Bestseller Mystery

B-45

DEATH in Five Boxes

by CARTER DICKSON

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DEATH IN FIVE BOXES

by

CARTER DICKSON

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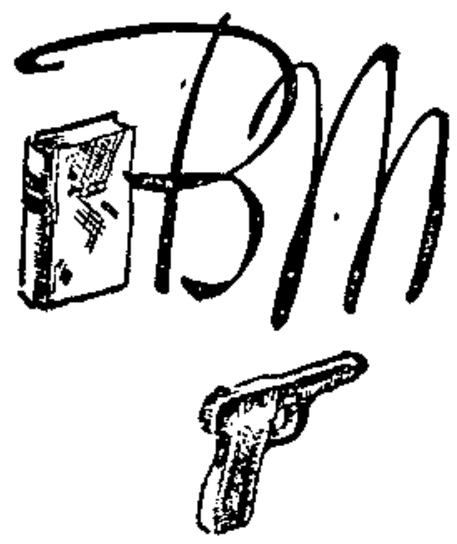
Publisher



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CHAPTER ONE

AT ONE O'CLOCK in the morning Dr. John Sanders closed up his laboratory. He was still puzzling over the problem of how arsenic had been introduced into the ice-cream: the Smith case, on which he must make a report by the end of the week. He was tired, and his eyes ached from long strain at the microscope. That was why he decided to walk home and clear his brain.

The Harris Institute of Toxicology is in Bloomsbury Street. Sanders was the last to leave the building, which he locked up with his usual care. A light rain had begun to fall as he turned into Great Russell Street. It was the only noise in the long lane of houses between here and Tottenham Court Road. The quiet glow of street-lamps intensified the darkness of the houses — except at one place.

He never knew why he noticed it at all. It was a narrow eighteenth-century house of red brick. It had three floors and an attic with dormer windows, and seemed to be let out chiefly in offices. Two of the little dormer windows in the attic were lighted, shining behind whitish blinds. Just outside the house was a street-lamp, which partly illuminated the little entry.

Then he saw that there was someone standing by the street-lamp, looking at him.

"I beg your pardon," said a girl's voice.

His first thought was that she was an ordinary night-prowler, and he quickened his step. But one glance made him hesitate. She wore a short brown fur coat, and she was without a hat. The gaslight shone down on brown hair parted at one side. She had very fine brown eyes, and a short straight nose.

"You're Dr. Sanders, aren't you?" she asked. "And you're connected with the police."

"With the police? No, not exactly. I —"

She came closer. "Oh, please don't put me off!" she said. "I heard you give evidence in the Holtby case."

"Yes, I do some work for the Home Office Analyst. Is anything wrong? Can I help you?"

She moved still closer. "You see, he made his will before he went out tonight," explained the girl. "That's what scares me."

Sanders stared at her.

"I'm Marcia Blystone. I do sketches," she went on. "You may know my father, Sir Dennis Blystone. You see those windows up there, the ones with the lighted blinds? Will you go up there with me for just a minute or two? Will you?"

"Yes, of course, if it's necessary. But why?"

"Because I'm afraid to go up alone," said the girl simply.

John Sanders, who was so entirely concerned with forensic medicine that he seldom had time to look at life, glanced up and down the street.

"You had better get in out of the rain," he said, with a polite gesture towards the entry.

"You see, I didn't want a policeman," she was urging. "But I had to have somebody who knows something about it. And, anyway, I had to stop somebody, and you looked nice, so I did."

The entry consisted of a vestibule with glass doors opening into a long and dingy hall. At the left of the vestibule there was a board painted with the names of those occupying the different floors. He struck a match and inspected it. Ground floor, Mason & Wilkins, Chartered Accountants. First floor, Charles Dellings' Sons, Estate and Housing Agents. Second floor, the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Co. Third and top floor, Mr. Felix Haye — the name newly painted in large letters.

"That's it," she whispered. " 'Mr. Felix Haye.' It's not an office; it's a flat. *Will* you go up?"

He tried the glass doors and found that they were unlocked. Then he struck another match.

"To judge by the light," he said, "Mr. Haye is still up. I don't want to be inquisitive; but what am I supposed to say to him when we get there?"

"If anybody answers the door, just pretend that you're a friend of mine and that we're coming home from a party. I'll do the talking. If nobody answers the door — I don't know," admitted the girl, and he thought she was going to cry.

Sanders groped for, but failed to find, an electric switch, and went ahead, striking matches. Past the offices of Mason & Wilkins, Chartered Accountants, they groped halfway up to the landing of the second flight when Sanders's hand hit something in the dark.

He was just striking another match. In the flash of the light he saw that it was nothing more startling than an umbrella. Somebody had left an umbrella standing on the stairs, propped against the inner wall. But it clattered down the stairs with a loud din and seemed to fall half apart.

The crook of the handle was now separated from the rolled umbrella by several inches of shiny metal. He ran down to look at it. It was an umbrella-swordstick. Into the shaft was fitted a very narrow steel blade about two feet long.

"It's the first one of its kind," he said, "I ever —"

But he did not draw the blade more than part way out of its sheath, for he saw that there were bloodstains on it.

Dr. John Sanders, medical consultant of the Home Office, snapped the blade back very quickly just as the match-flame burnt his fingers.

"What's wrong?" Marcia Blystone whispered.

A light had been switched on by someone on the floor overhead. Sanders saw the girl standing on the stairs above, holding to the banisters.

"It's all right," he said. "It's all right. Go on up. Somebody's given us a light, and —"

The person who had given them the light was peering out of a half-opened door on the floor above. The offices here had been enclosed in a series of frosted-glass panels bearing the inscription, *Anglo-Egyptian Importing Co. Ltd.: B. G. Schumann, Managing Director.* The same inscription appeared on the doors towards the rear of the hall. Out of one of these stepped a mild elderly man of clerkly appearance, craning his neck. Evidently he had just been washing his hands and face; his bald brow looked polished, his crown of grayish hair was ruffled up, and he still held the towel. After peering at them over half-glasses, he spoke in a natural tone.

"I thought I heard something. Did anybody fall?"

"An umbrella," said Sanders, holding it up. "Yours? We found it on the stairs."

It was a new one, with a shining redwood handle. The other contemplated it with an expression at once sour and vaguely disappointed. His eye wandered to another flight of stairs, the last one, leading up to the closed door of Mr. Felix Haye's flat.

"Oh, an umbrella," he grunted. "No, it's not mine. Probably belongs to somebody upstairs. And when you come down, please, will you kindly remember that the hall light switch is *there*, and remember to turn it out when you leave? Thank you."

He was about to go inside when Marcia Blystone spoke. "Is Mr. Haye at home?"

A pause. "Oh, yes. He's at home."

"Has he some guests, do you know?"

"I believe he has," replied the other, as though trying to be noncommittal. An evident desire to talk conquered after a struggle. "And very quiet they've been, too, tonight. Not a sound out of them for hours. At first they all started to laugh like a lot of wild Indians, and stamp their feet on the floor. Laugh? I thought it was going to lift the roof off. Why can't people —!"

Checking himself, he went in quietly and closed the door.

Without looking at the girl Sanders went up the last flight of steps and began to press the electric bell. There was no reply. After he had pressed it for some seconds, he tried the knob of the door. Then he turned back to the girl.

"Look here. I don't know what's happened in this place, but I'm afraid something has. The door is open. I'm going in. But I don't want you to come in until I give you the word. Just tell me this: what were you afraid you'd find in here?"

"My father," she said.

Inside, another short flight of stairs led up to the hall of the flat. Every light was blazing. Ahead of him, at the end of the spacious hall, was a small kitchen overlooking the street. On his right were three communicating rooms: a big living-room overlooking the street, a bedroom, and a bathroom.

When he went to the living-room Sanders's first impression was that he was looking at a waxworks or a group of stuffed figures. In a rich shell of a room, with mural paintings on either side of the fireplace, four dummies sat in various attitudes at a long refectory table. At the foot of the table was a handsome woman in an evening gown, with her head nearly on her shoulder. At one side of the table sprawled an old man with coarse whitish hair. At the other side was a middle-aged man sitting bolt upright. Finally, at the head of the table sat an immense, fat, jovial-looking man with a tonsure of red hair. He looked like a dissipated monk, and dominated them all.

Dead? Not quite, anyhow. Even in the doorway Sanders could hear strange breathing. He went softly across to the woman. Her pulse was very rapid; her skin had a patchy reddish look. He lifted one of her eyelids, and understood. The pupil of the eye was so dilated that it left only a narrow ring round the iris.

Moving quickly round the table, he examined each person. No one was dead or even in danger, but each had the symptoms of having swallowed a narcotic poison.

Most affected was the old man with the coarse whitish hair; his scholarly face lay on the table, and his breathing disturbed the ashes in the ashtray before him. The middle-aged man sat almost upright as though with dignity:

Sanders noticed the fineness and strength of his hands, on which the first two fingers of each hand were nearly the same length. A cocktail glass was before the first man, a tumbler before the second.

But, when Sanders reached the fourth, he drew back. The fat man with the tonsure of red hair had been dead for over an hour. When he lifted the man up, Sanders found the cause of death.

There was a phone on the table between the two windows. Handling the receiver in his handkerchief, he jiggled the hook several times before he discovered that the phone was as dead as the red-haired man.

"Dr. Sanders!" cried Marcia Blystone's voice.

He hurried out into the hall and closed the door of the living-room. She was waiting.

"I couldn't stand it any longer," she said. "Is my father — ?"

"Steady, now. It's all right. What does your father look like? Is he big and partly bald, with red hair?"

"Oh, God, no! That's Mr. Haye. But my father?"

"If your father is in there, he's quite all right. Nobody has been seriously hurt except Mr. Haye. What does your father look like?"

"He's — well, he's a fine-looking man. You'd notice his hands: the first two fingers of each hand are the same length. I've got to go in there."

He put out his arm. "Yes, your father's there. Listen to me. Those people have been drugged; or poisoned, if you prefer. I think with belladonna or atropine. But the only one who is dead is this man Haye. All the same, I've got to get them to a hospital immediately, so I'm going down to find a telephone. You can go in there and see for yourself if you promise not to touch anything."

"I'm all right," she told him after a pause. "Yes, I promise. So Mr. Haye has been poisoned."

He was already on his way downstairs. In passing he picked up the umbrella with the redwood handle, which he had automatically leaned against the wall as he entered. He neglected to tell her, at the moment, that Felix Haye had not died of poison. Felix Haye had died of a stab through the back, from a long and narrow blade like a swordstick.

CHAPTER TWO

"JUST A MOMENT, please," said Sanders.

The offices of the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company were now dark. The elderly clerk — wearing a dark topcoat and a shabby soft hat — was just leaving, though Sanders observed he made no move to lock the door. He peered round.

"Did you speak?" he demanded.

Sanders produced his card. "Yes. May I use your telephone? I'm afraid this is serious. There's been an accident or a deliberate murder upstairs. Several people have swallowed a poisonous drug, and Mr. Haye is dead."

The other man opened the door quickly.

"Phone's on the desk," he said. "Might have known it'd happen, with his monkey-tricks. I'd better go up there straightaway. Schumann's there."

He nodded towards the name, *B. G. Schumann, Managing Director*, printed on the doors of the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company. Sanders dialed the Gifford Hospital in Gower Street. Then the clerk demanded:

"How's the lady?"

"Quite all right. She's taking it quietly enough, considering that her father was one of the —"

"Her father?" The man made a gesture of exasperation. "Oh, I don't mean *her*. I mean the dark-haired lady who's up there. Mrs. Sinclair."

"She's all right, too."

But the man had gone by the time Sanders was ringing the divisional police-station. Registering the name "Mrs. Sinclair," and picking up the umbrella again, Sanders went upstairs. He found Marcia Blystone sitting on a carved oak chest in the hall.

"Tell me the truth," she began instantly. "Is he going to die?"

"No."

"Who's that woman?" asked Marcia, nodding towards the closed door.

"The clerk from downstairs says it's a Mrs. Sinclair. But I don't know anything about her. Did you recognize anybody, aside from your father?"

"Well, there's Mr. Haye, the one who's —" She stopped. "So that leaves only one person we don't know, the old man with the white hair. But what on earth happened? You say they were poisoned with belladonna or something —"

"Atropine, more likely. That's the alkaloid of belladonna."

"Oh, atropine, then! You mean someone was trying to kill a whole roomful of people?"

"Possibly," he admitted with caution. "Or it may have been used as a drug, to make them all unconscious. Atropine brings on a kind of delirium. Before the victim knows what is happening to him, he can't move. But I thought you might be able to help us. What were you afraid might happen to your father if he came here tonight?"

She jumped up as though this had surprised her.

"I — I don't know."

"But there must have been something?"

"There was. I know my father hates Mr. Haye like poison." She paused over an unfortunate choice of words. "Yet he insisted on coming here tonight. Also, he had his solicitor at our house today, and he made his will. What's more, he has been acting queerly. Just before he went out of the house tonight, he put four watches in different pockets."

"Four what?"

"Watches. It's absolutely true. Jefferson saw him do it: that's his valet. After my father put on his dinner jacket, he put one watch in each of two waistcoat pockets, and one in each of his trousers' pockets. He went into my mother's room to get one of the watches, and borrowed another from Jefferson, because he doesn't own four watches."

"Yes, but look here: what did he want with four watches?"

"How on earth should I know? If I did I shouldn't be so worried."

"Has he still got the watches on him?"

"I don't know," said Marcia abruptly. "You said not to touch anything, and I didn't, except to make sure he wasn't dead. Also, you know quite well that Felix Haye wasn't poisoned. He was stabbed; and I think it was with that little sword inside the umbrella, the one you're taking such care of."

"Yes," he admitted.

"Somebody tried to kill them all, or maybe only to drug them," said the girl sharply. "Maybe somebody put a small dose of poison in each of the drinks except his own. When it made them all unconscious he killed Haye, and then took some of the stuff himself, so that afterwards nobody would know which person did it. Or somebody outside the house poisoned the drinks. When all four of the people were unconscious, this outsider came in and stabbed Haye; and went out again knowing one of the people in the room would be suspected."

"There are flaws in the argument," Sanders decided. "In either case, wouldn't it have been simpler to poison Haye outright? Why should the murderer bother with the swordstick at all? Furthermore, if the murderer is an outsider who wanted to throw suspicion on somebody in that room, why did he walk out of the house and leave the swordstick propped up conspicuously on the stairs two flights down? — All of which," he added, "means that we're theorizing without data."

"You're very funny and rather nice," observed Marcia, and grinned: "What do we do about the data?"

Sanders was puzzled. "We get it," he said. "Who was this Haye, and why should anybody want to kill him?" He could feel her sliding away from the subject. "Is he a friend of your father?"

"If you're thinking that he's any kind of crook," she said, "get it out of your head. He's an investment broker. All of his money may not be made honestly, but at least it's all made on the stock market."

"Did you know him?"

"Slightly. But I detested the very sight of him," replied Marcia, "I didn't think he was funny, though people were always saying how jovial and generous he was. And he wanted to know too much. He didn't want the information for anything, he just wanted to *know*."

She turned her eyes towards the closed door of the living-room; and, as though in response, the door opened. The clerk from the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company came out, closing the door behind him.

"This is a fine kettle of fish," he said, shaking himself. "How are we going to explain all this. Eh?"

"We don't have to explain it," said Sanders. "You didn't touch anything in there, did you?"

"I mind my own business," the other retorted darkly. "My name's Ferguson. I work for Bernard Schumann downstairs. Bernard Schumann's in there."

"Which one is he?"

Ferguson pushed the door partly open again. They could see an edge of the refectory table, on which sprawled the old man with the coarse whitish hair.

"That's him. You say you're a doctor, young man. Is he bad?"

"He'll recover," said Sanders curtly. "I was just wondering whether you could tell us anything about what happened tonight."

"No. I'm going home." Ferguson started stumping on his way, then turned round glowering. "What should I know about it? I mind my own business."

"Yes. That's why you probably know something about what happened tonight. You told us you were downstairs in your office for some time. That laughing you spoke of was probably the hysteria when the drug took effect. You would have known, for instance, whether someone went in or out during that time."

Ferguson hunched his shoulder. "I'll answer the proper authorities, if they ask me. Not you."

"What about your employer?"

"Well, what about him?" demanded Ferguson. "If Bernard Schumann wants to drink cocktails, at his age, and play the giddy goat like that, he can be thankful he's no worse off."

"I wish you'd take the chip off your shoulder," said Marcia. "My father's in there, and —"

Ferguson went so far as to show a gleam of interest. "Your father? Which one is he?"

"Sir Dennis Blystone. Sitting opposite this Mr. Schumann. Tall man, about fifty —"

"The one with the watches," grunted Ferguson. "No, I don't know him. What's *he* celebrated for?"

"He happens to be a great surgeon," said Marcia coldly.

Sanders remembered that for certain sorts of head operations Blystone was spoken of in Harley Street as *the* man. But this interested Sanders less than Ferguson's blatant question, "What's *he* celebrated for?" — which hinted at darker forces moving.

"Are they all noted for something?" Sanders asked.

"Are they?" inquired Ferguson. "I wouldn't know. I'm only Bernard Schumann's cart-horse. And you must be a friend of Felix Haye, so you would know better than I. But Mrs. Sinclair, that fine lady there, is supposed to be a very distinguished art critic; and collector too. Bernard Schumann has been decorated by the Egyptian government. He's the only one who has been able to reproduce the embalming process of the Nineteenth Dynasty."

His tone as he said this made Marcia draw back.

Sanders was not impressed. "Yes," he agreed. "They're all well-known people in different professions. Then just what were they doing here?"

"Doing here?" repeated Ferguson. "You ought to see for yourself, young man. Having a party. Acting the fool. Felix Haye was always giving parties when decent people had to work."

"It doesn't look like a party," said Sanders simply. "That's just the trouble.

Look at the way they're each sitting, spaced round the table as exactly as dummies in a window, and each with a glass placed exactly in front of him. It doesn't look like a casual gathering: it looks like a board meeting."

"That's it," Marcia interposed quietly. "You've got it. My father never went on a party in his life. He's *afraid* to drink. You know, there's something wrong in there; something horribly wrong."

Ferguson reached out with a quick gesture and closed the door. "How much do you know?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Sanders, who hated bluff with a scientist's hatred. "But there is something to know, isn't there? I wish you'd say something. I don't know what to make of you or any of your exhibits; but I think the police will be interested in you."

"The police won't bother me," returned Ferguson, with a strange smile. "They never have and they never will. I'm only Bernard Schumann's cart-horse. I'm no more alive than one of his scarabs or mummies. By God, I believe you're an honest man!" he added. "All right: I'm going to give you a word of warning gratis. Don't stir up anything with the police. If you've got any respect for your own health you won't."

Ferguson suddenly lost his head. "Take a look at those four inside there. They're well-off. They're famous. They sleep in soft beds and they don't have dreams. They would charm everybody at a church social, and they'd do it naturally. But all of them are criminals and some of them are murderers. You're right about the board meeting, in a way. There's more cunning, and baby-faced lying, and plain downright evil locked up in their heads than you'd imagine existed in the world. The trouble is, you don't know which are the murderers and which have comparatively clean hands. And you never will know until it's too late. That's why I'm telling you: take a fool's tip and keep away."

Before Sanders could speak, he stumped off towards the stairs; and Sanders, not an imaginative man, felt in his stomach a queasy sensation which might have been fear.

CHAPTER THREE

AT A LITTLE PAST two o'clock, Sanders sat in the dimly lighted waiting-room of the Gifford Memorial Hospital, turning over the pages of a magazine.

The poison was atropine; but he had come dangerously close to underestimating the strength of the doses. Dr. Neillsen was now in charge here, as the police were in charge at Haye's flat.

He threw the magazine on the table just as Chief Inspector Humphrey Masters came in.

Sanders knew the chief inspector very well. Masters — ruddy of face, bland as a cardsharper — was as affable as the circumstances would permit.

"Ah, sir," Masters greeted him heartily. He hitched out a chair and put his brief case on the table. "Rotten bad business, this. But it's a bit of luck having you here on the spot. Now, sir, I've just had a preliminary look at that flat. And, while the boys were doing their work, I thought I'd better nip over here and see how the patients were getting on. Of course, it's bad luck they had to be moved before we got there —"

"Better have one corpse than four. That old man, Mr. Schumann, was in pretty bad shape."

"So the doctor here tells me," said Masters, looking at him sharply. "Oh, I don't say you did *wrong*, sir. I know it had to be done. The doctor says the three of 'em are safe enough now, but that they'd better not be moved or disturbed until tomorrow. Can I depend on that?"

"Well, Neillsen knows his business. Even if you did try to question them, you probably wouldn't get anything of importance tonight."

"Just so. On the other hand," said Masters judicially, "the doctor tells me that the lady, Mrs. Sinclair, pulled through in regular A-1 style. Couldn't have had as big a dose as the others. So it mightn't do a whole lot of harm if I were to ask her just a few questions?"

"If Neillsen says it's all right —"

"Ah! I knew you'd agree, sir. But, first of all, I'd like a detailed statement from you, if you don't mind. Miss Blystone is upstairs with her father, and she's not very anxious to talk."

Sanders told him in careful detail, while the other took notes. Long before the end of the recital, Masters was pacing about the room.

"Lummy, we're in it again!" he said offhandedly, "I'm just wondering what Sir Henry Merrivale would make of this mess. It's a queerer business than even you think, doctor. This man Ferguson told you that all four persons in that room were criminals and some were murderers. Did he say anything else?"

"No; he went downstairs and shut himself up in the office."

The chief inspector pulled at his underlip. "Did Ferguson give you any idea of what those four people might have been doing there?"

"No. But I think he knows or suspects."

"Oh, ah. Now tell me, sir," pursued Masters, sitting down again. "What did Miss Blystone say to all this? Ferguson said her father was one of a group of criminals at the very least. Didn't it surprise her, or make her mad, or anything like that?"

"She said that Ferguson had probably committed the murder himself. When we first met Ferguson on our way upstairs, he had just finished washing his hands. Her idea was that he was washing the blood off."

"He may have been, at that," Masters agreed. "But had *she* any idea what they were all doing upstairs? She followed her father there; and she must have been waiting in the street a good long time at an unholy hour of the night. And all on the strength of the fact that her father had made his will and gone out with four watches in his pocket. They tell me Sir Dennis Blystone is a well-known surgeon?"

"Yes, that's true." Sanders moved restlessly. "Aren't we taking a lot for granted on the word of Schumann's clerk? You're a chief inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department. Do you know any of them as criminals?"

"I take nothing for granted, sir," said Masters. "And I can't say I know any of 'em in the way you mention. Trust me not to make a row just on the word of this chap Ferguson. Offhand —" Masters bent forward — "offhand, what would you say was the queerest feature of this case, apart from wholesale poisoning and stabbing with a new kind of swordstick?"

"Sir Dennis Blystone and his four watches."

"That's only a part of it," replied the chief inspector. "When I was upstairs looking in on the patients, I took the liberty of running through their clothes. Well, sir: each of the others, Mrs. Sinclair and Mr. Schumann, was carrying something every bit as odd as Sir Dennis's four watches. In the right-hand pocket of his dinner jacket, Mr. Bernard Schumann had the ringing mechanism of an alarm clock. Spring, clapper, everything except the bell. It was old and a little rusty, but it would still work. Also, in the breast pocket of his coat he was carrying a magnifying glass. What do you make of that?"

"Schumann deals in Egyptian antiquities," Sanders pointed out. "So it's not at all surprising to find a magnifying glass. But I don't see any reason why he should need the wheels and springs of an alarm clock. Mrs. Sinclair had something too?"

"She had," affirmed Masters. "Her handbag was lying in her lap when she sat at that table. And in it were two exhibits: a five-ounce bottle of quicklime, and a five-ounce bottle of phosphorus."

Sanders was frankly beaten. "Phosphorus is a poison, of course. In fact, I've often wondered why more murderers haven't used it. It's absolutely impossible to trace back to the murderer, because anybody can procure it. You get it from ordinary match-heads; and sixteen of them would contain enough to do the business. As for quicklime —"

"Hurrum, yes," said Masters, clearing his throat. "But there's no suggestion of phosphorus being used as a poison here? No. Consequently, what does she want with quicklime and phosphorus?"

"Well, if it comes to that, what does an Egyptian importer want with the works of an alarm clock, and why does a distinguished surgeon borrow a lot of watches before he goes out in the evening?"

Masters nodded. At the same time, Sanders had a feeling that the chief inspector was concealing something.

"Look here, Inspector, what's up your sleeve?"

"Up my sleeve, sir?" repeated Masters. "Nothing at all. I was only wondering if you had any more suggestions."

"Not at the moment. Unless you think they're all murderers, and these articles are somehow proofs of their murders? I shouldn't think by the look of you that you believed it yourself. Phosphorus is a poison; but you can't kill anybody with a watch or a sheet of glass."

Masters laughed uproariously. "Sounds like a conjuror's equipment, doesn't it?" he inquired. "Now, now, sir! No offense meant. The man I want to see is that fellow Ferguson. Meantime, would you like to come along while I have a few words with Mrs. Sinclair?"

Mrs. Sinclair had been installed in one of the few private rooms at the Gifford Hospital. She was propped up in a white enameled bed, a shaded lamp over the bed shining down on her hair, and Dr. Neillsen was talking soothingly to her.

Though she had looked somewhat older in Haye's flat, she could not have been more than in the early thirties. Mrs. Sinclair was soft, sleek, and long of limb. Her long, very dark and glossy hair was let down behind her ears, uncovering a round face of great beauty and sensitiveness, with large eyes of a bluish-black color, a small mouth, and a round but strong chin. Altogether she was a very attractive woman: as Dr. Neillsen evidently thought.

Masters cleared his throat. He hesitated.

"Only five minutes, mind," Dr. Neillsen warned him. "And I'll stay here to see it's enforced."

"Please do talk to me," the woman urged in a low voice. "Dr. Neillsen has

been telling me what happened."

"Just so," said Masters, ingratiatingly. "Now, ma'am — as you know, I'm a police officer, and I'm bound to ask you a few questions. Don't mind my notebook; it's just a matter of form."

She thanked him with an earnest smile. The pupils of her eyes were still a trifle dilated.

"Your name, ma'am?"

"Bonita Sinclair. I am a widow."

"What is your address, ma'am?"

"I live at 341 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea."

Masters glanced up. "Are you — occupied, ma'am; have you a profession?"

"Oh, yes, I work," she told him. "I advise about pictures; and I deal in them, sometimes. Then I write a good deal for the *National Art Review*."

The chief inspector shut his notebook. "You know Mr. Felix Haye was murdered tonight?"

There was a silence. Then tears gathered in her eyes. Sanders could swear they were genuine.

"That is what the doctor was telling me. It is horrible. I hate thinking about horrible things."

"Well, ma'am, I'm afraid we've got to think about them for a minute. I want you to start at the beginning, and tell me everything that happened tonight."

She sat up, shakily. "But that's just it. I honestly don't know. The last thing I remember is that someone at the table was telling a story — a joke. I laughed and laughed until I was ashamed of myself. But by that time things went all out of perspective, and —"

"Just begin at the beginning, if you will. How did you come to be at Mr. Haye's flat?"

"Why, it was a party. Just a little gathering."

"What time did you go there, Mrs. Sinclair?"

"About eleven o'clock, I think. You see, I had three very important phone calls to put through tonight, at stated times; and I told Mr. Haye I couldn't possibly be there before eleven. He said he wouldn't think of inconveniencing me, so he wouldn't ask the guests until eleven."

"But couldn't you have phoned from Mr. Haye's flat?"

She smiled. "I'm afraid not. One call was to New York, one to Paris, and one to Rome. They were business calls, you see."

"Did Mr. Haye have any purpose in asking you there?"

"But — really, I don't know. He was a very good friend of mine, and he asked me, so I went."

Masters switched his attack. "Did you know all the other guests?"

"I knew Mr. Haye, of course, and Sir Dennis Blystone. Sir Dennis" — she reddened — "picked me up at my house and took me on to the flat. But I had never met Mr. Schumann. I thought him charming."

"When did you get to the flat?"

"It was nearly eleven, I think. About five minutes to eleven. Mr. Schumann was already there."

"And then you started drinking?"

Her blue-black eyes smiled. "Hardly that, you know. I had one cocktail, and not all of that."

"Only one —" Masters checked himself, clearing his throat. "Who mixed the cocktails?"

"I did. When I was there Mr. Haye would never drink anything except White Lady cocktails. He had some stupid joke about me. And he always insisted that I should mix the cocktails, so that he could make the joke. He would say, 'Have you tried my White Lady?' or something quite meaningless." She flushed.

"You all drank the cocktails, did you?"

"No; Sir Dennis had a highball. But —"

"You didn't have anything else to drink or eat?"

"Nothing."

"Well, ma'am, you see why I ask this. The drug you all swallowed was in those drinks."

"But that's impossible!" she cried weakly. "I tell you that there can't have been any poison in anything we took. If you doubt me, ask the others. You'll see that we couldn't have taken a poison, and you'll understand why."

There was a click as Neillsen shut up his watch.

"Time's up, Masters," he said.

Masters turned round. "Here, stop a bit! You don't mean that?"

"Don't I, though," said Neillsen grimly. "I'm not going to risk what often follows these things. Sorry, Masters; but this is one place where I give the police orders. Will you go quietly, or shall I have a couple of orderlies escort you?"

The chief inspector went quietly. Masters had long known the literal nature of obedience. It did not prevent him, however, from making some strong comments going down in the lift.

"She's having us on," he insisted. "There's a game there, and I mean to find

out what it is. Patient mustn't be disturbed! They don't hesitate to wake me up in the middle of the night, —"

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Sanders, "but there's something more on your mind than that."

Masters lowered his defenses. "Yes, there is. It's that word 'impossible.' Blast it, there's nothing impossible about somebody getting a dose of poison, is there? Could be done in a hundred ways, couldn't it? And if I discover —"

He stepped out into the dimly lighted lower hall of the hospital, in time to hear the swish of the revolving door in the vestibule. A young man whom Sanders recognized as Detective-Sergeant Pollard hurried up to the chief inspector.

"You'd better come over to Great Russell Street, sir," he said. "That fellow Ferguson — he's gone."

"So he's gone," whispered Masters, with powerful restraint. "He's just up and gone, is he? I suppose you let him walk right out of the front door?"

"No, sir," said Pollard quietly. "He didn't go out the front door. And I don't think he went out the back door either."

"Now keep your shirt on, Bob," whispered Masters with sudden urgency. "Just take it easy! Where is he?"

"You see, sir, I didn't think we'd have to keep a man watching him. The last time I saw Ferguson, he was sitting in his office. He said he'd be there when we needed him. But I went down a few minutes ago, and opened the door — and he wasn't there. His linen sleeve bands were on the table, and so were his spectacles. But no Ferguson."

"I'm asking you," said Masters, "how did he get out of there?"

"He must have gone by the back window, sir. But there's no way to climb down from those old-fashioned windows. He must have jumped."

"Goddelmighty!" whispered Masters, lifting both fists. "An old man like that jumped down forty feet in the dark, and then got up and walked away?"

"I admit that's difficult too," Pollard said. "We can't find any marks on the wet ground where he must have landed if he jumped. But the back door is bolted and chained on the inside; and Wright was standing by the front door the whole time. So the only thing he could have done was jump."

"Is it, by George!" said Masters.

"But that's not all," went on the sergeant. "It seems there's no such person as Ferguson. While we were looking for him, we woke up the caretaker of the building, who was asleep in the basement. He's an Irishman named Timothy Riordan; as suspicious as they make 'em, and more than half full of whisky.

He tells us that there's nobody called Ferguson in Mr. Schumann's employ. Mr. Schumann's only employees in the English office (he's got one in Cairo too) are two assistants, one of 'em an Egyptian who's been with him for ten years. Ferguson doesn't exist, that's all."

CHAPTER FOUR

IT WAS NEARLY eleven o'clock next morning when Sanders returned to Great Russell Street, where he had arranged to meet the chief inspector.

In his transport box he was carrying a remarkable collection of glasses and bottles from Felix Haye's flat. He had spent most of the night and all of the morning analyzing their contents, with results which made him stare when he tabulated them.

The house in Great Russell Street went on with business as usual; Mason & Wilkins, Chartered Accountants, and Charles Dellings' Sons, Estate Agents, moved incuriously on the first two floors. But the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company was locked up, with a policeman before the door.

Masters met him in Felix Haye's flat. Only Masters and Sergeant Pollard were there.

"Morning, sir," said Masters. "We'd just about given you up. Took a long time, didn't it?"

"Curse your hide," said Sanders amiably. "Have you any idea how long this sort of work takes?"

"Never mind," said Masters soothingly. He led the way into the living-room. "Point is — is the news good or bad?"

"Bad, I should say."

Masters face clouded. "Oh, ah. I might have expected that. Well?"

From the transport box Sanders took out the nickeled cocktail shaker from which last night's drinks had been poured. They had found it standing on an occasional table near Felix Haye's chair, and it was still half full.

"Three of them," Sanders went on, "had been drinking these White Lady cocktails. Composition: gin, Cointreau, and lemon juice. But in the dregs left in the cocktail shaker here — no atropine. Nothing."

The chief inspector whistled. Sanders set out the three cocktail glasses.

"In the dregs of the glasses," he continued, "amounts of atropine ranging from one-fiftieth to one-tenth of a grain. Judging by the dregs, Schumann had

the biggest dose, Haye the second biggest, and Mrs. Sinclair the smallest."

He then set out a tumbler. "Sir Dennis Blystone, as you know, had a highball composed of rye whisky and ginger ale. He only half finished it; and there was about a third of a grain of atropine in the remainder. Finally, there was no atropine in any of the original bottles from the kitchen, even the dregs from the lemon squeezer.

"Consequently, it means that atropine was dropped individually into each of the four glasses."

"Just offhand," remarked Masters, after a pause, "I can't think of anything more risky. Somebody drops atropine in four glasses — and never gets caught." He brooded. "By the way, doctor, what's a fatal dose of the stuff?"

"Half a grain, usually."

"And in those glasses," persisted the chief inspector, "there were still amounts up to a third of a grain? Lummy! Wasn't the chap who did it in danger of polishing off the whole lot with atropine alone?"

"In very great danger, it seems to me."

Masters stared at the refectory table, as though he were still trying to visualize the four victims sitting there. Sunlight through the narrow windows brought out the colors of the paneling, and of the murals painted on either side of the fireplace. It had a carved over-mantel, on top of which a few bright-jacketed novels were shoved together between book ends. The umbrella with the rosewood handle now lay on the refectory table like a sword.

"A big dose of poison," Masters was going on doggedly, "in each drink. And Mrs. Sinclair said last night she could swear, they would all swear, that no drug could have been put into any drink. Why was she so quick to let us know that? You don't suppose they all *knew* they were drinking atropine, do you?"

"I shouldn't think it likely," observed Sanders. "Have you discovered anything else?"

"Fine crop of fingerprints here; probably lead to nothing. The handle of that umbrella's no good. You mucked it about yourself, doctor, when you came up. It's the weapon that stabbed Haye, but nobody seems to know whose it is or where it came from. I'll find that out when I get on to the witnesses. They were sent home from the hospital this morning."

"What about Ferguson?"

"All I know about Ferguson," snapped Masters, "is that he really did vanish. I've half a mind to try it out on Sir Henry. He didn't go out the front door, and he didn't go out the back. There's a rain-pipe on that back wall; but it's nowhere near the window, and Ferguson would have to be first cousin to a

gorilla to reach it. He must have jumped — without marks on the ground. We've got only one clue.

"He left his spectacles behind," grunted Masters, "and he left his finger-prints on the spectacles. Unless he's in the files at the Yard, which isn't likely, we're no better off than before. Meantime, I've got the address of Haye's solicitor, and I'm sending the sergeant round to see him. I'm going to tackle Mrs. Sinclair again. Like to come along, doctor?"

Sanders did like to come along; he felt he deserved it. They drove to Chelsea in a police car. Bonita Sinclair's house was more like a cottage or a doll's house. The dark bricks had careful lines of white mortar between them; there were many window boxes, and the green door had a brass knocker shaped like a cat.

But despite spring and budding trees, the long windows to the right of the door showed the reflections of firelight. And a man's figure passed across one window.

"Sir Dennis Blystone," snorted the chief inspector. "I had 'em all watched, to keep 'em from getting in touch with each other before I got here. And now look what's happened!"

A neat maid took Masters's card. They were led into a drawing-room, a sort of bower, where Bonita Sinclair and Sir Dennis sat on either side of the fire. Blystone got up abruptly from his chair.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sinclair," said Masters. "Morning, sir. You made a good recovery."

"Fortunately, yes."

Blystone had a personality at once forceful and hesitant. He was tall, with a pair of fine eyes which won confidence. Dr. Sanders liked him at once.

"All the same, sir," Masters went on, "I thought I requested that none of you would leave your homes this morning."

Blystone nodded gravely. "So you did, Inspector. The trouble was — I had to know." He smiled in a reminiscent way. "I don't often lose my memory. The last time I did was a good many years ago, on a Boat-Race Night. When I woke up, I couldn't rest until I had gone round to see every one of my friends, and pestered them for an hour with questions about my smallest action. I had to know. So I had to know what I did last night."

Masters became affable. "Just so. Well, sir, you didn't kill Mr. Haye, did you?"

"Not to my knowledge," answered Blystone, returning the smile.

They all sat down.

"Now here's the position," Masters pursued. "The difficulty I'm finding is

to get anyone to admit *anything*, even the smallest facts. But there're certain things we can't deny. We can't deny Mr. Haye is dead. And it's no use denying that we're pretty sure he was killed by one of the three other persons in that room."

Mrs. Sinclair looked at him with wide-eyed horror.

Blystone stopped him. "In other words, by Mrs. Sinclair, by Schumann, or by me?"

"If you must have it, sir: yes."

"Inspector, that is ridiculous. It's plain damned nonsense," retorted Blystone. "None of us had any reason to kill him. He was our friend, and I think I speak for all of us."

He hesitated, and then burst out: "Oh, look here. Haye was sometimes annoying, and some might have called him a common bounder. But he was a good friend; he did me a lot of favors; and — if the man who killed him isn't hanged higher than Haman, it won't be for lack of help *I* can give you."

After this outburst, Blystone resumed his consulting-room manner and sat back.

"Good!" said Masters cheerfully. "That's the sort of talk we like to hear. Now, sir: didn't it surprise any of you to be invited to Mr. Haye's flat as late as eleven o'clock last night?"

"No, not particularly."

"But your daughter tells us that you never go to parties."

"My daughter has nothing to do with this," said Blystone, suddenly annoyed. "I am told she gave you some trouble last night, for which I apologize. And I hardly know what she means. I don't consider myself old enough to qualify for a bath chair just yet."

"For instance," argued Masters, "Mr. Haye didn't say he had some information to give you. Eh?"

"Information? No. I don't understand."

"You say he did some favors for you. What sort of favors?"

"He had invested some money for me, always successfully, and he gave me a number of — outside tips."

"Oh, ah? And did he invest money for you too, ma'am?" asked Masters, turning to the woman.

She assumed the same earnest air she had shown last night.

"Quite often, Mr. Masters. I'm a dreadful idiot at business, and Mr. Haye was always willing to help."

"Now, ma'am," pursued Masters, "I'd like to have you go on telling me

what you began last night about the atropine. You were all given a dose of atropine in *something*, you know. But last night you told me it was impossible that anybody could have dosed the drinks."

She looked puzzled. "Perhaps I didn't make myself quite clear. What I meant, of course, was that none of us could have poisoned the drinks. Any of the four of us at Mr. Haye's flat.

Masters stared at her. "Excuse me, ma'am, but that wasn't what you said last night! You said N-o-b-o-d-y at all."

"Surely you misunderstood?" she suggested, with earnest candor. "As soon as we all arrived at Mr. Haye's flat, he asked me to make the cocktails — as I think I told you? Yes. Of course, I know you don't think *I* put the poison in them. But I couldn't have done that, even if I had wanted to. And neither could anyone else. They were all there in the kitchen, watching me."

"All three men?"

"All three, standing round me. To begin with, Sir Dennis rinsed out the cocktail shaker with hot water. And the glasses too, with us watching. I made the drinks, and Mr. Haye shook them. Sir Dennis made his own highball, of whisky and ginger ale." (Blystone nodded firmly.) "Then Mr. Schumann put the shaker, and the highball glass, and three empty cocktail glasses on a tray, and carried them into the living-room. We saw him put them down on the little table, and then he came back; and poor Mr. Schumann certainly didn't tamper with them. We can testify to that. Also, I *know* there was nothing wrong with the drinks at that time."

"How do you know that, ma'am?"

"Because I tasted them," she answered, with a smile. "When I had made the White Ladies I took a drink of them, straight out of the shaker. Also, I tasted Sir Dennis's highball. I had never had a 'highball' before, you see, and I wanted to know what it was like."

Masters cleared his throat. "You say Mr. Schumann carried all the things from the kitchen to the living-room, and 'came back.' Didn't you all go into the living-room?"

"No. We stayed in the kitchen, because Mr. Haye was showing us a trick with an orange. You cut the peel in a certain way, and wriggle it or something, and it's got a face like a laughing or crying baby. There never was such a man as Mr. Haye for tricks and jokes and appliances of all kinds. I don't think I shall ever forget him standing up in front of the electric refrigerator in the kitchen, making that orange baby say, 'Ma-ma,' and bursting with laughter." She shuddered and added: "That horrible umbrella-swordstick belonged to him,

you know. It used to stand in the ordinary umbrella rack in the hall."

"But about the poison. Mrs. Sinclair, are you willing to swear nobody tampered with those drinks?"

She clasped her hands together. "I do. I am. We were watching each other all the time. It simply wouldn't have been possible. But of course it must have been done afterwards. We all stayed in the kitchen for — how long, I wonder?"

"Three or four minutes, at the least," Blystone decided, his hard eye on Masters.

"And during all that time," Mrs. Sinclair continued, "the drinks were in the other room, exposed on the table. The door from the kitchen to the hall was nearly shut, because Mr. Haye was standing in front of it. So we couldn't see out into the hall. During that time, someone must have crept into that living-room — some outsider — and put the drug in."

"Just so, ma'am," the chief inspector said with interest. "One thing, though. Are you quite certain Mr. Schumann didn't drug the things when he took them to the living-room?"

Both Mrs. Sinclair and Sir Dennis Blystone spoke at once; there was no doubt of this.

"We watched him from the hall," she explained. "The tray was a bit wet, and I didn't want him putting it down on any of Mr. Haye's fine furniture."

"I see. Had any of the cocktails been poured out when they were taken to the living-room?"

"No; they were poured out later. The only drink actually in glass was Denny's highball. Oh, Inspector," she urged, "a person would only have to slip into the living-room, drop the atropine into the cocktail shaker and the tumbler, and — there you are."

"'M, yes. Quite. The atropine must have gone into the cocktail shaker. Eh?"

"Of course." She hesitated. "There isn't much else, really. Afterwards we went into the living-room. Mr. Haye poured out the cocktails and handed them round. We sat down round the table. Mr. Haye put us each at one side of the big table because he said he had a little speech to make. He got up like a chairman at a meeting and said, 'Friends, Romans, countrymen.' He said first we would drink a toast to me. 'Our White Lady,' he said. So we drank the toast. Then he said he had something to tell us: that this was a sort of celebration." She looked at the fire. "He never finished. It reminded him of a story about two Scotchmen. It was one of those long stories, all full of dialect — Mr. Haye loved to imitate dialects.

"Well, I didn't think the story was so funny. But all of a sudden I burst out

laughing. We were all laughing. I was feeling queer and overheated. Mr. Haye certainly looked overheated, and he was laughing so much he could hardly talk. The oddest thing was to see Mr. Schumann almost doubled up, and stamping on the floor.

"The last thing I remember is Mr. Haye's face seeming to swell up and red as fire. Everything sort of scrambled up and grew horrible; and that's the last I recall.

"I don't even like to think about it," she added.

The chief inspector turned noncommittally to Blystone. "You, sir. Have you anything to add to that?"

"I'm afraid not," said Blystone, passing one of those curious hands across his forehead. "I realized that something was wrong. But there was no time to do anything about it. I wanted to sing. But I can't remember whether I actually did."

"You agree with Mrs. Sinclair's story?"

"Certainly."

"Now, then!" Masters said. "It's time we got down to business and you told the truth. The point is, there was no atropine in that cocktail shaker. You follow? Consequently, the atropine must have been put into each individual drink, *after* the cocktails were poured out. I want to know which one of you poisoned those drinks. I also want to know why you had four watches in your pocket; and why you, ma'am, were carrying a bottle of quicklime and a bottle of phosphorus. Well?"

CHAPTER FIVE

BOTH OF THEM stared at him. For one brief instant you seemed to see through their opened eyes into their brains; and what you saw there, Sanders would have sworn, was honest bewilderment.

Sir Dennis Blystone got up from his chair.

"It will not be necessary," he said sharply, "to try any police tricks on us. We are trying to help you."

"It's not a trick, sir," the chief inspector told him. "Ask Dr. Sanders here, if you don't believe me. There was no atropine in that cocktail shaker."

Blystone turned to the woman. "God, Bonny," he said, "what *did* happen?"

"You'd better try to remember, sir: let's just have the truth. If the cocktails

had been poured out while you were all in the kitchen — well, your story would have held water. But they weren't. There's no atropine in the shaker. But somebody slipped the drug into each glass. You were all sitting at the table; you must have seen who did it. Now, then: have you anything to tell me?"

"I do not want to change my story," Blystone said. "It is the plain, literal truth."

"Oh, what's the good of all this, sir?" demanded Masters. "If you keep on like this, you'll be saying it was impossible the drinks could have been poisoned at all."

Blystone gave him a glance. "That is precisely what I am saying. I will take my dying oath that nobody tampered with those drinks round the table. Do you think it would be possible to sit at a table and not observe a drug being put in?"

The chief inspector, fuming, looked from one to the other of them.

"Please let me say something," Bonita Sinclair interposed. "What is this 'atropine' like? I mean, is it solid or liquid? Has it got a color?"

"It is a colorless liquid," Sanders told her. "Atropine comes from belladonna, and there is belladonna in most ordinary eye lotions."

She looked startled. "Eye lotions? And how much of it would be needed to make a person unconscious?"

"Of pure atropine, only a few drops. This was pure atropine; not the weaker medical preparations."

"Then I think I can solve your problem," said Bonita. "It's quite simple, too. Someone came in from outside, just as we thought. But he didn't put the atropine into the cocktail shaker. He put a little of it into the bottom of each glass, where he could measure the quantity. You say it is colorless. Most cocktail glasses are damp or wet anyway; and, if it were noticed, the person would simply assume it was water from the washing, and pay no attention."

"What about it, doctor?" said Masters grimly. "Could that have happened?"

"No," said Sanders.

It caused a minor sensation. Both Bonita and Sir Dennis became very quiet.

"I mean," Sanders went on, "that it doesn't seem very likely. Where were the cocktail glasses standing?"

"In the middle of the refectory table," she answered. "Mr. Haye poured out the drinks."

Sanders considered. "The largest amount in those glasses was almost big enough to kill, if the whole cocktail had been drunk. It amounted to something between a teaspoonful and a tablespoonful. If there were three glasses,

little ones, and all with so much white liquid at the bottom of them — wouldn't someone at least have noticed it? Did anyone notice it?"

"I — I believe I did," the woman told him earnestly. "But, of course, I shouldn't like to swear to it."

Though Masters must have been furious, he tried not to show it. He opened his notebook again.

"We'll leave that for a moment," he said. "In the meantime, sir: would you mind telling me just what you were doing with those four watches?"

Blystone threw back his head and laughed.

"I beg your pardon," he corrected himself gravely. "But may all your riddles be solved as easily as that! Mrs. Sinclair gave you the clue last night — though you don't seem to have spotted it. Didn't you tell them, Bonny, that I was to pick you up here at your house before we went on to Haye's?"

"Yes, sir, she told us that," said Masters. "What of it?"

"And she further told you, I think, that she had three very important telephone calls to put through at various times? One to New York, one to Paris, and one to Rome?"

Masters's eyes opened, and then narrowed.

"You've guessed it, Inspector," said Blystone heartily. "Those cities do not operate on Greenwich time. In the case of New York, there is five hours' difference. Paris and Rome have different times as well. But, if from various cities like that you are told to ring up at an hour indicated by them, you are going to find it extremely complicated.

"I found the solution," he explained with amusement. "One of the four watches, my own, is set with ordinary English time. The other three were set to the corresponding times in New York, Paris, and Rome. One glance at my watches, and you could tell the time in any of four cities. It was a great help. And it's all very easy when you known the answer."

"You don't tell me, sir?" said Masters. "As you say, all very easy when you know the answer. Is there any answer to the quicklime and the phosphorus?"

"But surely that didn't bother you? I suppose it would, though, in a way," the woman remarked thoughtfully. "You see, I took the wrong handbag out last night. Naturally I don't carry such things in the ordinary way. Quicklime and phosphorus are used for removing paint from canvas when you suspect there is another painting, a valuable one, underneath. They're both calciums, you see — calcium oxide and calcium phosphate. I can really recommend the preparation, Mr. Masters."

"You seem to have quite a knowledge of chemistry, ma'am. And *I* can

recommend your ingenuity if all this don't happen to be true."

"You don't doubt our word?" asked Blystone sharply.

"Well, sir, after all — that's my business, isn't it?" said Masters. "Where would the police be if I never doubted anything? But I don't suppose you could tell me, could you, what Mr. Schumann was doing with the works of an alarm clock?"

"Alarm clock?" Blystone repeated. "I don't understand. What about it?"

Masters described the find.

"So we all had a treasure trove," the other observed, looking into space. "No, I can't tell you anything about it. You'll have to ask Schumann."

"If you will allow me," interposed Bonita gently, "Mr. Masters, did you ever hear of Andrew J. Borden?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Surely you have? Andrew Borden was the victim in a great American murder case nearly fifty years ago. He and his wife were killed with a hatchet in broad noon of a summer day in their own house. Their daughter Lizzie — Lizzie Borden of Fall River — was tried for it and acquitted. It is most unpleasant to talk of such things — but in Mr. Borden's pocket they found an old, rusty, discarded lock-mechanism. He had picked it up off the street that morning. He had a habit of picking up things like that; things that interested him or that might come in useful. Mr. Schumann, I think, is very much like that. Don't you read character, Mr. Masters?"

"Why, you might say I'm reading character now," declared Masters gravely. "And very interesting it is too. There's just one other thing I think you ought to know. Are you aware that all three of you have been accused of being criminals?"

Bonita Sinclair sat up, as though startled. Sir Dennis Blystone suddenly put his curious hands behind his back.

"That's utterly ridiculous," the woman said indignantly. "Why not murderers as well?"

Masters nodded. "Yes. That was a part of the idea too."

"By George!" exploded Blystone. "This takes your breath away to such an extent that you don't even think of denying it." He chuckled. "Our professions will give you some very sinister suggestions. The storybooks will be useful. Bonita, of course, sells faked paintings, whereas I undoubtedly sell drugs or perform illegal operations. What about poor old Schumann? He murders people, wraps them up in mummy cases, and sells them as mummies. That's more spectacular than our offenses, but just about as true. Seriously, who has been

stuffing you with all this rot?"

Masters kept an imperturbable face.

"You seem concerned, sir."

"Of course I'm concerned," said Blystone impatiently. "If a man is accused of something, he's got a right to know what he's accused of and who accuses him."

"What are you accused of, sir?"

"Well, good God, man, that is what I'm trying to find out! Isn't this carrying police reticence a bit too far?" Blystone's dignity had broken down again.

Masters shook his head. "Maybe I can answer your question by asking another. When you and Mrs. Sinclair went to Mr. Haye's flat last night, was Mr. Schumann already there?"

"Where? At Haye's flat? Yes. But I don't see —"

"Was Mr. Schumann's office closed up?"

"Yes. No. Now that I come to think of it, there was someone in the rear office. A clerk or someone. I did not notice particularly. Why?"

"The clerk's name seemed to be Ferguson," observed Masters. "A very interesting chap. Good morning, and thank you both."

As they went out into the hall, Masters grinned wryly and spoke to Sanders in a low voice.

"Now I wonder," he said, "which of us came off best there? I've got me doubts. But I've scared both of 'em, which is what I tried to do. They'll have a tail put on them straightaway. If they knew Ferguson, they'll try to get in touch with him; and it may lead us straight to the old chap." He scowled. "But just keep in mind what you've heard today, doctor. No wonder Ferguson said they were smooth customers. You heard the explanation about the watches."

"You mean there's still another reason for the four watches? And another explanation of the quicklime and phosphorus?"

"Of course there is," grunted Masters. "The point is, I can't make the woman out. Hurrum! I don't see how the quicklime and phosphorus applies to her, unless we've come across a new wrinkle in crime. All I'm certain of is that she's got an A-1 head on her shoulders, and an A-1 imagination for thinking up jiggery-pokery and general ghost stories. Sir Dennis Blystone isn't a patch on her for cleverness or maybe other things. But . . . hullo!"

They had come to the front door, and Masters was opening it, when he paused. Against the wall in the little front hall there was a low carved chest. The lid was raised a crack; and sticking in that crack at one side was what

looked like a gray-gloved finger.

On the wall hung a curious unfinished sketch, signed with the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. To Sanders's surprise, the chief inspector looked at this picture carefully before he leaned over and lifted the lid of the chest.

Mrs. Sinclair was evidently a slovenly housekeeper under the spick-and-span exterior. The chest was full of old lumber: several umbrellas, a tennis racket going to pieces, a grimy jumper, and two raincoats.

And on top of the pile lay a man's arm.

It gave Sanders an unpleasant shock until he realized that it was a dummy arm. It was composed of a black coat-sleeve stuffed with wool, the edge of a white cuff, and a stuffed hand in a gray glove.

"Ah," said Masters, lowering the lid again.

Sanders spoke quietly as they both hurried towards the door.

"For God's sake, chief inspector, what's going on here? What are they up to? And why does she keep a stuffed arm put away in —?"

"Easy!" muttered the chief inspector. "You'll know soon enough, doctor. Besides, I don't think the arm is her property. In the meantime, we'll just run out to Hampstead and see Mr. Schumann."

CHAPTER SIX

PAST THE STEEP STREETS of Hampstead, the road still seemed to curve up interminably to the heights overlooking Hampstead Heath. The police car circled a broad pool of ornamental water and drew up at one entrance to the roads down across the heath.

Masters drove the car down the road to the left, in the direction of Schumann's house.

"I don't want to make a nuisance of myself," Sanders insisted, "but I should appreciate a hint, anyway. Four watches, quicklime and phosphorus, the works of an alarm clock, and now a dummy arm. Honestly, *have* you got an idea what the whole mess means?"

"I have," the chief inspector admitted. "What's more, I've got a good notion to drop in and see Sir Henry Merrivale today. Do you know him?"

"I've seen him. I was in court when he defended Answell on that murder charge."

"Ah! Not a bad bit of work, that Answell case," Masters conceded. "But

this is one case that will make the old man wild. He won't be able to make head or tail of it, and — I can."

"One other point. Why were you so interested in that drawing hung up in Mrs. Sinclair's hall?"

Masters grew serious.

"Well, I'm not what you would call a connoisseur. But I don't know whether you noticed, in Mrs. Sinclair's parlor, another picture hung up opposite the fireplace? Painting of a girl in a Dutch cap?"

"I can't say I did. It was darkish in there."

"H'm. Maybe she meant it to be," said the chief inspector. "Anyhow, I'll take my oath I saw the dead image of that same picture in the National Gallery. It's by this chap Rembrandt."

"There must be a good many Rembrandt copies in existence," Sanders pointed out. "Hold on! Is it true that Mrs. Sinclair deals in fake paintings?"

"Oh, no. Lordlovus, no!" said the chief inspector heartily. "If Mrs. Bonita Ruddy Sinclair is half as clever as I think she is, she'd never be as crude as that. It's a new dodge, doctor. You'll enjoy it. — This is our house, I think."

He stopped the car outside a low wall fronting the path. Bernard Schumann lived in a gray brick, semi-detached house of solid Victorian respectability.

A grim-faced old woman in a housekeeper's dress admitted them and waved away Masters's card.

"I know who you are," she told him. "And, if I had my say, you wouldn't get in at all. But he insists on seeing you. In there."

Before a bright coal fire in the drawing-room, a horsehair sofa of ancient pattern had been drawn up. Schumann, wearing a dressing gown, lay propped up on the sofa with a quilt tucked closely round him.

He was an appropriate figure for that high bow-windowed room, where the knick-knacks of sixty years ago made a kind of jungle. Among the ordinary gew-gaws there stood a long glass case containing rare antique ornaments. And, in the corner by the windows, stood a mummy case some seven feet high.

"Please sit down, gentlemen," said Schumann, with a courtly gesture. "I have been expecting you. I understand you wish to ask me some questions about an alarm clock."

"Just so, Mr. Schumann," agreed Masters, without surprise. "How did you know that?"

The other smiled. "Sir Dennis Blystone telephoned to me. But I can tell you in advance that I have nothing to add to what my friends have said. They told you the truth, and the whole truth."

"Suppose we take it in order," suggested Masters. "First of all, since you mentioned it, what about that alarm clock? What were you doing with that?"

"I was doing nothing with it. I never saw it before in my life."

"Now that's too bad, sir," Masters told him. "I was hoping you'd have some good reason for carrying it. Mrs. Sinclair and Sir Dennis both had good reasons."

"No doubt. I can speak only for myself."

"How do you think the alarm clock works got into your pocket?"

"I don't know. I imagine someone must have put it there."

"While you were unconscious? Then you're suggesting that the other things found in Sir Dennis's pockets and Mrs. Sinclair's handbag were also put there while they were unconscious?"

"Not in the least. I have no doubt they are telling the truth."

For a long time Masters carefully led him over every incident that had happened the night before. His story varied in no particular from the account already given by the other two witnesses.

"—and I can only repeat," Schumann continued, "that there was *no* ulterior motive in our gathering at Haye's flat: at least, that I was aware of. I did not even know who the other guests were going to be."

"What time did you arrive at the flat?"

"At about a quarter to eleven."

"Was Mr. Haye already there?"

"Yes; he told me he had just arrived there."

"How did he — um — behave, sir?"

"Well, he seemed annoyed that the caretaker of our building, Timothy Riordan, had not made a good job of tidying up his flat. He had told Riordan to attend to this earlier in the evening, it appeared." Schumann smiled. "Otherwise he was in excellent spirits. He made one or two jokes about dragons."

Masters blinked. "Eh? Dragons, sir?"

For a second Dr. Sanders could have sworn their host was trying to tell them something. But Schumann drew back again.

"I suppose," he said unconvincingly, "that Timothy may be considered something of a dragon."

"When you went up past your office last night, Mr. Schumann, was anybody working there?"

"No, certainly not."

Masters leaned forward. "Just the same, there was a man in your office last

night. He said his name was Ferguson, and that he worked for you. He knew his way about: identified you: he made himself at home, to the extent of washing his hands there —"

Schumann's expression seemed to reflect darkening sky outside. But he spoke quietly:

"Sir, are you raving mad?"

"Of course," said Masters, "we know there's no such person —"

"I don't think I quite follow you," interposed Schumann. "Certainly there is such a person."

For the first time Masters was honestly taken aback.

"Here! You don't mean to say you've got a clerk named Ferguson?"

"Not now. But he, or a man such as you describe, did work for me eight or ten years ago. He — he left: there was some trouble. I understood he was dead."

"Lummy, what a lot that would explain!" the chief inspector muttered. "How he was at home there, how he knew about you, even how he might have got into the office when it was locked up. . . . But it still wouldn't explain how he got out. . . . You might as well know it, sir. After we got there, Ferguson disappeared out of a building locked up back and front. How did he do that?"

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you that." Schumann winked slightly and became humorous. "The Ferguson I knew was not a magician."

Masters scented evasion. "Ah! Possibly not, sir. But you tell me that there was some trouble at the office, and Ferguson 'left.' What was that?"

"He absconded with some money," answered Schumann, showing a certain fastidious distaste.

"Didn't you prosecute?"

"No. He went abroad. What he was doing there last night, I have not the remotest idea." Schumann's eyes narrowed. "I know there has been no robbery or even any disturbance, because I talked to my chief clerk this morning. The whole affair is irrational. It is mad. Think back over it. A group of us meet for a — an ordinary social evening.

"We are drugged. Poor Haye is stabbed. Certain outlandish articles are placed in our — in my pocket. A former clerk of mine is pottering about in my office below: doing nothing, stealing nothing, acting nothing except a senseless masquerade. Then this clerk, according to you, vanishes through locked doors. Did Ferguson say anything about me?"

"Yes, sir, he said two things. He said you had been decorated by the Egyp-

tian government for being able to reproduce the embalming process of the Nineteenth Dynasty. He also said you were a criminal."

"The first statement is correct. The second is not."

"But haven't you got anything else to say, sir?" demanded Masters. "Anything to show — ?"

"I have my whole life to show," said Schumann quietly. "It compares very favorably with that of an absconding thief whom I failed to prosecute, and who dares not remain behind to say this to my face."

Masters showed an intuition for which Sir Henry Merrivale would never have given him credit.

"Mr. Schumann," he said, "who killed Haye?"

"I do not know. . . . Atropine is a curious drug," Schumann went on, as though irrelevantly. "I had some experience last night with the hallucinations it brings. At that table last night, I was facing across the room towards some murals on the wall and some bright-jacketed books on a shelf over the fireplace. The murals came to life and the titles of the books grew like electric signs. Persons, non-existent persons, seemed to walk in and out of doors —"

Masters's tone became colorless. "Very well. Now, about the drugging of the various drinks. I'm bound to tell you your story agrees with the others. But it's been suggested that a little atropine could have been brought to the flat by an outsider, and put into the glasses themselves while they were unattended in the living-room. Do you agree?"

"No, sir. The glasses were quite clean. I noticed it later when Haye was pouring out the cocktails."

"Ah!" said Masters with satisfaction. "Then how was the atropine put into the drinks?"

For the first time a twitch of annoyance crossed Schumann's face. He lifted one hand and shaded his eyes with it.

"My friend, to my homely mind that seems so simple that I cannot understand your attitude. Now, you deny that during that three or four minute interlude the work could have been done. Why? Solely and simply, because you later found no atropine in the cocktail shaker. But think again:

"Suppose an outsider has come in, and has poisoned both the contents of the shaker and Sir Dennis Blystone's highball? We drink, and become unconscious. The outsider has then a free hand to do as he likes: he took that swordstick out of the umbrella stand and stabbed Haye. What is to prevent him from washing out the shaker, filling it half-way up again with harmless cocktails, and leaving it where you found it?

"It will then be assumed that atropine was put into each individual glass. Thereby suspicion is thrown on one of us. And, but for the fortunate chance that we had stood by to watch while the drinks were prepared, we might have believed it ourselves. Surely you had thought of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I'd thought of it," said Masters gruffly. "Then you accuse Ferguson of being the murderer?"

"Not at all. I am more charitable than Ferguson."

Masters made a last entry in his notebook.

"Just one more thing," he said, "and I'll leave it at that — for the present. I'd like to get a full description of Ferguson as you last knew him. I daresay you can supply that?"

"Not offhand. It has been at least eight and nearer ten years ago, and I am a little hazy. But I think I could get you the details. I am as interested as you are. You see, I thought he was dead. . . .

"I will send you the details this afternoon, sir," repeated Schumann, standing upright. "Meantime, I must ask you to excuse me."

The reason for this abrupt dismissal Sanders did not understand unless Schumann was at the end of his strength. Schumann's eyes followed them as they went out. Yet the stolid Chief Inspector Masters, when he glanced behind, seemed uneasy.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Sanders.

"Urr!" said the other. "If I hear any more ruddy explanations —"

He had his hand on the front gate when another person who had been lurking just outside, stepped in front of him with an air of concern.

"Please don't say that," requested Marcia Blystone. "I've been following you all morning, and now you've got to listen to me. I know who killed Mr. Haye, and how the poison was put in the drinks."

Masters stopped and stared. It was the first time Dr. Sanders had seen Marcia in honest light. She looked more robust, more smiling, than the rather-too-intense girl he had seen last night.

"You too, miss?" demanded the chief inspector. "What are you doing here?"

"I took a taxi out," she explained. "And I dismissed it. Honestly, I'm afraid you'll have to give me a lift home in your Black Maria or police car or whatever you call it. Hello, doctor."

Masters tried a tone of fatherly reasonableness. "Now, miss, you're entirely welcome to ride back in the car, of course. But as for any more theories —"

"It's not theories," she said calmly. "It's facts. Or, at least, some of it," she amended carefully.

Throwing away her cigarette and taking a large sketching pad from under her arm, she got into the car beside the chief inspector. Sanders climbed in at the back. Masters drove off vigorously.

"Very well, miss," he said. "Were you going to say that the atropine was put into the cocktail shaker, and that the murderer washed it out afterwards?"

"No, of course not," said Marcia, surprised. "It's much more ingenious than that. The murderer —"

"Just so," said Masters. "I was afraid of that. But let's get it in order. Who's the murderer?"

Carefully she opened the sketching pad and placed it across the steering wheel — to the discomfort of Masters. But he risked a look. On the pad she had drawn in pencil a really brilliant sketch of Bonita Sinclair.

Marcia added offhandedly, "There's the hussy."

"Miss," roared the chief inspector, "will you kindly take that thing off my — Anyway, what makes you think she did?"

"She murdered her husband," said Marcia, "and I've got evidence to prove it."

At that moment the police car shot like a projectile down the long curve of the road descending the hill.

In the middle of the road, an enormous fruit barrow was creaking its way up the hill. The man who was pushing it could be seen only with difficulty behind gentle pyramids of oranges, apples, lemons, Brazil nuts, greengages, and bananas. But his despairing howl rose up an instant before the collision.

Yanking the wheel over hard, Masters avoided a head-on smash. In one majestic crash, the barrow whirled, rose, and pirouetted like a dancer. The man who had been pushing the barrow escaped its weight, but he went into the ditch under an avalanche of fruit.

Bumping on a broken wheel, the barrow coquettishly turned turtle and stayed there. The man who had been pushing it struggled up, an avatar of wrath; he was stout and he wore a loud-colored bathrobe, running-shorts, and spectacles.

"What the goddamholyblazes do you think you're doin'?" howled a familiar voice. "Oh, gimme me breath! Just gimme the goddam strength to get my hands round your neck —"

Distorted with rage, there peered from the ditch the malevolent face of Sir Henry Merrivale.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WELL, what were you doing on the wrong side of the road?" shouted Masters. "What were you —"

"What was I —" H.M. stared. "That's not Masters," he declared. "Don't tell me that's Masters?"

"I tell you I couldn't help it, sir! The young lady was leaning across me with that drawing, and her foot was on top of mine —"

"So you're at it again," H.M. said in a strangled voice. "Burn me, Masters, you're not decent. No gal is safe with you —"

"Let-him-rave-miss," Masters said. "That's Sir Henry Merrivale. And you, sir. Will you kindly tell me what in blazes you're doing in the middle of Hampstead Heath, with nothing on but a bathrobe and pants, pushing a blazing fruit barrow up this hill?"

"I'm reducin', curse you," said H.M., drawing his bathrobe round him like a Roman toga. "I got a friend named Giovanni who did own a fruit barrow. He bet me I wouldn't push it up the hill, and he was right. How far did I get with it, hey? Just twenty-nine paces, and along comes a joy-ridin' policeman and swipes it to glory. Burn me, I'll —"

"In that case, sir," Masters urged soothingly, "you'd better get in the car with us. Never mind the barrow. As soon as we get to the nearest A.A. box, I'll see that the damage is attended to. You don't want to do any more exercising today, do you?"

"Well . . . now. I expect I've taken off enough inches for today," said H.M., inspecting his waistline hopefully — as we all do. "You're smackin' well right I don't want to do any more exercising today. *Gor!* I could —"

He waddled over to the car. After inspecting the wreckage, he sat down on the running board, picked up a banana, and malevolently began to eat it.

"Aren't you afraid you'll put it all back on again?" said Marcia.

"Ur — sorry," interposed Masters, and performed introductions. At mention of Sanders's name H.M. looked up with interest.

"So? I know your boss at the Home Office Analyst's. I say, son, are you the fellow who wrote that book, *Post-Mortem Analysis of the Larger Intestine?*"

"How terribly romantic," said Marcia, gurgling. "Did you really, doctor?"

Sanders felt his enthusiasm dimmed. The book, his literary ewe-lamb, was

eighty pages long, had sold eleven copies, and was probably not known even to the Recording Angel.

"It's a good book," asserted H.M., and made himself Sanders's friend for life. "A thunderin' good book. Somebody's got to write these things, my wench. It can't be all moonlight and roses."

"Not in the larger intestine, anyway," said Marcia.

"Don't be indelicate," howled H.M. "Look here, Masters: I seem to see dirty work at the crossroads. Were you three conferrin' about the Haye case?"

"Possibly, sir. As a matter of fact, I'd thought of dropping in on you this afternoon —"

"I've already been consulted about it," said H.M. "And I'll bet I know a thing or two you don't. You know the firm of Drake, Rogers & Drake?"

"Mr. Felix Haye's solicitors," stated Masters. "I sent Sergeant Pollard round there this morning."

"It was old man Drake who came to me," said H.M. "He must be gettin' on for ninety. Last night they had a burglary. Haye deposited some things there for safe keepin', and they got pinched. Nothin' financially valuable. Just five little sealed boxes, to be opened by the solicitors in case Haye died. The solicitors never got a chance to open 'em. And I'm afraid, Masters, they might contain five little motives for murder, all in a row."

The Chief of the Military Intelligence Department sat on the running board and gobbled bananas with concentration.

Masters spoke warningly: "Just so, sir. Miss Blystone here is the daughter of Sir Dennis Blystone."

"Sure; I know," H.M. agreed, looking up. "When I saw the mention of Haye's death in 'stop press' this morning, I thought I'd better ring up your superintendent, and I got the details. I don't like it, Masters. It's not pretty."

"Do you think we'd better discuss the case: at the moment?"

"Masters," said H.M. querulously, "I wouldn't have your nasty suspicious mind for anything in the world. Why not say it in front of the gal? She looks like a nice gal. And she may be able to help us."

The chief inspector grinned.

"You might say, sir, it was helping us that wrecked your friend's fruit barrow. Miss Blystone was just about to tell us who committed the murder, and how the poisoning was done —"

"Oh, never mind that now," cried Marcia, getting out of the car. "But what did you mean about five little boxes?"

"Just that. Haye deposited five cardboard boxes, wrapped in brown paper,

tied, and sealed with red wax. They were to be opened in case of his death. Each box had a certain person's name written on it. I wrote down the list, but it's back in my trousers at Giovanni's, and I don't recall offhand. But your father was one of 'em."

"I don't believe it." She had grown very quiet. "You think my father is a criminal. You think there was a kind of — of board meeting of crooks in Mr. Haye's flat last night. But you're wrong about my father.

"He only went with Mrs. Sinclair. My mother doesn't know anything about it — I hope. *I* didn't know anything about it until this morning. But I saw Stella Erskine, who knows everything there is to know in London. And the way my father has been carrying on with that Sinclair woman is a public scandal."

"H'm," said Masters. "I'm not surprised. *Well?*"

"She's *notorious*," said Marcia. "She's known all over Europe. She really is a quite genuine authority on paintings, but that's not her only profession. And I don't want to see him divorce my mother, get married to this — this machine, and then get himself poisoned for his money."

Masters whistled. "Look here, miss. You said she was a murderess, and you could prove it. You didn't honestly mean that, did you?"

Marcia lifted her shoulders. "Oh, nothing was actually proved against her. But Stella Erskine says there was the death of her husband. Nobody knows or knew much about him. One day he simply up and died, that's all. It was at Nice or Biarritz. He was buried quickly; the old doctor, who was a friend of Mrs. Sinclair, granted a death certificate; and she collected the insurance.

"That," admitted Marcia, "is all the real dirt. The rest is just a whisper. It seems she has had some rows, also hushed up, with a museum in New York, an art dealer in Paris, and some private collectors. She does get about."

"Phooey!" said H.M., uninformatively.

"You're sure this isn't just gossip, Miss Blystone?" demanded Masters. "Because, if it isn't —"

"She drugged the drinks last night," answered Marcia. "I was following you all morning. You went to her house, didn't you? And my father was there. I went right in when I saw you come out. I'm afraid I caused rather a dust-up; but I got the facts. She drank out of my father's highball glass last night, didn't she? And, what is more, she also tasted the batch of cocktails just after she mixed them. But she drank straight out of the shaker. Didn't she?"

"That's what she told us," grunted Masters.

"She had a reason, of course. I've tried the trick with mouthwash, and I know it works. You put a little of the liquid in your mouth, in the hollow under the tongue. You don't have to keep it there long.

"All right! Then you pick up a tumbler or a cocktail shaker, and pretend to drink from it. But really, you add something to its contents: in this case, you add the atropine. And in full sight of several witnesses you've drugged the drinks in such a way that everybody will swear they couldn't possibly have been drugged in any way whatever."

There was a silence amid the holocaust of fruit.

H.M. was amused. "That's torn it," he said. "Masters is shocked. He thinks it's unsanitary. He also thinks it's unladylike of the wench —"

"I don't care whether it's unladylike," snapped Masters. "The point is, is it practical? What do you say, doctor?"

"It's remotely possible," Sanders replied, "provided she could hold enough pure atropine to do the business, which I doubt. But there are two 'human' objections to it. First: if Mrs. Sinclair did anything like that, why did she afterwards clean out the cocktail shaker? She herself told us the stuff must have been put into the shaker, so why make herself out a liar? Second: the great objection to the method is that it's comic. If you ever tried to prove a case like that in court, you'd have the jury grinning at you, and counsel for the defense would laugh you to pieces."

With some effort H.M. hoisted himself up from the running board, and began to climb into the car.

"I want some trousers," he growled. "Masters, my son, you're in one awful mess. I wonder if you know how bad it is."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, sir." Masters was smug.

Rapidly he sketched out the events of the morning. H.M.'s expression of evil satisfaction deepened.

"And there you are, Sir Henry. I don't blame you for thinking it's a mess, or being puzzled —"

"Puzzled?" said H.M. "Who's puzzled? Not me. I'll tell you just exactly what you can explain and what you can't explain. You can explain the four watches, the alarm clock guts, the magnifying glass, and the dummy arm. You can explain the quicklime and the phosphorus too; but you don't see how they apply to Mrs. Sinclair. Also, even grantin' that there's a real Ferguson after all, you can't for the life of you think of what he's doin' in the picture: to say nothin' of how he vanished out of it.

"H'mf. Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair. Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair. Yes, son,

they're your two crooked puzzle-pieces. Try Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair together, just for the sake of argument."

H.M.'s little eye opened in the direction of Sanders.

"You, son. You were the first to speak to Ferguson after the discovery of the murder? Did he say anything, son? Make any comment?"

Sanders considered. "Yes. He said he might have expected it, and that Bernard Schumann was upstairs. Then he said, very sharply, 'How's the lady?' I thought he meant Miss Blystone; but he seemed to get mad, and said that he meant the dark-haired lady, Mrs. Sinclair. Then he hurried upstairs."

H.M. shut his eyes. "So. And consequently, Masters, we got a connection between the two already. Enough to lead straight through hypothesis to Q.E.D. Think of what you know about the quicklime and the phosphorus. Think of what you know about Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair. Then tie 'em all together like a string of sausages; and see if you can't tell me straightaway just what Ferguson is, and how he evaporated out of that building."

"Lummy!" breathed Masters. "You've got it. Not a doubt in the world. It's as clear as daylight."

Dr. John Sanders looked from one to the other of them, at such a point of maniacal curiosity as he had never known before.

Marcia Blystone was now standing close to him with her hand on his arm.

"Is it really as clear as daylight?" she said. "I know I'm here only by courtesy, but if you've gone as far as that you might be a little more explicit."

"All right," said H.M. abruptly. "Get into the car."

But he still sat silent, glaring at the windscreen, while they drove. In fact, it was not until the car drew up before Felix Haye's building in Great Russell Street, at two o'clock in the afternoon, that he spoke.

"If I was talkin' like that," H.M. said to Marcia, as though there had been no interruption, "it was because I want you to tell the truth. Here we are; and you can tell me the truth now, can't you? You were standin' by that street lamp, weren't you?"

"Yes." She looked at him curiously.

"And how long had you been waitin' here last night before the doctor came along?"

"A little over an hour, maybe."

"Uh-huh," said H.M. "Then you saw the murderer, didn't you? You must have."

CHAPTER EIGHT

AT ABOUT the same time on the same afternoon, Detective-Sergeant Robert Pollard — acting on instructions from Chief Inspector Masters — was entering the offices of Drake, Rogers & Drake in Gray's Inn.

Pollard's morning had been devoted to collecting information about the various persons in the case. The result left him depressed and rather dazed. Sir Dennis Blystone was unimpeachable. An affair with Mrs. Sinclair had been hinted at. But he did much work for charity; he was of sober reputation; there was no swank about him; he never took a taxi when a bus would do; and so on.

The most suspicious art dealers spoke of Mrs. Sinclair in terms so glowing that their sincerity could not be doubted. Schumann not only appeared to be honest: he was a much-persecuted man who once had ten thousand pounds' worth of completely uninsured stock wiped out in a disastrous fire at his warehouse in Cairo. Even Felix Haye himself dwelt in an odor of sanctity throughout the City.

Pollard, who had crept into the Force by way of Harrow and Cambridge, by this time had certain definite ideas, which evidently did not square with those of Masters. To two leads, he felt, Masters was not paying half enough attention: (1) the swordstick; (2) the girl, Marcia Blystone.

That morning Pollard had questioned the caretaker at Haye's flat. Timothy Riordan still breathed an air of whisky and suspicion. He knew nothing, he swore, about the events of last night. The last time he had seen Haye alive was at a little past six o'clock in the evening, when Haye had gone out to dinner; he had met Haye on the stairs, and Haye had asked him to tidy up the flat, because there were guests coming that night.

He had tidied the flat up immediately and then gone down to his basement again. He had not seen any of the guests arrive that night, because he had gone to bed at half-past ten.

That umbrella swordstick? It belonged to Mr. Haye himself, and he (Timothy Riordan) had noticed it in the flat last night when he was tidying up.

This interested Pollard. Why a swordstick at all, if the murderer were able to poison any given glass with atropine? And why, after the murder, had it been left standing so conspicuously on the stairs?

Marcia Blystone had also been neglected.

"Not my type," Pollard had decided, after inspecting her. He much preferred Mrs. Sinclair. Mrs. Sinclair, said gossip, had buried two husbands. The latest had been an aging business man, remembered for his startling agility on a tennis court. She had also had a string of admirers along the Riviera; one of them a rich Italian who — during an intimate dinner at Monte Carlo — had got so excited about her charms that it brought on an attack of appendicitis, and he died of it.

Privately, Pollard could understand this. In Marcia Blystone there was too much of the boy; and the sergeant detested boyish women. He was quite sure she was a fluent liar.

Marcia Blystone had been hanging about outside the building where Haye was killed. For how long? An hour at least, she said. Well, had the girl seen anything? Had she gone into the building? And how did she figure in the affair anyhow?

Pollard had got to this point when he groped up the breakneck stairs of the old red-brick house in Gray's Inn where Drake, Rogers & Drake had been an established firm before the birth of Queen Victoria. The almost gruesome integrity of Drake, Rogers & Drake, was well known to Pollard. An ancient secretary took him into the presence of Mr. Charles Drake, the junior partner.

The junior partner was a brisk, aggressive, no-nonsense man of fifty-odd, with a rolling walk like a sailor and a pince-nez which pushed up the bridge of his nose into a hump. His manner may have been intended to intimidate clients; but behind it Pollard now sensed uncertainty.

"This is awkward," he said, greeting Pollard in a little office. "I suppose my father knows best; but I understood he wasn't going to the police. Er — just yet, in any case. You've come about Haye's death?"

"Yes, sir, of course. Why else should I have come?"

"Burglars," said Drake briefly. "But I guessed as much. I saw a mention of it in the paper this morning. May I ask if Mr. Haye was murdered?"

"He was murdered, sir."

"I guessed that too. Very well: you're here. Get out your notebook, and I'll give you the facts.

"Mr. Felix Haye," he said, talking like a machine gun. "Mr. Haye was an investment broker, and had offices at 614 Leadenhall Street. He has been a client of ours for eleven years. He was a bachelor, and his only surviving relative is an aunt in Cumberland. Exactly a week ago, April 7, Mr. Haye came to us and stated that someone had tried to kill him."

Pollard sat up with a jerk. Drake's tones were merely businesslike.

"For our mutual inspection," continued Drake, "he produced a half-flagon bottle of Ewkeshaw's Pale Ale. With this he had a cardboard container, wrapping paper, and a covering letter. The letter was a sheet of Ewkeshaw's stamped stationery, on which were the typewritten words, 'With the compliments of Horace Ewkeshaw & Co. Ltd.' Mr. Haye stated that he believed the letter was a forgery, and that the contents of the bottle were poisoned."

"I see, sir. An old dodge," commented Pollard, like a detective of ripe experience.

"As you say, an old dodge," agreed Drake, like a poisoner of even riper experience. "He asked our advice. My father suggested the police, although I did not concur in this view, and neither did Mr. Haye. He asked us to send the bottle to an analytical chemist's; and, if it should prove to be poisoned, to put the matter into the hands of a reliable firm of private inquiry agents.

"I followed instructions. Two days later, April 9, we received the analyst's report. The bottle contained ten grains of a narcotic poison called atropine."

"Atropine! What happened to the bottle?"

"One moment," said the solicitor with asperity. "You must have the facts in order. Mr. Haye called on us that same afternoon, and we informed him of the analyst's report. He was upset.

"He returned on the following morning, the tenth. Mr. Haye was so insistent that we were obliged to bring my father from our house in Bloomsbury Square, so that we should all be represented.

"Mr. Haye then showed us five small parcels or packages, which he spread out on the desk — er — like a conjuror. Each was a cardboard box about six inches long by four inches broad. Each was wrapped in heavy brown paper, tied with strong string, and sealed in two places with red wax bearing the imprint of his own signet ring. On each box he had printed a name in ink. Here is a list of the names."

He pushed a sheet of paper across to the sergeant. Pollard read:

1. Bonita Sinclair.
2. Dennis Blystone.
3. Bernard Schumann.
4. Peter Ferguson.
5. Judith Adams.

Uncertainly Pollard put the sheet away in his notebook. A real Ferguson, then? But this did not trouble him so much as the fifth name on the list.

"This last name, sir. Who is Judith Adams?"

"I can't say. Probably some friend — I mean, some person he knew. If you

search long enough you will undoubtedly find her; *I* don't know. . . . Mr. Haye said that he wished to deposit the boxes with us, to be opened by us in case anything happened to him. We accepted the charge. Last night someone broke into the office and stole every one of them."

Drake's large, cold gray eyes, magnified behind the pince-nez, concealed a powerful impatience and curiosity. But he asked no questions.

"But what did Mr. Haye say about the boxes?" asked Pollard.

"He said," replied the other, "that they contained evidence about certain persons who wished him dead. He may have meant evidence against. I do not know."

"Do you know what was in the boxes?"

"Certainly not. Stop: except in one case. Miss Rawlings, my secretary, picked up the boxes to put them away in Mr. Haye's deed box here. One of the small boxes began to tick. T-i-c-k, tick. Miss Rawlings almost dropped it. Mr. Haye was amused. He said: 'You must have started up one of the watches. There are four of them in there. They should have run down long ago.' That was the box bearing the name Dennis Blystone.

"On the following Monday I received the bottle of Ewkeshaw's ale back from the analytical chemist's. On Tuesday — in short, yesterday, the day of the murder — Mr. Haye rang me up. He asked me if I would bring the bottle round to his flat yesterday afternoon. I did so, and I arrived there about six o'clock.

"When I arrived at the flat, he was dressing and taking a drink or two. I found him standing in the hall in his evening trousers and under-vest, waving a cocktail shaker in one hand and a cavalry saber in the other.

"I told him I had brought the bottle. He instructed me to put it in the kitchen somewhere. I asked him if he wanted anyone poisoned. He said he rather thought he did. To make sure nobody got the bottle by mistake, I took a piece of paper and wrote, 'Poison; do not drink,' on it. I put it in a conspicuous place on one of the lower shelves of the pantry, with the paper stuck round its neck."

Pollard made a note. He must find that bottle. Felix Haye himself had had ten grains of atropine in his possession the night before. Of course, it was contained in Ewkeshaw's ale; but all the same —

"You say, sir, that this was at about six o'clock . . . And then?"

"I asked him why he was in such a hurry to get the bottle of ale. He said, 'I want to exhibit it at a little party I am giving tonight.' At this time he was shouting out to me from the bedroom.

"He finished dressing, and we left the flat together. He said that he was going on to dinner somewhere, and then to a music hall; but that he meant to return before eleven o'clock. I am sorry, sergeant. That is all I can tell you."

"But wasn't there anything else, sir? *Anything* at all? A reference to any guests —?"

Drake frowned rather angrily. "Stop. As we passed the Anglo-Egyptian Importing company on our way downstairs (you are acquainted with Mr. Bernard Schumann, the owner?), we met one of Mr. Schumann's assistants, who was just going home. An Egyptian; I cannot remember his name. All eyes and teeth and polished hair. Haye asked him whether Mr. Schumann was in the office. The Egyptian said that Mr. Schumann had not been there all day; and that he was entertaining some out-of-town friends."

"Did Mr. Haye say anything to this?"

"Only that he *rather* expected to see Mr. Schumann that night," replied Charles Drake sharply. "That was all."

"When you were on your way out of the building did you meet the caretaker, a little oldish man named Timothy Riordan."

"Yes, Haye asked him if he would go upstairs and tidy up the flat."

"Was he drunk, sir?"

"Not that I observed. Er — he made some reference," said Drake with an effort, "to a book which he seemed to have loaned to Haye, and asked whether Haye had finished with it. Haye said nothing."

"Book, sir? What book? He said nothing about a book."

"I have not the remotest idea. Something scurrilous, I daresay."

Pollard grunted. "Finally, sir, if you'll just tell me about this burglary at your office last night —?"

"Ah, that is better. Well, the burglary took place at twelve-thirty. At twelve-thirty the night watchman here, Beasley, rang up my house — or my father's house, I should say. I got up and answered the phone, and then I waked up my father. Beasley had just seen someone climb out of the window of our rear office here, and go down the fire escape.

"Beasley chased this person, whoever it was, without result. Then he came up to the office. Nothing had been touched in the rear office except the large 'deed box' painted with Mr. Haye's name. This box was broken open, lying on the floor. I got dressed and came here as soon as I could. The five smaller boxes were all missing.

"I never thought before," said Drake, staring through his pince-nez, "how easy it would be to rob an office like this. These windows are two hundred years

old. A knife would open the catches like — like cheese. But who robs solicitors' offices? All valuable documents are in our safe, which has not been touched."

Pollard got up. He was thinking out a solution to all the inconsistencies of the case.

Felix Haye had called a "board meeting" to exhibit the poisoned bottle of ale to his guests. He meant to announce that evidence against each of them, which might mean anything from a prison sentence to the gallows, had been packed away in five boxes; and these would be opened if another attempt were made on his life.

But somebody had been prepared for all this. Somebody drugged the drinks of those in Haye's flat.

Then "somebody" stabbed Haye with the swordstick. Leaving a group of unconscious persons at the table, this person hurried to Gray's Inn, broke into the solicitors' office and took away the damning boxes. If the murderer removed only one box, on which his own name was written, it would betray the person who had taken it. So all five had to be removed in order to protect the thief.

Pollard saw it now. The essential clue lay in those four watches.

In the box bearing the name *Dennis Blystone*, Haye had deposited four watches, the same four watches that were found in Blystone's pockets on the night of the murder. Therefore Marcia had lied when she said Sir Dennis had taken them to Haye's flat himself.

The murderer's actions became apparent. He had returned to Great Russell Street with the contents of the boxes. The four watches he put into Blystone's pockets. The alarm-clock works (contained in Schumann's box) he put in Schumann's pocket. The quicklime and the phosphorus (evidence against Mrs. Sinclair) he put into her handbag. In all probability Haye had written a letter which would explain the meaning of these articles. But the murderer was not willing to expose everything.

Haye had met his death between eleven and twelve. During this time the murderer had been in the building. He then left and went to Gray's Inn for his burglary, established at twelve-thirty o'clock. Consequently, since the murderer afterwards returned to Great Russell Street, he must have done this between twelve-thirty and one o'clock.

Therefore the key to the whole case was Marcia Blystone.

By her own confession, Marcia Blystone had been waiting outside the building for over an hour: that is, between twelve and one o'clock. There was only one way in or out of that building — the front door. The windows were inaccessible and the back door bolted and chained on the inside. Therefore the murderer

must have used the front door. And therefore Marcia Blystone must have seen him.

The girl had been lying, just as she had been lying about the four watches.

CHAPTER NINE

"— IF I SAW the murderer?" repeated Marcia Blystone staring at H.M. "Honestly, I don't know what on earth you're talking about."

Neither, it appeared, did the chief inspector; though with native caution he checked himself on the edge of speech.

"Oh, Masters, my son," said H.M. despondently, answering his look. "You haven't heard the story of the burglary, from old man Drake. I have."

H.M., sitting in a police car, peered malevolently up and down Great Russell Street. He studied the building in which Felix Haye had died.

"The murderer hocussed the drinks and stabbed Haye. He got out, raided Drake's office, came back here with the loot, and festooned people's pockets with the contents of those boxes. The crib was cracked at Drake's at twelve-thirty. So," insisted H.M., "who went in and out of here during that time? Because I'm smackin' well certain the murderer did."

"I can understand," the chief inspector admitted, "how the murderer might have destroyed all those boxes. But why should he bring any of the — um — trinkets back, and put them in people's pockets?"

H.M. seemed bothered by an invisible fly.

"I dunno, son. But that's what happened. Burn me, you don't think Mrs. Sinclair or Blystone or Schumann run around normally carryin' keepsakes like that, do you?

"And it's why they were so worried when they woke up and found the stuff in their pockets. Blystone and Mrs. S. tried to account for it by tellin' stories that wouldn't deceive a baby. Schumann at least acknowedged he wasn't in the habit of carryin' the works of an alarm clock, and that someone must have put it in his pocket when he was unconscious."

"Very well, sir. If you say so," Masters growled. "But I still ask, *why?* Why did the murderer take a big risk in coming back to the house here?"

"It seems to me," said H.M., "rather a good move. He'd both throw suspicion and keep the others quiet with somethin' on their consciences to worry 'em. But there's more in it than that, son. You follow it?"

"I follow this much. If this is true, we've — well, almost — eliminated the three guests at the party. Whoever it was would hardly have put damaging evidence in his own pocket along with the rest."

"Is it so very damagin'?" inquired H.M. "Just think that over for a while. For the love of Esau don't take anything for granted, or you'll find yourself on a butter-slide. In the meantime —" he turned round to look at Marcia — "why not tell us the truth?"

"I am telling the truth," she said in a low voice. "It's quite true I waited out here for over an hour last night. But during that time nobody went in or out of that door. *Nobody*. I'll swear it with any oath you like. Or you can arrest me."

There was a silence. H.M. grew disconsolate. Masters glanced suspiciously between them.

"Now, miss!" he warned. "It had to be by this door. The back door was bolted and chained on the inside —"

"What about Ferguson?" Dr. Sanders put in mildly. "There's a fellow who gets out of buildings without using either the front door or the back door. Every confounded theory seems to come straight back to Ferguson. You can't test anything until you find him."

Masters got out of the car sternly.

H.M. intervened. "Now, now, son! Keep your shirt on. He's quite right, y'know. I see I've got to make it my business to get Ferguson by that scruff of the neck." He blinked at Marcia. "You weren't tellin' the truth when you said your father left your home last night carryin' those four watches, and that he took them to Haye's. Now were you?"

"If I don't answer you," she said, "I suppose you'll send me to prison. All right. Go ahead."

"Y'see," continued H.M., tilting his hat over his eyes, "it will save an awful lot of fuss and bother if you do tell us. Now, Masters and I know what the four watches mean. We know what's inside that dummy arm your father hid away at Mrs. Sinclair's. But we can't *prove* anything, can we? Your father's got the watches. And the only thing Masters is interested in is the murder."

"You're not joking? You really do know?"

H.M. quite seriously crossed his heart. But Marcia got out of the car and slammed the door.

"Then I'll tell you something else," she said. "If this ever comes out, I'll — I'll kill myself or go to Buenos Aires or something. So you can go along and

investigate and accuse just as you please; but that woman killed Haye. You'll see."

Without another word she turned round and walked quickly away. H.M. turned to Sanders.

"After her, son," he said. "She's the wrong type to worry. Stop a bit. Burn me, I'll go with you!" Glaring at a dumfounded chief inspector, he crawled out of the car. "You stay here, Masters. Why do think I'm mixin' myself up in this business, anyway? Denny Blystone is one of my oldest friends. You sit tight and I'll see you later. Come on, son."

They overtook Marcia as she was crossing Bloomsbury Street. H.M. waddled at one side of her, Sanders strode at the other. They walked on rapidly.

"I don't suppose you'd care for a spot of lunch?" suggested H.M. hopefully.

"All right," she said, at last. "We'll go to a pub or somewhere, and you'll tell me what you really think about this business."

They settled down in the saloon-bar of a smoky and comfortable tavern. Two pints of bitter and a gin-and-tonic were on the table when Marcia spoke over the last drink.

"I didn't let on before that policeman," she informed him, "but I know all about you. Evelyn Blake, Ken Blake's wife, says you've got the most un-moral, cussed nature of anyone she knows. That's why I think you're on my side really. So I don't mind talking in front of you. But I'm not sure I ought to talk in front of Dr. Sanders. After all, Dr. Sanders is connected with the police, in a way. And Dr. Sanders said my idea of how Mrs. Sinclair had poisoned the drinks was comic."

Sanders's exasperation was full-blown. "And so it is. Can't you see —"

"Do you think it's comic, Sir Henry?"

H.M. regarded her with sour amusement. "Well . . . now. You can test it out right here, you know. Sure you can hold liquid in your mouth. But there is just one thing you can't do while you're holdin' the liquid there: and that's talk. It's absolutely impossible, my gal. Now Mrs. Sinclair, before tastin' your father's rye highball, asked him for a sip of it. No. I'm afraid the whole thing won't wash. You've got to find another way for the drinks to have been poisoned."

"Oh — !" Marcia checked herself. "Then how do *you* say they were poisoned?"

"Suppose," H.M. said absently, "we assume that the whole crowd of guests were tellin' the truth when they swore no atropine could have been sneaked into the cocktail shaker or the glasses up to the time Schumann carried the

drinks to the living-room. In that case we seem to have only one alternative. I mean the original thesis that an outsider sneaked in and poisoned the shaker while the guests were in the kitchen; and washed out that shaker afterwards." He turned to Marcia. "Now you tell me the truth or I'll skin you. *Did* anybody go in or out of that building while you were watchin'?"

"No. That really is true."

H.M. studied her for a long time.

"Uh-huh. We'll accept it, then. In that case we're bound to admit that the murderer is (1) Ferguson himself; or (2) 'a confederate workin' with Ferguson. Now if Ferguson or a confederate did all the dirty work, why should Ferguson hang about the building for so long after the dirty work was done? And make himself so ruddy conspicuous before he decided to vanish? It's all wrong. If he's guilty, why should he want to appear in the mess at all?".

"I don't know," acknowledged Sanders. "I'll admit I got the idea that he was genuinely startled when he heard about the murder."

"Yes, that's what I mean. Suppose neither Ferguson nor any outsider did the dirty work, then?"

Sanders stared at him.

"You mean that Ferguson had nothing to do with the real business? And the murder was committed by one of the three guests in Haye's flat? I don't see it. On the contrary, that would make the whole crime absolutely impossible. One of them would have had to drug the cocktails — which is impossible. One of them would have had to get in and out of the building without being seen — which is impossible."

"Uh-huh. I know. But," said H.M. gently, "I've had to deal with these impossible things before."

During this debate Marcia had been looking across the almost empty room. Now she turned to them.

"I've got it all now," she said almost wearily. "I know how Ferguson got out of the building."

"All right," groaned H.M. "Let's have it. What's your shot?"

Marcia nodded. "Right, then! The murder was committed by Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair acting in collusion. She supplied him with the poison; he did the drugging, stabbed Haye, and stole the boxes. As for the way he got out of the building, he never did get out of the building."

"I hope you're havin' a good time," said H.M. malevolently.

"Listen, please! You'll immediately say that Ferguson wasn't hiding in the building. Of course he wasn't: just the reverse. But who definitely *was*

the only other person known to have been in the building all the time? It was the caretaker, a short stocky Irishman named Riordan. Don't you see it? Ferguson *is* the caretaker."

H.M. seemed incapable, at the moment, of saying anything.

"Ferguson, the real Ferguson, is in disguise," said Marcia earnestly. "He got a job as caretaker in that building, where he had worked before as an employee of Mr. Schumann. You were telling Mr. Masters that Schumann thought Ferguson was dead. Last night Ferguson took off his 'caretaker' disguise and appeared upstairs as himself. He *wanted* to impress the picture on us — then he would disappear. It would drive the police wild looking for a phantom who didn't exist. And all the while Ferguson, in his rôle of Riordan the caretaker, would be sitting downstairs unsuspected among the hot-water pipes."

"Hand the lady a cokernut," said H.M. "That's idyllic, that is. Do you honestly believe all that?"

"There happens to be proof. Were Ferguson and the caretaker ever seen together? No. Just where was the caretaker during all that fuss before and after the police arrived? Nobody saw him — until the police started looking for Ferguson. *Ooo! Am I right!*" It was not a question; it was an exultant statement.

"No," said H.M. "For God's sake will you shut up before Ferguson turns into a howlin' nightmare? I tell you there's nothin' very strange or extraordinary about Ferguson at all. He —"

Marcia became earnest again. "Please tell me, then: do you deny that Ferguson and Mrs. Sinclair are mixed up in this together, somehow?"

This stopped H.M., who was simmering.

"No. No. I've already said so, ain't I? Consequently —"

"And you'll admit that it's quite likely Mrs. Sinclair supplied the atropine?"

"Stop cross-examinin' me!" H.M. roared. "I'll admit it's a probability; but as for provin' it —"

Marcia subsided. But this was the point at which Dr. Sanders felt he had got to assert himself.

"If that's the case," he observed, lighting a cigarette with some deliberation, "there's only one thing to do. Burgle Mrs. Sinclair's house and find out. I'll do the job, if you like."

There was a silence. "Darling, you mustn't!" cried Marcia. "I won't let you. You'd get caught!"

A warm feeling flooded from Dr. Sander's chest up round his collar. For her face was radiant.

"But do you know anything about — burgling, and things like that?" She continued.

"From a practical standpoint, no," Sanders admitted. "But scientifically, yes. You leave it to me."

"But would you — I mean, could I come along with you?"

"Certainly, if you like."

"Ho ho," said H.M. "Do you really mean it, son? Not that I'd want to be a damper or spoilsport —"

"I should think you wouldn't," Marcia told him. "Evelyn Blake says you've got a positive obsession on the subject of burglary."

"Well . . . now," muttered H.M. "I'm not objectin'. All I'd like to know is the point of this idea. Supposin' you do break into Mrs. Sinclair's? What in the flamin' acres of Tophet do you expect to find there?"

Sanders was calm. "Evidence. I'm not certain what evidence; but surely it's the sensible thing to do. We couldn't get a search-warrant on the evidence we've piled up so far. So the thing to do is get inside that house and —" He gestured.

"You speak awful persuasively, son," H.M. observed. "Simple as that, hey? But, I say! Maybe there's something in the idea. Maybe I could help you." He reflected. "I might be able to arrange a few things, like seein' that Mrs. Sinclair was out of the way, and a couple of details about the neighbors.

"I admit I'm awful curious about certain things you might find. If a ghost of me sort of turned up in the neighborhood later, don't be too surprised. But understand this: don't expect any help from me if you get into trouble. I can't be mixed up in any monkey-business like that. I'm not in it. I'm not near it. I don't know you. Before I begin givin' you your instructions," insisted H.M., with malignity, "is all that clearly understood?"

CHAPTER TEN

LATE ON a fine April night, Sanders — wearing a dark suit and a dark hat — called for Marcia at Sir Dennis Blystone's house in Harley Street. Sanders was ablaze with excitement. For, while he had been poring over the best sci-

entific works on house-breaking, he had discovered the answer to one of the chief problems in the case.

But he found a strained atmosphere when he arrived at the house in Harley Street.

It was a placid, dignified place like Sir Dennis Blystone himself, with a suggestion of the office as well as the home. Yet there was something wrong with it.

Sir Dennis Blystone he saw almost as soon as the maid admitted him. Blystone wandered out of a door at the rear of the hall, his fine face heavy with domestic trouble. At the same time Marcia hurried down the stairs, buttoning on a pair of dark gloves.

"Sorry," she informed her father. "They're taking me to Scotland Yard to be questioned."

Blystone, who had seen Sanders with the chief inspector that morning, did not question this. But a tall, stately woman with waved grayish hair hurried out from the door behind. She almost flew towards Sanders, and she also was on the edge of tears.

"Surely that is absurd?" the woman demanded. "She knows nothing. She wasn't even there. And do you know what time it is? It's past eleven o'clock. You can't —"

Sanders assumed his heaviest manner.

"Can't be helped, madam," he said. "Orders."

"Of course. Don't be absurd, mother," said Marcia crisply. "Don't bother to wait up for me. All right, Inspector; I'm ready."

Lady Blystone turned. "And Marcia. What on earth do you mean, going out in those awful rubber-soled shoes? Go upstairs and change immediately. Dennis, are you going to allow this?"

"Now, Judy —" the other began pacifically.

"Oh, my God," cried Lady Blystone, "haven't you brought enough disgrace on us already, without seeing your own daughter taken to Scotland Yard like a common jail-bird? You think that since your friend Mrs. Sinclair has been taken there tonight, it's all very well for your own daughter to go too. There will be reporters, you know that. They'll wait outside with cameras —"

"Sorry, madam," thundered Sanders. "Orders. This way, Miss Blystone. I've got a taxi waiting."

In the taxi he spoke again.

"We shall have to cruise round a bit first. We're to meet H.M. at Mrs.

Sinclair's house at midnight, and we're not to budge an inch until we see him. So Mrs. Sinclair has been taken to the Yard! That must be his doing; it keeps the way clear for us. But what made you tell that fat-headed lie about being taken for questioning yourself? I hope she doesn't ring up about it. She's in the mood to."

"Well, it sounded more romantic," said Marcia looking at him curiously. "Oh, don't preach. Not tonight, of all nights. She's always in the mood to. You understand now why my father might be inclined to take up with a little bit of fluff? Are you all ready for the —?"

"Quite ready. And I think I've got some things that will surprise you."

He saw in her face an absolute confidence which made him throw out his chest. The glow had only increased — dangerously — when the taxi set them down a few streets away from Cheyne Walk.

Mrs. Sinclair's house was dark. So, Sanders observed, were the houses on either side. Over Chelsea and the river a dim moon made the scene as unreal as the adventure on which they were embarking. The two conspirators walked very slowly towards the low brick wall and green-painted iron gate leading into Mrs. Sinclair's front garden.

"Here we go," Sanders whispered. "Ready?"

He heard her draw a breath, but she jumped back.

"Ugh! I say, what on earth is that? What have you got on your hands?"

"Rubber gloves."

"Well, take them off! They feel horrible. . . . Oh, you lunatic, what are you doing now? Take it away! It's on my hands; I can't let go of it. Oh, my God, what have you got there?"

"Let go of it. Ss-t!" Sanders hissed. "It's only fly-paper."

"Fly-paper? John Sanders, have you gone completely and utterly ma —"

The infernal stuff was sticking to his own gloves now. He pulled it loose and reached out to open the front gate. And, at the same time, there appeared just inside the gate the large figure of a policeman.

Sanders's heart gave a violent bump, like someone jumping off a shed. But Sanders's wits did not jump from the shed as well.

"Good evening, constable," he said calmly. He folded up the fly-paper and put it in his pocket.

"Evening, sir," answered the policeman sharply. "Who lives in this house?"

It was the turn of the evening, the determining throw of dice. Sanders risked it.

"You're new to this beat, aren't you, constable?"

"Yes, sir. Just transferred this week."

"I thought so," said the amateur liar. He took a key out of his pocket. "*I* live here. Or my wife and I, rather. Why?"

He ushered Marcia inside the gate, holding the key conspicuously. It was the key to the Harris Institute of Toxicology.

"Oh," grunted the policeman, saluting. "Well, we'd better have a look around, sir. There's a suspicious-looking character here somewhere. Rough customer, I'm afraid. Broad, hefty bloke with a bald head. He threw a flower-pot at me." The policeman snorted. "Shall I have another look round the back garden?"

"John!" said Marcia, beginning to recover her nerve. "I'm afraid he means Uncle Henry."

The policeman turned round sharply. "You don't mean you know the man, ma'am?"

"Did he have spectacles and a top-hat on?" demanded Sanders. "Of course we know him. He's my uncle. Damn it all, constable, this is going too far! He's a little eccentric, but —"

"Very sorry if I've made a mistake, sir," the policeman said stiffly, "but I've got my duty to do. I'll have to make a report of this, in any case. And I'm afraid he's smashed the daylights out of your cucumber-frames. I chased him across them, and he went through. If he is your uncle he could have saved a lot of trouble just by answering my questions. And he'll get into more trouble one day if he keeps on swearing at people the way he swore at me. *Good* night, sir."

Sanders, with the wrong key in his hand, took a few more steps towards the front door.

"Good night, constable."

The policeman remained where he was.

Never in his life had Sanders passed a longer series of seconds. He reached the door, and lifted the key.

"Don't you think, my dear," he said to Marcia, as though struck by an afterthought, "we'd better go round to the back and find Uncle Henry?"

"Hadn't you better open the door first, sir?" said the constable, very quietly.

Sanders turned his back, and fitted against the lock a key several sizes too large for it. The door was unlocked! He pushed it open and looked round coldly.

"Satisfied, constable?"

"Good night, sir."

Taking Marcia by the hand, he drew her inside and closed the door. There was a stuffy and musty odor in the hall as he had noticed when he was there with the chief inspector that morning.

"That's torn it," whispered Marcia. "Aren't you going to turn on any lights? Won't he think it's queer if we come in here and no lights go up?"

Sanders peered out through the side-window. "We can't risk it yet. We *think* Mrs. Sinclair is at Scotland Yard; but suppose she's still in the house? And what about the maid?"

He felt her shiver.

"You know, I — I don't like this," she said. "Oh, I'll carry on. But what do we do now? And what did you want with that horrible fly-paper?"

"We've got to find H.M. We weren't supposed to stir until he could find out how the land lies. But, with that policeman watching us, there was nothing else we could do. The fly-paper was to put against a window and break the glass without noise; the pieces of glass stick to it. We don't need it now. Let's get through the house and out at the back. But, before we do, I want to show you something."

The boards in the hall creaked. He took her as quietly as he could to the front parlor where that morning he and Masters had seen Mrs. Sinclair and Sir Dennis Blystone. The long windows were not covered, except by lace curtains through which a good deal of light penetrated. A fire had almost smouldered out in the grate. The clock in the hall ticked throatily.

"Is that policeman still outside?" Sanders muttered.

She crept over to the window, and jerked back.

"Yes! He's standing out on the pavement, looking straight at this room —"

"Good. Now watch. I am going to show you," said Sanders, "the real meaning of the quicklime and the phosphorus."

From his pocket he took the small vial of whitish powder or quicklime, which he had bought that afternoon, and sprinkled a wide trail of its contents along the window-sill. Then, putting a little water into a tumbler, he began cautiously to sprinkle the water on the lime. . . .

There was a pungent odor, and something appeared to be happening under the curtain. A thin veil seemed to rise along the glass, and the room darkened.

"Now the other window," he said. The room darkened still more, and he was afraid she was going to scream.

"It's all right," he assured her fiercely. "But you see what's happened?

Both windows are now completely 'frosted.' But anybody outside — like that policeman — notices no difference. All he knows is that he can't see into the room. And, unless you showed a very bright light in here, the room would seem to be empty . . ."

From another pocket he carefully drew out a second vial, wrapped in a wool sheath. A faint yellowish-green glow appeared in the room. The vial contained phosphorus. Sanders held it up.

"Got it now?" he whispered. "It's the superburglar's electric torch. There's quite enough light to see by — notice? But the light doesn't jump up and flash round dangerously, like an electric torch. The windows are frosted. You can't see this little light through them. I could rob this room under the very nose of a policeman staring at the window. The quicklime and the phosphorus are simply part of the tool-kit of an up-to-date housebreaker."

"But —" the girl cried, and lowered her voice. "They were found in Mrs. Sinclair's handbag. You can't think *she* is a burglar, can you?"

"No, not at all. That's what Masters and H.M. argued about. He could explain the meaning of the articles; but he couldn't see how they applied to her. But they don't belong to her: they belong to someone very closely connected with her. And you'll spot it straight away when you think of the connection between Mrs. Sinclair and —"

This time Marcia did cry out. He had been holding the vial higher, so that the soft-glowing core fell to the other side of the fireplace. First they made out the shape of a wing chair, and then the shape of someone sitting in it and looking at them.

In the chair, seeming even older and more wicked-faced as he nodded at them, sat Ferguson.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE soft glow remained steady. Sanders felt strung up but oddly clear-headed. Ferguson resembled a somewhat crusty schoolmaster, sitting back with his birch across his knee. There were even inkstains on Ferguson's fingers.

Only it was not a birch which lay across Ferguson's knee, with his hand fingering it. It was a thick-barreled and silvered-steel pistol of a design Sanders had never seen before.

"Well," Ferguson said in his harsh, common-sense voice. "I told you not to get yourself mixed up in this.

"To begin with, your friend the policeman may be outside. But you won't whistle for him, young man. If you do I'll put a bullet in you. And don't say the shot would give me away, because it wouldn't. This is an air-pistol. Just to show you I don't mean to stand any nonsense from you, I'll let you have one *for good measure.*"

He hardly seemed to lift the mechanism on his knee. Though Sanders saw that his hand jerked as though with a kick, he heard no more than the snap of a trigger and a thud somewhat deeper than the report of a boy's air-rifle. Blended with it, Sanders felt a sharp push on his left shoulder, and a brisk pinch in the left arm above the elbow. Nothing more.

But Ferguson's face was altering a little before his eyes. He glanced down. There was a tear in the sleeve of his coat, exposing the lining. The arm began to feel hot and wet, as though it were crawling. A few seconds after the shot, something stung the arm like fire, and Sanders realized that it was beginning to swell up. He was feeling more than a little queasy.

"There's a newspaper over the arm of the chair beside you," said Ferguson. "No; don't lower that light; use your left hand. Get that newspaper, and spread it out under you. Stand on it. I don't want you getting blood on the carpet. Do as I tell you."

The whole arm burnt like fire now, and seemed to go on swelling. He moved it with difficulty. Then he found himself standing on the newspaper.

"Have you got it all clear?" asked Ferguson, "or shall I give the young woman some of it?"

"No," said Sanders. "If you've got to plug away at somebody, plug away at me."

"Right. I will," said Ferguson — and fired again.

This time Sanders did not know or seem to care whether he had been hit.

"You've got to learn," said Ferguson, "that some things in this world are serious. I told you. But, oh, no. You knew it all. You and this young woman were just too big for your breeches. You were the big I Am. All right; now you'll take the consequences. Hand me that vial of phosphorus. Take up that newspaper in your right hand and hold it under your arm. Yes, it'll hurt a little; but if you spill anything on the carpet, I'll give you another. Now walk ahead of me, both of you."

This began to induce in Sanders a wild and light-headed rage. But Sanders

could do nothing, and he knew it.

Marcia, though she was very white, walked quietly. At the end of the room was a door which Ferguson told Sanders to open. Past this they went through a passage, and into a little room where Ferguson had evidently been making himself comfortable.

Heavy shutters were on the windows, to exclude every chink of light. The room had a stone-flagged floor; it smelt of centuries' washing. But a padded chair was drawn up before a bright fire. On the table stood a glass of hot milk; a plate of cold beef, with bread and a cruet-stand, had been pushed to one side. Ferguson sat down in the padded chair. He was wearing carpet-slippers and had a fountain-pen in his breast pocket.

"Sit down over there," he told them, "and keep off the carpet."

"When you're hanged," said Marcia, almost crying, "I'll come and dance in front of the jail."

Ferguson regarded her without animosity.

"Shut your mouth, young woman," he said. "You've played the fool and you'll take what is coming to you." He looked towards Sanders. "But I've got something to say to you."

Sanders's arm was a mass of pain and his head had begun to ache violently; but he tried to steady his eyesight. With the pistol in his left hand, Ferguson sipped at the glass of hot milk.

"Here, take this," added Ferguson, tossing across a napkin, "and twist it round. Pull that wash-tub over. I don't want you fainting on me. You're soft enough as it is, Mr. Too-Big-For-Your-Breeches. Now tell me a few things. So you know who I am and what I am, do you?"

"Yes." Sanders steadied himself. "Your name is Peter Ferguson, and Haye had enough on you to hang you. By profession you're a cat-burglar, and you're almost worn out. You're not as old as you look, not by ten years. Your real age is about forty-five."

Again he steadied himself, focusing his eyesight.

"Most people think of a burglar as being a young tough. If they came across you in an office you were robbing, they would find an elderly man with glasses and a pen behind his ear. It's one of the best disguises ever invented."

Ferguson did not comment; he sipped his milk.

"And they wouldn't suspect you of being a cat-burglar," Sanders went on dully. "But a person's only got to look at your walk to see that. That was how you got out of the building last night. The chief inspector said there was

a drain-pipe on the rear wall of the building; but that it was too far away from the window for any normal man ever to have reached it. But a cat-burglar could have made it without difficulty. That's you."

"Now that surprises me. You're right," Ferguson acknowledged. "Do the police know this?"

"Certainly they know it. Masters and Sir Henry Merrivale guessed it this afternoon, when they realized you and Mrs. Sinclair were connected, and that the quicklime and the phosphorus really belonged to you. Besides, you were ass enough to leave a pair of spectacles behind when you got away. That showed that your age and general debility weren't what you pretended. What's more, you were fool enough to leave a fingerprint on the lens. If you're known to Scotland Yard, as I suspect, they know all about you by now."

He spoke calmly, fitting together evidence in his own careful way. All things came to him in sharp sounds and colors. The pistol was looking steadily at him from Ferguson's chair. Then the steamy smell of the wash-house got into his nostrils, and wouldn't get out.

But something he said had stirred Ferguson.

"The police don't know me, young man. What's this about my being connected with Mrs. Sinclair?"

Silence.

"Are you going to speak when you're spoken to?"

"No," said Sanders. "I know you're giving me hell, but you've had two shots already, and they don't hurt much, so why should I be afraid of you? The point is, what are you going to do after you've finished making a target of me?"

Ferguson merely lifted his wrist again.

Even when there were footsteps outside the door to the passage, his eyes hardly flickered. He moved himself a little so that he could cover the door. With a mutter of hard breathing, Sir Henry Merrivale pushed open the door and ducked his ancient top-hat under the lintel. H.M.'s face looked lowering.

"Evenin', son," he said. "That'll be quite enough of that."

There was a silence. Ferguson's wrist moved.

"Get over there beside him," Ferguson said.

H.M. obeyed orders. Waddling over between Marcia and Sanders, he pulled out a kitchen-chair and wheezed down on it. His overcoat was open; a corporation adorned with a gold watch-chain projected from it. After a glance at Sanders, he settled back and twiddled his thumbs. It seemed all the more

ominous because he did not say anything.

"Oh, yes," said Ferguson, as though recalling. "I know who you are. You're the Whitehall comic that everyone laughs at. I suppose it was you running about the back garden tonight."

H.M. nodded, studying Ferguson's face.

"That's right, son. I thought it might be wise to have the coppers interested in this house tonight — I thought you were probably inside. If these two young 'uns had obeyed my orders and met me in the back garden, there might have been a little less shootin'. You're a fine, brave feller. I admire you."

"We'll attend to you in a minute," Ferguson said. "In the meantime — talk."

"Sure," agreed H.M. "I'm like the doctor here. I want to know where you stand. You can't keep on puttin' bullets into people and then turn 'em out into the street and say: 'Now you've had your spanking; go home.' Unless you mean to kill somebody?"

"I don't kill," said Ferguson. "I never have and I never will. That's a fool's trick. I haven't decided what I'm going to do with you yet; but I *could* turn you over to the police you're so fond of. You're housebreakers."

"Uh-huh. You could do that. But there are two reasons why you won't."

"Talk," said Ferguson.

"All right, son. The first reason is that in theory you're supposed to be dead. You're Mrs. Sinclair's husband, who 'died' in Biarritz a year ago. And she collected a packet of insurance out of that fake.

"Y'see, we had an idea you two were connected. Then we were talkin' this evenin' to Sergeant Pollard, who collected a lot of information about Mrs. Sinclair today. Her late husband was a certain Peter Sinclair who 'died' during an epidemic of some kind in Biarritz in 1936. He was an elderly gent who staggered everybody's wits by his thunderin' agility on a tennis court. Now, we already knew you weren't as old as you looked. We already knew you were a highly skilled cat-burglar. Y'see, we've had some information now from both Bernard Schumann and the French police. So I looked at Masters and I said, 'Could it be?' And he looked at me and he said, 'We'll find out.' — And we have. Son, the game is smackin' well up. Honest it is."

Ferguson sat back in the padded chair. A nerve was beginning to twitch beside his eyelid.

"It would be interestin'," H.M. pursued woodenly, "to sort of sketch out your career and Mrs. Sinclair's, if I had time. Because at various times both of you have worked out some awful clever pieces of crookedness. What I'm

wonderin' is whether you worked together or separately."

"Are you going to talk," said Ferguson, "or must I give you a little medicine?"

"Oh, look here! Don't be a howlin' ass! You —"

Ferguson fired point-blank. As in a nightmare Sanders heard the familiar snap and thud. Unconsciously he leaned sideways towards the wash-tub, and he saw the bullet-hole jump up black in the wall some inches from H.M.'s head. Marcia Blystone gave out a whispering kind of cry. She would not last much longer. H.M.'s expression did not change,

"You missed," he said.

"Too bad," snapped Ferguson excitedly. "That means we must try again. If —"

"I wouldn't," said H.M., shaking his head. "You can blow me to glory if you keep on tryin' and if your hand stays steady, which it won't. Somebody's done the dirty on you, son. There was poison in that hot milk you've been drinkin'. And, unless you stop playin' the fool and let me give you an antidote, you'll be dead yourself in ten minutes."

There was a pause of bursting quality. Dr. Sanders glanced up quickly. He saw Ferguson's eye, and understood. The symptoms of atropine poisoning were coming on with dissolving rapidity.

"We're very clever, aren't we?" Ferguson sneered. "Don't try it on, Merrivale. I never was one to be taken in by bluff."

H.M.'s little eyes opened. "You don't think I'm bluffin', do you? Can't you feel your own symptoms?"

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you," the other told him. "But you're not. And you'll be a sight more uncomfortable by the time I've finished. What else do you know?"

The sweat was starting out on H.M.'s forehead. He surged to his feet.

"Come on, son. Let me have that gun."

"All right. Watch the little birdie," said Ferguson. He raised the air-pistol and steadied his wrist on the arm of the chair for good aim.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IN THE bare little waiting-room at New Scotland Yard Mrs. Bonita Sinclair sat with every polite indication of patience. But at intervals she would glance at her small wrist watch, and then up at the clock. Both at the moment said

that it was five minutes to midnight.

From across the room, Detective-Sergeant Pollard watched her with admiration. Her face, with its round chin and small mouth, was in complete repose. The blue-black eyes never met Pollard's; they moved round the room with incurious blankness.

But this seemed to be wearing thin. She smiled at Pollard from under her eyelids. And Pollard, off guard, was indiscreet enough to return it.

Chief Inspector Masters opened the door at that moment.

"Will you come in now, ma'am," stated Masters. His eye said to Pollard that he was to come along. A light was burning over Masters's desk. On that desk three messages, all from the French police, lay under the blotter. Indicating a chair, Masters contemplated her with boiled-eyed politeness.

"I was just telling the sergeant," said Mrs. Sinclair, "that I cannot understand why you asked me to come here at such an hour. I understand you even have my poor maid here. You're not going to keep me up all night, or give me the third-degree, or anything, are you?"

"First, ma'am, it is your privilege, if you wish it, to have a solicitor here when you answer my questions."

She regarded him with a perplexed smile.

"But, really, Mr. Masters, how could I get a solicitor at this time of the night? Wouldn't it be simpler if we waited until tomorrow morning, and then we could all come here together?"

Masters was wooden. "If you insist, ma'am. At the same time I've got some very serious news for you, which you may prefer to hear now." He waited. "Do you know, Mrs. Sinclair, that if certain persons care to press the charges, you can serve a long prison-sentence for extortion?"

It is an unpleasant word. Her breast rose and fell as though she were sleeping.

"But — truly, I don't understand."

"I'll be frank with you, Mrs. Sinclair," said Masters, leaning forward. "I know how your game is worked. Though I'll say this for you: nobody so far has developed it, or enlarged it, or put so many twists in it, as you have. Eh?"

Masters tapped his notes, spacing each word.

"Let's say, for instance, that in sixteen-something the famous Italian artist Thingummy paints a picture that everybody likes. It's a hit. Well, then everybody wants it: his home town, the national picture-galleries all over Europe, the Duke of Something, and so on. All good payers: eh? So who's going to get it?

"Now, Sir Edward Lytle tells me," said Masters with satisfaction, "that even these great artist-blokes weren't above grabbing up a few extra guilders, or whatever they used for money then. So what does this artist do? Why, he paints the same picture twice and sometimes three and four times over. And he sells it to all of 'em as the original Thingummy. There's no deception, because it really is the real thing, painted by the chap himself. Sir Edward says it's happened time and time again: only for Lord's sake to keep it quiet."

Curiously, Mrs. Sinclair seemed to breathe easier.

"What happens then? A hundred years, a couple of hundred years go by," said Masters broadly. "The Thingummies get scattered. Usually one stays — in a public gallery, mostly — and is known as the original. Nobody suspects it. Nobody thinks of looking for another original, even if he finds it.

"Suppose it's somebody's business to find these originals. Say it's you. What do you do?

"Several things. You go to a millionaire private collector. You say, 'Would you care to buy the original Venus at the Bath?' The collector says, 'In a pig's eye, madam; the original Venus at the Bath is in the national gallery at Leipzig,' — or wherever it is."

Masters edged his chair closer.

"Well, then you say, 'Believe me, this is the Venus at the Bath. Get your tame expert in and see.' It's found to be genuine. Collector wild to buy. 'I'll sell,' you say; 'but keep this quiet, or there'll be trouble with the Leipzig gallery.' The inference is that the Leipzig gallery's been sold a pup; but you don't *say* so. Being a collector, the chap usually rubs his hands together as pleased as Punch, and keeps quiet. He's got what he wants. You've paid maybe ten pounds for that Venus. You sell it for a couple of thousand. And, even if there is trouble, what you've done is legal."

"I'm not sure I follow you," Mrs. Sinclair remarked. "If all this is legal, why are you talking to me about extortion and —?"

"And blackmail," said Masters. "That's not all, ma'am. Not by a long chalk.

"Where it gets ugly is when you come to deal with the big public or private galleries. They've got a famous picture. A spanker, one that cost maybe twenty thousand pounds. It's the draw of the town, like the Blackpool illuminations. So you go to the Something Museum. You show them the duplicate of one of their prize exhibits. 'Now,' you say, 'would you like to buy this duplicate and stow it away like sensible people — or shall I take it elsewhere?' That, Mrs. Sinclair, is what I call extortion.

"Then there's the little matter of unfinished pictures. Sir Edward Lytle told me about it long ago. When any well-known painter dies, he usually leaves a heap of unfinished sketches and canvases. The smart crook gets there first and buys up what he wants. If he's got a smart forger with him, that picture can be completed so well that experts swear it's genuine. And it is genuine, mostly. That's your racket, Mrs. Sinclair: you never sell anything except genuine stuff."

Masters settled back. But he looked at her grimly.

For a short time she did not reply. It was dark in the room except for the light over the chief inspector's desk, which brought out every move in her sensitive face.

Then she looked up. "Forgive my stupidity in these matters. But to prove fraud, you would have to show that the unfinished picture had been guaranteed in writing as an untouched original. Regarding the other matter, isn't it a field for specialized knowledge, really? And to be commended?

"An art-gallery," said Mrs. Sinclair, "could not prosecute without publicity. And isn't publicity the very thing they are trying to avoid? Then they must prove under what terms the picture was offered to them, mustn't they? I only ask. The worst you can say of me, Mr. Masters, is that everything I sell is genuine. Really, I ought to appreciate your thinking I have enough intelligence to work out all those ways to —"

"Not altogether yours, ma'am," interposed Masters, in a quick, quiet tone. "I daresay a good part of it came from your late husband, Mr. Peter Ferguson."

Mrs. Sinclair went white. It was an abrupt turn.

Masters went on comfortably. "This evening I got a letter by special messenger from Mr. Bernard Schumann, his former employer. I've also got a long cable from the French police.

"His real name is Peter Ferguson. He's only forty-two years old, as you know; the son of a Scotch clergyman. He got a science degree at Aberdeen. Good at all kinds of gadgets. Expert gymnast. Has had all sorts of jobs, including acting: played old men's parts at twenty-five. Employed by Mr. Schumann, first at Cairo office in manufacturing imitation papyruses — no fake there; the stuff was advertised as imitation — and later in London office. Robbed his employer. Escaped to Continent. That's Mr. Schumann's statement.

"Now, the information of the French police. Used aliases of Peter Sinclair

and Peter Macdonald: keeping the Scotch touch. Suspected of a series of burglaries, best Continental-scientific style, where quicklime was used to steam windows. Disappeared; believed abroad or dead. But on June 11, 1935, in Nice, a certain Peter Sinclair married a certain Bonita Fisher. That's you.

"Mr. Schumann's letter enclosed a snapshot of Ferguson. We radioed it to the French police. Snapshot identified by concierge at that address as being Sinclair. In other words, your husband. Final information! 'Sinclair' is supposed to have died at Biarritz in May, 1936, during that smallpox scare which the authorities hushed up so carefully. Body buried more or less secretly, in charge of old servant. Doctor issued death certificate without seeing body. Hah! But Ferguson didn't die. He's in London now. Right at this minute, ma'am, the French police are getting an exhumation order. They'll find the coffin empty. And you collected the insurance. That's fraud, and a fraud that can be proved."

Mrs. Sinclair lay back in the chair, and uttered a shuddering sigh of relief.

"Thank God," she said. "Yes, he is my husband. And he is not dead. But I swear to you," she told him quietly, "I did not know that until last week. I — the truth is that when I thought he was dead I was glad."

"Notebook, Bob," said Masters briefly.

"What I cannot imagine is why or how I ever came to marry him. But he — swanked so, that it took me in. He had a way with him, at first. He seemed to know exactly what he wanted, and he was determined to get it. The trouble was that in spite of all his will-power and talk he never did get it. It made him furious. Then I found out that for all his boasting he wasn't a rich man. With all his smattering of knowledge he wasn't really good at anything, except tennis and gymnastics. But that only made my friends laugh. What is more, that — that man wanted to live off me. Off *me*."

"Most unusual, ma'am," said Masters grimly. "Was his knowledge of art-fake, the trade he's learned at Mr. Schumann's, of any help to you?"

"You will please not say that," she flashed at him. "It is wrong and foolish and slanderous. I have a certain work to do. It calls for specialized knowledge, as I told you. That is all.

"But I began to suspect that Peter Ferguson was — a criminal, probably. And, really, that was the last straw!"

Masters was impatient. "Let's come back to the point, Mrs. Ferguson, and face the facts. You both took the best way out, and you helped him to 'die' for the insurance."

She spread out her hands. "But I didn't! I knew absolutely nothing about it.

I was not even there at the time. I was traveling in Italy with some friends; you should be able to establish that. When I was summoned back, everything was over. He and the servant must have managed the whole death and burial between them."

"Then how was it going to benefit him?" asked Masters. "Mrs. Sinclair, it won't do much good just to say you weren't on the spot at the time. If you didn't make inquiries, and simply put in a claim for the insurance —"

"But I did not get any insurance. I didn't even put in a claim for it. So how did it benefit me?" asked Bonita Sinclair.

"I am informed on credible authority," said Masters, pompously, "that Ferguson, or Sinclair, took out a large policy in your favor."

"Please, please. You may as well hear what really happened," she insisted. "And then I should like to go home. Yes, of course he *told* everybody he had a large policy, and that he used to keep the premiums paid a year in advance. But I never believed it, naturally. I thought it was simply his usual talk. I never thought of it again."

"Well?"

"But last week, I came home from the opera on Monday night, and found Peter Sinclair sitting in my drawing-room in his carpet-slippers. . . . Everything had been so nice, Mr. Masters. I thought I was rid of him. He said he had come for his share of the money.

"Then the truth came out. He really had taken out an insurance policy, for fifteen thousand pounds, at the Paris office of the London Pari-Annual. He left it in a safe deposit box in Biarritz, where he thought I knew all about it. And it's still there. The premiums had been paid far in advance: so nobody at the company inquired about it and nobody had received notification of his 'death.'

"Don't you see the wicked, *wicked* thing he had done? He set a trap for me, because I refused to support him. He believed I would attempt to collect the insurance, as I certainly should have. If the company refused to pay, or made any trouble, he would have vanished and I should have had to bear all the blame. If the company paid, he appeared after a suitable interval to — to blackmail me. And I should not have dared to give him away."

She added, "That is Peter Ferguson to the life."

"Urr!" said Masters. But he kept an impassive face. "Where is Ferguson now?"

"At my house."

"Oh, ah? Been there all the time, has he?"

"But what else could I do? He's been threatening all sorts of things. Not that he could say anything about me, really." She hesitated as the telephone rang on Masters's desk. Masters's eye never left her while he listened to the telephone. "It's about me!" she cried. "It's about me, isn't it?"

Masters replaced the receiver. "Tell me," he said smoothly. "Your husband's life insurance premiums had been paid a year in advance. When does that policy expire?"

"In — in May of this year, I think Peter said."

"Fifteen thousand pounds," said Masters. "And a month to go. You may collect that policy after all. Ferguson's dead now, right enough."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN HIS OWN BED at home, Dr. Sanders was haunted by elusive dreams. Half the time he seemed to be analyzing something or working at a puzzle. There were waking moments when his arm throbbed dully. But these things became intertwisted with the figures of sleep, with a kitchen or a wash-house. He or someone else was bending low and moving across a stone-flagged floor. A piece of sticky flypaper was concerned in it.

There was a fire, too. Someone was lying at the foot of a padded chair, whose seat had come loose. Under the seat of the chair there were castaway newspapers, and Marcia Blystone was leaning over the back of it while Sanders and Sir Henry Merrivale bent over the figure on the floor. Most of all his dreams concerned the end of the night, where they grew into reality. Two bullets had been extracted from his left arm by a surgeon in Cheyne Walk; the bone had been broken, but broken cleanly; and the arm was now padded into a splint. Afterwards he had seen Marcia Blystone put into a taxi, and he remembered that her arms had been round his neck.

When Sanders opened his eyes again, it was in the sunlight of a noble spring morning. Despite the state of his arm, he had an extraordinary feeling of well-being — a feeling which had nothing to do with the presence of H.M. and Chief Inspector Masters, who were standing at the foot of the bed.

"Morning, son," growled H.M. "How are you feelin' now?"

"Ferguson," said Sanders. And all the events of the night returned to him.

"Ah, sir," the chief inspector greeted him heartily. "Good morning! Everything all right?"

"A bit stiff. Otherwise fine."

"What Sir Henry is trying to say," pursued Masters, "is — thanks. You dished that chap Ferguson just in time, doctor. Yes, it was a neat idea. To take him sideways and slap that piece of flypaper over his face! Not bad, doctor. Not bad."

"Not too bad," said H.M.

Sanders stared at the windows. He remembered Ferguson writhing on the stone-flagged floor, his face caught in that sticky surface, and the pistol knocked across the room.

"Sir Henry," the chief inspector went on, "insists on calling the fellow a megalomaniac, whatever that may be. I've got a shorter word. There were eight bullets in that Kreuger air-pistol of his, and he'd only fired four of 'em when you snaffled him. Sir Henry also wishes to say —"

"I can do my own talkin', can't I?" demanded H.M.

"Did Miss Blystone get home all right?" Sanders asked.

"Uh-huh. So far as I know."

"And Ferguson? Have you got your witness?"

H.M.'s expression grew somber.

"No, son," he said. "Ferguson's dead." He took out a cigar. "If the silly dummy had let us attend to him, he'd have pulled through. But it was too late. He committed suicide just as sure as someone else intended to commit murder when another whack of atropine was shoved into his glass. Your landlady's bringin' up your breakfast, son. Yes, you can get up if you insist, provided you stay in your room and keep quiet for today. In the meantime, we all ought to do a little serious sittin' and thinkin'."

During breakfast, the chief inspector informed them of developments at Scotland Yard on the previous night.

"What I want to know," he concluded, "is what in blazes went on at Mrs. Sinclair's house last night." He turned to H.M. "Apparently, sir, you arranged a burglary without saying anything to me about it, but what were you up to? Ferguson was our chief witness. And no sooner do we find him than somebody polishes him off. So what went on?"

H.M. considered.

"Well . . . now. I rather thought Ferguson might be hidin' away at Mrs. Sinclair's. But if I told you about it, I was afraid you'd bring a squad of cop-

pers (as I seem to remember you've done before) and Ferguson would have sheered away like the man on the flyin' trapeze. So I thought I'd take a hand in the game myself.

"Two of our friends, the doctor here and Denny Blystone's daughter, insisted on searchin' the house. But I didn't want them to run the possible risk of meetin' Ferguson there. So I thought I'd better get there first, and mooch round a bit, and find out if Ferguson really was inside. That's why I made 'em swear to meet me in the back garden at a specific time. Everything would'a been all right if one of your coppers hadn't spotted me."

"And you threw a flower pot at him, sir."

"I was bein' crafty," roared H.M. "The best way to find out whether Ferguson was in the house, and make him give some sign of his presence, was to cause a first-class, three-ring row. And it was, too. That copper and I went across the cucumber frames like a couple of dancin' bears. The trouble was that the blighter insisted on stickin' to the trail. I couldn't get rid of him. So I had to take refuge in the house. What else could I do?

"My pal Shrimp Calloway had given me an excellent bunch of skeleton keys. I was goin' to hand 'em to Dr. Sanders, because," said H.M. apologetically, "I wasn't sure he knew the technique quite so well. *I* wasn't goin' to get mixed up in the burglary myself. But what else could I do? I got in. That was why the front door was unlocked when my two amateurs got there."

"Well, sir, maybe you know what you're doing. I say *maybe*. But the point is, what about this poisoned milk? What was going on inside the place?"

"Poisoner at work," said H.M. briefly.

The chief inspector whistled. He got out his notebook.

"As soon as I got inside the place," grunted H.M. "I made straight for the back door. Y'see, I wanted to get in a position to get out into the back garden before my amateurs arrived. The whole house was dark. I still didn't know whether Ferguson was lurkin' or not. I was passin' the hall door of that little back room when a light went on inside.

"I got into the cupboard under the stairs. I could see across to the door of the little room. It was open two or three inches; I could see the chair and table by the fire, with the lamp. There was a sound of movin' about, and I heard Ferguson talkin' to somebody."

"How did you know it was Ferguson?"

"I saw him, that's how. His pictures are pretty distinctive, son. He and his companion (whoever it was) had evidently been standin' in there in the dark,

watchin' my little performance in the garden. Well, he stuck his head out into the hall, and he had that air-pistol in his hand. He went up and down the hall, sniffing at things. I could'a reached out and wrung his ruddy little neck off, but there was somebody else in the little room."

"You didn't see the other person?"

"I saw his hand," said H.M. "Just that," he added doggedly. "In a brownish kind of glove. I could see the table by the fire, and the glass of milk. It was still steamin'. I saw some blurry brown gloves jump out and do a kind of war dance over the milk. They seemed pretty nervous. They squirted with a medicine dropper into the glass. Then they sort of moved about, as though they were a butler settin' a table. Brown gloves. They gave me the creeps, Masters, I'll swear they did. Like being alive."

His cigar had gone out.

"Well. As soon as they heard Ferguson's footsteps comin' back, one of the gloves jerked back out of sight. The other hovered round over the glass. It hesitated no end, till the last minute. Picture of a poisoner at work. Just before Ferguson got to the door, *it* jerked back.

"Ferguson said, 'They seem to have gone, whoever they were; but you'd better get out of here.' Then he turned out the light. It was blacker than Cerberus in that place. I heard more confused footsteps. I thought, 'That's done it. I've got him now, both Ferguson *and* the murderer.' I was just wonderin' what to do, when I heard another kind of noise. It was shutters bein' closed. That sacred son of a vulture, Ferguson, had let the murderer out through one of those full-length windows —

"There it was. I knew it next second, because Ferguson turned on the light. He seemed to be pleased as billy-o. Next he reached under the seat of the chair, and fished up some sheets of paper. Then he sat down by the lamp, and got out a fountain pen, and started to write. He'd evidently been writin' before that. When he mooched past me in the hall with his air pistol, there was fresh ink on his fingers."

"Go on, sir," prompted Masters.

"He'd no more than got hold of his pen when there was another rumpus at the front of the house, outside." H.M. nodded towards the invalid. "It was my two amateurs arguin' with the policeman.

"Ferguson shoved away his writin' again and turned out the light. I thought that was my cue to get out the back door and meet my amateurs in the garden — as arranged. Burn me, how should I know they would be maneuvered into

comin' slap into the house by the front door? Out in the garden, I heard voices comin' from the little room. So back I came, and sort of stepped in. You know what happened. I was extremely bucked to find that Ferguson had guzzled over half of his tasty cup. What a night!"

Masters got up and stumped over to the window.

"Fire away," growled H.M. "Say it. Say I lost both Ferguson *and* the murderer."

"So you did, sir. It's the truth. All the same —" Masters grinned crookedly. "That pair of gloves was the murderer, right enough. We found the medicine dropper. It was thrown away behind one of the wash'tubs, with atropine in it. And five grains of the stuff in Ferguson's milk. What time did you see the visitor there?"

"H'm, yes. Yes. The pair of gloves left the house at midnight, just before my amateurs got there —"

"Which eliminates Mrs. Sinclair," said Masters. His amusement faded, and he scowled. "Gone! Our best suspect. She had every reason to wish that her husband was dead. She was sitting in my office at midnight. And there you are, sir. She couldn't be your pair of gloves. She's got an alibi as big as a house."

"Then what's the next course?" H.M. demanded.

"I shall be interested," said Masters pontifically, "to find out just where the others were at midnight last night. And as for Felix Haye? Oh, yes. The private inquiry agents —"

H.M. sat up. "Inquiry agents? What inquiry agents?"

"You know all about it. When Haye had the bottle of poisoned ale sent to him, he told the solicitors to put the matter in the hands of a firm of private detectives. *And* they chose a good one: the Everwide. Drake, Rogers & Drake are in another temper. In addition to stealing the five boxes, our murderer also pinched some securities belonging to them. In any case, the Everwide has picked up some information about the bottle of ale. That's point number one."

"Uh-huh. And what's point number two?"

"Judith Adams." Masters drew a deep breath. "Something very queer there, Sir Henry. She's the fifth name on Haye's list of five people who might do him in. But who in blazes *is* she? Nobody has ever heard of her. But she must be somewhere close at hand, or Haye wouldn't have included her. I mean to find her. I tell you, Sir Henry, there's some hanky-panky connected with that name. If there is such a person as Judith Adams, why doesn't anybody know her? There's not a Judith connected with the whole case."

Dr. Sanders sent his coffee cup rattling across its saucer. Masters was looking at him.

"That's torn it," said H.M., with a gusty sigh. "Yes, son, there is a Judith connected with the case. Sir Dennis Blystone's wife."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"OH?" said Masters, with sustained quietness. His suspicious eyes moved from Sanders to H.M. "How long have you been keeping this back?"

"Nonsense!" Sanders burst out. "You don't think that Lady Blystone — I wasn't keeping anything back. I only heard the name, or met her at all, for the first time last night. And I'm not certain what her name is anyway. She and Sir Dennis were in the hall when I went round to pick up Marcia at their house. She was rather upset about Marcia being 'taken to Scotland Yard.' They both were, for that matter. Sir Dennis addressed her as 'Judy'. That may not mean anything. What you want to find out is whether her maiden name really was Judith Adams."

The chief inspector turned grimly to H.M.

"Ho ho," said the latter. "Well, I don't know what her maiden name was. But it ought to be easy to find out."

"It ought," agreed Masters. "Was Lady Blystone acquainted with Haye?"

"I tell you, son, I don't know!"

"One thing, though," the chief inspector pointed out, "we can settle now. A matter of alibis. Now, doctor, you say that you met Miss Blystone at her home; and then you both went on to Mrs. Sinclair's. Sir Henry says you two arrived there at just on midnight. Meantime, the visitor with brown gloves — the murderer — had been talking to Ferguson in the back room at Mrs. Sinclair's. Eh? And presumably the visitor had been there for some little time?"

"Yes, I think we can say that," admitted H.M.

"Good! But Dr. Sanders had just come on from Sir Dennis's, where he saw both Sir Dennis and Lady Blystone. *If* that's the case — well, it's unlikely that Lady Blystone could have dashed on ahead to Mrs. Sinclair's, and could have been the brown-gloved visitor who was just leaving the house when Dr. Sanders got there. By that we could eliminate both the Blystones, couldn't we?"

"I'm afraid not," Sanders said. "I called at the Blystones' house at just past

eleven o'clock. But we weren't to meet Sir Henry until twelve. Marcia and I spent most of the time driving round in a taxi."

"H'm. So there's an hour unaccounted for. An hour," speculated the chief inspector. "Well, doctor, Sir Henry and I will have to be getting along. We only dropped in to see how you were. I've got two good men on the track of that atropine — who bought it, and where. That's what always trips up the poisoner. Ready, Sir Henry?"

H.M. sat woodenly. "You run along, Masters," he said. "I got somethin' to say to the doctor."

Masters hesitated. "Here! Man to man, now, Sir Henry. Can you make one single good constructive suggestion as to what I ought to do?"

H.M. considered. "Yes, I'll give you two. First, with regard to Haye's murder: assign several of your best men, and check up on the movements of Mrs. Sinclair, Blystone, and Schumann for the entire day up to the time they met in Haye's flat at eleven o'clock in the evening. The entire day.

"Second point, with regard to Ferguson's murder last night: find out what Ferguson was writin' just before he died."

The chief inspector grinned. "Yes, sir. I'd already thought of that myself. Unfortunately, as *I* told *you*, we've been all over that room already. We searched everything, including the seat of the chair. There was a sheet of writing paper there all right, along with some newspapers stuffed away out of sight. But there wasn't any writing on the paper. So we didn't find anything."

"I know," agreed H.M. "Neither did I. That's all, son. Hop it. I'll see you at dinner tonight."

When the chief inspector had gone, H.M. did not speak for a long time. Sanders pushed his breakfast tray to one side and crawled out of bed. He steadied himself enough to get a dressing gown round his shoulders and put on his slippers. Then he took an easy chair by the window and looked at H.M.

"What," he asked, "did you want to see me about?"

"I didn't want to see you, exactly," said H.M. "But I wanted to see Marcia Blystone. She's comin' to see you this morning. At least, she most solemnly promised she would last night. Masters has been talkin' about people who obstruct justice. But of all the people who most consistently, charmin'ly, and earnestly shove justice into the ditch at every turn, your friend Marcia Blystone is the worst. She pinched those two sheets of paper Ferguson had been writin'," said H.M. "She pinched 'em out of the chair. Didn't you see her?"

"Hell!" said the other, sitting up. "No, I was thinking about other things. But —"

"Sure. So was I. However, it happens to be the case. Just throw your mind back over the little rumpus, and tell me what happened to the chair after Ferguson slid out of it."

"The seat came loose. It was pushed forward about half-way."

"Uh-huh. And what did the gal do?"

"First she leaned over the back of the chair while we were holding Ferguson down, and then she sat down —" he stopped.

"Something's got to be done about this, son," H.M. pointed out seriously.

"But how could she have known the sheets of paper were there?"

"She must have seen 'em starin' up at her when the padded seat was forward."

Sanders reflected. "There's just one thing I'd rather know, at the moment, than anything else in the whole case. If Sir Dennis Blystone is a criminal, what is his crime? You see," he went on, "we're learning to fit the person to the crime — though you and the chief inspector seem to have known it all along. Ferguson was a burglar. Mrs. Sinclair is an art swindler. There remain Bernard Schumann and Sir Dennis Blystone.

"What Schumann's line is I haven't got the slightest idea. Masters has cleared him from any charge of selling fake Egyptian antiques. Sir Dennis made some wild joke about Schumann killing people and selling their bodies as mummies. But Schumann seems, in the best sense of the term, a gentleman. Whatever his crimes are, they can't be very serious. He is the calmest and most undisturbed and helpful of the lot.

"With Sir Dennis Blystone it's different. The people attached to him take on in various ways whenever they think of it. Lady Blystone nearly has hysterics. Marcia says she'll kill herself or go to Buenos Aires if it ever comes out. The old man himself, in moments of uncertainty, is the uneasiest of any. The atmosphere in that house was sinister. Anyhow, what sort of unholy crooked activities is he guilty of?"

Sanders stopped, for H.M.'s face was wreathed with fantastic jollity.

"Exactly," observed H.M. "What sort of crime makes dignified elderly ladies have hysterics, and adolescent daughters twist through any hoop rather than reveal it?"

"Well?"

"A comic crime," said H.M. "A social disgrace. That great surgeon, and justly respected man-about-town, has been in the past nothin' more than a

rather successful pickpocket."

Sanders stared at his companion, and made a feeble sort of noise. He concluded by merely listening.

H.M. spoke in an argumentative tone.

"Y'see, son, it's a mistake to think of the pickpocket as a seedy little blighter who shuffles past furtively in a dirty collar. Oh, no. Usually the pickpocket is the most quietly distinguished and best-dressed man in the bus or tube. He's got to be. It's a part of his profession. You never glance twice at the well-dressed stranger who sits readin' his newspaper beside you in the train. You prefer to sit or stand by him rather than a grubby 'un. Ain't it well known, incidentally, that Blystone never uses a taxi when he can travel by bus or Underground?

"Now, all coppers know these points about pickpockets. Masters, of course, spotted Blystone's little hobby as soon as he saw his hands —"

Sanders was groping out of a daze.

"His hands? But he's got very fine hands."

"Sure: in their own way. Hans Gross's encyclopedia o' crime points out that the best pickpocket has the first two fingers of his business-hand the same length. *Vide* Blystone. Reason? The pickpocket, y'know, don't grope round in your clothes with all five fingers wrigglin'. You'd spot him in half a tick if he did. He uses his hand like the blades of a scissors: first two fingers together, second two together: slidin' in and liftin' with the space between. So."

H.M. illustrated, moving the fingers like a child making a silhouette of a talking donkey on the wall.

"By the Lord," Sanders muttered, "if anybody ever writes an account of this case, it ought to be called The Criminals' Handbook. Then those four watches were merely —?"

H.M. nodded. "Spoils, son. Blystone's spoils from a few old raids. Felix Haye somehow got hold of 'em, probably together with the number of the watch, who owned it, when and where it was taken. Those watches have the most howlin'ly simple explanation of the lot. As for the dummy arm, which I told you long ago belonged to Blystone —" H.M. made a sour face. "Copied. It's used by the well-dressed chap sittin' beside you to divert all suspicion from himself. He's holdin' his newspaper in two hands and readin' it. The neat gloved hand and arm on your side are dummies, while the real hand is usin' its scissor-fingers as it pleases."

"But is the man stark mad?" demanded Sanders. "Why should he do that

sort of thing? He's one of the best-known surgeons in London —"

"He can't help it, son. It's a well-known form of kleptomania; see Gross again. Dennis Blystone is well off. He doesn't need watches or money. I sort of think he's got over it now. How it started I dunno; but in our younger days he used to be fond of conjurin' tricks and was awful nimble with his fingers. I expect there used to be times when he did need the money — like all of us. Do you dare say it couldn't happen to you?"

There was a silence.

"I tell you, son," grunted H.M. "I've been as worried as blazes! If this business comes out —"

"It would ruin him."

"Ruin him? Burn me, he'd be laughed off the face of the earth! I don't suppose he's in any danger of bein' prosecuted or servin' a stretch.

"But he's got everything in the world to lose. Would he commit murder to destroy the evidence?"

Sanders did not know. But chiefly he was thinking of Marcia.

"And she," he said, "stole whatever Ferguson was writing last night. The real story of the murder?"

"I dunno, son. It seems very probable."

"I know what you're thinking," Sanders said, when H.M. had been silent for a long time. "Atropine has been used in this case in large quantities. It's a medical man's poison: especially a medical man like Blystone, who does head and eye operations. On the other hand —"

H.M. opened one eye. "You're gettin' back into form, you are. On the other hand what?"

"It would be easy for anybody, even without a knowledge of chemistry, to go straight to its source and get all he wanted. The original herb, *atropa belladonna*, is found in plenty of English hedgerows. If the murderer boiled the leaves and roots, he could extract as much atropine as he needed. Masters's confident talk about 'tracing' the poison is pretty thin. Besides, until you can show how the poison was introduced into the drinks at Haye's —"

"Oh, that?" said H.M. "I know that."

"And the atropine was not put in by anybody who sneaked in from outside while the drinks were unattended?"

"That's right, son. It wasn't."

Mrs. Bartlemy, Sanders's landlady, put her head in at the door, she was obviously impressed.

"Lady and gentleman here, sir," she announced, as though stating a novel fact. "Sir Dennis Blystone and Miss Blystone."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"I'VE COME," began Marcia, "to —"

She saw H.M., and stopped abruptly. Behind her in the doorway her father seemed to waver like a figure on wires. Then, Sir Dennis Blystone took command of the situation.

"Merrivale!" he said, striding over to shake hands. "Hel-*lo*, Henry! It's good to see you again. How are you?"

"Hello, Denny," said H.M. rather sheepishly, and glared at the floor. "Keepin' pretty well, thanks."

There was a long pause. Then Blystone turned to Sanders.

"Dr. Sanders," he said in a low, sincere voice, "I hope you will forgive my coming here. I think you were very foolish to lead my daughter into the nonsensical and dangerous pranks you two played last night, though I have a suspicion Marcia did most of the leading. I have been able to keep it from her mother. But thank God you both came through it safely. And that you did come through it safely, I recognize, was due to your courage and determination, which —"

Sanders was embarrassed, hideously embarrassed.

"— at the same time, you must realize that your conduct was unprofessional and, from the point of view of your career, absolutely insane. You are not, of course, a practicing physician; but if you'll allow me to advise you —"

Whereupon Sanders blurted it out.

"Let's clear the air," he said. "In another minute we'll all be standing here like a lot of Schumann's mummies. Sir Dennis, we've heard all about the four watches and the pocket-picking. We also think Miss Blystone had better give the chief inspector that manuscript she took from Ferguson's chair last night. After that, everything's fine and there's whisky in that cupboard, so let's all pour ourselves a drink."

"Oh," said Blystone. That was all. He stroked his cheek with those curious two fingers.

"No, thanks," he said mechanically. "I don't care for whisky. I — I'm afraid

I'm no good to anybody."

It was the beginning of a somewhat painful speech.

"Oh, for cat's sake!" H.M. roared. "Don't take on like that. Out of pure cussed self-pity you'll have your own kid weepin' and convince yourself you're a fallen tower of poetic magnitude. Well, you're not. All that's worryin' you is a social convention. Pinchin' watches! Cor! if you got any sense you'll pinch somebody's watch at the next dinner you go to, and hold it up, and talk about it freely as an amusin' hobby. Do you know how to laugh? Then use it on yourself. Lots of respectable people are amateur conjurers."

Blystone, roused out of himself, looked up sharply.

"Why not?" said H.M. "Pinchin' watches! Cor!"

During this time Sanders had been watching Marcia. It was as though another sort of girl emerged, and showed honest human nature all over her face.

"You know," she cried, "you really are a tonic." She turned to Blystone. "He's absolutely right! Laugh. Laugh all over your face. Then it doesn't really matter if you do go about with that hussy in Cheyne Walk —"

"Marcia!" said Blystone. He seemed shocked.

"There you go again," groaned H.M. "Standin' on your sacred rights and bankin' up the old hearth-fires of home. Horseradish. She's twenty-one, ain't she? I've got two daughters. They both think I'm the funniest thing that ever staggered in out of the wet, but you'd be surprised at what a feelin' of peace it brings under the ancestral roof."

"I think," said Blystone, turning to Sanders, "I think I could use a spot of that whisky after all."

H.M. was inexorable. "No you don't! You sit down there and listen to me. Y'see, my son, you've got yourself mixed up with real criminals this time. They're not foolin'. Two pretty nasty killings have happened. Did you do it?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"Uh-huh. Got any atropine?"

"Yes, but I can account for all of it. Fortunately."

"What were you doin' last night between eleven and twelve o'clock?"

"I went for a walk."

"Yes. You would. Where'd you go?"

"In the direction of Scotland Yard. I heard they were detaining Mrs. Sinclair there."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"My wife spoke about it when Dr. Sanders came there pretending to be a

detective-inspector —"

"No, I'm hanged if I did!" snapped Sanders. "All I said —"

"Shut up," H.M. told him austerely. His little eye fastened on Blystone again. "What's your wife's maiden name, son?"

"Look here," said Blystone in a fussed voice, "what's all this got to do with it? Her maiden name? Barbara Gore-Reeves."

"Barbara! It's Judith, ain't it? You always used to call her Judy."

"Yes, but she called me Punch," answered Blystone, with an attempt at dignity. "It — er — dates from the early years of our marriage. I was young and full of theories about how babies should be treated."

"You're not lyin' to me, are you, Denny? The name wasn't Judith Adams?"

The other blinked. "Judith Adams! No, I should think not. It will be quite easy to prove, if you care to come round and ask her. But, I say, Merrivale. A little discretion — you understand? Lady Blystone is a highly strung woman, and not at all well. The last time you were there. Chewing tobacco, you know. Oh, yes. I can show you her passport as well. But —"

He was interrupted. Marcia moved across in front of him, composedly opening her handbag.

From it she took two sheets of closely written paper, crumpled up into a ball, and handed them to H.M.

"There it is," she said. "Read it."

"Oh," H.M. said. "This is what you pinched out of Ferguson's chair last night. So you're confessin'?"

"Read it, please." She brushed the other matter aside.

"You were quite right," she declared, "about his having got mixed up with real criminals. Brr! I knew he was the worst of the lot the first time I set eyes on him."

H.M. spread out the sheets on his knee. It was a full minute before he spoke. For the first time Marcia turned to Sanders, very deliberately, and smiled.

"This has torn it," said H.M. "Oh, my eye! This has unquestionably torn the full story of Haye's murder. Not mentionin' the name of the murderer. Y'see, Ferguson didn't have time. It's headed *Statement with Regard to the Murder of Felix Haye, Esq., by Peter Sinclair Ferguson, B.Sc., E.O.M.* (*Egyptian Order of Merit*). Shall I read it?"

"Read it," said Blystone quietly, "and hurry up."

> Emulating the example of Felix Haye [read H.M.], I wish to put on paper the name of the person who killed him, and also the highly ingen-

ious method by which the crime was managed.

Unlike Haye, I do not anticipate any danger. But, in the unlikely event of anything happening to me, I feel that the police should have all the information at my disposal.

First a word of personal history. During the years 1926–27 I served as Chief Production Artist to the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Co., Ltd., at their office and warehouse in the Boulevard Kasr El Ali, Cairo. Here were manufactured such articles as scarabs and the mummies of animals; larger statues to represent black basalt; and papyri of considerable convincingness.

My reproduction of a XIXth Dynasty papyrus, presented by us to H.M. the King of Egypt, earned warm commendation, and resulted in my receiving the Egyptian Order of Merit. I am one of the few who have received this.

The greater part of our valuable stock was in a separate warehouse, where Bernard Schumann had his private office. Bernard Schumann was and is head of the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company. To avoid income-tax complications he calls himself managing director; but he is sole owner. I am in a position to indict this man for arson and murder.

"Arson and murder," repeated Blystone mechanically. He was looking rather white.

"That's right," agreed H.M. "Bob Pollard collected the information yesterday that nearly all Schumann's valuable stock had once been wiped out in a fire — completely uninsured stuff."

The fire was planned and executed by Schumann, to conceal the murder of his only serious competitor, a Moslem named El Hakim, who was putting him out of business. Schumann deliberately allowed the insurance on his stock to lapse.

This was his reasoning. The world will never believe that anybody will deliberately destroy a fortune's worth of his own goods in order to commit any crime whatever. And the only way to commit a perfect murder, said Schumann, is by such a sacrifice.

He stabbed El Hakim (I do not know with what) in the loft of the warehouse on the afternoon before the night he intended the fire to break out. He arranged it so that when the fire broke out he should be far away, with an alibi.

This is how he did it. The floor of the warehouse was thick with shavings, excelsior, and other combustibles. He added petrol to these. He then obtained the works of an ordinary alarm clock. As is known, the ringing

mechanism of such a clock consists of an arm or clapper which is agitated violently back and forth against the bell until the clockwork runs down.

Bernard Schumann removed the bell from the clock. To the arm or clapper he fastened with wire several large ordinary matches.

The clock was placed in such a position by a large wooden box that, when the alarm went off, the matches would be rasped against a sandpaper surface and catch fire. The box was drenched with petrol, the infernal machine piled with shavings.

Bernard Schumann could time the fire to begin at any hour he liked: all he had to do was set the alarm. In this case it was at ten P.M., when he was sitting on the terrace at Shepheard's. I have seen few more spectacular sights than that blazing pyre.

Remains were naturally found in the ruins. It was assumed — as Schumann meant it to be — that El Hakim had tried to ruin his rival, had set fire to the warehouse, and had himself died in the fire. This is called poetic justice, and I must say it looked like it. Schumann received much sympathy. It was a very gôod idea.

"There," said Dr. Sanders, also in a hollow voice, "is an example of classic understatement to go with any. A very good idea is right."

H.M. nodded seriously.

"Always assumin'," he replied, "that good old Ferguson is tellin' the truth — yes. There's not a flaw in it. The murderer don't try to hide the identity of the body. He never tries to hide anything. They can investigate all they like, and he's still safe. Psychologically it's sound too. As Ferguson says, nobody can believe a man will destroy a fortune's worth of his own property in order to commit any crime whatever."

He scowled. "Humph. These details are all new. *If* they're true, it comes close to bein' the perfect murder. The only thing that was known before is that Schumann's crime was arson."

"You knew that all along?" asked Blystone.

"Sure. That alarm-clock trick is as old as sin and Satan. Whenever you find a suspicious character carryin' alarm-clock works *without* the bell attached — as this was — you just keep an eye on him to make sure his game's not arson. When at the same time you've got a magnifyin' glass in the feller's pocket, you want to look sharper still. For it's also a burning glass. And that's a device for startin' fires as old as Egypt itself."

Sanders reflected. There had been doubt in H.M.'s voice.

"Yes, but look here, sir! The alarm clock works in Schumann's pocket

couldn't have been the ones he used to start the fire in Cairo. Wouldn't the heat have melted them into an unrecognizable lump of metal?"

"It would," growled H.M. "Unless Schumann is addicted to arson, and was plannin' another stroke. We don't know Haye's bit of information. We don't know what was in the five boxes."

"Excuse me," Marcia interposed softly. "But Ferguson has a few juicy things to say about Mrs. Sinclair — his wife. I didn't know about her being an art crook, until I read that."

"This is not your affair, Marcia," retorted Blystone peevishly. "She has done nothing which was not quite legitimate business. Has she, Merrivale? What does Ferguson say about her?"

"Ferguson," said H.M., running his eye down the microscopically written sheets, "Ferguson, out of pure meanness of heart, was simply takin' a whack at everybody. The only one he don't discourse on, Denny, is you: because he apparently didn't know you. But I'll skim over the relevant parts, up to Haye's murder."

> I never had any actual proof against Schumann for the Cairo fire, but he knew I knew. When I wished to return to England, and asked to be made manager of the London office, I received the appointment.
>
> Whenever Bernard Schumann tended to grow sharp or above his place, I had a habit of looking down my nose and saying, "Great Fire of London, 1666." "Great Fire of London, 1666." "Great Fire of London, 1666." It was very effective.
>
> But I am a man of wide and diverse interests. I did not like to remain in an office for long. I left for the Continent, taking a sum of money with me. You will be able to guess why Bernard Schumann did not prosecute me.

"Then," said H.M. with ghoulish relish, "we got some remarks on his marriage to Mrs. Sinclair, and their happy life together. In spite of your insistence —" he peered at Marcia — "we'll pass over 'em. For the rest is pure jam."

> On Monday night of last week, I walked into my wife's house. I had not seen her for nearly a year. I am not sure that she really believed me dead.
>
> Not at all sure. She is a woman of great acumen, and I do not think she could have missed that insurance policy unless she saw a trap in it.
>
> In any event, she welcomed me with open arms, and we spent a very pleasant night —

"That's a damned lie," said Blystone.

"Well, after all, son," returned H.M. meekly, "the woman was his wife."

"But she isn't his wife now. Or, rather, she's his widow."

H.M. was looking at him steadily.

"Is it any good tellin' you, son, to watch out for your fingers in a different way? This is fire. You're mixin' with some of the cleverest criminal minds in England. Mrs. Bonita Sinclair and Mr. Peter Sinclair Ferguson were pull-baker, pull-devil every second of the time. You're fightin' out of your weight. All right, all right! Don't yell. I'll wind this up."

It was plain, therefore, that she had a use for me. And she had.

I never had the honor of meeting Mr. Felix Haye. I do not know why he should have been interested in me, or thought I wanted to kill him, or where he got the quicklime and phosphorus I once used in certain activities of mine.

But my wife told me about him. Someone, it seemed, had been trying to kill Haye with a bottle of poisoned ale.

Shortly Haye meant to call a meeting of those who might be responsible. This presumptuous fool had collected dangerous evidence against several persons. She also believed that he had hidden it away, or was going to hide it away. She said the persons included me, but I believed her to be lying. My wife was very frightened.

This was what she proposed to me: I should attend the meeting, unknown to Haye. This would not be difficult. I learned with surprise that Haye's flat was above my old office.

I should wait in Bernard Schumann's office. She would leave the door of the flat on the latch when she went in. After allowing a time for the party to settle down in one room, I should then go into the flat and listen.

This Mr. Haye, my wife said, had a rare talent for boasting. He would either hint at or tell outright the place where he had hidden the things that worried my wife.

My wife needed me because I can crack any crib on earth. That was my purpose in being there. As soon as I heard what he had done with the stuff —in my wife's case it was two letters written by her, guaranteeing the genuineness of a fake Rubens and a fake Van Dyck, which could have sent her up the river for five years—I would be ready to get out and act. Unless Haye had the stuff in some place like the Bank of England, I could get it while he was still talking about it.

This is what she wanted me to do. I said I would do it for a thousand pounds. We finally compromised at seven-fifty.

I waited until they were all upstairs in Haye's flat, and then I got into Bernard Schumann's office with my twirlers. I liked that. I like pretending,

and if any one came in I was going to pretend to work there. I was not afraid of meeting Schumann. I was all ready with "Great Fire of London, 1666."

I went upstairs to the flat at ten minutes past eleven. They were all in the kitchen. This fool Haye was imitating a baby, to judge by the sounds.

I got into the bedroom, where I could look through into the sitting-room. Soon Bernard Schumann walked out of the kitchen carrying a tray with a cocktail shaker, some glasses and a tumbler on it. He put them on a little table and went back to the kitchen.

If you think that anybody put poison into that cocktail shaker or the tumbler or the glasses while they were standing there unattended, you are wrong. Nobody did. I was watching.

In a few minutes all the people came back from the kitchen. Haye told them to sit round the table. Then he gave them hell, in a silky kind of way. He started, "Friends, Romans, countrymen." I could not make out what it was he had on each of them. But he said he had left the stuff with his solicitors, Drake, Rogers & Drake, and that was all I needed to know. They seemed to be getting wild and drunk on just one drink. At the time I could not understand it.

H.M. raised his eyes and studied Blystone.

"So," he observed in a flat tone. "Haye did tell you what he had on his mind, hey? He didn't just crack jokes before the atropine worked?"

Blystone, whose mind seemed to be turned inwards, roused himself again.

"Yes. Haye said a few things," he admitted. "He could not talk straight. What between the atropine and Haye's Henry-Jamesian tendency never to say a straight thing straight out, the result was confused. I was listening only to what concerned me. But do you believe this swine Ferguson is telling the truth?"

"Sure. About this part of it, anyway."

"Then how was the atropine put into the drinks?" demanded Blystone, leaning forward. "I'll swear that Bonny — Mrs. Sinclair — didn't do it. I watched her."

"How closely?" asked Marcia with contempt.

"I watched the others too," said Blystone. "And they didn't. The thing is absolutely impossible."

I waited to see if Haye would say anything more, but he only raved. That tall ass with the distinguished manner was singing, "Pull for the shore, sailor." I watched the wardrobe too, which made me get out.

Then I went down to Bernard Schumann's office and got the telephone

directory to find out the address of Drake, Rogers & Drake. It took a long time, because there are nearly three columns of Drakes in the directory.

In the meantime, it got all quiet upstairs. I did not like that. Just when I had found the address, there was a noise from upstairs. I had just turned the light out, fortunately. Someone came down the stairs from Haye's flat, and passed Bernard Schumann's office, and walked down the next flight of stairs.

I followed. It was dark on the stairs. The person went down to the ground floor, started unbolting the back door of the building, and went out. I followed. When this person went out into the street again, I saw who it was — as plain as day.

You will be surprised when I tell you.

This person started walking, very fast, down Great Russell Street in the direction of Southampton Row. That was the direction I was going anyway, so I followed. From Southampton Row this person turned into Theobald's Road, and I had an idea this person must be making for Gray's Inn, as I was.

I was right. He was going to the solicitors' office. He (or it might have been a she: what do you think?) went down a little court behind the building. Then the person climbed up a fire escape.

This happened at fifteen minutes past twelve. The person went to a certain window, and seemed to be turning back the catch of the window with a knife. Then the person went through the window, and came out two minutes later, and got away.

I was supposed to do what my wife was paying me for. It seemed that somebody had done it already. I was not worried because I had the goods on this person profitably afterwards, so I did not attempt to stop this person. But I thought I had better make sure this person had cleaned out the evidence in the lawyers' offices. I went up the fire escape myself.

It was all right. A box painted with Haye's name was lying on the floor with its lock broken — a difficult job. There was nothing in it. I went all through the offices, making sure nothing had been overlooked.

It was half-past twelve when I left. A night watchman saw me and started a row, so I had to duck. This delayed me. It takes nearly fifteen minutes to walk from Gray's Inn to that place in Great Russell Street. It was ten minutes to one before I got back.

The damned back door, by which I and this other person had left the building, was now bolted on the inside again.

I had not expected this. I did not understand it.

Even if I could not get into the building this way, getting in was easy for me. (See my history above.) I went up the rainpipe at the back of the building, and got through the window of Bernard Schumann's office.

It was a dirty business, climbing up like that. I had to brush myself and

wash my hands. What worried me was what had happened in the flat above, which I did not know at the time.

I heard people coming up the stairs. By this time I knew that there was something wrong in the business. So I played the part of Bernard Schumann's clerk, and went out and met that flighty girl and the young doctor.

"Uh-huh. There's not much more," said H.M., examining the last sheet, "and the rest of it you know anyway. We know now why Ferguson thought Schumann would never give him away. And he had to give some explanation of what he was doin' there, because when the murder was discovered he wanted to find out what in the blazin' Tophet had happened. It was only after inspectin' the drugged dummies in the flat upstairs, that he decided to disappear."

H.M. blinked at Sanders. "It's a sad thing, y'know, but Ferguson really didn't know what had happened until you told him. He was human enough to inquire after his wife. But he talked a bit indiscreetly before you and the wench. He must have regretted that afterwards. He never quite made a success of crime, somehow."

"This is all very well," snapped Blystone, "but it *tells* nothing. Ferguson never said or even indicated who the murderer really is, or how the atropine was administered —"

"Oh, yes, he did," said H.M.

Again Blystone's hand went to his cheek. Marcia, Sanders noticed, kept a look of blank composure.

"I'm not jokin', son," insisted H.M. "It's all here, if you read it properly. Truth sort of groans between the lines."

He peered round. "All riddles have now been solved, except who killed Haye and how was the merry party drugged? We got a neat list. Peter Ferguson — burglar. Bonita Sinclair — art swindler. Dennis Blystone — pickpocket. Bernard Schumann — arsonist. But the party's not exactly complete until it's plain who Judith Adams is. She's awful elusive. Nobody so far has been able to hazard a guess about her."

"Nonsense," said Blystone, curtly. "There's no mystery about that. I know quite well who Judith Adams is. She is —"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SERGEANT POLLARD received the information about Judith Adams only a few minutes after he entered Felix Haye's flat.

He had spent a not very profitable morning. Chief Inspector Masters had returned from seeing Dr. Sanders at eleven o'clock, and instructed Pollard to begin checking up on the various people concerned for the entire day of Haye's murder.

And Pollard began, of course, with Bonita Sinclair. After interviewing her at her house in Cheyne Walk, he followed a tortuous trail from dressmaker to restaurant. But he satisfactorily accounted for every minute of her time up to eleven o'clock on the night of Haye's death.

Sir Dennis Blystone was not at his office in Harley Street. However, between the secretary, Lady Blystone, and two maids, he also accounted for Sir Dennis's movements up to the time he had left to pick up Mrs. Sinclair.

By Lady Blystone he was not impressed. She was a tall woman with hard hair and drooping mouth, who did much more questioning than he did.

"If I were the old man," he said to himself when he left the house, "I should —" And he fell to thinking of Bonita Sinclair again.

From Harley Street it was not a great distance to Bernard Schumann's office. Pollard also had to question the caretaker about possible visitors to Haye's flat upstairs, and to pick up that poisoned bottle of ale before somebody lifted it.

After getting something to eat at a snack bar, he drew a blank in Great Russell Street. The Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company was open. But a courteous and soft-voiced Egyptian informed him that Mr. Schumann was remaining at home that day. He was not well. Mr. Schumann, in fact, had not even been at the office on the day of the crime.

Pollard went upstairs. It was getting on towards three in the afternoon; and the sergeant was warm and irritated.

After some rummaging in the kitchen cupboards, he found the bottle of ale. Then he wandered into the living-room. The atmosphere was drowsy.

Pollard sat down and lit a cigarette. Again he contemplated with interest the bright-painted murals of the nymphs on either side of the fireplace. One of the

nymphs, he thought, looked a little like Bonita Sinclair. After all, what had the woman done? Used her specialized knowledge to good effect, but what of it?

Pollard got up and wandered towards the bedroom, wondering in what capacity Bonita had known Felix Haye. The bedroom was very large and had only one small window. It contained an enormous bed and an enormous wardrobe. A cavalry saber stood in one corner. A photograph of a famous conjurer hung proudly over the mantelpiece; it was autographed. "To my good friend Felix Haye," and was the *chef d'oeuvre* of the room.

Back in the living room again, Pollard found himself looking at the shelf of bright-jacketed books.

He wondered idly what Haye's literary tastes had been, and began to glance over the titles. Several books of puzzles and tricks of a simpler kind, joke books; a volume of very pungent limericks, published in Paris. Novels. *Barney of the Bar-X. Alua, Virgin of the South Seas.* Several collections of intimate memoirs of the great, their pages gleefully underscored wherever some noted person had been shady or dishonest in any way. And —

Pollard's gaze grew fixed and staring.

JUDITH ADAMS

The name jumped up in white lettering on a red background. It was the name of the author of a book.

For several seconds, in that hot and quiet room, he stood staring at it. Then he reached out and took down the book.

Its title was *The Lair of the Dragon.* On the title page was written in bold handwriting, "I can use you, Judith." He compared the writing with the annotations in the other books.

The handwriting was the same.

He began to turn over the pages of the book. It was a straightforward collection of mythological lore surrounding dragons and similar monsters. Pollard looked at the name of the publisher, and swore with triumph. The publisher was Goffit. And he knew Tommy Edwards of Goffit very well.

The telephone here in the flat was out of order. Pollard hurried downstairs, obtained permission from the Egyptian to use Schumann's telephone, and rang up the publisher.

"That you, Tom? Bob Pollard here. I say, Tom: You've got an author on your list named Judith Adams. I want to know something about her. I know you're not supposed to give information, but this is police business."

"I don't mind telling you about this one," said Edwards mildly. He seemed interested. "What's the old girl been up to?"

Pollard, remembering Masters's stern eye, was cautious.

"Well, of course, we don't know that she's been up to anything, exactly —"

"I bet she hasn't," said the voice with conviction, "She's dead."

"She's *what?*"

"D-e-a-d. You know. And buried."

"But when did she die?"

"About eighteen-ninety-three. Have you been reading the *Dragon?* It's a re-issue. The book's been dead for years, but what with all this Loch-Ness-monster business, I thought it might catch on. Look here, what's up?"

Pollard blinked at the telephone. The courteous Egyptian was listening. If Judith Adams had died in eighteen-ninety-three, Felix Haye must at that time have been all of six or seven years old.

"Wait! Has she got any children, someone like that, of the same name?"

"If she has," said the voice, "it's going to be a first-class scandal even now. Judith Adams was a spinster of a particularly pure and frosty sort. Daughter of a clergyman up in Cumberland somewhere. Died full of years and good works. Read the book: you'll catch it from the style."

"Do you know whether Judith Adams was in any way connected with a man named Felix Haye?"

The voice whistled. "Wow! Are you on that case? I don't know, but I can find out for you. Ring me back in about an hour, will you?"

"Right," said Pollard. "Thanks."

He put up the receiver, and reflected again. The Egyptian was walking about with a ledger in his hand. He stopped by the door, and spoke softly in French to the man in the front office, as though he were reading from the ledger.

"*Il ne comprend pas, ce sale flic. C'est rigolo, hein?*"

Pollard came out of his thoughts with a jerk. The Egyptian made no other comment of relevance. All he murmured, in a sing-song voice was:

"Invoice, one blue canopic jar, porcelain, ibis head —"

Pollard got up. "I thank you for the use of the telephone," he said in French. "What is it that the *sale flic* does not understand, thou *sale* son of the desert?"

The dapper man looked at him sideways, concluded, "— sixty-five pounds, ten shillings, and sixpence"; and then smiled broadly.

"Monsieur must not misunderstand," he replied in French. "I was joking. Perhaps I do wrong to be amused when the police fail to solve a case. But I

meant no harm. As for being a son of the desert, I am half Spanish. That is why I smile."

Pollard could get nothing out of him. After some minutes of blistering invectives, Pollard was forced to retire. Gloomily he thought he had better finish up his business by going to Hampstead and seeing Schumann.

Going out in the Underground, he racked his brains and his notebook. He leafed through Judith Adams's book wondering how she figured in this.

Of Schumann himself he was not inclined to be suspicious. Chief Inspector Masters had said very little about the man, though he had dispatched to the police in Cairo a cable which Pollard did not see.

The shadows were lengthening when he reached the house on the edge of Hampstead Heath. Bernard Schumann himself opened the door.

"Oh, yes," he said, when Pollard had introduced himself. Schumann's eye went first to the bottle of ale, and then to the book. There was about him a watchfulness which rather amused the sergeant. Schumann's pale blue eyes looked washed out. Pollard noted again the contrast between his delicate hands and the coarse texture of his hair.

"I must do my own errands today," Schumann told him. "My housekeeper and my cook are both out. Will you walk into my parlor?"

The house was very quiet, and nearly as stuffy as Haye's flat. Schumann walked ahead, creaking in stiff slippers.

"My haunt," he explained, opening the door of a big room on the right. It was an overcrowded drawing-room with a great mummy case in the corner, and horsehair furniture.

His host indicated a chair at one side of the fireplace — where, despite the warmth of the day, a coal fire was burning.

"Well, sergeant?" he prompted. His fine face was clouded. "I learn from the newspapers that you have found Peter Ferguson, under unusual circumstances. May I ask if he was poisoned?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"I am sorry." Schumann glanced sideways at the fire. He did not look ill. "He was a very able man, though sometimes difficult to get on with. Have you any idea who-er —?"

"A clue has been discovered, sir. At the moment, I'd rather not discuss it," said Pollard drily. "I'd like to put some questions to you. What were you doing on the day before yesterday, the day Mr. Haye was murdered? Just give me an account of your movements, if you will, from the morning until

eleven o'clock at night."

The other shaded his eyes with his hand. "Let me see. Come, that is easy! In all the excitement I had forgotten. I was entertaining some very dear friends of mine, Lord and Lady Thurnley —"

"Not the historian?" asked Pollard. Here was a very eminent and respectable witness.

"Yes," said Schumann, evidently surprised that the other should know this. "They live in Durham and are not often in London. I called for them at their hotel — Almond's — at ten o'clock. We spent the morning at the Guildhall Library, and came back to the hotel for lunch. At lunch a telephone message came through for me. It was from poor Haye, asking me to come to a party at his flat that evening. I said that I was entertaining the Thurnleys, and could not possibly do so.

"Haye told me that another guest, Mrs. Sinclair, had made the same excuse. He said therefore that he was arranging the party for eleven o'clock at night, and he would not take no for an answer."

"But you didn't really want to go to the party, did you?"

Schumann's eyes seemed to grow far away.

"The answer to that is that I did go. But that is to anticipate. I was with Lord and Lady Thurnley the entire day. In the afternoon we went to a matinee, and then to an exhibition at Burlington House. After tea we returned here. They dined with me. At about twenty minutes past ten they left here in a taxi and returned to their hotel. After they had gone, I rang up for another taxi, and was driven straight to Haye's flat: I arrived, as I have already said to the chief inspector, at a quarter to eleven. Haye was there, and met me. Up to the time of the Thurnleys' departure, I am sure they will be willing to testify to all this. They are still at their hotel."

"Did you mention Mr. Haye's party to them, sir?"

"No." He did not elaborate or explain.

"Mr. Schumann, how well did you know Mr. Haye?"

"Casually, only casually. I met him some years ago, in Cairo. It was — er — a time of some distress and misfortune to me."

The sergeant remembered. That was where the fire had nearly wiped out Schumann's uninsured stock. Well, that was nothing against the man; he could not blame the old buffer for looking a bit queer.

"Yes, we learned about that, sir. You were very unfortunate. I thought myself it was too bad the alarm wasn't sounded sooner."

There was a pause. Schumann spoke in a curious voice. "Did you, indeed? And does the chief inspector also think it was too bad?"

Pollard smiled. "I haven't exactly discussed it with him. But I wanted to ask you: did Mr. Haye ever mention to you a woman called Judith Adams?"

His host seemed to reflect. "Judith Adams? Judith Adams? Not that I recall. I never heard of her."

"Mr. Haye didn't mention her name even on the night of the party?"

"No. I should be interested to know, sergeant, why you say *even*."

Pollard examined his notebook. "All in good time, sir. But if the name of Judith Adams isn't known to you, it seems to be known to your staff. You have two assistants, one of them an Egyptian —"

"Well? I honestly do not follow all this."

"Judith Adams wrote a certain book," explained Pollard, "which seems to have a direct bearing on this case. I found it this afternoon in Mr. Haye's flat; even the chief inspector hasn't seen it or heard of it yet."

"What is all this about a book? I don't understand. A book about what?"

"Monsters," said Pollard.

Schumann's pale blue eyes remained fixed. He cleared his throat slightly.

"Monsters?" he repeated. "Criminals, you mean?"

"No, no. Mythological monsters. Dragons and the like. Now, sir, there's reason to believe that the name of Judith Adams is connected with one of the persons Mr. Haye suspected of trying to murder him.

"When I found that book, *The Lair of the Dragon*, I went downstairs to your office and rang up the publisher. We had a talk about the book. When we had finished, your Egyptian assistant was amused, and said in French, under his breath, that the dirty copper did not understand. What did he mean?"

"I have not the remotest idea," said Schumann. "Is that the book you have there? May I see it?"

"In just a minute, sir. But it had some meaning to your assistants; and, consequently, I suggest it must have some meaning to you," urged Pollard.

"Just try to think, sir. There's a connection somewhere. I admit I don't know what it is. All I know is that the dragon was a mythical animal who was supposed to breathe fire. Beyond that, nothing."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"QUITE," Schumann agreed, clearing his throat once more. "But I can't help you either. It must have been one of Haye's heavy-handed jokes."

Regretfully snapping the band round his notebook, Pollard put it away. He got up.

"Then that's that, Mr. Schumann. Sorry to have taken up so much of your time. If you'll excuse me —"

"No, no, no," interrupted Schumann. "The matter is much too interesting. You must not go yet. You must sit down and have a drink. I really insist. It is possible that I can give you some information."

Pollard looked at him quickly. "About?"

"What would it be about but Felix Haye's death? It is not often that I get an opportunity to talk to such an intelligent young man."

Schumann drew a long and quiet breath. "If I have seemed not altogether helpful, you must remember that I am not well and that things distress me. These persistent references to conflagrations you may find amusing; but it is difficult for me to accept them as a literary exercise."

"Confla —" said Pollard. "You don't mean Lord Thurnley's book about the Great Fire of London in 1666?"

"You really must have a drink," Schumann said smiling. He stretched out his hand to a bell beside the fireplace, and then drew it back. "I had forgotten. There is nobody to call; we are all alone here."

His slippers creaked as he crossed the room. The sideboard was in the embrasure of the bay-window: Schumann stood with his back to the visitor, moving bottles and opening drawers. If a fire ever did start here, Pollard thought, it would sweep this dust-trap in ten minutes.

Schumann returned with two glasses of sherry, one of which he handed to his guest. Then he resumed his seat on the opposite side of the fireplace.

Yes, definitely there was something wrong. Pollard frowned.

"Look here, sir, *have* you got anything to tell me?"

"A great deal, both about dragons and about fires. But, before I do, there is some information I insist on having in return."

"Sorry," said Pollard, and got up.

His host did not move.

"Sergeant, you are being foolish. What I offer you may be the solution of everything you wish to know. What, as opposed to that, do you risk? Two minutes of your valuable time, and one or two facts which in twenty-four hours will be published in the newspapers. You are a bad hand at a bargain, if you refuse to trade on those terms."

Pollard nodded. Putting down his glass of sherry on the mantel-shelf, he waited.

"I have only one question," said Schumann. "When the chief inspector was here yesterday, he suggested that all of our group, were accused of being criminals. Of what particular crime am I accused?"

Sharply through the quiet house, the noise of the front-door knocker rapped and rapped again.

"I suppose," Schumann remarked slowly, "I shall have to answer that."

The knocker kept on banging. Again Schumann's slippers creaked as he got up and moved out into the hall. The man who returned with Schumann was Chief Inspector Humphrey Masters.

"Ah, sir," he greeted Schumann affably. His eye wandered in an unobtrusive manner round the room. "Just happened to be passing, and — oh, hullo, Bob."

"Yes, sir," said Pollard. "Following my instructions, I —"

Masters cut him off. "Just so."

The chief inspector wandered over to the fireplace. He glanced at the glass of sherry on the mantel-shelf.

"I hope I wasn't intruding," he went on. "Fact is, sir, I knew you had a guest. I saw you pouring out two glasses. Through the window, you know. Don't tell me you've gone and offered the sergeant a drink?" He looked round with an inquiring frown.

"Is it forbidden, my friend?"

"It is, sir. Absolutely forbidden," lied Masters cheerfully, "to anybody below the rank of inspector. However, *I* could do with a bit of a warmer at this time of day. Do you mind if I take this one?"

"Let me get you some brandy."

Masters laid a hand on the other's frail arm as he turned. "Wouldn't think of it, sir! Waste a good glass of sherry? Not if you had my salary you wouldn't. I'll just have this one."

Picking up the glass, he walked over and settled himself comfortably on the sofa. He lifted the glass.

"Your very good health, sir."

Schumann did not move.

"Yours, chief inspector," he said.

Struck with another thought, Masters frowned and put the glass down on the table beside him.

"Bob, what are you doing out here anyway? You've come out here behind my back, my lad. What have you been talking to Mr. Schumann about?"

It was Schumann who answered. "Chiefly about dragons," he said. "Can you explain anything about it, chief inspector?"

"It's Judith Adams," said Pollard. "I've found out who she is — or was, rather. I discovered her book in Haye's flat."

"Oh, ah!" said Masters, enlightened. "You mean the old lady who wrote the book about fire-breathing monsters? I'm afraid I know all about it. Sir Henry rang me up. Sir Dennis Blystone told him about the book." He looked sideways at Schumann. "Did you know, Mr. Schumann, that Peter Ferguson left a statement before he died?"

"I did not know it. But I am not at all surprised to hear it."

"Would it interest you to know, sir, that some very serious accusations were made against you?"

Schumann spoke with great clarity. "Yes. I have been very patiently waiting to hear them for some time. A most ingenious game of cat-and-mouse has been played with me. The sergeant plays it even better than you do, though he intimated that he was the only one who knew the facts."

Masters glanced sharply at his subordinate. Pollard now guessed the significance of that damning glass of sherry at Master's elbow. Even as he felt that he might have been close to a bad kind of death, still Schumann had gone up a good deal in his estimation.

Masters played with the stem of the sherry-glass; and Schumann's arms had begun to shake on the arms of the chair.

"You had better not waste your time," said Schumann. "Out with it, man! Just before you came in, I had made a bargain with Sergeant Pollard that I would give him some important information about this case if he at last told me what I was accused of."

The chief inspector dropped his bluff and amiable manner.

"What would you say, sir, if I told you it was murder?"

"Murder." Schumann regarded Masters in a puzzled way. "And is *that* all?"

"Have you committed many worse crimes?"

"Nonsense. Anything else, specifically?"

"Specifically, sir, that on a certain night in the year 1927 you willfully set fire to the warehouse of the Anglo-Egyptian Importing Company in Cairo, by means of an alarm-clock mechanism; and that in destroying the warehouse with its contents you also destroyed the body of a man named El Hakim, whom you had killed. When I heard about that grand blaze of yours in Cairo, I sent a cable to the police there. When I heard about the murder of El Hakim, I sent another. There'll be an answer to it very shortly. In the meantime — shall I drink this sherry?"

"By all means. I thought you wanted it."

"You're a cool one, Mr. Schumann, and no mistake. So you think it would be quite safe for me to drink poison?"

Their host leaned back, as though someone were forcing his head.

"God in heaven," he said. "You blithering ass. Do you think there is poison in that sherry?"

"I can only tell you that I'm going to have it analyzed just as quick as I can. And I'll be very much surprised, Mr. Schumann, if I don't find it's loaded with atropine. What's your answer to that?"

"This is my answer," said Schumann courteously.

His movement was so swift that Masters had no time either to intervene or even to think. He reached across, flicked up the glass, and drained its contents at a gulp. Then Schumann sat back coughing and apologizing at once.

"That," he explained, with a twinkle in his eye, "is an insult to my hospitality I cannot allow."

"So that's the game," Masters snarled. "All right, Bob. Telephone in the hall. Nearest hospital; emergency case. That stuff doesn't work very fast. We've *got* him now. We've got him so dead to rights —"

Schumann lifted his hand. "Inspector Masters," he said formally. "May I ask you to stop talking like a shilling shocker and listen to me for just one moment? Sergeant Pollard: stay where you are.

"You think this is a case of suicide. 'The scorpion, surrounded, destroys himself.' You now propose to summon an ambulance; to stir up a hospital; and for the second time in three days to submit me to the application of a stomach-pump. No, thank you. If you try any such lunatic measure as that, I will institute proceedings against you and make a fool of you for every person in England to laugh at. Now, I warn you."

Masters stared. "Do as you're told, Bob," he said. "This is Ferguson all

over again, only with a reverse twist that makes me — urr!"

"Stay where you are, Sergeant," Schumann instructed him coolly. "Dr. Burns, my personal physician, lives only two houses up the road. If you rang him, he could get here ten times faster than any ambulance. Let him examine me. If there is the slightest trace of poison, you will save me for the gallows more quickly. If not, you will be saved the biggest mistake of your career."

"What shall I do, sir?" demanded Pollard. "I think he's telling the truth. What shall it be?"

"Gawdlummy," said Masters, "I wish I knew. But we can't afford to take chan — what's the address and telephone-number of that Dr. Burns?"

Schumann told him.

"Hop to it, Bob. If there is such a person, and if he'll come over, ring for him. But if you can't get that doctor or anyone else there, you know what to do."

He took quick little pigeon-toed steps up and down the room, regarding Schumann malevolently. Schumann now picked up the other glass of sherry, the one he had poured for himself, and drank that too.

"Just to clear everything up," he explained.

Masters permitted himself some wicked language.

"I feel impelled," Schumann went on, "to drink out of the decanter on the sideboard and all the other bottles as well. You have given me a very bad time this afternoon. I should like to put the knife in your gizzard and twist hard. But, aside from the fact that I do not want to be roaring drunk when Dr. Burns arrives, I should like to explain the matter to you. In the meantime, my friend, will you tell me why I should wish to kill myself or anybody else?"

"We can't get around facts, you know." Masters came over and looked down at him significantly. "First, there's a little matter of arson —"

"I beg your pardon, there is not. Where does the arson come in? Arson is the willful and malicious destruction by fire of public property or property belonging to someone else. In Cairo the articles destroyed were a warehouse and some property of which I was the sole owner. No other building or property was damaged. You don't dispute that?"

"No," said Masters grimly. "But there's a little question of a murder as well —"

Sergeant Pollard returned to the room. "Dr. Burns is coming straightaway," he reported.

Schumann appeared to be a trifle shaky but enjoying himself.

"I am accused (I think?) of murdering a certain Nizam El Hakim before or during that fire. Now, I can give you the best of reasons why I did not kill Nizam El Hakim. Because," said Schumann, "Nizam El Hakim is not dead. Sergeant Pollard was talking to him this afternoon."

But the chief inspector did not appreciate this jolt as much as Pollard appreciated it. "You don't mean that Egyptian fellow in your office?"

"I do," responded Schumann calmly. "Did you ask him anything about himself, including his name? I venture to think not. To be more accurate, he is half Egyptian and half Spanish, but —"

"Never mind all this," interposed an exasperated chief inspector. "What *about* this man El Hakim?"

"It is time," said Schumann, "to dispose of an ugly and absolutely nonsensical report which was circulated at the time of the fire. The fire I admit: that is, I admit the fact of its having occurred." A shadow of the old uneasiness was back on his face. "El Hakim at that time was in the same business as myself, though in a much smaller way, and in bad financial straits.

"Well, gentlemen, on the night of the fire El Hakim disappeared. Actually he had run away to Port Said to escape his creditors. The first wild rumor was that El Hakim had fired the place and been killed in doing so. The next and wilder rumor —" his fingers clenched — "was that I had somehow been concerned in it. I suppose you got this information from Ferguson?"

"There's no harm in saying we did, sir."

"Yes," agreed Schumann, with an unusual malevolence in his eyes. "Ferguson insisted on playing detective to such an extent that I had to send him back here to my English office —"

"Why should you have minded his playing detective?"

"It was a confounded nuisance, as I think you must admit. Of course there were bones found in the ruins! They were bones in a perfect state of preservation for two thousand years: in other words, those of a very fine Theban mummy of the XXIst Dynasty."

He smiled, as Masters scowled.

"The police proved beyond question that the remains were those of a mummy. A statement was issued. But unfortunately there is in such a place no world-wide press that reaches everyone. Even the reappearance of the alleged corpse in Cairo six months later, stony broke and repentant, did not altogether stifle the rumor. Out of sheer self-defense I was compelled to take Nizam El Hakim into my own employ; and he has been with me ever since.

Ferguson knew the actual facts quite well. The conceited idiot was only making trouble: as usual. You need not accept my statement. If you have cabled to Cairo, you will hear about it shortly. . . . I think that knock at the door must be Dr. Burns arriving."

Five minutes later a somewhat annoyed G.P., who had come rushing from tea in order to circumvent a wholly imaginary case of atropine poisoning, was saying some realistic things to Schumann about the intelligence of the police.

And Masters and Pollard stood in the gloomy hall and looked at each other again.

"All right, my lad," growled the former. "You needn't rub it in. But I could have sworn I saw him hocussing that sherry, so what else could I think? If he's telling the truth about this Cairo business —"

"*I think we know he's telling the truth, sir.*"

"Then what's the fellow guilty of? What evidence did Haye have against him?" Masters reflected. "It's arson in some way. He's a — whatd'yecallit? —"

"Pyromaniac? Firebug?" supplied Pollard. "But does even a pyromaniac make a bonfire of all his possessions and dance round it? In any case, he's out of the picture as far as murder is concerned. For it seems he's got some information to give us. By the way, what were you doing out here this afternoon?"

Masters frowned. "To ask him about just that. Also, to tell him that Sir Henry Merrivale wants everybody concerned in the case to come to Haye's flat tonight for a little demonstration —"

"You mean — ?" Pollard whistled.

"Never you mind what I mean, my lad," said the chief inspector ominously. "I'll do the 'meaning.' Let me know what you've found out today." He listened with attention while Pollard sketched it out. "So you got on to the publishers, eh?"

"Yes, sir. The point is, I don't see how that Judith Adams book can have any relation to Schumann, under the circumstances. It must refer to somebody else. It's got to."

"Never mind your theories. What else did the publishers say?"

Pollard swore. "Hold on! Tommy Edwards was going to see if he could find out anything for me. I promised to ring him back in an hour. It must be nearer two hours now. I hope he's still at the office."

Again he went in some haste to the telephone, and Masters said some pungent and realistic things about duty.

Fortunately, Pollard did catch Edwards at the office.

"My pal," said Edwards bitterly. "I've been sitting by this phone waiting to give you the real, true low-down —"

"Sorry, Tom. What's the news?"

The telephone was mollified.

"Well, to begin with, there's not much more known about Judith Adams personally than I told you. But I have established a connection between Judith Adams and somebody who may be mixed up in the case. I got it from old G.G. — Grotius Goffit — himself. About a month ago a fellow came into the office, looking very secret and mysterious, and asked to see the head of the firm on important business concerning one of our authors. G.G. saw the fellow himself.

"Well, the secret business turned out to be the fact that this fellow wanted to buy a book. He said he lived near by, and had seen the announcement of Judith Adams's book. He said his father had worked for Miss Judith in the north; and he had known her well as a young man, and so on. G.G. gave the fellow a copy and shooed him out. The fellow departed saying thanks, faith and begob."

"Why faith and begob?"

"That's the point. Because he's an Irishman: named Riley or Riordan, G.G. thinks. Anyway, he said he was the caretaker at number 12 Great Russell Street round the corner; and that's where your friend Haye was murdered."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AT NINE O'CLOCK that night, when the lamps of Great Russell Street were again glowing and there was a hint of rain in the air, a policeman on his meditative round noticed a two-seater car drawn up at the curb in front of a house he had good reason to know.

From this car issued sounds which seemed to indicate a debate or a scuffle. The policeman approached.

"Now, then!" he said.

In the car, at the wheel, sat a remarkably good-looking girl with brown hair and brown eyes. Beside her was a serious-faced young man of thirty or so, with a raincoat draped over an arm in bandages and splints.

"It's all right, constable," said Dr. Sanders. "We are only agreeing."

"We are going to be married," Marcia Blystone informed him. "Whee!"

"I see." said the constable. "Well, you can't take longer than twenty minutes, sir," and went on.

"If," Marcia said abruptly, "we're both so anxious to go up to Haye's flat, why don't we *go* up?"

"There's likely to be an emotional dust-up," he replied, "and you don't relish it any more than I do."

She admitted it. Four persons besides themselves and the investigators were to be in Haye's flat that night: Schumann, Sir Dennis Blystone, Mrs. Sinclair — and Lady Blystone.

From what Sanders could gather, the last-named person had consented to be there only under pressure. Her position had been simple: She Would Not Meet That Woman in Public.

Two other persons were supposed to attend: Timothy Riordan, the caretaker of the building; and (to Sander's surprise) an Egyptian who worked in the Anglo-Egyptian office.

Dim lights now burned on the landings of the building, to light the company's way up. He and Marcia were the first of the outside guests to arrive. When they reached Haye's flat, they found a police conference in progress in the drawing-room.

The refectory table was piled with papers. People moved and talked slowly. In one corner sat H.M., smoking a cigar and reading *The Lair of the Dragon.* Sergeant Pollard moved round the table, with another man — evidently a police officer — whom Sanders did not recognize. Chief Inspector Masters was at the head of the table, questioning Riordan the caretaker. It was plain, Sanders thought, that the newcomers were interrupting something.

The chief inspector looked up sharply. "Sorry," he said. "Aren't you a bit early? We hadn't finished —"

"Nonsense," rumbled H.M. without lifting his eyes from the book. "Let'em come in. Stand over there, you two, and be quiet."

Sanders and Marcia moved over against the wall. Masters turned to the caretaker.

"Now, I want you to go over, so that the sergeant can take it down, what you've told Sir Henry. That book Sir Henry's reading — you loaned it to Mr. Haye?"

Riordan looked stolid and rather secretive. His age might have been sixty: he

had close-cropped brownish hair and a face that looked grained with work. He spoke with a parliamentary grimness and roll.

At the moment he merely nodded with dignity.

"You tell us you knew Miss Judith Adams in the north?"

"That I did. An educated traveled lady, that spoke foreign languages so it was a pleasure to hear, and my father her coachman."

"Where did you learn about this book?"

"It was in an illustrated paper I read of it. About the grand writer that was dead; and it was the lady herself. Many things in that book was told to her by my father himself, though not in such fine language."

"Why did you want to buy the book?"

"If," said Riordan bristling, "I may not read the lady's book —"

Masters stopped him. "None of that! How did you come to lend Mr. Haye the book?"

"Didn't I put it on my table for people to see? Didn't the gentleman see it?"

The purpose of this Sanders did not see. Yet he remembered Marcia's earlier suspicions about the caretaker, and wondered.

"Now, then," pursued Masters. "About the night Felix Haye died. When did you last see him alive?"

"Awbejasus!" cried the caretaker impatiently. "Haven't I told you all that? It might have been past six o'clock, when he went out in his evening-dress to get his dinner."

"Did he say anything to you then?"

"He did, as he was going out. He said, would I be good enough to clean up his rooms, as it was grand people he was meeting that night."

"You've got a key to this flat?"

"I have."

"Wait half a tick, son," interposed H.M. "Better let me handle this."

H.M. came lumbering over to the table and peered at Riordan over his spectacles.

"I tell you what, son. Let me do the talkin', and you just correct me if I go wrong. Just nod or grunt: I'll understand. You came in here to tidy up the place. Now, Haye had been drinkin' before he went out to dinner, hadn't he?"

A nod.

"Yes. Cocktails, son?"

Another nod.

"Yes. You washed out the shaker, put away the bottles, and cleaned off the drainboard. Why didn't you finish tidying up? You wouldn't tell us, but I'll tell you.

"It was because you saw plenty of drink in the kitchen, includin' a fetching bottle of whisky. A lot of people have remarked on your powers of sleepin' on the night of the murder, and not being roused till the coppers dragged you out. That was the reason. You took down that bottle of whisky and sat here in the flat drinkin' until you were afraid Haye might be due back. Then you took it along with you and went downstairs to the basement. That was shortly before Haye got back here himself, round about twenty minutes to eleven."

There was a silence.

"And what if I did?" blazed the other.

"Nothin' at all," said H.M. mildly. "It's something any of us might have done. But now comes the important part, and I want the truth. *Did you come up from the basement again at any time — at any time, mind — before the coppers woke you up?*"

Everyone in the room looked stoical; yet everyone, Sanders felt, was holding his breath for the answer. They seemed to see the case poised on a thin edge.

The caretaker himself looked impressed and suspicious. He said: "And how should I know?"

"All right, son. Of course, if you were too drunk to walk —"

"Ah, bedad, and who was too drunk to walk?" shouted the other suddenly. "I mind it well. It was a matter of a door banging in the middle of the night. The back door of the building, that somebody had left wide open. I got up and bolted and chained it about a quarter past twelve."

Round that ring of faces went a flicker, a loosening of breath, which said that they had heard what they wanted.

"That's all, son," said H.M. "You can go."

"Got the bounder," breathed Masters. "Murderer sewed up tight as a drum, if I know anything —"

He glanced towards Marcia Blystone and Dr. Sanders, and cleared his throat.

"— suppose, sir, we adjourn to the other room and have a bit of a conference?" said Masters, checking himself. "Bob! You and Wright pick up that chap from the Everwide Detective Agency, and follow Sir Henry's instructions. Hurry back here. Will you come with me a moment, Sir Henry?"

Masters shepherded H.M. into the bedroom and closed the door. But he missed more interesting visitors. Bonita Sinclair, Lady Blystone, and Sir Dennis Blystone were coming up the stairs into the hall of the flat.

"All right," whispered Marcia. "Here we go."

But still Sanders noticed the order of the procession. First Bonita Sinclair, with Lady Blystone following her. He was staggered by the complete amity which seemed to exist between the two women.

They heard Lady Blystone say in a bright tone: "What do we do with our things, Punch, my dear? I've never been here before, you know."

"Bedroom," muttered Blystone. "I'lltakeum."

Sanders felt uneasy. Lady Blystone marched up to them. She studied him with one comprehensive glance.

"Your hair wants straightening, Marcia," she said automatically. "Dr. Sanders, isn't it. My husband told me who you were this evening. How do you do. Oh, Mrs. Sinclair! Will you come here, please. I don't know whether you two have met. This is my little daughter Marcia."

"How do you do?" said Marcia. "This is my future husband. We're going to be married."

And this is a hell of a time, thought Sanders, to bring *that* up.

"Are you indeed, my dear," said Lady Blystone absently. "Dennis, do come along! Sometimes you're so slow. Don't you find my husband slow, Mrs. Sinclair?"

"Not in the least," said the other, gravely.

"Marcia, I almost forgot to tell you," Lady Blystone went on. "You will have to get along without us for a while. Your father and I are going to take a nice long cruise, possibly a world cruise. We decided it tonight."

"You didn't!" cried Marcia. "That's wonderful!"

"Your father wondered whether the police might try to stop us, because of this dreadful affair; but he is sure they won't, and in any case he has too much influence. We shall be sailing next week, and we shall be away for nearly six months."

"Good," said Marcia. "In that case, you will be back just in time for the wedding. *My* wedding. In case you didn't catch it, I am going to marry Dr. Sanders here."

"Nonsense!"

Sanders got out his pocket-diary, in which he had penciled a few notes on his income and other qualifications.

"I had hoped," he said, "to go into this at some better time, but you may as well know it now. Marcia and I are going to be married at Marylebone Registry Office in the first week of September. I'm afraid there is not much that can be done about it. However, I think you ought to know —"

He talked for about a minute and a half, shut up the diary, and put it in his pocket. Then they looked each other in the eye. Something in this business-like way of doing things seemed to appeal to her.

"Well, my dear," she said to Marcia, "if you insist on getting married I suppose I cannot stop you. I will discuss it with you later. In any case, your father and I cannot be expected to alter *our* plans —"

"Of course not! I only wanted to mention that I was getting married, that's all."

Lady Blystone appeared to be of two minds how to take this, but she turned with great politeness. "Have you ever been on a world cruise, Mrs. Sinclair?"

"Never," smiled Bonita.

"I daresay you have been much too occupied, of course. I am sure my husband and I will enjoy every minute of this one. Your husband, Mrs. Sinclair — you *are* married now, aren't you?"

"No," said Bonita quietly. "My husband died last night. I can't pretend that I am very sorry about it; but he is dead and someone murdered him. That's really why we are here, isn't it? If you can feel very triumphant over a victory of that sort, please enjoy yourself."

There was a silence. John Sanders liked the woman, because she said that and seemed to mean it. Then he became aware that the room was filling up.

Out of the door to the bedroom came Sir Henry Merrivale, Chief Inspector Masters, and Sir Dennis Blystone. Out of the door to the hall came Bernard Schumann and a glossy-haired, stoop-shouldered, sallow-faced man who Sanders supposed must be the Egyptian assistant.

"*Voici le cadavre*," the last-named whispered, chuckling and tapping his chest. "*La tête de morte, c'est moi. Je prendrai ma place au pied de la table.*"

Schumann, formally dressed like Blystone, nodded.

"I hope we are not late?" he observed. "This is my assistant, Mr. El — that is, whose name some of us discussed this afternoon."

"No, son, you're not late," said H.M. "We were just goin' to begin."

He lumbered to the head of the table, and put down *The Lair of the Dragon* with a thump. He kept tapping his cigar to dislodge imaginary ash.

"Sit down, everybody."

Everybody followed his instructions except Masters, who remained with his back to the fireplace.

Smoke curled up in the bright room. H.M., distending his jaws with a hideous pantomime-face, blew a few rings.

"I was just wonderin'," said H.M., "where to begin. I know now. In the course of this business we've dug out quite a few secrets about people. But there's one secret we haven't even discussed yet, though it's at the root of the whole affair. I mean, friends and enemies, the secret of Felix Haye."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"IT'S NOT," pursued H.M., "a very deep secret. It's a matter of character, and most of you know it. Think of Haye's actions. Read his books. Muse over his words. And you'll know what the feller really was.

"Felix Haye was just what he pretended to be: a quiet straight business-man with an undeveloped mind, includin' his sense of humor, and a certain hobby. I'll tell you what he was: he was a debunker.

"There are some people who enjoy above all things, for its own sake, to hear that General X was a coward and Lady Y a dipsomaniac. Felix Haye was one of 'em. Most of us, a' course, grow out of that. Things get adjusted, and we come to accept necessary humbug *lento risu*.

"But Felix Haye never did grow out of it. He went further. It became a hobby with him, a source of joy and delight, to dig out the low-down on people he knew. Then he would slyly and subtly taunt 'em with it, to see how they acted. He didn't think he meant 'em any harm. He wasn't going to give 'em away publicly. It was only Young Felix's hobby."

H.M. paused. "What he wanted, of course, was great or highly placed people. That would have been nuts to him. Only, unfortunately he didn't know any. So he had to be content with the most distinguished persons he did know. Meanin' —"

Raising his finger, H.M. moved it round to indicate the quiet group before him.

Bernard Schumann spoke thoughtfully. "I see. I nearly went mad trying to find out the fellow's motive. I could not imagine why he should be so in-

terested in me. He hardly knew me."

"He didn't know Peter Ferguson at all," said H.M. "He learned about Peter F. through Ferguson's wife, but he was awful interested. Now," added H.M. suddenly, "how Haye learned all he knew is a secret that'll die with him, and it don't concern our present problem. But he did learn certain things. I first want to tell you — all of you — that there's not now a shred of evidence against any of you for your little peccadilloes. So don't jump up and shout blue thunder at me just because Chief Inspector Masters is standin' over there lookin' sinister. He can't do anything. Consequently —"

Sir Dennis Blystone got up from his chair. There was a grave, thoughtful look on his face as he rose.

He walked straight up to Masters.

"Chief Inspector, allow me to return your notebook," said Blystone, handing it over. "I got it out of your pocket while I was putting the coats in the bedroom."

"Dennis!" screamed Lady Blystone. She caught herself up then, and remained rigid.

"I must say, sir," snapped Masters, "that this doesn't seem to be the time for any of your funny —"

"Not at all," said Blystone, chuckling. "I am only practising a course recommended by my friend Henry Merrivale. You behold an expert amateur conjurer who will henceforth have a good time in social circles." He added: "God, what a relief! I don't care if you publish it tomorrow in the *Daily Mail.* Eh, Judy?"

"Dennis, you fool! You utter —"

"Shut up," roared H.M.

For a second Sanders thought he was going to throw *The Lair of the Dragon* at her. And Sanders understood why: H.M.'s feeling was relief. He had seen H.M. carry on in just that way before.

He felt Marcia's arm link through his as H.M. turned back.

"Uh-huh. Anybody else like to make a little confession? You can see it's good for the soul."

H.M. glanced at Mrs. Sinclair, who was contemplating him from under her eyelids.

"Not I, thank you," she answered. And she smiled. "You will have certain persons thinking me far worse than I really am — and I wish I could confess. But what can I say? I work for my living. I sell pictures."

Lady Blystone looked at her.

"I sell pictures," repeated Bonita Sinclair. "If I have any other profession, it has been sanctioned in the past by many great ladies, and policemen are interested in it only when off duty. The woman who does not succeed in it as a wife has my sympathy. That's all. I have committed no crime."

"Hold on!" H.M. intervened sharply, as Lady Blystone made a movement. "Any charges of poisoning against this gal, any rumors or general hocus-pocus, are a washout. The French police are clear about that. There never has been any real charge of murder against her. She was at Scotland Yard when Ferguson died —"

"Thank you, Sir Henry," the woman said. "So you told me when I met you this afternoon at my house. Then why go over it again?"

"You'll see. No: the only thing Haye had against you was two letters dealin' with a fake Rubens and a fake Van Dyck, guaranteein' their genuineness —"

"That *is* slander."

"Sure," agreed H.M. meekly. "But I got to mention it." He turned to Schumann. "We haven't met; but I know who you are too. Would you like to tell me what Haye had against you in the nature of evidence of arson?"

The room grew very quiet, while Bernard Schumann looked impatient.

"Confound it all!" said Schumann, clenching his fingers. "I am getting tired of this nonsensical charge. The chief inspector there came to me this afternoon and repeated it, with the added refreshment of murder. I was supposed to have set fire to my own warehouse and killed Mr. Nizam El Hakim — whom I now present in very good health indeed."

"*Enchanté*," bowed El Hakim, as though he were being introduced.

"I do not," said Schumann, "ask for an apology. That would be too much to hope for. But I do ask that you will have the decency to shut up. You don't accuse me of setting fire to my own warehouse, I suppose?"

H.M. shook his head disconsolately.

"No, son. Not at all. As a matter of fact," said H.M., pointing his cigar at Nizam El Hakim, "I think *he* set fire to it."

The Egyptian jumped up and began to pour out a falsetto of bad French with such rapidity that Sanders lost him after the first sentence. Then he stopped like a clockwork toy — and ran out of the room; they heard him bang out.

H.M. held up his hand.

"Mind," he insisted carefully. "I can't prove it. It's rank slander. But I was sittin' and thinkin', and I think El Hakim fired your warehouse and ran away to Port Said. Unfortunately, when he came back to Cairo, out of sheer self-defense you had to take him into your employ.

"For it's possible he knows what Haye knew: that you yourself are addicted to arson for the pure hell of it. Those alarm clock works in your pocket, *un-*damaged by fire, had nothin' to do with the blaze in Cairo. They're the relic of one of your arson-pranks that didn't work: and Haye had the goods on you. The point's this: At the moment I don't give a curse what fires you started, or anything about it. It's entirely outside our problem — which is murder."

"Then why bother me — us — with this cat-and-mouse game? You have the answer," retorted Schumann, controlling himself, "to your problem. This afternoon, as I promised, I gave Chief Inspector Masters important information. I told him who the murderer is."

"Steady," said H.M.

"Steady be hanged," retorted Schumann with unconscious aptitude. "I have given you the information. Sir, I know what I know. I shall be prepared to swear to it in court —"

"Sure," agreed H.M. patiently. "That's the whole point. You blazin' fatheads, don't you realize that this case will have to come to trial?"

He then gave up his meekness and roared.

"If the murderer's caught, there'll be a trial. And you're *witnesses*. What do you think has been worryin' me all along? You talk about hushin' things up! Ho ho! Counsel for the defense will be all over you. So just you make sure there isn't any real evidence to —"

"Suppose," Blystone interposed in an even tone, "the murderer is never caught?"

A slight quiver went round the table, as though they were sitting at a spiritualistic seance.

"Oh, my son," said H.M. "The murderer is tied up in a sack. The murderer was actually tied up in a sack before either Haye or Ferguson was murdered. Because the Everwide Inquiry Agency, that firm of private snoopers, have found out who bought atropine and who sent the poisoned bottle to Haye. Evidence. Cor! I couldn't have stopped the thing from comin' out if I'd wanted to. And now with Bernard Schumann's ev —"

"Still," interposed Bonita Sinclair in a soft voice, "there is a flaw in the case even so, isn't there? In order to convict anyone, you would have to show

how atropine was put in all our drinks, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said H.M. "That's what I'm goin' to show you right now." He pushed himself up from the table. "We'll reconstruct a bit. You, ma'am, are goin' to mix another batch of cocktails, with the others watching you. Denny is goin' to have another highball. Mr. Schumann is goin' to carry the drinks in here. As for me, *I'll undertake to poison 'em.* Watch me closely, ladies and gents, and see if you can tell how I do it.

"We've heard a good deal in this case," snapped H.M., "about ingenious ways of committin' crimes. Let's have a concludin' one, a true one, to round off the business; and the best of the lot at that. But, before we do, there's one question I'd like to ask."

He glowed at Sir Dennis Blystone.

"You, Denny. How did you come to call for a rye-whisky highball at Haye's party?"

Blystone looked at him sharply. "There are two reasons. First, I rather like rye. Second, it's not commonly served at parties. If I consistently call for rye and ginger-ale, and none is available, I am not pressed to take other drinks when I don't feel like having any at all."

"All right," said H.M. "Get started. Masters will play the part of Haye. Just to show you there's no jiggery-pokery in the mix-up and scramble round the kitchen sink, I'll stay right here where I can't touch the drinks as yet. Out to the kitchen, now."

The next few minutes were among the longest that Sanders remembered. Under the chief inspector, Mrs. Sinclair, Sir Dennis, and Schumann were shepherded out into the kitchen. Lady Blystone sat quietly, her head high. And Marcia plucked at Sanders's sleeve as he was starting for the kitchen.

"No, we don't," she said fiercely, nodding towards H.M. "We stay here and watch *him.* He's the one to keep your eye on."

Faintly from the kitchen came the sound of Masters's voice, mixed with the hiss and splash of running water.

"The cocktail shaker, please. I'll rinse it, as Mr. Haye did. Here you are, Mrs. Sinclair. The glasses —"

Sanders glanced at his wrist-watch. Even the second hand seemed to crawl. In the kitchen there was a scraping of bottles and a brisk banging. H.M. stood motionless, and scratched his nose. Then they heard the rattle of the cocktail shaker.

"Ready, sir!" called Masters from the other room.

"Do as you did the other night," said H.M., without moving. "Have Mrs. Sinclair taste 'em out of the shaker."

Mrs. Sinclair's voice was clear but suddenly shaky. "The cocktails are quite all right, yes. But you're not *really* going to put anything —"

"Carry on," said H.M.

Bernard Schumann came into the living-room with the tray, like an aged waiter. He put it down on a small table near the long refectory one. On the tray stood the nickled shaker, four cocktail-glasses, and one filled tumbler.

Still H.M. did not move.

"Go back to the kitchen, son," he said to Schumann, "with the others." He looked at Sanders. "You keep time. They said, 'between two and three minutes.' Give it two and a half. You others out there!" he roared. "Talk! Somebody imitate a cryin' baby. You hear me?"

It was Masters who complied. The resulting noise was hideous enough to be funny; but nobody laughed.

One minute. Two minutes. Sanders had never known a time so long. Two and a — Sanders made a gesture.

"All right," said H.M.

The intermittent crying of the baby died away. A quiet group, led by a quiet chief inspector, came back into the living-room.

"Good," said H.M. "It's just as it was the other night?"

"Just as it was," said Blystone, putting up a hand to his collar. "Including the fact that you've had the opportunity to drop atro — er — something into something while we were in the kitchen."

"Well, doc?" demanded H.M., looking at Sanders.

"He never went near that tray," declared Sanders, and Marcia nodded confirmation. "Not within six feet of it."

H.M. did go to the tray now. He picked up the tumbler and handed it to Blystone. With a grotesque shake and flourish of the cocktail shaker, he poured out a whitish-looking cocktail into one of the glasses.

"You mixed these," he said to Mrs. Sinclair. "You ought to know, hey? Right, then. You drink this."

Silence. "I would rather not," said Bonita Sinclair. "I have tasted them once. Mr. Schumann brought them in here afterwards. Let him drink it."

Schumann inclined his head courteously. "I have no objection, madam," he said; "since I know who is in charge of proceedings." He reflected, lifting the glass. "For the second time today, I am going to drink a glass which some-

one confidently believes to be poisoned. In time I shall be —

"*God!*" he said involuntarily.

Schumann sprang back, throwing out his hands. The glass dropped and broke with a crash on the tray. Then Schumann wiped his hand across his mouth.

"It's all right," H.M. told him with great reassurance. "There's no poison in there, son. Only a little mouth-wash that won't hurt you. I had to make you taste somethin', or you wouldn't 'a' believed me."

Gingerly Blystone tilted his highball glass. "It's true. There's something in it, and there wasn't anything before. But, Merrivale, *how?* How did you do it?"

"Oh, my eye," roared H.M. "Think, son. It's heartbreakin'ly easy. There's two sets of drinks. One is made of gin, the other of whiskey. One has ginger-ale in it, the other has Cointreau and lemon-juice. But what's the other thing? The only other thing? The thing that's absolutely necessary to both of 'em if they're to be any good at all?"

"Well?"

"Ice," said H.M., sniffing and glowering round. "I thought of it," he went on, "when I heard about Haye standin' by the electric refrigerator and imitating the baby. Ice, son. Ice out of the tray of cubes. D'ye see now?

"Somebody's prepared it. A colorless liquid (atropine) has been poured into the water of a drawer of ice-cubes, and the drawer is pushed in to freeze. Right. The batch of cocktails is mixed, the highball is mixed. The ice-cubes from the drawer are taken out and shoved into each; the shaker is given a couple of rattles; but it's not quite ready.

"Y'see? Mrs. Sinclair tastes the cocktails. But the ice hasn't had time to melt and loosen its cargo of atropine into the stuff. The same rule applies to the highball, which Mrs. S. tastes as well. Then the drinks are brought in here, put on the table, and left for two or three minutes. When the group comes into this room, the host picks up the shaker, automatically gives it a couple of rattles (which spread the poison better), and pours out. The machine is now loaded; and the carnage is terrible.

"The murderer knew that Haye drank only White Lady cocktails. His guests would all be certain to join him, except possibly Denny Blystone. But Blystone would have his favorite rye whisky and ginger-ale. You're lucky, Denny. If you'd been in the habit of takin' sherry or any one of a dozen drinks that don't require ice, you'd be dead now. The murderer would have had to kill you. But a sweet-tastin' highball is pretty sickening without it.

And the ice went in.

"That's why the individual doses of poison were so varied: the murderer, of course, couldn't estimate 'em. That's why the murderer had to kill Haye with a swordstick: he couldn't pick and choose his victims with the poison alone. Afterwards, the murderer simply rinsed out the shaker and refilled it with harmless cocktails. He wanted us to think — as we did think — that the doses were administered in each individual glass by one of the guests at the party."

Blystone stared at him.

"By one of the guests at —? But we didn't do it! We couldn't have done it. None of us went near that refrigerator. Nobody here had the opportunity to freeze poison into a drawer of ice-cubes!"

"I know that, son," said H.M. somberly.

"Then who is the murderer?"

" 'Judith Adams,' " said H.M.

"Oh, yes," he went on. "I know the real Judith Adams is dead. I mean the crashin' hint that was intended to be conveyed by that name. For the real secret of Felix Haye is the secret of his last joke — his masterpiece. It's betrayed the murderer neatly, as Haye meant it should. The name 'Judith Adams' was written on the outside of one of those five boxes. But inside the box, *inside*, there was evidence referrin' to the dirty work of a very different person."

"The man's mad," said Blystone wildly. "What would be the point of having one name outside and another inside? It was to be opened in the presence of three solicitors, wasn't it? They would discover the difference, wouldn't they?"

"Exactly," said H.M. "It would be discovered. But not until all three members of the firm opened it in each other's presence. All three, son. The most iron-bound, gruesomely respectable, Spartan-honest firm of lawyers in all London. And they would discover —"

"You mean that the murderer is —?"

"Yes," said H.M. "*All right, Bob!*"

The door to the bedroom burst open, and rebounded against the wall. With Sergeant Pollard at one side, and plain-clothes P. C. Wright at the other, a prisoner was dragged in. The watchers had one glimpse of a rolling walk, a bunched nose, and staring eyes magnified behind a tottering pince-nez — the solicitor, Charles Drake.

CHAPTER TWENTY

IT WAS nearly an hour later, when much of the tumult and the shouting had passed, before H.M. resumed.

"Before I proceed to show you that Charles Drake, junior partner of Drake, Rogers & Drake, was the only person in the whole cursed case who could have killed Felix Haye," said H.M., "I'd better emphasize the extreme devilishness of the device Haye had prepared to snaffle Drake in case Drake was the murderer."

H.M. surveyed the silent group with an air of broad-mindedness. "What else did Haye go out for except crooks? He attracted them; or, I ought to say, they attracted him. And what was the prize, the ripe plum, of all his collection? Why, a twister in the most crusted firm of solicitors in London, Drake, Rogers & Drake. Young Charles Drake (he's fifty-three) has been pinchin' securities entrusted to them in a way that —

"I've told you about old man Drake, Charles's father. He values his integrity, his Creator, and his family in the order named. So does Wilbert Rogers.

"And that's where Haye's scheme was so neat. He entrusts to that firm, to be opened in case of his death, evidence incriminatin' a member of it! — the one place in the world where Charles Drake will never think of lookin' for it. Haye knew that Drake, Rogers & Drake never followed instructions of that kind unless all three of 'em were present to open what had been deposited there. Charles Drake would be caught by his own father. And why (thinks Haye) should Charles suspect that innocent little box labeled 'Judith Adams'? The woman's name alone would divert his mind; as, burn me, it diverted ours.

"But Felix Haye wasn't very intelligent, y'know. He underestimated Drake. Badly."

The prisoner had been removed, and he had said not a word the whole time: though Dr. Sanders remembered those large, frightened gray eyes moving behind his pince-nez like rats behind a screen. The only upset had been a sudden and unexpected fit of hysterics on the part of Bonita Sinclair, which had calmed down now.

And, at the chief inspector's words, several persons had sat up.

"I must insist," said Bernard Schumann with some acerbity, "that I object

to being called a criminal."

"I am not sure that I do," said Blystone thoughtfully. "But I still don't see that the name Judith Adams in any way points to Charles Drake. You maintain that Drake is the only person who could have committed the crime; and I don't understand that either."

H.M. stared fishily at *The Lair of the Dragon* for a little time before he answered.

"All right," he growled. "Let's work it out."

"You know the theory of the crime we had already decided on. The guests drank atropine. The murderer stabbed Haye, slipped out of the house, went to Gray's Inn, burgled the office, returned with the loot, and strewed it in people's pockets.

"At the first, and up until last night, I thought the murder and burglary at Drake's office must have been committed by Peter Ferguson, actin' in collusion with his wife, Mrs. Sinclair. It solved our major problem: how had the drinks been hocused?

"In that case all the answers were simple. Ferguson sneaked in and poisoned the drinks while they were unattended here in the living-room. Afterwards he went out of the house by the back door, unbolting it, went to Gray's Inn, cracked the crib, returned, and re-bolted the door. *He* didn't even need to pay any attention to bolted doors.

"Of course, there were some thunderin' objections to it — if Ferguson were the murderer, why should he hang about the building after the crime, and bray like an ass, and then disappear? But it was the best theory we had. That was why I lent myself to that very rummy burglary last night.

"But you know what happened. Bang went the whole theory. Ferguson was polished off with atropine — I saw the murderer's hands — at the same time Mrs. Sinclair was sittin' with Masters at Scotland Yard.

"With Ferguson out of the way, it seemed absolutely proved that the murder of Haye must have been committed by one of the guests at the party. There was a witness, Marcia Blystone, at the front door. But a guest could easily have come downstairs, got out the back door, gone to Gray's Inn, returned, and bolted the door again.

"But if we excluded outsiders, back we came to the original question of how the drinks were poisoned. The guests swore it was impossible. Then I woke up to the refrigerator trick and the frozen atropine.

"So far, easy. We think we've established that the only possible murderers

are Mrs. Sinclair, Sir Dennis Blystone, or Bernard Schumann. We can add Riordan the caretaker, who was also in the building. But that's the lot.

"Now, if any of you first three made the poisoned ice-cubes, when did you do it? Haye arrived here at twenty minutes to eleven. Schumann arrived some five minutes later; and Mrs. Sinclair and Denny Blystone at close on eleven. Immediately afterwards, the cocktails were mixed. It's impossible that after *getting* here one of these persons walked out into the kitchen, removed the tray already in the refrigerator, knocked out the old cubes, poured in new water with atropine added, and replaced it — all without bein' noticed by anybody. No, that's out; and besides there wouldn't have been time for the new cubes to freeze.

"So the poisoned cubes were made at some time previous to fifteen minutes to eleven that night."

Schumann leaned forward, lifting his hand. "Is that why the police were so anxious to find out what all of us had been doing *up to* the time we met here that night?"

H.M. nodded. "Sure. But I hadn't got very far yet. I thought: Could we narrow down the time durin' which the murderer froze the cubes?

"Yes, there was a witness who could help. The witness was Charles Drake, the helpful lawyer, who gave a statement to Bob Pollard. Charles Drake went to Haye's flat at six o'clock that evenin'. He went there (in person, mind you) to return a bottle of ale, just been sent back from the analytical chemist's. It's not often that the junior partner of a crusted old firm scurries about on errands that could be done by the post or an office-boy. But Drake, level-headed Drake, had already heard over the phone about Haye's proposed party that night, and so he was curious.

"What happened when Drake got there? Well, Felix Haye was dressin' to go out to dinner. Charles Drake went out to the kitchen, where he put down the bottle of ale. He spent some time there — as he said — writin' a warning sign to hang on the bottle. During this interval, Haye was in the bedroom, shouting through the flat.

"But Haye had been drinkin'. Cocktails! Ho? Then there couldn't 'a' been any atropine in the ice he used at that time. And he went out immediately afterwards, with Drake, at some minutes past six. It seemed to me that the hocused cubes must have been made between the time Haye went out to dinner and the time he returned at twenty minutes to eleven.

"So. But bright and early this morning, we got two new bits of evidence: the

statement of Peter Sinclair Ferguson, and the persistent puzzle of the 'Judith Adams' nobody could identify.

"I looked at Ferguson's statement, and I groaned with awful fervor. Now, Ferguson wasn't a lily of truth; but there was no reason to doubt his account of the murder of Haye, because his whole conduct was based on it. He was murdered just because he knew what he knew.

"But just listen to what he says. Gimme a copy of that statement, Masters.

"He's describing how he stood in the bedroom of this flat, watching this room through a door standin' a bit open. He tells how all of you sat round this table, and Haye started to give you hell. He hears that the five rummy boxes are in the offices of Drake, Rogers & Drake. He's ready to go and burgle.

"But directly after that comes the followin' surprising and altogether meaningless remark: '*I watched the wardrobe, too, which made me get out.*'

"The only wardrobe in this flat is that whackin' great one in the bedroom. But why should he watch it? Why should it make him get out?

"Was it possible, my lads, that there was somebody else in the flat, an outsider, hidin' in the wardrobe?

"Follow Ferguson from there. He goes downstairs, looks up the address of Drake's office, and hears someone come hurrying downstairs, and follows. They both go out the back door, leavin' it open. In the street Ferguson sees who the person is, and writes: '*You will be surprised when I tell you.*'

"The 'person' goes to the solicitors' offices, climbs up a fire escape, and seems — 'seems' — to turn the catch of the window with a knife. He goes in, and comes out in two minutes. Time, twelve fifteen *et seq.*

"I repeat: two minutes. Then Ferguson, a practiced housebreakin' eel, follows and has a look round. Hear Ferguson again: '*A box painted with Haye's name was lying on the floor with its lock broken — a difficult job. There was nothing in it. I went all through the offices. . . . It was half-past twelve when I left.*'

"Was the burglary done at that time, by the 'person' Ferguson had followed from Great Russell Street?

"I'll submit to you that it's not possible. And is that all? Not a bit of it. What do we hear this mornin' from Drake, Rogers & Drake? Durin' the same burglary some valuable securities belongin' to Haye have been pinched, not out of the same box, but out of the safe. All in two minutes.

"Is Ferguson lyin' about it? Possibly; but, if he is, where is the meanin' in any word he's written and why is he murdered? Out of Ferguson's statement we get the followin' points:

"*Point One.* The burglary at Drake, Rogers & Drake's was not committed at a quarter past twelve. It was committed at a much earlier time.

"*Point Two.* It was committed by someone with a key to the safe of Drake, Rogers & Drake.

"*Point Three.* It was committed by someone who knew Felix Haye had securities in that office, what securities they were, and where they were to be found.

"But (again assumin' Ferguson's story to be true) where does that get us? If the burglary had already been committed, we can't now say that the 'person' — at twelve-fifteen — scooped up the evidence, (the four watches, the alarm-clock works, and the rest of it), took all this stuff back with him to Great Russell Street, and strewed it in people's pockets. It was gone already.

"Gone, in short, long before a quarter-past twelve. But those articles couldn't be put into people's pockets until the guests were unconscious, and the guests weren't unconscious until about ten minutes to twelve. So —

"*The murderer put that stuff in their pockets at the same time he stabbed Haye with the swordstick, between ten minutes to twelve and midnight. His work was then over. Afterwards he left the building, went to Gray's Inn, and took one last look round in the solicitors' offices to make sure nothin' had been overlooked.*

"Then he went — home. Oh? You deny there's a suggestion of an outsider goin' home?

"After seein' the murderer leave, after investigatin' the solicitors' offices himself, Ferguson then goes back to Great Russell Street himself. Here's what he says:

" '*The damned back door, by which I and this other person had left the building, was now bolted on the inside again.*

" '*I had not expected this. I did not understand it.*'

"Well, now . . . If the murderer had been a member of Haye's party, an insider, why should Ferguson be surprised at that? For, after all, the murderer would have been inside. No, my lads. It surprised him because he thought the outside murderer had finished work, dusted his hands, and gone home.

"But there, it'd appear, our great big beautiful bloomin' theory collapses. Back door bolted: front door watched: outsider phooey. Hey? But it wasn't worryin' me so much as it had before.

"It had begun to be plain, who might do.

"Good old 'Judith Adams'!" said H.M. with feeling. "Denny Blystone told me about her, and her book on dragons. It wasn't evidence. It wasn't anything

except an example of Felix Haye in his vilest punning mood. Judith Adams's taste for languages which even Timothy Riordan remarked on, gave him his information. Oh, my eye."

He pointed his finger malevolently.

"You, Denny. Derivation of the word 'dragon'?"

Schumann answered. "*I* have pointed out that, Sir Henry. From the Latin *draco* meaning a tame snake,—"

"A tame snake!" grunted H.M. "Sure. A tame snake. Now listen —" he picked up the book — "to what good old Judith has to say about it: 'The *draco* of the Romans was not the fire-breathing serpent of Christian legend; but a tame, though occasionally venomous, snake which was kept as a pet by the wealthier families. From it is also derived the English word *drake*, meaning a small piece of artillery. But it is notable that in Spanish the Latin *draco* is *el draco*, and was applied in Elizabethan times, during his raids, to Sir Francis Drake.' Felix Haye couldn't resist it: either the tame snake, or the small piece of artillery, or the actual repetition of the name. He wasn't very subtle, I'm afraid. And he died because he wasn't. *El Draco*, Drake —"

"My assistant, Mr. El Hakim," said Schumann, "is half-Spanish, as I have mentioned. Yesterday the sergeant could not understand why he was so amused when the sergeant was arguing bitterly about that book over the telephone. Haye has often referred to Charles Drake under that name."

"Let's get back to real proof," growled H.M.

"Now, I'd already asked Masters to check up on the movements of Mrs. Sinclair, Denny Blystone, and Bernard Schumann for the entire day of Haye's murder. I was pretty sure the atropine was put into the ice-cubes between six o'clock — when Drake was visitin' here — and twenty minutes to eleven. Could any of 'em have done it? Moreover, could any of 'em have carried out the real burglary at Drake, Rogers & Drake's place?

"And they couldn't. None of 'em came near this flat or Drake's office.

"But who did come to this flat at six o'clock?

"Charles Drake, and only Drake. Who had a golden opportunity to load the ice-cubes with atropine, while Haye was dressin' in the bedroom? Drake. Who spent a long time in the kitchen? Drake. Who knew every detail of the party that night, when it was to begin, and who was to be there? Drake.

"But tie him even tighter! Felix Haye drank iced but undrugged cocktails at six o'clock. Then he left. Could *anybody* have come into the flat afterwards and done the dirty besides Drake?

"No. Just as he was goin' out, Haye instructed the caretaker, Timothy Riordan, to come upstairs and tidy the flat. Which Timothy Riordan did straight-away. He then, like a true son, proceeded to sit down in the kitchen and get roaring drunk on Haye's whisky. Even when he left, he took the rest of the bottle along. But, drunk or sober, nobody could have crept into that little kitchen and messed about with the ice while he was there.

"Of course," said H.M. apologetically, "you can say that the sinister murderer was Timothy himself, and that *he* poisoned the ice. But I'm afraid you'll find it full of holes.

"All the same, though, one thing remained as a howlin' objection. If Drake was the murderer, how did that back door get itself bolted and chained? Timothy was full of Irish; and, when he heard the open back door bangin' at a quarter past twelve, he came up like a loyal son and bolted it.

"Charles Drake's whole course is pretty clear now. Drake has probably known for months that Haye knew about his crooked work in the firm. How much Haye had on him he wasn't sure. But Drake, bein' a practical man, took practical measures. He sent Haye a bottle of ale loaded with atropine.

"Drake talked to Pollard like a cynical artist in crime, an artist of ripe experience and thought: and maybe Drake believed he was. Drake knew one thing, anyhow. The only way to buy poison invisibly is to buy it in such enormous quantities that nobody ever thinks twice about it. Drake set himself up as a 'firm' manufacturing eye-lotions. He bought a ten-ounce bottle of pure atropine from the wholesalers, so much that it couldn't even be thought of as a poison.

"But Haye wasn't havin' the ale. I got an idea his suspicions were pretty ripe and fresh. Otherwise why did he bring that bottle to his *solicitors*, and have *them* — meanin' Charles — send it to the analytical chemist? He talked a lot about it to Drake. He asked Drake to put private detectives on the trail.

"Then Haye came chargin' round with his five boxes, burstin' with delight over the neat trap he'd prepared for his enemies: both for his other enemies and for Drake, in case there was funny business. Drake saw through him. I'll lay you a fiver to a cold kipper that Drake understood 'Judith Adams,' and opened his own box, very shortly afterwards.

"We dunno what Haye had on him. Drake isn't likely to tell us, d'ye see. But the contents of that box must'a shown that Haye's real knowledge, his other knowledge, must be hair-raisin'. And that was too dangerous. Now Haye certainly had to die.

"Drake waited for the party or board meetin' that was to come off. Haye undoubtedly had let drop hints about it already, and Drake was gettin' ready. He had to stage a fake burglary and pinch all the boxes, the others as well as his own. He opened 'em all and found curious articles inside, with full descriptions and histories written by Haye — a tireless annotator — about Blystone, Schumann, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Sinclair Ferguson.

"Then Drake had his great idea. Suppose, on the occasion of the party, he could manage to dose the lot of 'em with atropine? Not kill 'em! Just make 'em unconscious. Then he could enter the flat in safety. He could make a little search to see if Haye had any more evidence. He could kill Haye with Haye's famous swordstick or even with the saber Haye kept there. Haye would be skewered, and three potential murderers would sit round him unconscious in the room. In their pockets he would put a little evidence. A *little*, that's all. Incongruous and rummy things, like watches and a magnifyin'-glass, that'd be unpleasantly difficult to explain when the tableau was discovered — as he meant it to be discovered.

"One point was uncomfortable. The evidence against Mrs. Sinclair consisted of a couple of Haye annotated letters. Nothin' more. If he shoved those documents into her handbag, the cat would be out of that handbag with a reverberatin' yowl. But there was all the low-down on Peter Ferguson, her husband, gained by Haye through kind remarks of Mrs. Sinclair."

Here H.M. blinked over his spectacles at Bonita.

"Y'see, ma'am, you didn't really believe Peter Ferguson was dead. Now, did you? Otherwise you'da collected that insurance-policy. Haye didn't believe he was dead. But nobody knew where he was. So Charles Drake decided to take the quick-lime and phosphorus (relics of Ferguson's old burglar's kit, preserved by you and obtained by Haye) and shove them into your handbag to underline the connection between you and Ferguson."

Bonita Sinclair smiled. "May I ask a question? Suppose Drake himself were invited to the gathering? What if Haye invited him?"

H.M. stared at her. "Oh, my wench!" he said. "*And spoil the joke?* Spoil Haye's beautiful scheme? How could he let Drake know he suspected without either tippin' off the Judith Adams game or at least lettin' Drake know Haye's ideas about him? Oh, no. Drake knew he was safe there.

"Well, when Drake received the word, 'Tonight's the night,' he was ready. He arranged to call on Haye, *circa* six o'clock. Haye would be dressin' for dinner and swillin' a cocktail before he went out. Drake therefore had admirable ex-

cuse, or could make excuse, to renew the ice in the refrigerator.

"His 'burglary' of the office he must have managed between six-thirty and, say, ten-thirty, after the staff had gone home. Whether he stole Haye's securities then or a long time ago we don't know now. He broke the lock of the deed-box, fooled about with the window, and was off again.

"He was certainly in Great Russell Street before ten-thirty. He was goin' to sneak into the flat and wait for the guests' arrival. I think he'd got a duplicate key to Haye's flat, but he didn't need it. The door was open, because Timothy the caretaker was guzzlin' whisky in the kitchen.

"Charles Drake got into the bedroom and waited. He didn't prowl about much, except to disconnect the telephone. Then he hid in the wardrobe.

"You know what happened. His worst moment was when Peter Ferguson suddenly appeared in the bedroom. Drake didn't know Ferguson or what in blazes he was doin'. But Drake wasn't worried. Ferguson had seen the people in the other room: he hadn't seen Drake, or so our solicitor thought. And Ferguson slipped out just before the whole company keeled over.

"Drake's fault was that he worked too fast. He put the articles in various persons' pockets. He nerved himself and struck Haye through the back with the umbrella-swordstick. Then he wanted to get out of there, fast.

"His artful purpose was to suggest that one of the 'drugged' guests had crept out of there, gone to Gray's Inn, burgled his office, and returned. He damned near did plant that immutably and finally in our minds. That was why he left all the doors open behind him and the swordstick propped up on the stairs.

"The offices of the Anglo-Egyptian company were dark. He didn't know Ferguson was followin' him."

H.M. broke off and looked at Schumann.

"I say, son. You were tellin' the chief inspector that Ferguson knew Charles Drake personally? You said so this afternoon, didn't you?"

Schumann nodded. "Yes. I have heard Ferguson talk about it as much as ten years ago. He said that Drake's rolling walk, like a sailor's, was distinctive."

"Sure," said H.M. "Ordinarily, Charles Drake would'a gone straight out the front door instead of the back. But — he looked out through the glass front doors, and he saw — " H.M. turned to Marcia. "You, waitin' there under the lamp dead in front of him.

"Drake had a brief look round at his own office, just to prove there was somebody there; and also really to fool with the catch on the window and show it was an outside job. At a quarter-past twelve he went home to Bloomsbury

Square, only ten minutes' walk away. Naturally it was really the pursuer Ferguson that the night-watchman saw climbin' out of the office window at just twelve-thirty. By that time, a'course, Drake was home in time to answer the telephone-call from the night-watchman, screamin' about a burglary.

"He must'a wondered what in blazes was up, with the night-watchman sayin' the burglar left at twelve-thirty and providin' a rare alibi for himself. On his way to investigate the burglary, he nipped up into Great Russell Street. His intention was to phone the police there was somethin' wrong in Haye's flat.

"But he saw Marcia Blystone and Dr. Sanders arguin' under the lamp, and then going into the building.

"The rest of it Masters'll be able to fill in with routine detail. Ferguson had gone back to Great Russell Street, as his manuscript says. He was there at the discovery of the murder. He wasn't quite sure of it all; the things in people's pockets bothered him horribly; but he knew Drake was a murderer. And the next day he got in touch with Drake with beautiful schemes o' blackmail. Obviously he wouldn't share such a rich vein of gold with his wife. When she had been taken to Scotland Yard, he invited Drake to Cheyne Walk for a chat. Drake was ready for that too. You know how.

"But the saddest part of it all was that the firm of private detectives, the Everwide, the firm Drake employed himself, had traced the poison to him before either Haye or Ferguson was murdered. Since it was a matter of murder and they value their reputation, they first told Drake they had information — and then went to the police. When Masters and I heard they had tipped Drake off, we knew it was time to hit Drake hard with the facts and a reconstruction o' the murder (he was with Pollard and Wright, forcibly, in the other room). We had got from Mr. Schumann here the rest of the evidence. He not only knew of Haye's Judith Adams game, but —"

"I was the last to lose consciousness at this table," said Schumann very quietly. "I thought I saw him come into the room before I was gone. It might have been an atropine hallucination; though I know now it was not. But, God help me, how could I speak without giving myself away for — for other things?"

He drew a shaking breath, and they were all quiet.

Outside it had begun to rain, softly at first, and then with a deepening rustle, until it sounded like the rain of two nights ago. Sanders remembered another thing, too. Two nights ago he had wrestled with a problem at the Harris Institute: it was the Smith case, and the problem was how arsenic had been introduced into ice-cream. Now he knew.

In the midst of their silence Lady Blystone got to her feet.

"Do I understand," she said quietly, "that this case will come to trial?"

"That's right," said H.M., and looked at her without expression.

"And all these things about my husband will be mentioned in court?"

Blystone smiled. "Never mind, Judy," he soothed her. "I can take care of myself. I don't mind."

"But I mind," she said. "Why do you believe I have endured all this? Coming here tonight, even? Endured other things? Because I will not have disgrace in any family with which I am concerned. I cannot stand it. It would kill me. I shall instruct my solicitors to file divorce proceedings tomorrow. It will hardly be necessary for me —" she did not look at Bonita Sinclair — "to mention the name of the co-respondent here. Then at least I can disassociate myself with the matter as soon as possible, if technically only."

She walked out of the room, not hurrying. Blystone jumped to his feet.

"Yes, go after her," said Bonita Sinclair. "Go after her, and lose the rest of your soul and peace of mind. Or stay with what you're pleased to call a mercenary harlot like me, and take the chance you know you have of being happy. Do as you like, and be damned to you. But first try to say a word of thanks to the only friend who would try to help you when you really came to harm."

H.M. was making sputtering noises of general rage and wildness. But Sanders was then looking at Marcia. She disengaged her hand quietly from his. She reached over and touched the other woman's arm.

"Mrs. Sinclair," said Marcia. "I'm sorry. I beg your pardon."

THE END

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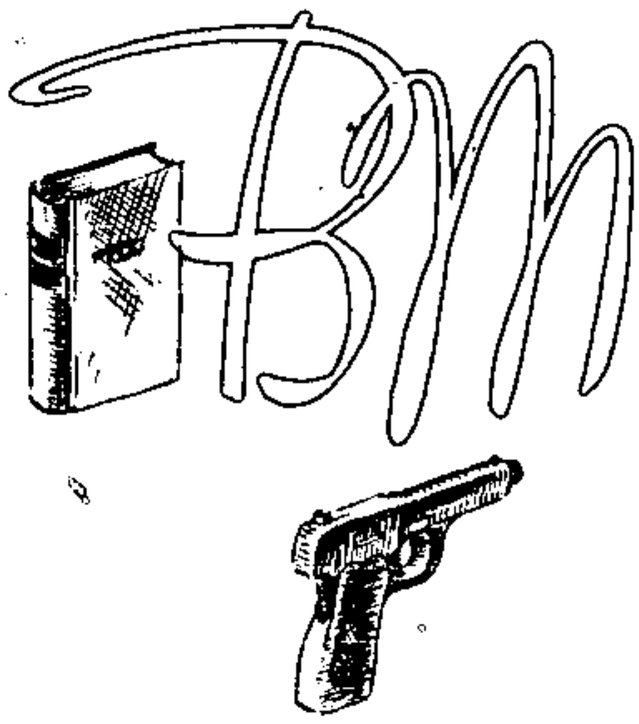


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