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BOOKS BY GERALDINE BONNER

Miss Maitland, Private Secretary

Treasure and Trouble Therewith

The Girl at Central

The Black Eagle Mystery

D. APPLETON & COMPANY
Publishers New York

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Rising into the white wash of moonlight came Suzanne
[Page 45]

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MISS MAITLAND PRIVATE SECRETARY

BY

GERALDINE BONNER

AUTHOR OF "THE EMIGRANT TRAIL," "THE GIRL AT CENTRAL," "TREASURE AND TROUBLE THEREWITH," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

A. I. KELLER

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK LONDON

1919

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MISS MAITLAND
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CHAPTER I

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

CHAPMAN PRICE was leaving Grasslands. Events had been rapidly advancing to that point for the last three months, slowly advancing for the last three years. Everybody who knew the Prices and the Janneys said it was inevitable, and people who didn't know them but read about them in the "society papers" could give quite glibly the reasons why Mrs. Chapman Price was going to separate from her husband.

His friends said it was her fault; Suzanne Price was enough to drive any man away from her — selfish, exacting, bad tempered, a spoiled child of wealth. Chappie had been a first-rate fellow when he married her and she'd nagged and tormented him past bearing. *Her* friends had a different story; Chapman Price was no good, had neglected her, was an idler and a spendthrift. Hadn't the Janneys set him up in business over

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and over and found it hopeless? What he had wanted was her money, and people had told her so; her mother had begged her to give him up, but she would have him and learned her lesson, poor girl! Those in the Janney circle said there would have been a divorce long before if it hadn't been for the child. *She* had held them together, kept them in a sort of hostile, embattled partnership for years. And then, finally, that link broke and Chapman Price had to go.

There had been a last conclave in the library that morning, Mrs. Janney presiding. Then they separated, silent and gloomy — a household of eight years, even an uncongenial one, isn't broken up without the sense of finality weighing on its members. Chapman had gone to his rooms and flung orders at his valet to pack up, and Suzanne had gone to hers, thrown herself on the sofa, and sniffed salts with her eyes shut. Mr. and Mrs. Janney repaired to the wide shaded balcony and there talked it over in low tones. They were immensely relieved that it was at last settled, though of course there would be the unpleasantness of a divorce and the attending gossip. Mr. Janney hated gossip, but his wife, who had risen from a Pittsburg suburb to her present proud eminence, was too battle-scarred a veteran to mind a little thing like that.

As they talked, their eyes wandered over a delightful prospect. First a strip of velvet lawn, then a terrace

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and balustraded walk, and beyond that the enameled brilliance of long gardens where flowers grew in masses, thick borders, and delicate spatterings, bright against the green. Back of the gardens were more lawns, shaven close and dappled with tree shadows, then woods — Mrs. Janney's far acres — on this fine morning all shimmering and astir with a light, salt-tinged breeze. Grasslands was on the northern side of Long Island, only half a mile from the Sound through the seclusion of its own woods.

It was quite a show place, the house a great, rambling, brown building with slanting, shingled roofs and a flanking rim of balconies. Behind it the sun struck fire from the glass of long greenhouses, and the tops of garages, stables and out-buildings rose above concealing shrubberies and trellises draped with the pink mantle of the rambler. Mrs. Janney had bought it after her position was assured, paying a price that made all Long Island real estate men glad at heart.

Sitting in a wicker chair, a bag of knitting hanging from its arm, she looked the proper head for such an establishment. She was fifty-four, large — increasing stoutness was one of her minor trials — and was still a handsome woman who "took care of herself." Her morning dress of white embroidered muslin had been made by an artist. Her gray hair, creased by a "permanent wave," was artfully disposed to show the fine

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shape of her head and conceal the necessary switch. She was too naturally endowed with good taste to indicate her wealth by vulgar display, and her hands showed few rings; the modest brooch of amethysts fastening the neck of her bodice was her sole ornament. And this was all the more commendable, as Mrs. Janney had wonderful jewels of which she was very proud.

Five years before, she had married Samuel Van Zile Janney, who now sat opposite her clothed in white flannels and looking distressed. He was a small, thin, elderly man, with a pointed gray beard and a general air of cool, dry finish. No one had ever thought old Sam Janney would marry again. He had lost his wife ages ago and had been a sort of historic landmark for the last twenty years, living desolately at his club and knowing everybody who was worth while. Of course he had family, endless family, and thought a lot of it and all that sort of thing. So his marriage to the Pittsburg widow came as a shock, and then his world said: "Oh, well, the old chap wants a home and he's going to get it — a choice of homes — the house on upper Fifth Avenue, the place at Palm Beach and Grasslands."

It had been a very happy marriage, for Sam Janney with his traditions and his conventions was a person of infinite tact, and he loved and admired his wife. The one matter upon which they ever disagreed was Suzanne.

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She had been foolishly indulged, her caprices and extravagances were maddening, her manners on occasions extremely bad. Mr. Janney, who had beautiful manners of his own, deplored it, also the amount of money her mother allowed her; for the fortune was all Mrs. Janney's, Suzanne having been left dependent on her bounty.

His wife, who had managed everything else so well, resented these criticisms on what should have been the completest example of her competence. She also resented them because she knew they were true. With all her cleverness and all her capability she had not succeeded with her daughter. The girl had got beyond her; the unfortunate marriage with Chapman Price had been the climax of a youth of willfulness and insubordination. Suzanne's affairs, Suzanne's future, Suzanne herself were subjects that husband and wife avoided, except, as in the present instance, when they were the only subjects in both their minds.

Presently their low-toned murmurings were interrupted by the appearance of Dixon, the butler, announcing lunch.

"Mrs. Price," he said, "will not be down — she has a headache."

Mrs. Janney rose, looking at the man. He had been in her service for years, was one of the first outward and visible signs of her growth in affluence. She was

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sure that he knew what had happened, but her face was unrevealing as a mask, as she said:

"See that she gets something. Will Mr. Price take his lunch upstairs?"

"No, Madam," returned the man quietly, "Mr. Price is coming down."

It was a ghastly meal — three of them eating sumptuous food, waited on by two men hardly less silent than they were. It wouldn't have been so unbearable if Bébita, Suzanne's daughter, had been there to lift the curse off it with her artless chatter, or Esther Maitland, the social secretary, who had acquired a habit of talking with Mr. Janney when the rest of the family were held in the dumbness of wrath. But Bébita was spending the morning with a little chum and Miss Maitland was lunching with a friend in the village.

Chapman Price, as if anxious to show how little he cared, ate everything that was passed, and prolonged the misery by second helpings. Mrs. Janney could have beaten him, she was so angry. Once she glanced at him and met his eyes, insolently defiant, and as full of hostility as her own. They were vital eyes, dark and bold, and were set in a handsome face. At the time of his marriage he had been known as "Beauty Price" and it was his good looks which had caught the capricious fancy of Suzanne. In the eight years since then they had suffered, the firmly modeled contours had grown

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thin and hard, the mouth had set in an ugly line, the brows had creased by a frown of sulky resentment. But he was still a noticeable figure, six feet, lean and agile, with a skin as brown as a nut and a crown of black hair brushed to a glossy smoothness. Many women continued to describe Chapman Price as "a perfect Adonis."

When they rose from the table he stood aside to let his parents-in-law pass out before him. They brushed by, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable and wanting to get away as quickly as their dignity would permit. They dreaded a last flare-up of his temper, notoriously violent and uncontrolled, one of the attributes that had made him so unacceptable. In the hall at the stair foot they half turned to him, swept him with cold looks and were mumbling vague sounds that might have been dismissal or farewell, when he suddenly raised his voice in a loud, combative note:

"Oh, don't bother to be polite. There's no love between us and there needn't be any hypocrisies. You want to get rid of me and I want to go. But before I do, I'd like to say something." He drew a step nearer, his face suddenly suffused with a dark flush, his eyes set and narrowed. "You've done one thing to me that you're going to regret — stolen my child. Yes," in answer to a protesting sound from Mr. Janney, "*stolen* her — that's what I said. You think you can

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hide behind your money bags and do what you like. Maybe you can nine times, but there's a tenth when things don't work the way you've expected. Watch out for it — it's due now."

His voice was raised, loud, furious, threatening. The dining room door flew open and Dixon appeared on the threshold in alarmed consternation. Mr. Janney stepped forward belligerently:

"Chapman, now look here —"

Mrs. Janney laid a hand on her husband's arm:

"Don't answer him, Sam," then to Chapman, her face stony in its controlled passion, "I want no more words with you. Our affairs are finished. Kindly leave the house as soon as possible." She turned to the butler who was staring at them with dropped jaw: "Shut that door, Dixon, and stay where you belong." The sound of footsteps at the stair-head caught her ear. "The other servants are coming; we'll have an audience for this pleasant scene. We'd better go, Sam, as Chapman doesn't seem to have heard my request for him to leave, the only thing for us is to leave ourselves."

She swept her husband off across the hall toward the balcony. Behind them the young man's voice rose:

"Oh don't have any fears. I'm going. But I may come back — that's what you want to remember — I may come back to settle the score."

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Then they heard his footsteps mounting the stairs in a long, leaping run.

In his own room he found his valet, Willitts, a small, fair-haired young Englishman, closing the trunks. The door was open and he had a suspicion that the footsteps Mrs. Janney had heard were probably Willitts'. He didn't care, he didn't care what Willitts had heard. The man knew anyhow; they *all* knew. There wasn't a servant in the house or a soul in the village who wouldn't by to-morrow be telling how the Janneys had thrown him out and were planning to get possession of his child.

He strode about the room, tumbled the neat piles of cravats and handkerchiefs on the bureau, yanked up the blinds. In his still seething passion he muttered curses at everything, the clothes that lay across chair backs, the boots that he kicked as he walked, finally the valet who once got in his way. The man made no answer, did not appear to notice it, but went on with his work, silent, unobtrusive, competent. Presently Chapman became quieter; the storm was receding. He fell into a chair, sat sunk in moody reflection, and, after studying the shining toes of his shoes for some minutes, looked at the man and said, "Forget it, Willitts. I was mad straight through."

It may have been a capacity to make such amends that caused all servants to like Chapman Price. Wil-

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litts, who had been in his service for nearly a year, was known to be devoted to him.

An hour later, when they left, the house had an air of desertion. The large lower hall, with vistas of stately rooms through arched doorways, was as silent as the Sleeping Beauty's palace. Chapman's glance swept it all — rich and still, gleams of parquette showing beyond the Persian rugs, curtains too heavily splendid for the breeze to stir, flowers in glowing masses, the big motor, visible through the wide-flung hall door, a finishing touch in the picture. It was the perfect expression of a carefully devised luxury, a luxury which for the last eight years had lapped him in slothful ease.

As he came out on the verandah steps a voice hailed him and he stopped, the sullen ill humor of his face breaking into a smile. Across the lawn, running with fleet steps, came his daughter Bébita. Laughing and gay with welcome, she was as fresh as a morning rose. Her hat, slipped to her neck, showed the glistening gold of her hair back-blown in ruffled curls; her rapid passage threw her dress up over her bare, sunburned knees, and her little feet in black-strapped slippers sped over the grass. Healthy, happy, surrounded by love which she returned with a child's sweet democracy, she was enchanting and Chapman adored her.

"Where are you going, Popsy?" she cried and,

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dodging round the back of the motor, came panting up the steps. Chapman sat down on the top, and drew her between his knees. Otto, the chauffeur, and Willitts with the bags, watched them with covert interest, ready to avert their eyes if Chapman should look their way. The nurse, an elderly woman, came slowly across the grass, also watching.

"To town," said the young man, scrutinizing the lovely, rosy face, with its deep blue eyes raised to his.

"For how long?" She was used to her father going to town and not reappearing for several days.

"Oh, I don't know; longer than usual, though, I guess. Going to miss me?"

"Um, I always miss you, Popsy. Will you bring me something when you come back?"

"Yes, or maybe I 'll send it. What do you want?"

"A 'lectric torch — one that shines. Polly's got one"— Polly was the little friend she had been visiting —"I want one like Polly's."

"All right. A 'lectric torch."

"I'm going to get one, Annie," she cried triumphantly to the nurse; "Popsy's going to send me one." Then turning back to her father, "Take me to the station with you?"

Willitts and the chauffeur exchanged a glance. The nurse made a quick forward movement, suddenly gently authoritative:

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"No, no, darling. You can't drive now. It's time to go in and take your rest."

Bébita looked mutinous, but her father, drawing her to him and kissing her, rose:

"I can't honey-bun. I'm in a hurry and there wouldn't be any fun just driving down to the village and back. You run along with Annie now and as soon as I get to town I'll buy you the torch and send it."

The nurse mounted the steps, took the child's hand, and together they stood watching Chapman as he got in. Willitts took the seat beside the chauffeur, adroitly disposing his legs among a pile of suitcases, golf bags, umbrellas and walking sticks. As the car started Chapman looked back at his daughter. She was regarding him with the intent, grave interest, a little wistful, with which children watch a departure. At the sight of his face, she smiled, pranced a little, and called:

"Good-by, Popsy dear. Don't forget the torch. Come back soon," and waved her free hand.

Chapman gave an answering wave and the big car rolled off with a cool crackle of gravel.

The village — the spotless, prosperous village of Berkeley enriched by the great estates about it — was a half mile from Grasslands' wrought-iron gates. The road passed through woods, opening here and there to afford glimpses of emerald lawns backed by large houses, with the slope of awnings above their balconies.

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On either side of this highway ran a shady path, worn hard by the feet of pedestrians and the wheels of bicycles.

As the Janney motor turned out into the road a young woman was walking along one of these paths, returning to Grasslands. She appeared to be engrossed in thought, her step loitering, her eyes downcast, a slight line showing between her brows. Out of range of the sun she had let her parasol droop over her shoulder and its green disk made a charming background for her head. She wore no hat and against the taut silk her hair showed a glossy, burnished brown. It was beautiful hair, growing low on her forehead and waving backward in loose undulations to the thick knot at the nape of her neck. Her skin was pale, her eyes, under long brows that lifted slightly at the outer ends, deep-set, narrow and dark. She was hardly handsome, but people noticed her, wondered why they did, and then said she was "artistic-looking," or maybe it was just personality; anyway, say what you like, there was something about her that caught your eye. Dressed entirely in white, a slim, sunburned hand coiled round the parasol handle, her throat left bare by a sailor collar, she was as trim, as flecklessly dainty, graceful and comely as a picture-girl painted on the green canvas of the trees.

