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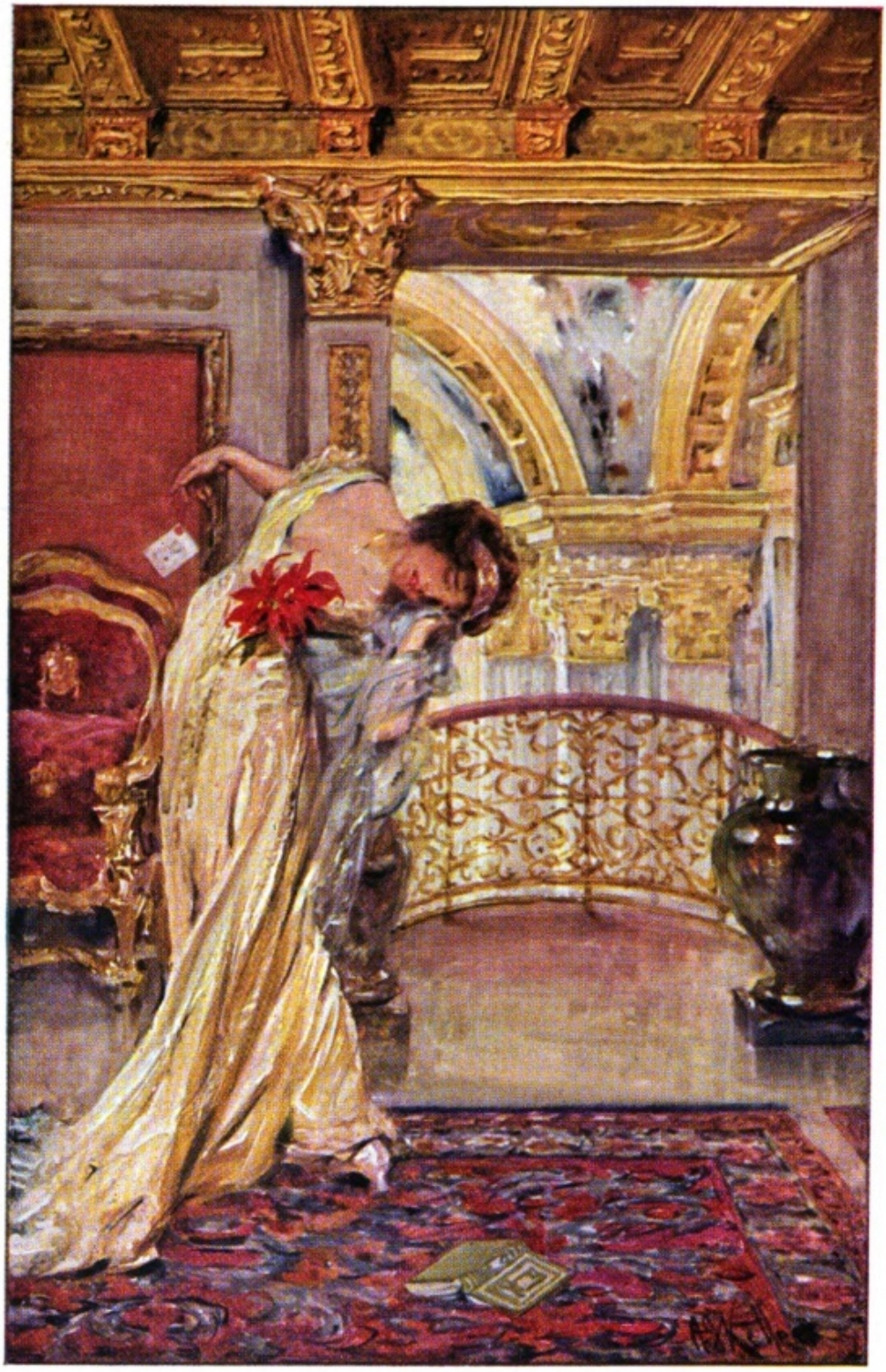

SHE FELL WITH THE LETTER STILL IN HER HAND

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BY

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

AUTHOR OF "THE LEAVENWORTH CASE," "THE FILIGREE BALL,"
"THE HOUSE OF THE WHISPERING PINES," ETC.

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1918

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BOOK I

AS SEEN BY TWO STRANGERS

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I

POINSETTIAS

"A remarkable man!"

It was not my husband speaking, but some passerby. However, I looked up at George with a smile, and found him looking down at me with much the same humour. We had often spoken of the odd phrases one hears in the street, and how interesting it would be sometimes to hear a little more of the conversation.

"That's a case in point," he laughed, as he guided me through the crowd of theatre-goers which invariably block this part of Broadway at the hour of eight. "We shall never know whose eulogy we have just heard. 'A remarkable man!' There are not many of them."

"No," was my somewhat indifferent reply. It was a keen winter night and snow was packed upon the walks in a way to throw into sharp relief the figures of such pedestrians as happened to be walking alone. "But it seems to me that, so far as general appearance goes, the one in front answers your description most admirably."

I pointed to a man hurrying around the corner just ahead of us.

"Yes, he's remarkably well built. I noticed him when he came out of the Clermont." This was a hotel we had just passed.

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"But it's not only that. It's his height, his very striking features, his expression —" I stopped suddenly, gripping George's arm convulsively in a surprise he appeared to share. We had turned the corner immediately behind the man of whom we were speaking and so had him still in full view.

"What's he doing?" I asked, in a low whisper. We were only a few feet behind. "Look! look! don't you call that curious?"

My husband stared, then uttered a low, "Rather." The man ahead of us, presenting in every respect the appearance of a gentleman, had suddenly stooped to the kerb and was washing his hands in the snow, furtively, but with a vigour and purpose which could not fail to arouse the strangest conjectures in any chance onlooker.

"Pilate!" escaped my lips, in a sort of nervous chuckle. But George shook his head at me.

"I don't like it," he muttered, with unusual gravity. "Did you see his face?" Then as the man rose and hurried away from us down the street, "I should like to follow him. I do believe —"

But here we became aware of a quick rush and sudden clamour around the corner we had just left, and turning quickly, saw that something had occurred on Broadway which was fast causing a tumult.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "What can have happened? Let's go see, George. Perhaps it has something to do with our man."

My husband, with a final glance down the street at the fast disappearing figure, yielded to my importunity, and possibly to some new curiosity of his own.

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"I'd like to stop that man first," said he. "But what excuse have I? He may be nothing but a crank, with some crack-brained idea in his head. We'll soon know; for there's certainly something wrong there on Broadway."

"*He* came out of the Clermont," I suggested.

"I know. If the excitement isn't there, what we've just seen is simply a coincidence." Then, as we retraced our steps to the corner—"Whatever we hear or see, don't say anything about this man. It's after eight, remember, and we promised Adela that we would be at the house before nine."

"I'll be quiet."

"Remember."

It was the last word he had time to speak before we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of men and women, jostling one another in curiosity or in the consternation following a quick alarm. All were looking one way, and, as this was towards the entrance of the Clermont, it was evident enough to us that the alarm had indeed had its origin in the very place we had anticipated. I felt my husband's arm press me closer to his side as we worked our way towards the entrance, and presently caught a warning sound from his lips as the oaths and confused cries everywhere surrounding us were broken here and there by articulate words and we heard:

"Is it murder?"

"The beautiful Miss Challoner!"

"A millionairess in her own right!"

"Killed, they say."

"No, no! suddenly dead; that's all."

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"George, what shall we do?" I managed to cry into my husband's ear.

"Get out of this. There is no chance of our reaching that door, and I can't have you standing round any longer in this icy slush."

"But — but is it right?" I urged, in an importunate whisper. "Should we go home while he —"

"Hush! My first duty is to you. We will go make our visit; but to-morrow —"

"I can't wait till to-morrow," I pleaded, wild to satisfy my curiosity in regard to an event in which I naturally felt a keen personal interest.

He drew me as near to the edge of the crowd as he could. There were new murmurs all about us.

"If it's a case of heart-failure, why send for the police?" asked one.

"It is better to have an officer or two here," grumbled another.

"Here comes a cop."

"Well, I'm going to vamoose."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," whispered George, who, for all his bluster was as curious as myself. "We will try the rear door where there are fewer persons. Possibly we can make our way in there, and if we can, Slater will tell us all we want to know."

Slater was the assistant manager of the Clermont, and one of George's oldest friends.

"Then hurry," said I. "I am being crushed here."

George did hurry, and in a few minutes we were before the rear entrance of the great hotel. There

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was a mob gathered here also, but it was neither so large nor so rough as the one on Broadway. Yet I doubt if we should have been able to work our way through it if Slater had not, at that very instant, shown himself in the doorway, in company with an officer to whom he was giving some final instructions. George caught his eye as soon as he was through with the man, and ventured on what I thought a rather uncalled for plea.

"Let us in, Slater," he begged. "My wife feels a little faint; she has been knocked about so by the crowd."

The manager glanced at my face, and shouted to the people around us to make room. I felt myself lifted up, and that is all I remember of this part of our adventure. For, affected more than I realised by the excitement of the event, I no sooner saw the way cleared for our entrance than I made good my husband's words by fainting away in earnest.

When I came to, it was suddenly and with perfect recognition of my surroundings. The small reception room to which I had been taken was one I had often visited, and its familiar features did not hold my attention for a moment. What I did see and welcome was my husband's face bending close over me, and to him I spoke first. My words must have sounded oddly to those about. "Have they told you anything about it?" I asked. "Did he —"

A quick pressure on my arm silenced me, and then I noticed that we were not alone. Two or three ladies stood near, watching me, and one had evidently been using some restorative, for she held a

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small vinaigrette in her hand. To this lady, George made haste to introduce me, and from her I presently learned the cause of the disturbance in the hotel.

It was of a somewhat different nature from what I expected, and during the recital, I could not prevent myself from casting furtive and inquiring glances at George.

Edith, the well-known daughter of Moses Challoner, had fallen suddenly dead on the floor of the mezzanine. She was not known to have been in poor health, still less in danger of a fatal attack, and the shock was consequently great to her friends, several of whom were in the building. Indeed, it was likely to prove a shock to the whole community, for she had great claims to general admiration, and her death must be regarded as a calamity to persons in all stations of life.

I realised this myself, for I had heard much of the young lady's private virtues, as well as of her great beauty and distinguished manner. A heavy loss, indeed, but —

"Was she alone when she fell?" I asked.

"Virtually alone. Some persons sat on the other side of the room, reading at the big round table. They did not even hear her fall. They say that the band was playing unusually loud in the musicians' gallery."

"Are you feeling quite well, now?"

"Quite myself," I gratefully replied as I rose slowly from the sofa. Then, as my kind informer stepped aside, I turned to George with the proposal that we should go now.

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He seemed as anxious as myself to leave, and together we moved towards the door, while the hum of excited comment which the intrusion of a fainting woman had undoubtedly interrupted, recommenced behind us till the whole room buzzed.

In the hall we encountered Mr. Slater, whom I have before mentioned. He was trying to maintain order while himself in a state of great agitation. Seeing us, he could not refrain from whispering a few words into my husband's ear.

"The doctor has just gone up — her doctor, I mean. He's simply dumbfounded. Says that she was the healthiest woman in New York yesterday. I think — don't mention it, that he suspects something quite different from heart failure."

"What do you mean?" asked George, following the assistant manager down the broad flight of steps leading to the office. Then, as I pressed up close to Mr. Slater's other side, "She was by herself, wasn't she, in the half floor above?"

"Yes, and had been writing a letter. She fell with it still in her hand."

"Have they carried her to her room?" I eagerly inquired, glancing fearfully up at the large semi-circular openings overlooking us from the place where she had fallen.

"Not yet. Mr. Hammond insists upon waiting for the coroner." (Mr. Hammond was the proprietor of the hotel.) "She is lying on one of the big couches near which she fell. If you like, I can give you a glimpse of her. She looks beautiful. It's terrible to think that she is dead."

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I don't know why we consented. We were under a spell, I think. At all events, we accepted his offer and followed him up a narrow staircase open to very few that night. At the top, he turned upon us with a warning gesture which I hardly think we needed, and led us down a narrow hall flanked by openings corresponding to those we had noted from below. At the furthest one he paused and, beckoning us to his side, pointed across the lobby into the large writing-room which occupied the better part of the mezzanine floor.

We saw people standing in various attitudes of grief and dismay about a couch, one end of which only was visible to us at the moment. The doctor had just joined them, and every head was turned towards him and every body bent forward in anxious expectation. I remember the face of one grey haired old man. I shall never forget it. He was probably her father. Later, I knew him to be so. Her face, even her form, was entirely hidden from us, but as we watched (I have often thought with what heartless curiosity) a sudden movement took place in the whole group — and for one instant a startling picture presented itself to our gaze. Miss Challoner was stretched out upon the couch. She was dressed as she came from dinner, in a gown of ivory-tinted satin, relieved at the breast by a large bouquet of scarlet poinsettias. I mention this adornment, because it was what first met and drew our eyes and the eyes of every one about her, though the face, now quite revealed, would seem to have the greater attraction. But the cause was evident and one not

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to be resisted. The doctor was pointing at these poinsettias in horror and with awful meaning, and though we could not hear his words, we knew almost instinctively, both from his attitude and the cries which burst from the lips of those about him, that something more than broken petals and disordered laces had met his eyes; that blood was there — slowly oozing drops from the heart — which for some reason had escaped all eyes till now.

Miss Challoner was dead, not from unsuspected disease, but from the violent attack of some murderous weapon. As the realisation of this brought fresh panic and bowed the old father's head with emotions even more bitter than those of grief, I turned a questioning look up at George's face.

It was fixed with a purpose I had no trouble in understanding.

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II

"I KNOW THE MAN"

YET he made no effort to detain Mr. Slater, when that gentleman, under this renewed excitement, hastily left us. He was not the man to rush into anything impulsively, and not even the presence of murder could change his ways.

"I want to feel sure of myself," he explained. "Can you bear the strain of waiting around a little longer, Laura? I mustn't forget that you fainted just now."

"Yes, I can bear it; much better than I could bear going to Adela's in my present state of mind. Don't you think the man we saw had something to do with this? Don't you believe —"

"Hush! Let us listen rather than talk. What are they saying over there? Can you hear?"

"No. And I cannot bear to look. Yet I don't want to go away. It's all so dreadful."

"It's devilish. Such a beautiful girl! Laura, I must leave you for a moment. Do you mind?"

"No, no; yet —"

I did mind; but he was gone before I could take back my word. Alone, I felt the tragedy much more than when he was with me. Instead of watching, as I had hitherto done, every movement in the room opposite, I drew back against the wall and hid my eyes, waiting feverishly for George's return.

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He came, when he did come, in some haste and with certain marks of increased agitation.

"Laura," said he, "Slater says that we may possibly be wanted and proposes that we stay here all night. I have telephoned Adela and have made it all right at home. Will you come to your room? This is no place for you."

Nothing could have pleased me better; to be near and yet not the direct observer of proceedings in which we took so secret an interest! I showed my gratitude by following George immediately. But I could not go without casting another glance at the tragic scene I was leaving. A stir was perceptible there, and I was just in time to see its cause. A tall, angular gentleman was approaching from the direction of the musicians' gallery, and from the manner of all present, as well as from the whispered comment of my husband, I recognised in him the special official for whom all had been waiting.

"Are you going to tell *him?*" was my question to George as we made our way down to the lobby.

"That depends. First, I am going to see you settled in a room quite remote from this business."

"I shall not like that."

"I know, my dear, but it is best."

I could not gainsay this.

Nevertheless, after the first few minutes of relief, I found it very lonesome upstairs. The pictures which crowded upon me of the various groups of excited and wildly-gesticulating men and women through which we had passed on our way up, mingled themselves with the solemn horror of the scene

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in the writing-room, with its fleeting vision of youth and beauty lying pulseless in sudden death. I could not escape the one without feeling the immediate impress of the other, and if by chance they both yielded for an instant to that earlier scene of a desolate street, with its solitary lamp shining down on the crouched figure of a man washing his shaking hands in a drift of freshly fallen snow, they immediately rushed back with a force and clearness all the greater for the momentary lapse.

I was still struggling with these fancies when the door opened, and George came in. There was news in his face as I rushed to meet him.

"Tell me — tell," I begged.

He tried to smile at my eagerness, but the attempt was ghastly.

"I've been listening and looking," said he, "and this is all I have learned. Miss Challoner died, not from a stroke or from disease of any kind, but from a wound reaching the heart. No one saw the attack, or even the approach or departure of the person inflicting this wound. If she was killed by a pistol-shot, it was at a distance, and almost over the heads of the persons sitting at the table we saw there. But the doctors shake their heads at the word *pistol-shot*, though they refuse to explain themselves or to express any opinion till the wound has been probed. This they are going to do at once, and when that question is decided, I may feel it my duty to speak and may ask you to support my story."

"I will tell what I saw," said I.

"Very good. That is all that will be required.

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We are strangers to the parties concerned, and only speak from a sense of justice. It may be that our story will make no impression, and that we shall be dismissed with but few thanks. But that is nothing to us. If the woman has been murdered, he is the murderer. With such a conviction in my mind, there can be no doubt as to my duty."

"We can never make them understand how he looked."

"No. I don't expect to."

"Or his manner as he fled."

"Nor that either."

"We can only describe what we saw him do."

"That's all."

"Oh, what an adventure for quiet people like us! George, I don't believe he shot her."

"He must have."

"But they would have seen — have heard — the people around, I mean."

"So they say; but I have a theory — but no matter about that now. I'm going down again to see how things have progressed. I'll be back for you later. Only be ready."

Be ready! I almost laughed,— a hysterical laugh, of course, when I recalled the injunction. Be ready! This lonely sitting by myself, with nothing to do but think was a fine preparation for a sudden appearance before those men — some of them police-officers, no doubt.

But that's enough about myself; I'm not the heroine of this story. In a half hour or an hour — I never knew which — George reappeared, only to

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tell me that no conclusions had as yet been reached; an element of great mystery involved the whole affair, and the most astute detectives on the force had been sent for. Her father, who had been her constant companion all winter, had not the least suggestion to offer in way of its solution. So far as he knew — and he believed himself to have been in perfect accord with his daughter — she had injured no one. She had just lived the even, happy and useful life of a young woman of means, who sees duties beyond those of her own household and immediate surroundings. If, in the fulfillment of those duties, she had encountered any obstacle to content, he did not know it; nor could he mention a friend of hers — he would even say lovers, since that was what he meant — who to his knowledge could be accused of harbouring any such passion of revenge as was manifested in this secret and diabolical attack. They were all gentlemen and respected her as heartily as they appeared to admire her. To no living being, man or woman, could he point as possessing any motive for such a deed. She had been the victim of some mistake, his lovely and ever kindly disposed daughter, and while the loss was irreparable he would never make it unendurable by thinking otherwise.

Such was the father's way of looking at the matter, and I own that it made our duty a trifle hard. But George's mind, when once made up, was persistent to the point of obstinacy, and while he was yet talking he led me out of the room and down the hall to the elevator.

"Mr. Slater knows we have something to say,

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and will manage the interview before us in the very best manner," he confided to me now with an encouraging air. "We are to go to the blue reception room on the parlour floor."

I nodded, and nothing more was said till we entered the place mentioned. Here we came upon several gentlemen, standing about, of a more or less professional appearance. This was not very agreeable to one of my retiring disposition, but a look from George brought back my courage, and I found myself waiting rather anxiously for the questions I expected to hear put.

Mr. Slater was there according to his promise, and after introducing us, briefly stated that we had some evidence to give regarding the terrible occurrence which had just taken place in the house.

George bowed, and the chief spokesman — I am sure he was a police-officer of some kind — asked him to tell what it was.

George drew himself up — George is not one of your tall men, but he makes a very good appearance at times. Then he seemed suddenly to collapse. The sight of their expectation made him feel how flat and childish his story would sound. I, who had shared his adventure, understood his embarrassment, but the others were evidently at a loss to do so, for they glanced askance at each other as he hesitated, and only looked back when I ventured to say:

"It's the peculiarity of the occurrence which affects my husband. The thing we saw may mean nothing."

"Let us hear what it was and we will judge."

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Then my husband spoke up, and related our little experience. If it did not create a sensation, it was because these men were well accustomed to surprises of all kinds.

"Washed his hands — a gentleman — out there in the snow — just after the alarm was raised here?" repeated one.

"And you saw him come out of this house?" another put in.

"Yes, sir; we noticed him particularly."

"Can you describe him?"

It was Mr. Slater who put this question; he had less control over himself, and considerable eagerness could be heard in his voice.

"He was a very fine-looking man; unusually tall and unusually striking both in his dress and appearance. What I could see of his face was bare of beard, and very expressive. He walked with the swing of an athlete, and only looked mean and small when he was stooping and dabbling in the snow."

"His clothes. Describe his clothes." There was an odd sound in Mr. Slater's voice.

"He wore a silk hat and there was fur on his overcoat. I think the fur was black."

Mr. Slater stepped back, then moved forward again with a determined air.

"I know the man," said he.

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III

THE MAN

"You know the man?"

"I do; or rather, I know a man who answers to this description. He comes here once in a while. I do not know whether or not he was in the building to-night, but Clausen can tell you; no one escapes Clausen's eye."

"His name."

"Brotherson. A very uncommon person in many respects; quite capable of such an eccentricity, but incapable, I should say, of crime. He's a gifted talker and so well read that he can hold one's attention for hours. Of his tastes, I can only say that they appear to be mainly scientific. But he is not averse to society, and is always very well dressed."

"A taste for science and for fine clothing do not often go together."

"This man is an exception to all rules. The one I'm speaking of, I mean. I don't say that he's the fellow seen pottering in the snow."

"Call up Clausen."

The manager stepped to the telephone.

Meanwhile, George had advanced to speak to a man who had beckoned to him from the other side of the room, and with whom in another moment I saw him step out. Thus deserted, I sank into a chair near one of the windows. Never had I felt

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more uncomfortable. To attribute guilt to a totally unknown person — a person who is little more to you than a shadowy silhouette against a background of snow — is easy enough and not very disturbing to the conscience. But to hear that person named; given positive attributes; lifted from the indefinite into a living, breathing actuality, with a man's hopes, purposes and responsibilities, is an entirely different proposition. This Brotherson might be the most innocent person alive; and, if so, what had we done? Nothing to congratulate ourselves upon, certainly. And George was not present to comfort and encourage me. He was —

Where was he? The man who had carried him off was the youngest in the group. What had he wanted of George? Those who remained showed no interest in the matter. They had enough to say among themselves. But I was interested — naturally so, and, in my uneasiness, glanced restlessly from the window, the shade of which was up. The outlook was a very peaceful one. This room faced a side street, and, as my eyes fell upon the whitened pavements, I received an answer to one, and that the most anxious, of my queries. This was the street into which we had turned, in the wake of the handsome stranger they were trying at this very moment to identify with Brotherson. George had evidently been asked to point out the exact spot where the man had stopped, for I could see from my vantage point two figures bending near the kerb, and even pawing at the snow which lay there. It gave me a slight turn when one of them — I do not think it was

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George — began to rub his hands together in much the way the unknown gentleman had done, and, in my excitement, I probably uttered some sort of an ejaculation, for I was suddenly conscious of a silence in the room, and when I turned saw all the men about me looking my way.

I attempted to smile, but instead, shuddered painfully, as I raised my hand and pointed down at the street.

"They are imitating the man," I cried; "my husband and — and the person he went out with. It looked dreadful to me; that is all."

One of the gentlemen immediately said some kind words to me, and another smiled in a very encouraging way. But their attention was soon diverted, and so was mine by the entrance of a man in semi-uniform, who was immediately addressed as Clausen.

I knew his face. He was one of the doorkeepers; the oldest employé about the hotel, and the one best liked. I had often exchanged words with him myself.

Mr. Slater at once put his question:

"Has Mr. Brotherson passed your door at any time to-night?"

"Mr. Brotherson! I don't remember, really I don't," was the unexpected reply. "It's not often I forget. But so many people came rushing in during those few minutes, and all so excited —"

"Before the excitement, Clausen. A little while before, possibly just before."

"Oh, now I recall him! Yes, Mr. Brotherson went out of my door not many minutes before the cry

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upstairs. I forgot because I had stepped back from the door to hand a lady the muff she had dropped, and it was at that minute he went out. I just got a glimpse of his back as he passed into the street."

"But you are sure of that back?"

"I don't know another like it, when he wears that big coat of his. But Jim can tell you, sir. He was in the café up to that minute, and that's where Mr. Brotherson usually goes first."

"Very well; send up Jim. Tell him I have some orders to give him."

The old man bowed and went out.

Meanwhile, Mr. Slater had exchanged some words with the two officials, and now approached me with an expression of extreme consideration. They were about to excuse me from further participation in this informal inquiry. This I saw before he spoke. Of course they were right. But I should greatly have preferred to stay where I was till George came back.

However, I met him for an instant in the hall before I took the elevator, and later I heard in a round-about way what Jim and some others about the house had to say of Mr. Brotherson.

He was an habitué of the hotel, to the extent of dining once or twice a week in the café, and smoking, afterwards, in the public lobby. When he was in the mood for talk, he would draw an ever-enlarging group about him, but at other times he would be seen sitting quite alone and morosely indifferent to all who approached him. There was no mystery

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about his business. He was an inventor, with one or two valuable patents already on the market. But this was not his only interest. He was an all round sort of man, moody but brilliant in many ways — a character which at once attracted and repelled, odd in that he seemed to set little store by his good looks, yet was most careful to dress himself in a way to show them off to advantage. If he had means beyond the ordinary no one knew it, nor could any man say that he had not. On all personal matters he was very close-mouthed, though he would talk about other men's riches in a way to show that he cherished some very extreme views.

This was all which could be learned about him off-hand, and at so late an hour. I was greatly interested, of course, and had plenty to think of till I saw George again and learned the result of the latest investigations.

Miss Challoner had been shot, not stabbed. No other deduction was possible from such facts as were now known, though the physicians had not yet handed in their report, or even intimated what that report would be. No assailant could have approached or left her, without attracting the notice of some one, if not all of the persons seated at a table in the same room. She could only have been reached by a bullet sent from a point near the head of a small winding staircase connecting the mezzanine floor with a coat-room adjacent to the front door. This has already been insisted on, as you will remember, and if you will glance at the diagram which George hastily scrawled for me, you will see why.

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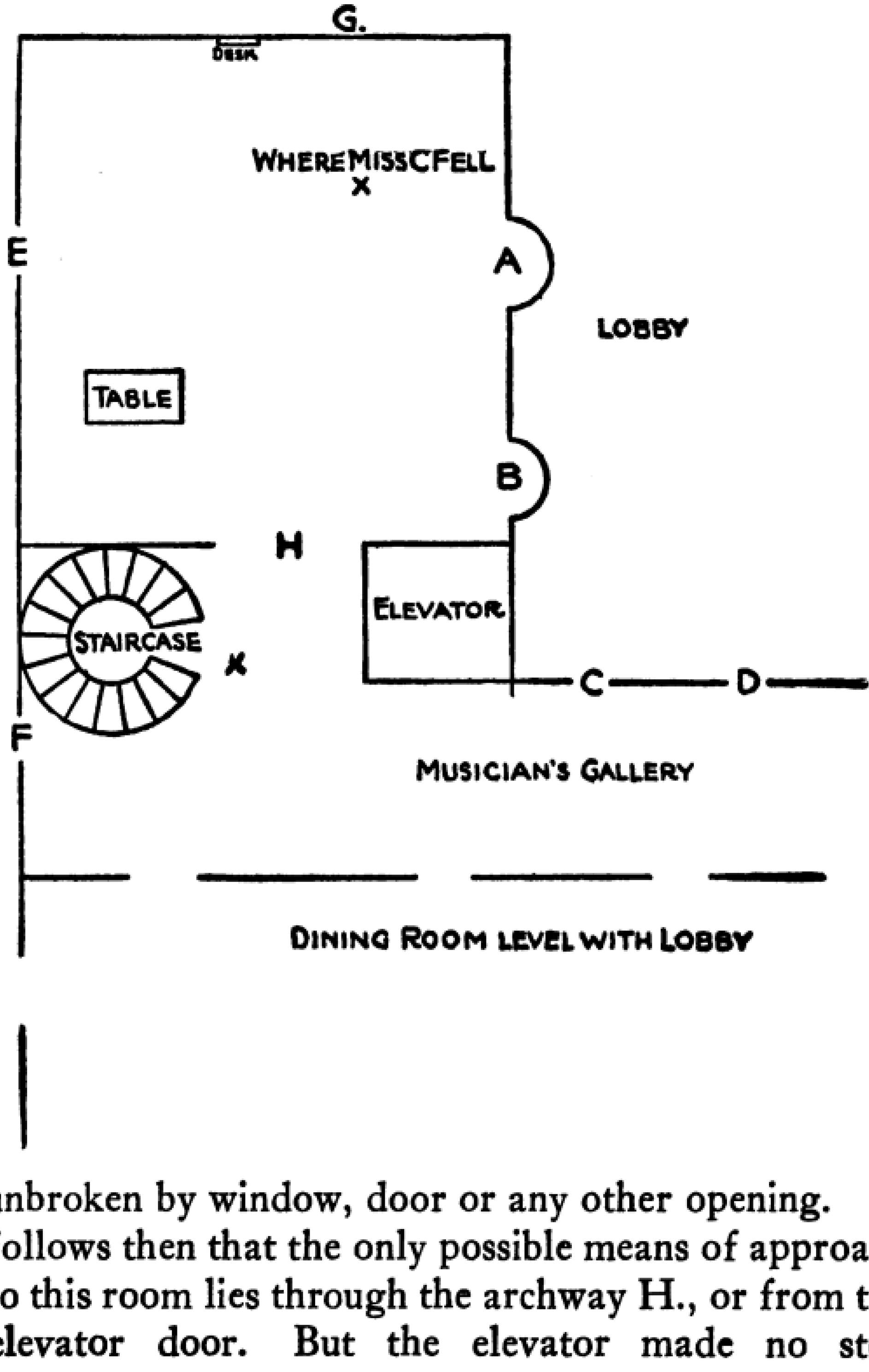
A. B., as well as C. D., are half circular openings into the office lobby. E. F. are windows giving upon Broadway, and G. the party wall, necessarily



unbroken by window, door or any other opening. It follows then that the only possible means of approach to this room lies through the archway H., or from the elevator door. But the elevator made no stop

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at the mezzanine on or near the time of the attack upon Miss Challoner; nor did any one leave the table or pass by it in either direction till after the alarm given by her fall.

But a bullet calls for no approach. A man at X. might raise and fire his pistol without attracting any attention to himself. The music, which all acknowledge was at its full climax at this moment, would drown the noise of the explosion, and the staircase, out of view of all but the victim, afford the same means of immediate escape, which it must have given of secret and unseen approach. The coat-room into which it descended communicated with the lobby very near the main entrance, and if Mr. Brotherson were the man, his sudden appearance there would thus be accounted for.

To be sure, this gentleman had not been noticed in the coatroom by the man then in charge, but if the latter had been engaged at that instant, as he often was, in hanging up or taking down a coat from the rack, a person might easily pass by him and disappear into the lobby without attracting his attention. So many people passed that way from the dining-room beyond, and so many of these were tall, fine-looking and well-dressed.

It began to look bad for this man, if indeed he were the one we had seen under the street-lamp; and, as George and I reviewed the situation, we felt our position to be serious enough for us severally to set down our impressions of this man before we lost our first vivid idea. I do not know what George wrote, for he sealed his words up as soon as he had

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finished writing, but this is what I put on paper while my memory was still fresh and my excitement unabated: —

He had the look of a man of powerful intellect and determined will, who shudders while he triumphs; who outwardly washes his hands of a deed over which he inwardly gloats. This was when he first rose from the snow. Afterwards he had a moment of fear; plain, human, everyday fear. But this was evanescent. Before he had turned to go, he showed the self-possession of one who feels himself so secure, or is so well-satisfied with himself, that he is no longer conscious of other emotions.

"Poor fellow," I commented aloud, as I folded up these words; "he reckoned without you, George. By to-morrow he will be in the hands of the police."

"Poor fellow?" he repeated. "Better say 'Poor Miss Challoner!' They tell me she was one of those perfect women who reconcile even the pessimist to humanity and the age we live in. Why any one should want to kill her is a mystery; but why this man should — There! no one professes to explain it. They simply go by the facts. To-morrow surely must bring strange revelations."

And with this sentence ringing in my mind, I lay down and endeavoured to sleep. But it was not till very late that rest came. The noise of passing feet, though muffled beyond their wont, roused me in spite of myself. These footsteps might be those of some late arrival, or they might be those of some wary detective intent on business far removed from the usual routine of life in this great hotel.

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I recalled the glimpse I had had of the writing-room in the early evening, and imagined it as it was now, with Miss Challoner's body removed and the incongruous flitting of strange and busy figures across its fatal floors, measuring distances and peering into corners, while hundreds slept above and about them in undisturbed repose.

Then I thought of *him*, the suspected and possibly guilty one. In visions over which I had little if any control, I saw him in all the restlessness of a slowly dying down excitement — the surroundings strange and unknown to me, the figure not — seeking for quiet; facing the past; facing the future; knowing, perhaps, for the first time in his life what it was for crime and remorse to murder sleep. I could not think of him as lying still — slumbering like the rest of mankind, in the hope and expectation of a busy morrow. Crime perpetrated looms so large in the soul, and this man had a soul as big as his body; of that I was assured. That its instincts were cruel and inherently evil, did not lessen its capacity for suffering. And he was suffering now; I could not doubt it, remembering the lovely face and fragrant memory of the noble woman he had, under some unknown impulse, sent to an unmerited doom.

At last I slept, but it was only to rouse again with the same quick realisation of my surroundings, which I had experienced on my recovery from my fainting fit of hours before. Someone had stopped at our door before hurrying by down the hall. Who was that someone? I rose on my elbow, and endeavoured to peer through the dark. Of course, I could

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see nothing. But when I woke a second time, there was enough light in the room, early as it undoubtedly was, for me to detect a letter lying on the carpet just inside the door.

Instantly I was on my feet. Catching the letter up, I carried it to the window. Our two names were on it — Mr. and Mrs. George Anderson: the writing, Mr. Slater's.

I glanced over at George. He was sleeping peacefully. It was too early to wake him, but I could not lay that letter down unread; was not my name on it? Tearing it open, I devoured its contents,— the exclamation I made on reading it, waking George.

The writing was in Mr. Slater's hand, and the words were:

"I must request, at the instance of Coroner Heath and such of the police as listened to your adventure, that you make no further mention of what you saw in the street under our windows last night. The doctors find no bullet in the wound. This clears Mr. Brotherson."

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IV

SWEET LITTLE MISS CLARKE

WHEN we took our seats at the breakfast-table, it was with the feeling of being no longer looked upon as connected in any way with this case. Yet our interest in it was, if anything, increased, and when I saw George casting furtive glances at a certain table behind me, I leaned over and asked him the reason, being sure that the people whose faces I saw reflected in the mirror directly before us had something to do with the great matter then engrossing us.

His answer conveyed the somewhat exciting information that the four persons seated in my rear were the same four who had been reading at the round table in the mezzanine at the time of Miss Challoner's death.

Instantly they absorbed all my attention, though I dared not give them a direct look, and continued to observe them only in the glass.

"Is it one family?" I asked.

"Yes, and a very respectable one. Transients, of course, but very well known in Denver. The lady is not the mother of the boys, but their aunt. The boys belong to the gentleman, who is a widower."

"Their word ought to be good."

George nodded.

"The boys look wide-awake enough if the father does not. As for the aunt, she is sweetness itself.

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Do they still insist that Miss Challoner was the only person in the room with them at this time?"

"They did last night. I don't know how they will meet this statement of the doctor's."

"George?"

He leaned nearer.

"Have you ever thought that she might have been a suicide? That she stabbed herself?"

"No, for in that case a weapon would have been found."

"And are you sure that none was?"

"Positive. Such a fact could not have been kept quiet. If a weapon had been picked up there would be no mystery, and no necessity for further police investigation."

"And the detectives are still here?"

"I just saw one."

"George?"

Again his head came nearer.

"Have they searched the lobby? I believe she had a weapon."

"Laura!"

"I know it sounds foolish, but the alternative is so improbable. A family like that cannot be leagued together in a conspiracy to hide the truth concerning a matter so serious. To be sure, they may all be short-sighted, or so little given to observation that they didn't see what passed before their eyes. The boys look wide-awake enough, but who can tell? I would sooner believe that —"

I stopped short so suddenly that George looked startled. My attention had been caught by some-

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thing new I saw in the mirror upon which my attention was fixed. A man was looking in from the corridor behind, at the four persons we were just discussing. He was watching them intently, and I thought I knew his face.

"What kind of a looking person was the man who took you outside last night?" I inquired of George, with my eyes still on this furtive watcher.

"A fellow to make you laugh. A perfect character, Laura; hideously homely but agreeable enough. I took quite a fancy to him. Why?"

"I am looking at him now."

"Very likely. He's deep in this affair. Just an everyday detective, but ambitious, I suppose, and quite alive to the importance of being thorough."

"He is watching those people. No, he isn't. How quickly he disappeared!"

"Yes, he's mercurial in all his movements. Laura, we must get out of this. There happens to be something else in the world for me to do than to sit around and follow up murder clews."

But we began to doubt if others agreed with him, when on passing out we were stopped in the lobby by this same detective, who had something to say to George, and drew him quickly aside.

"What does he want?" I asked, as soon as George had returned to my side.

"He wants me to stand ready to obey any summons the police may send me."

"Then they still suspect Brotherson?"

"They must."

My head rose a trifle as I glanced up at George.

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"Then we are *not* altogether out of it?" I emphasised, complacently.

He smiled — which hardly seemed *à propos*. Why does George sometimes smile when I am in my most serious moods.

As we stepped out of the hotel, George gave my arm a quiet pinch which served to direct my attention to an elderly gentleman who was just alighting from a taxicab at the kerb. He moved heavily and with some appearance of pain, but from the crowd collected on the sidewalk many of whom nudged each other as he passed, he was evidently a person of some importance, and as he disappeared within the hotel entrance, I asked George who this kind-faced, bright-eyed old gentleman could be.

He appeared to know, for he told me at once that he was Detective Gryce; a man who had grown old in solving just such baffling problems as these.

"He gave up work some time ago, I have been told," my husband went on; "but evidently a great case still has its allurement for him. The trail here must be a very blind one for them to call him in. I wish we had not left so soon. It would have been quite an experience to see him at work."

"I doubt if you would have been given the opportunity. I noticed that we were slightly *de trop* towards the last."

"I wouldn't have minded that; not on my own account, that is. It might not have been pleasant for you. However, the office is waiting. Come, let me put you on the car."

That night I bided his coming with an impatience

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I could not control. He was late, of course, but when he did appear, I almost forgot our usual greeting in my hurry to ask him if he had seen the evening papers.

"No," he grumbled, as he hung up his overcoat. "Been pushed about all day. No time for anything."

"Then let me tell you —"

But he would have dinner first.

However, a little later we had a comfortable chat. Mr. Gryce had made a discovery, and the papers were full of it. It was one which gave me a small triumph over George. The suggestion he had laughed at was not so entirely foolish as he had been pleased to consider it. But let me tell the story of that day, without any further reference to myself.

The opinion had become quite general with those best acquainted with the details of this affair, that the mystery was one of those abnormal ones for which no solution would ever be found, when the aged detective showed himself in the building and was taken to the room, where an Inspector of Police awaited him. Their greeting was cordial, and the lines on the latter's face relaxed a little as he met the still bright eye of the man upon whose instinct and judgment so much reliance had always been placed.

"This is very good of you," he began, glancing down at the aged detective's bundled up legs, and gently pushing a chair towards him. "I know that it was a great deal to ask, but we're at our wits' end, and so I telephoned. It's the most inexplicable —

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There! you have heard that phrase before. But clews — there are absolutely none. That is, we have not been able to find any. Perhaps you can. At least, that is what we hope. I've known you more than once to succeed where others have failed."

The elderly man thus addressed, glanced down at his legs, now propped up on a stool which someone had brought him, and smiled, with the pathos of the old who sees the interests of a lifetime slipping gradually away.

"I am not what I was. I can no longer get down on my hands and knees to pick up threads from the nap of a rug, or spy out a spot of blood in the crimson woof of a carpet."

"You shall have Sweetwater here to do the active work for you. What we want of you is the directing mind — the infallible instinct. It's a case in a thousand, Gryce. We've never had anything just like it. *You've* never had anything at all like it. It will make you young again."

The old man's eyes shot fire and unconsciously one foot slipped to the floor. Then he bethought himself and painfully lifted it back again.

"What are the points? What's the difficulty?" he asked. "A woman has been shot —"

"No, not shot, stabbed. We thought she had been shot, for that was intelligible and involved no impossibilities. But Drs. Heath and Webster, under the eye of the Challoners' own physician, have made an examination of the wound — an official one, thorough and quite final so far as they are concerned, and they declare that no bullet is to be found in the

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body. As the wound extends no further than the heart, this settles one great point, at least."

"Dr. Heath is a reliable man and one of our ablest coroners."

"Yes. There can be no question as to the truth of his report. You know the victim? Her name, I mean, and the character she bore?"

"Yes; so much was told me on my way down."

"A fine girl unspoiled by riches and seeming independence. Happy, too, to all appearance, or we should be more ready to consider the possibility of suicide."

"Suicide by stabbing calls for a weapon. Yet none has been found, I hear."

"None."

"Yet she was killed that way?"

"Undoubtedly, and by a long and very narrow blade, larger than a needle but not so large as the ordinary stiletto."

"Stabbed while by herself, or what you may call by herself? She had no companion near her?"

"None, if we can believe the four members of the Parrish family who were seated at the other end of the room."

"And you do believe them?"

"Would a whole family lie — and needlessly? They never knew the woman — father, maiden aunt and two boys, clear-eyed, jolly young chaps whom even the horror of this tragedy, perpetrated as it were under their very nose, cannot make serious for more than a passing moment."

"It wouldn't seem so."

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"Yet they swear up and down that nobody crossed the room towards Miss Challoner."

"So they tell me."

"She fell just a few feet from the desk where she had been writing. No word, no cry, just a collapse and sudden fall. In olden days they would have said, struck by a bolt from heaven. But it was a bolt which drew blood; not much blood, I hear, but sufficient to end life almost instantly. She never looked up or spoke again. What do you make of it, Gryce?"

"It's a tough one, and I'm not ready to venture an opinion yet. I should like to see the desk you speak of, and the spot where she fell."

A young fellow who had been hovering in the background at once stepped forward. He was the plain-faced detective who had spoken to George.

"Will you take my arm, sir?"

Mr. Gryce's whole face brightened. This Sweetwater, as they called him, was, I have since understood, one of his protegés and more or less of a favourite.

"Have you had a chance at this thing?" he asked. "Been over the ground — studied the affair carefully?"

"Yes, sir; they were good enough to allow it."

"Very well, then, you're in a position to pioneer *me*. You've seen it all and won't be in a hurry."

"No; I'm at the end of my rope. I haven't an idea, sir."

"Well, well, that's honest at all events." Then,

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as he slowly rose with the other's careful assistance, "There's *no* crime without its clew. The thing is to recognise that clew when seen. But I'm in no position to make promises. Old days don't return for the asking."

Nevertheless, he looked ten years younger than when he came in, or so thought those who knew him.

The mezzanine was guarded from all visitors save such as had official sanction. Consequently, the two remained quite uninterrupted while they moved about the place in quiet consultation. Others had preceded them; had examined the plain little desk and found nothing; had paced off the distances; had looked with longing and inquiring eyes at the elevator cage and the open archway leading to the little staircase and the musicians' gallery. But this was nothing to the old detective. The locale was what he wanted, and he got it. Whether he got anything else it would be impossible to say from his manner as he finally sank into a chair by one of the openings, and looked down on the lobby below. It was full of people coming and going on all sorts of business, and presently he drew back, and, leaning on Sweetwater's arm, asked him a few questions.

"Who were the first to rush in here after the Parrishes gave the alarm?"

"One or two of the musicians from the end of the hall. They had just finished their programme and were preparing to leave the gallery. Naturally they reached her first."

"Good! their names?"

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"Mark Sowerby and Claus Hennerberg. Honest Germans — men who have played here for years."

"And who followed them? Who came next on the scene?"

"Some people from the lobby. They heard the disturbance and rushed up pell-mell. But not one of these touched her. Later her father came."

"Who did touch her? Anybody, before the father came in?"

"Yes; Miss Clarke, the middle-aged lady with the Parrishes. She had run towards Miss Challoner as soon as she heard her fall, and was sitting there with the dead girl's head in her lap when the musicians showed themselves."

"I suppose she has been carefully questioned?"

"Very, I should say."

"And she speaks of no weapon?"

"No. Neither she nor any one else at that moment suspected murder or even a violent death. All thought it a natural one — sudden, but the result of some secret disease."

"Father and all?"

"Yes."

"But the blood? Surely there must have been some show of blood?"

"They say not. No one noticed any. Not till the doctor came — her doctor who was happily in his office in this very building. He saw the drops, and uttered the first suggestion of murder."

"How long after was this? Is there any one who has ventured to make an estimate of the number of minutes which elapsed from the time she fell,

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to the moment when the doctor first raised the cry of murder?"

"Yes. Mr. Slater, the assistant manager, who was in the lobby at the time, says that ten minutes at least must have elapsed."

"Ten minutes and no blood! The weapon must still have been there. Some weapon with a short and inconspicuous handle. I think they said there were flowers over and around the place where it struck?"

"Yes, great big scarlet ones. Nobody noticed — nobody looked. A panic like that seems to paralyse people."

"Ten minutes! I must see every one who approached her during those ten minutes. Every one, Sweetwater, and I must myself talk with Miss Clarke."

"You will like her. You will believe every word she says."

"No doubt. All the more reason why I must see her. Sweetwater, someone drew that weapon out. Effects still have their causes, notwithstanding the new cult. The question is who? We must leave no stone unturned to find that out."

"The stones have all been turned over once."

"By you?"

"Not altogether by me."

"Then they will bear being turned over again. I want to be witness of the operation."

"Where will you see Miss Clarke?"

"Wherever she pleases — only I can't walk far."

"I think I know the place. You shall have the

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use of this elevator. It has not been running since last night or it would be full of curious people all the time, hustling to get a glimpse of this place. But they'll put a man on for you."

"Very good; manage it as you will. I'll wait here till you're ready. Explain yourself to the lady. Tell her I'm an old and rheumatic invalid who has been used to asking his own questions. I'll not trouble her much. But there is one point she must make clear to me."

Sweetwater did not presume to ask what point, but he hoped to be fully enlightened when the time came.

And he was. Mr. Gryce had undertaken to educate him for this work, and never missed the opportunity of giving him a lesson. The three met in a private sitting-room on an upper floor, the detectives entering first and the lady coming in soon after.

As her quiet figure appeared in the doorway, Sweetwater stole a glance at Mr. Gryce. He was not looking her way, of course; he never looked directly at anybody; but he formed his impressions for all that, and Sweetwater was anxious to make sure of these impressions. There was no doubting them in this instance. Miss Clarke was not a woman to rouse an unfavourable opinion in any man's mind. Of slight, almost frail build, she had that peculiar animation which goes with a speaking eye and a widely sympathetic nature. Without any substantial claims to beauty, her expression was so womanly and so sweet that she was invariably called lovely.

Mr. Gryce was engaged at the moment in shifting

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his cane from the right hand to the left, but his manner was never more encouraging or his smile more benevolent.

"Pardon me," he apologised, with one of his old-fashioned bows, "I'm sorry to trouble you after all the distress you must have been under this morning. But there is something I wish especially to ask you in regard to the dreadful occurrence in which you played so kind a part. You were the first to reach the prostrate woman, I believe."

"Yes. The boys jumped up and ran towards her, but they were frightened by her looks and left it for me to put my hands under her and try to lift her up."

"Did you manage it?"

"I succeeded in getting her head into my lap, nothing more."

"And sat so?"

"For some little time. That is, it seemed long, though I believe it was not more than a minute before two men came running from the musicians' gallery. One thinks so fast at such a time — and feels so much."

"You knew she was dead, then?"

"I felt her to be so."

"How felt?"

"I was sure — I never questioned it."

"You have seen women in a faint?"

"Yes, many times."

"What made the difference? Why should you believe Miss Challoner dead simply because she lay still and apparently lifeless?"

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"I cannot tell you. Possibly, death tells its own story. I only know how I felt."

"Perhaps there was another reason? Perhaps, that, consciously or unconsciously, you laid your palm upon her heart?"

Miss Clarke started, and her sweet face showed a moment's perplexity.

"Did I?" she queried, musingly. Then with a sudden access of feeling, "I may have done so, indeed, I believe I did. My arms were around her; it would not have been an unnatural action."

"No; a very natural one, I should say. Cannot you tell me positively whether you did this or not?"

"Yes, I did. I had forgotten it, but I remember now." And the glance she cast him while not meeting his eye showed that she understood the importance of the admission. "I know," she said, "what you are going to ask me now. Did I feel anything there but the flowers and the tulle? No, Mr. Gryce, I did not. There was no poniard in the wound."

Mr. Gryce felt around, found a chair and sank into it.

"You are a truthful woman," said he. "And," he added more slowly, "composed enough in character I should judge not to have made any mistake on this very vital point."

"I think so, Mr. Gryce. I was in a state of excitement, of course; but the woman was a stranger to me, and my feelings were not unduly agitated."

"Sweetwater, we can let my suggestion go in regard to those ten minutes I spoke of. The time is

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narrowed down to one, and in that one, Miss Clarke was the only person to touch her."

"The only one," echoed the lady, catching perhaps the slight rising sound of query in his voice.

"I will trouble you no further." So said the old detective, thoughtfully. "Sweetwater, help me out of this." His eye was dull and his manner betrayed exhaustion. But vigour returned to him before he had well reached the door, and he showed some of his old spirit as he thanked Miss Clarke and turned to take the elevator.

"But one possibility remains," he confided to Sweetwater, as they stood waiting at the elevator door. "Miss Challoner died from a stab. The next minute she was in this lady's arms. No weapon protruded from the wound, nor was any found on or near her in the mezzanine. What follows? She struck the blow herself, and the strength of purpose which led her to do this, gave her the additional force to pull the weapon out and fling it from her. It did not fall upon the floor around her; therefore, it flew through one of those openings into the lobby, and there it either will be, or has been found."

It was this statement, otherwise worded, which gave me my triumph over George.

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V

THE RED CLOAK

"WHAT results? Speak up, Sweetwater."

"None. Every man, woman and boy connected with the hotel has been questioned; many of them routed out of their beds for the purpose, but not one of them picked up anything from the floor of the lobby, or knows of any one who did."

"There now remain the guests."

"And after them — (pardon me, Mr. Gryce) the general public which rushed in rather promiscuously last night."

"I know it; it's a task, but it must be carried through. Put up bulletins, publish your wants in the papers; — do anything, only gain your end."

A bulletin was put up.

Some hours later, Sweetwater re-entered the room, and, approaching Mr. Gryce with a smile, blurted out:

"The bulletin is a great go. I think — of course, I cannot be sure — that it's going to do the business. I've watched every one who stopped to read it. Many showed interest and many, emotion; she seems to have had a troop of friends. But embarrassment! only one showed that. I thought you would like to know."

"Embarrassment? Humph! a man?"

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"No, a woman; a lady, sir; one of the transients. I found out in a jiffy all they could tell me about her."

"A woman! We didn't expect that. Where is she? Still in the lobby?"

"No, sir. She took the elevator while I was talking with the clerk."

"There's nothing in it. You mistook her expression."

"I don't think so. I had noticed her when she first came into the lobby. She was talking to her daughter who was with her, and looked natural and happy. But no sooner had she seen and read that bulletin, than the blood shot up into her face and her manner became furtive and hasty. There was no mistaking the difference, sir. Almost before I could point her out, she had seized her daughter by the arm and hurried her towards the elevator. I wanted to follow her, but you may prefer to make your own inquiries. Her room is on the seventh floor, number 712, and her name is Watkins. Mrs. Horace Watkins of Nashville."

Mr. Gryce nodded thoughtfully, but made no immediate effort to rise.

"Is that all you know about her?" he asked.

"Yes; this is the first time she has stopped at this hotel. She came yesterday. Took a room indefinitely. Seems all right; but she did blush, sir. I never saw its beat in a young girl."

"Call the desk. Say that I'm to be told if Mrs. Watkins of Nashville rings up during the next ten

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minutes. We'll give her that long to take some action. If she fails to make any move, I'll make my own approaches."

Sweetwater did as he was bid, then went back to his place in the lobby.

But he returned almost instantly.

"Mrs. Watkins has just telephoned down that she is going to — to *leave*, sir."

"*To leave?*"

The old man struggled to his feet. "No. 712, do you say? Seven stories," he sighed. But as he turned with a hobble, he stopped. "There are difficulties in the way of this interview," he remarked. "A blush is not much to go upon. I'm afraid we shall have to resort to the shadow business and that is your work, not mine."

But here the door opened and a boy brought in a line which had been left at the desk. It related to the very matter then engaging them, and ran thus: —

"I see that information is desired as to whether any person was seen to stoop to the lobby floor last night at or shortly after the critical moment of Miss Challoner's fall in the half story above. I can give such information. I was in the lobby at the time, and in the height of the confusion following this alarming incident, I remember seeing a lady,— one of the new arrivals (there were several coming in at the time)— stoop quickly down and pick up something from the floor. I thought nothing of it at the time, and so paid little attention to her appearance. I can only recall the suddenness with which she stooped and the colour of the cloak she wore. It was red, and the whole garment was voluminous. If you wish further particulars,— though

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in truth, I have no more to give, you can find me in room 356.

"HENRY A. MCELROY."

"Humph! This should simplify our task," was Mr. Gryce's comment, as he handed the note over to Sweetwater. "You can easily find out if the lady, now on the point of departure, can be identified with the one described by Mr. McElroy. If she can, I am ready to meet her anywhere."

"Here goes then!" cried Sweetwater, and quickly left the room.

When he returned, it was not with his most hopeful air.

"The cloak doesn't help," he declared. "No one remembers the cloak. But the time of Mrs. Watkins' arrival was all right. She came in directly on the heels of this catastrophe."

"She did! Sweetwater, I will see her. Manage it for me at once."

"The clerk says that it had better be upstairs: She is a very sensitive woman. There might be a scene, if she were intercepted on her way out."

"Very well." But the look which the old detective threw at his bandaged legs was not without its pathos.

And so it happened that just as Mrs. Watkins was watching the wheeling out of her trunks, there appeared in the doorway before her, an elderly gentleman, whose expression, always benevolent, save at moments when benevolence would be quite out of keeping with the situation, had for some reason, so

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marked an effect upon her, that she coloured under his eye, and, indeed, showed such embarrassment, that all doubt of the propriety of his intrusion vanished from the old man's mind, and with the ease of one only too well accustomed to such scenes, he kindly remarked:

"Am I speaking to Mrs. Watkins of Nashville?"

"You are," she faltered, with another rapid change of colour. "I — I am just leaving. I hope you will excuse me. I —"

"I wish I could," he smiled, hobbling in and confronting her quietly in her own room. "But circumstances make it quite imperative that I should have a few words with you on a topic which need not be disagreeable to you, and probably will not be. My name is Gryce. This will probably convey nothing to you, but I am not unknown to the management below, and my years must certainly give you confidence in the propriety of my errand. A beautiful and charming young woman died here last night. May I ask if you knew her?"

"I?" She was trembling violently now, but whether with indignation or some other more subtle emotion, it would be difficult to say. "No, I'm from the South. I never saw the young lady. Why do you ask? I do not recognise your right. I — I —"

Certainly her emotion must be that of simple indignation. Mr. Gryce made one of his low bows, and propping himself against the table he stood before, remarked civilly: —

"I had rather not force my rights. The matter

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is so very ordinary. I did not suppose you knew Miss Challoner, but one must begin somehow, and as you came in at the very moment when the alarm was raised in the lobby, I thought perhaps you could tell me something which would aid me in my effort to elicit the real facts of the case. You were crossing the lobby at the time —"

"Yes." She raised her head. "So were a dozen others —"

"Madam,"— the interruption was made in his kindliest tones, but in a way which nevertheless suggested authority. "Something was picked up from the floor at that moment. If the dozen you mention were witnesses to this act we do not know it. But we do know that it did not pass unobserved by you. Am I not correct? Didn't you see a certain person — I will mention no names — stoop and pick up something from the lobby floor?"

"No." The word came out with startling violence. "I was conscious of nothing but the confusion." She was facing him with determination and her eyes were fixed boldly on his face. But her lips quivered, and her cheeks were white, too white now for simple indignation.

"Then I have made a big mistake," apologised the ever-courteous detective. "Will you pardon me? It would have settled a very serious question if it could be found that the object thus picked up was the weapon which killed Miss Challoner. That is my excuse for the trouble I have given you."

He was not looking at her; he was looking at her hand which rested on the table before which he him-

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self stood. Did the fingers tighten a little and dig into the palm they concealed? He thought so, and was very slow in turning limpingly about towards the door. Meanwhile, would she speak? No. The silence was so marked, he felt it an excuse for stealing another glance in her direction. She was not looking his way but at a door in the partition wall on her right; and the look was one very akin to anxious fear. The next moment he understood it. The door burst open, and a young girl bounded into the room, with the merry cry:

"All ready, mother. I'm glad we are going to the Clarendon. I hate hotels where people die almost before your eyes."

What the mother said at this outburst is immaterial. What the detective did is not. Keeping on his way, he reached the door, but not to open it wider; rather to close it softly but with unmistakable decision. The cloak which enveloped the girl was red, and full enough to be called voluminous.

"Who is this?" demanded the girl, her indignant glances flashing from one to the other.

"I don't know," faltered the mother in very evident distress. "He says he has a right to ask us questions and he has been asking questions about — about —"

"Not about me," laughed the girl, with a toss of her head Mr. Gryce would have corrected in one of his grandchildren. "He can have nothing to say about me." And she began to move about the room in an aimless, half-insolent way.

Mr. Gryce stared hard at the few remaining be-

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longings of the two women, lying in a heap on the table, and half musingly, half deprecatingly, remarked:

"The person who stooped wore a long red cloak. Probably you preceded your daughter, Mrs. Watkins."

The lady thus brought to the point made a quick gesture towards the girl who suddenly stood still, and, with a rising colour in her cheeks, answered, with some show of resolution on her own part:

"You say your name is Gryce and that you have a right to address me thus pointedly on a subject which you evidently regard as serious. That is not exact enough for me. Who are you, sir? What is your business?"

"I think you have guessed it. I am a detective from Headquarters. What I want of you I have already stated. Perhaps this young lady can tell me what you cannot. I shall be pleased if this is so."

"Caroline"—Then the mother broke down. "Show the gentleman what you picked up from the lobby floor last night."

The girl laughed again, loudly and with evident bravado, before she threw the cloak back and showed what she had evidently been holding in her hand from the first, a sharp-pointed, gold-handled paper-cutter.

"It was lying there and I picked it up. I don't see any harm in that."

"You probably meant none. You couldn't have known the part it had just played in this tragic drama," said the old detective looking carefully at the cutter which he had taken in his hand, but not so

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carefully that he failed to note that the look of distress was not lifted from the mother's face either by her daughter's words or manner.

"You have washed this?" he asked.

"No. Why should I wash it? It was clean enough. I was just going down to give it in at the desk. I wasn't going to carry it away." And she turned aside to the window and began to hum, as though done with the whole matter.

The old detective rubbed his chin, glanced again at the paper-cutter, then at the girl in the window, and lastly at the mother, who had lifted her head again and was facing him bravely.

"It is very important," he observed to the latter, "that your daughter should be correct in her statement as to the condition of this article when she picked it up. Are you sure she did not wash it?"

"I don't think she did. But I'm sure she will tell you the truth about that. Caroline, this is a police matter. Any mistake about it may involve us in a world of trouble and keep you from getting back home in time for your coming-out party. Did you — did you wash this cutter when you got upstairs, or — or —" she added, with a propitiatory glance at Mr. Gryce —"wipe it off at any time between then and now? Don't answer hastily. Be sure. No one can blame you for that act. Any girl, as thoughtless as you, might do that."

"Mother, how can I tell what I did?" flashed out the girl, wheeling round on her heel till she faced them both. "I don't remember doing a thing to it. I just brought it up. A thing found like that belongs

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to the finder. You needn't hold it out towards me like that. I don't want it now; I'm sick of it. Such a lot of talk about a paltry thing which couldn't have cost ten dollars." And she wheeled back.

"It isn't the value." Mr. Gryce could be very patient. "It's the fact that we believe it to have been answerable for Miss Challoner's death — that is, if there was any blood on it when you picked it up."

"Blood!" The girl was facing them again, astonishment struggling with disgust on her plain but mobile features. "Blood! is that what you mean? No wonder I hate it. Take it away," she cried. "Oh, mother, I'll never pick up anything again which doesn't belong to me! Blood!" she repeated in horror, flinging herself into her mother's arms.

Mr. Gryce thought he understood the situation. Here was a little kleptomaniac whose weakness the mother was struggling to hide. Light was pouring in. He felt his body's weight less on that miserable foot of his.

"Does that frighten you? Are you so affected by the thought of blood?"

"Don't ask me. And I put the thing under my pillow! I thought it was so — so pretty."

"Mrs. Watkins," Mr. Gryce from that moment ignored the daughter, "did you see it there?"

"Yes; but I didn't know where it came from. I had not seen my daughter stoop. I didn't know where she got it till I read that bulletin."

"Never mind that. The question agitating me is whether any stain was left under that pillow. We

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want to be sure of the connection between this possible weapon and the death by stabbing which we all deplore — if there is a connection."

"I didn't see any stain, but you can look for yourself. The bed has been made up, but there was no change of linen. We expected to remain here; I see no good to be gained by hiding any of the facts now."

"None whatever, Madam."

"Come, then. Caroline, sit down and stop crying. Mr. Gryce believes that your only fault was in not taking this object at once to the desk."

"Yes, that's all," acquiesced the detective after a short study of the shaking figure and distorted features of the girl. "You had no idea, I'm sure, where this weapon came from or for what it had been used. That's evident."

Her shudder, as she seated herself, was very convincing. She was too young to simulate so successfully emotions of this character.

"I'm glad of that," she responded, half fretfully, half gratefully, as Mr. Gryce followed her mother into the adjoining room. "I've had a bad enough time of it without being blamed for what I didn't know and didn't do."

Mr. Gryce laid little stress upon these words, but much upon the lack of curiosity she showed in the minute and careful examination he now made of her room. There was no stain on the pillow-cover and none on the bureau-spread where she might very naturally have laid the cutter down on first coming into her room. The blade was so polished that it must have been rubbed off somewhere, either pur-

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posely or by accident. Where then, since not here? He asked to see her gloves — the ones she had worn the previous night.

"They are the same she is wearing now," the anxious mother assured him. "Wait, and I will get them for you."

"No need. Let her hold out her hands in token of amity. I shall soon see."

They returned to where the girl still sat, wrapped in her cloak, sobbing still, but not so violently.

"Caroline, you may take off your things," said the mother, drawing the pins from her own hat. "We shall not go to-day."

The child shot her mother one disappointed look, then proceeded to follow suit. When her hat was off, she began to take off her gloves. As soon as they were on the table, the mother pushed them over to Mr. Gryce. As he looked at them, the girl lifted off her cloak.

"Will — will he tell?" she whispered behind its ample folds into her mother's ear.

The answer came quickly, but not in the mother's tones. Mr. Gryce's ears had lost none of their ancient acuteness.

"I do not see that I should gain much by doing so. The one discovery which would link this find of yours indissolubly with Miss Challoner's death, I have failed to make. If I am equally unsuccessful below — if I can establish no closer connection there than here between this cutter and the weapon which killed Miss Challoner, I shall have no cause to mention the matter. It will be too extraneous to the

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case. Do you remember the exact spot where you stooped, Miss Watkins?"

"No, no. Somewhere near those big chairs; I didn't have to step out of my way; I really didn't."

Mr. Gryce's answering smile was a study. It seemed to convey a two-fold message, one for the mother and one for the child, and both were comforting. But he went away, disappointed. The clew which promised so much was, to all appearance, a false one.

He could soon tell.

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VI

INTEGRITY

MR. GRYCE'S fears were only too well founded. Though Mr. McElroy was kind enough to point out the exact spot where he saw Miss Watkins stoop, no trace of blood was found upon the rug which had lain there, nor had anything of the kind been washed up by the very careful man who scrubbed the lobby floor in the early morning. This was disappointing, as its presence would have settled the whole question. When, these efforts all exhausted, the two detectives faced each other again in the small room given up to their use, Mr. Gryce showed his discouragement. To be certain of a fact you cannot prove has not the same alluring quality for the old that it has for the young. Sweetwater watched him in some concern, then with the persistence which was one of his strong points, ventured finally to remark:

"I have but one idea left on the subject."

"And what is that?" Old as he was, Mr. Gryce was alert in a moment.

"The girl wore a red cloak. If I mistake not, the lining was also red. A spot on it might not show to the casual observer. Yet it would mean much to us."

"Sweetwater!"

A faint blush rose to the old man's cheek.

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"Shall I request the privilege of looking that garment over?"

"Yes."

The young fellow ducked and left the room. When he returned, it was with a downcast air.

"Nothing doing," said he.

And then there was silence.

"We only need to find out now that this cutter was not even Miss Challoner's property," remarked Mr. Gryce, at last, with a gesture towards the object named lying openly on the table before him.

"That should be easy. Shall I take it to their rooms and show it to her maid?"

"If you can do so without disturbing the old gentleman."

But here they were themselves disturbed. A knock at the door was followed by the immediate entrance of the very person just mentioned. Mr. Challoner had come in search of the inspector, and showed some surprise to find his place occupied by an unknown old man.

But Mr. Gryce, who discerned tidings in the bereaved father's face, was all alacrity in an instant. Greeting his visitor with a smile which few could see without trusting the man, he explained the inspector's absence and introduced himself in his own capacity.

Mr. Challoner had heard of him. Nevertheless, he did not seem inclined to speak.

Mr. Gryce motioned Sweetwater from the room. With a woeful look the young detective withdrew,

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his last glance cast at the cutter still lying in full view on the table.

Mr. Gryce, not unmindful himself of this object, took it up, then laid it down again, with an air of seeming abstraction.

The father's attention was caught.

"What is that?" he cried, advancing a step and bestowing more than an ordinary glance at the object thus brought casually, as it were, to his notice. "I surely recognise this cutter. Does it belong here or —"

Mr. Gryce, observing the other's emotion, motioned him to a chair. As his visitor sank into it, he remarked, with all the consideration exacted by the situation:

"It is unknown property, Mr. Challoner. But we have some reason to think it belonged to your daughter. Are we correct in this surmise?"

"I have seen it, or one like it, often in her hand." Here his eyes suddenly dilated and the hand stretched forth to grasp it quickly drew back. "Where — where was it found?" he hoarsely demanded. "O God! am I to be crushed to the very earth by sorrow!"

Mr. Gryce hastened to give him such relief as was consistent with the truth.

"It was picked up — last night — from the lobby floor. There is seemingly nothing to connect it with her death. Yet —"

The pause was eloquent. Mr. Challoner gave the detective an agonised look and turned white to the

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lips. Then gradually, as the silence continued, his head fell forward, and he muttered almost unintelligibly:

"I honestly believe her the victim of some heartless stranger. I do now; but — but I cannot mislead the police. At any cost I must retract a statement I made under false impressions and with no desire to deceive. I said that I knew all of the gentlemen who admired her and aspired to her hand, and that they were all reputable men and above committing a crime of this or any other kind. But it seems that I did not know her secret heart as thoroughly as I had supposed. Among her effects I have just come upon a batch of letters — love letters I am forced to acknowledge — signed by initials totally strange to me. The letters are manly in tone — most of them — but one —"

"What about the one?"

"Shows that the writer was displeased. It may mean nothing, but I could not let the matter go without setting myself right with the authorities. If it might be allowed to rest here — if those letters can remain sacred, it would save me the additional pang of seeing her inmost concerns — the secret and holiest recesses of a woman's heart, laid open to the public. For, from the tenor of most of these letters, she — she was not averse to the writer."

Mr. Gryce moved a little restlessly in his chair and stared hard at the cutter so conveniently placed under his eye. Then his manner softened and he remarked:

"We will do what we can. But you must under-

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stand that the matter is not a simple one. That, in fact, it contains mysteries which demand police investigation. We do not dare to trifle with any of the facts. The inspector, and, if not he, the coroner, will have to be told about these letters and will probably ask to see them."

"They are the letters of a gentleman."

"With the one exception."

"Yes, that is understood." Then in a sudden heat and with an almost sublime trust in his daughter notwithstanding the duplicity he had just discovered: "Nothing — not the story told by these letters, or the sight of that sturdy paper-cutter with its long and very slender blade, will make me believe that she willingly took her own life. You do not know, cannot know, the rare delicacy of her nature. She was a lady through and through. If she had meditated death — if the breach suggested by the one letter I have mentioned, should have so preyed upon her spirits as to lead her to break her old father's heart and outrage the feelings of all who knew her, she could not, being the woman she was, choose a public place for such an act — an hotel writing-room — in face of a lobby full of hurrying men. It was out of nature. Every one who knows her will tell you so. The deed was an accident — incredible — but still an accident."

Mr. Gryce had respect for this outburst. Making no attempt to answer it, he suggested, with some hesitation, that Miss Challoner had been seen writing a letter previous to taking those fatal steps from the desk which ended so tragically. Was this letter to

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one of her lady friends, as reported, and was it as far from suggesting the awful tragedy which followed, as he had been told?

"It was a cheerful letter. Such a one as she often wrote to her little protégées here and there. I judge that this was written to some girl like that, for the person addressed was not known to her maid, any more than she was to me. It expressed an affectionate interest, and it breathed encouragement — *encouragement! and she meditating her own death at the moment!* Impossible! That letter should exonerate her if nothing else does."

Mr. Gryce recalled the incongruities, the inconsistencies and even the surprising contradictions which had often marked the conduct of men and women, in his lengthy experience with the strange, the sudden, and the tragic things of life, and slightly shook his head. He pitied Mr. Challoner, and admired even more his courage in face of the appalling grief which had overwhelmed him, but he dared not encourage a false hope. The girl had killed herself and with this weapon. They might not be able to prove it absolutely, but it was nevertheless true, and this broken old man would some day be obliged to acknowledge it. But the detective said nothing of this, and was very patient with the further arguments the other advanced to prove his point and the lofty character of the girl to whom, misled by appearance, the police seemed inclined to attribute the awful sin of self-destruction.

But when, this topic exhausted, Mr. Challoner rose to leave the room, Mr. Gryce showed where his

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own thoughts still centred, by asking him the date of the correspondence discovered between his daughter and her unknown admirer.

"Some of the letters were dated last summer, some this fall. The one you are most anxious to hear about only a month back," he added, with unconquerable devotion to what he considered his duty.

Mr. Gryce would like to have carried his inquiries further, but desisted. His heart was full of compassion for this childless old man, doomed to have his choicest memories disturbed by cruel doubts which possibly would never be removed to his own complete satisfaction.

But when he was gone, and Sweetwater had returned, Mr. Gryce made it his first duty to communicate to his superiors the hitherto unsuspected fact of a secret romance in Miss Challoner's seemingly calm and well-guarded life. She had loved and been loved by one of whom her family knew nothing. And the two had quarrelled, as certain letters lately found could be made to show.

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VII

THE LETTERS

BEFORE a table strewn with papers, in the room we have already mentioned as given over to the use of the police, sat Dr. Heath in a mood too thoughtful to notice the entrance of Mr. Gryce and Sweetwater from the dining-room where they had been having dinner.

However as the former's tread was somewhat lumbering, the coroner's attention was caught before they had quite crossed the room, and Sweetwater, with his quick eye, noted how his arm and hand immediately fell so as to cover up a portion of the papers lying nearest to him.

"Well, Gryce, this is a dark case," he observed, as at his bidding the two detectives took their seats.

Mr. Gryce nodded; so did Sweetwater.

"The darkest that has ever come to my knowledge," pursued the coroner.

Mr. Gryce again nodded; but not so, Sweetwater. For some reason this simple expression of opinion seemed to have given him a mental start.

"She was not shot. She was not struck by any other hand; yet she lies dead from a mortal wound in the breast. Though there is no tangible proof of her having inflicted this wound upon herself, the jury will have no alternative, I fear, than to pronounce the case one of suicide."

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"I'm sorry that I've been able to do so little," remarked Mr. Gryce.

The coroner darted him a quick look.

"You are not satisfied? You have some different idea?" he asked.

The detective frowned at his hands crossed over the top of his cane, then shaking his head, replied:

"The verdict you mention is the only natural one, of course. I see that you have been talking with Miss Challoner's former maid?"

"Yes, and she has settled an important point for us. There was a possibility, of course, that the paper-cutter which you brought to my notice had never gone with her into the mezzanine. That she, or some other person, had dropped it in passing through the lobby. But this girl assures me that her mistress did not enter the lobby that night. That she accompanied her down in the elevator, and saw her step off at the mezzanine. She can also swear that the cutter was in a book she carried — the book we found lying on the desk. The girl remembers distinctly seeing its peculiarly chased handle projecting from its pages. Could anything be more satisfactory if — I was going to say, if the young lady had been of the impulsive type and the provocation greater. But Miss Challoner's nature was calm, and were it not for these letters —" here his arm shifted a little —"I should not be so sure of my jury's future verdict. Love —" he went on, after a moment of silent consideration of a letter he had chosen from those before him, "disturbs the most equable natures. When it enters as a factor, we can

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expect anything — as you know. And Miss Challoner evidently was much attached to her correspondent, and naturally felt the reproach conveyed in these lines."

And Dr. Heath read:

"Dear Miss Challoner:

"Only a man of small spirit could endure what I endured from you the other day. Love such as mine would be respectable in a clod-hopper, and I think that even you will acknowledge that I stand somewhat higher than that. Though I was silent under your disapprobation, you shall yet have your answer. It will not lack point because of its necessary delay."

"A threat!"

The words sprang from Sweetwater, and were evidently involuntary. Dr. Heath paid no notice, but Mr. Gryce, in shifting his hands on his cane top, gave them a sidelong look which was not without a hint of fresh interest in a case concerning which he had believed himself to have said his last word.

"It is the only letter of them all which conveys anything like a reproach," proceeded the coroner. "The rest are ardent enough and, I must acknowledge that, so far as I have allowed myself to look into them, sufficiently respectful. Her surprise must consequently have been great at receiving these lines, and her resentment equally so. If the two met afterwards — But I have not shown you the signature. To the poor father it conveyed nothing — some facts have been kept from him — but to us —" here he whirled the letter about so that

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Sweetwater, at least, could see the name, "it conveys a hope that we may yet understand Miss Challoner."

"Brotherson!" exclaimed the young detective in loud surprise. "Brotherson! The man who —"

"The man who left this building just before or simultaneously with the alarm caused by Miss Challoner's fall. It clears away some of the clouds befogging us. She probably caught sight of him in the lobby, and in the passion of the moment forgot her usual instincts and drove the sharp-pointed weapon into her heart."

"Brotherson!" The word came softly now, and with a thoughtful intonation. "He saw her die."

"Why do you say that?"

"Would he have washed his hands in the snow if he had been in ignorance of the occurrence? He was the real, if not active, cause of her death and he knew it. Either he — Excuse me, Dr. Heath and Mr. Gryce, it is not for me to obtrude my opinion."

"Have you settled it beyond dispute that Brotherson is really the man who was seen doing this?"

"No, sir. I have not had a minute for that job, but I'm ready for the business any time you see fit to spare me."

"Let it be to-morrow, or, if you can manage it, to-night. We want the man even if he is not the hero of that romantic episode. He wrote these letters, and he must explain the last one. His initials, as you see, are not ordinary ones, and you will find them at the bottom of all these sheets. He was brave enough or arrogant enough to sign the ques-

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tionable one with his full name. This may speak well for him, and it may not. It is for you to decide that. Where will you look for him, Sweetwater? No one here knows his address."

"Not Miss Challoner's maid?"

"No; the name is a new one to her. But she made it very evident that she was not surprised to hear that her mistress was in secret correspondence with a member of the male sex. Much can be hidden from servants, but not that."

"I'll find the man; I have a double reason for doing that now; he shall not escape me."

Dr. Heath expressed his satisfaction, and gave some orders. Meanwhile, Mr. Gryce had not uttered a word.

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VIII

STRANGE DOINGS FOR GEORGE

THAT evening George sat so long over the newspapers that in spite of my absorbing interest in the topic engrossing me, I fell asleep in my cozy little rocking chair. I was awakened by what seemed like a kiss falling very softly on my forehead, though, to be sure, it may have been only the flap of George's coat sleeve as he stooped over me.

"Wake up, little woman," I heard, "and trot away to bed. I'm going out and may not be in till daybreak."

"You! going out! at ten o'clock at night, tired as you are—as we both are! What has happened—Oh!"

This broken exclamation escaped me as I perceived in the dim background by the sitting-room door, the figure of a man who called up recent, but very thrilling experiences.

"Mr. Sweetwater," explained George. "We are going out together. It is necessary, or you may be sure I should not leave you."

I was quite wide awake enough by now to understand. "Oh, I know. You are going to hunt up the man. How I wish —"

But George did not wait for me to express my wishes. He gave me a little good advice as to how I had better employ my time in his absence, and was off before I could find words to answer.

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This ends all I have to say about myself; but the events of that night carefully related to me by George are important enough for me to describe them, with all the detail which is their rightful due. I shall tell the story as I have already been led to do in other portions of this narrative, as though I were present and shared the adventure.

As soon as the two were in the street, the detective turned towards George and said:

"Mr. Anderson, I have a great deal to ask of you. The business before us is not a simple one, and I fear that I shall have to subject you to more inconvenience than is customary in matters like this. Mr. Brotherson has vanished; that is, in his own proper person, but I have an idea that I am on the track of one who will lead us very directly to him if we manage the affair carefully. What I want of you, of course, is mere identification. You saw the face of the man who washed his hands in the snow, and would know it again, you say. Do you think you could be quite sure of yourself, if the man were differently dressed and differently occupied?"

"I think so. There's his height and a certain strong look in his face. I cannot describe it."

"You don't need to. Come! we're all right. You don't mind making a night of it?"

"Not *if* it is necessary."

"That we can't tell *yet*." And with a characteristic shrug and smile, the detective led the way to a taxicab which stood in waiting at the corner.

A quarter of an hour of rather fast riding brought them into a tangle of streets on the East side. As

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George noticed the swarming sidewalks and listened to the noises incident to an over-populated quarter, he could not forbear, despite the injunction he had received, to express his surprise at the direction of their search.

"Surely," said he, "the gentleman I have described can have no friends here." Then, bethinking himself, he added: "But if he has reasons to fear the law, naturally he would seek to lose himself in a place as different as possible from his usual haunts."

"Yes, that would be some men's way," was the curt, almost indifferent, answer he received. Sweetwater was looking this way and that from the window beside him, and now, leaning out gave some directions to the driver which altered their course.

When they stopped, which was in a few minutes, he said to George:

"We shall have to walk now for a block or two. I'm anxious to attract no attention, nor is it desirable for you to do so. If you can manage to act as if you were accustomed to the place and just leave all the talking to me, we ought to get along first-rate. Don't be astonished at anything you see, and trust me for the rest; that's all."

They alighted, and he dismissed the taxicab. Some clock in the neighbourhood struck the hour of ten.

"Good! we shall be in time," muttered the detective, and led the way down the street and round a corner or so, till they came to a block darker than the rest, and much less noisy.

It had a sinister look, and George, who is brave enough under all ordinary circumstances, was glad

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that his companion wore a badge and carried a whistle. He was also relieved when he caught sight of the burly form of a policeman in the shadow of one of the doorways. Yet the houses he saw before him were not so very different from those they had already passed. His uneasiness could not have sprung from them. They had even an air of positive respectability, as though inhabited by industrious workmen. Then, what was it which made the close companionship of a member of the police so uncommonly welcome? Was it a certain aspect of solitariness which clung to the block, or was it the sudden appearance here and there of strangely gliding figures, which no sooner loomed up against the snowy perspective, than they disappeared again in some unseen doorway?

"There's a meeting on to-night, of the Associated Brotherhood of the Awl, the Plane and the Trowel (whatever that means), and it is the speaker we want to see; the man who is to address them promptly at ten o'clock. Do you object to meetings?"

"Is this a secret one?"

"It wasn't advertised."

"Are we carpenters or masons that we can count on admittance?"

"I am a carpenter. Don't you think you can be a mason for the occasion?"

"I doubt it, but —"

"Hush! I must speak to this man."

George stood back, and a few words passed between Sweetwater and a shadowy figure which seemed to have sprung up out of the sidewalk.

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"Balked at the outset," were the encouraging words with which the detective rejoined George. "It seems that a pass-word is necessary, and my friend has been unable to get it. Will the speaker pass out this way?" he inquired of the shadowy figure still lingering in their rear.

"He didn't go in by it; yet I believe he's safe enough inside," was the muttered answer.

Sweetwater had no relish for disappointments of this character, but it was not long before he straightened up and allowed himself to exchange a few more words with this mysterious person. These appeared to be of a more encouraging nature than the last, for it was not long before the detective returned with renewed alacrity to George, and, wheeling him about, began to retrace his steps to the corner.

"Are we going back? Are you going to give up the job?" George asked.

"No; we're going to take him from the rear. There's a break in the fence — Oh, we'll do very well. Trust me."

George laughed. He was growing excited, but not altogether agreeably so. He says that he has seen moments of more pleasant anticipation. Evidently, my good husband is not cut out for detective work.

Where they went under this officer's guidance, he cannot tell. The tortuous tangle of alleys through which he now felt himself led was dark as the nether regions to his unaccustomed eyes. There was snow under his feet and now and then he brushed against some obtruding object, or stumbled against a low

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fence; but beyond these slight miscalculations on his own part, he was a mere automaton in the hands of his eager guide, and only became his own man again when they suddenly stepped into an open yard and he could discern plainly before him the dark walls of a building pointed out by Sweetwater as their probable destination. Yet even here they encountered some impediment which prohibited a close approach. A wall or shed cut off their view of the building's lower storey; and though somewhat startled at being left unceremoniously alone after just a whispered word of encouragement from the ever ready detective, George could quite understand the necessity which that person must feel for a quiet reconnoitring of the surroundings before the two of them ventured further forward in their possibly hazardous undertaking. Yet the experience was none too pleasing to George, and he was very glad to hear Sweetwater's whisper again at his ear, and to feel himself rescued from the pool of slush in which he had been left to stand.

"The approach is not all that can be desired," remarked the detective as they entered what appeared to be a low shed. "The broken board has been put back and securely nailed in place, and if I am not very much mistaken there is a fellow stationed in the yard who will want the pass-word too. Looks shady to me. I'll have something to tell the chief when I get back."

"But we! What are we going to do if we cannot get in front or rear?"

"We're going to wait right here in the hopes of

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catching a glimpse of our man as he comes out," returned the detective, drawing George towards a low window overlooking the yard he had described as sentinelled. "He will have to pass directly under this window on his way to the alley," Sweetwater went on to explain, "and if I can only raise it — but the noise would give us away. I can't do that."

"Perhaps it swings on hinges," suggested George. "It looks like that sort of a window."

"If it should — well! it does. We're in great luck, sir. But before I pull it open, remember that from the moment I unlatch it, everything said or done here can be heard in the adjoining yard. So no whispers and no unnecessary movements. When you hear him coming, as sooner or later you certainly will, fall carefully to your knees and lean out just far enough to catch a glimpse of him before he steps down from the porch. If he stops to light his cigar or to pass a few words with some of the men he will leave behind, you may get a plain enough view of his face or figure to identify him. The light is burning low in that rear hall, but it will do. If it does not,— if you can't see him or if you do, don't hang out of the window more than a second. Duck after your first look. I don't want to be caught at this job with no better opportunity for escape than we have here. Can you remember all that?"

George pinched his arm encouragingly, and Sweetwater, with an amused grunt, softly unlatched the window and pulled it wide open.

A fine sleet flew in, imperceptible save for the sensation of damp it gave, and the slight haze it dif-

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fused through the air. Enlarged by this haze, the building they were set to watch rose in magnified proportions at their left. The yard between, piled high in the centre with snow-heaps or other heaps covered with snow, could not have been more than forty feet square. The window from which they peered, was half-way down this yard, so that a comparatively short distance separated them from the porch where George had been told to look for the man he was expected to identify. All was dark there at present, but he could hear from time to time some sounds of restless movement, as the guard posted inside shifted in his narrow quarters, or struck his benumbed feet softly together.

But what came to them from above was more interesting than anything to be heard or seen below. A man's voice, raised to a wonderful pitch by the passion of oratory, had burst the barriers of the closed hall in that towering third storey and was carrying its tale to other ears than those within. Had it been summer and the windows open, both George and Sweetwater might have heard every word; for the tones were exceptionally rich and penetrating, and the speaker intent only on the impression he was endeavouring to make upon his audience. That he had not mistaken his power in this direction was evinced by the applause which rose from time to time from innumerable hands and feet. But this uproar would be speedily silenced, and the mellow voice ring out again, clear and commanding. What could the subject be to rouse such enthusiasm in the Associated Brotherhood of the Awl, the Plane and the Trowel?

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There was a moment when our listening friends expected to be enlightened. A shutter was thrown back in one of those upper windows, and the window hurriedly raised, during which words took the place of sounds and they heard enough to whet their appetite for more. But only that. The shutter was speedily restored to place, and the window again closed. A wise precaution, or so thought George if they wished to keep their doubtful proceedings secret.

A tirade against the rich and a loud call to battle could be gleaned from the few sentences they had heard. But its virulence and pointed attack was not that of the second-rate demagogue or business agent, but of a man whose intellect and culture rang in every tone, and informed each sentence.

Sweetwater, in whom satisfaction was fast taking the place of impatience and regret, pushed the window to before asking George this question:

"Did you hear the voice of the man whose action attracted your attention outside the Clermont?"

"No."

"Did you note just now the large shadow dancing on the ceiling over the speaker's head?"

"Yes, but I could judge nothing from that."

"Well, he's a rum one. I shan't open this window again till he gives signs of reaching the end of his speech. It's too cold."

But almost immediately he gave a start and, pressing George's arm, appeared to listen, not to the speech which was no longer audible, but to something much nearer — a step or movement in the adjoining yard. At least, so George interpreted the quick

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turn which this impetuous detective made, and the pains he took to direct George's attention to the walk running under the window beneath which they crouched. Someone was stealing down upon the house at their left, from the alley beyond. A big man, whose shoulder brushed the window as he went by. George felt his hand seized again and pressed as this happened, and before he had recovered from this excitement, experienced another quick pressure and still another as one, two, three additional figures went slipping by. Then his hand was suddenly dropped, for a cry had shot up from the door where the sentinel stood guard, followed by a sudden loud slam, and the noise of a shooting bolt, which, proclaiming as it did that the invaders were not friends but enemies to the cause which was being vaunted above, so excited Sweetwater that he pulled the window wide open and took a bold look out. George followed his example and this was what they saw:

Three men were standing flat against the fence leading from the shed directly to the porch. The fourth was crouching within the latter, and in another moment they heard his fist descend upon the door inside in a way to rouse the echoes. Meantime, the voice in the audience hall above had ceased, and there could be heard instead the scramble of hurrying feet and the noise of overturning benches. Then a window flew up and a voice called down:

"Who's that? What do you want down there?"

But before an answer could be shouted back, this man was drawn fiercely inside, and the scramble was

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renewed, amid which George heard Sweetwater's whisper at his ear:

"It's the police. The chief has got ahead of me. Was that the man we're after — the one who shouted down?"

"No. Neither was he the speaker. The voices are very different."

"We want the speaker. If the boys get him, we're all right; but if they don't — wait, I must make the matter sure."

And with a bound he vaulted through the window, whistling in a peculiar way. George, thus left quite alone, had the pleasure of seeing his sole protector mix with the boys, as he called them, and ultimately crowd in with them through the door which had finally been opened for their admittance. Then came a wait, and then the quiet re-appearance of the detective alone and in no very amiable mood.

"Well?" inquired George, somewhat breathlessly. "Do you want me? They don't seem to be coming out."

"No; they've gone the other way. It was a red hot anarchist meeting, and no mistake. They have arrested one of the speakers, but the other escaped. How, we have not yet found out; but I think there's a way out somewhere by which he got the start of us. He was the man I wanted you to see. Bad luck, Mr. Anderson, but I'm not at the end of my resources. If you'll have patience with me and accompany me a little further, I promise you that I'll only risk one more failure. Will you be so good, sir?"

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IX

THE INCIDENT OF THE PARTLY LIFTED SHADE

THE fellow had a way with him, hard to resist. Cold as George was and exhausted by an excitement of a kind to which he was wholly unaccustomed, he found himself acceding to the detective's request; and after a quick lunch and a huge cup of coffee in a restaurant which I wish I had time to describe, the two took a car which eventually brought them into one of the oldest quarters of the Borough of Brooklyn.

The sleet which had stung their faces in the streets of New York had been left behind them somewhere on the bridge, but the chill was not gone from the air, and George felt greatly relieved when Sweetwater paused in the middle of a long block before a lofty tenement house of mean appearance, and signified that here they were to stop, and that from now on, *mum* was to be their watchword.

George was relieved I say, but he was also more astonished than ever. What kind of haunts were these for the cultured gentleman who spent his evenings at the Clermont? It was easy enough in these days of extravagant sympathies, to understand such a man addressing the uneasy spirits of lower New York — he had been called an enthusiast, and an enthusiast is very often a social agitator — but to trace him afterwards to a place like this was certainly a sur-

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prise. A tenement — such a tenement as this — meant home — home for himself or for those he counted his friends, and such a supposition seemed inconceivable to my poor husband, with the memory of the gorgeous parlours of the Clermont in his mind. Indeed, he hinted something of the kind to his affable but strangely reticent companion, but all the answer he got was a peculiar smile whose humorous twist he could barely discern in the semi-darkness of the open doorway into which they had just plunged.

"An adventure! certainly an adventure!" flashed through poor George's mind, as he peered, in great curiosity down the long hall before him, into a dismal rear, opening into a still more dismal court. It was truly a novel experience for a business man whose philanthropy was carried on entirely by proxy — that is, by his wife. Should he be expected to penetrate into those dark, ill-smelling recesses, or would he be led up the long flights of naked stairs, so feebly illuminated that they gave the impression of extending indefinitely into dimmer and dimmer heights of decay and desolation?

Sweetwater seemed to decide for the rear, for leaving George, he stepped down the hall into the court beyond, where George could see him casting inquiring glances up at the walls above him. Another tenement, similar to the one whose rear end he was contemplating, towered behind but he paid no attention to that. He was satisfied with the look he had given and came quickly back, joining George

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at the foot of the staircase, up which he silently led the way.

It was a rude, none-to-well-cared-for building, but it seemed respectable enough and very quiet, considering the mass of people it accommodated. There were marks of poverty everywhere, but no squalor. One flight — two flights — three — and then George's guide stopped, and, looking back at him, made a gesture. It appeared to be one of caution, but when the two came together at the top of the staircase, Sweetwater spoke quite naturally as he pointed out a door in their rear:

"That's the room. We'll keep a sharp watch and when any man, no matter what his dress or appearance comes up these stairs and turns that way, give him a sharp look. You understand?"

"Yes; but —"

"Oh, he hasn't come in yet. I took pains to find that out. You saw me go into the court and look up. That was to see if his window was lighted. Well, it wasn't."

George felt non-plussed.

"But surely," said he, "the gentleman named Brotherson doesn't live here."

"The *inventor* does."

"Oh!"

"And — but I will explain later."

The suppressed excitement contained in these words made George stare. Indeed, he had been wondering for some time at the manner of the detective which showed a curious mixture of several opposing emotions. Now, the fellow was actually

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in a tremble of hope or impatience; — and, not content with listening, he peered every few minutes down the well of the staircase, and when he was not doing that, tramped from end to end of the narrow passage-way separating the head of the stairs from the door he had pointed out, like one to whom minutes were hours. All this time he seemed to forget George who certainly had as much reason as himself for finding the time long. But when, after some half hour of this tedium and suspense, there rose from below the faint clatter of ascending footsteps, he remembered his meek companion and beckoning him to one side, began a studied conversation with him, showing him a note-book in which he had written such phrases as these:

Don't look up till he is fairly in range with the light.
There's nothing to fear; he doesn't know either of us.
If it is a face you have seen before; — if it is the one we are expecting to see, pull your necktie straight. It's a little on one side.

These rather startling injunctions were read by George, with no very perceptible diminution of the uneasiness which it was only natural for him to feel at the oddity of his position. But only the demand last made produced any impression on him. The man they were waiting for was no further up than the second floor, but instinctively George's hand had flown to his necktie, and he was only stopped from its premature re-arrangement by a warning look from Sweetwater.

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"Not unless you know him," whispered the detective; and immediately launched out into an easy talk about some totally different business which George neither understood, nor was expected to, I dare say.

Suddenly the steps below paused, and George heard Sweetwater draw in his breath in irrepressible dismay. But they were immediately resumed, and presently the head and shoulders of a workingman of uncommon proportions appeared in sight on the stairway.

George cast him a keen look, and his hand rose doubtfully to his neck and then fell back again. The approaching man was tall, very well-proportioned and easy of carriage; but the face — such of it as could be seen between his cap and the high collar he had pulled up about his ears, conveyed no exact impression to George's mind, and he did not dare to give the signal Sweetwater expected from him. Yet as the man went by with a dark and sidelong glance at them both, he felt his hand rise again, though he did not complete the action, much to his own disgust and to the evident disappointment of the watchful detective.

"You're not sure?" he now heard, oddly interpolated in the stream of half-whispered talk with which the other endeavoured to carry off the situation.

George shook his head. He could not rid himself of the old impression he had formed of the man in the snow.

"Mr. Dunn, a word with you," suddenly spoke

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up Sweetwater, to the man who had just passed them. "That's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is my name," was the quiet response, in a voice which was at once rich and resonant; a voice which George knew — the voice of the impassioned speaker he had heard resounding through the sleet as he cowered within hearing in the shed behind the Avenue A tenement. "Who are you who wish to speak to me at so late an hour?"

He was returning to them from the door he had unlocked and left slightly ajar.

"Well, we are — You know what," smiled the ready detective, advancing half-way to greet him. "We're not members of the Associated Brotherhood, but possibly have hopes of being so. At all events, we should like to talk the matter over, if, as you say, it's not too late."

"I have nothing to do with the club —"

"But you spoke before it."

"Yes."

"Then you can give us some sort of an idea how we are to apply for membership."

Mr. Dunn met the concentrated gaze of his two evidently unwelcome visitors with a frankness which dashed George's confidence in himself, but made little visible impression upon his daring companion.

"I should rather see you at another time," said he. "But —" his hesitation was inappreciable save to the nicest ear —"if you will allow me to be brief, I will tell you what I know — which is very little."

Sweetwater was greatly taken aback. All he had looked for, as he was careful to tell my husband later,

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was a sufficiently prolonged conversation to enable George to mark and study the workings of the face he was not yet sure of. Nor did the detective feel quite easy at the readiness of his reception; nor any too well pleased to accept the invitation which this man now gave them to enter his room.

But he suffered no betrayal of his misgivings to escape him, though he was careful to intimate to George, as they waited in the doorway for the other to light up, that he should not be displeased at his refusal to accompany him further in this adventure, and even advised him to remain in the hall till he received his summons to enter.

But George had not come as far as this to back out now, and as soon as he saw Sweetwater advance into the now well-lighted interior, he advanced too and began to look around him.

The room, like many others in these old-fashioned tenements, had a jog just where the door was, so that on entering they had to take several steps before they could get a full glimpse of its four walls. When they did, both showed surprise. Comfort, if not elegance, confronted them, which impression, however, was immediately lost in the evidences of work, manual, as well as intellectual, which were everywhere scattered about.

The man who lived here was not only a student, as was evinced by a long wall full of books, but he was an art-lover, a musician, an inventor and an athlete. So much could be learned from the most cursory glance. A more careful one picked up other facts fully as startling and impressive. The books were

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choice; the invention to all appearance a practical one; the art of a high order and the music, such as was in view, of a character of which the nicest taste need not be ashamed.

George began to feel quite conscious of the intrusion of which they had been guilty, and was amazed at the ease with which the detective carried himself in the presence of such manifestations of culture and good, hard work. He was trying to recall the exact appearance of the figure he had seen stooping in the snowy street two nights before, when he found himself staring at the occupant of the room, who had taken up his stand before them and was regarding them while they were regarding the room.

He had thrown aside his hat and rid himself of his overcoat, and the fearlessness of his aspect seemed to daunt the hitherto dauntless Sweetwater, who, for the first time in his life, perhaps, hunted in vain for words with which to start conversation.

Had he made an awful mistake? Was this Mr. Dunn what he seemed, an unknown and careful genius, battling with great odds in his honest struggle to give the world something of value in return for what it had given him? The quick, almost deprecatory glance he darted at George betrayed his dismay; a dismay which George had begun to share, notwithstanding his growing belief that the man's face was not wholly unknown to him even if he could not recognise it as the one he had seen outside the Clermont.

"You seem to have forgotten your errand," came

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in quiet, if not good-natured, sarcasm from their patiently waiting host.

"It's the room," muttered Sweetwater, with an attempt at his old-time ease which was not as fully successful as usual. "What an all-fired genius you must be. I never saw the like. And in a tenement house too! You ought to be in one of those big new studio buildings in New York where artists be and everything you see is beautiful. You'd appreciate it, you would."

The detective started, George started, at the gleam which answered him from a very uncommon eye. It was a temporary flash, however, and quickly veiled, and the tone in which this Dunn now spoke was anything but an encouraging one.

"I thought you were desirous of joining a socialistic fraternity," said he; "a true aspirant for such honours don't care for beautiful things unless all can have them. I prefer my tenement. How is it with you, friends?"

Sweetwater found some sort of a reply, though the thing which this man now did must have startled him, as it certainly did George. They were so grouped that a table quite full of anomalous objects stood at the back of their host, and consequently quite beyond their own reach. As Sweetwater began to speak, he whom he had addressed by the name of Dunn, drew a pistol from his breast pocket and laid it down barrel towards them on this table top. Then he looked up courteously enough, and listened till Sweetwater was done. A very handsome man, but one not to be trifled with in the slightest degree.

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Both recognised this fact, and George, for one, began to edge towards the door.

"Now I feel easier," remarked the giant, swelling out his chest. He was unusually tall, as well as unusually muscular. "I never like to carry arms; but sometimes it is unavoidable. Damn it, what hands!" He was looking at his own, which certainly showed soil. "Will you pardon me?" he pleasantly apologised, stepping towards a washstand and plunging his hands into the basin. "I cannot think with dirt on me like that. Humph, hey! did you speak?"

He turned quickly on George who had certainly uttered an ejaculation, but receiving no reply, went on with his task, completing it with a care and a disregard of their presence which showed him up in still another light.

But even his hardihood showed shock, when, upon turning round with a brisk, "Now I'm ready to talk," he encountered again the clear eye of Sweetwater. For, in the person of this none too welcome intruder, he saw a very different man from the one upon whom he had just turned his back with so little ceremony; and there appeared to be no good reason for the change. He had not noted in his preoccupation, how George, at sight of his stooping figure, had made a sudden significant movement, and if he had, the pulling of a necktie straight, would have meant nothing to him. But to Sweetwater it meant every thing, and it was in the tone of one fully at ease with himself that he now dryly remarked:

"Mr. Brotherson, if you feel quite clean, and if

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you have sufficiently warmed yourself, I would suggest that we start out at once, unless you prefer to have me share this room with you till the morning."

There was silence. Mr. Dunn thus addressed attempted no answer; not for a full minute. The two men were measuring each other — George felt that he did not count at all — and *they* were quite too much occupied with this task to heed the passage of time. To George, who knew little, if anything, of what this silent struggle meant to either, it seemed that the detective stood no show before this Samson of physical strength and intellectual power, backed by a pistol just within reach of his hand. But as George continued to look and saw the figure of the smaller man gradually dilate, while that of the larger, the more potent and the better guarded, gave unmistakable signs of secret wavering, he slowly changed his mind and, ranging himself with the detective, waited for the word or words which should explain this situation and render intelligible the triumph gradually becoming visible in the young detective's eyes.

But he was not destined to have his curiosity satisfied so far. He might witness and hear, but it was long before he understood.

"Brotherson?" repeated their host, after the silence had lasted to the breaking-point. "Why do you call me that?"

"Because it is your name."

"You called me Dunn a minute ago."

"That is true."

"Why Dunn if Brotherson is my name?"

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"Because you spoke under the name of Dunn at the meeting to-night, and if I don't mistake, that is the name by which you are known here."

"And you? By what name are you known?"

"It is late to ask, isn't it? But I'm willing to speak it now, and I might not have been so a little earlier in our conversation. I am Detective Sweetwater of the New York Department of Police, and my errand here is a very simple one. Some letters signed by you have been found among the papers of the lady whose mysterious death at the hotel Clermont is just now occupying the attention of the New York authorities. If you have any information to give which will in any way explain that death, your presence will be welcome at Coroner Heath's office in New York. If you have not, your presence will still be welcome. At all events, I was told to bring you. You will be on hand to accompany me in the morning, I am quite sure, pardoning the unconventional means I have taken to make sure of my man?"

The humour with which this was said seemed to rob it of anything like attack, and Mr. Brotherson, as we shall hereafter call him, smiled with an odd acceptance of the same, as he responded:

"I will go before the police certainly. I haven't much to tell, but what I have is at their service. It will not help you, but I have no secrets. What are you doing?"

He bounded towards Sweetwater, who had simply stepped to the window, lifted the shade and looked across at the opposing tenement.

"I wanted to see if it was still snowing," ex-

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plained the detective, with a smile, which seemed to strike the other like a blow. "If it was a liberty, please pardon it."

Mr. Brotherson drew back. The cold air of self-possession which he now assumed, presented such a contrast to the unwarranted heat of the moment before that George wondered greatly over it, and later, when he recapitulated to me the whole story of this night, it was this incident of the lifted shade, together with the emotion it had caused, which he acknowledged as being for him the most inexplicable event of the evening and the one he was most anxious to hear explained.

As this ends our connection with this affair, I will bid you my personal farewell. I have often wished that circumstances had made it possible for me to accompany you through the remaining intricacies of this remarkable case.

But you will not lack a suitable guide.

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BOOK II

AS SEEN BY DETECTIVE SWEETWATER

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X

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

At an early hour the next morning, Sweetwater stood before the coroner's desk, urging a plea he feared to hear refused. He wished to be present at the interview soon to be held with Mr. Brotherson, and he had no good reason to advance why such a privilege should be allotted him.

"It's not curiosity," said he. "There's a question I hope to see settled. I can't communicate it — you would laugh at me; but it's an important one, a very important one, and I beg that you will let me sit in one of the corners and hear what he says. I won't bother and I'll be very still, so still that he'll hardly notice me. Do grant me this favour, sir."

The coroner, who had had some little experience with this man, surveyed him with a smile less forbidding than the poor fellow expected.

"You seem to lay great store by it," said he; "if you want to sort those papers over there, you may."

"Thank you. I don't understand the job, but I promise you not to increase the confusion. If I do; if I rattle the leaves too loudly, it will mean, 'Press him further on this exact point,' but I doubt if I rattle them, sir. No such luck."

The last three words were uttered *sotto voce*, but the coroner heard him, and followed his ungainly

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figure with a glance of some curiosity, as he settled himself at the desk on the other side of the room.

"Is the man —" he began, but at this moment the man entered, and Dr. Heath forgot the young detective, in his interest in the new arrival.

Neither dressed with the elegance known to the habitués of the Clermont, nor yet in the workman's outfit in which he had thought best to appear before the Associated Brotherhood, the newcomer advanced, with an aspect of open respect which could not fail to make a favourable impression upon the critical eye of the official awaiting him. So favourable, indeed, was this impression that that gentleman half rose, infusing a little more consideration into his greeting than he was accustomed to show to his prospective witnesses. Such a fearless eye he had seldom encountered, nor was it often his pleasure to confront so conspicuous a specimen of physical and intellectual manhood.

"Mr. Brotherson, I believe," said he, as he motioned his visitor to sit.

"That is my name, sir."

"Orlando Brotherson?"

"The same, sir."

"I'm glad we have made no mistake," smiled the doctor. "Mr. Brotherson, I have sent for you under the supposition that you were a friend of the unhappy lady lately dead at the Hotel Clermont."

"Miss Challoner?"

"Certainly; Miss Challoner."

"I knew the lady. But —" here the speaker's eye took on a look as questioning as that of his inter-

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locutor —"but in a way so devoid of all publicity that I cannot but feel surprised that the fact should be known."

At this, the listening Sweetwater hoped that Dr. Heath would ignore the suggestion thus conveyed and decline the explanation it apparently demanded. But the impression made by the gentleman's good looks had been too strong for this coroner's proverbial caution, and, handing over the slip of a note which had been found among Miss Challoner's effects by her father, he quietly asked:

"Do you recognise the signature?"

"Yes, it is mine."

"Then you acknowledge yourself the author of these lines?"

"Most certainly. Have I not said that this is my signature?"

"Do you remember the words of this note, Mr. Brotherson?"

"Hardly. I recollect its tenor, but not the exact words."

"Read them."

"Excuse me, I had rather not. I am aware that they were bitter and should be the cause of great regret. I was angry when I wrote them."

"That is evident. But the cause of your anger is not so clear, Mr. Brotherson. Miss Challoner was a woman of lofty character, or such was the universal opinion of her friends. What could she have done to a gentleman like yourself to draw forth such a tirade?"

"You ask that?"

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"I am obliged to. There is mystery surrounding her death; — the kind of mystery which demands perfect frankness on the part of all who were near her on that evening, or whose relations to her were in any way peculiar. You acknowledge that your friendship was of such a guarded nature that it surprised you greatly to hear it recognised. Yet you could write her a letter of this nature. Why?"

"Because —" the word came glibly; but the next one was long in following. "Because," he repeated, letting the fire of some strong feeling disturb for a moment his dignified reserve, "I offered myself to Miss Challoner, and she dismissed me with great disdain."

"Ah! and so you thought a threat was due her?"

"A threat?"

"These words contain a threat, do they not?"

"They may. I was hardly master of myself at the time. I may have expressed myself in an unfortunate manner."

"Read the words, Mr. Brotherson. I really must insist that you do so."

There was no hesitancy now. Rising, he leaned over the table and read the few words the other had spread out for his perusal. Then he slowly rose to his full height, as he answered, with some slight display of compunction:

"I remember it perfectly now. It is not a letter to be proud of. I hope —"

"Pray finish, Mr. Brotherson."

"That you are not seeking to establish a connection between this letter and her violent death?"

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"Letters of this sort are often very mischievous, Mr. Brotherson. The harshness with which this is written might easily rouse emotions of a most unhappy nature in the breast of a woman as sensitive as Miss Challoner."

"Pardon me, Dr. Heath; I cannot flatter myself so far. You overrate my influence with the lady you name."

"You believe, then, that she was sincere in her rejection of your addresses?"

A start, too slight to be noted by any one but the watchful Sweetwater, showed that this question had gone home. But the self-poise and mental control of this man were perfect, and in an instant he was facing the coroner again, with a dignity which gave no clew to the disturbance into which his thoughts had just been thrown. Nor was this disturbance apparent in his tones when he made his reply:

"I have never allowed myself to think otherwise. I have seen no reason why I should. The suggestion you would convey by such a question is hardly welcome, *now*. I pray you to be careful in your judgment of such a woman's impulses. They often spring from sources not to be sounded even by her dearest friends."

Just; but how cold! Dr. Heath, eyeing him with admiration rather than sympathy, hesitated how to proceed; while Sweetwater, peering up from his papers, sought in vain for some evidence of the bereaved lover in the impressive but wholly dispassionate figure of him who had just spoken. Had pride got the better of his heart? or had that organ always

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been subordinate to the will in this man of instincts so varying, that at one time he impressed you simply as a typical gentleman of leisure; at another, as no more than a fiery agitator with powers absorbed by, if not limited to the one cause he advocated; and again — and this seemed the most contradictory of all — just the ardent inventor, living in a tenement, with Science for his goddess and work always under his hand? As the young detective weighed these possibilities and marvelled over the contradictions they offered, he forgot the papers now lying quiet under his hand. He was too interested to remember his own part — something which could not often be said of Sweetwater.

Meantime, the coroner had collected his thoughts. With an apology for the extremely personal nature of his inquiry, he asked Mr. Brotherson if he would object to giving him some further details of his acquaintanceship with Miss Challoner; where he first met her and under what circumstances their friendship had developed.

"Not at all," was the ready reply. "I have nothing to conceal in the matter. I only wish that her father were present that he might listen to the recital of my acquaintanceship with his daughter. He might possibly understand her better and regard with more leniency the presumption into which I was led by my ignorance of the pride inherent in great families."

"Your wish can very easily be gratified," returned the official, pressing an electric button on his desk; "Mr. Challoner is in the adjoining room." Then,

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as the door communicating with the room he had mentioned swung ajar and stood so, Dr. Heath added, without apparent consciousness of the dramatic character of this episode, "You will not need to raise your voice beyond its natural pitch. He can hear perfectly from where he sits."

"Thank you. I am glad to speak in his presence," came in undisturbed self-possession from this not easily surprised witness. "I shall relate the facts exactly as they occurred, adding nothing and concealing nothing. If I mistook my position, or Miss Challoner's position, it is not for me to apologise. I never hid my business from her, nor the moderate extent of my fortune. If she knew me at all, she knew me for what I am; a man of the people who glories in work and who has risen by it to a position somewhat unique in this city. I feel no lack of equality even with such a woman as Miss Challoner."

A most unnecessary preamble, no doubt, and of doubtful efficacy in smoothing his way to a correct understanding with the deeply bereaved father. But he looked so handsome as he thus asserted himself and made so much of his inches and the noble poise of his head — though cold of eye and always cold of manner — that those who saw, as well as heard him, forgave this display of egotism in consideration of its honesty and the dignity it imparted to his person.

"I first met Miss Challoner in the Berkshires," he began, after a moment of quiet listening for any possible sound from the other room. "I had been on

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the tramp, and had stopped at one of the great hotels for a seven days' rest. I will acknowledge that I chose this spot at the instigation of a relative who knew my tastes and how perfectly they might be gratified there. That I should mingle with the guests may not have been in his thought, any more than it was in mine at the beginning of my stay. The panorama of beauty spread out before me on every side was sufficient in itself for my enjoyment, and might have continued so to the end if my attention had not been very forcibly drawn on one memorable morning to a young lady — Miss Challoner — by the very earnest look she gave me as I was crossing the office from one verandah to another. I must insist on this look, even if it shock the delicacy of my listeners, for without the interest it awakened in me, I might not have noticed the blush with which she turned aside to join her friends on the verandah. It was an overwhelming blush which could not have sprung from any slight embarrassment, and, though I hate the pretensions of those egotists who see in a woman's smile more than it by right conveys, I could not help being moved by this display of feeling in one so gifted with every grace and attribute of the perfect woman. With less caution than I usually display, I approached the desk where she had been standing and, meeting the eyes of the clerk, asked the young lady's name. He gave it, and waited for me to express the surprise he expected it to evoke. But I felt none and showed none. Other feelings had seized me. I had heard of this gracious woman from many sources, in my life among the suffering

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masses of New York, and now that I had seen her and found her to be not only my ideal of personal loveliness but seemingly approachable and not uninterested in myself, I allowed my fancy to soar and my heart to become touched. A fact which the clerk now confided to me naturally deepened the impression. Miss Challoner had seen my name in the guest-book and asked to have me pointed out to her. Perhaps she had heard my name spoken in the same quarter where I had heard hers. We have never exchanged confidences on the subject, and I cannot say. I can only give you my reason for the interest I felt in Miss Challoner and why I forgot, in the glamour of this episode, the aims and purposes of a not unambitious life and the distance which the world and the so-called aristocratic class put between a woman of her wealth and standing and a simple worker like myself.

"I must be pardoned. She had smiled upon me once, and she smiled again. Days before we were formally presented, I caught her softened look turned my way, as we passed each other in hall or corridor. We were friends, or so it appeared to me, before ever a word passed between us, and when fortune favoured us and we were duly introduced, our minds met in a strange sympathy which made this one interview a memorable one to me. Unhappily, as I then considered it, this was my last day at the hotel, and our conversation, interrupted frequently by passing acquaintances, was never resumed. I exchanged a few words with her by way of good-bye but nothing more. I came to New York, and she remained in

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Lenox. A month after and she too came to New York."

"This good-bye — do you remember it? The exact language, I mean?"

"I do; it made a great impression on me. 'I shall hope for our further acquaintance,' she said. 'We have one very strong interest in common.' And if ever a human face spoke eloquently, it was hers at that moment. The interest, as I understood it, was our mutual sympathy for our toiling, half-starved, down-trodden brothers and sisters in the lower streets of this city; but the eloquence — that I probably mistook. I thought it sprang from personal interest, and it gave me courage to pursue the intention which had taken the place of every other feeling and ambition by which I had hitherto been moved. Here was a woman in a thousand; one who could make a man of me indeed. If she could ignore the social gulf between us, I felt free to take the leap. Cowardice had never been a fault of mine. But I was no fool even then. I realised that I must first let her see the manner of man I was and what life meant to me and must mean to her if the union I contemplated should become an actual fact. I wrote letters to her, but I did not give her my address or even request a reply. I was not ready for any word from her. I am not like other men and I could wait. And I did, for weeks, then I suddenly appeared at her hotel."

The change of voice — the bitterness which he infused into this final sentence made every one look up. Hitherto he had spoken calmly, almost monotonously,

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as if no present heart-beat responded to this tale of vanished love; but with the words, "Then I suddenly appeared at her hotel," he showed himself human again, and betrayed a passion which though curbed was of the fiery quality, befitting his extraordinary attributes of mind and person.

"This was when?" put in Dr. Heath, anxious to bridge the pause which must have been very painful to the listening father.

"The week after Thanksgiving. I did not see her the first day, and only casually the second. But she knew I was in the building, and when I came upon her one evening seated at the very desk in the mezzanine which we all have such bitter cause to remember, I could not forbear expressing myself in a way she could not misunderstand. The result was of a kind to drive a man like myself to an extremity of self-condemnation and rage. She rose up as if insulted, and flung me one sentence and one sentence only before she hailed the elevator and left my presence. A cur could not have been dismissed with less ceremony."

"That is not like my daughter. What was the sentence you allude to? Let me hear the very words." Mr. Challoner had come forward and now stood awaiting his reply, a dignified but pathetic figure, which all must view with respect.

"I hate the memory of them, but since you demand it, I will repeat them just as they fell from her lips," was Mr. Brotherson's bitter retort. "She said, 'You of all men should recognise the unseemliness of these proposals. Had your letters given me

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any hint of the feelings you have just expressed, you would never have had this opportunity of approaching me.' That was all; but her indignation was scathing. Ladies who have supped exclusively off silver, show a fine scorn for the common ware of the cottager."

Mr. Challoner bowed. "There is some mistake," said he. "My daughter might be averse to your addresses, but she would never show indignation to any aspirant for her hand, simply on account of extraneous conditions. She had wide sympathies — wider than I often approved. Something in your conduct or the confidence you showed shocked her nicer sense; not your lack of the luxuries she often misprised. This much I feel obliged to say, out of justice to her character, which was uniformly considerate."

"You have seen her with men of her own world and yours," was the harsh response. "She had another side to her nature for the man of a different sphere. And it killed my love — that you can see — and led to my sending her the injudicious letter with which you have confronted me. The hurt bull utters one bellow before he dies. I bellowed, and bellowed loudly, but I did not die. I'm my own man still and mean to remain so."

The assertive boldness — some would call it bravado — with which he thus finished the story of his relations with the dead heiress, seemed to be more than Mr. Challoner could stand. With a look of extreme pain and perplexity he vanished from the doorway, and it fell to Dr. Heath to inquire;

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"Is this letter — a letter of threat you will remember — the only communication which passed between you and Miss Challoner after this unfortunate passage of arms at the Clermont?"

"Yes. I had no wish to address her again. I had exhausted in this one outburst whatever humiliation I felt."

"And she? Did she give no sign, make you no answer?"

"None whatever." Then, as if he found it impossible to hide this hurt to his pride, "She did not even seem to consider me worthy the honour of an added rebuke. Such arrogance is, no doubt, commendable in a Challoner."

This time his bitterness did not pass unrebuked by the coroner: "Remember the grey hairs of the only Challoner who can hear you, and respect his grief."

Mr. Brotherson bowed.

"I have finished," said he. "I shall have nothing more to say on the subject." And he drew himself up in expectation of the dismissal he evidently thought pending.

But the coroner was not done with him by any means. He had a theory in regard to this lamentable suicide which he hoped to establish by this man's testimony, and, in pursuit of this plan, he not only motioned to Mr. Brotherson to reseat himself, but began at once to open a fresh line of examination by saying:

"You will pardon me, if I press this matter. I have been given to understand that notwithstanding your break with Miss Challoner, you have kept up

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your visits to the Clermont and were even on the spot at the time of her death."

"On the *spot?*"

"In the hotel, I mean."

"There you are right; I was in the hotel."

"At the time of her death?"

"Very near the time. I remember hearing some disturbance in the lobby behind me, just as I was passing out at the Broadway entrance."

"You did, and did not return?"

"Why should I return? I am not a man of much curiosity. There was no reason why I should connect a sudden alarm in the lobby of the Clermont with any cause of special interest to myself."

This was so true and the look which accompanied the words was so frank that the coroner hesitated a moment before he said:

"Certainly not, unless — well, to be direct, unless you had just seen Miss Challoner and knew her state of mind and what was likely to follow your abrupt departure."

"I had no interview with Miss Challoner."

"But you saw her? Saw her that evening and just before the accident?"

Sweetwater's papers rattled; it was the only sound to be heard in that moment of silence. Then —

"What do you mean by those words?" inquired Mr. Brotherson, with studied composure. "I have said that I had no interview with Miss Challoner. Why do you ask me then, if I saw her?"

"Because I believe that you did. From a dis-

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tance possibly, but yet directly and with no possibility of mistake."

"Do you put that as a question?"

"I do. Did you see her figure or face that night?"

"I did."

Nothing — not even the rattling of Sweetwater's papers — disturbed the silence which followed this admission.

"From where?" Dr. Heath asked at last.

"From a point far enough away to make any communication between us impossible. I do not think you will require me to recall the exact spot."

"If it were one which made it possible for her to see you as clearly as you could see her, I think it would be very advisable for you to say so."

"It was — such — a spot."

"Then I think I can locate it for you, or do you prefer to locate it yourself?"

"I will locate it myself. I had hoped not to be called upon to mention what I cannot but consider a most unfortunate coincidence. As a gentleman you will understand my reticence and also why it is a matter of regret to me that with an acumen worthy of your position, you should have discovered a fact which, while it cannot explain Miss Challoner's death, will drag our little affair before the public, and possibly give it a prominence in some minds which I am sure does not belong to it. I met Miss Challoner's eye for one instant from the top of the little staircase running up to the mezzanine. I had

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yielded thus far to an impulse I had frequently combatted, to seek by another interview to retrieve the bad effect which must have been made upon her by my angry note. I knew that she frequently wrote letters in the mezzanine at this hour, and got as far as the top of the staircase in my effort to join her. But I got no further. When I saw her on her feet, with her face turned my way, I remembered the scorn with which she had received my former heart-felt proposals and, without taking another step forward, I turned away from her and fled down the steps and so out of the building by the main entrance. She saw me, for her hand flew up with a startled gesture, but I cannot think that my presence on the same floor with her could have caused her to strike the blow which terminated her life. Why should I? No woman sacrifices her life out of mere regret for the disdain she has shown a man she has taken no pains to understand."

His tone and his attitude seemed to invite the concurrence of Dr. Heath in this statement. But the richness of the one and the grace of the other showed the handsome speaker off to such advantage that the coroner was rather inclined to consider how a woman, even of Miss Challoner's fine taste and careful breeding, might see in such a situation much for regret, if not for active despair and the suicidal act. He gave no evidence of his thought, however, but followed up the one admission made by Mr. Brotherson which he and others must naturally view as of the first importance.

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"You saw Miss Challoner lift her hand, you say. Which hand, and what was in it? Anything?"

"She lifted her right hand, but it would be impossible for me to tell you whether there was anything in it or not. I simply saw the movement before I turned away. It looked like one of alarm to me. I felt that she had some reason for this. She could not know that it was in repentance I came rather than in fulfilment of my threat."

A sigh from the adjoining room. Mr. Brotherson rose, as he heard it, and in doing so met the clear eye of Sweetwater fixed upon his own. Its language was, no doubt, peculiar and it seemed to fascinate him for a moment, for he started as if to approach the detective, but forsook this intention almost immediately, and addressing the coroner, gravely remarked:

"Her death following so quickly upon this abortive attempt of mine at an interview startled me by its coincidence as much as it does you. If in the weakness of her woman's nature, it was more than this — if the scorn she had previously shown me was a cloak she instinctively assumed to hide what she was not ready to disclose, my remorse will be as great as any one here could wish. But the proof of all this will have to be very convincing before my present convictions will yield to it. Some other and more poignant source will have to be found for that instant's impulsive act than is supplied by this story of my unfortunate attachment."

Dr. Heath was convinced, but he was willing to

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concede something to the secret demand made upon him by Sweetwater, who was bundling up his papers with much clatter.

Looking up with a smile which had elements in it he was hardly conscious of perhaps himself, he asked in an off-hand way:

"Then why did you take such pains to wash your hands of the affair the moment you had left the hotel?"

"I do not understand."

"You passed around the corner into —— street, did you not?"

"Very likely. I could go that way as well as another."

"And stopped at the first lamp-post?"

"Oh, I see. Someone saw that childish action of mine."

"What did you mean by it?"

"Just what you have suggested. I did go through the pantomime of washing my hands of an affair I considered definitely ended. I had resisted an irrepressible impulse to see and talk with Miss Challoner again, and was pleased with my firmness. Unaware of the tragic blow which had just fallen, I was full of self-congratulations at my escape from the charm which had lured me back to this hotel again and again in spite of my better judgment, and I wished to symbolise my relief by an act of which I was, in another moment, ashamed. Strange that there should have been a witness to it. (Here he stole a look at Sweetwater.) Stranger still, that circumstances by the most extraordinary of coinci-

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dences, should have given so unforeseen a point to it."

"You are right, Mr. Brotherson. The whole occurrence is startling and most strange. But life is made up of the unexpected, as none know better than we physicians, whether our practice be of a public or private character."

As Mr. Brotherson left the room, the curiosity to which he had yielded once before, led him to cast a glance of penetrating inquiry behind him full at Sweetwater, and if either felt embarrassment, it was not the hunted but the hunter.

But the feeling did not last.

"I've simply met the strongest man I've ever encountered," was Sweetwater's encouraging comment to himself. "All the more glory if I can find a joint in his armour or a hidden passage to his cold, secretive heart."

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XI

ALIKE IN ESSENTIALS

"Mr. Gryce, I am either a fool or the luckiest fellow going. You must decide which."

The aged detective, thus addressed, laid down his evening paper and endeavoured to make out the dim form he could just faintly discern standing between him and the library door.

"Sweetwater, is that you?"

"No one else. Sweetwater, the fool, or Sweetwater, much too wise for his own good. I don't know which. Perhaps you can find out and tell me."

A grunt from the region of the library table, then the sarcastic remark:

"I'm just in the mood to settle that question. This last failure to my account ought to make me an excellent judge of another's folly. I've meddled with the old business for the last time, Sweetwater. You'll have to go it alone from now on. The Department has no more work for Ebenezar Gryce, or rather Ebenezar Gryce will make no more fool attempts to please them. Strange that a man don't know when his time has come to quit. I remember how I once scored Yeardsley for hanging on after he had lost his grip; and here am I doing the same thing. But what's the matter with you? Speak out, my boy. Something new in the wind?"

"No, Mr. Gryce; nothing new. It's the same old

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business. But, if what I suspect is true, this same old business offers opportunities for some very interesting and unusual effort. You're not satisfied with the coroner's verdict in the Challoner case?"

"No. I'm satisfied with nothing that leaves all ends dangling. Suicide was not proved. It seemed the only presumption possible, but it was not proved. There was no blood-stain on that cutter-point."

"Nor any evidence that it had ever been there."

"No. I'm not proud of the chain which lacks a link where it should be strongest."

"We shall never supply that link."

"I quite agree with you."

"That chain we must throw away."

"And forge another?"

Sweetwater approached and sat down.

"Yes; I believe we can do it; yet I have only one indisputable fact for a starter. That is why I want you to tell me whether I'm growing daft or simply adventurous. Mr. Gryce, I don't trust Brotherson. He has pulled the wool over Dr. Heath's eyes and almost over those of Mr. Challoner. But he can't pull it over mine. Though he should tell a story ten times more plausible than the one with which he has satisfied the coroner's jury, I would still listen to him with more misgiving than confidence. Yet I have caught him in no misstatement, and his eye is steadier than my own. Perhaps it is simply a deeply rooted antipathy on my part, or the rage one feels at finding he has placed his finger on the wrong man. Again it may be —"

"What, Sweetwater?"

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"A well-founded distrust. Mr. Gryce, I'm going to ask you a question."

"Ask away. Ask fifty if you want to."

"No; the one may involve fifty, but it is big enough in itself to hold our attention for a while. Did you ever hear of a case before, that in some of its details was similar to this?"

"No, it stands alone. That's why it is so puzzling."

"You forget. The wealth, beauty and social consequence of the present victim has blinded you to the strong resemblance which her case bears to one you know, in which the sufferer had none of the worldly advantages of Miss Challoner. I allude to —"

"Wait! the washerwoman in Hicks Street! Sweetwater, what have you got up your sleeve? You do mean that Brooklyn washerwoman, don't you?"

"The same. The Department may have forgotten it, but I haven't. Mr. Gryce, there's a startling similarity in the two cases if you study the essential features only. Startling, I assure you."

"Yes, you are right there. But what if there is? We were no more successful in solving that case than we have been in solving this. Yet you look and act like a hound which has struck a hot scent."

The young man smoothed his features with an embarrassed laugh.

"I shall never learn," said he, "not to give tongue till the hunt is fairly started. If you will excuse me, we'll first make sure of the similarity I have mentioned. Then I'll explain myself. I have some notes here, made at the time it was decided to drop

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the Hicks Street case as a wholly inexplicable one. As you know, I never can bear to say 'die,' and I sometimes keep such notes as a possible help in case any such unfinished matter should come up again. Shall I read them?"

"Do. Twenty years ago it would not have been necessary. I should have remembered every detail of an affair so puzzling. But my memory is no longer entirely reliable. So fire away, my boy, though I hardly see your purpose or what real bearing the affair in Hicks Street has upon the Clermont one. A poor washerwoman and the wealthy Miss Challoner! True, they were not unlike in their end."

"The connection will come later," smiled the young detective, with that strange softening of his features which made one at times forget his extreme plainness. "I'm sure you will not consider the time lost if I ask you to consider the comparison I am about to make, if only as a curiosity in criminal annals."

And he read:

"'On the afternoon of December Fourth, 1910, the strong and persistent screaming of a young child in one of the rooms of a rear tenement in Hicks Street, Brooklyn, drew the attention of some of the inmates and led them, after several ineffectual efforts to gain an entrance, to the breaking in of the door which had been fastened on the inside by an old-fashioned door-button.

"'The tenant whom all knew for an honest, hard-working woman, had not infrequently fastened her door in this manner, in order to safeguard her child who was abnormally active and had a way of rattling

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the door open when it was not thus secured. But she had never refused to open before, and the child's cries were pitiful.

"'This was no longer a matter of wonder, when, the door having been wrenched from its hinges, they all rushed in. Across a tub of steaming clothes lifted upon a bench in the open window, they saw the body of this good woman, lying inert and seemingly dead; the frightened child tugging at her skirts. She was of a robust make, fleshy and fair, and had always been considered a model of health and energy, but at the sight of her helpless figure, thus stricken while at work, the one cry was 'A stroke!' till she had been lifted off and laid upon the floor. Then some discoloration in the water at the bottom of the tub led to a closer examination of her body, and the discovery of a bullet-hole in her breast directly over the heart.

"'As she had been standing with face towards the window, all crowded that way to see where the shot had come from. As they were on the fourth storey it could not have come from the court upon which the room looked. It could only have come from the front tenement, towering up before them some twenty feet away. A single window of the innumerable ones confronting them stood open, and this was the one directly opposite.

"'Nobody was to be seen there or in the room beyond, but during the excitement, one man ran off to call the police and another to hunt up the janitor and ask who occupied this room.

"'His reply threw them all into confusion. The

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