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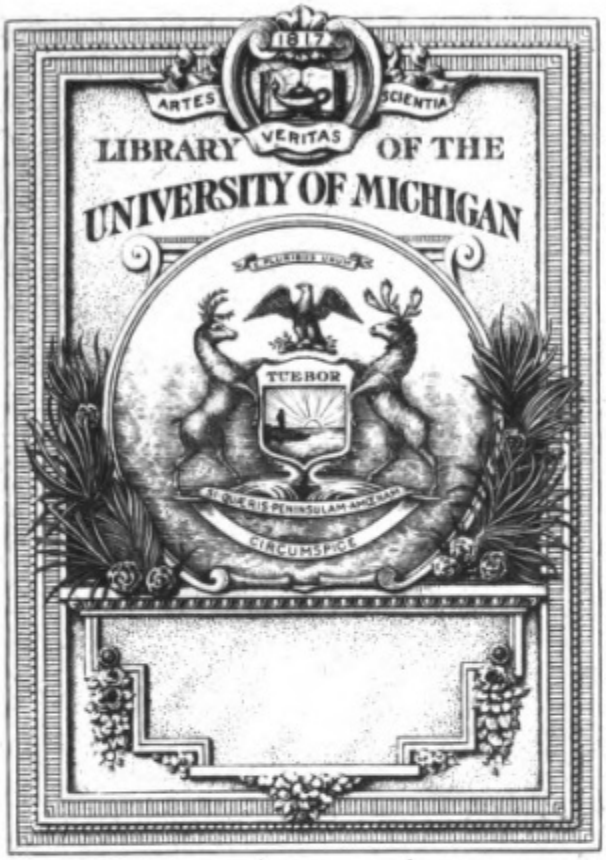

BEQUEST OF
ORMA FITCH BUTLER, PH.D., '07
PROFESSOR OF LATIN

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SWEETER THAN HONEY

ARTHUR APPLIN IN HIS NEW BOOK, "SWEETER THAN HONEY", has very cunningly put old wine into a new bottle; and his wine sparkles and has a delightful bouquet of romance. This author's happiest hunting ground has always been the Stage and the Turf, but in "Sweeter Than Honey" he has created a crook who bears no resemblance at all to the type which Hollywood has exploited with such tiresome regularity. Whether everyone will approve of the charming old apiarist and his fascinating daughter remains to be seen; but no one who reads the story can fail to be intrigued and excited.

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By the same Author:

PICKED UP
THE BLACK NAIL
PICCADILLY
THE ACTRESS
COLD CREAM
THE GOLD TRAP
LUXURY UNLIMITED
THE DEATH MASK
THE FINAL PAYMENT
THE REVUE GIRL

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SWEETER THAN HONEY

ARTHUR APPLIN

GREEN CIRCLE BOOKS

NEW YORK

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I

IT LOOKED GOOD to Tony, the rising sun turning the unruffled waters of the Solent various lovely shades of green, with the blue of the sky reflected in patches; the Isle of Wight still half asleep under the thin counterpane of mist. Yachts lying lazily at their moorings, a few small craft with white or red sails looking for a breeze, motor-boats like angry bees buzzing to and fro, and overhead a couple of 'planes circling around the *Atlantia*. Tony took a deep breath of the soft, sleepy air, turned to Henry Van Dyke standing just behind him, a small stubbornly built man with eyes like flints, a thin, determined mouth and a large nose—the business-man's nose that can smell gold across a continent. "Sort of feel I've come home—I was born in England, you know."

"Oh yes! Now I know what's wrong with you, Howard; now I know why you've walked out on me. Not that I've got anything against England, except that it suffers from the Safety First complex and a swollen head."

Tony grinned. Walking out on Van Dyke—multi-millionaire, proprietor of the *Chicago Herald* and allied journals, and of one of the richest islands in Malaya—was the first really courageous thing he had ever done, though it needed no small amount of courage to be first news reporter and crime detector on the *Herald*. "Still feeling sore

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with me?" he asked. "I suppose I'm the first guy that's walked out before he was worn out?"

Van Dyke grunted. "Well, do you know what you'll do on this side? You'll fade out. There isn't a news-sheet worth handling, nor a crime worth reporting." He glanced over his shoulder at the passengers leaning over the rails. "By the way, you know those two fellows that my wife and I played contract with most evenings—kind of looked as if they belonged to a good old English family on the decline, sloppy clothes and an Oxford accent? Well, last night my wife suggested asking them to the state-room to play. When she went to bed one of them started dealing a few hands of poker, and before I woke up and got wise they'd taken six thousand grand off me!"

Tony stared at Van Dyke and laughed softly. "I'd like to meet those guys; they must have done it for a bet. Can't imagine any ordinary crook having the nerve to try and best you, Henry." He could afford to be familiar now Van Dyke was no longer his boss. "Haven't you reported them to the purser or the captain?"

"Nothing like that. But, say, that's an idea, doing it for a bet. You'll be a long time finding a job, Howard. Suppose you trail these two dons and round them up; if you look lively you might get them before they've time to cash in, and you can keep the six thousand. That's a bet?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders. The ship was nearing the dock. England didn't look quite so attractive now. A clutter of masts and funnels, low, long buildings looking lifeless and deserted, ugly squat houses; but a little breeze blowing off shore brought a splendid smell. That, he remembered, was how England smelled! His heart began to

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beat fast with excitement. He had a queer feeling that something was waiting for him. Adventure—discovery.

"I've had too much of crooks and crime to bother about a couple of card-sharpers," he said. "I'm out to find something new."

Van Dyke flicked the ash off his cigar. "You need plenty of dough for that, my boy. Well, I'd better go below and see if the wife has finished packing the crown jewels. Look us up at the 'Magnificent'—that's the new joint in Park Lane. We shall be there until we sail for Malaya."

Tony nodded. "I'm leaving a suitcase there myself while I have a look round."

Van Dyke's thin-lipped mouth relaxed into a smile, and he gave Tony a quick glance. "Inside a year you'll be applying to the *Herald* for a job as pay-boy."

Tony watched him walk away—in action Van Dyke reminded him of a penguin. Suddenly he felt sorry for the man who had been his boss, whom all his life he had envied and respected. The poor devil had everything in the world he wanted. Poor devil, his only chance of happiness lay in losing something.

While Tony was looking for a seat on the boat train Mrs. Van Dyke waved a heavily jewelled hand at him from her private drawing-room car in the Pullman, and the old man indicated in pantomime that the boys who had taken the six thousand off him were somewhere in the offing. If they had been any good, Tony thought, they would have relieved Mrs. Van Dyke of some of her jewels—that would really have set Henry going, because he was fond of his wife, when he had time to think about her. He had married her when he had only fifteen dollars a week, and

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she was employed as a waitress in a rough joint down town. Tony watched the country unfold itself as he sat over coffee and a cigarette; that, he thought, was something that had never come into his life—a girl he wanted to marry. And he was pretty hard-boiled now, and thirty years old. He had always thought if he married it would be an English girl—calm, warm, and gentle, like the country.

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2

"If you would make money you must spend money," was one of Van Dyke's famous dictums. Tony decided he would spend money all right as long as he stayed at the "Magnificent." Making it was not going to be easy—London definitely was not Chicago. Nothing happened, life was like a machine, highly polished, well-oiled, working smoothly and quietly; you felt if an earthquake occurred it would just go on working. He sat in the lounge near the lift, watching the people who came and went, all of the same pattern, and coloured like their town in half-tones. The only exciting thing he had seen was a girl with chestnut hair, hazel eyes, and a large red mouth; a nice figure in a neat coat and skirt, with a gay scarf twisted round her neck. She was carrying a large dressmaker's box. He tried to read the name on it, but deciphered no more than "Jane." She told the lift attendant to take her to Mrs. Van Dyke's apartment. He waited for her to return, but when the cocktail bar opened he drifted in—this was the meeting place of the magnates in the business, literary, and dramatic world. Charlie, the cocktail shaker, greeted him with a mixture of familiarity and respect which was both flattering and useful. Charlie had been round the world and knew most of the men who made a noise in it. Had he chosen to talk, there were a few famous

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people he could have put behind the bars, but silence paid higher dividends than the police. Charlie's bar was the best agency and private broadcasting house in town.

Tony made two bronx last until six-thirty. Charlie shook his head sympathetically. "Very quiet today; but there's a big charity show on tonight. If you look in about mid-night—extension of licence—you'll find them all here. And they'll open out, too—bored with watching duchesses imi-tating chorus-girls."

Tony strolled back to the lounge. Through the wide glass windows the park looked pleasant, tulips stood in bloom: red and purple and bronze; chestnut trees already threatening to burst into flower. He hesitated as he heard the lift descending, remembered the girl with the chestnut hair, wondered if she was in the lift if he would have the nerve to speak to her. To hell with work! It was spring, and there was something peculiarly exciting about spring in London—very fragile and delicate and lovely.

The lift gates crashed back and two men got out in a hurry—the antitheses of spring—bowler hats, white spats, rolled umbrellas; the Savile Row Twins. But Tony's trained journalistic eye noticed how badly the umbrellas were rolled. As the revolving doors swung open he caught a breath of fresh air, decided he would have a run round the park in the secondhand Ford he had picked up for a pony. He was running down the steps on to the pavement when he heard a piercing cry. A woman was standing on a balcony on the third floor. "Help! . . . Murder! . . . Police!"

He saw her for a fraction of a second out of the corner of his eye. She didn't look real and the words she shouted sounded fantastic; but they stopped the traffic and arrested

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the attention of people on the pavement, who began to run towards the hotel. Everyone was running—except the two men Tony had seen leaving the lift in the hotel. As if unaware of the commotion, they had thrown themselves into a rakish red Hispano car. The engine must have been running for, as the door slammed, the car started. Tony noticed that the door had closed on one of those rolled umbrellas; it broke, hung suspended a moment before the door opened again and it was drawn inside. He saw some small object fall and roll into the gutter; he saw it shining there in the evening sun, red, like a drop of blood. As he dashed towards his Ford, which had been standing a few feet in front of the Hispano, he picked it up—a large ruby set in an ear-ring. Jumping into his car he started her, put his foot on the accelerator and went in pursuit of the Hispano. He was just in time to see it turn left, taking the kerb and narrowly missing a Belisha Beacon.

When Tony got round the corner it was half way down the street, turned left again. A taxi-cab baulked Tony; to avoid crashing he had to swerve, miss the street, and run straight on. Swinging round the next turning, he came into the lower part of Grosvenor Square. Again he nearly crashed, jammed on his brakes when the Hispano car flicked his buffer with her tail as she skidded round—then roared away in front of him. He cursed himself for not being quicker in the uptake; if he had crashed he would have got them. He calculated that they would cross the north end of the Square, go up Duke Street and into Oxford Street. He would lose them there unless he headed them off first.

Did they know they were being followed? The odds were they didn't; in that case he had only to keep going

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and with any luck he would get them. That screaming woman on the balcony had put the wind up them; at the same time it had attracted everyone's attention and given them a chance of an easy get-away. After all, they were probably only a couple of sneak-thieves who worked hotels and private houses; women cried murder on the least provocation, and it had done them a good turn.

Tony had jammed his foot on to the accelerator again, but his thoughts were moving faster than the Ford; sub-consciously he was figuring out the amount of publicity he would get for himself, and the copy he could make if he caught the Savile Row Twins!

The driver of the Hispano suddenly applied his brakes, did a neat skid-turn again, and instead of going up Duke Street shot into Brook Street. Tony grinned. Here they had some half a dozen left-hand turnings from which to choose, narrow streets where he could easily crash them. They thought they were safe, but to his surprise they went straight on as if they meant to get into Bond Street.

He heard the roar of the Hispano's exhaust as the driver suddenly accelerated; he saw the traffic signal lights on Davies Street turn from green to orange, then red as the Hispano dashed past. Tony set his teeth and followed, a fraction of a second too late—a motor-van shot across him. Tony spun his wheel, cleared the van, ran on to the pave-ment, swung left again where a stationary car was standing. He tried to pull the Ford round, but the front wheels locked; he skidded down the centre of the road, turned a complete circle, and would have crashed into a plate-glass window of a small shop but for the intervention of an electric light standard. Tony was thrown forward as the wind-screen crumpled up; the wheel caught him in the

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pit of his stomach, winding him. Kicking the off-side door open, he crawled out and leant against the standard; a crowd surrounded him. While he got his breath he tried to locate the Hispano. It had disappeared. He looked at the gaping faces and grinned cheerfully; they thought he was mad or drunk. Marvellous thing, a London crowd, something magnificent in its dumb immobility. The driver of the light van, however, found his voice, and the air was filled with biblical allusions which did credit to his Sunday-school training. An old gentleman with a bristly moustache forced his way forward and shook his stick in Tony's face. "You ought to have been killed, sir; pity you weren't. Where are the police? Of course, never to be seen when they're wanted!"

Tony nodded. "You've said a mouthful. Did anyone notice a red Hispano?"

The girl standing in the entrance of the shop pushed her way through the crowd. "Hadn't you better do something about that wrist?" she said.

Tony glanced at his left hand, covered with blood; blood was dripping on to the pavement—quite a small pool already. Pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, he wrapped it loosely round his wrist, covering his hand with it. Then he looked at the girl—wondered why she wasn't wearing a hat. Her face seemed vaguely familiar. It was a pleasant face; it was more than that, it was an exciting face. Glancing round at the crowd, which was now assuming unpleasant proportions, he decided that hers was the only human face in it. The toughest crowd on the other side of the Atlantic had never worried Tony; a roaring, fighting mob was the life-blood of his job. But this mass of inarticulate, well-dressed people, murmuring under its breath,

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shaking its head, staring vacantly at him as if he were a circus and they were waiting for the next turn, began to get on his nerves. And he was certainly losing more blood than seemed healthy.

"It looks as if you'd cut an artery," the girl went on, "and your handkerchief's not doing a bit of good. Why doesn't someone run for a doctor?"

A youth with a bicycle said: "There's a doctor's house at the top of the street, but I don't suppose he's at home."

"I'm all right." Tony took an unsteady step forward, looked round for his hat; someone picked it up from the gutter and gave it to him. "If I haven't smashed up the old Ford it would be a good idea to get away." He reeled unsteadily, supported himself against the lamp standard again. . . . Hazel eyes, chestnut hair, lovely mouth with a sense of humour—like a ripe plum—had plums a sense of humour, though? "Say, your cops must be having a busy day. What about blowing a whistle?"

"Hadn't you better come inside the shop and sit down?" the girl said. "I can 'phone up a doctor—unless you want to bleed to death."

Tony looked at the shop window; blinked, looked again. Miniature models of well-developed females advertising corsets, belts, and brassières; expensive underthings hanging in orderly abandon. He glanced at the name above the door—Jane Estelle. Suddenly he remembered "Jane" was the name on the box which the exciting girl at the Hotel Magnificent had taken up to Mrs. Van Dyke's apartment.

"Thanks awfully," he said, "but shan't I be a nuisance?"

The girl put her hand under his arm, the crowd opened

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to let them pass, still dumb and gaping. "It's quite all right; I've just closed for the day."

She led him to a comfortable chair; it was a relief to sit down. He saw himself reflected in several mirrors; looked a nasty mess, blood on his face, tie hanging out, hair rumpled. The girl shut the door, he heard the lock click. "Sit quite still," she said, "I shan't be a moment."

Tony began to talk, didn't matter whether she could hear him or not. He wanted to reassure himself; beginning to feel a bit faint. He was aware of ghostly figures wrapped in white sheets, and curiously shaped, disturbing garments in silk and satin. He kept the fingers of his right hand pressed tightly on his left wrist—the blood was still flowing—while he told Jane, or Jane's representative, his name; that although he had only been in England a week or two he was really British.

"You know, you're really the first live person I've met on this side. Don't suppose you recognize me, but I saw you at the 'Magnificent' this afternoon. Who are you—I mean, is this your joint?"

"Keep quiet!" A voice came from an ante-room somewhere at the back of the shop. "I manage this place for Jane; I'm Anne Chiltern."

Tony heard a noise like a dentist's drill working at high speed, hoped she wasn't destroying some lovely's trousseau. She returned with a dust-sheet, which she rolled into a cushion and laid across his knees. Then she brought a basin of water, cotton wool, a bottle which he eyed suspiciously, and two long strips of linen. She pulled off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, tied a rough tourniquet around his arm, then washed the wound on his wrist.

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"Quite a clean cut. This will hurt," she said, dabbing his wrist with cotton-wool soaked in iodine. "I think it's only one of the larger veins you've cut. If I plug it with some wool and bandage it tightly you ought to be all right until you get home."

"It's feeling fine, Anne. Is Nurse your second name? I must say you are a sweetheart." She glanced at him, the sort of look she had given him at the "Magnificent." "All right, I'm not getting fresh, but that's what we call a girl when she does something lovely in the States."

"This isn't the States. Hold on to the end of the bandage while I get a couple of safety-pins. . . . Now you'd better keep quiet; leave that tourniquet on for a few minutes longer. I don't want the shop looking like a slaughter-house, or when Jane comes tomorrow she'll cry murder."

Tony had dropped back into the chair with a sigh of relief; he was beginning to feel good. Something had happened to him at last, but that word "murder" made him sit upright again.

"Say, do you know what I was doing when my Ford tried to get into your shop?"

"Looking for trouble, I should think!"

"Chasing it. Say, what were you doing at the 'Magnificent' this afternoon?"

"Trying to squeeze a human penguin into a Charnaux."

"I don't know what a Charnaux is, but was the penguin Mrs. Van Dyke by any chance?"

Anne turned away to light a cigarette. "How did you guess that?"

It was growing dark in the shop. The light from the window outlined Anne in clean, sharp lines: lovely neck, brave shoulders, her body like a young tree, with finely-

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tapered limbs. Tony said: "What time did you leave the hotel?"

She leant against the long mirror, blew a spiral of smoke between her lips as she looked at the ceiling. Before she could reply there was a loud, single knock on the shop door. Tony glanced interrogatively at her. The bell rang. Moving to the window, she looked out, then stepped back and said quietly: "The police."

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3

TONY HEAVED HIMSELF out of the chair. "Well, I suppose I'm for it. Will they take me to the cells, or the lock-up, or whatever you call it, or what does it cost to square them?"

"You can't do anything like that," Anne said quickly. "Our police don't take bribes."

"Oh no!" Tony was fumbling with the Chubb lock of the door.

"Wait a moment. You can't go into the street—in your shirt-sleeves without a coat."

"What's wrong with my shirt? You don't want the police in here, do you? An inquisitive cop might take it into his head to pull the wrappings off those models of yours, and report you to the bishop——"

"Here, I'll help you into your coat. Careful now! You must keep on that tourniquet for a bit." She dusted his hat, gave him a quick brush.

"You are a sweet kid. All I want now is a cigarette. You wouldn't light it for me? Just as you like—but I've only got one hand working. All right, Officer, I'm coming! You won't run away until I'm through with Little Boy Blue outside, will you? And remember, you saw nothing, know nothing. If I'm in a jam you've got to keep out of it."

He opened the door, and it closed behind him before

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Anne could reply. She stood at the window for a few moments, watched him walk over to the car with the policeman and produce his driving licence. The light van and its driver had disappeared, the crowd had dwindled away. Anne tidied up, then went to the dressing-room, washed her hands—blood-stains on them—did her face, and put on her hat. She wanted to get away before Tony Howard returned, and anyway, if she didn't hurry she would miss her train at Waterloo. Yet when she was ready she lit another cigarette and peeped through the window again. The policeman was still there, writing in his notebook. Tony got into the car. The engine was running all right. She watched him reverse into the road, hoped he was going—and would be disappointed if he did.

Someone was knocking on the shop door. She opened it and Peggy rushed in. "My dear, certain I was going to miss you. Just wanted to tell you, can't get away this weekend. Dowagers simply clamouring to have their winter chins removed, and I'm always the one to be sent out on private jobs. I ask you!" she cried in a husky, breathless voice.

"Your sensitive fingers and your schoolgirl complexion, Ducky. Sorry about tomorrow; Daddy was looking forward to seeing you. That reminds me, I've one of those little buzzing boxes to take down. Sorry, but I've simply got to rush."

"Go ahead." Peggy sat on the arm of the chair and studied her reflection in one of the mirrors—it was impossible for her to see a mirror without looking at herself. She was very young, very blonde and brilliant. Though she had brains, she hated using them. "Mind the glass when you go out, the pavement's simply littered with it.

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There's a policeman and a Ford and a bloody young man—you know what I mean! At first I thought someone had been trying to rape your Charnaux models! What's the trouble?"

She had left the door open and the trouble walked in. "Sorry," Peggy said; "didn't know you were a friend of Anne's."

"I was until Anne said I couldn't square the police. He really believed I was a gentleman because I didn't take the number of the light van and charge him with dangerous driving!" Tony turned to Anne. "Everything's O.K., bar a crumpled mudguard and the windscreen. I'll run you round to your railway station."

"The Underground's quicker—and safer."

"You're afraid."

"I'm not," Peggy cried. "If you're going Bayswater way you can drop me at Prince's Mansions."

Tony ignored her; he waited outside until Anne appeared. He took her arm, ran her across the pavement, and before she knew what had happened she was sitting in the Ford and he beside her.

Tony started the car and told Peggy to jump in.

"The man thinks I'm an acrobat," Peggy gasped as she tumbled into the back seat.

Tony was still holding Anne's arm, steering with his right hand. She didn't like to struggle in case she started his wrist bleeding again. She wondered if he was a little mad. His eyes were rather mad; couldn't be sure whether they were blue or green; an attractively impudent mouth over an aggressive chin. He couldn't be drunk, she decided, or the policeman wouldn't have let him get away with it.

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He was driving through Grosvenor Square into Upper Brook Street.

"Just where do you think you're going?" Anne asked coldly.

"Home. It would be easier if you gave me your address."

From the back of the car Peggy said: "Lavender Cottage, Cookham. If you go down the Bayswater Road, I'll fall out at the corner of Queen's Road; falling into your car has started a ladder in a new pair of silk stockings."

"Nothing doing; stockings don't ladder in Fords!"

He swung into Park Lane, slowed down as they passed the "Magnificent"; there was a crowd outside the entrance, two policemen keeping it on the move. Tony remembered the ruby ear-ring in his pocket; it could wait, and anyway, he had lost the chance of a good news story. "What's the riot?" he asked casually.

"Oh, queuing up to see the swells arrive for the big show tonight," Peggy said quickly. "Hurry up, I'm late."

Tony released Anne's arm, glanced at her; she was leaning back, staring through the broken windscreen, her hands holding a little oblong box on her lap. When they reached Queen's Road he put his hand on Anne's arm again. As Peggy jumped out, she said: "Straight on through Shepherd's Bush, in case you don't know, and then turn right, keep right—and mind the bees don't sting you! Cheerio, Anne."

As soon as they had cleared the bottle-neck at Notting Hill Gate, Tony said, "I'm afraid you're taking a lot of air. Do you mind?"

"Oh no, I love being blown to bits!"

"Well, stick your feet out and sink a bit. You look

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fine. . . . You're not feeling rattled with me, are you? The least I could do was to take you home after what you've done for me."

Slowly she turned her head and looked at his bandaged wrist, afraid, though she wouldn't confess it, in case she saw blood oozing through. "Isn't that tourniquet hurting?"

"Like hell it is, but it's going to stop there; keeps my mind off higher things."

She was trying to hate him without any reason, but curiosity prompted her to say: "Meaning?"

"You. This afternoon I was beginning to wonder why I had left Chicago and a good job—now I know. I've fallen in love, Anne." He opened wide the throttle; the wind through the screen made a noise like a plucked fiddle-string. "I've never been in love before; no woman has ever made me feel that way. I've had—affairs, of course. I'm human—hope you are. Don't say anything until I've finished."

She said, "Here, turn right."

"Thanks, I guessed it. Just give me a break and sit tight; wait till you know me."

"Perhaps I don't want to."

"You will."

"I suppose you think you know me?"

"Sure; you see, it's my job knowing people on sight. I'm a newspaper man—or was. Nothing at the moment, but I can get busy now and start right in collecting the dough, and then we'll get married. D'you like travelling? All over the world, I mean? You're too young to start having a home and a lot of kids. This little star has got to give us a heap of fun before we pass it on to the next generation."

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"At the end of the by-pass you turn right again."

"I know it; the blonde told me. She's a swell kid too. What's she do?"

"Restores ruins!"

"And you put them into straight-jackets? Pretty work—and I suppose when Peggy finds a new ruin and has fixed it up, she passes it on to you for the props. Do you work the big hotels together? I might get a story out of you!"

Anne didn't reply. She had got rather a thrill when he had pushed her into the car and driven off with her. She was still intrigued, but beginning to feel just a tiny bit scared. She had allowed herself to be picked up by a strange young man who was evidently quite irresponsible. Or had the accident outside Jane's shop been staged?

The speedometer had been registering a steady fifty; it rose to sixty just before coming into Slough, and Tony did not slow down until they were in the town. He took the right turning; didn't speak again until they reached Maidenhead Bridge. There they stopped suddenly, and sent a piece of loose glass rattling on to the radiator. He gazed upstream in silence for nearly a minute, then said in a quiet voice: "That's great, isn't it?"

The sun had dropped, but it tinted an egg-shell sky with crimson and purple; the stream reflected these colours, but the banks threw out deep green shadows; a white-sailed canoe drifted beneath the bridge. Higher up, a girl was standing motionless in a punt, her pole held lightly in one hand floating from the stern. She, too, was sharply reflected in the water—blue shirt, brown trousers. "I was wondering why you rushed out of London just to sleep—but do you sleep?" Tony said.

A news-boy came running up the incline of the bridge

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shouting as he ran: "Attempted murder in West End hotel. . . . Great jewel theft. . . . All the winners. . . . Murder. . . ."

Tony held out his hand for a paper; threw the boy a coin. Splashed across the top of the front page he read the headlines:

DARING DAYLIGHT ROBBERY AT THE HOTEL MAGNIFICENT

MURDEROUS ATTACK ON AMERICAN MILLIONAIRE'S WIFE

Anne opened her bag, found a cigarette and leant forward to light it, her hands cupping the flame of the match.

"That's pretty bad," Tony said. "Gee, what a scoop I just missed." He pushed the paper in front of Anne. "What do you know about that? Here, give me a cigarette." He took the one she had just lit. "Excuse me, but I've got to do some quick thinking. Can you find your way home from here? I'll have to be getting back."

Anne was sitting upright, staring at the news-sheet. "How awful!" she cried. "They say she's not expected to live. Why, I was only with her a few hours ago—" She broke off abruptly, looked at Tony. "You saw me leaving the hotel, didn't you?"

"Yes. . . . Did that cop, who took the number of my car, see you get into it and drive off with me?" He slipped his hand into his coat-pocket, fingering the ear-ring. "Looks as if we might get into a jam if we're not careful."

The voice of the news-boy came faintly from the lawn of "Skindles," where he was distributing newspapers: "Attempted murder in West End hotel. . . . Great jewel robbery. . . ."

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Anne turned quickly towards Tony, her face suddenly pale. "What do you mean? You weren't—I mean, you haven't . . . ?"

He looked at her thoughtfully; she gave him back the newspaper. As she did so, the box lying in her lap slid to the floor of the car. She picked it up quickly before Tony could move. "If you've got to go back I dare say I can pick up an omnibus from the railway station," she said, "but can't you tell me what's happened? Why you've got to go back?"

He didn't reply. He was staring at the placid river again; the green shadows were lengthening. In the far west the sky was almost blood-red—like a ruby. Anne waited a little while, then put her hand on his bandaged wrist. The linen was stained now. "You ought not to have driven me here. Why did you?"

"I told you. Because I'm in love with you," he said roughly. "Get wise to this: most big things happen suddenly. They may have been going on inside one unconsciously, but realization is a matter of a second or two . . . getting born, getting rich, getting bumped off, getting loved. . . . What have you got in that box?"

He remembered the blonde girl, Peggy, had given it to her; called it a buzzing box. She, too, had been to Mrs. Van Dyke's apartment in the "Magnificent."

"Oh, nothing—it belongs to father. We're wasting time. You'd better go. I can walk to the station. . . . Look after your wrist. I'm afraid it's bleeding still."

She opened the door of the car, but before she could rise he leant across her and shut it. "I'm taking you on. Guess I've missed my chance, so there's no hurry." He pushed the engine into gear. "You see, Van Dyke was my

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boss in Chicago. If I'd been on the spot I could have given this murder-robbery stuff a good write-up; but it's broadcasting through the States already. Where's your home-town? Do we keep straight on?"

"Sharp right again."

Tony laughed as he swung the wheel round. Anne was still pale, with the startled expression still in her eyes. "You can't keep a fellow going right all the time," he said. "At the next cross-roads I may take a chance!"

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LAVENDER COTTAGE WAS HIDDEN on the north from the road by a high brick wall; the river bounded it on the south, while on the east a mill-stream divided it from the garden of Odney Club. Anne jumped out to open the iron gates, and closed them when the car had driven through. Tony peered through the drive, bordered with beech and acacia trees. "I wondered why you came down here to sleep. Now you've got me guessing why you spend your day in a belt-and-bust shop making lovelies for old trout that have missed the boat. This looks some estate. Is your father a duke, or a lord, or what?"

"He's a simple old gentleman with one idea in his head. You'll hear it buzzing directly."

"And the rest of the family?"

"No family; I'm the only specimen. Mother died soon after I was born."

"That's tough. I guess your father won't exactly fall on my neck. . . . Just look at that!" The car had swung round to the left—on either side of it orchards of plum and apple; pink and white blossoms were blown through the broken windscreen. Tony throttled the engine down until the car crawled. "I'm beginning to feel like that fellow in the Russian ballet. Your father won't turn me into a frog or a newt, will he?"

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"Something smaller than that!"

Another turn in the drive brought them in sight of the cottage. It looked like a toy which a child had dropped in the centre of a vast garden: white-washed walls almost hidden by jasmine, a thatched roof. All the lattice windows were wide open. An Alsatian dog that was sleeping on the lawn woke up and gave a warning bark.

"There's father at the far end of the lavender fields," Anne said. "You can see the bee-hives—or some of them. They're the English bees, very rare and delicate; he gets all broody about them this time of the year. I prefer the Italians, they're hearty and good-tempered, even if they do a bit of robbing occasionally."

Tony said: "You've got me beat."

He stopped the car outside the front door; here, on either side of the drive were wide herbaceous borders; the air was heavy with the smell of flowers. Before Anne could rise, the dog jumped up on to the running board, nozzled her hands, tried to lick her face. As soon as he had quietened down, Anne jumped out. "Thanks very much. Suppose you haven't time to meet father and have a drink?"

"I've got to meet him some time; it might as well be now. If I don't get rid of that tourniquet I shall pass out. Shouldn't say 'no' if you offered to bandage my wrist again."

She hesitated; looked at him thoughtfully. "I'll have to let father know I'm here—and I must explain how we met. You'd better go into the house and sit down. I shan't be a couple of minutes."

"Rather come with you." He pulled off his coat; unfastened the tourniquet.

Anne led the way across the lawn, through a wooden

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gate into the lavender field. At the end of the long tiled path there was a cluster of lime trees, and beneath these a semi-circle of hives. Chiltern was examining one. When he saw his daughter approaching he replaced the roof.

"Hallo! You're a bit earlier than usual, aren't you, Anne?"

"Thought I was going to be late. This is Mr. Tony Howard, Daddy—he motored me down—and here's your precious box. I do wish they wouldn't send them by me. I'm always terrified of mislaying one."

Chiltern chuckled: "I'd rather trust you than the post; it's the English queen, I suppose. I've had bad luck with the English breed lately." He glanced at Tony's wrist: "Had an accident?"

"Missed the traffic signals and nearly skidded into your daughter's shop. I'd have bled to death if she hadn't come to my rescue. She's a great girl, Mr. Chiltern."

"Thanks for telling me," Chiltern said dryly. "All I know about her is that she's a good girl." He took a large coloured handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his face and hands. Tony noticed his hands; finely made, long, tapering fingers. He had a leonine head, eyes set wide apart, but small—very small and busy, never seeming to rest for more than a moment on any object. You couldn't see them because you couldn't hold them, and you got an impression that they were always laughing at you, amused because they knew you were baffled. "Come back to the house and have a glass of beer—perhaps a cocktail is more in your line though?"

"I drink anything."

"An American!"

"I was, but Anne's converted me."

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"Things happen to you very easily, don't they?" Anne said.

The living-room in the cottage was the entrance hall, a long, oak-panelled room with a large open fireplace; at the far end a staircase led to a gallery and the bedrooms. An old woman wearing a black cap on her grey hair brought in the drinks. At first Tony wasn't sure whether she was a servant or a friend. Though her face was lined, it was beautiful and sensitive; her movements were slow and deliberate. Tony noticed that Anne spoke to her almost in a whisper and the woman answered only with her eyes. "Deaf and dumb?" he hazarded.

"Born that way." Chiltern emptied his mug of beer. "Been with me twenty years; warned her when she first came that if she ever found her voice I'd sack her." He picked up the box Anne had brought down. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll see how my queen has travelled. Perhaps you'd like to stop and have a bit of food with us—very simple I warn you."

Tony looked at Anne; she began to go upstairs. "Shall I stay?" he asked.

She didn't reply until she had reached her bedroom door. She turned as she opened it: "You may miss a good story if you do—and I don't think you'd be safe, driving back at night."

She shut the door before he could speak again. Chiltern had disappeared through a green baize door beneath the staircase. Tony hesitated; there was a telephone on the bureau by the window. He could get through to Van Dyke at the "Magnificent"—but there was nothing he could tell him over the wire.

He pulled the ruby ear-ring out of his pocket and

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examined the stone closely; the largest he had ever seen; a true ruby he could swear, not reconstructed with small ones fused together. In the pale light coming through the window its colour seemed to vary from red to deep violet. If the crooks had got the other, they would have to be pretty smart to get rid of it without being traced. He grinned as he wondered what would happen if this ear-ring were found on him. What Anne would say if he showed it to her . . . Perhaps she would recognize it? Bad luck the Savile Row Twins hadn't crashed outside Jane's shop. And then he wondered just who "Jane" was.

He glanced at the green baize door; old Chiltern was introducing himself to the queen bee—he had never met a queen, not of the bee variety, anyway. Tony ran a few steps up the staircase.

"Anne!"

She must have heard—he had a penetrating voice—even English oak wouldn't stop it. He climbed to the gallery, knocked on her door, then opened it; she was standing by the window. She had taken off her frock and was wearing a green wrap.

"Anne, I guess you don't want me to stop to dinner, but I've got to see you tomorrow. You'll be at the shop in the morning?"

"Probably; but you can't see me there."

"I can see you anywhere. Don't you worry about Jane. I know just how to treat those kind of dames. I'll tell her we are going to buy your trousseau from her."

"I don't know whether you're trying to be funny, but I think you're being a little mean, taking advantage of——"

"Don't look at it like that," he interrupted eagerly. "I've got to take every advantage I can. I love you. Every

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moment I'm with you I know it more surely. You are what I've been looking for all my life. Get this: you mean more to me than anything else. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you—understand? I'm calling for you at the shop at lunch time."

When he had gone she wanted to call him back; she had forgotten his wrist, and she had noticed that the bandage was red all over. She went back to the window and looked out over the lavender fields to the apple orchard; pink blossoms were floating on the breeze and falling to the ground. It was strange—or wasn't it?—how spring made you want to be loved. She had never been so vividly conscious of the need of love before.

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TONY HESITATED between the green baize door and the front door; already it was dusk and it would be dark long before he reached London. Both headlights on his car had been smashed; that wasn't worrying him. He was wondering if through meeting Anne he hadn't lost a big scoop. He was wondering why he had stopped the car on Maidenhead Bridge just in time to meet the news-boy shouting "Murder and robbery," and why he hadn't gone straight back to London. It wasn't love, but some keen instinct he possessed, very like second-sight, that had made him drive on and discover this queer cottage standing lonely in lavender fields and orchards. He found himself listening—to the silence; not even the buzzing of a bee, only now and then the breathless whisper of running water from the mill-stream. Unaccustomed to silence, never having known absolute quiet, Tony found himself caught in its spell. He hadn't been prepared for this; he felt uncomfortable, unsafe. Action was paralysed, while fantastic ideas drifted slowly through his mind.

He mixed himself a gin-and-vermouth while he wondered why he had been left alone; for all they knew he might be a crook. And for all he knew the eccentric old man and his lovely daughter and the deaf-and-dumb servant . . . Tony emptied his glass and pulled himself

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together; the utter stillness, and the air, heavy with the perfume of flowers and herbs, was playing hell with his imagination. He visualized Chicago, the *Herald* office, the press-room and pandemonium. Picking up the telephone he got through to the Magnificent Hotel, and the cocktail bar.

"Is that Charlie? Tony Howard speaking. Listen, Charlie, I can't shout. Can you give me anything about Van Dyke?"

The barman said he knew nothing for sure. Mrs. Van Dyke's maid had found her lying unconscious on the bed; the jewels she had been going to wear at the ball that night had been stolen. As far as he knew, the police had made no arrest. All the servants had been questioned, including himself. No one had been seen entering or leaving her room.

"The police have no clue, then?" Tony asked. He glanced over his shoulder at the gallery.

Charlie didn't reply at once. Tony could hear the clink of glass, the subdued hum of voices and an occasional laugh. "They had the hall-porter and the lift man for examination for half an hour, and judging by the questions they asked me, they have got no clue. Must have all happened in a couple of minutes. Can't talk any more, we're busy."

"One moment, Charlie. Is Mrs. Van Dyke badly injured?"

"Not expected to recover." He heard the click of the receiver as it was replaced.

So it really was murder. Wife of famous American millionaire! They'd got away with it—and with the jewels. It looked as if a lucky chance had given him a break at last, and the only clue lay in his pocket. Bowler hats, rolled

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umbrellas, white spats!—the West End was stiff with them, and he hadn't seen their faces—just one in profile.

Tony crossed the hall and went through the green baize door. At the end of a stone passage he saw the kitchen, the glow from an old-fashioned range, the servant bending over an open oven door. She turned as he approached, and he said quickly: "Can you tell me where Mr. Chiltern is?"

She smiled, rather a sweet smile, and her eyes interrogated him, yet he wondered if she was acting. He asked again, forming each word with his lips. She nodded, left the kitchen, beckoned him to follow her down a passage on the right and through a courtyard. She pointed to an outhouse that might once have been a small stable. Tony walked past her, opened the door and went in.

Chiltern was standing at a long, narrow table; he appeared to be fiddling with a couple of boxes; the only light came from a large window facing him. At the far end of the room was a carpenter's bench; shelves ran almost the entire length of one wall. Intent on his work, Chiltern had not heard Tony come in. He was about to speak when he changed his mind and tried to see what the old man was doing.

Again he was conscious of the leonine head, broad, powerful shoulders, and the long, sensitive hands. An unusual type, Chiltern; a link between the past age and the present. As Tony's eyes grew accustomed to the dim light he saw that one of the boxes was that which Anne had brought, the other resembled a cage; he was holding the two together, a strip of cardboard between them, Presently Tony became conscious of a faint smell of carbolic. He

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took a cigarette from his case, and as he lit it he said: "Excuse me for walking in on you, but——"

Without looking up, Chiltern said quickly: "Please don't smoke. . . . The journey seems to have upset them, but they're nearly all in now."

Tony stood beside him and asked if he might watch. Chiltern told him to speak quietly: "Bees are very sensitive to sound . . . now they are all in! You see, I have to persuade the queen bee and the workers who have come with her to leave the travelling cage and walk into the introducing cage; they go through that little hole I've made in the cardboard. Now they are secure and I take them to the queenless colony you saw me examining when you arrived."

"Gee! I wondered why Anne was so fussy about her little box." He picked it up; examined it. "You don't mind?" Chiltern didn't reply. Tony held the travelling cage up to the light, peering through the thin gauze wire. He saw a mass of sticky stuff; asked what it was while he twisted the cage to and fro.

"That's candy; bees have to be fed when they travel. Now, if you like to come with me, you can watch me introduce her to the colony."

Tony dropped the cage; obviously nothing in it but candy. He felt a vague sense of relief, afraid to ask himself why he was relieved.

Ever since he had stopped the car on Maidenhead Bridge and bought that evening paper, a bee had been buzzing in his head, and from the moment Anne had opened the iron-wrought gates of Lavender Cottage and he had driven up the acacia-lined avenue through the orchard into the fairy-like garden, he had felt in the grip

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of some sort of spell—mystery, enchantment. He wouldn't have been surprised if suddenly he awoke in hospital and learnt that when the Ford crashed he had been stunned, and that this was no more than a dream.

He glanced round the room as he followed Chiltern.

"Bee-keeping looks like a full-time job."

"Every job's a full-time job if you're keen on it. I make my own hives, frames and section crates. Anne helps me in that, and she renders all the wax."

"She's a great girl. I may as well tell you, I've fallen for her."

They had reached the drive through a door in a high wall at the end of the courtyard. Tony didn't know whether Chiltern heard. He was hurrying ahead; had to introduce the queen before it was dark. Tony opened the door of his car, switched on the side-lights; they were working, anyway.

"Afraid I shall have to be leaving," he shouted. "Got to get back to town on business."

Chiltern turned: "Sorry; you must come in again one day if you're interested in bee-keeping."

Tony said he was; he hoped the new queen would like her home and do her duty. He wasn't quite sure what were the duties of a queen bee; had a vague idea they spent their time murdering their husbands and laying hundreds of thousands of eggs. He glanced back as he drove down the drive; a light was shining in one of the windows of an upper room. He saw, for an instant, Anne sitting before her dressing-table. She had slipped off her wrap and was combing her hair. He put his foot on the accelerator.

It was a quarter past nine before he reached London,

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left his car in the garage and walked across to the hotel. The hall porter stopped him as he went in. "The police have been inquiring for you, Mr. Howard," he said in a low voice. "There's an officer in room thirty-three of Mr. Van Dyke's suite now. Of course, you've heard what's happened?"

Tony nodded. "What do they want me for?"

"Well, sir, you were in the cocktail bar about the time the robbery took place; anyone who might be able to give the slightest clue has been questioned. As I was on duty, they expected me to give a detailed description of every single person who came in or went out."

"And did you?" Tony asked.

"All those I saw—I've trained myself to remember faces—but I can't be watching all the time. I've other duties."

Tony said he guessed the police could wait, he wanted a drink before he talked. He went into the cocktail bar, ordered a brandy fizz, ate a handful of chips while Charlie was preparing it. The bar was full, nearly everyone discussing the affair on the third floor. Tony listened; learnt nothing that he hadn't read in the newspaper except that Mrs. Van Dyke was not expected to live. Charlie was too busy to talk; rattled, too.

Before going to Van Dyke's suite Tony went to his own room, changed his shirt, tore a handkerchief in half and bound it round the blood-stained one on his wrist. The police would have found out that he had left the hotel just about the time of the robbery, and they would have already discovered that he had crashed his car in Brook Street. They might suspect he was a confederate. He had come from the States on the same ship as Van Dyke, was staying at the same hotel, would be presumed to know

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their movements and would be quite aware of the value of Mrs. Van Dyke's jewels. If this had happened in Chicago and the cops weren't able to pick on anyone else he might easily have found himself in the cells waiting for an application of the third degree. Still, Van Dyke knew and trusted him; but you never knew how a newspaper proprietor would react when he was hit below the belt. His wife was dying, too, and he was fond of her in his own way. If only he had succeeded in running down those Savile Row Twins, Van Dyke would have set him up for life—but then he would never have met Anne. He left the ear-ring in his coat pocket; safer there than hidden anywhere else.

When he took the lift down to the third floor he hadn't decided on the story he would give the police; didn't feel like making it a gift to anyone. When he got out of the lift he saw a man standing outside the door, facing him, studying the back page of an evening paper; his trained eye recognized a policeman in plain clothes. Tony walked past him, then turned and asked if he could direct him to Mr. Van Dyke's room. Very slowly the man walked up to him, asked his business.

Tony lit a cigarette; said: "I believe he wants to see me." Without waiting for a reply he doubled back, opened the door of thirty-three and shut it behind him before the officer had realized his intention. He found himself in a sitting-room; the door on the right led into a bedroom. The officer was following him. Tony saw the bathroom facing him, dashed through it into Mrs. Van Dyke's room. On one side of the bed a Scotland Yard detective was sitting, and on the other side a doctor was standing; Van Dyke was leaning over the foot of the bed, watching his

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wife. Slowly Van Dyke turned his head, recognized Tony, waved him away.

"I've got something, Chief. You must see me alone for a moment," Tony said.

Van Dyke asked the doctor to call him if there was any change. He followed Tony into the adjoining room; told the plain clothes man to get out. He waited until the door had closed. "They tell me there's not much hope—for my wife—so make it snappy, Tony."

He spoke in a low, emotionless voice. It wasn't a millionaire newspaper magnate who spoke, but an ordinary man who had come up against an unseen power, stronger than himself.

"I was your best crime reporter on the *Herald,* Van Dyke. I tracked Mole-faced Peters, the man who shot up the Wynterham family—cornered him at San Diego, brought him back and we handed him over to the police commissioner in your office. That was our biggest scoop ever."

Van Dyke didn't seem to be listening. He pulled a cigar from his waistcoat pocket, bit off the end and began to chew it. "Do you want those guys who put out Mrs. Van Dyke and robbed her?" Tony went on.

"I want them more than anything in the world," Van Dyke said between his teeth. "If she could only speak and tell us. . . . No one saw anything, no one heard anything—only our maid found her lying unconscious on the bed. Say, what sort of rough house do you call this?"

"Listen, Chief. I've a hunch I can find the men who've done this. Give me a break. If we let the police into what I know, they'll mess it up for sure. This is a one-man job."

Van Dyke took the cigar from his mouth; it broke

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between his fingers and he threw it away. "Where were you when it happened?"

"In the cocktail bar, I guess. I was going out when I heard a maid cry 'Murder!' from an upper storey—took a fancy to a car that was moving off and followed it. That's how I cut my wrist open—might have caught them otherwise." He pulled the ear-ring out of his pocket and held it up: "Picked this up in the gutter as I was starting."

Van Dyke snatched it from him. "I wish the whole damn lot were there." He came closer to Tony, looked hard at him. "You don't want to let the police in on what you know. What's the idea?"

"I've said I've got a hunch I can round up these crooks while they are messing about with finger-prints, photographs, and clues. And I want a job. I'll never let you down, Van Dyke."

Van Dyke turned his back on Tony, walked to the bedroom door, opened it and looked in, came back again.

"O.K. You've told me nothing. You know the risk you're taking over here if you keep your mouth shut?"

Tony grinned. "You learnt me that taking risks was the only way to live."

"Remember, it's not the jewels I want," Van Dyke said, "but the swine who murdered my wife."

Tony held his tongue. It was no use trying to comfort Van Dyke. He watched him take a wallet from his pocket, pull out a wad of notes. "If you want any more let me know—and keep away for the next few days."

When he had gone Tony sat down, counted the money and stuffed it into his trousers pocket. The window facing him was wide open; he saw the trees in the park, lights moving through them, like fire-flies. He listened to

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the steady rumble of traffic. Downstairs the ball had begun —music, wine, men sweating in boiled shirts as they danced; bare-backed women, cool beneath their paint and jewels. He thought of Anne as he had seen her through her bedroom window.

The doctor came into the room, followed by the inspector; the door closed quietly behind them.

Tony said, "What's happened? Has she—gone?"

"I'm afraid I can't give you any information," the doctor replied. He told the inspector he would use the telephone in the sitting-room, and wait for him there.

The inspector drew the curtains across the window, switched on the centre lights. "Your name Tony Howard?"

Tony looked him over. A large head with, he guessed, a thick skull, lifeless eyes, and a broad, flat nose. He didn't look intelligent, but Tony knew that you couldn't judge a police cop by his face. An outward appearance of stupidity was both a shield and a weapon. "That's my name. And yours?"

The inspector produced a note-book, moistened the end of his pencil. Tony said: "We had a reporter in Chicago who licked so many pencils that he died of lead poisoning."

"You were in the hotel when this affair took place?"

"The robbery and murder, you mean?"

The inspector had seated himself at the table. "Who said anything about murder?"

"Mr. Van Dyke told me—and I guess his wife has just passed out."

"I shouldn't start guessing, Howard."

"That's what I'm here for." Tony lit a cigarette. "And I generally guess right."

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"In what part of the hotel were you when the jewels were stolen?"

Tony smiled. "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No one gave me the time. Guess I must have been somewhere between the cocktail bar and the exit into Park Lane."

"Now, you're a newspaper man, Howard. You've been trained to notice people and things that escape the man in the street. Now, did you see any suspicious or queer characters about the hotel?"

"Plenty."

The inspector began to suck the end of his pencil again. "You left the hotel after Mrs. Van Dyke had been robbed."

"You're guessing now, Inspector! The first I knew about it was when I bought an evening paper. But just after I'd left the hotel and was starting my car, I heard someone shouting, and I looked up and saw a woman standing on a balcony of the hotel, crying out she'd been robbed."

"And you didn't wait to see what the matter was?"

Tony flicked the ash off his cigarette. "If I'd stopped to get a story out of every woman who'd screamed, I'd have been in the free-meal queue long ago. Besides, I'd got a date with a girl."

The inspector closed his book; the ghost of a smile parted his tight-lipped mouth. "Late for that, weren't you?"

"I certainly tried to beat the traffic signals." He held out his damaged wrist. "One of your cops might have got me for wilful suicide, but a light standard saved me."

The inspector got up. "Well, that's all, Howard—for

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the present. You can go. You've rooms in this hotel, haven't you?"

"With bath—sorry, you call it 'barth' over here, don't you?"

On his way through the sitting-room, Tony asked the doctor if he had anything to tell him. "I'm a friend of Van Dyke's, and I want a story for his own paper." The doctor shook his head. Tony said he supposed he would have to go on guessing.

He hurried back to his room, locked the door, and picking up the telephone receiver, put through a personal call to Murdock, the news editor of the *Chicago Herald*. In less than half an hour he was talking to him. Tony just gave him the bald facts of the robbery and murder, said he would telephone the complete story later on. "You're getting this before the London press. I was in her room with Van Dyke, the doctor, and the police inspector. The instant she passed out I rang you—no one in the hotel knows yet."

Tony heard Murdock's rasping voice giving orders, other voices echoing and answering; the faint clicking of typewriters, the drone of a machine. He realized fierce, breathless activity. Murdock was telling him he was going to throw out a special edition; "Gimme the whole story now."

"Can't do that until I've seen the Chief again. I'll get through to you in an hour or two. How much are you giving me, Murdock? I want a thousand grand."

"You'll want."

"Then I'm broadcasting it to New York right away."

"O.K., Baby, but sling that story across before anyone

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starts writing an in memoriam card. . . . And say, Tony, send a wreath from the boys."

Tony disconnected. He lit a cigarette, waited a couple of minutes, then picked up the microphone again, asked to be put through to Miss Sophie Boden's room.

"That is Mrs. Van Dyke's maid. I don't think——" the telephonist said.

"I didn't ask you to think," Tony interrupted sharply. "I'm speaking for Mr. Van Dyke. Get through at once."

The bell buzzed for thirty seconds before the maid replied; again Tony said he was speaking for Van Dyke, and that she was to come round to room three-one-five at once.

A long time elapsed before there was a timid knock on his door. Opening it he told Sophie to come right in and sit down. Her eyes, red with weeping, looked at him suspiciously. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Howard. I know what you want, but I can't tell you anything. The police said——"

"Never mind what the police said." Tony stood with his back against the door; the maid dropped into a chair by the dressing-table. She began to twist a handkerchief nervously between her fingers; a strand of dark hair fell across her forehead. Her large eyes, broad nose, and full-lipped mouth indicated that there was a dark strain in her blood.

"The police don't come into this," Tony went on. "We help them all we can, of course, but the Chief has given me the job of finding who murdered Mrs. Van Dyke."

"She's not passed over? Don't tell me she's passed over!" Sophie's deep Southern voice rose hysterically.

"No—but her condition is serious. Now you've got to keep calm. She was a good mistress to you, wasn't she? And you must help her now by telling me everything you

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know—and then forgetting you told me. Had she any visitors this afternoon?"

The maid shook her head. "I've been all through this once; I can't bear much more. Mrs. Van Dyke did a little shopping after lunch; at half past four she had an appointment with a young lady from Madame Estelle's."

"What was her name?"

"Miss Chiltern, I think. She'd come to fit her with some new corsets she'd ordered, and she brought some underthings she was taking with her to Malaya." Sophie began to sob.

Tony crossed the room and shut the window. "Were you with her all the time? How long was she here?"

"Oh yes, I never left the room. Mrs. Van Dyke always wanted my advice about those things. I don't suppose the young lady was here more than half an hour; and when she'd gone I got Mrs. Van Dyke ready for her treatment. She'd been having massage and such-like ever since she arrived, but this afternoon it was something special, mud-pack I think they call it, because she was going to the big charity ball."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes; the tears were rolling down her face again. Tony gave her a few moments to recover. "Now get on with it, Sophie."

"I went down to have a cup of tea, and when I came back the masseuse had gone." Tony asked where she came from and her name. "Some place called *'Maison de Beauté'* in Bond Street. Never heard her name. Mrs. Van Dyke just called her Peggy."

"A blonde, young and attractive?"

The maid nodded. "I made Mrs. Van Dyke comfortable so she could have a sleep before dressing for dinner, and

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then I got her things ready and put out her jewels. On special occasions she always liked everything laid out on the dressing-table, and then, when she was dressed, she chose what she wanted to wear."

"And then?"

"I sat reading for a bit and she went off to sleep."

"How do you know she was asleep?" Tony asked.

"By her breathing—she breathed heavy when she slept. It must have been somewhere about half past six when I went into the bathroom to get her bath ready. I shut the door so as not to disturb her. I couldn't have been there more than three or four minutes, and when I came back the first thing I saw was one of her cut-glass bottles lying on the floor, and then I looked at the dressing-table, and all the jewels were gone. And there she was lying on the bed with her arms stretched out, and blood running down her forehead."

The maid covered her face with her hands and began to rock to and fro.

"What did you do?"

"I can't tell you; I was paralysed. I seem to remember rushing out on the balcony—the windows were wide open, and I tried to cry out, but I couldn't hear nothing but the traffic, and then I rushed out into the corridor; there wasn't anyone about. I shouted for help and began to run downstairs, and one of the valets, I think it was, came along and he got help and fetched the doctor."

"When you were in the bathroom, didn't you hear anything? No cry for help?"

"I didn't hear a sound. You see, the noise of the traffic and the rushing of the bath water drowned everything else."

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"When the police came, do you know if they got any clue?"

"I don't know. There doesn't seem anything for them to get hold of. That's all I can tell you. Please let me go now."

"All right, Sophie. Tell me this, though, about how long elapsed between the time the girl Peggy went and you left the bathroom and discovered what had happened?"

She looked at him with frightened eyes. "I couldn't say within a few minutes—three quarters of an hour, perhaps."

As soon as she had gone, Tony put on his hat, grabbed a sheaf of note-paper from the bureau, and without waiting for the lift, ran downstairs.

The lounge was crowded. People who had dined in the hotel were waiting for the cabaret to commence before going into the ballroom. They were dancing in the restaurant. He knew that the grill-room would be full of hearty men and fleshless women. He went out and picked up a taxi. He was hungry and thirsty and wanted somewhere where he could sit with the pulse of life throbbing, and make up a hot story for Murdock. Accustomed to the uproar of the press-room he couldn't work in solitude and silence. He stopped the taxi at the bottom of Stratton Street; told the driver what he wanted.

"Well, there's the Spanish restaurant in Swallow Street; or you might try the 'Blue Angel' just here on the left. I've taken all sorts there."

Tony got a table with a sofa seat in an alcove. He ordered chicken *en casserole* and a bottle of Pommard; watched half a dozen couples dancing on a floor the size of a billiard table. The women were young and amusing. The majority of the men were not young; looked as if they

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had never been amused. When the waiter brought his coffee and a cognac, he talked to Tony. Was the *casserole* to Tony's liking? Had he been to the opera? That new conductor from Moscow. His hands drew a sketch of the conductor for Tony. A terrible affair that at the "Magnificent." A friend of his was a floor waiter there; he had been talking to him on the telephone a little while ago. A mysterious affair; they'd killed the poor lady and got away with all her jewels, thousands of pounds worth. Perhaps, after all, a waiter was better off than a millionaire.

When he had gone, Tony began to make notes for his story. The waiter had given him quite a lot of stuff that would make good copy; and his own interview with Van Dyke, the inspector and the doctor—from facts like those he could turn out columns of fiction.

He was writing the description of some of the stolen jewels, when he glanced up and saw Peggy sitting on the other side of the room with a girl and a tired business man. She crooked a finger at him, said something to her friend, who got up and pulled Tired Business Man on to the floor. Tony watched him push her round; though she had painted a smile on her lips, she made no attempt to conceal the boredom in her avaricious eyes. Tony went over to Peggy and asked if she would dance with him.

"I've been giving you the glad eye ever since you came in," she said, "but you've been too busy writing your love-letters to notice me."

"Been writing up that murder at the 'Magnificent'," he replied carelessly. "Now I've got to buzz off and 'phone it to Chicago."

The band began to play a tango; he felt the pressure of her body as she looked up at him. "How thrilling. I got

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an awful shock when I read it in the paper this evening. I was there, you know, giving the poor old thing beauty treatment a few hours before it happened. Tell me all about it."

"Don't know a thing—the less one knows, the better the story."

"I always say you can't believe a thing you read in the newspapers. You got Anne to Cookham all right? I bet she was shocked—or hadn't she heard?"

"Got the news going through Maidenhead."

"I suppose that's why you rushed back. . . . Glad you did; I was on the point of passing out when I saw you. You see, when Joan's boss asks her out to dinner, she always drags me along, too."

They passed them on the floor, and Joan made a grimace over the man's shoulder. "We're just leaving," she said; "you needn't hurry."

Peggy looked at Tony. "Do you want to get rid of me?"

"Not until we've had another dance, then I must get busy." He called a passing waiter, and told him to take a bottle of Perrier Jouet to his table. "It will have to be a quick drink."

"I say, couldn't you send your message from here? There's a telephone downstairs."

"Too public, and it would take too long."

Peggy didn't speak again until the band stopped playing and they were sitting at the table, drinking the champagne. "If it's awfully important, you could telephone from my flat if you like. Absolutely quiet there. You would have the room to yourself while I'm putting on my bath and playing around."

That was an idea, but why did she suggest it? He paid

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the bill, changing a fiver from the wad of notes Van Dyke had given him. Peggy was powdering her face, but he saw her give a sidelong glance as he stuffed the roll of money back into his pocket.

The commissionaire called a taxi. Tony gave the driver Peggy's address. Peggy leant back, put her feet up on the little seat facing her. Tony made a note of her shoes and stockings; wondered if she was wearing one of Jane's Charnaux. Didn't look as if she was wearing very much, but what she had was good. Beauty culture was a paying business.

She said: "Why have you suddenly gone dumb? What are you thinking about?"

"My story."

She leant towards him. "Tell me; I'm dying to know what really happened. Do you think they'll find the man who did it?"

"Sure thing."

"Were you in the hotel when it happened? Did you see anything?"

"Left just about the time the murder was committed."

"Bad luck. She was a nice old thing, but still, a woman who goes about with thousands of pounds worth of jewels is asking for trouble, isn't she?"

"What were they like? You must have had a chance of seeing them."

Peggy laughed. "Wish I had! Might have tried pinching something myself. No, whenever I gave her treatment she hadn't as much as a ring on her finger. If you ask me, someone in the hotel did it; one of the floor waiters, I shouldn't wonder."

Tony nodded. "That's what I'm working on."

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The taxi stopped outside Prince's Mansions. Tony followed Peggy into the hall. An electric lift took them to the top floor; her flat was at the end of a long corridor. "It's a bit of a bandbox," she said as she opened the door and switched on the lights, "but the view's worth the money. Have a look. You can see all London and a bit of Surrey as well."

Tony picked up the telephone and asked International Services for Chicago. While he waited for his number, Peggy showed him round the flat. "Two makes a crowd, but I'd rather be crowded and comfortable than have the vast windy spaces of Victorian-converted mansions."

"You've got the States beat," Tony admitted, "but you've been a long time in doing it. Gee, if a girl can get a home of her own like this and every luxury she wants by pressing a button, why marry?"

"Because if you let a man hang his hat in the hall without getting a licence, you are liable to be left like a bit of unlabelled luggage; find yourself in the lost property office—annual clearance sale. And anyway, what will your children say to you when they ask for their father and you give them the refrigerator!"

She filled two glasses with iced Pilsner and went back to the sitting-room. "When your call comes through, how long will you be talking?"

"Five or ten minutes, perhaps."

"Well, when you start, I'll undress and have my bath, and when you've finished, you can just walk out."

"Wouldn't you like to hear what a good story I can make out of nothing?"

"Nothing! I like that! I bet you've found out more than the police."

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"Maybe I have, but that's not much. I know, for example, that you placed a mud-pack on Mrs. Van Dyke's face at five-forty this afternoon." Peggy got up, slid back two panels in the wall and pulled down her bed. "Nothing mean or small about that, anyway," Tony said.

"We call it Mae West—Anne and I do, I mean—she often stays here when she's kept working overtime. How long have you known her?"

Tony was looking through his notes; he didn't reply at once. "Oh, long enough to have fallen in love with her."

Peggy had drifted into the bathroom. "That's a blow," she cried. "You'll have to work hard; where men are concerned, Anne is hard-boiled. And take my tip, keep out of the way of her old man; he's batty, as perhaps you discovered." The telephone bell buzzed. Peggy looked into the sitting-room. "If that's your call, I'll shut you in. By the way, you're not getting Chicago for twopence! Where shall I send the account?"

Tony said: "I'll have the time checked and get them to tell me the amount—twenty or thirty quid, I expect—I'll leave it on the mantelpiece for you."

"Sounds too immoral; I shall wake up in the morning, feeling like an abandoned woman. When you've finished, scram, as they say in the best talkies."

She shut the sitting-room door; then Tony heard the bathroom door bang. Murdock's voice came over the wire: "Is that Tony? You're too late, Kid, they've got it on the radio."

"Oh, yes! Not what I've got. Take this."

When he had finished, Tony replaced the receiver, wiped his forehead—sweating; he'd got a thrill out of that. He visualized the front page of the *Chicago Herald*. He'd

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nothing but a background upon which to work, but he knew he'd put across one of the best stories of his career. Real people in it, too—the doctor, police inspector, maid, the girl from the corset shop, and the beauty culturist. He'd been in the death chamber a few minutes after the murder. . . . What a scoop for Murdock! He ought to have asked more money. It was a bit of luck meeting Peggy. She'd given him inspiration—and the doll's-house flat up in the sky—below it, London stretched like a map, pricked with pin-holes, through which a million lights shone. Somewhere down there were the Savile Row Twins with the Van Dyke jewels. He lit a cigarette. Not a sound except the distant rumble of traffic. He looked at the bed. A vision of Peggy and Anne lying there asleep—the Kestos Twins—perhaps they worked together. . . . He drained the glass. A box like a cabinet pushed under the bookcase caught his eye; he remembered seeing it when he first sat down. Vaguely familiar. He moved it with his foot, then pulled it out; of course, he'd used the thing himself once, a dictaphone.

He heard Peggy leave the bathroom. When she appeared he was putting six five-pound notes on the mantelpiece. "You will find that O. K. Sorry I've kept you out of bed."

"No one's ever done that." Throwing off her wrap she jumped into bed. She looked attractive—blue pyjama trousers, with a little tight-fitting, wine coloured jacket, her yellow hair stood out like a mop, giving her a gamin-like appearance. Sea-green eyes—he hadn't noticed their colour before.

He said: "You've got me guessing."

"The answer is the lift."

"I know! Anyway, thanks for the loan of your room. I

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see you've got a dictaphone; I'll be borrowing that next. The stenographer at the hotel is twenty degrees below zero. . . . Say, do you compose your beauty hints on that machine?"

"And I don't get paid extra for it. Couldn't you get me the Woman's Gossip column on your Chicago paper? 'What to do with red noses.' 'Schoolgirl complexion for all.' 'How to lose five pounds of superfluous fat a day.' . . . Shut the door quietly as you go out, and switch off the light."

Peggy waited until she heard the lift descending, then she got out of bed, threw on her wrap again, and closed the windows. She put the dictaphone on the table, slipped in a cylinder, lit a cigarette, and began to dictate.

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When Tony got back to the hotel, he found the lounge deserted, although the ball was still going on. He asked the man who took him up in the lift how long he had been on duty.

"Since five o'clock, sir."

"You were here when the robbery took place?"

The man nodded. He looked surly, tired of being questioned. Tony slipped a pound note into his hand. "I've just had to write a story for my newspaper, so anything you can tell me now will not get into print."

"That's all right. I wish there was something I could tell. The police seem to think the thieves must have used the lift, but one thing I can swear to is that I didn't make a stop on the third floor, and I wasn't called there for quite ten minutes before the alarm was given."

The lift attendant shrugged his shoulders. They reached the top floor, and he swung back the gates. Tony waited to light a cigarette.

"It's a queer business—someone in the hotel, perhaps."

"As likely as not. They must have been pretty smart. There was a party in Mr. Erbach's rooms on the fourth floor. It was just after I'd taken a full load down from there and was going up again when the valet stopped me and

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said someone had been murdered in Mr. Van Dyke's room."

Tony asked if he could remember the people he took down.

"Four ladies, foreign looking; three gentlemen. I remember one, an old fellow with a white moustache and bushy eyebrows; the other two, well, I should say they were about your style, sir—if you know what I mean. I think one had a bit of a toothbrush moustache, like they used to wear after the War."

"Did you notice if they were wearing bowler hats?"

"Can't say; you see, they took their hats off before getting into the lift. That's always struck me as funny, sir, the way men take off their hats when they get into the lift and put them on when they get out! You don't see so many bowler hats as you used to, and toppers are rare. I'd have noticed a topper."

"Have you heard if the police have got hold of any clue yet?"

"If they had, they'd keep it dark. It was quite a time before they came, so the valet told me; but when the inspector went into the room with the doctor, he picked up a handkerchief lying just inside the door. The maid swore it wasn't Mrs. Van Dyke's, because all hers have her initials on them. They won't get much out of that—she'd lots of visitors—young ladies from shops, and that sort of thing."

"Quite," Tony said. "A woman couldn't have murdered her."

"No—but to my mind a woman was behind it, someone who knew Mrs. Van Dyke's habits and movements, and that she was lying down before going to the ball this eve-

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ning, and that the maid had put her jewels and things out before leaving the room."

"It looks like that," Tony said. "The work of a pretty smart gang, cleverly organized. But they didn't mean to murder her. She must have woken up, seen them, and cried out."

"That's it," the lift attendant agreed. "If she'd only recovered consciousness before she died, she could have told the police what they looked like, and then I dare say I should have had something to say. As it is, all the staff on the third floor will be suspected." The bell rang, and he closed the gates. "We've been warned not to open our mouths, so you'll forget I've been talking to you, sir, won't you?"

Tony watched the lift out of sight. He would like to get hold of that handkerchief. If there were laundry marks on it, the police might trace the owner, but he had an idea that women didn't send their handkerchiefs to the laundry, and they certainly wouldn't leave laundry marks on them. When he got into bed he put out the light, and lying on his back went through the events of the afternoon. The two men with bowler hats, rolled umbrellas, and white spats he'd seen get out of the lift had murdered Mrs. Van Dyke and stolen her jewels. Of that he was certain; the ear-ring they'd dropped was evidence enough. Yet, if he met them tomorrow, he wouldn't be able to identify them. He'd noticed their clothes first—those infernal spats had caught his eye—and when he had looked up, all he had got was one man in profile: swarthy complexion, thick neck, something of the Dago about him, perhaps; both were well built, a bit above the average height.

When they had left Mrs. Van Dyke's room, instead of

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going down by the staircase, they'd run up to the fourth floor and waited with the guests from the party there for the lift. Some of those people might be able to help him if he could get hold of them, but it was extraordinary how unobservant the average individual was.

Did they know they were being followed? Hardly looked like it. They would naturally be in a hurry to get away, yet they'd taken a more or less direct route to Bond Street. . . . Where Peggy worked at the beauty shop.

Peggy and Anne and old Chiltern, the bee-keeper? Absolutely no connection between them and the murder at the "Magnificent"—and yet he had a peculiar hunch that there might be some connection; that peculiar instinct that forces a good bridge player to make a psychic bid. Was it chance that had crashed him right outside Anne's shop door, and induced her to take him in and bind up his wrist? He'd brought off so many lucky coups on his Chicago newspaper from similar chances that he had been forced to believe that they were the workings of destiny. Call it by any name you like, but there remained the fact that Peggy and Anne and the Savile Row Twins had all been in the hotel that afternoon between four and six o'clock. Peggy knew that Mrs. Van Dyke was going to the charity ball that evening. She knew when she'd finished her treatment that Mrs. Van Dyke was going to have an afternoon sleep —she had only to wait a few moments and see the maid leave the room. . . . And Anne . . . Subconsciously he was trying to leave Anne out of it—because he loved her.

He turned over on his side and went to sleep.

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"MR. VAN DYKE WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU in his room, sir, as soon as possible," the valet said.

Tony had just finished breakfast, coffee and toast; he'd been looking through the morning newspaper. The murder was the front-page news—nothing to compare with the story he'd made up, though. Putting on a dressing-gown and pushing his feet into a pair of slippers, he ran down to the third floor. In the sitting-room he found the police inspector, the valet, and Sophie. She was sitting in an armchair, her hands lying on her lap, head bowed on her chest. She looked crushed and lifeless. Van Dyke was standing at the far end of the room, in the shadows, nervously biting on the stump of a cigar. His collar was unfastened and the tie hanging outside his waistcoat. Obviously he hadn't been to bed all night. Tony thought: "Poor devil! He must have cared for her more than he knew." And then he thought of Anne—and he wondered, did you love from inspiration or just from habit.

The inspector said: "Now, Howard, I've a couple more questions I want to ask you."

Tony glanced at Van Dyke, but the heavily ringed, sunken eyes gave no response; they were lifeless. "Fire!" Tony said.

"You came over here on the same ship as Mr. Van Dyke

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and his wife? Did you play cards at all during the voyage?" Tony shook his head. "You watched Mr. Van Dyke playing, perhaps. Did you notice anyone playing at the same table with him?"

"Can't say I did."

"Now, when you had that accident to your car in Brook Street yesterday, you told me you were in a hurry because you were going to meet a girl. I'd like the lady's name and where you were meeting her."

Tony grinned. He had to think quickly. "I suppose if I were a gentleman I would refuse to tell you. She said her name was Fanny Roberts. I was meeting her at the Corner House in Coventry Street. That's where I picked her up the night before last."

The inspector glanced at his note-book, sucked his pencil reflectively. Tony wished it would kill him.

"Where did you go when you left Brook Street?"

"I went on to Fleet Street to see if I could pick up any dirt—that's copy, you know—for my Chicago newspaper. Had a drink or two, wrote out my story, and 'phoned it over."

"Didn't meet the girl, then?"

"With me, business comes before pleasure." He glanced again at Van Dyke, who said slowly:

"Howard's on the staff of my newspaper, Inspector. If you could give him any information——"

"There's a department at the Yard where he can get that." The inspector told the valet and Sophie they could go. "And I shan't want you again, Howard."

But Van Dyke asked him to wait. As soon as the inspector had gone, he said: "Got anything, Tony?"

"Nothing more than a hunch for the moment, Chief."

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"Keep going then. The police know nothing, and they can't do any guessing. I am relying on you. Get the man who killed my wife, and you can have anything you want. You've got to get him—do you understand?"

"I'll get him." Tony dashed for the door. Van Dyke's toneless voice and expressionless face, with the death-like eyes that looked at him without seeing him, had got on Tony's nerves. In spite of, or perhaps because of his small stature, Van Dyke always impressed him as being Napoleonic. He had withered in the night. His nose was no longer dominating; the stubborn shoulders drooped. With his fingers on the handle of the door, Tony stopped; he couldn't leave him standing over there in the corner of the cold, unsympathetic hotel sitting-room. The windows were shut; the atmosphere smelt stale and exhausted; the flowers on the table were drooping. . . . They had taken the body away to the mortuary. Van Dyke was alone. No beggar in the whole city so poor, or so mean as he.

Here was a story! A man who had given his life to making money and getting power; who would have lost both unmoved and with a smile started to fight back again. But the loss of something he had never valued, of the one person in the world with whom he had never bargained, had toppled him off his pedestal and crushed him. Again Tony thought he must have loved her without realizing it, only conscious of the lives of those he dominated. And there he stood, huddled up in the corner, waiting for the word that not one of all his acquaintances could say. Tony tried to think of a word, but he knew there was none that would reach him.

There was a knock on the door. Tony opened it and took a heap of cables and telegrams from the page-boy. He

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threw them on the table. Here were words from all over the world. They would continue to come throughout the day, but Van Dyke would not read them, or reading, would know they were messages sent to a news king and not to a man.

"What are you waiting for? Why don't you get out?" Van Dyke said.

"Listen, Chief; did you tell the police about those two guys with whom you played poker in your saloon coming over?"

"Yes, but you can cut them out. This isn't their sort of racket."

"I know that, but they may be the intelligence department of the gang who did this job. And I would like to go round to that beauty shop in Bond Street and get Mrs. Van Dyke's account and settle it."

Van Dyke slowly turned his head and looked at him. "Don't ask me what you can do; just get on with it. And if you've got to pay to make anyone talk, don't worry about the price."

When Tony was dressed he went round to the garage, told the manager to scrap his car; he would hire a Bentley in its place. Then he strolled down Bond Street, rubbering outside the shops that caught his fancy until he came to the *Maison de Beauté*. He climbed a heavily carpeted staircase to the first floor. Reception room. Luxurious furniture, faint, exotic perfumes. He asked a girl with ash-blonde hair, pale face, and pale hands, for the cashier's office, wondering if anything so vulgar existed.

"If it is about an account, the secretary's office is on the second floor. Take the lift, please. Mrs. Fordyce's room."

The secretary was a middle-aged woman with white hair,

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a silky voice, and a schoolgirl complexion. The *Maison de Beauté* knew its business.

"But this is really very embarrassing," Mrs. Fordyce said. "Under such tragic circumstances, I mean. We shouldn't have dreamed of sending in the account."

"I guessed that," Tony smiled. "You see, Mr. Van Dyke will leave London directly everything is settled. Personal accounts like yours might easily be overlooked."

Looking a little shocked, Mrs. Fordyce ordered the account to be made out. That such a thing should happen in London at one of the fashionable hotels was incredible, she said. "Miss Peggy was so overwhelmed when she arrived this morning that we had to send her home again. As perhaps you know, she had been attending Mrs. Van Dyke."

"Really," Tony replied. "Yes, I suppose it would be a shock; she must have been with Mrs. Van Dyke just before she was murdered."

"Peggy was one of our cleverest manipulators; very highly strung, though. She was succeeding so well with Mrs. Van Dyke. . . . Really, it is too shattering."

A beautiful brunette, hiding behind a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, brought the account. Fifty guineas. Tony wondered if he ought to apologize for paying it in bank-notes. "In the States," he said, "everyone is so busy shattering everyone else, that no one has time to enjoy the luxury of being shattered. Perhaps you would post the receipt direct to Mr. Van Dyke." He borrowed an envelope, took a five-pound note from his pocket, made a note of the number. "Would you give this to Miss Peggy? It may help to recompense her for the shock she received."

"Really, there is no need." Mrs. Fordyce had a beautiful

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smile, a smile that made you believe in perpetual youth and life everlasting. "Too kind. If you have an opportunity, will you convey to Mr. Van Dyke our heartfelt sympathy and the horror we all feel at this dastardly crime."

Tony made his way slowly towards Brook Street. It was rather early to call on Anne, but love made him impatient. There was no doubt that he was desperately and hopelessly in love. He had never imagined he would ever feel that way about a woman. Desperate—but not hopeless, because she was going to love him, if she didn't love him already. And why should not she? People talked about making love! You couldn't make it, or only the synthetic variety! Love came to you ready-made. He was beginning to feel intoxicated. If he didn't get hold of himself in a few minutes, he would be drunk and reeling. He stopped to look up at the sky: blue—and a blue sky in London was unlike a blue sky anywhere else. And Bond Street, a mean, narrow little thoroughfare, blocked with ungainly buses and expensive cars, was unlike any other fashionable street in the world.

Here, life almost stood still, caught its breath and stared at itself, amazed and unashamed. It dawdled, recklessly, indifferent to time. Tony saw Bond Street as an extension of Aladdin's Cave; rubbed an imaginary lamp, and in imagination helped himself to its treasures. He walked into a florist's shop, then remembered that Anne's garden was already crammed with spring flowers. But here were red June roses, forced to bloom before their time. He ordered them to be sent by messenger to Anne.

Outside "Jane Estelle's," the lamp standard still advertised his crash; he pushed open the door and went in quickly, trying to look as if he believed Charnaux made

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belts for men. Anne was packing a box that suggested a trousseau. He saw Jane herself in the background. He said: "Hello, Anne."

She looked up, gave a quick smile, and then answered coldly: "Good morning."

That was a good sign; glad to see him, pretending she didn't care. Jane came out of the background, like a steam-roller coming into action. Anne said: "This is Mr. Tony Howard—he writes for the newspapers."

"On the other side. I'd like to write a story round you, madam, and your delightful shop. We've nothing like this in the States—so intimate and friendly. I'd like to get a picture of it, and of you, of course."

That was an idea, Tony decided—the shop Mrs. Van Dyke had patronized just before her death. The beauty parlour, too, photographs of Peggy and Anne. On second thoughts he decided to leave Anne out of it. She had turned her back on him and was packing the trousseau again. Jane was looking at him, not unkindly, and laughing.

"I'm afraid I'm not a celebrity. I'm not Charnaux, you see——"

"Oh yes, you are," Tony interrupted. "If you weren't a celebrity, I'd make you one. Celebrities on this side don't realize their importance. Now, take that cat that sits in the window of the poulterer's shop in Bond Street; everyone knows it, but no one has thought of featuring it. I got its picture the day after I arrived here. Ten days later it was in the *Chicago Herald*, with its real life story. Believe me, if that cat could read, it would be tickled to death."

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"I am sure," Jane said; "but we are busy at the moment. What can I do for you?"

Tony glanced at Anne, but she refused to look up. "I'm representing Mr. Van Dyke. Of course, you've read all about the dreadful tragedy. She was a client of yours; if you'll let me have her account I'd like to settle it."

Jane said there was no need to worry about a trifle like that at such a moment, but she asked Anne to make it out. A modest twenty-five guineas. When Anne gave him the receipt, he glanced at his watch and said: "You haven't forgotten our luncheon appointment? I'll be back at one o'clock."

"It will have to be a quick one; I promised father to be home early. He has friends coming to tea."

He told her he would get her down in plenty of time. He dashed out just as the page-boy from the florist's arrived with his roses. He hurried to Piccadilly, had a luncheon basket packed at Robert Jackson's, and at five minutes to one he was waiting outside "Jane's" with his hired Bentley. He gave Anne ten minutes, then got out of the car, found the shop door locked, rattled until she opened it, walked straight in.

"Closed rather early, didn't you? Don't you want to come?"

She looked at him thoughtfully. When she was serious, her beauty, he thought, was enhanced. He felt she was trying to read his thoughts, to discover him. He felt guilty. His subconscious mind had connected her with the murder at the "Magnificent." No evidence; just a thin chain of events. When he let his conscious mind have free play, he only knew he loved her, and nothing else mattered.

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But could he play lover and crime detector at the same time?

He dismissed the question. He didn't want to think at that moment, he only wanted to feel, and he was feeling rapturously happy and carefree. He was in England, and he was in love, and it was spring.

Anne said: "Why did you send me those flowers? What do you really want?"

As she spoke, he saw two small boxes on the counter, similar to the one she'd taken down to Lavender Cottage the previous evening.

Automatically he read the label attached to one of the boxes: "Queen bee. Great care." Tony did not know much about bees, but he had an idea that a hive only needed one queen, and that a bee-master of Chiltern's experience ought to be able to breed his own queens.

"Is your wrist all right this morning?"

"Sorry," Tony said quickly; "I didn't answer your first question, did I? But you know what I want. I don't think my wrist is too good; started bleeding when I had my bath this morning, and as I was rather rushed I just tied it up with a handkerchief. I'd be fearfully grateful if you could fix it again for me. . . . Do you mind?"

Without a word she got a strip of linen, dabbed a little iodine on the wound, then neatly bandaged it.

"I'm thinking you've missed your vocation."

"You mean nursing? No thanks! I hate blood and bugs. . . . I'm quite a good saleswoman really."

She was putting on her hat in front of a mirror. Watching her, he wondered if she knew what she was doing, what her actions conveyed to him. She was doing much more than fixing her hat and her hair. She was fixing her

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attitude towards life and preparing for her reactions to life. But she was unconscious of it, and it was all done in a few seconds.

Anne threw her coat over her arm, picked up the roses. "I'm ready."

"I'm sorry."

"Changed your mind?"

"No, but it's rather fun sitting here watching you fiddling around. Like other folk, I've spent hours watching a cat washing itself, a bird preening its feathers, a horse rolling on its back, legs in air, or a sentimental spaniel stretched in soulful contemplation, but you've just taught me that a woman can do all those things a darn sight better."

"You'd better ask Peggy to take you into her beauty shop, and show you some of her clients, lying on their backs and kicking their legs in the air, or stretched in soulful contemplation. Hallo, new car! Of course, I didn't realize you were Mr. Van Dyke's secretary. I suppose you can afford to crash a car a day."

"I'm not, and I can't. I'm just a common news-monger. I can make a lot of money when there's a good political, economical, or moral racket on. Never kept what I made. Nothing worth while keeping it for. But now I've met you, I'm going to work like hell and collect the dough."

"Where are we lunching?"

"I've got a new job," Tony went on. "If I make good, we can get married right away. I want to tell you all about it, but I can't yet."

"I wish you'd watch the traffic signals instead of talking."

"I've got to talk or I shall get reckless. I love you! Of

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