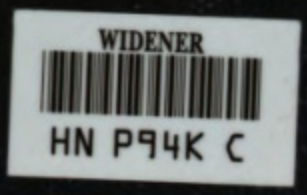
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# THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

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## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SCRAP OF GREY PAPER

As a rule, Spargo left the *Watchman* office at two o'clock. The paper had then gone to press. There was nothing for him, recently promoted to a sub-editorship, to do after he had passed the column for which he was responsible; as a matter of fact he could have gone home before the machines began their clatter. But he generally hung about, trifling, until two o'clock came. On this occasion, the morning of the 22nd of June, 1912, he stopped longer than usual, chatting with Hacket, who had charge of the foreign news, and who began telling him about a telegram which had just come through from Durazzo. What Hacket had to tell was interesting: Spargo lingered to hear all about it, and to discuss it. Altogether it was well beyond half-past two when he went out of the office, unconsciously puffing away from him as he reached the threshold the last breath of the atmosphere in which he had spent his midnight. In Fleet Street the air was fresh, almost to sweetness, and the first grey of the coming dawn was breaking faintly around the high silence of St. Paul's.

Spargo lived in Bloomsbury, on the west side of Russell Square. Every night and every morning he walked to and from the *Watchman* office by the same route—Southampton Row, Kingsway, the Strand, Fleet Street. He came to know several faces, especially amongst the



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police; he formed the habit of exchanging greetings with various officers whom he encountered at regular points as he went slowly homewards, smoking his pipe. And on this morning, as he drew near to Middle Temple Lane, he saw a policeman whom he knew, one Driscoll, standing at the entrance, looking about him. Further away another policeman appeared, sauntering. Driscoll raised an arm and signalled; then, turning, he saw Spargo. He moved a step or two towards him. Spargo saw news in his face.

"What is it?" asked Spargo.

Driscoll jerked a thumb over his shoulder, towards the partly open door of the lane. Within, Spargo saw a man hastily donning a waistcoat and jacket.

"He says," answered Driscoll, "him, there—the porter—that there's a man lying in one of them entries down the lane, and he thinks he's dead. Likewise, he thinks he's murdered."

Spargo echoed the word.

"But what makes him think that?" he asked, peeping with curiosity beyond Driscoll's burly form. "Why?"

"He says there's blood about him," answered Driscoll. He turned and glanced at the oncoming constable, and then turned again to Spargo. "You're a newspaper man, sir?" he suggested.

"I am," replied Spargo.

"You'd better walk down with us," said Driscoll, with a grin. "There'll be something to write pieces in the paper about. At least, there may be." Spargo made no answer. He continued to look down the lane,

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wondering what secret it held, until the other policeman came up. At the same moment the porter, now fully clothed, came out.

"Come on!" he said shortly. "I'll show you."

Driscoll murmured a word or two to the newly-arrived constable, and then turned to the porter.

"How came you to find him, then?" he asked

The porter jerked his head at the door which they were leaving.

"I heard that door slam," he replied, irritably, as if the fact which he mentioned caused him offence. "I know I did! So I got up to look around. Then—well, I saw that!"

He raised a hand, pointing down the lane. The three men followed his outstretched finger. And Spargo then saw a man's foot, booted, grey-socked, protruding from an entry on the left hand.

"Sticking out there, just as you see it now," said the porter. "I ain't touched it. And so——"

He paused and made a grimace as if at the memory of some unpleasant thing. Driscoll nodded comprehendingly.

"And so you went along and looked?" he suggested.

"Just so—just to see who it belonged to, as it might be."

"Just to see—what there was to see," agreed the porter. "Then I saw there was blood. And then—well, I made up the lane to tell one of you chaps."

"Best thing you could have done," said Driscoll. "Well, now then——"

The little procession came to a halt at the entry.

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The entry was a cold and formal thing of itself; not a nice place to lie dead in, having glazed white tiles for its walls and concrete for its flooring; something about its appearance in that grey morning air suggested to Spargo the idea of a mortuary. And that the man whose foot projected over the step was dead he had no doubt: the limpness of his pose certified to it.

For a moment none of the four men moved or spoke. The two policemen unconsciously stuck their thumbs in their belts and made play with their fingers; the porter rubbed his chin thoughtfully—Spargo remembered afterwards the rasping sound of this action; he himself put his hands in his pockets and began to jingle his money and his keys. Each man had his own thoughts as he contemplated the piece of human wreckage which lay before him.

"You'll notice," suddenly observed Driscoll, speaking in a hushed voice, "You'll notice that he's lying there in a queer way—same as if—as if he'd been put there. Sort of propped up against that wall, at first, and had slid down, like."

Spargo was taking in all the details with a professional eye. He saw at his feet the body of an elderly man; the face was turned away from him, crushed in against the glaze of the wall, but he judged the man to be elderly because of grey hair and whitening whisker; it was clothed in a good, well-made suit of grey check cloth—tweed—and the boots were good: so, too, was the linen cuff which projected from the sleeve that hung so limply. One leg was half doubled under the body; the other was stretched straight out across the threshold; the trunk

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was twisted to the wall. Over the white glaze of the tiles against which it and the shoulder towards which it had sunk were crushed there were gouts and stains of blood. And Driscoll, taking a hand out of his belt, pointed a finger at them.

"Seems to me," he said, slowly, "seems to me as how he's been struck down from behind as he came out of here. That blood's from his nose—gushed out as he fell. What do you say, Jim?" The other policeman coughed.

"Better get the inspector here," he said. "And the doctor and the ambulance. Dead—ain't he?"

Driscoll bent down and put a thumb on the hand which lay on the pavement.

"As ever they make 'em," he remarked laconically. "And stiff, too. Well, hurry up, Jim!"

Spargo waited until the inspector arrived; waited until the hand-ambulance came. More policemen came with it; they moved the body for transference to the mortuary, and Spargo then saw the dead man's face. He looked long and steadily at it while the police arranged the limbs, wondering all the time who it was that he gazed at, how he came to that end, what was the object of his murderer, and many other things. There was some professionalism in Spargo's curiosity, but there was also a natural dislike that a fellow-being should have been so unceremoniously smitten out of the world.

There was nothing very remarkable about the dead man's face. It was that of a man of apparently sixty to sixty-five years of age; plain, even homely of feature, clean-shaven, except for a fringe of white whisker,

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trimmed, after an old-fashioned pattern, between the ear and the point of the jaw. The only remarkable thing about it was that it was much lined and seamed; the wrinkles were many and deep around the corners of the lips and the angles of the eyes; this man, you would have said to yourself, has led a hard life and weathered storm, mental as well as physical.

Driscoll nudged Spargo with a turn of his elbow. He gave him a wink. "Better come down to the dead-house," he muttered confidentially.

"Why?" asked Spargo.

"They'll go through him," whispered Driscoll. "Search him, d'ye see? Then you'll get to know all about him, and so on. Help to write that piece in the paper, eh?"

Spargo hesitated. He had had a stiff night's work, and until his encounter with Driscoll he had cherished warm anticipation of the meal which would be laid out for him at his rooms, and of the bed into which he would subsequently tumble. Besides, a telephone message would send a man from the *Watchman* to the mortuary. This sort of thing was not in his line now, now——

"You'll be for getting one o' them big play-cards out with something about a mystery on it," suggested Driscoll. "You never know what lies at the bottom o' these affairs, no more you don't."

That last observation decided Spargo; moreover, the old instinct for getting news began to assert itself.

"All right," he said. "I'll go along with you."

And re-lighting his pipe he followed the little cor-

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tège through the streets, still deserted and quiet, and as he walked behind he reflected on the unobtrusive fashion in which murder could stalk about. Here was the work of murder, no doubt, and it was being quietly carried along a principal London thoroughfare, without fuss or noise, by officials to whom the dealing with it was all a matter of routine. Surely——

"My opinion," said a voice at Spargo's elbow, "my opinion is that it was done elsewhere. Not there! He was put there. That's what I say." Spargo turned and saw that the porter was at his side. He, too, was accompanying the body.

"Oh!" said Spargc. "You think——"

"I think he was struck down elsewhere and carried there," said the porter. "In somebody's chambers, maybe. I've known of some queer games in our bit of London! Well!—he never came in at my lodge last night—I'll stand to that. And who is he, I should like to know? From what I see of him, not the sort to be about our place."

"That's what we shall hear presently," said Spargo. "They're going to search him."

But Spargo was presently made aware that the searchers had found nothing. The police-surgeon said that the dead man had, without doubt, been struck down from behind by a terrible blow which had fractured the skull and caused death almost instantaneously. In Driscoll's opinion, the murder had been committed for the sake of plunder. For there was nothing whatever on the body. It was reasonable to suppose that a man who is well dressed would possess a watch and chain, and have

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money in his pockets, and possibly rings on his fingers. But there was nothing valuable to be found; in fact there was nothing at all to be found that could lead to identification—no letters, no papers, nothing. It was plain that whoever had struck the dead man down had subsequently stripped him of whatever was on him. The only clue to possible identity lay in the fact that a soft cap of grey cloth appeared to have been newly purchased at a fashionable shop in the West End.

Spargo went home; there seemed to be nothing to stop for. He ate his food and he went to bed, only to do poor things in the way of sleepin ·. He was not the sort to be impressed by horrors, but he recognized at last that the morning's event had destroyed his chance of rest; he accordingly rose, took a cold bath, drank a cup of coffee, and went out. He was not sure of any particular idea when he strolled away from Bloomsbury, but it did not surprise him when, half an hour later he found that he had walked down to the police station near which the unknown man's body lay in the mortuary. And there he met Driscoll, just going off duty. Driscoll grinned at sight of him.

"You're in luck," he said. " 'Tisn't five minutes since they found a bit of grey writing paper crumpled up in the poor man's waistcoat pocket—it had slipped into a crack. Come in, and you'll see it."

Spargo went into the inspector's office. In another minute he found himself staring at the scrap of paper. There was nothing on it but an address, scrawled in pencil:—Ronald Breton, Barrister, King's Bench Walk, Temple, London.

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## CHAPTER TWO

## HIS FIRST BRIEF

Spargo looked up at the inspector with a quick jerk of his head. "I know this man," he said.

The inspector showed new interest.

"What, Mr. Breton?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm on the *Watchman,* you know, sub-editor. I took an article from him the other day—article on 'Ideal Sites for Campers-Out.' He came to the office about it. So this was in the dead man's pocket?"

"Found in a hole in his pocket, I understand: I wasn't present myself. It's not much, but it may afford some clue to identity."

Spargo picked up the scrap of grey paper and looked closely at it. It seemed to him to be the sort of paper that is found in hotels and in clubs; it had been torn roughly from the sheet.

"What," he asked meditatively, "what will you do about getting this man identified?"

The inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, usual thing, I suppose. There'll be publicity, you know. I suppose you'll be doing a special account yourself, for your paper, eh? Then there'll be the others. And we shall put out the usual notice. Somebody will come forward to identify—sure to. And—"



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A man came into the office—a stolid-faced, quiet-mannered, soberly attired person, who might have been a respectable tradesman out for a stroll, and who gave the inspector a sidelong nod as he approached his desk, at the same time extending his hand towards the scrap of paper which Spargo had just laid down.

"I'll go along to King's Bench Walk and see Mr. Breton," he observed, looking at his watch. "It's just about ten—I daresay he'll be there now."

"I'm going there, too," remarked Spargo, but as if speaking to himself. "Yes, I'll go there."

The newcomer glanced at Spargo, and then at the inspector. The inspector nodded at Spargo.

"Journalist," he said, "Mr. Spargo of the *Watchman*. Mr. Spargo was there when the body was found. And he knows Mr. Breton." Then he nodded from Spargo to the stolid-faced person. "This is Detective-Sergeant Rathbury, from the Yard," he said to Spargo. "He's come to take charge of this case."

"Oh!" said Spargo blankly. "I see—what," he went on, with sudden abruptness, "what shall you do about Breton?"

"Get him to come and look at the body," replied Rathbury. "He may know the man and he mayn't. Anyway, his name and address are here, aren't they?"

"Come along," said Spargo. "I'll walk there with you."

Spargo remained in a species of brown study all the way along Tudor Street; his companion also maintained silence in a fashion which showed that he was by nature and custom a man of few words. It was not until the

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two were climbing the old balustrated staircase of the house in King's Bench Walk in which Ronald Breton's chambers were somewhere situate that Spargo spoke.

"Do you think that old chap was killed for what he may have had on him?" he asked, suddenly turning on the detective.

"I should like to know what he had on him before I answered that question, Mr. Spargo," replied Rathbury, with a smile.

"Yes," said Spargo, dreamily. "I suppose so. He might have had—nothing on him, eh?"

The detective laughed, and pointed to a board on which names were printed.

"We don't know anything yet, sir," he observed, "except that Mr. Breton is on the fourth floor. By which I conclude that it isn't long since he was eating his dinner."

"Oh, he's young—he's quite young," said Spargo. "I should say he's about four-and-twenty. I've met him only——"

At that moment the unmistakable sounds of girlish laughter came down the staircase. Two girls seemed to be laughing—presently masculine laughter mingled with the lighter feminine.

"Seems to be studying law in very pleasant fashion up here, anyway," said Rathbury. "Mr. Breton's chambers, too. And the door's open."

The outer oak door of Ronald Breton's chambers stood thrown wide; the inner one was well ajar; through the opening thus made Spargo and the detective obtained a full view of the interior of Mr. Ronald Breton's rooms.

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There, against a background of law books, bundles of papers tied up with pink tape, and black-framed pictures of famous legal notabilities, they saw a pretty, vivacious-eyed girl, who, perched on a chair, wigged and gowned, and flourishing a mass of crisp paper, was haranguing an imaginary judge and jury, to the amusement of a young man who had his back to the door, and of another girl who leant confidentially against his shoulder.

"I put it to you, gentlemen of the jury—I put it to you with confidence, feeling that you must be, must necessarily be, some, perhaps brothers, perhaps husbands, and fathers, can you, on your consciences do my client the great wrong, the irreparable injury, the—the——"

"Think of some more adjectives!" exclaimed the young man. "Hot and strong 'uns—pile 'em up. That's what they like—they—Hullo!"

This exclamation arose from the fact that at this point of the proceedings the detective rapped at the inner door, and then put his head round its edge. Whereupon the young lady who was orating from the chair, jumped hastily down; the other young lady withdrew from the young man's protecting arm; there was a feminine giggle and a feminine swishing of skirts, and a hasty bolt into an inner room, and Mr. Ronald Breton came forward, blushing a little, to greet the interrupter.

"Come in, come in!" he exclaimed hastily. "I——"

Then he paused, catching sight of Spargo, and held out his hand with a look of surprise.

"Oh—Mr. Spargo?" he said. "How do you do?—we—I—we were just having a lark—I'm off to court

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in a few minutes. What can I do for you, Mr. Spargo?"

He had backed to the inner door as he spoke, and he now closed it and turned again to the two men, looking from one to the other. The detective, on his part, was looking at the young barrister. He saw a tall, slimly-built youth, of handsome features and engaging presence, perfectly groomed, and immaculately garbed, and having upon him a general air of well-to-do-ness, and he formed the impression from these matters that Mr. Breton was one of those fortunate young men who may take up a profession but are certainly not dependent upon it. He turned and glanced at the journalist.

"How do you do?" said Spargo slowly. "I—the fact is, I came here with Mr. Rathbury. He—wants to see you. Detective-Sergeant Rathbury—of New Scotland Yard."

Spargo pronounced this formal introduction as if he were repeating a lesson. But he was watching the young barrister's face. And Breton turned to the detective with a look of surprise.

"Oh?" he said. "You wish——"

Rathbury had been fumbling in his pocket for the scrap of grey paper, which he had carefully bestowed in a much-worn memorandum-book. "I wished to ask a question, Mr. Breton," he said. "This morning, about a quarter to three, a man—elderly man—was found dead in Middle Temple Lane, and there seems little doubt that he was murdered. Mr. Spargo here—he was present when the body was found."

"Soon after," corrected Spargo. "A few minutes after."

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"When this body was examined at the mortuary," continued Rathbury, in his matter-of-fact, business-like tones, "nothing was found that could lead to identification. The man appears to have been robbed. There was nothing whatever on him—but this bit of torn paper, which was found in a hole in the lining of his waistcoat pocket. It's got your name and address on it, Mr. Breton. See?"

Ronald Breton took the scrap of paper and looked at it with knitted brows.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "So it has; that's queer. What's he like, this man?"

Rathbury glanced at a clock which stood on the mantelpiece.

"Will you step round and take a look at him, Mr. Breton?" he said. "It's close by."

"Well—I—the fact is, I've got a case on, in Mr. Justice Borrow's court," Breton answered, also glancing at his clock. "But it won't be called until after eleven. Will——"

"Plenty of time, sir," said Rathbury; "it won't take you ten minutes to go round and back again—a look will do. You don't recognize this handwriting, I suppose?"

Breton still held the scrap of paper in his fingers. He looked at it again, intently.

"No!" he answered. "I don't. I don't know it at all—I can't think, of course, who this man could be, to have my name and address. I thought he might have been some country solicitor, wanting my professional services, you know," he went on, with a shy smile at

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Spargo; "but, three—three o'clock in the morning, eh?"

"The doctor," observed Rathbury, "the doctor thinks he had been dead about two and a half hours."

Breton turned to the inner door.

"I'll—I'll just tell these ladies I'm going out for a quarter of an hour," he said. "They're going over to the court with me—I got my first brief yesterday," he went on with a boyish laugh, glancing right and left at his visitors. "It's nothing much—small case—but I promised my fiancée and her sister that they should be present, you know. A moment."

He disappeared into the next room and came back a moment later in all the glory of a new silk hat. Spargo, a young man who was never very particular about his dress, began to contrast his own attire with the butterfly appearance of this youngster; he had been quick to notice that the two girls who had whisked into the inner room had been similarly garbed in fine raiment, more characteristic of Mayfair than of Fleet Street. Already he felt a strange curiosity about Breton, and about the young ladies whom he heard talking behind the inner door.

"Well, come on," said Breton. "Let's go straight there."

The mortuary to which Rathbury led the way was cold, drab, repellent to the general gay sense of the summer morning. Spargo shivered involuntarily as he entered it and took a first glance around. But the young barrister showed no sign of feeling or concern; he looked quickly about him and stepped alertly to the side of the dead man, from whose face the detective was turn-

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ing back a cloth. He looked steadily and earnestly at the fixed features. Then he drew back, shaking his head.

"No!" he said with decision. "Don't know him—don't know him from Adam. Never set eyes on him in my life, that I know of."

Rathbury replaced the cloth.

"I didn't suppose you would," he remarked. "Well, I expect we must go on the usual lines. Somebody'll identify him."

"You say he was murdered?" said Breton. "Is that—certain?"

Rathbury jerked his thumb at the corpse.

"The back of his skull is smashed in," he said laconically. "The doctor says he must have been struck down from behind—and a fearful blow, too. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Breton."

"Oh, all right!" said Breton. "Well, you know where to find me if you want me. I shall be curious about this. Good-bye—good-bye, Mr. Spargo."

The young barrister hurried away, and Rathbury turned to the journalist.

"I didn't expect anything from that," he remarked. "However, it was a thing to be done. You are going to write about this for your paper?"

Spargo nodded.

"Well," continued Rathbury, "I've sent a man to Fiskie's, the hatter's, where that cap came from, you know. We may get a bit of information from that quarter—it's possible. If you like to meet me here at twelve o'clock I'll tell you anything I've heard. Just now I'm going to get some breakfast."

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"I'll meet you here," said Spargo, "at twelve o'clock."

He watched Rathbury go away round one corner; he himself suddenly set off round another. He went to the *Watchman* office, wrote a few lines, which he enclosed in an envelope for the day-editor, and went out again. Somehow or other, his feet led him up Fleet Street, and before he quite realized what he was doing he found himself turning into the Law Courts.

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CHAPTER THREE

## THE CLUE OF THE CAP

Having no clear conception of what had led him to these scenes of litigation, Spargo went wandering aimlessly about in the great hall and the adjacent corridors until an official, who took him to be lost, asked him if there was any particular part of the building he wanted. For a moment Spargo stared at the man as if he did not comprehend his question. Then his mental powers reasserted themselves.

"Isn't Mr. Justice Borrow sitting in one of the courts this morning?" he suddenly asked.

"Number seven," replied the official. "What's your case—when's it down?"

"I haven't got a case," said Spargo. "I'm a pressman—reporter, you know."

The official stuck out a finger.

"Round the corner—first to your right—second on the left," he said automatically. "You'll find plenty of room—nothing much doing there this morning."

He turned away, and Spargo recommenced his apparently aimless perambulation of the dreary, depressing corridors.

"Upon my honour!" he muttered. "Upon my hon-



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our, I really don't know what I've come up here for. I've no business here.''

Just then he turned a corner and came face to face with Ronald Breton. The young barrister was now in his wig and gown and carried a bundle of papers tied up with pink tape; he was escorting two young ladies, who were laughing and chattering as they tripped along at his side. And Spargo, glancing at them meditatively, instinctively told himself which of them it was that he and Rathbury had overheard as she made her burlesque speech: it was not the elder one, who walked by Ronald Breton with something of an air of proprietorship, but the younger, the girl with the laughing eyes and the vivacious smile, and it suddenly dawned upon him that somewhere, deep within him, there had been a notion, a hope of seeing this girl again—why, he could not then think.

Spargo, thus coming face to face with these three, mechanically lifted his hat. Breton stopped, half inquisitive. His eyes seemed to ask a question.

"Yes," said Spargo. "I—the fact is, I remembered that you said you were coming up here, and I came after you. I want—when you've time—to have a talk, to ask you a few questions. About—this affair of the dead man, you know."

Breton nodded. He tapped Spargo on the arm.

"Look here," he said. "When this case of mine is over, I can give you as much time as you like. Can you wait a bit? Yes? Well, I say, do me a favour. I was taking these ladies round to the gallery—round there, and up the stairs—and I'm a bit pressed for time—I've

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a solicitor waiting for me. You take them—there's a good fellow; then, when the case is over, bring them down here, and you and I will talk. Here—I'll introduce you all—no ceremony. Miss Aylmore—Miss Jessie Aylmore. Mr. Spargo—of the *Watchman*. Now, I'm off!" Breton turned on the instant; his gown whisked round a corner, and Spargo found himself staring at two smiling girls. He saw then that both were pretty and attractive, and that one seemed to be the elder by some three or four years.

"That is very cool of Ronald," observed the elder young lady. "Perhaps his scheme doesn't fit in with yours, Mr. Spargo? Pray don't——"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Spargo, feeling himself uncommonly stupid. "I've nothing to do. But—where did Mr. Breton say you wished to be taken?"

"Into the gallery of number seven court," said the younger girl promptly. "Round this corner—I think I know the way."

Spargo, still marvelling at the rapidity with which affairs were moving that morning, bestirred himself to act as cicerone, and presently led the two young ladies to the very front of one of those public galleries from which idlers and specially-interested spectators may see and hear the proceedings which obtain in the badly-ventilated, ill-lighted tanks wherein justice is dispensed at the Law Courts. There was no one else in that gallery; the attendant in the corridor outside seemed to be vastly amazed that any one should wish to enter it, and he presently opened the door, beckoned to Spargo, and came half-way down the stairs to meet him.

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"Nothing much going on here this morning," he whispered behind a raised hand. "But there's a nice breach case in number five—get you three good seats there if you like."

Spargo declined this tempting offer, and went back to his charges. He had decided by that time that Miss Aylmore was about twenty-three, and her sister about eighteen; he also thought that young Breton was a lucky dog to be in possession of such a charming future wife and an equally charming sister-in-law. And he dropped into a seat at Miss Jessie Aylmore's side, and looked around him as if he were much awed by his surroundings.

"I suppose one can talk until the judge enters?" he whispered. "Is this really Mr. Breton's first case?"

"His very first—all on his own responsibility, any way," replied Spargo's companion, smiling. "And he's very nervous—and so's my sister. Aren't you, now, Evelyn?"

Evelyn Aylmore looked at Spargo, and smiled quietly.

"I suppose one's always nervous about first appearances," she said. "However, I think Ronald's got plenty of confidence, and, as he says, it's not much of a case: it isn't even a jury case. I'm afraid you'll find it dull, Mr. Spargo—it's only something about a promissory note."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you," replied Spargo, unconsciously falling back on a favourite formula. "I always like to hear lawyers—they manage to say such a lot about—about——"

"About nothing," said Jessie Aylmore. "But there

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—so do gentlemen who write for the papers, don't they?"

Spargo was about to admit that there was a good deal to be said on that point when Miss Aylmore suddenly drew her sister's attention to a man who had just entered the well of the court.

"Look, Jessie!" she observed. "There's Mr. Elphick!"

Spargo looked down at the person indicated: an elderly, large-faced, smooth-shaven man, a little inclined to stoutness, who, wigged and gowned, was slowly making his way to a corner seat just outside that charmed inner sanctum wherein only King's Counsel are permitted to sit. He dropped into this in a fashion which showed that he was one of those men who loved personal comfort; he bestowed his plump person at the most convenient angle and fitting a monocle in his right eye, glanced around him. There were a few of his professional brethren in his vicinity; there were half a dozen solicitors and their clerks in conversation with one or other of them; there were court officials. But the gentleman of the monocle swept all these with an indifferent look and cast his eyes upward until he caught sight of the two girls. Thereupon he made a most gracious bow in their direction; his broad face beamed in a genial smile, and he waved a white hand.

"Do you know Mr. Elphick, Mr. Spargo?" enquired the younger Miss Aylmore.

"I rather think I've seen him, somewhere about the Temple," answered Spargo. "In fact, I'm sure I have."

"His chambers are in Paper Buildings," said Jessie.

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"Sometimes he gives tea-parties in them. He is Ronald's guardian, and preceptor, and mentor, and all that, and I suppose he's dropped into this court to hear how his pupil goes on."

"Here is Ronald," whispered Miss Aylmore.

"And here," said her sister, "is his lordship, looking very cross. Now, Mr. Spargo, you're in for it."

Spargo, to tell the truth, paid little attention to what went on beneath him. The case which young Breton presently opened was a commercial one, involving certain rights and properties in a promissory note; it seemed to the journalist that Breton dealt with it very well, showing himself master of the financial details, and speaking with readiness and assurance. He was much more interested in his companions, and especially in the younger one, and he was meditating on how he could improve his further acquaintance when he awoke to the fact that the defence, realizing that it stood no chance, had agreed to withdraw, and that Mr. Justice Borrow was already giving judgment in Ronald Breton's favour. In another minute he was walking out of the gallery in rear of the two sisters.

"Very good—very good, indeed," he said, absent-mindedly. "I thought he put his facts very clearly and concisely."

Downstairs, in the corridor, Ronald Breton was talking to Mr. Elphick. He pointed a finger at Spargo as the latter came up with the girls: Spargo gathered that Breton was speaking of the murder and of his, Spargo's, connection with it. And directly they approached, he spoke.

