HDI
HW 1XZ8 V

The Silver Blade

CHARLES E. WALK

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

IE4187

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE SILVER BLADE

Digitized by Google

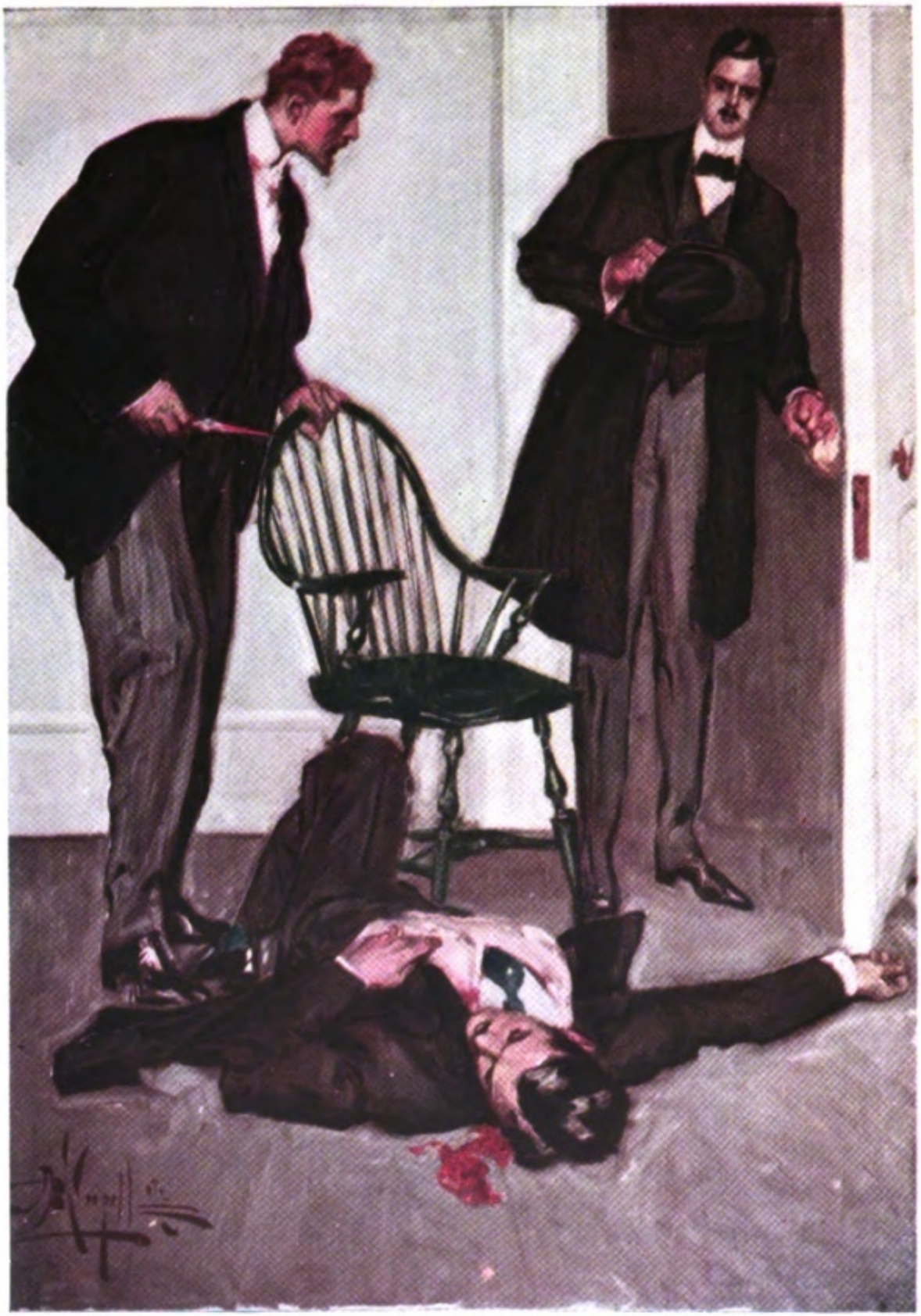
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



"Good God, Mobley! Did You Do This?"

[Page 92]

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE SILVER BLADE

THE TRUE CHRONICLE OF A DOUBLE MYSTERY

BY

CHARLES EDMONDS WALK

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY A. B. WENZELL

CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.
1908

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ICE 4187

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

COPYRIGHT
A. C. McCLURG & Co.
1906

Published March 18, 1906
Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, Eng.

All Rights Reserved.

The Lakeside Press
R. R. DONNELLEY & SONS COMPANY
CHICAGO

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BROTHER

GEORGE EDWARD WALK

WHOSE INTEREST IN THE GROWTH OF THIS STORY
WAS NOT THE LEAST INCENTIVE
TO ITS COMPLETION

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

BOOK I. A DUPLEX PROBLEM

Chapter		Page
I.	Exit Señor de Sanchez	15
II.	The First Problem Develops	29
III.	A Search for Clues	45
IV.	Mr. Converse Appears as Chorus	60
V.	A Telegram from Mexico	77
VI.	The Inquest	87
VII.	The Verdict	103
VIII.	Cherchez la Femme	122
IX.	The Second Problem	135
X.	Footprints	151
XI.	A Burnt Fragment	165
XII.	A Door is Opened	177

BOQK II. CHARLOTTE FAIRCHILD

I.	Miss Charlotte Waits in the Hall	193
II.	Miss Charlotte Entertains a Caller	208
III.	"Paquita — What Do You Spell?"	220
IV.	Miss Charlotte Becomes a Factor	236

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Contents

Chapter		Page
V.	A Decision and a Letter	245
VI.	Faint Rays from Strange Sources	252
VII.	A Voice in the Night	262
VIII.	The Coroner's Coup	275
IX.	The Light Brightens — and Dims	283

BOOK III. SLADE'S BLESSING

I.	Opening Ways	301
II.	Fairchild Redivivus	314
III.	"The Thunderbolt Has Fallen"	330
IV.	Some Loose Ends	338
V.	Mr. Slade Resigns	341
VI.	An Arrest	351
VII.	"Slade's Blessing"	367

BOOK IV. THE DANCER AND THE MOUNTEBANK

I.	"That Is Paquita"	379
II.	The Serpent Strikes	385
III.	Which Is the Last	400

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"Good God, Mobley! Did you do this?" . *Frontispiece*

Captain Converse was endowed with the impassiveness of an Indian, nor could one imagine him agitated in any circumstances 62

Joyce was herself a mystery, an enigma, as inscrutable as "Paquita" 180

Mr. Mountjoy's thin, handsome features were saved from asceticism only by the lines of humor about his eyes 290

At times Charlotte became beautiful; a warm tide of color mounted to her cheeks; her head became regally erect 352

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LIST OF CHARACTERS

GEN. PEYTON WESTBROOK, a gentleman of the Old South.
MRS. WESTBROOK, his wife.
DR. MOBLEY WESTBROOK, their son.
JOYCE, Mobley's sister.
MRS. ELINOR FAIRCHILD, a widow of fallen fortunes.
CLAY, her son.
"MISS CHARLOTTE," Clay's sister.
JOHN CONVERSE, Captain of Detectives.
MR. MOUNTJOY, the District Attorney.
MR. MERKEL, the Coroner.
J. HOWARD LYNDEN, a cotton-broker.
SEÑOR JUAN DE VARGAS Y ESCOLADO, otherwise known as Señor Vargas, a Mexican capitalist.
WILLIAM SLADE, an abstracter of titles.
ABRAM FOLLETT, a dealer in worn-out utilities.
ROBERT NETTLETON, a lawyer.
FERDINAND HOWE, a banker.
HARRY MCCALEB, SEPTIMUS ADAMS } serving under Capt. Converse.
SAM, JOE, MELISSA, POLLY ANN } faithful servants.

THE PLACE: A City in the South.
TIME: The Present.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BOOK I.

A DUPLEX PROBLEM

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand?

—MACBETH.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE SILVER BLADE

BOOK I—A DUPLEX PROBLEM

CHAPTER I

EXIT SEÑOR DE SANCHEZ

ABOUT six o'clock on an evening in the early part of a recent November, the drowsy quiet sometimes pervading police headquarters was rudely broken by the precipitate entrance of a young man, who made his way hurriedly to the door marked, in neat gilt letters, "CHIEF OF POLICE."

In addition to the reserve squad, whose vigil never ends, many other officers were present in the lazy transition stage between going on and going off duty. The attention of them all was immediately attracted to the stranger, and held by his extraordinary manner, from the instant he became visible in the flickering gas-lights until he finally disappeared.

In the first place, he was not such a one as usually comes to the city-hall basement, either voluntarily or when haled hither by one of the law's myrmidons; for he was fashionably, even fastidiously, attired, with a marked preciosity of manner which would have been even more noticeable under ordinary conditions.

But it was not over any idiosyncrasy of apparel or customary detail of personality that the aroused curiosity of the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

officers lingered. Inured as they were to uncommon and surprising events, they were nevertheless startled by this young man's advent, and greatly interested in his extreme discomposure. It was obvious to the most casual glance that he was the victim of a fright so potent that it possessed him to the complete exclusion of every other feeling, made him oblivious of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, and drove him blindly to the commission of some idea fixed by the terror which mastered him. And there was one other still more powerful emotion depicted in his pallid, twitching countenance: a horror unspeakable.

Looking neither to the right nor the left, the stranger walked directly to the Chief of Police just as that official was in the act of closing and locking his office door for the night. The latter looked up inquiringly, and, struck at once by the young man's appearance, asked with sudden sharpness:

"What 's the matter? What has happened?"

The young man, his wild regard fastened on the Chief, tried to answer; but he was incapable of speech, and the effort resulted only in a queer, gasping sound.

With the directness of a man accustomed to prompt action, the Chief of Police opened his door once more, and guided the young man into the smaller room beyond. The visitor, dazed by his emotions and unable to respond to any suggestion less forceful than the actual pressure of the persuasive hand on his arm, probably would have remained indefinitely motionless on the threshold before any customary invitation to enter.

The Chief struck a match and ignited a gas-jet above a big roll-top desk. The action, simple in itself, seemed to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

loose the young man's faculty of speech; just as the official turned, he darted suddenly forward, grasped the other's arm, and began incontinently:

"Murder! Murder has been done!" The words had the effect of a cry, although uttered in a hoarse whisper.

"Murder, I tell you. Come with me at once; don't delay." He shook the Chief's arm excitedly, and strove to draw him toward the door.

"Hurry! Hurry! For God's sake, hurry!"

The Chief of Police easily disengaged his imprisoned arm.

"There, there . . . . sit down there," said he, in a tone he might have used to calm a terrified child. "You are upset. Sit there a while and try to collect yourself. Come; make an effort. Pull yourself together and tell me about it."

"But the murderer!" the young man went on, still with high excitement, but unconsciously sinking back into the chair under the gentle pressure of the Chief's hand. "The murderer will escape! Great Heavens, man! even now he may be assaulting the doctor — Mobley — do you hear me? — he may have killed him! Send officers — go yourself — anything but to sit here idle. Come!" He made as if to rise again; but the other pressed him back.

"Steady," said the Chief quietly. "Mobley? Do you mean Doctor Mobley Westbrook? Has he been murdered?"

"No-no-no," in a burst of exasperation. "It was — it was — I mean — good God, what do I mean? It — it happened in his office."

The Chief regarded him for a moment with eyes that were mere pin-points of light.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You are Mr. J. Howard Lynden, are you not?" he presently asked. The other nodded a quick affirmative. "I thought so," he continued. "Who is the murderer? Who has been murdered? — or has any murder been done? You don't make yourself clear."

Lynden twisted nervously upon his chair. "Heavens! you do not doubt me?" he cried. "Why, Mobley's office is like a shambles. It 's horrible! — horrible! Mobley — Doctor Westbrook, that is — was standing right over the dying man with — with — " He checked himself abruptly, as an expression of horror deepened in his pale countenance.

Since the introduction of Doctor Mobley Westbrook's name, the Chief of Police was paying closer attention to the incoherent recital; he regarded the young man gravely, and evidently concluded that the situation was serious enough to warrant some initiative on his own part. He was accustomed to panic-stricken people who intruded thus unceremoniously upon him, and experience had taught him that, oftener than not, the circumstances were far from warranting the excitement.

Concerning his present visitor, he was aware, in a general way, that the young man was well known about town, the inheritor of a considerable fortune from his father, and that his name figured prominently as a leader of cotillons, on the links of the Country Club, and among the names of the many others who formed the society set of the city.

But all these qualifications did not supply the force so conspicuously absent from Mr. Lynden's personality, lacking which his perturbation was not very impressive. He was not at all bad looking: he was even handsome

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in a way; but the Chief of Police, as he looked, could not help remarking that a more resolute man would have been less the slave of his emotions in a situation like the present. While the young man sat drumming with nervous fingers on the arms of his chair, the Chief pressed a button beneath his desk, whereupon the door was almost immediately opened by an officer, who, without entering, respectfully awaited his superior's commands.

To him the Chief said, "If Converse is in, tell him to come to my office;" and as the door closed, "I want Captain Converse to hear this," he explained to Lynden; "it seems to be a matter for his department."

The two had not long to wait. A man entered, cast a piercing glance at the visitor, and took his stand at a corner of the roll-top desk, waiting with an air of deferential attention. He was a man of physique so immense — with such a breadth of shoulders and absence of neck — that his more than average height was much disguised. Above all, he was one whose appearance must attract attention in any gathering of his kind; for even as Lynden seemed to lack those desirable traits, so force and resolution flowed from this man's rugged personality, making their influence felt subtly and insistently. His air of quiet composure was evocative of confidence. Endowed with the impassiveness of an Indian, one could hardly imagine him excited or agitated in any circumstances.

The Chief recognized his presence with a brief nod, and at once addressed Lynden:

"Repeat what you have told me; see if you can't make it plainer."

The visitor recounted the bare facts in a more connected

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

manner. "But I was so shocked," he supplemented, "that I am afraid I can't make myself intelligible. The facts explain nothing to my mind further than that an atrocious murder has been committed, that the victim is still lying in Doctor Westbrook's office, and that no one seems to know who is responsible for the deed."

"You say the man was stabbed?" queried the Chief.

"Yes," was the reply; "stabbed in the throat."

"But I fail to understand," the Chief frowned. "Do you mean to say that a man was stabbed in the presence of Doctor Westbrook, and that he knows nothing about it?"

"No — no. It seems to have occurred in the hall just outside Mobley's door; the man fell through the door into the office, Mobley said. I don't know — I am so confused." Which last statement he confirmed by at once becoming involved in a wild incoherency of utterance.

After he had quieted somewhat, he sat trembling for a moment, suddenly bursting forth again:

"Wait!" he cried, his face lighting. "I forgot to say there was another man present in Doctor Westbrook's office — a stranger to me. I never saw him before."

"And he?"

"Just like Mobley and myself, he appeared to be overcome by the shocking occurrence."

The Chief of Police plainly showed his perplexity. "According to your statement — the man who was killed — will you repeat his name?"

"De Sanchez. General Westbrook's friend, Alberto de Sanchez."

"According to your statement he was bleeding profusely. Had the weapon been withdrawn from the wound?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The young man evinced unaccountable hesitancy. He moved uneasily, and glanced from his questioner to the impassive figure standing at a corner of the desk. This man, called Converse, had taken no part in the talk; he stood silent and motionless, seemingly paying no heed to what was going forward; but now he shot a swift glance at Lynden, whose nervousness measurably increased. That look was remarkable in a way: the eyes, steely gray, were in themselves without expression; they failed, however, to veil an intentness and concentration of mind which disclosed beyond a doubt that their owner was abnormally alive to every detail of speech and manner; they could not hide a power of will lying behind their quick regard, which mocked deception, and Mr. Lynden shuddered. Instantly the brief glance was withdrawn; but the young man, if such had been his intention, attempted no liberties with the truth. The confusion with which he now spoke, however, suggested strongly that the thought had entered his mind, although he may not have entertained it there.

"I — I — I would rather that you, or some officer, accompany me to Mobley's office," he faltered. "I consider it rather unfair, in my condition, to press me further. I would n't for the world present anything in a false light. I feel that the situation is not only serious, but extremely delicate."

"It is that," the Chief agreed, emphatically. "For that very reason you must tell all you know. Now, why should you hesitate in regard to the weapon? Come now, what about it?"

"Well, sir, I answer you under protest; remember, I did not see the blow struck."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Sure?"

The young man nearly sprang from his chair. The interruption, a penetrating, sibilant bullet of speech, came from the massive figure of Mr. Converse; again that shrewd regard was fastened on him, and the sweat started from his brow.

"No!" he cried, explosively; "I did not. By George, how nervous I am! — but I think half-truths should not be told. No one is less capable of perpetrating such a deed than Mobley Westbrook. Why, you know the man!" He appealed with feverish eagerness to the two figures now sternly confronting him. "Every one knows Mobley Westbrook's character; would he do such a thing?"

"But come to the point — come to the point, man!" the Chief demanded, rapping sharply upon the desk with his knuckles. "What of the weapon — was it a knife — sword — axe — hatchet? Where was it?"

"Well, Mobley had some kind of a — blade, a — dagger in his hand; but — "

"Ah! And standing over a man whose very life-blood is ebbing away beneath his eyes!" The Chief's manner was politely ironical, and struck the young man cold. "You must admit that you portray an astonishing set of circumstances to surround a man not only innocent but ignorant of an offence," concluded the official, pointedly.

Lynden indeed started from his chair. "I knew it! I knew it!" cried he, wildly. "I knew you would put such a construction upon my words; now, damn it! I'll not say another word. Go — go! Go and see for yourselves how wrong you are!"

The Chief of Police ignored this vehement advice. In-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

stead, he curtly admonished Lynden to remain a few moments where he was; and leaving the wretched news-bearer alone with his own reflections, he and Converse withdrew from the room.

After a minute or two the Chief returned. "I have sent for a carriage," said he. "As soon as it arrives I must request you to accompany Captain Converse to Doctor Westbrook's offices; are you willing to do that?" He awaited the reply with an interest mingled with doubt of what its probable tenor might be; when the young man acquiesced with an alacrity and relief obviously sincere, his doubt merely grew. He contemplated Lynden an instant longer, and with a curt nod, seated himself at his desk again.

Almost at once, however, the large figure of the Captain — or plain Mr. Converse, as he much preferred to be known — appeared in the doorway.

"Come!" he whispered; and the whisper rasped upon Lynden's nerves. Confound the man! was he afraid he would betray some momentous secret, so that he did not talk like other people? Nevertheless, he arose and followed him,— under the heavy stone arches, shrouded with gloom in the flickering gas-light, out into the cool night air and into a waiting hack. Two other men followed close behind, and entered a second hack; immediately the two vehicles, one behind the other, were going at full speed in the direction of Doctor Westbrook's offices.

Under the soothing influence of rubber tires spinning easily over the smooth asphalt, the young man was fast regaining his lost composure. He was so rapt in his own thoughts that for a time he quite forgot his still companion,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and presently he laughed — mirthlessly, but a laugh signifying sudden relief. Quite as suddenly it was checked, as he met the inquiring, probing glance of his *vis-à-vis*.

"It is astonishing that I never thought of it before," he explained, in an embarrassed way. "That other man — the stranger — can set Mobley right in an instant. Do you think Doctor Westbrook could have done it?"

Immediately he regretted the question, for it entailed hearkening to that uncomfortable hissing voice. It was Mr. Converse's misfortune that, properly speaking, he had no voice at all. His entire speech was a series of sibilant utterances, wonderfully distinct and possessed of remarkable carrying power when one considered their quality. It is likely that he was sensitive about his vocal defect, since he was known as a silent, taciturn man among his *confrères*. On certain rare occasions, however,— under, for example, the spur of an inflexible purpose or the influence of a sympathetic nature,— it was also known that he could wax eloquent; his forceful individuality supplied, in a large measure, the place of a normal, flexible voice.

The head of the detective department might have been anywhere between forty and sixty years of age, so far as one could gather from his huge frame and stolid countenance. His hair was gray, and thinning slightly at the temples; but behind his illegible exterior there reposed a vigor and a reserve of power — revealed now and then, as in the lightning-like glance cast at Lynden in the Chief's office — which could not be reconciled with age. He was, in fact, fifty-two.

His face was full and round, smooth-shaven, expressionless — such a visage as one associates with some old sea-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dog; a countenance that has long been subjected to the hardening processes of wind and weather. As the young man waited for a reply, the immovable features underwent a curious change; the mouth gradually assumed a pucker, as though the facial muscles were inelastic and unused to such exercise; his right eyebrow lifted, which, as the other remained motionless, was made all the more noticeable,— the effect being an expression of inquiry and speculation that seemed ludicrously out of place. Lynden became familiar with this queer transformation later on; he learned to associate it with the futility of seeking to penetrate the wall of reserve which ever surrounded this unusual man, and perceived that it came and went as a sort of involuntary warning to place least trust in his frankest confidences. Now it introduced the response to his question, "Do *you* think Doctor Westbrook could have done it?"

"The Doctor is a strong, vigorous man, is n't he? I don't see why he could n't."

"My dear sir," Lynden anxiously expostulated, "you don't know Mobley Westbrook, or you never could entertain such a thought."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Converse, carelessly, "the thought seems to be your own; I was simply giving you the first fact that occurred to me, to justify your opinion. I have formed none myself."

"You interpret my words strangely."

"No; your silence."

The young man, with another shudder, drew back to the corner of the vehicle farthest from his companion.

The receding lights outside followed the carriage in squares of diminishing illumination, which, shining through

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the window, made strange play of light and shadow over that inscrutable visage. All at once it became deeply portentous to Lynden; as if by sudden divination he became possessed of a conviction that it was destined to take a high place in his affairs,— signifying, perhaps, the controlling influence in a strange drama, the first scene of which was now upon the boards.

"It is very remarkable," the Captain mused, presently, as if the episode were too much for him.

Lynden started from his reverie.

"Yes," he murmured, not meeting the other's eye. "Yes; it is very remarkable." Both lapsed into a silence that continued until the end of the ride.

As the vehicle proceeds, a few words about those whose names have been mentioned, together with some others who will figure in this narrative, will give a better idea of the importance of the tragedy, the ill tidings of which Lynden had been the bearer.

Both by reason of recognized ability in his profession and of his high family connections, Doctor Mobley Westbrook was leader of the medical fraternity in the city of his birth and residence. He was still youthful in spite of his thirty-five years; democratic in his tastes, immensely popular in every class of society, and for these reasons considerably at odds with his father.

Notwithstanding his popularity, his single excursion into politics had only shown his unfitness for the national game; a circumstance mentioned here because later on he is to have it brought back to him in a manner both forcible and disagreeable.

Singularly enough,— for from another and altogether

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

different sentiment the General himself was popular,—General Westbrook was known to hold his son in some disfavor because he was so well and universally esteemed. His exclusive nature could not brook the physician's democratic inclinations; it made the latter an alien. The General did not understand it, and what he could not understand he disliked.

The two personalities were remarkably divergent in every way. General Peyton Westbrook was an exaggerated type of the old-school Southern gentleman. Strikingly handsome, elegant in appearance, his erect and rigid bearing, together with a falcon-like glance suggested a stature which one in describing would be likely to pronounce tall when in reality it was not much over five feet. His graceful slenderness added considerably to the illusion. His hair was white, his features cameo-like — aristocratic, and stamped with the overweening family pride, to which, with him, every other human emotion was subservient.

It is probable that his presence and name were better known in every part of the State than those of any other living man. For the class which he represented was that noble body of patricians — handsome and recklessly brave men, and beautiful, high-minded women — who have given the world criterions by which human excellence and human weakness alike may be measured; and his position was a personal hobby, persistently and consistently ridden.

Of his standing he was perhaps pardonably proud. Besides his social position and that of his wife, who had been a Shepardson, and of his lovely daughter, Joyce, he had fought gallantly, if not brilliantly, through the war between

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the States; but he was just narrow-minded enough to allow his pride and egoism to exclude the rest of humanity.

