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THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

By

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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GROSSET & DUNLAP
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THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE

CHAPTER I

I TAKE A COUNTRY HOUSE

THIS is the story of how a middle-aged spinster lost her mind, deserted her domestic gods in the city, took a furnished house for the summer out of town, and found herself involved in one of those mysterious crimes that keep our newspapers and detective agencies happy and prosperous. For twenty years I had been perfectly comfortable; for twenty years I had had the window-boxes filled in the spring, the carpets lifted, the awnings put up and the furniture covered with brown linen; for as many summers I had said good-by to my friends, and, after watching their perspiring hegira, had settled down to a delicious quiet in town, where the mail comes three times a day, and the water supply does not depend on a tank on the roof.

And then—the madness seized me. When I look

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back over the months I spent at Sunnyside, I wonder that I survived at all. As it is, I show the wear and tear of my harrowing experiences. I have turned very gray—Liddy reminded me of it, only yesterday, by saying that a little bluing in the rinse-water would make my hair silvery, instead of a yellowish white. I hate to be reminded of unpleasant things and I snapped her off.

"No," I said sharply, "I'm not going to use bluing at my time of life, or starch, either."

Liddy's nerves are gone, she says, since that awful summer, but she has enough left, goodness knows! And when she begins to go around with a lump in her throat, all I have to do is to threaten to return to Sunnyside, and she is frightened into a semblance of cheerfulness,—from which you may judge that the summer there was anything but a success.

The newspaper accounts have been so garbled and incomplete—one of them mentioned me but once, and then only as the tenant at the time the thing happened—that I feel it my due to tell what I know. Mr. Jamieson, the detective, said himself, he could never have done without me, although he gave me little enough credit, in print.

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I shall have to go back several years—thirteen, to be exact—to start my story. At that time my brother died, leaving me his two children. Halsey was eleven then, and Gertrude was seven. All the responsibilities of maternity were thrust upon me suddenly; to perfect the profession of motherhood requires precisely as many years as the child has lived, like the man who started to carry the calf and ended by walking along with the bull on his shoulders. However, I did the best I could. When Gertrude got past the hair-ribbon age, and Halsey asked for a scarf-pin and put on long trousers—and a wonderful help that was to the darning!—I sent them away to good schools. After that, my responsibility was chiefly postal, with three months every summer in which to replenish their wardrobes, look over their lists of acquaintances, and generally to take my foster-motherhood out of its nine months' retirement in camphor.

I missed the summers with them when, somewhat later, at boarding-school and college, the children spent much of their vacations with friends. Gradually I found that my name signed to a check was even more welcome than when signed to a letter, though I wrote them at stated intervals. But when Halsey had

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finished his electrical course and Gertrude her boarding-school, and both came home to stay, things were suddenly changed. The winter Gertrude came out was nothing but a succession of sitting up late at night to bring her home from things, taking her to the dressmakers between naps the next day, and discouraging ineligible youths with either more money than brains, or more brains than money. Also, I acquired a great many things: to say *lingerie* for under-garments, "frocks" and "gowns" instead of dresses, and that beardless sophomores are not college boys, but college men. Halsey required less personal supervision, and as they both got their mother's fortune that winter, my responsibility became purely moral. Halsey bought a car, of course, and I learned how to tie over my bonnet a gray baize veil, and, after a time, never to stop to look at the dogs one has run down. People are apt to be so unpleasant about their dogs.

The additions to my education made me a properly equipped maiden aunt, and by spring I was quite tractable. So when Halsey suggested camping in the Adirondacks and Gertrude wanted Bar Harbor, we compromised on a good country house with links near,

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within motor distance of town and telephone distance of the doctor. That was how we went to Sunnyside.

We went out to inspect the property, and it seemed to deserve its name. Its cheerful appearance gave no indication whatever of anything out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed unusual to me: the housekeeper, who had been left in charge, had moved from the house to the gardener's lodge, a few days before. As the lodge was far enough away from the house, it seemed to me that either fire or thieves could complete their work of destruction undisturbed. The property was an extensive one: the house on the top of a hill, which sloped away in great stretches of green lawn and clipped hedges, to the road; and across the valley, perhaps a couple of miles away, was the Greenwood Club House. Gertrude and Halsey were infatuated.

"Why, it's everything you want," Halsey said. "View, air, good water and good roads. As for the house, it's big enough for a hospital, if it has a Queen Anne front and a Mary Anne back," which was ridiculous: it was pure Elizabethan.

Of course we took the place; it was not my idea of comfort, being much too large and sufficiently isolated to make the servant question serious. But I give my-

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self credit for this: whatever has happened since, I never blamed Halsey and Gertrude for taking me there. And another thing: if the series of catastrophes there did nothing else, it taught me one thing—that somehow, somewhere, from perhaps a half-civilized ancestor who wore a sheepskin garment and trailed his food or his prey, I have in me the instinct of the chase. Were I a man I should be a trapper of criminals, trailing them as relentlessly as no doubt my sheepskin ancestor did his wild boar. But being an unmarried woman, with the handicap of my sex, my first acquaintance with crime will probably be my last. Indeed, it came near enough to being my last acquaintance with anything.

The property was owned by Paul Armstrong, the president of the Traders' Bank, who at the time we took the house was in the west with his wife and daughter, and a Doctor Walker, the Armstrong family physician. Halsey knew Louise Armstrong,—had been rather attentive to her the winter before, but as Halsey was always attentive to somebody, I had not thought of it seriously, although she was a charming girl. I knew of Mr. Armstrong only through his connection with the bank, where the children's money

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was largely invested, and through an ugly story about the son, Arnold Armstrong, who was reported to have forged his father's name, for a considerable amount, to some bank paper. However, the story had had no interest for me.

I cleared Halsey and Gertrude away to a house party, and moved out to Sunnyside the first of May. The roads were bad, but the trees were in leaf, and there were still tulips in the borders around the house. The arbutus was fragrant in the woods under the dead leaves, and on the way from the station, a short mile, while the car stuck in the mud, I found a bank showered with tiny forget-me-nots. The birds—don't ask me what kind; they all look alike to me, unless they have a hall mark of some bright color—the birds were chirping in the hedges, and everything breathed of peace. Liddy, who was born and bred on a brick pavement, got a little bit down-spirited when the crickets began to chirp, or scrape their legs together, or whatever it is they do, at twilight.

The first night passed quietly enough. I have always been grateful for that one night's peace; it shows what the country might be, under favorable circumstances. Never after that night did I put my

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head on my pillow with any assurance how long it would be there; or on my shoulders, for that matter.

On the following morning Liddy and Mrs. Ralston, my own housekeeper, had a difference of opinion, and Mrs. Ralston left on the eleven train. Just after luncheon, Burke, the butler, was taken unexpectedly with a pain in his right side, much worse when I was within hearing distance, and by afternoon he was started cityward. That night the cook's sister had a baby—the cook, seeing indecision in my face, made it twins on second thought—and, to be short, by noon the next day the household staff was down to Liddy and myself. And this in a house with twenty-two rooms and five baths!

Liddy wanted to go back to the city at once, but the milk-boy said that Thomas Johnson, the Armstrongs' colored butler, was working as a waiter at the Greenwood Club, and might come back. I have the usual scruples about coercing people's servants away, but few of us have any conscience regarding institutions or corporations—witness the way we beat railroads and street-car companies when we can—so I called up the club, and about eight o'clock Thomas Johnson came to see me. Poor Thomas!

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Well, it ended by my engaging Thomas on the spot, at outrageous wages, and with permission to sleep in the gardener's lodge, empty since the house was rented. The old man—he was white-haired and a little stooped, but with an immense idea of his personal dignity—gave me his reasons hesitatingly.

"I ain't sayin' nothin', Mis' Innes," he said, with his hand on the door-knob, "but there's been goin's-on here this las' few months as ain't natchal. 'Tain't one thing an' 'tain't another—it's jest a door squealin' here, an' a winder closin' there, but when doors an' winders gets to cuttin' up capers and there's nobody nigh 'em, it's time Thomas Johnson sleeps somewhar's else."

Liddy, who seemed to be never more than ten feet away from me that night, and was afraid of her shadow in that great barn of a place, screamed a little, and turned a yellow-green. But I am not easily alarmed.

It was entirely in vain I represented to Thomas that we were alone, and that he would have to stay in the house that night. He was politely firm, but he would come over early the next morning, and if I gave him a key, he would come in time to get some sort of

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breakfast. I stood on the huge veranda and watched him shuffle along down the shadowy drive, with mingled feelings—irritation at his cowardice and thankfulness at getting him at all. I am not ashamed to say that I double-locked the hall door when I went in.

"You can lock up the rest of the house and go to bed, Liddy," I said severely. "You give me the creeps standing there. A woman of your age ought to have better sense." It usually braces Liddy to mention her age: she owns to forty—which is absurd. Her mother cooked for my grandfather, and Liddy must be at least as old as I. But that night she refused to brace.

"You're not going to ask me to lock up, Miss Rachel!" she quavered. "Why, there's a dozen French windows in the drawing-room and the billiard-room wing, and every one opens on a porch. And Mary Anne said that last night there was a man standing by the stable when she locked the kitchen door."

"Mary Anne was a fool," I said sternly. "If there had been a man there, she would have had him in the kitchen and been feeding him what was left from dinner, inside of an hour, from force of habit. Now don't be ridiculous. Lock up the house and go to bed. I am going to read."

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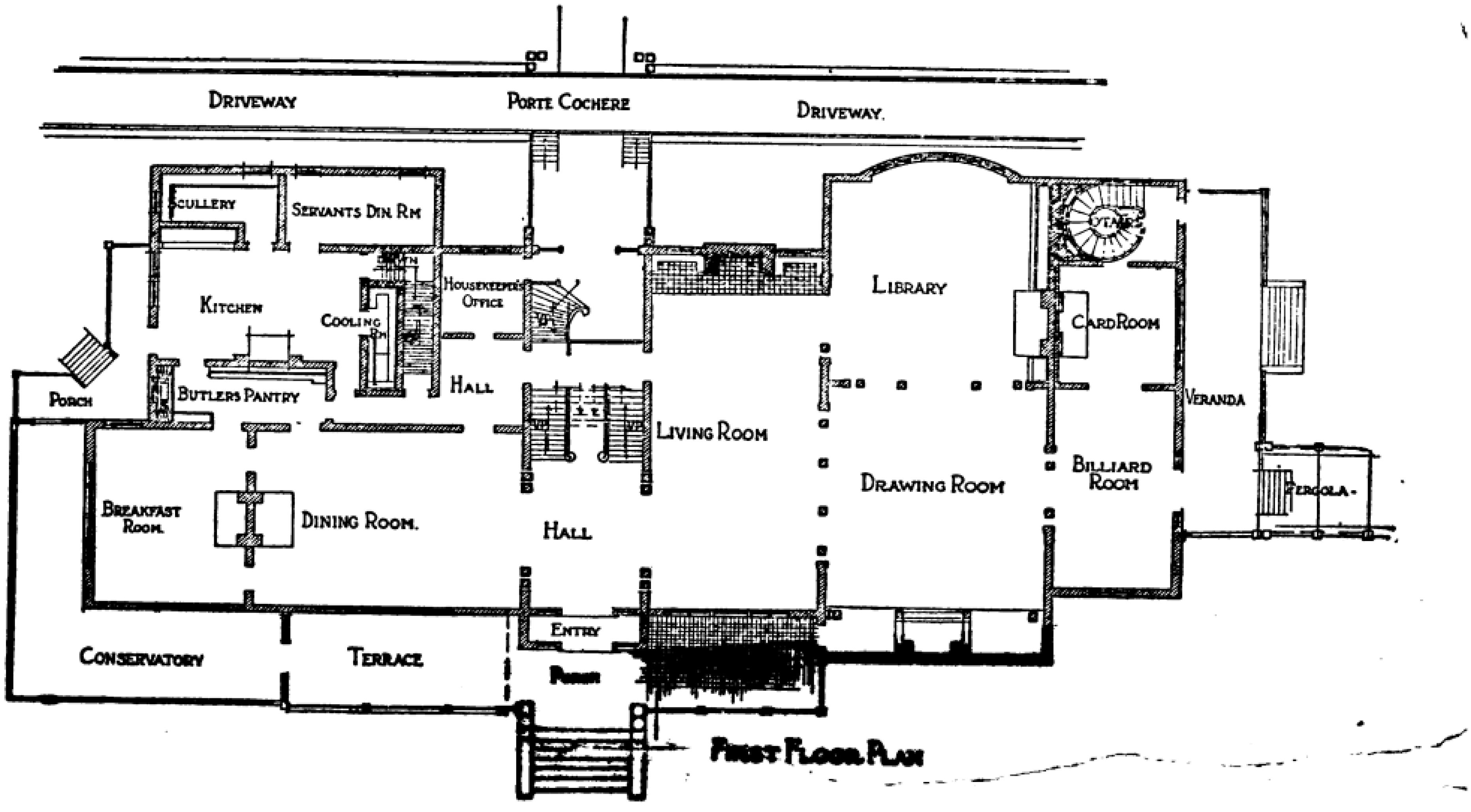

First Floor Plan

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But Liddy set her lips tight and stood still.

"I'm not going to bed," she said. "I am going to pack up, and to-morrow I am going to leave."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I snapped. Liddy and I often desire to part company, but never at the same time. "If you are afraid, I will go with you, but for goodness' sake don't try to hide behind me."

The house was a typical summer residence on an extensive scale. Wherever possible, on the first floor, the architect had done away with partitions, using arches and columns instead. The effect was cool and spacious, but scarcely cozy. As Liddy and I went from one window to another, our voices echoed back at us uncomfortably. There was plenty of light—the electric plant down in the village supplied us—but there were long vistas of polished floor, and mirrors which reflected us from unexpected corners, until I felt some of Liddy's foolishness communicate itself to me.

The house was very long, a rectangle in general form, with the main entrance in the center of the long side. The brick-paved entry opened into a short hall, to the right of which, separated only by a row of pillars, was a huge living-room. Beyond that was the drawing-room, and in the end, the billiard-room. Off

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the billiard-room, in the extreme right wing, was a den, or card-room, with a small hall opening on the east veranda, and from there went up a narrow circular staircase. Halsey had pointed it out with delight.

"Just look, Aunt Rachel," he said with a flourish. "The architect that put up this joint was wise to a few things. Arnold Armstrong and his friends could sit here and play cards all night and stumble up to bed in the early morning, without having the family send in a police call."

Liddy and I got as far as the card-room and turned on all the lights. I tried the small entry door there, which opened on the veranda, and examined the windows. Everything was secure, and Liddy, a little less nervous now, had just pointed out to me the disgracefully dusty condition of the hard-wood floor, when suddenly the lights went out. We waited a moment; I think Liddy was stunned with fright, or she would have screamed. And then I clutched her by the arm and pointed to one of the windows opening on the porch. The sudden change threw the window into relief, an oblong of grayish light, and showed us a figure standing close, peering in. As I looked it darted across the veranda and out of sight in the darkness.

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CHAPTER II

A LINK CUFF-BUTTON

LIDDY's knees seemed to give away under her. Without a sound she sank down, leaving me staring at the window in petrified amazement. Liddy began to moan under her breath, and in my excitement I reached down and shook her.

"Stop it," I whispered. "It's only a woman—maybe a maid of the Armstrongs'. Get up and help me find the door." She groaned again. "Very well," I said, "then I'll have to leave you here. I'm going."

She moved at that, and, holding to my sleeve, we felt our way, with numerous collisions, to the billiard-room, and from there to the drawing-room. The lights came on then, and, with the long French windows unshuttered, I had a creepy feeling that each one sheltered a peering face. In fact, in the light of what happened afterward, I am pretty certain we were under surveillance during the entire ghostly evening. We

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hurried over the rest of the locking-up and got upstairs as quickly as we could. I left the lights all on, and our footsteps echoed cavernously. Liddy had a stiff neck the next morning, from looking back over her shoulder, and she refused to go to bed.

"Let me stay in your dressing-room, Miss Rachel," she begged. "If you don't, I'll sit in the hall outside the door. I'm not going to be murdered with my eyes shut."

"If you're going to be murdered," I retorted, "it won't make any difference whether they are shut or open. But you may stay in the dressing-room, if you will lie on the couch: when you sleep in a chair you snore."

She was too far gone to be indignant, but after a while she came to the door and looked in to where I was composing myself for sleep with Drummond's *Spiritual Life*.

"That wasn't a woman, Miss Rachel," she said, with her shoes in her hand. "It was a man in a long coat."

"What woman was a man?" I discouraged her without looking up, and she went back to the couch.

It was eleven o'clock when I finally prepared for

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bed. In spite of my assumption of indifference, I locked the door into the hall, and finding the transom did not catch, I put a chair cautiously before the door —it was not necessary to rouse Liddy—and climbing up put on the ledge of the transom a small dressing-mirror, so that any movement of the frame would send it crashing down. Then, secure in my precautions, I went to bed.

I did not go to sleep at once. Liddy disturbed me just as I was growing drowsy, by coming in and peering under the bed. She was afraid to speak, however, because of her previous snubbing, and went back, stopping in the doorway to sigh dismally.

Somewhere down-stairs a clock with a chime sang away the hours—eleven-thirty, forty-five, twelve. And then the lights went out to stay. The Casanova Electric Company shuts up shop and goes home to bed at midnight: when one has a party, I believe it is customary to fee the company, which will drink hot coffee and keep awake a couple of hours longer. But the lights were gone for good that night. Liddy had gone to sleep, as I knew she would. She was a very unreliable person: always awake and ready to talk when she wasn't wanted and dozing off to sleep when

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she was. I called her once or twice, the only result being an explosive snore that threatened her very windpipe—then I got up and lighted a bedroom candle.

My bedroom and dressing-room were above the big living-room on the first floor. On the second floor a long corridor ran the length of the house, with rooms opening from both sides. In the wings were small corridors crossing the main one—the plan was simplicity itself. And just as I got back into bed, I heard a sound from the east wing, apparently, that made me stop, frozen, with one bedroom slipper half off, and listen. It was a rattling metallic sound, and it reverberated along the empty halls like the crash of doom. It was for all the world as if something heavy, perhaps a piece of steel, had rolled clattering and jangling down the hard-wood stairs leading to the card-room.

In the silence that followed Liddy stirred and snored again. I was exasperated: first she kept me awake by silly alarms, then when she was needed she slept like Joe Jefferson, or Rip,—they are always the same to me. I went in and aroused her, and I give her credit for being wide awake the minute I spoke.

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"My candle only emphasized the gloom." *Page 17*

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"Get up," I said, "if you don't want to be murdered in your bed."

"Where? How?" she yelled vociferously, and jumped up.

"There's somebody in the house," I said. "Get up. We'll have to get to the telephone."

"Not out in the hall!" she gasped; "Oh, Miss Rachel, not out in the hall!" trying to hold me back. But I am a large woman and Liddy is small. We got to the door, somehow, and Liddy held a brass andiron, which it was all she could do to lift, let alone brain anybody with. I listened, and, hearing nothing, opened the door a little and peered into the hall. It was a black void, full of terrible suggestion, and my candle only emphasized the gloom. Liddy squealed and drew me back again, and as the door slammed, the mirror I had put on the transom came down and hit her on the head. That completed our demoralization. It was some time before I could persuade her she had not been attacked from behind by a burglar, and when she found the mirror smashed on the floor she wasn't much better.

"There's going to be a death!" she wailed. "Oh, Miss Rachel, there's going to be a death!"

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"There will be," I said grimly, "if you don't keep quiet, Liddy Allen."

And so we sat there until morning, wondering if the candle would last until dawn, and arranging what trains we could take back to town. If we had only stuck to that decision and gone back before it was too late!

The sun came finally, and from my window I watched the trees along the drive take shadowy form, gradually lose their ghostlike appearance, become gray and then green. The Greenwood Club showed itself a dab of white against the hill across the valley, and an early robin or two hopped around in the dew. Not until the milk-boy and the sun came, about the same time, did I dare to open the door into the hall and look around. Everything was as we had left it. Trunks were heaped here and there, ready for the trunk-room, and through an end window of stained glass came a streak of red and yellow daylight that was eminently cheerful. The milk-boy was pounding somewhere below, and the day had begun.

Thomas Johnson came ambling up the drive about half-past six, and we could hear him clattering around on the lower floor, opening shutters. I had to take

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Liddy to her room up-stairs, however,—she was quite sure she would find something uncanny. In fact, when she did not, having now the courage of daylight, she was actually disappointed.

Well, we did not go back to town that day.

The discovery of a small picture fallen from the wall of the drawing-room was quite sufficient to satisfy Liddy that the alarm had been a false one, but I was anything but convinced. Allowing for my nerves and the fact that small noises magnify themselves at night, there was still no possibility that the picture had made the series of sounds I heard. To prove it, however, I dropped it again. It fell with a single muffled crash of its wooden frame, and incidentally ruined itself beyond repair. I justified myself by reflecting that if the Armstrongs chose to leave pictures in unsafe positions, and to r[illegible] a house with a family ghost, the destruction of property was their responsibility, not mine.

I warned Liddy not to mention what had happened to anybody, and telephoned to town for servants. Then after a breakfast which did more credit to Thomas' heart than his head, I went on a short tour of investigation. The sounds had come from the east

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wing, and not without some qualms I began there. At first I found nothing. Since then I have developed my powers of observation, but at that time I was a novice. The small card-room seemed undisturbed. I looked for footprints, which is, I believe, the conventional thing to do, although my experience has been that as clues both footprints and thumb-marks are more useful in fiction than in fact. But the stairs in that wing offered something.

At the top of the flight had been placed a tall wicker hamper, packed with linen that had come from town. It stood at the edge of the top step, almost barring passage, and on the step below it was a long fresh scratch. For three steps the scratch was repeated, gradually diminishing, as if some object had fallen, striking each one. Then for four steps nothing. On the fifth step below was a round dent in the hard wood. That was all, and it seemed little enough, except that I was positive the marks had not been there the day before.

It bore out my theory of the sound, which had been for all the world like the bumping of a metallic object down a flight of steps. The four steps had been skipped. I reasoned that an iron bar, for instance,

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would do something of the sort,—strike two or three steps, end down, then turn over, jumping a few stairs, and landing with a thud.

Iron bars, however, do not fall down-stairs in the middle of the night alone. Coupled with the figure on the veranda the agency by which it climbed might be assumed. But—and here was the thing that puzzled me most—the doors were all fastened that morning, the windows unmolested, and the particular door from the card-room to the veranda had a combination lock of which I held the key, and which had not been tampered with.

I fixed on an attempt at burglary, as the most natural explanation—an attempt frustrated by the falling of the object, whatever it was, that had roused me. Two things I could not understand: how the intruder had escaped with everything locked, and why he had left the small silver, which, in the absence of a butler, had remained down-stairs over night.

Under pretext of learning more about the place, Thomas Johnson led me through the house and the cellars, without result. Everything was in good order and repair; money had been spent lavishly on construction and plumbing. The house was full of con-

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veniences, and I had no reason to repent my bargain, save the fact that, in the nature of things, night must come again. And other nights must follow—and we were a long way from a police-station.

In the afternoon a hack came up from Casanova, with a fresh relay of servants. The driver took them with a flourish to the servants' entrance, and drove around to the front of the house, where I was awaiting him.

"Two dollars," he said in reply to my question. "I don't charge full rates, because, bringin' 'em up all summer as I do, it pays to make a special price. When they got off the train, I sez, sez I, 'There's another bunch for Sunnyside, cook, parlor maid and all.' Yes'm—six summers, and a new lot never less than once a month. They won't stand for the country and the lonesomeness, I reckon."

But with the presence of the "bunch" of servants my courage revived, and late in the afternoon came a message from Gertrude that she and Halsey would arrive that night at about eleven o'clock, coming in the car from Richfield: Things were looking up; and when Beulah, my cat, a most intelligent animal, found some early catnip on a bank near the house and rolled

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in it in a feline ecstasy, I decided that getting back to nature was the thing to do.

While I was dressing for dinner, Liddy rapped at the door. She was hardly herself yet, but privately I think she was worrying about the broken mirror and its augury, more than anything else. When she came in she was holding something in her hand, and she laid it on the dressing-table carefully.

"I found it in the linen hamper," she said. "It must be Mr. Halsey's, but it seems queer how it got there."

It was the half of a link cuff-button of unique design, and I looked at it carefully.

"Where was it? In the bottom of the hamper?" I asked.

"On the very top," she replied. "It's a mercy it didn't fall out on the way."

When Liddy had gone I examined the fragment attentively. I had never seen it before, and I was certain it was not Halsey's. It was of Italian workmanship, and consisted of a mother-of-pearl foundation, encrusted with tiny seed-pearls, strung on horsehair to hold them. In the center was a small ruby. The trinket was odd enough, but not intrinsically of great

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value. Its interest for me lay in this: Liddy had found it lying in the top of the hamper which had blocked the east-wing stairs.

That afternoon the Armstrongs' housekeeper, a youngish good-looking woman, applied for Mrs. Ralston's place, and I was glad enough to take her. She looked as though she might be equal to a dozen of Liddy, with her snapping black eyes and heavy jaw. Her name was Anne Watson, and I dined that evening for the first time in three days.

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CHAPTER III

MR. JOHN BAILEY APPEARS

I HAD dinner served in the breakfast-room. Somehow the huge dining-room depressed me, and Thomas, cheerful enough all day, allowed his spirits to go down with the sun. He had a habit of watching the corners of the room, left shadowy by the candles on the table, and altogether it was not a festive meal.

Dinner over I went into the living-room. I had three hours before the children could possibly arrive, and I got out my knitting. I had brought along two dozen pairs of slipper soles in assorted sizes—I always send knitted slippers to the Old Ladies' Home at Christmas—and now I sorted over the wools with a grim determination not to think about the night before. But my mind was not on my work: at the end of a half-hour I found I had put a row of blue scallops on Eliza Klinefelter's lavender slippers, and I put them away.

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I got out the cuff-link and went with it to the pantry. Thomas was wiping silver and the air was heavy with tobacco smoke. I sniffed and looked around, but there was no pipe to be seen.

"Thomas," I said, "you have been smoking."

"No, ma'm." He was injured innocence itself. "It's on my coat, ma'm. Over at the club the gentlemen—"

But Thomas did not finish. The pantry was suddenly filled with the odor of singeing cloth. Thomas gave a clutch at his coat, whirled to the sink, filled a tumbler with water and poured it into his right pocket with the celerity of practice.

"Thomas," I said, when he was sheepishly mopping the floor, "smoking is a filthy and injurious habit. If you must smoke, you must; but don't stick a lighted pipe in your pocket again. Your skin's your own: you can blister it if you like. But this house is not mine, and I don't want a conflagration. Did you ever see this cuff-link before?"

No, he never had, he said, but he looked at it oddly.

"I picked it up in the hall," I added indifferently. The old man's eyes were shrewd under his bushy eyebrows.

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"There's strange goin's-on here; Mis' Innes," he said, shaking his head. "Somethin's goin' to happen, sure. You ain't took notice that the big clock in the hall is stopped, I reckon?"

"Nonsense," I said. "Clocks have to stop, don't they, if they're not wound?"

"It's wound up, all right, and it stopped at three o'clock last night," he answered solemnly. "More'n that, that there clock ain't stopped for fifteen years, not since Mr. Armstrong's first wife died. And that ain't all,—no *ma'm*. Last three nights I slep' in this place, after the electrics went out I had a token. My oil lamp was full of oil, but it kep' goin' out, do what I would. Minute I shet my eyes, out that lamp 'd go. There ain't no surer token of death. The Bible sez, *Let yer light shine!* When a hand you can't see puts yer light out, it means death, sure."

The old man's voice was full of conviction. In spite of myself I had a chilly sensation in the small of my back, and I left him mumbling over his dishes. Later on I heard a crash from the pantry, and Liddy reported that Beulah, who is coal black, had darted in front of Thomas just as he picked up a tray of dishes;

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that the bad omen had been too much for him, and he had dropped the tray.

The chug of the automobile as it climbed the hill was the most welcome sound I had heard for a long time, and with Gertrude and Halsey actually before me, my troubles seemed over for good. Gertrude stood smiling in the hall, with her hat quite over one ear, and her hair in every direction under her pink veil. Gertrude is a very pretty girl, no matter how her hat is, and I was not surprised when Halsey presented a good-looking young man, who bowed at me and looked at Trude—that is the ridiculous nickname Gertrude brought from school.

"I have brought a guest, Aunt Ray," Halsey said. "I want you to adopt him into your affections and your Saturday-to-Monday list. Let me present John Bailey, only you must call him Jack. In twelve hours he'll be calling you 'Aunt': I know him."

We shook hands, and I got a chance to look at Mr. Bailey; he was a tall fellow, perhaps thirty, and he wore a small mustache. I remember wondering why: he seemed to have a good mouth and when he smiled his teeth were above the average. One never knows why certain men cling to a messy upper lip that must

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get into things, any more than one understands some women building up their hair on wire atrocities. Otherwise, he was very good to look at, stalwart and tanned, with the direct gaze that I like. I am particular about Mr. Bailey, because he was a prominent figure in what happened later.

Gertrude was tired with the trip and went up to bed very soon. I made up my mind to tell them nothing until the next day, and then to make as light of our excitement as possible. After all, what had I to tell? An inquisitive face peering in at a window; a crash in the night; a scratch or two on the stairs, and half a cuff-button! As for Thomas and his forebodings, it was always my belief that a negro is one part thief, one part pigment, and the rest superstition.

It was Saturday night. The two men went to the billiard-room, and I could hear them talking as I went up-stairs. It seemed that Halsey had stopped at the Greenwood Club for gasolene and found Jack Bailey there, with the Sunday golf crowd. Mr. Bailey had not been hard to persuade—probably Gertrude knew why—and they had carried him off triumphantly. I roused Liddy to get them something to eat—Thomas was beyond reach in the lodge—and paid no atten-

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tion to her evident terror of the kitchen regions. Then I went to bed. The men were still in the billiard-room when I finally dozed off, and the last thing I remember was the howl of a dog in front of the house. It wailed a crescendo of woe that trailed off hopefully, only to break out afresh from a new point of the compass.

At three o'clock in the morning I was roused by a revolver shot. The sound seemed to come from just outside my door. For a moment I could not move. Then—I heard Gertrude stirring in her room, and the next moment she had thrown open the connecting door.

"O Aunt Ray! Aunt Ray!" she cried hysterically. "Some one has been killed, killed!"

"Thieves," I said shortly. "Thank goodness, there are some men in the house to-night." I was getting into my slippers and a bath-robe, and Gertrude with shaking hands was lighting a lamp. Then we opened the door into the hall, where, crowded on the upper landing of the stairs, the maids, white-faced and trembling, were peering down, headed by Liddy. I was greeted by a series of low screams and questions, and I tried to quiet them. Gertrude had dropped on a chair and sat there limp and shivering.

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I went at once across the hall to Halsey's room and knocked; then I pushed the door open. It was empty; the bed had not been occupied!

"He must be in Mr. Bailey's room," I said excitedly, and followed by Liddy, we went there. Like Halsey's, it had not been occupied! Gertrude was on her feet now, but she leaned against the door for support.

"They have been killed!" she gasped. Then she caught me by the arm and dragged me toward the stairs. "They may only be hurt, and we must find them," she said, her eyes dilated with excitement.

I don't remember how we got down the stairs: I do remember expecting every moment to be killed. The cook was at the telephone up-stairs, calling the Greenwood Club, and Liddy was behind me, afraid to come and not daring to stay behind. We found the living-room and the drawing-room undisturbed. Somehow I felt that whatever we found would be in the card-room or on the staircase, and nothing but the fear that Halsey was in danger drove me on; with every step my knees seemed to give way under me. Gertrude was ahead and in the card-room she stopped, holding her candle high. Then she pointed silently to the doorway

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into the hall beyond. Huddled there on the floor, face down, with his arms extended, was a man.

Gertrude ran forward with a gasping sob. "Jack," she cried, "oh, Jack!"

Liddy had run, screaming, and the two of us were there alone. It was Gertrude who turned him over, finally, until we could see his white face, and then she drew a deep breath and dropped limply to her knees. It was the body of a man, a gentleman, in a dinner coat and white waistcoat, stained now with blood—the body of a man I had never seen before.

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CHAPTER IV

GERTRUDE gazed at the face in a kind of fascination. Then she put out her hands blindly, and I thought she was going to faint.

"He has killed him!" she muttered almost inarticulately; and at that, because my nerves were going, I gave her a good shake.

"What do you mean?" I said frantically. There was a depth of grief and conviction in her tone that was worse than anything she could have said. The shake braced her, anyhow, and she seemed to pull herself together. But not another word would she say: she stood gazing down at that gruesome figure on the floor, while Liddy, ashamed of her flight and afraid to come back alone, drove before her three terrified women-servants into the drawing-room, which was as near as any of them would venture.

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Once in the drawing-room, Gertrude collapsed and went from one fainting spell into another. I had all I could do to keep Liddy from drowning her with cold water, and the maids huddled in a corner, as much use as so many sheep. In a short time, although it seemed hours, a car came rushing up, and Anne Watson, who had waited to dress, opened the door. Three men from the Greenwood Club, in all kinds of costumes, hurried in. I recognized a Mr. Jarvis, but the others were strangers.

"What's wrong?" the Jarvis man asked—and we made a strange picture, no doubt. "Nobody hurt, is there?" He was looking at Gertrude.

"Worse than that, Mr. Jarvis," I said. "I think it is murder."

At the word there was a commotion. The cook began to cry, and Mrs. Watson knocked over a chair. The men were visibly impressed.

"Not any member of the family?" Mr. Jarvis asked, when he had got his breath.

"No," I said; and motioning Liddy to look after Gertrude, I led the way with a lamp to the card-room door. One of the men gave an exclamation, and they all hurried across the room. Mr. Jarvis took the lamp

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from me—I remember that—and then, feeling myself getting dizzy and light-headed, I closed my eyes. When I opened them their brief examination was over, and Mr. Jarvis was trying to put me in a chair.

"You must get up-stairs," he said firmly, "you and Miss Gertrude, too. This has been a terrible shock. In his own home, too."

I stared at him without comprehension. "Who is it?" I asked with difficulty. There was a band drawn tight around my throat.

"It is Arnold Armstrong," he said, looking at me oddly, "and he has been murdered—in his father's house."

After a minute I gathered myself together and Mr. Jarvis helped me into the living-room. Liddy had got Gertrude up-stairs, and the two strange men from the club stayed with the body. The reaction from the shock and strain was tremendous: I was collapsed—and then Mr. Jarvis asked me a question that brought back my wandering faculties.

"Where is Halsey?" he asked.

"Halsey!" Suddenly Gertrude's stricken face rose before me—the empty rooms up-stairs. Where was Halsey?

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"He was here, wasn't he?" Mr. Jarvis persisted. "He stopped at the club on his way over."

"I—don't know where he is," I said feebly.

One of the men from the club came in, asked for the telephone, and I could hear him excitedly talking, saying something about coroners and detectives. Mr. Jarvis leaned over to me.

"Why don't you trust me, Miss Innes?" he said. "If I can do anything I will. But tell me the whole thing."

I did, finally, from the beginning, and when I told of Jack Bailey's being in the house that night, he gave a long whistle.

"I wish they were both here," he said when I finished. "Whatever mad prank took them away, it would look better if they were here. Especially—"

"Especially what?"

"Especially since Jack Bailey and Arnold Armstrong were notoriously bad friends. It was Bailey who got Arnold into trouble last spring—something about the bank. And then, too—"

"Go on," I said. "If there is anything more, I ought to know."

"There's nothing more," he said evasively. "There's

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just one thing we may bank on, Miss Innes. Any court in the country will acquit a man who kills an intruder in his house, at night. If Halsey—"

"Why, you don't think Halsey did it!" I exclaimed. There was a queer feeling of physical nausea coming over me.

"No, no, not at all," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Come, Miss Innes, you're a ghost of yourself, and I am going to help you up-stairs and call your maid. This has been too much for you."

Liddy helped me back to bed, and under the impression that I was in danger of freezing to death, put a hot-water bottle over my heart and another at my feet. Then she left me. It was early dawn now, and from voices under my window I surmised that Mr. Jarvis and his companions were searching the grounds. As for me, I lay in bed, with every faculty awake. Where had Halsey gone? How had he gone, and when? Before the murder, no doubt, but who would believe that? If either he or Jack Bailey had heard an intruder in the house and shot him—as they might have been justified in doing—why had they run away? The whole thing was unheard of, outrageous, and—impossible to ignore.

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About six o'clock Gertrude came in. She was fully dressed, and I sat up nervously.

"Poor Aunty!" she said. "What a shocking night you have had!" She came over and sat down on the bed, and I saw she looked very tired and worn.

"Is there anything new?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing. The car is gone, but Warner"—he is the chauffeur—"Warner is at the lodge and knows nothing about it."

"Well," I said, "if I ever get my hands on Halsey Innes, I shall not let go until I have told him a few things. When we get this cleared up, I am going back to the city to be quiet. One more night like the last two will end me. The peace of the country—fiddle-sticks!"

Whereupon I told Gertrude of the noises the night before, and the figure on the veranda in the east wing. As an afterthought I brought out the pearl cuff-link.

"I have no doubt now," I said, "that it was Arnold Armstrong the night before last, too. He had a key, no doubt, but why he should steal into his father's house I can not imagine. He could have come with my permission, easily enough. Anyhow, whoever it was that night, left this little souvenir."

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Gertrude took one look at the cuff-link, and went as white as the pearls in it; she clutched at the foot of the bed, and stood staring. As for me, I was quite as astonished as she was.

"Where did—you—find it?" she asked finally, with a desperate effort at calm. And while I told her she stood looking out of the window with a look I could not fathom on her face. It was a relief when Mrs. Watson tapped at the door and brought me some tea and toast. The cook was in bed, completely demoralized, she reported, and Liddy, brave with the daylight, was looking for footprints around the house. Mrs. Watson herself was a wreck; she was blue-white around the lips, and she had one hand tied up. She said she had fallen down-stairs in her excitement. It was natural, of course, that the thing would shock her, having been the Armstrongs' housekeeper for several years, and knowing Mr. Arnold well.

Gertrude had slipped out during my talk with Mrs. Watson, and I dressed and went down-stairs. The billiard and card-rooms were locked until the coroner and the detectives got there, and the men from the club had gone back for more conventional clothing.

I could hear Thomas in the pantry, alternately

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wailing for Mr. Arnold, as he called him, and citing the tokens that had precursed the murder. The house seemed to choke me, and, slipping a shawl around me, I went out on the drive. At the corner by the east wing I met Liddy. Her skirts were draggled with dew to her knees, and her hair was still in crimps.

"Go right in and change your clothes," I said sharply. "You're a sight, and at your age!"

She had a golf-stick in her hand, and she said she had found it on the lawn. There was nothing unusual about it, but it occurred to me that a golf-stick with a metal end might have been the object that had scratched the stairs near the card-room. I took it from her, and sent her up for dry garments. Her daylight courage and self-importance, and her shuddering delight in the mystery, irritated me beyond words. After I left her I made a circuit of the building. Nothing seemed to be disturbed: the house looked as calm and peaceful in the morning sun as it had the day I had been coerced into taking it. There was nothing to show that inside had been mystery and violence and sudden death.

In one of the tulip beds back of the house an early blackbird was pecking viciously at something that

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glittered in the light. I picked my way gingerly over through the dew and stooped down: almost buried in the soft ground was a revolver! I scraped the earth off it with the tip of my shoe, and, picking it up, slipped it into my pocket. Not until I had got into my bedroom and double-locked the door did I venture to take it out and examine it. One look was all I needed. It was Halsey's revolver. I had unpacked it the day before and put it on his shaving-stand, and there could be no mistake. His name was on a small silver plate on the handle.

I seemed to see a network closing around my boy, innocent as I knew he was. The revolver—I am afraid of them, but anxiety gave me courage to look through the barrel—the revolver had still two bullets in it. I could only breathe a prayer of thankfulness that *I* had found the revolver before any sharp-eyed detective had come around.

I decided to keep what clues I had, the cuff-link, the golf-stick and the revolver, in a secure place until I could see some reason for displaying them. The cuff-link had been dropped into a little filigree box on my toilet table. I opened the box and felt around for it. The box was empty—the cuff-link had disappeared!

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CHAPTER V

GERTRUDE'S ENGAGEMENT

AT ten o'clock the Casanova hack brought up three men. They introduced themselves as the coroner of the county and two detectives from the city. The coroner led the way at once to the locked wing, and with the aid of one of the detectives examined the rooms and the body. The other detective, after a short scrutiny of the dead man, busied himself with the outside of the house. It was only after they had got a fair idea of things as they were that they sent for me.

I received them in the living-room, and I had made up my mind exactly what to tell. I had taken the house for the summer, I said, while the Armstrongs were in California. In spite of a rumor among the servants about strange noises—I cited Thomas—nothing had occurred the first two nights. On the

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third night I believed that some one had been in the house: I had heard a crashing sound, but being alone with one maid had not investigated. The house had been locked in the morning and apparently undisturbed.

Then, as clearly as I could, I related how, the night before, a shot had roused us; that my niece and I had investigated and found a body; that I did not know who the murdered man was until Mr. Jarvis from the club informed me, and that I knew of no reason why Mr. Arnold Armstrong should steal into his father's house at night. I should have been glad to allow him entrée there at any time.

"Have you reason to believe, Miss Innes," the coroner asked, "that any member of your household, imagining Mr. Armstrong was a burglar, shot him in self-defense?"

"I have no reason for thinking so," I said quietly.

"Your theory is that Mr. Armstrong was followed here by some enemy, and shot as he entered the house?"

"I don't think I have a theory," I said. "The thing that has puzzled me is why Mr. Armstrong should enter his father's house two nights in succession,

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stealing in like a thief, when he needed only to ask entrance to be admitted."

The coroner was a very silent man: he took some notes after this, but he seemed anxious to make the next train back to town. He set the inquest for the following Saturday, gave Mr. Jamieson, the younger of the two detectives, and the more intelligent looking, a few instructions, and, after gravely shaking hands with me and regretting the unfortunate affair, took his departure, accompanied by the other detective.

I was just beginning to breathe freely when Mr. Jamieson, who had been standing by the window, came over to me.

"The family consists of yourself alone, Miss Innes?"

"My niece is here," I said.

"There is no one but yourself and your niece?"

"My nephew." I had to moisten my lips.

"Oh, a nephew. I should like to see him, if he is here."

"He is not here just now," I said as quietly as I could. "I expect him—at any time."

"He was here yesterday evening, I believe?"

"No—yes."

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"Didn't he have a guest with him? Another man?"

"He brought a friend with him to stay over Sunday, a Mr. Bailey."

"Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the Traders' Bank, I believe." And I knew that some one at the Greenwood Club had told. "When did they leave?"

"Very early—I don't know at just what time."

Mr. Jamieson turned suddenly and looked at me.

"Please try to be more explicit," he said. "You say your nephew and Mr. Bailey were in the house last night, and yet you and your niece, with some women-servants, found the body. Where was your nephew?"

I was entirely desperate by that time.

"I do not know," I cried, "but be sure of this: Halsey knows nothing of this thing, and no amount of circumstantial evidence can make an innocent man guilty."

"Sit down," he said, pushing forward a chair. "There are some things I have to tell you, and, in return, please tell me all you know. Believe me, things always come out. In the first place, Mr. Armstrong was shot from above. The bullet was fired at close range, entered below the shoulder and came out, after passing through the heart, well down the back.

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In other words, I believe the murderer stood on the stairs and fired down. In the second place, I found on the edge of the billiard-table a charred cigar which had burned itself partly out, and a cigarette which had consumed itself to the cork tip. Neither one had been more than lighted, then put down and forgotten. Have you any idea what it was that made your nephew and Mr. Bailey leave their cigars and their game, take out the automobile without calling the chauffeur, and all this at—let me see—certainly before three o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't know," I said; "but depend on it, Mr. Jamieson, Halsey will be back himself to explain everything."

"I sincerely hope so," he said. "Miss Innes, has it occurred to you that Mr. Bailey might know something of this?"

Gertrude had come down-stairs and just as he spoke she came in. I saw her stop suddenly, as if she had been struck.

"He does not," she said in a tone that was not her own. "Mr. Bailey and my brother know nothing of this. The murder was committed at three. They left the house at a quarter before three."

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"How do you know that?" Mr. Jamieson asked oddly. "Do you *know* at what time they left?"

"I do," Gertrude answered firmly. "At a quarter before three my brother and Mr. Bailey left the house, by the main entrance. I—was—there."

"Gertrude," I said excitedly, "you are dreaming! Why, at a quarter to three—"

"Listen," she said. "At half-past two the down-stairs telephone rang. I had not gone to sleep, and I heard it. Then I heard Halsey answer it, and in a few minutes he came up-stairs and knocked at my door. We—we talked for a minute, then I put on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down-stairs with him. Mr. Bailey was in the billiard-room. We—we all talked together for perhaps ten minutes. Then it was decided that—that they should both go away—"

"Can't you be more explicit?" Mr. Jamieson asked. "*Why* did they go away?"

"I am only telling you what happened, not why it happened," she said evenly. "Halsey went for the car, and instead of bringing it to the house and rousing people, he went by the lower road from the stable. Mr. Bailey was to meet him at the foot of the lawn. Mr. Bailey left—"

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"Which way?" Mr. Jamieson asked sharply.

"By the main entrance. He left—it was a quarter to three. I know exactly."

"The clock in the hall is stopped, Miss Innes," said Jamieson. Nothing seemed to escape him.

"He looked at his watch," she replied, and I could see Mr. Jamieson's eyes snap, as if he had made a discovery. As for myself, during the whole recital I had been plunged into the deepest amazement.

"Will you pardon me for a personal question?" The detective was a youngish man, and I thought he was somewhat embarrassed. "What are your—your relations with Mr. Bailey?"

Gertrude hesitated. Then she came over and put her hand lovingly in mine.

"I am engaged to marry him," she said simply.

I had grown so accustomed to surprises that I could only gasp again, and as for Gertrude, the hand that lay in mine was burning with fever.

"And—after that," Mr. Jamieson went on, "you went directly to bed?"

Gertrude hesitated.

"No," she said finally. "I—I am not nervous, and after I had extinguished the light, I remembered

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something I had left in the billiard-room, and I felt my way back there through the darkness."

"Will you tell me what it was you had forgotten?"

"I can not tell you," she said slowly. "I—I did not leave the billiard-room at once—"

"Why?" The detective's tone was imperative. "This is very important, Miss Innes."

"I was crying," Gertrude said in a low tone. "When the French clock in the drawing-room struck three, I got up, and then—I heard a step on the east porch, just outside the card-room. Some one with a key was working with the latch, and I thought, of course, of Halsey. When we took the house he called that his entrance, and he had carried a key for it ever since. The door opened and I was about to ask what he had forgotten, when there was a flash and a report. Some heavy body dropped, and, half crazed with terror and shock, I ran through the drawing-room and got up-stairs—I scarcely remember how."

She dropped into a chair, and I thought Mr. Jamieson must have finished. But he was not through.

"You certainly clear your brother and Mr. Bailey admirably," he said. "The testimony is invaluable, especially in view of the fact that your brother and

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Mr. Armstrong had, I believe, quarreled rather seriously some time ago."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "Things are bad enough, Mr. Jamieson, without inventing bad feeling where it doesn't exist. Gertrude, I don't think Halsey knew the—the murdered man, did he?"

But Mr. Jamieson was sure of his ground.

"The quarrel, I believe," he persisted, "was about Mr. Armstrong's conduct to you, Miss Gertrude. He had been paying you unwelcome attentions."

And I had never seen the man!

When she nodded a "yes" I saw the tremendous possibilities involved. If this detective could prove that Gertrude feared and disliked the murdered man, and that Mr. Armstrong had been annoying and possibly pursuing her with hateful attentions, all that, added to Gertrude's confession of her presence in the billiard-room at the time of the crime, looked strange, to say the least. The prominence of the family assured a strenuous effort to find the murderer, and if we had nothing worse to look forward to, we were sure of a distasteful publicity.

Mr. Jamieson shut his note-book with a snap, and thanked us.

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"I have an idea," he said, apropos of nothing at all, "that at any rate the ghost is laid here. Whatever the rappings have been—and the colored man says they began when the family went west three months ago—they are likely to stop now."

Which shows how much he knew about it. The ghost was not laid: with the murder of Arnold Armstrong he, or it, only seemed to take on fresh vigor.

Mr. Jamieson left then, and when Gertrude had gone up-stairs, as she did at once, I sat and thought over what I had just heard. Her engagement, once so engrossing a matter, paled now beside the significance of her story. If Halsey and Jack Bailey had left before the crime, how came Halsey's revolver in the tulip bed? What was the mysterious cause of their sudden flight? What had Gertrude left in the billiard-room? What was the significance of the cuff-link, and where was it?

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CHAPTER VI

IN THE EAST CORRIDOR

WHEN the detective left he enjoined absolute secrecy on everybody in the household. The Greenwood Club promised the same thing, and as there are no Sunday afternoon papers, the murder was not publicly known until Monday. The coroner himself notified the Armstrong family lawyer, and early in the afternoon he came out. I had not seen Mr. Jamieson since morning, but I knew he had been interrogating the servants. Gertrude was locked in her room with a headache, and I had luncheon alone.

Mr. Harton, the lawyer, was a little, thin man, and he looked as if he did not relish his business that day.

"This is very unfortunate, Miss Innes," he said, after we had shaken hands. "Most unfortunate—and mysterious. With the father and mother in the west, I find everything devolves on me; and, as you can understand, it is an unpleasant duty."

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"No doubt," I said absently. "Mr. Harton, I am going to ask you some questions, and I hope you will answer them. I feel that I am entitled to some knowledge, because I and my family are just now in a most ambiguous position."

I don't know whether he understood me or not: he took off his glasses and wiped them.

"I shall be very happy," he said with old-fashioned courtesy.

"Thank you. Mr. Harton, did Mr. Arnold Armstrong know that Sunnyside had been rented?"

"I think—yes, he did. In fact, I myself told him about it."

"And he knew who the tenants were?"

"Yes."

"He had not been living with the family for some years, I believe?"

"No. Unfortunately, there had been trouble between Arnold and his father. For two years he had lived in town."

"Then it would be unlikely that he came here last night to get possession of anything belonging to him?"

"I should think it hardly possible," he admitted,

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"To be perfectly frank, Miss Innes, I can not think of any reason whatever for his coming here as he did. He had been staying at the club-house across the valley for the last week, Jarvis tells me, but that only explains how he came here, not why. It is a most unfortunate family."

He shook his head despondently, and I felt that this dried-up little man was the repository of much that he had not told me. I gave up trying to elicit any information from him, and we went together to view the body before it was taken to the city. It had been lifted on to the billiard-table and a sheet thrown over it; otherwise nothing had been touched. A soft hat lay beside it, and the collar of the dinner-coat was still turned up. The handsome, dissipated face of Arnold Armstrong, purged of its ugly lines, was now only pathetic. As we went in Mrs. Watson appeared at the card-room door.

"Come in, Mrs. Watson," the lawyer said. But she shook her head and withdrew: she was the only one in the house who seemed to regret the dead man, and even she seemed rather shocked than sorry.

I went to the door at the foot of the circular staircase and opened it. If I could only have seen Halsey

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coming at his usual hare-brained clip up the drive, if I could have heard the throb of the motor, I would have felt that my troubles were over. But there was nothing to be seen. The countryside lay sunny and quiet in its peaceful Sunday afternoon calm, and far down the drive Mr. Jamieson was walking slowly, stooping now and then, as if to examine the road. When I went back, Mr. Harton was furtively wiping his eyes.

"The prodigal has come home, Miss Innes," he said. "How often the sins of the fathers are visited on the children!" Which left me pondering.

Before Mr. Harton left, he told me something of the Armstrong family. Paul Armstrong, the father, had been married twice. Arnold was a son by the first marriage. The second Mrs. Armstrong had been a widow, with a child, a little girl. This child, now perhaps twenty, was Louise Armstrong, having taken her stepfather's name, and was at present in California with the family.

"They will probably return at once," he concluded, "and part of my errand here to-day is to see if you will relinquish your lease here in their favor."

"We would better wait and see if they wish to

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come," I said. "It seems unlikely, and my town house is being remodeled." At that he let the matter drop, but it came up unpleasantly enough, later.

At six o'clock the body was taken away, and at seven-thirty, after an early dinner, Mr. Harton went. Gertrude had not come down, and there was no news of Halsey. Mr. Jamieson had taken a lodging in the village, and I had not seen him since mid-afternoon. It was about nine o'clock, I think, when the bell rang and he was ushered into the living-room.

"Sit down," I said grimly. "Have you found a clue that will incriminate me, Mr. Jamieson?"

He had the grace to look uncomfortable. "No," he said. "If you had killed Mr. Armstrong, you would have left no clues. You would have had too much intelligence."

After that we got along better. He was fishing in his pocket, and after a minute he brought out two scraps of paper. "I have been to the club-house," he said, "and among Mr. Armstrong's effects, I found these. One is curious; the other is puzzling."

The first was a sheet of club note-paper, on which was written, over and over, the name "Halsey B. Innes." It was Halsey's flowing signature to a dot,

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but it lacked Halsey's ease. The ones toward the bottom of the sheet were much better than the top ones. Mr. Jamieson smiled at my face.

"His old tricks," he said. "That one is merely curious; this one, as I said before, is puzzling."

The second scrap, folded and refolded into a compass so tiny that the writing had been partly obliterated, was part of a letter—the lower half of a sheet, not typed, but written in a cramped hand.

"———by altering the plans for———rooms, may be possible. The best way, in my opinion, would be to———the plan for———in one of the———rooms———chimney."

That was all.

"Well?" I said, looking up. "There is nothing in that, is there? A man ought to be able to change the plan of his house without becoming an object of suspicion."

"There is little in the paper itself," he admitted; "but why should Arnold Armstrong carry that around, unless it meant something? He never built a house, you may be sure of that. If it is this house, it may mean anything, from a secret room—"

"To an extra bath-room," I said scornfully. "Haven't you a thumb-print, too?"

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"I have," he said with a smile, "and the print of a foot in a tulip bed, and a number of other things. The oddest part is, Miss Innes, that the thumb-mark is probably yours and the footprint certainly."

His audacity was the only thing that saved me: his amused smile put me on my mettle, and I ripped out a perfectly good scallop before I answered.

"Why did I step into the tulip bed?" I asked with interest.

"You picked up something," he said good-humoredly, "which you are going to tell me about later."

"Am I, indeed?" I was politely curious. "With this remarkable insight of yours, I wish you would tell me where I shall find my four-thousand-dollar motor-car."

"I was just coming to that," he said. "You will find it about thirty miles away, at Andrews Station, in a blacksmith shop, where it is being repaired."

I laid down my knitting then and looked at him.

"And Halsey?" I managed to say.

"We are going to exchange information," he said. "I am going to tell you that, when you tell me what you picked up in the tulip bed."

We looked steadily at each other: it was not an un-

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friendly stare; we were only measuring weapons. Then he smiled a little and got up.

"With your permission," he said, "I am going to examine the card-room and the staircase again. You might think over my offer in the meantime."

He went on through the drawing-room, and I listened to his footsteps growing gradually fainter. I dropped my pretense at knitting and, leaning back, I thought over the last forty-eight hours. Here was I, Rachel Innes, spinster, a granddaughter of old John Innes of Revolutionary days, a D. A. R., a Colonial Dame, mixed up with a vulgar and revolting crime, and even attempting to hoodwink the law! Certainly I had left the straight and narrow way.

I was roused by hearing Mr. Jamieson coming rapidly back through the drawing-room. He stopped at the door.

"Miss Innes," he said quickly, "will you come with me and light the east corridor? I have fastened somebody in the small room at the head of the card-room stairs."

I jumped up at once.

"You mean—the murderer?" I gasped.

"Possibly," he said quietly, as we hurried together

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up the stairs. "Some one was lurking on the staircase when I went back. I spoke; instead of an answer, whoever it was turned and ran up. I followed—it was dark—but as I turned the corner at the top a figure darted through this door and closed it. The bolt was on my side, and I pushed it forward. It is a closet, I think." We were in the upper hall now. "If you will show me the electric switch, Miss Innes, you would better wait in your own room."

Trembling as I was, I was determined to see that door opened. I hardly knew what I feared, but so many terrible and inexplicable things had happened that suspense was worse than certainty.

"I am perfectly cool," I said, "and I am going to remain here."

The lights flashed up along that end of the corridor, throwing the doors into relief. At the intersection of the small hallway with the larger, the circular staircase wound its way up, as if it had been an afterthought of the architect. And just around the corner, in the small corridor, was the door Mr. Jamieson had indicated. I was still unfamiliar with the house, and I did not remember the door. My heart was thumping wildly in my ears, but I nodded to him

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to go ahead. I was perhaps eight or ten feet away—and then he threw the bolt back.

"Come out," he said quietly. There was no response. "Come—out," he repeated. Then—I think he had a revolver, but I am not sure—he stepped aside and threw the door open.

From where I stood I could not see beyond the door, but I saw Mr. Jamieson's face change and heard him mutter something, then he bolted down the stairs, three at a time. When my knees had stopped shaking, I moved forward, slowly, nervously, until I had a partial view of what was beyond the door. It seemed at first to be a closet, empty. Then I went close and examined it, to stop with a shudder. Where the floor should have been was black void and darkness, from which came the indescribable, damp smell of the cellars.

Mr. Jamieson had locked somebody in the clothes chute. As I leaned over I fancied I heard a groan—or was it the wind?

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CHAPTER VII

A SPRAINED ANKLE

I WAS panic-stricken. As I ran along the corridor I was confident that the mysterious intruder and probable murderer had been found, and that he lay dead or dying at the foot of the chute. I got down the staircase somehow, and through the kitchen to the basement stairs. Mr. Jamieson had been before me, and the door stood open. Liddy was standing in the middle of the kitchen, holding a frying-pan by the handle as a weapon.

"Don't go down there," she yelled, when she saw me moving toward the basement stairs. "Don't you do it, Miss Rachel. That Jamieson's down there now. There's only trouble comes of hunting ghosts; they lead you into bottomless pits and things like that. Oh, Miss Rachel, don't—" as I tried to get past her.

She was interrupted by Mr. Jamieson's reappearance. He ran up the stairs two at a time, and his face was flushed and furious.

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"The whole place is locked," he said angrily. "Where's the laundry key kept?"

"It's kept in the door," Liddy snapped. "That whole end of the cellar is kept locked, so nobody can get at the clothes, and then the key's left in the door, so that unless a thief was as blind as—as some detectives, he could walk right in."

"Liddy," I said sharply, "come down with us and turn on all the lights."

She offered her resignation, as usual, on the spot, but I took her by the arm, and she came along finally. She switched on all the lights and pointed to a door just ahead.

"That's the door," she said sulkily. "The key's in it."

But the key was not in it. Mr. Jamieson shook it, but it was a heavy door, well locked. And then he stooped and began punching around the keyhole with the end of a lead-pencil. When he stood up his face was exultant.

"It's locked on the inside," he said in a low tone. "There is somebody in there."

"Lord have mercy!" gasped Liddy, and turned to run.

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"Liddy," I called, "go through the house at once and see who is missing, or if any one is. We'll have to clear this thing at once. Mr. Jamieson, if you will watch here I will go to the lodge and find Warner. Thomas would be of no use. Together you may be able to force the door."

"A good idea," he assented. "But—there are windows, of course, and there is nothing to prevent whoever is in there from getting out that way."

"Then lock the door at the top of the basement stairs," I suggested, "and patrol the house from the outside."

We agreed to this, and I had a feeling that the mystery of Sunnyside was about to be solved. I ran down the steps and along the drive. Just at the corner I ran full tilt into somebody who seemed to be as much alarmed as I was. It was not until I had recoiled a step or two that I recognized Gertrude, and she me.

"Good gracious, Aunt Ray," she exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"There's somebody locked in the laundry," I panted. "That is—unless—you didn't see any one crossing the lawn or skulking around the house, did you?"

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"I think we have mystery on the brain," Gertrude said wearily. "No, I haven't seen any one, except old Thomas, who looked for all the world as if he had been ransacking the pantry. What have you locked in the laundry?"

"I can't wait to explain," I replied. "I must get Warner from the lodge. If you came out for air, you'd better put on your overshoes." And then I noticed that Gertrude was limping—not much, but sufficiently to make her progress very slow, and seemingly painful.

"You have hurt yourself," I said sharply.

"I fell over the carriage block," she explained. "I thought perhaps I might see Halsey coming home. He—he ought to be here."

I hurried on down the drive. The lodge was some distance from the house, in a grove of trees where the drive met the county road. There were two white stone pillars to mark the entrance, but the iron gates, once closed and tended by the lodge-keeper, now stood permanently open. The day of the motor-car had come; no one had time for closed gates and lodge-keepers. The lodge at Sunnyside was merely a sort of supplementary servants' quarters: it was as con-

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venient in its appointments as the big house and infinitely more cozy.

As I went down the drive, my thoughts were busy. Who could it be that Mr. Jamieson had trapped in the cellar? Would we find a body or some one badly injured? Scarcely either. Whoever had fallen had been able to lock the laundry door on the inside. If the fugitive had come from outside the house, how did he get in? If it was some member of the household, who could it have been? And then—a feeling of horror almost overwhelmed me. Gertrude! Gertrude and her injured ankle! Gertrude found limping slowly up the drive when I had thought she was in bed!

I tried to put the thought away, but it would not go. If Gertrude had been on the circular staircase that night, why had she fled from Mr. Jamieson? The idea, puzzling as it was, seemed borne out by this circumstance. Whoever had taken refuge at the head of the stairs could scarcely have been familiar with the house, or with the location of the chute. The mystery seemed to deepen constantly. What possible connection could there be between Halsey and Gertrude, and the murder of Arnold Armstrong? And

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yet, every way I turned I seemed to find something that pointed to such a connection.

At the foot of the drive the road described a long, sloping, horseshoe-shaped curve around the lodge. There were lights there, streaming cheerfully out on to the trees, and from an upper room came wavering shadows, as if some one with a lamp was moving around. I had come almost silently in my evening slippers, and I had my second collision of the evening on the road just above the house. I ran full into a man in a long coat, who was standing in the shadow beside the drive, with his back to me, watching the lighted windows.

"What the hell!" he ejaculated furiously, and turned around. When he saw me, however, he did not wait for any retort on my part. He faded away—this is not slang; he did—he absolutely disappeared in the dusk without my getting more than a glimpse of his face. I had a vague impression of unfamiliar features and of a sort of cap with a visor. Then he was gone.

I went to the lodge and rapped. It required two or three poundings to bring Thomas to the door, and he opened it only an inch or so.

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"Where is Warner?" I asked.

"I—I think he's in bed, ma'm."

"Get him up," I said, "and for goodness' sake open the door, Thomas. I'll wait for Warner."

"It's kind o' close in here, ma'm," he said, obeying gingerly, and disclosing a cool and comfortable-looking interior. "Perhaps you'd keer to set on the porch an' rest yo'self."

It was so evident that Thomas did not want me inside that I went in.

"Tell Warner he is needed in a hurry," I repeated, and turned into the little sitting-room. I could hear Thomas going up the stairs, could hear him rouse Warner, and the steps of the chauffeur as he hurriedly dressed. But my attention was busy with the room below.

On the center-table, open, was a sealskin traveling bag. It was filled with gold-topped bottles and brushes, and it breathed opulence, luxury, femininity from every inch of surface. How did it get there? I was still asking myself the question when Warner came running down the stairs and into the room. He was completely but somewhat incongruously dressed, and his open, boyish face looked abashed. He was a

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country boy, absolutely frank and reliable, of fair education and intelligence—one of the small army of American youths who turn a natural aptitude for mechanics into the special field of the automobile, and earn good salaries in a congenial occupation.

"What is it, Miss Innes?" he asked anxiously.

"There is some one locked in the laundry," I replied. "Mr. Jamieson wants you to help him break the lock. Warner, whose bag is this?"

He was in the doorway by this time, and he pretended not to hear.

"Warner," I called, "come back here. Whose bag is this?"

He stopped then, but he did not turn around.

"It's—it belongs to Thomas," he said, and fled up the drive.

To Thomas! A London bag with mirrors and cosmetic jars of which Thomas could not even have guessed the use! However, I put the bag in the back of my mind, which was fast becoming stored with anomalous and apparently irreconcilable facts, and followed Warner to the house.

Liddy had come back to the kitchen: the door to the basement stairs was double-barred, and had a

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table pushed against it; and beside her on the table was most of the kitchen paraphernalia.

"Did you see if there was any one missing in the house?" I asked, ignoring the array of sauce-pans, rolling-pins, and the poker of the range.

"Rosie is missing," Liddy said with unction. She had objected to Rosie, the parlor maid, from the start. "Mrs. Watson went into her room, and found she had gone without her hat. People that trust themselves a dozen miles from the city, in strange houses, with servants they don't know, needn't be surprised if they wake up some morning and find their throats cut."

After which carefully veiled sarcasm Liddy relapsed into gloom. Warner came in then with a handful of small tools, and Mr. Jamieson went with him to the basement. Oddly enough, I was not alarmed. With all my heart I wished for Halsey, but I was not frightened. At the door he was to force, Warner put down his tools and looked at it. Then he turned the handle. Without the slightest difficulty the door opened, revealing the blackness of the drying-room beyond!

Mr. Jamieson gave an exclamation of disgust.

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"Gone!" he said. "Confound such careless work! I might have known."

It was true enough. We got the lights on finally and looked all through the three rooms that constituted this wing of the basement. Everything was quiet and empty. An explanation of how the fugitive had escaped injury was found in a heaped-up basket of clothes under the chute. The basket had been overturned, but that was all. Mr. Jamieson examined the windows: one was unlocked, and offered an easy escape. The window or the door? Which way had the fugitive escaped? The door seemed most probable, and I hoped it had been so. I could not have borne, just then, to think that it was my poor Gertrude we had been hounding through the darkness, and yet—I had met Gertrude not far from that very window.

I went up-stairs at last, tired and depressed. Mrs. Watson and Liddy were making tea in the kitchen. In certain walks of life the tea-pot is the refuge in times of stress, trouble or sickness: they give tea to the dying and they put it in the baby's nursing bottle. Mrs. Watson was fixing a tray to be sent in to me,

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and when I asked her about Rosie she confirmed her absence.

"She's not here," she said; "but I would not think much of that, Miss Innes. Rosie is a pretty young girl, and perhaps she has a sweetheart. It will be a good thing if she has. The maids stay much better when they have something like that to hold them here."

Gertrude had gone back to her room, and while I was drinking my cup of hot tea, Mr. Jamieson came in.

"We might take up the conversation where we left off an hour and a half ago," he said. "But before we go on, I want to say this: The person who escaped from the laundry was a woman with a foot of moderate size and well arched. She wore nothing but a stocking on her right foot, and, in spite of the unlocked door, she escaped by the window."

And again I thought of Gertrude's sprained ankle. Was it the right or the left?

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CHAPTER VIII

THE OTHER HALF OF THE LINK

"MISS Innes," the detective began, "what is your opinion of the figure you saw on the east veranda the night you and your maid were in the house alone?"

"It was a woman," I said positively.

"And yet your maid affirms with equal positiveness that it was a man."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "Liddy had her eyes shut—she always shuts them when she's frightened."

"And you never thought then that the intruder who came later that night might be a woman—the woman, in fact, whom you saw on the veranda?"

"I had reasons for thinking it was a man," I said, remembering the pearl cuff-link.

"Now we are getting down to business. *What* were your reasons for thinking that?"

I hesitated.

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"If you have any reason for believing that your midnight guest was Mr. Armstrong, other than his visit here the next night, you ought to tell me, Miss Innes. We can take nothing for granted. If, for instance, the intruder who dropped the bar and scratched the staircase—you see, I know about that—if this visitor was a woman, why should not the same woman have come back the following night, met Mr. Armstrong on the circular staircase, and in alarm shot him?"

"It was a man," I reiterated. And then, because I could think of no other reason for my statement, I told him about the pearl cuff-link. He was intensely interested.

"Will you give me the link," he said, when I finished, "or, at least, let me see it? I consider it a most important clue."

"Won't the description do?"

"Not as well as the original."

"Well, I'm very sorry," I said, as calmly as I could, "I—the thing is lost. It—it must have fallen out of a box on my dressing-table."

Whatever he thought of my explanation, and I knew he doubted it, he made no sign. He asked me

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to describe the link accurately, and I did so, while he glanced at a list he took from his pocket.

"One set monogram cuff-links," he read, "one set plain pearl links, one set cuff-links, woman's head set with diamonds and emeralds. There is no mention of such a link as you describe, and yet, if your theory is right, Mr. Armstrong must have taken back in his cuffs one complete cuff-link, and a half, perhaps, of the other."

The idea was new to me. If it had not been the murdered man who had entered the house that night, who had it been?

"There are a number of strange things connected with this case," the detective went on. "Miss Gertrude Innes testified that she heard some one fumbling with the lock, that the door opened, and that almost immediately the shot was fired. Now, Miss Innes, here is the strange part of that. Mr. Armstrong had no key with him. There was no key in the lock, or on the floor. In other words, the evidence points absolutely to this: Mr. Armstrong was admitted to the house from within."

"It is impossible," I broke in. "Mr. Jamieson, do you know what your words imply? Do you know that

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you are practically accusing Gertrude Innes of admitting that man?"

"Not quite that," he said, with his friendly smile. "In fact, Miss Innes, I am quite certain she did not. But as long as I learn only parts of the truth, from both you and her, what can I do? I know you picked up something in the flower bed: you refuse to tell me what it was. I know Miss Gertrude went back to the billiard-room to get something, she refuses to say what. You suspect what happened to the cuff-link, but you won't tell me. So far, all I am sure of is this: I do not believe Arnold Armstrong was the midnight visitor who so alarmed you by dropping—shall we say, a golf-stick? And I believe that when he did come he was admitted by some one in the house. Who knows—it may have been—Liddy!"

I stirred my tea angrily.

"I have always heard," I said dryly, "that undertakers' assistants are jovial young men. A man's sense of humor seems to be in inverse proportion to the gravity of his profession."

"A man's sense of humor is a barbarous and a cruel thing, Miss Innes," he admitted. "It is to the feminine as the hug of a bear is to the scratch of—well,

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anything with claws. Is that you, Thomas? Come in."

Thomas Johnson stood in the doorway. He looked alarmed and apprehensive, and suddenly I remembered the sealskin dressing-bag in the lodge. Thomas came just inside the door and stood with his head drooping, his eyes, under their shaggy gray brows, fixed on Mr. Jamieson.

"Thomas," said the detective, not unkindly, "I sent for you to tell us what you told Sam Bohannon at the club, the day before Mr. Arnold was found here, dead. Let me see. You came here Friday night to see Miss Innes, didn't you? And came to work here Saturday morning?"

For some unexplained reason Thomas looked relieved.

"Yas, sah," he said. "You see it were like this: When Mistah Armstrong and the fam'ly went away, Mis' Watson an' me, we was lef' in charge till the place was rented. Mis' Watson, she've bin here a good while, an' she warn' skeery. So she slep' in the house. I'd bin havin' tokens—I tol' Mis' Innes some of 'em—an' I slep' in the lodge. Then one day Mis' Watson, she came to me an' she sez, sez she, 'Thomas,

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you'll hev to sleep up in the big house. I'm too nervous to do it any more.' But I jes' reckon to myself that ef it's too skeery fer her, it's too skeery fer me. We had it, then, sho' nuff, and it ended up with Mis' Watson stayin' in the lodge nights an' me lookin' fer work at de club."

"Did Mrs. Watson say that anything had happened to alarm her?"

"No, sah. She was jes' natchally skeered. Well, that was all, far's I know, until the night I come over to see Mis' Innes. I come across the valley, along the path from the club-house, and I goes home that way. Down in the creek bottom I almost run into a man. He wuz standin' with his back to me, an' he was workin' with one of these yere electric light things that fit in yer pocket. He was havin' trouble—one minute it'd flash out, an' the nex' it'd be gone. I hed a view of 'is white dress shirt an' tie, as I passed. I didn't see his face. But I know it warn't Mr. Arnold. It was a taller man than Mr. Arnold. Beside that, Mr. Arnold was playin' cards when I got to the club-house, same's he'd been doin' all day."

"And the next morning you came back along the path," pursued Mr. Jamieson relentlessly.

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"The nex' mornin' I come back along the path an' down where I dun see the man night befoh, I picked up this here." The old man held out a tiny object and Mr. Jamieson took it. Then he held it on his extended palm for me to see. It was the other half of the pearl cuff-link!

But Mr. Jamieson was not quite through questioning him.

"And so you showed it to Sam, at the club, and asked him if he knew any one who owned such a link, and Sam said—what?"

"Wal, Sam, he 'lowed he'd seen such a pair of cuff-buttons in a shirt belongin' to Mr. Bailey—Mr. Jack Bailey, sah."

"I'll keep this link, Thomas, for a while," the detective said. "That's all I wanted to know. Good night."

As Thomas shuffled out, Mr. Jamieson watched me sharply.

"You see, Miss Innes," he said, "Mr. Bailey insists on mixing himself with this thing. If Mr. Bailey came here that Friday night expecting to meet Arnold Armstrong, and missed him—if, as I say, he had done this, might he not, seeing him enter the following

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night, have struck him down, as he had intended before?"

"But the motive?" I gasped.

"There could be motive proved, I think. Arnold Armstrong and John Bailey have been enemies since the latter, as cashier of the Traders' Bank, brought Arnold almost into the clutches of the law. Also, you forget that both men have been paying attention to Miss Gertrude. Bailey's flight looks bad, too."

"And you think Halsey helped him to escape?"

"Undoubtedly. Why, what could it be but flight? Miss Innes, let me reconstruct that evening, as I see it. Bailey and Armstrong had quarreled at the club. I learned this to-day. Your nephew brought Bailey over. Prompted by jealous, insane fury, Armstrong followed, coming across by the path. He entered the billiard-room wing—perhaps rapping, and being admitted by your nephew. Just inside he was shot, by some one on the circular staircase. The shot fired, your nephew and Bailey left the house at once, going toward the automobile house. They left by the lower road, which prevented them being heard, and when you and Miss Gertrude got down-stairs everything was quiet."

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"But—Gertrude's story," I stammered.

"Miss Gertrude only brought forward her explanation the following morning. I do not believe it, Miss Innes. It is the story of a loving and ingenious woman."

"And—this thing to-night?"

"May upset my whole view of the case. We must give the benefit of every doubt, after all. We may, for instance, come back to the figure on the porch: if it was a woman you saw that night through the window, we might start with other premises. Or Mr. Innes' explanation may turn us in a new direction. It is possible that he shot Arnold Armstrong as a burglar and then fled, frightened at what he had done. In any case, however, I feel confident that the body was here when he left. Mr. Armstrong left the club ostensibly for a moonlight saunter, about half after eleven o'clock. It was three when the shot was fired."

I leaned back bewildered. It seemed to me that the evening had been full of significant happenings, had I only held the key. Had Gertrude been the fugitive in the clothes chute? Who was the man on the drive near the lodge, and whose gold-mounted dressing-bag had I seen in the lodge sitting-room?

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It was late when Mr. Jamieson finally got up to go. I went with him to the door, and together we stood looking out over the valley. Below lay the village of Casanova, with its Old World houses, its blossoming trees and its peace. Above on the hill across the valley were the lights of the Greenwood Club. It was even possible to see the curving row of parallel lights that marked the carriage road. Rumors that I had heard about the club came back—of drinking, of high play, and once, a year ago, of a suicide under those very lights.

Mr. Jamieson left, taking a short cut to the village, and I still stood there. It must have been after eleven, and the monotonous tick of the big clock on the stairs behind me was the only sound. Then I was conscious that some one was running up the drive. In a minute a woman darted into the area of light made by the open door, and caught me by the arm. It was Rosie —Rosie in a state of collapse from terror, and, not the least important, clutching one of my Coalport plates and a silver spoon.

She stood staring into the darkness behind, still holding the plate. I got her into the house and secured the plate; then I stood and looked down at

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her where she crouched tremblingly against the doorway.

"Well," I asked, "didn't your young man enjoy his meal?"

She couldn't speak. She looked at the spoon she still held—I wasn't so anxious about it: thank Heaven, it wouldn't chip—and then she stared at me.

"I appreciate your desire to have everything nice for him," I went on, "but the next time, you might take the Limoges china. It's more easily duplicated and less expensive."

"I haven't a young man—not here." She had got her breath now, as I had guessed she would. "I—I have been chased by a thief, Miss Innes."

"Did he chase you out of the house and back again?" I asked.

Then Rosie began to cry—not silently, but noisily, hysterically. I stopped her by giving her a good shake.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" I snapped. "Has the day of good common sense gone by! Sit up and tell me the whole thing."

Rosie sat up then, and sniffled.

"I was coming up the drive—" she began.

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"You must start with when you went *down* the drive, with my dishes and my silver," I interrupted, but, seeing more signs of hysteria, I gave in. "Very well. You were coming up the drive—"

"I had a basket of—of silver and dishes on my arm, and I was carrying the plate, because—because I was afraid I'd break it. Part-way up the road a man stepped out of the bushes, and held his arm like this, spread out, so I couldn't get past. He said—he said —'Not so fast, young lady; I want you to let me see what's in that basket.'"

She got up in her excitement and took hold of my arm.

"It was like this, Miss Innes," she said, "and say you was the man. When he said that, I screamed and ducked under his arm like this. He caught at the basket and I dropped it. I ran as fast as I could, and he came after as far as the trees. Then he stopped. Oh, Miss Innes, it must have been the man that killed that Mr. Armstrong!"

"Don't be foolish," I said. "Whoever killed Mr. Armstrong would put as much space between himself and this house as he could. Go up to bed now; and mind, if I hear of this story being repeated to the

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other maids, I shall deduct from your wages for every broken dish I find in the drive."

I listened to Rosie as she went up-stairs, running past the shadowy places and slamming her door. Then I sat down and looked at the Coalport plate and the silver spoon. I had brought my own china and silver, and, from all appearances, I would have little enough to take back. But though I might jeer at Rosie as much as I wished, the fact remained that some one had been on the drive that night who had no business there. Although neither had Rosie, for that matter.

I could fancy Liddy's face when she missed the extra pieces of china—she had opposed Rosie from the start. If Liddy once finds a prophecy fulfilled, especially an unpleasant one, she never allows me to forget it. It seemed to me that it was absurd to leave that china dotted along the road for her to spy the next morning; so with a sudden resolution, I opened the door again and stepped out into the darkness. As the door closed behind me I half regretted my impulse; then I shut my teeth and went on.

I have never been a nervous woman, as I said before. Moreover, a minute or two in the darkness en-

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abled me to see things fairly well. Beulah gave me rather a start by rubbing unexpectedly against my feet; then we two, side by side, went down the drive.

There were no fragments of china, but where the grove began I picked up a silver spoon. So far Rosie's story was borne out: I began to wonder if it were not indiscreet, to say the least, this midnight prowling in a neighborhood with such a deservedly bad reputation. Then I saw something gleaming, which proved to be the handle of a cup, and a step or two farther on I found a V-shaped bit of a plate. But the most surprising thing of all was to find the basket sitting comfortably beside the road, with the rest of the broken crockery piled neatly within, and a handful of small silver, spoons, forks, and the like, on top! I could only stand and stare. Then Rosie's story was true. But where had Rosie carried her basket? And why had the thief, if he were a thief, picked up the broken china out of the road and left it, with his booty?

It was with my nearest approach to a nervous collapse that I heard the familiar throbbing of an automobile engine. As it came closer I recognized the

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outline of the Dragon Fly, and knew that Halsey had come back.

Strange enough it must have seemed to Halsey, too, to come across me in the middle of the night, with the skirt of my gray silk gown over my shoulders to keep off the dew, holding a red and green basket under one arm and a black cat under the other. What with relief and joy, I began to cry, right there, and very nearly wiped my eyes on Beulah in the excitement.

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CHAPTER IX

"AUNT Ray!" Halsey said from the gloom behind the lamps. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk," I said, trying to be composed. I don't think the answer struck either of us as being ridiculous at the time. "Oh, Halsey, where have you been?"

"Let me take you up to the house." He was in the road, and had Beulah and the basket out of my arms in a moment. I could see the car plainly now, and Warner was at the wheel—Warner in an ulster and a pair of slippers, over Heaven knows what. Jack Bailey was not there. I got in, and we went slowly and painfully up to the house.

We did not talk. What we had to say was too important to commence there, and, besides, it took all kinds of coaxing from both men to get the Dragon

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Fly up the last grade. Only when we had closed the front door and stood facing each other in the hall, did Halsey say anything. He slipped his strong young arm around my shoulders and turned me so I faced the light.

"Poor Aunt Ray!" he said gently. And I nearly wept again. "I—I must see Gertrude, too; we will have a three-cornered talk."

And then Gertrude herself came down the stairs. She had not been to bed, evidently: she still wore the white negligée she had worn earlier in the evening, and she limped somewhat. During her slow progress down the stairs I had time to notice one thing: Mr. Jamieson had said the woman who escaped from the cellar had worn no shoe on her right foot. Gertrude's right ankle was the one she had sprained!

The meeting between brother and sister was tense, but without tears. Halsey kissed her tenderly, and I noticed evidences of strain and anxiety in both young faces.

"Is everything—right?" she asked.

"Right as can be," with forced cheerfulness.

I lighted the living-room and we went in there. Only a half-hour before I had sat with Mr. Jamieson

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in that very room, listening while he overtly accused both Gertrude and Halsey of at least a knowledge of the death of Arnold Armstrong. Now Halsey was here to speak for himself: I should learn everything that had puzzled me.

"I saw it in the paper to-night for the first time," he was saying. "It knocked me dumb. When I think of this houseful of women, and a thing like that occurring!"

Gertrude's face was still set and white. "That isn't all, Halsey," she said. "You and—and Jack left almost at the time it happened. The detective here thinks that you—that we—know something about it."

"The devil he does!" Halsey's eyes were fairly starting from his head. "I beg your pardon, Aunt Ray, but—the fellow's a lunatic."

"Tell me everything, won't you, Halsey?" I begged. "Tell me where you went that night, or rather morning, and why you went as you did. This has been a terrible forty-eight hours for all of us."

He stood staring at me, and I could see the horror of the situation dawning in his face.

"I can't tell you where I went, Aunt Ray," he said,

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after a moment. "As to why, you will learn that soon enough. But Gertrude knows that Jack and I left the house before this thing—this horrible murder—occurred."

"Mr. Jamieson does not believe me," Gertrude said drearily. "Halsey, if the worst comes, if they should arrest you, you must—tell."

"I shall tell nothing," he said with a new sternness in his voice. "Aunt Ray, it was necessary for Jack and me to leave that night. I can not tell you why—just yet. As to where we went, if I have to depend on that as an alibi, I shall not tell. The whole thing is an absurdity, a trumped-up charge that can not possibly be serious."

"Has Mr. Bailey gone back to the city," I demanded, "or to the club?"

"Neither," defiantly; "at the present moment I do not know where he is."

"Halsey," I asked gravely, leaning forward, "have you the slightest suspicion who killed Arnold Armstrong? The police think he was admitted from within, and that he was shot down from above, by some one on the circular staircase."

"I know nothing of it," he maintained; but I fan-

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cied I caught a sudden glance at Gertrude, a flash of something that died as it came.

As quietly, as calmly as I could, I went over the whole story, from the night Liddy and I had been alone up to the strange experience of Rosie and her pursuer. The basket still stood on the table, a mute witness to this last mystifying occurrence.

"There is something else," I said hesitatingly, at the last. "Halsey, I have never told this even to Gertrude, but the morning after the crime, I found, in a tulip bed, a revolver. It—it was yours, Halsey."

For an appreciable moment Halsey stared at me. Then he turned to Gertrude.

"My revolver, Trude!" he exclaimed. "Why, Jack took my revolver with him, didn't he?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't say that," I implored. "The detective thinks possibly Jack Bailey came back, and—and the thing happened then."

"He didn't come back," Halsey said sternly. "Gertrude, when you brought down a revolver that night for Jack to take with him, what one did you bring? Mine?"

Gertrude was defiant now.

"No. Yours was loaded, and I was afraid of what

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Jack—might do. I gave him one I have had for a year or two. It was empty."

Halsey threw up both hands despairingly.

"If that isn't like a girl!" he said. "Why didn't you do what I asked you to, Gertrude? You send Bailey off with an empty gun, and throw mine in a tulip bed, of all places on earth! Mine was a thirty-eight caliber. The inquest will show, of course, that the bullet that killed Armstrong was a thirty-eight. Then where shall I be?"

"You forget," I broke in, "that I have the revolver, and that no one knows about it."

But Gertrude had risen angrily.

"I can not stand it; it is always with me," she cried. "Halsey, I did not throw your revolver into the tulip bed. I—think—you—did it—yourself!"

They stared at each other across the big library table, with young eyes all at once hard, suspicious. And then Gertrude held out both hands to him appealingly.

"We must not," she said brokenly. "Just now, with so much at stake, it—is shameful. I know you are as ignorant as I am. Make me believe it, Halsey."

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Halsey soothed her as best he could, and the breach seemed healed. But long after I went to bed he sat down-stairs in the living-room alone, and I knew he was going over the case as he had learned it. Some things were clear to him that were dark to me. He knew, and Gertrude, too, why Jack Bailey and he had gone away that night, as they did. He knew where they had been for the last forty-eight hours, and why Jack Bailey had not returned with him. It seemed to me that without fuller confidence from both the children—they are always children to me—I should never be able to learn anything.

As I was finally getting ready for bed, Halsey came up-stairs and knocked at my door. When I had got into a negligée—I used to say wrapper before Gertrude came back from school—I let him in. He stood in the doorway a moment, and then he went into agonies of silent mirth. I sat down on the side of the bed and waited in severe silence for him to stop, but he only seemed to grow worse. When he had recovered he took me by the elbow and pulled me in front of the mirror.

"'How to be beautiful,'" he quoted. "'Advice to maids and matrons,' by Beatrice Fairfax!" And then

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I saw myself. I had neglected to remove my wrinkle eradicators, and I presume my appearance was odd. I believe that it is a woman's duty to care for her looks, but it is much like telling a necessary falsehood —one must not be found out. By the time I got them off Halsey was serious again, and I listened to his story.

"Aunt Ray," he began, extinguishing his cigarette on the back of my ivory hair-brush, "I would give a lot to tell you the whole thing. But—I can't, for a day or so, anyhow. But one thing I might have told you a long time ago. If you had known it, you would not have suspected me for a moment of—of having anything to do with the attack on Arnold Armstrong. Goodness knows what I might do to a fellow like that, if there was enough provocation, and I had a gun in my hand—under ordinary circumstances. But—I care a great deal about Louise Armstrong, Aunt Ray. I hope to marry her some day. Is it likely I would kill her brother?"

"Her stepbrother," I corrected. "No, of course, it isn't likely, or possible. Why didn't you tell me, Halsey?"

"Well, there were two reasons," he said slowly.

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"One was that you had a girl already picked out for me—"

"Nonsense," I broke in, and felt myself growing red. I had, indeed, one of the—but no matter.

"And the second reason," he pursued, "was that the Armstrongs would have none of me."

I sat bolt upright at that and gasped.

"The Armstrongs!" I repeated. "With old Peter Armstrong driving a stage across the mountains while your grandfather was war governor—"

"Well, of course, the war governor's dead, and out of the matrimonial market," Halsey interrupted. "And the present Innes admits himself he isn't good enough for—for Louise."

"Exactly," I said despairingly, "and, of course, you are taken at your own valuation. The Inneses are not always so self-depreciatory."

"Not always, no," he said, looking at me with his boyish smile. "Fortunately, Louise doesn't agree with her family. She's willing to take me, war governor or no, provided her mother consents. She isn't overly-fond of her stepfather, but she adores her mother. And now, can't you see where this thing puts me? Down and out, with all of them."

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"But the whole thing is absurd," I argued. "And besides, Gertrude's sworn statement that you left before Arnold Armstrong came would clear you at once."

Halsey got up and began to pace the room, and the air of cheerfulness dropped like a mask.

"She can't swear it," he said finally. "Gertrude's story was true as far as it went, but she didn't tell everything. Arnold Armstrong came here at two-thirty—came into the billiard-room and left in five minutes. He came to bring—something."

"Halsey," I cried, "you *must* tell me the whole truth. Every time I see a way for you to escape you block it yourself with this wall of mystery. What did he bring?"

"A telegram—for Bailey," he said. "It came by special messenger from town, and was—most important. Bailey had started for here, and the messenger had gone back to the city. The steward gave it to Arnold, who had been drinking all day and couldn't sleep, and was going for a stroll in the direction of Sunnyside."

"And he brought it?"

"Yes."

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"What was in the telegram?"

"I can tell you—as soon as certain things are made public. It is only a matter of days now," gloomily.

"And Gertrude's story of a telephone message?"

"Poor Trude!" he half whispered. "Poor loyal little girl! Aunt Ray, there was no such message. No doubt your detective already knows that and discredits all Gertrude told him."

"And when she went back, it was to get—the telegram?"

"Probably," Halsey said slowly. "When you get to thinking about it, Aunt Ray, it looks bad for all three of us, doesn't it? And yet—I will take my oath none of us even inadvertently killed that poor devil."

I looked at the closed door into Gertrude's dressing-room, and lowered my voice.

"The same horrible thought keeps recurring to me," I whispered. "Halsey, Gertrude probably had your revolver: she must have examined it, anyhow, that night. After you—and Jack had gone, what if —that ruffian came back, and she—and she—"

I couldn't finish. Halsey stood looking at me with shut lips.

"She might have heard him fumbling at the door—

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he had no key, the police say—and thinking it was you, or Jack, she admitted him. When she saw her mistake she ran up the stairs, a step or two, and turning, like an animal at bay, she fired."

Halsey had his hand over my lips before I finished, and in that position we stared each at the other, our stricken glances crossing.

"The revolver—my revolver—thrown into the tulip bed!" he muttered to himself. "Thrown perhaps from an upper window: you say it was buried deep. Her prostration ever since, her—Aunt Ray, you don't think it was Gertrude who fell down the clothes chute?"

I could only nod my head in a hopeless affirmative.

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CHAPTER X

THE morning after Halsey's return was Tuesday. Arnold Armstrong had been found dead at the foot of the circular staircase at three o'clock on Sunday morning. The funeral services were to be held on Tuesday, and the interment of the body was to be deferred until the Armstrongs arrived from California. No one, I think, was very sorry that Arnold Armstrong was dead, but the manner of his death aroused some sympathy and an enormous amount of curiosity. Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, a cousin, took charge of the arrangements, and everything, I believe, was as quiet as possible. I gave Thomas Johnson and Mrs. Watson permission to go into town to pay their last respects to the dead man, but for some reason they did not care to go.

Halsey spent part of the day with Mr. Jamieson, but he said nothing of what happened. He looked

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grave and anxious, and he had a long conversation with Gertrude late in the afternoon.

Tuesday evening found us quiet, with the quiet that precedes an explosion. Gertrude and Halsey were both gloomy and distraught, and as Liddy had already discovered that some of the china was broken—it is impossible to have any secrets from an old servant—I was not in a pleasant humor myself. Warner brought up the afternoon mail and the evening papers at seven—I was curious to know what the papers said of the murder. We had turned away at least a dozen reporters. But I read over the head-line that ran half-way across the top of the *Gazette* twice before I comprehended it. Halsey had opened the *Chronicle* and was staring at it fixedly.

"The Traders' Bank closes its doors!" was what I read, and then I put down the paper and looked across the table.

"Did you know of this?" I asked Halsey.

"I—expected it. But not so soon," he replied.

"And you?" to Gertrude.

"Jack—told us—something," Gertrude said faintly. "Oh, Halsey, what can he do now?"

"Jack!" I said scornfully. "Your Jack's flight is

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easy enough to explain now. And you helped him, both of you, to get away! You get that from your mother; it isn't an Innes trait. Do you know that every dollar you have, both of you, is in that bank?"

Gertrude tried to speak, but Halsey stopped her.

"That isn't all, Gertrude," he said quietly; "Jack is —under arrest."

"Under arrest!" Gertrude screamed, and tore the paper out of his hand. She glanced at the heading, then she crumpled the newspaper into a ball and flung it to the floor. While Halsey, looking stricken and white, was trying to smooth it out and read it, Gertrude had dropped her head on the table and was sobbing stormily.

I have the clipping somewhere, but just now I can remember only the essentials.

On the afternoon before, Monday, while the Traders' Bank was in the rush of closing hour, between two and three, Mr. Jacob Trautman, President of the Pearl Brewing Company, came into the bank to lift a loan. As security for the loan he had deposited some three hundred International Steamship Company 5's, in total value three hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Trautman went to the loan clerk and, after certain

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formalities had been gone through, the loan clerk went to the vault. Mr. Trautman, who was a large and genial German, waited for a time, whistling under his breath. The loan clerk did not come back. After an interval, Mr. Trautman saw the loan clerk emerge from the vault and go to the assistant cashier: the two went hurriedly to the vault. A lapse of another ten minutes, and the assistant cashier came out and approached Mr. Trautman. He was noticeably white and trembling. Mr. Trautman was told that through an oversight the bonds had been misplaced, and was asked to return the following morning, when everything would be made all right.

Mr. Trautman, however, was a shrewd business man, and he did not like the appearance of things. He left the bank apparently satisfied, and within thirty minutes he had called up three different members of the Traders' Board of Directors. At three-thirty there was a hastily convened board meeting, with some stormy scenes, and late in the afternoon a national bank examiner was in possession of the books. The bank had not opened for business on Tuesday.

At twelve-thirty o'clock the Saturday before, as soon as the business of the day was closed, Mr. Jul-

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Bailey, the cashier of the defunct bank, had taken his hat and departed. During the afternoon he had called up Mr. Aronson, a member of the board, and said he was ill, and might not be at the bank for a day or two. As Bailey was highly thought of, Mr. Aronson merely expressed a regret. From that time until Monday night, when Mr. Bailey had surrendered to the police, little was known of his movements. Some time after one on Saturday he had entered the Western Union office at Cherry and White Streets and had sent two telegrams. He was at the Greenwood Country Club on Saturday night, and appeared unlike himself. It was reported that he would be released under enormous bond, some time that day, Tuesday.

The article closed by saying that while the officers of the bank refused to talk until the examiner had finished his work, it was known that securities aggregating a million and a quarter were missing. Then there was a diatribe on the possibility of such an occurrence; on the folly of a one-man bank, and of a Board of Directors that met only to lunch together and to listen to a brief report from the cashier, and on the poor policy of a government that arranges a three- or four-day examination twice a year. The mystery,

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it insinuated, had not been cleared by the arrest of the cashier. Before now minor officials had been used to cloak the misdeeds of men higher up. Inseparable as the words "speculation" and "peculation" have grown to be, John Bailey was not known to be in the stock market. His only words, after his surrender, had been "Send for Mr. Armstrong at once." The telegraph message which had finally reached the President of the Traders' Bank, in an interior town in California, had been responded to by a telegram from Doctor Walker, the young physician who was traveling with the Armstrong family, saying that Paul Armstrong was very ill and unable to travel.

That was how things stood that Tuesday evening. The Traders' Bank had suspended payment, and John Bailey was under arrest, charged with wrecking it; Paul Armstrong lay very ill in California, and his only son had been murdered two days before. I sat dazed and bewildered. The children's money was gone: that was bad enough, though I had plenty, if they would let me share. But Gertrude's grief was beyond any power of mine to comfort; the man she had chosen stood accused of a colossal embezzlement—and even worse. For in the instant that I sat there I seemed to

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see the coils closing around John Bailey as the murderer of Arnold Armstrong.

Gertrude lifted her head at last and stared across the table at Halsey.

"Why did he do it?" she wailed. "Couldn't you stop him, Halsey? It was suicidal to go back!"

Halsey was looking steadily through the windows of the breakfast-room, but it was evident he saw nothing.

"It was the only thing he could do, Trude," he said at last. "Aunt Ray, when I found Jack at the Greenwood Club last Saturday night, he was frantic. I can not talk until Jack tells me I may, but—he is absolutely innocent of all this, believe me. I thought, Trude and I thought, we were helping him, but it was the wrong way. He came back. Isn't that the act of an innocent man?"

"Then why did he leave at all?" I asked, unconvinced. "What innocent man would run away from here at three o'clock in the morning? Doesn't it look rather as though he thought it impossible to escape?"

Gertrude rose angrily. "You are not even just!" she flamed. "You don't know anything about it, and you condemn him!"

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"I know that we have all lost a great deal of money," I said. "I shall believe Mr. Bailey innocent the moment he is shown to be. You profess to know the truth, but you can not tell me! What am I to think?"

Halsey leaned over and patted my hand.

"You must take us on faith," he said. "Jack Bailey hasn't a penny that doesn't belong to him; the guilty man will be known in a day or so."

"I shall believe that when it is proved," I said grimly. "In the meantime, I take no one on faith. The Inneses never do."

Gertrude, who had been standing aloof at a window, turned suddenly. "But when the bonds are offered for sale, Halsey, won't the thief be detected at once?"

Halsey turned with a superior smile.

"It wouldn't be done that way," he said. "They would be taken out of the vault by some one who had access to it, and used as collateral for a loan in another bank. It would be possible to realize eighty per cent. of their face value."

"In cash?"

"In cash."

"But the man who did it—he would be known?"

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"Yes. I tell you both, as sure as I stand here, I believe that Paul Armstrong looted his own bank. I believe he has a million at least, as the result, and that he will never come back. I'm worse than a pauper now. I can't ask Louise to share nothing a year with me, and when I think of this disgrace for her, I'm crazy."

The most ordinary events of life seemed pregnant with possibilities that day, and when Halsey was called to the telephone, I ceased all pretense at eating. When he came back from the telephone his face showed that something had occurred. He waited, however, until Thomas left the dining-room: then he told us.

"Paul Armstrong is dead," he announced gravely. "He died this morning in California. Whatever he did, he is beyond the law now."

Gertrude turned pale.

"And the only man who could have cleared Jack can never do it!" she said despairingly.

"Also," I replied coldly, "Mr. Armstrong is forever beyond the power of defending himself. When your Jack comes to me, with some two hundred thousand dollars in his hands, which is about what you have lost, I shall believe him innocent."

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Halsey threw his cigarette away and turned on me.

"There you go!" he exclaimed. "If he was the thief, he could return the money, of course. If he is innocent, he probably hasn't a tenth of that amount, in the world. In his hands! That's like a woman."

Gertrude, who had been pale and despairing during the early part of the conversation, had flushed an indignant red. She got up and drew herself to her slender height, looking down at me with the scorn of the young and positive.

"You are the only mother I ever had," she said tensely. "I have given you all I would have given my mother, had she lived—my love, my trust. And now, when I need you most, you fail me. I tell you, John Bailey is a good man, an honest man. If you say he is not, you—you—"

"Gertrude," Halsey broke in sharply. She dropped beside the table and, burying her face in her arms, broke into a storm of tears.

"I love him—love him," she sobbed, in a surrender that was totally unlike her. "Oh, I never thought it would be like this."

Halsey and I stood helpless before the storm of her emotion. I would have soothed her, but she had put

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me away, and there was something aloof in her grief, something new and strange. At last, when her sorrow had subsided to the dry shaking sobs of a tired child, without raising her head, she put out one groping hand.

"Aunt Ray!" she whispered. In a moment I was on my knees beside her, her arm around my neck, her cheek against my hair.

"Where am I, in this?" Halsey said suddenly, and tried to put his arms around us both. It was a welcome distraction, and Gertrude was soon herself again. The little storm had cleared the air. Nevertheless, my opinion remained unchanged. There was much to be cleared up before I would consent to any renewal of my acquaintance with John Bailey. And Halsey and Gertrude knew it, knowing me.

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CHAPTER XI

HALSEY MAKES A CAPTURE

IT was about half-past eight when we left the dining-room, and still engrossed with one subject, the failure of the bank and its attendant evils, Halsey and I went out into the grounds for a stroll. Gertrude followed us shortly. "The light was thickening," to appropriate Shakespeare's description of twilight, and once again the tree-toads and the crickets were making night throb with their tiny life. It was almost oppressively lonely, in spite of its beauty, and I felt a sickening pang of homesickness for my city at night—for the clatter of horses' feet on cemented paving, for the lights, the voices, the sound of children playing. The country after dark oppresses me. The stars, quite eclipsed in the city by the electric lights, here become insistent, assertive. Whether I want to or not, I find myself looking for the few I know by name, and feeling ridiculously new

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and small by contrast—always an unpleasant sensation.

After Gertrude joined us, we avoided any further mention of the murder. To Halsey, as to me, there was ever present, I am sure, the thought of our conversation of the night before. As we strolled back and forth along the drive, Mr. Jamieson emerged from the shadow of the trees.

"Good evening," he said, managing to include Gertrude in his bow. Gertrude had never been even ordinarily courteous to him, and she nodded coldly. Halsey, however, was more cordial, although we were all constrained enough. He and Gertrude went on together, leaving the detective to walk with me. As soon as they were out of earshot, he turned to me.

"Do you know, Miss Innes," he said, "the deeper I go into this thing, the more strange it seems to me. I am very sorry for Miss Gertrude. It looks as if Bailey, whom she has tried so hard to save, is worse than a rascal; and after her plucky fight for him, it seems hard."

I looked through the dusk to where Gertrude's light dinner dress gleamed among the trees. She *had* made a plucky fight, poor child. Whatever she might have

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been driven to do, I could find nothing but a deep sympathy for her. If she had only come to me with the whole truth then!

"Miss Innes," Mr. Jamieson was saying, "in the last three days, have you seen a—any suspicious figures around the grounds? Any—woman?"

"No," I replied. "I have a houseful of maids that will bear watching, one and all. But there has been no strange woman near the house or Liddy would have seen her, you may be sure. She has a telescopic eye."

Mr. Jamieson looked thoughtful.

"It may not amount to anything," he said slowly. "It is difficult to get any perspective on things around here, because every one down in the village is sure he saw the murderer, either before or since the crime. And half of them will stretch a point or two as to facts, to be obliging. But the man who drives the hack down there tells a story that may possibly prove to be important."

"I have heard it, I think. Was it the one the parlor maid brought up yesterday, about a ghost wringing its hands on the roof? Or perhaps it's the one the milk-boy heard: a tramp washing a dirty shirt, presumably bloody, in the creek below the bridge?"

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I could see the gleam of Mr. Jamieson's teeth, as he smiled.

"Neither," he said. "But Matthew Geist, which is our friend's name, claims that on Saturday night, at nine-thirty, a veiled lady—"

"I knew it would be a veiled lady," I broke in.

"A veiled lady," he persisted, "who was apparently young and beautiful, engaged his hack and asked to be driven to Sunnyside. Near the gate, however, she made him stop, in spite of his remonstrances, saying she preferred to walk to the house. She paid him, and he left her there. Now, Miss Innes, you had no such visitor, I believe?"

"None," I said decidedly.

"Geist thought it might be a maid, as you had got a supply that day. But he said her getting out near the gate puzzled him. Anyhow, we have now one veiled lady, who, with the ghostly intruder of Friday night, makes two assets that I hardly know what to do with."

"It is mystifying," I admitted, "although I can think of one possible explanation. The path from the Greenwood Club to the village enters the road near the lodge gate. A woman who wished to reach the

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Country Club, unperceived, might choose such a method. There are plenty of women there."

I think this gave him something to ponder, for in a short time he said good night and left. But I myself was far from satisfied. I was determined, however, on one thing. If my suspicions—for I had suspicions—were true, I would make my own investigations, and Mr. Jamieson should learn only what was good for him to know.

We went back to the house, and Gertrude, who was more like herself since her talk with Halsey, sat down at the mahogany desk in the living-room to write a letter. Halsey prowled up and down the entire east wing, now in the card-room, now in the billiard-room, and now and then blowing his clouds of tobacco smoke among the pink and gold hangings of the drawing-room. After a little I joined him in the billiard-room, and together we went over the details of the discovery of the body.

The card-room was quite dark. Where we sat, in the billiard-room, only one of the side brackets was lighted, and we spoke in subdued tones, as the hour and the subject seemed to demand. When I spoke of the figure Liddy and I had seen on the porch through

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the card-room window Friday night, Halsey sauntered into the darkened room, and together we stood there, much as Liddy and I had done that other night.

The window was the same grayish rectangle in the blackness as before. A few feet away in the hall was the spot where the body of Arnold Armstrong had been found. I was a bit nervous, and I put my hand on Halsey's sleeve. Suddenly, from the top of the staircase above us came the sound of a cautious footstep. At first I was not sure, but Halsey's attitude told me he had heard and was listening. The step, slow, measured, infinitely cautious, was nearer now. Halsey tried to loosen my fingers, but I was in a paralysis of fright.

The swish of a body against the curving rail, as if for guidance, was plain enough, and now whoever it was had reached the foot of the staircase and had caught a glimpse of our rigid silhouettes against the billiard-room doorway. Halsey threw me off then and strode forward.

"Who is it?" he called imperiously, and took a half-dozen rapid strides toward the foot of the staircase. Then I heard him mutter something; there was the crash of a falling body, the slam of the outer door,

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and, for an instant, quiet. I screamed, I think. Then I remember turning on the lights and finding Halsey, white with fury, trying to untangle himself from something warm and fleecy. He had cut his forehead a little on the lowest step of the stairs, and he was rather a ghastly sight. He flung the white object at me, and, jerking open the outer door, raced into the darkness.

Gertrude had come on hearing the noise, and now we stood, staring at each other over—of all things on earth—a white silk and wool blanket, exquisitely fine! It was the most unghostly thing in the world, with its lavender border and its faint scent. Gertrude was the first to speak.

"Somebody—had it?" she asked.

"Yes. Halsey tried to stop whoever it was and fell. Gertrude, that blanket is not mine. I have never seen it before."

She held it up and looked at it: then she went to the door on to the veranda and threw it open. Perhaps a hundred feet from the house were two figures, that moved slowly toward us as we looked. When they came within range of the light, I recognized Halsey, and with him Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper.

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CHAPTER XII

ONE MYSTERY FOR ANOTHER

THE most commonplace incident takes on a new appearance if the attendant circumstances are unusual. There was no reason on earth why Mrs. Watson should not have carried a blanket down the east wing staircase, if she so desired. But to take a blanket down at eleven o'clock at night, with every precaution as to noise, and, when discovered, to fling it at Halsey and bolt—Halsey's word, and a good one—into the grounds,—this made the incident more than significant.

They moved slowly across the lawn and up the steps. Halsey was talking quietly, and Mrs. Watson was looking down and listening. She was a woman of a certain amount of dignity, most efficient, so far as I could see, although Liddy would have found fault if she dared. But just now Mrs. Watson's face was an enigma. She was defiant, I think, under her mask of

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submission, and she still showed the effect of nervous shock.

"Mrs. Watson," I said severely, "will you be so good as to explain this rather unusual occurrence?"

"I don't think it so unusual, Miss Innes." Her voice was deep and very clear: just now it was somewhat tremulous. "I was taking a blanket down to Thomas, who is—not well to-night, and I used this staircase, as being nearer the path to the lodge. When—Mr. Innes called and then rushed at me, I—I was alarmed, and flung the blanket at him."

Halsey was examining the cut on his forehead in a small mirror on the wall. It was not much of an injury, but it had bled freely, and his appearance was rather terrifying.

"Thomas ill?" he said, over his shoulder. "Why, I thought I saw Thomas out there as you made that cyclonic break out of the door and over the porch."

I could see that under pretense of examining his injury he was watching her through the mirror.

"Is this one of the servants' blankets, Mrs. Watson?" I asked, holding up its luxurious folds to the light.

"Everything else is locked away," she replied.

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Which was true enough, no doubt. I had rented the house without bed furnishings.

"If Thomas is ill," Halsey said, "some member of the family ought to go down to see him. You needn't bother, Mrs. Watson. I will take the blanket."

She drew herself up quickly, as if in protest, but she found nothing to say. She stood smoothing the folds of her dead black dress, her face as white as chalk above it. Then she seemed to make up her mind.

"Very well, Mr. Innes," she said. "Perhaps you would better go. I have done all I could."

And then she turned and went up the circular staircase, moving slowly and with a certain dignity. Below, the three of us stared at one another across the intervening white blanket.

"Upon my word," Halsey broke out, "this place is a walking nightmare. I have the feeling that we three outsiders who have paid our money for the privilege of staying in this spook-factory, are living on the very top of things. We're on the lid, so to speak. Now and then we get a sight of the things inside, but we are not a part of them."

"Do you suppose," Gertrude asked doubtfully, "that she really meant that blanket for Thomas?"

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"Thomas was standing beside that magnolia tree," Halsey replied, "when I ran after Mrs. Watson. It's down to this, Aunt Ray. Rosie's basket and Mrs. Watson's blanket can only mean one thing: there is somebody hiding or being hidden in the lodge. It wouldn't surprise me if we hold the key to the whole situation now. Anyhow, I'm going to the lodge to investigate."

Gertrude wanted to go, too, but she looked so shaken that I insisted she should not. I sent for Liddy to help her to bed, and then Halsey and I started for the lodge. The grass was heavy with dew, and, mannlike, Halsey chose the shortest way across the lawn. Half-way, however, he stopped.

"We'd better go by the drive," he said. "This isn't a lawn; it's a field. Where's the gardener these days?"

"There isn't any," I said meekly. "We have been thankful enough, so far, to have our meals prepared and served and the beds aired. The gardener who belongs here is working at the club."

"Remind me to-morrow to send out a man from town," he said. "I know the very fellow."

I record this scrap of conversation, just as I have

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tried to put down anything and everything that had a bearing on what followed, because the gardener Halsey sent the next day played an important part in the events of the next few weeks—events that culminated, as you know, by stirring the country profoundly. At that time, however, I was busy trying to keep my skirts dry, and paid little or no attention to what seemed then a most trivial remark.

Along the drive I showed Halsey where I had found Rosie's basket with the bits of broken china piled inside. He was rather skeptical.

"Warner probably," he said when I had finished. "Began it as a joke on Rosie, and ended by picking up the broken china out of the road, knowing it would play hob with the tires of the car." Which shows how near one can come to the truth, and yet miss it altogether.

At the lodge everything was quiet. There was a light in the sitting-room down-stairs, and a faint gleam, as if from a shaded lamp, in one of the upper rooms. Halsey stopped and examined the lodge with calculating eyes.

"I don't know, Aunt Ray," he said dubiously; "this is hardly a woman's affair. If there's a scrap of any

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kind, you hike for the timber." Which was Halsey's solicitous care for me, put into vernacular.

"I shall stay right here," I said, and crossing the small veranda, now shaded and fragrant with honeysuckle, I hammered the knocker on the door.

Thomas opened the door himself—Thomas, fully dressed and in his customary health. I had the blanket over my arm.

"I brought the blanket, Thomas," I said; "I am sorry you are so ill."

The old man stood staring at me and then at the blanket. His confusion under other circumstances would have been ludicrous.

"What! Not ill?" Halsey said from the step. "Thomas, I'm afraid you've been malingering."

Thomas seemed to have been debating something with himself. Now he stepped out on the porch and closed the door gently behind him.

"I reckon you bettah come in, Mis' Innes," he said, speaking cautiously, "It's got so I dunno what to do, and it's boun' to come out some time er ruther."

He threw the door open then, and I stepped inside, Halsey close behind. In the sitting-room the old negro turned with quiet dignity to Halsey.

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"You bettah sit down, sah," he said. "It's a place for a woman, sah."

Things were not turning out the way Halsey expected. He sat down on the center-table, with his hands thrust in his pockets, and watched me as I followed Thomas up the narrow stairs. At the top a woman was standing, and a second glance showed me it was Rosie. She shrank back a little, but I said nothing. And then Thomas motioned to a partly open door, and I went in.

The lodge boasted three bedrooms up-stairs, all comfortably furnished. In this one, the largest and airiest, a night lamp was burning, and by its light I could make out a plain white metal bed. A girl was asleep there—or in a half stupor, for she muttered something now and then. Rosie had taken her courage in her hands, and coming in had turned up the light. It was only then that I knew. Fever-flushed, ill as she was, I recognized Louise Armstrong.

I stood gazing down at her in a stupor of amazement. Louise here, hiding at the lodge, ill and alone! Rosie came up to the bed and smoothed the white counterpane.

"I am afraid she is worse to-night," she ventured

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at last. I put my hand on the sick girl's forehead. It was burning with fever, and I turned to where Thomas lingered in the hallway.

"Will you tell me what you mean, Thomas Johnson, by not telling me this before?" I demanded indignantly.

Thomas quailed.

"Mis' Louise wouldn' let me," he said earnestly. "I wanted to. She ought to 'a' had a doctor the night she came, but she wouldn' hear to it. Is she—is she very bad, Mis' Innes?"

"Bad enough," I said coldly. "Send Mr. Innes up."

Halsey came up the stairs slowly, looking rather interested and inclined to be amused. For a moment he could not see anything distinctly in the darkened room; he stopped, glanced at Rosie and at me, and then his eyes fell on the restless head on the pillow. I think he felt who it was before he really saw her; he crossed the room in a couple of strides and bent over the bed.

"Louise!" he said softly; but she did not reply, and her eyes showed no recognition. Halsey was young, and illness was new to him. He straightened himself slowly, still watching her, and caught my arm.

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"She's dying, Aunt Ray!" he said huskily. "Dying! Why, she doesn't know me!"

"Fudge!" I snapped, being apt to grow irritable when my sympathies are aroused. "She's doing nothing of the sort,—and don't pinch my arm. If you want something to do, go and choke Thomas."

But at that moment Louise roused from her stupor to cough, and at the end of the paroxysm, as Rosie laid her back, exhausted, she knew us. That was all Halsey wanted; to him consciousness was recovery. He dropped on his knees beside the bed, and tried to tell her she was all right, and we would bring her around in a hurry, and how beautiful she looked—only to break down utterly and have to stop. And at that I came to my senses, and put him out.

"This instant!" I ordered, as he hesitated. "And send Rosie here."

He did not go far. He sat on the top step of the stairs, only leaving to telephone for a doctor, and getting in everybody's way in his eagerness to fetch and carry. I got him away finally, by sending him to fix up the car as a sort of ambulance, in case the doctor would allow the sick girl to be moved. He sent Gertrude down to the lodge loaded with all manner

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of impossible things, including an armful of Turkish towels and a box of mustard plasters, and as the two girls had known each other somewhat before, Louise brightened perceptibly when she saw her.

When the doctor from Englewood—the Casanova doctor, Doctor Walker, being away—had started for Sunnyside, and I had got Thomas to stop trying to explain what he did not understand himself, I had a long talk with the old man, and this is what I learned.

On Saturday evening before, about ten o'clock, he had been reading in the sitting-room down-stairs, when some one rapped at the door. The old man was alone, Warner not having arrived, and at first he was uncertain about opening the door. He did so finally, and was amazed at being confronted by Louise Armstrong. Thomas was an old family servant, having been with the present Mrs. Armstrong since she was a child, and he was overwhelmed at seeing Louise. He saw that she was excited and tired, and he drew her into the sitting-room and made her sit down. After a while he went to the house and brought Mrs. Watson, and they talked until late. The old man said Louise was in trouble, and seemed frightened. Mrs. Watson made some tea and took it to the lodge, but Louise

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made them both promise to keep her presence a secret. She had not known that Sunnyside was rented, and whatever her trouble was, this complicated things. She seemed puzzled. Her stepfather and her mother were still in California—that was all she would say about them. Why she had run away no one could imagine. Mr. Arnold Armstrong was at the Greenwood Club, and at last Thomas, not knowing what else to do, went over there along the path. It was almost midnight. Part-way over he met Armstrong himself and brought him to the lodge. Mrs. Watson had gone to the house for some bed-linen, it having been arranged that under the circumstances Louise would be better at the lodge until morning. Arnold Armstrong and Louise had a long conference, during which he was heard to storm and become very violent. When he left it was after two. He had gone up to the house—Thomas did not know why—and at three o'clock he was shot at the foot of the circular staircase.

The following morning Louise had been ill. She had asked for Arnold, and was told he had left town. Thomas had not the moral courage to tell her of the crime. She refused a doctor, and shrank morbidly from having her presence known. Mrs. Watson and

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Thomas had had their hands full, and at last Rosie had been enlisted to help them. She carried necessary provisions—little enough—to the lodge, and helped to keep the secret.

Thomas told me quite frankly that he had been anxious to keep Louise's presence hidden for this reason: they had all seen Arnold Armstrong that night, and he, himself, for one, was known to have had no very friendly feeling for the dead man. As to the reason for Louise's flight from California, or why she had not gone to the Fitzhughs', or to some of her people in town, he had no more information than I had. With the death of her stepfather and the prospect of the immediate return of the family, things had become more and more impossible. I gathered that Thomas was as relieved as I at the turn events had taken. No, she did not know of either of the deaths in the family.

Taken all around, I had only substituted one mystery for another. If I knew now why Rosie had taken the basket of dishes, I did not know who had spoken to her and followed her along the drive. If I knew that Louise was in the lodge, I did not know why she was there. If I knew that Arnold Armstrong had

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spent some time in the lodge the night before he was murdered, I was no nearer the solution of the crime. Who was the midnight intruder who had so alarmed Liddy and myself? Who had fallen down the clothes chute? Was Gertrude's lover a villain or a victim? Time was to answer all these things.

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