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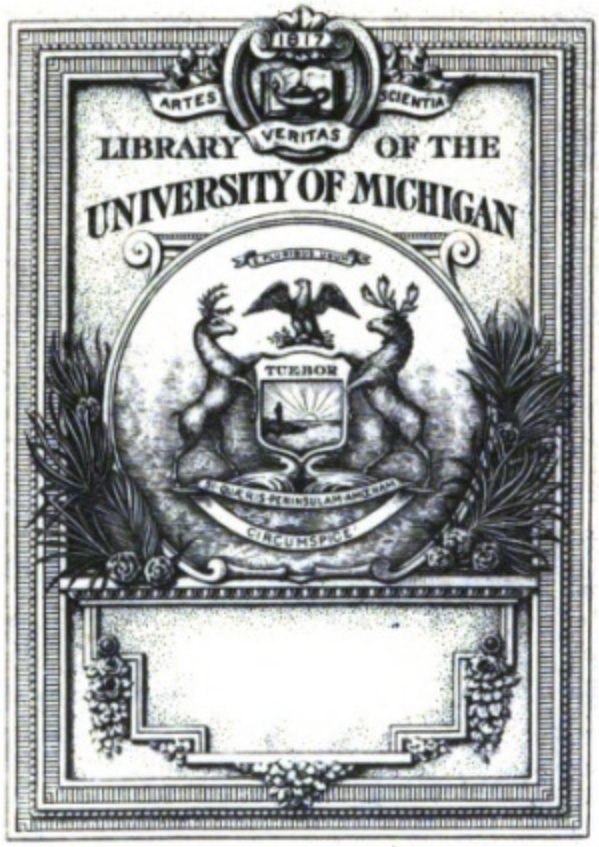

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SCORPION'S TRAIL

WALKING on the burrows, Doctor Paul Hanson and his friend Lieutenant Marlow met a woman fleeing in terror from an old cottage. Considering it their duty to investigate, they stepped into the case and found themselves in a maelstrom of horror. Unwittingly they had entered the lair of The Scorpion, dreaded menace to society, whose crimes were distinguished for their subtlety and gruesomeness. Scotland Yard takes up the trail . . . enters upon a grim duel of death.

¶ SCORPION'S TRAIL is a masterly novel, skilfully interweaving romance and mystery and adventure, crowded with incident, and culminating in a climax as thrilling as it is unforeseen.

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SCORPION'S TRAIL

by T. C. H. Jacobs

Author of DOCUMENTS OF MURDER, THE KESTREL HOUSE MYSTERY, etc.

New York, THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

AT THE CHURCH DOOR

"DEARLY BELOVED, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God. . . ."

The rich, sonorous voice of the white-haired clergyman resounded through the beautiful old church, impressive and inspiring even to the group of wedding devotees occupying the rear pews.

". . . Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined."

The slight little figure standing so stiffly erect by the tall, swarthy man began to tremble. But the benign old clergyman beamed reassuringly upon her as he continued with the service:

"Therefore if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

In the pause that followed there was no sound to break the solemn silence. The little man clad in rusty-black, semi-clerical garb, with a pair of steel-rimmed glasses perched rakishly on his large and very red nose, shifted restlessly in his seat under the shadow of a pillar. For a moment his black-gloved hands closed convulsively over the handle of his shabby umbrella. Then a smile flickered across his mouth, a mirthless, sardonic grin.

In the pew behind he heard a woman whisper:

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"Poor dear's nervous. Pretty little soul, ain't her, Mrs. 'Awkins?"

He heard the rustle of Mrs. Hawkins' bonnet as she nodded an emphatic agreement.

"Golden hair and blue eyes, Mrs. Smith, it do fetch 'em sure. Bit of a nob, too, she's marrying. A Count or something."

Again the bitter grin creased the odd little man's mouth. His eyes, very bright behind the tinted glasses, gleamed. He rested his chin upon his hands clasped over the umbrella handle and stared toward the altar. Only when the service was nearing its conclusion did he move again.

As he watched the priest join their right hands his small teeth gritted together and he drew in his breath with a sigh.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Almost invisible in the deep shadows, he huddled against the pillar. Gently his narrow shoulders shook in a dreadful travesty of mirth. "Those whom God hath joined together!" Silently he repeated the words to himself and he grinned again; the grin of a man with a raging panther in his soul.

He scarcely heard the rich, clear voice pronounce the final blessing. But when the general stir began he slipped like a shadow from his seat and mingled with the crowd about the door waiting for the bride and bridegroom.

Presently they appeared, the young girl walking down the aisle with that grace and dignity of movement which is the natural heritage of beauty; but unnaturally pale, looking neither to the right nor the left. The bridegroom, tall and elegant, with a smile upon his handsome face, acknowledging the congratulations and conventional good wishes with polished ease. A magnificent figure of a man,

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dwarfing the dainty bride who walked so unseeingly beside him.

The throng at the door parted and joined behind them again as they paused upon the steps to face a battery of press cameras.

The *Evening Comet* reporter whispered to his cameraman:

"Gad, boy, what a peach! But why the heck don't she smile?"

"Not exactly bursting with joy, is she?" returned the cameraman and clicked the shutter.

The reporters moved away, hats in hand, bowing, and the tall bridegroom smiled down at his bride.

It was his last conscious action in this life. A second later his head jerked back and his hands shot out before him, groping blindly. He stood for a moment swaying, and then with a strangled moan he slowly collapsed upon the steps. The great bouquet of white carnations dropped from the nerveless fingers of his bride and fell upon his back. They hid the tiny stream of blood which oozed from the hole beneath his left shoulder blade.

For perhaps twenty seconds the crowd stood frozen with horror; then it surged forward. The odd little figure seemed to melt through them until he was upon the outer rim. He waited long enough to hear the cry of "Murder!" and the shrill notes of a police whistle before he slipped silently away, totally unobserved in the general commotion.

Ten minutes later he was gazing down upon Oxford Street from the deck of a westbound bus. His shabby umbrella was clutched tightly to his breast, an expression of benevolent idiocy upon his lined face. But the dark eyes veiled behind the tinted glasses were neither benevolent nor stupid. They glittered with a savage, unholy joy.

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CHAPTER II

TRAGEDY ON THE BURROWS

THE COOL sea-breeze blowing across the burrows was both sedative and stimulant. Ann Penhayle paused to admire the beauty of the scene. To her left swept the bay where the two rivers met and the white breakers thundered over the treacherous bar, with the gulls wheeling and dipping above. The quaint little village of Appledore clustered on the steep hillslope, its whitewashed walls gleaming in the setting sun. Before her, across the river, lay the yellow sand dunes with the blue water rippling lazily over the beach. A scene of peace and restful beauty.

Ann felt the soft wind gently ruffling her fair hair in playful caress and, for the first time for many days, she smiled. Her marriage to Count Raoul du Buisson and his assassination at the church door seemed like some dreadful nightmare that had passed, leaving her bewildered and exhausted. Impossible to believe that by that ceremony, but dimly remembered, she had become the Countess du Buisson. For the hundredth time she wondered what had made her do it. Why had she ever consented to marry him? He had swept her off her feet by his whirlwind, masterful wooing. And her guardian, the Reverend Elphinstone Clayton, had been so delighted about it. That more than anything had been the cause.

She recalled the old man's round, benevolent face as he stood above them. Heard again his rich, sonorous voice with

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its bell-like clarity resounding through the church. Of the words themselves she remembered few, but their solemn meaning had frightened her, filled her with a sense of panic. She would have given anything for the courage to have stopped the ceremony. The kindly, reassuring smile had lent her strength, but at the same time it had forced her to go on. She could not disappoint him.

The appalling sequel had been, if possible, a greater shock for him than for her. When he had suggested this escape to the quiet North Devon village she had welcomed it. Anywhere to get away from the awful tragedy.

Ann possessed a quality of mind denied to most women. She could be honest with herself. She was shocked by the dreadful murder; so much so that she doubted if ever she would erase the horror from her memory. But in her heart she knew that her predominant emotion was one of profound relief. She felt like a person whose life has been reprieved at the last moment. That it should be so troubled her greatly. She desperately wanted someone in whom to confide. Someone who would tell her that she was not heartless and ungrateful. Her mother she had never known. Her father, manager of the Paris branch of a London bank, had died four years previously while she was still a schoolgirl at a South Coast school. He had appointed the Reverend Elphinstone Clayton as her guardian. But the clergyman, Vicar of the English Church in Paris, had come infrequently to England, and she had scarcely known him until his retirement some months ago.

Absent-minded and absorbed in his books, he was no companion for a young girl full of life. In the tragedy of her marriage he had failed to help her. The Biblical quotations with which he sought to bring comfort had merely irritated her. She could not accept his blind submission to what he believed to be the Divine Will.

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Vainly endeavoring to find a solution to her problem, she walked slowly across the wild burrows toward the high river bank. Her path lay by the ruined cottage, standing battered and forlorn, slowly crumbling to decay.

Curiosity prompted her to turn aside and glance within. As she entered the derelict garden she was immediately conscious of a changed atmosphere. An air of melancholy seemed to breathe from the old ruin. A subtle aura of gloomy foreboding, depressing in the extreme. Ann shivered. A chill as of some unseen spectral presence seemed to pass icily over her. A horrible emotion without a name, cold and menacing.

Her wood-violet blue eyes opened wide in surprise as she halted, puzzled and somewhat startled. Then the humor of some recollection brought a smile to her dainty, cherry-red lips. She had remembered Old Sam Fisher's yarn. That very morning the fisherman had told her that the cottage was haunted. Not by your ordinary ghost; this was a phantom horse. Ann liked horses almost as much as she liked dogs, and she was not unduly alarmed at the prospect of encountering an equine spirit. Not, of course, she told herself, that such a thing could be possible, especially on a warm July evening.

With a shrug of her small shoulders, half defiant, she stepped up to the window. The interior was in gray shadow, and her eyes, attuned to the sunlight, did not at once observe the ghastly thing which lay upon the floor.

It was fully a minute before she saw it, and a gasp of sheer terror broke from her parted lips. She turned to flee, blind panic urging her on.

. . . . .

Doctor Paul Hanson and his companion, Lieutenant Richard Marlow, R.N., walking out from Instow along the

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river bank, saw her running toward them and promptly halted.

"One superior maiden in distress," remarked Dick Marlow. "And, if my eyes do not deceive, possessed of a most complete wind-up. Sir Sawbones, your lance. There's a fiery dragon to slay somewhere. Come on."

Ann looked up and saw them approaching. She stopped, conscious of a horrible dizziness. But taking a fresh grip upon herself she managed to quell the tumultuous beating of her heart. One man, she noticed, was very tall, with raven-black hair and a strong, serious face. The other was much shorter and younger. His hair was bleached to exceptional fairness and his gray eyes were laughing. He moved with the effortless swing of the trained athlete. Both men were obviously gentlemen.

She went forward to meet them.

"There's a man dreadfully injured in the cottage over there," she announced breathlessly. "I—I'm afraid he is dead."

Paul Hanson raised his eyebrows and glanced at his companion, who was regarding Ann with undisguised admiration.

"I'll go and see, Dick," he said, in a low voice in which the American accent was faintly discernible.

"Frightful shock for you, eh?" observed Dick Marlow as Hanson hurried off. "I mean, finding bodies all over the place and that sort of thing. It's not nice, is it?"

Ann looked up at the gray eyes and the tanned face and found them pleasant. His manner was free and comradely, and her heart, aching for friendship, warmed to him. Instinctively she felt that he was a man who could be trusted.

She smiled, and Dick Marlow felt his pulse quicken. He was not a ladies' man—they rather frightened him—

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but he had long carried his secret ideal. Never had he expected to find his ideal realized. Yet here before him stood the living counterpart of that mental picture: dainty, adorable, far more wonderful than his mind's creation.

"Jolly lucky old Paul is a doctor," he heard himself saying, and scarcely recognized his own voice.

Paul Hanson, unconscious that Dick, mainly to cover his own confusion at the miracle, had begun a flattering and slightly inaccurate description of his friend's medical skill, hurried up to the ruin. His profession and five years as scientific expert to the New York Homicide Bureau had made him very nearly shock-proof. But the dreadful sight which met him as he stepped into the derelict cottage momentarily staggered him.

Sprawled upon the floor, blood thickly streaking his ashen face and eyes staring sightlessly at the rotten beams above, lay the body of a well-dressed young man. Across his forehead ran a curved wale which extended over his temples in horseshoe formation. Hanson saw that the bone was crushed into the brain beneath.

But it was not the injury which made the face so horrible to look upon. It was the expression of mingled terror and amazement which struck such a chill. In all the years of his experience he had never seen such ghastly fear frozen on a dead man's face.

He dropped to his knees beside the still form and began a rapid examination. Presently he sat back on his heels, hands hanging loosely over his knees, and regarded the wound intently.

"Damn—I knew it!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet and bringing his clenched fist with a loud smack against his open palm. His dark eyes flashed excitedly and his mouth set hard. His mind was working at lightning speed and along a new track. Lingering doubt gave way to firm

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conviction as he reviewed the matter from all angles. Impossible as it had at first appeared, he was now convinced of the terrible truth.

He turned impatiently as Dick Marlow jumped over the low wall.

"Don't come in, please," he requested curtly.

"Genuine corpse?" queried Dick, eying him with frank curiosity. There was precious little which perturbed Paul; but something had now, and no mistake about it.

"Come outside," said Hanson, taking his arm and gently but firmly pushing him back.

Ann Penhayle waited a short distance away and Hanson went to her.

"You did not recognize him, I suppose, Miss . . . ?"

"Ann Penhayle," she offered, shaking her head in negative reply. She had given her maiden name deliberately. The Countess du Buisson was a title she would never use.

Hanson bowed, his grave eyes regarding her approvingly.

"The poor fellow has been kicked to death by a horse," he informed her. "We should notify the police at once. Do you know where the village constable might be found, Miss Penhayle?"

"No, Doctor Hanson," Ann replied regretfully. "I am merely a visitor, like yourself."

Hanson smiled as he turned to Dick. With that smile the whole character of his face altered, revealing the true man beneath the stern exterior which so often acted as a barrier between him and his fellows.

"Then it's up to you, Dick," he announced. "You had better escort Miss Penhayle and then inquire at the New Inn. But do it discreetly. We don't want a bunch of villagers hiking along too. Come back to me here."

"Discretion's my middle name. Rely on the Navy." Dick

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gave him a mock salute. "Are you fit, Miss Penhayle? Good! Then let's leg it in search of the law-and-order merchant."

Hanson watched them go, a smile upon his lips. He was thinking that Dick had wasted no time in establishing a basis of friendship. He must have told her their names almost at once. He wondered what else his impetuous friend had confided, and found himself hoping that he had refrained from reference to his own position as scientific expert to the New York police. Having recently completed a tour of Europe studying the various police methods, he was soon returning to America to take charge of the Department of Science. Though one of the leading authorities on medical jurisprudence, Paul Hanson avoided publicity. He detested it in any shape. But it was not this alone which made him hope that Dick Marlow had not talked too much. There were other and vastly more important reasons.

With a shrug of his shoulders he dismissed the matter from his mind and went slowly toward the place where the dead man lay. Before the blundering, untrained local police arrived he had work to do.

Twenty minutes later, having completed his task, he arose to his feet, satisfied that he had missed nothing. He sensed rather than heard the slight movement behind him and turned swiftly.

Framed in the window opening, regarding him intently, was a most extraordinary little figure. Clad in rusty black, vaguely clerical, and clutching to his narrow chest a dis-gracefully rolled umbrella, he stared with singular fixity through a pair of steel-rimmed glasses perched on a large red nose. From beneath his black, broad-brimmed hat straggled a few strands of dirty gray hair. Hanson swore

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softly. Here was a complication for which he had not bargained.

"Oh, tut, tut!" beamed the stranger, wagging a black-gloved finger in mild reproof. "*Pax vobiscum.* I merely ask is anything wrong?"

Paul Hanson thrust his hands into his coat pockets and, with shoulders hunched and jaw out, glared down at the diminutive intruder. If he was surprised his lean face betrayed no sign. But his dark eyes were frigid and aggressively inquiring.

The stranger nodded his head with a peculiar birdlike motion and beamed again, quite unabashed. He shifted his umbrella to the other arm and giggled.

"My name is Wernick," he announced. "Simon Wernick. I am a psychic investigator. Like the great Flammarion, I would seek to lift the veil which shrouds the mysteries of the grave. But, dear me," he added hastily after a pause, "I seem to have arrived at an unfortunate moment in which to pursue the path of science. May I come in?"

Without waiting for a reply he placed one hand upon the sill and vaulted into the room. He stepped round Hanson, who had not moved, and stood viewing the body, head cocked on one side, thoughtfully scratching his chin with a thumbnail protruding through the glove.

"*Horribile visu!*" he exclaimed. Then jerking around, he shot one swift glance at Hanson's cold eyes. "Strange how a horse may kick sometimes," he remarked, with an irritating, inane titter.

"Very strange," agreed Hanson, staring speculatively at the bright, unwinking eyes behind the tinted glasses. For a long, tense minute they stayed thus, neither man moving. Then Wernick beamed approvingly and bowed as though acknowledging a compliment:

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"Ah, so ingenious! Oh, so clever!" he murmured, hugging the umbrella to his narrow chest as if he were enjoying himself immensely. "But, as my old friend Lafontaine used to say, 'repetition is apt to spoil a joke.'" He tittered again, the silly giggle of a half-wit.

Hanson frowned. Simon Wernick was a problem to which he could find no ready solution. A false move now might precipitate that very thing he wished most to avoid.

Though he fully understood the significance of the odd little man's remarks he feigned ignorance. Wernick had used Baron Lafontaine's name deliberately. That he should have known it at all was sufficiently disturbing. But that he should have mentioned it now, under the present circumstances, was a calculated challenge. Hanson played for time.

"I trust that your friend's sense of humor is not so misplaced as your own," he said icily.

Wernick's bright eyes returned his frigid stare unwinkingly. "But you admit the joke?" he insisted. "You must do that."

Hanson maintained an uncompromising silence, his dark eyes vainly searching the other's face for some clew to his identity, but it served only to strengthen him in his conviction that never before had he set eyes upon him.

Who the devil *was* he? And why was he here now?

Wernick's face contorted into an exasperating grin and his narrow shoulders shook as with secret mirth difficult to control.

"And you came for a holiday! Oh, so very annoying, *n'est-ce pas?* All my sympathies are with you, for I am sure that the trail will be long. But what sport, Doctor! What a quarry to pursue!"

The sound of footsteps without indicated the return of Dick Marlow.

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"All O.K.," he announced. Then, catching sight of the odd little figure: "What the heck——!"

Hanson motioned him to come away and walked out upon the burrows with him.

"Been collecting scarecrows in my absence?" asked Dick in a stage whisper.

Hanson did not smile. If anything, his lean face revealed more than its habitual seriousness.

"I've collected something," he replied gravely; "and I'd give a whole heap to know just what it is."

"Something that's plain bughouse," grinned Dick. "Candidate for the nearest loony-bin without the option. Where's he gone?" he added, looking back.

Hanson swung round and with a muttered exclamation of annoyance strode swiftly to the ruin. He stepped inside, but Wernick was not there. With rapid strides he circled the cottage, without result.

"Hell's bells!" ejaculated Dick in frank amazement. "Sure he wasn't a ghost, Paul?"

Hanson thrust long nervous fingers through his raven hair. His mouth set in a grim, hard line. He knew that it would be hopeless to search for Wernick on the burrows. Inwardly he was filled with rage at his own folly, and, torn by indecision, he stood for several minutes staring out across the bay. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he glanced down at Dick.

"A ghost did you say? A very unpleasant spook for somebody, I fancy. We shall hear of him again, Dick. Ah! Here come the police and half the damned population. Leave the talking to me. Understand?"

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CHAPTER III

CHIEF INSPECTOR BARNARD

BIG BEN was acclaiming the hour of four when Paul Hanson turned off the Embankment into New Scotland Yard.

"I have an appointment with Chief Inspector Barnard," he informed the constable on duty.

Five minutes later he was ushered into the Chief Inspector's room, a bare, bleak apartment overlooking the river.

A heavily built man with close-cropped, iron-gray hair, seated at a desk, glanced up as he entered. For a fleeting moment his cold, steely eyes gleamed and then his stern mouth relaxed into a smile of welcome. He rose and extended his hand.

"Pleased to see you again, Doctor," he greeted in slow, measured tones.

Hanson returned the firm handshake and seated himself on a chair by the desk. Crossing his long legs, he leaned back, thrusting his hands deep into his coat pockets. The other favored him with a questioning stare which most men would have found extremely disconcerting.

"Barnard," said Hanson quietly, "The Scorpion is in England."

Had it been his intention to startle the steely-eyed inspector he would have been sadly disappointed. Barnard's face betrayed no more emotion than a stone image.

Hanson, well acquainted with him, continued:

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"Last evening, by the merest chance, I struck his trail."
"So? Where?"
"Instow, North Devon."
"Blast!" Barnard cursed with disgust.
Hanson smiled. He understood the other's annoyance.

"That is one of the defects in your British system," he said. "If the county police do not seek your aid you are powerless to proceed. It spoils what is otherwise the finest police organization in Europe."

"It does," agreed Barnard grimly. "Maybe it'll be altered one day. However, that's neither here nor there. This is murder, I take it?"

Hanson nodded slowly.

"Yes, it is murder. But it will never be recognized as such by the local police. Do you recall Baron Lafontaine's death? It occurred in Paris eight months ago."

"Lafontaine?" repeated Barnard thoughtfully. "Rich banker, kicked to death in a stable by his favorite horse. That it?"

"That was the arranged official verdict, but it was not the truth. Lafontaine was murdered by a member of The Scorpion gang. At that time I was attached to the Sûreté and played a part in the subsequent investigation. The crime was cleverly conceived, but one little mistake was made."

"There always is—if one can see it."

"Quite. That, of course, is the science of detection: to find the detail that has been overlooked. In this case the murderer was no horseman or he would have known that a horse kicks upward. On the Baron's forehead was the most perfect impression of a horseshoe, complete to nails and calkins. But, Barnard, this was the error. *It was the wrong way up!*"

A fleeting smile crossed the Chief Inspector's stern

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mouth. "Proving that the man had been killed by a downward stroke. A bad mistake that, Doctor!"

Hanson leaned forward and stuck out a long finger.

"But one which was not recognized for nearly two days," he retorted. "You see, a real horseshoe had been used, wired to a length of iron rod. And, in addition, the blood splashed over the mare's shoe was human blood. It was clever and came within a hair's breadth of success."

"It *was* clever," agreed Barnard. "So the same thing has happened again at Instow, eh?"

"Yes, exactly the same. Except that no particular horse will have been bloodmarked. There were at least a dozen, all half wild, grazing on the burrows. What is more, two months ago a farm hand was savaged at that very spot."

"Thereby suggesting the method of murder?"

"Possibly. There is the additional suggestion furnished by the fact that the cottage is reputed to be haunted by a phantom horse. The locals believe that with deep-rooted conviction."

"They would! Well, I must say he's tried to satisfy all tastes," remarked Barnard with the nearest approach to humor he ever attained. "Tell me about it."

For fully ten minutes he listened with close attention. From time to time he made brief notes on the pad before him, but he asked no questions until Hanson concluded. He glanced over his notes.

"H'm, so you think a woman committed the crime. It takes some muscular strength to smash a man's skull, Doctor."

"Unquestionably it does," agreed Hanson readily. "But all the other evidence points so clearly to a woman that we must assume the necessary strength. He had been kissed by rouged lips shortly before he died. As he collapsed his fingers slid over a silk stocking and broke a thread. I

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found a tiny length caught in a thumbnail and preserved it for your inspection. Beside him in the thick, earthy dust was a woman's footprint trodden over a splash of blood. Moreover, it was made when the blood was first shed. The peculiar expression on his face indicates that his slayer was well known to him. When he saw death coming at her hands he was too paralyzed with horror and amazement to defend himself."

"H'm," grunted Barnard noncommittally. "I suppose a man so rotten with dope would prove an easy victim, anyway."

For the next few minutes he leaned back in his chair, hands clasped behind his neck, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling as if he would draw inspiration from the grimy plaster. Then he leaned over the desk and, fixing Hanson with his cold and penetrating stare, asked:

"Did you read in last Tuesday's papers of Count du Buisson's murder?"

"I never read newspapers when I am on holiday," smiled Hanson.

"No? Then listen. Last Monday the Count was married. For All Saints' it was a quiet wedding, but nevertheless attracted the usual crowd of habitual weddingites. As the bride and bridegroom came out of the church they posed for the press photographers. Immediately afterwards the bridegroom was shot through the heart by someone in the crowd behind him."

"Yes?" prompted Hanson as the other paused.

"Whoever did it used a silent-action spring gun, shooting a needle-pointed shaft four inches long." Barnard's thick eyebrows came down in a scowl. He banged the desk with his fist and said earnestly: "Doctor, I've questioned every single member of that crowd, and do you think that any one of them could give me a clew? No, sir, not a damned

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whisper. I've checked them all up since. Checked and rechecked until I was dizzy. I'll take my oath that the murderer is not among 'em."

"He slipped away in the commotion," suggested Hanson. "Any man is conceivably a murderer, Barnard, but no man is a wizard."

Barnard shook his head emphatically.

"No, Doctor. No one was seen to leave and we had a dozen men on the spot within a matter of minutes. The church crowd was an isolated group around the porch with fifteen wide steps to reach it. The only way a man could have escaped without being noticed was down the side path, and the gates there were locked. Besides which the murderer must have been right in front of the crowd, and so hemmed in that he could not have got out without attracting attention. However, we can let that go for a while. The case came to me to deal with and I went along and had a look at the body. What did I find? Just this. Neatly tattooed on his chest a red scorpion in a blue circle."

Hanson leaned forward in his chair, his eyes bright with interest. He motioned Barnard to continue but made no comment.

"That, of course, may have been pure coincidence," resumed the Chief Inspector. "But I was taking no chances. I had copies of his fingerprints made and forwarded to Paris. Last night I received the report."

"Yes?" breathed Hanson.

"The aristocratic Count du Buisson proves to be none other than a Parisian criminal, one Jules Valiente. Nice, ain't it?"

"Jules Valiente!" exclaimed Hanson softly, a reminiscent light in his large dark eyes. "The Apache, henchman of The Scorpion! He should have died long ago!"

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"Then I wish he'd selected his own country to do it in," snapped Barnard with considerable feeling. "There's going to be merry hell to pay before this is through."

A prophetic statement and one which both men were to remember before many weeks were out.

"Have you copies of the press photographs?" asked Hanson.

Barnard opened a drawer and withdrew a number of unmounted photographs which he pushed across the desk.

Hanson smiled as he recognized the handsome features of the bogus Count. But a moment later his expression changed to one of astonishment. He drew in his breath with a deep, resounding hiss as he stared incredulously at the picture. Hastily he scanned the remainder. Then rising slowly to his feet, he walked to the window as if he required more light. But he did not again study the photographs. He looked out upon the broad boulevard of the Embankment, his mind at grips with this new and totally unexpected complication.

Presently he turned to Barnard, who was regarding him through narrowed lids.

"What was the bride's name?" he asked, and knew the answer before Barnard spoke.

"Penhayle. Ann Trehawke Penhayle. Know her?"

Hanson did not reply. He took a turn up and down the room, hands buried in his coat pockets, head thrust forward, thinking furiously. Returned to the desk he halted, and placing his two palms upon it leaned toward the inspector.

"Barnard," he said quietly but impressively, "Ann Trehawke Penhayle is the girl who found The Scorpion's victim at Instow."

"So?" murmured Barnard between set teeth. The pupils of his cold eyes became as pin-points and he nodded slowly,

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three times. Hanson sat down and brushed a hand a little wearily over his brow. He waited expectantly for the other to speak.

Chief Inspector Barnard's lips twisted into a mirthless grin. He rested his elbows upon the desk and supported his chin upon his clenched fists.

"Very interesting, Doctor," he observed, with slow deliberation. "Miss Penhayle will pay for closer study, I think. Curious how The Scorpion's trail crosses her own, is it not? And the murder a woman's crime, too! I wonder if the mysterious Simon Wernick would be such a great stranger to her."

Paul Hanson, who had looked into Ann's eyes with all the knowledge and experience to read the truth, knew that Barnard had jumped to the wrong conclusion.

"Don't be too hasty," he warned sharply. "Wernick, I freely admit, is a complete mystery to me. He is fully aware that Lafontaine was murdered and recognized the repetition at Instow. As this was a closely guarded official secret I can only imagine that he learned it through criminal sources, possibly from the actual assassin. Who he is and what his purpose I do not pretend to know. But of this I am absolutely convinced: Ann Penhayle is an honest woman."

Barnard raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips.

"Maybe," he replied indifferently. "You should know."

His manner did not deceive Hanson. Ann Penhayle was under very definite suspicion and would form the subject of much painstaking inquiry in the near future. Scotland Yard would know as much about her past life as she did herself, and keep a watchful eye on her future actions. Failure to discover the murderer of the French crook had shaken the Chief Inspector. He was a man possessed of enormous confidence in himself. The blow to his pride was severe. The assassin, presumably, had been under his eyes

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and he had failed to recognize the person. Someone very close to the crook had shot him with a silent-action spring gun. Not a large weapon. One which might easily be concealed in a bride's bouquet of white carnations. Barnard's suspicion was pardonable.

Hanson did not like the turn events had taken. A new thought came to disturb him, and his brow corrugated in a frown as he foresaw the dreadful possibilities.

Barnard pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Well, Doctor, I suppose you are returning to Devon. I'll set about pulling the wires and be with you—um—in time for the inquest. Luckily the Devon people are reasonable."

Hanson pushed on his hat absent-mindedly and stood frowning at the shabby carpet. Suddenly he looked up.

"Look here, Barnard," he said forcefully. "If you think that Miss Penhayle has any guilty connection with either murder you are making a great and dangerous mistake. And I tell you frankly, right now, that I shall do all in my power to protect her."

"Have I suggested that she is a guilty party?" Barnard's voice was harsh and his steely eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"You have not directly admitted it," replied Hanson. "But I feel that you believe it. I have seen her, Barnard, and I *know*."

The Chief Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well then, Doctor. Good enough." He glanced down, gathered up the photographs and stood for a minute studying them. Then he leaned across the desk and said, very deliberately, tapping the pictures with a large forefinger: "If that young woman is, as you believe, an innocent party, then I wouldn't give a tinker's cuss for her life."

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CHAPTER IV

IN THE NIGHT

THE SALOON bar of the "Ocean" is a popular rendezvous. Blue-jerseyed, merry-eyed pirates, of the stock that manned Drake's fleet, met dinner-jacketed visitors and, in the intervals of lowering large pots of beer, arranged to fleece them further on the morrow. It is a pleasant company. Usually the conversation turns mainly on the weather and the fishing prospects. But to-night the death on the burrows the previous evening formed almost the sole topic. For the dead man had been identified as the son of a local notable, Sir Ambrose Cleeve of Appledore.

"Durned funny thing to me thet he should 'a' met ees death thet way," said Old Sam Fisher, emptying his tankard and wiping his bearded mouth with the back of a gigantic hand. "I mind ee well as a youngster. Thet wus long afore he went painting pictures up in Lunnon. Ee could manage a hoss then wi' the best o' 'em."

"Iss, you'm right, Sam," agreed Bill Yeo, nodding his grizzled head emphatically. "'Twadden no flesh-and-blood hoss wot kicked ee."

The visitors looked at one another and then they laughed. But their amusement roused no answering smile on the faces of the local men.

Sam Fisher shrugged his brawny shoulders.

"'Ave it yer own way, maisters," he growled. "It don't make a scrap o' difference to we."

Dick Marlow, sitting in the big bay window, listened to

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the conversation, inwardly amused. They were all sadly off the mark. Tracey Cleeve had been murdered. But under a stern pledge of secrecy to Paul Hanson he dared not tell them so.

He gazed out across the bay to where Crow lighthouse was winking. Dark thunderclouds overhung the bar, as if it were not sinister enough already! The long line of sand dunes looked, in the pale moonlight, like the realm of those ghosts in which the fishermen so firmly believed. His gaze wandered to the village opposite, nestling along the waterfront and up the hill behind. Old Appledore thrusting out her nose aggressively to the bar on which so many of her sons had found a watery grave.

Somewhere toward Bideford the noise of a speedboat, new toy of a wealthy resident, shattered the heavy, oppressive silence without.

Dick glanced at the clock. Nearly closing time for the saloon. He rose and pushed his way through the crowd to the door. A couple of turns up and down the front before retiring appealed to him.

The threatening storm had driven the visitors within doors and he had the front to himself. As he walked along by the sea wall he was thinking of Ann Penhayle. Hanson's early morning departure for London had left him to his own resources. Ordinarily that would not have troubled him in the least. But to-day there was a queer restlessness upon him such as he had not known before. A disturbing sense of something about to happen; what, he did not know.

He had spent the morning mooning around the dunes, half hoping that Ann might appear. In the afternoon he had decided that there was sufficient justification and had called at Ann's house, only to learn that she had gone with her guardian to Barnstaple.

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Absorbed with his thoughts, he had crossed the railway bridge and gone half a mile on the main road without realizing that he had left the seafront. It was now only a matter of a hundred yards or so to the lane in which Ann's house was situated. With no particular idea in mind he decided to walk on and return to the village by the higher road.

It was just as he was nearing the drive gates that he was suddenly roused from his reverie by a vivid flash of lightning which stabbed to earth almost directly before him. But it was not the lightning alone which startled Dick. In that moment of illumination he saw a man dart from the drive and run swiftly up the lane. It was but a fleeting glimpse he had caught, but it was sufficient for him to recognize the odd little figure of Simon Wernick.

Seized with a sudden, nameless alarm, Dick started after him. So intent was he on catching his quarry that he did not see the man who pulled up abruptly by the gates and shrank into the deep shadows as he passed. Any sound which the newcomer may have made on the graveled drive was drowned by the loud crash of thunder and blinding rain which followed immediately.

It took ten minutes to convince Dick that his task was hopeless, by which time he had circled back to the village, wet to the skin.

Swearing softly to himself and very uneasy in his mind, he slipped into the hotel by the side entrance, hoping to escape observation. In this he was unsuccessful. The landlord happened to be crossing the lounge.

"Hullo, sir!" he exclaimed. "You've caught it properly! Better have a tot of hot rum to keep out the cold. I'll send it up."

Dick, who felt in need of a stimulant, nodded.

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"Sure, but don't bother to send it up; I'll come into the kitchen."

He swallowed the hot rum and felt better for it. He wished the landlord "good night" and went up the stairs to his room, humming a popular tune.

Opening the door, he switched on the light. The tune died on his lips as he stared incredulously, unable to trust the evidence of his eyes. Sitting in a chair by the window, looking more than ever like the preposterous creation of a cartoonist, was the grinning, bedraggled figure of Simon Wernick.

"I hope that I'm not intruding," tittered Wernick, squirming in his seat and rubbing his black-gloved hands together.

"How the flaming hell did *you* get here?" ejaculated Dick. "Are you a ruddy ghost, or what the devil are you?"

"Oh, tut, tut! What nautical language!" reproved Wernick, holding up one hand as if to stem a further flow. "*Ecce signum.* I am here. What matters how I came? But please come in and close the door. You stand in a draft, my young friend."

Dick closed the door very deliberately and stood with his back against it.

"Now," he said grimly. "What's the jolly little game? Speak up, or I'll twist your scraggy neck for you."

Simon Wernick cocked his head upon one side and regarded him critically.

"Yes, and I really believe you'd try, too! Dear, dear! Well, to be quite candid, my young friend, I came to see Doctor Hanson."

"Doctor Hanson is not here," snapped Dick.

"No, so I observe. He has gone to London?"

Dick did not answer. He stood against the door, eying his unwelcome visitor aggressively, fast losing patience.

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"Your silence tells me that he has. Most unfortunate! However, I am going to entrust this letter to your keeping. I must impress upon you that it is of considerable importance."

Wernick's hand slid into his breast pocket and produced an envelope, which he placed upon the pillow at his elbow. He looked up at Dick with an inane grin.

"Now just fancy, all that trouble to obtain a letter. But men have died for less than a letter. Is it not so? Ah! You are young. You do not know."

"I know this much," snapped Dick, taking a step toward him: "that I'm very tired of this damned rot. Who the blazes are you, anyway?"

Wernick's grinning lips suddenly hardened into a straight, bloodless line. He stared unwinkingly at the irate Dick, who stopped short, conscious that he was facing a new and totally different Simon Wernick.

"Who am I?" Wernick's voice was low, but the slumbering passion vibrated through its calm level. "Who am I? I am a dead man who has crept out of hell. Good night, my young friend."

Before Dick could recover from the shock of his words, uttered with such appalling bitterness, Wernick's gloved hand shot out toward the light switch hanging over the bed. Dick heard the click as the room was plunged into darkness. He made a leap forward, but his outflung hands found nothing. The door banged softly behind him and he whirled round. His fingers closed over the handle and he flung open the door, to bound into the lighted corridor.

Simon Wernick rose from the floor at the foot of the bed, slipped like a wraith across the room, and silently opened the double windows. He stepped out upon the veranda, closed the windows, and ran lightly down the iron steps. Shielding his face against the blinding rain, he

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crossed the lawn. With the agility of a cat he leaped up and swung himself over the wall to drop upon the sand below.

Dick Marlow returned to his room, chilled and raging. He looked under the bed and in the wardrobe. Then he noticed the rain spots and realized how he had been tricked. His face lit up with a smile of genuine admiration as he went over and securely fastened the windows.

"Sink me, Simon," he murmured, "but you're darned slick, whatever else you may or may not be!"

The letter on the pillow caught his attention and he picked it up. The envelope was addressed to Tracey Cleeve at a place in Chelsea. Dick hesitated about reading the letter. He turned it over in his hand several times. The envelope had been torn across the back and the signature of the sender was visible on the paper beneath: *Lola D.*

Then shivering in his sodden clothes, Dick thrust the letter into a drawer of the dressing table and hastily prepared for bed.

But it was a long time before sleep came to him. Though tired he tossed and turned, striving hard to throw off a sense of disquietude which oppressed him. And when at last he did fall asleep that feeling still lingered. He dreamed that quite near to him hovered some vague shape which alternately assumed the features of Simon Wernick and the dreadful, battered face of the murdered Tracey Cleeve.

Then, more disturbing still, he fancied that Ann Penhayle was calling to him, imploring his help. In his dream he was searching frantically to find her and all the while her voice was growing more and more agonized.

He struggled back to consciousness, drenched in perspiration, feeling physically ill. His first thought was that he was in for a dose of malaria as a result of the soaking.

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But as he lay still the sickness passed. He noted that the storm had ceased and the oppressive heat with it.

A slight noise within the room roused him to full consciousness. He glanced toward the door, faintly visible in the moonlight, and blinked. Surely the door was moving, being closed from without. He reached up and switched on the light. He had been wrong. The door was closed.

"Gad," he muttered disgustedly. "I've got 'em tonight!"

Nevertheless he slipped out of bed and went to the door. The corridor was in darkness, and though he listened for several minutes he heard no sound except the monotonous ticktack of the old clock in the lounge below.

Simon Wernick's words, for some unaccountable reason, came back to him. "Men have died for less than a letter."

"Damn it!" he muttered irritably. "That little pest has got on my nerves. The devil take him and his infernal letter!"

He went over to the drawer and drew it out. For a moment he stood staring into it, biting his lip in perplexity. Then he pulled out the twin drawer and looked in. Placing his hands upon his hips, he stood with legs astride, too astounded even to swear. Simon Wernick's letter was gone.

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CHAPTER V

HANSON RETURNS TO INSTOW

PAUL HANSON returned the following afternoon. One glance at Dick's expressive face told him that something had happened in his absence.

They passed out of the station and along the harbor road to the hotel. Dick, unable to suppress his information any longer, exclaimed:

"Sink me, Paul, but things have been moving! Last night I had the most amazing experience of all my promising career."

Hanson smiled at the excitement in the gray eyes and which somehow seemed to have communicated itself to the mop of fair hair as well.

"Wait until we are alone," he replied, glancing over his shoulder at a number of visitors who had arrived with him on the Atlantic Coast Express.

Dick was too intent upon his own adventure to notice the action.

"Now," said Hanson, when they were alone in his bedroom.

He listened with close attention to Dick's recital of the night's events. But his long, serious face gave no indication of his reaction to the narrative.

"You are quite sure that it was Wernick who came from Miss Penhayle's house?" he asked.

Dick nodded emphatically.

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"Absolute stone-wall cert, old boy. But how the deuce he got here before me licks creation!"

"The explanation is probably quite simple. But it means that someone followed Wernick. Someone, I fancy, who knows a lot more about him than I do."

"You take it from me, sonny boy, Simple Simon isn't so darned soft as he looks. You should have seen the expression on his face when he put over that bit of cryptic stuff about a dead man out of hell. He meant every word of that. I'd as soon have biffed a cobra as touched him then."

Hanson walked over to the window and looked out. The veranda ran the whole length of the wall, with the steps leading down to the lawn almost under Dick's windows. Opposite was the high sea wall, against which a palm grew. Anyone on the wall would have been able to see into the bedroom. That person had seen the letter and gone to great risk to obtain it. Who? Obviously some member of The Scorpion gang—perhaps The Scorpion himself. Therefore the letter contained either damning evidence or much coveted information. He was inclined to favor the former.

Lola D. The signature conveyed nothing to him, but it suggested a number of possible lines for inquiry. How had Wernick come by the letter? Stolen it from somewhere. It had not been in Tracey Cleeve's pockets when he searched the body. Of that he was certain.

The more Hanson considered matters the less he liked the prospects.

He took out his cigar case and extended it to Dick, who shook his head.

"In his hand he bore the brand that none but he might smoke," he misquoted, grinning. "No, thanks, I'll have a gasper. My tonsils are too young and innocent for anything but tobacco."

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Hanson struck a match and motioned Dick to a chair.

"Sit down, Dick," he said seriously. "I think I'd better go into more details than I have done."

Dick obediently sat down, wondering what he was about to hear and conscious that he was feeling strangely excited.

Hanson leaned back in the chair.

"I have already told you that Tracey Cleeve was murdered. It was a crime having so many points in common with one which occurred in Paris, while I was attached to the French police, that I was immediately struck by the similarity. That crime was committed by a gang of criminals under the leadership of a mysterious being rejoicing in the sobriquet of The Scorpion. That none of his men betrayed him is plain proof of his tremendous power over them. Criminals generally are a faithless mob. They will double-cross and inform against their best pals if it is to their own advantage. In France, too, the police have methods of obtaining information which would not be tolerated in this country. However, there is evidence to suggest that Tracey Cleeve died at the hands of The Scorpion, or one of his agents."

Dick whistled between his teeth and then he laughed outright.

"Paul, you're damned near as bad as Old Sam Fisher and his ghosts," he protested.

Hanson frowned.

"Nevertheless, Dick, it is the truth," he replied slowly and impressively. "Here in Instow is at least one member of that nefarious and very dangerous organization. What is more, he was in your room last night."

Dick Marlow sat up with a jerk. His mouth opened and closed as he licked his tongue over his lips. He stared, goggle-eyed, at his friend.

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Hanson smiled at the expression on Dick's face. He raised his eyebrows and nodded slowly.

"Quite true. I'm thinking that you were rather lucky to have remained asleep while he was stealing the letter."

Dick blew out his cheeks and exhaled noisily.

"It's the last time I come on holiday with you, anyway," he declared. "You're a positive menace to have about the house. But tell me more about the jolly old Scorp. Who is he? He appears to have the makings of a bright little chap, if he's properly educated."

"He does!" agreed Hanson grimly. "His identity is known to no one, except possibly his more intimate followers. Even that I am inclined to doubt. In France he specialized in wealthy young fools of either sex, but mainly male. Filled them full of drugs, as he did young Cleeve, or otherwise got them into his power. He bled them white and, when there was nothing more to come, disposed of the body. Some were found; some are still missing, and probably will remain so. 'Dead men tell no tales' was his slogan."

"Untidy person!" commented Dick. "Littering up the place with unwanted corpses. Is Cleeve his first effort in England?"

Hanson sent a cloud of smoke ceilingward. It was some moments before he answered.

"That is something we have yet to discover. Did you read quite recently of the assassination of a French Count outside a London church?"

"I saw the headlines, but I didn't read the account. Newspaper reporters have such fertile imaginations that I stick religiously to the sporting page."

"A very wise procedure," remarked Hanson. "Well, Dick, that French Count was an impostor. Actually he was a Parisian crook, a trusted man of The Scorpion."

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Dick looked puzzled.

"I don't get you. If he was one of The Scorp's boys, who pipped him?"

Hanson shrugged his shoulders. "Ah! Who did? Scotland Yard would like an answer to that, too." He hesitated. Should he tell Dick that Ann Penhayle was the murdered criminal's bride?

A knock came at the door, and in answer to Dick's invitation the head of a page boy appeared.

"Lady and gent to see you, sir," he announced, addressing Hanson.

"Names?"

"Didn't give no names, sir. The gent be a parson. They'm in the lounge."

The boy closed the door and Hanson glanced at Dick.

"The Reverend Elphinstone Clayton and his ward, Miss Ann Penhayle. Now I wonder what they want?"

"Why not go and see?" suggested Dick brightly, rising from his chair and throwing his cigarette out of the window. "It's probably me they want."

"In that case we will both go," smiled Hanson. "But mind, not a single word about the matter we have been discussing."

Dick grinned and, wetting his finger, drew it across his throat in mock pledge of secrecy.

As they came down the stairs they saw Ann inspecting one of the sporting prints which adorned the wall. Dick realized more than ever how much his mental picture had fallen short of the living reality. He scarcely noticed the white-haired, benevolent-faced clergyman seated on the divan, reading from a small book and repeating each word softly to himself.

Ann came forward to meet them. Dick seized her small hand in a grip which made her wince. On his face was a

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look which no woman could mistake. The color flickered into her cheeks and she turned quickly to Hanson, who took her hand, bowing with grave dignity.

The old man looked up at them with a slightly puzzled expression on his round face. Then, as if suddenly remembering, his brow cleared and he rose to his feet.

Ann introduced them.

"Ah, Doctor Marlow. . . . What, my dear? . . . Hanson? I'm *so* sorry, my memory is not what it used to be. You will forgive me."

Hanson smiled in friendly fashion and the old man continued.

"It was very remiss of me not to have thanked you yesterday. Ann is a dear brave soul, but unquestionably it has been a shock to her. I would have given anything for it not to have happened. Well, well, what is to be will be. It was kind of you to escort her home."

"That was a pleasure which fell to my friend Marlow," smiled Hanson, with a side glance at Dick, who had successfully edged Ann away to the sporting print once more and was engaged in a low-voiced conversation with her.

Elphinstone Clayton raised his white, bushy eyebrows in surprise. "Indeed! Indeed! I get so confused with people's names. As a matter of fact I was in bed and asleep when Ann returned, and she, good girl, did not disturb me. You see, I have been engaged on a new book for some time, and at my age it is rather fatiguing," he added, with a smile possessing a childlike quality of innocence which was rather appealing.

Hanson nodded sympathetically.

"It must be," he agreed. Then, indicating a chair: "Shall we be seated, Mr. Clayton?"

"Yes—er—yes. Well, as I was saying, it was very

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kind of you to call yesterday. But so unfortunate that we were not at home."

Hanson let the error pass. Dick Marlow heard it and glanced down at Ann. She looked up at him, laughter lurking in the corners of her adorable little mouth.

"Mr. Clayton is terribly absent-minded," she whispered. "Doctor Hanson will find him difficult, I'm afraid."

Dick grinned.

"Not likely!" he declared. "They are getting along famously. Old Paul's bedside manner has to be seen to be believed. It's the first thing they teach them in hospitals."

"Being the most important item of their training, I suppose," smiled Ann.

Elphinstone Clayton looked up and, observing their smiling faces, beamed upon them. It was the first time he had seen Ann smile for many days. Then, as if suddenly recollecting something of importance, he turned to Hanson.

"Yes, now I remember what I was going to ask you. Do you think it would be possible for Ann to be exempted from attendance at the inquest on that unfortunate young man? There will be an inquest?"

"Oh yes, that is certain," replied Hanson. "And I'm afraid that Miss Penhayle will be expected to give evidence."

The old man's faintly lined forehead puckered.

"So dreadful for Ann," he murmured. "Coming so close upon the terrible——"

He broke off, brushing his fingers nervously over his chin, and shifting uncomfortably in his chair.

Hanson waited, wondering if he would confide in him. But apparently he changed his mind, or his thoughts had gone off at a tangent.

"I suppose that there is no doubt that it was an accident?" he asked.

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Hanson glanced at him sharply.

"The verdict, I anticipate, will be one of misadventure," he replied.

"Ah, yes, misadventure. You know, Doctor Hanson, these village people are strange folk. It is difficult to understand the working of their minds. The man who does the gardening was hinting that it was not a horse which killed him. Really, I could not fathom what he meant to tell me. I think he must be a little—er—mental," and Elphinstone Clayton touched his forehead suggestively.

"Perhaps he was referring to the legend of the phantom horse," said Hanson. "All the local people know and believe it here."

The clergyman shook his head slowly and sighed. "Ah, yes," he murmured, "old beliefs die hard in country places. One wonders sometimes if there may not be some foundation of truth in them. When I was—" He broke off as Ann came over, Dick at her side.

"Have you asked Doctor Hanson to join us at dinner to-night, Uncle?" she asked, addressing him by the familiar name she found most convenient.

"Dear me, no, no! I had quite forgotten. You will, eh?"

"We shall be delighted," accepted Hanson, with a side glance at Dick.

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CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THERE IS TALK OF GHOSTS

It was after dinner when Elphinstone Clayton returned to the legend of the phantom horse. Ann and Dick were somewhere in the garden and he was alone with Hanson in the large, airy dining room, from which a fine view of the distant sand dunes and the broad estuary could be obtained.

Hanson was standing by the open windows smoking one of his long cigars and admiring the sunset as it lit the heavens in a blaze of flaming glory.

He turned slowly to face his host.

"Modern science places no ban upon supernormal phenomena, Mr. Clayton," he replied, in answer to the clergyman's question. "But those principles of reason to which science is pledged will continue to be outraged by the dreadful rubbish which emanates from so-called mediums and their half-witted followers."

Elphinstone Clayton shifted a little uncomfortably in his chair.

"Perhaps I did not explain my meaning," he said, half apologetically. "My question was somewhat crude. What I meant was, how do you men of science explain the—er—supernormal phenomena? Take, for instance, this legend of the phantom horse which we were discussing this afternoon; there must surely be some basis of truth for it to have persisted so long."

"So the devotees of spiritualism would have us believe," replied Hanson.

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"Please do not misunderstand me, Doctor," said Elphinstone Clayton hastily. "I am a good churchman, and I view with no favor the spiritualistic movement, which is, I am sure, mostly fraudulent. But I have in my day witnessed many strange occurrences for which I could find no natural explanation."

"Everything, however apparently bizarre or impossible, is intelligible to the mind when it is sufficiently well known, Mr. Clayton. In the main, all those wonderful phenomena which are so impressive, if not the result of conscious fraud, must be attributed to telepathy. That is, thought transference between two minds without the apparent use of any of the known organs of sense. Such transference has been demonstrated beyond question."

"Ah, yes, telepathy!" murmured the old man thoughtfully. "Perhaps that would account for some of those strange occurrences of which I was thinking. Maybe a plausible explanation; but somehow I do not feel that it would cover them all. What actually is telepathy? How does science account for it?"

Hanson shook his head.

"Science has, as yet, no explanation to offer, Mr. Clayton. There are several possibilities, all unproved."

"And those? Forgive me for being so persistent, Doctor, but I am interested in this subject."

"Why, of course! I too am interested, and have devoted some care to its study. As regards those possibilities, one may suppose some hypothetical ether waves which carry messages direct from one brain to another, or else impressions transmitted direct from mind to mind without any physical connection between brain and brain. There is a third hypothesis, highly improbable, that the information is conveyed by a separate and invisible intelligence."

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"Ah, yes, a third intelligence not present in the flesh. But what do you think yourself, Doctor?"

"Personally I am of the opinion that telepathy is merely a non-vocal method of communication inherited from our animal ancestry and which still persists in a few individuals, often quite unsuspected by them."

"But you do not reject the possibility of a—er—supernatural agency?" asked Clayton, almost eagerly. "I noticed that you were careful to distinguish between mind and brain. You believe that mind may exist apart from matter, eh? Is that not the great proof of our glorious survival after earthly death? Mind and personality and memory go on living forever."

Hanson glanced at the other's eager face and felt a wave of pity for the old man. All his life he had been preaching the soul's survival. Yet it seemed that his own faith was seeking support, some definite, tangible proof. He was groping in the dark himself, wandering without the light of real conviction. To Hanson that was understandable. He believed that a progressive revelation of the Divine nature and purpose, whose range and character was at present beyond human conception, was a reasonable expectation. But he confidently rejected as irrational those beliefs and dogmas of the Church which to him were based on fear and a subtle selfishness. Clayton had come into close contact with many religions. He knew that each religion was the same in that it claimed the future for its followers and damnation for those benighted ones who would have none of it. His own faith had been sapped and his mind become confused. Like so many of his brethren, he stood in grave danger of mental collapse through long absorption with problems incapable of solution.

"Mind and matter have, in the past, been dealt with by

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the psychologists and the physicists as separate subjects, Mr. Clayton," replied Hanson, as the old man moved restlessly in his chair. "There is much to suggest that mind and matter are not inseparable. When the two branches are combined the relation between them will be more clearly understood. We may then understand the transition of mechanical vibrations into sensation and emotion. There are vast fields for science to explore yet. Realms, I suspect, at the moment undreamt of."

"Oh yes, Doctor, I agree with you. I do. I do. When I was a missionary in China I witnessed some amazing things. It seemed to me that the soul might leave the body and wander far afield, returning with accurate knowledge of what was occurring in those distant parts."

"Traveling clairvoyance," murmured Hanson, watching the excited face. "It is but a vivid form of reciprocal telepathy."

Further discussion was interrupted by the advent of Ann and Dick, returned from a lengthy inspection of the garden by twilight.

"Sitting in the gloaming, Uncle?" asked Ann.

"Why—er—yes, my dear. We have been talking on—er—matters of science."

"Discussing ghosts," added Hanson with a smile.

"Ghosts! How thrilling!" exclaimed Ann. "But you don't believe in ghosts, Doctor Hanson?"

"He ought to," laughed Dick. "Think of all the unfortunate people he experimented upon before he learned his trade."

"Doctor Hanson is not an unbeliever, my dear," said Elphinstone Clayton. "Unlike so many of his colleagues, he does not deny the probability of discarnate intelligences around us."

"Not quite that," corrected Hanson gently. "There are

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many things which we do not now understand which one day will be capable of simple scientific explanation."

Dick Marlow laughed. "I'm thinking it will take a lot of scientific explanation to convert the locals," he declared. "They really and honestly believe that house-haunting stuff."

Elphinstone Clayton looked up expectantly at Hanson. "Mr. Marlow is right in that," he said. "I do not think your theory of telepathy covers a happening of that nature."

Hanson shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly. "That is known as the fixed local ghost. I very much doubt if there is a single authentic instance of the appearance of such an apparition."

"But, Doctor Hanson," protested Ann, "I've read lots of ghost stories written by well-known people who have declared them to be true. There must be some truth in them."

"Unquestionably, Miss Penhayle," replied Hanson slowly. "But one must not be dazzled by a well-known name; and one must distinguish between the types of story. Here, for example, is an instance related to me. A young man was killed in a car smash. Almost immediately afterwards he was seen and spoken to by a friend many miles distant from the scene of the accident. That is a ghost story. It must be attributed to a telepathic and sympathetic connection between two kindred minds. At the moment of his death the young man thought of his friend with sufficient vividness for the friend to receive the mental impression and imagine that the dead man was actually present in the flesh. As yet we have no explanation to offer, but such an occurrence is no more mysterious than the power of dowsing, for instance. Supernatural influence is not attached to this very useful accomplishment."

"No, I suppose not," replied Ann doubtfully.

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"I say," protested Dick, laughing, "this is all most frightfully morbid. Let's have some music, shall we, Miss Penhayle?"

But when later, after taking leave of their host, Hanson walked down the drive with Ann she returned to the subject. Dick, having missed his pipe, had gone back to the house.

"Doctor Hanson," she said in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper, "do you believe it possible for the spirits of the dead to communicate with the living?"

Hanson glanced down at her, a swift, penetrating glance, but her eyes were averted from him. He knew that it was not mere curiosity which had prompted the question. Ann was troubled.

"I do not know, Miss Penhayle," he replied quietly. "You have had some recent personal experience?"

For some moments she walked at his side in silence. Then looking up: "It is hard to explain—" she hesitated, "but just lately I have fancied that my father has been very close to me, trying to convey some message to me."

Two explanations flashed into Hanson's mind, but with his customary caution he voiced neither. Instead he asked: "You have seen nothing?"

Ann shook her fair head. "No, not really. Once I thought I saw a gray shape moving at the foot of my bed, but it was gone before I could be sure."

"Where was this, Miss Penhayle?"

"At Mr. Clayton's house at Twickenham."

"I see. And you have received vague impressions on several occasions?"

"That my father was near me, yes. At all sorts of odd times I have felt it."

Hanson thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets and

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frowned at the twinkling lights of Appledore across the water.

"One's imagination may play us some strange tricks, Miss Penhayle," he said. "It is difficult, often impossible, to distinguish between the products of our own minds and those of outside influence. Have you mentioned this to Mr. Clayton?"

Ann smiled a little wistfully. "Uncle would not understand," she replied. "He would nôt be very helpful, I'm afraid."

To Hanson her words conveyed a world of meaning. He realized how lonely she must be with no one to help or comfort her. The Reverend Elphinstone Clayton, admirable though he might be in his own sphere, was a hopeless companion for a young girl. Yet he found it difficult himself to offer advice. He would have liked to have told her that it was nothing more than morbid imaginings resulting from loneliness, the domestic atmosphere, and, above all, the shock of her recent tragic experiences. But he was by no means sure that this was the true explanation. There might be another and much less simple cause.

"I should wait for something more definite, Miss Penhayle," he advised. "The probability is that your fancies are only fancies and nothing more. I would prescribe the company of young companions as a certain cure."

Dick's footsteps and cheery whistle cut short any further discussion.

"Found the jolly old brier," he announced. "Say, isn't it a glorious night! I feel like a ten-mile walk."

"Then you'll do it alone," retorted Hanson, turning to Ann. "Good night, Miss Penhayle, and thank you for a most enjoyable evening."

He pressed her hand in a warm and reassuring grip;

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then, with a side glance at Dick, moved slowly down the road.

As he loitered along he was conscious of a chill of apprehension at his heart. Dick stood to him very much in the position of a younger brother. The long-standing friendship of their families had commenced when Marlow senior was secretary to the British Embassy in the U.S.A. When Hanson himself was at Oxford he had spent most of his vacations with the Marlows. Though of antipodal natures, the one carefree to the point of recklessness, the other studious and methodical, they each recognized the sterling qualities of the other. Between them there existed a deep and sincere friendship.

Hanson devoutly hoped that nothing would happen to erase that happy smile from Dick's face. And, hoping, knew how great were the odds against fulfillment.

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CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE INQUEST

As HANSON had predicted, the verdict at the inquest on Tracey Cleeve was one of misadventure. Ann had not been spared the ordeal, but the coroner had been very considerate, and she had borne up bravely. Hanson had seen nothing of Chief Inspector Barnard before the inquest, but he recognized his controlling influence in the carefully edited questions put to the witnesses.

The grim business had not been without its humorous side, and the amazing verdict which the jury had attempted to bring had not so much astonished as amused him. Local men all, they had endeavored to find in accordance with their deep-rooted beliefs, and this had resulted in a tussle with the coroner. That patient official had, with great tact, pointed out to them that in these days it was not possible to try either a devil or a horse, and the only verdicts which could be returned were either murder, suicide, or misadventure. Suicide being definitely ruled out, and there being no evidence to support murder, the only possible verdict was misadventure. Finally, and with great reluctance, the jury had found accordingly.

Immediately it was over, Dick had left, accompanied by Ann and Elphinstone Clayton. The old man appeared to have taken a great liking to him, a fact on which he secretly congratulated himself. They walked along the road for some distance in silence, broken at last by Clayton, speak-

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ing his thoughts aloud rather than addressing either Ann or Dick.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured, shaking his head slowly. "And yet when I was in China I saw some strange things myself. But no—mystery and superstition belong to ignorance—unthinkable, senseless, like black magic and sorcery. A perversion of all rationality."

"You are thinking of the verdict which the dear old lads tried to bring, eh, sir?" asked Dick, smiling at the memory.

Elphinstone Clayton nodded thoughtfully. "Yes—er—yes, I was. Do you now, Mr. Marlow, there are times when I wonder if there may not be something in it. Years ago I was a missionary in China, and I saw there some strange things quite beyond my understanding. Dr. Hanson has his scientific explanation, but——"

"Oh, I say, sir," protested Dick, "that sort of thing may happen out East, but not in Devon."

"But why not? Why should mere geographical position affect it? Why should the forces of evil be less powerful in Devon than in China?"

While Dick was entering into friendly argument with the clergyman, Paul Hanson was reading a note handed to him by a constable. It was from Barnard, requesting him to meet him at the "Hare and Hounds" at Fremington.

Evidently the Chief Inspector had deemed it wise to keep clear of the immediate vicinity. Hanson, wondering what he had discovered, lost no time in borrowing Dick's two-seater and motoring over. He found Barnard occupying a private room. With him was another, a man shorter than himself, with a round, cheerful face. This was Detective-Sergeant Trotter of the C.I.D., an officer much feared by certain of the criminal fraternity in London. The Chief Inspector introduced his subordinate and Hanson sat down.

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"Well, Doctor, we've got a bit further," announced Barnard. "We've dug into Tracey Cleeve's life in town, and a pretty hectic career he had, too! He was something of an artist, but his taste seems to have run more to women than painting. Lola D. is probably a dancer in a night club which Cleeve frequented. Lola Demaine, she calls herself."

"A Frenchwoman?" queried Hanson.

Barnard nodded.

"Yes, but married to an Englishman; a con man, recently returned from the U.S.A."

"Name?"

"Mike Cardon. Know him?"

Hanson nodded affirmation. Mike Cardon, Red Mike, the man with the smile that had earned him thousands of dollars and the creator of numerous highly ingenious methods of swindling the unsuspecting. But of late things had been getting a little too hot for Mike and Hanson was not surprised to learn that he had returned to his own country.

"Your central office cabled us that he was on his way over," continued Barnard, "and an eye has been kept on him since. But apart from marrying this Lola Demaine, he seems to have been living on his capital. Either he gets a nice fat allowance from the woman or else he brought a lot with him. He's worked himself in with quite a number of the wealthy young bloods about town, and that means spending money. I'd like to know what his game is."

"Lola Demaine, by marrying him, of course, becomes a British subject."

Barnard grunted. "That's the old gag. They can't be chucked out of the country as undesirable aliens then."

"Isn't anything at all known about the woman?" asked Hanson. "Have you inquired of the French or Belgian police?"

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"Not yet. I want a little more information before I do that. She's in with some pretty ripe crooks, but I don't know yet if they are her finding or Mike Cardon's. They're nearly all swell con men and, like Mike, they seem to be giving the mugs a rest. It ain't natural. They must be getting their money from somewhere."

"Is it possible that they have pooled their finances in preparation for a big haul?" suggested Hanson. "Or perhaps found some other method of making a living?"

"I've considered that," replied Barnard, "and I don't think it probable. You know as well as I do that criminals are rigid specialists. If they have turned over to some other game it must be something big and easy; and that's what I don't like."

The Chief Inspector paused and fixed Hanson with his cold and penetrating stare.

"I'd feel a lot more comfortable if I could get a man in with 'em. But it's hopeless with that crowd. They know every officer of the department as well as I do. I'd ask you to take a chance, but half those crooks know the States, and I'll lay long odds they know you. Now it occurs to me that your young friend, Mr. Marlow, would be a very suitable person for the job. What about it?"

Hanson had guessed that the Chief Inspector had been leading up to this. It was something which had been in his own mind ever since his return to Instow. Yet he knew the risk, and shrank from exposing Dick Marlow to the certain danger if their plans miscarried. Dick was, he admitted to himself, an ideal man for the job. He was acquainted with the circle in which these young bloods moved, though he did not get around with them. Easy enough for him to scrape acquaintance with Lola Demaine.

"Well?" demanded Barnard impatiently.

"I think that Marlow might be willing to help," he re-

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plied. "Provided that he is not exposed to too much danger, I am prepared to ask him."

"Good!" exclaimed Barnard. "It ought to appeal to him, and there will be practically no real danger."

Sergeant Trotter glanced at Hanson, stuck his tongue in his cheek and stared at the ceiling, a smile hovering over his big humorous mouth. Barnard scowled at him, but suppressed the witheringly sarcastic remark which rose to his lips. It would have been a gross libel on a very courageous and efficient officer.

"Well," continued Barnard briskly, "the verdict was satisfactory. Let us hope it bluffs The Scorpion into a false sense of security. Now I'll just run over the plan I have mapped out, and if you have any suggestions to make I'll be glad to hear them."

Coming from Chief Inspector Barnard, this was a fine tribute to Hanson's reputation.

For close upon an hour they were discussing matters. Sergeant Trotter, for the most part, remained a silent and apparently bored spectator.

Dick Marlow was not in the hotel when Hanson arrived back but came in soon after.

Hanson put the suggestion to him and found it eagerly accepted. "Sink me, old Sawbones!" he ejaculated. "It's what I've been wanting to do all my life! Lucky I've another six weeks' leave."

"Don't get too excited about it, Dick," warned Hanson. "You may find assisting the police to be rather sordid."

"Oh, don't be a wet blanket!" protested Dick, laughing. "Anyway, do you think we shall nobble the jolly old Scorp?"

Hanson shook his head. "That, only time will tell. I sincerely hope that we do not have to wait until the killer strikes again. Though I fear we shall."

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CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN KILEY ASSISTS

CAPTAIN TERRENCE KILEY moved restlessly in his bed. The pneumatic drill was at it again. The cursed thing had been going all night. Gad, what an infernal din it made! Just outside his window, too! It was an outrage.

He opened one eye, but promptly shut it again as the ceiling swooped down in an alarming bulge. Some fool had drawn the curtains and the sun was streaming in like liquid fire, scorching the inside of his head. He was aware that his tongue was at least three sizes too large for his mouth, despite the fact that it was as dry as old leather. Who the blazes was that shouting at him?

"Your tea, sir."

Captain Kiley made a determined and heroic effort and opened both eyes at once. His man, Parker, stood beside the bed, a series of ripples going up and down his stocky body in a manner most irritating.

"Keep still, Parker."

"Very good, sir. Your tea, sir."

"What? Oh, tea! Fine!"

He reached out and gripped the cup handle firmly. Carefully he conveyed the cup to his lips and sipped with keen appreciation. He sighed and glanced up at Parker, standing stiffly to attention.

"How did I get home last night, Parker?" he asked.

"Two gentlemen assisted you, sir."

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"Two gentlemen! I don't remember any gentlemen, Parker."

"No, sir? One was Mr. Carfax, the other was a stranger to me."

Captain Kiley digested this information in silence while he drank the tea.

"Was I very blotto, Parker?"

"Never seen you worse, sir."

"Oh!"

Terrence Kiley closed his eyes and lay back upon the pillows. Rummy how it had got him last night! Usually he could carry a skinful like an officer and a gentleman. Not a thick evening, either. Well, not very thick. Carfax had brought him home. He hadn't a lot of time for Carfax. Who the devil was he, anyway?

The shrill note of the telephone cut short his meditations. He put his hands to his ears and groaned. "Shut off that damned thing, Parker!"

Parker moved across the room with that noiseless tread peculiar to the well-trained servant. He picked up the receiver. Captain Kiley waited impatiently.

"Tell the fool I've gone to Scotland," he ordered, guessing the nature of the call.

"It's Mr. Marlow, sir. He says he is coming round to see you right away."

"Dick Marlow!" exclaimed the invalid, interested. "He's welcome."

Parker, having conveyed this information over the wire, hung up the instrument and prepared to assist his employer in the serious business of dressing.

Dick Marlow found him toying with breakfast and grinned understandingly. "Hullo, old scout," he greeted. "You look like the morning after the night before."

Captain Kiley made a weary gesture of protest. "Don't

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talk about it. I feel positively bloodstained. But what brings you here at this unholy hour?"

Dick helped himself to a cigarette and sat on the corner of the table, swinging one leg.

"You know everybody in town, don't you, Terry?" he asked.

"More or less, dear boy. All those sweet souls worth knowing," admitted Kiley modestly. "Who is the alluring creature, sailor?"

Dick laughed.

"Hit it in one. Her name is Lola Demaine."

"What?"

"Lola Demaine," repeated Dick, wondering why his friend looked so startled. "Do you know her?"

"Do I know Lola Demaine? Do I? My dear old Dick, I most sincerely hope that this is not your idea of a joke. Really, dear boy, I'm not strong enough to stand it this morning."

Terrence eyed him reprovingly and Dick made a gesture of repudiation. "No joke, Terry. I'd like to meet her, that's all."

"Jolly good luck to you, laddie. If it's of any interest to you, it was at a little affair given by Lola last night that I collected this perfectly foul head. Most amazing; quite staggers me. If I'd had a useful load I could understand it."

Dick, who knew the gallant captain's capacity, wondered how much he had actually consumed. Some vague inkling of the truth dawned upon him, but he refrained from comment.

"When are you seeing her again?" he asked.

Kiley carefully buttered a piece of toast and considered the question.

"Well, you know, dear comrade, I did think of popping

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around this A.M. just to discover what really did happen last night. Care to come?"

"Yes, rather," replied Dick, highly satisfied that the matter could be so easily arranged. "But look here, Terry, I don't want to appear too keen to know her. Understand?"

"Oh, absolutely, dear lad," agreed the expert on all things appertaining to "alluring creatures." "Never let them get that idea in their sweet heads. They'll walk on your face if they do. Bless their little hearts, too!"

Sixty minutes later Captain Kiley was so far recovered as to feel equal to driving his car as far as Westminster, where Lola Demaine's flat was situated. He had previously ascertained through the medium of a telephone conversation with her maid that they might expect to find Lola risen and sufficiently advanced with her toilet to receive them.

Dick had long since ceased to marvel that Terrence Kiley was still alive. The journey, however, was accomplished without incident, except for a slight misunderstanding with the officer on traffic control at the Marble Arch and a taxi-driver as they skidded into Birdcage Walk.

It was not without a feeling of excited anticipation that Dick passed into Lola Demaine's flat, admitted by a smart maid. Kiley appeared perfectly at home. He flung himself into a comfortable chair and breathed a weary sigh. "Spots before the eyes, dear one. I'm damned bad."

Dick, standing legs apart by the fireplace, looked down and grinned, but glanced up quickly as the door opened and Lola Demaine came into the room. She was taller than he had expected, slightly built, with jet-black hair protruding, Bishareenlike, around her head. The vivid colors of her kimono emphasized her pale skin and dark eyes. About her there was a subtle suggestion of Oriental blood.

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She hesitated on seeing Dick, but Kiley hauled himself from the chair and she flashed him a smile of welcome, revealing a set of small, pearly teeth.

"This is my dear old friend, Dick Marlow," introduced Kiley. "He's acting as my private nurse and guardian this A.M. Mind he doesn't mangle your mitt, darling."

Dick was conscious of an odd sense of revulsion as he took her hand, but remembering the part he had to play, he gave it a friendly squeeze. He was rewarded with a dazzling smile and a flash of the dark, slightly oblique eyes.

She turned to Kiley with a movement full of lithe grace. "What den is de matter, my poor Terry. You look so—so —what you say—'aggard?"

There was a soft caress in her voice which reminded Dick of a purring tiger. Terrence Kiley put his hands before his eyes and groaned. "Lola, those damned colors!" he protested. "They tear what's left of my optics to minute shreds."

Lola Demaine laughed softly. "Ah, my Terry," she murmured, "you were so ver-ry drunk. Nevaire mind. Lola will give you something nice for dat."

She seemed to glide rather than walk from the room. Terry glanced at Dick.

"Well, sailor," he whispered, "that's it. What think you of the beautiful creature?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "Looks to me as if a splash of Chink was included in the make-up," he replied. "She's certainly good looking all the same."

Lola Demaine returned, bearing in her hand a wineglass half filled with a liquid, slightly chalky in appearance. She offered it to Kiley. "Dere, my Terry, drink dat and head all gone, ver-ry quick," she said in her soft, musical voice, rendered all the more attractive by its foreign inflections.

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Kiley made a wry grimace as he drank the liquid. "Lola, what hell brew is that?" he demanded, setting the glass upon the table. "Gad, it's got an almighty kick in it!"

Lola bared her small, even teeth in a smile. "Dat is something nice I make," she replied. "You feel good now, eh?"

The effect upon Kiley was plainly beneficial. In a matter of minutes he had lost the weary, haggard expression and recaptured his customary gay, debonair manner.

Several times during the next fifteen minutes Dick glanced at him curiously. Terry's wit was positively sparkling. A most amazing transformation in so brief a while.

Lola Demaine clasped Dick's hand as they were leaving, and whispered softly, "You come and see me again, eh?"

Dick smiled and nodded as if he found the suggestion very much to his liking. Lola suddenly reached up and kissed him squarely upon the lips. Then she sped lightly away.

Kiley had walked out to his car and was standing by the door when Dick came down the steps. The feel of that kiss sent a shudder through him. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his mouth. As he crushed the silk in his hand he noticed a faint smear of rouge.

"What about some interior decorations, old lady-killer?" suggested Kiley. "I'm deuced peckish somehow."

"And that's more than you were an hour ago," grinned Dick. "No, thanks, Terry, I want to get back."

"Hullo, Kiley," hailed a genial voice, "how is it this morning?"

Dick turned to see a figure, immaculately clad, complete with monocle and gold-mounted cane, standing beside him.

"'Morning, Carfax," acknowledged Kiley, without particular enthusiasm. "Many thanks for assistance last night."

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Carfax chuckled. "The blind leading the blind, Kiley," he said. "I was half seas over myself."

While these pleasant exchanges were taking place Dick had seated himself. Kiley got in beside him.

"Chin, chin, Carfax. See you sometime."

Carfax's reply, if any, was drowned in the roar as the car moved off.

"I can't stand that blighter at any price," confided Terry. "I don't object to redheaded blokes on principle, but that ginger hound I can*not* bear. Whither wouldst thou go, brother?"

"Charing Cross, Southern," replied Dick. "I'm due back for lunch."

They parted in the station yard, Dick being just in time for a train to Bexley, where he was staying with a maiden aunt, and Hanson with him.

His learned friend listened with an attention which was flattering while he recounted his morning's adventure. He nodded approvingly when Dick concluded.

"Good man!" he said. "Kiley was not inquisitive?"

Dick grinned. "Not at all. He was too sorry for himself when I first met him and too elated afterwards to remember to ask, I think."

Hanson frowned and walked to the windows leading to the old-fashioned garden which was Miss Marlow's pride. He stood for a minute gazing out, and then he turned to Dick. "I suppose you realize what actually was wrong with Kiley?"

"Not quite. But knowing Terry's capacity, I'd say someone doped his drink for some reason best known to themselves."

Hanson nodded gravely. "Exactly. I think, my dear Dick, that Terrence Kiley will have good reason to be very grateful for your visit."

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"Grateful! Why?"

"Don't you see through the vile scheme?" asked Hanson, a trifle impatiently. "If Kiley had not visited the woman this morning she would certainly have called him on the 'phone and inquired as to how he was feeling. Naturally he would have told her and asked how drunk he was the previous evening and that sort of thing. Apologized for being a nuisance, probably. She would then have invited him to come to her and sample her marvelous restorative. Result: one unsuspecting poor fool well on the way to being a drug fiend."

A look of horror came into Dick's gray eyes. "Sink me, Paul!" he exclaimed. "What a devilish plot!"

"It is," agreed Hanson grimly. "So simple, too. It is practically impossible for the police to do anything until it is too late. I don't know what it was she gave Kiley this morning, probably a very weak solution of cocaine. For a while he will feel wonderfully well, but when the effect wears off he will become depressed. Lola Demaine will be on hand with a further dose. And so it will go on until Kiley is ready to sell his soul for the stuff."

"Not while I can stop it," said Dick with grim determination.

"Fortunately for Kiley there's not much harm done at the moment," continued Hanson. "The grip of the cocaine vice is impossible to shake off, no matter how strong-willed the person may be. In addition, the victims of this habit seem positively to delight in recruiting others. You will have to go carefully, Dick."

"Here, damn it, Paul!" protested Dick indignantly. "You don't think——"

Hanson smiled and slapped him upon the shoulder. "No, of course not. What I mean is that you will certainly have them endeavor to administer a secret dose to you.

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However, I can fix up a preparation which will enable you to furnish a realistic fake of a drugged man should it be necessary. What sort is Kiley really?"

"Jolly good fellow," replied Dick promptly. "By no means the complete fool he appears to be. Why?"

"I was thinking that the time may come when we shall find it necessary to enlist his aid seriously. By the way, what was Carfax like in appearance?"

Dick described the man as accurately as he could. Hanson smiled. "I thought so," he murmured.

"Do you know him?" asked Dick in some surprise.

"Mr. Carfax's description seems to me to fit very neatly a gentleman I knew as Mike Cardon. I think, Dick, that you were privileged to observe a notorious criminal, a confidence trickster of a high order. Having made the United States and Canada too warm to be comfortable, he has now returned to his native country. I must look up his record. He is, by the way, Lola Demaine's lawfully wedded husband."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Dick. "I didn't know they did that sort of thing!"

"Just to make Lola a British subject, that's all," smiled Hanson. "What's that on your handkerchief?"

Dick glanced down at the handkerchief in his hand. He had been about to use it.

"Rouge, I'd say," he said in disgust. "That damned woman kissed me before I could stop her. I'd forgotten all about it."

Hanson held out his hand. "I'll take that if you don't mind, Dick."

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CHAPTER IX

THE VOICE ON THE 'PHONE

ANN PENHAYLE allowed the novel to slip from her fingers over the side of the hammock and closed her eyes, swinging herself gently to and fro. The afternoon sun glared down from a cloudless sky. But under the leafy boughs of the ancient chestnut and with a faint breeze stirring along the river it was no more than pleasantly warm, inducing that feeling of lazy comfort of which daydreams are born.

Elphinstone Clayton's house at Twickenham was an old Georgian residence, with a garden flanking the Thames bank. A delightful place, and Ann, who had spent most of her young life in boarding schools, loved it.

When they had left Instow on the day following the inquest she had been fearful lest returning to London would revive the full horror of her marriage to Count du Buisson. Contrary to her expectations, her predominant emotion was one of gladness to have returned to the old house.

That was a week ago. Already the memory of those shocking tragedies in which she had been so intimately involved was fading into the background of her thoughts. Not entirely, of course. At times it returned with unabated force, especially at night and at odd moments during the day when she was alone.

But another emotion was stirring, happy, healthy in its conception. One which gradually crowded out those mor-

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bid fears and imaginings. Dick Marlow's tanned face and laughing gray eyes were never totally absent from her thoughts.

Ann possessed to the full that intuition which is supposed to be wholly feminine. But she would have been blind indeed not to have been able to read the message written large upon Dick's expressive face.

Twice during the past week he had called to visit her. Each time on a pretext so lame that she felt that it would not have deceived even her guardian, who, as it so happened, had been absent on both occasions.

The sound of a footfall on the graveled drive cut short her reverie. She glanced toward the well-trimmed privet hedge and a moment later a man appeared whom she recognized as a Mr. Kotlar. He was the secretary to some mission or charity, the name of which, if she had ever known, she had forgotten. Though he appeared to be welcomed by Elphinstone Clayton, she did not like him, and she imagined that her guardian received him more in his official capacity than as a personal friend. The old man was connected with numerous charities of one sort or another.

Kotlar was a dark, sallow-skinned man, rather slightly built, with heavy eyebrows and a dark, drooping mustache which almost concealed his mouth. Ann loathed that mustache and his habit of continually stroking it.

He came forward briskly on seeing her, an oily, ingratiating smirk upon his face. "Ah! Good afternoon, Countess," he said, bowing and raising his bowler hat with an exaggerated sweep which possibly he believed to be courtly. "How delightful to commune with Nature in this old-world garden!"

Ann forced a polite smile. "You wish to see Mr. Clayton, I suppose?"

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