There was but one uniting link between Mobley and his father and mother — the latter even more distant and unapproachable than her spouse — and that was the daughter and sister, Joyce. Whatever their differences, the family was held together by affection for this beautiful girl.

The love that bound Joyce and Mobley was deep and abiding. It is not surprising, then, when the question of his sister's marriage became gossip, that Mobley should have taken a stand on the subject which brought about a final and complete rupture from his father and mother. The name with which his sister's had been linked was no other than that of this same Alberto de Sanchez, who now lay dead, with a ghastly knife-wound in his throat, in the Doctor's own office.

James Howard Lynden — or "Jim," as Doctor Westbrook called him — had long been on intimate terms with the Westbrook family. And it was he who now accompanied the silent Mr. Converse through a small but curious group gathered about the entrance leading to the Doctor's office; the first stage of an intermingling of interests widely diverse; the bringing together of lives as far asunder as the stars.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PROBLEM DEVELOPS

DOCTOR WESTBROOK'S offices were in the Nettleton Building in Court Street. It and its neighbor on the east, the Field Building, were of that solid old style of structure devoted to business, which knew not the elevator nor steam heat, nor any of the many devices that enter into the complexities, and often questionable conveniences, of the modern office edifice. They were not, and never had been, of an imposing appearance, boasting as they did only three stories; but they were nevertheless the blue-bloods among the city's commercial houses, preserving their exclusive position amidst the newer generation of garish sky-scrapers which rudely intercepted the vision on every hand.

The occupants of these monuments of the old regime were in full accord with their habitations,— solid, conservative, and even aristocratic. As often as not a modest sign — if it could be deciphered at all — notified the visitor that behind certain doors could be found "Harvey Nettleton, Estate of," or, "Richard Fairchild, Estate of," or some name equally well known, and associated with a glory that had departed. In most instances, well might the present owners of those family names cry "Ichabod!" for they had long since ceased to have any interest in the estates other than the shadowy interests which lie in memories and vain regrets.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Silver Blade

As Mr. Lynden and his taciturn companion passed through the Nettleton Building entrance, where the curious little throng was restrained by the presence of a couple of mute policemen, the Captain's entire manner underwent a complete and sudden transformation; his expressionless countenance remained wooden, but into his eyes there arrived an intentness and brightness entirely absent from them before; his rather lethargic and apparently purposeless movements giving way to a brisk mode of proceeding which one would hardly have expected from his cumbrous frame. His demeanor was become at once alert and wary, and he had little to say to Lynden.

It was now night outside, and the stairs were faintly illuminated by the single incandescent lamp which hung at their head in the hall of the second story. The sole indication that Mr. Converse was striving to allow nothing to escape his observation was the quickness with which he stooped, when near the top, and picked something from the stairs — something too small for Lynden to catch even a glimpse of — which, whatever it was, the Captain scrutinized intently a moment, and, without comment, dropped into the large pocket-book he brought forth from an inside pocket. The two continued on their way until they reached Doctor Westbrook's office.

Everything was as Lynden had left it, save for the fact that Doctor Westbrook, and the stranger mentioned by the young man, had been joined by several other persons.

One was a swarthy, lean man, whose face was pitted by small-pox, and whose rather dull eyes remained expressionless behind a pair of gold-rimmed *pince-nez*. He was standing aloof from the others, and seemed to be taking

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

only languid interest in what was going forward. Occasionally he coughed in a manner that told much to the physician's trained ear; save for this, he remained silent. Mr. Merkel, the coroner, and a uniformed policeman were also present.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Merkel to Converse as he and his companion appeared. "So they have sent you, have they? How fortunate! how exceedingly fortunate! This, gentlemen," he continued, addressing the other occupants of the room, "is Captain Converse. He will pardon me, I know, if I add — the great detective. Nothing has been disturbed, Captain, nothing has been disturbed. You will find everything just as I did. It is a bad business, a bad business."

Mr. Merkel was fussy, important, and wholly incompetent; and the Captain was so accustomed to his repetitions of phrases that were not, to say the least, pregnant with meaning, that he ignored them and turned to an inspection of the dead man.

The body lay just as it had fallen. Somebody had placed a handkerchief over the face, a covering that also hid an ugly wound in the throat. Mr. Converse stooped and removed this, and began a minute but rapid examination of the still form. It reposed in the Doctor's reception-room, close to the wall, partially on its back and partially on its right side. The right arm was extended, the fingers of that hand still in a position as though upon the point of grasping something. Curved naturally across the breast, the left arm suggested restful slumber rather than death by violence; but whatever the eyes had last looked upon, before the film dimmed their lustre, it had stamped upon the handsome features an indelible expression of mingled terror and horror, which one

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

could scarcely regard without an inward tremor of something very like fear. It was an expression likely to remain disagreeably in the memory for a long time.

A search of the dead man's pockets revealed nothing unusual, except that, in a petty way, he had been a violator of the law; for the first thing Mr. Converse drew forth was a nickel-plated, pearl-handled revolver of 32-caliber. The remainder consisted of a number of letters, all relating to business matters; two long envelopes, evidently but recently sealed, and addressed simply, "*El Señor Juan de Vargas*"; a purse containing money; a gold watch; a fountain pen, and pencil; two memorandum books; a silver match-box; a pouch of dark tobacco, and brown cigarette papers; a handkerchief; a penknife; a bunch of keys,— these were all.

When these effects were inventoried, while Mr. Merkel was assorting them at Doctor Westbrook's writing-table, the dark man with the *pince-nez* stepped forward. All eyes were turned toward him, excepting, apparently, those of Converse, which continued to give the body and the reception-room floor their attention.

"Pardon, señores," said the dark man, bestowing a bow upon the entire group, and ending it at the Coroner; "is there anything addressed to Juan Vargas, or Juan de Vargas? I am he."

Mr. Merkel looked at him sternly, and held up the two long envelopes.

"I see the name of Vargas — er — ah — inscribed on these. Are you Mr. Vargas?"

The other remained unmoved, replying simply, "I am Juan de Vargas."

"What connection have you with the deceased gentle-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

man?" continued the Coroner, without relaxing in the least the sternness of his look. "Can you tell us anything of this affair?"

Señor de Vargas shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing, señores; I lament that I cannot. The contents of the envelopes should tell you about the extent of our connection; they contain but a deed, some shares of stock, no more. Señor de Sanchez would have delivered them to me to-night. Open them by all means."

The man's eyes, dull and unmoving, continued to regard Mr. Merkel. Had he been discussing the weather his tones could have been no more dispassionate.

The Coroner tore open the envelopes, and, as the man had said, one contained a deed, conveying certain land to Juan Sebastian de Vargas y Escolado, the notary's certificate showing it had been signed and acknowledged that very day before Clay Fairchild. Alberto de Sanchez had made the transfer. The other envelope disclosed a certificate for one thousand shares of stock in the Paquita Gold Mining and Milling Company, also made over to Señor Vargas in due form. The papers told no more.

"Good!" exclaimed Señor de Vargas. "We agreed yesterday, and I have made the first payment of ten thousand dollars for myself and associates. I was but awaiting the deed and the stock."

At this juncture Doctor Westbrook interposed:

"I happen to know that this gentleman is Señor de Vargas," said he. "He called here with — with Señor de Sanchez last evening. I have heard something of this deal between the two, and I believe it represents the occasion of this gentleman's presence in the city at this time."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Señor de Vargas acknowledged this speech with a grave "Gracias, señor." Turning to Mr. Merkel again, "I hope there will not be much delay?" he queried, mildly, with a certain precision of enunciation that alone marked him of an un-English-speaking race.

Since he had comprehended the magnitude of the transaction as disclosed by the deed and certificates, and after Doctor Westbrook's interposition, the Coroner's manner toward the Mexican had noticeably altered.

"No more than necessary," he replied deferentially; "no more than necessary, sir. I am sorry, but these papers will have to remain among the deceased's other effects until after the inquest, anyhow. Mr. Mountjoy, our district attorney, is the proper authority for you to see."

"Good!" returned the Mexican. "I desire not for my humble affairs to stand in the path of justice." Bowing once more, he returned to his former position away from the others.

Converse suddenly passed over to the Coroner, and laid a bloody dagger upon the table. Its silver blade, crimsoned in part, was grewsome and startling beneath the bright glare of the shaded incandescent lamp. Mr. Merkel involuntarily drew back his hands, the strange gentleman who had been with the Doctor since the tragedy visibly shuddered, and for an instant — the smallest portion of a second — the dull eyes of Señor Vargas took on a strange light, as though the pupils had all at once distended, allowing a glimpse to the uttermost depths, then became dull again. It was like the abrupt opening and closing of a shutter. Otherwise his features did not change, nor did he move. The more phlegmatic policeman looked upon the little weapon without

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

apparent emotion; the Doctor and Howard Lynden with none at all.

However, as the Captain placed it upon the table his eyes took in every occupant of the room in one rapid sweeping glance, only to drop as he stooped and whispered to the Coroner, who there upon nodded and turned to the waiting group.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "this is not the inquest, of course; but let us hear what you have to say about this. You first, Doctor Westbrook; you first."

"What I can tell you will seem much less than it should," the Doctor returned. "It was about five o'clock, and I was sitting at my table — there, where you are now. I had just finished a letter to no other than Señor de Sanchez himself."

"Is this it?" the Coroner interrupted, extending a letter to the speaker. Doctor Westbrook replied affirmatively, and proceeded with his recital.

"I had just completed and blotted it, and was preparing to address the envelope, when I heard footsteps in the hall. I paused, with the pen in my hand, and listened, for I was expecting Señor de Sanchez to call at my office this evening, though not so early, and I imagined the footsteps might be his. As I listened, I noted that my door was not quite shut, and the footfalls advanced steadily down the hall, approaching my office. When immediately outside the door, and while I was looking up expectant of the caller's entrance, they ceased abruptly. There was a slight sound of scraping on the floor of the hall, as though the man — whom I could not then see — were endeavoring to rub something from his shoe-sole on the boards, or had slipped slightly;

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

without the slightest warning, his whole weight plunged against the door. It was thrown violently open by the impact, and I was horrified to behold Señor de Sanchez stagger through, his right hand extended in front of him, as if groping for support. As he crossed the threshold he lurched to his right and struck the wall, along which he slid to the floor, just as you now see him."

During his relation of these particulars, the Doctor's manner was perfectly cool and collected. The next incident fairly electrified his intent listeners.

"As he was falling," he continued, "I noticed the dagger handle protruding from the left side of his throat."

"Is this the one?"

It was Converse's sibilant whisper which now rudely broke into the recital. At the same time he thrust the silver blade close to the other's face.

Doctor Westbrook at first merely glanced at the weapon; but something about it evidently caught and held his attention, and an emotion vastly different from mere recognition overspread his countenance; it was astonishment, pure and simple.

"God bless my soul!" he gasped, in extreme amazement; "that is mine — my paper-knife — and I did not recognize it! What does this mean?" He sat with his eyes glued upon it, the centre of a dumfounded group. The Captain continued a moment to hold it forward, his gaze fixed inscrutably upon the physician's puzzled and bewildered countenance.

Presently Converse drew the weapon slowly back again, and replaced it upon the table.

"So that is yours?" the Coroner soberly asked.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It is," replied the Doctor; "and I did not recognize it until this minute. How did it — why —" he began vaguely; but Merkel interrupted.

"Well," said he, with a wave of the hand that seemed to dispose of all complications, "it will be time enough for questions when you have finished."

"De Sanchez was falling," resumed the Doctor after a moment's reflection, "when I noticed the dagger handle. The body had scarcely touched the floor before I had stooped and wrenched the blade from the wound. It did not come easily; it required a severe tug to loosen it, and the withdrawal of the blade was followed by such a gush of blood that I knew some important artery must be severed. The man's death was practically instantaneous. After I had extracted the blade I had no time to render him any further service; I simply stood dumfounded until Jim — Mr. Lynden — grasped my arm and shook me."

"But, Doctor Westbrook," insisted Mr. Merkel, "was there no one else in the hall? Did you hear no other footsteps? Did n't you see or hear some one else when the door was thrust wide open? Surely the murderer could n't have left so quickly without attracting the attention of some one of you. It is simply incredible." He grasped the arms of his chair, leaning forward in his eagerness, his heavy countenance overshadowed with perplexity.

As the Doctor started to reply, Converse glanced sharply toward him; when Lynden's name was presently mentioned, shifting his scrutiny to that gentleman.

"I must say no to all those questions," was the Doctor's reply. "I saw nobody but De Sanchez. I heard nothing but his footsteps, and the noise he made in collapsing through

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

this door. Ask Jim Lynden, there; he was in the hall at the time; he followed so closely behind De Sanchez that he arrived here before the man died."

Lynden merely shook his head, hopelessly, as if he had no vocabulary to express himself. The Coroner was impressed by the young man's mien, and after regarding him a moment with a scowl, turned again to Doctor Westbrook.

"Was any one else present, Doctor?" he asked.

The physician's face was suddenly illumined.

"Yes; why, certainly. Howe!" he exclaimed. "Howe, where were you?"

The man, who apparently had been a stranger to everybody in the room, now advanced.

"I was in there — your laboratory — looking into the light-well."

Converse noiselessly disappeared into the room indicated, returning in a few seconds to eye the stranger with increased interest.

"And who are you, if I may ask?" bluntly demanded the Coroner.

"My name is Ferdinand Howe, sir," the stranger replied, with dignity. "My home is in Bruceville, Georgia, and I am in your city on business for the bank of which I happen to be the cashier. Doctor Westbrook and I are old college-mates, and I know about as much of this affair as he has told you; that is to say, I was there — the other side of that partition in the laboratory — when the murdered man fell where you now see him. The first intimation I had that anything was amiss was when the outside door crashed open and the body fell to the floor. I ran into this room, saw the man gasp twice, and then lie motionless.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I never saw him, and never heard of him, before this night. That is all."

Mr. Howe appeared to be about the Doctor's age, and was a fair type of the American man of business. He was well groomed, clean, and possessed of a clear, steady eye.

"And you saw and heard no one else?" Mr. Merkel persisted.

Howe shook his head. "No, sir; no one. There was not the slightest thing to indicate — "

He stopped. He shot a swift, startled glance at Doctor Westbrook; but the Doctor remained unconscious of it, evidently absorbed in his own cogitations. Mr. Converse's eyes watched the speaker through mere slits, so nearly closed were they; but a gleam came from between the contracted lids that might have betrayed a quickened interest somewhere in the depths of his big frame.

"No," concluded Howe presently, in tones measurably subdued; "I neither saw nor heard anybody else, but —" With compressed lips he indicated by a nod the form on the floor. "You must remember," he concluded, "I was in the next room, looking out the window into the light-well."

Converse looked quickly from the speaker to Lynden. That young man was staring strangely at Howe, evidently impressed by something unusual in his concluding words.

Suddenly the young man caught Converse's intent look, and his own eyes lowered. Next they shifted to Doctor Westbrook, at whom he continued to look in a moody silence.

The Coroner, apparently more and more at sea, stared first at one and then another of the room's occupants, at the partition which separated the reception-room from the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

laboratory, and lastly through the open doorway into the hall. The most extreme of the different points were not over six feet apart; and for three men — wide awake and in full possession of their faculties — to be so close to such a crime and know nothing of it until it was all over! How could human ingenuity supply an explanation for so incongruous a circumstance? Had the man committed suicide? The most cursory examination of the wound demonstrated beyond doubt that, however else it might have been inflicted, Alberto de Sanchez was incapable of having administered it himself.

Meanwhile the Captain was moving from one to another of the group, his whisper barely audible, but persistent and pervading the entire room. Occasionally he made a brief memorandum upon an envelope,— cabalistic marks which no one but himself could have deciphered. Then the whisper again for a moment, followed by a deferential lowering of his gray head as he hearkened to the reply. Had one been observing him closely he would have noticed that the circle of inquiry gradually narrowed. The policeman he paid no attention to at all; he was soon through with Señor Vargas; but from Lynden he passed to Howe; next to Doctor Westbrook; and from one to another of the last three, as a word from one suggested a new inquiry to be asked of another. His movements were silent, his manner unobtrusive, distracting no attention from Mr. Merkel and his investigation. Now and then he paused and stared contemplatively into vacancy for a moment, with the odd lifting of his right eyebrow, and with his mouth thoughtfully pursed; but the mask of his countenance told nothing, and only once did he include the whole group with a question.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The First Problem Develops

It was after he had been whispering quietly for some minutes with Howe.

"Who can give me young Mr. Fairchild's address? You, Doctor?" he asked.

"Clay?" Dr. Westbrook returned. "Yes. It is close to the terminus of the Washington Heights car line. The conductor can direct you to it; the houses are not numbered out there."

Converse nodded, and chose a slip of paper from the table. After looking at it, first on one side and then on the other, it apparently did not suit his purpose; for he subjected another bit of paper to a similar scrutiny before pencilling a hurried line thereon, although he did not replace the first slip. The note he handed to the policeman with a whispered word, and the policeman instantly quitted the room. Had one still been observing Mr. Converse he would have seen him abstractedly place the first bit of paper in his waistcoat pocket.

Well, it seemed that no one present could throw additional light upon the manner of Señor de Sanchez's death. Mr. Merkel arose from his chair at the Doctor's table, and looked a pointed inquiry at the Captain, who responded by a short negative shake of his head. As if relieved of a distasteful responsibility, the Coroner said:

"Such of you as desire to go may do so. Captain Converse and I will have to look about a bit. He must have an opportunity to apply his wonderful skill, gentlemen; and you will all be notified of the inquest; you will be duly notified. . . . . Doctor Westbrook, I will send a wagon for the body," he concluded. "Good-night, gentlemen." He turned to the table again, and to a contemplation of the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dead man's personal effects, as though picking out an answer to this latest riddle propounded by death.

Whatever of restraint had been upon the group, it was released by the Coroner's words, and each member showed it in his own way. Ferdinand Howe instantly advanced to Doctor Westbrook, and, smiling, held out his hand.

"Well, Mobley," said he, as they grasped hands, "this is a regrettable affair. It has been a shocking interruption to my visit; a visit which I now suppose will be indefinitely extended. If I can be of service, don't hesitate to call upon me. I shall be at the hotel any time I am wanted. Good-night." And he quitted the room.

Next, Señor Vargas bowed before the Doctor, saying in a low, conventional tone:

"My sympathies, Señor Doctor, that anything so deplorable should have occurred in your apartments." He turned to the Coroner:

"Don Alberto was a fellow-countryman," he went on; "he had many relatives and friends, by whom he was much beloved. But Mexico is far away, señor, and should there be any delay in communicating with those relatives or those friends, it is I, his countryman, upon whom you should call. Upon my own responsibility I request that every attention be accorded the body, and that no expense be considered. I also will be at — what you call *la posado?* — the 'otel. I thank you for your courtesy."

His departure left, besides the Captain and Mr. Merkel, only Howard Lynden and the Doctor; as the door closed behind the Mexican, the Doctor said:

"Now, then, we here are all about equally interested; if you have any idea how this dreadful crime was committed,

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

pray enlighten us. Surely even vulgar curiosity is pardonable under the circumstances." He looked inquiringly from the Coroner to Mr. Converse.

The latter made no remark, but watched the Doctor steadily, while Mr. Merkel dubiously shook his head, and replied:

"It seems as though we scarcely had made a beginning yet. We shall be obliged to go much farther, Doctor — much farther."

"I will begin right now, then," Converse whispered. "Mr. Lynden, you can help me if you will."

All four were in the act of emerging from the room, when the Captain, as though an idea had just occurred to him, turned suddenly and touched Doctor Westbrook upon the arm.

"By the way, Doctor," he whispered, close to that gentleman's ear, "I notice you have several penholders on your table; are you particularly partial to any one of them? No, no, don't stop; go on."

The Doctor turned a surprised visage to his questioner.

"Why, yes, since you have mentioned it. I always use the black celluloid holder. Why?"

"It is just an idea of mine; I took a particular fancy to that holder. . . . . And have you had occasion to put a new point in it lately?"

Doctor Westbrook now did stop. He frowned heavily as he pondered a moment, while the Captain watched him steadily.

"Yes," he presently said. "I placed a new pen-point in it this evening. I found the other broken — bent — quite useless."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Thank you, thank you," Mr. Converse said, hastily. "Good-night, Doctor Westbrook."

While the Doctor and Mr. Merkel continued on out of the building, Converse devoted his attention to the hall window which opened into the light-well. There he stood until the others had disappeared; whereupon he and Lynden reëntered the Doctor's office.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

A SEARCH FOR CLUES

BY running a board partition down the centre of the room nearest the hall, Doctor Westbrook had by the simplest means given himself a place of reception; one where his patients could wait while he was engaged in the room overlooking Court Street, there being still another for his drugs and medicines.

There was not much wasted space in the laboratory. Against the walls stood cases filled with bottles of many sizes and colors, and other cases displaying glittering, sinister instruments; in one corner stood a carboy of distilled water, and by the window, opening into the light-well, stood the table where the Doctor compounded such prescriptions as he did not send to a regular apothecary.

The light-well opened like a chasm between the Field and Nettleton buildings; its bottom, on a level with the second-story floors, was of heavy semi-opaque glass, so that such rays of light as were not diverted into the windows on the one hand or the other found a way to the shop space on the ground floor. At present an arc lamp beneath this skylight suffused a soft and mellow radiance throughout the entire light-well.

Mr. Converse let himself down to a narrow ledge bordering the skylight, and with an injunction to the young man to wait, made his way around it to a window diagonally opposite, which the latter recognized as belonging to the offices

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of Petty & Carlton, attorneys, in the Field Building. Here the Captain drew himself up with remarkable agility, and disappeared through the window. All the windows letting into the light-well were open, the watcher was noticing, when his attention was attracted by Mr. Converse's sharp whisper.

"Stand where you are a few minutes, Mr. Lynden," said he. "I want to experiment a bit, and I shall call on you for a report presently."

He lowered himself to the ledge again, passed over to Nettleton Building side, and to the hall window of the latter. There he stooped and scrutinized the ledge intently, and next the window-sill; after which, with a little spring, he raised himself to the window, and crawled through it into the hall.

A sudden quiet fell, — a quiet unbroken by any sound. Standing there alone in the gloom, one undoubtedly would have been impressed by the blank, staring windows that were like wide and lidless eyes; and as he looked, Lynden seemed to become sensible of a feeling of dread at the awfulness of the crime which had been committed so near at hand, for he shuddered visibly, as if the windows had some purpose in staring,— as if they were in reality eyes that still retained some expression of their horror at a deed witnessed but a moment since.

Noting the alacrity with which Converse let his heavy frame in and out of windows, a spectator might fancy it an easy matter for one lurking in the light-well to do likewise, at the ripe moment strike a swift blow, and then leap back again.

But whatever the current of Lynden's meditations, it was abruptly diverted. He fell to listening intently. The

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

door between the hall and the reception-room was being slowly and cautiously opened; still slowly and with an apparent effort to occasion no betraying noise, some one advanced on tiptoe into the room. The young man faced deliberately about until he could see the door in the partition, and waited. Toward it the almost silent footfalls were moving; presently there appeared at the aperture the expressionless face of Mr. Converse, who, when he perceived Lynden's startled attitude, gave utterance to a low chuckle.

"I was not endeavoring to frighten you, Mr. Lynden," said he; "I was simply trying a little experiment. When did you first hear me?"

"I heard the door open, and next, you tiptoeing across the room. I did not know what to think." He was pale and trembling.

"Not another sound? No footsteps in the hall? Nothing of that kind?"

Lynden shook his head. "No; the first thing I heard was the door opening," he repeated.

"Well," continued the Captain, reflectively, pursing his mouth, and lifting his right eyebrow at the young man, "I don't believe anybody could have made less noise than I did in there"— he nodded his head toward the partition — "nor more than I made in the hall. And you heard nothing until the door began to open — h-m-m!" He looked around the laboratory,— at the shelves of bottles, at the partition not reaching quite to the ceiling; he stepped to the window, and, leaning out, contemplated the hall window. "It 's confoundedly queer," he concluded.

"What is?"

"Why, the way noises act here. You know, that man —

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Ferdinand Howe — was standing at this window, and heard nothing in the hall. I almost believe, if the deceased had been shot instead of stabbed he would not have heard it. . . . . But let us have a look at the other side of the hall. . . . Let me see," he went on, in a meditative way, "Room 4; that must be Mr. Nettleton's private office; as my friend Mr. Follett would say,— his 'lair.' He has no use for lawyers." He pushed open the door directly opposite the Doctor's suite.

The room was large and had three windows opening into the light-well. Through these windows sufficient light from the arc lamp beneath the skylight found its way to cause the furnishings to loom shadowy and ghost-like in a sort of feeble twilight, and to make it easy to find an incandescent lamp, which Mr. Converse turned on, illuminating the apartment with a brighter and more cheerful radiance. He surveyed the room, and looked at Lynden.

"I suppose," said he, "the door has not been locked this evening?"

The young man merely shook his head. For some reason since passing to this side of the hall, he had become strangely taciturn, though he watched the Captain's every movement eagerly, and cast many furtive glances toward the denser shadows.

Converse knelt and examined the floor closely on either side of the door. Lynden's nerves were at such a tension that he actually started at a whispered ejaculation from the Captain as he picked up a tiny hairpin,— the kind a woman would have specified as "invisible."

So, then, there had been some one behind this door — and that one a woman!

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A Search for Clues

Why should this circumstance affect Lynden so strangely? for it would seem that, in the undisturbed stillness of these deserted chambers, there was a potent, disquieting influence which kept him in a *qui vive* of nervous expectancy,— an invisible something in the atmosphere of the place filling him with an apprehensive dread. It was really remarkable that his observant companion did not notice his agitation; and still it was difficult to imagine how he could, for he was crossing the floor in a crouching attitude, apparently directing his entire attention to the floor with a concentration that permitted no individual thread of the heavy carpet to escape his earnest scrutiny.

Mr. Nettleton was a lawyer, and he occupied two rooms, both of which opened directly into the hall. The two men were now in the one that the lawyer used as his consultation room, and the course being pursued by Mr. Converse would soon take him to the connecting door between the two offices. Arriving at that point, he stood erect and paused a moment, plunged in thought. He said nothing, and seemingly had become oblivious of his companion's attendance.

Just to the left of the connecting door, and in the general office, stood the desk occupied during business hours by Clay Fairchild. Above this desk was another incandescent light, which the Captain lighted, after which he took up whatever trail he had been following so closely, at the exact point where he had left it, continuing, in a stooping posture, to the hall door of the general office. From the point where he had picked up the hairpin, immediately within the entrance to Room 4, he had pursued a course away from the hall, through the connecting door to Room 5,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and back again toward the hall to the hall entrance of the latter room,— the whole forming, roughly, an arc, the chord of which was the hall.

At the door of Room 5 he stood upright once more, and the young man became aware all at once that he was being eyed quizzically.

"Look!" the Captain whispered. Stooping again, he pointed to the heavy ply of the moquette carpet.

For a moment Lynden could descry nothing unusual; his heart was thumping in a manner for which he could assign no reason; but when the Captain traced an outline with his thumbnail, he could see quite distinctly the imprint of a small, partial footprint, such as a woman's French heel might make.

"That appears at just two other places," Converse continued; "at the entrance to Room 4, where I found the hairpin, and just inside this room; and there, beyond that desk, near the connecting door. They were made by a woman who stood a while at the first door, and who then, I believe, — though I can't be positive, — tiptoed to the connecting door, where she paused again for a while. She either tiptoed between those points, or stood for a time; the marks would n't have remained had she walked directly through the two rooms."

Lynden stared at the tiny impression — so faint that nobody else would ever have remarked it — and seemingly sought to frame a reply that he could voice naturally.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" was all he said, but in tones so low that they were scarcely louder than Mr. Converse's whisper.

The latter now turned to the rest of the room. Swiftly,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

but apparently permitting not the least article to escape his observation, he made the circuit of the apartment, and finally paused at Clay Fairchild's desk. Almost instantly his eyes singled out one from among the mass of papers which littered it. This he carefully folded, and placed, with the article he had picked up on the stairway, which Lynden had been unable to see, in the capacious pocket-book. He seemed reluctant to leave this desk; after he had turned away he paused and cast another look at it, sniffing as one striving to locate the source of a faint odor. Lynden paused too; he glanced hurriedly from right to left, his brow lined, his expression troubled and perplexed.

At length they returned to Mr. Nettleton's private office, which was subjected to as close and thorough an examination as had been the room just quitted. Only one thing seemed especially to hold Converse's attention, and that was the space beneath the lawyer's desk. Here he got down to his hands and knees, and struck no less than five matches in an effort to obtain a better light. Whether the dusty space told him anything Lynden could not determine.

They passed back into the hall again. Converse walked directly to the entrance of Suite 2, immediately adjoining Doctor Westbrook's offices, on the side nearest the stairway. A small card pasted on the ground glass of this door bore the words "To Let." Converse ignited another match, in the added light of which he examined the door-knob. His companion observed him touch it with the tip of a finger, and shake his head, as if something incomprehensible had all at once presented itself.

"Does the janitor sleep in the building?" the Captain

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

inquired after a moment; when the young man nodded affirmatively, he added: "Can you get the keys of this floor for me? It will save some time and trouble, and I want to finish before the reporters come."

"Certainly. His room is in the third story."

Converse watched him until he disappeared around the corner toward the stairway, and straightway did something very strange. With the silence and speed of a cat he made his way back to Fairchild's desk. Over this he bent and smelt the papers which lay there. But that would not do. Hastily he tried the top right-hand drawer. It was unlocked — as were all the other drawers — and opened easily. That for which he was searching was not there, either. He turned rapidly to another drawer, and another, and another, until every drawer in the desk had been opened and closed again, its contents having been hastily but thoroughly gone over; and still the object of this hurried search was not found. Quickly he glanced from side to side. To the left of the desk was a waste-paper basket, which had not been recently emptied, and over this he inhaled deeply, as one would drink in the fragrance of a rose. He thrust a hand among the debris of papers, and in a moment drew forth a dainty lace handkerchief, to which clung the unmistakable odor of stephanotis. Again the capacious pocket-book; and when Lynden returned with the keys the Captain was contemplating the door-knob of Suite 2 with unabated interest.

Lynden sniffed as the other ran over the key-tags in a search for No. 2.

"What is that perfume?" he demanded sharply.

"Ah, do you like that, now?" rejoined Converse, with

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the first display of enthusiasm he had yet shown. "That is an odor I am very partial to, and hope to have more of — if I can find where this came from."

The young man moistened his lips, and his eyes turned away from the other's steady look.

Converse now had the door to No. 2 open, but he did not enter this room. It needed only the match he now struck to disclose layer upon layer of dust, the undisturbed accumulation of months.

"Now, then," said he, as he closed and locked the door again, "back to the light-well for a minute or two, and I am through."

He let himself out of the hall window, and made another circuit of the ledge around the skylight. The light-well was more or less a catch-all for the windows opening into it; it therefore contained many scraps of paper, every one of which he glanced at before casting it aside. Only one thing here seemed to interest him,— something he picked up far out on the skylight and scrutinized. Lynden was afforded another glimpse of the pocket-book.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A cigarette butt," was the reply; "interesting only because it is the second one of the same kind I have found to-night."

Presently, when he announced that he had finished, Lynden said it had fallen to them to turn out the lights and lock the doors, as the negro janitor was too frightened to venture into the second story that night. This was soon accomplished, and the two had turned to depart, when both abruptly stopped. A light had flashed forth through the ground glass of Room 6.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"What room is that?" asked Converse; for the door was bare of significance excepting for the single figure "6," now standing out boldly against the light behind.

"The record and abstract room of the Guaranty Trust Company," was the reply. "He must have come in while you were in the light-well."

"He? Who?" Converse queried bluntly.

Both were standing as they had paused when the light first surprised them, and Lynden turned to his interlocutor with some surprise at the quickening eagerness of his tone, but he answered merely:

"Slade,— William Slade; he prepares the company's abstracts of title, you know."

Converse's manner became completely impersonal again. "Can you find some excuse for knocking?" he asked. "Would you mind doing so? I should like to have a glimpse of him."

"Not at all; if I can make him hear. He 's quite deaf."

Lynden, after knocking once perfunctorily, did not wait for a summons to enter. He immediately threw the door wide open, crying, without much show of deference:

"Hello, Mr. Slade! You work late to-night."

A little, dingy, dreary figure of a man, perched on a high stool, and bending over a huge canvas-bound volume, slowly raised his head, and gazed at his unceremonious callers with the vacant look that one sees in the eyes of deaf people who have not heard distinctly. His smooth-shaven face was like leather, shot and crisscrossed with a network of fine wrinkles. Almost on the tip of his nose he was balancing a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, and the eyes which now looked over them were remarkably bright and

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

sparkling, like a mouse's, conveying to the casual glance an alertness which they did not actually possess.

"Howard Lynden, close the door," was the odd creature's greeting, in a voice hoarse and rasping. The sharp little eyes shifted to the Captain, and back to Lynden again. There was no cordiality in either his tone or manner.

The young man took a step forward, laid his hand upon the tall desk at which the little man was seated, raised his voice and asked, "Did you know there had been a murder committed on this floor this evening?"

"Murder?" querulously, and with no show of interest. "Murder?"

"Yes; murder. The man died in Doctor Westbrook's office — stabbed."

Without displaying the least curiosity at so unexpected, so sensational an announcement, Mr. Slade slowly wagged his head, saying only, "I heard nothing of it." He dipped his pen into the ink-well, with an air of dismissing his callers and the subject alike.

"I saw your light, and just dropped in to learn if you knew of it," Lynden concluded, as he followed the Captain toward the hall. Lowering his voice, and addressing the latter, "Is there anything else?" he inquired; at once the wrinkled, meagre visage and twinkling eyes became suspicious and alert.

"What is that?" demanded Slade, with obvious mistrust.

"Nothing," the young man returned shortly. "Good-night."

Mr. Slade's parchment-like countenance again bent over the big volume, and his pen flew industriously. It was startling, when the door had nearly closed, to have the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

rasping voice come after them with the suddenness of an explosion.

"Howard Lynden!" it cried. That gentleman, surprised, thrust his head back into the room.

With pen poised in hand, with spectacles still balanced near the tip of his thin nose, the ill-favored mask of Slade's countenance was again confronting the detective and his companion.

"What time was that murder?" asked the abstracter.

"At five o'clock," Lynden rejoined, he and the Captain again advancing into the room.

"And the murdered man?"

"General Westbrook's friend, Señor de Sanchez."

The little eyes turned once more quickly to the Captain and back to Lynden as he asked the next question:

"Ah! And who was — the — murderer?" He spoke deliberately, his harsh voice lowering itself strangely.

"That the police would very much like to know."

Again the little eyes shifted to Mr. Converse.

"An officer?" inquired Slade.

The Captain nodded. Slade's brusque manner returned; dropping his eyes to his work once more, he said, with an air of finality:

"I am sorry, gentlemen, I can tell you nothing. This is my first intelligence that a crime had been committed. Good-night. Howard Lynden, close the door tightly after you."

When the two were once more in the hall the Captain said, "Mr. Slade developed a mighty sudden interest."

"Yes," returned his companion; "a queer bird — irascible, and touchy about his deafness. His father was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

an overseer, you know," as though this fully accounted for Mr. Slade's undesirable qualities. "But his curiosity got the better of him that time; he could n't let us go without finding out more."

"He and I would have some difficulty in getting along together without a sign language," remarked Mr. Converse, dryly.

The two were near the foot of the stairs, but they were not destined to leave the building without another interruption. A man came precipitately, though noiselessly, in at the entrance, who, when he observed they were descending, stopped short and awaited their approach at the foot of the stairs. He was one of the two men who had followed them from headquarters, and he now, after touching his hat respectfully to Mr. Converse, looked askance at Lynden. The Captain, with a nod of apology to the young man, drew the newcomer to one side.

"Well, Adams?" said he.

"We found Mr. Fairchild's all right," the man whispered; "but Mr. Fairchild was not there. He has not returned from the office, and his sister and mother are very anxious. The mother is something of an invalid — did n't see her at all. Talked with the sister, who seemed, anyhow, to be the head. Pretended to want a notary and quizzed her, but she could tell me nothing. I don't believe horses could draw anything from her if she did n't want to tell. Captain Converse, sir, she had an eye that looked right into me all the time I was talking, and I know she thought I was lying when I said I wanted a notary." The man showed two rows of glistening white teeth in an unpleasant grin. "I did want a notary, but she did n't know I was so particu-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

lar about which one. But I don't believe she knows where he is. I left Barton to watch the house, and I came on to report."

"Very good."

"And what shall I do now?"

"Keep your eye on this man here with me until I can send you relief; I shall keep Barton watching the house."

The manner of the man called Adams was both stealthy and ingratiating; his visage seemed unable to rid itself of a perpetual smile, which, taken with a pair of crafty, shifting eyes, gave him a sinister appearance. During the entire time he and Mr. Converse were talking, he kept looking past the latter at Lynden; and that this surreptitious espionage was extremely unpleasant was made manifest by the young man's growing uneasiness.

Still smiling, shooting a last rapid glance at Lynden, he departed as abruptly and noiselessly as he had come.

Converse turned to his companion, fixing him with a steely eye; and what he said seemed unaccountably to agitate the young man.

"I wish to remind you that you are a very important witness in this affair. I shall venture a hint and a word of advice: if you are not more circumspect on the witness-stand than you have been to-night, you will have a mighty bad hour; if you are contemplating a trip from the city, why — change your mind." With a curt "Good-night," he left Lynden speechless in the doorway of the Nettleton Building.

Lynden remained motionless many minutes. When he at last produced a cigarette from his pocket, the cupped hands holding the lighted match trembled so he had diffi-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

culty in igniting it. Abruptly he started away in a direction opposite that taken by the huge figure of the Captain.

Behind him moved a shadow so stealthily, its outlines so dim, that it was scarcely to be distinguished from the surrounding night.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

MR. CONVERSE APPEARS AS CHORUS

EARLY the next morning Mr. Mountjoy, the district attorney, and the Coroner were seated in the former's office with a flat desk between them. Upon this set forth in orderly array, were the letters, papers, and other personal effects gleaned from the pockets of the dead man; dominating the whole was the sinister and grewsome little silver blade,— Doctor Westbrook's paper-knife.

The regard of both officials rested upon it as they meditated and waited for the Captain.

Remove those bloodstains and the weapon became a dainty toy, but withal a dangerous one. The point was like a needle's, and terminated a slender, tapering blade, silver-like in its brightly polished steel, two-edged, and of indubitable fineness. The guard, a solid piece of beautifully engraved gold, was shaped somewhat like a Cupid's bow, while the hilt, of silver, was decorated with an intricate, graceful pattern of chasing, inlaid with gold, and surrounding a scroll upon which was engraved in script the single word:

Paquita

The chasing, in addition to being an exquisite work of art, possessed also the utility of supplying an excellent purchase for any hand grasping it.

And what hand was upon that pretty hilt when last it was held in anger? Whose fingers had tightened slowly

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

over the dainty feminine name, as the unsuspecting victim approached? Did "*Paquita*" contain a hidden charm — some invisible potency — to guide the hand to its hideous, self-appointed task?

Alas, if it could but tell! If, instead of the prænomen, redolent as it was of fresh maiden innocence, the scroll had borne some word pointing to the assassin! And yet, after all, could it be possible that the momentous intelligence actually was there, and only human eyes were blind? If such be the case, it will require a vision more than human to seek it out and read what is there written. Surely; for the weapon bore no other mark or testimony.

The District Attorney's voice disturbed the quiet.

"It is an amazing thing," said he, in a speculative tone, "what a nice tangle this case is beginning to promise. Relate the bare facts, as we know them, to any disinterested person, and he would instantly say that Mobley Westbrook committed the deed. To be suddenly come upon, a smoking dagger in your hand — standing over a dying man — the provocation supplying a motive — and all that — h-m-m! pretty bad."

But Mr. Mountjoy the next instant laughed in a way that signified it to be the height of absurdity to think of Doctor Westbrook as a murderer.

"There is not a phase or side of the man's character," he continued, "with which the crime can be made to fit. I can more easily imagine Mobley Westbrook — but of course I know him so well that personal bias influences me largely in his favor. It would require evidence quite conclusive, though, to move me to proceed against him. It 's queer, anyhow, a family of their quiet, humdrum

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

respectability being mixed with an affair of this nature, even remotely; there is more behind it than we now imagine; and I believe there will be plenty of work for one John Converse."

As if this colloquy had been a scene on a stage, and the two last words a cue, the door opened, and the Captain of detectives himself entered. He walked to the desk with manner quiet and deferential, gravely returning the salutations of the two officials seated there.

"Here 's John to speak for himself," said the Coroner.

"Theseus has come to lead us from this labyrinth of mystery," laughed Mr. Mountjoy. "Silent and enigmatical servant of Destiny, who knows what momentous knowledge is hidden behind that impassive exterior? John, are you ready to point the stern and unrelenting finger of denunciation at the guilty wretch, and say, 'Thou art the man!'?"

But the Captain did not respond to the lawyer's bantering humor. Instead, he seated himself on one side of the table, remarking merely:

"Gentlemen, this is a very serious case."

"Serious!" cried the District Attorney, his mood in no wise changing. "Serious? which is but one method of informing us that there has been a dearth of clues." He suddenly leaned forward, rested his elbows upon the table, and interlocked his slender fingers. "Come, John, what have you discovered?" he concluded more soberly.

For answer Mr. Converse drew forth his large and well-worn pocket-book, from which he took one by one, and laid upon the desk, two slips of paper, a small hairpin, two half-consumed cigarettes — the paper of which was a dark brown, like butcher's wrapping-papers — and lastly, a dainty

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CAPTAIN CONVERSE WAS ENDOWED WITH THE IMPASSIVENESS OF AN INDIAN, NOR COULD ONE IMAGINE HIM AGITATED IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bit of cambric and lace, to which clung a delicate odor of stephanotis,— a lady's handkerchief.

Mr. Merkel adjusted his spectacles; the District Attorney became wholly serious; and together they bent over the grotesque assortment, staring as though the mystery might be disclosed then and there.

Presently both sat back in their chairs, and turned expectantly to Converse.

"Well, sir," he began gravely, "I believe we must look to a certain lady for a detailed account of her connection with this case."

"A woman!" ejaculated the lawyer. "Well, I am not surprised; it could not promise much without a woman — no more than that affair of the Garden could have been without Eve. . . . And do you know who she is?"

Mr. Converse raised a protesting hand.

"No," said he; "not yet. But a woman was in Mr. Nettleton's offices so close to the time the crime was committed that her presence is quite the most important factor at present — that, and Clay Fairchild's disappearance."

Both listeners showed their astonishment.

"So that young Fairchild has disappeared, has he?" remarked Mr. Merkel. "I always thought he was a steady sort of chap. But you can never tell about these young fellows, especially when they get tangled with a woman. I wonder who she is?" he added, musingly, and colored when Mr. Mountjoy laughed.

"That is just a puzzling feature of the thing," the Captain resumed. "I have had no trouble in securing a complete record of the young man's private life, and it proves to be unexceptionably clean. No woman figures in it to any

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

great extent. Young Fairchild is very poor; but he is the head of one of these old families here, and is on a footing with people like the Westbrooks, the Nettletons, and their class, that a great many with more money can't boast of. He is one of 'the quality'; and though his poverty prevents him from figuring at all in society, he is nevertheless a frequent visitor in many of the best homes in the city."

"Aye, I know those Fairchilds," said Mr. Mountjoy, nodding his head slowly; "fine old stock, but dropped from sight since Dick, the scamp, went smash. There 's a girl, too, is n't there? Mother an invalid? Thought so. Proceed, John."

"It appears that he was always a studious boy," Mr. Converse went on, "and there is only one thing that seems to be in his disfavor. It is this: although he has been acting as Mr. Nettleton's clerk and stenographer, and is a notary public, he entered Mr. Nettleton's office for the purpose of studying law. Now, Mr. Nettleton says that while young Fairchild was diligent in his duties, and possessed of no bad habits, he disappointed his patron by evincing a lack of interest in his studies, which he gradually came to neglect. It seems that he has literary aspirations, and his present vocation is a necessity. His mother and sister, excepting for a little property belonging to the latter, are both dependent on him, and he has always been particularly solicitous of their welfare. I must confess that his lighting out the way he has, and our failure to find the slightest trace of his whereabouts, coupled with the circumstance of the woman, are at present very puzzling. But we will get to this later; we can secure a better grasp of the entire situation by commencing at the beginning.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Converse Appears as Chorus

"Well, when De Sanchez entered the Nettleton Building yesterday evening there were in the east end of the second floor at least five persons, — Doctor Mobley Westbrook, who was in his reception-room; Fairchild, who was in one or the other of Mr. Nettleton's rooms; Mr. Ferdinand Howe, who was in the Doctor's laboratory; William Slade, who was in Room 6; and some woman. Mr. J. Howard Lynden entered the building only a few seconds after De Sanchez, and both were bound for the Doctor's office. It is self-evident that the criminal was present also, and I can account for no one else. Indeed, unless the witnesses were blind or are now resorting to deliberate falsehood, it is absolutely impossible that any person besides those indicated could have been present.

"Of the six individuals named we may at once drop Slade and Howe, leaving us Fairchild, the woman, Doctor Westbrook, and Lynden to be considered as possibilities.

"Beginning with Fairchild, and in connection with the lady, I will preface what I have to say with the statement that his place in the case is very difficult to determine; but that it is at least of great moment, I am convinced.

"For the present there is only a hypothetical motive for his curious behavior; but he was in the neighborhood of the crime at the time of its commission, and did not leave the building until several minutes afterward — and then under very peculiar circumstances. The hypothetical motive by which I shall try to explain his conduct is affection for the woman.

"Now, the hall dividing the rooms in the eastern wing of the Nettleton is just twelve feet wide, and we may take it as an established fact that the blow was delivered between

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Doctor Westbrook's entrance and the hall door to Mr. Nettleton's private office, the two doors being directly opposite each other. We may even go a bit farther and say that De Sanchez was closer to the Doctor's door, for, owing to the nature of the wound, all volition was immediately removed from the deceased's movements. The act of his falling through the door would indicate that he had already turned to enter the Doctor's office, was close to it, and was projected through the doorway simply by the momentum of the speed at which he had been walking. That gives us four possible routes whereby the murderer could have come into contact with his victim at the spot mentioned, and it is necessary to bear these in mind:

"1. Through the hall from the stairway;

"2. From Doctor Westbrook's office;

"3. Through the window at the end of the hall, which opens into the light-well; and

"4. Through Mr. Nettleton's private office.

"Assuming the truth of all the statements, the story I obtained from Lynden obviates the first; number two we will set aside on the strength of Doctor Westbrook's statement, partially corroborated by Howe. Regarding the third route — that is to say, the hall window opening into the light-well — we have two persons who were looking into the light-well from two different points, from about five minutes before, and during the time the deed was committed, until several seconds thereafter. These two are Mr. Howe and Judge Elihu Petty, of Petty & Carlton, who was looking from his window in the Field Building, diagonally across from where Howe was standing. Both these gentlemen are positive that no one entered or left the Nettleton hall window,

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and that there was no movement of any kind at any of the other windows during the time they were looking into the light-well. Indeed, it seems impossible that there could have been under the circumstances. Looking from any of the windows mentioned, the entire light-well is within one's range of vision; and while it is true that twilight had set in, it was by no means dark or even nearly so when the deed was committed; and we may assume that it was impossible for anybody to have entered the hall by way of the light-well without attracting the attention of either Howe or Judge Petty.

"Fortunately we have a basis from which to estimate the exact time the blow was struck, and, in fact, all the other known incidents in this affair. That was the five o'clock whistles. We may set it down, then, as another established fact, that the blow was delivered in not to exceed four seconds of that hour. Howe knows the exact time he took up his position at the laboratory window; it was there he was standing when De Sanchez fell through the reception-room door, and at that moment he heard the whistles begin blowing. Judge Petty remembers the circumstance also, and connects it with Howe's sudden disappearance from the laboratory window; and Doctor Westbrook is now able to recall the fact of the whistles blowing being coincident with the deceased's tragic entrance.

"These facts confine us to Mr. Nettleton's private office to seek a solution, and there we find a number of circumstances justifying a closer examination.

"The facts here warrant the following assumptions: That between four-thirty and five o'clock yesterday afternoon, Clay Fairchild and some woman — name unknown — were

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in Mr. Nettleton's offices; that Mr. Fairchild did not depart until after five o'clock; that the lady was familiar with the arrangement of the second floor; that so far we know no one who either saw her enter the building, or saw her while she was inside it, or saw her leave; that she went into Mr. Nettleton's private office from the hall, where she stood behind the door for a while; that she next tiptoed on through to Mr. Nettleton's general office, where she stopped again at the connecting door, close by Fairchild's desk, at which point, in her agitation, she dropped this handkerchief into the waste-paper basket. She then made her way to the hall door of Mr. Nettleton's general office, where she again stopped behind the door, as though waiting for some one to pass.

"Now, if this woman was the assassin, her actions are easily explained. She stood behind the private office door — whence, with the door ajar, one has a view down the length of the hall to the stairway — and awaited the victim's approach; just as he turned to enter the Doctor's office she sprang out and administered the death wound, — in such haste to get back that she made no effort to recover the weapon, but hurried on through Mr. Nettleton's office to the hall door of the general office. Here warning footsteps announce that there is some one else in the hall, and standing close to the partially opened door, with her hand on the knob, she waits until Lynden passes. It is but a second after that he is standing at the threshold of the Doctor's open door, overcome by the scene it discloses, and both deaf and blind for a moment to all else. She takes advantage of that moment to pass on down the hall to the stairway, and so out of the building, probably unobserved

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

by any one except Fairchild. An agile person would have had just about time before Lynden appeared at the head of the stairs to strike such a blow as killed De Sanchez, and then either spring into the light-well or run into Mr. Nettleton's office.

"Now, all this could not have happened without Fairchild's knowledge, and we are not lacking light on his participation in the murder under the theory I am now unfolding.

"Under the circumstances, knowledge can mean only connivance. The known facts coincide precisely, and explain every hypothesis upon which this theory is based; and to get at his connection with the affair, please observe these two bits of paper."

Mr. Converse unfolded one of them, and flattened it on the desk, and as he did so, asked:

"Is it not singular that two men, apparently unknown to each other, should have betrayed interest in Doctor Westbrook's paper-knife in an identical manner? But such is the fact.

"This one was torn from a sheet of typewriter paper, such as Fairchild uses; I found it on his desk. Here we have a fairly good drawing of the dagger in question, made painstakingly, and as though to illustrate a verbal description. But he drew it from memory, as a close inspection of the sketch will indicate. He has either omitted or distorted several little details which not only appear quite plain on the dagger itself, but are quick to catch the observer's notice. But most convincing of this circumstance are the words alongside the picture blade in Fairchild's handwriting, 'about 6 inches.' The blade is, in reality, exactly five inches

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

long: then why, if he had it before him, together with the office ruler, which lay on the desk, should he have guessed at the blade's length?

"This other came from Doctor Westbrook's desk in the reception-room. It is widely different from Fairchild's drawing, and was made by a person who is something of an artist. Furthermore, he had the weapon before him, for the intricate design on the hilt is copied faithfully; besides, many trifling details, such as the peculiar shape of the little knobs at each end of the guard, the script in which the word 'Paquita' is engraved, are all rendered exactly in the sketch. From it we are even able to form an idea when it was drawn: some time on the evening of November third, or the day before the murder. So we may say that the weapon had not been removed from the Doctor's table prior to that time. Observe this spattered blot and the hole in the paper beneath it. That was caused by the artist bringing the pen down on the paper with such force that the pen broke, the ink was spattered, and the paper perforated as you now see it.

"Doctor Westbrook has four penholders on this table; but he is so partial to a particular one of them that he invariably selects it in preference to the other three when he wishes to write. He used it about four o'clock Tuesday afternoon — the third — and did not have occasion to use it again till yesterday evening, when he started to write the letter to De Sanchez. Then he discovered that the point was bent and broken; and we may infer the sketch to have been made between four o'clock on the afternoon of the third and five o'clock last evening.

"During that time a score or more of people were in and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

out of the Doctor's office, and we have no handwriting to guide us in this instance, as the word 'Paquita' here is a faithful copy of the script in the scroll — too faithful to betray many individualities. But still, it is easy to infer who sketched this dagger. Observe the blot again: it is located immediately at the end of the word 'Paquita,' and was made just as the artist concluded that word. Now, what emotions would cause one to so maltreat a pen? Anger or impatience,— the two being very near akin. It follows there was some suggestion in the word 'Paquita' which angered the artist; and this immediately suggested to me the man Vargas.

"On the evening of the third he called at Doctor Westbrook's offices in company with Señor de Sanchez. He and the latter were negotiating the deal involving the deed and the shares of stock in the Paquita Gold Mining Company, and, as I have found out, Vargas was having some difficulty in closing the matter, Only that afternoon had they come to an understanding; but De Sanchez had not yet delivered the papers. Vargas was becoming very anxious and impatient over the delay of getting them into his possession. When they called on the Doctor Tuesday evening, the latter and De Sanchez retired to the consultation-room, leaving Vargas in the reception-room, and as he sat idly at the table his eye was caught by the dagger, and he fell to sketching it. The word 'Paquita' on the hilt brings suddenly to mind his anxiety and impatience; and by a natural, involuntary gesture he ruins the Doctor's pen and blots the drawing.

"I will interpolate here, so that we may dismiss him, that this person Vargas attracted my attention owing to the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

very fact of his presence in the city at this time, his association with deceased, and the coincidence of the name 'Paquita' occurring both on the dagger-hilt and as the name of the mining company. But I have been able to follow the negotiations between the two, and to trace Vargas's movements all yesterday afternoon, and each succeeding fact tends cumulatively to absolve him from any participation in the affair. Warren, a clerk at the La Salle House, knew of the deal; both parties frequently talked about it in his presence; and it evidently was just what it appears to be. We are extremely fortunate in having this unprejudiced witness to save confusion upon this particular point. On the afternoon of Tuesday De Sanchez and Vargas approached him in rather an elated mood, and invited him to join them in a bottle of wine to celebrate the consummation of the negotiations. Right there, you see, this deal is removed from the chance of being a motive. As the party separated, De Sanchez mentioned half-past four on the following afternoon, yesterday, as the hour for delivering the papers. Vargas was on hand promptly at the appointed time, but the other was not; and after waiting, with growing impatience, the former left the hotel and did not return until about six o'clock. But it is not probable that he entered the Nettleton Building near the time of the murder, for it would have been utterly impossible for him to do so without being seen; and he was still awaiting De Sanchez when informed of his death by the clerk, Warren. Then he hastened to Doctor Westbrook's offices.

"Now, let us return to Fairchild. I learned a fact of some importance from the Doctor this morning. Yesterday, as he was leaving his office at about one o'clock, he met

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Fairchild at the reception-room entrance; the latter, in a hurried manner, asked Doctor Westbrook if he could borrow the dagger for a few minutes, to which the Doctor assented. Doctor Westbrook continued on out, not giving the matter another thought, while Fairchild went into the reception-room. The Doctor don't know whether he got the dagger then; as a paper-knife, the Doctor uses it only to cut magazines or books, or the little papers in which he puts up powders — and often, when it is not right at hand, he resorts to his pocket-knife, rather than hunt for it in the mass of magazines and papers that usually litter his table. It could easily be absent from its place several days without his missing it.

"Mr. Nettleton left his office yesterday afternoon at four-thirty, and he had no lady callers during the entire day; hence the following assumption — for want of a better one —will fit the present theory: During the noon hour, while Mr. Nettleton was at lunch, Fairchild and the woman were together; the crime was contemplated and discussed between them, the man volunteering to secure the weapon; which he did, but was surprised by encountering the Doctor, who generally goes out to make his visits at that time of day.

"However, she was the active spirit; hers was the hand that held the weapon, while the more timid man waited at his desk in the adjoining room. There she paused in her flight, and told him the deed had been committed; and there he waited until about a quarter-past five, when, moved by that irresistible impulse which leads some murderers to gloat over their handiwork, he crossed the hall and looked upon the dead man. This happened while Lynden was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

on his way to headquarters with the news of the murder. Fairchild's actions were so singular that they attracted both Doctor Westbrook's and Howe's attention. Overcome with horror, he turned and fled without a word. That is the last seen of Clay Fairchild, and that is why I sent a note to Barton and Adams, who were waiting below, to find him.

"Under this theory I can as yet conjecture but a single motive — Fairchild's interest in the woman; and as to what hers is, we must wait until her identity is established."

Converse paused. His eyes narrowed, and he ran the tip of his tongue across his lips with a deliberate lateral movement.

"I 'd like very much to lay my hand on that fair lady," said he, presently, in a quiet manner; but an observer might have remarked that a shudder convulsed the corpulent figure of Mr. Merkel, and that Mr. Mountjoy shot at him a quick, keen look, and then nodded his head in silent approval.

The Captain went on at once.

"There is one incongruous element in this theory, however. When the blow was struck the deceased was in the act of turning toward Doctor Westbrook's door, and consequently his back was almost squarely presented to Mr. Nettleton's. The wound, as you know, is not only on the left side of the throat, but tends backward toward the spinal column, which the point of the blade penetrated. Suspended from the centre of the hall, and on a line with the centre of the two doorways, is an electric light. Now, then, the murderer coming from behind the victim could, under the present circumstances, strike the blow in one of two

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ways: it was either a left-handed person, or, if right-handed, the murderer must have stepped to deceased's left, and a little in front of him, facing in the same direction, and struck to the right and backward. If the latter theory is correct, the murderer would have been between De Sanchez and the hall window opening into the light-well, and so close to the window that he — or she, if it was a woman — would have been not only plainly visible from the windows on the opposite side of the light-well, but would have cast a distinct shadow because of the electric light. If the murderer was left-handed he would not have been obliged to go so far to De Sanchez's left, and consequently would have remained so nearly beneath the electric light that the only shadow would have been on the hall floor.

"Now, from the point where Judge Petty was looking into the light-well, one cannot quite see Doctor Westbrook's door through the Nettleton hall window; but the hall window would be so far within such a person's range of vision that the slightest obscuring of the light would attract notice. Judge Petty recollects that the light was burning at five o'clock yesterday evening, and he is positive that there was no shadow at the hall window, and that no one approached close to it while he was looking into the light-well.

"Now mark this — at least, as a singular coincidence — while Doctor Westbrook is not what you might call left-handed, he can use both hands equally well."

"Ambidextrous," suggested Mr. Mountjoy.

Converse nodded. "Exactly," said he; "ambidextrous." He continued:

"Regarding the woman's identity, now there are one or two little points deserving special attention. Lynden states

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

positively that he neither saw nor passed anybody in the hall nor on the stairway; yet, there was something about Mr Nettleton's offices and the indications of a woman's recent presence there that disturbed him strangely. While in the very act of asserting that he had neither seen nor passed anybody, he stopped as though struck by a sudden doubt, although he did not alter his statement. A similar incident happened with Howe while we were all gathered in the Doctor's office last night after the murder. He also paused in the midst of a statement that there was nothing to indicate who the assassin might be, and Lynden was impressed by his hesitation, as though it reminded him of his own. Are these gentlemen trying to conceal anything? What possible object could Howe have in doing so? Yet I believe that both of them are perturbed by some misgiving which they hesitate to put into words. Their doubt may contain the key to the whole riddle; but it will be a delicate matter getting at it. Assuming that it points to the lady's identity, we may surprise one or the other of them into betraying it; but it is no easy task to make a man speak of something which he will not admit even to himself."

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

A TELEGRAM FROM MEXICO

"YOUR deductions seem natural," said Mr. Mountjoy, at length. "But this unknown woman? Is there any one in the city to whom you could ascribe a motive? Will you have to go into the past record of Señor de Sanchez? And Fairchild — Heaven knows there can't be anything between him and such a mysterious, bloodthirsty female. How are we to account for his participation in the crime? I think it well to secure such a record; also De Sanchez's association with General Westbrook in Mexico. There is no telling how the darkness may be illuminated from some unexpected quarter. At present, John, to me it is completely baffling."

But Mr. Converse had neglected nothing that his experience suggested as being a likely means of casting light upon the crime.

"Yes, sir," he rejoined, in his steady manner. "Yes, sir; I admit the case offers many puzzling phases, and apparently contradictory circumstances; but you must remember that we have been at work on it less than twenty-four hours; the woman's identity may be shown in a manner we cannot now imagine, and any hour may bring the news of Fairchild's apprehension.

"Besides, I have been beforehand in looking up the deceased's past. I should receive a telegram from Mexico to-day. The net is well spread, I think. A man is watch-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing Fairchild's house — in fact, the whole department are keeping a look-out for him; and the other actors are being shadowed by capable men."

"But from all the facts in your possession," interrupted Mr. Mountjoy, "have you considered the possibility — aside from the statements of the witnesses, I mean, and simply upon what you know to be the facts — of either Doctor Westbrook or Howard Lynden being the assassin?"

"Yes, sir, I have," was the reply. "But for the present we may dismiss them shortly, though I shall not cease to consider every development in this case in the light of its possible application to all the parties.

"Could the Doctor, then, have delivered the fatal thrust? From the present facts we must give him the benefit of the doubt, and abide the results of further investigation. It is very fortunate for him that his friend Howe happened to be present just when he was; and it is strange, his coming all the way from Georgia to be a piece in this puzzling game. But here he is.

"Howe's importance arises from the peculiar acoustics of that portion of the Nettleton Building about Doctor Westbrook's office." Converse then told of his experience with Lynden in the Doctor's laboratory, concluding: "It is not at all surprising that Howe could not hear a struggle in the hall, while, at the same time, he could hear such faint sounds as the scratching of a pen and the rustling of paper while the Doctor was writing in the reception-room.

"As for Lynden, we have to show he so quickened his pace that he overtook De Sanchez at Doctor Westbrook's door. He shared with all the frequenters of the Doctor's office a knowledge of the dagger and where it usually re-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

posed. Under such a theory, however, Lynden's actions would have displayed a carelessness and a reckless disregard for consequences which I don't think the man capable of. He did not know who had or had not gone home from the other offices that line the hall, and the deceased was not surprised by the sudden onrush of a determined murderer. Had such been the case, how about Doctor Westbrook's statement that De Sanchez came on steadily to the reception-room door? — for, singularly enough, in the reception-room one can hear quite distinctly sounds arising in the hall. Besides, the Doctor does not remember having heard Lynden at all until the young man grasped his arm."

"Well, now, tell us of the cigarette stubs." This from the District Attorney.

Converse picked them both up, one in each hand, and contemplated them with uplifted brow and puckered lips.

"Gentlemen," he began at length, "these two snipes have caused me more mental worry — I have had more trouble in fitting them into any place where they could belong — than anything else concerning this case.

"You will observe that both of them are but half consumed, and that when rolled neither was moistened by the tongue to hold it together. Any one who has travelled in Mexico or the extreme Southwest will recognize this as a national and local characteristic. The paper of both is identical — coarse and a dark brown; and the tobacco is from a black Mexican growth. I suppose, outside the Mexican quarter you could not find a man in the city who smokes such a cigarette — excepting Vargas. It is just such a cigarette as nine out of ten of the lower class of Mexicans — men, women, and children — smoke. Yet the tastes

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of neither De Sanchez nor Vargas were too fastidious for them; the papers and tobacco are identical with those found in the deceased's pocket, and they are just like those Mr. Vargas smokes.

"The first I picked up near the top of the Nettleton Building stairway, while I was accompanying Lynden to Doctor Westbrook's offices; the second I found on the skylight at the bottom of the light-well. The ends that had been held in the mouth were still moist when I found them, so they had not been long discarded. De Sanchez, of course, is responsible for the first; but how about the other? Could he, after throwing one cigarette away at the point where I found the first, roll and light another and smoke it half up as he walked down the hall, then flip the second out the hall window into the light-well just before turning toward the Doctor's door? I believe not.

"The second could have come from any window abutting upon the light-well, of either the Field or the Nettleton Buildings. But who threw it, and why was he there at that particular time? Well, it took two men more than an hour this morning to eliminate all except five windows out of a possible twenty; and those five told nothing. I examined them myself. Yet it might be possible that the second stub came from the unknown woman.

"Did she steady her nerves and beguile the time until her victim's approach, with a cigarette? It may be —"

Here, for the first time, Mr. Merkel interrupted.

"A Mexican woman!" he fairly shouted; "some dark-eyed señorita —" His enthusiasm suddenly cooled as Mr. Mountjoy's look of surprise at his outburst rapidly changed to one of much meaning.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A Telegram from Mexico

At this juncture the door opened, and a clerk appeared from the outer office, holding a telegram in his hand.

"For you, Captain," said he, handing him the message,

Neither of the other two could conceal his impatience, as, with annoying deliberation, Converse opened the yellow envelope.

"Well," said he, presently, "it is indeed from Mexico — the reply to my inquiry. Here it is." He read aloud:

A. de S. has no police record, but have obtained following facts: Age, 38; family, old, aristocratic, and very wealthy; A. educated in Paris; returned here when twenty-one. Was in banking and broking business several years ago with P. Westbrook, but severed partnership about four years ago. Reason not known. A. always prominent in society; rather wild when young; but nearest approach to woman entanglements are following: Engagement broken with Señorita Aurora de Pacheco. Understood to have been by reason of disagreement in marriage settlements. She has since married into prominent family, and now on best of terms with De S. family. A rumored liaison with a circus performer, supposed to have committed suicide, but unable to ascertain details; liaison with a Mme. Claude Le Tellier, now residing Nice, France, on pension from De S. family. For last twelve years A. de S. known as unusually steady. Rumored he fell in love with Miss Westbrook when she visited here about four years ago, and that he has followed her for purpose of marrying. GRINNELL.

"Well!" said the District Attorney, "this is not promising: Señorita Somebody"— with a sidewise look at Mr. Merkel —"now a matron and probably the mother of other señoritas; a circus performer — "

"It 's the madame that interests me," Converse quietly

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

broke in. "Grinnell would not, of course, know whether she is in Nice at the present time. I will go to headquarters, ascertain who our correspondent at that place is, and send him the lady's name. That should bring us what we want to know about her.

"That is about all now," he concluded. "I have gone over these different phases of the case in order that you might formulate a line of inquiry to be followed at the inquest. In the meantime, I will work out one or two little ideas of my own, laying the results before you as soon as they mature. Good morning."

That day Mr. Converse received two more messages, one of them a cable despatch. The first read:

Rumor connecting A. de S. with circus performer very vague. Seems to have occurred in Paris 17 or 18 years ago. No trace of her identity here. GRINNELL.

The cablegram contained the following:

Mme. C. Le T. died Oct. 28. GAILLARD.

He tossed the cable message to one side; but for several minutes he pondered over the second message from Mexico. He then prepared, with much care, a long despatch, which was sent immediately to Paris.

Away from the presence of his superiors and those whose concern it was to be put in possession of everything bearing upon the case, John Converse was the last man to advance any theory to account for Alberto de Sanchez's untoward end.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A Telegram from Mexico

His seemingly unerring judgment and his uniform success in dissipating the clouds of mystery in which his associates sometimes lost themselves were governed by an extreme caution, and based upon a vast knowledge of humanity. His had been an unusually eventful life. Of New England parentage, he had early run away to sea; and to portray the stirring experiences of this period of his life would require a whole volume for itself.

But those experiences had given him wonderful powers of observation, which were able to grasp and contemplate every detail in its just proportions to the whole, a trait that was simply the complement to his unemotional and methodical temperament.

If he hesitated, however, in advancing theories, the papers did not,— either probable or improbable; and as it was one of his maxims never to ignore a suggestion coming from the outside, he followed these reports with the same intensity of eagerness that characterized all his proceedings.

The murder, owing not only to the prominence of every one concerned therein, but also to the suggestive veil of mystery which surrounded it, had been "featured" every day since the tragedy, and he was impressed by the unanimity with which the press hit upon Robert Nettleton's offices as the probable lurking-place of the murderer.

None of the papers, of course, was in as full possession of all the known facts as the Captain was; but a certain evening sheet, after theorizing at length on Fairchild's unaccountable disappearance, concluded with the assertion that the end would show the controlling factor of the mysterious murder to have been a woman.

"I believe that gentleman is eminently correct," was the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Captain's comment, as he laid the paper aside. "If his insight had been only a little clearer, if he had looked only a little farther, and seen who that woman is, it would save a deal of trouble and worry."

He left his private office and walked to the mail repository at the police clerk's desk. He found several letters addressed to himself; but one, the writing of which was very like copper-plate engraving, caught his instant attention by the peculiarity of its address. It read:

For Detective on De Sancher Case,
Police Headquarters,
City.

After the Captain had returned to his desk he turned his attention to this letter. The mark of the cancelling-machine showed that it had been mailed at the main post-office that morning. What the envelope contained made him suddenly sit upright.

The writer knows that C. Fairchild had no hand in the murder of the man De Sanchez. When you discover the female who was in the second story of the Nettleton on Wed. P. M., Nov. 4, at the hour of 5, you will know why C. F. has vanished.

Again — the unknown woman!

There was no address to this brief epistle, no date, no signature — nothing else; yet there was an added light in Mr. Converse's gray eyes, as he laid the missive on the desk before him, that lent something like an expression of satisfaction to his almost illegible countenance. He scrutinized

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the single sheet of paper long and attentively before finally folding and returning it to the envelope.

"Who in the city can write such a hand?" he mused.

After he had placed the anonymous missive in his pocket-book, he drew toward himself a number of bound typewritten sheets — the record of the De Sanchez case. Turning until he found the paragraphs he sought, he read the following:

Besides the front entrance, opening into Court Street, the Nettleton has but one other outside doorway or means of exit. Opening into a high-walled court in the rear is a single door, used only for the purpose of admitting fuel in the winter; during the summer it is open not more than once or twice, when the trash-bin accumulations are removed. During the interim it is locked by a bolt, a No. 4 Yale compound spring lock, and a common padlock passed through staples. Inspection of this door revealed beyond doubt that it had not been disturbed for weeks.

The reader turned back to the statements of the different persons in the second story at the fatal moment, and his glance passed them all over until it fell upon the following:

William Slade, 62; bachelor; abstracter of titles for the Guaranty Trust Co. Is very deaf; was engaged in his regular duties in Room 6 on the evening of Nov. 4, at 5 o'clock, yet it cannot be shown that he knew anything of the murder. His statement is to the effect that he first learned of it at about 8:30 o'clock that night."

He closed the volume, placed it in a drawer of his desk, and after securing his hat, left department headquarters, and made his way to Court Street.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Here he consumed the better part of the day by interrogating closely every individual whose place of business had an outlook toward the Nettleton entrance, a quest the results of which were purely negative. He called at all the newspaper offices; and the next morning, again in the evening, and for a week thereafter, every local paper contained the following advertisement:

> $25 — REWARD — $25.
> The above sum will be paid any person who saw a lady leave the Nettleton Building at or about 5 o'clock on the evening of Wednesday, Nov. 4th. Apply in person at No. 18 Ash Lane.

The address given was that of the house where Mr. Converse had his lodgings; and whatever else he might think of the De Sanchez case, it was evident he had become convinced that there was "a woman at the bottom of it"— and one very hard to find.

Late in the afternoon, after he had returned to his private office, he found the reply to the cable message sent his Paris correspondent awaiting him. He opened it and read:

Nothing ascertainable of A. de S. here further than that his name appears on the roster of College of St. Ignatius for three years, inclusive, September, 1883, to September, 1886. Examination of records of women suicides during period fails to connect him with any of them. No one during that time or near it could be circus performer. Might glean something if I had name. NOIZET.

Unfortunately, he had no name to send.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VI

THE INQUEST

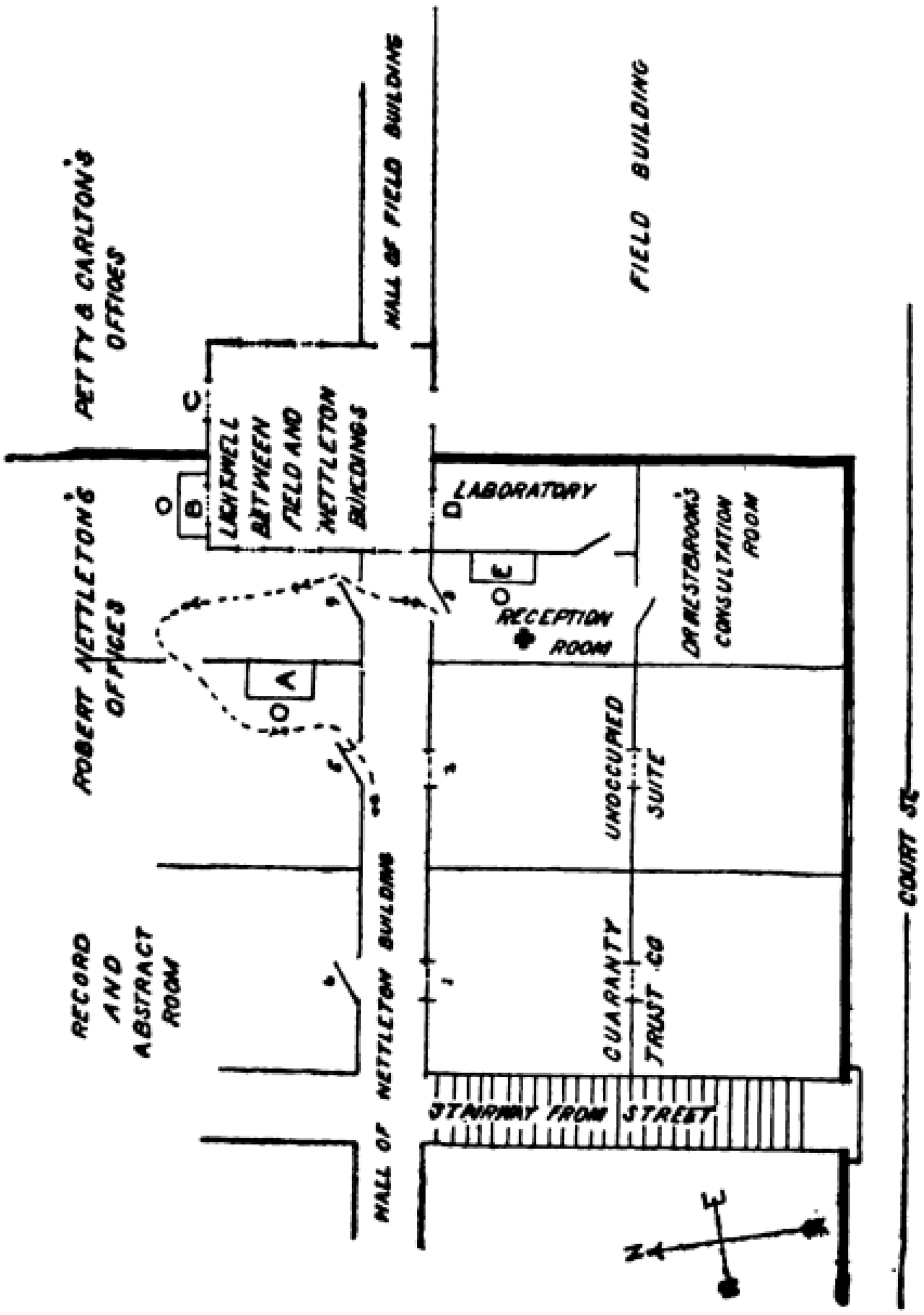
MR. MERKEL was not in readiness for the inquest into the Nettleton Building affair until the Monday following; and at the hour set for the hearing the outer of his two offices, which made a fairly large court-room, was literally packed by a throng of gaping, perspiring spectators.

In a corner by themselves sat the witnesses who were to testify. General Westbrook is of this group; also J. Howard Lynden, plainly ill at ease. The Doctor and his friend, Ferdinand Howe, are seated behind the General, an expression of concern on their countenances that is noted and commented on by the crowd. Why should Dr. Westbrook be so pale? Why should his face be so drawn? The affair is not of such consequence to him.

Still aloof from the others sits Señor Vargas, lean and swarthy, his eyes still dull behind their gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, and his pitted countenance not yet quickened to an interest by the sudden tragic death of his compatriot. Occasionally he coughs in a manner that seems to afford Doctor Westbrook some diversion from his own pressing care, for now and then he glances toward the Mexican gentleman with quite a professional air.

At length the door to the Coroner's private office opens, and through it file Mr. Merkel, self-important, Mr. Mountjoy, John Converse, a stenographer, and various clerks

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY



PARTIAL PLAN OF THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE FIELD AND NETTLETON BUILDINGS

(A) Clay Fairchild's Desk. (B) Mr. Nettleton's Desk. (C) Window at which Judge Petty Stood. (D) Window at which Mr. Howe Stood. (E) Doctor Westbrook's Desk. (✠) Marks Spot where De Sanchez Fell.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and petty officials. Converse, the Coroner, and the District Attorney seat themselves about a separate table away from one occupied by numerous reporters and newspaper artists; and immediately the tedious ordeal of securing a jury is entered upon.

After six freeholders are accepted and sworn in, the captain of detectives is duly put upon his oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. A brief delay follows while the District Attorney asks for an application of the rule excluding witnesses. The witnesses are duly excluded.

Captain Converse established the *corpus delicti;* after which he related at length the results of his investigation, very much as he already had told them to Mr. Mountjoy and the Coroner.

As he returned to his seat by the table, a stir spread throughout the apartment; a rustling as of forest leaves before a tempest sibilated upon one theme: the unknown woman; but the sounds sank at once to anticipatory silence when the clerk arose and made ready to read from a sheet of paper in his hand the name of the next witness. Perhaps the avid curiosity is to be satisfied by the woman's name.

"James Howard Lynden."

On the wall facing the witness-chair was suspended a large map of those portions of the Nettleton and Field buildings which formed the *locus operandi* of the tragedy, and this Lynden contemplated seriously. The rooms were named and numbered thereon, the points of interest designated by letters or otherwise; and the reader is here referred to the plan (page 88), as occasion may arise, for a clearer understanding of the evidence.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Silver Blade

The witness began his testimony in a well-modulated voice, which could be distinctly heard in every part of the room. In reply to interrogatories, he stated that he was a cotton-broker, twenty-eight years of age, and that his office was in Court Street, a few doors west of the Nettleton Building. He had been acquainted with the deceased, having met him frequently in a social way, but between them there had never been more than ordinary civilities exchanged. He next related such facts of the tragedy as he had imparted to Mr. Converse and the Chief of Police. The Coroner asked:

"What time did you leave your office on the evening of November fourth?"

"It was a very few minutes to five o'clock."

"Now, Mr. Lynden, begin at the time you left your office, and describe in detail the events from then onward."

"I merely walked leisurely toward the Nettleton Building for the purpose of stopping at Doctor Westbrook's office, before proceeding to my club for dinner. I have been in the habit of doing this several evenings in the week, and last Wednesday evening was no more eventful than scores of others until I arrived within forty or fifty feet of the Nettleton entrance."

"And what occurred then?"

"I observed Señor de Sanchez turn in at the entrance."

"What direction was he going when you first observed him?"

"West — toward me."

"Very well; proceed, Mr. Lynden."

"I continued on to the doorway, where I turned into the Nettleton Building, going directly upstairs without pausing."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Inquest

"Did you see Señor de Sanchez?"

"Yes. Just as I began ascending the stairs he was turning to the right — to the east — at the top. There was a lighted incandescent lamp at that point, and I beheld him distinctly."

"Do you know what time that was?"

"It could have been only two or three seconds to five o'clock, for I heard the whistles begin to blow before I reached the top of the stairs."

"You are sure it was before you arrived at the top that you heard the whistles blow?"

"Oh, yes; I have n't a doubt of it. I remember the circumstance perfectly."

"Now, when you reached the head of the stairs — at the second story — did you see Señor de Sanchez?"

"No, sir. I saw him no more until I arrived at Doctor Westbrook's office — until I beheld him dying on the floor of the Doctor's reception-room."

Responding to a number of interrogations, the witness added that not more than thirty seconds elapsed between the time of his seeing De Sanchez turn at the head of the stairs and seeing him lying on the reception-room floor; that there was a lighted incandescent lamp before the entrance to this room; that there had been no one in the hall, and that it was impossible for anybody to have been concealed there. He continued:

"When I arrived at Doctor Westbrook's office the door was wide open. Señor de Sanchez was lying on his right side, his feet toward the door, and not much more than a yard beyond the threshold. Blood was spurting, — in rhythm with the heart-beats, it seemed, — from a wound

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in his throat, as though some large artery had been severed. This ceased in a second or two.

"I paused just at the threshold, dazed and utterly dumfounded by the sight that met my eyes. Doctor Westbrook, Mr. Howe, and myself held our respective attitudes three or four seconds,— possibly it was longer,— but during that time Señor de Sanchez only breathed two long sighs and became apparently dead.

"I believe, then, I was first to speak. 'Good God, Mobley!' I cried, 'What does this mean?' He still seemed dazed and made no reply. I advanced into the room and seized his arm, and said, 'For God's sake, tell me! Did you do this?' I was very much excited, and could not grasp the full import of what I beheld; but when he felt my touch, he aroused himself, and, recoiling a step or two, cried in tones of amazement, 'Jim! Jim! *I* do this? My God, Jim! No, no, no!' Then checking himself, he asked me, 'But who did? You must have seen; who was in the hall, man?'

"I next looked at Mr. Howe. He was exceedingly agitated and said nothing. He stood shaking his head like one whose mind could not digest the horror of the deed. I turned again to Doctor Westbrook and looked at the silver-bladed dagger he was holding in his hand. 'But that dagger,' I said, 'what does that mean?' He looked at it in a preoccupied manner, as though he did not see it. Suddenly becoming sensible of the fact that he was holding it in his hand, he exclaimed, 'You don't think *I* stabbed him, do you? Why, man, I just drew the knife from the wound.' I felt immensely relieved."

A deep exhalation burst from the massed throng, as

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

though they had been holding their breath in an anxiety not to miss a word of this recital. Under the influence of this eagerness and galvanic expectancy, Lynden was growing restless; but he kept his gaze on the coroner, and continued to respond to that official's interrogations without hesitation. In answer to a number of these, witness said:

"I did not identify the dagger at the time. I am thoroughly familiar with the ornamental little weapon which Doctor Westbrook uses as a paper-knife, and have handled it many times. In fact, I was present when it was given the Doctor by his sister. She secured it, I believe, about four years ago, during a visit to Mexico, and at the time of the presentation she told a story — quite a tragic romance — in which it had —"

"We may omit that, Mr. Lynden," interrupted the Coroner. "Where did Doctor Westbrook usually keep this dagger, or paper-knife?"

"When not in use, it always lay on the table in his reception room."

Every eye was turned toward the dagger as Mr. Merkel arose and took it in his hand. And not one of those eyes missed the sombre stains which now dulled the lustre of its silvery blade.

"Is this the dagger?"

"That is the one that lay on Doctor Westbrook's table — his paper-knife. I am unable to identify it with the one he held in his hand; the hilt was then concealed, and the blade was very bloody; but it might be — I had no such thought at the time."

Mr. Merkel returned the dagger to the table and resumed his seat. The District Attorney leaned toward him and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

whispered a few words; whereupon — evidently on a suggestion — he asked:

"Are you familiar with the arrangement of the second floor of the Nettleton Building, Mr. Lynden, — more particularly, those rooms to the right or east of the stairway?"

"I am."

"Describe them, please."

Once more Lynden fixed his attention upon the plan suspended before him.

"Well, to begin with, the Nettleton Building faces in a southerly direction. From the head of the stairway the hall extends east to the light-well between the Nettleton and Field buildings. Beginning at the head of the stairs, the first room to the right, or on the south side of the hall, is the first office of the Guaranty Trust Company; the next suite is vacant, and then comes Doctor Westbrook's suite. I may add, that the numbers run in the order I am naming the suites: the Guaranty Trust Company's offices are number one, number two is unoccupied, and the Doctor's is number three.

"Now, passing over to the north side of the hall, the entrance to number four is directly opposite Doctor Westbrook's. It is the door to Mr. Nettleton's private office. Next to that, and facing the unoccupied suite, is Room 5, Mr. Nettleton's general office. Adjoining this is number six, a room occupied by the Guaranty Trust Company as a record and abstract room. That brings us back to the stairway again, but on the opposite side of the hall whence we started."

"Then there are six doors — three on each side — opening into the hall?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"That is correct."

"Now, Mr. Lynden, are not the upper portions of those doors ground or frosted glass?"

At this apparently harmless and irrelevant question, the witness's composure dropped from him like a cloak cast aside; a swift, startled expression came into his light blue eyes, and he answered with obvious hesitation:

"I believe so."

"Don't you know?

"Yes."

"Well, are they?"

"Yes."

"Then, if a light were burning in one of those rooms and a person should be standing close to the door of that room, and on the inside, would there not be a pretty distinct shadow or silhouette of that person on the ground glass of that particular door?"

"I should imagine there would," said Lynden at length, but in a voice both low and unnatural.

"Well, in your frequent visits to Doctor Westbrook's office at such hours as the lamps were lighted, have you not observed that to be a fact?"

Without altering his attitude, the young man shook his head.

"No," said he; "I cannot say that I have."

At the next question an audible murmur of disappointment rippled through the room. It was as though the Coroner were searching for something while blindfolded, and had suddenly taken the wrong turning when about to lay his hand on the object of his quest. But if he was not over-astute, he had at least gathered wisdom from experi-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ence — to the extent of knowing that more than one road leads to Rome.

"Now, then, Mr. Lynden," he began once more, "when you arrived at the head of the stairs on the evening of November fourth, did you look down the length of the hall to your right — to the east?"

Witness answered, with visible relief:

"I did."

"How light was it? Was it light enough for you to see distinctly?"

"In addition to the two incandescents, the window at the end of the hall at the light-well was wide open and it was only twilight outdoors."

"Then, if anybody had been in the hall anywhere between the head of the stairs and the light-well window, you would have seen him?"

"I certainly should; there was no one there."

"I must ask you to recollect carefully, Mr. Lynden: Was there a lady — a woman — in the hall? Or did you pass a woman either in the hall or on the stairway?"

"Lady!" the witness exclaimed. "No — no; there was no lady — there was no one in the hall or on the stairs." He cast a furtive, uneasy glance at the expressionless visage of Mr. Converse, concluding, "I neither saw nor passed any one."

"Well, let us return to the head of the stairs. When you arrived there, what did you do?"

"I proceeded directly to Doctor Westbrook's office."

"As you walked down the hall, did you observe the doors on either side — whether they were open or closed?"

Here was a return to those mysterious doors. The

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

young man's grip on the chair-arms tightened, and once again his answer was preceded by obvious hesitancy.

"Some were entirely closed," he said, slowly; "others were more or less open."

"Well, which ones were more or less open?"

"Doctor Westbrook's was —" he began; but the Coroner quickly interrupted:

"Did you notice it first?"

Silence. The young man sat rigid as a statue.

"Please answer, Mr. Lynden."

The insistence was soft, but inexorable. The witness seemed to have lost the power of speech, and was obliged to clear his throat before he could reply.

"Sir," he finally began, "I was not thinking of the doors, nor was I particularly observing whether they were open or closed. I will say this, however, in the hope that you will find the information you desire: that it is customary for the tenants of the Nettleton Building to leave their doors unfastened when departing in the evening, for the benefit of the janitor. As soon as he has cleaned the rooms, he locks the doors for the night. For that reason, I suppose, it would be safe to assume that those rooms whence the occupants had gone for the night were unlocked — in the event, of course, that the janitor had not yet placed them in order."

"The information is valuable, Mr. Lynden; but you stated that some doors were entirely closed, while others were more or less open. I will put my question in another way. Which was the first door you observed to be entirely closed?"

"That to number six."

"Was there a light in that room?"

"Yes."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Did you observe any shadow on the door?"

"No."

"The next door you noticed to be closed — which was it?"

"The regular offices of the Guaranty Trust Company."

"Any light there?"

"They were dark."

"Well, the next door you noticed to be closed entirely?"

With a visibly growing reluctance to answer, each moment his voice becoming more and more strained, the young man replied:

"Number two — the vacant suite."

But the interrogations were relentless.

"The next?"

He moistened his lips, and his voice was barely audible.

"I observed no other doors closed," said he.

"Now, then, we have got this far — note it, please, Mr. Stenographer,— we have got this far: The doors to numbers one, two, and six were closed. That leaves three, four, and five — were they open or closed?"

No one heard the reply.

"Louder, if you please; the jury can't hear you."

"I said that number three was open."

"You have already testified that Doctor Westbrook's door was open," was the dry remark with which his answer was met. "Was number four open?"

"I did not notice."

"Not notice?" in a tone of intense surprise. "Did you not see it?"

"Sir, when I had arrived at that point I was so shocked by the sight in the Doctor's office that I did not observe the condition of doors or windows."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Well, as you passed the door to Room 5 — Mr. Nettleton's general office — you had not yet heard or beheld anything shocking, had you? Did you notice whether it was open or closed?"

There was an enthralling significance in the witness's manner which everybody present felt, and a conviction was natural that the young man knew something that he was resolved at any cost not to reveal. It was exasperating that the Coroner should so play about the mainspring of the witness's discomposure — as he plainly was doing — without being able to light upon a point that must force from him some admission, sufficient at least to serve as a fulcrum whereby the rest might be pried from him.

"Come, Mr. Lynden, the jury awaits your answer."

The witness's reply came hoarsely, as if it were indeed literally dragged forth:

"It was not closed — entirely."

"Ah, one of the 'more or less' doors: which was it, more or less?"

"I do not understand."

"Was the door to Room 5 of Mr. Nettleton's suite open or closed; and if not closed, how far was it open?"

The young man lowered his head a moment in an attitude of reflection.

"I should say it stood ajar about three or four inches," was the reply.

"Was there a light in that room?"

"Yes."

"Is there not a desk against the east wall of that room at which Clay Fairchild ordinarily sits, which is visible from the hall when the door is three or four inches ajar?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Yes."

"On the evening of November fourth, as you passed Room 5, did you observe this desk?"

"I did not; I could not see into the room."

Both Mr. Converse and Mr. Mountjoy were watching him through lids narrowed to mere slits, with an intentness of which he was plainly sensible.

"And why not?" came the next question. Lynden faltered:

"Be — because the — the aperture was closed by — by something."

"By what?"

"I cannot say."

"Was it a human form?"

Witness's voice was again becoming inaudible.

"I — I cannot say," said he, nervously,— "yes, it was a human form."

"Was it that of a man or a woman?"

So low that the jury, leaning as far forward as they could, scarcely caught the murmur, came the answer:

"It — it looked like a woman."

"Did you recognize her?"

Witness considered his response a long time. When finally it came, a sigh of disappointment welled from the crowd; it seemed that after all the baiting his examination was to come to naught.

"No," said he.

The Coroner persisted.

"Come, Mr. Lynden," said he, "was there not something about that form that struck you as being familiar? — that suggested the individuality of the person standing there?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Inquest

"I tell you I do not know who it was; I do not know," burst from the witness. "Whatever I beheld, if it was any one or anything at all, is but a shadow in my mind, — a nameless shadow, void of substance and form, and a nameless shadow it must remain. I can add no more to that, sir, nor shall I try."

Unless the witness had chosen deliberately to lie, it was evident that he could tell no more of the vague figure — that it was indeed only a shadow — and not pursuing this line of inquiry further, the Coroner took up another.

After Mr. Merkel and the District Attorney had conferred together with heads bowed over the table, the former began.

"Mr. Lynden," said he, "you say you enjoy friendly relations with General Westbrook's family. Have you recently heard any rumors connecting the name of Señor de Sanchez with any member of that family in a matrimonial way?"

"I have heard such rumors — yes; but nothing more. I certainly have heard nothing to that effect from any one in a position to know."

"Did you ever hear Doctor Westbrook deny the possibility of such a marriage?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last Tuesday night."

"The night before Señor de Sanchez's death?"

"Yes."

As the Doctor himself further on relates at length the substance of what occurred between him and De Sanchez the night before the latter's death, it may here be omitted from Lynden's testimony. The only other point touched upon

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

while this witness was upon the stand was shown in the following question:

"On the evening of November fourth, when you saw De Sanchez turn in at the Nettleton Building entrance, did you observe whether he was smoking?"

"I did not."

"That is all, Mr. Lynden; you may step aside."

With what relief he descended from the dais supporting the witness-chair can only be imagined. The examination of the first witness in the De Sanchez case had been a long and tedious affair. And what was there to show for it? Not much more than the public already knew; and there remained the woman — still unknown. And Mr. Lynden's extreme agitation — what did that signify? If he did not know the woman — if what he had beheld behind the nearly closed door was only a shadow — why had he not said so at once? Certainly, at this rate, the mystery which surrounded the case was only becoming deeper as the investigation proceeded.

However, speculation was forgotten in curiosity over whom the next witness might be.

"Mobley Westbrook," read the clerk; and an officer retired to the Coroner's private room to summon him.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VII

THE VERDICT

DOCTOR WESTBROOK walked unhesitatingly and with a firm tread to the witness-chair; but once seated, it was more apparent than ever that his personal appearance had undergone a marked change. It was difficult to define: his head and beard appeared to be more shaggy and unkempt than usual; certain faint lines cast a vague and almost imperceptible shadow over his frank and open countenance; and without abating in the least their steady and unwavering glance, his eyes contained within their depths an added expression, fleeting and indeterminate.

These changes, slight as they were, combined to produce varying effects: they might have been the result of sickness, or they might have been caused by mental perturbation. With the latter thought in his mind, John Converse studied the Doctor attentively. Presently he leaned across the table, and whispered to Mr. Mountjoy. That gentleman nodded with an air of understanding, adding, "Another witness who has something to conceal."

Doctor Westbrook's testimony, however, belied this assertion. He answered promptly all questions, and added many details in an obvious effort to make his statements clear and concise. But he could tell little more than he had related to Mr. Converse and Mr. Merkel on the night of the murder. He repeated the story precisely as he had then

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

narrated it, and almost in the same words. He corroborated Lynden's testimony regarding what had taken place after that gentleman's arrival; and in describing the wound, he made it clear that his surmise on the fatal night was correct.

"In addition to the severing of the carotid artery," said he, "the autopsy demonstrated that the point of the blade passed between the fourth and fifth cervical vertebræ, also severing the spinal cord."

Concerning the letter addressed to De Sanchez, together with the presence of Howe in his office at the time of the murder, he testified at length. He was expecting the deceased to call upon him some time during the evening of the fourth, and while awaiting his arrival he was most agreeably surprised by the entrance of his old friend Ferdinand Howe.

"It was about half-past four," the witness continued, "when Mr. Howe entered my office. In the pleasant surprise of the meeting I forgot completely about De Sanchez for several minutes. When he again recurred to my mind I suddenly resolved not to see him at all. I explained to Ferdinand that I was expecting a caller whom I did not care to meet, and as it was not necessary that I should, I requested him to wait a few minutes while I wrote and despatched a brief note."

"Did you hear the five-o'clock whistles blow?"

"Yes, they were blowing when De Sanchez burst through the door."

"Now, Doctor Westbrook, returning to the letter you wrote on the evening of November fourth — you say it was directed to Señor de Sanchez?"

"It was."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I will ask you to look at this letter, and state whether or not this is the one you had just completed when deceased burst in upon you."

The witness merely glanced at the missive before stating positively that it was; whereupon the Coroner read it aloud. After the date and superscription it ran as follows:

It will be useless to renew our conversation of last night. You can make no representations that will influence me to change my mind. So long as the lady herself is only submitting to the wishes of her parents in accepting your attentions, I shall continue to oppose any union between herself and you.

My father's attitude in this matter is incomprehensible to me, and I am confident that I would retain the support of the lady's and my own friends in preventing your project.

Rest assured that I shall not hesitate at adopting any measures to thwart your purpose. Your insistence, knowing as you do that you have neither the lady's love nor respect, is ungentlemanly, and can only lead to consequences, to say the least, disagreeable to yourself.

MOBLEY WESTBROOK.

This letter was then marked "Exhibit B," and became a part of the records of the case.

"Was it your intention to send this letter to Señor de Sanchez?" the examination proceeded.

"Yes. Had events terminated differently, I should have sent the letter to him that same night."

Mr. Merkel here referred to the missive, saying, "In this letter occurs the phrase, 'My father's attitude in this matter is incomprehensible to me.' Now, what did you mean by that?—or rather, why did you make use of that particular phrase in the sense you did? What occasioned it?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Doctor Westbrook frowned as at a disagreeable memory.

"The favor with which he looked upon De Sanchez's addresses to my sister," he replied.

"De Sanchez was a suitor for your sister's hand?"

"He was."

"What was incomprehensible in the fact that your father favored him?"

"A number of things that should be quite obvious, sir. It is very unpleasant going into this."

"Pardon me, Doctor, but it is none the less necessary."

"Well, to begin with, Señor de Sanchez was not of our nationality, and I never before knew my father to be in any way partial to foreigners — quite the contrary. I am convinced — although it is merely an impression amounting to conviction — that my father did not personally like De Sanchez. Again, other facts, when arrayed together, present a false perspective. Several years ago General Westbrook quite suddenly severed intimate business relations with Señor de Sanchez: concerning this he has never, so far as I know, uttered a word of explanation. All communication between them ceased abruptly, and I don't believe my father ever mentioned the man's name until he appeared here."

"Do you know that General Westbrook did favor Señor de Sanchez as a suitor?"

"I do."

"Please state how."

"From his own lips. When the rumors linking De Sanchez's and my sister's names became persistent, I went to see my father; but he —" The Doctor checked himself, concluding in a different tone: "It is very painful going into this matter. Unless it is absolutely essential —"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I will touch upon it as lightly as possible, Doctor. That conversation with General Westbrook was characterized by some warmth, was it not?"

"Very bitter words were used — at least, by me."

"And he then gave you to understand that he would continue to support Señor de Sanchez as a suitor to his daughter's hand?"

"That is correct."

Abandoning this line of inquiry, the Coroner again picked up the dagger with its sombre stains, which the witness identified as his paper-knife. A juror interposed with a question.

"Doctor Westbrook," said he, "was it commonly known by your friends and acquaintances that this dagger — 'Exhibit A'— usually lay on your writing-table in the room where your patients wait?"

"Oh, yes," the Doctor replied. "There is not one of them who has not, at one time or another, had it in his hands and expressed curiosity concerning it. It was the occasion of innumerable questions, and I suppose I have been reminded a hundred times that such a present carried with it bad luck — that knives cut friendship, and much to the same effect."

The Coroner took up once more the thread of the examination.

"Now, Doctor Westbrook, the dagger was obviously removed from your desk some time before the commission of the crime. Did you miss it from its accustomed place?"

"No, sir. It might have been gone for several days, for all I know. I used it solely as a paper-cutter, and then not always, unless it was right at hand."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Did you notice it at any time during the day of November fourth?"

"I cannot say; I am so accustomed to and familiar with its presence, that the circumstance scarcely would have impressed me."

The whole of the witness's testimony up to this point was barren enough of excitement or anything in the nature of a surprise; but the next question elicited the particulars of Clay Fairchild's strange request for the dagger on the day of the tragedy. Witness added:

"He stated that he wished to show it to some one. I assented, passed on out, and never thought of it again until it recurred to me during a conversation with the detective after the murder."

"Do you know whether he returned it?"

"No. I do not know that he got it in the first place; I did not wait to see."

"Do you lock the doors when leaving your office, Doctor?"

"Only those opening into the laboratory and the front room. Except at night — after I have finally departed — the reception-room door is never fastened. It is scarcely ever closed."

"On the afternoon of November fourth, then, when you left your office at one o'clock, was the door open as usual? — the door opening from the hall into your reception-room?"

"Certainly."

At this point the inquisitive juror again shot forward with a question:

"Did Fairchild ever before ask you to lend him the dagger?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Not that I now recall," was the reply.

"But he knew of it, did n't he? and where you commonly kept it?"

"Oh, yes. He frequently came into my office, and I remember once telling him, as I have told some hundreds of others, how the dagger came into my possession, together with its romantic little history."

Mr. Merkel here resumed.

"Now then, Doctor, let us go back to the evening of November third, the night before Señor de Sanchez's death. At what time did he call at your office?"

"At about five-thirty or six o'clock."

"Was he alone?"

"No, sir. He was accompanied by Señor Vargas."

"Please relate just what happened at that time."

"Señor de Sanchez and I went immediately into my consultation-room, while Señor Vargas remained in the reception-room. The former began, in a polite enough manner, to ask me my reasons for objecting to him as a suitor for my sister, and he presently assumed an insinuating attitude that soon angered me and made me refuse to listen further to his representations. Although he was a model of suavity throughout the interview, I presently gathered the idea that his words were hiding a covert threat; that he was holding something back which he considered would be sufficient to cause me to change my mind. I abruptly interrupted his flow of speech, and told him, in words incapable of misconstruction, that my mind was made up, and if he continued to press his attentions where they were not wanted, he should regret it.

"As he was leaving, De Sanchez said,' You desire to know

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more of my past relations with your honored father?' To this I replied that I cared nothing about them. He then said, 'I am sure that you would rather have the facts in your own bosom than that they should become known inadvertently to your and his friends.' This was so directly a threat that I immediately closed the interview. He smiled, bowed, and passed out. As he did so he continued, 'I shall take great pleasure in relating these facts to you — you only, Doctor; and I have no doubt that I can surprise you — even to commending my humble person to your charming —' Oh, I fail to remember all the insulting nonsense he unburdened himself of. It was much to the same effect."

"Well?"

"I told him to go to the devil. He merely laughed again and said that he was then on his way to my father's. After remarking that he would return the next evening at about five o'clock, he rejoined Señor Vargas and withdrew.

"When I had thought it over, my anger cooled somewhat, and I resolved to hear what the man had to say — to know if he would really go to the extreme of saying anything that would reflect upon a member of my family. This, I finally concluded, would put such an advantage into my hands that I could bring his attentions to an end for all time."

"You never heard, then, what it was he intended to say?"

"No. When next I saw him he was practically a dead man."

"Recurring once more to the night of the fourth, Doctor, did not Clay Fairchild come into your office shortly after De Sanchez expired?"

"He did."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Verdict

"Relate the circumstance in full, please."

"About four or five minutes after Jim — Mr. Lynden — had left to notify the police of the tragedy, the door suddenly opened, and Clay entered the room. He stopped, his hand on the knob, and stood staring at De Sanchez with a look of bewilderment. This quickly gave way to an expression of horror, such as I never saw before in a sane human countenance. All at once he looked at me, and apparently tried to speak; but a queer, choking sound in the throat was the only result. Without an instant's warning — before Howe or I could realize it — he darted through the door and ran swiftly down the hall. Before that, however, I called upon him to speak and explain himself. I fail to remember just what I said; but his actions were very strange, and I did n't know what to make of them."

"Did Mr. Fairchild have on his hat when he entered your office?"

"He had on his hat and a light overcoat."

Next there followed a minute description of the young man's dress, together with his personal appearance, such as had been given to the police shortly after his disappearance: Height, about six feet; weight, 168 pounds; eyes and hair, very dark, the latter worn rather long and inclined to curl; form, slender, with a stoop to the shoulders, so slight as to be scarcely noticeable; all of his movements slow and deliberate, a striking feature being an air of interested attention with which he listened to anybody addressing him, together with a low and decisive manner of speech — almost a drawl. The description contained the further information that he was not easily moved from his natural reserve, a circumstance making his conduct after the murder all the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more remarkable, suggesting that he was then laboring under an extraordinary emotion.

With their heads almost touching, the Coroner and the District Attorney whispered briefly together; after which Mr. Merkel addressed the witness.

"When your office door was thrown open, and De Sanchez staggered through, did you not, in looking up, have that portion of the hall between your room and Mr. Nettleton's private office directly before your eyes?"

"Yes. But while, at the time, I was not looking for any one else but De Sanchez, I am now able to recall that no one was there — that that part of the hall was empty. The occasion was so startling that the association of ideas did not suggest the possibility of the assassin being near by, or even that a murder had been committed. It was some minutes before I came to a realization of the gravity of what had happened."

"Can you recall whether Mr. Nettleton's door was open or closed?"

"Not positively. But I believe if it had been wide open and no light in his office, I should have noticed it — the circumstance would have been unusual."

"Then, his door might have been ajar or closed completely, but not entirely open?"

"Yes; I believe that is correct. I have a strong impression that it was entirely closed, or very nearly so; yet I would not make a positive statement to that effect."

During the entire time Doctor Westbrook occupied the stand Mr. Mountjoy watched him narrowly, and seemed to weigh carefully each word of the witness's replies. They followed the interrogations so promptly, the manner of their

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

utterance was so convincing, that the truth of the Doctor's statements could not be doubted. Still, there was that fleeting shade of apprehension in his eyes, the vague shadow of worry that clouded his face. What caused them?

"We have been groping all about the focal point," Mr. Mountjoy whispered to the Coroner and Converse. "We have not yet laid our finger upon the *primum mobile*. There is a question that will open up the whole thing, if we can only find it. Think!" And he stopped, staring fixedly at the detective.

The Captain remained silent a few moments — a long time it seemed to those who waited — before he spoke. Then he whispered to Mr. Merkel, who turned immediately to the witness and asked:

"Doctor, do you know, or have you any reason to believe, there was any person other than yourself, Ferdinand Howe, J. Howard Lynden, Clay Fairchild, and William Slade on the second floor of the Nettleton Building at or about the time of Señor de Sanchez's death?"

The answer came unhesitatingly.

"I have not."

But was that an expression of relief that hid the worry in his eyes, that lightened the shadow on his face? or were the worry and the shadow still there? Neither the District Attorney nor Mr. Converse could determine.

"Very well, Doctor, that is all," said the Coroner. "Call General Westbrook."

Stiffly erect, and with an air of obeying only the inevitable mandate of Justice, the General entered the room.

However, little additional light was shed upon the mystery by his testimony; though it cannot be said that

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

it was entirely devoid of interest. He related at length his acquaintance with the deceased, but with a reserve no one could ever attempt or expect to penetrate. He stated that their relations in Mexico,— which had been solely of a business nature,— had been dissolved by mutual agreement; that there had been no subsequent correspondence between them, as their affairs had been entirely wound up; and that his social connection with Señor de Sanchez dated only from that gentleman's arrival in the city. He would not undertake to say that Señor de Sanchez had or had not a living enemy. If there were any such he was in complete ignorance of that person's existence.

"General, did not Señor de Sanchez desire to marry your daughter?"

"He did."

"With your approval, of course?"

"Yes."

"And Mrs. Westbrook's?"

"Certainly," returned the witness, with a mild expression of astonishment.

"But Doctor Westbrook rather emphatically opposed it, did he not?"

The General suddenly glared, and Mr. Merkel stirred uneasily.

"Pardon me," the latter added with a propitiatory tone, "er - ah — General; I should n't ask the question were it not necessary." The witness then coldly replied:

"Doctor Westbrook saw fit to obtrude himself into my private affairs in a manner that would have had no effect one way or another on the result."

"You mean?" Mr. Merkel innocently asked.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Just what I say, sir."

"You — you say he intruded, General," the Coroner persisted. "Is it not a fact that his attitude in this matter has brought about a severance of his relations with the rest of the family?"

"We hold no communication."

"Was Miss Westbrook opposed to the proposed marriage?"

"This is nonsense. What have the vagaries and whims of a young girl to do with this —"

"Again, General, pardon me; I must press the question," interrupted the Coroner. "If it is possible, we will avoid calling upon Miss Westbrook to testify."

General Westbrook stared at his questioner in speechless astonishment, for so long a time that the latter was obliged to speak again.

"We may presume, then, that she was not in complete sympathy with the idea?"

The witness all at once smiled — the kind of smile his opponents had learned to dread.

"I would not take it upon myself to correct any ideas you may have formed upon the subject," he said, pleasantly, while an audible, but quickly suppressed, titter ran round the room, and the heavy countenance of the Coroner became a dull red.

Mr. Mountjoy relieved the situation — and certainly relieved Mr. Merkel — finally eliciting the fact that Miss Westbrook was at first not in sympathy with the idea of accepting Señor de Sanchez's attentions; that she had later asserted a woman's prerogative by changing her mind and agreeing to receive him, although the matter had not arrived at the stage of a definite engagement.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"At the last interview between Doctor Westbrook and yourself," Mr. Merkel then resumed, "was he not very vehement in expressing his opinion on the subject of the proposed marriage?"

"I believe he was not very successful in concealing his feelings."

"Will you repeat what Doctor Westbrook said on that occasion?"

"I would rather not attempt it."

"I assure you, General, it is essential."

"I cannot recall his exact language."

"Well, its purport."

"His statements amounted to this: that the marriage should not take place as long as he was alive to prevent it; that he should certainly find ways and means of preventing its celebration — no more and no less."

Ferdinand Howe followed the General. His testimony, of course, was of prime importance; but as its nature is already familiar it need not be repeated here — with a single exception. After corroborating the Doctor's evidence regarding Fairchild's behavior when the latter encountered the body, the witness added:

"Mobley cried, 'Clay, what do mean? Why do you stare at me so?' But the look of horror only deepened; his jaw dropped, and his eyes became fairly glassy. I believe, then, Mobley half rose from his chair. 'Speak!' he cried. But the young man seemed incapable of doing so. He uttered a peculiar gurgling cry, darted abruptly through the open door, and disappeared."

Judge Elihu Petty, of the firm of Petty & Carlton, attorneys, testified that on the evening of November fourth,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

at about five o'clock, he was in his office in the Field Building. After confirming the previous testimony regarding the light-well and the impossibility of anybody having entered the Nettleton hall window by that means, the witness continued with a description of the other Nettleton windows. He asserted that in broad daylight, and at other times when there was a light in Mr. Nettleton's private office, he could see the books on the further wall of the room mentioned.

Question by the Coroner: "Could you see the books on the evening of November fourth?"

"No, sir. While there was light enough outside, yet it was so late that the interior shadows were dense enough to prevent me seeing any distance into the room. There was no light in that room."

"Had there been a person in Mr. Nettleton's private room at that time, could you have seen him?"

Witness shook his head doubtfully.

"Not unless such person had approached quite close to the windows," he presently replied. "It is possible that somebody might have been there without my seeing him. But I saw no one."

Judge Petty stated that he remembered the five-o'clock whistles, associating the circumstance with Mr. Howe's abrupt disappearance from the Doctor's window, which ended his testimony.

The calling of Señor Vargas — Juan Sebastian de Vargas y Escolado, as he announced his name after being sworn — occasioned a quick accession of interest; and he surprised even the Coroner by revealing an unexpected acquaintance with his dead compatriot, and an intimate

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

knowledge of his life and affairs. Aside from this, Señor Vargas added nothing to the information regarding the tragedy; but as the only hope, it would seem, of eliciting anything at all lay in the past, witness was questioned closely, the examination covering the whole period of his acquaintance with the deceased. He continued to evince a stolid lack of interest; on the other hand, however, it seemed obvious that he had nothing to reserve, and he answered all questions fully and with an apparent desire to throw whatever light he might upon the mystery. As his examination lengthened considerably, it will here be merely summarized.

The witness had known De Sanchez ever since his (the witness's) residence in Mexico — about seven or eight years. Socially he knew little of the deceased; but early in their acquaintance they had become interested in a number of commercial undertakings, which, proving profitable, led naturally to other enterprises. There never had been anything in the nature of a partnership,— so far as the world knew, at least,— but a mutual confidence had grown up between them, and each frequently intrusted the other with large sums; "an association," added Señor Vargas, "that has more than doubled my fortune." They usually struck a balance twice in the year, when funds were divided and other enterprises planned.

Question: "Did Señor de Sanchez owe you anything at the time of his death?"

Answer: "Neither of us was indebted to the other, except in this way: at the present time there is a joint account approximating one hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars. I have my own figures; but I shall abide by his. He was a careful business man,— so much so, that I can confi-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dently assert that a proper division of this sum can be made, to a centavo, from his private books. Our association was exceptionally pleasant and profitable; there was never the shadow of a dispute or misunderstanding between us."

"Were the relations between you amicable at the time you left Mexico?"

"As much so as they ever were. On the day Señor de Sanchez left Mexico City he executed to me a power of attorney to certain lands of which he was at that time negotiating a sale. I consummated the deal, and deposited to his account the sum of sixty-two thousand dollars."

"Why, then, should you have experienced difficulty in closing with him the Paquita Gold Mine matter, which led you, as you say, to follow him here?"

The witness considered some time, and presently replied:

"I do not want it to appear that I desire to reserve any information; but understand, please, that this is a matter in which I am merely acting as an agent for other parties, and that it is not closed yet. Perhaps you will appreciate my position from the fact that Señor de Sanchez owned the property, and I am making a purchase for a party of English capitalists."

Mr. Merkel smiled knowingly, adding, "And of course you have no interest in the property yourself. I see."

But the knowing look brought no answering light to the dark, impassive features; and neither, apparently, did witness feel called upon to make any response at all.

"Señor Vargas," said the Coroner, "we are seeking to ascertain if the unfortunate gentleman had an enemy; or if any of his affairs or business transactions were of such a nature that they would antagonize anybody to the point

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of such extreme retaliation as has been meted out to him. Now, from your association with Señor de Sanchez, do you know of any such person, or any such affair?"

Witness slowly shook his head.

"I know of no such affair or enemy — at least, I am sure there is no enemy in Mexico."

For the first time during the entire proceedings the District Attorney ignored the Coroner to put an interrogation himself.

"In Mexico?" he asked, quickly. "Do you know or suspect an enemy in this country — here — or elsewhere?"

"No, no, señor. Perhaps I should not have said that; but in Spain — in Mexico — Don Alberto could not have loved so beautiful a maiden as the Señorita Westbrook without making many enemies, and bitter ones too. I was thinking of that alone." He spread out his hands in true Latin fashion. "*Eso se comprende* — it is a matter of course — but I know nothing."

The inquiry now turned to the relations between General Westbrook and De Sanchez. It appeared that the witness had never met the General, and knew nothing of their mutual affairs. The two had separated amicably, so far as he knew. He had no reason to think otherwise. "When the Señorita Westbrook departed from Mexico, after her visit with her father, the Señor General accompanied his daughter home, and never returned."

So ended the testimony. The audience rapidly dwindled away as the jury filed out to deliberate; while the few who remained separated into groups and fell to discussing the "De Sanchez Mystery,"— now more of a mystery than ever.

For a reason not made known to the witnesses, they,

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

with the exception of General Westbrook and Judge Petty, are requested to remain until the jury report. The request, regardless of the politeness in which it was couched, might have excited some doubt and apprehension among those who obeyed it, if the officers, in managing to keep near them, had been less adroit in doing so. Nobody can conjecture at whom the jury's verdict will point, and they are quite an hour in making up their own minds.

When they finally file back into the room there are very few remaining to hear what the result of their deliberations may be. The foreman slurred over the verdict with such haste that it was all but unintelligible. It ran:

We, the jury, in the matter of the death of Alberto de Sanchez, find that said De Sanchez came to his death by a dagger wound in the throat, at the hand of some person or persons to this jury unknown.

So ended the first act of the drama of the "De Sanchez Mystery." As for Mr. Converse, "Now I can get to work," he confided to himself, as he walked home to his lodgings in Ash Lane.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VIII

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

THE exterior of No. 18 Ash Lane did not present an inviting appearance. It was a dingy, battered, and weather-worn brick structure, marking a remote epoch in the past; and besides Mr. Converse, it contained one other tenant, a little old man whose entire body was so twisted and contorted into deformity by rheumatism, that one wondered what incentive could prevail upon him to move.

A sign above the double door conveyed to the casual wayfarer the information that the busy, cheerful cripple's name was "A. Follett." Long before the remainder of the legend — "Dealer in Scrap Iron, Brass, Copper, Castings, and All Sorts of Junk" — could be deciphered, the stranger was aware of the business conducted here; for as far as the eye could penetrate into the recesses of the lower floor, it was met by a conglomeration of cast-off material which promised insanity to anybody rash enough to attempt its assortment and classification.

Close by the double entrance a gate in a high board fence gave access to the yard. Through this each day passed the peripatetic collectors of such refuse as Mr. Follett dealt in, and their burdens were disposed of by a black Hercules — Mr. Follett's back and legs and arms — who answered to the name of Joe.

The Captain's daily associates would have been quite staggered had they known that the cheerful, grizzled, and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

battered dealer in junk was his closest friend and his only confidant, and that he discussed all his most perplexing problems with Mr. Follett. Mr. Converse, however, had demonstrated more than once that his confidence was not misplaced; that his friend's judgment, shrewd insight, and discretion were of a value not to be expressed by words. In Mr. Converse's sailor days the two had been companions on many a memorable voyage, and each was as comprehensive of the other's silences as if they had been filling the moments with golden speech.

On the Monday night subsequent to the inquest and one week after that event, the two are sitting in the snug front room upstairs, and it is Mr. Follett who first speaks.

"So, John," he remarks, "the newspapers have something to stir up the interest in your dead Mexican man." He laughed softly and waved his pipe with a feeble gesture toward the Captain. "But I 'm thinkin' it won't hurry you up none to crowd the canvas on you."

"You are thinking of the reward?" queried Mr. Converse.

The other nodded and continued: "Twenty thousand dollars is a heap o' money, John; many men would do murder over an' over again for it. Sometimes I can't believe that these ideas o' rewardin' an' punishin' are right. No matter how high the reward, nor how hard the punishment, some people will do wrong in the face o' one an' in spite o' the other. . . . Twenty thousand American, is it?"

"Yes; and we are to draw on the De Sanchez estate through the Mexican consul for expenses necessary to pursuing the investigation."

Mr. Follett expressed his wonder in a prolonged whistle.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"John, this is what you will have when you run down the murderer. Then you can retire. Then you can get that little cottage an' all them flowers you sometimes talk about: funny idea for an old sailor man." He changed the trend of his talk abruptly, and added, with a more serious note: "We must increase the reward for that woman. Everything centres an' circles about her, an' that 's what discourages me. When you get clear o' the harbor on a cruise o' this kind, it 's like tryin' to navigate without chart or compass, an' the stars all hid, to have a woman mixed in it to the extent that this one seems to be. Make it a hundred — *two* hundred — dollars; but find that woman."

"Abram, you are right," Mr. Converse rejoined, with unusual warmth. "I am no nearer to laying my finger upon her than I was the day of the murder. As you say, we must find the woman; everything hinges upon her. But look you, Abram, we, every one of us, missed a very fine point at the inquest that now is as plain as the nose on your face."

Mr. Follett unconsciously and thoughtfully fell to rubbing that member, while he attended to his friend's words.

"What was it Howard Lynden was afraid of betraying?" continued Mr. Converse, warming to his subject. "What was it Mr. Ferdinand Howe was afraid of betraying? What worried Doctor Westbrook?" He stared hard at Mr. Follett, and answered the questions himself. "It 's just this: they have reason to suspect that the woman is mixed up some way in the matter; but how? They asserted under oath that no woman was present; did they one and all perjure themselves? I don't believe it."

The listener nodded gravely to signify that he was following the argument, but offered no interruption.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"No; I believe that every man Jack of them told all he knew of the affair. Doctor Westbrook would not lie; I don't think under the circumstances Howe would, and Lynden — well, he just could n't. Any woman that you might name will not supply an adequate reason for them all to unite in an oath of falsehood."

"Yet," observed Mr. Follett, "it is the woman, and we must look for the one least likely to have been there."

"Exactly. And they are banded together to shield her name. We failed to hit upon the right question, or to put it in the proper way, so leaving them an opportunity for evasion without downright falsehood.

"Again, Abram, would these complications involve the woman or some one else? Are they shielding her for her sake or their own? If you could answer me those questions, Abram, I could tell you the rest. Where is the Mexican woman now, who smokes a cigarette while she waits for her victim? That 's Merkel's idea. Poppycock! There 's no Mexican woman on the face of the earth that all of those men would be so anxious to shield."

"John, there 's one thing about this here female that you have n't considered yet," began Abram Follett. "She may know nothin' about the murder; she may only have showed a common weakness o' the sex by bein' where she had no business; she may be in the same boat with those three men, an' they are simply a-tryin' to save her from fallin' overboard, thinkin' she could n't throw any light on how Mr. de Sanchez came to be a dead man all of a sudden, but could get herself in a pretty bad fix. They are not the best judges, o' course; but if there 's anything in that 'nonymous letter you got about her, why, there 's some-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

body else knows who she is, an' it 's some one who could be made to tell.

"Now then, John, listen to me a bit: there 's only one other person we know o' havin' been on that floor at the time o' the killin' — Bill Slade; an' I know two or three things about him — though I 've never sot eyes on the man that I know of — that might interest you. First, his father, before the war, was the Fairchild overseer; secondly, Bill Slade himself is to-day the owner o' the old Fairchild homestead. What we don't know that might show how they 're all tangled up together — if they really are — might be a hull lot. . . . Truth can't be downed, John, but it sometimes has a mighty hard time a-gettin' up to where it can be seen an' recognized. Oftener than not we don't want to recognize it; we just hand it a rap over the head by way o' conveyin' the information that it must n't get too conspicuous."

"There 's a good deal about Slade that is hard to understand; I 'll think it over." The Captain was still looking hard at Mr. Follett.

"Another thing, John: that letter gives me the idea everything ain't a-goin' smooth with them people; there 's a conflictin' interest somewhere, you mark my words. They ain't just plain common folks, either, that we have to do with; not the kind that goes about their business peacefully an' ca'mly, day after day, under the heft of a secret o' this kind; especially when so many shares it."

"Speaking of Slade," said Mr. Converse, abruptly breaking the current of the conversation, "reminds me of something odd. I don't know that you have ever heard of it, but there is a peculiarity about Slade and General West-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

brook that is the foundation of a joke of long standing at the General's expense, although they are few enough who would have the hardihood to take that liberty with him to his face.

"It seems that always when Slade and the General meet, wherever it may be — on the street, at the bank, in offices or business houses,— the former is possessed of some powerful emotion. He steps to one side, oblivious of everything besides General Westbrook, at whom he stares as though he were quite overcome by his greatness. At the same time Slade is continually mumbling unintelligibly to himself. After a bit he seems to realize his queer actions, and recovers himself all at once with a sheepish look around, as if to see whether anybody has been observing him; and if General Westbrook has not already departed, Slade blurts out a confused apology and hurries away. It 's queer enough in that dried-up little man; for he bears the reputation of a miser, is as sour as vinegar, lives to himself in a little cubbyhole of a room, and has n't, I suppose, one intimate friend in the world. People will say, 'Slade? Why, yes, I know old Slade. Who don't?' Yet the truth is that nobody really does know him. He 's simply a machine, and as long as he works smoothly and in good order he 's taken for granted, like the Lee monument or the changes of the moon.

"Anyhow, the General accepts it all seriously, as a tribute from an inferior to his own high mightiness, and he unbends to the old codger quite graciously — for him. Whatever it is Slade has in mind, or what he mutters to himself, no one seems to know; but 'Slade's Blessing' has come to be a by-word in the city.

"Now then, on the night of the eleventh — last Wednes-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

body e
be ma
"N
other p
o' the
about
know
before
Slade h
stead.
all tan
hull lo
times
seen a
recogn
conve
spicu
"
stand
hard
"
ever
a c
ain
wit
fu
th

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

er people's. You know, meddlin'
ess is the surest sign that you can't
at don't seem to be his style, so you
him mixin' himself in this matter on
hin' important behind it."

ly enough, fell one of the familiar,
characterized the friendship between
aptain's manner soon began to reveal
oked innumerable pipes of tobacco —
ly way, but alternating between fits
ie for a space, and then permitting the
ut. Several times he rose and walked
length of the room, his hands clasped
nseeing — oblivious of everything but
ich his tenacious mind was fastened.
ed at the window and looked out into

s of extreme mental effort were to the
n the big chair so many indications that
ed upon an idea that he was revolving
Neither by word nor gesture would Mr.
n these cogitations until the other saw
. The issue would be yielded in good
l it in silent, patient eagerness.

rse threw one of the windows wide open,
rush of cool night air began rapidly to
which hung in well-defined strata of blue.
night was unbroken by any sound, until
ocks away, could be heard the faint
g horse. As with all distant sounds in
uld now and then become completely

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

day night — the headquarters man, Adams, who is watching Vargas, made a report in which 'Slade's Blessing' figures in rather a curious and incomprehensible manner. It appears that Slade went to the La Salle House, apparently looking for some one; Vargas was sitting in the rotunda, smoking, when all at once who should come in but General Westbrook. Slade was then standing right by Vargas's chair, when he caught sight of the General, and the old scene began. Westbrook came directly up to Vargas and spoke in an absent-minded way to Slade, who made his usual embarrassed exit. Now, Vargas did not show that he had noticed this incident — which should have been strange and novel to him — and there may not be any connection between it and what followed, but the next morning Vargas called on Slade at the Guaranty Trust Company's offices. He remained only a few minutes; but he called again shortly before five o'clock the same evening, and accompanied Slade to the latter's room, where he remained with the abstracter until nearly seven o'clock."

"Belay a moment, John. Did the two know each other before?"

"Oh, no; not at all."

Mr. Follett nodded, and his friend continued:

"Vargas went to Slade's lodging again the next day, and again on Friday — each time at five o'clock,— and remained from an hour and a half to two hours. It 's pretty clear that the first visit to Slade at the office was merely to make an appointment, and that the others followed therefrom. But what does it mean? Has Vargas begun a little detective work on his own account? This question is prompted by what followed at the La Salle House between General

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Westbrook and Vargas on Wednesday night after Slade had left them.

"The General approached and made himself known to Vargas. You know they had met only casually — at the inquest — and the meeting Wednesday night appeared no more than a refreshing of each other's memory. Yet when General Westbrook departed he seemed to be greatly disturbed — so much so that Adams says he had half a mind to follow him. It is true that the two conversed some time, but nothing appeared which would account for the General's agitation; the talk seemed to be merely chatty, pleasant, marked by smiles, and all that. It did not seem to occur to Adams that a man might 'smile, and smile, and be a villain' still; and, after all, it may be that the matter has to do with some property titles. But why enlist the services of Señor Vargas, a stranger? I thought that Vargas himself might be interested in some realty here; but I've had that looked up, and his name does not appear of record anywhere in the county. In this connection I have been having the records carefully gone over to see if any of these people are mixed up by some old deal. The result has been somewhat queer; but we 'll pass that up for the present."

"It 's no easy matter just a-sortin' out the known facts, is it?" observed Mr. Follett.

The Captain shook his head. "But to sum up, Abram," he added, "we have a number of people connected by a lot of little circumstances, which, at the present moment, have mighty wide gaps between, and seem to point to nothing."

"I tell ye, John, a thing that 's standin' stronger in my mind than all else comes from what you 've just told me, an' from what I 've told you about this man Slade.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Silver Blade

"You know, before the war, old Bill Slade, the father, was the Fairchild overseer. I 've heard the son's story, an' it appears that he was always little an' mean an' picayunish — not the kind that could do any big dirty thing; just little an' sneakin'. But old Bill was ambitious for his boy, who was just a young feller at the end o' the war, an' he charted out a course for young Bill that pointed from the Fairchild plantation straight to the United States Supreme Court; but he failed to mark off all the rocks an' shoals, an' the set o' the currents; he knew little o' the craft's qualities that was to make the voyage; an' the consequence is, that young Bill landed high an' dry right where he is to-day. He never drank, as I've often heard, nore hewed nor smoked, nor he never fought, nor did anything else to show that he had any good red blood in him — just natcherally unable to do anything good or bad." Mr. Follett abruptly altered his tone. "Has there been anything betwixt him and the Fairchilds since, besides him now ownin' their old home an' lettin' it go to rack an' ruin?" he asked.

"That 's being gone into now. Nothing has been turned up so far that sheds any light upon the problem of the murder."

Mr. Converse's reply was thoughtful; his companion's run of talk seemed more to be a harmonious accompaniment to his own reflections than a source either of information or available ideas. Yet he listened patiently, self-contained and reserved, his occasional responses showing that he was following the other's words.

"Another point, John," Mr. Follett went on. "From what you 've told me o' this Mr. Vargas, he seems to be a man who looks pretty sharp to his own affairs without bother-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in' himself about other people's. You know, meddlin' with other folks' business is the surest sign that you can't 'tend to your own. That don't seem to be his style, so you can be pretty sure that him mixin' himself in this matter on another tack has somethin' important behind it."

Here, quite naturally enough, fell one of the familiar, pleasant silences that characterized the friendship between these two men. The Captain's manner soon began to reveal an impatience. He smoked innumerable pipes of tobacco — not in his usual steady way, but alternating between fits of puffing like an engine for a space, and then permitting the fire in the bowl to die out. Several times he rose and walked slowly to and fro the length of the room, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes unseeing — oblivious of everything but the problem upon which his tenacious mind was fastened. Once or twice he paused at the window and looked out into the darkness.

All these evidences of extreme mental effort were to the still, crippled figure in the big chair so many indications that the Captain had seized upon an idea that he was revolving to a definite end. Neither by word nor gesture would Mr. Follett break in upon these cogitations until the other saw fit to enlighten him. The issue would be yielded in good time, and he awaited it in silent, patient eagerness.

Once Mr. Converse threw one of the windows wide open, and the sudden in-rush of cool night air began rapidly to dissipate the smoke which hung in well-defined strata of blue. The stillness of the night was unbroken by any sound, until presently, many blocks away, could be heard the faint clatter of a galloping horse. As with all distant sounds in a sleeping city, it would now and then become completely

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

extinguished behind some intervening wall or building, only to burst forth again with added clamor.

How often are the greatest crises ushered in by the most trivial of incidents! Mr. Converse was only dimly aware of the beating hoofs, and his train of thought was not at all interrupted by any reflection that horse and rider might portend aught for him; then the circumstance was entirely forgotten as the Federal Building clock boomed forth one loud, deep-throated stroke that rang high on the night: one o'clock.

The vibrations were still trembling audibly when he turned of a sudden from the window.

"Abram, I have it," he announced in a tone of finality. "I know how to find Fairchild."

Whatever Mr. Follett might have responded was never uttered; for all at once the thud of hoofs became loud and insistent. The rider was evidently in Ash Lane now, and approaching at a pace that would soon bring him opposite No. 18.

"Listen!" whispered Mr. Converse; and both waited in tense expectation while the wild rider drew nearer and nearer.

The horse was pulled up to a sharp standstill immediately below, just as Converse turned to the window once more. In the light which fell from the lamp behind him he could make out the faint glint of brass buttons and the brighter reflection from a nickel-plated star: the rider was an officer of the mounted force. What errand required such speed, and at such an hour?

"Is it you, Captain Converse?" the rider began, breathlessly. "You are to come to headquarters right away."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"What is it?" demanded the Captain.

"The Old Man told me to say it was a new development in the De Sanchez case; he sent me himself. McCaleb came in off his beat half an hour or so ago, and he looked as though he 'd been seeing ghosts. Whatever it is, he brought in the news, and it must be mighty important to rout the Old Man out at this hour." "The Old Man," be it known, was the Chief of Police.

"Very well, Harrison, I 'll be along at once." The messenger wheeled his blowing horse and disappeared into the night again.

Converse was not long in following. As he left the room Mr. Follett cried cheerfully after him, "Sail, ho!" The latter was accustomed to these unceremonious interruptions of their post-prandial communions, and he forbore any display of curiosity.

But if Mr. Follett's figurative farewell was a prognostication that the voyage of discovery was no longer to be conducted in unknown seas, or, to drop metaphor altogether, that some fact had come to light which promised explanation of the mystery, he was scarcely a true prophet. This the Captain had presented to him in a startling manner almost as soon as he entered the Chief's private office. He was impressed at once by that official's unusual agitation and the white, excited countenance of the young officer who stood by his desk, nervously and alternately mopping his brow and the inside of his helmet.

The Chief glared at Converse as though the Captain himself had been guilty of some unusual offence.

"Another murder, Converse!" he cried, with unsteady articulation. "Good Lord, what kind of a force have I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

got under me, anyhow? McCaleb, here, has just brought in a most astounding report. I don't know which way to turn; I feel —"

"May I inquire who has been murdered?" said Converse, quietly.

"General Westbrook!" thundered the Chief, banging his fist down on the desk; "one of our very best citizens is the victim of a dastardly assassination!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND PROBLEM

THE fact that John Converse was not given to betraying either surprise or astonishment only enhanced the effect of the involuntary step he took backward in the face of the intelligence flung at him by the Chief of Police. For a minute, perhaps, he returned the gaze of the agitated official; then the indomitable tenacity of the man began to manifest itself in a setting and tightening of the solid jaw; and when he presently turned to the excited McCaleb, the stunning effect of the news had been entirely overcome — he was quite himself again, masterful, determined, and inspiring confidence. Both the Chief and the young patrolman began at once to respond to his quieting influence.

Officer Harry McCaleb was of an aptness and intelligence promising rapid advancement. It was no secret that he had aspirations looking to success in the detective service; and it was of him that the Captain demanded particulars of the crime.

"Tell me what you know," said he, his manner advising promptness and despatch.

The young patrolman delivered his account with a glibness and attention to details that betokened forethought on the subject.

"Captain Converse," he began, "this month I am on the night shift, and my beat takes in Vine Street and General Westbrook's neighborhood. Mike Clancy 's my partner.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

You know it 's a pretty big beat for two men to cover — especially as we are obliged to remain together,— and we can't pass any one point oftener than once in every two hours, or such a matter.

"Well, sir, to-night we passed the Westbrook place last at about ten-thirty. Everything was perfectly quiet at that time, and we had no occasion to be more than ordinarily vigilant. We continued on our beat, and in the natural run of events should have been back at the Westbrook corner — Tenth and Vine, sir — at about twelve-thirty. At twelve o'clock we were over in the next block — on Live Oak, to the rear of the Westbrook place, and between Tenth and Eleventh. You know it 's a part of our duty after dark to watch people getting off cars to see if they belong in our territory, and we can't gauge our time very well when we meet many cars on Live Oak Street.

"It was just at twelve — the Federal Building clock had just struck, sir — when Mike stopped short. 'What 's that, McCaleb?' says he. It 's one of those perfectly still nights, you know, when sounds carry a long way." Converse had a fleeting memory of a madly galloping horse. " 'Was that a shot?' asked Mike. I had heard something, too, but could n't tell whether it was a shot or not; and anyhow, neither of us could locate it. We waited quite a while, listening; then, hearing nothing more, we went on. In about ten minutes — maybe fifteen — we stopped suddenly again; we heard a woman scream. There was no mistaking the direction this time; it was one of those piercing, long-drawn-out screams that makes a man's blood run cold. We had no trouble following the sounds, for the screams kept up, as fast as the woman could get her breath. 'Help! Murder!'

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

she was yelling; and Mike and I raced down Tenth Street to the Westbrook place, as fast as we could.

"Well, sir, when we got there it was as though bedlam had broke loose; the neighbors were pouring out on all sides; some society affair was going on last night, and most of them had just got home. A woman was running up and down the Westbrook front gallery, wringing her hands in a distracted way, and every now and then stopping to scream 'Murder!'"

"Stop a moment, Mac," interposed Converse. . . . . "Chief, call a cab, please; I don't want to waste any time — I can listen to Mac as we ride. . . . . Now, Mac, go on."

"Well, as Mike and I vaulted the front fence, I yelled out that we were officers, and Mike set his whistle going for Hartman and Corrigan in the next beat, in case we should need help; though they never heard it. The lady fell back against one of the big gallery pillars and waited till we came up. Then we saw it was Mrs. Westbrook. She looked as if she were being beaten by some one we could n't see, and was trying to shrink away from the blows.

"The whole house was a blaze of light, every electric lamp being turned on, it seemed like; and the niggers — well, sir, they were all plum crazy. Mrs. Westbrook had evidently been to whatever was going on, because she was all dressed up in one of those shiny white dresses, and had lots of jewelry on. I could see the diamonds on her fingers sparkling with her heart-beats, for she had her hands locked tight together and pressed against her bosom. When we got close enough to her we could hear her moaning to herself, 'Oh, my God! Peyton! Peyton! Peyton! Oh, my God! Peyton!' over and over again, like a machine, and it was some time before we could get her to notice us.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Just then two or three of the neighbors came up. One of them, a lady, grabbed Mrs. Westbrook, and asked, 'What is it, Lou?' and Mrs. Westbrook just had time to whisper, 'Peyton — in there — dead!' before slipping down the pillar in a faint.

"Of course we waited for nothing more. Leaving her with the lady, we hurried into the house through the front door, which was standing wide open.

"I never saw anything like it in my life, Captain; back under the stairs a big yellow wench was sitting on the floor, holding Miss Westbrook's head in her lap, and moaning and rocking to and fro. The young lady herself was lying out in such a way that we thought at first she was dead too. The telephone was right above her head —"

Here the recital was once more broken in upon, this time by the arrival of the cab. Mr. Converse and the patrolman hastened into it. "General Westbrook's — hurry!" said the Captain to the driver, who, having had experience in such matters, lashed the horses to a gallop in an effort to obey the injunction.

Once under way, Officer McCaleb resumed his story:

"As I was saying, the telephone was right above where Miss Westbrook was lying. She was still holding the receiver in her hand, a part of the cord attached to it, the whole thing torn loose — evidently while she was trying to use the 'phone. She must have fainted then. It took only a second or two to see that nothing worse was the matter with her; and after stirring the nigger woman up to getting water and bringing her mistress round, we went on hunting for the General. We had to search, too; for every one that had n't fainted was wild with terror.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Pretty soon, however, we came upon him in a downstairs room — sure enough dead, Captain Converse, with a knife sticking in him. I left Mike there to keep the crowd out, and after 'phoning to headquarters from a neighbor's, I hurried in myself to make sure."

Not until the young man had finished did Converse vouchsafe a question.

"A knife, you say?" he mused, the words being hardly so much an interrogation as an expression of the importance he seemed to attach to the circumstance. "A knife?"

"Yes, sir. But I neglected to say there was a revolver lying on the floor. I did n't have time to see much; but it was out in pretty plain view, lying close to the General."

"His, likely. But wait till we get there," said Mr. Converse; then, as an afterthought, "Who else was at the house?"

"I saw no one, sir,— that is, before the neighbors arrived."

"Doctor Westbrook?"

"No, sir."

Shortly the conveyance was grinding over the gravelled driveway which led from the street to the *porte-cochère*.

The house itself was a commodious colonial mansion, possessing the familiar, massive-pillared Greek front. Setting in the midst of a wide expanse of beautiful park, shaded by magnolia, catalpa, and numerous oak and elm trees, it was merely a variation, in details alone, of a uniform style of architecture at once simple and imposing, which lent to the neighborhood an air of distinction and aloofness, and imparted that genuine spirit of the old Southern home which is both impressive and incapable of imitation.

The few neighbors who remained had succeeded in bring-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing some sort of order out of the chaos that had greeted officers McCaleb and Clancy upon their arrival. The negro servants had been banished to their own quarters, where they were out of the way; all lights had been extinguished excepting the few needed, and the house was shrouded in the unbroken stillness which exists like a vacuum behind the swift turbulence following a sudden and tragic death.

The Captain was received with something of the awe that always greets a man of his profession when he first enters upon such a scene, when those who meet him are as far removed from the law's intricate machinery as were General Westbrook's friends and intimates. Old as it was, the neighborhood had never in the past sustained so rude and violent a shock to its calm respectability. Mr. Converse was now indeed the Captain, the god in the car.

An elderly gentleman, evidently a neighbor, met them at the door. He led the officers straight back through the wide and richly furnished hall, past the carved oaken stairway, which rose like an invitation to a multitude, to a lateral hall extending the width of the house. Here he turned to the left, and presently paused before a curtained door; a door so massive and solid that, together with the voluminous folds of the heavy velvet curtain which hung before it, it promised to afford an effective barrier to sounds arising within the room beyond, causing the sharpest of noises emanating therefrom to strike muffled and dead upon the ear of anybody in the hall.

Mr. Converse placed a restraining hand upon the arm outstretched to open the door.

"Just a moment, sir," said he. "Is Doctor Westbrook here?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"No, sir; but efforts are being exerted to find him. It appears that he is in attendance upon some suburban patient."

"Who discovered the tragedy?"

"Miss Westbrook. She is completely prostrated, sir."

"Very good; now open the door."

The portal swung open and revealed, obviously, the household library. Save for the door, the windows, and the narrower spaces between the windows, its walls were entirely concealed by book-laden shelves; the apartment was otherwise scantily furnished.

By a large, old-fashioned fireplace in the southwest corner stood a heavy leathern couch; besides this the room contained nothing more in the way of large furniture except a heavy oaken table which stood in the bay of the east window. There was a swivelled desk-chair before the table; a Morris chair, a straight-backed wooden chair, and a light ladder whereby the higher shelves were made accessible. All this at a glance.

Presently, however, a number of details challenged Captain Converse's attention.

First of all, let us, as briefly as possible, dismiss the grewsome, silent figure in the centre of the floor. It lay flat upon its back beside the desk-chair; the arms were wide outstretched, and a dagger handle of ebony, or some other black wood, protruded from the left breast, into which the blade had been driven to the hilt. Surprisingly little blood had found its way through the wound, since the blade must have been reposing in the stilled heart — a well-aimed, deadly blow, signifying a cool and sinister intent. Death could not have ridden more swiftly on a thunderbolt; and

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

plainly it had met its victim here just as he was either in the act of rising hastily from the swivel-chair, or at the moment he had gotten to his feet.

A brief inspection showed that most of the room's windows were closed and fastened, as were also the inside wooden blinds, and that lace curtains hung from the ceiling to the window-seats.

Before the table the swivel-chair was turned so that it faced two pairs of French windows in the front or north wall. These opened on a wide veranda extending across the entire front of the house. One pair of these windows now stood open, and between them stood the room's third chair,— the straight-backed one,— and upon it the Captain's attention seemed to linger.

If General Westbrook had been seated in the desk-chair, who had occupied this one so near the handily opened window? It faced the one before the desk, and their relative positions irresistibly suggested a *tête-à-tête*, the silent figure on the floor that this *tête-à-tête* had been brought to an abrupt and violent termination. Both chairs had been forcibly pushed back a foot or more, as if the occupants of each had arisen with precipitation; for the swivel-chair had raked up one end of a magnificent tiger-skin, tearing the felt lining; and the one by the window could be traced back to where it had formerly stood, by the four deep scorings that its legs had made in the polished surface of the floor.

The occupancy of the straight-backed chair seemed to contain the crux of the matter. And here was presented another suggestion: whoever had chosen a seat so close to the open window had done so with an eye to hasty and easy retreat. This spot seemed to have attracted Mr. Converse's

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

attention immediately after his first cursory glimpse; he still stood just inside the doorway, and his eyes, after travelling over various details of the scene before him, returned again and again to the vacant seat.

At last his regard rested upon Officer Mike Clancy, standing respectfully at attention, and he pointed to the object of his interest.

"Clancy," he asked, "who 's been sitting in that chair?"

"Sure, an' there 's been no wan, sorr, since Oi 've been in the room."

"Not yourself?"

Clancy cast an appreciative glance at the comfortable Morris chair, and then one of contempt at the less inviting seat.

"Oi hov not," he replied, with deliberate emphasis. Such innocence of his questioner's intent was not to be doubted: the chairs had not been disturbed.

If the Captain evinced an unusual interest in the straight-backed chair, one other article must be mentioned to which his eye reverted many times,— the nickel-plated desk telephone, overturned upon the blotting-pad, its hooks free of the receiver. It was more than likely that when Miss Westbrook attempted to use the instrument in the hall, she received no response from Central, the line already, doubtless, having been put out of commission.

Close by the nerveless fingers of the General's right hand was a revolver. An inspection of this revealed a weapon of familiar make, of .38 calibre; and the pungent odor of freshly burnt powder, which still clung about it, together with two exploded shells, told its own story of recent and apparently ineffectual use.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Silver Blade

It was only natural to turn from the revolver to a partially open drawer on the right side of the desk, and to the desk itself; and here once more the mute witnesses gave their unspoken testimony. Had General Westbrook been seated at his desk writing when some midnight caller interrupted him? Had a conference then followed which crescendoed rapidly through the various stages of a quarrel, *a verbis ad verbera*, to a sudden resort to violence? Well, here was the cover off the ink-well; a spreading spot of ink on the blotting-pad marked where a pen had been dropped; a tablet was conveniently at hand, but not one scrap of paper that had been written upon, except one or two neat piles of envelopes containing letters addressed to the dead man, and other documents of various kinds, none of which, probably, had engaged his attention during the minutes preceding the abrupt blotting out of his life.

But in these particulars could be read the fact that the unfortunate gentleman had, some time during the night, been actually writing at his desk. Then, the chair forcibly shoved backward; the right hand, overturning the telephone in its precipitancy, flying to the drawer where the revolver reposed, presented a picture to the Captain's mental vision almost as comprehensive as a photograph. The General had not been surprised: an explanation of the interval between the dropping of the pen and the hurried opening of the drawer lay in the occupancy of the two chairs; this hiatus contained the whole story of the crime.

Thoughtfully Converse set the telephone upright again. He hung the receiver upon the hooks, and after a minute or so of waiting endeavored to catch Central. But it was of no use; no response came; the line evidently had been, as

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he had already thought, "cut out" as being out of order — which naturally would follow upon a continuous signal with no request for a number.

Next, he picked up the writing-tablet, and upon it his scrutiny became almost instantly glued. He seemed to be as absorbed in the unsullied whiteness of its top sheet as if it had been covered with written characters. His stiff lips presently pursed; his right eyebrow lifted in a familiar quizzical manner; and he looked from the tablet in his hand to the fireplace, black and cold. After all, there was evidently a message in those blank pages: the last one used had been hastily and carelessly rent from the binding gum, as the saw-tooth particles of paper yet adhering to the tablet, in this one instance, affirmed.

The elderly gentleman who had admitted the two officers had been watching Mr. Converse with as much interest as that evinced by McCaleb himself, and the young patrolman was taking advantage of his opportunity greedily. The elderly gentleman now stepped forward.

"Pardon me," he began, "but if the question is not premature, are you able to form a theory? Have you any idea as to the identity of the assassin?"

Converse eyed the old man askance, and the latter went on immediately:

"Besides yourselves and Doctor Bane I am the only man in the house. I am a near neighbor; I reside on the opposite corner. Wilson is my name, Slayden Wilson. I was going to say, that perhaps I may be needed else —"

"By all means, don't let us detain you," urged Converse with suspicious haste.

"Thank you. And if you require anything —" his eye

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

wandered until it rested upon the bell-button beside the door — "if you require anything, press the button there."

"Very good," Converse returned. "Try to prepare the ladies for a meeting, as I shall want to question them — the servants too."

The old gentleman withdrew, closing the door noiselessly after him.

Mr. Converse still held the writing-tablet in his hand, and now he laid it upon the table. As he did so, McCaleb — all the time close to his elbow — quietly observed.

"Do you suppose somebody 's got away with it, sir?"

"It looks that way," the older man replied, abstractedly; then abruptly breaking off, he fixed a keen look upon the young man. "What do you mean, McCaleb?" he asked.

"Are you not looking for some writing?"

"Aye, aye, Mac," was the quiet reply, the speaker's glance kindling shrewdly, "aye, aye, Mac, you are correct."

He pointed to a blotter lying on the desk.

"See there, Mac; my fingers are just itching to get hold of that writing; but I fear it 's gone. Mac, you have n't the first idea of its importance."

The young man slowly shook his head. "I 'm afraid not, sir," said he simply.

"Well, it 's just this: if we had it, we would know who is —" The speaker dropped suddenly into a reverie, leaving the thought incomplete. He picked up the blotter and stared fixedly at it for a moment; laid it back again on the table, still watching it, and concluded in a preoccupied manner, "What a game! what a game! How near — and how far — to both these deaths!"

McCaleb caught his breath.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Second Problem

"You don't say!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "De Sanchez —"

The Captain merely nodded once.

The blotter all at once became an object of magnetic interest for the young man, and he bent over it and began studying its cryptic markings with puckered brow.

"See what you can make of it," suggested Converse.

After a while McCaleb stood upright again, took a long breath, and shook his head.

"I can make nothing of it," said he; "the lines are too crisscrossed and mixed, the fragments of words too short and indistinct. Maybe — if I had a lens — something more to go on —"

"But is there nothing that particularly attracts your attention?"

Once more McCaleb frowned heavily and concentrated his mind upon the blotter.

"I suppose this is the one General Westbrook was using?" he asked.

"Yes."

In silence he studied it some moments longer. . . . "No," said he, with an air of finality; "I can make out nothing but a lot of curlicues that look like figure three's with tails to 'em. I can't imagine what they mean."

Converse chuckled in his throat. "My question was hardly fair," said he. "You had n't the advantages in the first case I had. I 'll tell you this much, though: they 're letter 'z's.' "

"Oh, I begin to see. I suppose you would like me to confirm your opinion, by coming independently to the same conclusions. Well, I 'll try again."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Once more the Captain nodded, and moved over to the open window.

Without touching it, he began carefully to look over the straight-backed chair, at the polished hard-wood floor about it, and at the narrow section of panelled wall behind — one of the room's wall spaces uncovered by books. Presently a barely audible exclamation escaped him — a mere breath of satisfaction, which, nevertheless, instantly brought McCaleb to his side.

"What is it?" the young man asked, breathlessly.

The Captain pointed to a small round hole in the oak panel, somewhat lower than his own shoulder as he stood, from which protruded what appeared to be half an inch of black yarn.

"You 'll have to keep yourself better in hand, Mac," was his only verbal recognition of the young man's curiosity, while he extracted the particle of fabric from the tiny aperture.

"Ah, I see," McCaleb continued; "General Westbrook nearly winged him, did n't he? The man must have been standing right up against the wall to have the bullet carry away a piece of his coat like that."

Again Converse looked at the young man appreciatively.

"We 'll make a detective of you yet," said he. "But the man was n't standing so close to the wall, though. And why 'a man'? It is simply one of those rare chances where the thread of cloth clung to the bullet a bit longer than usual. If you 'll notice the floor closely, you 'll see — from this chair, where he sat for some time, to the desk; from the desk to the window there, and away. What that person took with" — the briefest of pauses before the pronoun —"him I 'd give a

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

good deal to have. . . . Those are about the actions of the General's caller. Do you notice anything peculiar about the footmarks on the floor?"

The Captain's manner was quiet and deliberate; and McCaleb, the pupil, followed the vague markings with the intentness and thoroughness of a born specialist. Slight as they were, the imprints would have been lacking entirely had it not been for the dampness of the night; but they held a meaning.

"The man came on to the desk," McCaleb began, but paused. "I suppose it was a man?" he asked.

The answer was a steady look.

In a moment the young man went on: "Well, the party came up to the desk after stabbing the General. I imagine that 's where your missing paper went — what he was after. And right here — just as he got out of his chair — he seems to have slipped. Probably in a hurry; or else the bullet clipped him about that time — eh? — or her."

Converse shook his head dubiously. "I can't say," he returned, meditatively. "There 's something about those footmarks that is mighty peculiar, Mac; I can't just make it out." He mused a moment longer, but presently bestirred himself again. "Two shots were fired from that gun, you know," he concluded; "have you located the other bullet?"

McCaleb looked blank for an instant, as if he had been guilty of some vital oversight. However, he turned at once to a search for the missing bullet.

The glass doors before the books simplified the matter somewhat: the radiating lines from a bullet-hole in one of the panes would be so conspicuous that the most cursory glance would scarcely overlook them. Elsewhere there was no

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

indication of the second missile; and with a little laugh McCaleb abruptly stopped and indicated by the wave of a hand the open window.

"If you have eliminated every other possibility, all right," said Converse. "Now, Mac, you may telephone for Merkel." At which last statement McCaleb smiled: the Coroner would not be in the way now.

The young man departed on his errand, and Converse went over and knelt before the fireplace.

To Policeman Clancy, the quiet, self-contained, confident man scanning the bricks and the crevices between them with an eagle-like scrutiny was the embodiment of awful and mysterious possibilities.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER X

FOOTPRINTS

ALTHOUGH it is now the morning of November seventeenth, the mild and spring-like Southern autumn has not yet presented any wintry aspects, and the wide, old-fashioned fireplace in the Westbrook library gives no indication that it has been recently used.

If any papers had been removed from the General's desk, they had not been destroyed here — unless, indeed, the fireplace had been cleaned since midnight, which was scarcely likely. Still, the Captain continued to scrutinize the bricks; and when McCaleb returned, he was carefully picking between them with the point of his pencil.

"Find anything?" asked the young man, as Converse stood upright.

"No; and yet, some paper has been burnt here recently. But it could not have been the missing one. . . . Have you a pocket-lamp?"

From the recesses of his blue coat McCaleb produced a short black tube with a bull's-eye in one end — an electric dark-lantern, operated by the simple means of pressing and releasing a button in its side. This the Captain took and moved toward the open window. He got down on his hands and knees, looked intently at the sill, and, still in a crouching attitude, passed out to the veranda — or, in local parlance, "gallery" — McCaleb following close behind. His course led him directly to the east end, where he cautioned his companion to move carefully.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I want to examine these marks again by daylight," he explained; "but they are pretty distinct even now. There is just enough moisture to-night to soften the turf and cause smaller bits of gravel from the driveway to cling to one's feet."

While talking, he flashed the light upon various points between the gallery's edge and the open window.

"See, Mac; just like the traces inside. Lucky — there might have been none."

Together they moved silently, swiftly; their eyes kindling with a keen alertness that missed not the least particular. The nature of the occasional brief comments indulged in by one or the other indicated clearly that each took it for granted that their thoughts were running in the same channel.

McCaleb's thin, aquiline features were tense, his black eyes fairly luminous with eager concentration.

"Strange way to make a call," he muttered, peering over the end of the gallery. "Seems to have come openly, too."

The response was an indefinite sound, incapable of interpretation by any written character.

All at once Converse diverted the beam of light to the ground, immediately voicing a feeling of satisfaction, of doubt removed.

"It was a man!" he exclaimed. "Look!"

There in the turf at the end of the gallery was a clearly defined imprint of a masculine shoe heel.

"Careful there, Mac," the Captain went on, as the other started to let himself down to the ground; "go as far to the right as you can."

They moved rapidly over the lawn, one on each side of a very plain trail.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Footprints

"And look here!" McCaleb presently cried. Both came to a stop. The distinct imprints of two heels lay nearly side by side, the only apparent difference between them being that one pointed toward the house and the other away from it.

"The fellow departed just as he came," was the older man's comment; "straight from the end of the gallery to the drive. Not much to be seen there, though — too hard. But let us try it."

With Converse going in advance and flashing the light from side to side, they started down the driveway. They had advanced but a short distance when the leader came to an abrupt pause.

"Hello!" he ejaculated, softly; "our caller left by a different route after all. Now, why did he turn off here?"

The driveway lay between two parallel rows of cedars, set so closely that they almost formed a hedge. Simultaneously with the exclamation, Converse stepped to one side, directing the light to a spot beneath the low-hanging branches. Here the shadow was so dense, even in daytime, that the soil was quite free from grass or any growth, excepting a few wan, straw-like weeds; it was, besides, quite moist.

"Tiptoeing, too, you see," went on the Captain. "He took alarm at something. . . . One solitary, isolated heel-mark; I wonder if he 's left an entire footprint anywhere?"

"You can see where he pressed through the branches," observed McCaleb.

"Yes. If he followed a straight course, he struck the walk at about the front gate. Come a little farther down the drive."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Nearly every step of this sally into the night presented something novel to the two eager searchers. They had proceeded but a few yards, when of a sudden the leader once more came to a halt, at the same time extending a restraining hand.

"Wait a bit, Mac," he admonished. He dropped to one knee and cast the eye of light about over the space in front of him. "There 's been some one else here," he presently announced in his whisper; "somebody 's been standing here and moving about — quite a while to kick up the hard gravel like this. Explains why the other turned off back there. . . . A-h-h —"

A quizzical lifting of the eyebrow — a puckering of the lips — absorbed the thought.

A little hollow, worn by the passage of many wheels over the hard road-bed, was filled with the product of attrition — a soft sand, fine and plastic; and to this the Captain pointed. McCaleb could see the outline of a small French heel, and beside it a second, which had been partially obliterated by another foot — the latter unmistakably masculine.

"A woman!" the young man breathed; his astonishment was complete. "Well, well! a woman, after all." He looked at the Captain with open curiosity; but Mr. Converse was grimly silent.

If he had been alive before to overlook no possible detail, the concentration with which he now began an inspection of the driveway seemed to include within his scrutiny each separate grain of sand.

"Don't move," he curtly enjoined; McCaleb instantly froze.

Slowly, inch by inch, he went over a space covering the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

radius of about a rod from where they had paused. Again and again he returned to the footprints in the little depression, and once he passed swiftly back to the point where the first trail diverged from the driveway so abruptly. He examined the solitary heelmark here with an added interest, in the end producing from his pocket a finely graduated ivory rule, which he applied to the print in a variety of ways.

Returning again to the depression, he made a careful comparison by means of the measure. At last he turned to McCaleb.

"I was afraid you would disturb something," he explained. "Our trail is becoming a little involved; it was too plain to last. This promises to be a wonderful case, Mac, — a wonderful case. I wish I were twenty years younger."

"What do you make of it, sir?"

Mr. Converse considered before replying, and when he did his whisper was no more than audible.

"Mac, keep this to yourself, and do not ask me to go any farther into it just now." He threw the light upon the young man's sharp-featured countenance, and subjected it to a momentary but searching scrutiny. "A woman was here," he went on, "and some man; but I 'm afraid her identity will cause a devil of a mess."

It was obvious that he was much impressed by what he had read in the driveway, and he presently concluded, in a vastly altered manner:

"You see, Mac, how carefully one must act in a case of this kind; there is never any telling what might turn up, nor what a lot of needless worry — not to say danger — an innocent person may be made to suffer. The fact that a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

woman figures so prominently in the De Sanchez case, and yet is kept in the shadowy background, coupled with the fact that we have stumbled upon these impressions here, looks pretty bad for that woman if she happens to be the same in both instances. It may be only a coincidence, but a man and woman were here — here when General Westbrook was done to his death, and here when the assassin departed. Why? Now let us drop this as though it had never come to our knowledge — until we know more. . . . I believe you said Mrs. Westbrook wore some sort of evening gown when you and Clancy got here."

"Yes, she did; Miss Westbrook, too."

"Did you notice what colors?"

"Mrs. Westbrook's costume was of some light color, but Miss Westbrook's was —"

With a startled exclamation the young man stopped and stared strangely at Converse. For some incomprehensible reason his mind was flooded with the vision of a bit of fabric protruding from a bullet-hole in a carved oak panel.

"Well?" curtly.

"Black," McCaleb said, in a whisper, "dead black."

For a moment the Captain returned the other's regard in silence; then he said in his customary quiet way:

"Very good, Mac. Now, let us get through with the driveway."

They proceeded to the handsome wrought-iron gates, but without observing anything more of moment; and passing through them to the sidewalk, they continued to the front gate. Just inside the latter the Captain paused and indicated with the lamp the bordering bed of flowers.

"Just as I expected," he observed; "here 's where the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

midnight caller made his exit. Still tiptoeing, too — see? The bed was a little too wide for him to jump across, and his toe sank deep into the soft earth — an active, athletic man to make a jump like that. He cut right across the lawn from the driveway."

The attention of the two was now diverted by the sound of a rapidly driven horse being brought to an abrupt standstill, and both paused to listen. Presently the front gate clanged, and an approaching dim figure finally resolved itself into the ponderous form of the Coroner.

"Bless my soul! Captain Converse!" he cried, as soon as he recognized the Captain. "Here we are together again. This is dreadful — dreadful, is n't it?" After he had given expression to his feelings at some length in a similar strain, the Captain saw an opportunity to interrupt.

"Mr. Merkel, you must let me run this thing for a while."

The other looked blank.

"Oh, all I desire is a day or two unhampered —" Converse paused, tentatively.

"Well — er — ah — as to that," returned the Coroner, in his important, official manner,— "as to that, John, I cannot commit myself to act against my better judgment."

"I should say not!" exclaimed Converse, apparently amazed at the implication that he could harbor such a thought.

"It is my desire, of course," the other went on, with a comical, heavy air of patronage that made McCaleb confide a thin-lipped smile to the darkness, "that we work together in perfect harmony; I wish to aid to the extent of my powers; but there are responsibilities attaching to my office; there are responsibilities —"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"To be sure there are," Converse interrupted with prompt acquiescence; "and with your permission, I will assume them entirely. Now, what I want is, that you will not act at all for a while. Of course you will not. Delay the inquest for a day or two, and I will show you some things that will astonish you."

"Very well," responded Mr. Merkel, after a moment of gravid deliberation; "I agree to be guided by you for the present — within certain limits, of course,— unless my better judgment — "

"Good! very good!" was the satisfied interruption. "We 'll handle this conscientiousness of yours as if it were cut glass;" and passing his hand beneath Mr. Merkel's arm with an air of irresistible cordiality, the Captain added, "Now, let us go to the house. Come, Mac."

The elderly gentleman, Mr. Slayden Wilson, met the trio in the hall, and to his tender mercies Converse intrusted the Coroner with a request that the latter be conducted to the library. "Then return to me here," he concluded, still addressing the guide.

Mr. Converse watched the two disappear; then seated himself, and soon was in a deep study. McCaleb was not without skill himself, but their discoveries of the night told him no more than what they might baldly signify to any observer, and he watched the Captain, filled with a deep curiosity, but too accustomed to discipline to ask questions.

With a slight shake of the head, like a diver coming to the surface of a pool, Mr. Converse presently came out of his meditations, and immediately brought joy to the heart of McCaleb.

"Mac," said he, "your detective career begins to-night.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A word from me to the Commission depends upon the way you accomplish what I want you to do. See every darkey on the place, singly, and find out — first, what time Miss Westbrook returned home last night, and if she returned alone; second, was anybody at all seen skulking about the premises during the night; third, were any shots heard, how many, at what time, and what was thought of the occurrence. Let them talk; impressions are sometimes of value. Now go."

As the young man departed for the servants' quarters, Mr. Slayden Wilson reappeared.

"Now, then," Converse began at once, "I suppose at present the ladies are not in a condition to be seen?"

"Oh, no, sir; I could not disturb them now; Doctor Bane has succeeded in getting them to sleep. They know nothing, however; I can assure you of that. This terrible tragedy has been a prostrating shock to both of them."

"Well, that can wait. I want the servant who attended the door to-night and Miss Westbrook's maid. If they 're asleep, wake 'em up."

"Sam and Melissa are quite ready; I took occasion to impress upon them the necessity of remaining cool under the ordeal of a searching examination, and if they are in possession of any facts you will surely learn them. You will find Sam quite intelligent for a darkey; but I am certain that both are ignorant of — "

"We 'll see," was the curt interruption; "hurry, please."

And Mr. Wilson disappeared, noiselessly, up the broad stairway.

In a short time he returned, closely followed by a stout, middle-aged negress, whose face, much swollen with

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

weeping, reflected the degree of terror often described as speechless. She approached Mr. Converse with obvious reluctance and trepidation; but upon observing her condition his sternness relaxed, and he sought to reassure her that he was somewhat less formidable than an ogre.

"Sam is in the servants' quarters," Mr. Slayden Wilson explained. "He does not fully realize what the taking away of a kind master and friend means. Ordinarily he is inclined to be jocular, and the shock has not yet had time to exert its sobering influence, so pray overlook any facetiousness or apparent levity."

"Very good — if you will only fetch him."

It was not difficult to calm Melissa when it became evident to her understanding that this burly, unassuming man desired nothing more momentous of her than the shoes worn the preceding night by her mistress.

Miss Joyce's shoes — the idea!

But astonishment and awakened curiosity made her pliable, and the articles of apparel were not long in forthcoming.

Converse placed one on the palm of his right hand; but whatever of softness and femininity it might have imparted, such influences were apparently lost upon the impassive figure who scrutinized it so closely. His cold eyes took in the fact that the heel and sole were stained with yellow sand, and that innumerable bits of fine gravel yet clung to it.

To any person beneath that roof — save himself and Mc-Caleb, of course,— the circumstance would have appeared ridiculously trifling, yet it made him terribly, dangerously silent and absorbed.

"Fo' de lan' sake, seh," said Melissa, unable longer to

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

restrain her wonder, "what you see in Miss Joyce's shoe to stare at hit dat erway?"

What, indeed? But the Captain did not reply directly; he handed the little shoe back to Melissa, saying:

"I hear Sam coming; but I have n't heard yet where the ladies were last night — at a ball, perhaps?"

"Oh, no, seh; dey wuz at Miz Farquier's 'ception."

"To be sure. And Miss Westbrook was feeling badly and came home before her mother. . . . Wait there, Sam; I 'll be ready for you in two seconds. . . . That 's how she happened to find her father, is n't it?"

"Yes, seh," was the reply; and Melissa proceeded to tell all she knew of the circumstance.

Further than that the hour was late, she did not know when Miss Westbrook returned from the Farquier reception. The young lady had come up the stairs alone, roused her maid, and inquired for her father, who had been feeling ill for a week or more, and upon being informed that he was still in the library, she went at once downstairs again. The rest was confusion in the darkey's mind.

"So Miss Westbrook came upstairs before entering the library?" asked the Captain.

"Oh, yes, seh; she suttenly did."

"How do you know that?"

"I don' know; I des knows hit," was the rather enigmatic reply. "What fo' she ax me 'bout her pa, if she done been in de lib'ry?"

Obviously, it was useless to answer this reasoning.

Sam, the butler, had somewhat more to tell. It was his duty to make everything fast after the family were all in of a night, and he had been dozing in his waiting-room off the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

rear hall. About midnight he had been startled into wakefulness by a sound which he took to be a shot; but failing to locate its source, and hearing nothing more, he settled himself for another nap, when Miss Westbrook arrived and he was obliged to admit her. She was a trifle flushed and out of breath, as if she had been running.

"I ax her ef she seen somebody in de yahd," added Sam. "When I ax dat, she look at me mighty queer; den she laugh an' say: 'Why, de idea, Sam! You must have been dreaming.'" She then laughed again softly, and ran lightly up the stairs.

About when there had last been a fire in the library, Sam spoke at some length.

"Lemme see, seh," he beat his memory. "On Sunday Marse Peyton went to Bellefontaine, de plantation, an' de nex' night Marse Howa'd Lynden an' Clay Fai'chile was heah to see Miss Joyce. I minds dat, seh, kase dey both sot an' sot dere eyin' one an'er lak dey wanter see which can stay de longes', wiv Miss Joyce pokin' fun at 'em all de time. Bimeby Marse Peyton come in, an' de young gen'lmen dey goes home. Miss Joyce see dat Marse Peyton is cold an' wo'n out. She tole me to make a fiah in de lib'ry, while she mix him a toddy. Dat was a Monday night — de second Monday befoah Marse de Sanchez got kilt."

"That would be in October."

"Yes, seh. I minds it was de fust night Miss Joyce been right peart sence Marse de Sanchez been comin' to de house, an' Marse Peyton was mighty glad to see her dat way."

There had been no fire since until the morning before the General's death, when Sam discovered that some papers had evidently been destroyed in the library fireplace, the ashes

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY