

SUPERINTENDENT WILSON'S HOLIDAY

by

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IN A TELEPHONE CABINET

The Downshire Hill Murder (to give it its newspaper name) was discovered about half-past nine on a Sunday morning of May, 1920, one of those lovely mornings with which our climate tries to pretend that it really knows how to make a summer. Superintendent Henry Wilson of New Scotland Yard was walking along Downshire Hill, Hampstead, in company with his friend Dr. Michael Prendergast. It was long before the sensational death of Radlett, the millionaire,¹ which, as everyone will remember, covered England and America with placards, and drove Wilson, who had committed the unpardonable sin of detecting an ex-Horne Secretary in shady courses, into the exile of private practice. He was still a C.I.D. man, liable at any moment to be called from bed and board to attend to public affairs, and it was not without some misgivings that he had obeyed the commands of his sister, with whom he was staying, to put himself for one day at least beyond reach of the telephone. However, it was a wonderful morning; and Michael Prendergast, one of his few intimate friends, who had spent the Saturday evening and night with him, had added his entreaties; and the result was that the two men, in flannels and tennis shirts, were now walking briskly down the road to the North London Station, where they intended to catch a train for Richmond.

¹ See *The Death of a Millionaire*, by G. D. H. and Margaret Cole

"You'd almost think you were in the country here," Prendergast said appreciatively, noting the trees which filled the little front gardens and the young green of the Heath which closed the end of the road. "There was an owl hooting outside my window all night."

"They do come close to the houses here," Wilson replied, "but I never heard of one actually nesting in the wall of a house before."

"Nor I. Why?" For answer Wilson pointed to the ivy-clad wall of a little house about a hundred yards farther down, which was only just visible through a mass of lilac and young chestnut. "Something flew in and out of the ivy just there, between those boughs," he said.

Prendergast stared at him. "You have sharp eyes. I was looking at the lilac, and I didn't see anything. How do you know it was an owl, anyway, at this distance?"

"I don't," Wilson said. "It may not have been. I couldn't see it at all clearly. But it was too big for any other bird. Anyway, somebody else appears to have seen it too." They were now approaching the ivy-clad house, which, though hidden from view on the west, was quite open in front, and standing by its gate on the pavement was a man to whom it appeared to be an object of enormous interest. As the two friends passed, he looked up at them with a dubious air, which suggested that he was wondering whether to open a conversation; and Prendergast, who never could resist conversing with all and sundry, responded promptly to the suggestion.

"Have you seen the owl, too?" he asked.

"Owl!" said the man. "I ain't seen no owl. But I've seen a man go in there," he pointed to the house. "What's he want to go in for, that's what I want to know."

"Perhaps it's his house," Prendergast suggested.

"Ho!" said the man. "Then what's he want to go in by the window for, that's what I want to know. Banging on the door fit to wake the dead, he was. When he sees me, he says, 'Something wrong here,' he says. 'Can't get no answer,' and he outs with a knife and gets in at the window. And what's he want to bang for, if it's his house, and what's wrong in there, that's what I want to know." He spat suspiciously.

In a moment his question was answered in a sufficiently dramatic manner. There was a sound of feet within the house; the front door, which was only a matter of twenty yards from the gate, opened suddenly, and a little man, pale and frightened in appearance, looked out and yelled in a voice of surprising power to come from a person of his physique, "Murder!"

All three started; and indeed the cry had sounded as if it must reach Camden Town at least. On seeing their astonished faces the man at the door looked rather confused, and coming down to the gate, said in a considerably lower tone, "Will you fetch the police, please, gentlemen? Mr. Carluke's been murdered."

He then closed the gate, and made as if to return to the house; but Prendergast, with a nod from

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Wilson, followed him up the path. "Can I do anything?" he said pleasantly. "I'm a doctor."

"'Tisn't a doctor he wants, poor fellow," said the little man. "He's as cold as a fish. He must have died hours ago." He stopped with his hand on the hall door. "If you'll fetch the police, sir, I'll stay with him. I don't think the house ought to be left alone. And there's nobody there."

"That's all right," Wilson, who had stopped to speak to the man at the gate, now came up to them. "I am from Scotland Yard. Here's my card." He produced one from his cigarette case, and Michael looked on with amusement, wondering what use he had intended to make of his official dignity at Richmond. The little man took it gingerly, as if it had been a spider, and looked with obvious distaste at the owner's clothes. Quite clearly he thought that policemen ought to dress as policemen and not stroll about in flannel trousers.

"I've sent that man to the Rosslyn Hill station with a message," Wilson went on. "They'll be here in a few minutes. But, as you say, the place oughtn't to be left alone. So, if you'll show me where the body is, I can start making the preliminary investigations, and my friend here can see how he was murdered. You're certain he was, Mr.—?"

"Barton," said the little man. "Edward Barton. He was murdered all right, sir. Shot right through the head. His brains are all over the floor, poor fellow. This way, sir." He seemed a trifle hurt at the doubt thrown on his diagnosis.

"Well, well, we'll see," Wilson said soothingly. "Where is he?"

"Telephone cabinet," said Mr. Barton, pointing. "By the stairs on the right. That glass door. It's his foot that's holding it open. I haven't touched him. I just made sure he was dead, poor fellow."

II

It was not a pleasant sight which greeted them when Wilson pulled open the door of the little dark telephone cabinet; and it thoroughly justified Mr. Barton's confidence in his own verdict. On the floor, crumpled up, with one foot half across the sill of the door, lay what once must have been a hale man of between fifty and sixty years of age. His body had fallen in a heap, facing the telephone, and the fingers of both hands were curved as if he had died gripping something which he had subsequently dropped. But the cause of death was plain enough; for the whole front of his face and part of his head had been pierced in a number of places, and the blood and brains which had oozed out from the wounds had covered the floor. Michael Prendergast had been through the war, and thought himself used to death; but the sight of the old man lying shattered in that gloomy, musty shambles stirred emotions in him which he believed wholly conquered and he had to struggle with a violent feeling of nausea before he dared step across the threshold.

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"Go carefully, Michael," Wilson warned; and Prendergast noted with shame and annoyance that he seemed wholly unmoved by the sight. "Don't tread in more than you can help. We'll want all the clues we can get." He surveyed with displeasure some unmistakable footprints in the blood that covered the floor. "You've been in here, Mr. Barton?"

"Of course I have," said Mr. Barton in injured tones. "I went to see if I could do anything for him, naturally. When I found I couldn't, I looked round to see if there was a revolver or anything anywhere. In case he shot himself, you see—in case it was suicide."

"Turn on the light, will you?" came Prendergast's voice from where he was bending over the body. "I can't see anything in this coal-hole."

"It's broken," said Mr. Barton. "I tried it when I came in." He was, however, obediently reaching his hand to the switch, a porcelain one of the old pattern, when Wilson forestalled him. With a handkerchief wrapped round his hand he turned the switch backwards and forwards several times, but without result.

"It's broken all right," he said. "Probably the bulb's gone. You must make shift with my torch, Michael. But be as quick as you can. It's pretty obvious that we can't do anything for this poor fellow now, except to find his murderer, and I want to get on with that as soon as possible." While Prendergast finished his examination he stood still in the doorway, staring at the little room as if

memorizing its contents, at the telephone, which stood unperturbed on a rather high shelf at the far end, at a shelf above containing two or three old directories, and at a baize curtain which fell from the telephone shelf to the ground.

"What's behind that curtain, do you know?" he asked Barton.

"Boots—and some old rubbish, I think," the latter replied. "Mr. Carluke used to shove any stuff he didn't want there."

"You knew him quite well, then?"

"So-so," said Mr. Barton. "As well as anyone did, I daresay. He hadn't a great many friends; he was a bit of a queer old cuss, and didn't mind how much he was alone."

Prendergast straightened himself. "That's all I can do here," he said. "The poor chap's dead, of course—been dead about twelve hours, I should say, off-hand. He can't have lived more than a few seconds after he was shot."

"Shot from close quarters?" Wilson asked.

"Very close. Not more than a few inches, I should say. And—he was shot by a blunderbuss."

"Blunderbuss!" exclaimed the other two.

"Blunderbuss or something with an enormous charge of soft-nosed slugs in it. Beastly little things. Here are two I picked off the floor, and there are some more in his head. There must have been dozens in the charge."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Barton, with a kind of irritable incredulity. "Why should anyone want to shoot poor Carluke with a blunderbuss?"

"That's what we have to find out," said Wilson. "Perhaps, as you know the house, Mr. Barton, you'd take us into a room where we can talk."

The little man led the way into a small room which was obviously a sort of study or morning-room, and motioned Wilson and his companion to chairs. In broad daylight, Prendergast studied him with some interest, but found little to repay his scrutiny. He looked a very ordinary type of middle-class clerk or shopkeeper, about forty-five or fifty years old, with a bald crown fringed with grayish hair that had once been ginger, a ragged ginger moustache, and face and features of no particular shape. He appeared considerably upset and distressed by the position in which he found himself, rather more so than Prendergast would have expected, though, of course, it must be very trying for any friend of the murdered man. For all his agitation, though, he answered Wilson's questions clearly enough.

"Can you tell me Mr. Carluke's full name, and how you came to be a friend of his?" Wilson began.

"Harold Carluke," Mr. Burton replied. "Only we weren't exactly friends, as I told you, more kind of acquaintances. We came together through working in the same place, and we used to play chess a bit and go for a walk together now and then and so on."

"What place was that?"

"Capital and Counties Bank. Hampstead branch. Mr. Carluke is the cashier, and I'm head counter clerk."

"Had he any relations, do you know? Was he married?"

No, he wasn't married, Mr. Barton said. And he didn't think he'd any relatives. He'd once or twice spoken of a nephew, rather a wild young fellow, who seemed to give him some trouble. But that was all. Mr. Carluke wasn't the man to talk about his family, nor the kind you could put questions to. Not the sort many knew anything about.

"How comes it," Wilson asked, "that he is apparently alone in the house? Didn't he keep any servants?"

Barton explained that he did not. Mr. Carluke, it would appear, was something of a fussy old maid, and did not like to see servants about the house. So he employed only a daily woman who came in after he had left for business in the morning to clean and leave his supper laid for him, and departed before he returned. On Sundays she did not come at all. "You never saw anyone in such a bait as he was," Mr. Barton added, "if he found her in the house any time after he'd come home."

"What if he were ill?" Michael Prendergast's profession suggested to him. But it appeared that the question had not arisen. Mr. Carluke's health was excellent; he had never been known to miss a day at the bank.

"This charwoman, she must have had a key?" Wilson asked.

"I suppose she must have. But she doesn't come in on a Sunday. Besides the door was bolted and chained when I got in."

"The front door, you mean?"

"Yes; but the back door was locked and bolted too."

"Oh!" Wilson took this in. "You had a look round, then, before giving the alarm?"

"Only the ground floor," Barton licked his lips and looked at him with a kind of frightened appeal. "I couldn't see anything I could do for *him*. So I thought I might just see—if there was anyone else about."

"And was there?"

Barton shook his head. "No. Not a sign. But I wasn't long at it. Then I opened the door."

"I see," said Wilson. "How did you get in yourself?"

"Through that window"—pointing. Wilson crossed and looked at the window, whose catch had plainly been forced back.

"Why did you break in?"

"Couldn't get any answer. I'd called to go for a walk with Mr. Carluke as we'd arranged. Then I knocked and rang and couldn't make anyone hear. And I was a good bit behind my time, too, so I got a bit anxious—I thought he might be ill, perhaps. So I got in."

"I see. When did you last see him?"

"Last night."

"What time?"

"About—about nine o'clock," said Mr. Barton, licking his lips again and looking considerably distressed. Prendergast gave a start of surprise; then, remembering that he was in effect representing the law, pulled himself together and tried to look as impassive as Wilson. No wonder the little man was showing signs of alarm. His own position was certainly dubious.

"Could you tell us what happened?" Wilson inquired. Mr. Barton could, and did, not without a good many nervous glances at Wilson's face. He had gone round at Mr. Carluke's invitation for high tea and a game of chess. He had had to leave about nine o'clock because he had promised to fetch his wife home from an evening party at some neighbours' in Hendon; but the two men had arranged to go for a country walk on the Sunday. Barton had then left, arranging to call at nine o'clock in the morning to fetch his friend, and Carluke had seen him out of the house and walked with him as far as the corner of Willow Road, where they had parted. Then Barton had gone on to fetch his wife; but they had stayed very much longer at the party than they had intended and had not got back to their home in Hendon until nearly one. As soon as he knew they were going to be late, he had tried to telephone Mr. Carluke to suggest a less early start in the morning; but though he had tried twice, once from his friend's house and once from his own when he returned, he had got no answer. "I supposed he was out," Barton said. "Though it was a bit odd, though, because he said he was going straight to bed when he left me. He liked to keep early hours. So I tried again; but there was still no answer, so I supposed he was asleep. So I came round this morning as early as I could, as he'd be waiting."

"I see," said Wilson again. "You didn't meet anyone as you left, did you? When you were with Mr. Carluke, I mean."

"Not *meet*, exactly," said Mr. Barton, looking very nervous. "There were a lot of people about—it was a fine evening—but we didn't meet anyone. But we stood outside the Dog and Duck, at the bottom there, a minute or two. The landlord was in the doorway—I saw him—and he might have noticed us. He knows Mr. Carluke quite well. Look here," he burst out suddenly. "I know what you're getting at, and I know what it looks like! If he went straight back and locked up when he left me I was the last to see him alive. But *he was* alive and perfectly all right when I left him—I'll swear he was!" He half rose in his seat, and sat down again, looking fearfully at the others.

"Quite, quite," said Wilson soothingly. "I'm not trying to cast any suspicion on you, Mr. Barton. But we must find out what happened, you know. Now, if you two will excuse me, I'll start having a look at the place. The police ought to be here in a minute or two, and then I want you, Mr. Barton, to go along with them to the station, if you will, and tell the officer in charge what you've just told me." He rose to his feet. "By the way, Michael, did you find any signs of a struggle on the body?"

"None whatever," Prendergast promptly replied. "I should say he was shot before he knew what was happening."

"That was my impression, too," Wilson nodded, and disappeared into the hall. Prendergast would have dearly liked to accompany him and see how a Scotland Yard man handled the scene of a murder (his association with Wilson having hitherto been

entirely unprofessional) ; but he was distinctly in awe of his friend's official position, and felt sure that if he had been wanted he would have received an invitation. So he sat with what patience*he could muster in the uncomfortable little study, while Mr. Barton, on the other side of the fireplace, huddled in his chair and uneasily bit his nails.

They had not long to wait, for in less than three minutes there was a sound as of heavy feet on the path, and a loud official knock rang through the house. Barton and Prendergast both sprang to their feet, but Wilson was before them ; and as they went into the hall they heard him giving a rapid account of the circumstances to an awestruck sergeant.

"Constable Wren's got your bag, sir," the sergeant explained. "I sent him round to Fitzjohn's Avenue for it as soon as I got your note. Lord, sir!" By this time they had reached the door of the telephone cabinet. "Well, he stopped one then, and no mistake, poor chap!" the sergeant said. "What was it, sir? Looks almost like a charge of grape-shot."

"Dr. Prendergast says it was a blunderbuss," said Wilson. "But you'd best get him along to the station at once. Is the ambulance here? Good. Get your man in and tell the divisional surgeon to examine him as quickly as possible. They can take Mr. Barton along with them too, and get his statement down. Is Inspector Catling there?"

"Just coming, sir," the sergeant said. "We rang him up, and he'll be along by the time the men get back."

"Good. Then they might as well be getting on. You stay with me, and we'll go over the house. Put a constable to watch the door. I'm sorry, Michael"—he turned to Prendergast—"but I'm afraid poor Carluke has rather put a stop to our expedition. Will you go without me, or would you rather stay?"

"I'd rather stay, if I can be of any use," said Prendergast, as eager as a schoolboy; and Wilson smiled a little, and nodded. "I'd like you to go to the station with the constables if you will, Mr. Barton," he said to the morose little figure that hovered in the background, "and give your account to the inspector. But first there are one or two more things I want to know. Did Mr. Carluke ever have charge of money or valuables in his house, do you know? For the bank, I mean?"

"Not that I know of," Barton said. "But he wouldn't have told me if he had. He was as close as an oyster on bank business."

"Thank you. Now, this nephew that you spoke of. Do you know his name, or address, or anything about him?"

Barton thought. "Edgar Carluke, his name is. I think he's a ship's purser, and I *believe* he's ashore just now. But I don't know his address."

"He didn't stay here, then, when he was ashore."

"He did once," Barton said. "But they had a row about money, and he wasn't asked again. That's how I happen to know about the once, because I came to call in the middle of it."

"How do you mean—about money?"

"Oh, Edgar Carluke wanted some; and his uncle wouldn't let him have it. I don't know—I didn't hear any more than that. But perhaps Mr. Carluke would have something about him in his papers, if you want to know."

"Do you know where he kept his papers?"

"Upstairs, in a safe in his bedroom. It's the room above this."

"Thank you. What is the bank manager's name—the branch manager?"

"Mr. Warren. He lives in Belsize Park, but he's away."

"Thank you. By the way, we shall want a light in that telephone cabinet, and the bulb appears to be broken. Do you happen to know where Mr. Carluke kept his spares?"

"Yes, in a cupboard in the kitchen, left of the gas-stove."

"Would you mind finding me one, as you know where they are? Medium strength, please." Wilson went to the door of the kitchen, and stood waiting while Mr. Barton groped in a cupboard and extracted an electric bulb.

"This do?" he said, unwrapping it. "It's a forty."

"Thank you." Wilson took it from him. "Now, sergeant, call your men in and tell them to disturb things as little as possible in getting him out. Constable!" He called to the man standing on guard at the hall door. "Take Mr. Barton up to Inspector Catling at once and let him make his statement. Tell the inspector the sergeant and I

are going over the house and will let him know as soon as possible how things are going. And, constable," he drew the man aside a little, and the conversation dropped to a whisper. Meanwhile the ambulance men had come in and were taking out their melancholy burden. Prendergast, who shuddered afresh as the remains of Mr. Carluke came out of the telephone cabinet, could not but marvel at the cool calm with which the police officers did their business. When it was finished, Wilson dismissed the other constable, who strode firmly off, a dejected Mr. Barton following in his wake.

III

"This is a shocking affair, sir," the sergeant began as the door closed on them.

"Shocking," Wilson agreed, beginning to open the case which the constable had brought, and which appeared to contain principally a number of little bottles of various kinds. "Did you know this Mr. Carluke, sergeant? Any idea why he should be murdered?"

"Not an earthly, sir," the sergeant said. "As quiet-spoken and nice an old gentleman as you could wish. Bit unsociable, they said, but nothing to matter. I shouldn't have said he'd an enemy in the world."

"So Mr. Barton seemed to think," said Wilson, extracting a thin pair of gloves and putting them on. "Well, we'd better get on. I've a feeling that we've no time to lose in this affair, if we want to

catch the murderer. Will you go round the house, sergeant, and look at the doors and windows and see if you can find how he got away? Michael, could you look in that cupboard and see if you can find me a sixty lamp? I think I won't use this one after all." He laid it on a shelf as he spoke; and the sergeant looked up suddenly as if he were going to speak, but apparently thought better of it. Prendergast found the required lamp without much difficulty, and was taking it into the telephone cabinet to replace the old one, when Wilson stopped him. "Let me do that," he said; and unscrewed the old lamp carefully from the top with his gloved hands. The sergeant gave a chuckle.

"Looking for finger-prints, sir?" he said. "The murderer's not very likely to have held on to the lamp, is he? Especially as it was broken."

"Oh, you never know," said Wilson. "Come in, Michael, and tell me what you think of it. You needn't mind treading there now. I looked at the footprints carefully before the men came in. Tell me how you think the man died." As he spoke, he was dusting the broken lamp and a card which he held in his hands with powder from his little bottles.

Prendergast stared round the little cabinet, which measured about seven feet by three. "He was shot here," he said. "He couldn't have moved after he had been hit, and he couldn't have bled like that if he'd been carried from anywhere else."

"That's so. And where was he shot from? Where did his murderer stand?"

"There, at the far end of the cabinet. You can

see by the direction of the slugs. There's one gone into the wall facing the telephone."

"And Carluke was standing—where?"

"Just by the telephone, I should think, from the way he fell. At the far end, anyway."

"Then where was the man who shot him standing? There doesn't appear to be any room for him. And do you suggest Carluke walked up to a blunderbuss and stood right in front of it?"

"It was dark. The light was broken."

"True, O Michael. But when it's on in the hall there is plenty light enough to see anyone inside the cabinet. I don't suppose Mr. Carluke kept his house in complete darkness. Try it yourself."

Prendergast went out into the hall to make the experiment, which resulted as Wilson had said. When he returned he found his friend blowing powder over the telephone. "He must have been behind the curtain," Prendergast said.

"Behind the curtain! My dear fellow, there isn't room! It's full of boots, and even if he'd removed the boots, the whole shelf is only a foot wide. A man couldn't get underneath it. You try. No, not this minute. Come and look at the telephone. This is rather interesting."

"Are those finger-prints?" asked Prendergast, looking at the instrument, to which little bits of yellow powder were adhering. "They don't look to me like anything."

"No, they aren't. The telephone's been rubbed clean. That's rather interesting in itself. People's charwomen aren't usually so particular. But that

wasn't what I meant. Look at the shelf just by it."

"There's a bloodstain on it," said Prendergast. "I suppose it's Carluke's. But why shouldn't there be?"

"Because," said Wilson, "that bloodstain was right *under* the telephone."

"What! Then he was actually telephoning when he was killed, and managed to put the telephone back! I shouldn't have thought he would have been able to."

"Neither should I," said Wilson. "What's more, I don't think he did."

"Then his murderer did. Jove, that was pretty cool. By the way, Harry, at that rate, couldn't you fix the time of his death, anyway? The telephone people keep records of calls, don't they? If you asked for the last call he had that would fix the time almost exactly."

"Perhaps," said Wilson. "If he was telephoning. But we don't know that he was, yet. And you haven't told me where the murderer stood."

"Well, damn it!" Prendergast cried after a pause, which Wilson utilised to powder the electric light switch. "If he wasn't behind the curtain, I don't know where he stood! Could he have been at the other end of the cabinet—no, that's impossible, the shots are all the wrong way. I suppose he must have sneaked in while Carluke was telephoning and come right up to him and shot him from just by his ear. But it seems an insane thing to do."

"It does," said Wilson. "Quite insane."

"Well, do *you* know where he stood? And why he used a blunderbuss? It seems an extraordinary sort of weapon. Why not a revolver? They're plentiful enough."

"I think I've an idea where he stood—or rather, where he *didn't* stand," Wilson replied, "though it's only an idea; and at present I haven't the ghost of a notion how to prove it. And I'm pretty sure I know why he used a blunderbuss. Think of the specific characteristics of blunderbusses, and you'll be able to answer that question for yourself. *Hullo, what's this?" He was standing close by the telephone, peering at the shelf above it. "God be praised, the charwoman isn't as thorough as might have been gathered from the telephone. Look there." Prendergast stared at the shelf, which was fairly thick with an accumulation of London dust. At one end, the end to which Wilson was pointing, there was a round depression in the dust about six inches across. "Something round has stood there," he said; and felt he was being a little obvious.

"It has," said Wilson. "And it has only recently been taken down, and it hadn't been standing there long. The dust on the mark is practically as thick as that on the rest of the shelf—it's only been compressed. Now look around, Michael, and tell me what made that mark."

"The telephone," Prendergast said promptly. Indeed it was the only possible object in sight.

"So it would appear. But we'd better make sure," said Wilson, proceeding carefully to measure the diameter of both telephone and mark. "Now

perhaps you can tell me why the late Mr. Carluke kept his telephone in so inconvenient a position? I can hardly reach it, and I should say I'm as tall as he was."

"Taller," said the man of science mechanically; and racked his brains to think why the telephone should have been removed to that distant shelf. To make room for the murderer, seemed the only possible answer; yet what could it possibly avail a murderer to have the telephone cleared out of the way? Prendergast's mind, as he told Wilson, could only conjure up the vision of a murderous gnome the size of a telephone, sitting on the shelf with a blunderbuss in his arms. He was rather surprised that Wilson smiled at him encouragingly.

"That's better," Wilson said. "You're beginning to use your brains."

"If the only result of using them is to produce hobgoblins," Prendergast grumbled, "I think they might as well be unused." At that moment he nearly jumped out of his skin, for the bell of the telephone shrilled suddenly through the silent house.

"Somebody ringing up Mr. Carluke?" he said, as Wilson lifted the receiver.

"No, it's the station," the latter said. "Yes, inspector. Yes. Wilson speaking. . . ." Prendergast wandered out into the hall, where the sergeant was just coming downstairs after a careful official search of the house.

"Well, whoever did that poor fellow in's got wings," he said. "There's nowhere for him to have

got out at. Back door's locked and bolted; windows all fastened and the snibs as tight as anything with this weather. You couldn't possibly push any of them back from outside. There's one window open on the top floor, but no signs of anyone getting in or out. And the window's too small to climb through without leaving marks."

"What about the chimneys?" Prendergast suggested. "I suppose a murderer could climb up a chimney?"

"Not up a gas-flue he couldn't, doctor," said the sergeant. "It's gas all over the house, and the flues quite tightly fastened in. No, he flew, that's what he did. Unless he chopped himself up and put himself away in pieces. I've looked everywhere a man could possibly hide himself in this house, and there's no one there."

At this point the telephone bell tinkled to indicate the end of the conversation, and Wilson came out into the hall. "You've some very efficient men at your station, sergeant," he said; and the sergeant blushed with pleasure. "They've checked Barton's statements already. His story's all right. The landlord of the Dog and Duck remembers him and Carluke passing the door last night, and actually watched Carluke back to his own house. Then they've got on to his hosts at Hendon, who say he arrived at nine-thirty and didn't leave till nearly one, and his wife and son say he came straight home."

"Sounds all right," said the sergeant. "Unless he came back after one."

"That would make it nearly two when he got

back," said Wilson. "Buses and tubes would have stopped running by then, and he hasn't got a car."

He looked at Prendergast with a question in his eyes.

"I don't think so," the latter answered. "I'm pretty sure he was dead long before midnight. Of course, one can't tell to an hour or so—but I'm pretty certain. Did you think Barton's alibi was wrong then?"

"No," said Wilson, "I didn't. But we had to check it."

"And in any case," said the sergeant, "if he did come back, how'd he get out again?" He explained to Wilson the difficulties. "What are we to do now, sir?"

"Search the house thoroughly," Wilson said. "And his papers. I've got his keys. I'll help you. Only we must be quick."

"Anything you're looking for particular, sir?"

"Oh, as for papers—anything bearing on the crime—or suggesting that anybody else has been a part of it. And for the rest—the weapon."

"Blunderbuss, sir?"

"That, or something like it. But it may have been taken to pieces. Look for anything that could conceivably be part of a blunderbuss. It ought to be somewhere in the house, I'm pretty certain, but I've no idea where."

"It's my belief, doctor," the sergeant said admiringly, as they began their search, "that Mr. Wilson's got the whole thing solved already."

"Only half solved, sergeant," said Wilson,

turning a rather anxious face on him. "I haven't got the motive, and I haven't got the weapon. And if we don't find one of them quickly I'm afraid I shan't get the murderer either."

IV

It was a long and depressing search that they conducted through the dead man's effects, while the minutes wore on, and Wilson's face got more and more tense. Prendergast felt that he had never till that morning known what a careful search really was. Wilson made them grope in every crevice, shake out every cushion and every piece of fabric; he felt along the seams of mattresses and chair seats; he made them turn out the dustbin and the sink and look under the traps; they even went into the little garden and searched the gravel path that encircled the house, and all its adjoining flower beds; but all in vain. There was no blunderbuss, nor any less unusual firearm to be seen; there was not even anything that might have been part of a blunderbuss. At length, after more than two hours' searching, they came to the safe, which Wilson unlocked with the dead man's keys.

"Doesn't look as if there was much to be found here, sir," said the sergeant, looking at the neat bundles of documents.

"Well, we can but try," said Wilson, beginning to examine the first packet.

"You know," he said after a few minutes, "I'm

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inclined to think that somebody's been through these papers before us. They're just a little bit out of order—as if somebody had tried to put them back tidily who didn't really know what the order was. Like one's library after someone's been dusting it. But for the life of me I can't make out what the somebody was after. Whatever it was, if he took it away it's left no traces. What on earth could he have wanted? There's not much sign of the mysterious nephew, anyway. Mr. Carlisle seems to have been in the habit of destroying his private papers."

"You didn't," Prendergast, having no answer to the last question, suggested, "you didn't think anything of my idea that the telephone people might be able to give you the time of his death? That would settle people's alibis, anyway."

"I know," said Wilson. "The difficulty is, that I'm pretty certain he wasn't telephoning when he died."

But he was!" Prendergast cried. "You're forgetting his hands—his fingers, I mean. Don't you remember the way they were curved? I can just see them. They were exactly at the angle one uses to hold a telephone"—he illustrated with his own hands—"only a bit wider—as if it had been dragged out of them, and the rigor had fixed them in that position. I remember noticing at the time, and wondering what he could possibly have been holding. I thought it might have been the blunderbuss—but if it had been, of course, he'd be holding it still. But the telephone's much more

likely." He stopped with a feeling of triumph, for Wilson had dropped the papers and was looking at him with real respect.

"By George, Michael, I believe you've got it!" he said. "I'd quite forgotten his hands, fool that I am. Sergeant, do you happen to know if the Post Office have lost an instrument lately?"

"An instrument? I'm afraid I don't, sir," the sergeant chuckled, while Prendergast gaped at this unexpected result of his suggestion. "The Post Office attend to their own lost property."

"Then ring them up and find out, as quick as you can," was the reply. "Hurry up, man, the whole thing may depend on it."

"Why ever should you think they've lost a telephone?" Prendergast asked.

"It's only a guess," Wilson answered. "But if it's right, it makes the thing pretty certain."

The sergeant was away a long time, while Wilson and Prendergast patiently searched through a quiet old gentleman's most uninteresting private papers. When he came back, he gazed at Wilson with an expression almost of reverence on his face.

"How *did* you know, sir?" he said. "They *have* lost one. There was one pinched out of an empty flat in Golders Green within the last week or two; but they can't say exactly when, and they've no idea who took it. How did you know?"

"Well, it was a fairly obvious conclusion, wasn't it?" said Wilson. "I wish it was as obvious where it had got to. Come, we *must* find this thing. It a't have left the house; there wasn't time. And

there's nowhere he can have dropped it—Good Lord ! ” He sprang to his feet, and made for the door. “ The owl ! ”

“ What's the matter ? ” Prendergast said, following him breathlessly as he rushed down the stairs.

“ What a fool ! The owl, of course ! ” was all the answer he got. “ No, wait a moment. I'll be back directly.”

Prendergast and the sergeant stood at the hall door, gaping, while Wilson ran out into the road and about a hundred yards up the hill. There he stood for five seconds or so, staring up at the trees which all but screened the house from view ; and then he returned at the same pace. “ It's the bathroom window, I think,” he said as he regained the house ; and shot up the stairs, the other two following. Arrived at the bathroom he flung wide the window, which was the same that the sergeant had already found open, and leaned out as far as possible to the left, groping with his hand in the thick ivy that covered the wall. After two or three seconds' searching he gave an exclamation of triumph.

“ Got it ! ” he said. “ At least, I think so. Will you both please look carefully ? I want to have a witness to this.” He brought his hand back, with a fat envelope in it marked Capital and Counties Bank. This he handed to the sergeant. “ The weapon, sir ? ” the latter said, puzzled. “ There's more coming,” said Wilson ; and dived again into the ivy.

“ This wants careful handling,” he said as he

returned for the second time. In his hand was what at first sight looked like an ordinary telephone receiver. But on looking closely, it was apparent that the mouthpiece and the top of the telephone had been removed, and in their place was a fat muzzle of metal. Prendergast came close to it and stared down the black mouth of the thing.

"My God, it's the blunderbuss!" he said.

"It seems to be," said Wilson. "We'll have to take it to pieces to find out how it worked. But it seems quite clear what the murderer did. The inside of this instrument has been taken out to make room for the charge, and the hook for the earpiece is fastened to the trigger. A man going to answer a telephone ring in the dark—remember that broken light, sergeant, which was probably broken by the murderer—would take hold of the earpiece and let the gun off. You see now the point of having a blunderbuss—and a blunderbuss, as Dr. Prendergast noticed, charged with a peculiarly nasty type of expanding slug, like soft-nosed bullets. You can't make quite certain where a man's head will be when he's answering the telephone, and the blunderbuss was pretty safe to hit him wherever he was. There are some finger-prints on both the receiver and the earpiece"—he had been dusting it with powder as he spoke—"I'm pretty certain they are Carluke's, but we can compare them downstairs for certain. I took his prints on a card before he was taken away. Now, Michael, I think I can answer the question I asked you a while back—where did the murderer stand when he killed his victim? The answer is—

at a private telephone in Hendon. Sergeant, will you send down to the station and tell them to detain Edward Barton on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Harold Carluke? I think you'll find he's still there."

"Good God, sir," the sergeant said. "What a diabolical thing! Do you mean he fixed up this affair and then went off and left the poor old boy to be shot next time he went to the telephone?"

"And then rang him up to make sure he did go," said Wilson. "Twice, you remember, in case he should have been out the first time. The telephone people will be able to trace those abortive calls for us. But, of course, he was dead long before the second one was made."

"Good God!" said the sergeant again. "The cold-blooded devil! Why did he murder him, sir?" He spoke as though he regarded Wilson as an eye-witness of the whole thing.

"I don't know that, yet," said Wilson. "But I shouldn't be surprised if the envelope you have in your hand throws some light on it." He tore it open, and a small bundle of cheques drawn on the Capital and Counties Bank fell out. Drawing a lens from his pocket, he made a rapid examination of the signatures.

"Of course, I don't know the Hampstead clients of the Capital and Counties Bank," he said. "But I should say there's no doubt that some of these are forgeries. Look at the waviness of that line in the glass. That's no true signature." He handed

cheque and glass to the sergeant, who nodded agreement. "I presume friend Barton had either written them or helped to pass them through; and that Carluke had found it out. If we get into touch with the bank manager, we'll probably get the whole story. But you'd better go and make sure of your prisoner. I doubt whether Catling's finding it easy to detain him."

V

"You gave my eyesight better credit than it deserved. What I took for an owl was Barton's hand putting the papers away," said Wilson. "My only excuse is that I wasn't looking at the place at all. I only got a faint impression at the edge of the retina, and when I focussed on it, it was gone. There is only one spot in the road from which that particular bit of ivy is visible at all—and that spot's not visible from the window. Barton must have thought himself quite unobserved. But I nearly lost the clue, all the same, through not following up my impression quickly enough."

"What I don't see," Prendergast said, "is why you were looking for a weapon at all—why you thought it hadn't been taken away." They were discussing the case again after Barton's execution. Faced with the forged cheques and the incriminating telephone, his nerve had gone and he had confessed everything—incidentally giving away the actual forgers of the cheques which he had paid over the counter. The bank manager on his return had

supplied the information that investigations had been taking place into one of the forged cheques, which had been detected, and that the dead man had asked him for an interview as soon as he came back on that very subject. Hence the necessity for his murder. The rest of the crime was as Wilson had indicated—even to the stealing of the telephone from the empty flat in Golders Green and the careful breaking of the electric light bulb.

"Well," Wilson said. "I didn't see what else he could have done with it. He had only been in the house a few minutes, the man at the gate said—no time to take it anywhere else. Of course, he might have had it on him; but I didn't think he'd risk that, as he knew he would have to go to the police station. If I hadn't found it in the house, I was going to have him searched, as a last resort. But I didn't want to do that, because we should have had to let him go, after his complete alibi; and that would have given him plenty of time to find and destroy his weapon, or to leave the country."

"Then you knew all along he was guilty?" Prendergast asked. "How?"

"Well, I began to suspect him as soon as I'd had a look at the telephone cabinet. You see, it was so obvious, from the dimensions of the cabinet and the direction of the shots, that the murderer hadn't been in the cabinet at all. You saw that yourself, only you were convinced that he must have been. But there was no room for him to have been, and no signs of his departure. There were only Barton's footprints visible, and no one could have got out

across the body and across that pool of blood without stepping in it. I tried myself. That suggested that the man was alone when he was killed, and that he was killed by some mechanical means or other ; and the fact that the bulb—a practically new one, as I daresay you noticed—was broken, was suspiciously convenient for a trap. I got Barton to put his finger-prints on another bulb for me so as to have a record of them, and later I discovered that the broken one bore prints of the same hand. Of course, that wasn't conclusive ; but it was suggestive. The bulb's well out of Barton's reach ; he wouldn't have been changing it in the ordinary course of events. That was his principal slip, by the way ; he wiped everything else clean—the real telephone rather suspiciously so—but he forgot the bulb.

" Well, if the man was alone when he met his death, obviously his murderer could have a cast-iron alibi, so that any alibis could be left out of account in the preliminary investigations. Actually, it made Mr. Barton's own alibi a little suspicious—it almost suggested careful preparation. So when I'd got all I wanted out of him, I left you to look after him and went back to make a further study. Then I found, as I showed you, that there was blood *under* the telephone, showing that it had been put down after the crime. Carluke himself couldn't possibly have put it back, as you said ; he must have fallen as soon as he was hit ; and as additional evidence of that, I found, when I examined the telephone, that Carluke had apparently never touched it at all.

That meant that somebody else must have put it back after his death, and cleaned it after moving. But, so far as we knew, only Mr. Barton had been in the cabinet after his death. So I tried a little more investigation of Mr. Barton's movements; and when I found, first that the telephone had apparently stood very recently for a few hours on an exceedingly inaccessible shelf, and secondly, prints of somebody's bloodstained toe-tips just below the place where it had stood, and a smudge on the shelf below which looked uncommonly like the mark of a knee resting there, I was pretty certain that it was he who had moved it—and moved it back again when he 'discovered' the corpse.

"But why? As you very pertinently said, to make room for the murderer. At this point, I must admit, I was criminally slow. I ought to have thought of the dummy telephone at once. But I was still looking for an ordinary blunderbuss—probably fixed to the upper shelf, and fired by some mechanical arrangement—when your lucky recollection of the corpse's hands gave me the clue. Then it was plain sailing; we had only to find the dummy."

"Why didn't he wait a little longer, and take the thing to pieces, instead of giving the alarm at once?" Prendergast wondered.

"Probably because he didn't dare delay for fear of exciting the suspicion of the man at the gate," Wilson said. "Of course he didn't expect to find us there too. He thought he would be able to send the man to the police station, and have a quiet

twenty minutes to clear up. Our turning up was just a bit of bad luck for him. So was that tiny gap in the trees. Otherwise, except for the oversight in regard to the bulb, which might very easily never have been found, I think he showed remarkable intelligence. His acting of innocent apprehensiveness was very natural indeed, and his alibi, if I hadn't suspected him already, was just right, and not too circumstantial."

"Did you deduce the motive, too?" Prendergast inquired.

"Not really. I only noted that, as both men worked in a bank, there was one obvious possibility. But there might have been a hundred others. And you see, of course, the paramount necessity of haste. If we had stayed to look for the motive, we should never have got the man."