NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07481155 9

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NBO
Oeuvres

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

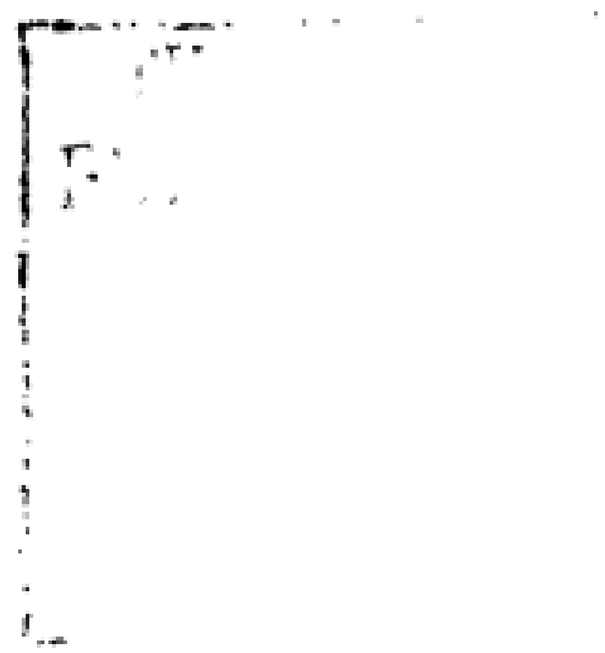
THE MORETON MYSTERY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"What's wrong with your hand?" Jowett asked quickly.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE
Moreton Mystery

By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

Author of
The Tiger's Coat, Nobody's Child
Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. H. D. KOERNER

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

COPYRIGHT 1920
THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

COPYRIGHT 1920
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
268279A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1926 L

Printed in the United States of America

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A Red-Hot Night	1
II	A Surprise	9
III	The Waif and the Wife	13
IV	The Steel Grip	19
V	A Stolen Interview	26
VI	The House-Party	34
VII	A Toast	47
VIII	Something Has Happened	55
IX	Suspicions and a Conviction	66
X	Parker Is Politic	75
XI	Jowett Makes a Discovery	82
XII	No Real Meeting Ground	87
XIII	The Butler Takes a Hand	97
XIV	Guessing at Thoughts	105
XV	The Household Collects	111
XVI	An Accusation	115
XVII	The Semicircle Puts Over a Farce	140
XVIII	Motives	160
XIX	The Pocket-Case	182
XX	Give Me Your Confidence	188
XXI	Widow's Weeds	203
XXII	The Doctor's Theory	214
XXIII	It's Woman Against Woman	223
XXIV	His Subconscious Self	232
XXV	Parker Expects a Visitor	241
XXVI	I'm Done	256
XXVII	An Appeal and a Refusal	260
XXVIII	The Workers in Secret	274
XXIX	A Call for Help	284
XXX	From the Beginning	287
XXXI	The Tiny Mark	300
XXXII	The Inexplicable Explained	322
XXXIII	She Needs You	332

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Moreton Mystery

I

A RED-HOT NIGHT

THE hazy gray of an August morning crept upon the city, slowly bleaching the tops of the sky-scrapers, gradually etching into distinctness towers and spires and roofs, rows upon rows of mammoth forms with excrescences revealed. Between them lay gulfs of murky gloom besprinkled with gleams that were and then were not, snatched away by oncoming day. Beyond the huge concourse of behemoths, a silvery strip widened and grew, paled at the edges, spread until it met encircling gloom, then stretched an eager arm oceanward, toward the vastness, the harbor awakening. Its twinkling lights were fading into dark bodies which rode the silvery expanse, formless hulks rapidly gaining outline. The city was waking from a restless sleep into the incisive complaints of day; the sun was rising upon a red-hot airless night.

Seated at his window, Parker watched the coming of a white-hot day. He had slept little; who had slept other than fitfully during that interminable night?

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Certainly the girl in the next room had not! The evening before he had envied her, or, rather, he had envied the man who had joined her. He had seen her; the man he had not seen. Parker had passed her door just as she was entering it, preceded by a bell-boy bearing a single suit-case. She had turned to close her door, flinging back, as she turned, the long automobile veil she was wearing, and he had seen her face distinctly, an imperfect oval, a brow too wide and low to complete the oval of cheek and chin; dominant eyes the color of sea-water on a cold gray day and heavily fringed with black; straight determined brows; nose faintly piquant; a voluptuous mouth; dusky satin-soft skin. It was a contradictory face and arresting, ice-cold eyes, warm mouth, and pomegranate tinting. She was not tall, below the usual woman's height, slim and well-formed—and young, certainly not over twenty-two.

For a moment, before the door closed on her, her eyes had met his fully, and coldly, and Parker had experienced an instant interest. Was it possible that she was alone in this hotel overrun with officers, men of all descriptions and many nationalities, and, in addition to them, the civilians who were coming and going to Washington? Scarcely the place for a strikingly beautiful young girl.

As Parker had divested himself of garments and had bathed in water that no amount of persuasion could make less than milk-warm and then had prepared for

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

bed, he had continued to think of his neighbor—until his interest was given poignancy by the realization that a man had entered the next room. He had heard through the connecting door the rattle of the key against the metal of the outer door, the girl opening it evidently; then a soft laugh and some deep exclamation, the man's voice, smothered as if by an embrace. . . . So that was it—the expected man! A large man and deep-chested, for the voice was so deep.

Parker knew the hotel well. For the last five years it had been his custom to close his up-town apartment during August, give his housekeeper a month's holiday and betake himself to the seashore or the mountains; or, if possible, to add two or three weeks to his own holiday and go to Europe. When called into town by business, he always stopped here. It was a single room his neighbor occupied, not a suite, and it was ten o'clock. A girl who had come to meet her lieutenant husband? A bridal pair?

Early in the night, Parker had decided that they were certainly a married couple. A deep murmur, the man's muffled voice, reached him occasionally, and movements. They had been followed by what Parker had judged to be the silence of a complete understanding, and Parker had reflected that it was a pity that either a meeting or a parting should be staged in this abominable heat; it was enough to cause the first rift in the lute.

Parker was in no agreeable frame of mind himself.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Why in heaven's name must Mathew Moreton be moved to make a will during this blazing week in August! And why in such haste? He had received a long-distance call from Moreton's steel foundries in Pennsylvania: "Meet me at my office on Friday morning at eleven, Parker, and be prepared to draw up a will," Moreton had said. No, he had never felt in better health in his life, but he wanted the will drawn. "Then arrange to go out with me to Moreton House for over Sunday—we'll get out of the heat as soon as possible."

So Parker had come from the Adirondacks, inwardly fuming at the compulsion a multimillionaire can exert upon even a very successful lawyer. Had Parker himself possessed a million, he would have said, "Go to!" But he was not worth a million, far from it, though he hoped to be, some day. He was only forty, and he had been mighty successful. Moreton had had much to do with his success; he did not begrudge Moreton his will, but the man had a perfectly good will already—what had come over him?

Parker had drawn his bed into the middle of the room so as to catch what breeze there might be, then, sans garments of any sort, had stretched himself upon the bed. He had not expected to sleep. New York had turned on a spell of heat unknown since eighteen something, and all any mortal could hope for was to escape alive. There had been two days of this sort of thing, and to-day the horses had begun to drop, to say

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

nothing of humans—to-morrow there would be a harvest of death.

As Parker lay on the burning sheet, he hoped that Moreton had reached New York and was scorching, as he was. Possibly it was the killing weather that had set the millionaire considering whether his house was in order, altogether to his liking. There was not a nervous atom in Mathew Moreton's composition, but this sort of torment was enough to make any man think seriously of his possible demise.

Parker had passed on then to a consideration of his own finances: he had laid by, in gilt-edged securities, sufficient to provide for his old age, trust his caution for that, but he had some shaky investments which needed bolstering, everything was uncertain in these war-times—he could make good use of a hundred thousand, if he could lay his hands on it.

Everitt Parker wanted *money;* he had always wanted money; he had always longed to handle money —as Mathew Moreton handled money—as other millionaire clients of his handled money. His profession was his first passion, his was innately a legal mind, but money, sums of it at hand, would be a gorgeous pastime! . . . That was the reason he had never married; he had not met a fortune large enough to tempt him.

Then, as sometimes happened, the other man in Everitt Parker asserted himself, reminding him that, in his heart, he had no desire for the much married

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

or the widowed woman; that, had he ever been overwhelmingly in love with a young girl, he would have married; some one young and beautiful and with *brains;* some unusual girl. As he approached the forties, his craving for youth as a companion, an offset to legal intricacies and the perpetual contact with shrewd-minded men, had asserted itself, annoyingly. It was part with the lift of heart he had begun to feel when he watched the boys in khaki. There had been dozens of them at the station, moist-faced, their uniforms perspiration stained across the shoulders and around the belt line, swinging in and out of trains, swarming all over the place.

Parker had felt no particular heart-stir over the war; he had no young relations who would be affected by it; the thing was inevitable, and, in his secret mind, he considered the whole situation was being rather badly managed, but he would have to adapt himself to it. In a perfunctorily dutiful way he had joined with others of his profession in offering his services to the government. . . . But those boys forming into line and marching through the intolerable heat! They were going to march in the same fashion, only with even greater eagerness, straight into the German hell, while he, in taxied ease, was on his way to draw up a rich man's will! Dry work that, while the whole world was up and doing. Parker had envied them their youth and enthusiasm; had wished, for the time being, that he might be one of them.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

And thinking of it again brought to his mind the warm youth of the girl in the next room—a war bride? Who was she, and from whence had she come? For over an hour there had been no sounds in the next room, a love-laden silence, Parker had decided. . . . But, after midnight, when the city had quieted somewhat, he was conscious of a murmur next door, voices quite indistinguishable but persistent. They were not sleeping, those two. They were talking steadily—from one o'clock until two.

Then there had been movements, the click of a switch, a line of light beneath the connecting door, the man's voice more plainly distinguishable. Parker thought then that he heard the rattle of a key in their outer door, and was certain that some one brushed by his own door. Then there was perfect silence. . . . They had gone then? Their light was still burning! . . . But in a few minutes it was switched off; the man had gone of course, the woman was still there.

Parker had thrust aside his pillow and had sought a cooler spot on the bed. This was a highly respectable hostelry, but it was not the first case of the kind he had known. Still, it might be quite all right, some young officer snatching the last possible minute with his bride and now bound for his train. . . . Sleep had seemed an impossibility to Parker, and reading meant a light and more heat. . . . Sprawled, with arms extended, he must finally have slept, but lightly and with the occurrence uppermost in his mind, for he

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

was conscious of starting up broad awake, galvanized by sounds in the next room. . . . He looked at his watch—it was the stillest hour of the night, three o'clock.

Then the sounds that had startled him were repeated, a woman weeping bitterly, deeply, desperately, now with face in her pillow, now turned, gasping for breath—so it seemed to Parker. And there was no man's voice answering her, either soothing or objecting; she was evidently quite alone and sobbing her heart away. . . . God, how she cried and choked and strove to smother her sobs! Parker had never heard any creature cry like that, keep it up, sob after sob, until every nerve in him was jumping. Mechanically he had begun to dress, with the intention of doing something, ask her through the connecting door what was the matter, telephone to the office—do something!

Then his usual caution had suggested that, if she were one sort of girl, he would simply be bringing confusion upon her; and, if of the other sort, he would probably bring an awkward entanglement upon himself. . . . As for telephoning to the office—that was out of the question.

With the reflection that there must be an end to all things, even to such weeping as hers, Parker had seated himself at the window and waited; the city was waking.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

II

A SURPRISE

BUT not until the gray of morning lightened into unmistakable day was there quiet in the next room. Either the early stir in the hotel had frightened the weeping girl into silence, or exhaustion had plunged her into sleep; the latter most likely. Had Parker's strained attention discovered movements, he would have feared some desperate act. That any one could weep like that, for hours, in this suffocating heat, and not go mad, seemed impossible; it would tear a man to pieces, to weep like that. . . . Then Parker realized that he was in a subnormal state himself, exhausted and every nerve on edge. It had been a horror of a night.

Parker decided to bathe and dress and have his breakfast sent up to him, as soon as it could be served. At ten o'clock he must go to his office and prepare to meet Moreton, but until that time he would stay where he was, not because it was a whit cooler here than his office would be, but because he meant to make a few discoveries. If his neighbor moved about he would hear her; if she left her room he would follow her;

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

if the man joined her he would know it. He'd like to have a look at that man. The girl was evidently desperately wretched; the whole performance was queer, and if he spied on her it would be for her own good. Parker granted, however, that he was taking a personal interest in his neighbor; he had seen her face.

There was a stir in the next room before he expected it. He had completed his dressing and was waiting a reasonable hour for breakfast, when the telephone in the next room rang. As he had no compunctions now over listening at the intervening door, he heard distinctly:

"Yes—" huskily. Then more clearly, "Yes, it's I." Parker noted her enunciation and correct speech.

Then, "Oh, I'm all right!" A cheerful note! And after that bitter weeping! No man could so dissemble; the words would stick in his throat.

She was continuing. "Yes, but I'll get up. . . . At half past six—at the Thirty-third Street entrance? . . . Yes, I'll be ready. . . . I know, but don't worry, dear. . . . All right!" Again that cheerful lilt.

She replaced the receiver, and then Parker heard hasty preparations for departure. He guessed what "At the Thirty-third Street entrance" meant. Going that way she would avoid the lobby; the man would meet her there. It was six o'clock. Parker partly

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

opened his door and waited. The elevator that took her down should carry him.

Promptly at half past six a bell-boy appeared, and Parker gave them time to pass down the hall and near the Thirty-third Street elevator. Then he followed. As he approached them, he was conscious that, through the obscuring pink of the girl's veil, he was being closely scrutinized. But as they stood side by side in the elevator she became oblivious of his presence. Beneath her veil Parker could discern the black line of her lowered lashes, and that the warm color he had noticed the night before was gone. Her eyes were heavy and her skin looked dull. She appeared even younger than he had thought her.

When they reached the main floor, she stepped out promptly; the Thirty-third Street entrance was straight ahead.

"The office?" Parker asked of the elevator boy.

"Around to the left, sir."

Parker swung around the corner, then came back. She had reached the sidewalk and several details rushed upon Parker: a touring-car standing directly before the entrance, the bell-boy lifting her bag into the tonneau, a big man with an extraordinarily thick shock of gray hair bending forward and offering a guiding hand to the girl, seating her beside him on the front seat.

Parker knew that car almost as well as he knew his

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

own; he knew the man better than he knew any other client of his—Mathew Moreton, multimillionaire, husband of a woman nearly his own age and childless, the man whose will he was about to draw.

Parker turned back then, and, somewhat vaguely, went down to the grill. Had he been a vulgar sort, he would have laughed. Had he known Mathew Moreton less well, he would probably have shrugged. As it was, he was profoundly surprised—and interested.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

III

THE WAIF AND THE WIFE

"IT'S NIXIE," Mathew Moreton said.

"The Nixola Allen mentioned in your will?" Parker asked quickly.

"Yes. . . . You won't see her at dinner—I want you to meet her now," and Moreton's big voice volleyed across the stretch of water, "Nixie! Ahoy, there! . . . This way!"

It was the afternoon of the following Saturday, and Moreton had brought Parker out with him to Moreton House. When they first glimpsed the lake, Moreton had pointed out a canoe which was mid-lake and headed for the dense, rock-studded woods opposite. Moreton had brought his car to a stop at the water's edge, where the park drive skirted the lake closely. Then he had called.

She heard, for she stopped paddling and looked behind her. Moreton waved his handkerchief, and she waved in return, then headed for them. There was a considerable distance between them, and Moreton settled back in his seat.

"What do you think of my lake?" he asked with

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

a note of satisfaction. "All that space covered with water was an old stone-quarry with a clean stream running through it, when I took hold of it. Only ten years ago, I bought Henderstott's folly, the house and the grounds. Then I obtained the quarry and the woods around it, and now see! I've got a hundred acres in all now, park and lake and terraces, and a sunken garden —a place that figures in every pamphlet on beautiful New York estates. When we get up to the house, you'll see the Hudson, up river and down, and pretty much all of Westchester County. There's nothing in New York State to compare with it, in my estimation. . . . Money and brains—the combination will accomplish anything!"

Parker had frequently heard Moreton express this same sentiment; one reason for Mathew Moreton's success had been his cheerful self-assurance. He had a cheerful-souled as well as a shrewdly confident way with him that won men—and money. In the main, Parker agreed with him: money and brains certainly procured the material things, and, to Parker's way of thinking, material things were desirable. But, judging by the will he had just drawn, money and brains had not procured matrimonial contentment for Mathew Moreton.

To some extent, Moreton's will had explained that curious night at the hotel. The thing was not like Moreton—as Parker had known him—but observation had taught Parker that when a man of Moreton's

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

type cuts loose from his wife he is apt to solace himself with youth. The millionaire's domestic relations were certainly not of the happiest, a thing Parker had not suspected until he drew the will. Parker himself had worked his way up; with him, in the beginning, it had been brains and an indomitable will; then brains, influence, and some money. He had a high appreciation of money, yet he did not agree with Moreton. And he doubted whether Moreton agreed with himself; it was simply his way of speaking.

But Parker nodded in agreement, while he watched the figure in the canoe gain distinctness, a slim little body topped by an obscuring mop of dark curls. "She is little more than a child," he remarked.

"It's not I can tell you exactly how old Nixie is—she can't tell you herself, nor can any one else, so far as I've been able to discover," Moreton answered. He hesitated, then said with decision: "You may as well have the story now. . . . Mrs. Moreton and I had been married eleven years and no children or prospects of any when we picked Nixie up. That was seven years ago—Mrs. Moreton was forty-one and I forty-five. It was just one of those chances, our private car was sided at a God-forsaken little town in Iowa, a wreck on the road ahead that held us eight hours, and in a field near by a circus, some penny side-shows and that sort of thing. We went to the show and saw that baby lifting weights and doing trapeze work, the prettiest, most graceful little body you ever saw, with

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

bleached curls fluffed up in a mass and eyes blackened till they looked like lumps of coal." His voice grew dry. "Mrs. Moreton was just recovering from her last 'interest' and was getting into shape for Child Welfare, and she fell for that baby. She got into a fever over the shame of it and—well, the upshot was that I regularly bargained for the child, and had no great difficulty doing it, for it developed that little Mademoiselle Nixola, as she figured on the bill-boards, didn't belong to any one in particular. A trapeze-woman by the name of Allen had joined the circus with Nixola attached to her, and a couple of years before the Allen woman had died and left Nixie as a sort of legacy to the troupe. As nearly as any one could determine, the child was about thirteen. I arranged with the manager, and Nixie came on east with us, and for a year or so there was a possibility that we'd adopt her. . . . But it didn't turn out that way."

Moreton was speaking more deliberately now, and there was something besides dryness in his voice, coldness commingled with feeling. "You see, Parker, Mrs. Moreton has always been high-strung, too much high-living and inbreeding on the part of her forebears, I suppose. . . . We started well enough, she had family and I had money, I was making money then by leaps and bounds, and the first years she worked to make us fashionable. Then that palled, perhaps because she couldn't make a mere dancing partner of

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

me, and there were periods of neuritis and neurosis and what-not, and then she took up 'interests.' . . . There were no children—I laid her discontent largely to that. . . . Well, in the beginning, I mildly opposed the adoption idea, partly because I hadn't much faith in Nixie's powers of regeneration—the kid was adaptable enough, on the surface; she was phenomenally observant and quick-witted, she slipped into beautiful clothes and smooth language—but I felt sure that, at heart, she was an Arab and always would be. That didn't bother me particularly, but it would bother Mrs. Moreton mightily in the future; Nixie and Mrs. Moreton were cut from entirely different pieces of cloth. But my main objection was that I wasn't at all sure Mrs. Moreton's enthusiasm would last—I'd watched too many 'interests' come and go. I advised waiting until Nixie was a little older—we'd know better then what she was going to be. If it proved a genuine bit of mother feeling, I was willing enough, my beginnings weren't much more to boast of than Nixie's." Moreton paused to laugh shortly. "Lord bless you! At the end of two years Nixie was a forgotten toy! She was given a governess and just shunted—kept out here in the country year in and year out. Mrs. Moreton was forty-four and her troubles, both bodily and mental, had begun, and they've continued to the present day. This last two years she's turned against Nixie—she can't endure the sight of her, and yet she won't allow the girl out of her sight,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

poor Nix! . . . But Nixie's grown on me. She suits me. She's a loyal soul and she has a head full of good sense—and she's real *woman*. We're devoted to each other. I don't mind telling you that that little girl there is the biggest interest I have on earth; it's a thing you have to know, but it goes no further, understand. . . . Here she is—now take a look at her."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

IV

THE STEEL GRIP

PARKER did not need Moreton's urging; he was looking with keen interest at the little figure which, as it swung from side to side, tossed a mass of dark curls over a face whose features he could not distinguish. Even when the canoe touched ground a few yards away and she sprang out, he did not really see her face.

Then she turned and flung back her curly mane, and, at that gesture, even before he saw her eyes, which were widened by a sudden flash of recognition, he knew who she was: his neighbor during that interminable, burning night; her slight body, undraped now by a flowing veil, and her childish curls had deceived him.

Parker experienced a decided shock. He was conscious that he was changing color. Just what his eyes had said to her he did not know, but he noticed that the warm flush in her cheeks had mounted to her brow, and that, after the first flash of recognition, she looked only at Moreton, and that her eyes had no part in her smile and general air of pleasure.

"You're back early!" she said. "I thought it

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

couldn't be you, for Holt said he was going to the station to meet you."

In his rapidly returning coolness Parker noticed there was genuine enough pleasure in Moreton's eyes and voice. "I decided to bring Parker out in the car. . . . Nixie, this is Everitt Parker, my lawyer, you know. Shake hands with him."

She sprang lightly to the step of the car, on Moreton's side, and leaned across his body, offering Parker her hand, and, as she did so, she looked fully at him, her lips still smiling but her eyes, opaque as cloudy green water, offering an unfathomable surface to Parker's steady observation. "The lake is pretty, isn't it?" she asked with the insouciance of a child. But her eyes were not a child's eyes; they were wise and very chill.

"It was prettier a few minutes ago, Miss Nixie."

Parker saw that she instantly grasped his meaning and also assimilated his quickly adopted attitude; she had negatived his recognition—so be it. Parker decided that she was swiftly intelligent and thoroughly experienced. When he had joined her at the elevator she must have realized that he had been her neighbor during the night, he had come from the room next her own, she could see that; and she must have guessed that he had purposely followed her. And Parker was uncomfortably conscious that now, before he had conquered surprise, he had looked at her meaningfully, with the intensest surprise and curiosity.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

She drew her hand from his and dropped heavy lashes over her opaque gaze, and Moreton chuckled, as if amused at the cool scrutiny she had given his lawyer. "Getting a little exercise before dinner, were you, baby? It's a blessing this morning's storm broke the heat, but it's too hot still for much exertion—don't overdo." He looked fondly at her lowered lashes and flushed cheeks.

"It stormed fearfully here," she answered.

"Lilian got back safely from her motor trip?"

"Yesterday," she said composedly.

"Who are we going to run into at the house? The doctor, of course—if it wasn't for him, I don't know what we would do, he's an ever-present help in time of trouble." He spoke half amusedly, half seriously and also with a touch of contempt.

She nodded. "Coming back through the heat made Mrs. Moreton ill. The doctor's staying over till to-morrow."

"That's a blessing. . . . Lilian's all right again, I suppose?"

"Yes, it was just a nervous attack."

"Who else?"

"The Von Betlers and Mrs. Insmann. There is a Count Gansingen, too. They are all staying over Sunday."

"That crowd!" Moreton's broad black brows lowered into an angry line. "Who is this Count Gansingen?"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I don't know, but Burke says he has lived in New York for a long time and that he knows all the best people. Burke said he was 'very much of a gentleman.' . . . He's not a German." Parker saw her hand touch Moreton's shoulder.

"Oh, some one of Lilian's fool foreigners," he said more quietly. "Who else?"

"Driscoll—he said he wanted to see you."

"Glad there's one American in the bunch—two, counting the doctor," Moreton muttered. "Driscoll's on a borrowing expedition, of course—still he's a Moreton. . . . He's been haunting you, I dare say, and you took to the lake—eh, Nixie?"

"He went for a walk," she answered non-committally.

"Yes, the house would be too hot for him. . . . The rest are all there?"

"They had tea, then they went for a ride." Her color had faded; she looked tired and grim, an expression that aged her.

"What that crowd needs is a good jolt!" Moreton said decidedly. Then his manner changed completely. He put his arm about her, took her hand and patted it. "You run along to your canoe now," he said affectionately. "I wanted Parker to meet you, that's all. He knows my affairs, so if ever you need advice and I'm not by to give it, you apply to him. You're the biggest interest I have on earth, Nixie girl—just remember that and live up to it."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The color swept over her face and her hand must have tightened on his, for Moreton laughed. "You have a grip, baby! . . . Show Parker the wonder. Parker give her your hand."

"Willingly," Parker said.

Nixie fixed her eyes on his and the suffusion which had softened them faded. "I'll hurt you," she said.

Parker laughed. He was slenderly built and not over medium height, but he was proud of his muscle. He trained regularly in his club gymnasium and was fully a match for the powerfully built man beside him. Parker had sporting proclivities—so had Moreton. On more than one occasion he and Moreton had wrestled and the millionaire had good-naturedly cursed what he called Parker's "steel-wires." Moreton had accused Parker of a sly knowledge of ju-jutsu.

The girl's hand was slim and firm, she gripped well, but Parker smiled as he looked from her steady eyes to her tightening fingers. Then he ceased to be amused, for each slim finger stiffened into steel. It was not just a hand-grip, arm and shoulder came into play—and she had the best of it.

Parker's color rose. "Lord—" he muttered.

She suddenly relaxed. "I said I would hurt you," she returned softly.

Involuntarily Parker rubbed his wrist. "Where did you learn that—in the—" He caught himself up; he had almost said, "circus."

"Born with her and then trained into perfection,"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Moreton interjected hastily. "We used to play about in my gymnasium, up there at the house, Nix and I. I have some muscle myself, but she always got the better of me. . . . Climb in behind, baby, and let me take you to the house."

She sprang to the ground. "No, I'm going to canoe."

"Come, get in—I'll send Holt for the canoe, later on."

"I better not," she said quietly.

Moreton eyed her for a moment, then nodded. "Perhaps you're right. . . . Go ahead—but, Nixie, be at the boat-landing at seven—I want to see you before dinner."

She did not answer, for a car had just rounded the group of willows about which the drive circled and was almost upon them. The broad-shouldered, strong-looking young fellow who was driving brought his car to an abrupt stop and touched his cap. He was in chauffeur's livery and Moreton spoke carelessly to him:

"Going for me, were you, Holt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I didn't come by train. Draw out of the way, will you, and let us by. You can come on back then and look after this car—it didn't take the hill right."

"Yes, sir. But I'll have to go to the station first—Burke said there were some supplies coming out."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Oh, all right—but don't forget to look after this car, for I want it in the morning."

The chauffeur backed and made room for them, waited for them to pass, but Parker noticed that he was not looking at them. His eyes were fixed on Nixie, who had already shoved her canoe into the water and sat with paddle across her knees.

And from beneath her curls she was returning the look, steadily.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

V

A STOLEN INTERVIEW

MORETON parted from Parker in the upper hall. "Make yourself at home," he said cordially. "Burke, here, will attend to you. There's the library and the porches, or the grounds if you want to walk about. We'll gather at dinner-time, seven-thirty—I'll see you then."

The butler led Parker to one of the guest-rooms, where Parker dismissed him with: "Never mind my bag. I'll attend to it."

As soon as the door closed on the man Parker went to the window. His room was on the lake side of the house, above the terraces, with a clear view of the water and an extended one of rolling country beyond. Parker's gaze sought the farther shore of the lake; on his way to the house he had seen Nixie headed again for the opposite woods. But the canoe was not in sight now; she had probably drawn it up behind some rock and had gone into the woods.

Without pausing to look about him, Parker left his room and walked out on the terraces. The house, an enlarged and magnificent imitation of an old colonial mansion of the Delaware-Maryland type, a central

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

building and two wings with a Georgian portico its front entrance and a wide and long veranda in the rear overlooking terraces and lake, crowned a wooded hill above the Hudson. As Moreton had said, there were extended views in every direction. It was a superb location and nearly a million had been expended in beautifying it.

This was Parker's first visit to Moreton House, and he meant to inspect it very thoroughly, but that was not his immediate interest. He realized now that Moreton had not asked him to his country home merely to enjoy its beauty. Parker was inclined to be both critical and skeptical; he had met with too many surprises, too many unexpected twists in apparently honest and clean natures not to be skeptical. He surmised that Moreton wished to acquaint him with a situation about which Moreton could speak only half truths and about which he intended Parker should know only half the truth, and he had begun by introducing him to Nixola Allen, and by emphasizing a paternal attitude. Moreton seemed to feel that his will needed explanation or justification, particularly to his lawyer who was expected to enforce its provisions.

Parker had not drawn Moreton's two previous wills; he had been counsel for the millionaire only six years. It was a surprising document he had just been called on to prepare and had opened up to him a vista of conjectures, coming as it did after that occurrence at the hotel. And since Parker had made the astounding dis-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

covery that Nixola Allen and the girl at the hotel were one and the same, the vista had immeasurably widened and lengthened. His brain was busied with conjectures and possibilities.

Six years before, when Moreton first engaged his services, he had said with characteristic decision, "I've watched your career, Parker—you've the right lawyer stuff in you, and you're not too well off to neglect business. You've a long way to go yet before your ambition's satisfied, and you're a young man, only thirty-four. Breen was a good lawyer, but he was too old, and now he's dropped off. I want a man who will well outlast me. Your wits are keen and your body's strong —you may set to upon my affairs."

Parker had made a careful study of the millionaire's business interests and had met most of the men with whom Moreton had financial connections, but of Moreton's family affairs he knew little more than the general public. He had met Mrs. Moreton only twice, and he had never heard of a Nixola Allen until he drew the will. Mrs. Moreton had impressed Parker as the young grande-dame, overcultured, physically delicate, and veneered by a deliberate vivacity; he had doubted whether she was clever. He had thought her beautiful, however, quite the patrician type, a woman who did not look her forty or so years. She had shown Parker a barely polite attention; she had never extended to him any social favor.

So Moreton's insistence that he come out with him

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

to Moreton House had surprised Parker. When the will had been signed and deposited, Moreton had said abruptly, "I told you when I telephoned, I wanted you to come out with me to Moreton House. When you took charge of my business interests, you made a study of them—you've taken hold of something else now, so I want you to meet my family."

Moreton certainly wished to acquaint him with a situation, not in its entirety, but sufficiently for him to get a good working basis, and Parker meant to gain all the knowledge possible. His opinion of Mathew Moreton and of his probable relations with Nixola Allen, the moral aspect of the situation, had nothing to do with his duty to Moreton as a client. Parker had already acquired an impression, down there by the lake, something of which he fancied Moreton had no suspicion, and he was intent now on verifying that impression.

When he reached the lake, he found, as he had expected, a path skirting it and leading into the woods toward which Nixie had been so determinedly headed. Parker did not enter the woods but kept at their edge until he saw the station, a stone's throw away, and noticed that there were no waiting automobiles about. Then he turned into the woods.

Moving cautiously through the undergrowth and circling the rocks with care, he took a diagonal course which would, in time, bring him to the lakeside. The morning storm had made the ground sodden, so there

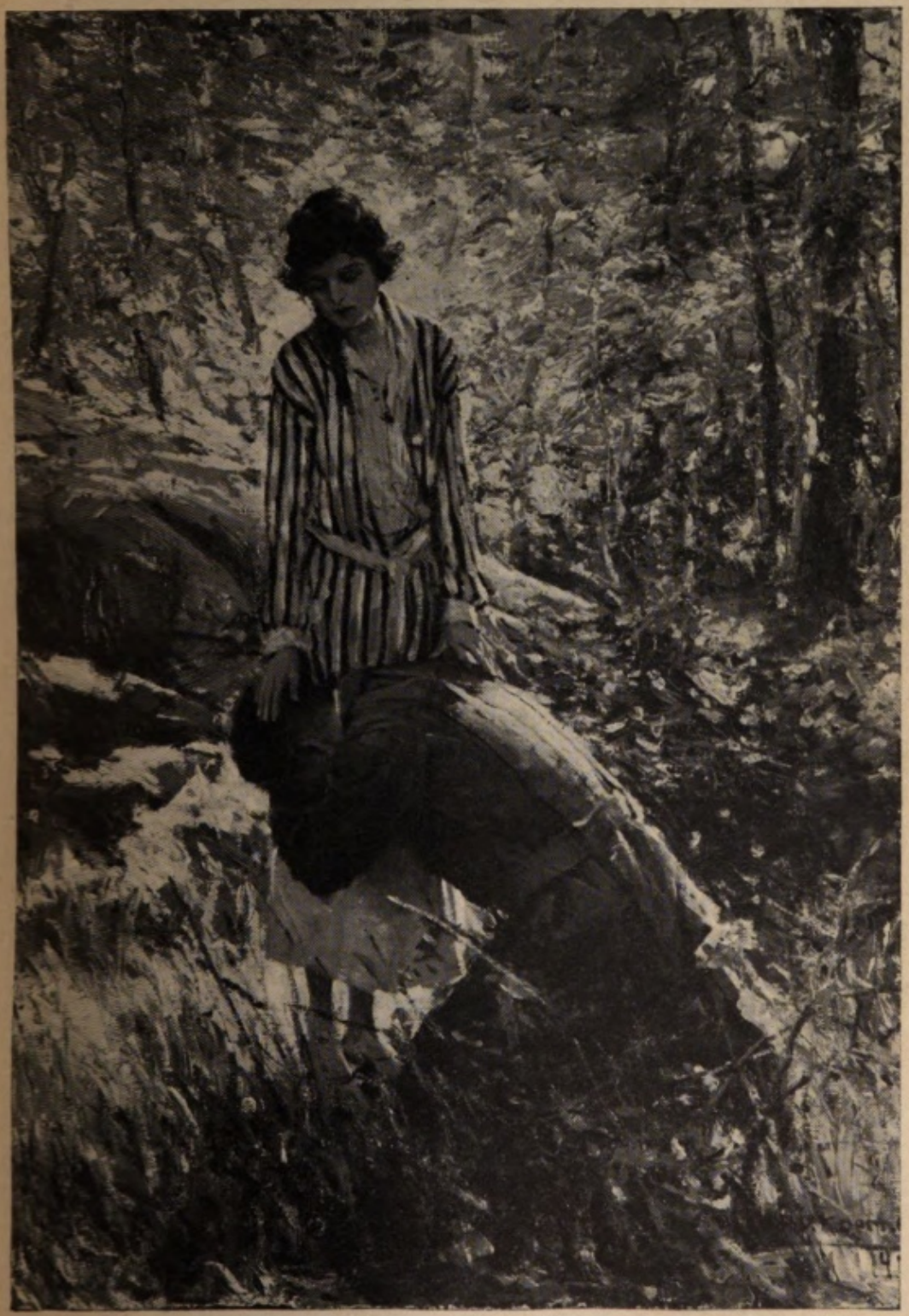
Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

was no rustling or snapping of twigs to hamper him. But his frequent pauses for observation and listening were not rewarded; he saw no one; he heard no one.

Then, suddenly, he came upon them. He had circled a rock and parted the bushes at its base, and there, a short distance away, stood Nixie and the chauffeur, whose powerful physique Parker had instantly noticed. He saw now that the young man was full six feet tall, broad-shouldered and broad-chested. He was not in the least handsome, he looked as if he might be a pugilist; low brow, high cheek-bones, long upper lip, preponderant jaw, and reddish hair cropped close. His eyes were his best feature, for they were vividly blue and keen—Parker had been struck by their intentness when he and Moreton had passed him on the park drive.

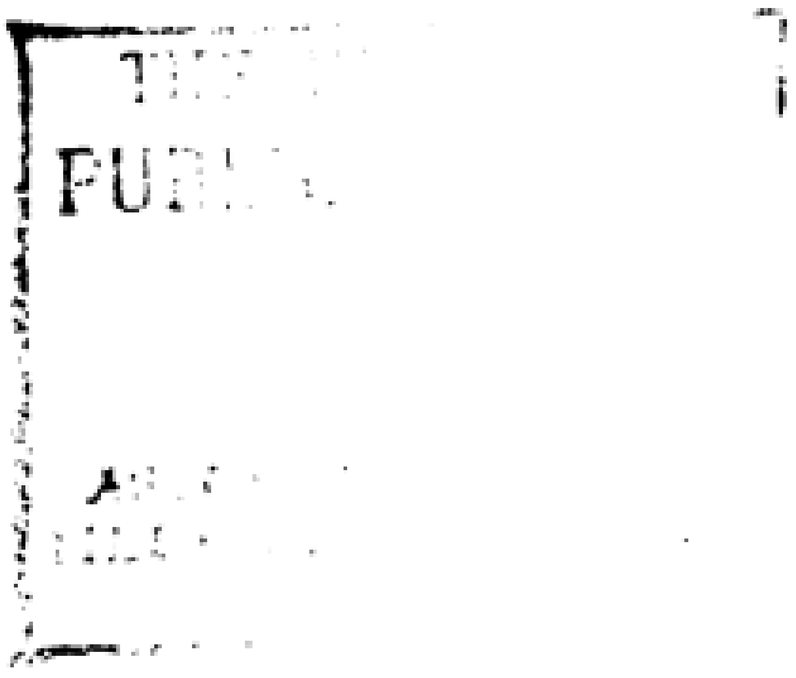
The young man had been looking at Nixie then and he was looking at her now; looking down at her, for she appeared a child beside his height and breadth. He was facing Parker, so Parker could see the play of his features distinctly. He was heavily tanned, but his very evident emotion had turned him a brick red. Had it not been for the expression of his large mouth, the slightly parted lips and his air of complete absorption, Parker would have judged him to be in a rage; he looked such a powerful brute. The spell of passion was on him, but not anger. Nixie's face Parker could not see, only her back-tossed curls. She

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



"Forgive me," he said chokingly.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

was looking up at Holt and talking in too rapid and too low a tone for Parker to distinguish even a word. But when she finished, Parker caught Holt's exclamation: "You mean it?"

She nodded vigorously, and he suddenly caught her up and held her strained to him, his face hidden by her curls. His embrace was so tense with passion that Parker felt his own cheeks burn. The man was murmuring over her, smothering her with kisses.

She struggled resolutely, and finally he set her down —those steel muscles of hers were probably equal even to his strength. "Can't you be sensible?" she said. "Don't make me sorry I came!" She had stepped back from him, so Parker caught the words.

Holt's answer was perfectly distinct. "Sensible! after that promise of yours! Why, Nixie, it's been all I could do not to strangle Moreton. When I watch him petting you, things turn red. Be sensible!"

"Hush!" she said sharply. "That ridiculous jealousy of yours!" Her voice rang in anger and she had retreated until they stood well apart. "I owe everything to him!" she declared passionately. "I'd be making a poor return if I weren't at least affectionate to him! I won't endure being misunderstood!"

He flung back his head. "I hate him! I wish he was—" He stopped suddenly, lowered his head and looked down at the ground, his face flaming, his lips bitten.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Nixie said nothing at all, simply looked at him. Parker had a partial view of her face now, lips hard-set and eyes steady. Though a little thing, she looked imposing. She neither moved nor spoke until Holt raised his eyes to her. The flush of angry jealousy was fading from his face; when he met her steady gaze, it vanished and he looked ashamed and miserable.

"Harry—" she said softly.

He reached her at a stride, dropped on his knees, put his arms about her and hid his face against her. "Forgive me—" he said chokingly. "It's enough—just to be allowed to love you—"

A conquered lion. She stroked his hair, smiled down on him. "Perfectly conscious of her power," Parker thought.

Holt drew her hands down then and kissed them, turned them palms up and held them against his face. Parker barely caught his thick murmur. "You know you hold me between your little hands. . . . You're so little—and so dear. . . . He can be near you, and I can't—that's what hurts—"

"I know," she said softly. Then with more decision, "But you must go now. The train will be in before you get there and some one may suspect."

"Very well—" he said in the same thick way. He got up, bent and kissed her hair, turned hastily and disappeared behind a rock. Parker heard him start his machine.

Nixie stood for a few minutes where he had left

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

her, looked after him in an expressionless way, then down at the ground. Her lips quivered, then set in a resolute line. . . . Suddenly she swung about and dived into the bushes, almost within reach of Parker's arm; she was making for the lake.

And Parker also left the woods. . . . As he unpacked his bag, carefully locked it again, then dressed for dinner, he frowned frequently. When dressed he sat down by his window and stared at the terraces below, smoking steadily, thinking intently. . . . He wondered, among other things, whether Nixola Allen would tell Moreton that his lawyer had been their neighbor, that night at the hotel? What was Nixola Allen, anyway?

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

VI

THE HOUSE-PARTY

PARKER found the house-party gathered on the veranda and was conscious that every member of the group eyed him interestedly, though, when he joined them Mrs. Moreton rose with an air of merely vague recognition.

He introduced himself a trifle incisively. "I am Everitt Parker, Mrs. Moreton—I see you don't remember me."

She gave him a thin hand and as thin a smile. "Oh—yes, I do remember now—Mr. Moreton mentioned having brought you out with him. . . . Mrs. Insmann—Mr. Parker, my husband's lawyer; Mrs. von Betler—and Mr. von Betler, whom you have probably met, and Count Gansingen. . . . Edouard, you and Mr. Parker should know each other, the family physician and the family lawyer! Doctor Edouard Levene, Mr. Parker."

Parker received a distinct impression of each in turn, Mrs. Insmann, blue-eyed and fair-haired, a handsome woman, certainly over forty and indisputably a Teuton; Mrs. von Betler, perhaps forty-six,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

dark and slender and nervously alert, as indisputably an American; Von Betler, six feet tall, strongly built and fair, decidedly of the Prussian officer type; Count Gansingen, not tall and not particularly well-featured, but with an indefinable grace about him, suggestions of the diplomat and courtier; and Doctor Levene, who shook Parker's hand cordially.

Parker studied the latter, for he remembered Moreton's remarks about "the doctor." Mrs. Moreton had strained a point when she had called him "the family physician." Moreton's physician was an elderly man whom Parker knew well. Doctor Levene was younger, though by no means a youth; Parker judged him to be near his own age, about forty. He was typically a New York product, Parker decided, probably an evolution from the heterogeny of the East Side: an Irish lift of cheek-bones, eyes and coloring suggestive of the Hebrew, the slight mustache and mouth of the southern European, mustache and hair both a jet black. He had the dapper body, nervous vivacity and affected speech of the erotic New York youth, yet, in spite of his effeminate effect, he conveyed an impression of cleverness and experience and the capacity to please. He evidently stood high in Mrs. Moreton's favor, for her affected pronunciation of his name and the drooping glance she gave him when she sank back in her chair were expressive.

Parker was struck by the change in Mrs. Moreton; he had not seen her for three years. Moreton had told

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

him that she was forty-eight, and it was apparent that she had reached the stage when not even a skilled masseuse can hide the inevitable. She was still a handsome woman, her body had not lost its long graceful lines, and either her maid or nature had preserved the golden lights in her hair, but there was imminent wreckage about her mouth and chin, premonitions of deep nervous lines, and there was a strained, dilated look in her large hazel eyes. And she was thinner; she had the pinched appearance about the nostrils usual with a highly nervous woman when mentally and physically subnormal. Her tinting had always been delicate and now she was only slightly rouged, yet even that touch of artificiality made her look hectic. Parker noticed that her hands moved incessantly, and that her vivacity appeared more than ever a veneer; she gave the impression of mental and physical tensity. She was a little pathetic, Parker thought.

He at once fell into conversation with Von Betler, for he knew something of his history and was acquainted with a number of his business associates. Though of German parentage, he was American born. His father had established the immense drug manufacturing company which had made a fortune for the family and had enabled the son to marry into Mrs. Moreton's set. But, unlike Moreton, Von Betler was well born; he came of a prominent Prussian family. Parker knew, after America had declared war, that Von Betler had proved himself stanchly loyal. He

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

had worked energetically for the Liberty Loans and had associated himself with that group of German-Americans which was interested in Americanizing the German in America. Though viewed with distrust in the beginning, Von Betler had won the liking of the patriots with whom he had worked.

Parker chose for a topic the equipping of a private laboratory, a matter in which one of his clients was interested, and Count Gansingen soon joined in the conversation; it appeared that he had studied medicine. He seemed a much-traveled man and extremely intelligent, and Parker recalled, now, that he had heard of him a number of times as a man of much social charm and possessed of a considerable fortune, not an American citizen, but a frequent visitor in New York, where he was much sought after socially. He was fair-haired and blue-eyed, and Parker decided that he must be a German, until Gansingen spoke of Switzerland as "my country."

"You are not German, then?" Parker said.

Gansingen smiled and shook his head. "Else I would not be here," he replied. "I am a Swiss—of that country whose neutrality irks me."

There was something very charming about the man; even his precise English was delightful. He had introduced the subject of war and he continued, "I can endure it no longer, this sitting still, with the whole world on fire to vindicate a principle. The first year of the war I was in the Orient. Then the fire touched

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

me and I returned to Switzerland. There I bore inaction as long as I could—I must have my part in this struggle. So I came to America; I am beyond the age for the trenches, but I have a good medical training, which just at this time, I am told, America is in need of, to send in support of its army. I have that to offer, and surely in some such capacity your government will find a place for me. I have been, as you say, 'pulling the ropes' to get some kind of commission with the medical corps. I am very eager for it."

Von Betler nodded. "You will get it. We want every man who is honest and willing, and trained material is at a premium. . . . I'm after the so-called German-American who has been systematically Teutonized, for I feel that the loyal German-American citizen is the man best fitted for the work of Americanizing the German-American. The German understands the German, however little he may understand the psychology of other nations. And the loyal German-American understands better than any other American citizen the pull of the 'Fatherland,' that commingling of sentimentality and patriotism which is so strong in the German and which has been so carefully fostered by the 'Father-Country.' And he knows better than any American possibly can the reasons why so many German-Americans have failed to declare their loyalty; they are afraid of their own people, afraid of boycott, social and political and in business, and they also resent the attitude of so many Amer-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

icans, 'The leopard can't change his spots' attitude, and 'Every German be damned!' But the German-American is a big actuality in America, and a potentiality, and I consider his Americanization one of our most vital problems. . . . I've been giving myself to it." Von Betler expressed himself resolutely and with heightened color.

Gansingen spoke of the pro-German strongholds in the Middle West, he and Von Betler talked earnestly of the best methods of counteracting German propaganda, and Parker listened with interest, but with one ear also for the conversation of the others. Doctor Levene was entertaining the three women with an account of a Newport house-party of which he had been a member. Mrs. Moreton was of course his patient and his admirer, but Parker gathered that the other two women were not Doctor Levene's patients; Mrs. von Betler the doctor had evidently met before, but Mrs. Insmann he was meeting for the first time, and Parker concluded that the doctor was bent upon making an impression. He had much social gossip at his tongue's end; it appeared that his Newport hostess, Mrs. Gordon-Syke, was his patient, a star-patient evidently.

Parker was amused by the adroit way in which Doctor Levene played off his eminent hostesses against these three women who had not quite achieved the Newport altitude. He spoke in intimate and affectionate terms of the Grassmeres, whose wealth and

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

social stability there was no gainsaying. Mrs. Elfreda Craxton, the widowed niece of Alfred Grassmere, appeared to be the doctor's particular friend—he called her by her first name.

Mrs. von Betler asked, "When are you two people going to announce what everybody knows? Come, 'fess up, Doctor! A Christmas wedding? And am I invited?"

"My dear Mrs. von Betler!" Levene protested. "Neither Elfreda nor I are responsible for that ridiculous rumor! There's not a word of truth in it!"

But he looked both self-conscious and pleased, quite the boyishly devoted lover and the fortunate choice of an heiress. Then, with becoming promptitude he switched the conversation to Mrs. Gordon-Syke and gossiped with zest. Parker, who was a stickler for professional etiquette, was somewhat shocked when Doctor Levene concluded with a description of "dear Mrs. Gordon-Syke's ravishing peignoir, absolutely exquisite—but seductive—most charming things are seductive."

"The silly fool!" was Parker's first mental comment, which was followed by a somewhat closer analysis of the lady-doctor, or, rather, of the doctor of ladies, for Parker decided that the man deliberately appealed to the socially ambitious woman well along in life, whose nerves were askew and whose body was jaded; that he both tantalized and interested such women as Mrs. Moreton. He certainly had an instinct

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

for flattery, though with these three women his compliments were not at all subtle. But they did not want subtlety; they were too consciously on the wane; they demanded substantial lumps of sugar. "Well, why not?" Parker reflected, amused. "Their type needs a physician—quite as decidedly as their millionaire husbands need a lawyer, and, for the fortune-spoiled, the pill must be sugar-coated or they won't take it. Rightly handled, they are paying patients—and clients—the physician and the lawyer must live."

Parker also reminded himself that this type of woman was usually childless, and that even the over-civilized woman's heart is sometimes a queer void. Doctor Levene had a boyish air and lapsed easily into appeal, possibly a mere affectation, but the more alluring for that. To women who were themselves largely composed of affectations, if not actual abnormalities, Levene's was the only language that greatly appealed. The doctor was a very clever man; he was also a good self-advertiser.

Moreton interrupted Parker's observations. He came up the terraces and strode along the veranda toward his guests. Evidently he had been down at the boat-landing with Nixie, and it struck Parker that he looked grim; Parker wondered whether Nixie had told him that his lawyer had been a next-door neighbor of theirs at the hotel.

Moreton spoke to them all, but shook hands with none of them, not even with Count Gansingen. When

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

his wife performed the introduction, he said incisively, "Glad to meet you, Count. Mrs. Moreton takes a special interest in foreigners, so I'm always having the pleasure of meeting them. . . . My dear, I hope I haven't delayed your dinner?"

To one who did not know Mathew Moreton, the speech would appear merely an American brusquerie. How it struck Count Gansingen, Parker could not tell; the count bowed with faultless politeness. But to Mrs. Moreton the greeting was discomposing; her color rose, and Parker noticed that Doctor Levene glanced at her, then looked away.

"Burke has been watching for you—he'll announce dinner in a moment," Mrs. Moreton answered clearly. There was anger in her voice, and her foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"Where's Driscoll—he came out to-day, didn't he?" Moreton asked.

"Here!" a voice answered from a near-by window, and its owner swung himself out over the ledge. "I took up that book of Hoffman's in there, and gad! I've lost my appetite! Whose is it, Uncle Mathew—yours or Aunt Lilian's? . . . How'dy, Von Betler. How'dy, Parker. . . . *Hel*lo, Doctor—I didn't expect to see *you* here! . . . Mrs. von Betler, your butler turned me away from your door last week—"

He shook hands with them all, an immaculately groomed young man of about twenty-seven, a younger addition of Mathew Moreton, big-framed, ruddy-faced,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

pale gray eyes, startlingly heavy and black brows, and a wide humorous mouth. A loose sagging mouth on occasion, as Parker well knew, for, at Moreton's bidding, he had several times taken this nephew of his in hand, straightened him out and paid his debts.

The story was, that Mathew Moreton had set his elder brother up in business, but the brother was of no account; that he had dropped off some twelve years before, and that Moreton had then tried to make something of his brother's son, had sent him to college and had given him a mining-engineer's training with the wish to keep him out of cities.

But Driscoll Moreton had thrown up his first job; he loved New York. And he had a natural aptitude for newspaper work. He had "pulled off" some brilliant things for various papers with which he had been connected. But he was given to lengthened sprees that were disastrous; while only his splendid constitution saved him from physical wreckage. Had it not been for his utter unreliability, he would have made a famous war correspondent; he had been eager to go to the front, he had persuaded one paper to back him, then had begun his duties by missing his steamer—at the eleventh hour he was too intoxicated to be shipped. Perhaps that experience had cooled his ardor, at any rate, he had not enlisted, and, so far, he had not been taken in the draft.

There was one curious thing about him, he was always immaculate in appearance; even when intoxi-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

cated he avoided the gutter. And he had a social gift; he was deplored but greatly liked and was a favorite with women. "Gad!" he had said to Parker on the occasion of his last spree. "If only I could bring myself to it, there're plenty of women who would see me through, but no, thank you, *Papa!* I haven't got to the point of working women. . . . I guess Uncle Mathew don't miss the bits he gives me—he hasn't an heir, you know. And, Parker, if he'd let me have a sum just now, I know a corking investment that would net us an easy twenty-five per cent. Perhaps I'd pull up, if I'd make some money." Parker suspected that he had come now on that errand.

Mrs. von Betler made room for him beside her and he promptly remarked, "Stunning wave you've got on your hair—it's the 'Cocotte,' isn't it?"

"'The Cocotte?'"

"Yes, the 'Cocotte Wave.'"

"I never heard of it," she said with interest.

"You haven't! Haven't you heard of Madame Steinall's Cocotte Wave? Greatest thing invented! It's warranted harmless, will withstand fog, rain, soap and water—lasts till the hair sprouts again. It was invented by Madame Steinall—she's an Austrian, by the way, a Viennese—I'll give you her address," and he dived into a coat pocket.

"What's that?" Doctor Levene asked.

Driscoll raised his pale eyes for a momentary glance.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Madame Steinall. . . . She's an adept in dyes, Levene—and she'll grow hair on the most hopeless bald spot in existence. Recommend her to your patients. Mrs. Ericson Cantor swears by her and Mrs. Gordon-Syke is one of her patrons—just tell your lady patients that—and that madame has a score of actresses on her lists. She's just acquired Mrs. Grassmere, by the way."

"Elfreda hasn't mentioned her."

"No? Your fiancée's too busy over the Red Cross for such trifles as hair-dressing, Levene."

"Mrs. Cantor's hair is a wonderful color," Mrs. von Betler murmured.

"My dear Madame! Such a suggestion never emanated from me!" Driscoll exclaimed in apparent horror. "Madame Steinall *dresses* Mrs. Cantor's hair."

There was a laugh in which Mrs. Moreton did not join. Her lip lifted; her husband's nephew was evidently no favorite of hers. Moreton, who stood towering above them, eyed the young man amusedly. Then his face changed and he looked away at the lake.

He touched Parker's shoulder. "See there!" he said, and pointed.

Nixie in her canoe was paddling across the lake, followed by half a dozen swans. In mid-lake she stopped and was surrounded; from the activity of the birds, she was evidently feeding them.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he said with growling softness.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"It's clean and cool down there," and he walked to the veranda rail. There was wistfulness in his eyes and in his voice.

Parker rose, that he might see better, and Driscoll also sprang up. "I say!" he breathed; and then, "I wish I could paint!"

"Burke is announcing dinner," Mrs. Moreton remarked dryly.

Moreton swung about. "I am quite ready, my dear," he returned curtly. "Will you and the count lead the way?"

The antagonism between the two was apparent enough, and Parker caught the exchange of several glances. Mrs. Moreton laid her hand on Gansingen's arm, and, with Doctor Levene on her other side, she "led the way," her head high, her beautiful profile rigid.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

VII

A TOAST

MRS. MORETON showed discrimination in seating her guests; Parker found himself on Moreton's right, between Moreton and Von Betler. Mrs. Insmann came next, then Doctor Levene at Mrs. Moreton's left, Count Gansingen at her right, Mrs. von Betler between the count and Driscoll, who was at Moreton's left. Mrs. Moreton had placed a buffer on either side of her husband.

As the dinner proceeded, it had the qualities of a divided camp. Parker talked to Von Betler when the latter was not claimed by Mrs. Insmann, otherwise he was silent, for Driscoll was deep in talk with Moreton. Mrs. Moreton's end of the table was gaily loquacious; both the count and Levene calling forth laughter. Under their skilful homage Mrs. Moreton flushed into a vivacity which lost its metallic quality.

Parker, who was, perforce, a listener, discovered that the investment Driscoll was proposing to Moreton was nothing less than a controlling interest in Madame Steinall's establishment. Driscoll pronounced Madame Steinall a genius, but what interested Parker was the apparent business value of the proposition.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Driscoll showed some of his uncle's faculty for scenting a money-making certainty. Moreton was evidently impressed, for he gave the matter his close attention, his observant eyes all the while on his nephew's earnest face.

He leaned back—finally. "It's a good proposition," he remarked.

Evidently his approval meant much to Driscoll, for he flushed. "You'd be willing, then?" he asked eagerly.

"No," said Moreton.

The color left Driscoll's face with startling suddenness. "Why?" he asked finally.

"I'd rather not give my reason," Moreton returned.

"Lack of confidence in me, I suppose."

"No—" Moreton said slowly and so low that Parker barely caught it. "I've always hoped you'd evolve some business capacity, for you'll have money to handle one of these days. . . . I drank when I was your age, and pulled up. A man who's determined and who has the business keenness you've just shown will find a way—I'm not the only man who has money to invest. Besides, you know how I feel—that you ought to be at the front—quit drinking and enlist. . . . You want Nixie—but I can't help you in *that* venture."

"You won't, you mean!" There was an angry glint in Driscoll's eyes. "I grasp your 'reason.'"

"Why I decline to back Madame Steinall?" Moreton squared his shoulders. "I'd fling all I've got into

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the lake before I'd back a *German*—in anything! That's my reason, sir—in this case!"

"Oh—all right, sir. I'm sorry you have such determined prejudices. I have no love for the tribe myself, but, with me, it wouldn't stand in the way of a perfectly honest business transaction. Besides, Madame Steinall is not a German—she's an Austrian." He raised his glass and emptied it, then turned to Mrs. von Betler. He had flushed again and his hand was not steady. When on the veranda, Parker had suspected that Driscoll had been drinking during the afternoon. Burke refilled his glass, and Parker noticed that Driscoll quickly emptied it.

Moreton sat for a time, silent, his food untouched. Then he turned to Parker and talked of unimportant matters. The only thing that betrayed his thoughts was a remark he made about Nixie. "If Nix were here, we'd have a livelier end of the table. When we first took her, we settled on a birthday for her—by our count, she was nineteen last month. But Mrs. Moreton continues to regard her as under age for society, so Nix is excluded."

"I should say that she was two, perhaps three, years older than that," Parker answered.

"Very likely," Moreton said thoughtfully. "You see, she's such a little thing. That Allen woman wasn't her mother. Nixie must have been just a child the woman picked up somewhere. And I've no doubt that circus work stunted the child's growth. I've been

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

working on the matter of Nixie's parentage for some time and have made a memoranda of all the facts I've learned, and I'm going to put Jowett on the job. . . . There is one thing sure, Nixie has sense enough for thirty-five—better judgment than some who are nearly fifty," and he glanced at his wife.

It was evident to Parker that Nixie had not told Moreton of his encounter with her at the hotel; Moreton showed no self-consciousness when he spoke of her. For some reason she had kept the thing to herself.

After glancing at his wife, Moreton deliberately appraised his wife's guests. There was a purposeful air about him, but his intention was not apparent until Mrs. Moreton rose. "Let us go out to the veranda for coffee," she said. "You gentlemen will not want to sit here, it is so hot."

"Quite right," Moreton answered. "But just wait a moment, Lilian. . . . Burke, fill our glasses—I have a toast to propose."

While the silence held a vague surprise at Moreton's manner, the butler and footman filled the glasses. When they stood aside, Moreton turned to them. "Fill for yourselves," he commanded. They hastened to obey, then stood at attention.

Moreton ran his eye over the company, then slowly rose, his glass held high. "Ladies and gentlemen—" he said incisively, "to the cause of the Allies—to *America!* . . . To the complete vanquishing of her

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

foe and the annihilation of autocracy, however long it takes—to *Democracy!*"

Every man at the table sprang to his feet. Levene stood with his eyes fixed on Mrs. Moreton. She was already standing, but when her husband concluded, she seated herself and looked at him with blazing eyes.

"I'm against this war—*I'll* not drink!" she said passionately. Mrs. Insmann also kept her seat. Mrs. von Betler had risen.

Moreton merely glanced at his wife. "Levene?" he said with peculiar emphasis.

The doctor had bent over Mrs. Moreton, imploringly; at Moreton's question he came upright. "Of course I drink to that!" he said warmly. "You know I'm going over as soon as I can get there!"

Moreton looked about him and smiled slightly. "I see the gentlemen are all standing," he remarked. "Count, you have something to say?"

Gansingen's fine voice rang out. "I come of a neutral country, but of whose neutrality I do not approve. I drink with all my heart!"

Moreton merely nodded; his eyes were shining and his face warmly flushed. "Von Betler—and Mrs. von Betler—you are both on your feet—do you drink my toast, in its *entirety?*"

Von Betler had grown fiery red. "I do! America is my country!" he said, looking at Moreton with hot eyes.

"Exactly!" Moreton returned.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

They drank, all but Mrs. Moreton and Mrs. Insmann, Moreton draining his glass to the last drop. He set it down, then bent toward them, his clenched hand on the table, and though he spoke quietly it was ominously and with tremendous force. "Hereafter, every soul who enters my house first salutes the flag, and any one who sits at my table drinks my toast, and I shall see to it that he or she does so *with his heart as well as his lips*. The pacifist, the time-server, and the *spy* shall not find lodgment under *my* roof. The man or woman of doubtful sympathies need not seek to enter here—if they do so, it is at their peril. . . . We are fighting for a vital principle—whether the world shall progress or shall retrograde depends largely upon us, and we are at death grips with a powerful foe. It is best for us to realize it." He looked at his wife, who had grown very white, and his voice softened somewhat. "You do not realize, Lilian—I speak for you as well as myself, and out of consideration for your welfare. . . . Now take your guests to a cooler place and serve them their coffee. As for me, I have some important papers to look over—you will excuse me." He straightened and turned on his heel. "Bring me a glass and a pitcher of water, to my study—then see that I am not disturbed," he said to the butler as he passed him, and, going on, crossed the hall to the immense library. He passed through it to the room beyond and shut himself in.

The butler disappeared with the haste of a sub-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

mersible avoiding a shot, and then, for a moment, they all remained as they were, held by various emotions. Certainly nothing in Parker's experience, since his country had declared war, had given him a more acute feeling of his slackness in the mighty struggle. That big, bluff, gray-haired man had been majestic, so profoundly earnest and sincere. Some of the things Parker had thought of him, during the last few days, seemed grotesquely unreal. For the moment, Parker was deeply and tensely moved.

They were gathering themselves together. Mrs. Moreton had risen, uncertainly, and with eyes dilated. Doctor Levene took her arm and said something to her, and she answered hurriedly, "No, no, I'm all right! But what has come over him—?"

Both Parker and Driscoll caught Levene's grave answer. "You knew that he was particularly excited and distressed to-day, and yet you refused to drink his toast. . . . But don't, for heaven's sake, give way to your nerves now—remember you have guests." He had rebuked her; his manner was grave and decided.

"Oh, I know, but I don't see why he went on like that—against everybody. He must have lost his mind."

She was shaking, visibly, and the doctor guided her to the door, his face grave and troubled. He glanced back at Parker and Driscoll, and indicated Mrs. Moreton by a nod, as if to say, "She's my patient—I'll have to look after her." The others were silent; they went out together, warmly flushed and with an air of dis-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

tress, like people who had been undeservedly denounced. Driscoll and Parker were left alone.

Driscoll was staring at his companion. "Gad!" he exclaimed. "That gave me a regular turn! I've never in my life seen him like that! Why, he as good as accused them! He's insulted the lot of them! Aunt Lilian and Mrs. Insmann are fool pacifists, but the rest are as straight as a die! . . . They'll see to-morrow through, they'll want to avoid the appearance of a break, but they'll never come *here* again—not after that!" He poured himself a finger-length of whisky and drank it. "There's been another row this afternoon, I suppose. . . . He's simply brooded over Aunt Lilian's silly pacifism until he's off his head," he muttered.

Parker was perfectly cool again. "You will be off yours, if you drink much more," he said curtly. "You're more than half seas over now. Better go to your room."

"I will—couldn't face that crowd now," Driscoll declared. He went into the hall and Parker saw him mount the stairs.

Parker stood for a moment, considering. The scene he had just witnessed and Driscoll's remarks had given him added food for thought. He wished to avoid the gathering on the veranda, and decided to go out by the front door.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

VIII

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED

THREE hours later, at half past eleven, Parker, who was in his room, was startled by a loud knocking on the door opposite his own, followed by exclamations and then a woman's high, tense voice: "No, it's Mr. Parker I want! . . . Mr. Parker! Mr. *Parker!*"

When Parker jerked open his door, it was Nixie who stood before him, her eyes wild and her face very pale. Parker noticed that there were others in the hall, Von Betler without coat or collar and Mrs. von Betler in negligee and, with them, Mrs. Insmann; all with startled faces.

"What is it? What has happened?" Parker demanded.

Nixie gripped his arm. "I want *you!*" she said. "Come down-stairs—it's Mr. Moreton—!"

"Something has happened to him?"

She was breathlessly urging him to the stairs. "Yes, yes—"

They were plunging down the stairs, the others following, when Nixie slipped and almost fell. Parker

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

caught her and steadied her. "Keep my arm! . . . Where is he? What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know—" she answered, panting. "He can't speak—he's in his study. . . . I think he's dying—"

"*Dying!*" Parker exclaimed.

They ran through the dimly lighted library and into the room beyond. Here they encountered a glare of light which made distinct the group at one end of the plain office-like room: Mrs. Moreton braced against the big square desk, leaning over and peering at what lay on the floor, her neck craned and her lips fallen apart; Count Gansingen standing beside her and looking down; Holt, the chauffeur, also in the same attitude; Burke, the butler, near by, his face ashen; Doctor Levene on his knees beside a prostrate body that hulked long and large; and, a little apart from the group, a stockily built, capable-looking man who stood with hands in his pockets, face grave and eyes observant.

When Parker and Nixie and those following rushed in, then stopped under the spell of tense silence that rested upon the room, the stranger glanced up. He nodded to Parker; then he tiptoed over to him.

Parker's dark face had blanched and set and hardened. "What has happened, Jowett?" he asked very low and through tight lips.

"He'll tell us in a minute," the other answered in a whisper.

"How came you to be here?"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I'll tell you later."

Meanwhile the chauffeur had joined Nixie; his face was fiery red; his was perhaps the only face in the room that had not blanched. She looked up at him; her excitement had quieted and her straight brows were knit in tense questioning. "What is he doing to him?" she demanded in a whisper.

"Making an examination," he answered thickly. He continued to stand beside her while she stared at Doctor Levene's bent back and moving hands. They all waited. The servants were crowding in, and they also stood arrested. The man beside Parker was the only person in the room whose gaze was not fixed on the doctor and the prostrate body; his eyes roved over the room, passed from face to face. He studied Parker's hard-set expression as keenly as any other. Parker had folded his arms and was standing motionless, head a little bent, eyes intent beneath slightly lowered brows.

Doctor Levene lifted, finally, then rose to his feet. He was very white, save for the vivid spots of color on his cheek-bones. He ran his eye over the group, then, though evidently quivering with excitement, he spoke slowly and evenly and without a trace of his usual affected manner:

"I wish I could say something else—but—he is dead. . . . He died of hydrocyanic poisoning. Traces of the poison are in his mouth and on his lips. And, there, on the desk, is the bottle of hydrocyanic, uncorked—and the glass with some drops of the poison

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

in it. . . . Death must have come almost instantly —and I judge that he took the poison only a few minutes ago, certainly within the last twenty minutes."

When he concluded, there was a universal caught breath, like a great sigh. Then, in the silence that followed, a man's excited voice demanded, "What's happened? What's *happened?* . . . Oh, my *Lord!*"

It was Driscoll who had burst in upon the hush, in his pajamas, his hair disheveled, his look wild. At sight of his uncle's motionless body, his arms lifted in a dramatic gesture and he stood for a full moment petrified and staring. Then his arms dropped and he buried his face in his crooked elbow and wept like a child. Perhaps he was not sober, at any rate he was completely unmanned.

It may have been his audible weeping that brought on Mrs. Moreton's hysteria. She suddenly fell across the desk in a convulsion of shrieks and frantic laughter, clutching and slipping to the floor as Doctor Levene sprang to catch her. Count Gansingen, who was nearest, helped to lift her and hold her, for she struggled violently, shrieking over and over again, "He has killed himself! He has killed himself—" Von Betler came forward, and Mrs. Insmann, and they succeeded in holding her while Doctor Levene drew from his pocket a physician's case and gave her a hypodermic. Either her hysteria quickly merged into stupor or the opiate was powerful, for she soon relaxed into moaning, and then into silence. They carried her to the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

couch and Mrs. Insmann sat beside her. She had not lost her presence of mind, but Mrs. von Betler was weeping and wringing her hands.

Parker had not moved. He had continued to stand with arms folded. He had looked at Doctor Levene while the latter was speaking; he had glanced at them as they worked over Mrs. Moreton, but most of the time he was looking at Nixie and the chauffeur. Holt stood close to the girl, and from the time she had entered the room he seemed unconscious of any other presence; he never moved his eyes from her white set face. Holt's own face had paled; he looked gray now, in spite of his tan.

Nixie had stood very erect. She had stared at the doctor while he made his examination, eyed him narrowly while he made his announcement, and she had turned and looked at the group collected about Mrs. Moreton; but she had made no movement toward them, had not offered her help. Instead, she went to Moreton, who had been forsaken for the moment, and knelt beside him. She looked at him for a long moment, then covered his poor distorted face with her little handkerchief. She did not weep and she said not a word; her face was as set and white as marble.

And she continued to kneel beside the body. She looked like a child as she knelt there, a little thing with curls escaping from the loosened ribbon at the back of her neck. But her face was not that of a child, nor her eyes a child's eyes, for they traveled

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

about the room, observantly; watched the group bearing Mrs. Moreton to the couch, then settled intently on the man whom Parker had called "Jowett." This man was now deftly examining the desk, the small unlabeled and uncorked bottle which was a quarter full of liquid, and the glass in which were a few drops, and the pitcher nearly filled with water. He examined closely the chair which was thrust back from the desk and also the floor near the desk and the rug upon which Moreton lay.

But when he bent and lifted the handkerchief from Moreton's face, Nixie caught his hand. "You're a stranger—what are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I have Mr. Parker's permission," he answered, and she instantly dropped his hand.

While they were busied over Mrs. Moreton, the man had said something to Parker, and, after a slight hesitation, Parker had nodded. Then the man had set to work. When Doctor Levene left Mrs. Moreton and turned toward them, Jowett was rising from his inspection of the body.

Doctor Levene's brows lifted in surprise. "Who are you?" he asked. "You don't belong in this house."

The man looked at him meaningly. "My name is Jowett—I was in Mr. Moreton's employ. I happened to be on the grounds when the alarm was given. I have Mr. Parker's permission."

The doctor's look cleared. "Oh, I see!" he said quickly. "I'm glad you're here, Mr. Jowett. Of course

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. Parker is in charge here, as Mrs. Moreton's representative. . . . Mr. Parker, will you suggest what we shall do next? The coroner must be notified —of course." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow and his hands, and it was evident that his self-control was breaking; for a nervous effeminate man he had borne himself exceedingly well. "This—this fearful thing has about bowled me over," he said thickly. "That was a quick passing—he must have been irresponsible for the moment. It's—I'm terribly sorry—" His voice failed him and he turned away.

"Who found my uncle?" Driscoll asked abruptly. "I was in bed when some one pounded on my door and said Uncle Mathew had killed himself." He had recovered from his fit of weeping; he was certainly quite sober now, deadly pale and red-eyed, but calm.

The doctor turned and spoke with greater steadiness. "It was Burke who told us; he said Miss Allen had sent him. I was on the veranda with Mrs. Moreton and Count Gansingen, sitting close to the library window, when we were startled by seeing the library door burst open and Miss Allen running through the library. The next moment Burke came out to us. When I ran in here, Holt and Miss Allen were trying to lift the body."

"*You* found him, Nixie!" Driscoll said with peculiar emphasis.

They were all looking at her, and she rose slowly and faced them, looked at them in a wide-eyed reso-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

lute way, then fixed her eyes on Parker, and addressed him. "Yes, it was Har—Holt and I who found him." She had stumbled over the chauffeur's name and was momentarily confused. Then she went on steadily: "Holt wanted to see Mr. Moreton about something, and I brought him in. The door was a little open, but I didn't notice at first—only that the room was dim, just the reading light burning. I didn't see him the first time I looked in. . . . Afterward, I opened the door wider and we came into the room, and then we saw that Mr. Moreton was lying on the floor by the desk—as if he had fallen from his chair. . . . And we couldn't tell what was the matter till I turned on the lights. . . . When we saw his face . . . I thought it must be a fit—but he wouldn't speak—and —Holt said he wasn't breathing—and I ran out through the library—and Burke was in the dining-room—and I told him to get Doctor Levene. . . . Then I ran back and we, Holt and I, tried to lift him up—and Doctor Levene and the others came in and he made us put him down. . . . And then I ran for you, Mr. Parker." She had spoken with pauses toward the end, maintaining steadiness with the greatest difficulty. Her determined self-control was remarkable.

Almost at her first word Parker had lost his air of merely an observant onlooker. The moment she finished he spoke, and with decision: "As Doctor Levene has said, it devolves on Driscoll Moreton and myself to take charge here—until we can learn Mrs. More-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

ton's wishes. . . . Miss Allen has told us what we all wanted to know. If Mr. Moreton's chauffeur had come on his errand a few minutes earlier, possibly this tragedy might have been averted. But it happened otherwise, and now we must endeavor to help in every way possible a family who are in deep distress. I beg you—and I know Driscoll Moreton seconds me in the request—I beg of you all to be calm. A man whom we all respected, and whom many of us loved, has left us. We are shocked and grief-stricken, but let us avoid excitement. Things in this room must remain just as they are until after the coroner's inquest, which is usual in such cases." Parker paused and looked about him, at the silent group and at the collection of servants. "Can any of you tell me where the nearest coroner lives?"

There was silence for a moment; then a voice at the door said, "I think, sir, there's a coroner at Fulton. Mr. Crane, I think 'is name is, sir." It was the butler, Burke, who had spoken.

"Fulton is at the far end of the county," Parker objected. "There are three coroners for the county. . . . Jowett, do you—?"

"There is a coroner at Ford's Landing, and he must be the nearest," Doctor Levene interrupted. "But I don't know his name."

"The telephone will help us to that," Parker answered. "Driscoll, you and Mr. Jowett and Holt and myself must remain and assist Doctor Levene, for

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mrs. Moreton must be carried to her room. I think Burke had better take two of the maids and go up at once and see that Mrs. Moreton's room is in readiness, then give Doctor Levene any assistance he requires. Miss Allen, will you see that matters are attended to up there?" He raised his voice slightly. "And the rest of you, please go quietly to your rooms. We want no confusion or excitement in the house—its master has gone to rest and its mistress is ill."

He was obeyed. But Von Betler, before he led his wife away, said to Parker, "I suppose we must remain until after the inquest. If there is any possible thing my wife and I can do, please let us be of assistance." He looked haggard and distressed, and spoke feelingly.

"Yes, no one must leave until after the inquest," Parker answered. "I'll call on you, Mr. von Betler—if I need help."

"It's a fearful thing," Von Betler said, his voice not altogether steady. He turned away abruptly and went out with his wife.

Count Gansingen came to Parker for a moment. He appeared more self-controlled than Von Betler, but he also looked pale and distressed. "It is mysterious and terrible—a man at the height of his success to take his life! Please if there is anything I can do, give me the opportunity of helping."

Parker thanked him, then turned to his duties. "Doctor, will you call the coroner? That's your province."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"No, you do it," Levene returned. "It will take time and I must look after Mrs. Moreton."

"Very well."

Driscoll and Holt and Jowett, with Doctor Levene in attendance, carried Mrs. Moreton up-stairs, and Parker was left alone in the study.

He surveyed the room alertly for a few moments, the windows, the floor, the door into the library. Then he went swiftly to the body, knelt beside it, removed Nixie's handkerchief and looked closely at Moreton's features; parted his thick hair and examined his head, then his throat and his wrists and his hands. He drew up the shirt-sleeves and examined the arms, as far up as he could, then drew the sleeves down again and replaced Nixie's handkerchief. He worked deftly and rapidly and did not disturb the position of the body. Then he examined the uncorked and labelless bottle on the desk, took up the cork, which lay near by, smelled it, paused a moment, then put the cork back in exactly the position it had occupied. He also scrutinized the paper which lay under the reading-light, a somewhat lengthy memorandum upon which Moreton had evidently been working.

Then, in the same swift, purposeful way, he went into the library and telephoned.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

IX

SUSPICIONS AND A CONVICTION

PARKER was still at the telephone when Jowett and Holt returned; Driscoll was not with them. Holt stood near the hall door, as if waiting for orders, and Jowett walked about, glanced into the study, went to the windows giving on the veranda, looked out, and finally strolled into the hall.

When Parker had finished telephoning, Jowett turned toward the library. "When is the coroner coming?" he asked.

"In the morning—half past eight," Parker answered. "He has to get his jury together—then they'll motor over." He turned to the chauffeur. "Holt, will you kindly be on hand early in the morning—we shall want the car."

"Yes, sir," Holt answered and went out quickly, as if glad to escape. His heavy face still looked gray.

Then Parker asked Jowett, "Where is Driscoll?"

"He went to his room, Mr. Parker. He looks all in—I guess he's doing some thinking, like the rest of us." He spoke in an alert, somewhat tense way.

"Come into the study," Parker said.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He led the way in, then paused in surprise, for Nixie was there. She was covering Moreton's body with a robe taken from the couch. When Parker came in, she stood up, but said nothing, simply looked at him. Shock and strain were plainly visible upon her; she was tremulous.

Parker's quick eye had circled the study, but he did not ask her how she had entered. She had certainly not come by way of the library, and none of the study windows gave on the veranda, and the first floor of this wing of the house stood high; some ten feet from the ground.

Parker simply said, "Why, Miss Allen . . . I meant to do that. You ought not to be here—you have gone through too much already."

"I came to ask you something," she answered.

"Yes?" he returned kindly.

"What time will the coroner come to-morrow?"

"At half past eight."

She considered for a moment, then asked anxiously, "What will he do?"

"He will hold the usual inquest—ask us all what we know of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Moreton's death, then, if possible, determine the cause."

"I thought so—" she said slowly, and then, with a touch of appeal, "And will you stay in this room, or close by, to-night?"

"Yes, that was my intention. . . . But why do you ask?" Parker said gravely. Jowett, his hands

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

thrust deep in his trousers pockets, was eying the two keenly.

"Because this was his room," Nixie answered. "His papers are on the desk—and"—she looked away from him, trying to steady her quivering lips— "I know Mr. Moreton wanted you to look after his affairs—if he should die—even little things."

"I intend to look after them," Parker said. "So don't worry, Miss Nixie. . . . Won't you go to your room now and try to rest?" He spoke with great gentleness and he had come close to her.

Nixie gave him a swift upward glance charged with doubt and anxiety. "Yes—I'll go. . . . Thank you," she said, and drew away from him. Then, as if moved by impulse, she turned suddenly and offered her hand to Jowett. "Thank you for helping tonight," she said rapidly. "I've heard Mr. Moreton speak of you. You know how fine he was. He was a good father to me—always."

Jowett jerked his hand from his pocket and clasped hers. She let her hand lie in his long enough for him to look into her tear-dimmed eyes. Then she drew it away and hurried out through the library.

Jowett stared after her, his lips slightly parted, and for a few moments Parker watched his surprise and absorption. Then he asked, "Well, Jowett?"

The man started and turned. "A hell of a note—it looks to me! . . . Who is this Miss Allen?"

"A ward of Moreton's—she's lived with them since

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

she was a child," Parker said quietly. "But what brought you out here, Jowett?"

Jowett plunged his hands back into his pockets. Parker knew that attitude meant stirred feeling; once or twice before he had seen Jowett under the stress of emotion. "*He* sent for me," he answered. "Telephoned in at six o'clock—said he had a job for me that would take me out West, that might take weeks, and wanted to know if I was free to give all my time to it. He told me to get the nine o'clock out—that when the house quieted down, at half past eleven, he'd come out and have a talk with me, and that meantime I might amuse myself by keeping watch on the house and the grounds. . . . He laughed when he said that, like that part of it was a joke. . . . I caught the nine o'clock, got up here from the station at twenty to eleven and hung about. Then I ran into *this!*" He nodded toward Moreton's still form. There was decided feeling in his voice, distress and something akin to anger.

"Yes—" Parker said and drew a long breath. "Poor Moreton—"

"Have you any idea why he sent for me?" Jowett asked.

Parker remembered what Moreton had said about setting Jowett to work on Nixie's parentage. And the memorandum on the desk was evidently a list of instructions designed for him. Jowett was a detective who worked alone; Moreton had frequently

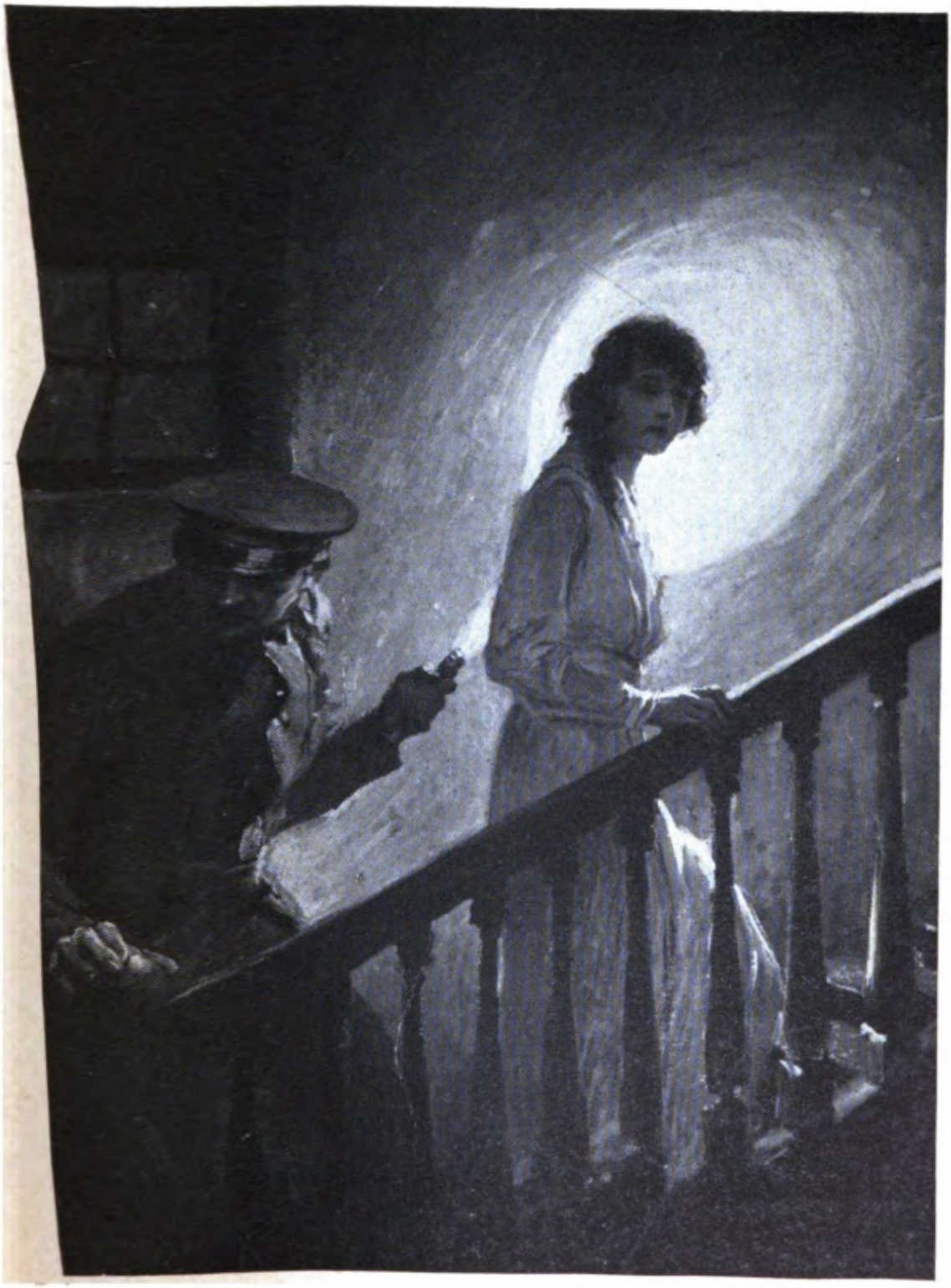
Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

employed him, and so had Parker, for, like Moreton, he had a high opinion of Jowett's acumen and his discretion; he was clever and he was honest, he was not to be bought. It was exactly the sort of thing Moreton would put into Jowett's hands.

But, for reasons of his own, Parker did not impart his conclusion. He shook his head. "Moreton said nothing to me about sending for you." His manner was reserved to the extent of being provocative, perhaps intentionally so.

Jowett eyed him. "You guess, but you won't tell," he said shrewdly though not aggressively. "Well, I don't know why he sent for me, but I do know that you're appointed to look after Moreton's interests, and I've got something to tell you. I'll get it off my chest as briefly as possible, for I judge I've got a busy night before me: I told you I was hanging around out there for three-quarters of an hour? Well, I'd circled the house a couple of times when this Miss Allen came out by the front door and made for the garage. That husky chauffeur was there and the two talked in whispers for a time. I took them for a pair of lovers who were too serious for any spooning. Then the chauffeur went into the room that opens off the garage, his bedroom, I judge. He turned on the light, so I saw what he was doing—he took something white from a satchel and put it into his pocket. . . . Then they came to the house, and, because they came cautiously, with a lookout for any one that might be

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



"I saw them going up a flight of stairs at the end of the passage"

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

about, I followed them. Miss Allen, in the account she gave, didn't mention how they got in here—she left us to infer that they came in by that door," and the detective pointed to the door into the library.

"But they didn't," he continued. "There is an entrance into the basement, below this room, which wouldn't be noticed from the outside because of the bushes. The veranda runs across the library, but not so far as this room, and the corner made by the veranda and the basement wall is filled with tall shrubbery that hides the door. . . . Well, Mrs. Moreton and the two men were on the veranda, just as the doctor said, and Miss Allen and the chauffeur took such pains to avoid being seen from above that I got interested. The door below opens into a passageway, and I followed them in. It was not lighted, but the chauffeur had a flashlight, and I saw them going up a flight of stairs at the end of the passage. They made as little noise as possible, and after they reached the top I couldn't hear a sound, though I came as far as the foot of the stairs. I stopped there, for I didn't know just what to do. The girl had come out the front way and I knew by the look of her that she was no servant. What she and the chauffeur were sneaking in that way for, I couldn't imagine, unless she was taking him to her room. Anyway, I thought best not to go up the stairs—besides, in fifteen minutes or so Moreton would be out looking for me.

"But I hung around the passage, against the time

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Moreton would be out, when, all of a sudden, some rays of light struck across the top of the stairs and the next minute there was a commotion. I came up then and found myself in a long carpeted passage which had a boxed stairway at the end, evidently going to the floor above this, and an opening into this room, that window over there which is curtained like a window and looks like one, but is really a door—it's hinged like a door and swings into this room. It stood open and the light I'd seen came from it. When I came in, this room was glaring, all the lights on, and the people you saw when you ran in were collected about a body on the floor—Moreton, lying here by the desk. Nobody noticed me. I closed the door by which I'd come and stood where you saw me when you came in with Miss Allen. Just as I came into the room I saw Miss Allen run out through the library, going for you, I suppose." The detective had talked rapidly and toward the end, as he noted Parker's impassive face, with a certain sharpness and insistence.

When he finished, Parker nodded. "What you've told me confirms what Miss Allen said."

Jowett's brows lifted. "She didn't mention the window-door, and she said nothing about the interval of twenty-five minutes. I know just when they entered the house, for I looked at my watch before I followed them in—I didn't want to keep Moreton waiting. And I know to a minute when I entered this

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

room, for one of the first things I did was to look at my watch."

Parker frowned slightly. "It's natural enough, her not going into details, Jowett—she wouldn't want to call attention to a friendship with the chauffeur. And there's evidently no mystery about that window-door, for she came in that way only a few minutes ago. I think it was just as she said: Holt had some sort of a request to make of Moreton and she undertook to help him through with it. Miss Allen was devoted to Moreton and he to her; if she backed a request Holt had to make, Moreton would have granted it. He may have got into some speeding mess, for all we know."

"And that twenty-five minutes?" Jowett asked dryly.

"I dare say there's a perfectly good explanation for that interval—they may have gone up-stairs first, we can't tell." He sighed impatiently. "But all that's a secondary matter! What in heaven's name made Moreton do this mad thing!"

"Are you asking my opinion?" Jowett said with a flash of the eye. "I've never known a lawyer yet who found it easy to be candid!"

"If you have an opinion that's not founded on mere sensational conjecture, I'm willing enough to hear it!" Parker retorted icily.

Jowett was not quelled by his manner. "I have a conviction, Mr. Parker—a very decided conviction."

"About what?"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Mathew Moreton's death."

"Have you? Explain what you mean."

Jowett's face had hardened into stubborn lines. "I will, Mr. Parker: I'm convinced that this was no suicide."

"You think it was an accident?"

Jowett's patience suddenly forsook him. "Accident! *No!*" he said with sudden heat. "It was *murder!* A cold-blooded, wilful *murder*—and you're just as certain of it as I am!"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

X

PARKER IS POLITIC

AFTER Jowett's declaration that Moreton had been murdered and that Parker was certain of it, there was a pronounced silence which lasted through several minutes, during which Parker looked steadily into the detective's angry eyes.

Then Parker said, "Sit down, Jowett, and let's talk this over. . . . You're wrong about my being certain this was murder. I did consider it until I ran over in my mind all the circumstances and applied to them a few facts which you don't know. Besides, I never let first ideas run away with me. . . . I am one of the executors of Moreton's estate, and am, of course, acting for his heirs. You have made a very serious statement and I should not be doing my duty if I didn't listen to all you have to say on the subject. I know you to be a sensible man and on the square—now tell me just what you think, just what you have discovered—mention names if you want to—our talk shall be strictly confidential. . . . Now go ahead." Parker's manner was grave enough, but not antagonistic.

"I am on the square," Jowett answered with a touch

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

of feeling. "I have just as strong a sense of justice as any other right-minded man. I knew Mathew Moreton—his kind don't suicide. He was a good sort, was Moreton, and if any one has done him bad, I'd like to send him—or her—to the chair for it. Besides, I'd like to pull off a big thing like this. . . . You know, Mr. Parker, in my business, I go a lot on instinct. The moment I came into this room I had the *feeling;* and when I saw Moreton's face I was certain. That man died *fighting*. Didn't you notice his expression? His face was set in a look of fury. . . . Now, you can see, from the position of the desk, against this end wall, that, when seated and looking over papers, his back would be turned to that window-door. The way in which his chair was thrust back and the position of his body after he fell indicate that he was seated back to that window-door and, probably, with head bent forward over those papers on the desk—"

"And also with his back to the library door," Parker interrupted.

Jowett made an impatient gesture. "Yes, of course, he sat with his back to the whole room. . . . Now, it would not be a difficult matter for a man and a cool-headed woman—it would be possible for one man alone, provided he was strong and skilful—to pinion Moreton from behind, cover his mouth with a cloth, get a pressure on his throat with the cloth held in such a way as to protect the throat from finger-marks, and pour some drops of that dope into his mouth. It takes

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

an awful short time for that stuff to act. When it did, he would slip to the floor without any assistance of theirs. The few drops poured into the glass and the bottle placed on the table would be a still easier matter."

Jowett expected an incredulous comment. Instead, Parker asked quietly, "You think then that one man, alone, could have managed it?"

"It's possible," the detective said, "if the man was unusually strong and skilful and had a cool head. You remember the Powell case? A towel and a bottle of poison. But both Powell and his assassin bore marks of a struggle—Powell's assassin hadn't quite strength enough to cope with his victim. Of course a man attacking from behind has the advantage."

"I saw you examine the throat and wrists; did you find any suspicious marks?" Parker asked in the same quiet way.

"No—but I made only the briefest examination. . . . Mr. Parker, I'm not making any accusations, but this can so easily be murder. There ought to be an investigation—I think the circumstances justify it. I want to examine Moreton's body more thoroughly. I want to find where that bottle and its contents came from; I want to search this room; I want to explore that passage out there and find where that boxed stairway leads to; I want to investigate that husky chauffeur, hunt up his record, and I want to know where those two were during that twenty minutes when I

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

couldn't hear a sound; and, most of all, *I want to get at the motive any one would have for doing such a thing!*"

"You have a fixed idea and many 'wants,'" Parker said with a touch of sarcasm. "You have stated your conviction and your reasons for it, now let me have my say. You rely on your 'instinct,' and I rely equally on my judgment of character. I am certain that Miss Allen loved Mathew Moreton—she just told us that he had been a devoted father to her—and I don't believe Holt is a criminal sort. I feel sure that those two can satisfactorily account for that interval, which, to my mind, is the only thing that tells against them. And I know the following facts: Moreton was violently loyal, intensely pro-Ally and fighting American. His wife is a pacifist and one or two of her guests at dinner last night were of that persuasion. Moreton was queerly dramatic over it. He proposed a patriotic toast, spoke for some length with intense feeling, practically denounced his wife's guests, and then came off in here after giving the butler a peremptory order to bring him a glass and a pitcher of water. It was a queer scene and impressed everybody. Mrs. Moreton said blankly, 'But what has come over him—?' and Doctor Levene, her physician, answered, 'You knew that he was particularly excited and distressed to-day, and yet you refused to drink his toast.' And she answered in great agitation, 'Oh, I know, but I don't see why he went on like that—against everybody. He

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

must have lost his mind.' And Driscoll Moreton remarked to me later, 'There's been another row this afternoon, I suppose. He's simply brooded over Aunt Lilian's silly pacifism until he's off his head.' I don't go so far as to agree with Mrs. Moreton and Driscoll, but I think it a possible explanation. I have known too many financiers, Jowett, who, for apparently no adequate reason, have retired to their rooms and put an end to themselves. Moreton was a terribly hard worker, and this last week he's been hustling about in heat that's been enough to prostrate any man. His kind do break sometimes, very unexpectedly and curiously. . . . I am telling you all this because it's best to look on all sides of this case, and not run away with a fixed idea."

It was not like Everitt Parker to give information, but the scene at dinner would be public property in a few hours, and he had decided that the explanation he had given would be the one given by Mrs. Moreton and her guests: a sudden and inexplicable brain-storm. And he also had his own reasons for emphasizing the probability of suicide.

Jowett had listened with keen interest, but his air was as resolute as ever. "It's possible," he said without conviction, "but surely, if there is cause for doubt, any chance that Moreton met with foul play, his wife, and you, as executor, would not oppose an investigation? If there are suspicious circumstances, you would want them cleared up?"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Parker had been thinking steadily. He had considered and had decided upon his course. He had forgotten nothing; every circumstance, every unexpected development, all his secret knowledge, he had weighed and considered. And he had given tense thought to Jowett's determined attitude. Parker remembered his own first important case—all hell would not have stopped him or have swerved him. Jowett was an ambitious man. He was also a clever detective, and he was animated by a very real liking for Mathew Moreton. It would never do to antagonize Jowett; he was bound to ferret, let him ferret unmolested.

"You have a perfect right to your conviction," Parker answered gravely. "There will, of course, be the inquest, and any information you can bring to it will be important. If there is a possibility of foul play, of course the heirs will want to know it, and I'd want to know it. You have your suspicions and your conviction, and I feel that you ought to be given every opportunity to investigate, now, before the inquest. Mrs. Moreton's not in a condition to give you permission, but I think I'm quite within my rights in saying, 'Go ahead and make every discovery you can.' . . . But, Jowett, you know as well as I that an accusation, even the statement of a suspicion, is a mighty serious thing." He ended a trifle sternly.

"I know all that," Jowett said. His mental comment was, "Lawyer to the backbone, but dead afraid I'm right. The chauffeur's not the only man who's inter-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

ested in that girl—and little wonder, if she looks at every man as she looked at me."

"Very well," Parker returned. "Now, what can I do to help you? You want the run of the house—you can take my room to-night, if you want to? I shall get my bag and camp out there in the library."

Jowett considered a moment. "Yes, I'll take your room—I want a chance to get about up-stairs. I'll be stirring about here in the study, too, part of the time."

"Come on up with me then—but first let me see whether we can lock this place."

Parker went to the window-door, found a key in the lock and turned it. He next examined the door into the library and found that it also had a key. "That's all right," he said. "You can have the keys and go in when you want to."

As they left the room, Jowett said, "There's one question I'd like to ask—is Miss Allen one of Moreton's heirs?"

Parker's answer was prompt. "I can't say as to that. I know he was attached to her—he has probably made some sort of provision for her."

"I should judge so," Jowett returned.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

XI

JOWETT MAKES A DISCOVERY

PARKER and Jowett went up to Parker's room. Parker secured his bag, unlocked it and thrust into it a book that was lying on the bed, then locked it again.

"I'll leave you now," he said. "I want to see Driscoll a minute, then I'll go down."

Jowett had glanced about the room, then had watched Parker lock his bag. "I'd like to see him too," he remarked. "It was like a stage frame-up—the way he came in down there in the study."

"Very well—come with me then."

They found Driscoll seated by one of the windows in his room, slouched in a big chair, head hung, and with the same disordered look about him which he had worn when he had appeared in the study; he was still in his pajamas.

"How are you?" Parker asked. "I thought I'd see how you were, before I turned in."

"I'm right enough," Driscoll answered tonelessly. He straightened somewhat and the movement made him catch his breath.

"What's wrong with your hand?" Jowett asked quickly.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Driscoll's hand and wrist were wrapped in a towel. Driscoll looked down at it. "It's strained," he said. "I'll get Levene to look after it, by and by—I've got a wet towel around it."

"Let me see it," Jowett offered. "Perhaps I can do something for it." Parker understood the eagerness the detective could not altogether eliminate from his voice. He himself was galvanized by sudden interest.

Jowett dropped on his knees beside Driscoll and began to unwrap the towel; Parker stood over them. "Take care!" Driscoll said through his teeth. "It hurts!"

His hand and his wrist and his arm were badly swollen. And his hand was scratched. "How did you do that?" Jowett asked. "Your other hand's scratched too."

"I don't know—exactly," Driscoll answered without raising his eyes. "I was drunk after dinner—had had a good deal in the afternoon and then wine at dinner," —he glanced up at Parker—"then that whisky—it was that finished me. . . . I fell when I got to my room, I suppose—anyway, I didn't notice I was hurt until we lifted Aunt Lilian; then I saw my arm was no good."

One of Driscoll Moreton's characteristics was an almost reprehensible candor, but now, neither his manner nor his words were candid. He had a shamed

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

look, and there also hung about him the indifference of wretchedness.

There was a moment's silence, then Jowett said, "I don't see how you ever managed to get out of your clothes, with a wrist like that?" He spoke in the mild tone one employs when bent upon eliciting information from an unsuspecting child.

A little of the flippancy usual with Driscoll Moreton tinged his answer. "Oh, I'd dress and undress accurately enough, even when too drunk to remember whether I'd simply scrapped with somebody or been beaten up for trying to kiss a girl." Jowett did not know Driscoll, but Parker did; the speech was very like him, and it was also the truth.

"You've got a bad arm there," Jowett continued. "The doctor ought to tend to it right away."

"He'll be along," Driscoll said indifferently. "He's fussing over Aunt Lilian just now."

"I'm going to get him," Jowett persisted. "You oughtn't to let that go. It must hurt like the devil." Parker had no doubt that Jowett greatly desired to invade Mrs. Moreton's privacy; the man was insatiable.

"Get him if you want to! I don't care what you do!" Driscoll exclaimed with sudden impatience. "I'm not thinking about my *arm*—all I want is to be let alone!"

Jowett seized upon the permission and hastened out.

Driscoll's flash of irritation was also very characteristic, but the way in which he looked up at Parker,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

as soon as Jowett had disappeared, and what he said were not like the Driscoll Moreton Parker knew. "I'm done!" he said. "I've drunk the last drop of that stuff I'm going to! Katie, the chambermaid, came in here a few minutes ago with some brandy and begged me to take it, and I wouldn't. Katie's a good sort—she brought me this wet towel. . . . I made my vow, down there in the study. I wish I'd listened to him when he was living. I've been thinking, sitting here alone, of what a beast I've been. No wonder a decent girl won't have anything to do with me!" His eyes filled with tears. "And the last thought I had of him was an ugly one—I wished I had some of his money. I went up-stairs thinking that—with that damned whisky burning me up! . . . I'll sit here and give it to myself till the man he wanted me to be gets so worked into my marrow that I'll walk straight—from this night on." He was unstrung, yet there was a substrata of profound feeling and resolution beneath his emotion.

Parker had his own thoughts, but all he said was, "Your uncle would be glad to hear you say that."

"Perhaps he does hear me," Driscoll returned.

Jowett came in then. "Doctor Levene says he can't leave Mrs. Moreton just now, but he'll come as soon as he can."

"Yes, he and his little black bag," Driscoll said contemptuously; then with weary indifference, "I'm much obliged." His sudden change of tone was prob-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

ably meant to cover his emotion; he kept his face turned from Jowett.

"You had better go to bed," Parker said.

"No. I told you—I'm going to sit here till morning. It'll be the best thing I ever did for myself." His voice was husky again.

Parker motioned Jowett out and they went to the head of the stairs together, but Parker made no reference to what Jowett must consider an important discovery, not even when Jowett said, "I know a reporter who knows Driscoll Moreton—he told me whisky had a queer effect on him. He said, too, that Driscoll was always broke and wanting money—he told me a lot about Driscoll Moreton. . . . He spoke of him as 'Mathew Moreton's heir.'"

"Whisky intoxicates Driscoll—as it does most people," Parker returned equably. "But Driscoll's a good sort, nevertheless. . . . Here are the keys to the study, Jowett. I'm going to get a couple of hours' sleep on the library divan, sometime before morning—I propose to have a clear head for to-morrow's work. You'll prowl about for the remainder of the night, I suppose?"

"I'll not do much sleeping."

"Then will you wake me at daylight? I always sleep on a case, but there's one bad thing about me—I'm never able to wake myself at a given hour, as some people can."

"You can rely on me," Jowett said.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

XII

NO REAL MEETING GROUND

THE sun was shining brightly when Jowett aroused Parker. He sat up and looked about him. "You let me oversleep!" he said sharply.

"I couldn't help myself," the detective answered unperturbed. "I've had my hands full, Mr. Parker."

Parker regarded him gravely, but his momentary annoyance had passed. "You've had an eventful night then? . . . Well, I slept soundly—after I got to sleep. I feel better."

Jowett showed the effects of a sleepless night; he looked unrefreshed, thoughtful and grim. "Yes, I've had plenty to occupy me. . . . I had to hurry down to the station just at daylight, and the trip took me longer than I expected."

"I told you to call on me if there was anything I could do to help you."

"There wasn't anything you could do, Mr. Parker. . . . I'd rather tell my story in sequence, if you don't mind: As soon as I'd parted from you, I overhauled the study and the passage beyond, and the stairs—you probably heard me at it. I found that

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the boxed stairway goes up to a small landing which has only one door, an entrance directly into Moreton's bedroom—one can go up from the study into Moreton's room and through it to the main hall. There's also an up-stairs porch which crosses Moreton's bedroom and the room next to it, which is an unoccupied guest-room, and runs as far as Miss Allen's room. One of her windows opens on it, and there is a door opening from Moreton's bedroom on to the porch. I wanted to examine Moreton's body next, but I had given particular attention to that bottle of poison and its cork, so, when I saw through Miss Allen's window that she was not in her room, I took the opportunity to search it. I was looking for a particular thing and I found it. In her bathroom is a medicine cupboard, and on the top shelf there are a number of empty bottles, the larger ones labeled 'Glycerine' or 'Witch-Hazel,' and several little one-ounce bottles labeled 'Rose-Water,' all from the same New York drug-store. The top shelf is dusty, and I found there a small dust mark where one of those one-ounce bottles had recently stood, and into which that bottle of poison exactly fits. And I also found, in the waste-paper basket, a little ball of paper. I opened it out; it was a label like those on the one-ounce bottles in the cupboard, and marked, 'Rose-Water.' The cork to that one-ounce labelless bottle of poison has an easily distinguishable odor of roses."

Parker had bent over to put on his shoes. He

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

looked up. "That's interesting," he said. "Was the ball of paper wet or dry?"

"Dry on the outside, damp in the center."

"Did you find any trace of a bottle from which the one-ounce bottle might have been filled?"

"No, I didn't find anything else in her room that interested me particularly—but I hadn't much time to give to it. I felt pretty certain that Miss Allen had gone for a talk with the chauffeur, and she might step in on me any moment. . . . Then I went around by Moreton's room and through into the main hall. Mrs. Moreton's apartment is directly across the hall from her husband's; then there are several guest-rooms on her side of the hall. On Moreton's side of the hall are, first his room, next the unoccupied guest-room, then Miss Allen's room, then your room, then Driscoll's. Driscoll's door was open and I went in. The doctor was bandaging his arm. I wanted the doctor—I'd decided that we'd examine Moreton's body together.

"'So you're getting fixed up at last?' I said.

"Driscoll looked sick, he didn't say anything, but the doctor said, 'I've been telling Driscoll that Mr. Moreton's body ought to be examined, more thoroughly than I was able to examine it in those few minutes. Have you examined it?'

"'When we were in the study, not since,' I told him. 'I'd like to have a look over again.'

"Driscoll seems a blunt sort. 'Go ahead and do it,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

you two, if you have any suspicions,' he said. 'To my mind, it's a clear enough case of suicide.' He looked worried though, fairly sick with anxiety. He turned his head away and shut his eyes, and the doctor came out with me. Neither of them asked if I was a detective, but they both knew I was—the doctor understood that as soon as he saw me in the study.

"Well, he went down with me, that back way and in by the window-door, and on the way he said, 'I agree with Driscoll. He and I were talking of the state of excitement in which Mr. Moreton left the dinner table last night. Mr. Moreton was utterly unlike himself during and after that fracas. I'm certain it's suicide, but I want to make a more thorough examination before the inquest. I want to feel really satisfied that there are no marks of violence.'

"I said nothing at all, I didn't even ask him what the 'fracas' was. We set to work, but we'd barely begun when the window-door was pushed open—I hadn't locked it behind us—and Miss Allen came in—"

Parker stopped short in his dressing. "Miss Allen—" he said.

"Yes, Miss Allen. . . . She came up to the desk and stood there. *I* said nothing, but the doctor begged her to leave and she refused pretty curtly. He got scarlet then and let her alone. She stood there throughout the whole thing, just holding on to the desk and looking, her face like chalk and her eyes red. She'd been crying hard and she did look a little thing, young

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

and little and in trouble, but there was a stony look about her, too. She's got grit, hard grain in her, that girl, and *will*. Will enough for anything!"

Jowett paused. Evidently he had been impressed; possibly he expected Parker to say something. But Parker was silent, his face impassive. Jowett continued: "It made me feel queer, her standing there, and it upset the doctor for a time, his hands shook. He's nervous as a cat; physically he's a whiffet, but he knows his business, that man. He cooled down presently and regularly set to work. He made a good examination—between us we made it thorough, I can tell you."

"And the result?" Parker asked.

"We found no suspicious marks—nothing."

"And Miss Allen?"

"She stood there, holding to the desk, until we had dressed the body, covered it and started to leave. She looked positively ghastly, and I thought she was going to faint, but when we started to go she turned and went out ahead of us, straight up-stairs through Moreton's bedroom and into the main hall, then into her own room, without looking at us or speaking to us. Doctor Levene said to me, 'That's a strange thing for a girl to do—I don't understand her.' It certainly struck me as queer—how do you explain it, Mr. Parker?"

"I hardly think a bad conscience brought her—that wouldn't be correct criminal psychology—not as I

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

have observed it," Parker said dryly. Then with a change of tone, "But affection might have brought her and have held her there."

Jowett considered Parker's answer, then he shrugged. "Well, anyway, we went back up and, after we'd talked for a time—the doctor appears to know a good deal about the Moreton family—he went to Mrs. Moreton's apartment and I went to your room. I stayed there for a while and all the time I was there I could hear Miss Allen in her room, walking the floor—when she wasn't listening at her door to what was going on, just as I was, for no one up there appeared to be sleeping. Von Betler and the count didn't go to bed—they talked together in the count's room for a time, but most of the time Von Betler was with his wife and Mrs. Insmann. Mrs. von Betler was ill and had to have attention, and it was plain Von Betler was worried over her—he seems to be very fond of her. Doctor Levene was in and out, doctoring everybody, as far as I could make out, but most of the time in Mrs. Moreton's room. He told me, when we were talking together, that he'd had 'a tragic time' with Mrs. Moreton—that she'd been 'dangerously near a total collapse,' but was better. He talks like a sissy, but he seems to have a kind heart—he was certainly doing his best for everybody up there, Driscoll included.

"Then, near morning, I came down-stairs and had a look around the first floor and the veranda. In the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

dining-room, I ran into the little butler, Burke. From the look of him, he'd not touched his pillow that night —I believe he was on guard down there—he looked it. I tried to talk with him, but he shut up tight. He's a polite but resolute little Irishman, though he talks cockney English. He said, 'I'm sorry not to answer questions, sir, but I've 'ad no orders to answer questions. Perhaps in the morning, sir, Mr. Driscoll or Mr. Parker will tell me what's my duty—I'm quite ready to do my duty, sir, though there's very little I know about what's happened.'

"I let him be and went out to the garage. I wanted to have a look at the chauffeur. The place wasn't locked and the chauffeur's door was open. I got a surprise then, for at the first glance I saw that he'd flown."

"Holt gone!" Parker exclaimed. "You're sure of that?" His brows had lowered.

"Gone—bag and baggage. . . . It didn't take me long to digest the fact, and then I got the garage telephone and arranged to have him shadowed, if he should turn up in New York. I'd just finished that, when a man came up from the park—he proved to be the head-gardener. He said that about three-quarters of an hour before, Holt had called him out from his cottage by the park gate and had given him a letter addressed to you which the gardener was to deliver at the house. Holt told him he was on his way to the station, that he wanted to catch the next train, and that

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the letter would explain. It seems that the head-gardener can run a car, and Holt told him he better take charge of the garage, for he wouldn't be back, and then he made off, a satchel in each hand. The head-gardener was in something of a stew, considering what had happened here, but I told him just to look after the garage, and I'd bring the letter to you. He thinks he knows of a man who can take Holt's place, so the household won't be without a chauffeur.

"Then we got out a machine and I made for the station, for I had my suspicions. I found that Holt had not taken a ticket there—that he'd not been there at all. Then I came back to the garage and did some more telephoning. That's what made me late, and here's Holt's letter."

Parker took the bulky envelope without comment. In it were a letter to Parker and an enclosed and sealed letter addressed, "For the Coroner."

Parker read Holt's letter to him, put the enclosed letter in his pocket; then handed the open letter to Jowett. "You may as well read it, Jowett."

The letter was in a bold, decided hand, and was correct in form and spelling:

"My dear Mr. Parker:

"As Mrs. Moreton is ill and ought not to be bothered by such matters, I address this to you.

"A month ago, I gave Mr. Moreton notice that I would leave at the end of my month. I secured another position and have to begin my duties at once.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

My new position is some distance away and is a really important position, far more so than the one I have occupied. I have to be on hand to the hour of agreement or I lose it. I was going to tell Mr. Moreton last night that I should be leaving early in the morning.

"Each month Mr. Moreton gave me a sum in advance for garage supplies, etc. I have deducted my wages from the sum and my account for supplies is in the locker in the garage, and, I think, will be found correct.

"I am exceedingly sorry to leave at this time, when the Moreton family are in trouble. It is absolutely necessary for me to reach my new position on time, otherwise I would remain until I could tell the coroner what little I know of Mr. Moreton's death. When I parted from you last night, I hoped I might be able to stay until noon, but I find that if I do stay I shall not be able to make train connections. As I can not appear at the inquest, I am enclosing a statement.

"Please accept my regrets and my sincere distress over what has occurred.

"Respectfully,
"Harry Holt."

Jowett folded the note. "Um—" he said thoughtfully. "He writes like an intelligent, educated man. . . . But it was foolish of him to run. . . . I wonder how the coroner will find—with a material witness decamped after that fashion?"

Parker offered no opinion. He had given close attention to the detective's recital and had decided that Jowett had been unnecessarily minute as to detail and altogether silent as to his deductions. He had evi-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

dently settled upon his course; there was going to be no real meeting ground for them.

Parker had finished his dressing, had put on his coat, and now he settled his collar with decision. His air was energetic. "What the coroner'll do remains to be seen," he said. "I'm going up to my room now and wash up a bit," and he lifted his locked satchel.

Jowett eyed him gravely. "Here are the keys you loaned me," he returned. "There are no traces of my search in there—everything's just as it was."

Parker pocketed the keys. "Very well," he said pleasantly. "I'll see you later then, Jowett."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

XIII

THE BUTLER TAKES A HAND

BARELY had Parker reached his room when he was disturbed by a mild knock on his door.

It proved to be the butler bearing a tray. "It's your breakfast, sir," Burke said. "Mrs. Moreton thought the guests would prefer to breakfast in their rooms."

"Mrs. Moreton is better then, Burke?" Parker asked.

"Yes, sir—very weak, Doctor Levene says, sir, but comin' 'round from the shock and quite herself again."

"That's good."

"I'll set it for you on the table 'ere by the window, sir. There's coffee and toast and eggs and fruit; would you like anything else, sir?"

"No, no, nothing more—though I'll do justice to what you've brought. Strangely enough, I'm hungry."

"Yes, sir—it's something to be sitting down to breakfast with a good conscience, sir. . . . Shall I put your things to rights, sir? The footman's serving across the 'all—I'm looking after the family."

"Across the 'all," referred to the Von Betlers, the count, and Mrs. Insmann. And Burke's remark anent "a good conscience," was curious.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Parker was standing before the mirror, and he studied Burke's reflection. He was not an imposing butler; he was not tall or stout, and he was elderly, rather a small man with a round and, under ordinary circumstances, a rosy face, haloed by beautiful white hair. Though slightly lame, he moved quite nimbly. And, in spite of his cockney lapses, he appeared Irish. If Irish, he was likely to be quick-tempered and impulsive.

"You're Irish, aren't you, Burke?" Parker asked.

"Indeed no, sir!" Burke returned with decision. "I'm *English*—except by my mother, sir—she was Irish."

Parker wanted to say that of course his mother had had some small part in the matter, but it was no time for pleasantry. Burke looked tired and greatly troubled; he had probably come for a purpose.

Parker turned to the table. "Well, we know where your sympathies are then, Burke. If you were a younger man, you'd be at the front."

"Indeed yes, sir! But for Mr. Moreton and this bad leg of mine, I'd be back in England this minute. Mr. Moreton wanted me by him, sir. He says, 'Burke, you stay by me as long as you can. It's not much you can do over there, and I'll see that your nieces' families have money regular so they'll be easy in their minds while their 'usbands and sons go to the front.' And that's what he did, sir—every man of them was free to march."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"You've been some time with Mr. Moreton, then?"

"Ten years, sir—come this autumn. 'Twas Mr. Moreton brought me over from England ten years ago. I was butler to Sir Donald Blair, sir, before that—for twelve years—till he died."

"And I've been connected with Mr. Moreton for six years—that was a terrible thing, last night, Burke."

"It *was*, sir! I've never in my life had a worse turn. It was the surprise of it, partly, sir."

"Then you didn't notice anything unusual about Mr. Moreton when you took him the water last night?"

"No, sir—not what you would call anything unnatural. He seemed moved, though, sir, and I was moved myself, after what 'ad 'appened at dinner, sir. When I set the tray on the desk, he looked up at me so—under his brows—it was a way he 'ad of looking sometimes—and he nodded his head. 'We're well over fifty, Burke,' he says, 'but some day we'll break out. We'll shoulder muskets and make for the front, eh, Burke?' and he laughed in his throat, like."

"And you, Burke—what did you say?" Parker asked gravely.

Burke straightened. "I stood so, sir—and saluted. And he laughed again, and I went out. . . . That's the last I seen of him livin'." Burke's voice faltered somewhat.

"Yes, you appear to be the last person who saw Mr. Moreton alive. . . . You should tell Miss Allen about it, Burke—I imagine it would be a great

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY