Best Detective Stories of Cyril Hare

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CONTENTS

Legal

Murder

Other Crimes

The Children

The Death of Amy Robsart

I

Gus Constantinovitch was an Englishman. His passport said as much when he went abroad. His name, indeed, hinted at Russia or Greece, his complexion suggested the Levant, his nose proclaimed Judea. As for his figure, it was as cosmopolitan as the restaurant meals that were responsible for it. But nobody who had seen him standing by the door of the music-room of his house at Ascot, rolling a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, or heard the crisp monosyllables in which he took leave of his guests, would have been excused for thinking him American. For this his profession was responsible. As Chairman and Managing Director of Cyclops Films Ltd., the organization which was (in his own words) to beat Hollywood at its own game, he had adopted, quite naturally, the badges of his tribe.

The party in honour of the trade showing of "Amy Robsart—the film magnificent" was slowly petering out. Gus from his station at the door surveyed his few remaining guests with lack-lustre eyes. It was impossible to tell from his expression whether either party or film had proved to his liking. The long room was almost empty, its windows open to the sultry July night. A Strauss waltz was being played on the gramophone, but only one couple still gyrated in the middle of the polished floor—a slim young man in evening clothes and a fair, white-faced girl with tired eyes who wore Amy Robsart's flowing Tudor dress. In a corner a lank young woman with a predatory face was sitting talking to a superbly handsome giant of a man.

"She's a pretty little thing, isn't she?" she said, indicating the dancer.

"Who do you mean—Camilla?" he asked. "Why, Lady Portia, she's lovely."

Lady Portia Fanning's mouth gaped in a tigerish smile.

"Yes, Mr. Brancaster, I had noticed during the evening that you thought as much. What does your wife think about it?"

Teddy Brancaster looked across the room to the bar, where his wife and one or two men were standing.

"We can leave Geneviève out of it," he said, reddening.

"Of course. Besides, she's French, and they look at these things differently from you Americans, don't they? Otherwise I should have expected her to look for consolation to that young man with her now. What is his name—Bartram, isn't it?"

"Dick Bartram's all right."

"I'm sure he is. But we were talking about Camilla Freyne—have you seen her film?"

"No. I was on the set this morning, and this afternoon I was practising dives in the swimming-pool here."

"Has Gus got his own swimming-pool?"

"Sure. In the garden. A very good one, too."

"How sweet! Too, too Hollywood! But does a champion like you need to practise?"

"Every day, Lady Portia, if I'm not to lose my form."

"How wonderful of you! Well, you didn't miss much—the film, I mean. Your Camilla may be all you think her, but as an actress she's the world's worst."

"Maybe."

She looked at her watch.

"I must go. Can't I give you a lift home, Mr. Brancaster?"

"No, thank you. I am staying here, you know."

"Of course, I forgot. Perhaps I shall see you in London some time, if Mrs. Brancaster will allow?"

She went up to her host.

"Good night, Mr. Constantinovitch. It's been such a delightful party, and I'm sure the picture will be a great success."

"Good night, Lady Portia. Happy to have you at my house."

The waltz came to an end. Camilla's partner bowed his thanks and took his leave. No sooner had he gone than in a flutter of long skirts she was across the room to where Teddy Brancaster was standing.

"Now I'm going to dance with you, Teddy," she said. "Put on another record, just for you and me—please." She looked up to his face like a small girl at the window of a sweetshop.

As if by magic, Geneviève, who had been standing contentedly during the dance among the group at the bar, materialized at her husband's side.

"She should not dance any more, Teddee," she declared. "But see how tired she is!"

"Sure," said Teddy equably. "Time little girls were in bed, Camilla." His voice, as he turned to her, took on an altogether new quality of warmth and tenderness.

"Oh, what's the use of going to bed when you can't sleep?" Camilla pouted. "I haven't slept properly for ages." She passed the back of her hand across her eyes with a gesture simple as a child's. "Not since I started work on the picture."

Gus Constantinovitch had joined the group.

"And the picture's finished now," he said. "You'll sleep sound tonight, Camilla. That's what you're in my home for, to sleep sound."

"But I want to dance, Gus. Just one more little dance with Teddy."

Teddy shook his head.

"It's too late for dancing," he said. "I guess I'll have a dip in the swimming-pool before I turn in."

"I too," broke in Geneviève. "I will come with you swimming, Teddee."

"Sure you will," said Teddy sardonically. "You'll follow me round anywhere, won't you, Geneviève? Well, let's go get our bathing things."

"I'll come too," Camilla declared. "Bathing by moonlight—lovely!"

"You're going to bed," said Teddy firmly. "Besides, there's no moon tonight, no stars neither. It's as dark as pitch."

"Ah, but that makes it better still! To dive into the dark, when you can see nothing! That's what Amy Robsart did, wasn't it? Just fell in the dark, and it was all over." Her voice trailed away uncertainly.

"Camilla!" Gus spoke sharply. "Here, Mrs. Brancaster, take her upstairs to her room. You know where it is, don't you? Next door to yours. And see that she doesn't come down again."

Geneviève took her by the arm. For a moment it seemed as if she would try to resist, but the Frenchwoman had a grip of iron, and she gave way meekly enough.

"That's a good girl," said Gus paternally. "Go to bed now, and your Uncle Gus will come and tuck you up."

They made an odd couple as they moved together to the door—the fragile girl, wilting under her Tudor magnificence and the active, muscular young woman beside her. Teddy Brancaster seemed to feel the contrast as he stared after them.

"I'll go change," he said abruptly.

Among the group at the cocktail bar Dick Bartram was watching them too.

"She's very handsome," someone said.

"Pity she can't act."

"Act? Why, I bet she could if she ever tried."

"I like that! Hasn't she been trying hard enough these last six months?"

Dick blushed painfully.

"Oh—you mean Camilla! I—I thought you were talking about——"

There was a chorus of laughter, which made his cheeks redder than ever.

"My poor chap!" said the man who had spoken first. "Don't waste your young love in that quarter. Geneviève's a one-man's woman. Haven't you noticed that?"

"Pity her husband's not one woman's man," said another.

"Oh, I shouldn't worry. The fair Geneviève can be relied on to protect herself. A stiletto in her garter for any rivals—that's her type."

Without a word Dick left them and walked out of the room.

"And there goes the best cameraman in England," was the comment from the bar. "Well, if Gus goes on turning out tripe like his last opus, he'll soon be out of a job."

"Will America look at it, do you think?"

"Not a hope. I saw Souderberg after the show today, and he told me——"

"Gus was looking pretty green tonight, I thought."

"That doesn't prove anything. He always does. It's his British blood boiling in his veins."

"I hear there's been some trouble down at the studio. They've had a Scotland Yard man in."

"Oh, that's nothing. Some bright cashier been embezzling while the going's good."

"Where's Gus got to? He was here just now."

"Counting his losses, I expect. Well, here's luck."

Teddy Brancaster strode in, his magnificent brown body clad only in a pair of bathing trunks, a towel over his arm.

"Is Geneviève down yet?" he asked.

"My dear Apollo, was ever a woman ready when you expected her? Of course not."

Teddy went into the hall and called up the stairs.

"Hi, Geneviève! Are you coming?"

Geneviève appeared on the landing.

"Coming soon, Teddee!" she cried.

A bedroom door opened just behind her, and Camilla's white face appeared.

"Please, may I come too? Please, Teddy, just this once!"

Teddy smiled and shook his head.

"You shall not come!" said Geneviève with decision, and the door closed.

"I'm going down now," said Teddy. "See you at the pool, then. So long!"

From a chair in an alcove in the hall Dick Bartram, sick with envy, saw him go. Then he moved to the foot of the staircase.

"Geneviève!" he called softly.

II

Some twenty minutes later the last guests reluctantly decided that it was time to be going. They had damned *Amy Robsart* in general and Camilla's performance in particular, down to the last detail. They had cheerfully canvassed the prospects of a similar fiasco for the film which Teddy Brancaster was rehearsing, and they had almost exhausted their host's abundant supplies of drinks. At this point Gus again entered the room.

"Gus, old man, it's time I was going. It's been a great party."

"Glad you enjoyed it, Tom."

"Good night, Gus. That little Freyne girl is a real find. You'll make a big hit with *Amy Robsart*. All the boys think the same."

"Sure I hope so, Mike, I hope so."

"Good night, old boy. We've overstayed our welcome, I'm afraid."

"Not a bit, Jimmy. Always happy to see you."

"Good night . . . Good night . . ."

"Hey, you fellows! Anybody seen my wife about?"

Teddy Brancaster came in by the french window, his skin glistening with water drops, his bare feet leaving damp marks on the parquet floor.

"Hullo! It's Apollo back again! Didn't she keep her date with you, Teddy?"

"Nope. I've been swimming around the last quarter of an hour and she never came along."

"Too bad, Teddy. Quite a new experience for you to be jilted, isn't it? Sorry we can't stay for the end of the drama, but we're just off. Good night."

Teddy grinned cheerfully.

"Good night, you fellows. Guess I'll go look for her."

"Hope there's no bloodshed when you find her, anyway."

The guests took their noisy departure. Teddy followed them into the hall and went upstairs. A moment or two later he was down again. Gus was standing in the hall and Teddy looked down at him with troubled eyes.

"Gus, she isn't in her room. What's happened to her, d'you think?"

"I shouldn't worry, Teddy. Maybe she stayed in Camilla's room to help her sleep. I'll go and see, if you like."

"But she said she was coming swimming," Teddy objected.

"I'll go and look, all the same," said Gus, and mounted the stairs.

Teddy remained for a moment irresolute.

"Were you looking for me, Teddee?" said a voice behind him.

He spun round as if he had been shot. Geneviève and Dick Bartram had just emerged from a little sitting-room on the further side of the hall.

"I'm sorry I didn't come with you, Teddee," she began, but he cut her short. He had gone deathly pale, his eyes blazed.

"You . . . !" he exclaimed. "You . . . !" He seemed incapable of saying more.

"But what is the matter, Teddee?"

"What's the matter? Weren't you coming swimming with me? Where have you been? What have you been doing? And who—oh, my God!"

But Geneviève had found her tongue.

"Ah, so it is like that, is it?" she exclaimed. "So the great Teddy is become jealous all at once, is it not? And all because I did not come the moment I was wanted, eh? Is it so often you want me, then? Have I ever complained to you about your Rosa, your Kitty, and now your Camilla? You know now what it is to feel what I have felt, then? That is good!"

"You little bitch!"

"Look here, Brancaster," began Bartram, "you're not to speak to your wife in that way. And if you suggest that she and I——"

"Be quiet, Dickee. This is my affaire."

"Hold your tongue, both of you. I——"

A fresh voice cut in above the noise of the dispute. Gus's voice, urgent with alarm.

"Stop that noise, for God's sake! Something is wrong here!"

All three were suddenly silent.

"Camilla's not in her room," said Gus. "And—and her window's wide open!"

It was an appreciable time before anyone spoke again. Gus came slowly down the stairs. His sallow face was as expressionless as ever, but his fingers twitched incessantly as they grasped the banister rail and his feet stumbled uneasily at every step. When he reached the foot of the stairs, it was as if a spell had been broken, and everyone began to talk at once.

"Camilla!" groaned Teddy. "No, it's not possible!"

"*Ah, la pauvre fille!*" exclaimed Geneviève. "*Elle est somnambule sans doute. C'est ce que j'ai toujours cru!*"

Dick said simply:

"Did you look in her bathroom, Gus?"

"I looked," Gus answered. "It was empty. Her clothes were all over the room and her bed hadn't been slept in."

Once more silence fell on the little group—an oppressive silence in which each

looked at the others in growing perplexity and fear.

"But what do we wait for?" said Geneviève suddenly. "We must search—the house, garden, everywhere!"

"The garden!" said Dick. "Have you got a torch anywhere, Gus? Come on, quickly, for God's sake!"

But it was Teddy who led the blind rush through the garden door behind the staircase to the back of the house.

To eyes coming direct from the brilliantly lighted hall the garden was in utter darkness, and the party halted in momentary uncertainty on the threshold. From the open door behind them a broad shaft of light illuminated a section of the terrace which ran the length of the house, and a little of the lawn beyond. Their shadows wavered against the background of white stone and vivid green.

"To the right," said Dick. "That's where her window is, isn't it? Hurry up with that torch, Gus!"

But before the torch could be found, and while their eyes were still straining to accustom themselves to the dark, Teddy had seen something showing dully white against the surrounding blackness.

"There! There!" he cried, and ran in its direction.

The others heard the patter of his bare feet as he went towards it, heard the sharp intake of his breath as he reached it. Then Gus's fumbling fingers found the switch of the electric torch and the whole scene was revealed.

Teddy was kneeling beside the body of Camilla Freyne, a pitiful crumpled heap upon the wide stone terrace. Her bare arms and legs gleamed alabaster white in contrast to the dark-blue bathing dress which was her only covering. Her face was so hideously mutilated as to be scarcely recognisable. From a dreadful wound in the head the blood had soaked through the towel on which it lay, staining the stone a dull red.

Teddy was weeping unashamedly.

"Camilla! Camilla, darling!" he sobbed. "Why did you do it? I loved you! I loved you! I'd have given my life for you—Camilla!"

"Teddee!" Geneviève's voice was shrill. "Teddee, get up! There is nothing you can do."

Teddy rose to his feet. His grief-distorted face disappeared from the circle of light. In the darkness his voice sounded hollow.

"Sure, there's nothing we can do—nothing at all! Amy Robsart fell in the dark, that's all—and now I suppose you're happy!"

"How dare you!" cried Dick.

"Be silent, all of you!" Gus commanded. "Have you no reverence? Dick, you will please go and telephone for a doctor and the police."

"A doctor and a policeman!" echoed Teddy bitterly. "They'll be mighty useful! Will they give me Camilla back again? Ask them that! Ask them——" He sobbed afresh.

"Teddy," said Gus, with an air of authority, "you will go indoors. In my study there is brandy. Drink some. And do not come out again. Geneviève, you will stay here with me till help comes. It is not good for the dead to be alone."

III

It was a brilliantly fine morning. The sun, flaming out of a cloudless sky, penetrated into the room where Gus lay, sleepless. He rose from his bed and went to the window. The room occupied a wing built on to one end of the house, and from where he stood he could look along the whole length of the terrace. It was a placid, smiling scene, with nothing at first sight to remind him of the events of the night before. Only at one point on the terrace a single flagstone was covered with a rough piece of sacking. Gus averted his eyes from it hastily. The poor broken body of Camilla had been taken away overnight under the orders of a doctor who had murmured remarks about multiple head injuries and shock, and a police sergeant who had been a miracle of sympathy and calm.

About the house in which she had been the guest of honour a few hours before nothing of her remained except an ugly red stain, protected from the elements by an old half sack.

As Gus watched, two men came into his view round the further end of the house. One of them was the kindly sergeant of the night before. The other was a tall, broad-shouldered man in grey tweeds, with a fierce military moustache. As they walked round the corner they appeared to be deep in conversation.

". . . Danish bacon!" the one in tweeds was saying. "It's all very well, Parkinson, but when I come into the country I don't expect to be given Danish bacon!"

"I know, sir," said the sergeant sympathetically, "but it's like that everywhere nowadays. When I was a boy—er—here we are, sir!"

They had arrived at the piece of sacking. The sergeant pulled it away and together they looked at what lay beneath. Then he replaced it.

"You see where it lies, sir," he demonstrated. "Now, if anyone was to fall, or dive from that window above us, this is just where you would expect them to pitch."

"So I see," replied the other. "But, strictly speaking, you couldn't fall from the

window. You would have to get on to the balustrade outside it."

"Exactly. But that's easy done."

"No doubt."

"You've seen the body, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, I called at the mortuary on the way here."

"Well, sir, it certainly looks a simple enough case to me. This young lady, according to all accounts, was in a bad state of nerves. They often are, them actresses, you know. She takes it into her head that she wants to bathe last night—to dive into the dark, as he puts it. She's told she's not to, and put to bed. Then she gets up, sleep-walking like, if you follow me, pops on her bathing dress, and dives out of window."

"It seems simple, certainly."

"Why, sir, it's plumb natural, if you ask me. And I'll tell you another thing. This girl's been acting a part called Amy Robsart. Now Amy Robsart, so far as I can make out, is killed much the same way, only it wasn't a window she fell out of——"

"I know. I've read the book."

"It isn't a book, it's a film. But I daresay it's much the same thing. What I'm getting at is that with her in a bad state of nerves and all, she'd be quite likely not to know whether she was herself or whether she was Amy Robsart, and behave accordingly, if you follow me?"

"Amy Robsart didn't wear a bathing dress, did she?"

"That's true, sir, she didn't. But I reckon the young lady got into a proper muddle about things and forgot that."

"Very likely."

A door in the house opened, and Teddy Brancaster, dressed—or rather undressed—for swimming, came out on to the terrace. He stopped when he saw the two men.

"Good morning," said Sergeant Parkinson. "You're up early."

"I'm always up for a dip before breakfast when your English climate allows it," said Teddy. He looked hard at the man in tweeds. "Haven't I seen you before?" he asked.

"This is Inspector Mallett of Scotland Yard," the sergeant explained. "He has been doing some investigation at the Cyclops Studios, and he was good enough to come along this morning and help us."

"Pleased to meet you," said Teddy. "Well, if you gentlemen will excuse me, I'll be going."

"Perhaps you will give me a moment or two later, when you have had your

breakfast," said Mallett.

"Surely."

The giant strode away across the lawn. He struck a narrow stone path that ran in the direction of a little shrubbery, and, following it, disappeared from view. A moment later the detectives heard the thud of a spring-board, followed by a splash.

"A fine figure of a man, that," was Parkinson's comment. "It's easy to see that he keeps himself in 'good condition'. Makes men like us look quite flabby, doesn't it, sir?"

"At all events, I haven't got black circles under my eyes at this time of day," said Mallett in an aggrieved tone.

"Well, sir, we must make allowances for that. I don't expect he had much sleep last night. He was in a terrible state when I came in—crying and howling fit to burst himself, he was."

"Really? Suppose we go indoors now?"

They passed into the house. A scared housemaid fled at their approach.

"That reminds me," said Mallett. "What about the servants last night? Did they hear anything?"

"They had all gone to bed," Parkinson explained. "They sleep in a wing on the other side of the house. The guests at the party were looking after themselves. It was what they call a Bohemian party, I'm told—meaning that they could all drink as much as they liked without any servants to tell tales on them."

"I see. Now which way do we go?"

The sergeant led the way upstairs. He stopped before a door on the first-floor landing and unlocked it with a key which he took from his pocket.

"This is her room," he said. "Nothing has been touched."

It was a room of medium size, lit by one large sash window giving on to the garden. The bed was made, but had not been slept in. On it, and on the armchair at its foot, was distributed Camilla's finery of the night before—the heavy, embroidered Elizabethan gown and the stomacher stiffened with whale-bone contrasting strongly with the gossamer silk underwear of the twentieth century. The built-in wardrobe hung open. On the dressing-table a pearl necklace and some rings lay scattered. From an open powder bowl a faint scent permeated the room. To the right an open door led into the bathroom. Here, in contrast to the disorder of the bedroom, all was neatly arranged. The towels were folded; the sponges, hard and dry, in orderly array; and the bath mat, neatly centred, showed no sign of having been disturbed since the servant had laid it down. The window, a small one, was closed.

Mallett took in everything with a few quick glances. Then, returning from the

bathroom to the bedroom, he went to the window. It was open at the bottom, and, leaning through, he looked out for a few moments. Outside the window was a balustrade, some two feet high, which ran the entire length of the house. Between this and the window was a small space, just sufficient for a man to stand in.

His survey completed, Mallett withdrew his head.

"Have you looked out of here?" he asked Parkinson.

"No, sir. It was dark when I was here last night, of course."

"Have a look now."

The sergeant did so.

"Well?" Mallett said. "Did you notice anything?"

"I did, sir."

"Yes?"

"The place where the body was found is not under this window, sir. It is farther along to the right."

"What does that convey to you?"

"Why, sir, it looks as if the young lady had walked along the balustrade that way before she fell off."

"Why should she?"

"Isn't that just the kind of thing a sleep-walker would do, sir? Walk along a dangerous place until she lost her footing? I'm sure I've heard of that sort of thing happening more than once."

"Sleep-walking . . . H'm . . . And where did she sleep, Sergeant?"

Parkinson looked at the bed, and flushed a little.

"She fell asleep in the chair, very likely," he suggested.

"On top of her undies? Well, that's always possible, though one would expect them to be more crumpled. But there's one thing you haven't accounted for."

"Indeed, sir?"

"If she went sleep-walking, as you suggest, why was her head wrapped in a towel when she was found?"

"Good Lord, sir! Why didn't I think of that at once? Of course, that explains it. It wasn't sleep-walking at all, but just plain suicide!"

"I don't quite follow."

"Why, sir, don't you see the pea sigh cology of the thing."

"The what?"

"The pea sigh cology, sir."

"Oh, the pea . . . No, I'm not sure that I do."

"Why, it's quite plain to me. Look here, sir. The young lady wants to kill herself.

She makes up her mind to throw herself out of window. Then when it comes to the point she finds that she hasn't the nerve. So what does she do? She blindfolds herself with the towel, so that she can't see what's coming to her, if you follow me ——"

"I do, Sergeant, I do."

"And just walks along the edge till she falls off, so taking herself by surprise in a manner of speaking. Am I right?"

"You may be, Sergeant. By the way, which window was it that she was found under?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Brancaster's bedroom, sir. That's next door to this, with just the bathroom in between."

"I see. Well, there doesn't appear to be anything further that we can do up here. We had better go downstairs now and see what the people in the house can tell us."

IV

In the dining-room the detectives found Teddy Brancaster finishing his breakfast. He had changed into a grey-flannel suit which set off his magnificent proportions to advantage.

"You are all alone, I see," said Mallett.

"As you see," assented the American gravely.

"Is Mrs. Brancaster breakfasting in bed?"

"I expect so. I haven't seen her this morning."

"How is that?"

"Well, if it interests you, I slept in my dressing-room last night—if you can call it sleeping," he added bitterly.

"When were you last in her bedroom?"

Teddy looked surprised at the question, and reflected a little before answering.

"Why, I guess it must have been before dinner last night," he said slowly.

"But didn't you go up there to look for her when you came in from bathing?"

"Sure, I did. I forgot that. She wasn't there."

"Can you tell me," the inspector pursued, "whether the window was open or shut when you went in?"

"Shut."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Do you know that it was under that window that Miss Freyne's body was

found?"

"Is that so?" said Teddy slowly. "No, I did not know it."

"It occurred to me that she might perhaps have fallen from that window last night, but if you are right in your recollection that the window was shut it doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"It certainly does not."

"And you still say the window was shut?"

"I do, sir."

"When you went up to change last night, you didn't hear anything suspicious?"

"I did not go up to change last night. Gus lets me use the cloakroom down here as a changing room. It's more convenient for the pool, as I'm in and out all day."

"Thank you. That may be important. Now I must ask you about another thing altogether: was there something of a quarrel between you and your wife last night?"

Teddy's face darkened.

"There was," he admitted.

"Things were not altogether happy between the two of you?"

"Well—you've heard of film-stars' marriages not turning out well before now, I suppose?"

"Film stars' marriages don't often last as long as yours, Mr. Brancaster. Let me see, six years, isn't it?"

"You seem to know a lot about me, Inspector."

"You must remember that I have been carrying out a fairly thorough investigation at the studios, and I have found it necessary to examine the lives of pretty well everyone connected with it."

"You British are certainly thorough," said Teddy with a faint smile.

"We try to be. And your American police are not very far behind when we ask them for assistance. Now I find that since your marriage your name has been—connected, shall we say——"

"Connected will do very well."

"—with a number of women. There was Rosa Layton, for example. She was killed in an accident, wasn't she, Mr. Brancaster?"

"She was drowned in a boating accident—yes."

"Then there was Kitty Cardew."

"Sure. Poor Kitty, she died from an overdose of veronal."

"Was your wife jealous of these women?"

"Of them—and others. Yes."

"Was she jealous of Miss Freyne?"

"She most certainly was."

"Has it ever occurred to you, sir, that there might be some connection between these various accidents?"

Teddy Brancaster sat silent for a moment, staring at his plate. Then he said between clenched teeth, "Never—until now."

Dick Bartram came into the room. Teddy gave him a curt "Good morning!" and rose to his feet.

"I must be getting along to the set," he announced. "If you gentlemen want me again you know where to find me."

Bartram meanwhile had sat down at the table and was attacking a grapefruit with a gloomy air. He paid no attention to the other two men until Mallett addressed him.

"You know who I am, I think?" he began.

"Certainly. You're the Scotland Yard man, aren't you? How is your work at the studios going?"

"Pretty well. But that isn't what I'm here for today."

"No?"

"I am looking into the circumstances of the death of Camilla Freyne."

Dick pushed away his plate and looked up with interest.

"Do you really think," he asked, "that there may be something to—to look into, as you put it?"

"Every case of sudden death has to be investigated, naturally."

"But do you think that this case is—is something that needs special investigation?"

"I think it possible."

"Then I shall give you all the assistance in my power, of course. That is," he added, "if you don't mind my going on with my breakfast while I do it."

"Please do. . . . Your coffee smells remarkably good, if I may say so."

"Gus has it specially imported from Costa Rica. Would you care for a cup?"

"Well, since you press me. . . . Thank you. . . . Yes, that is certainly excellent coffee. Costa Rica, you say? I'll make a note of it."

"Would you care for some, Sergeant?"

"I thank you, no, sir," said Parkinson virtuously. "I drink tea myself."

"Now, sir," said Mallett, putting down his cup with an air of satisfaction. "I just want to put a few questions to you about your movements last night."

"They were very restricted movements, Inspector."

"After Miss Freyne had gone upstairs what did you do?"

"I stayed at the bar in the music room for a short time and then went into the

hall."

"Yes?"

"I remained there till after Brancaster had gone out to the swimming-pool——"

"While you were in the hall, did you hear Mr. Brancaster speaking to his wife?"

"Yes, and I heard her speak to him and to Miss Freyne."

"You heard Miss Freyne's voice too?"

"Yes."

"No doubt about it?"

"None at all. I have had the job of photographing Miss Freyne every day for the last two or three months, and I'm not likely to be mistaken about her face or her voice or her scent or anything that is hers."

"Quite. Then what did you do?"

"As soon as Brancaster was out of the house I called upstairs to Geneviève. She came down immediately. I took her into the smoking-room next door to the hall and there we stayed till Brancaster came back."

"You did not leave the room during that time?"

"No."

"From where you were could you have heard anybody going up or down the stairs?"

"I think not. We heard Teddy's voice when he came in, but he was talking pretty loud."

"What were you and Mrs. Brancaster doing in the smoking-room?" asked the inspector suddenly.

Bartram answered without a tremor.

"I was trying to persuade Geneviève to come away with me."

Parkinson blew out his cheeks and looked shocked, but Mallett pursued, unruffled, "Did you succeed?"

"No," said Dick bitterly. "Nothing that I could say would induce her to leave that hulking brute of a husband of hers. I don't know what women can be made of. He has treated her disgracefully—neglected her for a simpering little doll who thinks she's an actress because she's got a pretty face——"

He stopped abruptly.

"Sorry," he murmured. "I forgot—she's dead. I shouldn't have spoken of her in that way. I daresay she didn't know what she was doing. She was very young, and infatuated with him. But she was breaking the heart of a woman worth ten of her, and I couldn't forgive her."

There was a pause, and then the inspector said in a matter-of-fact way:

"It comes to this, then, Mr. Bartram. You and Mrs. Brancaster were alone together from the time that Miss Freyne, so far as we know, was last seen alive to the time when she was found to be missing?"

"Yes."

"And there is nobody, apart from Mrs. Brancaster, who can verify—— Oh, good morning, Mr. Constantinovitch."

Gus's sallow face had appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning," he said. "You wished to see me, Inspector?"

"If you please. But it will keep till after you have breakfasted."

"I do not breakfast," said Gus, rubbing his great paunch reflectively. "Once, perhaps, but for many years—no, I do not breakfast."

"You have my sympathy. Then in that case——"

"Come this way, please."

The two men followed him into his study, a tiny room almost entirely filled by an enormous Louis XV desk, littered with papers. Gus sat down before it and sighed heavily.

"And what have you to tell me, Inspector?" he asked.

"The position is serious," answered Mallett. "The defalcations are on an even larger scale than was thought at first. They have been cleverly made, and very cleverly concealed."

"Ah . . .! It is that fellow Sneyd, I suppose?"

"It would appear so."

"We must prosecute, of course. But what good will that do us? All this is most unfortunate, Inspector, especially coming at this time. It puts the Cyclops set in a very difficult position. I say it within these four walls, but the position is difficult."

"Your organisation suffered a loss of a different kind last night," Mallett observed.

"The poor Camilla! Indeed, yes! An artist," said Gus sententiously, "whom the British film industry could ill afford to lose."

"Did your company insure her life?" Mallett asked abruptly.

"Certainly. We insure all our stars while they are under contract to us."

"What was Miss Freyne's contract?"

"For three years, at three hundred pounds a week. She was only beginning, you know," he added, as if in apology for the beggarly figure.

"And the insurance?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"So her death was not entirely a loss from the point of view of your company,"

suggested Mallett.

"One must look on the bright side, even of the greatest tragedy," Gus agreed.

"What were you doing last night," was the inspector's next question, "between the time when Miss Freyne went to bed and the time when you went to her room and found it empty?"

"After she had gone to bed," was the reply, "I stayed a little in the music room and looked at my guests—those who remained. They all seemed to be enjoying themselves without me, so I left them and came in here, where I remained until just before Mr. Brancaster came back from his swim. There were some figures and reports that I wanted to look at."

"Figures and reports relating to *Amy Robsart*?"

"Yes. My secretary had left them during the evening."

"They were not very satisfactory, were they?"

Gus made a deprecatory gesture.

"The preliminary bookings were disappointing," he admitted.

"Miss Freyne's tragic death will, however, give the film some assistance, I suppose?"

"We shall have some very useful publicity from it, I have no doubt."

"Thank you, Mr. Constantinovitch. I think that is all I want to know."

Mallett and Parkinson left the room.

"You certainly do know how to make them talk, sir," said Parkinson admiringly. "Now I suppose it's Mrs. Brancaster's turn to be put through it?"

"Mrs. Brancaster? No, I hardly think I need trouble her yet. I think I shall go for a walk in the garden. I've hardly seen it so far."

"The garden, sir? Oh yes, just so—the garden. Can I assist you in any way?"

"I don't think I need trouble you. I am sure you have plenty to do elsewhere."

"Since you mention it, sir, I have. Good day, sir!"

The sergeant left the house, and Mallett stepped out alone into the sunshine.

The garden was not a horticulturist's paradise. Its principal attraction was the well-kept lawn which stretched broad and green for some eighty yards from the terrace. This was flanked on either side by some tasteless beds of antirrhinums and fuchsias, and at the further end by leaden statuettes intended to give an olde worlde atmosphere, and succeeding only too well. Beyond it, to the right, a rustic sundial formed the focal point of an unenthusiastic rose-garden, which was separated from the lawn by the path which led to the swimming-pool.

This path Mallett followed. It took him to the little shrubbery behind which he had seen Teddy Brancaster disappear that morning. Here it sloped steeply

downwards, serpentined aimlessly left and right, and ended abruptly at the edge of the pool.

The pool was not large—some fifty feet long by twenty broad, its length running in the same direction as the path, but it was well equipped, with a high diving-board, water-climb and spring-board, all at the deep end of the pool where Mallett now found himself. He stopped, one foot on the spring-board, and gazed meditatively into the clear water, through which the pattern of the blue-and white-tiled bottom wavered and sparkled. Lifting his eyes he saw at the other end of the pool another man, apparently similarly engaged. From his clothes it could be guessed that he was a gardener, and from his expression that he did not care much for his job. Mallett walked over towards him.

"Good morning," he said.

The man acknowledged his presence by a stare and a sniff.

"This is a pretty place you've got down here," the inspector went on genially.

"So 't oughter be with all the money it cost," was the answer.

"Ah! Expensive, was it?"

"Cost a packet to make and costs a packet to run. Money no objeck! And can I git any money for my 'ouses? Can I get s'much as a bundle of pea-sticks without there's Gawd Almighty's row first? No, it's always the same thing. 'Jenkins, I can't afford it!' 'Jenkins, the garden costs too much money!' But 'is lordship's loverly swimming-bath—that's quite another pair o' shoes!"

He spat disgustedly into the water. Mallett's face must have shown what he felt, for he added:

"Oh, you needn't worry! I'm going to clean her out now."

"It doesn't look as if it needed it."

"Needed it? Of course it doesn't need it. But that makes no difference. Twice a week it 'as to be done, while 'is mightiness is in residence. That's nice work for an Englishman, ain't it? Swilling out a bath for a pack of foreign-born film actors. Company's water, mind you! Waste of money, waste of time, I calls it."

"How long does it take?"

"Two hours to empty, four hours to fill. And the time spent in the scrubbing of it out."

"How is it emptied?"

"I'll show you. It's just over where you're standing. See? There's a cock 'ere. You turn it *that* way, and she starts to empty. Then when you want to fill 'er, you turn that cock there. That's all."

"Thanks very much. Now I wonder if you could do something for me. Perhaps I

had better tell you who I am . . .”

Mallett continued to talk to the man for a full quarter of an hour, and then left him gloomily regarding the receding waters with the evident intention of doing no further work until the pool was empty.

On returning to the house, Mallett went straight to the little study. Gus was busy on the telephone. As he put down the receiver and turned to the inspector he displayed a countenance decidedly more cheerful than it had been an hour previously.

“You were quite right, Inspector,” he said. “The publicity value of this business —this sad tragedy, I should say, is going to be very great. Greater than I had imagined, and I think that I should know something about publicity. Already I have given three interviews by telephone to press representatives, and now I think that the trade will begin to find that there is more in *Amy Robsart* than they had bargained for.” He rubbed his hands. “Was I not right when I said that one must always look on the bright side?” he added.

“You were,” the inspector admitted. “Now, Mr. Constantinovitch, there is only one more thing I should like you to do for me. I am going now, and shall not return until this evening. Can you arrange for all the people who slept in the house last night to be here then?”

“That can be done, Inspector. What time will you wish to see them?”

“I will be here at ten o’clock.”

“Very good. Hullo? Yes? Mr. Constantinovitch speaking . . . Certainly I will give a message to your readers. ‘The tragic death of the glamorous young star at the very moment of attaining the pinnacle of fame in a performance which experts acclaim as . . .’”

Mallett left Gus to the telephone and made his way to the police-station. Sergeant Parkinson greeted him eagerly.

“Can I help you in any way, sir?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Mallett. “You can tell me where the offices of the local water company are.”

Parkinson looked somewhat disappointed.

“I’ll take you round myself,” he said. “But I meant—that is, I hoped—well, I thought there would be something you wanted *done*, if you follow me.”

“I’m afraid not—at the present, at any rate. But I’d like you to meet me outside Mr. Constantinovitch’s house at ten o’clock this evening. Perhaps there will be something to be ‘done’ then.”

Mallett would vouchsafe no more, and he parted from Parkinson at the offices of

the water company. Here he interviewed an intelligent young engineer, who from being bored and suspicious became as the interview went on more and more interested, and finally very busy indeed.

V

It was an uneasy party that awaited Mallett's visit in the music-room that evening, after a dinner that had been eaten for the most part in silence. Gus, who was by a good deal the most self-possessed of the four, proposed a game of poker. He was a good player at all times, and on this occasion the others were no match for him. Geneviève seemed listless and preoccupied, Dick was nervous, Teddy out of temper with his cards, his companions and himself. It was a positive relief to all of them, except Gus, who had pocketed a good deal of his guests' money, when on the stroke of ten Inspector Mallett was announced.

"I think you know everyone here," said Gus, "except Mrs. Brancaster."

Mallett bowed to her. She inclined her head languidly and then looked away. Mallett stood in the middle of the room and cleared his throat.

"As you all know," he said, "I am enquiring into the circumstances of the death of Miss Camilla Freyne. There will have to be an inquest, of course, and you, who were the only persons in or about the place at the time, will all be essential witnesses. There are reasons, which I cannot go into now, why it is important that I should know exactly what were the movements of each of you between the time when Miss Freyne left this room and the moment when she was found outside the house."

"But we've told you all that already," Dick objected.

"I agree. But at the same time there are some points which I should like cleared up, and I think they can best be cleared up by your helping me, so far as possible, to reconstruct the events of last night—in so far as you were respectively concerned in them. I want everyone to go through the same actions in the same order and in the same place as they did last night. Is that agreed?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"Very good, then. We start from the moment when Mr. Constantinovitch asked Mrs. Brancaster to take Miss Freyne to bed. Where were you standing?"

"Here," said Gus.

"Very good. Mrs. Brancaster, go and stand there too, please. Were you with them, Mr. Brancaster? Then stand with them also. Where were you, Mr. Bartram?"

"By the bar, at the other end of the room."

"Then go there, please. Now, Mrs. Brancaster, what did you do?"

"I left the room with Camilla, *so*."

"Did you follow, Mr. Brancaster?"

"Not at once."

Mallett followed Geneviève to the door. She walked up the stairs and stopped at the door of Camilla's room.

"I went in for a moment or two to talk to her," she explained.

"Go in there, then," said Mallett from the hall.

"Go in? In there? I cannot—I will not. It is not good in there."

Mallett shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "Then stand at the door till it is time to come out. Now, Mr. Brancaster?"

Teddy came out of the music-room.

"This was where I went to the cloak-room and got into my bathing-kit," he said.

"Then go there now," said the inspector.

"And change my clothes?"

"Certainly. I want to see how long it takes you."

"Will any old bathing trunks do, or must it be the same ones?" asked Teddy sarcastically.

"That is of no importance. Who moves next?"

"I came out of the room just after Brancaster," said Dick, moving accordingly, "and sat in the hall, *here*."

From above, Geneviève's voice was heard.

"I leave this room now, and go to my own."

"Very good, Mrs. Brancaster."

Gus walked across the hall.

"I am going to my study to look at papers," he said.

A pause ensued, during which nobody moved. Mallett ran quickly up the stairs, surveyed the hall from the landing and came down again. Then Teddy came in, wearing his bathing trunks.

"Here I am, Sherlock," he announced. "Where do I go from here?"

"Wherever you went last night."

Teddy took a few steps into the music-room and back again.

"I'm looking for my wife," he explained.

"He call me, and I come out here," said Geneviève from above. "Then Camilla open her door, and I shut her back, so."

"And I go off for my swim," said Teddy, walking into the music-room again.

"Stay there a moment, Mr. Brancaster. What do you do, Mr. Bartram?"

"Call for Mrs. Brancaster."

"Without going upstairs?"

"Yes."

"Then come down, Mrs. Brancaster."

Geneviève came down.

"Now we go to the smoking-room," she said.

Mallett saw them go and then went into the music-room where Teddy was waiting.

"What next?" asked Teddy.

"Which way did you go?"

"Through here," he said, indicating the french windows.

"Then let's go."

Mallett walked with him out into the garden. The moon was up and they could see their surroundings clearly.

"It was pitch dark last night, of course," Teddy explained.

"But you knew your way well enough?"

"Sure. You just follow the path. It runs straight from here."

"We'll follow it, then."

Teddy shrugged his shoulders and they walked on together. When they reached the clump of bushes he stopped.

"That's all there is to it," he said. "I just run down here and dive in."

"We'll run, then," said the inspector amiably.

They reached the edge of the pool together.

"Dive in," said Mallett.

"Here, what's the great idea?" said Teddy violently.

Before them in the moonlight, the pool gleamed bare, polished, empty.

"Did you dive in last night?" Mallett asked in a new and terrible voice. "Or did somebody else—somebody who didn't know, who couldn't see, that she was diving into an empty pool?"

From the shadows behind them Sergeant Parkinson silently approached and stood at Brancaster's shoulder.

"You knew that it was empty," Mallett continued. "You had emptied it yourself. You arranged for your wife to come here last night, so that she might kill herself in the dark. You waited here, and saw her, as you thought, plunge to her death down there. You climbed down into the pool, wrapped her head in your towel, so that the blood drops might not betray you and carried the body back to beneath your wife's window, turning on the water to fill the pool again before you left. Then you went

into the house and began asking where your wife was. It wasn't till you found her that you knew the truth—that it was not your wife but Camilla Freyne who had followed you—that you had killed the woman for whose sake you wanted to murder your wife. Is that not true?"

Teddy was shuddering convulsively, and his breath came in quick gasps.

"Sure, it's true," he muttered over and over again. "Sure, it's true—true. I killed her—I killed her! The only girl I ever loved—I killed her! Leave me go!"

As Mallett's hand closed upon his shoulder, he swung round, drove him off with a tremendous blow in the face, knocked Parkinson fairly over and made a rush for the spring-board. He leapt in the air, came down with all his weight upon its end and soared into the sky. In the moonlight his brown body gleamed for an instant as it turned in a perfect jack-knife dive, to crash head first on to the tiled floor below.