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"This is Mr. Spargo, sub-editor of the *Watchman*," Breton said. "Mr. Elphick—Mr. Spargo. I was just telling Mr. Elphick, Spargo, that you saw this poor man soon after he was found."

Spargo, glancing at Mr. Elphick, saw that he was deeply interested. The elderly barrister took him—literally—by the button-hole.

"My dear sir!" he said. "You—saw this poor fellow? Lying dead—in the third entry down Middle Temple Lane? The third entry, eh?"

"Yes," replied Spargo, simply. "I saw him. It was the third entry."

"Singular!" said Mr. Elphick, musingly. "I know a man who lives in that house. In fact, I visited him last night, and did not leave until nearly midnight. And this unfortunate man had Mr. Ronald Breton's name and address in his pocket?"

Spargo nodded. He looked at Breton, and pulled out his watch. Just then he had no idea of playing the part of informant to Mr. Elphick.

"Yes, that's so," he answered shortly. Then, looking at Breton significantly, he added, "If you can give me those few minutes, now——?"

"Yes—yes!" responded Ronald Breton, nodding. "I understand. Evelyn—I'll leave you and Jessie to Mr. Elphick: I must go."

Mr. Elphick seized Spargo once more.

"My dear sir!" he said, eagerly. "Do you—do you think I could possibly see—the body?"

"It's at the mortuary," answered Spargo. "I don't know what their regulations are."

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Then he escaped with Breton. They had crossed Fleet Street and were in the quieter shades of the Temple before Spargo spoke.

"About what I wanted to say to you," he said at last. "It was—this. I—well, I've always wanted, as a journalist, to have a real big murder case. I think this is one. I want to go right into it—thoroughly, first and last. And—I think you can help me."

"How do you know that it is a murder case?" asked Breton quietly.

"It's a murder case," answered Spargo, stolidly. "I feel it. Instinct, perhaps. I'm going to ferret out the truth. And it seems to me——"

He paused and gave his companion a sharp glance.

"It seems to me," he presently continued, "that the clue lies in that scrap of paper. That paper and that man are connecting links between you and—somebody else."

"Possibly," agreed Breton. "You want to find the somebody else?"

"I want you to help me to find the somebody else," answered Spargo. "I believe this is a big, very big affair: I want to do it. I don't believe in police methods—much. By the by, I'm just going to meet Rathbury. He may have heard of something. Would you like to come?"

Breton ran into his chambers in King's Bench Walk, left his gown and wig, and walked round with Spargo to the police office. Rathbury came out as they were stepping in.

"Oh!" he said. "Ah!—I've got what may be help-

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ful, Mr. Spargo. I told you I'd sent a man to Fiskie's, the hatter? Well, he's just returned. The cap which the dead man was wearing was bought at Fiskie's yesterday afternoon, and it was sent to Mr. Marbury, Room 20, at the Anglo-Orient Hotel."

"Where is that?" asked Spargo.

"Waterloo district," answered Rathbury. "A small house, I believe. Well, I'm going there. Are you coming?"

"Yes," replied Spargo. "Of course. And Mr. Breton wants to come, too."

"If I'm not in the way," said Breton.

Rathbury laughed.

"Well, we may find out something about this scrap of paper," he observed. And he waved a signal to the nearest taxi-cab driver.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ANGLO-ORIENT HOTEL

The house at which Spargo and his companions presently drew up was an old-fashioned place in the immediate vicinity of Waterloo Railway Station—a plain-fronted, four-square erection, essentially mid-Victorian in appearance, and suggestive, somehow, of the very early days of railway travelling. Anything more in contrast with the modern ideas of a hotel it would have been difficult to find in London, and Ronald Breton said so as he and the others crossed the pavement.

"And yet a good many people used to favour this place on their way to and from Southampton in the old days," remarked Rathbury. "And I daresay that old travellers, coming back from the East after a good many years' absence, still rush in here. You see, it's close to the station, and travellers have a knack of walking into the nearest place when they've a few thousand miles of steamboat and railway train behind them. Look there, now!"

They had crossed the threshold as the detective spoke, and as they entered a square, heavily-furnished hall, he made a sidelong motion of his head towards a bar on the left, wherein stood or lounged a number of men who from their general appearance, their slouched hats, and



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their bronzed faces appeared to be Colonials, or at any rate to have spent a good part of their time beneath Oriental skies. There was a murmur of tongues that had a Colonial accent in it; an aroma of tobacco that suggested Sumatra and Trichinopoly, and Rathbury wagged his head sagely. "Lay you anything the dead man was a Colonial, Mr. Spargo," he remarked. "Well, now, I suppose that's the landlord and landlady."

There was an office facing them, at the rear of the hall, and a man and woman were regarding them from a box window which opened above a ledge on which lay a register book. They were middle-aged folk: the man, a fleshy, round-faced, somewhat pompous-looking individual, who might at some time have been a butler; the woman a tall, spare-figured, thin-featured, sharp-eyed person, who examined the newcomers with an enquiring gaze. Rathbury went up to them with easy confidence.

"You the landlord of this house, sir?" he asked. "Mr. Walters? Just so—and Mrs. Walters, I presume?"

The landlord made a stiff bow and looked sharply at his questioner.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he enquired.

"A little matter of business, Mr. Walters," replied Rathbury, pulling out a card. "You'll see there who I am—Detective-Sergeant Rathbury, of the Yard. This is Mr. Frank Spargo, a newspaper man; this is Mr. Ronald Breton, a barrister."

The landlady, hearing their names and description, pointed to a side door, and signed Rathbury and his

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companions to pass through. Obeying her pointed finger, they found themselves in a small private parlour. Walters closed the two doors which led into it and looked at his principal visitor.

"What is it, Mr. Rathbury?" he enquired. "Anything wrong?"

"We want a bit of information," answered Rathbury, almost with indifference.

"Did anybody of the name of Marbury put up here yesterday—elderly man, grey hair, fresh complexion?"

Mrs. Walters started, glancing at her husband.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I knew some enquiry would be made. Yes—a Mr. Marbury took a room here yesterday morning, just after the noon train got in from Southampton. Number 20 he took. But—he didn't use it last night. He went out—very late—and he never came back."

Rathbury nodded. Answering a sign from the landlord, he took a chair and, sitting down, looked at Mrs. Walters.

"What made you think some enquiry would be made, ma'am?" he asked. "Had you noticed anything?"

Mrs. Walters seemed a little confused by this direct question. Her husband gave vent to a species of growl.

"Nothing to notice," he muttered. "Her way of speaking—that's all."

"Well—why I said that was this," said the landlady. "He happened to tell us, did Mr. Marbury, that he hadn't been in London for over twenty years, and couldn't remember anything about it, him, he said, never having known much about London at any time. And,

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of course, when he went out so late and never came back, why, naturally, I thought something had happened to him, and that there'd be enquiries made."

"Just so—just so!" said Rathbury. "So you would, ma'am—so you would. Well, something has happened to him. He's dead. What's more, there's strong reason to think he was murdered."

Mr. and Mrs. Walters received this announcement with proper surprise and horror, and the landlord suggested a little refreshment to his visitors. Spargo and Breton declined, on the ground that they had work to do during the afternoon; Rathbury accepted it, evidently as a matter of course.

"My respects," he said, lifting his glass. "Well, now, perhaps you'll just tell me what you know of this man? I may as well tell you, Mr. and Mrs. Walters, that he was found dead in Middle Temple Lane this morning, at a quarter to three; that there wasn't anything on him but his clothes and a scrap of paper which bore this gentleman's name and address; that this gentleman knows nothing whatever of him, and that I traced him here because he bought a cap at a West End hatter's yesterday, and had it sent to your hotel."

"Yes," said Mrs. Walters quickly, "that's so. And he went out in that cap last night. Well—we don't know much about him. As I said, he came in here about a quarter past twelve yesterday morning, and booked Number 20. He had a porter with him that brought a trunk and a bag—they're in 20 now, of course. He told me that he had stayed at this house over twenty years ago, on his way to Australia—that, of course, was long

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before we took it. And he signed his name in the book as John Marbury.''

"We'll look at that, if you please,'' said Rathbury.

Walters fetched in the register and turned the leaf to the previous day's entries. They all bent over the dead man's writing.

"'John Marbury, Coolumbidgee, New South Wales,'" said Rathbury. "Ah—now I was wondering if that writing would be the same as that on the scrap of paper, Mr. Breton. But, you see, it isn't—it's quite different.''

"Quite different,'' said Breton. He, too, was regarding the handwriting with great interest. And Rathbury noticed his keen inspection of it, and asked another question.

"Ever seen that writing before?'' he suggested.

"Never,'' answered Breton. "And yet—there's something very familiar about it.''

"Then the probability is that you have seen it before,'' remarked Rathbury. "Well—now we'll hear a little more about Marbury's doings here. Just tell me all you know, Mr. and Mrs. Walters.''

"My wife knows most,'' said Walters. "I scarcely saw the man—I don't remember speaking with him.''

"No,'' said Mrs. Walters. "You didn't—you weren't much in his way. Well,'' she continued, "I showed him up to his room. He talked a bit—said he'd just landed at Southampton from Melbourne.''

"Did he mention his ship?'' asked Rathbury. "But if he didn't, it doesn't matter, for we can find out.''

"I believe the name's on his things,'' answered the landlady. "There are some labels of that sort. Well,

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he asked for a chop to be cooked for him at once, as he was going out. He had his chop, and he went out at exactly one o'clock, saying to me that he expected he'd get lost, as he didn't know London well at any time, and shouldn't know it at all now. He went outside there—I saw him—looked about him and walked off towards Blackfriars way. During the afternoon the cap you spoke of came for him—from Fiskie's. So, of course, I judged he'd been Piccadilly way. But he himself never came in until ten o'clock. And then he brought a gentleman with him."

"Aye?" said Rathbury. "A gentleman, now? Did you see him?"

"Just," replied the landlady. "They went straight up to 20, and I just caught a mere glimpse of the gentleman as they turned up the stairs. A tall, well-built gentleman, with a grey beard, very well dressed as far as I could see, with a top hat and a white silk muffler round his throat, and carrying an umbrella."

"And they went to Marbury's room?" said Rathbury. "What then?"

"Well, then, Mr. Marbury rang for some whiskey and soda," continued Mrs. Walters. "He was particular to have a decanter of whiskey: that, and a syphon of soda were taken up there. I heard nothing more until nearly midnight; then the hall-porter told me that the gentleman in 20 had gone out, and had asked him if there was a night-porter—as, of course, there is. He went out at half-past eleven."

"And the other gentleman?" asked Rathbury.

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"The other gentleman," answered the landlady, "went out with him. The hall-porter said they turned towards the station. And that was the last anybody in this house saw of Mr. Marbury. He certainly never came back."

"That," observed Rathbury with a quiet smile, "that is quite certain, ma'am? Well—I suppose we'd better see this Number 20 room, and have a look at what he left there."

"Everything," said Mrs. Walters, "is just as he left it. Nothing's been touched."

It seemed to two of the visitors that there was little to touch. On the dressing-table lay a few ordinary articles of toilet—none of them of any quality or value: the dead man had evidently been satisfied with the plain necessities of life. An overcoat hung from a peg: Rathbury, without ceremony, went through its pockets; just as unceremoniously he proceeded to examine trunk and bag, and finding both unlocked, he laid out on the bed every article they contained and examined each separately and carefully. And he found nothing whereby he could gather any clue to the dead owner's identity.

"There you are!" he said, making an end of his task. "You see, it's just the same with these things as with the clothes he had on him. There are no papers—there's nothing to tell who he was, what he was after, where he'd come from—though that we may find out in other ways. But it's not often that a man travels without some clue to his identity. Beyond the fact that some of this linen was, you see, bought in Melbourne, we

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know nothing of him. Yet he must have had papers and money on him. Did you see anything of his money, now, ma'am?" he asked, suddenly turning to Mrs. Walters. "Did he pull out his purse in your presence, now?"

"Yes," answered the landlady, with promptitude. "He came into the bar for a drink after he'd been up to his room. He pulled out a handful of gold when he paid for it—a whole handful. There must have been some thirty to forty sovereigns and half-sovereigns."

"And he hadn't a penny piece on him—when found," muttered Rathbury.

"I noticed another thing, too," remarked the landlady. "He was wearing a very fine gold watch and chain, and had a splendid ring on his left hand—little finger—gold, with a big diamond in it."

"Yes," said the detective, thoughtfully, "I noticed that he'd worn a ring, and that it had been a bit tight for him. Well—now there's only one thing to ask about. Did your chambermaid notice if he left any torn paper around—tore any letters up, or anything like that?"

But the chambermaid, produced, had not noticed anything of the sort; on the contrary, the gentleman of Number 20 had left his room very tidy indeed. So Rathbury intimated that he had no more to ask, and nothing further to say, just then, and he bade the landlord and landlady of the Anglo-Orient Hotel good morning, and went away, followed by the two young men.

"What next?" asked Spargo, as they gained the street.

"The next thing," answered Rathbury, "is to find the man with whom Marbury left this hotel last night."

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"And how's that to be done?" asked Spargo.

"At present," replied Rathbury, "I don't know."

And with a careless nod, he walked off, apparently desirous of being alone.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# SPARGO WISHES TO SPECIALIZE

The barrister and the journalist, left thus unceremoniously on a crowded pavement, looked at each other. Breton laughed.

"We don't seem to have gained much information," he remarked. "I'm about as wise as ever."

"No—wiser," said Spargo. "At any rate, I am. I know now that this dead man called himself John Marbury; that he came from Australia; that he only landed at Southampton yesterday morning, and that he was in the company last night of a man whom we have had described to us—a tall, grey-bearded, well-dressed man, presumably a gentleman."

Breton shrugged his shoulders.

"I should say that description would fit a hundred thousand men in London," he remarked.

"Exactly—so it would," answered Spargo. "But we know that it was one of the hundred thousand, or half-million, if you like. The thing is to find that one—the one."

"And you think you can do it?"

"I think I'm going to have a big try at it."

Breton shrugged his shoulders again.



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"What?—by going up to every man who answers the description, and saying 'Sir, are you the man who accompanied John Marbury to the Aglo——'"

Spargo suddenly interrupted him.

"Look here!" he said. "Didn't you say that you knew a man who lives in that block in the entry of which Marbury was found?"

"No, I didn't," answered Breton. "It was Mr. Elphick who said that. All the same, I do know that man—he's Mr. Cardlestone, another barrister. He and Mr. Elphick are friends—they're both enthusiastic philatelists—stamp collectors, you know—and I dare say Mr. Elphick was round there last night examining something new Cardlestone's got hold of. Why?"

"I'd like to go round there and make some enquiries," replied Spargo. "If you'd be kind enough to——"

"Oh, I'll go with you!" responded Breton, with alacrity. "I'm just as keen about this business as you are, Spargo! I want to know who this man Marbury is, and how he came to have my name and address on him. Now, if I had been a well-known man in my profession, you know, why—"

"Yes," said Spargo, as they got into a cab, "yes, that would have explained a lot. It seems to me that we'll get at the murderer through that scrap of paper a lot quicker than through Rathbury's line. Yes, that's what I think."

Breton looked at his companion with interest.

"But—you don't know what Rathbury's line is," he remarked.

"Yes, I do," said Spargo. "Rathbury's gone off to

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discover who the man is with whom Marbury left the Anglo-Orient Hotel last night. That's his line."

"And you want——?"

"I want to find out the full significance of that bit of paper, and who wrote it," answered Spargo. "I want to know why that old man was coming to you when he was murdered."

Breton started.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I—I never thought of that. You—you really think he was coming to me when he was struck down?"

"Certain. Hadn't he got an address in the Temple? Wasn't he in the Temple? Of course, he was trying to find you."

"But—the late hour?"

"No matter. How else can you explain his presence in the Temple? I think he was asking his way. That's why I want to make some enquiries in this block."

It appeared to Spargo that a considerable number of people, chiefly of the office-boy variety, were desirous of making enquiries about the dead man. Being luncheon-hour, that bit of Middle Temple Lane where the body was found, was thick with the inquisitive and the sensation-seeker, for the news of the murder had spread, and though there was nothing to see but the bare stones on which the body had lain, there were more open mouths and staring eyes around the entry than Spargo had seen for many a day. And the nuisance had become so great that the occupants of the adjacent chambers had sent for a policeman to move the curious away, and when Spargo and his companion presented them-

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selves at the entry this policeman was being lectured as to his duties by a little weazen-faced gentleman, in very snuffy and old-fashioned garments, and an ancient silk hat, who was obviously greatly exercised by the unwonted commotion.

"Drive them all out into the street!" exclaimed this personage. "Drive them all away, constable—into Fleet Street or upon the Embankment—anywhere, so long as you rid this place of them. This is a disgrace, and an inconvenience, a nuisance, a——"

"That's old Cardlestone," whispered Breton. "He's always irascible, and I don't suppose we'll get anything out of him. Mr. Cardlestone," he continued, making his way up to the old gentleman who was now retreating up the stone steps, brandishing an umbrella as ancient as himself. "I was just coming to see you, sir. This is Mr. Spargo, a journalist, who is much interested in this murder. He——"

"I know nothing about the murder, my dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Cardlestone. "And I never talk to journalists—a pack of busybodies, sir, saving your presence. I am not aware that any murder has been committed, and I object to my doorway being filled by a pack of office boys and street loungers. Murder indeed! I suppose the man fell down these steps and broke his neck—drunk, most likely."

He opened his outer door as he spoke, and Breton, with a reassuring smile and a nod at Spargo, followed him into his chambers on the first landing, motioning the journalist to keep at their heels.

"Mr. Elphick tells me that he was with you until a

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late hour last evening, Mr. Cardlestone," he said. "Of course, neither of you heard anything suspicious?"

"What should we hear that was suspicious in the Temple, sir?" demanded Mr. Cardlestone, angrily. "I hope the Temple is free from that sort of thing, young Mr. Breton. Your respected guardian and myself had a quiet evening on our usual peaceful pursuits, and when he went away all was as quiet as the grave, sir. What may have gone on in the chambers above and around me I know not! Fortunately, our walls are thick, sir—substantial. I say, sir, the man probably fell down and broke his neck. What he was doing here, I do not presume to say."

"Well, it's guess, you know, Mr. Cardlestone," remarked Breton, again winking at Spargo. "But all that was found on this man was a scrap of paper on which my name and address were written. That's practically all that was known of him, except that he'd just arrived from Australia."

Mr. Cardlestone suddenly turned on the young barrister with a sharp, acute glance.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "What's this? You say this man had your name and address on him, young Breton! —yours? And that he came from—Australia?"

"That's so," answered Breton. "That's all that's known."

Mr. Cardlestone put aside his umbrella, produced a bandanna handkerchief of strong colours, and blew his nose in a reflective fashion.

"That's a mysterious thing," he observed. "Um—does Elphick know all that?"

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Breton looked at Spargo as if he was asking him for an explanation of Mr. Cardlestone's altered manner. And Spargo took up the conversation.

"No," he said. "All that Mr. Elphick knows is that Mr. Ronald Breton's name and address were on the scrap of paper found on the body. Mr. Elphick"—here Spargo paused and looked at Breton—"Mr. Elphick," he presently continued, slowly transferring his glance to the old barrister, "spoke of going to view the body."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Cardlestone, eagerly. "It can be seen? Then I'll go and see it. Where is it?"

Breton started.

"But—my dear sir!" he said. "Why?"

Mr. Cardlestone picked up his umbrella again.

"I feel a proper curiosity about a mystery which occurs at my very door," he said. "Also, I have known more than one man who went to Australia. This might—I say might, young gentlemen—might be a man I had once known. Show me where this body is."

Breton looked helplessly at Spargo: it was plain that he did not understand the turn that things were taking. But Spargo was quick to seize an opportunity. In another minute he was conducting Mr. Cardlestone through the ins and outs of the Temple towards Blackfriars. And as they turned into Tudor Street they encountered Mr. Elphick.

"I am going to the mortuary," he remarked. "So, I suppose, are you, Cardlestone? Has anything more been discovered, young man?"

Spargo tried a chance shot—at what he did not know.

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"The man's name was Marbury," he said. "He was from Australia."

He was keeping a keen eye on Mr. Elphick, but he failed to see that Mr. Elphick showed any of the surprise which Mr. Cardlestone had exhibited. Rather, he seemed indifferent.

"Oh?" he said—"Marbury? And from Australia. Well—I should like to see the body."

Spargo and Breton had to wait outside the mortuary while the two elder gentlemen went in. There was nothing to be learnt from either when they reappeared.

"We don't know the man," said Mr. Elphick, calmly. "As Mr. Cardlestone, I understand, has said to you already—we have known men who went to Australia, and as this man was evidently wandering about the Temple, we thought it might have been one of them, come back. But—we don't recognize him."

"Couldn't recognize him," said Mr. Cardlestone. "No!"

They went away together arm in arm, and Breton looked at Spargo.

"As if anybody on earth ever fancied they'd recognize him!" he said. "Well—what are you going to do now, Spargo? I must go."

Spargo, who had been digging his walking-stick into a crack in the pavement, came out of a fit of abstraction.

"I?" he said. "Oh—I'm going to the office." And he turned abruptly away, and walking straight off to the editorial rooms at the *Watchman*, made for one in which sat the official guardian of the editor. "Try to get me a few minutes with the chief," he said.

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The private secretary looked up.

"Really important?" he asked.

"Big!" answered Spargo. "Fix it."

Once closeted with the great man, whose idiosyncrasies he knew pretty well by that time, Spargo lost no time.

"You've heard about this murder in Middle Temple Lane?" he suggested.

"The mere facts," replied the editor, tersely.

"I was there when the body was found," continued Spargo, and gave a brief résumé of his doings. "I'm certain this is a most unusual affair," he went on. "It's as full of mystery as—as it could be. I want to give my attention to it. I want to specialize on it. I can make such a story of it as we haven't had for some time—ages. Let me have it. And to start with, let me have two columns for tomorrow morning. I'll make it—big!"

The editor looked across his desk at Spargo's eager face.

"Your other work?" he said.

"Well in hand," replied Spargo. "I'm ahead a whole week—both articles and reviews. I can tackle both."

The editor put his finger tips together.

"Have you got some idea about this, young man?" he asked.

"I've got a great idea," answered Spargo. He faced the great man squarely, and stared at him until he had brought a smile to the editorial face. "That's why I want to do it," he added. "And—it's not mere boasting nor over-confidence—I know I shall do it better than anybody else."

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The editor considered matters for a brief moment.

"You mean to find out who killed this man?" he said at last.

Spargo nodded his head—twice.

"I'll find that out," he said doggedly.

The editor picked up a pencil, and bent to his desk.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead. You shall have your two columns."

Spargo went quietly away to his own nook and corner. He got hold of a block of paper and began to write. He was going to show how to do things.

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# CHAPTER SIX

## WITNESS TO A MEETING

Ronald Breton walked into the *Watchman* office and into Spargo's room next morning holding a copy of the current issue in his hand. He waved it at Spargo with an enthusiasm which was almost boyish.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "That's the way to do it, Spargo! I congratulate you. Yes, that's the way—certain!"

Spargo, idly turning over a pile of exchanges, yawned.

"What way?" he asked indifferently.

"The way you've written this thing up," said Breton. "It's a hundred thousand times better than the usual cut-and-dried account of a murder. It's—it's like a—a romance!"

"Merely a new method of giving news," said Spargo. He picked up a copy of the *Watchman*, and glanced at his two columns, which had somehow managed to make themselves into three, viewing the displayed lettering, the photograph of the dead man, the line drawing of the entry in Middle Temple Lane, and the facsimile of the scrap of grey paper, with a critical eye. "Yes—merely a new method," he continued. "The question is—will it achieve its object?"

"What's the object?" asked Breton.

Spargo fished out a box of cigarettes from an untidy



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drawer, pushed it over to his visitor, helped himself, and tilting back his chair, put his feet on his desk.

"The object?" he said, drily. "Oh, well, the object is the ultimate detection of the murderer."

"You're after that?"

"I'm after that—just that."

"And not—not simply out to make effective news?"

"I'm out to find the murderer of John Marbury," said Spargo deliberately slow in his speech. "And I'll find him."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much in the way of clues, so far," remarked Breton. "I see—nothing. Do you?"

Spargo sent a spiral of scented smoke into the air.

"I want to know an awful lot," he said. "I'm hungering for news. I want to know who John Marbury is. I want to know what he did with himself between the time when he walked out of the Anglo-Orient Hotel, alive and well, and the time when he was found in Middle Temple Lane, with his skull beaten in and dead. I want to know where he got that scrap of paper. Above everything, Breton, I want to know what he'd got to do with you!"

He gave the young barrister a keen look, and Breton nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I confess that's a corker. But I think——"

"Well?" said Spargo.

"I think he may have been a man who had some legal business in hand, or in prospect, and had been recommended to—me," said Breton.

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Spargo smiled—a little sardonically.

"That's good!" he said. "You had your very first brief—yesterday. Come—your fame isn't blown abroad through all the heights yet, my friend! Besides—don't intending clients approach—isn't it strict etiquette for them to approach?—barristers through solicitors?"

"Quite right—in both your remarks," replied Breton, good-humouredly. "Of course, I'm not known a bit, but all the same I've known several cases where a barrister has been approached in the first instance and asked to recommend a solicitor. Somebody who wanted to do me a good turn may have given this man my address."

"Possible," said Spargo. "But he wouldn't have come to consult you at midnight. Breton!—the more I think of it, the more I'm certain there's a tremendous mystery in this affair! That's why I got the chief to let me write it up as I have done—here. I'm hoping that this photograph—though to be sure, it's of a dead face—and this facsimile of the scrap of paper will lead to somebody coming forward who can——"

Just then one of the uniformed youths who hang about the marble pillared vestibule of the *Watchman* office came into the room with the unmistakable look and air of one who carries news of moment.

"I dare lay a sovereign to a cent that I know what this is," muttered Spargo in an aside. "Well?" he said to the boy. "What is it?"

The messenger came up to the desk.

"Mr. Spargo," he said, "there's a man downstairs who says that he wants to see somebody about that mur-

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der case that's in the paper this morning, sir. Mr. Barrett said I was to come to you."

"Who is the man?" asked Spargo.

"Won't say, sir," replied the boy. "I gave him a form to fill up, but he said he wouldn't write anything —said all he wanted was to see the man who wrote the piece in the paper."

"Bring him here," commanded Spargo. He turned to Breton when the boy had gone, and he smiled. "I knew we should have somebody here sooner or later," he said. "That's why I hurried over my breakfast and came down at ten o'clock. Now then, what will you bet on the chances of this chap's information proving valuable?"

"Nothing," replied Breton. "He's probably some crank or faddist who's got some theory that he wants to ventilate."

The man who was presently ushered in by the messenger seemed from preliminary and outward appearance to justify Breton's prognostication. He was obviously a countryman, a tall, loosely-built, middle-aged man, yellow of hair, blue of eye, who was wearing his Sunday-best array of pearl-grey trousers and black coat, and sported a necktie in which were several distinct colours. Oppressed with the splendour and grandeur of the *Watchman* building, he had removed his hard billycock hat as he followed the boy, and he ducked his bared head at the two young men as he stepped on to the thick pile of the carpet which made luxurious footing in Spargo's room. His blue eyes, opened to their widest, looked round him in astonishment at the sumptuousness of modern newspaper-office accommodation.

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"How do you do, sir?" said Spargo, pointing a finger to one of the easy-chairs for which the *Watchman* office is famous. "I understand that you wish to see me?"

The caller ducked his yellow head again, sat down on the edge of the chair, put his hat on the floor, picked it up again, and endeavoured to hang it on his knee, and looked at Spargo innocently and shyly.

"What I want to see, sir," he observed in a rustic accent, "is the gentleman as wrote that piece in your newspaper about this here murder in Middle Temple Lane."

"You see him," said Spargo. "I am that man."

The caller smiled—generously.

"Indeed, sir?" he said. "A very nice bit of reading, I'm sure. And what might your name be, now, sir? I can always talk free-er to a man when I know what his name is."

"So can I," answered Spargo. "My name is Spargo—Frank Spargo. What's yours?"

"Name of Webster, sir—William Webster. I farm at One Ash Farm, at Gosberton, in Oakshire. Me and my wife," continued Mr. Webster, again smiling and distributing his smile between both his hearers, "is at present in London on a holiday. And very pleasant we find it—weather and all."

"That's right," said Spargo. "And—you wanted to see me about this murder, Mr. Webster?"

"I did, sir. Me, I believe, knowing, as I think, something that'll do for you to put in your paper. You see, Mr. Spargo, it come about in this fashion—happen you'll be for me to tell it in my own way."

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"That," answered Spargo, "is precisely what I desire."

"Well, to be sure, I couldn't tell it in no other," declared Mr. Webster. "You see, sir, I read your paper this morning while I was waiting for my breakfast—they take their breakfasts so late in them hotels—and when I'd read it, and looked at the pictures, I says to my wife 'As soon as I've had my breakfast,' I says, 'I'm going to where they print this newspaper to tell 'em something.' 'Aye?' she says, 'Why, what have you to tell, I should like to know?' just like that, Mr. Spargo."

"Mrs. Webster," said Spargo, "is a lady of business-like principles. And what have you to tell?"

Mr. Webster looked into the crown of his hat, looked out of it, and smiled knowingly.

"Well, sir," he continued, "Last night, my wife, she went out to a part they call Clapham, to take her tea and supper with an old friend of hers as lives there, and as they wanted to have a bit of woman-talk, like, I didn't go. So thinks I to myself, I'll go and see this here House of Commons. There was a neighbour of mine as had told me that all you'd got to do was to tell the policeman at the door that you wanted to see your own Member of Parliament. So when I got there I told 'em that I wanted to see our M.P., Mr. Stonewood—you'll have heard tell of him, no doubt; he knows me very well—and they passed me, and I wrote out a ticket for him, and they told me to sit down while they found him. So I sat down in a grand sort of hall where there were a rare lot of people going and coming, and some fine pictures and images to look at, and for a time I

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looked at them, and then I began to take a bit of notice of the folk near at hand, waiting, you know, like myself. And as sure as I'm a christened man, sir, the gentleman whose picture you've got in your paper—him as was murdered—was sitting next to me! I knew that picture as soon as I saw it this morning."

Spargo, who had been making unmeaning scribbles on a block of paper, suddenly looked at his visitor.

"What time was that?" he asked.

"It was between a quarter and half-past nine, sir," answered Mr. Webster. "It might ha' been twenty past—it might ha' been twenty-five past."

"Go on, if you please," said Spargo.

"Well, sir, me and this here dead gentleman talked a bit. About what a long time it took to get a member to attend to you, and such-like. I made mention of the fact that I hadn't been in there before. 'Neither have I!' he says, 'I came in out of curiosity,' he says, and then he laughed, sir—queer-like. And it was just after that that what I'm going to tell you about happened."

"Tell," commanded Spargo.

"Well, sir, there was a gentleman came along, down this grand hall that we were sitting in—a tall, handsome gentleman, with a grey beard. He'd no hat on, and he was carrying a lot of paper and documents in his hand, so I thought he was happen one of the members. And all of a sudden this here man at my side, he jumps up with a sort of start and an exclamation, and——"

Spargo lifted his hand. He looked keenly at his visitor.

"Now, you're absolutely sure about what you heard

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him exclaim?" he asked. "Quite sure about it? Because I see you are going to tell us what he did exclaim."

"I'll tell you naught but what I'm certain of, sir," replied Webster. "What he said as he jumped up was 'Good God!' he says, sharp-like—and then he said a name, and I didn't right catch it, but it sounded like Danesworth, or Painesworth, or something of that sort—one of them there, or very like 'em, at any rate. And then he rushed up to this here gentleman, and laid his hand on his arm—sudden-like."

"And—the gentleman?" asked Spargo, quietly.

"Well, he seemed taken aback, sir. He jumped. Then he stared at the man. Then they shook hands. And then, after they'd spoken a few words together-like, they walked off, talking. And, of course, I never saw no more of 'em. But when I saw your paper this morning, sir, and that picture in it, I said to myself 'That's the man I sat next to in that there hall at the House of Commons!' Oh, there's no doubt of it, sir!"

"And supposing you saw a photograph of the tall gentleman with the grey beard?" suggested Spargo. "Could you recognize him from that?"

"Make no doubt of it, sir," answered Mr. Webster. "I observed him particular."

Spargo rose, and going over to a cabinet, took from it a thick volume, the leaves of which he turned over for several minutes.

"Come here, if you please, Mr. Webster," he said. The farmer went across the room.

"There is a full set of photographs of members of the present House of Commons here," said Spargo.

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"Now, pick out the one you saw. Take your time—and be sure."

He left his caller turning over the album and went back to Breton.

"There!" he whispered. "Getting nearer—a bit nearer—eh?"

"To what?" asked Breton. "I don't see——"

A sudden exclamation from the farmer interrupted Breton's remark.

"This is him, sir!" answered Mr. Webster. "That's the gentleman—know him anywhere!"

The two young men crossed the room. The farmer was pointing a stubby finger to a photograph, beneath which was written *Stephen Aylmore, Esq., M.P. for Brookminster.*

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

## MR. AYLMORE

Spargo, keenly observant and watchful, felt, rather than saw, Breton start; he himself preserved an imperturbable equanimity. He gave a mere glance at the photograph to which Mr. Webster was pointing.

"Oh!" he said. "That he?"

"That's the gentleman, sir," replied Webster. "Done to the life, that is. No difficulty in recognizing of that, Mr. Spargo."

"You're absolutely sure?" demanded Spargo. "There are a lot of men in the House of Commons, you know, who wear beards, and many of the beards are grey."

But Webster wagged his head.

"That's him, sir!" he repeated. "I'm as sure of that as I am that my name's William Webster. That's the man I saw talking to him whose picture you've got in your paper. Can't say no more, sir."

"Very good," said Spargo. "I'm much obliged to you. I'll see Mr. Aylmore. Leave me your address in London, Mr. Webster. How long do you remain in town?"

"My address is the Beachcroft Hotel, Bloomsbury, sir, and I shall be there for another week," answered the farmer. "Hope I've been of some use, Mr. Spargo. As I says to my wife——"



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Spargo cut his visitor short in polite fashion and bowed him out. He turned to Breton, who still stood staring at the album of portraits.

"There!—what did I tell you?" he said. "Didn't I say I should get some news? There it is."

Breton nodded his head. He seemed thoughtful.

"Yes," he agreed. "Yes, I say, Spargo!"

"Well?"

"Mr. Aylmore is my prospective father-in-law, you know."

"Quite aware of it. Didn't you introduce me to his daughters—only yesterday?"

"But—how did you know they were his daughters?"

Spargo laughed as he sat down to his desk.

"Instinct—intuition," he answered. "However, never mind that, just now. Well—I've found something out. Marbury—if that is the dead man's real name, and anyway, it's all we know him by—was in the company of Mr. Aylmore that night. Good!"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Breton.

"Do? See Mr. Aylmore, of course."

He was turning over the leaves of a telephone address-book; one hand had already picked up the mouthpiece of the instrument on his desk.

"Look here," said Breton. "I know where Mr. Aylmore is always to be found at twelve o'clock. At the A. and P.—the Atlantic and Pacific Club, you know, in St. James's. If you like, I'll go with you."

Spargo glanced at the clock and laid down the telephone.

"All right," he said. "Eleven o'clock, now. I've

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something to do. I'll meet you outside the A. and P. at exactly noon."

"I'll be there," agreed Breton. He made for the door, and with his hand on it, turned. "What do you expect from—from what we've just heard?" he asked.

Spargo shrugged his shoulders.

"Wait—until we hear what Mr. Aylmore has to say," he answered. "I suppose this man Marbury was some old acquaintance."

Breton closed the door and went away: left alone, Spargo began to mutter to himself.

"Good God!" he says. "Dainsworth—Painsworth—something of that sort—one of the two. Excellent—that our farmer friend should have so much observation. Ah!—and why should Mr. Stephen Aylmore be recognized as Dainsworth or Painsworth or something of that sort. Now, who is Mr. Stephen Aylmore—beyond being what I know him to be?"

Spargo's fingers went instinctively to one of a number of books of reference which stood on his desk: they turned with practised swiftness to a page over which his eye ran just as swiftly. He read aloud:

"AYLMORE, STEPHEN, M.P. for Brookminster since 1910. Residences: 23, St. Osythe Court, Kensington: Buena Vista, Great Marlow. Member Atlantic and Pacific and City Venturers' Clubs. Interested in South American enterprise."

"Um!" muttered Spargo, putting the book away. "That's not very illuminating. However, we've got one move finished. Now we'll make another."

Going over to the album of photographs, Spargo deftly

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removed that of Mr. Aylmore, put it in an envelope and the envelope in his pocket and, leaving the office, hailed a taxi-cab, and ordered its driver to take him to the Anglo-Orient Hotel. This was the something-to-do of which he had spoken to Breton: Spargo wanted to do it alone.

Mrs. Walters was in her low-windowed office when Spargo entered the hall; she recognized him at once and motioned him into her parlour.

"I remember you," said Mrs. Walters; "you came with the detective—Mr. Rathbury."

"Have you seen him, since?" asked Spargo.

"Not since," replied Mrs. Walters. "No—and I was wondering if he'd be coming round, because——" She paused there and looked at Spargo with particular enquiry—"You're a friend of his, aren't you?" she asked. "I suppose you know as much as he does—about this?"

"He and I," replied Spargo, with easy confidence, "are working this case together. You can tell me anything you'd tell him."

The landlady rummaged in her pocket and produced an old purse, from an inner compartment of which she brought out a small object wrapped in tissue paper.

"Well," she said, unwrapping the paper, "we found this in Number 20 this morning—it was lying under the dressing-table. The girl that found it brought it to me, and I thought it was a bit of glass, but Walters, he says as how he shouldn't be surprised if it's a diamond. And since we found it, the waiter who took the whisky up to 20, after Mr. Marbury came in with the other gentleman, has told me that when he went into the room the two

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gentlemen were looking at a paper full of things like this. So there?''

Spargo fingered the shining bit of stone.

''That's a diamond—right enough,'' he said. ''Put it away, Mrs. Walters—I shall see Rathbury presently, and I'll tell him about it. Now, that other gentleman! You told us you saw him. Could you recognize him—I mean, a photograph of him? Is this the man?''

Spargo knew from the expression of Mrs. Walters' face that she had no more doubt than Webster had.

''Oh, yes!'' she said. ''That's the gentleman who came in with Mr. Marbury—I should have known him in a thousand. Anybody would recognize him from that—perhaps you'd let our hall-porter and the waiter I mentioned just now look at it?''

''I'll see them separately and see if they've ever seen a man who resembles this,'' replied Spargo.

The two men recognized the photograph at once, without any prompting, and Spargo, after a word or two with the landlady, rode off to the Atlantic and Pacific Club, and found Ronald Breton awaiting him on the steps. He made no reference to his recent doings, and together they went into the house and asked for Mr. Aylmore.

Spargo looked with more than uncommon interest at the man who presently came to them in the visitors' room. He was already familiar with Mr. Aylmore's photograph, but he never remembered seeing him in real life; the Member for Brookminster was one of that rapidly diminishing body of legislators whose members are disposed to work quietly and unobtrusively, doing yeo-

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man service on committees, obeying every behest of the party whips, without forcing themselves into the limelight or seizing every opportunity to air their opinions. Now that Spargo met him in the flesh he proved to be pretty much what the journalist had expected—a rather cold-mannered, self-contained man, who looked as if he had been brought up in a school of rigid repression, and taught not to waste words. He showed no more than the merest of languid interests in Spargo when Breton introduced him, and his face was quite expressionless when Spargo brought to an end his brief explanation—purposely shortened—of his object in calling upon him.

"Yes," he said indifferently. "Yes, it is quite true that I met Marbury and spent a little time with him on the evening your informant spoke of. I met him, as he told you, in the lobby of the House. I was much surprised to meet him. I had not seen him for—I really don't know how many years."

He paused and looked at Spargo as if he was wondering what he ought or not to say to a newspaper man. Spargo remained silent, waiting. And presently Mr. Aylmore went on.

"I read your account in the *Watchman* this morning," he said. "I was wondering, when you called just now, if I would communicate with you or with the police. The fact is—I suppose you want this for your paper, eh?" he continued after a sudden breaking off.

"I shall not print anything that you wish me not to print," answered Spargo. "If you care to give me any information——"

"Oh, well!" said Mr. Aylmore. "I don't mind. The

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fact is, I knew next to nothing. Marbury was a man with whom I had some—well, business relations, of a sort, a great many years ago. It must be twenty years —perhaps more—since I lost sight of him. When he came up to me in the lobby the other night, I had to make an effort of memory to recall him. He wished me, having once met me, to give him some advice, and as there was little doing in the House that night, and as he had once been—almost a friend—I walked to his hotel with him, chatting. He told me that he had only landed from Australia that morning, and what he wanted my advice about, principally, was—diamonds. Australian diamonds.''

''I was unaware,'' remarked Spargo, ''that diamonds were ever found in Australia.''

Mr. Aylmore smiled—a little cynically.

''Perhaps so,'' he said. ''But diamonds have been found in Australia from time to time, ever since Australia was known to Europeans, and in the opinion of experts, they will eventually be found there in quantity. Anyhow, Marbury had got hold of some Australian diamonds, and he showed them to me at his hotel —a number of them. We examined them in his room.''

''What did he do with them—afterwards?'' asked Spargo.

''He put them in his waistcoat pocket—in a very small wash-leather bag, from which he had taken them. There were, in all, sixteen or twenty stones—not more, and they were all small. I advised him to see some expert —I mentioned Streeter's to him. Now, I can tell you how he got hold of Mr. Breton's address.''

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The two young men pricked up their ears. Spargo unconsciously tightened his hold on the pencil with which he was making notes.

"He got it from me," continued Mr. Aylmore. "The handwriting on the scrap of paper is mine, hurriedly scrawled. He wanted legal advice. As I knew very little about lawyers, I told him that if he called on Mr. Breton, Mr. Breton would be able to tell him of a first-class, sharp solicitor. I wrote down Mr. Breton's address for him, on a scrap of paper which he tore off a letter that he took from his pocket. By the by, I observe that when his body was found there was nothing on it in the shape of papers or money. I am quite sure that when I left him he had a lot of gold on him, those diamonds, and a breast-pocket full of letters."

"Where did you leave him, sir?" asked Spargo. "You left the hotel together, I believe?"

"Yes. We strolled along when we left it. Having once met, we had much to talk of, and it was a fine night. We walked across Waterloo Bridge and very shortly afterwards he left me. And that is really all I know. My own impression——" He paused for a moment and Spargo waited silently.

"My own impression—though I confess it may seem to have no very solid grounds—is that Marbury was decoyed to where he was found, and was robbed and murdered by some person who knew he had valuables on him. There is the fact that he was robbed, at any rate."

"I've had a notion," said Breton, diffidently. "Mayn't be worth much, but I've had it, all the same. Some fellow-passenger of Marbury's may have tracked

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him all day—Middle Temple Lane's pretty lonely at night, you know.;"

No one made any comment upon this suggestion, and on Spargo looking at Mr. Aylmore, the Member of Parliament rose and glanced at the door.

"Well, that's all I can tell you, Mr. Spargo," he said. "You see, it's not much, after all. Of course, there'll be an inquest on Marbury, and I shall have to re-tell it. But you're welcome to print what I've told you."

Spargo left Breton with his future father-in-law and went away towards New Scotland Yard. He and Rathbury had promised to share news—now he had some to communicate.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE MAN FROM THE SAFE DEPOSIT

Spargo found Rathbury sitting alone in a small, somewhat dismal apartment which was chiefly remarkable for the business-like paucity of its furnishings and its indefinable air of secrecy. There was a plain writing-table and a hard chair or two; a map of London, much discoloured, on the wall; a few faded photographs of eminent bands in the world of crime, and a similar number of well-thumbed books of reference. The detective himself, when Spargo was shown in to him, was seated at the table, chewing an unlighted cigar, and engaged in the apparently aimless task of drawing hieroglyphics on scraps of paper. He looked up as the journalist entered, and held out his hand.

"Well, I congratulate you on what you stuck in the *Watchman* this morning," he said. "Made extra good reading, I thought. They did right to let you tackle that job. Going straight through with it now, I suppose, Mr. Spargo?"

Spargo dropped into the chair nearest to Rathbury's right hand. He lighted a cigarette, and having blown out a whiff of smoke, nodded his head in a fashion which indicated that the detective might consider his question answered in the affirmative.

"Look here," he said. "We settled yesterday, didn't



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