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A HUSBAND BY PROXY

By

JACK STEELE

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A Husband by Proxy

CHAPTER I

THE PROPOSITION

With the hum of New York above, below, and all about him, stirring his pulses and prodding his mental activities, Jerold Garrison, expert criminologist, stood at the window of his recently opened office, looking out upon the roofs and streets of the city with a new sense of pride and power in his being.

New York at last!

He was here—unknown and alone, it was true—but charged with an energy that he promised Manhattan should feel.

He was almost penniless, with his office rent, his licenses, and other expenses paid, but he shook his fist at the city, in sheer good nature and confidence in his strength, despite the fact he had waited a week for expected employment, and nothing at present loomed upon the horizon.

His past, in a small Ohio town, was behind him. He blotted it out without regret—or so at least he said to himself—even as to all the gilded hopes which had once seemed his all upon earth. If his heart was not whole, no New York eye should see its wounds—and the healing process had begun.

He was part of the vast machine about him, the mighty brain, as it were, of the great American nation.

He paced the length of his room, and glanced at the door. The half-painted sign on the frosted glass was legible, reversed, as the artist had left it:

JEROLD ——— CRIMINOLOGIST.

He had halted the painter himself on the name, as the lettering appeared too fanciful—not sufficiently plain or bold.

While he stood there a shadow fell upon the glass. Someone was standing outside, in the hall. As if undecided, the owner of the shadow oscillated for a moment—and disappeared. Garrison, tempted to open the door and gratify a natural curiosity, remained beside his desk. Mechanically his hand, which lay upon a book entitled "A Treatise on Poisons," closed the volume.

He was still watching the door. The shadow returned, the knob was revolved, and there, in the oaken frame, stood a tall young woman of extraordinary beauty, richly though quietly dressed, and swiftly changing color with excitement.

Pale in one second, crimson in the next, and evidently concentrating all her power on an effort to be calm, she presented a strangely appealing and enchanting figure to the man across the room. Bravery was blazing in her glorious brown eyes, and firmness came upon her manner as she stepped inside, closed the door, and silently confronted the detective.

The man she was studying was a fine-looking, clean-cut fellow, gray-eyed, smooth-shaven, with thick brown hair, and with a gentleman-athlete air that made him distinctly attractive. The fearless, honest

gaze of his eyes completed a personal charm that was undeniable in his entity.

It seemed rather long that the two thus stood there, face to face. Garrison candidly admiring in his gaze, his visitor studious and slightly uncertain.

She was the first to speak.

"Are you Mr. Jerold?"

"Jerold Garrison," the detective answered. "My sign is unfinished. May I offer you a chair?"

His caller sat down beside the desk. She continued to study his face frankly, with a half-shy, half-defiant scrutiny, as if she banished a natural diffidence under pressure of necessity.

She spoke again, abruptly.

"I wish to procure peculiar services. Are you a very well-known detective?"

"I have never called myself a detective," said Garrison. "I'm trying to occupy a higher sphere of usefulness. I left college a year ago, and last week opened my office here and became a New Yorker."

He might, in all modesty, have exhibited a scrap-book filled with accounts of his achievements, with countless references to his work as a "scientific criminologist" of rare mental attainments. Of his attainments as a gentleman there was no need of reference. They proclaimed themselves in his bearing.

His visitor laid a glove and a scrap of paper on the desk.

"It isn't so much detective services I require," she said; "but of course you are widely acquainted in New York—I mean with young men particularly?"

"No," he replied, "I know almost none. But I know the city fairly well, if that will answer your purpose."

"I thought, of course—I hoped you might know some honorable—— You see, I have come on rather extraordinary business," she said, faltering a little helplessly. "Let me ask you first—is the confidence of a possible client quite sacred with a man in this profession?"

"Absolutely sacred!" he assured her. "Whether you engage my services or not, your utterances here will be treated as confidential and as inviolate as if spoken to a lawyer, a doctor, or a clergyman."

"Thank you," she murmured. "I have been hunting around——"

She left the sentence incomplete.

"And you found my name quite by accident," he supplied, indicating the scrap of paper. "I cannot help observing that you have been to other offices first. You have tramped all the way down Broadway from Forty-second Street, for the red ink that someone spilled at the Forty-first Street crossing is still on your shoe, together with just a film of dust."

She withdrew her shoe beneath the edge of her skirt, although he had never apparently glanced in that direction.

"Yes," she admitted, "I have been to others—and they wouldn't do. I came in here because of the name—Jerold. I am sorry you are not better acquainted—for my business is important."

"Perhaps if I knew the nature of your needs I might be able to advise you," said Garrison. "I hope to be more widely acquainted soon."

She cast him one look, full of things inscrutable, and lowered her lashes in silence. She was evidently striving to overcome some indecision.

Garrison looked at her steadily. He thought he had never in his life beheld a woman so beautiful. Some wild, unruly hope that she might become his client, perhaps even a friend, was flaring in his mind.

The color came and went in her cheeks, adding fresh loveliness at every change. She glanced at her list of names, from which a number had been scratched.

"Well," she said presently, "I think perhaps you might still be able to attend to my requirements."

He waited to hear her continue, but she needed encouragement.

"I shall be glad to try," he assured her.

She was silent again—and blushing. She looked up somewhat defiantly.

"I wish you to procure me a husband."

Garrison stared. He was certain he had heard incorrectly.

"I do not mean an actual husband," she explained. "I simply mean some honorable young man who will assume the rôle for a time, as a business proposition, for a fee to be paid as I would pay for anything else.

"I would require that he understand the affair to be strictly commercial, and that when I wish the arrangement to terminate he will disappear from the scene and from my acquaintance at once and absolutely.

"All I ask of you is to supply me such a person. I will pay you whatever fee you may demand—in reason."

Garrison looked at her as fixedly as she was looking at him.

Her recital of her needs had brought to the surface a phase of desperation in her bearing that wrought upon him potently, he knew not why.

"I think I understand your requirements, as far as one can in the circumstances," he answered. "I hardly believe I have the ability to engage such a person as you need for such a mission. I informed you at the start that my acquaintance with New York men is exceedingly narrow. I cannot think of anyone I could honestly recommend."

"But don't you know any honorable young gentleman—like some college man, perhaps—here in New York, looking for employment; someone who might be glad to earn, say, five hundred dollars?" she insisted. "Surely if you only know a few, there must be one among them."

Garrison sat back in his chair and took hold of his smooth-shaved lip with his thumb and finger. He reviewed his few New York experiences rapidly.

"No," he repeated. "I know of no such man. I am sorry."

His visitor looked at him with a new, flashing light in her eyes.

"Not one?" she said, significantly. "Not one young *college* man?"

He was unsuspecting of her meaning.

"Not one."

For a moment she fingered her glove where it lay upon the desk. Then a look of more pronounced determination and courage came upon her face as she raised her eyes once more to Garrison's.

She said:

"Are you married?"

A flush came at once upon Garrison's face—and memories and heartaches possessed him for a poignant moment. He mastered himself almost instantly.

"No," he said with some emotion, "I am not."

"Then," she said, "couldn't you undertake the task yourself?"

Garrison leaned forward on the table. Lightning from an azure sky could have been no more astonishing or unexpected.

"Do you mean—will I play this rôle—as your husband?" he said slowly.
"Is that what you are asking?"

"Yes," she answered unflinchingly. "Why not? You need the money; I need the services. You understand exactly what it is I require. It is business, and you are a business man."

"But I have no wish to be a married man, or even to masquerade as one," he told her bluntly.

"You have quite as much wish to be one as I have to be a married woman," she answered. "We would understand each other thoroughly from the start. As to masquerading, if you have no acquaintances, then who would be the wiser?"

He acknowledged the logic of her argument; nevertheless, the thing seemed utterly preposterous. He rose and walked the length of his office, and stood looking out of the window. Then he returned and resumed his seat. He was strangely moved by her beauty and some unexplained helplessness of her plight, vouchsafed to his senses, yet he recognized a certain need for caution.

"What should I be expected to do?" he inquired.

His visitor, in the mental agitation which had preceded this interview, had taken little if any time to think of the details likely to attend an alliance such as she had just proposed. She could only think in generalities.

"Why—there will be very little for you to do, except to permit yourself to be considered my lawful husband, temporarily," she replied after a moment of hesitation, with a hot flush mounting to her cheek.

"And to whom would I play?" he queried. "Should I be obliged, in this capacity, to meet your relatives and friends?"

"Certainly—a few," said his visitor. "But I have almost no relatives in the world. I have no father, mother, brothers, or sisters. There will be, at most, a few distant relatives and possibly my lawyer."

Garrison made no response. He was trying to think what such a game would mean—and what it might involve.

His visitor presently added:

"Do you consent—for five hundred dollars?"

"I don't know," answered the man. Again he paced the room. When he halted before his client he looked at her sternly.

"You haven't told me your name," he said.

She gave him her card, on which appeared nothing more than just merely the name "Mrs. Jerold Fairfax," with an address in an uptown West Side street.

Garrison glanced at it briefly.

"This is something you have provided purposely to fit your requirements," he said. "Am I not supposed to know you by any other name?"

"If you accept the—the employment," she answered, once more blushing crimson, "you may be obliged at times to call me Dorothy. My maiden name was Dorothy Booth."

Garrison merely said: "Oh!"

They were silent for a moment. The man was pondering the possibilities. His visitor was evidently anxious.

"I suppose I can find someone else if you refuse the employment," she said. "But you will understand that my search is one of great difficulty. The person I employ must be loyal, a gentleman, courageous, resourceful, and very little known. You can see yourself that you are particularly adapted for the work."

"Thank you," said Garrison, who was aware that no particular flattery was intended. He added: "I hardly suppose it could do me any harm."

Mrs. Fairfax accepted this ungallant observation calmly. She recognized the fact that his side of the question had its aspects.

She waited for Garrison to speak again.

A knock at the door startled them both. A postman entered, dropped two letters on the desk, and departed down the hall.

Garrison took up the letters. One was a circular of his own, addressed to a lawyer over a month before, and now returned undelivered and marked "Not found," though three or four different addresses had been supplied in its peregrinations.

The second letter was addressed to himself in typewritten form. He was too engrossed to tear it open, and laid them both upon the table.

"If I took this up," he presently resumed, "I should be obliged to know something more about it. For instance, when were we supposed to have been married?"

"On the 10th of last month," she answered promptly.

"Oh!" said he. "And, in case of necessity, how should we prove it?"

"By my wedding certificate," she told him calmly.

His astonishment increased.

"Then you were actually married, over a month ago?"

"I have the certificate. Isn't that sufficient?" she replied evasively.

"Well—I suppose it is—for this sort of an arrangement," he agreed. "Of course some man's name must appear in the document. I should be obliged, I presume, to adopt his name as part of the arrangement?"

"Certainly," she said. "I told you I came into your office because your name is Jerold."

"Exactly," he mused. "The name I'd assume is Jerold Fairfax?"

She nodded, watching him keenly.

"It's a good enough name," said Garrison.

He paced up and down the floor in silence a number of times. Mrs. Fairfax watched him in apparent calm.

"This is a great temptation," he admitted. "I should like to earn the fee you have mentioned, Miss Booth—Mrs. Fairfax, but——"

He halted.

"Well?"

"I don't exactly like the look of it, to be frank," he confessed. "I don't know you, and you don't know me. I am not informed whether you are really married or not. If you are, and the man—— You have no desire to enlighten me on these matters. Can you tell me why you wish to pretend that I am your husband?"

"I do not wish to discuss that aspect of the arrangement at present," she said. "It is purely a business proposition that should last no more than a month or two at most, and then terminate forever. I would prefer to have you remain out of town as much as possible."

"A great many haphazard deductions present themselves to my mind," he said, "but all are doubtless inaccurate. I have no morbid curiosity concerning your affairs, but this thing would involve me almost as much as yourself, by its very nature."

His brows were knitted in indecision.

There was silence again between them. His visitor presently said:

"If I could offer you more than the five hundred dollars, I would gladly do so."

"Oh, the fee is large enough, for up to date I have had no employment or even a prospect of work," said Garrison. "I hope you will not be offended when I say that I have recently become a cautious man."

"I know how strange it appears for me to come here with this extraordinary request," agreed Mrs. Fairfax. "I hardly know how I have done so. But there was no one to help me. I hope you will not consider the matter for another moment if you feel that either of us cannot trust the other. In a way, I am placing my honor in your keeping far more than you are placing yourself in charge of mine."

Garrison looked at her steadily, and something akin to sympathy—something that burned like wine of romance in his blood—with zest of adventure and a surge of generosity toward this unknown girl—tingled in all his being. Something in her helplessness appealed to his innate chivalry.

Calmly, however, he took a new estimate of her character, notwithstanding the fact that his first,

most reliable impression had been entirely in her favor.

"Well," he said, after a moment, "it's a blind game for me, but I think I'll accept your offer. When do you wish me to begin my services?"

"I should like to notify my lawyer as soon as possible," answered Mrs. Fairfax, frankly relieved by his decision. "He may regard the fact that he was not sooner notified as a little peculiar."

"Practically you wish me to assume my rôle at once," commented Garrison. "What is your lawyer's name?"

"Mr. Stephen Trowbridge."

Garrison took up that much-addressed letter, returned by the post, and passed it across the table. The one fairly legible line on its surface read:

STEPHEN TROWBRIDGE, ESQ.

"I think that must be the same individual," he said. "I sent out announcements of my business and presence here to nearly every lawyer in the State. This envelope has been readdressed, as you observe, but it has never reached its destination. Is that your man?"

Mrs. Fairfax examined the missive.

"Yes," she said, "I think so. Do you wish his present address?"

"If you please," answered Garrison. "I shall take the liberty of steaming this open and removing its contents, after which I will place an antedated letter or notification of the—our marriage—written by yourself—in the envelope, redirect it, and send it along. It will finally land in the hands of your lawyer with its tardiness very naturally explained."

"You mean the notification will appear as if misdirected originally," said Dorothy. "An excellent idea."

"Perhaps you will compose the note at once," said Garrison, pushing paper, pen, and ink across the desk. "You may leave the rest, with the address, to me."

His visitor hesitated for a moment, as if her decision wavered in this vital moment of plunging into unknown fates, but she took up the pen and wrote the note and address with commendable brevity.

Garrison was walking up and down the office.

"The next step——" he started to say, but his visitor interrupted.

"Isn't this the only step necessary to take until something arises making others expedient?"

"There is one slight thing remaining," he answered, taking up her card. "You are in a private residence?"

"Yes. The caretaker, a woman, is always there."

"Have you acquainted her with the fact of your marriage?"

"Certainly. She is an English servant. She asks no questions. But I told her my husband is away from town and will be absent almost constantly for the next two or three months."

Garrison slightly elevated his brows, in acknowledgment of the thoroughness of her arrangements.

"I have never attempted much acting—a little at private theatricals," he told her; "but of course we shall both be obliged to play this little domestic comedy with some degree of art."

She seemed prepared for that also, despite the sudden crimson of her cheeks.

"Certainly."

"One more detail," he added. "You have probably found it necessary to withhold certain facts from my knowledge. I trust I shall not be led into awkward blunders. I shall do my best, and for the rest—I beg of you to conduct the affair according to your own requirements and judgment."

The slightly veiled smile in his eyes did not escape her observation. Nevertheless, she accepted his proposal quite as a matter of course.

"Thank you. I am glad you relieved me of the necessity of making some such suggestion. I think that is all—for the present." She stood up, and, fingering her glove, glanced down at the table for a moment. "May I pay, say, two hundred dollars now, as a retainer?"

"I shall be gratified if you will," he answered.

In silence she counted out the money, which she took from a purse in a bag. The bills lay there in a heap.

"When you wish any more, will you please let me know?" she said. "And when I require your services I will wire. Perhaps I'd better take both this office and your house address."

He wrote them both on a card and placed it in her hand.

"Thank you," she murmured. She closed her purse, hesitated a moment, then raised her eyes to his. Quite coldly she added: "Good-afternoon."

"Good-day," answered Garrison.

He opened the door, bowed to her slightly as she passed—then faced about and stared at the money that lay upon his desk.

CHAPTER II

A SECOND EMPLOYMENT

For a moment, when he found himself alone, Garrison stood absolutely motionless beside the door. Slowly he came to the desk again, and slowly he assembled the bills. He rolled them in a neat, tight wad, and held them in his hand.

Word for word and look for look he reviewed the recent dialogue, shaking his head at the end.

He had never been so puzzled in his life.

The situation, his visitor—all of it baffled him utterly. Had not the money remained in his grasp he might have believed he was dreaming.

"She was frightened, and yet she had a most remarkable amount of nerve," he reflected. "She might be an heiress, an actress, or a princess. She may be actually married—and then again she may not; probably not, since two husbands on the scene would be embarrassing."

"She may be playing at any sort of a game, financial, political, or domestic—therefore dangerous, safe, or commonplace, full of intrigue, or a mystery, or the silliest caprice.

"She—oh, Lord—I don't know! She is beautiful—that much is certain. She seems to be honest. Those deep, brown eyes go with innocence—and also with scheming; in which respect they precisely resemble blue eyes, and gray, and all the other feminine colors. And yet she seemed, well, helpless, worried—almost desperate. She must be desperate and helpless."

Again, in fancy, he was looking in her face, and something was stirring in his blood. That was all he really knew. She had stirred him—and he was glad of the meeting—glad he had entered her employment.

He placed the roll of money in his pocket, then looked across his desk at the clean, white letter which the postman had recently delivered.

He took it up, paused again to wonder at the meaning of what had occurred, then tore the envelope and drew forth the contents.

He had barely spread the letter open when a knock on the door startled every thought in his brain.

His first conclusion was that Mrs. Fairfax had returned to repudiate her bargain and ask the surrender of her money. With a smile for any fate, he crossed the room and opened the door.

In the hallway stood a man—a little, sharp-faced, small-eyed, thin-nosed person, with a very white

complexion, and a large, smooth-shaved mouth, open as if in a smile that never ceased.

"Garrison?" he said sharply. "Wicks—I'm Wicks."

"Wicks?" said Garrison. "Come in."

Mr. Wicks stepped in with a snap-like alacrity. "Read your letter," he said—"read your letter."

Obediently Garrison perused the missive in hand, typed on the steel-plate stationery of the New York Immutable Life Insurance Company:

"DEAR SIR:

"At the recommendation of our counsel, Mr. Sperry Lochlan, who is still abroad, we desire to secure your services in a professional capacity. Our Mr. Wicks will call upon you this afternoon to explain the nature of the employment and conclude the essential arrangements.

"Respectfully yours,
"JOHN STEFFAS,
"Dep't of Special Service."

A wave of gratitude toward Lochlan, the lawyer who had first employed him, and advised this New York office, surged with another, of almost boyish joy, through Garrison's being. It seemed almost absurd that two actual clients should thus have appeared within the hour. He looked up at the little man with a new, keen interest.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Wicks," he said. "Will you please sit down?
I am at your service."

Mr. Wicks snatched a chair and sat down. It was quite a violent maneuver, especially as that sinister grin never for a moment left his features. He took off his hat and made a vicious dive at a wisp of long, red hair that adorned the otherwise barren top of his head. The wisp lay down toward his left ear when thus adjusted. He looked up at Garrison almost fiercely.

"Obscure, ain't you?" he demanded.

"Obscure?" inquired Garrison. "Perhaps I am—just at present—here in New York."

"You are!" stated Mr. Wicks aggressively.

Garrison was not enamored of his manner.

"All right," he said—"all right."

Mr. Wicks suddenly leaned forward and fetched his index finger almost up against the young man's nose.

"Good at murder?" he demanded.

Garrison began to suspect that the building might harbor lunatics, several of whom had escaped.

"Am I good at murder?" he repeated. "Doing murder or—"

"Ferretting murder! Ferretting murder! Ferretting murder!" cried the visitor irritably.

"Oh," said Garrison, "if you wish to employ me on a murder case, I'll do the best I can."

"You worked out the Biddle robbery?" queried Mr. Wicks.

Garrison replied that he had. The Biddle robbery was the Lochlan case—his first adventure in criminology.

"Take the case!" commanded Mr. Wicks in his truculent manner. "Two hundred and fifty a month as long as you work. One thousand dollars bonus if you find the murderer. Accept the terms?"

"Yes, I'll take the case," he said. "What sort of—"

Mr. Wicks made a sudden snatch at his wisp of hair, adjusted it quite to the other side of his head, then as abruptly drew a paper from his pocket and thrust it into Garrison's hand.

"Statement of the case," he interrupted. "Read it."

Garrison accepted the document, spread it open, and read as follows:

STATEMENT: Case of John Hardy.

Name—John Hardy.

Age—57.

Occupation—Real estate dealer (retired).

Residence—Unfixed, changed frequently (last, Hickwood, two days, boarding).

Family—No immediate family (no one nearer than nephews and nieces).

Rating in Bradbury's—No rating.

Insured in any other companies—No.

Insured with us for what amount—Twenty thousand dollars.

Name of beneficiary—Charles Scott.

Residence—Hickwood, New York (village).

Occupation—Inventor.

Date of subject's death—May 27th.

Place of death—Village of Branchville (near Hickwood).

Verdict of coroner—Death from natural causes (heart failure or apoplexy).

Body claimed by—Paul Durgin (nephew).

Body interred where—Shipped to Vermont for burial.

Suspicious circumstances—Beneficiary paid once before on claim for similar amount, death of risk having been equally sudden and unexplained.

Remarks—The body was found on the porch of an empty house (said by superstitious neighbors to be haunted). It was found in sitting posture, leaning against post of porch. No signs of violence except a green stain on one knee. Deceased uncommonly neat. There is no grass growing before the empty house, owing to heavy shade of trees. No signs of struggle near house. Details supplied by old woman, Mrs. Webber, whose son found deceased. Our company not represented, either at inquest or afterward, as no notification of subject's death was filed until the 31st inst.

At the bottom, written in pencil, appeared the words:

"Quiet case. Steffas."

That was all. Garrison turned the paper. There was nothing on the reverse. Placing it face upward on the table, he thrust his hands into his pockets and looked at Mr. Wicks.

"I'm expected to fasten this crime on Scott?" he inquired. "Is that what your company requires?"

"Fasten the crime on the guilty man!" replied the aggressive Mr. Wicks. "If Scott didn't do it, we'll pay the claim. If he did, we'll send him to the chair. It may not be murder at all."

"Of course," said Garrison. "Who wrote this report?"

"What's that to you?" said Wicks.

"I wondered why the writer drops out of the case," answered Garrison.
"That's all."

"I wrote it," said Wicks. "Scott knows me from the former case. If you want the case, you will start this evening for Hickwood and begin your work. Use your own devices. Report everything promptly—everything. Go at once to the office and present your card for expenses and typed instructions. Good-day!"

He had clapped on his hat. He strode to the door, opened it, disappeared, and closed it again as if he worked on springs. Garrison was left staring at the knob, his hand mechanically closed on the statement intrusted to his keeping.

"Well," he said, "I'll be scalloped! Good old New York!"

He was presently out upon the street, a brisk, active figure, boarding a Broadway car for the downtown office of the company.

At half past five he was back once more in his office with a second hundred dollars in his pocket, fifty of which was for expenses.

He was turning away from his desk at last to leave for his lodgings, thence to journey to Hickwood, when a messenger-boy abruptly appeared with a telegram.

When Garrison had signed, he opened the envelope and read the following:

"Wire me you have arrived unexpectedly and will be here at eight, then come.

"DOROTHY FAIRFAX."

He almost ran from the building, bought a five-dollar bunch of the choicest roses, and, after wiring in accordance with instructions, sent them to the house.

CHAPTER III

TWO ENCOUNTERS

Garrison roomed in Forty-fourth Street, where he occupied a small, second-story apartment. His meals he procured at various restaurants where fancy chanced to lead.

To-night a certain eagerness for adventure possessed his being.

More than anything else in the world he wished to see Dorothy again; he hardly dared confess why, but told himself that she was charming—and his nature demanded excitement.

He dined well and leisurely, bought a box of chocolates to present to his new-found "wife," dressed himself with exceptional care, and at length took an uptown train for his destination.

All the way on the cars he was thinking of the task he had undertaken to perform. Not without certain phases of amusement, he rehearsed his part, and made up his mind to leave nothing of the rôle neglected.

Arrived in the West Side street, close to the house which should have been Dorothy's, he discovered that the numbering on the doors had been wretchedly mismanaged. One or the other of two brownstone fronts must be her residence; he could not determine which. The nearest was lighted from top to bottom. In the other a single pair of windows only, on the second floor, showed the slightest sign of life.

Resolved to be equal to anything the adventure might require, he mounted the steps of the lighted dwelling and rang the bell. He was almost immediately admitted by a serving-man, who appeared a trifle surprised to behold him, but who bowed him in as if he were expected, with much formality and deference.

"What shall I call you?" he said.

Garrison was surprised, but he announced:

"Just Mr. Jerold."

A second door was opened; a gush of perfumed air, a chorus of gay young voices, and a peal of laughter greeted Garrison's ears as the servant called out his name.

Instantly a troop of brilliantly dressed young women came running from the nearest room, all in fancy costume and all of them masked. Evidently a fancy-dress party was about to begin in the house. Garrison realized his blunder.

Before he could move, a stunning, superbly gowned girl, with bare neck and shoulders that were the absolute perfection of beauty, came boldly up to where the visitor stood. The others had ceased their laughter.

"Jerold!—how good of you to come!" said the girl, and, boldly patting his face with her hand, she quickly darted from him, while the others laughed with glee.

Garrison was sure he had never seen her before. Indeed, he had scarcely had time to note anything about her, save that on her neck she wore two necklaces—one of diamonds, the other of pearls, and both of wonderful gems.

Then out from the room from which she had come stepped a man appareled as Satan—in red from top to toe. He, too, was in mask. He joined in the laughter with the others.

Garrison "found himself" with admirable presence of mind.

"My one regret is that I may not remain," he said, with a bow to the ladies. "I might also regret having entered the wrong house, but your reception renders such an emotion impossible."

He bowed himself out with commendable grace, and the bold masquerader threw kisses as he went. Amused, quite as much as annoyed, at his blunder, he made himself ready as best he might for another adventure, climbed the steps of the dwelling next at hand, and once more rang the bell.

Almost immediately the dark hall was lighted by the switching on of lights. Then the door was opened, and Garrison beheld a squint-eyed, thin-lipped old man, who scowled upon him and remained there, barring his way.

"Good evening—is my wife at home—Mrs. Fairfax?" said Garrison, stepping in. "I wired her——"

"Jerold!" cried a voice, as the girl in the party-house had done. But this was Dorothy, half-way down the stairs, running toward him eagerly, and dressed in most exquisite taste.

Briskly stepping forward, ready with the rôle he had rehearsed, he caught her in his arms as she came to the bottom of the stairs, and she kissed him like a sweet young wife, obeying the impulse of her nature.

"Oh, Jerold, I'm so glad!" she said. "I don't see why you have to go away at nine!"

She was radiant with blushes.

He recognized a cue.

"And how's the dearest little girl in all the world?" he said, handing her the box of confections. "I didn't think I'd be able to make it, till I wired. While this bit of important business lasts we must do the best we can."

He had thrown his arm about her carelessly. She moved away with a natural gesture towards the man who had opened the door.

"Oh, Jerold, this is my Uncle Sykey—Mr. Robinson," she said. "He and Aunt Jill have come to pay me a visit. We must all go upstairs to the parlor."

She was pale with excitement, but her acting was perfect.

Garrison turned to the narrow-eyed old man, who was scowling darkly upon him.

"I'm delighted to meet you," he said, extending his hand.

"Um! Thank you," said Robinson, refusing his hand. "Extraordinary honeymoon you're giving my niece, Mr. Fairfax."

His manner nettled Garrison, who could not possibly have gauged the depth of the old man's dislike, even hatred, conceived against him simply as Dorothy's husband.

A greeting so utterly uncordial made unlooked-for demands upon his wits.

"The present arrangement will not endure very long," he said significantly. "In the meantime, if Dorothy is satisfied there seems to be no occasion for anyone else to feel distressed."

"If that's intended as a fling at me——" started Robinson, but Dorothy interrupted.

"Please come upstairs," she said, laying her hand for a moment on Garrison's shoulder; and then she ran up lightly, looking back with all the smiles of perfect art.

Garrison read it as an invitation to a private confidence, much needed to put him properly on guard. He bounded up as if in hot pursuit, leaving her uncle down there by the door.

She fled to the end of the upper hall, near a door that was closed. Garrison had lost no space behind her. She turned a white, tense face as she came to a halt.

"Be careful, please," she whispered. "Some of my relatives appeared here unexpectedly this afternoon. I had to wire on that account. Get away just as soon as you can. You are merely passing through the city. You must write me daily letters while they are here—and—don't forget who you are supposed to be!"

She was radiant again with blushes. Garrison was almost dazzled by her beauty. What reply he might have made was interrupted. Dorothy caught him by the hand, like a fond young bride, as her uncle came rapidly up the stairs. The door was opened at his elbow by a white-haired, almost "bearded" woman, large, sharp-sighted, and ugly, with many signs of both inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness upon her.

"So, that's your Mr. Fairfax," she said to Dorothy. "Come in here till I see what you're like."

Dorothy had again taken Garrison's arm. She led him forward.

"This is Aunt Jill," she said, by way of introduction and explanation. "Aunty, this is my husband, Jerold."

Aunt Jill had backed away from the door to let them enter. Garrison realized at once that Dorothy's marriage had excited much antagonism in the breasts of both these relatives. A sudden accession of boldness came upon him, in his plan to protect the girl. He entered the room and faced the woman calmly.

"I'm glad to meet you," he said, this time without extending his hand. "I beg to impress upon both you and Mr. Robinson that, such as I am, Dorothy chose me of her own free will to occupy my present position."

Mrs. Robinson was momentarily speechless. Her husband now stood in the door.

Dorothy shot Garrison a look of gratitude, but her immediate desire was for peace.

"Let us all sit down, and try to get better acquainted," she said. "I'm sure we shall all be friends."

"No doubt," said her uncle somewhat offensively.

Garrison felt himself decidedly uncertain of his ground. There was nothing to do, however, but await developments. He looked about the room in a quick, comprehensive manner.

It was a large apartment, furnished handsomely, perhaps even richly, but in a style no longer modern, save for the installation of electric lights. It contained a piano, a fireplace, a cabinet, writing-desk, two settees, and the customary complement of chairs.

The pictures on the walls were rather above the average, even in the homes of the wealthy. The objects of art, disposed in suitable places, were all in good taste and expensive.

Quite at a loss to meet these people to advantage, uninformed as he was of anything vital concerning Dorothy and the game she might be playing, Garrison was rendered particularly alert by the feeling of constraint in the air. He had instantly conceived a high appreciation for Dorothy's art in her difficult position, and he rose to a comprehension of the rôle assigned to himself.

He had earlier determined to appear affectionate; he now saw the need of enacting the part of protector.

In the full illumination of the room, the glory of Dorothy's beauty was startling. His eyes sought her

face with no need of acting, and the admiration blazing in his gaze was more than genuine; it was thoroughly spontaneous and involuntary.

The moment was awkward and fraught with suspense for Garrison, as he found himself subjected to the flagrantly unfriendly appraisal of his newly acquired relations.

Aunt Jill had been wilted for a moment only. She looked their visitor over with undisguised contempt.

"Well, I dare say you *look* respectable and healthy," she said, as if conceding a point with no little reluctance, "but appearances are very deceiving."

"Thank you," said Garrison. He sat down near Dorothy, occupying a small settee.

If Mrs. Robinson was personally pugnacious, her husband harbored far more vicious emotions. Garrison felt this in his manner. The man was looking at him narrowly.

"How much of your time have you spent with your wife since your marriage?" he demanded, without the slightest preliminary introduction to the subject.

Garrison realized at once that Dorothy might have prepared a harmless fiction with which his answers might not correspond. He assumed a calm and deliberation he was far from feeling, as he said:

"I was not aware that I should be obliged to account to anyone save Dorothy for my goings and comings. Up to the present I believe she has been quite well satisfied with my deportment; haven't you, Dorothy?"

"Perfectly," said Dorothy, whose utterance was perhaps a trifle faint. "Can't we all be friends—and talk about——"

"I prefer to talk about this for a moment," interrupted her uncle, still regarding Garrison with the closest scrutiny. "What's your business, anyway, Mr. Fairfax?"

Garrison, adhering to a policy of telling the truth with the greatest possible frequency, and aware that evasion would avail them nothing, waited the fraction of a minute for Dorothy to speak. She was silent. He felt she had not committed herself or him upon the subject.

"I am engaged at present in some insurance business," he said. "It will take me out of town to-night, and keep me away for a somewhat indefinite period."

"H'm!" said Mr. Robinson. "I suppose you'll quit your present employment pretty soon?"

With no possible chance of comprehending the drift of inquiry, Garrison responded:

"Possibly."

"I thought so!" exclaimed the old man, with unconcealed asperity. "Marrying for money is much more remunerative, hey?"

"Oh, uncle!" said Dorothy. Her pain and surprise were quite genuine.

Garrison colored instantly.

He might have been hopelessly floundering in a moment had not a natural indignation risen in his blood.

"Please remember that up to this evening you and I have been absolute strangers," he said, with some heat. "I am not the kind to marry for money. Had I done so I should not continue in my present calling for a very modest compensation."

He felt that Dorothy might misunderstand or even doubt his resolution to go on with her requirements. He added pointedly:

"I have undertaken certain assignments for my present employers which I mean to put through to the end, and no one aware of my motives could charge me with anything sordid."

Dorothy rose, crossed the space between her chair and the small settee where Garrison was seated, took the place at his side, and shyly laid her hand upon his own. It was a natural, wifely thing to do. Garrison recognized her perfect acting. A tingle of strange, lawless joy ran through his veins; nevertheless, he still faced Robinson, for his anger had been no pretense.

There was something in his bearing, when aroused, that invited caution. He was not a man with

whom to trifle. Mrs. Robinson, having felt it before, underwent the experience anew.

"Let's not start off with a row," she said. "No one means to offend you, Mr. Fairfax."

"What do you think he'll do?" demanded her husband. "Order us out of the house? It ain't his yet, and he knows it."

Garrison knew nothing concerning the ownership of the house. Mr. Robinson's observation gave him a hint, however, that Dorothy's husband, or Dorothy herself, would presumably own this dwelling soon, but that something had occurred to delay the actual possession.

"I came to see Dorothy, and for no other purpose," he said. "I haven't the slightest desire or intention to offend her relatives."

If Robinson and his wife understood the hint that he would be pleased to see Dorothy alone, they failed to act upon it.

"We'll take your future operations as our guide," said Mr. Robinson significantly. "Protestations cost nothing."

Mrs. Robinson, far more shrewd than her husband, in her way, had begun to realize that Garrison was not a man either to be frightened or bullied.

"I'm sure we shall all be friends," she said. "What's the use of fighting? If, as Mr. Fairfax says, he did not marry Dorothy for money——"

Her husband interrupted. "I don't believe it! Will you tell me, Mr. Fairfax, that when you married my niece you were not aware of her prospects?"

"I knew absolutely nothing of her prospects," said Garrison, who thought he foresaw some money struggle impending. "She can tell you that up to the present moment I have never asked her a word concerning her financial status or future expectations."

"Why don't you tell us you never knew she had an uncle?" demanded Robinson, with no abatement of acidity.

"As a matter of fact," replied Garrison, "I have never known the name of any of Dorothy's relations till to-night."

"This is absurd!" cried the aggravated Mr. Robinson. "Do you mean to tell me——"

Garrison cut in upon him with genuine warmth. He was fencing blindly in Dorothy's behalf, and instinct was guiding him with remarkable precision.

"I should think you might understand," he said, "that once in a while a young woman, with a natural desire to be esteemed for herself alone, might purposely avoid all mention both of her relatives and prospects."

"We've all heard about these marriages for love," sneered Dorothy's uncle. "Where did you suppose she got this house?"

Garrison grew bolder as he felt a certain confidence that so far he had made no particular blunders. His knowledge of the value of half a truth, or even the truth entire, was intuitive.

"I have never been in this house before tonight," he said. "Our 'honeymoon,' as you called it earlier, has, as you know, been brief, and none of it was spent beneath this roof."

"Then how did you know where to come?" demanded Mr. Robinson.

"Dorothy supplied me the address," answered Garrison. "It is not uncommon, I believe, for husband and wife to correspond."

"Well, here we are, and here we'll stay," said Mr. Robinson, "till the will and all the business is settled. Perhaps you'll say you didn't even know there was a will."

Garrison was beginning to see light, dimly. What it was that lay behind Dorothy's intentions and her scheme he could not know; he was only aware that to-night, stealing a glance at her sweet but worried face, and realizing faintly that she was greatly beset with troubles, his whole heart entered the conflict, willingly, to help her through to the end.

"You are right for once," he answered his inquisitor. "I have known absolutely nothing of any will

affecting Dorothy, and I know nothing now. I only know you can rely upon me to fight her battles to the full extent of my ability and strength."

"What nonsense! You don't know!" exclaimed Mr. Robinson. "Why——"

"It's the truth," interrupted Dorothy. "I have told him nothing about it."

"I don't believe it!" said her uncle. "But whatever he knows, I'll tell him this, that I propose to fight that will, day and night, before my brother's property shall go to any scheming stranger!"

Garrison felt the need for enlightenment. It was hardly fair to expect him to struggle in the dark. He looked at his watch ostentatiously.

"I did not come here expecting this sort of reception," he said truthfully. "I hoped at least for a few minutes' time with Dorothy, alone."

"To cook up further stories, I presume," said Mr. Robinson, who made no move to depart.

Garrison rose and approached Mr. Robinson precisely as he might have done had his right been more than a fiction.

"Do you require Dorothy to go down in the hall, in her own house, to obtain a moment of privacy?" he demanded. "We might as well understand the situation first as last."

It was a half-frightened look, full of craft and hatred, that Robinson cast upward to his face. He fidgeted, then rose from his seat.

"Come, my dear," he said to his wife, "the persecutions have commenced."

He led the way from the room to another apartment, his wife obediently following at his heels. The door they left ajar.

CHAPTER IV

UNSPOKEN ANTAGONISM

Garrison crossed the room with an active stride and closed the door firmly.

Dorothy was pale when he turned. She, too, was standing.

"You can see that I've got to be posted a little," he said quietly. "To err has not ceased to be human."

"You have made no mistakes," said Dorothy in a voice barely above a whisper. "I didn't expect them. When I found they had come I hardly knew what to do. And when they declared I had no husband I had to request you to come."

"Something of the sort was my conclusion," Garrison told her. "I have blundered along with fact and fiction as best I might, but what am I supposed to have done that excites them both to insult me?"

Dorothy seemed afraid that the very walls might hear and betray her secret.

"Your supposed marriage to me is sufficient," she answered in the lowest of undertones. "You must have guessed that they feel themselves cheated out of this house and other property left in a relative's will."

"Cheated by your marriage?" said Garrison.

She nodded, watching to see if a look of distrust might appear in the gaze he bent upon her.

"I wouldn't dare attempt to inform you properly or adequately to-night, with my uncle in the house," she said. "But please don't believe I've done anything wrong—and don't desert me now."

She had hardly intended to appeal to him so helplessly, but somehow she had been so glad to lean upon his strength, since his meeting with her relatives, that the impulse was not to be resisted.

Moreover she felt, in some strange working of the mind, that she had come to know him as well within the past half-hour as she had ever known anyone in all her life. Her trust had gone forth of its own volition, together with her gratitude and admiration, for the way he had taken up her cause.

"I left the matter entirely with you this afternoon," he said. "I only wish to know so much as you yourself deem essential. I feel this man is vindictive, cowardly, and crafty. Are you sure you are safe where he is?"

"Oh, yes, I'm quite safe, even if it is unpleasant," she told him, grateful for his evident concern. "If need be, the caretaker would fight a pack of wolves in my defense."

"This will?" asked Garrison. "When is it going to be settled—when does it come to probate?"

"I don't quite know."

"When is your real husband coming?" he inquired, more for her own protection than his own.

She had not admitted, in the afternoon, that she had a husband. She colored now as she tried to meet his gaze.

"Did I tell you there was such a person?"

"No," said Garrison, "you did not. I thought— Perhaps that's one of the many things I am not obliged to know."

"Perhaps." She hesitated a moment, adding: "If you'd rather not go on——"

She lowered her eyes. He felt a thrill that he could not analyze, it lay so close to jealousy and hope. And whatever it was, he knew it was out of the bargain, and not in the least his right.

"It wasn't for myself I asked," he hastened to add. "I'll act my part till you dismiss me. I only thought if another man were to come upon the scene——"

The far-off sound of a ringing house-bell came indistinctly to his ears. Dorothy looked up in his face with a startled light in her great brown eyes that awoke a new interest within him.

"The bell," she said. "I heard it! Who could be coming here to-night?"

She slipped to the door, drew it open an inch, and listened there attentively.

Garrison was listening also. The door to the outside steps, in the hall below, was opened, then presently closed with a slam. The caretaker had admitted a caller.

"Good! I'd like to see him!" said the voice of a man. "Upstairs?"

Dorothy turned to Garrison with her face as white as chalk.

"Oh, if you had only gone!" she said.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Who's come?"

"Perhaps you can slip in my room!" she whispered. "Please hurry!"

She hastened across the apartment to a door, with Garrison following. The door was locked. She remembered she had locked it herself, from the farther side, since the advent of her uncle in the house.

She turned to lead him round, by the hall. But the door swung open abruptly, and a tall, handsome young man was at the threshold. His hat was on. He was dressed, despite the season, in an overcoat of extraordinary length, buttoned close round his neck. It concealed him from his chin to his heels.

"Why, hello, Dot!" he said familiarly, advancing within the room. "You and your Jerold weren't trying to run away, I hope."

Dorothy struggled against her confusion and alarm.

"Why, no," she faltered. "Cousin Ted, you've never met Mr. Fairfax. Jerold, this is my cousin, Mr. Theodore Robinson."

"How do you do?" said Garrison, nodding somewhat distantly, since none of the Robinson group had particularly appealed to his tastes.

"How are you?" responded Dorothy's cousin, with no attempt to conceal an unfriendly demeanor.

Crossing to Dorothy with deliberate intent to make the most of his relationship, he caught her by the arms.

"How's everything with you, little sweetheart?" he added in his way of easy intimacy. "What's the matter with my customary kiss?"

Dorothy, with every sign of fear or detestation upon her, seemed wholly unable to move. He put his arm roughly about her and kissed her twice.

Garrison, watching with feelings ill suppressed, beheld her shrink from the contact. She appeared to push her cousin off with small effort to disguise her loathing, and fled to Garrison as if certain of protection.

"What are you scared of?" said young Robinson, moving forward to catch her again, and laughing in an irritating way. "You used not to——"

Garrison blocked him promptly, subconsciously wondering where he had heard that laugh before.

"Perhaps that day has passed," he said quietly.

The visitor, still with his hat on, looked Garrison over with anger.

"Jealousy already, hey?" he said. "If you think I'll give up my rights as a cousin you're off, understand?"

Garrison stifled an impulse to slap the fellow's face.

"What are your rights as a cousin, if I may ask?" he said.

"Wait and see," replied Robinson. "Dot was mighty fond of me once—hey, Dot?"

Garrison felt certain of his ground in suppressing the fellow.

"Whatever the situation may have been in the past," he said, "it is very much altered at present."

"Is that so?" demanded Theodore. "Perhaps you'll find the game isn't quite finished yet."

Dorothy, still white and overwrought, attempted to mediate between the two.

"I can't let you men start off like this," she said. "I—I'm fond of you both. I wish you would try to be friendly."

"I'm willing," said her cousin, with a sudden change of front that in no wise deceived Garrison, and he held forth his hand. "Will you shake?"

That Dorothy wished him to greet the fellow civilly, and not incur his ill-feeling. Garrison was sure. He took the proffered hand, as cold as a fish, and dropped it again immediately.

Theodore laughed, and stepped gracefully away, his long coat swinging outward with his motion. Garrison caught a gleam of red, where the coat was parted at the bottom—and he knew where he had heard that laugh before. The man before him was no other than the one he had seen next door, dressed in red fleshings as Satan.

It was not to be understood in a moment, and Theodore's parents had returned once more to the door. Indeed, the old man had beheld the momentary hand-clasp of the men, and he was nettled.

"Theodore!" he cried; "you're not making friends with a man who's sneaked off and married Dorothy, I hope! I wouldn't have believed it!"

"Why not?" said his son. "What's done is done."

His mother said: "Why have you got on an overcoat such a night as this?"

"Because I like it," said Theodore.

Garrison knew better. He wondered what the whole game signified.

The old man was glaring at him sharply.

"I should think for a man who has to leave at nine your time is getting short," he said. "Perhaps your story was invented."

Garrison took out his watch. The fiction would have to be played to the end. The hour lacked twenty minutes of nine. He must presently depart, yet he felt that Dorothy might need protection. Having made up his mind that a marriage had doubtless been planned between Dorothy and Theodore—on the man's part for the purpose of acquiring valuable property, probably veiled to Dorothy—he felt she might not be safe if abandoned to their power.

He had found himself plunged into complications on which it had not been possible to count, but notwithstanding which he meant to remain by Dorothy with the utmost resolution. He had not acknowledged that the charm she exercised upon him lay perilously close to the tenderest of passions, but tried to convince himself his present desire was merely to see this business to the end.

It certainly piqued him to find himself obliged to leave with so much of the evening's proceedings veiled in mystery. He would have been glad to know more of what it meant to have this cousin, Theodore, masquerading as the devil in one house, and covering all the signs here at home. He was absolutely helpless in the situation. He knew that Dorothy wished him to depart. She could not, of course, do otherwise.

"Thank you," he said to the elder Robinson. "I must leave in fifteen minutes."

Dorothy looked at him strangely. She could not permit him to stay, yet she felt the need of every possible safeguard, now that her cousin had appeared. The strange trust and confidence she felt in Garrison had given her new hope and strength. To know he must go in the next few minutes, leaving her there with the Robinsons, afflicted her abruptly with a sense of desolation.

Yet there was nothing she could say or do to prevent his immediate retreat.

Young Robinson, made aware that Garrison would soon be departing, appeared to be slightly excited.

"I'll go down and 'phone for my suit-case," he said, and he left the room at once.

Aunt Jill and old Robinson sat down. It was quite impossible for Garrison to ask them again to retire. Dorothy crossed the room and seated herself before the piano. Garrison followed, and stood there at her side.

She had no spirit for music, and no inclination to play, nevertheless she permitted her hands to wander up and down the keys, calling forth a sweetly sad bit of Hungarian song that took a potent hold on Garrison's emotions.

"Is there anything I can do but go?" he murmured, his voice well masked by the melody. "Do you think you may need me very soon?"

"I do not know. I hope not," she answered, for him alone to hear. "I'm sorry it's been so disagreeable. Do you really have to go away from town?"

"Yes."

"To-day you said you had no employment."

"It was true. Employment came within ten minutes of your leaving. I took it. For you know you hardly expected to require my services so soon."

She played a trifle louder, and asked him:

"Where are you going?"

"To Branchville and Hickwood."

The playing suddenly ceased. She looked up at him swiftly. In nervous haste she resumed her music.

"Not on detective work? You mentioned insurance."

"It concerns insurance."

She was silent for a moment.

"When do you return?"

"I hardly know," he answered. "And I suppose I've got to start at once in order to maintain our little fiction."

"Don't forget to write," she said, blushing, as she had before; and she added: "for appearances." She

rose from her seat.

Garrison pulled out his watch and remarked, for the Robinsons to hear: "Well, I've got to be off."

"Wait a minute, please," said Dorothy, as if possessed by a sudden impulse, and she ran from the room like a child.

With nothing particularly pleasant to say to the Robinsons, Garrison approached a center-table and turned the pages of a book.

Dorothy was back in a moment.

"I'll go down to the door," she said.

Garrison said good-night to the Robinsons, who answered curtly. He closed the door upon them as he left the room.

Dorothy had hastened to the stairs before him, and continued down to the hall. Her face was intensely white again as she turned about, drawing from her dress a neat, flat parcel, wrapped in paper.

"I told you to-day that I trust you absolutely," she said, in a nervous undertone. "I wish you'd take care of this package."

Garrison took it, finding it heavy in his hand. "What is it?" he said.

"Don't try to talk—they'll listen," she cautioned. "Just hurry and go."

"If you need me, write or wire," he said.

"Good-night!"

She retreated a little way from him, as if she felt he might exact a husband's right of farewell, which the absence of witnesses made quite unessential.

"Good-night," she answered, adding wistfully; "I am very grateful, believe me."

She gave him her hand, and his own hand trembled as he took it.

A moment later he was out upon the street, a wild, sweet pleasure in his veins.

Across the way a man's dark figure detached itself from the darkness of a doorstep and followed where Garrison went.

Shadowed to his very door, Garrison came to his humble place of abode with his mind in a region of dreams.

It was not until he stood in his room, and his hand lay against his pocket, that he thought again of Dorothy's parcel surrendered to his keeping. He took it out. He felt he had a right to know its contents.

It had not been sealed.

He removed the paper, disclosing a narrow, shallow box, daintily covered with leather. It was merely snapped shut with a catch.

He opened it, and an exclamation of astonishment escaped his lips.

It contained two necklaces—one of diamonds and one of pearls, the gems of both marvelously fine.

CHAPTER V

THE "SHADOW"

Nothing more disquieting than this possession of the necklaces could possibly have happened to Garrison. He was filled with vague suspicions and alarms. The thing was wholly baffling.

What it signified he could not conjecture. His mind went at once to that momentary scene at the house he had entered by mistake, and in which he had been confronted by the masked young woman, with the jewels on her throat, she who had patted his face and familiarly called him by name.

He could not possibly doubt the two ropes of gems were the same. The fact that Dorothy's cousin, in the garb of Satan, had undoubtedly participated in the masking party, aroused disturbing possibilities in Garrison's mind.

What was the web in which he was entangled?

To have Theodore come to the house in his long, concealing coat, straight from the maskers next door; to have him disappear, and then to have Dorothy bring forth these gems with such wholly unimaginable trust in his honesty, brought him face to face with a brand-new mystery from which he almost shrank. Reflections on thefts, wherein women were accomplices, could not be driven from his brain.

Here was Dorothy suddenly requiring a pseudo-husband—for what? Here was a party next door to the house—a party on which he had stumbled accidentally—where a richly dressed young woman chanced to greet him, with her jewels on her neck. Here was, apparently, a family disturbance, engendered by his marriage with old Robinson's niece. And now—here were the necklaces, worth, at the least estimation, the sum of thirty thousand dollars—delivered to himself!

He could not escape the thought of a "fence," in which he himself had possibly been impressed as a tool, by the cleverest intrigue. The entire attitude of the Robinsons might, he realized, have been but a part of the game. He had witnessed Dorothy's acting. It gave him a vivid sense of her powers, some others of which might well lie concealed behind her appearance of innocence.

And yet, when he thought of the beautiful girl who had begged him not to desert her, he could not think her guilty of the things which this singular outcome might suggest. He was sure she could clear up the mystery, and set herself straight in his eyes.

Not a little disturbed as to what he should do with these precious baubles, sparkling and glinting in his hand, he knitted his brow in perplexity. He was due to leave New York at once, on orders from Wicks. No safe deposit vault was available at such an hour. He dared not leave the things behind in this room. There was no alternative, he must carry them along in his pocket.

Inasmuch as the problem could not possibly be solved at once, and in view of the fact that his mind, or his heart, refused to credit Dorothy with guilt, there was nothing to do but dismiss the subject, as far as possible, and make ready to depart.

He opened a drawer to procure the few things requisite for his trip. On top of a number of linen garments lay a photograph—the picture of a sweetly pretty young woman. He took it up, gazed at it calmly, and presently shook his head.

He turned it over.

On the back was written: "With the love of my heart—Ailsa."

He had kissed this picture a thousand times, in rapture. It had once represented his total of earthly happiness, and then—when the notice of her marriage had come so baldly, through the mail—it had symbolized his depths of despair. Through all his hurt he had clung, not only to the picture, but also to some fond belief that Ailsa loved him still; that the words she had spoken and the things she had done, in the days of their courtship, had not been mere idle falsehoods.

To-night, for the first time since his dream had been shattered, the photograph left him cold and unfeeling. Something had happened, he hardly knew what—something he hardly dared confess to himself, with Dorothy only in his vision. The lifeless picture's day was gone at last.

He tossed it back in the drawer with a gesture of finality, drew forth a number of collars and ties, then went to a closet, opened the door and studied his two suit-cases thoughtfully. He knew not which to take. One was an ordinary, russet-leather case; the other was a thin-steel box, veneered with leather, but of special construction, on a plan which Garrison himself had invented. Indeed, the thing was a trap, ingeniously contrived when the Biddle robbery had baffled far older men than himself, and had then been solved by a trick.

On the whole, he decided he would take this case along. It had brought him luck on the former occasion, and the present was, perhaps, a criminal case. He lifted it out, blew off some dust, and laid it, open, on the bed.

To all appearances the thing was innocent enough. On the under side of the cover was a folding flap, fastened with a string and a button. Unremembered by Garrison, Ailsa's last letter still reposed in the pocket, its romance laid forever in the lavender of rapidly fading memories.

Not only was the case provided with a thin false bottom, concealing its mechanism, but between the cover and the body proper, on either side, were wing-like pieces of leather, to judge from their looks, that seemed to possess no function more important than the ordinary canvas strips not infrequently employed on a trunk to restrain the cover from falling far backward when opened. But encased in these wings were connections to powerful springs that, upon being set and suddenly released, would snap down the cover like the hammer of a gun and catch, as in the jaws of a trap, any meddling hands that might have been placed inside the case by a thief, at the same time ringing a bell. To set it was a matter of the utmost simplicity, while to spring it one had barely to go at the contents of the case and touch the trigger lightly.

The springs were left unset, as Garrison tossed in the trifles he should need. Then he changed his clothes, turned off the gas, and was presently out once more in the open of the street, walking to the Grand Central Station, near at hand.

The man who had followed all the way from Dorothy's residence not only was waiting, but remained on Garrison's trail.

At a quarter of ten Garrison ensconced himself in a train for Branchville. His "shadow" was there in the car. The run required fifty minutes. Hickwood, a very small village, was passed by the cars without a stop. It was hardly two miles from the larger settlement.

The hour was late when Garrison arrived. He and his "shadow" alighted from the train and repaired to a small, one-story hotel near the railway depot, the only place the town afforded. They were presently assigned to adjoining rooms.

Garrison opened his suit-case on the bureau, removed one or two articles, and left the receptacle open, with the cover propped against the mirror. Despite the lateness of the hour he then went out, to roam about the village. His fellow traveler watched only to see him out of the house, and then returned in haste.

In the town there was little to be seen. The houses extended far back from the railroad, on considerably elevated hills. There was one main thoroughfare only, and this was deserted. The dwellings were dark. No one seemed stirring in the place, though midnight had not yet struck.

Garrison was out for half an hour. When he returned his suit-case was closed. He thought nothing of a matter so trifling till he looked inside, and then he underwent a feeling as if it had been rifled. But nothing was gone, so far as he could see. Then he noticed the folding-pocket, for its fastening cord was undone. How well he remembered placing there the letter from Ailsa, months ago! A little surprised that he had so utterly forgotten its existence, he slipped his hand inside the place—and found it empty!

Even then he entertained no suspicions, for a moment. The letter, like the photograph, was no longer a valued possession. Yet he wondered where it could have gone. Vaguely uncertain, after all, as to whether he had left it here or not, his eye was suddenly caught by the slightest movement in the world, reflected in the mirror of the bureau. The movement was up at the transom, above a door that led to the next adjoining room.

Instantly turning away, to allay any possible suspicion that he might be aware of the fact that someone was spying upon him, Garrison moved the suit-case to a chair, drew from his pocket a folded paper that might have appeared important—although merely a railroad folder—placed it carefully, as if to hide it, under various articles of apparel, set the springs of the vicious steel-trap, and, leaving the suitcase open as before, took a turn around the room.

All this business was merely for the benefit of the man whom he knew to be watching from over the door. Starting as if to undress, he paused, appeared to remember something left neglected, and hastened from his room, purposely leaving the door more than half-way ajar. Down the hall he strode, to the office, where he looked on the register and discovered the name of his neighbor—John Brown—an obvious alias.

He had hardly been thus engaged for two minutes when the faint, far-off sound of a ringing bell came distinctly to his ears.

"My alarm-clock's gone off," he said to the man at the desk, and he fled up the hall like a sprinter.

A clatter of sounds, as of someone struggling, had come before he reached his room. As he bounded

in he beheld his suit-case, over at the window, jerking against the sash and sill as if possessed of evil spirits. No thief was visible. The fellow, with the trap upon his fingers, had already leaped to the ground.

Within a yard of his captured burglar Garrison beheld the suit-case drop, and his man had made good his escape.

He thrust his head outside the window, but the darkness was in favor of the thief, who was not to be seen.

Chagrined to think Mr. "Brown" had contrived to get loose, Garrison took up the case, carried it back to the bureau, and opened it up, by skillfully releasing the springs. Three small patches of finger-skin were left in the bite of its jaws—cards of the visitor left as announcements of his visit.

The room next door was not again occupied that night. The hotel saw no more of Mr. Brown.

CHAPTER VI

THE CORONER

Not in the least reassured, but considerably aroused in all his instincts by these further developments of a night already full of mysterious transactions, Garrison, after a futile watch for his neighbor, once more plunged into a study of the case in which he found himself involved.

Vaguely he remembered to have noticed that the man who had come here to Branchville with him on the train carried no baggage. He had no doubt the man had been close upon his trail for some considerable time; but why, and what he wanted, could not be so readily determined. Certain the man had extracted Ailsa's letter from the pocket of the case, yet half convinced that the thief had been searching for the necklaces intrusted to his care, Garrison was puzzled.

There seemed to be no possible connection between the two. He could not understand what a thief who would take the one would require of the other. Aside from his money, the gems were the only articles he possessed of the slightest value or significance. Half persuaded that the diamonds and pearls afforded the booty for which his visitor had searched, he was once more in doubt as to whether he had lost Ailsa's letter or not. He might find it still among his things, at his room in Forty-fourth Street.

He was fully convinced the man would return no more. Nevertheless, when he turned in at last, the jewels were under the pillow.

Branchville, in the morning, proved an attractive place of residence. Half its male population went to New York as commuters. Its housewives then bustled about their gardens or their chicken-coops, at the rear of the houses, and a dozen old men gathered slowly at the post-office store to resume the task of doing nothing.

Garrison experienced no difficulty in searching out Mrs. Webber, the woman who had supplied certain details concerning the finding of the body of the man, John Hardy, whose death had occurred here the previous week.

The house, at the porch of which the body had been discovered, was empty. Mrs. Webber went with Garrison to the place, showed him exactly where the body had reclined, and left him alone at the scene.

He looked the details over carefully. The porch was low and roofed; its eaves projected a foot. If, as Garrison fancied, the stricken man might have come here in weakness, to lean against the post, and had then gone down, perhaps leaving heel-marks in the earth, all signs of any such action had been obliterated, despite the fact that no rains had fallen since the date of the man's demise. Garrison scrutinized the ground closely. A piece of broken crockery, a cork, the top of a can, an old cigar, and some bits of glass and wire lay beside the baseboard—the usual signs of neglect. The one man-made article in all the litter that attracted Garrison's attention was the old cigar. He took it up for a more minute examination.

It had never been lighted. It was broken, as if someone had stepped upon the larger end; but the label, a bright red band of paper, was still upon it. The wrapper had somewhat spread; but the pointed

end had been bitten off, half an inch up on the taper.

Aware that the weed might have been thrown down by anyone save Hardy, Garrison nevertheless placed it in an envelope and tucked it away in his pocket. A visit to the local coroner presenting itself as the next most natural step, he proceeded at once to his office.

As a dealer in real estate, a notary public, and an official in several directions, the coroner was a busy man. He said so himself.

Garrison introduced himself candidly as a New York detective, duly licensed, at present representing a State insurance company, and stated the nature of his business.

"All right," said the coroner, inclined at once to be friendly. "My name is Pike. What'd you want to know? Sit down and take it easy."

"As much as I can learn about the case." Garrison took a proffered chair. "For instance, what did you find on the body?"

"Nothing—of any importance—a bunch of keys, a fountain-pen, and—and just some useless trash—I believe four dollars and nineteen cents."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, some scraps of paper and a picture postal-card."

"Any cigars?" asked Garrison.

"Yep—three, with labels on 'em—all but one, I mean." He had taken one label for his son's collection.

"What did you do with the stuff?"

"Locked it up, waiting orders from the court," replied Mr. Pike. "You bet, I know my business."

Garrison was pursuing a point. He inquired: "Do you smoke?"

"No, I don't; and if I did, I wouldn't touch one of them," said the coroner. "And don't you forget it."

"Did anyone help you to carry off the body—anyone who might have thrown a cigar away, unlighted?"

"No, siree! When Billy Ford and Tom Harris git a cigar it never gits away," said Mr. Pike.

"Did you find out where the dead man came from and what he was doing in the village?"

"He was stopping down to Hickwood with Mrs. Wilson," answered Pike. "His friend there was Charlie Scott, who's making a flying-machine that's enough to make anybody lunny. I've told him he can't borrow no money from me on no such contraption, and so has Billy Dodd."

Garrison mentally noted down the fact that Scott was in need of money.

"What can you tell me of the man's appearance?" he added, after a moment of silence. "Did his face present any signs of agony?"

"Nope. Just looked dead," said the coroner.

"Were there any signs upon him of any nature?"

"Grass stain on his knee—that's about all."

"About all?" Garrison echoed. "Was there anything else—any scratches or bruises on his hands?"

"No—nary a scratch. He had real fine hands," said the coroner. "But they did have a little dirt on 'em—right on three of the knuckles of the left hand and on one on the right—the kind of dirt you can't rub off."

"Did it look as if he'd tried to rub it off?"

"Looked as if he'd washed it a little and it wouldn't come."

"Just common black dirt?"

"Yes, kind of grimy—the kind that gits in and stays."

Garrison reflected that a sign of this nature might and might not prove important. Everything

depended on further developments. One deduction was presented to his mind—the man had doubtless observed that his hands were soiled and had washed them in the dark, since anyone with the "fine" hands described by the coroner would be almost certain to keep them immaculate; but might, in the absence of a light, wash them half clean only.

He was not disposed to attach a very great importance to the matter, however, and only paused for a moment to recall a number of the various "dirts" that resist an effort to remove them—printers' ink, acid stains, axle grease, and greasy soot.

He shifted his line of questions abruptly.

"What did you discover about the dead man's relatives? The nephew who came to claim the body?"

"Never saw him," said the coroner. "I couldn't hang around the corpse all day. I'm the busiest man in Branchville—and I had to go down to New York the day he come."

"Did you take possession of any property that deceased might have had at his room in Hickwood?"

"Sure," said Pike. "Half a dozen collars, and some socks, a few old letters, and a box almost full of cigars."

"If these things are here in your office," said Garrison, rising, "I should like to look them over."

"You bet, I can put my hand on anything in my business in a minute," boasted Mr. Pike. He rose and crossed the room to a desk with a large, deep drawer, which he opened with a key.

The dead man's possessions were few, indeed. The three cigars which his pocket had disgorged were lying near a little pile of money. Garrison noted at once that the labels on two were counterparts of the one on the broken cigar now reposing in his pocket. He opened the box beneath his hand. The cigars inside were all precisely like the others. Five only had ever been removed, of which four were accounted for already. The other had doubtless been smoked.

On the even row of dark-brown weeds lay a card, on which, written in pencil, were the words:

A BIRTHDAY GREETING—WITH LOVE.

Garrison let fall the lid and glanced with fading interest at the few insignificant papers and other trifles which the drawer contained. He had practically made up his mind that John Hardy had died, as the coroner had found, of heart disease, or apoplexy, even in the act of lighting up to smoke.

He questioned the man further, made up his mind to visit Charles Scott and Mrs. Wilson, in Hickwood, and was presently out upon the road.

CHAPTER VII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

Garrison walked along the road to Hickwood out of sheer love of being in the open, and also the better to think.

Unfortunately for the case in hand, however, his thoughts wandered truantly back to New York and the mystery about the girl masquerading to the world as his wife. His meditations were decidedly mixed. He thought of Dorothy always with a thrill of strong emotions, despite the half-formed suspicions which had crossed his mind at least a dozen times.

Her jewels were still in his pocket—a burden she had apparently found too heavy to carry. How he wished he might accept her confidence in him freely, unreservedly—with the thrill it could bring to his heart!

The distance to Hickwood seemed to slip away beneath his feet. He arrived in the hamlet far too soon, for the day had charmed bright dreams into being, and business seemed wholly out of place.

The railroad station, a store, an apothecary's shop, and a cobbler's little den seemed to comprise the entire commercial street.

Garrison inquired his way to the home of his man—the inventor.

Scott, whom he found at a workshop, back of his home, was a thin, stooped figure, gray as a wolf, wrinkled as a prune, and stained about the mouth by tobacco. His eyes, beneath their overhanging brows of gray, were singularly sharp and brilliant. Garrison made up his mind that the blaze in their depths was none other than the light of fanaticism.

"How do you do, Mr. Scott?" said the detective, who had determined to pose as an upper-air enthusiast. "I was stopping in Branchville for a day or two, and heard of your fame as a fellow inventor. I've been interested in aeroplanes and dirigible balloons so long that I thought I'd give myself the pleasure of a call."

"Um!" said Scott, closing the door of his shop behind him, as if to guard a precious secret. "What did you say is your name?"

Garrison informed him duly.

"I haven't yet made myself famous as a navigator of the air, but we all have our hopes."

"You'll never be able to steer a balloon," said Scott, with a touch of asperity. "I can tell you that."

"I begin to believe you're right," assented Garrison artfully. "It's a mighty discouraging and expensive business, any way you try it."

"I'll do the trick! I've got it all worked out," said Scott, betrayed into ardor and assurance by a nearness of the triumph that he felt to be approaching. "I'll have plenty of money to complete it soon—plenty—plenty—but it's a long time coming, even now."

"That's the trouble with most of us," Garrison observed, to draw his man. "The lack of money."

"Why can't they pay it, now the man is dead?" demanded Scott, as if he felt that everyone knew his affairs by heart and could understand his meaning. "I need the money now—to-day—this minute! It's bad enough when a man stays healthy so long, and looks as if he'd last for twenty years. That's bad enough without me having to wait and wait and wait, now that he's dead and in the ground."

It was clear to Garrison the man's singleness of purpose had left his mind impaired. He began to see how a creature so bent on some wondrous solution of the flying-machine enigma could even become so obsessed in his mind that to murder for money, insurance benefits, or anything else, would seem a fair means to an end.

"Some friend of yours has recently died?" he asked. "You've been left some needed funds for your labors?"

"Funny kind of friendship when a man goes on living so long," said the alert fanatic. "And I don't get the money; that's what's delaying me now."

"You're far more fortunate than some of us," said Garrison. "Some friend, I suppose, here in town."

"No, he was here two days," answered Scott. "I saw him but little. He died in the night, up to the village." His sharp eyes swung on Garrison peculiarly the moment his speech was concluded.

He demanded sharply; "What's all this business to you?"

"Nothing—only that it shows the world's great inventors are not always neglected, after all," answered Garrison. "Some of us never enjoy such good fortune."

"The world don't know how great I am," declared the inventor, instantly off, on the hint supplied by his visitor. "But just the minute that insurance company gives me the money, I'll be ready to startle the skies! I'll blot out the stars for 'em! I'll show New York! I know what I'm doing! And nothing on earth is going to stop me! All these fool balloonists, with their big silk floating cigars! Deadly cigars is what they are—deadly! You wait!"

Garrison was staring at him fixedly, fascinated by a new idea which had crept upon his mind with startling abruptness. His one idea was to get away for a vital two minutes by himself.

"Well, perhaps I'll try to get around again," he said. "I can see you're very busy, and I mustn't keep you longer from your work. Good luck and good-day."

"The only principle," the old man answered, his gaze directed to the sky.

Garrison looked up, beholding a bird, far off in the azure vault, soaring in the majesty of flight. Then he hastened again to the quiet little street, and down by a fence at a vacant lot, where he paused and looked about. He was quite alone. Drawing from his pocket the envelope containing the old cigar that Hardy had undoubtedly let fall as he died at the porch of the "haunted" house, he turned up the raggedly bitten end.

"By George!" he exclaimed beneath his breath.

Tucked within the tobacco folds, in a small hollow space which was partially closed by the filler which had once been bitten together, was a powdery stuff that seemed comprised of small, hard particles, as of crystals, roughly broken up.

His breath came fast. His heart was pumping rapidly. He raised the cigar to his nostrils and smelled, but could only detect the pungent odor of tobacco.

That the powder was a poison he had not the slightest doubt. Aware that one poison only, thus administered, would have the potency to slay an adult human being practically on the instant, he realized at once that here, at the little, unimportant drug-shop of the place, the simple test for such a stuff could be made in a matter of two minutes.

Eager and feverish to inform himself without delay, he took out his knife and carefully removed all the powder from its place and wrapped it most cautiously about in the paper of the envelope in hand. The cigar he returned to his pocket.

Five minutes later, at the drug-store down the street, an obliging and clever young chemist at the place was holding up a test-tube made of glass, with perhaps two thimblefuls of acidulated solution which had first been formed by dissolving the powder under inspection.

"If this is what you suppose," he said, "a slight admixture of this iron will turn it Prussian blue."

