THE TREVOR CASE

NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN

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The TREVOR CASE



“De Morny’s eyes sparkled with anger as he

watched”

THE TREVOR CASE

By Natalie Sumner Lincoln

AUTHOR OF
"C. O. D.," "The Man Outside," Etc.



With Frontispiece by
EDMUND FREDERICK

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY DEAR FATHER
AND
TO MY KINDEST CRITIC
MY MOTHER

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THE TREVOR CASE

CHAPTER I
FACE TO FACE

A FAINT, very faint scratching noise broke the stillness. Then a hand was thrust through the hole in the window pane; deftly the burglar alarm was disconnected, and the fingers fumbled with the catch of the window. The sash was pushed gently up, and a man's figure was outlined for a second against the star-lit sky as he dropped noiselessly through the window to the stair landing.

For a few moments he crouched behind the heavy curtains, but his entry had been too noiseless to awaken the sleeping household. Gathering courage from the stillness around him, the intruder stole down the steps, through the broad hall, and stopped before a door on his left. Cautiously he turned the knob and entered the room.

He could hear his own breathing in the heavy silence, as he pushed to the door, and then flashed the light of his electric torch on his surroundings. The room, save for the massive office furniture, was empty. Satisfied on that point, the intruder wasted no time, but with noiseless tread and cat-like quickness, he darted across the room to the door of what was apparently a closet. It was not locked, and as it swung back at his touch the front of a large safe was revealed.

Placing his light where it would do the most good, the intruder tried the lock of the safe. Backwards and forwards the wards fell under the skillful fingers of the cracksman. His keen ear, attuned to the work, at last solved the combination. With a sigh of relief he stopped to mop his perspiring face and readjust his mask.

“Lucky for me,” he muttered, “the safe’s an old-fashioned one. As it is, it’s taken three quarters of an hour, and time’s precious.”

The big door moved noiselessly back on its oiled hinges, and the intruder, catching up his electric torch, turned its rays full on the interior of the safe. For one second it burned brilliantly; then went dark in his nerveless hand.

God in Heaven! He was mad! It was some fantasy conjured up by his excited brain. With desperate effort his strong will conquered his shrinking senses. Slowly, slowly the light was raised to that fearful thing which crouched just inside the entrance.

Eye to eye they gazed at each other—the quick and the dead! The intruder’s breath came in panting gasps behind his mask. Again the light went out. In his abject state of terror, instinct did for him what reason could not. His hand groped blindly for the safe door; but not until it closed did he regain his benumbed wits.

Silently, mysteriously as he had come, so he vanished.

CHAPTER II
THE SECRET OF THE SAFE

"HELP! Murder! Murder!"

The sinister cry rang through the house.

Seated at the breakfast table, his daughter opposite him, the daily papers at his elbow, the Attorney General, hardly realizing the tragical interruption, sprang from his chair as the cry came nearer and the door burst open admitting his confidential secretary.

"In God's name, Clark, what is the matter?" he demanded, seizing the distraught man.

"Father, Father, give him time, he is dreadfully upset," begged Beatrice, coming around the breakfast table and laying a restraining hand on his arm.

Wilkins, the impassive butler, for once shaken out of his calm, hastened to assist his master in helping Alfred Clark to a chair, and then he gave the half-fainting man a stiff drink of whisky.

"It's the safe, sir," gasped Clark, struggling to regain his self-control.

"The safe?" questioned the Attorney General.

"Yes; she's there—dead!"

"She—who?"

"Mrs. Trevor."

"My wife! Nonsense, man; she is breakfasting in her own room!"

"Beg pardon, sir," Wilkins interrupted. "Mary has just brought the tray downstairs again. She says she knocked and knocked, and couldn't get an answer."

The Attorney General and his daughter exchanged glances. It was impossible to tell which was the paler. Without a word he turned and hastened out of the room. He hardly noticed the excited servants who, attracted by the cry, had already gathered in the spacious hall outside the door of his private office. With swift, decisive step he crossed the room and stood in front of the two opened doors. A cry of unutterable horror escaped him. For one dreadful moment the room swam around him, and there was a roaring in his ears of a thousand Niagaras.

"Father?"

With a violent effort he pulled himself together. "Do not enter," he said, sternly, to the shrinking girl who had remained by the hall door. "This is no sight for you. Wilkins, send at once for Doctor Davis. Clark, close that door, and see that no one comes in except the doctor. Then telephone the Department that I shall not be there to-day." His orders were obeyed instantly.

The Attorney General turned back to the safe; to that still figure which was keeping vigil over his belongings. The pitiless light of a sunny morning shone full on the beautiful face. The wonderful Titian hair, her greatest glory, was coiled around the shapely head, and her low-cut evening dress was scarcely disarranged as she crouched on one knee leaning her weight on her left arm, which was

pressed against the door-jamb of the safe. Her lips were slightly parted, and her blue eyes were wide open, the pupils much dilated. No need to feel pulse or heart; to the most casual observer it was apparent that she was dead.

His beautiful young wife! Edmund Trevor groaned aloud and buried his face in his hands. Clark watched him for a moment in unhappy silence; then moved quietly over to the window and looked out with unseeing eyes into the garden.

The large mottled brick- and stone-trimmed house was situated on one of Washington's most fashionable corners, Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle. On being appointed Attorney General, Trevor had taken it on a long lease. He had selected it from the many offered because it was very deep on the 20th Street side, thus allowing the drawing-room, library, and dining-room to open out of each other.

On the right of the large entrance hall was a small reception room, and back of it the big octagonal-shaped room, with its long French windows opening into the enclosed garden, that had appealed to him for his own private use, as a den, or office. And he was particularly pleased with the huge safe, more like a vault, which had been built in one of the large old-fashioned closets by the owner. It had been useful to the Attorney General on many occasions.

The silence was broken by a tap at the door.

"Doctor Davis, sir," announced Wilkins.

"I came at once," said the doctor, advancing quickly to the Attorney General's side. A horrified exclamation escaped him as his eyes fell on the tragic

figure, and he recoiled a few steps. Then his professional instincts returned to him, and he made a cursory examination of Mrs. Trevor. As he rose from his knees, the eyes of the two men met. He silently shook his head.

"Life has been extinct for hours," he said. "Rigor mortis has set in."

The Attorney General gulped back a sob. Reason had told him the same thing when he first found her; but he had hoped blindly against hope.

"Can she be removed to her room?" he asked, as soon as he could control his voice.

The doctor nodded his acquiescence, and with the assistance of Clark, Wilkins, and the chauffeur, they carried all that was mortal of the beautiful young wife to her chamber.

Shortly afterwards, the Attorney General returned to his office, and together he and Clark went over the contents of the safe. They had just finished their task when Beatrice came into the room.

Beatrice Trevor was a well-known figure in the society life of New York, Paris, and Washington. Taller than most women, with a superb figure, she carried herself with regal grace. She was not, strictly speaking, a beauty; her features were not regular enough. But there were men, and women, too, who were her adoring slaves.

Her mother had died when she was five years old, and up to the time of her eighteenth year she had lived alone with her father. Then he met, wooed, and won the beautiful foreigner, whose butterfly career had come to so untimely an end.

"Father, I *must* know just what has happened."

"Why, my dearest—" there was deep tenderness in the Attorney General's usually impassive voice—"I thought you had been told. Hélène evidently went into the safe to put away her jewelry; and in some mysterious way she must have pulled the heavy door to behind her. Thus locked in, she was smothered. It is terrible—terrible—" His voice shook with the intensity of his emotion. "But—well, Wilkins, what is it?"

"A detective, sir, from headquarters."

"A detective! What on earth—did you telephone them, Clark?" The secretary shook his head. "No? Well, show him in, Wilkins."

There was nothing about the man who entered to suggest a detective; he was quietly dressed, middle aged, and carried himself with military erectness. He had spent five years as a member of the Canadian Northwest mounted police, and that service had left its mark in his appearance.

"Good morning, Mr. Attorney General." His bow included all in the room. "Sorry to disturb you, sir, but my errand won't take long."

"Be seated, Mr. ——"

"Hardy—James Hardy, sir. Just before dawn this morning, O'Grady, who patrols this beat, noticed a man sneak out of your back yard. O'Grady promptly gave chase and caught his man just as he was boarding a train for New York. He took him to the station and had him locked up on suspicion. As the fellow had a full kit of burglar's tools with him, including mask and sneakers, the Chief sent me round here to ask if you'd been robbed?"

"Oh, no," replied the Attorney General. "I have just been through my safe and everything is intact. There's nothing missing in your quarters, Wilkins?" he added, turning to the white-faced butler.

"No, sir; nothing, sir." Wilkins' voice trembled, and he looked at the detective with frightened eyes.

"Perhaps he tried, and finding all the windows barred gave it up as a bad job. I am—" continued the Attorney General, but his speech was cut short by the entrance of Doctor Davis.

"I am told there is a detective here." The Attorney General bowed and motioned to Hardy. "You are properly accredited?" went on the physician. Hardy threw back his coat and displayed his badge. "Have you told him of Mrs. Trevor's death?"

"No. Why speak of that terrible accident—"

"It was no accident." The physician's voice, though low pitched, vibrated with feeling.

The Attorney General half rose from his chair; then sank back again.

"Davis," he said, almost fiercely, "you *know* that by some fearful mischance Hélène locked herself in the air-tight safe and was suffocated."

The detective glanced with quickened interest at the two men.

"On closer examination upstairs," said the doctor, slowly, "I found a small wound under the left breast. The wound was concealed by the lace bertha of her evening dress. The weapon penetrated to the heart, and she bled internally. Mrs. Trevor was dead before she was put in that safe."

The detective broke the appalling silence with an

exclamation:

“Murdered!”

Without one word Beatrice Trevor fell fainting at her father’s feet.

CHAPTER III
AT THE MACALLISTERS'

MANY called, but few were invited to attend Mrs. Van Zandt Macallister's stately entertainments. Possibly for that reason alone her invitations were eagerly sought and highly prized by social aspirants.

For more years than she cared to remember, official, residential, and diplomatic Washington had gathered on an equal footing in her hospitable mansion on F Street. So strictly did she draw social distinctions that one disgruntled climber spoke of her evening receptions as "Resurrection Parties," and the name clung. But all Washingtonians took a deep interest in "Madam" Macallister, as they affectionately called her. She was *grande dame* to her fingertips.

On the occasion of her daughter's marriage to the Duke of Middlesex she gave a beautiful wedding breakfast. The wedding was of international importance. The President, his Cabinet, and the Diplomatic Corps were among the guests.

Mrs. Macallister was standing in the drawing-room with her back to the dining-room door talking to the President. As the butler drew apart the folding doors, the long table, covered with massive silver, china, and glass, gave way under the weight. The crash was resounding. The terrified guests glanced at each other. Mrs. Macallister never even turned her head, but went on conversing placidly with the

President.

The doors were instantly closed; the guests, taking their cue from their hostess, resumed their light chatter and laughter; and in a remarkably short time the table was cleared and reset, and the breakfast announced. As the President, with a look of deep admiration, offered his arm to Mrs. Macallister, he murmured in her ear:

"'And mistress of herself though china fall.'"

Washington society had never forgotten the incident.

Mrs. Macallister had rather a caustic tongue, but a warm, generous heart beat under her somewhat frosty exterior. Her charities were never aired in public. Only the clergymen knew how many families she kept supplied with coal in winter and ice in summer. And many an erring sister had cause to bless her name.

Mrs. Macallister glanced impatiently at the clock —twenty minutes past five. She leaned forward and touched the electric bell beside the large open fireplace. There were two things she abominated—to be kept waiting—and midday dinners; the former upset her nerves; the latter her digestion.

"Has Miss Margaret returned?" she asked, as Hurley entered with the tea tray.

Before the butler could answer there was the sound of a quick, light footstep in the hall, and then the portières were pushed aside.

Mrs. Macallister looked approvingly at her granddaughter. Peggy was more like her father's people, and her grandmother's heart had warmed to

her from the moment the motherless little baby had been placed in her tender care. The young father, never very strong, had not long outlived his girl-wife. Since then Peggy and her grandmother had lived alone in the old-fashioned residence, which her grandfather Macallister had bought years before when coming to live in Washington on the expiration of his third term as Governor of Pennsylvania.

"Well, Granny, am I very late?" giving Mrs. Macallister a warm hug. She had never stood in awe of her formidable grandmother, but with all the passionate feeling of her loving nature, she looked up to and adored her.

"My dear, five o'clock is five o'clock, not twenty minutes past," retorted Mrs. Macallister, smoothing her silvery hair, which had been decidedly ruffled by Peggy's precipitancy.

"I declare, Granny, you are as bad as Nana; if it is three minutes past five she says its 'hard on six o'clock.' I had an awfully good time at the luncheon, and stayed to talk things over with Maud. She has asked me to be one of her bridesmaids, you know."

"Did you hear the news there?"

"News? What news?"

"Mrs. Trevor has been murdered!"

"Mrs. Trevor—murdered!" Peggy nearly dropped her teacup on the floor.

"I really wish, Peggy, you would stop your habit of repeating my words. It's very uncomfortable living with an echo under one's nose."

"Oh, Granny, please tell me all about it right away."

"Well, according to the *Evening Star— What* is it, Hurley?" as that solemn individual entered the room.

"Mr. Tillinghast, to see you and Miss Margaret, ma'am."

"Show him in. Now, Peggy, we will probably get the news at first hand. Good evening, Dick."

The young fellow bowed with old-fashioned courtesy over her beautifully shaped, blue-veined hand. Clean living and plenty of outdoor sports could be read in his clear skin and splendid physique. He was a particular favorite of Mrs. Macallister's.

"I suppose you are discussing the all-absorbing topic," he said after greeting Peggy.

"I have been reading this." Mrs. Macallister held up the paper with its flaring headlines:

MURDER MOST FOUL
MRS. TREVOR KILLED
BY BURGLAR
CRIMINAL IN THE TOILS

"The police acted very promptly, and deserve a lot of praise," said Dick.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Macallister, slowly, "they have caught the burglar, but whether he is also the murderer is yet to be proved."

"That's true; but there is hardly any doubt. Nothing was stolen, therefore it is a fairly easy deduction that Mrs. Trevor, disturbed by some noise, went down into the office to investigate and was killed. He had the safe already open, stabbed her, then locked her in. Probably his nerve forsook him,

and he fled without stopping to steal what he came for."

"My *dear* Dick! Your theory might answer if any other woman was in question; but Mrs. Trevor—*she* wouldn't have troubled herself if there had been a cloud-burst in the office. She was simply a human mollusk. And as for—" Mrs. Macallister's feelings were beyond expression.

"I say, aren't you a little hard on her? I don't know when I've seen a more beautiful woman, and one so popular—"

"With men," supplemented Mrs. Macallister, dryly.

Dick laughed outright. "Anyway," he said, "the police have found that the burglar entered the house by the window on the stair landing, which looks out on the roof of the butler's pantry. It is an easy climb for an active man. All the windows on the first floor are heavily barred. They found one of the small panes of glass had been cut out, and the window unfastened, although closed. I'm afraid our friend, the burglar, will have a hard time proving his innocence."

"It is terrible, terrible," groaned Peggy, who had been reading the paper's account of the tragedy. "I must go at once and leave a note for Beatrice," and she started to rise.

"Sit still, child; I have just returned from the Trevors, and left your card and mine with messages."

"Did you see Beatrice, Granny?"

"No, only that odious Alfred Clark. I cannot bear the man, he is so—so specious—" hunting about for

a word. “He told me that Beatrice and the Attorney General would see no one.”

“Beatrice must be terribly upset, poor darling.”

“I didn’t know there was much love lost between them?”

“There wasn’t,” confessed Peggy. “Mrs. Trevor was perfectly horrid to her.”

“That’s news to me,” said Dick, helping himself to another sandwich.

“Beatrice is not the kind to air her troubles in public,” answered Peggy, “and she never talked much to me, either; but I couldn’t help noticing lots of things. I’ve got eyes in my head.”

“That you have,” thought Dick, who had long since fallen a victim.

“Why, last night Beatrice and I went to the Bachelors’ together. I stopped for her, and she just broke down and cried right there in the carriage. She had had an awful scene with her stepmother just before I got there. We had to drive around for half an hour before she was composed enough to enter the ballroom.”

“What did they quarrel about?” asked Mrs. Macallister, deeply interested.

“She didn’t tell me.”

“By Jove! what actresses women are,” ejaculated Dick. “I danced with her several times, and I thought she was enjoying herself immensely.”

Peggy sniffed; she had not a high opinion of a mere man’s perceptions; then she qualified her disapproval by a smile which showed each pretty dimple, and sent Dick into the seventh heaven of

bliss.

“Of what nationality was Mrs. Trevor?” asked Mrs. Macallister, coming out of a brown study.

“She was an Italian,” answered Dick.

“No, Dick, I think you are mistaken. I am sure she was a Spaniard,” declared Peggy. “She spoke Spanish faultlessly.”

Mrs. Macallister shook her head. “That doesn’t prove anything. She spoke French like a Parisian, and also Italian fluently. The only language in which her accent was pronounced was English.”

“Beatrice told me her maiden name was de Beaupré, so perhaps she was of French descent,” continued Peggy. “Mr. Trevor met her in London. They were married six weeks later very quietly, and Beatrice was not told of the affair until after the ceremony.”

“Indeed!” Mrs. Macallister smiled grimly. “Marry in haste, repent at leisure.”

“But being a lawyer perhaps he just naturally pressed his suit quickly,” interrupted Dick, man-like, standing up for his sex. “I’d do the same, if *you* gave me half a chance,” he added in an ardent aside to Peggy, whose only answer was a vivid blush.

“Don’t talk to me of lawyers,” retorted Mrs. Macallister, who had unpleasant recollections of a bitter lawsuit with one of her relatives. “Their ways are past finding out. But I really must discover who Mrs. Trevor was before her marriage.”

“Why, Granny, I have just told you she was Mademoiselle de Beaupré.”

“The only de Beaupré I have ever heard of,

Peggy, is Anne de Beaupré. And I imagine it is a far cry from Sainte Anne to Hélène whose very name suggests sulphur. Must you go?" she asked, as Dick rose.

"Yes. I have a special story to send on to the Philadelphia papers. If I hear any further details of the murder, I'll drop in and tell you."

"Thanks; but I have decided to attend the inquest, which the papers say will be held at the Trevors'."

"Granny!" cried Peggy, in a tone of horror.

"Tut, child, of course I am going. I dearly love a mystery; besides, the world and his wife will be there."

"And so will I," added Dick, as he bowed himself out.

CHAPTER IV
THE INQUEST

THE dastardly murder created a tremendous sensation not only in Washington, but in every State of the Union as well. The Trevors were bombarded with telegrams and special delivery letters, and their house besieged by reporters.

Mrs. Macallister was right; all fashionable society turned out to attend the inquest, and fought and struggled for admittance, rubbing shoulders with the denizens of Southeast Washington and Anacostia as they pushed their way into the Trevor mansion.

The inquest was to be held in the library, the suite of rooms, comprising parlor, library and dining-room, having been thrown open to accommodate the public. A rope had been stretched in front of the office door and across the square staircase to keep the crowd within bounds. Uniformed policemen stationed in the wide hall warned those whose curiosity caused them to linger about the room where the tragedy occurred, to “move on.”

Mrs. Macallister, true to her word, had arrived early, and she and Peggy had been given seats in the library. As she glanced about her, she caught the eye of Senator Phillips, who instantly rose and joined her.

“This is a terrible affair,” said the Senator, after they had exchanged greetings. “Beautiful Mrs. Trevor

—so young—so fascinating!"

"It is indeed dreadful," agreed Mrs. Macallister, with a slight shiver. "The idea of any woman coming to such an end makes my blood run cold. I cannot sleep at night thinking of it. Have you seen the Attorney General?"

"Yes. He sent for me; we were college chums, you know. I never saw such self-control. He is bearing up most bravely under the fearful shock."

In the meantime, Peggy, sick at heart, was looking about her and thinking of the many handsome dinners, luncheons, and receptions she had attended in the Trevors' beautiful home. When all was said and done, Mrs. Trevor had been an ideal hostess; for besides beauty, she had tact and social perception, and, therefore, had always steered clear of the social pitfalls which lie in wait for the feet of the unwary in Washington's complex society. Only the night before the murder, Mrs. Trevor had given a large theater and supper party, and Peggy remembered that she had never seen her hostess appear more animated or more beautiful; and now —"In the midst of life we are in death"; the solemn words recurred to Peggy as she watched the coroner and the jury file into the room and seat themselves around the large table which had been brought in for their use.

To one side, representatives of the Associated Press and the local papers were busy with pad and pencil. Among the latter Peggy recognized Dick Tillinghast. Some telepathy seemed to tell him of her presence, for he turned and his eyes lighted with pleasure as he bowed gravely to her and Mrs. Macallister.

Senator Phillips and Mrs. Macallister were intently scanning the jury. They realized how much might depend upon their intelligence and good judgment. In this case the jurymen had apparently been selected from a higher stratum of life than usual, and Senator Phillips sighed with relief as he pointed to the men sitting at the end of the long table.

“Why *did* the Lord ever make four such ugly men?” he asked Mrs. Macallister, in a whisper.

“To show His power,” she answered, quickly.

All further remarks were cut short by Coroner Wilson swearing in the jury. Their foreman was then elected. All the witnesses were waiting in the small reception room to the right of the front door. Policemen guarded each entrance.

“Have you viewed the scene of the tragedy, and the body of the victim?” asked the coroner.

“We have, sir,” answered the foreman.

Then the coroner in a few words briefly stated the occasion for the hearing. The first witness summoned was Doctor Davis. After being duly sworn, he seated himself in the witness chair facing the jury. In a few clear words he stated that he had been telephoned for by Wilkins, and had come at once. On his arrival he had been shown into the private office.

“Please state to the jury the exact position in which you found Mrs. Trevor.”

“Mrs. Trevor was crouching on one knee directly inside the safe, with her left hand pressing against the door-jamb, so—” and he illustrated his statement. “From the condition of her body I judged she had been dead about eight or nine hours. The pupils of

her open eyes were very much dilated."

One of the jurymen leaned forward and opened his lips as if to speak, then drew back. The coroner noticed his hesitancy.

"Do you wish to question the witness?" he asked.

"I—I," he was obviously confused by the attention drawn to him. "Doctor, I always thought that when people died their eyes shut up."

"On the contrary," answered Doctor Davis, dryly. "Their eyes usually have to be closed by the undertaker."

"Did you order the body removed, Doctor?" asked the coroner, resuming the examination.

"Yes. I thought that Mrs. Trevor had been asphyxiated in the air-tight safe. It was not until her clothes had been removed that I discovered the small wound a little to one side under her left breast. At the post-mortem we found no other cause for death, Mrs. Trevor having been perfectly sound physically and mentally."

"Were there no blood stains?"

"None. The weapon, which pierced the heart, was broken off in the wound preventing any outward flow of blood. She bled internally. Death was probably instantaneous."

"Have you the weapon?"

"Yes. I probed the wound in the presence of the deputy-coroner and Doctor Wells. Here it is."

There was instant craning of necks to see the small object which Doctor Davis took out of his pocket. It was a piece of sharp-pointed steel about four inches long. The coroner passed it over to the

jury, then continued his questions.

“Could the wound have been self-inflicted?”

“Impossible, unless the victim was left-handed.”

“Now, Doctor, what kind of a weapon do you think this point belongs to?”

“Well—” the doctor hesitated a moment—“I don’t think it could be called a weapon in the usual sense of the word. To me it looks like the end of a hat-pin.”

His words caused a genuine sensation. A hat-pin! Men and women looked at each other. What a weapon for a burglar to use!

“Could so frail an article as a hat-pin penetrate through dress, corset and underclothes?” asked the coroner, incredulously.

“Mrs. Trevor wore no corsets. In place of them she had on an elastic girdle which fitted perfectly her slender, supple figure.”

The coroner asked a few more questions, then the doctor was dismissed. The next to take the stand was the deputy-coroner. His testimony simply corroborated that of Doctor Davis in every particular. As he left the witness chair, the clerk summoned Alfred Clark.

“Your name?” asked the coroner, after the usual preliminaries had been gone through with.

“Alfred Lindsay Clark.”

“Occupation?”

“Confidential secretary to the Attorney General.”

“How long have you been in his employ?”

“Eleven months.”

"And before that time?"

"I was a clerk in the Department of Justice for over two years, in fact, ever since I have resided in this city."

"Then you are not a native of Washington?"

"No. My father was in the Consular Service. At the time of my birth, he was vice consul at Naples, and I was born in that city. I lived abroad until two years and a half ago."

"You were the first to find Mrs. Trevor, were you not?"

"Yes. I always reach here at eight o'clock to sort and arrange the mail for the Attorney General. He breakfasts at that time, and usually joins me in the private office twenty minutes later. At five minutes of nine we leave for the Department. This is the everyday routine—" he hesitated.

"And yesterday, Mr. Clark?"

"I arrived a few minutes earlier than usual, as there were some notes which I had to transcribe before the Attorney General left for the Department. I went immediately to the office."

"Did you notice any signs of confusion, or unusual disturbance in the room?"

"No. Everything was apparently just as I had left it the night before. I started to typewrite my notes but had not proceeded very far when I found I needed to refer to some papers which were in the safe. So I went...."

"One moment. You know the combination?"

"Certainly. It is one of my duties to open the safe every morning, and lock it the last thing at night."

"Did you find the safe just the same as when you left the night before?"

"Exactly the same. Apparently the lock had not been tampered with."

"Proceed."

Clark spoke with a visible effort. "I unlocked the safe and pulled open the door and found—" his voice broke. "At first I could not believe the evidences of my senses. I put out my hand and touched Mrs. Trevor. Then, and then only, did I appreciate that she was dead. In unspeakable horror I ran out of the room to summon aid."

"What led you to think she was murdered? Doctor Davis did not know it until much later."

"I beg your pardon. I had no idea Mrs. Trevor was murdered."

"Then, why did you cry 'Murder' as you ran along?"

"I have no recollection of raising such a cry. But I was half out of my senses with the shock, and did not know what I was doing."

Clark's handsome face had turned a shade paler, and he moistened his lips nervously. Mrs. Macallister noticed his agitation, and gave vent to her feelings by pinching Peggy's arm.

"Was Mrs. Trevor facing you?"

"Yes. She was crouching on one knee, her left hand extended."

"Could two people stand in the safe at the same time."

"Side by side, yes; but not one in front of the

other. The safe, which really resembles a small vault, is shallow but wide. The back of it is filled with filing cases. In fact, Mrs. Trevor's body was wedged in between the cases and the narrow door-jamb. It was probably owing to this that she remained in such a peculiar position."

"Was her head sunk forward on her breast?"

"No; on the contrary, it was thrown back and she was looking up, so that I, standing, looked directly down into her eyes."

"Did you touch or move anything in the vault before summoning aid?"

There was a barely perceptible pause before the secretary answered.

"No, sir; nothing."

"Did you see much of Mrs. Trevor?"

"No. She came but seldom to the office during the day."

"Do you mean that it was her habit to go there often at night?"

"As to that, I cannot say, because I am not with the Attorney General at night unless some special work has to be done."

At that moment a note was handed to the coroner. He read it twice; then addressed the secretary, saying:

"I think that is all just now."

Clark bowed and retired. Coroner Wilson turned and addressed the jury.

"I have just received a note from the Chief of

Police. He says that his prisoner, the burglar who was captured after leaving these premises, has asked to be allowed to make a statement before this jury. Therefore he has been sent here under guard. Up to the present time he has stubbornly refused to answer any questions, although every influence has been brought to hear to make him speak. I expected to call him later, anyway."

The coroner's remarks were interrupted by the entrance of the guard with their prisoner. He was of medium height, and insignificant enough in appearance save for his small, piercing blue eyes. His abundant red hair was plastered down on his round, bullet-shaped head, and his numerous freckles showed up plainly against the pallor of his face.

"Swear the prisoner," ordered the coroner.

The clerk rose and stepped up to the man. "Place your hand on this book and say after me: 'I, John Smith—'"

"Hold on; my name's William Nelson. T'other one I just used to blind the cops, see?"

"I, William Nelson, do solemnly swear—" The singsong voice of the clerk, and the heavier bass of the prisoner seemed interminable to Peggy, whose nerves were getting beyond her control. She wished he would get through his confession quickly. It was awful sitting in callous judgment on a human being, no matter how guilty he might be.

"Now, William Nelson, alias John Smith," said the coroner, sternly, "I am told you have volunteered to confess—"

"Nix, no confession," interrupted Nelson. "Just an account of how I came to get mixed up in this deal."

"Well, remember you are on oath, and that every word will be used against you."

The prisoner nodded, cleared his throat, then spoke clearly and with deliberation.

"I came to Washington just to get certain papers. We knew those papers were kept in the Attorney General's private safe. I used to be a messenger at the Department of Justice, and knew this house well, as I often brought papers to the Attorney General in his private office here. I had my kit with me, and broke in by way of the window over the pantry. The safe is an old one, and I found the combination easy. But, though I crack safes—by God! I am no murderer! When I opened that door I found the lady there—*dead*!" The man rose. "I know no more than you who killed her, so help me God!"

Nelson's deep voice, vibrating with intense feeling, carried conviction. There was no doubting the effect his words had upon the jury and the spectators.

"I ain't no coward, but the sight of that figure crouching there, and I looking down into her dead eyes, struck cold to my marrow bones. I ain't been able to sleep since," and the prisoner's hand shook as he wiped the beads of perspiration off his forehead.

"Quite a dramatic story," said the coroner, dryly. "And the proof?"

The prisoner struck the table fiercely with his clenched hand.

"Go ask the men who hired me to come here and steal the papers showing the attitude the Attorney General and the Department of Justice would take against the Fairbanks railroad combine. Ask those

who wanted to get the news first, before it was given out to the public."

"Do you think they would incriminate themselves by admitting such a rascally piece of business?"

"Perhaps not," sullenly, "but I'll make them."

"Secondly, the motive of your presence here does not clear you of the suspicion of being the murderer. Did you get the papers?"

"No. When I saw that dead body I stopped for nothing. You don't believe me, but I've told you God's truth. I don't mind doing time for house-breaking; but I ain't hankering for the electric chair."

The coroner rose abruptly and signaled to the guards.

"You will be summoned again, Nelson," he said, and as the guards closed about the prisoner, he announced that the hearing was adjourned until one o'clock that afternoon.

CHAPTER V
THE SIGNET RING

EXCITEMENT ran high among the spectators as they crowded into the rooms a few minutes before one o'clock. The burglar's story had impressed them by its sincerity. But, if he was innocent, who could be the criminal?

"Nelson knew how to play on people's emotions and made up a plausible tale; but as the coroner says, he has given no proof to back his statement that Mrs. Trevor was killed before he entered the house," said Philip White, in answer to one of Peggy's questions. She and her grandmother were occupying their old seats in the library, and Dick Tillinghast and White had just joined them. Philip White, who stood at the head of the district bar, was not one to form opinions hastily. Therefore, he was usually listened to. He was a warm friend of the Attorney General's, and had been a frequent visitor at his house.

"No, Miss Peggy," he went on, "the fellow's just a clever criminal."

"I rather believe in him," said Peggy, stoutly. "He didn't have to tell what he knew."

"That's just it—it was a neat play to the galleries. He would have been summoned before the jury anyway, and his story dragged from him piece by piece. He hoped it would tell in his favor if he

volunteered and gave a dramatic account of what occurred that night."

"Where did he get his information about the papers being in the safe?" queried Mrs. Macallister, who had been an interested listener.

"Probably there is some leak in the Department of Justice."

The low hum of voices ceased as the coroner's clerk rose and called the Attorney General to the stand.

Many a sympathetic eye followed his tall, erect figure, as he passed quietly through the room. Edmund Trevor had won distinction early in life by his unremitting labor and ability. A New Yorker born and bred, he had given up a large law practice to accept the President's tender of the portfolio of Attorney General. His devotion to his beautiful wife, some twenty years his junior, had been often commented upon by their friends. While not, strictly speaking, a handsome man, his dark hair, silvering at the temples, his fine eyes and firm mouth gave him an air of distinction. He was very popular with both men and women, as his courtly manner and kind heart gained him a warm place in their regard. To-day sorrow and fatigue were visible on his face. He looked careworn and troubled.

After he had answered the usual questions as to his age, full name, and length of residence in Washington, the coroner turned directly to him.

"How old was Mrs. Trevor, and where was she born?" he asked.

"Thirty years old. She was born in Paris, France."

"Where did you first meet her?"

"In London at a ball given by the American Ambassador three years ago."

"When and where were you married?"

"We were married on the eleventh of June of the same year, at St. George's, Hanover Square."

The coroner's manner was very sympathetic, as he said:

"Now, Mr. Attorney General, will you kindly tell the jury of your movements on Wednesday night, last."

"Certainly. I did not dine at home, as I had to attend the annual banquet given by the Yale alumni, at which I was to be one of the speakers. Just before leaving the house, I joined my wife and daughter in the dining-room. Mrs. Trevor told me that, as she had a bad nervous headache, she had decided not to go to the Bachelors' Cotillion, but instead she was going to retire early. My daughter Beatrice had, therefore, arranged to go to the ball with her friend, Miss Macallister, who was to call for her at ten o'clock.

"My motor was announced, and as I kissed my wife, she asked me not to disturb her on my return, as she wanted to get a good night's sleep. That was the last time I saw her *alive*—" His voice quivered with emotion, but in a few seconds he resumed: "On my return, about midnight, I went directly upstairs. Seeing no light in my wife's room, which is separated from mine by a large dressing room, I retired."

"Did you hear no noises during the night; no cries; no person moving about?"

"No. I am always a heavy sleeper, besides which I had had a very fatiguing day; a Cabinet meeting in the morning; and I had also been detained at the Department by pressure of business until six o'clock that evening."

"Were your doors and windows securely fastened?"

"Wilkins attends to that. I did not put up the night-latch on the front door because I knew Beatrice had to come in with her latch key."

"How did you find the house lighted on your return?"

"Why, as is usual at that time of night when we are not entertaining. All the rooms were in darkness; the only lights being in the front and upper halls—they were turned down low."

"In regard to Wilkins—"

"I would trust him as I would myself," interrupted the Attorney General. "He has lived first with my father and then with me for over twenty years."

"And your other servants?"

"I have every confidence in them. The cook, second man, and chambermaids have been in my employ for at least five years."

"And Mrs. Trevor's personal maid?"

"Came with her from England three years ago."

"Were you not surprised when Mrs. Trevor did not breakfast with you the next morning?"

"No. My wife was not an early riser. She always had a French breakfast served in her room. Unless she called to me to enter, as I went downstairs, I

often did not see her until luncheon."

"Was Mrs. Trevor left-handed?"

The Attorney General looked at the coroner in surprise.

"She was, sir," he answered.

"Have you formed any theory as to who perpetrated this foul murder?"

"I think the burglar, Nelson, guilty."

"Was Mrs. Trevor on good terms with everyone of your household?"

The witness' face changed, ever so slightly.

"To the best of my knowledge, she was," was the quiet reply.

"Then that is all. Stay just a moment," as the Attorney General rose. "Will you kindly describe what took place on the discovery of Mrs. Trevor's body?"

In a concise manner the Attorney General gave the details of that trying scene. He was then excused.

His place was taken by Wilkins, who in a few words confirmed the Attorney General's statement that he had served the Trevor family, as butler, for nearly twenty-one years.

"Did you securely close the house for the night on Wednesday, Wilkins?"

"Yes, sir; I did, sir. I bolted every door and window, sir."

"Are you positive, Wilkins?"

"Absolutely positive, sir."

"Did anyone call at the house after dinner that night to see either of the ladies?"

"No, sir, no one; except Miss Macallister came in her carriage to take Miss Beatrice to the ball."

"At what time did they finish dinner?"

"About twenty minutes past eight, sir. The hall clock was striking the half hour as I carried the coffee into the library. Mrs. Trevor was there, and she told me that Miss Beatrice had gone upstairs to dress, so I left her cup on the table, sir."

"At what time did you go to bed?"

"I went up a few minutes after ten o'clock, sir. All the other servants had gone upstairs before me."

"Was that their usual hour for retiring?"

"No, sir. You see, sir, Mrs. Trevor gave a very large supper party for Madame Bernhardt on Tuesday night. The guests didn't leave until nearly four o'clock Wednesday morning. We were all dead tired from the extra work and no sleep, so Mrs. Trevor told me in the library that night, sir, that I was to tell the others to go to bed as soon as their work was done, and that I needn't wait up, nor her maid either, as she would undress herself."

"Was that the last time you saw Mrs. Trevor alive?"

"Yes, sir; the last time I saw her."

There was a peculiar inflection in Wilkins' usually quiet monotone that caught the coroner's attention.

"What do you mean, Wilkins?"

"I didn't *see* her again, sir."

"Well, I'll change my question. Did you hear her afterwards?"

"Yes, sir," reluctantly.

"When?"

"Why, sir, the door bell rang about a quarter to ten. It was a messenger boy with a telegram for the Attorney General. I signed for it, and walked over towards the library intending to hand it to Mrs. Trevor. The door was partly open, sir, and I heard the ladies—"

"Ladies! What ladies?"

"Mrs. Trevor and Miss Beatrice, sir. I recognized their voices."

"Could you hear what they were saying?"

"Perfectly, sir; but indeed I didn't listen intentionally, sir. The carpet deadened my footsteps; besides, they were too excited to hear me."

"Were they quarreling?"

"I—I—"

"Remember, Wilkins, you are on oath to tell the truth, the *whole* truth."

"Yes, sir." The unhappy man glanced appealingly at the jury, but found no help there. They were all waiting expectantly for what was to follow. "I only caught a few words, sir. Miss Beatrice said: 'And your price?' 'You know it,' answered Mrs. Trevor. She said it in a voice that seemed to infuriate Miss Beatrice, who cried out: 'You devil, get out of my way, or I may forget myself and strike you.'"

Everyone in the over-crowded rooms felt the shock of the testimony.

"What happened next?"

"Just then the front door bell rang loudly. Putting the telegram on the hall table, I went to answer it, and found Mrs. Macallister's footman waiting in the vestibule. I started to tell Miss Beatrice, but at that moment she walked out of the library, with her cloak over her arm. When I helped her on with it she was trembling from head to foot."

"What became of Mrs. Trevor?"

"I don't know, sir. After the carriage drove off, I went first into the private office to fasten the windows, and from there into the other rooms. I think Mrs. Trevor must have gone upstairs when I was in the parlor. I went to bed very soon after."

"Were you disturbed in the night?"

"No, sir. The servants' quarters are all on the fourth floor. The house is well built and the walls are very thick. We couldn't hear any sound up there, except the bells in the corridor, and they did not ring at all."

"How did you find everything when you came down the next morning?"

"Every window was locked on the ground floor, and the night-latch was up on the front door, sir. The window on the stairway by which the burglar entered is covered by heavy curtains; and as it was closed, I never noticed it was unfastened until after the detective's arrival."

"Did you enter the private office?"

"Yes, sir; nothing had been disturbed."

"No sign of a struggle?"

"No, sir. Every chair and rug was in its place."

"That's all; you can go now," said the coroner, after a moment's silence. Wilkins heaved a sigh of relief, as he hastened out of the room.

Interest was at fever heat among the spectators. For once Mrs. Macallister was too shocked by the trend of suspicion to voice her feelings to Peggy.

Apparently the least concerned person in the room was Beatrice Trevor, who had entered in answer to the clerk's summons. Lack of sleep and anxiety had left their mark on the girl's finely cut features, but there was no trace of fear in her large, candid eyes, which were turned inquiringly on the coroner.

Peggy's heart was hot within her. How dare these people insinuate that Beatrice, her dear, dear friend, was guilty of murder. The idea was too preposterous!

Even the coroner was struck by the young girl's poise and dignity, and his manner was very gentle as he said:

"Miss Trevor, I have just a few questions to ask you. At what hour did you return from the ball?"

"We left the New Willard at a quarter to three, and reached here about fifteen minutes later."

"Did you encounter anyone as you entered?"

"No."

"Was the house dark?"

"Yes; except for the light in the hall."

"Did you go directly to your room?"

"Yes. I put up the night-latch, turned out the light, and went to my room at once."

"When did you last see your stepmother?"

"In the library, before the carriage came for me."

"Miss Trevor"—the coroner fumbled with his watch chain—"what did you and Mrs. Trevor quarrel about that night?"

The question struck home. Beatrice reeled in her seat.

"What did you say?" she stammered.

The coroner repeated his question. With a visible effort, Beatrice regained her self-control.

"That is a matter between my stepmother and myself. I decline to discuss it with anyone."

"But you must, Miss Trevor."

"I will not. Our quarrel had nothing whatever to do with Mrs. Trevor's death."

"I am the best judge of that," retorted Coroner Wilson, but Beatrice remained obstinately silent.

"Come, Miss Trevor, can you not see that you are injuring yourself by this refusal. People will jump to but one conclusion. For your own sake, I beg you to tell us what your quarrel was about."

"I decline to answer."

The coroner shrugged his shoulders. He had warned her; he could do no more.

"Very well, Miss Trevor. You may retire."

With pale, set lips and flashing eyes, Beatrice swept from the room.

For a few minutes the coroner looked over his papers, then he beckoned to his clerk. The next

instant, Lieutenant-Commander Donald Gordon had been called to the stand. There was a gasp of amazement from the fashionable spectators. How came Donald Gordon to be mixed up in this affair?

But none was more surprised than Donald Gordon himself. He had been subpœnaed as a witness that morning, to his great disgust, as he had orders to accompany the President to New York on the afternoon train. He reported the subpœna to his superiors, and another aide had been detailed to attend the President in his place.

Gordon had an enviable record as an officer in the United States navy. He had served bravely under Admiral Dewey at Manila, and had on several occasions received special commendation from Congress. Good-looking, in a big, fine way, he was immensely popular in the service, and also with his many civilian friends.

“Mr. Gordon,” said the coroner, after he had been duly sworn, “I wish to ask if this is your property.” As he spoke, he held up a heavy gold signet ring.

Absolute incredulity was plainly written on Gordon’s face, as he leaned over and took the ring.

“Yes,” he said, turning it over, “yes. It is my class ring. My initials and the date of my graduation from the Naval Academy are engraved on the inside.” Then his voice deepened. “How came you to have this ring in your possession?”

“It was found”—the coroner paused impressively —“it was found tightly clasped in Mrs. Trevor’s right hand.”

In stupefied silence, Gordon gazed at the coroner, while the meaning of his words slowly took form in

his brain. Then he leaped to his feet.

"You lie—damn you—you lie!" he cried, fiercely.

CHAPTER VI
THE VERDICT

So totally unexpected had been the dénouement that for a few seconds the spectators sat stunned; then pandemonium broke loose. It was only after the coroner threatened to clear the rooms that quiet was restored.

“Such violence is unnecessary,” said he, addressing Gordon.

“I—I—beg pardon,” the young officer spoke with an effort. “Your statement was so utterly unbelievable, so astounding that I forgot myself.”

“It is absolutely true, and can be proved by Doctor Davis and Detective Hardy, who was present when the doctor found the ring. Mrs. Trevor’s hand was so tightly clenched that he had to exert his strength to force it open. Can you explain its presence there?”

He gazed intently at Gordon, but the latter had his emotions under control, and his face was expressionless, as he answered with perfect composure:

“I cannot, sir.”

“Where were you on Wednesday night, last?”

“I dined at the Metropolitan Club with Lieutenant James Raymond. We went later to the Bachelors’ Cotillion.”

The coroner held a whispered conversation with his clerk, then turned to the witness.

“Will you kindly withdraw to the waiting room, Mr. Gordon; but don’t leave the house, as I wish to call you again to the stand.”

Gordon nodded silently to Dick Tillinghast and several other friends as he left the room.

The next witness was Lieutenant Raymond. His testimony was very brief. Yes, he and Lieutenant-Commander Gordon had dined together on Wednesday night. They had left the Club about half past nine as he, Raymond, was a member of the Committee and had to go early to the New Willard. No, Mr. Gordon did not accompany him to the hotel; but had left him at the corner of 17th and H Streets, saying he had to return to his rooms at the Benedict, but would go to the dance later on. Gordon did not enter the ballroom until just after supper, which was served at midnight.

“Are you positive of that?” asked the coroner.

“Absolutely positive, because I had to get a temporary partner for Miss Underhill, who was to have danced the cotillion with Mr. Gordon.”

“How long a time would it take for Mr. Gordon to go from 17th and H Streets to his apartment?”

“About five minutes.”

“And how long would it take him to get from his apartment at the Benedict to the New Willard?”

“Seven minutes if he went in the cars, and fifteen minutes if he walked.”

Lieutenant Raymond was then excused, and after his departure Detective Hardy was called to the

witness chair. He gave a brief résumé of all that took place after the murder was discovered.

“Did you find any trace of the end of the weapon?” asked the coroner.

“No, sir. I turned the whole place inside out, but could find nothing. The only clue I had to go upon was the ring which we found in Mrs. Trevor’s hand. I saw at a glance that it was a naval class ring, so I at once went to the Navy Department. There I looked through the register of Annapolis graduates, and found that two men in that class had the two initials ‘D. G.’—Donald Gordon and Daniel Green. The latter is stationed at Mare Island, California. That eliminated him, so I went to Mr. Gordon’s quarters at the Benedict Apartment House.” He paused.

“Go on,” ordered the coroner. “Tell your story in your own way.”

The jury to a man were leaning across the table, regarding the detective with deep interest.

“The janitor there is a friend of mine, so he let me into Mr. Gordon’s apartment, which is on the second floor, with his pass key. I searched his rooms thoroughly, but could find nothing. Then I went through his personal belongings. In the inner pocket of his overcoat, I found a few pieces of a torn note.

“It didn’t take me long to fit the words together. I then pasted them all on a sheet of note paper. Here, you can see for yourselves.”

He drew out his pocketbook as he spoke, and removed from it a sheet of paper on which were pasted scraps torn in different shapes, and handed it to the coroner. After one startled glance, the coroner read the contents aloud.

"Come—Wedn—half—elev—must—
you—for—leav—New Yor—

"HÉLÈNE DE—T
—"

Without a word of comment, the coroner handed the paper to the jurymen, who eagerly scanned it.

"Have you any further evidence to give to the jury?"

"No, sir."

"That is all, then, Hardy. You are excused. Bayne," to his clerk, "recall Mr. Gordon."

Gordon was walking impatiently up and down the smaller room, eager to be gone, and he answered the summons with alacrity.

"Mr. Gordon, where were you between the hours of nine thirty P.M. and midnight on Wednesday last?"

"I decline to state."

"Tut! We know you called to see Mrs. Trevor at eleven thirty that night."

"Indeed, and may I ask who your informant is?"

The coroner paid no attention to the interruption, but went steadily on with his examination.

"Did Mrs. Trevor admit you?"

Silence.

The coroner repeated his question.

Still no reply.

"Come, sir; you must answer. Yes, or no?"

Gordon stirred uneasily in his chair. "I was in my

rooms at the Benedict until I left to go to the ball," he said.

"Was anyone with you?"

"No."

"Did anyone see you leave the Benedict?"

"Not to my knowledge." Then he added quickly, "At least, there may have been some of the other tenants around, or perhaps the janitor; I never noticed in my hurry."

"Mr. Gordon—" the coroner's manner was abrupt and stern—"do you see these pieces?" He took up the sheet from the table. "They are apparently torn from a letter of Mrs. Trevor's to you, making an appointment to see you here on Wednesday night at eleven thirty. These scraps were found in your overcoat pocket. Again I ask, did Mrs. Trevor admit you?"

Gordon glanced at the sheet and recognized the handwriting. His mouth closed in a hard line, and he grew perceptibly paler. He straightened his broad shoulders, and faced the jury squarely, saying:

"I refuse to incriminate myself."

In the dead silence the scratching of the stenographer's pen could be heard plainly.

"You may retire," said the coroner.

With perfect self-possession, Gordon left the room.

The coroner's summing up of the case was short and to the point. As soon as he finished, the jury left the room to deliberate.

The hands of the ormolu clock on the mantel had

gone five times around its dial, but there was no thinning out of the crowd. The majority of the spectators had attended the inquest out of friendship for the Trevors, others had been brought there by morbid curiosity; but none had expected such an outcome to the investigation. Now, in silence and nervous apprehension they waited for the return of the jury. The tension was snapped by their reappearance. The coroner rose and addressed them.

“Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?”

“The jury find,” answered the foreman, “that Mrs. Hélène de Beaupré Trevor came to her death on the night of Wednesday, February 3rd, 19—, in the City of Washington, District of Columbia, from a wound inflicted by Lieutenant-Commander Donald Gordon.”

CHAPTER VII
WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

TRAMP, tramp, back and forth, back and forth, went the restless footsteps. Would she never tire? Would she never stop? Alfred Clark bent lower until his eye was on a level with the keyhole of the closed library door. Suddenly the gong over the front door rang loudly. With a smothered exclamation, Clark glided quickly across the wide hall and entered the private office just as Wilkins came out of the dining-room.

"Good afternoon, Wilkins. Can I see Miss Beatrice?" Peggy's fresh young voice sounded cheerily in Wilkins' ears. During the last week he had had a surfeit of horrors and unmitigated gloom.

"Yes, Miss Margaret, she is expecting you. Will you please walk into the drawing-room, and I will tell her you have come."

Peggy had only time to straighten one refractory curl which would trail down on her forehead. It had been the cause of much mental anguish in childish days because everyone dinned into her ears, "There was a little girl, and she had a little curl." Consequently she always took care to tuck that particular lock carefully out of sight. As she turned from the mirror, Beatrice came in through the communicating doors leading to the library.

"My dearest, how good it is to see you again,"

exclaimed Peggy, giving her a warm kiss and hug.

"It is, indeed," and Beatrice's sad face brightened, as she affectionately returned the embrace.

"I have been here several times since the funeral, Beatrice."

"I know, dear, and it did my heart good to know you were thinking of me. I feel so alone, so utterly alone." Beatrice stopped to control her voice, and Peggy, with loving sympathy, threw her arm about her shoulders.

They made a charming foil sitting side by side on the divan, one so dark in her stately beauty, the other so fair and winsome, their faces seen first in shadow then in light as the fickle wood fire flickered to and fro on the wide hearth.

"There, I did not intend to allude to the terrible happenings. Since the funeral, which was private, I have tried not to let my mind dwell on the tragedy. Otherwise I think I should go mad. I cannot, cannot speak of it even to you, dearest." Her hands twitched spasmodically, and she bit her lips to hide their trembling. Regaining her composure by a desperate effort, she signed to Wilkins to move the tea table nearer the fire. "Two lumps and lemon, Peggy?"

"Yes, please, and very weak."

"It was dear of you to come out in this snow storm."

"Puf! I don't care that for a storm." Peggy snapped her fingers derisively. "I had been in all day and was longing for fresh air when you telephoned me. And the walk up here did me no end of good. I always eat too much at Granny's lunches."

"Tell me who were there?"

"Oh! just the Topic Club. One of the members gave out at the eleventh hour, and Granny asked me to take her place."

"It must have been interesting," ejaculated Beatrice.

The Topic Club, composed of eleven witty women, was a time-honored institution in the Capital. It met once a month at the different members' houses. Each hostess was always allowed to ask one of her friends to make the twelfth guest, an invitation eagerly sought for. The topic to be discussed was written on the back of the place cards.

"What was the topic this time, Peggy?"

"'What does a woman remember longest?' May I have some more hot water, my tea is a little too strong?"

"And what answer did they find for it?" asked Beatrice, taking up the hot water kettle as Peggy held out her cup.

"Why, they decided that no woman ever forgets 'the man who has once loved her.' My gracious, Beatrice, look out!" as a few drops of boiling water went splashing over her fingers.

"Oh, Peggy, did I scald you?"

"Not very much," groaned Peggy, putting her injured finger in her mouth, that human receptacle for all things—good and bad.

"I am so sorry, dear. Tell me, did you hear anything exciting at luncheon?"

"Nothing in particular." Peggy could not tell her that the chief topic at the table had been the Trevor

murder, so she rattled on: “People say that divorce proceedings are pending in the Van Auken family. You know their home is called ‘the house of a thousand scandals.’ But the latest news is that Martha Underhill’s engagement to Bobby Crane has been broken off.”

“Why?” asked Beatrice, her curiosity excited.

“Well, they quarreled about Donald Gordon—” Beatrice’s convulsive start brought Peggy up short. As usual her thoughtless tongue had gotten her into hot water. To hesitate would be but to make a bad matter worse, so she went bravely on: “Bobby is desperately jealous, and simply hates to have Martha even look at any other man. So he was simply raging when she told him she intended dancing the last Bachelors’ with Mr. Gordon, who is an old friend of hers. Bobby was very nasty about it. Yesterday when we were all walking up Connecticut Avenue from St. John’s, Martha remarked how mortified she had been at being left without a partner during the first part of the cotillion.

“‘Serves you jolly well right,’ snapped Bobby. ‘That’s what comes of dancing with a murderer!’”

“Oh, the coward!” exclaimed Beatrice. “The coward!”

“That’s what we all thought, and I left Martha telling Bobby what she thought of him. Result—the broken engagement. As to Mr. Gordon, we all believe in his innocence,” declared Peggy, stoutly.

“It is not the first time a Court of Justice has blundered,” agreed Beatrice, wearily, and she brushed her soft hair off her hot forehead.

“The idea of suspecting Mr. Gordon,” went on

Peggy, heatedly. “He is so chivalrous; so tender in his manner to all women! What matter if he is a bit of a flirt—”

Beatrice moved uneasily in her chair.

“How is Mrs. Macallister?” she asked abruptly.

“Very well, and enjoying herself immensely at present. She is having an out and out row with the Commissioners of the District. Major Stone applied to them for permission to cut an entrance to the alley through Granny’s rose garden. My, she was mad!” and Peggy smiled broadly at the recollection.

“I don’t wonder,” exclaimed Beatrice. “Why, Peggy, it would be a perfect shame. Mrs. Macallister’s garden is one of the beauties of Washington.”

“It would be beastly. You see, Granny owns nearly half the square between 19th and 20th on F Street. To prevent apartment houses going up, she wanted to buy the whole block. But the owners, finding she wanted the real estate, asked her an exorbitant price, which Granny naturally refused to pay. Now, I suppose to get back at her, old Major Stone insists that the alley, which already has two entrances, must have a third.

“So yesterday, Granny and I went to call on Major Cochrane, the new Engineer Commissioner, in the District Building. He didn’t know us from Adam, and didn’t seem able to get a clear idea of our errand. Finally, he asked Granny:

“‘Do I understand you came here to get an alley put through?’

“‘No,’ replied Granny, with her blandest smile, ‘I came to get an ally.’ And she did, too,” laughed

Peggy. “Before we left she had won him, body and soul, over to her cause.”

“I prophesy Mrs. Macallister wins. Must you go, dear,” as Peggy started gathering her wraps together.

“It’s getting late, and I am far, far from home; besides which, I am dining with the Van Winkles, and afterwards going to the Charity Ball. So I have a busy night ahead of me. But I hate to leave you, dearie, all by yourself. Won’t you come down and visit us? We’d love to have you. Indeed, it is not good for you to stay shut up here by yourself—” Peggy came to a breathless pause.

There were tears in Beatrice’s eyes as she bent and kissed the soft, rosy cheek. What it cost her to stay in that house, none would ever know. She shook her head.

“It is like you to ask me, Peggy darling, but I cannot leave Father. He needs me *now*.”

The slight emphasis was lost on Peggy, who was busy adjusting her furs. With a searching glance around the dimly lighted room, Beatrice drew a small, flat box from her dainty work bag, and going close to Peggy whispered:

“I am surrounded by prying eyes. You, and you only, can I trust. In the name of our long friendship, and for the sake of the old school days I beg, I entreat you, Peggy, to take this box and keep it for me!”

“Indeed I will!” Peggy’s whisper was reassuring in its vehemence. “No one shall ever see or know of it.” As she spoke, she thrust it in her large muff. “Remember, Beatrice, Granny and I are always your devoted, loyal friends. Do not hesitate to let us help

you."

Beatrice's only answer was to fold Peggy in a passionate embrace. Then, as the latter left the room, she threw herself on the divan, her slender form racked with sobs.

As Peggy crossed the square hall on her way to the front door, she came face to face with the Attorney General's secretary. Alfred Clark, who was putting on his overcoat, greeted her effusively.

"Oh, good afternoon," she replied, a trifle coldly; for his obsequious manner always grated on her.

"Can I see you home?" asked Clark, eagerly, opening the front door as he spoke.

"You are very kind, but I am going to catch the car at the corner, and I wouldn't think of taking you so far out of your way."

"On the contrary, it is right in the direction I am going," rejoined Clark, helping Peggy down the slippery steps. "I was so sorry not to see you when I called last Sunday," he continued, as they turned to walk in the direction of Connecticut Avenue. "I thought you always stayed at home that day?"

"I usually do; but last Sunday I went down to the station to see a friend off, so missed all my callers. Gracious! there's our car. Do stop it."

Obediently Clark ran ahead and signalled the motorman to wait until Peggy could get there. But once inside the car they had no further chance for conversation, for Clark, jostled by the crowd, was obliged to stand some distance from Peggy, who had been given a seat further up. On transferring to the G Street herdic they found they had that antiquated vehicle entirely to themselves.

"How do you think Miss Trevor is looking?" inquired Clark, after he had stuffed the transfers into the change box by the driver's seat.

"She seems utterly used up, poor dear," answered Peggy, soberly. "I am afraid the strain is telling on her more than she will admit."

"You are right, Miss Macallister; and something should be done about it." Clark spoke with so much feeling that she glanced at him with deepened interest. "Her father is so absorbed in his grief that he never notices his daughter's condition."

"It is a shame," agreed Peggy, "and yet, not surprising. He was perfectly devoted to Mrs. Trevor, and Senator Phillips says he is heartbroken by her tragic death."

"That is no excuse for neglecting the living. Mr. Trevor owes much to his daughter's affection." Peggy did not see the quickly suppressed sneer that distorted Clark's handsome features. "Miss Trevor acts as if she had something preying on her mind, don't you think so?"

Peggy clutched the box secreted so carefully inside her muff in sudden panic. What did the man's insinuation mean?

"No," she answered tartly. "I think her nervous, over-wrought condition is simply due to the tragedy, and its attending mystery."

"Mystery?" echoed Clark. "Why, all that has been cleared up by Gordon's arrest."

"Indeed it has not," indignantly declared Peggy. "I don't for a moment believe him guilty. I think he is the victim of circumstantial evidence." Her rapid speech was interrupted by their arrival at her street

corner, and she did not finish her sentence until they stood in the vestibule of the Macallister mansion. “In the first place, Mr. Clark,” she continued, “where would you find a motive for such a crime?”

“In Gordon’s past, Miss Macallister.” And, as Hurley opened the front door, “Good night; thanks so much for allowing me to escort you home.”

He ran down the steps and walked rapidly up the street before the astonished girl could frame another sentence.

CHAPTER VIII
THE CHALLENGE

JUST before midnight the Charity Ball, given annually for the benefit of the Children's Hospital, was at its height. The long ballroom at the New Willard was almost too crowded for comfort, at least so thought the dancing contingent.

"Come on over here out of the crowd, Peggy," and Dick Tillinghast pointed to one of the deep window recesses. It looked cool and comfortable after the heat of the room, and with a sigh of relief Peggy sank back in its kindly shelter. She was beginning to feel weary, having danced every encore and extra.

"Now, I call this jolly," went on Dick, fanning her vigorously. "Peggy—you wretch—you have been flirting outrageously with little de Morny all the evening."

"The Count is very agreeable," answered Peggy, demurely. "Besides, I was giving him lessons in English."

Dick snorted. "*You* may call it what you like; but the Count is in dead earnest."

"Really, Mr. Tillinghast—" Peggy's head went up. Dick, seeing the light of combat in her eyes, hastened to interrupt her.

"Now, Peggy—please. You've been perfectly beastly to me all the evening; never even saved me a

dance, and I had to steal this one."

"It is customary to ask for them," frigidly.

"It wasn't my fault. I was detained at the office, as you know perfectly well. It wasn't kind, Peggy, indeed it wasn't."

Dick's voice expressed more bitterness than the occasion warranted. Swiftly Peggy's kind heart relented.

"I didn't keep a dance, Dick, because," she lowered her voice, "I—I—thought you would prefer to take me out to supper."

"You darling!" Dick leaned impulsively nearer; then cursed inwardly as Tom Blake's stout form stopped before them.

"Well, you two look very 'comfy'; may I join you?" The chair, which Peggy pushed toward him creaked under his weight. "This is a bully alcove; you are in the crowd and yet not of it. Hello, de Morny, come and sit with us. Miss Macallister was just asking for you," and he winked at Dick.

De Morny was walking past, vainly searching for Peggy, and he accepted the invitation with alacrity. He had met her early in the season. Her sunny disposition and fascinating personality had made instant appeal to the Frenchman's volatile nature. Wherever Peggy went, de Morny was sure to follow, much to Dick's silent fury.

Their mutual friends had not been slow to grasp the situation, and many were the conjectures as to which man would win the little flirt, and, incidentally, the Macallister millions. The money consideration did not enter altogether into de

Morny's calculations, for contrary to the usual order of things, he was wealthy. Belonging to the old nobility of France, he was a most desirable *parti*, and had often been relentlessly pursued by mothers with marriageable daughters on their hands.

But many times Dick cursed Peggy's prospective inheritance. Without a penny except his salary, it was bitter indeed to the proud fellow to feel that he was looked upon as a fortune hunter. They had been boy and girl sweethearts when their parents had lived next door to each other until the crash came. His father gave up home and personal belongings to meet his creditors, dying shortly after, and Dick had been thrown on his own resources during his freshman year at Harvard. It was simply another case of from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations, no uncommon occurrence in America.

"Mademoiselle," said the Frenchman, bowing before Peggy, "have I zer permission to present to you *mon ami*, Count de Smirnoff." He beckoned to a tall stranger who had stopped just outside the alcove when de Morny joined the little group. "And to you, also, Monsieur Blake, and Monsieur Tillinghast."

Count de Smirnoff acknowledged the introductions most courteously, and then, to Dick's secret annoyance, promptly appropriated the chair nearest Peggy and devoted himself to her.

"Will you look at Mrs. Wheeler," whispered Tom Blake to his companions. "Solomon in all his glory couldn't touch her."

Mrs. Wheeler was dazzling to behold. Dressed in scarlet and gold, with diamonds in front of her, diamonds on top of her, she easily out-diamonded every woman present. The crowd parted to make

way for her as she moved slowly, very slowly up the long room. With the Vice-President on one side of her and the British Ambassador on the other, the apotheosis of the house of Wheeler was reached.

Dick drew a long breath after they had passed. “My eyes actually hurt from such illumination. Why, oh, why does Washington accept such people?”

“Because she possesses the Golden Key which unlocks most doors in democratic America,” answered Tom, dryly. “She wined and dined herself into our midst, and now—” he paused dramatically —“she draws the line on the Army and Navy people here, because her calling list is already so large!”

“How’s poor Gordon?” he asked, suddenly, a few minutes later.

“He refuses to see anyone, or talk,” answered Dick.

“Poor devil! What made him do such a mad action?”

“I don’t believe he is guilty,” said Dick, slowly. “He isn’t that sort. He wouldn’t kill a man in cold blood, let alone strike a woman.”

“I agree with you, Dick. There has been some dreadful mistake,” chimed in Peggy.

“Is it the Trevor murder of which you speak?” asked de Smirnoff. He spoke English perfectly, but for a slight accent.

“Yes, Monsieur. Even the District Attorney thinks someone has blundered; he is furious because the coroner’s jury brought in that verdict against Gordon.”

“Oh, well, he’ll have a chance to clear himself

before the Grand Jury two weeks from now. After all, Dick, he virtually admitted he was guilty."

"I don't see it that way," answered Dick, obstinately.

"Well, I hope he can prove an alibi. But if he does it will go hard with Beatrice Trevor. Suspicion already points to her."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Peggy, in horror, and she looked appealingly at Dick.

"I'm afraid so," he said, sorrowfully, answering her unspoken thought. "You see, it's very obvious that she has some secret to conceal."

Peggy actually jumped as her mind flew to the box which was at that moment safely hidden in the secret drawer of her bureau. Beatrice guilty—never—never—she put the thought from her, but it would return.

"You mustn't say such things," she said, angry with herself for her disloyal thoughts, and her face paled perceptibly.

"I am sorry I spoke in that way," replied Dick. "I had forgotten for the moment that she is your greatest friend. Indeed, Peggy, I meant no offense. You know I would do anything for you, anything."

"So would we all, Miss Peggy," exclaimed Tom, and de Morny, but half understanding the rapidly spoken English, nodded his head back and forth like a china mandarin.

"Then," said Peggy, "find the real murderer of Mrs. Trevor. That," loyally, "would clear my friends from suspicion. And I will give you"—unconsciously her eyes sought Dick's and the look in them made his

heart throb with hope; then she glanced quickly at Count de Morny, and his heart sank with sickening dread—"unto the half of my kingdom."

"I accept the challenge," he said, gravely, and he raised her hand to his lips; while Tom, in a few sentences, explained the wager to the two foreigners.

"To find ze murderer? But ze police have done zat, Mademoiselle," de Morny ejaculated.

"No, no; they have only arrested a man on suspicion. Miss Peggy thinks the murderer is still at large."

"As Mademoiselle sinks, so sinks I," answered the Count gallantly.

"It appears to me that the police acted with great discretion," said de Smirnoff, who had been an interested listener. "But they do not make the most of their opportunities."

"In what way, Count?" asked Dick.

"In regard to the burglar, Monsieur. Since my arrival here I have read with deep interest all the newspaper accounts of the tragedy. Frankly, I had not expected to find such a *cause celebre* in the Capital of this great country. It occurs to me that the burglar has not told all he knows."

"Since telling his story at the inquest he refuses to talk."

De Smirnoff shrugged his shoulders. "In my country he would be made to talk. The secret police of Russia, Monsieur, can extract information from the most unwilling of witnesses."

"You really think Nelson is keeping something back?" asked Tom, incredulously. "Why, the poor

devil is only too anxious to clear himself. Surely, if he knew he would not hesitate to tell the whole truth?"

"It is difficult to say, Monsieur. He may have been bribed to hold his tongue; money can do much these days. Again, fear of the murderer may force him to silence."

"That's true, too; yet fear of the gallows would make most people talk."

"Ah, but he does not stand in very much danger there, for has not another man already been arrested, charged with the crime? No, no, depend upon it, he is holding something back."

"What, for instance?" inquired Dick, eagerly.

"The weapon," suggested de Smirnoff. "It is quite within the possible that he found it. According to his testimony, he was the first to find the body. Now, he may be keeping back this information so as to be able to blackmail the murderer when his sentence for house-breaking is over. Apparently, he is a clever crook, and undoubtedly knows how best to look after his own interests."

CHAPTER IX
"MAIN 6"

BUZZ—buzz—sounded the alarm. Dick stirred, shivered slightly, and sat up.

"May the devil fly away with you!" he muttered, addressing the clock. "I wish to thunder I could go to bed as sleepy as I wake up," stretching himself, and vividly recollecting how many hours he had lain awake thinking of Peggy. His thoughts turned quickly to her challenge; with a bound he was out of bed; no time for loitering now—too much was at stake.

Some hours later Dick was staring moodily at the snow and slush in front of the District building on Pennsylvania Avenue. So far, he had been unsuccessful. Gordon had refused to be interviewed by him, now he was in search of Detective Hardy. Muttering uncomplimentary remarks about the offenders who allowed the streets in Washington to get in such a fearful condition, he waded ankle deep through the melting snow to the sidewalk, and almost into the arms of the very man he was looking for.

"Hello, Mr. Tillinghast, how are you?" exclaimed Hardy, recovering his balance as he slipped on the icy pavement. "What brings you down to these diggings?"

"You," answered Dick, briefly. "I'm assigned to

cover the Trevor murder, as you know, and I'm looking for more material."

"Gwan," chuckled Hardy. "Your paper has already spread itself some on that line. In fact, it's said just a leetle too much," remembering the furore Gordon's arrest had made, and the attendant abuse heaped on the detective force for not making more headway with the case.

"Pshaw! Hardy, you know the paper has to cater to the public, and Washington has gone wild over the murder. I've had to write columns and give 'em all sorts of theories, but none hold water."

"'Course not. We've got the guilty man under lock and key."

"Hum! Found the weapon yet?"

A look of chagrin crossed Hardy's face. "Naw, damn it!" he growled. "Mr. Gordon sure hid it safely; threw it down an open street sewer most likely."

"How about Nelson?"

"Nelson? Oh! he's doing time for house-breaking; so we've got him dead to rights if we find he's wanted for the murder. Sorry, sir," glancing as he spoke at the clock over the City Post Office, "but I've got to beat it quick." Then, lowering his voice, "I've a bit of news which may surprise some folks. Come round in a day or two and I'll let you in on it."

"Here, wait," shouted Dick, making a futile dive for Hardy's coat as he swung himself aboard a south-bound car.

"What are you wasting so much energy for, Dick?" asked a hearty voice at his elbow. Dick swung around with a jump.

"Why, where in —— did you drop from?" he gasped, hardly able to credit his senses as the newcomer seized his hand and wrung it vigorously.

"Just arrived via Panama," explained General Long. "Let's get on the sidewalk, Dick. I didn't come to Washington to be knocked down by a dray horse," and he dragged his still bewildered friend to the curb. "Come into the Willard and lunch with me. I'm half dead with hunger."

"Now," said Dick, after they had done justice to the Martinis, "give an account of yourself, past, present and future."

"Past—Philippines; present—here; future—God knows!" General Long sighed as he helped Dick and himself to the tempting dish in front of him. "It's good to taste Christian cooking once again. Don't insult good food by hurrying too much, Dick; take your time. At present I've come here on waiting orders."

Dick inwardly wondered what necessity had induced the War Department to send for Chester Long. A man of exceptional executive ability and personal bravery, he had been rapidly advanced over the heads of older officers, to their unspeakable rage, until finally he had been appointed second in command in the Philippines. He had made a record for himself out there, and Dick was astounded that his recall should have been kept so profound a secret.

"How did you slip away without the papers getting on?" he asked.

"Orders from the Department hushed things up pretty well, and then I traveled incog. The why and

the wherefore, I may—guess—" he smiled quietly. "Now, Dick, give an account of yourself."

It did not take long in the telling, as the two friends had never completely lost sight of each other, and mutual friends had kept them in touch with their doings. General Long was Dick's senior by some fifteen years, but since the days of the Spanish war in Cuba, where Dick was sent as war correspondent, they had been sworn allies.

"I'm dreadfully shocked about the Trevor murder," said Long, after Dick had finished speaking of himself. "The papers are filled with it. Gordon is the last person I'd think capable of so dastardly a crime. While at Annapolis, where he was a three-striper, he was voted the most popular man, and the one most likely to succeed. He never lied, and he never went back on a friend. Since his graduation his record in the Service has been fine, fine. And now, to have such a charge against him! How have the mighty fallen! Poor Gordon—poor devil!"

"Things look pretty black for him," admitted Dick. "But still the evidence is not absolutely conclusive, simply circumstantial."

"In what way?"

"In the first place no weapon has been found in his possession. Secondly, the absolute lack of motive."

Long twirled his wine glass about in his fingers.

"Is there none?" he asked, finally.

"Apparently none. After years of absence Gordon came to Washington on receiving his appointment as aide to the President one month ago. He never went to the Trevors much. In fact, he and Mrs. Trevor

were total strangers. They met first at a theater party I gave, which Mrs. Trevor chaperoned, on the night of Gordon's arrival in town. You know he and I went to Lawrenceville together."

Long glanced around the half empty café; their table was in the farther corner, and their waiter had departed after removing the dessert and putting the liqueur and coffee before them. There was no chance of their conversation being overheard, but Long motioned to Dick to pull his chair closer, as he said in a low voice:

"I've always had great respect for your discretion, Dick; therefore, I'm going to confide in you. You can use your judgment about speaking of what I tell you now.

"Some four years ago or more, I was military attaché at the Court of St. James. One day I ran across Don Gordon in Hyde Park. He told me he was there on leave visiting his sister, Lady Dorchester. I didn't see much of him because his entire time was taken up with paying desperate attention to—Hélène de Beaupré."

"What!" shouted Dick, starting up in his intense surprise.

"Hush, man," said Long, sternly. "You are attracting attention." Dick, much abashed, subsided into his chair. "I can swear to what I am saying, because at that time Hélène de Beaupré was the rage in London. Men and women raved about her, and she was received everywhere. Gordon lost his head over her, he was madly infatuated with her beauty; whether his affection was returned, I know not." Long shrugged his shoulders.

"Just about that time I was relieved from duty in London, and in the rush of departure forgot all about Gordon and his affairs. But one day on shipboard Alfred Clark told me that he had seen Gordon and Hélène de Beaupré applying at the Home Office for a special license to marry at once."

Dick looked at his friend too dazed to speak. "Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered.

For a few minutes they sat regarding each other in puzzled silence. Then Dick roused himself to ask: "Is the Alfred Clark of whom you speak the man who is now secretary to the Attorney General?"

"Is he tall, well-built, handsome, with a peculiar scar on his temple?"

"You have described the man to a dot. Looks like a Gypsy?" Long nodded in acquiescence. "He goes out here a great deal; sort of insinuates himself into people's good graces. I never liked him—too much of a beauty man to suit me. What was he doing in England?"

"He stopped there from Italy on his way to the States. At that time his father had plenty of money, and Alfred did nothing but travel about at his own sweet will. The crash came just afterwards, and then he had to get to work."

"It must have been a bitter pill for him to swallow, poor devil. I've gone through a somewhat similar experience," and Dick sighed sympathetically. "Strange that Mrs. Trevor, Gordon and Clark should all be here at the same time!"

"Fate plays strange tricks," agreed Long. "I heard nothing further about these three people until I read of the Trevor tragedy. How did Gordon and Mrs.

Trevor look, Dick, when you introduced them?"

"I don't know," confessed Dick. "Gordon didn't appear until about the middle of the first act; the box was in semi-darkness. I introduced him to all my friends as he was the stranger, and I remember hearing Mrs. Trevor say she was 'delighted to meet him.' I took it for granted she didn't know him."

Long shook his head. "It's a black business, Dick, whichever way you look at it. If she jilted Gordon and married Trevor, it might be a reason for the crime; or if Gordon really married her first, then there is a still greater motive for the murder."

"Bigamy?" ejaculated Dick.

"Perhaps. Gordon is poor—Trevor rich; apparently the balance dipped in the latter's favor. It is not the first time souls have been bought and honor lost by the desire for filthy lucre. Mind you, Dick, this last is all surmise. I may be entirely wrong. You can use the information I have given you if you think best; and I'll be here if you want to consult me about it."

"Which way are you going?" asked Dick.

"To the War Department, and you—?"

"To the office. I'll drop in and see you sometime to-morrow. It's bully having you back again, old man. So long," and with a parting hand shake the two friends parted.

Dick was very tired when he reached his home in Georgetown that night. His landlady heard his key turn in the lock and came out in the hall to meet him.

Mrs. Brisbane, "befo' de wah," had not known

what it was to put on her own silk stockings; now, she took “paying guests.” Her husband and brothers had died for “The Cause”; her property near Charleston, South Carolina, had been totally destroyed during the horrors of the Reconstruction period. She had come to Washington, that Mecca for unemployed gentlewomen, in hopes of adding to her slender income. For years she had been employed in the Post Office Department, as a handwriting expert. Then suddenly her eyesight failed her; and broken in health and hopes, she and her young granddaughter kept the wolf from the door and a roof over their heads as best they could.

Dick was devoted to Mrs. Brisbane. Her gentle dignity and indomitable pluck in the face of every misfortune had won his admiration and respect. He had lived with them for over three years, and was looked upon as one of the family.

“You are late, Dick,” she said. “Have you had a busy day?”

“Yes, Mrs. Brisbane,” he answered, “and I’m dog tired, having been on the dead jump ever since I left here this morning.”

“Not too tired to come into the dining-room and help us celebrate my seventieth birthday, I hope?”

Dick looked reproachfully at her. “And you never told me! I don’t think that’s fair. Am I not one of the family? Yes— Then I claim a relative’s privilege.”

Mrs. Brisbane beamed upon him. “You extravagant boy! That’s just why I did not tell you. I hope you are not too exhausted to enjoy a glass of eggnog?”

“What a question! You know I would walk miles

to get a taste of your eggnog. There's nothing like it, this side of Heaven."

"Heaven is not usually associated with eggnog," laughed Nancy Pelham, a pretty young girl of sixteen. "And Granny's brew is apt to lead one in the opposite direction."

"Tut! Child. As Pa once said, eggnog was invented especially for God's po' creatures in their moments of tribulation. It puts new heart in most everyone, even a po' Yankee."

Dick laughed. "You are a pretty good hater, Mrs. Brisbane," he said, helping himself to the frothy beverage.

"I reckon I've got cause." Mrs. Brisbane's drawl was delicious. "An' I'm from Charleston, Dick, don't forget that. Why, one of my nieces never knew until she got to New York that 'damn Yankee' was two words."

"Granny, Granny," remonstrated Nancy. "Dick's a good Northerner by birth, and we mustn't wave the bloody shirt."

"Nonsense," said Dick, hastily. "I love to fight our battles over with Mrs. Brisbane. What a beautiful punch bowl that is?" he added, enthusiastically.

"Isn't it? It was given to Granny's father, General Pinckney, by Mr. Calhoun."

"It is the only piece of silver saved from the wreck," said Mrs. Brisbane, sadly. "I could not part with it for old associations' sake. Everything else of value, silver and jewelry, was sold long ago. How many distinguished men have drunk out of that bowl!" she sighed involuntarily. "Heigh oh! It is not

good to reminisce. But I'll never forget, Dick, one dinner I attended here.

"It was before I secured my place in the Post Office, and I was visiting some Washington friends. They took me to a dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. John Thompson, who were new-comers. They had struck 'ile' and were entertaining lavishly that winter. Imagine my feelings when I saw them using my entire silver service, even to the small silver!

"I recognized our coat-of-arms, as well as the pattern of the silver. They passed it off as family heirlooms! I found out later that they had spent months collecting the pieces from different second-hand dealers in antiques. I would not have minded so much if they had not been so palpably nouveaux riches. It seemed a sacrilege! Why, they hardly knew the uses of some of the pieces."

Dick leaned over and patted her hand sympathetically.

"'Heaven sends almonds to those who have no teeth,'" he quoted. "Now, I wonder if you can tell me anything about Texas?" he added, suddenly.

"Texas!" exclaimed Mrs. Brisbane. "Not much; I've never been there myself, but I have been told that only men and mules can live in that State. The climate usually kills all the women."

"It isn't Texas in general I am interested in," chuckled Dick, "but the Gordons."

"The Gordons are Georgians, Dick."

"Not Donald Gordon, he was born in Texas."

"Now, I do recollect that Major Gordon moved to Texas just after the wah. I believe he married a

Galveston woman; and then went into politics."

"Whatever the cause," said Dick, his eyes twinkling, "he represented Texas in the Senate for years; finally died in Washington, and is interred in the Congressional Burying Ground here. Now, Mrs. Brisbane, can you tell me anything about them?"

"Not a thing, Dick, except that Senator Gordon was a man of very high temper; he nearly killed a soldier once for disobeying orders. Why do you ask?"

"I know," broke in Nancy. She had been an interested listener, and had also seen that Dick's glass was never empty. "It has something to do with the Trevor murder."

"Yes," acknowledged Dick, gravely. "I am doing my best to prove Gordon's innocence; and, hang it all! every shred of evidence I turn up, is against him."

"It was a shocking murder of a defenseless woman. I do not believe a Gordon could have done it," declared Mrs. Brisbane.

"And yet—"

"Listen to me a moment, Dick," Nancy tapped the table in her earnestness. "Perhaps I can help you. That Wednesday was my night shift at the North Exchange." Nancy was temporarily working as a central in the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company until she had taken her Civil Service examination for a Government position. "Well, about fifteen minutes after two that morning a call came for the Trevors' house."

"What? Really?"

"Yes. I don't mean the regular house telephone,

but for the Attorney General's private wire in his private office."

"What!" Dick's voice grew in volume as his astonishment increased. "Are you sure, Nancy?"

"Absolutely positive. You know the number of the telephone in the Attorney General's private office at his home is not listed in the regular book, as is his house wire. His private telephone is 'North—123'; I remember it because it is so easy; and the other is 'North—6795.'"

"But as to the time, Nancy?"

"I am certain about that, too. It was very quiet in the Exchange, and when the call came I nearly jumped out of my skin. I looked at the big wall clock directly opposite, and I saw it was fifteen minutes past two."

"Nancy, you are a wonder—a brick. But why didn't you come forward and give your evidence at the inquest?"

"Oh, I couldn't, Dick," the young girl colored painfully. "I went to work at the Exchange because we are so frightfully poor; but I—I—just couldn't face the notoriety which I feared I would be dragged into. Then again, it might not have anything to do with the terrible affair."

"Do?" echoed Dick; his tone was eloquent. "Was the telephone answered?"

"Yes, at once."

"Now, do you happen to know where the call came from?"

"Yes. It was—'Main 6.'"

Dick gazed at her too spellbound for words.

Main 6—The White House!

CHAPTER X
CAUGHT ON THE WIRES

DICK was up betimes the next morning, stopping only long enough to swallow a cup of coffee and a plate of oatmeal. Then calling a cheery good-by to Mrs. Brisbane, he banged out of the front door and down the steps in such haste that he collided violently with "Uncle" Andy Jackson, the Brisbane factotum, who was busy shoveling the snow off the steps.

"Laws, Marse Dick," groaned Uncle Andy, picking himself up carefully. "'Pears like yo' am in a hurry."

"Awfully sorry, Uncle," said Dick, helping the old man to his feet. "Here," thrusting some loose change into the ready palm, "buy some liniment for the bruises. Whew! I didn't realize it snowed so much last night."

As far as the eye could see the large, old-fashioned gardens, which surround the old houses in Georgetown, were covered with banks of snow, an unusual sight in the Capital City. In some places the drifts were waist high.

"Plenty mo' snow fo' ole Andy to shovel," grumbled the old man, who dearly loved the sound of his own voice, and seized every opportunity to talk to Dick, whom he especially admired because he belonged to "de quality." "'Pears like de sky am a-tryin' ter whitewash dis hyer wicked city. Las' night,

sah, I went to hear de Reverend Jedediah Hamilton. He sho' am a powerful preacher. He says Satan am a-knocking at de gates ob Washington; dat it am a whitened sepulcher; an' dat we all am a-gwine ter perdition. Hadn't yo' better git religion, Marse Dick?"

"Oh, I'm not worrying just now, Uncle. You see, my brother John is a minister of the Gospel, and I guess he'll intercede for me."

"'Twon't do, Marse Dick; de Good Book it say: 'Every man shall bear his own burden and every tongue shall stand on its own bottom.'"

Dick waved his hand in farewell as he plunged through the drifts to cross the street. Uncle Andy watched the tall, athletic figure out of sight; then shook his head solemnly.

"'Pears like Marse Dick am pas' prayin' fo'," he muttered. Then, hearing Mrs. Brisbane's frantic calls for him, he shouted: "Comin', ole Miss, comin'."

The street cars were blocked by the heavy fall of snow, so Dick had to walk from Georgetown to the *Star* Building, a distance of nearly two miles, consequently he was late. But after the first rush of work was over, he stole a moment to call up the White House, and asked the names of the night watchmen who were on duty in the Executive Offices on that fatal Wednesday.

"Wait a moment," answered the White House central, "and I'll find out. Hello—the men were Charlie Flynn and Tom Murray."

"Much obliged," called Dick, as he rang off. Luck was certainly with him at last. He had greatly feared that he would not get any information in regard to the mysterious telephone call without a great deal of

difficulty and delay, for “mum” was the word with all the White House employés.

But Tom Murray had been General Long’s orderly during the campaign in Cuba, and, in fact, owed his present position to the General’s influence. Dick knew where he lived, as Tom had married Peggy Macallister’s maid, Betty; and once when Betty was ill with typhoid fever, Peggy had asked Dick to go with her to Tom’s modest home on Capitol Hill.

Dick hurriedly covered his first assignment, rushed back to the office in time to get his story in the afternoon paper, then tore out again and jumped aboard a Navy Yard car. Twenty minutes later he was beating a hasty tattoo on the Murrays’ front door. Tom himself admitted him.

“Why, Mr. Tillinghast, sir! I’m mighty glad to see you. Won’t you come in?”

Dick stepped into the tiny parlor. “I’ve just stopped by for a moment, Tom. Thought you’d like to know that General Long is in town.”

Tom fell back a step in his astonishment.

“Glory be,” he shouted. “Where is he stopping, sir. That is, if he cares to see me?”

“At the New Willard. He wants to see you to-night.”

Tom’s face fell. “I can’t go, at least not to-night, sir. You see, I’m on night duty at the White House now, sir. I get off at six every morning and sleep until noon. I’m just up now, sir. Do you think the General could see me in the afternoon?”

“Sure; I’ll ask him. By the way, Tom, who answers the White House telephones at night?”

"I do, sir; leastways, I attend to the switch-board in the Executive Offices."

"Do you happen to recollect what person in the White House called up 'North—123' on February third, or rather February fourth, at two fifteen in the morning?"

Tom looked searchingly at his questioner.

"Ought I to answer that question, sir?"

"I think you should. General Long sent me here to ask you."

"May the good Lord forgive me," thought Dick, "I know Cheater will back me up."

Tom's face cleared. "Then it's all right, sir. I hesitated to answer you, sir, because—the call came from the President himself."

For a moment Dick was too aghast to speak. The President! Truly, his investigations were leading him into deep water.

"Are you quite sure, Tom?" he asked, soberly.

"Quite, sir," with military precision. "I remember the night perfectly, sir. While the White House is often called up at all hours, it ain't usual for inmates of the household to ring up outside calls after midnight."

"Had you any trouble getting your party?"

"No, sir. Central was rather slow about answering, but that was the only delay."

"Thanks, Tom, you've helped General Long a lot by telling me all this. Go and see him about six to-night on your way to the White House. You will probably catch him then. Is your wife well?"

"Yes, sir, thank you. Please tell the General I will be at the hotel without fail. Good-by, sir."

When Dick had departed, Tom walked into his kitchen with a grave face.

"I'm afraid, Betty, I talked too freely with Mr. Tillinghast."

"Nonsense," snapped Betty, whose temper was apt to get peppery when she worked over a hot fire. "Master Dick isn't the sort to get us into trouble." And that ended the discussion.

Dick plodded along the streets too absorbed in thought to notice the snow and ice. Should he, or should he not? Well, he would try anyway, so quickening his steps he hastened over to the Congressional Library and entered one of the pay-station telephone booths in the building.

"What number, please?" asked Central.

"Main 6." A few minutes' wait.

"Drop in your nickel, there's your party."

"Hello, White House, I want to speak to Secretary Burton—Hello, Burton, that you? This is Dick Tillinghast talking."

"Well, Dick, how are you?"

"Oh, so-so. Say, Burton, do you think the President would see me alone for a few minutes?" Dick heard Burton whistle. "I know he is fearfully busy with the arrival of the Grand Duke Sergius, but I swear it's important—a matter of life and death."

Burton detected the earnest note in Dick's voice, and was convinced.

"Hold the wire, old man."

Dick waited impatiently. So much depended on the answer.

"Hello, Central, don't cut me off—Burton, that you?"

"Yes. The President says he will see you at ten minutes of five, *sharp*."

"Burton, you are a trump. By-by."

Prompt to the minute, Dick appeared in the waiting room of the Executive Offices. Burton came to the door and beckoned to him.

"In with you," he whispered. "I sincerely hope your news is of sufficient importance to excuse my sending you in ahead of two irate senators," and he gave Dick's broad shoulders an encouraging pat, as the door swung open to admit him to the private office.

Dick had been frequently thrown with the President, having been one of the reporters detailed to accompany him when he toured the country before his election, but he never entered his presence without feeling the force and personality of the great American, who, with unerring hand, was steering the Ship of State through such turbulent waters.

The President straightened his tall, wiry form as Dick advanced to greet him. His large dark eyes, set deep under shaggy eyebrows, gazed rather blankly at Dick for a moment, then lighted with recognition as they shook hands.

"How are you, Mr. Tillinghast? Sit down here." The President pointed to a large arm chair close beside his desk, then he glanced at the clock. "Burton said you wished to see me alone about a matter of life and death."

“Well, yes, Mr. President; I put it that way to attract Burton’s attention.” Then, seeing a frown gathering on the rugged, heavily lined face, he hastened to add: “I came to see you about the Trevor murder.”

There was no mistaking the President’s genuine start of surprise.

“To see me! Why?”

“I wanted to ask you, sir, who it was answered the telephone when you called up the Attorney General’s private office on Thursday morning at two fifteen o’clock?”

The President leaned thoughtfully back in his chair and regarded Dick intently. Apparently what he saw in his appearance pleased him, for after a prolonged scrutiny, which Dick bore with what equanimity he could, he reached over and touched his desk bell.

“Is Secretary Bowers still in the White House?” he asked the attendant who answered his summons.

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“My compliments, and ask him to step here.”

Dick waited in silence, a good deal perturbed in spirit. What was to pay? The President had but time to gather up some loose papers and put them in his desk when the door opened and admitted his Secretary of State, James Bowers, a man known throughout the length and breadth of the land as representing all that was best in America and Americans.

“Your attendant caught me just as I was leaving, Mr. President,” he said. “I am entirely at your

service," and he bowed gravely to Dick, who had risen on his entrance.

"I won't detain you long. You know Mr. Tillinghast?"

"Yes," smiled the Secretary. "He has interviewed me on many occasions."

"Then sit here by me." The President pushed a chair toward him. "Mr. Tillinghast has come to me about the Trevor murder." The Secretary raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I leave this matter entirely in your hands, Bowers. Use your judgment in the affair. Now, Mr. Tillinghast, tell us how you found out a telephone call came from this office at that particular hour for the Trevor house."

Quickly Dick told them; and the two men followed each word with deep attention. After Dick ceased speaking, the Secretary sprang from his chair and paced the room rapidly in deep thought.

"Tillinghast," he said, stopping abruptly, "what I tell you now is strictly confidential. I am not speaking for publication."

"Mr. Secretary," replied Dick, quietly, "I give you my word of honor that I shall never make use of what you tell me."

"Good! On the whole, I am glad you came, because I was just debating whether or not to send for the Chief of Police about this very affair. Have I your permission to speak freely to Tillinghast, Mr. President."

"You have."

Secretary Bowers settled himself more comfortably in his chair, cleared his throat, and

began:

"On that Wednesday night I came here to have a secret conference about a matter of national importance. The President and I talked until long after midnight. During our discussion we found it necessary to get the Attorney General's advice on a vital law point. Knowing that Trevor often stays until daylight in his private office, as I do—" a ghost of a smile lighted his lips—"I took the chance of finding him and rang him up there first, intending, if that failed, to call his house 'phone. The President's voice and mine are much alike, and it is not surprising that Murray thought it was he calling up Mr. Trevor at that hour."

"And did he answer you?" asked Dick, breathlessly.

"No—a woman did."

Dick sat back in his chair and gazed hopelessly at the President, and then at the Secretary. Instantly his thoughts flew to Beatrice. Great Heavens! He was almost afraid to ask the next question.

"Did—did you by chance recognize her voice?"

The Secretary hesitated a moment before answering.

"She spoke with a decided foreign accent"—again he hesitated. "I called her 'Mrs. Trevor.'"

"Mrs. Trevor!" gasped Dick. For once words failed him.

"Let me describe the scene to you exactly," went on the Secretary. "I waited only a few minutes for the connection, and then I heard the faint click of the receiver being removed from the hook, then a

woman's cultivated voice asked: 'Who is eet?' I promptly replied: 'Can I speak to your husband, Mrs. Trevor?' She made no answer, but in a second the Attorney General came to the telephone, gave me the desired information, and I rang off."

In absolute silence the three men faced each other, with bewilderment and doubt written on their countenances. The long pause was broken by the Secretary.

"When I first heard of the tragedy I, like the rest of the world, thought poor Mrs. Trevor had been murdered by the burglar, Nelson. On the day the inquest was held, I received a telegram saying that my wife was dangerously ill with typhoid fever in Cambridge. She had gone there two weeks before to be with our son, who is at Harvard. I dropped everything and hastened at once to her bedside. Until the crisis was over I never left her. And so deep was my anxiety, for the doctors held out little hope that she would recover, that I neglected everything outside the sick room. I left all my business to my private secretary.

"My wife rallied wonderfully after the crisis was passed, and I returned to Washington on last night's Federal. On the trip down my secretary told me all the developments in the Trevor case. I was simply thunderstruck!"

"In his direct testimony Mr. Trevor denied being in his private office after his return from the banquet; denied having seen his wife again. He undoubtedly perjured himself," said the President, thoughtfully. "Still, even in the face of such evidence, he may be innocent of the crime. For the time being I shall give him the benefit of the doubt."

"You are right, and very just, Mr. President," exclaimed the Secretary. "This phase of the case must be sifted to the bottom in absolute secrecy. It would be ruinous to let the outside world know you even suspect your Attorney General guilty of murder. The effect would be appalling. Now, Tillinghast—" he spoke with greater emphasis—"I know you to be a man of integrity. You have already shown great skill in this affair; therefore, I am going to ask you to go and see the Attorney General as my representative, and ask him for an explanation. Then come and report to me. I could send one of the Secret Service men, but the fewer people involved in this scandal the better."

"I'll do my very best, Mr. Secretary, to merit your trust," said Dick, warmly. "But how am I to reach the Attorney General? He refuses to see any newspaper men."

"That is easily arranged," said the Secretary. "May I borrow pen and ink, Mr. President?" drawing some note paper toward him as he spoke. "I'll write a few lines asking him to see you; that will be all that is necessary."

Quickly Secretary Bowers' hand traveled over the paper; then, folding it neatly, he handed the note to Dick, saying:

"Don't fail us, Tillinghast; remember we depend on your tact and discretion. I would see Trevor myself, but my time is entirely taken up with the Grand Duke Sergius' presence in the city. He dines with the President to-night, as you doubtless know...."

"Come in," called the President, as a discreet knock interrupted the Secretary. Burton entered and

handed him a note.

"This is marked 'Immediate and Personal,' Mr. President. Recognizing the handwriting, I brought it right in."

As the President tore open the envelope and rapidly read its contents, Secretary Bowers turned to Dick, who was standing by the desk awaiting an opportunity to depart, and said quickly:

"Come and see me at the State Department tomorrow morning at nine o'clock."

The President signaled to Burton to withdraw; then he looked directly at the Secretary of State and Dick.

"This," he said, tapping the letter in his hand, "is from Mr. Trevor, tendering me his resignation as my Attorney General on the ground of ill health."

CHAPTER XI
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

A LOUD rat-a-tat-tat startled Dick as he dressed in his room that night. On opening the door, he was much surprised to find General Long standing on the threshold.

"Didn't expect to see me, did you?" asked Long, smiling at Dick's amazement. "Your very charming landlady told me I might come right up. By Jove! she has fixed you up in comfort," and he looked enviously around Dick's pleasant, home-like room. "This is something like," sinking luxuriously into a huge lounging chair.

"It's mighty good of you to look me up so soon, Chester. Sorry I can't spend the evening with you, but I must hurry along as soon as I am fully dressed," struggling to tie his cravat as he spoke.

"Don't mind me. I only dropped in to ask what you did to Tom Murray; he's in the devil of a flutter for fear he betrayed official secrets."

"Tom need not worry; he won't get into trouble. Say, old man, I simply must consult you; but first promise by all that you hold sacred you won't breathe a word of what I'm telling you."

"I swear." Long's mouth closed like a steel trap. When he spoke in that tone Dick knew he meant what he said.

"The Secretary of State asked me to keep these

facts from becoming public; but I know you can be relied on to be 'mum.'" Dick spoke slowly, weighing each word. "I must have your advice, Chester. Since I saw you last I have received incontestable proof that Trevor *did* see his wife on his return from the banquet that night, although he testified to the contrary."

Long whistled. "You think then that he had a hand in the murder?" he asked doubtfully.

"I cannot reach any other conclusion." Dick stopped a moment to check off his deductions on his fingers. "First, there is the possibility of Gordon's being Mrs. Trevor's first husband—anyway, an old lover. Secondly, he certainly was there that night. Probably Trevor returned in time to catch them together."

"Or perhaps he overheard their conversation, waited until Gordon left, then had it out with his wife," interjected Long, quickly. "He may have lost his temper—biff! Poor devil!" remorsefully. "We must not judge too hastily, Dick; we don't know what provocation he had—he may have been insanely jealous, like Othello, for instance."

"Think of having to go and ask a man why he murdered his wife—oh, Lord!—oh, damn!" Dick's lamentations changed to maledictions. To emphasize his remarks he had inadvertently used too much strength in forcing his sleeve button through his cuff, and one of the links had broken in his hand. "Here, help yourself to a cigarette," pushing a box towards Long, "while I mend this confounded button. Why aren't you dining at the White House to-night?"

"Not sufficiently urged. Nothing under a Major-General was invited to meet his Imperial Highness,

the Grand Duke. The Russians are a mighty fine looking race of men, Dick, and the Grand Duke's staff is no exception to the rule."

"Is that so? I met a very distinguished looking Russian last night, a Count de Smirnoff. He spoke our language much better than most foreigners."

"Oh, his nation are all good linguists. Is the Count a member of the Grand Duke's staff?"

"De Morny didn't tell me. By the way, we discussed the Trevor murder last night, and Count de Smirnoff suggested that the burglar may have picked up the broken end of the weapon used to kill Mrs. Trevor, and being in no immediate fear of the hangman, is holding it back to use as blackmail when he gets out of jail."

"That's not a bad theory," said Long. "Look into it, Dick. The deeper we get in this affair the more involved it becomes. At present," rising as he saw Dick pick up his overcoat and hat, "it looks as if the Attorney General were indeed the guilty man. And yet, Dick, if those three people had a scene that night, Gordon, if innocent, must suspect Trevor. Then why doesn't he speak out and clear himself?"

Dick shook his head despondently. "It's beyond me," he groaned. "Come down and see me at the office to-morrow afternoon, Chester."

"I am sorry, but I can't; for I have to escort the Grand Duke to Fort Myer. The troops stationed there are to give a special drill in his honor. But you come and dine with me at the Willard, about seven thirty; for I am most anxious to hear the outcome of your interview with Trevor."

"All right, I'll be there. Come, hurry up, Chester,

I'm behind time." So saying he hustled Long into his overcoat and out of the house.

Twenty minutes later Dick ran lightly up the Trevor steps in much tribulation of spirit. He heartily wished the night was over.

"Can I see the Attorney General, Wilkins?" he asked, as that functionary opened the door.

"No, sir. He is not at home, sir."

"Sorry, Wilkins, but I must insist on being admitted. I come from the Secretary of State. Take this note and my card up to the Attorney General and ask if he can see me."

On entering the drawing-room Dick was surprised to see Alfred Clark lounging comfortably back on the big divan near the fireplace. He glanced up with annoyance at the sound of footsteps; but, recognizing Dick, he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Good evening, Tillinghast," he said cordially. "I didn't hear the front bell ring; I must have been dozing."

"Indeed," answered Dick. What was it about the fellow he didn't like? Ah, it came to him as Clark moved forward a chair—it was the Secretary's air of proprietorship—as if he were host and Dick a tolerated intruder!

"Can I do anything for you to-night, Tillinghast?"

"No, thanks. I called to see the Attorney General."

"Ah!" Clark's exclamation and shrug were foreign in their expressiveness. "That is impossible. Mr. Trevor sees no one."

"I think he will see me," said Dick, patiently.

"I fear you are mistaken, Tillinghast. The Attorney General denies himself to all callers," Clark replied suavely. "You will really have to confide your business to me."

"That is impossible," replied Dick, shortly.

Clark flushed at his tone, and his eyes flashed.

"You forget, sir, that I am the Attorney General's confidential secretary, in fact, his representative. I would be perfectly within my rights if I denied you admittance to this house."

The hot retort on Dick's lips was checked by Wilkins' entrance.

"The Attorney General will see you, sir. Please walk into his private office."

Try as he would, Clark could not prevent a look of deep chagrin crossing his face, and Dick chuckled inwardly as he followed the butler out of the room and across the broad hall. Just before he reached the door leading into the office, he felt his nose twitching, premonitory symptoms of a sneeze, and with hasty fingers he pulled his handkerchief out of his cuff.

The mended cuff link broke and made a tinkling noise as it struck on the hearth of the open fireplace; and then, with the evil ingenuity which sometimes possesses inanimate objects, it rolled far out of sight under a suit of chain armor which hung to the left of the chimney. Dick sprang in pursuit; Mrs. Macallister had given the set to him that Christmas, and he was determined not to lose the button. So getting down on hands and knees he groped about until his fingers closed over it again; then rose hurriedly to his feet at the same time thrusting the recovered link into his

waistcoat pocket, to find himself face to face with the Attorney General.

"G—good e—evening, Mr. Attorney General," he stammered, much flustered. "I smashed my cuff link, and was hunting for the thing." And he exhibited his unfastened cuff to the Attorney General's amused gaze.

"I am sorry, Tillinghast," said he. "Wilkins, see if you can help—"

"Oh, I have the link," broke in Dick, tapping his pocket reassuringly.

"Then let us go into the office. I believe you wish to see me alone. Ah! Clark," as his secretary came out of the drawing-room, "you need not wait any longer. Stay," as Clark hastily put on his overcoat with Wilkins' assistance, "please stop on your way down Connecticut Avenue and send this night letter for me. Good night, my boy."

"Good night, sir; good night, Tillinghast," and the door banged to behind his retreating form.

After they were seated in the closed room Dick gazed in shocked surprise at the Attorney General. Never had he seen a man alter so much in so short a time. His hair and mustache were white, deep lines had formed about his mouth and eyes, and the latter had a feverish light in them which worried Dick extremely. For a moment he was at a loss how to explain his errand, but the Attorney General solved the difficulty for him.

"Secretary Bowers in his note tells me that I can trust you absolutely, and that you have confidential news of importance for my ear alone. Is it in regard to my resignation?"

"Well, partly, sir. I was with the President and the Secretary when your letter was delivered. They both wish you to reconsider your decision."

A shade of annoyance crossed Trevor's face. "I am afraid that is impossible, Tillinghast. I am an ill man, as you can see. It is physically impossible for me to carry on my work at the Department of Justice."

"Very true, sir. But could you not take a vacation only? That would set you up wonderfully."

"My mind is made up," said Trevor, stubbornly. "I intend to resign."

"The President told me, Mr. Attorney General, that he could not accept your resignation until—until—"

"Until what?" questioned Trevor, in growing surprise.

Dick, taking his courage in both hands, continued: "Until you explain your presence here with your wife shortly before she was killed."

"Are you mad?" shouted Trevor. "As I said on the witness stand, I never saw my wife after my return that night—I—"

"One moment, sir. You forget the Secretary himself talked on the telephone to both you and your wife in this room at fifteen minutes past two on Thursday morning."

The Attorney General grew so ghastly that Dick feared he would collapse in his chair.

"The telephone," he croaked. "My God! the telephone—I forgot that—" then, in uncontrollable agitation, he sprang to his feet and walked up and down, head bent, eyes on the floor.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed; but the silence between the two men remained unbroken. Dick simply could not speak, he felt as if he were torturing some dumb animal, for the look of agony on Trevor's face unnerved him. Finally the Attorney General dropped exhausted into his revolving chair.

"Tillinghast," he said, slowly, "I am miserable—miserable—" His shaking hand played for a second with his watch chain. "I thought that by taking a certain course of action I could prevent knowledge of other matters from becoming known broadcast."

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Dick, gently. "What you tell me to-night will, as far as I am concerned, be repeated to only one person—the Secretary."

"Thanks; that assurance makes it easier for me. If I had recollected about the telephone call I would have gone to the President myself; but—" a shrug completed his sentence. "Now, as I understand it, Tillinghast," he continued, "you three men think I came down here, met my wife, quarreled with her, and killed her."

"Yes, that's about it," admitted Dick, reluctantly.

"It is, I suppose, a natural inference. But the woman whom I was talking to in this room—was not my wife."

Dick started so violently that he overturned a pile of magazines lying on the desk by his elbow. He was too confused to pick them up, but sat gazing blankly at Trevor. A vulgar intrigue! He had never supposed he was that sort of man.

The Attorney General colored painfully as he read Dick's thought.

"Don't jump to conclusions," he said, harshly. "To explain matters fully I shall have to go back to my marriage to Hélène de Beaupré. We met in London, and I, like many others, fell madly in love with her. She returned my affection, and I persuaded her to marry me at once.

"She has always been a good and loving wife to me. But I found she had one fault; in fact, it became an overwhelming passion—she gambled. It seemed to be some taint in her blood. Again and again I remonstrated with her, but to no purpose. She gambled so persistently, so recklessly, and her losses were so large that, finally, I told her my income was crippled by her extravagance, and that hereafter she would have to live within a certain allowance. She realized at last that I was in earnest, and did her best to comply with my request. Would God I had never made it!" Trevor spoke with passionate feeling. "I might have known that a born gambler can never be cured or kept within bounds.

"Well, to go on with my story, I thought that she had stopped gambling, knowing that she had not overdrawn her allowance, or appealed to me for extra money. But on Monday, February 1st, I went to the Barclays' about midnight to fetch my wife home from their card party. They play bridge for high stakes in that house, and I had asked my wife to decline the invitation. She refused to do so, however, saying if I would go there for supper she would leave with me immediately afterwards. Knowing that most of the high play took place after midnight, I agreed to do as she requested.

"When I entered the Barclays' drawing-room the guests were still playing, and I went and stood silently behind my wife's chair. She was absorbed in

the play and did not notice my presence. To my unspeakable horror, I saw her deliberately cheat.

"For a moment the room swam around me, then gathering my wits I looked to see if the other players had also detected her. As my eye traveled around the table, Madame de Berriot raised her head, and I saw by her expression that she also had caught my wife in the act of cheating. For one sickening second I feared she would call everyone's attention to their table, but to my surprise, she said nothing.

"I got my wife away as quickly as possible, but I was too sick at heart to tell her of my discovery. I walked the floor for the rest of the night wondering what was the best thing for me to do.

"On my arrival at the Department Tuesday morning, I found Madame de Berriot awaiting me in my office. It was not a pleasant interview." The Attorney General smiled bitterly. "We went over the whole dirty business. She had come there to bleed me, and she did—$10,000 was her price of silence.

"I am a proud man, Tillinghast, and I could not bear to have my wife and my name coupled with dishonor. I—I could not face the scandal that would follow the exposé; therefore, I bought the woman off.

"It was a large sum, and I could not give it to her at a moment's notice. She was then on her way to Baltimore, but intended to return to Washington late on Wednesday afternoon to get her traps together, as she was leaving here for good Thursday morning on the Colonial Express. She did not wish me to call at the Embassy where she was stopping as it might cause comment; she would not accept a certified check for the same reason.

"My engagements on Wednesday were such that I

had no time free. Therefore, in desperation, I suggested she should stop here for the money. I knew my wife and Beatrice intended to go to the Bachelors', and that they never left a dance until the very end. So it was arranged that she should come here on her way from the ball about two o'clock.

"It was sheer madness to yield to a blackmailer, I know, but, Tillinghast, I was half wild by that time, and lost my head; and bitterly have I rued it since." Trevor sighed drearily. "I came home that night, as I testified at the inquest, and went directly to my room, tiptoeing past my wife's door, for I was desperately afraid of awakening her. I threw myself down on the lounge and, overcome by weariness, fell into a troubled sleep.

"Some time later I awoke with a start, struck a match and glanced at the clock; it was just five minutes of two. I raised the shade and looked out of the window. The Embassy was not far away. Suddenly I saw a woman's figure coming slowly down 20th Street. I watched her cross the street, and then hurried downstairs as noiselessly as I could and admitted her. We went at once to the private office, and there I discovered that I had left my wallet containing the money in my bedroom, and I hastened back upstairs to get it. Just as I was returning the telephone rang. Madame de Berriot, thinking the noise might be overheard, removed the receiver, but instead of putting it on the table answered the call; then beckoned to me. I talked to the Secretary; then rang off. Immediately afterwards I gave Madame de Berriot her money in gold certificates, and escorted her to the door. That is the last I ever saw of her," he added, leaning wearily back in his chair.

For some minutes Dick sat regarding Trevor in silence. Then he roused himself.

“Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“No; go ahead.”

“Do you think anyone could have been in hiding in this room while you were here?”

“I think not. Madame de Berriot was as nervous as a cat, she kept glancing in every direction.”

“Was the safe open or closed?”

“The outside closet door was closed, so the one to the safe had to be shut.”

“Why did you not keep the $10,000 in the safe?”

“I had forgotten the combination.” Then, as he saw Dick’s look of incredulity, he added: “I never can remember the complicated numbers; so for convenience I wrote the word ‘safe’ and the numbers of the combination down in a small memorandum book when I first took this house. I seldom open the safe as Clark attends to it for me.”

“Why didn’t you ask your secretary for the combination, or look it up in your book?”

“I forgot to ask Clark until after he had gone,” explained the Attorney General patiently, “and when I looked for the book it was not in its place.”

“Indeed. Where do you usually keep it?”

The Attorney General put his hand on the beveled front of his massive, flat-topped desk.

“This looks like a solid piece of mahogany,” he said, “but in fact it is a secret drawer. To unlock it you open this upper left hand drawer as far as it will

go. There is a round hole in its back partition, and by putting your hand through it you can touch the spring." He illustrated his words as he spoke, and the small secret drawer slid noiselessly open. Dick examined the mechanism with care.

"How many people can open this drawer besides yourself?" he asked.

The Attorney General considered a moment before replying.

"I am positive only Mrs. Trevor, my daughter, and myself can do so," he declared, finally. "My daughter bought the desk at an auction in New York, and gave it to me shortly after we moved here."

"Did you go immediately upstairs after Madame de Berriot's departure?" asked Dick, continuing his inquiries.

"I did; going straight to my room. Everything upstairs was perfectly quiet. I went to bed at once, and fell sound asleep shortly after my head touched the pillow." Then, as Dick rose, he added quickly: "Tell the Secretary everything. Now that I know I may be suspected of murder, I withdraw my resignation. I will stay here and fight it out. Tell him, also—" his voice rang out clearly, impressively —"that, as God is my witness, I know nothing of my wife's murder!"

CHAPTER XII
BLIND CLEWS

"AND what is your opinion, Tillinghast?" asked the Secretary. They were sitting alone the next morning in his private office. He had listened attentively to Dick's detailed account of his interview with the Attorney General.

"I believe Mr. Trevor's statement," he answered, looking squarely at Secretary Bowers.

"And so do I," heartily agreed the other. "Trevor had to buy Madame de Berriot's silence. If the scandal had gotten out it would have meant social ostracism, not only for the guilty woman, but for Beatrice Trevor and her father as well. It is another case of the innocent suffering with the guilty. Now, Tillinghast, do you know any facts about Mr. Gordon's connection with this affair which have not been made public?" Seeing Dick's hesitancy, he added, "Murders are usually outside my province, I know, but this one touches the President closely; first one of his aides is suspected, then his Attorney General is dragged into the affair. If innocent, they must be cleared as quickly as possible. Come, sir, I must have an answer."

"You are right, Mr. Secretary," replied Dick. "I only hesitated fearing I might get Gordon into further trouble." Then, in a few words, he repeated what General Long had told him.

"Whew!" whistled the Secretary. "That certainly complicates matters. Do you think Trevor knew of Gordon's former infatuation for his wife?"

"Indeed, sir, I was afraid to speak of Gordon," confessed Dick. "I didn't know what effect it might have. Mr. Trevor looked so desperately ill and worn."

The Secretary nodded comprehendingly. "I am going to send for him to lunch with me to-day to tell him that he must on no account resign just now, and I will try and find out how much he does know of Mrs. Trevor's old love-affair." He paused a moment, then resumed: "There are two things which I think have a bearing on this case."

"What are they, Mr. Secretary?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"First—find out who removed the Attorney General's memorandum book. Secondly—while everyone has tried to prove who entered the Trevor house, no one has sought to find out when a certain member of the household left there."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, what time did the private secretary leave the house, and where did he spend the evening?"

"By Jove! I never thought of him."

"Look up those two things. I feel sure they will repay you." Then, as Dick picked up his hat and cane, "Tillinghast, you have acted with great discretion in this affair, and I feel convinced you will carry your investigations to a successful issue. If I can be of service to you at any time, come and see me."

Thanking the Secretary warmly for his

encouraging words, Dick hastened out of the room. At the *Star* Office, he found a note awaiting him from Peggy. She asked him to come and see her that afternoon and "report progress."

"'Report progress,'" groaned poor Dick. "I'm damned if I can. Your Uncle Dudley's up a tree for sure, Peggy darling, but he'll do some tall climbing before he gives up, you bet."

"Say, son, the City Editor wants you P. D. Q.," called Dan Conner. "Stop mooning and hump yourself."

Taking the hint, Dick fled upstairs to the city room on the double quick.

"Morning, Dick," said Colonel Byrd. "Gibson has just sent word that he is sick, so you will have to take his place at the Capitol. Get down there early, as there are some important committee meetings to cover. By the way, any further news about the Trevor murder?"

"Not now, sir. There may be some new developments shortly, though. Can I get off if I hear of anything turning up in that quarter?"

"Sure; drop everything and run. Get your stuff in as quick as you can." And the busy editor turned back to his desk.

The clock was just striking half past five when Dick, after an eventful day at the Capitol, reached Mrs. Macallister's hospitable mansion on F Street. The old house with its Colonial architecture looked like a relic of antebellum days, for standing as it did

well back from the sidewalk, with two fine old elms on either side of the brick walk, it had an individuality of its own. A central hall ran through it, the drawing-room and dining-room being to the left of the front door, while the large library and billiard room were on the other side. The ceilings were very high, which made the house most comfortable in hot weather. That fact, combined with her beautiful rose garden, induced Mrs. Macallister to stay in the city until July.

True to the traditions of old Washington, Mrs. Macallister kept her “Fridays at Home” from November until June. The fashion of having only four days in a month did not suit her hospitable mind, and those who put first and third Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, as the case might be, on their visiting cards, drove her nearly frantic. “I was always a poor mathematician,” she informed one of her friends. “I know two and two make four, but this dot and carry one business is beyond me.” Therefore, she usually flung the offending pasteboards into the scrap basket and went serenely on her way, returning calls when it suited her pleasure and convenience.

Another innovation to which she seriously objected was having tea served in her drawing-room. Five o’clock tea at home in the bosom of her family was one thing; but having a small tea table, littered with cups and saucers and plates, stuck in one corner with an unhappy matron presiding over it was quite a different matter. Therefore, every Friday the dining-room table was regularly set and covered with tempting dishes of all descriptions; and Peggy poured tea at one end, and one of her numerous friends was always asked to take care of the hot chocolate at the other.

The callers had thinned out by the time Dick arrived, only about a dozen people, mostly men, were sitting comfortably around the table. His heart sank when he saw de Morny in close attendance upon Peggy. To his jealous eyes they appeared to be on very confidential terms indeed, which completed his misery. Mrs. Macallister beckoned to him to sit by her, so, casting a lingering glance at Peggy, he obediently carried his cup and saucer to her side of the table.

“Any further developments in the Trevor murder, Dick?” Mrs. Macallister asked him, after a few minutes’ chat about other matters.

Her words were overheard by a tall, showily dressed woman sitting across the table from them, and she leaned over and joined in the conversation.

“Yes, do tell us, Mr. Tillinghast,” she begged, with an ingratiating smile. Matilda Gleason was one of four sisters who lived in a handsome palace on Columbia Road. It was rumored to have cost in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand dollars; as to the architecture, the Gleasons *said* it was Early English, but having employed three architects before the house was completed, the effect was more or less startling. It had been nicknamed “Gilded Misery.”

Where the Gleasons had come from was a mooted question, but they had taken a good many staid Washingtonians into camp by the splendor of their entertainments. Mrs. Macallister had never called upon them, but in an unwary moment the chairman of the Board of Lady Managers of the Children’s Hospital had put Miss Gleason on the same committee with Mrs. Macallister, and the former had seized the opportunity to call that afternoon on the pretext of discussing business pertaining to the

Hospital.

“Why, no news at all,” answered Dick, cautiously. He knew Miss Gleason’s love of scandal, and that the sisters had been nicknamed “Envy, Hatred, Malice, and All Uncharitableness” by one long-suffering matron, who had been their victim on several occasions.

“When does the case go to the Grand Jury, Dick,” called Peggy, from her end of the table.

“In about ten days, I think.”

“I hope Mr. Gordon’s sentence will be all that the law allows,” said Miss Gleason. It was apparent to everyone where the shoe pinched. All Washington, which in some ways is like an overgrown village, knew of her relentless and unsuccessful pursuit of Gordon during the month that he had been stationed at the White House, and several of the men present, who had suffered from the same cause, smiled to themselves.

“It is not at all certain he committed the crime,” said Mrs. Macallister, freezingly.

“He virtually admitted it,” retorted Miss Gleason.

“We look on a man as innocent until proven guilty, you know, Miss Gleason,” answered Dick, quietly.

“Well, if he isn’t guilty, who is?” asked Miss Gleason.

“The burglar,” promptly chimed in Peggy.

“Nonsense, my dear; why should such a person use a hat-pin when he had his revolver, and where would he get such a thing?”

For a moment Peggy was at a loss for a reply. She had the same doubt herself, but she was determined not to give in to Miss Gleason, “horrid old cat.” Count de Morny, all unconsciously, came to her rescue. The other guests were silently listening to the discussion.

“I sink Madame Trevor haf stick herself wiz ze pin,” he volunteered, struggling with the *langue terrible*, which he had never been able to master. “But yes, Monsieur,” catching Dick’s incredulous stare, “did not ze doctaire say it was possible for one who was left handed to strike herself the blow?”

“How do you know Mrs. Trevor was left handed?” demanded Miss Gleason loudly.

“I haf played ze cards wiz her most often,” answered de Morny, simply.

“But why should Mrs. Trevor commit suicide?” asked Dick, unbelievingly.

De Morny shrugged his shoulders, and answered his question with another: “Why should Monsieur Gordon kill her?”

“That’s right,” declared Captain McLane, of the U.S. Marine Corps. “Why should he? I served three years on board the same cruiser with Donald Gordon, and there isn’t a more honorable, lovable fellow in the Service. It is absolutely unbelievable that he could perpetrate so ghastly a crime.”

As Dick looked across at Peggy he caught Count de Smirnoff’s eye. The Russian was sitting between his hostess and Miss Gleason. For the first time he joined in the conversation.

“Your theory is weak, Henri,” he said, mildly. “Why should a young and beautiful woman, who

enjoys health, wealth, and a happy home, kill herself?"

"You nevaire can tell about ze ladies," retorted de Morny, obstinately. "Zey are—what you say—'a law unto themselves, and easily wrought-over and deviled up. Zey make trifles into mountains."

"Granting that Mrs. Trevor might have had a motive for suicide," said Dick, smiling at the excited Frenchman, "it was utterly impossible for a dead woman to lock herself in the safe."

"Could she not have killed herself in the safe after shutting the door?" inquired de Smirnoff.

Dick shook his head. "Possibly you do not recollect that witnesses testified at the inquest that her left arm was pressed tightly against the door-jamb, supporting her weight."

"She might have fallen forward into that position."

"I hardly think it likely. Mr. Clark, who was the first inmate of the household to find Mrs. Trevor, testified that her body was literally wedged into the safe."

"You have but his word for it."

A peculiar tone in the speaker's voice caused Dick to glance sharply at him, but he learned nothing from the Russian's face. It was expressionless. Before Dick could pursue his questions, Miss Gleason threw herself into the conversation.

"How is that dear Mr. Clark bearing up under this terrible tragedy?" she asked, addressing Peggy directly.

"He looked very well the last time I saw him,"

said the latter, a twinkle of mischief in her deep blue eyes.

“I am so glad to hear it. You know, dear Mrs. Macallister, he is such a delightful man to have around. He always looks after one so attentively. I never want for anything when he is in the room; and then he is so handsome, so cultivated! It is a dreadful blow having him in mourning.”

“I wasn’t aware he is in mourning,” said Peggy, surprised. “Has he lost a relative?”

“Oh, no. But of course he will accept no invitations now, on account of his engagement to Beatrice Trevor.”

“What!” Peggy nearly overturned the urn in her excitement. “Miss Gleason, you are entirely mistaken. Beatrice never was engaged to Mr. Clark.”

“Indeed? Mrs. Trevor led me to suppose otherwise. From what she said I gathered the engagement was to be announced shortly. It is not surprising I thought it a love match,” she continued, catching a glimpse of Peggy’s indignant expression. “He is desperately attentive to her, and I see them together all the time.”

“Speaking of seeing people,” broke in Captain McLane, “have you seen Bertie Lee since he and his wife returned from their honeymoon? He came into the club the other night looking absolutely woe-begone.”

“He did, indeed,” laughed Dick. “I couldn’t help thinking of the lines:

‘“When I think on what I are
And what I uster was

I feel I threw myself away
Without sufficient cos!’”’

“They suit him to a ‘T,’” agreed McLane, helping himself to a glass of cherry bounce.

“You know the Courtland Browns, do you not, Mrs. Macallister,” asked Miss Gleason, pulling on her gloves preparatory to departing. “I hear they are going to air their marital troubles in court, but it’s a long story, and I must go. Good-by, dear Mrs. Macallister, such a delightful afternoon. Good-by, everybody, don’t get up?” She waved her hand to them all and tripped out of the room.

“‘The wicked flee when no man pursueth,’” quoted Mrs. Macallister, a naughty twinkle in her eye.

“Have you heard of the dinner the Gleasons gave at which they separated the goats from the sheep?” asked Captain McLane. “They served Veuve Cliquot at one table, and American champagne at the other.”

“Oh, why do we put up with such ill-bred behavior?” cried Peggy, impulsively.

“My dear, you are wrong,” said Mrs. Macallister. “The Gleasons belong to a large class who show ‘the unconscious insolence of conscious wealth,’ as one of our statesmen aptly puts it.”

“Miss Gleason is very highly colored for a woman of her years,” said de Smirnoff, gravely.

“Highly colored!” exclaimed Mrs. Macallister. “It’s a wonder she doesn’t die of painter’s colic. Must you go?” as her guests rose from the table, and she walked with them into the drawing-room.

It was some few minutes before the other callers

started on their way, and Dick listened with what patience he could muster to their interminable good-bys. But Peggy soon joined him in the drawing-room.

"Now, sir, give an account of yourself," she said, with mock severity. "You haven't been near me since the ball—" a sudden recollection caused her to blush hotly, and Dick thought what a lovely, dainty bit of femininity she was. Her shimmering crêpe de chine Princess dress of sapphire blue showed up her blonde beauty in a way to tantalize any man, let alone poor Dick, who was already hopelessly in the toils.

Dick promptly lost his head. "Peggy," he stammered. "Dearest—be—"

"What are you two talking about?" asked Mrs. Macallister, coming suddenly back into the room.

"Er—nothing," gasped Dick, who had a wholesome dread of incurring her displeasure. Having a very modest opinion of himself, he feared she would bitterly oppose his suit. "I was just going to ask Peggy about Alfred Clark and Beatrice Trevor. Was there ever anything between them, Peggy?"

"Well, really, Dick!—"

"I know, Peggy, I know you won't break a confidence; but indeed it is important that I know."

Peggy debated for a moment while Mrs Macallister looked thoughtfully at them. What were those two young people up to? It behooved her to find out.

"Then, I think I'd better tell you, Dick; particularly as I'm not breaking any confidence. Alfred Clark *is* devoted to Beatrice, and I overheard him making desperate love to her at their house on Tuesday night, or rather Wednesday morning. I was

searching for Beatrice to say good-by and walked in upon them in the private office. You know it was a very large party, and the entire first floor was thrown open to accommodate the guests. Beatrice seemed glad of the interruption, but Mr. Clark looked as black as a thunder cloud. I rather enjoyed his discomfiture," and Peggy laughed at the recollection. "One gets so tired of his perpetual smile."

"Do you think Miss Trevor returns his affection?"

Peggy looked troubled. "Beatrice is very reserved," she said. "She seldom speaks of men's attentions to her, even to me, her best friend. If you had asked me that question a month ago I would have said positively, 'No'—but lately, Beatrice, without actually encouraging Mr. Clark, has allowed him to be with her more than formally."

"Then you think—?"

"I don't know what I think," pettishly.

"Was this supper given the night before the murder?"

"Yes. Madame Bernhardt was the guest of honor."

"Was Gordon there by chance?"

"Oh, yes. He took me out to supper and was just as jolly and nice as he could be."

"I am sorry to interrupt you young people," called Mrs. Macallister from the doorway. She had strolled out into the hall to speak to her maid. "But I must remind Peggy that she has to dress for a dinner at the Pattersons'."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Dick, in dismay, glancing at his watch. "I had no idea it was so late. Do forgive me, Mrs. Macallister, for staying so long."

"I will, provided you promise to come and dine with us on Wednesday next, at eight o'clock."

Peggy's eyes seconded the invitation, and Dick accepted so joyfully that Mrs. Macallister's eyes danced wickedly. "Count de Smirnoff is very agreeable," she said, as Peggy left the room, "and I am indebted to Count de Morny for bringing him to see me. They had been to the drill at Fort Myer, and the Russian gave a most entertaining account of it. It is a relief to talk to him after struggling with Count de Morny's broken English."

"It is indeed," agreed Dick, heartily. "Poor de Morny certainly murders the King's English."

"I asked Count de Smirnoff to call again," pursued Mrs. Macallister. "I like him, and we have many mutual friends."

"How long is he going to be here?"

"Until the Grand Duke returns to New York. Good night, Dick; come and see us soon again."

CHAPTER XIII
THE THREAT

ON that same afternoon Beatrice sat in the library gazing with troubled eyes at a letter lying open in her lap. Suddenly she tore it into shreds and flung the pieces into the open fire.

"How dare he?" she exclaimed aloud.

"Beg pardon, Miss Beatrice," said Wilkins, patiently. He had already addressed her three times.

"What is it?" asked Beatrice, for the first time aware of his presence.

"Detective Hardy is at the telephone, miss. He wishes to know if you can see him this afternoon."

"No, I cannot." She shivered slightly. "Tell him, Wilkins, that I am lying down, but that I will see him to-morrow about this time. I am not at home to anyone to-day."

"Very good, miss."

Just as Wilkins hung up the telephone receiver, the front bell rang so loudly that in the library Beatrice paused in her rapid pacing back and forth to listen. She heard voices raised in a heated altercation. "Some more reporters," she thought, shrugging her shoulders nervously. She threw herself on the lounge and took up her embroidery.

"Well, here I am," said a heavy bass voice from

the doorway. Beatrice glanced up in surprise, and saw Mrs. Curtis, wife of the Secretary of War, standing on the threshold. Wilkins' flushed and unhappy countenance could be seen over her shoulder. It was not often that he was out-maneuvered as a watch-dog. "Your servant said you were out, but I knew he was *lying*, so just walked right by him. I simply had to see you, Beatrice," kissing her affectionately.

"And I'm very glad to see you, Mrs. Curtis," answered Beatrice, warmly, as she helped her off with her wraps.

"Joe said you wouldn't want to see me," went on Mrs. Curtis, picking out a comfortable chair and seating her two hundred odd pounds in it very gingerly. "Joe also said I must not allude to your troubles—Mercy on us!"—greatly embarrassed —"well, the murder's out—good gracious!"

Her consternation was so ludicrous that Beatrice smiled as she pulled a chair forward. Mrs. Curtis' faculty for making "breaks" was well known among her friends.

Short of stature, her weight made her waddle when she walked, and no art of any dressmaker could give her a waist line. Boasting as she did of a long line of ancestors, whose names were illustrious in American history, she considered she could do as she pleased, live where she pleased, and associate with whom she pleased. Her manners could not always be relied on; they were apt to vary with the state of her digestion. Abrupt and often overbearing at times, she had, however, two traits of character shared by few—loyalty and the courage of her convictions.

She had always been fond of Beatrice, and some recent gossip about the Trevors coming to her ears that afternoon had made her very angry. She championed their cause at once, to the consternation of the two worthy women who, having repeated the gossip, wilted under her indignant glance. Hence the determined assault on the Trevors' front door.

"Tea!" she exclaimed, overhearing Beatrice's order to Wilkins. "My dear, don't have it on my account. I detest the stuff. A glass of sherry and a biscuit will do me more good than anything else you can offer."

"How is the Secretary?" asked Beatrice, placing the decanter and biscuits which had been quickly forthcoming, before her guest.

"Very well, barring an attack of gout. I told him it was a case of suppressed kicking against the powers that be on Capitol Hill. I met your father on the street this morning. He looks dreadfully, poor man. Is there any truth in this rumor of his resigning?" casting a keen glance at the unconscious girl.

"No truth at all," Beatrice answered emphatically. "We may both go to Atlantic City for a week, but that is the only time father will be away from his office until June. I can't imagine how such a report started."

"Washington is a hotbed of rumors always," retorted Mrs. Curtis. "What people don't know, they make up. But I did not come here to talk about my neighbors' shortcomings, but to ask if you won't go motoring with me as soon as the condition of the streets permits. You need to be out in the fresh air," and she patted Beatrice's thin cheeks. The somber black garb enhanced her pallor, but for all that Mrs.

Curtis decided in her own mind that she had seldom seen her look more lovely. “If that man has been playing fast and loose with her affections,” she thought, “I’ll—I’ll give him a piece of my mind.” It was no idle threat. Those who had experienced a piece of her gray matter would rather have faced a Gatling gun; at least, the end came swiftly.

“I’d love to go with you, Mrs. Curtis.”

“Good. And you’ll come back and dine with us?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t like to, just yet, because of our deep—” for the life of her she could not say grief —“mourning,” she supplemented.

“Tut! No one stops to think of that, nowadays.” Suddenly realizing that she might be treading on rather painful ground for Beatrice, Mrs. Curtis pulled herself up short. “I’ll take another glass of sherry after all, for I am simply exhausted. Ever since three o’clock I’ve done nothing but peddle cards from house to house.”

“Done what?” asked Beatrice, in blank amazement.

“Peddle cards—visiting cards. I have a calling list as long as the Washington Monument. It’s perfectly fearful. First they call; you call; they call, and so it goes, back and forth, battledore and shuttlecock.”

“It is a treadmill,” agreed Beatrice, laughing. “It is a pity someone doesn’t open a clearing house for callers, it would simplify matters, particularly for the official set.”

“The habit is just as bad among the Cave Dwellers (old Washingtonians),” she explained in parenthesis. “*They* even make tea calls! I work like a slavey, and yet it’s all I can do to make my bread and butter

ones. By the way, did you go to the Constables' dinner dance two weeks ago?"

"No," answered Beatrice, interested. "I heard it was a feast."

"A feast? It was a feed! One hundred and fifty dinner guests, and fifty extra couples for the cotillion afterwards. The favors were beautiful, so beautiful that there was great rivalry to get them, and later in the evening it was noised around that the souvenir favors were twenty dollar gold pieces. Anyway, that particular favor was given out in cardboard boxes, and none of the men would give them away to a girl until they investigated them first for fear they wouldn't get one in return."

"What were they?" asked Beatrice, greatly diverted.

"Oh, pieces of handsome jewelry. By the way, I saw Margaret Macallister there flirting outrageously. That nice Mr. Tillinghast is very attentive to her."

"He has been in love with her for years. But Peggy flouts him, as she does all the rest."

"To take up with a broken stick in the end, I suppose. Well, it's a pity young Tillinghast is wasting his time. Mrs. Macallister would never consent to her marrying a poor man when a title is in sight."

"You are wrong, Mrs. Curtis," said Beatrice, politely but positively. "Mrs. Macallister is a woman of the world, not a worldly woman. She is devoted to her granddaughter, and would not let money considerations interfere with Peggy's future happiness."

"Still, my dear, Count de Morny is a matrimonial prize. Perhaps he will win her after all, the diplomats

have such charming, delightful manners—a great contrast to our men."

"Quite true, Mrs. Curtis; but personally give me an American every time. Our men may not know parlor tricks, but they are tender, loyal and brave." Beatrice spoke with unwonted feeling.

"Hoity-toity, child, don't get so excited. I meant no particular criticism of our men. Haven't I a dear old bear at home, whom I'd positively *hate* if he wasn't an American. Mercy on us, it's nearly six o'clock, I must run along. Good-by, my dear," kissing Beatrice with unusual tenderness. "Keep a good heart." And she bustled out of the house.

Beatrice walked rather slowly back to the library. She was deeply touched as well as surprised by Mrs. Curtis' blunt kindness. "From those we expect the least, we get the most," she thought bitterly, while gathering up her workbag preparatory to going to her room.

"May I come in for a moment?" asked a voice from the doorway. Beatrice glanced with some astonishment at the speaker, and answered quietly:

"Why, certainly, Mr. Clark."

"Your father has just telephoned that he is detained at the White House, and will not be back until late." He stopped speaking, and fingered the table ornaments; then burst out: "Miss Beatrice, why do you not take better care of yourself?"

Beatrice flushed. "I am stronger than I look. You must not always judge by appearances."

Clark shook his head. "It does not require much intelligence to see that you are nearly worn out.

Why," leaning a little closer, "your eyes are actually red from crying."

"You are not very complimentary," said Beatrice, vexedly, biting her lip, "and," drawing herself up, "just a trifle personal."

"You mean familiar?"

Beatrice made no answer.

"Well, I plead guilty. Do not be angry with me. I am only personal because I cannot bear to see you ill —suffering."

"Indeed, Mr. Clark, you are mistaken," she answered lightly. "There is nothing whatever the matter with me, except the physical exhaustion which naturally follows such a tragedy. A good sleep would be my best tonic. I am going upstairs now to rest before dinner. Ring for Wilkins if you wish anything."

As she moved towards the door Clark put out his hands beseechingly.

"Don't go; stay just a moment. I so seldom see you now. Why do you avoid me?"

"*You* ask me that?"

"Yes," steadily.

"Your own conscience can answer better than I."

"It tells me only of my love for you."

"You must have it well under control then."

Clark's dark eyes flamed. "You doubt my love, my devotion, after all these months?"

Beatrice faced him squarely, her face showing white and drawn in the cold electric light.

"Do you call it 'love' to torment me day after day with unwelcome attentions; to use my stepmother as a lever against me; to poison my father's affection for me with lying tales? Do you think *that* a way to win a woman?"

Clark's handsome face paled under Beatrice's accusing eyes.

"I deny your charges," he said, keeping his self-control with difficulty.

"What is the use?" Beatrice sighed wearily. "It was owing entirely to your influence that my home became unendurable. Mrs. Trevor did everything in her power to force me to accept you."

Under his breath, Clark muttered a remark that was not complimentary to the dead woman.

"Beatrice," he said, gently, "in your sheltered life you know little of the temptations, of the evil of this world. Before I came to your father, I had knocked about from pillar to post and been thrown with all sorts and conditions of men and women. The least said about the latter the better." He smiled unpleasantly. "Then I met you, so kind, so courteous to the poor secretary. Is it any wonder that I lost my head, and built castles in the air? As week followed week my admiration for you changed to passionate love. God knows, you never gave me any encouragement. But I have hoped on, my starved heart feeding on every stray crumb of attention that you showed me.

"Beatrice, Beatrice, look at me." He flung back his head, shaking his black hair off his broad forehead, his handsome face alight with feeling; and he drew his well-knit, slender figure to his full height. "Am I deformed? Am I hateful to look upon? My darling,

my dear, dear one, give me but a chance."

Beatrice's face softened. He was making it very hard for her. As she hesitated, he caught the look of pity in her beautiful eyes, mistook it, and springing forward clasped her in his arms, showering frantic kisses on her brow, face and lips.

Desperately Beatrice struggled to free herself. With superhuman strength she thrust him from her.

"You coward—you coward!" she cried.

Clark stood a short distance from her, panting a little from his emotions.

"You coward," reiterated Beatrice, "to take advantage of a defenseless woman!"

Slowly the hot blood ebbed from Clark's face, and his eyes gleamed wickedly.

"Take care," he said. "I admit I forgot myself; but God! you don't know how I've longed to hold you in my arms; to feel your heart beating against mine. It was sheer madness; but the look in your dear eyes went to my head like wine. I thought I had won."

"Do you think that such a cur as you can win an honest woman's love?"

"Stop! Don't go too far. I come of a race that never forgets an insult. My mother was a Neapolitan." He drew a long breath. "That one moment was worth your hate."

"My hate!" echoed Beatrice. "Say rather my loathing!" And she drew her handkerchief across her lips as if to wipe out the burning kisses he had showered upon her.

Clark saw the gesture and read its meaning. The

fierce anger in his eyes almost made her quail.

"So," he said, as soon as he could speak; "so I am not good enough to touch you—" He laughed insultingly. "Bah! you are not worth my love."

Shaken and outraged as she was, Beatrice faced him proudly.

"This scene has gone far enough," she said. "Go!"

"Go? Yes, I'll go." Clark fairly shook with rage as he bent towards her. "But be sure of one thing: I'll get even, although it ruins me. Oh, I can do it, too—" seeing her look of disdain—"for—I know your secret!"

With ashen face and fast beating heart, Beatrice stood transfixed gazing at Clark's retreating figure. As the library door slammed to behind him, she staggered rather than walked to the lounge and threw herself face down upon it.

CHAPTER XIV
HAND AND PIN

"AND so you are no nearer clearing poor Gordon than you were twenty-four hours ago?" said Long, thoughtfully.

"Exactly," answered Dick, glumly. The two friends were sitting in Long's room at the New Willard, and Dick had been giving an account of his efforts to straighten out the tangled threads of the Trevor mystery. He was tired in body, and discouraged in mind. Even the fragrant Havana he was smoking gave him no comfort. Then his teeth came together with a snap, and he threw back his head defiantly. "I refuse to give up. I'll find out the truth if it takes me years!"

"Bully for you, old man. I wish I could help you."

"After all, the evidence against Gordon is simply circumstantial," argued Dick.

"Many men have been convicted on that alone; and these against Gordon are pretty damning," commented Long. "We have already established a motive for the crime."

"Hold on. Clark's statement of Mrs. Trevor's marriage to Gordon has never been substantiated. He simply saw them—"

"Applying for a license. Quite true; but there is one fact you cannot overlook. Gordon was infatuated

with the murdered woman; for that I can vouch. He knew her intimately in London; and yet, you say they greeted each other as strangers when they met here three years later."

"A lot can happen in that time."

"Very true. But why were they not consistent in their behavior? Outwardly posing as mere acquaintances, Mrs. Trevor made an appointment with Gordon at a most unconventional hour when she *knew* her husband would be absent. Do you think she would have run the risk of compromising herself if some vital interest had not been at stake?"

"No."

"Obviously they quarreled—what about we have yet to find out—and the murder followed."

Dick shook his head in dissent. "I cannot reconcile the perpetrator of so frightful a deed with the Gordon I have known and admired."

"Mrs. Trevor probably goaded him past human endurance, and he struck her in a moment of ungovernable rage."

"Where did he get the weapon?"

"Very likely Mrs. Trevor left her hat-pin in her husband's office some time during the day, and forgot about it. Gordon may have picked it up, and toyed with it, all unconscious of the use he could put it to until the blind moment came."

"It may have been no murder at all," exclaimed Dick. "Perhaps Mrs. Trevor tripped, and Gordon, forgetful of the pin in his hand, tried to catch her and accidentally pierced her side in a vital spot."

"Then how did her dead body get into the safe?"

"Ask me something easy," groaned Dick. "Perhaps Gordon, fearing his story of an accident would not be believed, thrust her in there and fled, thinking he would not then be connected with the affair."

"How did Gordon get the safe open?"

"Possibly Mrs. Trevor opened the safe before he got there."

"Did she know the combination?"

"The Attorney General declares that only he and Clark knew it."

The room telephone rang loudly, and Long hastened to answer it. "Hello! Yes, at the 'phone. Yes; he's here—all right." He hung up the receiver. "It's a note for you, Dick, so I told the clerk to send it right up."

"Thanks. Secretary Bowers advised me to find out the whereabouts of Clark on the night of the third," pursued Dick, tossing his cigar stub into the ash receiver, "but up to now I've been so busy I have not had a chance."

"That's not a bad idea— Come in," called Long, as a knock sounded on his door. A district messenger boy entered.

"Mr. Tillinghast?" he asked. Long motioned to Dick. "Sign here, sir," and he extended his book and the letter at the same time.

"How did you know Mr. Tillinghast was here?" asked Long, idly, as Dick hurriedly scrawled his name in the place designated.

"The lady at his house told me he was dining here with you, sir; and as the Attorney General said it must be delivered at once, I came right here. I've

already been paid, sir, thankee, sir, good night," and, taking back his book, the messenger departed.

"I have so many hurry calls that I always tell Mrs. Brisbane where I am to be found when I dine out," explained Dick, tearing open his note. "Hello! the Attorney General wants to see me on 'most important business' to-night, if possible. I wonder what has turned up? Will you excuse me, Chester, if I hurry along?"

"Sure. It looks as if things might be getting exciting. I wonder if Trevor hasn't some clew; some person in mind whom he suspects?"

"He swears he hasn't."

"Could it be that Mrs. Trevor overheard his interview with the Frenchwoman, became alarmed at the prospect of discovery as a card cheat and committed suicide?"

"That's what de Morny suggested yesterday. By gracious! I wonder if he knew she cheated at cards?"

"If he played much with her, he may have discovered it," answered Long, dryly. "Who is this Count?"

"One of the attachés of the French Embassy," explained Dick, struggling into his overcoat. "He and Mrs. Trevor did play often together, for I have seen them. Can't afford to play auction myself, but I drop in for supper at many of the card parties."

"There is the same objection to the theory of suicide as to that of accidental death—how did her body get into the safe?"

"Trevor might have placed her there, if he knew she killed herself, to conceal the fact and make

people think it a murder. Otherwise she could not have been buried in consecrated ground. They are Roman Catholics, you know."

"He told you that he had forgotten the combination, and couldn't open the safe."

"Somebody must be lying," answered Dick, with conviction. "Coming?" as Long started for the open door.

"Yes; I am going down to the lobby." The two men left the room together.

Wilkins was expecting Dick, and showed him at once into the private office where the Attorney General was sitting.

"Good evening, Tillinghast. It is good of you to come," said he, warmly. "I want to see you particularly. Sit down and I will explain."

Dick took the chair pushed toward him, and waited for the Attorney General to begin.

"My nerve is not what it was," said Trevor. "It has been badly shaken by the tragic event through which I have just passed. Ordinarily I would not pay any attention to an anonymous letter. But I confess this one has upset me."

He opened the secret drawer and took from it a soiled sheet of paper. "Read this, and tell me what you think of it."

Dick's eyes opened wide with astonishment as he perused the badly written scrawl.

> If you prosecute the Fabriani Merger as being in violation of the Sherman Act, you seal your own Death warrant. You have

tasted of our Power. Take heed to this Warning lest worse should befall you.

Remember—February third!

Dick examined the letter closely. It was written on a soiled sheet of cheap, ruled paper, and the handwriting was evidently disguised. Towards the bottom of the page were crude drawings of a black hand, a coffin, and a hat-pin!

“When did you receive this, Mr. Attorney General?” he asked.

“By the four o’clock post. Wait a moment,” as Dick started to speak. “The mail was delivered just as I was leaving the Department to go to the White House, and I hastily gathered up what I thought were my personal letters, leaving the rest of my correspondence for Clark to look over. I opened this while driving home.”

“Can I see the envelope?”

“Certainly; but I am afraid you will find no clew there. It is postmarked ‘Times Square Station, N. Y.,’ and was mailed early this morning. It is next to impossible to trace anonymous letters through the post office, for they are usually mailed at an hour when no one is about.”

Dick tossed the envelope on the table. There was nothing to be learned from its ordinary exterior. It was addressed in the same disguised writing as the letter.

“Who is Fabriani?”

“An Italian importer. He and two other Italian merchants have merged their business, and have crowded out the smaller importers. Fabriani has

resorted to illegal measures to force his rivals out of business. They have appealed to the courts to protect them against the merger."

"I see." Dick balanced the letter in his hand. "Do you think that it is Fabriani who is trying to intimidate you by making use of a Black Hand threat?"

"It has that appearance. Come," glancing keenly at Dick, "what is your opinion?"

"Why, that this rascal Fabriani has concocted this scheme in his own head and is using your wife's tragic death in hopes to check your actions against his merger. Of course, he may be a member of the Black Hand. But in the numerous accounts of murders attributed to that society some token of the Black Hand has always been found by the body of the victim. Besides, I really do not think they would perpetrate so wanton a crime on so slight a provocation."

"That would not stop them," declared Trevor. "They are a bloodthirsty crew, and when lust and hate lure them on will commit any crime."

"But in this instance they had neither of those motives," said Dick, obstinately.

Trevor moved restlessly in his chair. "I would give much to believe in your theory."

"What makes you doubt its truth?" asked Dick, quickly, and he looked searchingly at his companion.

Trevor's face flushed darkly, and he considered a moment before replying.

"I have had a long talk with my friend, Secretary Bowers," he said finally. "He advised me to do all in

my power to have the real murderer apprehended; and to that end thought I should offer a large reward for his detection. I cannot believe that Mr. Gordon murdered my wife—cannot, cannot believe there was a—a—" he stumbled in his speech—"an affair between them. Whatever her faults, my wife," proudly, "was faithful to me. Nothing will make me believe otherwise. I am convinced there is an innocent explanation of their meeting that night."

"I am sure there is," exclaimed Dick, heartily. "And, Mr. Attorney General, I honor you for the stand you are taking."

"Thanks, Tillinghast, thanks," said Trevor, huskily. "I have been searching vainly for a clew. This letter," taking it from Dick, "puzzles me greatly. On thinking the matter over I decided to send for you and ask your advice. Publicity is hateful to me, and I find it easier to discuss these details with you, as you already know so much about my family affairs."

"I shall be delighted to be of any service, sir."

"I think I told you in our last interview," began Trevor, "that my wife and I were married after a six weeks' acquaintance. We met through mutual friends. I know nothing of her past. I loved her devotedly, and was satisfied when she told me that my affection was returned and that she was free to become my wife. During our happy married life I never questioned her, being content to live in the present and let the dead past bury its dead. But about eight months ago I discovered that my wife was in deadly fear of one man—" he hesitated.

"Do go on," urged Dick, bending forward in his eagerness. "Did you find out who he was?"

“He was an Italian.”

“And his name?”

“Giovanni Savelli.”

Dick sat back in his chair and stared at the Attorney General.

“Giovanni Savelli,” he repeated, thoughtfully; “Giovanni Savelli. Why, he is said to be one of the heads of the Camorra.”

“Exactly,” replied Trevor, dryly.

CHAPTER XV
MAN PROPOSES

PEGGY went to her room that night very cross and very sleepy. The Patterson dinner had been a very long and, to her, a very tedious affair of many courses and numerous pauses.

"I never before worked so hard to make conversation," she confided to her grandmother in the privacy of her pretty bedroom. No matter how late Peggy stayed out, she always found her grandmother awake and waiting for her when she returned.

When no social engagements took her from home, Mrs. Macallister, who required very little sleep, always retired to her own sitting room about ten o'clock. She dressed in a warm wrapper and made herself comfortable by her reading lamp and perused magazines and the latest novels at her leisure.

"You see, Granny, it was a mixed affair," explained Peggy, sitting on the edge of her bed while she took down and shook out her lovely "lint white locks," as Dick called them. "And one man gave out at the last moment, so I sat between old Mr. Forsythe and Mrs. Wheeler."

"Good Heavens! what a combination! Were you the only young person present?"

"No; Sybil Ferguson and Tony Forsythe were across the way from me, and Captain McLane sat by

Mary Patterson. Mrs. Patterson invited Ned Morgan for me, but, as I said before, he could not come as he is ill in bed with grippe."

"Did you play auction afterwards?"

"Yes. I had miserable luck; everything went against me," Peggy sighed with vexation. "I even drew Mrs. Wheeler as my first partner. Have you ever played with her?"

"Once!" Mrs. Macallister's tone spoke volumes. "Was Ruth Wheeler there, also?"

"No, she went to a débutante dinner given by the Wilsons. Oh, Granny, I must tell you something so funny. During dinner, Mr. Forsythe leaned across me and asked Mrs. Wheeler if Ruth enjoyed being out.

"'She does indeed,' answered Mrs. Wheeler, with a beaming smile, 'and she has been a great success since her début last December. Why, Mr. Forsythe, she has already had two proposals and one hint.'"

"That is just like Maria Wheeler," laughed Mrs. Macallister.

"What did you do this evening, Granny? You read a blood-curdling mystery story as usual, I suppose."

"Indeed, I did nothing of the sort. I was most agreeably entertained by a young man."

"General de Peyster?"

"I said a young man," with dignity.

"I give it up, Granny; you have too many of the male gender anxious to call on you. It would take me an hour to go through the list."

"Tut! child, I am not to be flattered," but she smiled quietly, well pleased. She had queened it too

long in salon and drawing-room not to know her power. “My visitor this evening was Count de Morny.”

“Count de Morny! Why, good gracious, Granny, he was here only this afternoon.”

“I know it,” placidly.

“Why did he come a second time?”

“He came to ask my permission to pay his addresses to you.”

Peggy dropped her slipper with a thud on the floor, while the rich, warm blood mounted to her cheeks.

“And you told him?”

“That he could—yes.”

The clock ticked loudly in the quiet room. Mrs. Macallister was the first to break the silence.

“Peggy, look at me.”

Slowly the deep blue eyes were raised to hers, but the dearly loved face was blurred by the tears that filled them.

“Granny, Granny, I cannot leave you. Why need we speak of marriage, we are so happy, we two?”

“Nonsense, child,” Mrs. Macallister’s tone was husky, and she cleared her throat of a suspicious lump. “Do you think I want you to be a lonely old maid? No, dear heart, I wish you to marry a man worthy of you. I want to see you rich in domestic happiness, so that when you reach my age and look back over the past, you can say, as I do: ‘My life has been one grand Thanksgiving Hymn.’”

It was not often that the stately dame showed

emotion, and Peggy was deeply touched. She dropped down on her knees and pressed her cheek against her grandmother's as the loving arms met around her.

"Hush, dearie, do not cry." Mrs. Macallister rocked her back and forth as she had been wont to do in her babyhood. "You do not have to accept Count de Morny if you do not care for him. I did not think it fair to either of you to forbid his proposal. He says he loves you devotedly, and he offers you a most distinguished name, and a splendid social position in the Old World. I know nothing against him, and I like him personally. But, Peggy, I warn you, de Morny is not a man to trifle with. He has a high temper under that debonair manner. Come, it is late; go to bed, dear, and do not worry any more. Remember, I shall not force you into any marriage. The decision must rest with you. Now, hurry and undress," kissing her warmly. "I will come back and tuck you up in bed."

Left alone, Peggy went thoughtfully over to her bureau. She took up a photograph in its silver frame and studied it long; the Court dress was becoming to de Morny. Then her left hand strayed toward a kodak picture, a snap shot, and she gazed down into a gay, laughing face, but the lips, which curved in a merry smile, were well shaped, and the chin determined. A strong face, and a lovable one; and the other—Peggy sighed as she put them back in their places.

Glancing at the clock she was shocked to find it long after midnight. Hastily picking up her jewelry, she pressed the spring of her secret drawer. It opened half-way, then stuck. Slipping her hand inside the small opening, she felt about to find the obstruction. A box was jammed against the top, and with

impatient fingers she pulled it out breaking the side of the pasteboard in her effort to get it free. Its contents fell into the now fully opened drawer. She picked it up and examined it; then let it fall as if it scorched her fingers. It was the broken top of a hat-pin which she had given Beatrice Trevor that Christmas. She recognized it instantly because of the curious design in gold surrounding the cat's-eye. She picked up the box. It was the identical one which Beatrice had entrusted to her care. The twine around the middle still held; only one end had been broken.

Merciful Heaven! what had she discovered? No, it could not be possible—her gentle, charming friend could not be guilty. It was too monstrous for belief. And yet, Beatrice's intense desire to get the box out of the house, her quarrel with her stepmother—the doctor's testimony that Mrs. Trevor had been killed by a stab from a hat-pin—all pointed to her guilt.

With trembling fingers the bewildered and overwrought girl thrust the telltale cat's-eye back into the box, put it securely in the drawer, dropped in her jewelry and snapped the lock. Then, for the first time in her healthy, happy life, Peggy fainted just as Mrs. Macallister re-entered the room.

CHAPTER XVI
PLAYING WITH FIRE

It was a very woe-begone Peggy who came into the drawing-room the next afternoon, and Dick looked with consternation at her pale cheeks and heavy eyelids.

"Peggy! What have you been doing with yourself?" he exclaimed, detaining her small hand in his.

"Sit down here," patting the chair next her. Dick needed no second bidding. "I could not sleep—Granny was so upset," she began, incoherently, "I simply had to send for you."

"Is Mrs. Macallister ill?" he demanded.

"Oh, no. I gave her a dreadful fright, that was all. She found me in my room last night in a dead faint."

"Great Heavens!" bending toward her much alarmed. "My dearest—what—"

"I am all right now; my fainting was caused by a shock. I made a terrible discovery. But before I tell you about it, you must give me your solemn word of honor not to repeat what it was."

Dick gave her the desired promise; then he listened with growing amazement to her account of finding the broken hat-pin in the box Beatrice had entrusted to her care. He drew a long breath when she finished.

"Rosamond's Bower can't be mentioned in the same breath with this Trevor maze," he said. "This discovery of yours, Peggy, certainly complicates matters more than ever."

She looked at him with troubled eyes, and her lips quivered as she answered: "Indeed, Dick, I cannot think Beatrice knew anything of this fearful murder, or that she is implicated in any way in it."

"Of course not, Peggy," returned Dick, soothingly, but there was doubt, black doubt, in his heart. He remembered the quarrel Wilkins overheard. "Don't you think the simpler way to find out would be to go and ask her!"

"Oh, I couldn't," wailed Peggy, wringing her hands. "And I would not hurt her now when she is in such trouble, by letting her think I have doubted her, and had betrayed her trust. She would be sure to jump to that conclusion. Dick," with sudden energy, "you have just got to clear her. Think of the suffering of a proud, delicately reared, and lovable girl being under the stigma of murder. It would kill her."

"I'll do my very best, Peggy," declared Dick, stoutly. "I do not need your urging. Remember all that is at stake for me."

A bright blush dyed Peggy's pale cheeks, and she hastened to change the subject.

"Have you seen Mr. Gordon?"

"No," vexedly. "Gordon still declines to see anyone, and his lawyers are equally reticent. He even refused to allow them to apply for bail."

"I thought a man arrested on a charge of murder was never permitted to be bailed out?"

"Oh, it has been done in the District on several occasions. I am told Gordon takes the situation very calmly."

"My heart aches for him. It is like him to face his troubles so bravely. What has the Navy Department done about him, Dick?"

"Done? Oh, nothing. They cannot take any steps in the affair until after the Civil Court decides whether he is innocent or guilty. Now, Peggy," he went on, glancing at her sorrowful face, "I don't want you to make yourself ill worrying, so I am going to tell you in strict confidence that the Attorney General is convinced that Mrs. Trevor was a victim of the Camorra. But mind you," as her face brightened with relief, "he has no direct evidence, only surmise and a threat to go upon, so far. But he is sending for the head of Pinkerton's Agency to investigate these clews. If necessary he will communicate direct with the Italian Government."

"That is splendid!" exclaimed Peggy, her eyes shining with relief. "But then," again perplexed, "why should Beatrice secrete the top of her hat-pin?"

"It is bewildering," acknowledged Dick. "Perhaps she accidentally found the broken pin and did not dare confess that she had it, thinking it might involve her in further difficulties with the police."

"Of course that is it," agreed Peggy. "Under the same circumstances I might have done the same myself. I am so glad I consulted you, Dick. You have taken a weight off my mind. Can't you stay and have tea with me?"

"I am sorry that I cannot. I must hurry off. At present I am covering the Russian Grand Duke's visit here for an out-of-town paper, and am to have an

interview with his Chief-of-Staff at five o'clock. If anything else turns up let me know, and above all—" his tone was very tender—"take care of your precious self."

Her reply was interrupted by Hurley's quiet entrance.

"Count de Morny, Miss Margaret," he announced, holding back the portière, as the Frenchman appeared in the doorway.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, advancing with outstretched hand, "it is ze great plaiser to find zat you are in."

Peggy was instantly conscious of the restrained antagonism between the two men as they greeted each other.

"Monsieur Tillinghast and I, like ze great minds, sink alike," smiled de Morny. "We each decide to come here. We shall wear out ze chairs."

"To-day it is just how-de-do and good-by, Count," said Dick, briefly. "Unfortunately I must hurry away. Good-by again, Peggy."

De Morny's eyes sparkled with anger as he watched their cordial leave taking. As Dick disappeared he drew his chair closer to Peggy and proceeded to improve his opportunity.

"You look fatigue, Mademoiselle," glancing keenly at her.

"I have been doing too much," confessed Peggy. "Fortunately Lent will be here soon, and I can then take a much-needed rest."

"It ees hard to go every night and in ze day time, too, yes," sympathized de Morny. "I nevaire haf

known so fas a season. But I like eet. I feel as keen as a mink."

"As a what?" questioned Peggy, puzzled.

"As a mink," complaisantly. "I am ver happy to-day, Mademoiselle; for Madame, your *grande mère*, has given me permission to tell you how much I lof you."

Peggy's heart beat fast, and she crumpled her handkerchief into a little ball. De Morny stopped to glare at Hurley, as that solemn individual came in with the tea tray.

"Will you not gif me some hope," he pleaded, as soon as Hurley went out of the room. "*Mon cœur*, I adore you; I cannot lif without you."

The excited Frenchman bent forward, caught Peggy's little hand, and impulsively kissed it before she could snatch it away.

"Monsieur, monsieur, you go too fast," she remonstrated. "You forget that at the Charity Ball I said I would listen to you and," hesitating, "my other friends, only on one condition."

"And that condition, Mademoiselle?"

"Is that you find the murderer of Mrs. Trevor."

The pupils of de Morny's eyes contracted suddenly. An involuntary shiver ran down Peggy's spine as they met hers.

"And zen—what, Mademoiselle?" he asked, slowly.

"Come and have a cup of tea." Peggy held the tongs poised over the sugar bowl. "One lump, or two, Count? Oh, Granny," as Mrs. Macallister walked in,

“you are just in time to have some hot toast and tea.”

CHAPTER XVII
ACROSS THE POTOMAC

AFTER getting his special story on the wires, Dick had only time for a hasty meal at a down-town restaurant. Then he hurried over to the *Star* office, and was soon at work in the city room. About half past nine his chief sent for him.

"This is the busiest Saturday night we've had in years," grumbled Colonel Byrd. "You know Dr. Gibson, superintendent of St. Elizabeth's, don't you?" Dick nodded assent. "Well, go over there as quick as you can and see if you can get him to talk. Word has just come in that two of the criminally insane have escaped and are still at large terrorizing the neighborhood. Get all the details, for it is local news and we will feature it."

St. Elizabeth's, The U. S. Government Hospital for the Insane, is on Nichols Avenue beyond Anacostia. Anacostia, one of the most beautifully situated suburbs of Washington, is on the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, and directly across from the Navy Yard. The scenery in that vicinity is very fine, and from the extensive grounds about the Insane Asylum there is a wonderful view of the winding Potomac, with Washington and its environs in the distance.

At no time an accessible place even in summer, on that stormy night it was a fearful journey to the Government Reservation; and Dick prepared for his trip with no great alacrity.

Some hours later he stopped, footsore and weary, at the intersection of Sheridan Road and Nichols Avenue and sought shelter from the storm on a porch of a vacant house. He had not only interviewed Dr. Gibson, but, joining one of the searching parties, had been present at the capture of the two escaped lunatics. The pursuit and capture would make a readable story, so, well satisfied with his night's work, he waited patiently to catch the last car to Washington, which left at eight minutes past one o'clock. It lacked fifteen minutes of that time, so, pulling his coat collar up about his ears, he made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted.

While waiting, his eyes, grown accustomed to the darkness, discerned a solitary figure coming toward him from Anacostia. When opposite Dick the newcomer paused and, screening himself from the storm behind one of the porch pillars, struck a match. Holding it in the hollow of his two hands, he lighted his pipe. As the tiny flame flared up his face was visible. Dick, too amazed to speak, drew back deeper in the shadow of the friendly porch. With growing curiosity, he watched the slender figure glide rapidly up Nichols Avenue. What was Alfred Clark doing in that neighborhood after midnight?

Dick hesitated. It was obviously his duty to return to the *Star* with his story, but a certain furtiveness in Clark's movements caused all doubt to vanish. Throwing his duty to the winds, he pulled his soft hat low on his head, scrambled down the steps, and turned up Nichols Avenue.

Dick picked his way carefully along the frozen and slippery sidewalk, keeping Clark in view, but not getting close enough to let him suspect that he was being shadowed. On and on they went, past the

entrance and the extensive grounds of St. Elizabeth's, past the few straggling houses marking the outskirts of the little village, and into the more desolate country beyond.

After about twenty minutes' walking, Clark turned into a lane on his right, and going some distance in the direction of the Potomac River, he suddenly leaped a fence and struck off across country. It was not very easy to follow him in the more open fields, and Dick, fearful of being discovered, dropped far behind. On reaching the top of a slight rise in ground he was dismayed to find that Clark had disappeared. He glanced about him in every direction, but save for himself the field was deserted.

Cursing himself for going on so wild a goose chase, he started forward in the direction he judged Clark might have gone. But his hopes fell when, after trudging along for ten minutes, he found no trace of his quarry. Thoroughly discouraged, he rested for a moment against a rail fence before retracing his way to Anacostia. As his eyes traveled over the low, rolling country, he noticed three trees forming a triangle standing in a field a quarter of a mile away. His heart gave a bound; at last he knew where he was. He could not be mistaken. He hurried over to the trees; yes, he was right, they were the tall poplars which he himself had named "The Three Sisters." He was on land belonging to Allan Dorsey. While he had accompanied Allan there in the summer, he had never been there in winter or at night. Allan Dorsey, whose paintings were known the world over, had purchased the deserted farm because of the magnificent views which stirred his artist soul. He would work for days at a time in solitude, and only

Dick was privileged to come and see him on rare occasions.

"Lord! I wish Allan were there instead of in Paris," thought Dick. "He'd give me a high ball for the inner man, and a dry suit for the outer one." He shivered in his damp clothes. "May the foul fiend seize that Clark! I wonder where in thunder he went to."

As if in answer to his unspoken question, an idea flashed into his head. The studio! By Jove! that was it; and yet, what in the name of Heaven was Clark doing in so deserted and forsaken a place?

There was but one way to find out and suiting the action to his thought, Dick walked in the direction of the old barn which had been converted into a roomy and up-to-date studio. It stood some distance from the "Three Sisters," hidden from view by a grove of trees.

Dick cautiously approached the building. There was no sign of life or human habitation. The heavy, old-fashioned wooden shutters were tightly closed, but as Dick bent and placed his ear against the wide door, he distinctly heard the sound of several voices. Certain now that he was on the right track, and his curiosity at fever heat, he paused to think over the situation.

The rain and sleet had stopped some time before, and the wind was dying down. Suddenly he thought of the skylight Allan had built into the roof of the barn to obtain a better light. If he could climb up there he could see all that was going on inside the studio. To think was to act with Dick; his blood was up and he was determined to see the adventure through, whatever the consequences. Taking off his

coat and shoes and hiding them behind a large bowlder, he proceeded to climb a tree whose limbs stretched out close to the roof of the barn. He hated to trust his weight to the slender limb, but there was no other way to accomplish his object. So, putting his trust in Providence, he crept along until just parallel with the chimney, then dropped lightly as a cat to the shingled roof.

Very gingerly and softly he crawled forward on hands and knees to the skylight. Gently he ran his hand over the portion of the glass frame nearest him. Joy of joys; one of the panes of glass was out, and his hand passed through the opening and touched the large Holland shade which was drawn over the inside of the skylight. Light was visible around the edges of the shade; that was all he could discover. He pulled out his penknife and gently cut an opening in the green shade, and applied his eye to the hole.

Seated directly beneath him around a table were four masked men. Their voices carried distinctly in the closed room to where he crouched above them. To his great surprise they spoke in Italian, a language with which he was fairly familiar, having studied it with a view to going into the Consular Service.

The smallest man of the four placed a square box in the center of the table.

“Draw,” he said briefly. “The one who gets the marked card is accepted by the Brotherhood as its Avenger.”

One by one four hands were slipped inside of the small opening in the end of the box and silently withdrawn, holding a card at which each glanced indifferently. Dick could not tell from their quiet movements which had drawn the fatal card. The

leader rapped softly on the table before speaking.

"Our plans are now perfected," he said. "There can be no failure. In this country of the free we, children of the Camorra, can wreak its vengeance upon those who have thwarted our society. The Grand Duke Sergius has seen fit to hound certain of our members who have come within his power. The Brotherhood has decreed his death. The Grand Duke, the President, the great men of this country, and the Diplomatic Corps will be assembled five days from now to attend the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial. No better opportunity could be found. The means, I leave to the fortunate holder of the marked card. Remember—the Place and the Hour."

Dick could hardly believe his ears. The Camorra! Surely he was in some mad dream. So bewildered was he that he missed a few sentences, but his wandering attention was attracted by the excited gestures of the masked man who sat facing the leader.

"You ask for an explanation," said the latter. "For that you must apply to Giovanni Savelli. The Trevor affair is in his hands. But are you not his direct agent?"

The man's answer was spoken in so low a tone that Dick, not catching what he said, bent far over the skylight, forgetful of the frailness of the structure. Glass and frame gave way beneath his weight, and, with a resounding crash, Dick fell forward into space.

CHAPTER XVIII
NIP AND TUCK

BEFORE Dick, half stunned by his fall, could get upon his feet, the four masked men threw themselves upon him, and, despite his struggles, bound him hand and foot. They cleared away the débris made by him in his unlucky fall, and placed him in the cleared space.

"Do you speak Italian?" asked the leader in fairly good English, as the men, after reconnoitering outside, returned and grouped themselves about their prisoner.

"No," lied Dick, calmly.

"That is not so," spoke up one of the men next the leader. "He is a good linguist and speaks our language fluently."

Dick recognized the voice despite the mask.

"Clark! You renegade!" he shouted with sudden fury.

Clark made a hasty move in his direction, but the leader checked him.

"What matter," he said, indifferently. "It will not be long in his power to injure us by any information he may have picked up to-night."

The finality of his tone sent a cold shiver up and down Dick's spine. Apparently his doom was sealed.

Only a game of bluff might pull him out of his ghastly predicament.

"Don't be too certain of that," he said, coolly. "Clark, there, can add to the information he has already given you of me by saying that I am a representative of the *Washington Star*, one of the most influential newspapers in the country. You know the power of the press in America."

His words made a visible impression on the three men. They glanced uneasily at each other. The leader spoke hastily and sternly.

"It does not matter who is at your back. You are in our power and cannot escape the fate of a spy."

Dick's heart sank, but he refused to give up. He was fighting for time. Something must intervene.

"I was sent over to follow that man," pointing to Clark. "Do you think my disappearance will not be noticed if I don't turn up safe and sound? Well, you are wrong. By noon to-morrow you will all be in custody; your precious plans for murdering the Grand Duke will then be nipped in the bud. Thus, instead of carrying out the orders of the Camorra you will be preparing to swing for my death."

"Your arguments are all very fine, my friend," returned the leader composedly, "provided everything happens as you say. But no one will know of your disappearance. It is an easy matter to secure a specimen of your handwriting, forge a letter from New York to your employers saying you were called there suddenly. One of the Brotherhood will impersonate you on a voyage to Europe. We never fail in our plans. Months will elapse before your disappearance will be noticed. You will never be traced."

“Sounds well,” commented Dick. “You forget I have a very substantial body which is apt to betray your best laid schemes.”

“It will not be found.”

“Pooh! Murder will out!”

“Not in this instance.” The leader rose and stepped over into a corner and picked up a satchel, which he opened. He took out a hypodermic syringe and a small black leather box such as surgeons carry. “We have plenty of disguises with us,” he continued. “You will be dressed in one of them. Your body will be found, but it will never be recognized as yours. In this little vial,” taking it out of the leather case, “there is a deadly poison. Under its influence your body becomes bloated and your features unrecognizable. It will be necessary to bury you at once, as decomposition follows fast. Therefore, no lengthy examination can be made.”

A terrible fear was upon Dick, brave fellow that he was. He could have faced death by dagger or revolver without flinching, but this creeping horror shook his nerve. Despairingly he glanced about the room; there was no help there. His eyes traveled back to the leader, and, fascinated, he watched him fit on the hypodermic needle and fill the syringe. His back and forehead were bathed in a cold perspiration, and his throat was parched and dry. He thought of Peggy, his dear, dear love, and involuntarily a groan escaped him.

“Tut!” said the Italian. “Just a pin prick. A few twists of your limbs and all will be over.”

At his signal two of the men tore off Dick’s left cuff and bared his arm. As the hand holding the needle hovered above Dick’s wrist, a shot rang out,

and the leader crumpled up and fell forward over him, the syringe flying across the room.

“Throw up your hands!” commanded a stern voice from the broken skylight. The amazed men looked up into the barrels of four revolvers, while Dick fainted away.

A few minutes later Dick recovered consciousness. Dazed and bewildered he looked at the tall man bending over him, and put out his hand to push the brandy flask away.

“De Smirnoff!” he gasped. “How in h—l did you get here?”

“Gently, gently, my friend; drink this cognac,” and, as Dick complied with his request, he added, “I am a member of the Russian Secret Police. It is my special duty to guard the person of his Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Sergius.”

CHAPTER XIX
THE CONFERENCE

"How my head aches," groaned Dick, "and every part of my body." He touched himself tenderly as he changed his position on the lounge.

"It is not surprising," said Long, dryly, "after the experience you went through last night, or rather early this morning. How I wish I had been with you, instead of sitting up and chatting small talk with a stuffy dowager. Just my beastly luck!"

"You are a nice one to begrudge me such an adventure, after all the fighting you have seen," retorted Dick. "I wish you had been with me, though. Just thinking of that fearful needle hovering over me sends my heart into my mouth." He shuddered. "I never was so glad to see anyone in my life as de Smirnoff."

"It was a close shave. Have you had a chance to ask the Russian how he came to be there?"

"No. I was in pretty bad shape, so de Smirnoff sent me back to town with one of his assistants. We came directly here. It was good of you to square me with my chief, Chester," looking gratefully at Long. "How did you do it?"

"After hearing your story I went to see Colonel Byrd and told him you had stumbled into an affair of state over in Anacostia which couldn't be divulged at present. The old boy was very decent, took my word

for it, and said you were not to return to work until fit to be up and doing. Then I returned here, and Mrs. Brisbane gave me a capital midday dinner. She told me you did full justice to the share she sent up to you."

"Bless her heart! She is the salt of the earth. As poor as she is, she is always doing something for her fellow man. Only last week she sent five dollars to an indigent Southern friend, who is frightfully hard up, thinking she would buy some much-needed underclothing. She received a note yesterday from the Southerner saying that she and her daughter were so obliged for her kind assistance. It had enabled them to buy a canvasback duck, which they had wanted for a long time!"

"De Smirnoff said he would drop in this afternoon," continued Dick. "He ought to be here at any moment now," glancing at his watch. "I asked Mrs. Brisbane to have him shown right up."

"Then I'll be going." Long started to rise.

"No, no, Chester; sit down. I particularly want you to know each other."

A quick rap interrupted him, and Long hastened to open the door.

"Here is Count de Smirnoff," said Mrs. Brisbane's cheery voice from the hall. As the Russian, with innate courtesy stood aside to allow her to enter first, Dick rose and went into the hall.

"How are you, Count?" he said, cordially, and their hands met in a strong, firm clasp. "Thanks so much, Mrs. Brisbane, for taking all this trouble. Won't you both come in?"

But Mrs. Brisbane shook her head and disappeared down the corridor. Dick ushered the Russian into his room and closed the door.

“Count de Smirnoff—my friend, General Long,” he said, quickly.

“General Long is well known to me by reputation,” exclaimed de Smirnoff. “It is a great pleasure to meet so distinguished an American.”

“I am glad of this opportunity of thanking you for what you did for my friend, Tillinghast, last night, Count,” answered Long, shaking hands warmly; while Dick busied himself putting cigars and cigarettes on the table alongside a syphon of vichy and its accompanying bottle of Scotch.

“I am a poor hand at expressing my feelings, Count,” said the latter, gravely. “I owe you a debt I can never repay.”

“If I have won your friendship, I am repaid,” replied de Smirnoff, looking with admiration at Dick’s fine, determined face.

The Slav and the Anglo-Saxon have one trait in common—neither is demonstrative. Long, seeing that both men were much embarrassed, broke the awkward pause.

“Suppose, Count, you tell us how you came to arrive at the studio at so opportune a moment for Dick.”

“May I speak of confidential matters?” asked the Russian, glancing hastily about the room.

“Yes, indeed; there is no danger of our being overheard.”

“Some months ago our Secret Service Bureau,

which is probably the finest in the world, received information that the Camorra were plotting against the Grand Duke's life," began de Smirnoff.

"I thought it was usually the Nihilists who do that," interposed Long.

"The hands of the Nihilists, anarchists, the Mafia, and the Camorra are all raised against law and order, General; call them what you will. At present the Camorra desire to punish the Grand Duke because he was instrumental in having certain information against their leaders given to the Italian Government.

"Russia wishes to honor the memory of that great American, Lincoln, whose friend she was; therefore, it was decided that the Grand Duke should come to this country to attend the ceremonies of the dedication of his Memorial. The moment they heard this the Camorra leaders laid their plans to assassinate his Imperial Highness. I was put on the case, and my researches brought me here.

"When I reached Washington I communicated with the Chief of your Secret Service, and he immediately coöperated with me to safeguard the Grand Duke. My agents brought me word that several Italians, disguised as fruit venders, were spending much time in Anacostia with a certain Tamaso Velati. I had my agent point out the latter to me. Despite his disguise I recognized him as a man long suspected of having secret dealing with that society. My suspicions were aroused, and I placed a watch upon his movements.

"Last night, accompanied by four of your Secret Service men, I crossed over to Anacostia. We went to a tavern near the water-front and waited for my spy to join me there. He was very late in keeping his

appointment; I was on the point of starting out after Tamaso without waiting for him, when he appeared. He told me that he had traced Tamaso to a deserted building some miles away, and had waited about until he saw several men join the Italian. Thinking some deviltry was to pay, he hastened back to warn me. He is familiar with the country about Anacostia, and so took us by a short cut direct to the studio. The Italians were so absorbed in dealing with you, Monsieur Tillinghast, they never heard our cautious approach. I saw the light shining above the broken skylight, climbed on the roof by aid of the tree, and reached the opening just in time to shoot Tamaso as he bent above you."

Dick drew a long breath. The agonizing scene was too fresh in his mind to be pleasant.

"Take a drink," he said, by way of relieving his feelings, and he pushed the paraphernalia towards the Russian. De Smirnoff helped himself liberally, and the others followed his example.

"What have you done with the prisoners?" questioned Long.

"Tamaso is to be buried to-morrow. I surrendered the two Italians to your Chief of the Secret Service."

"That accounts for three men; what became of the fourth?" asked Dick.

De Smirnoff colored with vexation. "He escaped," he said, bitterly. Dick swore softly. "It was this way," hastily explained the Russian: "As two of my men forced open the studio door one of the masked men, who stood near a window, threw up its sash. The detective covering him fired, but missed, and before he could take aim again the prisoner had pushed

open the shutter, vaulted through the window and was gone. Luck was with him; every one of our shots went astray, and though I sent men in pursuit, he made good his escape. The other two men, cowed by the death of their leader, gave us no trouble."

"Were they Italians?" inquired Dick.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

Dick pondered a moment. Should he take de Smirnoff into his confidence? He looked earnestly at the Russian's face; the broad brow and clever, handsome eyes, the slightly aquiline nose, and the firm, thin-lipped mouth—he looked what he was: a keen, brilliant officer of the Secret Service, brave to a fault, secretive perhaps, but withal a gentleman. Quickly Dick made up his mind to trust him.

"Because the fourth masked man was an American," he answered, slowly. Long, as well as de Smirnoff, glanced at him in surprise. "It was Alfred Clark."

"Well, by gad!" muttered Long, completely taken aback.

De Smirnoff looked inquiringly at Dick.

"I went to Anacostia to cover an assignment for my paper," the latter hastened to explain. "While I was waiting for a Washington car, Clark passed me. I never trusted the fellow, and seeing him there on such a night and at that hour made me suspect that he was up to no good. So I followed him, with what results you already know."

"Did you overhear much of their talk?"

"Enough to know that the men were plotting to assassinate the Grand Duke at the dedication of the

Lincoln Memorial. Then they spoke of the Trevor murder."

"What did they say about it?" asked Long, as Dick stopped to strike a match.

"If I remember correctly, Clark asked some question which I did not catch, and Tamaso replied: 'The Trevor affair is in the hands of Giovanni Savelli. But are you not his direct agent?' In trying to hear Clark's reply I leaned too far forward and fell through the skylight.

"Now," went on Dick earnestly, "this fits in with a Black Hand threat the Attorney General received on Friday afternoon. He is convinced the Camorra is responsible for his wife's murder, chiefly because he knows she lived in fear of this Giovanni Savelli. He doesn't know why she feared him. The Black Hand letter spoke of the Fabriani Merger, but that looks to me like a blind to throw him off the trail. Can you tell me, Count, the best way to get track of this Savelli?"

De Smirnoff leaned thoughtfully back in his chair and considered the question.

"It seems to me," he said finally, "that the person you need to put your hands on is Monsieur Clark. You heard Tamaso say that he was Savelli's direct agent in the affair."

Dick sat up as straight as his sore body would permit, and swore fluently. "Of course, you are right. What a blundering fool I have been."

"You were in no condition to reason out clews last night, Monsieur," smiled de Smirnoff, consolingly.

"I am sure your theory is right," argued Long. "Clark must be the guilty man. He knew the combination of the safe, and he also knew when certain inmates of the house would be absent."

"It looks plausible," agreed Dick. "Clark may have joined the Camorra while in Naples. But he must have been very deeply involved to commit murder for this Savelli."

"Perhaps Monsieur Clark is using the Camorra to shield his own deed," suggested de Smirnoff, slowly. "We, in the Secret Service keep in touch with every country in the world. I recollect now that this Alfred Clark, of whom you speak, was a resident in Naples for many years. He did not have a very savory reputation. Madame Trevor, or as she was then, Hélène de Beaupré, spent several winters in that city. Monsieur Clark, before he lost his money, was her devoted lover."

Long bent forward and helped himself to Scotch and vichy.

"The plot thickens," he said, laconically.

De Smirnoff nodded his head. "I must take steps to have this Monsieur Clark apprehended," he said. "According to Count de Morny, Madame Trevor," he raised his glass and examined its contents critically, "Madame Trevor was not—a good woman."

CHAPTER XX
CASTING OF NETS

DICK was awakened out of a sound sleep the next morning by a loud banging on his door.

"Come in," he shouted, sleepily; then, realizing that the disturber of his peace could not crawl through the keyhole, he scrambled out of bed, unlocked the door and jerked it open.

"I ax yo' pardon, Marse Dick," said Uncle Andy, bowing and scraping on the threshold, "but dis hyer note done come fo' yo', an' de bearer am waitin' fo' an answer, sah." As he spoke he handed Dick a sealed envelope and a small package.

"Wait a minute, Uncle, and I'll see what it's about," and Dick, going inside his room, plumped himself down on the edge of his bed and tore open the note. Not recognizing the bold, clear writing, he turned at once to read the signature on the last page. It was from Beatrice Trevor. With quickened interest, he read the few lines.

Dear Mr. Tillinghast:

> My father tells me that you are doing your best to clear up the terrible mystery which surrounds our house. I am in great trouble. I must see you.
>
> I am going to dine alone with Mrs. Macallister to-night. Will you come there at eight o'clock? I have told Wilkins to

wait for your answer.

Sincerely yours,
BEATRICE TREVOR.

P. S. Wilkins tells me the accompanying package belongs to you.

"Thank the Lord!" ejaculated Dick, aloud. "Your note's a direct answer to my unspoken wish. You want to see me, Miss Beatrice, but I bet not half so badly as I want to see you. But what does your postscript mean?"

Taking up the small package he looked doubtfully at it. "Best way to find out is to open it," he muttered, tearing off the string and wrapping paper. It proved to be a small pasteboard box, and on lifting the cover he saw his broken cuff link lying inside on some cotton. It was unmistakable. The round gold button with his interwoven initials "R. T." stared him in the face.

With a startled cry, he sprang up and pulled out his white waistcoat from the half-opened bureau drawer. Quickly his fingers fumbled in the little pocket—yes, there it was, just where he had put it four nights before. In growing excitement, he jerked out his fingers and disclosed not his broken cuff button, but a round coin attached to a broken, golden link!

With open mouth, and eyes fairly popping from his head, Dick contemplated the two links, while his bewildered mind gradually pieced together the scene in the hall. It was not surprising he had made such a mistake, the two were identical in size; and in the semi-darkness of the large hall and his hurry he had never glanced at the recovered cuff button, but had taken it for granted it was the piece of jewelry he

had dropped.

As busy as he was, he had not troubled to get his broken set mended. He had used a second pair the next morning; and this was, therefore the first time he had thought of the broken set since thrusting the button into his waistcoat pocket.

Taking up the coin, he examined it closely. It was apparently very old; the edges were worn thin and the hieroglyphics on the two sides were so defaced he could make nothing of them. It was attached by a swivel to the heavy red-gold link. The link itself was worn at the rough ends, but still it must have been a powerful wrench which had caused it to break off. To Dick it looked like a link torn from a watch chain; and an unusual one at that, for the outer side was delicately etched in some intricate design. Pshaw! What was the use of puzzling his brains, Wilkins could tell him all about it; and with the thought Dick walked over to the closed door, and, opening it, looked into the corridor. But Uncle Andy, tired of waiting, had gone about his work. There was nothing for it but to go to the back stairs and "fetch a yell" for the old darky, as the ancient house boasted of no bell except the one to the front door.

Mrs. Brisbane answered Dick's stentorian shout from the kitchen, where she had gone to superintend the cooking of the Maryland beaten biscuits for the morning meal.

"What is it, Dick?" she called.

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Brisbane. Will you please ask Uncle Andy to show the messenger up to my room. Thanks, ever so much." And Dick retreated hastily, conscious of his pajamas as a female boarder thrust her head out of the door to find out what the

noise was about.

He was busy writing at his desk when Wilkins' discreet tap sounded on his door, and at his bidding the butler entered and closed the door behind him.

"Good morning, Wilkins; sorry to keep you waiting, but I was delayed."

"Morning, sir. That's all right, sir. Miss Beatrice wanted me to be sure and see you received her note, and told me to come over here before you left for your office. I was to be particular and get an answer."

"I am writing it now. I'm much obliged to you for returning my cuff link. By the way, where did you find it?"

"I didn't find it, sir. The second man took up the large rug near the fireplace to shake it in the yard yesterday morning and saw the bit of jewelry lying under one corner. He brought it to me, and as I knew you had broken your cuff button, sir, I was pretty sure it was yours."

"Quite right, Wilkins, and here's a small token of my thanks," handing the butler some change. And as the man thanked him profusely, Dick held up the coin, and asked: "Who does this belong to?"

Wilkins stared at it in astonishment. "I don't know, sir."

"Oh, come, Wilkins, I picked it up in the hall under the armor the other night, thinking it was my cuff link. Surely, you know who owns it?"

Wilkins turned it over curiously in his hand; then shook his head. "I have never seen it before, sir," he said, positively.

Dick sat for a few moments thoughtfully nibbling his pen. He recollected that the Attorney General's watch chain was a plain gold affair, very different from the link in his hand.

"Did Mrs. Trevor, or perhaps Miss Beatrice, have a chain like it?" he asked. "Women wear such peculiar gewgaws nowadays."

But Wilkins stuck to his guns. "No, sir, they didn't. It's an uncommon thing, and I'm sure I'd 'a' remembered it if I had ever seen either of them wear such a thing," he stubbornly declared. "Some guest must have dropped it, though I dunno how it stayed so long unnoticed."

Dick looked at Wilkins queerly. A sudden thought had entered his active brain ... by Heaven!... Suppose....

"Has the front hall been swept since the murder of Mrs. Trevor?" he asked.

Wilkins looked bewildered. "We don't sweep it, sir," he answered. "It is a hard wood floor, sir. The different rugs in the hall are shaken and gone over by a vacuum cleaner every day. We oiled the entire floor, sir, the morning after the supper for Madame Bernhardt. If the gold link had been there *then*, sir, we would have found it."

"The morning after? Why, that was the third—Mrs. Trevor was murdered that same night?"

"Yes, sir," stolidly.

"Does Mr. Clark, the secretary, own such a chain?"

"No, sir; he always wears a fob."

"At what hour did Mr. Clark leave the house the

day Mrs. Trevor was killed?"

"Why, I suppose about the usual time, sir, five o'clock." Wilkins hesitated. "I really don't know the exact time because I didn't see him go, sir."

"Well, ask the other servants if they know, and then send me word. But don't rouse comment by too many questions, Wilkins. I'll make it worth your while if you get that information on the quiet."

Wilkins hesitated a perceptible moment. "It wouldn't be much use asking them, sir. Mr. Clark can run in and out of the house at any time," he volunteered, finally. "He has a front door key. Mrs. Trevor said she couldn't have the front bell rung so often, and asked the Attorney General to give him an extra key."

Dick looked thoughtfully at Wilkins, but the butler's expressionless face told him nothing.

"Was Mr. Clark with the Attorney General yesterday?"

"No, sir; I don't think he has been to the house since Friday afternoon. I heard Mr. Trevor tell Miss Beatrice he had been called away on business." He paused, and looked suggestively at the clock. Dick signed his note and hastily sealed the envelope. And he was on the point of handing it to the butler when Secretary Bowers' advice about the missing memorandum book occurred to him.

"Can you tell me, Wilkins, how Mrs. Trevor and Miss Beatrice spent the afternoon of the third?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Trevor was at home receiving callers, for Wednesday is Cabinet Day, you know, sir. Mrs. Trevor never served refreshments except at private teas, so I spent the afternoon in the hall with

the footman helping her guests with their coats and wraps. Miss Beatrice went out directly after luncheon and didn't return until about five o'clock, sir."

"Did she join her stepmother?"

"Not at once, sir; she first went into the private office and took off her wraps. After that she went into the drawing-room."

"Was anyone else in the office at that time?"

"No, sir."

"How long did she stay there?"

"About fifteen minutes, sir. Mrs. Trevor sent me to ask her to come into the drawing-room as Mrs. Macallister wished to see her."

"What was Miss Beatrice doing when you entered the office?"

"Sitting at her father's desk, sir, and writing."

"Had—had she a memorandum book in her hand?" asked Dick hesitatingly. So much depended on the answer.

"I didn't see any such book, sir," answered Wilkins, surprised. "After I gave her Mrs. Trevor's message, Miss Beatrice picked up her hat and fur coat and went immediately out of the room."

"What did she do with the papers on which she was writing?"

"She stuffed them inside the pocket of her fur coat, sir."

"Could you see what she had been writing?"

"No, sir; I couldn't."

"Well, I won't detain you any longer, Wilkins.

Here's the note for Miss Beatrice. By the way, were Mrs. Trevor and Mr. Clark good friends?"

"Not always, sir." Then, seeing Dick's surprise, Wilkins hastened to add: "Mrs. Trevor had a very quick temper. Many's the time I've nearly given notice on account of her hasty way of finding fault. She and Mr. Clark were very thick, that is," stumbling in his speech, "good friends like. Mr. Clark had eyes for nobody but Miss Beatrice, and he and Mrs. Trevor often had words over her. They had several nasty quarrels last month, sir. Is—is that all, sir?"

"Yes. I'm very much obliged to you, Wilkins," replied Dick, heartily. "Good day."

"Good day, sir," answered Wilkins. He stopped for a moment on the other side of the door to scratch his head in perplexity. "He's a rum cove, wonder what he's up to."

Dick wondered very much himself. It was a case of the blind leading the blind. If Clark was guilty, and certainly suspicion pointed his way, why should Beatrice hide the hat-pin? Above all, who had dropped the broken gold link in the Trevors' front hall? More and more puzzled by the facts which he had elicited from the communicative Wilkins, he dressed with what speed he could, and, not waiting for breakfast, ran across to the corner drug store and rang up a taxi-cab. While waiting he telephoned to Peggy and then to Mrs. Curtis. Both of them told him they had never owned a chain of any description with such a coin attached to it.

The taxi-cab was not long in coming, and he was whirled away to the Treasury Department as rapidly as the speed laws of the District allowed. On his

arrival there he went direct to the Secret Service Division, and on mentioning his name and errand he was at once taken to Chief Connor.

“I won’t take up a moment of your time, Chief,” explained Dick, as the two men sat down.

“Count de Smirnoff told me of your share in the capture of the three Italians on Saturday,” said the famous Secret Service man. “What can I do for you?”

“Did the Count tell you the identity of the fourth man?”

“Yes. Apparently Clark realized the game was up, for on inquiry at the Buckingham we learned that he hasn’t been to his room since Saturday afternoon. I have sent a description of him to every Secret Service man in the country, and have also had the trans-Atlantic steamship lines watched. We shall catch him, never fear, but I am afraid he will get off afterwards. Conspiracy is a mighty hard thing to prove.”

“I am convinced you can hold Clark for another crime,” said Dick slowly. Chief Connor looked at him in surprise.

“As for instance?” he asked.

“Mrs. Trevor’s murder.”

“Indeed!” The Chief sat back and pulled his mustache thoughtfully. “And your grounds for such a charge?”

“Clark is the one person beside the Attorney General who can open the safe. Mrs. Trevor’s body, you may remember, was found locked inside it. The burglar, Nelson, declares on oath that she was there when he opened the safe. According to the butler,

who has lived with the Trevors for over twenty years, Clark and Mrs. Trevor quarreled often. He had a key to the Trevors' front door, so that he could enter without anyone in the house being the wiser. And," added Dick, "he knew where every member of the household would be on that night. Then the Camorra had evidently decreed her death; Clark was said to be their direct agent in the affair."

"And his motive for killing Mrs. Trevor?"

"Count de Smirnoff informed me Clark was an old lover of hers in Naples. I know that he has been paying great attention to Miss Trevor. Possibly he did not take the precaution of being off with the old love before being on with the new."

Chief Connor followed Dick's arguments closely.

"Circumstantial evidence does point toward him," he admitted. "There is no doubt that Clark is a pretty thorough-going rascal. Have you tried to find out where he was on the night of the third?"

"Not yet. I came to find out if Clark had been arrested, to tell you of my suspicions, and to ask your advice in the matter."

"My men are busy now tracing Clark's career. If they discover any facts which point to the murder I will send for you. In the meantime, haven't you a mutual friend who would know something of Clark's life here?"

Dick's face brightened. "Of course, there's Charlie Archibald; he knows Clark pretty well. Charlie works in the Department of Justice. I'll go right over there." He rose as he spoke.

"Let me know the result," said Chief Connor.

"All right, sir. Many thanks for your suggestion. Good-by." And he hastened out of the building.

"The chase is getting warm," thought Dick, as the taxi turned and started up Fifteenth Street. "If only—only Peggy meant what she said. Well, here's for another try," and he opened the door just as the car drew up in front of the Department of Justice.

Dick hastily threaded his way through the busy rooms searching for his friend.

"Hello, Charlie, you're a sight for sair een," he hailed. "Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Oh, boning for an exam," said Archibald, his tired face lighting up with a smile. "You look as if the world were treating you pretty well, Dick?"

"Nothing to boast of. Say, Charlie," drawing him to one side and speaking in a low tone, "can you tell me anything about Alfred Clark?"

"Tell you anything about him?" echoed Archibald, surprised. "Well, no, not much; he's a quiet sort of chap, keeps himself pretty much to himself, not a good mixer with the boys. I've seen more of him than the others because he's lending me a hand in my studies for the District Bar examination."

"Perhaps you can tell me where he was on the night of the third?"

"The third," repeated Archibald. "What the deuce was I doing that night? Wait a moment." He took out a memorandum book and turned the leaves rapidly. "22nd January—1st of February—ah, here we are —'study with Clark.' Of course, I remember now. That night I went over to his rooms at the

Buckingham, to go over some papers with him. He has often told me to go up to his room and wait if he wasn't there; and so I sat waiting and waiting until after midnight, but he never showed up. Then I cleared out."

"Did he ever tell you what detained him?"

"Nope, just said he forgot the engagement."

"Do you know where Clark generally spends his time when not working?"

"He used to be with the Trevors all the time. He is quite a lady killer, you know." Dick shivered involuntarily, while his unconscious friend went on. "He is society mad, but lately he's not been like himself. It may be money troubles; he plays the races and has been a heavy loser. I know because I made him a small loan, and lately the money lenders have been pressing him for payments." He looked curiously at Dick. "Why do you want to know all this? You and Clark never hit it off very well."

"I'll explain some other time. Many thanks, old man. By-by," and Dick turned and ran down the corridor after the Attorney General, who had just entered the building.

"How are you, Tillinghast?" said he, cordially, as Dick brought up breathless before him. "Want to see me?"

"Only to ask you one question." As he spoke, he took the gold coin out of his pocket. "Have you ever seen this before, sir?"

The Attorney General examined the coin with interest, then handed it back to Dick.

"Never laid eyes on it before," he said. "Why do

you ask?"

But Dick never waited to reply; he was off down the corridor as fast as his legs could take him.

"District Building," he called to the chauffeur as he jumped inside and slammed the door.

Detective Hardy was reflecting on his week's work with great satisfaction when Dick burst hurriedly into his office.

"Time's up, Hardy," he said, coolly. "Come, divulge your news."

Hardy smiled indulgently. He could afford to tease Dick a little.

"News in regard to what, sir?"

"Who killed Mrs. Trevor?"

"That's rather a large order," smiled the detective.

"Well, I'll amend the question. Who do you *think* killed Mrs. Trevor?"

Hardy's eyes flashed with anger. He hated to be made fun of, especially by a young "Mr.-Know-It-All," and he instantly determined to take the wind out of his sails.

"It isn't a case of 'think,' Mr. Tillinghast; I have absolute proof."

"Against whom?"

"Miss Beatrice Trevor."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Dick, roughly. But his heart sank as he thought of the hat-pin and Beatrice's endeavor to secrete it. Should he confide in Hardy? His conscience pricked him. Undoubtedly the

detective should be told. But he had given his word to Peggy to shield her friend; let the consequences be what they might, he would keep it.

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Hardy. "We know they had a bitter quarrel; she threatened to strike her stepmother."

"Pooh! If we believe everything an angry woman says—" Dick shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Their bark is worse than their bite, Hardy."

"Maybe so, but not in this instance."

"Next?" questioned Dick, with a tantalizing smile.

"Her maid—" began Hardy, then checked himself. "Look here, sir; this is absolutely private, it must not get into the papers until I say so."

"Sure; I'll keep absolutely mum."

"I've made myself solid with Suzanne, Miss Trevor's maid. Nothing like using a little tact in that direction, sir," chuckled Hardy. "Anyway, she told me that a handsome, strong (mind you, *strong*) hat-pin that was given to Miss Beatrice by Miss Macallister is missing. Wait a moment," as Dick opened his lips to speak. "Suzanne says Miss Beatrice wore it that afternoon, and when she came in went into the private office and took off her hat there, later, carrying it up to her room, but she didn't have the hat-pin with her, because Suzanne asked her where it was when she put her coat and hat away. Miss Beatrice made no reply, and shortly after went downstairs to dinner. Suzanne never saw the hat-pin again. She remembers it distinctly because of the curious design of the gold about the cat's-eye in the top."

"See here, Hardy, that's not much to go on. You haven't found the weapon remember, and therefore cannot prove it belonged to Miss Beatrice. Secondly, Mrs. Trevor was found locked in the safe, not on the floor."

"Quite true, sir. But you must recollect that Mrs. Trevor was a small, slender woman. I don't believe she weighed over one hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"I know; but a relaxed body is a mighty heavy, unwieldy thing to lift."

"Miss Trevor is tall and strong," said Hardy, dryly. "She is a fine tennis player, a good fencer, and is also a magnificent cross-country rider. It wouldn't be much exertion for her to get Mrs. Trevor into the safe, which was a short distance away."

Dick shook his head. "I can't agree with you, Hardy."

The detective leaned toward Dick and raised his hand impressively.

"Listen to me, sir. Her initialed handkerchief with blood stains upon it was found in the safe near the body."

Dick stared with unbelieving eyes at the triumphant detective.

"You are crazy," he said, tersely. "In the first place, Doctor Davis said no blood was visible on Mrs. Trevor's outer garments. Then all the witnesses, including yourself, testified at the inquest that nothing had been found either in the safe or in the room."

"I have just seen Doctor Davis," explained Hardy,

patiently. “He said that undoubtedly some blood must have spurted out on the murderer’s hand when the foul blow was struck. Secondly, we didn’t find the handkerchief. It was brought to me by a person who said his conscience would no longer permit him to keep the matter secret. He had held back the information to protect Miss Trevor; but now, convinced of her guilt, he could no longer shield her.”

“And may I ask the name of this—this shrimp?” asked Dick, boiling with rage.

“Certainly. Alfred Clark, the secretary!”

CHAPTER XXI
FORGING THE FETTERS

DICK sat back in his chair and glowered at Hardy.

"Do you know that your informant is at present a fugitive from justice?" he asked.

"What!" cried the detective, springing to his feet in his surprise.

"It's a fact," declared Dick. "The Secret Service men are after him. I expect to hear of his arrest at any moment."

Hardy sank back in his chair and mopped his red face. He had very much the appearance of a pricked gas balloon.

"Would you mind putting me wise?" he asked, finally. "I've been so busy shadowing Miss Trevor, I am all in the dark about Clark. The Secret Service Bureau haven't notified us yet. I suppose they want him for some Government business."

In a few terse sentences Dick told him of his interview with Chief Connor, and of the evidence he had collected against Clark. At the end Hardy swore with fluency and ease.

"What a blank—blank—fool I've been to be taken in by that scoundrel," he gasped. "Then this handkerchief business is only a plan to throw dust in my eyes."

"I think so," agreed Dick. "Clark evidently wanted to turn suspicion against Miss Trevor, so manufactured this evidence. It was probably an easy matter for him to pick up one of Miss Trevor's handkerchiefs; as a rule women shed them wherever they go. Then he pricked his arm, or made his nose bleed so as to get blood stains on it. Depend upon it, Hardy, he is your man."

"You are right, sir," exclaimed Hardy, banging his fist on the table. "Now that you have shown me the way, I'll bring the murder home to him, or bust. Here, Johnston," to a plain clothes officer who had just entered the office, "get your hat and come on."

Dick left the two detectives at the main entrance of the District Building and rushed down to the *Star*. After a satisfactory interview with Colonel Byrd, he hastened to his desk where he found an accumulation of work waiting for him. But, as it happened, that particular work was never finished by him, for at that moment a District messenger boy handed him a note, the contents of which surprised him very much. It read:

Dear Dick:

Get over here as quick as you can. Must see you. Most important.

Yours in haste,
TOM BLAKE.

Blake the phlegmatic—Blake the most easy-going and laziest of clubmen! Dick wondered what was to pay as he closed his desk and got his overcoat and hat. After a few words of explanation to Colonel Byrd, he left the office and hastened up to Stoneleigh Court.

Blake's apartment on the sixth floor faced on Connecticut Avenue, but from the side windows there was a magnificent view of the White House grounds and the Washington Monument, whose wonderful white shaft seemed to float aloft, detached from the solid earth, a part of the fleecy clouds themselves; while still farther to the south a glimpse of the Potomac River could be caught now and then as it twisted and turned along the Virginia and Maryland shores.

Dick had plenty of time to admire the view before Tom made his appearance, dressed immaculately.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, old man, but I had to shift after traveling all night, first getting some sleep; never closed my eyes all night in a beastly upper berth. Lunch ready, Lambert?" as his man came to the door. "All right, come along, Dick."

Dick sighed with satisfaction, as he helped himself to a juicy piece of beefsteak and some French fried potatoes. He was almost famished, and Tom was in like condition. For a short time conversation languished while they both attended to the wants of the inner man.

"Where have you been, Tom?" Dick finally asked, helping himself to a hot muffin.

"Philadelphia," answered Tom, his speech somewhat impeded by a large mouthful which he, with difficulty, swallowed in a hurry. "I had to go over there to see about the strike in the Warren textile mills. I'm a big stockholder in the concern, so had to take an interest in the blooming business. Can't say I was much help; couldn't seem to understand the rights of the row. Far as I could make out, the workers wanted more wages."

"Most people do," interrupted Dick, laughing.

"I know, but the business doesn't warrant a raise, hasn't paid a dividend for months. The strikers claim they can't even buy the necessities of life at the present scale of wages. The whole trouble is, no one knows nowadays what are necessities and what luxuries, and no one attempts to live without them both."

"Oh, I could exist without the necessities if someone supplied me with all the luxuries," laughed Dick. "But seriously, Tom, why did you send me this urgent note?"

Tom beckoned to Lambert. "Put the cigars and coffee on the table, and don't wait." He remained silent until his order had been swiftly obeyed, then continued, "While I was in Philadelphia, Dick, I saw your brother John."

"How's the dear old chap?" inquired Dick, much pleased to get first-hand information, as he and his brother were poor correspondents.

"Looking finely, but, of course, as busy as ever. Never saw such a man for work," grumbled Tom. "He told me he was on the point of coming to Washington, when he read in the papers that I was at the Bellevue-Stratford. Therefore, he decided to consult me instead of you."

"What did he consult you about?"

"The Trevor murder."

Dick straightened up in his chair. "What on earth induces him to take a particular interest in that?"

"In the first place he knows you are investigating the murder, having read your signed despatches to

the *Inquirer*. Secondly, he feels that he is holding back some information which may help to elucidate the mystery. He confided certain facts to me, first making me promise to tell no one but you."

"What did he tell you?" eagerly demanded Dick.

"That Beatrice Trevor and Donald Gordon were married on the first of January."

His startling news had more effect on his friend than Tom expected. For a moment Dick felt physically ill, and the dishes on the table whirled up and down.

"Here," exclaimed Tom, startled by his white face. "Take some whisky, quick!" He poured out a liberal portion. "There, that will soon set you up."

"Are you sure there is no mistake?" asked Dick, imploringly.

"Absolutely positive," answered Tom, gravely. "Your brother and I both realize the scandal that must follow if the secret leaks out before Gordon is cleared of this monstrous charge. John gave me all the details known to him. The marriage was perfectly legal. He performed the ceremony, and Mrs. John Dundas and Arthur Vandergrift were the witnesses. The affair was kept absolutely quiet for personal reasons given by Mrs. Dundas. John wouldn't, of course, tell me what they were, except to say that everything was open and above board."

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"Only that the marriage took place at three o'clock in the afternoon. He gave me this copy of the marriage certificate for you." He took the paper out of his notebook and handed it to Dick. The printed lines danced before the latter's eyes as he studied

them.

"Whichever way I look at it, Gordon's guilt seems certain," he said, finally.

But Tom shook his head in doubt. "I still don't see where the motive comes in," he argued. "Just because he married Beatrice in secret he didn't have to kill her stepmother."

"It happens that Gordon was an old lover of Mrs. Trevor's," answered Dick, shortly. "General Long says he was madly infatuated with her, and there's a rumor they were married in London before she met Trevor."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Tom, in open-eyed amazement. "Do you mean that Gordon intentionally or unintentionally committed bigamy?"

"I don't know," moodily. "Apparently the marriage was kept from the Trevors. But why? From a worldly point of view it was a most suitable match. Both are well-born, wealthy, and good looking. Why, then, elope?"

"Blessed if I know." Tom scratched his head hopelessly. "Mrs. Trevor, as proved by her letter, made an appointment with Gordon at a most unconventional hour. Perhaps she refused to keep silent about the past in that last interview, and in a boiling fury he snatched up the hat-pin."

"But then how did Beatrice get so entangled in the affair?" asked Dick.

"Is she?" inquired Tom, puzzled by the new development.

"Yes," despondently. "I know positively that she had the top of the broken hat-pin in her possession

after the murder. It was undoubtedly the weapon used to kill Mrs. Trevor. Also, Beatrice's blood-stained handkerchief is said to have been found inside the safe by the body of her stepmother. Gordon is the last man to throw suspicion on an innocent woman by using her handkerchief and her hat-pin. Even if guilty, he would never hide behind a woman's petticoat."

Tom's eyes grew bigger and bigger as he listened to Dick.

"It strikes me you are on the wrong tack," he said when the latter paused. "All your arguments appear to me to point to the fact that Gordon is trying to shield Beatrice. Innocent himself, he might have purposely let them arrest him for her crime."

"Good God!" Dick looked at Tom in sudden horror.

"Beatrice might have been concealed behind a curtain and overheard the scene between her husband and her stepmother. Mrs. Trevor was very beautiful, also very fascinating; perhaps Gordon lost his head and made love to her. Beatrice's jealousy roused—"

"No, no," exclaimed Dick. "Beatrice was at the ball then. I was with her myself at the very time Mrs. Trevor and Gordon were together."

"Why not later on then?" pursued Tom. "She was the last person to enter the house—everyone else was in bed—perhaps the two women met and continued their quarrel. You remember Wilkins overheard Beatrice threaten her stepmother earlier in the evening. Stronger than most of her sex, blind hatred may have nerved Beatrice's arm and eye to strike the fatal blow."

"I won't believe it!" declared Dick, fiercely. "I won't! I stick to it that Alfred Clark is the criminal."

"The secretary?" asked Tom, much astonished.

"Yes. He was Mrs. Trevor's old lover, too...."

"Another! Apparently the woods were full of them," interpolated Tom.

"Mrs. Trevor was probably jealous of his attentions to Beatrice, and threatened to disclose some disgraceful secret of his past. Clark, to silence her, killed her, the cold-blooded fish. He would not scruple to throw suspicion on Beatrice, particularly as, being married to Gordon, she must have rejected his suit."

"For all that, Dick," said Tom, obstinately, "if Beatrice Trevor ever comes to trial for this crime, you will have great difficulty in convincing twelve good men and true that she is innocent."

"I'll do it!" Dick's eyes snapped with determination.

"How?"

"By proving that that black-hearted scoundrel Clark is guilty."

"Beg pardon, sir," Lambert's discreet voice from the doorway interrupted them. "James has just sent up word, sir, that the car is here, sir."

"All right, Lambert; get Mr. Tillinghast's coat and hat, and mine. I'll take you wherever you wish to go, Dick, but first come with me to Galt's. I have to buy a wedding present for May Seymour. Please come and help me select it."

Dick consulted his watch. "If you won't be very

long, I'll come. I have an appointment with General Long at four o'clock."

Lambert helped them into their overcoats, and a few minutes later they were whirled away in the big Pierce Arrow car which was Tom's latest addition to his overstocked garage.

"I had a great mind to turn detective and use the knowledge of Beatrice's secret marriage to find the murderer of her stepmother," said Tom, as the big car slowed up at a street crossing. "You remember, Dick, that Peggy Macallister challenged us all. But don't worry, old man," seeing the telltale color rise in Dick's face. "I know when I am out of the running. But what struck me as being extremely ludicrous was her including Count de Morny in the wager. I was the only one to appreciate the humor of it."

"I fail to see any particular humor in the situation," retorted Dick, warmly. "De Morny has as great a right to win Peggy as any man; far more than I, in fact." And he sighed as he bitterly thought of his small bank account.

"Tut! I wasn't thinking of your rivalry, but of de Morny's putting himself out to revenge Mrs. Trevor's death. Why, man alive, they hated each other like poison."

Dick looked curiously at Tom. "What makes you think so?"

"I don't think—I *know*. De Morny told me so himself. He said she affected him as a cat does some people; simply couldn't stand being in the same room with her, and yet they were constantly thrown together at bridge parties. I thought it simply one of his over-charged Latin speeches; but one day at the

Macallisters I inadvertently overheard them talking. They were in a bay window concealed by the curtain, and I stood with my back to them waiting for the crowd to thin so I could go and speak to Mrs. Macallister."

"And what did you overhear?" asked Dick, with growing interest.

"At first I paid no attention to the few words I caught; but finally I heard a woman's voice say: 'Indeed, Count, I will not agree....'

"'You must. If you do not, disaster will overtake you. Be warned in time.'

"His voice was so threatening that I involuntarily turned to interrupt them just as Mrs. Trevor parted the curtains and walked out. Until then I had not known for certain who they were. They spoke in French. From that moment Mrs. Trevor won my admiration. There was no trace of excitement or embarrassment in her manner. Jove! she carried off the situation with a high hand, and de Morny followed her lead."

"Probably they didn't know they had been overheard," suggested Dick.

"That must have been it," answered Tom. "Come to think of it, the last time I saw Mrs. Trevor was on Wednesday about noon. She was sitting in her limousine in front of de Morny's small house on K Street."

"Considering their dislike was mutual, it's strange she should drive up to his door. Was the Attorney General with her?"

"No, she was alone; probably she stopped to leave

a note. They played auction a great deal. De Morny told me the other day, though, that he would have to give up playing as his losses had been very heavy this winter. Here's Galt's, come on in."

It did not take Tom long to select a present. He picked out an after-dinner coffee service, and gave directions as to its marking and delivery. Dick glanced impatiently at the clock. He had barely time to keep his appointment if he left at once. As he turned to speak to Tom he heard a man standing next him say:

"My mastaire wishes it repaired and returned at once, Monsieur."

Dick's eyes traveled over the speaker, obviously by the cut of his clothes a foreigner, then on to the piece of jewelry which the man laid on the counter as he spoke. It was a long, heavily linked, red-gold watch chain. Dick waited for the valet to go before addressing the clerk, who had often waited on him.

"May I look at this chain?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Tillinghast."

Dick took it up in his left hand. The outer sides of the links were covered with intricate scroll work. One link was missing. With trembling fingers, he took the coin out of his pocket and placed the link in the broken chain. It fitted exactly!

Dick's heart was beating nearly to suffocation as he asked, in little more than a whisper:

"Can you tell me to whom this chain belongs?"

"Certainly, sir. Count de Morny."

CHAPTER XXII
AT THE TIME APPOINTED

DICK leaned limply against the high, glass counter, his cold fingers holding fast to the telltale chain.

"Mr. Tillinghast." He whirled around and found Hardy standing by his side. "I tried to see you at your office, but Colonel Byrd said you were at Stoneleigh Court. On going there, Mr. Blake's servant told me I might catch you here. Chief Conner has received word that Clark was arrested this morning in New York on board an outgoing tramp steamer. He was disguised as an Italian stoker. Two Secret Service men are bringing him back on the six ten train to-night. Chief Conner sent me word to look you up at once, as he—"

"Just a moment, Hardy," Dick interrupted. He had done some rapid thinking, and a daring plan had occurred to him, which he decided to put into instant execution. "Are you a good bluffer?"

"You bet; try me."

"Then go to the head clerk and tell him you need this chain," picking it up, "as a piece of evidence in a murder. Do that, then come with me, and by night you will have the real murderer of Mrs. Trevor under lock and key. Be quick."

Hardy did exactly as Dick suggested, meeting with but little opposition from the head clerk after he

had convinced that individual that he was a properly accredited representative of the law.

"Come on, Tom," called Dick, as his friend stopped for a moment to examine a tray filled with cigarette cases.

"What's up?" he inquired, joining the two men at the door.

"Another clew," answered Dick, briefly. "In with you both," bundling them unceremoniously into the waiting motor. "I want half an hour's uninterrupted talk with you and Hardy, Tom."

Tom looked keenly at Dick's serious face. "Drive to the Mall," he ordered, and the chauffeur started slowly off in that direction. "Out with your story, Dick."

The latter took the broken link out of his pocket and handed it to Tom. "I found this link in the Trevor house under the armor in the front hall. No member of that household can identify it. Wilkins, their butler, declares it was not there on the morning of the murder, as he and the footman oiled the floor then. Clark, according to the butler, wears a fob. Swarms of people called and left cards at the Trevors' but they go no further than the front door. I am telling you all this to prove that that broken link was not where I found it *before* the murder, nor could it have been dropped there after the finding of the body. Now, that broken link is exactly the same design and fits in this chain which Hardy has just received from the clerk at Galt's."

"Well, what then?" demanded Hardy, eagerly.

"Just this." Dick spoke slowly and distinctly so as to be heard by the deeply interested men. "This

chain belongs to Count de Morny."

"Hold on—hold on," exclaimed Tom, recovering from his surprise. "Perhaps some person attending the inquest dropped it?"

"That part of the house was roped off and guarded by policemen."

"You are right," agreed Hardy. "I remember the careful arrangements we made to keep the crowd to the left as they entered the house. Besides," examining the chain closely, "it must have taken a tremendous wrench to break off that link, and the few pieces of furniture on the way to the library and parlor were moved to make room for the people passing back and forth."

"Exactly," said Dick. "My theory is that de Morny, after committing the murder, concealed himself behind the armor in the corner by the chimney. In getting up, his chain must have caught and wrenched off the link."

"But the motive?" demanded Hardy. "Count de Morny is a member of the Diplomatic Corps; there will be an awful howl and international complications unless we have absolute proof of his guilt before we arrest him."

"Mr. Blake can tell you that Mrs. Trevor and the Count hated each other."

"Yes, he told me so," corroborated Tom, as the detective looked at him. "I also overheard the Count threaten her."

"Gordon was not the only man late in arriving at the Bachelors' Cotillion that night," went on Dick. "De Morny never got there until after midnight. He gave very evasive answers to Miss Macallister when

she asked what had detained him. We all teased him about his unusual solemnity; and then towards the end of the ball he astonished us by sudden outbursts of hilarity. At the time I attributed them to too many convivial glasses of champagne. But a more sinister cause may have been responsible for his conduct.

“To sum up—we know de Morny hated Mrs. Trevor; we know he threatened her; we know this chain belongs to him; we know one link from it was found in the Trevor house; we know he could have killed Mrs. Trevor that night and have gone afterwards to the ball—it is what Gordon is accused of doing.

“Now, I propose we go to de Morny and demand an explanation. If he cannot give a satisfactory one, Hardy, here, as a representative of the law, can threaten to arrest him.”

“I can—” Hardy looked troubled—“but you gentlemen have got to stand by me, for I may get into a devil of a row by exceeding my authority.”

“Don’t worry,” said Tom. “I am convinced de Morny is the murderer, and that our bluff will work.”

“I must speak to Captain Brown first, sir,” objected the detective.

Tom wasted no time in words, he leaned across and spoke to his chauffeur.

“Police Headquarters,” he ordered, “as fast as you can get there.”

About an hour later the big car purred softly up K Street and stopped before a modest red-brick house. Tom led the way up the short flagged walk and rang the bell. A Union Transfer baggage wagon drove up to the curb, and Hardy nodded toward it, whispering

to Dick: “Making a quick get-away.”

“Take my card to Monsieur le Comte,” said Tom to the attendant who answered the door. “I will detain him but a moment.”

His air of authority had its effect on the servant, and he promptly showed them into the small parlor, saying he would summon his master.

Too nervous to sit down, Dick wandered around the cozy room, looking at first one ornament and then another. The place spoke of wealth and good taste. A Corot and a Millet hung on the walls. The rich coloring of the oriental hangings and rugs gave out an air of comfort and warmth which was added to by the cannel coal fire burning cheerfully in the grate. It had grown bitterly cold outside, and the men, grateful for the warmth, stood grouped about the fireplace as Count de Morny entered.

“Ah! Monsieur Blake, most welcome; and you, too, Monsieur,” shaking Dick warmly by the hand, “and—” looking at the detective.

“Detective Hardy,” supplemented Tom, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable; but the Frenchman apparently did not notice the air of constraint in each man’s attitude, but greeted Hardy with all the courtesy of his nation.

“Won’t you seet?” he asked, pulling the lounging chairs nearer the fire. “Eet ees cold outside, *n’est-ce pas*?”

“Thanks. We have only come for a moment,” answered Dick, “just to ask you—” He hesitated, glancing at Hardy.

“To ask you,” said Hardy, stepping forward,

"what took place between you and Mrs. Trevor on the night of Wednesday, February third?"

A look of blank astonishment crossed de Morny's face.

"Ze night of ze sird!" he exclaimed. "But I do not see Madame zen. I do not remembaire—one moment —" As he spoke, he drew a small Morocco-bound memorandum book from his vest pocket, and rapidly turned its leaves. "*Mais, oui*—I was at ze Bachelors' zat night," he added, triumphantly.

"You did not go there until after midnight," said Dick.

"*Oui*, Monsieur," said de Morny. He eyed the men sharply. It just occurred to him that their behavior was somewhat peculiar. "And what then?" haughtily.

"We wish to know where you were between the hours of ten o'clock and one in the morning on the night of the third."

"Why should you question me, Monsieur Hardy?" turning squarely on the detective.

"Because I want to know when you killed Mrs. Trevor," he bluntly replied.

The detective's meaning dawned slowly upon de Moray's mind; then he leaped to his feet with an oath, his handsome eyes flashing with fury.

"*Pardieu!*" he cried. "You dare—you dare—" Not able to express his indignation in his limited English, he burst into French.

Tom tried to stem the torrent of his words by addressing him in his native tongue, while Dick and Hardy stood hopelessly looking on, but de Morny would not be appeased.

"I—I—" he began, lapsing into broken English, "I —a de Morny—am accused by a pig of an Americaine of a crime so foul! Bah!" Then, mastering his rage by a great effort, he asked more calmly, "May I ask Monsieur for his reasons of a charge so monstrous?"

"Certainly," said Hardy. "You were heard to threaten her—"

"*I*, Monsieur?" in great astonishment.

"Yes; I overheard you do so at Mrs. Macallister's," interrupted Tom.

De Morny looked at him with an enigmatic smile. "So!" was his only comment.

"You cannot give a satisfactory account of your whereabouts on February third between the hours of ten and one in the morning; at least you haven't yet."

"So!" Again the Frenchman smiled.

"Now, Count—" Hardy spoke slowly, to make sure that de Morny understood him—"we have irrefutable evidence that you were in the Trevor house on that night. A piece of your property was found there."

"What is eet?" questioned de Morny, with a rising inflection.

"This—" taking the watch chain out of his pocket.

"*Mais c'est impossible!*" ejaculated the Frenchman. "I myself sent the chain to ze jeweler to be mended."

"Exactly, Count—*to be mended*. Here is the broken link you lost in the Trevor house on the night of February third."

Spellbound, de Morny gazed at the coin lying in

Hardy's broad palm. Then he reached over, took up the watch chain, laid it on the bare mahogany table, and fitted the broken link into place. In silence the three men watched him, as a cat watches a mouse, but they could learn nothing of the passion burning within him from his set face and brooding eyes. Finally, he broke the long pause to ask:

"And you sink—"

"That the owner of that chain is the murderer of Mrs. Trevor."

"You are right, sir," said a low, clear voice back of the detective. "*I am he.*"

With a convulsive bound Hardy swung round; Dick and Tom being too petrified to move.

"Ah, *non, non*, de Smirnoff, say not so," cried de Morny, deep feeling in his shaking voice.

The Russian had entered unnoticed some minutes before by a door communicating with an inner room. Too shocked for speech, and sick at heart, Dick gazed at him. This—this was the man who had saved him from a horrible death—and he had repaid the debt by hounding him to the gallows. But for his intervention the criminal would have gone undetected.

"And why not, Henri?" asked de Smirnoff, quietly. "I cannot have you, *mon ami*, arrested for my crime. And so, Monsieur," to Hardy, "you found my lucky piece and traced it here—I do not know how you did it, but it was clever work. I thought I had covered my tracks."

"Hold, sir," said Hardy, his sense of fair play causing him to interrupt. "I must warn you that

everything you say will be used against you."

De Smirnoff shrugged his shoulders. "It can make no difference." Then, as Hardy pulled out a pair of handcuffs, his face flushed hotly. "Not that—my God!—not that; I will come quietly with you."

At a sign from Dick, Hardy reluctantly put them back in his pocket.

"My warm thanks, Messieurs," said de Smirnoff, slowly, "for the great kindness; and I have another favor to ask of you. My host, Count de Morny, knows nothing of this affair. I would like, if possible, to explain my share in it to him and to you. It was no sordid murder. Will you not sit a moment?"

Dick held a whispered conversation with Tom and Hardy, and then turned to de Smirnoff.

"We agree to listen, Count."

De Smirnoff bowed his head in grave acknowledgment, and then signed to the men to draw up their chairs. It was a scene Dick never forgot: the room, lighted only by the winter twilight and the bright blaze of the cannel coal, the five men seated in a circle around the hearth, the firelight flickering on their excited faces. De Smirnoff was by far the calmest of them all.

"It will not take long in the telling," he began; "but to make the present situation clear, I must speak first of the past. Hélène de Beaupré's mother, Olga Weletsky, was a Russian. She married Claude de Beaupré, and they lived first in one country and then in another, finally returning to St. Petersburg. There they lived in comparative poverty and obscurity, having spent most of their patrimony in their wanderings about the world.

"About five years later they both died within a very short time of each other, leaving their only child, a girl of twenty-three, in the care of an uncle, Colonel Weletsky. I saw her often before the death of her parents. She was very beautiful then—the beauty of the devil—the beauty that destroys men's souls.

