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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK "PERSONS UNKNOWN" \*\*\*

## "PERSONS UNKNOWN"

BY VIRGINIA TRACY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
HENRY RALEIGH

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1914

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TO  
MY FELLOW-CONSPIRATORS  
HELEN L. KLOEBER AND JESSIE C. SOULE

When winter's breath was on the pane,  
Through dusk and snow, wild winds and rain,  
I fled to your bright hearth again  
To read about a *Shadow!*  
You lit the lamp, you brewed the tea,  
Pulled up the deepest chair for me,  
And set yourselves to guess and see—  
*What ailed that minx, Christina?*

What Herrick found—what Nancy knew—  
Whose motor raced the county through—  
What could that harsh Policeman do—  
You never failed to argue;  
Of moonlight, murders, lovers, threats,  
Vengeance and kisses, siren's nets,  
And pale, dark men with cigarettes,  
Not once I found you weary!

Through broken music, sudden light  
In the deep darkness, jewels bright,  
Persons unknown in unknown plight,  
You still sought *unknown* persons;  
Authors, if you would straightway know  
Where faith and cheer and counsel grow,  
Suggestions flourish and hints flow:



**Suddenly she flung one arm up and out in such a strange and splendid gesture, of such free and desperate passion, as Herrick had never seen before**

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## **BOOK FIRST THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND**

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# CHAPTER I

## WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

"Ask Nancy Cornish!"

The phrase might have exploded into Herrick's mind, it leaped there with such sudden violence, distinct as the command of a voice, out of the smothering blackness of the torrid August night.

He started up instantly, as if to listen, sitting upright on the bed from which he had long since tossed all covering. Then he frowned at the tricks which the heat was playing upon even such strong nerves as his. In the unacknowledged homesickness of his heart his very first doze had brought him a dream of home; then the dream had slid along the trail of desire to a cool sea beach, where he and Marion used to be taken every summer when they were children, and a fog had rolled in along this beach which, at first, he had welcomed because it was so deliciously cold. It was no longer his sister who was there beside him; it was no less unexpected a person than the Heroine of the novel he was writing and whose conduct in the very next chapter he had been trying all day to decide. It was a delightful convenience to have her there, ready to tell him the secret of her heart! He saw that she had brought the novel with her, all finished. She held it out to him, open, and he read one phrase, "When Ann and her lover were down in Cornwall." He asked her what that was doing there—since her name was not Ann and he had never imagined her in Cornwall. And then the fog rolled up between them, blotting out the book, blotting out his Heroine; that fog became a horror, he was lost in it, and yet it vaguely showed him the shadowy forms of shadowy persons—he hoped if they were his other characters they really weren't quite so shadowy as that!—one of whom threateningly cried to him through the fog, "Ask Nancy Cornish!" And here he was, now, actually conscious of a great rush of energy and intention, as if he really had some way of asking Nancy Cornish, or anything to ask her, if he had!

He remembered perfectly well, now, who she was—a little red-headed girl, a friend of his sister; a girl whom he had not seen in eight years and did not care if he never saw again. What had brought her into his dreams?

She certainly had no business there. No girl had any business anywhere inside his head for the present, except that Heroine of his, whose photograph he had had framed to reign over his desk. It was a photograph which he had found forgotten, last winter, in the room of a hotel in Paris, and it had seemed to him the personality he had been looking for. Of the original he knew no more than that. But he knew well enough she was not Nancy Cornish.

The novel was his first novel; and, after a long day of laborious failure at it, Herrick, in pure despair of his own work, had early flung himself abed. He had lain there waking and restless upon scorching linen, reluctantly listening, listening; to the passage of the trolley cars on upper Broadway; to the faint, threatening grumble of the Subway; the pitiful crying of a sick baby; the advancing, dying footfalls; to all the diabolic malevolence of shrieking or chugging automobiles. The mere act of sitting up, however, recalled him from the mussy stuffiness in which he had been tossing. Why, he was not buried somewhere in a black hole! He was occupying his landlady's best bedroom—the back parlor, indeed, of Mrs. Grubey's comfortable flat. Well, and to-morrow, after two months of loneliness, of one-sided conversations with the maddeningly mute countenance of his Heroine and of swapping jokes, baseball scores, weather prophecies, and political gossip with McGarrigle, the policeman on the beat, he was going to take lunch with Jimmy Ingham, the most eminent of publishers. Everything was all right! That peculiar sense of waiting and watching was growing on him merely with the restless brooding of the night, which smelt of thunder. In that burning, motionless air there was expectancy and a crouching sense of climax.

Yet it was not so late but that, in the handsome apartment house opposite, an occasional window was still lighted. The pale blinds of one of these, directly on a level with Herrick's humbler casement, were drawn to the bottom; and Herrick vaguely wondered that any one should care to shut out even the idea of air. Just then, behind those blinds, some one began to play a piano.

The touch was the touch of a master, and Herrick sat listening in surprise. The tide of lovely melody swept boldly out, filling the air with soaring angels. Could people be giving a party?

Herrick got to his feet and struck a match. Five minutes past one! If he dressed and went down to the river, he would wake Mrs. Grubey and the Grubey children. He resigned himself; glancing at the precious letter of appointment with Ingham on his desk, and at the photograph of his Heroine, looking out at him with her quiet eyes; shy and candid, tender and bravely boyish, and cool with their first youth. To her he sighed, thinking of his novel, "Well, Evadne, we must have faith!" He turned out the light again, stripped off the coat of his pajamas, sopped the drinking water from his pitcher over his head and his strong shoulders, and drew an easy chair up to the window. Down by the curb one of those quivering automobiles seemed to purr, raspily, in its sleep. Some one across the street was talking on and on, accompanied by the musician's now soft and improvising touch. Then, in Herrick's thoughts, the voice, or voices, and the fitful, straying music began to blend; and then he had no thoughts at all.

He was wakened by a demonic crash of chords. His eyes sprang open; and there, on the blind opposite, was the shadow of a woman. She stood there with her back to the window, lithe and tense, and suddenly she flung one arm up and out in such a strange and splendid gesture, of such free and desperate passion, as Herrick had never seen before. For a full minute she stood so; and

then the gesture broke, as though she might have covered her face. The music, scurrying onward from its crash, had never ceased; it had risen again, ringing triumphantly into the march from Faust, a man's voice rising furiously with it, and it flashed over Herrick that they might be rehearsing some scene in a play. Then the sound of a pistol-shot split through the night. Immediately, behind the blind, the lights went out.

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## CHAPTER II

### HERRICK FINDS A DOOR BOLTED

The sleepy boy at the switchboard of the house opposite did not seem to feel in the situation any of the urgency which had brought Herrick into that elegant vestibule, barefoot and with nothing but an unbuttoned ulster over his pajama trousers. The boy said he guessed the shot wasn't a shot; he guessed maybe it was an automobile tire. There couldn't be a lady in 4-B, anyhow; it was just a bachelor apartment. Well, he supposed it was 4-B because there was always complaints of him playing on the piano late at night. The switchboard called him imperatively as he spoke, and he reluctantly consented to ring up the superintendent. Instinctively, he refrained from interfering with Herrick when that young man possessed himself of the elevator and shot to the fourth floor.

There was no further noises, no call for help, no woman's fleeing figure. But Herrick's sense of locality guided him down a little hall, upon which, toward the front, only two apartments opened. One of these was lettered 4-B. If Herrick had not stopped for his boots he had for his revolver and it was with the butt end of this that he began hammering upon the sheet-iron surface of that door. There was no answer. Was he too late?

The other door opened the length of a short chain. A little man, with wisps of woolly gray standing up from his head as if in amazement, brought his face to the opening and quavered, "Be careful! You'll get hurt! Be—"

"Good God!" cried Herrick. "There's a woman in there!"

"A woman! Why—I *thought* I heard a woman—!"

It was not so long since Herrick's reporting days but that he believed he could still work the trick pressure by which two policemen will burst in the strongest lock. But he now gave up hope of the woolly gentleman as an assistant and turned his attention to the brass knob. "Get me a screw-driver!"

"Theodore!" came a voice from behind the woolly gentleman, "Don't you open our door! It's no business of yours!"

Herrick, glancing desperately about him for any aid, was sufficiently aware that he might be making a fool of himself for nothing. But the young fellow felt that was a risk he had to take. In the long hall crossing the little one he could hear doors opening; the clash of questioning voices mingled with excited cries—And then came a girl's voice shrilling, "Isn't anybody going to *do* anything?" A husky business voice roared from secure cover, "You don't know what you may be breaking into, young man! You may get yourself in trouble."

Herrick growled through his teeth an imprecation that ended in "Hand me a screw-driver, can't you? And a hammer!" The sweat was pouring down his face from the pressure of his strength upon the lock, but the lock held. What was going on in there? Or—what had ceased to go on? He could hear Theodore tremblingly protesting, "I have telephoned for the superintendent—He has the keys. It's the superintendent's business—" Had the one shot done the trick? Then, above the stairhead, across the longer hall, appeared the helmet of a policeman. At his heels came the superintendent, carrying the keys.

The policeman was jolted from his first idea of arresting Herrick by Herrick's welcoming cry, "Get a gait on you, McGarrigle!" which proclaimed to him a valued acquaintance; then, with a hand shaking with excitement, the half-dressed superintendent fitted the key in the lock. The lock turned but nothing happened. The door was bolted on the inside.

The re-captured elevator was heard in the distance, and the superintendent sang out, "Get the engineer! Hurry! Make him hurry!—You heard no cries—no?" he asked of Herrick. And he stood wiping his face and breathing hard, his brow dark with trouble.

The halls had begun to be bravely peopled. Also, a second policeman had arrived. And the information spread that one of these reassuring figures had been left in the hall downstairs and that another had gone to the roof. Curiosity, comparatively comfortable and respectable, now, made itself audible and even visible on every side; some adventurers from the street had sallied in. When McGarrigle asked the superintendent, "Any way we can get a look in?" some one immediately volunteered, "There's Mrs. Willing's apartment right across the entrance-court. You can see in both these rooms from hers."

"Only two rooms?"

"Parlor, bedroom and bath," said somebody in the tone of a prospectus.

"You go see what you can see, Clancy," said McGarrigle to the second policeman. "Now, Mr. Herrick?"

Herrick told what he knew, and McGarrigle, his eyes resting with admiration on the extremely undraped muscles of his informant, plied him with attentive questions. Herrick's own eyes were on the engineer's steel. Would it never spring the bolt? "If only she'd cry out!" he said. "Why doesn't she make some sign?"

"You're sure 'twas him fired?"

"That shadow had no revolver."

"He's done for her, then. Els't he'd never have barricaded himself like, in there. He didn't give himself a dose, after?"

"Only the one shot."

"If there's an inquest you'll be wanted."

"All right.—But why hasn't he tried to gain time with some kind of parley—some kind of bluff?"

"Knows he's cornered. He'll show fight as we go in on him. If there's more than one—" The bolt gave.

McGarrigle turned like a fury. "Clear the hall," he cried.

There was a confused movement. Obedient souls disappeared.

Clancy returned and reported the front room invisible from Mrs. Willing's side window, the shade of its own side window being down. In the bedroom and bath all lights out, but shades up and nothing stirring.

"Any hall?"

The superintendent replied in the negative.

"No fire-escapes, you say?"

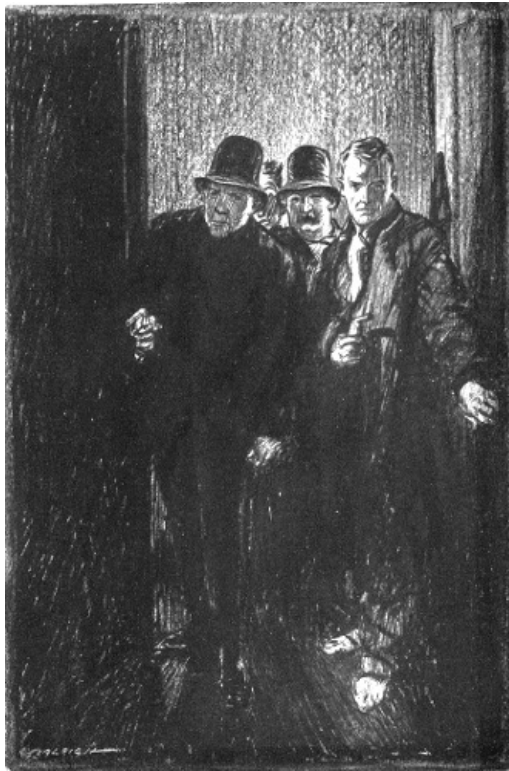
"No. Fireproof building."

"They're right ahead of us, then."

Again, with a long shudder, the door gave.

The whole hall seemed to give a gasping breath. McGarrigle growled. "I'll have no mix-up in this hall!" He favored Herrick with a wink that said, "See me clear 'em out!" "Clancy, you stay here by the door; pick out half a dozen of 'em that see it through and hold 'em to be witnesses." The halls were cleared. Locks clicked as if by simultaneous miracles and even the adventurers from the street could be heard in full flight. Herrick and McGarrigle exchanged grim smiles. "Now! You keep back, Mr. Herrick! Clancy, look out!" The engineer jumped to one side. The door swung open.

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**Not a breath, not a movement, greeted the invaders**

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It gave directly into the dark room which had lately been full of light and music and a woman's passionate grace. Not a breath, not a movement, greeted the invaders. No shadow, now, on the white blind. Whatever was within the dusk simply waited. Herrick, pushing past Clancy, entered the room with McGarrigle. Behind them the superintendent leaned in and pressed an electric button. Light sprang forth, flooding everything. The room was empty.

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **SOMETHING ELSE IS FOUND**

"Get-away, eh!" said McGarrigle, grimly.

The superintendent, shaken and wide-eyed, responded only "The bolt!"

They glanced round them, non-plused.

The large living-room upon which they had entered was richly furnished, but it had no screens nor hidden corners, and, on that summer night, the windows were undraped. The doorway in which they stood faced the great window which took up nearly all the frontage of the room. The door opened against the left wall. Just beyond the door, along that left wall, stood the piano; beyond that a couch; between the head of the couch and the front window the wall was cut, up to the molding, by one of those high, narrow doors which, in a modern apartment house, indicate the welcome, though inopportune, closet. This door was the single object of suspicion; then, an overturned chair caught their attention. It lay between the great library-table which, standing horizontally, almost halved the room, and the narrow strip of paneling of wall to the right of the main door in which the superintendent had pressed the button for the lights. In the right wall, opening on the entrance-court, directly opposite the piano, but also with its blind drawn, was another window of ordinary size.

"The bedroom," said the superintendent, moistening his lips, "'s on the court, there." Then they observed, to their right, the bedroom's arch hung with heavy portières. And the sight of these portières carried with it a cold thrill. But—"There ain't anybody in there!" Clancy persisted.

McGarrigle walked over to the door in the wall and tried it. It was locked and there was no key in the lock. "What's this?"

"A closet."

"Open it, engineer. Clancy, you stand by him."

He went up to the portières, opened them with some caution and peered in. Faced only by an empty room he jerked at the portières to throw them back; they were very heavy and the

humidity made their rings stick to the pole so that Deutch, running to his assistance, held one aside for him, while with his other hand he himself fumbled to spring on the bedroom light. Herrick was hard upon McGarrigle's heels, but, a look round revealing nothing, he was struck by a sudden fancy and, recrossing the living-room, raised the shade. No, the little balcony was wholly empty. The great window had been made in three sections, and the middle section was really a pair of doors that opened outward on this balcony. Clancy commented upon the foolishness of their not opening in as he watched Herrick step through them into the calm night that offered no explanation of that bolted emptiness. Herrick stepped to the end of the balcony and craned round toward the entrance-court. From the now lighted bedroom window there was no access to any other. He glimpsed McGarrigle's head stuck forth from the bathroom for the same observation. And it somehow surprised him that a trolley car should still bang indifferently past the corner; that, just opposite, that automobile should still chug away, as if nothing had happened. Then he heard a cry from the superintendent, followed by the policeman's oath. Herrick ran into the bedroom and stopped short. On the floor at the foot of the bed lay the body of a young man in dinner clothes. He had been shot through the heart.

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## CHAPTER IV

### HERRICK IS SURE OF ONE THING

There was something at once commonplace and incredible about it—about the stupid ghastliness of the face and about the horrid, sticky smear in the muss of the finely tucked shirt. That gross, silly sprawl of the limbs!—was it those hands that had called forth angelic music? The dead man was splendidly handsome and this somehow accentuated Herrick's revulsion. McGarrigle bent over the body. After a moment he said to the superintendent, "No use for a doctor. But if you got one, get him."

"He's dead!" said the superintendent. "It's suicide!" He spoke quietly, but with a dreadfully repressed and labored breath. "Officer, can't you see it's suicide?" He called up the doctor, and then to the silent group he again insisted, "It's him shot himself. The door was bolted on the inside. He had to shoot himself!"

McGarrigle was at the 'phone, calling up the station. Turning his head he responded, "Where's the weapon?"

They had got the closet open now; no one there. No one in the bedroom closet. No one under the big brass bed, in the folds of the portières, behind the piano, under the couch. No one anywhere. Nor any weapon, either.

Herrick and Clancy began to examine the fastening of the door. It was an ordinary little brass catch—a slip-catch, the engineer called it—which shot its bolt by being turned like a Yale lock. "If this door shut behind any one with a bang, could the catch slip of itself?" The engineer shook his head.

The hall was long since full again, though the adventurers were ready to pop back at a moment's notice; pushing through them came the doctor. Herrick did not follow him into the bedroom. The room he stood in had a personality it seemed to challenge him to penetrate.

His most pervasive impression was of cool coloring. The portières were of a tapestry which struck Herrick as probably genuine Gobelin, but with their famous blue faded to a refreshing dullness and he now remembered that in handling them he had found them lined with a soft but very heavy satin of the same shade, as if to give them all possible substance. The stretched silk, figured in tapestry, which covered the walls, had been dyed a dull blue, washed with gray, to match them; and, to Herrick, this tint, sober as it was, somehow seemed a strange one for a man's room. In couch and rugs and lampshades these notes of gray and blue continued to predominate, greatly enhanced by all the woodwork, which, evidently supplied by the tenant, was of black walnut.

He had been no anchorite, that tenant. In the corner between the bedroom and the court window the surface of a seventeenth century sideboard glimmered under bright liquids, under crystal and silver. Beyond that window all sorts of rich lusters shone from the bindings of the books that thronged shelves built into the wall until they reached the great desk standing in the farthest right hand corner to catch the front window's light. A lamp stood on this desk, unlighted. At present all the illumination in the room came from three other lamps; one that squatted atop of the grand piano, between the now flameless old silver candelabra; one, almost veiled by its heavy shade, in the middle of the library table; and one, of the standing sort, that rose up tall from a sea of newspapers at the head of the couch. All these lamps, worked by the same switch, were electric, and the ordinary electric fixtures had been dispensed with; the light was abundant, but very soft and thrown low, with outlying stretches of shadow. It was not remarkable that it had failed to show them the murdered man until the electricity in the bedroom itself had been evoked.

Herrick looked again at the couch. Its cushions had lately been rumbled and lounged upon; at its head, under the tall lamp, stood a teakwood tabouret, set with smoking materials on a Benares



tray. At its foot, as if for the convenience of the musician, a little ebony table bore a decanter and a bowl of ice; the ice in a tall glass, half-empty, was still melting into the whiskey; in a shallow Wedgewood saucer a half-smoked cigarette was smoldering still.

"McGarrigle!" said Herrick, in a low voice.

"Hallo!"

"He was shot in here, after all. I was sure of it." And he pointed to the foot of the piano stool. Still well above the surface of the hardwood flooring was a little puddle of blood.

McGarrigle contemplated this with a kind of sour bewilderment. "Well, the coroner's notified. You'll be wanted, y'know, to the inquest."

"What's this?" asked somebody.

It was a long chiffon scarf and it lay on the library table under the lamp. Clancy lifted it and its whiteness creamed down from his fingers in the tender lights and folds which lately it had taken around a woman's throat. Just above the long silk fringe, a sort of cloudy arabesque was embroidered in a dim wave of lucent silk. And Herrick noticed that the color of this border was blue-gray, like the blue-gray room. As they all grimly stared at it, the superintendent exclaimed, "I never saw it before!"

McGarrigle looked from him to the scarf and commanded, in deference to the coming coroner, "You leave that lay, now, Clancy!"

Clancy left it. But something in the thing's frail softness affected Herrick more painfully than the blood of the dead man. In no nightmare, then, had he imagined that shadow of a woman! She had been here; she was gone. And, on the floor in there, was that her work?

Now that the interest of rescue had failed, he wanted to get away from that place. He wanted to dress and go down to the river and think the whole thing over alone. He had now heard the doctor's verdict of instant death; and McGarrigle, again reminding him that he would be wanted at the inquest, made no objection to his withdrawal.

On his own curb stood a line of men, staring at the windows of 4-B as if they expected the tragedy to be reënacted for their benefit. They all turned their attention greedily to Herrick as he came up, and the nearest man said, "Have they got him?"

"Him?"

"Why, the murderer!"

"Oh!" Herrick said. Even in the crude excitement of the question the man's voice was so pleasant and his enunciation so agreeably clear that Herrick, constitutionally sensitive to voices and rather weary for the sound of cultivated speech, replied familiarly, "I'm afraid, strictly speaking, that there isn't any murderer. It's supposed to be a woman."

"Indeed! Well, have they caught her?"

"They've caught no one. And, after all, there seems to be some hope that it's a suicide."

"Oh!" said the other, with a smile. "Then you found him in evening dress! I've noticed that bodies found in evening dress are always supposed to be suicides!"

The note of laughter jarred. "I see nothing remarkable," Herrick rebuked him, with considerable state, "in his having on dinner clothes."

"Nothing whatever! 'Dinner clothes'—I accept the correction. Any poor fellow having them on, a night like this, might well commit suicide!—I'm obliged to you," he nodded. And, humming, went slowly down the street.

Herrick suddenly hated him; and then he saw how sore and savage he was from the whole affair. The same automobile still waited, not far from his own door, and he longed to leap into it and send it rapid as fury through the night, leaving all this doubt and horror behind him in the cramped town. His troubled apprehension did not believe in that suicide.—What sort of a woman was she? And what deviltry or what despair had driven her to a deed like that? Where and how—in God's name, how!—had she fled? He, too, looked up at that window where he had seen the lights go out. It was brightly enough lighted, now. But this time there was no blind drawn and no shadow. The bare front of the house baulked the curiosity on fire in him. "How the devil and all did she get out?" It was more than curiosity; it was interest, a kind of personal excitement. That strange, imperial, and passionate gesture! The woman who made it had killed that man. Of one thing he was sure. "If ever I see it again, I shall know her," he said, "among ten thousand!"

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## CHAPTER V

### HERRICK READS A NEWSPAPER

Late the next morning Herrick struggled through successive layers of consciousness to the full remembrance of last night. But now, with to-morrow's changed prospective, those events which had been his own life-and-death business, had, as it were, become historic and passed out of his sphere; they were no longer of the first importance to him.

Inestimably more important was his appointment with Ingham. Herrick had passed such a lonely summer that the prospect of a civilized luncheon with an eminent publisher was a very exciting business. Moreover, this was a critical period in his fortunes.

At twenty-eight years of age Bryce Herrick knew what it was to live a singularly baffled life—a life of artificial stagnation. His first twenty-two years, indeed, had been filled with an extraordinary popularity and success. In the ancient and beloved town of Brainerd, Connecticut, where he was born, it had been enough for him to be known as the son of Professor Herrick. The family had never been rich, but for generations it had been an honored part of the life of the town. It was Bryce's mother who, marrying in her girlhood a spouse of forty already largely wedded to his *History of the Ancient Chaldeans and Their Relation to the Babylonians and the Kassites*, brought him a little fortune; she brought, as well, the warm rich strain of mingled Irish and Southern blood which still touched the shrewdness of her son's clear glance and his boyish simplicity of manner, with something at once peppery and romantic. It was a popular combination. He grew into a tall youth with a square chin, with square white teeth and rather an aggressive nose, but, in his crinkly blue eyes, humor and kindness; with a kind of happy glow pervading all his thought and all his dealings—just as it pervaded his fresh color, his look of gay hardihood and enduring power, the ruddiness of his brown hair and his tanned skin, and of his sensitive and sanguine blood. At college he had appeared very much more than the son of an eminent man. Of that fortunate physical type which is at once large and slender—broad shouldered and deep chested, but narrow hipped, long of limb and strong and light of flank—it had surprised nobody when he became, as if naturally, spontaneously, a figure in athletics. What surprised people was the craftsmanship in those articles of travel and adventure which sprang from his vacations. At twenty-two he was a reporter on the *New York Record*; soon other reporters were prophesying that rockets come down like sticks, and he was not yet twenty-three when the blow fell. Mrs. Herrick died, and it was presently found that her money had been a long time gone; mismanaged utterly by a hopeful husband. This amiable and innocent creature had been bitten, in his old age, by the madness and the vanity of speculation; he had made a score of ventures, not one of which had come to port. His health being now quite shattered, Switzerland was prescribed; there, for five years, in the country housekeeping of their straitened circumstances, his son and daughter tended him. There, during the first two years of exile, Herrick had written those short stories which had won him a distinguished reputation. No predictions had been thought too high for him; but he had never got anything together in book form, and bye-and-bye he had become altogether silent. It was all too painful, too futile, too muffling! He seemed to be meant for but two uses: to struggle with the knotted strains of Herrick senior's business affairs and to assist with that *History of the Ancient Chaldeans and Their Relation to the Babylonians and the Kassites*, which was his father's engrossing, and now sole and senile, mania. His father suffered, so that the young man was the more enslaved; and made him suffer, so that he was the more anxious his sister should do no secretary work for the Chaldeans. But it was his mother's suffering he thought of now; the years in which she had put up with all this, uncomforted, and struggled to save something out of the wreck for Marion and for him, struggled to keep the shadow of it from their youth—and he had not known! In so much solitude and so much distasteful occupation, this idea flourished and struck deep. He saw his sister's life sacrificed, too; given up to household work and nursing, to exile and poverty, with lack of tenderness and with continual ailing pick-thanks; and there grew up in him a passionate consideration for women, a romantic faith in their essential nobility, a romantic devotion to their right to happiness. Snatched from all the populous clamor and dazzle of his boyhood and set down by this backwater, alone with a young girl and the Ancient Chaldeans, he grew into a very simple, lonely fellow; sometimes irascible but most profoundly gentle; a little old-fashioned; perhaps something of the pack-horse in his daily round; but living, mentally, in a very rosy, memory-colored vision of the great, strenuous, lost, world.

Death gave him back his life; Professor Herrick followed the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, and the Kassites; within a few months Marion was married; and Herrick, with something like Whittington's sixpence in his pocket, famished for adventure and companionship, with the appetite of a man and the experience of a boy, started for the rainbow metropolis of his five-years' dream. In this mood he had rushed into the hot stone desert of New York in summer—a New York already changed, and which seemed to have dropped him out!

But he brought, like other young desperadoes, his first novel with him; and he had approached the junior partner of the famous old house of Ingham and Son with letters from mutual friends in Brainerd. Now, at last, within twenty-four hours after his own return from abroad, Ingham—himself scarcely a decade older than Herrick, preceding him at the same university, and with a Brainerd man for a brother-in-law,—had responded with the invitation to lunch. Yes, it was exciting enough! Herrick looked at his watch. It was barely ten. And then he took time to remember when he had last looked at his watch in that room.

Certainly, it was rather grim! And yet, said the desperado, it wasn't going to be such a bad thing with which to command Ingham's interest at lunch and get him into a confidential humor that wouldn't be too superior. While he was attempting to inspire Ingham with a craving for his complete works, this thrilling topic would be just the thing to do away with self-consciousness.

He mustn't lose faith in himself. And, before all things, he mustn't, as he had done last night, lose faith in his Heroine!

He looked across the room at her picture; got out of bed; walked over to her, and humbly saluted. Lose faith in her? "Evadne," he said, "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous—You darling!" Lose faith in *her*!

The photograph, which looked like an enlargement of a kodak, represented a very young girl, standing on a strip of beach with her back to the sea. Her sailor tie, her white dress, and the ends of her uncovered hair all seemed to flutter in the wind. Slim and tall as Diana she showed, in her whole light poise, like a daughter of the winds, and Herrick was sure that she was of a fresh loveliness, a fair skin and brown hair, with eyes cool as gray water. It was the eyes, after all, which had wholly captured his imagination. They were extraordinarily candid and wide-set; in a shifting world they were entirely brave. This was what touched him as dramatic in her face; she was probably in the new dignity of her first long skirts, so that all that candor and courage, all the alert quiet of those intelligent eyes were only the candor and courage of a kind of royal child. She wanted to find out about life; she longed to try everything and to face everything; but she was only a tall little girl! That was the look his Heroine must have! Thus had she come adventuring to New York with him, to seek their fortunes, and all during those dreary months of heat and dust she had borne him happy company; in the Park or in the Bowery, at Coney Island or along Fifth Avenue's deserted pomp, he had always tried to see, for the novel, how things would look to that young eagerness—no more ardent, had he but realized it, than his own!—"Evadne," said he, now, "if things look promising with Ingham this afternoon we'll take a taxi, to-night, and see the moon rise up the river." He called her Evadne when he was talking about the moon; when he required her pity because the laundress had faded his best shirt, he called her Sal.

A sound as of the Grubey children snuffling round his door recalled him to the illustrious circumstance that he was by way of being a hero of a murder story. But, if he was nursing pride in that direction, it was destined to a fall. Johnnie Grubey thrust under the door something which, as he had brought it up from the mail-box in the vestibule, Johnnie announced as mail. But it was only a large, rough scrap of paper, which astonished Herrick by turning out to be wall-paper—a ragged sample of the pale green "cartridge" variety that so largely symbolizes apartment-house refinement—and which confronted him from its smoother side with the lines, penciled in a long, pointed, graceful hand,

For the Apollo in the bath-robe! Or was it a raincoat?  
But should not Apollos stay in when it rains?

It was many a day since Herrick had received a comic valentine, but all the appropriate sensations returned to him then. The hand of this neighborly jest was plainly a woman's and its slap brought a blush. He was forced to grin; but he longed to evade the solemn questioning of the Grubeys through whose domain he must presently venture to his bath and it occurred to him that the most peaceful method of clearing a road was to send out the younger generation for a plentiful supply of newspapers. Besides, he wished very much to see the papers himself.

He distributed them freely and escaped back to his room still carrying three. When he had closed his door, the first paragraph which met his eyes was on the lower part of the sheet which he held folded in half. It began—"The body of Mr. Ingham was not found in the living-room, but—" He flapped it over, agog for the headlines. They read:

DEATH BAFFLES POLICE.

James R. Ingham, Noted Publisher, Found Shot in Apartment—

Herrick was still standing with the paper in his hand when the second Grubey boy brought him a visiting-card. It bore the name of Hermann E. Deutch; and scribbled beneath this in pencil was the explanatory phrase, "Superintendent, Van Dam Apartment House."

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## CHAPTER VI

### HERRICK IS ASKED A FAVOR

Hermann Deutch was a shortish, middle-aged Jew, belonging to the humbler classes and of a perfectly cheap and cheerful type. But at the present moment he was not cheerful. He showed his harassment in the drawn diffidence of his sympathetic, emotional face, and in every line of what, ten or fifteen years ago, must have been a handsome little person. Since that period his tight black curls, receding further and further from his naturally high forehead, had grown decidedly thin, and exactly the reverse of this had happened to his figure. But he had still a pair of femininely liquid and large black eyes, brimming with the romance which does not characterize the cheap and cheerful of other races, and Herrick remembered him last night as very impressionably, but not basely, nervous.

He now fixed his liquid eyes upon Herrick with an anxiety which took humble but minute notes. Since the young fellow was at least half-dressed in very well-cut and well-cared-for, if not

specially new, garments, it was clear to Mr. Deutch's reluctant admiration that he was thoroughly "*high-class!*" Whatever was Mr. Deutch's apprehension, it shrank weakly back upon itself. Then he simply took his life in his hands and plunged.

"I won't keep you a minute, Mr. Herrick. But I've got a little favor I want to ask you.—You behaved simply splendid last night, Mr. Herrick.—Well, I will, thanks,"—as he dropped into a chair. "I—I won't keep you a minute—"

"I'll be glad to do anything I can," Herrick interrupted.

The news in his paper had made him feel as if he had just been disinherited and, now that the dead man was a personality so much nearer home, his brain rang with a hundred impressions of pity and wonder and excitement. But he sympathized with poor Mr. Deutch; it could be no sinecure to be the superintendent of a murder! Then, recollecting, "What made you so certain it was suicide?" he asked suddenly.

"What else could it be? There wasn't anybody but him there."

"There was a woman there," Herrick said, "when the shot was fired."

The superintendent took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. "Well, now, Mr. Herrick, that's just what I wanted to see you about. Now please, Mr. Herrick, don't get excited and mad! All I want to say is, if there *was* a lady there last night—but there *couldn't* have been—well, of course, Mr. Herrick, if you say so! Why, you couldn't have seen her so very plain, now could you?"

"What are you driving at?" Herrick asked.

"Couldn't it have been a gentleman's shadow you saw, Mr. Herrick? Mr. Ingham's shadow? Raising his pistol, maybe, with one hand—"

"While he played the piano with the other?"

"Mr. Herrick, there couldn't have been any lady there!" He bridled. "It's against the rules—that time o' night! I wouldn't ever allow such a thing. There's never been a word against the Van Dam since I been running it. Why, Mr. Herrick, if there was to be that kind of talk, especially if she was to murder the gentleman and all like that, I'd be ruined. And so'd the house. It ain't one o' these cheap flat buildings. We got leases signed by—"

"Oh, I see!" Herrick felt his temper rising. But he tried to be reasonable while he added, "I'm very sorry for you. But there was a woman there. I've reported so already to the police. Even if I had not, I couldn't go in for perjury, Mr. Deutch."

"No, no! Of course not! Of course! I wouldn't ask you! You don't understand me! It's not to take back what you said already to the police. That'd get you into trouble. And it couldn't be done. I couldn't expect it. It's not facts you might go a little easy on, Mr. Herrick; it's your language!"

"What!"

"It's your descriptive language, Mr. Herrick. If only you wouldn't be quite so particular—"

"Look here!" said Herrick with his odd, brusk slowness. "I didn't know it myself last night. But Mr. Ingham wasn't altogether a stranger to me." Deutch stared at him. "He had friends in the town I come from and a good many people I know are going to be badly cut up about his death. I was to have met him on business this very day. Now you can see that I don't feel very leniently to the person—not even to the woman—who murdered him. I don't believe he killed himself. He had no reason to do it. If there's anything I can do to prove he didn't, that thing's going to be done. If there's any word of mine that's a clue to tell who killed him, I can't speak it often enough nor loud enough. Understand that, Mr. Deutch. And, good-morning."

"Oh, my God! Oh, dear! But my dear sir—"

"And let me give you a word of warning. If you keep on like this what people will really say is, that you knew there was a woman there and that it was you who connived at her escape!"

"All right!" cried Mr. Deutch, unexpectedly. "Let 'em say it! I got no kick coming if people tell lies about me, any. All I want stopped is the lies you're putting into people's heads about Miss Christina."

"Miss Christina!" Herrick exclaimed. He stared, wondering if the poor worried little soul had gone out of his head. "I never mentioned any woman's name. I didn't know any to mention. I never heard of any Miss Christina!"

"You told the policeman the way she made motions, moving around and all like that, it made you think maybe they were rehearsing something out of a play."

"Did I? Well?"

Mr. Deutch possessed himself of the newspaper which Herrick had dropped upon the bed, and pointed to the last line of the murder story. It ran: "About a year ago Mr. Ingham became engaged to be married to Christina Hope, the actress." And Herrick read the line with a strange thrill, as of prophecy realized. "Oh—ho!" he breathed.

"Oh—ho!" hysterically mocked the superintendent. "You see what it makes you think, all right."

Even me!—that was what brought her first to my mind, poor lady. The police officers may have forgot it or not noticed, any. But if you say it again, at the inquest, you'll make everybody think the same thing. And it's not so!" he almost shrieked. "It's not so. It's a damn mean lie! And you got no right to say such a thing!"

"That's true," said Herrick, intently. After his impulsive whistle he had begun to furl his sails. He had heard vaguely of Christina Hope, as a promising young actress who had made her mark somewhere in the West, and was soon to attempt the same feat on Broadway. He knew nothing to her detriment.

"Ain't it hard enough for her, poor young lady, with him gone and all, but what she should have that said about her! And it wouldn't stop there, even! She was there alone with him at night, they'd say, with their nasty slurs. She'd never stand a chance. For there ain't any denying she's on the stage, and that's enough to make everybody think she's guilty—"

"Oh, come! Why—"

"Wasn't it enough for you, yourself?"

Herrick opened his lips for an indignant negative, but he closed them without speaking.

"The minute you seen that paragraph you felt 'She's just the person to be mixed up with things that way.' And then you grabbed hold of yourself and said, 'Why, no. She may be as nice as anybody. Give her the benefit of the doubt.' But there's the doubt, all right. You're an edjucated gennelman," said Mr. Deutch, sympathetically, "but all these prejudiced, old-fashioned farmers and low-brows like they got on juries—people like them, and Miss Christina—Oh! Good Lord! Ach, don't I know 'em! Mr. Herrick, it's my solemn word, if you say that at the inquest to turn them on to Miss Christina, you—"

"I shan't say it at the inquest," Herrick said. He was astonished at the completeness of the charge in his own mind. He was convinced, now, in every nerve, that Ingham had met death at the hands of his betrothed. But the very violence of his conviction warned him not to lay such a handicap upon other minds. His chance phrase, his chance impression, must color neither the popular nor the legal outlook. "I shall take very good care, you may be sure, to say nothing of the kind. Here!" he cried, "you want a drink!"

For Mr. Deutch, at this emphatic assurance, had put his plump elbows on his plump knees and hidden his moon face, his spaniel eyes, with plump and shaky fists. He drank the whiskey Herrick brought him and slowly got himself together; without embarrassment, but with a comfort in his relaxation which made Herrick guess how tight he had been strung. As he returned the glass he said, "If you knew what a lot we thought, Mr. Herrick, me and my wife, of the young lady, I wouldn't seem anywheres near so crazy to you."

Herrick sat down on the edge of the bed in his shirtsleeves and regarded his guest. Strict delicacy required that he ask no questions. But he was human. And he had been a reporter. He said, "You used to see her with Mr. Ingham?"

"Oh, great Scott, Mr. Herrick, we knew her long before that! Long before ever *he* set eyes on her. When she was a tiny little thing and her papa had money, he used to get his wine from my firm. He was such a pleasant-spoken, agreeable gentleman that when I went into business for myself I sent him my card. It wasn't the wine business, Mr. Herrick, it was oil paintings. I always was what you might call artistic; I got very refined feelings, and business ain't exactly in my line. I had as high-class a little shop as ever you set your eyes on; gold frames; plush draperies, electric lights; fine, beautiful oil paintings—oh, beautiful!—by expensive, high-class artists; everything elegant. But it wasn't a success. The public don't appreciate the artistic, Mr. Herrick, they got no edjucation. I lost my last dollar, and I don't know as I ever recovered exactly. I ain't ever been what you could call anyways successful, since."

"But you saw something of Mr. Hope—"

"Well, Mr. Hope was an edjucated gentleman, Mr. Herrick, like you are yourself. He had very up-to-date ideas; and when he'd buy a picture, once in a while I'd go up to the house to see it hung. Miss Christina was about eight years old, then, and I used to see her coming in from dancing school with her maid, or else she'd be just riding out with her groom behind her, like a little queen. When my shop failed; I went to manage my sister-in-law's restaurant. I was ashamed to let Mr. Hope know that time. But one Sunday night, my wife says to me, 'Ain't that little girl as pretty as the one you been telling me about?' And there in the door, with her long hair straight down from under her big hat and her little long legs in black silk stockings straight down from one o' them pleated skirts and her long, square, coat, was Miss Christina. Behind her was her papa and her mama. And after that they came pretty regular every week or two; we served her twelfth birthday party. My wife made a cake with twelve pink rosebuds, all herself. She was always the little lady, Miss Christina, but she made her own friends, and to people she liked she spoke as pretty as a princess. We got to feel such an affection for her, Mr. Herrick, we couldn't believe there was anybody like her in this world. We never had a child of our own, me and my wife, Mr. Herrick. It does knock out your faith in things to think a thing like that can happen, but it's what's happened to her and me. We was kind of cracked about all children, and Miss Christina was certainly the most stylish child I ever set eyes on!"

"Father living?" Herrick prompted.

"No, Mr. Herrick, no. And before he died, he got into business difficulties himself, and he didn't leave enough to keep a bird alive. I helped Mrs. Hope dispose of all the bric-a-brac, my paintings and all, everything that wasn't mortgaged, and they put it in with an aunt of Mr. Hope's, a catamaran, and went to keeping a high-class boarding-house. We're all apt to fall, Mr. Herrick. I've fallen myself."

"The boarding-house didn't succeed either, then?"

"I ask you, how could it, with that battle-ax? She cheated my poor ladies, and she bullied Miss Christina, and used to take the books she was always reading and burn 'em up, and say nasty common things to her, when she got older, about the young gentlemen that were always on her heels even then, and that she'd like well enough, one day, and the next she couldn't stand the sight of. If there's one thing Miss Christina has, more than another, it's a high spirit; she has what I'd call a plenty of it. They had fierce fights. Often, when she'd come to me with a little breastpin or other to pawn for her, so her and her mama'd have a mite o' cash, she'd put her pretty head down on my wife's shoulder and cry; and my wife'd make her a cup o' tea. She'd say then she was going to run away and be an actress. And, when she was sixteen yet, she ran. Two years afterward, her and her mama turned up in my first little flat-house; a cheap one, down Eighth Avenue, in the twenties. She was on the stage, all right, and what a time she'd had! It'd been cruel, Mr. Herrick; cruel hard work and, just at the first, cruel little of it. But now she's a leading lady. And this fall she's going to open in New York, in a big part. It's the play they call 'The Victors'; I guess you've heard. Mr. Wheeler, he's the star, and Miss Christina's part's better than what his is. But now—"

There was a pause. Mr. Deutch mopped his face, and Herrick, cogitating, bit his lip.

"This engagement to Ingham—"

"She met him about two years ago, when she had her first leading part, and they went right off their heads about each other. I never expected I should see Miss Christina act so regular loony over any man. But she refused him time and again. She said she'd always been a curse to herself and she wasn't going to bring her curse on him. In the end, of course, she gave in. She said she'd marry him this winter, if he'd go away for the summer and leave her alone. You knew it was only day before yesterday he got back from Europe?"

"Yes. I know."

"My wife and me have seen a lot more of her this summer than since she was a little girl. There's been years at a time, all the while she was on the road, that we wouldn't know if she was alive or dead. And then some day I'd come home, and find her sitting in our apartment—it's a basement apartment, Mr. Herrick!—as easy as if she'd just stepped across the street. But I wouldn't like you should think it's Miss Christina's talked to us very much about her engagement. She's a pretty close-mouthed girl, in her way, and a simply elegant lady. Not but what Mrs. Hope is an elegant lady, too. But still she is—if you know what I mean—gabby! Miss Christina's always been a puzzle to her; and she's a great hand to sit and make guesses at her with my wife. Mr. Ingham left a key with Miss Christina when he went abroad so she could come and play his piano and read his books whenever it suited her, and she'd have a quiet place to study her part. Every once in a while Mrs. Hope would take a notion it wasn't quite the proper thing she should come by herself. But after she'd seen her inside, she'd drop down our way and wait. She wasn't just exactly gone on Mr. Ingham, and my wife wasn't either."

Herrick lifted his head with a flash of interest. "Mrs. Hope opposed the marriage?"

"Well, not opposed. She never opposed the young lady in anything, when you came down to it. But he wanted she should leave the stage. And he wasn't ever faithful to her, Mr. Herrick! For all he was so crazy about her and so wild-animal jealous of the very air she had to breathe, he wasn't ever faithful to her—and if ever you'd seen her, that'd make your blood boil! She'd hear things; and he'd lie. And she'd believe him, and believe him! If it wasn't for his money, she'd be well rid of him, to my mind."

He sat nursing his wrath. And Herrick, still watching him, felt sorry. For, in Herrick's mind it was now all so clear; so pitifully clear! Poor little chap!—he didn't know how scanty was the reassurance in his portrait of his Miss Christina! The indulged, imperious child, choosing "her own" friends; the unhappy, bold, bedeviled girl, already with young men at her heels, whom she encouraged one day and flouted the next; pawning her trinkets at sixteen and plunging alone into the world, the world of the stage; the ambitious, adventurous woman capable of holding such a devotion as that of the good Deutch by so capricious and high-handed a return, snaring such a man of the world as Ingham by an adroit blending of abandon and retreat, putting up with the humiliations of his flagrant inconstancies only, perhaps, to find herself, after her stipulated summer alone, on the verge of losing him through his insensate jealousy—were there no materials here for tragic quarrel? Was not this the very figure that last night he had seen fling out an arm in unexampled passion and grace? In his heart he saw Christina Hope, while her betrothed, whether as accuser or accused, taunted her from the piano, kill James Ingham. And he profoundly knew that he had almost seen this with his eyes. His pulse beat high; but it was with a sobered mind that he beheld Mr. Deutch preparing to depart.

"Well, you see how I had to ask you, Mr. Herrick, not to say that lady's shadow made you think any of an actress?"

"I do, indeed."

"There isn't any language can express how I thank you. But I know if only you was acquainted with her—" He had turned, in rising, to get his hat, and he now stopped short and exclaimed with bewildered reproach, "Oh, well, now, Mr. Herrick! Why wouldn't you tell me?"

"Tell you?" Herrick's eyes followed his. They led to the likeness of his Evadne, of his dear Heroine. "Tell you what?"

"Why, that you *was* acquainted with—" said Mr. Deutch, extending his hat, as if in a magnificence of introduction, "Christina Hope."

Herrick could not speak. And Deutch added, "You was acquainted with her, all along! It's a real old picture—'bout five years ago. You knew her then? You knew her—And you—saw—" His voice died away. His glance turned from Herrick's and traveled unwillingly to where, upon the blinds drawn down again, across the street, it seemed to both men the shadow must start forth. And, as he slowly withdrew his gaze, Herrick saw, looking out at him from those soft, spaniel eyes, the eyes of fear.

Deutch bowed bruskiy and withdrew. Herrick was alone, as he had been these many months, with the young challenge of his Heroine; the familiar face, long learned by heart, asking its innocent questions about life, shone softly out on him, in pride. And, on that August morning, he felt his blood go cold.

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## CHAPTER VII

### HERRICK HAS A BUSIEST DAY

There was a time coming when Herrick was to salute as prophetic what he now noted with a grim amusement; that from the moment the shadow sprang upon the blind the current of his life was changed. Peopled, busy, adventurous, it had passed, as one might say, into active circulation. He was suddenly in the center of the stage.

This was brought home to him rather sharply when Deutch had been not five minutes gone. On the exit of that gentleman Herrick's first thought had been for Miss Hope's photograph. Although an actress seems less a woman than a type, yet, since, to any stray gossip, she was recognizable as a real person, she mustn't, at this critical time, be left hanging on his wall to excite comment. He had scarcely laid the photograph on his desk to compare it with a cut in one of the newspapers when information that he was "wanted on the 'phone" made him drop the paper atop of his dethroned Heroine and hurry into the hall. And the place to which the telephone invited him was the Ingham publishing house.

The message was from old Gideon Corey, the prop and counselor of the House of Ingham, father and son. It told Herrick that Ingham senior had just arrived in New York and had not yet gone to an hotel; he had turned instinctively to his office, where he besought Herrick, whose name he had recognized, to come to him and tell him what there was to tell. It was only the piteous human longing to be brought nearer, by some detail, by some vision later than our own, to those to whom we shall never be near again. Herrick flinched from the task, but there could be no question of his obedience; and he came out from that interview humbly, softened by the gentleness of such a grief. It seemed to him that he had never seen so tender a dignity of reserve; that beautiful old gentleman who had wished to question him had also wished to spare him; wished, too,—and taken the loyalest precautions—to spare some one else.

"I don't know if you are aware, Mr. Herrick," Ingham's father had said to him, "that my son was engaged to be married?"

"I had just heard—"

"Then you will understand how especially painful it is that there should be any mention of a—another lady—Miss Hope is a sweet girl," said the old gentleman, "a sweet, good girl—" He paused, as if he were feeling for words delicate enough for what he had to say; and then a little breath that was like a cry broke from him. "My son was a wild boy, Mr. Herrick, but he loved her—he loved her! Will it be necessary to add to her grief by telling her that, at the very last, he was entertaining—? I wanted her for my daughter! May she not keep even the memory of my son?"

Herrick could have groaned aloud. "Only tell me," he said, "what can I do?"

"Mr. Ingham means to ask"—Corey interposed—"whether, at the—the inquest, it will be necessary to lay so much emphasis on that shadow you observed?"

Thus, for the second time that day, from what different mouths and under what different circumstances, came the same request! And there passed over Herrick that little shiver of the skin which takes place, the country people tell you, when some one steps over your grave.

"Could you not assume that you might have been mistaken? That it might have been a man's shadow—?"

"I was not mistaken—Why, look here!" he continued, eagerly. "Can't you see that it would be the worst kind of a mistake for me to change now? They'd think I'd heard who the woman was, and was trying to shield her! And, besides," he added to Corey, "it's your only clue." It occurred to him, as he spoke, that Ingham's family might be concerned for his reputation rather than for vengeance; this continued to seem probable even while they assured him that it was not the police, but Miss Hope alone, from whom they wished to keep the circumstance; they were thinking of what would have been the dead man's dearest wish. What she read in the papers they could perhaps deny; but what she heard at the inquest—

When, however, they reluctantly agreed with him that it was too late for any effectual reticence it was with unabated kindness that Corey went with him into the hall. "We remain infinitely obliged to you, Mr. Herrick, and—later on—we mustn't lose track of you again—Well, good-morning! Good-morning!"

It was nearly afternoon and Herrick stepped out from the dark, old-fashioned elevator into its sunny heat, which occasional spattering showers had vainly tried to dissipate, with a very highly charged sense of moving among vivid personalities. Concerning two of these there persisted a certain lack of reassurance, and as that of Ingham brightened or darkened the shadow herself now shone as a tigress devouring, now an avenging angel. Sometimes her figure stood out clearly, by itself; sometimes it wavered and changed, and passed, whether Herrick willed it or not, into the figure of Christina Hope. Then, whether for Deutch's or Ingham's sake, or for Evadne's, there was something oppressive in the sunshine.

But the young fellow was not enough of a hypocrite to pretend, even to himself, that all this excitement, all this acquaintance with swift events, with salient people under the influence of strong emotion, all this quick, warm, and strong feeling which had been aroused in himself, were anything but very welcome. Nor were his adventures over yet. His walk brought him, with a thoughtful forehead but all in a breathing glow of interest, to City Hall Park; a spot where he had loitered that summer a score of times, wearying vaguely for a friendly face. To-day, his brisk step had scarcely carried him within its boundaries before he heard his name called and, turning, was accosted by a *Record* acquaintance of six years ago whose recognition displayed the utmost eagerness.

The spirit of New York City, which had hitherto considered him merely one of her returned failures, had now made up her mind to show what she could do for such a darling as the near-eye-witness of a murder. He found himself hailed into the office of the *Record*, whence they had been madly telephoning him this long while, and immediately commissioned, at the price of a high, temporary specialist, to report the Ingham inquest, and to write a Sunday special of the murder!

He thought of Ingham's father, and "It isn't a tasty job!" he said to his old chief. But it swept upon him what material it was; it felt, in his empty hand, like the key of success; and then, there is always in our ears at such a time the whisper that it will certainly be done by somebody. "And never, surely," Herrick wrote his sister that night, "so chastely, so justly, with either such dash or such discretion, as by our elegant selves!"

This, at least, was the view which the Ingham office took of it. Corey reported the family as glad to leave it in Herrick's hands; while a tremor at once of regret, pleasure and superstition pricked over Herrick's nerves as Corey followed up this statement with an invitation through the *Record* phone to meet him at the Pilgrims' Club and talk some things over during lunch!

"To shake the iron hand of Fate" was becoming so much the rule that Herrick was nearly capable of feeling gripped by it even in the somewhat remote circumstances that the Pilgrims' had been founded as a club of actors and, overrun as it was by men of all professions and particularly literary men, it had remained essentially a club of actors—while he, Bryce Herrick, hastening toward it through a smart shower, had at first conceived of his novel as a play and then, in Switzerland, been baffled by the inaccessibility of that world! His novel, of whom the heroine had been so unwittingly Christina Hope!—However, the low, wide portals of the Pilgrims' received him under their great, wrought iron lanterns without excitement and he passed, self-consciously and with a certain shyness, into the cooling twilight of a hallway still perfectly calm and over the lustrous, glinting sweeps of easy and quite indifferent stairs up to an "apartment brown and booklined" that looked out on a green park.

At one of the windows Corey stood talking to a dark, heavy, vigorous man whose face was familiar to Herrick and whom Corey introduced as Robert Wheeler. It was a name of note but Herrick bewilderedly exclaimed "Miss Hope's manager?" Two or three men turned to Wheeler and grinned and he, himself, said with a gruff chuckle, yes, he supposed it had come to that, already! Herrick's embarrassed tactlessness sought refuge in looking out of doors.

The famous square had kept its ancient privacy secure from all the city's noise and hurry. It was still, secluded; self-sufficient with an old-world grace; and the green park shone fresh after the shower, its flower beds and the window boxes of its grave, dark houses gave out a delicate, glimmering sparkle along with their moist and newly piercing sweetness. Nothing could have been more tranquil except the cool spaces, the dusky, sunny, airy, oak-hued shadows of the wide-windowed club—neither could anything have been less like Mrs. Grubey's or even Professor Herrick's idea of what an actors' club would be. The whole place seemed to rebuke its visitor, more graciously than had Hermann Deutch, for the feverish suggestion which Christina's calling had hinted round her name. The blithe young gentlemen in light clothes, fussing over with



cigarette smoke and real and unreal English accents, the older men, less saddled and bridled and fit for the fray but still with something at once lazy and boyish in the quick sensibility of their faces, appeared to have no very lurid intensities up their sleeve and amid so much serene and humorous assurance Ingham senior's "sweet, good girl," Hermann Deutch's "Miss Christina" seemed better founded in kind and credible probabilities. She bloomed, indeed, hedged with all proprieties in the sound of Wheeler's voice saying, "But must Miss Hope appear at the inquest?"

"Yes," said Corey, tartly, "since her name will add to its notoriety! Have you forgotten our coroner?" Wheeler lifted his thick brows in annoyance and with the same sourness of inflection Corey added, "Is it possible any corner of the universe can for a moment forget Cuyler Ten Euyck!"

Herrick started and looked at the two men with quick eagerness. "You don't mean—"

"Precisely! The mighty in high places—Peter Winthrop Brewster Cuyler Ten Euyck! No less!"

Wheeler broke into a curse and then into his deep laugh, and said Miss Hope's manager would do well to clear out before any Sherlock Holmes with wings got to throwing his mouth around here. "I can stand his always bringing down a curtain with 'Seventy times a millionaire—the world is at my feet!' A man has to believe in something! But it's his taking himself for a tin District-Attorney-on-wheels that'll get his poor jaw broken one of these days!"

Herrick's curiosity was roused to certain reminiscences and he went on putting them together even while he followed Corey downstairs and out onto an open gallery whose tables overlooked a little garden. As soon as the waiter left them he asked Corey, "But—I've been so long away—this coroner can't be the same Ten Euyck—"

"Can you think there are two?"

Well, the world is certainly full of entertainment! A man born to one of the proudest names and greatest fortunes of his time serving as coroner—coroner! That was what certain references of McGarrigle's meant, certain newspaper flippancies. "Mr. Ten Euyck!" Herrick's extreme youth had witnessed the historic thrill that shook society when the full significance of the great creature's visiting-cards first burst upon a startled and ingenuous nation! But even then Mr. Ten Euyck must have aspired beyond social thrills and seen himself as a man of parts and public conscience. It was not so much later that Herrick remembered him as a literary dabbler, an amateur statesman, endeavoring by means of elegant Ciceronics to waken his class to its duty as leader of the people! He had then seemed merely a solemn ass who, having learned during a long residence abroad an aristocratic notion of government, took his caste and its duties much too seriously.—"But why coroner?"

Despair, apparently, over that caste's lack of seriousness! There had been talk of abolishing the coronership, Corey said, and Ten Euyck had run for it. If irresponsible idlers dared to slight even the presidency in their choice of careers let them see what could be done with the least considerable of offices! If younger sons dared lessen class-power by neglecting government, let them see to what Mr. Ten Euyck could condescend in the public service! It was an old-fashioned, an old-world ambition; the man, essentially stiff-necked, essentially egotistical, was in no sense a reformer. "He pushes his office, upon my word, to the diversion of the whole town; holding court, if you please, as if he were launching a thunderbolt, making speeches and denunciations, and taking himself for a kind of District Attorney.—I may as well say, Mr. Herrick, that it's a black bitterness to me that that pretentious puppy should have authority in—in dealing with Mr. James. There was never anything cordial between them; in fact, quite the contrary. We refused a book of his once!"

"But, great heavens,—"

"It was a book of plays, Mr. Herrick; blank verse and Roman soldiery—with orations! I don't deny Mr. James's letter was a trifle saucy; he was often not conciliating; no, not conciliating! Well, now, it's Ten Euyck's turn. If he can soil Mr. James's memory in Miss Hope's eyes, why, that will be just to his taste, believe me. Now I come to think of it, I believe Miss Hope herself is rather in his black books! It seems to me she once took part in one of the plays, and it failed. I tell you all this, Mr. Herrick, because James Ingham had the highest admiration for you, and had great pleasure in the hope of bringing out your novel."

Herrick gaped at him in an astonishment which had not so much as become articulate before—such is our mortal frailty—his slight, but hitherto persistent, repulsion from the dead man was shaken to its foundation and moldered in dust away.

"Yes, when we are ourselves again, you must bring in that manuscript. Yes, yes, he wished it! They were almost the last words I had from him. He was very pleased to get your letter, very pleased. He was talking about it to Stanley, his young brother, and to me; we were all there yesterday—think of it, Mr. Herrick, yesterday!—working out his ideas for our new Weekly. He was always an enthusiast, a keen enthusiast, and the Weekly was his latest enthusiasm. Its politics would have been very different from Mr. Ten Euyck's—"

A friendly visage at another table favored them with a sidelong contortion and a warning wink. Just behind them a shrewd voice ceased abruptly and a metallic tone responded, "Yes, but you—you're a man with a mania!"

The first voice replied, "Well, you're down on criminals and I'm down on crime."

Then Ten Euyck's was again lifted. "You're out after a criminal whom you think corrupting and to wipe him out you'll pass by fifty of the plainest personal guilt! In my view nobody but the corruptible is corrupted. Any person who commits a crime belongs in the criminal class."

"Crime may end in the criminal class," the other voice took up the challenge, "but it begins at home. You can't always pounce upon the decayed core. But if you observe a very little speck on a healthy surface, one of two things—either you can cut it away and save the apple, or your tunneling will lead you farther and farther in, it will open wider and wider and the speck will vanish, automatically, because the whole rotten fruit will fall open in your hand."

"Delightful, when it does! But in this short life I prefer the pounce!"

By this time everybody was harkening and Herrick ventured to turn his chair and look round. He beheld a sallow man, nearer forty than thirty and as tall as himself or taller, but of a straighter and stiffer height; with a long head, a long handsome nose and chin, long hands and long ears. This elongated countenance was not without contradictions. Under the sparse, squarely cut mustache Herrick was surprised to find the lips a little pouting, and the glossily black eyes were prominent and full. Fastidiously as he was dressed there persisted something funereal in the effect; forward of each ear a shadow of clipped whisker leant him the dignity of a daguerreotype. He spoke neatly, distinctly. His excellent, strong voice was dry, cold and inflexible. On the whole Herrick's easy and contemptuous amusement received a slight set-back.

"I prefer the pounce!" To be pounced upon by that bony intensity might not be amusing at all!

Then he discovered what had changed his point of view: it had shifted a trifle toward the criminal's! All very well for Ten Euyck's guest—Herrick had somehow gathered that the other man was a guest—to give up the argument, indifferently refusing to play up to his host! All very well for the free-hearted lunchers to sit, diverted, getting oratorical pointers from the monologue into which Ten Euyck had plunged! It was neither the lunchers nor the guest, but Herrick who must, to-morrow morning, appear as a witness before Ten Euyck! He would have to tell the man something which the Inghams had asked him not to tell because it might prove prejudicial to James Ingham—his admirer—which Hermann Deutch had asked him not to tell because it might prove prejudicial to Christina Hope—she whose face had been his heart's companion through hard and lonely times! The idea of the inquest had become exceedingly disagreeable to Herrick.

And the more he listened to Ten Euyck, the more disagreeable it became; the more he felt that a derisive audience had underestimated its man. Ten Euyck might take himself too seriously; he might show too small a sense of the ridiculous in loudly delivering, at luncheon, a sort of Oration-on-the-Respect-of-Law-in-Great-Cities. But this depended on whether you considered him as a man or a trap. The real quality in a trap is not a sense of the ridiculous nor a delicate repugnance to taking itself seriously. Its real quality is the ability to catch things. And, as a trap, Herrick began to feel that Ten Euyck was made for success.

The new-born criminal actually felt an impulse to warn his unknown accomplice how trivial gossip had been, how blind the public gaze. Platitudes about law, yes. But, when the orator came to dealing with the lawless, the whole man awoke. Those who broke the rules of the world's game and yet struggled not to lose it were to him mere despicable impertinents whose existence at large was an outrage to self-respecting players and for what he despised he found excellent cold thrusts and even a kind of homely and savage humor. Then, indeed, "it was not blood which ran in his veins, but iced wine." Why, he was right to think of himself as a prosecutor—he was born a prosecutor! In unconsciously assuming the robes of justice he had simply found himself. To him justice meant punishment, punishment an ideal vocation for the righteous and life a thing continually coming up before him to be weighed, found wanting and rebuked. To admonish, to blame, and then—with a spring—to crush—it is a passion which grows by what it feeds on, so that even Ten Euyck's jests had become corrections and the whole creature admirably of one piece, untorn by conflicting beliefs and inaccessible to reason, provocation, pity or consequences; because illegal actions—ideas, too, daily spreading—must be suppressed at all costs by proper persons and the patriarchal arrangement of the world rebuilt over the body of a rebel.—Of course, as his cowed analyst admitted, with P. W. B. C. Ten Euyck on top! Thank heaven the monster had one weak spot! As he jibed at a newspaper cartoon of the coroner's office he displayed fully the symptom of his disease; a raging fever of egotism. He was one to die of a laugh and Herrick doubted if he could have survived a losing game.

But when was he likely to lose? Not when, as now, he lifted the bugle of a universal summons, calling expertly on a primitive instinct. Your aristocrat may be a fool and a bore in your own workshop, but he is the hereditary leader of the chase; his mounted figure convinces you he will run down the fugitive and in the minds of men the weight of his millions add themselves, automatically, to his hand. This huntsman had branched off to the importance of motive in murder trials and his audience was not smiling, now. It had warmed itself at his cold fire and the excitement of the hunt was in the air. Ten Euyck always uttered the word "crime" with a gusto that spat it forth, indeed, but richly scrunched; and it was a day on which that word could not but start an electrical contagion. Nothing definite was said, in Corey's presence; still less was a name named—nor was any needed. But a sense of gathering issues, of closing in on some breathless revelation thickened in the heating, thrilling, restive atmosphere till a boy's voice said languidly, "Lead me to the air, Reginald! This is too rich for my blood!" and they all dropped the wet blanket of a shamefaced relief upon the coroner's inconsiderate eloquence. The quiet guest got suddenly to his feet and bore his host away.

In a tone of tremulous scorn Corey said to Herrick, "He's grown a mustache, you see, because Kane wears one!"

"Kane?"

"You've no nose for celebrities! Ten Euyck brought him here to-day to pose before him as a literary man and before us as a political lion. But our coroner's founded himself on Gerrish so long I don't know what'll become of him now we've got a District-Attorney who has no particular appetite for the scalps of women!"

Kane! So the District-Attorney was the quiet guest! To Herrick's roused apprehension Kane might just as well have been brought there to be presented with any chance mention which might indicate some circumstance connected with last night. And he understood too well the allusion to Gerrish, a District-Attorney of the past whose successful prosecutions had made a speciality of women; who had never delegated, who had always prosecuted with especial and eloquent ardor, any case in which the defendant was a woman, whether notorious or desperate. Herrick could scarcely restrain a whistle; this did indeed promise a lively inquest! Heaven help the lady of the shadow if this imitation prosecutor should nose her out! It was, perhaps, an immoral exclamation. Yet all the afternoon, as Herrick worked on his story for the *Record*, he could not rout his distaste for his own evidence.

Even after his late and imposing lunch he brought himself to a cheap and early dinner, rather than go back to the Grubey flat. He affected, when he found himself downtown, a little Italian table d'hôte in the neighborhood of Washington Square; much frequented by foreign laborers and so humble that a plaintive and stocky dog, a couple of peremptory cats, and two or three staggering infants with seraphic eyes and a chronic lack of handkerchiefs or garters generally lolled about the beaten earth of the back yard, where the tables were spread under a tent-like sail-cloth. It was all quaint and foreign and easy; and, so far as might be, it was cool; on occasions, the swarthy *dame de comptoir* was replaced by a spare, square, gray-haired woman, small and neat and Yankee, whom it greatly diverted Herrick to see at home in such surroundings; a little gray parrot, looking exactly like her, climbed and see-sawed about her desk; a vine waved along the fence; the late sun flickered on the clean coarseness of the table-cloths and jeweled them, through the bottles of thin wine, with ruby glories; there was a worthless, poverty-stricken charm about the place, and Herrick sat there, early and alone, smiling to himself with, after all, a certain sense of satisfying busyness and of having come home to life again.

He had little enough wish to return to his close room where his perplexities would be waiting for him and he lingered after dinner, practicing his one-syllable Italian on Maria Rosa, the little eldest daughter of the house, who trotted back and forth bearing tall glasses of branching bread-sticks and plates of garnished sausage to where her mother was setting a long table for some fête, and, when the guests began to come, he still waited in his corner, idly watching.

They were all men and all poor, but all lively; there was an almost feminine sweetness in the gallantry of the Latin effervescence with which they passed a loving-cup in some general ceremony. And no woman could have been more beautiful than the tall Sicilian whose grave stateliness, a little stern from the furrowing of brows still touched with Saracen blood, faced Herrick from the table's farther end. Herrick even inquired, as he paid his check, who this imposing creature was and the Yankee woman replied with unconcern that he was Mr. Gumama, who ran a pool-game at the barber's.

It charmed Herrick to combine this name and occupation with the fervent kisses which Mr. Gumama, rising majestically and swooping to the nearer end of the table, implanted, one on each cheek, upon the hero of the fête. All the guests, as each finished the ceremonial draught, followed his example. None of the rest, however, had Saracen brows, nor long, grim earrings whose fringe swing beneath three stories of gilt squares. The Yankee woman turned contemptuously from "such monkey-shines," but Herrick lingered till the last kiss and as he even then walked home through the hot cloudy night it was after nine o'clock before he reached there. He had not been in since morning and he was greatly to blame. For he had had a caller and the caller was Cuyler Ten Euyck!

The Grubeys were greatly excited by this circumstance and it excited Herrick, too. The coroner had himself examined Ingham's apartment and then the conscientious creature had climbed the stairs to Herrick's. He had even waited in the hope that his witness might return. All this was proudly poured forth while Herrick was also asked to examine a rival public interest—a most peculiar prize which the corner saloon-keeper's son had been awarded at a private school; he had loaned it to Johnnie Grubey for twenty-four hours if Johnnie would let him see the revolver with which Herrick would have shot the murderer last night if the murderer had been there! It was a sort of return in kind; for the school prize was also a revolver.

It was a very little one and Johnnie insisted that it was solid gold. On the handle was a monogram of three capital A's in small bright stones, white, green and red—near them a straggling C had been wantonly scratched. Johnnie averred that the A's stood for Algebra, Astronomy and Art-Drawing and even had the combination of studies for one prize been less remarkable Herrick would have suspected that the boy was lying. What he suspected he hardly knew; still less when he discovered that this unwontedly sympathetic prize was, after all, a fake. The little golden pistol was not a pistol, but a curiously pointless trinket—the cylinder was nothing but a sculptured suggestion; the toy was made all in one piece!—"D'yeh ever see the like?" Mrs.

Grubey asked him. And he never had. It was quaintier than Mr. Gumama's kisses.

But Herrick's head was full of other things. As he opened his door he grinned to think of that aristocratic scion waiting in his humble bedroom. Well, it had been a great day! Even if he had lost heart for that taxi-ride up the river with Evadne! And then from long habit, he glanced at Evadne's empty place.

The picture had left an unfaded spot on the wall-paper. "I suppose I might add 'And on my heart!'" said Herrick. He lifted the concealing newspaper. Then he went out and made inquiries. No one but Ten Euyck and Mrs. Grubey had been in the room nor had Mrs. Grubey noticed that the picture had been moved. Now Herrick was certain he had left the likeness under the newspaper, lying face up. It was still under the newspaper, but face down. He said to himself, with a shrug of annoyance, that the coroner had made good use of his time.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### MRS. WILLING TELLS WHAT SHE KNOWS

The morning of the inquest was cloudy, with a wet wind. Herrick was nervous, and he could not be sure whether this nervousness sprang from the ardor of championship or accusation. But one thing was clear. Christina Hope had slain Evadne and closed his mouth to Sal; but, at last, he was to see her, face to face.

She was there when he arrived, sitting in a corner with her mother. Herrick recognized her at once, but with a horrid pang of disappointment. Was this his Diana of the Winds? Or yet his Destroying Angel? This was only a tall quiet girl in a gray gown. To be more exact it was a gray ratine suit, with a broad white collar, and her small gray hat seemed to fold itself close in to the shape of her little head; the low coil of her hair was very smooth. Herrick observed with something oddly akin to satisfaction that he had been right about her coloring—there were the fair skin, the brown hair, the eyes cool as gray water. Under these to-day there were dark shadows and her face was shockingly pale.

The first witness called was a Doctor Andrews. After the preliminary questions as to name, age, and so forth, he was asked, "You reside in the Van Dam Apartments?"

"I do."

"On what floor?"

"The ninth."

"On the night of August fifth did you hear any unusual sounds?"

"Not until I heard the pistol-shot—that is, except Mr. Ingham, playing his piano—if you could call that unusual."

"He often played late at night?"

"He had been away during the summer; but, before that, there was a great deal of complaint. He gave a great many supper-parties; at the same time, he was such a charming fellow that people forgave him whenever he wished. Besides, he was a magnificent musician."

"Were there ladies at these supper-parties?"

"Not to my personal knowledge."

"What did you do, Dr. Andrews, when you heard the shot?"

"I looked out of the window, and saw nothing. I thought I might have been mistaken; it might have been a tire bursting. But I noticed that the piano had stopped."

After the shot the witness had remained restless.

"Presently I thought I heard some one hammering. I got up again and opened the door and then I heard it distinctly. I know now that it was the efforts of Mr. Herrick to break Ingham's lock with a revolver. I could hear a mixture of sounds—movements. I went back and began to get my clothes on and when I was nearly dressed my 'phone rang."

"Tell us what it said."

"It was the voice of the superintendent saying, 'Please come down to 4-B in a hurry, Dr. Andrews. Mr. Ingham's shot himself.'"

"And you went?"

"Immediately."

"He was dead on your arrival?"

"Quite."

"How long should you, as a physician, say it was since death occurred?"

"Not more than fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Had the death been instantaneous?"

"Certainly. He was shot through the heart."

"Then, in your opinion, if the deceased had taken his own life, he could not have sprung off the electric lights, nor in any fashion done away with the weapon, after the shot."

"He certainly could not."

"In your professional opinion, then, he did not commit suicide?"

"There is no question of an opinion. I know he did not."

"You are very positive, Dr. Andrews?"

"Absolutely positive. Death was instantaneous. Also, there was no powder about the wound, showing that the shot had been fired from a distance of four feet or more. Also, the body did not lie where it had fallen."

"How do you know that?"

"There was a little puddle of blood in the sitting-room, where Ingham fell. Your physician and myself called the attention of the police to marks on the rugs following a trail of drops of blood into the bedroom where the body was found."

"You do not think that the deceased could have crawled or staggered there, after the shooting?"

"I do not."

"You believe that the body was dragged there, after death?"

"Yes."

"You remained with the body until the arrival of myself and Doctor Shippe?"

"I did."

"Dr. Andrews, the apartment in which the shooting occurred had no access to the windows of any other apartment, no fire-escape, and no means of egress except through a door which was found bolted on the inside. Suppose that a murder was committed. Have you any theory accounting for the murderer's escape?"

"None whatever."

"And does not the absence of all apparent means of escape shake your theory of the impossibility of suicide?"

"Not in the least. It is unshakable."

"Thank you. That will do."

The coroner's physician confirmed Dr. Andrews in every particular. The coroner settled back and seemed to pause. And the listeners drew a long breath. Something at least had been decided. It was not suicide. It was murder.

This had been established so completely and so early in the examination that Herrick found himself impressed with the idea of the coroner's knowing pretty distinctly what he was about. It seemed that he might very well have some theory to establish, for which, in the first place, he had now cleared the ground. Herrick stole a glance at Deutch. His face was wet and colorless, and his eyes fixed on vacancy. And then, curious to note the effect of hearing her lover proclaimed foully murdered, he permitted himself the cruelty of looking at Miss Hope. Apparently it had no effect on her at all. Her mother, a slight, handsome woman, very fashionably turned out, followed eagerly every suggestion of the evidence. But the girl still sat with lowered eyes.

The next evidence, that of the police, threw no further light; and then came the tremulous Theodore of Herrick's acquaintance whose surname transpired as Bird.

Bird, too, had been awake and had heard the shot; he had been fully aware from the first that it was a pistol-shot. He and Mrs. Bird had risen and put up the chain on their door, and then he had telephoned to the superintendent.

"Did the hall-boy connect you at once?"

"It isn't the hall-boy. It's the night-elevator-boy."

"Well, did the night-elevator-boy connect you at once?"

"No, I was a long time getting him."

"The boy?"

"Yes."

"Ah! He, at least, was able to sleep. But, after you got him, was your connection with the superintendent immediate?"

"Almost immediate, I guess."

"It didn't strike you that he was purposely delaying?"

The listeners leaned forward. And Herrick, as at a touch home, dropped his eyes.

"Why, I couldn't say that it did. No, hardly. Besides, he might have been asleep, too."

"Ah! So he might. And what was the first thing he said to you?"

"Through the 'phone?"

"Certainly. Through the 'phone."

"He said, 'What is it?'" (Slight laughter from the crowd.)

"Well? Go on!"

"I said, 'Excuse me. But I heard a shot just now, in 4-B.' And he said, 'A pistol-shot?' And I said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Do you think somebody has got hurt?' And I said, 'I'm afraid so.' Then he said, 'Well, I'll come up.'"

"Did he seem excited?"

"Not so much as I was."

Mrs. Bird, though she described at some length her forethought in dressing and getting their valuables together, had nothing material to add. Nor had the widow and her son in the apartment below that in which the catastrophe took place; nor the couple, Mr. and Mrs. Willing, in the apartment across the court which had been invaded as a look-out station by the police, anything further to relate; until, indeed, the lady stumbled upon the phrase—"The party had been going on for some time."

"In 4-B?"

"What? Yes."

"What made you think there was a party going on in 4-B?"

"There were voices. And then he often had them."

"Did you, as a near neighbor, ever observe that there were any ladies at these parties?"

"I wouldn't like to say."

"I see. Well, on this occasion, how many voices were there?"

"I don't know."

"About how many? Two? A dozen? Twenty?"

"Oh, not many at all. There was poor Mr. Ingham's voice, nearly all the time. And maybe a couple of others. I was in my bedroom, trying to sleep, and the piano was going all the time."

"I see. So there may have been two or three persons besides Mr. Ingham, and there may have been only one?"

"Yes, sir. At times I was pretty sure I heard another voice. I mean a third one, anyhow."

"Was it a man's voice or a woman's?"

"I don't know."

"Could you swear you heard a third voice at all?"

"Well, I don't believe I could exactly. No."

"Now, Mrs. Willing, I want you to be very careful. And I want you to try and remember. Please tell exactly all that you can remember about what I am going to ask you and nothing more."

"Oh, now, you're frightening me dreadfully."

"I don't want to frighten you. But I do want you to think. Now. You are certain you heard at least two voices?"

"Yes, I am, I—"

"Mr. Ingham's and one other?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was that other voice the voice of a man?"

"No, sir."

"It was a woman's voice?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Aren't you sure?"

"Well, yes, I am."

"Was it angry, excited?"

"Toward the end it was."

"As if the speaker were losing control of herself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Mrs. Willing, had you ever heard it before?"

"The woman's voice?"

"Yes."

"I can't be sure."

"What do you think?"

"Well, I thought I had, yes. I told Mr. Willing so. He'd been to a bridge party upstairs and he came down just along there."

"You recognized it then?"

"Well, toward the end I thought I did; yes."

"Mrs. Willing, whose was that voice?"

"Oh, sir,—I—I'd rather not say!"

"You must say, Mrs. Willing."

"Well, then, I'll just say I don't know."

"That won't do, Mrs. Willing.—When you told your husband that you thought you recognized that voice, exactly what did you say?"

"Well, I said—oh!—I—Well, what I said was 'That's that actress he's engaged to in there with him.'"

"Ah!—And, now, I suppose you know the name of the actress he was engaged to?"

"Yes, of course. She's Miss Hope. Christina Hope her name is. Of course, I haven't said I was sure!"

"Thank you. That will do."

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## CHAPTER IX

### JOE PATRICK IS DETAINED

A thrill shook the assemblage. It was plain enough now to what goal was the coroner directing his inquiry. The covert curiosity which all along had been greedily eyeing Christina Hope stiffened instantly into a wall, dividing her from the rest of her kind. She had become something sinister, set apart under a suspended doom, like some newly caught wild animal on exhibition before them in its cage. Through the general gasp and rustle, Herrick was aware of Deutch slightly bounding and then collapsing in his seat, with a muffled croak. His wife frowned; clucking indignant sympathy, she looked with open championship at the suspected girl. Mrs. Hope started up with a little cry; Herrick judged that she was much more angry than frightened. When the coroner said, "You will have your chance to speak presently, Mrs. Hope," she dropped back with exclamations of fond resentment, and taking her daughter's hand, pressed it lovingly. Christina alone, a sedate and sober-suited lily, maintained her composure intact.

But, now, for the first time, she lifted her head and slowly fixed a long, grave look upon the coroner. There was no anger in this look. It was the expression of a very good and very serious child who regards earnestly, but without sympathy, some unseemly antic of its elders. Once she had fixed this gaze upon the coroner's face, she kept it there.

In that devout decorum of expression and in the outline of her exact profile occasioned by her change of attitude, Herrick began once more to see the youthful candor of his Evadne. Yes, there was something royally childlike in that round chin and softly rounded cheek, in that obstinate yet all too sensitive lip, and that clear brow. Yes, thus expectant and motionless, she was still strangely like a tall little girl. Where did the coroner get his certainty? By God, he was branding her!—"Mr. Bryck Herrick," the coroner called.

The young man was aware at once of being a local celebrity. His evidence was to be one of the

treats of the day. Not even the attack upon Christina had created a much greater stir. He took his place; and, "At last," said the coroner, "we are, I believe, to hear from somebody who saw *something*."

Herrick told his story almost without interruption. He was listened to in flattering silence; the young author had never had a public which hung so intently on his words. The silence upon which he finished was still hungry.

The coroner drew a long breath. "We're greatly obliged to you, Mr. Herrick. And now let us get this thing straight. It was one o'clock or thereabouts that Mr. Ingham began to play?"

They established the time and they went over every minutest detail of changing spirit in Ingham's music.

"That crash which waked you for the second time—do you think it could have been occasioned by an attack on Mr. Ingham?—that he may have been struck and thrown against the piano?"

"Oh, not at all. It was a perfectly deliberate discord, a kind of hellish eloquence."

"Ah! I'm obliged to you for that phrase, Mr. Herrick." And again he was asked—"That gesture which so greatly impressed you—do you think you could repeat it for us?"

Herrick quelled the impulse to reply, "Not without making a damned fool of myself," and substituted, "I can describe it."

"Kindly do so."

"She threw her arm high up, as high as it would go, but at a very wide angle from her body, and at that time her hand was clenched. But while the arm was still stretched out, she slowly opened her fingers, as if they were of some stiff mechanism—and it seemed to me that it was the violence of her feeling they were stiff with—until the whole hand was open, like a stretched gauntlet."

"Well, and then, when she took down her hand?"

"She drew it in toward her quickly; I had an idea she might have covered her face."

"And then she disappeared?"

"Yes; but she seemed to dip a little forward."

"As if to pick something up?"

"Well, not as much as from the floor; no."

"From a chair, then, or the couch?"

"Possibly."

"She would, standing at the window, have been some five or six feet from the piano, where Ingham sat?"

"I should say about that."

"Mr. Herrick, are you absolutely sure that this was not until after the shooting?—this forward dip?"

"After? No, it was before!"

"Ah—And directly after the shot the lights went out?"

"Directly after. Almost as if the shot had put them out."

"Now, Mr. Herrick, you have testified that from, as you say, the vague outline of the hair and shoulders and the slope of her skirts, and from the fact that when she raised her arm there was a bit of lace, or something of the kind, hanging from her sleeve, you were perfectly sure that this shadow was the shadow of a woman. Yet you still could not in the least determine anything whatever of her appearance. That I can quite understand. But didn't you gather, nevertheless, some notion of her personality?"

Herrick avoided Deutch's eye. He said—"I don't think so."

"That extraordinary movement, then, did not leave upon you a very distinct impression?"

"In what way?"

"An impression of a lady not much concerned with social constraint or emotional control; and of a very great habitual ease and flexibility in movement."

Herrick managed to smile. "I'm afraid I'm no such observer as all that. Perhaps any lady, within sixty seconds of committing murder, is a little indifferent to social constraint."

The coroner looked at him with a slight change of expression. "Well, then, let us put it another way. You would not expect to see your mother, or your sister, or any lady of your own class, make such a gesture? No? Yet you must often have seen an actress do so?"

"That doesn't follow!" Herrick said. His flush resented for Christina the slur that his words



overlooked. And suddenly words escaped him. "You answered the previous question yourself, remember! Be kind enough not to confuse my evidence with yours!"

The coroner studied him a long time without speaking, while the young man's color continued to rise, and at length came the comment, "I'm not falling asleep, Mr. Herrick. I'm only wondering what charming influence has been at work with the natural appetite, at your age, for discussing an actress."

"Ask me that later, outside your official capacity," said Herrick hotly, "and we'll see if we can't find an answer!"

"Mr. Herrick, why, on the morning after the murder, did you take down Miss Hope's photograph from over your desk?"

"Because, never having met Miss Hope, it was a photograph I had no right to. I took it down when I learned the identity of the original. I didn't want its presence to be misconstrued by cads."

"Thank you. That will do. Hermann Deutch, if you please."

Herrick retired, ruffled and angry at himself; and Deutch, in passing him, cast him a clinging glance, as of a fellow conspirator, that he found strangely indigestible. At Christina, he could not look.

It did not take the coroner two minutes to make hay of Mr. Deutch. Not, indeed, that he was able to extract any very damaging admissions. The superintendent said that he was wakened by his wife, who had herself been wakened by the 'phone. He had held the before stated conversation with Mr. Bird, and, not being able to get the elevator, had walked upstairs, being joined in the office by a policeman. The rest of his proceedings were unquestionable. But the coroner, an expert in caricature and bullying and the twisting of phrases, by making him appear ridiculous, managed to make him appear mendacious; this was the easier because every now and then there was a slip in the sense of what he said, as if he had forgotten the meaning of words; he certainly perspired more than was at all persuasive; he soon began to stumble and to contradict himself about nothing; his slight accent thickened and, in a syntax with which his German tongue was habitually glib, but not accurate, he was soon making errors laughably contemptible to a public that presumably expressed itself with equal elegance in all languages. So that presently, when he was sufficiently harrowed, the coroner drew from him an admission; not only had Ingham frequently entertained ladies at his supper-parties, but complaints had been made to Deutch by various tenants, and these complaints he had not transmitted to the owners of the apartment house. The most searching inquiry failed to connect Christina with these parties, but the inference was obvious.

"I didn't,"—Mr. Deutch burst forth—"keep 'em quiet any because she was there. She wouldn't have touched such doings, not with the sole of her foot. But I didn't want the gentleman she was engaged to should be put out of the house when I was running it, after her recommending it to him, on my account!" His eyes and his voice were full of exasperated tears. "He'd have told her one lie and yet another and another, and she'd have believed him, and he'd have wanted her to fight me. Not that she would. But he was fierce against her friends, any of 'em. And I didn't want she should have no more trouble than what she had with him already."

"Very kind of you. Nature made you for a squire of dames, Mr. Deutch. Miss Hope, now,—you are a particularly old friend of hers, I believe. And I understand you would do a great deal for her."

"I'd do anything at all for her."

"I see." All that was crouching in the coroner coiled and sprang. "Even to committing perjury for her, Mr. Deutch. Even to concealing a murder for her sake?—Silence!" he commanded Christina's friends.

In the sudden deathly stillness Deutch lifted his head. He looked at the coroner with the eyes of a lion, and in a firm voice he replied, "Say, when you speak like that about a lady, Mr. Coroner, you want to look out you don't go a little too far."

"I am about to call a witness," said the coroner, with his cold laugh, "who will go even farther. Joseph Patrick, please!"

Joe Patrick was the night-elevator boy.

People stared about them. No witness. The coroner's man came forward, saying something about "telephoned—accident—get here shortly."

"See that he does,—The day-elevator boy in court!"

Disappointment reigned. After the glorious baiting of one whose race went so long a way to make him fair game, almost anything would have been an anti-climax. There now advanced for their delectation a slim, blond, anemic, peevish youth, feeble yet cocky, almost as much like a faded flower from a somewhat degenerated stalk as if he had been nipping down Fifth Avenue under a silk hat, and whose name of Willie Clarence Dodd proclaimed him of the purest Christian blood. Yet the stare of the assembly wandered from him, passed, grinning, where Deutch sat with hanging head, and settled down to feed upon the pallor of Christina's cheek. Herrick rose suddenly, displacing, as it were, a great deal of atmosphere with his large person, and stalking across the room, pulled up a chair to Deutch's side. If he had clasped and held that plump, that

trembling hand, his intention could not have been more obvious. Christina turned her head a little and, with no change of expression, looked at him for a moment. Then she turned back again to Willie Clarence Dodd. That gentleman, ogling her with a canny glance, affably tipped his hat to her, and she bowed to him with utter gravity.

Mr. Dodd was a gentleman cherishing a just grudge. By the accident of bringing him into day-service instead of night-service, when there was a murder up her sleeve, Fate had balked him of his legitimate rights in life. Notoriety had been near him, but it had escaped. Mr. Dodd's self-satisfaction, however, was not easily downed. He had still a card to play, and he played it as jauntily as if doom had not despoiled him of his due. He smiled. And he had a right to. The first important question asked him ran—"On the day after Mr. Ingham's return from Europe—the day, in fact, of his death—did Mr. Ingham have any callers?"

"Yes, sir. He had one."

Interest leaped to him. He bloomed with it.

Apart from interruptions, his story ran—"Yes, sir. A lady. Quite a good-looker. Medium height. Might make you look round for a white horse; but curls, natural. Very neat dresser and up-to-date. Cute little feet. She wouldn't give her name. But not one o' *that* sort, you understand. She came up to me—the telephone girl was sick and I was onto her job—and she says to me, very low, as if she'd kind of gone back on herself,—'Will you kindly tell Mr. James Ingham that the lady he expects is here?' He came down livelier than I'd ever known him, and she said it was good of him to see her and they sat down on the window-seat. That's one thing where the Van Dam's on the bum—no parlor. I was really sorry for the little lady—no, not short, but the kind a man just naturally calls little—she was so nervous and she talked about as loud as a mouse; I guess he felt the same way, for he says, 'Won't you come upstairs to tell me all this? We shall be quite undisturbed,' he says. And while they were waiting for the elevator—the hall-boy wasn't much on running it—she says to him, 'You understand; I don't want to get Christina into any trouble.' And he says, 'Of course; that is all quite understood.' In about half an hour down they came together and he had his hat. He wanted to send her off in a cab, but she wouldn't let him. The minute she was gone he says to me, 'Phone for a taxi!' They didn't answer, and he says, 'Ring like the devil!' It hadn't stopped at the door when he was in it and off."

"You couldn't, of course, hear his direction?"

"Nop! He got back about six—chewing the rag, but on the quiet. Went out in his dress suit about seven-thirty. I went off at eight."

He was dismissed, strutting.

"And now let us get down to business. If you please," said the coroner, "Miss Christina Hope."

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## CHAPTER X

### JOE PATRICK ARRIVES

If the young actress and Ten Euyck, now at his best as the coroner, had, as Corey had suggested, any previous knowledge of each other, neither of them stooped to signify it now.

"Your name, if you please?"

"Christina Hope."

"Occupation?"

"Actress."

"May one ask a lady's age?"

"Twenty-two years."

She said she was single, and resided with her mother at No. — West 93rd Street. The girl spoke very low, but clearly, and of these dry preliminaries in her case not a syllable was lost. Her audience, leaning forward with thumbs down, still took eagerly all that she could give them. On being offered a chair, she said that she would stand—"Unless, of course, you would rather I did not."

The coroner replied to this biddable appeal—"I shan't keep you a moment longer than is necessary, Miss Hope. I have only to ask you a very few questions. Believe me, I regret fixing your mind upon a painful subject; and nothing that I have hitherto said has been what I may call *personally* intended. I question in the interests of justice and I hope you will answer as fully as possible in the same cause."

"Oh, certainly."

"You were engaged to be married to Mr. Ingham, Miss Hope?"

"Yes."

"When did this engagement take place?"

"About a year ago."

"And your understanding with him remained unimpaired up to his death?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see him alive?"

"On the day before he—died. He drove to our house from the ship."

"Ah! Very natural, very natural and proper. But surely you dined together? Or met again during the next twenty-four hours?"

"No."

"No? What were you doing on the evening of the fourth of August—the evening of his death?"

"My mother and I dined alone, at home. We were neither of us in good spirits. I had had a bad day at rehearsal—everything had gone wrong. My head ached and my mother was worn out with trying to get our house in order; it was a new house, we were just moving in."

"You rented a new house just as you were going to be married?"

"Yes, that was why. I was determined not to be married out of a flat."

A smile of sympathy stirred through her audience. It might be stupidity which kept her from showing any resentment toward a man who had practically accused her of murder. Or, it might be guilt. But she was so young, so docile, so demure! Her voice was so low and it came in such shy breaths—there was something so immature in the little rushes and hesitations of it. She seemed such a sweet young lady! After all, they didn't want to feed her to the tigers yet awhile!

And the coroner was instantly aware of this. "Then your mother," he said, "is the only person who can corroborate your story of how you passed that evening?"

"Yes."

"How did you pass it?"

"I worked on my part until after eleven, but I couldn't get it. Then I took a letter of my mother's out to the post-box."

"At that hour! Alone!"

"Yes. I am an actress; I am not afraid. And I wanted the air."

"You came straight home?"

"Yes."

"While you were out did any neighbor see you? Did you speak to any one?"

"On the way to the post-box I saw Mrs. Johnson, who lives two doors below and who had told us about the house being for rent. She is the only person whom I know in the neighborhood. On the way back I met no one."

"Then no one saw you re-enter the house?"

"I think not."

"Did the maid let you in?"

"No, I had my key. The maids had gone to bed."

"But it was a very hot night. People sat up late, with all their windows open, and caretakers in particular must have been sitting on the steps, some one must have seen you return."

"Perhaps they did."

"Did you, yourself, notice no one whom we can summon as a witness to your return?"

"No one."

"What did you do when you came in?"

"I went to bed."

"You do not sleep in the same room with your mother?"

"No."

"On the same floor?"

"Yes."

"Do you lock your door?"

"No."

"But she would not be apt to come into your room during the night?"

"Not unless something had happened; no."

"Could you pass her door without her hearing you?"

"I should suppose so. I never tried."

"So that you really have no witness but your mother, Miss Hope, that you returned to the house, and no witness whatever that you remained in it?"

"No," Christina breathed.

"Well, now I'm extremely sorry to recall a painful experience, but when and how did you first hear of Mr. Ingham's death?"

"In the morning, early, the telephone began to ring and ring. I could hear my mother and the maids hurrying about the house, but I felt so ill I did not try to get up. I knew I had a hard day's work ahead of me, and I wanted to keep quiet. But, at last, just as I was thinking it must be time, my mother came in and told me to lie still; that she would bring up my breakfast herself. I said I must go to rehearsal at any rate; and she said, 'No, you are not to go to rehearsal to-day; something has happened.'"

The naïveté of Christina's phrases sank to an awed whisper; her eyes were very fixed, like those of a child hypnotized by its own vision.

"I saw then that she was trying not to tremble and that she had been crying. She couldn't deny it, and so she told me that Mr. Ingham was very, very ill, and she let me get up and helped me to dress. But then, when I must see other people—she told me—she told me—"

Christina's throat swelled and her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

The coroner, cursing the sympathy of the situation, forced himself to a commiserating, "Did she say how he died?"

"She told me it was an accident. I said, 'What kind of an accident?' And she said he was shot. 'But,' I said, 'how could he be shot by an accident? He didn't have any pistol? You know he didn't own such a thing.'" A slight sensation traversed the court. "Then it came out—that no one knew—that people were saying it was—murder—"

"Do you believe that, Miss Hope?"

"I don't know what to believe."

"Did Mr. Ingham have any enemies?"

"I knew of none."

"From your intimate knowledge of Mr. Ingham's affairs you know of no one, either with a grudge to satisfy or a profit to be made, by his death?"

"No. No one at all."

"So that you have really no theory as to how this terrible thing happened?"

"No, really, I haven't."

"Well, then, I suppose we may excuse you, Miss Hope."

The girl, with her tranquil but slightly timid dignity, inclined her head, and heaving a deep sigh of relief, turned away.—

—"Oh, by the way, Miss Hope,—"

And suddenly, with a violent change of manner, he began to beat her down by the tactics which he had used with Deutch. But with how different a result! Nothing could make that pale, tall girl ridiculous. Scarcely speaking above a breath, she answered question after question and patiently turned aside insult after insult. He found no opposition, no confusion, no reticence; nothing but that soft yielding, that plaintive ingenuousness. The crudest jokes, the cruelest thrusts still left her anxiously endeavoring to convey desired information. He took her back over her relations with Ingham, their interview upon his return, the events of the last evening, with an instance and a repetition that wearied even the auditors to distraction; he would let her run on a little in her answers and then bring her up with a round turn; twenty times he took with her that journey to and from the post-box and examined every step, and still her replies ran like sand through his fingers and left no trace behind. But, at last, she put out a hand toward the chair she had rejected, and sank slowly into it. Then indeed it became plain that she was profoundly exhausted.

And because her exhaustion was so natural and so pitiable, the coroner, watching its effect, said, "Well, I can think of nothing more to ask you, Miss Hope. I suppose it would be useless to inquire whether, being familiar with the apartment, you could suggest any way in which, the door being bolted, the murderer could have escaped?"

Christina looked up at him with a very faint smile and with her humble sweetness that had

become almost stupidity, she said, "Perhaps the murderer wasn't in the apartment at all!"

The whole roomful of tired people sat up. "Not in the apartment! And where, then, pray?"

"Well," said Christina, softly, "he could have been shot through an open window, I suppose. Of course, I'm only a woman, and I shouldn't like to suggest anything. Because, of course, I'm not clever, as a lawyer is. But—"

"Well, we're waiting for this suggestion!"

"Oh!—Well, it seems to me that when this lady, whose shadow excited the young gentleman so much, disappeared as if it went forward, perhaps it did go forward, perhaps she ran out of the room. You can see—if you don't mind stopping to think about it—that she must have been standing right opposite the door. If she had been quarreling with Mr. Ingham, he may have bolted the door after her. I don't know if you've looked—but the button for the lights is right there—in the panel of the wall between the door and the bedroom arch. Mr. Ingham was a very nervous, emotional person. If there had been a scene, he might very well have meant to switch the lights out after her, too. If he had his finger on the button when the bullet struck him, he might very well, in the shock, have pressed it. And then the lights would have gone out, almost as if the bullet had put them out, just as the young man says. But, of course, if this were what had happened, you would have thought of it for yourself." And she looked up meekly at him, with her sweet smile.

The coroner smiled, too, with compressed lips, and putting his hands in his pockets, threw back his head. "And how do you think, then, that—if he was killed instantly, as the doctors have testified,—the corpse walked into the bedroom, where it was found?"

"Ah!" said Christina, "I can't account for everything! I'm not an observer, like you! But there has never been, has there, a doctor who was ever wrong? Of course, I don't pretend to know."

"Well, it's a pretty theory, my dear young lady, and I'm sure you mean to work it out for us all you can. So give us a hint where this bullet, coming through an open window, was fired from."

"It could have been fired from the apartment opposite. Across the entrance-court. You remember, the policeman who went in there found that the windows exactly—do you call it 'tallied'?"

"Very good, Miss Hope. If it were an unoccupied apartment. But it is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Willing, and Mrs. Willing was in the apartment the entire evening."

"Yes," said Christina, turning and looking pleasantly at the lady mentioned, "alone." Then she was silent.

After a staggered instant, the coroner asked, "And what became of this lady who ran out into the hall?"

"Well, of course," said Christina, sweetly, "if it was Mrs. Willing—"

The Willings leaped to their feet. "This is ridiculous! This is an outrage! Why!" cried the husband, "his blind opposite our sitting-room was down all the time. There isn't even a hole through it where a shot would have passed!"

"Oh, isn't there?" asked Christina. "You see, it wasn't I who knew that!"

"What do you mean, you wicked girl! How dare you! Why, you heard the policeman say that it was only when he looked through our bedroom that he could see into Mr. Ingham's apartment—"

"And wasn't it in the bedroom that the body was found?"

"Miss Hope!" said the coroner, sternly, "I must ask you not to perpetrate jokes. You know perfectly well that your implied charge against Mrs. Willing is perfectly ridiculous—"

"Is it?" Christina interrupted, "she implied it about me!"

And for the first time she lifted to his a glance alight with the faintest mockery of malice; a wintry gleam, within the white exhaustion of her face. Then,—if all the time she had been playing a part—then, if ever, she was off her guard.

And she could not see what Herrick, from his angle, could see very well; that the coroner had been quietly slipping something from his desk into his hand, and was now dangling it behind his back.

This something was the scarf found on Ingham's table—that white scarf with its silky border, cloudy, watery, of blue glimmering into gray. How the tender, misty coloring recalled that room of Ingham's!

"Don't you know very well, Miss Hope," the coroner went on, "that Mrs. Willing had nothing whatever to do with Mr. Ingham's death?"

"How can I? You see, I wasn't there!"

"So that, by no possibility," said the coroner, "could this be yours?"

He launched the scarf, like a soft, white serpent, almost in her face. And the girl shrank from it, with a low cry. She might as well have knotted it about her neck.

And in the horrible stillness that followed her cry, the coroner said, "Your nerves seem quite shattered, Miss Hope. I was only going to ask you if you didn't think that ornament, in case it was not yours, might have been left on Mr. Ingham's table by the young lady who called on him that afternoon."

With a brave attempt at her former mild innocence, Christina responded, "I don't know."

"Neither can you tell us, I suppose,—it would straighten matters out greatly—who that caller was?"

"No, I can't. I'm sorry."

"Think again, Miss Hope. Are there so many smartly dressed and pretty young ladies of your acquaintance, with curly red hair and, as Mr. Dodd informs us, with cute little feet?"

Christina was silent.

"What? And yet she knows you well enough to say to your fiancé—'I don't wish to get Christina into trouble!'" Whose was the smile of malice, now! "Come, come, Miss Hope, you're trifling with us! Tell us the address of this lady, and you'll make us your debtors!"

The girl opened her pale lips to breathe forth, "I can't tell you! I don't know!"

"Let us assist your memory, Miss Hope, by recalling to you the lady's name. Her name is Ann Cornish."

Herrick's nerves leaped like a frightened horse. And then he saw Christina start from her chair, and, casting round her a wild glance that seemed to cry for help, drop back again and put her hands over her face. A dozen people sprang to their feet.

Mrs. Hope ran to her daughter's side, closely followed by Mrs. Deutch. The two women, crying forth indignation and comfort, and exclaiming that the girl was worn out and ought to be in bed, rubbed Christina's head, and began to chafe her hands. She was half fainting; but when a glass of whiskey had appeared from somewhere and Mrs. Deutch had forced a few drops between her lips, Christina, unlike the heroine of romance whose faints always refuse stimulants, lifted her head and drank a mouthful greedily. She sat there then, breathing through open lips, with a trace of color mounting in her face.

Then the coroner, once more commanding attention, held up a slip of pasteboard. "This visiting-card," he said, "is engraved with Miss Cornish's name, but with no address. It was found leaning against a candlestick on Mr. Ingham's piano, as though he wished to keep it certainly in mind. As a still further reminder, Mr. Ingham himself had written on it in pencil—'At four.'"

Christina, with the gentlest authority, put back her friends. She rose, slowly and weakly, to her feet. "Mr. Coroner," she said, "I wish to correct a false impression; may I?"



**"Mr. Coroner," she said, "I wish to correct a false impression; may I?"**

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"That's what we're here for, my dear young lady," the coroner scornfully replied.

"I have said nothing," she went on, "that is not true, but I have allowed something to be inferred which is not true." She pressed her hands together and drew a long breath. "It is true that I was engaged to Mr. Ingham. And when you asked me if our understanding was unimpaired at the time of his death, I said yes; for, believe me, our understanding then was better than it had ever been before. But that was not what you meant. I will answer what you meant, now. At the time of his death, I was not engaged to marry Mr. Ingham."

"You were not! Why not?"

"We had quarreled."

"When?"

"The day before he died."

An intense excitement began to prevail. Herrick longed to stand up and shout, to warn her, to muzzle her. Good God! was it possible she didn't see what she was doing? The coroner, weary man, sat back with a long sigh of satisfaction. His whole attitude said, "Now we're coming to it."

"And may one ask an awkward question, Miss Hope? Who broke the engagement?"

"I did."

"Oh, of course, *naturally*. And may one ask why?"

"Because I began to think that life with Mr. Ingham would not be possible to me."

"But on what grounds?"

"He was grossly and insanely jealous," said Christina, flushing. "Some women enjoy that sort of thing; I don't."

"Jealous of anyone in particular, Miss Hope?"

"Only," said Christina, "of everyone in particular."

"There was never, of course, any grounds for this jealousy?"

Christina looked through him without replying.

"Well, well. And was there nothing but this?"

"He objected to my profession; and when I was first in love with him I thought that I could give it up for his sake. But as I came to know more of—everything—and to understand more of myself, I knew that I could not. And I would not."

"So that it was partly Mr. Ingham, himself, in his insistence upon your renouncing your profession, who broke the engagement?"

"If you like."

"At least, your continuance in it made his jealousy more active?"

"It made it unbearable. And as it gradually became clear to me that he scarcely pretended to practise even the rudiments of the fidelity that he exacted, it seemed to me that there were limits to the insults which even a gentleman may offer to his betrothed. And I—freed myself."

Two or three people exchanged glances.

"Was the engagement ever broken before and patched up again?"

"We had quarreled before, but not definitely. Last spring I asked him to release me, and he would not. But he consented to my remaining on the stage, and to going away for the summer, so that I could think things out."

"And you immediately took a house from which to be married!"

"Yes. I tried to go on with it. I thought furnishing it might make me want to. But I couldn't. I wrote him so, and he came home. While he was on the ocean I found out something which made any marrying between us utterly impossible. When he drove to my house the day before he was killed, I told him so. We had a terrible scene, but he knew then as well as I that it was the end. I never saw him again."

"As a matter of fact, then, the definite breaking of the engagement was caused by something new and wholly extraneous to your profession or his jealousy?"

"Yes."

"And what was this discovery, Miss Hope?"

"Oh!" said Christina, quite simply, "I am not going to tell you that." And she suddenly began to speak quite fast. "Do you think I don't know what I am doing when I say that? Do you think you have not taught me? But I don't care about appearing innocent any longer. And so I know, now, what I'm saying. I will never tell you the cause of our quarrel. It had nothing to do with Mr."

Ingham's death. It was simply something—monstrous—which happened a long time ago. But, between us two, it had to fall like a gulf. More than that I will not tell you. And you can never make me."

"And you don't know Ann Cornish?"

Christina hesitated. "Of course I thought of her. But I couldn't bear to have that little girl brought into it. She's only twenty," Christina added, as if the difference in their ages were half a century. "And, besides, how could it be she? She scarcely knew Mr. Ingham; she never had an appointment with him; I can't believe she ever told him ill of me. She is my dearest friend. But ask her, Mr. Coroner, ask her. Her address is—" And Christina gave an address which was hastily copied. "She is rehearsing at the Sheridan Theater. She, too, is an actress, poor child!"

"Let us go back a moment, Miss Hope. What do you mean,—you don't care about appearing innocent any longer?"

"I mean that never again will I go through what I have gone through this afternoon. You have asked me the last question I shall answer. You've made me sound like a liar, and feel like a liar; you've made me turn and twist and dodge, trying to convince you of the truth about me, and now that I have told you all the truth, you may think a lie about me, if you choose!"

Her face was all alive, now, and her voice thrilled out its deep notes, impassioned as they were soft. "Oh, I wished so much to say nothing! Not to have to stand up here and tell all sorts of intimate things, in this horrible place before these gaping people! But when you began to worry me, to threaten and jeer at me, trying to trip me, I was afraid of you! I know people say that your one thought is to make a mark and have a career, and I seemed to see in your face that you would be glad to kill me for that. I remembered all I had ever heard of you; how you hated women—once, I suppose, some woman hurt you badly;—how you copied an attorney who made all his reputation by the prosecution, by the persecution, of women, and how they say you never run a woman so hard as when she has to work for her living, as I do, and stands exposed to every scandal, as I am! And so I tried to convince you, to answer everything you asked; I am in great trouble, and I am not so very old, and since this came I have scarcely eaten and not slept at all. For if you imagine that, because I haven't really loved him this long while, it is easy to bear thinking how his life had been rived out of him like that, oh, you are wrong—and my nerves are all in shreds. So that it seemed as if I must clear myself, as if it were too hideous to be hated, and to have every one thinking I had murdered him! I struggled to defend myself, and I let you torture me. But oh, I was wrong, wrong! To be judged and condemned and insulted, that's hard, but it's not degrading. But to explain, and pick about, and plead, and wrack your brain to make people believe your word, oh, that degrades!" She paused on a little choking breath. "Think what you like! I have no witness but my mother, and I know very well, in such a case, she doesn't count. I can't prove that I returned to my house, I can't prove that I stayed in it. It's worse than useless to try. If I had friends to speak for me do you think I would have them subjected to what Mr. Deutch has borne for me to-day? I've nothing that shop-keepers call position; I've no money; I'm all alone. Think what you please." And Christina crossed the room and sat down beside her mother.

Conflicting emotions clashed in the silence. She seemed to flash such different lights! She had so little, now, the manners or the sentiments of a sweet young lady. Many people were greatly moved, but no one knew what to think. If Christina had brought herself to slightly more conciliatory language or if, even now, she had thrown herself girlishly into her mother's arms, she could, at that moment, easily have melted the public heart. But she sat with her head tipped back against the wall, with her eyes on vacancy, and great, slow tears rolling down her unshielded face, "as bold as brass." And the coroner, leaning forward across his desk, surveyed the assemblage with a cold, fine smile. "My friends," he began, "after the young lady's eloquence, I can hardly expect you to care for mine. Nevertheless, while we are waiting for a witness unavoidably detained, I will ask you to listen to me. Let us get into shape what we have already learned.—The first thing of which we are sure is that James Ingham landed in New York on the afternoon of the third of August and drove directly to the residence of Miss Christina Hope, his betrothed. Miss Hope tells us that when he left that house their engagement was broken; that he was unbearably jealous; that he disapproved of the profession which she persisted in following and that they quarreled over something which she refuses to divulge. We have no witness to this quarrel, but I will ask you to remember it. I will ask you to remember that neither have we witnesses to Miss Hope's statement that it was she, rather than Mr. Ingham, who broke the engagement.

"Let us get to our next positive fact. Our next positive fact is that Mr. Ingham, on the next afternoon, the afternoon of August fourth, had an appointment with a lady for four o'clock—an appointment the hour of which he was so anxious not to forget that he wrote it on the lady's visiting-card, and stood the card against a candle on his piano. Our next facts are that the lady kept this appointment, that she had a private interview with Mr. Ingham which greatly excited him; that, as soon as she was gone, he drove off in a taxi with desperate haste, and that he returned in about an hour, still under the repressed excitement of some disagreeable emotion. If, gentlemen of the jury, you should bring in a verdict warranting the State in examining that cabman and in questioning Miss Ann Cornish as to the news she imparted to Mr. Ingham, then, indeed, I am much mistaken if we do not have our hands upon the great clue to all murders, gentlemen, the motive. For, as you have clearly perceived, the meeting between Mr. Ingham and Miss Cornish was not a lover's meeting. Or, if so, it was not a meeting of acknowledged lovers.



Miss Hope tells us that Miss Cornish is her confidential friend, and, as far as she knew, had only the most formal acquaintance with Mr. Ingham. No, Miss Cornish had a piece of information to give Mr. Ingham, and she expected this information to serve her own ends, for she said—'It is good of you to see me.' And Mr. Ingham found the information important, for he soon wished it told him at greater length upstairs, 'where we shall be quite undisturbed.' The lady agrees; although she adds, 'I don't want to get Christina into trouble.' Now, I ask you, gentlemen, what could have been her object except to get Christina into trouble. Why does a pretty young woman who refuses to give her name come to a specially attractive man with news of her dearest friend whom she supposes him to be still engaged to marry—news for which she feels it necessary to apologize—for but one of two reasons;—either she is in love with him herself, and wishes to injure her friend in his eyes, or she is in love with some other man and jealous of her friend whom she wishes warned off by the friend's legitimate proprietor. In either case, she evidently effected her point for she sent Mr. Ingham rushing from the house. He, however, apparently failed in what he set out to do. All this, gentlemen, is but conjecture.

"Here is where I expected to present you with an astonishing bridge of facts. I had now meant to show you that Mr. Ingham, that evening, expected an unwelcome visitor; that he left orders she was not to be admitted; that she came, that she was well-known to the elevator boy, and to all of us here present as well as to a greater public; that despite the efforts of the elevator boy, she penetrated to Mr. Ingham's apartment, whence she was not seen to return, and that she was the only visitor he had that night. But in the continued absence of the boy, Joseph Patrick, all this must wait.

"Our next known fact is that Mr. Herrick was wakened by Mr. Ingham's playing at one or shortly before. You will remember that it was after eleven when Miss Hope spoke to Mrs. Johnson on her way to the post-box, and that after that no one but her mother claims to have seen or spoken with her. For a quarter of an hour, Mr. Herrick tells us, Mr. Ingham played, calmly and beautifully. All was peace. But then there began to be the sound of voices talking through the music—the voices, as other witnesses have testified, of a man and a woman. And the piano begins to sound fitfully and brokenly. The man and the woman have begun to quarrel. Their voices—particularly the woman's voice—rise higher and stormier. Mr. Herrick, with the whole street between, has fallen asleep. But Mrs. Willing, just across the court, hears a voice she knows, and says to her husband, who has just come in, 'He's got that actress he's engaged to in there with him.' And then even Mr. Herrick is awakened by a deliberate discord from the piano; a jarring crash, 'a kind of hellish eloquence.' In other words, the man, with his comparative calm and his mastery over his instrument, is mocking and goading the woman, whose shadow, convulsed, threatening, furious, immediately springs out upon the blind. Gentlemen, can you not imagine the sensations of that woman? Let us suppose a case. Let us suppose that a girl ambitious and lovely, but of a type of loveliness not easily grasped by the mob, a girl who has had to work hard and fight hard, who is worthy to adorn the highest circles, but who is, in Miss Christina Hope's feeling expression, without position, without money, without friends, suddenly meets and becomes engaged to marry a distinguished and wealthy man. Let us suppose that she puts up with this man's exactions, with his furious jealousies, with his continual infidelities for the sake of the security and affluence of becoming his wife. But is it not possible that when this exacting gentleman is safely across the ocean she may allow herself a little liberty? That in the chagrin of knowing she is presently to be torn from her really more congenial friends and surroundings she goes, in his absence, a little too far? At any rate, he cuts short his visit in Europe, he flies to her from the steamer, full of accusations, but—contrary to the experience narrated by Miss Hope—he is perhaps soothed by her version of things and goes away, without having fully withdrawn his word, to examine matters. Let us suppose that on the next day he receives a call from his fiancée's confidential friend,—very possibly his informant while he was abroad—who circumstantially confirms his worst suspicions. Let us suppose he drives wildly to the house of his betrothed; but she is not at home, and after a time he gives up looking for her. He comes miserably back, dines out, returns early, but leaves word that he is not at home. But in the meanwhile may not the lady have got word of all this? Suppose that when she does, she comes to him,—at any hour, at any risk,—and uses her hitherto infallible charm to get him back. Suppose she gets him back; they are alone together; she is excited and confident and off her guard. She lets something slip. Instantly the battle is on. This time she cannot get him back. She becomes desperate. If he speaks, as perhaps he has threatened to, she loses not only him, but everything. For she is on the brink of the great step of her career. She is to play the leading feminine rôle under a celebrated star, who does not care for scandal in his advertisements. On the contrary, he has bruited everywhere her youth, her propriety, her breeding, her good blood. She is a fairy-tale of the girlish virtues. He has no use for her otherwise. And still the man at the piano proclaims her everything that is otherwise, and she sees that she is to lose him and all she has struggled for, professionally, in one breath. He sits there—he, he, the man who has been continually false to her, claiming for himself a different morality—he sits there playing, playing, shattering her nerves with his crash of chords, with his hellish eloquence. But with his back to her, you observe, where she stands at the window and suddenly she sees something lying on a little table or the foot of the couch—something not unusual in a man's apartment, although we have Miss Hope's word that Mr. Ingham did not possess one—something which, perhaps, in his wrecked happiness, he had loaded earlier in the evening with that sinister intention of suicide in which Miss Hope's respected friend, Mr. Deutch, so profoundly believes. Well, gentlemen, the frenzied eye of this tormented girl lights on that little object, she stoops to pick it up, he turns,—and then comes a pistol-shot. There is an end to the strength of a woman's nerves, gentlemen, and she has found it. She cannot look upon her handiwork. She springs off the light and flees. In the confusion she escapes. Gentlemen, with the

dumbfounding mystery of that bolted door I can not deal, unless—as Miss Hope has reminded us—medical science may be for once at fault,—unless the wounded man instinctively staggered to the door and bolted it, staggered toward his telephone, in his bedroom, and died there. That, gentlemen, can be threshed out at the trial. In the meantime, I must ask you to remember that the lady whom events seem to indicate is high-strung and overwrought; that her natural grief and nervousness led her through a long cross-examination in which she never once betrayed any hesitation, or the fact that she had quarreled with Mr. Ingham or that she was aware of the existence of Ann Cornish, to a satirical attack upon Mrs. Willing, whose remarks had annoyed her; that, as she tells us, she has no one to take care of her, and if we are inclined to think that she can take very good care of herself, we must remember that when she was confronted with a lady's scarf found not far from the murdered man, she screamed at the sight of it, and when confronted with the visiting-card of Ann Cornish, she so much wished her friend to be kept out of it that she fainted, and, afterwards, *changed all her evidence*.—Gentlemen, I rejoice to see, entering this room, our witness, Joseph Patrick."

Joe Patrick, a short, thick-set young fellow, with rough hair and a bright eye, advanced to the coroner's desk. His forehead was ornamented with a great deal of very fresh surgeon's plaster, and when asked why he was so late, he replied that he had been knocked down by an automobile on his way to the inquest. Well, yes, he would sit down; he did feel a little weak, but it wasn't so much from that—he'd had some candy sent him day before yesterday and he'd been awful sick ever since he ate it. Joe was a friendly soul and he added that he was sorry the man the coroner sent hadn't seen anybody but his mother. He was to the doctor's, then.

"But you had telephoned a pretty detailed account to your mother, hadn't you, before you left the Van Dam—on the morning of the murder—much more detailed than you gave the police?"

"Yes, sir. I guess I did."

"Well, then, please give that account to us."

Joe looked rather at sea, and the coroner added, "You have said from the beginning, that a lady called upon Mr. Ingham the night of his death?"

"Oh, yes, sir! She did!"

"Well, tell us first what happened when you went on watch. You had a message from Mr. Ingham?"

"Yes, sir. He telephoned down to me. He says, 'I'm out. And if any lady comes to see me this evening, you say right away I'm out.'"

"Well, and then?"

"Well, along about half-past twelve—it was awful hot and lonesome, and—and—"

"And you began to get sleepy! It seems that at least the house-staff was able to sleep that night!"

"Well," said Joe, "I guess anybody'd get sleepy, been sittin' there for four hours in that heat! Anyhow, it seemed like I'd just closed my eyes, when they came open all of a sudden and I was looking at the front door. And there, all in white—'Great Scott!' I says to myself, 'there's Miss Hope!' I don't know why it seemed so awful queer to me, unless because I wasn't really but half-awake."

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**"Great Scott! I says to myself, 'there's Miss Hope!'"**

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It is not too much to say that a shudder traversed the court. Christina, white as death, and her eyes black and strained with horror, leaned toward him in an agony.

"Perhaps you thought she was rather a late visitor!" smiled the coroner. "Well? She didn't melt away, I suppose?"

"No, sir. She came up to me, all smiles like, but you bet there was something that wasn't a bit funny in that smile. And she says to me, 'Is our friend, Mr. Ingham, at home?' she says. And I says, 'No, ma'am.' And she says, 'You're a bad liar, my boy! But you won't take me up, I suppose?' And I says, 'He told me not to, ma'am.'"

"Well? Go on!"

"So she says, 'Well, then, I must take myself up.' And before you could say 'Pop,' she was up the stairs."

"And what did you do?"

"'Oh, here, ma'am, ma'am,' I says, 'you mustn't do that!' She stopped and put her elbows on the stair-rail,—they run right up to one side o' the 'phone desk, you know,—and laughed down at me. She looked awful pretty, but there was something about her kind o' scared me. And 'It's all right, my boy,' she says. 'I shan't hurt him!' An' she laughed again an' ran on up."

"And you did nothing?"

"Well, what could I do, I like to know! But I grabbed at the switchboard and called up Mr. Ingham. 'Mr. Ingham,' I says, 'that lady's coming up anyhow.' An' he says, 'Damnation!' That's the last word I ever heard out o' him."

"'That lady!' Didn't you give him her name?"

"Why, I didn't know her name, sir!"

"Not know her name! Why, you know Miss Hope—you know her name?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, are you crazy, then? It was Miss Hope, was it not?"

"Why, no, you bet you it wasn't! It was another lady altogether!"

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## **CHAPTER XI**

### **PERSONS UNKNOWN**

The revulsion of feeling in Christina's favor was so immense that it became a kind of panic. It practically engulfed the rest of the inquest. The taking of testimony from her mother and Mrs. Deutch was the emptiest of formalities; the notion of holding her under surveillance until Ingham's cabman and Ann Cornish could be produced confessed itself ridiculous. Another woman, a strange woman, an aggressive, sarcastic woman forcing her way in upon Ingham a couple of hours before his death, and not coming down again! Well!

As for the coroner, he suffered less a defeat than a rout. Even his instant leap upon Joe Patrick was only a plucky spurt. He was struggling now against the tide, and he knew it; the strength of his attack was sucked down. Even the remainder of Joe's own evidence did not receive its due consideration. The public fancy fastened upon that figure of a smiling woman, "awful pretty, but with something scaring about her," leaning over the baluster to laugh, "I won't hurt him!" It worked out the rest for itself.

"Yes, sir," Joe persisted, "my mother misunderstood me, all right. I said I took her for Miss Hope at the door, and so I did. But she wasn't."

"Did she look so much like Miss Hope?"

"No, sir; not when she came near. That was the thing made me feel so queer. I can't understand it. First she was Miss Hope, and then she wasn't. She gave me a funny feeling when I seen her standing there in the door an' says to myself, 'There's Miss Hope.' 'Twas kind of's if I seen her ghost. An' then all of a sudden there she was, right on top o' me. An' not like Miss Hope a bit. An' that gimme a funny feeling, too!"

"Well, never mind your sensations. If she didn't resemble Miss Hope, at least how did she differ from her?"

"Why, I guess she was a good deal handsomer for one thing. At least I expect most people would think so, though I prefer Miss Hope's style, myself. She was dressier, for one thing, in white lace like, with a big hat, an' she was pretty near as slim, but yet she had, as you might say, more figger. An' she had red hair."

Joe had made another sensation.

"Red hair! Curly?"

"Well, it was combed standin' out fluffy like one o' these here halos, up into her hat. It wasn't anyways common red, you know, sir, it was elegant, stylish red, like the goldy part in flames."

"Don't get poetic, Joe. Was she a very young lady?"

"I don't think so, sir.—Oh, I guess she wouldn't hardly see twenty-five again! Her feet, sir? I didn't notice. But she didn't walk kind o' waddlin', either, nor else kind o' pinchin', the way ladies mostly do; she just swum right along, like Miss Hope does."

"But she didn't swim downstairs again, without your seeing her?"

"No, sir."

"Now look here, Joe Patrick, how do you know she didn't? When Mr. Bird went to the 'phone after the shooting he was a long time getting connected, and Mr. Herrick found you asleep at the desk."

"I couldn't have fell asleep again until after one o'clock, sir, for I had a clock right on the desk and at one I noticed the time. I was watchin' for her, she was such a queer one, an' only one man came in all that time, that I had to carry upstairs. He only went to the fourth floor, just where she was, an' I rushed him up an' dropped right down again. She couldn't ha' walked down in that time. I could hear the piano goin' all the while, the front doors bein' open. But after one I must ha' dropped off. Because it was about twenty minutes past when Mr. Herrick shook me up. Then I knew I'd been kind o' comin' to, the last few minutes, hearin' Mr. Bird ringin'. When Mr. Herrick grabbed my elevator I called up Mr. Deutch, an' he was quite a minute, too. I says to him, 'Say, Mr. Deutch, somepun's happened,' an' I switched him onto Mr. Bird."

"Well, we're very much obliged to you, Mr. Patrick, for an exceedingly full account. What apartment did the gentleman have whom you took up to the fourth floor? Perhaps he may have heard something."

"I don't know, sir."

"What?"

"He just stepped into the elevator, like he lived there, an' he says to me, 'Fourth!' I never thought nothing about him."

"You didn't know him?"

"No, sir."

"You'd never seen him before?"

"No, sir."

"Nor since?"

"No, sir."

"You took a man upstairs in the middle of the night, without announcing him, whom you knew to be a stranger?"

"Why no, I thought he was a new tenant. We got a few furnished apartments in the building, goes by the month. And then there's always a good deal o' sublettin' in the summer. He was so quiet an' never asked any questions nor anything, goin' right along about his business, I never give him a thought."

"Well, give him a thought now, my boy. When you let him out of the elevator, which way did he turn?"

The boy started and his eyes jumped open. "Oh, good Lord! sir," he cried, "why, he turned down toward 4-B."

His start was reproduced in the persons of all present. Only the coroner controlled himself.

"What time was this?"

"It hadn't quite struck one, sir."

"And during all this talk about Mr. Ingham's murder, at one-fifteen, it never occurred to you that at just before one, you had taken up to his floor a man whom you had never seen, whom you never saw again, and who turned toward his apartment?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I never thought of it till this minute."

"Think hard, now. Give us a good description of this man."

"A description of him?"

"Yes, yes. What did he look like?"

"Why, I don't hardly know, sir."

"Try and remember. He at least, I presume, did not remind you of Miss Hope?"

"No, sir; he didn't remind me of anything."

"He looked so unlike other people?"

"No, sir. He looked just like all gentlemen."

"I see, Joseph, that you don't observe your own sex with the passionate attention which you reserve for ladies. Well, had he a beard or a mustache?"

"No, sir, he hadn't any beard, I'm sure."

"Come, that's something! And no mustache?"

"Well, I don't think so, sir. But I wouldn't hardly like to say."

"Was he light or dark?"

"I never noticed, sir."

"Was he tall?"

"Well, sir, I should say he was about middle height."

"About how old?"

"Oh, maybe thirty, sir. Or forty, maybe. Or maybe not so old."

"Stout?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! He was slender, then?"

"Well, I shouldn't say he was either way particular, sir."

"How was he dressed, then?"

"Well, as far as I can remember; he had on a suit, and a straw hat."

"Was the suit light or dark?"

"About medium, sir."

"Not white, then? Nor rose color, I presume? Nor baby blue?"

"No, sir."

"Black?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Well, was it brown, gray, navy-blue?"

"Well, it seems like it might have been a gray, the way I think of it. But then, again, when I think of it, it seems like it might ha' been a blue."

"Thank you, Joe. Your description is most accurate. It's a pity you're not a detective."

"There's no use getting mad at me, Mister," Joe protested. "I'm doing the best I know."

"I'm sure you are. If Mr. Ingham's second anonymous visitor had only been a lady, what revelations we should have had! But this unfortunate and insignificant male, Mr. Patrick. Should you know him again if you saw him?"

"I think so, sir. I wouldn't hardly like to say."

"Well, to get back to more congenial topics!—The lady who was not Miss Hope—you would know her, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"—Joe hesitated.

"Out with it!" commanded the coroner.

"Why, it's only—why, anybody'd know her, sir. They couldn't help it. She had—" He paused, blushing.

"She had—what?"

"I couldn't hardly believe it myself, sir. She had—I'm afraid you'll laugh."

"Oh, not at you, Joe! Impossible!"

"Well, she had a blue eye, sir."

"A blue eye! You don't mean she was a Cyclops?"

"Sir?"

"She had more than the one eye, hadn't she?"

"Oh, yes, sir. She had the two o' them all right."

"Well, then, I don't see anything remarkable in her having a blue one."

"No, sir. Not if they was both blue. But the other one was brown!"

The anticipated laughter swept the room. After a pallid glare even the coroner laughed.

"Well, Joe, I'm afraid you must have been very sleepy indeed! I don't wonder the lady gave you such a turn! But if only you had been awake, Joe, your friend would have had one invaluable quality—she would be easily identified!"

Thus, almost gaily, the inquest ended. With Mr. Ingham closeted just before his death with an unaccounted-for woman and, presumably, with an unaccounted-for man, there was but one verdict for the jury to bring in, and they brought it. James Ingham had come to a violent death by shooting at the hands of a person or persons unknown.

Christina was surrounded by congratulating admirers. But Herrick had not gone far in the free air of the rainy street when, hearing his name called, he turned and saw her coming toward him. She had, in Joe Patrick's phrase, swum right along. She came to him exactly as she had come along the sea-beach in his dream, the wet wind in her skirts and in her hair, the fog behind her, and the cool light of clearing in her eyes. And she said to him,

"You're the man, I think, who thought a woman was in distress and went to help her?"

He replied, awkwardly enough, "I didn't see what else I could do!"

"You haven't been long in New York, Mr. Herrick," she replied. "I wonder, will you shake hands?"

He had her hand in his, stripped of her long glove, her soft but electric vitality at once cool and vibrant in his clasp.

"And try to believe, will you?" said Christina, "that perhaps, whoever she was and whatever she did, perhaps she was in distress, after all."

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## CHAPTER XII

### HERRICK RECEIVES A TELEPHONE MESSAGE

Herrick came home through a world which he had never seen before, blindly climbed his three flights of stairs, and, shutting himself into his room, sat down on his bed. He stared across the

floor at the wall-paper, like a man drugged. Yes, there was wall-paper in the world, just as there had been this morning. This room had existed this morning! And so had he! Incredible! Almost indecent! To-day, for the first time, he had found himself. For he had found Her!

Yes, he had lived twenty-eight years, and it had been so much time wasted! But he need waste little more. She was an actress. Incredibly, she did not abide in a sanctuary! She was stuck up there on the stage for fools to gape at. And, for two dollars a performance, he, too, could gape! Two dollars a vision—eight visions a week. He began to perceive that he would need some money!

And, with the thought of money, there materialized out of the void of the past a quantity of loose scribbled papers, which, last night, had been of paramount importance. They belonged to his Sunday special. Good—that would buy many theater tickets! Yesterday it had been the key to Success. But now he said to himself, "Success?" And he looked dully at the scribbled sheets. "Success?" he thought again, as he might have thought "Turkish toweling?" It was a substance for which, at the moment, he had no use.

He had no use for anything except the remembrance of being near her. First there was the time when she was just a girl, sitting beside her mother. He remembered that he, poor oaf, had been disappointed in her. And then came the time when she turned her head, and he had seen that strange, proud, childish innocence—like Evadne's. At the time he had reminded himself that this effect was largely due to her extraordinary purity of outline; to the curving perfection of modeling with which the length of her throat rose from that broad white collar of hers into the soft, fair dusk of her coiled hair; to the fine fashioning of brows and short, straight nose and little chin and the set of the little head, so that the incomparable delicacy of every slope and turn, of every curve and line and luminous surface at last seemed merely to flower in one innocent ravishment. He had then admitted that for a girl who wasn't a howling beauty she had at least the comeliness of being quite perfectly made. And no bolt from the blue had descended upon his gross complacency to strike him dead!

He remembered next, how, at the end of his testimony, she had, with her first restless movement, begun pulling off her long gloves. Her hands were slim and strong and rather large, with that look of sensitive cleverness which one sees sometimes in the hands of an extremely nice boy. And with the backs of these hands she had a childish trick of pushing up the hair from her ears, which Herrick found adorable. Suddenly his brain became a kind of storm-center filled with snatches of verse, now high, now homely—she had risen to give her testimony! There she stood before that brute; and the thing he remembered clearest in the world was a line from his school-reader—

"My beautiful, my beautiful, that standest meekly by—"

Did he, then, think that she was beautiful? Had he not denied it? For the first time she lifted her eyes, giving their soft radiance, so mild, so penetrating, out fully to the world. And every pulse in him had leaped with but the one cry,

"Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!"

"Your name?"

"Christina Hope."

"Occupation?"

"Actress."

"Age?"

"Twenty-two years."

Through the light, clear silver of Christina's speech there ran a strain deeper, lower, richer colored,—Irish girls speak so, sometimes. It trailed along the listener's heart; it dragged; it drawled; by the unsympathetic it might have been called husky. Conceivably, creatures may have existed who did not care for it. But to those who did, it was the last turn of the screw.

"Name?"

"Christina Hope."

"Occupation?"

"Actress."

"The devil hath not yet in all his choice  
An arrow for the heart like a sweet voice!"

This arrow, with Christina's very first word, pierced to the center and the quick of Herrick's heart, and nailed it to the mast!

"Name?"

"Christina Hope."

"Age?"

"Twenty-two years."

At the beginning of that scrap of dialogue, Herrick, as a lover, had not yet been born; at its end, compared to him, Romeo was a realist.

He did not tell himself that he was in love with her, and he would have denied convulsively that he wished her to be in love with him. With him? Fool! Dolt! Lout! Boor! Not to him did he wish her to stoop! All he wanted was to become nobler for her sake, to serve her, to die for her! Merely that! And before dying, to become humbly indispensable to her, to know her more intimately than any one had ever known her, to take up every moment of her time! It was entirely for the sake of her perfection, of the holy and ineffable vision, that he objected profoundly, almost with nausea, to Deutch's saying that she had acted loony about Ingham. Ingham!—why Ingham? Even he, Herrick, would be better than Ingham. For had not he, unworthy, by his deep perception of her become worthy? Great as her beauty was, it was not for the mob. It was too fine, too subtle; slim as a flame and winged as the wind yet April-colored, its aching ravishment could thrill only sensitive nerves. Yet he remembered something—the elevator boy had thought that, too! Joseph Patrick had declared he supposed that other people thought dressier ladies was handsomer, but he preferred Miss Hope! Deutch, too; hadn't he suggested something of the kind? Now he came to think of it, even the beast of a coroner had said so! Then, and not till then, did he fully perceive the cruel trick, the last refinement of her perfect beauty; that it came to you in such a humble, friendly, simple guise, so slight and helpless did it knock upon your heart, whispering its shy way into your blood with the sweet promise that it was yours alone and that you alone could understand it. Until, when it had taken you wholly, passion and spirit, it drew aside its veil and revealed itself as the dream of every common prince and laborer and lover; the poet's hope and the world's desire. He saw her now, coming toward him through the wet wind, shining in the gray day, with a smile on her uplifted face, and, at last, past its candor and its child's decorum, he knew it for the face that launch'd a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilium!

At that moment the summons of a Grubey infant declared him wanted on the telephone. And through the potent instrument a friendly voice from the *Record* office brought him back to earth. It said, "Say, Herrick, we've got hold of a corking wind-up for your inquest story."

He cared nothing, now, for inquests, since they no longer concerned her. But he said, "Have you?"

"Yes. We thought we'd see what the Cornish girl had to say, and we sent right down, both to her boarding-house and her theater."

"And what had she?"

"Why, that's it. Since the day of the murder she hasn't showed up at either place. She's disappeared."

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## BOOK SECOND

### THE SHADOW ON THE SCREEN

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#### CHAPTER I

##### HERRICK PAYS A CALL, AND THE TEA IS SPILT

Herrick had written on his card, "Forgive what must seem an intrusion. I am asking your time on a matter of business, but I'm afraid I must call it a personal matter, too." After the maid had taken it, he suffered the terrors of considering this message at once pretentious and too emotional and in the worst possible taste.

Christina's little reception-room was a delicate miracle of Spartan white, with a few dark gleams of slender formal mahogany shapes and a couple of water-colors in white frames. On a little table a broad, shallow bowl was filled with marigolds. Herrick had time for a second's charmed curiosity at the presence of the little country flowers, and then, from the floor above, he heard a low cry.

Instinctively, he stepped into the hall, and there came Christina, flying down the stairs.

"Oh, Mr. Herrick," she called out to him. "Have you any news?" And then, "Please don't hesitate. I can bear it! I can't bear suspense!"

"News?" he queried.

"Of Nancy!"



He cursed himself for not having known that that would be her first thought. "I'm sorry and ashamed, Miss Hope. I've no news of her at all."

Christina's legs gave way under her, and she sat down on the stairs.

Herrick's chagrin and discomfiture were extreme. She paid no further attention to him. Dropping her head on her clenched hands, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" she said.

Mrs. Hope came out of a room at the back, and, passing Herrick with as little ceremony as even her daughter had displayed, caught hold of Christina's wrists and shook her sharply.

"Christina!" she exclaimed. "Christina! Now, there has been quite enough of this!"

Christina did not seem to resent this summary treatment. She began to sob more quietly, until she suddenly burst forth, "Where is she, then? Can you tell me that? Where is she?"

"I don't care where she is!" cried poor Mrs. Hope. "Or, at least, now you know very well what I mean, my dear. I can't have you going on in this hysterical way all the time, when you've rehearsals to attend to. Nancy probably went away to get out of all the disagreeable notoriety that you've got into. And I'm sure she's very well off."

"Where is she, then?" Christina wailed. She seemed to have an extraordinary capacity for sticking to her point. "With all the police in New York looking for her, where is she?"

"Well, she hasn't been murdered, as you seem to think! If she had been, she'd be found. If people kill people, they have to do something with their bodies! But if people are alive, they can do something with themselves!"

Christina shuddered.

"Now, my dear," said her mother, "it's very high time that we apologized to Mr. Herrick, who must think us mad. But let me tell you this. I am not going to have you go on the stage in a month looking like your own ghost and all unstrung. I'm not going to have the play ruined by you, and have you turn Mr. Wheeler and all of them into your enemies. It would be better for them to get some one else. You don't sleep, you won't eat, and you sit brooding all the time, as if you were looking at nightmares. Well, if you don't get some kind of hold over yourself within the next day or two, I shall tell Mr. Wheeler that you are nervously unfit to be entrusted with a part, and I am taking you away."

Christina sat for an appreciable time without moving. Then she slowly lifted her face and smiled at Herrick with her wet eyes. "We have treated you to a strange scene," she said. "It is our bad hour. But—sometimes—we can be really nice." She held out her hand. Then, becoming aware of herself sitting on the steps, and of her mother and Herrick standing before her, "'Have we no cheers?'" she quoted; and, springing up, she led the way into the little white room.

Herrick found that it was only he who followed her there. Mrs. Hope, having dealt with the emergency, had again retreated; evidently feeling that Christina, even in tears, was quite capable of entertaining a young man single handed.

But when he was seated near her, Herrick was shocked by the girl's appearance. It was not only that her face was worn with anxiety, but that, in twenty-four hours, she seemed actually to have lost flesh. The lovely outline of her cheek was sunken and the jaw sharpened; if it were possible to be paler than she had been yesterday, she was paler now. She looked so fine and light and frail that it seemed as if the beating of her heart must show through her body, and all during the talk that followed, Herrick had the sense of her bright, still eyes being concentrated in expectation,—almost, as it were, in listening,—through her thick, wet lashes; the gentle wildness of some woodland animal listens so for the moving of a twig. She was dressed in white serge with a knot of the marigolds in her belt, and they seemed like a kind of bright wound in the tragic pallor of her weariness.

The cause of his visit seemed more than ever an impertinence, but it must be faced, and he began to stumble out the story of his Sunday special.

"There's the old argument that it must be done by somebody. Only, of course, without your sanction, it will never be done by me. I've ventured to bring it to you," said he, guiltily producing the article which he had sat up all night to typewrite. "If I might, I'd leave it here, and the maid could give it to me when I called for it—you would only have had to run your pencil through anything that distressed you. I know how distasteful the idea—the horribly melodramatic and sensational idea—must be to you—"

"Oh, well, I don't know that I joined a profession so retiring as all that!" Christina said, and she held out her hand for the manuscript. She seemed to weigh this for a moment, and then she handed it back to Herrick unopened. "No,—say what you please of me. It is sure to be only too good. Well, and if not?—What does it matter?" She closed her eyes, and the terrible fatigue of her face brought him to his feet. At the same time, he knew his story was amazingly good, and, despite his tremors, he couldn't help wanting her to read it.

"But—" he ventured.

"Well, then, I will tell you what we can do—give it to my mother. You will need it at once? She can have read it by tea-time. You may be quite easy that if there is anything in it which can injure me

I shall break the news to you, over your tea-cup, that it is in ashes. Will that do?—Ada," she said to the maid, "please take this in to my mother and ask her to read it at once. She's alone, isn't she?"

"Please, ma'am, Mrs. Deutch is with her."

"Then they can both read it."

Herrick expressed his thanks and added, "About five, then, I may come back?"

Christina opened her eyes full on him; glancing from the portières to the softly curtained windows between which they two were completely alone, "Is it so terrible here?" she inquired.

Herrick sat down.

She waited for him to speak and he had something on his conscience. He told her, then and there, about the voice in his dream which had said to him, "Ask Nancy Cornish!" The little nerves in her skin trembled and he, too, felt a superstitious thrill. "But I must suppose, now, that I didn't dream it at all. Some one in that room must have called it out—perhaps when they saw her card on the piano. I was in a pretty fidgety state,—to speak grandly, an electric state,—and, being just on the sensitive borderline between sleeping and waking, I suppose I simply happened to catch it—like a wireless at sea."

"Ask Nancy Cornish!" Christina repeated. "Ask Nancy—ah, if we could! What kind of voice was it? Should you recognize it, do you think, if you heard it again?"

"How could I? I'm scarcely even sure that I heard a voice."

"Only that you heard a shot and had to help! And didn't it occur to you that it might have been the woman who fired? I see—you don't think of women in that way. The reason I didn't ask you, yesterday, to call here," Christina volunteered, "was that I didn't want you to come."

She made this rude announcement with an effect of such good faith that Herrick laughed, "Ah, well, it's too late for that! I'm here!"

"Exactly! But not through me. My friends come to no good, Mr. Herrick—they are parted from me by a trouble as wide as the world, or else—" She put one hand over her eyes. "What is it?—a curse, a darkness?—I don't know! It's like a trap! It's as if vengeance baited a circle with me and, whenever a kindness advanced toward me, the trap fell. Even my poor Herr Hermy, who lost his picture-shop with the plush curtains, may lose his superintendency because I sent Mr. Ingham to his house. You would do better to take my word; to believe me when I tell you that somehow I bring danger. What have I done? What does it mean? I can't tell you. It's always been so. I'm like some bird that brings the storm on its wings, it doesn't know why. Life's hard for me, that's all." She pushed up her hair with the backs of her hands,—the quaint little gesture that he loved. "But what use is there in saying all this to frighten you. Something tells me you will never be afraid. Well, then, if you come here against my will, is that my fault? You do wish to befriend me? Isn't that true?"

"It's the biggest truth in my life," Herrick replied.

"You see. I, who am so unlucky, what am I to do? If ever a poor girl needed a friend, I am that girl. But I don't dare let you touch my need. I don't know what it may do to you."

Herrick answered her with a smile—"And I don't care."

She, too, smiled. It began to be borne in upon Herrick how great, when she chose to exercise it, was her self-control. She could talk to him with one part of her mind while the other was still listening, peering, questing, trembling for some fatal news. And he was suddenly aware of her murmuring—

"*Vous qui m'avez tant puni,  
Dans ma triste vie—*"

"Well, then," she said, "if you must,—I want something. Not protection, not pity, not championship; I'm a little in your own line, you know, I'm not easily frightened.

"*Je suis aussi sans désir  
Autre que d'en bien finir—  
Sans regret, sans repentir—*"

"I don't know if you read Peter Ibbetson?"

"Raised on it!" Herrick said.

"Well, then, you understand things—I don't mean merely his French songs! And that is exactly what I want—to be quite simply and sensibly and decently understood! I am a more successful actress than you realize, you backward Easterners, and I am treated like a goddess, a bad child, a sibyl, an adventuress, a crazy woman. I should like to speak now and then with some one who knew that I was nothing but a lonely girl with some brains in her head, who often took herself too seriously and sometimes, alas! not seriously enough; who was capricious and perverse but not a coward, and oh, who meant so well! Such a person would sometimes say, 'She was silly to-day,

but by this time she is ashamed. She had a strange girlhood and they taught her very bad manners, but she is not a fool and she will learn.' Well, I will not have any common person thinking like that about me! It takes an artist to understand an artist! You think me very arrogant to speak like that of you and me, because, at the bottom of your heart, you have the arrogance of all the world—you do not admit that an actress really is an artist! Wait a little, and you shall own that I am one. At any rate, I know a bit of other people's art; it's my pride I was among the first to be made happy by yours—and oh, but I could do very well with a friend I could be proud of!"—It was not very long before he had embarked upon the history of his novel.

He went on and on; he explained to her Ten Euyck's thrust about the photograph; he told her of Evadne and of Sal. The first thing she said to him was—"Is there a play in it?"

"I tried it as a play first, but—"

"Oh, surely, the novel's better first! You can get it all out of your system in the novel, and then we could drain it of the pure gold for my end of it—for the play! You'd never sell it over my head! Why, I could have you up,—couldn't I?—for plagiarism! Do you know how you can keep me agreeable? Bring it to me here, when my rehearsals are over, and read it to me—it will please me and it can do you no harm. If you find me stupid, say to yourself, 'She is drunk with pleasure, poor thing, at what I have made of her.' Oh, you'd never have the heart to publish my portrait, and not let me see the proof!"

The compact was concluded as the maid entered with the tea things. Mrs. Hope came in radiant. She began to thank Herrick for his article, and Christina said, "Where is Mrs. Deutch?"

"She is in the sitting-room. She says she must go home."

Christina went and parted the portières and Herrick heard her speaking with a kind of sweet authority in German, of which he caught the phrase—"Yes, you will stay! You will certainly stay!" She waited there till her friend joined her, and then, returning, she took charge of the tea-table.

Henrietta Deutch was a large, handsome woman of about forty-five, too stout, but of a matronly dignity; her beautiful coloring was blended into a smooth, rich surface as foreign-looking as lacquer. So far as he was capable of perceiving anything but Christina, Herrick perceived that not only her physical but her social stature was higher than her husband's; she was neither ignorant nor fussy; she was a person of large silences, as well, he imagined, as of grave sympathies; for her age she was, to an American, strangely old-fashioned but, despite her addiction to black silk and the incessant knitting of white woolen clouds, she had, in her continental youth, received an excellent formal education "with accomplishments."

"Tante Deutch," said Christina, "this is our new friend, Mr. Herrick, who stood up for us against that man."

The little maid continued to throw out signals of distress and Mrs. Hope, going to her relief, was heard to say, "Well, she'll use her white one." She explained to Christina, "It's only about laying out your things for to-night. She can't find your blue cloak—you know, the long one with the hood —"

"I am very glad to know you, sir," said Mrs. Deutch. "Christina, my lamb, you are ill!"

"No, I am not ill. But I am distracted. Sugar, Mr. Herrick? Lemon? My hand shakes and if the coroner were here he would say it was with guilt. Poor soul, what a disappointment!"

"Christina!" exclaimed Mrs. Hope. "Don't laugh!"

"I am not laughing. I think the man a dangerous enemy and now he is my enemy. He will never forgive me for letting him make himself ridiculous. He is too righteous to forget a grudge, for any one who earns such a thing from the excellent Peter Winthrop Brewster Cuyler Ten Euyck becomes a criminal by that action. 'Winthrop.' Of course there had to be the New England strain—he was born to wear a steeple hat and snoop for witches! May he never light the faggots about me!"

"Now, my dear, you are working yourself up!"

"Dear mother, you are a bit hard to please! First you tell me not to laugh and then you reproach me with working myself up! But you are right! Why should I fash myself over a man with a personality like a pair of shears? Ah, if I could get news of Nancy, my hand would be steady enough!"

"You'll have news of Nancy when she gets ready!" declared Mrs. Hope, with the maternal freedom of speech toward our dearest friends, "An ungrateful, stubborn, secretive girl!"

"My mother," said Christina, "is enthusiastic but inaccurate. She means that Nancy is neither voluble nor impulsive, like the paragon before you, and that though her affection is steady it is not easily dazzled. We have been friends scarcely more than four years—since she made her first five dollars a week as part of a stage-mob—but I knew her at once for the little real sister of my heart. I told you I'd always been a lonely girl, Mr. Herrick, and that soft, little touch came close on my loneliness, like a child's. I have succeeded and she has not; I am the world's own daughter—I know the world and she does not; my hands are very keen, believe me, for the power and the glory—after all, one must have something!—and she can only put hers into mine. But where I am weak, she is strong. One can't ask one's family to forgive that!" said Christina. And with a

tempestuous swoop she handed him a photograph upon which, whether for newspapers or detectives, had been pasted some memoranda. "This is more to the point."

He beheld a charming little face, fresh and pretty, quaintly feminine, with sensible and resolute brows to balance the wistfulness of the soft mouth; a face at once grave and glad, with a deep dimple softening the stubborn little chin. Herrick, studying the memoranda, compared them with his own vague memories and the photograph.

Height, five feet, four inches.

Weight, a hundred and twenty pounds.

Age, twenty years.

Complexion, fair.

Hair, dark auburn and curling.

Eyes, blue.

Wearing, when last seen, a white organdie dress with lace insertion; white shoes, stockings and gloves; small straw hat, dull green, trimmed with violets; carried a white embroidered linen sunshade and a small purse-bag, green suède with silver monogram, "A. C." No jewelry of any value. Wearing round her neck a string of green beads. Missing from her effects and commonly worn by her, two bangle bracelets—one silver, one jade. One silver locket. One scarab ring, bluish-green Egyptian turquoise, set in silver. Last seen on West Eighty —th Street, walking east, at five o'clock in the afternoon of August fourth.

It was now August seventh; she had been missing for three days.

"Where is she?"

"And I thought it strange enough, before the inquest, that I was in such trouble and didn't hear from her! Mother, you say she is hiding herself. But,—all alone? I have telegraphed and telephoned everywhere, to every one! And then—does a girl throw down her work, her engagement, for nothing, without a syllable, and disappear! Her things are all at Mrs. McBride's; her bill for her room is still going on; she was to have gone out to an opening that night with Susie Grayce! She hadn't a valise with her, not a change of clothes! She turned east from Jim Ingham's doorway, and that's all!" Christina was beginning to lose control of herself; she looked as if her teeth were going to chatter.

"Now, my pretty—" began Mrs. Deutch.

"Turned east?" ruminated Mrs. Hope. "East? That's toward the park. She might have been going to meet—Well, Christina!"

For the hand which Christina had criticized as trembling had dropped the tea-pot. This must have dropped rather hard, for it broke to pieces. Everything was deluged with tea.

"My sweeting!" cried Mrs. Deutch. "Move yet a little!" For she was already at work upon the disaster which was threatening Christina's white gown. The fragments of the wreck were cleared away, and while fresh tea was being made Christina urged Mrs. Deutch to play "and get me quiet."

"Yes, you will play. You will play for me and for Mr. Herrick. Mr. Herrick is not one of these deaf Yankees—don't you remember what he wrote about the music in Berlin?"

"So!" said Mrs. Deutch. "In Berlin! Is it so!" She went seriously to the piano where she executed some equally serious music with admirable technique and some feeling, but her performance was scarcely so remarkable as to account for Christina's extreme eagerness.

When she had finished Herrick took himself unwillingly away, and was still so agitated by the sweetness of Christina's farewell that after he had got himself into the hall he dropped his glove. The little maid who had opened the door for him, let it slam as she sprang to pick up the glove, and at the closing of the door he heard Christina's voice break hysterically forth, and rise above some remonstrance of her mother's.

"Yes, you do. You spy on me, both of you."

"But, my little one—" ejaculated Mrs. Deutch.

"You spy on me, you whisper, you stare, you guess, you talk! Talk! Talk! And you remember nothing that I tell you! I shall go mad! I am among spies in my own house!"

Herrick quickened his petrified muscles and went. Even to his infatuation it occurred that whatever might have been the faults of James Ingham, Christina herself was a person with whom it would not be too difficult to quarrel.

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## CHAPTER II

## IN WHICH A MYSTERIOUS ARM IS OUTSTRETCHED

It was not because this reflection was in any way cooling to his love that Herrick did not see again, for some days, the lady of his heart. He was, perhaps, not very self-assured. Yet when his story of the murder and the inquest appeared he became a marked man. He awoke to find himself famous, and to be summoned to another interview at the Ingham publishing house.

There seemed to be no thought of allowing the prestige of "Ingham's" to perish with its brilliant junior partner. Ingham, senior, who for years had been only nominally its head, intended to resume active work once more, at least until the younger son should have finished college and gone into training for his brother's place. Perhaps the real pillar of the house was Corey; and Corey remained, to sustain both father and son. And they had all three agreed not to forsake the new, the yet unborn enterprise of *Ingham's Weekly*. "Mr. James Ingham was wrapped up in it," Corey told Herrick, whom he had met with the kindest compliments, "and his father can't bear that all his work should be wasted now. Besides, in the whole of the business, it's the thing that most interests young Mr. Stanley, and it seems to me the place where the boy may be most of use. We want the *Weekly* to be a real force, Mr. Herrick, and in its first number we shall want to give up the usual editorial pages to a memoir of its founder and his ideals for it. Mr. Herrick, if we could induce you to undertake that memoir we should think ourselves extremely fortunate."

Herrick could not believe his ears; it seemed such a strange sequel to a kind of police report, however able, for the Sunday papers. There began to be something uncanny to him about his connection with Ingham's death and how it continued to seem his Open Sesame to fortune. But he was glad enough and grateful enough. He ventured to send Christina a note telling her that her new friend was now being pursued by good not evil fortune and her reply came in the same mail with a letter from his sister to whom he had written for details about Nancy Cornish.

Marion remembered only that Nancy's parents had been killed in a runaway when she was about fourteen and that Nancy had gone out West somewhere,—to Portland, Oregon, Marion thought, to live with an uncle—and had gradually ceased to write. Of this uncle's name or address both Marion and the principal of the school which both girls had attended were amiably ignorant.

"There's only one thing I'm positive about; she was the best little soul alive. Never in this world did she go to that man's rooms to tell tales of her friend. She never told tales. She was a natural born hero-worshiper; the most loyal child I ever saw and the most generous, the bravest, the lovingest, the most devoted. If she went to Mr. Ingham, it wasn't to injure that Christina Hope; it was to help her out of some scrape. She was just the kind of girl to be taken in by a woman like that, whom I must say sounds—"

Herrick dropped this letter to return to that other which it cannot be denied he had read first. It was directed in a penmanship new to him but recognized at once in every nerve, and he had drawn forth Christina's note with that strange thrill which stirs in us at the first sight of the handwriting of the beloved. She thanked him, with a certain shyness, for his news. It was so good one must take it with their breath held! And now she had a favor to ask. Stanley Ingham had gone home to Springfield for the week-end, but he had just telephoned her that he would be back in town on Tuesday morning, by the train which got in to the Grand Central at eleven thirty-five. He had some news for her but she would be at rehearsal; she should not see him until the evening, and she was naturally an impatient person. Would not Mr. Herrick humor a spoiled girl, meet the train and bring her the news at about noon to a certain little tea-room of which she gave him the address. "You may find it a great bore. They are supposed to let us out for an hour, like the shop-girls. But, alas! they don't do it so regularly. They may push us straight through till mid-afternoon. But I know you will have patience with my eagerness to hear any news where it need not trouble my mother. She has had anxiety enough." It may be taken as a measure of Herrick's infatuation that he saw nothing in this letter which was not angelic.

The Grand Central Station, however, is no sylvan spot and Herrick wondered how he should recognize an unknown Stanley Ingham among the hordes swarming in its vast marble labyrinth. But that gentleman proved to be a lively youth of about twenty, who plucked Herrick from the crowd without hesitation and led him to a secluded seat with that air of deferential protection which a really smart chap owes it to himself to show to age. His collar was so high that it was remarkable how powerfully he had established winking terms with the world over the top of it, but he stooped to account for himself at once as an emissary of Christina's.

"She wired me to see you here, and here I am. You know I'm the bearer of some new exhibits for the police. We think we've struck a new trail. After I've handed 'em over I'm dining with Miss Hope, and as she'd have heard all about 'em then, should think she might have waited. Still, you know how women are!

"In the first place," young Mr. Ingham continued, "we want you, we want everybody, to know we're Miss Hope's friends. We want to go on record that the way she's been knocked around in this thing has been simply damnable, and, if poor old Jim were alive—"

He stopped. At the mention of his brother a moisture, which Herrick knew he considered the last word of shame, rose in his eyes; behind his high collar something swelled and impeded his utterance. Then Mr. Stanley Ingham became once more a man of the world.

"You can take it from me that if you hadn't treated her as jolly well as you did in that capital article of yours, we shouldn't be trying to lasso you now onto the staff of the *Weekly*." Herrick

started, but the man of the world was not easily checked. "You were awfully decent, you know, to all of us, and Corey was all the more pleased because that—that last day, old Jim was down at the office till three o'clock—the first day after he was home, too,—working like a dog, and yet when he found that letter of Rennett's introducing you he was as pleased as Punch, and when he made the appointment with you for next day, he said to Corey, 'People are taking that boy pretty easy yet awhile, but he's the best short-story writer on this side of the Atlantic; and if he's really got a novel about him, the old house will show him it's still awake.'" The man of the world repeated these phrases with an innocent satisfaction in having them at first hand, and Herrick's own heart went questing into the future.

Then his attention returned to the words of his young friend. "We don't think we've done enough for her, and we want to do all we can do."

"Miss Hope?"

"Of course. You see, we don't any of us feel she was wrong in quarreling with Jim—except the mater, who thinks she ought to have let him cut her throat for breakfast every morning and damned glad to get him—and, considering everything, we think she let him down pretty easy at the inquest. There's no denying the dear old fellow had been a gay one in his time, and, of course, he drove a high-spirited girl like that frantic with a lot of antiquated notions about the stage. You see, he was pretty close to thirty-five, and when a man gets along about there he's apt to lose touch with what's going on. Well, having her in our pew and our carriage at the funeral didn't shut all the fools' mouths in New York nor Springfield either! So now we're going to do something really swotting—we've taken a box for her first night, and we're going to get mother into it, mourning and all, if we have to bring her in a bag. It's our duty. Read that."

"My dear and kind Mr. Ingham (ran Christina's letter): You must try and be patient with me, and not think hardly of me, when I tell you that I can not profit by the terms of Jim's will. He made those provisions for the girl who was to be his wife, and not for me who never could be.

"As I write this I feel your good heart harden to me, with the sense that I never loved him. But oh, believe me!—time was when I loved him better than earth or heaven. We couldn't agree, he and I. Let it remain my consolation that between us there was never any question of expedient nor compromise.

"If she can bear it, give my love to his mother.

"My heart is full of fondest gratitude to all that family which I should have been so proud to enter. And do you keep a little kindness for your unhappy,

"CHRISTINA HOPE."

"What do you think of that? Won't take a cent! You can easily see," commented the wise one, "that they'd have made it up all right. Splendid girl! Best thing the poor old chap ever did was trying to get her into the family. I don't suppose you're as hiped about her good looks as I am? Takes a special kind of eye, I fancy! I snaked this particularly to show you—but we want everybody to know she's turned down the coin. And we're going to have the beast that fired that shot if he's alive on this planet. 'Tisn't only on Jim's account! It's for her—it's the only way you can knock that damned lie on the head about her being up there in his rooms that night.—Chris! Why, she's a regular kid! And the straightest kid that ever lived! We mean to keep the police hot at it. And look here what I'm turning in to them!"

It was a typewritten envelope, postmarked "New York City" and addressed to Mr. James Ingham.

"We found it, opened, in his desk at the office," the boy explained. "But we've only just got it away from my mother." Its contents were a piece of red ribbon and a single sheet of paper, closely typed.

The Arm of Justice warns Mr. James Ingham—

("Is this a joke?") "Go on! Read it!"

—warns Mr. James Ingham that it demands ten thousand dollars. ("By George!") If Mr. Ingham wisely decides to grant this application, he will tie the enclosed ribbon to the frame work of his awning on the afternoon of August fourth, at four o'clock. It will be seen by an agent of the Society, who will then advise Mr. Ingham as to how and where the money may be paid. If Mr. Ingham decides against the application, he will do nothing.

But in that case he must be prepared for the publication of a paragraph in the *Voice of Justice*, beginning—"There has recently come to light an episode in the career of Mr. James Ingham, the well-known publisher, eldest son of Robert Ingham of Springfield and New York, who is engaged to be married to the popular actress, Christina Hope—"

It will go on to relate the story of his association with a young, pure and helpless girl eight years ago; how he betrayed her, and, after a promise of marriage—she being then destitute—abandoned her. It will tell this girl's name and where she is. It will give all names in connection with the affair. It will publish letters that passed between Mr.

Ingham and this young girl, corroborating the worst that has been said.

Mr. Ingham knows the standards of society, the reputation, the probity and the justice of his father, and also the temper of Miss Christina Hope. Mr. Ingham is the best judge of whether or not it will be wise to pay for silence.

"That's all!" exclaimed Stanley Ingham, as if the absence of signature were really remarkable. "Well, how's that! Poor old chap, you know—how dare they!" He reddened. "Because, hang it all, of course a man has to be a man, and you've got to be liberal-minded and all that; but, just the same, a fellow that would do what that thing says—why, he'd be regularly rotten! You can't deny it, he'd be rotten."

Herrick sat dumb. Words of Christina's were passing in his mind.—"I will never tell you the cause of our quarrel. It was simply something monstrous which happened a long time ago." Because he had to say something, he said—"And you're taking this in to the police?"

"Yes. Isn't it a mercy Jim didn't destroy it? Meant it for the detectives himself, I dare say. Perhaps his not hanging out that piece of ribbon didn't have anything to do with his death. And perhaps it did. Anyhow, wait a bit—I'm a walking post-office this morning. Here's the last exhibit!" And he plumped down on Herrick's knee the duplicate of the typewritten envelope. The postmark, however, was dated August ninth, and it was directed to Ingham senior.

"It opened with the same formalities, but this time its threat ran—

"The *Voice* will relate the actual circumstances connected with the death of Mr. James Ingham—"

"Jove!" cried Herrick, "that would be something!"

"Wait till you read 'em!"

"It will not pause after the story of the young girl whom Ingham abandoned years ago. It will tell how, on the eve of his departure for Europe, just such a story was reënacted, but this time with a close friend of his intended bride, an actress named Ann Cornish; who, on his return, appealed to him for the only reparation in his power; even slandering her friend Christina Hope in the attempt to win him back. Failing in this, she fled, and disappeared—perhaps destroyed herself. It will tell how Miss Hope suspected the intrigue, having quarreled about it with her lover the day before, when he denied all knowledge of Nancy Cornish; how, suspecting an appointment for the evening instead of the afternoon of August fourth, Miss Hope disguised herself in a red wig and dabs of paint about her eyes and penetrated to Ingham's apartment; how, finding no one there, she was placated until she spied Nancy Cornish's card on the piano and how then a terrible quarrel arose; the excitable young woman, springing in front of the window with her arm outstretched, the fingers slowly spreading and stiffening in the air, uttered a terrible, low cry, and snatching up Ingham's revolver from the table at the head of the couch, shot him dead. It will follow the flight of Miss Hope exactly as she described it at the inquest—out through the door which Ingham must have bolted behind her. She ran upstairs and escaped over the roof into the apartment house next door. It was a terribly hot night, and, against all rules, the roof-doors of both apartment houses had been fastened back. Miss Hope came quietly downstairs, passed through an entrance hall, empty of the boy who had run to join the crowd in the street, and walked away. This will be the conclusion of the narrative."

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## CHAPTER III

### HERRICK GUESSES AT THE MYSTERY AND GETS IN SOMETHING'S WAY

The light in the little tea-room was rather dim. Christina spread out Herrick's copies of the two blackmailing letters upon the table and studied them, propping her chin on her hands. Herrick, in surrendering them, had dreaded the squalid clutch which they laid upon herself. But when she lifted her eyes it was to say—"We must never let them credit this trash about Nancy!"

"None of it, then—?"

"Not a syllable! Not a breath!—Jim! Little she cared for Jim, poor child! She was unhappy, but not with that unhappiness. It's true her only love-affair had come to grief. That's what my mother means by calling her secretive—even I have never been able to get out of her what happened to it. But disgrace—run away! Disgrace could never have looked at her, and never in her life did she run away from anything! And if she were alive and free, anywhere upon this earth, the first word against me would have brought her back. She would butt walls down, with her little red head, to stand by a friend's side!"

"That's what my sister says. It's odd!"

"Odd?"

"I mean—Well, there's the circumstance that the hour when she called on Ingham was the hour when the ribbon was to have signaled from the window. And she didn't give her name, you know;

she said, 'The lady he expects.' Then one remembers that this mysterious woman who passed Joe had red hair. Joe says she had on a white lace dress, Miss Hope—well, Miss Cornish was in white with lace trimming. He mistook her for you. Still, he was very sleepy, and though she's not so tall as you are, she's not short, and she's very slender, too. Forgive me for making you impatient. But the boy's devoted to you, isn't he?"

"I suppose so," Christina ingenuously replied.

"Well, he knows, now, that Nancy Cornish is your dear friend. I can't altogether rely upon his not recognizing her photograph."

"I can," said Christina, almost tartly. "White—everybody's in white. I wore a white dress that night, myself. It wasn't Nancy. You may put that out of your mind."

Herrick considered. "That business of the variegated eyes—people seem to suppose he threw it in for good measure. But could such an effect be produced by make-up?"

"I think not. On the stage we generally use blue pencil to darken our lashes. Well, once in a way, some one from the front assures us that we have blue eyes. Or else brown, if we use brown. But close to, and—and in combination—surely not! And why try so thin a disguise?"

"To suggest a striking mark of identification which does not really exist. That would explain so much. Why she was willing to make a conspicuous impression on the boy—she may have been a dark woman, you know, in a red wig, only too glad to leave behind her the picture of a blonde. There always lingers the impression that it may have been some one whom Joe knew, or was used to seeing, and that it was merely this vague familiarity which he recognized before he had time to be taken in by her disguise. Ingham was on his mind; that may have been why he first thought of you.—Miss Hope, do you know what other impression, or superstition, or whatever you like, I can't get rid of? That the mystery of who fired the shot is part of the answer to the mystery of that bolted door. When we know how he got out, we shall know who he was."

"He?"

"Well—man or woman. It's ridiculous, it's silly, but I feel as if that personality were somehow still imprisoned in those rooms. As though, if we knew how to look, it would be there and there only we should find the truth."

Christina murmured a soft sound of regret and wonder. "What a strange thing! His poor mother—she feels so, too! She won't have a thing in his rooms touched till the lease is up. She says the secret is still there."

He loved the pity in Christina's face. And then he watched her reabsorption in the letters. But though they absorbed, they did not impress her. They somehow seemed even to bring her mind relief. "Heavens!" said she, presently. "Is it altogether a bad joke?—'The Arm of Justice!'"

"I did think at first they were a hoax of some sort. But the Inghams are far from thinking so."

"They think—?"

"Yes. They've accepted these letters as changing the whole course of the investigation. They believe now that the scandalous, the personal motive was an entirely wrong lead; that Ingham was murdered in cold blood, as a matter of business; that the woman was only a cat's paw. And they're looking for a man."

"Dear God!" said Christina. "How hot it is in here! That fan—can't they start it?" She took off her hat; the cool air from the fan came about her face, carrying to Herrick's nostrils a scent of larkspur and verbena and candy-tuft (how she clung to those garden flowers!), and she closed her eyes.

Herrick sat watching her with concern. He thought of how she had said her mother had had anxiety enough. It seemed now, to Herrick, that Christina, too, had had anxiety enough. "Evadne!" he said, suddenly.

She opened her eyes, smiling at him.

"You know I have known you very intimately and served you very faithfully for an immensely long time. I am your author, and I'm going to bully you. I want you to drop all this! What is it to you? Something hideous, that's over. In no way can the miserable muck of these letters touch you! Let the Inghams and the police and the District Attorney worry—it's their business. It's your business to make beautiful things for the world. Dear Evadne, you've got to possess your own soul if you're going to polish up ours! Forget these lies!"

It was rather late in the little restaurant and they were the only patrons. After a moment the girl leaned toward him, and laid her hand on his.

"I will try!" she said, gently. "And you will dine with us to-night? And Stan can tell what the detectives say to you, and not to me? Oh, please! You are right. I want to forget. I am worn out, my soul and my body; my heart's drying up. Nancy! Nancy! Oh, Nancy! If I could only know about Nancy! But for the rest, I don't care. You are my friend, and I will tell you something. Whenever they've wanted to show me they didn't think me a murderess, they've said, 'Of course, my dear, you're as eager to have the criminal caught as any of us.' It's false! Why should I wish for anything so horrible?"



He looked at her with a start of wonder that was half agreement.

"In what age are we living that I am expected to enjoy an execution? Do you know what one's like? I've been on trial for my life now, and I've been reading it up! They—"

"Hush!" said Herrick, sternly.

"But isn't it wicked? Why should I wish that done?—to man or woman?—Or to lock some one up for life—that's worse! Why should it amuse me to have people tortured? Who tortured Jim? Poor fellow, he scarcely could have known! Why should they suffer more than he? For the act of one little minute to burn in fire all the rest of one's life. Oh, my good friend, what's the use of pretending? We know perfectly well that some girl's despair may have fired that shot, that if she had a brother or a lover—Can't you stop them, Mr. Herrick? Must they go frothing on in this man-hunt? It's to clear my name? My name's my own; I won't have it put up against any human being's misery! If they catch and kill some unhappy creature for my sake—it will kill me, too. I shall die of it!"

"What you'll do now," said Herrick, "is to come out of here into the sunlight, and get some air before you go back to rehearsal."

She let him walk with her to the stage-door, and before it swallowed her, she abruptly and almost gaily soliloquized, "A man! A man wrote those letters! Does one man send a piece of ribbon to another, and ask him to hang it out of his window? Do you mean, to tell me that it was a man who made that remark about my temper? 'The Arm of Justice' forsooth! There's a female idea of a brigand."

It was plain that she inclined to believe the blackmailer some mercenary trickster, who knew no more of the murder than herself. Some woman, she said. But there were two persons in Joe Patrick's testimony. And Herrick believed there were two in the attempted blackmail. As to their knowledge of Ingham's death, one circumstance appeared to him highly significant; the changed standpoint of the second letter! He said to himself, "The first is obviously sincere; it was written in the genuine hope of getting money out of Ingham by a person who really felt that he or she had a case. And the second is nothing on earth but an attempt to divert suspicion from the murderer by a lot of villainous poppycock. Between the writing of those two letters they lost their case and they lost their nerve. Suppose the first letter had been written by a woman,—by a woman of some cultivation, with a very strong taste for expressing herself picturesquely. But her picturesqueness all streams into one channel—into hatred for Ingham. When she cuts at him, her pen scorches the paper. She has only one sentiment of anything like equal strength—her sympathy with the girl whom Ingham is supposed to have deserted. There, now, is a person whom she thoroughly admires. Was she herself once that girl?"

Herrick was on his way to dine at Christina's by the time that he hazarded this runaway guess, and he told himself that he must pull up a little, now he was on the public street, or he would be holding people with his glittering eye, like the Ancient Mariner.

But one fact continued to strike him. The man whom Joe Patrick had taken up to the fourth floor after the arrival of the red-haired woman did not appear in the narrative.

How if this man himself had written the second letter? The writer had sacrificed the only other persons mentioned—Christina and Nancy—without a scruple, but that curt and silent male it had never occurred to him to sacrifice. He was consistently shielded. Having no feasible way of accounting for him, the writer had not even explained him away. He had simply left him out, hoping that, in the definiteness of the accusation of a woman, he would be forgotten. For this reason he had gone into details of her flight without even touching the great dark points of the moving of Ingham's body and the bolted door. He was too busy pointing: "Look, look, there she goes! The murderess! The woman! I am calling her Christina Hope. But, in any case, a woman. No man has had anything to do with it."

Herrick turned off the avenue into Christina's street. And trying to clear his brain lest its feverish contagion should presently reach hers, he told himself, "You're cracked, my friend. You know nothing whatever. Simply cracked." But he could not cure himself. Right or wrong, his obsession continued. Nonsense or no, there grew steadily within him the notion of that man who had seen all, who knew all, and who had done his work! This figure became strangely potent, and singularly ominous. They were all suffering and struggling here, ridiculously ignorant, ridiculously in pain, and he could laugh at them. Not a sound had escaped him. He had betrayed himself by no melodramatic shadow. "He was so quiet," Joe Patrick had said, "goin' right along about his business—" Yes, he had come upon his business, he had accomplished it, he had vanished, and left no trace behind. Blackmailer, slanderer, murderer, and maybe coward and traitor, there was about him a stillness that had a strange effect. The very blankness of his passage—he looked so like "all gentlemen," neither tall nor short, stout nor thin, light nor dark, thirty, forty, or some other age—why, Beelzebub himself could not have accomplished a more complete disguise! It was as if, going so quietly on such an errand, some evil of devilish mockery looked out from behind that featureless face, as from behind a mask. And about the heart of the big, lean, ruddy youth striding toward his beloved through the warm August evening, the cold breath of superstition lightly breathed. It was, for one instant, as though it were at him the mockery were directed; as though, when that mask should be removed, it would be his blood that would be frozen by the sight. The next moment his strength exulted. Patience! He must be found, that fellow—he had made Christina suffer! The young man's heart winced and then steeled itself

upon the phrase. He drew deep into his spirit the horrid degradation that had been breathed upon her; the sickening danger that had struck at her; he saw the thinned line of her cheek, her pallor and her tears, and the dark circles under those dear eyes. He saw and his teeth set themselves. Oh, yes, that featureless and silent fellow should be found! And when that hour came, and Herrick's hand was on that mask, it made him laugh to think how well its wearer should learn that it was not only a woman at whom he had struck!

Immersed in these thoughts Herrick had not noticed a scudding automobile which now passed him so close that he had to spring backward in order to avoid being knocked down. And he was not in the mood when springing backward could be in the least agreeable to him. The rescuer of ladies was thrown into a fuming rage. What, he, he, a free-born American citizen, he, a knight-errant on his way to the queen of love and beauty, he, Bryce Herrick, a presentable young man of the privileged classes to bound into the air like a ball or a mountebank! Made to retreat ignominiously and hurriedly!—actually to—in the language of his childhood—to "skip the gutter" by the menial of upstarts with his horn!—By George, the fellow had not blown his horn!

Herrick came to a raging pause and looked about him for a policeman. He could at least complain to a policeman! Then he discovered that he was within half a block of Christina's corner; her house was on the other side of the street. To come into her presence was to forget everything else. As he reached the corner and started to cross the road he heard the whirr of another motor and then beheld it speeding toward him, some distance off, from the same direction as his first enemy. Determined not to skip the gutter this time he advanced at a dignified pace, deliberately fixing the automobile with the power of the human eye. The wild beast approached headlong, nevertheless, and Herrick, observing that it, too, dispensed with the formality of blowing its horn, stopped dead in its path. He was filled with the immense public spirit of outraged dignity and pure temper. The automobile was a long, low touring-car, gray, with an unfashionable look of hard usage, and there were three roughly dressed men in it. If they thought he would move unless that horn were blown, they were mistaken! He glared pointedly at the number which was streaked, illegibly, with mud. And the truth came to him, that this was no second automobile—it was the same one! And now it was so near that, above the man's raised collar, he could see the eyes of the chauffeur looking straight at him. Then it was he knew that they did not expect him to get out of the way; that they did not intend to blow the horn; nor did they intend to swerve aside. What they intended was to run him down! With inconceivable rapidity the thing had loomed out of the distance and was here; death lunged at him in a flash, bulked right upon him, the wind of it in his angry eyes. The shock of that anger utterly controlled him and took up the challenge; he could not have changed the set of his whole nature and broken his defiance if he would. But from the sidewalk some one screamed. Automatically, he started, and the touring-car, as though rocked by the scream, swayed a hair's breadth to one side. Only a hair's breadth! Herrick felt an impact like the end of things; then a horrible, jarring pain as if his bones were coming out through himself and knocking him to splinters. And then—nothing.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE MYSTERY PAUSES, AND OTHER THINGS GO FORWARD

The doctor drew back from examining a badly bruised, cut, and skinned youth and smiled.

"Well, young man," said he, "if I were you, the next time I saw an automobile making right for me, I'd get out of its way."

"I guess I'm all right," Herrick grinned. The grin was rather sketchy. He was not very secure yet in which world he was.

On first recovering consciousness he had found himself lying with his head in Christina's lap, and had supposed he was in heaven. But it hadn't been heaven; it had still been the middle of Ninety-third Street and Christina was sitting in the dust thereof. And then he had another glimmer; he was on a couch, and, facing him, Christina was huddled on her heels on the floor with large tears running down her nose and plumping off the end of it into a bowl, full of funny red water, that she held; a cloth in her hand was even redder, and her mouth had such a piteous droop that if only he could have sat up it would have been the natural thing to kiss it. "Darling!" he had said, to comfort her; and she had said, eagerly, "Yes!" just as if that were her name; then another blackness. And now the couch was in her drawing-room and everywhere was the scent and the sheen of her country flowers—larkspur and sweet alyssum and mignonette, the white of wild cucumber vine, the lavender of horsemint, and everywhere the breath of clover—the house was filled with them! Wherever did she get them?

"What's that?" he asked sharply. It was a policeman's helmet.

The policeman was merely left there,—the automobile having escaped without leaving its number behind it,—to take his evidence of the accident. Herrick rather dreaded being laughed at for his surety that it was no accident; but a man who had seen it from a window and the passing lady who had saved his life by shrieking had already testified to the same effect. They had both declared the offending car to be a gray touring-car; a very dark gray, Herrick thought. The policeman, who had read his Sunday special, stooped to be communicative. "Do you remember

the young feller," he asked, "that was a witness to the Ingham inquest? Do you remember he got there late through bein' knocked over by 'n automobile?"

Herrick stared.

"Well, the young lady called him on the 'phone with me listenin', an' I guess you're on a'ready to what kind of a car it was that hit him—'twas a gray tourin'-car."

By-and-by, when the policeman and the doctor were gone, and Mrs. Hope and Mrs. Deutch, without whom no crisis in the life of the Hope family seemed to be complete, had swathed him tastefully in one of Mrs. Hope's kimonos they began to tell him that he must send for his things, because he would have to convalesce as Christina's guest. The idea was distressing to him, but he was a little surprised by the soft bitterness with which Christina opposed it. "Do you want him murdered outright?" she said. "What has he done that he should be mixed up with my house and my life? I was wrong ever to let him be my friend." She was spreading a cloth over a little table which Stanley Ingham had brought close to the couch. She lifted a lighted lamp out of Herrick's eyes and set it on the mantel shelf behind his head. Looking down as the light touched his bandaged forehead and the unusual pallor of his bronzed face she said, so gently that Herrick's heart melted with a painful sweetness, "I warned you!"

"It does look awfully funny," young Ingham exclaimed, "about this touring-car. Wonder what the police will say to that! Wouldn't open their mouths about the letters, and warned me not to open mine. Wouldn't even let me tell you, Chris!"

"Fortunately," said Christina, "Mr. Herrick had told me before any one could possibly interfere.—The police think they're genuine, then?"

"You bet they do! At least, I s'pose they do. They didn't say. But they grabbed them, fast enough."

Christina asked no more, and thereafter, if she kept the talk around Herrick quiet, she kept it almost gay. She and the boy ate their dinner with him in order to wait on him and watch his comfort; and before long she seemed scarcely the older of the two. It was all wonderfully simple and kind; there could be no embarrassment in that light, genial atmosphere; when the dishes had been cleared away the girl went to the piano and sang softly—tender negro melodies, little folk lullabies, snatches of German love-songs. Just as Herrick, greatly soothed and at peace, was beginning to feel tired, Deutch arrived and he and Stanley Ingham took the patient home in a taxi and put him to bed.

To Herrick's indignant astonishment, it was four or five days before he could get about again, and at the end of that period the Deutches had become almost as large a part of his life as of the Hopes. It was in vain he protested. Mrs. Deutch came twice a day and looked after his comfort with a devotion as arbitrary as a mother's; she inspected all his garments, and, with clucks of consternation, took them away with her and returned them, perfected; between her and Mrs. Grubey a deep distrust as to each other's cookery arose. She cooked him three meals a day, beside all sorts of elaborate "foreign" trifles, Mr. Deutch bringing them over in a basket, piping hot; and Mrs. Grubey, entering with her own dainty contribution of pork chops and canned lobster, professed herself unable to understand how he could eat such messes. He finished his memorial of Ingham amid the perpetual bloom and fragrance of Christina's garden flowers; once Mr. Ingham came, with Stanley, to inquire; Mrs. Hope came twice. On her second visit, when he was almost ready to re-enter the world, she brought Christina with her.

The girl had lost her air of tragic greatness; there was more color in her face, the pupils of her eyes were less expanded and her nostrils less inflated. She seemed, too, to have been rather put back into her place as a young lady, for she smiled sweetly but a little shyly about Herrick's room, and left the talking to her mother; when her eyes encountered the photograph which had been replaced over the desk a faint flush suffused her face.

"My daughter has at last allowed herself to be persuaded," said Mrs. Hope, "that Miss Cornish is hiding voluntarily; and that, if there is a blackmailing society trying to slander us and to injure any one who is apt to defend us, the police are quite as capable of dealing with it as she is. Therefore she is now able to give a little attention to her own affairs."

Herrick was sorry for the poor lady; he knew that she was devoted to Christina and that she must have had a great deal to endure. He had learned by this time that she had been a Miss Fairfax, and that her family, however desperately poor, considered her to have made a misalliance with a mere wealthy manufacturer of wall-papers, like Hope. It had been, indeed, a runaway match and relations with her family were never really resumed. Now Deutch reported that of late conciliatory relatives, making advances to the rising star, had been routed with great slaughter. But both men guessed that this had not been the real wish of a person so socially inclined as Mrs. Hope; she was too plainly dragged at the chariot-wheels of a freer spirit, and in this light even her occasional asperities, her method of communicating with her daughter mainly by protesting exclamations, became only pathetic attempts at an authority she did not possess. "You know, Mr. Herrick," she now went on, "that the opening of 'The Victors' three weeks from next Thursday night is the great occasion of my daughter's life. I can't begin to tell you what it means to us; it's everything. At such a time I think we—we ought to have our friends about us. The Inghams are so kind; they are taking me in their box. But Christina had already ordered me two of the best seats in the house, and I'm sure I'm speaking for her, too, when I say what a pleasure it would be if you would accept them. Indeed it would be a favor.—My dear, can't you persuade him?"

"It's only—" said Christina, slowly, "that I'm afraid."

"Christina! I do wish you would drop that ridiculous pose. No horrible fate has overtaken me!"

"Ah, mother," said the girl, touching her mother's shoulder, "perhaps because we were both born, you and I, under the same ban!"

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Hope, as if Christina had mentioned something indecent. "I hope you won't pay any attention to her, Mr. Herrick."

"I certainly shan't. I shall be too glad to get those seats."

"Ah, now you're a dear! You'll see Christina at her best, and I'm going to say that that's something to see. It's a magnificent part and Mr. Wheeler has been so wonderful in rehearsing her in it. Christina doesn't find him at all intimidating or brutal, as people say. Though, of course, he's a very profane man."

"I love every bone in his body," Christina said.

"My child! I wish you wouldn't speak so immoderately!"

"I'm an immoderate person," the girl replied. She rose, and pointing out of the window she said to Herrick—"You sat here? It was there, on that shade?"

"Yes."

Christina shuddered; just then Mr. Deutch arrived with the luncheon basket. The ladies passed him in taking their leave and Christina slipped her hand through his arm. "Mr. Herrick," she said, "Herr Hermy does not look wise—no, Herr Hermy, you don't,—but if ever I puzzle you, ask him. Do not ask Tante Deutch, she will tell you something noble and solid, for she herself is wise, and so she can never understand me. But Herr Hermy is a little foolish, just as I am. He is flighty; he has the artistic temperament and understands us; he knows me to the core.—Herr Hermy, he is coming to see me act; tell him I am really Sal, not Evadne; tell him that I am a hardworking girl."

As he came to know her better, Herrick did not need to be told that. He had never seen any one work so hard nor take their work quite so seriously. But her advice remained with him and he began to listen more respectfully to Hermann Deutch on his favorite subject. "Wait till you see her, Mr. Herrick! She's like Patti, and the others were the chorus; you'll say so, too. And it don't seem but yesterday, hardly, she didn't know how she should go to faint, even! Drop herself, she would, about the house, and black and blue herself in bumps! We used to go in the family circle, when I had a half-a-dollar or two, and watch great actresses and when one did something she had a fancy for, she'd pinch me like a pair o' scissors! And she'd be up practising it all night, over and over, and the gas going! She'd wear herself out, and there's those that would expect she shouldn't wear them out, too!"

"She takes things too hard," said the lover fondly.

"Yes," said Mr. Deutch, after a pause, "she takes 'em hard, but she can drop 'em quick!" Herrick felt a little knife go through his heart; and then Deutch added, "Not that she's the way people talk—insincere. Oh, that's foolish talk! She's only quick-like; she sees all things and she feels all things, and not one of 'em will she keep quiet about! Those glass pieces, you know, hang from chandeliers?—when they flash first in the one light and then the way another strikes 'em, they ain't insincere. An' that's the way Miss Christina is—she's young, an' she's got curiosity, an' she wants she should know all things an' feel all things, so she can put 'em in her parts; she wants all the lights to go clean through her. And there's so many of 'em! So many to take in and so many to give out! There ain't one of 'em, Mr. Herrick, but what she'll reflect it right into your face."

Although, in this elaborate fancy, Herrick suspected an echo of Christina's own eloquence, he did not listen to it less eagerly on that account. "After all," he translated, "it's only that she's willingly and extraordinarily impressionable, and then willingly and extraordinarily expressive! In that case, instead of being less sincere than other people, she's more so!"

"You got it!" cried Mr. Deutch with satisfaction. "That's what these outsiders, they can't ever understand. The best friend she ever had says to me once, 'If ever Miss Hope gets enough really good parts to keep her interested, she'll take things more quietly around the house!' That's been a great comfort to me, Mr. Herrick.—She's got these emotions in her, I'll say to myself, and what harm is it she should let 'em off?"

"The best friend she ever had?"

"Well, now, Mr. Herrick, he was an old hand when she first came into the business. He taught her a lot; she'd be the first to say so. Often I've thought if she hadn't been so young then, what a match they might ha' made of it! But she never thought of it, nor, I shouldn't wonder, he neither, and now it's too late. But don't you worry because she takes all things hard; she's got a kind of a spring in her. When she's laid down to die of one thing, comes along another and she gets up again."

If Herrick did not complete this analysis, it was not for lack of opportunity. As soon as he was about again he found himself as merged in the life of the Hopes as were the Deutches themselves. "You interest Christina," Mrs. Hope told him. "You take her mind off these dreadful things. It's a very critical week with us. I hope you won't leave her alone."

Herrick did all that in him lay to justify this hope, and if Christina never urged nor invited, never made herself "responsible" for his presence, she accepted it unquestioningly. His first outing was a Sunday dinner at their house, and again Christina kept herself in the background, and only drew her mother's affectionate wrath upon herself by one remark; saying, as Herrick helped himself from the dish the maid was passing him, "I hope it's not poisoned!"

She seemed rather tired, and he hoped this was not because she had made him come at an outrageously early hour and read her the beginning of his novel. He knew she was recasting it into scenes as he read; she got him to tell her all that he meant to do with it and, as they all, save Mrs. Hope, lighted their cigarettes over the coffee in the sitting-room, she began telling Wheeler about it.—Wheeler had dined there, too.

Christina's star was a big, stalwart man of about fifty, who had not quite ceased to be a *matinée* idol in becoming one of the foremost of producers. He listened with a good deal of interest and indeed the story lost nothing on Christina's tongue; Herrick began to see that her mind was a highly sensitized plate which could catch reflections even of disembodied things. Then Wheeler exclaimed what an actor's approval has to say first, whatever he may bring himself to deal with afterward. "Why, but there's a play in that!"

"Yes," said Christina, promptly. "For me!"

Humor shone out of the good sense and good feeling of Wheeler's heavy, handsome face. "Give me more coffee, my cormorant! Do you think I want to play the young lady myself? Nay, 'I know the hour when it strikes!'—heavy fathers for mine! Stouter than I used to be—Tut-tut, no sugar!—There will be too much of me—Did you get your idea of moral responsibility out of New England, Mr. Herrick?"

"Well, this form of it I got from such a different source as a very suave, amiable Italian, Emile Gabrielli, an intending author, too,—a lawyer who had exiled himself to Switzerland. Do you know a line of Howell's?—"The wages of sin is more sinning." And it's seemed to me that the more-sinning doesn't stop with ourselves; it draws the most innocent and indifferent people into our net. Well, I always wanted to find a vehicle for that notion."

"And your Italian told you this story?"

"Something like it. Set the tone for it, too, in a way. He was a highly respectable sentimental person, and used to carry about an old miniature of a lovely girl to whom, I believe, he had once been betrothed. The bans had been forbid by cruel parents but he used to brag to me, at fifty, that they could never force him to part from her idolized face! Yet he knew so many shady stories I've often wondered if he hadn't left home in order to avoid a circle of too embarrassing clients. At any rate he had known a woman whose husband had got into trouble with the police in Italy—for swindling, I think he said. She had to clear out and disappeared. Years afterward he found that she had run into the arms of a respectable, God-fearing family; the natural prey of cheats because years before their little daughter had been kidnapped or lost and never found. They cry out at this young woman's resemblance to the child; the young woman puts two and two together into a story which deceives those who wish to be deceived, and settles down to be taken care of for the rest of her life. It must have been any port in a storm, for I didn't gather her adopted family had money. Spent all they had in looking for her when she was a baby, as I understood. To Signor Gabrielli the cream of the jest was that this girl was being petted and cherished and labored for by industrious people who would have perished of horror if they had known who she was, and who had not one drop of their blood in her veins.—I may not have got the incidents at all straight, but that's the idea."

"But you've changed the relationship—?"

"Oh, yes. I've cut down the family to a daughter and, as you see, I've reversed the parts—in my story it is the daughter who is deceived; it is the supposed mother who settles down upon the devoted innocence and labor of a generous girl."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Mrs. Hope. "Put it all on the mother! Nowadays, everything's sure to be her fault!"

Christina gave her mother her hand, much as she might have given her a cup of tea and said, "Well, but that is only where your novel begins?"

"Yes. I thought the interesting part was all to come. I thought I should be justified in supposing my reformed lady to go back to her old habits, perhaps through the mere claim of genuine ties,—old friendships, real relationships—to be caught in some serious crime, involve those friends and, finally, without in the least intending it, draw her daughter and her daughter's lover into her quicksand—of course, by means of their efforts to pull her out! And then to see what happened!"

"When the daughter finds out," Wheeler cogitated, "that should be a strong scene, a very strong scene.—What made you think of reversing the characters?—less trite?"

"Simply, I could handle it this way and not the other. When I had the cheat a young woman, she was very strenuous—I couldn't keep her from being the most lurid of common adventuresses. And I had a theory that people are never like that to themselves. Well, as soon as I substituted a rather *passée* woman she became much quieter—just a feeble, worthless, selfish person a good deal battered by life, and wanting nothing but comfort—trying to get it in the easiest way. I wanted so much to give the commonplace quality of crime, of what a simple, sensible, ordinary

piece of business it seems to the person engaged in it—at any rate until it's found out, and he begins to be reacted on by fear and other people's minds. Ah, if I can only give these people their own point of view, and make one thing after another seem quite ordinary and human, just the necessary thing to do! Until they begin to lose their heads when one gate and then another closes and, finding themselves cornered, they fight like rats in a trap! The good as well as the bad, in one panic degradation of despair! I heard a figure of crime the other day which I should like to carry out. I should like to start with the smallest blemish on the outside of the clean, rosy apple of respectable society, 'the little, pitted speck in garnered fruit, which, rotting inward' lets you, by following it, down and down, from one layer of human living to another, at last hold a whole sphere of crime, collapsed, crumbling and wide open, in your hand. Then I've got to save Evadne in the end, without the effect of dragging her through a trap-door!"

"Well, if you made it into a play," Wheeler persisted, "would the mother or the daughter be the star-part?"

"I could play both!" Christina cried.

Wheeler laughed aloud. "You are too good to be true!"

"Well, but why not? Why not a dual rôle? Even if the relationship were false, the resemblance would have to be real—it's the backbone of the story! Mother and I look a good deal alike, but I've seen chance resemblances incomparably stronger!"

She went on eagerly and Herrick was surprised to see that it was not she alone but Wheeler who took the idea of dramatization seriously. It was his first real gage of what was expected of Christina as an actress—that in a year or two she would be starring on her own account. She was not only Wheeler's leading-woman, she was his find, his speculation; he meant to be her manager and Christina meant that he should, too. Again Ingham's death seemed to be dragging Herrick into the path of success.

Then his attention was caught by Wheeler's saying, "Well, we must all be as criminal as we can, while we can. Once P. L. B. C. Ten Euyck gets to be a police inspector there will be no more crime. The word will be blotted from the vocabulary of New York."

"That man!" Mrs. Hope cried.

"Well, all these recent scandals in the Department are making them remove Simmonds; they want somebody beyond the reach of graft; and Ten Euyck has resigned his coronership. What does that look like to you?"

"It will be nuts to watch," Wheeler went on. "The force, down in his district, will be shaken up till its teeth rattle. Ten Euyck won't rest contented till he has stopped mice from stealing scraps of cheese! But my leading-woman must be civil to him, now, or he's the sort of fellow to get my license revoked. Nobody's ever run up against his self-righteousness and got away with it, yet. Poor chap, he'd be mighty able if he weren't crazy! I believe I could do a Valjean if I could engage him as Javert!"

"Don't let us speak forever of that bilious person! Why do you distract a poor girl from her work? Come," cried she to Wheeler, "are we going to do our scene?"

She drove her rather reluctant star to action.—"Young miss!" he said, "it is not every ageing favorite who would take a girl on the word of a mutual friend, give her a better part than his own, push her over his own head, and coach her in private into the bargain!" He put his big hand on Christina's shoulder. "But she's worth it!" he said. "A scene with her is a tonic to me—I did not know the old man had so much blood in him! Sally, the poor working-girl, what are you going to do to the critics, that still sleep unconscious? 'Ha—ha! Wait till Monday week!' or whenever we open!

"They'll be all gangin' East an' West,  
They'll be all gane a-gee!  
They'll be all gangin' East an' West,  
Courtin' Molly Lee!"

"Mr. Herrick, as you come up Broadway, you don't see her name on the bills! But they might as well be printing the paper!—for the younger generation is knocking at the door. Ah, Christina, my dear, thou art thy Wheeler's glass, and he in thee calls back the lovely April of his prime!" His indulgent sardonic glance caught Christina's and the flaming sword of hers drove him to work. They left behind them such a vivid sense of Herrick's having written his play and their having taken it, that he might have thought it a scene of his they were working on.

From the room where they were immured strange sounds occasionally escaped; sometimes Wheeler laughed and sometimes he swore furiously. "She'll get everything that he knows out of him!" said Mrs. Hope with great satisfaction.

Herrick discovered this, in no ignoble sense, to be the keynote of Christina's life. It was borne in upon him with every hour that her work in the theater was the essence of her; that no matter where nor how utterly she should consciously give her heart the unconscious course of her nature would still flow through the field of dramatic endeavor. He might admire or condemn this, like it or leave it; but the jealous humility of his love must recognize it.

She seemed largely to have recovered from the terrors that had enveloped her upon Ingham's death. If for Nancy Cornish she had lain down to die, for her opening night she had got up again. And she was ready to bend the whole world to that night's service. Herrick saw that she had always been so.

It became a thrilling amusement to him to watch her at work; to see how vividly she perceived, how unscrupulously she absorbed! In the vocabulary of her profession, everything was so much "experience." All her life long she had sucked out of every creature that came near her some sort of artistic sustenance; learning from the jests of her own heart and its despair; out of the shop windows and the night sky. At an age when other girls were being chaperoned to dancing-parties she had worked,—she with her soft cheek and slight strength and shy eye,—"like a miner buried in a landslide"; she was mistress of her body's every curve, of her voice's every note; she had read widely and with passionate intelligence; as soon as she had begun to make money, she had poured it into her accomplishments; she was a diligent student of passing manners and historic modes, and of each human specimen through which she did not hesitate to run her pin.

For instance, what use had she not made of the Deutches? From Henrietta Deutch she had learned German and a not inconsiderable amount of music; they had a venerated library of standard works that contained a few modern continentals in the original; she developed her school-girl French by reading the Parisians under Mrs. Deutch's supervision and in Italian she surpassed her; while all the time she learned just enough knitting to know how people feel when they knit, and just what the sensation is of stirring sugar into the preserves. She liked to go to their apartment of an evening and, once, when Mrs. Hope sent Herrick after her, he found her sitting on the floor with her hair down and her head against Mrs. Deutch's black silk knee while that lady crooned German lullabies to the baby she had never borne, and "Herr Hermy" played the pianola. As soon as she had twisted up her hair, she put on a long apron and got supper and waited on them all with the charming daughterly ways which lent her such a tender girlishness; and Herrick perceived that when a part required her to move about a kitchen she would be able to welcome the kitchen as an old friend. She could reproduce Deutch's accent, his whole personal equation, with inhuman exactness, even his tremors at the inquest, his inarticulate stammer—as of a mental dumbness, groping for words—that overtook him in moments of extreme excitement, she had caught in her net; she had learned from him some jokes and stories, some student songs, which would have astonished the many delicate tea-tables at which she shyly cast down her thieving eyes to observe exactly what service was in vogue; she did not hesitate to stir him up to dreadful stories of old racial hates and though Herrick saw her eyes darken and her nostrils expand he knew that she was drawing thoroughly into her system the dark passion of retaliation with which she would some day scorch an astonished audience. "If ever I get a queen to do—oh, one of the virtuous queens, of course," she said, "I shall have to fall back on Tante Deutch." And Herrick saw how right she was; how all along she had modeled her grand moments—and Christina, though so fond of describing herself as a poor working girl, had occasional moments of extreme grandeur—upon that simple, domestic stateliness which was really the stateliness of a great lady.

On the other hand when she was out with her mother she modeled herself—except for a stray vagary of speech—upon Mrs. Hope's excellent idea of a-young-lady-out-with-her-mother-a-la-mode; and she was by no means insensible to the glories of the smart world, nor to the luxuries of the moneyed world. "I want them all," she confessed to Herrick as they walked up Fifth Avenue from rehearsal. "I covet them; I long to own them, and I dare swear I should never be owned by them. I'm infinitely more fit than those that have them, and thank heaven I've stood out here when I was cold and wet and *oh!* how hopeless, and felt in me the anarchist and his bomb. I was never made to smile on conquerors. One man, from these great houses, once taught me how to hate them! How I should like to do a Judith! How I should like to *tame* all this!" She looked, with a bitterer gaze than he had ever seen in her, down the incomparable pomp of the great street. Then more lightly, with a curving lip, "My Deutches, I believe," she said, "are supposed to belong to the moneyed camp. But it is borne in upon me, every now and then, that our own race has occasionally put by a dollar or two."

She moved in such an atmosphere of luxury that it was difficult to imagine her what she plainly called "hard up." But it will be seen that they were now continually together and there was something about her which made it possible to offer her the simplest and the cheapest pleasures. In her rare hours of freedom he had the fabulous happiness of taking her where he had often taken Evadne in that old empty time; to Coney Island, to strange Bowery haunts, to the wharves where the boys dive, and even to his table d'hôte in the back yard. She had a zest, a fresh-hearted pleasure in everything and her sense of characterization fed upon queer colors and odd flavors just as he had known it would. He was so sorry that the little Yankee woman was absent from his table d'hôte, particularly as he had recently had a specimen of her which he longed to hear Christina reproduce. She had a little sewing-table behind her desk at which she sat playing solitaire with a grim precision which made Herrick think of the French Revolution and the knitting women; but as she had then been absent from the restaurant for some time he ventured a "Buon giorno" as he passed.

She instantly replied, "You needn't talk that Dago talk to me. I just took my daughter's paul-parrot away from here, case 't 'ed get so it couldn't talk real talk."

"That's what I call a good firm prejudice!" Herrick laughed to himself, and he continued to hope for some such specimen, or at least for Mr. Gumama, when he should bring Christina again.

But as the opening drew near, she began to limit her interests and to exclude from her vision everything which could interfere with the part in hand. It sometimes seemed to him, indeed, as if even her new calm about Nancy were only because Nancy—yes, and the threatening Arm of Justice,—were among these conscious, these voluntary exclusions. It was almost as though, over the very body of Ingham's death, she had thrown her part's rosy skirts and shut it out of sight. Beneath her innumerable moods one seemed permanent, strangely compounded of languor and excitement. By-and-by, she seemed to dwell within it, veiled, and Herrick knew that only her part was there behind the veil with her.

It was Mrs. Hope who could least endure this sleepwalking abstraction. There came an evening when some people whom Mrs. Hope considered of importance were asked to dinner. Christina improved this occasion by having her own dinner served upstairs, so that she would not be too tired to rehearse that night with Wheeler. And to Herrick Mrs. Hope reported this behavior, biting her lips. "She's the most self-willed person living! I declare to you, Mr. Herrick, she has the cruelest tricks in the world. The best friend that any girl ever had said once that, if acting were in question, she would grind his bones to make its bread!"

Later, Herrick said jealously to the girl, "Who *was* the best friend you ever had?"

Her head happened to be turned from him and it seemed to him a long time before she spoke. Even then her indifference was so great she almost yawned as "Who has told you of him?" she asked.

"Both Deutch and your mother called some old actor that."

"They meant a dear fellow who put me in the moving-picture business, bless him, when I hadn't enough to eat!"

"And where's he now?"

"I dare say he's very well off. He taught me poise. He taught me independence, too. That's enough for one man. He had a singular way of turning his eyes, without turning his head. I learned that, too."

Was it true, then—what had been hinted to him often enough—that once she had plucked out the heart of your mystery, the heart of the human being she forgot all about? She might be of as various moods as she would, she was very single-minded, and was all she valued in her friends some personal mannerism?—any peculiar impression of which she might master the physical mechanism and reproduce it? A trait like this naturally made Herrick take anxious stock of his own position. What personal peculiarity of his was she studying? But it was nevertheless in such a trait that the staunchness of his love found its true food. He found his faith digested such things capitably; his passion at once nourished and clarified itself by every human failing, by all the little nerves and little ways of his darling divinity, until it ceased to be merely the bleeding heart of a valentine and found within itself the solid, articulated bones of mortal life. If, in return, there was the least thing she could learn of him, let her, in heaven's name, learn it! Only, how long before she would have finished with it?

In the blessed meantime she scarcely stirred without him. With a freedom unthinkable in girls of his own world, she let him take her to lunch every day; unlike a proper heroine of romance, Christina required at this time a great deal of food and he waited for her after rehearsal and took her to tea. It was a mercy that he was now doing a series of Famous Crimes in Manhattan, for the Record, as he certainly did not wish to put her on a diet of Italian table d'hôtes! She accepted all this quite as a matter of course; and it had become a matter of course that he should go home with her for dinner. Sometimes they walked up through the Park, sometimes they took a taxi and drove to shops or dressmakers; she did not scruple, when she was tired or wanted air, to drive home with her hat off and her eyes shut. It seemed to the poor fellow that she had accepted him like the weather.

For she had become strangely quiet in his presence. Eventually she ceased to use upon him any conscious witchery whatever; something had spiked all her guns, and Herrick was too much in love to presume that this quiet meant anything except that he did not irritate her. Every now and again, it is true, he was breathlessly aware of something that brooded, touchingly humble and anxious and tender, in a tone, in a glance. He feared that this anxiety, this tenderness, was only that royal kindness with which, for instance, when Joe Patrick gave up his elevator, hating that haunted job, she at once got him taken on as usher at the theater. But Herrick dared not translate her expression, when, looking up suddenly, he would find her eyes swimming in a kind of happy light and fastened on his face. At such moments a flush would run through him; there would fall between them a painful, an exquisite consciousness. And, with the passing of the wave, she would seem to him extraordinarily young.

He considered it a bad sign that seldom or never did she introduce him to any of her mates. Public as was their companionship, she kept him wholly to herself. This was particularly noticeable in the restaurants where she would go to strange shifts to keep actors from dallying at her table; she would forestall their advances by paying visits to theirs, leaving Herrick to make what he liked of it; and, do what he would, the poor fellow could find no flattering reason for this. Already he knew Christina too well to have any hope that it was the actors who were not good enough.

They were to her, in the most drastic and least sentimental sense, her family. She quarreled with



them; often enough she abused and mimicked them; at the memory of bad acting scorn and disdain rode sparkling in her eye, and if her vast friendliness was lighted by passionate enthusiasms, it was capable, too, of the very sickness of contempt. But this was in private and among themselves; there was not the least nor the worst of them whom she would not have championed against the world. Quite apart from goodness or badness of art, Christina conceived of but two classes of human beings, artists and not artists; as who should say "Brethren"; "Cattle." Herrick congratulated himself that he could be scooped in under at least the title of "Writer." It was not so good as "Actor," but 't was enough, 't would serve. All her sense of kin, of race, of patriotism, and—once you came to good acting—of religion, was centered in her country of the stage. Herrick had never seen any one so class conscious. With those whom she called "outsiders," she adopted the course most calculated, as a matter of fact, to make her the rage; she refused to know them. And when, for the sake of some day reproducing high life upon the boards, she brought herself to dine out, this little protégée of the Deutches had always said to herself, with Arnold Bennett's hero, "World, I condescend."

Such an affair took place on the Monday before Christina's opening. Some friends of the Inghams made a reception for her; and Herrick saw a dress arrive that was plainly meant for conquest. Now Herrick considered that this reception had played him a mean trick. He had a right to! He who had recently been a desperado with sixpence was soon to be an associate editor of *Ingham's Weekly!*—While he was still dizzy with this knowledge a friend on the *Record* had pointed out a suite in an old fashioned downtown mansion, which had been turned into bachelor lodgings: a friend of the friend wished to sub-let these rooms furnished, and Herrick had extravagantly taken them. A beautiful Colonial fireplace had decided him. He remembered a mahogany tea-table and some silver which Marion could be induced to part with, and it seemed to him that he could not too quickly bring about the hour when Christina, before that fireplace and at that tea-table, should pour tea for whatever Thespians she might think him worthy to entertain. But it had taken time for the things to arrive; to-morrow she was going on the road for the preliminary performances, and to-day was set for the reception! He had, of course, kept silence. But it was heartbreaking to see how perfect a day it was for tea and fires—one of those cool days of earliest September. He kindled the flame; alas, it didn't matter! Then, toward six he went uptown to hear about the party.

He found Mrs. Hope, but not Christina, and the elder lady received him almost with tears. "She is out driving, Mr. Herrick; she is out driving about all by herself and she won't come home. She is in one of her tantrums and all about Mr. Wheeler—a fine actor, of course, but why bother?"

Herrick had never seen the poor lady so ruffled. "It was such a beautiful reception," she told him, "all the best people. She got there late. She always does. You can't tell me, Mr. Herrick, that she doesn't do it on purpose to make an entrance. All the time I was brushing her up after the rehearsal she stood with her eyes shut, mumbling one line over and over from her part. Nobody could be more devoted to her success than I am, but it got on my nerves so I stuck her with a hairpin and I thought she would have torn her hair down. 'What are these people to me?' she said. 'Or I to them.' You know how she goes on, Mr. Herrick, as if she were actually disreputable, instead of being really the best of girls. Then, again, she's so exclusive it seems sometimes as if she really couldn't associate with anybody, except the Deutches! She likes well enough to fascinate people, all the same. She behaved beautifully after she got there; and oh, Mr. Herrick, you can't imagine how beautiful she looked! Surely, there never was anything so lovely as my daughter!"

"Can't I?" Herrick exclaimed.

"Well, every one just lay down flat in front of her. Even Mr. Ten Euyck. Yes, he was there. I trembled when they should meet. You know, he has his inspectorship now. He wants to give her a lunch on board his yacht! It was a triumph. Christina was very demure. But by-and-by I began to feel a trifle uneasy. You know that soft, sad look she's got?—it's so angelic it just *melts* you—when she's really thinking how dull people are! Well, there, I saw it beginning to come! And about then they had got rid of all but the very smartest people, just the cream, you know, for a little intimacy! We were all getting quite cozy, when some one asked Christina how she could bear to play love-scenes with a man like Wheeler—of course, Mr. Herrick, it *is* annoying, but they will ask things like that; they can't help it."

"And Miss Hope?"

"She looked up at them with the sugariest expression I ever saw and asked them why, and they all began reminding her of the—well, you know! And I must say, when you come to think of his—ah—affairs—! And they talked about how dear Miss So-and-So had refused to act with him in amateur theatricals, he said such rough things! And how lovely Christina was, and how hard it was on her, and all the time I could see Christina clouding up."

Herrick, with his eyes on the rug, smilingly murmured, "Wave, Munich, all thy banners wave! And charge, with all thy chivalry!"

"Well, Mr. Herrick, she stood up and looked all round her with that awful stormy lower she has, and then, in a voice like one of those pursuing things in the Greek tragedies, 'I!' she said, 'I am not worthy to kiss his feet!' Oh, Mr. Herrick, why should she mention them? There are times when she certainly is not delicate!"

Herrick burst out laughing. He thought Christina might at least have exhibited some sense of

humor. "And was the slaughter terrible?"

"Why, Mr. Herrick, what could any one say? She looked as if she might have hit them. She shook the crumbs off her skirt, as if they were the party, and then she said good-by very sweetly, but coldly and sadly, like Mary Queen of Scots going to execution, and left. Mr. Herrick, I don't know where to hide my head!"

Herrick stayed for some time to counsel and console, but Christina did not return and as Mrs. Hope did not ask him to dinner he was at length obliged to go. For all his amusement he felt a little snubbed and blue and lonely; his eyes hungered for Christina in her finery; he saw her at once as the darling and the executioner of society and he longed to reassure himself with the favor of the spoiled beauty; how was he to wait till to-morrow for the summons of his proud princess? As he opened his door he saw that the fire had been kept up; some one kneeling before it turned at his entrance and faced him. It was Christina.

The shock of her presence was cruelly sweet. The firelight played over her soft light gown; she had taken off her gloves and the ruddiness gleamed on her arms and her long throat and on the sheen of her hair. As she rose slowly to her feet that something at once ineffably luxurious and ineffably spiritual which hung about her like the emanation of a perfume stirred uneasily in him and his senses ached. Never had her fairness hurt him like that; his passion rose into his throat and held him dumb.

"The man looked at me, hard," she told him, "and let me in. I came here to rest. And because I didn't want to be scolded. Don't scold me. Perhaps I've thrown away a world this afternoon. But no; it will roll back to be picked up again. Listen, and tell me that I was right."

Without stirring, "I can never tell you but the one thing," he said. "I love you!"

It was no sooner said than he loathed himself for speaking. He had not dreamed that he should say such a thing. It was not yet a month since her engagement to Ingham had been broken; she was a young girl; she was here alone with him in his rooms, to which she had paid him the perfect honor of coming—she, who had accepted him so simply, so nobly, as a gentleman. Hot shame and black despair seized upon him.

The girl stood quiet as if controlling herself. Then, so gently that she was almost inaudible, she said, "I must go!"

He could not answer her; he was aware of the ripple and murmur of her dress as she fetched her wraps; she put on her hat and the lace of her sleeves foamed back from her arms in the ruddy light; he felt how soon she would be engulfed by that world which was already rolling back to be picked up. He stepped forward to help her with her thin chiffon coat and she suffered this, gently, passively; as it slipped over her shoulders he felt her turn; he felt her arms come around his neck, clinging to him, and the sweetness of her body on his breast. In that firelit room her lips were cold, as they stumbled on his throat with the low cry, "Oh, you love me!—You love me!" she repeated. "And you're a man! Save me!"

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## CHAPTER V

### HERRICK HEARS A BELL RING

"Don't let them take me!" Christina entreated. "Don't let them lock me up! That door—! Turn the key!"

Without demur he turned it. He was in that commotion of bewildered feeling where one shock after another deliciously and terribly strikes upon the heart, and anything seems possible. From the trembling girl his pulses took a myriad alarms; apprehension of he knew not what ran riot in them and credited the suggestions of her terror; but all the while his blood rushed through him, warm and singing, and his heart glowed. She was here, with him! She had fled here and clung to him for defense! She loved him! In no dream, now, did she lie back there, in the deep chair beside his fire, with her hand clasping his eagerly as he knelt and her shoulder leaning against his. It was keener than any dream; it was that fullness of life, which, even at Herrick's age, we have mostly ceased to expect.

"There are detectives shadowing me," Christina said. "Don't deny it—I know! They've been following me from the beginning!"

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**"There are detectives shadowing me," Christina said. "Don't deny it—I know!"**

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"But why, dearest, why?"

"Because they think I killed Jim Ingham."

"Christina! Why should they think such a thing?"

"Why shouldn't they? Don't you?"

She put her finger on his lips to still his cry of protest, and, looking down into his face, her own eyes slowly filled with that brooding of maternal tenderness which seemed to search him through and through. For a moment he thought that her eyes brimmed, that her lips trembled with some communication. But, without speaking, she ran her hand along his arm and a quiver passed through her; taking his face in her two hands she bent and kissed his mouth. In that kiss they plighted a deeper troth than in ten thousand promises. And, creeping close into his breast with a shuddering sigh, she pressed her cheek to his. "Oh, Bryce, you won't let them take me away? I can stand anything but being locked up—I couldn't bear that—I couldn't! What can I do?"

"My dearest, no one in the world can harm you!"

"I came here to be safe, where I could touch you. Let me rest here a little, and feel your heart close to me. Oh, my love, I'm so frightened! I thought I was strong! I thought I was brave and could go through with it! But I can't! I'm tired—to death! All through my soul, I'm cold. It's only here I can get warm!"

"Christina," he asked her, "go through with what?"

She stirred in his arms and drew back. "Look first—ah, carefully!—from the window. What do you see?"

"Nothing but ordinary people passing. And the usual number of waiting taxis."

"Well, in the nearest of those taxis is a detective. He has been following me all the afternoon. He is sitting there waiting for me to come out."

Herrick carried her hand to his lips. "Christina, don't think me a cursed schoolmaster. But it's imagination, dear. You've driven yourself wild with all this worry and excitement. Why, believe me, they're not so clumsy! If they were following you, you wouldn't know it."

"I tell you I've known it for at least two weeks! I'm an actress, and if, as they say, we've no intelligence, only instincts, well then, our instincts are extraordinarily developed. And mine tells me that, over my shoulder, there is a shadow creeping, creeping, looming on my path."

A series of sounds burst on the air. Herrick went to the window. "There, my sweet, the taxi's gone."

"Did no one get out?"

"No one."

He had snatched up her hand again and he felt her relax.

"Well, I ought to be used to shadows; all my girlhood there has been a shadow near me. Bryce, when I was really a child, something happened. Something that changed my whole heart—oh, you shall know before you marry me! I shall find a way to tell you!—It made me a rebel and a cynic; it made me wish to have nothing to do with the rules men make; I had to find my own morality. Only, when I saw you, I felt such a strength and freshness, like sunny places. Bryce!"

"Yes."

"My feeling for Jim was dead a year ago. Do you believe that?"

"Oh, my darling! Why—"

"Because I won't have you think me shameless! Nor that an accident, like death, turned my light love to you! I was just twenty when he first asked me to marry him; I was so mad about him that my head swam. And yet it wasn't love. It was only infatuation and I knew it. I was still young enough for him to be a sort of prince—all elegance and the great world. The last two have been my big years, Bryce. I was rather a poor little girl till then. Even so, I held him off ten months. I felt that there was a curse on it and that it could never, never be! What did I know of men or that great world—well, God knows he taught me! When I did consent to our engagement the fire was already dying. But by that time the idea of him had grown into me. He had always a great influence over me, Bryce, and he could trouble and excite me long after he had broken my dream. Oh, my dear, it was one long quarrel. It was a year's struggle for my freedom! Well, I got my release. I didn't wait for fate." She paused. And then with a low gasp, "All my life I've stood quite alone. I have been hard. I have been independent. I have been brave—oh, yes, I can say it; I have been brave!—but I've broken down. Only, if you will let me keep hold of you, I shall get courage."

"Christina!"

"Do you know how big you are? Or what a clear look your eyes have got? There in that coroner's office—oh, heavens,—among those *stones!*—Bryce, he was there this afternoon! that man!"

"Ten Euyck? Yes, I know."

"Do you know what he means to do as Police Inspector? He means to run me down! Wait—you've never known. I've kept so still—I didn't want to think of it. Four years ago he payed for the production of a play of his, by a stock company I was with. Oh, my dear, that play! It gave us all quite a chill! He wanted his Mark Antony played like a young gentleman arranging the marriage-settlements. But he took the rehearsals so hard, he nearly killed us." She hesitated. "He was very kind to me. He was too kind. One night, he met me as I was coming out of the theater, and—forgot himself. One of the boys in the company, who was right behind me, slapped him in the face! Do you mean to tell me that he has ever forgotten that? At the inquest he thought he had me down, and the laugh turned against him! Is he the man to forget that?"

"But what can he do?"

"How I detested him!" Christina hurried on. "He taught me, in that one minute, when I was eighteen, how men feel about girls who aren't in their class! Just because I was on the stage, he took it for granted I—Well, he, too, learned something! Since then I've heard about him. He isn't a hypocrite, he's an egoist. I wonder, were some of the Puritans really like that? He's so very proper, and so particular not to entangle himself with respectable women! But with women he calls bad he doesn't mind—because for him bad women don't count, they don't exist! Oh, dear God, how I despise a man who feels like that! How I love you, who never, never could! Does he really know, I wonder, that sometimes it's the coldest of heart who can be made to turn his ships at Actium?—'What can he do?' He can hope I'm guilty! And he can use all the machinery of his office to prove me so!"

"Why, look here, dearest, if he's never revenged himself on the man who struck him—"

Christina gave a shrill little cry. "But, now he has his chance with me! His great spectacular chance! Oh, Bryce, I'm afraid of him, and I was never afraid before!—Dearest dear, I know you can't do anything! But the girl's in love with you, poor thing, and she feels as if you can! I've wanted you—oh, how I've wanted you!—all my life. I've known the dearest fellows in the world, the cleverest, the gamest, the most charming. But they were too much like poor Christina; fidgety things, nervous and on edge. 'You take me where the good winds blow and the eternal meadows are!'—What are you doing?"

He had bowed down to kiss her wrist and he replied, "I'm thanking God I look like a farmer!"

"My poor boy!" cried Christina, breaking her tears with little laughs, "I've got your cheek all wet! Bryce dear, we're engaged, aren't we? You haven't said.—Bryce!"

He slipped back onto the floor, with his head in her lap and her two hands gathered in his one. They were both silent. The little fire was going out and the room was almost dark. And in that happy depth of life where she had led him he was at first unaware of any change. Then he knew that the hands he held had become tense, that rigidity was creeping over her whole body, and looking up, he could just make out through the dusk, the alert head, the parted lips of one who is waiting for a sound. "Bryce," she said, "you were mistaken. That detective has not gone!"

"What do you hear?"

"I don't hear. I simply know." Their senses strained into the silence. "If he went away, it was only to bring some one back. He went to get Ten Euyck!"

"Christina! Tell me what you're really afraid of!"

"Oh! Oh!" she breathed.

"Christina, what was it you couldn't go through with?"

"Death!" she said. "Not that way! I can't!" She rocked herself softly to and fro. "If I could die now!" she whispered.

"You shan't die. And you shan't go crazy, either. You're driving yourself mad, keeping silence." He drew her to her feet, and she stood, shaking, in his arms. "Christina, what's your trouble?"

"Nancy,—that murder—my opening—my danger—aren't they enough?"

"For everything but your conviction that it is you who are pursued, and you who will be punished. Some horrible accident, dear heart, has shown you something, which you must tell. Tell it to me, and we will find that it is nothing."

"Bryce," she said, "they're coming. It's our last time together. Don't let's spend it like this."

"Did you—" he asked her so tenderly that it sounded like a caress, "did you, in some terrible emergency, in some defense, dear, of yourself, Christina—did you fire that shot?"

Her head swung back; she did not answer.

"My darling, if you did we must just take counsel whether to fight or to run. Don't be afraid. The world's before us. Christina, did you?"

"No, no, no!" she whispered. "I did not!" She felt his quiver of relief, and her nervous hands closed on his sleeve. "Oh, if you only knew. There is a thing I long to tell you! But not that! Oh, if I could trust you!"

"Can't you?"

"I mean—trust you to see things as I do! To do only what I ask! What I chose—not what was best for me! Suppose that some one whom—Bryce?"

"Yes?"

"If any one should hear—"

"There is no one to hear."

"You can't tell where they are."

"Christina, can't you see that we're alone here? That the door's locked? That you're safe in my arms? The cab went away. No one followed you. No one even knows where I live; my dear, dear love, we're all alone—"

The door-bell sounded through the house.

He thought the girl would have fallen and his own heart leaped in his side. "Darling, it's nothing. It's for some one else."

"It's for me."

"That's impossible."

There was a knock on the door.

Herrick called—"Who's there?"

"It's a card, sir."

"A card?"

"A gentleman's card, sir. He's down in the hall."

"I can't see any one at present."

"It's not for you, sir; it's for the young lady."

"Did you tell him there was a lady here?"

"He knew it himself, sir."

"Well, she came in here because she felt ill; I'm just taking her home. She can't be bothered."

"He said it was very important, sir. Something she's to do to-morrow," he said.

"Christina! It's only some one about your going away."

"No. It's the end. Take the card."

Springing on the light, he took the card to reassure her. She motioned him to read it. And he read aloud the words "Mr. Ten Euyck."

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## CHAPTER VI

### AND HOLDS A RECEPTION AFTER ALL

Christina took the card from him, and seemed to put him to one side. Almost inaudibly she said, "I will go down."

Before Herrick could prevent her, a voice from just outside the door replied, "Don't trouble yourself, Miss Hope. May I come in?" Ten Euyck, hat in hand, appeared in the doorway.

He looked from one to the other, noting Christina's tear-stained face, with a civil, sour smile. "I am sorry if I intrude. I had no idea Mr. Herrick was to be my host. The truth is, Miss Hope, I followed you and have been waiting for you, in the hope of making peace—where it was once my unhappy fortune to make war."

Christina said, "You followed me!"

"But I shouldn't have yielded to that impulse so far as to—well, break into Mr. Herrick's apartment, if I had not become, in the meanwhile, simply the messenger of—a higher power." Ten Euyck tried to say the last phrase like a jest, but it stuck in his throat. He moved out of the doorway, and there stepped past him into the room the man whom Herrick had seen at the Pilgrims'. "Miss Hope, Mr. Herrick," Ten Euyck said, "Mr. Kane; our District Attorney."

Kane nodded quickly to each of them. "Miss Hope," he said, "I don't often play postman; but when I met our friend Ten Euyck outside and he told me you were here, the opportunity was too good to lose." He took a letter out of his pocket, watching her with shrewd and smiling eyes. "We've been tampering with your mail. Allow me."

Christina took the letter wonderingly, but at its heading her face contemptuously brightened. "I can hardly see," she said, passing it to Herrick. "Read it, will you?—He would have to know anyhow," she said sweetly to the two officials. "We are just engaged to be married. You must congratulate us."

Herrick, never very eloquent, was stricken dumb. "Sit down, won't you?" was as much as he could ask his guests. The letter ran—

"The Arm of Justice suggests to Miss Christina Hope that she exert her well-known powers of fascination to persuade the Ingham family into paying the Arm of Justice its ten thousand dollars. Miss Hope need not work for nothing, nor even in order to avert an accusation against which she doubtless feels secure. But the Arm of Justice has in its possession a secret which Miss Hope would give much to know. She may learn what that secret is, and how it may be negotiated if she will hang this white ribbon out of the window wherever she may be dining on Monday. She will receive a communication at once."

"Exactly!" said Kane, as though in triumph. "For such swells as the Arms of Justice it's about dinner-time now. Would you oblige me, Miss Hope, by tying the ribbon out of the window? Show yourself as clearly as possible. All the lights, please."

As Christina stepped to the window, he added, "I'm trusting they didn't recognize us as we came in. It's pretty dark."

They waited. The three men were strung to a high degree of expectation.

"But it's all so silly!" Christina said. The call of the telephone shrilled through the room.

"Miss Hope?" Herrick asked. "Yes, she's here."

Then they heard Christina answering, "Yes, yes, it's Miss Hope. I hear. I understand. I'll be there." She hung up the receiver and turned round. "The Park. To-morrow. At ten in the morning. The bench under the squirrel's house at the top of the hill beyond the Hundred-and-tenth Street entrance. And be sure to come alone." She sat down, staring at Kane.

He said, "Excuse me!" and went to the 'phone. "Boy! Did that party ask for Miss Hope in the first place? All right. That's queer. They asked for Mr. Herrick's apartment."

"They knew I was living here? Why, I only moved in this morning."

"And they must know I'm going on the road to-morrow; the eleven-thirty train!"

"Exactly. They're well informed." Kane had been passing up and down; now he stopped in front of Christina and again he seemed to measure her with his keen eyes. "Well!" he said; "are you game for it?"

Christina sprang up and stood before him, glowing.

"You'll keep this appointment?"

"Surely! And alone!"

"Not by a long shot! Your mother and Mr. Ingham have feared exactly some such escapade; that's why you've had to be shadowed all this while and not advised of the activities of the police. There will be plenty of plain clothes men, well planted. But not you, Mr. Herrick, whom they would know. If you attempt to smuggle yourself in, we'll have to put you in irons. Well, Miss Hope?"

"My mother," said Christina, rising, and faintly smiling, "deserves to have her hair turn as white as I'm sure it has by this time." She held out her hand. "You gave me a great fright," she said. "Did you know it? I thought you had all come to execute me. Don't! I'm not worth it!"

The admiration which no man could withhold from her for very long colored Kane's studying face and warmed his handshake. "I can count on your not losing your head, I think. You'll be there?"

"I'll be there.—But have these people really any secret? Are they really going to tell me something?"

"Well, my dear young lady, we'll know that to-morrow."

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## CHAPTER VII

### MORNING IN THE PARK: THE SILENT OUTCRY

The week in which Christina was to open in "The Victors" was one of those which call down the curses of dramatic critics by producing a new play each night. Thursday was to see the opening of openings; there were but two nights on the road and Mrs. Hope and Herrick were to live through these as best they might in a metropolis that was once more a desert.

After that momentous interview of Monday evening Christina would not let Herrick drive home with her. "Come to the station in the morning, and hear what has happened. Lunch with me on Thursday. But don't let me see you alone again till Friday noon, when—" she laughed—"when I've read my notices. Let your poor Christina tell you her trouble then. Till then she has trouble enough!" She put her face up with a kind of humble frankness, to be kissed. And he saw that it was a weary face, indeed.

Throughout the night his anxiety concerning the next day's meeting with the blackmailers contended in him with that other anxiety: what she was to tell him on Friday—when she had read her notices! Whatever it was, it was not for his passion that he feared. There were even times when he could almost have wished it were not some distorted molehill that the girl's excitable broodings had swollen past all proportion, but some test of his strength, some plumbing of his tenderness. And then again he would be aware of a cold air crawling over his heart, of that horrible sinking of the stomach with which, walking in the dark, we feel that we are taking a step into space. A black wall, ominous, menacing and very near, would loom upon him and blind him from the wholesome and habitable world. The daylight reinforced his faith in simpler probabilities. It washed away all but the sweetly humble arrogance of the one fact which all night long had shot in glory through his veins and built itself into the foundations of his life. With the day he remembered only that she loved him.

He hung about the outskirts of One Hundred-and-tenth Street till he saw her enter the Park and till he saw her leave it—safe, but with an exceedingly clouded brow.

"They didn't come, of course!" she said to him at the station. "They very naturally refused to swim into a net. Mr. Kane is a great dear, but I wish he would mind his own business! Mother, speak to Bryce." She took leave of them both with a serenely fond indifference to public conjecture and the train bore her away.

Mrs. Hope may habitually have endeavored to clutch at the life-lines of her own world even while she was being submerged in the billows of Christina's but she was not mercenary and she accepted Herrick with an evident thankfulness that he was no worse. When he had taken her home, he found himself at a loss as to what to do with his life. Christina had become so wholly his occupation that to lose her even for a few days was to lose the bottom out of the world. Although the morning was still swathed in yesterday's fog, the sun was struggling, the damp air was very warm, and his steps turned toward the Park. But he did not follow the paths which he and Christina had trod homeward from rehearsals; instinctively, he turned north. Then he smiled to see that he was once more making for the Hundred-and-tenth Street entrance.

Yes, here was the last spot which had held her, and, as he looked about him, his heart stirred to think of her here. They should come here together, he and she. The place was a little wilderness; he could not have believed that in that kempt and ordered domain there could be so wild and sweet a grace of nature and charmed loneliness. The hill was high and thinly wooded; finely veiled in the mist and the faint sunshine it was the very spot for the dryad length and lightness of Christina's movements. At the same time, so close to the city's hum, there seemed something magic, something ominous and waiting in the utter, perfect stillness, and the little clearing at the top of the hill somehow, whether by its broken boulders or the columnar straightness of a semicircle of trees, suggested a Druid clearing. Those who wished to make a sacrifice here would

be very strangely unmolested. High and low and far away there was no human figure, and a cry might perish long before it traveled those misty distances. Herrick thought, "If she had come alone!" and shuddered.

But there was the little squirrel house; there the bench where she had waited; and at its base he smiled to see the scattered nuts which Christina, with her variegated interests, had not failed to bring her furry hosts. A lassitude of loneliness came over him; he was still not wholly recovered from his accident of three weeks before and with a weary yielding to stiffness and weakness he dropped down on the bench. Then he saw that along one of its slats some one had recently penciled a line, and he recognized Christina's hand. "I will come again for three days running, after Thursday. At the same hour. And I will come *alone*."

He was startled, but he smiled. It was so like her! Looking up, he saw behind him a man sweeping leaves in the distance, and, far down the hill, there appeared a loafer with a newspaper. The charm was broken. Good heavens, where were people starting from! He could perceive, now, to his left a man sleeping in the grass. Could any of these be the plain clothes men, still lingering hopefully about? By George, they must be! And Christina was right—they were too obvious a snare! Why, there was a fourth, altogether too loutishly and innocently eating an apple as he strayed on!

Herrick looked down at Christina's message, wondering if the detectives had seen it. Intrepid and obstinate darling, how resolute she was to know all there was to be known! When he looked up again he saw that the slumberer had wakened and was sitting up. The other three men were approaching from their respective angles, nearer and nearer to the bench. And then it occurred to him—did they take him for a blackmailer?

It made him laugh and then somehow it vexed him; and he began to stir the fallen leaves with a light stick he carried, restlessly. The men came on, and it annoyed him to be surrounded like this, as by a pack of wolves. He lifted his head impatiently, and was about to hail the nearest man when a splash of sun fell full on that man's face. It was the face of the chauffeur in the gray touring-car.

He knew then that he was in a trap. Controlling his first impulse to spring up and bring the struggle to an issue, he counted his chances. He remembered how far and still was this deserted spot; his muscles were very stiff, and he felt the slimness of the stick in his hand. He had no other weapon. And there were four of those figures sauntering in upon him through the silence and the pale, dreamy sunshine. He felt the high, hot beating of his heart. The city lay so close at hand! He could still feel on his mouth Christina's kiss! And the immense desire to live, and all a man's fury against outrage, against this causeless and inexplicable brute-hate, which already, in the city's very streets, had dared to maim and tried to murder him, rose in him with a colder rage and kept him quiet and expressionless. He rose; and striking the dust of the bench from his clothes, he glanced about. Yes, the man behind him was still advancing, sweeping leaves; down the hill before him the man climbed upward, still mumbling over his newspaper; to his right the apple-eater, chewing his last bite, tossed away the core as he came on; the chauffeur alone disdained subterfuge, advancing quietly; he carried in his hand some lengths of rope. Herrick believed that he had one chance. This wooded isolation could not be so far-reaching as it seemed: they would scarcely dare to fire a shot.

Leisurely he idled a step or two down the slope toward the man with the newspaper, till he was just outside the closing semicircle of the others. Then, lowering his head, he shot swiftly forward. Immediately there was a shrill whistle and the reader cast his newspaper away. It was too late; Herrick's lowered head struck him in the diaphragm and knocked him backwards. As he fell, Herrick leaped over him and turning, caught the chauffeur a stinging blow across the eyes with his stick. The stick broke; and Herrick, dropping to his knees, caught the ankle of the next comer and threw him flat upon his face. The fourth man flung a blackjack which, as Herrick rose up, caught him just below the right elbow; the young fellow sprang up and, shouting now for help at the top of his strong voice, he raced down the hill as if, once more, he were bearing the ball to its last goal.

For a moment he felt that he had snatched the victory, but his stiff muscles played him false and his right arm hung as if paralyzed. His shouts, too, were leaving him winded and the fourth man, now considerably in advance of the others, was gaining on him at every step. Suddenly Herrick mistook the shadow of a little bush for the shadow of a fifth opponent; in his second's wavering the fourth man lunged at him, missed him, and losing his own balance clutched the end of Herrick's coat. They both went down together, getting and giving blows; and though Herrick was up and off again in an instant, the breath was pretty well knocked out of him. Violent pains were throbbing now through his arm; he seemed to himself as heavy as lead; near the bottom of the hill the fourth man was on him again; Herrick landed on the fellow's head with his left, only to fall himself into the hands of the two whom he had thrown at first and who now fell upon him with a zeal that all his French boxing, which enabled him to land a kick in one jaw and a horrible backheeled stroke into the ribs of the fellow who was trying to wrap a coat round his head, scarcely availed to rid him of. He gathered himself together for one shout that seemed to him to crack the tree-trunks. But the game was up; without knowing it he was turning faint from the pain in his arm, and then the men were all round him now; barring his path and only holding off from him a little because the chauffeur was running down hill toward them, aiming at Herrick, as he came, the rope which he had tied into a noose. Herrick leaped to one side, and clinging to the tactics which had served him best, dropped to the ground and pulled the chauffeur down atop of



him. They clenched like that and went, rolling and struggling, down the hill; striking against trees, kicking, clawing, blind with rage, till they were stopped by the flat ground. It was Herrick who landed on his back and found himself staring up at the revolver the chauffeur was drawing from his pocket. At that moment there sounded a policeman's whistle.

The man who had been running after them with the coat for Herrick's head, dropped it and ran like mad. His companion's arm had been broken by Herrick's kick, but this man and the fourth continued wildly searching for something they had dropped on the hill. The chauffeur had had to ease a little on Herrick in order to draw his gun; but when he felt Herrick struggling onto his right side and even rolling himself on top of his right arm, he quickly slid the barrel of the revolver into his palm and lifted the butt-end. As he did so Herrick's left fist shot up and dealt him a blow on the point of the chin. He fell back as if his neck were broken; the pistol slipped out of his hand and Herrick caught it just as the man with the broken arm dropped on his chest. The policemen's whistles were sounding nearer and nearer; the man on Herrick's chest kept him from aiming the pistol, but he discharged it in the grass, shot after shot, five of them, to guide the police. "Let him have it!" said the man on top of Herrick, but in an Italian phrase, to the fourth man, who leaned over Herrick raising what the other had dropped back there on the hill. It was the blackjack. Herrick could just turn the pistol a little and point it upward from his side. He fired it straight into the fourth man's face; and he was always glad, afterward, that, like a sick girl, he had closed his eyes. The next man who bent over him was a policeman.

"Don't mind me," Herrick said, "get them! Get after them!" But that automobile of theirs must have been waiting on the driveway near at hand; for the man whom Herrick had shot dead was the only one they caught.

At first the body seemed to offer no clue; save a soiled and torn half of a blank card on which had been uncouthly scribbled the number 1411—unless its being the body of a young Italian could be called a clue. Herrick, who had, of course, accompanied it to the station under a nominal arrest, turned sick with disappointment. At that moment the lieutenant in charge emitted an exclamation. He had found on the dead man a letter addressed in the typewriting of the Arm of Justice to Christina Hope. The inclosure was intact, and the lieutenant held it out to Herrick.

To the single sheet of paper was fastened a thick, soft curl of dark red hair. Under the curl, in a rounded but girlish handwriting, were four words: "Help me, dear Chris!"

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## CHAPTER VIII

### A GREAT OCCASION APPROACHES AND THE VILLAIN ENTERS

This piece of information was very carefully guarded from the newspapers. Nothing of the Arm of Justice had as yet leaked out. But the fight in the Park was another matter; people linked it with the sinister automobile, and it broke out in headlines everywhere. Herrick began to find himself the most widely advertised man in New York; his battle-scarred appearance was but too apt to proclaim his identity and he did not know whether he most objected to being considered a hero who had slain four ruffians with one hand or a presumptuous nine-pin always being bowled over and having to be rescued by the police! There was a good deal of pain below his elbow, where the blackjack had temporarily paralyzed certain muscles, so that for another day or so his arm hung helpless at his side; he could almost have wished it a more dangerous wound! Curious or jeering friends made his life a burden; Christina called him up over the long distance 'phone and swore him not to leave the house without his revolver; Marion telegraphed him entreaties to come home, and his own mind seethed in a turmoil of question and of horrible fancy to which the young figure of Nancy Cornish was the unhappy center. Nor could Mrs. Hope be called a comforting companion. "Besides, Mr. Herrick,—Bryce—were they trying to kidnap you, too? And if so, wouldn't you think they had enough on their hands already? Or did they mean to murder you, really? And if so, why? Why? And, oh, Mr. Bryce, just think how uncontrollable Christina is—and who will it be next?" Often as Herrick had asked himself these and many other questions, they could not lose their interest for him. His mind spun round in them like a squirrel which finds no opening to its cage.

Notoriety, however, sometimes brings strange fish in its net. And when Mrs. Grubey stopped Herrick on the street to applaud his prowess as a pugilist, within the loose-woven mesh of her wonder and concern he seemed to catch a singular gleam, significant of he knew not what.

For Mrs. Grubey, in celebrating the hero which Herrick had become to her Johnnie, did hope that he would see the boy, sometime, and use his influence against his being such a little liar.—"You remember that queer toy pistol, Mr. Herrick, that he said he borrowed off a boy friend?"

"A. A. A., Algebra, Astronomy and Art-Drawing! It had no connection with them?"

"Why, it never come from a school at all!"

"I misdoubted it! Art-Drawing was rather elaborate than convincing."

"Oh, you'd oughtn't to laugh, Mr. Herrick—and the child so naughty! Why that morning after Mr. Ingham was killed he found it propping open the slit in our letter box." Herrick ceased to laugh.

"He was so set on keeping it he made up that story, and then to go to work and lose it, an' it so queer the stones in it was maybe real—"

"He lost it, then?"

"Els't we'd never have known on account of him coming home crying. He lost it in the Park, where he'd been playing train-robber with it an' lots o' the loafers on benches watchin' him. A bigger boy got it away from him, larkin' back an' forth, an' threw it to him, an' just then a horse took fright from an automobile and run up on the grass with its rig. The boys scattered in a hurry an' when they come back the pistol was gone. He hadn't noticed no particular person watching, so he didn't know who was gone, too. I tell him, God took it to punish his lyin'," concluded Mrs. Grubey, with the self-righteousness of perfect truth, "but I certainly would like to know how much it was worth! An' how it ever got there an' who it belonged to."

Herrick had a vision of a comic valentine he had received on the same morning. "I'm afraid it was meant for me!" he said. He knew this could not clear things up much for Mrs. Grubey; and afterward he fell to wondering if the capital "C" scratched on the dummy pistol's golden surface bore any similarity to the slender, pointed lettering which had formed the words "To the Apollo in the bath-robe." He could never remember when the initials rose before him in a new order; the A's blent as one and then the C—A. C.—Oh, madness! Yet, on Friday, he would ask Christina.

One other tribute to his popular fame gave him a new idea. It came from his Yankee woman at the table d'hôte. The night after the attack she motioned him to her as he was leaving and without ceasing to play solitaire she said, "If I was you, young feller, I guess I wouldn't come down here for one while."

His eyes opened in amused surprise. "Why not?"

"Ain't you the one shot a Dago yesterday in the Park? Pshaw, you needn't tell me—I know 'twas 'cause you had t' do it! An' good riddance! But it's healthier for you to stay where you belong."

Herrick looked round him on the good-tempered, smiling people at the little clean tables, and laughed. "But you don't suppose the whole nation is one united Black-Hand, do you? You seem to have a mighty poor opinion of Italians!"

"Well," said the woman, with a grim smile of her own, "I married one. I'd oughta know!"

She finished her game and seeing him still lingering, in enjoyment of her tartness, she said, "All forriners 're pretty poor folks. When I get mad at my children I say it's the streak of forrin' in 'em. Well, my girl's good Yankee, anyhow. Fair as anybody. It's my son's took after his father, poor fellow!"

"Then the proprietress, here, isn't your daughter?"

"Her? Sakes, no! She's my niece-in-law. I brought up my daughter like she was an American girl! It's my son keeps in with these! He's homesick. My daughter's husband got into a little bit o' trouble in the Old Country," said this remarkable little dame, without the least embarrassment, "and her an' me's glad enough to stay here. But the men kind o' mope. Their business worries 'em and as I say, 'tain't the business I ever would have chose, but I s'pose when I married a Dago I might's well made up my mind to it!" She said this with an air inimitably business like, and so continued—"Now I want you should clear out from here, young man! There's all kinds of fellers come here. It may be awful funny to you to think o' gettin' a knife in your back, but I don't want it any round where I am! When they're after Dagoes, it ain't my business. But my own folks is my own folks."

Now it could not be denied that there was something not wholly reassuring as to the pursuits of this respectable old lady's family in this speech, and in lighter-hearted times Herrick might have noted it as a testimonial to that theory of his concerning the matter-of-fact in crime. But now it suggested to him that he might do worse than look for the faces of the blackmailers in such little eating-places as this one. After all, they evidently were Italians, and it was with Italians that they would sojourn. Yes—that was one line to follow! He remembered that this region was in or adjacent to Ten Euyck's district and he wondered if he could bring himself to ask the favor of a list of its Latin haunts. He and Mrs. Hope were on their way to a big Wednesday night opening when this resolution took definite shape, and it was strange, with his mind full of these ideas, to come into the crush and dazzle of the theater lobby.

Mrs. Hope at once began bowing right and left; the theatrical season was still so young that there were actors and actresses everywhere. Herrick, abnormally aware of his new conspicuousness, could only endeavor to look pleasant; and, trailing, like a large helpless child, in her wake, was glad to catch the friendly eye of Joe Patrick; fellow-sufferer in a common cause, whom Christina's recommendation as usher he perceived to have landed him here, instead of at the theater where she was to play. Unfortunately Joe hailed him by name, in an unexpectedly carrying voice; a blush for which Herrick could have kicked himself with rage flamed over him to the roots of his hair, and when he perceived, with horror, that they were entering a box, he clutched Mrs. Hope's cloak and slunk behind the curtains with it like a raw boy.

But even so, there was a continual coming and going of acquaintances, many of whom conveyed a sort of sympathetic flutter over Mrs. Hope's interest in to-night's play; an impression that Christina must feel her own absence simply too hard, and Herrick smiled to think how much more concentrated were Christina's interests than they realized. Not but their expectation of her

appearance to-morrow was keen enough. It seemed to Herrick that there was a thrill of it in all the audience, which persistently studied Mrs. Hope's box. Christina's genius was a burning question, and the unknown quantity of her success agitated her profession like a troubled air—through which how many eyes were already ardently directed toward to-morrow night, passionate astronomers, attendant on a new star! Murders come and murders go, but here was a girl who, in a few hours, might throw open the brand-new continent of a new career; who, next season, might be a queen, with powers like life and death fast in her hands. And, with that tremendous absorption in their own point of view which Herrick had not failed to observe in the members of Christina's profession, people asked if it wasn't too dreadful that this business of Ingham's murder and Nancy Cornish's disappearance should happen just at this time, when it might upset Christina for her performance?

Mrs. Hope introduced him to all comers with a liberality which her daughter had been far from displaying, and he could see them studying him and trying to place him in Christina's life. It was clear to him that if he ranked high, they were glad he had not gone and got himself beaten to death in the Park, or it might have upset her still more. He thought of the girl whose wet cheek had pressed his in the firelight. The sweetness of the memory was sharp as a knife, and the rise of the curtain, displaying wicked aristocrats of Louis the Fourteenth, sporting on the lawns of Versailles, could not deaden it.

For if there is one quality essential to the effect of wicked aristocrats it is that of breeding; and of all mortal qualities there is none to which managers are so indifferent. In a costume play more particularly, there is one requisite for men and one only; size. Solemn bulks, with the accents of Harlem, Piccadilly and Pittsburgh, bowed themselves heavily about the stage in conscientiously airy masquerade and, since nothing is so terrible as elegance when she goes with a flat foot, Herrick's eyes roved up and down the darkened house studying the faces of Christina's confreres, there, and endeavoring to contrast them with the faces of the public and the critics to whom, to-morrow, she must entrust her fate.

A burst of applause, recalling his attention to the stage, pointed out to him a real aristocrat. Among the full-calved males in pinks and blues, the entrance of a slender fellow in black satin, not very tall, with an order on his breast and the shine of diamonds among his laces, had created something the effect of the arrival of a high-spirited and thoroughbred racehorse among a drove of caparisoned elephants. Herrick, the ingenuous outsider, supposed this actor the one patrician obtainable by the management; not knowing that it was his hit as the spy in "Garibaldi's Advance" which had opened to him the whole field of foreign villains, and that he could never have been cast for a treacherous marquis of Louis Quatorze this season if he had not succeeded as a treacherous private of Garibaldi the season before.

With a quick, light gesture, which acknowledged and dismissed the welcome of the audience, the newcomer crossed the stage and bowed deeply before his king. The king stood at no great distance from Herrick's box, and when the newcomer lifted his extraordinarily bright, dark eyes they rested full on Herrick's own. Then Herrick found himself looking into the face of the man in the street who had questioned him about the murder on the night of Ingham's death.

Herrick had a strange sensation that for the thousandth part of an instant the man's eyes went perfectly blind. But they never lost their sparkle, and his lips retained the fine light irony that made his quiet face one pale flash of mirth and malice. "Who is that?" Herrick asked Mrs. Hope.

"Who? Oh—that's Will Denny."

Herrick was startled by a hand on his sleeve, and a hoarse, boyish voice said in his ear, "That's him!" He knew the voice for Joe Patrick's. "That's the man I took up in the elevator."

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## CHAPTER IX

### PRESTO CHANGE: "OUT OF THE NIGHT THAT COVERS ME!"

Herrick excused himself to Mrs. Hope and followed Joe Patrick out of the box. "But are you sure, Joe?" he asked. "Could you swear to it?"

"Sure I could! Why couldn't I?"

"And you couldn't tell the coroner that that man was as slim as a whip and as dark as an Indian, about middle height and over thirty, and of a very nervous, wiry, high-strung build."

"Well, now I look at him close again I can see all that. But he didn't strike me anyways particular."

Herrick had an exasperated moment of wondering, if Joe considered Denny commonplace, what was his idea of the salient and the vivid. Was the whole of Joe's testimony as valueless as this? He stood now and watched their man with wonder. Had Denny recognized him? Had he seen Joe Patrick rooted upright there, behind his chair, with staring eyes? If so, after that first flicker of blindness, not an eyelash betrayed him. He was triumphantly at his ease; his part became a thing of swiftness and wit, with the grace of flashing rapiers and of ruffling lace, so that from the

moment of his entrance the act quickened and began to glow; the man seemed to take the limp, stuffed play up in his hand, to breathe life in it, to set it afire, to give it wings. And all this so quietly, with merely a light, firm motion, an eloquent tone, a live glance! He had, as Herrick only too well remembered, a singularly winning voice, an utterance of extraordinary distinction, with a kind of fastidious edge to his words that seemed to cut them clear from all duller sounds. But Herrick recalled how, after the first pleasure of hearing him speak, he had disliked a mocking lightness which seemed to blend, now, with the something slightly satanic of the wicked marquis whom Denny played. He remembered Shaw's advice, "Look like a nonentity or you will get cast for villains!" Truly, they didn't cast men like that for heroes! And in the light of that sinister flash, Herrick was aware of vengeance rising in him. He rejoiced to be hot on the trail, and when he and Joe parted it was with the understanding that he was to allay suspicion by returning to the box and Joe was to telephone the police. Rather to his surprise the performance continued without interruption and he somehow missed Joe as he came out.

Now at the ungodly hour of one-thirty in the morning, Christina was expected home. She was to take the midnight train from some Connecticut town, and the thought of her approach began gradually to overcome, in Herrick's mind, the thought of justice. As he walked to meet her through the beautiful warm, windless dark, he told himself, indeed, that he had a great piece of news for her and took counsel of her how he should carry it to Kane.

But when, under the night lights of the station, he saw how she was ready to drop with fatigue, he simply changed his mind. He had sufficiently imbibed the tone of her colleagues to feel that nothing was so necessary as that she shouldn't be upset. It was bad enough that to-morrow she must be told of Nancy's message and add her identification of that curly hair; let her sleep to-night.

In the cab she drooped against him with a simplicity of exhaustion that was full, too, of content. "I was afraid I should never get you back!" she said, and again, "I thought, all the evening, how you had been—hurt; and how all that theaterful of women could see that you were safe—and I couldn't! Do you know how I comforted myself?" And she began to murmur into his shoulder a little scrap of song—

"Careless and proud,  
That is their part of him—  
But the deep heart of him  
Hid from the crowd!"

"You know where my heart was!" he said. He had forgotten how large a part of it had been excited by the apparition of Denny.

Still humming, she drew back a little and let her look shine up to his.

"Simple and frank,  
Traitors be wise of him!  
Are not the eyes of him  
Pledge of his rank?"

"Christina!" he said, humbly. "Don't!"

"You don't like it!" she softly jeered. And though when he put her into her mother's arms her little smile was so pitiful that it frightened him, and he would have given anything that to-morrow night were past, yet she turned on the stairway and cast him down, with a teasing fondness, a final verse.

"Vigor and tan!  
Look at the strength of him!  
Oh, the good length of him!  
There is my man!"

"Christina!" cried Mrs. Hope, scandalized. And Christina, with a hysterical and weary laugh, dragged herself upstairs.

Herrick went forth into the street bathed in the sense of her love and with a soul that trembled at her sweetness. He was himself very restless, and, sniffing the fresh dark, he dismissed the cab. He had begun to be really in dread lest Christina should break down; after he had crossed the street he turned, with anxious lingering, to look up at her window, and he saw the light spring forth behind it as he looked. It was so hard to leave the sense of her nearness that Herrick, like a boy, stood still and there rose in his breast a tenderness that seemed to turn his heart to water. He had no desire, ever again, on any blind, to see a woman's shadow. Yet he hoped that she might come to the window to pull this blind down; in case some one else did so for her, he stepped backward into a little area-way in the shadow of a tall stoop. But she did not come. The hall light went out, and then hers. He gave up, and just then the front door opened and Christina, not having so much as removed her hat, appeared upon the threshold. He remained quite still with astonishment; and the girl, after glancing cautiously up and down the street, descended the steps and set off eastward at a brisk pace.

When she turned the corner into Central Park West, the explanation was clear to him. In some way or another, she had got into communication with the blackmailers and made a rendezvous

which she was determined this time to keep alone. For the first time, Herrick felt angry with her. He had a sense of having been trifled with and he was really frightened; now, indeed, he cursed himself for continuing to go unarmed. He knew that it would be worse than useless to reason with her, and the instant she was out of sight, he merely followed. Gaining the avenue, he looked up the long line of the Park without seeing her. Ah! This time she was going south. He went as far as he dared on the other side of the street but he knew her ears were quick and, reaching the Park side he vaulted the wall, and gained the shelter of the trees.

He had scarcely done so when Christina turned sharply round; and she continued to take this precaution every little while, but he could see that it was a mere formality. She no longer thought herself followed and never glanced among the trees; his steps were inaudible on the soft turf. At the Seventy-sixth Street entrance she turned into the park; pausing, wearily, she took off her hat and pushed up her hair with the backs of her hands. She looked as if she were likely to drop; but then she set off rapidly again, and Herrick prayed they would meet a policeman. But no member of the law put in an appearance, and presently Herrick smelled water, and knew that they were near the border of the big lake. Under the white electric light Christina stopped and looked at her watch; she frowned as if her heart would break; and then, in a few steps, she paused on the threshold of a little summer-house that stood with the lake lapping its outer edge. The doorway was faintly lighted from an electric light outside, and Christina glanced expectantly within. But there was no one there. She uttered a little moan of disappointment and entering dropped onto the bench beside the lake; she rested her elbow on the latticework and Herrick could see her dear, outrageous, uncovered head mistily outlined against the water.

Never in his life had he so little known what to do. A wrong step now might precipitate untold disaster. His instinct was merely to remain there, like a watchdog, and never take his eyes off her till the time came for him to spring. But reason insisted that on the drive, less than a block away, there must be policemen, and that the quicker he sought one the better. He had not even yesterday's stick, his right arm was now useless, and in a struggle by the water the odds against him were doubled. Moreover, he had no reason to think that the blackmailers intended Christina any violence. They had come to her yesterday in order to deliver a message. This failing, they had allowed her to depart unmolested and, on her side, her only thought was to do as they asked. He perceived that the meeting would at least open with a parley; if he could return with reinforcements in time to prevent foul play or to effect a capture! But he simply could not bear to try it! And then the nearness of the roadlights and the sense of his own extreme helplessness overbore his instinct, and kicking off his shoes, he sped noiselessly over grassy slopes. It seemed to him his feet were leaden; his heart tugged at him to be back; his senses strained backward for a sound and when he burst out on the drive he could have cursed the officer he saw for being fifty feet away. It did not occur to him until afterwards that if his likeness had not been in every paper in New York he might himself have been immediately arrested. But the policeman listened with interest to his story and then ambled out with the circumstance that the summer-house was not on his beat, but that Herrick would find another officer near such and such a place! With the blackness of death in his heart, Herrick sped back as he had come, and then, hearing nothing, slackened speed. There, still, thank God, was that dim outline of an uncovered head against the lake! But so motionless that Herrick was stabbed by one of those quick, insensate pangs of nightmare. Suppose they had killed her and set her there, like that! He controlled himself; but he was determined, now, at all hazards to get her away and stepping into the path before the door, "Christina!" he said.

The figure rose, and as it did so, he saw that it was not Christina at all, but a man. A slight man, not over tall, who, as he stepped forward toward the light, turned upon Herrick the pale, dark, restless face of the actor, Will Denny.

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## CHAPTER X

### MIDNIGHT IN THE PARK; "JE SUIS AUSSI SANS DÉSIR—"

The men were equally startled; a very slight quiver passed over Denny's face, but he said nothing. "Good God!" Herrick cried, "what are you doing here?"

"The same to you," Denny replied.

"But Christina! Where's Miss Hope?"

"Christina! Has she been here?"

Herrick pushed roughly past him. There was no sign of the girl, and in a cold apprehension, Herrick stared out over the lake. Denny's voice at his elbow said, "She doesn't seem to float! Why not see if I've thrown her under the bench?"

"Why not?" Herrick savagely replied.

The other smiled faintly. "Christina? It wouldn't be such an easy job!"

She wasn't under the bench and Herrick hurried back into the path.

"Go and look for her, if you like. I'll wait here." He called in a sibilant whisper after Herrick, "You'll have to hurry. Don't yell."

No hurry availed, but as Herrick burst out of the Park he caught a glimpse of her back as she passed into a moving trolley car bound for home. Only love's baser humors and blacker claims were left in him. He knew that his dignity lay anywhere but in that little arbor, yet he deliberately retraced his steps. Again he found Denny sitting there, and this time the actor did not rise. But he must have been walking about in Herrick's absence for he made a slight motion to a dark blot on the bench near him. He said, "Are those your shoes?"

Herrick sat down angrily and put them on, more and more exasperated even by the dim shape of a cigar in Denny's fingers; although he was a seething volcano of accusation he could not think of anything to say and besides, what with emotion and with haste, he was rather breathless. So that at last it was Denny who broke the silence with, "Well, now that you are here, have you got a match?—Thank you!" But he did not light it. He seemed to forget all about it as he sat there silent again in the darkness waiting for Herrick to speak.

When Herrick struggled with himself and would not, Denny at length began. "I won't pretend to deny that she came here to find me. I only deny that she did find me. I missed her, poor child. Doesn't that content you?"

And Herrick asked him in the strangling voice of hate, "Do you usually have ladies meet you here? At this hour?"

"No. That's what disturbs me. It must have been something very urgent. She couldn't trust the telephone and she couldn't wait till morning. She knows that now I almost never sleep, and that I can't bear to be awake with walls around me; if I'm not careful I shall have walls around me close enough. I come here, as Chris remembered, because—I must be somewhere. So she chanced it. She didn't find me. I came just too late."

Herrick rose. He felt as if he were stifling. "Do you pretend to tell me, then, that you don't know why she came?"

"No, I'd better not pretend that. I suppose I know why she came." He added, very low, in his clear voice, "I suppose she came to warn me."

"Warn you? Of what?"

"Come, do I need to tell you that? Her mother must have told her that you recognized me to-night and that the elevator boy recognized me, too, and told you."

"You saw all that?"

"I saw all that."

"And did nothing?"

"What could I do?"

"You've had time, since the performance, to get away!"

"Where to?" asked Denny.

If it was the simplicity of despair it affected the distraught and baffled Herrick like the simplicity of some subtle and fiendish triumph. Not for nothing had he observed the calm of the French marquis. Taking a violent hold on himself, "Do you realize—" he demanded, "what you're admitting?"

"The mark of Cain?" said the other, with his faint smile. "Oh, yes!"

Herrick incredulously demanded, "You don't deny it?"

"Deny it? Why, yes, I deny it. I'm not looking for trouble and I deny it absolutely. But what then? Will anybody believe me? Between friends, do you believe me? Well—what's the use?"

"You've no proofs? No defense?"

"None whatever!—And I've been playing villains here for four years! My dear fellow, don't blush! I'm complimented to find that you, too, are hit by that impression. And I shan't tell Christina!"

"If I could see by what damned theatrical trick you go about admitting all this!"

Denny seemed to take no offense. "I'm indifferent to who knows it. I'm tired out."

Herrick flounced impatiently and, "But season your solicitude awhile," the other added. "Remember that even to you I don't admit my—what's the phrase? My guilt! And legally I shall never admit it."

"You merely 'among friends' allow its inference?"

"If you like."

"You don't seem very clear in your own mind!"

"Clear?" The brilliance of his eyes searched Herrick's face with a singular, quick, sidelong glance

for which he did not turn his head. Then the glance drooped heavily to earth and Herrick could just hear him add, in a voice that fell like a stone, "No—pit-murk!" He sat there with his elbows on his knees and seemed to stare at the loose droop of his clasped hands. He said, "I shall never play Hamlet. But at least I am like him in one thing; I do not hold my life at a pin's fee."

"Good God!" Herrick burst forth. "Do you think it's you I care about?"

The other man replied softly into the darkness, "You mean, I've implicated Christina?"

"You've admitted that she knows—and shields you!"

"So she does, poor girl! But don't think I shall put either Chris or me to the horrors of a trial. I seem to have given some proof that I carry a revolver. And I haven't the least fear of being taken alive."

"I care nothing about you!" Herrick repeated. "What I want to understand is why Miss Hope should shield you—if she is shielding you. Why she should come here, in the middle of the night, to warn you? Whoever shot Ingham was mixed up with everything that's rotten—with blackmail—with the disappearance of that girl—"

"O!" Denny had perceptibly winced. But then he said, "I don't confess to all the crimes in the decalogue! For instance, Mr. Herrick, I am perfectly guiltless of those rude—ah—ornamentations on your own brow." He laughed outright. "How could I face Chris?" he said.

Herrick jumped at him with an oath and bore him, by pure force of weight, back against the lattice. His hand was on Denny's throat and it was a moment before Denny could tear it away. When he had done so, he said nothing; he continued to sit there as if nothing had happened; and Herrick, a little ashamed, sulked at him, "Don't speak of her like that, then!" He walked to the door of the arbor and back, facing Denny and controlling himself, with his hands in his pocket. "There's been enough of this," he said, through his teeth. "I've got to know now—what's she to do with you? What's it to her, if you're caught? How, in the first place, did she ever come to know such a secret? Why should you confide it to *her*?"

He was aware of Denny lifting his eyes and looking at him steadily through the half-dark. "I'll tell you why, if you'll sit down. I've done a hard night's work and, at any rate, I don't care to shout."

Herrick dropped down beside him and Denny struck his match. "Smoke?" he queried. Herrick shook his head and again, by the light of the little flame, Denny stared gravely into his set and haggard face. "Is it so much as that to you?" he said. "Well, then, I never told Christina. Nothing—whether I was innocent or guilty. I didn't need to. There was a—friend of hers in the room when it was done. But here's my connection with the thing. You don't know, I suppose, that two months ago, I expected to marry Nancy Cornish?"

"I might have known it!" Herrick said.

"I don't see why! Unless you've observed that the sweetest women are born with a natural kindness for cads. I was perfectly sure that she loved me. I used to meet her here"—Herrick started—"and take her out in a boat and all that, as if I were a boy,—she was *so* young! Well, then I displeased her and she sent me to the right about. It was hard. I don't know if you're too happy and too virtuous to see that when another woman was good to me, then, I fell in what it pleases us to call love with her. It came and passed, like fever. No matter. She belonged legally, at that time, to another man, but she swore to me she would get free and marry me—yes, I believed she loved me, too, if you can swallow that! You see, there were no limits to my complacency! There were certain things I couldn't help but know, and she accounted for them all, to me, by a dreadful tale of ill-usage when she was just growing up—a man of the world, older than she, her first love, promise of marriage, desertion, the horrors after it; how she had been forced to accept the first chance of respectability—but now—for love of me—All the old story! She never would tell me that man's name. She pretended to hate him and fear him, and I lashed myself into such a rage against him, and the insults with which she said he was following her again, that I hardly saw the streets I walked through. The afternoon before the shooting Nancy called me up; she said she had something to tell me, and asked me to meet her at the old place in the Park at five o'clock. It was cruel hard, because now I'd doubly lost her. I was sick of myself and the whole world. It was touch and go with me. I sat here, waiting, waiting—if she'd brought her goodness, her freshness, her gentleness even within hailing distance of me, then, they might have shed a little sanity on me as she passed."

"And Christina?" Herrick persisted.

"Well—this other woman was Christina's friend. That day that Nancy didn't come I had a dress rehearsal, and Christina and this other woman dined with me, just before that. She said, then, for the first time that Ingham was the man she had told me of. She said she told me now because it was he who had sent Nancy away; that Nancy was afraid of me because he and she—I went straight for him after rehearsal. They didn't expect me. And up there, in that room with Ingham, I found that other woman. Would anybody believe in my innocence after that? Ought I to be innocent? 'Deny it?' No, on the whole, I'd better not deny it!' That's all!"

They were both silent. Then through his groping thoughts Herrick could hear Denny half-humming a catch of song whose words were instantly familiar.

"Je suis aussi sans désir

Autre que d'en bien finir—  
Sans regret, sans repentir,  
Sans espoir ni crainte—"

"Without regret, without repentance—Repentance? Surely! But—without regret? He asked a good deal, that lad! You ought to like my little song—it was taught me by the erudite Christina."

"Where's that woman, now?"

"Ah!" said Denny, "that's her secret."

"And Christina?" said Herrick, again.

"Christina and I are very old chums; aside from the Deutches I am the oldest friend she has. It was I got Wheeler to go West and see her. I was in the first company she ever joined, when she was just a tall, slim kid—sixteen, I think—and I was twenty-six. We've worked together, and won together and—gone without together. I had been at it for eight years when she first went on; and I taught her all I knew; when I got into the moving pictures for a summer I worked her in—"

Herrick started. "The best friend Christina ever had!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said the other. "Thank you!" Herrick was aware of his quaint smile. "Yes, I suppose I might be called that!"

"I was told—I was led to believe you were an older man."

"Ah, that's one of Christina's sweetest traits—she colors things so prettily! She can't help it! But you see, now, don't you, that she'd never give me away? Chris would shield her friends as long as she had breath for a lie. She's pretended a quarrel with me all these weeks, because, thinking the police were following her, she didn't want them to find me. She's kept you from knowing people who might speak of me. She's had but the one thought since the beginning; and that was to save my life. But she's in love with you, and she can't lie to you any longer—you'll see. Besides, she thinks she can make you our accomplice; that because you're a friend of hers, you're a friend of mine. She has still her innocences, you see, and, in the drama, so many lovers behave so handsomely." The ring had died out of his voice; but he went on, with a kind of rueful amusement, spurring himself to be persuasive, "Come, now, stop thinking of what would influence you, and try to think of what would influence Chris! Do you think she'd like to see Wheeler hanged?"

"Wheeler!"

"Well, allow me to put forward that Chris thinks me quite as good an actor as Wheeler, with the double endearment of not being so well appreciated by outsiders!" He leaned forward with an intent flash. "If you think she wouldn't stand by me, you don't know her!"

"And is that the reason," asked Herrick, "why you left her in the lurch?" He was aware of behaving like a quarrelsome old woman, now that he had a probable murderer on his hands and didn't quite know what to do with him. The man must feel singularly safe. There was something at once annoying and disarming in his passiveness, and Herrick drove home this question with a voice as hard as a blow. "Was it because you could play on the loyalty and courage of a romantic girl, that, when you were likely to be suspected, you ran away and left her to bear the public accusation?"

Denny answered, with that gentleness which Herrick found offensive, "I didn't run far."

"You've been filling her, too, I suppose, with this cock and bull melodrama of suicide if you're arrested?"

He had touched a live nerve. "Would it be less melodramatic to crave that other exit—have my head shaved so that the apparatus could be fitted on—let them take half an hour strapping me into an electric chair! Do you think that would be soothing to her? No, thank you! Or do you want me to hide and run, to twist and duck and turn and be caught in the end?—I can't help your calling me a coward," Denny said, "and I dare say I am a coward. A jump over the edge I could manage well enough. But 'to sit in solemn silence, in a dark, dank dock, awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock—'" He seemed to rein in his voice in the darkness. "If I were even sure of that! But to be shut up for life, for twenty years, death every minute of them! To be starved and degraded, pawed over and mishandled by bullies—" He shuddered with a violence that seemed to snap his breath; even his eyebrows gave a convulsive twitch, as if he felt something crawling over his face. And, rising, he went across to the entrance of the arbor and stood leaning in the doorway, looking out.

Herrick did not want him to get away and at the same time he did not want to bring about any crisis until he had seen Christina. He thought Denny's explanation of her attitude only too probable. "I've known the dearest fellows in the world—the cleverest, the gamest, the most charming. But they were all like poor Christina—fidgety things, nervous and on edge." Was she thinking of Denny then? "Oblige me by staying where you are!" he said to Denny's back. Denny turned the grim delicacy of his pale face to smile at him and the smile maddened Herrick. He went on, "You must see yourself I can't let you go! Will you come to my rooms for to-night, and in the morning Miss Hope can tell me if this story's true!"

Denny walked slowly out and stood smoking in the center of the pathway, under the tall electric



light. He was far from a happy-looking man, and yet he looked as if he were going to laugh. "And what then?" he asked.

"Then I shall know if this isn't all a bid for sympathy. Whether there's really any other woman beside this Nancy Cornish—"

Denny wheeled suddenly round on him.

"Or whether you don't know more of her—"

"Damn you!" Denny said. "You fool,—" He had come close to Herrick and then remembering the limp hang of Herrick's arm, he paused. And as he paused a man stepped out from among the trees and touched him on the shoulder.

He wheeled round; there were two men behind him. They were in plain clothes but the man who had touched Denny showed a shield. "Come along! You're wanted at headquarters."

Denny stood quiet, breathing a little rapidly. "Let me see your warrant," he said, and he took two steps backward to get it under the light. So that before any one could stop him, he had whipped out a revolver, put the end of the barrel in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

There was a little click before the man could jump on him and then another; and then Herrick heard the steel cuffs snap over his wrists. The man with the shield drew back, and grinning, shook into his palm what were not even blank cartridges but only careful imitations. "The next time you rely on a gun," he said, "you want to look out for that valet of yours!"

Denny was standing with his heavy hair shaken by the struggle about his eyes; one of the men obligingly pushed it back with the edge of Denny's straw hat which he picked up and put on Denny's head. "Come! Get a gait on us," said the man with the star.

Denny said, aloud, "You overheard those last remarks for which this gentleman raised his voice?"

"Rather!" the three grinned.

"Ah, well, then there is certainly no more to be said." He nodded agreeably to Herrick, and then between his captors, walked lightly and quickly off, into the darkness.

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## CHAPTER XI

### KEEPING CHRISTINA OUT OF IT

Daylight was in the streets when Herrick got to bed, sure he should not close his eyes; then he was wakened only by the cries of the newsboys underneath his windows, calling, as if it had been an extra—"Ingham Murderer Arrested! Murderer Arrested! Popular Actor Arrested in the Ingham Murder!"

Herrick tumbled into his clothes and bought a paper on his way to a very late breakfast at the Pilgrims', where he had a card. In the account of the arrest he himself figured as something between a police decoy and an accomplice in crime, but Christina's midnight sally remained unknown and he breathed freer. Now that she was to be kept out of it, he could but admire the quiet good sense with which the police had gone about their business. While those more closely concerned had dashed and bewildered themselves against their own points of view like blind, flying beetles, the police had simply made haste to ascertain if Nancy Cornish had a lover. She had been engaged to Denny; a recent coolness between them had been common gossip; and, since Nancy's disappearance, their common friend, Christina Hope, had kept aloof from Denny, as though embracing her friend's quarrel or suspecting her friend's sweetheart. It now transpired for the first time that the police had dug further into that evidence of Mrs. Willing's which Ten Euyck's eagerness to turn it against Christina had left undeveloped. Mrs. Willing had heard a man's voice which she did not think to be Ingham's, call out loudly and very clearly, "Ask—" somebody or something the name of which was unfamiliar to her, and which she had forgotten until later events had violently recalled it—"Ask Nancy Cornish."

Herrick did not read any further till he was seated and had given his order to a friendly waiter. There were some men at a table near him; it seemed to him that everybody in the room was talking of the arrest and as a matter of fact most of them were talking of it. He had an uneasy desire to know how Christina appeared in her own world's version. But she remained there the friend of Denny, and of the girl over whom Ingham and Denny must have quarreled. When he looked at the paper again, he read that on the night in question by no less a person than Theodore Bird, Denny had been seen to enter Ingham's apartment!

Yes, the tremulous Theodore, despite his wife's particular instructions that he should keep out of it, had called at headquarters and delivered up the fact that at one o'clock or thereabouts, when he was just on the point of retiring, he had heard what sounded like a ring at his door-bell. But he had opened the door only a crack because the wires between his apartment and Ingham's were apt to get crossed, and, indeed, this was what had happened in the present case. He had seen a man standing there, at Ingham's door; and Theodore, safe behind his crack, his constitution

being not entirely devoid of rubber, had taken a good look; had seen Ingham fling wide his door, and the stranger enter. On being asked if he could identify this stranger, he said he was certain of it. Confronted with photographs of a dozen men he had unhesitatingly selected Denny's.

The police had delayed Denny's arrest in the hope of finding him in correspondence with Nancy Cornish. Sure of their man, they had given him rope to hang himself. But Joe Patrick's recognition, which, at any moment, he might reveal to the suspected man, had forced their hand. They did not add that until yesterday they had never connected Denny or Nancy with the blackmailing letters, but Herrick now added it for them; and he saw how Nancy's message, with its suggestion of the girl's peril, had forced it, too.

He deduced that, by the summer-house, they had not been able to overhear anything until Denny had gone to the doorway and Herrick had raised his voice. He read, finally, how, while Denny was changing for the street, after the performance, his dresser had managed to unload and reload the revolver. The number of the cartridge used in it was the same as that of the bullet taken from Ingham's body.

Up to the last line of the article Herrick kept a hope that Denny had given some clue of Nancy's whereabouts but the police were obliged to admit that the young man had proved a mighty tough customer. "He has undergone six hours of as stiff an examination as Inspector Corrigan has ever put a prisoner through and nothing whatever save the barest denial has been got out of him. However, the Inspector is confident that in the near future—" There was something in this last statement which made Herrick slightly sick. He hoped Christina had not seen it.

He understood well enough the weakness and blankness of Denny's account of himself. The young man denied the murder much more definitely than he had troubled himself to deny it to Herrick, but with the same listless lack of hope and even of conviction. He made no secret of his having gone to Ingham's room with the intention of shooting him, though he asserted that Ingham had proved false the story which had occasioned their quarrel and he had gone away again—that was all. Expect to be believed? Of course he didn't expect to be believed! On the reason of their quarrel he remained mute. To all further questions, such as what other visitors Ingham had that night, he opposed the blankest, smoothest ignorance. And Herrick, filling out the blanks, was still impatient of the reticence which left it possible for any woman of the men's mutual acquaintance to be taken for the woman of the shadow. No effort for the good name of another woman justified to him the suspicion and the suffering that Christina had already been allowed to endure. Denny's guilt he did not and he could not doubt, but he might have respected a guilt which, after so strong a provocation, had instantly given itself up. Such an avowal might have kept further silence with the highest dignity and Herrick wondered why an actor, of all people, could not see that that would have been even the popular course. Then he heard another actor, a much handsomer and more stalwart person, remark, "I always said, poor chap, that he hadn't the physique for a hero!"

"Well," agreed a manager, solemnly, after every possible version of the affair had been discussed, "what I've always said is—Strung on wires! He's the best in his own line, I don't deny it! You could have your star and your juvenile man tearing each other to pieces in the middle of the stage and he'd be down in a corner, with an eye on a crack, and everybody'd be looking at him! But I've always said, and I say it again—Strung on wires!" The manager seemed to think that this remark met the occasion fully at every point.

And as the men became more and more excited in their talk, Herrick discovered that the very heart of their excitement was their sympathy for Denny's own manager who would have to replace him by to-morrow night. Heaped all around lay this morning's papers, every one of them extolling Denny's performance of the night before, and little guessing what the next editions would bring forth; these fine notices made the management's position all the more difficult and the talkers all seemed to feel that it was very hard, after so expensive a production, that Denny should get himself arrested for murder at such a moment.

So that between this extremely business-like sympathy which suited Herrick to perfection and his own desire that Christina should be kept out of it, he perceived that about the last person for whom any one was excited was Denny himself. He was congratulating himself that Mrs. Hope was a person to keep distressing newspapers out of sight as long as possible and that her daughter was sure to rise late on the morning of the night of nights when a boy brought him a 'phone message. "You're please to go and ask to see Mr. Denny at Inspector Corrigan's office!"

With somewhat restive promptitude Herrick obeyed. As he was shown into the office the first person his eye lighted upon was Christina.

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## CHAPTER XII

### AULD ACQUAINTANCE: WHAT CHRISTINA SAW

The only professional appearance which Wheeler had hitherto permitted Christina to make in New York had been when she recited at a benefit early in the preceding spring. The benefit was for the families of some policemen who had perished valiantly in the public service and when

Christina had enlisted the Ingham influence in the cause Wheeler had made the whole affair appear of her contriving. To procure herself an interview with Denny in the Inspector's office before the formalities of the Tombs should close about him she had not scrupled to make use of this circumstance, and whether because it combined with her having business there, in the identification of Nancy's message, or because the Inspector believed she could really influence Denny to talk, as she said she could, or because he wanted to watch them together, or, after all, because she was one of those who get what she desired, there she was.

Herrick was no longer at a loss to account for a sort of tickled admiration which admitted him as one at least near the rose. She had evidently been treated with the consideration due the chief mourner, whatever one may think of the corpse; the Inspector, over by the window, had made himself inconspicuous and for a moment Herrick saw only Christina—a Christina wholly baffled and at a loss! She had, indeed, that air of having spent her life in the office which was her distinguishing characteristic in any atmosphere. Her hat was, as usual, anywhere but on her head; she had stripped off her gloves and tossed them into it. But she now sat in an attitude of despairing quiet which she broke on Herrick's entrance only to catch his arm with one hand; turning her face in upon his sleeve, "Bryce," she moaned, "I brought him to this!"

Then he saw that Denny was standing looking through the barred window with his back to them. When he turned Herrick had to struggle against a touch of sympathy for the change in his appearance. Although he had never seen Denny in the daylight before, there was no denying that he was only the worn ghost of what he had been last night. His slenderness had the broken droop of physical and emotional exhaustion; beneath the intense black of his hair, his face was the color of ashes and his quick, brilliant eyes looked lifeless and burned out. Nevertheless, Herrick preferred the daytime version. The sort of evil phosphorescence of the French marquis which had continued to dazzle his eyes in the darkness and the sharp electric light, had wholly vanished; Denny was not playing a villain now—and in the blue serge suit of ordinary life, there was something almost boyish in him.

"He won't help me, Bryce," Christina said. "He won't tell me anything, he won't say anything. He won't even tell me what lawyer he wants."

Denny stood with his eyes fixed on his visitors but in an abstraction which seemed to take no note of them; and Christina went on to Herrick, as to a more sympathetic audience. "I tell him he shall have the best lawyers in the world! He shan't be tormented any longer; he shall have the law to look out for him! He'll be all right, won't he, Bryce, won't he? If he'll only help himself! If he'll only say something!" Her voice rose desperately and broke. "Tell him you're simply *for* him, as I am—that's what I brought you here for! Tell him we're with him, both of us, all the world to nothing, and that we urge him to anything he can say or do to help himself! And that it will never make any difference to—either of us!" When Herrick had made out to say that Christina's friends were his friends, she went up to Denny and took him by the shoulders. "Don't you understand? I want to speak not only for myself, but for all those dear to me!"

Denny broke into a nervous laugh, but he said nothing.

Herrick guessed that his denial of his guilt had taken Christina wholly by surprise; that she had relied greatly on the story of his provocation and that now she did not know what to do. That it is not seemly for young ladies to display such extreme emotion over gentlemen to whom they are not related and who have had the misfortune to be imprisoned for murder did not cross her mind. She was now reduced to a sort of hysterical practicality in which, for lack of the treacherous valet, she enlisted Herrick to discuss with a surprised Inspector what clothes and furnishings of Denny's she would be allowed to have packed up and sent to the Tombs—"What ought I to do to make them like me there? Oh, yes, Bryce, it makes a difference everywhere! I mustn't wear a veil; and I must get them plenty of passes. It's a pity we can't pretend to be engaged—it would interest every one so!—How about money, Will?"

"I've plenty, thanks."

"Most ladies don't think beyond flowers!" contrasted the Inspector, in amused admiration.

Exasperated beyond endurance, Herrick heard himself launch the sickly pleasantry, "Any use for flowers, Mr. Denny?"

"Not before the funeral," Denny said.

She shook him a little in her eagerness. "Books. And tobacco. And things to drink. And the best food. And magazines. And all the newspapers." Christina clung to the items like a child trying to comfort itself. "Or—perhaps—not the newspapers—"

Denny flung restlessly out of her hands. "Oh, yes," he said, "the newspapers, please! Let me at least know how I am admired." He went back to staring out of the window; he seemed so little interested in his visitors that it was as though he had left them alone.

Christina stood looking at him with an infinite pity. She was not crying but her magnificent eyes swam in a sort of luminous ether and Herrick had never seen her so girlishly helpless.—"Knowing me brought him to this!"

"Don't talk like a fool, Christina!" Denny interrupted over his shoulder in his dead-and-alive voice.

"It's true. If you'd never known me, or if I'd never engaged myself to Jim—"

"Or if I'd never been born. It's just as true and just about as relevant." His absent voice died in his throat. Then, of a sudden, he turned on her with a kind of restive suspicion. "What did you say, awhile ago, about Kane's office?"

"He's sent for me to come there to-morrow at two."

"Well, whatever you begin telling him, remember there's one thing I can't put up with. And that's—Well, anything less than—the full dose." He came up to the girl and took her hand in his cold fingers. "And I implore you, Christina, whatever you do, not to set such a motion on foot, not to work up any sympathies nor bring forward any circumstances which might lead to what they call a merciful sentence. I couldn't stand it, Chris. It's the one thing I can't bear.—Oh, don't cry, don't cry! Come, my dear! Why, you surely don't want me to live—like this! With nothing to think of except—about Nancy! Well, then!" But Christina was visibly gasping for breath and, in a nature easily drawn together against a world harsh or indifferent, all the defenses against feeling began to give way. Some comfort must be found for those that insist upon caring! But what comfort?—"Ah now, Chris, dear old girl, such a brave girl—it's all right. It's bound to be. Why, it's what I want, really. Really it is. You know that. You know I've been pretty well through, all these weeks, isn't that so?—Oh, take her away, won't you?" he cried to Herrick.

But Christina had by this time begun to cry, indeed, and now she threw her arms round Denny's neck, pulled down his face and kissed him. "To leave you here!" she wept.

For a moment he stood stiff in her embrace and then he gently returned her kiss; suddenly, with a sobbing breath, he caught her by the shoulders as a man clings to something tried and dear, which he knows he may not often see again. "Poor Chris!" he said. "All right, Chris!"

The Inspector signed to the doorman who stepped up, pleasantly enough, to Denny, and at his touch Denny took the girl by her elbows and held her off.

"Come," he said, "you've got a performance to-night!"

"Oh, God help me!" Christina cried. "How am I to go through with it!"

"Why," said Denny, quickly, "do it for me! Don't let me wreck everything I touch!" He looked at Herrick as though to say, "Be good to her—she's only a girl! You needn't fear she can help me!" And aloud he continued, "Look here, Christina, you mustn't fail. You're my friend, to pull me through and make friends for me, isn't that so? Well, then, you mustn't be a nobody! If you're going to get me out of here, you've got to be a celebrity, and move worlds. Well, you've got nothing but to-night to do it with. People like us, my dear, we've nothing but ourselves to fight with, just ourselves! Come, get yourself together and pull it off to-night! For me!" Over her head his miserable eyes besought Herrick to take her away while she could believe this. But the girl, straightening up, held out her hand. Denny took it and "All right," she said, "I will!" As they stood thus, a door from within the building opened and there was admitted no less a person than Cuyler Ten Euyck.

Christina was standing between him and Denny. The eyes of the two men met and slashed like whips. Herrick never needed to be told whose was the hand that long ago, for Christina's sake, had struck Ten Euyck. Now Denny said in a quick undertone, "Don't fret, old girl!" And the guard took him away.

The newcomer looked rather more frozen than usual; he was surprised and he did not take kindly to surprises. "It seems to be my fate to interrupt! Mr. Herrick, don't you feel de trop?"

He indulged himself in this discomfiting question while his byplay of glances was really saying to Inspector Corrigan, "What are all these people doing here?" and Corrigan's was replying, "None of your business!" There was evidently no love lost between the types, particularly when the first glance persisted, "You got nothing out of him?" And the second was obliged to admit, "Nothing!"—"But I implore your toleration," Ten Euyck continued to Christina, "I can perhaps do you some service for the prisoner with Inspector Corrigan."

"The prisoner thanks you, as I do. But we have played in melodrama and we are acquainted with the practice of poisoned bouquets. Inspector Corrigan and I are doing very well as we are!"

"You are unkind and, believe me, you are unwise. I really wish to please you—do you find that so unnatural?—and to justify myself in your regard. I want to begin by advising you not to let your friend's melodramatic silence suggest to the public that he is going to hide behind some story of a woman—"

"He is very foolishly trying to keep a woman's name out of his story," Christina clearly and boldly declared.

"Nonsense! There is no such person!"

"Why not?"

"Because if there were he would be only too anxious to get her to come forward and tell the jury what she told him. It might get him off."

"How do you know what she told him?"

"My dear lady, they all tell the same thing. It seems to those who are interested—"

"It seems nothing whatever but a chance to divert yourself with what you consider his disgrace, because the idea of disgrace comes natural to you—and, indeed, to you, in his presence, it should do so! But I rely on Inspector Corrigan to limit your diversions. His favors are the favors of a practical man; neither he nor I are fortune's darlings; we both work for our living and we both understand one another.—I ought to say that I am sorry to be rude. But I am not sorry, I rejoice. While there was a suspicion for you to nose out I was afraid of you. But now I am free of you. If I were your poor mother," cried Christina, catching up her hat, "I should pray you were ever in a disgrace that did you so much honor!"

This outburst produced a silence: Inspector Corrigan amused and gratified, Inspector Ten Euyck struggling to appear amused and tolerant. In fact, as Christina, still breathing fire, drew on her gloves, he became so very easy and happy as to hum a little tune. The words instantly fitted themselves to it in Herrick's mind.

"Je suis aussi sans désir  
Autre que d'en bien finir—"

"That's very charming!" said Christina, in the tone of a person always governed by amiability. "Where did you hear that?"

"I don't really know. I'll trace it for you, if that will make my peace."

"Thank you, no.—Then you think," said Christina, sharply to both officials, "that it would do him great good if this woman, whether he's innocent or guilty, should come forward of her own accord, and repeat the story of her trouble as she repeated it to him?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Well, then, she shall!"

"Christina!"

"Miss Hope!"

Christina was inexpressibly grave; she trembled a little, but her voice was firm. "What must be, must be!" she said.

"But, Miss Hope, in person?"

"In person, yes."

"But how, when, where?"

"Very simply. On Friday. At the office of the District Attorney."

"And you can be certain of this?"

"I can."

"You know who she is then?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"Mr. Herrick's terrible shadow?"

"Oh, she needn't bring her shadow, need she?" Christina said.

Ten Euyck, who was just leaving the building, turned and looked at her; there was always a covert, sullen admiration in his glances at her. "I'm glad to see your spirits are improving. It's now you who are singing!"

"Auld acquaintance!—a sad enough song! But my Nancy's favorite! Don't begrudge it me, Inspector Ten Euyck; it reminds all who love her of kind hours. '*Should* auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?' Good-by, Mr. Ten Euyck." The outside door closed after him, and she said to the Inspector, "There is something you wish me to identify?"

"Here we are!" said the Inspector. "The experts say she wrote it!"

Christina looked at the four words a long time. The tears rose in her eyes again. "Yes. She did." She turned to Herrick. "This was what I came to tell Will last night. My mother had just told me. But now that he's helpless, he mustn't know!"

"Well?" said the Inspector, and he handed Christina the red lock of curly hair.

She took it a little gingerly; studying it, as it lay in the palm of her hand. "Of course, one could be deceived," she said, slowly. "But it's either her hair or it's exactly like it." She lifted the curl and held it to the light. She untied the string which bound it, and thinning it out in her fingers spread it to a soft flame of color. "Oh, surely, it's her hair—oh, poor little girl!" she cried, and crossed by a sudden shiver, she let the hair fall from her hand. Swifter than the men about her she gathered it up again, and again stood studying the tumbled and scattered little mass. And then Herrick saw a terrible change come over her face—an immense amazement, mingled almost at once with passionate incredulity; slowly, the incredulity gave way to conviction and to fear; and then there swept upon Christina's face a blaze of such anger as Herrick had never seen in a woman's eyes.

"What is it?" they all cried to her.

She opened her lips, as if to call it forth; but then she seemed to lose her breath, and, all at once, she slipped down in a dead faint at their feet.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE NIGHT OF NIGHTS: THE PRINCESS IN THE TRANSFORMATION SCENE

If the police believed Christina when she revived enough to say that it had seemed to her as if the hair were soaked in blood it was more than Herrick did. He only wondered that they let her go and if they were perhaps not spreading a net about her as they had spread one about Denny.

But thereafter she was very composed, allowed herself to be taken quietly home, and took a sedative so as to get some sleep. Herrick came in from an errand at four and found the house subdued to the ordinary atmosphere—high-pressured enough in itself—of the house of an actress before a big first night.

Down in the drawing-room Mrs. Hope said they must not talk about anything exciting or Christina would be sure to feel it. But she herself seemed to feel that the fact of her coming appearance in the Inghams' box was about the only satisfactory piece of calmness in connection with her daughter's future. She congratulated herself anew upon the outcome of an old bout with Christina in which the girl had wished to go to supper afterward with Wheeler rather than with the devoted Inghams, and in which Mrs. Hope had unwontedly conquered. She said now that she wished she had spoken to the Inghams about inviting Herrick; it could have been arranged so easily.

When Christina came in she allowed herself to be fondly questioned as to how she felt and even to be petted and pitied. She was perhaps no more like a person in a dream than she would have been before the same occasion if Ingham had never been shot; when she spoke at all she varied between the angelic and the snappish; and before very long she excused herself and went to her room. She was to have a light supper sent up and Mrs. Hope adjured Herrick not to worry!

He duly sent his roses and his telegram of good wishes, but that she could really interest herself in the play at such a time seemed horrible to him and he arrived at the theater still puzzled and rather resentful of the intrusion of this unreal issue.

But the first thrill of the lighted lobby, glowing and odorous with the stands of Christina's flowers; the whirr of arriving motors; the shining of jeweled and silken women with bare shoulders and softly pluming hair; the expectant crowd; the managerial staff, in sacrificial evening dress, smiling nervously, catching their lips with their teeth; the busy movements of uniformed ushers; the clapping down of seats; the high, light chatter, a little forced, a little false, sparkling against the memory of those darker issues that clung about Christina's skirts; the whole, thrilling, judging, waiting house; all this began to affect Herrick like strong drink on jaded nerves. From his seat in the third row he observed Mrs. Hope and the Inghams take their places; the attention of the audience leaped like lightning on them. Just then one man came into the box opposite and drawing his chair into its very front, sat down. It was Cuyler Ten Euyck.

Herrick forgot him quickly enough. It was a real play, acted by real artists; the production held together by a master hand; and it continued to string up Herrick's nerves even while to himself he scarcely seemed to notice it. He had had no idea that it would be so terrible to live through the moment of Christina's entrance. He sat with his eyes on his program, suffering her nervousness, feeling under what an awful handicap she was waiting there, the other side of that painted canvas, to lose or win. There was the wracking suspense of waiting for her, and then, as in a dream, the sound of her voice. Her dear, familiar voice! She was there! She was there; radiant, unshadowed, exulting in the flood of light, at home, at ease; softly, shyly, proudly bending to the swift welcome and carrying, after that, the hearts of the audience in her hand. She had only to go on, now, from triumph to triumph; her sun swam to the meridian and blazed there with a splendid light. Mrs. Hope with lowered eyes, breathed deep of a success that passed her dreams; Ten Euyck, compressing his lips, his arms folded, never took his eyes from Christina's face. And Bryce Herrick, watching her move, watching her speak, not accepting this, as did the public, for a gift from heaven, but aware to the bone of its being all made ground, of the art that had lifted her as it were from off the wrack into this divine power of breathing and creating loveliness, could have dropped down before her and begged to be forgiven.

Who was he to have judged her?—to-day or last night? to have exacted from her a line of conduct? to have tried to force upon her the motives and the standards of tame, of ordinary women? He remembered having often smiled, however tenderly, at her pretensions; not having taken quite seriously her attitude to her work. And here was a genius of the first order, whose gifts and whose beauty would remain a happy legend in the hearts of men when he was dust; whose name youth would carry on its lips for inspiration when no one would care that he had ever been born! Oh, dear and beautiful Diana who had stooped to a mortal! For this was the secret thrill that ran like wildfire through the homage of his heart—the knowledge that she loved

him, and the feel of her lips on his!

Let them worship, poor creatures, poor mob! Unknowing and unguessing that between him and her there was a bond that crossed the footlights—the memory of a dark room and firelight, a girl in his arms.—"Bryce dear, are we engaged? You haven't said?—I've wanted you—Oh, how I've wanted you—all my life!"—At the end of the performance it was impossible not to try to see her; not to get a word with her, to confess and to have absolution.

But at the stage-door there were so many people that he could not have endured to share his minute with them. He knew the Babel that it must be inside, and he decided to wait here; by-and-by the Inghams wouldn't grudge him a moment. They seemed to stay forever; but at last all were gone but two or three, and he decided to send in his card. As he stepped forward the door opened, and Christina, in the oblong of light, stood drawing on her gloves.

She was dressed as if for a coronation and not even upon the stage had the effulgence of her beauty seemed so drawn together for conquest. Her long white gown had threads of silver in it; the white cloak thrown back from her shoulders did not conceal her lovely throat nor the long string of diamonds that to Herrick's amazement were twisted round her neck and fell down along her breast; she carried on one arm a great white sheaf of orchids, and Iphigenia led to the sacrifice was surely not so pale.

Upon her appearance the closed motor which had been waiting across the street swept into place. It was a magnificent car, lined with white; the little curtains at the windows were drawn back and a low electric lamp showed the swinging vases of orchids and white violets. Christina turned her eyes from it till they met Herrick's; for a moment they widened as if galvanized, and then, with a sweet, icy bow, she went right past him. A man who had jumped out of the motor got in after her, and closed the door. It was the man who had sat all alone in the stage box; Cuyler Ten Euyck.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

There are violences to nature in which she is reined up so suddenly that after them we are left stupid rather than unhappy. In such a mood of held-in turmoil Herrick walked home and waited for to-morrow. His appointment with Christina was at twelve, noon, and until noon he struggled not to think at all. Anything was better than thought; yet nothing would now answer save security—security past, present and future—a full understanding of her life, of her trouble, of her actions, of what game she was playing and of what part in it she was ready to give him. By-and-by the wound began to throb, but he merely kept it closed with a firm hand. Till noon to-morrow!

With the morning the papers he had ordered, in a time that seemed long ago, came to his door; he found himself opening them, and tracing the dazzling streams of Christina's notices. Their flaming praises left him cold; already they seemed to be written about some one whom he did not know.

Here, at any rate, was a Christina Hope with whom he could imagine parting. The greatness of her destiny was full upon her; she seemed ringed with a cold fire, brilliant as the golden collar of the world and passible, perhaps, by Cuyler Ten Euycks, but hardly by a young literary man from the country. Never again, whether she wished or no, could she be quite the same girl in the gray gown who had sat in a corner of the coroner's office beside her mother. Hermann Deutch's Miss Christina had become one of the great successes of all time. And Herrick shrank a little at the loud clang of her fame.

He was going that morning to the Ingham offices at ten o'clock to sign his contract. The day was oppressively warm, with hot glints of sunshine, and it seemed to Herrick that the bright, feverish streets swarmed with the rumors of Christina's triumph. He wondered if it had got in to that man in jail and acquainted him with the strange difference in their fates. His contract meant nothing to him; he got away as soon as he could. Yet already the atmosphere was changed, the sky was overcast, and as the clocks about Herald Square struck eleven, a warm, dusty wind, even now bearing heavy drops of rain, swept down the street. If Herrick took a car he would reach the Hopes a good half hour too early, and he had no mind, after walking in the wet, to present himself in muddied boots and a wilted collar before Christina. He looked about him. He could choose between hotel bars—where actors might be talking of her glory—dry goods shops and a moving-picture show. Perhaps because Christina had gratefully mentioned moving-pictures, he chose the latter. His longing and dread were so concentrated upon twelve o'clock that he had no consciousness of buying his ticket. Only of wondering—wondering—

The place was not yet full enough to be oppressive, and Herrick sat there in the welcome dark, with the rhythmic pounding of the music stunning his nerves. He closed his eyes; and immediately there sprang up before his consciousness the eternal, monotonous procession of questions—What had she meant last night, by throwing over everything for Ten Euyck? Why had she fainted at the sight of Nancy Cornish's hair and what strange bond linked Nancy with Ingham's murder? Why had Nancy disappeared a few hours before the shot; who had said, in

Ingham's room, "Ask Nancy Cornish," and to whom had they said it? Why had her visiting-card broken down Christina's earlier evidence, and was that her scarf which had frightened Christina so, or did it belong to that woman of the shadow? And who was that woman? Why had an uncontrolled and variable man, such as Denny had described himself, suffered six hours of the third degree rather than risk revealing her name? By what authority did Christina promise to produce her, that very afternoon, at the office of the District Attorney? Had she made Christina break with Ingham, as she had made Denny kill him, by that story of his betrayal of her youth? He felt intuitively that in this woman was the key to the entire situation. She had created it; she would be found, more than they now knew, to have controlled it; and she, and perhaps she alone, could solve its manifold involutions. She had arrived before Denny, she had spoken boldly and insolently to Joe of Ingham; she had forced herself in upon him when he did not want her; she had come openly in a white lace dress—he remembered the lace that hung from the shadow's sleeve—and made herself as conspicuous as possible—why? And as Herrick asked himself these questions in the darkness he could almost have believed himself surrounded by the darkness of that night; the brisk strumming of the orchestra was not much like Ingham's piano, but it had the same excited hurry of those last few moments; and Herrick's mind called up again the light, bright surface of the blind and then the shadow of the woman cast upon it, lithe and tense, with uplifted arm, the fingers stiffening in the air. His eyes sprang open, and there before him, on the pictured screen, among the moving figures of the play, was the same shadow, with uplifted arm, the fingers spreading and stiffening in the air. Then in the movement of the scene, the shadow turned clean round and disclosed Christina's face.

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## CHAPTER XV

### "WHEN STARS GROW COLD"

Herrick sat without moving while the shadows played out their play. But he saw them no longer. They had begun and ended for him with that certainty which it seemed to him, now, that he had always felt.

When Christina's film came round again he watched it carefully all through from the beginning. The play was of some western episode, and he saw Christina come on, a spare slip of a girl in short skirts and long braids, a little awkward, a little jerky, like a suspicious colt, and he observed quite coolly what she had gained in five years. He saw Denny come on, dressed as a Mexican—cast for the villain even then!—and he saw for himself how greatly Denny had been her superior in those days, and all the method and knowledge which she had absorbed from him as she absorbed everything from everybody; and Herrick smiled there, in the darkness, to think of it. As the action of the play quickened it shook the novice from her self-consciousness; the promise of her great talent began to show; already she did things that were magnificent; and when at last her wedding was interrupted at the church door by the Mexican's attempt to claim her as his sweetheart, her fire and fury became superb. Herrick leaned forward watching. He saw Denny pour out his accusation, he saw the bridegroom hesitate, he saw Christina sweep round denouncing them both, saw the lithe, tense length of her, and her proudly lifted head, saw her suddenly fling one arm up and out in her strange and splendid gesture of her free, her desperate passion; the hand clenched for an instant and then the fingers slowly spreading and stiffening in the air. He waited for the shot, but no shot came. Only once more the shadow turned and revealed the young face of Christina, as she was at seventeen, and shone upon him through the darkness with Christina's eyes. Herrick rose to his feet and pushed out of the theater. The streets were full of wind and rain, but he did not know it, and along the crowded crossings, among multitudes that he did not see, he had the luck of the drunken and the blind.

He walked for hours without knowing where he went. His soaked clothes hung on him like lead and the wind pounded him and made him wrestle with it, but the burning poison of his thoughts could not be put out by wind or rain. Towards nightfall he found himself at the door of the house where he lived, and having nothing else to do, he went in. His sitting-room was dark and cold; he threw himself into a chair and lounged there, sodden with fatigue and wet, and staring at the empty grate. There, when it was all aglow, had she leaned to him and put her face to his and lied. As she had lied to Ingham, waking on his breast! As she had lied to Denny, folded in his arms! Harlot and liar, liar and cheat—oh, liar, liar, liar! For that was the poison in the wound, and the bitterness beyond death—that not for one hour had she been true! That flower-sweetness of her dear touch, of her hand in his, was as corrupt as hell. His dear, wild, brave, demure Diana had never drawn one breath of life—and the adventuress who wore her masque had all along laughed at him in her sleeve! If she had only told him! It was a challenge he could have met and carried; he felt his hand lock on Christina's, strong to draw her from any quicksand of which she struggled to be free. But that she should have fooled him and played with him and led him blindfold, that she should have gone out of her way to snare and laugh at him—what one of the lies with which she had been waiting for him this noon could he now believe? She had betrayed and thrown over Ingham for Denny as she had thrown over Denny for him, and as she had thrown him over for Ten Euyck! She had played them all four against each other—them, and how many others!—as in her insatiable vanity she would yet throw Ten Euyck over for some new fool! She was all vanity and nothing else; foul in her heart and scheming in her tongue, cruel, cheating, worthless! Oh, Christina, oh, sweet, my sweet—liar, liar, liar!—oh, Christina!—you! How could



you?

He sprang up; going to his sideboard, he poured out a strong drink of the raw liquor and drained the glass. And as he stood there, with the rank fire coursing through his exhaustion, the chilled stiffness of his body and the heavy reeking damp of his crumpled clothes gave way to a terrible warm sense of life and pain, and to a hunger, such as he had never known, for that pain to be eased. Only one thing on earth could ease it and that was the sight of Christina's face.

He struck a light and looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. In the mirror opposite he could see his leaden face, stiff with soil and weariness and framed in his moist, rumpled hair. He looked at it with a sense of its being very ugly and unseemly, and that the dull red beginning to creep into it from the whiskey was uglier and unseemlier still. His body weighed upon him horribly, it seemed to creak and prickle in its reluctant joints, and to loom up tangibly before him, as if he saw double. But his spirit was very light and fierce and swift, and throbbed in him, mad to be out of jail. Mechanically he got his hat, and started for Christina's theater.

He did not want to speak to her, to have any sort of dealings with her; but see her he must. It was a need like any other, but stronger than any other; not to be argued with. Now that he knew her, he must see her. That would cure him. Let him see her once more and he could forget her in peace. Something heavy, like his body, told him that this wouldn't do; this was death and damnation, this would destroy him through and through! And he replied that he hated her, and would forget her, and never wished to pass another word with her! But see her this once more, he must. Once more! Through the night and the pouring rain, the lights of her theater began to gleam. They gleamed on arriving motors; on high hats and snowy shirt-fronts, on opera cloaks and jeweled hair. Despite the storm, the city had driven forth to do homage to the new star. The candles at Christina's altar were burning high and clear; the lobby, all brightness and warmth, was filled with delicate rustlings, frou-frous of light feet and chattering voices and soft, merry sounds, idle excitement. There was a little sparkle on all faces; the glimmer reflected from Christina's eyes. In all men's mouths was the sound of her name. Not last night had been more crowded nor more brilliant.

And Herrick was very quiet and knew quite well how to behave. There would not be a seat left at the box-office, nor would he appeal to the management. He pushed to the center of the little crowd around a speculator; then, clutching his ticket, went in. Just as last night, the ushers ran up and down the aisles, and the seats clapped into place; just as last night, he was surrounded by a garden of chiffon and satin and perfume, of gossip and murmur. The audience, a little nervous, was waiting to be thrilled. The overture was in, and the music quivered through Herrick as the drink had done. He sat there very still, muddy and damp, with a wilted collar, a rough head, and no gloves; there was a little fixed smile on his lips and he stared at the curtain. He couldn't see through it. But soon it must go up. He was nothing but one waiting expectancy.

They played a second overture and this did not surprise him. Then he saw Wheeler, dressed for the first act, come before the curtain. And his smile broke. Because the delay was so terrible. Then he realized that Wheeler was making a speech.

"You can imagine, ladies and gentlemen, with what regret I am obliged to inform you that there will be no performance this evening. On account of the sudden illness of Miss Christina Hope the theater will be closed for to-night." There was something about getting back money at the box-office.

Herrick continued to sit there, unable to accept what had happened to him. He wasn't going to see her! It was the snatching back of food from a starving man; he had laid his lips to the spring in the desert and found it dry! The thing wasn't possible. All his nature had been running violently forward, and the shock of its stoppage stupefied him. As for any concern over Christina's illness, it never occurred to him. By-and-by he stood a long while on the corner of the street, not knowing where to go. He was not so lost as to seek Christina in person, and after his recent vigil there his own rooms were insupportable to him. Presently some one jostled him, and he was face to face with Wheeler.

"Great God, man!" Wheeler said. "Where have you been! What are you standing here for! We've been looking for you all afternoon. Called up your rooms a dozen times! Deutch and Mrs. Hope and I, we've scoured the city—been to the Tombs, the District Attorney's, Police Headquarters, everywhere. The Inghams are raving crazy. Ten Euyck's worse. Well, and how about me? After all it's my loss! Everything's been done that can be done. By to-morrow morning the whole city of New York'll be hit by a tornado. This little old town's going to get the shock of its life and go right off its trolley! Say something! Don't stand there like a stuck pig! Speak, can't you? Have you got any idea?"

Herrick heard his own voice saying, "Is she so ill?"

"Ill? Heavens and earth—you didn't swallow that drool, did you? Where have you been? Ill? No, the girl's gone—vanished, kidnapped, run away, whatever you like. She's disappeared!"

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## BOOK THIRD

## CHAPTER I

### GLEAMS IN THE RAIN: WHEELER'S STORY

Herrick made no outcry at Wheeler's words. He simply stood looking out into the wet and windy spaces of Times Square, where the great splashes of colored lights wavered and shone in manifold reflections on the gleaming pavement. And a tremendous and ultimate change arose like new life in his heart.

There is a common human fallacy, touching and perhaps profounder than we know, by which we instinctively assume any person in danger to be an innocent person. To both men the missing girl was now in danger. It occurred no more to Herrick than to Wheeler that Christina, by any possibility whatever, could have voluntarily deserted a performance. Something had happened. Inevitably, Herrick remembered the once laughed at Arm of Justice. Had it known, all along, what the shadow on the screen had told him to-day? A hundred references of hers, a hundred inconsistencies, were solved at a stroke. Alone with that insensate malignity which he had himself encountered, had she now tried to break some blackmailing game and—lost?—He remembered with a horrid shock that once let her be identified with the shadow on the blind and in the eyes of the law she became the perjured witness of a murder, accessory before and after!—Threatened, thus, on every side, Christina's face seemed to flower for him there, on the night sky; as once, upon a foggy afternoon just as the wind began to rise, it had shone on him in the rainy street—when Christina had first held out her hand to him and said, "Try to believe that perhaps she was in distress, after all!"

In what hectic hot-house had he been stifling?—It was as though, in this wild hour of sweeping rain and blowing air, of lights that flashed and changed in the surrounding darkness, of isolation amid the myriad noises of the theater traffic and the clanging trolleys, he heard, of a sudden, Christina's cry for help; as though, running out into the freedom of the storm, he gained her side of the road and took her hand. It might be the hand of an outlaw, it was empty, forever, of any love or hope for him; but he could feel it, now, in his and he did not care against what world, whether his own or hers, he held it. For their personal relation was no longer the great thing. The great thing could be only that somewhere beyond him in the darkness, desperately needing help, *she was*. And the next thing was to find her.

"Well," he heard himself say to Wheeler in a commonplace voice, "let's hear about it."

"I want to eat something beside trouble!" Wheeler groaned. "Come in across the way. Stan's to 'phone there at nine."

Instinctively they chose a table by a window, as though in the great street she had loved so much and won so lately, they might see her hurrying by. The restaurant was almost empty, but the news was already there. It peered out of the cigar-smoke of the men to whom Wheeler curtly nodded; it questioned them from the waiter's face. "Where'll I begin?" asked Wheeler. "Well, this afternoon they wouldn't let me see Denny. But I met Stan, and he told me Chris had jumped her appointment with Kane, never brought her witness! Partly, I could have choked the girl—and, partly, I couldn't believe it of her. I called up her house and I've been jumping ever since." And he poured out a story of haste and confusion, of friends interrogated, detectives summoned, of a mother more ignorant than any one and more prostrated.—"God, Herrick, I'm sick! The girl's such a monkey, up to the last minute I hoped she'd show up! About seven Kane got me over the coals. Wonder what he's hit the trail so hard for? He'd had his suspicions of the Park,—the little Cornish girl was last seen, you remember, going that way—but the police have searched every bush for hours. The Inghams are all stewed up with him and Stanley's wished on to him like a burr. The first thing he said to me was, 'At what time did Mrs. Hope inform you of her daughter's absence? Don't hesitate—I can remind you. She never informed you at all!' Was he trying to see if I'd lie to him? What does he think I've done with her? But funny thing—Mrs. Hope and the Deutches had been worrying round looking for that girl all day and yet she'd never consulted me! Look here, it's not possible—No, what cause would she have to harm herself?—Mrs. Hope blames herself because last night when Christina didn't come home—You didn't know that? Well, she didn't. Her mother thought she was at the Deutches, out of temper. You knew she quarreled with her mother about Ten Euyck? They nearly knifed each other!"

"For God's sake," said Herrick, "tell me whatever you know!" Across his shoulder the zest of Broadway seemed to peer and listen. But it was too late to consider that.

"You see, last night's supper has been delicate ground from the beginning. Before I knew what the Inghams had planned I asked Christina to come to supper with me—to bring her mother and any one she liked. She seemed to be down on Denny since he and that Cornish girl disagreed and, as a particular bait, I mentioned you. I knew she was interested in you. And when she isn't interested, the Lord help her host! Well, she preferred my scheme to the Inghams'—she seems to have shown all along the most ungodly resistance to their help or countenance in any way! But I could see, as well as her mother, which was best for my leading-woman, and she finally gave in. It's remarkable how entirely one thinks of Christina as the head of the house, and yet how often

she does give in—what an influence her mother has over her when she has any at all!" He drained his long glass with a sigh. "But last night, right after the performance, Mrs. Hope comes running into my dressing-room, well—as I may say, at death's door. Christina was going off to supper with Ten Euyck. You can understand that I didn't listen to her then as I should now. She wanted me, as the only person Christina would be likely to take a word from, to reason with her. I said, 'Yes, yes. By-and-by.' I only wanted to shut her up, you understand. For just then, in the first flush of Christina's triumph, I didn't any more think of interfering with her than with the sun in heaven! I won't say I'd been rehearsing an angel unawares, but the girl had grown, in that one night, way out of my sphere. I thought probably Ten Euyck had just prostrated himself and she'd gone a little off her head, and no wonder! It didn't seem necessarily so terrible to me. But the old lady is a great stickler for the proprieties—yes, and for all her talk, Christina has her own eye on social splendor! It's one thing not to receive people and it's quite another not to have them call!—When I'd got rid of my friends and had given Christina time to get rid of hers, I went round to thank her and congratulate her and at the same time to ask her if she didn't think she was doing the Inghams a pretty dirty trick. There stood my young lady dressed out—I was going to say 'to kill'—why, to make Solomon in all his glory turn pale and fade away! Great Scott!—She looked like the kingdoms of the earth and the wonders thereof! Christina is always bewailing the money she owes but you may have noticed that, for a poor working-girl, she does herself rather well in frocks. Mrs. Hope was sitting quiet in a corner, quashed, and Christina was humming—'Auld acquaintance,' if you please!—to herself in front of the glass. 'Auld acquaintance,' indeed! I thought of Denny, and how he'd stood by this radiant image through thick and thin—in a way, you might say, made her! And though you'll forgive a good deal to a first night like that, I began to agree with the people who say she hasn't any heart. And then I saw—"

"Yes—"

"I saw she had a long string of diamonds twisted round her neck. 'Great God, girl!' I said, 'where did those come from?'"

"And she answered?"

Wheeler had been speaking slower and slower and now, for a long time, it seemed as if he were not going to speak at all. Then "She answered, 'They have come from Cuyler Ten Euyck. But don't breathe it. It has just killed dear mamma.'"

"Well, go on."

"Her mother got up at that and started to go. But Christina stopped her at the door and took hold of her arm. 'Mother,' she said, 'what does it matter? Oh, my poor mother, can't you see that whatever happens we have done with respectability? It's inevitable, it must be done. And to-night or to-morrow, what does it matter? Twenty-four hours, one way or the other, and then—mud to the right of us, mud to the left of us, and unto dust we shall return!' I thought they were the strangest words that ever came out of a girl's mouth on the night of what you might call her coronation!"

"And Mrs. Hope?"

"Mrs. Hope just took her daughter's hand off her arm and walked out of the door and out of the theater.—Well," said Wheeler, with a deep sigh, "it wasn't for me to do that. I'm a pretty long way from a Puritan! All the same, this thing made me sick. 'Chris,' said I, 'don't go with him! Take off those damned diamonds and tell him to go to hell! You can soon make diamonds for yourself, old girl!' She looked up, singing, in my face. And that's the last I saw of her."

"Go on!"

"My boy, you need a drink!"

"And Ten Euyck says—?"

"Oh, poor Ten Euyck—his dignity can't bend, so it's all cracked. He took her to supper at the Palisades and she left early." The Palisades was a new roadhouse up the river and the rage of that summer. "The zealous creature has even run to Kane and disgorged the names of his guests. So it leaks out that, once the poor soul had unbent so far as to be seen with an actress, he couldn't be devilish by halves. It seems miss was annoyed at the character of said guests, as well as at finding supper served in a private room. So with the offended majesty of an injured queen, she withdrew to no less public a spot than the entrance porch. There she sat, swathed in her cloak and with her skirts drawn about her, till the arrival of the cab she had insisted upon." Wheeler broke into a laugh. "That girl," he said, "is the devil himself!"

"And that—was that the very—last—?"

"Exactly. There she is, togged out in a white, silky crepe-y, trail-y dress, embroidered in silver, and a white lace opera cloak. In these useful and inconspicuous garments, she vanishes." His grim grin soured. "You know what they'll all say! Kane tells the Inghams she couldn't catch Ten Euyck so surely as with an irritant. She took, of all ways, the way to hold him. Why, she left him in public—him, the invulnerable corrector of women! He'll never rest until she is seen, in public, hanging on his arm! And then the man values his diamonds at forty thousand dollars!"

"She drove off alone, at midnight, in a taxicab, with forty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds round her neck—"

"Yes, and the cabman was discharged this morning for drunkenness! Stan's to 'phone if they've found him. Oh, but look here—take it slow! She 'phoned Ten Euyck's house at eight this morning and left a message, openly, with her name! The servant who took the message describes exactly that trailing voice of hers—'tell him he may come for his necklace to-night!'"

"Come! Come where?"

"Search me! Or Ten Euyck, either, from the foam on his mouth!—Well, doesn't that put it up that wherever she 'phoned from they got on to the diamond necklace. So, where was she? You and I, we know old Chris—we know, after all, that she just went somewhere for the night on account of her quarrel with her mother. But, oh, lord, Herrick, who else is going to believe it? The whole braying pack of this intelligent world—all it can think of's dirt—the devilish gay sensation of the whole business! Christina Hope! D'you think there's a bank clerk or a submissive wife that won't recognize her proper atmosphere at a glance? You and I and little Stan—a poor author, a profane actor and a brat! In a few hours that's what her kingdom's crumbled to—'that was so wondrous sweet and fair!' Police and all, there's the spirit in which they're going to look for her, and that's going to be one of the worst things in our way. Well, I'm not a rich man and our precious kid's just about ruined me this night! But I've done for her what may bust me sky-high and worth it—I've offered ten thousand for her—safe, you understand! It ought to be in to-night's late editions, so by now, in one spirit or the other, this town's out after her like a hound!—Eh? All right! It's Stan, now!"

Herrick sat there staring into the street. A newsboy ran past with the last extra of the evening. Two of the interested smokers had just left the restaurant and now stopped in the rain to buy a paper, opening and scanning the flapping sheets against the wind. Ah, yes, of course! He, too, sent for a paper. Yes, there, on the first page—scare headings, but in itself the meagerest fact. Scarcely even insinuations yet—"friends fear some serious accident," "friends deny suicide," "suspicious circumstance—Ten Euyck necklace"—Wheeler's reward, and news three hours old. When he looked up the square seemed full of newsboys; several people as they came into the restaurant had papers in their hands. She was just news, now; disreputable news! "The town's out after her like a hound!"—Wheeler's hand was on his shoulder. "No cabman yet. But they want you, Herrick, on the 'phone."

Stanley's voice told him only to hold the wire. Then a crisper tone asked pleasantly, "Mr. Herrick? This is Henry Kane. I just wanted to ask you—you had an appointment with Miss Hope for noon to-day. If you didn't know she was not at home, why didn't you keep it?"

How sharply the trap bit!

"You've had no communication with her since last evening? Nothing happened to arouse your anxiety? Nor distrust? No, nothing? And yet, just as it began to rain, you started for a walk in a light suit—or" (the telephone itself seemed to give forth a dry smile) "what I am told was once a light suit, and walked about all day in an equinoctial storm! Taking yourself to the theater at night without changing, without shaving, without dining, but still carrying on your person a good deal of the surface of the earth and of the waters under the earth! Well, sorry to have disturbed you. Only my dear sir, don't trouble yourself to conceal too much. Don't fancy yourself the only man in New York who has been to a moving-picture show." Kane hung up the receiver.

That stunned, sick, silent curse of the man on the wrong side of the law! This attorney fellow was like a hound after her, too! He, then, since he was so clever, in God's name let him find her and find her—soon! It was all he asked!—As Herrick stepped out of the booth into the corridor of mirrors that ran through the building to the next street a page boy came briskly up the gilded lane, pattering out a phrase that washed across Herrick's mind in a wave of sound dimly familiar; he saw the boy turn into the orangerie and through the glass-screen he vaguely watched him wend his way between the little green tables with their golden lamps, lifting his flatted tones into the orange-scented air so that its mechanical legend was caught by trailing vines and mingled with the plashing of a little fountain. His mind aimlessly followed the boy's cry till it was lost in the music of a mezzanine orchestra hidden in the foliage of a tame tropical jungle! This was what they called civilization—this trash which had achieved no mechanism to find her, to protect her! But which could know that she had been struck out of its midst and yet sit there in its futile nonsense, stuffing—A voice rose from the velvet lounge beside him in the toneless delivery of one who reads aloud. It was reading the extra's account of a gesture in a moving picture show. "The police say that boys began reporting it before noon, and, the attention of the theater having been called to the film, its patrons are now offered a thrill of realism by the piano in the orchestra accompanying the gesture with the march from Faust. This time, it will be remembered..."

Oh, no doubt it would be remembered! Its exultant shout sounded like the hunter's cry after her now, winged by Wheeler's offer of ten thousand dollars! Doubtless the film would be repeated on the morrow, that all the world might steel its heart as it watched with its own eyes Christina Hope moving with that motion to that time!

Oh, for something to do! Some untried search, some shrewder question! Something to do, to suffer, to dare—some clue—some suggestion—Denny! Had they tried Denny? He who knew so much at the least would set them right, would know and would tell them that she had never deserted his cause of her own free will, that he who knew her believed in her—Wheeler came out into the lobby and took him by the arm. He, too, had bought a paper and now he held it under Herrick's eyes. "This is why I couldn't see him, then!" In the Tombs that afternoon, Denny had again attempted suicide.

So that was how he proclaimed his confidence! He had somehow got hold of a knife, but the blow aimed at his heart had been averted by a watchful guard and he had received only fleshwounds—one in the left shoulder, one in the left forearm. A little ludicrous, a little sickening that a man so expert in killing another should always bungle about killing himself! But he had been prompt enough and successful enough in setting upon the girl who had failed him the brand of his despair! Who would credit, now, that he did not believe in her flight? Herrick felt a thickness in his throat; with a longing for fresh, dark spaces he pushed open a door of the lobby and was confronted by the city, glittering in wet gold. There, up Long Acre, lay the heart of her world.

And from down where the bronze workmen struck the hours in Herald Square up past where the gathering streets parted again under a new electric girl, high in the sky, who winked a knowing colossal eye over a rainbow cocktail, what faith did it keep with her? Her flight, her shadow on the screen, they burned in a newer sky-sign, they flashed a fearful but a more stirring legend! This swept up the thoroughfare that never colors itself more like Harlequin than in its mirrors of wet asphalt and sped down every side street starred with theaters where, between the acts, men gathered and returned with news, and it became clear to thrilling audiences that so long as there had been nothing against this Christina Hope she had meant to tell some tale to Kane in Denny's behalf—it would have been a pretty piece of acting—but the mute witness of the shadow had broken her down. She had fled from that writing on the screen—even in the dressing-rooms they would say that! And later, in all these hot, bright jardins de danse that yesterday were cabarets, these cabarets that were restaurants yesterday, among the pellucid proprieties of slit skirts, tango turns, and trotting music it would be said that all along Denny had kept at least the half of his silence for Christina's sake. Oh, street of a thousand feverish tongues, how she loved you! And why did she leave you? Where is she, and where is she? How near, how far? "Where is she? And how doth she?" There lay her theater; what stroke could be so heavy as to drive her from that? "The Victors!" Leave "The Victors!" There were great blurs of light before the billboards. But the wind tore through them at the boards, struggling to wrench the signs away. Fierce as it was it was still rising and it ran like a crazy newsboy whooping through the world, senseless as the cry of the page that came nearer and nearer. So that Wheeler said, "Good lord, man, don't you know your own name?"

Yes, that was what the boy had been saying all along—"Herr—ick! Herr—ick! Mr. Bry—us Herrick!"

"No card, sir. Forty-fifth Street entrance. In a taxi, sir. A lady wants to speak to you."

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## CHAPTER II

### CORPSE CANDLES IN THE NIGHT: MRS. DEUTCH'S STORY

The monstrous hope died almost in the pang that gave it birth. The lady who leaned out to him from the cab, putting aside her heavy veil, showed him the troubled countenance of Henrietta Deutch.

It came to him even then that he had arrived at the turning of a corner. So that he was surprised when she said to him, "Oh, sir, where have you been? Sir, sir, have you any news?"

She had none, then!

"Hours have I waited and waited at your rooms! There the young Ingham sends me word that you are here. We have hoped always you might be with her! Oh, dear heaven! You know nothing, young sir? Nothing at all?"

"Nothing."

She drew back. "Tell me only this. Are you—for her, Mr. Herrick? Or *rid* of her?"

Herrick replied, "Well, what do you think?"

She, whom grief somehow became and illumined like her native and revealing element, peered into his haggard face, worn and soiled and sharpened and grim. "Then, young gentleman, I am asked by Mrs. Hope if of her daughter you have any word or trace, do not give it to the police."

What? Herrick felt something cold breaking about the roots of his hair. Then this clinging, this devoted mother did not want her daughter found!—"She said nothing more than this?"

"Nothing more."

He digested it in silence and it was with a heavy gathering dread that when she asked him to drive home with her he put himself in her hands. Then, in what seemed a single convulsion of the storm, the taxi rocked to a standstill before the Deutch apartment.

As Mrs. Deutch sprung on the light their eyes vainly quested for some envelope beneath the door; she went out again to the mail-box, to the elevator, inquiring for a message. Then the woman and the young man, not knowing where to turn next, sat down amid the emptiness of those walls which had so often held Christina. Here, more than ever, everything said, "She must be just

round the corner! Where is she? Where can she be?" And still Herrick knew that Mrs. Hope's message was but a part of what he had to hear and that his hostess still groped for terms in which to tell the rest.

The pause lay heavy between them. Then, "Young gentleman," said Mrs. Deutch, "you love my Christina, is it not so?"

"Don't make me laugh!" Herrick desolately replied.

She rose. "Then I will say to you what I have long had on my heart." She opened the door. The halls were empty. She turned the key in the lock, and glanced at the closed windows; sitting close to him again she laid a kind hand on his. "Mr. Herrick, there is something wrong with Hermann Deutch. There is something in his mind to make him crazy. And in the last days—say it is two or three—it makes him crazier all the while. Yes, this is so. It is fear. And something that he will not tell. He knows something, and it makes him afraid. It has been so since he went up to the room of Mr. Ingham on *that* night."

Herrick looked down at her hand and then he put his other hand atop of both and gave hers a little pressure. "Mrs. Deutch, what is it that you know about that night? Don't be afraid of me. Don't be afraid for me. What is it?"

"Oh, my young sir, I am ready to tell you. Yesterday, no. But to-day, when all the world has seen the shadow-picture, yes—why not? On that night till very late I was away. For I had a friend with a sick baby, and nurses one can not always pay. When I came to the basement gate there was in our flat no lights. But when I went in there was my husband, with his coat over his shirt, standing, listening, in the dark. And he said, 'Christina is upstairs!'—very cross and ugly. I said, 'At Ingham's? Why, what for?—Why,' I said, before he could tell it to me, 'are you out of your mind that you should let her go up there with that man at midnight?' He said, 'Tell me the one thing. How would you have prevented her from going up?'"

They smiled at one another, ruefully, as at an evocation of Christina.

"Oh, my God!" he cries out. "There is going to be trouble! Mr. Denny, he has found out why she quarreled with that Ingham, yesterday. She says he will kill him. She wants that Ingham should go away."

"Do you know why they did quarrel?"

"No, neither of us. Never at all.—But then, I started to go up to her, by the freight elevator as he had taken her. Down that back hall we did not hear the shot. But the telephone made us halt. Joe told us."

The clasp of Herrick's hand lent her its reassurance and she went on.

"My husband was all at once like a man in a fit. He seemed to have no head. He is not to say fearful, but he is the way men are. 'Go!' I said, 'Hasten! It may be that it is he who himself shot!' And this gave him heart to go upstairs. Then comes to me Christina, slipping along from the back. I saw her white dress in the dark. And then she came into a little patch of light and put her finger to her lips. I ran and pulled her in and shut the door. And I took her in my arms to warm her, for she was made all of ice. 'Is he dead?' I asked her. And she shivered out, 'Oh, a doctor! Get a doctor! Go up to him, Tante Deutch! And hurry!' she would say, 'Hurry!' But, indeed, I thought there was enough with him. I asked her the one thing: 'Who did it?' She looked at me with her lips all wide apart. But not a name would she breathe out. Neither then nor to this day. And by that I knew it was Mr. Denny. For no man but him would she be so still. Or not then, when you she did not yet know."

The color rushed into Herrick's face. But he could not speak and Mrs. Deutch went on. "I asked her not one thing more. I held her and tried to give her comfort, and at first she clung to me. She did not cry, but by and by she would sit alone, waiting, listening, and her nostrils made themselves large. But at last it was only my husband who came, and Christina flew up and looked at him. And her eyes were big and wild with questions, but still speak she would not. But my husband's face, Mr. Herrick, it was the face of him who has been struck, who has been stabbed. Not then nor now do I know why that look he has. But it is not gone, it grows worse. He said only to Christina, looking straight at her, 'You left your scarf!' and his voice had in it a sound that was hard. She looked at him a long time, and she said, 'Very well, then. I shall know what to do!' At that moment, see you, she said to herself, 'Me they will suspect, and not him!' And oh, my brave heart, her mind she made up: 'So be it!' We kept her there till just before dawn. And then, because of her white lace dress, we put upon her my old black coat and hat, and both of us went home with her that she might be the less looked at. She let herself in, and all the rest you know. Only—"

"Only that Deutch knows something more!"

"And in all our life the one with the other, it is to me the one thing he has not told. He is not a secret man. Mr. Herrick, here is what makes my heart heavy. This thing—it is something not good for our little girl or he would have told it long ago! But to-day when she vanishes like that other girl who was her friend, he tells it to the mother of Christina!"

So, that was why! Herrick rose. No hour seemed too late, no scene too strange. "Mrs. Hope will have to tell me!" he said.

Henrietta Deutch rose, too, and put her hands on his two shoulders, as if at once to comfort and control. She said, "She is not here!"

"Not where?"

"Not in New York. She is gone. She has fled away that she need not tell at all. A train to some other city where there are boats for Europe—he says it is best I know no more. He has gone West somewhere. You see, he must have thought Christina, too, has fled. And what he told her mother, it has made them not dare to stay. My poor boy!" said Mrs. Deutch, tightening her hold of Herrick, "my poor boy!"

"It's all right!" Herrick said, "It's all right! They're wrong, that's all! They're wrong!"

He moved up and down the room with long, excited strides. False lights of misery—horrible corpse candles, leading their lying way toward that which was bitterer than a new-made grave!—"Why, Denny did it! We all know that! You've just said so, yourself!"

"Ah, yes, truly. Surely! But—yet—"

"What could Deutch have seen that we didn't see? We were all there—he only went in with us. He may guess something—he can't know. What are we all afraid of?"

"And yet," said Mrs. Deutch, "we are all afraid!"

There was a brisk knock on the door. The newcomer smiled grimly at them from under a dripping hat brim. "I hope I'm welcome," he said. It was the District Attorney.

He seemed to take his own appearance quite naturally and perhaps he was not averse to their being stunned by it. Standing with his back against the door he removed his hat and rubbed his hand over the wet mark across his forehead. "Mrs. Deutch? As soon as my assistants get here I want to try an experiment in the Ingham apartment. You're rather an exceptional—janitress, madam! I think I'm going to ask you at once if there isn't some story connected with your marriage to Hermann Deutch. It looks as though there must have been scandal of some sort to account for it."

The wife's glow of indignation maintained in silence an unruffled dignity. After awhile she said very slowly, "It is true. There was a scandal. It did make our marriage."

Herrick's defensive frown faltered over a sense of something coming true. He knew, now, that he had always felt in that rich simplicity of Henrietta Deutch a superiority somehow mysterious. Yes, he had always seen that figure of domestic tranquillity as not wholly detached from a dense background, somehow somber and mysterious.

"Before you commit yourself on that point, just tell me who or what enforces obedience with a triangular knife?—Let her alone!"

For Mrs. Deutch had uttered a dreadful cry. It was low, but full of incredible pain.

Kane grinned triumphantly at Herrick. "Great heaven!" Herrick begged. "What is it? What do you know?"

"Here! Let's sit down and get at this! Mrs. Deutch, this is nearer than you think to our young lady. Best help me!"

"Wait! A moment! No, what I know it is far from Christina. It happened before she was born. But I will tell it. You shall judge."

A long painful breath labored from her bosom. Then she spoke.

"The scandal was this. My father died in prison. He was imprisoned for his life. He was accused that he had killed a child."

"Yes. Well, go on."

"It begins long before, with my home in Germany. My father was a merchant of wines there, and he had in business relations with a Neapolitan family named Gabrielli. Their son, Emile, was my brother's friend.—Emile Gabrielli, Herrick's Italian lawyer, who had suggested his novel!"

"I had but the one brother; for my mother was never strong and of her children only two grew up. We were very old fashioned; we lived in comfort but we had neither the new thoughts nor the new manners. Only my brother was very advanced. He was so modern that when he looked upon us, even, it gave him exasperation. His friend was not of his faith. But that was so old-fashioned a thought it could not be at all mentioned before him. Well, then, I—too—for one thing perhaps we are all enough advanced! I came to love Emile. He loved me, too. And no one was pleased—not even my brother! But, after a long time, when they began to think I, too, was falling ill like all the rest who died, we were betrothed. And my father sold his business out and bought a vineyard in Sicily, near to the estate of Emile's father, taking there my mother, whose health failed." Yes, with the bewildered indifference of his own emotion, Herrick remembered the miniature of which the parents of that sentimental gentleman had not been able to deprive him and recognized the changed original in Henrietta Deutch.

"And one morning, walking far before breakfast, my father came upon a dead little boy under a bush among some rocks. He brought it to our home in his arms; it was the baby of a poor farmer.

It had been stabbed between the little shoulders. And there was a strange, three-cornered wound."

She stopped and her hands stirred in her lap. But she clasped them and went on. "My father was accused. Witnesses appeared against him with strange tales. How could we make ourselves believed. I have told you how he fared.

"Do you think my brother could rest? He left his law in Germany; he came to Sicily to fight, to hunt, to turn every stone. He was found like the child. There was the same three-cornered mark."

Kane gave a low whistle.

"My mother and I, we were all alone." She smoothed out a little fold in her dress. "We had but the one message from the family of my betrothed—that they withdrew the word of their son."

Kane looked up quickly. "Yes?" he urged. "And then?"

"Then came to us Hermann Deutch, who in the old days sold our wine. He gave us escort to Naples, for my mother could go no farther, and returned to attend our property. It was all in a ruin. The house had burned. The cattle were gone. The laborers, too, nor would any return. The land none would buy. It was a place accursed. Our money was soon all gone." She paused, struggling with a sudden sob. "Hermann Deutch, to stay on he had lost his position, and he took one that was poor but in Naples, to be near me. He was all that came near us, who had word or dealing with us, while my mother grew too weak to live. When she, too, died, I married him. There was the scandal, sir, to account for my marriage."

She looked with deep, mild scorn at Kane. He remained imperturbable, while Herrick blushed for him.

"There was one thing more. Mr. Deutch had spent much for us and before he could take me from Naples he must save something from what work he had. One month came upon another in that terrible city and we had not gone. So the time came when I, like other women, thought to have a child. One night there were fire-works at the seashore and, to liven my mind, he made me go. As we came home there was a lonely bit of beach, though toward the cars. Out of the dark a voice called some words at us and something fell—it rang on a stone at our feet. They had thrown a kind of dagger. Sirs," said Mrs. Deutch, "it was a triangular knife."

Kane gave a cry with a strange note of satisfaction.

But the tears were running down Mrs. Deutch's face. "The shock and the fear, they were too much for me. I never bore my child. God has never given me a child to love except Christina. Tell me what all this can be to her?"

"Do you know what aphasia is, Mrs. Deutch? And doesn't Mr. Deutch suffer, occasionally, from a confusion of words?"

"Not so much that it could be called by a name. Except that one time. Mr. Deutch has been all his life an excited man. And when that knife fell at my feet he was like one crazed. Then he forgot language, sir, and could not speak well for days. English and German he ran together, and what of French he knows with what Italian. Though he knew well what he wished to say. And there is yet a smear in his brain where the words may sometimes a little mix together. But—Christina?"

"Mrs. Deutch, what did all this suggest to you? Of what did you think you were the victims?"

"Imagine yourselves that it was in a time of one of those outcries against Jewish people which come like stupid fever as though nations, ignorantly, have eaten too much in strong sun. They needed to blame some one and, just then, in blaming us they could blame as they would."

"H'm!—Do either of you know what happened at the Tombs this afternoon?"

"The papers say that Mr. Denny has tried to kill himself."

"Well, and very obliging of them. But, for a desperate man, he gave himself rather queer wounds—scratches in the shoulder and arm. The guard ran for the doctor and seems to be running yet. But where was our suicide really cut to the bone? On the insides of his hands!"

He had produced his sensation.

"The guard was one of the new Italian contingent. And the blow aimed by an Italian, then, at the prisoner's heart and caught by his arm, was given with a triangular knife!"

They were all three on their feet.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Deutch, for my opening gallery play with you. I didn't know the tragedy I was running into. And our friend Herrick, here, and the excellent Wheeler both tried to hoodwink me to-night when I asked them straight questions. You're going to tell me the truth, I know, for now I'm telling it to you. We got hold of your husband at the Pennsylvania Station. Our intelligent police tried to frighten him with the stab of Denny's triangular prick and they succeeded in putting him clean out of the game with aphasia—sensory aphasia. Word blindness—speech or writing—heavens, what a gag! But don't be alarmed; fortunately it goes with a perfectly clear mind and it's only temporary. Only—time's everything! Well, it gave me the cue to come up here and dig for some three-cornered mystery, blackmailing if procurable, in Deutch's life. Every



District-Attorney his own detective! Yes—when it's this District-Attorney and this crime—Amen! Amen!—What is it?"

"Oh, sir, the Italian!"

"Yes?"

"All morning one hung about the house of Mrs. Hope. Not coming near, but watching, watching. A little, slim, soft, pretty man, in gentleman's clothes. And it made her afraid."

"Ah!"

"Look here, the fellow in the park—the one with the message—he was an Italian! They all were!"

"Exactly! Now—Mrs. Deutch, what was that old secret in the life of the Hopes which turned the daughter into a cynic and a hater of social conventions? Ah, come, please!"

"Oh, sir, that was not a great thing!"

"What was it?"

"The sister of Mr. Hope found letters from him—old letters when Christina was fourteen—written to her who was afterwards his wife. The marriage had been so long forbidden, they were driven to see each other so seldom, secretly, alone, and in strange places. Sir, they were in love and they were very young."

"This was not known till Christina was fourteen?"

"No, sir."

"Then her birth was, of course, legitimate."

"Oh, of a surety!"

"And this was all?"

"All!"

Herrick found himself listening with a strange excitement. He could not have told why he had a sudden sense of having touched a spring. That brief revelation of rash love—what was there in that? Such a thing might loom large in a society novel; in the vast, mixed, multitudinous life of men and women it was small enough. How could it arrest his attention at a time like this? As though some small, mysterious, irrelevant key had been slipped into his hand! By the fleeing figure of Mrs. Hope? That amiable, vacant, and correct lady, how could any young and long-dead folly of hers, reaching across a generation, strike down Ingham and shatter a little world? "The little pitted speck"—What was that? What was he remembering now? "The wages of sin are more sinning!" Why, that was the motto he had taken for his novel? Sin? Nonsense! "The little pitted speck in garnered fruit that, rotting inward,—"

He woke himself roughly to hear Mrs. Deutch adding, "But they lived with that hard woman, she and her mother, in poverty. And to have it nagged at and flaunted at the mother, it made her a morbid child. No more. But now, sir, the Italians?"

"The Italians, indeed! Mrs. Deutch, as you owe them such a grief, as you believe in justice and the protection of the weak, as you have had enough of government by the triangular knife, give me the name of your Christina's Italian host!"

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## CHAPTER III

### SEARCH-LIGHTS FLASHED IN THE EYES: KANE'S STORY

"Well, for one thing," Kane said, "no mortal creature ever looked at that girl and thought her a quitter." He was standing at Ingham's table, wrinkling his eyebrows at the storied blind. "I've come within the fascinations of that young person myself, but I don't think it's infatuation which makes me say that she didn't drop down in a dead faint yesterday afternoon, just to pass the time. When those clear eyes of hers looked at that lock of hair she learned something that astonished and horrified her. From that moment she made up her mind to go somewhere and, at the appointed hour, go she did. Devil take her for not confiding in Mrs. Deutch! She meant, I daresay, to return. But she must have been greeted with the news of the moving picture advertisement and thought herself very well off where she was. Eventually, she'll pull some string from there."

He began putting out all lights but the table-lamp.

"I fancied, at first, the mother had followed, for she lied about going to Europe. We've had every steamship and railway line watched since long before she left, so she's not beyond the scope of trolleys. But she'd only be a nuisance to the girl, nor is she one to pursue risks—more likely, she just skipped out early to avoid the rush. All sorts of intimidating things have happened lately; then, last night, Christina threatened her with some exposure, this morning she was frightened

by an Italian, and the climax has been capped by whatever it was Deutch told her—Don't jump! No, I'm no mind-reader. But I had, of course, the Deutch apartment, as well as yours, wired for a dictograph. Useful thing a dictograph—especially when there are ladies about!"

With a happy indifference to the effect of this statement upon Herrick he cast about the room, appearing to sniff up its suggestions and to compare them with a vision in his mind's eye. Absorbed, elate, on edge, tingling with some suspended energy, as he raised the blind and peered out he radiated a good humor somehow inhuman.

"That wasn't a taxi? I'm expecting a couple of my boys and," he grinned, "poor Ten Euyck!" He disappeared, bent on examining the bedroom.

Herrick still stood, dumb and raging, with his back against the door. In his impotent rebellion against Kane's inferences he had been almost indifferent to the fateful setting of the new scene in that night's hurrying kinoscope. But slowly this had begun to assume its natural imaginative sway. There were the dim blue walls framed in their outline of smooth, black wood. There before him was the long white blind; to his left the piano where Ingham had sat playing; by stretching out his right hand he could touch the portières of the room in which they had found Ingham's body. It was all in order now. The cushions of the couch had been smoothed and set up. The chair that had lain overturned beside the table had been stood in its proper place, at the edge of the portières, near the door. The newspapers and ashes, the siphon and half-empty glass had been cleared away. The little puddle by the piano stool, too, was gone. All was in order; Ingham's hand might have been about to draw those portières, he might have stepped between them to tell—what? What, the poor fellow persisted, was there to tell? He knew the secret of the shadow on the blind, the secret of the shot in Ingham's breast. Only the one thing was unknown—Who had contrived to bolt the door? That he had always felt the puzzle's essence and its answer; there stole through him again that sense of a skeleton still locked within those walls to be discovered with some recognizing shock; once more his fancy began to search through those hollow rooms in desperate hope, driven by that superstition, by the obstinate unreason with which a starving hand continues to fumble in an empty pocket. Futilest of occupations! The sense of shamed stupidity, of failure in Christina's cause, warned him with a squelching sneer that he was the merest pawn in Kane's hand and that the room would yield its secret, if it had one, to Kane and not to him. At any rate, how could that secret find Christina? And, if he were not looking for Christina, what was he doing there?

As he turned to go it was Kane who came back through the portières and said, "Sit down, for heaven's sake! Don't stand there glaring at me as if I were Ingham's corpse!"

The sharpness of his entrance suggested something.

Herrick answered with his hand on the knob, "I'm virtually a prisoner, I suppose?"

"Oh, don't you care to sit out the show?"

"If I left here should I be arrested?"

"Arrested's an exaggeration."

"I should be shadowed, then?"

"Well, my dear fellow, there've been so many disappearances! And you're so near the storm-center—you make such a sensitive barometer!"

Herrick dropped on to the couch as a mouse might give itself up to a cat and leaned forward, frowning, motionless.

"It's a great game, this, of 'Vanishing Lady'! But I don't mind telling you that it's the Italian background to the vanishings that interests us. An obscure young girl—but a great friend of Christina Hope's—is the first to vanish. She sends an appeal for aid to Christina Hope, through the Arm of Justice.

"A publisher—betrothed to Christina Hope—receives blackmailing letters from the Arm of Justice, and is murdered.

"A young author—also betrothed to Christina Hope—is attacked. But, as a victim, proves a failure.

"An actor—also—well, also an old friend of Christina Hope, and said to have been recently in love with the vanished Nancy Cornish is arrested for Ingham's murder. And what happens? S-s-z-boum! A cluster of respectable and comfortable persons scatter for the ends of the earth. While, ahead of them all, pop goes the beauty! In a white and silver dress. So she didn't go farther than the embrace held wide open to receive her."

"You mean, of course, the Arm of Justice?"

"Of course."

"What are you trying to do with me?" Herrick snarled.

Kane answered with great deliberation, "I'm trying to save you, you young fool!"

"Spare yourself wasted time. What does all this matter to me? What does a lot of gab matter? I've

heard enough of it to-night, God knows! But does it tell me anything? You're all full of suggestions, but where is she? Do something if you know how—find her, find her! She's in danger, that's all that matters! Where is she? Where is she?"

"You talk about danger! And you want *me* to find her?"

"Has Denny retained you, then?"

"Oh, you poor kid!—Now, Herrick, I know your place in life. I studied, one term, under your father. I breathe familiarly the air of Brainerd, Connecticut. Corey and old Ingham are friends of mine. This muss of—Paah! Come out of it, Herrick, it isn't good enough! She in her rotten world and you—Oh, all right!"

Kane rose and went again to the window. "Rain's held up." He looked at his watch. Strolling back to his chair he fixed his eyes on Herrick, across his interwoven knuckles.

"But you've listened so willingly to Wheeler and to Mrs. Deutch, why not listen to me? I've something of a confession to make, myself. Do you know what it is to be possessed by a mania?"

A man with a mania!

"I heard Ten Euyck call you that, the first time I ever saw you."

"Good! A man with a mania, a prosecutor with a pet criminal! But he didn't mention the criminal? Allow me—the Arm of Justice!"

Herrick's pulse gave a mad leap and he slowly raised his head.

"You've taken that business, all along, as just a mask for some desperate amateur. Then, too, you were all thrown off the track—and small wonder!—by those literate, unbusinesslike letters in idiomatic English. A lady's letters, in fact!—My dear fellow, a very real and definite 'Arm of Justice,' a low-lived little gang that sunny Italy knew how to get rid of, has made its living at blackmailing certain gutters of ours for a generation. What nobody but your humble servant has believed is that this more stylish business, using our language and dwelling very evidently in our midst, has any connection with the original A. of J. beyond borrowing its title from the police reports. Not for the first time! See here! The Arm of Justice started life as the humblest little blackguard gang, extorting money from low-class Italians. It was like all its class, strictly minding its own business in its own nationality and considered worth nobody's while to catch. But to my mind about four years ago this violet by a mossy stone burst out like a sunflower. To my mind, it was this very same Arm of Justice which abandoned every precedent by entering, with one bound, into American life."

His look seemed to ring with triumph, but his voice kept a cold edge.

"No Italian gang, real or bogie, big or little, had ever thrown its shadow there. But the Arm of Justice flew high, carried the new territory at a rush, and struck at the very proudest families in New York, the most powerful individuals!"

"But how? How?"

"Ah, if I knew! What's its source of information? How does it get hold of those unhappy secrets that its owners guard like Koh-i-noors? Well, men will tell a good deal to a woman—and those were a woman's letters, Herrick! Once it gets its secret it starts a correspondence. How often it has succeeded, grabbed its hush-money and retreated, of course I don't know. But when its advances are rejected it abandons its typewriter and calmly prints a scant edition of a dirty little rag calling itself *The Voice of Justice* and telling the blackmailing story. It then mails marked copies through various New York post offices to the family, friends and enemies of its victims—the three before Ingham were all of Knickerbocker standing. What a revenge! What a prestige for next time such a threat gave it! The desire of my life is to smash that printing-press!"

"But it followed up the Ingham business with letters alone?"

"There you are—the whole Ingham business is a departure! Observe that until Ingham's death the English-speaking branch of the business never committed itself to violence; it caused four tragedies in four years, but it simply pressed the button of exposure and its vengeance came off automatically. The first time a young girl went crazy. The second there was a divorce and the wife shot herself. And the third time a bad stumble, lived down for twenty years by a fine old friend of mine, a judge of the highest standing who had made himself an honorable character, was exposed to such relentless political foes that this office had to prosecute. Well, Mrs. Deutch's father isn't the only gentle soul who's died in jail!"

Kane's voice had risen in hot anger. "Perhaps you think I ought to be grateful—thank them for doing my work! Am I to do theirs, then? Execute their orders, their sentences? Make my office the tool of cowards and criminals worse than those I convict? Ah, my boy, that did turn me into a monomaniac! Is there anything I wouldn't give to break that particular bone in the Arm of Justice?—to lay hands on the real villain of that little evening party in these rooms that night—not the one who fired the shot but who prompted it! Believe me, the death of Ingham was a slip, an accident, bitterly repented. Some last new element got in this time and got in wrong. The Arm was using a new tool and pushed it farther than it dreamed the tool would go. The English-speaking branch, always so careful not to commit murder—I could almost be thankful for this time—it's put a definite, popular crime into my hand! And now the poor fools've lost their heads!

They that were so cautious, they're following one sensation with another. They've tried anything, everything, to get clear! They've only floundered further and further in! And now they're wild as rats in a trap!"

"Like rats in a trap!" There it was again! "The wages of sin is more sinning!" Good heavens, what was his novel to him, now?

"Still people don't believe me. They can't credit that a single criminal gang has its feet in the slums, its hand in the pocket of Fifth Avenue, and its head—well, for instance, on Broadway. Naturally, it wants a connecting thread. I was so keen after that, even before I came into office, that they used to call me The Blackhander and say I ought to write a comic opera. Well, Italy's an operatic nation! And this great brat of a city, that thinks there's nothing doing in the world but Anglo-Saxon temperaments, embezzling and baseball games, doesn't know what it may get up against! I'm sure if I can nab either end of the skein it will carry conviction. But unfortunately even the Eastsiders never gave us a map of their whereabouts. There are about seven hundred Italians in New York who might be called professional gangsters and very likely a cozy, private little affair like the A. of J. but murmurs, 'We are seven.' So I've never been able to put the slightest Italian accent on those illustrious letters till I saw the body of your gunman from Central Park. Encouraging though not overwhelming evidence! But the knife that stuck in Denny's arm is a bigger business."

He might well congratulate himself, Herrick inwardly groaned, over the color and the emphasis liberally supplied him in the story of Mrs. Deutch.

"Of course, you understood what had happened? The farmer had refused toll to the brigands who governed the south so capably in those days. They killed his child, leaving their mark on it as a warning that toll must be paid. The poor wine-merchant attempted to set the authorities on that sign. The authorities were too weak to take up the gage, and, of course, a stranger and a Jew made an easy scape-goat. But the brother didn't take warning from the father's fate. Then the mark on him warned the countryside that the family was taboo. They became simply lepers. Not, this time, because the people were religious bigots nor social asses but because they were scared stiff. Every one connected with the tabooed strangers must have dreaded some brigand dictum. Every Gabrielli may have squirmed under that thumb for many a year. Whatever she romantically believes, her fiancé's family simply dared not, for their lives, receive Henrietta. Nobody dared, except, apparently, our little friend, Hermann Deutch. Hats off—I salute Hermann! Really, for an excited man—! But how's that for the nationality of the three-cornered knife? The nation's pitched it out, over there; and now, to-day, in the city of New York, in the city's jail, in broad daylight, some descendant of this agreeable Sicilian clan uses the same weapon to silence a wiry gentleman who turns out a bit too much for him—being a little on the Sicilian order himself! But isn't that a sign of something doing between the slums and Broadway? For what were they afraid Denny would tell? Why did they wish to silence him except for what he could tell of a certain lady?"

Herrick rose, lighted a cigar and flicked out the match with steady fingers. "And you picture Miss Hope as The Queen of the Black Hand?"

This pleasantry was delivered with such a raucous and guttural attempt at quiet satire that Kane returned to earth and smiled.

"Put in that way it's comic opera, indeed. But it's the tune that makes the song. I know how crass the thing seems. Good heavens, says common sense, in what century are we living? And who believes in comic opera? What's the clue? What's the connecting thread that can reach from the lowest dives of the East Side, out of another country and another race, and mix with the grandeurs of so extremely well-known and high-flying a young lady, on the very day that she becomes a world-celebrity? What's the answer?"

The extreme nonchalance of Herrick's voice shook a little as he remarked, "That's up to you, isn't it?"

"It's bound to lie in some dangerous indiscretion of her youth. She's had hard struggling years, in which her temper was still luxurious—a youth that's ambitious is never too scrupulous—if she had a friend unscrupulous by profession—And yet I was so sure they had got hold of her by some secret of her mother's! The Hope honeymoon took place in Italy—but, in that day, so did everybody's! After all, perhaps they had a closer clutch. What do we inevitably find in the pasts of all very young, very beautiful and very successful actresses? We find a dark and early husband. Italians whose humbler connections still sojourn in tenements are often highly ornamental and blackmailers aren't branded, you know, to keep them out of matrimony. Well, whatever the start, whether she was coaxed in or threatened or married, forced by poverty or blackmail, she's made them a wonderful—Do you know the thieves' slang of Naples? And the term 'basista'?"

"A basista's a sort of fence, isn't he? A confederate on the outside?"

"A good deal more. A basista, without being a member of the gang, is the invaluable unsuspected spy in the camp of the victims, who loots profitable news and sends it in. He or she is sometimes the brilliant amateur director, the educated person with an outlook, the Adviser Plenipotentiary. A dramatic-minded young lady with extravagant tastes and some kind of righteous grudge against society might hardly realize at first what she was doing—and oh, how she has struggled to be rid of it, since! Naturally, she's become worth double to them. And she's recently furnished them with such a hold that, so far from getting clear, I fancy she was pushed to furnish them with

another victim; that if it hadn't been for the moving-picture another person would soon have received an Arm of Justice letter, and that person Cuyler Ten Euyck. What do you think of my thread?"

"Pretty thin, isn't it?"

"Wait, encouraging youth! You'll be grateful some day! Come, I'll show you my hand! Ever since the inquest it has been perfectly clear to the unprejudiced mind that Christina Hope was in that room when Ingham was shot. It was perfectly evident that she was shielding somebody. We say, now, that she was shielding Denny. When we began to suspect Denny we had to run down his friend, Christina Hope, who left behind her a scarf bordered with the color in which, through his craze for her, Ingham's apartment was decorated—a color which up to the time of the murder she wore so constantly that it was like a part of her personal effect, and which she has never worn since."

The color was all about them—blue-gray. What could that have to do with the shimmer of a dummy pistol, scratched upon whose golden surface Herrick once more confronted the initial "C"? But he did not put this question to the District-Attorney. And it was Kane who continued. "Shall I treat you to a bit of ancient history; shall I reconstruct for you the movements of Miss Hope on the night of the fourth of August?"

"As you please."

"She testified to have dined at home. So she did; but with so poor an appetite that the maids said to each other that she had really dined early somewhere else. She testified to being ill and out of sorts; so she was. But she was incited by this being out of sorts to something very different from the languor to which she testified. Far from having bade Ingham farewell forever she called him up at the Van Dam on an average of every half hour, as well as at his club, and at two restaurants which he frequented. Failing to find him, at eleven o'clock she did, indeed, go to the post-box and mail a letter; but at twenty minutes past eleven she was waiting in a taxi outside the theater where Denny was rehearsing and sent in a message, without any concealment of her name, that she wished to speak to him. He sent out word that he was engaged. An hour later she was there again, and not believing the back doorman who told her that he had left, she stopped Wheeler, who had been inside, and besought him to get Denny to speak to her. He replied that Denny was gone, whereupon she called out to her chauffeur, with every adjuration to hurry, the name of the Van Dam apartment house—where, say at a quarter after one, you, Herrick, saw her shadow on the blind. According to Joe Patrick she was the first on the spot.—Was she the last there, too?"

Herrick paused in a long stride; with his bones slowly freezing in him he turned and faced the District-Attorney.

"If Denny loved her and went there on her account did he shoot down Ingham before her eyes? Or did she run out, as she suggested at the inquest, and Denny shoot Ingham as he turned to follow her? There's your chance, Herrick, prove that! Mr. Bird tells us when our prisoner came in. But, before all and everything, when did he come out?"

He had a way for which Herrick could have slain him, of driving points home with a smile.

"But suppose, now, she did most of the loving on her own account. Ingham, to a certainty, had found out her connection with the Arm of Justice, when it tried to blackmail him through her. From the row you heard between them he's likely to have been threatening her with exposure. Suppose Denny's story is straight and when he found her there with Ingham he just turned and walked off. Was Ingham a man to refrain from threatening to send his revelations, first of all, to a man who had treated him so cavalierly? Is she a girl to stop short of the desperate in preventing him? Isn't she one to avenge herself in advance? It may not have been wholly in revenge. Ingham was himself a wild revengeful fellow who sometimes had too much to drink. He may have provoked her even to bodily fear. If he guessed such a thing do you think Denny would not keep silence? I see it strikes you."

It seemed to him as if it struck the life out of his heart over which he folded his arms. "Try somebody else," he said, in defiance of the little clasps of proof which he could hear snapping into each other, "next time you accuse her."

"Yes, I'll try Deutch. I gave her every doubt till I heard of his secret. Is it possible you don't know what he found? And is it possible that you don't see a preparation for emergency in her taking such pains to establish—well, not an alibi, but a substitute?—A mysterious unknown lady with the most conspicuous physical attributes, in whose person this admirable actress appears before Joe Patrick as the red-headed murderess of the drama on the front stairs, before, on the back stairs, with which she appears to be so familiar, she resumes herself and turns to see what can be done with Ingham! That's the worst point in the story of a distracted girl, pushed to the wall, driven past her last stand, maddened by a suddenly enlightened and too cruel Ingham, hounded by her friends, the Arm of Justice, to their work; herself no more—as I was once no more!—than a trigger pulled by their hand! No wonder they've had a firmer hold on her than ever since that night, and shield her, now, with all their care because in doing so they shield themselves!"

"That's what you think, is it?"

"It's what I fear—and it's what you fear! Or—what's a District-Attorney to a lover?—you'd have knocked me down long ago!—There's not a man of you, knowing the girl, in whose mind, in

whose pulse, it hasn't been from the first hour! Yet there's not one of you who hasn't sacrificed Denny to her without a scruple. One man in the end won't do it. I mean Denny himself. He, too, is prepared to go extraordinary lengths not to betray her. He will deny, of course, that it was she who was there that night. But I rely on one thing. He knows that in the State of New York he can not plead guilty to murder in the first degree. And he won't send himself up for anything less. He's not afraid of death, but he's mortally afraid of prison—it gets on every one of his nerves. And he seems to have a great many of them. If they are ground on the idea of jail so that they break they may break quite contrary to poor Deutch's—they may set him talking! Ah, if he and Deutch could happen to meet; those two temperamental persons!—Here, in this room, in the night, now when neither of them are quite themselves, what a start they might get! What mightn't it shake out of them?—There's one final thing the person who shot Ingham, the person who was last with him in this room, alone, can tell me—How came that door bolted? Whatever Denny guesses, you'll find he won't guess me that!—Come in!"

He conferred with some one on the threshold. "Ask Inspector Ten Euyck to come up." Turning back to take his place at the library table he motioned Herrick to a seat. "Pity the sorrows of a poor policeman whose legal sense is too strong to let him ask a single question of an accused man, yet who was born to be the head of the Inquisition and looks at the prisoner with a deep desire quite simply to tear him open! The prisoner is well held together with surgeon's plaster, but the poor Inspector's pride in his profession is suffering horribly from the inadequate conduct of his city's jail to-day and of our detectives' search.—Here we are!"

A group of young men appeared in the doorway, with Ten Euyck looming like a damaged monument in their wake. Civility and self-control forced themselves on Herrick. He and Ten Euyck sniffed each other, wary as strange dogs, their spines beginning to rise. "Inspector," said Kane, "cheer up!" And indeed the funereal quality in that gentleman's appearance had greatly increased. He sat down, as directed, but when he looked at Herrick he had to turn his growl into a cough and when he looked at Kane he winced. It was evidently not alone the errors of the Tombs and the police department which had bowed his head. It was the knowledge of last night. His magnificent storm coat could not hide his riddled dignity. Only by the sight of Christina in his grasp could he get his dignity back again.

"Ten Euyck, I sent for you because this is so largely your affair, but you are not going to be asked to do anything immoral. I am about to examine a witness, but with no illegal questions nor shall I force him to testify against himself. He is only going to be asked about another, a missing witness. Your legal mind doesn't quarrel with his being hard pushed in that direction? I thought not!"

Ten Euyck exclaimed, eagerly, "But Deutch can't talk yet!"

"Deutch? Did you think I meant Deutch? There is some one dearer to Christina Hope than her dear Deutches and still nearer to the habits of her life. I mean a gentleman who can talk but won't. Ah, brighten up Ten Euyck—he shall be got to! He may be ignorant of certain amiable Italians as criminal characters, it's inconceivable he can be ignorant of them as Christina Hope's familiar friends. He mayn't be able to tell me the secret of their lives. But he can give me their address. And he will."

They were all grouped about the long table: Kane at its center, facing the window; Ten Euyck and Herrick bearing with each other at one end; Holt, an assistant of Kane's, between him and Ten Euyck; to his right, a stenographer with a short-hand pad. The end of the table was still vacant. Kane's own doorman stood on the threshold.

"Wade, have you got Mrs. Deutch? Please step into the bedroom, Mrs. Deutch. Sit down comfortably, keep silent and listen to everything.—I want to remind you all that, wise as our witness is, there are some things he doesn't know. So far as we know he has never connected the Cornish girl's disappearance with the blackmailers. He's not supposed to know there are any blackmailers. And, for certain, he's seen no papers nor been allowed to talk with any one. He doesn't know that Christina Hope has disappeared! He doesn't know that New York has seen a moving-picture!" Turning to the man at the door Kane said, "Bring in William Denny."

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## CHAPTER IV

### A LIGHT ALONG THE ROAD: DENNY GIVES AN ADDRESS

Herrick felt the strong light of the one lamp like something hypnotic; it reminded him of the glare in some Sardou or Belasco torture chamber. It seemed to him that the scene wasn't real; it was like a council of wolves and he powerless and quiet with them there, as they hungered to run, baying, on Christina. It was only a nightmare and yet it was more real and keen than life, and only God knew what would come of it! Then he saw the slight, dark figure pass the door; every eye, but with what different desires, turned, ravenous as his, for the secret that it carried in its breast.

The doorman brought Denny up to the end of the table and withdrew. The prisoner was very carefully dressed, his black hair brushed as smooth as satin, and against his dark blue coat the

black silk handkerchief that supported his arm was scarcely noticeable. He looked a model of rigid decorum until you observed the heavy straps of plaster across his hands. Only his skin, always dark and pale, seemed really to be drained of blood. He nodded gravely to Kane, and with a sort of still surprise to Herrick. Ten Euyck he passed over. He remained standing until Kane told him to sit down. If he then dropped rather wearily into a chair he contrived to sit upright, with a good show of formal manners. As his dark eyes met the keen light ones of the lawyer a faint, derisive smile appeared, and was instantly suppressed, upon both their faces.

"You seem very sure of yourself!" Ten Euyck exploded.

Denny appeared to become slowly conscious of him. "Even the persuasive manners of your department," he said, "couldn't make me tell what I didn't know!"

Ten Euyck said quickly, "You don't know who killed Ingham?"

"If I said anything more incriminating, it's possible it might be used against me."

"We're not here," Kane interposed, "to discuss Ingham's death. Mr. Denny, within the last few days there have been some very grave occurrences, about which it's possible you can enlighten us. If you can, we shan't be ungrateful. Did you ever hear of an organization called the Arm of Justice?"

"Is this a joke?"

"You never heard of it?"

"No."

"Well, then, you can have no objection to repeating the name and address of Miss Hope's Italian friends?"

"Not the least in the world. Has she any?"

"You mean to tell me you don't know she has?"

"Not if it annoys you. I thought you asked."

Ten Euyck, with a gesture as of uncontrollable impatience, rose and went to the window.

"Since you're in a jocular mood, I will ask you something you may think extremely amusing. Do you know if Miss Christina Hope owns a red wig?"

He didn't think it amusing. He seemed to think little enough about it. "I suppose so."

"But you never saw one about her house?"

"She wouldn't keep it about her house, like a pet. She'd keep it in a trunk. She's not an amateur."

"You never saw her wear one in private life?"

"Not even on the first of April."

"You couldn't even swear she had one, perhaps."

"I certainly could not."

"Nor that she had not?"

"No."

"So that you wouldn't recognize hers if you saw it?"

"No."

The light was very strong upon his face, which remained relaxed and tranquil. But he was very weak and a faint moisture broke out upon it.

"Was there any love affair between you and Miss Hope which angered Nancy Cornish?"

"No."

"Don't lie to me!"

Denny drew in his breath a little. But he did not speak.

"What was your trouble with Nancy Cornish?"

Silence.

"Didn't she quarrel with you because of some woman?"

Silence.

"You know she did. You can't deny it. Do you know what many of your friends are saying? That you kept that appointment with her and got rid of her. They think you were tired of her and preferred Christina Hope!"

"Do they?"

It had missed fire utterly. Yet, since the mention of that other girl, a kind of hunger had been growing in his face, and suddenly Kane wholly veered on that new track.

"But I don't!" said Kane, leaning toward him, and trying to catch and hold his eye. "I think you really care for Nancy Cornish, whether she's alive or dead!" He paused. "I think you'll end by telling me what you know of the woman whom you'll find parted you."

The same dead silence; only Denny had closed his eyes.

"Come, give me your attention. Look at me, please. Look at me, and you'll see that I'm sincere. Did you hear me say if you can help me I shan't be ungrateful? But you can do better for yourself than that. You can simply tell the truth! Tell the truth and you won't need my favor. You'll be free. And you'll have set me in the way to find Nancy Cornish! It isn't possible you prefer to keep this ridiculous silence, to die like a criminal for nothing; or spend fifteen to twenty years in the penitentiary—spend life there,—ah, I thought so!" The District-Attorney laughed with triumph at the little straightening of Denny's nostrils. "There's your weak point, my friend! I have never seen a man to whom the idea of jail was so entirely uncongenial! Get rid of it, then! Admit the truth about Christina Hope! What do you owe her? She never even came to me with the witness that she promised."

"I rather thought she'd have trouble doing that!"

"Because you knew there was no such woman. Or rather that that woman was Christina Hope; that she tried to get up courage to incriminate herself in your place and failed!"

"You're a bad guesser, Kane!" Denny said. He had sunk a little forward with his arms upon his knees, and Kane rose and stood over him.

"Admit that your whole attitude is dictated simply by loyalty to her. You need be loyal no longer. Has she been near you since you've been in the Tombs?"

"No, you've kept her out. And a fine time you must have had doing it!"

Ten Euyck turned round and said, "She's so *fond* of you, I suppose!"

Denny flushed. "Yes," he said, "she's fond of me. She was born to be a good comrade-in-arms, to carry the flag of a forlorn hope and stand by you in the last ditch. If you gentlemen can't understand that, I'm sorry for you. I can't change her."

"Exactly," Kane said. "I knew that was your ground. Well, this comrade-in-arms has deserted you altogether. The day she should have brought me that witness, she threw down her engagement and left New York!"

"Oh, guess again!" said Denny. "Not while she lived, she didn't!"

"And she took with her," Ten Euyck cried, "forty thousand dollars' worth of my diamonds! Perhaps she was in hopes you'd get away and join her!"

"Well," said Denny, turning his eyes toward Herrick, without raising his head, "you!—you're not a criminal!—are you going to stand for that?"

"Doesn't his standing for it speak for itself!" said Ten Euyck. "If you want to defend a woman, why don't you come out like a man and confess that you did it yourself."

They all looked at him in astonishment and, flushing at himself, he subsided.

"Ah, thanks, Ten Euyck, that's what I've been suspecting! You think you can trap me into one of your damned confessions with these tricks! Get rid of that idea. I'll not confess. It's up to you to prove it; prove it! Why should I help you!" He turned again to Herrick, as if in justification. "Yes, I am afraid of jail! I'm a coward about prison, I confess that! and to give myself up to a lifetime of it—no!—Herrick, there's no chance of their being serious in this talk about Christina."

Kane took him by the unwounded shoulder and forced him from his leaning posture, till his face came full into the light. "Upon my word of honor, Denny," he said, "Christina Hope has disappeared."

The shock struck Denny like a sort of paralysis. He did not stir, but he seemed to stiffen. His eyes dilated with a horrified amazement. "What do you mean?" he said.

Kane handed him that evening's paper, folded to the headlines that dealt with the missing girl. He read them with greed, but it was plain that he found their information stupefying. "Chris, now! First, Nancy!" he said, "and then, Christina! What is this thing? What can it be? You," to Kane, "you that are so clever, have you any explanation at all? Have you the least clue? Have you?" he insisted, and from the dark meaning of their faces he seemed to kindle, and half rose, leaning on the table. "My God, then," he cried, "what is it? What is it?"

"Well, then," said Kane, "as you yourself suggest, she is very probably in the same place with Nancy Cornish." Denny continued to lean on the table, looking at him with ravenous eyes. "You know that Joe Patrick was knocked down by an automobile on his way to the inquest, that the same so-called accident happened two or three days later to Herrick, here; you know that subsequently four armed men attacked him in the park; to-day you had an experience of your own. Well, all these things hang together and were committed by a band of blackmailers. Your



own shoulder gives you a taste of their quality. You can judge for yourself what they'll stop at. Brace yourself. We know, now, for a certainty that Nancy Cornish is in their hands."

Denny continued to lean there, without stirring. "It's a trick! It's one of your little tricks! Is it?" he said to Herrick with a sudden shrillness, "Is it?"

"One of them brought us a message from her. It said, 'Help me, dear Chris!'"

"No, no, no!" said Denny, as if to himself. "It's a lie. It's all a lie. I won't be frightened. I know it's a lie."

"Is that her writing?"

He cried out, a dreadful, formless sound, and covered his face with his hands. Kane's glance said to the others, "Let him alone! It's working!"

He asked them then, quite gravely and clearly, "When—do you expect—to catch—this—gang?"

"I don't know that we can catch them at all. We don't know how to get at them. We've no idea where they are."

His hands dropped from his face; it throbbed now and blazed; all the nerves had come to life in a quivering network. "Oh, for God's sake," he said, "don't tell me that!—Go on, then, go on! Tell me!" He looked beseechingly and then in a fury of impatience from face to face. "Don't stand gaping! You must know something! Look here, you don't understand! You don't know all I've been through all these weeks—wondering!—If she was in that lake where we used to row! If she'd only gone away, hating me! My mind's in pieces trying to think—think—following every sign! Hundreds of times I've seen her dead! And now you tell me she's alive! and calling—calling for help! Do you? Do you?"

"Yes," said Kane.

He swayed forward so suddenly that he had to catch at the table. "It's horrible! It's a nightmare!" With a strange monotonous inflection his voice rose higher and higher on the one strained note. "It's the thing I've dreamed of night and day, week out and in! That she was frightened and in danger! With brutes! With the faces of beasts round her! Oh, God—!"

"Don't!" Herrick cried.

"Yes, but look here!" With an eagerness sudden as a child's, he said to Herrick, "But it's hope! Hope, isn't it? She's alive! And she didn't just leave me!—I've got to get out of here! Yesterday—why, yesterday—this morning—but now! 'Help me!' she says! I've got to get out! I—" He stopped. The dusky choking red that had surged up horribly over his face and forehead receded sharply, and left only his eyes burning black in the white incredulous horror of his face. He cried, "There's no way out!"

"There may be," said the District-Attorney, "if you will look very carefully at this lock of hair."

Denny took the soft red curl in a hand that he vainly strove to steady; they could read recognition, but no further enlightenment in his tormented face.

"Sit down!" Kane said. "Untie the string. Shake the hair loose here on the table under the lamp. Now, does anything strike you? No?"

Once more Herrick had that singular impression of Denny's going, for an instant's flash, perfectly blind. Then he said, quite quietly, "Go! The station you want is Waybrook. Drive five miles inland, on the road to Benning's Point; about three miles south of the Hoover estate. The left-hand side of the road; an old house newly fixed up and painted yellow. Pascoe's the name. And, for God's sake, go quickly."

The District-Attorney sat back and wiped his forehead. It had been a hard day's work. "Don't you, Herrick, want to take a look at the curiosity without which I might as well have asked a clam for a Fourth of July oration?"

The hair was spread out and thinned under the lamp. And now Herrick could see distinctly that it was of two shades. The outer curl was the dark red of Nancy Cornish; hidden within it was a smaller lock of a singularly fine light shade, like the red of golden fire. This it was which had wrung the address from Denny and stricken down Christina in a faint.

"Nancy Cornish hid it there in the message she was allowed to send," guessed Herrick. "She was certain Miss Hope would know the head it came from."

"Then I needn't point out to a gentleman of your discernment that it was the head which astonished Joe Patrick on the night of Ingham's murder. Directly afterward, I think Miss Hope stored that head, inconspicuously, with her friends in the Arm of Justice."

Denny, rabid with impatience, seemed eating them alive with his savage eyes. "Start!" he bit out. "Go, can't you? Go! What are you waiting for?"

Kane looked up at him with a smile of triumphant ice. "We're waiting for your account of midnight in these rooms between the fourth and fifth of August. And no one stirs to Nancy Cornish till we get it."

Denny's jaw dropped and he hung against the edge of the table as if he were struck too sick to stand.

Ten Euyck, too, cried out and Kane silenced him. "Why not—since he says he's innocent?"

"You dog!" Denny groaned. "You won't save her?"

"*You* won't save her—you know how!"

"Lose time and you lose everything!"

"What do you know?"

"Know! Know! Of course I know! But do you think you can make me tell? Try that game! Try it! Try! You know damned well you can't! So what'll you give for what I know?"

"You mean—?"

"Come back to me when you've found Nancy Cornish and you shall have your murderer fast enough! Every detail, every fact, every clue! Till then I don't trust you! Bring her here, bring her!" He leaned forward, beside himself; shaken and exhausted, burning with fever, weak with loss of blood, he reached toward Kane and beat the table with his wounded hands. "That's my bargain! That's my price! I'm not going to give up for nothing! You don't get my life unless you give me hers—"

"*What?*"

The great gasp broke into a buzz. Denny came slowly to himself and read what he had uttered in their looks. His face went dead, a cold sweat stood out upon it. "O!" he breathed. And once more he covered his face with his hands.

It didn't take many questions to get his story from him after that.

"Yes, I killed him. Yes, I'm confessing. I've got to. All right,—take it down. I killed James Ingham. I went to his apartment after my dress-rehearsal on the night of the fourth of August. I had been told that he had injured Nancy Cornish. I shot him dead. I've regretted it every moment of my life since then. That's all. What are you waiting for now?"

"Then, Miss Hope—was not in Ingham's rooms that night?"

There was a dead pause. Denny looked hard in Kane's face. "Yes," he said, "she was. She came there to try and prevent our quarrel." The men who had seen the moving-picture of the shadow breathed again.

"What did she do when you fired?"

"I sent her down to the Deutches to get a doctor. I wanted her out of the way, and I switched off the lights so she need not see how useless any doctor was!"

"How did you yourself escape?"

"Up the back stairs, across the roof, into the next house."

"But she went out of the room before you did?"

The earth swam before Herrick's eyes, and then he heard Denny's "Yes."

"Then since you were the last to leave, explain how you were able to bolt the door behind you?"

"I didn't bolt it behind me. I stayed in the room."

Herrick lifted his head.

"I had dropped my revolver and in feeling for it on the rug I got my hand stained." He spoke lower and lower, but every now and then his voice flickered, licking upward like a flame, and cracked. "I ran into the bathroom and put it under the faucet, and after that it was too late to get away. People were peering and listening from their doors. I got in a blind panic—you've noticed I'm upset by jail!—I knew I was cornered—I bolted the door. But in doing that I saw how close the portières hung." Herrick drew a long breath. "I thought once I could clear that outside room a little I could make a dash for it. To do that it was necessary to remove the magnet. I dragged Ingham's body into the bedroom. The bed's head was toward the portières. I went and stood in its shadow, in the portières' folds. Then they burst in. When Deutch held the portière aside for the policeman I was so close at his back that he touched me. When he saw me he screened me almost completely. They had been so obliging as to clear the hall. There was plenty of noise; the men were opening the closet door, a motor whirring, a trolley passing the corner; they all had their backs to me, and I made but a couple of steps of it into the hall. A few moments later I had the honor and privilege of addressing Mr. Herrick, and of hearing from him that the murderer was a lady and had not been caught."

"Deutch screened you, you say? Why?"

A queer little color came into Denny's face. "I'm fated to be ridiculous," he said. "I had seen a hooded cloak of Christina's lying on the table; it was Christina's own blue-gray; just the shade of the portières. The hood covered my head. The shadow back there is very deep. Well, Deutch

knew Christina had been there, you know. He must have left his apartment just before she got to it, for he was simply one funk of anxiety about her." Denny had to struggle up, for the interview had told on him terribly, and he kept one hand on the back of his chair. "I'm of no greatly imposing bulk," he said. "And Christina Hope is la tall woman!"

A cry came from within the portières. Denny, his self-control utterly shattered, flashed round. Henrietta Deutch greeted him with a radiant face.

"Ah, sirs, thank God! Oh, oh, it was that he saw! Mr. Deutch saw one he took for her! And Christina it could not have been! He was not two minutes gone when she was with me!"

"Thanks, Mrs. Deutch! I couldn't have trusted even you for the truth of that point if I'd simply asked you! But we must make sure that was what he saw—that and no other proof. Here's the same depth of shadow, then, and the same portières. Take this couch cover, Denny, for a cloak. Stand back, and screen your face with it.—Wade, bring in Deutch."

Herrick shuddered and anticipation choked him. This man had suffered so much for Christina, and now he was to decide her fate! The superintendent stepped into a silent room. All those eyes fed on him. The place cast its spell of horror. His plump, pale, sagging face quivered with dread; his eyes floundered from Herrick to Kane, and a kind of dumb moan burst from him. Kane pointed to the portières and his panic was complete.

"Show him, Herrick. Just as he stood, that night."

He stood there, dizzy with bewilderment, and suddenly he screamed. Gasping, he clutched at the portière through which some touch, some motion had repeated for him a dreadful moment. Behind it he once more beheld a dim, blue figure. He fell on his knees, strangling, his breath raving and rattling in his mouth, and brought out like a convulsion the one word "Christina!" Sobbing, he caught at a fragment of the cloak and covered it with piteous, protecting kisses. Denny let the cloaking stuff fall from him, and, stepping out, broken as a thing thrown away, stood in full view with hanging head. Every eye was fastened upon Deutch.

He had no need for words. What he had believed himself to have seen, what he had suffered, the mad relief, the almost ludicrous exultation in what he now learned, passed one after the other across that tormented visage and broke in one happy blubber as he ducked his head in his wife's skirts.

The relief that shook Herrick touched, too, every one in the room. No man there had really wished to sentence a girl. It was as though, at last, they had all got air to breathe. When into this new air Denny's voice broke with a sick snarl.

"And do you think you've saved her? You miserable, gabbling fools, did you think your Arm of Justice was her friend? Why, she knew no more of it than you do! If they've got the girl there, she's fighting, accusing, threatening them, she's facing her death! And now in God's name, can you hurry? Hurry!"

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## CHAPTER V

### THE WRONG SIDE OF THE LIGHT: WHERE CHRISTINA WAS

At nine o'clock on the morning of Friday, the day when Christina disappeared, there stood at the little interior station of Waybrook, awaiting the train from New York, a touring-car which had very recently been painted black. In the body of this car an observing person might have descried a couple of indentations which, were he of a sensational turn of mind, would have suggested to him the marks of bullets. This touring-car was, at that time of day, the only vehicle in waiting, and when the train rushed on again from its brief pause, only one person had alighted from it.

This was a tall woman, heavily veiled, wearing a long dark ulster, considerably too large for her, and a rather shabby black hat. This woman walked directly up to the touring-car and flung herself into it without a word. When the chauffeur turned and said to her, in surprise, "You all alone?" she responded, "Yes. And in twice the hurry on that account!" The curt command of the words did not conceal the quality of a voice which all the newspapers in New York were that morning praising; and the face from which she then lifted her veil, although furrowed with anger and ravaged with grief, was the unforgettable face of Christina Hope. She sat for the five miles which led to her destination with her eyes closed and her hands wrung tight together in her lap.

The touring-car stopped at the gate of an old yellow house, very carefully kept, its bright windows screened by curtains rather elegantly pretty; and a flagged path leading up to its brass-knocked door. On either side of the flagged path stretched a garden, a little sobered by its autumn coloring, but still abounding in the country flowers which to Bryce Herrick's admiration had kept Christina's house so sweet.

The door was opened by a small, square, hard-featured, close-mouthed old woman, very neatly dressed, with gray hair and a white apron. In other words, by the occasional cashier at the Italian table d'hôte. This woman, as the chauffeur had done, looked over Christina's shoulder in expectation and then said, grudgingly, "Oh, it's you!"

"As you see," said Christina, pressing inside. "But I shan't trouble you long. I should like some coffee, if you please. I've had no breakfast." The woman stood still, staring at Christina's ill-fitting clothes and sunken eyes, and the girl added, with the same peremptory coldness which had marked her manner from the beginning, "I must ask you to be quick. I have only come to relieve you of our guest."

"You have!" said the old woman. "Who says so?"

"I think you heard me say so," Christina responded, from the foot of the stairs.

The old woman hurried after her. "Yes, I daresay. But by whose orders?"

Christina turned round. "Who owns this place?" she demanded.

"Well, you do."

"Who pays for every mouthful that is eaten here and for everything that is brought into this house? Who makes your living for you?"

"You do, I suppose."

"Well, then, I suppose, by my orders. Where is she?"

"She's in your room, the same as ever."

"Locked in, of course?"

"Of course."

"The key, please."

The old woman hesitated, then she took the key out of her pocket. And at that moment Christina noticed something. There came from the floor above the sound of a voice speaking rapidly, incessantly, and indistinctly like a child talking to itself. An expression of amused and contemptuous malice broke upon the old woman's face and she handed over the key with greater readiness. "Much good may it do you!" said she, turning toward the kitchen.

Christina snatched it and fled upstairs. "Bring the coffee up here, please," she called over her shoulder.

For all her haste she paused at the top of the stair, and, with her hand over her heart, listened to the babbling voice. Then she turned to the right and knocked on a closed door. The voice ran on, heedlessly. "Nancy!" Christina called. "Nancy! It's I, Chris! Dear Nancy, I've come to take you home."

She was answered only by the endless repetition of some phrase, and unlocking the door, she went in.

She stepped into a charming, simple, sunny room, comfortably appointed, the windows open toward the road and their thin, flowery curtains stirring in the low, sultry wind. But on the inside of these curtains the windows were completely screened with poultry wire, and, over the door, the transom was wired, too. In the bed a young, slight girl half lay, half sat; her dark red curls had been gathered into a heavy braid and her blue eyes were blank with fever; she rocked her head from side to side upon the pillow with an indescribable weariness, and without breath, without change, with a monotonous and yet agitated inflection, she repeated over and over again the same phrases: "No, no, no, no! I don't believe it! Oh, Will, Will, Will, I don't believe it! You did it yourself! You did it yourself! You did it yourself! Ask Nancy Cornish!" And then, always with a little listening pause, "I'll promise anything!"

Christina shrank back against the door-jamb as if she were going to fall.

"Whatever does this mean? How came she like this? Oh, God!" she breathed, "what shall I do? What can I do?"

"Oh, Will, Will, Will!" said the other voice. "No, no, no, I don't believe it!"

"Ah, me!" Christina breathed. "Nor I! If only I hadn't been there, and seen!"

"You did it yourself! You did it yourself! You did it yourself! Ask Nancy Cornish!"

Christina sank on her knees beside the bed, in an agony of terror and tenderness, and for the first time since she had seen the lock of hair, her tears poured forth. But she took the girl's hand and held it; and she tried to master those feverish eyes with the eyes of her own despair. "Nancy!" she said, "Nancy! It's Christina. Nancy dear, it's Chris. Oh, try to know me. Look at me. Listen to me. You must know me. You shall. Nancy, stop it! Stop it and look at me!—Oh, God!" Christina prayed. "Help me! Help me!" She caught the sick girl in her arms and covered the young little face with tears and kisses.

And as she held Nancy on her breast she became aware of a thin ribbon round the girl's neck, with a key to it. She picked up this strange ornament, and immediately Nancy's fingers came creeping in search of it and she cried out. Christina dropped it and rose to her feet. "Why!" she said aloud. "It's the key to my desk!" The desk stood against the wall and she tried it. It was locked. Nancy lay almost quiet clutching the key. Christina stood there, puzzled.

In a drawer of the dressing-table there was a key much the same in shape and size. Christina took it out, drew the ribbon from Nancy's neck, and, steeling her heart, plucked open Nancy's hand. The girl set up a shrill cry but was instantly quieted by the substitute key; the old woman could be heard rattling with a tray at the foot of the stairs.

Christina sprang to the desk and opened it; it was in order and almost empty, containing no object that Christina did not know. She pulled open one after the other of the three little drawers. And thus she came, with an amazed start, upon a bulky envelope bearing an address which was the last she could have expected. The envelope was addressed to the District-Attorney of New York.

Christina appropriated it without pause or scruple, slipped it into her little handbag and restored Nancy's property almost with one swift movement. She was sitting on the edge of the bed in an attitude of listless dejection when the housekeeper entered with the tray.

"Well," said the old woman, "why don't you take her? Mebbe everything ain't just as you expected. What'd she yell out like that for?"

"I touched that ribbon round her neck. What has she got clutched in her hand?"

"Oh, just some old trash! Better leave it be. She yells blue murder if you try to take it away from her."

These two truthful ladies looked down together on the turning head and chattering lips and the eyes burning with fever. "Ain't it a sight?" said the old woman. "It's wonderful what frettin' 'll do. She ain't been like this but since Wednesday. She kep' up surprisin' until then. Guess her not hearin' anything from you set her off. She counted on that. I'd know why she sh'd be so terrible set on gettin' away from here. She's been well treated. When there's been anybody here fit to keep an eye on her, she ain't even been locked up. Nicola fastened down the window in the closet where you had the sink put in—y' know, under the stairs?—in case she sh'd take to carryin' on. But mercy me, we found out soon enough that wa'n't the idea. She's had the best in the house.—Well, you 'bout scalded yerself."

"I'm in a hurry," said Christina, setting down the empty coffee-cup. "Where are some loose clothes for her?"

"Land sakes!" said the old woman. "You want to kill her!"

Christina went to a closet and found some skirts and a cloak.

"Please go down," she said, "and tell Nicola to put the hood up and let down the rain curtains."

The old woman's suspicion and resentment had never been allayed, but she kept them choked under. "Well," said she, "I s'pose it's all right. I guess she's goin' t' die anyhow. An' I guess it's 'bout the best thing she can do. I dunno what on earth we're goin' t' do with her if she don't. I ain't goin' to stand for any o' them Dago actions. But I dunno as I can always put a veto on 'em!—Well, I don't see as you got any call to make such a face as that—seems to me that Denny fellow got a long way ahead o' anything any o' our boys done, if they are Dagoes!"

"Take my message to Nicola, please," Christina said, "and don't stand there talking. Hurry!"

The old woman got as far as the door. "I s'pose you know's well as anybody why she's here!" she said, intently studying Christina's face. She went out and downstairs muttering. "But I'd jus' like to know why you're takin' a hand in it! The idea! I guess that Denny feller—" The front door closed after her; Christina looked out of the window and saw her speaking with Nicola.

She had Nancy partly dressed, and now wrapped her in the cloak. "What am I to ask you, my poor Nancy? Do you know what he never would tell me—how that door came to be bolted?" The girl's babble kept on undiminished. "God forgive me!" Christina cried, "if I do wrong!" With a strong effort, she lifted the girl in her arms.

And then she was struck still by a sudden sound. It was the sound of the automobile racing down the road.

She laid Nancy down and ran to the window; she flew downstairs and opened the front door. The rear of the car in which she had arrived, speeding in an opposite direction, was still visible in its own dust. Had Nicola gone to borrow rain curtains or some tool? Puzzled, Christina called to the old woman. "Mrs. Pascoe!" Getting no answer she went into the dining-room and from thence to the kitchen; they were empty. Her glance scoured the weedy homeliness of the backyard. She went to the shed, to the barn; they were deserted. A strange silence had fallen upon the place. In the hot lowering sunshine the girl stood still, and for the first time the cold fingers of suspicion began to creep along her pulse.

She had been very sure of her position, and she felt, as yet, nothing that could be called fear. But the defiance of her authority was amply evident. She knew now that she had been a fool to come here alone, to depend entirely on her personal force. But her mouth set itself in a smile like light on steel. Did they know what they were doing when they pushed her to the wall like this? Perhaps, in some way, they counted on the time it would take her to leave Nancy behind her and go for help—the nearest house was half a mile away. Leave Nancy behind her! For reply Christina sped into the hall, and caught up the New York telephone book. She ran her finger down a column until, having come to the number 3100 Spring, she picked up the receiver.

Something said, in her little steely smile, that with the utterance of that number she would throw a world away. The number was that of Police Headquarters.

The exchange was a long time answering. Christina shook the receiver hook vigorously. Still silence. As she gave an impatient movement something brushed, swinging, against her wrist. It was a loose end of dark green cord from the receiver in her hand. The wire had been cut.

Christina remained there quite quiet, while that cold hand of the suspicion that was now certainty seemed to stop her heart. She remembered that, in the world of help she was cut off from, not a living human being knew where she was. Well, she was a strong girl. She said to herself, "It is better Nancy should die on the road in my arms than that I should leave her here!" She ran up to Nancy's room. When she had first descended to the road, some one must have mounted the back stairs. Nancy's door was locked.

With a firm step Christina entered the kitchen and opened the table-drawer. They had thought of that, too. Everything with which a lock might be pried open had been swept up and away. Christina lifted a dining-room chair and carried it upstairs.

She brought it down with all the force she had upon the lock. Failing in this, she held the chair in front of her and charged the door with it. But whereas in anything requiring swiftness, elasticity, endurance even, Christina was as strong as wire, she had absolutely no weight. After half a dozen of these batteries every one of which seemed to strike through her own heart on Nancy's fever, she decided that whether or no she might shatter the door in time, time was the last thing she had to waste. And she could run half a mile like an arrow. She had all along retained her hold on the little bag which held her purse and she thanked heaven for the money in it. She had her hand on the front door when she was arrested by the sound of voices and approaching footsteps; Mrs. Pascoe's, Nicola's and the heavier step of an older man.

From her earlier confidence Christina had now jumped to an extreme of accusation in which any violence seemed probable. Mad to get away for help, it seemed better to delay for a moment or two than to be caught. She slipped back across the hall and hid herself in the little closet under the stairs. She was scarcely secure there when the front door opened, and Christina hardly dared to breathe lest the click of her own door closing should have betrayed her presence. To her highly wrought nerves the utter darkness, the airless pressure of her sanctuary were terrible, and she found and held the knob that at the first stillness she might slip out. She could hear calling and running about; she could hear them talking in Nancy's room. After a while, the men went out and then she heard Mrs. Pascoe come downstairs and the dining-room door close after her. The time had come. Christina, all her life subject to fainting-fits, felt that she scarcely could have borne, for a moment longer, that black airlessness. With infinite softness, she turned the knob. And then, indeed, her heart stood still. Mrs. Pascoe had omitted to mention one improvement with which, in preparation for Nancy's occupancy, the outside of the closet-door had been fortified. This improvement was a Yale lock.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE YELLOW HOUSE AND WHAT THEY FOUND AT IT

It was after midnight when Stanley Ingham stopped his car and yielded up the steering-wheel to Herrick. Besides themselves their car carried three of Kane's detectives and they were followed by the sheriff and a roadster full of armed men.

The detectives had a secondary mission. At the last minute Kane had received a message from a much concerned elderly cousin of Joe Patrick's. This cousin was a waiter at "Riley's," a roadhouse which was not only a cheap edition of the aristocratic Palisades, whence Christina had disappeared, but was kept by a brother-in-law and erstwhile partner of the Palisades' proprietor. The waiter at Riley's declared that a drunken taxi-driver had just turned up with a note from the Palisades urging Riley's to keep him over night. This man was quite drunk enough to talk about having lost his place through obliging the Palisades and Joe's cousin volunteered to keep an eye on him till the arrival of the detectives. These were to return to New York with their prisoners of the yellow house not from Waybridge, but from Benning's Point, stopping on the way to that station at Riley's and telephoning thence all news to Kane.

At Waybridge they had been fortunate in finding the sheriff up and starting forth after some marauders who were reported to have robbed a still burning post-office at Benning's Point; the station agent whom they found with him had seen Nicola, that morning, meet a lady with that old car of his that he had painted black when there was so much talk about those New York Guinees having a gray one; the agent was sure the lady had taken no return train.

From both him and the sheriff it was evident that the Pascoes as foreigners, had been contemptible, but not disliked. The unpopular person was a boarder they had; a woman with red hair who stayed out there to write novels and thought she was so much too good for other people that she never so much as passed the time of day with anybody. Friends of hers did come out from the city to see her sometimes. Going or coming from the city herself she was tied up in one of those automobile veils—might 'uv been her come back this morning, only she looked kind of

shabby-dressed. The sheriff added that there was old Mrs. Pascoe, Nicola's mother, as nice a little woman as you'd want to see; real neat, trim, gray-haired lady, an American lady. Herrick suddenly turned and stared.

But now they were within half a mile of the Pascoe house. Stanley and the detectives crowded into the sheriff's car. They had been instructed to send Herrick on alone; he was to attempt an entrance by a message of urgent and friendly warning, endeavoring to get the lay of the land and to make his presence known to any watchful captive, but otherwise awaiting reinforcements. One of the detectives said to Herrick, "If they won't let you in, just leave your message. And let them hear you drive off. Then we'll get together."

Herrick ran the car slowly along the unfamiliar road. This was still clogged and rutted with mud, which had begun to stiffen since the rain had stopped; a high wind shouldered the clouds in driving masses. His destination was the second house on his left; and, as he peered along the roadside, the deep excitement, the terrible questions which glowed in that dark night, worked in him with a fearful gladness. Certainty was at hand! A bitter exultation rode within him nearer and nearer to whatever stroke Fate stood to deal him in the yellow house. A hundred visions of Christina shone and darkened before him, leaping along his pulse, and his blood sang in him with a kind of madness.—The second house on the left! There it rose, a blot on the blackness! Dark as a stone, it somehow struck cold on his hot hopes.

He brought up the car before the gate and flung a falsely cheerful halloo upon the wind. Nothing answered. The gate yielded to his hand; as he went up the path a fragrance greeted him like Christina's presence—the cold, moist air was filled with the sweetness of old-fashioned, garden flowers. His fingers missed the bell; but, lighting on the brass knocker, sent loud reverberations through the house. Nothing within it seemed to stir. But the silence echoed horribly and swung, quaking, in his breast. Of a sudden he knew that house was empty.

Nothing else mattered. Discretion ceased to exist. He drew back and scanned the vacant, shuttered windows; he ran round the house; there was still no light; he tried the kitchen door and drew back to listen; it was as though within the house he could hear silence walking and her step was ominous. He put his shoulder to the kitchen door and burst it in.

Once again, as on that night in August, a dark room lay waiting; the darkness seemed to breathe. He had matches in his pocket and once again the light discovered only emptiness. But he remembered what, that other time, the inner chamber had revealed. He found a candle and then a lamp, and, lighting that, crossed the dining-room and then the hall into the living-room. All prettily upholstered, all in order, and vacant as the eye of idiotcy. His soul knew there was nothing living in that house; and yet it seemed to him there would surely be a step upon the stair, that a voice behind him or an opening door would certainly reveal some fateful presence. There in the hall, under the stairs, a door was open and he paused to look into a closet.

It contained a sink with running water, gardening tools, wraps hanging upon nails, and, on the floor, a big silk umbrella without a handle, the rod recently broken. There were also some old flower-pots, two of them half full of earth. Nothing else.

At the foot of the stairs he called out, "Christina!" and stood and listened while his voice went dying about the empty house. "Christina—it's I—Bryce!" and then "Nancy Cornish! Can you hear me, Nancy Cornish?" But no face leaned over the balusters to him. He went upstairs. But his step was heavy, and up there the silence weighed on him, like silence in a vault. Two rooms on the left told him nothing. But in a room on his right he found a small forgotten slipper. That slipper had fitted the slim foot of some littler maid than Christina! Holding the lamp high, he was struck to see the transom covered with poultry-wire. He went at once to the windows. Yes, there were the holes in the woodwork; even, here and there, a nail. There had been poultry wire over the windows, too. In this room some one had been held a prisoner. They had taken her away; and in such haste that they had forgotten to strip the transom and they had forgotten her slipper. At one side of the room a desk lay open, all its drawers pulled out and empty; he snatched at the waste basket; there was a crumpled sheet of paper in it and a handful of torn-up scraps. He shook the scraps into his handkerchief and, setting the lamp on the desk, he bent above the crumpled sheet. There leaped before him, in an illiterate, but very firm hand, an opening of such unimpeachable decorum as to stagger his prying eyes.

Mrs. Hope,  
Honored Madam,

There was no date or other heading. The note ran:

Mrs. Hope,  
Honored Madam,

Would say don't come here or send. You can tell where by knowing my handwriting. She is not here. Where she is now I got no idee on earth. I surmise she will be heard from.

There was no signature. Why had the letter not been sent? It had evidently been volunteered upon some early intimation of Christina's disappearance. "Perhaps they found out, later, that Mrs. Hope had gone away—" Then he heard Stanley hailing him from the road.

The sheriff's party, taking advantage of his house breaking, were with him immediately. They

examined the place from the small, bare, air-chamber into which Stanley, mounting on Herrick's shoulders, stuck his head, to the cellar; where only a coal-bin, almost empty beneath their flinching quest, an ice-box, and an admirable array of preserves confronted them.

Upstairs, clothes had been found in all the closets—the clothes of working people for the most part; but in one, the long, slim, sophisticatedly simple gowns of a pretty woman. In that room they had forced another desk, which kept them busy for a while with tradesmen's bills, all made out, regularly enough, to Nicola Pascoe. Nowhere was there a letter, no significant writing nor any other name. In the barn a couple of trunks disgorged only some winter coats and a smell of camphor; the tools in the shed were in empty order, and when, considerably soiled and stuck about with lint and hay, they met again in the composed and pretty living-room, there on the mantelshelf the face of Christina Hope smiled mockingly at them from a silver frame. Indifferent to prayer or scrutiny, it had nothing to tell them. And it seemed to ask if they, on their part, had anything to say.



**Nowhere was there a letter, no significant writing nor any other name.**

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Herrick never knew what instinct took him back to the closet under the stairs. He could not bear to leave it; there was a little broken glass on the floor and a sudden wavering in his lamp suggested that this came from a break in one of the minute panes in a small window over head. He tried to reach this window to see if it were fastened and found it nailed down, with outside shutters that were closed. But in getting near enough for this he knocked over one of the flower-pots. "Find anything?" Stanley cried, bounding forward.

The smashed flower-pot lay at their feet. "No, only broken something!" Herrick instinctively picked it up and the loosened earth parted in his hand. "Yes, after all," he said, "I think I have." There had been buried, smooth and deep in the flower-pot, the diamond necklace.

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## CHAPTER VII

### VANISHING LADY: THE SHADOW AT THE DANCE

The countryside slept vigorously and an hour's exhaustive inquiry gleaned but the one circumstance—the search party itself discovered, pinned to the first door they came to, a note informing the neighbor he might have the livestock in lieu of certain debts. It had not been there when the man had closed his house at nine o'clock. This limitation of time was their sole reward, unless they counted the talk of an old farmer, after the sheriff, promising to drop the detectives at Riley's, had gone on to his post-office. The farmer said that hours ago, when he'd been ever so long in bed and asleep, he thought he heard somebody hollerin' an' bangin' on his door. Kind o'



half dreamed it. Kind o' half fancied it was a woman's voice. Storm was so bad he warn't sure. It was with this pale fancy to keep them company that Herrick and Stanley let out their car along the road again, this time in a dryly nipping air and under a troubled, scudding moon.

From that desert purity and freedom of cold space Riley's accosted them like Babylon. It was one glare and glare of hot lights and jiggling music; colored globes over the gates, colored lanterns in the garden; along the driveway the blazing headlights of continually arriving and departing motor cars that hissed and shrieked and shuddered; on the veranda, where the tables indeed were nearly deserted, fur-coated men stood smoking huge cigars and women with complexions artificially secure against the wind passed in and out; their solitaire earrings pushed forward beyond the streaming scarlet or purple of the veils that bound their heads. The change of atmosphere warmed Herrick with that unreasonable anger which the young feel against those who do not suffer when they suffer.

He followed Stanley Ingham morosely through the hubbub and felt no fitting gratitude for the table miraculously provided with a fortifying meal, since Thompson, the chief detective, had not yet been able to get Kane upon the 'phone. The cabman was upstairs under guard of the others, babbling some trash about having taken the lady to the Amsterdam hotel and left her there. The thick smoke, the smell of wine and food and abominable coffee, the clatter of cheap china, the banging of the music and the motions of the "trotting" dancers in street dress, the cries of acquaintances urging them to new contortions, disgusted Herrick and set an edge upon the iron of his self-contempt. The woman calling and knocking in the night confronted him like a ghost, in the rank profusion and fever of that place. He, to eat and drink and wile away the time; what was *she* doing? Was that she who had begged in vain for shelter, beaten by the wind and drenched by the storm, and with God knew what terrors in her heart! Out of her pale face, with the rain upon it, her eyes besought him.

Stanley, anxious, but waving a cigar, for at twenty an adventure is still an adventure, commented, "Say, old man, you want to relax! I could let things wear on me, too, if I wanted to!—What are those?"—For the detective having again fidgetted to the 'phone, Herrick had shaken out upon the table-cloth the handful of torn scraps from the waste-paper basket.

They were in the same handwriting as the interrupted note, but much more hurried and scrawled on cheap pad paper as if to a more intimate associate. Only six of them were of appreciable size and these came to Herrick's hand in this order—

This time	get rid of her.
I say. She	but she can't g
real dau	mother

et rid	do the way
	een any
	but

She can	she's got to
mebbe	ain't ever b
of	ghter to me

At the phrase "get rid of her" Stanley quailed. But what the words brought clearest to Herrick's mind was a small, spare face in its gray frame bent above its game of solitaire. Without help from the law could he make her speak? He heard Stanley saying, "How did Chris ever get mixed up with this lot? What kind of hold *can* they have on her?" "Sssh!" he said, dropping his handkerchief over the scraps. The detective was returning.

Thompson sat down at their table, balked and restive, and Herrick, a hundred times more so, was reduced to scowling at their surroundings. Near him sat a wrinkled, enameled, fluffy mite stubbing out her cigarette as she giggled at a masculine bulk whose face Herrick could not see. Dark and handsome as it vaguely promised to be this did not account for a curiosity which Herrick somehow at once felt to see it; but between them reared a gorged Amazon with a high bust and a coiffure of corrugated brass. The band struck up again, this time to a music-hall ditty, so that the customers kept their seats. But the hired singers were straining their poor voices above the tumult and some musicians blacked up as negroes joined in the chorus, performing shuffles as they walked up and down and slapping steps with a dreary, noisy simulation of irrepressible glee; infected by this whirl of gaiety the Amazon frisked back from the little dyed man to whom she had been bending and gave Herrick a clear view of a portly seigneur with a close beard. Instinct had not misled his curiosity; the portly seigneur was his old acquaintance, Signor Emile Gabrielli.

He could not have told why this struck him as portentous. The men smiled and bowed. Then Gabrielli bowed to Stanley. "Didn't you know?" Stanley asked. "He brought us letters—this is his first visit. He's going to do our Italian correspondence."

It was the more remarkable that there should be, in Signor Gabrielli's honeyed civility, a kind of

chill. Then Herrick remembered that he, at least, was a marked man and that his old suspicion of shady corners in the lawyer's experience had been partly due to that gentleman's extreme dislike of being "mixed up" in things. Henrietta Deutch could also have borne witness to that characteristic! Far from advancing toward their old familiarity the signor began to round up his innocent flock and insinuate it mildly from Herrick's polluted neighborhood. And though this splendor retreated Herrick did not regret being left alone, as if beside the dear ghost with the rain upon its face!

But there was a singular beating at his heart, a feeling that he was plucking at a veil which he longed and feared to raise. Yet that at some other time he had raised it and lived through a shock upon the threshold of which he stood again. It was already time for another dance and the groups about the tables rose to their feet. Herrick had a moment's vision, fever keen, of the room's arrested motion. Even the Gabrielli party paused in the doorway; Herrick was moved by an uncontrollable impulse to follow and accost the Italian and oddly impelled by his excitement Stanley, too, rose to his feet; all round them the couples clasped each other; the musicians lifted their bows; after ten minutes' enforced repose the whole world seemed to hang in expectation of the maxixe. When, just ahead of the orchestra, from somewhere outside, beyond, above, into that instant's perfect silence there thrilled forth the voice of a single instrument; the full-tongued call of a piano, leaping, swelling, swaying into the march from Faust!

A gasp of amazement, a prickle, a shudder, ran over the skin of that susceptible assembly. It was a tune, just then, so well advertised! They recovered themselves with amused, scared smiles, awaiting some jest in the sequel. The piano stopped with a wild crash. Instantly, from the front courtyard where the motors waited, a bomb of oaths, cries and movement burst upon the night. The sound of men jumping and running, exclaiming, stumbling, swearing, of people bounding up the steps, of the hall filled with astonished, excited questioners merged with one phrase growing over, topping all the others—"The shadow! It's the shadow! The shadow on the blind!"

Amazement, bewilderment, incredulity, obstructed the story which Herrick traced to a knot of chauffeurs. "Yes—up there! The third window! Look, it's dark—they've turned out the lights!" As Stanley, Herrick and Thompson ran to the second story the legend still beat about their ears. "It had its back to the window—it threw out its right arm—"

The door of the room was thrown open. The proprietor's wife, shaken with hysterical laughter, ushered in the crowd. She was a flushed, stout woman in the gaudiest of kimonos, larger than the fat man in the driving-coat to whom she appealed. "My brother here 's from Mizzouri and I was just showing him how the shadow must have done—you can't earn any reward's round here! Anyhow, you don't suppose that hussy spends all her time giving signals for murders, do you?"—"But the shadow was so slim!" somebody said, as Mrs. Riley scornfully assisted Thompson in his researches. These coming to nothing the young men were powerless to refuse going oil to Benning's Point and telephoning from there—Thompson had begun to be suspicious of this exchange.

They had gone perhaps a mile, moving slowly, watchful of the leaves in every bush, and Herrick was remounting from the examination of a false alarm when they heard a hail in their rear and beheld approaching through the moonlight a hatless figure on a motorcycle.

The elderly cousin of Joe Patrick, whom they had not seen since he first welcomed them, bore down upon them in timid and disheveled haste.—"Yis, sor. I tried to see y' alone, sor, but yeh were gone. 'T is the reward, sor; I'd not be sharin' it with the policeman an' him takin' th' whole of it, not a doubt! An' impidence, beside, they do always give yeh! But a gintleman, sor, I don't mind tellin' him; if yeh 'll excuse me sayin' so, Mrs. Riley's a liar!"

Not that he really knew anything. "No more than yirselves! But the piana, sor! It stands there fer the upstairs dances, an' her not knowin' wan note from another!—An' what's more, comin' down the back stairs from that same room wid the dhirty dishes, what did I see standin' at the back door but a car like yer own—only still as death an' no lights in its head! Wasn't that a queer thing, now? An' it gone whin I rode out."

What was that?—down the road which crossed theirs, where they had just reconnoitered for a sound! Nothing but their distorted fancy, their roused longing! "An' all I can tell surely, sor, is that awhile back, whin Riley sinds me upstairs with a bite o' supper for Mrs. Riley's brother that's just come in, barrin' the long drink, stheamin' hot, 'twas chicken an' like that yeh'd give to a lady. He has his own room, has the brother, but 'twas to hers I took the thray. An' though I saw no wan an' I heard no wan, yit sure there was some wan beyond Riley she was yellin' at an' him prayin' her 'Hoosh! Hoosh!' as I come to the door!"

"Did you hear anything of what she was saying?"

"Just the wan thing, sor, an' you'll remimber 'twas me told yeh. She said, 'I'll thank yeh to hand over that diamond necklace!'"

There was something there! They could not hear, but they could somehow feel from far behind them a stealthy purring. They turned; no lamp nor headlight but their own was anywhere to be seen. The second and less traveled road crossed theirs just above them at a narrow angle; but it, too, lay untenanted, not a breath quivering on the stillness. They saw themselves quite alone beneath the moon, breathing a night silence drenched with coldest sweetness; the last words rang in their blood with an accent that could not leave them wholly sober; they were, perhaps, a little "fey." At any rate, it was by an impulse with which reason had nothing to do that, as the old

waiter continued—"Twas for her, surely, they'd have that dark car waitin'!" Herrick held up a warning hand. The waiter hushed himself, stricken, and huddled in against their car; Herrick bent forward in a passionate readiness, and from far in the rear, but nearing swifter than the flight of time, along the intersecting road came the tremulous vibration of a second automobile.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### JILL-IN-THE-BOX! THE LAST OF THE GRAY TOURING CAR

They listened, incredulous, straining their eyes among the black pools and bright patches of wooded, winding way up from the river and discerned—almost on the instant close at hand—a gray ghost dipped in moonshine; lost under the trees and then springing out upon them, a black shape against the darkness, heralded by no sound of voice or horn, speeding as if with its head down like some sullen thunderbolt.

With their lights blazing defiance Herrick, catching out his revolver, attempted to cross the junction in time to throw their own car across the narrow road. He was too late; she grazed them as she passed; they fell in behind her, shouting threats which were lost in the wind of that flight; the road fell away before them; the hilled and wooded earth tore past; the noise, as of blowing forests, of multitudinous crowds and the roaring of the sea, surged in their ears; great waves and solid hills of air rose up and moved upon them, and, as they passed through, split into stinging, icy shreds that whipped their faces; the car rocked in the wild tide of its own speed, and in a world where they had gone blind to everything but one crazy whirl, they yet saw their lights fall ever nearer and brighter upon the fugitive.

It was now nearing three o'clock, the moon wholly victorious and the cars leaping through a world of molten silver. Herrick said to the boy beside him, "Can you shoot?"

"Not so that you can tell it!"

"Take the wheel, then!"

He could not make out her figure in the car. But in such thickly looming dangers, what must be, must be.

The men ahead heard him call to them to stop before he fired. In answer they merely leaned forward shielding themselves, and Herrick let fly two shots, aiming for the back tires; but, in that swaying speed, he missed. With a kind of harsh gaiety he answered Stanley, "No more can I!" and with the words the man beside Nicola turned and fired straight at Herrick's head. The wind-shield shattered in their faces; as the bullet passed between them Stanley felt a little sting, like the scorch of a quick, hot iron, on his cheek. "Slide down," Herrick said to him, "way under the wheel! Keep your head to one side." He himself was kneeling, resting his revolver on the frame of the broken wind-shield. At his third bullet they heard Nicola cry out and clap his hand to the back of his neck; the touring-car swerved and gave a kind of bounce; the man beside Nicola fired again and put a hole through Herrick's cap. The next minute the revolver dropped out of his hand; Herrick's fourth shot had broken his wrist. And now the road broadened a little, and the Ingham car was drawing on a level with its opponent. The touring-car did not carry Christina.

"Get as far forward as you can," Herrick said, "I'm after the front tires."

Their own front tires passed the rear of the first car; as they came abreast the man with the broken wrist, using his left hand, emptied his pistol almost in their faces; a shot from the man in the body of the car struck their steering-wheel; there was a cloud now between the two cars, smelling so thick of powder that Stanley seemed to himself to eat it. He was aware of Herrick suddenly casting aside all defenses, leaning forward into this cloud, his brows knotted and his arm outstretched. There came the quick Ping!—Ping! of his last two shots and as if in the same breath, the earthquake! The black touring-car seemed to spring into the air; then her fore wheels collapsed and she sank forward, still sliding a little as if on her nose, and, running quietly over the edge of the road into the shallow ditch that edged it, turned on her side.

They were well passed by this time, and despite the jerk with which Stanley brought up, Herrick had leaped out before they were stopped, and at the same moment a figure scrambled from the fallen hulk and, without a glance behind, made off across the fields. Herrick, shifting his empty revolver as he ran, till he carried it by the barrel, swung into full pursuit.

This was the more foolhardy because on getting to his feet Nicola had drawn his own revolver, from which Herrick had to dodge as he ran, and at length indeed to throw himself down, and get forward only by his hands and knees. They were now in a broken, stony lot, spotted with underbrush; a brook running through it, and here and there tall chestnut trees. By screening himself with these, and making a run for it in any patch of shadow, he kept his man in sight and even gained upon him; he was waiting till Nicola's gun should be as empty as his own before he came to closer quarters. For this he knelt and rose and ran and crawled, now showing himself, to draw—and waste!—a bullet; and now plumping down among bushes. It was at one of these moments that he heard a shot behind him and, peering through the screen of twigs, saw that Nicola's comrades had freed themselves from the ditch and were advancing, apparently full-

armed, and he of the uninjured hand beating the coverts as they came. They called to each other, and in Italian sure enough; and they carried a lantern from Stanley's car. What had become of Stanley? And what now was he himself to do?

He crept forward to the edge of his thicket and could just make out a figure, not very far off, running heavily across a cleared space. Then, in a blanket of darkness, the figure disappeared as though through a trap-door, and Herrick, for all his listening, could hear only the calling and trampling of the men with the lamp. He told himself that Nicola had taken a leaf from his own book and was perhaps lying flattened to the earth—there came a disturbance in the bushes, a jar along the ground, as of some one plunging back from that cleared space toward the road; it appeared to him that a bulk of blacker blackness appeared and disappeared where those sounds rose. But the moon had so gone under a cloud that he could not be sure. So he thought; and then his heart leaped to admit the blessed truth—the moon had set! He slipped to his feet and fled, swift as a shadow and strong as a hound, after the heavier runner. He had guessed the truth, that Nicola was returning to the road. He had been led out across the fields on a false scent, but now Nicola, thinking to have doubled and shaken him off, was on the home trail straight for the high road. They came out upon it perhaps two hundred feet to the south of their empty motors; Herrick steadily gaining, and surprised cries and lantern-flashes piercing the field they had left behind. But as Herrick lifted his gun to let the lagging quarry have its butt-end, suddenly Nicola pitched forward and lay at his feet. He brought up short, suspicious of a trick. And then he remembered how Nicola had clapped his hand to the back of his neck. Holding the gun ready, he stooped and put his own hand to the same spot. It was covered with something hot and wet, which Herrick, with a surprising lack of sentiment, wiped off on the man's coat; he tried to lift the senseless figure and get it back to his own car. Something fell out of Nicola's breast with a little silver tinkle. The sound, as of some woman's trinket, drove the sense out of Herrick's head. Though he might as well have run up an electric target, he struck a match. A silver locket lay in his hand. It had been violently wrested from a neck-chain in whose wrenched links a thread or two of lace still clung. In one broken side the glass had been ground to fragments, as though under a man's heel, but the marred lines of a likeness were still there. The likeness, cut from an old kodak picture, was of Will Denny. Some one, like Signor Gabrielli, had never voluntarily parted with the features of her love! Out of the locket's other side, warm from Nicola's breast and unmarred but by the trickling of his blood, cried mutely, eagerly, to Herrick the fresh youth of Nancy Cornish.

Almost as he saw the bullets sang about him, as if he had charged into a bee hive. The lamp the Italians carried swallowed up his little match and picked him out with brightness, holding him in the circle of its light. He snatched up Nicola's gun and pulled the trigger, but the barrel was empty as that of his own; he might have flung himself down and taken his chance to crawl off in the ditch, but he had no mind to die like that; and what he did was to snatch off his coat and hold it before him, back and forth like a moving screen, as he ran forward into the mouth of the revolvers to crack at least one man on the head with his cold weapon before he fell. Just then from down the road a fresh volley of bullets shattered the night, and the voice of Stanley and the sheriff came to him like music.

The rescue which so much firing had helped Stanley to summon swept in full chase after the Pascoes and the tables were completely turned. But the shouts of the sheriff's party—"Got one?" "No; haven't you?" "Hi, Williams, they must have got over the wall of the Hoover place!" "We'll scramble over from the hood and see if they've struck down to the river!" "Blake, you and Cobbett drive round and ring up the lodge. Them old folks are easy a million, but get 'em up!"—warned Herrick of a blank in the sequel. And sure enough when the conquerors foregathered, the escape of the Pascoes, presumably by the river, was the end of their conquest.

For this had they fought and ridden, crawled and run! No wonder they felt a certain need of cheering each other with what gains they had. There was the yellow house; the home of the Pascoes and their Arm of Justice, the rainbow end of Kane's dream! And there, in the ditch beside them was a vague tumble of wreckage. "Hail, and farewell!" Herrick whistled, with a curious laugh. "We've met once too often!" For there, at least, was the end of his acquaintance, the gray touring-car.

As the two young men reëntered New York with the milk wagons and drove soberly through the Park, a cool gray light, more like darkness than light and yet perfectly and strangely clear like shadowed water, had begun to break above the sleeping town. Then Herrick drew from his pocket his paper puzzle and spread it out beside him on the rear seat of the car.

This time	get rid of her.
I say. She	but she can't g
real dau	mother

et rid	do the way
	een any
	but

She can	she's got to
---------	--------------

mebbe                      ain't ever b  
of                              ghter to me

Some of the connections were obvious enough, but what the torn edges helped him still further to form was a purely domestic statement. "This time she's got to do the way I say. She ain't ever been any real daughter to me. But—" Then there was a bit gone. Then, "She can get rid of" word missing, "mebbe, but she can't get rid of her mother—"

"Well!" cried Stanley in disdainful disappointment. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"How should I know?"

He made the scraps into a little pile on the floor of the car, set fire to them, and ground them to ashes with his heel. For he knew only too well. That gray parrot face, that sharp, ignorant, cold voice in the sunny table d'hôte! "I want you should clear out from here, young man. I'd oughta know Dagoes; I married one." Yes, that was it! Wasn't it Stanley who wanted to know what hold such people had on Chris? "My girl's good Yankee—fair as any one. I brought her up so fine—" As they turned down still unawakened Broadway to his rooms Herrick looked into the light that was like darkness with eyes that made nothing of the first pale blush of peach blow nor the first hint of vaporous blue.

Till he heard Stanley say, "And if that Pascoe Arm-of-Justice gang have run away and yet come back, where did they run to?"

Through all his preoccupation Herrick was aware of an immense stupidity. "You're right. We went over that place inch by inch. And you know, when they left, they must have tumbled into their car and off—no time for anything. They packed nothing, they took nothing. Well, then, Stan, where was Justice's typewriter? And in what room or garret or cellar was the printing-press?"

Stanley gaped.

"Agreed—there wasn't any. And so that never was their real shop. Only a blind. Their real place of business, Stan, their fortress, their retreat, we've never found at all!"

This was the net result of town and country in their search for a missing girl, twenty-four hours after Christina had disappeared.

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The anxiety of her friends would have been scarcely more enlightened, or even more relieved, had the search not happened to miss one accident of that cross-wired night.

At about eleven o'clock, more than an hour before Herrick had forced an entrance, the since damaged touring-car, returning from its expedition of the morning, had drawn up before the gate of the yellow house. The night world was then still a world of wind and rain; the car was splashed as though it had passed through a flood, and Nicola, stiff, muddy and drenched, was not in a very good humor when he got no reply to his knock at the kitchen door. He had driven quietly and knocked quietly, but now he lost control of himself and began to hammer; catching hold of the knob impatiently, he felt it turn in his grasp and entered. The door had not been locked, though the kitchen was lighted. He thought he could hear, somewhere, some one knocking. He took the lamp and went up the back stairs; then it seemed to him that the knocking came from the front of the house. He retraced his steps. Yes, there was a light in the hall and the knocking came from the closet under the stairs.

The Pascoes were in desperate straits, and Nicola was alone. He drew his knife from the capacious foldings of his coat, and stepped a little behind the door as he flung it open. There stumbled out, and sank, gasping, at his feet, the figure of a woman. She brought with her, out of the reeking closet, a strong odor of ammonia. Nicola gave a grunt of amazement. Then, like Herrick afterward, he lifted his lamp, and stared about the closet. On the floor lay an empty quart bottle which had recently been full of household ammonia, a still soaking towel, and a large silk umbrella, the rod broken and the handle missing. With the point of this umbrella a pane of the little window overhead had been broken and a slant of the outside shutter forced open for air. Nicola could make nothing of it; he turned at length, and grouchily pulled the gasping woman to her feet. This woman was the gray-haired housekeeper, Mrs. Pascoe.

At ten o'clock she said she had gone to get something from the closet and, as she opened the door, she had smelled ammonia. Then a towel, soaking with it, had been pressed on her face. Before she could do more than struggle with that, she had been pushed into the closet and the door had clicked upon her. That was all she knew. She must have been unconscious part of the time.—At ten o'clock! What an eternity of despair, then, had Christina not lived through before she thus ruthlessly freed herself! And what, now, had become of her; under a dawn some seven hours later than when, leaving Nancy behind, she had rushed out of that house and sped away, along the storm-tossed road?

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## CHAPTER IX

## A SIGN IN THE SKY

At the end of four days Christina's friends gave up their private search for the retreat of the Arm of Justice.

During those days Herrick and the faithful Stanley, sometimes accompanied by Wheeler's stalwart hopefulness, had persistently attempted to take up the trail where it had broken—in the fields at one end of the Hoover estate. The beautiful old place, one of the great show places of the Hudson, stretched three miles deep to the river bank and a mile and a half along the road; remembering the theory of an escape through the grounds they presented themselves as richly tipping tourists to the little old, old couple at the lodge. These aged folk accustomed, during the Hoovers' prolonged absence abroad, to curious sightseers, welcomed them beneath the winged marble lions of the entrance-gates and made them free of the grounds with a host-like courtesy. But no broken shrubbery, no footstep save of that of a stray gardener or of their rival searchers the police, rewarded them; from the Hudson Club's boathouse, which had rented a strip of the beach, no boat was missing; the shores of unbroken woodland for a league on either side yielded no sign; when a hanging shutter at the great house led to a belief that the refugees had sheltered there the friends watched anxiously the disappointed ransacking of privileged authorities, and their only gain came from the gossip of the old lodge-keepers which informed them that the body of Nicola Pascoe had never been found. He could, then, have been only stunned. Thus it was still he they were most alert for during the next three days when the whole district—inns and post-offices, country-stores and stable-yards as well as every grove and by-lane—yielded them by day or night no scrap of news.

During their search, indeed, what clues existed had crumbled away. The cabman, for instance, had most truly driven Christina to the Amsterdam hotel, where she had simply given him so large a tip as to upset his sobriety and earn his discharge. Meeting in with the manager of The Palisades and applying fuddleheadedly for relief he had conveyed to that gentleman the idea of "knowing something," and had been sent to sober up at Riley's in order to keep the reward in the family. Then the day-clerk of the Amsterdam brought forth Christina's registered signature, engaging a suite on Thursday afternoon for Thursday night; she had claimed this suite from the night-clerk and occupied it; early in the morning she had sent for the housekeeper and hired some clothes of hers, saying she couldn't wait for her maid to bring her any. The frightened housekeeper had at length displayed the white and silver dress. Last and worst, to Herrick, when, on Saturday, he had sought out the table d'hôte, the dogs, the cats, the babies were unchanged, the Italian proprietress greeted him with a smile of welcome, but no gray-haired woman played solitaire behind the desk.

It was a curious enough blight without being heightened by the fact that Kane's patience with Herrick had plainly given out. Ever since the young man's return from Waybridge he had been aware of a change in the official attitude which rendered it suddenly impossible for him to see any one whom he asked to see and stretched like a fine wire excluding him from the whole affair. It increased his sense of outlawry, but a private preoccupation kept it from striking home.

This preoccupation ran parallel with, but, alas! could never be brought to meet that old story of the Hopes' love-affair which he could not help feeling to be the key to the true, the hidden, situation. That little pitted speck—and his novel! His novel of the Italian impostor! On the morrow of his chase after Nicola the table d'hôte had scarcely failed him before he was knocking at the door of Mrs. Deutch.

He took her for a walk on Riverside Drive, to be out of the way of dictographs, and laid before her not only the whole labyrinth of his perplexities but the best outline he could make of his dim conjectures. He had not failed to secure Signor Gabrielli's address from the Ingham office and he now put forward a petition which he tried not to feel monstrous. "Mrs. Deutch, there is a man who knows some strange things and strange people, who might perhaps send to Naples and receive from there a very enlightening cablegram. I am less than nothing to him, he will never send it for me. But I needn't tell you he is a man of great sensibility, very susceptible both to shame and pride. And still, after twenty-five years, he carries the miniature of his betrothed."

Mrs. Deutch looked out across the proud bright waters. Through the serene air the somber glory of an autumn leaf floated to her feet; its fellows were gathered everywhere in withered piles which shouting children rejoiced to trample into powder. "Yes," she said, by-and-by, "I will see him. There are always perhaps those of whom he is afraid. Perhaps he is like that. But it will be easy to say, 'We were very fond of each other, you and I, we were so young and you were so beautiful a person! It would be a great happiness to think that now you were brave!' I can tell him 'Christina is my youth and my prettiness and my true faith and all that you once knew.' Oh, yes, he will give them back to me! He will send your message!"

He had, indeed, sent it; but on Tuesday afternoon no reply had arrived. Having given up the countryside in despair Herrick could not keep away from the table d'hôte and, merely as a curious resort, he asked Stanley, who was returning to Springfield on Wednesday, to meet him there for dinner. He was able to show his guest the gorgeous Mr. Gumama with the knit, gloomy glories of his Saracen brow, but no mystery showed a feather. Inquiry, in his primitive Italian, elicited a statement that nearly wrenched a groan from his lips—his old lady had taken her eldest grandniece, Maria Rosa, to visit relations in the country! The mother of Maria Rosa insisted with a sweet smile that she could not remember the name of the place.

The young men sat for a while in the square, where Stanley's astuteness discovered so many blackmailers in the gentle, lolling crowd that even the statue of Garibaldi seemed scarcely safe, and then they started up Fifth Avenue; the austere, departing dignities of whose lower end never seem so faded, so historic, so composed, as in September dusks. When they made out the identity of an angular correctness sailing stiffly but handsomely some distance ahead of them, it seemed of all neighborhoods the most suitable in which to encounter Ten Euyck; yet they loitered, lacking the spirit to cope with their opportunities. And Stanley, who was still in favor with the powers, began to attempt the diversion of his moodier companion with an account of Ten Euyck's efforts to propel the Commissioner of Police. "Every little while you forget that he isn't anybody and can't do anything, even if there were anything to do. And you say to yourself, 'Golly! I'd rather Chris stayed lost than that he laid hands on her.' He looks so black and white and dried in vinegar he does get on your nerves all right. You remember what a lot of money he's got, after all, and pull and all the rest of it, and you feel as if he'd be able to find *something* against her—or, even if he didn't—"

In the warm still evening his voice had carried farther than he thought; Ten Euyck turned round and recognized them. Evidently without offense, since he stood waiting for them to overtake him. "Good news for you, Ingham," he greeted the boy. "Judge Fletcher does not consider a confession equivalent to pleading guilty in the first degree! Moreover, in strict confidence, the judge is a veteran with an extreme distaste for the artistic temperament! If the prisoner is brought before him we shall get a first degree sentence yet!"

"Oh, I don't care!" cried the lad, making a disgusted face. "It's all too horrible and—and queer, somehow! I don't want to hear about it."

"Oh, if your consideration is for the actor in the lady's cloak—what a symbol of his whole conduct!—I understand he prefers it." Ten Euyck gave a short laugh. He was evidently in his happy vein of inquisitorial power. "When a man's been ruffling before the public in lace and satin and diamonds of course he baulks at prison accommodations. Yet even there our temperamental friend is welching."—He had evidently approached his point and they could not deny him the tribute of a stare.

"We may be very foolish, my dear sirs, but we are not incapable of learning and I may tell you that we have acted on a hint."

"You mean by 'we' yourself and the law?"

"Perhaps I do, Mr. Herrick. At any rate, this time to-morrow we shall have rung the door-bell of the Arm of Justice."

He took a tolerant pity on their restiveness, relaxing to an urbane smile as though his machinery were eased by the oil which always flowed when his prosecuting talent raised its head. "When that disgraceful laxity occurred at the Tombs and a prisoner was attacked there, we took a leaf from the criminals' book and put in among the guards some men of our own. One of these, a man named Firenzi, a very capable fellow, informed himself in no time of a marvelously well-paid plan for the prisoner's escape. Yes, by the very tribe who tried to kill him. Anything, you see, to get him out of the way. The idea is the old one of passing him out as a guard, leaving the true-false guard quite overcome in his cell;—a slim chap who's let wear a black beard on account of asthma or some such nonsense. They naturally suppose that an actor will look less conspicuous than most criminals in a bit of make-up! Does our consistent hero refuse to go? Filled with the bright hope of a hanging judge he does have to be coaxed a little, but not much. He is not lured by being told that he is to be sent to the safety of foreign lands, a far-off country and, I believe, a tropical climate, suited to his complexion. Firenzi reports him as demanding what they suppose there is in this foreign country to interest him. 'The lady who throws a shadow that you know.' 'It's enough!' says Denny, through his teeth, I am informed. I don't mind telling you that it's enough for us, too! They will be sure to take him to their nest to transfer him to the escort of their gang and his visit—before a Sampson shorn of his new beard and having still further done for himself with Fletcher, is returned to a jail somewhat less porous than he imagines to-night—his visit will be well watched!"

They had reached Thirty-fourth Street and turned toward Broadway where Stanley had an errand. The two puppets in Ten Euyck's hands had nothing to say. Neither of them could bring himself to utter his excitement in that now potent presence and Herrick wondered if he were really trembling. A far-off country! The phrase chilled and hardened him, as premeditated safety always does. He was scarcely even grateful for the strength and fleetness of her wings. Never had Ten Euyck's inspectorship seemed less absurd or more really a fact. Of to-night and to-morrow he was now the master. And yet, beside the news of a far-off country, what news could he wring from the Arm of Justice to-morrow for which Herrick need care so much? They stopped on the corner of Long Acre and as Stanley plunged into a drug-store, a certain embarrassment fell upon the two men left together. "It's remarkable how warm it is!" Ten Euyck said.

Herrick refrained from the flippancy of replying, "Wonderful weather for the time of year!" On closer inspection Ten Euyck proved a good deal worked up. His excitement was like a sort of dry paste and as he now grew pastier and pastier something that was almost a tremor seemed about to crack it; in fact the dry mask of his face was suffering from a lockjaw which was his form of hysteria. He took off his hat and, cold as he looked, produced an extremely superior handkerchief and wiped his brow. He said something about the last hot spell of the year and his lips clicked on the words as though they were rather a compromising statement; was it the coming crisis that

creaked in his throat? It occurred to Herrick that Ten Euyck might be suffering from a sense that his vanity of achievement and his taste for torture, in leading him to disclose to-morrow's program, had led him injudiciously far. At any rate he studied, as if for sympathy, the irreproachable excellence of his hat-lining and a little pink line came out about his nose.

Herrick looked uneasily at the doorway beyond which Stanley still loitered; he saw no reprieve. And as he made sure of this Ten Euyck again fortified himself with the interior of his hat and spoke. "On your honor, now, Herrick, you wouldn't keep it from me? You've no idea where she is?" And he followed this extraordinary question with a piteous, a blenching glance.

Herrick did not speak; and Ten Euyck moistened his lips. The whole outline of his face seemed to take on a certain sharpness, and famine and fever thrust themselves, for a moment, into the windows of his eyes. In the silence which Herrick could not break, he murmured, "I'm not like this about women! You know that! Only she—" His voice cracked and then snapped off short, but with a hundred quiverings, like the string of a banjo breaking.

Herrick seemed to himself to look through a door, in a house of revelations. Was this what covered Ten Euyck's complacent coldness to the other sex? Did those neat and formal lips often stifle an outcry like this? True, Christina's own story had revealed to him that Ten Euyck's coldness was all hot ice and very swarthy snow. But he had presumed that incident to be a deliberate brutality; Ten Euyck had always appeared to govern his instincts masterfully or to walk on them, indeed, with heels of iron. To see him bared and shaken like this was to put a new value on the force that had betrayed him; but Herrick was too young and too much in love to endure this lusting and trembling breath when it blew upon Christina.

"On the whole," said he, deliberately, "keep your confidences to yourself, can't you? They make me sick."

The pinkness spread over Ten Euyck's face:

"Oh, I had forgotten your happiness!" he managed to cry, with a fierce shaking laugh. "Do let me know the date of the wedding!" He lifted his hat and strode from a neighborhood dangerous to dignity. But as he flung over his shoulder the ejaculation, "I hope you thought my diamonds became her!" Stanley's return arrested him.

"These infernal papers!" the boy cried.

Neither he nor Herrick had ever been strong enough to deny themselves the foolish headlines where one hour Christina had been seen as a passenger for Hongkong and another as a chambermaid in Yonkers. Nancy's ill-treated locket had roused the public to frenzy, but its imagination had definite items only of the eclipsing Christina Hope who, in the mid-day editions, generally lapsed to a lunatic in a suburban sanitarium; but nightfall always saw her mount again to the ghastliest and most criminal of "bodies." It was some such horror upon which Stanley had now fallen; below it Herrick saw the statement that in a day or two Denny would come up for sentence before Judge Fletcher.

He had little enough love for Will Denny, but it was with a feeling of nausea that he observed the mounting satisfaction of Ten Euyck. After four years the law was to wipe out, for its most obedient son, a blow across the mouth! It was, nevertheless, the poisoned rumor of Christina which had set the air afire between all three men. This dealt with some lovely fugitive hunted out that day by wireless and then disappearing from a steamer in mid-ocean. The languor of an incredible fatigue stole feverishly through Herrick's veins. Ten Euyck shouted to Stanley in a kind of bark, "Well, no waves can hold her down!" And he began to hum a tune in defiance of the faith with which Herrick's silence defied the printed words. Herrick looked up and their gaze met across the screaming columns. Ten Euyck's tune was, "Come rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer." Herrick knocked the newspaper out of his hand and there was a second's tense fury before these two, who had forgotten everything else, should leap at each other. In that second Stanley, lifting his eyes, whistled excitedly and caught Herrick's arm.

They were standing at the corner of Long Acre where five nights ago Herrick had met Wheeler in the rain. Fiery words and figures flashed their announcements, bright as ever, against the soft, lowering, purple blackness of the night. Down the side street Wheeler's theater, since Christina's disappearance, had been dark. It was still closed, but Wheeler must now have taken heart; for dark, save in theatrical parlance, it was no longer. The electric sign—

ROBERT WHEELER  
IN  
THE VICTORS

had been re-lighted. And beneath this, in letters of equal size and brilliancy ran the surprising legend—

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20TH,  
CHRISTINA HOPE  
WILL POSITIVELY REAPPEAR

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## CHAPTER X

### "THE OLD EARL'S DAUGHTER": MRS. PASCOE ON FAMILY TIES

"I know no more than you do," Wheeler said. "Or rather, no more than this." And he spread before them a sheet of writing-paper.

Above the penciled scribble was neither date nor heading, but the signature in Christina's slapdash scrawl made the world spin before Herrick's eyes. Upon that sheet of paper her hand had rested and had written there to Wheeler, but not to him! The message ran—

"Announce me for Thursday night, September 20th. I will be there.

"CHRISTINA HOPE."

"Where did it come from?"

"From the infernal regions, apparently. It was left here at the club without the mannikin in buttons so much as noticing by whom. It may have been written from across the street; it may have been enclosed from anywhere."

"When?"

"This noon-time. You don't doubt its being genuine?" Wheeler asked. "No more do I. As for what to think, I haven't a guess. The girl may be, for all I know, a mere born-devil, or the tool of devils. Let her come back to my cast, and, for what I care, she may bring all hell in her pocket! I've had a very nasty interview with Ten Euyck, who thinks I can explain my sign."

Stanley stood there with his face working. "You don't mean to tell me," he cried aloud, "you don't mean to tell me that it's been nothing but an advertising trick from the beginning!"

"God forgive you!" Wheeler said. "You are our public!—No, my dear lad, there is one thing in this angelic wildcat of ours that you can tie to. When she tells me, in our business, to bank on her being in the theater Thursday night, I bank on it; if she can set one foot before the other, there she will be. That's my belief, if it were my last breath, and I'm staking everything on it. But we've got to allow for one thing. *If she can!* Christina has a great idea of her powers. But, even for her, heaven and earth are not always movable."

More people than one were perhaps discovering a certain helplessness before fate. About noon of the next day Mrs. Pascoe sat knitting in a bedroom above her niece's table d'hôte. There was only one other person in the room, a smallish man in the early thirties, who looked as though he had once been a gentleman, and whose correct feminine little features were now drawn into an expression at once weak and wild. His soft helpless-looking figure writhed and twitched as he now lay down and now sat up upon the bed; his face was swollen with weeping and the tears still flowed from his eyes.

"Well, if yeh're goin' to take on that way," said Mrs. Pascoe, "I dunno as I can blame her any. I dunno as I blame her anyhow. Yeh never objected when there was any money in it. It's kind o' late to carry on, now. What say?"

The gentleman poured forth in Italian, which Mrs. Pascoe understood better than he did English, that the lady he lamented had never wished to leave him before; she had never loved anybody before; hitherto it had always been business. The business of the whole family he had never interfered with, but this he would not bear; he had borne too much. And, indeed, from his language, it appeared that he had.

"My," said Mrs. Pascoe, "men are funny! Yeh been married to my girl since she was sixteen years old, and she ain't never treated yeh like anything but dirt. Well, what do yeh want to hang on to her for! Clear out! You ain't like me. Yeh can get another wife but I ain't got no other daughter. I gotta stick. She don't want me either. She wants swift folks an' gay folks, she'd forget she was mine if she could. But she can't! An' I can't! I can't deny anything yeh got to say. You say she ruined yer life. She'd ruin anybody's she can get her clutch onto. You say she don't love you. If you ask me, why should she? Even if 'twasn't herself she was thinkin' of, first, last an' all the time! She ain't never cared for any human bein' but this actin' feller, an' that's 'cause he cares 'bout the other one. Still, she got hold of him, oncet, an' do you think if she can get him again, if she can get them fellers our boys know to snake him out onto that boat for 'er, she's goin' to care whether you like it or not? You take it from me you ain't goin' to sail to-morrow any—or anyway not with us. You ain't never wanted anything but a wife that could take care o' you, an' you're quite a pretty lookin' little feller. The best you can do is to get some money out of her an' get a divorce."

The young man rolled back and forth and bit the pillows. Mrs. Pascoe, who had hitherto regarded him with contemptuous tolerance, observed a wave of genuine despair in this sea of grief and her eyes narrowed.

"See here, young man," she said, "don't you let me ketch ye doin' anything underhanded—squealin' on us or tryin' to keep us here, 'cause we got to get out. If I was to say a word to my son that I thought that, there wouldn't be no prettiness left to you. I ain't goin' to have her locked up in no jail for any man that ever was born. Mebbe you think, 'cause I speak harsh of her, I ain't

fond of 'er. Why, you little fool, I ain't never had a thought but for that minx since she was born. Even when I first see the other child, an' the resemblance gimme such a turn, the first thing I think of was how I was goin' to get somepun' out of it for her. That's why when I got to nurse the little thing I never let on fur a minute that I had one the spittin' breathin' image of it,—hair, mouth and nose, an' the eyes, too, so I near fainted when I first seen theirs—somepun' warned me to shut up an' somepun' 'ud come of it. They thought I'd just gone cracked on their baby. It's been the same ever since. I read all them yarns about changed children an' I thought it would be funny if I couldn't work it. An' I did. She used to act it all to me afterwards, right out in poetry. 'The ol' earl's daughter died at my breast'—Didn't she ever do any of her actin' fur you? Goes—'I buried her like my own sweet child an' put my child in her stead.'" Mrs. Pascoe gave this forth with an inimitable relish of its stylish precedent. "If theirs hadn't died I'd ha' worked it somehow. They was rich then. She's walked on me an' on them, an' on the whole blame lot of us, ever since. But she's mine. What she wants she's goin' to have,—him or anything—I can't prevent her. No more can you. I'm goin' to stan' by her. An' you've got to."

"He's a murderer!" shrieked the Italian gentleman. "He's a murderer!"

"Seems like it's catchin'," Mrs. Pascoe commented. "Here's my daughter tells me you was hangin' round Mrs. Hope's all last Friday, lookin' fur that spy feller, an' all is you wasn't even competent to find him.—I guess I don't want to hear no talk outer you! Though as far forth as what roughness goes I don't say but what you wus druv to it."

The young man rose and stretching out a delicate hand, over which a gold bracelet drooped from underneath a highly fashionable British cuff, tremulously lighted a cigarette. Under its soothing influence he replied that of course he was a lost soul and he didn't deny that his companions had at last succeeded in dragging him to their level.

Mrs. Pascoe snorted like an angry horse. "Now you look here, Filly; when I married Mr. Ansello I didn't have no more idee what his business was than what you had. So far forth as what that goes, I didn't rightly ketch the whole o' what was goin' on till you come whoopin' along an' got us all into that muss where we had to clear out back to my country. I was mighty glad we did an' cut loose from all them demons—I said then an' I say now I won't stand fur nothin' rough! But you know as well as I do, oncet we was started out fur ourselves there's nobody ain't worked harder to keep to the quiet part o' the business 'un what yer brother-in-law an' yer wife has. It usta be, before Ally come back, that things did get oncet in a while beyond Nick's control, but never any more, thank the Lord—not in his own little crowd 'ut he has anything to do with! I guess there's one thing we agree on, young feller; it's jus' druv me crazy, lately, to get mixed up with the regular Society again. It's gettin' to be so big, even in this country, it won't let none o' the little ones work fur themselves—all this month since it took us in I've felt there was things goin' on I never got to hear of an' I'm mighty glad we're goin' to get away from it to-morrer." She caught herself back from what was evidently a favorite topic. "But don't let me hear any more talk about draggin' down! You've done considerable draggin' on us with all that feller spyin' on yeh costs us, an' yeh'd ought to thank the children the way they've kep' yeh clear out o' the whole business. Why, nobody hardly knows 'ut yer alive! Y' ain't asked to do anything, y' ain't asked to show yerself, y' ain't even ever been a member, so now the Society ain't nabbed on yeh none. I wisht it hadn't sent fur yeh to the meetin' to-day, jus' to take Nick the word an' his money. Ally nor me, we won't do—no, they gotta have a man, an' I s'pose they take you fur one! So far forth as what that goes the less I have to do with their greasy meetin's the better I like it, but I want you should be awful careful. If oncet they was to get on to who you was—Now, Filly, don't you smash them mugs!"

The Italian hastily resigned the object with which he had been angrily and absently rapping the table, and, exhausted with sobbing, began to breathe upon and polish his fingernails.

The mug, or jug, a little earthenware copy of a two-handled Etruscan drinking-vase, was one of three which stood there side by side, exactly alike save that the crude design which each of them bore—an arm and hand holding a scales—was differently colored; one red, one white, one green. But Mrs. Pascoe was aware of another difference and she turned the jugs around in a bar of sunlight till she found it; on one jug the scales of justice were gilded, on another silvered, on the third painted a dull gray. The single exclamation stenciled over each design translated into a sort of jingle:

Gold buys!  
Silver pays!  
Lead slays!

"Ain't she the hand," exclaimed Mrs. Pascoe, "for monkey-shines! Don't you wonder what they do with these here, Filly? Mr. Gumama asked Ally to get him these new ones fur to-day. She'd have to fancy a thing up if 't was only to take a pill out of. Comin' in las' night without the car, what with luggin' these here an' the paul-parrot—'t ain't spoke a word, that bird ain't, since it left here!—I dunno but I'd ha' broke my neck hadn't been fur M'ree. I do hate turrible to part from M'ree—I declare, if ever anything happens to my Ally, I'll come back here an' put up with these Dagoes on M'ree's account—Now, for mercy's sake, Filly, don't howl!"

For the mention of parting had brought on a still more violent attack of the young man's anguish. The smile—wan but touched with the charm of Sicilian plaintiveness—with which he had been reconciling himself to life utterly disappeared; he ceased half-way through an excellent polish

and casting himself down as from the Tarpeian rock, blubbered into the bedspread.

The old lady regarded him with contempt passing again into suspicion and then into a softening weariness that rose in her manner like an anxiety that all the time had barely been held down. "Filly," said Mrs. Pascoe with sudden friendliness and such an uneasy, furtive look of dread as quite transformed her face, "what'er they goin' to do with that girl?"

He lay quiet a moment, as if uncomfortably arrested by the question. Then he asked, how did he know? Take her, leave her; what was it to him?

"Well, 't ain't hardly likely they're goin' to take her—an' her feller on the boat! An' I should jus' like to know how they could leave her!" A strange, helpless tremor passed across that firm mouth. "Oh, why was she ever brought away? I allus knoo what it 'ud come to! Times there I did hope she was goin' to die, poor thing! But it war n't to be!" There was no sound but the sound of Filly, growling moistly into the bed.

Mrs. Pascoe,—or, according to her own reference, Mrs. Ansello—looked at the clock and began to fold up her knitting. But her long pent-up broodings burst from her again in a new channel. "One while I was scared Nick was kind o' losin' his head about the little piece. What with him gettin' more an' more stuck on her, all the time, an' her sick with love uv another feller, even to the farm I didn't know from one day to the next what he would do. But when he made out 't was safer to take her alone with him up t' the old place—Well, we all had to scuttle there that very same night, an' when she begun to take on for that letter I guess he forgot all them feelin's. He ain't never let a human bein' stand in his sister's way an', however pretty that little neck o' hers might strike him, 't wouldn't take him two minutes t' wring it if he got scared she'd shoot her mouth against Allegra. I've had bad dreams before you ever was born, but I ain't ever had any like waitin' fur the bunch to come home that night an' the river so handy! I never thought I'd be glad to see my son half-bled to death—but there, there's allus mercies! I expect he wishes, though, he'd come straight home from the post-office, instead o' snoopin' round that hotel! The sea-voyage'll fix him up all right, an' he's strong enough an' cross enough an' sick enough to pull the whole house down 'cause he can't get back an' forth without the car. Filly," she shot forth, "sure as you live he's got something made up fur to-night about that girl!"

The Italian gentleman taking this as a still further personal degradation, inquired aloud why he ever was born. But Mrs. Pascoe did not attempt the obvious retort.

She rose, fetched paper and string and, with an impotence foreign to her whole nature, fumbled in tying up the jugs. "I've allus said I wouldn't stand fur it, allus! But what can I do? I tell him I'll curse the last breath he draws—but can I stop him? Yeh know what he is—can anybody stop him? I tell yeh what 't is, Filly, I'm gettin' scared uv him! Yes, now I'm past sixty, I'll say it fur oncet—I'm scared uv him! And then, poor boy, so far forth as what that goes, what can he do, himself? When you come down to it, what can any uv us do? The girl knows everything—nobody knows that better'n you!—an' what she knows she'll blab. She's soft-lookin' but she's got a chin an' she's in love! If her feller's done fur, we're goin' to be done fur, too! There's my daughter to consider an' every last one uv us. Jus' now, too, when Ally's goin' to get her divorce an' be so happy! What can I do?"

There was the sound of doors opening and closing and of some one coming upstairs. But Mrs. Pascoe paid no heed. Her unaccustomed garrulity, which had hitherto seemed the result of mere strain, began to appear as her idea of conciliation for the ushering in of a plan. "I've only one thing I can say favorable to you, Filly," she urged him, "yeh ain't rough an' yeh was a gentleman. Yeh don't want screamin' an' hurtin', I'll be bound. She's a little lady, Filly, an' she's 'n American girl. Well, what I'm gettin' at is, would yeh dare do this? Now she's conscious, they won't lemme near her. But they'll never suspect you. I want yeh should tell her there's a bottle o' laudanum fur M'ree's tooth in my closet an' if she wants it, give it to her. Give it to her quick!"

The Italian gentleman giving no sign of finding consolation in this prospect, "Oh, yeh'll never in the world do it!" Mrs. Pascoe groaned. "Yeh ain't got the nerve uv a sick worm! Why, it's different,—can't yeh see, Filly?—if she asks fur it herself—it's different, ain't it? It's what she promised to do in the beginnin'. An' now, jus' out o' spite-work, she won't. But I bet she will to-night. Whatever's up, she'll know it before they get her feller out there to-night. Give it to her, Filly!"

There was a knock at the door and the proprietress of the table d'hôte entered cheerfully. "They come?" inquired Mrs. Pascoe. "Well, time I went. There, get up, Filly, an' blow yer nose, do! Come, come, yeh don't want the gentleman yer wife's goin' to marry to be brought up an' find yeh wallerin' on yer stomach!—Well, stay where yeh be! But now yeh mind what I was tellin' yeh, awhile back, about bein' anyways treacherous. 'T wouldn't be the first time but 't would be the last! My daughter's my daughter, an' as fur my son—I never said there was anythin' so rough I wouldn't stand fur it, when it come to Dagoes!"

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE ARM OF JUSTICE ON CLEANING DAY: AN OVERTURE TO A COMIC

## OPERA

Mrs. Pascoe had some last minute shopping on hand, including farewell gifts for her niece's family and a special token for Maria Rosa, and she was quite unaware that it would have been a godsend for her daughter's plans had she kept her sharp eyes, that day, on the interior of the table d'hôte. But even had this occurred to her the number of figures on the background of her son's life had lately so increased that she could scarcely have been expected to recognize that the friendly Italians who arrived at the appointed time were not a guard of Nicola's choosing, sent to carry a willing captive to the freedom of Allegra's waiting ship, but plain clothes men, who bore their prisoner back to jail. She and little Maria Rosa shopped successfully, refreshed themselves at an ice-cream parlor, returned home for a distribution of the farewells and, re-emerging from the house in mid-afternoon, walked briskly enough eastward, though now laden with heavier packages. Mrs. Pascoe carried so many bottles of wine that even the stout wrappings threatened to give way and, wrapped in many folds of clean dust-cloth, Maria bore the pretty jugs.

"I did lay out you should wait an' take those home," said Mrs. Pascoe to the little girl, "since your cousin Ally's fixed 'em up so pretty! But it'll be too late, likely, an' I don't like you should be crossin' the street after dark. You better tell me good-by an' run home soon 's I get the loft cleaned up fer the meetin'. I told yer ma you an' me 'd unpack that barrel o' backyard party truck an' the boys could bring a bundle of it over when they leave to-night. No use it settin' in a empty garradge. Don't fergit yer old great-aunt, now will you, M'ree?—an' I'll send you somepun' reel pretty from furrin' parts, where yer parrot come from." She added, as they crossed under a bend of the Elevated Road into South Fifth Avenue, "Remember, I've told yer ma ye're always to go out an' visit my folks, same as if I was there. Mercy, I hope it don't rain with all of us trapesin' out there fer our last night! I don't see how the boys are goin' to get that feller out, with them fools skiddin' round the roads the way they be—an' Filly'll faint away most likely!"

They turned in at the door of a small dingy structure, which had been something else before it became a garage and that now looked vaguely out of use; from its obscure depths emerged the tall Sicilian, Mr. Gumama, who relieved her of the wine. She and the child mounted a ladder-like staircase and emerged through a sort of hatchway, scarcely more than an opening in the boards, with its lid tipped back against the wall.

It was not yet four in the afternoon, but the September light was already failing under the low roof of the loft. The windows were built close to the floor and that at the rear had a little, begrimed straggle of vine waving in at it. For the window looked out upon a triangle of trodden earth, heaped as with the rubbish of an old machine-shop but producing spears of grass and black, stunted bushes to show it had once been part of a yard. In front the loft gave directly upon a turning of the Elevated Road, and when a deafening train roared by the whole flimsy structure rattled and shook; the walls were irregularly studded with nails and hooks from which hung lengths of rope and buckled straps as of old harness that shook, too. Among these, from a cleared space of honor, a head of Garibaldi, in gaily colored lithograph, confronted the flyspecked grandeur of the Italian royal family, domestically grouped; the pink paper of cheap gazettes brightened some of the murkier boards with woodcuts of prizefighters or disrobing ladies. Three or four stools stood about on the dingy boards and rather a greater number of worn out chairs; a couple of heaping barrels in one corner were covered with an old awning; there was a small bureau, once yellowish glazed, without any glass; a kitchen table, stained with al fresco dinners, had been brought in from the yard; in another corner, torn rubber curtain-flaps, collapsed tires and threadbare leather cushions supported each other. Suddenly Mrs. Pascoe uttered a little hiss. She had perceived, sitting in the frame of the front window, a listless, undersized, undeveloped lad with the delicate, soft-eyed face of a young seraph, who looked seventeen and had probably turned twenty.

This young person was reading an Italian newspaper and sucking a limp cigarette which hung from between his teeth and occasionally scattered sparks down the slim chest which his inconceivably filthy shirt left open to his belt. He was greeted devotedly by Maria as Cousin Beppo and, though he was evidently the old lady's abomination, when she accosted him with the unconciliatory greeting, "Here, you! You stir yourself!" he reared himself slowly to his feet and, with a good-natured smile, sagged amicably toward her.

"I don't s'pose you think so," snapped Mrs. Pascoe, "but this place's got to be swep' out!"

Fortunately, the tidying of the loft did not depend upon the sweet-smiling indolence which remained unbroken while she swept and rubbed; when the barrels were despoiled of their green and pink netting, their feast-day lanterns and paper flowers Beppo nosed ingratiatingly up; but long before the old woman had laid clean oil-cloth over table and bureau he was playing charmingly with Maria, whom he coaxed to carry a chair to the rear window, to fill and set upon it a tin basin, and to filch him a clean dust-cloth.

Then he began cautiously to wash his face, down almost to the black rim midway of his pretty throat; cleansing his hands, too, but not so as to disturb the fingernails. Out from the top drawer of the bureau he took a broken bit of mirror, also richly scented pomatum with which he smoothed his hair well down over his brows and then he brought forth a velvet jacket and a waistcoat sprigged with embroidered flowers. He handled them as if they were vestments and, despite the warmth of the afternoon, their weight did not appal him. To these, over the filthy shirt, he added a silk neckerchief of robin's egg blue and a glittering scarfpin; there came forth, from its hiding-place about his person, a very graceful little knife which he stuck with airy

bravado in his belt. Lastly, he lighted a huge cigar and assumed, though for indoor display only, a soft hat balanced on the left side of the head, and a light cane swung from the left hand. Standing thus, full-costumed, with a hip-swaying swagger, he was more picturesque though less fashionable than his confreres of northern races, but his infamous profession was none the less proclaimed in every line of him. And once more he turned the sweet beam of his smile upon the little girl.

Beppo had not, however, dressed himself for professional purposes. The coming occasion was more solemn and his toilette an act of the purest piety. Perhaps that was why, when Mrs. Pascoe turned her contempt on him again, he was no longer amused.

The old woman, as she set out the jugs, was saying, "Fetch up them bottles, M'ree. An' Becky or whatever your name is—"

She turned and beheld the basin of dirty water. "You take that right down stairs!" cried she, in outrage. "An' the rest o' yer trash with yeh! When I clean a place, I want it left clean!"

He said something, sulkily, about emptying it herself.

"Well, when I come to emptyin' swill, 't won't be no Dago swill! Here—"

For he had furiously snatched the basin above his head to dash it on the floor.

She caught at and somehow prevented him, but not from whirling it through the window into the back yard. He was smiling again at this assuagement to his dignity when he suddenly perceived that the struggle had sprinkled his vest; spots appeared also upon his scarf's cerulean blue! He became, on the instant, a maniac, not human; he raved, he shrieked, his delicate skin flamed, tears suffused his eyes, he ran up and down scattering prayers, howls and curses. Until, one of these voyages bringing him close to Mrs. Pascoe's small disgusted figure, he seized her by the wrist and with the deliberate, systematic skill of custom began to wrench her arm.

Mrs. Pascoe very promptly kicked him in the shins. "If my son Nick was here he'd take the buckle-end o' one o' those straps an' spank the life out o' yeh! Yeh wax-face! Yeh—" For once stooping to Italian she shot forth the word, "Ricondoterro!"

It was his calling and he should not have objected to it. None the less, pursing his soft lips he spat a fine spray over her face. She jumped at him in such a fury that Maria threw protecting arms about her playfellow; then they were all parted by the tall Sicilian, Mr. Gumama.

This imposing person had, with dramatic quiet, brought up the wine; and now, holding Beppo by one wrist, he listened to Mrs. Pascoe's angry cluckings. Then he seemed merely to put out one fist. The boy fell on his back without even a cry and lay as he fell. "Why, you beast, you!" cried Mrs. Pascoe. "Mebbe you've killed him!"

"No. But no matter," said Mr. Gumama. "Go and make your guard. Come not up again till I call you. Take the child."

She went, holding Maria's hand and looking back, with her old mingling of curiosity and reluctance at the prone figure of the pretty ricondoterro, from whose nostrils blood had begun copiously to gush on her clean floor. The tall Mr. Gumama was evidently not one to be defied.

It was half-past four and those who were expected began to come. First a couple of laborers, warm from their work; the next had the proud bearing of a chauffeur; after him came a respectable professional man, probably a dentist, wearing a black suit, a full beard and glasses; then a plump and coquettish little beau, the owner of a fruit-and-candy stand, who bore a flower in his light, ornamental coat and the scar of a knife across his rosy left cheek. He was followed by his cousin, who had only a fruit cart and sold for him on commission. One and all were obliged to halt before Mrs. Pascoe, who sat on a stool at the foot of the stairs, playing solitaire on a couple of orange boxes.

She bent her tongue Italianwards and asked of each the same question.

"What do you want here?"

"Justice!"

"How can you get it?"

"By the Arm of God."

"Who is your enemy and mine and your children's children's?"

"A traitor!"

"Y' can g'won up."

As they emerged into the loft they were each greeted by Mr. Gumama and then dropped themselves awkwardly about on stools and window-sills, with the whispering stiffness of people in their best clothes. Beppo, moaning, now lay huddled on his side and, as occasion arose, they stepped about and over him without the slightest interest or even malign amusement in his plight. By-and-by he got to his hands and knees and crawled into a corner, where, with the now fatally ruined blue scarf held to his nose, he shivered himself slowly quiet. But his pomatum came into play with the laborers, who sat seriously down by the still bright rear window and beautified

their heads with it, cheerfully assisting each other's toilet as amiable monkeys often do and even smearing themselves a little from the communal mercies of the water-pitcher. "Enough!" Mr. Gumama sternly rebuked them. "Business alone!"

They looked meekly at him, stricken, and he called one of them by name—"Take the stairs!"

The man crossed to the opening in the floor and seated himself a little back from where it gave into the room; the knife which he drew from inside his clothes seemed a trifle clouded and he sat idly polishing it. Mr. Gumama looked at his large silver watch and, stepping to the front window, glanced out. A certain anxiety in him began to make itself felt.

More and more men arrived, but evidently not the looked-for men. A strapping youth began unconcernedly to converse with Beppo about a duel they were to fight. "I cannot remain forever a picciotto. If I do not fight the next duel how shall I ever get to be a member?"

"Me they will not yet let fight again." Beppo stopped sniffing and displayed, a bit above his knee, a wound that might have been made with a knife like that in his belt or a short dagger. "In two duels have I lost, and if I lose the third I lose my entry."

The strapping youth began to get excited. "With whom, then, can I fight? How long do they intend to keep me waiting? See, now, I want my rights—I want to be promoted—"

A man with turned-up red mustaches, sporting a carnation and a pair of highly polished boots, interrupted his complaint that the bootblack under the Elevated had overcharged him and reproved Beppo for kicking his chair. The fruit-vendors also stopped quarreling over the accusation of the huckster that the merchant had supplied him with decayed fruit; the merchant allying himself with the strapping youth and declaring that his wife's brother was right and ought to be promoted. Then, with the one word, "Peace!" Mr. Gumama struck them into abject silence.

"Peace! Ludovisi, your wife's brother may win all three duels and yet endure years of probation. Beppo, let your squeal rise once more and you are suspended for a month.—Have you, then, no wits at all? Let the result of this meeting go a little wrong and promotion it will be no more! At least for us, fellow members of the old-days Arm of Justice, for we shall be no more!"

A number of men cast glances of horror. But after a few lightning-shot growls even this number returned to its knitting, being accustomed to obey and not to ask questions. Again Mr. Gumama looked at his watch.

More and more men arrived till the loft was crowded. The unknown persons who had so long so strangely shadowed the pathway of Christina Hope were beginning to mass for action and to detach themselves from the background. And still as the loft darkened with the passage of each train and relightened less and less when that was gone, another presence seemed to enter and abide; the growing, shadowy presence of suspense. It was in the air, for the ignorant many as well as for the few who understood. There were brief silences so deep that the little vine, spying in at the window, could be heard tapping on the upper pane. Then a cab stopped outside and a startled thrill passed through the assembly. The man who had been told to take the stairs rose with a soft, business-like precision and drew his knife. He stood, waiting. Something in his attitude defined his duty as preventative not of an entrance, but an exit. Any unwelcome comer who got past Mrs. Pascoe's guard would get farther; he would enter the loft, but he would never leave it. He would not even turn round. Mr. Gumama, watching the cab avidly, opened his fateful mouth. But the men disgorged from its disreputable depths were friends to that house.

The first two tumbled into the garage, glanced round, saluted Mrs. Pascoe, and returned to the assistance of those on the sidewalk. These manœvered between them a man with his hat pulled down over his eyes and an overcoat hanging about his shoulders whom they supported like a drunkard. A fascinated crowd stopped to wink and advise. As soon as the two men were inside they threw their burden flat on the floor and returned to the cab for another. The man on the floor was gagged, his arms were tied behind him and even his thighs were bound.

Swarthy as was the man's face Mrs. Pascoe was still observing with annoyance these signs of roughness when a second human bundle was brought in from the cab and the cavalcade somehow hoisted itself upstairs. In the loft the human bundles were propped against the wall and the meeting came to attention.

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE COMIC OPERA CHORUS: "AND SAID, 'WHAT A GOOD BOY AM I!'"

"The eighth district, members of the Honorable Society," said Mr. Gumama, bowing to the assembly as if he were ascending a throne, "it is my duty to inform you that, for reasons which you shall presently know, Nicola Pascoe is no longer our capo d'intini. Unworthy that I am," he continued with pomp, "be pleased to signify by the vote whether it is your pleasure that I assume this post of glory."

It was their pleasure and the vote acclaimed it. Instantly Beppo, the merchant's brother-in-law and three or four other lads ranged chairs and barrels in a circle nearly as might be round the

kitchen-table and all of the assembly that could find seats sat quietly down. Mr. Gumama filled the earthen jugs with wine and they were passed from hand to hand, each man taking a ceremonial draught; then the man at Mr. Gumama's right rose and, with dramatic gesture and winy mouth, kissed him on the forehead. So, in turn, did each of those to whom, by some mystic precedence, the seats at the table had been spontaneously allotted. All was accomplished with due ceremony, but rapidly and with an undertone of nervous expectation, the weight of some unusual circumstance. It was another and less flowery version of the festivity which had so amused Herrick that evening, a month ago, when it had frothed round Nicola Pascoe under the sail-cloth of the table d'hôte. Almost immediately the meeting proceeded to business.

The man with the carnation and the resplendent shoes rose ponderously and began to hurry through a fortnightly financial report. This report was starred with titles—capos of various departments, first voters, senior members, cashiers, secretaries—and with references to local districts, twelve or fourteen of them, into which that blundering mammoth baby, New York City, would have been surprised to find itself divided. The administrative looting of these departments was again crossed off into eight sub-divisions—paranze, the treasurer called them, each of which had, apparently, its own committee and procedure; for each paranza had turned over its earnings to its capo d'intini, these capos in turn had passed them to the capo in testa who had turned them into the treasurer in exchange for a receipt. One of these receipts Mr. Gumama now produced. The fortnightly gains were deposited upon the table in two cigar-boxes; in one the baratolo, won at games and swindling; the other held the sbruffo, more heroically acquired from extortion or theft. Every one began to praise what he had himself contributed, and it became evident that the apprentices, like Beppo, were expected to do most of this light work. However, save for a glass of wine to each, which they were told to drink thankfully, they did not share in the spoils they had so largely produced. These were apportioned by Mr. Gumama without the protestation of a single voice. Percentages for three funds were set aside; one for what was politely called "social expenses," which, to a gross mind, might have suggested corruption; one for legal defense; the other for pensioners—retired members, families of those unfortunately detained in jail, and widows of members deceased while in good standing. Not till then was the remainder paid equally into each individual hand, in a model of just and scrupulous dealing.—As, in various dialects, a foam of pent-up exclamations now rose, Mr. Gumama again looked at his watch and, with an awe-inspiring contraction of his beautiful brows, once more betook himself to the window.

A slick, sleek oily youth in a gray derby began to deliver some mail which he had just collected from the branch post-office in Marco Morello's drug-store down the street; among the innocent pleasantries of indecent post cards there seemed to be at least two enigmatic warnings in dirty envelopes and a happy suggestion of workable scandal about a rich jeweler; one postal, demanding in scarcely legible and very illiterate Neapolitan slang the "suppression" of a woman who had turned the writer out of his job in her fake employment agency, was frowned upon by Mr. Gumama as unnecessarily careless. Directly the meeting had formed itself into a rough semblance of a court, the writer of the careless postal was condemned to be suspended for six months, so that his earnings were cut off from both sources.

One of the laborers rose to complain that the capo of his paranza had sentenced him to a week's suspension for quarreling with a companion; the evidence showed injustice and the complaint was sustained. A saloon-keeper broke into passionate appeal against another sentence of suspension, this time for a year, because he had shed a tear of pity for the child of a wine-merchant which had died while held for ransom. But his capo d'intini, the head of a whole district, had seen the tear and the punishment was confirmed. A picciotto di sgarro, a novice, who had passed two duels with credit, was found to have hesitated in obedience and was expelled from possible membership for all time. Now popped up a red, bushy stub of a man, with a full tuck under his chin and a certain unshaven dinginess, to declare that something outrageous was going on in his neighborhood: there were rowdies who hung about the street corners and offended the female foundlings of the good sisters, making remarks when these took exercise! The gentle ladies had appealed to the police in vain, but to the Honorable Society they could now in tranquillity trust. The Honorable Society, shocked and indignant, assumed the future immunity of the female foundlings for a slight consideration. Finally amidst an ominous silence Balbo the Wolf, a chauffeur, a full member, was convicted of having practised extortion without orders and on his own account.

"Lupo Balbo," said Mr. Gumama, in the profound chest notes of an outraged parent, "you deserve to sleep forever. You have broken your oath of humility, you have rebelled against your father and scandalized your mother, you have taken food from the mouth of your family, for the Society is your family and your father and your mother.—Tommaso Antonelli—" He spoke low and quick to a man near him, who sprang forward, there was an instant's sharp, half-voluntary struggle and then Antonelli drew back with a dripping razor in his hand. Lupo, the chauffeur, covered a face marked forever with a double slash. And Mr. Gumama somewhat unnecessarily added, "The spreggio is for you the punishment, you wolf Balbo. Bathe your face, there in the pitcher by the innocent vine, and leave the council." Lupo Balbo, no more than his predecessors, winced, argued, nor rebelled. Against the decree of the capo no appeal was possible.

All this time—so much shorter a time than any agreeable social club would have taken to despatch a single item of business—the human bundles had remained propped against the wall; silent perforce and wrapped in the indifference of their own doom. Mr. Gumama now turned an attentive eye upon these lumps of misery, and a kind of brightening glimmered through the

assemblage; the duller preliminaries were disposed of at last.

The poor souls being brought forward the capo pronounced their names with scorn. "Luigi Pachotto and Carlo Firenzi, you deserve no trial. But the Society honors its strict laws and does not condemn without justice. Beppo, Chigi, remove those gags." The eyes of the human bundles goggled avidly forward; their mouths puffed moistly in physical relief. Still, they made no complaint.

"Full members of the Society, alas!" Mr. Gumama tragically continued, "members, also, of our Arm of Justice, ere the Society accepted that Arm as part of its own body, we have received demands for your suppression and, from our camorrista scelto, proof of your guilt. Luigi Pachotto, of the eight crimes against the Society which incur the penalty of death you are charged with the first—Number one, to reveal the secrets of the Society. And you, Carlo Firenzi, with the second,—spying on behalf of the police. It is true that Lupo Balbo was guilty of the sixth, and I made his penalty little. But of such crimes, like disobedience, the punishment at its worst is death. Yours are the crimes of treachery, for which the death is slow. Most for you, Carlo Firenzi, there can be no excuse. When you began to suspect the news which I am about to break to the paranza you turned police operative and betrayed the system by which our unfortunate friends communicate in horrible prisons and become properly organized. And when, last night, you were set by the paranza to do a service this morning to your basista you gave notice to the police. So that they came and took back the friend of our basista and now guard the nest of our social gatherings. Did you think the Arm of Justice had grown too weak to punish? Carlo Firenzi, what have you to say?"

He had nothing to say; only, hanging his head, he ground his teeth. Yet the form—the form? the very core and gist—of a trial was put through; the evidence heard and questioned, the witnesses confronted with the mute despair of a guilt taken red handed and making no denial; fifteen minutes of the truth passionately sought and no law-game played.

The conclusion, however, was foregone and Firenzi was soon stood back out of the way. "Luigi Pachotto, you have, I believe, affirmed good intention. You knew that the old-days' Arm of Justice, now the fifth paranza of this eighth district of the Honorable Society, had long sheltered in its midst, all unknowing, a traitor to the Honorable Society." He had touched a spring that vibrated through the whole room. Unable to proceed he waited till the murmur of incredulous horror that had risen to a growl should die away. "You betook yourself to the capo in testa of the Honorable Society rather than to your old friends of the Arm or even to this district, and to him pointed out the whereabouts of the traitor. Did you dare to insinuate that the Arm itself would not have punished had it known? What good to it or to the Society did you expect of this?"

It was more a slur than a question and he answered it in a hopeless mumble. "I did it for the good of the Arm and to make our peace with the Honorable Society. I say it, who am about to die—I thought to resign the traitor, to give him into its hand who sullies ours, to be done with him and at peace."

"Luigi Pachotto, you took too much upon yourself! It is for the Arm to make its own terms. I think it was your private peace you wished to make, thus to save your own throat. But you have cut it." Mr. Gumama paused and sententiously expanded his beautiful brows. "Nevertheless, it may be that you are to be shown strange mercy!"

The murmur rose again, humming with amazement.

"The Society can be merciful for its own just ends. There is a service to be rendered, a deed to be done, beyond the skill of any garziona di mala vita, its apprentice, or yet of its novice, the picciotto di sgarro, the young one. It should be done by one who is past life. Therefore, the Society, yet a little while, suspends your execution." Pachotto was thrust into the background and Mr. Gumama, who all this time had been seated at the table, rose and leaned forward, indicating that the meeting had reached its climax.

"Dear friends, you observed well what Pachotto said? For this have we come together. We of the Fifth paranza, Hands of the Arm, we, in particular, must take heed to ourselves." He paused, collecting attention. But it was already in his pocket. "He who used the Arm of Justice to shelter a traitor, is its long-time chief, Nicola Pascoe—called in the country from which he carried his bowed head, Nicola Ansello! Ah, you know the name! Then you know well that the serpent whom he nourished in our bosom is the traitor at whose word, ten years ago in Italy, four members perished!"

A shudder shook the assembly. Many crossed themselves. Mr. Gumama, in the relish of his own rhetoric, grew increasingly impressive. He was, moreover, extremely pale. "The Society passes sentence—that Arm still enfolds the traitor!"

The assembly cried out as against a sacrilege and its cry was menacing. The Hands of the Arm were now easily distinguishable by their very long faces.

"Ah, my friends," wailed Mr. Gumama with a sudden shrillness, "the Society falters not, but strikes—Fifth paranza, Hands of the Arm, it condemns us, every one!"

A horrible yelling broke loose like a storm. Sobs and hysterical curses strangled together amidst the revilements of the now inimical district. One man was seized with convulsions and had to have wine and water dashed over him, another fainted and got stepped on. Mr. Gumama



remained superior and at last made himself heard. "But was it not from the Society I learned lenience to Pachotto? Does it not, in wisdom, leave me in place to address you? On one condition the Society withdraws its condemnation."

The very melody of howling rose. "The condition! Tell! Tell!"

"First, lest too great the shock, listen a moment. You know well how in this America where, since Italy drove her forth, she grows so great, the conditions of the Mother Society are greatly relaxed; so that, in a new country, she may strengthen herself with all her children. When heads of small societies, existing ere here she had waxed great, came to be absorbed in her she accepted the members for whom they vouched without requiring the apprenticeship nor the novitiate. So it was with the Arm of Justice. Of all the small societies we were the most distinguished. It was not seemly so superior a collection should exist outside the Honorable Society. So much truth do I speak that in accepting us it made our chief, Nicola Pascoe, chief of this district, made ourselves into one paranza where we are yet a unit with our own rules, fifth paranza of the eighth district. The Society decrees that after to-day this paranza shall be broken up and scattered among the others and that name, the Arm of Justice, be spoken no more. So shall the true forget the traitor!"

His breath failed him. But fortunately his audience came to his rescue with a hissing snarl—"Traditore! Traditore!"

"Fellow members, it is nothing. We who are innocent expect to suffer for the guilt of friends. What I entreat, it is that you examine what kind of a friend Nicola Pascoe has been to us. It is true he found us little and made us great. It is true he taught us, formed us and was our leader. But knew we who he was? Did he tell us he had fled from Naples to this place carrying in his arms a traitor? Now that we know, to us what is he?—Ah, we, guileless, true shoot of the parent vine, branch of her root, of the Honorable Society the pious children!" Mr. Gumama, sincerely overcome by this pastoral vision, rolled up his eyes for a long pause. But as he had to sneeze he continued, "Hands of the Arm, for to-day we are still ourselves. For to-day I might have called one last meeting of the fifth paranza and we, all alone, have discussed our own affairs. But that there may be no stain on us of secret counsel we show our hand to the whole district.—How may we again be dear children of the Mother from Naples, held safe in her embrace? Hands of the Arm, to save the Arm cut off always the Hand, one, three, how many, it is no matter! Hear the one condition of the Honorable Society: We divulge the whereabouts this night of Nicola Pascoe, the basista and all their house; we offer them neither warning, shelter nor defense; we lead, ourselves, this district in their suppression!" And he leaned towards them, glaring and sweating, his voice still cautiously lowered and waited their answer with open mouth.

They who never yet had disobeyed Nicola Pascoe stared at him a trifle wanly, huddling one on the other. Astonished gutturals mingled hoarsely with shrill peeps; "Body of Bacchus!" "Woe, woe! Beware!" "Presence of the devil!" clashed with gobs of thieves' slang and the less amiable expressions that were overwhelmed by the general assurances of the district that the paranza had no choice.

Then a well-to-do little soul with a black beard rose to speak. "Listen to the voice of reason. If we condemn ourselves, can we save Nicola Pascoe? But if we condemn Nicola Pascoe, we still do save ourselves! All must not die—a few it is better to die! It is well I should say this, for I am a man of gentle speech. I do not wish to be thought like a bad murderer nor the companion of murderers. I am a business-man—a dealer in tortoise-shells which I send mostly to Chicago, and I am unique for the perfection of my wares. I have now the one hope for the support of my family and small children—that the Society if it suppresses us all will leave upon each of us its mark. That would cause a sensation and perhaps advertise my unique tortoise-shells to improve the business for my wife. But this hope is not enough. Nicola Pascoe, the basista, all, all, suppress them! Me, I wish to live!" He sat down.

But then, from Nicola's closer brethren immediate and violent opposition arose, with arguments that Nicola himself had done no wrong and pleading for a lighter sentence. The meeting was in scarcely less than an apoplectic fit when, from its outskirts, a young farmhand shrieked out that they must take the counsel of the good priest, the Angel of the Society.

A tall man at once began to weep and to utter horrible invectives against the last speaker, while Mr. Gumama exhorted him to be more calm. It turned out that the Angel of the Society was in jail for perjury and that the tall man was his brother. "I must leave the room! I must have air! How could he, the bad of heart, the pig, mention my brother before me—"

"Angelo, you are a man and must show more strength! Antonio was not aware of the trouble of your brother—"

"Not aware of—He who celebrated masses for the soul of King Humbert, he who remained tender to us though all other fathers refused us absolution while we practised our profession, he who among us was best for plausible defenses, that holy man!"

"We revere him. But it is impossible to allow you to leave the room every time he is mentioned! You have disordered in that way the last four meetings!"

Angelo threw himself on the ground with cries of injustice, and an equally angry person started up from his corner. "What is he screaming about? Has he the only feelings to be considered? Do I thus weep like a woman? I, too, have a brother in a dark prison—and if I were with him I would

be more safe! While that one there slobbers do I wish to die? And to thus make a martyr not only of me, but of that holy soul, my mother! Who, at eighty-four would weep for me and tear her sacred hair, all gray!" A chorus of sympathetic wails responded to this touching reference. "Me, I see in this room one who once took my lock of that hair for another woman's!" Hisses arose. "Yet do I ask to leave the room? Let it be the house of Pascoe which forever leaves this room. Rather than meet in the dark with the agent of the Honorable Society I will surrender me to the police!"

This, indeed, achieved tumult, breaking into personal rancors in which the issue of Nicola seemed to vanish.

"You are a liar! He did not—"

"I will swear on the ashes of my father and of my dead son!"

"You would swear on anything!"

"Beware! Beware the anathema!"

"I am sorry for you—I take you to my bosom!"

"I curse you down to the seventh generation!"

"Once you dug, quiet, in my sewer! But now you are proud and a gentleman—"

"I was always more of a gentleman than you are!"

"I remind you that you must die!"

At last the voice of Mr. Gumama was able to make itself heard. "Beautiful friends, the vote, the vote!—Ah! Now, attention! This is what you do not know. Who thinks to be faithful to Nicola Pascoe, is Nicola Pascoe faithful to him? Nicola Pascoe flees away! A-a-ah! Doubt you that the Society will have *some* atonement? He flees to Brazil, this coming sunrise, he and his, and leaves us to bear his blame!"

It was enough. The meeting could not speak; it could only shake and froth in one united epilepsy. As the fifth paranza found voice it groaned, "We have been betrayed! We are innocent! We have been cast like lambs to the slaughter! He has trampled not only on the human but the divine law! He leaves us to perish in this infamous market—" And a very old man, as he called down upon the Pascoes all the curses of heaven mixed with descriptions of his sufferings from nightmare as a child, put up insane appeals for their punishment. He rose from hysteria to hysteria; sobbing with exhaustion he buried his face in his hands after summoning God, personally, to convince Nicola's friends; suddenly he raised his head and, plucking at one of his wild eyes, with a sweeping movement he cast a small object apparently at Jehovah's feet. His magnificent gesture defying their mercies, he lifted to their gasp of amazement the seared, empty, gaping socket in his ancient, bearded face, and, uttering a choking shriek, he fell to the ground. A stampede of horror was averted by Mr. Gumama, who picked up the eye-ball, cast it down again and ground it under foot. It was glass.

There being no hope of capping this climax they got down to business and surrendered Nicola in a wink. There remained to be dealt with a flourish of Mr. Gumama's. "This is all demanded by our kind Mother. But shall we not give a little more? Shall she herself be obliged to slay the serpent that we have fed and made strong? Will she not be pleased by a little more zeal on our part, while still we are ourselves? My friends, I have made a little arrangement." Fortunately for Mr. Gumama's climax as he now sent another of his impatient glances out of the window he gave an uncontrollable cry of relief. "Here they come!"

Strolling along the sidewalk appeared three men, all evidently Italians; but two, in their rough clothes, lumpish sailors. The slenderer and finer-made came sauntering between them; he had a charming smile with which he listened attentively to some oath embroidered anecdote. As they entered the garage one of the sailors, looking up, caught the eye of Mr. Gumama and made a quick signal. "Bene! They have not been followed!" Mr. Gumama exclaimed. "By the grace of heaven they have not been followed! And he has no suspicion!" The confidential aides purred aloud, the whole meeting slightly relaxed and the man with the knife decided to sit down. But he kept his knife in his hand.

Mr. Gumama stationed two men at the window to watch the sidewalk and then motioned half a dozen distinguished members to the stairs. Crouching forward they could see the slight man leaning in the doorway, whistling, and glancing up and down the swarming street with quick, dark eyes. Mr. Gumama squatted until he was in danger of falling through the opening and pointing a long, soiled finger at the slight man, "Il traditore," hissed Mr. Gumama. "He whom Nicola and the basista shelter in our midst! Alieni, o' n'infama! Traditore! He, Filippi Alieni!"

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## CHAPTER XIII

### "WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?": A CRIMINAL PERFORMANCE

Once more a hand had touched the spring. Once more the meeting vibrated to a universal shock.

Mr. Gumama signed to the fruit-peddler and a brace of laborers that they provide themselves with lengths of rope and the three withdrew to a position across the stairhead from the man with the knife, where they, too, waited in the shadow of the walls. Confiding in the sharpshooters at the window Mr. Gumama had the sailors called upstairs.

Meanwhile the man at the door, happily unaware of the preparations for receiving him above, came lounging inside with his hands in his pockets; and Mrs. Pascoe, whose greeting had shown some slight surprise at his appearance, laughed aloud. "It's funny how it does become you! I can't deny it!"

For he had doffed his gentleman's attire and was dressed like the shabbiest laborer, the tawny, earth-stained shirt open at his throat against a red cotton handkerchief; his loose, frayed, dingy jacket had once been of square, seafaring cut.

"I bet she picked them out fur yeh!" Mrs. Pascoe jeered. "She ain't one to miss the artistic touch!" Her mockery took him all in. "She'd be sure t' have yeh more uv a Dago organ-grinder 'n any Dago organ-grinder ever was! But I will say you wear 'em t' the manner born!"

Well, truly, the swinging gold earrings, rounder than Mr. Gumama's, had been carefully tarnished; his bracelet shot its golden gleam from under a ragged cuff; the cord of a scapular, scarlet against his olive skin, had been torn and knotted, and a handkerchief in the Sicilian colors was thrust into a belt supple with age. But, truly again, they became him mightily. For in those weathered boots, of which the soles were almost gone, his feet gripped the earth with a loping, elastic tread like a young animal's; and when, at the disconcerting coldness of her greeting, he snatched off his old cap and stood with it crushed flat in his nervous fingers the smooth and coal-black glitter of his head called her attention to the alertness of its carriage, like some prowler's scouting in the woods. Doubtless morning-coats and starched British linen are very discreet garments. But the worn softness of those old borrowed properties, in loosing the movement and the poise of his lithe body, had released some other change in him; something wild, light and strong, with the strength of a hound and the lightness of a cat, which, in the dense jungle where he was about to enter, might yet stand him in good stead. After all, one does not dress as a Sicilian for nothing!

Particularly when there are ladies about! Mrs. Pascoe was as much a woman as any silkier petticoat and it must have been some such momentary glimmer of the national presence, of the primitive equation, which had won her forgotten girlhood as it had once wooed and won her daughter's fancy. "Well, I vum!" said she again with tart amusement. Was he going to turn out a man? She leaned toward him all intentness. *Was he?*

"What yeh got up yer sleeve?" she whispered, for she thought she saw an impulse flickering in his eyes. "Look here, my lad, you pluck up heart an' mebbe yeh'll win through yet. She ain't God A'mighty, whoever she is; she ain't got rid o' that Cornish girl yet, nor, p'raps she ain't goin' to. She'll fin' she's gotta answer t' somebody in this world—she's got her ma. An' I don't see but what, when all's said, she's got her husband!"

He drew back with that little viperish black motion of his head and she cautioned him, "Now, now! Don't yer go puttin' those fellers' back up! I got no doubt they mean well by yeh if yeh keep quiet. But they're natcherul born devils—she's a natcherul born devil, as seems to me yeh had oughtta know by this time! An' only thing fur you is to jus' lay low an' squirm through.—Yeh goin' to do what yeh can fur that girl out there?"

He turned from her with the impatience of a man tested beyond his strength and as she went back to her solitaire her lips twitched. A man came down past her and quietly but with tremendous dramatic consciousness touched the arm of the slim figure in the doorway. "You will, above, attend the council!"

Without a sign to her he followed the messenger. Putting out one claw she clutched his cuff in her hold like a parrot's. She was looking in his face for her answer and he made that motion, palm downwards, with which an Italian dismisses some slight unpleasantness. "Ah, che vuol pazienza!" he intoned as the messenger turned round, shrugging and pulling mildly at his cuff.

The claw held. "Ah, let 'em wait! An' don't yeh gimme none o' that gibberish—I been altogether *too* patient, this good while!" The messenger beckoned and she lowered her voice. "Yeh claim yer a gentleman an', as far forth as what that goes, I dun't say but yeh be. I never thought one o' yer kind was a man, exactly, but if yer be, be one now. I hadn't ought to let yer do it, but, if yeh can, do! An' if not, yeh got all the rest o' yer life to think what kind uv a gentleman y' are!—Yeh can g'won up."

Did she feel a pressure of his hand? Did she imagine a sharp breath through his whole body, like an outcry, like a pledge? Under his guide's disapproving glance his face was merely sulky and she could only gape wistfully after him as he was swallowed up into the dusky loft.

At any rate it was with these words in his ears that he found himself standing, facing the light, and between it and him a blurred sea of faces. The air, heavy from so many lungs, was thick with cigarette smoke and the odors of cheese, garlic and cheap scent; here and there the cruder and uglier features, expressions of gutter enmity or degenerate glee, sprang out like exclamations; here and there a jaunty pose, a bright tie, the treasurer's carnation or a pair of earrings reassured him of a peaceful and joyous gathering. No! As he stood there, facing that assemblage, there crept through his nerves a sense of being on trial, of being a satisfaction to its lust and fear.

The poor fellow looked from one to the other of those fervid, luscious faces, great-eyed and full-mouthed, smiling a little, festively decked, oiled and curled; he was groping for some unguessed doom in their amusement, as if he were thrown into an arena which they watched, pleasantly; surrounding him not with harsh horrors but with that horror of softness which hardness can never equal. A nausea, a blind faintness, crept in upon him; where were the hopes of Mrs. Pascoe, now?—A satisfied, panting breath, full of heat, rose from the crowd.

"Filippi Alieni?"

"Suor servitor, signor."

He did not deny it!

"Filippi Alieni, are you duly grateful that you, an outsider, are admitted to the Council of the Arm of Justice?"

"Si, Signor."

"Filippi Alieni, twelve years ago was it not you who were admitted to another council? You, who were brother in the law to Nicola Ansello, were not you in Naples received into the bosom of the Honorable Society?"

"Si, signor."

"He admits it, he admits it!" The cry broke forth, quickening dead wires and releasing muffled sparks. The old murmur swelled and grew and beat in little waves of angry, of fearful sound, trembling about the name of Alieni. Black looks, shudders of repulsion and denial began to translate themselves into the curses of a dozen dialects; against Alieni all the accents of the south crossed fingers. Then there was a low whistle from somewhere without. Every one started on guard. The lid of the hatch was softly lifted. The voice of Mrs. Pascoe was heard, dryly bargaining. It was only some one come in to buy gasoline. The baited guest still stood sulky and utterly bewildered, searching their faces.

"So, you admit it! You, brother in the law of our chief, husband of our basista, you joined the Honorable Society! You received the kiss upon both cheeks, you accepted the salutation on the brow, you took the oath of the Omerta! That oath of humility and obedience, that oath never to reveal to any one, brother nor sister, father nor mother, wife of your bosom nor child of your loins, the secrets of the Society! Never to avenge but by the Society's permission and your own hand any wrong done you by any brother in the Society, nor ever, even on the bed of your death, dying from his knife, to denounce him to the police! You sang the sacred song

If I live, I will kill thee,  
If I die, I forgive thee!

You took that oath and you broke it. You revealed a secret and you denounced to the police! For you four heroes died! Yet you live—because you were shielded by Nicola Pascoe. He forsook the Honorable Society and fled with you, you and your wife, and for love of that sister, whom he feared to be condemned like you, has he lived an exile and a shamed man! And for this has the Honorable Society sought and found you at the last—is it not so!"

He knew better than to answer, this time. But his silence did him no good. "He denies not! He can not speak! He knows well his guilt! His guilty heart, it shows in his face! He has an evil eye!" So howled the pure-minded chorus, feeling that Mr. Gumama had had the floor long enough. Timid spirits began to call upon the saints for protection when through the hubbub there lightly threaded the clipped final syllables and soft, melancholy rhythm of some Parmesan; strangely netted out of the virtuous north and lifting the tender chant, "I demand the suppression of Filippi Alieni!"

"I demand—" "I demand—" The loft was full of it. "Let him be put to sleep." "I volunteer!" "I volunteer!" "NO, I! I am the older novice!" And then the Parmesan, "I will put him to sleep and bear him to the cap in testa in our name!"

"Pazienza! Pepe, the greed for glory is well. But be not too greedy.—Admit, Alieni!" thundered Mr. Gumama. "All else is useless! Admit! Admit!"

"Oh, si! Si! Si!" cried the young fellow, who had been standing as if stunned. And now he threw his arms above his head and rocked himself between them, with a transport that matched the crowd's.

It, too, was stunned by that simple admission into a moment's silence in which Mr. Gumama gave forth, "You have said. You are condemned. Filippi Alieni, you must now be put to sleep."

Still he took it quietly, stupidly, looking questioningly, incredulously, into Mr. Gumama's face. Then some instinct turned his head and at last he saw and quite mistook the sentinel with the knife. He gave a convulsive start and sprang through their hands like an uncoiled whiplash. As he leaped on the surprised sentinel the rope of the little vendor caught him in its noose. Still there was a moment when he was the active center of a writhing knot, a centipede of men rolling, tearing and struggling upon the ground; bounding and falling like one, tripping and throttling each other and kicking the wrong ribs. A babel of oaths and sporting outcries shook the place, pierced from the street without by the strains of an emulous organ-grinder jocularly jerking out

the tango. And then the noose tightened, the strength which was only energy collapsed, and the struggling prisoner, prone upon his back, could only bite the hand which agreeably attempted a bit of triumphant tickling. The bitten one, with an outraged shriek, caught him a buffet between the eyes that made his head swim and then a train roared past and its infernal reverberations quieted all sound. When it was gone the renewed stillness and the restored, dim light found the prisoner on his feet; upheld by a guard on either hand and safely lashed, from knee to shoulder, in firm-laced rope.

"Filippi Alieni, have you anything to say before you sleep?"

The young man stood drooping in the hands of his captors, still breathing desperately; not flushed from his struggle but pale and faint as if his blood were stolen by some hidden pain. His throat swelled with a bitterness which he was now too hopeless or too spiritless to loose, and Mr. Gumama saw that it was doubtful if his question had penetrated to a mind that was one concentrated egoism. A barrel which Mrs. Pascoe had emptied of its finery, was brought into the cleared space before the court and Mr. Gumama, examining it, ordered, "Find a cover. And nails." Before he repeated, "Do you, then, make no request?"

This time he shook his head, with a long automatic shake, playing for time. Yet he had no hope. He had used himself up in that first spurt and the spirit upon which Mrs. Pascoe had lately built sank slowly back again till there was no life left in his face except, in the depths of his dark eyes, a waiting, raging stillness of despair.—Mr. Gumama regarded him disapprovingly. "You do not wish to make peace with God?"

He answered with a grinding laugh and let his head drop down again upon his breast. Even the organ-grinder had changed from the tango to the Miserere. Those present had piously removed their hats. Mr. Gumama pointed toward the bonds of the two condemned men as if giving a signal.

"Wait yet a little!"

It was the coo of the Parmesan. He had been diligently and amusedly studying the last prisoner. "I wish to ask him a thing."

The prisoner drew a quick, scared breath, but he did not look up.

Mr. Gumama, annoyed at the Parmesan for putting himself forward, tartly replied, "Ask, then!"

"Alieni o' n'infama," said the Parmesan, pleasantly, "what would you do to remain awake?"

The crowd and the prisoner gave a simultaneous start. This was too much! The cry of the crowd was a baulked tiger's. Regardlessly, the dark eyes of the prisoner leaped to those of the Parmesan and clung there with their bright questioning, tenacious as bats. Mr. Gumama turned upon the Parmesan with a gesture like a blow.

"Oh, oh, oh!" sighed the Parmesan, lightly reproachful. "Let me speak, who have thought of things. We of the Arm know a game of our own. It was invented by the basista Alieni, and it calls itself the Duel by Wine." He bowed low to Mr. Gumama. "Sir, it is not our custom to bring evildoers here in packages and let them be warned of that which might befall them so much the easier accidentally, after dark, in the rough street. So I suppose—what else?—that those two are to attempt the Duel by Wine. Yes? And that he who wins lives to suppress the traitor—leaving him in the barrel on the wharf, signed with our sign? And bearing his token—that bracelet will do—to the capo in testa?"

"It is the plan."

"And have you not one more plan? No? Sir—pardon!—you do not—in your greatness you do not—reflect! There is, to us of the fifth paranza, another danger. Enlighten us, sir, please, what this other is."

His look met and challenged Mr. Gumama's, upon whose face intelligence and admission reluctantly broke forth.

"Ah-ha! Is, then, the sentence of the Mother Society the only sentence that we have to fear? Is there not a sentence that will strike at us and, perhaps, through us at her? The foe which has enchained Angelo's brother, the foe from which, suspecting us not at all, Nicola flees—the policemen of the Americans! Ay di me—listen, my dears! Does not this cold foe ever seek and question night and day, with pictures always in the journals, for one who perhaps knows too much and who has a girl's tongue to talk? You think all will be well when you have suppressed the traitor. What if there should be a danger deeper than the traitor? Tell us, sir, your plan about the pretty one, the little one, the little Nancia—Oh, what name! Nancia Cornees!"

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SICILIAN TRAITOR: "YOU THAT CHOOSE NOT BY THE VIEW"

The prisoner had never taken his eyes from the Parmesan's face. Their hope was so cruel that it

might have been fear, instead. If, from the world of responsibility, the girl's name penetrated to him with any meaning he gave no sign. The same animal concentration abode in his close stare.

But the new anxiety at once affected the meeting. Only Mr. Gumama, resenting this intrusion, shrugged, snubbingly. "Clever youth, there is a plan for her, wholly good. When the Signora Alieni expected her American lover to travel with her she could not take with her his betrothed—it would not have been seemly! So Nicola sends her to-night with the gang of Roselli, which is soon, too, sailing for Brazil. There they must restore her to himself. He knows not he will not sail. Very well. She is slight but she is fair. She will do well for the Rosellis in Brazil."

"I do not—pardon!—I do not think of the Rosellis. What will she do for us?"

"In Brazil? If she were a danger even there would not the Signora Alieni have destroyed that danger?"

"The Signora Alieni has never done such work—she has no practice. Moreover, be sure she fears what Nicola feared in the beginning—the curse of his mother!"

A voice remarked, "His mother is ugly and old. If she should die she could not curse."

"True. But we are busy."

Beppo began to exclaim, "It is too bad! Time after time have I asked for her! I, too, love her and could be happy. And I need them like her every day! Why should she be sent to Brazil? I never have anything!" He stamped with rage and his nose began to bleed again.

Other young riondeterros, complaining of the dearth of blondes, began to protest against Brazil. The Parmesan looked at Mr. Gumama with a smile. "Is she not a firebrand, eh? She who is so sought by the police, is it to the police she shall tell her story?"

Brushing the Parmesan aside the capo insisted, "She is not of our nation. It is against the custom. It is a greater danger than she is. Even if she should meet, so far away, with men of the Americans, what does she know?"

The Parmesan, now visibly measuring strength with Mr. Gumama, responded merely, "What is it, Beppo?"

Beppo, past the handkerchief he ostentatiously held to his nose, cried out, "She knows everything!" As this won him the center of the stage he proceeded in a series of sniffing shrieks, "I will tell you! I am the cousin of Nicola. I am the friend of their house. I play much with Maria but I watch and listen. Attention! She knows all, all, all! She seemed at first wrapped in the love of the basista. They slept side by side. She made a promise to ask, of her own accord, for sleep; but then she is ill and when she is well again she has some notion and she will not—why? Because she wills to tell all she knows! She, too, has watched and listened! She knows my name—and yours, Giuseppe Gumama! Under her red hair she carries death for you, Antonelli! And for you—and you—and you!"

The meeting was on its feet, swaying with passion and fear and gesticulating, with congenial resolution, "I demand the suppression—"

"I, too!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

"I demand the suppression of Mees Cornees!"

The capo's authority was shaken in a paranza which was a paranza no longer. Obedience was not what it had been in the Arm of Justice.

"Hands of the Arm," Beppo adjured, "is she not now at our meeting-place? Knows she not that? Did the basista conceal when Nicola was made a capo in the Honorable Society? Knows she not that? Oh, friends of my blood, can she not tell *that name*? By the body of Bacchus, I see her in my dreams! There is a shower of gold about her! If she is not for me, do not give her to the Rosellis—let her sleep!"

The meeting echoed, in one soft whisper of satisfaction, "Let her sleep!"

"S-s-ssh!" said Mr. Gumama.

He said it instinctively, glancing toward the scuttle. But he realized that the precedent of dealing solely with his own nation must now be set aside; he heard the people's voice. Alas, he had also to baulk it of its Duel by Wine.

"Let it be so. Firenzi, you will suppress the traitor and deliver him to the wharf. Choose two apprentices to help you with the barrel. Pachotto, you will take Beppo and the brother of Antonelli's wife and proceed to our old meeting-place. When you have suppressed the girl Cornees bring back her token."

"Sir," the Parmesan again coolingly corrected, "Nicola has still with him some of his men and the Rosellis. There is but one man who, without suspicion, can reach past these to the little Cornees.—Alieni o' n'infama," he pleasantly repeated, "would you do this to remain awake?"

The prisoner felt himself quiver as though he had been struck. He could not control the hope which was almost a sickness that rose in him at these words. He heard the popular cry surge up against him, hissing and protesting; Firenzi and Pachotto were the most horribly excited for he and they were the only persons in the room not having a good time. His quick glances, furtive and secret, ran questing among the lips that condemned him; when he lifted them to his questioner the sharp intake of his breath promised his soul away. But Mr. Gumama turned upon the Parmesan and told him that he forgot himself.

"Ah, sir, in private a word. Alieni, does he speak English?" He broke his beautiful Italian into a strange sound. "Spik Inglese, Alieni?"

The prisoner, trembling to oblige, responded in the same dialect, "Unstan' Inglese!"

It did not oblige—the Parmesan frowned. "Unstan' Inglese verra good?" He coaxed, winningly, hoping for a denial.

Now the prisoner, though he understood English perfectly, was no fool and could see a possible weapon when it was put into his hand. "I deplore!" said he, shrugging sadly. "Heartseek! Unstan' notta mooch!" And he tried not to vibrate with greed of what they should say.

"Va bene! Spik Inglese, us! Spik low! Oh, Gumama, let heem put da girl to slip—heem! Let heem tak' for token—Whatta she wear?" he asked Beppo.

Beppo considered and then pointed to the gold bracelet under the old Sicilian cuff. "But silvere!" He lapsed into Italian. The girl had had three silver trinkets—a ring, a locket, a bracelet. Nicola had taken the locket, the ring she had lost. "It ees time she loosa da t'ird!" grinned the Parmesan. "Ssh! He ees leesten!" Their voices sank to a whisper. Inordinately acute though his senses always were the prisoner could no longer understand a syllable.

"I go weeth Beppo an' Chigi. Let heem settle da girl an' tak' her token. Den *we* settle heem an' tak' botta tokens! Tak' dem to capo in testa for show extrra gooda faith in nama da Arma of Zhoosteets. Den Honorrahble Soceeata embrass us! We done gooda!" He inhaled with languid elegance and returned to the world a ring of cigarette smoke.

Still the prisoner could not catch a word. The decision hung fire. The protesting roar surged louder and louder and the cries of Pachotto and Firenzi became tiger cries. Mr. Gumama suddenly called to order. He had found a way to satisfy the Parmesan and yet to maintain his supremacy.

"This meeting promised Firenzi and Pachotto a chance of mercy and a chance of service. This meeting keeps its word. The chance is to be now. But for Alieni, also. Do not rebel. They were to enter on the Duel by Wine. But for the Duel by Wine the basista Alieni has sent us three cups. Why should not the prisoner Alieni play at the game of his wife?"

He had turned the tide. Their craving for games of chance, always temporarily stronger than fear, anger or duty, flared into high fire. Again was Mr. Gumama the popular man. Even on the prisoner smiles were lavished. And still for some crevice of safety, as if in every muscle of their faces, his eyes sought.

The meeting got happily to work, like a good child. It brought forth a dice-box and dice, a bottle of wine and, wrapped in a colored handkerchief, two triangular knives. In that musical neighborhood another hand-organ had long since followed the first; "The Wearing of the Green," which had made melodious the Parmesan's battle, now gave way to the Tales of Hoffman and the Barcarolle, a rhythm that swayed in every busy motion and humming tongue as the prisoner watched the table cleared and the painted jugs set forth. Mrs. Pascoe was called up to fetch a lantern; as she withdrew all three prisoners were faced toward the wall; Mr. Gumama took a twist of paper from his pocket, shielded it from view, and dropped a tablet from it into each of two jugs. Then he filled them all with wine. The prisoners were turned round again. "Alieni o' n'infama," called the Parmesan, blithely, "you are very much afraid!"

He knew it and sank his head on his breast.

"Cowards play well. They grow brave from fear. You will be desperate."

The young fellow shuddered. But he tried to keep his head clear.

"Cheer up, traditore! It is true our haste but sentenced you to the knife and the knife is quick. But do you not choose to risk a few drops and die wriggling—when, if you are lucky, you may live? When you have but to strike, afterwards, a little soft blow to make your peace!" The Parmesan, snatching up a triangular knife and, despite the remonstrances of Mr. Gumama, one of the jugs, thrust them jocularly under the prisoner's nose.

The tormented fellow, with an uncontrollable gasp that spilled the wine, bent and kissed the jug. A burst of childish applause approved his enthusiasm. A dank moisture of relief broke out upon him. At least they saw that he was resolved and would not fear to let him try. What was coming?

The meeting had formed into a circle as for a cock fight. He, Firenzi and Pachotto and the table with the dice and wine were in the center. The silent circle devoured him with applauding, encouraging glances. He was horribly aware of the two other men, larger, heavier, perhaps therefore luckier—the bigger the build, he had thought before, the greater the luck!—They were all too still! What were they going to make him do now?

Mr. Gumama himself took down a strap from the wall and tested its strength.

"Firenzi, then you, Pachotto, then you, Alieni, you will appeal to the dice. He who throws highest will have first choice of the jugs. Of the three who drink, one will live. It will take some time to settle this. The meeting will disperse, but a committee will return. The man whom they find alive will go with Beppo and Chigi and you, Pepe, to our meeting-place and put to sleep that girl. Those not surviving will be signed with our sign—but only one thrust for each paranza of this district.—Filippi Alieni, what is the matter with you? You show no feeling at what I say!"

For all his brilliant, questioning eyes, it was true he looked extremely blank; his expression too often merely followed theirs with an opposite. "Well, there must always be a first time. It is true, Alieni, is it not so, that you have never suppressed a life?"

There are bitternesses which fear cannot quench. Having no free hand to beat his breast he turned his head with restless passion from side to side and in a high, shrill, wild desolation, a Latin sweetness of hysteria roughened by his grinding laugh, he cried aloud, "Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!"

"There is no need for irreverence!" exclaimed Mr. Gumama, scandalized. "That is all. Loose their bonds."

Firenzi and Pachotto ran to examine the jugs, voting simultaneously for the immunity of the golden scales—what others? So that the first choice would be all important. But the third prisoner had given his last flash. He dropped his shivering face and hid it in his hands.

"Sit!"

They dropped beside the table.

"Swear obedience to the decree of Fate!"

All three laid a hand on the crossed triangular knives. Mr. Gumama purposed the oath. "Filippi Alieni, your lips shake so that you do not repeat distinctly. Say, I swear!"

"I swear!"

"Rise!"

"Firenzi, make your appeal."

Firenzi started forward on a rush. But after a step or two he halted, glared about him as if just waking up, and then went forward, sagging like a drunkard. Arrived at the table he crossed himself, shook the dice, and, whimpering, fell on his knees. His shaking hand crawled along the table, groping for the dice-box and lifted it. The crowd, straining in upon him, buzzed. For the number was moderate. He had thrown a three and a two. And kneeled there, blubbing. The courage of the Honorable Society does not remain fast in all washes.

"Pachotto, make the appeal."

He, too, started with bravado; he was perhaps half way across when they had to catch and drag him forward. He threw wild and they had to support his wrist. Even so one die fell underneath the edge of the saucer in which the box had stood. That in view was another two-spot. If, however, that under the saucer were even a four he was ahead in the throw. They moved the saucer—the die was a five. Pachotto leaped in the air with triumph—Firenzi, yellow and cursing, tried to fold his arms. Frightful sounds issued from his throat, upon which the cords stood out.

"Alieni, you will make the appeal."

He who had been a gentleman drew himself together and came slowly forward. He was now the darling of the crowd. But he did not guess that; he came of a superstitious tribe and to him, too, it seemed important to win from the start. His soul trembled, but steadily and softly he stole to the table. Now he was arrived, looking down, one concentrated apprehension, on his fate. Lifting the dice-box he once more threw out his bright suspicious glance into the crowding faces. "Whatever gods there be!"—he threw the dice. Over these he bent with a sort of sweep and then, uttering a sharp hiss, sprang up like a jack-knife. The crowd swayed, yelped and shivered with amusement into a triumphing crowd. He had thrown two sixes. Pachotto uttered a piercing yell and fell on his stomach in a dead faint.

"Filippi Alieni, of the jugs you have the first choice."

He stood as if nothing had happened. He had suddenly realized that his situation was really more terrible than ever. Watching, watching, he could descry no help. None of those alert, elated faces had a hint in it, not a congratulating hand pointed toward the fateful jug. He moistened his lips and looked mechanically at the dice which had thrown him this choice. But the dice, too, were dumb. Then, at last, he looked at the jugs.

There was the red design, the white and the green. His hand crept up and touched the chord at his throat. Scarlet was her favorite! But did she know? White—there was no luck in white. Green, the color of hope! Of resurrection! Yes, but to be resurrected one must first die! Red, again, was blood-color—but there was blood at every turn! Whose blood did this stand for—whose? Ah, yes, the scales—the scales were different! Gold, silver, and gray! The scales were very little, so it was they that held the secret! Silver, gray and gold! Why gray? Silver—hadn't he heard them



whispering about silver? Why, there were some words—He dropped to the ground with the jug, leaning on the table and pressing the scrolled legend to the lantern.—Silver pays! Pays whom? Pays what? Oh, God, to understand! What was the other—gold? He was panting—his breath smeared the glass of the lantern. It was dry and cut his lips like grass-blades! Yet he reeked with cold sweat, it was running into his mouth! He wiped the glass clear with one cuff. Steady! Take care! Can't you read, you fool! Gold buys. Oh, heaven, what would it buy here? Life—freedom—what else would anybody buy? What was the sense of it, if it meant anything else? But it might be a lie! "She's a natcherul-born devil." It was a lie she would delight in! One chance! One! Everything on it—everything! Never to leave here—to die here—here, where no one would ever know! Without doing what he had secretly meant to do, without ever having lifted a hand—to die in torment, squirming on the floor like a rat with torn bowels—There was one other jug. Gray—what a color! Ghost-color—was that what she meant? Lead slays! But, once more, slays whom? Lead slays—lead—lead—Lead!

A change passed over him. He became very still. Then, shaking with suppressed eagerness, he got slowly to his feet. He put his dense hair back from his eyes. And those eyes, hypnotized by the little jug with its gray scales, never left it; drinking it up before he could raise it to his lips. His mouth gaped for it with hanging jaw. He raised it in hands that gradually steadied and then over its brim, he gave the faces that fawned in upon him, breathless, one last look.—"He has chosen!"

They might be less than human, but he and they were still living creatures; and, in ten minutes, what would he be? Beyond them were dusky walls, built by human hands, chairs, a bureau, lithographs, all the warm furnishings of life; windows into the world, into the swarming, chattering streets where the lamps began to glow, while from round the corner came the clang of trolley-cars; whistles, calls, footsteps, were in his ears, laughter above the crash of wheels,

"Give my regards to Broadway—"

That was the hand-organ, tired of opera and getting down to business;

"Remember me to Herald Square—"

It filled the whole room! A lighted train swept by; he could see the faces of people reading evening papers, people who complained at hanging on to straps! The roar of it was familiar and dear as a beloved voice at home but it passed and left him quite alone.

"Tell all the boys on Forty-second Street  
That I will soon be there!"

—"Choose, Alieni, choose! Drink! Drink!"

Everything passed from his eyes. He was blind as before he was born. Then his mouth was in the wine; he drank it to the last drop; the jug, with a clatter that he heard perfectly but no longer understood, rolled at his feet. "È fatto!" said he, in a low, clear voice. "È fatto—it is done!" And his face dropped into his hands.

The meeting came about him but he did not know it. Around one wrist a strap was buckled and the strap's other end nailed to the table so that the death-agonies might not wander too far. A like precaution was taken with the other men when they had drunk. He did not notice it. He looked at the floor. Firenzi, upon whom chance had forced the silver scales, gave a horrible sound of retching and slid from his stool, the strap holding his arm. A quiver passed through the body of the first drinker, but he would not look. The meeting picked up its lantern and trooped—rather reluctantly but leaving the hatch open—chattering down the steps. The hands of the Arm dismissed Mrs. Pascoe, fetched some more wine, cut some tobacco and sat down to the business of making bets while they waited. He did not miss them.

He, too, waited.

Twenty minutes later, in the darkness, the loft was quite still. Two bodies, horribly contorted, lay straining on their straps. The rigor of death was already settling upon those convulsive heaps. The faint squares of the windows made a kind of glimmer by which it was possible to discern a pale face, a slight figure; this leaned against the table, which it clutched with hands of steel. He who had trusted to the leaden scales had trusted well.

In that darkness, in that silence, through that horror of squalid death which had not been silent, he had shed the rags of his hysteria and had caught again the concentration, the keenness, the readiness of that moment when Mrs. Pascoe had called on him to be a man. But what did he see in those empty shadows, and for what did he nerve himself? The figure there at the table was desperate, but it was very slight, and at the end of no road—valor nor cowardice nor vengeance—could he see escape. They were all blocked, those roads, the program too close built and every knot too tightly tied. Whatever he might wish, there was but one thing he could do. A knife was to be put into his hand and he had no choice except to strike. After all that had passed it was perhaps even with eagerness that silently, alone among those shadows, he embraced his fate.

A stir began to rise from below; the men down in the garage were coming to pack the barrel. He heard the mounting footstep of his guard, ready to convey him to the secret meeting-place of the Arm of Justice; along that road where it should deal with him, when he had dealt with Nancy Cornish.

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## CHAPTER XV

### ONE WITNESS SPEAKS

It was fully dark under the sail-cloth of the table d'hôte. A strong smell of rancid wicks disturbed nobody and in the charged, suspensive air the cheap lamps burned with a still flame. This may in part have been due to Herrick's tensely strung imagination, which Christina's message of the night before still mercilessly played upon. From that source no drop of further information had fallen through Tantalus on to the parched tongue of Herrick's nor of Wheeler's nor of the Law's desire.

That afternoon Herrick had seen Stanley off from the station where not six weeks ago they had met as strangers. And so little was Fate's veil lifted for him, even now, that he had no forewarning of when next, nor why, he should be there again!—Stanley had, however, told him Ten Euyck's latest news—how it was to the table d'hôte the Italians had conveyed their liberated prisoner from the Tombs!

The boy looked at his friend a little suspiciously even while he repeated Ten Euyck's chagrin: "That's a hideously shameful thing to happen to me! It's the annoyance of a blind, stupid, brutal reproof—when I've worked so hard and suffered so much! Here, in my own district—Under my own hand—!" There are no unalloyed elations in this world! Nor did there seem any doubt in Ten Euyck's mind that this was the long-sought-for secret place, where they should find a printing-press. But he forebore to raid it until evening, when all possible birds should have returned to the nest, and contented himself with the sending of his disguised operatives peacefully to fetch from it Will Denny, before whose coming Stanley had fled the police station. That young gentleman had also gathered from Wheeler's thunderstorm of oaths that Christina's manager considered himself under surveillance. And this had made Herrick wonder if the same were not true of himself.

On account of his momentarily expected cablegram it was a crushing suspicion. He spent an afternoon of aloof and goaded wandering, and at last, shielded as he hoped by the darkness and by the company of a whole group of entering diners, yielded to the temptation of the table d'hôte. He could not doubt it was encompassed by spies; he could not but attend the seizure, the crisis, the outcome. Here, more than anywhere, were the lines converging; here, for to-night, was the center of the web. He said to himself, then, in his ignorance, that nothing mortal should induce him to forsake it.

Under the sail-cloth there was no longer any room; but, within doors, save for a couple of men at a distant table, Herrick was quite alone. There was no change in the department of the place, no disturbance. The Italian proprietress, in her comings and goings, found time to reply that the old lady was still in the country but her prototype, the little gray parrot, which he had not seen for a long time, was climbing in and out of its cage and the angelic children still snuffled about the floor. It was on these innocents that Herrick began as usual to practise his Italian when the proprietress had gone affably to see about his order, but if he thought one of them would lightly drop Christina's address he was mistaken. Smother-y as the place was, with that same looming sultriness of a week ago, agitated in its daily business, its pulse did not beat so hard as his, its imagination did not quiver, like the figures of a cinematograph, reviewing the movements of a motor-car that until yesterday had sped through mire and dust and blood, through sunrise and midnight, past the spread, astonished wings of the marble Hoover lions, past the smoking-ruins of a post-office, past Riley's where the shadow danced, after a will o' the wisp. There was no suggestion, here, which could lift that phantom light; the customers ordered, the little fat boy, next in age to Maria Rosa, leaned familiarly against his knee, the parrot continued to clamber over its cage, talking steadily, rapidly and monotonously to itself, and then Herrick said in surprise,

"Why, the bird's speaking English!"

The parrot looked at him coldly, disinterred something which it had buried in its food-cup, gnawed on the treasure, and dropped it. The little fat boy picked it up and smiled at Herrick. Herrick said, "Let's see!" It was a silver ring, holding a bluish-green Egyptian scarab.

It seemed to Herrick that he had heard of such a ring before, and he tried to remember where. One of the men at the further table left and the other was buried in a foreign newspaper. Herrick got up and went over to the desk. That was English the bird was speaking. "No, no, no, no! I don't believe it. I don't believe it!"

"Polly," said Herrick, "what are you talking about? And what do I know about this ring?"

The bird burst into a shriek of the ungodly laughter of its kind, pecked the ring out of his hand, backed away with it, dropped it again; and then, out of a perfect stillness, with its little eyes fixed on his face it replied—

"Ask Nancy Cornish!"

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## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LAST SHADOW: "LEAVE ALL THAT TIES THY FOOT BEHIND AND FOLLOW, FOLLOW ME!"

Oh, yes, the Italian proprietress cheerfully informed him, the parrot had been in the country with Maria Rosa and her great-aunt. Truly, the great-aunt was fond of the country, she was still there. When was he going to see Maria Rosa again? Oh, there, alas!—Maria Rosa had gone with her father to the moving-picture show—

He could get no further and he feared to excite conjecture. He might waylay the little girl as she returned, but not too near the watched house—nor was the idea of the father encouraging. Nevertheless, he betook himself outside, turning toward Third Avenue where the picture-shows flourished. About two blocks down the street he took refuge in the hole of a tobacconist, whose door stood open into the warm dusk. On the farther corner the bright blue interior of a delicatessen that was also a fruit stand blazed hot with gas and, in exchange for a bottle of oil, a child passed a coin over the counter. The gas gleamed on the child's face and Herrick crossed the street. Here was Maria Rosa and here the moving-picture show which she attended!

He stopped on the outside for some nuts and affected surprise when Maria appeared. She accepted various delicacies and was freely chatty about her country visit. Oh, she had been in a beautiful place; grass, trees, flowers—nothing of its whereabouts could be ascertained. Great-auntie had lived there with old auntie—old auntie was her mama—when she was a little girl no bigger than Maria Rosa! But they had gone often to a grand big place where Cousin Nick's office used to be in the basement. But the morning after they brought the sick lady the things for the office were all gone! Ah, the grand big place had made the greater impression, but ignorance had evidently been carefully preserved. Herrick tried the words "Waybridge" and "Benning's Point" to no avail. With "river" he was more successful. Did you go there by the boat? Apparently not. Finally it came out that you went there by the walk past old auntie's house. And what pretty thing had she ever noticed about old auntie's house? Eh? Come, now? What did she like best?

"The marble kitties with wings."

The marble—

A child had dropped an address, after all!

Herrick, reaching into his pocket for a time table, had discovered a train for Benning's Point at eight-fifteen when, hearing his name he turned; beyond the now hurrying figure of Maria Rosa Joe Patrick was advancing toward him.

The boy came up hastily, extending an envelope addressed to Herrick in Mrs. Deutch's hand. As he took it he saw that Joe was brimming with some communication. "I saw you from down street. She sent for me an' says to bring you this. I was lookin' for you when I met Mr. Ten Euyck and he said the place to find you was around here."

"Touché!" Herrick said to himself. Even at that moment he vouchsafed an admiring smile to Ten Euyck's able conveying of a taunt.

"Mr. Herrick?"

"Yes, Joe."

"I got to get right back in time for the theayter. But I'd like to speak to you a minute."

"Walk back toward the Square with me."

"It's something I been worried about telling for days an' now I'm goin' to. I mean—Mr. Herrick, I wouldn't tell it to anybody but a friend o' hers! But I make out that it's right to tell it to you.—You remember that night out to Riley's?"

"Yes."

"An' the shadder the chaufers seen?"

"Yes?"

"I was there. My cousin Sweeney sent for me, an' my uncle an' me come out together. As we come into the yard—that toon—you know! There was the shadder—I seen it, too! And another man seen it an' skipped up the steps an' went inside. Me after him! An' before he'd got in, hardly, out he bounced with a lady. That lady wasn't no Mrs. Riley, Mr. Herrick. It was—*her!*"

"You've seen the moving-picture?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this gesture was the same?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that you thought you saw Miss Hope's shadow?"

"I know I did, sir."

"Wait. This gentleman, had you ever seen him before?"

"No, I never laid eyes on him."

"He went right into the room?"

"Popped right in as if he lived there!"

"And came out with Miss Hope?"

"Yes, sir."

"How was she dressed?"

"She had on a long coat an' a fussed up hat o' Mrs. Riley's."

"And no one else saw them?"

"No, sir. They run down the back-stairs as everybody come up the front."

"She was willing to go with him, then? He wasn't forcing her?"

"Well, you bet he wasn't! She was hangin' right on to him!"

"What was your idea of the whole business?"

"I thought mebbe she done it for a signal to him when to come in."

"Now, Joe, don't you believe that—it being, as you say, done so quick—and you having just seen this shadow which you had taken for Miss Hope's, you might have imagined it was she who came out with this man?"

"No, Mr. Herrick. I was at the door when they come out. I saw her face clear. I didn't make no mistake this time."

"And you didn't follow?"

"No, sir. Because—because—Oh, Mr. Herrick, she seen me as plain as I see you an' she smiled at me!"

Herrick paused with a threatening cry. "Why didn't you speak to her, then? Why didn't you tell—"

"Because, Mr. Herrick, when she opened her eyes wide and smiled at me, that way, she put her finger to her lips! Oh, Mr. Herrick, I ain't ever told a soul but you!"

She put her finger to her lips! Secret she had ever been, and there was another way in which Christina had never failed. She had never failed, in any stress of change or chance, to seize the measure of a devotion and use it to its hilt.

She smiled and put her finger to her lips! She pleased herself, then! She was free! She came and went at her own pleasure! Secretly, with companions of her choice! While he, in the room below—That night, too! That night of the road and the fields, of Denny and the yellow house!

Bitterness mastered him. An indifference like the indifference of sleep somehow wearied him to the bone. After Joe's departure, when he stopped under a street-lamp to open Mrs. Deutch's letter, he scarcely cared what it contained.

"—When you were not at home he sent this to me. Think you for yourself the meaning for it. What in myself I believed and prayed, that afternoon, now in person have I ascertained. Christina was born in this city of New York; she was baptized in the same month in the Church of the Holy Service, April 17, 1892."

He unfolded Gabrielli's cablegram:

Girl you inquire of victimized family named Hope, in America. They lived at Naples 1886. Record daughter born to Hopes, Allegra, not Christina, 1886. Died 1889.

The Hopes had had a child, that died three years before Christina was born! What was the meaning in the case of this dead baby? And if Christina was Mrs. Pascoe's child, what had the death of Allegra Hope to do with her? How could she have passed herself off on the Hopes for a dead child six years older than herself? He knew that somewhere in his aching brain the answer quivered to spring forth, when—at about the time when the Italians started with their prisoner from the garage—an open taxi hesitated at the corner nearest to the table d'hôte and then spun on without stopping. As it passed under the lamp Herrick was just leaving, a veiled lady rose in it to her tall height and pulled on a long, light coat. And all the pulses in his body stopped as though they had been stricken dead. For his eyes had recognized Christina.

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## CHAPTER XVII

## HERSELF

There was no other cab in sight. But fortunately a 'bus was just starting, and bye and bye he plunged from that into a taxi. All the way up Fifth Avenue he continued to keep his quarry well in sight; flashing in and out beneath the lamps, the beautiful tall figure sitting lightly erect and neither shunning nor avoiding the public gaze. At first he thought she had come back to be well in time for to-morrow night, but at Forty-second Street she turned toward the depot. She was making for the same train as himself.

A policeman, who should have died before he ever was born, let her cab through the block and held up Herrick's. He saw with horror that it was possible he should miss the train. Then, with a thrill of hope, that they would probably both miss it. When he got to the depot there was no sign of her. He tore like a madman across the vast stretches and up and down the flights of stairs by which modern travel is precipitated and came to the gate. She was inside, just stepping on the last car of the train. Officials were shouting at her, enraged, because the train had begun to creep.

"Tickets, tickets!" said the man at the gate. He was resolute, and Herrick had to pick him up and lift him to one side. It took an instant, and now the train was under way. But Herrick, as a free-born male unhampered even by a suit-case, was privileged to risk his neck, and he flew down the platform and gathered himself to leap upon the car. His hand was outstretched for the railing but it never reached it. A single zealous employee plunged at him, roaring. The sound halted his quarry in the doorway, and when she saw him she stepped back on to the platform of the car, bending toward him with a look of eager amusement, and throwing back her veil. And Herrick lost his chance to jump.

For her face, framed in soft flames of red, of golden fire, was the face of a stranger. It was extremely lovely, but for one curious defect. She had a blue eye and a brown.

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## BOOK FOURTH

### THE LIGHTED HOUSE

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## CHAPTER I

### THE HOSTESS PREPARING

Herrick lay in the long grass of the wooded lot, against the wall of the Hoover place. Already the night was velvet-black, and hot and thunder-scented as in summer. A million vibrations that were scarcely sound stirred with the myriad lives of leaf and blade in the dense silence. And his expectancy vibrated too, reaching for the end of a long chase. His slower train had followed on the very heels of that malign and radiant red-haired changeling, whose mysterious brew he was at last to taste for himself. Not this time in a little yellow cottage beside an open road, but in that great house, walled and guarded, deep and still in its own woodland, between the stone lions with their lifted wings and the mighty current of the tidal river! What he should do when he got there could be decided only by what he found. He had his revolver, and he scarcely knew whether to pray that he might, or that he might not, have need for it.

He remembered, tumbling over the wall from the inside, cascades of ivy, which he now hoped might give him a hand up the rough stone. But they tore away, one after the other, and sagged in his hold. He went on down the field, scouting in the darkness for some friendly tree; when he found one at last it was not so near the wall as he could have desired, and the first branch that seemed likely to bear him for any distance he judged to be about twenty feet above the ground. He crawled along this till its circumference seemed so slight he dared not trust another inch and peered into the pit. There was no way to make sure that the wall was there but to let go; he lowered himself the whole six feet of his length; let go; landed on the coping; by a miracle of balance maintained his equilibrium; and then, dropping cautiously to his knees, flattened himself along the edge. When you have dropped on to a wall which might or might not be there, it is nothing at all to drop on to the earth, which can not escape. He stood up, at last, within the Hoover grounds.

All was perfectly silent; the noise of his descent, which had seemed to crash like an earthquake, in reality had not waked a bird. He had now to make his way to the house through about a mile of perfect blackness; as a good beginning, he ran into a tree, and this rebuke of nature's seemed to put him in his place, and tell him to walk here like a spy, not like a combatant. He went on, but now with infinite caution.

This part of the ground was as little tended as a wild wood; then presently he came forth upon an old-fashioned garden, run wild, but still sending out sweet smells beneath his trampling feet; beds of white gillyflowers and fever-few and white banks of that odorous star-shaped bloom

which opens to the night made a kind of paleness in the dark which perhaps he rather breathed and guessed than saw. It was an approach for a Romeo, and seemed to cast a kind of dream over his desperate and grimy business. He sped on to another little grove upon a rise of ground and coming to the top of the slope saw, far ahead of him through the trees, the shining of bright lights.

He could scarcely believe his eyes, for surely they would never dare to light the house. And then again he remembered how far and lonely that house stood, a mile and a half in from the road, and save through the lodge or from the river how hard to come at! If this was really their haunt it must have been so a long time; they must have grown used to it, like their own house. All the more chance, then, for his spying! Expectancy sprang higher. He kept on down the slope, this time at something of a reckless pace, and, at the bottom, plumped full into a pond.

The shock was horrid and without even the dignity of danger. He could easily have scrambled back but that, as he re-opened his eyes, he found himself gazing at a lantern, held up from across the pond. At that moment three shots flew past him, aimed at the bank he had so involuntarily and violently quitted. It seemed well to remain inconspicuous as might be; the bullets began to skip close to him, and, experimentally sinking, he found a fair depth and struck out under water for the opposite shore.

In the middle of the pond his hands touched a solid and terrifying obstruction. Heavens, what was this? Through what snares did he clumsily struggle to make his way? And in what nightmare? Involuntarily he came to the surface and found himself confronted by a high, overhanging shape, bulking featureless in the darkness and chilling him with a sort of superstitious despair. The more so that he seemed to be grasping something shaped like a foot; his hand climbed a vast, cold leg and the next moment he could have laughed aloud. He remembered, now, from his daylight forays, an ornamental wilderness of rocks and ferns, across which he had once glimpsed a stone lady; seated, and bending forward with a vase extended in her hand. The pond had been hidden by that wilderness; the vase had once been a playing fountain, and the lady herself sat on a rock in the middle of the waters. It was against this rock his hand had struck and it was her ankles which he thus ungallantly grasped. He hung to them a moment, resting in her shadow, and then with infinite precautions began to pull himself up those smooth, cold knees. She was very large and dense, a bulwark between him and the spitting bullets; he felt her rocky island beneath his feet, and gave himself, even with ardor, to her embraces.

The light upon the shore split in two and one-half of it began to skirt the pond at a brisk pace. He clambered across the stone lady's lap and crouched, kneeling, in the shadow of her arm. Thus sheltered, his first thought was for the priming of his revolver. It was soaked through! He could have cried out like a child! But already his breathing space was past.

The runner with the lantern had reached the spot where Herrick had plunged in and the surface of the pond was now raked with rays of light, crossing each other and striking perilously near his refuge so that they sought out at once the breast and the bent back of the stone lady. Herrick, as he blotted himself down the rock, observed that on the further side the pond was edged by a coping of rough stones rising, perhaps, two feet above the water and irregularly surmounted by small boulders—the beginning of the ornamental wilderness. He came up close against the wall; his fingers wedging themselves in a crack between the stones, and his head, shadowed by a boulder, half above the water. Thus, as he could hear and was not likely to be seen, he had every advantage of that dangerous neighborhood. And also time for a somewhat chill reflection. Suppose the life were not knocked out of him in the next five minutes, what use was there in going on with a useless pistol? It seemed even the outer grounds were being patrolled or perhaps searched—he remembered the light shining from the house—it came in upon him that something unusual was going on, and that he might presently succeed in being either the victim or the witness of a climax. That thought was enough; his blood committed him beyond denial; and when the searchers, without having dropped a single significant remark, began scouting their own fears, and, accepting the surrounding silence as empty of intruders, turned back through the artificial wilderness toward the center of the estate, Herrick pulled himself out of the water and, sometimes on his hands and knees, sometimes upon his stomach, followed among the rocks.

The group with the lantern came out upon the carriage-way and paused. A horse and two-seated wagon awaited them, the horse's head turned toward the house; in the wagon sat Herrick's old friend, Mrs. Pascoe and the little old, old couple from the lodge. As the other men tumbled in the old lodge-keeper lifted up his voice: "I ain't slep' out o' the lodge, nor your ma ain't, either, in forty years!"

"Well, you'll have to to-night, pa," said Mrs. Pascoe. "An' there ain't any time to talk about it, either." She added, "You an' ma can come back when we're gone. Don't ferget M'ree's your great gran'niece by marriage. Have her visit yeh again." They were off and through the shrubbery; Herrick followed.

But the carriage-way was clear of everything save errant weeds and at an ordinary trot they very easily distanced him. After a while he ceased to hear the wheels, but now again he could see the house shine among the trees, and as he came closer still he listened for the sounds of their arrival but heard nothing.

It was extraordinary what a stillness had again fallen upon the night. No sound covered his approach, and when he came at last in view of the great entrance no wagon waited on the path

nor did any voice challenge him from the doorway.

He stood among the trees and stared across the wide sweep of carriage-way. He saw on either side depths of lawn, kept cut and roughly trimmed, merging at last again into the darkness. The drive was bright from the great glowing portico, and from the entrance doors set wide into a stately hall; the hall was all in order as though for a reception, with rugs and palms and candelabra, and to its left a vast apartment like a ballroom flung from its long open windows, that crossed the left front of the house and shone far along the side, spaces of lamplight down the terraces. Save for one pane gleaming overhead, the rest of the house stood dark, as if unoccupied. But in that still yet quivering night, in that dense, black, vast but sultry silence, this made a great illumination, and that wing of the old mansion seemed to blaze like a palace in a wood; in the lack of sound or motion, it seemed swept, opened and made ready by enchantment, and waiting for the conqueror. It had indeed so great an air, so composed, so ordered, and of such stately openness that it seemed to rebuke suspicion; surely law and seamliness were on its side and not that of the dark, soiled, muddied, creeping figure that skulked, staring, in the shrubbery like a thief in the night; totally confounded, oppressed by every terror of the house-breaker and yet with empty hands. But the bright house, which should have threatened, invited him with every luster.

He was a fool, if you wish, but at least he knew his foolhardiness to the core. The wagon he had followed must have passed the house and gone on toward the river, but this bright vacancy and quiet had not been arranged for nothing. To go forward was most likely death; a death quite futile and unremarked, and scarcely a breathing-stage in the wild story whose blazed trail of ruin and murder he had already followed so far. Well, he had followed too far to go back. He was too near the goal; he was too near the turning of the page, and, as far as was mortally possible, he must read it.

The empty drive, the empty hall, the empty, shining windows drew him like wires, and, dropping back across the border of the drive to a far-lying depth of shadow, he crossed it like a ghost; taking advantage of every unclipped shrub and moldering urn, began to mount the terraces.

Thus at last he came to the long windows, and huddling at one side, peered in. He saw a proud interior, brilliant and pale, with panels of latticed glass, after the French fashion, and other panels frescoed with Pierrots and Columbines and with great clusters of wax candles set between the panels. There was a great chandelier with swinging prisms reflected in the floor that was waxed like satin; but this chandelier was not lighted, and indeed everything suggested that they had never dared to use any electricity, for which they would have to work the power-house on the estate. But the clustered candles and the many lamps made the place afloat with liquid gold, and the room trembled and bloomed with the scent and the beauty of hot-house flowers, so that the air seemed to shimmer with their sweetness. There was little enough furniture; a golden grand piano with Cupids painted on it; a few chairs from which Herrick guessed the holland had but lately been removed; and near the huge, rose-filled fireplace, a little table, gleaming with silver and linen, with lilies and crystal and lace. It was set for two; close at hand was a serving-table with silver covers showing on it, and, for a practical and modern touch, a chafing-dish! There was no one in the room.

But the table was hint enough. Here was the center of these preparations. Here two people were to meet, and Herrick thought he knew the hostess. In the departing wagon-load, there had been no beautiful tall figure with red hair. To this little private festivity Fate had led him through the rough magic of his scramble in the night; she pointed at the table with a very sure finger, and now all his vague expectancy was centered in a single question, and his first necessity was to behold the face of the red-haired woman's guest.

Now at the first glance he had taken this room for a sort of music-room which had been used, too, for informal dances. And sure enough, along one wall, just as though put there to tempt him to the final madness, ran a little gallery for the dance-music. It had a balustrade about it and within this balustrade hung short yellow brocaded curtains, in a sort of valance, that seemed to Herrick strangely fresh, as though hung there yesterday. And he determined if it should be his last move on earth to get behind those curtains.

There was no staircase to the balcony from within the room. He crept to the hall-door; the hall opened out square as a courtyard with doorways and arches upon every side. At the rear the great staircase, after perhaps a dozen steps, branched off to either hand, and on its left a little gallery ran along the wall behind that very room and led to a curtained niche. This would be the entrance to the musicians' balcony, and there was nothing for it but that Herrick should traverse the hall and mount the staircase. It was as if the house had turned to one great eye; he thanked heaven for the rugs upon the marble and for the scanty shelter of the palms; while with every step he took and every breath he drew the house-breaker dreaded to hear another footstep in his rear or to see an assailant rise before his eyes. But all remained vacant and was as silent as the tomb. Running up those marble steps, he came at one bound to the curtained niche, and, as he darted in between its hangings, he had a strong inclination to laugh; for, if there were any one within, it would be quaint to see whether he or they were the more startled! But there was no one there. He had now his private box for the coming entertainment. He dropped softly to the floor and, as he did so, some one in the room below struck a match.

It startled him like the crack of doom. He parted the little curtains of the valance, and beheld himself so far right that there stood the red-haired lady lighting the chafing-dish.

Herrick was not more than about nine feet above the flooring of the room, with the main door from the hall to his right hand and the fireplace on his left, so that the little glittering table was before him and to the left of him but a few feet. And there the red-haired woman blew out the flame she had kindled, as if she had but meant to test the wick. It was Herrick's first long clear look at her and he looked hard. The resemblance to Christina lay only in a very striking suggestion of the tall figure, a pose, a poise, an indescribable lightness and sense of life; they had the same gracious, gallant bearing, the same proud carriage of the head, and he suddenly realized that he was looking at one of Christina's gowns. For the rest, she was, of course, six years the elder, and her equal slenderness was much more richly hued and softly curved. Handsome enough, her face at once attracted and repelled by the diverse coloring of the eyes. It was a face at once selfish and fierce and soft, with the softness of a woman who is fashioned from head to foot in one ardent glow; a softness like a panther's. In the flame-white allure of sex she struck straight at you, as undisguised and challenging as lightning, and, to any but a monomaniac, as soon wearied of. It seemed that she could never be satisfied with her preparations. She walked about the room, touching and re-touching the flowers; over and over again she scrutinized the appointments of the table; lifted the silver covers; peered into the chafing-dish, and tested the champagne in its bucket of ice. At last she could find nothing more to do. Through all her coming and going, she had seemed to be mocking and triumphing to herself; humming, singing and even whistling very low with her mouth pursed into a confident and quizzing little smile, or inclining her bright head, in victorious scrutinies, from side to side; so that it seemed the guest must be very welcome and, if she were bent on conquest, the conquest very sure.

She was not yet gowned for a festival, and, remembering the light in the room above, Herrick, grim as the hour was, smiled to imagine that here was to be played a little domestic comedy like thousands that go on in Harlem flats and tame suburban cottages; the servantless hostess satisfied at length about her cooking and her table and flying upstairs at the last moment to dress for company. So indeed she turned to fly, but then her mood changed. She whirled round upon the vacant table, her comedy, her mockery quite fallen from her, and given way to a black hate. All her quick humors swarmed in her, in a threatening storm; she was not so much like a woman as like a great, bad, lovely, furious child that runs its tongue out in defiance. But there was a power in this defiance like the power in that soft panther of her grace. So that it was a sort of curse her swirling movement cast upon the pretty table as she flung one arm up and out above her head; the hand clinched, and then the fingers slowly spreading and stiffening in the air. Then she went out of the room and up the stair and overhead.

Herrick, scarcely knowing what he did, rose to his knees! Just then, he thought he heard a slight noise behind him. As he turned, something struck him on the head; he fell millions of miles through a black horror stabbed with pain and forgot everything.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE EXPECTED COMPANY

When he came to himself he was trussed up like a bundle, with arms and ankles tied too tight for comfort. He still lay on the floor of the musicians' gallery and the room below him was still lighted. He rolled over and again could look through the valance. Only a little time must have elapsed, for the room was still empty.

And with the sight of that emptiness, questions poured in upon him. Who had found him out? And for what fate was he reserved? How long did they mean to leave him here and why did they leave him here at all? Why had he not been finished and done with? There struck through him, with perhaps the first utter and broken fear of his life, the depth of the silence by which he was again surrounded. No breath, no stir; that intense stillness was vivid as a presence and positive like sound; he was alone in it; he lay there helpless; a bound fool and sacrifice in the bright house, in the middle of the wood and the depth of the night, and, if those chose who left him so, he must lie there till he died. He lurched up and sat quiet, waiting for the dreadful giddiness and nausea that came with movement to pass by; determined to struggle till he got to his knees and on his knees, if necessary, to attempt to pass out of that house. He knew it was impossible, but movement he must have. Then, through that density of silence, he heard a step upon the terrace.

His curiosity rushed back on him, like fire in a back-draft. He held his breath; the step was a man's; it crossed the threshold of the great door and sounded on the tiling of the hall. The next instant the guest of the red-haired woman was in the room under Herrick's eyes.

Removing a long driving ulster and a soft hat, he proved to be in full evening clothes, and expectancy, held firmly down, lay mute and rigid in every part of him. He lifted a face the color of tallow and, staring straight at Herrick's balcony with blank, black eyes, the visitor drew a quivering breath. This visitor was Cuyler Ten Euyck.

The sound of his entrance had evidently been remarked. Again there was a light footstep overhead, and Herrick guessed that enough time had elapsed for the toilet to have been completed. The hostess came forth at once, and could be heard slowly, and with great deliberation, descending the stairs. Ten Euyck did not go to meet her. Only his eyes traveled to



the door and he stood stiff, with little swallowings in his throat. Herrick could hear, as she came into the room, a swish, a tinkle about her steps as though she walked through jeweled silk, and before her on the waxed and gleaming floor there floated a pool of additional brightness, so that he saw she had not been satisfied, after all, with the lighting of her supper-party, but carried a lamp to her own beauty as she came. Another step and there swam into his sight the beautiful, tall figure, carrying her lamp high, and incomparably more than before the mistress of that great apartment. This time it was Christina herself.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE SHIPS AT ACTIUM

She stretched out one arm, keeping Ten Euyck at the tips of her fingers. He seemed content to stay so, looking at her.

She was dressed in a trailing gown of silken tissue that was now gold, now silver, as the light took it; but the long vaporous slip beneath was of pale rose; molded to her motion and stirring with her breath, there dwelt in the gauze which covered her a perpetual faint flush. The stuffs were cut as low about the breast as if she had been some social queen, and her fair, pale arms were bare of gloves. Their adorable young flatness below the gleam of the slim, smooth shoulders, was now shimmered over and now revealed by short fringes of silver and gold, of cooler colored amber and crystal, which were their only sleeve; and these fringes hung about the borders of her gown and trembled into music as she moved. In the high-piled softness of her hair, diamonds glimmered like stars in a fair dusk; diamonds banded her brow in an inverted crescent; diamonds and topaz dropped in long pendants from her ears; diamonds and pearls clung round her arms; the restored necklace drooped down her breast, and the peep and shine of jewels glanced from her everywhere like glow-worms. She seemed to be clothed in fluctuant light, and yet it could not dim one radiance of her beauty. This was more than newly crowned; the rose was fully open; her loveliness had spread its folded wings and come into its own. There was no shyness now in those wide eyes; her spirit shone there, all in arms, and moved with a new and deeper strength in her young body. Very faintly, on the pure and delicate oval of her cheek, burned the soft, hot stain of rouge. This was the reality of the dear ghost, calling in the night with the rain upon its face; this was the pale girl in the gray suit who had once sat beside her mother in the corner of the coroner's office. It may be Ten Euyck thought of this; it may be she did.

"Well," she said, "have I made myself fine? Do I please you?"

He broke from his trance, took the lamp out of her hold, set it on the mantelshelf, and returned to her without a word.

"Pray speak!" she said; "I am all yours!"

"Christina!" he broke out, and caught and covered her hand with kisses.

"It is quite true. Do I do you credit?"

"Look at me here,  
Look at me there,  
Criticize me everywhere—"

He leaned toward her and she swayed past him to the piano. Over her shoulder she sang to him—

"From head to feet  
I am most sweet,  
And most perfect and complete!"

She struck the chords a crash and whirled round to him with her hands in her lap. "Yes, it is quite true. From my head to my feet—" here she thrust forth through the music of the shaken fringe a slim gold shoe with its buckle winking up at him—"you have paid for every rag I stand in." Christina's accent upon the word "rag" suggested that she was accustomed to standing in something much better. "It would be hard if you were not suited. Would you like to go to your room a moment? It's all ready."

He must have considered this jabber at somewhat its true worth, for what he did was to draw up a chair and take and hold her hands. "Christina," said he, studying her face, "do you hate me so much?"

She remained a moment, silent. Then, "Yes!" she said. "I am a good hater!" And she smiled at him, a soft, stinging smile, with her eyes lingering on his.

"And yet you come—willingly—to me?"

"Willingly?" she said. "Oh, greedily!"

"Of your own suggestion?"

"Of my own suggestion."

"And on my terms?"

"Ah, no!" she cried. "On mine!"

"Well, then, for simply what you know I have?"

"For that," she said, "and nothing else."

"Great heavens!" he cried. "You're a cool hand!—You, who value yourself so well, are willing to pay so high for it."

She replied, "To the last breath of my life!"

He leaned down and kissed her wrist and then her arm, and she sat quiet in his grasp.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, looking up.

She replied, "Of other kisses."

He sprang to his feet with a kind of snort, going to one of the windows, and Christina purred at his broad back, "Don't be angry. How can I help what I think? Have I not kept my part of the bargain? Have I not come here to meet you without another soul? To a house I never saw before? That you tell me you have hired? In a sort of wood, at night, quite alone, not even a servant—although I must say everything seems to have been well arranged and left quite handy! Would you like some supper, now? If you ordered it, I am sure it must be good. I am very obedient. All the same, I am rather hungry."

He came back to the table with the little pink line showing about his nostrils. "I do not mind your not desiring me," he said, "and perhaps, after all, I shall not mind your desiring another man. As you say, it is not a question of what you desire, but of what I do. Well, Christina, I am satisfied with your preparations for me; do you approve mine for you? You shall have servants enough, Christina, when I am sure we may not be traced by your sister's gentry! How do you like my trysting-place? You gave me very little time. If you consider it a cage, is it sufficiently gilded?"

Christina drew a long breath. "It's wonderful. A palace—wonderful! Surely I was born to walk rooms like these! And a far cry from the little boarding-house I lived in when you first met me! God knows," said Christina, in a voice that trembled, "I am glad to be here!"

"You like it then?" he cried eagerly. "It's for sale. It shall be yours to-morrow!"

"Give me some wine!" she said. "I am tired!"

He looked at her and said, yes, she was right; and she would better have something to eat.

The wine brought back her brightness; it was she who lighted the wick, heated the supper, and set the smoking chafing-dish before him. Till it came to the serving she would not let him stir and he could only lean forward on the table, looking and looking at her. During this she said little enough, except that he must be sure to praise her cooking, for she had always boasted she could be a good wife to a poor man! But once she was seated she poured out a stream of chatter which he sometimes answered and sometimes not, being intent upon but one thing, and that was to drink deeper and deeper of her presence.

Now through much of this Herrick lost sight of them, for he had come upon an interest of his own. He had discovered in one of the balusters against which he lay the jutting head of a nail. Never was an object, not in itself alluring, more dearly welcomed. For he saw that his legs were bound with only the soft cord that had once looped back the curtains between the inner and the outer balcony; there must have been two of these cords, and if his arms were but fastened with the other the edge of the nailhead might make, in the course of time, some impression upon it. He sat up and found the nail of a good height to saw back and forth upon, and if it did not convincingly appear that any effect would be made upon the cord, at least it provided him with a violent, if furtive, exercise. This was better than to lie there and let those below saw upon his heart instead.

But he must stop at last from pure exhaustion; and at that moment there was the sound of a chair pushed back. "I thank you for your hospitality," said Christina's voice. "But, now to business. I have played in too many melodramas to sign a contract without reading it. The yacht sails at sunrise?"

"Or when you will."

"And takes with her Allegra and Mrs. Pascoe and whatever of their tribe they choose?"

"Safely and secretly to Brazil! They have chosen their own crew. They must be aboard of her already."

At such words as these Herrick may well be said to have picked up his ears. He heard Ten Euyck go on:

"She is yours, Christina; and theirs if you choose to make her so!"

"You are very generous!" said Christina dryly. "But there is only one way I can be sure of the end

of all this. You know what is most important to me." Herrick, leaning against the banisters had got his eye to the opening in the valance again, and he could now see Christina with her hands in her lap facing Ten Euyck. "Have you got that letter?" she said.

Ten Euyck gave his breast a smart rap so that Christina, being so near, must have heard the paper crackle there.

"Very well," said she; "so much for the District-Attorney's mail!"

He stood up, and his voice croaked with triumph as he talked. "Christina," he said, "I have brought you that letter—it's the price of my professional, my political honor; it's bought with my disgrace, with my career! But I have brought it. I'm ridiculous to you, Christina, but who got it for you? Your friends, the Inghams? your admirer, Wheeler? your poor fool of a Herrick? your cherished jail-bird, Denny?—No, I did! This letter that I have here Ann Cornish fell ill guarding, for her vengeance. You stole and lost it. Your enterprising family broke into a post-office to get it back. But the despised policeman brings it to you."

"You got it by accident, you say," commented Christina. "Don't forget that!"

"Forget! I shall never forget the triumph of catching that gang, although I renounce it at your bidding. I shall never forget your message when the letter was barely in my hands!—

"I know now that I am come of a family of criminals. My pride is in the dust, as deep as you could wish it. If you do not help us, if it must come out that I am tied to blackmailers whom you will catch and send to prison, I shall die of it! Christina, can I forget that?"

"No," said Christina, "I never thought you could."

"And you will remember my answer, my dear! That I had the proof, the letter in my hand, to publish or to destroy, as you should choose. You haven't forgotten that?"

"No," said Christina again. "But the destroying, that's the thing! You'll burn it?"

"Yes."

"Before my eyes?"

"Of course."

"To-night?"

"To-morrow!"

She seemed, for a moment, to take counsel with herself. "Very well."

An extraordinary limp helplessness, a kind of dejection of acquiescence, seemed to melt her with lassitude at the words. It was enough to sicken the heart of any lover, and even Ten Euyck cried out, as if to justify himself, "Ah, remember—you gave me the slip once before!" And at the memory he seemed to lose all control of himself, falling suddenly forward, clinging to her knees and hiding his face in her skirts.

She sat for a moment motionless. Then, with fastidious deliberation, as if they were bones which a dog had dropped in her lap, she plucked up his wrists in the extreme tips of her fingers, and slowly pushed him off. "Quietly!" she said. "You are one who would always do well to be quiet!"

He sat on his heels, the picture of misery, already ashamed and almost frightened at himself. And suddenly, "Christina," he whispered, while another flash branded itself across his face, "whose kisses were you thinking of?"

She did not, at first, understand; and then, remembering—"I will take a page from your book. I will tell you to-morrow."

"Was it Denny?" he snapped.

"Denny?" said she, abstractedly. "Will? God bless me, no!"

He sighed with a kind of vacancy. "You could easily tell me so!"

"Well, then," said Christina, with considerable temper, "I will tell you something else. When I came here to-night, that I might not die of my own contempt I promised myself one thing. I swore to that girl I used to be, who carried so high a head she could not breathe the same air with you and never thought to stand you miawling and whimpering here about her feet, that at least I should tell no lies of love. There shall never come one out of my mouth to you and may God hear me. So if I do not tell you the man I thought of, it is only because I can not bear to speak his name in this place!—But rest easy! I am very capricious. Things will be different to-morrow. To-morrow, if you still think it interesting, you shall know."

"Know!" he cried. And catching her arm, looked at her with a baleful face. "Yes, there's my trouble! What do I know of you at all! I met you once four years ago—well, I forget myself, I know it! But did I?—Were you even then—? Well, at the inquest, at that reception, in the station, holding to Denny, the night of your performance, and now, to-night! There's my knowledge of you! You dazzle, you befool, you drive me crazy, and you leave me empty—why should I throw my life away for that! After all, where were you when all New York was looking for you? Nearly a

week! Where were you?"

"Where was I!" Christina cried. "Well, it's rather long. But does not the favorite slave always tell stories to her master? Listen to Scheherezade."

Then, for the first time, Herrick heard the story of Christina's visit to the yellow house; how she had determined that Allegra must tell the authorities, in Denny's behalf, the story of his provocation against Ingham; how then, hidden in Nancy's, she had found Allegra's hair and guessed everything. "Then it seemed that the first thing was to get Nancy away, quietly, without warning, so that there should be no danger to her. I thought that then I could manage Allegra." She had had Allegra come into town for her performance, and go straight from it to the Amsterdam, up to Christina's apartment in Christina's name; following her there she had slept on the couch, and slipped off early in the morning. Suspecting the identity of the motor, she had telephoned for it as though to meet them both, and now she went on to tell Ten Euyck of her attempt to deceive Mrs. Pascoe, as though she had come from Allegra, and of her imprisonment in the closet.

"Ah, that wretched necklace! I said to myself, 'If it comes to a fight, they may find it and take it from me.' And then I should really have been in your power! I buried it in the flower-pot, thinking to come back with reinforcements!" She told of the flight in the rain, and of the farmers who wouldn't wake up. Both men listened, absorbed, staring. And Christina said, "I was afraid to go toward Waybrook, in case those men followed me. I ran toward Benning's Point. I feared the main road, too, and I thought I could follow the short cut. It is very hilly and broken and I had never seen it before in the dark; the sheets of rain were like the heavens falling, and the wind beat out my last strength; I was mud up to my knees and I had on heavy clothes, too large for me, all dragging down with wet. Perhaps it all made me stupid; at any rate, I lost my way. Oh!" said Christina, "that was hard!" and she put her hand over her heart. "I don't know—it must have been hours—I ran and staggered and stumbled and climbed! You are to remember I had had no food all day, and little enough the day before. And by and by I fell. I got up and on again for a little, but I had hurt myself in falling, and I fell again. And this time I lay there."

Ten Euyck lifted the border of her golden dress and put it to his lips.

The moisture of self-pity swam in Christina's eyes. "Nancy!" she said. "That was worst to think of!" In her own lip she set her teeth and soon she went on—"While I was still unconscious, a man came along with a motor. Somehow, he didn't run over me; he found me. And he recognized me! He wanted the reward. He took me to his sister's; to that Riley's. They gave me all sorts of hot drinks and things; I think they saved my life. But when I tried to thank them, something very comic had happened—I had lost my voice." Christina closed her eyes.

"Well?" said Ten Euyck.

"Well, that woman said I needed sleep, so she sent her brother out of the room—but she didn't send her husband. When she found I could not speak, she pulled down the blinds of her room for fear some one should see in, and said I needn't make a fuss, trying to get away, for she knew as well as any one I was mixed up with murder and trying to clear out. She said she was not going to hold any poor girl that was in trouble, not for the few hundreds he would give her out of that reward. She was going to let me go. 'But first,' said she, 'I'll thank you to hand over that diamond necklace!'"

Both Ten Euyck and the unseen Herrick started and stared.

"She wouldn't believe me. If I didn't have it, I had hidden it since I got in the house. 'Very well, if you won't do anything for me, I think there's a gentleman who will. I think the party for me to send for is Mr. Ten Euyck.' I wasn't ready for you, then, nor did I mean to be handed over to you, like a thief done up in a bundle! But what was I to do? I was still weak and she was between me and the locked door! I'm grand at screaming," said Christina, "but I couldn't even speak! And then, out of the stones of the courtyard, heaven raised up a miracle for me!"

"It was you, then?"

"The shadow? yes. But how could I dream a friend would be going by? It was just a desperate game, a wild chance! She had been telling me what an outcry there was, how I would be recognized anywhere, and about the moving-picture, and how they played the march from Faust, now, at that film—and I thought of the reward and how there must be many looking for it. There was a piano in that room and I went to it, put my foot on the loud pedal and began to play. 'Oh,' I thought, 'will some one glance up? Will some one guess?' And then I threw the shadow on the blind! Before she could do much more than drag me away, my unsuspected friend was in the room. She didn't dare to try to keep me. He put a hat and cloak on me from her closet—oh, I'm sure he sent them back!—and snatched me off!"

"And is this your idea of explanation?" said Ten Euyck. "Who was this friend?"

"Ah," she said, "you ask too much! Leave something for to-morrow!" And she went and sat at the piano, with her elbows on the keyboard and her head in her hands.

This was the first moment in which Herrick began to be sensible of a little hope. It seemed to him that the edge of the nail was beginning to make some impression upon the soft silk cord that bound him. He ground away, desperately, but always there was the dread of any sound, and quivers of terror that the violence of his pressure might loosen the nail. The blow on his head

made him easily dizzy, and as he leaned there quiet to recover himself, it was plain that Ten Euyck with a dozen questions had endeavored to follow Christina to the piano, and been checked where he was.

"No, we are both getting fussed. It is my right, perhaps, but hardly the man's. As for me, I'm all for decorum. Sit back and smoke and when you have smoked you will not fidget. I will play and sing to you—yes, I should love it!" softly laughed Christina, her fingers moving on the keys and her voice breaking into song—

"I'm only a poor little singing girl  
That wanders to and fro,  
Yet many have heard me with hearts awirl;  
At least they tell me so!  
At least—"

she chanted, leaning with gay insolence toward Ten Euyck,

"At least they tell me so!"

"Christina!" he said hoarsely.

"You like personal ditties! You shall have another!"

"You dressed me up in scarlet red  
And used me very kindly—  
But still I thought my heart would break  
For the boy I left behind me!"

That's too rowdy a song for a patrician! But I can sing only very simple things! The one I always think of when I think of you is the simplest of all!—

"We twa hae run about the braes  
And pu'd the gowans fine;  
But we've wandered many a weary foot  
Sin auld lang syne."

The color rose up in her face and her eyes shone; her bosom rose and fell in long, triumphant breaths, and—"Damn him!" Ten Euyck cried. "It's not me you think of when you sing that! It's Denny!"

"For auld lang syne, my dear,  
For auld lang syne—"

Is it?" Christina broke out. "Who knows!"

"We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet  
For auld lang syne."

Ah, that stays my heart!—Ten Euyck!"

"My God!" he cried. "I won't bear it!"

He had his two hands on her shoulders and as she continued to play she lifted up toward his at once a laughing and a tragic face. "What does he matter to you?" she said, "to you, the Inspector of Police! Aren't you here, with me, and isn't he down and done for, and out of every race? As good as dead?"

"He is dead and gone, lady,  
He is dead and gone,  
At his heels a grass-green turf;  
At his head, a stone!"

Come, pluck up spirit!

"Tramp, tramp, across the land they ride!  
Hark, hark, across the sea!  
Ah-ha, the dead do ride with speed!  
Dost fear to ride with me?"

—'Dost fear to ride with me?'" she sang, on the deepest note of her voice, and turning, rose and held Ten Euyck off from her, seeming to study and to challenge him, and then, with the excitement and the wild emotion which she had kindled in both of them, dying slowly from her face but not from his.

She released him, and, going to a little table, unclasped her necklace, and slipped the strings of diamonds from her arms. The crescent round her head came next. "What are you doing?" he almost whispered.

"Unclasp this earring. Thank you!" She lifted one foot and then the other and tore the buckles

from her shoes. She did not hesitate above that bewildering heap, but pushed closer and closer together those fallen stars and serpents of bright light. "There!" she cried. "Are they all there? No—here!" At her breast there was still a quivering point or two; she wrenched off the lace that held them and flung it on the pile. "There!" she said again, "they are all there! My poor fellow, I have changed my mind."

She walked away and leaned her forehead on the tall mantelshelf.

Whence she was perhaps prepared to have him turn her round and holding her by the wrists say to her through stiff lips,—“Explain yourself!” He shook from head to foot with temper; doubtless, too, with the scandalous outrage to commonsense.

"There is so little to explain. I thought I could. I can't! It wouldn't pay!"

"Not pay!"

"Oh," said Christina, indicating, with a scornful glance, the mirrored, golden room and piled-up jewels, "these were only incidents! Try to understand. Long ago, when I was a child, I set out to vanquish the world. Not to belong to it, not to be of it, but to have it under foot! I was so poor, so weak, so unbefriended. I thought it would be a fine day when I could give this great, contemptuous, cold, self-satisfied world a little push with my shoe and pass it by. It was a childish ambition—well, in some ways I have never grown up! And to me, since our first encounter, *you* have always typified that world."

He started back, and released her hands.

"All that I really wanted I won for myself last week! And Allegra stole from me when I saw her hair! You tell me that you can save it for me in saving her, but it's not true! It was easy to think of you as the world, to feel that you were giving me yourself and it to play with! It's easy to imagine that you would be under my heel.—No, I should be under yours! I shouldn't have vanquished the world, I should be vanquished by it!—No, I thank you!"

"And Allegra?" he asked her, grimly.

Christina shuddered and closed her eyes. But she said, "Has Allegra been so tender to me that I should lose myself for her? Understand me, it never was for Allegra that I came here to-night. Ah, Ten Euyck, I have been a good sister. It is time I thought of myself."

"Think," he replied, "that she will pass from ten to twenty years in jail."

The girl's face trembled as if he had struck it, but—"Well," she said, "you the upholder of the law—you shall judge. She lived off me—that's nothing!—But she lived off and bled others, and drove and hounded them, and made me an ignorant partner in it—that's something, you'll admit! And—Nancy! How about that? She lied to Will about Nancy and Jim Ingham.—Come, isn't the balance getting heavy? She just as much killed Jim as if she had done it with her hand; and if Will—dies," cried Christina, with a breath like a little scream upon the word, "it is my sister kills him! I am stone and ice to her! When I saw Nancy's message, in that moment I knew who and what my sister was, and then and there I had done with her! Let me hear you blame me! And yet," said Christina with a change of voice, "there is one more count!"

Her look had changed and darkened. "When that crew of hers laid hands on *him*—O!" she cried out, suddenly. And flinging forth her arms buried her face in them.

The effect on Ten Euyck was electrical. Hitherto drugged and fascinated by the mobility of her beauty, the lights and emotions varying in it, he now shot forward on his sofa as if, in a mechanical toy, a spring had been touched.

"It isn't possible!" he cried. "That calf! That milk-sop! Christina, you don't mean—Herrick!"

She let her arms fall, and without raising her head, lifted her eyes for him to read.

He broke into a loud laugh that jangled, hysterically cold, round the great, brilliant room. "And to think," he said, "that all this time I have thought of him as my pet diversion, my wittol, my moon-calf! It has been my one jest through all this wretched business to see the importance of that great baby! To watch him industriously acquiring bumps and bruises, and getting more and more scratches on his innocent nose! I waited to see it put out of joint forever when you threw him flat upon it! I thought that we were laughing in our sleeves at him, together! When I had this appointment with you safe, I smiled to see him careering up and down the country like Lochinvar in a child's reader.—"

"He stayed not for brake and he stopped not for stone,  
He swam the Eske River—"

Ten Euyck sprang up and catching Christina by the elbows snatched her smartly to her feet and shook her till, on her slim neck, her head bobbed back and forth. "What did you tell me for," he cried, "if you hoped to be rid of me! I, at least, am no baby, and I have had enough of this! Your dear Lochinvar is doubtless swimming and riding somewhere in the neighborhood. But not within call! And let me assure you, though he stay not for brake and he stop not for stone—yet ere he alights here at Netherby Gate—"

"Go on!" said Christina, "you know the end of the verse." She flung it, with a gallant backward

movement of her head, straight in his teeth—

"For a laggard in love and a dastard in war—"

Oh, listen, listen, listen! Now you know! Now you know whose name I would not speak! Not in this place! Oh, oh!—Will and Nancy; after all, they are only pieces of myself! They are no more to me than—me! But he is all I am not and long for! He is life outside myself, to meet mine! He is my light and my air and my hope and my heart's desire! She knew it—*she knew it!* She had taken my youth and my faith and my kindness with the world, and killed them, and then she tried to kill him too!—Love him? O God!" cried Christina, "what must he think of me!" And she began to shake with weeping.

"That cub!" said Ten Euyck. "You love that cub!" And he took her in his arms; and covering her throat and hair with kisses, he held her off again, and tried to see into her face. "Do you?" he cried. "Do you? Do you?"

"Give me a handkerchief!" Christina snapped.

He was surprised into releasing her; and plucking forth her own scrap of lace, she wiped her nose with some deliberation. "I look hideous. I should like those lights out!"

He went about putting out light after light, till she said,

"Leave my lamp!"

She was standing beneath it, pensive and grave and now quite pale, with her back to the mantelshelf, her soft, fair arms stretched out along its length, and her head hanging. She might have been bound there, beneath the single lamp, like an olden criminal to a seacoast rock before the rising tide. The pale light floated over her as Ten Euyck came up and seemed to illumine her within a magic circle.

"My dear," Ten Euyck began, with a kind of solemn fierceness, "when you made me accomplice in a crime, when you came here to me like this to-night, did you really dream that you could change your mind? Did you suppose you could make me ridiculous again? Do you know where you are? And under what circumstances? There is a slang phrase, Christina—do you really think you can get away with it?"

"No," Christina replied. She quietly lifted her head. Her eyes rested soberly on his. "I am here, with you. I am alone. There is no Rebecca's window here to dash myself from. You see I have counted up everything. And this is what I will do. If I cannot die now, I can die to-morrow. You can not watch me forever. And in the hour when you leave me, I shall find a way to die."

His face grayed as he looked at her.

"Do you think I am not acquainted," Christina went on, "with the story of Lucretia? I could strike a blow like hers! And oh, believe me, like her I should not die in silence!" She felt him start. "Do you suppose I should not tell why I came here? Do you by any chance suppose I should not tell what bait I had from the Inspector of Police? Ah, when we have something to lose, we stumble and make terms. But when we have no longer anything, we are the masters of terms.—Is this my last night?" Christina asked.

"By God!" he said, "you know how to defend yourself!" And his arms dropped at his side.

He was a moment silent, his mouth twitching, his eyes drinking her up. Christina had, in argument, that better sort of eloquence that calls up convincing pictures. Doubtless, he knew she might denounce his theft of the letter. Doubtless he saw her, then, clay-cold; lost to him, utterly. On the other hand, to lose her, now, was a thing outside nature and not to be endured. So that suddenly he broke out in a kind of high, hoarse whisper; "Christina, there's another way! I never meant to marry—but—Christina, shall it be that?"

"*What!*" she exclaimed. It was a volcanic outcry, not a question. She stretched out her two arms, with the palms of her hands lifted against him, and laughter and amazement seemed to course through her and to wave and shine out of her face, like fire in a wind.

"Christina," he said; "Christina, I will marry you!—Oh, Christina, isn't that the way! There's your ambition! There's your satisfaction! There's the world under your shoe! Christina, will you?"

"Is it possible?" she said. And again—"Is it possible! What! Peter Winthrop Brewster Cuyler Ten Euyck and the girl in the moving-picture show? 'Mr. Ten Euyck' and the sister of a jail-bird! Eh, me, my poor soul, is it as bad as that?" Her laughter died and her brows clouded. "It's a far cry, Ten Euyck, since you stole my kiss on the sly! You laid the first bruise on my soul! You put the first slur and sense of shame into the shabby little girl in the stock-company who had no one to defend her but a boy as poor as herself. What did it feel like, dear sir, that check? We have come a long way since then, but have you forgotten? And does the pure patrician and the representative of high life now lay the cloak of his great name down at my feet? To walk on it, yes! But to pick it up? After all, I think it would be stopping! Ah, my good fellow, I don't jump at it!"

"I know you don't! That's why I want you! I've been jumped at all my life!" Thus Ten Euyck, holding her fast, his face burning darkly under her little blows of speech, and his pulse rising with the sense of battle. "I think I've never known a woman who wouldn't have given her eyes to

marry me! I've never taken a step among them without looking out for traps! Christina, I long to do the trapping and the giving, yes, and the taking, for myself! You don't want me; well, I want you! Yes, for my wife! I see it now. You dislike me, you despise me. Well, your dislike doesn't count; believe me, you'd not despise me long! I'd rather see you bearing my name—you, with another man for me to wipe out of your heart, you, as cold as ice and as hard as nails to me,—than any of those soft, waiting women! See, we'll play a great trick on the world! We'll be married to-morrow! We'll sail for Europe. From there we'll send back word we've been married all along. People shall think that when you left me the other night I followed you; that we fooled them from the beginning, and when next they see you, you shall be on my arm! Come, Christina, will not that be a reëntry? Will not the world be vanquished, then?"

"Hush!" she said, with lifted finger. "I thought I heard some one!" She lifted the lamp from the mantelshelf and going to the window held it far out into the darkness with an anxious face. "No!" she breathed. Ten Euyck observed with joy that her manner to him had changed; it had become that of a fellow-conspirator. Up and down the terrace she sent the light, her apprehensive eyes searching the shadows and the bushes. "No!" said she again, "I was wrong."

She came back to him flushed and eager, and setting the light upon the table, he caught her hands. "Remember!" he said, "otherwise I shall stop your sister. And where will your name be then?"

Her nostrils widened, her eyes contracted, doubt succeeded to triumph in her face. "If it were not the truth!" she said.

"What do you mean?"

"If there were no such necessity! If you did not have my name in your power at all. If you have no such letter!"

"Christina!"

"It is what I have doubted from the beginning! How do I know you haven't lied to me all along? I ask you if you have that letter, and you thump your breast! I ask you to show it to me and you answer, 'To-morrow!' Traps—did you say? Did you think I was to be caught in a trap? When you were looking for a poor gull, did you cast eyes on Christina Hope? If you had that proof to show me, you wouldn't hesitate! There is no such letter—I can see it in your face!"

He took the letter from his coat and held it up.

"Oh, well," Christina said, "I see an envelope. Am I to marry for an envelope?"

He cast the envelope away, folded the letter to a certain page and held it for her to read.

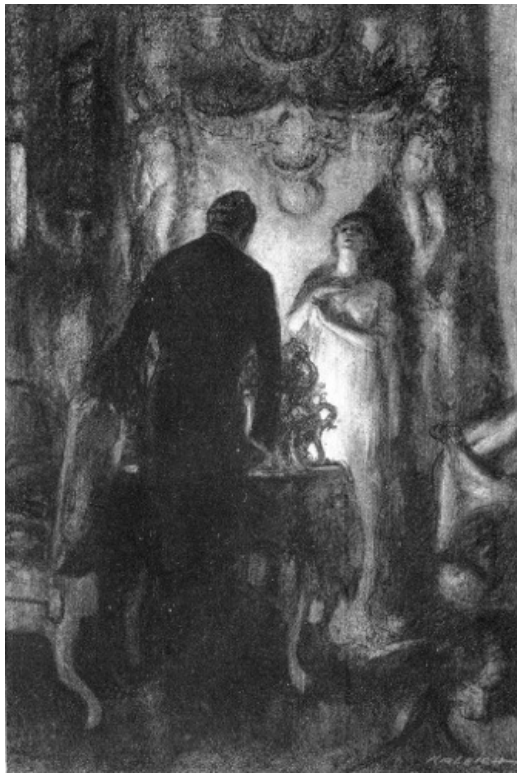
She read it and a faintness seized her. She stood there, swaying, with closed eyes, and he put an arm about her for support. She leaned upon him, and he put down his mouth to hers. "Christina, look up!" he cried. "Don't be afraid! Don't tremble so! My darling, here's your first wedding-present!" And, alarmed by her half-swoon, transported by that surrender in his arms, he held the letter above the lamp and let its edge catch fire.

Christina opened her sick eyes and they dwelt dully on the paper and then with pleasure on the little flame. "Let me!" she breathed. "Yes, let me. It's my right."

He put the burning paper in her hands, smiling on her with a tender playfulness. "Take care!" he said.

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**"You fool!" she cried. "You miserable, monstrous fool! Thank God, I've done with you!"**

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"I will take care." She held up the paper, intent on the thin edges crisping in the glowing fire, and then, swift as a deer and wild as a lion's mate, she sprang away, clapped her hands hard upon the burning paper, pressed out the flame upon the bosom of her gown, and thrust the letter in her breast. "You fool!" she cried. "You miserable, monstrous fool! Thank God, I've done with you!"

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## **CHAPTER IV**

### **TURN, FORTUNE, TURN THY WHEEL—**

Ten Euyck's face blazed white with anger. Sick with rage, driven with bewilderment and some touch of vague suspicion, all his cold strength gathered itself. He was no longer merely a harp for Christina's fingers. She stood at the far end of the room with her back against the wall, barricaded, indeed, by a little gilded table, but not at all alarmed or even concerned, and the master of the situation forced himself to say quietly, "I am tired of play, my dear. I shall not run after you. Bring that letter here!"

Christina laughed.

"You will come to me, quite obediently, and give that letter here to me."

"Oh, I think not!" Christina said. "Not to a thief! Not to a blackmailer! Nor even to a gentleman who tried, and failed, at murder.—How much did you give the man in the Tombs?"

A profound silence fell upon that house. It was as if, in that great golden room, among the mirrored gulfs of shadow, something held its breath. Night seemed to look in at the windows with a startled face. Then somewhere, a hawk cried. And still there was no movement in the room. The homely sound of crickets rose from without like the stir of a world immeasurably far away. And Christina, in the changing lusters of her gold and silver gown, stood half in shadow; flushed and radiant, a little shaken with triumph, as a spent runner who has touched his goal, and with her hand above the letter on her heaving breast. Ten Euyck did not make one sound. But his face had a paralyzed, chalky stiffness, and the jaw dropped, like the jaw of a corpse.

"You fatuous hypocrite!" cried the girl. "You pillar of society! And could you ever imagine it was for *you* I came! For your name, for your position! I thank you, I prefer my own! For your protection? Can you protect yourself? Am I the girl to throw myself away on you for the sake of a bad sister, who has treated me with so much hate? It took all your greed, all your vanity, all your stupid, cruel pomp and dullness to be fooled like that! Did you ever really think I could stoop to such a scene as this to-night for you—or me? Oh, blind, blind, blind! How could you imagine I would leave him in your hands and never make a fight for it? Did you think I didn't remember?—that I couldn't still hear, as I heard when I was a frightened girl, the stroke of his hand across

your face, and that I didn't know you had always had death for him in your heart?"

She covered her face with her hands and then she stood up tall again.

"My dear Will, my poor boy!—who treated me as if I were his little brother! Oh, the cold night trips on railway trains when I couldn't pay for a sleeper and used to sit wrapped in his coat; the morning races down the track for coffee; the scenes we used to work and work on and get so cross we almost struck each other; the time I was discharged and he lent me his few dollars till I should get work again; his first big hit and then mine; and then—Nancy, and all the sweetness of a hundred times with both my dears! Did you think I was going to sit quiet and let you turn your heel on all of that? Allow your conceit and insolence and spite to feed on his disgrace and danger! Let *you* sneer at *him*! Leave *him* to be triumphed over by *you*!—Will Denny by a Ten Euyck! An artist by a bourgeois Inspector of Police! An actor," cried Christina, beginning to soar, "and *such* an actor, by a mere outsider! Your side over mine!—Why did you try? Will to be shamed and hidden in the dark! And you to be bowed down to, to swell and strut and smirk and look dull and glossy and respectable, and be brushed by valets, and have prize cattle raised for you to eat, and carry gold umbrellas! He to die! And you to pillow yourself upon a hundred crimes he never dreamed of!—Tybalt in triumph and Mercutio slain!—You poor, pretentious, silly, vulnerable soul!—not while he was paying for one moment's madness, and I began to guess and hope and pray that about you there was something prisons had been gaping for, year after year, if only I could find it out! Did you really think I didn't guess what was in this letter? Do you think I didn't know you sent Nicola into that post-office to steal it? Why, it was I, with my last strength, who mailed it there. He must have found some trace of me and guessed. Nothing in heaven or earth would have brought me here, except to steal it back!"

"How did you—" he tried to say. But the machinery of his throat was stiff and could not work. He swallowed once or twice, and then, dropping his dulled eyes, he got out—"When—did you—at first—?"

"When you came so grandly to the station, a master of the trap that my poor boy was caught in, and said, 'If she would tell the jury what she told him—' Don't you remember that I answered, 'How do you know what she told him?' A strange confidant for Allegra! It wasn't accident, coincidence—for you knew the music that she made for Will's and my French song! Not five minutes later I learned what Allegra was! A queerer confidant, still, for an Inspector of Police! I said to myself, 'There is a very black spot frozen inside that block of bilious ice. If one could know, now, what it was!' Then came your necklace and your note. And I saw you were a violent, greedy creature, after all, who would go a long way to get your will; I saw you could be managed—and how. I remembered Will's saying that people like us had nothing but ourselves to fight with. Oh, it has been with myself that I have fought! I'm sorry, I'm ashamed. But I've won!—What was my second hint? Do you remember the torn card of the Italian Bryce Herrick had to kill? How it said, 1411—nothing more? When I 'phoned you to call for your necklace your number wasn't in the book. The girl, at first, gave me a wrong direction. Then she remembered that was your old number which you had just had changed. The district was the same, of course. But the old number ran, 1—4—1—1.—Ah, wait for my third—the best of all! My good Ten Euyck, you never made quite such a mistake as when you lost one symbol of respectability—as when you forgot your umbrella!"

This time he looked up with a stare.

"You left it at Allegra's, and, like all excellent housekeepers, Mrs. Pascoe put it in the closet under the stairs. I found it there. I was looking for something to break the window with. A little light came in then, and I saw the gold handle, like a staff of office, with your name. I broke the rod and have the handle still." Christina paused and smiled at him. "My sister's partner in the business of blackmail; you, whose money robbed and burned a post-office of the United States; you, whose influence attempted murder in jail, on the highroads, in the Park, rather than be found out, I make you my bow! If I cannot save Will with you, if I cannot trade you for him with the law—and oh, I think I can!—at least our side shan't fall alone! If he is to be punished, at least he will never be punished by you! But you, Mr. Ten Euyck, who exulted in his trouble, who are afraid, as he is not, who will perish at the scorn of every fool, as he has not, you, who of shame are about to die, I salute you! Your career as a criminal, your career as a shining light, they are both at an end!—And why? Because you declared war against people without money, without position, without influence, whom you despised! Because you weren't strong enough to fight Christina Hope! Remember that!"

The heart knoweth its own bitterness. For one little moment Ten Euyck stood with his eyes upon the reckless girl who was driving him to the last terrible extreme of self-defense. He had come there a happy and indulgent conqueror, and even the sweetness of a necessary revenge was black and poisoned in him. Then, in that moment, he heard what Christina, flushed with victory, did not hear at all—a little sound behind him and above his head.

His driving-coat still lay across a chair and he went slowly to it and drew the case of his revolver from its pocket; the revolver was fully loaded; he looked at the barrel a long time, as if he were thinking something out, and then he heard Christina laugh. "Take care!" she said. "I did not come without a guard."

He did not turn upon her. He still stood with his back to her, and, from under his bent brows, his glance shot up and found the parting of the valance. Now, since the lessening of the lights, Herrick, half-mad and goaded by the continual slight weakening of the cords, had grown careless

of concealment. There, in the opening, his face showed. Not much, indeed; not enough to be easily recognized; all masked, too, with blood and sweat and with the gag across the mouth. But still whiter than the Italian face Ten Euyck had most expected. Then he caught a glimpse of the brown, ruddy hair, and knew. This was Nicola's and Allegra's idea of a jest.

"A guard?" he said. And he turned then upon Christina.

"Don't come near me!" the girl cried. "And if you want to live, don't shoot! My friends are all about this house! They are in waiting down the road! They have waited the whole evening long, watching for my signal. They started to close in on us when I waved my lamp. Let me cry out my name and you will hear, in answer, the horn of an automobile. It will blow three times—two short notes and one long. That means—Stand out of the way, Christina Hope; the men are ready!—Don't come near me!"

"Cry out your name!" Ten Euyck replied.

The girl lifted up her voice, and gave forth the words "Christina Hope" so that they leaped out in the still darkness and went shrilling and searching through the night, the vibrations dying in the distance, and the air giving back an echo of their call. Till, after an age-long moment, their last note died away. And nothing happened. No note from the horn of an automobile broke forth in answer; there was only a profounder stillness. Christina was left face to face with nothingness and Cuyler Ten Euyck.

"You spoke too soon!" he said. "You were always foolhardy. This time you have outdone yourself. The clever Christina was not the only person, on coming here, to take precautions. If I gave so much to the guard in the Tombs, what did I give to buy off these friends of yours? The agreeable gang your sister commands—did you think it was in your pay for to-night? It is in mine! I suspected nothing, but I took no chances. I prepared for accident. No automobile can pass that lodge. No spy can creep about these grounds. One tried, my dear. They caught him. He is lying in that little gallery gagged and bound. When his body is discovered, he will have been shot by blackmailers, whom Cuyler Ten Euyck never so much as saw. I thought you wouldn't leave me!"

Christina had gathered up her train for flight and had been manœuvering nearer and nearer to the window that gave deepest into the shelter of the dark. Only at the first word of a spy she had stood still.

"Yes," Ten Euyck went on, "I see that you guess his name. I am not a bad shot, and he can't move, poor fellow. Give me that letter!"

Christina looked along his arm, along the lifted revolver, to what was now only a dark opening in the valance. Her mouth opened, but no sound came. The life went out of her like the flame from a dying candle, and she seemed to shrink and crumple and to sway upon her feet. There was a long stillness.

"That letter, if you please!" Ten Euyck said.

"Bryce!" Christina called, quite low. "Bryce, are you there! Let me see!" she screamed out, and ran forward.

Ten Euyck held up a finger, and she stopped dead. "Do you understand that I, too, have a signal and these fellows will come at it? Do you understand what cause they have to love Herrick?—Fetch that chair!"

She brought it forward.

"No, under the balcony. Pardon my not helping you. I dare not lower my hand. Stand on the chair! Can you reach those little curtains? No? Take this candlestick—push them back! What do you see?"

Christina shuddered like a stricken birch, and gave forth a lamentable cry. The candlestick fell to the ground. She had met Herrick's eyes.

"Have I won?" said Ten Euyck.

"You are a brave girl, but you lack discretion.—Get down! Take that letter from your breast. That's right. What a pretty change in manners, my dear! Come here! Come!"

Her face looked thin and her eyes were set with fear. She came slowly on, like a person in a trance, half hanging back, half drawn with ropes. She stopped at one end of the little table, a few feet from him.

"Put out your hand and offer me that letter."

She put it out and he seized the letter and the hand in his.

"And now, my dear, understand me. In my connection with the Arm of Justice, I hold myself neither stained nor shamed. It has been an arm of *justice*; when I have struck it was—as poor Kane will tell you!—always at those who had sinned against the law, though I could not then reach them through the law. In that punishment I used an imperfect instrument, as a man who stands for decency must do, in an imperfect world. When I recognized your sister as our mysterious shadow I forced her to write this account of her disgraceful life not, as she supposed, for fear she might some day blackmail me—for there was nothing in my life to be used for

blackmail—but for a net to snare you with! In that net you are caught. Never till its loss determined me to have it back at any cost did I really sin. And never legally! For when I give money to a needy woman I do not question what she does with it. If there is violence—why not? In self-defense! But if I sinned, at least I have succeeded in my sin. For here you are! While you—you have forfeited even your price. But when Denny is dead, talk over with Allegra, in her prison, the story of his death—it may divert you both! For now she, too, is lost, as well as he. And through your fault as Herrick is!"

She lifted her white face and questioned him, with the darkness of her eyes.

"Let him go! After all that he has heard? How could I? You gave your signal and now I must give mine!—It's been a hard fight, Christina! And to the victor belong the spoils!"

He dragged her slowly toward him by the clenched hand he held, his hungry smile flushed and yet cold with hate, feeding on her desperate compliance. And as he drew her past the table, Christina caught up the lamp and struck it with her whole force into his face.

There was a tremendous noise of crashing glass, and then darkness, filled with the smell of oil. Christina's slender strength had found force for such a blow that the lamp had been put out before it could explode,—and what it had been put out upon was Ten Euyck's head. He floundered back; dazed, cut, with the sense battered out of him. And at the same moment the last knot yielded to stiff fingers and Herrick staggered to his feet. He dropped over the balcony to the ground, and Christina ran toward the sound of him, in the darkness. "Oh! Oh!" she said, and clung like a child upon his breast.

But for a little crack under the door into the hall, the blackness had swallowed every shape. This was all in their favor. They stood listening, holding their breath, knowing that Ten Euyck was there before them but not able to see where; and then he fired. Herrick followed the lead of the flash and leaped upon him. Ten Euyck sank to one knee, but he had gripped Herrick as he fell; the two men struggled to their feet, and across the room and up and down they fought and clung and swayed and trampled, upsetting chairs, their feet slipping and grinding on the smooth floor; and though the shots continued to sound, they were fired downward and Christina guessed that Herrick forced Ten Euyck's hand toward the ground and was struggling for possession of the pistol. She could hear their breath pulsing and sobbing in the darkness. Suddenly their black, struggling bulk crashed down on the piano and the shots ceased. The pistol fell to the ground. Ten Euyck's voice gasped out, like rending cloth: "All six are fired! That's my signal!" Then there was an oath, a lurch, a sound of blows, the table tipped over with a smash, followed by the thud of both men falling to the floor; there was a groan, a pause, a last decisive blow, and then some one rose and came slowly toward Christina through the dark room.

In a childish terror of broken nerves, "Bryce!" Christina shrieked. Then her shrieking, outstretched fingers touched a rough, damp sleeve, and "Bryce!" she sobbed contentedly. They met with a bump, and clutched each other, laughing with joy, in this little moment before the last. Already they could hear the hurrying men; dark figures blackened on the darkness, the terraces came alive with sound, lights showed and were gone; and Herrick, holding the empty gun, sought vainly to put Christina back from him. She held to him, leaning on him, hardly breathing. "It's death, dear!" she said. "Forgive me!"

"Oh!"

She felt him bend his head, and lifting up her face, she set her mouth to his.

From the carriage sweep without there came—two short and one long—three notes from the horn of an automobile.

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## CHAPTER V

### CARNAGE: A COMIC OPERA CLIMAX

The door from the hall opened, letting in a flood of light. At the same time a man stepped through one of the windows. He was the first of a number whom the halls and staircases instantly absorbed. Out of Herrick's very hold Christina slipped and caught this man by the arm and hung away from him as she was wont to hang upon the arm of Hermann Deutch. "Oh, heaven and our fathers!" cried she in a faint wail. "But you were a little late!"

The man, standing tense in the shadow, was examining the room with appraising eyes. Christina, blind to something rigid in him, hurried on. "And I did so depend on a quick curtain! But all's well that ends well—I've got it! Mr. District-Attorney, your mail!"

"Who's that with you?" said the voice of Henry Kane.

As he took, from the hand that had never once resigned them, the scorched and torn sheets and buttoned them beneath his coat he glanced over his shoulder, expectantly.

"You'll go to the Governor, yourself, to-morrow? To-morrow!"

"Please God! Ah, Herrick, you make one more! Hear anything, Sheriff?" he called into the hall.

Kane had turned to close the shutters at his back but Christina, blind with triumph, continued to Herrick: "He saw my shadow at Riley's. I told him all that I suspected and he believed me. He spoke to the Governor. They promised me if I could give Mr. Kane that man and the headquarters of the others I should have Will's life in exchange. I knew from Nancy's holding that letter and it's being addressed in Allegra's hand that it must be the story which caused his feeling against Ingham—that Nancy, as well as I, must have hoped it might even set him free. Mr. Kane got me a doctor and as soon as I had my voice he sent me to a little hotel up the river here, kept by Ten Euyck's old servants whom he would know must recognize him, and there I sent for him. He was afraid to come there, of course, into my disreputable company. But he was fine and eager to meet me somewhere. We hoped he would name that stronghold of Allegra's where he would feel safe and when he named this house our hopes leaped.—Oh, I'm so tired!" cried Christina, sitting down on the floor like a worn-out child and snuggling her head forward in her lap.

"Are those doors fast?" called Kane from his second window. "That shutter's loose! What's that balcony? This room won't stand a siege! You, Herrick, the sheriff and I and five men—can we hold this house?"

Sheriff Buckley had just limped in with his bruised, cut face further discolored by the blood from a scalp-wound which he was binding with a handkerchief. Herrick had already noticed that Kane's arm was tied tight, just above the elbow, with a gaily flaunting necktie and around this necktie the torn sleeve was soaked and stained.—"Against how many?" he replied.

It was not till then that, lifting a face of weary dismay, "Are we still fighting?" Christina almost sobbingly demanded.

"Now, don't frighten the lady!" The sheriff turned to Kane. "We just got into a mix-up at the gate with the whole Dago gang. They'll never come up here after us."

All three men, none the less, were busy latching shutters, locking, barricading. They were not interrupted and no alarm but their own seemed in the air. As they worked Kane said, "There's something up we don't understand. This is something more than any bunch of Pascoes. We expected a fight. We had over a dozen men. We were attacked by a hundred. They had made an obstacle race for the motors. One they put out for good. But the sheriff got this one through."

"We've left 'em a mile behind!" said the sheriff. "Before they can get here the river police'll have taken the yacht. They'll be up here before long. We're safe here awhile, all to ourselves, and they can't get within a hundred feet of the house without being picked off by our boys upstairs!"

As he spoke the pane above Herrick's head, where he struggled with the loose shutter, cracked into flying splinters. A small hard object had hurtled into the room and thumped at Kane's feet. A bewilderment ludicrous as hysteria came over Herrick. For the object that carried a bit of paper rolled in its mouth was a little golden pistol—which though sufficiently valued to carry on its handle a monogram of three capital A's, picked out in jewels, was yet no pistol at all. It was a dummy made all in one piece!

"So!" said the District-Attorney. "Now we know!"

"What?"

"I asked you, Herrick, if we could hold this house. And you asked me against how many. I can't tell you against how many but I can now tell you against what. Against an army of which you have read, not so long since, a considerable deal in the papers. Against the Camorra."

"Here!"

"After us?"

"The Italian Camorra!"

"In America!"

"Yes," Kane insisted, "and under those trees."

"In costume!" cried Christina, with rising spirits and flitting to the window.

"A skeleton pistol is its badge. The owner of this trinket is a member. Please, Miss Hope, translate us this paper."

She read aloud, "Alieni the infamous and all his house die here to-night the death of traitors."

"Well, the information's dear, but we're getting plenty of it! There's an advance guard, evidently, set hereabouts!—Alieni! And capital A's! It's their traitor's badge they've stolen to threaten him. If we only knew who Alieni is? And where he is! And what they think he has to do with us!"

Herrick told them where he had seen the pistol before. To no one did this, at that time, bring any light. Kane's mind was busy with the fortunes of the police-boat. "The Camorra easily swarms thick enough to overpower that!" He paused, surveying their fortress. If they had needed anything to tell them they were doomed they might have found it in the colloquial, dry calm of Kane's voice as he said, "We should, perhaps, have sent Miss Hope upstairs."

"Oh, I beseech you—anything but a trap. Let me stay where I can run!"

"The more as they may try to smoke us out!"

Silence grew up in their midst.

The great front doors were barred and chained; through the house five men were on watch; the door into the hall was barricaded with the gilt piano, whence still the Cupids smiled, stacked above and below with the little table and the chairs; down the room's long front the five great windows, three more crossing at the farther end, were dark with the latched shutters of which the second on the front was the suspected. So frail were the defenses! So short a time from the first blow must the slats give and the glass crash in!

"I think you'd best take the end, Mr. Kane; me and Mr. Herrick the front windows—Lord, who's this?"

The black figure with gleaming shirt-front was seated in a little gilt chair in the wall's darkest angle; with outstretched legs and tilted head it confronted them from very glassy eyes. But it was only the dead body of Ten Euyck, who must have reared up thus with his last breath and joined their council.

"Well," cried the sheriff, gaily, "you make another—if they think so!" Seizing the chair he trundled it across the room; on the floor he found Ten Euyck's gun and propped it into the passive fingers. "There! If this blind falls down, you'll be better 'n the piano—they'll waste a lot of attention on you! Now, if they only make noise enough, down by the river—Oh, you mustn't let him make you whimper, miss!"

Herrick was mainly aware of a terrible impatience. The surprise and confusion of their peril made its expectation a raging fever, as if only a horrible scarecrow in a mirror waited to be smashed. Despite the whole week's frenzied pulse, despite the happenings of the last four hours, Herrick could not believe in what lay before and all about them. These were men he knew, with whom he had put through other adventures; the girl beside him had never seemed so much a girl as in this failure of her hardihood—he saw her for the first time with loosened hair that touched her face with a childish softness, made for cherishing—it tightened something in his heart as though to crack it, but it was absurd to suppose that in half an hour, in ten or twenty minutes, they would be there on the floor, unconscious of each other, ended, wiped out! Christina lifted her arms in a gesture instinctive with all womankind and gathering up this tumble of hair her dear, quick fingers twined and thrust till it was heaped into its place—why, of course not! This strange night camp amid broken furniture, the spreading pool of oil, the jewels lying mixed with the supper's wreckage, Christina silent again and holding his hand tight, the two wounded, haggard men, all these his mind admitted, all these were conceivable. But what was soon to come was not conceivable! Yet—hark! Was that—No, only some creak of the old house! What sound would be the last before the deluge? How long must they wait? Already the air seemed thick and hard to breathe, the twilight of the room hung on them like a solid weight and the one candle Christina had lighted made scarce a twinkle of sane, human comfort in the vast yellowish gloom.—

"If you please, miss, put out that light!"

"Oh!"

"We can't afford to advertise!"

The light was gone.

In the pitch-black airlessness Herrick could feel Christina kneeling against him, quiet but for the broken breathing that told him she was still afraid of the dark. As he put his left arm round her shoulders she pressed her cold cheek to his hand.

"It's funny, isn't it? We never even had time to get an engagement-ring!—Here they come!"

A sound as of excited animals plunged through the groves about the house; with trappings and scufflings a great herd seemed to surge out upon the vacant drive. As it confronted the empty automobile, the tranquil terraces and the blank front of the locked house it paused, uncertainly; then a high, prolonged whistle sounded, shorter whistles responded from every stretch and nook of woodland and there fell again, to the stupefaction of those within, a perfect silence.

This continued unbroken, baffling, interminable, inscrutable, and solid as the walls of a cell. Christina in her endeavor for control gave a slight, nervous cough, no more than a rough catch of the breath, such as Herrick had heard her give many a time when their taxi skimmed too close to a trolley in the safe, crowded, far-off streets. And with this familiar little sound apprehension awoke in him, full-armed. The merciful veil was torn from his imagination, his soul gaped to the knowledge of death and of direr things that precede death. On the instant all he had ever known of struggle changed; chivalry, civilization, restraint, vanished like things that never were; if, at that moment, the bodies of a hundred other women as sweet, as defenseless, as tender as his love's had stood in her way he could have set his heel upon them all to save her. Then, close at hand, as if from somewhere within the wall, came the imperative, prolonged tingle of a telephone!

They turned, dumbfounded, shaken with incredulous, mad hope. But whence came it? Where was it? Christina stirred and slid to her feet; her dress went whispering across the room; the men, not daring to leave their posts, knew she must be feeling along the rear wall and still through the darkness the telephone rang. Then she gave a low cry—a narrow door in the glass paneling had

slipped sideways so that she stretched her hands into a kind of pantry; the instrument's shrill call was now directly in her ears—"It's Nicola!"

The three questioning whispers sprang at her at once.

"He wants to speak to Mr. Ten Euyck."

Blankness answered. The ringing became more impatient.

"Take the message."

But no message was to be had. Nicola's party was at the boathouse, in great trouble, in danger—never mind what! He wanted to speak to Mr. Ten Euyck. "He says, 'Get him to pass me his word to shelter us or what will you give—what will you give for news of Nancy Cornish?'"

"Tell him I, Kane, 'll buy his news."

Christina dropped back against the wall. "When he has spoken to Mr. Ten Euyck."

Perhaps, in the helpless pause, the glassy face taking aim behind the shutter smiled to itself in the dark. Before they had time to try if the wire connected only with the boathouse, a single shot sprang from across the drive.

There was a sharp crack and splintering, a hot puff on Christina's cheek, and the shattered telephone hung crazily on the wall. The besieging force had misinterpreted what seemed the reinforcement of the world and used its best marksman. Having done so it was content and reassumed its patient crouching. "Rifles!" cried the sheriff. "And yet they don't attack!"

Kane peered through the broken slat and with a very grim expression drew back for the others. "Look under the trees, there. Is it just dark? Or is it dark with men?"

"Looks like Birnam Wood!" said Herrick.

It was that blackest hour before the morning when darkness takes on weight and bulk so that the eye must carve a way through. But the blazing dazzle of the entrance porch broke and distorted the besieging dark, exaggerating, multiplying the forces that it held. Beyond the brightness of the steps the stone and then the grassy terraces fell indistinct and shallow to the lawns, beyond which, perhaps a hundred feet away, the drive was rather known than discerned; twenty feet or so farther still the wood lay shapeless and invisible but filled by the monstrous darkness as close as with a great tide. There the most straining eye could see nothing whatever; now and again the night came alive with snapping twigs, every grove would wake and rustle; then not a leaf would stir. But through all the intermediate borderland shadows seemed to loom, to creep, dissolve and disappear; then to their more accustomed eyes these shadows began to take on form—they were the shadows of softly moving men, individuals and small groups, unknown persons on unknown errands which carried them here and there but closer and closer about the house. "Queer the boys upstairs don't spot them!" One group passed so close to the end windows that Kane fired at it and produced a commotion which he followed by another shot. There was no response, but from all directions the fringe of figures drew nearer, a crouching, irregular line behind its faggot-like shields of broken boughs. The defenders spent their shots recklessly, now, for the same thought was in all their minds; it seemed to take form from its own apprehension when, as the invaders drew back their wounded, those within became aware of something across the tree-tops, down toward the river; a ruddier dusk, a glow that was not morning, far against the sky.

Close at their backs Christina's voice murmured with an icy softness, "The boathouse! It's afire!" Her tone told Herrick that the telephone had stolen all her weakness, she was strung like a bow; side by side with his her glance strained out and forward as the knots of men continued to advance with velvet stealth. The fire of the defenders ceased. Automatically, for they had nothing left to fire with. "What's become of my fellows?" Sheriff Buckley wondered. The first foam of the tide began to lap the terraces. Christina looked beyond it toward the flames that flared on the horizon. And from that way Herrick, too, heard a new sound, the thudding of a horse galloping clumsily on soft turf. The shadows blotted themselves to the ground. The hoofbeats began to run amuck as though the horse had lost its rider. Hither and yon round the corners of the house shapeless movements hurried, there came the step of a heavy runner and the cursing of a deep voice in some Italian patois. The long, single whistle darted out again and once more there fell that motionless waiting of the profoundly brooding night. It was Christina who first said, "Some one else is in this room!"

As they listened they, too, could hear the sound of crawling. Something was creeping into the room. It was coming through the pantry door which Christina had left open and it advanced with a dragging sound as a wounded beast drags on its stomach. Kane, dropping on it, found his hands in a man's hair. The man sank under him with a deathly groan and now it was Kane who called for a candle. "Nicola!" Christina breathed.

He was making horrible motions with his mouth; Christina found some unspilled wine and thrust the edge of the glass between his lips. "Tell me! Nancy—?"

Kane held up his hand. Beyond, in the pantry, a step sounded—backing from Nicola's trail. Herrick and the sheriff dragged in between them a tall Sicilian whose triangular knife was still wet. The embroidered table-cloth with which they bound him to the piano strained under his renewed efforts to attack the dying man whom Christina still entreated, "Is she with my sister? Is

she?"

A hoarse sob raged through Nicola and gasped past his last grin of pride and hate. "You fool of hers! Fool of us all! *Your* sister? *My* sister, mine! You think *you* ever have a sister like that?"

The girl stood above him, tranced and wide-eyed, with distended nostrils; as she turned to Herrick a face which release and knowledge were even then palely lighting the figure of a man darted into the gallery where Herrick had lain; a slim, soft man whose pretty little face was all flecked and sweated with the insane hate and courage which come of insane fear. The Sicilian greeted what he took for reinforcement with a cry of triumph and encouragement; but it was not Nicola, it was Herrick at whom this tremulous assassin, yelling "Spy! Spy! Will you show me again to the Camorra?" extended his revolver. At the same moment, Nicola, turning on his side and aiming upward, shot him dead. The slim, soft figure doubled over the rail and the refined, pretty, convulsed face swung there with open mouth. At this Nicola spat the wine which he had sucked as he lay: "Thus my sister salutes thee!" Then his head knocked back upon the floor and he lay still.

The tall Sicilian, who had watched the action without fully understanding the quick English words, now strained forward, peering with a kind of gratified thirst into Christina's face. He said to her in Italian that was almost a whisper, "You are very fair!"

"Do you think that is news to me?" asked the girl, with a kind of fury. "But my fairness has done all it can! What's to do, now?"

"You are fair. But you are the devil. You brought police to the river, who will return with more. You have plunged this night in the blood of your brothers. There was one who was like a little sister. Where is she?"

Christina started; half in appeal, half in defense against the omen of his tones, she stretched out her hands. The Sicilian lowered his mouth to the bosom of his shirt and brought forth in his teeth a little hoop of silver which he shook before Christina's eyes. "Where is she now? Of her tokens *she has lost the third!*" It was Nancy's bracelet that he dropped at Christina's feet.

"Devil of fine fairness," he said, "I shall pick it up again, when you are lying low! When not one shot is left for our hurt we there, without, will come quietly in! Then shall I bear this to my chief. I took it from the hand of Beppo, who lay bleeding in the grass. Were Chigi and Pepe caught in the fire? They reached her late, for they had rowed their boat back, to escape those policemen on the river. Only when Alieni jumped and swam they must follow him and tramp to the house for boats along the shore. But they reached her! I was against it always—she was not of our nation. Ah, she was pretty! Had you not let her know too much she need not have been put to sleep!"

Christina made no outcry. If his attack on herself bewildered her, her imagination caught the significance of the Camorrist phrase. "Where," asked she slowly, "does she sleep?"

"In the dead ashes of the house of boats." His malignant sneer took in the stricken, threatened group, as well as his own bondage. And turning once more to Christina he smilingly informed her, "I seek in the house for boats Nicola Pascoe. I hear him talking as at a telephone. They have brought a lamp and in the window I see a pretty girl, young and not so tall, with a face very sweet but sick and the hair falls curling and red. She has in her hands a tiny bottle filled with a dark liquid. She throws it from the window where it fills the air with laudanum smell. And at that up runs to her Nicola—and she, away! They must have knocked over the lamp, for next the house for boats is blazing high. And, as the smoke comes in the window, there she runs again—just as I see the woman's figure and in the fiery smoke one light of her red hair at that out from the bushes a bullet springs. She clasps her hands over her breast with a small cry and down she sinks. And Alieni flies out of the bushes with Beppo and Chigi and Pepe at his back and he races into the flaming house. It is after that down plunges Nicola, down and past us, running here to this place, and I follow him, sure that past him I shall come, too, upon his sister. Before we reach here, through the dark, comes a horse with two men on its back—one is yelling 'I have killed her! I have killed her!' and he passes. The other falls off. It is Beppo, who dies at my feet, giving me the bracelet. He had it from Pepe, the Parmesan, whom he saw meet with Alieni in the doorway of the house for boats. By this time all, everywhere, is fighting and the house for boats blows up in a puff and falls in upon itself in crumbling fire."

Christina had never taken her eyes from his face and in those eyes alone there now seemed any life to hold her body upright. "It's not true!" said she, gently and at length. "Life's not so silly!" But she stretched out a blind hand to Herrick and leaned on him a little.

"Ah!" mocked the Sicilian, "it made a beautiful grave! You will not have so fine! But yours gapes for you now as well as for your lover, and for your husband, who caused all the death! Do not pity the girl who died. Exult not over Giuseppe Gumama. Read, instead, the writing in your golden pistol—of Alieni—and the Signora Alieni—" He stopped with a gratified gasp. The handle of the door into the hall had been softly turned from the outside.

No one moved. In a strange voice the sheriff called to know if this were one of his men. There was no answer. "Where are they? Why don't they—"

Gumama the Sicilian laughed aloud. "The long cellar-way, where by night we carried out to the river our broken press—It has let us in—so quietly—Many went upstairs—"

Herrick translated. With one impulse the three men turned toward the slide in the paneling. It



was closed. But their intent listening made sure of more than one soft touch, straying in search of the mechanism. Of crowding whispers they could not be so sure. Herrick reached for Nicola's gun. But it had only one charge and then, indeed, though without turning her head, Christina closed her hand on his and took it from him. "That's mine, you know!" No man gainsaid her and she put it in her breast. Undisguised, unhurried footsteps sounded overhead. An alien presence pervaded all that house. Caged in their shelter, they drew together, close under the balcony. Christina suffered herself to be drawn with them, but she was considering aloud the Sicilian's words.

"My golden pistol!" Christina looked from the little femininely jeweled dummy to the script, "'Filippi Alieni and all his house'—And all his house! 'The death of traitors'—My husband, you say? The Signora Alieni—A. A. A. Alieni, of course! But—Allegra?—Allegra?—Alieni?"

"Signora Alieni!" Gumama smilingly repeated.

The girl gave him one glance, sprang past him and flung herself against the shuttered windows. "Whom do you mean by traitors?" she called. "For whom do you take us? Answer! Answer!"

At the sound of her voice a deep-bayed, many-throated yell roared out derision and victory. As the men dragged Christina back a coarse laugh mocked loudly from across the road. "Signora Alieni, we rejoice at the last to salute you!" And the whole woodland took up his phrase in chorus, "Buona sera, Signora Alieni!"

Then, uncontrollably, at length the darkness volleyed, the earth was rived with sound and fire, the flashes of it scorching their skin while glass, plaster, woodwork, split and spattered round them as through the windows the hail beat.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE DARKEST HOUR: "OF WOUNDS AND SORE DEFEAT I MADE MY BATTLE STAY!"

Christina's stream of Italian left Herrick so far behind that he could only watch the incredulity of Gumama's face turn to doubt and then to reflection. The word "American" was often repeated, and then came Gumama's slower answer, puzzling out the question—But was not the Signora Alieni herself much American? Did not she to-night meet here in this house her brother Nicola? And was she not to run away at sunrise with—and he pointed to Herrick—an American? And how well was it not known that the Signora Alieni was bella, bella donna?—"Bella—bella!" with mounting fervor he violently repeated.

"But you, yourself? You never saw her?"

"The Signora Alieni goes always veiled."

"Are there none—out there—who know her?"

"Old friends ten years ago in Naples. And the laborers of Nicola."

"When they come, they will know at once she is not here," said Christina, with an odd, proud calm. "Ah, please, let me see what they are about!" And she persistently advanced to a window and peered between the slats of a blind.

Blackness was lifting from the earth. That clear gray light, clearer and grimmer than ever they had seen it, of the slowly rising dawn had begun to fill the open spaces. Under the trees it was still a dusk of living shadows, and, from within the house, the half-muffled, surrounding pressure strained closer still against the walls. Christina faced round, uttered a piercing shriek and pointed toward the panel. To this, the men who watched her turned. And on the instant, the shutters clicking as she flung them open, the girl flashed through and ran straight into the dawn on the white terrace. "You who know Allegra Alieni, am I she? Am I she?"

A wail of amazement and denial greeted her. The men within, the men without, came to a standstill.—"If you ever loved me," said Christina to Herrick, "keep back from me, now!" He replied only by swinging forward Gumama, who thereupon stood in the sight of his friends with the mute argument of a revolver at his head. Not a voice replied. But not a shot was fired.

In the pause produced by the concerned and puzzled hesitation of the besiegers, Christina gathered up her voice. She was used to send it far, to hush and rouse with it, to pierce and move at will, and neither misery nor fatigue seemed now to have weakened its flexible and winning melody. "Sirs," cried the girl, "I ask you the one thing. Are you not here as the executioners of the great Camorra? Do you, then, wish to disobey?"

She had centered upon herself a bewildered stare.

"And do you not disobey if you blunder? Do you wish to bring all the new world about your ears for the wrong thing? Believe me, we four, we are strong persons in that world—we do not fall unavenged! If we are to die here, now, and the great society of the Camorra is to wreck itself upon our death, let it not be in a mistake!—Ah, you see! Believe me! We are not false brethren of

yours, we are Americans, every one! But in a way you and I are brethren, for I, like you, have seen my heart's good faith betrayed—and by the same hand!"

A startled murmur rose.

"I, too, was brought to come here by the ruin of my life through Allegra Alieni! Of her husband I never knew. Only hold back the force that masses at our door and here is a plan. We are here four—three men and a woman. Send us four men—mask them, if you will—and let them look at us close and well; they will see that we cannot be those whom you seek. But we have with us the body of Nicola whom this one here, calling himself Giuseppe Gumama, slew, and who was brother to the Alienis. Let your men take this Nicola from our house, for we, no more than you, have any use for traitors!"

These words produced an extraordinary effect. A murmur of admiration, of fellowship, exclamations, argument, a sort of congratulation traversed the green spaces through the still strengthening dawn. Christina, as always, had found her audience.

"Oh, sirs," cried the girl, in a softer cadence, advancing to the very edge of the terrace, and still eagerly baring her face to the pale light, "you seek our lives and I am so weary I am almost glad to die. But die or live, oh, now, for the dear love of God, let me go down to the river! Let me see who is still alive there! Send whom you will with me, but let me go!" And Christina stretched out her arms to the men of the Camorra as to the brothers of her soul and for the moment they were all more than her brothers in their inflammable hearts.

But even a little noise could still distract them. And this time it was the noise of the unhinged shutter as it slid, bumping, for a second and then fell with a crash upon the terrace. In the half-light Ten Euyck's hand, holding a pistol, was visible at the window and above it the white leer of his face. Voices cried, "A fourth man! A man of whom she did not tell!"

A prisoner from the yellow farmhouse called out in an insufferable, fawning yelp, "I know him! He used to visit the signora! He is the confidant of the signora and of her brother!"

A roar rose and drowned out Christina's voice. "That man—how comes he there! The friends of Allegra Alieni are her friends!"

The crowd did not advance for the ring of Herrick's gun was still pressed against Mr. Gumama's beautiful brow. But some shrill voice rose, a-quiver with exhorting hate. "The hour is come! For what have we waited? Till they had not a shot left! They have none now! If they had they would have shot Gumama when he came in! They do not shoot him, now—they have nothing to shoot! Give the signal! They hid the friend of Allegra Alieni behind the window—how shall they tell us her friends are not their friends? How shall they tell us they can injure our Gumama? Close in! Close in!"

The tide of the Camorra washed forward, and surged up the first terrace. But it came to a halt.

"How?" Christina had cried. And then, extending the revolver that carried the last shot, she had fired straight into the dead face of Ten Euyck.

The jar shattered that perilous equilibrium. The corpse fell in upon itself, its weapon dropping with a clank, the tongue suddenly protruding beneath the shattered cheekbones and the head goggling on the breast. The note of one still unaffrighted bird came through the perfect stillness.

The invading army shivered, shocked and applausive; then, apprehensively, it glanced at Gumama. It drew together in consulting knots. Some men, coming from round the house, joined the counsel and created a sensation. A puzzled but now rather friendly voice shouted, "Some one lies! Alieni was seen to enter where you are!"

They all looked at Christina. But the wire had snapped at last. She stood with a scared vagueness on her white face, the pistol swinging loose in her hand and her eyes fixed on the hunched clutter of what had been Ten Euyck. Herrick made out to translate the message and Kane said, "Ask 'em if they'll send up that investigating committee?"

Christina's shot had made, however, too great an impression. If they had ammunition to spare, they were no hosts for the Camorra. Would the Americans come out, each one, upon the second terrace?—bringing, also, the dead and wounded, till Gumama shall tell us there are no more?

"When the devil drives—! Say we'll begin with the dead!"

They began with Ten Euyck. Sheriff Buckley took the head, Kane the feet; the long, bony figure sagged between them and the tails of its dress-coat flopped as if pointing jocularly toward the ground. As they bore this burden down the terraces and laid it on the smooth greenness of the lawn, amid the ever brightening daylight and the ever growing chirp and twitter of the slowly calming birds, various disheveled figures began to hurry into view along the drive from the river. These arrivals had all the air of refugees and continued to excite, in counsel, an increasing perturbation. Yet the truce remained unbroken. So long as Kane and Buckley, exposed, defenseless, to the first marksman, carried forth Nicola no word nor movement was given in enmity. But the delay in reaching the figure in the gallery produced great restiveness. Taunts and outcries of nervous impatience gave way, when the two men appeared with their slighter burden, to a chorus of half-derisive welcome. The Camorra had begun to be in a hurry.

Its nervousness communicated itself to the men who bore this third body down the great stone

steps and laid it at Ten Euyck's right hand. A thick sweat stood out upon them when a sharp storm of curses, geysers and downpours of venom broke suddenly from heavens and earth. But the tempest was not for them. The face of their last burden had become visible to the advance guard stationed among the foremost trees and this now leaned violently forth, tossing like branches with the shriek, "Alieni! Traditore! Alieni!"

Upon that the shadow of the woodland broke at last. A dozen men, their hats screened low to shield their faces, detached themselves from the mass which crouched greedily after them and, racing out upon the lawn, threw themselves prostrate on the soft, supine thing that lay there. Behind them the tide became ungovernable; rose, swelled forward; covered the road, the lowest terrace; raving, shrieking, leaping and falling; biting the grass upon which it rolled in frenzy. There were perhaps two minutes of pandemonium. Then a whistle sounded. Then another. The tide rolled back; the groves of oak and pine and maple swallowed it into their shadow; and of that orgy of living hate no trace remained in the full clearness of the fresh morning but the trampled, mangled body of Filippi Alieni, pierced with fifty-eight wounds and still bearing between the shoulder blades a triangular knife. The will of the Camorra was satisfied.

A chorus of whistles sounded from the wood. Then arose a single voice, demanding Gumama. His captors realized that the war was over; the prisoner was released. Despite the hurrying bird-calls of his mates he paused, thoughtfully knitting his Saracen brows, for a look at Christina.

The girl was standing perfectly still, with her eyes intent upon Ten Euyck's empty chair, as if she had not observed his removal; her gaze was fixed, but her lower lip strained and quivered. As Gumama paused the pistol slid from her hand; the noise of its dropping at her feet attracted her eyes; she shivered violently; broke into trembling mirth and sank, till her soft cheek and the convulsive throbbing of her young body lay pressed upon the stone. Herrick and Gumama both sprang to her. Herrick lifted her head upon his knee, but she lay limp and shook from head to foot with sobbing laughter.

Gumama shrugged and stood back. "Is it," he asked, "the silver bracelet?" Then they all saw that the bracelet snatched from Nancy was on Christina's wrist.

Herrick nodded; his soul was sick with that horror. There was no triumph, now, in victory.

"Tell her," said the tall Sicilian, "when she avenges her friend to think of me. I will come. Always. She is the pearl of everything. All would not see it. But I have the piercing eye. I see."

He ran off swiftly; and the sort of uproarious twitter which welcomed him under the trees ended in a final message. "Farewell, Americans. You do us the courtesy of our beloved Gumama! We do you our courtesy—Flee! Whoever you are, the policemen are upon you! They are coming from the gate, they are coming from the river! In ten minutes they will be here! Americans, farewell!"

It was the last word of the Camorra in their lives. The undergrowth of the wood seemed to grow scantier; it was the backward fading of the shadows, it was the passing of a great, black bulk; the disappearance of innumerable unknown persons whom they had never even seen, of whose existence they had never even known, out of their path. Nothing remained but the signaling whistles of the Camorra, gathering its children in its retreat. The thing was over. The last consequence of the Ingham murder, of the birth of the Hopes' first child twenty-eight years ago in Naples, was over and done. And the three men regarded each other with a strange feeling of vacancy.

But in the mouths of Kane and the sheriff the morning air was good and life ran sweet in their veins. Even to Herrick, with the exhausted girl laughing and shuddering in his arms, there seemed to rise a kind of future hope when forgetfulness should deal tenderly with her. Soon she must begin to weep and the other side of weeping a kind of consolation lies. "Why, her own youth and life must heal her!" Kane said. "It's hard, it's bitter hard! But there's her feeling for you, her future, her work—Don't look at her as if she were dying! Time, my boy, she needs time, that's all!—As for Nancy Cornish, she fell with one shot. And since she was so much in love with that poor fellow, believe me, she's better off!"

Herrick looked up in alarm, lest Christina should hear bad news. But she was lost in the hot surge of tears that had come to her at last and lay only quieter and quieter in his hold. Till at length, since there was a time coming when she must know if Fate had played her doubly false, he fetched a coat to put under her head and drew Kane aside. "You meant just now—?"

"I meant what I've had on my mind through all this night, as something with which I didn't know how to face Miss Hope. I meant that this chap Denny was never a very lucky fellow—"

"Was?"

"But that never was anything unluckier than his consenting to leave the Tombs."

"Because they followed and brought him back?"

"They followed. But they didn't bring him back!—I forgot you wouldn't know. The Italians somehow palmed off on Ten Euyck's men another Italian made up with the things in which they took Denny from the Tombs. It's easy enough to understand now why Ten Euyck, with discreet mercy, called this substitute simply a mistake and let him go." He paused, studying the driveway with clouded eyes. "The Italians must have got clear away with Denny, but why did they take so much pains? Were they really going to hand over to Allegra a man whom they certainly

considered in some way their enemy, when already they must have begun to turn against her? What were they going to do with him? What *did* they try to do with him when he was first imprisoned in the Tombs? Don't groan, my boy! It's the one way out. It's the most merciful thing for that poor girl, there; it's the most merciful thing for Denny himself. Hope for it! If his captors didn't get away, if he's been retaken with them, then marry Christina Hope as fast as may be and get her out of this country for awhile. You understand?" Herrick looked up. "I intend, with all my strength, to keep my bargain. I'll go to the Governor to-morrow. But he let me know, as I was starting here, that it would be useless."

"After his promise?"

"Since that promise Denny broke jail. There are minds to which such a move is always the unpardonable sin! Against it the mere justifying provocation in any story Allegra Alieni may tell could make no appeal. Besides, it's told by a woman who was in love with him, and who, by this time, is either dead or run away. So must be every witness to it. Even as evidence against the blackmailers, if there are any left, Miss Hope can't force the state to sell her his life for this, now. Well, some day, perhaps, you can make her see that whatever happens, police or Camorra, he managed to get his way, poor chap! If she weren't fooled by life's being hope she would see, well enough, that he was the last man to thank her for a light sentence. He was keen against jail, you remember?"

They were both silent. Yes, Herrick remembered. "The best friend Christina ever had" she would surely some day see could not have lingered in the black durance that he loathed.—Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!

It was the hour for resolution, for new birth. Herrick felt a strength of pity in his breast whose tide should lift Christina from the whirlpools of which the lessening eddies still plucked at her sick soul. Poor girl, poor, brave, spoiled, wilful, imperious, generous heart! To have fought so hard and to be checked thus at the end! To have outwatched, outstalked, outrun the hounds for this! "Thus far shalt thou go...." Hers had been a heroic presumption, but it had been presumption all the same. You cannot outface consequences nor outdare natural tragedy; no, not even you, Christina Hope! After all, could she have expected to clear out from a morass like this without a loss? Ah, for her defeat he suffered, but for her safety he thanked God! Rest, time, the irrevocable—these in the end would place the past under her feet. Was it because she read the tender vowing of his thought that she had a little ceased to weep?

For she lifted her exhausted face, where the wild, wet eyes still seemed to listen, just as Herrick remembered their continual guard six weeks ago. She was listening to those chorusing signals, still whistled from far stations nearer road and river and returned in such imitation of bird voices that bird after bird replied. They were growing fainter—they were retreating on every hand—all but one, which seemed to advance and to give forth a more familiar note. And suddenly Christina answered it.

Herrick caught her closer, in a new terror of delirium. The girl rose to her knees and put him back. "But we've wandered many a weary foot—" From among the fleeing whistles of the wood one had certainly warned or questioned in articulate notes with which hers joined in a familiar bar—"Since auld lang syne, my dear—" Through the colorless day a strong yellow light had begun to flood the earth; the clouds were carved out sharp in it, the woods stood black; the light had a blush of happy fire and the air sparkled. In that cool radiance, in that bright hour, out from among the very waves of the Camorra's receding sea, a single figure stepped from the border of the wood and came straight up the terraces.

Not so tall as Mr. Gumama but still vaguely Sicilian in cut, the messenger or fugitive or whatever he might be advanced under the gaze of those who grew terribly pale and could not speak; Christina peering forward, shaking from head to foot, her clenched hands hanging at her side and her lips caught between the knocking of her teeth. The echoing, ominous whistles, the noises of rescue approaching from two sides, the hails of the police, the sound of wheels, tires, horses' hoofs and running feet did not deter the single figure which, mounting with a kind of steady stumble, like one far spent, blind, now, to the danger of sudden bullets, indifferent to arrest or punishment or anything in heaven or earth but his own ends, gained at length the foot of the stone steps and lifted his face. At the same instant the risen sun glinted on the swinging gold of sailors' earrings, on the bracelet slipped out below a ragged cuff, on the red cord of a scapular and on the scarf in the Sicilian colors that had helped to play their part in the Duel by Wine in the loft above the garage. The wearer was damp from the river and stained with earth, yet smelling of singed cloth and grimed with smoke; torn, wounded, blackened, haggard, with bright, steady eyes. It was Will Denny. He carried the unconscious but still breathing figure of Nancy Cornish in his arms.

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The first thing she woke to was Allegra's letter and Kane's question, "Do you know what this document contains? Can you witness its truth?"

And then answered Nancy Cornish, "Of course I can! I saw her come out in Christina's cloak. They kept me waiting in the motor outside while she shot Mr. Ingham."

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE SHADOW'S FACE: BEING ALSO THE FULL STORY OF THE SHADOW'S FLIGHT

The whole of Allegra's document was never made public. Before it was read even by those concerned they heard from Nancy how, when she had run from the window of the boathouse, it was Allegra who had reappeared there, she whose red hair Gumama had glimpsed through the smoke and she whom Alieni had found courage to shoot. Afterwards they got from Denny the story of his venture: how he had guessed that, on leaving the Tombs, he would, in his own person, be kept a prisoner by his Italian hosts till he was got out of the country; and how he had therefore persuaded Filippi Alieni to change places with him—Filippi to be carried to Allegra and he to receive at the meeting of the Camorra a message that would take him to Nicola, to the hiding of the Arm of Justice and to Nancy Cornish. What must forever sicken Denny to think of was that hour in the boathouse when Nancy might have yielded and taken the laudanum that Mrs. Pascoe had finally secured, before he could get to her. Nancy's eyes were upon him, regarding him fixedly and strangely. With the vividness of his remembrance he broke off to question her. "How, at such a time, among such dangers, did you dare to throw it away?"

"Why, I had to! No matter what! I had to live till the last minute. The letter was gone. I was your life. I was the only one who knew!"

He dropped his face into her lap with a strange laugh. By and by, they turned to the story of Allegra.

That great donkey of a Ten Euyck wishes me to write this. He says it is for his protection, but I know well enough what it is for. It is a net to catch a peacock—to whom he is welcome. He will never bray about me—this is two-edged; it would avenge me. It is a pity none will ever read it, for it is a good story and I should like every one to know about me. Then, too, sometimes, I almost think that when I am far away and sheltered with my friends, I will send word of it to high places for *his* sake. For I shall be always in torment if they kill him. That is, if by then there shall be no Nancy Cornish. To send him, free, to the arms of another woman—no, that would be a little too much!

I am a remarkable girl. It has taken to crush me the same as to crush Napoleon—bad luck. My bad luck began when I was born, with the two colors of my eyes. Thus a mark was put upon me, keeping me always in holes and corners unless I would be known, and making most men, who love me by nature, growing in time to weary of my face. If it had not been for the blue eye and the brown, my mother would never have noticed, among the children in the park, the American baby with the fair down upon its head who, when she came to look at it, was made with a shaped face like mine, and who also had a brown eye and a blue. She would never have made friends with the nurse and learned how the child was named Allegra Hope, and how the rich Americans had been married but four months before it was born, and were to wait in Italy till it could be brought home a year younger than it was. This the nurse had picked up, not being supposed to speak much English. And then came the telegram to come home, somebody was dying. And at the same time the nurse was sick, and there was no one with whom to leave the child. And then the nurse brings forth her friend who has always showed so fond of the child, and there is rejoicing because she is American, and the English doctor says she is healthy and the child is left with her. It is treated well; it grows; it grows more and more like me, who am but one year the older, so that all laugh to see us, and I am more like that other mother than my own, showing in what class it would have been just I should be born. And the old creature in America does not die, but hangs and hangs, and money is always sent for the baby, and by and by when it is three years old it catches the fever and it dies. And the English doctor is to write to the parents, but he does not write—he does an injury to one of the great clan of the Camorra and he writes no more. And I grow every day more beautiful, more strong, more strange to have sprung out of the mud, and the money keeps coming and coming; but that the dead one was fair in the head, and I am red like the sun, there is no great difference from what she might have been, and that she is dead and buried and the money spent and spent on me, is never told. But they there in America, thinking to be gone but a month at most, never said there was a daughter, so they know not how, now, one is to be produced.

So that when I am seven years old, comes the Hope man; he looks upon the child with the blue eye and the brown, and sighs his great breath on my hair, and takes me to the English school. But I come every summer to my own people, so that I have all that is best of both kinds, and grow to be so beautiful and have such fascination, that when there comes sometimes a Hope father or Hope mother to take me on a trip and be sorry for me, I laugh at their backs! The mother I do not like, and she does not like me. She is a fool, and she has, too, another child. It is a girl and it is said to be pretty; but the picture she carries with her resembles a pale, shapeless child with dull hair,—not like mine that burns men's hearts like fire! Moreover this child has things that I should have, more money, more fuss, she is more shown. I am proud to be what I am; my mother, who is scarcely more than a common servant, had the great luck to marry into the Camorra, and my brother Nicola at eighteen takes the oath, so I am not come alone from dull peasants and these cackling Yankees, but from free men, born to judge, born to strike, born to live wild and to satisfy their blood. But all the same, as to this brat, Christina, I am the elder sister and I should have all, *all!* I make up my mind to be even with her and to spoil what things she has. I hear how she is

strange, and is a lonely child, and plays she has a sister to talk to, a little girl who lives in the looking-glass; and how it is a game of hers that when she is in a gown of pink the sister is in blue, and when they buy her a doll there is another for the sister, and a place set at the dolls' teas, and Christina talks for the two. Then I know she is a fool, like her mother.

When I am fifteen, and of the right age for passion and to break men's hearts, my bad luck comes and breaks my own. It could not leave me with the poor to be like the poor, it raised me up so that my nose sniffed at sight of them, and then it brought me together with Alonzo Pasquale, the son of a millionaire. He was mad for me, and well he might be, and I liked him so well, being young and fanciful, that I gave him encouragement. I ran away from school with him and we would have been happy forever, he having so much to give me, but that he grew weary of my blue eye and my brown. He told me so, for he was a dog and a devil, and I took little Filippi Alieni, and married him! It was wise. It was as well to be married, and he was a gentleman, with money. All was done as a wise girl should do, and yet see how my luck pursued me!

His people cast him off, on my account, their own daughters being ugly; and Nicola, who has been the best of brothers to me, Nicola got him into the Camorra, where his gentlemanly manners would make him able to get, first, confidence, and then money, from the best.

Yet when I had been but three months married and was not yet sixteen, he gets himself caught. And in prison he tells, he betrays his comrades, so that he is released, and for this Nicola does not kill him. No, he keeps the secret of that disgrace, and ships us to America, where I am to introduce my husband to the Hopes. All so well planned, and yet such luck!

One of those to whom he had confessed loses his place, and then, by blackmail, that he will give my husband's treachery to the Camorra, he gets from him all the money that he now has. So that I have to lose him quickly; to take the little, ah, so little! there is left, and slip away! I do not wish a Camorra knife in my back!

I am afraid to go to the Hopes, for there he will follow me, and he is a snivelling, watering thing to make a fuss and spoil all. So I ask for work to teach Italian, and I live for a little while as if I were quite commonplace. And so I meet with the great Jim.

Hail and farewell, my poor Jim! You were only twenty-three and you cared too much! You did so many things for me, you thought such things about me, and were of such a considerate politeness and care, it made me laugh! But you were a beautiful lover, and I would have loved you, if I could! I would have been glad to marry you, as you made me so weary begging of me. I was very happy with you; you gave more to me and I think you loved me better than any one. But you were very silly to believe me, and silly to leave me when you found me out! That little whimpering puppy came; and, since you left me, and he had a good hint from Nicola how to get money from an Italian family here, what was I to do? We did very well, for a while, besides the money the Hopes sent me—I told them I came here to escape impertinence and was teaching Italian—and then they lost their money and I wrote to them no more.

But Mrs. Hope, because of her sick conscience, was always trying, in sly ways, to find where I was. And it seems when her brat was come to fourteen years old it chanced upon my last letter and learned all. Heavens, what a row it raised! And how I was written to and written to; and some letters being forwarded me that they had tried sending me to Italy, were all about how she cried for me, and pitied and loved me and rejoiced, and said, again and again: "Oh, mother, I have a sister! I have a sister!" "Bene!" I thought, "she sounds like a tiresome little minx; but at least it is a thing to know!"

So that by and by—when Filippi is clumsy again and goes to jail for four years, and they dare to put me there for two—when I come out I go to my sentimental miss, who is now more than sixteen and makes already a little money. Not a dollar has she made since but I have had the half of it. She has no frugality; she is all luxuries and caprices and always in debt; and for a while it seemed as if really she would be scarcely of any use at all. But it is strange how pale she is, and yet attracts and shoots onward! Since then I have found a letter about those two years when I was silent. She wrote it to Will Denny, who thought she did too much for me. Like this:

"As I grew up and understood, and saw what little girls can come to in a world like this, I thought here was I and where was she?—My elder sister, born in wedlock, born of my father and my mother, grown up among peasants, among hardships, and if she had come to harm, lost, thrown away, forsaken and denied—for what? For any fault of hers? For a convention, a cowardice, done in obedience to the chatter of fools and in order to stand well with those that have no hearts! What can I think of my poor mother but that her weakness forsook and denied her child to please the world? What can I think of any shame or sorrow that touches Allegra but that this is what the world and her own family have made of her? Oh, Will, it came to be my madness to find her and to ask her forgiveness for being in her place. All that I am and have and ever shall be I stole from her, and only give her back again to repay what can never in this world be repaid!"

You see, she was a crazy girl from the beginning. As soon as ever I see her I know the thing to tell her is that I have been in prison for stealing—I do not tell her I am innocent; I tell her I was starving! It was funny to see her—I was like a saint to her! I think of all I can that is piteous and wild and of a great pride, broken, like a sick eagle! I tell her about Ingham, but all wrong and round the other way, and how he cannot marry me because I am without money or place, and leaves me, when I am eighteen, without a dollar and without a name. And how when that had

come to a young girl I could not write. All, all because society had kept me from my place in life and, having turned me out, had locked me into jail because I could not starve.

Eh me, you should have seen her! She used herself like a maid to me, and a mother and a little lover, all in one. And I might have done very well with her, and the world would have been all for me to walk,—or this little running colt, she would have known the reason!—but for my bad luck. Nicola who would do better in this country with education wishes me to work with him. And how can I guess the growing brat will grow so far and high? So I am glad enough to make a little butter to my bread. Try living once, three women, the Hope woman and Christina and me, off the salary of a girl younger than eighteen and you will see. But who would think that all the while this monkey girl was looking in the glass of my grace, to steal and steal and steal from me? And would steal once too often, for the moving-picture show, and gets herself into a corner! That was, indeed, the justice of the gods.

All this time I have made Christina keep me secret. I have still the brown and the blue eye, to be noticed everywhere, and I do not want Filippi on my hands, nor yet Jim Ingham. And for all she begs me to know this Denny, whom she persists to tell about me, I think he has a look that is not simple—the look of a man who has been about, and may guess too much—and so I will not—I am too sensitive and proud, and cannot face a person in the world except my little sister, whom I love so much and who is all I have! Except, I want the poor, devoted, kind, good folk who brought me up! So when she is eighteen she begins to buy for me this farm and here she welcomes my mother and Nicola. Nicola has found out friends of ours and kinsfolk who have long run, among people of our nation in New York, a business called the Arm of Justice, and we work for that; I having the best ideas, but, alas, ever doomed to hide. And on the farm we live in innocence and peace, and conduct our business excellently, out of the way of those from whom we make a little money, and here comes at last the sick puppy, Filippi, not to be kept off, who can but sit quiet and lick his paws in the background, that Christina shall not know of him.

And then, it is the first year of Ten Euyck being coroner, and a man who has been paying us, unfortunately, dies, and Ten Euyck, nosing, nosing, he comes upon our trail. And he sees how we have had nothing to do with the death, only the man had no more to pay and so he killed himself. And Ten Euyck sends for me, and tells me he is sorry for me and he will not inform against me. He tells me of a young girl he knows in the highest of society, for whom a friend of his had so great a fancy he was ready to marry her, and I knew he was that friend. And the girl dare not but lead him on, but all the time she prefers some one else and is in trouble; and he tells me all he has found out and he says, "I would not tell this to you, if I did not think you grateful to me and too discreet to use it otherwise than as I wish, when you know liberty is in my hand!" So I know what I am to do, and the girl goes mad. And he pays me by and by, but not enough. But what can I do?

We are going mad, too, for money, for our bad luck is always there! That man who made Filippi pay has found us out, and exacts of us more and more. We are in terror of the law from Ten Euyck, who has let none see him but me, and not one strand to hold him by, and of the Camorra from this brute. We work hard, we run great danger, and we remain poor, so that if we lose Christina we have nothing but what we must make and pay away—and Christina engages herself to Ingham! Was it not enough to break the heart! What use is it to work, to struggle, to be beautiful, and to have nothing? And here is this silly girl, not worth my little finger, who has all!

Three times more I work for Ten Euyck, and that man Kane gets after us. It is all the fault of Ten Euyck, who has made us conspicuous, and he knows Kane thinks there is something strange, and he loses his nerve. He comes always to the farm like a caller, when I have sent all away but me, for he will put nothing in writing, and he drives his own machine. And one day he is raging against Ingham and Christina, and what he would give to know against them, any more than Ingham's dissipation, and I think "Maybe I can make something out of this!"

By and by I rejoice to hear that there is trouble with Jim Ingham. He is not the boy I found him. He has let himself go wild so long he cannot tame himself, all at once, and then he is exacting, like a fiend, and jealous and suspicious, not believing in himself, nor anything, nor anybody; and I laugh to myself, if she should know why! For were there nothing else at all, it would annoy me that chit should marry him! But I am pleased, and in that moment I let her bring out to me her Will Denny and her Nancy Cornish. And so I spoil my life and break my heart, and do not know myself with love.

I have come to be twenty-eight years old and nothing has counted. Then I meet him, and nothing else can count. I say to myself that I will have him, and I know it is not possible but I shall get him. But still he is all eyes and ears for a rag of a girl, who is so sick with love she knows not even how to charm. She knows nothing at all but to love him; and to love him nicely—so that she would not make him unhappy, even to hold him forever! It makes me ill to look at her, and still I cannot get him to look at me. But I can make him seem to look at me. I can make him ever with me, and amused by me, and of a manner a little sweet and tender to me—the poor sister of Christina, whom he can see to be dying on her feet for love of him. And the little rag of a girl sees how beautiful I am and full of life and far above her every way and fit for him, and knows no better than to grow pale and to keep out of the way, and to be silent and cold with him. And he begins to be hurt and not to follow her so hard, and then she finds me crying, crying. And at first I will not tell, but then I say how I must go away, because I love him. By and by I say that I would not have to go but I am afraid if I stay I will steal him from her. And at last, very reluctant, I show her a letter—for Nicola, who has done something in that line, too, was ever a good brother to me

and taught and helped me well, so that it was in Will's hand. It said how he would never forsake Nancy, who loved him, for she could not live without him, but I was brave and strong and he must be so, too. It said how we were each other's mates, he and I, but met too late, and his heart would be mine forever, but he could never forsake nor pain his poor Nancy. Crack, she broke her engagement, the little fool! Who never had scarcely been able to understand how he should love her, as no more could I—and she shuts herself away from him, and will not answer and will tell him nothing! Only, she's changed her mind. And he says to Christina, "I am too old for her, and not so gay!" And I see him tear up the photographs she has sent back, and sneer at them, and say how God knows she could never have taken him for a beauty! And oh, I am so kind to him! I am so gentle and so sad, and I get new clothes and dress my hair, and always he can see me die of love. And so there comes a day when he asks me if I would be afraid to take the pieces of our lives and see what we could make of them together.—Ah me! and to think it all had to be kept secret because I was still so proud and sad! For bethink you, there was Filippi!

I think at last what a fool I am not to have divorced Filippi long ago! Here I am, betrothed to marry and it is all to do yet! Long ago, had I not been so soft-hearted, or had I thought of it, I might have been rid of fearing the spy who threatens him with the Camorra, in being rid of him. I wonder how much Filippi will take to set me free, and he makes a horrible fuss and will take nothing at all! But his spy is begun all fresh, killing him by inches with demands for five thousand dollars. And he asks also five thousand, now, not to report Nicola who has remained silent and a friend to us! It is all like a mad spider's web which but entangles more and more. And I think I will get that ten thousand from Ingham because I do not publish the story I have told Christina. Or else from Ten Euyck, because I do.

I send the Arm of Justice letter to Ingham's office that it may be forwarded to Europe. And then I hear from Christina that she cares for him no longer and has written him, and already he is coming back to argue with her. Oh, my luck, my bad luck! If he has lost her already, he will fight my lies! He will get my letter, too; he will connect that with her broken promise, he will ask her if she knows a girl with a brown eye and a blue, and what may he not guess and put into her head about my business? I am in despair, I have a fit of crazy rage, and I think, too, I will get ahead of him, so she will not listen to him. I say to her, "That man who ruined my life years ago, that was James Ingham!" I say to her, "I could not let it go on, dear sister. But don't let him know where I am." He comes straight to her, before he has my letter, and all she says to him is, "You have never known all these years that I had a sister." And then she tells him her sister's name, and he goes away.

But Nicola ever hopes that perhaps he will pay and at four o'clock watches his window for my ribbon. Then he sees go in Nancy Cornish, and he thinks that very queer and comes to tell me, who am round the corner in the car. We watch and see her come out, and turn east, and we follow her, and I see her going into the Park; a thing to drive me wild, for I know well she used to meet Will Denny in the Park. She came much, much too soon this time, but did not care. Till she saw me.

If she had not come so soon, if she had kept her mouth shut, how different all would be to-day! No! Out she came with it—Filippi has told her! He has told her we are married! She has telephoned to my betrothed, she is to tell him here! Filippi has done worse. He has said to her, "This I would not tell to every one. But if she should seek to injure you and get him back, say to her—What do you know of the Arm of Justice? She will let you alone, then!" With those words did she not seal her own fate? He must have got drunk on talk, Filippi,—not being used to be listened to—for he tells her that Nicola and I wrote that letter from Will I gave her to read. He gives this girl the address of my cousin, and says if Will comes there, directly, he will show him the papers of our marriage. Thus do these two little jealous, peeping fools spoil everything!

In the meanwhile Ingham has got my letter, and has guessed I wrote it. And he calls up this girl, whom he knows to be Christina's dearest friend, and asks her, does she know Christina's sister? He tells her that though all is broken between Christina and him, there are things Christina must not believe, and perhaps there is something she must know. He asks when he can see this Cornish girl, and she tells him after rehearsal, but before five. She is very much excited, and she says how always in her own room girls run out and in and so she will come to him—She, mind you, the baby-girl! And there she tells him her tale and he tells her his, my letter for the money and all, and she gives him the address of my cousin, and there he has gone to find Filippi,—for she is not so crazy Will shall go!—while she is telling me what she thinks of me, softly, in a low voice, in the Park. I think how Will Denny is coming, and I make a little sign. And Nicola hits her once, and picks her up limp; I following with her hat, like a sister, in case we meet a policeman. And we lift her in the automobile and put up the hood, going fast as we dare. At my cousin's they have denied to know of Filippi. For Filippi, out of the window, saw it was not Will, but Ingham. And we take her in there. She comes to, before long, and all we can do with her is to take her out of town. Only I must leave her at my cousin's now, for I am to dine with Will before his rehearsal.

It seems to me that any person of a pitiful heart, who also admires courage and address, must be sorry for me, now. Here am I, born for love and to command and charm, tied to Filippi and to lowly life; having planned so wisely and dared so well, now with this rag of a girl on my hands, not knowing what to do with her; with the Camorra itself, all unconscious, closing ever in and in, by its offer to absorb our Arm of Justice; with the spite of Ingham on my heels and tattlers and spies on all sides, just when I need all my wit to win my love. For he has not had time to learn to love me as he would love me before long. He is very, very sweet to me, but he does not care. Just when he first turned to me there was one flash. I hope and I pray to all the saints, I plan and



watch and make myself fair and think of all that can please him; I spend my days and nights to feed the fire; but it burns out. He is kind, he thinks he is to marry me, he is fond of me, because I am sad and so is he. But he is sick for that Cornish girl who is not worth one hair of my head, and I have no time to wait till his love grows. I think how I am to defend myself with him if Ingham talks; and when I get to the restaurant where we have a private room—I am so shy and so sensitive, lest people laugh at my queer eyes!—there I find he has met Christina on the street and carried her along to ask her does she know why Nancy did not come in the Park.

Well, I tell him. I tell him Ingham's name, as I have told it to Christina. And he does not like Ingham, whom he has seen fascinate Christina against her will, and whom he has heard of as a brute to women. And always Ingham has wished Christina to be less friends with him, and has done many little things in hate of him. So that he is all ready to believe what I say; how his Nancy was afraid to face him this long while, and meant to try this afternoon and failed; and how it is Ingham who has given her money to go away. I think it will make him hate her. I think it will make him not listen to Ingham. I do not know it will make him perfectly cold and perfectly still, not speaking a word—not even when Christina, for the first time in her whole life, is angry with me and tells me I deceive myself, I misunderstood Nancy, he does not speak.

He talks nicely about other things at dinner, but he does not go toward the theater afterwards. And when Christina asks him why not, he says he forgot something which he has at home. And she says to him, "You cannot go to Ingham now, you have a dress-rehearsal." And he says, "I have not forgotten that." So she takes me with her to Nancy's boarding-house, and there they who are busy and notice no better, say she has gone out to dinner, before the theater, with a Miss Grayce. And Christina goes home to see if she can get word to Ingham to keep out of Will's way and I go back to my cousin's table d'hôte.

Now we have never said to Christina that we have a car. She cannot afford us one, however she tries, and we do not want her to know we have ever a dollar but from her. We sell a little from the farm, and she knows we send this in to market by a man with a truck, and she is willing to spend so much on her own fancies that she even arranges with him to bring her my flowers. But for us she buys a little wagon with two seats and a plug of a horse. She needs not to know everything and watch all our movements. So mostly we keep the car at the other place; and half the time I am there myself. If she comes visiting to the farm I can take the Cornish girl out there.

But I must first see Ingham and beg him to be merciful to me. And, indeed, he has loved me so much, I think he cannot resist to be a little kind. And I leave Nancy in the car with Nicola and the boys and with her mouth stopped, across the street from Ingham's house under the windows of that Herrick. So, without thought of fear, I enter. Afterward, when I read about the elevator boy, I remember I have on a favorite of Christina's dresses. For, naturally, of hers, I take what I choose.

Well, there is nothing to be done with Ingham—he is mean, mean through. He will give me up to the police. He has heard before of the Arm of Justice; he says that he will break it. And then I tell him he would better clear out, for I know Christina thinks that Will will kill him. And it is then Will rings and when he, grinning, welcomes Will in, he sees, and any one may see, that Will has his revolver in his hand. But when Will finds me there he is stricken dumb. And Ingham laughs and says, "You wonder what this injured lady is doing here? Ask Nancy Cornish!"

And Will cries out at him, not so very loud, but as a sword goes through the air, "Ask Nancy Cornish!" and then, very low, "Do not imagine but that I shall ask Nancy Cornish! And you shall tell me where she is!"

Then Ingham says, "Well, if you didn't wish her to have done with you, my dear fellow, why did you throw her over for this married lady?"

Will never gets any further than to stand by that panel of wall, between the portières and the door. He looks to me and not to Ingham, and it is the one time in my life when I can think of nothing to say. I talk on and on, but I say nothing. It is the fault of that Ingham who continues to laugh, and to play like an angel who is a devil, too.

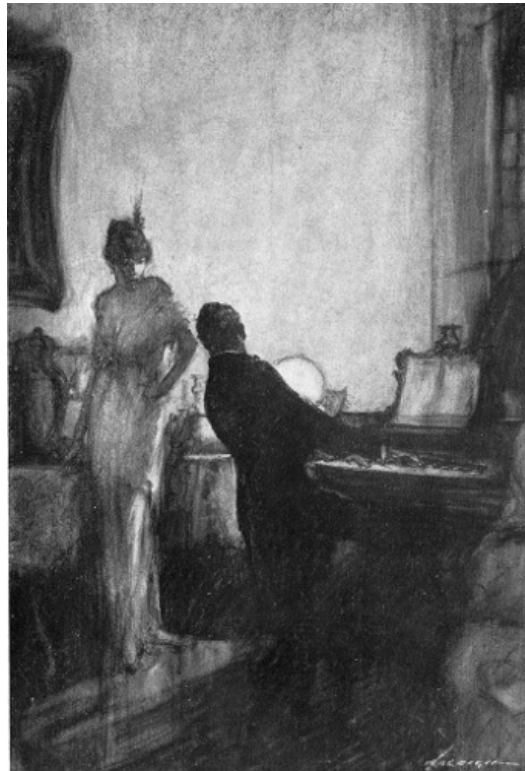
I tell him that Filippi married me when I was an ignorant child, with poor people, for the sake of the Hopes' money; how he brought me to this country and deserted me and came back after I had thought I was free, and had made friends with Ingham because I was destitute and alone. And he does not speak. But he does not believe me. I fall down on my knees and tell him, before Ingham's face, how I love him, and only him; how there never was any other man who had my heart! How when I saw him I knew he was my life, and I was born anew in knowing him. I tell him how I fear to let him know I am married. But how I am trying all the time to get free, and how I would have been free before I married him; how not for years have I been a wife to Filippi who hangs upon us and will not work and does not care for me! And I take his hand and cover it with kisses and with tears, and I implore him not to leave me, I shall die if he leaves me! And I ask him if he himself has never in his life done wrong! And I swear if I lied to him it was for love for him! He knows that is true; he cannot look at me, and not know! And I throw myself down, before his feet.

He lifts me up by one shoulder, and he looks at me long and long; still kind but very cold and still, and what he says is, "Then was it a lie you told me about her—and this man?" He has not one thought of me, at all.

It throws me into a great rage. I spring up and round the table, and Jim, who has not ceased to

play, laughs loud, and gives one crash of chords. It is his triumph and I could kill him for it. I am all one fire of hate that tosses in the wind, and I lift my arm and Herrick sees my shadow on the blind. But quick I put my hand over my mouth, petrified. For at that moment there is a soft, quick knocking on the door and Christina's voice saying, "Let me in, both of you! Let me in!"

By good luck, she has come while I am silent. And I leap forward and catch my hat up off the table and fly behind the curtains. For I know I have lost Will. And if I lose her, too, I have nothing. And Ingham breaks into the march from "Faust," triumphing, and just then I see through the curtain crack on the little chair at Will's side his pistol that he has dropped. And I hear Ingham say, now all in fury, "Shall I let her come in? Shall I tell at last what you are, through and through?"— And the door opens. She had her key, Christina, that she had forgot to give him back. And she calls out, sharp, to Will. But she turns to Ingham and says, "I implore you, leave me with him a moment!" And he swirls round to see where I have run. I snatch up Will's pistol and fire past him from behind the curtain into Ingham's heart. Will reaches back to catch my hand and shakes the pistol out of it. It has not taken one breath and his first thought is for Christina, yes, and for me, and he snaps off the light. There she stands in the doorway; the light in the hall on Ingham fallen back dead. And when she turns her eyes again, there is still no one there but Will. Will stoops for the pistol that still smokes and drops it loose in his pocket.



**"Shall I let her come in? Shall I tell at last what you are, through and through?"—**

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You are to remember it is what she has come there to prevent. And before she has time scarcely to breathe, he forces her back across the threshold. Up he swoops her in his arms for he is strong like wire, and light and swift as a hound is, and flies with her for the back stairs. I wait, for if she sees me I do not know, any more than he does, which way she will turn. She has stood by him, and perhaps she would have stood by me; but not if she had known the truth. And at the back stairway he asks her, "Can we trust the Deutches?" And she replies, "For me, yes. But I will not trust your life with any one." And then, poor fellow, he must have seen what she thought, and made up his mind to let her think it. I was her sister; and he had gone into that room the man who was to marry me. He could still feel my kisses and my arms about him; and he never dreamed that Ingham was to denounce me for a criminal—he thought I fired not from mingled frenzies, but from only the desperate love of him. Besides, it was only accident he had not fired himself. He would not have given me up if he had died.

For me, almost in a moment, it is too late to run. I stumble on Christina's cloak and scarf, that she has had on her arm and dropped in the dark. I am terribly afraid! I am in panic to think they are all coming, and I bolt the door! I wish only to hide and yet I know I cannot hide! I am wild! I try the closet. It is locked. I run behind the portières, knocking over the little chair in the dark. I have no plan, nothing but fear! Till, with the feeling of the curtains close about me, I remember how I once slipped out of the rooms of a man I had been to see on business, for the Arm of Justice. He had called the people out of the front room into the other, the room where I was, and

as they all got in, I had slipped out. How to get them in here? Then I drag in Ingham's body. I stand close in my cloak colored like the curtains, and once I hear Deutch's voice I remember that it is Christina's cloak. He makes it all easy. To come out while those men were working, there at the closet, is terrible, but there are the trolley-car and my automobile making good noises. I have pinned my hat under the cloak, and my slippers I put in its inside pocket. It is when the police have cleared the halls. I have scarcely got to the back-stairs when the people begin peeping out again. I have in my hand Christina's key. I turn to the door of the apartment nearest the back stairs, to pretend I am unlocking it. And the knob turns in my hand. The decorators have left it open and I walk in and slip the catch. There I wait till all the hunt is done. But I wish to be rid of the little pistol, shaped for the impunitura of the Camorra, which, in early days, Filippi had made for me and on which once, before Nicola forbade me, I had tried to scratch "Camorrist." Were I taken with that, I should have every foe on my heels! I wish that I might slip it into the coat-pocket of that great boy with the figure of gods—he who led the chase and deafened me with his hammering. Then I remember him telling the police where he lives. It makes me laugh; there are scraps of wall-paper about. On one of these I write a message and in this I wrap my impunitura. Then, long after, when all my cackling geese have cackled into bed again, I go up to the roof and across into the next house. There is an opening of some feet between the two apartment houses, and it may be that Will jumped it, but I think not. I think he must have gone up to the front, where the cornices join, and crept and balanced along the little ledge behind them, as I do. And I walk boldly down those stairs where all is still, and choose a moment when the night-boy takes some one up in the elevator, and then I cross the office, and Nicola is still waiting with the car. I stuff the impunitura in the letter-box and I am away, away!—But the little rag of a girl, she knows when I went in and when I came out!

So now you see how hard my problem is, my problem that is double: what to do with her, and how to save my love! Three weeks and more go by, and for him I am beginning to breathe. And he tells Christina nothing, nothing at all. Only he asks her did she meet me as she came up, for I have only just run out as he and Ingham quarrel. And she says no, Deutch brought her up in the freight-elevator. Thus she is not surprised to hear about my shadow on the blind; she thinks I came there like her to get Jim away. But she fears I will be implicated and my poor story told. This she thinks of a great deal, and keeps me very quiet in the country. While she, if you please, is no sooner saved from Ingham but she takes up that boy with the figure of gods, who saw my shadow. The fool did not feel such a kindness for that which moved with splendid grace! Nor did he keep my pistol. But perhaps he wants her money. I tell Nicola and the boys he is the spy who drains us of ours, and who is carrying news to her from little Stanley of my letters. They will rid her of him! And no one knows who fired that shot but Will and me, no one. And Mother Pascoe-Ansello watches all the time what we do with Nancy Cornish. I am very good to Nancy Cornish. In case she should, by any chance, get away and tell Will and Christina. For there are some things they would not forgive. I am frightened, now, and I would let her go, if I could.

And, then, Ten Euyck will not pay me! He is furious I have shot Ingham, which he finds out at the inquest, and yet he must give me his protection. And he says what I said in the Ingham letter was a lie, and he will not pay for lies; they are wrong in all ways, for they never work. And money I must have, or that spy of Filippi's will settle us. We have just been received by the Camorra and all must be careful. Then I think Christina can some way get it. But not to know it is for me. So at last I threaten the little Nancy, and she is glad to write as I say. And she cut off the lock of her hair at my own dressing-table with my own scissors, when mine was all down my back to show her that I had more than she.

And when we do not have the answer that we hope for, she begins to fret terribly. She is always listening and watching; she is so helpless and I am lonely and perhaps I talk too much! Then, oh, my God, he is arrested! I cannot keep it to myself, I run screaming through the house! I think I shall die, and I think almost that that rag of a girl will kill me! She recognized his voice up there cry, "Ask Nancy Cornish!" and she has not said one word so that I think she thinks he did it. But when they catch him and she jumps at me that it was I, she can see it in my face. And she makes a terrible scene—begs me and prays me to denounce myself, to save him. And then I know that she must die.

But I have a mind to Mother Pascoe-Ansello, and I make a bargain with this girl. I ask her what she will promise, and she says *anything*. And I ask her if I write a full confession to the District-Attorney and mail it when things go hard with Will, will that content her? Oh, very fine! So I tell her it is what I would do, who would die for him to-morrow, but that it would give him to her arms. And she says she will go away, she will never see him. I reply, "He will find you, he will make you." And she says to me eager, with open mouth, "What can I do?" I answer, "You are not very well. You grow every day more feverish. Nothing shall ever happen to you under my roof. But if it should, how it would solve all." She says, "Will you let me keep the letter myself and mail it myself?" and I say, "Yes." So then she says, "You gave me laudanum so I could sleep. When I have mailed that letter, give me some more." Oh, I feel such a relief! If she is found, even, with laudanum it is suicide. "Will you ask for it every night, aloud, before them all, and after you have mailed the letter will you take—enough? Will you swear?" "Oh," she says, "upon his freedom, I do swear."

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So! Thus far has she read. And now she falls ill. And any hour, now, may Ten Euyck come for this. And I must warn him I will not have him drop another word before Nicola, as though Will would

drag us all in by telling I was there with him. Nicola's hand might reach into his prison. When Nancy wakes, she has still this envelope—stuffed with blanks. But if I cannot fool her, Nicola has planned a better way. A fine way! For, after that, she will be silent—she, who thought to be bride to the man I choose.—Oh, my love, you love her. If you, too, must die, it is for that you die, my darling! For no little rag of a girl can frustrate the will of

ALLEGRA ANSELLO ALIENI.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### IN WHICH CHRISTINA HOPE DOES POSITIVELY REAPPEAR

"Oh, then, I'll marry Sally! For she is the darling of my heart—"

"But *is* she?" queried Christina, swinging round from the piano, "Is she?" And she looked wistfully at Herrick as he took her outstretched hand. "Oh, if she's a very troublesome person, tell me at least she brought the author luck! Was it any wonder, eh, that the pulse of your life changed when you saw a shadow on the blind? Since at that very moment my hand was on the door? Oh, I can perhaps rouse luck with the best 'when I come knocking!'"

It was Sunday evening, a month from that September Twentieth when, to a public that perhaps had never given quite such a welcome, Christina Hope had positively reappeared. This occasion was of a very homely gathering, an hour when Christina had simply confessed to the need of seeing all the people of one episode "alive together." She had spent the month in watching Nancy grow strong, here, in her house, and to-morrow was the day of Nancy's wedding. "Once I have packed off my daughter," Christina had been saying, "I shall marry myself out of hand—quite simply, by just stepping round the corner—to the patientest fellow living. The public and I meet often enough—it shall not stick its head in at my marriage!"

But Herrick's sister was to arrive to-morrow and this seemed to have made Christina restive. "You know very well that you are marrying an actress. But there has been too much glare—to her you must be marrying, as some play says, 'The Queen of the Gipsies!' Ah, but Bryce—it's easy enough to be fond of me, now! After all, I behaved admirably, like a good girl. I was as grand as Evadne and as energetic as Sal! I had a very hard time and, really, I was quite a heroine. But my hard times are done and God send I may never be a heroine again! Well, what price the Queen of the Gipsies, dear, as a nice young lady? And through what rent in my admirable behavior will next—to try your patience—the real Christina Hope too positively reappear? I wonder!" Thus she spoke, a little sadly. And, then, at the ringing of the door-bell called out for her mother and Mrs. Deutch. "For heaven forbid," added Christina, "that ever I should be seen without a chaperone!"

It was the simplest of supper-parties, at a table that jumbled Joe Patrick with the District-Attorney; but the great kindness of good-will still showed, inevitably, against a somber background. Before that company there continued to rise in vivid silences, sharp as though edged with acid, a wild space of death and hiding, of prison and darkness, when suddenly Christina's perverse lip twitched with a small, soft laugh. "And to think that, all the time, we were just as respectable as we could be!"

"I don't know how respectable you can be," said Denny. "I think I could do better."

"I think it's a pretty good thing for you," said Wheeler, "that she is as she is. You appear to have what I don't mind calling—in a lean, black party of no particular stature—an almost inexplicable charm for the ladies!"

"In that case," said Christina, "you can see what a waste it is for him to play villains. Give him to me for the hero of Bryce's play, when I star next year."

"Thank you for waiting a year. You must have arranged your production with Ten Euyck so quickly that it makes a manager's hair raise!"

"As fast as I could learn my lines!" Christina cried. "But sometimes he did throw me out. Ah, if I could only have spoken his speeches too!"

"Many stars in your profession have made that complaint! But I forgive you everything, Christina, since you notified me for an advance sale!"

"She broke her word to me," said Kane, "to do that! I was so anxious not a breath should get out—it might have ruined everything. I caught her second message—to you, Herrick—and stopped it."

Herrick asked, "Will it always be the first which goes to Wheeler?"

She responded with surprised earnestness, "Why, but, dearest, that was *business*!"

He laughed; and there was no bitterness in his laugh. He was glad of her quick, earnest interest. A month and three days had softened the tragic brooding of Christina's face and drawn them all far from pain and fear, deep waters and dark night. But this first attempt to mention that time

with any ease showed him how they all still winced at scars; even this ripple of mirth, glowing and vibrating like the air of all that house with love and joy, had glowed and vibrated too sharply. He wanted some happening that should clear the air, and he did not know what. Work was the safest thing he knew. And even his work, now they had begun, was a good thing to talk of.

"How about that realistic tone?" Wheeler was asking. "Our experience doesn't leave much of Herrick's idea about the commonplaceness of crime—"

"Oh, yes, it does!" Christina interrupted. "They were commonplace enough, to themselves. It was only where we rushed in that it turned into melodrama. That's the way with amateurs! They have to," she flung at Denny, "be more like Dago organ-grinders than any Dago organ-grinder ever was!"

"I thank you," returned that unabashed young man. "It was quite realistic enough for me. If all my foreign traitors had done as well by me as this one!" His eyes sought Nancy's. For an instant neither of them could speak. But the girl could not resist putting out her hand. And no one minded when he took it. "But I thanked the gods," he could then say with a laugh, "for my Italian accent! I knew two or three phrases from the Garibaldi play—and then I knew the sound and some of the sense from—Chris's farm. But I could have wished, none the less, to be better equipped."

"Rotten to have to make out so much funk!" contributed Stanley. "So's to seem like that scared-to-death fellow."

"On the whole, that was the best thing I did. It came quite easy!"

"But the choice?" inquired Mrs. Deutch. "How did you make that choice, dear sir, amidst the goblets?"

"Only luck—I just chanced it. Gold, silver, and lead—can't you guess?"

He looked at Christina, and Christina blushed. Deutch glanced up twinkling.

"Ah, tante," said the girl, "you will never understand—you have not the artistic temperament! 'What find I here? Fair Portia's counterfeit!' That was it, Will? Ah, my dear, and to think you've never played the scene!"

Her pensiveness turned sterner. She looked at him with reproving eyes. "You took it out of a part!" she said. "Heaven help us, of what are we made? That shot I fired—that last shot—I took that out of a part, too! 'A Princess Imprisoned,' the end of the third act. And you with your 'Merchant of Venice' and your casket scene! It's true what they say of us—we're stuffed with sawdust!"

"We'd be fools not to use it, then," Denny comfortably retorted. "Though you might certainly have chosen a better play."

"No, you don't understand me. It's too bad, it's wrong—all wrong! It cheapens life. It dulls the value of what we feel. To think of written things at such a moment and throw oneself on them—it's like an insincerity of the heart. It's like acting a lie. And with all my faults, that one fault I never had," Christina said. "I was never a liar!" And she turned on them the ineffable starry candor of her wide, cool eyes.

A smile traversed the board. Christina looked puzzled.

"Never mind, old girl," Wheeler came to her assistance. "Some lies are made in heaven. How about your pretending, at the inquest, not to know who Nancy was?"

"Ah, that card of Nancy's! There, surely, was a dreadful moment! It was a shock. I didn't know what to say. Why, it was like seeing that horrible story fastened round her neck—it was like seeing Will pointed out! Oh, and I'd tried to keep away even the thought of them!"

"I don't wonder that knocked you out all right. But, Miss Christina," pondered Deutch, "before that—a thing starts the trouble for you at that inquest always gives me a puzzle. Miss Christina, why did you holler when you saw the scarf? That wasn't a surprise, anyhow. You knew he had it!"

"Yes," said Christina, "but it was *such* a thrilling point! I'd worked so much further up into an accused murderess than I'd ever gone before, and I did so long to know how it would feel—"

An aghast laugh silenced her. It rang about the room, it swept with gay and topsy-turvy cleansing through every heart and blew the cobwebs far away. The air was cleared for good and all. No more shudders skulked in emotional underbrush. Christina Hope had quite too positively reappeared.

"Christina, you she-devil!" Denny cried. But he bent his black head with the words and kissed her hand. There were tears that were like worship in the teasing, jeering smile that lit his eyes.

Christina caught his hand and stood up, flushing. Her eyes traveled round the table and came back to Herrick's face. He had never seen her thus bathed in rosy color before she sobered again to that meek gravity, like a good child's.

"Very well, then, very well—there I am! Well, take me as I am! I will—myself! I will say, let's get down to it, then: the dearest or most terrible experience I ever had is none too terrible or too

dear for Bryce's play! Is yours, Will? Is your own, Bryce? Ah, and then, we zealous ones, when we want to know the hardest, hardest, passive part, the loneliest suffering, the simplest courage, the deepest depths, we needn't experiment, we can humbly inquire—we can ask Nancy Cornish!"

## THE END

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