At the sight of her Chapman, who had been lounging

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in the tonneau, started and his morose eye brightened. As the motor ran toward her, she looked up, saw who it was, and in the moment of passing, inclined her head in a grave salutation. Chapman leaned forward and touched the chauffeur on the shoulder.

"Just stop for a minute, Otto, I want to speak to Miss Maitland."

She did not see that the car had stopped or hear the footstep on the grass behind him. Chapman's voice was low:

"Hullo, Esther. Don't be in such a hurry. I'm going."

She wheeled, evidently startled, her face disturbed and unsmiling.

"Oh! Do you mean *really* going?"

"Yes. Parting of the ways — all that sort of thing."

He eyed her with a curious, watching interest and she returned the look, her own uneasily intent.

"Why do you stop to tell me that," was what she said. "Everybody knew it was coming."

He shrugged and then smiled, a smile full of meaning:

"I thought you'd like to hear it — from *me*, first hand. I'll be a free man in a year."

She stood for a moment looking at the ground, then lifting the parasol over her head, said:

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"If you're going to catch the three forty-five you'd better hurry."

His smile deepened, showed a roguish malice, and as he turned from her, raising his hat, he murmured just loud enough for her to hear:

"Thanks for reminding me. I wouldn't miss that train for a farm — I'm devilish keen to get to the city."

He ran back to the waiting motor and the girl resumed her walk, her step even slower than before, her face down-drooped in frowning reverie.

There was no chair car on the three forty-five and Chapman had to travel in the common coach, Willitts and the luggage crowded into the seat behind him. It was an hour and a half run to the Pennsylvania Station and he spent the time thinking over the situation and arranging his future. His business — Long Island real estate — had been allowed to go to the dogs. He would have to get busy in earnest, and, with his friends and large acquaintance to throw things in his way, he could put it on a paying basis. His expenses would have to be cut down to the bone. He'd give up his chambers, a suite in a bachelor apartment — Willitts could find him a cheap room somewhere — and of course he'd give up Willitts. That had been already arranged and the faithful soul had asked leave to help him in the move and stay with him till a new job was

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found. He would keep his car — it would be necessary in his business — and could be stored in the garage at Cedar Brook where he'd spend his week-ends with the Hartleys. Joe Hartley was one of his best friends, knew all about his marriage and had counseled a separation more than a year ago. He'd probably spend a good deal of his time at Cedar Brook, it was a growing place; unfortunate that it should be the next station after Berkeley, but it could not be helped. He was bound to run into the Janney outfit and he'd have to get used to it.

The train was entering the tunnel when he gave Willitts his instructions — go to the apartment and pack up, then see about a room. He himself would look up some places he knew of, and if he found anything suitable he'd come back to the apartment and the things could be moved to-morrow. They separated in the depot, Willitts and the luggage in a taxi, Chapman on foot. But that part of the city to which he took his way, dingy, unkempt, remote from the section where his kind dwelt, was not a place where Chapman Price, fallen from his high estate as he was, would have chosen to house himself.

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CHAPTER II

MISS MAITLAND GETS A LETTER

IT was Thursday morning, three days after her husband's departure, and Suzanne was sitting in the window seat of her room looking across the green distances to where the roof of Dick Ferguson's place, Council Oaks, rose above the tree tops. Council Oaks adjoined Grasslands, there was a short cut which connected them — a path through the woods. Before Mrs. Janney bought Grasslands the path had become moss-grown, almost obliterated. Then when she took possession the two households wore it bare again. The servants found it shortened the walk from kitchen to kitchen; Mr. Janney often footed its green windings; Dick Ferguson's father had been one of his cronies, and Dick Ferguson himself was the most constant traveler of them all.

Council Oaks was a very old place; it had been in the Ferguson family since the days when the British governors rolled over Long Island in their lumbering coaches. Before that the Indians had used it for a council ground, their tepees pitched under the shade of

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the four giant oaks from which it took its name. The Fergusons had kept the farm house, built after the Revolution, adding wings to it, till it now extended in a long, sprawl of white buildings, with the original worn stone as a step to its knockered front door, and the low, raftered ceilings, plank floors, and deep-mouthed fireplaces of its early occupation.

There Dick Ferguson lived all summer, going to town at intervals to attend to the business of the Ferguson estate, for, like the young man in the Bible, he had great possessions. The dead and gone Fergusons had been canny and thrifty, bought land far beyond the city limits and sat in their offices and waited until the town grew round it. It was known among the present owner's intimates that he disapproved of this method of enrichment, and that his extensive charities and endowments were an attempt to pay back what he felt he owed. He was very silent about them, only a few knew of the many secret channels through which the Ferguson millions were being diverted to the relief of the people.

But none of this seriousness showed on the outside. If you didn't know him well Dick Ferguson was the last person you would suspect of a sense of responsibility or a view of life that was anything but easy-going and light-hearted. People described him as a nice chap, not a bit spoiled by his money, just a big, jolly boy, simple

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and unaffected. He looked the part with his long, lank figure, leggy as a young colt, his shock of light brown hair that never would lie flat, his freckled, irregular face with gray eyes that had an engaging way of closing when he laughed. He did this a good deal and it may have been one of the reasons why so many people liked him. And he also had a capacity for listening to long-winded tales of trouble, which may have been another. He was twenty-nine years old and still unmarried, and that was his own fault as any one would tell you.

When Sam Janney married the Pittsburg widow Dick Ferguson became a friend of the family. He fitted in very well, for he was sympathetic and understanding and the Janneys had troubles to tell. He heard all about Chapman's shortcomings; a little from old Sam who was not expansive, more from Mrs. Janney, and most from Suzanne. He was very sorry for her and gave her good advice. "A poor little bit of bluff," he called her to himself, and then would stroll over to Grasslands and spend an hour with her trying to cheer her up.

He spent a good many hours this way and the time came when Suzanne began to wait and watch for his coming.

Sitting now in the cushioned window seat she was wondering if he would come that morning and she could

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get him off in the garden and tell him that Chapman was gone. She saw herself saying it with lowered eyes and delicately demure phrases. She would frankly admit she was glad it was over, glad she would be free once more, for in the autumn she would go to Reno and begin proceedings for a divorce.

At this thought she subsided against the cushions, and closed her eyes smiling softly. Seen thus, the bright sunlight tempered by filmy curtains, she was a pretty woman, looking very girlish for her twenty-eight years. This was partly due to her extreme slenderness and partly to her blonde coloring. Both had been preserved with sedulous care: the one matter in which she exercised self-restraint was her food, the one occasion on which she showed patience was when her maid was washing her hair with a solution of peroxide.

Every window in the large, luxurious room was open and through them drifted a flow of air, scented with the sea and the breath of flowers. Then rising on the stillness came the sound of voices — a man's and a woman's — from the balcony below. They were Mr. Janney's and Miss Maitland's — the secretary was preparing to read the morning papers to her employer.

Suzanne opened her eyes and sat up, the smile dying from her lips. The dreamy complacence left her face and was replaced by a look of brooding irritation. It

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changed her so completely that she ceased to be pretty — suddenly showed her years, and was revealed as a woman, already fading, preyed upon by secret vexations.

She rose adjusting her dress, a marvelous creation of thin white material with floating edges of lace. She went to the mirror, powdered her face and touched her lips with a stick of red salve, then studied her reflection. It should have been satisfying, delicate, fragile, a lovely, ethereal creature, with baby blue eyes and silky, maize-colored hair. It was not to be believed that any man could look at Esther Maitland when she was by — and yet — and yet —! She turned from the mirror with an angry mutter and went downstairs.

On the balcony Miss Maitland was looking over the papers with Mr. Janney opposite waiting to be read to. Suzanne sat down near them where she could command the place in the woods where the path from Council Oaks struck into the lawn. With a sidelong eye she noted the Secretary's hand on the edge of the paper — narrow, satin-skinned, with fingers finely tapering and pink-tipped. *Her* fingers were short and spatulate, showing her common blood, and all the pink on them had to be applied with a chamois. Miss Maitland began to read — the war news first was the rule — and her voice was a pleasure to hear, cultivated, soft, musical. Suzanne, for all her expensive education

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and subsequent efforts, had never been able to refine hers; the ugly Pittsburg burr would crop out.

A gnawing fancy that she had been fighting against for weeks rose suddenly into jealous conviction. This girl — a penniless nobody — had a quality, an air, a distinction, that she with all her advantages had never been able to acquire, *could* never acquire. It was something innate, something you were born with, something that made you fitted for any sphere. Immovable, apparently absorbed in the reading, Suzanne began to think how she could induce her mother to dispense with the services of the Social Secretary.

When the war news was finished Miss Maitland passed on to the news of the day. On this particular morning it was varied and interesting: A Western senator had attacked the President's policy with unseemly vigor; the mysterious murder of a woman in Chicago had developed a new suspect; a California mob had nearly killed a Japanese student; and in the New York loft district a strike of shirtwaist makers had attained the proportions of a riot in which one of the pickets had stabbed a policeman with a hatpin.

Mr. Janney was shocked at these horrors, but he always liked to hear them. Miss Maitland had to stop reading and listen to a theory he had evolved about the Chicago murder — it was the woman's husband and he demonstrated how this was possible. Then he took

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up the shirtwaist strike with a fussy disapproval — they got nothing by violence, only set the public against them and their cause. Miss Maitland was inclined to argue about it; thought there was something to say for their methods and said it.

Suzanne listened uncomprehending, unable to join in or to follow. She had heard such arguments before and had to sit silent, feeling a fool. The girl didn't know her place, talked as if she were their equal, talked to Dick that way, and Dick had been interested, giving her an attention he never gave Suzanne. Mr. Janney was doing it now, leaning out of his chair, voicing his hope that a speedy vengeance would overtake the picket who had made her escape in the mêlée.

The conversation was brought to an end by the appearance of Mrs. Janney. It was time for the mail; Otto had gone for it an hour ago. Before its arrival Mrs. Janney wanted their answers about two dinner invitations which had just come by telephone. One was for herself and Sam — Sunday night at the Delavalles — and the other was from Dick Ferguson for to-night — all of them, very informally — just himself and Ham Lorimer who was staying there.

Mr. Janney agreed to both and in answer to her mother's glance Suzanne said languidly, "Yes, she'd go to-night — there was nothing else to do."

"And he wants you too, Miss Maitland," said Mrs.

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Janney, turning to the Secretary. "You'll come, won't you?"

Miss Maitland said she would and that it was very kind of Mr. Ferguson to ask her. Mr. and Mrs. Janney exchanged a gratified glance; they were much attached to the Secretary and felt that their lordly circle ignored her existence more than was necessary or kindly. Suzanne said nothing, but the edges of her small upper teeth set close on her under lip, and her nostrils quivered with a deep-drawn breath.

Mrs. Janney gave orders for messages of acceptance to be sent, then sank into a chair, remarking to her husband:

"I'm glad you'll go to the Delavalles. It's to be a large dinner. I'll wear my emeralds."

To which Mr. Janney murmured:

"By all means, my dear. The Delavalles will like to see them."

Mrs. Janney's emeralds were famous; they had once belonged to Maria Theresa. As old Sam thought of them he smiled, for he knew why his wife had decided to wear them. In her climbing days, before her marriage to him had secured her position, the Delavalles had snubbed her. Now she was going to snub them, not in any obvious, vulgar way, but finely as was her wont, with the assistance of himself and Maria Theresa.

The motor came into view gliding up the long drive

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and the waiting group roused into expectant animation. Mr. Janney rose, kicking his trouser legs into shape, Miss Maitland gathered up the papers, and Mrs. Janney went to the top of the steps. In the tonneau, her body encircled by Annie's restraining arm, Bébita stood, waving an electric torch and caroling joyfully:

"It's come — it's come. It was sent to me, in a box, with my name on it."

She leaped out, rushing up the steps to display her treasure, Annie following with the mail. There was quite a bunch of it which Mrs. Janney distributed — several for Sam, a pile for herself, one for Suzanne and one for Miss Maitland. They settled down to it amid a crackling of torn envelopes, Bébita darting from one to the other.

She tried her mother first:

"Mummy, look. You just press this and the light comes out at the other end."

Suzanne's eyes on her letter did not lift, and Bébita laid a soft little hand on the tinted cheek:

"Mummy, do *please* look."

Suzanne pushed the hand away with an angry movement.

"Let me alone, Bébita," she said sharply and, getting up, thrust the child out of her way and went into the house.

For a moment Bébita was astonished. Her mother,

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who was so often cross to other people, was rarely so to her. But the torch was too enthralling for any other subject to occupy her thoughts and she turned to her grandfather, reading a business communication held out in front of his nose for he had on the wrong glasses. She crowded in under his arm and sparked the torch at him waiting to see his delighted surprise. But he only drew her close, kissed her cheek and murmured without moving his eyes:

"Yes, darling. It 's wonderful."

That was not what she wanted so she tried her grandmother:

"Gran, *do* look at my torch."

Gran looked, not at the torch at all but at Bébita's face, smiled into it, said, "Dearest, it's lovely and I'm go glad it's come," and went back to her reading.

It was all disappointing, and Bébita, as a last resource, had to try Miss Maitland, who, if not a relation, was always sympathetic and responsive. The Secretary was reading too, holding her letter up high, almost in front of her face. Bébita laid a sly finger on the top of it, drew it down and sparked the torch right at Miss Maitland.

In the shoot of brilliant light the Secretary's face was like that of a stranger — hard and thin, the mouth slightly open, the eyes staring blankly at Bébita as if they had never seen her before. For a second the child

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was dumb, held in a scared amazement, then backing away she faltered:

"Why — why — how funny you look!"

The words seemed to bring Miss Maitland back to her usual, pleasant aspect. She drew a deep breath, smiled and said:

"I was thinking, that was all — something I was reading here. The torch is beautiful; you must let me try it, but not now, I have to go. I've read the papers to Gramp and I've work to do in my study."

Any one who knew Miss Maitland well might have noticed a forced sprightliness in her voice. But no one was listening; Suzanne had gone and Mr. and Mrs. Janney were engrossed in their correspondence. She stole a look at them, saw them unheeding and, with a farewell nod to Bébita, rose and crossed the balcony. As she entered the house, the will that had made her smile, maintained her voice at its clear, fresh note, relaxed. Her face sharpened, its soft curves grew rigid, her lips closed in a narrow line. With noiseless steps she ran through the wide foyer hall and down a passage that led to the room, reserved for her use and called her study. Here, locking the door, she came to a stand, her hands clasped against her breast, her eyes fixed and tragic, a figure of consternation.

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CHAPTER III

ANOTHER LETTER AND WHAT FOLLOWED IT

SUZANNE, her letter crumpled in her hand, had gone directly to her own room. There she read it for the second time, its baleful import sinking deeper into her consciousness with every sentence. It was in typewriting and bore the Berkeley postmark:

"DEAR MRS. PRICE:

This is just a line to give your memory and your conscience a jog. Your bridge debts are accumulating. Also, I hear, there are dressmakers and milliners in town who are growing restive. If there was insufficient means I wouldn't bother you, but any one who dresses and spends as you do hasn't that excuse. Perhaps you don't know what is being said and *felt*. Believe me you wouldn't like it; neither would Mrs. Janney. It is for her sake that I am warning you. I don't want to see her hurt and humiliated as she would be if this comes out in *The Eavesdropper*, and it will unless you act quickly. 'There's a chiel among you takin' notes' and that chiel's had a line on you for some time. So take these words to heart and as the boys say, 'Come across.'

A FRIEND."

Ever since the opening of the season the summer colony of which Berkeley was the hub had been the subject of paragraphs — more or less scandalous — appearing in *The Eavesdropper*. The paper, a scurrilous

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weekly, had evidently some inside informer, for most of the disclosures were true and could only have been obtained by a member of the community. Suzanne, whose debts would make racy reading, had quaked every time she opened it. So far she had been spared, and she had hoped to escape by a gradual clearing off of her obligations. But she had not been able to do it — unforeseen things had happened. And now the dreaded had come to pass — she would be written up in *The Eavesdropper*.

Though her allowance had been princely she had kept on going over it ever since her marriage and her mother had kept on covering the deficit. But last autumn Mrs. Janney had lost both patience and temper and put her foot down with a final stamp. Then the winter had come, a feverish, crowded winter of endless parties and endless card playing, and Suzanne had somehow gone over it again, gone over — she didn't dare to think of what she owed. Tradespeople had threatened her, she was afraid to go to her mother, she told lies and made promises, and at that juncture a woman friend acquainted her with the mystery of stocks — easy money to be made in speculation. She had tried that and made a good deal — almost cleared her score — and then in April all her stocks suddenly went down. Inquiries revealed the fact that stocks did not always stay down and reassured she set forth on

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a zestful orgy of renewed bridge and summer outfitting. But the stocks never came up, they remained down, as far down as they could get, against the bottom.

She felt as if she was there herself as she reviewed her position.

She couldn't let it be known. She would be ruined, called dishonest; the yellow papers might get it — they were always writing things against the rich. Dick Ferguson would see it, and he despised people who didn't pay their bills; she had heard him say so to Mr. Janney, remembered his tone of contempt. There would be no use lying to him for she felt bitterly certain that Mr. Janney had told him what her mother gave her. There was nothing for it but to go to Mrs. Janney and she quailed at the thought, for her mother, forgiving unto seventy times seven, at seventy times eight could be resolute and relentless. But it was the one way out and she had to take it.

When no engagements claimed her afternoons Mrs. Janney went for a drive at four. At lunch she announced her intention of going out in the open car and asked if any of the others wanted to come. All refused: Mr. Janney was contemplating a ride, Suzanne would rest, Miss Maitland had some sewing to do on her dress for that evening. Both Suzanne and Miss Maitland were very quiet and appeared to suffer from a

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loss of appetite. After the meal the Secretary went upstairs and Suzanne followed.

She waited until Mr. Janney was safely started on his ride, then, feeling sick and wan, crossed the hall to her mother's boudoir. Mrs. Janney was at her desk writing letters, with Elspeth, her maid, a gray-haired, sturdy Scotch woman, standing by the table opening packages that had just arrived from town. Elspeth, like most of Mrs. Janney's servants, had been in her employ for years, entering her service in the old Pittsburg days and being promoted to the post of personal attendant. She knew a good deal about the household, more even than Dixon, admired and respected her mistress and disliked Suzanne.

The young woman's first remark was addressed to her, and, curtly imperious, was of a kind that fed the dislike:

"Go. I want to talk to Mrs. Janney."

"That'll do, Elspeth," said Mrs. Janney quietly. "Thank you very much. I'll finish the others myself." Then as the woman withdrew into the bedroom beyond, "I wish you wouldn't speak to Elspeth that way, Suzanne. It's bad taste and bad manners."

Suzanne was in no state to consider Elspeth's feelings or her own manners. She was so nervous that she blundered into her subject without diplomatic preliminaries, gaining no encouragement from her mother's

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face, which, at first startled, gradually hardened into stern indignation.

It was a hateful scene, degenerated — anyway on Suzanne's part — into a quarrel, a bitter arraignment of her mother as unloving and ungenerous. For Mrs. Janney refused the money, put her foot down with a stamp that carried conviction. She was even grimmer and more determined than her daughter had expected, the girl's anger and upbraidings ineffectual to gain their purpose as spray to soften a rock. Her decision was ruthless; Suzanne must pay her own debts, out of her own allowance. Yes, even if she was written up in the papers. That was *her* affair: if she did things that were disgraceful she must bear the disgrace. The interview ended by Suzanne rushing out of the room, a trail of loud, clamorous sobs marking her passage to her own door.

When she had gone Mrs. Janney broke down and cried a little. She had thought the girl improved of late, less selfish, more tender. And now she had been so cruel; the charge of a lack in love had pierced the mother's heart. Mr. Janney, returned from his ride, found her there, looking old, her eyes reddened, her voice husky. When he heard the story, he took her hand and stroked it. His tact prevented him from saying what he felt; what he did say was:

"That bridge money'll have to be paid."

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"It will *all* have to be paid," Mrs. Janney sighed, "and I'll have to pay it as I always have. But I'm going to frighten her — let her think I won't — for a few days anyway. It's all I can do and it may have some effect."

Her husband agreed that it might but his thoughts were not hopeful. There always had to be a crumpled rose leaf and Suzanne was theirs.

He accompanied his wife on her drive and was so understanding, so unobtrusively soothing and sympathetic, that when they returned she was once more her masterful, competent self. Noting a bank of storm clouds rising from the east, she told Otto to bring the limousine when he came for them at a quarter to eight. Inside the house she summoned Dixon and said as the family would be out "the help"— it was part of her beneficent policy to call her retinue by this name when speaking to any of its members — could go out that night if they so willed. Dixon admitted that they had already planned a general sortie on "the movies" in the village. All but Hannah, the cook, who had "something like shooting pains in her feet, and Delia, the second housemaid, who'd got an insect in her eyes, Madam. But it wasn't the hurt of it that kept her in, only the look which she didn't want seen."

At seven the storm drove up, black and lowering, and the rain fell in a torrent. It was still falling

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when Mr. and Mrs. Janney descended the stairs, a little in advance of the time set, for, while dressing, Mrs. Janney had decided that her costume needed a brightening touch, which would be suitably imparted by her opal necklace. This, being rarely worn, was kept with the more valuable jewels in the safe of which Elspeth did not know the combination. Of course Mrs. Janney did, and at the foot of the stairs she turned into a passage which led from the foyer hall into the kitchen wing. It was a short connecting artery of the great house, lit by two windows that gave on rear lawns, and at present encumbered by a chair standing near the first window. Mrs. Janney recognized the chair as one from her sitting room which had been broken and which Isaac, the footman, had said he could repair. She gave it a proprietor's inspecting glance, touched the wounded spot, and encountering wet varnish, warned Mr. Janney away.

In the wall opposite the windows the safe door rose black and uncompromising as a prison entrance. It was large and old fashioned — put in by the former owner of Grasslands. Mrs. Janney talked of having a more modern one substituted but hadn't "got round to it," and anyway Mr. Janney thought it was all right — burglaries were rare in Berkeley. The silver had already been stored for the night, the bosses of great bowls, flowered rims, and filagree edgings shining from

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darkling recesses. The electric light across the hall-way did not penetrate to the side shelves and Mr. Janney had to assist with matches while his wife felt round among the jewel cases, opening several in her search. Finally they emerged, Mrs. Janney with the opals which after some straining she clasped round her neck, while Sam closed the door.

As they reëntered the main hall Suzanne came down the stairs, tripping daintily with small pointed feet. She was very splendid, her slenderness accentuated by the length of satin swathed about her, from which her shoulders emerged, girlishly fragile. She was also very much made up, of a pink and white too dazzlingly pure. With her blushing delicacy of tint, her angry eyes and sulkily drooping mouth, Mr. Janney thought she looked exactly like a crumpled rose leaf.

"Where's Miss Maitland?" she said to him, ostentatiously ignoring her mother.

Before he could answer Esther's voice came from the hall above:

"Coming — coming. I hope I haven't kept you," and she appeared at the stair-head.

The dress she wore, green trimmed with a design of small, pink chiffon rosebuds and leaves, was the realized dream of a great Parisian *faiseur*. It had been Mrs. Janney's who, considering it too youthful, had given it to her Secretary. Its vivid hue was singularly be-

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coming, lending a warm whiteness to the girl's pale skin, bringing out the rich darkness of her burnished hair. Her bare neck was as smooth as curds, not a bone rippled its gracious contours; the little rosebuds and leaves that edged the corsage looked like a garland painted on ivory.

It was a good dinner, but it was not as jolly as Dick Ferguson's dinners usually were. Before it was over the rain stopped and a full moon shone through the dining room windows. Suzanne had hoped she and Dick could saunter off into the rose garden and have that talk about Chapman, but he showed no desire to do so. They sat about in long chairs on the balcony and she had to listen to Ham Lorimer's opinions on the war.

As soon as the motor came she wanted to go — she was tired, she had a headache. It was early, only a quarter past ten, and the night was now superb, the sky a clear, starless blue with the great moon queening it alone. Mr. Janney would have liked to linger — he always enjoyed an evening with Dick — but she was petulantly perverse, and they moved to the waiting car with Ferguson in attendance.

Mrs. Janney settled herself in the back seat, Suzanne, lifting shimmering skirts, prepared to follow, while Miss Maitland waited humbly to take what room was left among their assembled knees. She was close to

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Ferguson who was helping Suzanne in, and looking up at the sky murmured low to herself:

"What a glorious night!"

Ferguson heard her and dropped Suzanne's arm.

"Isn't it? Too good to waste. Does any one want to walk back to Grasslands?"

Suzanne, one foot on the step, stopped and turned to him. Her lips opened to speak, and then she saw the back of his head and heard him address Esther:

"How about it, Miss Maitland? You're a walker, and it's only a step by the wood path. We can be there almost as soon as the car."

"You'll get wet," said Mrs. Janney, "the woods will be dripping."

Mr. Janney remembered his youth and egged them on:

"Only underfoot and they can change their shoes. Dick's right — it's too good to waste. I'd go myself but I'm afraid of my rheumatism. Hurry up, Suzanne, and get in. They want to start."

Miss Maitland said she wasn't afraid of the wet and that it would not hurt her slippers. Suzanne entered the car and sunk into her corner. As it rolled away Mr. and Mrs. Janney looked back at the two figures in the moonlight and waved good-byes. Suzanne sat motionless; all the way home she said nothing.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CIGAR BAND

ESTHER and Ferguson walked across the open spaces of lawn and then entered the woods. Ferguson had set the pace as slow, but he noticed that she quickened it, faring along beside him with a light, swift step. He also noticed that she was quiet, as she had been at dinner; as if she was abstracted, not like herself.

He had seen a good deal of her lately and thought of her a good deal — thought many things. One was that she was interesting, provocative in her quiet reserve, not as easy to see through as most women. She was clever, used her brains; he had formed a habit of talking to her on matters that he never spoke of with other girls. And he admired her looks, nothing cheap about them; "thoroughbred" was the word that always rose to his mind as he greeted her. It seemed to him all wrong that she should be working for a wage as the Janneys' hireling, for, though he was "advanced" in his opinions, when it came to women there was a strain of sentimentality in his make-up.

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On the wood path he let her go ahead, seeing her figure spattered with white lights that ran across her shoulders and up and down her back. They had walked in silence for some minutes when he suddenly said:

"What's amiss?"

She slackened her gait so that he came up beside her.

"Amiss? With what, with whom?"

"You. What's wrong? What's on your mind?"

A shaft of moonlight fell through a break in the branches and struck across her shoulder. It caught the little rosebuds that lay against her neck and he saw them move as if lifted by a quick breath.

"There's nothing on my mind. Why do you think there is?"

"Because at dinner you didn't eat anything and were as quiet as if there was an embargo on the English language."

"Couldn't I be just stupid?"

He turned to her, seeing her face a pale oval against the silver-moted background:

"No. Not if you tried your darndest."

Dick Ferguson's tongue did not lend itself readily to compliments. He gave forth this one with a seriousness that was almost solemn.

She laughed, the sound suggesting embarrassment, and looked away from him her eyes on the ground.

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Just in front of them the woodland roof showed a gap, and through it the light fell across the path in a glittering pool. As they advanced upon it she gave an exclamation, stayed him with an outflung arm, and bent to the moss at her feet:

"Oh, wait a minute — How exciting! I've found something."

She raised herself, illumined by the radiance, a small object that showed a golden glint in her hand. Then her voice came deprecating, disappointed:

"Oh, what a fraud! I thought it was a ring."

On her palm lay what looked like a heavy enameled ring. Ferguson took it up; it was of paper, a cigar band embossed in red and gold.

"Umph," he said, dropping it back, "I don't wonder you were fooled."

"It was right there on the moss shining in the moonlight. I thought I'd found something wonderful." She touched it with a careful finger. "It's new and perfectly dry. It's only been here since the storm."

"Some man taking a short cut through the woods. Better not tell Mrs. Janney, she doesn't like trespassers."

She held it up, moving it about so that the thick gold tracery shone:

"It's really very pretty. A ring like that wouldn't

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be at all bad. Look!" she slipped it on her finger and held the hand out studying it critically. It was a beautiful hand, like marble against the blackness of the trees, the band encircling the third finger.

Ferguson looked and then said slowly:

"You've got it on your engagement finger."

"Oh, so I have." Her laugh came quick as if to cover confusion and she drew the band off, saying, as she cast it daintily from her finger-tips, "There — away with it. I hate to be fooled," and started on at a brisk pace.

Ferguson bent and picked it up, then followed her. He said nothing for quite suddenly, at the sight of the ring on her finger, he had been invaded by a curious agitation, a gripping, upsetting, disturbing agitation. It was so sharp, so unexpected, so compelling in its rapid attack, that his outside consciousness seemed submerged by it and he trod the path unaware of his surroundings.

He had never thought of Esther Maitland being engaged, of ever marrying. He had accepted her as some one who would always be close at hand, always accessible, always in town or country to be found at the Janneys'. And the ring had brought to his mind with a startling clearness that some day she *might* marry. Some day a man would put a ring on that finger, put it on with vows and kisses, put it on as a

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sign and symbol of his ownership. Ferguson felt as if he had been shaken from an agreeable lethargy. He was filled with a surge of indignation, at what he could not exactly tell. He felt so many things that he did not know which he felt the most acutely, but a sense of grievance was mixed with jealousy and both were dominated by an angry certainty that any man who aspired to her would be unworthy.

When they emerged into the open he looked at her with a new expression — questioning, almost fierce and yet humble. Sauntering at her side across the lawn he was so obsessed with these conflicting emotions that he said not a word, and hardly heard hers. The Janneys were awaiting them on the balcony steps and after an exchange of good-nights he turned back to the wood trail and went home. In his room he threw himself on the sofa and lay there, his hands clasped behind his head, staring at the ceiling. It was long after midnight when he went to bed, and before he did so he put the cigar band in the jewel box with the crystal lid that stood on the bureau.

The Janney party trailed into the house, Sam stopping to lock the door as the ladies moved to the stair foot. Suzanne went up with a curt "good-night" to her mother, and no word or look for the Secretary. Esther did not appear to notice it and, pausing with her hand on the balustrade, proffered a request — could

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she have to-morrow, Saturday, to go to town? She was very apologetic; her day off was Thursday and she had no right to ask for another, but a friend had unexpectedly arrived in the city, would be there for a very short time and she was extremely anxious to see her. Mrs. Janney granted the favor with sleepy good-nature and Miss Maitland, very grateful, passed up the stairs, the old people dragging slowly in her wake, dropping remarks to one another between yawns.

A long hall crossed the upper floor, one side of which was given over to the Price household. Here were Suzanne's rooms, Chapman's empty habitation, and opposite them Bébita's nurseries. The other side was occupied on the front by Mrs. Janney and the Secretary with a line of guest chambers across the passage. In a small room between his wife's and his step-daughter's Mr. Janney had ensconced himself. He liked the compact space, also his own little balcony where he had his steamer chair and could read and sun himself. As the place was much narrower than the apartments on either side a short branch of hall connected it with the main corridor. His door, at the end of this hall, commanded the head of the stairway.

Mr. Janney had a restless night; he knew he would have for he had taken champagne and coffee and the combination was always disturbing. When he heard the clocks strike twelve he resigned himself to a *nuit*

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blanche and lay wide awake listening to the queer sounds that a house gives out in the silent hours. They were of all kinds, gurglings and creaks coming out of the walls, a series of small imperative taps which seemed to emerge from his chest of drawers, thrummings and thrillings as if winged things were shut in the closets.

Half-past twelve and one struck and he thought he was going off when he heard a new sound that made him listen — the creaking of a door. He craned up his old tousled head and gave ear, his eyes absently fixed on the strips and spots of moonlight that lay white on the carpet. It was very still, not a whisper, and then suddenly the dogs began to bark, a trail of yaps and yelps that advanced across the lawn. Close to the house they subsided, settling down into growls and conversational snufflings, and he sank back on his pillow. But he was full of nerves, and the idea suddenly occurred to him that Bébita might be sick, it might have been the nursery door that had opened — Annie going to fetch Mrs. Janney. He'd take a look to be sure — if anything was wrong there would be a light.

He climbed out of bed and stole into the hall. No light but the moon, throwing silvery slants across the passage and the stair-head, and relieved, he tiptoed back. It was while he was noiselessly closing his door that he heard something which made him stop, still as

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a statue, his faculties on the qui vive, his eye glued to the crack — a footstep was ascending the stairs. It was as soft as the fall of snow, so light, so stealthy that no one, unless attentive as he was, would have caught it. Yet it was there, now and then a muffled creak of the boards emphasizing its advance. The corridor at the head of the stairs was as bright as day and with his eye to the crack he waited, his heart beating high and hard.

Rising into the white wash of moonlight came Suzanne, moving with careful softness, her eyes sending piercing glances up and down the hall. Her expression was singular, slightly smiling, with something sly in its sharpened cautiousness. As she rose into full view he saw that she held her wrapper bunched against her waist with one hand and in the other carried Bébita's torch. He was so relieved that he made no move or sound, but, as she disappeared in the direction of her room, softly closed his door and went back to bed.

She had evidently left something downstairs, a book probably — he could not see what she had in the folds of the wrapper — and had gone to get it. If she was wakeful it was a good sign, indicated the condition of distressful unease her mother had hoped to create. Such alarm might lead to a salutory reform, a change, if not of heart, of behavior. Comforted by the thought, he turned on his pillow and at last slept.

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CHAPTER V

ROBBERY IN HIGH PLACES

THE next morning Mr. Janney had to read the papers to himself for Miss Maitland went to town on the 8:45. He sat on the balcony and missed her, for the Chicago murder had developed several new features and he had no one to talk them over with. Suzanne, who never came down to breakfast, appeared at twelve and said she was going to the Fairfax's to lunch with bridge afterward. Though she was not yet aware of Mrs. Janney's intention to once more come to her aid, her gloom and ill-humor had disappeared. She looked bright, almost buoyant, her eyes showing a lively gleam, her lips parting in ready smiles. She was going to the beach before lunch, and left with a large knitting bag slung from her arm, and a parasol tilted over her shoulder. It was not until she was half way across the lawn that old Sam remembered her nocturnal appearance which he had intended asking her about.

She was hardly out of sight when Bébita and Annie came into view on the drive, returning from the morn-

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ing bath. Bébita had a trouble and raced up the steps to tell him — she had lost her torch. She was quite disconsolate over it; Annie had said they'd surely find it, but it wasn't anywhere, and she *knew* she'd left it on the nursery table when she went to bed. In the light of subsequent events Mr. Janney thought his answer to the child had been dictated by Providence. Why he didn't say, "Your mother knows; she had it last night," he never could explain; nor what prompted the words, "Ask your mother; she's probably seen it somewhere." Bébita accepted the suggestion with some hope and then, hearing that her mother would not be home until the afternoon, fell into momentary dejection.

Mrs. Janney was to take her accustomed drive at four and her husband said he would go with her. Some time before the hour he appeared on the balcony, cool and calm, his poise restored after the trials of the previous day and the disturbed night, and sat down to wait. Inside the house his wife was busy. Several important papers had come on the morning mail and these, with the opals, she decided to put in the safe before starting. After they were stored in their shelves and the opals back in their box she could not resist a look at her emeralds, of all her material possessions the dearest. She lifted the purple velvet case and opened it — the emeralds were not there.

She stood motionless, experiencing an inner sense

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of upheaval, her heart leaping and then sinking down, her body shaken by a tremor such as the earth feels when rocked by a seismic throe. She tried to hold herself steady and opened the other cases — the two pearl necklaces, the sapphire rivière, the diamond and ruby tiara. As each revealed its emptiness her hands began to tremble until, when she reached the white suède box of the black pearl pendant, they shook so she could hardly find the clasp. Everything was gone — a clean sweep had been made of the Janney jewels.

Moving with a firm step, she went to the balcony. In the doorway she came to a halt and said quietly to her husband:

"Sam, my jewels have been stolen."

Mr. Janney squared round, stared at her, and ejaculated in feeble denial:

"Oh *no!*"

"Oh yes," she answered with the same note of grim control, "Come and see."

When he saw, his old veined hands shaking as they dropped the rifled cases, he turned and blankly faced his wife who was watching him with a level scrutiny.

"Mary!" was all he could falter. "Mary, my *dear!*"

"Last night," she nodded, "when we were out. The place was almost empty. I 'll call the servants."

She went to the foot of the stairs and called Elspeth,

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old Sam, bewildered by this sudden catastrophe, emerging from the safe, as pale and shaken as if he was the burglar.

"Last night, of course last night," he murmured, trying to think. "They were here at eight. I saw them, we saw them, anybody could have seen them."

Elspeth appeared on the stairs and came running down, Mrs. Janney's orders delivered like pistol shots upon her advance:

"I've been robbed. The safe's been opened and all the jewels are gone. Go and call the servants, every one of them. Tell them to come here at once."

Elspeth knew enough to make no reply, and, with a terrified face, scudded past her mistress to the kitchen. Mrs. Janney, her attention attracted by sounds of distracted amazement from her husband, mobilized him:

"Go and get Miss Maitland. We'll have to send for detectives. She can do it — she doesn't lose her head."

Mr. Janney, too stunned to be anything but meekly obedient, trotted off down the hall to Miss Maitland's study, then stopped and came back:

"She's in town; she hasn't got back yet."

"Tch!" Mrs. Janney gave a sound of exasperation. "I'd forgotten it. How maddening! You'll have to do it. Go in there to the 'phone"— she indicated the telephone closet at the end of the hall. "Call up the Kissam Agency — that's the best. We had

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them when the bell boy at Atlantic City stole my sables. Get Kissam himself and tell him what's happened and to take hold at once — to come now, not to waste a minute. And don't you either — hurry! —"

Mr. Janney hasted away and shut himself in the telephone closet, as the servants, marshaled by Dixon and Elspeth, entered in a scared group. They had been taking tea in their own dining room when Elspeth burst in with the direful news. Eight of them were old employees — had been years in Mrs. Janney's service. Hannah, the cook, had been with her nearly as long as Dixon; Isaac, the footman, was her nephew. Dixon's large, heavy-jowled face was stamped with aghast concern; the kitchen maid was in tears.

Mrs. Janney addressed them like what she was — a general in command of her forces:

"My jewels have been stolen. Some time last night the safe was opened and they were taken. It is my order that every one of you stay in the house, not holding communication with any one outside, until the police have been here and made a thorough investigation. Your rooms and your trunks will have to be searched and I expect you to submit to it willingly with no grumbling."

Dixon answered her:

"It's what we'd expect, Madam. Me and Isaac both know the combination and we'd want to have our own

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characters cleared as much as we'd want you to get back your valuables."

Hannah spoke:

"We'd welcome it, Mrs. Janney. There's none of us wants any suspicion restin' on 'em."

Delia, the housemaid with the inflamed eye, took it up. She was a newcomer in the household, and in her fright her brogue acquired an unaccustomed richness:

"God knows I was in my room at nine, and not a move out of me till sivin the nixt mornin' and that's to-day."

Mr. Janney, issuing from the telephone closet, here interrupted them. He addressed his wife:

"It's all right. I got Kissam himself. He'll be here on the 5:30."

She answered with a nod and was turning for further instructions to Dixon when Suzanne entered from the balcony. Up to that moment Mr. Janney had forgotten all about his nocturnal vision; now it came back upon him with a shattering impact.

He felt his knees turn to water and his heart sink down to inner, unplumbed depths in his anatomy. He grasped at the back of a chair and for once his manners deserted him, for he dropped into it though his wife was standing.

"What's all this?" said Suzanne, coming to a halt, her glance shifting from her mother to the group of

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solemn servants. She looked very pretty, her face flushed, the blue tint of her linen dress harmonizing graciously with her pink cheeks and corn-colored hair.

Mrs. Janney explained. As she did so old Sam, his face as gray as his beard, watched his stepdaughter with a furtive eye. Suzanne appeared amazed, quite horror-stricken. She too sank into a chair, and listened, open-mouthed, her feet thrust out before her, the high heels planted on the rug.

"Why, what an awful thing!" was her final comment. Then as if seized by a sudden thought she turned on Dixon.

"Were all the windows and doors locked last night?"

"All on the lower floor, Mrs. Price. Me and Isaac went round them before we started for the village, and there's not a night —"

Suzanne cut him off brusquely:

"Then how could any one get in to do it?"

There was a curious, surging movement among the servants, a mutter of protest. Mr. Janney intervened:

"You'd better let matters alone, Suzanne. Detectives are coming and they'll inquire into all that sort of thing."

"I suppose I can ask a question if I like," she said pertly, then suddenly; looking about the hall, "Where's Miss Maitland?"

"In town," said her mother.

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"Oh — she went in, did she? I thought her day off was Thursday."

"She asked for to-day — what *does* it matter?" Mrs. Janney was irritated by these irrelevancies and turned to the servants: "Now I've instructed you and for your own sakes obey what I've said. Not a man or woman leaves the house till after the police have made their search. That applies to the garage men and the gardeners. Dixon, you can tell them —" she stopped, the crunch of motor wheels on the gravel had caught her ear. "There's some one coming. I'm not at home, Dixon."

The servants huddled out to their own domain and Dixon, with a resumption of his best hall-door manner, went to ward off the visitor. But it was only Miss Maitland returning from town. She had several small packages in her hands and looked pale and tired.

The news that greeted her — Mrs. Janney was her informant — left her as blankly amazed as it had the others. She was shocked, asked questions, could hardly believe it. Old Sam found the opportunity a good one to study Suzanne, who appeared extremely interested in the Secretary's remarks. Once, when Miss Maitland spoke of keeping some of her books and the house-money in the safe, he saw his stepdaughter's eyelids flutter and droop over the bird-bright fixity of her glance.

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It was at this stage that Bébita ran into the hall and made a joyous rush for her mother:

"Oh, Mummy, I've *waited* and *waited* for you,"—she flung herself against Suzanne's side in soft collison. "I've lost my torch and I've asked everybody and nobody's seen it. Do *you* know where it is?"

Suzanne arched her eyebrows in playful surprise, then putting a finger under the rounded chin, lifted her daughter's face and kissed her, softly, sweetly, tenderly;

"Darling, I'm so sorry, but I haven't seen it anywhere. If you can't find it I'll buy you another."

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CHAPTER VI

POOR MR. JANNEY!

THE peace and aristocratic calm of the Janney household was disrupted. Into its dignified quietude burnt an irruption of alien activity and the great white light of publicity. Kissam with his minions came that evening and reporters followed like bloodhounds on the scent. Scenes were enacted similar to those Mr. Janney had read in novels and witnessed at the theater, but which, in his most fevered imaginings, he had never thought could transpire in his own home. It was unreal, like a nightmare, a phantasmagoria of interviews with terrified servants, trampings up and down stairs, strange men all over the place, reporters on the steps, the telephone bell and the front door bell ringing ceaselessly. Everybody was in a state of tense excitement except Mr. Janney whose condition was that of still, frozen misery. There were moments when he was almost sorry he'd married again.

After introductory parleys with the heads of the house the searchlight of inquiry was turned on the

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servants. Their movements on the fateful night were subject of special attention. When Kissam elicited the fact that they had not returned from the village till nearly midnight he fell on it with ominous avidity. Dixon, however, had a satisfactory explanation, which he offered with a martyred air of forbearance. Mr. Price's man, Willitts, had that morning come up from town to Cedar Brook, the next station along the line. In the afternoon he had biked over to see them and, hearing of their plan to visit the movies, had arranged to meet them there. This he did, afterward taking them to the Mermaid Ice Cream Parlors where he had treated them to supper. They had left there about half past eleven, Willitts going back to Cedar Brook and the rest of them walking home to Grasslands.

From the women left in the house little was to be gathered. This was unfortunate as the natural supposition was that the burglary had been committed during the hours when they were alone there. Both, feeling ill, had retired early, Delia at about half-past eight, going immediately to bed and quickly falling asleep. Hannah was later; about nine, she thought. It was very quiet, not a sound, except that after she got to her room she heard the dogs barking. They made a great row at first, running down across the lawn, then they quieted, "easing off with sort of whines and yaps, like it was somebody they knew." She had

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not bothered to look out of the window because she thought it was one of the work people from the neighborhood, making a short cut through the grounds.

In the matter of the safe all was incomprehensible and mysterious. Five people in the house knew the combination — Mr. and Mrs. Janney, Dixon and Isaac and Miss Maitland. Mrs. Janney was as certain of the honesty of her servants and her Secretary as she was of her own. She rather resented the detectives' close questioning of the latter. But Miss Maitland showed no hesitation or annoyance, replying clearly and promptly to everything they asked. She kept the house money and some of her account books in the safe and on the second of the month — five days before the robbery — had taken out such money as she had there to pay the working people who did not receive checks. She managed the financial side of the establishment, she explained, paying the wages and bills and drawing the checks for Mrs. Janney's signature.

Questioned about her movements that afternoon, her answers showed the same intelligent frankness. She had spent the two hours after lunch altering the dress she was to wear that evening. As it was very warm in her room she had taken part of it to her study on the ground floor. When she had finished her work — about four — she had gone for a walk returning just before the storm. After that she had retired to

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her room and stayed there until she came down to go to Mr. Ferguson's dinner.

The safe and its surroundings were subjected to a minute inspection which revealed nothing. Neither window had been tampered with, the locks were intact, the sills unscratched, the floor showed no foot-mark. There were no traces of finger prints either upon the door or the metal-clamped boxes in which the jewel cases were kept. The mended chair was just as Mrs. Janney remembered it, set between the safe and the window, in the way of any one passing along the hall.

It was on Sunday afternoon — twenty-four hours after the discovery — that Dick Ferguson appeared with one of his gardeners, who had a story to tell. On Friday night the man had been to a card party in the garage of a neighboring estate and had come home late "across lots." His final short cut had been through Grasslands, where he had passed round by the back of the house. He thought the time would be on toward one-thirty. Skirting the kitchen wing he had seen a light in a ground floor window, a window which he was able to indicate. He described the light as not very strong and white, not yellow like a lamp or candle. As he looked at it he noticed that it diminished in brightness as if it was withdrawn, moved away down a hall or into a room. He could see no figure, simply the lit oblong of the window, with the pattern

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of a lace curtain over it, and anyway he hadn't noticed much, supposing it to be one of the servants coming home late like himself.

This settled the hour of the robbery. It had not been committed when the place was almost deserted, but when all its occupants were housed and sleeping. The window, pointed out by the man, was directly opposite the safe door, the light as he described it could only have been made by an electric lantern or torch, its gradual diminishment caused by its removal into the recess of the safe.

If before this Mr. Janney's mental state was painful, it now became agonized. He was afraid to be with the detectives for fear of what he would hear, and he was afraid to leave them alone, for fear of what he might miss. When Mrs. Janney conferred with Kissam he sat by her side, swallowing on a dry throat, and trying to control the inner trembling that attacked him every time the man opened his lips. He gave way to secret, futile cursings of the jewels, distracted prayers that they never might be found. For if they were, the theft might be traced to its author — and *then* what? It would be the end of his wife, her proud head would be lowered forever, her strong heart broken. Sleep entirely forsook him and the people who came to call treated him with a soothing gentleness as if they thought he was dying.

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His misery reached a climax when something he remembered, and every one else had forgotten, came to light. It was one day in the library when Kissam asked Mrs. Janney if there had ever been any one else in the house — a discharged employee or relation — who had known the combination. Mrs. Janney said no and then recollected that Chapman Price did, he had kept his tobacco in the safe as the damp spoiled it. Kissam showed no interest — he knew Chapman Price was her son-in-law and was no longer an inmate — and then suddenly asked what had been done with the written combination.

At that question Mr. Janney felt like a shipwrecked mariner deprived of the spar to which he has been clinging. He saw his wife's face charged with aroused interest — she'd forgotten it, it was in Mr. Janney's desk, had always been kept there. They went to the desk and found it under a sheaf of papers in a drawer that was unlocked. Kissam looked at it, felt and studied the papers, then put it back in a silence that made Mr. Janney feel sick.

After that he was prepared for anything to happen, but nothing did. He got some comfort from the papers, which assumed the robbery to have been an "outside job"; no one in the house fitting the character of a suspect. It was the work of experts, who had entered by the second story, and were of that class of

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burglar known as "tumblers." Mr. Janney, who had never heard of a "tumbler" save as a vessel from which to drink, now learned that it was a crackman, who from a sensitive touch and long training, could manipulate the locks and work out the combination. He found himself thanking heaven that such men existed.

When a week passed and nothing of moment came to the surface, the Janney jewel robbery slipped back to the inside page, and, save in the environs of Berkeley, ceased to occupy the public mind. Mr. Janney could once more walk in his own grounds without fear of reporters leaping on him from the shrubberies or emerging from behind statues and garden benches. His tense state relaxed, he began to breathe freely, and, in this restoration to the normal, he was able to think of what he ought to do. Somehow, some day, he would have to face Suzanne with his knowledge and get the jewels back. It would be a day of fearful reckoning; it was so appalling to contemplate that he shrank from it even in thought. He said he wasn't strong enough yet, would work up to it, get some more sleep and his nerves in better shape. And she might — there was always the hope — she might get frightened and return them herself.

So he rested in a sort of breathing spell between the first, grinding agony and the formidably looming fu-

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ture. But it was not to last — events were shaping to an end that he had never suspected and that came upon him like a bolt from the blue.

It happened one afternoon eight days after the robbery. Mrs. Janney and Suzanne had gone for a drive and he was alone in the library, listlessly going over the morning papers. His zest in the news had left him — the Chicago murder offered no interest, the stabbed policeman in desperate case from blood poisoning, his assailant still at large, could not conjure away his dark anxieties. With his glasses dangling from his finger, his eyes on the green sweep of the lawn, he was roused by a knock on the door. It was Dixon announcing Mr. Kissam, who had walked up from the village and wanted to see him.

Kissam, with a brief phrase of greeting, closed the door and sat down. Mr. Janney thought his manner, which was always hard and brusque, was softened by a suggestion of confidence, something of intimacy as one who speaks man to man. It made him nervous and his uneasiness was not relieved in the least by the detective's words.

"I'm glad to find you alone, Mr. Janney. I 'phoned up and heard from Dixon that the ladies were out and that's why I came. I want to consult you before I say anything to Mrs. Janney."

"That's quite right," said Mr. Janney, then added

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with a feeble attempt at lightness, "Are you, as the children say, getting any warmer?"

"We're very warm. In fact I think we've almost got there. But it's rather a ticklish situation."

Mr. Janney did not answer; he glanced at his shoes, then at the silver on the desk. For the moment he was too perturbed to look at Kissam's shrewd, attentive face.

"It's so out of the ordinary run," the man went on, "and *so much* is involved that I decided not to move without first telling you. The family being so prominent —"

"The family!" Mr. Janney spoke before he thought, his limp hands suddenly clenching on the arms of the chair.

The detective's eyes steadied on the gripped fingers.

"What do you mean? Let me have it straight," said the old man huskily.

Kissam put his hand in his hip pocket and drew out an electric torch which he put on the desk.

"This torch I myself found two days ago in a desk in Mrs. Price's room. It was pushed back in a drawer which was full of letters and papers. It fits the description of the torch that was lost by Mrs. Price's little girl."

Mr. Janney's head sunk forward on his breast, and Kissam knew now that his suspicions were correct and

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that the old man had known all along. He was sorry for him:

"Mrs. Price not being your daughter, Mr. Janney, I decided to come to you. I suspected her after the second day and I'll tell you why. I had a private interview with that woman Elspeth, Mrs. Janney's maid, and she told me of a quarrel she had overheard between Mrs. Janney and her daughter. The subject of the quarrel was money, Mrs. Price asking for a large sum to meet certain debts and losses in the stock market which Mrs. Janney refused to give her. That supplied the motive and gave me the lead. The loss of the torch was also significant. The child was confident — and children are very accurate — that she had left it on the table in her nursery when she went to bed. The proximity of the two rooms made the theft of the torch an easy matter. What puzzled me was how Mrs. Price had gained access to the safe, but that was cleared up when the written combination was found in your desk here; and finally I ran across what I should call perfectly conclusive evidence in Mrs. Price's room. I don't refer only to the torch, but to the fact that a wrapper that was hanging in the back of one of the closets showed a smudge of varnish on the skirt."

Mr. Janney leaned forward over his clasped hands, feeling wan and shriveled.

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"If your surmise is right," he said, "where has she put them?"

"If!" echoed the other. "I don't see any if about it. You can't suspect either of the men servants — reliable people of established character — nor Miss Maitland. A girl in her position — even if she happened to be dishonest, which I don't for a moment think she is — wouldn't tackle a job as big as that. Come, Mr. Janney, we don't need to dodge around the stump. As soon as I'd spoken I saw you thought Mrs. Price had done it."

The old man nodded and said sadly:

"I did."

"Would you mind telling me why you did?"

There was nothing for it but to tell, and he told, the detective suppressing a grin of triumph. It cleared up everything, was as conclusive as if they'd seen her commit the act.

"As for where she put them," he said, "she may have a hiding place in the house that we haven't discovered, or cached them outside. In matters like this women sometimes show a remarkable cunning. I've looked up her movements on the Saturday and it's possible she hid them somewhere in the woods. She left the house at twelve, carrying a silk work bag, walked past Ferguson's place and talked there with him in the garden for about fifteen minutes, went on to

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the beach, sat there a while, and then walked to the Fairfax house on the bluff, where she stayed to lunch, coming back here about half-past four. She had ample opportunity during that time and in the places she passed through to find a cache for them."

Mr. Janney raised a gray, pitiful face:

"Mr. Kissam, if Mrs. Janney knew this it would kill her."

Kissam gave back an understanding look:

"That's why I came to you."

"Then it must stop here — with me." The old man spoke with a sudden, fierce vehemence. "It *can't* go further. The girl's been a torment and a trouble for years. I won't let her end by breaking her mother's heart, bringing her gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Good God, I'd rather say I did it myself."

"There's no need for that. We can let it fizzle out, die down gradually." He gave a slight, sardonic smile. "I've happened on this sort of thing before, Mr. Janney. The rich have their skeletons in the closet, and I've helped to keep 'em there, shut in tight."

"Then for heaven's sake do it in this case — help me hide this skeleton. Keep up the search for a while so that Mrs. Janney won't suspect anything; play your part. Mr. Kissam, if you'll aid me in keeping this dark there's nothing I wouldn't do to repay you."

Kissam disclaimed all desire for reward. His pro-

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fessional pride was justified; he had made good to his own satisfaction. And, as he had said, the case presented no startling novelty to his seasoned experience. Many times he had helped distracted families to suppress ugly revelations, presented an impregnable front to the press, and seen, with a cynical amusement, columns shrink to paragraphs and the public's curiosity fade to the vanishing point. He promised he would aid in the slow quenching of the Janney sensation, gradually let it flicker out, keep his men on the job for a while longer for Mrs. Janney's benefit, and finally let the matter decline to the status of an "unsolved mystery."

As to the restoration of the jewels he gave advice. Say nothing for a time, sit quiet and give no sign. If she was as thoroughly scared as she ought to be, she would probably return them — they would wake one fine morning and find everything back in the safe. If, however, she tried to realize on them it would be easy to trace them — he would be on the watch — and then Mr. Janney could confront her with his knowledge and have her under his thumb forever.

Mr. Janney was extremely grateful — not at the prospect of having Suzanne under his thumb, that was too complete a reversal of positions to be comfortable — but at the detective's kindly comprehension and aid. With tears in his eyes he wrung Kissam's hand and honored him by a personal escort to the front door.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCERNING DETECTIVES

KISSAM kept his word and the interest in the Janney robbery began to languish. Detectives still came and went, morning trains still disgorged reporters, but it was not as it had been. The first, fine careless rapture of the chase was over; nothing new was discovered, nothing old developed. The house settled back to its methodical régime, the faces of its inmates lost their looks of harassed distress.

Mr. Janney, though much pacified, was not yet restored to his normal poise. His wife was now the object of his secret attention, for he knew her to be a very sharp and observant person, and the fear that she might "catch on" haunted him. It was therefore very upsetting when she remarked one morning at breakfast that "those men didn't seem to be doing much. They were just where they had been ten days ago."

He tried to reassure her — it would be a long slow affair — didn't she remember the James case, where a year after the theft the jewels were found under the

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skin of a ham hanging in the cellar? Mrs. Janney was not appeased, she scoffed at the ham, and said the detectives were the stupidest body of men in the country outside Congress. She was going to offer a reward, ten thousand dollars — and then she muttered something about " taking a hand herself." In answer to Mr. Janney's alarmed questions she quieted down, laughed, and said she didn't mean anything.

She did, however, and had Mr. Janney known it wakeful nights would again have been his portion. But she had no intention of telling him. She had seen that he was worn out, a mere bundle of nerves, and what she intended to do would be done without his knowledge or connivance. This was to start a private inquiry of her own. The written combination, loose in an unlocked drawer, had influenced her; it was possible some one in the house had found it. She felt that she owed it to her dependents and herself to make sure. And the best way to do this was to have a detective on the spot —but a detective whose profession would be unknown. Fortunately the plan was workable; there was a vacancy in the household staff. For the past month she had been advocating the engagement of a nursery governess for Bébita.

Two days after her slip to Mr. Janney an opportunity came for broaching the subject. They were at lunch when Suzanne announced that she intended going

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to town the next morning. It was about Bébita — the child's eyes, which had troubled her in the spring, were again inflamed and she had complained of pain in them. Suzanne wanted to consult the oculist; she hoped a prescription would be sufficient, but of course if he insisted on seeing the child she would have to be taken in for an examination.

Mrs. Janney thought it the right thing to do and said she would accompany her daughter. Suzanne, who was eating her lunch, paused with suspended fork and sidelong eye; — why was that necessary, she was perfectly competent to attend to the matter. Mrs. Janney agreed and said she was going on another errand — to see about the nursery governess they had spoken of so often. It was time something was done, Bébita was running wild, forgetting all she had learned last winter. Mrs. Janney had heard of several women who might answer and would spend the day looking them up and interviewing them. Suzanne returned to her food. "Oh, very well, it might be a good thing, only please get some one young and cheerful who didn't put on airs and want to be a member of the family."

One of Suzanne's fads was a fear of the Pennsylvania Tunnel. Whether it was a pose or genuine she absolutely refused to go through it, declaring that on her one trip she had nearly died of fright and the pressure on her ears. Since that alarming experience she

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always went to the city either by the old Long Island Ferry route, or by motor across the Queensborough Bridge.

It being a fine morning they decided to drive in — about an hour's run — and at ten they started forth. They chatted amicably, for Suzanne, since the robbery and the knowledge that her debts were paid, had been unusually gay and good-humored. They separated at Altman's, Mrs. Janney keeping the motor, Suzanne taking a taxi. At four they would meet at a tea room and drive home together.

Mrs. Janney's first point of call was a strange place in which to look for a nursery governess. It was the office of Whitney & Whitney, her lawyers, far downtown near Wall Street. She was at once conducted into Mr. Whitney's sanctum, for besides being an important client she was a personal friend. He moved forward to meet her — a large, slightly stooped, heavily built man with a shock of thick gray hair, and eyes, singularly clear and piercing, overshadowed by bushy brows. His son, George, was sent for, and after greetings, jolly and intimate, they settled down to talk over Mrs. Janney's business.

She told them the situation and her needs — could *they* find the sort of person she wanted. She knew they employed detectives of all sorts and Kissam's men had been so lacking in energy and so stupid that she wanted

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no more of that kind. She had to have a woman of whose character they were assured, and sufficiently presentable to pass muster with the master and the servants. Mr. Whitney gave a look at his son and they exchanged a smile.

"Go and see if you can get her on the wire, George," he said, "and if she's willing tell her to come down right now." Then as the young man left the room he turned to Mrs. Janney. "I know the very person, the best in New York, if she'll undertake it."

"Some one who's thoroughly reliable and can fit into the place?"

"My dear friend, she's as reliable as you are and that's saying a good deal. As to fitting in, leave that to her. In her natural state there are still some rough edges, but when she's playing a part they don't show. She's smart enough to hide them."

"Who is she — a detective?"

"Not a real one, not a professional. She was a telephone girl and then she made a good marriage — fellow named Babbitts, star reporter on the *Despatch*. She's in love and happy and prosperous, but now and again she'll do work for us. It's partly for old sakes' sake and partly because she has the passion of the artist — can't resist if the call comes to her. She came to our notice during the Hesketh case — did some of the cleverest work I ever saw and got Reddy out of

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prison. The Reddys are among her best friends — can't do too much for her."

Mrs. Janney, who knew the beautiful Mrs. Reddy, was impressed.

"Do you think she'll come?" she asked anxiously.

He gave her a meaning look and nodded;

"Yes. It's an unusually interesting case."

Half an hour later Mrs. Janney met Molly Morgenthau Babbitts and laid the situation before her. She found the much-vaunted young woman, a pretty, slender girl, with crisply curly black hair, honest brown eyes, and a pleasantly simple manner. Mrs. Janney liked what she said and liked her. There was no doubt about her intelligence and as to rousing any suspicions in the household — she would have deceived Mr. Janney — she even would have deceived Dixon. As the case was outlined she could not hide her kindling interest and, when she agreed to undertake the work, Mrs. Janney felt that the nursery governess idea had been an inspiration. The interview ended with practical details: Mrs. Babbitts would make her reports to the Whitneys, who would figure as her employers and would hand on her findings to Mrs. Janney. She would arrive by the twelve-thirty train on the following day and be known at Grasslands as Miss Rodgers. As they were separating she asked if there was a branch telephone on the upper floor and, being told that there was in an alcove

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off the main hall, requested that her room might be near it as the telephone played an important part in her work.

Suzanne's course had a curious resemblance to her mother's, though her plan of procedure was different.

From the day after the robbery she had developed an interest in the telephone "Red Book." She had taken it to her room and turning to the D's studied the list of detective agencies. After much comparison and cogitation she had copied down the name of one Horace Larkin, who appeared to be in business by himself and whose office was in a central and accessible part of the city.

After she had parted from her mother she went to a department store, shut herself in a telephone booth, and called up Mr. Larkin. A masculine voice, that of Larkin himself, had answered, and explaining her desire to see him on important business, he had made an appointment to meet her that afternoon at the Janney house on Fifth Avenue.

This was an excellent place for Suzanne's purpose, closed for the summer, its porch boarded up, its blue-blinded windows proclaiming its desertion. An ancient caretaker occupied the basement with her niece, Aggie McGee, to help and be company. Mrs. Janney never went there, but now and then Suzanne did, generally

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on a quest for some needed garment, so that her presence in the house was in no way remarkable.

The appointment was for two and, after telling Aggie McGee that a gentleman would call and to show him into the reception room, she retired to the long Louis Quinze salon and threw herself on a sofa. She was a little scared at what she had planned but she did not let her uneasiness interfere with her intention, for, her mind once set on a goal, she was as determined as her mother. Stretched comfortably on the sofa, her glance traveling over the covered walls, the chandelier, a misshapen bulging whiteness below the frescoed ceiling, she carefully thought out what she would say to Mr. Larkin.

A ring of the bell brought her to a sitting position, her hands pushing in loosened hairpins. She waited listening, heard the opening and closing of doors and then Aggie McGee's head appeared between the shrouded portières and announced, "The gentleman to see you, ma'am."

Her first impression of him was as a tall, broad-shouldered shape, detailless against the light of the window. Then, as she sunk into a chair, motioning him to one opposite, a nearer view showed him as a fine-looking man, on to forty, with a fresh-colored, rounded face, its expression smilingly good-humored. After the unkempt and slouchy detectives she had seen

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at Grasslands his appearance, natty, smart, almost that of a man of fashion, surprised and pleased her. She had an instinctive distaste for all ungroomed and ill-dressed people and seeing him so like the members of her own world, she felt a rising confidence and reassurance. Also his manners were good, respectful, business-like. The one thing about him that suggested the wily sleuth were his eyes, very light colored in his ruddy face, small, shrewd and piercing.

He came to the matter of the moment without any preamble. Yes, he knew of the robbery and knew who she was; he supposed she had called him up to consult him about the case.

"Of course, Mr. Larkin," she said, "that's what I wanted. But before I say anything it must be understood between us that this — er — sending for you — is entirely my affair. I want to employ you myself indepently of the others."

He nodded, showing no surprise;

"You want to put your own detective on the case."

"Exactly. You're to be employed by me but no one must know you are or know what you're doing."

He smothered a smile and said:

"I see."

"I don't think the men that are working over it now are very clever or interested. They just poke about and ask the same questions over and over. The way

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they're going I should say we'd never get anything back. So I decided I'd start an inquiry of my own and in a direction no one else had thought of."

Mr. Larkin gave a slight movement an almost imperceptible straightening up of his body:

"Do you mean that you suspect some one?"

Suzanne looked at the arm of her chair and then smoothed its linen cover with delicate finger tips. A very slight color deepened the artificial rose of her cheeks.

"I'm afraid I do," she murmured.

"Afraid?"

She nodded, closing her eyes with the movement. She had the appearance of a person distressed but resolute.

"I can't help suspecting some one that I don't like to suspect. And that's why I want your assistance."

"I don't quite understand, Mrs. Price."

"*This* is the explanation. If it were known that this person was guilty it would ruin and destroy them. My idea is to be sure that they did it — have evidence — and then tell my mother. We could keep quiet about it, get the jewels back and not have the thief disgraced and sent to jail."

"Oh, I see. You want to face the party with a knowledge of their guilt, have them restore the jewels, and let the matter drop."

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"Precisely. And I don't want to say anything until I'm sure, can come out with everything all clear and proved. That's *where* I expect you to help, put things together, find out, work up the case."

"Who is the person?"

Her color burned to a deep flush; she leaned toward him, urgent, almost pleading:

"Mr. Larkin, I hardly like to say it even to you, but I must. It's my mother's secretary, Miss Maitland."

He looked stolidly unmoved:

"She lives in the house?"

"Yes, for over a year now. My mother thinks everything of her, wouldn't believe it unless it was proved past a doubt."

"What are your reasons for suspecting her?"

Suzanne was silent for a moment moving her glance from him to the window. Mr. Larkin had a good chance to look at her and took it. He noticed the feverish color, the line between the brows, the tightened muscles under the thin cheeks. He made a mental note of the fact that she was agitated.

"Well that night, the night of July the seventh," she said in a low voice, "I was wakeful. I often am, I've always been a nervous, restless sort of person. About half past one I thought I heard a noise — some one on the stairs — and I got up and looked out of my

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door. I can see the head of the stairs from there, and as it was very bright moonlight any one coming up would be perfectly plain — I couldn't make a mistake — what I saw was Miss Maitland. She was going very carefully, tiptoeing along as if she was trying to make no noise. At the top she turned and went down the passage to her own room which is just beyond my mother's."

She paused and shot a tentative look at him. He met it, teetered his head in quiet comprehension and murmured:

"She didn't see you?"

"Oh no, she was not looking that way. And I didn't say anything or think anything then — thought she'd gone downstairs for something she'd forgotten. The next day it had passed out of my mind; it wasn't until I heard that the jewels were gone that it came back and then I was too shocked to say a word. It all came upon me in a minute — I remembered how I'd seen her and remembered that she knew the combination of the safe."

"Oh," said Mr. Larkin, "she knew that, did she?"

"Yes, she keeps her account books and money in there, things she uses in her work. You see she's been thoroughly trusted — never looked upon as anything but perfectly honest and reliable."

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"Then she's filled her position to Mrs. Janney's satisfaction?"

"Entirely. Of course we really don't know very much about her. She was highly recommended when she came, but people in her position if they do their work well — one doesn't bother much about them."

"Have you noticed anything in her conduct or manner of life lately that could — er — have any connection with or throw any light on such an action?"

Suzanne pondered for a moment then said:

"No — she's always been about the same. She's gone into the city more this summer than she did last year, on her holidays, I mean. And — oh yes, this may be important — that night, when we came home from dinner, she asked my mother if she could have the following day — Saturday — in town. Mrs. Janney said she might and she went in before any of the family were up."

"Um," murmured Mr. Larkin and then fell into a silence in which he appeared to be digesting this last item. When he spoke again it was to propound a question that ruffled Suzanne's composure and caused her blue eyes to give out a sudden spark:

"Do you happen to know if she has any admirer — lover or fiancé or anything of that sort?"

"I know nothing whatever about it, but I should say *not*. Certainly I never heard of such a person. I

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never saw any man in the least attracted by her and I should imagine she was a girl who had no charm for the other sex."

Mr. Larkin stirred in a slow, large way and said:

"Such a robbery is a pretty big thing for a girl like that to attempt. She must know — any one would — that jewels like Mrs. Janney's are hard to dispose of without detection."

Suzanne shrugged, her tone showing an edge of irritation:

"That may be the case, I suppose it is. But couldn't she have been employed by some one — aren't there gangs who put people on the spot to rob for them?"

"Certainly there are. And that would be the most plausible explanation. Not necessarily a gang, however, an individual might be behind her. At this stage, knowing what I do, that would be my idea. But, of course, I can say nothing until I'm better informed. What I'll do now will be to look up her record and then I think I'll take a run down to Berkeley and see if I can pick up anything there."

Suzanne looked uneasy:

"But you'll be careful, and not let any one guess what you're doing or that you have any business with me?"

He smiled openly at that:

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"Mrs. Price, you can trust me. This is not my first case."

After that there was talk of financial arrangements and future plans. Mr. Larkin thought he would come out to Berkeley in a day or two and take a lodging in the village. When he had anything of moment to impart he would drop a note to Mrs. Price and she could designate a rendezvous. They parted amicably, Suzanne feeling that she had found the right man and Mr. Larkin secretly elated, for this was the first case of real magnitude that had come his way.

At the appointed time Suzanne met Mrs. Janney at the tea room and on the way home they exchanged their news. The nursery governess had been found, approved and engaged, and the oculist had said to go on with the lotion and if Bébita's eyes did not improve to bring her in to see him. Both ladies agreed that their labors had exhausted them, but each looked unusually vivacious and mettlesome.

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CHAPTER VIII

MOLLY'S STORY

I'VE been asked to tell the part of this story in which I figure. I've done that kind of work before, so I'm not as shy as I was that first time, and since then I've studied some, and come up against fine people, and I'm older — twenty-seven on my last birthday. But as I said then, so I'll say now — don't expect any stylish writing from me. At the switchboard there's still ginger in me, but with the pen I'm one of the "also rans."

Fortunately for me, I was always a good one to throw a bluff and, having made a few excursions into the halls of the rich and great, I felt I could be safely featured as a nursery governess. She belongs in the layer between the top and bottom and doesn't mix with either. I wouldn't have to play down to the kitchen standards or up to the parlor ones, just move along, sort of lonesome, in the neutral ground between. As for teaching the child, I knew I could do that as well as the girls who are marking time until they marry, or the decayed ladies who employ their declining years and intellects that way.

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It didn't seem to me hard to size up the family. Mrs. Janney was the head of it, the middle and both ends — a real queen who didn't need a crown or a throne to make people bow the knee. Mr. Janney was a good, kind old gentleman who was too law-abiding to get rich any way but the way he did. Mrs. Price wasn't up to their measure — an only child, born with a silver lining. She was one of those slimpsy, thin women that a man would be afraid to hug for fear she'd crack in his arms or snap in the middle. She was very cordial and pleasant to me and I will say she was fond of her little girl.

When I came to the servants I couldn't see but what every one of them registered honesty. If it had been printed on their foreheads with a rubber stamp it couldn't have been plainer. There were only two new ones in the outfit — girls, one of them my chambermaid — and no one, not even a sleuth desperate for glory, could have considered them. Outside there were gardeners and chauffeurs — in all there were twenty-one people employed — but it was the same with them. They were a decent, well-paid lot, the garage men and head gardener living on the place, the laborers lodged in the village.

The one person my eye lingered on was Miss Maitland the Secretary. Not that there was anything suspicious about her, but that she wasn't as simple and

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easy to see into as the others. She was a handsome girl, tall and well made, sticking close to her job and not having much to do with any one. Her study was just under the day nursery where we had lessons and had its own door on to the piazza. When she wasn't at work, she'd either sit there reading or go off walking by herself and there was something solitary and serious about her that interested me. The nursery window was a good look-out, commanding the lawns and garden and with the tennis court to one side. After lessons I'd let the blinds down and coil up there on a cushion, and I saw her several times coming in and going out, always alone, and always looking thoughtful and depressed.

To get any information about her I had to be very careful for Mrs. Janney thought the world of her, but I managed to worm out some facts, though nothing of any importance. She had come to Mrs. Janney from a friend who had had her as secretary for two years. She was entirely dependent on her work for her living, was an orphan, and had no followers. The only thing the least degree out of line was that several times during the spring and the early summer she had asked for more days and afternoons off than formerly. Mrs. Janney didn't seem to think anything of this and I didn't either. The girl — settled down in her place

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and knowing it secure — was slackening up on her first speed.

There were a lot of people coming and going in the house — oftenest, Mr. Richard Ferguson. I'd heard of him — everybody has — millions, unmarried, and so forth and so on. I hadn't been there thirty-six hours before I saw that Mrs. Price had an eye for him. That's putting it in a considerate, refined way. If I was the cat some women are, I'd say she was camped on his trail, with her lassoo ready in her hand. Of course she'd work it the way ladies do, very genteel, pretend to be lazy if he wanted to play tennis and when he was off for a swim wonder if she had the energy to walk to the beach. But she always got there; every time, rain or shine, she'd be awake at the switch. I didn't know whether he responded — you couldn't tell. He was the kind who was jolly and affable to everybody; even if he was a plutocrat you had to like him.

I had a good deal of time to myself — lessons only lasted two hours — and I roamed round the neighborhood studying it. The second afternoon I went into the woods, where there's a short-cut that goes past Council Oaks to the beach. Off the path, branching to the right, I found two smaller trails both leading to the same place — a pond, surrounded by trees, and with a wharf, a rustic bench, and two bathing

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houses, where the trails ended. In my room that evening I asked Ellen, my chambermaid, about the pond and she told me it was called Little Fresh and that the bathing houses and wharf had been built by the former owner of Grasslands. But the first year of Mrs. Janney's occupation a boy from the village had been drowned there, since when Mrs. Janney had forbidden any one to go near or bathe in Little Fresh. She had put up trespassing signs and locked the bath houses, and no one ever went there now, because, anyway if you didn't go in and get drowned, folks said you might catch malaria.

A few days after that Bébita asked me to go into the woods with her and look for lady-slippers; the kitchen maid had found two and Bébita had to see if there weren't any left for her. Everybody said it was too late for them, but that didn't faze Bébita who had the kitchen maid's word for it and was set upon going.

The woods were lovely, all green and shimmery with sunlight. We took the trail I've spoken of, I strolling along the path, and Bébita hunting about in the underbrush for the flowers. I was some little distance ahead of her when I saw a figure moving behind the screen of trees toward the right. I could only catch it in broken bits through the leaves, hear the footsteps soft on the moss, and I didn't know whether it was a man or a woman. Then it came into view, out of the trail that

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led to Little Fresh Pond, and I saw it was a man, who stopped short at the sight of me.

He was good-looking, the dark kind, naturally brown, and sunburned on top of it until he was as swarthy as an Indian, the little mustache on his upper lip as black as if it was painted on with ink. Now I'm not one that thinks men ought to be stunned by my beauty, but also I don't expect to be stared at as if the sight of me was an unpleasant shock. And that's the way that piratical guy acted, standing rooted, glaring angry from under his eyebrows.

I was going to pass on haughty, when Bébita's voice came from behind in a joyful cry of "Popsy." She rushed by me, her arms spread out, and fairly jumped at him. The ugly look went from his face as if you'd wiped it off with a sponge, and the one that took its place made him another man. He caught her up and held her against him, and she locked her feet behind his waist and her hands behind his neck swinging off from him and laughing out:

"Oh, Popsy, I was looking for lady-slippers and I found *you*."

"Well," he said, gazing at her like he couldn't look enough, "would you rather have found a lady-slipper?"

She hugged up against him, awful sweet and cunning.

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"Oh, Popsy, that's a joke. I like you better than all the lady-slippers in the world. Where have you been?"

"Over on the bluff, calling on some people. I'm taking a short cut through the woods."

"Where are you going now?"

"To Cedar Brook. My car's out there on the road at the end of the path."

I knew Bébita had been told not to speak of her father. I'd heard it from Annie and Mrs. Janney had cautioned me, if she asked any questions, to say that he had gone away and was not coming back. Children are queer, take in more than you think, and I believe the little thing felt something of the tragedy of it. Anyway she said nothing more on that subject, but loosing one hand, waved it at me;

"That's my new governess, Miss Rogers. I'm studying lessons with her."

He looked at me, and having no free hand, just nodded. Though his expression wasn't as unfriendly as it had been, it didn't suggest any desire to know me better. He turned back to Bébita.

"Dearie, you'll have to let go for I must jog along. I've a date to play tennis at Cedar Brook and I'm late now."

He kissed her and she loosened her hold sliding through his arms to the ground. Then with a few last

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words of good-by he swung off down the path. Bébita looked after him till the trees hid him, gave a sigh, and without a word pushed her little hand into mine and walked along beside me. She seemed sobered for a while, then picked up heart, began to look about her, and was soon back at her hunt for the flowers.

I was nearing the second path to Little Fresh, when again I saw a figure coming behind the trees. This time it showed in a moving pattern of lilac and the sight made me brisk up for I'd seen Miss Maitland that morning in a lilac linen dress. I quickened my step until I came to a turning from which I could look up the branch trail, and sure enough, there she was, walking very lightly and spying out ahead. At the sight of me she too stopped and looked annoyed. But women are a good deal quicker than men — in a minute the look was gone and she was all smiles of welcome.

"Oh, Miss Rogers, and Bébita too! How nice to meet you. Are you going to the beach?"

Bébita explained our quest and said she was going to give it up — there wasn't a single lady-slipper left.

Miss Maitland's smile was kind and consoling:

"I could have told you that. They're gone for this year."

"Have *you* been looking for them?" Bébita asked.

No, Miss Maitland had been to the beach for a bath, and as the closed season for lady-slippers had begun,

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we turned back, Bébita and the Secretary in front, I meekly following. In answer to the child's questions Miss Maitland said she had taken a long swim, out beyond the raft.

Suddenly Bébita popped out with:

"Did you see my Daddy?"

There was a slight pause before she answered; when she did her voice was full of surprise:

"Mr. Price! Was he on the beach?"

"No, in the woods. We met him. He was taking a short cut."

Miss Maitland said she hadn't seen him, that he must have been some distance in front of her, and changed the subject.

While they were talking I was thinking and absently looking at her back. They'd both come out of the branch trails that led to Little Fresh; they had taken different paths and not come at the same time; they had each got a jar when they saw me. As I thought, my eyes went wandering over her back and finally stopped at the nape of her neck. The hair was drawn up from it and hidden under her hat. I could see the roots and the little curly locks that drooped down against the white skin. And suddenly I noticed something — they were perfectly dry, not a damp spot, not a wet hair. The best bathing cap in the world couldn't keep the water out like that. She had not been

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bathing at all, she had been with Chapman Price at Little Fresh Pond. And they wanted no one to know; were sufficiently anxious to lie about it.

The next day in a conference with Mrs. Janney, I asked her if Mr. Price had ever shown any interest in Miss Maitland. She was amazed, as shocked as if I'd asked if Mr. Janney had ever been in love with the cook. Chapman Price had taken no more notice of Miss Maitland than common politeness demanded, in fact, she thought that of late he had rather shunned her. She was curious to know why I asked such a question, and when I said I had to ask any and every sort of question or she'd be paying a detective's salary to a nursery governess, she saw the sense of it and quieted down.

That was more than I did. The way things were opening up, I was getting that small, inner thrill, that feeling like your nerves are tingling that comes to me when the darkness begins to break. I didn't see much, just the first, faint glimmer, but it was the right kind.

Two days later a thing happened that changed the glimmer to a wide bright ray. It was this way:

In the afternoon the family, unless they had a party of their own, were always out. The only person who stayed around was Miss Maitland, sometimes working over her books, sometimes sitting about sewing or reading. That day — about four — I'd seen her as I passed the study window writing at her desk. I'd

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gone on into the big central hall where I wasn't supposed to belong, but feeling safe with everybody scattered, I thought I'd make myself comfortable and take a look at the morning papers. I'd just cuddled down in the corner of the sofa with my favorite daily when I heard the telephone ring.

Now the bell of the telephone is to me like the trumpet to the old war horse. And hearing it that way, tingling in the quiet of the big, deserted house, I got a flash that any one wanting to talk to Miss Maitland and knowing the habits of the family would choose that hour. There was a 'phone in the lower story — in a closet at the end of the hall — and the extension one was upstairs in a sort of curtained recess off the main corridor just outside my door. I rose off the sofa as if lifted by a charge of dynamite and slid for the stairs. As I sprinted up I heard the door of Miss Maitland's study open.

The upper hall was deserted and I dashed noiseless into that alcove place, one hand lifting off the receiver as soft as a feather, the other pressed against my mouth to smother the sound of my breathing. On the floor below Esther Maitland had just connected; I got her first sentence, quiet and clear as if she was in the room with me:

"Yes. This is Grasslands."

A man's voice answered:

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"That you, Esther?"

I could tell she recognized it, for instantly hers changed, showed fear and a sort of pleading:

"Oh, why do you call me up here? I told you not to."

"My dear girl, it's all right — I know they're all out at this hour."

"The servants — I'm afraid of them — and there's a new nursery governess come."

"I know. I met her in the woods that day. Did you?"

"Of course I did. How could I help it? I said I'd been bathing. We mustn't go there again — it's much better to write."

The man gave a laugh that was good-humored and easy:

"Don't take it so hard. There's not the slightest need to be worried. I called you up to say everything was O. K."

Her answer came with a deep, sighing breath:

"It may be now — but how can we tell? The first excitement's dying down but that doesn't mean they're not doing anything. Don't think for a moment, because it's worked right so far, that we're out of the woods."

"I'm wise to all that, I know them better than you do. And the fellow that knows has got it all over

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the fellow that doesn't. Watchful waiting — that's out motto."

"Very well, then *let* it be watchful. And don't call me up unless it's urgent. I can see you in town when I go in. I won't talk any more. Good-by."

I heard the stillness of a dead wire and then before I let myself think, flew into my room, found a pad and pencil and wrote it down word for word.

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CHAPTER IX

TWO days after his interview with Suzanne, Mr. Larkin came to Berkeley and took a room at the Berkeley Arms. He registered as Henry Childs, and described himself to the clerk as a plumber, who, having had a prosperous year, was looking for a bit of land upon which to build a bungalow.

Berkeley was much too exclusive to permit a hotel within its exclusive limits and the Berkeley Arms was allowed to exist in a small, subdued way as a convenience. It was an unassuming, gray-shingled building, withdrawn behind a lilac hedge, and too near the station to mar the smart and shining elegance of the main street. In it dwelt the shop-keepers who plied a temporary summer trade in the village, and the chauffeurs of the less wealthy cottagers. Here the detective heard much talk of the Janney robbery, and, after he had extended his field of observation to the post-office lobby and Bennett's drug store, Berkeley had no secrets from him.

The public mind was still occupied with all that per-

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tained to Grasslands. He heard of the separation of the Prices, the scene *he* had made on leaving, and that *she* hadn't treated him right. Berkeley was on Chapman's side, said she wanted to get rid of him to marry Ferguson. It was hoped that Ferguson — highly esteemed — wasn't going to fall for it; but you couldn't tell, the best men made mistakes. Gossips, who professed an intimacy with the Grasslands kitchens, hinted that Ferguson was "taken with" the secretary. But Berkeley, fattened by prosperity to a gross snobbishness, rejected the idea as vulgar and unfitting.

All this had its value for Mr. Larkin, but it was by accident that he acquired the most illuminating piece of intelligence. Late one afternoon he wandered forth into a road that threaded the woods near Grasslands. The day being warm, the way dusty, he seated himself on a rock to cool off and ponder. While there, concealed by the surrounding trees, he had seen two small boys padding toward him down the road, their heads together in animated debate. Unaware of his presence their voices were loud and his listening ear caught interesting matter. They had been in the forbidden area of Grasslands, had gone to Little Fresh for a bathe, and had almost been caught in the act by a lady and gentleman.

Mr. Larkin made his presence known, and a dime passed into each grubby palm won their confidence.

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They were on the wharf slipping off their clothes when they heard footsteps and had only time to rush to cover in the underbrush when Mr. Chapman Price appeared. He waited round a bit and then Miss Maitland came and they sat on the bench and talked. The boys had not been able to hear what they said, but that it was serious they gathered from Mr. Price's manner and the fact that Miss Maitland had cried for a spell. Mr. Price went away first, and as he was going he said loud, standing in the path, "Take the upper trail and if you meet anybody say you've been at the beach bathing." Then he'd gone and Miss Maitland had waited a while, and then she'd gone too, by the upper trail, the way he'd said.

Mr. Larkin had been very sympathetic and friendly, swore he'd keep his mouth shut, and cautioned the boys to do the same, for he'd heard that Mrs. Janney wouldn't stand for any one bathing in Little Fresh and you couldn't tell but what she might have them arrested.

The next day he had a meeting with Suzanne in a summer-house on the Setons' grounds, the Setons being in California for the season. He gave his report of Miss Maitland's career — entirely worthy and respectable — and then asked the question Molly had asked Mrs. Janney: had Mr. Price ever exhibited any special interest in the secretary? Mrs. Price's surprise and

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denial were as genuine and emphatic as her mother's had been and Mr. Larkin arrived at the same conclusion as Molly — here started the path that led to the heart of the maze.

He did not say this to Mrs. Price. What he did say was that he would leave Berkeley shortly and when he had anything of importance to tell make an appointment with her by letter. It was not necessary to inform her that his next move would be to Cedar Brook where he had heard that Chapman Price spent a good deal of his time.

Cedar Brook, six miles above Berkeley on the main line, had none of the prestige of its aristocratic neighbor. It was in the process of development, new houses rising round its outskirts, fields being turned into lawns. Mr. Larkin took a room in a clapboarded cottage which stared at other clapboarded cottages through the foliage of locust trees. Announcing his intention of buying a piece of land, he was soon an object of general attention and added to his store of knowledge. He heard a good deal of Chapman Price, who was there off and on with the Hartleys, and of his man Willitts. It was understood that Willitts was staying with Price till he got a job, and, as the Hartley house was small, lodged in the village; in fact, Mr. Larkin learned to his satisfaction, was living in one of the clapboarded cottages close to his own.

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Professing a desire to study the environs of Cedar Brook he hired a wheel, and the third afternoon of his stay peddled out into the country. It was while passing the private hedge of a large estate, that he came upon a young man engaged over a disabled bicycle.

The day was warm, the salt air of the Sound shut out by forest and hill, the road bathed in a hot glow of sun. The man had taken off his coat, and, as Mr. Larkin drew near, looked up displaying a smooth-shaven, rosy face, beaded with perspiration.

Mr. Larkin, being by nature and profession curious, drew up and made friendly inquiries. The man answered them, explained the nature of the damage, his speech marked by the crisp, clipped enunciation of the Briton. His costume — negligée shirt, knickerbockers and golf stockings — did not suggest the country house guest, nor was his accent quite that of the English gentleman. The detective, who had some knowledge of these delicate distinctions, laid his bicycle against the bank and proffered his assistance. Together they repaired the stranger's wheel, and, when it was done, rested from their labors in the shade of the hedge, and engaged in conversation. This at first was of the war — the young man explaining that he was English and had volunteered at once, but been rejected on the ground of his eyes — very near-sighted, couldn't read the chart at all — touching with an indicating finger

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the glasses that spanned his nose. After that he'd come to America; he could make good money then and had people dependent on him. At this stage Mr. Larkin asked his profession and learned that he was a valet, by name James Willitts, just now looking for a place. He *had* been in the employ of Mr. Chapman Price and was still staying with him until he got a new "situation." Mr. Larkin in return recited his little lay about the plumbing business and the bungalow, and, the introductions accomplished, they passed to more general topics and soon reached the Janney robbery.

It was a propitious meeting for the detective, for Willitts proved himself a free and expansive talker. He launched forth into the subject with an artless zest, not needing any prompting from his attentive listener. Mr. Larkin was grateful for it all, but especially so for an account of the movements of Mr. Price the day before the robbery. He had sent his valet to Cedar Brook on the morning train, he to follow later in the afternoon. Willitts, after the unpacking and settling was done, had biked over to Grasslands to see "the help," and then made the engagement to meet them that night at the movies. Of course he had to go back, as part of his work was to lay out Mr. Price's dinner clothes and help him dress, and it was most unfortunate, because, when he went up to Mr. Price's room, Mr. Price said he

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wouldn't change, would keep on the clothes he had and go motoring.

"Motoring," observed Mr. Larkin, mildly interested, "did he motor in the evening?"

"Not usually — but I don't know if you remember that night. After a heavy rain it cleared and the moon came out as bright as day."

Mr. Larkin didn't remember himself but he had a vague recollection of having read it in some of the papers.

"It was a wonderful night, and if it hadn't been I'd never have kept my date. For I got side-tracked — had to fetch the doctor for my landlady's little girl who was taken bad with the croup. And what with that and the long distance I'd have given it up if it hadn't been for the moon."

The detective did not find these details particularly pertinent, and edged nearer to vital matters:

"Pretty unpleasant position for those two men, Dixon and Isaac. I was in Berkeley before I came here and there was a lot of talk."

The valet looked at him with sharp surprise:

"But no suspicion rests on *them*, I'll be bound. I lived in that house since last October and I'll swear that there's not an honester pair in the whole country."

Mr. Larkin, as a stranger to the parties, had no

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need to display a corresponding warmth, merely remarking that Berkeley was convinced of their innocence.

The young man appeased, felt in his coat for a pipe and drew a tobacco pouch from his pocket. As he filled the bowl, his profile was presented to the detective's vigilant eye, which dwelt thoughtfully on the neat outline, almost handsome except that the chin receded slightly. A good looking fellow, Mr. Larkin thought, and smart — somehow as the conversation had progressed he was beginning to think him smarter than he had at the start.

"How about that Miss Maitland," he said, "the young lady secretary?"

Willitts had the pipe in his mouth and was pressing the tobacco down with his thumb. He spoke through closed teeth:

"What about her?"

"Well, what sort is she? You needn't tell me she's good looking, for I saw her once in the post office and she's a peach."

The valet leaned forward and felt in his coat pocket for matches. The movement presented his face in full to Mr. Larkin's glance, and the detective noticed that its bright alertness had diminished, that a slight film of stolidity had formed over it like ice over a running stream. The man had removed his pipe and held

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it in one hand while he scrabbled round in his coat with the other.

"She's a very fine young lady; nothing but good's ever been said of her in *my* hearing. And very competent in her work — they say — and she would be, or Mrs. Janney wouldn't keep her."

He found the matches and, sitting upright, lit one and applied it to the pipe bowl. The detective, with his eyes ready to swerve to the landscape, hazarded a shot at the bull's-eye.

"They were saying — or more hinting I guess you'd call it — that Mr. Price was — er — getting to look her way too often."

Willitts was very still. The watching eyes noticed that the flame of the match burned steady over the pipe bowl; for a moment the valet's breath was held. Then, without moving, his voice peculiarly quiet, he said:

"Now I'd like to know who told you *that?*"

The other gave a lazy laugh:

"Oh, I can't tell — every kind of rumor was flying about. They were ready to say anything."

"Yes, that's it. Say anything to get listened to and not care whose character they were taking away."

"Then there's nothing in it?"

"Tommyrot!" he snorted out the word with intense irritation. "The silly fools! Mr. Price is no more in

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love with her than I am. He's not that kind; he's an honorable gentleman. And, believe me, the wrong's not all on his side. It's not for me to tell tales of the family, but I will say that there's not many men could have put up with what he did."

His face was flushed, he was openly exasperated. Mr. Larkin remembered what he had heard of the man's affection for the master, and his thoughts formed into an unspoken sentence, "He knows something and won't tell."

"Well, well," he said cheerfully, "when a big thing happens there's bound to be all sorts of scandal and surmise. People work off their excitement that way; you can't muzzle 'em —"

Willitts grunted a scornful assent and rose. It was time to go; Mr. Price would be coming up from town that night and he would be on duty. The detective, lifting his bicycle from the grass, casually inquired if Mr. Price motored from the city.

"Oh, dear no. He keeps his car here in Sommers' garage — he needs it, taking people about to see the country. He made a tidy bit of money here last week."

"Talking of money," said the other, "did you know that ten thousand dollars' reward has been offered for those jewels?"

Willitts, astride his wheel, stretched a feeling foot for the pedal:

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"Yes, I saw it in the papers."

"Easy money for somebody."

"Yes, but *is* there somebody beside the thief — or thieves — who knows? *That's* the question."

They pedaled back side by side talking amicably, mutually pleased to find they were neighbors. On the outskirts of the village they parted with promises for a speedy reunion, Willitts to go to the Hartleys, and Mr. Larkin to Sommers' garage to ask the price of a flivver for an excursion beyond the reach of his bicycle.

When he arrived at the garage a large touring car, packed full of veiled females, was drawn up at the entrance. The driver, with Sommers and his assistant beside him, had opened the hood and the three of them were peering into the inner depths with the anxious concentration of doctors studying the anatomy of a patient. Mr. Larkin walked by them and went into the garage. He cast a rapid look about him, over the lined-up motors in the back, and then through the doorway into the small office. The place was empty. With a stealthy glance at the party round the touring car, he strolled in to where the time card rack hung on the wall. He ran his eye down the list of names until he came to "Price" and drew out the card. The second entry was dated July seventh and showed that that night Price had taken out his car at eight-thirty and not returned it until five minutes to two.

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CHAPTER X

MOLLY'S STORY

AS soon as I had the notes of that 'phone message down I wrote a report for the Whitney office — just an outline — and posted it myself in the village. The answer with instructions came the following evening. The next time Miss Maitland went into town I was to come with her. In the concourse of the Pennsylvania station I'd see O'Malley (the Whitneys' detective) and it would be my business to point her out to him. He was to follow her and I to come to the office and make my full report. Say nothing of what I'd heard to Mrs. Janney.

That was Tuesday; Thursday was Miss Maitland's holiday and right along she'd been going into town. Wednesday afternoon I heard her say she'd go in as usual on the eight forty-five, tipped off the office by 'phone, and told Mrs. Janney I'd need that day to make a report to Mr. Whitney — a business formality that had to be observed.

Miss Maitland and I went in together, looking very sociable on the outside, and talking about the weather, the new style in skirts, how flat Long Island was, and

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other such lady-like topics. Coming off the train I stuck to her like a burr, was almost arm in arm going up the stairs, and then in the concourse broke myself loose and faded away toward the news stand. Right there, leaning against the magazine end, I'd seen a large, fat, sloppy-looking man, with a tired panama hat back from his forehead, and a masonic emblem on his watch chain.

O'Malley was a first class worker in his line, and his appearance was worth rubies. He'd a small-town, corner-grocery look that would have fooled any one unless they'd a scent for a sleuth like a dog for a bone. As I edged up near him, reaching out for a magazine, he cast a cold, disdainful glance at me like the rube that's wise to the dangers of the great city. I dragged a magazine out from behind his back and whispered, "In the lavender dress and the white hat with the grapes round it." And dreamy, as if his thoughts were back with mother on the farm, he heaved himself up from the stand and took the trail.

The Chief — that's my name for Mr. Whitney — and Mr. George were waiting for me in the old man's office. Gee, it was great to be there again, like times in the past when we'd meet together and thrash out the last findings. Of course the Chief had to have his joke, holding me by the shoulders and cocking his head to one side as he looked into my face:

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"My, my, Molly, but the country's put a bloom on you! What a pity it is you're married or you might get one of those millionaires down there."

And I couldn't help answering fresh — he just sort of dares you to it:

"I won't say but what I might, Chief. But it's poor sort. Seeing what they've got to choose from it would be a shame to take the money."

Mr. George was impatient — he always gets bristly when things are moving — and cut us off from our fooling when a sharp:

"Come on, Molly, sit down and let's hear the whole of this."

So I took up the white man's burden, told them all I'd seen and heard and picked up, ending off with the full notes of the 'phone talk. Then I laid the paper on the table and looked at them. The Chief was gazing thoughtfully at the floor, and Mr. George's face was puckered with a frown like he'd eaten a persimmon.

"It's the queerest thing I ever heard in my life," he said. "Chapman and that girl! Why, it's impossible. Are you sure the man on the 'phone *was* Chapman?"

"It must have been. He spoke of meeting me in the woods and Mr. Price is the only man I ever met there."

The Chief looked up, glowering at me from under his big eyebrows:

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"What's your opinion of this Maitland woman?"

"Well, I don't think there's anything wrong about her — I mean I'd never get that impression from her general make-up. But before I tapped that message, I did get a hunch that she was sort of abstracted and shut away in herself. She'd lonesome habits and she'd look downhearted when she thought no one saw her. I'd size her up roughly as some one who wasn't easy in her mind."

"Have you ever heard anything of her having any sort of affair or friendship with Price?"

"Not a hint of it. That's what made me sit up and take notice. Under everybody's eye the way they were and yet not a soul suspecting anything — you're not as secret as that for nothing."

"While they were talking on the 'phone did you notice anything in their voices — it certainly wasn't in the words — that suggested tenderness or love?"

"No, it was more as if they knew each other well. He sounded as if he was trying to jolly her along, keep up her spirits; and she as if she was scared, not at *him* but at what he might do."

"They'd be careful," said Mr. George. "A man and a woman who were involved in some dangerous scheme wouldn't coo at each other over the wire like two turtle doves."

"Love's hard to hide," said the old man, "betrays

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itself in small ways. And Molly's got a fine, trained ear."

"Well, it caught no love there, Chief. The only person at Grasslands who's got that complaint is Mrs. Price. She's in love with Mr. Ferguson."

Mr. George was very much surprised.

"The deuce you say! — Old Dick fallen at last."

The Chief gave a sort of sarcastic grunt.

"Ferguson can take care of himself. He's not as big a fool as he looks or pretends to be. Now these extra holidays of Miss Maitland's you've spoken of — how long has that been going on?"

"Since April. Before that she never wanted time off and often spent her Thursdays in the house. At Grasslands this summer she's gone into town every Thursday and three times asked for extra days. The last was July the eighth, the day after the robbery."

"Umph!" muttered the old man. "I guess we'll know something about that when we hear from O'Malley."

Mr. George, slumped down in his chair, with his hands thrust in his pockets, his chin pressed on his collar, said gloomily:

"I confess I'm dazed. It's perfectly possible that Chapman, who didn't like his wife, should have fallen in love with the girl, it's perfectly natural that they should have kept it dark; but that he's joined with her

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in a plan to steal Mrs. Janney's jewels!"— he shook his head staring in front of him —"I can't get the focus. Price wouldn't qualify for a Sunday school superintendent, but I can't seem to see him as a gentleman burglar."

"He was mad when he left," I said. "He made a sort of scene."

"What's that?" growled the old man, looking up quick.

"He got angry and threatened them. I don't know just in what way because I've only caught it in bits and scraps. But Dixon heard him and told in the village where I picked up an echo of it. He said they'd stolen his child."

"Sounds like him — and ugly temper. Try and get exactly what he said if you can."

We talked on a while, going back and forth over it like a lawn mower over grass. Then a knock on the door stopped us; a boy put in his head and announced:

"Mr. O'Malley's outside and wants to see Mr. Whitney."

Mr. George and I squared round in our chairs with our eyes glued on the doorway. The Chief, slouched down comfortable with his shirt-bosom bulging, looked like a sleepy old bear, but from under the jut of his eyebrows his glance shone as keen as a razor. O'Malley entered, hot and red, his panama in his hand, and

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that air about him I've seen before — a suppressed triumph gleaming out through the cracks.

"Well?" says Mr. George, curt and sharp.

O'Malley took a chair and mopped his forehead:

"There's no mistake she's got something up her sleeve. She took the Seventh Avenue car and went downtown until she came to Jefferson Court house, got out there, went a few blocks into the Greenwich Village section and stopped at a house on a small sort of thoroughfare called Gayle Street. I think she let herself in with a key, but I'm not sure. The place is a shady-looking rookery, no porch or steps, door opening right on the sidewalk, three windows to each floor, mansard roof. About ten minutes after she went in, a man came down the street, walking quick, hat low over his eyes — it was Mr. Chapman Price."

Mr. George stirred and gave a mutter. The old man, stretching his hand to the cigar box at his elbow, took out a large fat cigar and said:

"Price, eh? — Go on."

"I thought the lady'd used a key, and I saw plain that he did. The door opened and he went in. I crossed over and looked at the bells. There were nine of them, all with names underneath except the top floor ones. These, the last three of the line, had no names, showing the top floor was vacant.

"There was a drug store right opposite and I

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