"My only son, Sacha de Smirnoff, met her frequently at a friend's house, and fell madly in love with her. She returned his passion, but she would not consent to a marriage ceremony being performed, as she said she did not believe in the solemn rites of the church. I think she simply did not wish to bind herself legally to one man. They lived together for two years." He paused, then resumed his story.

"While this was going on, I was in Persia looking after some mining interests, which I inherited from an uncle. News travels but slowly in that country of no telegraphs, telephones, or railroads, and during those two years and more I heard but seldom from Sacha. Therefore, you can understand my horror and my agony when, on my return to St. Petersburg, I found that my son had been arrested as a nihilist, secretly tried, and sent God knows where." His voice shook with feeling. "Hélène had also vanished. I joined the Secret Police as a political spy. For nearly four despairing years I searched Siberia for my boy, visiting every penal settlement in that vast land.

"There is no need of recounting the humiliation and suffering I endured during that time; the worst agony being my anxiety for my son. Finally, I found him in the worst settlement of all, broken in health and in spirit, a physical and almost mental wreck. Remembering him as I did in the glory of his young manhood, tall, handsome, brave, it was a fearful shock to me to find him crippled, scarred, and

cringing. Shortly after my arrival Sacha fell ill with brain fever, and for days I nursed him, fearing he would never recover. He rallied finally, and slowly day by day regained his strength. I did everything I could to lighten his confinement, while all the time planning his escape.

"One day a fresh batch of political prisoners arrived, among them an old friend of Sacha's. When he found who I was, he told me that he himself after Sacha's arrest, had gone to Hélène and given her proofs of Sacha's innocence of the crime he was charged with, thinking that of course she would use the papers to clear him. But the Vampire was already tired of Sacha. She disappeared with the papers, believing that safe in the wilds of Siberia Sacha would never trouble her again, and she could live her own life untroubled by the past.

"Boris advised me to recover those papers, give them to the proper authorities, and secure my son's release. It seemed the only thing to do, as Sacha's health was such that to try and escape in the rigors of that climate was courting certain death. Therefore, I left Siberia, first arranging with one of the Cossack officials at the settlement to send me word every month of my son's physical condition, care of my Paris bankers." He stopped and sighed deeply, then drew out his cigar case. "Will you not join me, I speak more calmly when I smoke?

"I will not weary you with a detailed account of my search for Hélène. My connection with the Secret Police helped me, and I was of great use to the Bureau, as few suspected that I belonged to the force. Finally I traced Hélène to Italy, Paris, England, and then here. I knew of the Grand Duke's proposed visit, and asked permission to accompany him; and I was

sent on as special agent to guard him against the Camorra, as you already know," to Dick. "I came on to Washington before the Grand Duke, however, and meeting Henri," placing his hand affectionately on de Morny's shoulder, "an old friend of Sacha's, accepted his invitation to visit him during my stay here. That was on the second of February.

"On Wednesday morning as I was going out of the front door, I was astounded to see Hélène sitting in her automobile by the curb. I believe her chauffeur was in the vestibule waiting to deliver a note. I paid no attention to him but went straight to the limousine and opened the door. I have altered little, and Hélène knew me at once. She shrank back in her seat.

"'You have nothing to fear,' I said, quickly. 'I simply want those papers which will clear Sacha. Have you kept them?'

"My one terror had been that she might have destroyed them, and my heart leaped with joy when she told me she had the papers, but she also said she had no intention of giving them up.

"'I am not here to haggle with you,' I answered. 'What is your price?'

"'Twenty thousand.'

"'Roubles?'

"'No, dollars.'

"Her ruling passion was gambling. It was an inherited vice. She would sell her soul for money to lose over the gaming tables."

"It ees so," interrupted de Morny. "I was warning her, Monsieur Blake, when you overheard me. She

was my cousin, but yes, and I did not want the name disgraced. I hated and despised her for her treatment of my friend, Sacha; and it was I, Messieurs, who first notified Count de Smirnoff that she was in Washington." The Frenchman's eyes sparkled vindictively.

"Hélène leaned back in her car, thinking, thinking," continued de Smirnoff. "Finally she said, speaking low that the chauffeur should not hear:

"'Come to my house to-night at one o'clock. I can see you alone then; the others will be at the ball. Knock very softly on the front door.'

"I nodded understandingly, saying: 'I will bring the money, do not fail me,' and closed the door of the car as the chauffeur cranked the engine.

"The rest of the day was taken up with arranging my affairs. I produced my letters of credit and drew out the money without difficulty from different banks until I had the requisite amount. It was a quarter of my fortune, but no sum was too great to spend in rescuing my son from his living death. After helping me Henri went to Baltimore on business connected with his Embassy—"

"*Oui*, I did," again interrupted de Morny, "and I only return by ze midnight train."

"I was sitting here by the fire about eight o'clock," went on de Smirnoff, "thinking and planning for the future—the happy future—when Sacha and I could go to sunny Italy and in that ideal climate, he would regain his shattered health. We would take a villa on Lake Como— Just then the housekeeper brought in a cablegram. I tore it open—my son was dead!

"In letters of fire the message burned into my brain. How long I sat here I do not know; but when I rose my soul was frozen, my mind made up. She who was blood guilty should answer for her crime. I would keep my appointment, get the letters, and forward them to Russia, thus making certain that Sacha should sleep in no unhallowed grave, but be brought to the old vault in St. Petersburg to rest at last with honor unblemished by the side of his illustrious ancestors.

"At the time appointed I was in the Trevors' vestibule, and I tapped softly on the door. In a few minutes Hélène admitted me, and we tiptoed softly into what was apparently a private office. The light was on and I glanced about the room to see if we were alone; the open safe attracted my attention. Hélène noticed my glance in that direction.

"'My papers are there with my jewelry. I had to get the combination before I could see you. Have you the money?'

"I nodded. She went to the safe and picked up a small bundle. As I watched her my hand closed over a hat-pin lying on the top of the desk I was standing by; I glanced down at it—the long, sharp-pointed steel caught my attention. It was an ideal weapon for my purpose; far better than a revolver shot which might arouse the household. As it happened the pin broke in the wound—" There was not a trace of feeling in his voice.

"Hélène returned, and in silence I handed the money to her and watched her count it. Beautiful as ever, living in the lap of luxury—while he, Sacha, her devoted lover always, had experienced the dregs of life in that hell upon earth. Merciful God! Could such things be?

"In silence she handed me the papers; in silence I took them. She was about to speak when her eye caught the glitter of a ring on the floor. She dropped on one knee to pick it up, resting her left hand against my thigh to balance herself.

"Quickly I seized my chance; and with one strong, straight stroke drove the hat-pin into her heart, putting out my left hand to catch and steady her body. And I held her until her head fell back and I saw her eyes glazing. Thus died Hélène—the Vampire!"

No one spoke. In the terrible silence the ticking of the small clock sounded clear and distinct. De Smirnoff roused himself.

"My tale is soon finished. I carried the body to the safe and fastened the door; but first I put the twenty thousand dollar gold certificates, wrapped in her handkerchief, by her side. She had paid the price, I had no further use for the money."

A gasp came from Hardy. "Good God! Clark must have stolen the money," he cried, "he found the handkerchief."

"What matter?" said de Smirnoff, indifferently. "It is blood money, ill-gotten gains! To continue; I put out the lights in the room and went into the hall, but just as I started for the door I heard someone coming downstairs, so I hid behind a suit of old armor. The man, whom I judged to be Mr. Trevor, went straight to the front door and admitted a woman. They went immediately into the room I had just left. Just as I started to go, Mr. Trevor returned into the hall and went upstairs. He came down at once, and in a few seconds I heard him talking at the telephone. This was my opportunity. I rose up hurriedly; but in my

haste I caught my watch chain in some sharp part of the iron stand which supported the armor. I heard something snap, but dared not stop to investigate. I slipped out of the front door and down the front steps as noiselessly as I could,—but dropped the head of the hat-pin in opening the door.

"With a supreme effort, I took up my everyday life the next morning, attending to my duties in safe-guarding the person of the Grand Duke, and accepting the invitations I received as Henri's guest. It has given me infinite satisfaction to see Hélène's wicked past revealed gradually to the world she had fooled so long.

"Monsieur Tillinghast—" he turned directly to Dick—"I am glad, glad I was of service to you the other night, for you remind me of Sacha." His voice quivered on his son's name.

"Count—Count—what can I say," faltered Dick.

"Say nothing. It is Kismet. In my grief for my son I have never given the loss of my lucky coin another thought; but I hated to be without my chain, a present from Sacha when a lad; so I asked Henri to send it to a jeweler's to be mended. That—is—all—I —think—Messieurs—"

For some time his voice had grown husky from weariness and emotion; now he could hardly articulate. None of his listeners cared to break the painful pause. Suddenly, Hardy, the most callous of the four men, rose and turned on the lights. As he did so a cry escaped de Morny:

"Look—look!" he shouted pointing to de Smirnoff.

With a bound Dick was by the Russian's side, his

hand on his heart. De Smirnoff's head was thrown back, his body, unnoticed in the dimly lighted room, had twisted slightly, and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful stare. There was no need for Dick to speak. Each man in the room knew de Smirnoff was dead.

Tom leaned over and took the half-burnt cigar from the nerveless fingers.

"The poison was here," he said.

Dick's pitying gaze fell on the livid face.

"Better so," he said softly.

CHAPTER XXIII
THE LIFTING OF THE CLOUD

"DURLEY, fill up Miss Beatrice's champagne glass. I insist, my dear," as Beatrice protested. "Your health needs such a tonic, and it can do you no harm. I promised your father that I would take good care of you, so you must prepare to do exactly as I say," and Mrs. Macallister shook a warning finger at her guest.

Peggy had called for Beatrice that afternoon and carried her home in the Macallisters' landaulet. And already their tender but unobtrusive sympathy, and the cheery atmosphere of the house had had a beneficial effect on her over-wrought nerves.

Intuitively, Mrs. Macallister knew that Beatrice was silently grieving her heart out, too proud to complain even to those dear friends, as each day added its burden to those which her sensitive woman's soul was bearing so bravely. As her handsome dark eyes, filled with unshed tears, encountered Mrs. Macallister's piercing ones, that astute dame, deeply touched by their wistful appeal, then and there registered a vow to do everything within her power to help her. "There's some man in the case," thought she, watching Beatrice covertly. "And what on earth ails Peggy? She hasn't been herself since the night I found her in a dead faint."

All through dinner Peggy had eaten nothing. She sat, pale and preoccupied, making bread balls and

leaving her grandmother to entertain Beatrice. The hat-pin was weighing heavily on Peggy's mind, taking away both appetite and sleep. She was trying to screw up her courage to ask Beatrice to explain its presence in her box, but each time she looked at her friend's sad face her heart misgave her. What—what if she couldn't explain? Peggy sighed drearily.

"For goodness' sake, Peggy," exclaimed Mrs. Macallister thoroughly exasperated. "You are very depressing to-night. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," she hastily declared, suddenly waking up to the fact that she had not taken any part in the conversation for some time. "I was thinking of a story Mr. Sinclair told me this morning when I was in the bank about Mrs. Wheeler. He said his bookkeeper sent word to Mrs. Wheeler that she had overdrawn her bank account. She promptly wrote a note to him saying she was so sorry the mistake had happened, and she enclosed her check on them to cover the overdraw!"

"Poor Mrs. Wheeler," said Beatrice, as they rose from the table and strolled into the library. "I wonder what Washington would do without her, her blunders are so numerous?"

"Their name is legion," agreed Mrs. Macallister, helping herself to coffee. "Is that the door bell, Hurley?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I think it is probably Dick Tillinghast," exclaimed Beatrice rising in her agitation. "I took the liberty of asking him to call here, Mrs. Macallister. I hope you won't mind, but I—I—" she broke off. "It was imperative that I see him at once."

"My dear, of course not. I am always glad to see Dick," answered Mrs. Macallister, concealing her surprise. Could it be that he was the man in the case! Why, good gracious, *she* had other plans for him. "Ask Mr. Tillinghast to come in here, Hurley." Her usually tranquil tones were so emphatic that the well-trained servant positively jumped as he hastened out of the room.

Mrs. Macallister looked at the two girls very sharply. Surely she had not been mistaken? Dick had seemed to have only ears and eyes for Peggy; and yet —Beatrice's very evident excitement; Peggy's open-eyed wonder. "Oh, these men!" thought Mrs. Macallister, disgustedly, "you can't tell by the looks of a toad how far he'll jump. If that young man has played fast and loose with my Peggy, I'll—" And in growing anger she waited. The silence was unbroken by the two girls. They could hear the front door opened, and Hurley's raised voice; then steps sounded down the hall and stopped when they reached the library. Hurley threw open the door and announced:

"Mr. Gordon."

Too astounded to move, Peggy and her grandmother sat gazing at the young officer, thinking they saw an apparition. As he crossed the threshold, one wild scream of agony burst from Beatrice, and she swayed forward a dead weight into his arms.

"Beatrice—Beatrice—my darling—my dear, dear wife!" he cried, distractedly. Then, seeing no answering gleam of recognition in her dazed eyes, he turned appealingly to Mrs. Macallister. "Merciful God! have I killed her?"

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Macallister, her active

mind instantly grasping the significance of the situation. “Joy never kills. Quick, Hurley,” to the butler who was standing by with mouth agape, “some champagne.” And, as he darted out of the room to obey her order, she bade Gordon lift the limp form on to the wide lounge.

With Peggy’s assistance, he chafed her cold hands, and watched with anxious eyes while Mrs. Macallister forced Beatrice to swallow some foaming champagne. The stimulant had instant effect, a little color crept up into the wan cheeks, and she made a feeble attempt to sit up, all the time keeping her eyes fixed on Gordon as if she feared he would vanish from her sight.

“Donald—Donald—is it you?” she gasped, the pent-up longing of days finding voice at last. Then, as recollection gradually returned to her, her features were distorted with agony. “Don—Don—how could you?”

“Hush, my darling, you are wrong, wrong—I am innocent!” Her eyes distended with dawning hope as she glanced from one anxious face to the other.

“Here, take another glass of this,” insisted Mrs. Macallister, who firmly believed that a sip in time often saved many ills. “You will need all your strength, for I judge there are many things which will have to be explained to-night.”

“You are right, Madam,” exclaimed Gordon. “And the one to begin is right behind you.”

Mrs. Macallister wheeled around with such energy that she knocked a cherished vase off the center table, to find Dick Tillinghast just within the door.

"Mercy on us, Dick," she said, divided between vexation over the fate of the vase, and anxiety to hear what extraordinary events had transpired. "Come in and tell us at once what has happened."

Dick took the chair Peggy pushed toward him, and reading the agonized question in Beatrice's pleading eyes, he said briefly:

"The real murderer, Count de Smirnoff, has confessed."

A cry of surprise broke from Mrs. Macallister and Peggy, but Beatrice's feelings were too deep for words. She bowed her face in her hands, and only Gordon caught the fervid whisper: "God, I thank Thee," while hot scalding tears trickled through her fingers. Regardless of the others' presence, he threw himself on his knees beside her.

"My best beloved, can you ever forgive me for doubting you; I, who am most unworthy—"

Beatrice raised a radiant face. "Hush!" she said. "Do not let me hear you say such a thing again. I, too, am greatly to blame."

"Pardon me," interrupted Dick. "Neither of you have any cause for self-reproach. You were simply the victims of circumstances. But it strikes me that you two have played at cross-purposes long enough. If it isn't too painful," addressing Beatrice, "would you mind straightening out some of the kinks in the rope?"

"Gladly," she answered. "Where shall I begin?"

"Suppose you start with the marriage ceremony," suggested Dick, smiling covertly.

"What!" exclaimed Beatrice, astonished. "You

know of our marriage?"

"Yes. As it happened, my brother performed the ceremony."

Gordon's amazement was evident. "I never connected him with you; but go on, dearest—" and he touched her hand lovingly.

"Last November I went to visit my aunt, Mrs John Dundas, my mother's sister, in Philadelphia. At that time I was very unhappy at home. Alfred Clark wanted me to marry him, and Mrs. Trevor encouraged his suit. Mr. Clark," coloring vividly, "did not behave well. If I wanted to live in peace and tranquillity I had to be nice to him. Every time he thought I slighted or neglected him, he would complain to her, and between them they would hatch up all sorts of stories to tell Father. He believed my stepmother's lies, and often bitterly reproached me for making disagreeable scenes. If Mrs. Trevor stopped tormenting me, Mr. Clark always egged her on to more deviltry. They were not always good friends, though, and I hoped one of their numerous quarrels would lead to his dismissal. But I think he must have had some hold over her, for she apparently feared to break with him altogether."

"He had," interrupted Dick. "I have just seen Clark. Under Chief Connor's severe examination, he has made a complete confession. It seems—" Dick hesitated for words. It was not a pleasant tale he had to tell; he would have to expurgate it as best he could. "It seems that Mrs. Trevor, while living in Naples, had a desperate affair with Giovanni Savelli. In about a year he found she was unfaithful to him. I suspect Clark was the other man in question, but he wouldn't admit it. Anyway, Giovanni threatened to kill her when he turned her out in the streets; he was

so violent in his anger that, in desperate fear, she fled the city at night.

“Some time after her marriage to your father, Clark came to Washington, and through her influence secured his secretaryship. To terrorize Mrs. Trevor, he told her that Giovanni was planning to revenge himself on her, and that if she did not do exactly as he, Clark, wished, he would inform Giovanni of her whereabouts.

“Now comes his devilish ingenuity. While in Naples, both Clark and Mrs. Trevor joined the Camorra. Clark, desiring at last to get Mrs. Trevor out of his way as he feared she would speak of his disreputable past in one of her violent rages, sent word to Giovanni six weeks ago that she was betraying secrets of the Camorra to the Italian Embassy here. To further involve her, he himself sent information to the Ambassador in Mrs. Trevor’s name. The Camorra leaders promptly investigated Clark’s charges, found they were apparently true, and decreed her death.”

“What a fiend!” ejaculated Mrs. Macallister, horrified.

“He will have plenty of time to repent in one of our penitentiaries,” said Dick, dryly. “Won’t you continue your story, Miss Beatrice?”

“Right after my arrival in Philadelphia, I met Don at a hop at the League Island Navy Yard, where he was stationed. On Christmas day we became engaged —” Gordon caught her hand in his and kissed it passionately.

“I was very, very happy. On the 29th of December I received a long letter from Father saying Mr. Clark had asked formally for my hand in

marriage, and that, after due consideration, he had given his consent. Then he enumerated the advantages of the match. Through the whole letter I could perceive my stepmother's fine Italian hand. I knew the great influence she had over him, and while he said he would never force me to take anyone I disliked; still, he hoped, and so forth.

"The letter frightened me, Mrs. Macallister; and so when Don, after reading it, suggested that we marry secretly and at once, I agreed. We told my aunt, and she, also knowing that Father always sided with Mrs. Trevor, said that it would probably come to an elopement sooner or later. Therefore, liking and trusting Don as she did, she consented to arrange the affair for us. I returned to Washington with my aunt immediately after the ceremony, and Don came down the following day to report for duty at the White House.

"Ah, Don!" she broke off, turning towards him, "you should not have asked me to postpone the announcement of our marriage on the flimsy excuse that you found on your arrival only unmarried officers were to be the President's aides. You should have given me your full confidence then."

"I was wrong," admitted Gordon gravely. "But you do not know the tangle I found myself in. Go on, dearest."

"I was cruelly hurt," said Beatrice, slowly; "though I tried to convince myself that everything you did was for the best. And so things drifted until the evening of the third." She stopped and drew a long breath.

"As I came downstairs dressed for the Bachelors' that night, I was surprised when Mrs. Trevor called

me into the library. While outwardly civil, we usually saw as little of each other as possible. She asked me if it was true that I had definitely refused Mr. Clark, and when I said it was, she flew into a terrible rage. When her anger had spent itself, she begged and implored me to change my mind and marry him, saying that I would bitterly rue the day if I did not.

"I laughed the idea to scorn; and told her I was pledged to another, better man. 'His name?' she asked. 'Donald Gordon,' I replied. Without a word she leaned over and took out several notes from the drawer of her secretary, saying: 'I am afraid your chevalier—*sans peur et sans reproche*—is but human. Here is a letter from him to me; read it.'

"Startled, my eyes fell on the handwriting I knew so well, and I read the first few lines—words of endearment and love were written there, Donald—" A fierce exclamation broke from him, and he started to interrupt. "Wait," she said. "Your turn will come later. To go back: for a moment the room swam round me, and the black demons of jealousy and despair conquered. Remember, I thought I already had cause to doubt you. Mrs. Trevor's beauty had proved irresistible to others; why not to you? But I was determined not to give in; so I told her I did not believe her, and she laughed, oh, a laugh of pure deviltry. At least, it seemed so to me. She handed me another note from you, which said that you would be there that night, and would rap on the door for her to admit you.

"It was damning evidence, and my hope and faith crumbled away. In a few passionate words I renounced you; and then, tearing off your signet ring, which I always carried concealed since our

wedding, I gave it to her and bade her return it to you.

“As I started to leave the room, she said: ‘I will stop urging your marriage to Alfred Clark on one condition.’

“‘And that is?’ I asked.

“‘That you give me your mother’s pearls.’

“For a moment I stared at my stepmother, thinking she had taken leave of her senses. My dear mother’s rope of pearls! They are worth about twenty thousand dollars. Grandfather Trowbridge had collected them from all parts of the world, and their great value lay in their wonderful match. Therefore, I thought my ears had played me false, and I asked unbelievingly: ‘And your price?’ ‘You know it,’ she answered. By that time I was wrought up beyond endurance, and cried out: ‘You devil, get out of my way, or I may forget myself and strike you!’ That is the part overheard by Wilkins—” her voice trailed off in a sob.

Dick broke the pause that followed. “Clark also told me that Mrs. Trevor was trying to raise a large sum of money, hoping to buy his silence,” he said. “She must have realized that she was nearly at the end of her resources.”

“‘Whoso diggeth a Pit shall fall therein,’” quoted Mrs. Macallister, softly.

CHAPTER XXIV
JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS' MEETING

"BEATRICE, dear, why did you secrete your broken hat-pin, and where did you get it after the murder?" demanded Peggy, finding courage at last to ask the question which had worried her so much. Then, seeing Beatrice's open-eyed surprise, she added: "Your box caught when I opened my secret drawer on Friday night, and your cat's-eye fell out. I instantly recognized it. But believe me, dear, I never for one moment thought you were connected with Mrs. Trevor's death."

"She never did," affirmed Dick. "In fact, it was Peggy's desire to clear you from suspicion which urged me on in my efforts to find the real murderer."

"Peggy, dear Peggy; you best of friends." Beatrice leaned forward and kissed her warmly. "Did you open the box?"

"No, indeed!" indignantly. "The cat's-eye fell out of the broken end, and I simply thrust it back again without investigating further."

"I wish you had, dear; you would have understood then the dilemma I was placed in. I put our marriage certificate in the bottom of the box under the cotton, and then dropped the cat's-eye on top. Father told me, after Don's arrest, that the police would have great difficulty in proving his guilt because they could find no motive for the crime," she

went on to explain. “He himself was as puzzled as they. I instantly thought of our marriage certificate, and fearing its discovery might injure Don, I made plans to hide it.

“As to the broken pin—I never found it until after Mrs. Trevor’s funeral. When I put on black I decided to send all my dresses to a dear friend in New York. It was Suzanne’s afternoon out, but I was in a great hurry to send the express package, so I took down my dresses myself and laid them on the bed. On folding the ball dress I had worn at the Bachelors’ Cotillion I found the cat’s-eye securely caught by the gold setting in the lace underflounce of the train.

“I was simply horrified. I had no doubt whatever that the pin had been used to murder my stepmother. I knew I had left it in the private office on that Wednesday afternoon when I took off my coat and hat there. I went to the office to write a note to Peggy, which I gave to Mrs. Macallister in the parlor later on. I thought,” she glanced appealingly at Gordon, “that the guilty man had dropped the pin in the vestibule; for it must have caught in my dress when I let go of my train to insert my latch key and open the front door.

“I reasoned that the police would never believe my explanation if they found the pin in my possession, unless I told them the story of my quarrel with Mrs. Trevor, and of our marriage, Don. I knew Peggy was coming to see me, and made up my mind to ask her to keep the pasteboard box for me. You already know what took place on my return from the ball by my testimony at the inquest,” continued Beatrice. “When I heard Mrs. Trevor had been murdered, I thought Don had come to the house that night and had killed her in a moment of

ungovernable rage. Can you ever forgive me, dear?" clasping his hand in both of hers.

"There can be no question of that," said Gordon passionately. "You had every cause to doubt me. Mine was the fault. I have acted like a blind, crazy idiot. Listen: when in London some four years ago, I met Hélène de Beaupré and became very much infatuated with her. Well, she made a fool of me, as she did of others. One day, tired of having me around, she dismissed me. That ended the affair as far as I was concerned."

"Just a moment," interrupted Dick. "Did Alfred Clark see you and Hélène at the Home Office applying for a special license?"

If he had exploded a bomb under their noses, he could not have created a greater disturbance. Gordon sat up as if he had been shot, gazing incredulously at Dick.

"Great Heavens!" he ejaculated. "What an accomplished liar Clark is! And yet, this fabrication has a foundation of truth. He did see us in the Home Office talking to the clerk in charge of special licenses. We were waiting there for Sam Peters. You remember him, don't you?" Dick nodded. "Sam was to be married at noon. He knew no one in London, nor did his American bride-elect, except Hélène and myself. He asked me to be his best man, and Hélène to act as a witness. He had to procure his special license, so we agreed to meet him at the Home Office and go with him to the church. Sam will verify what I am telling you, if you care to ask him."

"No, no, Don, I'll take your word for it," said Dick, hastily.

"Beatrice has just told you of our marriage,"

continued Gordon. “I never knew until your theater party, Dick, which you gave on the night of my arrival here, that Beatrice’s stepmother and Hélène de Beaupré were one and the same person. Beatrice always spoke of her as ‘Mrs. Trevor.’ Mrs. Trevor greeted me that night as a stranger, and of course I took my cue from her. In the days that followed she must have seen how deeply and passionately I loved Beatrice, for she hinted as much to me. Then she told me that she had a package of my foolish, extravagant letters written years ago.

“‘I never throw anything away that might be of possible use,’ she went on. ‘Do you think the Attorney General would look with favor on your suit for his daughter’s hand if he saw those letters?’

“I stared at her aghast, as the whole horrible situation flashed over me. What in Heaven’s name was I to do? I should have confided everything to you then, my darling, but no man likes to speak of past love affairs, no matter how innocent, to his bride.

“For days Hélène played with me as a cat does with a mouse, keeping me on tenter-hooks. But on the morning of the third I received a note from her, asking me to go and see her that night about eleven thirty, and saying that she had decided to return my letters. Overjoyed, I gladly kept the appointment, and she admitted me after I had given the signal agreed on. We went at once to the private office.

“Here are the letters,” she said, speaking in a low voice. “I return them to you freely. But first you must pledge me your word as an officer and a gentleman never to mention them to either my husband or Beatrice.”

"Of course, I willingly promised, and after a few words of thanks I left the house as silently as I had entered. I went directly to the Benedict, destroyed the letters, then on to the ball."

"Good Heavens! did she not give you my message —my ring?" gasped Beatrice.

"No; neither of them."

"Clever woman," commented Mrs. Macallister. "She arranged it so you were in honor bound never to speak of the letters to Beatrice; and the latter, believing you false, would never refer to them either. Of course, she reckoned without the knowledge of your secret marriage. Mrs. Trevor was a shrewd judge of human nature. It was a pretty scheme she hatched to separate you two, and not get caught herself."

"You have summed it up exactly, Mrs. Macallister," agreed Gordon. "The first letter she showed Beatrice was probably one written years ago. I was bitterly hurt and angry, Beatrice, when you refused to speak to me at the hall. Then you returned my letter, unopened, which I wrote as soon as I heard of Mrs. Trevor's death.

"I was much surprised, at being summoned as a witness at the inquest. But when the coroner showed me my signet ring, which you, my dearest, had said you would never part with, and told me it had been found in the dead woman's hand, I was bewildered—horrified. I jumped to the conclusion that you two had met, quarreled and—God forgive me—" Gordon could not continue; and Beatrice, with shining eyes bent toward him.

"And so," she said, "you took the crime upon yourself that I might be spared. It was noble of you,

dear heart," and before them all, she kissed him passionately.

Mrs. Macallister swallowed a suspicious lump in her throat, while Peggy buried her nose in a convenient pillow.

"Tell us, Dick, how the real criminal came to confess," she said as soon as she could speak clearly.

With bated breath they listened to his thrilling account of de Smirnoff's vengeance.

"Some of the unfortunate story has to come out in the papers," ended Dick. "It cannot be hushed up, altogether, as justice has to be done the living."

"My poor father!" cried Beatrice. "Where is he!"

"At his house completely prostrated by the news."

"I must go to him at once." Beatrice sprang to her feet. "Will you call a cab, Don?"

"Mine is waiting; but, dearest, you cannot go without a coat," as Beatrice, forgetful of everything, hastened to the door. Quickly Peggy ran upstairs to collect her belongings.

"Miss Beatrice," Dick asked, "did you leave a handkerchief of yours in the private office that Wednesday?"

"I don't remember. I may have dropped one in the library just before Peggy called for me in the carriage. I burst out crying on the way to the ball, and she had to lend me one of hers. Thanks, dear," as Peggy returned with her wraps. Hurley ran down the steps and put her suit case in the waiting vehicle.

"Here is your box, Beatrice," and Peggy handed it back to her.

Beatrice looked at it with great distaste. “Except that it has my marriage certificate in it, I could not bear to touch it,” she said.

“Give it to me.” Gordon took the box and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. “I will return you the certificate, dearest; but to-morrow I intend to go over the Aqueduct Bridge and throw the cat’s-eye into the Potomac.”

“Good night, dear Mrs. Macallister.” Beatrice’s eyes were bright with tears as she kissed her. “How can I thank you all for what you have done for me? Good night, dear, dear Peggy,” and shaking hands warmly with Dick, she ran lightly down the steps, as Mrs. Macallister closed her front door.

Gordon helped her into the cab, gave the address to the driver; then hesitated. Beatrice leaned forward and touched the empty seat beside her.

“Donald—my husband—come home.”

And even in the dim illumination of the street lamp, Gordon saw in her glorious eyes the light that never was on land or sea, and he gathered her in his arms with a sigh of deep happiness as the cab started homeward.

Dick followed Peggy back into the library with a fast-beating heart. Now or never! Mrs. Macallister had discreetly disappeared.

“Peggy,” he said, standing back of her as she faced the open fire, “there’s something I want to say to you—”

“Well, say it,” provokingly; but catching sight of

Dick's determined face in the mirror over the mantel, she took fright. "I wonder where Granny is?"

"Oh, bother Granny! Peggy, darling—no, you sha'n't dodge," as Peggy moved slightly away and stood with head half averted. "I've always adored you, always. The first, the very first encouragement you ever gave me was that challenge. I have won, thank God! I know I am not half worthy of you; but I want you so, my darling." There was no doubting the passionate longing in his low, tense voice. "Peggy—I have come for my reward."

No answer. A log broke in half in the glowing fire, casting sparks in every direction. Dick drew a long breath and squared his shoulders—so be it, he would go.

As he moved slightly, Peggy turned her blushing face, and the alluring eyes twinkled at him for a second.

"Why don't you take your reward?" she whispered.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

On page 39, the word "be" has been added to the phrase "will used against you."

On page 70, half-past has been changed to half past.

On page 157, hatpin has been changed to hat-pin.

On page 159, door jamb has been changed to door-jamb.

On page 235, everyone has been changed to every one.

On page 253, watch-chain has been changed to watch chain.

On page 341, “in in” has been changed to “in it”.

All other spelling, hyphenation, dialect and non-English pronunciations have been left as typeset.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
THE TREVOR CASE ***

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