He poured in the iron, which was likewise in solution, and instantly the azure tint was created in all its deadly beauty.

Garrison was watching excitedly.

"No mistake about it," said the chemist triumphantly. "Where did you find this poison?"

"Why—in a scrap of meat," said Garrison, inventing an answer with ready ingenuity; "enough to have killed my dog in half a shake!"

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE CLEWS MAY POINT

Startled, thus to discover that, after all, a crime of the most insidious and diabolical nature had been committed, Garrison wandered along the street, after quitting the drug-store, with his brain aglow with excitement and the need for steady thought.

The case that had seemed but a simple affair of a man's very natural demise had suddenly assumed an aspect black as night.

He felt the need for light—all the light procurable in Hickwood.

Aware of the misleading possibilities of a theory preconceived, he was not prepared even now to decide that inventor Scott was necessarily guilty. He found himself obliged to admit that the indications pointed to the half-crazed man, to whom a machine had become a god, but nothing as yet had been proved.

To return to Scott this morning would, he felt, be indiscreet. The one person now to be seen and interviewed was Mrs. Wilson, at whose home the man Hardy had been lodged. He started at once to the place, his mind reverting by natural process to the box of cigars he had seen an hour before, and from which, without a doubt, this poisoned weed had been taken by Hardy to smoke. He realized that one extremely important point must be determined by the box itself.

If among the cigars still remaining untouched there were others similarly poisoned, the case might involve a set of facts quite different from those which reason would adduce if the one cigar only had been loaded. It was vital also to the matter in hand to ascertain the identity of the person who had presented the smokes as a birthday remembrance to the victim.

He arrived at Mrs. Wilson's home, was met at the door by the lady herself, and was then obliged to wait interminably while she fled to some private boudoir at the rear to make herself presentable for "company."

For the second time, when she at length appeared, Garrison found himself obliged to invent a plausible excuse for his visit and curiosity.

"I dropped in to ascertain a few little facts about the late Mr. Hardy, whose death occurred last week in Branchville," he said. "The insurance company that I represent goes through this trifling formality before paying a claim."

"He certainly was the nicest man," said Mrs. Wilson. "And just as I was countin' on the money, he has to up and die. I didn't think he was that kind."

"Did he have many visitors?" Garrison asked, hastening at once to the items he felt to be important. "I mean, from among the neighbors, or—anyone else?"

"Well, Charlie Scott come over, that second night and actin' that queer I didn't know what was the matter. He went off just about nine o'clock, and I went to bed, and then I heard him come back in half an hour, while Mr. Hardy was out, and he went again before Mr. Hardy come in and started off to Branchville to die."

Her method of narrative was puzzling.

"You mean," said Garrison, "that after Mr. Scott had called and gone, Mr. Hardy went out temporarily, and in his absence Mr. Scott returned and remained for a time in his room?"

"I didn't git up to see what he wanted, or how long he stayed," said Mrs. Wilson. "I hate gittin' up when once I'm abed."

"And he went before Mr. Hardy's return?"

"Yes, I stayed awake for that; for although Charlie Scott may be honest enough, he's inventin' some crazy fiddle-dee, which has been the crown of thorns of that dear woman all these—"

"Did they seem to be friends, Mr. Scott and Mr. Hardy?" Garrison interrupted mildly. "A clever woman, you know, can always tell."

"Ain't you New York men the quick ones to see!" said Mrs. Wilson. "Of course they was friends. The day he come Mr. Hardy was over to Charlie's all the livelong afternoon."

"Did Mr. Hardy get very many letters, or anything, through the mail?"

"Well, of course, I offered to go to the post-office, and bring him everything," said Mrs. Wilson, "but he went himself. So I don't know what he got, or who it come from. Not that I read anything but the postals and—"

"Did he get any packages sent by express?"

"Not that come to my house, for little Jimmie Vane would have brought 'em straight to me."

Garrison went directly to the mark around which he had been playing.

"Who delivered his birthday present—the box of cigars?"

"Oh, that was his niece, the very first evenin' he was here—and she the prettiest girl I ever seen."

"His niece?" echoed Garrison. "Some young lady—who brought them here herself?"

"Well, I should say so! My, but she was that lovely! He took her up to Branchville to the train—and how I did hate to see her go!"

"Of course, yes, I remember he had a niece," said Garrison, his mind reverting to the "statement" in his pocket. "But, upon my word, I believe I've forgotten her name."

"He called her Dot," said Mrs. Wilson.

"But her real name?" said Garrison.

"Her real name was Dorothy Booth before she was married," replied Mrs. Wilson, "but now, of course, it's changed."

Garrison had suddenly turned ashen. He managed to control himself by making a very great effort.

"Perhaps you know her married name?" he said.

"I never forget a thing like that," said Mrs. Wilson. "Her married name is Mrs. Fairfax."

It seemed to Garrison he was fighting in the toils of some astounding maze, where sickening mists arose to clog his brain. He could scarcely believe his senses. A tidal wave of facts and deductions, centering about the personality of Dorothy Booth-Fairfax, surged upon him relentlessly, bearing down and engulfing the faith which he strove to maintain in her honesty.

He had felt from the first there was something deep and dark with mystery behind the girl who had come to his office with her most amazing employment. He had entertained vague doubts upon hearing of wills and money inheritance at the house where she lived in New York.

He recalled the start she had given, while playing at the piano, upon learning he was leaving for Hickwood. Her reticence and the strangeness of the final affair of the necklaces, in connection with this present development, left him almost in despair.

Despite it all, as it overwhelmed him thus abruptly, he felt himself struggling against it. He could not even now accept a belief in her complicity in such a deed while he thought of the beauty of her nature. That potent something she had stirred in his heart was a fierce, fighting champion to defend her.

He had not dared confess to himself he was certainly, fatefully falling in love with this girl he scarcely knew, but his heart refused to hear her accused and his mind was engaged in her defence.

Above all else, he felt the need for calmness. Perhaps the sky would clear itself, and the sun again gild her beauty.

"Mrs. Fairfax," he repeated to his garrulous informant. "She brought the cigars, you say, the day of Mr. Hardy's arrival?"

"And went away on the six-forty-three," said Mrs. Wilson. "I remember it was six minutes late, and I did think my dinner would be dry as a bone, for she said she couldn't stay——"

"And that was his birthday," Garrison interrupted.

"Oh, no. His birthday was the day he died. I remember, 'cause he wouldn't even open the box of cigars till after his dinner that day."

Garrison felt his remaining ray of hope faintly flicker and expire.

"You are sure the box wasn't opened?" he insisted.

"I guess I am! He borrowed my screwdriver out of the sewin'-machine drawer, where I always keep it, to pry up the cover."

Garrison tacked to other items.

"Why did she have to go so soon?" he inquired. "Couldn't she have stayed here with you?"

"What, a young thing like her, only just married?" demanded Mrs. Wilson, faintly blushing. "I guess you don't know us women when we're in love." And she blushed again.

"Of course," answered Garrison, at a loss for a better reply. "Did her uncle seem pleased with her marriage?"

"Why, he sat where you're now settin' for one solid hour, tellin' me how tickled he felt," imparted the housewife. "He said she'd git everything he had in the world, now that she was married happy to a decent man, for he'd fixed it all up in his will."

"Mr. Hardy said his niece would inherit his money?"

"Settin' right in that chair, and smilin' fit to kill."

"Did the niece seem very fond of her uncle?"

"Well, at first I thought she acted queer and nervous," answered Mrs. Wilson, "but I made up my mind that was the natural way for any young bride to feel, especial away from her husband."

Garrison's hopes were slipping from him, one by one, and putting on their shrouds.

"Did Mr. Hardy seem to be pleased with his niece's selection—with Mr. Fairfax?" he inquired. "Or don't you know?"

"Why, he never even *seen* the man," replied Mrs. Wilson. "It seems Mr. Fairfax was mixin' up business with his honeymoon, and him and his bride was goin' off again, or was on their way, and she had a chance to run up and see her uncle for an hour, and none of us so much as got a look at Mr. Fairfax."

The mystery darkened rather than otherwise. There was nothing yet to establish whether or not a real Mr. Fairfax existed. It appeared to Garrison that Dorothy had purposely arranged the scheme of her alleged marriage and honeymoon in such a way that her uncle should not meet her husband.

He tried another query:

"Did Mr. Hardy say that he had never seen Mr. Fairfax?"

"Never laid eyes on the man in his life, but expected to meet him in a month."

Garrison thought of the nephew who had come to claim the body. His name had been given as Durgin. At the most, he could be no more than Dorothy's cousin, and not the one he had recently met at her house.

"I don't suppose you saw Mr. Durgin, the nephew of Mr. Hardy?" he inquired. "The man who claimed the body?"

"No, sir. I heard about Mr. Durgin, but I didn't see him."

Garrison once more changed the topic.

"Which was the room that Mr. Hardy occupied? Perhaps you'll let me see it."

"It ain't been swept or dusted recent," Mrs. Wilson informed him, rising to lead him from the room, "but you're welcome to see it, if you don't mind how it looks."

The apartment was a good-sized room, at the rear of the house. It was situated on a corner, with windows at the side and rear. Against the front partition an old-fashioned fireplace had been closed with a decorated cover. The neat bed, the hair-cloth chairs, and a table that stood on three of its four legs only, supplied the furnishings. The coroner had taken every scrap he could find of the few things possessed by Mr. Hardy.

"Nice, cheerful room," commented Garrison. "Did he keep the windows closed and locked?"

"Oh, no! He was a wonderful hand to want the air," said the landlady. "And he loved the view."

The view of the shed and hen-coops at the rear was duly exhibited. Garrison did his best to formulate a theory to exonerate Dorothy from knowledge of the crime; but his mind had received a blow at these new disclosures, and nothing seemed to aid him in the least. He could only feel that some dark deed lay either at the door of the girl who had paid him to masquerade as her husband, or the half-crazed inventor down the street.

And the toils lay closer to Dorothy, he felt, than they did to Scott.

"You have been very helpful, I am sure," he said to Mrs. Wilson.

He bade her good-by and left the house, feeling thoroughly depressed in all his being.

CHAPTER IX

Once in the open air again, with the sunshine streaming upon him, Garrison felt a rebound in his thoughts. He started slowly up the road to Branchville, thinking of the murder as he went.

The major requisite, he was thoroughly aware, was motive. Men were never slain, except by lunatics, without a deeply grounded reason. It disturbed him greatly to realize that Dorothy might have possessed such a motive in the danger of losing an inheritance, depending upon her immediate marriage. He could not dismiss the thought that she had suddenly found herself in need of a husband, probably to satisfy conditions in her uncle's will; that she had paid Mr. Hardy a visit as a bride, but *without her husband*, and had since been obliged to come to himself and procure his professional services *as such husband*, presumably for a short time only.

She was cheating the Robinsons now through him.

Of this much there could be no denial. She was stubbornly withholding important information from himself as the masquerading husband. She was, therefore, capable of craft and scheming. The jewel mystery was equally suspicious and unexplainable.

And yet, when his memory flew to the hour in which he had met her for the very first time, his faith in her goodness and honesty swept upon him with a force that banished all doubt from his being. Every word she had uttered, every look from her eyes, had borne her sincerity in upon him indelibly.

This was his argument, brought to bear upon himself. He did not confess the element of love had entered the matter in the least.

And now, as he walked and began to try to show himself that she could not have done this awful crime, the uppermost thought that tortured his mind was a fear that she might have a *genuine* husband.

He forced his thoughts back to the box of cigars, through the medium of which John Hardy's death had been accomplished. What a diabolically clever device it had been! What scheme could be more complete to place the deadly poison on the tongue of the helpless victim! The cigar is bitten—the stuff is in the mouth, and before its taste can manifest itself above the strong flavor of tobacco, the deadly work is done! And who would think, in ordinary circumstances, of looking in a cigar for such a poison, and how could such a crime be traced?

The very diabolism of the device acquitted Dorothy, according to Garrison's judgment. He doubted if any clever woman, perhaps excepting the famous and infamous Lucrezia Borgia, could have fashioned a plan so utterly fiendish and cunning.

He began to reflect what the thing involved. In the first place, many smokers cut the end from every cigar, preliminary to lighting up to smoke. The person who had loaded this cigar must have known it was John Hardy's habit to bite his cigars in the old-fashioned manner. He hated this thought, for Dorothy would certainly be one to know of this habit in her uncle.

On the other hand, however, the task of placing the poison was one requiring nicety, for clumsy work would of course betray itself at the cigar-end thus prepared. To tamper with a well-made cigar like this required that one should deftly remove or unroll the wrapper, hollow out a cavity, stuff in the poison, and then rewrap the whole with almost the skill and art of a well-trained maker of cigars. To Garrison's way of thinking, this rendered the task impossible for such a girl as Dorothy.

He had felt from the first that any man of the inventive, mechanical attributes doubtless possessed by Scott could be guilty of working out this scheme.

Scott, too, possessed a motive. He wanted money. The victim was insured in his favor for a snug little fortune. And Scott had returned to Hardy's room, according to Mrs. Wilson, while Hardy was away, and could readily have opened the box, extracted one or two cigars, and prepared them for Hardy to smoke. He, too, would have known of Hardy's habit of biting the end from his weed.

There was still the third possibility that even before Dorothy's visit to her uncle the cigars could have been prepared. Anyone supplied with the knowledge that she had purchased the present, with intention to take it to her uncle, might readily have conceived and executed the plan and be doubly hidden from detection, since suspicion would fall upon Dorothy.

Aware of the great importance of once more examining the dead man's effects at the coroner's office, Garrison hastened his pace. It still lacked nearly an hour of noon when he re-entered Branchville. The office he sought was a long block away from his hotel; nevertheless, before he reached the door a hotel bell-boy discerned him, waved his arm, then abruptly disappeared inside the hostelry.

The coroner was emerging from his place of business up the street. Garrison accosted him.

"Oh, Mr. Pike," he said, "I've returned, you see. I've nearly concluded my work on the Hardy case; but I'd like, as a matter of form, to look again through the few trifling articles in your custody."

"Why, certainly," said Mr. Pike. "Come right in. I've got to be away for fifteen minutes, but I guess I can trust you in the shop."

He grinned good-naturedly, opened the drawer, and hurriedly departed.

Garrison drew up a chair before the desk.

At the door the hotel-boy appeared abruptly.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Garrison," he said. "Been at the office about an hour, but nobody knew where you was."

Garrison took it and tore it open. It read:

"Return as soon as possible. Important.

"DOROTHY."

"Any answer?" inquired the boy.

"No," said Garrison. "What's the next train for New York?"

"Eleven-forty-five," answered the boy. "Goes in fifteen minutes."

"All right. Have my suit-case down at the office."

He returned to his work.

Ignoring the few piled-up papers in the drawer, he took up the three cigars beside the box, the ones which had come from Hardy's pocket, and scrutinized them with the most minute attention.

So far as he could possibly detect, not one had been altered or repasted on the end. He did not dare to cut them up, greatly as he longed to examine them thoroughly. He opened the box from which they had come.

For a moment his eye was attracted and held by the birthday greeting-card which Dorothy had written. The presence of the card showed a somewhat important fact—the box had been opened once before John Hardy forced up the lid, in order that the card might be deposited within.

His gaze went traveling from one even, nicely finished cigar-end to the next, in his hope to discover signs of meddling. It was not until he came to the end cigar that he caught at the slightest irregularity. Here, at last, was a change.

He took the cigar out carefully and held it up. There could be no doubt it had been "mended" on the end. The wrapper was not only slightly discolored, but it bulged a trifle; it was not so faultlessly turned as all the others, and the end was corkscrewed the merest trifle, whereas, none of the others had been twisted to bring them to a point.

Garrison needed that cigar. He was certain not another one in all the box was suspicious. The perpetrator of the poisoning had evidently known that Hardy's habit was to take his cigars from the end of the row and not the center. No chance for mistake had been permitted. The two end cigars had been loaded, and no more.

How to purloin this cigar without having it missed by Mr. Pike was a worry for a moment.

Garrison managed it simply. He took out a dozen cigars in the layer on top and one from the layer next the bottom; then, rearranging the underlying layer so as to fill in the empty space, he replaced the others in perfect order in the topmost row, and thus had one cigar left over to substitute for the one he had taken from the end.

He plumped the suspicious-looking weed into his pocket and closed the box.

Eagerly glancing at the letters found among the dead man's possessions, he found a note from

Dorothy. It had come from a town in Massachusetts. The date was over six weeks old.

It was addressed, "Dear Uncle John," and, in a girlish way, informed him she had recently been married to a "splendid, brilliant young man, named Fairfax," whom she trusted her uncle would admire. They were off on their honeymoon, it added, but she hoped they would not be long away, for they both looked forward with pleasure to seeing him soon.

It might have been part of her trickery; he could not tell.

The envelope was missing. Where Hardy had been at the time of receiving the note was not revealed. The picture postal-card that Pike had mentioned was also there. It, too, apparently, had come from Dorothy, and had been sent direct to Hickwood.

Once more returning to the box of cigars, Garrison took it up and turned it around in his hand. On the back, to his great delight, he discovered a rubber-stamp legend, which was nothing more or less than a cheap advertisement of the dealer who had sold the cigars.

He was one Isaac Blum, of an uptown address on Amsterdam Avenue, New York, dealer in stationery, novelties, and smokers' articles. Garrison jotted down the name and address, together with the brand of the cigars, and was just about to rise and close the drawer when the coroner returned.

"I shall have to go down to New York this morning," said Garrison. "I owe you many thanks."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Pike responded. "If you're goin' to try to catch fifteen, you'd better git a move. She's whistled for the station just above."

Garrison hastened away. He was presently whirling back to Dorothy.

His "shadow," with his bruised hand gloved, was just behind him in the car.

CHAPTER X

A COMPLICATION

With ample time in which to wonder what Dorothy's summons might imply, Garrison naturally found himself in the dark, despite his utmost efforts at deduction.

He welcomed the chance thus made possible to behold her again so soon, after what he had so recently discovered, and yet he almost dreaded the necessity of ferreting out all possible facts concerning her actions and motives for the past six weeks, the better to work up his case. Wherever it led him, he knew he must follow unrelentingly.

Masquerading as her husband, he had involved himself in—Heaven alone knew what—but certainly in all her affairs, even to the murder itself, since he was alleged to have married her prior to John Hardy's death, and was now supposed to benefit, in all probability, by some will that Hardy had executed.

The recent developments disturbed him incessantly. He almost wished he had never heard of Mr. Wicks, who had come to his office with employment. And yet, with Dorothy entangled as she was in all this business, it was better by far that he should know the worst, as well as the best, that there was to be discovered.

He wondered if the whole affair might be charged with insidious fatalities—either for himself or Dorothy. He was groping in the dark—and the only light was that which shone in Dorothy's eyes; there was nothing else to guide him. He could not believe it was a baneful light, luring him on to destruction—and yet—and yet—

His gaze wandered out at the window on a scene of Nature's loveliness. The bright June day was perfect. In their new, vivid greens, the fields and the trees were enchanting. How he wished that he and Dorothy might wander across the hills and meadows together!

A sweet, lawless wildness possessed his rebellious nature. His mind could reason, but his heart would not, despite all his efforts at control.

Thus the time passed until New York was reached.

Unobserved, the man who had shadowed Garrison so faithfully left the train at the Harlem station, to take the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street crosstown car, in his haste to get to Ninety-third Street, where the Robinsons were waiting.

Garrison went on to the Grand Central, carried his suit-case to his room, freshened his dress with new linen, and then, going forth, lunched at a corner café, purchased another bunch of roses, and proceeded on to Dorothy's.

It was a quarter of two when he rang the bell. He waited only the briefest time. The door was opened, and there stood young Robinson, smiling.

"Why, how do you do, Cousin Jerold?" he said, cordially extending his hand. "Come right in. I'm delighted to see you."

Garrison had expected any reception but this. He felt his old dislike of the Robinsons return at once. There was nothing to do, however, but to enter.

"Is Dorothy——" he started.

"Won't you go right up?" interrupted Theodore. "I believe you are not unexpected."

Garrison was puzzled. A certain uneasiness possessed him. He proceeded quietly up the stairs, momentarily expecting Dorothy to appear. But the house was silent. He reached the landing and turned to look at Theodore, who waved him on to the room they had occupied before.

When he entered he was not at all pleased to find the elder Robinson only awaiting his advent. He halted just inside the threshold and glanced inquiringly from father to son.

"How do you do?" he said stiffly. "Is Dorothy not at home?"

"She is not," said old Robinson, making no advance and giving no greeting. "Will you please sit down?"

Garrison remained where he was.

"Do you expect her soon?" he inquired.

"We shall get along very well without her. We've got something to say to you—alone."

Garrison said: "Indeed?"

He advanced to a chair and sat down.

"In the first place, perhaps you will tell us your actual name," said old Robinson, himself taking a seat.

Garrison was annoyed.

"Let me assure you, once for all, that I do not in the least recognize your right to meddle in my concerns, or subject me to any inquisitions."

"That's another way of saying you refuse to answer!" snapped Robinson tartly. "You know your name isn't Fairfax, any more than it's mine. Your name is Garrison."

Garrison stared at him coldly.

"You seem to have made up your mind very decidedly," he said. "Is that all you have to say?"

"You don't deny it?" cried the old man, exasperated by his calmness.
"You don't dare deny it!"

Garrison grew calmer.

"I haven't the slightest reason to deny anything," he said. "I frequently require a pseudonym. Dorothy knows that I employ the name Garrison whenever occasion demands."

The old man was wild.

"Will you swear that your right name is Fairfax?" he said. "That's what I demand to know!"

Garrison answered: "I came here to see my wife. I warn you I am growing impatient with your hidden insinuations!"

"Your wife!" cried old Robinson, making a dive into one of his pockets with his hand. "What have you to say to this letter, from the woman who is doubtless by now your *legal* wife?" Suddenly snatching a letter from his coat, he projected himself toward Garrison and held up the missive before him.

It was the letter from Ailsa—the one that Garrison had missed—the letter in which she had agreed to become his wife. He put forth his hand to receive it.

"No, you don't!" cried the old man, snatching it out of his reach. "I'll keep this, if you please, to show my niece."

Garrison's eyes glittered.

"So, it was *your* hired thief who stole it, up at Branchville?" he said. "I don't suppose he showed you the skin that he left behind from his fingers."

"That's got nothing to do with the point!" the old man cried at him triumphantly. "I don't believe you are married to my niece. If you think you can play your game on me——"

Garrison interrupted.

"The theft of that letter was a burglary in which you are involved. You are laying up trouble for yourself very rapidly. Give that letter to me!"

"Give it up, hey? We'll see!" said Robinson. "Take it to court if you dare! I'm willing. This letter shows that another woman accepted you, and *that's* the point you don't dare face in the law!"

Whatever else he discerned in the case, Garrison did not understand in the least how Dorothy could have summoned him back here for this.

"That letter is an old one," he replied to Robinson calmly. "Look at the date. It's a bit of ancient history, long since altered."

"There is no date!" the old man shrilled in glee; and he was right.

Garrison's reply was never uttered. The door behind him abruptly opened, and there stood Dorothy, radiant with color and beauty.

"Why, Jerold!" she cried. "Why, when did you come? I didn't even know you were in town."

She ran to him ardently, as she had before, with her perfect art, and kissed him with wifely affection.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHOCK OF TRUTH

For one second only Garrison was a trifle confused. Then he gave her the roses he had brought.

She carried them quickly to the table, hiding her face in their fragrant petals.

"Just a moment, Dorothy," said Garrison. "You didn't know I'd come to town? You wired——" He halted and looked at the Robinsons. "Oh," he added, "I think I begin to see."

Dorothy felt something in the air.

"What is it, Jerold?" she said. "I haven't wired. What do you mean?"

Garrison faced the Robinsons.

"I mean that these two *gentlemen* telegraphed me at Branchville to come here at once—and signed your name to the wire."

"Telegraphed you? In my name?" repeated Dorothy. "I don't believe I understand."

"We may as well understand things first as last," said her uncle. "I don't believe this man is your husband! I don't believe his name is Fairfax! He was registered as Garrison. Furthermore——"

Garrison interrupted, addressing Dorothy:

"They think they have discovered something important or vital in the fact that I sometimes use the name Garrison. And they have managed to steal an old letter——"

"I'll tell about the letter, if you please!" cried old Robinson shrilly. He turned to Dorothy, who was very white. "There you are!" he said, waving the letter before her face. "There's the letter from his sweetheart—the woman he asked to become his wife! Here's her acceptance, and her protestations of love. She is doubtless his wife at this moment! Read it for yourself!"

He thrust it into Dorothy's hand with aggressive insistence.

Dorothy received it obediently. She hardly knew what she should say or do to confute the old man's statements, or quiet his dangerous suspicions. His arrival at the truth concerning herself and Garrison had disconcerted her utterly.

Garrison did not attempt to take the letter, but he addressed her promptly:

"I am perfectly willing to have you read the letter. It was written over a year ago. It is Ailsa's letter. I told you I was once engaged to Ailsa; that she married my friend, without the slightest warning; that I had not destroyed her last letter. She never acquired the habit of dating her letters, and therefore this one might appear to be a bit of recent correspondence."

"A very pretty explanation!" cried old Robinson. "We'll see—we'll see! Dorothy, read it for yourself!"

Dorothy was rapidly recovering her self-possession. She turned to her uncle quite calmly, with the folded bit of paper in her hand.

"How did you come by this letter," she inquired. "You didn't really steal it?"

Garrison answered: "The letter was certainly stolen. My suit-case was rifled the night of my arrival at Branchville. These gentlemen hired a thief to go through my possessions."

"I've been protecting my rights!" the old man answered fiercely. "If you think you can cheat me out of my rightful dues you'll find out your mistake!"

"I wouldn't have thought you could stoop to this," said Dorothy. "You couldn't expect to shake my faith in Jerold."

She handed Garrison the letter to show her confidence.

Garrison placed it in his pocket. He turned on the Robinsons angrily.

"You are both involved in a prison offense," he said—"an ordinary, vulgar burglary. I suppose you feel secure in the fact that for Dorothy's sake I shall do nothing about it—to-day. But I warn you that I'll endure no more of this sort of thing, in your efforts to throw discredit on Dorothy's relationship with me! Now then, kindly leave the room."

Aware that Garrison held the upper hand, old Robinson was more than chagrined; he was furious. His rage, however, was impotent; there was no immediate remedy at hand. Theodore, equally baffled, returned to his attitude of friendliness.

"No harm's been done, and none was intended," he said. "There's nothing in family rows, anyhow. Father, come along."

His father, on the point of discharging another broadside of anger, altered his mind and followed his son to a room at the rear of the house.

Garrison closed the door.

Dorothy was looking at him almost wildly.

"What does it mean?" she asked in a tone barely above a whisper. "They haven't really found out anything?"

"They suspect the truth, I'm afraid," he answered. "I shall be obliged to ask you a number of questions."

Her face became quite ashen.

"I can see that your employment has become very trying," she said, "but I trust you are not contemplating retreat."

The thought made her pale, for her heart, too, had found itself potentially involved.

"No; I have gone too far for that," he answered, making an effort to fight down the dictates of his increasing love and keep his head thoroughly clear.

"In the first place, when you wire me in the future use another name, for safety—say Jeraldine. In the next place, I am very much hampered by the blindness of my mission. I can see, I think, that the Robinsons expected some legacy which you are now apparently about to inherit, and your marriage became necessary to fulfill some condition of the will. Is this correct?"

"Yes, quite correct." She remained very pale.

"Who was it that died, leaving the will? And when did he die?"

"Another uncle, Mr. John Hardy—quite recently," she answered.

"You are not in mourning."

"By his special request. He died very suddenly. He left a condition in his will that I should inherit his fortune provided I should have been married at least one month prior to his death to a healthy, respectable man—who was not to be my cousin."

"Theodore?"

She nodded. "You can see I had to have a husband."

"Exactly."

Garrison thought he saw a light that cleared her as he could have wished. He hastened to a question bearing directly upon it.

"Did the Robinsons know of this clause in your Uncle Hardy's will—say, two or three weeks ago?"

"No. They knew nothing of it then."

Garrison's heart sank. "You are sure?"

"Absolutely positive. Uncle John was very secretive."

The suggestion that the Robinsons, having known the condition in the will, had destroyed John Hardy in the belief that Dorothy, being unmarried, would thereby lose the inheritance, was vanishing. Garrison still had hope.

"You once alluded to certain obligations that—well, compelled you to hire a husband," he said. "You had no urgent need of funds in a large amount?"

She darted him a startled look. "I shall have a pressing need—soon. I suppose you have a right to know."

Garrison was almost in despair. There was nothing to do but go on.

"Did Mr. Hardy know anything of this need?"

"No."

"You feared he might not be in sympathy with your requirements?"

"No, he— Have these questions anything to do with our—case?" She seemed to be frightened.

"They have," he said. "You have your diamonds and pearls. You might raise quite a sum on such valuable gems."

The look of fear upon her face increased.

"I couldn't!" she said, as if she feared the walls might hear and betray. "Please don't mention—"

"You didn't tell me what they are, or why you wish to keep them," he said. "What does it mean?"

"Please don't ask!" She was greatly agitated. "Please trust me—a little while longer! You probably have to return to Branchville and your work."

He determined then and there upon the one supreme test of the situation.

"That reminds me," he said, averting his gaze; "the work on which I am engaged in Branchville is the case of a man named Hardy. I'm glad he was not your uncle."

Her face took on the hue of death. Her lips moved, but for a moment made no sound. Then, with an effort, she replied:

"You're glad—but—why?"

"Because," he replied, with a forced smile on his lips, "the man up at Branchville was murdered."

She made no sound.

She simply closed her eyes and swayed toward him, weakly collapsing as she fell. He caught her quickly against his breast, a heavy, precious burden that he knew he must love, though the angels of heaven accuse her.

"Dorothy—Dorothy—forgive me," he said, but her senses were deaf to his voice.

CHAPTER XII

A DISTURBING LOSS

Garrison, holding the limp, helpless form in his arms, gazed quickly about the room and saw the couch. He crossed the floor and placed her full length upon its cushions.

She lay there so white and motionless that he was frightened. He felt it impossible to call the Robinsons. He needed water, quickly. He knew nothing of the house. His searching glance fell at once on the vase of roses, standing on the table. He caught it up, drew out the flowers, and was presently kneeling at Dorothy's side, wetting his handkerchief with the water from the vase and pressing it closely on her forehead.

She did not respond to his ministrations. He tore at her dress, where it fastened at the neck, and laid it wide open for several inches. On the creamy whiteness of her throat he sprinkled the water, then sprang to the window, threw it up, and was once more kneeling beside her.

The fresh breeze swept in gratefully and cooled her face and neck. She stirred, slightly turned, opened her eyes in a languid manner, and partially relapsed into coma.

"Thank God!" said Garrison, who had feared for her life, and he once more applied his wetted handkerchief. He spoke to her, gently:

"Forgive me, Dorothy—it's all right—everything's all right," but her senses accepted nothing of his meaning.

For another five minutes, that seemed like an age, he rubbed at her hands, resprinkled her throat and face, and waved a folded paper to waft her the zephyr of air. When she once more opened her eyes she was fairly well restored. She recovered her strength by a sheer exertion of will and sat up, weakly, passing her hand across her brow.

"I must have fainted," she said. She was very white.

"You're all right now—the heat and unusual excitement," he answered reassuringly. "Don't try to do anything but rest."

She looked at him with wide, half-frightened eyes. Her fears had returned with her awakened intelligence.

"You mustn't stay," she told him with a firmness he was not prepared to expect. "Please go as soon as you can."

"But—can I leave you like this? You may need me," he answered. "If there's anything I can do——"

"Nothing now. Please don't remain," she interrupted. "I shall go to my room at once."

Garrison realized she was in no condition for further questioning. Whatsoever the status of the case or his doubts, there was nothing more possible, with Dorothy in this present condition. He knew she very much desired to be alone.

"But—when shall I see you? What shall I——" he started.

"I can't tell. Please go," she interrupted, and she sank back once more on the cushions, looking at him wildly for a moment, and then averting her gaze. "Please don't stay another minute."

He could not stay. His mind was confused as to his duty. He knew that he loved her and wished to remain; he knew he was under orders and must go. Disturbed and with worry at his heart, he took her hand for one brief pressure.

"Don't forget I'm your friend—and protector," he said. "Please don't forget."

He took his hat, said good-by, saw her lips frame a brief, half-audible reply, then slipped from the room, to avoid giving undue notice to the Robinsons, went silently down the stairs to the door, and let himself out in the street.

Aware, in a dim sort of way, that a "shadow" was once more lurking on his trail, as he left the house, he was almost indifferent to the fellow's intrusion, so much more disturbing had been the climax of his visit with Dorothy.

The outcome of his announcement concerning her uncle's death had affected Dorothy so instantaneously as to leave him almost without hope. The blow had reacted on himself with staggering force. He was sickened by the abruptness with which the accusing circumstances had culminated. And yet, despite it all, he loved her more than before—with a fierce, aggressive love that blindly urged him to her future protection and defense.

His half-formed plan to visit the dealer who had sold the cigars departed from his mind. He wanted no more facts or theories that pointed as so many were pointing. Indeed, he knew not where he was going, or what he meant to do, till at length a sign on a window aroused him to a sense of things neglected. The sign read simply:

BANK. SAFE DEPOSIT VAULTS.

He entered the building, hired a box in the vault, and placed within it the jewels he had carried. Then he remembered Wicks.

Instructions had been given to report, not only fully, but promptly. He must make a report—but what? He knew he could not tell of the horrible tissue of facts and circumstances that wound like a web about the girl he loved. He would far rather give up the case. And once he gave it up, he knew that no man alive could ever come again upon the damning evidence in his possession.

He would say his work was incomplete—that it looked like a natural death—that Scott had acted suspiciously, as indeed he had—that he needed more time—anything but what appeared to be the sickening truth. Later, should Dorothy prove to be but some artful, dangerous creature, masquerading as a sweet young girl behind her appearance of beauty, innocence, and exquisite charm—that would be time enough to move.

Perfectly willing to be followed for a time by his "shadow," he walked to the nearest Subway station in upper Broadway and was presently borne downtown.

He was barely in time at the big insurance office, for Wicks was preparing to leave. No less nervous, snappy, or pugnacious than before, the little sharp-faced man appeared more smiling than ever, and yet with an expression even more sardonic.

"Well?" he said, as he ushered Garrison into a small, private room.

"What have you to report?"

"Nothing very much to report as yet," said Garrison, slightly flushing at withholding the truth. "It looks very much as if the coroner's verdict may have been correct—although Scott acts a little like a man so absorbed in his inventions that he'd stop at nothing for money."

"Needs money, does he?" demanded Wicks. "He has admitted that?"

"Yes," said Garrison, "he speaks so plainly of his need and makes such heartless and selfish references to the money he hopes to procure on this insurance policy that I hardly know what to make of his character."

"Capable of murder, is he?"

"He's fanatical about his invention and—he needs money."

"You don't think him guilty?" announced Mr. Wicks, with rare penetration.

"There seems to be little or nothing against him as yet," said Garrison. "There was nothing found on the body, so far as I have been able to learn, to indicate murder."

"If murder at all, how could it have been done," demanded Mr. Wicks.

"Only by poison."

"H'm! You saw the dead man's effects, of course. What did they comprise?"

Garrison detailed the dead man's possessions, as found at the coroner's office. He neglected nothing, mentioning the cigars as candidly as he did the few insignificant papers.

"In what possible manner could the man have been poisoned?" demanded Wicks, rising, with his watch in his hand. "Was there anything to eat at his apartments—or to drink?"

"Not that I can trace. The only clew that seems important, so far, is that Scott spent fifteen minutes in Hardy's room, alone, on the night of his death."

"That's something!" said Wicks, with the slightest possible show of approval. "Put on your hat and go uptown with me and tell me exactly all about it."

They left the office, proceeded to the Subway, boarded an uptown express that was jammed to the guards with struggling humanity, all deserting the small end of Gotham at once; and here, with Wicks crowded flat up against him, and hanging, first to a strap and then to his shoulder. Garrison related the few facts that he had already briefly summarized.

"Well—nothing to say to you but go ahead," said Wicks, as they neared the Grand Central Station, where he meant to take a train. "Stick to the case till you clean it up. That's all."

Garrison, presently alone on the crowded street, with no particular objective point in view, felt thoroughly depressed and lonely.

He wished he had never discovered the poisoned cigar at Branchville.

Mechanically, his hand sought his pocket, where the second charged weed had been placed.

Then he started and searched his waistcoat wildly.

The deadly cigar was gone!

CHAPTER XIII

A TRYST IN THE PARK

Unable for a moment to credit his senses, Garrison moved over against the wall of the building he was passing, and stood there, slowly, almost mechanically, searching his pockets once again, while his mind revolved about the lost cigar, in an effort to understand its disappearance.

He was wholly at a loss for a tenable theory till he thought of the frequency with which men are robbed of scarf-pins or similar trifles—and then a sickening possibility possessed him.

One of the commonest devices that a woman employs in such a petty theft is to faint on the breast of her victim. In such a pose she may readily extract some coveted article from either his tie or his pocket, with almost absolute certainty of avoiding detection.

It did not seem possible—and yet the fact remained that Dorothy had fainted thus against him, and the poisoned cigar was gone. She had known of his visit to Branchville; his line of questions might have roused her suspicions; the cigar had been plainly in sight. He had seen her enact her rôle so perfectly, in the presence of her relatives, that he could not doubt her ability in any required direction.

For a moment a powerful revulsion of feeling toward the girl, who was undeniably involved in some exceptionally deep-laid plan, crept throughout his being. Not only does a man detest being used as a tool and played upon like any common dunce, but he also feels an utter chagrin at being baffled in his labors. Apparently he had played the fool, and also he had lost the vital evidence of Hardy's poisoning.

Mortified and angry, he remained there, while the crowds surged by, his gaze dully fixed on the pavement. For a time he saw nothing, and then at last he was conscious that a rose—a crushed and wilted rose, thrown down by some careless pedestrian—was lying almost at his feet. Somehow, it brought him a sense of calm and sweetness; it seemed a symbol, vouchsafed him here in the hot, sordid thoroughfare, where crime and folly, virtue and despair, stalk arm in arm eternally.

He could not look upon the bit of trampled beauty, thus wasted on a heedless throng, and think of Dorothy as guilty. She had seemed just as crushed and wilted as the rose when he left her at her home—just as beautiful, also, and as far from her garden of peace and fragrances as this rejected handful of petals. She must be innocent. There must be some other explanation for the loss of that cigar—and some good reason for the things she had done and said.

He took up the rose, indifferent to anyone who might have observed the action with a smile or a sneer, and slowly proceeded down the street.

The cigar, he reflected, might easily have been stolen in the Subway. A hundred men had crushed against him. Any one of them so inclined could have taken the weed at his pleasure. The thought was wholly disquieting, since if any man attempted to bite the cigar-end through, to smoke, he would pay a tragic penalty for his petty theft.

This aspect of the affair, indeed, grew terrible, the more he thought upon it. He almost felt he must run to the station, try to search out that particular train, and cry for all to hear that the stolen cigar would be fatal—but the thought was a wild, unreasoning vagary; he was absolutely helpless in the case.

He could not be certain that the weed had thus been extracted from his pocket. It might in some manner have been lost. He did not know—he could not know. He felt sure of one thing only—his hope, his demand, that Dorothy must be innocent and good.

Despite his arguments, he was greatly depressed. The outcome of all the business loomed dim and uncertain before him, a haze charged with mystery, involving crime as black as night.

He presently came to the intersection of fashionable Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, and was halted by the flood of traffic. Hundreds of vehicles were pouring up and down, in endless streams, while two calm policemen halted the moving processions, from time to time, to permit the crosstown cars and teams to move in their several directions.

Across from Garrison's corner loomed the great marble library, still incomplete and gloomily fenced from the sidewalk. Beyond it, furnishing its setting, rose the trees of Bryant Park, a green oasis in the tumult and unloveliness about it. Garrison knew the benches there were crowded; nevertheless, he made his way the length of the block and found a seat.

He sat there till the sun was gone and dusk closed in upon the city. The first faint lights began to twinkle, like the palest stars, in the buildings that hedged the park about. He meant to hunt out a restaurant and dine presently, but what to do afterward he could not determine.

There was nothing to be done at Branchville or Hickwood at night, and but little, for the matter of that, to be done by day. Tomorrow would be ample time to return to that theater of uncertainty. He longed for one thing only—another sight of Dorothy—enshrined within his heart.

Reminded at last of the man who had followed on his trail, he purposely strolled from the park and circled two blocks, by streets now almost deserted, and was reasonably certain he had shaken off pursuit. As a matter of fact, his "shadow" had lost him in the Subway, and now, having notified the Robinsons by telephone, was watching the house where he roomed.

Garrison ate his dinner in a mood of ceaseless meditation concerning Dorothy. He was worried to know what might have happened since his departure from her home. Half inclined in one minute to go again to the house, in the next he was quite undecided.

The thought of the telephone came like an inspiration. Unless the Robinsons should interfere, he might readily learn of her condition.

At a drug-store, near the restaurant, he found a quiet booth, far better suited to his needs than the noisier, more public boxes at the eating place he had quitted. He closed himself inside the little cubby-hole, asked for the number, and waited.

It seemed an interminable time till a faint "Hello!" came over the wire, and he fancied the voice was a man's.

"Hello! Is that Mrs. Fairfax?" he asked. "I'd like to speak to Mrs. Fairfax."

"Wait a minute, please. Who is it?" said a voice unmistakably masculine.

"Mr. Wallace," said Garrison, by way of precaution. "She'll understand."

"Hold the wire, please."

He held the receiver to his ear, and waited again. At length came a softer, more musical greeting. It was Dorothy. His heart was instantly leaping at the sound of her voice.

"Hello! Is that someone to speak to me?" she said. "This is Mrs. Fairfax."

"Yes," answered Garrison. "This is Jerold. I felt I must find out about you—how you are. I've been distressed at the way I was obliged to leave."

"Oh!" said the voice faintly. "I—I'm all right—thank you. I must see you—right away." Her voice had sunk to a tone he could barely distinguish. "Where are you now?"

"Downtown," said Garrison. "Where shall I meet you?"

"I—hardly know," came the barely audible reply. "Perhaps—at Central Park and Ninety-third Street."

"I'll start at once," he assured her. "If you leave the house in fifteen minutes we shall arrive about the same time. Try to avoid being followed. Good-by."

He listened to hear her answer, but it did not come. He heard the distant receiver clink against its hook, and then the connection was broken.

He was happy, in a wild, lawless manner, as he left the place and hastened to the Elevated station. The prospect of meeting Dorothy once more, in the warm, fragrant night, at a tryst like that of lovers, made his pulses surge and his heart beat quicken with excitement. All thought of her possible connection with the Branchville crime had fled.

The train could not run fast enough to satisfy his hot impatience. He wished to be there beneath the trees when she should presently come. He alighted at last at the Ninety-third Street station, and hastened to the park.

When he came to the appointed place, he found an entrance to the greenery near by. Within were people on every bench in sight—New York's unhoused lovers, whose wooing is accomplished in the all but sylvan glades which the park affords.

Here and there a bit of animated flame made a tiny meteor streak against the blackness of the foliage—where a firefly quested for its mate, switching on its marvelous little searchlight. Beyond, on the smooth, broad roadways, four-eyed chariots of power shot silently through the avenues of trees—the autos, like living dragons, half tamed to man's control.

It was all thrilling and exciting to Garrison, with the expectation of meeting Dorothy now possessing all his nature. Then—a few great drops of rain began to fall. The effect was almost instantaneous. A dozen pairs of sweethearts, together with as many more unmated stragglers, came scuttling forth from unseen places, making a lively run for the nearest shelter.

Garrison could not retreat. He did not mind the rain, except in so far as it might discourage Dorothy. But, thinking she might have gone inside the park, he walked there briskly, looking for some solitary figure that should by this time be in waiting. He seemed to be entirely alone. He thought she had not come—and perhaps in the rain she might not arrive at all.

Back towards the entrance he loitered. A lull in the traffic of the street had made the place singularly still. He could hear the raindrops beating on the leaves. Then they ceased as abruptly as they had commenced.

He turned once more down the dimly lighted path. His heart gave a quick, joyous leap. Near a bench was a figure—the figure of a woman whose grace, he fancied, was familiar.

Her back was apparently turned as he drew near. He was about to whistle, if only to warn her of his coming, when the shrubbery just ahead and beside the path was abruptly parted and a man with a short, wrapped club in his hand sprang forth and struck him viciously over the head.

He was falling, dimly conscious of a horrible blur of lights in his eyes, as helplessly as if he had been made of paper. A second blow, before he crumpled on the pavement, blotted out the last remaining vestige of emotion. He lay there in a limp, awkward heap.

The female figure had turned, and now came striding to the place with a step too long for a woman. There was no word spoken. Together the two lifted Garrison's unconscious form, carried it quickly to the shrubbery, fumbled about it for a minute or two, struck a match that was shielded from the view of any possible passer-by, and then, still in silence, hastily quitted the park and vanished in one of the glistening side streets, where the rain was reflecting the lamps.

CHAPTER XIV

A PACKAGE OF DEATH

A low, distant rumble of thunder denoted a new gathering of storm. Five minutes passed, and then the lightning flashed across the firmament directly overhead. A crash like the splitting of the heavens followed, and the rain came down as if it poured through the slit.

The violence lasted hardly more than five minutes, after which the downpour abated a little of its fury. But a steadier, quieter precipitation continued, with the swiftly moving center of disturbance already far across the sky.

The rain in his face, and the brisk puff of newly washed ozone in his heavily moving lungs, aroused Garrison's struggling consciousness by slow degrees. Strange, fantastic images, old memories, weird phantoms, and wholly impossible fancies played through his brain with the dull, torturing persistency of nightmares for a time that seemed to him endless.

It was fully half an hour before he was sufficiently aroused to roll to an upright position and pass his hand before his eyes.

He was sick and weak. He could not recall what had happened. He did not know where he was.

He was all but soaked by the rain, despite the fact that a tree with dense foliage was spread above him, and he had lain beneath protecting shrubberies. Slowly the numbness seemed to pass from his brain, like the mist from the surface of a lake. He remembered things, as it were, in patches.

Dorothy—that was it—and something had happened.

He was stupidly aware that he was sitting on something uncomfortable—a lump, perhaps a stone—but he did not move. He was waiting for his brain to clear. When at length he hoisted his heavy weight upon his knees, and then staggered drunkenly to his feet, to blunder toward a tree and support himself by its trunk, his normal circulation began to be restored, and pain assailed his skull, arousing him further to his senses.

He leaned for some time against the tree, gathering up the threads of the tangle. It all came back, distinct and sharp at last, and, with memory, his strength was returning. He felt of his head, on which his hat was jammed.

The bone and the muscles at the base of the skull were sore and sensitive, but the hurt had not gone deep. He felt incapable of thinking it out—the reasons, and all that it meant. He wondered if his attacker had thought to leave him dead.

Mechanically his hands sought out his pockets. He found his watch and pocketbook in place. Some weight seemed dragging at his coat. When his hand went slowly to the place, he found the lump on which he had been lying. He pulled it out—a cold, cylindrical affair, of metal, with a thick cord hanging from its end. Then a chill crept all the distance down his spine.

The thing was a bomb!

Cold perspiration and a sense of horror came upon him together. An underlying current of thought, feebly left unfocused in his brain—a thought of himself as a victim, lured to the park for this deed—became as stinging as a blow on the cheek.

The cord on this metal engine of destruction was a fuse. The rain had drenched it and quenched its spark of fire, doubtless at some break in the fiber, since fuse is supposedly water-proof. Nothing but the thunder-storm had availed to save his life. He had walked into a trap, like a trusting animal, and chance alone had intervened to bring him forth alive.

His brain by now was thoroughly active. Reactionary energy rushed in upon him to sharpen all his faculties. There was nothing left of the joyous throbbing in his veins which thoughts of his tryst with Dorothy had engendered. He felt like the wrathful dupe of a woman's wiles, for it seemed as plain as soot on snow that Dorothy, fearing the consequences of his recent discoveries in the Hardy case, had made this park appointment only with this treacherous intent.

All his old, banished suspicions rushed pell-mell upon his mind, and with them came new indications of her guilt. Her voice on the telephone had been weak and faltering. She had chosen the park as their meeting place, as the only available spot for such a deed. And then—then—

It seemed too horrible to be true, but the wound was on his head, and death was in his hand. It was almost impossible that anyone could have heard their talk over the 'phone. He was left no alternative theory to work on, except that perhaps the Robinsons had managed, through some machination, to learn that he and Dorothy were to meet at this convenient place.

One struggling ray of hope was thus vouchsafed him, yet he felt as if perhaps he had already given Dorothy the benefit of too many reasonable doubts. He could be certain of one thing only—he was thoroughly involved in a mesh of crime and intrigue that had now assumed a new and personal menace. Hereafter he must work more for Garrison and less for romantic ideals.

Anger came to assist in restoring his strength. Far from undergoing any sense of alarm which would frighten him out of further effort to probe to the bottom of the business, he was stubbornly determined to remain on the case till the whole thing was stripped of its secrets.

Not without a certain weakness at the knees did he make his way back to the path.

He had no fear of lurking enemies, since those who had placed the bomb in his pocket would long before have fled the scene to make an alibi complete. The rain had ceased. Wrapping the fuse about the metal cartridge in his hand, he came beneath a lamp-post by the walk, and looked the thing over in the light.

There was nothing much to see. A nipple of gas-pipe, with a cap on either end, one drilled through for the insertion of the fuse, described it completely. The kink in the fuse where the rain had found entrance to dampen the powder, was plainly to be seen.

Garrison placed the contrivance in his pocket. He pulled out his watch. The hour, to his amazement, was nearly ten. He realized he must have lain a considerable time unconscious in the wet. Halting to wonder what cleverness might suggest as the best possible thing to be done, he somewhat grimly determined to proceed to Dorothy's house.

CHAPTER XV

SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERIES

Damp and uncomfortable, he kept to the farther side of the street, and slackened his pace as he drew near the dwelling which he realized was a place replete with mystery.

He stood on the opposite sidewalk at length, and gazed across at the frowning brownstone front. The place was utterly dark. Not the slightest chink of light was visible in all its somber windows.

Aware that nothing is so utterly confusing to a guilty being as to be confronted unexpectedly by a victim, supposed to be dispatched, Garrison had come this far without the slightest hesitation. The aspect of the house, however, was discouraging.

Despite the ache at the base of his skull, and despite the excited thumping of his heart, he crossed the street, climbed unhaltingly to the steps, and rang the bell. He had made up his mind to act as if nothing unusual had occurred. Then, should either Dorothy or the Robinsons exhibit astonishment at beholding him here, or otherwise betray a guilty knowledge of the "accident" which had befallen him, his doubts would be promptly cleared.

A minute passed, and nothing happened.

He rang the bell again.

Once more he waited, in vain.

His third ring was long and insistent.

About to despair of gaining admission, he was gratified to note a dimly reflected light, as if from the rear, below stairs. Then the hall was illumined, and presently a chain-lock was drawn, inside the door, the barrier swung open, and the serving-woman stood there before him, dressed with the evidences of haste that advertised the fact she had risen from her bed.

Garrison snatched at his wits in time to act a part for which he had not been prepared.

"I'm afraid it's pretty late," he said, "but I came to surprise my wife."

"My word, that's too bad, sir, ain't it?" said the woman. "Mrs. Fairfax has went out for the night."

This was the truth. Dorothy, together with the Robinsons, had left the house an hour before and gone away in an automobile, leaving no word of their destination, or of when they intended to return.

Utterly baffled, and wholly at a loss to understand this unexpected maneuver. Garrison stood for a moment staring at the woman. After all, such a flight was in reasonable sequence, if Dorothy were guilty. The one thing to do was to avail himself of all obtainable knowledge.

"Gone—for the night," he repeated. "Did Mrs. Fairfax seem anxious to go?"

"I didn't see her, sir. I couldn't say, really," answered the woman. "Mr. Theodore said as how she was ailing, sir, and they was going away. That's all I know about it, sir."

"I'm sorry I missed them," Garrison murmured, half to himself. Then a thought occurred to him abruptly—a bold suggestion, on which he determined to act.

"Is my room kept ready, in case of present need like this to-night?" he said. "Or, if not, could you prepare it?"

"It's all quite ready, sir, clean linen and all, the room next to Mrs. Fairfax's," said the woman. "I always keeps it ready, sir."

"Very good," said Garrison, with his mind made up to remain all night and explore the house for possible clues to anything connected with its mysteries. "You may as well return to your apartments. I can find my way upstairs."

"Is there anything I could get you, sir?" inquired the woman. "You look a bit pale, sir, if you'll pardon the forwardness."

"Thank you, no," he answered gratefully. "All I need is rest." He slipped half a dollar in her hand.

The woman switched on the lights in the hallway above.

"Good-night, sir," she said. "If you're needing anything more I hope you'll ring."

"Good-night," said Garrison. "I shall not disturb you, I'm sure."

With ample nerve to enact the part of master, he ascended the stairs, proceeded to the room to which

he had always gone before, and waited to hear the woman below retire to her quarters in the basement.

The room denoted nothing unusual. The roses, which he had taken from the vase to obtain the water to sprinkle on Dorothy's face, had disappeared. The vase was there on the table.

He crossed the floor and tried the door that led to Dorothy's boudoir. It was locked. Without further ado, he began his explorations.

It was not without a sense of gratitude that he presently discovered the bathroom at the rear of the hall. Here he laved his face and head, being very much refreshed by the process.

A secondary hall led away from the first, and through this he came at once to the rooms which had evidently been set apart for Dorothy and her husband. The room which he knew was supposed to be his own contained nothing save comfortable furnishings. He therefore went at once to Dorothy's apartments.

She occupied a suite of three rooms—one of them large, the others small. Exquisite order was apparent in all, combined with signs of a dainty, cultured taste. It seemed a sacrilege to search her possessions, and he made no attempt to do so. Indeed, he gained nothing from his quick, keen survey of the place, save a sense of her beauty and refinement as expressed in the features of her "nest." He felt himself warranted in opening a closet, into which he cast a comprehensive glance.

It seemed well filled with hanging gowns, but several hooks were empty.

On a shelf high up was a suit-case, empty, since it weighed almost nothing as he lifted up the end. He took it down, found marks where fingers had disturbed the dust upon its lid, then stood on a chair, examined the shelf, and became aware that a second case had been removed, as shown by the absence of accumulated dust, which had gathered all about the place it had formerly occupied.

Replacing the case he had taken from the shelf, he closed the closet, in possession of the fact that some preparation, at least, had been made against some sort of a journey. He was certain the empty hooks had been stripped of garments for the flight, but whether by Dorothy herself or by her relatives he could not, of course, determine.

He repaired at once to the rooms farther back, which the Robinsons had occupied. When he switched on the lights in the first one entered, he knew it had been the old man's place of refuge, for certain signs of the occupancy of Mr. Robinson were not lacking.

It reeked of stale cigar-smoke, which would hang in the curtains for a week. It was very untidy. There were many indications that old Robinson had quitted in haste. On the table were ash-trays, old cigar-stumps, matches, burned and new; magazines, hairpins, a tooth-brush, and two calf-bound volumes of a legal aspect. One was a lawyer's treatise on wills, the other a history of broken testaments, statistical as well as narrative.

The closet here supplied nothing of value to Garrison when he gave it a brief inspection. At the end of the room was a door that stood slightly ajar. It led to the next apartment—the room to which Theodore had been assigned. Garrison soon discovered the electric button and flooded the place with light.

The apartment was quite irregular. The far end had two windows, overlooking the court at the rear—the hollow of the block. These were both in an alcove, between two in-jutting partitions. One partition was the common result of building a closet into the room. The other was constructed to accommodate a staircase at the back of the house, leading to the quarters below.

Disorder was again the rule, for a litter of papers, neckties, soiled collars, and ends of cigarettes, with perfumes, toilet requisites, and beer bottles seemed strewn promiscuously on everything capable of receiving a burden.

Garrison tried the door that led to the staircase, and found it open. The closet came next for inspection. Without expecting anything of particular significance, Garrison drew open the door.

Like everything else in the Robinsons' realm, it was utterly disordered. Glancing somewhat indifferently over its contents. Garrison was about to close the door when his eye caught upon a gleam of dull red, where a ray of light fell in upon a bit of color on the floor.

He stopped, put his hand on the cloth, and drew forth a flimsy pair of tights of carmine hue—part of the Mephistophelian costume that Theodore had worn on the night of the party next door. With this in his hand, and a clearer understanding of the house, with its staircase at the rear. Garrison comprehended the ease with which Theodore had played his rôle and gone from one house to the other

without arousing suspicion.

Encouraged to examine the closet further, he pawed around through the garments hung upon the hooks, and presently struck his hand against a solid obstacle projecting from the wall in the darkest corner, and heard a hollow, resonant sound from the blow.

Removing half a dozen coats that hung concealingly massed in the place, he almost uttered an exclamation of delight. There on the wall was a small equipment telephone, one of the testing-boxes employed by the linemen in their labors with which to "plug in" and communicate between places where no regular 'phone is installed.

It was Theodore's private receiver, over which he could hear every word that might be said to anyone using the 'phone!

It tapped the wires to the regular instrument installed in the house, and was thoroughly concealed.

Instantly aware that by this means young Robinson could have overheard every word between himself and Dorothy concerning their meeting in the park, Garrison felt his heart give a lift into realms of unreasonable joy.

It could not entirely dissipate the doubts that hung about Dorothy, but it gave him a priceless hope!

CHAPTER XVI

IN QUEST OF DOROTHY

More than half ready to believe that Dorothy had been spirited away, Garrison examined everything available, with the intention of discovering, if possible, any scrap that might indicate the destination to which the trio had proceeded.

The Robinsons had left almost nothing of the slightest value or importance, since what clothing remained was of no significance whatever.

It was not until he opened up the old man's books on the subject of wills that Garrison found the slightest clew, and then he came upon a postal-card addressed to "Sykey Robinson, Esq.," from Theodore's mother. It mentioned the fact that she had arrived quite safely at "the house," and requested that her husband forward a pair of her glasses, left behind when she started.

The address of the place where she was stopping was given as 1600 Myrtle Avenue. The postmark was Woodsite, Long Island.

Garrison made up his mind to go to Woodsite. If Dorothy were found, he meant to steal her—if need be, even against her will.

Warmed to the business by his few discoveries, he returned at once to Dorothy's apartments and opened her bureau and dressing-table for a superficial inspection. To his complete surprise, he found that every drawer was in utter confusion as to its contents. That each and all had been rudely overhauled there could not be a doubt for a moment. Not one showed the order apparent in all things else about the rooms.

There could be but one conclusion. Some one had searched them hurriedly, sparing not even the smallest. The someone could not have been Dorothy, for many reasons—and Garrison once more rejoiced.

He was thoroughly convinced that Dorothy had been taken from the house by force.

Whatever else she might be guilty of, he felt she must be innocent of the dastardly attempt upon his life. And, wherever she was, he meant to find her and take her away, no matter what the cost.

The hour was late—too late, he was aware—for anything effective. Not without a certain satisfaction in his sense of ownership, and with grim resolutions concerning his dealings in future with the Robinsons, he extinguished the lights in the rooms he had searched, and, glad of the much-needed rest, retired in calm for six solid hours of sleep.

This brought him out, refreshed and vigorous, at a bright, early hour of the morning. The housekeeper, not yet stirring in her downstairs quarters, failed to hear him let himself out at the door—and his way was clear for action.

His breakfast he took at an insignificant café. Then he went to his room in Forty-fourth Street.

The "shadow," faithful to his charge, was waiting in the street before the house. His presence was noted by Garrison, who nodded to himself in understanding of the fellow's persistency.

Arrived upstairs, he discovered three letters, none of which he took the time to read. They were thrust in his pocket—and forgotten.

The metal bomb, which was still in his coat, he concealed among a lot of shoes in his closet.

From among his possessions, accumulated months before, when the needs of the Biddle robbery case had arisen, he selected a thoroughly effective disguise, which not only grew a long, drooping mustache upon his lip, but aged him about the eyes, and appeared to reduce his stature and his width of shoulders. With a pair of shabby gloves on his hands, and a book beneath his arms, he had suddenly become a genteel if poor old book-agent, whose appearance excited compassion.

Well supplied with money, armed with a loaded revolver, fortified by his official badge, and more alert in all his faculties than he had ever felt in all his life, he passed down the stairs and out upon the street, under the very nose of the waiting "shadow," into whose face he cast a tired-looking glance, without exciting the slightest suspicion.

Twenty minutes later he had hired a closed automobile, and was being carried toward the Williamsburg Bridge and Long Island. The car selected was of a type renowned for achievements in speed.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he stood at length on the sidewalk opposite 1600 Myrtle Avenue, Woodside, a modest cottage standing on a corner. It was one of the houses farthest from the center of the town; nevertheless, it had its neighbors all about, if somewhat scattered.

There was no sign of life about the place. The shades were drawn; it bore a look of desertion. Only pausing for a moment, as even a book-agent might, after many repeated rebuffs, Garrison wended his way across the street, proceeded slowly up the concrete walk, ascended the steps, and rang the bell.

There was no result. He rang again, and out of the corner of his eye beheld the curtain pushed a trifle aside, in the window near at hand, where someone looked out from this concealment. For the third time he rang—and at last the door was opened for a distance no more than six inches wide. The face he saw was old man Robinson's.

The chain on the door was securely fastened, otherwise Garrison would have pushed his way inside without further ado. He noted this barely in time to save himself from committing an error.

"Go away!" said old Robinson testily. "No books wanted!"

"I hope you will not refuse a tired old man," said Garrison, in a voice that seemed trembling with weakness. "The books I have to offer are quite remarkable indeed.

"Don't want them. Good-day!" said Robinson. He tried to close the door, but Garrison's foot prevented.

"One of my books is particularly valuable to read to headstrong young women. If you have a daughter—or any young woman in the house——"

"She can't see anyone—I mean there's no such person here!" snapped Robinson. "What's the matter with that door?"

"My other book is of the rarest interest," insisted Garrison. "An account of the breaking of the Butler will—a will drawn up by the most astute and crafty lawyer in America, yet broken because of its flaws. A book——"

"Whose will was that?" demanded Robinson, his interest suddenly roused. "Some lawyer, did you say?" He relaxed his pressure on the door and fumbled at the chain.

"The will of Benjamin Butler—the famous Benjamin Butler," Garrison replied. "One of the most remarkable——"

"Come in," commanded old Robinson, who had slipped off the chain. "How much is the book?"

"I am only taking orders to-day," answered Garrison, stepping briskly inside and closing the door with his heel. "If you'll take this copy to the light——"

"Father!" interrupted an angry voice. "Didn't I tell you not to let anyone enter this house? Get out, you old nuisance! Get out with your book?"

Garrison looked down the oak-finished hall and saw Theodore coming angrily toward him.

Alive to the value of the melodramatic, he threw off both his hat and mustache and squared up in Theodore's path.

Young Robinson reeled as if struck a staggering blow.

"You—you——" he gasped.

Old Robinson recovered his asperity with remarkable promptness.

"How dare you come into this house?" he screamed. "You lying——"

"That's enough of that," said Garrison quietly. "I came for Dorothy—whom you dared to carry away."

"You—you—you're mistaken," said Theodore, making a most tremendous effort at calmness, with his face as white as death. "She isn't here."

"Don't lie. Your father has given the facts away," said Garrison. "I want her—and I want her now."

"Look here," said Theodore, rapidly regaining his rage, "if you think you can come to my house like this——" He was making a move as if to slip upstairs—perhaps for a gun.

Garrison pulled his revolver without further parley.

"Stay where you are! Up with your hands! Don't either of you make a move that I don't order, understand? I said I'd come to take my wife away."

"For Heaven's sake, don't shoot!" begged old Robinson. "Don't shoot!"

"You fool—do you think I'd bring her here?" said Theodore, trying to grin, but putting up his hands. "Put away your gun, and act like a man in his senses, or I'll have you pulled for your pains."

"You've done talking enough—and perhaps *I'll* have just a word to say about pulling, later on," said Garrison. "In the meantime, don't you open your head again, or you'll get yourself into trouble."

He raised his voice and shouted tremendously:

"Dorothy!"

"Jerold!" came a muffled cry, from somewhere above in a room.

He heard her vainly tugging at a door.

"Go up ahead of me, both of you," he commanded, making a gesture with the gun. "I prefer not to break in the door."

CHAPTER XVII

A RESCUE BY FORCE

Theodore was hesitating, though his father was eager to obey. Garrison stepped a foot forward and thrust the pistol firmly against the young man's body, cocking the hammer.

"I'm going—for the love of Heaven, look out!" cried the craven suddenly, and he backed toward the stairs in haste.

"That's better," said Garrison coldly. "Step lively, please, and don't attempt the slightest treachery unless you are prepared to pay the price."

Theodore had no more than started when the door-bell rang—four little jingles.

"It's mother," said old Robinson, starting for the door.

"Let her remain outside for the present," ordered Garrison. "Get on up the stairs."

The bell rang again. The Robinsons, resigned to defeat, ascended to the hall above, with the gun yawning just at the rear.

Once more Garrison called out:

"Dorothy—where are you?"

"Here!" cried Dorothy, her voice still muffled behind a solid door.

"The room at the back. I can't get out!"

Garrison issued another order to Theodore, whom he knew to be the governing spirit in the fight against himself and Dorothy:

"Put down one hand and get out your keys—but don't attempt to remove anything else from your pocket, or I'll plug you on the spot."

Theodore cast a defiant glance across the leveled gun to the steady, cool eyes behind it, and drew forth the keys, as directed.

"If that's you, Jerold—please, please get me out—the door is locked!" called Dorothy, alarmed by each second of delay. "Where are you now?"

"Coming!" called Garrison. He added, to Theodore: "Keep one hand up. Unlock the door." He called out again: "Keep cool when it's opened. Don't confuse the situation."

Young Robinson, convinced that resistance at this point was useless, inserted the key in the lock and opened the door, at the same time casting a knowing look at his father, who stood over next to the wall.

In the instant that Garrison's attention was directed to the unlocked room, old Robinson made a quick retreat to a tiny red box that was screwed against the wall and twice pulled down a brass ring.

Garrison beheld the action too late to interpose. He knew the thing for a burglar-alarm—and realized his own position.

Meantime Dorothy had not emerged.

"Jerold! Jerold!" she cried. "My feet are chained!"

"Get in there, both of you, double-quick!" commanded Garrison, and he herded the Robinsons inside the room, fairly pushing them before him with the gun.

Then he saw Dorothy.

White with fear, her eyes ablaze with indignation at the Robinsons, her beauty heightened by the look of intensity in her eyes, she stood by the door, her ankles bound together by a chain which was secured to the heavy brass bed.

"Jerold!" she cried as she had before, but her voice broke and tears started swiftly from her eyes.

"Be calm, dear, please," said Garrison, who had turned on her captors with an anger he could scarcely control. "You cowards! You infamous scoundrels!" he said. "Release those chains this instant, or I'll blow off the top of your head!" He demanded this of Theodore.

"The key isn't here," said the latter, intent upon gaining time since the burglar-alarm had been sprung. "I left it downstairs."

"I think you lie," said Garrison. "Get busy, or you'll have trouble."

"It's on his ring, with the key to the door," said Dorothy. "They've kept me drugged and stupid, but I saw as much as that."

Once more Garrison pushed the black muzzle of the gun against Theodore's body. The fellow cringed. The sweat stood out on his forehead. He dropped to his knees and, trembling with fear, fumbled with the keys.

"To think they'd dare!" said Dorothy, who with difficulty refrained from sobbing, in her anger, relief, and nervous strain.

Garrison made no reply. He was fairly on edge with anxiety himself, in the need for haste, aware that every moment was precious, with the town's constabulary doubtless already on the way to respond to the old man's alarm. The rights of the case would come too late, with his and Dorothy's story against the statements of the Robinsons, and he had no intention of submitting to arrest.

"You're wasting time—do better!" he commanded Theodore, and he nudged the gun under his ribs. "That's the key, that crooked one—use it, quick!"

Theodore dared not disobey. The chain fell away, and Dorothy ran forward, with a sob upon her lips.

"Don't hamper me, dear," said Garrison, watching the Robinsons alertly. "Just get your hat, and we'll go."

Dorothy ran to a closet, drew forth a hat, and cried that she was ready.

"Throw those keys in the hall!" commanded Garrison, and young Robinson tossed them out as directed. "Now, then, over in the corner with the pair of you!"

The helpless Robinsons moved over to the corner of the room. Dorothy was already in the hall. Garrison was backing out, to lock the door, when Dorothy ran in again beside him.

"Just a minute!" she said, and, going to the bed, despite Garrison's impatience, she turned down the pillow and caught up a bunch of faded roses—his roses—and, blushing in girlish confusion, ran out once more, and slammed the door, which Garrison locked on her relations.

"Throw the keys under the rug," he said quietly. "We've no time to lose. The old man rang in an alarm."

Dorothy quickly hid the keys as directed. The face she turned to him then was blanched with worry.

"What shall we do?" she said, as he led her down the stairs. "In a little town like this there's no place to go."

"I provided for that," he answered; and, beholding her start as a sound of loud knocking at the door in the rear gave new cause for fright, he added: "Thank goodness, the old bearded woman has gone around back to get in!"

Half a minute more, and both were out upon the walk. Garrison carrying his book, his pistol once more in his pocket.

A yell, and a shrill penetrative whistle from the rear of the house, now told of Theodore's activities at the window of the room where he and his father were imprisoned. He was doubtless making ready to let himself down to the ground.

"We may have to make a lively run," said Garrison. "My motor-car is two blocks away."

They were still a block from the waiting car when, with yells and a furious blowing of his whistle, Theodore came running to the street before his house. One minute later a big red car, with the chief of the town's police and the chief of the local firemen, shot around the corner into Myrtle Avenue, and came to a halt before the residence which the fugitives had just barely quitted.

"Make a run for it now, we're in for a race," said Garrison, and, with Dorothy skipping in excitement beside him, he came to his waiting chauffeur.

"That fellow up the street is on our trail!" he said. "Cut loose all the speed you've got. Fifty dollars bonus if you lose the bunch before you cross the bridge to New York!"

He helped Dorothy quickly to her seat inside, and only pausing to note that Theodore was clambering hotly into the big red car, two long village blocks away, he swung in himself as the driver speeded up the motor.

Then, with a whirl and a mighty lurch as the clutch went in, the automobile started forward in the road.

Ten seconds later they were running full speed, with the muffler cut out, and sharp percussions puncturing the air like a Gatling gun's terrific detonations.

The race for New York had commenced.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RACE

Some of the roads on Long Island are magnificent. Many of the speed laws are strict. The thoroughfare stretching ahead of the two cars was one of the best.

The traffic regulations suffered absolute demolition.

Like a liberated thing of flame and deviltry, happiest when rocketing through space, the car beneath the fugitives seemed to bound in the air as it whirred with a higher and higher hum of wheels and gears, and the air drove by in torrential force, leaving a cloud of smoke and dust in their wake.

Dorothy clung to Jerold, half afraid. He raised himself upon the seat and looked out of the tiny window set in the back. The big car in the road behind, obscured in the dust that must help to blind its driver, had lost scarcely more than half a block in picking up its speed.

It, too, was a powerful machine, and its coughing, open exhaust was adding to the din on the highway. It was trailing smoke in a dense, bluish cloud that meant they were burning up their lubricant with spendthrift prodigality. But the monster was running superbly.

The houses seemed scooting by in madness. A team that stood beside the road dwindled swiftly in perspective. The whirl of the gears and the furious discharge of the used-up gas seemed increasing momentarily. The whole machine was rocking as it sped, yet the big red pursuer was apparently gaining by degrees.

Garrison nodded in acknowledgment of the fact that the car behind, with almost no tonneau and minus the heavy covered superstructure, offered less resistance to the wind. With everything else made equal, and accident barred, the fellow at the wheel behind would overhaul them yet.

He looked out forward. The road was straight for at least a mile. He beheld a bicycle policeman, riding ahead, to develop his speed, with the certain intention of calling to his driver to stop.

Half a minute later the car was abreast the man on the wheel, who shrieked out his orders on the wind. Garrison leaned to the tube that ended by the chauffeur's ear.

"Go on—give her more if she's got it!" he said. "I'll take care of the fines!"

The driver had two notches remaining on his spark advance. He thumbed the lever forward, and the car responded with a trifle more of speed. It was straining every bolt and nut to its utmost capacity of strength.

The bicycle officer, clinging half a minute to a hope made forlorn by his sheer human lack of endurance, drifted to rearward with the dust.

Once more Garrison peered out behind. The big red demon, tearing down the road, was warming to its work. With cylinders heating, and her mixture therefore going snappily as a natural result, she too had taken on a slight accession of speed. Two meteors, flung from space across the earth's rotundity, could scarcely have been more exciting than these liberated chariots of power.

There was no time to talk; there was scarcely time to think. The road, the landscape, the very world, became a dizzying blur that destroyed all distinct sense of sight. In the rush of the air, and the rapid-fire fusillade from the motor, all sense of hearing was benumbed.

A craze for speed took possession of the three—Dorothy, Garrison, the driver. The power to think on normal lines was being swept away. Such mania as drives a lawless comet comes inevitably upon all who ride with such space-defying speed. The one idea is more—more speed—more freedom—more recklessness of spirit!

A village seven miles from Woodsite, calm in its half-deserted state, with its men all at business in New York, was cleaved, as it were, by the racing machines, while women and children ran and screamed to escape from the path of the monsters.

The fellow behind was once more creeping up. The time consumed in going seven miles had been barely ten minutes. In fifteen minutes more, at his present rate of gain, the driver behind would be up alongside, and then—who knew what would happen?

Dorothy had started as if to speak, at least a dozen times. She was now holding on with all her strength, aware that conversation was wholly out of the question.

Garrison was watching constantly through the glass. The race could hardly last much longer. They were rapidly approaching a larger town, where such speed would be practically criminal. If only they could gain a lead and dart into town and around some corner, into traffic of sufficient density to mask his movements, he and Dorothy might perhaps alight and escape observation on foot, while the car led pursuit through the streets.

About to suggest some such plan to his driver, he was suddenly sickened by a sharp report, like a pistol fired beneath the car. He feared for a tire, but the noise came again, and then three times, quickly, in succession. One of the cylinders was missing. Not only was the power cut down by a fourth, but compression in the engine thus partially "dead" was a drag on the others of the motor.

The driver leaned forward, one hand on the buzzer of his coil, and gave a screw a turn. Already the car was losing speed. The fellow behind was coming on like a red-headed whirlwind. For a moment the missing seemed to cease, and the speed surged back to the hum of the whirring gears.

"Bang! Bang!" went the sharp report, as before, and Garrison groaned. He was looking out, all but hopeless of escape, rapidly reflecting on the charges that would lie against not only himself, but his chauffeur, when he saw the red fellow plunge through the dust on a crazy, gyrating course that made his heart stand still.

They had blown out a tire!

Like a drunken comet, suddenly robbed of all its own crazy laws, the red demon see-sawed the highway. The man at the wheel, shutting off his power, crowding on his brakes, and clinging to his wheel with the skill and coolness of a master, had all he could do to keep the machine anywhere near the proper highway.

Unaware of what had occurred at the rear the driver in charge of Garrison's car had once more adjusted the buzzer, and now with such splendid results that his motor seemed madder than before to run itself to shreds.

Like a vanishing blot on the landscape, the red car behind, when it came to a halt, was deserted by its rival in the race. Two minutes later, with the city ahead fast looming like a barrier before them, Garrison leaned to the tube.

"Slow down!" he called. "Our friend has quit—a blow-out. Get down to lawful speed."

Even then they ran fully half a mile before the excited creature of wheels and fire could be tamed to calmer behavior.

CHAPTER XIX

FRIGHT AND A DISAPPEARANCE

With the almost disappointed thing of might purring tamely along through the far-spread town, and then on through level ways of beauty, leading the way to Gotham, Dorothy found that she was still clinging fast to Jerold's arm, after nearly ten minutes of peace.

Then she waked, as it were, and shyly withdrew her hand.

Garrison had felt himself transported literally, more by the ecstasy of having her thus put dependence upon him than by any mere flight of the car. He underwent a sense of loss when the strain subsided, and her trembling hold relaxed and fell from his arm.

Nevertheless, she clung to the roses. His heart had taken time to beat a stroke in joy during that moment of stress at the house, when she had caused a few seconds' added delay to gather up the

crushed and faded flowers.

Since speaking to the driver last Garrison had been content to sit beside the girl in silence. There was much he must ask, and much she must tell, but for this little time of calm and delight he could not break the spell. Once more, however, his abounding confidence in her goodness, her innocence, and deep-lying beauty of character rose triumphant over fears. Once more the spell of a mighty love was laid upon his heart. He did not know and could not know that Dorothy, too, was Cupid's victim—that she loved him with a strange and joyous intensity, but he did know that the whole vast world was no price for this moment of rapture.

She was the first to speak.

"Why did we have to run away? Aren't you supposed to have a perfect right to—to take me wherever you please—especially from a place like that, and such outrageous treatment?"

"I am only supposed to have that right," he answered. "As a matter of fact, I committed a species of violence in Theodore's house, compelling him to act at the point of the gun. Technically speaking, I had no right to proceed so far. But, aside from that, when they sprung the alarm—well, the time had come for action.

"Had the constable dragged me away, as a legal offender—which he would doubtless have done on the charge of two householding citizens—the delay would have been most annoying, while a too close investigation of my status as a husband might have proved even more embarrassing."

A wave of crimson swept across her face.

"Of course." She relapsed into silence for a moment. Then she added: "What does it all mean, anyway? How dared they carry me off like this? How did you happen to come? When did you find that I had gone? What do you think we'd better do?"

"Answer one question at a time," said Garrison, stuffing his handkerchief into the tube, lest the driver overhear their conversation. "There is much to be explained between us. In the first place, tell me, Dorothy, what happened just after I 'phoned you last evening, and you made an appointment to meet me in the park."

"Why, I hardly know," she said, her face once more a trifle pale. "I went upstairs to get ready, thinking to slip out unobserved. In the act of putting on my hat, I was suddenly smothered in the folds of a strong-smelling towel thrown over my head, and since that time I have scarcely known anything till this morning, when I waked in the bed at Theodore's house, fully dressed, and chained as you saw me."

"But—these roses?" he said, lightly placing his hand upon them. "How did you happen to have them along?"

It was not a question pertinent to the issues in hand, but it meant a great deal to his heart.

"Why—I—I was wearing them—that's all," she stammered. "No one stopped to take them off."

He was satisfied. He wished they might once and for all dismiss the world, with all its vexations, its mysteries, and pains, and ride on like this, through the June-created loveliness bathed in its sunlight—comrades and lovers, forever.

The hour, however, was not for dreaming. There were grim facts affecting them both, and much to be cleared between them. Moreover he was merely hired to enact a rôle that, if it sometimes called for a show of tender love, was still but a rôle, after all. He attacked the business directly.

"We require an understanding on a great many topics," he said to her slowly. "After I 'phoned you I went to the park, was caught in the rain, and attacked by two ruffians, who knocked me down, and left me to what they supposed would be certain destruction."

"Jerold!" she said, and his name thus on her lips, with no one by to whom she was acting, gave him an exquisite pleasure. There was no possibility of guilty knowledge on her part. Of this he was thoroughly convinced. "You? Attacked?"

"Later," he resumed, "when I recovered, I went to the house in Ninety-third Street, was admitted by the woman in charge, and remained all night, after taking the liberty of examining all the apartments."

She looked at him in utter amazement.

"Why—but what does it— You, attacked in the park—these lawless deeds—you stayed all night—"

And you found I had been carried away?"

"No; I merely thought so. The woman knew nothing. But I presently discovered a number of interesting things. Theodore has installed a private 'phone in his closet, and by means thereof had overheard our appointment. Your bureau and dressing-case had both been searched——"

"For the necklaces!" she cried. "You have them safe?"

"I thought it might have been the jewels—or your marriage certificate," he said, alive to numerous points in the case which, he felt, were about to develop.

She turned a trifle pale.

"I've sewn the certificate—where I'm sure they'd never find it," she said. "But the jewels are safe?"

"Quite safe," he said, making a mental note of her insistence on the topic. "I then discovered the address of the Woodsite house, and you know the rest."

"It's terrible! The whole thing is terrible!" she said. "I wouldn't have thought they'd dare to do such things! I don't know what we're going to do. We're neither of us safe!"

"You must help me all you can," he said, laying his hand for a moment on her arm. "I've been fighting in the dark. I must find you apartments where you will not be discovered by the Robinsons, whose criminal designs on the property inheritance will halt at nothing, and—you must tell me all you can."

"I will," she said; "only——"

And there she halted, her eyes raised to his in mute appeal, a dumb fear expressed in their depths.

They had both avoided the topic of the murder, at the news of which she had fainted. Garrison almost feared it, and Dorothy evidently dreaded its approach.

More than anything else Garrison felt he must know she was innocent. That was the one vital thing to him now, whether she could ever return his love or not. He loved her in every conceivable manner, fondly, passionately, sacredly, with the tenderest wishes for her comfort and happiness. He believed in her now as he always had, whensoever they were together. Nevertheless, he could not abandon all his faculties and plunge into folly like a blind and confident fool.

"I'd like to ask about the jewels first," he said. "The night I first came to your home I entered the place next door by accident. A fancy-dress party was in progress."

"Yes—I knew it. They used to be friends of Theodore's."

"So I guessed," he added dryly. "Theodore was there."

"Theodore—there?" she echoed in surprise he felt to be genuine. "Why, but—don't you remember you met him with the others in my house, soon after you came?"

"I do, perfectly. Nevertheless, I saw him in the other house, in mask, I assure you, dressed to represent *Mephistopheles*. Last night I found the costume in his closet, and the stairs at the rear were his, of course, to employ."

"I remember," said Dorothy excitedly, "that he came in a long gray overcoat, though the evening was distinctly warm."

"Precisely. And all of this would amount to nothing," Garrison resumed, "only that while I stood in the hall of the house I had entered, that evening, I saw a young woman, likewise in mask, wearing your necklaces—your pearls and diamonds."

Dorothy stared at him in utter bewilderment. Her face grew pale. Her eyes dilated strangely.

"You—you are sure?" she said in a tone barely audible.

"Perfectly," said Garrison.

"And you never mentioned this before?"

"I awaited developments."

"But—what did you think? You might almost have thought that Theodore had stolen them, and handed them to me," she said. "Especially after the way I put them in your charge!"

"I told you we have much to clear between us," he said. "Haven't I the right to know a little——"

"But—how did they come to be there?" she interrupted, abruptly confronted by a phase of the facts which she had momentarily overlooked. "How in the world could my jewels have been in that house and also in my bureau at the very same time?"

"Isn't it possible that Theodore borrowed them, temporarily, and smuggled them back when he came?"

The startled look was intensified in her eyes as she met his gaze.

"He must have done it in some such way!" she said. "I thought at the time, when I ran in to get them, they were not exactly as I had left them, earlier. And I gave them to you for fear he'd steal them!"

This was some light, at least. Garrison needed more.

"Why couldn't you have told me all about them earlier?"

She looked at him beseechingly. Some way, it seemed to them both they had known each other for a very long time, and much had been swept away that must have stood as a barrier between mere client and agent.

"I felt I'd rather not," she confessed. "Forgive me, please. They do not belong to me.

"Not yours?" said Garrison. "What do you mean?"

"I advanced some money on them—to some one very dear," she answered. "Please don't probe into that, if you can help it."

His jealousy rose again, with his haunting suspicion of a man in the background with whom he would yet have to deal. He knew that here he had no rights, but in other directions he had many.

"I shall be obliged to do considerable probing," he said. "The time has come when we must work much more closely together. A maze of events has entangled us both, and together we must find our way out."

She lowered her glance. Her lip was trembling. He felt she was striving to gain a control over her nerves, that were strung to the highest tension. For fully a minute she was silent. He waited. She looked up, met his gaze for a second, and once more lowered her eyes.

"You spoke of—of something—yesterday," she faltered. "It gave me a terrible shock."

She had broached the subject of the murder.

"I was sorry—sorry for the brutal way—the thoughtless way I spoke," he said. "I hope to be forgiven."

She made no reply to his hope. Her entire stock of nerve was required to go on with the business in hand.

"You said my uncle was—murdered," she said, in a tone he strained to hear. "What makes you think of such a thing?"

"You have not before made the statement that the Hardy in Hickwood was your uncle," he reminded her.

"You must have guessed it was my uncle," she replied. "You knew it all the time."

"No, not at first. Not, in fact, till some time after I began my work on the case. I knew Mr. Hardy had been murdered before I knew anything else about him."

She was intensely white, but she was resolute.

"Who told you he was murdered?"

"No one. I discovered the evidence myself."

He felt her weaken and grow limp beside him.

"The—the evidence?" she repeated faintly. "What kind—of evidence?"

"Poison."

He was watching her keenly.

She swayed, as if to faint once more, but mastered herself by exerting the utmost of her will.

"Poison?" she repeated, as before. "But how?"

"In a box of cigars—a birthday present given to your uncle."

It was brutal—cruelly brutal—but he had to test it out without further delay.

His words acted almost with galvanic effect.

"Cigars! His birthday! My cigars!" she cried. "Jerold, you don't suspect me?"

The car was starting across the bridge. It suddenly halted in the traffic. Almost on the instant came a crash and a cry. A dainty little brougham had been crushed against another motor car in the jam and impatience on the structure. One of its wheels had lost half its spokes, that went like a parcel of toothpicks.

Garrison leaped out at once, and Dorothy followed in alarm. In the tide of vehicles, blocked by the trifling accident, a hundred persons craned their heads to see what the damage had been.

A small knot of persons quickly gathered about the damaged carriage. Garrison hastened forward, intent upon offering his services, should help in the case be required. He discovered, in the briefest time, that no great damage had been done, and that no one had been injured.

Eager to be hastening onward, he turned back to his car. Almost immediately he saw that the chauffeur's seat was empty. Dorothy had apparently stepped once more inside, to be screened from public view.

Hastily scanning the crowd about the place, Garrison failed to find his driver. He searched about impatiently, but in vain. He presently became aware of the fact that his man had, for some reason, fled and left his car.

Considerably annoyed, and aware that he should have to drive the machine himself, he returned once more to the open door of the auto, intent upon informing Dorothy of their loss.

He gazed inside the car in utter bewilderment.

Dorothy also was gone.

CHAPTER XX

NEW HAPPENINGS

Still puzzled, unable to believe his senses, Garrison made a second quick search of the vicinity that was rapidly being cleared and restored to order by a couple of efficient police officers, but without avail.

Neither Dorothy nor the chauffeur could be found.

One of the officers ordered him to move along with his car. There was nothing else to be done. Reluctantly, and not without feelings of annoyance and worry, combined with those of baffled mystery and chagrin, Garrison was presently obliged to climb to the driver's seat and take the wheel in hand.

The motor was running, slowly, to a rhythmic beat. He speeded it up, threw off the brake, put the gears in the "low," and slipped in the clutch. Over the bridge in the halted procession of traffic he steered his course—a man bereft of his comrade and his driver and with a motor-car thrust upon his charge.

Through the streets of New York he was finally guiding the great purring creature of might, which in ordinary circumstances would have filled his being with delight. Thorough master of throttle, spark-advance, and speed-lever, he would have asked nothing better than to drive all day—if Dorothy were only at his side.

He had never felt more utterly disconcerted in his life. Where had she gone—and why?

What did it mean to have the chauffeur also disappear?

Had the two gone off together?

If so, why should she choose a companion of his type?

If not, then what could have formed the motive for the man's abrupt flight from the scene?

And what should be done with the motor-car, thus abandoned to his care?

A quick suspicion that the car had been stolen came to Garrison's mind. Nevertheless it was always possible that Dorothy had urged the driver to convey her out of the crowd, and that the driver had finally returned to get his car, and found it gone; but this, for many reasons, seemed unlikely.

Dorothy had shown her fear in her last startled question: "Jerold, you don't suspect me?" She might have fled in some sort of fear after that. But the driver—what was it that had caused him also to vanish at a time so unexpected?

Garrison found himself obliged to give it up. He could think of nothing to do with the car but to take it to the stand where he had hired it in the morning. The chauffeur might, by chance, appear and claim his property. Uneasy, with the thing thus left upon his hands, and quite unwilling to be "caught with the goods," Garrison was swiftly growing more and more exasperated.

He knew he could not roll the car to the stand and simply abandon it there, for anyone so inclined to steal; he objected to reporting it "found" in this peculiar manner at any police headquarters, for he could not be sure it had been stolen, and he himself might be suspected.

Having hired the car in crowded Times Square, near his Forty-fourth Street rooms, he ran it up along Broadway with the thought of awaiting the driver.

The traffic was congested with surface cars, heavy trucks, other motors, and carriages. His whole attention was riveted on the task in hand. Driving a car in the streets of New York ceases to be enjoyment, very promptly. The clutch was in and out continuously. He crept here, he speeded up to the limit for a space of a few city blocks, and crept again.

Past busy Fourteenth Street and Union Square he proceeded, and on to Twenty-third Street with Madison Square, green and inviting, lying to his right. Pushed over into the Fifth Avenue traffic by the regulations, he contemplated returning to the Broadway stream as soon as possible, and was crawling along with his clutch barely rubbing, when a hansom cab, containing a beautiful but pale young woman, slowly passed. The occupant abruptly rose from her seat and scrutinized the car in obvious excitement.

Garrison barely caught a glimpse of her face, busied as he was with the driving. He continued on. Two minutes later he was halted by a jam of carriages and the hansom returned at full speed. Once more the pale young woman was leaning half-way out.

"Stop!" she cried at the astounded Garrison. "You've stolen that car! I'll have you arrested! You've got to return it at once!"

Garrison almost smiled, the half-expected outcome had arrived so promptly. He saw that half a dozen drivers of cabs and other vehicles were looking on in wonder and amusement.

"Kindly drive into Twenty-sixth Street, out of this confusion," he answered. "I shall be glad to halt there and answer all requirements."

He was so obviously a thorough gentleman, and his manner was so calm and dignified, that the strange young lady almost felt abashed at the charges she had made.

The jam was broken. Garrison ran the car to the quieter side street, and the cab kept pace at his side.

Presently he halted, got down from the seat and came to the hansom, lifting his hat. How thankful he was that no policeman had overheard the young woman's cry, and followed, she might never suspect.

"Permit me to introduce myself as a victim of another's man's wrongful intentions," he said. "I hired this car this morning uptown—in fact, in Times Square, and was driven out to Long Island. Returning, we were halted on the bridge—and the chauffeur disappeared—ran away, leaving me to drive for myself.

"I feared at the time it might be the man was a thief, and I am greatly relieved to find the owner of the car so promptly. If this or any other explanation, before an officer, or any court, will gratify you more, I shall be glad to meet every demand you may make upon my time."

The young woman looked at him with widely blazing eyes. She believed him, she hardly knew why. She had alighted from the hansom.

"I've been driving up and down Fifth Avenue all morning!" she said. "I felt sure I could find it that way. It isn't mine. It was only left in my charge. I was afraid that something might happen. I didn't want to have it in the first place! I knew it would cause me endless trouble. I don't know what to do with it now."

"I should be gratified," said Garrison, "if you will state that you do not consider me guilty of a theft so stupid as this would appear."

"I didn't think you were the man," she answered. "A chauffeur my cousin discharged undoubtedly stole it. Policemen are after him now, with the man who runs the garage. They went to Long Island City, or somewhere, to find him, this morning. Perhaps he saw them on the bridge."

She was regaining color. She was a very fine-looking young woman, despite the expression of worry on her face. She was looking Garrison over in a less excited manner—and he knew she held no thought of guilt against him.

"Let me suggest that you dismiss your cab and permit me to take you at once to your garage," he said, adding to the man on the box: "Cabby, how much is your bill?"

"Five dollars," said the man, adding substantially to his charge.

"Take ten and get out!" said Garrison, handing him a bill.

"Oh, but please——" started the pretty young woman.

Garrison interrupted.

"The man who stole your car did yeoman service for me. I promised him five times this amount. He may never dare appear to get his money. Kindly step in. Will you drive the car yourself?"

"No, thank you," she murmured, obeying because of his masterly manner. "But really, I hardly know——"

"Please say nothing further about it," he once more interrupted. "I am sorry to have been in any manner connected with an event which has caused you uneasiness; but I am very glad, indeed, to be instrumental in returning your property and relieving your worry. Where do you keep your car?"

She told him the place. It was up in the neighborhood of Columbus Circle. Twenty minutes later the car was "home"—where it would never get away on false pretenses again, and the news of its coming began to go hotly out by wire.

Garrison heard the men call his fair companion Miss Ellis. He called a cab, when she was ready to go, asked for permission to escort her home, and was driven in her company to an old-fashioned house downtown, near Washington Square. There he left her, with a nice old motherly person, and bade her good-by with no expectation of ever beholding her again, despite the murmured thanks she gave him and the half-timid offer of her hand.

When he left and dismissed the cabman he was face to face with the problem of what he should do to find his "wife." His worry all surged back upon him.

He wondered where Dorothy had gone—where she could go, why she had fled from him—and what could he do but wait with impatience some word of her retreat. He had felt her innocence all but established, and love had come like a new great tide upon him. He was lonely now, and thoroughly disturbed.

He had warned her she must go to live in some other house than her own; nevertheless she might have proceeded to the Ninety-third Street residence for things she would require. It was merely a hope. He made up his mind to go to the house without delay, aware that the Robinsons might make all haste to get there and gain an advantage.

Half an hour later he was once more in the place. The housekeeper alone was in charge. No one had been there in his absence.

He had no intention of remaining long, with Dorothy to find, although he felt inclined to await the possible advent of Theodore and his father, whom he meant to eject from the place. As yet he dared not attempt to order the arrest of the former, either for Dorothy's abduction or the crime attempted on himself in the park. The risk was too great—the risk to the fictional marriage between himself and Dorothy.

He climbed the stairs, wandered aimlessly through the rooms, sat down, waited, somewhat impatiently, tried to think what were best to do, worried himself about Dorothy again, and finally made up his mind she might attempt to wire him at his office address. Calling up the housekeeper, he gave her strict instructions against admitting any of the Robinsons—an order which the woman received with apparent gratification. They were merely to be referred to himself, at this address, should they come upon the scene.

He started off. He had barely closed the door and heard the woman put on the chain, and was turning to walk down the brownstone steps when Theodore, half-way up, panting from haste, confronted him, face to face.

For a moment the two stood staring at each other in surprise. Garrison was first to break the silence.

"You came a little late, you see. I have just issued orders you are not to be admitted to this house again, except with my special permission."

"By Heaven, you—— We'll see about that!" said Theodore. "I'll have you put under arrest!"

"Try it," said Garrison, grinning in his face. "A charge of abduction, plus a charge even larger, may cause you more than mere annoyance. You've been looking for trouble with me, and you're bound to have it. Let me warn you that you are up against a number of facts that you may have overlooked—and you may hear something drop!"

"You think you've been clever, here and in Woodsite, I suppose," said Theodore, concealing both wrath and alarm. "I could drop a couple of facts on you that would fade you a little, I reckon. And this house isn't yours yet!"

"I wonder how many lessons you are going to need," answered Garrison coldly. "If you put so much as your hand inside this building, I'll have you arrested for burglary. Now, mind what I say—and get out!"

"I'll see you later, all right," said Robinson, glaring for a moment in impotent rage, and he turned and retreated from the place.

Garrison, with his mind made up to a *coup* of distinct importance, was presently headed for his room in Forty-fourth Street. Before he left the Subway he went to a waiting-room, replaced the long mustache upon his face—the one with which he had started away in the morning—and walked the few short blocks from the station to his house.

The street was nearly deserted, but the "shadow" he had duped in the morning was on watch, still undismissed from duty by young Robinson.

Garrison went up to him quietly—and suddenly showing his gun, pulled away the false mustache.

"I'm the man you've been waiting to follow," he said. "Now, don't say a word, but come on."

"Hell!" said the man.

He shrugged his shoulders and was soon up in Garrison's room.

CHAPTER XXI

REVELATIONS

The fellow whom Garrison had taken into camp had once attempted detective work himself and failed. He was not at all a clever being, but rather a crafty, fairly reliable employee of a somewhat shady "bureau" with which young Robinson was on quite familiar terms.

He was far from being a coward. It was he who had followed Garrison to Branchville, rifled his suit-

case, and been captured by the trap. Despite the fact that his hand still bore the evidence of having tampered with Garrison's possessions, he had dared remain on the job because he felt convinced that Garrison had never really seen him and could not, therefore, pick him up.

Sullen in his helplessness, aware that his captor must at last have a very great advantage, he complied with Garrison's command to take a seat in the room, and glanced about him inquiringly.

"What do you want with me anyhow?" he said. "What's your game?"

"Mine is a surer game than yours," said Garrison, seating himself with his back to the window, and the light therefore all on his visitor's face. "I'm going to tell you first what you are up against."

The man shifted uneasily.

"You haven't got anything to hold me on," he said. "I've got my regular license to follow my trade."

"I was not aware the State was issuing licenses to burglars," said Garrison. "Come, now, with that hand of yours, what's the use of beating around the bush. If my suit-case had nipped you by the wrist instead of the fingers, I'd have captured you red-handed in the act."

The fellow thrust his hand in his pocket. His face, with two days' growth of beard upon it, turned a trifle pale.

"I'd rather work on your side than against you," he ventured. "A man has to make a living."

"You've come around to the point rather more promptly than I expected," said Garrison. "For fear that you may not keep your word, when it comes to a pinch, I'll inform you I can send you up on two separate charges, and I'll do so in a wink, if you try to double-cross me in the slightest particular."

"I haven't done anything but that one job at Branchville," said the man in alarm.

"What are you givin' me now?"

"What's your name?" demanded Garrison.

"Tuttle," said the fellow, after a moment of hesitation. "Frank Tuttle."

"All right, Tuttle. You furnished Theodore Robinson with information concerning my movements and, in addition to your burglary at Branchville, you have made yourself accessory to a plot to commit a willful murder."

"I didn't! By Heaven, I didn't!" Tuttle answered. "I didn't have anything to do with that."

"With what?" asked Garrison. "You see you plunge into every trap I lay, almost before it is set."

He rose, went to his closet, never without his eye on his man, searched on the floor and brought forth the cold iron bomb. This he abruptly placed on Tuttle's knee.

Tuttle shrank in terror.

"Oh, Lord! I didn't! I didn't know they went in to do a thing like that!" he said. "I've been pretty desperate, I admit, Mr. Garrison, but I had no hand in this!"

The sweat on his forehead advertised his fear. He looked at Garrison in a stricken, ghastly manner that almost excited pity.

"But you knew that two of Robinson's assassins were to meet me in the park," said Garrison. "You procured their services—and expected to read of an accident to me in the papers the following morning."

He was risking a mere conjecture, but it went very near to the truth.

"So help me, I didn't go as far as that!" said Tuttle. "I admit I stole the letter up at Branchville, and sent it to Robinson at once. I admit I followed you back to New York and told him all I could. But I only gave him the names and addresses of the dagos, and I never knew what they had to do!"

Garrison took the bomb and placed it on his bureau.

"Very good," he said. "That makes you, as I said before, an accomplice to the crime attempted—in addition to the burglary, for which I could send you up. To square this off you'll go to work for me, and

begin by supplying the names and addresses of your friends."

Tuttle was a picture of abject fear and defeat. His jaw hung down; his eyes were bulging in their sockets.

"You—you mean you'll give me a chance?" he said. "I'll do anything—anything you ask, if only you will!"

"Look here, Tuttle, your willingness to do anything has put you where you are. But I'll give you a chance, with the thorough understanding that the minute you attempt the slightest treachery you'll go up in spite of all you can do. First, we'll have the names of the dagos."

Tuttle all but broke down. He was not a hardened criminal. He had merely learned a few of the tricks by which crime may be committed, and, having failed in detective employment, had no substantial calling and was willing to attempt even questionable jobs, if the pay were found sufficient.

He supplied the names and addresses of the men who had done young Robinson's bidding in Central Park. Garrison jotted them down.

"I suppose you know that I am in the detective business myself," he added, as he finished the writing.

"I thought so, but I wasn't sure," said Tuttle.

"You told young Robinson as much?"

"He hired me to tell him everything."

"Exactly. How much do you expect to tell him of what is going on to-day?"

"Nothing that you do not instruct," said Tuttle, still feeling insecure. "That is, if you meant what you said."

"I meant it," said Garrison, "meant it all. You're at work for me from this time on—and I expect the faithfulness of an honest man, no matter what you may have been before."

"You'll get it," said Tuttle. "I only want a show to start off square and right. . . . What do you want me to do?"

"There is nothing of great importance just at present, except to remember who is your boss," answered Garrison. "You may be obliged to double-cross Robinson to a slight extent, when he next hunts you up for your report. He deserves a little of the game, no matter how he gets it. Take his instructions the same as before. Tell him you have lost me for a time. Report to me promptly concerning his instructions and everything else. Do you know the address of my office?"

"You have never been there since I was put on the case," said Tuttle with commendable candor.

"All right," said Garrison. "It's down in the——"

A knock on the door interrupted. The landlady, a middle-aged woman who rarely appeared at Garrison's room, was standing on the landing when he went to investigate, and holding a message in her hand.

"A telegram for you," she said, and halting for a moment, she turned and retreated down the stairs.

Garrison tore the envelope apart, pulled out the yellow slip and read:

Please come over to 937 Hackatack Street, Jersey City, as soon as possible.

JERALDINE.

It was Dorothy, across the Hudson. A wave of relief, to know she was near and wished to see him, swept over Garrison's being.

"Here," he said to Tuttle, "here's the address on a card. Report to me there at six o'clock to-night. Get out now and go to young Robinson, but not at the house in Ninety-third Street."

"Why not?" inquired Tuttle. "Its the regular place——"

"I've ordered him not to enter the house again," interrupted Garrison. "By the way, should he attempt to do so, or ask you to get in there for him, agree to his instructions apparently, and let me know

without delay."

"Thank you for giving me a chance," said Tuttle, who had risen from his chair. "You'll never regret it, I'm sure."

"All right," said Garrison. "Shake!"

He gave the astonished man a firm, friendly grip and bade him "So 'long!" at the door.

A few minutes later, dressed in his freshest apparel, he hastened out to gulp down a cup of strong coffee at an adjacent café, then headed downtown for the ferry.

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN IN THE CASE

The hour was just after four o'clock when Garrison stepped from a cab in Hackatack Street, Jersey City, and stood for a moment looking at the red-brick building numbered 937.

It was a shabby, smoke-soiled, neglected dwelling, with signs of life utterly lacking.

Made wary by his Central Park experience, Garrison had come there armed with his gun and suspiciously alert. His cabman was instructed to wait.

Without apparent hesitation Garrison ascended the chalk-marked steps and rang the bell.

Almost immediately the door was opened, by a small and rather pretty young woman, dressed in good taste, in the best of materials, and wearing a very fine diamond ring upon her finger.

Behind her, as Garrison instantly discerned, were rich and costly furnishings, singularly out of keeping with the shabby exterior of the place.

"How do you do?" he said, raising his hat. "Is my wife, Mrs. Fairfax——"

"Oh," interrupted the lady. "Won't you please come in? She hardly expected you to come so promptly. She's lying down to take a rest."

Garrison entered and was shown to a parlor on the left. It, too, was furnished in exceptional richness, but the air was close and stuffy, and the whole place uncomfortably dark.

"If you'll please sit down I'll go and tell her you have come," said his hostess. "Excuse me."

The smile on her face was somewhat forced and sad, thought Garrison. His feeling of suspicion had departed.

Left alone, he strode across the room and glanced at a number of pictures, hung upon the walls. They were excellent oils, one or two by masters.

Dorothy must have slept lightly, if at all. Garrison's back was still turned toward the entrance when her footfall came to his ear. She came swiftly into the apartment.

"Oh, you were very good to come so soon!" she said in a tone made low for none but him to hear. "I wired you, both at your house and office, not more than an hour ago."

"I got the message sent to the house," he said. "It came as a great relief." He paused for a moment, looking in her eyes, which were raised to his own appealingly. "Why did you run away?—and how did you do it?" he asked her. "I didn't know what in the world to think or do."

Her eyes were lowered.

"I had to—I mean, I simply obeyed an impulse," she confessed.

In an almost involuntary outburst she added: "I am in very great trouble. There is no one in the world but you that can give me any help."

All the pain she had caused him was forgotten in the joy of that instant. How he longed to take her in his arms and fold her in security against his breast! And he dared not even be tender.

"I am trying to help you, Dorothy," he said, "but I was utterly dumfounded, there in the crush on the bridge. Where did you go?"

"I ran along and was helped to escape the traffic," she explained. "Then I soon got a car, with my mind made up to come over here just as soon as I could. This is the home of my stepbrother's wife—Mrs. Foster Durgin. I had to come over and—and warn—I mean, I had to come, and so I came."

He had felt her disappearance had nothing to do with the vanishing of the chauffeur. Her statement confirmed his belief.

"Durgin?" Garrison repeated. "Didn't some Durgin, a nephew of Hardy, claim the body, up at Branchville?"

Dorothy was pale again, but resolute.

"Yes—Paul. He's Foster's brother."

"You told me you had neither brothers nor sisters," Garrison reminded her a little sternly. "These were not forgotten?"

"They are stepbrothers only—by marriage. I thought I could leave them out," she explained, flushing as she tried to meet his gaze. "Please don't think I meant to deceive you very much."

"It was a technical truth," he told her; "but isn't it time you told me everything? You ran off before I could even reply to something you appeared to wish to know. You——"

"But you don't suspect me?" she interrupted, instantly reverting to the question she had put before, in that moment of her impulse to run. "I couldn't bear it if I thought you did!"

"If I replied professionally, I should say I don't know what to think," he said. "The whole affair is complicated. As a matter of fact, I cannot seem to suspect you of anything wrong, but you've got to help me clear it as fast as I can."

She met his gaze steadily, for half a minute, then tears abruptly filled her eyes, and she lowered her gaze to the floor.

"Thank you, Jerold," she murmured, and a thrill went straight to his heart. "I am very much worried, and very unhappy—but I haven't done anything wrong—and nothing like that!—not even a wicked thought like that! I loved my uncle very dearly."

She broke down and turned away to give vent to an outburst of grief.

"There, there," said Garrison after a moment. "We must do the best we can. If you will tell me more, my help is likely to be greater."

Dorothy dried her eyes and resumed her courage heroically.

"I haven't asked you to be seated all this time," she said apologetically. "Please do—and I'll tell you all I can."

Garrison took a chair, while Dorothy sat near him. He thought he had never seen her in a mood of beauty more completely enthralling than this one of helplessness and bravery combined.

"We are quite, well—secure from being overheard?" he said.

She went at once and closed the door.

"Alice would never listen, greatly as she is worried," she said. "It was she who met you at the door—Foster's wife."

Garrison nodded. He was happy only when she came once more to her seat.

"This is your stepbrother's home?" he inquired. "Is he here?"

"This is Alice's property," Dorothy corrected. "But that's way ahead of the story. You told me my uncle was poisoned by my cigars. How could that possibly have been? How did you find it out? How was it done?"

"The box had been opened and two cigars had been so loaded with poison that when he bit off one, at the end, to light it up, he got the deadly stuff on his tongue—and was almost instantly stricken."

Despite the dimness of the light in the room Dorothy's face showed very white.

She asked; "What kind of poison?"

He mentioned the drug.

"Not the kind used by photographers?" she asked in affright.

"Precisely. Foster, then, is a photographer?"

"He used to be, but— Oh, I don't see how he—it's terrible! It's terrible!"

She arose and crossed the room in agitation, then presently returned.

"Your suspicions may be wrong," said Garrison, who divined she had something on her mind. "Why not tell me all about it, and let me assist, if I can? What sort of a looking man is Foster?"

"Rather small, and nearly always smiling. But he may not have done it! He may be innocent! If only you could help me now!" she said. "I don't believe he could have done it!"

"But you half suspect it was he?"

"I've been afraid of it all along," she said, in an outburst of confession. "Before I even knew that Uncle John was—murdered—before you told me, I mean—I felt afraid that something of the kind might have happened, and since that hour I've been nearly distracted by my thoughts!"

"Let's take it slowly," said Garrison, in his soothing way. "I imagine there has been either anger or hatred, spite or pique on the part of your stepbrother, Foster, towards John Hardy in the past."

"Yes—everything! Uncle John spoiled Foster at first, but when he found the boy was gambling in Wall Street, he cut him off and refused to supply him the means to pay off the debts he had contracted. Foster threatened at the time.

"The breach grew wider. Uncle didn't know he was married to Alice. Foster wouldn't let me tell. He had used up nearly all of Alice's money. She refused to mortgage anything more, after I took the necklaces, on a loan—and if Foster doesn't get ten thousand dollars in August I don't know what he'll do!"

Garrison was following the threads of this quickly delivered narrative as best he might. It revealed a great deal, but not all.

"I see," he commented quietly. "But how could Foster hope to profit by the death of Mr. Hardy?"

Dorothy turned very white again.

"He knew of the will."

"The will that was drawn in your favor?"

"Yes."

"And he thought that you were married, that the conditions of the will had been fulfilled?"

Dorothy nodded assent.

Garrison's impulse was to push a point in personal affairs and ask if she had really married some Fairfax, not yet upon the scene. But he adhered strictly to business.

"What you fear is that Foster, aware that you would become your uncle's heir, may have hastened your uncle's end, in the hope that when you came in for the property you would liquidate his debts?"

Dorothy nodded again.

She said: "It is terrible! Do you see the slightest ray of hope?"

Garrison ignored the query for a moment.

"Where is Foster now?"

"No one knows—he seems to have run away—that's one of the worst things about it."

"But you came over here to warn him," said Garrison.

Dorothy flushed.

"That was my impulse, I admit, when you told me about the cigars. I hardly knew what else I could do."

"You are very fond of Foster?"

"I am very fond of Alice."

Garrison was glad. He could even have been jealous of a brother.

"But how could Foster have tampered with your cigars?" he inquired.
"Was he up there at Hickwood when you left them?"

"He was there all the time of uncle's visit, in hiding, and even on the night of his death," she confessed in a whisper. "Alice doesn't know of this, but he admitted it all to me."

"This is what you have been trying to conceal from me, all the time," Garrison observed. "Do the Robinsons have their suspicions?"

"I can't be certain. Perhaps they have. Theodore has exercised a very bad influence on Foster's life. He intimated once to me that perhaps Uncle John had been murdered."

Garrison thought for a moment.

"It is almost impossible for anyone to have had that suspicion who had no guilty knowledge," he said. "Theodore was, and is, capable of any crime. If he knew about the will and believed you had not fulfilled the conditions, by marrying, he would have had all the motive in the world to commit the crime himself."

"But," said Dorothy, "he knew nothing of the will, as I told you before."

"And he with an influence over Foster, who *did* know all about the will?"

Dorothy changed color once again. She was startled.

"I never thought of that," she admitted. "Foster might have told."

"There's a great deal to clear up in a case like this," said Garrison, "even when suspicions point your course. I think I can land Mr. Theodore on the things he attempted on me, but not just yet. He may reveal himself a little more. Besides, our alleged marriage will hardly bear a close investigation."

For the moment Dorothy was more concerned by his personal danger than by anything concerning the case.

"You told me a little of what was attempted in the park," she said. "I've thought about it ever since—such a terrible attack! If anything dreadful should happen to you——"

She broke off suddenly, turned crimson to her hair, and dropped her gaze from his face.

In that moment he resisted the greatest temptation of his life—the impulse to sink at her feet on his knees, and tell her of his love. He knew she felt, as he did, the wondrous attraction between them; he knew that to her, as to himself, the impression was strong that they had known each other always; but hired as he had been to conduct an affair in which it had been particularly stipulated there was to be no sentiment, or even the slightest thought of such a development, he throttled his passion and held himself in check.

"Some guardian angel must have hovered near," was all he permitted himself to reply, but she fathomed the depth of his meaning.

"I hope some good spirit may continue to be helpful—to us both," she said. "What are you going to do next?"

"Take you back to New York," said Garrison. "I must have you near. But, while I think of it, please answer one thing more. How did it happen that your uncle's life was insured for that inventor in Hickwood, Charles Scott?"

"They were lifelong friends," said Dorothy. "They began as boys together. Uncle John was saved by this Mr. Scott, when he was twenty-one—his life was saved, I mean. And he was very much in love with Mr. Scott's sister. But something occurred, I hardly know what. The Scotts never had much money, and they lost the little they had. Miss Scott was very shamefully treated, I believe, by some other friend in the group, and she died before she was thirty—I've heard as a result of some great unhappiness.

"Uncle and Mr. Scott were always friends, though they drifted apart to some extent. Mr. Scott became an inventor, and spent all his poor wife's money, and also funds that Uncle John supplied, on his inventions. The insurance was Uncle John's last plan for befriending his old-time companion. There was no one else to make it in favor of, for of course the estate would take care of the heirs that he wished to remember. Does that answer your question?"

"Perfectly," said Garrison. "I think if you'll make ready we will start. Is there any particular place in New York where you prefer to stay?"

"No. I'd rather leave that to you."

"By the way," he said, his mind recurring to the motor-car incident and all that had followed, "did you know that when you deserted me so abruptly on the bridge, the chauffeur also disappeared—and left me with the auto on my hands?"

"Why, no!" she said. "What could it mean?"

"It seems to have been a stolen car," he answered. "It was left in charge of a strange young woman, too poor to own it—left her by a friend. She found it in my possession and accepted my explanation as to how it was I chanced to have it in my care. She is living in a house near Washington Square."

"How very strange!" said Dorothy, who had suddenly conceived some queer feminine thought. "If the house near Washington Square is nice, perhaps you might take me there. But tell me all about it!"

What could be actuating her woman's mind in this was more than he could tell. But—why not take her to that house as well as to any in New York?

"All right," he said. "It's a very nice place. I'll tell you the story as we go."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ENEMY'S TRACKS

On the way returning to Gotham, Garrison learned every fact concerning John Hardy, his former places of residence, his former friends, his ways of life and habits that he deemed important to the issues and requirements now in hand, with Dorothy's stepbrother more than half suspected of the crime.

Dorothy gladly supplied the information. She had been on the verge of despair, harboring her fear and despair all alone, with the loyal desire to protect not only Foster, but Alice as well, and now she felt an immense relief to have a man's clear-headed aid.

Garrison held out no specific hope.

The case looked black for young Durgin at the best, and the fellow had run away. A trip to the small Connecticut town of Rockdale, where Hardy had once resided, and to which it had long been his wont to return as often as once a month, seemed to Garrison imperative at this juncture.

He meant to see Tuttle at six, and start for the country in the evening.

He outlined his plan to Dorothy, acquainting her with the fact that he had captured Theodore's spy, from whom he hoped for news.

By the time they came to the house near Washington Square, Dorothy was all but asleep from exhaustion. The strain, both physical and mental, to which she had been subjected during some time past, and more particularly during the past two days, told quickly now when at last she felt ready to place all dependence on Garrison and give up to much-needed rest.

The meeting of Miss Ellis and Dorothy was but slightly embarrassing to Garrison, when it presently took place. Explaining to the woman of the house that his "wife" desired to stop all night in town, rather than go on to Long Island, while he himself must be absent from the city, he readily procured accommodations without exciting the least suspicion.

Garrison merely waited long enough to make Dorothy promise she would take a rest without delay, and then he went himself to a hotel restaurant, near by in Fifth Avenue, devoured a most substantial meal, and was five minutes late at his office.

Tuttle had not yet appeared. The hall before the door was deserted. The sign on his glass had been finished.

Garrison went in. There were letters all over the floor, together with Dorothy's duplicate telegram, a number of cards, and some advertising circulars. One of the cards bore the name of one J. P. Wilder, and the legend, "Representing the New York *Evening Star*." There was nothing, however, in all the stuff that appeared to be important.

Garrison read the various letters hastily, till he came to one from the insurance company, his employers, requesting haste in the matter of the Hardy case, and reminding him that he had reported but once. This he filed away.

Aware at last that more than half an hour had gone, without a sign from his man, he was on the point of going to the door to look out in the hall when Tuttle's shadow fell upon the glass.

"I stayed away a little too long, I know," he said. "I was trying to get a line on old man Robinson, to see if he'd give anything away, but I guess he's got instructions from his son, who's gone away from town."

"Gone away from town?" repeated Garrison. "Where has he gone?"

"I don't know. The old man wouldn't say."

"You haven't seen Theodore?"

"No. He left about five this afternoon. The old man and his wife are stopping in Sixty-fifth Street, where they used to live some months ago."

"What did you report about me?"

"Nothing, except I hadn't seen you again," said Tuttle. "The old man leaves it all to his son. He didn't seem to care where you had gone."

Garrison pondered the matter carefully. He made almost nothing out of Theodore's departure from the scene. It might mean much or little. That Theodore had something up his sleeve he entertained no doubt.

"It's important to find out where he has gone," he said. "See old Robinson again. Tell him you have vital information on a special point that Theodore instructed you to deliver to no one but himself, and the old man may tell you where you should go. I am going out of town to-night. Leave your address in case I wish to write."

"I'll do my best," said Tuttle, writing the address on a card. "Is there anything more?"

"Yes. You know who the two men were who knocked me down in Central Park and left a bomb in my pocket. Get around them in any way you can, ascertain what agreement they had with young Robinson, or what instructions, and find out why it was they did not rob me. Come here at least once a day, right along, whether you find me in or not."

Once more Tuttle stated he would do his best. He left, and Garrison, puzzling over Theodore's latest movement, presently locked up his office and departed from the building.

He was no more than out on the street than he came upon Theodore's tracks in a most unexpected direction. A newsboy came by, loudly calling out his wares. An *Evening Star*, beneath his arm, stared at Garrison with type fully three inches high with this announcement:

MYSTERY OF MURDER AND A WILL!!

John Hardy May Have Been Slain! Beautiful Beneficiary Married Just in Time!

Garrison bought the paper.

With excitement and chagrin in all his being he glanced through the story of himself and Dorothy—all that young Robinson could possibly know, or guess, dished up with all the sensational garnishments of which the New York yellow press is capable.

Sick and indignant with the knowledge that Dorothy must be apprised of this at once, and instructed to remain in hiding, to induce all about her to guard her from intrusion and to refuse to see all reporters who might pursue the story, he hastened at once towards Washington Square, and encountered his "wife," almost upon entering the house.

She was white with alarm.

He thought she had already seen the evening sheet.

"Jerold!" she said, "something terrible has happened. When I got up, half an hour ago to dress—my wedding certificate was gone!"

CHAPTER XXIV

A NEW ALARM

Without, for a moment, comprehending the drift of Dorothy's fears, Garrison led her to a parlor of the house, looking at her in a manner so fixed that she realized their troubles were not confined to the loss of her certificate.

"What do you think? What do you fear? There isn't anything else?" she said, as he still remained dumb for a moment. "What shall we do?"

"Theodore threatened that something might occur," he said. "He has evidently done his worst, all at once."

"Why—but I thought perhaps my certificate was stolen here," whispered Dorothy in agitation. "How could Theodore—"

"No one in this house could have known you had such a document about you," interrupted Garrison. "While you were drugged, or chloroformed, in the Robinsons' house, the old woman, doubtless, searched you thoroughly. You told me your certificate was sewed inside—"

"Inside—yes, inside," she interrupted. "I thought it was safe, for they put a blank paper in its place, and I might not have thought of anything wrong if I had not discovered a black thread used instead of the white silk I had been so careful to employ."

"There is ample proof that Theodore has utilized his wits to good advantage," he said. "Your marriage-certificate episode is only a part of what he has achieved. This paper contains all the story—suggesting that your uncle may have been murdered, and telling the conditions of the will."

He held up the paper before her startled eyes, and saw the look of alarm that came upon her.

"Printed—in the paper!" she exclaimed in astonishment and utter dismay. "Why, how could such a thing happen?"

She took the paper and scanned the story hurriedly, making exclamations as she read.

"Theodore—more of Theodore," said Garrison. "From his point of view, and with all his suspicions concerning our relationship, it is a master-stroke. It renders our position exceedingly difficult."

"But—how could he have found out all these things?" gasped Dorothy. "How could he know?"

"He has guessed very shrewdly, and he has doubtless pumped your stepbrother of all that he happened to know."

"What shall we do?" she repeated hopelessly. "We can't prove anything—just now—and what will happen when the will comes up for probate?"

"I'll land him in prison, if he doesn't pull out of it now," said Garrison, angered as much by Theodore's diabolical cleverness as he was by this premature publicity given to the story. "He has carried it all with a mighty high hand, assured of our fear to take the business into court. He has stirred up a fight that I don't propose to lose!—a fight that has roused all the red-hot Crusader of my being!"

"But—what shall we do? All the newspaper people will be digging at the case and doing their best to hunt up everyone concerned!"

"No reporters can be seen. If the fact leaks out that you are here, through anyone connected with the house, you must move at once, and change your name, letting no one but me know where you are."

She looked at him blankly. "Alone? Can't you help me, Jerold?"

"It is more important for me to hasten up country now than it was before," he answered. "I must work night and day to clear things up about the murder."

"But—if Foster should really be guilty?"

"He'll be obliged to take his medicine—otherwise suspicion might possibly rest upon you."

"Good Heavens!"

She was very pale.

"This story in the *Star* has precipitated everything," he added. "Already it contains a hint that you and your 'husband' are the ones who benefit most by the possible murder of John Hardy."

She sank on a chair and looked at him helplessly.

"I suppose you'll have to go—but I don't know what I shall do without you. How long do you think you'll be away?"

"It is quite impossible to say. I shall return as soon as circumstances permit. I'll write whenever I can."

"I shall need some things from the house," she said. "I have absolutely nothing here."

"Buy what you need, and remain indoors as much as you can," he instructed. "Reporters will be sure to haunt the house in Ninety-third Street, hoping to see us return."

"It's horrible!" said Dorothy. "It almost makes me wish I had never heard of any will!"

Garrison looked at her with frank adoration in his eyes.

"Whatever the outcome, I shall always be glad," he said—"glad of the day you needed—needed assistance—glad of the chance it has given me to prove my—prove my—friendship."

"I'll try to be worthy of your courage," she answered, returning his look with an answering glance in which the love-light could only at best be a trifle modified. "But—I don't see how it will end."

"About this marriage certificate——" he started, when the door-bell rang interruptingly.

In fear of being overheard by the landlady, already attending a caller, Garrison halted, to wait. A moment later the door was opened by the lady of the house herself, and a freshly-groomed, smooth-shaven young man was ushered in. The room was the only one in the house for this semi-public use.

"Excuse me," said the landlady sweetly. "Someone to see Miss Ellis."

The visitor bowed very slightly to Dorothy and Garrison, and stood somewhat awkwardly near the door, with his hat in his hand. The landlady, having made her excuses for such an intrusion, disappeared to summon Miss Ellis.

Garrison was annoyed. There was nothing to do but to stand there in embarrassing silence. Then Miss Ellis came shyly in at the door, dressed so becomingly that it seemed not at all unlikely she had hoped for the evening's visitor.

"Oh, Mr. Hunter, this is a very pleasant surprise!" she said. "Allow me to introduce my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax." She added to Garrison and Dorothy, "This is Mr. Hunter, of the New York *Star*."

Prepared to bow and let it go at that, Garrison started, ever so slightly, on learning the visitor's connection. Mr. Hunter, on his part, meeting strangers unexpectedly, appeared to be diffident and

quite conventional, but pricked up his ears, which were strung to catch the lightest whisper of news, at the mention of the Fairfax name.

"Not the Fairfax of the Hardy case?" he said, for the moment intent on nothing so moving as a possible service to his paper. "Of course you've seen——"

Garrison sat down on the copy of the *Star* which Dorothy had left in a chair. He deftly tucked it up beneath his coat.

"No, oh, no, certainly not," he said, and pulling out his watch, he added to Dorothy, "I shall have to be going. Put on your hat and come out for a two-minute walk."

Then, to the others:

"Sorry to have to run off in this uncomplimentary fashion, but I trust we shall meet again."

Hunter felt by instinct that this was the man of all men whom he ought, in all duty, to see. He could not insist upon his calling in such a situation, however, and Garrison and Dorothy, bowing as they passed, were presently out in the hall with the parlor door closed behind them. In half a minute more they were out upon the street.

"You'll be obliged to find other apartments at once," he said. "You'd better not even go back to pay the bill. I'll send the woman a couple of dollars and write that you made up your mind to go along home, after all."

"But—I wanted to ask a lot of questions—of Miss Ellis," said Dorothy, thereby revealing the reason she had wished to come here before. "I thought perhaps——"

"Questions about me?" interrupted Garrison, smiling upon her in the light of a street-lamp they were passing. "I can tell you far more about the subject than she could even guess—if we ever get the time."

Dorothy blushed as she tried to meet his gaze.

"Well—it wasn't that—exactly," she said. "I only thought—thought it might be interesting to know her."

"It's far more interesting to know where you will go," he answered. "Let me look at this paper for a minute."

He pulled forth the *Star*, turned to the classified ads, found the "Furnished Rooms," and cut out half a column with his knife.

"Let me go back where I was to-night," she suggested. "I am really too tired to hunt a place before to-morrow. I can slip upstairs and retire at once, and the first thing in the morning I can go to a place where Alice used to stay, with a very deaf woman who never remembers my name and always calls me Miss Root."

"Where is the place?" said Garrison, halting as Dorothy halted.

"In West Eighteenth Street." She gave him the number. "It will look so very queer if I leave like this," she added. "I'd rather not excite suspicion."

"All right," he replied, taking out a booklet and jotting down "Miss Root," and the address she had mentioned. "I'll write to you in the name the deaf woman remembers, or thinks she remembers, and no one need know who you are. If I hurry now I can catch the train that connects with the local on the Hartford division for Rockdale."

They turned and went back to the house.

"You don't know how long you'll be gone?" she said as they neared the steps. "You cannot tell in the least?"

"Long enough to do some good, I hope," he answered. "Meantime, don't see anybody. Don't answer any questions; and don't neglect to leave here early in the morning."

She was silent for a moment, and looked at him shyly.

"I shall feel a little bit lonely, I'm afraid," she confessed—"with none of my relatives, or friends. I hope you'll not be very long. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Garrison, who could not trust himself to approach the subject she had broached; and

with his mind reverting to the subject of his personal worry in the case, he added: "By the way, the loss of your wedding certificate can be readily repaired if you'll tell me the name of the preacher, or the justice of the peace——"

"I'd rather not—just at present," she interrupted, in immediate agitation. "Good-night—I'll have to go in."

She fled up the steps, found the door ajar, and pushing it open, stood framed by the light for a moment, as she turned to look back where he was standing.

Only for a moment did she hover there, however.

He could not see her face as she saw his.

He could not know that a light of love and a mute appeal for forgiveness lay together in the momentary glance bestowed upon him.

Then she closed the door; and as one in a dream he slowly walked away.

CHAPTER XXV

A DEARTH OF CLEWS

Garrison's ride on the train was a matter of several hours' duration. Not only did he read every line of the story in the *Star*, which he felt convinced had been furnished by young Robinson, but he likewise had time to reflect on all the phases, old and new, of the case in which he was involved.

But wander where they would, his thoughts invariably swung around the troubled circle to Dorothy and the topic was she married or not, and if she was,—where was the man?

He could not reach a decision.

Heretofore he had reasoned there could be no genuine Fairfax; to-night he entertained many doubts of his former deductions. He found it possible to construe Dorothy's actions both ways. She was afraid to have him search out the man who had written her wedding certificate, perhaps because it was a fraud, or perhaps because there *was* a Fairfax somewhere, concerning whom something must be hidden.

The murder mystery, the business of the will, even the vengeance he promised himself he would wreak on Theodore, sank into significance in the light of his personal worry. There was only one thing worth while, and that was love.

He was rapidly approaching a frame of mind in which no sacrifice would be too great to be made, could he only be certain of winning Dorothy, heart-free, for his own.

For more than an hour he sat thinking, in the car, oblivious to the flight of time, or to the towns through which he was passing. He gave it up at last and, taking from his pocket a book he employed for memoranda, studied certain items there, supplied by Dorothy, concerning her uncle and his ways of life. There were names of his friends and his enemies among the scribbled data, together with descriptive bits concerning Hardy's personality.

Marking down additional suggestions and otherwise planning his work to be done at Rockdale, Garrison reflected there was little apparent hope of clearing young Durgin of suspicion, unless one trifling hint should supply the clue. Dorothy had stated that her Uncle John had long had some particularly bitter and malicious enemy, a man unknown to herself, from whom she believed Mr. Hardy might have been fleeing, from time to time, in the trips which had become the habit of his life.

That this constant moving from place to place had been the bane of his existence was a theory that Dorothy had formed a year before. Yet, for all she knew, it might have been young Foster Durgin whom her uncle was trying to avoid!

The train connection for Rockdale was wretchedly timed. What with a long wait at the junction and a long delay at a way station farther out, it was nearly one o'clock when at length his destination was reached and Garrison, with his steel-trap suit-case in hand, found his way to a second-rate hotel, where,

to his great relief, the beds were far better than they looked.

He had taken the precaution to register as Henry Hilborn, realizing that Rockdale doubtless abounded in acquaintances of Hardy's who would probably read the published story of his will in their own local papers in the morning. He wrote at once to Dorothy, under the name of Miss Root, apprising her of his altered name and his address.

In the morning he was early at his work. Representing himself as nothing more than the agent of the New York Insurance Company, for which he was, in fact, conducting his various investigations, at least in part, he rapidly searched out one after another of the persons whose names Dorothy had supplied, but all to little purpose.

He found the town very much alive indeed to the news which the *Star* had blazoned to the world. Hardy had been a well-known figure, off and on, for many years in Rockdale, and the names of the Durgins and of Dorothy were barely less familiar.

Garrison's difficulty was not that the people talked too little, but rather that they talked too much, and said almost nothing in the process. New trivialities were exceedingly abundant.

He worked all day with no results of consequence. The persons whose names had been supplied by Dorothy had, in turn, furnished more names by the dozen, alleging that this man or that knew John Hardy better than the proverbial brother, if possible; nevertheless, one after another, they revealed their ignorance of any vital facts that Garrison could use.

On the following day he learned that Paul Durgin, the nephew credited with having claimed the body of the murdered man, lived ten miles out on a farm, amassing a fortune rearing ducks.

Hiring a team, Garrison drove to Durgin's farm. He found his man in the center of a vast expanse of duck-pens, where ducks by the thousand, all singularly white and waterless, were greeting their master with acclaim.

Durgin came out of the duck midst to see his visitor. He was a large, taciturn being, healthy, strong, independent, a trifle suspicious and more than a trifle indifferent as to the final disposal of John Hardy's fortune.

Garrison, at first, found him hard to handle. He had not yet read the papers. He knew nothing at all of what was being said; and now that he heard it at last, from Garrison's lips, he scarcely did more than nod his head.

Garrison was annoyed. He determined on awakening the duck-stupored being, unless the task should prove hopeless.

"Mr. Durgin," he said, "the reasons for supposing that Hardy was murdered—poisoned—are far more convincing than anyone really supposes—and suspicion points particularly at a person in whom you may and may not be interested—your younger brother, Foster Durgin."

A curious white appearance crept all about the smooth-shaven mouth of the duck man. He was not in the least an emotionless clod; he was not even cold or indifferent, but silent, slow at giving expression to anything but excellent business capabilities.

He looked at Garrison steadily, but with dumb appeal in his eyes. The blow had gone home with a force that made Garrison sorry.

"How could that be?" the man inquired, "even with Foster wild?"

"He may not be guilty—it's my business to discover who is," said Garrison, with ready sympathy. "It looks as if he had a motive. With his knowledge of photography and his dabbling in the art, he has almost certainly handled poison—the particular poison used to destroy John Hardy's life. He was there in Hickwood at the time of the crime. He has gambled in Wall Street, and lost, and now has disappeared. You can see I need your help to clear the case."

CHAPTER XXVI

Durgin sat down on a box, picked up a sliver of wood and began to chew it slowly. He was not a man of rapid thoughts; and he was stunned.

"How did you find out all these things?" he said.

"From Dorothy, partially, and in part from my own investigations."

"Dorothy didn't go back on the boy like that?" The man was hurt by the thought.

"Not at all. She tried to shield him. I came to Rockdale on her account, to try to discover if there is anyone else who might have had a motive for the crime."

Durgin pulled the sliver of wood to shreds with his teeth.

"I don't think Foster would have done it," he said, concealing the pain in his breast. "He's been wild. I've lost all patience with his ways of livin', but Uncle John was never afraid of Foster, though he was of Hiram Cleave."

"What's that?" said Garrison, instantly, alive to a possible factor in the case. "Do you mean there was a man Mr. Hardy was afraid of—Hiram what?"

"He never wanted me to tell of that," said Durgin in his heavy manner. "He wasn't a coward; he said so, and I know it's true, but he had a fear of Cleave."

"Now that's just exactly what I've got to know!" said Garrison. "Man alive, if you wish to help me clear your brother, you've got to give me all the facts you can think of concerning Mr. Hardy, his enemies, and everything else in the case! What sort of a man is this Cleave?"

"A short, middle-aged man," drawled Durgin deliberately. "I never saw him but once."

"What was the cause of enmity between him and Hardy, do you know?"

"No, I don't. It went far back—a woman, I guess. But I hope you won't ever say I told that it was. I promised I wouldn't, and I never did till now."

The big fellow looked at Garrison with honest anxiety in his eyes.

"It's not my business to tell things," Garrison assured him. "This is a matter perhaps of life and death for your brother. Do you think Mr. Hardy feared this man Cleave would take his life?"

"He did, yes."

"Was it ever attempted before?"

Durgin looked at him oddly.

"I think so, but I couldn't be sure."

"You mean, Mr. Hardy told you a little about it, but, perhaps, not all?"

"How did you know that?" Durgin asked, mystified by Garrison's swiftness of thinking.

"I don't know anything. I'm trying to find out. How much did Hardy tell you of a former attempt on his life?"

"He didn't really tell it. He sort of let it out a little, and wouldn't say anything more."

"But you knew it was this man Cleave?"

"Yes, he was the one."

Garrison questioned eagerly: "Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"When was it that you saw the man?"

"A year ago."

"Where?"

"In the village—Rockdale," answered Durgin.

"Mr. Hardy pointed him out?"

"Yes, but how did you——"

"What was the color of his hair?" Garrison interrupted.

"He had his hat on. I didn't see his hair."

"What did your uncle say at the time?"

"Nothing much, just 'that's the man'—that's all," said the duck man. "And he went away that night—I guess because Cleave turned around and saw us in the store."

"All right," said Garrison. "Where's your brother now?"

"I don't know. We don't get on."

"Do you think he knew anything about Mr. Hardy's will?"

Durgin answered with a query: "Which one?"

"Why, the only one, I suppose," said Garrison. "What do you mean?"

"Well, there must have been more than one," drawled the duck man with exasperating slowness. "Foster was down in the first, but that was burned. I don't think he ever saw the others, but he knew he wasn't a favorite any more."

"What about yourself?" asked Garrison.

"I asked Uncle John to leave me out. I've got enough," was the answer. "We're no blood kin to the Hardys. I know I wasn't in the last."

"The last?" repeated Garrison. "You mean the last will of Mr. Hardy—the one in favor of Dorothy, in case she should be married?"

Durgin studied his distant ducks for a moment.

"No, I don't think that was the last. I'm sure that will wasn't the last."

Garrison stared at him fixedly.

"You're sure it wasn't the last?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Uncle John sent a letter and said he'd made a brand-new will," answered Durgin in his steady way of certainty. "I burned up the letter only yesterday, clearing up my papers."

"You don't mean quite recently?" insisted Garrison.

"Since Dorothy got married," answered Durgin, at a loss to understand Garrison's interest. "Why?"

"This could make all the difference in the world to the case," Garrison told him. "Did he say what he'd done with this new document?"

"Just that he'd made a new will."

"Who helped him? Who was the lawyer? Who were the witnesses?"

"He didn't say."

Garrison felt everything disarranged. And Durgin's ignorance was baffling. He went at him aggressively.

"Where was your uncle when he wrote the letter?"

"He was up to Albany."

Albany! There were thousands of lawyers and tens of thousands of men who would do as witnesses in Albany!

"But," insisted Garrison, "perhaps he told you where it was deposited or who had drawn it up, or you may know his lawyer in Albany."

"No. He just mentioned it, that's all," said Durgin. "The letter was most about ducks."

"This is too bad," Garrison declared. "Have you any idea in the world where the will may be?"

"No, I haven't."

"You found nothing of it, or anything to give you a hint, when you claimed the body for burial, and examined his possessions in Hickwood?"

"No."

"Where was Dorothy then?"

"I don't know. She's always looked after Foster more than me, he being the weak one and most in need."

Desperate for more information. Garrison probed in every conceivable direction, but elicited nothing further of importance, save that an old-time friend of Hardy's, one Israel Snow, a resident of Rockdale, might perhaps be enabled to assist him.

Taking leave of Durgin, who offered his hand and expressed a deep-lying hope that something could be done to clear all suspicion from his brother, Garrison returned to Rockdale.

The news of a will made recently, a will concerning which Dorothy knew nothing,—this was so utterly disconcerting that it quite overshadowed, for a time, the equally important factor in the case supplied by Durgin's tale concerning this unknown Hiram Cleave.

Where the clews pointed now it was utterly impossible to know. If the fact should transpire that Dorothy did, in fact, know something of the new will made by her uncle, or if Foster knew, and no such will should ever be produced, the aspect of the case would be dark indeed.

Not at all convinced that Theodore Robinson might not yet be found at the bottom of the mystery, Garrison wondered where the fellow had gone and what his departure might signify.

Israel Snow was out of town. He would not return till the morrow. Garrison's third night was passed in the little hotel, and no word had come from Dorothy. He had written four letters to the Eighteenth Street address. He was worried by her silence.

On the following day Mr. Snow returned. He proved to be a stooped old man, but he supplied a number of important facts.

In the first place he stated that Hiram Cleave had long since assumed another name which no one in Rockdale knew. No one was acquainted with his business or his whereabouts. The reason of the enmity between him and John Hardy went deep enough to satisfy the most exacting mind.

Cleave, Hardy, and Scott, the inventor, had been boys together, and, in young manhood, chums. Hardy had fallen in love with Scott's sister, while he was still a young, romantic man. Cleave, developing an utterly malicious and unscrupulous nature, had deceived his friend Hardy, tried to despoil Miss Scott's very life, thereby ultimately causing her death, and Hardy had intervened only in time to save her from utter shame and ruin.

Then, having discovered Cleave guilty of a forgery, he had spared no effort or expense till he landed the creature in prison out in Indiana. Cleave had threatened his life at the time. He had long since been liberated. His malicious resentment had never been abated, and for the past two or three years, with Miss Scott a sad, sweet memory only, John Hardy had lived a lonely life, constantly moving to avoid his enemy.

A friend of another friend of a third friend of Snow's, who might have moved away, had once had a photograph of Cleave. Old Snow promised to procure it if possible and deliver it over to Garrison, who made eager offers to go and try to get it for himself, but without avail. He promised to wait for the picture, and returned at last to his hotel.

A telegram was waiting for him at the desk. He almost knew what he should find on reading it. The message read:

Please return at once. JERALDINE.

He paid off his bill, and posting a note to Israel Snow, giving an address, "Care of J. Garrison," in the New York building where he had his office, he caught the first train going down and arrived in Manhattan at three.

CHAPTER XXVII

LIKE A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

Delaying only long enough to deposit his suit-case at his lodgings, and neglecting the luncheon which he felt he could relish, Garrison posted off to Eighteenth Street with all possible haste.

The house he found at the number supplied by Dorothy was an old-time residence, with sky-scrapers looming about it. A pale woman met him at the door.

"Miss Root—is Miss Root in, please?" he said. "I'd like to see her."

"There's no such person here," said the woman.

"She's gone—she's given up her apartment?" said Garrison, at a loss to know what this could mean. "She went to-day? Where is she now?"

"She's never been here," informed the landlady. "A number of letters came here, addressed in her name, and I took them in, as people often have mail sent like that when they expect to visit the city, but she sent around a messenger and got them this morning."

Thoroughly disconcerted by this intelligence, Garrison could only ask if the woman knew whence the messenger had come—the address to which he had taken the letters. The woman did not know.

There was nothing to do but to hasten to the house near Washington Square. Garrison lost no time in speeding down Fifth Avenue.

He came to the door just in time to meet Miss Ellis, dressed to go out.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Fairfax?" she said. "Mrs. Fairfax asked me to tell you, if you came before I went, that she'd meet you at your office. I felt so sorry when she was ill."

"I didn't know she'd been ill," said Garrison. "I was afraid of something like that when she failed to write."

"Oh, yes, she was ill in the morning, the very day after you left," imparted Miss Ellis.

"I know you'll excuse me," interrupted Garrison. "I'll hurry along, and hope to see you again."

He was off so abruptly that Miss Ellis was left there gasping on the steps.

Ten minutes later he was stepping from the elevator and striding down the office-building hall.

Dorothy was not yet in the corridor. He opened the office, beheld a number of notes and letters on the floor, and was taking them up when Dorothy came in, breathless, her eyes ablaze with excitement.

"Jerold!" she started. "Please lock the door and——" when she was interrupted by the entrance of a man.

Dorothy gave a little cry and fled behind the desk.

Garrison faced the intruder, a tall, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed man with a long mustache—a person with every mark of the gentleman upon him.

"Well, sir," said Garrison, in some indignation, "what can I do for you?"

"We'll wait a minute and see," said the stranger. "My name is Jerold Fairfax, and I came to claim my wife."

Garrison almost staggered. It was like a bolt from the bluest sky, where naught but the sun of glory had been visible.

"Dorothy! What does he mean?" he said, turning at once to the girl.

She sank weakly to a chair and could not meet the question in his eyes.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" demanded the visitor. "This is my wife and I'd like to know what it means, you or somebody else passing yourself off in my place!"

Garrison still looked at Dorothy.

"This isn't true, what the man is saying?" he inquired.

She tried to look up. "I—I— Forgive me, please," she said. "He's—He followed me here——"

"Certainly I followed," interrupted the stranger. "Why wouldn't I follow my wife? What does this mean, all this stuff they've been printing in the papers about some man passing as your husband?" He snatched out a newspaper abruptly, and waved it in the air.

"And if you're the man," he added, turning to Garrison, "I'll inform you right now——"

"That will do for you," Garrison interrupted. "This lady has come to my office on a matter of business. My services to her have nothing to do with you or any of your claims. And let me impress upon you the fact that her affairs with me are private in character, and that you are here uninvited."

"The devil I am!" answered Fairfax, practically as cool as Garrison himself. "I'll inform you that a man needs no invitation from a stranger, lawyer, detective, or otherwise, to seek the presence of his wife. And now that I've found her I demand that she come along with me!"

Dorothy started to her feet and fled behind Garrison.

"Please don't let him stay!" she said. "Don't let him touch me, please!"

Garrison faced the intruder calmly.

"I permit no one to issue orders in this office, either to me or my clients," he said. "Unless you are a far better man than I, you will do nothing to compel this lady to depart until she wishes to do so. You will oblige me by leaving my office."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" answered Fairfax. "Your bluff sounds big, but I'm here to call it, understand? Dorothy, I command you to come."

"I will not go with such a man as you!" she cried in a sudden burst of anger. "You left me shamefully, half an hour after we were married! You've been no husband to me! You have only come back because you heard there might be money! I never wish to see you again!"

"Well, you're going to hear from me, now!" said Fairfax. "As for you, Mr. Garrison, assuming my name and——"

He was making a movement toward his pocket, throwing back his coat.

"Drop that!" interrupted Garrison. He had drawn his revolver with a quickness that was startling. "Up with your hand!"

Fairfax halted his impulse. His hand hung oscillating at the edge of his coat. A ghastly pallor overspread his face. His eyes took on a look of supernatural brightness. His mouth dropped open. He crouched a trifle forward, staring fixedly at the table. His hand had fallen at his side. He began to whisper:

"His brains are scattered everywhere, I see them—see them—everywhere—everywhere!" His hand came up before his eyes, the fingers spread like talons. He cried out brokenly, and, turning abruptly, hastened through the door, and they heard him running down the hall.

Dorothy had turned very white. She looked at Garrison almost wildly.

"That's exactly what he said before," she said, "when he pushed me from the train and ran away."

"What does it mean?" said Garrison, tense with emotion. "What have you done to me, Dorothy? He isn't your husband, after all?"

Dorothy sank once more in the chair. She looked at Garrison appealingly.

"I married him," she moaned. "He's crazy!"

Garrison, too, sat down. His pistol he dropped in his pocket.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I was afraid," she confessed. "I thought you wouldn't consent to be—to be—what you have been."

"Of course I wouldn't," Garrison responded. "What have I got myself into? Why did you do it?"

"I had to," she answered weakly. "Please don't scold me now—even if you have to desert me." Her voice broke in one convulsive sob, but she mastered herself sharply. "I'll go," she added, struggling to her feet. "I didn't mean to get you into all this——"

"Dorothy, sit down," he interrupted, rising instantly and placing his hand on her shoulder. "I didn't mean it—didn't mean what I said. I shan't desert you. I love you—I love you, Dorothy!"

She turned one hurt look upon him, then sank on the desk to cover her face.

"Oh, don't, don't, don't!" she said. "You haven't any right——"

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "I didn't intend to let you know. I didn't intend to use my position for anything like that. Forgive me—forget what I said—and let me serve you as I have before, with no thought of anything but—earning the money, my fee."

He turned away, striking his fist in his palm, and went across to the window.

For nearly five minutes neither spoke. Dorothy, torn by emotions too great to be longer restrained, had controlled her sobs almost immediately, but she had not dared to raise her eyes. She sat up at last, and with gaze averted from the figure against the square of light, composed herself as best she might.

"What is there we can do?" she said at last. "If you wish to be released from your—your position——"

"We won't talk of that," he interrupted, still looking out on the roofs below. "I'm in this to stay—till you dismiss me and bid me forget it—forget it and you—forever. But I need your help."

"I have made it very hard, I know," she said. "If I've acted deceitfully, it was the only way I thought I could do."

"Please tell me about this man Fairfax," he requested, keeping his back toward her as before. "You married him, where?"

"At Rockbeach, Massachusetts."

She was businesslike again.

"To satisfy the condition in your uncle's will?"

"No," the confession came slowly, but she made it with courage. "I had known him for quite a long time. He had—he had courted me a year. He was always a gentleman, cultured, refined, and fascinating in many ways. I thought I was in—I thought I was fond of him, very. He was brilliant—and romantic—and possessed of many qualities that appealed to me strongly. I'm quite sure now he exercised some spell upon me—but he was kind—and I believed him—that's all."

"Who married you?"

"A justice of the peace."

"Why not a minister?"

"Mr. Fairfax preferred the justice."

Garrison remained by the window stubbornly.

"You said the man is crazy. What did you mean?"

"Didn't you see?" she answered. "That light in his eyes is insanity. I thought it a soul-light shining through, though it worried me often, I admit. We were married at two in the afternoon and went at once to the station to wait there for the train. He bought the tickets and talked in his brilliant way until the train arrived. It only stopped for a moment.

"He put me on, then a spell came over him suddenly, I don't know what, and he pushed me off the

steps, just as the train was moving out—and said the very thing you heard him say in here—and rode away and left me there, deserted."

She told it all in a dry-voiced way that cost her an effort, as Garrison felt and comprehended. He had turned about, in sheer sympathy for her predicament.

"What happened then?"

"I saw in a paper, two days later, he had been detained in a town in Ohio as being mentally unbalanced. In the meantime I had written to my Uncle John, while we were waiting at the station, telling him briefly I was married and to whom. The note was posted not five minutes before a postman came along and took up the letters in the box. I couldn't have stopped it had I wished to, and it never occurred to my mind to stop it, anyway."

"What did your uncle reply?"

"He wrote at once that he was thoroughly pleased. He had long hoped I might marry someone other than Theodore. He confessed that his will contained a clause to the effect that I should inherit no more than five thousand dollars, should I not have been married at least one month prior to his death, to a healthy, respectable man who was not my cousin.

"I dared not write that I had been deserted, or that Mr. Fairfax might be insane. I couldn't tell what to do. I hardly knew what to expect, or what I was, or anything. I could only pretend I was off on my honeymoon—and wait. Then came uncle's sudden death, and my lawyer sent me word about the will, asking when he should file it for probate. Then—then I knew I had to have a *sane* husband."

"And the will is not yet filed?"

"Not yet. And fortunately Mr. Trowbridge has had to be away."

Garrison pursued the topic of the will for purposes made necessary by his recent discoveries concerning a new one.

"Mr. Trowbridge had your uncle's testament in his keeping?"

Dorothy shook her head. "No. I believe he conferred with uncle's lawyer, just after his death, and read it there."

"Where did your uncle's lawyer live?"

"In Albany."

"Do you know his name?"

"I think it is Spikeman. Why?"

Garrison was looking at her again with professional coldness, despite the fact that his heart was fairly burning in his breast.

"Because," he said, "I learned from your stepbrother, Paul Durgin, near Rockdale, that your uncle made a later will, and we've got to get trace of the document before you can know where you stand."

Dorothy looked at him with her great brown eyes as startled as a deer's.

"Another will!" she said. "I may have lost everything, after all! What in the world would become of Foster then—and Alice?"

"And yourself?" added Garrison.

"Oh, it doesn't make the least difference about me," she answered in her bravery—bravery that made poor Garrison love her even more than before, "but they all depend so much upon me! Tell me, please, what did you find out about Foster?"

"Not a great deal," Garrison confessed. "This new will business was my most important discovery. Nevertheless, I confirmed your story of a man whom your uncle greatly feared. His name, it seems, is Hiram Cleave."

"That's the name! That's the man!" cried Dorothy. "I remember now! He once pinched my face till I cried."

"You have seen him, then? What sort of a looking being is he?"

"I don't remember much—only the horrid grin upon his face. I was only a child—and that impressed me. You didn't hear anything of Foster?"

"Not of his whereabouts—quite a bit concerning his character, none of it particularly flattering."

"I don't know where in the world he can be," said Dorothy. "Poor Alice! What are we going to do now, with all these new complications?"

"Do the best we can," said Garrison. "Aside from the will, and my work on the murder of your uncle, a great deal depends upon yourself, and your desires."

Dorothy looked at him in silence for a moment. A slight flush came to her face.

She said: "In what respect?"

Garrison had no intention of mincing matters now. He assumed a hardness of aspect wholly incompatible with his feelings.

"In respect to Mr. Fairfax," he answered. "He will doubtless return—dog your footsteps—make himself known to the Robinsons, and otherwise keep us entertained."

She met his gaze as a child might have done.

"What can I do? I've depended so much upon you. I don't like to ask too much—after this—or ever— You've been more than kind. I didn't mean to be so helpless—or to wound your feelings, or—"

A knock at the door interrupted, and Tuttle entered the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HELPLESS SITUATION

Confused thus to find himself in the presence of Dorothy as well as Garrison, Tuttle snatched off his hat and looked about him helplessly.

"How are you, Tuttle?" said Garrison. "Glad to see you. Come back in fifteen minutes, will you? I want your report."

"Fifteen minutes; yes, sir," said Tuttle, and he backed from the place.

"Who was that?" said Dorothy. "Anyone connected with the case?"

"A man that Theodore hired to shadow me," said Garrison. "I took him into camp and now he is shadowing Theodore. Let me ask you one or two questions before he returns. You were ill the morning after I left, and did not go at all to Eighteenth Street."

"I couldn't go," she said. "I tried not to give up and be so ill, but perhaps the effects of the drug that the Robinsons employed caused the trouble. At last I thought you might have written to the Eighteenth Street address, so I sent around and got your letters, before I could even send a wire."

"You wired because Fairfax had appeared?"

"Yes, I thought you ought to know."

"How did you know he was here in New York? Did he call at the house where you were staying?"

"No. He sent a note declaring he would call. That was this morning. Miss Ellis's friend, of the *Star*, had an intuition as to who we were, that evening when he called. When I finally requested Miss Ellis to ask him not to print more stories about us, he had already spoken to the editor, and more of the matter had appeared. Since you left, however, I haven't seen a single reporter."

"Fairfax got his clew to your whereabouts from the press, of course. The question now is, where do you wish to go? And what do you wish me to do—concerning the rôle I have filled?"

Dorothy was thoroughly disturbed by the topic.

"Oh, I don't know what to do," she confessed. "I wish I could never see that man again! What do you advise?"

"We hardly know what the situation may require, till we discover more about this latest will," said Garrison. "Things may be altered materially. If you wish it, you can doubtless manage to secure a separation from Fairfax. In the meantime I would strongly advise that you rent an apartment without delay, where no one can find you again."

She looked at him wistfully. "Not even you?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to see me, once in a while," he told her, suppressing the passionate outcry of his heart, "unless you wish to secure the services of someone who will make no mistakes."

She was hurt. She loved him. Her nature cried out for the sure protection of his arms, but her womanhood forbade. More than anything else in the world she wished to please him, but not by confessing her fondness.

However much she might loathe the thought, she was the wife of Jerold Fairfax, with everything precious to guard. By the token of the wound that Garrison had inflicted, she knew that she had wounded him. It could not have been avoided—there was nothing but a chasm between them.

"Please do not make me feel that I have been utterly despicable," she pleaded. "You have made no mistakes—in the conduct of the case. I should be so helpless without you."

Garrison knew he had hurt her. He was sorry. He knew her position was the only one possible for a woman such as he could love. He reviled himself for his selfishness. He forced himself now to return her gaze with no hint of anything save business in his eyes.

"Dorothy, I shall be honored to continue with your work," he said. "I mean to see you through."

"Thank you—Jerold," she said. Her voice all but broke. She had never loved him so much as now, and because of that had given herself the one little joy of calling him thus by his name. She added more bravely: "I'll find a room and send you the address as soon as possible. Meantime, I hope we will soon discover about this latest will."

"I shall do my best," he assured her. "Let me take you now to the annex elevator, in case anyone should be waiting to see you at the other. Get yourself a heavy veil, and be sure you avoid being followed when you hunt up your room. Take the apartment in the name of Miss Root, and send me word in that name also, just for precaution. Leave Fairfax and the others to me. I may go up to Albany about the will."

He opened the door, but she hesitated a moment longer.

"I hope it will all end somehow, for the best," she said. "It's very hard for you."

He smiled, but not mirthfully.

"It was here in this room I assumed my rôle," he said, "and here I drop it."

For a moment she failed to understand.

"Drop it?" she echoed. "How?"

"I'm no longer even your pseudo-husband. I drop the name Fairfax, with all it might imply."

She blushed crimson and could not meet his gaze.

"I'm sorry if I've been the cause——" she started.

Garrison interrupted.

"I'm glad—glad of everything that's happened. We'll say no more of that. But—Theodore—how he will gloat over this!"

"If he finds out Mr. Fairfax is crazy, he could overthrow the will," suggested Dorothy. "But—what's the use of thinking of that, if a new will comes to light? It's a dreadfully mixed affair." She stepped out in the hall and Garrison led the way to the elevator farther to the rear. The chains of a car were descending rapidly.

"Please try not to detest the hour I came to see you first," she said, holding out her hand, "if you can."

"I'll try," said Garrison, holding the precious little fingers for a second over the conventional time.

Glancing up at him quickly she saw a bright smile in his eye. Joy was in her heart. The car was at the floor.

"Good-by," she said, "till we meet again—soon."

"Good-by," he answered.

She stepped in the cage and was dropped from his sight, but her last glance remained—and made him happy.

CHAPTER XXIX

NIGHT-WALKERS

Tuttle had returned by the time Garrison came once more to his office. He entered the room behind his chief, and Garrison closed the door.

"Well?" said Jerold, "any news?"

"I got a line on young Robinson," answered Tuttle. "He's gone to a small resort named Rockbeach, up on the coast of Massachusetts, but his father doesn't know his business, or if he does he denies it."

"Rockbeach?" said Garrison, who realized at once that Theodore had gone there to search out the justice of the peace who had married Dorothy and Fairfax. "Is he up there still?"

"He hadn't come home this morning."

What so long an absence on Theodore's part might signify was a matter purely of conjecture. There was nothing more to be done but await developments. Whatever young Robinson's scheme, it might be wholly disorganized by the latest will that John Hardy had drawn.

"What about the two dagos—the fellows who attacked me in the park?" inquired Garrison. "Have you found out anything concerning them?"

Tuttle replied with a question. "Haven't you seen it in the papers?"

"Seen what?"

"Why, the bomb explosion and the rest of it—all Black Hand business last night," answered Tuttle. "One of our pair was killed outright, and the other one's dying, from a premature explosion of one of their gas-pipe cartridges. They attempted to blow up a boiler, under a tenement belonging to a man they'd tried to bleed, and it got 'em both."

He took from his pocket a two-column clipping from a morning newspaper, and placed it on the desk.

"Out of my hands, then; no chance to help send them up," commented Garrison reflectively, as he glanced through the article. "I'll keep this, if you don't mind," he added. "It may be useful with Robinson—in helping to warm up his blood."

"I tried to carry out instructions," said Tuttle, "but I couldn't find out where they were till this came out in print. I hope there's something else I can do."

Garrison thought for a moment.

"How many times have you been here to report?"

"Two or three times every day."

"Have you noticed a tall, light-haired man, with a long mustache, around here at all, either to-day or yesterday?"

"If he's got blue eyes and wears a brown striped suit, he was here this morning and asked me where

he could find you," Tuttle answered. "Is that your man?"

"The same. His name is Fairfax. He's the real Fairfax. He'll be likely to return. Until Robinson appears again, you can keep your eye on this office, spot Fairfax, and then keep him shadowed for a time. Find where he lives, where he goes, and what he does."

"Anything more?"

"Keep track of old man Robinson, and let me know as soon as Theodore returns."

Tuttle rose as if to go. He hesitated, turning his hat in his hands.

"Would it be asking too much if I suggested I need a little money?" he inquired. "The Robinsons pay with hot air."

"I can let you have twenty-five," said Garrison, pulling out his rapidly diminishing roll. "That do?"

"Fine," said Tuttle, receiving the bills. "When shall I——"

A messenger boy came plunging in at the door without the slightest formality.

"Telegram for Garrison," he said. "Sign here."

"Wait half a minute, Tuttle," said Garrison, tearing open the envelope, as the boy was departing, and he read the wire almost at a glance.

It was dated from Branchville.

Come up here as soon as possible. Important.

JAMES PIKE.

For a moment Garrison failed to remember the personality of James Pike. Then it came with a flash—the coroner! Aware at once that the tale of possible murder in the Hardy case had been spread and discussed all over the State, he realized that Pike, and others who had been concerned when John Hardy's body was found in their jurisdiction, might have come upon new material.

"Nothing to add to instructions," he said to Tuttle. "I shall be out of town to-night, and perhaps a part of to-morrow."

Tuttle took his leave. Garrison paced up and down the office floor for half an hour. He was very much in hopes that word might come from Dorothy as to where she had chosen a room. The afternoon was gone, and he was famished.

He left at last, went to a restaurant, ate a hearty meal, and returned to the office rather late. On the floor lay a notification of a special delivery letter, to be had at the nearest substation.

He was there in the shortest possible time.

The letter was from Dorothy. It began "Dear Jerold," but it merely informed him she had found apartments on Madison Avenue, not far from Twenty-ninth Street.

He wrote her a note to acquaint her with the fact that new developments called him at once to Branchville, whence he might continue to Albany, and this, with a dozen magnificent roses, he sent by special messenger to Miss Jeraldine Root.

He was still enabled to catch a fairly early train from Grand Central Station.

A little after eight o'clock he arrived in Branchville, found James Pike's real-estate office ablaze with light, and walked in on that busy gentleman, who rose in excitement to grasp him by the hand.

"You got my wire?" demanded Mr. Pike. "I'm awful glad you came. I turned up something in the Hardy case that I think you ought to know. Got a man coming 'round here in fifteen minutes who read up on the murder suspicions and the rest of it, and he saw a stranger, down in Hickwood the night of Hardy's death, get into Hardy's room at Mrs. Wilson's. It just struck me you ought to know, and so I wired."

"Thank you very much," said Garrison. "I consider this highly important. Who is your man?"

"He ain't a man, he's a boy; young Will Barnes," amended the coroner. "Most people think he's just a lazy, no-account young feller, but I've always said he was growin'. Goes fishin' a good deal, of course, but— There he goes, now!" He ran to the door, through the glass of which he had seen a tall, lanky youth across the way.

"Hi, Will!" he yelled, "come over, the New York man is waiting!"

Young Barnes came slowly across the highway.

"I've got to git some hooks," he said. "If I don't get 'em now the store'll close."

"This is more important than hooks," answered Pike. "Come in here. Mr. Garrison, this is Mr. Barnes. Will, Mr. Garrison, the New York detective."

Quite unimpressed by Garrison's personality or calling, Will advanced and shook his hand.

Garrison looked him over quickly.

"You're the man who saw a stranger going into Hardy's room, at Mrs. Wilson's, the night that Hardy died, I believe?" he said. "How did you happen to be there?"

"He lives right near," volunteered Mr. Pike.

"I was gettin' night-walkers," said Will.

"Night-walkers?" repeated Garrison. "People?"

"Fishin' worms," supplied Mr. Pike. "Angleworms walk at night and Will gits 'em for bait. Goes out with a dark lantern and picks 'em up."

"I see," said Garrison. "What sort of a looking person was the man who got into Mrs. Wilson's house?"

"A little shaver, that's all I could see," said the youthful angler.

The description tallied closely with all that Garrison had heard before of Hiram Cleave, or Foster Durgin.

"Very good," he said. "Did you see what he did in the room?"

"Didn't do nuthin' but steal a couple of cigars," informed the disciple of Walton. "He wasn't there more'n about a minute."

"But he *did* steal a couple of cigars?" echoed Garrison, keenly alert to the vital significance of this new evidence. "Did he take them from the table?"

"Nope. Took 'em out of a box."

"Then came out by the window and departed?"

"Yep, he sneaked."

"Why didn't you tell anyone of this before?"

"Nobody asked me."

"And he ain't got no use for Mrs. Wilson, nor she for him," supplemented the coroner. "But I thought you ought to know."

"Would you know the man again if you should see him?" Garrison inquired.

"Sure."

"Do you know where he went when he left the house, or yard? Did you follow him at all?"

"No, the night-walkers was too thick."

Garrison knew the lay of the yard at Mrs. Wilson's. He knew the room. There was no particular reason for visiting the scene again. There was nothing, in fact, to do at all except to visit the dealer in New York who had sold the cigars to Dorothy, and hope for news of Foster Durgin or the speedy arrival of the photograph of Cleave, which the old man in Rockdale had promised. He asked one more question.

"Was he young or old?"

"Don't know," said Will, grinning. "He didn't say."

Garrison rose to go.

"This is all of the utmost importance. I may be obliged to have you come down to New York—if I can find the man. But when you come it will be at my expense."

"The fishin's awful good right now," objected Will. "I don't know about New York."

"You can pick yourself out a five-dollar rod," added Garrison. "I'll wire you when to come."

Garrison left for Albany at once. He found himself obliged to take a roundabout course which brought him there late in the night.

In the morning he succeeded in running down a John W. Spikeman, who had served as Hardy's lawyer for many years.

The man was ill in bed, delirious, a condition which had lasted for several days. Naturally no word concerning the Hardy affair had come to his notice—hence his silence on the subject, a silence which Garrison had not heretofore understood.

He could not be seen, and to see him would have been of no avail, since his mind was temporarily deranged.

The utmost that Garrison could do was to go to the clerk at his office. This man, a very fleshy person, decidedly English and punctilious, was most reluctant to divulge what he was pleased to term the professional secrets of the office.

Under pressure of flattery and a clever cross-examination, he at length admitted that Mr. Hardy had drawn a will, within a week of his death, that Mr. Spikeman had declared it perfect, and that he and another had signed it as witnesses all in proper form. Concerning the contents of the document he was absolutely dumb. No amount of questioning, flattery, or persuasion would induce him to divulge so much as a word of what he had witnessed.

Garrison gave up with one more inquiry:

"Was the will deposited here in Mr. Spikeman's vault?"

"No, sir," said the clerk; "Mr. Hardy took it with him when he went."

Garrison's hopes abruptly wilted.

CHAPTER XXX

OVERTURES FROM THE ENEMY

Leaving Spikeman's office, Garrison walked aimlessly away, reflecting on the many complications so recently developed, together with the factors in the case, and all its possibilities. He was shutting from his mind, as far as possible, the thoughts of Fairfax, Dorothy's husband, whose coming he had feared by intuition from the first.

The actual appearance of a husband on the scene had come as a shock, despite his many warnings to himself. What could develop along that particular line was more than he cared to conjecture. He felt himself robbed, distracted, all but purposeless, yet knew he must still go on with Dorothy's affairs, though the other man reap the reward.

Forcing his mind to the Hardy affair, he found himself standing as one at the edge where things ought to be patent; nevertheless a fog was there, obscuring all in mystery.

Some man had entered Hardy's room and tampered with Dorothy's cigars. This did not necessarily absolve Charles Scott, the insurance beneficiary, from suspicion, yet was all in his favor. The Hiram Cleave was an unknown quantity. Unfortunately the general description of the man who had entered Hardy's room tallied closely with Dorothy's description of Foster Durgin, whom she herself suspected of

the crime. He had been in Hickwood, lurking near his uncle for several days. He had since run away and was apparently in hiding.

Intending to make an endeavor to seek out young Durgin and confront him with Barnes, who had seen the intruder in Hardy's room, and intending also to visit the dealer in tobacco from whom Dorothy had purchased her cigars, Garrison made his way to the railway station to return once more to New York.

The matter of finding Hardy's will was on his mind as a constant worry. It had not been found among his possessions or on his person. It could have been stolen from his room. If this should prove to be the case it would appear exceedingly unfavorable for Durgin. It was not at all unlikely that he might have been aware of something concerning the testament, while Hiram Cleave, if such a person existed, would have had no special interest in the document, one way or another.

Another possibility was that Hardy had hidden the will away, but this seemed rather unlikely.

Comfortably installed on a train at last, Garrison recalled his first deductions, made when he came upon the fact of the poisoned cigars. The person who had prepared the weeds must have known very many of Hardy's personal habits—that of taking the end cigar from a box, and of biting the point instead of cutting it off with his knife, for instance. These were things with which Foster, no doubt, would be well acquainted. And in photographic work he had handled the deadly poison employed for Hardy's death.

Again, as he had a hundred times before, Garrison accused himself of crass stupidity in permitting someone to abstract that cigar from his pocket. It might have been lost: this he knew, but he felt convinced it had been stolen. And since he was certain that Dorothy was not the one, he could think of no chance that a thief could have had to extract it without attracting his attention.

When at length he arrived once more in Manhattan, he proceeded at once to the shop on Amsterdam Avenue where Dorothy had purchased her cigars. Here he found a short individual in charge of a general business, including stationery, candy, newspapers, and toys, in addition to the articles for smokers.

Garrison pulled out his memorandum concerning that box of cigars still in possession of Pike, at Branchville.

"I dropped in to see if by any chance you recall the sale of a box of cigars some little time ago," he said, and he read off the name of the brand. "You sold them to a lady—a young lady. Perhaps you remember."

"Oh, yes," agreed the man. "I don't sell many by the box."

"Did anyone else come in while she was here, or shortly after, and buy some cigars of this same brand?" He awaited the dealer's slow process of memory and speech with eager interest.

"Y-e-s, I think so," said the man after a pause. "Yes, sure, a small man. He bought a box just the same. Two boxes in one evening—I don't do that every day."

"A man, you say—a small man. Was he young?"

"I don't remember very well. He was sick, I think. He had a handkerchief on his face and his hat was pulled far down."

"But surely you remember whether he was young or not," insisted Garrison. "Try to think."

A child came in to buy a stick of candy. The dealer attended to her needs while Garrison waited. When he returned he shook his head.

"So many people come," he said, "I don't remember."

Garrison tried him with a score of questions, but to no avail. He could add nothing to what he had supplied, and the vagueness that shadowed the figure of the man had not been illumined in the least. Beyond the fact that a small man had followed Dorothy inside the store and purchased the duplicate of her cigars, there was nothing of significance revealed.

Disappointed, even accusing himself of dullness and lack of resources in the all-important discovery of his unknown man's identity. Garrison went out upon the street. He felt himself in a measure disloyal to Dorothy in his growing conviction that young Foster Durgin was guilty. He was sorry, but helpless.

He must follow the trail wheresoever it led.

He ate a belated luncheon, after which he went to his office.

There were two letters lying on the floor, neither one addressed in a hand he knew. The first he opened was from Theodore. It was brief:

DEAR SIR:

If you can find the time to grant me an interview, I feel confident I can communicate something of interest.

Yours truly,
THEODORE ROBINSON.

His street address was written at the top.

Garrison laid the letter on the desk and opened the second. If the first had occasioned a feeling of vague wonder in his breast, the other was far more potently stirring. It read:

DEAR MR. GARRISON:

I called once, but you were out. Shall return again about four-thirty.

Trusting to see you,
FOSTER DURGIN.

Without even halting to lock the door as he fled from the place Garrison hastened pell-mell to the telegraph-office, on the entrance floor of the building, and filed the following despatch:

JAMES PIKE,
Branchville, N. Y.:

Get Will Barnes on train, headed for my office, soon as possible.

GARRISON.

As he stepped in the elevator to return to his floor, he found Tuttle in the corner of the car.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FRET OF WAITING

Tuttle had performed his services fairly well. He reported that young Robinson had returned to town and had lost no time in dismissing him, with a promise to pay for services rendered by the end of the week. Theodore had seemed content with the bald report which Tuttle had made concerning Garrison's almost total absence from his office, and had rather appeared to be satisfied to let the case develop for the present.

Tuttle knew nothing of the note on Garrison's desk from Theodore, and was therefore unaware how his news affected his chief, who wondered yet again what might be impending.

Concerning Fairfax there was news that was equally disquieting. He had been here once, apparently quite sane again. He had talked with Tuttle freely of a big surprise he had in store for the man who had hidden his wife, and then he had gone to his lodgings, near at hand, departing almost immediately with a suit-case in his hand and proceeding to the station, where he had taken a train on a ticket purchased for Branchville.

Tuttle, uninstructed as to following in a circumstance like this, had there dropped the trail.

"What seemed to be the nature of the big surprise he had in mind?" inquired Garrison. "Could you gather anything at all?"

"Nothing more than that. He appeared to be brooding over some sort of revenge he had in his mind, or something he meant to do, but he was careful to keep it to himself."

"He said nothing at all of leaving New York?"

"Not a word."

"You are positive he bought a ticket for Branchville?"

"Oh, sure," said Tuttle.

Garrison reflected for a moment. "I rather wish you had followed. However, he may return. Keep your eye on the place where he was rooming. Have you noticed anyone else around the office here—reporters, for instance?"

"No. The story's a sort of a dead one with the papers. Young Robinson was gone, and you kept out of sight, and nothing came up to prove any thing."

"You must have been talking to some newspaper man yourself," was Garrison's comment. He looked at Tuttle keenly.

"I did, yes, sir. One of them saw me here two or three times and finally asked me what paper I represented. I told him the *Cable*."

Garrison paced up and down the floor somewhat restlessly.

"I think of nothing further except for you to keep an eye on the Robinsons," he said. "Wait a minute. I want you to go to the Ninety-third Street house with a note I'll give you to the housekeeper, and examine the closet, in the back room, first flight up, to see if an equipment telephone is still in place there, concealed beneath a lot of clothing."

He sat down, wrote the note, and gave it to Tuttle, who departed with instructions to return with his report as soon as possible.

The office oppressed Garrison. It seemed to confine him. He prodded himself with a hundred vague notions that there ought to be something he could do, some way to get at things more rapidly. He wondered how far he would find it possible to go with Foster Durgin, and what the fellow would say or do, if confronted with the cold-blooded facts already collated.

Up and down and up and down he paced, impatient of every minute that sped away bringing nothing to the door. Would Barnes arrive in time, or at all? Would Durgin fail to come? Did Dorothy know of his presence in the city?

Everything always swung back to Dorothy. What would she do concerning Fairfax? What would Fairfax himself attempt to do, so far baffled, but a factor with a hold upon her name and, perhaps, upon her fortune? And if the thing should all be cleared at last, and come to its end, as all things must, what would be the outcome for himself and Dorothy?

She had told him at the start that when her business ends had been completely served she would wish him to dismiss himself,—from her life and her memory forever. He smiled at the utter futility of such a behest. It had gone beyond his power to forget like this, though a century of time should elapse.

For an hour he paced his cage impatiently, and nothing happened. A dozen times he went to the door, opened it and looked out in the hall—to no avail. The moment for young Durgin to arrive was at hand. It was almost time for young Barnes to appear.

Tuttle should have made his trip by this. The postman should have brought that photograph from Israel Snow, of Rockdale. Dorothy might at least 'phone.

It was maddening to wait and feel so impotent! His mind reverted to various phases of the case, but lingered most upon the second will—that might mean so much to Dorothy. Where had it gone? Had it been stolen—or hidden? Some way he felt it was hidden. For some reason, wholly illogical, he thought of Hardy lying dead with those grease-like stains upon his knuckles. What did they mean?

Working out a line of thought about the will, he was halted abruptly by a shadow on the glass of his door. He sat down quickly at his desk and assumed an air of calmness he was far from feeling. At the knock which came he called to the visitor to enter.

The visitor entered. It was Wicks.

"Oh, how do you do?" said Garrison, rising from his chair. "Come in. Come in, Mr. Wicks."

CHAPTER XXXII

A TRAGIC CULMINATION

The grin on the face of Mr. Wicks had apparently deepened and become even more sardonic. He glanced Garrison over in his sharp, penetrative manner, heightened by his nervousness, and took a chair.

"Forgotten instructions, haven't you, Garrison?" he snapped, adjusting his thin wisp of hair. "Where's your report on the case of Hardy, all these days?"

"Well, I admit I've rather neglected the office," said Garrison, eying his visitor with a new, strange interest. "I've been hard at work. I've lost no time. The case is not at all simple."

"What's all this business in the papers? You mixing up with some niece of Hardy's, and the girl getting married to save an inheritance?" demanded Wicks. "What the devil do you mean?"

"That part is my private affair," answered Garrison calmly. "It has nothing to do with my work for your company, nor has it interfered in the least with my prosecution of the inquiry."

"Do you mean to say it hasn't delayed your reports?"

"What if it has? I've had nothing to report—particularly."

"Yes, you have," snapped Wicks. "You know it was murder—that's something to report!"

Garrison studied the man deliberately for half a minute before replying. What a living embodiment of Durgin's description of Hiram Cleave he was! And what could he know of the facts in the case of Hardy's death that would warrant him in charging that the affair was known to be murder?

"Do I know it was murder?" he queried coldly. "Have I said so, Mr. Wicks, to you, or to anyone else?"

Wicks glanced at him with a quick, roving dart from his eyes.

"You saw what was printed in the papers," he answered evasively. "You must have given it out."

"I gave out nothing," said Garrison, bent now on a new line of thought, and determined that he would not accuse young Durgin by name till driven to the last extremity. "But, as a matter of fact, I do know, Mr. Wicks, that Hardy was murdered."

"Then why the devil don't you report to that effect?" snapped Wicks. "Are you trying to shield that young woman?"

Garrison knew whom he meant, but he asked: "What young woman?"

"Dorothy Booth-Fairfax! You know who I mean!"

"What has she to do with it?" Garrison inquired in apparent innocence. "Why should you think I'm shielding her?"

"She's the likely one—the only one who could benefit by Hardy's death!" answered Wicks, a little less aggressively. "You could see that by the accounts in the paper."

"I haven't read the papers for guidance," Garrison observed dryly. "Have you?"

"I didn't come here to answer questions. I came to ask them. I demand your report!" said Mr. Wicks. "I want to know all that you know!"

Garrison reflected that the little man knew too much. It suddenly occurred to his mind, as the man's sharp eyes picked up every speck or fleck upon his clothing, that Wicks, in the Subway that evening when they rode together in the jostling crowd, could have filched that poisoned cigar from his pocket with the utmost ease. He determined to try a little game.

"I've been waiting for the last completing link in my chain," he said, "before accusing any man of murder. You are right in supposing that I have found out more than I've reported—but only in the last few days and hours. I told you before that I thought perhaps Hardy had been poisoned."

"Well! What more? How was it done?"

"The poison employed was crushed to a powder," and he mentioned the name of the stuff.

"Used by photographers," commented Wicks.

"Not exclusively, but at times, yes."

"How was the stuff administered?"

"I think in a fifteen-cent cigar." Garrison was watching him closely while apparently toying with a pen.

"Very good," said Wicks with an air of satisfaction that was not exactly understandable. "I presume you have something to go on—something by way of evidence?"

"No," said Garrison, "unfortunately I have not. I had a second cigar which I believe was prepared with the poison, but I committed the blunder of losing it somewhere—Heaven alone knows where."

"That's devilish poor business!" cried Wicks in apparent exasperation. "But you haven't said why you believe the man got the poison in any such manner. On what do you base your conclusions?"

"Near where the man was found dead I discovered an unsmoked cigar," answered Garrison, watching the effect of his words. "It contained what little of the powder the victim had not absorbed."

Wicks looked at him almost calmly.

"You've done good work," he said. "It's a pity you lost that second cigar. And, by the way, where did you get it?"

Garrison realized that, despite his intended precautions, he had gone irretrievably into disclosures that were fetching the case up to Dorothy or young Foster Durgin. In his eagerness to pursue a new theory, he had permitted Wicks to draw him farther than he had ever intended to go. There was no escape. He decided to put it through.

"I got it from a box, at the coroner's office," he admitted.

"Mr. Garrison, what do you mean by withholding all these facts?" demanded Wicks sharply. "Where did Hardy get the box of cigars?"

Garrison would gladly have evaded this question, but he was helpless.

"They were a birthday present from his niece."

"This Miss Booth-Fairfax?"

"Yes."

"And you're in love with her!—masquerading as her husband! What do you mean by saying you've not attempted to shield her?"

"Now go slow, Mr. Wicks," cautioned Garrison. "I know what I'm doing in this case. It was given to me to ferret out—and I'll go through it to the end—no matter who is found guilty."

"That's better!" said Wicks. "You don't believe it's this young woman. Who else could have as good a motive?"

Garrison was fighting for time. A sacrifice was necessary. He utilized young Durgin, who might, after all, be guilty.

"Miss Booth, or Mrs. Fairfax, has a step-brother, by marriage," he said. "He has worked at photography. He gambles in Wall Street. He was desperate—but as yet I have no positive proof that he

did this crime. I am waiting for developments—and expecting things at any moment."

"Where is the man?" said Wicks. "What's his name?"

"Foster Durgin. I'm waiting for him now. He's fifteen minutes overdue."

"Arrest him when he comes!" commanded Wicks. "Take no chances on letting him escape!"

"Perhaps that's good advice," said Garrison slowly. "I'll think it over."

"He's the only one you suspect?"

"Well, there's one more element, somewhat vague and unsubstantiated," admitted Garrison. "There's a man, it seems, who threatened Hardy years ago. He has followed Hardy about persistently. Hardy appeared to fear him greatly, which accounts for his ceaseless roving. This man may and may not have accomplished some long-planned revenge at Branchville. He appears to be somewhat mystical, but I felt it my business to investigate every possible clew."

"Certainly," said Wicks, whose scrutiny of Garrison's face had grown once more abnormally acute. "What's his name?"

Garrison focused his eyes on the man across the desk incisively.

"Hiram Cleave."

So far as he could see there was not so much as a flicker to show that his shot had gone home.

Wicks spoke up, no less aggressively than before.

"Where is he now?"

"No one seems to know. I hope to discover—and report."

Wicks rose and took his hat from the desk.

"Except for your negligence in appearing at the office," he said, "you have done fairly well. Shall you need any help in arresting Durgin? If you wish it I——"

A knock on the door interrupted. A postman entered, met Garrison as he was stepping across the floor, and handed him a thin, flat parcel, crudely wrapped and tied. It was postmarked Rockdale.

Garrison knew it for the photograph—the picture of Cleave for which he had hoped and waited.

"Wait just a minute, Mr. Wicks," he said, backing toward the door with intent to keep his man from departing. "This is a letter from a friend who is helping on the case. Let me look it through. I may have more to report before you go."

Wicks sat down again.

Garrison remained by the door. He was cutting the string on the package when a second knock on the glass behind him gave him a start.

He opened the door. A small, rather smiling young man was in the hall.

"Mr. Garrison?" he said. "My name is——"

"How do you do?" Garrison interrupted loudly, having instantly recognized Foster Durgin, from a strong resemblance to his older brother, and instantly calling out: "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Wicks," stepped out in the hall and closed the door.

"My name is Durgin," said the visitor. "I called before——"

"I know," interrupted Garrison, moving down the hall and speaking in a voice so low he was certain Wicks could hear nothing, from behind the door, even should he try. "I've been expecting you. I want you to do something quickly, before we try to have a talk. I want you to go downstairs, ring up police headquarters and ask for a couple of officers to come as quickly as they can travel."

"What for? I don't——"

"I've got to arrest the man who murdered your uncle," said Garrison, using the most searching and startling method at command to put young Durgin to the test of guilt or innocence. "Act first and come back afterward!"

"I'm with you!" said Durgin. "Got him, have you?—what's his name?"

He was innocent.

Garrison knew it, and instantly concluded that the young man before him could hardly have stolen the uncle's second will. But he had no time for ramifying inquiries. He pushed his visitor toward the elevator and only answered with more urging for speed.

He returned to the office, tearing off the wrapper from his picture as he went. He glanced at it once before he opened the door. It was Wicks—not so bald—not so aggressive of aspect, but Wicks beyond the shadow of a doubt. On the back was written "Hiram Cleave."

Wicks turned upon him as he entered.

"I can't wait here all day while you conduct your business in the hall," he said. "Who was the man outside?"

Garrison had grown singularly calm.

"That," he said, "was Foster Durgin."

"And you let him get away?" cried Wicks wrathfully. "Mr. Garrison——"

Garrison interrupted curtly.

"I took your advice and sent him to get the police. Good joke, isn't it, to have him summon the officers to arrest the man who murdered his uncle?"

Wicks had an intuition or a fear. He stared at Garrison wildly. Garrison remained by the door.

"What do you mean to do?" demanded the visitor.

"Wait a few minutes and see," was Garrison's reply. "Meantime, here is a photograph of the man who threatened Hardy's life. And, by the way," he added, holding the picture with its face toward himself, in attitude of carelessness, "I forgot to say before that a man was seen entering Hardy's room, in Hickwood, the night of the murder. He extracted two cigars from the box presented to Hardy by his niece, and in their place he deposited others, precisely like them, purchased at the same little store in Amsterdam Avenue where she obtained hers, and bought, moreover, within a very few minutes of her visit to the shop. All of which bears upon the case."

Wicks was eyeing him now with a menacing, furtive glance that shifted with extraordinary rapidity. He had paled a trifle about the mouth.

"Mr. Garrison," he said, "you are trifling with this matter. What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," answered Garrison. "The witness who saw the murderer leave his deadly cigars in that box should have arrived by now to identify the criminal. This photograph, as I said before, is a picture of the man I think guilty."

He advanced a step, with no intention of abandoning the door, and delivered the picture into his visitor's hand.

Wicks glanced down at it furtively. His face turned livid.

"So!" he cried. "You think you—— Get away from that door!"

He made a swift movement forward, but Garrison blocked his way.

"Not till your friends the policemen arrive!" he said. "It was your own suggestion, and good."

"You act like a crazy man!" Wicks declared with a sudden change of manner. "I'll have you discharged—you are discharged! The case is out of your hands. You——"

For the third time a knock was sounded on the door.

"Come in!" called Garrison, keeping his eyes on Wicks, whose face had turned from the red of rage to the white of sudden fear. "Come in—don't wait!"

It was Pike and young Will Barnes.

"That's the man!" said the youth on entering, his eyes transfixed by Wicks. "Look at him laugh!"

"I'd kill you all if I had a gun!" cried Wicks in an outburst of malignity. "I killed Hardy, yes! I said I'd get him, and I got him! It's all I lived for, but, by Heaven! you'll never take me to jail alive!"

He caught up a chair, ran to the window, and beat out the glass with a blow. Garrison ran to snatch him back, but Wicks swung the chair and it broke on Garrison's head and he went down abruptly in a heap.

There were two sharp cries. Wicks made one as he leaped to his death from the sill.

The other came in a woman's utterance.

It was Dorothy, at the open door.

"Jerold!" she cried, and ran into the room and knelt where he lay on the floor.

He was merely stunned. He recovered as if by the power of stubbornness, with his mind strangely occupied by thoughts of Hardy's will—the hidden will—and the fingers stained with black. When he opened his eyes he was looking up in the sweetest, most anxious face in all the world.

"Help me up. Let me go before everyone comes," he said. "I believe I know where to find your uncle's will!"

It was already too late. Durgin and two policemen appeared at the open door.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FOSTER DURGIN

Confusion reigned in the office presently, for more of the officers came upon the scene, and people from adjoining rooms helped to swell the numbers. Everyone was talking at once.

The form of Wicks, motionless and broken, lay far below the window, on the pavement of an air and light shaft, formed like a niche in the building. Garrison sent Dorothy to her lodgings, promising to visit her soon. There was nothing she could do in such a place, and he felt there was much she should be spared.

Pike, young Barnes, and Foster Durgin remained, the two former as witnesses of what had occurred, Durgin by Garrison's request. All others were presently closed out of the office, and the body of Wicks was removed.

The hour that followed, an hour of answering questions, making statements, proving who he was and what, was a time that Garrison disliked exceedingly, but it could not be escaped. Reporters had speedily gathered; the story would make a highly sensational sequel to the one already printed.

The guilt of Wicks had been confessed. Corroborative testimony being quite abundant, and every link in the chain complete, the affair left no possible suspicion resting upon either Scott or any of Hardy's relatives; and Garrison and Durgin refused to talk of Dorothy's marriage or anything concerning the will.

The story used before was, of course, reviewed at length. Despite the delays of the investigation immediately undertaken, Garrison managed at last to secure the freedom of Pike and Will Barnes, in addition to that of himself and Foster Durgin. As good as his word, he took the disciple of Walton to a first-class dealer in sportsmen's articles and bought him a five-dollar rod. Barnes and the coroner of Branchville started somewhat late for their town.

The evening was fairly well advanced when at length young Durgin and Garrison found themselves enabled to escape officials, reporters, and the merely curious, to retire to a quiet restaurant for something to eat and a chat.

Durgin, as he sat there confronting his host, presented a picture to Garrison of virtues mixed with hurtful tendencies. A certain look of melancholy lingered about his eyes. His mouth was of the sensitive

description. His gaze was steady, but a boyish expression of defiance somewhat marred an otherwise pleasant countenance.

He showed both the effects of early spoiling and the subsequent intolerance of altered conditions. On the whole, however, he seemed a manly young fellow in whom regeneration was more than merely promised.

Garrison ordered the dinner—and his taste was both excellent and generous.

"Mr. Durgin," he said at last with startling candor, "it looked for a time as if you yourself were concerned in the death of Mr. Hardy. More than half the pleasure that Dorothy will experience in the outcome of to-day's affairs will arise from her knowledge of your innocence."

Foster met his gaze steadily.

"I am sorry for many of the worries I have caused," he said, in a quiet, unresentful manner, free alike from surprise or anger. "I've been trying to do better. You knew I'd been away?"

"That was one of the features of the case that looked a little suspicious," answered Garrison.

"I didn't care to tell where I was going, in case my mission should fail," the young fellow imparted. "I went after work—good, clean, well-paying work—and I got it. I can hold up my head at last."

A look of pride had come upon his face, but his lip was trembling. That the fight he had waged with himself was manly, and worthily won, to some considerable extent, was a thing that Garrison felt. He had no intention of preaching and no inclination for the task.

"Nuff said," he answered. "Shake. Here comes the soup."

They shook hands over the table. No further reference was made to a personal subject. Some way Garrison felt that a man had come to take the place of a boy, and while he reflected that the fight was not yet absolutely finished, and the bitterness of it might remain for some time yet to come, nevertheless he was thoroughly convinced that through some great lesson, or some awakening influence, Foster had come to his manhood and could henceforth be trusted to merit respect and the trust of all his fellow-beings.

Garrison, alone, at nine o'clock, had an impulse to hasten off to Branchville. In the brief time of lying unconscious on the floor when Wicks struck him down, he had felt some strange psychic sense take possession of his being, long enough for the room that Hardy had occupied in Hickwood to come into vision, as if through walls made transparent.

He had merely a dim, fading memory that when he awoke he had spoken to Dorothy, telling her to help him to go, that the hiding-place of Hardy's will had been at last revealed. As he thought of it now, on his way to Dorothy's abiding place, he shook his head in doubt. It was probably all an idle dream.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RICHES OF THE WORLD

Dorothy was waiting to see him. She was still excited, still anxious concerning himself. She had quite forgotten his words about the will in her worry lest the blow on his head had proved more serious than had at first appeared.

He met her quietly in a large, common parlor—the duplicate of a thousand such rooms in New York—and was thoroughly determined to curb the impetuous surging of his feelings. She was wearing a bunch of his carnations, and had never seemed more beautiful in all her wondrous moods of beauty.

Just to have sat where he could look upon her all he wished, without restraint or conventions, would almost have satisfied his soul. But she gave him her hand with a grace so compelling, and her eyes asked their question so tenderly—a question only of his welfare—that riot was loosed in his veins once more and love surged over him in billows.

"I was afraid you might not come," she said. "I have never been more worried or afraid. Such a terrible moment—all of it—and that creature striking you down! If you hadn't come I'd have been so

sure you were very badly hurt. I'd have felt so guilty for all I've done to jeopardize your life in my petty affairs."

"It's all right. I was ashamed for going out so easily," said Garrison, turning away in self-defense and seating himself in a chair. "He struck me so suddenly I had no time to guard. But that part isn't worth another thought."

"I thought it the *only* part worth anything," said Dorothy in her honesty. "It came upon me suddenly that nothing I was after was worth the risks you've been assuming in my behalf. And they may not be ended. I wish they were. I wish it were all at an end! But Foster is innocent. If you knew how glad I am of that you would feel a little repaid."

"I feel thoroughly repaid and gratified," said Garrison. "I have told you before that I am glad you came into my existence with your need—your case. I have no regret over anything that has happened—to myself. It has been life to me—life! And I take a certain pride in feeling that when you come to dismiss me, at the end, I shall not have been an absolute disappointment."

She looked at him in a new alarm. He had purposely spoken somewhat bluntly of his impending dismissal. She had come to a realizing sense that she could never dismiss him from her life—that to have him near, to know he was well—to love him, in a word—had become the one motive of her life.

Nevertheless she was helpless. And he was treating the matter as if her fate were sealed to that of Fairfax indissolubly. What little timid hopes she might have entertained of gaining her freedom, some time in the future, and saving herself, soul and body, for him—all this he had somewhat dimmed by this reference to going from her ken.

"But I—I haven't said anything about dismissing—anyone," she faltered. "I hadn't thought——" She left her sentence incomplete.

"I know," said Jerold. "There has been so much to think about, the subject may have been neglected. As a matter of fact, however, I am already out of it, supplanted by your genuine husband. We can no longer maintain the pretense.

"The moment Mr. Fairfax and Theodore chance to meet, our bit of theatricalism goes to pieces. We would scarcely dare to face a court, in a will probation, with Fairfax on the scene. So, I say, I am practically eliminated already."

The one thing that remained in her mind at the end of his speech was not in the least the main concern. She looked at him with pain in her eyes.

"Has it been nothing but a bit of theatricalism, after all?"

He dared not permit himself to answer from his heart. He kept up his show of amusement, or indifference to sentiment.

"We have played theatric rôles to a small but carefully selected audience," he said. "I for a fee, and you—for needful ends. We might as well be frank, as we were the day it all began."

It was the way of a woman to be hurt. She felt there was something of a sting in what he said. She knew she had halted his impassioned declaration of love—but only because of the right. She had heard it, despite her protest—and had treasured it since, and echoed it over in her heart repeatedly.

She wished him to say it all again—all of it and more—but—not just yet. She wanted him to let her know that he loved her more than anything else in the world, but not by spoken words of passion.

"I am sorry if I've seemed so—so heartless in it all," she said. "I hadn't the slightest intention of—of permitting you to——"

"I know," he interrupted, certain he knew what she meant. "I haven't accused anyone. It was all my own fault. We'll drop it, if you wish."

"You haven't let me finish," she insisted. "I started to say that I had no intention of making you feel like—like nothing more than an agent—toward me—I mean, I had no intention of appearing to you like a selfish, heartless woman, willing to sacrifice the sweetest—the various things of life to gain my ends. I want you to believe that I—I'd rather you wouldn't call it all just mere theatrics."

Garrison gripped his chair, to restrain the impulse to rise and take her in his arms. He could almost have groaned, for the love in his heart must lie there, dumb and all but hopeless.

"Dorothy," he said when he felt his mastery complete, "I have already made it hard enough for myself by committing a folly against which you gave me ample warning. I am trying now to redeem myself and merit your trust and regard."

Her eyes met his in a long, love-revealing look—a look that could bridge all the gulfs of time and the vast abyss of space itself—and words would have been but a jar. Whatever the outcome, after this, nothing could rob them of the deep, supernal joy that flashed there between them for a moment.

Even when her lashes fell, at last, the silence was maintained.

After a time Garrison spoke again, returning to earth and the unfinished labor before him.

"I must go," he said, consulting his watch. "I hope to catch a train for Branchville in order to be there early in the morning."

"On our—this business?" she inquired.

He felt it quite impossible to raise her hopes—or perhaps her fears—by announcing he felt he should find John Hardy's latest will. Moreover, he had undergone a wakeful man's distrust of the "dream" he had experienced after falling at the hands of Wicks. He resorted to a harmless deceit, which, after all, was not entirely deceitful.

"Mr. Fairfax left for Branchville—he said to spring a surprise," he imparted. "I thought it would do no harm to be on hand and prepare for his moves, as far as possible."

He had risen. Dorothy did likewise. A slight suggestion of paleness overspread her face, followed at once by a faint, soft flush of color.

"I hope you will try to avoid him—avoid anything that might be dangerous," she faltered. "I feel already I shall never be able to forgive myself for the dangers into which I have sent you."

"This is the surest way to avoid any possible dangers," he assured her. "And, by the way, there is no particular reason now why you should longer remain away from Ninety-third Street. The newspaper men have done their worst, and the Robinsons will be entirely disarmed by the various events that have happened—unless Theodore should happen to spring a new surprise, and in any event you might be far more comfortable."

"Perhaps I will return—some time to-morrow," she said. "I'll see."

Garrison went to the door and she walked at his side.

He merely said: "Good-night—and Heaven bless you, Dorothy."

She answered: "Good-night, Jerold," and gave him her hand.

He held it for a moment—the riches of the world. And when he had gone they felt they had divided, equally, a happiness too great for terrestrial measurement.

CHAPTER XXXV

JOHN HARDY'S WILL

Garrison slept the sleep of physical exhaustion that night in Branchville. The escape from New York's noise and turmoil was welcome to his weary body. He had been on a strain day after day, and much of it still remained. Yet, having cleared away the mystery concerning Hardy's death, he felt entitled to a let-down of the tension.

In the morning he was early on the road to Hickwood—his faculties all eagerly focused on the missing will. He felt it might all prove the merest vagary of his mind—his theory of his respecting old Hardy and this testament. But stubbornly his mind clung fast to a few important facts.

Old Hardy had always been secretive, for Dorothy had so reported. He had carried his will away with him on leaving Albany. It had not been stolen—so far as anyone could know. Coupled with all this was the fact that the dead man's hands' had been stained upon the knuckles—stained black, with a grimy

something hard to wash away—perhaps the soot, the greasy, moldy old soot of a chimney, encountered in the act of secreting the will, and later only partially removed. It seemed as clear as crystal to the reasoning mind of Garrison as he hastened along on the road.

He passed the home of Scott, the inventor, and mentally jotted down a reminder that the man, being innocent, must be paid his insurance now without delay.

Mrs. Wilson was working in her garden, at the rear of the house, when Garrison arrived. She was wonderfully pleased to see him. She had read the papers—which Garrison had not—and discovered what a truly remarkable personage he was.

The credit of more than ordinarily clever work had been meted out by the columnful, and his name glared boldly from the vivid account of all he had done in the case. All this and more he found himself obliged to face at the hands of Mrs. Wilson, before he could manage to enter the house and go as before to Hardy's room.

It was just precisely as he had seen it on his former visit. It had not been rented since, partially on account of the fact that Hardy's fate had cast an evil shadow upon it.

Garrison lost no time in his search. He followed his theory. It led him straight to the fireplace, with its crudely painted board, built to occupy its opening. Behind this, he felt, should be the will.

The board was stuck. Mrs. Wilson hastened to her sitting-room to fetch a screwdriver back to pry it out. Garrison gave it a kick, at the bottom, in her absence, thus jarring it loose, and the top fell forward in his hand.

He put his hand far up, inside the chimney—and on a ledge of brick, where his knuckles picked up a coating of moldy, greasy soot, his fingers encountered an envelope and knocked it from its lodgment. It fell on the fender at the bottom of the place. He caught it up, only taking time to note a line, "Will of John Hardy," written upon it—and, cramming it into his pocket, thrust the board back into place as Mrs. Wilson entered at the door.

It was not with intent to deceive the good woman that he had thus abruptly decided to deny her the knowledge of his find, but rather as a sensible precaution against mere idle gossip, which could achieve no particular advantage.

Therefore when she pried the board from place, and nothing was discovered behind it, he thanked her profusely, made a wholly perfunctory examination of the room, and presently escaped.

Not until he found himself far from any house, on the road he was treading to Branchville, did he think of removing the package from his pocket. He found it then to be a plain white envelope indorsed with this inscription:

Last will of John Hardy. To be opened after my death, and then by my niece, Dorothy Fairfax, only.

Denied the knowledge whether it might mean fortune or poverty to the girl he loved, and feeling that, after all, his labors might heap great unearned rewards on Fairfax, bestowing on himself the mere hollow consciousness that his work had been well performed, he was presently seated once more in a train that roared its way down to New York.

There was still an hour left of the morning when he alighted at the Grand Central Station. He went at once to Dorothy's latest abode.

She was out. The landlady knew nothing whatever of her whereabouts. Impatient of every delay, and eager to know not only the contents of the will, but what it might mean to have Dorothy gone in this manner, he felt himself baffled and helpless. He could only leave a note and proceed to his office.

Tuttle was there when he arrived. He had nothing to report of Fairfax—of whom Garrison himself had heard no word in Branchville—but concerning the house in Ninety-third Street there was just a mite of news.

He had been delayed in entering by the temporary absence of the caretaker. He had finally succeeded in making his way to the closet in Theodore's room—and the telephone was gone. Theodore had evidently found a means to enter by the stairs at the rear, perhaps through the house next door. The caretaker felt quite certain he had not set foot inside the door since Garrison issued his orders.

Garrison wrote a note to Theodore, in reply to the one received the day before, suggesting a meeting here at this office at noon, or as soon as convenient.

"Take that out," he said to Tuttle, "and send it by messenger. Then return to the house where Fairfax had his room and see if there's any news of him."

Tuttle opened the door to go just as Dorothy, who had arrived outside, was about to knock. Garrison beheld her as she stepped slightly back. He rose from his seat and hastened towards her.

"Excuse me," said Tuttle, and he went his way.

"Come in," said Garrison. "Come in, Dorothy. I've been at your house and missed you."

She was somewhat pale.

"Yes, I couldn't stay—I wanted to see you the moment you returned," she told him. "Theodore has found my address, I don't know how, and sent me a note in which he says he has something new—some dreadful surprise—"

"Never mind Theodore," Garrison interrupted. "Sit down and get your breath. He couldn't have come upon much in all his hunting—much, I mean, that we do not already know. In the meantime, get ready for news—I can't tell what sort of news, but—I've found your uncle's latest will!"

Dorothy made no attempt to speak for a moment. Her face became almost ashen. Then it brightened. Alarm went from her eyes and she even mustered a smile.

"It doesn't make a great deal of difference now, whatever Uncle John may have done," she said. "Foster and Alice will be all right—but, where did you find it? Where has it been?"

"I found it at the room he occupied in Hickwood—and fetched it along."

He produced it from his pocket and placed it in her hand.

Despite her most courageous efforts she was weak and nervously excited. Her hands fairly trembled as she tore the envelope across.

"Take it calmly," said Garrison. "Don't be hurried."

She could make no reply. She drew the will from its sheath and, spreading it open, glanced through it rapidly.

"Dear Uncle John!" she presently said, in a voice that all but broke. "He has willed it all to me, with no conditions—all except a nice little sum for Foster—poor Foster, I'm so glad!"

She broke down and cried.

Garrison said nothing. He went to the window and let her cry it out.

She was drying her eyes, in an effort to regain her self-control, when someone knocked and immediately opened the door.

Garrison turned. Dorothy had risen quickly to her feet.

It was Theodore who stood in the doorway. He had come before Garrison's note could be delivered.

"Come in," said Garrison. "You're just the man I wish to see."

CHAPTER XXXVI

GARRISON'S VALUED FRIEND

Dorothy, catching up the precious will, had retreated from Theodore's advance. She made no effort to greet him, even with so much as a nod.

"I thought I might possibly find you both, and save a little time," said Robinson, striding in boldly, with no sign of removing his hat. "Seems I hit it off about right."

"Charmingly," said Garrison. "Won't you sit down and take off your hat and stay a while?"

"You sound cheerful," said Theodore, drawing forth a chair and seating himself in comfort. "Perhaps you realize the game is up at last."

"Yes," agreed Garrison. "I think we do—but it's good of you to come and accept our notice, I'm sure."

"I didn't come to accept notice—I came to give it," said young Robinson self-confidently. "I've recently returned from Rockbeach, where I went to investigate your so-called marriage."

He had seen or heard nothing of Fairfax; that was obvious.

"Well?" said Garrison. "Proceed."

"That's about enough, ain't it?" said Theodore. "The marriage having been a fraud, what's the use of beating around the bush? If you care to fix it up on decent terms, I'll make no attempt to break the will when it comes up for probate, but otherwise I'll smash your case to splinters."

"You've put it quite clearly," said Garrison. "You are offering to compromise. Very generous. Let me have the floor for half a minute. I've had your man Tuttle on your trail, when you thought you had him on mine, for some little time.

"I happen to know that you stole two necklaces in the keeping of Mrs. Fairfax, on the night I met you first, and placed them on the neck of some bold young woman in the house next door, where, as you may remember, I saw you dressed as Mephistopheles. You—"

"I stole nothing of the kind!" interrupted Theodore. "She's got them—"

"Never mind that," Garrison interposed. "Let's go on. You installed a 'phone in your closet, at the house in Ninety-third Street, and on the night when you overheard an appointment I made with Mrs. Fairfax, you plugged in, overheard it, abducted Dorothy, under the influence of chloroform, stole her wedding-certificate, and delivered me over to the hands of a pair of hired assassins to have me murdered in Central Park.

"All this, with the robbery you hired Tuttle to commit at Branchville, ought to keep you reflecting in prison for some little time to come—if you think you'd like to go to court and air your grievances publicly."

Theodore was intensely white. Yet his nerve was not entirely destroyed.

"All this won't save your bacon, when I turn over all my affidavits," he said. "The property won't go to you when the will's before the court. The man who married you in Rockbeach was no justice of the peace, and you know it, Mr. Jerold Garrison. You assumed the name of Fairfax and hired a low-down political heeler, who hadn't been a justice for fully five years, to act the part and marry you to Dorothy.

"I've got the affidavits. If you think that's going to sound well in public—if you think it's pleasant to Dorothy now to know what a blackguard you are, why let's get on the job, both of us flinging the mud!"

Dorothy was pale and tense with new excitement.

"Wait a minute, please," said Garrison. "You say you have legal affidavits that the man who performed that marriage ceremony was a fraud, paid to act the part?—that the marriage was a sham—no marriage at all?"

"You know it wasn't!" Theodore shouted at him triumphantly, pulling legal-looking papers from his pocket. "And you were married to another wretched woman at the time. Let Dorothy try to get some joy out of that, if she can—and you, too!"

"Thank you, I've got mine," said Garrison quietly. "You're the very best friend I've seen for weeks. Fairfax, the man who has done this unspeakable wrong, is a lunatic, somewhere between here and up country, at this moment. He was here in town for a couple of days, and I thought you might have met him."

"You—what do you mean?" demanded Theodore.

"Just what I say," said Garrison. "I'll pay you five hundred dollars for your affidavits, if they're genuine, and you may be interested to know, by the way of news, that a later will by your step-uncle, John Hardy, has come to light, willing everything to Dorothy—without conditions. You wasted time by going out of town."

"A new will!—I refuse to believe it!" said Robinson, weak with apprehension.

Garrison drew open a drawer of his desk and took out a loaded revolver. He knew his man and meant to take no risk. Crossing to Dorothy, he took the will from her hand.

"This is the document," he said. "Signed and witnessed in the best of legal form. And speaking of leaving town, let me suggest that you might avoid a somewhat unhealthy close confinement by making your residence a good long way from Manhattan."

Robinson aged before their very eyes. The ghastly pallor remained on his face. His shoulders lost something of their squareness. A muscle was twitching about his mouth. His eyes were dulled as he tried once more to meet the look of the man across the desk.

He knew he was beaten—and fear had come upon him, fear of the consequences earned by the things he had done. He had neither the will nor the means to renew the fight. Twice his lips parted, in his effort to speak, before he mastered his impotent rage and regained the power to think. He dropped his documents weakly on the desk.

"I'll take your five hundred for the papers," he said. "How much time will you give me to go?"

"Two days," said Garrison. "I'll send you a check to-morrow morning."

Theodore turned to depart. Tuttle had returned. He knocked on the door and entered. Startled thus to find himself face to face with Robinson, he hesitated where he stood.

"So," said Theodore with one more gasp of anger, "you sold me out, did you, Tuttle? I might have expected it of you!"

Tuttle would have answered, and not without heat. Garrison interposed.

"It's all right, Tuttle," he said. "Robinson knows when he's done. I told him you were in a better camp. Any news of Mr. Fairfax for us all?"

"It's out in the papers," said Tuttle in reply, taking two copies of an evening edition from his pocket. "It seems a first wife of Mr. Fairfax has nabbed him, up at White Plains. But he's crazy, so she'll put him away."

For the first time in all the scene Dorothy spoke.

She merely said, "Thank Heaven!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

A HONEYMOON

A month had flown to the bourne whence no summer charms return.

August had laid a calming hand on all the gray Atlantic, dimpling its surface with invitations to the color and glory of the sky. The world turned almost visibly here, in this vast expanse of waters, bringing its meed of joys and sorrows to the restless human creatures on its bosom.

Jerold and Dorothy, alone at last, even among so many passengers, were four days deep in their honeymoon, with all the delights of Europe looming just ahead.

There was nothing left undone in the case of Hardy. Scott had been paid his insurance; the Robinsons had fled; Foster Durgin and his wife were united by a bond of work and happiness; the house in Ninety-third Street was rented, and Fairfax was almost comfortable at a "sanatorium" where his wife came frequently to see him.

With their arms interlocked, Dorothy and Jerold watched the sun go down, from the taffrail of the mighty ocean liner.

When the moon rose, two hours later, they were still on deck, alone.

And when they came to a shadow, built for two, they paused in their perfect understanding. She put

her arms about his neck and gave him a kiss upon the lips. His arms were both about her, folding her close to his breast.

"It's such a rest to love you all I please," she whispered. "It was very, very hard, even from the first, to keep it from telling itself."

Such is the love that glorifies the world.

THE END

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