the three quarters of an hour's delay for which she had asked.

She read those neglected newspapers, especially the one containing the following highly coloured narration of this ghastly crime:

"A door ajar—an empty hall—a line of sinister looking blotches marking a guilty step diagonally across the flagging—silence—and an unmistakable odour repugnant to all humanity,—such were the indications which met the eyes of Officer O'Leary on his first round last night, and led to the discovery of a murder which will long thrill the city by its mystery and horror.

"Both the house and the victim are well known." Here followed a description of the same and of Mrs. Doolittle's manner of life in her ancient home, which Violet hurriedly passed over to come to the following:

"As far as one can judge from appearances, the crime happened in this wise: Mrs. Doolittle had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

been in her kitchen, as the tea-kettle found singing on the stove goes to prove, and was coming back through her bedroom, when the wretch, who had stolen in by the front door which, to save steps, she was unfortunately in the habit of leaving on the latch till all possibility of customers for the day was over, sprang upon her from behind and dealt her a swinging blow with the poker he had caught up from the hearthstone.

"Whether the struggle which ensued followed immediately upon this first attack or came later, it will take medical experts to determine. But, whenever it did occur, the fierceness of its character is shown by the grip taken upon her throat and the traces of blood which are to be seen all over the house. If the wretch had lugged her into her workroom and thence to the kitchen, and thence back to the spot of first assault, the evidences could not have been more ghastly. Bits of her clothing torn off by a ruthless hand, lay scattered over all these floors. In her bedroom, where she finally breathed her last, there could be seen mingled with these a number of large but worthless glass beads; and close against one of the base-boards, the string which had held them, as shown by the few remaining beads still clinging to it. If in pulling the string from her neck he had hoped

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to light upon some valuable booty, his fury at his disappointment is evident. You can almost see the frenzy with which he flung the would-be necklace at the wall, and kicked about and stamped upon its rapidly rolling beads.

"Booty! That was what he was after; to find and carry away the poor needlewoman's supposed hoardings. If the scene baffles description—if, as some believe, he dragged her yet living from spot to spot, demanding information as to her places of concealment under threat of repeated blows, and, finally baffled, dealt the finishing stroke and proceeded on the search alone, no greater devastation could have taken place in this poor woman's house or effects. Yet such was his precaution and care for himself that he left no finger-print behind him nor any other token which could lead to personal identification. Even though his footsteps could be traced in much the order I have mentioned, they were of so indeterminate and shapeless a character as to convey little to the intelligence of the investigator.

"That these smears (they could not be called footprints) not only crossed the hall but appeared in more than one place on the staircase proves that he did not confine his search to the lower storey; and perhaps one of the most interesting

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

features of the case lies in the indications given by these marks of the raging course he took through these upper rooms. As the accompanying diagram will show [we omit the diagram] he went first into the large front chamber, thence to the rear where we find two rooms, one unfinished and filled with accumulated stuff most of which he left lying loose upon the floor, and the other plastered, and containing a window opening upon an alley-way at the side, but empty of all furniture and without even a carpet on the bare boards.

"Why he should have entered the latter place, and why, having entered he should have crossed to the window, will be plain to those who have studied the conditions. The front chamber windows were tightly shuttered, the attic ones cumbered with boxes and shielded from approach by old bureaus and discarded chairs. This one only was free and, although darkened by the proximity of the house neighbouring it across the alley, was the only spot on the storey where sufficient light could be had at this late hour for the examination of any object of whose value he was doubtful. That he had come across such an object and had brought it to this window for some such purpose is very satisfactorily demonstrated by the discovery of a worn out wallet of ancient make lying on the floor directly

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in front of this window—a proof of his cupidity but also proof of his ill-luck. For this wallet, when lifted and opened, was found to contain two hundred or more dollars in old bills, which, if not the full hoard of their industrious owner, was certainly worth the taking by one who had risked his neck for the sole purpose of theft.

"This wallet, and the flight of the murderer without it, give to this affair, otherwise simply brutal, a dramatic interest which will be appreciated not only by the very able detectives already hot upon the chase, but by all other inquiring minds anxious to solve a mystery of which so estimable a woman has been the unfortunate victim. A problem is presented to the police——"

There Violet stopped.

When, not long after, the superb limousine of Peter Strange stopped before the little house in Seventeenth Street, it caused a veritable sensation, not only in the curiosity-mongers lingering on the sidewalk, but to the two persons within—the officer on guard and a belated reporter.

Though dressed in her plainest suit, Violet Strange looked much too fashionable and far too young and thoughtless to be observed, without emotion, entering a scene of hideous and brutal

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

crime. Even the young man who accompanied her promised to bring a most incongruous element into this atmosphere of guilt and horror, and, as the detective on guard whispered to the man beside him, might much better have been left behind in the car.

But Violet was great for the proprieties and young Arthur followed her in.

Her entrance was a *coup du théâtre*. She had lifted her veil in crossing the sidewalk and her interesting features and general air of timidity were very fetching. As the man holding open the door noted the impression made upon his companion, he muttered with sly facetiousness:

"You think you'll show her nothing; but I'm ready to bet a fiver that she'll want to see it all and that you'll show it to her."

The detective's grin was expressive, notwithstanding the shrug with which he tried to carry it off.

And Violet? The hall into which she now stepped from the most vivid sunlight had never been considered even in its palmiest days as possessing cheer even of the stately kind. The ghastly green light infused through it by the coloured glass on either side of the doorway seemed to promise yet more dismal things beyond.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Must I go in there?" she asked, pointing, with an admirable simulation of nervous excitement, to a half-shut door at her left. "Is there where it happened? Arthur, do you suppose that there is where it happened?"

"No, no, Miss," the officer made haste to assure her. "If you are Miss Strange" (Violet bowed), "I need hardly say that the woman was struck in her bedroom. The door beside you leads into the parlour, or as she would have called it, her workroom. You needn't be afraid of going in there. You will see nothing but the disorder of her boxes. They were pretty well pulled about. Not all of them though, he added, watching her as closely as the dim light permitted. There is one which gives no sign of having been tampered with. It was done up in wrapping paper and is addressed to you, which in itself would not have seemed worthy of our attention had not these lines been scribbled on it in a man's handwriting: "*Send without opening.*"

"How odd!" exclaimed the little minx with widely opened eyes and an air of guileless innocence. "What ever can it mean? Nothing serious I am sure, for the woman did not even know me. She was employed to do this work by Madame Pirot."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Didn't you know that it was to be done here?"

"No. I thought Madame Pirot's own girls did her embroidery for her."

"So that you were surprised——"

"Wasn't I!"

"To get our message."

"I didn't know what to make of it."

The earnest, half-injured look with which she uttered this disclaimer, did its appointed work. The detective accepted her for what she seemed and, oblivious to the reporter's satirical gesture, crossed to the work-room door, which he threw wide open with the remark:

"I should be glad to have you open that box in our presence. It is undoubtedly all right, but we wish to be sure. You know what the box should contain?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; pillow-cases and sheets, with a big S embroidered on them.

"Very well. Shall I undo the string for you?"

"I shall be much obliged," said she, her eye flashing quickly about the room before settling down upon the knot he was deftly loosening.

Her brother, gazing indifferently in from the doorway, hardly noticed this look; but the reporter at his back did, though he failed to detect its penetrating quality.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Your name is on the other side," observed the detective as he drew away the string and turned the package over.

The smile which just lifted the corner of her lips was not in answer to this remark, but to her recognition of her employer's handwriting in the words under her name: *Send without opening*. She had not misjudged him.

"The cover you may like to take off yourself," suggested the officer, as he lifted the box out of its wrapper.

"Oh, I don't mind. There's nothing to be ashamed of in embroidered linen. Or perhaps that is not what you are looking for?"

No one answered. All were busy watching her whip off the lid and lift out the pile of sheets and pillow-cases with which the box was closely packed.

"Shall I unfold them?" she asked.

The detective nodded.

Taking out the topmost sheet, she shook it open. Then the next and the next till she reached the bottom of the box. Nothing of a criminating nature came to light. The box as well as its contents was without mystery of any kind. This was not an unexpected result of course, but the smile with which she began to refold the pieces and throw them back into the box, revealed one

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of her dimples which was almost as dangerous to the casual observer as when it revealed both.

"There," she exclaimed, "you see! Household linen exactly as I said. Now may I go home?"

"Certainly, Miss Strange."

The detective stole a sly glance at the reporter. She was not going in for the horrors then after all.

But the reporter abated nothing of his knowing air, for while she spoke of going, she made no move towards doing so, but continued to look about the room till her glances finally settled on a long dark curtain shutting off an adjoining room.

"There's where she lies, I suppose," she feelingly exclaimed. "And not one of you knows who killed her. Somehow, I cannot understand that. Why don't you know when that's what you're hired for?" The innocence with which she uttered this was astonishing. The detective began to look sheepish and the reporter turned aside to hide his smile. Whether in another moment either would have spoken no one can say, for, with a mock consciousness of having said something foolish, she caught up her parasol from the table and made a start for the door.

But of course she looked back.

"I was wondering," she recommenced, with a half wistful, half speculative air, "whether I

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

should ask to have a peep at the place where it all happened."

The reporter chuckled behind the pencil-end he was chewing, but the officer maintained his solemn air, for which act of self-restraint he was undoubtedly grateful when in another minute she gave a quick impulsive shudder not altogether assumed, and vehemently added: "But I couldn't stand the sight; no, I couldn't! I'm an awful coward when it comes to things like that. Nothing in all the world would induce me to look at the woman or her room. But I should like—" here both her dimples came into play though she could not be said exactly to smile—"just one little look upstairs, where he went poking about so long without any fear it seems of being interrupted. Ever since I've read about it I have seen, in my mind, a picture of his wicked figure sneaking from room to room, tearing open drawers and flinging out the contents of closets just to find a little money—a little, little money! I shall not sleep to-night just for wondering how those high up attic rooms really look."

Who could dream that back of this display of mingled childishness and audacity there lay hidden purpose, intellect, and a keen knowledge of human nature. Not the two men who listened

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to this seemingly irresponsible chatter. To them she was a child to be humoured and humour her they did. The dainty feet which had already found their way to that gloomy staircase were allowed to ascend, followed it is true by those of the officer who did not dare to smile back at the reporter because of the brother's watchful and none too conciliatory eye.

At the stair head she paused to look back.

"I don't see those horrible marks which the papers describe as running all along the lower hall and up these stairs."

"No, Miss Strange; they have gradually been rubbed out, but you will find some still showing on these upper floors."

"Oh! oh! where? You frighten me—frighten me horribly! But—but—if you don't mind, I should like to see."

Why should not a man on a tedious job amuse himself? Piloting her over to the small room in the rear, he pointed down at the boards. She gave one look and then stepped gingerly in.

"Just look!" she cried; "a whole string of marks going straight from door to window. They have no shape, have they,—just blotches? I wonder why one of them is so much larger than the rest?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This was no new question. It was one which everybody who went into the room was sure to ask, there was such a difference in the size and appearance of the mark nearest the window. The reason—well, minds were divided about that, and no one had a satisfactory theory. The detective therefore kept discreetly silent.

This did not seem to offend Miss Strange. On the contrary it gave her an opportunity to babble away to her heart's content.

"One, two, three, four, five, six," she counted, with a shudder at every count. "And one of them bigger than the others." She might have added, "It is the trail of one foot, and strangely intermingled at that," but she did not, though we may be quite sure that she noted the fact. "And where, just where did the old wallet fall? Here? or *here?*"

She had moved as she spoke, so that in uttering the last "here," she stood directly before the window. The surprise she received there nearly made her forget the part she was playing. From the character of the light in the room, she had expected, on looking out, to confront a near-by wall, but not a window in that wall. Yet that was what she saw directly facing her from across the old-fashioned alley separating this house from

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

its neighbour; twelve unshuttered and uncurtained panes through which she caught a darkened view of a room almost as forlorn and devoid of furniture as the one in which she then stood.

When quite sure of herself, she let a certain portion of her surprise appear.

"Why, look!" she cried, "if you can't see right in next door! What a lonesome-looking place! From its desolate appearance I should think the house quite empty."

"And it is. That's the old Shaffer homestead. It's been empty for a year."

"Oh, empty!" And she turned away, with the most inconsequent air in the world, crying out as her name rang up the stair, "There's Arthur calling. I suppose he thinks I've been here long enough. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, officer. I really shouldn't have slept a wink tonight, if I hadn't been given a peep at these rooms, which I had imagined so different." And with one additional glance over her shoulder, that seemed to penetrate both windows and the desolate space beyond, she ran quickly out and down in response to her brother's reiterated call.

"Drive quickly!—as quickly as the law allows, to Hiram Brown's office in Duane Street."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Arrived at the address named, she went in alone to see Mr. Brown. He was her father's lawyer and a family friend.

Hardly waiting for his affectionate greeting, she cried out quickly. "Tell me how I can learn anything about the old Shaffer house in Seventeenth Street. Now, don't look so surprised. I have very good reasons for my request and—and—I'm in an awful hurry."

"But——"

"I know, I know; there's been a dreadful tragedy next door to it; but it's about the Shaffer house itself I want some information. Has it an agent, a——"

"Of course it has an agent, and here is his name."

Mr. Brown presented her with a card on which he had hastily written both name and address.

She thanked him, dropped him a mocking curtsey full of charm, whispered "Don't tell father," and was gone.

Her manner to the man she next interviewed was very different. As soon as she saw him she subsided into her usual society manner. With just a touch of the conceit of the successful débutante, she announced herself as Miss Strange of Seventy-second Street. Her business with him was in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

regard to the possible renting of the Shaffer house. She had an old lady friend who was desirous of living downtown.

In passing through Seventeenth Street, she had noticed that the old Shaffer house was standing empty and had been immediately struck with the advantages it possessed for her elderly friend's occupancy. Could it be that the house was for rent? There was no sign on it to that effect, but—etc.

His answer left her nothing to hope for.

"It is going to be torn down," he said.

"Oh, what a pity!" she exclaimed. "Real colonial, isn't it! I wish I could see the rooms inside before it is disturbed. Such doors and such dear old-fashioned mantelpieces as it must have! I just dote on the Colonial. It brings up such pictures of the old days; weddings, you know, and parties;—all so different from ours and so much more interesting."

Is it the chance shot that tells? Sometimes. Violet had no especial intention in what she said save as a prelude to a pending request, but nothing could have served her purpose better than that one word, *wedding*. The agent laughed and giving her his first indulgent look, remarked genially:

"Romance is not confined to those ancient

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

times. If you were to enter that house to-day you would come across evidences of a wedding as romantic as any which ever took place in all the seventy odd years of its existence. A man and a woman were married there day before yesterday who did their first courting under its roof forty years ago. He has been married twice and she once in the interval; but the old love held firm and now at the age of sixty and over they have come together to finish their days in peace and happiness. Or so we will hope."

"Married! married in that house and on the day that——"

She caught herself up in time. He did not notice the break.

"Yes, in memory of those old days of courtship, I suppose. They came here about five, got the keys, drove off, went through the ceremony in that empty house, returned the keys to me in my own apartment, took the steamer for Naples, and were on the sea before midnight. Do you not call that quick work as well as highly romantic?"

"Very." Miss Strange's cheek had paled. It was apt to when she was greatly excited. "But I don't understand," she added, the moment after. "How could they do this and nobody know

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

about it? I should have thought it would have got into the papers."

"They are quiet people. I don't think they told their best friends. A simple announcement in the next day's journals testified to the fact of their marriage, but that was all. I would not have felt at liberty to mention the circumstances myself, if the parties were not well on their way to Europe."

"Oh, how glad I am that you did tell me! Such a story of constancy and the hold which old associations have upon sensitive minds! But——"

"Why, Miss? What's the matter? You look very much disturbed."

"Don't you remember? Haven't you thought? Something else happened that very day and almost at the same time on that block. Something very dreadful——"

"Mrs. Doolittle's murder?"

"Yes. It was as near as next door, wasn't it? Oh, if this happy couple had known——"

"But fortunately they didn't. Nor are they likely to, till they reach the other side. You needn't fear that their honeymoon will be spoiled that way."

"But they may have heard something or seen

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

something before leaving the street. Did you notice how the gentleman looked when he returned you the keys?"

"I did, and there was no cloud on his satisfaction."

"Oh, how you relieve me!" One—two dimples made their appearance in Miss Strange's fresh, young cheeks. "Well! I wish them joy. Do you mind telling me their names? I cannot think of them as actual persons without knowing their names."

"The gentleman was Constantin Amidon; the lady, Marian Shaffer. You will have to think of them now as Mr. and Mrs. Amidon."

"And I will. Thank you, Mr. Hutton, thank you very much. Next to the pleasure of getting the house for my friend, is that of hearing this charming bit of news in its connection."

She held out her hand and, as he took it, remarked:

"They must have had a clergyman and witnesses."

"Undoubtedly."

"I wish I had been one of the witnesses," she sighed sentimentally.

"They were two old men."

"Oh, no! Don't tell me that."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Fogies; nothing less."

"But the clergyman? He must have been young. Surely there was some one there capable of appreciating the situation?"

"I can't say about that; I did not see the clergyman."

"Oh, well! it doesn't matter." Miss Strange's manner was as nonchalant as it was charming. "We will think of him as being *very* young."

And with a merry toss of her head she flitted away.

But she sobered very rapidly upon entering her limousine.

"Hello!"

"Ah, is that you?"

"Yes, I want a Marconi sent."

"A Marconi?"

"Yes, to the *Cretic*, which left dock the very night in which we are so deeply interested."

"Good. Whom to? The Captain?"

"No, to a Mrs. Constantin Amidon. But first be sure there is such a passenger."

"*Mrs.!* What idea have you there?"

"Excuse my not stating over the telephone. The message is to be to this effect. Did she at any time immediately before or after her marriage

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to Mr. Amidon get a glimpse of any one in the adjoining house? No remarks, please. I use the telephone because I am not ready to explain myself. If she did, let her send a written description to you of that person as soon as she reaches the Azores."

"You surprise me. May I not call or hope for a line from you early to-morrow?"

"I shall be busy till you get your answer."

He hung up the receiver. He recognized the resolute tone.

But the time came when the pending explanation was fully given to him. An answer had been returned from the steamer, favourable to Violet's hopes. Mrs. Amidon had seen such a person and would send a full description of the same at the first opportunity. It was news to fill Violet's heart with pride; the filament of a clue which had led to this great result had been so nearly invisible and had felt so like nothing in her grasp.

To her employer she described it as follows:

"When I hear or read of a case which contains any baffling features, I am apt to feel some hidden chord in my nature thrill to one fact in it and not to any of the others. In this case the single fact which appealed to my imagination was the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dropping of the stolen wallet in that upstairs room. Why did the guilty man drop it? and why, having dropped it, did he not pick it up again? But one answer seemed possible. He had heard or seen something at the spot where it fell which not only alarmed him but sent him in flight from the house."

"Very good; and did you settle to your own mind the nature of that sound or that sight?"

"I did." Her manner was strangely business-like. No show of dimples now. "Satisfied that if any possibility remained of my ever doing this, it would have to be on the exact place of this occurrence or not at all, I embraced your suggestion and visited the house."

"And that room no doubt."

"And that room. Women, somehow, seem to manage such things."

"So I've noticed, Miss Strange. And what was the result of your visit? What did you discover there?"

"This: that one of the blood spots marking the criminal's steps through the room was decidedly more pronounced than the rest; and, what was even more important, that the window out of which I was looking had its counterpart in the house on the opposite side of the alley. In gazing through the one I was gazing through the other;

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and not only that, but into the darkened area of the room beyond. Instantly I saw how the latter fact might be made to explain the former one. But before I say how, let me ask if it is quite settled among you that the smears on the floor and stairs mark the passage of the criminal's footsteps!"

"Certainly; and very bloody feet they must have been too. His shoes—or rather his one shoe—for the proof is plain that only the right one left its mark—must have become thoroughly saturated to carry its traces so far."

"Do you think that any amount of saturation would have done this? Or, if you are not ready to agree to that, that a shoe so covered with blood could have failed to leave behind it some hint of its shape, some imprint, however faint, of heel or toe? But nowhere did it do this. We see a smear—and that is all."

"You are right, Miss Strange; you are always right. And what do you gather from this?"

She looked to see how much he expected from her, and, meeting an eye not quite as free from all ironic suggestion as his words had led her to expect, faltered a little as she proceeded to say:

"My opinion is a girl's opinion, but such as it is you have the right to have it. From the indi-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cations mentioned I could draw but this conclusion: that the blood which accompanied the criminal's footsteps was not carried through the house by his shoes;—he wore no shoes; he did not even wear stockings; probably he had none. For reasons which appealed to his judgment, he went about his wicked work barefoot; and it was the blood from his own veins and not from those of his victim which made the trail we have followed with so much interest. Do you forget those broken beads;—how he kicked them about and stamped upon them in his fury? One of them pierced the ball of his foot, and that so sharply that it not only spurted blood but kept on bleeding with every step he took. Otherwise, the trail would have been lost after his passage up the stairs."

"Fine!" There was no irony in the bureau-chief's eye now. "You are progressing, Miss Strange. Allow me, I pray, to kiss your hand. It is a liberty I have never taken, but one which would greatly relieve my present stress of feeling."

She lifted her hand toward him, but it was in gesture, not in recognition of his homage.

"Thank you," said she, "but I claim no monopoly on deductions so simple as these. I have not the least doubt that not only yourself

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

but every member of the force has made the same. But there is a little matter which may have escaped the police, may even have escaped you. To that I would now call your attention since through it I have been enabled, after a little necessary groping, to reach the open. You remember the one large blotch on the upper floor where the man dropped the wallet? That blotch, more or less commingled with a fainter one, possessed great significance for me from the first moment I saw it. How came his foot to bleed so much more profusely at that one spot than at any other? There could be but one answer: because here a surprise met him—a surprise so startling to him in his present state of mind, that he gave a quick spring backward, with the result that his wounded foot came down suddenly and forcibly instead of easily as in his previous wary tread. And what was the surprise? I made it my business to find out, and now I can tell you that it was the sight of a woman's face staring upon him from the neighbouring house which he had probably been told was empty. The shock disturbed his judgment. He saw his crime discovered—his guilty secret read, and fled in unreasoning panic. He might better have held on to his wits. It was this display of fear which led me to search after its cause, and consequently to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

discover that at this especial hour more than one person had been in the Shaffer house; that, in fact, a marriage had been celebrated there under circumstances as romantic as any we read of in books, and that this marriage, privately carried out, had been followed by an immediate voyage of the happy couple on one of the White Star steamers. With the rest you are conversant. I do not need to say anything about what has followed the sending of that Marconi."

"But I am going to say something about your work in this matter, Miss Strange. The big detectives about here will have to look sharp if——"

"Don't, please! Not yet." A smile softened the asperity of this interruption. "The man has yet to be caught and identified. Till that is done I cannot enjoy any one's congratulations. And you will see that all this may not be so easy. If no one happened to meet the desperate wretch before he had an opportunity to retie his shoe-laces, there will be little for you or even for the police to go upon but his wounded foot, his undoubtedly carefully prepared alibi, and later, a woman's confused description of a face seen but for a moment only and that under a personal excitement precluding minute attention. I should

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

not be surprised if the whole thing came to nothing."

But it did not. As soon as the description was received from Mrs. Amidon (a description, by the way, which was unusually clear and precise, owing to the peculiar and contradictory features of the man), the police were able to recognize him among the many suspects always under their eye. Arrested, he pleaded, just as Miss Strange had foretold, an alibi of a seemingly unimpeachable character; but neither it, nor the plausible explanation with which he endeavoured to account for a freshly healed scar amid the callouses of his right foot, could stand before Mrs. Amidon's unequivocal testimony that he was the same man she had seen in Mrs. Doolittle's upper room on the afternoon of her own happiness and of that poor woman's murder.

The moment when, at his trial, the two faces again confronted each other across a space no wider than that which had separated them on the dread occasion in Seventeenth Street, is said to have been one of the most dramatic in the annals of that ancient court room.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PROBLEM IV

THE GROTTO SPECTRE

MISS STRANGE was not often pensive—at least not at large functions or when under the public eye. But she certainly forgot herself at Mrs. Provost's musicale and that, too, without apparent reason. Had the music been of a high order one might have understood her abstraction; but it was of a decidedly mediocre quality, and Violet's ear was much too fine and her musical sense too cultivated for her to be beguiled by anything less than the very best.

Nor had she the excuse of a dull companion. Her escort for the evening was a man of unusual conversational powers; but she seemed to be almost oblivious of his presence; and when, through some passing courteous impulse, she did turn her ear his way, it was with just that tinge of preoccupation which betrays the divided mind.

Were her thoughts with some secret problem yet unsolved? It would scarcely seem so from the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

gay remark with which she had left home. She was speaking to her brother and her words were: "I am going out to enjoy myself. I've not a care in the world. The slate is quite clean." Yet she had never seemed more out of tune with her surroundings nor shown a mood further removed from trivial entertainment. What had happened to becloud her gaiety in the short time which had since elapsed?

We can answer in a sentence.

She had seen, among a group of young men in a distant doorway, one with a face so individual and of an expression so extraordinary that all interest in the people about her had stopped as a clock stops when the pendulum is held back. She could see nothing else, think of nothing else. Not that it was so very handsome—though no other had ever approached it in its power over her imagination—but because of its expression of haunting melancholy,—a melancholy so settled and so evidently the result of long-continued sorrow that her interest had been reached and her heart-strings shaken as never before in her whole life.

She would never be the same Violet again.

Yet moved as she undoubtedly was, she was not conscious of the least desire to know who the young man was, or even to be made acquainted with his

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

story. She simply wanted to dream her dream undisturbed.

It was therefore with a sense of unwelcome shock that, in the course of the reception following the programme, she perceived this same young man approaching herself, with his right hand touching his left shoulder in the peculiar way which committed her to an interview with or without a formal introduction.

Should she fly the ordeal? Be blind and deaf to whatever was significant in his action, and go her way before he reached her; thus keeping her dream intact? Impossible. His eye prevented that. His glance had caught hers and she felt forced to await his advance and give him her first spare moment.

It came soon, and when it came she greeted him with a smile. It was the first she had ever bestowed in welcome of a confidence of whose tenor she was entirely ignorant.

To her relief he showed his appreciation of the dazzling gift though he made no effort to return it. Scorning all preliminaries in his eagerness to discharge himself of a burden which was fast becoming intolerable, he addressed her at once in these words:

"You are very good, Miss Strange, to receive

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

me in this unconventional fashion. I am in that desperate state of mind which precludes etiquette. Will you listen to my petition? I am told—you know by whom—"(and he again touched his shoulder) "that you have resources of intelligence which especially fit you to meet the extraordinary difficulties of my position. May I beg you to exercise them in my behalf? No man would be more grateful if— But I see that you do not recognize me. I am Roger Upjohn. That I am admitted to this gathering is owing to the fact that our hostess knew and loved my mother. In my anxiety to meet you and proffer my plea, I was willing to brave the cold looks you have probably noticed on the faces of the people about us. But I have no right to subject you to criticism. I——"

"Remain." Violet's voice was troubled, her self-possession disturbed; but there was a command in her tone which he was only too glad to obey. "I know the name" (who did not!) "and possibly my duty to myself should make me shun a confidence which may burden me without relieving you. But you have been sent to me by one whose behests I feel bound to respect and——"

Mistrusting her voice, she stopped. The suffering which made itself apparent in the face before her appealed to her heart in a way to rob her of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

her judgment. She did not wish this to be seen, and so fell silent.

He was quick to take advantage of her obvious embarrassment. "Should I have been sent to you if I had not first secured the confidence of the sender? You know the scandal attached to my name, some of it just, some of it very unjust. If you will grant me an interview to-morrow, I will make an endeavour to refute certain charges which I have hitherto let go unchallenged. Will you do me this favour? Will you listen in your own house to what I have to say?"

Instinct cried out against any such concession on her part, bidding her beware of one who charmed without excellence and convinced without reason. But compassion urged compliance and compassion won the day. Though conscious of weakness,—she, Violet Strange on whom strong men had come to rely in critical hours calling for well-balanced judgment,—she did not let this concern her, or allow herself to indulge in useless regrets even after the first effect of his presence had passed and she had succeeded in recalling the facts which had cast a cloud about his name.

Roger Upjohn was a widower, and the scandal affecting him was connected with his wife's death.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Though a degenerate in some respects, lacking the domineering presence, the strong mental qualities, and inflexible character of his progenitors, the wealthy Massachusetts Upjohns whose great place on the coast had a history as old as the State itself, he yet had gifts and attractions of his own which would have made him a worthy representative of his race, if only he had not fixed his affections on a woman so cold and heedless that she would have inspired universal aversion instead of love, had she not been dowered with the beauty and physical fascination which sometimes accompany a hard heart and a scheming brain. It was this beauty which had caught the lad; and one day, just as the careful father had mapped out a course of study calculated to make a man of his son, that son drove up to the gates with this lady whom he introduced as his wife.

The shock, not of her beauty, though that was of the dazzling quality which catches a man in the throat and makes a slave of him while the first surprise lasts, but of the overthrow of all his hopes and plans, nearly prostrated Homer Upjohn. He saw, as most men did the moment judgment returned, that for all her satin skin and rosy flush, the wonder of her hair and the smile which pierced like arrows and warmed like wine, she was more

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

likely to bring a curse into the house than a blessing.

And so it proved. In less than a year the young husband had lost all his ambitions and many of his best impulses. No longer inclined to study, he spent his days in satisfying his wife's whims and his evenings in carousing with the friends with which she had provided him. This in Boston whither they had fled from the old gentleman's displeasure; but after their little son came the father insisted upon their returning home, which led to great deceptions, and precipitated a tragedy no one ever understood. They were natural gamblers—this couple—as all Boston society knew; and as Homer Upjohn loathed cards, they found life slow in the great house and grew correspondingly restless till they made a discovery—or shall I say a rediscovery—of the once famous grotto hidden in the rocks lining their portion of the coast. Here they found a retreat where they could hide themselves (often when they were thought to be abed and asleep) and play together for money or for a supper in the city or for anything else that foolish fancy suggested. This was while their little son remained an infant; later, they were less easily satisfied. Both craved company, excitement, and gambling on a large scale; so they

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

took to inviting friends to meet them in this grotto which, through the agency of one old servant devoted to Roger to the point of folly, had been fitted up and lighted in a manner not only comfortable but luxurious. A small but sheltered haven hidden in the curve of the rocks made an approach by boat feasible at high tide; and at low the connection could be made by means of a path over the promontory in which this grotto lay concealed. The fortune which Roger had inherited from his mother made these excesses possible, but many thousands, let alone the few he could call his, soon disappeared under the witchery of an irresponsible woman, and the half-dozen friends who knew his secret had to stand by and see his ruin, without daring to utter a word to the one who alone could stay it. For Homer Upjohn was not a man to be approached lightly, nor was he one to listen to charges without ocular proof to support them; and this called for courage, more courage than was possessed by any one who knew them both.

He was a hard man was Homer Upjohn, but with a heart of gold for those he loved. This, even his wary daughter-in-law was wise enough to detect, and for a long while after the birth of her child she besieged him with her coaxing ways and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bewitching graces. But he never changed his first opinion of her, and once she became fully convinced of the folly of her efforts, she gave up all attempt to please him and showed an open indifference. This in time gradually extended till it embraced not only her child but her husband as well. Yes, it had come to that. His love no longer contented her. Her vanity had grown by what it daily fed on, and now called for the admiration of the fast men who sometimes came up from Boston to play with them in their unholy retreat. To win this, she dressed like some demon queen or witch, though it drove her husband into deeper play and threatened an exposure which would mean disaster not only to herself but to the whole family.

In all this, as any one could see, Roger had been her slave and the willing victim of all her caprices. What was it, then, which so completely changed him that a separation began to be talked of and even its terms discussed? One rumour had it that the father had discovered the secret of the grotto and exacted this as a penalty from the son who had dishonoured him. Another, that Roger himself was the one to take the initiative in this matter: That, on returning unexpectedly from New York one evening and finding her missing

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

from the house, he had traced her to the grotto where he came upon her playing a desperate game with the one man he had the greatest reason to distrust.

But whatever the explanation of this sudden change in their relations, there is but little doubt that a legal separation between this ill-assorted couple was pending, when one bleak autumn morning she was discovered dead in her bed under circumstances peculiarly open to comment.

The physicians who made out the certificate ascribed her death to heart-disease, symptoms of which had lately much alarmed the family doctor; but that a personal struggle of some kind had preceded the fatal attack was evident from the bruises which blackened her wrists. Had there been the like upon her throat it might have gone hard with the young husband who was known to be contemplating her dismissal from the house. But the discoloration of her wrists was all, and as bruised wrists do not kill and there was besides no evidence forthcoming of the two having spent one moment together for at least ten hours preceding the tragedy but rather full and satisfactory testimony to the contrary, the matter lapsed and all criminal proceedings were avoided.

But not the scandal which always follows the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

unexplained. As time passed and the peculiar look which betrays the haunted soul gradually became visible in the young widower's eyes, doubts arose and reports circulated which cast strange reflections upon the tragic end of his mistaken marriage. Stories of the disreputable use to which the old grotto had been put were mingled with vague hints of conjugal violence never properly investigated. The result was his general avoidance not only by the social set dominated by his high-minded father, but by his own less reputable coterie, which, however lax in its moral code, had very little use for a coward.

Such was the gossip which had reached Violet's ears in connection with this new client, prejudicing her altogether against him till she caught that beam of deep and concentrated suffering in his eye and recognized an innocence which ensured her sympathy and led her to grant him the interview for which he so earnestly entreated.

He came prompt to the hour, and when she saw him again with the marks of a sleepless night upon him and all the signs of suffering intensified in his unusual countenance, she felt her heart sink within her in a way she failed to understand. A dread of what she was about to hear robbed her of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

all semblance of self-possession, and she stood like one in a dream as he uttered his first greetings and then paused to gather up his own moral strength before he began his story. When he did speak it was to say:

"I find myself obliged to break a vow I have made to myself. You cannot understand my need unless I show you my heart. My trouble is not the one with which men have credited me. It has another source and is infinitely harder to bear. Personal dishonour I have deserved in a greater or less degree, but the trial which has come to me now involves a person more dear to me than myself, and is totally without alleviation unless you—" He paused, choked, then recommenced abruptly: "My wife"—Violet held her breath—"was supposed to have died from heart-disease or —or some strange species of suicide. There were reasons for this conclusion—reasons which I accepted without serious question till some five weeks ago when I made a discovery which led me to fear——"

The broken sentence hung suspended. Violet, notwithstanding his hurried gesture, could not restrain herself from stealing a look at his face. It was set in horror and, though partially turned aside, made an appeal to her compassion to fill

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the void made by his silence, without further suggestion from him.

She did this by saying tentatively and with as little show of emotion as possible:

"You feared that the event called for vengeance and that vengeance would mean increased suffering to yourself as well as to another?"

"Yes; great suffering. But I may be under a most lamentable mistake. I am not sure of my conclusions. If my doubts have no real foundation—if they are simply the offspring of my own diseased imagination, what an insult to one I revere! What a horror of ingratitude and misunderstanding——"

"Relate the facts," came in startled tones from Violet. "They may enlighten us."

He gave one quick shudder, buried his face for one moment in his hands, then lifted it and spoke up quickly and with unexpected firmness:

"I came here to do so and do so I will. But where begin? Miss Strange, you cannot be ignorant of the circumstances, open and avowed, which attended my wife's death. But there were other and secret events in its connection which happily have been kept from the world, but which I must now disclose to you at any cost to my pride and so-called honour. This is the first one: On

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the morning preceding the day of Mrs. Upjohn's death, an interview took place between us at which my father was present. You do not know my father, Miss Strange. A strong man and a stern one, with a hold upon old traditions which nothing can shake. If he has a weakness it is for my little boy Roger in whose promising traits he sees the one hope which has survived the shipwreck of all for which our name has stood. Knowing this, and realizing what the child's presence in the house meant to his old age, I felt my heart turn sick with apprehension, when in the midst of the discussion as to the terms on which my wife would consent to a permanent separation, the little fellow came dancing into the room, his curls atoss and his whole face beaming with life and joy.

"She had not mentioned the child, but I knew her well enough to be sure that at the first show of preference on his part for either his grandfather or myself, she would raise a claim to him which she would never relinquish. I dared not speak, but I met his eager looks with my most forbidding frown and hoped by this show of severity to hold him back. But his little heart was full and, ignoring her outstretched arms, he bounded towards mine with his most affectionate cry. She saw and uttered her ultimatum. The child should go with

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

her or she would not consent to a separation. It was useless for us to talk; she had said her last word. The blow struck me hard, or so I thought, till I looked at my father. Never had I beheld such a change as that one moment had made in him. He stood as before; he faced us with the same silent reprobation; but his heart had run from him like water.

"It was a sight to call up all my resources. To allow her to remain now, with my feelings towards her all changed and my father's eyes fully opened to her stony nature, was impossible. Nor could I appeal to law. An open scandal was my father's greatest dread and divorce proceedings his horror. The child would have to go unless I could find a way to influence her through her own nature. I knew of but one—do not look at me, Miss Strange. It was dishonouring to us both, and I am horrified now when I think of it. But to me at that time it was natural enough as a last resort. There was but one debt which my wife ever paid, but one promise she ever kept. It was that made at the gaming-table. I offered, as soon as my father, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, had gone tottering from the room, to gamble with her for the child.

"*And she accepted.*"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The shame and humiliation expressed in this final whisper; the sudden darkness—for a storm was coming up—shook Violet to the soul. With strained gaze fixed on the man before her, now little more than a shadow in the prevailing gloom, she waited for him to resume, and waited in vain. The minutes passed, the darkness became intolerable, and instinctively her hand crept towards the electric button beneath which she was sitting. But she failed to press it. A tale so dark called for an atmosphere of its own kind. She would cast no light upon it. Yet she shivered as the silence continued, and started in uncontrollable dismay when at length her strange visitor rose, and still, without speaking, walked away from her to the other end of the room. Only so could he go on with the shameful tale; and presently she heard his voice once more in these words:

"Our house is large and its rooms many; but for such work as we two contemplated there was but one spot where we could command absolute seclusion. You may have heard of it, a famous natural grotto hidden in our own portion of the coast and so fitted up as to form a retreat for our miserable selves when escape from my father's eye seemed desirable. It was not easy of access, and no one, so far as we knew, had ever followed us there.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

But to ensure ourselves against any possible interruption, we waited till the whole house was abed before we left it for the grotto. We went by boat and oh! the dip of those oars! I hear them yet. And the witchery of her face in the moonlight; and the mockery of her low fitful laugh! As I caught the sinister note in its silvery rise and fall, I knew what was before me if I failed to retain my composure. And I strove to hold it and to meet her calmness with stoicism and the taunt of her expression with a mask of immobility. But the effort was hopeless, and when the time came for dealing out the cards, my eyes were burning in their sockets and my hands shivering like leaves in a rising gale.

"We played one game—and my wife lost. We played another—and my wife won. We played the third—and the fate I had foreseen from the first became mine. The luck was with her, *and I had lost my boy!*"

A gasp—a pause, during which the thunder spoke and the lightning flashed,—then a hurried catching of his breath and the tale went on.

"A burst of laughter, rising gaily above the boom of the sea, announced her victory—her laugh and the taunting words: 'You play badly, Roger. The child is mine. Never fear that I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

shall fail to teach him to revere his father.' Had I a word to throw back? No. When I realized anything but my dishonoured manhood, I found myself in the grotto's mouth staring helplessly out upon the sea. The boat which had floated us in at high tide lay stranded but a few feet away, but I did not reach for it. Escape was quicker over the rocks, and I made for the rocks.

"That it was a cowardly act to leave her there to find her way back alone at midnight by the same rough road I was taking, did not strike my mind for an instant. I was in flight from my own past; in flight from myself and the haunting dread of madness. When I awoke to reality again it was to find the small door, by which we had left the house, standing slightly ajar. I was troubled by this, for I was sure of having closed it. But the impression was brief, and entering, I went stumbling up to my room, leaving the way open behind me more from sheer inability to exercise my will than from any thought of her.

"Miss Strange" (he had come out of the shadows and was standing now directly before her), "I must ask you to trust implicitly in what I tell you of my further experiences that fatal night. It was not necessary for me to pass my little son's door in order to reach the room I was making for;

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

but anguish took me there and held me glued to the panels for what seemed a long, long time. When I finally crept away it was to go to the room I had chosen in the top of the house, where I had my hour of hell and faced my desolated future. Did I hear anything meantime in the halls below? No. Did I even listen for the sound of her return? No. I was callous to everything, dead to everything but my own misery. I did not even heed the approach of morning, till suddenly, with a shrillness no ear could ignore, there rose, tearing through the silence of the house, that great scream from my wife's room which announced the discovery of her body lying stark and cold in her bed.

"They said I showed little feeling." He had moved off again and spoke from somewhere in the shadows. "Do you wonder at this after such a manifest stroke by a benevolent Providence? My wife being dead, Roger was saved to us! It was the one song of my still undisciplined soul, and I had to assume coldness lest they should see the greatness of my joy. A wicked and guilty rejoicing you will say, and you are right. But I had no memory then of the part I had played in this fatality. I had forgotten my reckless flight from the grotto, which left her with no aid but that of her own triumphant spirit to help her over those

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

treacherous rocks. The necessity for keeping secret this part of our disgraceful story led me to exert myself to keep it out of my own mind. It has only come back to me in all its force since a new horror, a new suspicion, has driven me to review carefully every incident of that awful night.

"I was never a man of much logic, and when they came to me on that morning of which I have just spoken and took me in where she lay and pointed to her beautiful cold body stretched out in seeming peace under the satin coverlet, and then to the pile of dainty clothes lying neatly folded on a chair with just one fairy slipper on top, I shuddered at her fate but asked no questions, not even when one of the women of the house mentioned the circumstance of the single slipper and said that a search should be made for its mate. Nor was I as much impressed as one would naturally expect by the whisper dropped in my ear that something was the matter with her wrists. It is true that I lifted the lace they had carefully spread over them and examined the discoloration which extended like a ring about each pearly arm; but having no memories of any violence offered her (I had not so much as laid hand upon her in the grotto), these marks failed to rouse my interest. But—and now I must leap a year in my story—there came a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

time when both of these facts recurred to my mind with startling distinctness and clamoured for explanation.

"I had risen above the shock which such a death following such events would naturally occasion even in one of my blunted sensibilities, and was striving to live a new life under the encouragement of my now fully reconciled father, when accident forced me to re-enter the grotto where I had never stepped foot since that night. A favourite dog in chase of some innocent prey had escaped the leash and run into its dim recesses and would not come out at my call. As I needed him immediately for the hunt, I followed him over the promontory and, swallowing my repugnance, slid into the grotto to get him. Better a plunge to my death from the height of the rocks towering above it. For there in a remote corner, lighted up by a reflection from the sea, I beheld my setter crouched above an object which in another moment I recognized as my dead wife's missing slipper. Here! Not in the waters of the sea or in the interstices of the rocks outside, but here! Proof that she had never walked back to the house where she was found lying quietly in her bed; proof positive; for I knew the path too well and the more than usual tenderness of her feet.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"How then, did she get there; and by whose agency? Was she living when she went, or was she already dead? A year had passed since that delicate shoe had borne her from the boat into these dim recesses; but it might have been only a day, so vividly did I live over in this moment of awful enlightenment all the events of the hour in which we sat there playing for the possession of our child. Again I saw her gleaming eyes, her rosy, working mouth, her slim, white hand, loaded with diamonds, clutching the cards. Again I heard the lap of the sea on the pebbles outside and smelt the odour of the wine she had poured out for us both. The bottle which had held it; the glass from which she had drunk lay now in pieces on the rocky floor. The whole scene was mine again and as I followed the event to its despairing close, I seemed to see my own wild figure springing away from her to the grotto's mouth and so over the rocks. But here fancy faltered, caught by a quick recollection to which I had never given a thought till now. As I made my way along those rocks, a sound had struck my ear from where some stunted bushes made a shadow in the moonlight. The wind might have caused it or some small night creature hustling away at my approach; and to some such cause I must at the time have

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

attributed it. But now, with brain fired by suspicion, it seemed more like the quick intake of a human breath. Some one had been lying there in wait, listening at the one loophole in the rocks where it was possible to hear what was said and done in the heart of the grotto. But who? who? and for what purpose this listening; and to what end did it lead?

"Though I no longer loved even the memory of my wife, I felt my hair lift, as I asked myself these questions. There seemed to be but one logical answer to the last, and it was this: A struggle followed by death. The shoe fallen from her foot, the clothes found folded in her room (my wife was never orderly), and the dimly blackened wrists which were snow-white when she dealt the cards—all seemed to point to such a conclusion. She may have died from heart-failure, but a struggle had preceded her death, during which some man's strong fingers had been locked about her wrists. And again the question rose, *Whose?*

"If any place was ever hated by mortal man that grotto was hated by me. I loathed its walls, its floor, its every visible and invisible corner. To linger there—to look—almost tore my soul from my body; yet I did linger and did look and this is what I found by way of reward.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Behind a projecting ledge of stone from which a tattered rug still hung, I came upon two nails driven a few feet apart into a fissure of the rock. I had driven those nails myself long before for a certain gymnastic attachment much in vogue at the time, and on looking closer, I discovered hanging from them the rope-ends by which I was won't to pull myself about. So far there was nothing to rouse any but innocent reminiscences. But when I heard the dog's low moan and saw him leap at the curled-up ends, and nose them with an eager look my way, I remembered the dark marks circling the wrists about which I had so often clasped my mother's bracelets, and the world went black before me.

"When consciousness returned—when I could once more move and see and think, I noted another fact. Cards were strewn about the floor, face up and in a fixed order as if laid in a mocking mood to be looked upon by reluctant eyes; and near the ominous half-circle they made, a cushion from the lounge, stained horribly with what I then thought to be blood, but which I afterwards found to be wine. Vengeance spoke in those ropes and in the carefully spread-out cards, and murder in the smothering pillow. The vengeance of one who had watched her corroding influence eat the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

life out of my honour and whose love for our little Roger was such that any deed which ensured his continued presence in the home appeared not only warrantable but obligatory. Alas! I knew of but one person in the whole world who could cherish feeling to this extent or possess sufficient will power to carry her lifeless body back to the house and lay it in her bed and give no sign of the abominable act from that day on to this.

"Miss Strange, there are men who have a peculiar conception of duty. My father——"

"You need not go on." How gently, how tenderly our Violet spoke. "I understand your trouble——"

Did she? She paused to ask herself if this were so, and he, deaf perhaps to her words, caught up his broken sentence and went on:

"My father was in the hall the day I came staggering in from my visit to the grotto. No words passed, but our eyes met and from that hour I have seen death in his countenance and he has seen it in mine, like two opponents, each struck to the heart, who stand facing each other with simulated smiles till they fall. My father will drop first. He is old—very old since that day five weeks ago; and to see him die and not be *sure*—to see the grave close over a possible innocence,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and I left here in ignorance of the blissful fact till my own eyes close forever, is more than I can hold up under; more than any son could. Cannot you help me then to a positive knowledge? Think! think! A woman's mind is strangely penetrating, and yours, I am told, has an intuitive faculty more to be relied upon than the reasoning of men. It must suggest some means of confirming my doubts or of definitely ending them."

Then Violet stirred and looked about at him and finally found voice.

"Tell me something about your father's ways. What are his habits? Does he sleep well or is he wakeful at night?"

"He has poor nights. I do not know how poor because I am not often with him. His valet, who has always been in our family, shares his room and acts as his constant nurse. He can watch over him better than I can; he has no distracting trouble on his mind."

"And little Roger? Does your father see much of little Roger? Does he fondle him and seem happy in his presence?"

"Yes; yes. I have often wondered at it, but he does. They are great chums. It is a pleasure to see them together."

"And the child clings to him—shows no fear—

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

sits on his lap or on the bed and plays as children do play with his beard or with his watch-chain?"

"Yes. Only once have I seen my little chap shrink, and that was when my father gave him a look of unusual intensity,—looking for his mother in him perhaps."

"Mr. Upjohn, forgive me the question; it seems necessary. Does your father—or rather did your father before he fell ill—ever walk in the direction of the grotto or haunt in any way the rocks which surround it?"

"I cannot say. The sea is there; he naturally loves the sea. But I have never seen him standing on the promontory."

"Which way do his windows look?"

"Towards the sea."

"Therefore towards the promontory?"

"Yes."

"Can he see it from his bed?"

"No. Perhaps that is the cause of a peculiar habit he has."

"What habit?"

"Every night before he retires (he is not yet confined to his bed) he stands for a few minutes in his front window looking out. He says it's his good-night to the ocean. When he no longer does this, we shall know that his end is very near."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The face of Violet began to clear. Rising, she turned on the electric light, and then, reseating herself, remarked with an aspect of quiet cheer:

"I have two ideas; but they necessitate my presence at your place. You will not mind a visit? My brother will accompany me."

Roger Upjohn did not need to speak, hardly to make a gesture; his expression was so eloquent.

She thanked him as if he had answered in words, adding with an air of gentle reserve: "Providence assists us in this matter. I am invited to Beverly next week to attend a wedding. I was intending to stay two days, but I will make it three and spend the extra one with you."

"What are your requirements, Miss Strange? I presume you have some."

Violet turned from the imposing portrait of Mr. Upjohn which she had been gravely contemplating, and met the troubled eye of her young host with an enigmatical flash of her own. But she made no answer in words. Instead, she lifted her right hand and ran one slender finger thoughtfully up the casing of the door near which they stood till it struck a nick in the old mahogany almost on a level with her head.

"Is your son Roger old enough to reach so

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

far?" she asked with another short look at him as she let her finger rest where it had struck the roughened wood. "I thought he was a little fellow."

"He is. That cut was made by—by my wife; a sample of her capricious wilfulness. She wished to leave a record of herself in the substance of our house as well as in our lives. That nick marks her height. She laughed when she made it. 'Till the walls cave in or burn,' is what she said. And I thought her laugh and smile captivating."

Cutting short his own laugh which was much too sardonic for a lady's ears, he made a move as if to lead the way into another portion of the room. But Violet failed to notice this, and lingering in quiet contemplation of this suggestive little nick,—the only blemish in a room of ancient colonial magnificence,—she thoughtfully remarked:

"Then she was a small woman?" adding with seeming irrelevance—"like myself."

Roger winced. Something in the suggestion hurt him, and in the nod he gave there was an air of coldness which under ordinary circumstances would have deterred her from pursuing this subject further. But the circumstances were not ordinary, and she allowed herself to say:

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Was she so very different from me,—in figure, I mean?"

"No. Why do you ask? Shall we not join your brother on the terrace?"

"Not till I have answered the question you put me a moment ago. You wished to know my requirements. One of the most important you have already fulfilled. You have given your servants a half-holiday and by so doing ensured to us full liberty of action. What else I need in the attempt I propose to make, you will find listed in this memorandum." And taking a slip of paper from her bag, she offered it to him with a hand, the trembling of which he would have noted had he been freer in mind.

As he read, she watched him, her fingers nervously clutching her throat.

"Can you supply what I ask?" she faltered, as he failed to raise his eyes or make any move or even to utter the groan she saw surging up to his lips. "*Will* you?" she impetuously urged, as his fingers closed spasmodically on the paper, in evidence that he understood at last the trend of her daring purpose.

The answer came slowly, but it came. "I will. But what——"

Her hand rose in a pleading gesture.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Do not ask me, but take Arthur and myself into the garden and show us the flowers. Afterwards, I should like a glimpse of the sea."

He bowed and they joined Arthur who had already begun to stroll through the grounds.

Violet was seldom at a loss for talk even at the most critical moments. But she was strangely tongue-tied on this occasion, as was Roger himself. Save for a few observations casually thrown out by Arthur, the three passed in a disquieting silence through pergola after pergola, and around beds gorgeous with every variety of fall flowers, till they turned a sharp corner and came in full view of the sea.

"Ah!" fell in an admiring murmur from Violet's lips as her eyes swept the horizon. Then as they settled on a mass of rock jutting out from the shore in a great curve, she leaned towards her host and softly whispered:

"The promontory?"

He nodded, and Violet ventured no farther, but stood for a little while gazing at the tumbled rocks. Then, with a quick look back at the house, she asked him to point out his father's window.

He did so, and as she noted how openly it faced the sea, her expression relaxed and her manner lost some of its constraint. As they turned to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

re-enter the house, she noticed an old man picking flowers from a vine clambering over one end of the piazza.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"Our oldest servant, and my father's own man," was Roger's reply. "He is picking my father's favourite flowers, a few late honeysuckles."

"How fortunate! Speak to him, Mr. Upjohn. Ask him how your father is this evening."

"Accompany me and I will; and do not be afraid to enter into conversation with him. He is the mildest of creatures and devoted to his patient. He likes nothing better than to talk about him."

Violet, with a meaning look at her brother, ran up the steps at Roger's side. As she did so, the old man turned and Violet was astonished at the wistfulness with which he viewed her.

"What a dear old creature!" she murmured. "See how he stares this way. You would think he knew me."

"He is glad to see a woman about the place. He has felt our isolation—Good-evening, Abram. Let this young lady have a spray of your sweetest honeysuckle. And, Abram, before you go, how is Father to-night? Still sitting up?"

"Yes, sir. He is very regular in his ways. Nine is his hour; not a minute before and not a

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

minute later. I don't have to look at the clock when he says: 'There, Abram, I've sat up long enough.'"

"When my father retires before his time or goes to bed without a final look at the sea, he will be a very sick man, Abram."

"That he will, Mr. Roger; that he will. But he's very feeble to-night, very feeble. I noticed that he gave the boy fewer kisses than usual. Perhaps he was put out because the child was brought in a half-hour earlier than the stated time. He don't like changes; you know that, Mr. Roger; he don't like changes. I hardly dared to tell him that the servants were all going out in a bunch to-night."

"I'm sorry," muttered Roger. "But he'll forget it by to-morrow. I couldn't bear to keep a single one from the concert. They'll be back in good season and meantime we have you. Abram is worth half a dozen of them, Miss Strange. We shall miss nothing."

"Thank you, Mr. Roger, thank you," faltered the old man. "I try to do my duty." And with another wistful glance at Violet, who looked very sweet and youthful in the half-light, he pottered away.

The silence which followed his departure was as

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

painful to her as to Roger Upjohn. When she broke it it was with this decisive remark:

"That man must not speak of me to your father. He must not even mention that you have a guest to-night. Run after him and tell him so. It is necessary that your father's mind should not be taken up with present happenings. Run."

Roger made haste to obey her. When he came back she was on the point of joining her brother but stopped to utter a final injunction:

"I shall leave the library, or wherever we may be sitting, just as the clock strikes half-past eight. Arthur will do the same, as by that time he will feel like smoking on the terrace. Do not follow either him or myself, but take your stand here on the piazza where you can get a full view of the right-hand wing without attracting any attention to yourself. When you hear the big clock in the hall strike nine, look up quickly at your father's window. What you see may determine— Oh, Arthur! still admiring the prospect? I do not wonder. But I find it chilly. Let us go in."

Roger Upjohn, sitting by himself in the library, was watching the hands of the mantel clock slowly approaching the hour of nine.

Never had silence seemed more oppressive nor

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

his sense of loneliness greater. Yet the boom of the ocean was distinct to the ear, and human presence no farther away than the terrace where Arthur Strange could be seen smoking out his cigar in solitude. The silence and the loneliness were in Roger's own soul; and, in face of the expected revelation which would make or unmake his future, the desolation they wrought was measureless.

To cut his suspense short, he rose at length and hurried out to the spot designated by Miss Strange as the best point from which to keep watch upon his father's window. It was at the end of the piazza where the honeysuckle hung, and the odour of the blossoms, so pleasing to his father, well-nigh overpowered him not only by its sweetness but by the many memories it called up. Visions of that father as he looked at all stages of their relationship passed in a bewildering maze before him. He saw him as he appeared to his childish eyes in those early days of confidence when the loss of the mother cast them in mutual dependence upon each other. Then a sterner picture of the relentless parent who sees but one straight course to success in this world and the next. Then the teacher and the matured adviser; and then—oh, bitter change! the man whose hopes he had crossed —whose life he had undone, and all for her who

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

now came stealing upon the scene with her slim, white, jewelled hand forever lifted up between them. And she! Had he ever seen her more clearly? Once more the dainty figure stepped from fairy-land, beauteous with every grace that can allure and finally destroy a man. And as he saw, he trembled and wished that these moments of awful waiting might pass and the test be over which would lay bare his father's heart and justify his fears or dispel them forever.

But the crisis, if crisis it was, was one of his own making and not to be hastened or evaded. With one quick glance at his father's window, he turned in his impatience towards the sea whose restless and continuous moaning had at length struck his ear. What was in its call to-night that he should thus sway towards it as though drawn by some dread magnetic force? He had been born to the dashing of its waves and knew its every mood and all the passion of its song from frolicsome ripple to melancholy dirge. But there was something odd and inexplicable in its effect upon his spirit as he faced it at this hour. Grim and implacable—a sound rather than a sight—it seemed to hold within its invisible distances the image of his future fate. What this image was and why he should seek for it in this impenetrable void, he did not

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

know. He felt himself held and was struggling with this influence as with an unknown enemy when there rang out, from the hall within, the preparatory chimes for which his ear was waiting, and then the nine slow strokes which signalized the moment when he was to look for his father's presence at the window.

Had he wished, he could not have forborne that look. Had his eyes been closing in death, or so he felt, the trembling lids would have burst apart at this call and the revelations it promised.

And what did he see? What did that window hold for him?

Nothing that he might not have seen there any night at this hour. His father's figure drawn up behind the panes in wistful contemplation of the night. No visible change in his attitude, nothing forced or unusual in his manner. Even the hand, lifted to pull down the shade, moves with its familiar hesitation. In a moment more that shade will be down and— But no! the lifted hand falls back; the easy attitude becomes strained, fixed. He is staring now—not merely gazing out upon the wastes of sky and sea; and Roger, following the direction of his glance, stares also in breathless emotion at what those distances, but now so impenetrable, are giving to the eye.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A spectre floating in the air above the promontory! The spectre of a woman—of his wife, clad, as she had been clad that fatal night! Outlined in supernatural light, it faces them with lifted arms showing the ends of rope dangling from either wrist. A sight awful to any eye, but to the man of guilty heart——

Ah! it comes—the cry for which the agonized son had been listening! An old man's shriek, hoarse with the remorse of sleepless nights and days of unimaginable regret and foreboding! It cuts the night. It cuts its way into his heart. He feels his senses failing him, yet he must glance once more at the window and see with his last conscious look— But what is this! a change has taken place in the picture and he beholds, not the distorted form of his father sinking back in shame and terror before this visible image of his secret sin, but that of another weak, old man falling to the floor behind his back! Abram! the attentive, seemingly harmless, guardian of the household! Abram! who had never spoken a word or given a look in any way suggestive of his having played any other part in the hideous drama of their lives than that of the humble and sympathetic servant!

The shock was too great, the relief too absolute for credence. *He*, the listener at the grotto? *He*,

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the avenger of the family's honour? *He*, the insurer of little Roger's continuance with the family at a cost the one who loved him best would rather have died himself than pay? Yes! there is no misdoubting this old servitor's attitude of abject appeal, or the meaning of Homer Upjohn's joyfully uplifted countenance and outspreading arms. The servant begs for mercy from man, and the master is giving thanks to Heaven. Why giving thanks? Has he been the prey of cankering doubts also? Has the father dreaded to discover that in the son which the son has dreaded to discover in the father?

It might easily be; and as Roger recognizes this truth and the full tragedy of their mutual lives, he drops to his knees amid the honeysuckles.

"Violet, you are a wonder. But how did you dare?"

This from Arthur as the two rode to the train in the early morning.

The answer came a bit waveringly.

"I do not know. I am astonished yet, at my own daring. Look at my hands. They have not ceased trembling since the moment you threw the light upon me on the rocks. The figure of old Mr. Upjohn in the window looked so august."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Arthur, with a short glance at the little hands she held out, shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly. It struck him that the tremulousness she complained of was due more to some parting word from their young host, than from prolonged awe at her own daring. But he made no remark to this effect, only observed:

"Abram has confessed his guilt, I hear."

"Yes, and will die of it. The master will bury the man, and not the man the master."

"And Roger? Not the little fellow, but the father?"

"We will not talk of him," said she, her eyes seeking the sea where the sun in its rising was battling with a troop of lowering clouds and slowly gaining the victory.

END OF PROBLEM IV

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PROBLEM V

THE DREAMING LADY

"AND this is all you mean to tell me?"

"I think you will find it quite enough, Miss Strange."

"Just the address——"

"And this advice: that your call be speedy. Distracted nerves cannot wait."

Violet, across whose wonted piquancy there lay an indefinable shadow, eyed her employer with a doubtful air before turning away toward the door. She had asked him for a case to investigate (something she had never done before), and she had even gone so far as to particularize the sort of case she desired: "It must be an interesting one," she had stipulated, "but different, quite different from the last one. It must not involve death or any kind of horror. If you have a case of subtlety without crime, one to engage my powers without depressing my spirits, I beg you to let me have it. I—I have not felt quite like myself since I came

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

from Massachusetts." Whereupon, without further comment, but with a smile she did not understand, he had handed her a small slip of paper on which he had scribbled an address. She should have felt satisfied, but for some reason she did not. She regarded him as capable of plunging her into an affair quite the reverse of what she felt herself in a condition to undertake.

"I should like to know a little more," she pursued, making a move to unfold the slip he had given her.

But he stopped her with a gesture.

"Read it in your limousine," said he. "If you are disappointed then, let me know. But I think you will find yourself quite ready for your task."

"And my father?"

"Would approve if he could be got to approve the business at all. You do not even need to take your brother with you."

"Oh, then, it's with women only I have to deal?"

"Read the address after you are headed up Fifth Avenue."

But when, with her doubts not yet entirely removed, she opened the small slip he had given her, the number inside suggested nothing but the fact that her destination lay somewhere near Eightieth

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Street. It was therefore with the keenest surprise she beheld her motor stop before the conspicuous house of the great financier whose late death had so affected the money-market. She had not had any acquaintance with this man herself, but she knew his house. Everyone knew that. It was one of the most princely in the whole city. C. Dudley Brooks had known how to spend his millions. Indeed he had known how to do this so well that it was of him her father, also a financier of some note, had once said he was the only successful American he envied.

She was expected; that she saw the instant the door was opened. This made her entrance easy—an entrance further brightened by the delightful glimpse of a child's cherubic face looking at her from a distant doorway. It was an instantaneous vision, gone as soon as seen; but its effect was to rob the pillared spaces of the wonderful hallway of some of their chill, and to modify in some slight degree the formality of a service which demanded three men to usher her into a small reception-room not twenty feet from the door of entrance.

Left in this secluded spot, she had time to ask herself what member of the household she would be called upon to meet, and was surprised to find that she did not even know of whom the household

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

consisted. She was sure of the fact that Mr. Brooks had been a widower for many years before his death, but beyond that she knew nothing of his domestic life. His son—but was there a son? She had never heard any mention made of a younger Mr. Brooks, yet there was certainly some one of his connection who enjoyed the rights of an heir. Him she must be prepared to meet with all due composure, whatever astonishment he might show at the sight of a slip of a girl instead of the experienced detective he had every right to expect.

But when the door opened to admit the person she was awaiting, the surprise was hers. It was a woman who stood before her, a woman and an oddity. Yet, in just what her oddity lay, Violet found it difficult to decide. Was it in the smoothness of her white locks drawn carefully down over her ears, or in the contrast afforded by her eager eyes and her weak and tremulous mouth? She was dressed in the heaviest of mourning and very expensively, but there was that in her bearing and expression which made it impossible to believe that she took any interest in her garments or even knew in which of her dresses she had been attired.

"I am the person you have come here to see,"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

she said. "Your name is not unfamiliar to me, but you may not know mine. It is Quintard; Mrs. Quintard. I am in difficulty. I need assistance—secret assistance. I did not know where to go for it except to a detective agency; so I telephoned to the first one I saw advertised; and—and I was told to expect Miss Strange. But I didn't think it would be *you* though I suppose it's all right. You have come here for this purpose, haven't you, though it does seem a little queer?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Quintard; and if you will tell me——"

"My dear, it's just this—yes, I will sit down. Last week my brother died. You have heard of him no doubt, C. Dudley Brooks?"

"Oh, yes; my father knew him—we all knew him by reputation. Do not hurry, Mrs. Quintard. I have sent my car away. You can take all the time you wish."

"No, no, I cannot. I'm in desperate haste. He—but let me go on with my story. My brother was a widower, with no children to inherit. That everybody knows. But his wife left behind her a son by a former husband, and this son of hers my brother had in a measure adopted, and even made his sole heir in a will he drew up during the lifetime of his wife. But when he found, as he very soon

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

did, that this young man was not developing in a way to meet such great responsibilities, he made a new will—though unhappily without the knowledge of the family, or even of his most intimate friends—in which he gave the bulk of his great estate to his nephew Clement, who has bettered the promise of his youth and who besides has children of great beauty whom my brother had learned to love. And this will—this hoarded scrap of paper which means so much to us all, is *lost! lost!* and I—" here her voice which had risen almost to a scream, sank to a horrified whisper, "*am the one who lost it.*"

"But there's a copy of it somewhere—there is always a copy——"

"Oh, but you haven't heard all. My nephew is an invalid; has been an invalid for years—that's why so little is known about him. He's dying of consumption. The doctors hold out no hope for him, and now, with the fear preying upon him of leaving his wife and children penniless, he is wearing away so fast that any hour may see his end. And I have to meet his eyes—such pitiful eyes—and the look in them is killing me. Yet, I was not to blame. I could not help—Oh, Miss Strange," she suddenly broke in with the inconsequence of extreme feeling, "the will is in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the house! I never carried it off the floor where I sleep. Find it; find it, I pray, or——"

The moment had come for Violet's soft touch, for Violet's encouraging word.

"I will try," she answered her.

Mrs. Quintard grew calmer.

"But, first," the young girl continued, "I must know more about the conditions. Where is this nephew of yours—the man who is ill?"

"In this house, where he has been for the last eight months."

"Was the child his of whom I caught a glimpse in the hall as I came in?"

"Yes, and——"

"I will fight for that child!" Violet cried out impulsively. "I am sure his father's cause is good. Where is the other claimant—the one you designate as Carlos?"

"Oh, there's where the trouble is! Carlos is on the *Mauretania*, and she is due here in a couple of days. He comes from the East where he has been touring with his wife. Miss Strange, the lost will must be found before then, or the other will be opened and read and Carlos made master of this house, which would mean our quick departure and Clement's certain death."

"Move a sick man?—a relative as low as you say

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he is? Oh no, Mrs. Quintard; no one would do that, were the house a cabin and its owners paupers."

"You do not know Carlos; you do not know his wife. We should not be given a week in which to pack. They have no children and they envy Clement who has. Our only hope lies in discovering the paper which gives us the right to remain here in face of all opposition. That or penury. Now you know my trouble."

"And it is trouble; one from which I shall make every effort to relieve you. But first let me ask if you are not worrying unnecessarily about this missing document? If it was drawn up by Mr. Brooks's lawyer——"

"But it was not," that lady impetuously interrupted. "His lawyer is Carlos's near relative, and has never been told of the change in my brother's intentions. Clement (I am speaking now of my brother and not of my nephew) was a great money-getter, but when it came to standing up for his rights in domestic matters, he was more timid than a child. He was subject to his wife while she lived, and when she was gone, to her relatives, who are all of a dominating character. When he finally made up his mind to do us justice and eliminate Carlos, he went out of town—I wish

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I could remember where — and had this will drawn up by a stranger, whose name I cannot recall."

Her shaking tones, her nervous manner betrayed a weakness equalling, if not surpassing, that of the brother who dared in secret what he had not strength to acknowledge openly, and it was with some hesitation Violet prepared to ask those definite questions which would elucidate the cause and manner of a loss seemingly so important. She dreaded to hear some commonplace tale of inexcusable carelessness. Something subtler than this—the presence of some unsuspected agency opposed to young Clement's interest; some partisan of Carlos; some secret undermining force in a house full of servants and dependants, seemed necessary for the development of so ordinary a situation into a drama justifying the exercise of her special powers.

"I think I understand now your exact position in the house, as well as the value of the paper which you say you have lost. The next thing for me to hear is how you came to have charge of this paper, and under what circumstances you were led to mislay it. Do you not feel quite ready to tell me?"

"Is—is that necessary?" Mrs. Quintard faltered.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Very," replied Violet, watching her curiously.

"I didn't expect—that is, I hoped you would be able to point out, by some power we cannot of course explain, just the spot where the paper lies, without having to tell all that. Some people can, you know."

"Ah, I understand. You regarded me as unfit for practical work, and so credited me with occult powers. But that is where you made a mistake, Mrs. Quintard; I'm nothing if not practical. And let me add that I'm as secret as the grave concerning what my clients tell me. If I am to be of any help to you, I must be made acquainted with every fact involved in the loss of this valuable paper. Relate the whole circumstance or dismiss me from the case. You can have done nothing more foolish or wrong than many——"

"Oh, don't say things like that!" broke in the poor woman in a tone of great indignation. "I have done nothing anyone could call either foolish or wicked. I am simply very unfortunate, and being sensitive—— But this isn't telling the story. I'll try to make it all clear; but if I do not, and show any confusion, stop me and help me out with questions. I—I—oh, where shall I begin?"

"With your first knowledge of this second will."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Thank you, thank you; now I can go on. One night, shortly after my brother had been given up by the physicians, I was called to his bedside for a confidential talk. As he had received that day a very large amount of money from the bank, I thought he was going to hand it over to me for Clement, but it was for something much more serious than this he had summoned me. When he was quite sure that we were alone and nobody anywhere within hearing, he told me that he had changed his mind as to the disposal of his property and that it was to Clement and his children, and not to Carlos, he was going to leave this house and the bulk of his money. That he had had a new will drawn up which he showed me——"

"Showed you?"

"Yes; he made me bring it to him from the safe where he kept it; and, feeble as he was, he was so interested in pointing out certain portions of it that he lifted himself in bed and was so strong and animated that I thought he was getting better. But it was a false strength due to the excitement of the moment, as I saw next day when he suddenly died."

"You were saying that you brought the will to him from his safe. Where was the safe?"

"In the wall over his head. He gave me the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

key to open it. This key he took from under his pillow. I had no trouble in fitting it or in turning the lock."

"And what happened after you looked at the will?"

"I put it back. He told me to. But the key I kept. He said I was not to part with it again till the time came for me to produce the will."

"And when was that to be?"

"Immediately after the funeral, if it so happened that Carlos had arrived in time to attend it. But if for any reason he failed to be here, I was to let it lie till within three days of his return, when I was to take it out in the presence of a Mr. Delahunt who was to have full charge of it from that time. Oh, I remember all that well enough! and I meant most earnestly to carry out his wishes, but——"

"Go on, Mrs. Quintard, pray go on. What happened? Why couldn't you do what he asked?"

"Because the will was gone when I went to take it out. There was nothing to show Mr. Delahunt but the empty shelf."

"Oh, a theft! Just a common theft! Someone overheard the talk you had with your brother. But how about the key? You had that?"

"Yes, I had that."

"Then it was taken from you and returned?

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

You must have been careless as to where you kept it——"

"No, I wore it on a chain about my neck. Though I had no reason to mistrust any one in the house, I felt that I could not guard this key too carefully. I even kept it on at night. In fact it never left me. It was still on my person when I went into the room with Mr. Delahunt. But the safe had been opened for all that."

"There were two keys to it, then?"

"No; in giving me the key, my brother had strictly warned me not to lose it, as it had no duplicate."

"Mrs. Quintard, have you a special confidant or maid?"

"Yes, my Hetty."

"How much did she know about this key?"

"Nothing, but that it didn't help the fit of my dress. Hetty has cared for me for years. There's no more devoted woman in all New York, nor one who can be more relied upon to tell the truth. She is so honest with her tongue that I am bound to believe her even when she says——"

"What?"

"That it was I and nobody else who took the will out of the safe last night. That she saw me come from my brother's room with a folded paper

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in my hand, pass with it into the library, and come out again without it. If this is so, then that will is somewhere in that great room. But we've looked in every conceivable place except the shelves, where it is useless to search. It would take days to go through them all, and meanwhile Carlos——"

"We will not wait for Carlos. We will begin work at once. But just one other question. How came Hetty to see you in your walk through the rooms? Did she follow you?"

"Yes. It's—it's not the first time I have walked in my sleep. Last night—but she will tell you. It's a painful subject to me. I will send for her to meet us in the library."

"Where you believe this document to lie hidden?"

"Yes."

"I am anxious to see the room. It is upstairs, I believe."

"Yes."

She had risen and was moving rapidly toward the door. Violet eagerly followed her.

Let us accompany her in her passage up the palatial stairway, and realize the effect upon her of a splendour whose future ownership possibly depended entirely upon herself.

It was a cold splendour. The merry voices of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

children were lacking in these great halls. Death past and to come infused the air with solemnity and mocked the pomp which yet appeared so much a part of the life here that one could hardly imagine the huge pillared spaces without it.

To Violet, more or less accustomed to fine interiors, the chief interest of this one lay in its connection with the mystery then occupying her. Stopping for a moment on the stair, she inquired of Mrs. Quintard if the loss she so deplored had been made known to the servants, and was much relieved to find that, with the exception of Mr. Delahunt, she had not spoken of it to any one but Clement. "And he will never mention it," she declared, "not even to his wife. She has troubles enough to bear without knowing how near she stood to a fortune."

"Oh, she will have her fortune!" Violet confidently replied. "In time, the lawyer who drew up the will will appear. But what you want is an immediate triumph over the cold Carlos, and I hope you may have it. Ah!"

This expletive was a sigh of sheer surprise.

Mrs. Quintard had unlocked the library door and Violet had been given her first glimpse of this, the finest room in New York.

She remembered now that she had often heard

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

it so characterized, and, indeed, had it been taken bodily from some historic abbey of the old world, it could not have expressed more fully, in structure and ornamentation, the Gothic idea at its best. All that it lacked were the associations of vanished centuries, and these, in a measure, were supplied to the imagination by the studied mellowness of its tints and the suggestion of age in its carvings.

So much for the room itself, which was but a shell for holding the great treasure of valuable books ranged along every shelf. As Violet's eyes sped over their ranks and thence to the five windows of deeply stained glass which faced her from the southern end, Mrs. Quintard indignantly exclaimed:

"And Carlos would turn this into a billiard room!"

"I do not like Carlos," Violet returned hotly; then remembering herself, hastened to ask whether Mrs. Quintard was quite positive as to this room being the one in which she had hidden the precious document.

"You had better talk to Hetty," said that lady, as a stout woman of most prepossessing appearance entered their presence and paused respectfully just inside the doorway. "Hetty, you will answer any questions this young lady

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

may put. If anyone can help us, she can. But first, what news from the sick-room?"

"Nothing good. The doctor has just come for the third time to-day. Mrs. Brooks is crying and even the children are dumb with fear."

"I will go. I must see the doctor. I must tell him to keep Clement alive by any means till——"

She did not wait to say what; but Violet understood and felt her heart grow heavy. Could it be that her employer considered this the gay and easy task she had asked for?

The next minute she was putting her first question:

"Hetty, what did you see in Mrs. Quintard's action last night, to make you infer that she left the missing document in this room?"

The woman's eyes, which had been respectfully studying her face, brightened with a relief which made her communicative. With the self-possession of a perfectly candid nature, she inquiringly remarked:

"My mistress has spoken of her infirmity?"

"Yes, and very frankly."

"She walks in her sleep."

"So she said."

"And sometimes when others are asleep, and she is not."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"She did not tell me that."

"She is a very nervous woman and cannot always keep still when she rouses up at night. When I hear her rise, I get up too; but, never being quite sure whether she is sleeping or not, I am careful to follow her at a certain distance. Last night I was so far behind her that she had been to her brother's room and left it before I saw her face."

"Where is his room and where is hers?"

"Hers is in front on this same floor. Mr. Brooks's is in the rear, and can be reached either by the hall or by passing through this room into a small one beyond, which we called his den."

"Describe your encounter. Where were you standing when you saw her first?"

"In the den I have just mentioned. There was a bright light in the hall behind me and I could see her figure quite plainly. She was holding a folded paper clenched against her breast, and her movement was so mechanical that I was sure she was asleep. She was coming this way, and in another moment she entered this room. The door, which had been open, remained so, and in my anxiety I crept to it and looked in after her. There was no light burning here at that hour, but the moon was shining in in long rays of variously coloured light. If I had followed her—but I did not. I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

just stood and watched her long enough to see her pass through a blue ray, then through a green one, and then into, if not through, a red one. Expecting her to walk straight on, and having some fears of the staircase once she got into the hall, I hurried around to the door behind you there to head her off. But she had not yet left this room. I waited and waited and still she did not come. Fearing some accident, I finally ventured to approach the door and try it. It was locked. This alarmed me. She had never locked herself in anywhere before and I did not know what to make of it. Some persons would have shouted her name, but I had been warned against doing that, so I simply stood where I was, and eventually I heard the key turn in the lock and saw her come out. She was still walking stiffly, but her hands were empty and hanging at her side."

"And then?"

"She went straight to her room and I after her. I was sure she was dead asleep by this time."

"And she was?"

"Yes, Miss; but still full of what was on her mind. I know this because she stopped when she reached the bedside and began fumbling with the waist of her wrapper. It was for the key she was searching, and when her fingers encountered it

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

hanging on the outside, she opened her wrapper and thrust it in on her bare skin."

"You saw her do all that?"

"As plainly as I see you now. The light in her room was burning brightly."

"And after that?"

"She got into bed. It was I who turned off the light."

"Has that wrapper of hers a pocket?"

"No, Miss."

"Nor her gown?"

"No, Miss."

"So she could not have brought the paper into her room concealed about her person?"

"No, Miss; she left it here. It never passed beyond this doorway."

"But might she not have carried it back to some place of concealment in the rooms she had left?"

The woman's face changed and a slight flush showed through the natural brown of her cheeks.

"No," she disclaimed; "she could not have done that. I was careful to lock the library door behind her before I ran out into the hall."

"Then," concluded Violet, with all the emphasis of conviction, "it is here, and nowhere else we must look for that document till we find it."

Thus assured of the first step in the task she

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

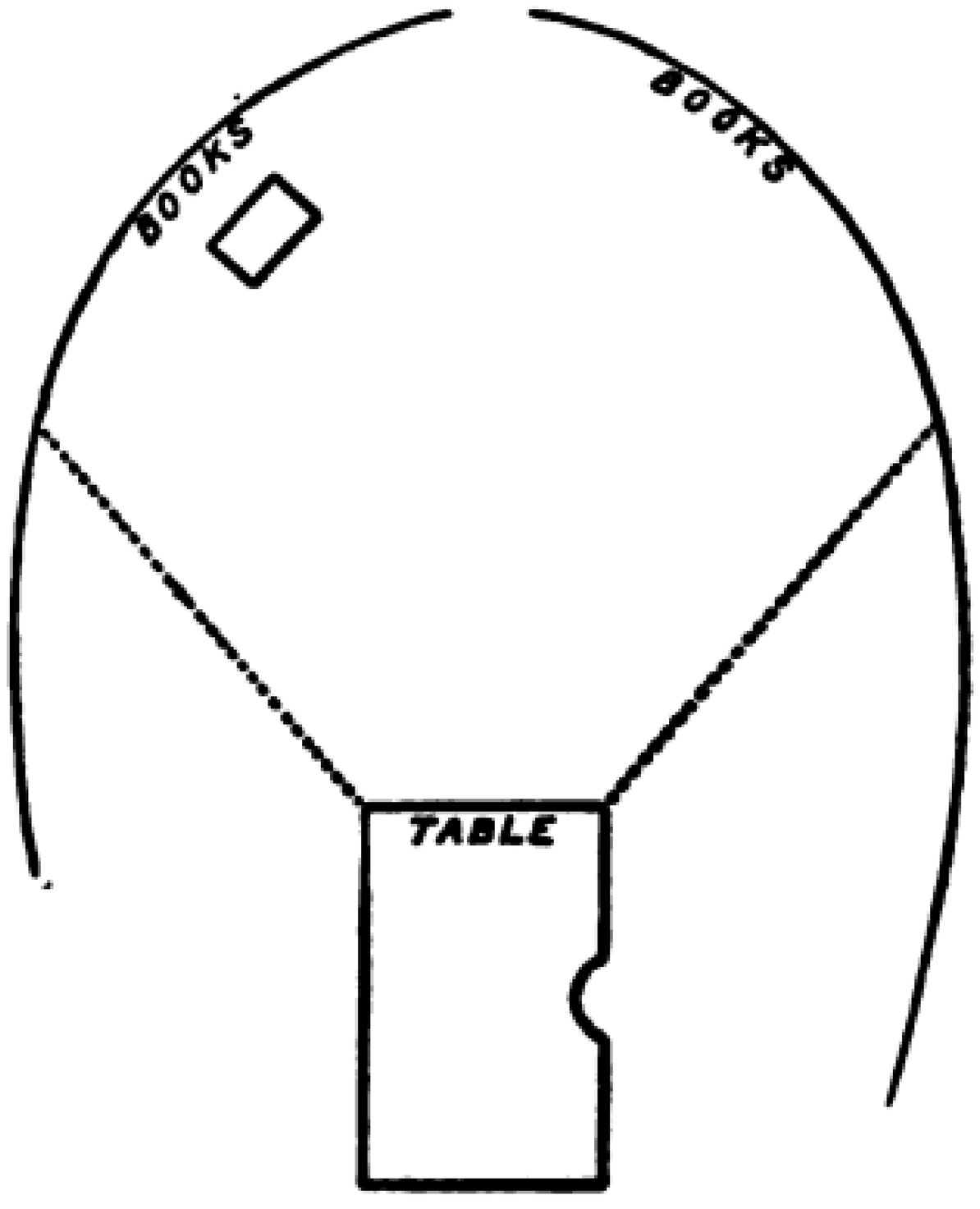
had before her, Miss Strange settled down to business.

The room, which towered to the height of two stories, was in the shape of a huge oval. This oval, separated into narrow divisions for the purpose of accommodating the shelves with which it was lined, narrowed as it rose above the great Gothic chimney-piece and the five gorgeous windows looking towards the south, till it met and was lost in the tracery of the ceiling, which was of that exquisite and soul-satisfying order which we see in the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey. What break otherwise occurred in the circling round of books reaching thus thirty feet or more above the head was made by the two doors already spoken of and a narrow strip of wall at either end of the space occupied by the windows. No furniture was to be seen there except a couple of stalls taken from some old cathedral, which stood in the two bare places just mentioned.

But within, on the extensive floor-space, several articles were grouped, and Violet, recognizing the possibilities which any one of them afforded for the concealment of so small an object as a folded document, decided to use method in her search, and to that end, mentally divided the space before her into four segments.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The first took in the door, communicating with the suite ending in Mr. Brooks's bedroom. A diagram of this segment will show that the only article of furniture in it was a cabinet.



It was at this cabinet Miss Strange made her first stop.

"You have looked this well through?" she asked as she bent over the glass case on top to examine the row of mediæval missals displayed within in a manner to show their wonderful illuminations.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Not the case," explained Hetty. "It is locked you see and no one has as yet succeeded in finding the key. But we searched the drawers underneath with the greatest care. Had we sifted the whole contents through our fingers, I could not be more certain that the paper is not there."

Violet stepped into the next segment.

This was the one dominated by the huge fire-place. A rug lay before the hearth. To this Violet pointed.

Quickly the woman answered:

"We not only lifted it, but turned it over."

"And that box at the right?"

"Is full of wood and wood only."

"Did you take out this wood?"

"Every stick."

"And those ashes in the fire-place? Something has been burned there."

"Yes; but not lately. Besides, those ashes are all wood ashes. If the least bit of charred paper had been mixed with them, we should have considered the matter settled. But you can see for yourself that no such particle can be found." While saying this, she had put the poker into Violet's hand. "Rake them about, Miss, and make sure."

Violet did so, with the result that the poker was

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

soon put back into place, and she herself down on her knees looking up the chimney.

"Had she thrust it up there," Hetty made haste to remark, "there would have been some signs of soot on her sleeves. They are white and very long and are always getting in her way when she tries to do anything."

Violet left the fire-place after a glance at the mantel-shelf on which nothing stood but a casket of open fretwork, and two coloured photographs mounted on small easels. The casket was too open to conceal anything and the photographs lifted too high above the shelf for even the smallest paper, let alone a document of any size, to hide behind them.

The chairs, of which there were several in this part of the room, she passed with just an inquiring look. They were all of solid oak, without any attempt at upholstery, and although carved to match the stalls on the other side of the room, offered no place for search.

Her delay in the third segment was brief. Here there was absolutely nothing but the door by which she had entered, and the books. As she flitted on, following the oval of the wall, a small frown appeared on her usually smooth forehead. She felt the oppression of the books—

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the countless books. If indeed, she should find herself obliged to go through them. What a hopeless outlook!

But she had still a segment to consider, and after that the immense table occupying the centre of the room, a table which in its double capacity (for it was as much desk as table) gave more promise of holding the solution of the mystery than anything to which she had hitherto given her attention.

The quarter in which she now stood was the most beautiful, and, possibly, the most precious of them all. In it blazed the five great windows which were the glory of the room; but there are no hiding-places in windows, and much as she revelled in colour, she dared not waste a moment on them. There was more hope for her in the towering stalls, with their possible drawers for books.

But Hetty was before her in the attempt she made to lift the lids of the two great seats.

"Nothing in either," said she; and Violet, with a sigh, turned towards the table.

This was an immense affair, made to accommodate itself to the shape of the room, but with a hollowed-out space on the window-side large enough to hold a chair for the sitter who would use its top as a desk. On it were various articles

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

suitable to its double use. Without being crowded, it displayed a pile of magazines and pamphlets, boxes for stationery, a writing pad with its accompaniments, a lamp, and some few ornaments, among which was a large box, richly inlaid with pearl and ivory, the lid of which stood wide open.

"Don't touch," admonished Violet, as Hetty stretched out her hand to move some little object aside. "You have already worked here busily in the search you made this morning."

"We handled everything."

"Did you go through these pamphlets?"

"We shook open each one. We were especially particular here, since it was at this table I saw Mrs. Quintard stop."

"With head level or drooped?"

"Drooped."

"Like one looking down, rather than up, or around?"

"Yes. A ray of red light shone on her sleeve. It seemed to me the sleeve moved as though she were reaching out."

"Will you try to stand as she did and as nearly in the same place as possible?"

Hetty glanced down at the table edge, marked where the gules dominated the blue and green, and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

moved to that spot, and paused with her head sinking slowly towards her breast.

"Very good," exclaimed Violet. "But the moon was probably in a very different position from what the sun is now."

"You are right; it was higher up; I chanced to notice it."

"Let me come," said Violet.

Hetty moved, and Violet took her place but in a spot a step or two farther front. This brought her very near to the centre of the table. Hanging her head, just as Hetty had done, she reached out her right hand.

"Have you looked under this blotter?" she asked, pointing towards the pad she touched. "I mean, between the blotter and the frame which holds it?"

"I certainly did," answered Hetty, with some pride.

Violet remained staring down.

"Then you took off everything that was lying on it?"

"Oh, yes."

Violet continued to stare down at the blotter. Then impetuously:

"Put them back in their accustomed places."

Hetty obeyed.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Violet continued to look at them, then slowly stretched out her hand, but soon let it fall again with an air of discouragement. Certainly the missing document was not in the ink-pot or the mucilage bottle. Yet something made her stoop again over the pad and subject it to the closest scrutiny.

"If only nothing had been touched!" she inwardly sighed. But she let no sign of her discontent escape her lips, simply exclaiming as she glanced up at the towering spaces overhead: "The books! the books! Nothing remains but for you to call up all the servants, or get men from the outside and, beginning at one end—I should say the upper one—take down every book standing within reach of a woman of Mrs. Quintard's height."

"Hear first what Mrs. Quintard has to say about that," interrupted the woman as that lady entered in a flutter of emotion springing from more than one cause.

"The young lady thinks that we should remove the books," Hetty observed, as her mistress's eye wandered to hers from Violet's abstracted countenance.

"Useless. If we were to undertake to do that, Carlos would be here before half the job was

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

finished. Besides, Hetty must have told you my extreme aversion to nicely bound books. I will not say that when awake I never place my hand on one, but once in a state of somnambulism, when every natural whim has full control, I am sure that I never would. There is a reason for my prejudice. I was not always rich. I once was very poor. It was when I was first married and long before Clement had begun to make his fortune. I was so poor then that frequently I went hungry, and what was worse saw my little daughter cry for food. And why? Because my husband was a bibliomaniac. He would spend on fine editions what would have kept the family comfortable. It is hard to believe, isn't it? I have seen him bring home a Grolier when the larder was as empty as that box; and it made me hate books so, especially those of extra fine binding, that I have to tear the covers off before I can find courage to read them."

O life! life! how fast Violet was learning it!

"I can understand your idea, Mrs. Quintard, but as everything else has failed, I should make a mistake not to examine these shelves. It is just possible that we may be able to shorten the task very materially; that we may not have to call in help, even. To what extent have they been approached, or the books handled, since you dis-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

covered the loss of the paper we are looking for?"

"Not at all. Neither of us went near them." This from Hetty.

"Nor any one else?"

"No one else has been admitted to the room. We locked both doors the moment we felt satisfied that the will had been left here."

"That's a relief. Now I may be able to do something. Hetty, you look like a very strong woman, and I, as you see, am very little. Would you mind lifting me up to these shelves? I want to look at them. Not at the books, but at the shelves themselves."

The wondering woman stooped and raised her to the level of the shelf she had pointed out. Violet peered closely at it and then at the ones just beneath.

"Am I heavy?" she asked; "if not, let me see those on the other side of the door."

Hetty carried her over.

Violet inspected each shelf as high as a woman of Mrs. Quintard's stature could reach, and when on her feet again, knelt to inspect the ones below.

"No one has touched or drawn anything from these shelves in twenty-four hours," she declared. "The small accumulation of dust along their edges

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

has not been disturbed at any point. It was very different with the table-top. That shows very plainly where you had moved things and where you had not."

"Was that what you were looking for? Well, I never!"

Violet paid no heed; she was thinking and thinking very deeply.

Hetty turned towards her mistress, then quickly back to Violet, whom she seized by the arm.

"What's the matter with Mrs. Quintard?" she hurriedly asked. "If it were night, I should think that she was in one of her spells."

Violet started and glanced where Hetty pointed. Mrs. Quintard was within a few feet of them, but as oblivious of their presence as though she stood alone in the room. Possibly, she thought she did. With fixed eyes and mechanical step she began to move straight towards the table, her whole appearance of a nature to make Hetty's blood run cold, but to cause that of Violet's to bound through her veins with renewed hope.

"The one thing I could have wished!" she murmured under her breath. "She has fallen into a trance. She is again under the dominion of her idea. If we watch and do not disturb her she may repeat her action of last night, and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

herself show where she has put this precious document."

Meanwhile Mrs. Quintard continued to advance. A moment more, and her smooth white locks caught the ruddy glow centred upon the chair standing in the hollow of the table. Words were leaving her lips, and her hand, reaching out over the blotter, groped among the articles scattered there till it settled on a large pair of shears.

"Listen," muttered Violet to the woman pressing close to her side. "You are acquainted with her voice; catch what she says if you can."

Hetty could not; an undistinguishable murmur was all that came to her ears.

Violet took a step nearer. Mrs. Quintard's hand had left the shears and was hovering uncertainly in the air. Her distress was evident. Her head, no longer steady on her shoulders, was turning this way and that, and her tones becoming inarticulate.

"Paper! I want paper"; burst from her lips in a shrill unnatural cry.

But when they listened for more and watched to see the uncertain hand settle somewhere, she suddenly came to herself and turned upon them

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a startled glance, which speedily changed into one of the utmost perplexity.

"What am I doing here?" she asked. "I have a feeling as if I had almost seen—almost touched—oh, it's gone! and all is blank again. "Why couldn't I keep it till I knew—" Then she came wholly to herself and, forgetting even the doubts of a moment since, remarked to Violet in her old tremulous fashion:

"You asked us to pull down the books? But you've evidently thought better of it."

"Yes, I have thought better of it." Then, with a last desperate hope of re-arousing the visions lying somewhere back in Mrs. Quintard's troubled brain, Violet ventured to observe: "This is likely to resolve itself into a psychological problem, Mrs. Quintard. Do you suppose that if you fell again into the condition of last night, you would repeat your action and so lead us yourself to where the will lies hidden?"

"Possibly; but it may be weeks before I walk again in my sleep, and meanwhile Carlos will have arrived, and Clement, possibly, died. My nephew is so low that the doctor is coming back at midnight. Miss Strange, Clement is a man in a thousand. He says he wants to see you. Would you be willing to accompany me to his room for a

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

moment? He will not make many more requests, and I will take care that the interview is not prolonged."

"I will go willingly. But would it not be better to wait——"

"Then you may never see him at all."

"Very well; but I wish I had some better news to give."

"That will come later. This house was never meant for Carlos. Hetty, you will stay here. Miss Strange, let us go now."

"You need not speak; just let him see you."

Violet nodded and followed Mrs. Quintard into the sick-room.

The sight which met her eyes tried her young emotions deeply. Staring at her from the bed, she saw two piercing eyes over whose brilliance death as yet had gained no control. Clement's soul was in that gaze; Clement halting at the brink of dissolution to sound the depths behind him for the hope which would make departure easy. Would he see in her, a mere slip of a girl dressed in fashionable clothes and bearing about her all the marks of social distinction, the sort of person needed for the task upon the success of which depended his darlings' future? She could

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

hardly expect it. Yet as she continued to meet his gaze with all the seriousness the moment demanded, she beheld those burning orbs lose some of their demand and the fingers, which had lain inert upon the bedspread, flutter gently and move as if to draw attention to his wife and the three beautiful children clustered at the foot-board.

He had not spoken nor could she speak, but the solemnity with which she raised her right hand as to a listening Heaven called forth upon his lips what was possibly his last smile, and with the memory of this faint expression of confidence on his part, she left the room, to make her final attempt to solve the mystery of the missing document.

Facing the elderly lady in the hall, she addressed her with the force and soberness of one leading a forlorn hope:

"I want you to concentrate your mind upon what I have to say to you. Do you think you can do this?"

"I will try," replied the poor woman with a backward glance at the door which had just been closed upon her.

"What we want," said she, "is, as I stated before, an insight into the workings of your brain at the time you took the will from the safe. Try and follow what I have to say, Mrs. Quintard.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Dreams are no longer regarded by scientists as prophecies of the future or even as spontaneous and irrelevant conditions of thought, but as reflections of a near past, which can almost without exception be traced back to the occurrences which caused them. Your action with the will had its birth in some previous line of thought afterwards forgotten. Let us try and find that thought. Recall, if you can, just what you did or read yesterday."

Mrs. Quintard looked frightened.

"But, I have no memory," she objected. "I forget quickly, so quickly that in order to fulfil my engagements I have to keep a memorandum of every day's events. Yesterday? yesterday? What did I do yesterday? I went downtown for one thing, but I hardly know where."

"Perhaps your memorandum of yesterday's doings will help you."

"I will get it. But it won't give you the least help. I keep it only for my own eye, and——"

"Never mind; let me see it."

And she waited impatiently for it to be put in her hands.

But when she came to read the record of the last two days, this was all she found:

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY