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THE
UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

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THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

BY

CHARLES J. DUTTON

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1921

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To

MY TEN YEAR OLD SON

ODARD DUTTON

WHO SAYS

"A FELLOW'S FATHER OUGHT TO
DEDICATE HIS FIRST BOOK
TO HIS SON"

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CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED GAME

JOHN BARTLEY, in preparation for a difficult drive, was trying out the swing of his various golf clubs when a man, whom I had previously noted hurrying across the links, came up and interrupted him.

"Are you John Bartley of New York" asked the stranger jerkily, between his rapid breaths.

"I am," said Bartley. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Sullivan," said the man. "I am the prosecuting attorney of this district. I just came from the telegraph office where I went to send a telegram to you in New York. The operator told me that you were actually right at hand,—spending your vacation I presume,—it is most fortunate."

"What's up?" asked Bartley, a little impatient at the interruption of his favourite pastime.

The district attorney jerked his head in the direction of the caddy, who was obviously listening.

"I see," said Bartley, handing his stick to the lad and turning in the direction of the club house. "This is my assistant, Mr. Pelt," he now said to the attorney, introducing me; "do you want him to come along?"

"I presume so," replied Mr. Sullivan, "if he is to assist you in the case."

"And what is the case?" asked Bartley as we walked toward the club house.

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"There is trouble up at the Underwoods, an affair that seems to need the services of a man of your ability."

"John Underwood, the great bear of Wall Street," remarked Bartley to me, "that's the mansion with the high sea wall we passed this morning when we came up the beach. Jewel robbery, I suppose; they have been pretty thick around here of late."

"More serious than that," said Sullivan; "this is really a most important case."

"And, whatever it is, am I to understand that Underwood himself has called me into the matter?"

"I was sending for you because Mrs. Underwood asked me to secure the best detective I could get hold of—John Underwood himself is dead!"

"How?"

"Suicide, apparently; he shot himself last night in the library. The room was locked, both doors and windows from the inside. There is really no other possible explanation, but Underwood carried three hundred thousand of insurance, with a clause in the policy which makes it void in case of suicide, and that is why you are wanted in the matter."

By this time we had reached the porch of the club house and found chairs in a secluded corner.

"Has the news been given out yet?" asked Bartley as he eyed Sullivan closely.

"No, they're keeping it quiet as long as they can; one reason, I presume, is to protect Underwood's interest in the stock market."

"Well, give us the details," Bartley broke in.

"It seems this morning," began the attorney, "that Underwood did not show up at breakfast. He always breakfasts at eight o'clock. They waited a half hour,

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and then his secretary, Vance, went to his rooms and knocked at the door. Getting no reply, he tried the door, and finding it unbolted, entered. The room was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. Mrs. Underwood's maid reported that he was not in his wife's rooms, so Vance went to the library, the place where Underwood spent his evenings, and trying the door, found that locked. He became alarmed then, and he called the butler. They went out to the front of the house, and getting a ladder placed it at the library windows. Vance climbed up, and looking in saw Underwood seated at his desk. By that time he was sure something was wrong, and he went back to the house and called Mrs. Underwood."

"Did they try the windows?" asked Bartley.

"Yes, but they were locked."

"In other words," said Bartley, "both the door and windows were locked?"

"That's it. When I looked the room over the windows were still locked. They called Mrs. Underwood, and when she came down she ordered them to break down the door. It's a rather massive thing, and so they knocked a hole in it, and reaching in, unlocked it. The key was in the door, on the inside. They found Mr. Underwood dead. He was in a chair by his desk, shot through the brain.

"They first sent for a doctor, who came promptly and announced that Underwood had been dead some hours. The doctor did not disturb the body. They left everything as it was and sent for the chief of the police, and shortly afterwards for me.

"The coroner was out of town for the day, and the chief and I, after looking things over, decided to wait

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until this evening when the coroner would return. I was away during part of the day, but Jenkins, one of our local patrolman, a very reliable fellow, was left to guard the place. I went back about an hour ago, as I wanted to be there when the coroner came. It was only then that Mrs. Underwood spoke to me of the insurance, with the result that I hurried to the telegraph office, and from there here. It is exceedingly fortunate that you happened to be in the locality."

Bartley had risen to his feet, a little smile playing around his lips. "In other words, you are not just certain that Underwood killed himself?"

Sullivan was silent a moment. "Well, they said it was suicide, and it looks like it, and yet I can't for the life of me see why a man like Underwood should kill himself. He had more money than a dozen men could use; there were no family troubles; he has only been married a year to his young wife. But the strangest thing to me is this: If he shot himself, the revolver should have been in the room, on the desk, in his hand, or on the floor. Well, I have searched the room a dozen times, and not a trace of that revolver can I find."

He sank back into his chair, and watched Bartley intently. It was some moments before the latter spoke, and then he said slowly:

"That's strange. Do you think any one moved it when they went in the room—the family or the servants?"

"No," was the reply. "I questioned them all, and every one was sure that they had not seen a revolver. Of course it looks like suicide, but—"

Bartley continued the sentence: "—But then again it

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doesn't. I think we had better look at things. It seems to be an interesting case."

Sullivan looked relieved. "All right, my car is here."

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CHAPTER II

THE DEAD MAN SITTING THERE

LEANING back in the car, I thought of the story I had just heard. I had not been with Bartley so long, but that I felt a thrill of excitement with every new case that came to us. Without a doubt there were some novel features in the story that the district attorney had just told us. So for a while I puzzled over them, but could reach no conclusion.

"Who is at the house now?" Bartley asked.

"Just the family," replied Sullivan, "and the servants. Mrs. Underwood was away yesterday, but got back some time last night."

"Let me see," said Bartley. "If I remember, she is Underwood's second wife. His first wife died some years ago. His present wife he married a year or so ago, and she was an actress playing on Broadway. I remember the marriage made some little stir, because she was a good many years younger than Underwood."

"That's right," answered Sullivan. "Moreover she is one of the most beautiful women that I have ever seen. She is only twenty-two; a bit older than his son. But the impression here is that it was a very happy marriage. Speaking of the son, his name is Robert. He was expelled from Yale, was a bit wild, but the only thing I can find that he did was to be mixed up in some automobile scrape, nothing very bad. So I judge his wildness is more talk than anything else."

At this point the car swung up the long drive leading

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to the house. We alighted upon the great stone platform, that formed the top of the sea wall, which dropped forty feet to the beach below.

"That's the room where they found Underwood," said Sullivan, pointing to three large windows which faced the sea.

Climbing the great stone steps, we pushed the button, and waited before the heavy door. It was opened by the butler, an old man with a rather intelligent face, his grey hairs showing years of service. He was listless and tired, walking with a weary step, and it was easy to see that he had received a great shock. He bowed us into a huge hall, and speaking in a tired voice, said:

"Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Vance wished me to say that the coroner came a while ago; he is in the room now with the chief of police. The coroner wished me to notify him when you came, and if you will step into the music-room, I will tell him you are here."

We entered the room he pointed out, and waited his return. It seemed only a moment before he was back, bringing with him two men. One wearing a blue uniform I judged was the head of the local police force. The other was a little fat man, who was in great need of a shave. His collar, which was several days old, had crumbled, while his baggy brown suit might have been cleaner. In fact he looked the part of the broken down politician. It was easy to see that he was a little excited, but that did not cause him to forget the importance of his position. He bowed to Sullivan, gave Bartley and me a glance as if to ask who we were. When Sullivan introduced us he said in a rather formal tone, "I am very glad to have the honour of meeting you, Mr. Bart-

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ley. But I will not take much of your time. The case is very simple."

Bartley spoke softly, "So you have decided on your finding?"

The coroner glanced at him with an air of surprise, as if he was startled. "Why it's a plain case of suicide. Room all locked up, and no one able to get in or out, and then the note on the table."

Both Sullivan and Bartley broke in on him:

"What note?"

"Not a complete note. But under some papers I found a note written to some lawyer; it was on the desk. Just a line; it was unsigned, but the secretary tells me it was in Mr. Underwood's handwriting. It was, 'After thinking it all over I have decided to end it, that will bring h—' There was nothing more. But I think without a doubt that it proves suicide all right, and the chief agrees with me."

And to this the man in blue solemnly nodded his assent.

For a moment Bartley looked at the men; there was an air of perplexity on his face. After a silence he said, "We had better have a look at the room."

We filed out of the room into the hall. It stretched half across the house, till it met the large stairway leading to the other floor. Upon one side was the high parlour and the music room that we had just left. An open door enabled me to see a great dining-room, its contents veiled by the growing dusk. On the other side, the side facing the sea, were several other rooms, but they were not open, and I could not tell what they were. And near the stairs, the light streaming through the broken panel of a door, was the library.

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Sullivan knocked softly, and the door was opened by a young patrolman.

In this room the lights were on and even under their glare the room appeared to be immense. Around its walls on nearly every side the bookcases towered to the ceiling, their shelves burdened with books. Upon the walls were a number of oil paintings, mostly marine views, evidently part of Underwood's wonderful collection. In the centre of the room was the largest desk that I have ever seen, heavy and massive—its surface, save for a few papers, clean. By the great fireplace at the end of the room was seen a built-in safe, and near it several tall, green, steel filing cases. The entire setting marked the room as the place where a man of wealth would retire, when he wished to be alone with his books. But my eyes did not linger long on these things, for, try as I could, they kept coming back to the one thing, whose presence filled the room. That still figure by the huge desk, the dead man sitting silent in his chair.

We walked to the front of the desk and stood looking down at him. The figure of the dead man was clad in a grey suit. He was leaning back in his chair, as if he wished to rest himself for a moment. The left hand was grasping the arm of the chair, while the other hand rested upon his knee. The head had fallen upon his right shoulder. Though his face was grey in death, yet it was calm, but I noticed that his open eyes had a startled look in them. But for the small hole in the forehead, flecked by a tiny drop of blood, one would not know that he had died a violent death.

For a while we stood looking at him, each busy with his thoughts. Bartley at last turned to Sullivan.

"Can you get me the private secretary Vance?"

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Going to the door, Sullivan spoke to Jenkins, the young patrolman, who had been on duty guarding the room.

Bartley walked around the desk, and, lifting Underwood's right hand, glanced at it a moment, then looked at the other. For a moment he studied the chair that was pushed a little back from the desk, near where I was standing. He then went to the three windows, in the centre of the room, which were hidden by long curtains. These windows were tall, all about the same size, though maybe the one in the centre was the largest. The top and bottom sash were each fitted with a single pane of glass. Bartley tried to lift them, trying one after another, but they were locked, the catches being the ordinary kind. For a moment he stood looking at the windows, a little frown upon his face. Through the glass one could look down upon the sea, the surface glimmering faintly in the fast-fading twilight. Then leaving the windows, he went around the room, stopping once in a while before some object, then passing on to something else.

There came a little knock at the door, and turning we saw Jenkins had returned. With him was a young man, about twenty-four, whom I took to be Vance. His every air marked him as a student. He had an intelligent face, surmounted by a mass of brown hair, and he wore the largest pair of tortoiseshell glasses that I have ever seen. Though his eyes wore a little excited look, otherwise he seemed to be calm.

"I take it you are the private secretary," said Bartley.

Vance nodded his head.

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"Now, Mr. Vance, is everything in this room just as you found it when you broke in and found Mr. Underwood dead? I mean, I want to know if a thing has been changed, even the merest trifle."

The secretary replied at once. "Nothing was touched in the room, sir. We left it just as we found it, and sent for the chief of police. When he came, he left the officer who has since been in charge.

Bartley turned to the coroner. "If you don't mind I will take another glance around the room."

He worked quickly, his tall figure moving from one object to the other. But I, who knew him, understood that not a single feature was escaping his notice. He glanced at the bookcases, the books standing in orderly rows on the shelves, pausing a moment before the closed door of the built-in safe. Going to the door, he took the key which was still in the lock and examined it very carefully, also the lock, both in the room and on the side in the hall. Coming back into the room, he went again to the windows, where he again tried the locks and spent some little time before he returned to the desk.

Then he came back to the centre of the room, and silently studied the dead man. Going to the desk, he commenced to look over the few things on it, for its great surface was almost clean. In the centre stood a gold inkstand, shaped like a lion's head, and near it several pens. At one end, near the figure of the dead man, was a pile of correspondence, evidently the daily mail. In the centre were several typewritten sheets of paper, a leaf with some figures on it and a pad of telegraph blanks. The *Wall Street Journal* of the day before, its pages open at the stock quotations, lay near the

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sheets of paper. In almost the centre of the desk, near the inkwell, stood a ash tray, and near it, but on the other side of the desk, was a squatty black cigar.

Taking things as they stood, I decided that little of interest had been found. But Bartley worked on, glancing through the letters, looking over the typewritten sheets, and at last going through the drawers of the desk, which he had opened. When he came to the ash tray, he spent more time, lifting it carefully, while he peered at the contents. Apparently satisfied, he went back to the side of Underwood, and, bending to the floor, came up with a cigar in his hand. He had not spoken, but turning to the coroner he now said, "You have the note you found?"

The latter plunged his hand into his pocket, and produced a battered and faded bill case, out of which he took a piece of paper which he handed to Bartley. Spreading it on the desk, we crowded around to see. It was a single piece of paper, part of the general business stock, for at the top was engraved "John Underwood." It was undated, and contained only these words: "After thinking it all over, I have decided to end it. That will bring h—" The last word was unfinished, only the letter h, started and uncompleted. Bartley looked up at me, and silently placed his finger upon the address that was over the note,

M. S. PHELPS,
180 Broadway New York.

"You know who it is?"

I nodded, for the initials were those of Underwood's lawyer well known as one of the leaders of the New York bar.

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He turned to the coroner.

"Where did you find it?"

"Under the pile of letters," was the answer. "It was near the end of the pile, and folded up."

No one made any answer, but while I was wondering what the letter could mean, Bartley asked,

"Mr. Vance, how about that chair? Does it always stand there?"

He pointed to the chair, which stood on the other side of the desk from Underwood. It stood, squarely facing the desk, but about three feet away from it.

Vance looked at it, puzzled. "No—" he hesitated. "As a rule there is nothing there."

Back came the next question. "Did you sit in it last night? I take it, of course, that you did some work here last evening."

"Yes," came the reply, "I always have to open the evening mail about seven. But if I sit here it is always by Mr. Underwood's side. I don't think I used that chair, nor do I remember seeing a chair there last night. In fact, I am sure there was none, for I stood there a moment before I left the room."

"And what time was that?"

"Around eight. I answered some letters, then went to my room. As a rule I work much later than that, but last evening Mr. Underwood dismissed me rather early. So I said good-night and left him. He generally spent the evening reading, when the letters had been dictated."

"I see," said Bartley, "and I take it he smoked."

"Oh, yes."

"Cigarettes?"

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"Never," was Vance's reply. "In fact he had a rather intense dislike to them."

Bartley picked up the cigar from the desk. "Is this one of his cigars?"

Vance took the cigar, studying it for a moment. "Yes, that is one of his. I know because he always smoked the same kind. They were made for his special order, and he would smoke no other kind."

"Do you ever smoke in his room?"

"Never," said Vance.

Placing the cigar back on the desk, Bartley again turned to the secretary. "By the way, you went through his clothes. Did you find anything missing, either from his clothes or the room?"

"No," was the answer. "Everything is as you see it; even his money was untouched."

Bartley took a turn round the table, and paused as if in thought, then he said, "Well that's all I wish to know now."

The coroner looked at him, as if wishing he would tell what he had discovered. But Bartley's face gave no sign that he knew they were waiting for him to speak. After a while the coroner said,

"It's time the chief and I returned to town. The doctor will have his autopsy this evening, and I will hold the hearing tomorrow at nine. You can move the body, and I presume you will leave the room undisturbed."

"Do you care to give any hint of what your finding will be?" I asked.

He looked about in an important way, and taking a soiled handkerchief from his pocket slowly polished his glasses.

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"Of course I cannot say what my jury may decide at the hearing, but I can give you my own opinion. It's suicide, everything here points that way. Here's the man dead in a locked room, nothing disturbed, money not taken, and then a note that says he was going to end it."

I glanced at Bartley; there was a little smile playing over his lips, as if he was amused at something.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you cannot build too much on that note. First of all, we are not sure that it was written last night, the ink was not very fresh on it, and then it's undated. Then one cannot conceive that a man about to kill himself would write a note to that effect and leave it unfinished, and then tuck it away out of sight. In all suicide cases that I have seen, where the man wrote a note, he left it in plain sight."

This seemed to disturb the coroner, for he sneered.

"Then, maybe, you don't agree with me?"

The reply came quick as a flash. "I don't, not for a moment. It's murder, everything in this room points to that."

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CHAPTER III

CLUES THAT ARE ASHES

THE word "murder" rang through the still room with an ominous sound that affected us all. The coroner was startled into a sudden exclamation, his face a study of wonder and chagrin. The district attorney showed less astonishment, while I myself had been with Bartley too long to be startled at any conclusion that he might reach. He studied us for a moment, and seeing that we were waiting for him to speak, began.

"You will find in every criminal case there are always a number of facts, that, taken as a whole, seem to lead to a definite conclusion. If we take each fact by itself, it may lead us, however, in another way. Now take this case. There are several things that seem to point direct to suicide. The closed room with the door and the windows locked, and the discovery of the so-called note—all these seem to point to one thing, suicide. But there are also a number of other things, that, though they may be small in themselves, yet when you add them all up point very clearly to murder."

The coroner broke in on him. "Will you kindly tell us what they are?"

Bartley continued. "We find in this case a man killed, and every exit from the room locked on the inside. But he is shot through the forehead, death presumably was instantaneous, and yet we find no revolver. Again, on the desk, we find a copy of the *Wall*

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Street Journal. I think we can assume that Underwood had been reading it, as we find on a piece of paper his notes and calculations concerning the prices of several stocks. Hastily considered, this might seem evidence of suicide if his figures referred to sudden heavy losses in the market. But on going over them carefully I find that they relate not to past losses but to future operations. Now a man who is thinking of killing himself is not apt to spend the few moment before he does it in planning future business deals. And while murder is often the result of sudden impulse, suicide never is."

He picked up the ash tray that was on the desk and went on. "I find this to be rather suggestive. Here are the stumps of two cigars, and what is left of a cigarette. One cigar is like the cigar that was found on the desk, the same heavy black Havana tobacco, his own make, in fact. The other is not. I have made some little study of tobacco, and it is a rather easy thing to distinguish the various grades and brands. The other cigar was another brand, a cheaper one, of the kind that sells in most places for ten cents. Now what do we make of this? Simply that Mr. Underwood was smoking when the murderer entered the room. He offered him a cigar, for I have the idea that he knew the man, but he did not take it, smoking instead one of his own. Then later, just before he was killed, Underwood lighted a fresh cigar."

The coroner broke in, with an exclamation of astonishment.

Bartley smiled. "It seems plain that whoever was in the room must have been some one that Underwood knew, or some one whom he was expecting. He dis-

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missed Vance early. That may have meant that he did not wish to be disturbed because he had some one coming to see him. Maybe he did not know him, but I think that he did, for the interview lasted long enough for a cigar to be smoked. It would take from thirty minutes at the longest to maybe twenty at the shortest for the cigar to be smoked. The cigar Underwood offered was refused. You see its position on the table, pushed over from Underwood, for it was just opposite his chair. It was refused, for the man did not pick it up but let it stay on the desk. Yet he sat in that chair, and he smoked. On the floor where the chair must have stood are cigar ashes. Now, you saw me pick up a partly smoked cigar from the floor near Underwood's chair. Only a little of it has been smoked, and the carpet is burned where it fell; it was lighted while the murderer was in the room, sometime after the other man had lighted his cigar. I think the murderer rose to his feet and suddenly fired. It must have been sudden and also unexpected, for Underwood had no time to move; you can tell that from his position in the chair. The man was standing, for the bullet took a downward course. There were no traces of powder marks, which would have been found had it been suicide. So I think we can picture the murder taking place in this way. The men had been talking, when the murderer, five or six feet away, rose suddenly to his feet and fired. As the bullet hit him, Underwood's cigar fell to the floor by the side of his chair. The man later walked around the desk, for I find the cigar that was on the floor had been crushed by some one's feet. I take it he would want to make sure he was dead. Then shortly afterward he left the room, but how I cannot tell."

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We had all been paying the closest attention, and I saw Sullivan nod his head in approval. To me it was so clear and realistic that instinctively I gave a little shudder. It seemed that I could almost see the murderer rising to his feet, and the sudden shot. Bartley, as a rule, was not given to airing his opinions but he continued.

"Just how the cigarette is to be explained I cannot say. Maybe there were two people in the room, but that will have to be decided later. All I wish to say is that there is no doubt but that he was murdered."

The coroner, who had listened very carefully, said, "I guess you are right; it sounds reasonable. But what do you think was the motive?"

Bartley smiled. "I have no idea. All I can say at this moment is that it hardly looks like robbery."

The coroner and the police captain withdrew, and having retired some little distance away held a conversation in low voice. But in the space of a moment the coroner returned to our side.

"I will hold the inquest tomorrow morning at nine. Who is in charge here?"

It was Vance who answered. "I am, that is for the present, till the young man returns. Mrs. Underwood is confined to her room by the shock, and asked me to take charge of things till Mr. Underwood's lawyer arrives."

"Well," said the coroner, "you can move the body if you wish. I will have to leave now."

He shook hands with us all, murmured a few commonplace remarks, and the coroner with his police chief left us.

Sullivan waited until he was out of the room, and

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then turned to Bartley with a broad smile. "It's a little over his head, Mr. Bartley, but I guess you can handle it. I presume you can arrange to stay in the house. As for me, I would like to get back home, as my wife is alone."

Vance, who had left the room with the coroner, returned and said to Bartley: "Mr. Bartley, Mrs. Underwood wished me to take charge of things. She has no knowledge of business at all, for Mr. Underwood took charge of everything. Just at present she is prostrated by his death. Mr. Sullivan has, I presume, told you about the insurance, which, of course, means that the affair must be looked into thoroughly. Any fee that you think is proper will be paid gladly by the estate."

Bartley did not reply at first, but by the eager look in his eyes I could tell that he was interested. And so I was not surprised when he answered, "I will be very pleased to do what I can."

Vance looked relieved. "I am very glad. And, if you will pardon a thought of mine, it might be well if your assistant and yourself took up your quarters in the house for a few days."

Bartley nodded his approval. "It was what I would have asked. I wish to make a careful investigation, and it is best that I should be here, at least for a short time."

Sullivan, who had been looking anxiously at his watch, now bade us good night. Vance went down to the hall with him but returned in a moment. Bartley walked over to the fireplace and put a log on the smouldering embers, and then motioned Vance and me to the seat that flanked it. Silently we watched the little tongues of fire licking the log. At last Bartley turned to Vance.

"Vance, I have an idea that you did not just agree

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with me when I said there was nothing missing from the room. I mean that you think or know of something that should be here."

The secretary looked rather startled, and from the expression on his face I doubted if he cared very much to answer. But he said: "You are right, sir. I told the truth when I said there was nothing missing—I mean from Mr. Underwood's person, watch, purse, jewellry, and such things. No one seemed to have bothered them. But there was something missing, something that the coroner and you would not be expected to know about."

Vance paused, and again I thought he seemed a little unwilling to speak. But after a while he continued: "It's like this, Mr. Bartley. I did not care to speak about it to the coroner, for after all I am not sure that it has any bearing on the death of Mr. Underwood. Then again I know that until this affair is over all of us who are in the house are in a way under suspicion. And then Mr. Underwood and myself were the only ones that knew anything about it. Yesterday about three o'clock he sent for me and said that I was to go to town and cash a check for him. I answered that the bank would be closed. But he said that he had called up the cashier of the First National, and that he would be waiting for me. So I took the check and received the money. It was made out to bearer, and was for three thousand dollars. It was in three packages of one thousands dollars each, all in fifty dollar bills. When I returned I gave the money to him, and he said that he wanted to use it the next morning."

Bartley broke in on him: "If he intended to use that money the next day then he did not intend to kill him-

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self. The suicide theory has this other fact against it. Did you see what he did with the money when you gave it to him?"

"Yes," Vance answered. "He placed it on his desk, by the inkstand. It was there when I left the room. This morning I noticed the money was gone, but I have not discovered where it went."

"I see," said Bartley. "Now, I understand, you left him about eight o'clock. Did you see him again that night."

"No, I did not see him, but I know he was in the library around ten."

"How do you know?"

"I went to my room about eight," Vance replied, "and read a little and then wrote several letters. I went down in the hall to place them on the stand, so the butler would see that they got in the morning's mail. As I passed the library door, I heard Mr. Underwood speaking."

Bartley broke in on him. "He was speaking rather loudly?"

Vance looked rather startled, so Bartley added: "If you heard him in the hall with the door closed he must have been speaking in a loud voice. That's a rather massive door, and I doubt if you could hear an ordinary conversation in the hall when it is closed."

"Yes," answered Vance, "his voice was raised rather high. I placed the letters on the stand, and when the door was passed on my way upstairs they were still quarrelling."

Bartley interrupted, "You say, 'They were still quarrelling.' You knew then who the other person in the room was?"

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Vance was not very keen to answer, and when he did it was in a very low voice: "It was his son Robert."

The eager look came into Bartley's eyes. "But I thought he was away?"

"He went away last night; I don't know what time. In fact I have not seen him myself for several weeks for he has not been home. I don't know how or when he came in last night."

"Do you know what they were quarrelling about?" asked Bartley.

"No, I do not. There has been some little feeling on the part of Mr. Underwood towards his son, and he had forbidden him to stay around the house. The boy had done some rather high playing at Clark's, and when his father heard of it he was angry. I myself heard him say that unless the boy stopped gambling he would turn him out of the house. So the boy had not been home for some time, and I was rather startled to hear his voice. But I could not hear what was said."

Bartley walked to the desk and slowly paced back again to our side. There was a thoughtful look on his face.

"Do you know where the boy is now?"

"No. I understood he was going on a yachting trip but with whom I do not know, nor where."

Bartley said nothing for a moment then asked, "By the way, you never saw any sign of a revolver when you broke into the room?"

Vance shook his head, "No, we looked for it but could not find it anywhere."

"Did you have one in the house?"

"I cannot say. I never heard of Mr. Underwood having a gun of any kind. I think there is one out in

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the garage, but it's a shotgun. And then I remember that Mr. Underwood's son had a revolver once, but he gave it away."

Bartley turned to the desk. "I guess that is all for the present, Vance. I judge you will want to arrange for the undertaker to look after the body." He turned to me. "And you better go to the hotel and get our things."

"I will have the car for you in a moment," said Vance as he left the room.

The moment he was out of sight, Bartley turned.

"Now, Pelt, you hustle up to Clark's and find out if the young man was in there last night, and if he played. Better see Clark himself and find out all you can about the young fellow."

I nodded my assent, and hearing the machine upon the drive I turned to leave the room. The last glance that I had as I went out was of Bartley, busy at the desk among the mass of papers.

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CHAPTER IV

A POOR PLACE TO HIDE A GUN

I FOUND the car, a red French racing machine, waiting on the driveway. Giving my directions to the driver, a young Irishman, I told him to first drop me at Clark's, and then to go to the hotel for our things.

Almost before I realized it we stopped in front of Clark's. In a way it was one of the show places of the Point. Standing upon a little hill was the great stone and wood cottage.

Just how Clark managed to fix it up with the authorities no one ever found out, but at any rate the place was never raided. It may have been because of the class of people that it catered to—the wealthiest people of Newport and New York.

I walked up the pebbled walk to the great massive door, silent and dark before me. After a moment I found the bell. The house itself was dark, though one could catch a line of light at the windows. Suddenly the door before me opened. I turned, peering at me through the opening was a servant. He studied me a moment before he decided to let me in, but I had been there before and he recognized me. Giving my hat to him, I climbed the four steps that led to the house, standing a moment at the top to glance over the great room. In the very centre of the room, under the great dome, was a double roulette table of mahogany and silver. In other parts of the room were other roulette

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wheels, also tables for faro, and *rouge et noire*. There were people gathered around the last, but the roulette tables seemed to be the most popular, for nearly all of the seventy or more men in the room were gathered there. There was little conversation, the only sound being the ball as it dropped from the wheel, and the voices of the dealers calling the numbers. Over the room hung a faint haze of tobacco.

I stood studying the men who were playing for a moment. I had a good description of young Underwood, and I felt sure that if he was in the room I would recognize him. But I found no one like him. Many of the men playing I had seen either at the hotel or at the golf club.

Catching the eye of one of the attendants I beckoned to him. He came across the room, and I asked him if Mr. Clark was in, and if I might speak to him. He hesitated a moment and seemed rather doubtful, but said he would see what he could do. In a few minutes the attendant had returned with Clark.

At first glance one would have taken Clark, with his portly figure, for a business man, though the checks of his grey suit were rather large, and the diamond in his red tie a little conspicuous. His round face was smooth, though a little white. As I stepped up to him, he studied me carefully with his keen grey eyes before he spoke.

"You wished to see me?" he asked.

For an answer I gave him one of Bartley's business cards. Though he must have been surprised, he showed no signs of it.

"You are not Mr. Bartley?" he asked.

"No," was my reply, "I am his assistant."

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He studied me for a moment, turning the card over and over in his hand, then said, "I think we could talk better in my office."

I followed him to the end of the room, where we went up a short pair of stairs to a small room, in the front of the house.

He waved me to a chair with his hand, and finding a box of cigars pushed them across the desk to me. Slowly lighting his cigar he waited for me to speak.

"Mr. Bartley wished me to ask that you give him a little information," I said.

The big frame of the gambler moved a little in his chair, and into his eyes, which had never left my face, there came a slight look of interest. "I would feel it a privilege to be able to aid Mr. Bartley in any way I could," he answered.

I went direct to my question. "He would like to know if Robert Underwood has been in your place today."

He looked rather startled for a moment, but at once replied, "I don't remember seeing him myself. But my manager can tell you far better than I can. He knows every one that comes into the place."

He rose, leaned over the desk and pushed a button in the wall. In a moment a young man in an evening suit, after knocking, entered. Clark said to him, "This gentleman would like to know if you have seen Mr. Underwood here today?"

"No," was the reply. "I have not seen him, and do not think that he has been here today."

I put the more important question. "Was he here yesterday, at any time?"

"Yes. He was in here last night. I think it was

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around twelve o'clock. He played a few turns of the wheel."

"Have you any idea the amount he played?"

The young man gave a quick glance at Clark who nodded back at him. "I cannot say as to that, sir, but it may be the dealer at whose table he played may know."

"Put some one else at the wheel and send him in," said Clark.

After the manager left he turned to me. "You will pardon me, but is there anything in this that will hurt the house? I run a quiet place and any scandal would drive away my clients."

I hesitated a moment. Though I knew that the murder would be out no doubt in the morning papers, yet I did not feel free to give Clark the facts, so I answered by saying, "I don't think that there is anything in it that will harm your place."

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and the dealer entered. He stood silent, his face expressionless, though he darted a quick glance at me when he entered the room.

"This gentleman," said Clark, "wishes you to answer a few questions."

He turned his gaze to me, and waited till I asked, "Can you tell me if Robert Underwood played at your table yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. He was in during the afternoon, but did not play. I did not see him again till round eleven that night."

"Are you sure of the time?" I asked.

"I am. I get relieved at eleven thirty. And he played a few turns, staying at the table for about a half

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hour; then said he would have to leave as he was going on a yachting trip, and that they started about twelve. It was twenty minutes to twelve then, for my relief had been waiting for about ten minutes for me to leave the table."

"How did he act when you first saw him?"

"Well," said the dealer, "he was a little bit excited, though I don't know what over. I was surprised to see him come to my table and play, for though he played a bit the first of the season, he had done little the past few weeks. He told me that his father had refused to let him have any more money. But last night he walked over to the table, and threw down a fifty dollar bill."

"What?" I interrupted.

"A fifty dollar bill, on the color. I was surprised to see it. But he had more, for when he lost that one he put down another. In fact he had quite a package of bills."

Here seemed a rather startling coincidence. Vance had told us that the young man quarrelled with his father and that the quarrel was over the fact that he had been gambling. Then I remembered the story of the money, in fifty dollar bills, that Vance claimed Underwood had the night before, and also that the money was missing. And the fact that a few moments after the murder the young man had come into the gambling house, and started to play with fifty dollar bills, seemed striking. For it was bills of that denomination which were in the missing package. Then Underwood had refused to give his son any money, until he had promised to stop gambling.

"Are you sure regarding the money that he played?" I asked.

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"Yes, sir, dead sure. Fifty dollars is large enough to remember. For as a rule they don't play as high as that on one turn of the wheel. I mean by that, when a man plays a high amount he will buy chips and not play the money itself."

"Now about that package of bills?" I asked.

"I don't know if they were all of the same amount. But I remember that when he wanted more money he took a flat package of bills from his inside pocket, and took what he wanted from it. I don't know if all the bills in that package were fifties, but all he played were."

"You say that Underwood seemed to be a little excited. In what way?" I ventured.

"Yes, he was a little. You see, sir, we watch the players rather carefully, and I got the idea that he was worked up a little over something. He seemed to be in a hurry also."

There followed a pause, and at length I said, "I guess that will be all."

He glanced at Clark, who dismissed him with a wave of his hand. But as he stood by the door, I thought of another question.

"Have you any idea where he was going?"

He turned. "I heard him say something about Block Island, but I am not sure that was the place he was going to."

He waited a moment, then seeing I had nothing more to ask him, left us.

I had secured all that I could, in fact more than I had expected, and I was anxious to get back to Bartley and see what he would have to say about it. So rising,

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I thanked Clark, and we left the room. He went with me to the door, the first a massive thing of steel, and then to the outer door, leaving me on the steps.

The car was waiting for me, and in a few moments I was again at the house. The old butler, who seemed even more tired and worn, said in a weary voice, "If you please, sir, Mr. Bartley wished me to say that he is in your rooms, and that he wished to see you as soon as you had returned. If you will follow me I will take you to him."

I followed him down the length of the great hall, past the closed door of the room where the crime had been committed. Then we went up a flight of stairs, and knocked at a door on the left of the landing. Bartley's voice answered, and I entered. He was seated in front of a large fireplace, in a great armchair. There was a book in his hand. By his side was a table covered with a mass of letters and papers and several books, with richly tooled leather covers. He smiled up at me and placed the book he was reading on the table. I picked it up and glanced at it. It was a thin copy of Petronius. The quaint French letters on the parchment were faded with age. Noticing that I was looking at it he said,

"I discovered it down in the library. There are a number of other good things down there besides this, though this is a very rare edition of Petronius. Ever read it?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he gives us a rather highly coloured picture of Roman life, yet I dare say you can find its counterpart in the society life of our day. The world has not

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changed as much as we sometimes think, or at least the people in it have not changed." He paused a moment. "Find anything?"

He was silent, setting back in his chair, with his eyes on my face, while I told him what I had discovered. The smoke from his cigar curled slowly to the ceiling in a grey mist. He did not speak till I finished and then simply said, "In the main, it's about what I expected."

"It looks rather bad for the young man," I replied.

He smiled. "There you go again, jumping at conclusions. The facts you have told me mean very little in themselves. Taken in connection with the murder they may assume more importance, and are worthy of being looked into. But there is nothing very sinister or out of the ordinary in a man who frequents Clark's being seen there last night."

I broke in on him. "How about the fact he had no money in the afternoon, and came back to play at the time after Underwood was shot. And played with fifty dollar bills. You know Vance said that money was missing from the room, and that it was in fifty dollar bills. It looks rather convincing to me."

"Yes," he replied, "it *looks* so." He rose to his feet, and going to the other side of the desk opened a drawer. Fumbling in it for a moment, he threw the thing that he was after out on the table. It was a black squatty automatic revolver, shining with newness.

"I think without a doubt," said Bartley, "that the shot that killed Underwood was fired from a revolver like this, and perhaps from this very one."

I said nothing for a moment, then asked, "Where did you find it?"

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"I found it in a room I searched while you were gone," he answered.

"Whose?" I asked.

He went back to the chair, seated himself, took another cigar, lighted it, then glancing at me said shortly, "Robert Underwood's."

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CHAPTER V

I STOOD for a moment looking at Bartley in astonishment. If what he had said was true, then it seemed to me that the last link in the chain of evidence against the young man had been reached. I could not see how he would be able to explain away the damaging evidence that was against him. There was the lost money, and the fact that he had played with money at Clark's which was of the same amount, and now came the finding of the gun in his room. To me it seemed almost a complete case.

Bartley evidently saw that I was rather startled for he added: "Jenkins and I went through the house after you left. We questioned the servants, but evidently they failed to hear anything last night. There was a heavy surf pounding on the shore. Then we went through their rooms, but found nothing till we came to the room that belonged to Underwood's son. It was the typical room of a college youth. Pennants of all kinds were over the walls, and countless pictures, mostly of girls that he knew or pictures of the popular actresses. He had a fine collection of the last. There were a few books, and they were mostly trash. The few letters that I found were chiefly bills. There seems to be no doubt that he was broke but at that his bills were not large. But under the bed I found this gun."

"Are you sure this is the gun with which Underwood was shot?" I asked.

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Bartley was silent a moment then replied: "That's a hard thing to be sure of. There is no doubt that this gun was fired a few hours ago. Five bullets are still in it, and you can find the traces of powder on the barrel. Even yet the barrel is a little oily. It's a new gun, too, and whoever owned it has not had it very long. I will be able to tell when it was made, and maybe trace it by the number on it."

I could think of nothing to say but that it looked bad for the young man. To this Bartley agreed but added: "At that it looks rather strange that the gun should have been found under the bed. Whoever shot Underwood would, you might think, wish to get rid of the gun, and to hide it, or throw it away. But under a bed is a very clumsy place to hide it. Now if it was Robert, the son, who did the killing, then he must have killed his father, and gone up to his room, where he threw the gun under the bed. Then he went to Clark's. Now I hardly see just where he had time to do all this, if he was in Clark's at the time they say he was. We are at least sure he was there shortly after eleven, and I feel sure that Underwood was not shot much before that hour. Then again, why throw the gun under the bed? You might say he expected to return and then hide it. But we are told that he was in a hurry, that he was going on a yachting cruise, and if that was so then he knew he would not be back to hide the gun, and it was sure to be found where it was. Then if he wished to get rid of the gun, why did he not take it with him, bury it in the sand, or else throw it in the sea. That would have been the easy thing to do, and it never would have been found then. In fact I think—"

"What?" I asked eagerly.

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He rose to his feet, and going to the fireplace dropped his cigar in the hot ashes. Turning he stood leaning against the mantel.

"Nothing," was his answer. "The case is far too complex for me to wander off on any theories. So far I have little to base them on. And there is no place for theories in this case, as yet."

"Its a strange affair," I added.

"I have an idea it will turn out to be one of the strangest cases we have ever had. But let us look over the facts that we have and see what we make of them."

He fumbled in the pocket of his blue-velvet smoking jacket, and brought forth a well-worn briar pipe. Dropping back in his chair, he packed the bowl of his pipe, patting the tobacco into place. When the pipe was drawing to suit him he started.

"In nearly every case that we have been on before, there has always been something that gave one some sort of a clue even at the very first; some fact that would give one a little light into the inner secrets of the case. But so far in this affair there seems to be very little. You would expect to find some fact of importance in the room where the man was shot. But there was very little there that would aid us." He was silent a moment, a thoughtful look coming into his face.

"Do you think," I ventured, "that maybe he killed himself after all?"

He shook his head. "No, he could not have killed himself. There are many reasons for my saying that. One of them is the fact that, above all other things, there was no reason why he should. A man like he, with his wealth, his many interests in life, is not going to commit suicide. Then you can tell by the lack of powder marks

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on his face. If he killed himself the powder marks would be there, and they were not. And if he killed himself, what became of the gun? There is no doubt to me that he was murdered."

I broke in on him with, "I can't see how the murderer left the room."

Bartley replied: "The question of the locked room is one that, if we could answer it, would in my opinion come very near solving the whole case. There is no doubt that the door leading from the hall into the library was locked, and on the inside. There are several who can swear to that."

"That is, if they tell the truth," I added.

Bartley nodded assent to this. "Yes, we have to suppose they are telling the truth. But then again you don't expect that all the people that saw that door locked were not telling the truth. That would mean that Mrs. Underwood, the butler and Vance all lied, and that they were all mixed up in the thing. That won't stand for a moment. The door was locked, when they tried it, later they broke in and the key was in the lock inside. Of course whoever shot Underwood had to leave the room. The question is, with both the door and the windows locked on the inside as we found them, how did he get out?"

"Yes," I repeated eagerly, "how did he get out?"

Bartley threw back his head and laughed. "At present I am afraid you will have to wonder, Pelt. How the person left the room I cannot say. I believe without a doubt that whoever the person was he walked in through the door. I believe also that it was some one that Underwood expected and knew. To climb in through the window would have meant that he would

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have been seen by Underwood, and he would not have been seated calmly at his desk if an intruder came in that way. But how the murderer left the room with everything locked as they found it the next morning is the question we must solve."

"But maybe everything was not locked," I ventured.

"Well," replied Bartley, "if it was not, then some one did not tell the truth. Vance tried the windows, the butler saw him do so, and when he came in the room tried them himself. Mrs. Underwood says they were locked. The chief of police and Sullivan found them locked, so it seems as if we must take their words for it. Then again there was no purpose in any one's saying that the door and windows were locked if they were not. If these were locked to make it appear suicide, then the gun would have been left in the room If it was murder, then of course the murderer got out some way."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "the murderer was hiding in the room when they entered, and escaped."

"No, that is impossible. There was not a place large enough to hide a cat in that room. Then again you forget that the three persons who entered the room first saw no one, and that from the time they entered there has been some one there. So far we cannot say any one is mixed up in the case. Every one is under suspicion, and every one is presumed to have told the truth. The servants, I may say, are out of it. Vance seems innocent, a quiet secretary, in fact, wrapped up in his work. Every one just at present seems clear."

"You forget Robert Underwood," I added.

Bartley simply glanced at me and said, "Yes, I forgot him."

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His pipe was out by this time, and he placed it back in his pocket and continued, "Now, of course, in every crime there has to be a motive. They say find the motive and you have found the criminal. But in this case we fail to find anything that suggests a convincing motive. True the crime may have been committed for money, but all we have missing is the sum of three thousand dollars, and we are not sure that is missing. He may have disposed of it himself. And if I am right in thinking that he knew his murderer, and it was some one that he treated as a friend, then three thousand dollars seems rather a small amount for such a crime to have been committed."

I looked at him rather doubtfully. Seeing my look he smiled and said, "You think otherwise. Let's hear your opinion, Pelt."

"Well," I answered, "all evidence so far points to the son. That he was on bad terms with his father, we know, and also that he was in need of money. They had a quarrel and he shot him. Seeing the money, he took it. Then afterwards he hid the revolver, in a foolish place I will admit, but maybe he intended to come back for it. Then —"

Bartley, who had been listening with a little smile upon his lips, added, "Then not wishing to be seen by any one he went to the one place where his having a large sum of money would be promptly noted."

"He was not a professional criminal," I answered a little warmly. "If he had been he would not have made a mistake like that. But a young man like him is always sure to make some break that gives him away. Just see the facts against him. His need of money, his quarrel with his father, his being without money in the

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afternoon, and his playing with the bills of the size missing last night. To add to it all you have found the gun in his room."

Bartley gave a little sigh and rose to his feet. "How that district attorney will delight in your case. But there are holes in it, Pelt. First of all you forget that you have little evidence that he quarrelled with his father last night. Vance only thinks he heard their voices. Then again you do not *know* that he was 'broke.' And you have not proven that the gun found was left there by the young man. Anyway keep your theory to yourself for a few days. The local police are working on the case. God only knows what they will dig up, and theories like yours would be apt to turn their heads."

He walked to the window and stood looking out at the night. Turning at last he said, "It all sounds rather mixed up, I will agree. But let us wait till morning and see what the inquest will bring forth. I have an idea that when it is over we will know more about the case than we do now. I think if I were you, Pelt, I would get a little sleep. You will have enough to do tomorrow. Your room is just off mine."

"Do you think—" I began.

Bartley took me by the shoulder, and leading me to a door pushed me into the room beyond it. With his hand on the door, he said, laughing, "Never mind what I think. Maybe tomorrow we will both be very much wiser. Better try to forget it all and get a little sleep." With that he said good night and closed the door.

Though I was tired out, I found when I got in bed that I could not sleep. For a while I ran over in my mind the details of the day. Then I tried to discover the motive of the murder, I looked at it from every

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angle that I could think of, only to come to the conclusion that, take it all in all, the son would find it rather hard in explaining away the facts against him. From that my thoughts ran to other cases we had been on. Then it struck me that inasmuch as in other cases my theories had been wrong more times than they had been right, I might be at sea on this. So after a while I gave up thinking about it and tried to sleep.

But sometimes when one endeavours to sleep he finds that he is apt to end in being more awake than ever. So I found it, and the thousand and one things that rush over one's mind at such times came into mine. But after a while I began to think of Bartley and to run over my friendship with him.

I had known Bartley for some years, in fact ever since I was a freshman at college. Later when a reporter just breaking into the newspaper game in New York, I had been detailed to write up one of the cases he was on. Out of it grew a friendship, which resulted in the end with my going to work with Bartley as his assistant. The strangest thing about Bartley, for those that knew him and the history of his family, was the fact that he had become a criminal investigator. He came from that well-known New England family of Bartleys, a family that went back to the *Mayflower*, and numbered in its long list of well-known names, lawyers, clergymen, even several bishops, and a governor or so. Even those who met him for the first time would hardly believe when informed of his profession. With his tall figure, and scholarly face, the general air of good breeding that he had inherited from his ancestors, most people took him for a professor or a lawyer. Others noticing his nervous hands, with the long fingers, were sure he was a

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surgeon. And once, to my great glee, a very devout and religious woman whom we met on the ship while crossing to England assured the first cabin that she knew he was a bishop. Few ever guessed his real profession, and even some of his best-known friends never dreamed that he was the John Bartley that the papers spoke of so often in connection with the great criminal cases.

Perhaps in the beginning Bartley himself never intended to take up the line that he did. He graduated from Harvard at an early age, where he specialized in literature. Then came a course in the law school, in which at the same time he carried on original work in chemistry. Then followed several years abroad when he devoted himself to chemistry and literature. After that he came to New York, living in the old family home, that had come to him, in Gramercy Square. Having all the money that he wished, he turned his attention to books. His library, which overruns all the rooms of his house, is one of the best known of its kind. His collection of early French memoirs, and of old trials and legal cases, is considered today the best in the country. But he did not neglect his love for chemistry, and published several monographs on rare and little known poisons.

It was his knowledge of poisons that brought him into his first criminal case. There had been a murder, in which the city detectives found themselves at sea. Some one happened to remember that Bartley knew more about poisons than any one else in the city. He was called in, and by his aid the case was solved. After that on several occasions his aid was sought, and given. But not till he solved the Duveen case, which had baffled all the detectives who worked upon it, did

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he become known as a great criminal investigator. After that, his services were sought more and more in mysteries that others could not solve. The excitement of such a career, the opportunity that it gave him to use his knowledge and gifts, the chance of matching his brain against others, was one that he welcomed, and in the end, he became known as the most resourceful private detective in the country.

After much vague reminiscing over Bartley's career, I fell asleep at last, just when I cannot tell. Neither can I tell how long I slept. My sleep was rather restless, nor was it very sound, for suddenly I was awakened. Half asleep I wondered what it was that had caused me to wake up. I seemed to remember a noise, but it was vague and indistinct, more like the rustling of the wind than anything else. For a while I pondered over it, reaching the conclusion that after all I had heard nothing, finally settled myself again to sleep.

But before I could close my eyes I was made wide awake by another sound. It was not a loud noise, but the house was still and I heard it plainly. It was the sound of a clicking door latch. I lay still for a moment, wondering what the sound meant. Then I got out of bed and stood hesitating in the centre of the room. I was not sure if the sound had come from the floor beneath, or from the hall, though it seemed to me that it had come from the hall.

I went to the door leading to the hall and listened, but heard nothing. Softly I opened the door, but again heard nothing. After a moment I stepped quietly into the hall. It was dark, so dark that I could hardly distinguish the wall by my side, and it was silent, not a sound coming from the rooms that faced the hall. I

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felt my way to the rail that lined the top of the stairs. Finding it, I peered into the darkness of the floor beneath. I could see and hear nothing. I stood for a moment with my hand resting on the rail, thinking. That I had heard a door close, was certain. It was rather late for any one to be wandering through the house, and whoever had closed the door had done it softly, but had been betrayed by the latch clicking into place. But where the sound had come from I did not know, and at last I went back into my room.

I was about to get back into bed, when suddenly, obeying an impulse, I turned and went again to the door and glanced down the hall. To my utter astonishment, even while I gazed out into the darkness, my eyes caught a flash of light thrown upward on the ceiling. It lasted but the merest part of a second and then was gone. But it had been a ray of light and though faint it had pierced the darkness of the hall.

Quickly I ran to the head of the stairs and eagerly looked down their long length. But the darkness was intense, and I could see nothing. Yet there was no doubt that the light had come from the floor beneath. What did it mean? Whoever was down there was quiet enough, for though I listened very carefully I did not hear a sound. For a moment I thought of waking Bartley, but I realized that time was precious and then if there was anything worth discovering I wished to do it alone.

So carefully, in order to make no noise, I groped my way down the dark stairs. Feeling my way along the wall, I came to the door of the library, or where I expected to find it; my hand encountered the air, and I knew the door was open. It had been closed, but now

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it was open. I could now make out very faintly the form of the open doorway. I wondered who had opened it and what reason any one should want to enter the room. After a moment I decided to enter the library myself. As I placed my feet over the threshold the thought came to me that it was a rather foolish thing to do. I was in my pajamas, my gun up in the room. I think that my idea was to turn on the light, but I found that I did not know where the switch was located. It seemed that I remembered that somewhere by the desk I had seen a push button. But the room was very dark, and though I could just dimly make out the space of the window I was unable to distinguish anything.

I could not see the form of the desk at first, but I knew where it was, and made my way towards it. I had almost reached it when I seemed to become aware that there was some one else in the room. I remembered that there had been a fire in the fireplace, when I had last been in the library, and I looked for it. I saw, however, but the tip of one tiny coal, a mere point of light almost dead. I moved again slowly, and as I did so I caught my foot in the edge of a rug and almost fell, being thrown against the desk. I knew that if I had been undiscovered before that my presence in the room was now known.

As I righted myself I heard a quick catching of some one's breath. It was some little ways from me. I shifted my position at once, going around to the other side of the desk. My ears caught a faint sound, and it seemed that the unknown person had moved. By this time I had given up all idea of turning on the lights. The only thing I wished to do was to get back to the door and close it and then get Bartley. I had no shoes

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on and felt that I could move softly. I listened carefully but heard nothing, though all the time I could feel the presence of the other person.

Though I could not be sure, it seemed to me that the noise I heard had come from somewhere near the fireplace, though it was so dark that I could see nothing there. Carefully I started to move, then stopped, for I had heard a faint rustle, the sound a person will make drawing their feet over the floor. It sounded a little nearer than it had before and came from a different direction. For a moment I was puzzled and wondered if there was more than one person in the room. Then I wondered what they were after. It seemed to me that the chances were that whoever was in the room would not be very keen to be discovered, and that maybe, like myself, was trying to get away without being seen. If the person was endeavouring to reach the door then he was trying to escape without being seen. That made a new quandary, for if we both were trying to get out by the door we might run into each other.

Clearly the one thing for me to do was to reach the door first. First I thought I would make a run for it, then decided to move as quietly as I could. I had taken but three steps, pausing between each one, when I tripped over a foot. Instinctively I threw out my arm to save myself from falling, and my hand encountered a man's coat.

I almost fell. Before I was able to steady myself, my arm was seized in a strong grip. Twisting, I managed to free myself, but the coat of my pajamas was torn from my back, and left in the man's hand. I twirled around, steadying myself, and the next moment we were locked in each other's arms.

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Even in the very first moment of the encounter, I realized that the odds were against me. Whoever my opponent was, he was taller than I and heavier, and possessed of great strength. With his arms around me he made it almost impossible for me to move, and tried to throw me to the floor. I freed one hand and grabbed for his throat, but he broke the grip loose. Slowly he bore me backward, though I managed to keep on my feet. But, try as I could, I was not able to break the circle of his arms.

Suddenly I felt the edge of the desk cut into my back. Slowly and silently the pressure of his body forced me backward. The sharp edge of the desk was cutting into my back, and it felt like the edge of a knife. I knew that I could stand this but a moment, and tried to wriggle out of his grasp. But it was no use, and if he had not shifted the position of his arm and seized me by the throat, it would have been all over in a moment. As it was, it gave me but a moment's grace. Vainly I struggled to escape the increasing pressure, but the grip tightened, and again I was pushed against the edge of the desk. I felt that resistance was useless and was about to give up, when suddenly I heard what seemed to be a gasp of surprise coming from the direction of the door. It was as if some one about to step into the room had discovered our presence and was startled.

This roused me to a frenzy, and gave me for the moment a new strength. I knew that if there were two men against me I was lost, for I was hardly able to hold my own with one. With a burst of strength, I struck the hand from my throat and managed to struggle loose. Then I threw myself at my unknown opponent, and drove with my clenched fist, in what I

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thought was the right direction. The darkness made the blow uncertain, but my hand struck his shoulder, struck with force enough to cause him to stagger. I rushed in on him, trying to overpower him, before he could recover, but the blow had done little harm, for his fist caught me on the chest. For a second or so we sparred wildly in the dark, most of our blows doing little damage and failing to land. But as he rushed into me, I landed full on his face with what should have been force enough to down him. Though he did not fall, yet the force of the blow drove him back.

I rushed in at him, to take advantage of his loss of balance. Before I reached him, there came the short, sharp spit of a revolver. The darkness, pierced by the flame, for the merest part of a second, revealed the lower part of a man's face, hidden by a dark beard.

I decided that it was about over. There was little I could do against a revolver, and I started to move aside, fearing a second shot. But he did not fire again, but came at me with a rush that almost carried me off my feet. I tried to escape his fists, but in vain. A blow having behind it the full weight of his body reached me flush on the point of the jaw, actually carrying me off my feet. As I staggered there came a heavy blow on the back of my head. I remember thinking vaguely that I had struck the edge of the desk in my fall, then a blinding flash of light, fading away into darkness, and I knew no more.

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CHAPTER VI

ROBERT UNDERWOOD COMES HOME

SLOWLY my bewildered brain began feebly to struggle back into consciousness. I seemed to hear, first of all, the sound of voices, but they sounded faint and far away. I opened my eyes for a second, but the light of the room blinded them, and I closed them for a while to find, when I did open them, that Bartley was bending over me. I tried to smile, and he smiled back, saying, "Feel better? That was a hard blow you received."

For an answer I struggled to my feet, and, feeling rather faint, dropped into the chair near by; the chair in which we had found Underwood. Then for the first time I noticed the butler standing near by, a basin in his hand and a towel over his arm. I started to ask,

"The man—"

"He got away; we could find no trace of him," Bartley replied, not waiting for me to finish. "Are you able to tell what happened?"

To tell the truth, I felt a little shaky, and my head was paining a bit, but I thought I would soon feel like myself. Putting my hand to the back of my head I found I had a rather large and sore lump, but when I withdrew my hand and looked at it there was no blood on it. Observing my gesture, Bartley smiled.

"It's not a cut; you are not seriously hurt, only were knocked out for a moment or so. But how did it happen?"

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So with Bartley on the edge of the table and the butler standing by with a interested look on his serious face, I told my story.

Bartley listened carefully, but did not interrupt me. Just as I finished, Vance came into the room and, in reply to a look from Bartley, said,

"The chauffeurs and the watchman have looked over the grounds but they found nothing, nor did they see any one."

"I did not expect they would," was the reply, and turning to the butler Bartley told him that he would not need either Vance or himself any longer.

After they left the room he turned to me, having drawn a chair up to my side.

"I want us to go over this thing here; we can cover the ground better by being in the room where it took place. Now I myself was awakened by a shot. It was not very loud, nor was I sure that it was in the house. I jumped from the bed and heard the sound of something falling to the floor. It must have been you. The sound came from downstairs, so I rushed out in the hall, down the stairs. At the bottom I paused a moment, but heard not a sound. Then I entered the library, and turned on the lights, and of course saw you were on the floor. It took but a second to see that you were only stunned, and I knew that you would be all right in a little while. So I rang for the butler, leaving you in his care while I looked over the house. That is, I looked downstairs, for I knew that no one had time enough to pass me while I was coming down the stairs. I had aroused Vance, and he was looking the grounds over at the same time. The result—nothing," and he threw out his hands with a rather expressive gesture.

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Already I felt stronger, though my head still ached a little. I could see that Bartley was very keen to question me.

"Now we will start at the beginning again," said Bartley. "You were awakened by a noise, and you got up and went into the hall?"

"No," I said, "I did not get up and go into the hall then; it was after I had heard the sound again."

"Then," said Bartley, "you heard the sound of a door latch click. If you are sure, then it seems rather strange." He walked over and tried the latch of the library door. It made very little sound. "You would hardly hear that in your own room, with your own door closed," he said. "On that part of the second floor where we were there are only two other rooms. Mrs. Underwood's rooms and the suite that her husband had are on the same floor but are separated from ours by another hall. You could not have heard any sound from those. And Robert Underwood had the two rooms that were near us, and he is away. Are you sure you heard a door latch click?"

This rather ruffled me and I replied rather warmly, "Absolutely. The first sound, the one that woke me up, I do not know what it was, but the second one was that of a door latch. I ought to know what I heard."

Bartley smiled a bit, at the warmth of my answer. "You must be feeling better. So be it, it was a door latch then. Then you went out in the hall, went back to your room and then opened your door again. The light you saw was a mere flash, lasting but a second."

I nodded.

"No doubt it was a flashlight."

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"But why," I asked, "would any one want to be in that room in the dark?"

Bartley looked at me and then replied: "It was easy to see a light there even if the door were closed. You know the panels were smashed when they broke in and found Underwood. But I have an idea that whoever was in the room had the idea that they could find what they wished without a light. Evidently they found they had to have a light later, and took the chance of being seen. So, one might add, whoever was in the room had been there before, and was familiar with it. So familiar that they could look for something in the dark. Now you say you heard nothing when you paused by the door, before your entered the room?"

"Yes," I answered. "The door was open. I remember I wondered a bit, for it was closed when we went to bed. Still I thought nothing of that. I listened for a while but heard nothing. In fact it was not till I half fell over the rug there that I became aware that there was any one else in the room. Even then it was not because I heard any one, but rather I seemed to feel that some one was there."

Bartley nodded. "Then in a moment you distinctly heard some one move and the next you were struggling."

I nodded to this, and glanced at the desk. I gave a little shudder, for I still felt the pain where its keen edge had cut into my back. Bartley interrupted my train of thought.

"And what do you think knocked you out?" he asked, his keen eyes fixed on my face.

"Why, I was knocked off my feet and struck my head on the desk."

"Indeed," drawled Bartley.

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I looked at him, catching from his tone an air of disagreement.

He shook his head. "You did not hit the desk at all when you fell. The blow on your head was caused by this." He reached his hand over to the desk and drew towards him the heavy gold inkstand, shaped like a lion's head. For a while he held it in his hand, studying it. Then glancing at me he said simply, "This was the thing that knocked you out."

In dazed wonder I could only look at the inkstand that Bartley held in his hand. It was a massive thing and must have weighed at least five pounds. He sat silent, enjoying my astonishment, with a little smile playing around his lips. Seeing that I had nothing to say, he added rather irreverently,

"I think that we will find this to be one of the most interesting cases that we have had in some time."

I turned and looked at the desk, for I could but think that I had hit it when I fell. Then I turned again and looked at the inkstand.

"But," I ventured, "if I was struck by that it means—"

"It means," replied Bartley, "there were at least two men in the room. When I came in I found you lying about three feet from the desk. You could not have hit it when you fell, for your head was pointing to the door. If you had struck the door, I think there is no doubt that you would have been found by the side of it. Also the sharp edge of the desk would have given you a nasty cut instead of the lump that you have. Then I found this inkstand on the floor by your side, and there seems to be no doubt that it was the thing that knocked you out."

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It seemed reasonable enough, and I could only reply, "It's strange."

A serious look came into Bartley's face, and he replied slowly, "There are several strange things about it. You see that to go to the desk in the dark and pick up the inkstand, for it was the only thing on it that could be used for a weapon, shows a rather striking knowledge of the room and its contents. A person in the room for the first time would hardly know that on the desk was the only weapon that he could use, nor would he be able to find it in the dark. Then after you were hit, both men speedily vanished, for I was down myself a moment after but there was no one here."

"What," I asked, "do you think they were after?"

"Well," he replied, "that's the question. It must have been something that was important for they would not have tried to come in here and take the chance of being found in the room. It might have been that money that Vance told about; it may have been left in the room. But if it was, the chances are that the persons found it. But why there were two people is the thing that bothers me."

He rose from his chair and walked over to the safe, which he examined for a while. Then he walked to the window and stood looking out at the night. After a while he turned and said,

"The thing I am unable to understand is your being so certain that you heard the sound of a door latch being closed. There is no one on your floor but you and me. Now, you may be mistaken —unless— I wonder if—yes, that must be it!" He rushed to the door, "Come on!" he called.

I followed him, and he hurried up the stairs, two steps

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at a time. Past the door of his room and the open one of mine he hurried to the end of the hall. Finding the door, he fumbled at the knob, and at last opened the door with a fling. It took but a second to find the switch which flooded the room with light. In the first quick glance that I gave, I saw that it was the room of a college youth, picture bedecked and book strewn. Bartley did not stop in this room, but went to the open door that lead to another room. Here he fumbled for the light, and when he turned it on I gave a sudden gasp of wonder. For upon the bed, his back turned toward us, and his head half covered by the bed clothes, was a young man asleep.

I turned to Bartley. Upon his face was a little smile, and he had to chuckle when he said, "It's about what I thought."

Disturbed by the light, the man on the bed turned over restlessly. I saw that he was only a boy, with his light hair tossed about his eyes. In a moment he was awake, staring at us. For a while he lay looking at us, then pulled himself up in the bed, and in an angry voice half yelled, "What in the devil are you doing in my room?"

Bartley took a step forward, and simply said, "Mr. Underwood."

The young man glared at us, and snapped, "Yes, my name is Underwood, but what is it to you? What are you doing in my room?"

I noticed that Bartley was watching him narrowly to see the effect of his answer. But even when he said, "I am John Bartley; it may be you have heard of me," the young man did not appear confused. He looked at us a moment, then got out of bed, and seated himself on

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the edge. And again I noticed that he was but a boy, with a youth's clear-cut features and candid eyes.

"The only John Bartley I ever heard of," he answered, "is a detective or something of the sort. I don't know him at all."

"Well," replied Bartley, "I am that chap."

Still Underwood did not seem startled, though a little look of wonder was on his face, while he asked, "What's up? Does father know that you are here?"

Bartley's reply came quickly, "No, he doesn't."

The young man rose to his feet. I could see that he was starting to get angry; it showed in his voice when he spoke.

"Then what do you mean by coming in my room at this time of the night. Why are you in this house anyway?"

Bartley, whose eyes had never left the young man's face, said slowly, "Because your father is dead."

Over the young man's face came a look of surprise that changed into horror. His jaw dropped and closed convulsively, his face twitched. He tried for a moment to speak, and at last stammered, "When—when did he die?"

"He was murdered some time last night," came Bartley's reply in a cold, even tone.

The face of the young man grew white, then flushed a deep red. His lips trembled as he tried to speak and was unable to make a sound. His hand, resting on the bed, closed and unclosed. And then suddenly he threw himself down on the bed, his head in his arms, and commenced to sob. His body shook with the violence of his grief, but in a while his sobs stopped and he lay still. At last he turned and rose to a sitting position on the

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bed. His eyes were red from weeping, his face white, but he had composed his voice when he spoke,

"You will excuse me, but I was rather overcome with your news"—his voice broke again for a second; but he continued. "It's rather a shock, for the last time I saw Father I never had the idea that I would never see him alive again."

"And when was that?" Bartley queried.

"Last night," was the simple answer.

There happened to be but two chairs in the room, and Bartley seated himself on the nearest and motioned to me to take the other. He turned to Underwood.

"Mr. Underwood, I have been brought into the matter of your father's death, and there are some questions that I must ask you, and they may as well be asked now."

The young man nodded his assent. He seemed to act frankly enough, but I had been impressed by the fact that he had not asked us who had killed his father. Also I could not forget that there were sóme rather damaging facts against him that he would have to explain. Yet all in all he seemed but a college youth, and his grief at his father's death had been real.

"Now," continued Bartley, "I thought that you were away on a yachting trip which was to last some days."

"I started on one," was the reply. "We left last night and ran into Block Island, intending to go from there up to the Maine coast. But this morning the engine went wrong, and finding that we could not get it fixed for a number of days we called the whole thing off. We got back here rather late, and I came right home."

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"Did you come directly up to your rooms?" asked Bartley.

Underwood nodded, then added, "Yes. I found I did not have my key and was afraid I would rouse the whole house, but, strange to say, the front door was slightly open; not locked at all."

Bartley leaned back in his chair, and his voice was eager as he asked, "You found the door open?"

The youth nodded.

"Is that not rather a strange thing? You are not in the habit of leaving it unlocked? I thought the butler was presumed to look after the doors."

"He is," answered Underwood. "I thought it was strange when I found the door open. I came up the front steps and reached for the door knob, only to find the door was open about an inch. I wondered a bit at this, for the last thing the butler does is to make the rounds of the doors and windows before he goes to bed."

I glanced at Bartley. He had thrown his head back in the chair, and his eyes were closed. He opened them to ask:

"Did you lock the door after you came in?"

"Yes."

"And you came direct to your room? Did you notice that any one was in the hall? Or did you hear any one in the library when you passed? It was there they found your father."

The young man gave a shudder, and was silent for a moment.

"I came right up. Did not turn on the light but went at once to my room, and right to bed. I was pretty tired, and fell asleep in a moment." His voice

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broke and he continued a little wildly, "But if I had known,"—and he strangled back a sob.

A softer expression came into Bartley's face, and going over to the boy he placed his hand on his shoulder. "Yes," he said, "if you had known. Life itself revolves around that expression."

For a while there was silence, Bartley standing and looking down at Underwood, who had buried his head in his hands. Finally, going back to his chair, Bartley spoke.

"What time was it when you saw your father last night?"

"You mean the last time?" asked the boy, looking up.

"I mean the last time, and for that matter all the times that you saw him last night."

"Well," came the reply, "I saw him after dinner around eight, and then some time a little after ten. That was in the library."

"Now," asked Bartley, "what were you talking about?"

The face of the young man flushed red. He half rose to his feet, and I could see that he was angry at the question. His voice was raised a little as he answered.

"I fail to see what right you have to ask that. Whatever we talked about was entirely a private matter between us two."

Bartley smiled, a little amused smile, and his voice was soft as he answered.

"I am willing to assume that it was a private matter, and you do not have to tell me concerning your conversation, unless you wish. But, so far, you seem to be the last one that saw your father alive, and if I were in your place I would be frank and answer all that

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I ask you. It may be easier to explain some things now than it will be later."

Underwood's face went white while Bartley was speaking, and the horror was expressed in his voice as he stammered, "You don't mean—that any one—any one dares say that I killed my father?"

He rose to his feet, his fists clenched tight, and stood towering over Bartley. His eyes flashed his anger, and his voice trembled with rage as he tried to speak.

"Who dared say that I killed my father? How could they, who dared—"

"No one," said Bartley with a weary tone, pushing the boy back on the bed. "No one,"—he paused, and then added significantly, "as yet." He waited for a second, as if he wished the boy to understand what he had just said, and then continued,

"But if you get in a rage every time some one asks you a question, some one will. For you know there seems to be one or two things that people will expect you to answer, and a little frankness now may save you much trouble later on. For I want you to remember that, after all, I wish to help you as much as I can, and frankness with me may save you a great deal of trouble later."

Underwood's anger seemed to leave him, and I fancied that he felt a bit ashamed at his outburst of a moment before, for he said meekly enough. "I will answer any questions that you wish, sir. You see Father had been a little angry with me, since I was thrown out of college. He wanted me to go back this fall, but I wished to try my hand at the flying game."

And then Bartley, smiling, added, "And, I judge, he also got after you for gambling."

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The face of the young man flushed, but his eyes met ours. "Yes, he did. I played quite a bit back in June, but I had no luck, and when father heard that I was going to Clark's he cut off my allowance and said a few hot things to me."

"Did he forbid your staying at the house?" asked Bartley.

"Not exactly. It was like this. I went to him several times for money, and when he found out what I wanted it for he was angry. We had a few words, and I said that I would stay with a few friends in a camp on the shore. I told him that I would stay there a while, and he retorted—" and the boy's face grew crimson—"that I better stay till I learned a little sense."

"And what brought you back?" was the question.

Underwood smiled, for the first time since we had entered the room—a boyish smile that lighted up his whole face. "I saw what a fool I had been."

Bartley looked amused at the answer, and then asked, "And last night when you saw your father did you have any quarrel, raise your voices or the like?"

"No, sir. For a moment Father seemed rather excited, maybe I better say surprised. But we soon fixed things up. I told him that I was sorry I had acted the part of the fool, and that I was willing to go back to college in the fall. That seemed to please him, and in the end we were on good terms."

"And you had no loud words?"

"No," answered Underwood. "When I first came in Father raised his voice, and said, 'I thought you were going to stay with your friends.' But maybe it was because he was disturbed over something. He has been

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disturbed, acted nervous and irritable all summer. I don't know what over though."

Bartley moved uneasily in his chair, and the interested look came back to his face, as he asked, "You say he has been disturbed all summer over something. What do you mean?"

"Well," answered Underwood, "Father was always a very busy man, but he was always cheerful. But this summer I noticed a change. There were many days that he did not seem to care to talk with any one. He would lose his temper—a rather strange thing for him. He acted tired, and I got the idea that he was worried—anyway he seemed to age."

Bartley was silent after the boy closed, and it was a number of minutes before he asked,

"How long did you stay with him?"

"Not very long; he gave me some money, and asked me about the trip, wishing me good luck. I did not ask him for the money, and he only said, 'Don't play all this away.' I doubt if I was in the library over thirty minutes in all."

"How much money did he give you?" came the question.

"Five hundred dollars, in fifty-dollar bills. He took it out of his pocket, saying I would wish some money. He had a thin package of bills, and gave me half of them."

Bartley shot a quick glance at me. Underwood seemed to be candid enough, but I wondered what had become of the rest of the money that Vance said he had given him. But my thoughts were broken by Bartley's voice:

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"You then went out. Did he seem rather eager to have you go?"

The boy looked startled at the question.

"I don't understand how you knew that," he said, "but I thought he wanted me to go. How did you know?"

Bartley smiled. "Oh, it was a venture. Did you see any one when you went out?"

"No one."

I did not expect the next question which was: "By the way, do you own a revolver?"

The young man did not answer at first, and to me seemed to hesitate longer than was necessary before replying, and when he did speak said, "No."

"Well," said Bartley, "that is all I want to know tonight. We had better all get some sleep."

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CHAPTER VII

THE PROBE OF THE LAW

I WAS aroused the next morning by the sun, which had found its way into my room and was shining in my eyes. For a while I ran over in my mind the many events of the previous night, building up theories only to discard them in the end.

I pondered over things for a while and at last arose and dressed. Going to the door of Bartley's room, I opened it and peered within, only to find it empty. I went out into the hall, down the stairs, pausing for a moment to look at the library door, which was closed. Before I got to the front of the house I was met by the butler, whose silent, expressionless face seemed even more sober than it had been the night before. He bowed and said, "I will serve your breakfast in just a moment, sir."

I followed him into the dining-room. Seating myself, I picked up a paper that was folded by my plate. Because of some serious labor troubles, the story of the murder, which on any other day would have been given the chief place in the paper, was on the third page. When I came to that page my eyes met the following headlines:

JOHN UNDERWOOD MURDERED

WEALTHY FINANCIER FOUND DEAD AT HIS SUMMER HOME

Murderer and Motive Unknown

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There was little need for me to read the short account of the crime, for I knew that the news had been kept back, till just about the time the morning papers would be going to press, and that but little news had been given out anyway. The half column account was devoted more to Underwood's life than his death, and no other facts relating to the case were chronicled than the bare statement of the headlines.

I smiled a bit as I pictured the scene in the office of the paper when the news of the crime came in over the press wire. There would be just the mere fact of the murder, and the paper would be on the verge of going to press. The rest of the article was simply a story of Underwood's life, and a guess at the amount of his wealth. Also there was a rather long account of his marriage.

The butler coming in at this time caused me to drop the paper and turn my attention to my breakfast. I had just finished my grape fruit when Bartley came in He was in a rare humour, and I could tell that he must be pleased with something, but what over I did not know.

The butler had started to pour my coffee when Bartley asked him:

"By the way, William, you locked up last night?"

The old man turned.

"Oh, yes, sir, as I always do."

"And you are sure you locked the doors?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if some one said they found the front door unlocked and even open early in the morning, what would you say?"

The butler looked rather puzzled, started to speak,

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and then paused for a moment, hesitating, and said,

"I locked it, sir, and unlocked it when I came down this morning, but if any one had found it open it would have been the second time, sir."

The amused air that Bartley had been wearing vanished in a second at the answer. His voice was eager as he asked,

"What do you mean?"

Again the butler hesitated before replying,

"I mean, sir, that several weeks ago I came down one morning and a window in the dining-room was open. Not very much, sir, but as I had locked it the night previous I wondered how it got opened. And at the same time the front door that I had locked the night before was unlocked and slightly open."

"Did you you tell any one about it?" asked Bartley.

"Not at first, sir. You see, I thought maybe I had overlooked it. But when several days later I found another window open I changed my mind, for this time I was sure that I had locked it. I looked the silver and things over, but there was not a thing missing."

After the butler had gone Bartley turned to me. "Pelt, I wish that you would say nothing about what took place last night in the library. I have told Vance and William to say nothing. At present we can not explain what happened, who hit you, or, above all, what they were after. What it was, there is no doubt they did not have time to get it, for you came in on them too soon."

He picked up the paper, saying, "I gave the papers a hint of the murder last night. The reporters are already here, and I have talked with them. There was not much to tell them, however." Presently Bartley turned to

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me again and said, "It may amuse you to know that I was offered another case this morning before breakfast. Of course I refused it. Just another of those jewellery robberies. You know the Winslows; he is mixed up with the copper crowd on the street. His wife went to a dance at the club two nights ago, and she came home to find that all her jewels were gone. It was not a big haul, about fifteen thousand dollars in all. The detective handling the case wanted me in consulting capacity. But I told him I was tied up here. It was rather ordinary anyway."

At that moment Vance came in sight, the same calm figure of the night before, his manner slow. Yet there was something about him that gave me the impression that there was far more life in him than I thought he had from his looks. From behind his slightly tinted glasses I caught the glint of a keen pair of eyes, eyes that had a sharpness that did not go with the apparent calmness of his manner. With a quick glance that took us all in, he said,

"The coroner is here, sir, and says that the inquest is ready to begin. He asked me to find you, Mr. Bartley, and tell you."

Bartley rose, going to the window.

"Very well, Vance, and, by the way, do you know who lives in the bungalow across the way."

The secretary shot a quick glance at the house that was pointed out; in fact, I did myself. It was a half-stone, half-wooden bungalow, and was about five hundred yards away. It was on the next estate, if one could call it that, to Underwood's, and a great stone wall stood between the two grounds. Vance I thought hesitated before he spoke.

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"The house belongs to the Holt estate, but this year it is being occupied by Arthur Ransome, the actor,"—he paused for a moment and then added, "He is an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Underwood and has spent a good deal of time here this summer."

When I started to follow Vance from the room, Bartley signaled me to remain. When Vance was out of hearing, he said,

"We will take that remark about Ransome being a friend of Underwood's with a grain of salt. I have already got a line on him from Robert. He knows Mrs. Underwood all right; in fact, he played in vaudeville with her, in an act he wrote himself, about a year before Underwood married her. But he is not the kind of a chap that Underwood would bother with. After Mrs. Underwood was married, Ransome settled down in New York and he has hit up a good many of the high spots of the tenderloin during the past year. Still I didn't get much against him, except that Underwood did not have much to do with him. It must cost Ransome a pretty bit of money to rent that place for the season. His excuse for being here is that he has a play that opens at one of Underwood's theatres this fall. But we better not keep the coroner waiting."

We went out of the room, down through the hall, to the library. From within came the hum of voices. It was fairly well filled, mostly with men, and, as all curious spectators had been forbidden, most of the men evidently had business there.

About the first person that I recognized was young Underwood, who was standing alone near the window. When he saw us, he came over at once. Though he had taken pains with his dress, it was plain to see that he was

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ill at ease and nervous. He nodded to me, and then Bartley drew him to one side where they talked in a low tone for several moments. As Bartley turned to greet the coroner, who was approaching him, I heard him say to the young man, "Don't worry, or lose your nerve, and it will come out all right." But even these words, at which he again gave his forced smile, did not seem to reassure him very much.

The coroner, who had now come over, impressed me a bit better than he had done the night before; maybe it was because he had been shaved and was wearing another suit. Still at the best he did not impress me as being any better than the average coroner, who had been given his job because of politics. Standing with him was District Attorney Sullivan, who had brought us into the case, and who now informed us that so far the police had done very little, and that they had no ideas regarding the crime at all. He added that the inquest would be a mere formality, for there was little to go on, and very little evidence to hear. I judged from this that he had a rather poor opinion of the local police.

The coroner now at the desk rapped for order. Bartley had managed to secure two chairs, near one of the windows, where he was able to take in the whole room at a glance, and at the same time be half hidden by the draperies.

A coroner's inquest is a queer thing at the best, and this one was not the best. To start with, the average coroner is a man of little ability, who holds his office because of politics. He is dealing with a crime that calls for a many-sided knowledge, and one that as a rule a coroner never has. The average coroner's jury, which is not used in all States, as a rule, does not rank up

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with the coroner himself in intelligence. They are as a rule made up of men with nothing to do, broken down business men and political hangers on. Bartley had often said that we needed a trained body of men, who had some knowledge of law, a bit of medicine and science, who had been educated to act as jurymen. And when I looked this jury over, I decided that he was right.

The coroner then rose, and, after a rather impressive gaze around the room, stated in a few words the object of the inquest. He then told us that he would first call as a witness District Attorney Sullivan.

While Sullivan was taking his place, which was a chair by the side of the coroner, I glanced around the room. There was, if we excepted the jury, only a few in it. I noticed young Underwood, his face rather white, and appearing a little uneasy. Across from him was Vance, with his face expressionless. There were also near by three or four old men, but the only one that I knew was the butler. Near the coroner sat half a dozen reporters, some of which I knew, and who smiled a greeting across at me.

Sullivan's testimony was brief, he having the ability to say what he knew in a few words. In response to the coroner's questions he stated that he had received a phone call about nine-thirty the previous day, asking him to come over at once to the Underwood residence.

"Do you know who sent the message?" asked the coroner.

"No," was the answer, "nor did I know what was wanted till I reached the house." He paused, waiting for the next question.

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"Tell us what you found when you reached the house."

"Well," said Sullivan, "the butler opened the door. He seemed rather broken up. Almost behind him was Mr. Vance, who told me that Mr. Underwood had killed himself. The chief of police had also been called and arrived shortly before me. He was accompanied by Patrolman Jenkins. They knew that I was on the way and waited until I came before inspecting the premises. The butler took us to the library, showing us the door with a broken panel and telling us that they had smashed it in order to get into the room. He said the door was locked in the inside, and that all they had to do was smash a panel and reach in and turn the key. The key was still in the door. Mr. Underwood was sitting in a chair by his desk. He was dead, a bullet hole in his head. We made a search of the room, but found nothing that would throw any light upon the affair. Though Mr. Underwood had been shot, yet we were unable to find the revolver."

"Did you ask if any of those who entered the room the first time had seen a revolver?"

"I did, but the butler and Vance both said that they had not seen one."

"And what about the windows?" asked the coroner.

"They were locked, fastened on the inside."

The foreman of the jury, who had been listening very closely, here asked,

"I take it you mean they were locked when you looked at them."

Bartley turned to me with an approving smile. "The foreman shows that he has a head."

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Sullivan turned in his chair. "Yes, naturally, I mean I found them locked. I know nothing, personally, as to how they were when the man was found dead. But I was told that nothing in the room had been changed, that everything had been left as they found it. Both the butler and Mr. Vance said they found the windows locked when they tried to enter the room. Mrs. Underwood was with them at the time, they told me."

The coroner consulted a paper that he had, then asked, "Who were in the room with you?"

"Simply Vance, the butler, Jenkins and the chief."

The next question came as a surprise to me.

"You said that Mr. Vance told you that it was a case of suicide. ' Did you receive that impression yourself?"

"Yes," came the response, "though, as I remember, I think he used the expression, that he 'thought it was suicide.' I myself for a while agreed with him."

"What caused you to change your mind?"

Sullivan did not answer for a moment, and when he did he spoke very slowly.

"When I first saw the room I found that the windows were locked, locked on the inside. I was told that they had found them that way, when they tried to get in. Then they said the door was also locked, locked on the inside, with the key in the lock. Nothing had been touched in the room. Naturally knowing that it was impossible for any one to leave the room, and at the same time have the doors and windows locked on the inside, my first thought was suicide. There was no other way out of the room, except by the door or the windows; they were locked—therefore, suicide. But if that was the case, we should have found the revolver. It was not

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in the room. I was told that they had not found one when they broke in. There is one other thing that also caused me to change my mind. If Mr. Underwood had shot himself, there should have been traces of the powder on his face. It was unmarked. So, taking all those things into consideration, I now believe that he was murdered."

I shot a glance at Bartley, who smiled. I knew that he was thinking that Sullivan had not reached that decision until he, Bartley, had suggested it. This finished Sullivan's testimony.

The chief and Jenkins testified in turn and corroborated Sullivan's testimony in every detail.

The coroner, after a glance at the paper in his hand, then called out the name of Dr. Drew. The doctor was a young man, may be thirty-five years old, clean shaven, with a keen, intellectual face. He gave me the impression that he knew his business. Aside from the technical phrases, that doctors love to use, and which I have forgotten, his testimony given in a clear, crisp voice was as follows:

"I was called on the phone yesterday morning, a little before nine o'clock, and asked to come at once to Mr. Underwood's. When I arrived, I was shown into the library by Mr. Vance, who told me at the door that Mr. Underwood was dead. I found him sitting in the chair by his desk. A glance told me that he had been dead for some hours. I took pains not to disturb the body or molest anything in the room."

At this point the coroner asked him to describe the wound, which he did, in language which was rather obtuse, but which might be given in these words. "The bullet entered above his right temple, and passing down-

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ward slightly passed through his brain to the back of his head. His death must have been instantaneous."

"Could the wound be self-inflicted?" asked the coroner.

"I would say not, though there is a faint possibility that it could. But I would say it would be almost impossible to fire the shot, that is to have had Mr. Underwood do it, without his leaving some trace of powder, or burning the skin. I mean if it was self-inflicted. Then again death would have come so quickly that the fingers would have retained their grip on the gun. I myself would say that the shot was fired some feet away, and not by Mr. Underwood himself."

"Then you say he was murdered?" said the coroner.

"Well," answered the doctor, "the evidence I found would not indicate that he shot himself."

"Did you reach any conclusion as to how long he had been dead?"

The doctor nodded. "I should say that he had been dead around ten hours. It's rather hard to say exactly how long a man has been dead, but we can come very near the time. It was just about nine o'clock in the morning when I first saw the body. From the changes that had taken place in the body I fixed the time when he was killed as some time around the hour of eleven the night before."

Bartley, who had followed the doctor's testimony very carefully, nodded his head at the last statement, in agreement.

"You performed the autopsy last night. Did you find anything to change your first impression?"

The doctor fumbled in his pocket and brought forth an object that was wrapped in tissue paper, which he

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unrolled before he spoke. "I did not change my opinion, either of the manner of his death or the time, but I found this."

Everybody in the room was craning their necks to see what the object was that the doctor had handed the coroner. In a second I saw that it was a bullet, which the coroner fingered a moment and then silently handed to the foreman. Then in a few sentences bristling with medical terms the doctor described the course of the bullet and the position in the head where he had found it.

The last question that was asked him was, "And you would say that Mr. Underwood's death was caused by this bullet?"

"Yes," was the answer, and with that he was dismissed from the stand.

For a few moments the district attorney and the coroner engaged in a whispered conversation that at times seemed to grow rather animated. The district attorney several times shook his head, and once brought his fist down on the table. I began to wonder what it was all about and who the next witness would be, when the name of George Vance was called.

I happened to be looking directly at Underwood as Vance rose slowly to his feet and walked to the desk. Up to this time the young man had apparently been little interested in the proceeding, or if he had been he concealed his feelings, sitting back in his chair with a rather listless air. But with the calling of Vance I saw a change. His body stiffened, and I saw his hands clench at the arm of the chair. As Vance, after being sworn in, dropped into the chair, he turned and for a moment his eyes met Underwood's. The expression upon his face was hard to analyse, and I glanced back

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at Underwood. Upon his face there was the faintest sign of a sneer, and his eyes did not leave Vance, who in a moment turned away. Underwood had outstared him. The action all took place in the barest part of a moment and was so barely noticeable that I almost wondered if I had not been mistaken. But glancing at Bartley, I found that his eyes were fixed on Vance, and I knew that he had noticed it also. For a moment I wondered what it might indicate. Apparently the feeling between Underwood and his father's secretary was rather strained. But what it might mean I did not know. But whatever my thoughts might have been, I never knew, for the next moment Vance commenced his testimony.

He gave his answers in a rather low voice, speaking very slowly, and using his words with much care. More than once, before he left the stand, it seemed to me that he was not answering the coroner's questions as fully as he might. But I might have been wrong in this impression.

In answer to the first question he stated that he was twenty-six years of age, a graduate of Williams College, and that for the last two years he had been Underwood's private secretary, at a salary of $3,000 a year. His duties were the usual ones of a secretary. He paused after this, waiting for the next question. In fact, what information the coroner got out of him he had to ask for, for Vance himself never volunteered any.

The coroner said. "Tell us in your own way of your discovery of Mr. Underwood's body."

Vance settled himself back in his chair, and after a moment's thought, commenced: "It was always Mr. Underwood's custom, while here, to have his breakfast at

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eight. He was very prompt in being at the table at that time, and disliked very much to have me late, I being supposed to eat with him. Yesterday morning when at 8:30 he had not come down, I thought that he might have overslept. I went to his rooms and knocked at the door. There was no answer, and I knocked again. Then as he still did not answer I tried the door, and finding it unlocked opened it. He was not in his room, and the bed had not been slept in. I then asked Williams to find out from Mrs. Underwood's maid if he was with her. But the maid returned and said that Mrs. Underwood had not seen him since dinner the night before. I then went down to the library, but the door was locked. This was so unusual that I began to wonder, and to be a little alarmed. Knowing that I could obtain a view of the room by looking through the windows, I called Williams and we went to the front of the house. The windows, as you can see, are too high for one to see into the room without using a ladder. So Williams secured a ladder and I climbed up and looked into the library. I could, of course, see very plainly everything in the room. Mr. Underwood was seated at his desk."

"Did you know then that he was dead?" came the question.

Vance answered a little warmly, "Of course not. Though after I had tapped on the window and he made no response I began to think that there was something wrong. I tapped again, and still no response."

"Did you try to enter the room through the windows?"

"Yes, but I could not raise them; they were locked."

Bartley rose at this and went over to the coroner.

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The jury watched him with interest, no doubt wondering who he was; but the reporters gave him one look, and then started to write in great haste. They recognized the fact that if Bartley was in the case there must be something up. For a few moments he talked to the coroner in a low tone that no one could hear. As he came back to his seat the coroner asked Vance,

"Tell us just how you made sure the windows were locked?"

"There are three windows," said Vance. "The ladder was up against the center window. I tried that and it was locked. Then I reached over and tried the other two, but was not able to move them; they were locked. I found later when we looked at the windows after we reached the room that they were locked. Williams then went up the ladder and also tried the windows. He suggested that Mrs. Underwood had better be notified. So we went in the house, and I notified Mrs. Underwood. She came downstairs and ordered me to break down the door. I got a hatchet and smashed the panel, and put my arm through. The key was in the lock, and all I had to do was unlock the door. We entered the room and found that Mr. Underwood was dead."

He paused for a moment, and the room waited for the next question.

"Did you look for any weapon?"

"We did. In fact we looked all over the room. You see that under the circumstances we thought that Mr. Underwood had killed himself. But we did not find any revolver, though we hunted the library over."

"Who do you mean by we?"

"Williams, Mrs. Underwood, and myself. I think

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her maid came in after we had entered the room, sometime later, but these were all that were in."

"Would you say that there was anything missing from the room?" asked the coroner.

Vance hesitated for some time, replying, "So far as I could see there was nothing disturbed. The papers on the desk had not been touched, and his personal things were all right, though we did not touch his body or look through his clothes. That was done by Mr. Sullivan, after he came, but I was with him and he found that nothing had been taken."

I turned to Bartley to whisper that Vance had not said anything about the $3,000, but Bartley simply shook his head, so I said nothing. But the fact that he hesitated when asked if anything was missing, and then said nothing about the money, struck me as rather strange. But the next question opened up a new line of evidence, if it could be called evidence, for so far we had nothing that threw any light on the crime.

"Was Mr. Underwood's son in the house at the time you found the body?"

I glanced at the young man before Vance gave the answer. He was ill at ease, and moved nervously in his chair.

"He was not. I know little about his movements, but I think he had left the night before on a yachting trip."

"Now, Mr. Vance," continued the coroner, "I understand that, so far as we can find out, you were the last person that saw Mr. Underwood alive. Will you give us all the circumstances, tell us just the time, and when it was you saw him."

"As a rule," replied Vance, "it was my duty to assist

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him with the evening mail. That evening I left him around eight o'clock as he said he wished to work the rest of the evening alone. So I said good night, and went to my room to read."

"And you never saw him alive again?"

"No, I never saw him alive after that."

"Now," said the coroner, "as far as you know eight o'clock would be the latest that you knew Mr. Underwood to be alive."

Vance smiled at this, a rather strange sort of a smile; there was a lot in it, and I wondered just what was behind it.

"On the contrary," said Vance, "I do know that he was still alive at least three hours after I left him."

The coroner leaned across the desk, as he shot out the next question.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. I came downstairs in the hall around eleven o'clock. I had some letters that I wished to be taken out in the morning mail and went down to leave them on the table from which the postman always took the mail. The library door was closed, but I could hear voices in the room as I passed by, and I was able to distinguish Mr. Underwood's."

I looked at Bartley significantly and saw that he also had noted the discrepancy in the testimony, for Vance had told us that it was ten o'clock when he had heard Robert Underwood talking with his father.

"Were these voices loud?" questioned the coroner.

"The voices were loud, though I was unable to distinguish anything that was said. In fact, I did not try to, or for that matter pause by the door. But I could

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tell that the persons within the room were quarrelling.''

"Could you tell who was talking?''

"Yes, one was Mr. Underwood; the other voice was that of his son.''

A startled look came over the faces of the jury, and involuntarily it seemed as if every one in the room turned to look at young Underwood. He sat gripping the arms of his chair, but keeping his eyes on Vance, who, however, did not glance at him once. There was the faintest trace of a sneer on his lips, though his face flushed as the questioning went on.

"You say that they were quarrelling. What makes you sure of that?''

Vance smiled again, the same evil smile that I had noticed before.

"Well, their voices were very loud, otherwise I would not have heard them at all because of the surf. Men as a rule do not lift their voices as high as these were unless they are quarrelling. Mr. Underwood was doing most of the talking, and I could tell by the tone that he was angry.''

"And you say this was around eleven o'clock?''

"Yes, sir,'' came the reply, in positive tones.

The coroner hesitated before he asked the next question.

"Mr. Vance, as Mr. Underwood's private secretary you of course must have been somewhat familiar with his family affairs. Tell us what the relations were that existed between Mr. Underwood and his son. I mean by that, were they on good terms, or was there anything over which they might have quarrelled?''

Vance did not reply at first, and it seemed as if he was not very eager to speak. In fact it was not until

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the coroner had repeated the question again, that he answered.

"I hardly like to answer, sir, but to tell the truth they were not very good. In fact Mr. Underwood had practically forbidden his son to stay at home, and that was one reason why I was surprised when I heard his voice in the library."

At this, I saw young Underwood half rise from his chair, and for a second I thought he was going to speak, but in a moment he thought better of it and sank down again.

"You say," continued the coroner, "that there was ill feeling between the two. How far would you say that this feeling had gone?"

"I cannot exactly tell," answered Vance, "but I do know that Mr. Underwood had threatened to change his will and to cut off his son. I believe also that he did stop his son's allowance. Just what caused the ill feeling I do not know, though I do know that his son's playing at Clark's had something to do with it. He lost quite a sum of money there this summer."

At this the coroner turned to the chief of the town police, who was near by and said, "That's a gambling house, isn't it, Francis?"

The chief smiled a sheepish smile as he answered, "I have heard that there is such a place."

At this several laughed, for Clark's was known the country over, and the question had been asked more than once why it was that the local police did not close the place.

"Did Mr. Underwood keep a revolver?" was the next question.

"I do not know," answered Vance.

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"Do you know if there was a gun in the house?"

Again Vance hesitated before his reply was made, and then it was simply to say that he did not know of any, but a second afterwards he changed his reply and said, "Come to think of it, I believe that Mr. Underwood, that is the son, had a revolver the early part of the summer. I do not know much about it, but I think that he disposed of it. I heard him say he was going to, and have no doubt but what he did."

It mattered not if Vance intended it or not, but he had given some damaging testimony against the son. He had told that the father and son had quarrelled, and had wound up by saying that the young man had owned a gun. From the expressions on the faces of the jury I knew that they also saw the testimony in the same light that I did. But Vance sat unconcerned, seemingly not realizing what he had said, or that he had injured the young man.

"Mr. Vance," asked the coroner, "do you know of any reason why any person should desire Mr. Underwood's death, or any reason why he should be killed?"

After a moment's silence the answer came, "I do not."

The coroner here held a short whispered conversation with the district attorney, and then asked,

"Did you hear a shot the night Mr. Underwood was killed?"

"No, sir. I doubt if one could have heard one. The surf was pounding very hard on the shore."

"Now, one other matter and I am through. After you left, for I take it you did leave the room to telephone the doctor, who was left in it?"

"No one, sir. Mrs. Underwood said that she under-

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stood that the law required everything left as it was found, so we all came out, closing the door, and left it till he came. No one else entered it.''

The next moment the coroner dismissed him and he left the stand. His testimony had not proven anything, but it had thrown suspicion upon the young man and had left many things for him to explain. But the case was now getting interesting, and there seemed to be much that had to be cleared up. While I was pondering over it there came a little commotion in the rear of the room. I saw Bartley turn, look back for a moment, and then he leaned over to speak to me.

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CHAPTER VIII

A WOMAN ENTERS

WHEN I turned to follow Bartley's gaze, I saw that the woman that had just entered the room was one of the most beautiful that I had ever seen. I did not need his whispered "Mrs. Underwood" to recognize her. I had seen her pictures many times, and for that matter had also seen her when she was upon the stage, in that year before her marriage, when New York was hailing her as the most beautiful show girl of the season.

In truth, for some reason or other, I had not thought of her in connection with the case. If I had given her any thought at all, it was to picture her overcome with grief at the tragedy that had taken place. Yet as I looked at her, though there were slight signs of nervousness, which could be seen if one observed closely, and rather dark circles under her eyes, still there were none of the extreme signs of grief that I expected to see. At least she had not been overcome by the crime. She had not even gone into mourning, for which I think she showed her sense. Her dress was of some light blue silk, that fitted her perfect figure rather closely, and was cut rather low. Her rich clear complexion had a slight tint of color, but this might have been the result of seeing all eyes turned on her. She was beautiful enough, that there was no doubt of, young, not being at the most over twenty-three and looking about eighteen, but as she

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leisurely seated herself she certainly did not look like a recently bereaved widow.

Though I had noticed that her French maid was with her, yet I paid her but little attention, but watched the man who closely followed her. He was hard to describe, being that common type seen so often in professional men of all kinds. He was also young, with a rather cold face, black hair and eyes, and with it all a rather blasé air. He was dressed faultlessly enough, in a striped suit, the only thing that seemed to me out of place being the extra wide black ribbon that fell from his wide-rimmed glasses. He assisted Mrs. Underwood into a chair, and seated himself by her side.

Bartley, noticing that I was looking at him, said simply, "That's Ransome."

Young Underwood did not rise when his step-mother entered, but I saw her flash a smile at him when their eyes met, a smile that he did not return. For a space I wondered how he liked having a step-mother of his own age, but I soon dismissed the thought and turned to look at Williams, the butler, who was now being sworn in.

There was something about the old man that appealed to me. One had but to look at the kindly face, crowned by the white hair, to know that here was an honest man. For many years, I understood that he had been the family butler, first for the dead man's father. Any one could tell that the death of his master had shaken him. His face was sad, and his hand trembled as he took his seat in the chair. While the coroner questioned him, it was necessary to repeat many of them a second time before the old man was able to sense them. And even then it was only after long pauses that he was able

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to answer, pauses in which he seemed to search for words with which to answer.

He commenced his testimony by telling of the years of service in the family, years that stretched far back to the childhood of the murdered man, and it was plain to see that the relations that existed between the master and servant had been founded on mutual regard and respect. His testimony, or at least the earlier parts of it, in which he told of his service in the family, was of little importance, though he did give one answer that opened up a line that had not been touched upon by any one else. The coroner had asked a simple question which had been misunderstood by the butler, for the old servant answered, "I noticed, sir, that during the spring Mr. Underwood had seemed to be disturbed by something, worried like."

The coroner was quick to follow it up.

"Explain more fully what you mean? What was it caused you to see any change in his manner?"

"Well, sir," began the old man, "I don't know what it was that caused me to think this. It was not any one thing that made me think he was worried. But I did see a change in him this spring. As a rule the master was a very pleasant man, always cheerful, always smiling, with a word for all the servants. But in April—I think it was—I saw a change. He became rather silent, went about having little to say, and did not smile much. He even spoke rather harshly to me at times, sir, a thing that he had never done in all the years I have been in the family, and I knew that there must be something wrong. But what it was I did not know, though I sometimes thought that it might be that he was a bit worried over business."

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The coroner then took up another line of attack.

"Was there any trouble between Mr. Underwood and his son? You have heard Mr. Vance say that Mr. Underwood was very angry at his son, and that they had quarrelled. What do you know about it?"

"There was no trouble that I know of." The tone was so earnest that one could see that the young man was a favourite. "I know that Mr. Robert did not wish to return to college, while his father was determined that he should. But I do not call this trouble, and do not know of any serious trouble."

"And no trouble over gambling?" came the question.

"Why, not what I would call trouble, sir. The young man had played a little, as all do—all gentlemen."

At this, a laugh went round the room, and even the jury unbended and condescended to smile. The room was stilled in a moment however, as the butler went on:

"Mr. Robert did lose some money, for at breakfast one morning he told his father that he wished some money, because he had lost what he had, at Clark's, and owed a small amount there. But the amount was very small, sir. The master said, I could not help hearing him, that it was time he acted like a man, and that after that he would give him no more money to play with. But he did say he would pay that bill. But there was not any quarrel, sir, for the master paid the amount, and very little was said. I never heard them quarrelling. Why, the master thought everything of his son, sir, and the boy loved his father."

The coroner did not continue this line of questioning any further, but by his questions brought the old man down to the evening of the crime. The butler testified that Mr. Underwood, after dinner, had gone into the

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library, having eaten alone, Mrs. Underwood, who had been in New York, had returned during the afternoon, but had not come down to dinner because of a headache. He told of seeing Vance leave the library, sometime around eight o'clock, and of his going upstairs. This left him, the only person, with the exception of Mr. Underwood, that was on the first floor.

The coroner asked, "Did you see any one go into the library, after Vance left?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "Robert came in shortly after eight, and went into his father's library. I did not hear any voices, for I was busy with my duties."

"And that was the last time that you saw Mr. Underwood alive?"

"Oh, no, sir. I was in the hall when Mr. Robert left the room, and his father came to the door with him, and spoke to him a moment. He only came to the door of the library, for I let Mr. Robert out myself and then went up to my room. As I passed the library door, I could see Mr. Underwood at his desk. He was writing."

"And what time would this be?"

"Shortly after ten; the hall clock struck while I was letting the young man out of the house."

It was only a few moments before that Vance had said he had heard Mr. Underwood and his son quarrelling in the library, and he had fixed the time around eleven. Yet here was the butler swearing that the young man had left the house around ten. Not only saying it was around ten, but also saying the clock struck that hour as he let the young man out. And these two statements did not agree; both, it seemed, could not be right. If the young man left the house at ten, it could not have

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been his voice that was heard around eleven by Vance; that is, unless he had returned to the house.

The coroner saw this, for he asked, "Did Mr. Underwood, the son, return to the house?"

"Not that I know of. I came downstairs in a very few moments after I went up to my room, in ten minutes at the most. The library door was closed then."

"Was the outside door, I mean the door that opened into the house, locked?" asked the coroner.

"The outside door was not locked. But there are two doors. One, the inner door, was fastened with a chain, which was in place when I went to lock it. That was the reason why I came downstairs again, having forgotten to lock the inner door. I locked it and then went up to my room for the night."

"And do you not think any one could have come in while you were upstairs?"

"I doubt it, sir."

"Now," asked the coroner, "you say you came down to lock the inner door. What time was that, and did you hear any voices from the library as you passed the door?"

Williams was silent a moment, a puzzled look coming over his face. After a while he spoke: "It was about eleven o'clock, sir. As for the voices, I am not sure, sir. For a moment I thought I did hear some one, but then later, when I thought of it, I was not sure. You see, I was not trying to listen, and simply went past the door on my way to my room."

"You say for a moment you thought that you heard a voice. Why are you uncertain of this?"

"If I did hear any one speak, sir, it was only the

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tone of a voice. I could not make out any words. I did not try to."

"If you heard a voice in the room, was anything about it any tone something that you could distinguish?"

The answer came quickly. It was easy to see that the butler was not very sure as to his having heard any one speak.

"Oh, no, sir; in fact it was so indistinct that for a moment I thought—" He paused and left the answer unfinished.

"You thought what?" came the quick question.

Williams again hesitated, speaking at length in a very apologetic tone.

"It was but a fancy, sir, for there was nothing to base it upon, yet it seemed as if—" There came a long pause, in which we waited for the answer. Bartley was leaning forward in his chair, the keen, interested look coming into his eyes.

"As if what?" came the impatient question of the coroner.

"As if the voice was a woman's."

It was like a shot, coming in a still room, for the answer was so very unexpected, and the surprise was to be seen on every face. It was the first sensational twist to the inquest. I turned to glance at Mrs. Underwood—others were doing the same thing—and saw her face flush and her lips tremble. She leaned across in her chair to speak to Ransome, who bent his head and smiled as he whispered to her. The next moment she was her composed self. The jury exchanged glances, while the coroner himself looked surprised.

Williams noticed the effect that his answer had caused,

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and added, "You understand, sir, I cannot swear that it was a woman's voice, but I thought I heard some one speaking, and somehow I got the idea that it was a woman, but I am not sure."

The coroner spent a good deal of time after this in endeavouring to draw from the witness his reasons for thinking that he heard a woman's voice. But all he could get out of Williams was his repeated answer that though he was not certain that he heard any one speak as he passed the library door, yet, if he did, there was something in the tone of the voice that made him think it was a woman's voice. But whose it was he could not say. Despite all the coroner's efforts to make him answer in a more definite way, he was not able to get any other sort of a reply from him.

He did testify that the next morning when he came down to his work he noticed that the library door was still closed. However, he did not try the door, for it was necessary for him to see that the breakfast was ready. From then on his testimony agreed with that which had been given by Vance.

His complete testimony had thrown little light on the crime, and to me it seemed to leave things in a more unsettled condition then they were before. If he told the truth, and there was no doubt that he had told the truth, then the question as to who was in the room with Mr. Underwood, after the son left at ten o'clock was one that would be hard to settle. In fact, it seemed that Vance must have come down after the butler left the hall for the last time.

The coroner now called Mrs. Underwood. She rose and went to the chair, laying her hand on her stepson's shoulder as she passed him. She was pale and

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nervous, the colour had left her cheeks, and one could tell that what was to follow was distasteful to her. But her beauty shed a radiance over the room, and both the coroner and the jury seemed touched by the wistful, questioning glance that she cast at them. In fact the coroner apologized for having to question her at all, but stated that the law left him no other course. To this she answered in a rather low voice, that she doubted if she knew anything of importance, but that she would try to answer any questions that he might ask, if she was able to do it. As he commenced his questioning, the coroner's voice showed that he stood somewhat in awe of a woman at once so beautiful and at the same time so wealthy.

She told us that before her marriage she had been an actress, and that she had met her husband while playing in New York. She had married Mr. Underwood a little over a year and a half before. Then she came down to the night of the murder. She told us that she had been in New York for a few days, and that she arrived home that afternoon. She did not see her husband, not coming down to dinner because she had a headache. In fact she had not seen her husband till she found him dead in the library, for he did not come to her room. I wondered a bit at this, more so when she told us she had been away ten days. Going into details, which were of very little importance, she told of Vance coming and telling her that her husband was not in his room, and of his return a few moments later, excited and fearful, over what he had seen through the window. Her voice trembled as she described the breaking in of the door, and when she came to the finding of the body she broke down for a moment and wept. But only for a moment; the

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