# The Valley of Ghosts

Wallace, Edgar

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**About Wallace:**

Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace (April 1, 1875–February 10, 1932) was a prolific British crime writer, journalist and playwright, who wrote 175 novels, 24 plays, and countless articles in newspapers and journals.

Over 160 films have been made of his novels, more than any other author.

In the 1920s, one of Wallace's publishers claimed that a quarter of all books read in England were written by him. (citation needed)

He is most famous today as the co-creator of "King Kong", writing the early screenplay and story for the movie, as well as a short story "King Kong" (1933) credited to him and Draycott Dell. He was known for the J. G. Reeder detective stories, The Four Just Men, the Ringer, and for creating the Green Archer character during his lifetime.

Source: Wikipedia

**Also available on Feedbooks for Wallace:**

- *Four Just Men* (1905)
- *Room 13* (1924)
- *The Door with Seven Locks* (1926)
- *Mr J G Reeder Returns* (1932)
- *Planetoid 127* (1927)
- *The Avenger* (1926)
- *The Angel of Terror* (1922)
- *The Mind of Mr J G Reeder* (1925)
- *The Daffodil Mystery* (1920)
- *The Joker* (1926)

# Chapter 1

Fate and an easy-running Spanz brought Andrew Macleod to the environs of Beverley. The town itself was at the end of a reluctant branch line, and had no visible excuse for existence, or means of support. Yet, for some extraordinary reason, the people of Beverley did not starve and the queer little shops that formed its one, broad, shaded street had the appearance of prosperity. This it could not have drawn from its aristocratic suburb, for Beverley Green had its supplies from the great department stores elsewhere, and came only to the town for such stocks as had been overlooked in the ordering.

Andy brought his long-bonneted car to a rest before the post office and got down. In five minutes he was chatting to headquarters, and the subject of his conversation was Allison John Wicker, alias Four-Eyed Scottie, from his practice of wearing spectacles. Scottie was one of the few men of his profession who enjoyed walking. When the manager of the Regent Diamond Syndicate came to his office one morning and found that somebody had saved him the bother of opening the large fire- and thief-resisting safe by means of an acetylene blower, it was as clearly Scottie's work as though he had left his receipt for the seven parcels of stones he had taken. Railway stations and ports of embarkation were instantly picketed by extra police, hotels were visited, and all constabularies warned.

Andy Macleod, spending his holiday with a fishing-rod and an accumulation of books which he had not time to read during the year, was dragged away from his recreation to organise the search.

He had started life as Dr Macleod, an assistant pathologist at headquarters, and had drifted into the profession of thief-catcher without exactly knowing how. Officially he was still a pathologist, a man to be called to the witness stand to testify the manner of deceased's death; unofficially, though they called him 'sir', he was 'Andy' to the youngest policeman that walked a beat.

"He passed through Panton Mills three days ago on a walking tour. I'm pretty certain it was Scottie," he said. "I'm quartering the country between here and Three Lakes. The local police swear that he hasn't been near Beverley, which means that he must have been living under their noses. They are a bright lot; asked me if he had done anything wrong, and they have had full particulars of the theft and a description of Scottie for a week."

A girl walked into the post office at this moment. Glancing sideways through the glass panel of the telephone booth, Andy noted her admiringly. Attractive—pretty—beautiful? To all men, all women look their best in tailored costumes of severe cut. She was tall for a woman; slim, but not thin.

"Yes, I think so," he answered his chief mechanically, his eyes on the girl.

She raised her hand, and he saw a ring on the engagement finger; a gold ring with little emeralds, or they may have been sapphires—no, they were emeralds. He caught the sea-green of them.

He had opened the door of the booth an inch after the more secret portion of his report had been made, and with one free ear he caught the murmur of her voice.

More than pretty, he decided, and admired the profile turned towards him.

And then a curious thing happened. She must have looked at him when his eyes were turned. Possibly she asked who he was; more likely the garrulous old postmaster, to whom Andy had shown his card to facilitate his call, volunteered the information. Andy heard the word 'detective'. From where he stood he had a clear view of her face.

"Detective!" she no more than whispered the word, but he heard—and saw. Her hands gripped the edge of the counter and the colour went out other face, leaving it a deathly white. Even the lips changed their hue queerly.

So intent, so startled was he, that he took the receiver from his ear, and at that moment she turned and met his gaze. Fear, panic, horror were in those eyes. He had a sense of something trapped and tortured as he stared at her, open-mouthed. Her eyes left his, and she fumbled at the money on the counter, the change the old man had put there, her hands shaking so that at last she scooped the coins into her palm and went out of the office hurriedly.

Unconscious of the fact that at the other end of the wire a puzzled police official was tapping the receiver urgently, having his own views to express, Andy hung up and passed into the shop.

"Who was that lady?" he asked as he paid the telephone charge.

"That, sir? Why, that's Miss Nelson, from the Green—Beverley Green, over by the hills. Wonderful place; you ought to see it. Lot of rich people live there. Mr Boyd Salter, you've heard of him? And Mr Merrivan, he's a rich man, too, though he's a bit mean, and oh, a lot of swell people. It's a sort of a—what do you call it? A garden city, that's what it is. Some of the biggest houses in the country. Mr Nelson's family lived there for years, long before there was any garden city. Remember his grandfather; a fine old fellow he was."

The postmaster was prepared to offer detailed biographies of the favoured folk who lived at Beverley Green, and Andy was anxious to catch another glimpse of the girl, and cut short the explanation.

He saw her walking quickly down the middle of the road, and guessed that she was on her way to the railway station.

He was puzzled and irritated. How might he explain her agitation? What had she to fear from detectives? What folly, big or small, had been responsible for the cold terror that had come to her eyes?

It was a waste of time to consider the cause. The folk of these little towns, picturesque, aloof from the world, where the stream of life seemed so idyllic and unruffled by the great passion storms which lash the surfaces of the cities, must inevitably experience crises no less tragic than these which disturb the people of the greater world. But—

The word 'detective', implying, as it would, the secret investigations of the law, holds no discomfort for normal, law-abiding people.

"Humph!" said Andy, and rubbed his smooth chin. "This won't catch Scottie!"

He drove the car out of the village, intending to push forward to the main road and begin his quartering of the network of secondary feeders which lie to the south from a point twenty miles away.

Slowing to take a sharp bend, a mile or more from Beverley, he saw an opening in the hedge to the right. There was a broad, gravelled boulevard flanked by trees; the paths, bordered by well-trimmed turf, curved out of view. An artistic signpost said private road to beverley green.

His speed had carried him beyond the opening, and he backed, looked thoughtfully at the sign, then turned into the drive. It was hardly likely that Scottie would pass into what was probably a dead end. On the other hand, Scottie was a versatile genius and a great opportunist. And Beverley Green was a rich community. So Andy told himself by way of excuse, though in his heart he knew that his curiosity had its causation in a new interest. He wanted to see the house in which she lived. What kind of style did Miss Nelson keep up?

The drive twisted and turned and at last took a sharper turn than usual, and Beverley Green, in all its summery beauty, came suddenly into view. Andy reduced speed to a walking pace. Before him was a broad space. It was almost flat, and was fringed with an unbroken border of flowering shrubs. Within a dozen yards from the drive was a tee, an indication of a golf course which probably extended along the valley. Set about the green, half revealed through the trees which surrounded them, were a dozen houses. A glimpse of a gable, a flash of a white-sashed window, a hint of timbering, the upstanding lift of a twisted Elizabethan chimney, indicated the type of architecture.

Andy looked around for somebody to question. The road bent sharply left and right from where he sat, and at the corner was a quaintly shingled building which suggested a club. He guessed it was a notice-board attached to the gatepost, and was getting out of the car to investigate further when a man came into view around the corner on which the building was situated.

"Prosperous city merchant—retired," said Andy mentally. "Black alpaca coat, broad-toed shoes, stiff collar, and a double watch-guard. Probably pompous, and wondering what the devil I mean by trespassing in these Elysian fields."

Certainly the newcomer eyed the intruder gravely, though it would be an exaggeration to say that he looked in any way resentful.

His age might have been anything between forty-five and sixty. The big, smooth face was unlined, and his gait was alert to the point of briskness. A big man, he supported his stoutness so well that Andy did not notice that he was inclined to fat until some time later.

The greeting he offered dispelled any doubt of welcome that the visitor may have harboured.

"Good morning, sir," he said. "You seem to be looking for somebody. The Green is a difficult locality for strangers; our houses have no names or numbers."

He laughed sedately.

"I am not looking for anybody in particular," said Andy, giving smile for smile. "I was led here by curiosity. It is a beautiful spot. I heard about it at Beverley."

The other inclined his head.

"We get very few visitors—I nearly said 'happily', but that would be unkind. The estate is privately owned by myself and my neighbours, and we have no inn to tempt visitors to stay. A guest-house." He waved his hand to the wisteria-covered building which Andy had thought might be a club. "We maintain that for visitors. Sometimes we cannot accommodate all our friends, and sometimes we have a distinguished—ah—person who is, so to speak, the guest of our little community. At present, for example," he went on, "we have an eminent Canadian geologist."

"Happy man," smiled Andy, "and happy community. Are all these houses occupied?"

He asked the question well knowing that every house would be in occupation, but anticipating the form a reply would take.

"Oh indeed, yes. That last house on the left is Mr Pearson's, the great architect, now of course retired. The next house with the gables is Mr Wilmot's, a gentleman who is—er—well, I don't know what he is, even though he is my nephew—shall we say something in the city? The next house, where you see the rambler roses, is Mr Nelson's—Kenneth Leonard Nelson, of whom you must have heard."

"The artist?" Andy was interested.

"Exactly. A great artist. He has a studio, but you cannot see it from here; it is on the northern side. Artists, I understand, prefer the northern light. The house on the far corner—you may not observe the corner from here, but there is a lane at the side leading to the tennis courts—that is my feudal mansion," he chuckled good-humouredly.

"What is that big mansion on the side of the hill?" asked Andy.

So her father was Nelson the artist. Now what had he heard about Nelson the artist? The name suggested something unpleasant.

"That house on the hill?" replied the guide. "That, unhappily, is not of our community. It is, in fact, the real feudal castle around which we humble—er—peasants have built our hovels."

The conceit seemed to please him, and he repeated, "Built our hovels," before he went on: "That is Mr Boyd Salter's place. The family has lived

here or hereabouts for centuries, sir. The Salters come down from—well, I won't inflict their history upon you. Mr Boyd Salter is a very rich man, but a semi-invalid."

Andy nodded and the other went on:

"There is our guest. Professor Bellingham. My name, by the way, is Merrivan."

So this was Mr Merrivan. "Rich, but a bit mean," was the description the postmaster gave.

Andy was eyeing the approaching figure of the Canadian geologist—a spare man in baggy breeches with a studious stoop.

"Been out on the hills collecting fossils. Quite a number have been found here," explained Mr Merrivan.

"I think I know him rather well," said Andy, more than interested.

He walked across to meet the professor, and when they were separated by a few yards the geologist looked up and stopped.

"Hard lines, Scottie," said Andrew Macleod, with ill-simulated sorrow. "Are you going to make a fuss, or shall I take you somewhere to lunch?"

"Logic is my weakness," confessed Scottie, "and if you'll let me go up to my room to pack a few articles of raiment I'll step along with you. I see you've got a car, but I'd rather walk."

Andy said nothing, but when they joined Mr Merrivan: "The professor is going to show me some of his specimens," he said pleasantly, "and thank you very much, Mr Merrivan, for your kindness and courtesy."

"Perhaps you will come back one day and let me show you round?" invited the big man.

"I should be delighted," answered Andy, and meant it.

He followed Scottie up the oaken stairs of the guest-house to the delightful little room that he had occupied for two days.

"Scepticism is the curse of this age," said Scottie bitterly. "Do you think I wouldn't have come back if you'd let me go alone to my room?"

There were times when Scottie was childish, and Andy Macleod did not trouble to reply.

The lank man stepped into the car, wearing on his countenance an expression of sheer distaste.

"There are too many motor cars in these days," he complained. "Lack of exercise is killing thousands every day. What do you want me for, Mac? Whatever it is, I've got an alibi."

"Where did you find it? With the fossils?" demanded his captor, and Scottie relapsed into a dignified silence.

# Chapter 2

With scottie lodged in the adequate lock-up, Andy discovered that there were certain formalities that need be gone through before his prisoner could be transferred to the area where he must answer for his sins.

"Where can I find one?" asked Andy, when he was told that the transfer must be approved and ordered by the local justice.

"Well, sir," meditated the sergeant of police, "there's Mr. Staining, but he's ill; and there's Mr James Bolter, but he's on his holidays, and there's Mr Carrol, but, now I come to think of it, he's gone up to the horse show. He breeds—"

Andy interrupted him.

"There is something in the air of this place which makes people talkative, sergeant," he said patiently, "but perhaps I was a little obscure. I don't want the names of the men who aren't here. Is there anybody in the neighbourhood who is on the Commission of the Peace?"

"There is one gentleman," emphasised the sergeant. "Mr Boyd Salter. He'll sign the order." He added: "If he's at home."

Andy grinned, and went in search of Mr Boyd Salter.

He found that the nearest way to the house avoided Beverley Green; in fact, Mr Salter's demesne ran well into Beverley, and was reached through a pair of lodge gates at the end of the town. He had seen them before and wondered who lived beyond them.

Beverley Hall was a handsome mansion of the type that Inigo Jones had made famous.

It was a house of silence. The first sound he heard as he was taken into a spacious, stone-flagged hall was the ticking of a clock. The man-servant moved noiselessly to carry Andy's visiting card, and Andy saw that he wore rubber-soled shoes. He was a long time gone, and when he returned he beckoned the caller forward.

"Mr Salter is a martyr to nerve trouble, sir," he whispered. "If you would speak quietly to him he would be obliged, I am sure."

Andy expected to meet an invalid, and had a vision of a trembling figure propped in a cushioned chair. Instead, he found a healthy-looking man of fifty, who looked up quickly as, unannounced, Andy was shown into the room.

"Good afternoon, Mr Macleod. What can I do for you? I see you are on police business," he said, examining the card.

Andy explained the reason for his visit.

"You needn't lower your voice," smiled the other. "I suppose Tilling told you? Sometimes I am rather jumpy, but this is one of my good days." He looked at the document which Andy put before him and signed it. "Our friend is the jewel burglar, isn't he?" he said. "Where has he been hiding?"

"In your garden city," said Andy, and a frown puckered Mr Salter's handsome face.

"Beverley Green? At the guest-house, of course?"

Andy nodded. "Did you meet any of the citizens?"

"One; Mr Merrivan." There was nothing said for a little while, then: "A curious lot of people. Wilmot is a rum fish. I can't quite get the measure of him. I've often thought he was an aristocratic burglar. What is the name of that fellow in the book—Ruffles? Ah, Raffles, that's it! A queer fish, Wilmot. Then there's Nelson. There is a weird fellow! Drinks like the devil! He'd drink the sea dry."

It was then Andy remembered the story he had heard about the artist.

"He has a daughter," he suggested.

"Ah, yes. Nice girl; very pretty. Wilmot is engaged to her or something of the sort. My son is a great news-gatherer when he's at home. He ought to be in the police service—at school now. H'm."

He looked down at the warrant, blotted it, and passed it across to Andy.

"Mr Merrivan seems a very nice man," he suggested.

The justice shook his had.

"Know nothing about him whatever," he said. "I've just said 'How d'ye do' to him, nothing more. He appears an inoffensive gentleman. Rather a bore, but inoffensive. Talks too fluently; everybody does in Beverley."

To emphasise this local weakness he went on, without stopping, to give the history of Beverley and its people. Presently he spoke of the Hall.

"Yes, it's a beautiful little place, but the estate is a very expensive one to keep up. I've not been able to do what I should have done, if—"

He looked quickly away, as though he feared his visitor could read his thoughts. It was some time before he spoke again. "Have you ever associated with the devil, Mr Macleod?"

He was not joking. The look he shot at Andy was straight and stern.

"I have associated with a number of minor devils," smiled Andy, "but I cannot lay claim to knowing the father of them."

The eyes of Mr Salter did not waver. They fixed Andy absently, it is true, but steadfastly, for fully thirty seconds.

"There is a man in London called Abraham Selim," he said, speaking slowly, "who is a devil. I am not telling you this as a police officer. I don't know why I am telling you at all. I think it comes of a natural association of ideas. I have had to sign many orders of arrest, but never once have I put pen to paper without thinking of this greatest of criminals. He is a murderer—a murderer!"

Andy, startled, moved in his chair.

"He has killed men; broken their hearts; ground them into the earth. He had a friend of mine like that!" He clasped his hand tight until the knuckles showed white.

"Abraham Selim?" Andy could think of nothing else to say, and his host nodded.

"If, as I believe, he will one day make a slip and fall into your hands, send me word. No, no, I don't mean that; he will never be trapped!"

"Is he Semitic—or Turkish? His name suggests both origins."

Boyd Salter shook his head.

"I've never seen him. I've not met anybody who has," he said surprisingly. "Now off you go, Mr Macleod. What is your rank, by the way?"

"I've been trying to discover for years," said Andy. "I'm by way of being a medical."

"A doctor?"

Andy nodded.

"I do a lot of analytical work. I'm a sort of assistant pathologist."

Boyd Salter smiled.

"Then I should have called you 'Doctor'," he said. "Edinburgh, of course."

Andy agreed.

"I've a weakness for doctors. My nerves are—terrible. Is there any cure?"

"Psycho-analysis," said Andy promptly. "It enables you to take out your inhibited worries and stare 'em out of countenance. Goodbye, sir."

There was no more effectual way of giving Andy Macleod his conge than to talk medicines with him.

"Goodbye-er—Doctor. You look very young for such a position—thirty or thirty-one?"

"You suggested midway, sir," laughed Andy, and went out.

# Chapter 3

Stella Nelson left the post office in a panic. Though she did not turn her head, she was conscious that the good-looking, strong-faced man she had seen in the telephone box was looking after her. What would he think, he, a man to whom, in all probability, the flicker of an eyelash had significance? She had nearly swooned at the shock of that word 'detective', and he had seen her sway and turn pale, and must have wondered what was the cause.

She wanted to run, and it required all her reserve of will to keep her from increasing her already hurried pace. She went rapidly down the declivity to the railway station and found she had half an hour to wait, and only then remembered that when she had left the house she had given herself time to order a number of commodities that were required for the kitchen. Should she go back? Dare she face the grave scrutiny which had so terrified her?

Eventually she did go back. The spur of self-contempt urged her, yet she was relieved to discover that the blue car had gone. She hurried from store to store with her orders, and then, after a moment's hesitation, went across to the post office and bought some stamps.

"What did you say that man was?"

With an effort she kept her voice steady.

"A detective, miss," said the old postmaster with relish. "You could have knocked me down with a feather duster when he showed me his card. I don't know what he's after."

"Where has he gone?" she asked, dreading the reply.

"He's gone up to Beverley Green, Miss, according to what he told me."

The postmaster's memory was not of the brightest, or he would have recalled the fact that Andy had expressed no such intention.

"To Beverley Green?" she said slowly.

"That's it, miss—Macleod!" he said suddenly. "That's the name. I couldn't remember it. Macleod." He pronounced it "Mac-lo-ed."

"Macleod," she corrected him. "Is he staying here?"

"No, miss, he's just passing through. Banks, the butcher, wouldn't believe that we had a detective in the town—a real man from headquarters. He's the fellow who gave evidence in that Marchmont poisoning murder. Do you remember it, miss? A wonderful murder it was, too. A man poisoned his wife, being anxious to marry another lady, and this Macleod's evidence got him hanged. Banks told me that, but I remembered it the moment he spoke. I've got a wonderful memory for murder cases."

She went back at a more leisurely pace to the station and took a ticket. She was undecided, tormented by doubt and fear. She hated the idea of going away from the place, even for a few hours, whilst that man was prying into heaven knows what, she told herself fretfully.

Again she walked back towards the village, and then she heard the scream of the train whistle. No, she would carry out her original idea. One danger at any rate was definite. She hated Macleod. He was an enemy. She hated him, but she feared him too. She shivered at the recollection of that inquiring stare of his, which said so plainly: "You have something to fear." She tried hard to read, but her mind was never upon the newspaper, and, though her eyes followed the lines, she saw nothing, read nothing.

Nearing her destination, she wondered that she had ever dreamt of going back. She had only a week to settle this ghastly business of hers—exactly a week—and every day counted. She might be successful. She might be returning that afternoon, her heart singing with happiness, passing by these very fields and bridges, her mind at peace.

Mechanically she noticed the objects of the landscape as the train flashed through. She must remember to register her emotions when they came to that white farmhouse on the return journey. By the time she saw it again she might not have a care in the world.

Dreams and journey ended simultaneously. She hurried out through the big terminus, crowded with jostling, horrible people, who would not so much as turn their heads if she died that moment. A taxi-cab came to her signal.

"Ashlar Building?" he pondered, and then: "I know where you mean, miss."

The Ashlar Building was a great block of offices; she had never seen it before, and had no idea as to how she was to find the man on whom she was calling. Inside the hall, however, and covering both walls, was an indicator, and her eyes went down column after column of names until they stopped.

309, Abraham Selim.

The office was on the fifth floor.

It was some time before she found it, for it stood in a corner of a long wing—two office doors, one marked private, the other abr. selim.

She knocked at the door, and a voice said:

"Come in."

A small rail separated the office from the narrow gangway in which callers were permitted to stand.

"Yes, miss?"

The man who advanced to her was brusque and a little hostile.

"I want to see Mr Selim," she said, and the young man shook his well-pomaded head.

"You can't see him, miss, without an appointment," he said, "and even then he won't talk to you." He stopped suddenly and stared at her. "Why, Miss Nelson!" he said. "I never expected to see you here."

She flushed, and strove vainly to recall where he had ever seen her.

"You remember me, miss—Sweeny," he said, and her face went a deeper red.

"Why, of course. Sweeny."

She was embarrassed, humiliated, at this discovery.

"You left Mr Merrivan's service rather hurriedly, didn't you?"

He was uncomfortable in his turn.

"Yes, I did, miss." He coughed. "I had a bit of a disagreement with Mr Merrivan. A very mean gentleman, and awfully suspicious." He coughed again. "Did you hear nothing, miss?"

She shook her head. The Nelsons did not keep their servants long enough to reach the stage of intimacy where they could gossip with them, even if they were so inclined.

"Well, the fact is," said Sweeny, a trifle relieved that he had the opportunity of getting in his version first, "Mr Merrivan missed some silver. Very foolishly I had lent it to a brother of mine to copy. He was very

interested in old silver, being a working jeweller, and when Mr Merrivan missed the silver—" He coughed again, and grew weakly incoherent. He had been accused of stealing—he! And he had been fired without ado. "I'd have been starving now, miss, only Mr Selim got to hear of me and gave me this job. It is not much," he added deprecatingly, "but it is something. I often wish I was back in the happy valley. That's what I always called Beverley Green."

She cut short his flow of explanation and reminiscence.

"When can I see Mr Selim?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I can't tell you that, miss. I've never seen him myself."

"What!" she said, staring at him in amazement.

"It's a fact, miss. He's a moneylender—why, of course, I needn't tell you that."

He looked knowingly at her, and she felt ready to sink through the floor from very shame.

"All his business is done by letter. I receive visitors and fix appointments. Not that he ever keeps them," he said, "but the clients fill in blanks—you understand, miss, the amount of money they want, the security they can offer, and all that sort of thing—and I leave them here in that safe for Mr Selim when he comes."

"When does he come?"

"God knows," said the other piously. "He must come, because the letters are taken away two or three times a week. He communicates with the people himself. I never know how much they borrow or how much they pay back."

"But when he wants to give instructions does he write them?" asked the girl, her curiosity getting the better other disappointment.

"He telephones. I don't know where from. It's a queer job. Only two hours a day, and only four days a week."

"Is there no possibility of seeing him?" she asked desperately.

"Not a scrap," said Sweeny, becoming important again. "There's only one way of conducting business with Abe—he wouldn't be mad if he knew I called him Abe, not at all—and that is by correspondence."

She dropped her eyes to the counter and stood awhile thinking.

"Is Mr Nelson quite well, miss?" asked Sweeny.

"Very well, thank you," she said hastily. "Thank you, Sweeny. I—" It was hateful to take a servant into her confidence. "You won't mention the fact that you saw me here?"

"Certainly not," said the virtuous Sweeny. "Lord, miss, if you knew the people who come up here you would be surprised. Actors and actresses, people you read about in the daily papers, ministers, religious ones—"

"Goodbye, Sweeny."

She closed the door on his recital.

Her knees wobbled as she walked down the stairs, which she took in preference to the lift, for she knew now just how much she had counted upon the interview. With despair in her heart she saw the iron inevitability of everything. What could now arrest the sword already swinging for the blow? Nothing, nothing! The man she wanted she could not reach—the only man, she told herself bitterly, the only man!

Looking up on the journey back she saw the white farmhouse and could have wept.

She changed at the junction and arrived at Beverley at five o'clock, and the first person she saw as she stepped off the train was the calm, capable, grey-eyed man. He had seen her first, and his eyes were on hers when she stepped down. For a second her heart stood still, and then she saw at his side the man with the handcuffs on his wrist—the Canadian professor! So that was whom he was after—the Canadian professor, who had talked so entertainingly on fossils.

Scottie knew a great deal about fossils; it was his favourite subject. In prison, if one takes up a subject, one usually discovers three or four books in the library that have a bearing upon the matter. On Scottie's other side stood a uniformed policeman. As for the criminal, he met her horrified glance with a bland smile. She supposed that people got callous and hardened after a while, and the shame of captivity ceased to be. But there must have been a time when even that lean-faced man would have dropped his eyes before the gaze of a woman who had so much as spoken to him.

She glanced quickly at Andy and went on. The relief! The dismal despair of the return journey was lightened. She was almost cheerful as she came up the rose-bordered path to the door.

# Chapter 4

In nelson's house you stepped from the street to a big hall, around three sides of which ran a gallery reached by a broad flight of stairs.

Nelson was standing at an easel examining a picture, and his face was hidden from her. But there was no need to see his face. The attitude was eloquent. He turned and surveyed her with a certain strange hauteur which a king might reserve for unwelcome intruders. He was a man with a narrow face, slightly bald. The nose was thin and aristocratic, the chin and mouth a little weak. A thin brown moustache, turning grey, gave him a quasi-military appearance, in keeping with a mood which at the moment was certainly militant.

"Well," he said, "you have come back."

He stalked slowly towards her, his hands behind him, his thin shoulders thrown back.

"Are you aware that I have had no lunch?" he asked ominously.

"I told you I was going to town this morning. Why didn't you ask Mary?"

She dreaded the reply.

"I have discharged Mary," he said, and Stella groaned inwardly.

"You haven't discharged the cook by any chance?" she asked.

"I have also discharged the cook."

"Did you also pay them their wages?" she demanded, angered beyond restraint. "Oh, Father, why do you do these things?"

"I discharged them because they were impertinent," said Mr Nelson with a gesture. "That is sufficient. I am master in my house."

"I wish you were a little more master of yourself," she said wearily, as she walked across to the mantelpiece, took down a bottle, and held it to the light. "Why do you always discharge the servants when you are drunk, Father?"

"Drunk?" he said, shocked.

She nodded.

In such moments as these she did not use euphemisms, it was not the occasion for delicacy.

"Tomorrow you will tell me you have no recollection of anything that happened, and you will be very penitent. But I shall have to go into Beverley and find two servants who have not been discharged by us. They will be difficult to find."

Nelson raised his eyebrows.

"Drunk?" he repeated, but she took no notice of him, and presently, in the kitchen, where she was preparing her meal, she heard him going up the stairs, repeating "Drunk" and laughing sardonically at intervals.

She sat by the spotless kitchen table and made her meal of a cup of chocolate and a slice of bread and butter. She looked for the cheese, though she knew her search would be fruitless. It was another characteristic of Mr Nelson that in his 'cups' he had a partiality for cheese. If he had done any work—she went out into the studio at the back of the house. The canvas she had placed for him that morning had not felt so much as the touch of a charcoal suck. Stella Nelson sighed.

"What's the use?" she asked, addressing her query to one of the many half finished studies that hung on the wall.

She was working at her household accounts at a small writing-table in a corner of the studio when she heard the bell tinkle, and went to the front door. It was dusk, and the figure of the man who had rung had retreated some half a dozen paces from the door, so that at first she could not distinguish him.

"Oh, is that you, Arthur? Come in, won't you? Father's gone to bed."

"I guessed he had."

Mr Arthur Wilmot waited until she had switched on the light in the studio before he came in.

"You went to town today?"

"Did you see me?" she asked quickly.

"No. Somebody told me; I think it was Merrivan. And did you hear about our Canadian geologist? He is quite an important burglar; important enough to have a man like Andrew Macleod looking for him. He's the pathologist."

"Who is Andrew Macleod?" she asked. She knew at once that Andrew Macleod was the man with the grey eyes, but she wanted to be sure.

"He's a detective. Well, he's not exactly a detective; I believe he's a doctor—a pathologist. He only takes the big cases, and the professor is a pretty big man in his business. 'Scottie' I think they call him; at least, that is how Mr Macleod addressed him."

"I must have seen him at the station," she said; "rather a good-looking man with peculiar eyes."

"I wouldn't call Scottie good looking," said Wilmot, and she was so confused that she did not correct the mistaken impression he had formed.

"I can't ask you to stay very long," she said. "We have lost our domestic staff."

"Again?" he said in surprise. "Oh no, that's too bad! Really I think your father is impossible. That means you've got to be cook and housemaid until you get somebody in."

"With a penitent parent most anxious to assist," she said savagely, "and all the time getting in my way! It is one of the crosses we have to bear, and father is really a wonderful darling when—"

It was on the tip of the young man's tongue to ask when was Mr Nelson ever completely sober. He was too wise, however, to let it go any further. Yet not so wise, as it transpired.

"To what part of the city did you go?" he asked.

She was over by the desk, tidying her papers.

"Why?" she asked, looking across at him.

"Oh, I—just asked—" he said lamely. "I wish I'd known you were in town. We'd have gone to lunch somewhere."

"I have a soul above food when I go to the city," she said. "What is it you do, Arthur?" she went on. "I have asked you that question more or less obliquely before. Permit me the luxury of a real indiscretion. Is it an indiscretion to ask you what you do for a living?"

He was silent.

"I just do things," he said vaguely.

"Have you an office?"

He hesitated, then nodded.

"Yes, I have an office," he said.

"Where?"

She saw the quick pucker of brow, and then:

"Mostly I use other people's offices. I have any number of friends, and my—" he stopped again. "I see my clients as near their homes as I can."

"You're not a lawyer and you're not a doctor." She ticked off the two professions on her fingers. "You're not a broker. Really, Arthur, you're almost as mysterious as"—a silence—"as Mr Scottie, as you call him, our poor professor. And now," she said briskly, "I think you had better go. I am not a stickler for the proprieties"—there was a bump overhead, and she looked up—"but when my parent has finally retired—I think he is just taking his boots off—you will have to retire also."

"I suppose," he began awkwardly, "you haven't thought any more—about—I don't want to rush or take advantage of—of things—"

She looked at him kindly enough, and took him in from the top of his tidy hair to the points of his polished shoes. He had a broad face and a small black moustache (it sometimes reminded Stella of a black caterpillar that had come to rest across his upper lip), and there were times when he appeared a little ridiculous. For some reason he was not so tonight and her heart went out to him in sympathy.

"I have thought about it, Arthur," she said quietly, "but it is wholly impossible. I really do not want to marry anybody. And now go home and forget all about it."

He sat, his eyes looking at the floor, his fingertips touching, and a silence followed, she did not care to break in upon thoughts which she guessed were not too happy.

Suddenly:

"Now, Stella, perhaps you had better drop that little-boy-don't-bother attitude," he said. "You're a woman and I'm a man. I'm offering you something. I'm not exactly empty-handed as it is, but when Merrivan dies—well, I'm his only relative. You're broke, and you've been up to some damned folly. I don't know what it is, but I'll know sooner or later. You can't stay in Beverley Green much longer. Your father has drunk two mortgages on to this house and he'll drink the furniture before he's through. I dare say you think it will be fine and large to earn your living, but it isn't. Five employers in seven will want to cuddle you, I know. I'm willing to put that poor soak into a good inebriates' home. It will be kill or cure, and, anyway, it has got to come to that. I'm speaking plainly. I've tried the other way and it hasn't worked. You're woman enough to see

that it is kindest to be cruel. I want you, Stella, I want you more than I've wanted anything. And I know!"

This significantly. Her lips moved; but the question she put had no sound.

"I know just how bad your affairs are, and I tell you that I am going to use my knowledge to get you. There isn't a low-down thing on earth that I won't do to get you. That's straight?"

They had been on such good terms that the reticences which separate ordinary friends from one another had been thawed away. He was the only man in the world, with the exception of her father, who addressed her by her Christian name. She called him "Arthur" naturally. To Stella Nelson he was a type of young business man who played tennis, danced well, talked about himself with satisfaction and owned a mid-opulent car. He was the most engaging of that type she had met, and she had studied him sufficiently well to know exactly what he would do in any given set of circumstances.

Her first sensation when he began to speak was one of dismay and chagrin. She was not hurt; it was a long time before she was hurt. But she was annoyed by the mistake she had made. She had felt that way when at a bridge party she had inadvertently or abstractedly led the wrong card, knowing that it was the wrong card, and had lost the rubber in consequence. She had an absurd desire to apologise to him for having misjudged his character, but, even had she not recognised its absurdity, she was incapable of speech. She was wrong, not he. He was right, natural, his own self, aggressive and 'hell-sure'. The Canadian professor had used that expression in her hearing and it had tickled her. Arthur Wilmot was hell-sure of himself, of his advantageous position, of her.

Then she found her voice.

"You'd better go, Arthur," she said gently.

In age she was little more than a child. She felt motherly towards him. He was so pathetically foolish that she felt sorry for him.

"I'll go when I want to," he said. "If you want me thrown out, call your father. Why don't you? Call the servants he fired! You think I'm being a cad, but I'm underlining and italicising the fact that you arc alone, not in this house, but in the world."

She had found her strength and her weapon.

"And you are being the strong, talkative man. The silent variety was sure to produce his opposite sooner or later," she said.

She leant against the back of a chair, her hands behind her. Her poise was disconcerting to this stormer of citadels. Neither hectic defiance nor surrender met him, but the consciousness that there was some hidden reserve. He felt it coming and was uneasy.

"I'm not frantically annoyed by your—I am trying to think of a good description—tragic clowning; clowning because it was intended to be tragic. I don't want to marry you, Arthur, because—well, you admitted that of yourself you have no particular quality or charm, didn't you? You must 'get me' by virtue of your better financial position. That is snobbish in you, isn't it? Or by blackmail, or some other thing. The villain in the melodrama does that. You should have had a green limelight focused on you—the strong, talkative man and the weak, silent woman. That would be novel, wouldn't it? You are the second drunken man I have met today, only you have swallowed a more potent intoxicant. You're vanity-drunk, and you'll find it hard to get sober again."

Her voice never lost its command of him. He writhed, made grunting little noises. Once he tried to break in on her, but in the end he was beaten down, and arrested the employment of arguments which he had so carefully thought out in a shrinking fear that they would sound silly even to himself. She crossed to the door and opened it.

"I only want to say—" he began, and she laughed.

"You still want to say something?" she asked. He walked out without a word and she crossed and locked the door, behind him.

She stood with one hand on the knob, thinking, her head bent low in the attitude of one who was listening. But she was only thinking, and still in thought she put out the lights and went upstairs to her room. It was very early to go to bed, but there was no reason why she should stay below. She undressed slowly by the light of the moon. Her room was on the top floor, on the same level as that of the servants. It was the gable window which Andrew Macleod had seen, and she chose it because it gave her a view uninterrupted by the trees.

She pulled a dressing-gown over her pyjamas and, throwing open the casement windows, leant her elbows on the edge and looked out. The world was a place of misty hues. The light flooding the central green turned the grass to a dove grey. The beams caught the white scar of old Beverley Quarry, and it showed like a big oyster-shell against the wooded slope of the hill. A night of peace; no sound but the faint screech of an owl from the hills and the crunching of feet on the gravel road. Tramp, tramp, tramp, like the measured march of a soldier. Who was

abroad? She did not recognise the leisurely footstep. Then he came into view.

Looking down between the branches of two trees, she saw a man, and knew him before he turned his face inquiringly towards the house.

The detective with the grey eyes—Andrew Macleod!

She bit her lip to check the cry that rose, and, stepping back, closed the windows stealthily.

Her heart was thumping painfully; she almost heard the 'Ugh!'of it.

The detective! She crept to the windows and looked out, and, waiting, she pulled them open. There was no sound, not even the distant sound of feet on gravel. In a moment she saw him. He was walking across the grass, and soon after disappeared. There came to her the drone of a motor that died away to nothing.

She staggered to her bed and sat down.

At that moment Arthur Wilmot was torturing himself with speculations. What would she think of him? He might have spared himself that sleepless night. She had forgotten that Arthur Wilmot existed.

# Chapter 5

Waiting on the station platform, Scottie had grown suddenly communicative, even rhetorical.

"You think that you're tolerably well acquainted with all the dirt of life, Macleod; because you know the hot spots in town, the Chink pipe cellars, and the silk curtains and divan emporiums, that you know it all. I admit you're not so hell-sure as some of those misapplications they call detectives, and your doctoring has taken you down to the lining of things, but you don't know it all."

"I don't," confessed Andy.

"That is where some of you people go wrong—not you, I admit, but some of you coppers. It isn't the dive and the thieves' kitchen, or the place where the scum and scrapings are found—little hooks who reckon they're Rothschildren when they touch a fiver—it isn't these that are the bad places." He looked round. The county policeman who was escorting him to town was not listening. "If you want to find tabulated hell, go to Beverley Green!"

Andy eyed him keenly and felt an inexplicable thrill run down his spine.

"What do you mean? Did you hear anything?"

Scottie conveyed a negative with a curl of his lips. "No, nothing; but I smelt it. I'm sensitive to—what'n hell's the word? Atmosphere, that's it. You'll snigger at that, but it was a fortune to me in what I might term my unregenerate days. I'll let you snigger now, but you won't laugh when you see the size and appearance of my alibi. In those days that sort of creepy feeling has saved me many a long stretch of wasted time. I've been in a prison when they brought in a man to be hanged. Nobody knew he was there; he was transferred the day before his execution, because the flooring of the death house caught fire. Fact! And I knew he was in the prison, knew the hour he came in. That is how I feel about Beverley Green. There is something—evil about it. Queer word for me to

use, Macleod, eh? They touch your elbow as you walk—ghosts! Laugh! But I tell you there's a bunch of 'em. That's how I've named it the Valley of Ghosts! Now I'll tell you something that would look bad against me if you put it in the charge. But I trust you, Macleod, because you're different to the general run of bulls; you're a gentleman. I carried a gun. Always had one in my kit, but never carried one in my jeans before. I did. I had it on me when you pinched me. I chucked it away as we drove into Beverley. I won't tell you where, for you didn't see me do it.'

"When you pretended to yawn as we were coming round the bend into the town," said Andy. "But we won't mention that, and I'll countermand the order I gave to search the ditches. Why, Scottie, you're not easily scared."

Scottie clicked his lips. He was quite serious.

"I don't know. I'm not nervy; never was. Not afraid of anything human. It was just—well—shooting stars used to give me the same creep. It was a fear. I let it out yesterday to Merrivan, the Community-Barker—"

Andy grinned at the tribute to Mr Merrivan as the advertising agent of, and guide to, Beverley Green.

"Not a bad fellow. He's forgotten how to learn, but that comes with fat. Not a bad fellow. He said the same thing—after I'd said it. Agreed with me. Maybe he'd agree with anybody; he's accommodating. But it seemed to me that I'd put into words all that he would have thought if the Lord had given him the power of thinking. Macleod, go and stay a day or so in Beverley Green and smell it yourself—something brooding, the dead silence before the flash of lightning that hits your house—and here's the train. If you're called to give evidence about me, say the good word."

"Have I ever said anything against you, Scottie?" asked Andy reproachfully. "Good luck to the alibi!"

Scottie winked.

It was at that moment that the train stopped and Stella Nelson got out. Andy's eyes followed her until she was out of sight.

"And she's in it somewhere," whispered Scottie, almost in his ear. "So long, Macleod."

So Scottie went off to the bar of justice, a less disastrous experience than he had anticipated, for his alibi was well and truly laid, and the evidence of four apparently respectable persons who were playing cards with him at the moment the crime was committed was unshaken by the

scorn of the prosecution and unmoved by the deft questions of a sceptical judge.

Andy had promised himself the pleasure of a moonlight drive across country to the holiday place whence he had been dragged. Evidence of arrest would be given by the inspector in charge of the case, to whom the receiving of the prisoner from the county policeman constituted arrest. If Andy's presence was necessary in court it would only mean a day in town.

Scottie's words had bitten into the surface of his mind as acid bites into a plate. When he went back to the inn where he had garaged the car he had no intention of leaving Beverley, although he was embarrassed to discover that his identity was public property, and the sparse but human population of Beverley turned to look awefully after him as he passed.

If he had no intention of leaving Beverley that night, he had less thought of paying a visit to Beverley Green. Subconsciously he may have already decided his action, but consciously he was obeying a sudden impulse, when, after dinner, he had his car out and drove towards the happy community. He turned at the guest-house, shut off his engine, and extinguished his lights. The moon was at its full, and its magic was working powerfully within him.

He stood for a long time greedily absorbing the delicate beauty of the scene, and then he crossed the green, and again subconsciously his feet carried him in the direction of the Nelson home.

An oblong of yellow light suddenly appeared; the door had opened, and he stopped in the shadow of a clump of rhododendrons, one of many that edged the village green.

He saw a man come out, and there was something in his gait that immediately attracted Andy's attention. It was literally true of Andy that his study of mankind was man. A grimace, a movement of the hands, the very way a man sat down to table and unfolded his napkin, had a meaning to this student.

"There goes one who is in a very bad temper," he thought, and watched the form of Arthur Wilmot as he strode wrathfully along the gravelled road. He threw open the gate of his own house and paused. As if a thought had struck him, he came out again, closed the gate, and continued his walk, turning into a house that stood at the corner of the lane—Mr Merrivan's house, Andy noted, and remembered that they were uncle and nephew.

He walked on, still keeping to the shadow of the bushes. Something—a twinge of apprehension—had communicated itself to him. He was imaginative in a practical way, but he was certainly not as susceptible as Scottie claimed to be. He had passed the burglar's narrative under review, and, allowing for certain natural extravagances of language, there remained his natural sincerity. Andy had discounted the fear which he man had so graphically described as part and portion of the extravagance, but now he himself was experiencing something of the same vague dread. It was as though his soul was passing under the shadow of a menace. He conceived that menace in the shape of a gigantic figure with an upraised sword, and smiled to himself at the romantic conceit.

Nevertheless, he kept to the shadows, and stopped opposite Mr Merrivan's house. What made him do it he never knew. He was jeopardising a better acquaintance with the people of Beverley Green, and, by all standards of behaviour, he was acting unpardonably. The gate of Mr Merrivan's house was open as Arthur Wilmot had left it, and, crossing the road, he passed through, walking on the grass border of the drive.

It was a house of many windows, he saw, when he was clear of the obstructing trees—white, owlish windows, which the moon had transmuted into polished silver. There was no sign of light, and he followed the border until he stood under a window on the entrance floor, and then, with startling clearness, he heard a voice.

"You won't! By God, you won't! I'll see you dead before you do!"

It was not Merrivan speaking. He guessed it must be the visitor. Presently he heard a murmur of sound. The window was opened a few inches at the top. Behind, he guessed, were heavy curtains, and the speakers were in this room. And now he heard Merrivan distinctly.

"You're ridiculous, you're absurd, my dear man. I am not afraid of your threats. And now I will tell you something—something that will surprise you. I know—mysterious occupation in the city—"

And then the voices dropped, and although Andy put his ear to the pane, he could not distinguish anything more, only he heard the quick, urgent murmur of the visitor's voice, and once Mr Merrivan laughed.

Then he caught the moving of a chair and went back the way he had come, standing by the bushes until Arthur Wilmot came out, and, walking more slowly, disappeared into his own house.

Family jars can very well seem more important, more tragic than they are. But this was an unusual quarrel. What was this mysterious occupation of Mr Arthur Wilmot, the very mention of which had reduced him from a hectoring bully, breathing fire and slaughter, to a murmuring supplicant?

He waited until the door of the Wilmot house closed, then he stepped down to the gravel and paced slowly back. As he came to the Nelson residence he stopped and looked, and his heart beat a little faster. He saw the girl distinctly. The moonlight gave her beautiful face a delicacy which was unearthly. He saw her draw back and the window slowly close, and knew that she had seen him. Was she afraid? Had she recognised him? It was queer, he told himself, as he drove back to Beverley, and queerest of all was the sudden lightening of spirit and the rolling away of a sense of impending trouble which he experienced as his car turned into the main road. If there was a devil at Beverley Green he was a most potent devil. For a second he had scared Andrew Macleod.

# Chapter 6

Stella nelson was at breakfast when her father came down. He was no longer a haughty dismisser of servants, but an ashamed and humble man. His whole attitude was an apology.

Once Stella used to be deceived by his penitence. She had argued that if a man realised and was truly sorry for his faults—and he had not grown so callous that he passed over these acts in silence—there must be something in him and a chance of reformation. But that illusion had passed, with many others.

"Good morning, my dear. I hardly like to look you in the face," he said as he sat down and unfolded his serviette with uncertain hands. "I am a beast, a beast!"

She poured out his tea unimpressed.

"This is the last time, Stella, the very last time. I resolved as I was dressing this morning that never again would a wineglass touch my lips. Was I unusually stupid? I didn't dismiss the servants, did I?"

"They've gone," she said.

He groaned.

"Perhaps I could see them," he said eagerly. "I think I could put things right with Nellie. She was not a bad girl, though she did lose my gold studs. I'll go down and explain, and we'll have them all up by lunch-time, my love. I can't allow you to do the housework."

"Nellie came for her box this morning," said the girl in a matter-of-fact tone, "and I made the same suggestion to her. She says she wouldn't come back if I paid her a million a year. I didn't offer it to her."

"Did I—did I call her names?" he asked guiltily.

She nodded and pushed the marmalade towards him.

"Have you any money? I want to go shopping," she said.

He shifted uneasily in his chair.

"I'm afraid I haven't," he said. "I went into Beverley yesterday morning after you had gone and made one or two purchases—"

"I know," Stella interrupted calmly. "You left exactly half a bottle, which I poured down the sink."

"You shouldn't have done that, my dear," he murmured. "It is poisonous stuff, but it is good to have in the house in case of sudden sickness."

Kenneth Nelson, on such occasions as these, invariably presupposed the outbreak of some malady which could only be cured by the liberal application of whisky.

"If we're sick we'll send for Dr. Grannitt," said the girl briskly. "Are you sure you have no money, Father?"

"I have a few shillings." He put his hand in his pocket and produced a handful of loose silver. "I shall want that," he said hastily. "I get my cheque from the dealers today. Why it hasn't come this morning I don't know. These dealers are most unbusiness-like."

"The cheque came last week," she said, without heat. "You took the letter from the maid and asked her not to tell me anything about it. She told me that yesterday, amongst other things."

He groaned again.

"I'm a spendthrift, I'm a wastrel," he wailed. "I drove your poor mother into her grave by my beastliness. You know I did, Stella."

In such moments of self-abnegation he found pleasure in the exposure of his weakness. That it might hurt his daughter did not occur to him. He himself derived such complete satisfaction in his role of flagellant that he could not imagine she did not share his painful pleasure.

"Don't," she said almost sharply, and returned instantly to the money question. "I must have some money, Father. The maids are coming up for their wages today. Or, to be more exact, I promised to send it down to them."

He was hunched up in his chair, an injured, brooding man.

"I'll make a start on that Pygmalion today," he said. "It will take some while to do, and it will be a long time before I get the money. These infernal dealers—"

He had started on the Pygmalion three years before, but had not been quite in the mood ever since. Stella had given up engaging models for him and accepted the announcement that a start was to be made upon

the great picture with the same indifference as she received his penitence.

He brightened up as a thought occurred to him and leant across the table, dropping his voice to a confidential tone.

"I suppose, Stella, you couldn't get—You remember the money you got when that wretched jam manufacturer sued me for the money he had deposited—as if I could paint a picture to order! I was never a tradesman, dear. I don't sing a song about art, but art is the essence of existence to me."

He looked at her expectantly, pleadingly. She shook her head.

"I cannot get any more money that way," she said. "I'd sooner die." She shivered at the recollection. "Don't let us talk about it. Father," she said.

Presently he got up and strolled disconsolately about the room, posing before the half-finished portrait of her which had been begun when she was three years younger.

"There's the makings of a picture," he said. "I've a jolly good mind to concentrate on that."

Later, however, she found him in the studio examining another incomplete canvas.

"A couple of weeks' work on that, Stella, and, by gad! I've got an Academy picture!"

"Why don't you make a start. Father?" she asked. "I'll help you fix the palette. Get into your smock and start."

"There's tons of time," he said airily. "I'm going to see if I can find a professional. One round would make a man of me."

She saw him afterwards disappearing into the valley, with his caddie behind him and the professional walking by his side, a man without a care in the world, without a thought of tomorrow or a real regret for yesterday.

When he came back to lunch he was so bright and confident, so dogmatic and optimistic, that she knew that his good resolution of the morning was already an amusing memory.

"It is knowing where to stop, Stella, that makes all the difference between a man and a fool," he said. "There is nobody who knows better than myself when he's had enough. The trouble with me is that I am an artist. My mind goes wandering into rosy dreamlands, and I drink mechanically, without realising that I am drinking at all." He laughed

outrageously and pinched her cheek. "We'll have that Pygmalion finished in a week," he said. "You think that's a stupid promise, don't you? I can tell you, my dear, that as a young man, when I painted the picture which made me famous—Homer drinking the hemlock—I began to work on the Sunday morning and the thing was finished on Tuesday night. Of course I touched it up afterwards."

She had heard the story innumerable times.

"Did you drink anything at the club, Father?"

The club was a tiny bungalow at the end of the village, and had perhaps the smallest membership of any golfing club in the world.

"Just a whisky and soda," he said airily, and added something about a man knowing when he had had enough.

Kenneth Nelson had the habit of repression, a habit to which neurotics are susceptible. He could put out of his mind any aspect of life and every memory of word or deed that was unpleasant to think about, or shocked his artistic soul. He referred to this facility as a gift; it was, in fact, a weakness, symptomatic of his neurosis. His speech abounded in wise sayings, old saws that had crystallised into a habit of thought. His favourite, and, indeed, the only poetical quotation, was that stanza from Omar which deals with the inevitability of the moving finger.

"Oh, by the way, Stella, we have a visitor at the guesthouse. Upon my word, it is poetical justice," he chuckled. "That rascal Bellingham was a thief, a burglar. By gad! I shouldn't have slept soundly if I had known that."

The girl wondered what there was in the house, other than unfinished paintings, that might have tempted the errant Scottie.

Before her father could continue she had an intuitive knowledge of what he was going to say.

"The detective?" she asked quickly.

He nodded.

"He is staying here for a day or two—quite an interesting fellow, a most charming fellow. He's a guest of Merrivan's in a sense. You know how Merrivan picks up odd people, impossible people as a rule; but this time he's picked a winner. This detective fellow—Andrew, Andrew, what the devil is it? A Scottish name. I never can remember all the Macs."

"Macleod."

"Andrew Macleod, that's it! Well, he is the fellow who was sent down to arrest the burglar, and very smart he was about it. He is quite a lion. Of course, it is unusual to find a detective who is a gentleman, except in books. You'd like to meet him, wouldn't you, my dear? He would interest you."

"No," she said, so quickly that he looked at her. "I'm really not interested," she went on hurriedly, "and besides, I saw him in the post office yesterday morning and didn't like the look of him."

Mr Nelson yawned and looked at his watch.

"Well, I'll get along. I promised Pearson I'd partner him in a foursome this afternoon. You're sure you won't come up to tea?"

She did not ask him inconvenient questions about the unfinished Pygmalion. Two years ago, when she first came back from school, she would have been surprised that he had so quickly forgotten his noble intentions, and would have suggested that he spent the afternoon in his studio, and he would have replied that he would get up early the next morning and make a good start. If she had repeated the suggestion now, she would have had the same answer. She was resigned now, resigned to everything. Things must work out as they might. She had made her effort and had failed. Recalling the journey to town and the high hopes she had set upon the interview which had proved impossible, she knew that her wild flutter to escape had been futile from the conception of the idea. The worst must happen. It was Kismet.

When she had come down that morning she had found a letter from Arthur Wilmot, and, after making sure that he was the writer, she had torn it up unread and thrown it into the wastepaper basket. He was the least disturbing element of all.

As to the detective, he also was fate. He must do whatever he wished, whatever it was his duty to do. She was resigned to the worst, and he was included in her category of misfortunes. Today he headed the list.

She spent the afternoon interviewing the raw materials of service. They were crude country girls, who gaped at her, and giggled at the labour-saving devices to which she introduced them. It was a waste of time to look for trained servants, for they knew the house, and they had heard of Kenneth Nelson in his cups.

A secret and dwindling reserve of money which she kept in her desk enabled her to discharge her liabilities to the servants whom Nelson, in his lordly way, had dismissed. She had just finished the heart-breaking

task of teaching the new cook the delicate art of tea-making ("I likes it hot and strong myself, miss," said that lady) when Mr Merrivan arrived. She saw him through the window, and opened the door to him herself.

He was an unwelcome visitor, though she did not dislike him. She stilled the nutter of apprehension which she felt by committing him to the category of her inevitabilities, and gained a certain peace of mind thereby.

"A delicate errand. Miss—er—Nelson," he said, shaking his head, and thereby implying his unfitness for the mission. "A very delicate errand. I hardly know where to begin."

She waited, fearing that he would begin by reminding her of a certain obligation she had once undertaken and happily discharged. To her relief, the subject which he had come to expound was the brutality of his nephew.

"I don't know what he said to you. I can only guess. May I sit down?"

"I'm so sorry."

She pushed forward a chair, and Mr Merrivan seated himself slowly and gave her elaborate thanks.

"He has insulted you beyond forgiveness," he was starting, but she stopped him.

"I do hope you're not going to talk about that, Mr Merrivan. Arthur is very young, and he doesn't know a very great deal about women."

"Doesn't he?" said Mr Merrivan significantly. "I am sorry to say I disagree with you. He knows enough about ladies to understand what is his duty."

"Did he tell you?" she asked, wondering how this big man came to know.

It occurred to her that Arthur must have inherited his talkativeness from Mr Merrivan's branch of the family.

"He certainly told me," nodded the other, "and he asked me to use my influence with you—ahem!" he coughed. "I told him," he spoke very distinctly and slowly, "that I certainly could not hope to press the suit of another."

There was a pause whilst she was taking this in.

"Of another?" she repeated. "Do you mean—oh, no, you cannot mean—"

"I mean," said Mr Merrivan, very quietly, and, as before, very distinctly, "myself. The disparity in our ages, Miss Nelson, is apparently an insuperable obstacle to my happiness."

"Age has nothing to do with it, Mr Merrivan," she said hastily, "only I—I don't want to get married. You do mean that? You want to marry me? I hope you don't—it would make me look a little foolish if you didn't, but—I'd rather feel foolish."

"That is what I mean," said Darius Merrivan in his stateliest manner. "I have for a long time contemplated such a step. Miss Nelson, and every day I have seen you I have become more and more convinced that you are the only woman in the world with whom life would be in any way agreeable."

Stella laughed.

"I'm a little hysterical, I think," she excused herself. "I never dreamt that you—Of course, I am very honoured, Mr Merrivan, I cannot tell you how honoured, and you have been so good to me."

He raised his hand in protest.

"Do not let us speak of that matter," he said. "I can offer you—"

"Wait," she interrupted urgently. "I don't want to be married; that is the truth. I am very young, and I have no fixed ideas about matrimony, and I don't want to be married. It isn't because it is you, Mr Merrivan, any more than it was because it was Arthur. I just don't want to be married!"

She might have thought that he had expected some such reply, he took her refusal so calmly and with such a little show of chagrin.

"The matter can wait," he said. "I cannot expect a young lady to make up her mind on the spot, but I shall not give up hoping."

She shook her head.

"I think it would be kinder to tell you not to hope," said she. "I like you awfully, and you have been very kind to me."

Again his hands protested.

"But I don't want to marry you, Mr Merrivan, any more than I want to marry your nephew, and I don't think any time you may allow me to reconsider the matter will cause me to change my views. They are fixed and immutable."

Still he did not make any attempt to rise, but sat there feeling his smooth check and staring past her, until she began to wonder what there was to attract his gaze.

"Are things well with you, Miss Nelson?"

"Very well indeed," she answered brightly.

"You are not troubled at all?"

She shook her head.

"Another delicate matter," he said. "I am a very rich man and have no relatives and few calls upon my purse. If a matter of two thousand would be of any use to you, to tide over these hard times, you may command me."

"No, Mr Merrivan," she answered quietly, "it is big and generous of you. I have once trespassed upon your kindness, but—it wasn't a nice experience. Oh, yes, you were very sweet about it, but I can't accept anything more."

He got up to his feet, flicked a speck of dust from his sleeve, and picked up his hat.

"Arthur knows," he said. "I told him."

"Told him what?" she demanded, startled.

"That I was going to ask you to marry me."

He laughed softly.

"He was very violent. Miss Nelson, and threatened—I think he threatened to kill me." He turned at the door. "By the way, did he say anything to you about knowing your secret?"

"Did he tell you that, too?"

He shook his head.

"No, I guessed that. The secret he knew was that you had borrowed money from me, and how he came to know is beyond my understanding. Perhaps I can induce you to change your mind?"

She shook her head.

He was standing in the doorway, his hand on the handle, looking out into the garden.

"When is the twenty-fourth of the month?" he asked, not turning his head,

A very considerable space of time elapsed before she replied.

"Next Monday," she breathed, and stood motionless as he dosed the door behind him.

So he knew. He really did know. And the detective was here, for what other purpose than to serve Mr Merrivan in his discretion?

# Chapter 7

Andy spent two unprofitable days at Beverley Green—unprofitable because the person he had come to meet had studiously avoided him. Once he saw a girl walking on the other side of the green. She was accompanied by two dogs, which ran erratically before and behind, and occasionally around her, and, quickening his steps, found that it was a Miss Sheppard, a girl to whom he had been introduced on the links.

He dined the first night with Mr Merrivan and Sheppard, the architect, a man of such elusive personality that thereafter Andrew could never form a mental picture of him. Mr Merrivan was a bachelor, he told them; not an incorrigible one by any means. He was open to conviction, and, if he dare talk about himself, though he was sure nobody was particularly interested, he had been convinced.

"Indeed?" said his guests, variously impressed.

Andy wondered what kind of woman his host would marry. Mr Sheppard did not speculate. He gave the impression that he had stopped thinking when he had made sufficient money to retire from his profession.

Andy recalled the great architect as a round-faced man, but was uncertain whether he had a moustache or was cleanshaven.

He wore a large gold stud, flat, and resembling a button. It had a small black stone in the centre. It was the only hint of his personality that Andy could ever recollect.

"The fact is, gentlemen," said Mr Merrivan, lowering his voice as if he were revealing a great secret, "beautiful as this place is, and charming as the community is and always will be, I am sure, I have planned an existence even more—ah—serene. Do you know Lake Como, Dr Macleod?"

Andy knew it rather well.

"I have purchased a villa—the Villa Frescoli—a little place where I hope to find even greater happiness than has been my lot at Beverley."

Andy was thoughtful. The Villa Frescoli, so far from being a little place, was a palace, and Mr Merrivan was not the kind of man who would boast; a big white marble palace, he remembered, because the title of villa had seemed so inadequate to him when it had been pointed out.

There was a woman in the party that day on the lake, a woman with a practical housekeeping mind.

"They call it a villa," she said, "but it would require a staff of a hundred servants to run it."

She had been over the place, which had been built for a Russian Grand Duke.

Mr Merrivan assumed a new interest in Andy Macleod's eyes. He had spent the evening wondering whether the Nelsons would drop in after dinner, for such was the practice amongst members of the 'community'. But life ran much more conventionally than he had supposed, and, really there had been no reason why he should expect it to run otherwise. Neighbours did not call on one another. Beverley Green kept itself to itself.

Mr Sheppard left early, and, at the invitation of his host, Andy took his coffee into what Mr Merriman called his 'den'. He found himself in the room where Merrivan and Wilmot had been when he had overheard their conversation on the previous night. In some respects it was a remarkable apartment. It was long, and also appeared narrower than it was. It ran from the front to the back of the house, and was lighted from both ends by two tall windows. In the very centre was a big carved fireplace, which would have been more in keeping with a baronial hall, and it was probably due to this feature that the room seemed out of proportion and the ceiling unusually low.

Oak panelling covered the walls, and the first thing Andy noticed was the absence of books. Evidently Mr Merrivan was not a literary man and made no attempt to deceive a casual caller into believing that he was. The pictures on the wall were mostly etchings, and very valuable. Andy noticed some priceless examples of Zohn's works, and Mr Merrivan pointed out to him, with justifiable pride, a cartoon of Leonardo da Vinci.

For the fireplace he apologised. He had bought it from the executors of Stockley Castle. The coats of arms of the Stockleys appeared on the entablature. The furniture was good and modern—two deep settees fitted into the window recesses, and besides Mr Merrivan's desk, which was in that portion of the room at the front of the house, there was a long table

at the other end, a beautifully carved cabinet of Eastern origin, and a sprinkling of most comfortable armchairs.

"I am a simple person with simple tastes," said Mr Merrivan complacently. "My nephew thinks that the apartment is more like an office. Well, I have been very comfortable in offices. You smoke, doctor?"

Andy selected a cigar from the silver case that was pushed towards him.

"Do you find our community restful?"

Andy smiled.

"It is a delightful backwater," he said, and Mr Merrivan purred.

"I take a great deal of credit upon myself for its creation," he said. "I acquired these houses one by one. Some of them are very old, though you may not think so, and it was I who laid out Beverley Green as you now see it, I sold every house and made not a penny profit, sir, not a penny," he shook his head.

Andy was surprised.

"That was unbusinesslike of you."

"Not a all, not at all," said Mr Merrivan, shaking his head. "The idea is to get the right kind of people here. I am afraid they are not all quite the right kind. People are not all they seem, and character deteriorates. But in contrast to your own active life, doctor, Beverley Green must be very restful."

They passed on to a discussion of crime and criminals, a discussion which, in the main, took the form of questions on the part of Mr Merrivan and answers, long and short, according to the interest he had in the particular object of Mr Merrivan's research, from Andy.

"Have you ever met in your travels," Mr Merrivan hesitated, "a man named Abraham Selim?"

"Somebody else was asking me that very question," said Andy. "Now who was it? Anyway, I have not met him, Mr Merrivan. He is rather a bad egg, isn't he?"

"He is a usurer, and, as I have every reason to believe, a blackmailer," said Mr Merrivan soberly. "Happily I have not been in his clutches, although other people—can you remember who spoke about him? It was not Nelson, by any chance?"

"No, it was not Nelson," said Andy. "I think it was Mr Boyd Salter who asked me whether I had met him."

"Our feudal lord," said Merrivan humorously. "A very nice man, Mr Boyd Salter. Do you know him very well? I was not aware that you had met him when I was speaking to you the other day."

"I met him the same afternoon," said Andy. "I had to get his signature as Justice of the Peace before I could remove my prisoner."

"A charming fellow; we see too little of him," said Merrivan. "He is a nervous wreck in these days, I am told."

Andy remembered the soft-footed servant and the silence of the house and smiled. He left soon after. Mr Merrivan would have accompanied him to the guest-house, but this Andy declined. He was anxious to be alone; he wanted to make the journey at his leisure. The Nelson house could only be seen from one part of the green.

"I seem to spend my time listening at people's doors," thought Andy. He was standing opposite the gate, a very amazed man, for from within there reached him the sound of a man's violent raving. Suddenly the door was flung open and two women came flying out, blubbering in their rage. Behind them, with long strides, came Nelson. He was dressed in his shirt and trousers and slippers. Andy guessed he was drunk, but although he had seen many drunken men, he had never met one who walked so steadily as he followed the women outside the gate, or whose voice and enunciation were so clear.

"Don't ever let me see you again, you—" He broke into a volley of vilest abuse.

"Father!" The girl was at his side and had slipped her arm into his. "I think you had better come back."

"I will not come back. I will do as I wish. Stella, go to your room!" He pointed dramatically. "Am I to be talked to by these sluts, these scourings of the gutter, I, Kenneth Nelson, an Associate of the Royal Academy? I'll not stand it!"

"Will you please come into the house, Father, or are you anxious to let Beverley Green—"

"Damn Beverley Green! I am superior to Beverley Green! A lot of retired jam manufacturers! Go to your room, Stella." But she did not move, and then Andy thought it was a propitious moment to make his influence felt.

"Ah, Mr Macleod." Nelson was geniality itself.

"Good evening, Mr Nelson. I wanted a little talk with you."

He took the arm of the man and led him unresistingly into the house, and the girl followed.

She was grateful, but she was frightened, curious to know more of him, to see him at closer quarters, and humiliated by the circumstances under which they met. First she recognised—and herein her gratitude was founded—the strength of him. He was one who had handled men before. She sensed something of his magnetism, and perhaps gave him greater credit for the docility of her father than he was entitled to.

"I have just dismissed two impertinent members of the lower classes—two infernal domestic servants, Mr Macleod," said Nelson, with a return of his old hauteur. "The lower orders are becoming more and more unbearable. My dear," he looked reprovingly at his daughter, "I cannot congratulate you on your selection. I really cannot. Now get Mr Macleod something to drink, and I will have just a little tot to keep him company."

"Then we'll have a tot of water, Mr Nelson," said Andy, smiling.

"Water!" Kenneth Nelson did not attempt to disguise his contempt for the suggestion. "Whilst I have a house and a cellar, my dear friend, no guest goes away from here without a beaker of the good yellow wine of Scotland. Ha, ha!"

Andy had expected to find the girl distressed, and was shocked to note her self-possession, shocked because her very poise in this crisis was eloquent of great experience. These outbreaks of Nelson must be of frequent occurrence, he thought, and she seemed so young, such a child. He had once read in a novel of a heroine that she was flower-like, and had dismissed this description as a piece of extravagance on the part of the writer. And yet the description fitted her. The petal purity of her colouring, the stem straightness of her figure—it wasn't these things, though they were there, that he admired. She was a bud, half-revealing the splendour of the flower, and yet wholly satisfying in her immaturity. He had seen her kind in the higher forms at girls' schools—something between girl and child—so exactly satisfying as they were that you grudged their improvement.

She made no attempt to go in search of the whisky. She knew there was none in the house.

"The cellar is empty. Father," she said dryly. "There has been a strike amongst the wine miners."

Ridicule infuriated him, and he swung round on her, but something brought his eyes to Andy. They dominated and held him.

"May I see your father alone for a few minutes, Miss Nelson?" he said. "There is something I want to speak to him about."

She nodded and disappeared.

"My dear fellow," murmured Nelson in weak protest.

"You called me Mr Macleod just now. You have forgotten that I am a doctor. Have you seen a doctor lately?"

"No, I haven't. My health is perfect, perfect," said the other defiantly.

"So far from being perfect," said Andy, "you are on the verge of a complete breakdown, from which you may never wholly recover. I can tell you, without troubling to examine your heart, that you have an aneurism. That made you jump, because you know it is true. I have watched you at golf, and I know, Mr Nelson, you will not live for another year unless you stop drinking."

Nelson bunked.

"You're trying to frighten me," he said. "I know I'm a fool, but I'm not such a fool as you think. I've got a lot of trouble on my mind—Mr—Dr Macleod."

"You can get rid of the greatest by cutting out whisky—though I hate to say anything that will reduce the manufacturing output of my native land. Will you let me come over and see you tomorrow? Who is your doctor?"

"Granitt of Beverley. I have never had him for myself. He attended my poor wife."

"Well, I'll examine you and he can treat you. We'll have a second examination. I'll call in Granitt. Probably he'll want to run the rule over you himself, but that isn't going to hurt you very much."

"I don't know why—" began Nelson in his old haughty way, but Andrew overrode his objections.

"I don't want to alarm your daughter," he said, lowering his voice, "so we will not discuss it any further."

When the girl returned, she found her father almost lamb-like in his mildness. Kenneth Nelson was terribly afraid, for he had had a shock from which he was not likely to recover in a hurry. "I think I'll go to bed, Stella," he said. "I am a bit run down. I haven't been feeling so well lately."

Andrew was amused, but he did not smile. He walked with the girl to the gate, waiting on the step whilst she put on a little scarf—a black scarf, he noticed idly. There was a little red monogram in the corner. Everything about her was interesting to him. He told her as they walked down the path something of the conversation he had had with her father.

"I don't for one moment suppose he has an aneurism, but I'll see Granitt. I think I know his son rather well—he was at Guy's with me—and we can fix up something peculiarly complicated that will keep him away from drink for a very long while."

"I hope so," she said dubiously.

"You have lost faith, haven't you?"

She nodded.

"A little. One gets that way."

"I'll tell you something," he said. "There are taxi-cabs on the streets run by a man named Stadmere. The Stadmere cabs are by far the most luxurious of any. I have trained myself, when I have not been in a very great hurry, to wait for a Stadmere. It is generally a long time coming. Sometimes you can get one almost at once. But it is remarkable, if you make-ip your mind that you will take nothing but a Stadmere, how quickly it comes."

"That is a parable," she smiled. "But I am wanting something chat is even more rare than a Stadmere; I am wanting a miracle."

He did not say anything to this, and she was regretting that she had said so much to a stranger when he turned, holding the wicket gate with his hands.

"I have even seen miracles happen," he said. "They're worth waiting for, too, but I suppose when you're very young, very impatient, days pass so very quickly, and years are such enormous gulfs of time, that you grow tired of waiting."

"You talk like an old gentleman." She smiled in spite of herself.

"A very old gentleman, with long white whiskers, eh?" he said good-humouredly. "Old enough to be impatient sometimes. But still I can wait!"

He held her hand in his for a moment, and she watched him crossing the Green until she saw his blurred figure enter the door of the guest-house.

# Chapter 8

The days went on. Andy extended his stay for another week. He consulted Dr Granitt, and that physician had called upon Nelson, and, though he had not discovered the alarming aneurism, he left his patient impressed with the number and character of maladies from which he was suffering.

Andy did not see the girl again, save at a distance. His holiday was approaching its end, and he really must put in a week at fishing. His room at the guest-house was a comfortable one, the golf course was excellent, and there was really no reason why he should fish at all.

On Sunday he went to church. He went somewhat hurriedly, for he was in his pyjamas reading when he saw Stella Nelson pass with a prayer-book in her hand. He was in church ten minutes after she entered, and secured a pew which gave him a view of her profile. She recognised him outside, and they walked back to Beverley Green together.

"It was rather an interesting sermon, don't you think, Dr Macleod?"

"Very," he agreed, and tactfully changed the subject. He knew there had been a sermon, because he had seen an old man curled up in one corner of the pew fast asleep. But what it was about he had not the slightest idea.

"I hear you are going away tomorrow," she said.

"I had intended going tomorrow," he said, "but probably I shall stay a few more days, unless they turn me out of the guest-house."

She shook her head.

"Nobody is turned out of the guest-house," she said. "Except by the police," she added a little maliciously, and he chuckled.

As they strolled up the road a man was coming to meet them. Unexpectedly he turned off and disappeared down a side-street.

"Sweeny looks as if he didn't want to meet me," said the girl with a smile.

"I was thinking the same myself. Who is Sweeny?"

"He used to be Mr Merrivan's butler, but I rather think he left under a cloud. He hates Mr Merrrivan."

She was puzzled. She did not credit Sweeny with such a sense of delicacy that he avoided her in order to save her an embarrassing reminder of their last meeting. The explanation of his visit came from Mr Merrivan himself. That genial gentleman came up to them as they were standing by the gate of the house.

"Good morning. Miss Nelson," he said cheerfully. "You didn't meet that rascally Sweeny, did you?"

"I thought it was he," she said.

"The scoundrel!" Mr Merrivan shook his large fist. "He has the audacity to show his nose in Beverley Green again. I caught the fellow spying round my house—or, at least, my gardener did. If I had been at church, as is my usual practice, I should probably never have heard of his appearance. All these servants hang together."

What was there especially heinous in overlooking Mr Merrivan's private grounds, Andy wondered, when he explained to him that Sweeny had done no more than wormed his way through a hedge, at which point he was discovered by the vigilant gardener. Probably the vigilant gardener would have said nothing, only Mr Merrivan happened to be pottering about—he was the sort of man who pottered—and had heard the sound of voices.

Nothing remarkable happened that day, and the machinery of fate, which in its working was to make Beverley Green world-notorious, did not begin grinding until the moon came up over the hills.

Stella was reading in the hall. She had just been up to see her father and make him comfortable for the night, since Mr Nelson had taken the medical advice very seriously and had not left his room since Andy's warning.

She was turning over the page when she heard a stealthy 'Tap, tap' at the window. She waited a moment, thinking she must have been mistaken or that it was a dripping faucet in the kitchen she had heard. It came again,' Tap, tap, tap,' and she put down the book and got up. She was not nervous. Arthur Wilmot, in the old days, used to attract her attention that way when he wanted her to come out and walk round the Green.

She pulled aside the curtain and looked into the garden, but saw nothing. Heavy clouds had been rolling up all the afternoon from the southwest, and the moon was obscured. She walked to the front door, and her hand was on the knob to open it when she saw a letter at her feet. It had been pushed under the door. It was unaddressed, and after a moment's hesitation she tore it open. It was a long letter; four pages were covered with close writing. At first she thought it was from Arthur. She had had several letters from him, and they had all gone the way of the first.

She turned to the signature, puzzled over it a little while, then began to read. The further she read, the colder grew her heart, and tighter seemed that restricted band about it, until she could hardly breathe. She went out into the kitchen and drew herself a glass of water, and, clutching the letter in her hand, she read it again, and every line was a knife-thrust. Presently she found what she was seeking—a small colt revolver which belonged to her father, and which she had locked away in the old days, when his drunken threats meant more to her than they did today. She found also a little green box, packed tight with cartridges. With a duster she cleaned the pistol, opened it calmly, put in three cartridges, and re-closed the breech. Then she went up to her room, found a dark overcoat, put it on, and slipped the pistol into her pocket.

Back in the hall she wished she had not burnt the letter; she wanted to make absolutely sure. She could find out, she told herself. She was cool and unshaken. The hand that turned the switch, plunging the room into darkness, did not shake. She slipped on her scarf and made sure that she had the key in her pocket before she closed the door gently.

At the garden gate she stopped to look over to the guesthouse. What a strength was there! For one wild moment she was tempted to lay her burden of agony upon his broad shoulders—for one moment. Then the absurdity of it struck her. Call a police officer! So she went on, a figure of doom, and her heart was as black as the room she had left, for the light of hope had gone out.

Andy Macleod had changed his mind for the third time that day. He would go tomorrow, he told himself; he was just being a stupid, sentimental fool, and that is a confession which does not sound nice to a man of thirty-five.

He walked over to the house, and, seeing the rooms black, he came back to his own apartment and tried to read. He put the book down after an unsuccessful attempt, undressed, and went to bed. He had a good

conscience and a good digestion, and, though he told himself he was going to have a restless night, he was asleep within five minutes.

A rattling at the bedroom door awoke him instantly.

"Who is that?"

"Johnston the manager, sir. Can I see you? It is very urgent."

Andy Macleod put on the light. The watch at his bedside marked the hour of a quarter to two. What had happened? He guessed that the telephone message had come through from headquarters requiring his presence in connection with Scottie's arrest, and he cursed that man unjustly.

His first glance at the manager's face told him that the trouble was nearer at hand. Johnston's face was grey and his lips were trembling.

"Oh, sir," he gasped, "such a terrible thing has happened. Mr Pearson told me to go and fetch you at once before I went to the police."

"What is the matter?" asked Andy quickly.

"Mr Merrivan, sir, Mr Merrivan," whimpered the man.

"What has happened?"

"Dead, sir, murdered, sir. Oh, it is dreadful!"

"Merrivan—murdered! Just wait a moment. I'll be down in a few minutes. Make a cup of tea if you can."

He dressed rapidly, swallowed the tea that the manager handed him (how the cup shivered and rattled in his hands!). Somebody else had notified the local authorities. A sergeant of police opened the door of Mr Merrivan's house to his knock.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," he said. "This is a pretty bad business. I've had every man of the police force roused and I've notified all stations on the road."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh yes, sir, he's quite dead. He must have been dead an hour. I've sent for Dr Granitt."

Andy nodded.

"Where is he?"

"There," said the sergeant, "in his 'den', as he used to call it."

Andy opened the door and walked into the long room. All the lights had been switched on, and he turned automatically to the right where Merrivan's desk was to be found, but he was not there. He lay at the other end of the room, his feet towards the window, his hands upraised, as

though to ward off an attacker, and a fearful grin upon his face. He had been shot at close quarters, for there was a blackening of powder upon his white waistcoat. There was no necessity to carry out a medical examination; one glance at the still figure told its story.

# Chapter 9

He came into the hall.

"Where are the servants?" he asked.

"The butler is pacifying the women, sir."

"Send for him," said Andy shortly.

The butler had heard nothing. His master had sent the servants to bed early. He had said that he would put out the lights and lock up. He often did this, so the butler did not see anything unusual in the order.

"Has he had any visitors this evening?"

The man hesitated.

"I couldn't say for certain, sir. I heard voices once. I came down for a candle, and I thought I heard him talking."

"To whom?"

"Well, sir," hesitated the man, "as far as I could judge, it was to a lady."

"Did you recognise her voice?"

"No, sir."

"What time was this?"

"Between half past ten and eleven."

"Did you hear no shot?"

"No, sir. Something woke me up; it may have been that. Cook says she heard a sound like a door creaking loudly. She came and woke me up. She didn't wake me up immediately she'd heard the sound, but lay shivering in bed thinking it was burglars. Then she got up and knocked at Mr Merrivan's door, and, as he didn't answer, she came to me. That's how I discovered Mr Merrivan, sir."

"When you went into the room were the windows open or closed?"

"They were closed, sir."

"Is there any other way out besides the front door?"

"Yes, sir. There's a way out through the kitchen, and there's another way out along the rosery path which Mr Merrivan uses himself."

The doors leading to both these exits were barred and bolted, and Andy returned to the room where the murder had been committed. He noticed something peculiar about the carved Chinese cabinet. The door did not seem to fit, and, pulling it open, it came away in his hand. Then he understood the utility of the cabinet. Inside was a steel safe, which was also open. A bunch of keys dangled from the lock. He pulled open this door, to discover that the safe was empty. Then in the fireplace he saw a heap of burnt papers. Part of the heap was still smouldering red, and carefully he extracted such unburnt scraps as remained. He rescued a little leather-covered diary which had only been partly consumed, and this he placed carefully on a piece of paper.

"Nobody is to touch those ashes, you understand, sergeant?"

"I understand, sir."

Andy examined the windows. Those in the front of the house were secured, and had not been tampered with. He tried the windows at the rear, and, as he had expected, one of them was unfastened.

"Excuse me, sir," said the sergeant. "Did you see the letter?"

"The letter?" said Andy. "No, where?"

"The butler found it on the floor by the desk. He tells me he picked it up and put it under a heap of papers on the desk. He has just remembered that. He said he thought it was a letter Mr Merrivan had been reading just before he was killed."

Andy searched the desk and drew forth from beneath a heap of accounts and unanswered letters a sheet of yellow notepaper. The calligraphy was cramped and of that style which is known as backhand, and is usually used by people who seek to disguise their handwriting.

The first words arrested Andy's attention. He sat down in the swing chair. The letter ran:

'I have given you a chance. You have failed me. You must bear the consequence. If in twenty-four hours you do not agree to carry out your promise, look out! This is final. I have been patient too long.'

It was signed 'A.S.'. He looked up at the ceiling. A.S.? Abraham Selim! There was a postscript.

'A trusted friend of mine will put this under your door.'

Andy folded up the letter and put it into his pocketbook as Dr Granitt came in.

"Well?"

"Very bad," said the old doctor, shaking his head. "Oh, yes, he's dead all right; been dead for an hour, I should think. Just lift his head, Dr Macleod. Yes, there's the wound. The thoracic aorta is severed and the fourth dorsal vertebra smashed by the same bullet. You may say he has been killed twice. Bad, very bad."

"Do you notice anything peculiar about him, Dr Granitt?"

"No," said the other, looking down with a professional eye at the dead man.

"Look at his boots."

The old man obeyed, and raised his eyebrows.

"Good lord, he's got a pair of labourer's boots on!"

They were thick, unshapely articles, the kind that agricultural labourers wear, and they were yellow with dried mud. The doctor looked and shook his head.

"You won't want me any more, Macleod?"

"No. I don't even think we shall want you at the coroner's inquiry unless they wish to call corroborative evidence."

"Thank heaven for that," said the doctor. He had all the general practitioner's horror of court proceedings, with their time-wasting protractions. "I'm frightfully busy just now. Hardly a night I'm not called up by anguished husbands—a very prolific people, the people of Beverley."

Andy saw him out of the house and went back to the death-chamber to conduct a more thorough examination. He worked away from the body, and began with the window through which the murderer must have come. Here he had a complete confirmation of his theory. There were three dusty footprints on the settee, which was covered in black poplin and showed the prints of shoes, two lefts and a right. They were very, very small, no bigger than a woman's, though the heel was broader. They might have been the marks of a woman's house-shoes—the butler had heard a woman's voice. The window was unbolted and moved up easily and noiselessly. He found nothing until he came to the writing-table. It was a broad pedestal desk in black oak. It looked an antique; a man like Merrivan would hardly have imitation Jacobean furniture.

There were two drawers on either side, and one of these—the lower and the nearest to the window—was open. It looked as though it had been opened by Merrivan as he sat in the swing chair. Andy pulled it out still further, and the glitter of gold caught his eye. It was a woman's dress ring—a thin hoop of gold with five small emeralds set at intervals.

He frowned. He had seen that ring before. Where? He knew, but he fought off an admission that he knew. It was Stella Nelson's ring. He had seen it on her engagement finger in the post office, and had felt a momentary pang of disappointment, the pang that all men feel when they see a pretty woman is not for them.

He stared at the little hoop in the centre of his palm, turned it over, and put it into his pocket, closing the drawer. Now he began to search about the desk and underneath.

Again he was rewarded. He picked up a tiny box, leather-covered. It was a jeweller's ring case, and it was empty. He did not trouble to fit the ring to the slot in the white velvet. A ring of any size would fit. There was a step in the passage, and he slipped the case into his jacket pocket.

The newcomer was the local inspector, an important man, very naturally anxious to extract whatever kudos was to be had from the conduct of the case.

He said it was a "very bad business". It was curious how people always said that on these occasions.

"I'll take over charge here, Mr—um—Macleod," he said.

"Certainly," agreed Andy, "but you must definitely instruct me in writing not to conduct any further investigation."

At this the inspector hesitated.

"I dare say we can work together, Mr Macleod. I've got on the 'phone to the chief constable and he told me to notify headquarters."

"We'll work together if I am in charge," said Andy. "You shall have all the credit that is going, Inspector. Leave me to find the murderer."

"I don't want any credit. But I'm sure you'll see me right, Mr Macleod. What do you want me to do?"

Andy gave his instructions and in half an hour the body was removed. Later the inspector came to him with information.

"Mr Pearson heard the shot; it woke him up, he said. He came over just as the butler made the discovery. The shot came from the orchard at the back of Merrivan's house."

Andy listened incredulously.

"From the orchard? Impossible. He was shot at close range. The waistcoat is scorched and blackened."

"But one of the maids heard it, too—the hysterical one. We've got her calm now, and she swears she heard the shot. The window of her room overlooks the orchard. She was awake, too, the knocking on the butler's door had awakened her."

"But the butler didn't hear it?"

"He was on his way downstairs by then," explained the officer.

Andy scratched his nose irritably.

"Merrivan was dead by then and the safe rifled. It must have taken at least four minutes to find the keys, open the safe—no, that is impossible. The butler must have made a noise of some kind—knocked a chair over probably."

"But Mr Pearson wouldn't have heard that."

Andrew was silent.

"Neither would he," he confessed.

It was getting light now, and he passed out through the kitchen into the garden. It was very still and solemn, and the fresh morning air tasted indescribably sweet.

The orchard lay beyond the truck garden. You followed a cinder path through a wooden gate and came to row upon row of fruit trees, the lime-washed trunks showing whitely in the dawn light.

Before this the path frayed to an end in coarse grass.

Andy peered left and right, but saw nothing until he had passed the first line of trees, and even then, so much a part of the shadows was it that he did not see the huddled figure by the tree-trunk for some time. He was dead, shot square through the heart.

Andy went back to the house and summoned the inspector.

"There is a second body in the garden," he said, "and, if my eyesight is not at fault, he should be an old acquaintance of yours."

The police officer accompanied him to where the dead man lay.

"I know him, a man named Sweeny," he said. "He was in Mr Merrivan's service and was discharged for stealing. So he was the murderer; first shot Mr Merrivan and then came out here and shot himself!"

"Where is the revolver?" asked Andy quietly.

The inspector searched the ground about, but without success. The grass was quite short and had been grazed over (Andy afterwards found that sheep had been admitted to the orchard that week), and there was no possible hiding-place for the weapon.

"There has been a struggle here," said Andy of a sudden. "Look at the turf! Three scars where the heel of somebody's boot has tried to get a foothold, and—Go and bring the butler, Inspector, will you, please?"

Andy waited until he was out of sight, then walked quickly to the next tree and picked up something from the ground. It was a black silk scarf—the scarf that Stella Nelson had worn when she came to the gate two nights before.

There was no doubt whatever. In one corner was a monogram worked in red silk, S.N. The scarf was torn slightly. He smelt it. He was aware that she used a perfume, an elusive scent; as delicate a fragrance as he remembered. Yes, it was Stella Nelson's scarf beyond any doubt. He rolled it up into as small a compass as possible and pushed it into his hip pocket, realising ruefully that he was loaded up with clues, and every clue pointed to this girl as the murderer.

Yet in his heart he had no doubt. It was not her beauty or her youth that convinced him of the impossibility of Stella being a murderess. It was something within him. Perhaps, like Scottie, he was fey. He was smiling at the thought when it came to him that he no longer felt the oppression that had irritated him all the time he had been in the valley. Perhaps it was the daylight. No, he had felt that lurking shape when the sun was shining its brightest.

The inspector came back, and for appearance sake, to justify his sending the officer away, he had to submit the agitated servant to the ordeal of identifying the dead man.

"Yes, sir, that was the man that Mr Merrivan found in the grounds this morning—yesterday morning, sir."

"Of course!" Andy had forgotten the incident. This man Sweeny hated Merrivan. Probably he had some reason outside his natural dislike for an employer who had detected him in the act of theft.

Back in the house he gave his final instructions.

"Nobody is to be admitted. No information is to be given to the reporters beyond the bare fact that Mr Merrivan was murdered some time between midnight and one o'clock this morning. The position of the body can be shown diagrammatically, nobody must enter the room.

Motive—robbery. The man in the orchard—let them try to explain him their own way."

He was half way down the garden path when Arthur Wilmot dashed in at the gate. He had dressed hurriedly—his pyjama jacket showed under the light buttoned coat—and he was very pale.

"Mr Macleod, is it true—my poor uncle—Good God, it can't be!"

"I'm glad I've seen you," said Andy slowly. "Yes, I'm afraid it is true. Your uncle has been killed—shot."

"Murdered?"

He whispered the word fearfully. Andy nodded.

"But—he has no enemies—"

"Few people are murdered from enmity," said Andy. "The only man who has threatened Mr Merrivan's life recently is you."

Wilmot staggered back as if he had been struck.

"I?" he stammered. "I've never—did he say—?"

"He was dead when he was found," answered Andy, "and he has not said anything to me about the matter at any time. Now, Mr Wilmot, don't answer in a hurry, and don't answer at all if you'd rather not. Had you a quarrel with Darius Merrivan?"

The young man was shocked to speechlessness. He could only wag his head impotently and stare horrified at the inquisitor.

"I'll tell you this much, that, standing outside this house a week ago, I heard you say, 'I will kill you first.'"

Wilmot recovered his voice.

"Somebody has been telling lies about me." His voice rose to a shout. "And I can tell you a few truths about somebody. I quarrelled with him—yes, I did! Over a girl who isn't worth a packet of pins. Now you know. He talked about marrying her—and he's married already. He didn't know I knew, and I never told him. His wife ran away from him and went abroad, and they were never divorced. He was afraid to divorce her—and when he said he was going to marry—"

"Don't shout," said Andy sharply. "I'm not deaf. And I'm not keen on knowing any of your family troubles. I'm pretty sure you had nothing to do with the murder. Although"—he paused to give point to the next sentence—"although you are his heir and benefit by his death. Unless, of course," he added, looking past the man but observing the

understanding in his eyes, "unless you care to prove that he has a wife living. In that case his wife gets the lot. There may be a will."

Wilmot shook his head.

"There isn't a will," he said in a milder tone. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Macleod, but I'm rattled, and who wouldn't be?"

"Who wouldn't be?" agreed Andy.

He walked back with Arthur Wilmot and watched him into the house. The man had a charge to bring against somebody—against the girl who was not worth quarrelling about? That gave him material for thought. Had they quarrelled, these two, whom Beverley Green regarded as 'practically engaged'? What hurt vanity went to the framing of those words "not worth a packet of pins"? He knew by the symptoms. The girl had wounded Wilmot's pride, had touched him on a very raw place. And the conceit of the young man had been patent to Andy from the beginning. He had a trick of closing his eyes for a second or so when he spoke about himself and his accomplishments—a glaring advertisement of a man's vanity.

Slowly he paced the gravel.

Should he go to the house? He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. She would not be up. He looked dubiously at the silent house. The blinds were drawn, but she had told him that she rose at six when they had no servants. Yet, he hesitated, his knuckles raised to rap on the door. If she were about, she would hear him. If she were asleep, he could do no harm. He knocked, and instantly the door was opened.

# Chapter 10

Her face was white; there were shadows under her eyes. But—more damning evidence to him—she was wearing the grey silk stockings she had worn on the previous day, and a woman does not wear light-coloured stockings two days in succession. She had not undressed that night!

She walked into the hall room. One light burnt, for the curtains had not been pulled apart nor the blinds raised.

"I was expecting you," she said listlessly. "Will you please let me tell father before you take me away?"

He stood, a man turned to ice.

"Before—I take—you away?" he repeated.

"I knew you would come for me. I have been waiting all night for you, Mr Macleod. I don't think I have moved from that chair."

She saw how ill he looked and dropped her head.

"I'm sorry," she muttered. "I was mad, just mad."

He recovered himself, and in two strides was before her, his hands gripping her shoulders.

"You fool—you poor, dear fool," he breathed. "Oh, God! you fool! Look what you left—look!"

He wrenched the scarf from his pocket and threw it on to the table. On to this he tossed the ring.

"My scarf—my ring! I remember."

He found some difficulty in speaking; his heart was beating at a rate that made the pathologist in him wonder. "I'm being as big a fool as you, Stella," he said, "but I can't—I can't let you go through that hell. I'm in love with you, I suppose, which sounds pretty mad to me, but I'll have my car ready in a quarter of an hour and I can get you out of the country

before anybody suspects—associates you with the crime. I'm mad, of course, but I can't see that—"

She was looking at him in a frowning, puzzled way, open-eyed, and the eyes were wet.

"You're very—wonderful, Doctor, but I can't, and Mr Merrivan knows and is probably watching."

He stepped back.

"Knows—watching? He's dead!"

She did not understand him.

"Merrivan is dead—murdered last night."

"Murdered last night," she repeated, and a stone rolled from his heart.

"Phew!" he wiped his clammy forehead. "I am mad after all—to think you knew anything about it." And then he sprang forward and caught her as her knees gave way.

The first thought that came to her as she recovered consciousness was that he had thought her a murderess and had wanted to save her. Mr Merrivan was dead. That was terrible news. They might suspect her, too, but he didn't, the man with the grey eyes who had searched her face and whom she had hated. Nothing else really mattered.

"I think I am a little mad," she said unsteadily, and the glass he held to her lips rattled against her chattering teeth.

She looked up into his face as she drank; he saw the confidence of a child—the confidence her father might have inspired.

"You're wonderful, and I think you've been making love to me—love amongst the ruins!" she said jerkily. "It is dreadful, Mr Merrivan's death. I went to his house last night. He sent for me, and I agreed, because I wanted something."

"What was it, Stella?" he asked gently.

"I'll never tell you that," she said. "If I die I cannot tell you, Doctor—Andrew, and I used to hate you so—and you're quite nice."

His arm was about her shoulder and pillowed her brown head. As she spoke she played with the fingers of his supporting hand.

"And then what happened?"

"He was horrible to me. I mustn't talk that way about him now that he is dead, must I? But he was—awful—and I had to let him paw me"—he felt her shiver—"and kiss me, and then he showed me things I wanted,

and he made me take my ring off and he put on the big flashing diamond ring; and then I snatched the things I wanted—they were on the table. And then he came after me; I pointed a revolver at him."

"You had a revolver? Oh, Lord, Stella, you did all that you could to endanger your dear neck, didn't you?"

"I did, didn't I? And then I flew out of the house."

"Which way did you come?"

"By the front door. I don't know any other way."

"You didn't go through the orchard?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Go on—you came straight home. What time was that?"

"Eleven. Beverley church clock struck eleven as I opened the door."

"What made you go to him?"

"A letter—a terrible letter—putting things plainly, and—and—alternatives as plainly. I—I destroyed the things I brought from the house, and then I waited for you to come and arrest me for what I'd done. I hoped a little bit that it wouldn't be you, and then I hoped it would. I thought you wouldn't be gruff and horrid like Inspector Dane. And when I saw you come to the gate—I somehow knew you were at the gate—I felt that I just wanted to get things over. I couldn't endure any more. What are you thinking about, Doct—Andrew?"

"Did anybody see you go to the house?"

She shook her head.

"Do you think—Wilmot saw you?"

"Arthur Wilmot? No. Why?"

"He was rather mysterious about something. The things you destroyed, they were documents of some kind?"

She nodded.

"Where did you burn them—here or at the house?"

"Here." She pointed to the fireplace. "Where I burnt the letter."

"The letter asking you to go over?" he demanded in dismay. "You didn't burn that? Why, that would have proved everything!"

She was not perturbed.

"I don't care—if you believe me," she said, and came painfully to her feet. "I'm going to bed. No, I'm not. There is nobody to get daddy's

breakfast. He combines with a healthy appetite the fastidiousness proper to an invalid."

"You're going to bed," said Andy authoritatively. "I'll fix your father's breakfast. I 'phoned yesterday for my man to come down. He can cook perfectly, and as a sweeper he has no rival."

"Are you sure?" she asked doubtfully, yet willing to be convinced, for she was aching for sleep.

"I won't suggest anything so indelicate as that I should carry you up," he said gravely. "I have carried ladies of great weight in the execution of my duty. They have generally been rather intoxicated."

"Thank you, I'll walk," hastily. She stopped halfway up and leant over the rail, dropping her hand.

"I'm very glad it was you," she said as he took her hand in his and laid it to his cheek.

"Father's room is on the first floor—the front room," were her last instructions.

When she had gone he pulled up the blinds and opened the windows. He had not 'phoned for his servant. He had a servant, but the memory of his cooking made him shudder. Searching the kitchen and pantry, he made himself some tea, then he proceeded to the preparation of Kenneth Nelson's breakfast. Several times, while so doing, he explained to himself that he was engaged in the detection of a double murderer, and that it was absurd of him to be dusting a room, pausing now and then to listen for a boiling kettle.

Kenneth Nelson was even more surprised at Andy than that gentleman had been at himself. He sat up gaping at the spectacle of an MD (Edinburgh) carrying in a tray, and his first impression was that he had suffered a relapse, and, following a period of unconsciousness, was a little light-headed.

"What day is it?" he gasped.

"It is still Monday," said Andy, setting down the tray. "Or it was, before I came upstairs. I've sent your daughter to bed."

"She's not ill?" Kenneth was genuinely alarmed.

"She's tired. There has been an exciting night. Merrivan is dead, and I think you might get up today. A little intercourse with your fellow-men will be all to the good. But, Nelson, this village is dry for you. I can't run a risk."

Nelson was shocked.

"Merrivan dead! When did it happen? He looked the picture of health when I saw him last."

Andy did not give him particulars until the artist was dressed and downstairs. He came down carrying a tray of cold eggs and tea and they breakfasted together.

"That's very bad. Poor Merrivan. He was not an especial friend of mine, but—"

Andy saw his face twitch as though some ugly and long inhibited memory had come to him. He knew this man's weakness, and, given time, he could reach its foundation. The death of Merrivan had broken a seal that covered some chamber of his mind and the dark thought was loose and disturbing him. Throughout breakfast Andy saw him striving to catch and imprison the prison-breaker. But the thing had grown too big for its narrow cell, and Nelson grew graver and quieter, and more like the man that Andy had expected him to be.

"Why was Stella up all night, Doctor?" he asked,

"She may have heard the shot, and possibly was told. One of the servants had hysteria and screamed for an hour on end. I wonder anybody in Beverley Green could sleep."

He left Mr Nelson preparing to go out and went off to the guest-house. It was then eight o'clock, and he had had an exhausting six hours and at least three minutes of concentrated mental agony which had been more wearing than all the rest of his experiences.

Inspector Dane was coming out of the bungalow as he arrived.

"Phone message from headquarters," he reported. "All stations have been warned, and a warrant will be issued this morning for the arrest of Abraham Selim. Headquarters wants to know if you have any idea where he lives. They have found his office."

Andy had no information to offer.

"Nothing else has been found?" he asked.

"Nothing. There are fingerprints on the polished part of the desk, and I am arranging for these to be photographed. The coroner would like to see you at eleven o'clock."

The formalities attaching to wilful murder are infinite, the actual 'committee work' wearisome, but necessary. Andy was dog-tired and sleeping at an hour when most people were sitting down to dinner.

Stella Nelson woke some time in the afternoon, and her first waking impression was that something pleasant had happened. In this spirit she continued as she bathed and dressed, though she knew that a murder had been committed within a few yards of her, and that she was the last known person to be in the victim's company. She told herself this much, and accepted the self-reproach with great calmness. She was very sorry, and if people thought evilly of her it was unfortunate. She might be arrested yet. Even this terrific ending did not frighten her from her equable frame of mind.

"You are cold-blooded, callous, and inhuman," she said, "and unwomanly."

Possibly she was more womanly in that mood than in any other. The world is more narrowly and specifically confined to a woman than to a man. It can be reduced to one shining figure that stands out against a smudged background of vague and meaningless shapes.

Andrew's servant was evidently a rough and ready duster of rooms, she thought, as she straightened the ornaments he had left askew, and picked up the broom and dust-pan from the top of the piano.

Kenneth Nelson came in bubbling with news. He had lunched at the club, and everybody had been there, and all had agreed that the murders were 'bad business'.

"I saw you were up," she said. "Do you know where Andrew Macleod's servant is? I want to thank him. Did he bring you your breakfast? I suppose you were surprised to see him?"

"Dr Macleod brought my breakfast. I didn't see any servant," he said. "I didn't know he had one. I say, Stella, this is terrible news about Merrivan and that man."

"What man?"

She asked the question without thinking. So Andrew was the awkward duster? She felt inclined to put the broom and dustpan back on the piano.

"What was his name—Sweeny—"

"Sweeny? What about him?" she asked quickly.

He told her the story, glad to find somebody who did not know.

"Didn't Macleod tell you? He said you'd heard the shot and were awake all night. Now, I've got a theory that Merrivan and this man had a sort of duel—"

He expounded his theory at length, and she was only too glad to hear him talk and be relieved of the necessity for replying.

She wondered how Andrew had found the eggs. She ought to have told him that the bread was in the earthenware pan and the butter in the refrigerator. She would not finish his dusting: that would be a desecration—like 'improving' a beautiful ruin. The teaspoons—how did he find the teaspoons? Of course he was a detective.

"What the dickens are you laughing at?" asked the outraged Mr Nelson. "I don't think it is a laughing matter, Stella, by gad!"

"I'm sorry, dear—hysteria—or something. What is this?"

She took the letter from his hand.

"A cheque from Mandbys, bigger than I expected," he said. "I'd nearly forgotten, dear, but seeing you sniggering reminded me."

He had never before given her a cheque he had received. Usually he carried it to the bank himself and the next morning she was looking for new servants. He was absurdly proud of his reformation, and she was touched.

"You dear!" She kissed him and hung to him, and Mr Nelson experienced some of the forgotten satisfaction which belongs to virtue.

"Macleod's in charge of the case. I saw him for a minute or two, looking perfectly ghastly. It shocked even him. He told me so. 'I had a bad ten minutes this morning,' he said. Poor chap; but cheerful! My dear, he was as cheerful as—as you are. I suppose these fellows get used to it. A capable man that. I'm glad he is here."

"So am I," she said, and glanced at the streaks of dust on the top of a table.

Mr Nelson had one item of good news. He had met a former cook of theirs in Beverley, and to that good lady's surprise had stopped and talked to her. In his sober moments he never admitted outside of the house that he was anything else. This had made reconciliations between discharged helps and their former employer a little difficult.

"I told her that I'd given up drinking," he said. "A bit of a pill to swallow, eh, Stella? But I did it. After all, she knew. Her sister is expecting her fourth baby," he added inconsequently, and went on, "She's coming this afternoon and bringing her sister—no, not that one, a younger one. She's a good parlourmaid. Quite a nice girl, engaged to a soldier in India, so we shall keep her for a bit."

Stella blessed Andrew once more.

She tried all that afternoon to recall or to reconstruct within herself just how she felt when she had first met him. It was a little difficult. You cannot reconstruct fear without being afraid. There are certain elements of emotion which defy synthesis. She would have given all that she had to give to live over those three minutes when he thought she was confessing to the murder. His terror—his love; she felt the grip of his hand on her shoulders. How long had she known him? She had seen him four times and had spoken a dozen sentences before he told her that he would sacrifice his profession and his honour for her safety. The violence of his abuse—he had called her a fool, a damned fool—

Fortunately her father had gone. He would never have understood her gurgling laughter. Resolutely she went in search of the dust-pan and the broom, and put them on the top of the piano with a bang.

# Chapter 11

'Who was the woman in Mr Merrivan's room? The butler of the deceased man heard a woman's voice distinctly. Mr Merrivan had received no visitors that evening. The butler had admitted nobody, and yet, coming downstairs half an hour after Mr Merrivan had told him to go to bed, he heard the sound of voices, and one of those voices was a woman's. Who was this mysterious visitor? In all probability she can throw a light upon a double crime, which in its sensational features has no parallel in recent years.'

Andy read the newspaper leader calmly. There were others very similarly worded. The reporters had got to the butler. That was inevitable. He couldn't keep the man locked up, and apparently the warning he had delivered had had no effect. The first reporter he saw the next morning brought the incident of the woman forward as being of supreme importance. "Possibly," said Andy, "she might tell us something, but obviously she could not throw any light on the murder. She was seen leaving the house at eleven o'clock. The murder was not committed until past one."

"Who saw her leave?"

"Ah, ha!" said Andy, smiling, "that is my own pet mystery. Seriously, I shouldn't bank on the woman. She may have been a neighbour who very naturally is horrified at the thought of publicity." To the second reporter he was more explicit. "Curiously enough, it was I who saw her. I was sitting at the open window. It was a warm, beautiful night and almost as clear as though the moon was shining. I saw her crossing the Green: she passed under my window and out on the main road."

Andrew Macleod was a problem to Andrew Macleod. He was working for two ends—to keep the girl out of the case; to bring to justice the murderer. The facility with which he had lied amazed him. Ordinarily scrupulous to a degree, so that even to gain a conviction when the guilt of a prisoner was known to him he would never stretch supposition into fact, yet he was now lying glibly, shamelessly.

At the announcement of every new reporter he expected to see the hard features of one man who would be more difficult than any other. Happily, a certain Mr Downer did not put in an appearance. He asked one of the other reporters:

"I should have thought that this was a case for Downer?"

The journalist made a wry face. "Downer is away on his holidays. I'm very glad. I hate working with him."

Andy smiled to himself. He shared the other's relief. He had replied to the wire he had received from headquarters placing him in charge and asking if he required any help. There was a big end of the case in town, and he left that to the town men, expressing himself as satisfied with the assistance that was at hand. His unofficial and most unexpected helper arrived at about eleven, when he had seen the last of the reporters.

A thin, long man, wearing loose knickerbockers and golfing shoes, arrived at the guest-house, and the manager's jaw dropped at the sight of him.

"Good morning, Johnston," said the newcomer cheerfully. "Is Macleod about?"

"Mr Macleod is in his sitting-room," said the manager slowly. "It is rather surprising to see you, Professor."

Four-eyed Scottie took off his gold-mounted spectacles and polished them with a purple silk handkerchief.

"It was a mistake, a foolish police error. I do not resent it. After all, Johnston, we must remember that in every highly efficient police system such mistakes must occur. Never blame the police, whatever inconvenience you may be put to. It is better that a dozen innocent citizens shall be arrested than one miscreant should escape."

"Yes, sir," said the dazed Johnston, falling naturally into the attitude of deference which he had shown to the former guest. "Did you want to see Mr Macleod?" He hesitated. "What name shall I give?"

"Bellingham, Professor Bellingham," said Scottie, and added: "My own name."

A minute later:

"Professor who?" said Andy.

"Bellingham, sir, the gentleman who was staying here before."

"The devil!" said Andy. "Show him up."

Scottie strolled into the room, dismissed Mr Johnston with a nod, and closed the door.

"To what miracle am I indebted for this visit, Scottie?"

"The miracle of justice," said Scottie as he sat down uninvited. "Fiat justicia, etc. I bear no ill-feeling, Macleod."

Andy chuckled.

"So your alibi got past, did it?"

Scottie nodded solemnly.

"The beak said that he could not commit me, and that it was evidently a case of mistaken identity. Such things have happened before and will happen again, Macleod. To be absolutely honest, I was playing solo whist with Mr Felix Lawson, a well-known licensed victualler—"

"And a receiver of stolen goods," added Andy pointedly. "There is a conviction against him on that score unless I am mistaken."

"Don't let us rake up old scandals," said Scottie; "the point is that here I am, and at your service."

Andy swung round to face his visitor.

"What name did you give Johnston?"

"Bellingham, Professor Bellingham. It is a nom de guerre. After all, what is a professor? One who professes. I profess to understand geology, from Leibnitz to Hutton. The Paleozoic rock, with which I include the Devonian system, is my long suit, and—"

"We won't quarrel over the question of your erudition," said Andy good-temperedly. "The point is, why have you come here? Having escaped the just processes of the law—I suspect perjury on an extensive scale."

Scottie drew up his chair nearer.

"I told you something about this place," he said sombrely. "I told you there was trouble coming, and it has come."

Andy nodded. He had remembered Scottie's warning a good many times since the murder.

"Now I'll unfurl another fold of information," said Scottie. "Under the rose, over the stone, and on the square"—he shifted his feet symbolically—"we're talking as brothers."

"Do you know anything about it?" asked Andy.

"I don't know; I'm only guessing. I took to this place partly because it was off the main road, and partly because it looked pretty good to me, with all those rich people hanging round with silver and gold for the taking. That Sheppard woman wears pearls like eggs. Her husband is a municipal architect, and naturally a grafter. But that is by the way. I tell you, there are pickings in this place for a—a scientist. Naturally I have reconnoitred the village from the club-house to the Sheppards' garage. The only house in the village that wouldn't show a profit on a night's work is the Nelsons', but probably you know that as well as I do. Not that it doesn't hold a treasure—"

"Get on with your speculations," said Andy shortly, and was sorry, for Scottie shot a quick, inquiring glance at him. Nevertheless, he made no further reference either to the Nelsons' house or to the treasure it contained.

"I've been all over Merrivan's grounds, and he is the only man who has taken adequate precautions to deal with robbers and thieves. There is a burglar alarm on every window except the back window of his study, and that has a patent bolt at the edge and can't be forced from the outside. He's got a gun, which he keeps in a little cupboard behind his desk. The door looks like one of the panels of the wall, but it isn't."

"That is one I missed," said Andy, interested. "How does it open?"

Scottie shook his head.

"I've never been inside, but I've seen it. And I'll tell you another one, Macleod; the back window hasn't a burglar alarm because that's the way old Merrivan used to go out at nights. Under the window outside there is a broad stone seat. You saw that?"

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know; I only saw him once; but he stepped out so pert and lively that I knew he must have gone that way before—through the orchard to God knows where. I never followed him; it would have been indelicate. Fat men are entitled to their adventures as much as we thin men."

"When did you see him go out by the window?"

"The night before you fixed me," said Scottie. "The time was about eleven-thirty. I didn't see him come back, but I did observe the man who followed him. Not distinctly in the sense that I could tell you who he was, or pick him out from twenty other men. That is why I didn't follow. I guessed that Merrivan had his own trouble coming to him, and

although, due to the miscarriage of justice, I have certainly appeared in law courts, I have never descended to taking the stand in a divorce case. Have I interested you?"

"You have indeed, Scottie. I suppose you've some idea of the height of the man?"

"He is a little man, rather about your size," said Scottie, with the insolence of six feet.

"About fifty-nine inches?"

"That's it," nodded Scottie, and corrected himself. "No, I wouldn't say he was even as big as that. Honestly, he was a little fellow. I should say he didn't come up to your shoulder. Bu it is very difficult to judge, even in the moonlight. I spotted his fellow before Merrivan came out. The trunks of the trees in the orchard are lime-washed, and I saw him pass a trunk and that scared me a bit. I took an entirely selfish view; my first thought was for my own safety, so I didn't go along and investigate. And then Merrivan came out and walked off as I told you. He had disappeared before this fellow who was watching in the orchard made any move, and then I saw him just for a second in the moonlight. The impression I had was that this wasn't the first time he had been watching, and maybe he had good reason."

"What you say puts rather a new complexion upon the case," said Andy thoughtfully. "To tell you the truth, Scottie, I was anxious to find that new complexion. It gives us a line. You've heard no scandal?"

Scottie shook his head.

"I never listen to such things," he said virtuously. "But I certainly did look hard at all the women up at the golf-house the next morning, without finding one of the married ladies who would inspire a man of taste and discrimination."

Andy thought for a while.

"I don't exactly know what I am going to do with you, Scottie, or how I am going to explain you. I think you would be very helpful, but naturally you can't go back to your old role of social pet."

"I was never exactly that," said Scottie, unabashed. "I had the glamour with which science envelops her votaries."

Andy laughed.

"Anyway, I'm glad to see you, Scottie, and almost glad, though it is an immoral thing to say, that you've got away with it. Now what am I to do

with you? I wonder if the Nelsons would harbour you? I'm not certain about Mr Nelson." He implied that he was very certain of the girl, and Scottie gathered that at least he had got acquainted.

"Just wait here whilst I run over," he said. "Don't read my correspondence if you can avoid it."

Here his guest was genuinely ruffled, but Andy laughed him down.

Stella, rioting in the sense of luxury which two capable servants brought to her, was working in the garden when Andy came through the gate, and she stripped off her gloves and offered her hand.

"Stella, I want you to help me. There's an old friend of mine arrived, and I cannot exactly keep him in the guesthouse, and I really want his assistance."

"But why not the guest-house?" she asked in surprise. "Father could sponsor him."

"It is Scottie," he explained. "You remember Four-Eyed Scottie?"

"The professor?" she said in surprise. "I thought he was in prison."

"There has been a miscarriage of justice," said Andy calmly, "and he's got off. Could you put him up? I know that it is an extraordinary thing to ask, for Scottie is undoubtedly a crook. But I promise you that he won't disgrace you or steal your silver. At the same time it will be necessary to offer a plausible explanation to your father."

She wrinkled her forehead in thought.

"If father ever really thought it was a miscarriage of justice—I mean his being arrested at all—and that the professor was in consequence a little sensitive—"

"That's it," said Andy, and went into the house to interview Mr Kenneth Nelson.

He found him in the studio paying marked attention to Pygmalion's left eye, and Mr Nelson listened with interest to the story of Scottie's return.

"I quite understand," he said. "The poor chap will not want to meet all these people again, and if, as you say, he wants to complete his study of the Beverley strata—Beverley, by the way, has the distinction of possessing a strata of its own—I'll accommodate him with pleasure, though I have never heard of people geologising by night."

"The professor is a remarkable man," said Andy gravely.

# Chapter 12

Scottie's installation at the Nelsons' served a double purpose. It recruited to Andy a shrewd, if unprincipled, lieutenant, and it gave him a more comfortable feeling about leaving Stella with no other protection than her father. There was the indisputable fact that somewhere at large was the murderer, and that that murderer had possibly seen the interview between the girl and Merrivan, and might, to save his own skin, implicate her. For how had Stella's scarf reached the orchard? For what purpose it had been taken he could not guess, but this was clear—that the murderer was well aware of her presence. He drove to town that morning, carrying with him the charred diary which had told him nothing, for half the pages had been torn out and burnt separately before the book was thrown upon the fire. His first call was at Ashlar Buildings.

Mr Abraham Selim's office was in the hands of the police, and the predecessor of Sweeny had been found and was waiting for him. The most important find that the police had made was a letter which was addressed to Sweeny. It was evidently in answer to one which Sweeny had left for his master, and it dealt with the prosaic matter of office-cleaning and the expenses to be incurred. Its importance, from Andy's point of view, was that the writing was identical with that which had been discovered on Merrivan's desk.

The second fact which was elicited—and this evidence came from an elevator boy who knew Sweeny—was that the man had been discharged the day before his murder. The reason for his being fired was also learnt. Selim had accused him of steaming open letters and reading the contents, and his complaint was probably well founded, though the man had denied it to his confidant.

There was little else to learn. Sweeny's predecessor had never seen his employer, and he apparently followed the same procedure as the man to whom he had handed over his duties. The letters were left in the safe and usually collected on Saturdays and Wednesdays, on which days the clerk was not expected to go anywhere near the office. Nobody had ever

seen the mysterious Mr Selim enter or leave the office, and the hall porter did not know him. There was a possibility that he occupied another suite in the building, but inquiries accounted for all the other tenants. Thinking that from proximity the staff might have seen something of Mr Selim, Andy personally visited the next office, which was occupied by a firm of shippers, Messrs Wentworth & Wentworth.

He found that the staff consisted of a girl typist, and, from what she told him, the firm of Wentworth & Wentworth had seen better days, and the business was kept on from sentiment rather than from any profits which accrued.

"Mr Wentworth is out just now," said the girl. "He is not in very good health, and only comes to the office two days a week, and I know that he could not tell you much about Mr Selim."

"Have you ever seen Mr Selim by any chance?"

"No, sir," she shook her head, "and I am sure Mr Wentworth hasn't, because he said to me once or twice how curious it was that nobody ever saw Mr Selim. The only person from that office I have seen was the clerk. He was there from eleven to one. It was a nice easy job for him. I wonder he was so silly as to lose it."

She had heard also of the steamed envelope apparently. Andy called on the local Income Tax Inspector. He reported that Mr Selim's accounts were always rendered in excellent order and that the tax was paid. He had not seen the man and had had no occasion to call upon him. Andy left a detective in charge of the office and went back to Beverley Green, very little wiser than when he had started out.

Would Scottie know—Scottie, with his queer knowledge of the underworld and the strange people who constituted its population? He would consult Scottie. He had frequently consulted him since he had been staying at the Nelsons'. It gave him an excuse for calling.

He found that worthy gentleman initiating Stella into the mysteries of bezique. Mr Nelson was at the club expounding a new theory.

"Selim? Abraham Selim? Yes, he is a moneylender, and he's on the crook, too, I think."

Andy observed that the girl's face had become suddenly serious. She was, in fact, experiencing the first twinge of uneasiness she had felt since the crime had been committed.

"I have never met anybody who knew him, but I have met lots of people who have been financed by him. He is a bad egg."

"Is he the kind of man who would threaten someone who would not pay?"

"Threaten?" said the other contemptuously. "There's nothing that Selim wouldn't do. A friend of mi—" He corrected himself. "A man I have heard about, Harry Hopson, double-crossed him for a matter of two hundred. He got Harry ten years. Not that Harry didn't deserve it, but Selim certainly put a fine case against him, an old one that Harry had forgotten. Anyway, he went down for ten years."

One thing was certain, that if Merrivan was in such financial difficulties that he had been obliged to borrow from Selim his indebtedness represented an enormous sum. His tradesmen had been paid up until the Saturday, there was a balance at his bank amounting to several thousands, and there was no evidence at all that he was pressed for money. Until the accountant had set to work on his securities it was difficult to tell how rich he was. No correspondence of any kind had been discovered that revealed the slightest obligation to the mystery man, nor were any other letters found from the moneylender.

One point had not been cleared up—the extraordinary boots which Merrivan had been wearing at the moment of his death. He had been in the habit of making nocturnal visits—but why the heavy boots, if, as Scottie supposed, the object of his midnight rambles was in the village itself? And if that were the case, why wear boots which would make an infernal din the moment they were on gravel or wood? Surely rubber-soled shoes would be more in keeping with that kind of adventure? Andy considered these matters as he walked across to Merrivan's house.

All day long and for two days the place had been besieged by reporters. There had been an inflow of strange men with cameras and inquisitive youths with notebooks. At this hour the last of the newspaper men had gone. He had promised himself the task of a thorough inspection of the house. Up till now he had confined his minutest scrutiny to the long room and contented himself with a casual examination of the other apartments.

The remaining inspection narrowed itself to a more careful search of Mr Merrivan's bedroom. It was on the first floor, in front of the house, and consisted of a large and airy bedroom, furnished only with the necessities of toilet, a dressing-room leading out from one door and a handsomely appointed bathroom opening from another. Mr Merrivan had taken a great deal of pains to secure his comfort. The bathroom was surprisingly luxurious. It was lined with marble, and had been fitted by a

Swiss firm which specialised in this kind of work. The furniture in the bedroom consisted of a four-poster bed, a tallboy, and a large bureau. The floor was partly covered by a square of grey carpet. There was also a dressing-chest, a smaller table, and a low armchair and two other chairs, and this practically comprised the contents.

He began by devoting a little more attention to the bed than he had been able to give to it. It was a very solid piece of furniture, and the supports at both sides were heavy and thick. He tapped one of them at the head of the bed and found it solid. The footboard was beautifully carved on the inner side, the outer side being fairly plain, except for two carved shields surmounted by a heraldic rose which appeared on the squat footsteps. He turned up the bed and examined the mattresses, spent an unprofitable half hour in tapping the walls and examining the remaining furniture.

It baffled him that he could find no further reference to Abraham Selim. Not a single document had been discovered which threw any light upon the threat contained in the letter found by the dead man's desk. As for Abraham Selim, he had disappeared completely. Every letter arriving at his office had been opened, and the surprising volume of his business and the solid character of his clientele had been revealed, but neither letter of appeal for loans or time to pay gave any clue to his identity. The man was a usurer of the worst type, and his disappearance must have been a relief to scores of unhappy people who were in his clutches.

But it was an extraordinary circumstance, and one which puzzled the police, that there was no documentary proof of the obligations of his clients. No bills or promissory notes were discovered in the office or at his bank. Usually a moneylender lodges these, with his other securities, in the bank's vaults. Nor was his credit a very high one. Though an enormous volume of business passed through his accounts, his floating balance was never more than a few thousands, and the money he paid in was, as soon as the cheques were cleared, withdrawn again. When it was necessary for him to cover a cheque he had issued for any large amount, it came to the bank manager in the shape of notes.

Here again it would seem impossible that this elusive man could have escaped observation. He must have gone to the bank to open an account, argued the police, but it proved to be that the account had been transferred from a country branch the manager of which was dead. Even had be been alive, it is probable he would have failed to have given any satisfactory testimony as to the identity of Abraham Selim.

To say that he had hidden his tracks would be untrue. He had made no tracks to hide. He had come from nowhere unseen, and, unseen, had vanished into the void from whence he came.

# Chapter 13

Scottie rarely went abroad in the daylight, not because of any secretiveness on his own part, but in deference to the wishes of Andy. If he were visible in the daytime, it was usually between one o'clock and two in the afternoon, at which hour Beverley Green was usually settled at lunch.

He came out by the side entrance of Nelson's house, his objective being the guest-house and Andy. Under his arm was the morning newspaper, a report in which was the subject of his visit, for there was a reference to himself which had made him uneasy. Some callow reporter who had evidently not heard of the happy conclusion to what Scottie euphemistically described as his 'law suit' had written of a 'sensational arrest in this delightful backwater of life' prior to the murder, and had evolved from this a conclusion unflattering to Scottie.

He had hardly taken a step upon the road when he stopped.

A big car blocked his way, being half on the road and half embedded in the shrubbery which bordered the Green, and which, as Scottie knew, was the pride of its inhabitants.

The red-faced chauffeur was making a frantic attempt to turn in the narrow road, with deplorable results to the arboreal beauties of the community. But it was not the chauffeur or the resplendent machine, nor yet the flurry and the snort of engines in reverse, that absorbed Scottie. It was the solitary occupant of the car.

She was a woman of uncertain age, stout and still comely. Under a toque of silver tissue her hair shone with a metallic redness, from which hue her black eyebrows rebelled. The red of her face was equally defiant of the thick layer of powder with which she had overlaid her natural heartiness of colouring. Her blue eyes bulged somewhat, giving the impression that she was permanently surprised. All this Scottie saw between an expert inspection of embellishments more substantial.

In the lobe of each ear was a diamond the size of a peanut; about her neck were three strings of pearls of great size; and attached to her person in this region was a diamond bar, a brilliant plaque that flashed a thousand colours in his dazzled eyes, and a large emerald clasp.

Scottie, looking at her glittering hands, concluded there were no rings on her thumbs.

"Very sorry to make such a fuss, but why don't you build your roads wider?" She favoured Scottie with a friendly smile.

He started at the sound of her voice. It was so utterly unlike anything that he had expected, and he gathered from her accent that she had lived some years in America. It was that strange intonation which English people acquire after a long sojourn in the United States. And it was a voice that made Scottie wince, for this woman with the diamonds was gutter-bred and gutter-reared, for all her obvious wealth.

"Common," thought Scottie, and wondered how she had charmed the diamonds.

"I ain't—haven't been around here for years," she went on, naturally mistaking her audience for a resident. "They tell me all about this place at Beverley. There's been a murder here, hasn't there?"

"There has," said Scottie, and politely handed up his paper. "You'll find a very full account here if you'd like to read it, madam."

"Didn't bring my glasses," she said briskly, but took the newspaper from his hand. "A gentleman murdered! How shocking! They didn't tell me his name, and it wouldn't have meant anything to me if they had. Say, these murders are awful, ain't they? We had one right near to us in Santa Barbara, and the Senator, my dear late husband, wouldn't tell me anything about it. Thought it would upset me, I guess. Senator Crafton-Bonsor. Maybe you've heard of him? His name was in the newspapers a whole lot. Not that he worried about what newspapers said."

Scottie judged that the newspapers had been unkind. But a United States Senator? That was a stiff one to swallow. He knew little about American public men, his experience being limited to a nodding acquaintance with sundry District Attorneys, but he had an idea that Senators were men of taste and discrimination.

"Well, I'll get along, mister. My, it must be creepy living in a place where murder was committed! I'd never sleep at nights, mister—"

"My name is Bellingham, Professor Bellingham."

She was impressed.

"Why, isn't that fine! It must be grand to be a professor. There was one came to our house in Santa Barbara—I'd like you to see my house; why, the lawn's as big as this village—he was wonderful. Got rabbits out of a plug hat, and he showed me the hat before and it was certainly empty. Such a clever man. Well, I'll get along, mister—professor, I mean. I'm staying at the Great Metropolitan. My, they know how to charge. And when I asked for a cantaloupe they'd no idea what I meant. Goodbye."

The car went on and out of sight, leaving Scottie a very thoughtful man.

"Did you see that car?" was the first question he put to Andy.

"No, I heard one. I thought it was a tradesman's truck."

"It was surely a truck," agreed Scottie, "but, Macleod, you should have seen the goods. About—well, I won't attempt to give you an estimate. It was fierce! And what a lady!"

Andy had other interests than chance visitors to Beverley Green.

"How is Miss Nelson?" he asked.

"Wonderful," said Scottie. "She is going a long walk up the valley this afternoon."

Andy went red.

"Who said so?" he demanded.

"She did," said Scottie coolly, "and she particularly reminded me to tell you. There's something highly intelligent about Miss Nelson, that's why she's different to the majority of girls I've met. A lot of that maidenly modesty you read about in books is punk."

"I certainly am not going to discuss Miss Nelson's sense of modesty, Scottie," said Andy haughtily, "and I see no particular reason why you should draw any inferences from what Miss Nelson said. She probably meant you to tell me that she is feeling well enough to take a solitary walk."

"Maybe," agreed Scottie. "She told me that she'd be at the second golf hut at three o'clock and she'd wait for you."

Andy had no immediate explanation to offer.

"And talking of love," Scottie went on, "I'd like you to see what the Post Herald reporter said about the arrest of a dangerous criminal—meaning me—a few days before the murder."

Andy had been waiting by the golf hut ten minutes before the girl came into view.

"I was afraid that you wouldn't be able to get away," she said when she reached him. "The professor told you, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes, he told me," said Andy dryly.

"Oh, and did he tell you what that queer-looking woman said?" she asked eagerly. "He had quite a long conversation with her. Her car has broken down two lovely lilac bushes. Really, people are careless, trying to turn a big car in that narrow road!"

"What queer woman was this?" asked Andy. "Scottie made some reference to her. A visitor?"

Stella nodded.

"I saw her through the window. She simply blazed! I haven't had a chance of speaking to Mr Scottie. I was dressing when he came back."

They were walking at a leisurely pace towards—Andy wasn't quite sure then or after which way they went, except that they came to the hedged boundaries of Beverley Hall. He was out of the world, in a new and tangible heaven. Attractive, pretty, beautiful? He had asked that question before. The profile was perfect, the colouring as delicate in the unromantic sunlight as it had been when the glamour of soft lights might have played tricks with his eyesight.

"Arthur Wilmot cut me this morning," she said.

"Oh! Why? I thought—people said—"

He did not finish his awkward sentence.

"That I was engaged to him?" she laughed softly. "They engage you very—very fluently at Beverley. I never was engaged to him. I used to wear a ring on the finger because—well, the ring fitted that finger. Daddy gave it to me."

He heaved a sigh, and she heard it, and glanced quickly sideways at him, then looked as quickly in the opposite direction.

"What does Arthur Wilmot do for a living?"

"I don't know," she answered. "He is something in the city. He never talks about his business and nobody knows what he is. That is curious, because most boys talk of their work-most of the boys I know. They're frightfully proud of their own cleverness, and there isn't very much more for them to talk about. You never talk about yourself, Doctor Andrew."

"I thought that I was unusually loquacious—Miss Nelson."

"Don't be silly. You called me Stella, and a fool, and a somethinged fool, almost the first time we met. It is rather wonderful, isn't it?"

"I certainly had a nerve," he confessed.

"I mean about—well, about our knowing each other so well, and liking you. I don't like people until I've known them for ever so long. Perhaps it was the reaction. I used to hate you; you made me feel so guilty when you looked at me. I used to think what a horrible man you must be; just like a bloodhound that hunts poor wretched slaves."

"So I made you feel like something out of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'?" he smiled. "I rather enjoy that sensation. I suppose people think of the police that way. But we flatter ourselves that the sight of a policeman's bright buttons brings a glow of joy to the good citizen's heart."

"I'm not a good citizen," she said shortly. "I'm a very bad citizen. You don't know how bad."

"I can guess," said he.

They went on for a long time after this, neither speaking a word.

"Stella," he said suddenly, "when you saw Merrivan, did he—well, did he give you any idea of the future—where he was going to live?"

"In Italy," she said with a shiver. "He told me that he would have a lot of money and that he had bought a beautiful palace on Como."

"He didn't say that he had the money?"

"No. I distinctly remember him saying 'will have'. He gave me the impression that he was going to get it from somewhere. Please don't let us talk about it."

Where was the money to come from? wondered Andy. From Abraham Selim? Or had he already secured and hidden the money, and had Abraham Selim, discovering his intention of living abroad, tried to get it back? Selim never sued a man in court. That was a curious circumstance. It seemed that he never lent money unless he had some sort of hold on his victim.

Crossing a stile, he took Stella's hand and did not release it when he had helped her over. Nor did she draw it away. She was peacefully happy in the communionship. The touch of that strong hand that held hers as lightly as though it were a piece of fragile china was especially soothing. Something of his strength and equanimity had passed to her when those hands had first gripped her shoulders. Now she was invincible, could look to any future that Fate might send, without a qualm.

"You're very serious, aren't you?" she asked as they were coming back. "Andrew, I knew our walk would be just like this—lovely. This, and

nothing more. I don't want any more—yet, it is perfect. And we can't repeat it tomorrow, because—well, it is like trying to repeat a party that has been spontaneously happy. It falls flat the next time. Our walks would never be that."

They stopped by the second golf hut where their stroll had begun. There was nobody in sight.

"I want you to kiss me," she said simply. Andy bent his head, and her quivering lips touched his.

# Chapter 14

Mr boyd salter was sitting at a small table drawn up near the open window of his library, a window which commanded an extensive view of the valley and a corner of Beverley Green. He was engaged in an elaborate game of patience, yet he was not so completely absorbed that he could not pause for lengthy periods and take an interest in such trivial things as came into his range of vision. Once it was a small flock of sheep that cropped their way slowly across the meadowlands. Once it was the swift downward swoop of a greyish hawk, and its disappearance with a limp victim. Then he saw a man in a long dark coat, and him he watched for a time. The stranger was behaving curiously, but he was too far away for the master of Beverley Hall to distinguish exactly his business, for he was skirting a plantation from which, apparently, he had emerged.

Mi Salter pressed a bell at his elbow.

"Bring me my field-glasses. Tilling. Is there a keeper about?"

"Madding is in the servants' hall, sir."

"Send him, please, but bring my glasses first."

Through the prismatics he saw the stranger, without then recognising him. He seemed to be searching for something, for his progress was slow and he followed a zigzag path.

Boyd Salter turned his head. A stout and red-faced man, in velveteen coat and gaiters, had been ushered into the room.

"Madding, who is that walking by Spring Covert?"

The gamekeeper shaded his eyes.

"Looks to me like one of those Beverley Green gentlemen," he said, "name of Wilmot, I think."

His employer looked again.

"Yes, I think it is. Go to him with my compliments, Madding, and ask him if there is anything we can do for him. He may have lost something, though how he lost it on this part of my estate is beyond me."

Madding went out, and Mr Salter resumed his game of patience. He looked up to see the stout gamekeeper striding across the grounds and returned to his cards. When he looked out again he saw Madding only; the unauthorised visitor had disappeared.

"Tiresome," said Mr Boyd Salter, and, gathering up the cards, shuffled and began all over again.

Some time after—

"Thank you, Madding. I saw that you had missed him."

"I found this, sir, a little way beyond where the gentleman was searching. I should think it was this he was looking for."

He held out a gold cigarette case, from which he had wiped the yellow mud, for Spring Covert was sited in marshland, and got its name from the tiny river that had its source in the heart of the wood.

The Justice took the case in his hand and pressed it open. It contained two damp cigarettes and a torn scrap of newspaper on which an address had been scribbled in pencil.

"Thank you, Madding. I will see that it is restored to Mr Wilmot. Yes, Mr Wilmot. There are his initials. I dare say he will reward you. I hear you trapped a stoat yesterday—this morning, was it? Good. They are pests with the young birds. Are the birds plentiful this year? Good. Thank you, Madding."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

The gamekeeper stood waiting, and Salter nodded to him to go on.

"About these murders, sir. I've got an idea that the man who did it escaped through the park."

"Good heavens! What makes you think so?"

"Well, sir, I was out that night looking after things. These fellows of Beverley are poaching worse than ever. Mr Golding's head keeper told me only today that he'd caught a fellow with six brace of pheasants in his bag. Well, sir, I was out and wandering about when I heard a shot, down by Valley Bottom, so off I went as fast as I could, though poachers don't usually work with guns around here. When I'd gone some way I stopped and listened, and I'll swear I heard somebody walking on the hard path—the path that goes up to Spring Covert, where that gentleman was. I called out 'Hello!' and then the sound stopped. 'Come on, the game's up,' I said, thinking it was a poacher, but I never heard another sound, nor saw anybody."

"Have you informed the police? You should have done so, Madding. It may be a very important clue. Fortunately, Mr Macleod is coming to see me this afternoon."

"I didn't know what to do exactly. As a matter of fact, sir, I didn't connect the shot with the murder until I'd talked it over with my wife—a rare headpiece my good lady's got, sir—and she up and said 'You must tell the squire.'"

Mr Boyd Salter smiled.

"Your wife is an intelligent woman, Madding. You had better be around when Mr Macleod calls. I think that is he coming up the Long Drive," he said. "You had better wait."

Andy, who had called in connection with the inquests, heard the gamekeeper's story with interest and questioned the man as to the time.

"Madding has also found a cigarette case belonging to Mr Wilmot," said Boyd Salter, and related the story of Arthur Wilmot's search. "I tell you this, not because it has anything to do with the murder—thank you, Madding, you need not wait, unless Mr Macleod has any further questions to ask you. No? Thank you, Madding."

Andy was examining the case.

"How did he come to be near the Covert? Is it on a public road?'

"Nowhere near. He must have been trespassing, though I would not use that harsh word about the wanderings of a neighbour. Our friends of Beverley Green have a standing invitation to avail themselves of the estate for picnics. I expect them to give notice to my head gamekeeper, and, of course, they never come too near the coverts and particularly Spring Covert, which is not the most pleasant of places."

Andy opened the case and took out the scrap of paper.

"An address, I think?" suggested Mr Boyd Salter.

"It is an address—the address of Sweeny," said Andy, "and it was given to Wilmot on the day of the murder!"

He turned over the scrap of paper.

It had been torn from the edge of a Sunday news-sheet, and the date line ran: '… unday, 23rd June'.

Obviously, thought Andy, the newspaper from which this scrap had been torn was the property of Sweeny. As clearly, the address had been written in the morning, because people do not as a rule carry about Sunday newspapers in the afternoon. They had met and talked, these

two men, and, for some reason, Wilmot had decided that he had a use for Abraham Selim's clerk and had taken his address. The meeting would hardly have taken place in Spring Covert, near where the case had been found, so that either they met again after dark, or else, for some purpose or other, Wilmot had made a furtive visit to the place after nightfall. He accepted the first hypothesis as being the more likely. Wilmot was in it, then—Wilmot, whose mysterious occupation Merrivan had discovered, and whose announcement of his discovery had cowed his hectoring nephew.

"What do you think?" asked Boyd Salter.

"I don't know. It is curious. I'll see Wilmot and restore his case, if you will allow me."

Certain coincidences occurred to him walking back to Beverley Green. Every important incident which had marked his stay had been in duplicate. He had heard the threat of Wilmot and the ravings of Nelson from the outside of their houses. There were burnings of paper at Merrivan's and burnings at Nelson's. Now something had been picked up—

"We have found a valuable diamond ring—at least Mr Nelson discovered it when he was walking across the Green," were the inspector's first words. "I haven't heard that any ring has been missing from Mr Merrivan's house, but nobody in the village claims it."

Really, Stella was the most careless of suspects! She strewed most damning evidence behind her with the prodigality of a 'hare' in a paperchase.

"Somebody will claim it," he said carelessly.

He overtook Wilmot that night as he was turning in at the gate.

"I think this belongs to you," he said, and produced the case.

The man went red and white.

"I don't think so," he said loudly. "I haven't lost—"

"Your monogram is on it," insisted Andy, "and two people have already identified it as yours."

This was not exactly the truth.

"So it is. Thank you, Macleod. I've never missed it."

Andy smiled.

"You were probably searching Spring Covert for something else," he said, and the last vestige of colour left Wilmot's face.

"When did you take Sweeny's address?"

Wilmot's eyes blazed his hate of the man who was questioning him. This manifestation was so unexpected that Andy was momentarily taken aback. There could be two causes for such an attitude—guilt or jealousy. He fancied that the second reason was the real one. He either guessed or knew just how Andy felt towards Stella Nelson.

"I met him on Sunday morning," said Wilmot suddenly. "He came to ask me to recommend him for a job. I knew him when he was in my uncle's employ. I met him on the golf course and wrote down his address on a piece of newspaper."

"You did not tell me or Inspector Dane that you had met him."

"I had forgotten. No, I hadn't forgotten, but I did not want to come into this case."

"You met him again at night. Why at Spring Covert?"

Wilmot was silent, and the question was repeated.

"He had been turned away from Beverley Green and was anxious to see me. He thought that I wouldn't want to be seen speaking to him."

"When did he think this? In the morning, when the second meeting must have been arranged?"

"Yes," reluctantly, and then: "Will you come in, Macleod?"

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, quite. Anyway, the servants never come into my room unless I send for them, and they are out."

Arthur Wilmot's bachelor establishment was the smallest house in the village, and it was furnished with exceptional taste. If it faulted, it was because it was a thought too finicky for a man.

And on a table in the room into which he was ushered was a woman's hat. Wilmot followed the direction of the glance and smothered an exclamation. It was a hat, in the course of creation—a glittering needlepoint, a festoon of coloured silk.

Their arrival had interrupted somebody, thought Andy, and pretended that he had not seen the evidence of anything remarkable. Wilmot was too flustered to leave well alone, and must needs explain.

"One of the servants, I expect," he said, and flung the hat viciously into a corner of the room.

The incident, which might well have increased his embarrassment, seemed to have the opposite effect, and his voice was steady when he spoke.

"I met Sweeny on both occasions, and it was stupid of me not to admit it. Sweeny hated my uncle, and came to me with a story—at least, with the hint of a story that he said would give me a hold on Mr Merrivan. Even now I do not know what this great secret was. The second meeting in Spring Coven was really to discuss the terms on which Sweeny would impart this information. I wish I hadn't gone, and certainly I did not stay very long. I had placed myself in a false, and, to say the least, an undignified position. I promised to write to him, and there the matter ended."

"What was this secret of Sweeny's?"

Wilmot hesitated.

"Honestly, I don't know. The impression I received was that Mr Merrivan was in Selim's debt—Selim was the name of Sweeny's employer. But that, of course, was ridiculous. My uncle was a rich man when he died."

Andy was silent, pondering the possibilities of this story being true. And then:

"Mr Wilmot, have you, in your mind, any opinion as to who killed your uncle?"

Wilmot's brown eyes rose.

"Have you?" he asked.

Andy knew then the direction in which this man's evidence would run if there came the slightest hint of danger to himself.

"I have many theories," he answered coolly, "but it would be a rash proceeding to pin myself to any one of them. Which reminds me, Mr Wilmot. The last time you and I spoke together you talked about some worthless girl. That interested me. You quarrelled over her, you told me, quarrelled with your uncle. That is rather important, you know. Who was she?"

It was a masterful challenge, well planned, and delivered at the most propitious moment.

Wilmot was not prepared for a question so brutally direct. He knew that Macleod was well aware that he had been speaking of Stella Nelson. He must speak now or—

"I am not prepared to say," was his compromise, but Andy had gone too far and risked too much to allow his enemy to break off action.

"You either know such a girl or you do not. There was either a quarrel between your uncle and yourself or there was no such quarrel. I am speaking to you as the police officer in charge of these investigations and I want the truth."

His voice was harsh, menacing. Arthur Wilmot was no fighter.

"I was a little distracted that morning," he said grudgingly, "I didn't know what I was saying. There was no woman and no quarrel."

Slowly Andy drew a notebook from his pocket and wrote down the words, and the other watched him in a cold and growing fury.

"Thank you," said Andy. "I won't trouble you again."

He went out without another word and left behind him a man who now, at least, had murder in his heart.

"Mr Macleod!"

Andy, at the end of the path, turned. Wilmot was behind him.

"I suppose there is no reason why I shouldn't visit the house now. I am my uncle's heir-at-law and there are certain preparations that have to be made for his funeral."

"The only thing is that for the moment I do not want you to go into the long room. I have kept that undisturbed until after the inquest."

He went across and spoke to the police sergeant in charge.

"It will be quite in order, Mr Wilmot. I have told the sergeant to admit you."

Andy took certain phenomena for granted. He was neither surprised nor amused to have discovered the tell-tale woman's hat in Wilmot's room. The man's embarrassment had been as eloquent as his explanation had been feeble. "One of the servants" did not quite accord with the statement he had made, only a few seconds earlier, that none of Wilmot's household staff ever went into that particular room unless they were sent for. Wilmot was a bachelor—no better, no worse, perhaps, than the generality of well-off bachelors—though it was a little surprising that he brought his indiscretions to Beverley Green, where servants were notorious gossips. Yet it did not seem quite like Arthur Wilmot.

He called at the Nelsons'. He would have gone there every day and remained all day if his own wishes governed. As it was, he usually

consulted Scottie in the early hours of the morning, usually in the very centre of the village Green.

Stella received him. Her father was in the studio working against the failing light and the girl was enthusiastic, for Kenneth Nelson had started a new picture, and the obliging Scottie was his principal model.

"It will be useful to have a real good picture of Scottie available," said Andy heartlessly. "When I want him in the future I'll send my hounds to the Academy to study him."

"But he'll never do wrong again," said she, horrified at the thought. "He was telling me that he had given up his old life and that nothing would ever tempt him to steal." Andy smiled.

"I shall be glad if he does," he said, and changed the topic. "Do you know Arthur Wilmot very well, Stella?"

Her impulse was to say very well. "I thought I did. Evidently I don't. Why?"

"Do you know whether he has any girl friends or relations?"

She shook her head.

"The only relation I know was his uncle and a very old aunt. Do you mean, does he have people staying with him? I've never known him to entertain people except the aunt, whom I think is dead now. He doesn't ever have bachelor parties. Why?"

"I wondered," he said, and she smiled, but became serious instantly.

"I don't know what is happening. Have you found any—any clue? The place has been crowded with reporters. One of them came here and asked me if I could give him any details about Mr Merrivan's daily life. Did he go to church, was he a quiet man, and things like that. I told him I didn't know much about him. He was easily satisfied."

Andy drew a long breath.

"Thank heaven Downer wasn't amongst them. Who is Downer? He is a reporter, the toughest of the whole bunch, and not as easily satisfied as your caller. And he wouldn't have asked such crude questions. He'd have talked art to your father, and been in the studio admiring Pygmalion and discussing colour values and atmosphere and movement and all the other jargon of the studio—and when he had gone he would have left you with an uneasy feeling that you had said much more than you ought to have said, not about old masters, but Mr Merrivan's private life."

She never took her eyes from his face when he was speaking. For his part, he never looked too long at her, for fear he would gather her into his arms and not let her go.

"You must know an awful lot of people. I don't mean that they're 'awful'—I mean—you know what I mean. I had no idea you were like you are. The man Downer, for instance, and people like the professor—Scottie. I called him 'Scottie' quite inadvertently and he seemed tremendously pleased. There is nothing new?"

"Except that Dane found your ring. Do you usually scatter diamond rings over the countryside?"

She was not at all perturbed.

"I threw it away. I don't remember where. Are you going? You hive only been here a minute and you haven't seen father or the picture."

"I have been here long enough to scandalise the neighbourhood," he said. "Do you realise that I cannot visit you unless I call on almost everybody on some excuse or other? I make myself a nuisance a dozen times a day in order—well, to see you."

She went with him to the door.

"I wish you'd come and dust the hall-room again," she said softly.

"And I—I wish we were at the second golf hut," he said fervently.

She laughed. He heard the sound of it as he went down the path.

# Chapter 15

It was no exaggeration to say that since his uncle's death Arthur Wilmot had lived under a strain that he thought at times would drive him mad. Neither his character nor his training fitted him for the ordeal through which he was passing. He had inherited from his mother, a highly strung, nervous woman, that weakness of resistance which had made a surrender to emotions of the moment seem natural and proper. Restraint, other than the restraint imposed by fear, he no more applied to the inclinations of maturity than he had to the tantrums of childhood. That Stella for one had not known him in his true character was entirely due to his confidence that the friendship between them would, in his own time, develop as he might direct. She did not know that their relationship had progressed on his side with the greatest caution. If in its earlier and longer period he had not given her the slightest hint that he was in love with her, it was because he had consciously avoided the compromising of his life. He thought he was acting 'fairly'. He told himself as much. He honestly believed that in the course of their relationship she had offered him certain opportunities for guiding their relationship into a closer one, and when he had at last decided that she was made for him, and he had, in carefully chosen words, explained his intentions, her prompt refusal came in the nature of a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

His vanity did not allow him to believe that her answer was final. He treated her rejection lightly, knowing (and saying) that women are a little perverse and illogical on such occasions. After a further rejection it pleased him to assume an attitude of gentle resignation, a role which enabled him to return to the subject without any violent interruption of their intercourse.

Then came the tremendous moment when he had attempted to carry by assault all that he had failed to win by patience and blandishment. And the lash of her tongue, her studied contempt, her sheer indifference to his fine feelings, had produced the effect which high and unscalable peaks have upon mountaineers. Whether he loved her or hated her was

not important; he loved himself very dearly, and, seeing himself robbed of something he desired, he gave to its object so great a value that life without its attainment seemed not worth while.

The coming of Andy Macleod, the frequent visits he paid to the Nelsons, the gossip that ran from servant to servant, these pushed him to the borderland of dementia. And to this was added the burden of his uncle's death and the knowledge that suspicion might attach to himself. Third of the causes of his agony of mind was the uncertainty of his own material future. His uncle had financed him. What provision had he made for him in his will? Was there a will at all? He had been called into consultation both with Mr Merrivan's lawyer and with Inspector Dane, and no mention had been made of the discovery of such a document. Arthur was asked by both whether he knew of any safe deposit or other hiding-place where papers might be hidden. He had said "No," yet once his uncle, in an expansive moment, had taken him into his bedroom and showed him such a place as the police were seeking.

When he asked Dane or Andy whether "anything had been found" he had this in his mind. It was strange that Darius Merrivan should have shown it to him at all. They were not intimates, and Arthur often wondered why his uncle should have made such generous advances to him for investment in a business, the nature of which he never asked. That was the curious thing—Darius never asked, and once, when Arthur Wilmot, a little shamefaced, was on the point of advancing information, the elder man had cut him short.

He had never asked for interest or mentioned the money, and this circumstance had been the basis of his belief that Merrivan intended leaving his considerable fortune to him on his death.

His uncle had once asked him to keep secret the fact that he was married. But he would hardly have paid so heavily for a silence which the request of a relation would impose, particularly as the manner in which the marriage had ended had been so scandalous.

Arthur Wilmot waited until he saw Andy vanish into the hedges towards Nelsons', then crossed over to his uncle's house.

"Mr Macleod said that you might be coming over, Mr Wilmot," said the sergeant. "I suppose he told you that he doesn't want you to go into the long room?"

Wilmot nodded and passed up the stairs.

Three of Mr Merrivan's servants had been sent home. They were all natives of Beverley and were available for the inquest. Two others Arthur had taken into his own establishment. They refused to sleep in the murder house, though they worked there during the day.

He went straight to Merrivan's bedroom. At any moment Andy could learn that he had taken immediate advantage of the permission and might return to supervise his search. He stood at the open door listening to make sure that the sergeant had not followed him up, then, crossing the room, he knelt at the foot of the bed. He gripped the carved rose that marked the juncture of the sides with the stout footpost and screwed it quickly to the left. There was a click, he tugged, and a shield-shaped drawer came out. There were a number of papers, a small roll of banknotes fastened about with a rubber band, and a flat case containing a paper of some kind. He pushed them into his inside pocket, closed the drawer, and turned the carved rose. Was there another drawer behind the shield on the second footpost? He walked to the door and listened. Down below he heard the sergeant sneeze and went back to the bed. But here rose and shield were immovable. They were part of the solid embellishments of the furniture. He was trembling violently, anxious to get back to his own room, and yet fearful that his agitation would be visible to the observant police officer.

Looking in a mirror, he saw that his face was chalk-like in its pallor, and rubbed his cheeks vigorously. To give himself time to recover his composure he went from room to room, and at last descended the stairs, his knees shivering.

"Find anything, sir?" The sergeant, sitting in the hall in a comfortable armchair, looked up from his newspaper.

"Nothing at all. I am afraid I am a little overcome by the—"

The quaver in his voice was not assumed.

"I quite understand, sir," said the sympathetic policeman. "This is my first murder case in twenty years' service. Mr Macleod is used to 'em, being a doctor, too. Lord! The coldblooded way he talks of things gives me the creeps!"

Arthur locked the door of his room when he got in, pulled down the blinds, and switched on the lights. Then he emptied the contents of his pocket. It only needed a glance to see that a will was not one of his finds, unless—He pulled out the folded paper which the leather case held. It was a certificate of marriage. His uncle's? No, it certified the marriage of Hilda Masters, her occupation described as parlourmaid, with John

Severn, student. The marriage was thirty years old. Arthur was puzzled. Why had his uncle taken the trouble to preserve the evidence of a serving maid's marriage? He read the document carefully, thinking he might find some clue. It had been celebrated at St Paul's Church, Marylebone, London, and his uncle did not figure in the document, even as a witness. Yet this certificate must have possessed an exceptional value to the dead man. All thoughts of the will were driven from his mind by the discovery he made when he examined the next of his finds.

They were two bills of exchange, one for seven hundred and another for three hundred, drawn in favour of Abraham Selim, and were signed by Kenneth Nelson. He turned them over for the signature of the acceptor, and found, as he had expected, the name of his uncle.

The two bills were pinned together, and attached was a slip of paper, and in Merrivan's handwriting: "These acceptances are forgeries. Due 24th of June."

Forgeries! Wilmot's eyes narrowed. Did Stella know? Was that the reason she had gone to Darius Merrivan's house on the night of the 23rd? She knew! That was the hold Merrivan had over her. That was why he was so sure that she would marry him. In some mad, drunken moment Kenneth Nelson, hard-pressed for money, had given two bills with forged acceptances into Merrivan's possession.

He whistled softly. He could not take it in yet. Idly he examined the money. It was a very large sum, and he breathed more quickly as he put it into his own notecase. Here is something at any rate. A legacy, and not inconsiderable. The other papers were long lists of securities. His uncle had written a beautiful copperplate, and they were easy to follow. Against each line was a letter. These could wait. He locked them and the certificate in a wall safe, and devoted his evening to speculations.

At half past ten he went out. The summer afterglow still lingered in the sky: the night was very still. He could hear voices from a garden on the far side of the Green.

The lights were burning in Stella's hall. He must risk meeting Andrew Macleod; more than this, must risk the inquiries which would start at the point where he produced the bills of exchange.

Stella was alone, however. She blocked the doorway when she recognised the caller.

"Can I see you, Stella? I won't keep you very long."

"You can see me now, Mr Wilmot," she said, "and I hope you will be very brief."

"I cannot tell you here," he said, checking his sudden anger, "unless you want everybody to hear what I am saying."

But she was adamant.

"I can't ask you in. I'm being unusually kind in speaking to you at all."

"Oh, you are, are you?" he said furiously. "Perhaps you'll think I'm unusually kind too, before I'm finished!"

She tried to close the door upon him, but he was too quick for her. His foot was an immovable wedge.

She was angry now.

"I shall call my father," she said.

"Do," he returned. "I'd like him to identify my uncle's signature on two bills of exchange drawn in favour of Abraham Selim."

He did not hear through his own speech the gasping intake of her breath, but the pressure on the door suddenly relaxed. She had fallen back against the wall, her hands at her side, her head drooped.

"Come in," she said huskily. Arthur Wilmot entered victoriously. He waited until she moved into the ballroom, then he followed and put his Homburg hat on the table with the air of one who was taking possession of her very soul.

She sat down and looked across at him. The table lamp was between them, and its shade hid her eyes, but he saw her quivering mouth and swelled with gratification.

"Your father forged the name of the acceptor," he said, dispensing with the preamble he had planned.

"May I see the—the things?" she asked.

He unfolded them on the table. "Yes, they were like those," she said listlessly. "I don't know very much about these things, but they looked like—I suppose the two I took were—dummies. He manufactured them just to fool me. I thought they were real."

"You went to see him on Sunday night?" he accused. "I saw you go in, I saw you come flying out. You went to get those bills. He gave you fakes." He asked her a question which made her feel physically ill. He was so foul, so foul! "Then you stole them, but the old man fooled you! Of course, he fooled you. You don't suppose that he'd allow you to get the better of him? What are you going to do about it?"

She did not answer.

"I'll tell you what you're going to do. You are going to be sensible and marry me. This damned detective doesn't mean anything. He is only a policeman. You've got some self-respect left, haven't you? You're soiled by knowing a man like that. I'll give you these as a wedding present. There will be trouble if you don't! These are legally mine now. I inherit my uncle's bad debts, and I'll put Mr Kenneth Nelson where he belongs. I can do it. Look! My uncle wrote on this paper, 'These acceptances are forgeries.' That is all the evidence that is required, Stella!"

He came round the table towards her with outstretched hands, but she had risen from her chair and was backing away from him.

"All right. Sleep on it. I'll come to you tomorrow. You can't tell Macleod without telling him that your father's a thief. He couldn't stomach that. He's done his best to keep you out of mischief, but he'd have to move against your father. Be sensible, Stella."

He stood at the door, peering towards the shadows where she stood. When he closed the door he was smiling. Smiling, he reached out to pull open the gate, and a big hand came sudden over his mouth and he was pulled violently backwards. Before he could understand what had happened, somebody was gripping his throat with one hand and searching his pocket with the other.

Then he was jerked to his feet, and he saw the fierce gleam of spectacled eyes.

"You talk about this and you're in trouble—hell-sure! Go and tell Macleod. He'll search your house tonight. Where did you get those bills, anyway? And what else did you get?"

"Give me back those—papers," quavered Wilmot.

Scottie grinned unpleasantly. "Go, tell the police," he said, "and see if they can get 'em back."

Arthur Wilmot went home. He was no fighter.

# Chapter 16

"A good deed," said Scottie sententiously, "brings its own reward, and I am merely acting in consonance with all the high-class literature I've read dealing with reformed criminals. I'm not sure that 'consonance' is the word, but it sounds right. In my last prison they ran a line of fiction dealing exclusively with the good deeds of old lags that had been saved from a life of shame and misery by the smile of a child. Sometimes she was the governor's daughter and sometimes the chaplain's sister, and her age varied from nine to nineteen. But she was always rescued from drowning by the hook—generally when he was on his way to commit an even more hideous crime. And the memory of her blue eyes turned him from his career, and he lived happily ever after. The end!"

"You're only—talking—to stop me—from getting hysterical," gasped Stella.

There was a new litter of ashes on the hearth; they still smoked.

"You shouldn't have burnt the pin," said Scottie, and picking it out, hot as it was, thrust it into the edge of his waistcoat. "Burnt paper is just burnt paper, but supposing Willy does run to the police and tells a story of two bills that were pinned together and suppose they find the burnt pin—well, that would look as if he were telling the truth, and I should hate that."

"You heard everything?" she said, dabbing her eyes.

"Mostly," confessed Scottie. "I was in the garden when he was talking to you on the step. And he left the front door open, so I heard—most of the things. That man isn't, from a professional point of view, a crook. It would take five years' hard learning to make him anything like a professional. He's all nerves. And he's talkative. Everybody round here is that way. You're looking at me. Miss Nelson, with a sort of doubtful expression. Perhaps you think I'm in that class, too. I am, but my conversation is backed by knowledge. I admit it. You can't go round the world as I've been, all through Canada and the United States, Australia, to South

Africa, and the islands, without acquiring knowledge which an occasional sojourn in jug helps you to consolidate."

"I'm going up to my room, Mr—Scottie. I haven't thanked you, have I? I must tell Mr Macleod."

Scottie shook his head violently.

"You mustn't do that, miss. It would put him in a hole. My experience of the police has taught me two things—what they want to know and what they don't want to know. It is fatal to make a mistake on either side."

He was right. She hadn't the strength to argue. This last shock had exhausted her reserves. She just wanted to go away and be quiet. She did not give another thought to Arthur Wilmot. He was with the ashes in the hearth.

"Good night and thank you."

"Pleasant dreams," said Scottie, and did not look up from the book he was reading until she was gone.

Then he carefully brushed up the ashes of paper, carried them to the kitchen, and mixed them in a glass with water. This he poured away, and washed and dried the glass.

"Would that one's past could be washed away as easily," said Scottie poetically.

There came to Beverley Green the next morning, and long after the vanguard of the reporting army had struck their tents, a clever, middle-aged newspaper man who was attached to no particular journal, but had the entree to all. He was in the most exact sense a gleaner of news, for he found his harvest among the stubble—tiny ears of news thinly scattered. Sometimes his gleaning gave him a poor return for his labour, but often the yield dwarfed the hastily-gathered sheaf of the earlier harvester.

He had the true news conscience, which means that all things were subservient to the truth, whoever was hurt or whatever interests were jeopardised by the telling. His methods presented the problem in ethics over which the metaphysician and the moralist have for ever disagreed. To secure the truth he would lie and cheat, and, if necessary, steal. He would betray a confidence as lightheartedly as he would order his breakfast. The solemn pledge to observe secrecy was part of his equipment. The majority of his fellows—more honest men—despised him, and made no secret of their dislike. But they admitted that he was a great

newsman, and expressed their wishes that they, too, had been born without a sense of decency.

He was a short, coarse-featured man, who wore powerful pince-nez and who smoked cigars from getting up to lying down. Normally, he looked bad-tempered and discontented, and was, in consequence, spoke of as 'repulsive'. He could be almost anything that complemented his vis-a-vis, and in this quality lay his power, and, for the victim, his danger.

It is on record that he talked theology to the Bishop of Grinstead for three hours and never made a false move, before the bishop, by way of illustrating some point, told him the inside story of the Rev. Stoner Jelph and why he resigned his living. Of course, the bishop did not mention Mr Jelph by name. He was, in the simple prelate's argument, a hypothetical X. But Downer (which was the reporter's name) had the story, and printed it. He did not mention names either, but he left no doubt as to who he was writing about.

Andy was the first to see Downer arrive. He had been expecting his advent ever since the day of the murder. The reporter came straight to him.

"Good morning, Macleod. I thought I would see you before I made any independent inquiries. I always say that it is not fair to the man in charge of the case to start nosing without telling him first. Very often a reporter does a deuce of a lot of harm that way. I think I've got the main facts. Is there any new development?"

Andy offered him his cigar case.

"I'm glad you've come. Downer, but you're rather late. No, there is nothing new."

"No fresh clues of any description? Who is this Abraham Selim you are after? I seem to know the name."

"He is your story. Downer," said Andy, pulling at his cigar and watching the other from under his drooped lids. "All the other men have missed it. And we've missed Selim."

"Great. Maybe this is the best place to get hold of his tail. You can trust me, Macleod. I'll not go barging into your lines. I'm too much of a fisher myself."

It would be inaccurate to say that Downer was afraid of Andy. He was not afraid of a hill of dynamite, but he would not have chosen its crest as a place for a quiet smoke. He respected him, and, if possible, avoided him. Andy was the only man he knew who could and would engage in

an intelligent vendetta against him if he were crossed. Downer respected the capability of this antagonist. Nevertheless:

"You have Four-Eyed Scottie here, they tell me. He got past with an alibi on some charge or other?"

"He is here now," said Andy. "Some friends of mine are giving him house-room."

"You think he has a string to the story?" said Downer, nodding. "Possibly. He is a sharp boy and I'll give him a miss. I don't believe in interfering with regular police witnesses. I'll be getting along."

Andy watched him as he loafed aimlessly in the direction of Merrivan's house. He had been frank about Scottie, knowing that Downer would find out sooner or later. Therein he had been wise, for the reporter had visited Beverley Green the night before, and had trailed Scottie to his home. Mentally ruling out Scottie as a source of sensation, Downer made his leisurely way to the house. Ten minutes later he was discussing with the fascinated sergeant the slowness of promotion in the county police.

The inquest was held that afternoon, and the little court was crowded to its fullest capacity.

Andy saw Mr Boyd Salter in a privileged seat near the Coroner and the Justice beckoned him forward.

"I have brought Madding, the gamekeeper, down," he said. "His evidence may be of value as to fixing the time the murder occurred. I have been trying to get you further particulars about Abraham Selim. He seems to have begun his operations about thirty-five years ago, somewhere in the west. A very old friend of mine, who, of course, does not want his name mentioned, had some dealings with him when he was a young man at college. He never saw Selim and never knew anybody who did. Selim seems to have come to town twenty-five years ago and to have established a profitable connection amongst shipping men, exporters, and agents, about whose financial position he had an extraordinary knowledge. I am afraid that is all I know."

Andy thanked him and went back to his seat.

Shippers! Who were shippers? He had been in an agent's office lately, and then he remembered with a start—Wentworth & Wentworth, the decaying firm whose offices were next door to Abraham Selim. It might only be a coincidence, but it was well worth a second investigation, he decided, as he settled himself down to the swearing-in of the jury.

His own evidence followed that of Mr Arthur Wilmot, who had identified his uncle and who had seen him on the night of the murder.

The butler followed him to the witness stand and told the story he had already told to a dozen reporters and to Andy.

The question which was exercising Mr Andrew Macleod was whether Arthur Wilmot would be recalled to testify as to the names of his uncle's women friends. No question had been asked him on this point when he had been giving his evidence. The coroner made no special point of the woman's voice, but seemed much more interested in the incident of the letter. The butler pointed out on a sketch-map exactly where the letter had been found, and how he had picked it up and placed it mechanically under Merrivan's other papers.

"Had it been folded or was it open?"

The butler was not sure. He thought it was half open when he picked it up.

"Had an envelope been discovered?"

Here Andy was recalled, and stated that after a very careful search no envelope was found. This had seemed strange to Andy at the time. The letter was undated, and it might have been delivered earlier in the day.

"Did you discover anything that would lead you to believe that Mr Merrivan was in fear of his life?"

"I found a loaded revolver," said Andy. "It was in a cupboard behind the desk and was in easy reach of his hand. It had not been discharged or touched."

(He had found this weapon after Scottie had described to him the location of the cupboard.)

The policeman who had first seen the body, Mr Vetch, the dead man's lawyer, Madding, the gamekeeper, Merrivan's cook, and his hysterical housemaid, who gave yet another exhibition of her weakness in this direction and had to be carried out of court, and the calling of Inspector Dane, concluded the proceedings; and the inquest seemed well through when the coroner, who was a fussy old gentleman with a defective memory, looked up from the papers he was examining, and:

"Doctor Macleod, I'd like to recall you again. There is a point here which does not seem to be cleared up. It is in relation to the woman whose voice was heard by the butler."

Andy walked calmly to his place.

"There is a newspaper report to the effect that you saw a woman leaving Mr Merrivan's house at eleven o'clock, and she passed under your window at the guest-house, on her way apparently to Beverley. Usually," said the coroner, "I do not take much notice of newspaper reports, but here it is distinctly stated in an interview with you by one of the reporters, and I do not remember any reference to the incident having been made in the course of this inquiry."

# Chapter 17

It was a novel experience for Andrew Macleod to find himself standing up in a court of law committing wilful perjury. He could hardly believe that it was he who was speaking so calmly.

"Yes," he said, "I saw the door of Merrivan's house open, and a little while after I saw a woman coming across the Green."

"At what time was this?"

"Eleven o'clock. The fact is, the clock of Beverley church was striking eleven as she passed."

"You could not distinguish her features?"

"No, your honour; the moon was obscured that night."

That concluded the evidence, and the jury retired. They returned in half an hour with a verdict of wilful murder against Abraham Selim. They had been practically directed to that verdict by the coroner.

Downer had not come to court. Andy had looked round in search of him, but he was neither at the reporters' table nor in the body of the little hall where the inquest was held.

He stopped to chat a moment with Mr Boyd Salter and a representative of the Public Prosecutor's department, and then he walked back to the village, having very much the same state of mind towards Mr Downer as Stella had had towards himself on the first day they had met.

He walked so slowly that Merrivan's lawyer was able to overtake him.

"The story about Mr Merrivan being in the clutches of a moneylender is nonsense," said that gentleman, whose name was Vetch. "Mr Merrivan was a rich man."

"Did he leave a will? You did not mention that in your evidence," said Andy.

"None has been discovered," said the other, shaking his head. "The estate will go to Mr Wilmot unless a nearer relative turns up."

Andy wondered how much truth there was in the story that Merrivan was married. A search had been made of the marriage registers, but no trace of such a marriage had been unearthed.

"You described Merrivan as a merchant. What does that mean exactly? In what particular branch of merchandise did he trade?"

Mr Vetch shook his head.

"I haven't the slightest idea. He was very reticent about his business affairs and did not come to us until he had retired. I have an idea he was in the tea trade."

"What makes you think that?" asked Andy quickly.

"He was rather fastidious about tea. I think it was the only commodity in his household in which he took the slightest interest. Often when I have been up at his house and the tea has been brought in, he has asked me what I thought of it, very much as a man who is a connoisseur of wines would ask you to pass an opinion on some old port."

They had turned into Beverley Green road when they came in sight of a man who was strolling in the same direction.

"Isn't that a reporter, a man named Downer? I saw him this morning. A very intelligent fellow," said Vetch. "We discussed that new judgment in the High Court on the liability of agents. He seems very well read in law."

"In everything," said Andy grimly. "I suppose he didn't ask you anything about Merrivan's private affairs?"

"If he had I shouldn't have told him," said the lawyer. "I am too old a bird to be caught discussing my clients' affairs. The only subject we did discuss was innocuous—the cost of living!"

"In what respect?" asked Andy curiously.

"He was suggesting that it must have cost Merrivan a lot of money to run that house. It hadn't occurred to me to check his expenditure, but I did then. Of course, I didn't show him the bills."

"If you had the bills on the table you showed them to him," said Andy. "That fellow can read upside down. Was there any especial bill—any exceptionally heavy bill amongst them?

"One for £130," said the lawyer. "It wasn't exactly a bill, but a memorandum written in Mr Merrivan's hand—Stelling Bros., £130. What it was for I do not know. Who are Stellings?"

Andy did not enlighten him.

Stellings were the biggest jewellers in town, and that memorandum which the methodical Mr Merrivan had jotted down, probably after he had destroyed the bill, was the price of the diamond cluster he had purchased in anticipation of his easy conquest.

By this time they were within earshot of Downer, and Andy discreetly changed the subject.

"No, I didn't come to the inquest," said Downer. "I had one or two calls to make, and inquests bore me, anyway. Nothing came out, I suppose?"

"Nothing that would enlighten us and which is not already published," said Andy.

At this point the lawyer left them. He had to settle accounts with Merrivan's household.

"Has anything come out about a diamond cluster Merrivan bought four or five days before his death?" asked Downer, lashing at the grass with his walking-stick, and apparently interested in nothing more than the decapitation of a daisy. "I think it must have been the ring that the Inspector found on the Green," he went on. "Queer thing, old Merrivan buying a diamond cluster and then chucking it away. It looks almost as if he bought it for somebody who hated him so much that as soon as she got out of the house—say at about eleven o'clock at night—she pulled it off her finger and threw it as far away from her as she could."

"That idea occurred to me also," said Andy. "The woman who passed under my window may have done almost anything between the time she walked out of Merrivan's house and the time she came into view."

There was a silence, and then:

"There was a policeman on duty at this end of Beverley High Street," said Downer. "He was waiting outside a house. A servant had brought him out some coffee, and he was chatting to her from eleven to half-past. Nobody passed from eleven until twenty minutes after."

He was still engaged in decapitating wild flowers and did not once look at Andy.

"She may have gone another way. There are two ends to the road," said Andy.

Another silence, and then Downer went on monotonously:

"A cyclist policeman started out at ten minutes to eleven from Hylton Crossroads—that's the other end of the road—and pedalled into Beverley. He saw nobody until he came up to the policeman who was talking

to the servant. He had a bright acetylene lamp in the front of his machine, and the road is fairly narrow. She couldn't even have hidden in the shadow of a hedge, could she?"

"It is a curious case altogether," agreed Andy. "The woman may have retraced her footsteps after I went away from the window. I went to bed a little later."

"You mean, she may have gone back to Merrivan's?" Downer raised his eyes. "Gone back after she had thrown away her ring?"

"She may have lost it, that is an explanation," said Andy, "and, discovering her loss, may have gone back to look for it."

"The ring was found near the road," persisted the indefatigable Downer. "She either threw it away or else she didn't come straight across the Green, as you said. The centre of the Green is about eighty-five yards from the place where the ring was found."

"Eighty-six," said Andy gravely; and Downer laughed.

"I agree with you that there is not much in the woman incident," he said. "These elderly men have queer friends. She was probably some slut from the village."

He fixed the detective with his eyes, but Andy did not flinch. This man knew. How he knew—whether it was clever deduction or information received—he did not bother to speculate upon.

"I don't think we ought to take away Merrivan's character," he said, "The man lived a very wholesome life, so far as we know."

"She didn't commit the murder," said Downer with conviction, "but she ought to be cleared up. Scottie busy?" he asked abruptly, and Andy laughed.

"Very. He is temporarily a reformed character. I believe he is posing for Mr Nelson, an artist who lives in these parts. But I needn't tell you anything about him. Downer. A sleuth like you will have his biography at his fingertips."

"He has gone in for a course of reformation himself, hasn't he?" said Downer. "Yes, I've made inquiries in the ordinary way of business. A very charming girl. Miss Nelson."

"Very," agreed Andy, "a very charming girl."

Downer nodded.

"I suppose she is very upset about the murder. She was a friend of Mr Merrivan's, wasn't she? He lent her £300 about nine months ago. Of

course," he added apologetically, "that is no business of mine or yours. And it is not a very terrible thing for a lady to borrow money from a man old enough to be her father."

This was indeed news to Andy, but he knew that Downer was not speaking at random.

"How did you get to know that?" he asked.

"I forget who told me," said Downer with a yawn. "So long. I'll see you later."

One of his own men had come down to help him prepare a report on the crime, and to him Andy gave an urgent commission.

"Go into the town and find out whether Downer was here last night and whom he saw. He probably stayed at the Beverley Hotel."

Andy's surmise was not far off the mark. Mr Downer had arrived on the evening train, and he had as a guest to dinner a clerk of the Micham Farmers' Bank.

"He is some sort of relation of Downer's," reported the detective on the telephone. "The clerk hasn't been in Beverley very long."

"And he won't be much longer," said Andy grimly.

That was obviously the source of Downer's information. The fact that his relative would certainly be fired if he had betrayed the secrets of the bank meant no more to Mr Downer than if a similar misfortune had overtaken his worst enemy.

Money was under discussion in the Nelson household that afternoon. Mr Nelson came in from his study wearing his long white coat, and the girl had expected him. He had been very quiet all the morning, hardly spoke at lunch, and she was a little apprehensive, because these signs of an unquiet spirit usually had only one consequence.

He shut the door leading into the passage which connected with the studio and then went back to make sure that it was shut.

"Stella," he said, "I woke rather early this morning and I did a lot of thinking. Do you remember that money we borrowed from poor Merrivan, or, rather, that you borrowed?"

She nodded.

"Did we ever pay it back?"

She nodded again.

"Where did you get the money to pay it back? I remember that I was in a tremendous hole when I sent you to get it."

She did not reply.

"It was £300, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Father," she said quietly.

"Where the dickens did we get £300 to pay him back? You are sure we did pay him?"

"Oh yes. Father," she said. "I have the receipt."

He sat down and for a long time examined his nails, his forehead knit.

"I've only the vaguest idea about it," he said. "It comes to me like scraps of a dream. But was the repayment made during that"—he hesitated—"that horrible week I gave you?"

He had not over-described those seven days of mental torture, during which he had never once appeared in the house wholly sober.

"I got hold of a lot of money just about then, didn't I? Where did I get it from?"

"I don't know," she said.

He started drumming his fingers on the table nervously, irritatingly.

"It is strange," he said. "I invariably associate that time with some unpleasant happening—something that makes my blood run cold—and I don't know what it is. Of course, it may be just a realisation of my beastliness, but I can't think it was that. I did not do anything particularly outrageous, did I?"

"No, Father," she said. The consequence of his outrageous deed had been wiped out with its charred evidence.

"You know of nothing?" he insisted, watching her narrowly. "I used to have my maudlin moments of contrition even in that period, didn't I? And if I had done anything wrong I should have told you. Where on earth did the money come from?"

She did not help him to discover. The burden of his sin she had borne at its heaviest. She would not share the memory of that crushing load.

At dusk Stella was watering a flower-bed under the shadow of the hedge which separated the front garden from the road. Two men were walking past, and she caught a scrap of their conversation. It was rather one-sided, for the speaker gave his companion very little opportunity of getting a word in.

"I thought when I saw you at first, Mr Wilmot, that you were going to be difficult. You quiet, deep men are always the most baffling to a reporter—"

Mr Downer was discussing a subject very dear to Mr Arthur Wilmot, namely, Mr Arthur Wilmot.

# Chapter 18

Andy macleod had ordered all the morning newspapers, and they were brought up to him whilst he was in bed. He ran his fingers over their folds and chose the Megaphone because he had learnt it was on behalf of the Megaphone that Mr Downer was conducting his investigations.

He opened the paper with a dull sense of apprehension and he discovered that he had sufficient cause. The Megaphone is not a journal that deals with sensational news sensationally. It has a strong political following, an excellent foreign correspondence, and a certain literary quality. The record of crimes was usually relegated to interior pages, but for once the Megaphone had splashed the crime story on its principal page.

Andy read the headline:

THE MIDNIGHT WOMAN!

but it was the second line which brought him to his feet with an oath:

MISS NELSON'S RELATIONS WITH THE DEAD MAN

He did not read the paragraph which followed, but put the paper down on the bed. His first feeling was one of consternation as he thought of the girl and what she would feel when she saw that headline. His second was of Mr Downer. He had never strangled a reporter, but he felt that in certain circumstances it would be rather a pleasant job. He picked up the newspaper and read:

'Yesterday's inquest at Beverley on the two men who were found murdered in such sensational circumstances was (writes our special correspondent) the merest formality. The proceedings neither revealed facts unknown to the public nor did they bring us any nearer a solution of the mystery.

'For some extraordinary reason the police pretend they do not know the name of the woman who called at Mr Merrivan's house at half past ten and is alleged to have left the house at eleven o'clock. Dr Andrew

Macleod, who is not only an eminent pathologist but a brilliant member of that inner council of crime investigators which is the terror of evil-doers, stated in evidence that he had seen a woman leave the house at that hour. It is clear, however, from inquiries which have been made, that the night was so dark—the moon was entirely hidden behind clouds—that it was humanly impossible for Dr Macleod to have followed the woman across the Green. That a woman did leave Beverley Green I have established. She was a servant of Mr Sheppard, who went to the end of the lane to post a letter in a letter-box which stands on the juncture of a lane on the main road. It is certain that this is the woman whom Dr Macleod saw, and not the woman who was heard by Mr Merrivan's butler quarrelling with his employer. Who, then, was this lady? It is generally known in Beverley that it was Miss Stella Nelson, the daughter of that eminent artist, Kenneth Nelson, who resides in Beverley Green.

'It is no secret that for this lady Mr Merrivan entertained the highest and, I might say without offence, the most affectionate regard. He had offered her marriage, an offer which must have been favourably entertained, for three days before the murder he purchased an engagement ring from Stelling Bros. On the day following the murder that ring was found in the grass within fifty yards of Miss Nelson's front gate. It is known, too, that, some time before. Miss Nelson was in financial difficulties and secured a loan of £300 from Mr Merrivan, repaying this from the proceeds of two bills which she successfully negotiated with the man who is cited as the murderer, namely, Abraham Selim.

'Those bills, which were in the house the day before the murder, have vanished. How came the girl acquainted with Selim? So well acquainted that, without any security whatever, he had advanced her a large sum of money? The question of this acquaintanceship is yet to be cleared up, but it is undoubtedly the fact that the name of Darius Merrivan appeared on the bills as acceptor, and that the receipt of those bills by the deceased man came as a thunderclap. The inference is that the acceptances were forged. I am not suggesting that Miss Nelson knew that these acceptances were false or that she was in any sense a party to any fraud that may have been perpetrated. A week before the tragedy Mr Merrivan had shown his nephew, Mr Arthur Wilmot, the bills, which, together with the marriage certificate of an old servant of his, which was probably preserved for sentimental reasons, and a few other documents, were locked in a desk in the room where Merrivan interviewed Miss Nelson, and where he met his death.

'Those documents have disappeared. There was in the fireplace when the police came upon the spot a heap of burnt paper, and it is clear that the murderer had ransacked the safe in search of these papers and had burnt them before he made his escape. Who had an object in burning the contents of the safe? Obviously one such was the person who had forged Mr Merrivan's acceptances.

'Now, as to Miss Nelson's movements on the night of the crime, this fact is established, that whilst a witness exists who saw her enter the house, there is no living person who saw her come out. Dr Macleod's evidence can be dismissed as a pardonable mistake. He saw a woman pass under his window; he fancied he saw somebody coming out of Mr Merrivan's house—the writer has since been in the room from which Dr Macleod obtained this view, and can vouch for the impossibility of anybody seeing Merrivan's front door—and in his honest mistake has to some extent increased his own difficulties.

'But the most remarkable feature of the case is the extraordinary trouble he has taken to gloss over the important clue of the woman visitor. To one person he had stated it was a neighbour—which hardly goes with his story of a woman who passed under his window—to another he has told a second story. The discovery of the ring he treated as lightly. In one respect, however, he has been consistent. He has steadfastly kept the name of Miss Nelson from discussion, and has stood between her and those who, like himself, are endeavouring to discover the murderer of Darius Merrivan.'

Andy read the account again. It was in a sense a masterpiece. The truth was so dovetailed into the maliciously false that it was impossible for anybody, other than one acquainted with all the facts, to see the joints. This was, of course, Arthur Wilmot, presented by that expert stater of cases, Mr Downer.

He dressed quickly and went across to see Stella, and at the first glance at her face he knew she had read the report.

"Mr Scottie saw it first," she said as she closed the door after him, "and he has taken father out on a sketching tour. Luckily he had planned this days ago."

"Your father hasn't seen it?"

She shook her head.

She was amazingly self-possessed, he thought. He had expected to find her on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Instead, she was as calm as she was serious.

"I think Arthur told him all this," she said. "You know the truth now, Andrew."

"I knew it all along," said he quietly, "except about your borrowing money. Of course, you borrowed it for your father?"

"Yes," she said without hesitation, "There is no sense at this moment in pretending that father hasn't been perfectly dreadful."

She looked at him with a light in her eyes that he had not seen before.

"And it is true that you shielded me, Andy," she said.

"What will happen now?"

"I'll tell you what Downer expects—that I will send in my resignation this morning," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, and she gasped.

"Then this has—ruined you—professionally, I mean? Oh, Andy!"

"I admit that I have no false idea about the truth of what this swi—this gentleman says," he went on, "but I have neglected my duty only in the sense that I refused to follow up avenues which I knew would lead me nowhere. I know you didn't commit the murder. If I resign I must also issue a writ for libel against the Megaphone, which you also would be compelled to do. But we won't take it to law, Stella. I know another way and a better. That cursed woman under the window! Of course, I didn't see anybody," he said, unashamed. "I was just making alibis for you. It was the worst luck in the world that Sheppard's servant went out at that time and supplied Downer with an explanation."

"I suppose Sheppard's servant did go out?" she asked.

He nodded. "Downer never makes mistakes of that kind," he said. "If he says that servant went out at eleven o'clock you can bet all your money that he's right. Wilmot gave him all his information. It is true that Wilmot had no right to be in possession of it. You brought the bills here, didn't you?"

She was silent.

Presently:

"Andy, I had a confession to make. I should have told you before, but Mr Scottie advised me not to."

There and then, and with all frankness, she told him of Arthur Wilmot's visit with the bills intact, and of Scottie's act of highway robbery with violence. He listened, and a light dawned upon him.

"Now I understand. The blackmailing brute! He is getting back on you in the easiest way. Nobody can prove that his uncle did not show him the bills a week before his death, and their disappearance, taken with the burnt ashes in the fireplace of Merrivan's sitting-room, looks all the more suspicious. Now, what are we going to do, Stella?" He stopped suddenly and frowned. "I gave Wilmot permission to go into the house. That is where he found that stuff. What was it? A wedding certificate of an old servant, a few important documents, and the notes. Wait!"

He was out of the house and striding across the Green in a minute.

# Chapter 19

It was the last day the police were in occupation of the house, and he was fortunate in finding the sergeant who had been there when Arthur Wilmot had paid his visit.

"No, sir, I think he was in the bedroom most of the time. He wasn't there long," said that official in reply to a question.

Andy went up the stairs two at a time. He had visited the bedroom three or four times. Again he made his scrutiny. Instinctively he knew that the hiding-place was somewhere in the vicinity of the bed. The shield and the Tudor rose attracted his attention by reason of the fact that whilst on the footpost the flat end of the petal was exactly straight and at the upright post, on the other post it had been twisted askew. He bent down, first pulled, then turned the florette. It clicked, and he pulled open an empty drawer.

It was not exactly empty, he found, when he had pulled it right out—it ran for eighteen inches into the seemingly solid side supports—there was a slip of paper on which three sets of figures were written. The first was £6700, and this had been crossed out. The second was £6500. This, too, had been crossed out, and written beneath it were the ciphers £6370. The difference was £130. The price of the ring! Andrew was sure of one thing, that it was in this drawer that the bills had been concealed, and with them the 'marriage certificate of an old servant,' and—he whistled—£6370!

A methodical man was Mr Merrivan. He kept account of the money that was in the drawer, and when he extracted any he crossed out the total and substituted the new sum that was left. If he could be sure! Andy's eyes sparkled.

He went back to the girl feeling almost cheerful and found her sitting where he had left her.

"Andy, you are not to dream of resigning," she said as he came into the room. "I will write down a statement telling the truth, and will give it to you."

"And how are you going to explain Scottie?" asked Andy, and her jaw dropped. "No, my dear, we are living examples of that jolly old adage which deals with deceivers and the webs they weave, and we are so interlocked that one of us can't come down without the other. Anyway, I shan't resign. We'll let the matter slide until I hear what headquarters are doing."

Now police headquarters is so inured to newspaper criticism that it grows uneasy if it is withheld. Moreover, there existed between headquarters and the Megaphone a coolness over the publication of an indiscreet paragraph which had sent a much-wanted company promoter scuttling abroad.

Andy was sent for, and, going up to town, spent two hours with his immediate chief, and the end of it was that he came back with his authority strengthened. He found a semi-apologetic note from Downer, which was not like the reporter. Mr Nelson had returned, had read the paper, and searched Beverley Green with a hunting-crop looking for Mr Downer and the absent Arthur Wilmot, and in the end had been quieted by Scottie.

"It is monstrous, monstrous, Macleod," he raved, to the undoing of all Scottie's good work. "I'll sue those people for libel, by gad! and I'll break that fellow's infernal head."

"You can do as you like about the libel," said Andy, "but you will put me in a very awkward position if you interfere at this moment, Mr Nelson. I will undertake to weaken the assurance of Downer. I dare say he has a very hot one ready for us tomorrow, but, unless I am mistaken, that will not be printed. You attack reporters in exactly the same manner as you attack juries. You shake the credibility of the witnesses. And I am going to give Arthur Wilmot the shock of his life tonight."

Mr Arthur Wilmot had found in Downer a man of sensibility and judgment. He was not, he told Downer several times, the kind of man who made sudden friendships. Downer agreed with him; he had never had that illusion. In fact, the first time he had seen Mr Arthur Wilmot he had said: "There goes a man of singular judgment and a difficult man to know."

He beamed benevolently at the object of his admiration.

They were dining in a private room at the Beverley Hotel, which had the advantage, from Mr Wilmot's point of view, of being away from Beverley Green, and from Mr Downer's point of view the advantage of being near to the telegraph office. "That article of yours was a little bit fierce this morning, wasn't it. Downer?" he asked.

It was a question he had put before.

"No, I don't think so," said Downer indifferently. "It puts the young lady in an awkward position, but, after all, Mr Wilmot, we have certain responsibilities as citizens, and, whilst I do not suggest, and have not suggested for one moment, that she knows anything about the murder, she certainly has behaved in a peculiar manner."

"I quite agree," said Arthur. "The point I want to make is this—I want to avoid, as far as possible, any hint that I gave you this information. When I told you I saw her going into the house you promised me that my name should not be mentioned."

"In that connection," corrected the other. "You may be sure that I shall not put a word about you in any account I write which will compromise you to the slightest degree. You haven't told me any of your private business, Mr Wilmot, because you are one of those reticent people who don't wear their hearts on their sleeves, but I've got an idea at the back of my mind that this young lady hasn't treated you very well?"

"She hasn't," said the other shortly; "but don't let us talk about it. I don't bear her any grudge, but, as you say, we have certain duties as citizens."

"Exactly," said Mr Downer.

They strolled back to the Green, following the path that was farthest away from the Nelsons'. Downer was getting a little impatient; he had quite a number of new facts, but just this once he wanted Wilmot's permission before he sent them off. Later, when all the threads were in his hands, he would dispense with his permission and approval. The hour was getting late, and although a wire was kept open for him at the post office, he had still a lot of work to do.

He accepted Arthur Wilmot's invitation to "Come in for a minute or two" as his right, and his host ushered him into the apartment where Andy had seen the unfinished lady's hat.

It was a good-sized corner room, with two large stained glass windows set in deep recesses, across which blue velvet curtains were drawn.

Wilmot had told the truth when he said that no servant was allowed in this room, for he had to unlock the door before he opened it.

"There you are," he said, switching on all the lights. "Take a seat, Downer. That's a comfortable one. Will you have a drink?"

"No, thank you," said Mr Downer. "I've got a lot of work to do. Now, what about this girl? I must follow up today's story. Have you any reason to believe that Macleod is sweet on her?"

"One moment," said Wilmot, and, getting up, he went to the curtains at the far end of the room and drew them aside. "I thought I felt a draught. The infernal window is open. Heaven knows who might have been listening. Now, who the devil did that?" He made the window fast, rearranged the curtains, and came back. "That is a point I don't want you to touch on," he said. "She is a very impressionable girl at a romantic age, and the fellow has probably fascinated her."

"Then there is something between them?" asked the alert Downer.

"There is a kind of—" Wilmot hesitated. "I hardly know what to call it. Put it this way; he is a man much older than the lady, and he has used his wiles and his art—"

"I don't think I should put it that way," said Mr Downer gently. "There are certain limitations imposed, even upon a crime reporter. Shall we say that a great friendship has sprung up between them? The reader will know what that means. It will give the idea that he has got entangled with this girl."

It was at that moment that a gentle knock sounded on the door and a maid-servant came in.

"Will you see Mr Macleod?" she asked.

The two men exchanged glances, and Downer nodded.

"Show him in," said Wilmot, wetting his lips, which had gone suddenly dry.

"Evening, Downer. Good evening, Mr Wilmot." Andy put down his hat and stood by the door eyeing them.

"Won't you sit down, Macleod?" asked Wilmot nervously. "You know Mr Downer?"

"I know him remarkably well," said Andy, without enthusiasm.

"You are not wild about my article, are you, Macleod?" asked Downer, in well-feigned surprise. "You are too old a hand at this game to worry about what newspapers say."

"This, I presume," Andy nodded towards Wilmot, "is the source of your information?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Downer.

"God knows you wouldn't!" said Andy.

"I'll say this for you. Downer, that in your articles you tell as near to the truth as possible, and it is about the only time you do. This morning you printed a lot of stuff which was designed"—Downer smiled—"to defeat the ends of justice. Don't interrupt. I have never said this to you before, and it is extremely unlikely that I shall ever tell you again. Miss Nelson may or may not take an action against your paper, but, if she does, it will cost them twenty thousand."

"The statements I have made are authenticated."

"By whom? By this man?" Andy pointed to the scowling Wilmot. "I am going to show you just how much reliance you can place upon Wilmot," He walked over to where Wilmot was sitting and looked down at him. "I have come to make inquiries as to the whereabouts of £6370, extracted from the secret drawer in Mr Merrivan's bedstead."

Wilmot leapt to his feet as though he were shot.

"What—what?" he spluttered.

"There are also other documents stolen by you."

"Stolen?" repeated Wilmot shrilly. "What do you mean? I am my uncle's heir."

"Stolen by you, I repeat, and as to being your uncle's heir, that is a matter for the courts to decide. There was also a marriage certificate—" He was watching the other narrowly as he spoke, and saw him start. "Now, Wilmot, there seems to be serious trouble ahead for you. What are you going to do about it?"

Arthur Wilmot was breathing painfully. He was for the moment incapable of speech, and Andrew turned to the reporter.

"Does it occur to you that this man may be suspect, and that you may be accused of conspiring with him to throw suspicion upon an innocent woman?"

"I am not in this case at all," said Downer loudly. He was thoroughly alarmed. "I am merely reporting the events as I find them."

"You are doing a little to invent those events," said Andy, "and, so far as your being a disinterested spectator. Downer, you are a participant. The inference which must be drawn is that you knew of this theft—"

"I won't have it called a theft," interrupted Wilmot, finding his voice. "I admit I took several things from my uncle's drawer. It was his wish that I should."

"Did you report the matter to his lawyer?" asked Andy dryly.

"That was not necessary."

"Indeed, it was very necessary," corrected Andy.

"I took these things because I was afraid of their falling into the hands of the servants."

"What was there?" asked Andy.

"If you had come to me before I would have handed them over to you," Wilmot was going on.

"What were they?" asked Andy.

"There was a marriage certificate, a sum of money—I think it was the amount you mentioned, though I haven't counted it—a list of securities, and—" He paused, and went on deliberately, "Two forged bills drawn by Mr Nelson in favour of Abraham Selim and accepted by my uncle. The acceptance was a forgery. Those bills were stolen from me by a criminal in your employ, and are probably destroyed."

"When did the robbery occur?" asked Andy.

"Two nights ago."

"Did you report it?"

"No; you know very well I didn't report it."

"Why not?" asked Andy coolly. "The law protects you as much as it protects any other man. You don't expect me to believe that you would be robbed of valuable securities and never mention a word, although the place is teeming with police officers?"

Wilmot was silent.

"Anyway, we'll see these things. Have you got them?"

"I've got them here in this wall safe," said Wilmot sulkily.

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket and began searching.

"Where the devil is the key of the safe?" he said.

Andy suspected him of wilfully procrastinating for some purpose, but the man's surprise was genuine. He could not have simulated that look of blank dismay which spread over his face as he handled key after key.

"It was on my ring this afternoon when I was at the bathing-pool," he said. "It hasn't left me except then."

He palled aside the sliding panel that hid the safe.

"The safe door isn't fastened," said Andy.

With an exclamation Wilmot opened the door of the safe and put in his hand.

"Good Lord!" he gasped, relieved. "I thought somebody had stolen it."

He threw the pocketbook on the table.

"The other documents," said Andy.

"Here is the list of securities, and here—" He groped, and Andy saw a look of bewilderment come to his face. "I'll swear I put it there."

"What?"

"The marriage certificate is gone!"

It happened that at that moment Andy turned his head towards the door. Between the door and the curtained recess were three electric switches that controlled the lights of the room. As he looked he saw a hand come out from behind the curtains and move towards the switches. He was momentarily paralysed with surprise at the strangeness of the sight.

There was a click, and the room was plunged into darkness. Another instant and the glare of an electric lamp thrust into their faces blinded them.

"Don't move," said a husky voice. "If you do, I'll shoot, whether you are policeman, reporter, or just plain thief."

"Who are you?" asked Andy sternly.

"My name is Abraham Selim," said the voice.

Another moment and the door opened and closed; they heard the snap of the key being turned in the lock and the thud of the front door as it slammed behind the intruder.

Andy tore to the window in front of the house and pulled aside the curtains. Through Wilmot's stained glass panes nothing would have been visible even if it had been broad daylight. By the time the window was open and Andy had slipped through into the night all sign of the visitor had disappeared.

Presently Wilmot and the reporter joined him outside. The servant, answering Wilmot's furious bell, had released them.

"Another adventure of your friend Scottie," said Wilmot between his teeth.

Andy turned his head towards the speaker.

"My friend Scottie, as you call him, would hardly have left £6000 behind him, and of one thing I am perfectly certain—he does not indulge in the luxury of a manicure!"

Andy's shrill whistle brought a policeman at the run.

"Send the sergeant to me and telephone your station to turn out every man for a search. Get any assistance you can. Rush!"

# Chapter 20

At this hour Scottie might have been out, but it happened that he was helping Stella prepare Kenneth Nelson's newest picture for transportation, and he had not left the house all the evening, she told Andy. He went back to the Wilmot establishment. Mr Downer was gone.

"I'll take this money," said Andy, gathering up the pocket-book. "And now, Wilmot, I would like you to tell me as much as you can remember about this marriage certificate."

"Do you really think that was Abraham Selim?"

"I am certain that it was the man who killed your uncle," said Andy shortly, "and he was pointing at us the identical weapon with which that murder was committed."

Mr Wilmot shivered.

"The certificate referred to a marriage between a man called John Severn and Hilda Masters, a parlour-maid. The marriage occurred about thirty years ago at St Paul's, Marylebone."

Andy jotted down the particulars.

"Did your uncle's name appear in any capacity?"

Wilmot shook his head.

"You know nobody named John Severn? You have not heard your uncle refer to him?"

"Never," said Wilmot. "Now about this money, Macleod. I don't want any trouble if I can avoid it. I really took it for safe keeping. How did you find out?"

"You know my methods, Wilmot," said Andrew sarcastically. "This will look pretty ugly, but my advice to you is to keep as far away from Mr Downer as you possibly can. He'll have no mercy on you, and he will betray you with as little concern as he would betray Abraham Selim if he knew him."

Something of the same idea was dawning upon the young man.

"He's scared about that libel action," he said. "I think tomorrow's paper will be milder. Besides, the dramatic appearance of Selim is going to give him all the copy he wants."

Andrew had thought the same thing.

He looked in on Stella before he went to the guest-house. Scottie had gone to bed, like the virtuous man that he was.

"Everybody in Beverley is being sweet about the article," said Stella. "I have never had so many people call upon me—the Sheppards, the Masons, and that quiet couple, the Gibbs. They are furious with Arthur Wilmot. What will the newspapers say tomorrow?" she asked.

"Very little," said Andy. "Downer will lay himself out to do the burglary at Wilmot's and the visit of the mysterious Abraham. He will also seize this opportunity of releasing you from all suspicion. People frequently threaten newspapers with libel actions in similar circumstances but they very seldom get any farther than threats. But Downer knew he had overdone it, and I knew he was a little nervous on that score when I got his note this morning. It was very unlike Downer to write, because, really, he doesn't care tuppence about my opinion of him, and he is not easily scared. He must have had some doubt as to the reliability of Wilmot."

The fog which enveloped the Beverley Green murder was growing deep. It had grown so thick that Andrew, figuratively speaking, could not see a yard before him. The appearance of Abraham Selim brought him no nearer to the solution. Why had the man taken this risk to obtain an apparently worthless marriage certificate? Who was John Severn and who was the parlour-maid, Hilda Masters?

He waited at the guest-house, from time to time receiving reports on the telephone from the meagre force of police which was searching the countryside for a stranger. In this search the police from the neighbouring villages were assisting. The main roads were patrolled and the cross-roads guarded. To work with his small force across open country was impossible. He must leave that until daylight.

At one o'clock in the morning he came out of the guesthouse to get a little air. His room was hot and stuffy and his head was aching.

No light showed in Beverley Green. Its people were sleeping. Not even in Stella's upper room did so much as a glimmer appear.

He was joined by Dane, who had cycled up with the latest report.

"We've held up every motor car between here and Cranford Corner. Do you think it is advisable to have a house to house search of Beverley Green?"

Andrew shook his head.

"I don't see what result could come from that," he said. "If Selim were a local inhabitant he can account for himself, and it is impossible to search every house thoroughly. It would be illegal without the necessary warrant. Perhaps—"

Andy was going on when the stillness of the night was broken by the sound of a shot. It was followed by a second and a third, an interval, and then a fourth. It came from the direction of the high lands beyond the village.

"They can't be poachers," said Dane.

"Poachers do not use revolvers," snapped Andy, "and that those were pistol shots I'll swear!"

And then the guest-house telephone began to ring furiously. They heard it through the open door, before the weary Johnston hurried out to call him.

"Mr Boyd Salter, sir, on the 'phone. He wants you urgently. That was his word—urgently!"

Andrew ran into the house, took up the receiver, and heard Boyd Salter's voice.

"Is that you, Mr Macleod? Did you hear the shots?"

"Yes, sir."

"I fired 'em," was the grim reply. "There has been a burglary at the Hall. Somebody tried to break in. He was making towards Covert. Can you come?"

Andy got his car out of the guest-house garage, and, with Dane at his side, flew along the main road, and after some delay succeeded in arousing the lodge-keeper.

Mr Boyd Salter, looking very white and ill, and wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, was waiting for them in his library.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Macleod," he said.

"Did you see the man?" asked Andy quickly.

"Only the back of him. He must have been in the house half an hour before I heard him, and I shouldn't have heard him then only the rascal had the audacity to come into my room."

He showed them the window that had been forced. It was in a small drawing-room off the library.

"He has been in the library, too," explained Mr Boyd Salter. "You see, those desks have been forced."

The drawers had been broken open and pulled out, and half their contents were on the floor.

"Probably he had the impression that there was money here," the Justice went on. "Of course I never keep anything of value in the library."

"Did he go into any other rooms?"

"I have an idea he went into my son's room—my son is away at Cambridge—but I am not sure."

He led the way to the floor above, but here nothing had been disturbed, though the door of young Boyd Salter's room was undoubtedly open.

"He may very well have mistaken this room for mine. Mine is exactly opposite," said the owner of Beverley Hall. "I don't know what woke me. It may have been the creaking of the door, though I have such a detestation of creaking doors that the hinges of all the doors at the hall are thoroughly oiled at regular intervals."

"He took nothing from here?" asked Andy.

"Nothing," was the reply. "He hadn't time. The moment I sat up in bed I heard the shuffle of his feet and he was gone. I caught a glimpse of him at the other end of the corridor as I came out of the room and ran downstairs shouting for Tilling. I caught another glimpse of him as he got through the window of the library, which was in darkness when I reached it. I always keep a pistol in my room, a Colt automatic, and I fired after him as he ran down the steps of the terrace and vanished into the darkness."

"You didn't hear him speak?"

Mr Boyd Salter shook his head.

It was the work of an expert, Andy could see that at a glance. If he were not absolutely sure that Scottie was at that moment sleeping the sleep of the just, and was hardly likely at this juncture to go back to his

old ways, he could have sworn to that individual being the midnight visitor.

Against this was the fact that Scottie had never been guilty of rifling a place unless he had exact information as to the quantity and position of the valuables it contained.

This burglar had had no fixed plan. Scottie would not have turned out papers from the desk, and would certainly not have bearded Mr Boyd Salter in his room.

"This is the second burglary that has been committed tonight, sir," said Andy, and told of Wilmot's visitor.

"Abraham Selim," said the other thoughtfully. "No, I won't interfere with your theories, Mr Macleod."

"Is anything missing?"

The other shook his head.

"I hardly think so. There was nothing here worth taking except a few leases, and I should not think he would trouble about those."

"What is that?"

Andy walked to the fireplace. It was empty, as all the other fireplaces had been empty, since the weather was unusually warm. At the bottom of the grate were the black ashes of burnt paper! The identical feature that had distinguished the murder of Darius Merrivan!

"Did you burn something?"

The squire shook his head.

"No," he said. "Is the writing distinguishable? It sometimes is after it is burnt."

Andrew knelt down and flashed his lamp upon the ashes.

"No, this has been broken up," he said, and gently lifted a scrap larger than the others and carried it to the table.

"It looks like 'RYL'," he said. "A curious combination of letters."

"Orylbridge," suggested Boyd Salter. "I have some property in that village."

He picked up some papers from the floor.

"It would be impossible for me to check them tonight," he said. "Perhaps you will come up in the morning, doctor."

Andy waited to receive the report from two gamekeepers, who, hastily summoned from bed, had searched the covert, before he returned to the Green.

"This case is getting on my nerves, Dane," he said as the car went down the hill to the lodge gates. "One thing is certain, that concealed somewhere in this valley is a murderer, call him Abraham Selim or whatever you wish. Obviously he is a local. There is no other possible explanation for the rapidity and sureness of his movements. He knows every inch of the ground, and he is looking for something. He killed Merrivan to find whatever it was he sought. He killed Sweeny because by some accident Sweeny happened to be in the orchard. He broke into Beverley Hall also for the purpose of search. But why did he in both cases burn the 'something' in the fireplace?"

"Where else could he burn it?" asked Inspector Dane intelligently. "In both cases the fireplace was near at hand."

Andrew did not reply.

There was a third case of burning, he remembered, and it had been Stella who had employed the same method of disposing of something she wished destroyed.

It was half past two, and the east was lighting palely when he said good night to the inspector and turned into his lodgings. As he did so he glanced to the Nelson house and stopped dead. Stella was up; her light showed through the blinds.

He waited for nearly an hour, waited until the world was dawn-grey, and then the light was extinguished.

Andrew sighed and went to bed.

# Chapter 21

Scottie loafed into his room before Andy was awake the following morning. Scottie had his hands thrust into his pockets and his face wore a look of supreme discontent.

"Hullo, Scottie," said Andrew, struggling to his elbow. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing, except the general moral tone of this community," said Scottie, sitting down. "I am going up to town, Macleod. This place is a bit too exciting for me, and, anyway, you're getting yourself a bad name. I met that pen-pusher, Downer, this morning, and he was as full of trouble as a dog is full of fleas. Said it was the worst case he had ever handled, and that he had given up a good, comfortable, straightforward murder to come here, and he wishes he hadn't."

"Have you seen his paper?"

Scottie nodded.

"Mild, Macleod, that's the word, and punk. It was all about what terrible danger he was in, and how a masked figure sprang from the curtains and threatened him with death."

"Whether it was masked or not, nobody knows. I should say it wasn't," said Andy. "What does he say about Miss Nelson?"

"He gives her a clean bill. Everything has been satisfactorily explained, he says, and there is an apology in the paper."

"Then he's going away?" asked Andy with some satisfaction.

Scottie shook his head.

"He said so. But what a—a—reporter! I'll bet he's staying another week."

He strolled to the door.

"Maybe I'll come back, Macleod," he said. "So long."

He was gone before Andy could ask him whether Stella Nelson was visible at that hour.

He was reaching the dead end of this crime, facing a baffling cul-de-sac. The time was approaching when he must leave Beverley Green and the murder must pass into the category of unpunished crimes.

The real mystery was the chain of circumstances that bound together Darius Merrivan, Abraham Selim, and the murderer.

He intended calling on Stella, but his plan was changed by the arrival of a long telegram from headquarters. He read it and whistled.

'Come to town at once. Mr Wentworth, a member of a business in Ashlar Buildings, has disappeared. Inquiries at his bank show that he has an enormous sum of money on deposit. There is reason to believe that Abraham Selim is connected with the disappearance.'

Mr Wentworth had occupied a suite of offices next door to that which Abraham Selim had rented. Andrew knew this from his previous inquiries; knew, too, something of the standing of the firm before he questioned Mr Wentworth's distressed lady clerk.

"He was in the office last Friday," said the girl. "He left my salary, money for petty cash, and told me that he would be in on Monday or Tuesday. I had a little talk with him about the business, because we were doing practically none, and I was worrying about how long he would go on before he closed up the office. But he was very cheerful and told me that he would soon have good news for me. He said this in a joking way. He was always a little jocular."

"You know where he lives, of course?" asked Andy.

"No, sir, I don't. I have an idea that he lives in hotels. He wrote me once or twice when he was away, and his address was always an hotel, though I never sent any letters to him there. Another remark I remember his making the last time I saw him was, that it was funny we never saw much of Mr Selim."

"You told me that before," said Andy, nodding. "Do you remember the hotel he wrote you from and about what date?"

"I've got those in the day book," she said. "I thought you might want them, and I have taken them out."

Andy glanced at the list she had prepared. They were well-known hotels in various parts of the country and he pocketed the memorandum for future action.

"Have you a photograph of Mr Wentworth?"

She shook her head.

"In appearance, what was he like?"

Here she was very vague indeed. Her own age was nineteen, which is an age when anybody over thirty-five is 'old'. He had a stoop, she remembered, and wore horn-rimmed spectacles. She knew very little about the business, and had only been in his employ for twelve months. She knew no other houses that he did business with; she never sent out accounts, and apparently her job was to receive callers who did not come, to make a precis from the newspapers of transactions on the Provision Exchange (she showed him a great heap of manuscript she had compiled in this way), and to receive her salary regularly on Friday afternoon.

It was not much of a business, she admitted.

"I did write a letter or two to him about the prices, but beyond that I did nothing."

Andrew visited the two hotels in town which were included in the list the girl had given him. They turned up their books and confirmed her story. Mr Wentworth had stayed with them, but they knew nothing about him, except that he was a name and a number.

Andy went back to headquarters and reported.

"Wentworth and Abraham Selim are identical personages," he said. "'Wentworth & Wentworth' is a fake concern, and existed to give Selim an excuse for being in the building. Remember that Selim's clerk only attended at the office between eleven and one. Wentworth never came to Ashlar Buildings until two o'clock in the afternoon, and then only on certain days, which were the days that the clerk was away on his holiday. For Wentworth to slip into Abraham Selim's office, take out the letters, and get back into his own room was a simple matter. Wentworth's banker tells me that he has a dozen deed boxes filled with papers, and with these, I think, we shall be able to establish the identity beyond any doubt."

"Has Wentworth drawn any money from the bank since he disappeared?"

"I asked that, and they tell me that he has not. That, however, is easily accounted for. Selim knew that we should go straight to his office. He probably thought that we should immediately discover the relationship

between Wentworth and himself. To draw a cheque as Wentworth would mean that he would run the risk of detection."

He secured the necessary orders for access to the possessions of Wentworth, and in the manager's private office he sat through the afternoon and far into the night, examining the contents of six tightly packed steel boxes.

His work was facilitated by the discovery that two of the boxes had documents relating to the legitimate firm of Wentworth. Apparently Selim had purchased the business some years before, and even then it was not in a nourishing condition. Under his guidance it had gone from bad to worse, for the simple reason there was no need for his exploiting legitimate trade when he found an easier way to wealth, a way which offered few risks and enormous benefits.

The other boxes held title deeds, instruments of transfer, old contracts, and in every case they were made out in the name of Abraham Selim.

The man seemed to possess property in every part of the country. A farm here, a few workmen's cottages there, a coalmine in some other place; there were particulars of mineral rights he had acquired, details of a sugar plantation in the West Indies, and numerous other pieces of documentary evidence of his enormous wealth.

It was nearing the hour of midnight, and the last pile of papers was being disposed of, when Andrew, glancing at an old contract, saw a familiar name.

"John Aldayn Severn."

Severn!

The contract was drawn up in legal language. It was between Abraham Selim on the one part, 'hereinafter called the lender', and John Aldayn Severn on the other part. And as he read he grew more and more amazed at the extraordinary conditions which were imposed. Stripped of its legal terminology, the lender agreed to place at the unknown Severn's disposal the sum of five thousand pounds per annum for life, and "for particular services rendered" Severn agreed that, in the event of his inheriting any property which produced the sum assured to him, he would pay regularly to Selim's account one-half of the revenues he acquired. The property concerned was not particularised.

Andy looked at the deed thoughtfully. It was dated five years after Severn's marriage, if Arthur Wilmot's information was correct. Had

Severn ever inherited his estate, and, if he had, did he ever fulfil the contract?

The bank manager had left two clerks to assist him, and there were available all the books dealing with Selim's accounts. Andrew ran his finger down page after page but it was difficult to distinguish the origin of any sum except—

He glanced at the contract again. The payments were to be made on the 1st of March and the 1st of September. He turned to the books and traced back the accounts for twenty years, and on the 1st March and the 1st September, every year, there had been paid to Selim's account sums varying from seven thousand to nine thousand five hundred. So Severn had acquired his property and was paying.

"Here is my man," said Andrew to himself. "If I find Severn I can find Abraham Selim."

There were no works of reference available, and on the following morning he examined carefully every directory of landed proprietors he could find. The name Severn occurred three times, but in each case they owned very little land, and his telegraph inquiries brought him no nearer to the identity of the John Aldayn Severn of the contract. It was a name entirely unknown in the vicinity of Beverley except to one man.

Mr Boyd Salter was something of an authority on the landed gentry, and Andy called on him the morning he came back to Beverley Green.

"I think the Severn you are in search of went to Australia some years ago. I told you when we first met that a friend of mine had suffered grievously at the hands of Selim. I was speaking of Severn at the time. I knew him rather well, and I knew he was in the hands of moneylenders."

"Then the estate he inherited was in Australia?" suggested Andy.

"You sound disappointed," smiled Boyd Salter.

"I am a little," replied Andy. "Can you suggest any reason why Merrivan should have treasured his marriage certificate?"

"I had no idea that he had, and talking of Merrivan reminds me of my burglar. I hit him."

"The dickens you did!" said Andy, interested. "How do you know, sir?"

"We found blood marks the next morning; not many, but sufficient to show that he had been wounded, and in the hand. The imprint of his hand is on a leaf. I took the liberty of informing Inspector Dane in your

absence, and I believe he has made inquiries of the doctors around, so far without success."

Instead of going to the village by car Andy walked back, leaving the car to be brought round to the village by Mr Boyd Salter's chauffeur. He followed the supposed track of the thief, and Madding, the gamekeeper, pointed out where the bloodstains had been found. The faintest trace remained. He examined the leaf; that and the twigs about it were gory evidence of the burglar's hurt.

Andy went on by the covert path into the village. His way skirted the orchard where Sweeny had been found, and he came on to the Green via the tennis court and the narrow lane which ran by the side of Mr Merrivan's house.

He had not seen Stella for two days. It seemed more like two years, and a century since he had first watched her through the glass panel of the telephone-booth in Beverley post office.

A servant answered the door.

"Miss Nelson has gone away, sir."

"Gone away?" repeated Andy in astonishment. "Where has she gone?"

"Would you like to see Mr Nelson, sir? He is in the studio. You know your way."

Andy found the artist pretending to work, and Kenneth Nelson welcomed him warmly.

"You don't know how glad I am you are back, Macleod," he said. "I am worried almost to death."

"Where is Stella?"

"Well, she is supposed to be at her aunt's," said Nelson slowly.

"Supposed to be? Isn't she there?"

"I sent a wire asking when she was coming back, and I had a reply from my sister saying that Stella had only spent the afternoon in the house and that she had gone north on business."

"Very probably she has," said Andy, relieved.

What he had expected he could not say, but Nelson's news was certainly not alarming. He had a suspicion that Stella did not take her father into her confidence even in matters pertaining to his own welfare.

"That alone wouldn't worry me," said Nelson, as though he read his thoughts. "I'll show you what does." He went upstairs with a wondering

Andy behind him, and on the second floor he opened a door disclosing a pretty little bedroom.

"This is Stella's room," he said unnecessarily, for Andrew knew the exact location.

"I came up here the day she left, which, by the way, was the same day that you went to town, to get some soft rags—Stella keeps a supply of them for me—but the cupboard was locked. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I had a key which fitted, and the first thing which met my eye when I opened the door was this."

He put his hand on to a shelf and pulled down a little bundle of linen strips. They were stained a deep red.

"And look there."

He pointed to the floor, where the tell-tale spots showed dearly.

"And on the edge of that basin. She must have cut herself and did not tell me a word. Her hand, I should think, from the regular intervals in which the stain occurs. Of course she can look after herself. She had a full nursing course during the war and liked it."

Andy looked at the bandages without seeing them. The sudden light which had occurred in Stella's room after the burglary at Beverley Hall! The stains which had been found in the park! It was incredible, impossible, that Stella could have been the burglar, but her sudden disappearance from view almost confirmed his half-formed suspicion. Why had she gone away so unexpectedly?

"Did you see Stella's hand when she went?" he asked.

"No, she had it in her muff. It was strange that she had a muff on a warm day like this. I particularly remembered that after I had found the bandages. She was awfully nervous, too. Quite jumpy for Stella."

Andrew threw out his arms with a gesture of despair.

"I'm beaten," he said.

He packed his bag that afternoon and stowed it behind his car, and with one glance at the valley of mystery he drove through Beverley village and to town. But it was not the Beverley mystery which had beaten him. It was the inexplicable Miss Nelson.

# Chapter 22

Mr Downer came out of the Newspaper Club with a tightly rolled umbrella under his arm and two inches of cigar in the corner of his mouth.

The day was hot and breathless. It seemed that unless he employed his umbrella to relieve him of the pitiless glare of the sun it was a superfluity. But Mr Downer would no more have thought of going out without his umbrella than an ordinary man would have thought of going about without his collar and tie. It was part of his personality, like his cigar and his hard Derby hat, and the three pencils and stylo that peeped out of his left-hand waistcoat pocket.

He examined the visible world through his highly magnifying glasses and found it neither good nor bad. What was good was the brief respite he had from labour, for it was the end of the week, and he had a bungalow on the seashore, where he could carry his umbrella along the beach and stare through his powerful glasses at the sea.

What was bad was the uncomfortable memory of a failure. He had been reminded of it that morning when his cheque came in from the Megaphone for the Beverley murder case. If the newspapers referred to the killing of Darius Merrivan it was only in a few lines of type on one of the inside pages, for two weeks had passed, there had been an interesting bank failure and a fascinating divorce case to carry the public along, and his offer to begin his investigations anew had been coldly received by the newspaper to which it had been made.

He knew that Andrew Macleod had returned to town. He had seen him twice on other matters. Andrew had given up the case as a bad job, evidently. He had, in fact, conveyed as much in his interview with Downer.

Probate of the Merrivan estate had been applied for on behalf of Mr Arthur Wilmot, who had expressed his intention of selling the Merrivan house just as soon as a likely buyer came along.

Mr Downer stepped out into the crowded streets aloof from and superior to his surroundings. He had wondered whether Andy was in love with the Nelson girl—a train of thought brought his mind to her—and promised himself the luxury of describing their wedding and attaching thereto a rechauffe of the murder case and its romantic sequel.

But apparently Andy had not been back to Beverley Green since he left. That proved nothing, for, according to his information, Stella Nelson had not returned to Beverley either. Downer's explanation of this latter circumstance was that she was waiting until the little scandal he had aroused had blown over. That, however, did not account for the detachment of Dr Andrew Macleod.

He was on his way to leave a manuscript at the office of a magazine. Mr Downer had literary moments. He was the author of Famous Criminals I Have Met; Professional Sharpers and their Methods; Some Famous Cases of Forgery, and divers other contributions to belles-lettres bore his name upon the title-page.

The office was situated in an unfashionable corner of the town, and to reach his objective he found it necessary to pass through a network of small streets occupied by working-class people. He was pausing at a corner marked with the inevitable general store when a girl came from the shop and walked away quickly. She carried a parcel under her arm, and he thought he recognised the figure. There was a certain familiar swing of shoulders, and, instead of pursuing his way, which lay in the opposite direction, he followed her. She turned another corner and he caught a glimpse of her face. There was no doubt at all. It was Stella Nelson. What was she doing in this neighbourhood? he wondered, and followed her cautiously.

He saw her stop at the door of a small house, insert the key, and disappear from view. It was a very tiny house indeed. The number on the discoloured door was 73. He made a mental note and continued until he found a woman standing idly in her doorway. Her arms were rolled in her apron, and she was pathetically eager to find somebody who had as much time as she to gossip.

"No, mister, she doesn't live here," she said, shaking her head when Downer asked for a fictitious name.

"I haven't been in the street for years," mused Downer. "It hasn't changed."

"Nothing changes here," said the woman oracularly. "It will be just the same in a hundred years' time."

"I thought I recognised that young lady who went into 73. How long has she been living here? She used to be very well off."

"Oh, she," said the woman. "She doesn't live here. She comes every day and goes home every night. Quite a lady, too, and yet she does the housework. I've seen her sweeping the front of the pavement."

"Who lives there?"

"A seafaring man, as far as I can understand. Maybe it is her father."

"A seafaring man, eh?" said Downer. "A sailor?"

"Something like that. He goes away for months at a time, but I have never seen her before."

Mr Downer pulled at his dead cigar, scenting a scandal.

"Rather a nice-looking fellow, tall—"

She shook her head.

"No, he isn't what I'd call strong on looks. He's ill now, and I suppose she's come to look after him. Got on in the world and hasn't forgotten her old father. That's what I like to see about a girl."

The good lady, now thoroughly wound up, was prepared to express her views on girls at length, but Mr Downer had his appointment.

He pulled the brim of his hard hat farther over his eyes, an action less designed to disguise himself than to shut him still further from the world in which he moved, and, shifting his umbrella from one arm to the other, moved back the way he had come.

It was characteristic of him that he left the woman without an apology and in the midst of her narrative. She had served her purpose, could be of no further use. He might spend time and art in finding acquaintances; he wasted neither in demolishing the structure of friendship which often he had so laboriously created.

After making his call, he worked out to a more salubrious neighbourhood. Passing police headquarters as he did on his way to the station, he stopped and thought, and, reaching a decision, he went into the gloomy building.

"Dr Macleod is in the laboratory, Mr Downer." The door sergeant shook his head dubiously. "I shouldn't think he'd see anybody." He lowered his voice. "He's on the poisoned woman, the Sweizer case. Yes, Reeder is in charge, but the doctor is doing the examinations. We had Tensey, the big specialist, here this afternoon. That's for yourself."

Downer nodded, and impressed these two facts upon his memory. He had thought of taking up the case. The Daily Globe-Herald had invited him to do so, but the Globe-Herald were notoriously tight-fisted, and fought every item of the most reasonable expense account.

"Find out if he is visible, and, if he is, get my card to him."

The gateman beckoned a uniformed man, who was gone some time before he reappeared flourishing Downer's card.

"Will you step up, Mr Downer?"

Andy, in his white overall, was washing his bands when Downer came in.

"Sit, will you, Downer? I've nothing for you in this case. The autopsy isn't complete, but you can say that Sweizer has been arrested this morning as he was going aboard a French boat."

Andy bore no malice. The man had his living to get; he was indubitably painstaking, and had been, and could be again, of real help to the police. Besides which, he was telling him nothing.

"I didn't come to see you about the Sweizer case, and the news of his arrest is in the evening editions," said Downer, tossing his cigar-butt into a wastepaper basket. "I came up to see you about Miss Nelson."

Andy finished drying his hands and hung up the towel.

"I should have thought your interest in Miss Nelson had evaporated by now," he said. "What is the latest discovery?"

"She's in town."

"Here?"

Andy's surprise was genuine.

"Do you mean that she is living here, or that you saw her passing through?"

"I don't know where she lives, but for a fortnight she has been visiting a sick sailor at 73 Castle Street."

Andy was using an orange stick on his nails; he looked across at his informant.

"At 73 Castle Street?"

He gave Downer the impression that he was trying to collect his thoughts. Then:

"A pretty poor neighbourhood, isn't it?"

Downer nodded. "I thought you would like to know. Somehow it didn't strike me that you were aware of this."

Andy resumed his manicure.

"There is no particular reason why she should not nurse a sick sailor at 73 Castle Street, is there?" he asked carefully.

"Not at all," said Downer.

"I suppose you know that Miss Nelson had a nursing course? She did a lot of that kind of work during the war."

"I didn't know," said Downer, choosing a cigar from his packed case with some care. "Maybe she's carrying on the good work."

"Very likely," said Andy.

Downer rose.

"I thought of going to Beverley one day next week to see whether there are any loose threads that I could get hold of," he suggested, and Andy smiled.

"Your old pet thread will be difficult to grip," he said significantly.

"Wilmot?"

Andy nodded.

"He's a queer fellow," ruminated Downer, lighting his cigar. "What does he do for a living? He has some sort of an office in town, hasn't he?"

"I don't know. I've never inquired."

"Isn't there a possibility that he is Abraham Selim?"

"The idea occurred to me, but I did not pursue it," said Andrew. "Why not try your expert hand in that direction? It would make a fine story."

# Chapter 23

Andy was glad when Downer had gone. The news the reporter had brought was startling. He had neither seen nor heard from Stella since he had left Beverley. A letter from her father had told him that she was staying with relations for a month, for apparently Kenneth Nelson was satisfied. It would be a simple matter for Andy to discover the identity of the sick sailor, but he shrank from spying upon the girl and whatever secret she had. He was even more reluctant to revive the painful unrest which he had experienced when he had returned to town. Life had lost a great deal of its colour and sweetness when she had gone out of his life. Pique? Perhaps he was piqued that she did not come to him in her trouble. He wished he had asked Downer about her hand. Was it bandaged still? he wondered. Why hadn't she told him everything? He had heard things from outside. That had hurt him.

As to the sick sailor—He shrugged his shoulders. He found nothing significant in that episode. Stella was a law unto herself. If it pleased her to devote herself to the sick poor, that was a matter entirely for herself. And yet—he told himself that he was curious to discover the identity of the invalid. In reality, as he knew, he was hungry to see the girl again.

He sat down to write her a letter, and succeeded in writing and destroying three before he came to his decision. She knew him well enough to believe that he would not spy on her, and that his intentions were not antagonistic. Having decided this much, the rest was easy.

He put on his hat, and out of the laboratory walked at a leisurely pace in the direction of Castle Street. Even his leisure had a significance. It was consistent with an indefinite and haphazard call. He intended walking through the street; whether he would call or not he would decide when he got there. In reality, his decision had been taken, and he did not hesitate for a second before he raised the knocker of No 73.

He heard a whisper of voices and a creak on the stairs. A little interval, and then the door was opened.

Stella's jaw dropped at the sight of him.

"Oh!" she said. It was the first time he had seen her embarrassed. "This is a surprise, Andrew," she went on. "However did you find out where I was? I don't live here. I'm just paying a visit."

She was jerky of speech and inconsequent. More noticeable was the fact that she stood square in the doorway and made no attempt to invite him inside.

"I thought I'd look you up," said Andrew quietly. "They told me you were nursing somebody here."

"Who told you? Father doesn't know," she said quickly.

She had gone red and white again, and was so palpably distressed at having been found that, with a sick little feeling at his heart, he was on the point of turning away when she stopped him.

"Will you wait here one moment?" she said.

She went down the passage and into a room. Presently she came out again.

"Come in," she said. "I want to introduce you to my patient."

Andy hesitated for a second, and then followed her. She stood inside the room holding the door, and from where he stood in the passage he could only see the foot of a bed.

"Come in," she said again, and Andy entered.

He stared at the invalid, unable to believe his eyes. It was Scottie!

"Well, I'm damned!" said Andy, and his profanity was justified.

Scottie did not look very ill, and, though he lay on the bed under a light coverlet, he was fully dressed.

"What is the matter with you, Scottie?"

"Malaria with complications," said Scottie promptly.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Andy.

The girl looked at Scottie, then looked back at Andy again.

"I suppose I shall have to tell you," she said. "Scottie hurt himself," she continued hurriedly. "He didn't want to go to a doctor, and, you see, I had a nursing course, and though it was a terrible wound, I managed to heal it."

Scottie nodded.

"That's right, Macleod. With all due respect to you, she is the only doctor I have ever had who worked a miracle."

"You're hurt, are you?" said Andy slowly. "In the hand, by any chance?"

Scottie nodded.

"Not as the result of a pistol fired haphazard in the dark by an outraged householder, whose home had been burgled?"

"Got it first time," said Scottie cheerfully. "I happened to be in the park and stepped in the way of one of his projectiles."

"I see," said Andy softly, and, seeing, was relieved. "So it was your hand that was hurt, and Miss Nelson took you up to her room and bandaged it? I didn't notice anything when you went away."

"I kept my hands in my pockets," said Scottie. "It gave me a little extra hell, but it was worth it."

"You see, Andrew," said the girl, laying her hand on his arm, "Mr Scottie was badly hurt, and if he had gone to a doctor there would have been all sorts of stupid inquiries. The police were looking for a man with a hurt hand."

"So you burgled Beverley Hall, did you?" said Andy, sitting down and glowering at the unabashed Scottie. "What's all this talk I heard about your reformation?"

"It is working very well," said Scottie agreeably. "The camouflage being no longer necessary, I will take my hand from beneath the counterpane and get up. The truth is, Macleod," he said with convincing frankness, "I had an idea that the gent who held up you and Wilmot with a gun was a servant at the Hall, so I went up to investigate. I was anxious to get the marriage certificate back."

"What servant at the Hall?" asked Andy.

"I didn't know then and I don't know now which one, and maybe it would have been better if I had given you my views and you had conveyed them to Salter. That it was a servant at the Hall I am sure. I have seen him. After you told me about what happened at Wilmot's place I slipped out of the house and got into Salter's grounds. I've always had a theory that Merrivan's murderer made his escape that way. In fact, my pet theory was that he was one of the gamekeepers, and so he is!"

"What!" Scottie nodded. There was no doubt about his earnestness.

"Don't you see why it might have been? The gamekeepers were the only people who were around at night and who have the range of the estate to hide in. I told you about the man I saw sneaking in the trees. What I didn't tell you was that he was dressed like a gamekeeper—brown velvet coat and gaiters—"

"Well, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I wanted to do a little private detective work myself," said Scottie. "It would have tickled me to death if I could have come up to you and said: 'Macleod, meet the murderer of Merrivan and Sweeny.' Conceit. I admit it. I am human."

"Well, what happened?"

"I got into the park," said Scottie, "and I made a bee-line for the house. Unless the lad who held you up went straight back I should see him, if my theory was correct. I did see him," he said impressively. "I was lying under a bush when he came up. I could have put out my hand and touched him, but for certain reasons I didn't. He went straight into the house."

"By which way?" asked Andy.

"Through a window," said the other. "The window I opened afterwards, though I didn't find it so easy. There was no light in the room when he pulled the window down after him. I thought I had missed him, but after a while he put on a light—the little lamp on Salter's desk."

"That was in the library?"

Scottie nodded. "His back was towards me and he was leaning over the desk looking at something."

"Was he a gamekeeper?"

"He was a gamekeeper," agreed Scottie. "Which of the bunch I couldn't swear to. I've never shot up the estate, though I've met a few brigands from Beverley that have."

Andrew stared at him.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," said Scottie. "I only saw him for a few seconds. He pulled open one drawer and then he pulled open another, and then, quite unexpectedly, he put the light out. I didn't understand why he did this at first, but I soon found it out. I had only just time to dip down under the window when he came to it and pulled down the blind. Then the light went on again, and was on for about four or five minutes. After that

time it went out, and I waited for a long while before I moved. You see, I expected him to come out by the front door, and that's where I made a mistake. It was an hour before I discovered that he had come out by the servants' hall. I worked my way round the house, and was wondering what I should do next, when a door leading to the courtyard opened and a man came out. I guessed by his kit that he was my man, and I watched him out of sight."

"Did you see his face?"

Scottie shook his head. "It was much too dark," he said. "He was a gamekeeper, and my gamekeeper, I'll swear. After he'd gone I went back to the front and tried the window where he got in, but he had fastened it. It took me about a quarter of an hour to get it open, and I went straight to the library. I admit I made it untidy," said Scottie, "but I'll swear to you, Macleod, that I was not after loot. It is not my game to burgle a house unless I know where the stuff is to be found."

"I thought that, too, Scottie, but I can't quite understand why you made such a mess, as you call it."

"I don't know myself," said Scottie, "but I had an idea he had broken in to read Salter's private papers, and I was mighty anxious to see what he could have been looking for."

"Did you burn anything?"

"Did I what?" said Scottie in surprise.

"Did you burn anything?"

"No, I didn't burn anything." Scottie shook his head. "Why, was anything burnt?"

"Go on with your story," said Andy.

"There isn't much more to tell," replied the other. "Like a fool, I started loafing around the house and barged into Salter's room. I wish I hadn't," he said ruefully, examining his bandaged hand.

The girl's eyes had been on Andy all the time. She had heard the story again and again. Now she added her narrative.

"When Scottie came back and told me, I was awfully worried. I thought he really had been burgling. But when he explained he had been looking for the murderer I did all I could for him. He told me he would be caught because you were certain to notify the doctors in the neighbourhood to look for a man with a gun-shot wound, and when Mr

Scottie said he had a little house in town that he rented, I promised to come and dress his hand every day."

Andrew drew a long sigh.

"My professional training induces me to call Scottie a liar. My instinct tells me he is speaking the truth," he said. "Really, you people are almost as much a nuisance to me as Abraham Selim. Have you lost the use of your hand, Scottie?"

"I have not," said the other with satisfaction. "Sorry to disappoint you, Macleod, but my hand's in thorough working order. The bullet missed the bone and I am nearly well again. If you hadn't come today, Macleod, you wouldn't have seen me. And I wish you hadn't."

"I had to come," said Andy slowly. "Downer trailed you—at least, he trailed Miss Nelson. By the way, who is the gentleman upstairs?"

Scottie looked guilty for a second.

"He is a friend of mine," he said carelessly, "an old college chum."

"Dartmoor College, or Pentonville Preparatory?" asked the sarcastic Andy, and Scottie smiled indulgently.

"The stage lost something when you went in for doctoring, Macleod," he said. "No, he is just an old friend. You wouldn't know him, and don't call him down," he added hastily. "He's much too shy!"

The discreet Andy acceded to his request.

# Chapter 24

Andy waited whilst the girl impressed upon Scottie for the twentieth time the necessity for dressing his hand twice a day and drilled into him the medicinal value in an array of lotions, powders and ointments, and then he walked back with her to her lodgings.

He was absurdly happy to see her again, even to meet her under these somewhat compromising circumstances, and happiness made him silent. She thought he was offended with her, and was disappointed.

"Andrew," she said, speaking for the first time since they had left the house, "I did it because I thought you would want me to do it."

"Did what?" he said with a start, emerging from his dreams. "Oh, looking after Scottie? I think it was most noble of you, Stella. I realise that I am being feeble-minded in believing all that Scottie says, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred his story of the murderous gamekeeper would be bunkum. Somehow, though I know he would lie to me, I am pretty certain that he would not lie to you. I am going down to Beverley Green again," he said. "The gamekeeper gives me an excuse."

"Do you want an excuse?" she asked, looking up at him, and dropping her eyes almost as quickly.

"No," he said slowly, after a pause, "I don't think I do."

"Come down tonight," she said, and instantly regretted her impulsiveness.

"I was thinking of doing that," said Andy, "but it had occurred to me that it would look less—er—"

She flushed.

"You mean if we went back together after going away the same day?" she said quietly. "It is curious how things like that occur to men before they occur to women. I suppose I have no sense of propriety. Now you must wait here, Andrew, whilst I pack my bag—which you can carry."

He walked up and down outside the little house where she had taken lodgings, peace in his heart and a glowing sense of triumph that his greatest successes had never brought to him.

Something of the same happiness possessed Stella Nelson as she packed her suitcase in frantic haste, for fear she should keep him waiting too long. There was a bill to be settled with her landlady, and Stella fretted whilst that good woman went in search of change. It was five minutes before she came back, and Stella, not waiting to count the silver she had given her, picked up her case and walked out of the house.

She looked up and down the street in dismay. Andy had disappeared. She waited ten minutes before she despatched a boy in search of a cab, and when the cab came and she put her baggage inside she could have wept.

Andy, pacing the pavement before the house, was so completely absorbed in his thoughts that the impression he received of his surroundings was of the faintest. On the opposite side of the street was a high wall, behind which the glass skylight of a workshop showed. It was evidently part of one of the shops in the High Street, the back of which he could see from where he stood. In the wall was a small door, and he was looking abstractedly at this when it opened and a man came out, followed by a bare-headed woman. She was smartly dressed, and they stood for a moment in consultation before, with a little nod, she went back, closing the door behind her, and the man set off at a smart pace towards the main road.

Andrew's interest was an idle one. He would have watched two sparrows fighting with a concern as great. It was not until the man, reaching the corner, turned to beckon something (a cab, thought Andy) that all his senses were awake. It was Arthur Wilmot! Never before had he seen that young man in town, and, though he had set inquiries on foot, he had not discovered the mysterious business which brought Arthur so regularly to the city. He looked round, hoping to see the girl, but he knew that she could not have finished her packing. It was an opportunity too good to be lost, and, although it was a wrench, he turned reluctantly and crossed the road as Wilmot jumped into the car he had summoned. Stella would understand. He would explain to her tomorrow. Such a chance might not occur again, he thought. Nevertheless, Andrew wished Arthur Wilmot at the bottom of the sea. He called a taxi to him as the car drove off.

"Follow that car," he said.

Stella's homecoming had been a disappointing experience. She was glad to be back at Beverley Green, almost as glad as Kenneth Nelson was to see her. He fussed around her, took her to the studio to show her a new picture, and produced a glowing record of the new cook's economy and efficiency, and yet she felt dispirited and amazingly lonely. The note which she found waiting for her from Arthur Wilmot, and which she read without realising that he was the writer, neither added to nor relieved her gloom.

"Now tell me all about what you have been doing," said Kenneth, beaming. "People have been inquiring about you, but I told them you had gone in for an extra nursing course. By the way, what made you take it up again, my dear? I suppose you were bored, and I don't wonder. Did you see our mutual friend Macleod?"

"I saw him for a moment," she said briefly.

"People have stopped talking about poor Merrivan," Mr Nelson rattled on, "and I must say it is a relief. Arthur Wilmot is selling the house—there was no will, by the way. A curious fellow, Wilmot. He glares at me every time I meet him, as though he had any cause for offence, by gad! He's a lucky fellow I didn't meet him the night that infernal reporter—"

She listened without hearing. Beverley Green would be very different without Andy. She could not realise what it would be like, and yet she had spent nearly three years in the village before she had known him. But she was only a child then (she was immeasurably superior to those adolescent days), a woman now. Andy was necessary.

She almost wished, she thought whimsically, that she had asked Scottie to come down and commit a burglary—just a little burglary, where nothing really valuable was stolen, but which would necessitate the permanent return of Andrew Macleod. She made a mental calculation; if every house in the Green was burgled, he would only be there three months, supposing there was a sufficient interval between each crime, and probably Scottie would be bored too. But Scottie was reformed. She had a little warm feeling of satisfaction at the thought that she had been responsible for his reformation.

At one time she had hated Andy. She recalled this period with satisfaction, and strove again, without success, to remember just how she felt. Andy was not coming back. He had thought things out whilst she was in the house, and he had decided to break off the friendship then and there.

It had been cruel of him to go away without a word—moral cowardice on his part.

"I am going over to the Sheppards' to play bridge. Will you come? They'll be delighted if you will," said Nelson.

She shook her head.

"No, thank you. Father, but please go."

She was glad to be alone in her present mood. Of course, Andy had not believed Scottie's story. All the time, when he was being so pleasant to her, he was secretly disapproving, and had seized the moment of her departure to run away. She couldn't imagine Andy running away from anything. It was inconsistent with her knowledge of him. But, then, she had made so many mistakes about men. Take Arthur Wilmot, for example; her error there had been disastrous. She wished she could hate Andy again. After all, she had only helped Scottie because she thought she was helping him. The acquaintance, the friendship, could not end this way. She would write to him.

She had got as far as "Dear Dr Macleod" when the maid came through to open the door. Stella had not heard the faint tinkle of the bell, and then she looked up into the smiling face of Andy, and, regardless of the maid, who was hurrying to obliterate herself, ran at him and caught him by the arms.

"You did come? You are a brute, Andy! Why did you leave me?"

"I'm all you say and worse, but I've come with the loveliest story—something that will amuse you, Stella."

Evidently it appealed to Andy. His laughter filled the room.

"I don't want to be amused," she said obstinately. "I want to be mollified. I was just writing you a terrible letter. No, you can't see it!"

But he had snatched up the paper.

"Dear Dr Macleod," he mimicked. "I should have answered you with even greater dignity."

"Tell me all the amusing news. I am glad to see you," she breathed. "Why did you leave me, Andy?"

"Because I saw Arthur Wilmot behaving as mysteriously as a stage criminal. I just had to find out what this secret business of his was. Do you know Flora?"

"Flora?" She frowned. "Flora who?"

"Have you never heard of Flora? I thought her name was famous amongst women."

"I know Flora the milliner," she said.

He nodded.

"Flora the milliner," he said solemnly, "is Arthur Wilmot!"

She gasped.

"Arthur Wilmot! Oh, that's too ridiculous. Arthur doesn't know anything about hats."

"On the contrary, he is an authority," he chuckled. "A little time ago I went into his house, saw a woman's hat in course of making lying on the table, and drew the worst possible conclusions. That is Arthur's secret. He is a man milliner; he is, in fact, Flora. He has three stores in town, and I followed him from one to the other. Apparently he always goes round in the evening to check the takings. Of course, there is no reason in the world why he shouldn't be a milliner."

"Wait," she said, and went to her desk.

She returned with a letter.

"This was waiting for me when I got back," she said.

It was a stiff little note, in which Mr Arthur Wilmot presented his compliments to Miss Nelson and requested her to furnish his lawyer with particulars of any financial transactions she may have had with the late Mr Darius Merrivan.

Andy read it through.

"As Scottie says, 'What a lady!'" he said vulgarly.

They saw Arthur Wilmot the next morning at the golf club, and he greeted them with a haughty little bow.

"Good morning, Arthur," said Stella sweetly. "I had your note."

He went very red.

"Perhaps you would discuss it with Vetch," he said gruffly as he began to move off to the first tee.

"Oh, Flora!" murmured the girl in a low voice, but not so low that Mr Arthur Wilmot did not hear her.

He played a bad game for the rest of the day.

# Chapter 25

Mr Downer was passing the police station at Sea Beach on the way to his bungalow when his eye was attracted to a notice that was pasted on the board outside the station.

It occupied a central position amidst other advertisements dealing with bodies found, absconding cashiers, and particulars of men wanted by the police, and he had not read two words before he realised that he had already perused the poster in town.

'INFORMATION IS REQUIRED CONCERNING ABRAHAM SELIM

(Alias WENTWORTH).

Wanted in connection with the murders of Darius Merrivan and John Albert Sweeny, on the night of the 24th of June.

Selim is a moneylender, and is believed to be a man of fifty-five. He has a stoop and wears gold-rimmed glasses, and is clean-shaven. He may endeavour to change cheques signed 'Jos. Wentworth', but he is probably in possession of large sums of money. Any information that will lead to his detention will be rewarded, and should be laid with Dr A. Macleod, Police Headquarters, or with the inspector in charge of this station.'

Mr Downer read and was annoyed. Anything that reminded him of the Beverley Green murder annoyed him. He had confidently believed that he had found the solution when Arthur Wilmot had told him in the greatest confidence ("You can trust me, my dear sir," said the virtuous Downer) that Stella Nelson had visited the house on the night of the murder.

If matters had followed the hoped-for course, Mr Downer would have been as near to being a happy man as it was possible for him to reach. He did not dislike Stella. In a faint, misty kind of way he admired her. He knew what to admire in women as he knew what to admire in architecture. Nor would it have given him any personal gratification if he had ruined Andrew Macleod. He honestly liked Andy. Only in business

hours he had no friends. If Downer's fiancee (supposing he had such an appendage) had been murdered by his best friend his first instinct would have been to estimate the news value of the occurrence. He would have been bitterly unhappy, but he would have described the victim's funeral and the murderer's execution with taste and judgment. He was an ideal reporter, a model for all juniors, and deserved the respect he had earned.

His bungalow was on the seashore. It consisted of a living-room, a bedroom, bath, and kitchen. There was a broad wooden veranda with hooks for a hammock, and a ten-by-twenty 'garden' where chrysanthemums grew wild in the autumn.

So he was told. He had never occupied the bungalow after summer, so he did not know. He opened the windows, pulled a basket chair on to the stoep, and lit a gas-ring under a kettle. The rooms were furnished plainly but comfortably, and twice a week (as arranged by contract) the widow of a fisherman came in to dust and clean.

From his bag Mr Downer produced a wad of copy-paper and certain galley proofs. He was at the moment completing his greatest work: Some Theoretical Solutions of Undiscovered Crimes, he called it, in the manner of a scientist. His publisher, having a large family to keep and being naturally anxious to make money from the work, had rechristened it Light on Mystery Murders.

Amongst the manuscript there was a letter from the publisher received by Mr Downer that morning.

"If you could only include the Beverley murder the sales would be immense. We want something hot and strong. The public would eat a good theory in regard to that crime."

Vulgarity in a publisher is rare, but such things have been known.

"Oh, damn the Beverley murder!" said Mr Downer irritably.

He might thus condemn it, yet not evade its intrusive interruption to his thoughts. When he sat on his wicker chair, and examined the sea impartially (as he did), or when he strode determinedly along the hard sand of the beach, the point of his umbrella leaving a miniature shaft at every two paces, or when he lay in bed and glared at the text over the door, the legacy of a former possessor which Mr Downer had not troubled to remove, it mattered little what subject occupied his mind, whether it was the need for a new summer suit or the reckless calling of his bridge partners, into the current of his meditations bobbed and spun the crime of Beverley Green. Two men had been murdered. Presumably

the slayer was one Abraham Selim, whose habits were unknown, whose very appearance was beyond identification. Abraham or X—he could not be considered except as an impersonality—could never be found, because for all practical purposes he did not exist. Mr Downer had dismissed all idea of Stella's guilt. Wise man that he was, he saw that the most suspicious feature so far as she was concerned was Andy's desire to shield her.

And—here he was, thinking about that infernal case, he told himself irritably, and turned over in bed seeking yet another hour's sleep, although the sun was up and gilding the wall with rods of gold that expanded and contracted as the sea breezes moved the blind. But he had done with sleep. He got up, and, finding his slippers, went into the kitchen and began the preparation of his breakfast. By the time he had had his bath the kettle lid was rattling urgently and the bacon he had left under the low-turned griller was curved and crisp.

It was only then that he went into the sitting-room and pulled up the blinds.

"Good Lord!" said Mr Downer. Sitting in the basket-chair on the veranda, his back towards him, was a man. He was well dressed; the one polished shoe that Downer could see had the covering of a white spat, the hand nearest to him was gloved, and rested on the golden head of a malacca cane. Mr Downer unbolted and unlocked his door and walked out. He had strong views of the sanctity of property and the reprehensibility of trespass.

"Excuse me," he said, in a tone which implied that if any excuse was called for it was not from him. "You've made a mistake. Why, Mr Boyd Salter!"

Mr Salter rose with his shrewd, cheerful smile, and held out a gloved hand.

"Will you forgive me for this liberty, Mr Downer? Unpardonable of me, I'm sure. But I remember that when you came to see me at the Hall—I fear I kept you waiting a long time, but it was one of my bad days—you said you had a bungalow at Sea Beach and I told you that—er—Sea Beach belongs to my family—more than half the land." He followed his host indoors.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you," said Mr Downer with great heartiness. "I must apologise for my scanty attire, but I've only just got up."

"Pray, not a word." Mr Salter raised a protesting hand. "The apology is due from me. It is a warm morning and green pyjamas harmonise so perfectly with this charming little room. I was afraid I had come too early, but—er—it is eleven o'clock, and Sea Beach is only an hour's run from Beverley." Whilst Mr Downer sought a few articles of clothing his visitor; surveyed the room dispassionately.

"I was only saying to myself yesterday," said Mr Downer through the half opened door of his bedroom, "what a pity I shan't have another excuse for seeing Mr Boyd Salter. I see a great many people in the course of my professional duties, and very few impress me. That sounds as if I am trying to flatter. I wouldn't be such a fool as to butter a man of your experience, and, if you don't mind my saying so, your age. But probably you have felt that yourself, Mr Salter?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr Salter earnestly, "and I assure you that I should not have intruded into your delightful little home—"

"A mere rabbit-hutch," said Mr Downer disparagingly, "but I am a simple man, with simple tastes."

"A charming little pied-a-terre," said the other graciously, "but I should not have come if I had not recognised certain appealing qualities in you, Mr Downer."

Mr Downer had seldom in his life been flattered. It was a novel experience for one whose chief asset was his skilful employment of the flattering word to find himself smeared with a little of his own oleaginous unguent. And he was more than interested, because this visit meant business. Mr Boyd Salter, for all his prejudice in his favour, was not making an early morning call for the pleasure of looking upon Mr Downer's hard features or listening to Mr Downer's soft phrases.

"I suppose you wonder why I have come?"

Mr Downer did.

"In a sense, yes," he said. "I can only hope that you want me to render you some small service. If that is the case you are doubly welcome."

"Not a small service." Salter shook his head gently. "On the contrary, a great service. The only thing I am worried about is whether I shall offend you."

Mr Downer smiled so broadly that he had to refix his glasses.

"I am a difficult man to offend," he said truly.

Mr Boyd Salter pursed his lips and stroked his short-clipped grey moustache.

"Well, it is this," he said at last. "I am going to take the unpardonable liberty of asking you to accept a commission which really should be offered to a detective agency. Now I've offended you?"

"No, you haven't," said Mr Downer. "You must remember that my work is almost parallel with that of a private detective. He reports to his employer; I report, in perhaps a little better English and at greater length, to the public."

"And with greater accuracy," acknowledged Mr Salter. "And that is why I have come to you in preference to employing one of those agency people. You are sure you are not offended?"

Mr Downer was very sure.

"If you had told me that I was asking you to do something which you, as a member of the great profession of letters, considered derogatory to your dignity and your calling, I should have understood. Out of your kindness, however, you have not repulsed me."

He smiled and Mr Downer smiled, too.

"What I want you to do is this. You were engaged in investigating the Beverley Green murder. For reasons which, I presume, were purely professional, you relinquished your work. I imagine that it was no longer a profitable occupation. Forgive me if I adduce the lowest motive for your retirement. You are a professional man living by your pen, and I imagine that your movements and preoccupations are dictated by the arbitrary will of your employers, your editors and publishers, or whatever they are."

Mr Downer nodded. He remembered his curt letter of recall and the distressing smallness of his cheque.

"Suppose I ask you to go down to Beverley Green and reopen your inquiries? I want to know more than I know at present. Particularly"—he spoke very deliberately—"do I wish to discover the secret of the burglary at the Hall. What was behind it? Was our friend Dr Macleod privy to that—er—crime? What does Dr Macleod know that I do not know? Has he any information concerning Abraham Selim that he has not communicated to his superiors? Where is Miss Stella Nelson?"

"Ah!" said Mr Downer. "I think I can begin right away by imparting information."

He told the story of the house in Castle Street and Stella's mysterious visits thereto.

"Who is the invalid?" asked Boyd Salter, but here his new employee had not pursued his inquiries.

"I think you will find that it is the man who broke into my house," said Salter, and the other glared at him through his glasses.

"Of course! Now why didn't that occur to me?"

"Find out for certain. I may be wrong, but somehow, when I jump to conclusions I am usually right, Mr Downer. I do know that she and the man—Scottie, I think his name is—went away on the same day. Scottie is probably the burglar. He is wounded if he is that rascal. But remember this—I do not wish that Dr Macleod should know that you are conducting investigations. I don't know how you will manage it, and I would not be so impertinent as to offer you any suggestion."

"You may rely upon me, Mr Boyd Salter," said Downer.

His employer took from his waistcoat pocket a folded paper and put it on the table.

"There will be certain expenses incurred," he said. "Regard this as on that account, please."

Mr Downer came to the end of the veranda to watch his visitor enter the car that was waiting for him on the Beach Road. Then he went back to his room and unfolded the paper. It was a banknote of considerable value, and Mr Downer smiled.

"I think I'll go back to town," he mused, and put the flat-iron on the gas-ring. He always pressed his own trousers.

# Chapter 26

"Get thee behind me, Satan," said Scottie sternly.

"You haven't grown religious, too, have you, Mr Scottie?" asked Big Martin in some anxiety.

Scottie was sitting on his bed in the little house in Castle Street, and his companion was that same attendant who had scuttled upstairs at the sound of Andy's knock. He was not naturally of a retiring disposition, but before announcing the arrival of Andrew Macleod he had, in his argot, taken a 'dekho' at the visitor through the front-room window. And the 'dekho' had produced a slight palpitation of heart.

He was called "Big" Martin because his height did not exceed four feet six inches, and there was a time when there wasn't a handier man than Big Martin for getting through a small scullery window in the profession.

Of late, however, good living had broadened him sideways and frontways, and, like many another specialist, he found now that his special qualities which had given him an advantage over his fellows had failed, and he was wholly unfitted for the general practice of his calling.

Scottie he had served in many capacities. He was an indefatigable reader of newspapers and a remarkable collector of information, and could reconnoitre a house with greater acumen than anybody Scottie had known in the course of a long and interesting career.

It was Big Martin who peddled buttons at kitchen doors and heard all the domestic gossip which was so useful to his various employers.

Scottie was above this kind of work. He had specialised in dealers in precious stones, and that required a more highly efficient intelligence department than Big Martin could supply. Yet Big Martin was useful. He maintained the establishment in Castle Street during Scottie's absences, he ran errands, made beds, and could at a pinch cook a simple meal.

"No, I haven't got religious," admitted Scottie, breathing on his spectacles and polishing them with a corner of the sheet, "but I have got careful. Have you ever heard the tale about the pitcher and the well?"

"No," said Big Martin suspiciously. "Is there a catch in it?"

"There is a catch in it," said the other grimly, and added: "I have made enough money to live quietly."

Mr Martin wrinkled his face.

"If you don't do it somebody else will," he said. "She's asking for it, walking about with all them diamonds."

It was Fate, thought Scottie.

"You needn't tell me anything about her," he interrupted the intelligence department. "I've met her socially. Mrs Crafton-Bonsor, near-American. Suite 907, Great Metropolitan Hotel."

"A bank couldn't buy her pearls," urged Big Martin. "They're as big as that." He made an 'o' of his forefinger and thumb. "Diamonds! You never saw anything like it, Mr Scottie."

"I know; but she keeps them in the hotel safe," suggested Scottie, and the other made a discouraging noise.

"Does she! My cousin's in the kitchen there, that's how I got to hear about it. She peels potatoes."

"Who, Mrs Bonsor?"

"No, my cousin."

Scottie was thoughtful. His fingers were busily playing a tune on his knee and his gaze was absent.

"No, I don't think so, Martin," he said. "Macleod would know it was me, and besides—" He hesitated and was about to speak, and changed his mind.

Big Martin would not understand his views in relation to Stella Nelson. It would be untrue to say that Scottie was reformed, or, if he was reformed, that he harboured any penitence for his past ill-deeds. The principal factor in whatever reformation had come about was the factor of personal safety. There was really no reason why he should take the risk. He was fairly well off. The Regent Street haul had sold well—one of the purchasers was a witness who helped to prove his alibi—and he had got another nest-egg which, together with his more recent acquisitions, would keep him in comparative comfort all the days of his life.

"I'll go and have another look at this Mrs. Bonsor," he said and Martin rubbed his hands joyously. "Not that I believe she's such a hell-fired fool as you made her out to be. Where does she come from?"

"Saint Barbara," said the other.

"Santa Barbara, so she does," corrected Scottie. "She told me—maybe she knows some friends of mine of the Pacific slope. And talking of friends. Big 'un, I saw you last night coming out of Finnagin's with a perfect gentleman."

Big Martin looked uncomfortable.

"He's a reporter," he said.

"What a bit of news!" said Scottie sarcastically. "As if I didn't know he was a reporter. What did he want?"

"It was about a job I was on four years ago," said Big Martin. "I got eighteen months for it—Harry Weston's job."

"I know it, and if he hadn't remembered it he would have looked it up. Any cop would have given him particulars and saved him that trouble. Well?"

"He was quite friendly, asked me what had become of Harry. We just chatted."

Scottie's lip curled.

"As if he didn't know that Harry is doing seven years in Parkhurst! Well, you chatterer, what did you chat about?"

Big Martin was now thoroughly alarmed. What had he said?

"If I die this minute I didn't say anything about you. He knew you were here and asked how your hand was." Scottie groaned. "But I didn't tell him. He's a good friend of yours, Scottie; said that if you was ever in trouble to send for him. Those were his very words."

"Take 'em, tie 'em up, and hand 'em to him," said Scottie. "You didn't tell him that Macleod knew all about it, did you?"

"He didn't want telling," said the other with satisfaction.

"You never could hold anything in your head," said Scottie, resigned, and began to change.

He dressed himself with care, found at the bottom of a box a small case, filled with cards, and selected one. It described him as Professor Bellingham, and the address was Pantagalla, Alberta. There was no such town on the map as Pantagalla, but he had once lived in a suburban

boarding-house which bore that name, and it seemed sufficiently Canadian.

The reception clerk at the Great Metropolitan discovered that Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor was in and the bellboy carried his card to her, what time Scottie sat in an easy-chair, seemingly absorbed in his thoughts, but in reality watching every man that entered or left the vestibule. The hotel detective he spotted at once. He wore that strained expression which all hotel detectives adopt, and is never wholly absent from the face of any detective.

Presently the bellboy came back and conducted him to the third floor, ushering him into an expensive suite (Scottie knew exactly how much per diem that suite cost).

The lady who was standing by the window looking out turned at the entrance of Scottie. "Good morning," she said briskly. "Mr—"

"Professor Bellingham," said Scottie deferentially. "We met before, you remember?"

"We surely did. I couldn't read your card without my glasses," she said. "Sit down, Professor. Now, isn't it nice of you to look me up?"

It was Scottie's experience that nobody was quite like what they were when he met them before, but he was not prepared for the surprising sameness of Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor. If anything, she was now more expensively garnished than when he had seen her lolling in her large car. Her jewels were magnificent. When she raised her hand it glittered as a jeweller's window display. There must have been a ring on every finger, and there were certainly three diamond bracelets on one arm which must have been worth a fortune.

All Scottie's old predatory instincts were aroused. It was a sin and a shame that this woman should have all these wonderful possessions, whilst he eked out a bare existence.

"I thought I'd come along and see you, Mrs. Crafton-Bonsor," he drawled. "I'm from Pantagalla, and seeing you were from Santa Barbara, why, I thought it would be neighbourly to come along and say how-do-you-do. I knew Santa Barbara very well—knew it before you rich people took it up and spoilt it. Ha, ha! My little joke, Mrs. Bonsor!"

"It's real kind of you. Professor—"

"Bellingham," he suggested. "Professor Bellingham, It is such a nuisance, my maid has mislaid my glasses, and I am as blind as a bat without

them. It is a lonely city this. I was here some years ago, but it is all new and strange to me now, and I shall be glad to get back home again."

"Have you been here long?"

"For a fortnight," said the woman, "and I haven't met a single nice person since I have been here. They are a lot of stuck-up people. I guess they haven't a cent to their names. Why, I called on a woman I met in San Francisco and the Senator was real nice to her, and they didn't ask me to stay to tea—not that I drink tea," she added.

Scottie could well understand that Mrs Crafton-Bonsor was not regarded as a social acquisition in spite of her wealth.

They chatted about Santa Barbara, about people (whose names fortunately Scottie knew) in San Francisco, and Mrs Crafton-Bonsor returned to her favourite topic, which was the inhospitable character of the people in foreign countries and the deterioration of the servant class.

"Why, this room is supposed to have been dusted this morning," she said, flicking a piece of fluff from the chair on which she was sitting. "Look at that—not a brush has touched it!"

Scottie was silent.

Mrs Crafton-Bonsor could not read his card because of her defective eyesight and yet she was picking minute specks of fluff from the chair without any visible effort. Some curious eye disease, he decided, and never gave the matter another thought.

He made himself agreeable to such an extent that he was invited to come to dinner that night.

"I dine in my suite," she said. "The trash that you find in hotel dining-rooms certainly get my goat."

As he came down the steps of the hotel, a little jubilant with the success of his preliminary visit, somebody tapped him on the arm, and he looked round into a familiar face.

"Andy wants you," said the detective. "He told me to ask you to step up to headquarters."

Scottie gave an impatient click of his lips but said nothing.

"Hallo, Scottie. Better? Take a seat, won't you? One of my men saw you were calling on Mrs Crafton-Bonsor, the rich American woman at the Great Metropolitan. What's the idea?"

"Can't a man have his social recreations?" said Scottie, grieved.

"All that you want, and more," said Andy brightly, "but I am acting in your own interests when I pull you in. This woman is a walking Kimberley diamond mine, and I hate to see you fall into temptation. By the way, I've just come back from Beverley Green," he added carelessly. "Miss Nelson was asking kindly after you."

Scottie licked his lips.

"That is very good of Miss Nelson," he said slowly, "and about this diamond woman, Macleod. My intentions are strictly honourable. You don't know what a comfort it is to get near to so much money or you wouldn't grudge me these few emotions."

"I grudge you nothing, Scottie," said Andy quietly, "but we've had her under observation since she came to town. We've already warned off two old friends of yours. Harry Murton and Dutch John, and it wouldn't be fair to you if I let you think you were working free from the observations of guardian angels."

Scottie was silent.

"Dees that mean I can't go and see her again?"

"You can go and see her as often as you like," said Andy, "but it she comes here with a squeal about the diamond tiara that you were admiring only a few minutes before you left, and which has mysteriously disappeared, why, Scottie, I shall put you on the file!"

A slow smile dawned on Scottie's face.

"Hasn't anybody told you I am reformed?" he asked innocently.

"I've heard about it," replied Andy with a laugh. "Scottie, I'm serious. I don't want to see you get into trouble, and I think, in the circumstances, that Mrs Bonsor is a dangerous acquaintance. Your morals are my first consideration," he said piously. "You can certainly see her as often as you like, but it is a little dangerous, isn't it? Suppose some other hook gets busy and there is a lacuna in the jewel case—"

"What's that fellow 'lacuna'?" asked Scottie, interested.

Andy explained.

"So you see."

"Thank you, Macleod." Scottie gathered up his hat and got up. "I still think I'll see her. She is fascinating. Apart from her jewellery, I mean. Have you met her?"

"No, I have not met her. She is not in my department," said Andy. "Steel is away on a holiday, and I am taking his place, luckily for you, because Steel wouldn't have given you half a chance."

"Thank you," said Scottie again, "and by the way, Macleod, that reporter Downer is alive and active."

This was no news to Andy.

"So I know," he said. "He has returned to Beverley or rather, to a village a mile or two out. Has he been after you?"

Scottie nodded.

"He's pumping a friend of mine. You know that he's wise to Miss Nelson being at Castle Street? You do? What a sleuth you are, Macleod. So long."

That night he walked boldly into the Great Metropolitan, though he knew he was being watched, and the evening was a pleasant one. Mrs Bonsor had taken to him, and laid herself out to give her professor a good time. He learned incidentally that the 'Senator', her husband, was not really a Senator at all. He gathered it was a name bestowed ironically by certain citizens of California. This information cleared the way to a better understanding. Scottie had been puzzled to account for an educated man having married a woman of this character. She talked about her palatial home in Santa Barbara, of her cars, her servants, her garden-parties, and every time she moved she scintillated.

"Scottie's been to see that Bonsor woman three times," reported a watcher. "He dines with her every night and took a joy-ride with her this afternoon."

Andy nodded.

"Put a man on to Big Martin and see if there's a job in progress."

He liked Scottie as an individual, but officially Scottie was a possible menace to human security. One afternoon a police officer called on Mrs Bonsor, and when Scottie came to dinner that night, resplendent in a new dress-suit, her manner was cold and her attitude distinctly distant.

"I nearly didn't let you up at all, mister," she said. (It was ominous that she called him "mister".) "But I thought I would have a little talk with you. The bulls are after you."

"After me?" said Scottie.

He was annoyed, but not resentful. It was the duty of the police to warn this woman, and he had rather wondered how long Andy would let him go before he did his duty.

"They say you are a crook called Scottie." She shook her head reprovingly. "I can only tell you that I am very much hurt."

"Why?" asked Scottie calmly. "I haven't stolen anything of yours, and I would never take so much as a hairpin from your beautiful head." Yes, Scottie said this, and, in a sense, meant it. "I admit that I am called Scottie. It is not my name, but it is good enough to identify me in two or three countries. I admit that I am a crook, but do you realise what it means, Mrs Crafton-Bonsor," he said with a quaver in his voice, "for a man like myself to meet a woman like you, a woman of the world, young, comparatively speaking, certainly in the prime of life, who takes an interest in a—a—an adventurer? It isn't your money or your jewels. They don't mean anything to me. I could have got 'em the first day I met you, lady," he went on recklessly. "I came to see those stones of yours. Everybody was talking about them, and I'm a geologist by profession. I admit it. But when I'd seen you and talked to you—it was like a dream. A man of refinement and taste in my profession doesn't meet a lady like you—not often."

"I'm nothing much, I'm sure," said Mrs Crafton-Bonsor, unwilling to interrupt the smooth flow of Scottie's comfortable eloquence, and yet feeling that modesty demanded such an interruption.

"I knew you weren't American the first time I spoke to you. They don't raise people like you on the Pacific slope," (which was true), "and when I'd seen you once I knew that I'd have to see you again. I fought with my foolishness, but every day you lured me back."

"Not intentionally," murmured Mrs Crafton-Bonsor.

"Don't I know it?" said Scottie wearily, as he rose and held out his hand. "Goodbye, Mrs Bonsor. It has been like living in another world."

She shook his hand, reluctant to end an interview which was not unpleasing.

"Goodbye, Mr Scottie," she said. "I'd like to see you again, but—"

"I understand," said Scottie bitterly. "It is what the world would think of you—what all these la-de-da people in the hotel would say."

Mrs Crafton-Bonsor stiffened. "If you think I care two cents for their opinions," she said shrilly, "why, you're wrong! Come up to dinner tomorrow night." Her words were a command, her mien a little majestic.

Scottie did not speak. He bowed and went out quickly. She might have changed her mind if he hadn't. Halfway down the stairs he tried to recall the conversation in its entirety. There were certain good books circulated amongst convicts designed to bring to them an appreciation of a virtuous life. He had made mention of these to Stella Nelson on one occasion. In these books there was recorded inevitably a speech delivered by the reformed lag usually to the gentle woman who had, by her sweet influence, brought about his reformation.

In the main the thief of fiction expressed very much the same sentiments as the Scottie of fact. But he had forgotten something—Then he remembered, with a "Tut" of impatience. "I didn't say anything about my mother!" he said.

Considering this omission later, he decided that on the whole it was well that he had forgotten. It would be advisable to hold something in reserve for the second interview. Nevertheless, he must take no chances, and, turning into the nearest railway terminus, he made for the newsstall.

"Have you got a book called Saved by a Child, or one called Only a Convict?"

"No," said the youth in charge, "we don't sell kid books."

"'Kid' is exactly the word, my son," said Scottie.

# Chapter 27

'My dear Macleod' (wrote an attache at the American Embassy)—'I do not know Mrs Crafton-Bonsor personally, but I have heard quite a lot about her. As you rightly surmise, Crafton-Bonsor was not a United States Senator. In this country you have what you call 'courtesy titles', 'Senator' may be described in in this case as a discourtesy title! The original name of Crafton-Bonsor is difficult to unearth. He was called variously 'Mike' and 'Murphy' by old associates, but he was 'Bonsor' Murphy and 'Grafter' Bonsor, and from these two appellations he probably arrived at Crafton-Bonsor. He had some sort of political pull, and in his latter days was universally known as 'the Senator'. He died immensely rich, and his widow inherited every cent.'

Andy read the letter to Stella Nelson the first time they were alone.

He had performed his duty, and Mrs Crafton-Bonsor could now have no doubt as to her friend's character. So far from the knowledge having interfered with the association of these strange people, it seemed to have had exactly the opposite effect.

"She may be trying to reform him," suggested Stella, her eyes twinkling. "Bad men have an irresistible fascination for susceptible ladies. Not that Scottie is bad or that Mrs Bonsor is particularly susceptible. I remember her now. She came to Beverley Green and smashed up our beautiful lilac. Scottie told me her name afterwards."

"At lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner!" protested Andy. "For all I know, he is breakfasting there! I am not concerned with Scottie's light recreations, and I suppose, having warned the lady, my responsibility is at an end, but still—"

"Perhaps he loves her," suggested the girl, "and please, Andy, don't sneer. Scottie has always struck me as having a romantic disposition."

"I wouldn't deny it," said Andy. "That alibi of his—"

"Andrew! Don't be unpleasant! Besides, you've got to meet her."

"I have to meet her?" said Andy in surprise.

Stella nodded solemnly.

"Scottie has written to me to ask if he can bring her down to dinner, and of course I have said yes. I gave a brief description of her to Father and he has been shuddering ever since. I think he will have an engagement at the club tonight, which makes it all the more imperative that you should be here."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Andy incredulously, "that Scottie has had the audacity to invite himself and his bejewelled friend to dine with you?"

Apparently Scottie had, and that evening Andrew Macleod made the acquaintance of a lady whom he had endeavoured to serve.

Mrs Crafton-Bonsor was arrayed in a tight-fitting plum velvet gown, cut perilously low, and, having seen her, Andy was smitten dumb. Never on one human being had he seen such a display of precious stones. From the diamond band about her red hair to the diamond buckles on her shoes, she was overpowering. Standing beside her, a Rajah in full uniform and wearing the jewels of State would have seemed mean and unadorned. Scottie was joyous. His pride was so absurdly sincere that Andy could only gape at him.

"Meet my friend, Mrs Crafton-Bonsor," he said. "This is Dr Macleod, Mirabel." ('Mirabel' repeated Andy, mentally, and gasped.) "Dr Macleod and I have had many contests—you might even call them fights—but I bear him no malice. He was the gentleman that warned you against me, and wasn't he justified?" He took Andy's hand in his and shook it intensely.

Mrs Bonsor, on the contrary, favoured Andy with a stony glance from her blue eyes. "Meet Miss Nelson, Mirabel," said Scottie. Something glittered on his finger as he waved the introduction.

"Glad to meet you, I'm sure," said Mrs Bonsor without enthusiasm. "Any friend of the professor's—Professor Bellingham"—she glared towards Andy—"is a friend of mine."

It was an awkward beginning to what Stella had hoped would be a very pleasant and amusing evening. It dawned upon her half way through dinner, and the thought left her helpless, that Mrs Crafton-Bonsor was jealous of her! But by this time that lady had over-ridden her earlier suspicions and antagonism, and was chatting genially with Andy.

The poison was creeping into Scottie's veins. That sober man, whose unostentation was his greatest charm, had developed two large solitaire rings. Andy did not look at them too closely; nor was there any need, he decided, for Scottie would not display jewellery that had been fully described in the Hue and Cry.

"Yes, I am leaving next week," Mrs Crafton-Bonsor was saying, with a glance at Scottie. "I have had a better time than I thought I should, but naturally I want to get back to my beautiful home in Santa Barbara. The lawn is as big as this village—I showed the professor a picture of it, and he thought it was wonderful. It is natural that, having a beautiful home like that, I want to stay with it."

She glanced at Scottie, as that gentleman dropped his eyes to the tablecloth. There was something obscenely modest about Scottie at that moment, and Andy would dearly have loved to have kicked him.

"I hope you won't find the journey too lonely for you, Mrs Crafton-Bonsor," said Andy. "You will miss our friend, the professor."

"Yes," said Mrs Bonsor, and coughed.

Scottie looked up.

"I was thinking of going over to California to have a look round," he said, and on this occasion it was Mrs Bonsor who simpered.

"The fact is, Mister—" she said, "Stanhope and I—"

"Stanhope? Who is Stanhope?" asked the baffled Andy, but he had no need to ask; the pleading eyes of Scottie met his.

"Stanhope and I are very good friends. I thought you would have noticed the ring." She held up a plump hand.

There and then Andy noticed about twenty. He made a good recovery. "May I offer you my congratulations," he said heartily. "Really, this is surprising news, Mrs Crafton-Bonsor."

"Nobody was more surprised than myself," said that lady cheerfully, "but you'll understand, mister—I always forget your name; I used to forget the Senator's sometimes. You understand how lonely a woman in my position can get. Besides, I want Stanhope to begin a new life. There is a peach of a mountain near my house where he could—what's the word, Stan?"

"Geologise," murmured Scottie.

"That's the word," said Mrs Bonsor. "And if that doesn't suit, there are some dandy mountains within a car-ride."

"So you are going to leave us?" smiled Andy. "And I suppose that in a month's time you will have forgotten Beverley Green and Wilmot, and the murderous Abraham Selim, and—"

There was a crash. Mrs Crafton-Bonsor had fallen to the floor in a dead faint.

"It was the heat of the room," she gasped, a dishevelled, untidy woman, her jewels awry. "I—I think I'll go back to the hotel. Stanhope"—it was pathetic to see how much she relied on him—"will you order the car?" Her face had gone suddenly old and grey, against which the carmined lips looked ghastly. Andy expected any minute to see her collapse again. He thought it was a more serious attack at first. She was of the build that is susceptible to such trouble, and he was relieved when she showed signs of recovery. He and the concerned Scottie assisted her to her car.

"The drive will do me good," she said with a nervous little laugh as she glanced round. "I am sorry to give you all this trouble. Miss What's-your-name, and I wanted to hear about that murder, too. Who was killed? Abraham Selim?"

"No, a man named Merrivan. It was foolish of me to mention that ghastly business," said Andy.

"Oh, that didn't worry me. Good night, mister."

Andy went back with the girl to the unfinished meal. "Abraham Selim," he said softly.

She frowned. "Do you think it was the mention of that name that made her faint?"

Andy nodded. "There is no doubt about it in my mind," he said, "but why should the name of the murderer of Merrivan have that result?" He sat studying the pattern of the cloth for a long time, and she did not interrupt his thoughts.

"I really think I must interview Mrs Crafton-Bonsor," he said slowly, "for unless I am greatly mistaken, that lady can tell us more about this murder and its motive than the murderer himself."

# Chapter 28

Andy stayed at the house until Mr Nelson returned, and strolled across the Green to the guest-house, where he had reserved his old room.

He was the only visitor in the house, and Johnston hailed his arrival with unfeigned pleasure. "Thank goodness you've come," he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't be here for another hour."

Andy shot a swift professional glance at the man; his face was drawn, his teeth were chattering.

"What is the matter with you, Johnston?" he said. "You seem to be under the weather."

"My nerves have all gone to pieces since this murder," said Johnston. "I get that jumpy I can hardly keep still, and I never go to sleep until three o'clock in the morning."

"Why not?" asked Andy.

The man laughed hysterically.

"If I tell you, you'll probably think I am mad, and there are times when I feel that way, doctor. And I'm not naturally a nervous man—never was. I don't mind telling you in confidence that in my younger days I poached on every estate in this county. But—"

"But what?" asked Andy after an interval of silence.

"I'm a religious man, too, in a manner of speaking," Johnston went on. "I never miss the evening service, and I don't believe in anything supernatural—spiritualism and all that sort of rubbish. I've always said that the spirits men see are the spirits they put inside of 'em."

"And you've been seeing ghosts, eh?" said Andy, interested. "Which means, Johnston, that you are thoroughly run down. I'll see Mr Nelson tomorrow and ask him to recommend to the committee that you have a holiday."

Johns on shook his head. "Perhaps you are right, sir, but—I'm a fool, I suppose, but I've seen things in Beverley Green that would make your blood turn to water, and you're a doctor. It is a valley of ghosts. I've always said it was, and it is."

"Have you been seeing any of the ghostly inhabitants?"

The man licked his lips.

"I've seen Mr Merrivan," he said.

Andy, who had turned with a laugh to go upstairs, swung round again.

"You've seen Mr Merrivan? Where?"

"I have seen him, as I've seen him dozens of times, standing at his front gate in his dressing-gown. He used to come out in the old days in the early morning, just wearing his long yellow dressing-gown—before people were about, you understand—at five or six o'clock, and I've seen him out there on warm summer nights, standing with his hands in his pockets, taking the air."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Andy softly, "And you've seen him since his death?"

The man nodded. "I saw him two nights ago," he said. "I haven't told a soul about it, but I've been sleeping badly, and I usually take a walk round the Green before I go to bed. I have been as many as twenty times round the Green in the course of a night," he explained. "At first I used to go as near Mr Merrivan's house as my nerves would let me, and after two or three nights I found I couldn't go within fifty yards of it. Two nights ago I was strolling up and down, wondering who would buy the house. Mr Wilmot has had all the furniture cleared out, the only things left being the curtains in the windows. I was loafing along, thinking how desolate the place looked, when all of a sudden I saw a light, and—" His voice shook tremulously. "It was in the room where the body was found."

"What sort of a light?"

"It looked to me like a candle, sir. It wasn't a bright light, as though somebody had turned on the electricity. As a matter of fact, Mr Wilmot has had the electric current cut off."

"And then what happened?" asked Andy.

"Then, sir," Johnston shivered, "well, I only saw a crack of light between the blinds and the wall, and I was thinking that I was imagining things, when the blind was slowly pulled up—"

Andy waited until the man had overcome his emotions.

"I couldn't see him distinctly, but he was in a dressing-gown, and he was looking out into the garden. I was paralysed, just stood stock still and couldn't move. Then the blind was pulled down and the light went out. I saw it a few minutes afterwards in the hall. There is a fanlight over the door. I don't know how long I stood there, possibly ten minutes, probably ten seconds—I didn't sort of realise that time was passing. And then, when I was just recovering myself, the door opened. There was only a faint light in the passage—and he came out."

"Merrivan?"

The man nodded.

"Or, at any rate, somebody in a dressing-gown, eh?" said Andy.

"Yes, sir."

"And have you seen it since?"

"I saw it again last night. I made myself walk towards the house. There he was standing at the front gate, with his hands in his pockets."

"Did you see his face?"

"No, sir, I didn't wait to see his face. I bolted."

"Have you told Mr Wilmot?"

"No, sir, I didn't like to tell him, Mr Merrivan being his uncle."

Andy thought over the matter for a long time.

"You are probably suffering from hallucinations due to a bad attack of nerves," he said. "I'll give you an examination tomorrow, Johnston."

It was eleven o'clock when Andy turned his light out and slipped into bed. For some reason he could not sleep. He had had a hard day's work, and it was absurd to suggest that his nerves had been in any way disordered by Johnston's narrative. The man was certainly neurotic. He had seen the reflection of a light from some other house and had imagined the rest. And yet there would be no lights in other houses at that hour of the morning. Turning over the matter in his mind, Andy fell into an uneasy sleep.

It was a scream that aroused him, a hoarse shriek of fear. He leapt out of bed and turned on the light, and a second later there came to him the

scuttle of hurrying footsteps along the passage. He opened the door to confront Johnston. The caretaker's face was the colour of chalk, and in his terror he mouthed and gibbered incoherently, pointing towards the window. Andy ran to the window and threw it up. He could see nothing.

"Turn out the light, Johnston," he said sharply. A second later the room was dark. Still peering into the darkness, he saw nothing.

"I saw him, I saw him!" gasped Johnston. "He was there on the Green, under my window, just walking up and down in his dressing-gown! I opened the window and looked out, to make sure. And he spoke to me. Oh, my God!"

"What did he say?" asked Andy, shaking the blubbering man by the shoulder. "Speak up, man! what did he say?"

"He asked for the key," wailed Johnston. "He called me by my name. 'Give me the key,' he said."

Andy slipped on an overcoat, ran down the stairs, and out into the open. He saw nobody, and, throwing himself flat on the grass to secure a skyline, he searched in every direction, but in vain.

Returning to Johnston, he found the man on the verge of collapse, and applied such rough-and-ready restoratives as he could secure. He succeeded in bringing him back to some semblance of manhood, but he held stoutly to his story.

"Why did he ask you for the key?"

"Because I have it," said Johnston. "Here it is, sir."

He took a key from a cupboard in his room.

"Mr Wilmot gave me this. I was supposed to show people over the house—people who want to buy it."

"Give it to me," said Andrew, and put it in his pocket.

There could be no more sleep for Andy that night. He dressed and went abroad on a tour of inspection. He met nothing human or supernatural in his walk across the Green. An eerie sensation came to him as he passed through the gates and by the aid of his flashlamp turned the key. His footsteps echoed hollowly in the bare hall.

He hesitated only for a second before he turned the handle and threw open the door leading into Mr Merrivan's 'den'. Every article of furniture had been removed, even the carpet had been taken up from the floor, and only a few hanging strands of wire showed where Mr Merrivan's etchings had hung.

He paused for a second to examine the dark stain on the floorboard where the owner of the house had met his death, and then he flashed his lamp on the window. In that second of time he saw something, and a cold shiver ran down his spine. It was the glimpse of a figure in the garden outside, the figure dimly illuminated by the flash of his electric torch. Another second, and it had disappeared.

He jumped to the window and tried to force it up, but the side screws had been put into place, and it was some time before he came out into the garden and followed the cinder-path to the orchard. There was no sign of man or ghost.

"Phew!" said Andy, wiping his moist forehead.

Going back to the room, he fastened the window behind him and closed and locked the street door before he returned to the guest-house, and then—

"Well I'm—"

Andy stood stock still in the middle of the Green and looked up to Stella's window. Once more in a moment of crisis her light was burning.

# Chapter 29

This time Andy decided he would not wait till the morning for an explanation. It would probably be a very simple one, and—a light had appeared in the hall-room. He only tapped gently on the door, but Stella answered him.

"Who is that?"

There was a note of anxiety in her voice.

"It is Andy!"

"Andy!" He heard her fingers fumbling with the chain. "Oh, Andy!" She fell into his arms, sobbing. "I'm so frightened! I'm such a fool!"

"Everybody seems frightened and foolish tonight," said Andy as he smoothed the brown head that lay on his shoulder. "What have you seen?"

"Have you seen anything?" she asked, looking up.

Mr Nelson's voice called from upstairs.

"It is Andy, Father. Will you come down?"

"Anything wrong?" Nelson was fastening his dressing-gown as he descended the stairs.

"I'm just trying to find out," said Andy. "Beverley Green seems to be in a state of nerves tonight."

Mr Nelson's dressing-gown was purple, he noted, and he had the appearance of a man who had just been aroused from sleep.

"Did you knock before?" he asked. "I could have sworn I heard somebody."

"No, Daddy, it wasn't Andy." She shivered.

"Did somebody knock?" asked Andy.

She nodded.

"I sleep very lightly," she said, "and I must have heard the knock the first time. I thought it was you and opened the window to look out. I saw somebody down below standing on the path. He was quite distinct."

"How was he dressed?" asked Andy quickly. "In a dressing-gown?"

"Have you seen him?" she said. "Who was it, Andy?"

"Go on, my dear, what happened?"

"I called out 'Who is it?' and he didn't answer at first," Stella went on, "and then in a deep kind of voice he said, 'Have you got your scarf?' I didn't know what he meant at first, then I remembered the scarf which had been found in the orchard. 'Yes,' I said. 'Who are you?' But he didn't answer, and I saw him walking away. I sat for a long time in the dark puzzling my head as to who it could be. It wasn't your voice; it wasn't the voice of anybody unless—but that is absurd."

"Unless it was Merrivan's?" said Andy quietly.

"Of course it wasn't his, but it was very low and gentle, just as his was, and the more I thought about it the more frightened I became. Yes, I did think it was Mr Merrivan's, and fought hard against the idea. Then I put my light on and came downstairs, intending to call Father and to get a glass of milk. Then you knocked, Andy."

"It is extraordinary," said Andy, and told them what he had seen and heard in the night. "Johnston is a dithering wreck. You'll have to let him go away, Mr Nelson."

"But who could it be? Do you think it was somebody trying to frighten us?"

"They succeeded very well if it was," said Andy.

"My theory is," said Mr Nelson, who was never at a loss for a theory, "that you were all upset by that wretched woman's fit. I knew you were upset the moment I came in."

"Johnston wasn't upset," said Andy, "and I think my nerves are in pretty good order." He took the key out of his pocket. "Go along and have a look at Merrivan's house," he smiled.

"Not for a thousand," said Mr Nelson fervently. "Now, off you go to bed, Stella. You'll be a wreck in the morning."

"It is morning now," said the girl, pulling aside the blinds. "I wonder if Arthur Wilmot is awake?"

The same thought had come into Andy's mind, and, having extracted a solemn promise from Stella that she would go straight to bed, he left her and made his way to Mr Wilmot's bijou residence.

It was a very long time before he aroused the milliner, and Arthur Wilmot received the news with strange calmness. "It is curious," he said. "I was in the house yesterday. In fact it was I who put the bolts in the back window. They haven't been bolted since the murder."

"You have seen nothing?" asked Andy.

"Nothing whatever," said Wilmot. "If you'll wait a minute while I dress, I'll come over to the house with you. It ought to be light enough then to see whether there are any footprints in the garden."

"Don't bother your head about footprints," said Andy irritably. "A cinder path and an asphalted courtyard are not the best material to collect that sort of evidence from."

Nevertheless, he accompanied Arthur to the house, and they made a thorough search of the rooms, beginning at the hall.

"Here's something." Wilmot pointed to the floor.

"Candle grease," said Andy, interested. "Have you had anybody here with candles?" Arthur Wilmot shook his head. They found another gout of grease in Merrivan's room, and then they discovered a half burnt candle. It lay at the back of the deep fireplace.

"I didn't need this to know that something more substantial than a spirit had been in this place," said Andy. "Without professing to be an authority on ghosts, I always understood they carried their own illumination." He wrapped the candle carefully in paper.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Wilmot in astonishment, and Andy smiled.

"Really, for a man who suggests that I should look for footprints on asphalt you are singularly dense, Wilmot. This candle is covered with fingerprints."

The murderer, sane or insane, was attracted to the scene of the crime, and probably his visits were of frequent occurrence.

He said nothing about his plans to Wilmot or to the Nelsons. His first business lay with Mrs Crafton-Bonsor, but that lady was not visible. More than that, when Andy urged the imperative necessity for an interview, she flatly and firmly refused to see him. And Scottie was her messenger.

"Women's whims," murmured Scottie. "It is no good, Macleod, she is as hard as a neolithic fossil. I have done my best, but she won't see you."

"Now, Scottie," said Andy. "I have treated you fair and you have got to help me. What was Abraham Selim to her?"

Scottie gave an elaborate shrug.

"Never inquire into a woman's past, Macleod," he said. "'The past is dead, so let it die' as the song says, and 'happiness is with the future'."

"I am not concerned with the future, but with Mrs Crafton-Bonsor's past," said Andy unpleasantly, "and I intend seeing that lady or there is going to be serious trouble."

Scottie disappeared, and was gone for nearly half an hour before he returned.

"She's ill, Macleod, there is no doubt about it. You, as a medical man, will see it with half an eye. But she'll give you two minutes."

Mrs Bonsor was lying on a couch, and Scottie had not exaggerated the tragic effect which his chance reference of the previous night had produced upon the woman. Her plump cheeks seemed to have grown haggard, the insolence in her blue eyes had departed.

"I've got nothing to tell you, mister," she said sharply, almost as soon as Andy was in the room. "I don't know Abraham Selim and I don't want to talk about him. If he is a friend of yours, well, I don't admire your taste."

"Hasn't Scottie told you—" he began.

"Scottie has told me nothing," she said shrilly, "and I don't see why you should come up here into my private sitting-room—God knows they charge me enough for it—and try to pump me."

"Did you ever know Abraham Selim?"

She hesitated.

"Well, I did," she said reluctantly. "That was years and years ago. I don't want to talk to you about it, mister. My private affairs are my own private affairs. I don't care who you are, policeman or not. My character will bear investigation, believe me."

Andy waited until she was finished, and then he said:

"Your name was Hilda Masters, and you married John Severn at St Paul's Church; Marylebone."

Her jaw dropped, and she stared up at him. And then she began to cry, and from tears she turned to laughter.

It was a wonderful Scottie that Andrew Macleod saw in the moment of the woman's despair. He was by turns tender and authoritative, soothing and sarcastic. Andy in his discretion left them alone for half an hour, at the end of which time Scottie came to him.

"Macleod," he said quietly, "she's going to tell you the whole truth, and, stenography being my long suit, I'd like to take it down for you. Mirabel," he hesitated, "hasn't got what I might term my flair for high-class language, and I guess it will look better if I put it into police-English than if you dig up the hotel stenog. She's a freckled-nosed woman with gold-filled teeth. I took a dislike to her the first time I saw her. Your surprise at my versatility does credit to your intelligence, but I used to do 180 when I was a youngster, and few key-punchers have ever passed me in a straightforward bit of typing. I'm keen on this girl. She's not a girl to you, but you'll get elastic in your ideas as you get older. Will you let me do it? You fire in the questions and I'll sort out the answers and fix 'em together."

Andy nodded, and of this strange partnership was born a stranger story.

# Chapter 30

"My name is Mirabel Hilda Crafton-Bonsor. I am not sure whether that was my late husband's real name. I believe that it was Michael Murphy. He was of Irish extraction, and when I first met him he was a contractor in the City of Sacramento, in the State of California.

"I was born in the village of Uckfield, Sussex, but came to London when I was aged seven. My parents dying, I lived with an aunt, Mrs Pawl, of Bayham Street, Camden Town, and entered domestic service at the age of sixteen, going as parlour-maid to Miss Janet Severn, of 104 Manchester Square. Miss Severn was a maiden lady and very eccentric. She had strong views about marriage, and particularly about the marriages of the lower classes.

"The only other person in the house beside Miss Janet and the other servants was Mr John Severn, Miss Severn's nephew, and he was only there during vacations. He was a student at Cambridge University. I do not know the college, but I know that it was Cambridge, because I have posted a good many letters from Miss Janet to him and she always read out the address aloud before she gave it to me. I know the college had a religious name.

"Unfortunately, I cannot read or write, and though I have since learnt to write my name on a cheque I can do no more. That explains why I never read of the murder, nor knew the names of the persons concerned. I used to see a lot of Mr John when he was at home. He was partial to me, for in those days I was a very good-looking girl, but he never made love to me.

"Whilst I was in Manchester Square I met a man who was called Mr Selim—Abraham Selim. He used to come to the servants' entrance once a week, and I thought he was one of those people who sell goods to servants on credit. I afterwards found out that he was a moneylender who had a big trade in the West End amongst servants. The cook was heavily in his debt and a housemaid named Rachael was also in debt to him.

"He was not a bad-looking fellow, and when he found that I didn't want to borrow money, but had a bit of my own in the savings bank (I being a saving kind, and always was), he seemed to be struck on me, and asked if I would go walking with him on my first Sunday out. I said yes, because I'd never had a fellow, and, as I say, he was not at all bad-looking. He met me the next Sunday. We drove to Hampton in a hansom cab. I must say that it was a grand experience for me. He gave me everything of the best and behaved like a gentleman in every way.

"To cut a long story short, he met me a good number of times, and then suggested that we should get married. He said that it would have to be secret, and I should have to stay on in my job for a month or two, as he had certain plans. I didn't mind that idea, because I was perfectly comfortable with Miss Janet. So one Monday I had the day off, and we were married before the registrar at Brixton, where he lived, and in the evening I went back to Miss Janet's.

"Then one day he came in a state of great excitement and asked me if I'd ever heard of a gentleman whose name I forget. I told him I'd heard Miss Janet speak of him. He was her brother-in-law, and she was not on speaking terms with him, because he had treated his wife (her sister) badly. He was well off, but from what I heard neither Miss Janet nor Mr John ever expected a penny from the old man. I told my husband all that I knew, and he seemed very pleased. He asked me if Mr John ever made love to me, and I was very upset at the question, for I was a respectable girl and did not hold with such things. He pacified me and said that perhaps he could make a fortune if I'd help him. He also said that when he married me he had no idea until I put an X on the register instead of my name that I couldn't read or write, and that was going to be a handicap to him.

"But I could help him a lot if I could find out where Mr John went in the evenings. I discovered afterwards that he wanted this information in order to plan a meeting with Mr John, whom he did not know. I did know that Mr John was in debt. He'd told me that the cost of living at Cambridge was very heavy and that he had borrowed money, and begged me not to say a word to his aunt.

"I naturally thought that Abraham had got word of this and wanted to do a little business with Mr John. If I had known what their meeting would lead to I'd have cut my tongue out rather than told Abraham the place where Mr John spent his evenings—which was in a club in Soho where young gentlemen used to go to gamble.

"About a week after, Selim informed me that he had met Mr John and had helped him. "'Whatever you do, don't tell him that you know me in ar shape or form.' I promised, and I wasn't likely to tell. Miss Janet was very straitlaced, and there would have been trouble for me if she knew that I was married and was masquerading as a single girl. The Severns are a very old family, and have a motto which means class people must never do anything mean. It was in Latin. And there was a bird's head on the notepaper, holding a snake in its beak. She did explain what it meant, but I've forgotten. I don't know what business he had with Mr John, but Abraham seemed very pleased when he met me. He had given up calling at the house now and sent a clerk.

"It is a strange thing that the clerk had never seen Abraham, and I afterwards found out that although Selim said that he had met Mr John they had never been face to face. It was just about that time that Abraham began to be very secretive. I found this out when Mr John told me that he had done a very good stroke of business with a man who had written to him.

"'He thinks I am going to inherit an estate,' he said. 'I told him there was no hope, but he insisted on lending me all the money I wanted.'

"I told Abe this when I saw him, but he only laughed. I remember the evening I told him very well. It was a Sunday, and we had met at a restaurant near King's Cross. I want to say that although I had been married to him over a month he and I had never met except, so to speak, in public. He never kissed me in his life.

"It had been raining very heavily, and when we came out of the restaurant he put me in a hansom and told the driver to drop me at the corner of Portman Square. It was about ten o'clock when I paid the cabman—Abraham always gave me plenty of money—and I had the shock of my life when I turned away from the cab and almost ran into the arms of Miss Janet. She didn't say anything then, but when I got home she sent for me.

"She said she couldn't understand how a respectable girl could ride in a hansom cab, and where did I get the money from? I told her that I had money saved and that a friend paid for the cab. She didn't like it a bit, I could see that and I knew that I should get notice next pay day.

"'Please wait up for Mr John,' she said. 'He's dining with some friends, but he will not be later than eleven.'

"I was glad to see the back of her when she went upstairs to bed. Mr John did not come in until past twelve, and I could see with half an eye

that he had been drinking. I had laid a little supper for him in the breakfast-room and I waited on him.

"He was what we call in America 'fresh', called me his darling little girl, and told me that he was going to buy me a pearl brooch.

"And then, before I knew what was happening, he had taken me in his arms and was kissing me. I struggled with him, but he was very strong, and he had his lips against mine when the door opened—and there was Miss Janet.

"She gave me one look and pointed to the door and I went, and glad I was to go. I fully expected the next morning to be packed off bag and baggage, especially as Miss Janet had sent up word to say that I was not on any account to do any work. At about ten o'clock she sent for me to the drawing-room.

"I shall never forget her sitting there in her black alpaca, with her little white lace cap and her beautiful hands folded on her lap. She had lovely hands; all we servants used to admire them.

"'Hilda,' she said, 'my nephew has done you a great wrong, how great I have not inquired. I understand now why you have so much money and showed the cook five golden sovereigns only last week. But that is beside the point. You are a young girl in my house and under my protection. I have a great responsibility, both to God and my fellows, and I have arranged that my nephew shall do the honourable thing and marry you.'

"I simply couldn't speak. In the first place, I'd started crying the moment she began to talk, and in the second place her words struck me all of a heap. I wanted to tell her that I was already married and had my certificate to prove it. At least I hadn't got it, but Abraham had. I think it was remembering this that shut me up.

"'I have spoken to my nephew and I have sent a note to my lawyer giving him the necessary particulars in order that he may get a licence from the bishop. You will be married at St. Paul's, Marylebone, on Thursday next.'

"And with that she sort of waved me out of the room. When Miss Janet moved her hand that way nobody breathing would have the courage to argue with her. When I came to my senses I wanted to go back and tell her the truth, and I asked if I could see her. But the other parlourmaid came back to say that Miss Janet was feeling poorly and that I could have the day off.

"I went straight away to find Abraham. He had a little office above Ashlar's, the tobacconist. Ashlar became a rich man after, I believe, and has a building named after him. Abe was there, for a wonder, but it was a long time before he unlocked the door and let me in. He told me that he never saw clients personally and was rather annoyed with me for coming. But when I told him the fix I was in he sort of changed his tone. I said that I should have to tell Miss Janet, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"'I always thought something like this might happen,' he said. 'Now, Hilda, you've got to be a good girl and do something for me. I've treated you very well, and it is now your turn to help me.'

"When I found what it was he wanted me to do I couldn't believe my ears. I was to marry Mr John!

"'But how can I when I'm already married?' I said. 'I should get put in prison.'

"'Nobody will ever know,' he said. 'You were married to me in another part of the town. I promise you that you shall leave him at the church and never see him again. Do this for me, Hilda, and I will give you a hundred pounds.'

"He said that if I married Mr John we should both be rich for life, but he didn't say why. He was always a wonderful talker, and he confused me so that I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels. He made black look white as the saying goes, and the long and short of it was that I consented. I suppose I was a weak fool, but I admired his cleverness and his education so much that I simply didn't think for myself.

"I've often wondered whether he did this to get rid of me, but that doesn't seem right, because there was no reason why he should have married me at all. I think now that he wanted a pretty girl in the house who was so bound up with him that she would do what he told her to do. I don't think he ever expected Mr John would ask me to marry him, but perhaps he foresaw something worse than that. There wasn't a meaner, more cold-blooded villain in the world than Abraham Selim.

"On the day before the marriage I went to see Miss Janet.

"'Hilda,' she said, 'tomorrow you will marry my nephew. I need not tell you that I am not boasting of this marriage, and I advise you to keep your own counsel. Now as to the future, it is not reasonable to expect that Mr John, who is a gentleman, will want to introduce a girl like you to his friends. You are totally uneducated, and, if your manners are nice, your terrible Cockney accent is impossible.'

"It is strange how I remember every single word that Miss Janet said, though it is over thirty years ago. I felt very upset and crushed by her words, but I did pluck up enough spirit to ask her what she intended doing.

"'I am going to send you to a first-class establishment where neglected educations are unproved. You will be there until you are twenty-two, and by that time you will be fit to take your place by your husband's side without humiliating him or yourself.'

"In a way this fitted in with what Abraham had promised me. In fact, I thought that he had arranged it, but I can see now that, if he had a plan, this was Miss Janet's own.

"Not until I walked into St Paul's Church on the Thursday did I see Mr John. I don't know now what passed between him and his aunt. I do know that he was very pale and very stand-offish, though polite. There were only about four people in the church, and the ceremony was over quicker than I expected. I had learnt to write my own name, so I didn't disgrace him by putting my mark. Why he married me I don't know. I am prepared to take an oath on the Bible that there was nothing between us but that kissing of his, and then he wasn't quite himself. But marry me he did. Perhaps the Latin motto of the family and the bird's head had something to do with it. It seems silly to me even now. Before I came to the church Miss Janet gave me £50 and the address I was to go to. It was in Victoria Drive, Eastbourne. She also wrote out the times of the trains.

"I just said goodbye to Mr John and walked out of the church, leaving him and his friend—Miss Janet did not come—and I never saw him again.

"Abraham had arranged to meet and take me to dinner (or lunch, as it was; it was dinner to me in those days).

"Sure enough, there he was, waiting for me outside the King's Cross restaurant, and when we got inside I told him just what had occurred.

"'Let me have the certificate,' he said, and I gave him my new marriage lines. We did not talk very much more about the marriage, though I was a little nervous. I didn't want to go to Eastbourne, and, what was more, I never intended going. But I was dependent on Abraham. I knew he would have a plan for me. He had. But it wasn't as I had hoped and prayed—that we should go into the country somewhere (which he'd promised when I agreed lo marry Mr John) and begin our married life in reality.

"When we had nearly finished the meal he pulled out a big envelope from his pocket.

"'I've got you a good berth—first-class. If you keep your mouth shut nobody will know that you're a domestic servant. There's £500 in notes, and you will have two days to get yourself some clothes.'

"I was bewildered. I didn't know what he was talking about.

"'You're going to America,' he said. 'I have got you some letters of introduction from my friend, Mr Merry—something.' It may have been Merrivan. I think it was. I understood from him that Mr Merrivan was a client. 'They'll get you a job,' he said, 'and you have all that money.'

"'But I don't want to go, and I won't go,' I almost shouted at him. I knew that I spoke so loudly that the people in the restaurant turned round and looked at us.

"That made him mad. I've never seen a man who could look so like a devil as he did. It frightened me.

"'You'll either go or I'll call a policeman and give you in charge for having committed bigamy.'

"I just hadn't the strength to fight him. I left by a ship called the Lucania for New York. From New York I went to a place called Denver City, where one of my letters was addressed to. I was in a situation for a year. They do not call you a 'servant', but a 'help'. I was a 'help' for thirteen months, and then I had an offer to go as working housekeeper to Mr Bonsor, who was a widower with one child that died. When Mr Bonsor asked me to marry him I had to tell him the truth, and he said a marriage more or less made no difference to him. He had independent views about religion.

"I never saw Abraham again, but I know that he wrote to the place where I was working in Denver asking what had become of me. The people did not know. That was seven years after I arrived in the United States. I have not heard of Mr John, but I know that Miss Janet died a month after I left from pneumonia. I found this out by a notice Mr Bonsor saw in an English paper."

# Chapter 31

There was one person to whom the statement of Hilda Masters should be shown, thought Andy. For some time he had had a suspicion that Mr Boyd Salter could have thrown more illumination upon his friend Severn's life and folly than he cared to cast. He sent a wire to the master of Beverley Hall asking for an interview, and had found a note awaiting him on his return to the Green asking him to come up at once.

"I'll go up with you," said Stella. "You can leave me in the car outside."

Tilling, that anxious man, seemed a little more nervous than usual.

"You'll be careful with the squire, doctor, won't you? He hasn't been sleeping any too well, and the doctor told Mr Francis—that's our young master—that his nerves may go at any moment."

"Thank you, Tilling," said Andy. "I will be careful."

He was to find that Tilling had not exaggerated Mr Salter's condition. His face was grey and sunken, but he greeted the detective with a smile.

"You've come to tell me that you've found my burglar," he said good-humouredly. "You can save yourself the trouble. It was that jewel thief of yours!"

Andy was not prepared for this piece of information. "I am afraid it was," he said, "but I honestly believe that he came here without felonious intent. In fact he was trailing my burglar."

"And found him, eh?" said Salter slyly. "A mysterious game-keeper."

"How on earth did you find that out?"

Salter laughed, and as he laughed he winced. Andy saw, and was distressed. The man had heart trouble. "I won't attempt to mystify you," said Boyd Salter, enjoying his sensation. "Scottie—that's the rascal's name, eh?—disappeared the day after. Miss Nelson went away the same day. She went to a place called Castle Street and nursed somebody. Who but your disreputable friend?"

A light dawned on Andy.

"Downer, of course," he said, and the other nodded smilingly. "But the gamekeeper, how did you know about him?"

"Downer again, plus another rascal'—Martin is he called?" Andy was too big a man to withhold the admiration which the clever Mr Downer deserved.

"I hand it to Downer. He is certainly the best of the newsmen."

"He came down to see me," explained Salter, "and for his benefit I had all my gamekeepers paraded and questioned. There was one man who admitted that he was in the kitchen—we have cocoa for them when they are on night duty—and he thinks he must have gone out at about the time Scottie saw a man go out. That was as far as I got. Now what is your important news?"

"I have found Hilda Masters."

Mr Salter looked up.

"Hilda Masters? Who is she?"

"You remember, Mr Salter, that in a secret drawer in Merman's room was found a marriage certificate."

"I remember. It was reported in the newspaper. The marriage certificate of an old servant. And it was afterwards stolen from you by the ghost called Selim. Was that the name of the woman who was married? And you have found her, you say?"

Andy took a copy of the statement from his pocket and laid it on the desk before the Justice, and Mr Salter looked at it for a long time before he fixed a pair of folding horn-rimmed glasses on his nose and began to read. He read slowly, very slowly. It seemed to Andy that he assessed the value of every word. Once he turned back and read a page all over again. Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed in a silence punctuated only by the swish of a turned page. And Andy grew impatient, remembering the girl in the car outside.

"Ah!" said Mr Salter as he put the manuscript down, "the ghost of the valley is laid—the greatest of all those malignant shapes that haunt us, Dr Macleod."

Andy could not follow him readily, and the other saw he was puzzled and came to the rescue. "Selim," he said, "revealed in his naked hideousness—the seller of souls, the breaker of hearts, the gambler in lives. This is he." He tapped the manuscript, and Andy saw that his eyes were unnaturally bright. But of all the miracles most startling it seemed that his

face had filled out and the deeply scored lines in his face had vanished. He must have touched a secret bell, for Tilling came in.

"Bring me a bottle of green seal port. Tilling," he said, and when the servitor had gone out, "You have achieved a triumph—an even greater triumph than if you had laid your hand on the shoulder of Abraham Selim. We must celebrate your success, Doctor."

"I am afraid I cannot wait. The fact is. Miss Nelson is waiting outside in my car."

Salter jumped up, turned white, and sat down again.

"I'm sorry," he said breathlessly. "Really, it was unpardonable of me to leave her there and of you not to tell me. Please bring her in."

* * * * *

"And you nearly killed him," said Andy. "At least the news that you were sitting outside. I don't like the look of him, Stella."

Mr Salter had recovered before they returned and was watching Tilling as he poured the precious wine into the glasses. "Forgive me for not getting up," smiled Salter. "So you helped my burglar?"

"Did Andy tell you?" she asked in alarm.

"No, Andy didn't tell me. You will drink a glass of port, Miss Nelson? No? It was old wine when your father was a baby."

He raised his glass to her and drank.

"And Miss Masters, or Mrs Bonsor, what is going to happen to her?" he asked.

"I rather think that she will not wait in London. She has confessed to an indictable crime, but it is so old that I doubt we could move in the matter even if we would. From certain indications I should say that this much-married lady will make yet a fourth plunge into the troubled sea of matrimony."

Salter nodded.

"Poor soul!" he said softly. "Poor duped soul!"

Andy had not expected to find sympathy for Mrs Crafton-Bonsor in the magistrate. "She is not particularly poor," he said dryly. "Scottie, who is something of an expert, estimates her jewels as being worth a hundred thousand, and there are sundry properties in the States. What I wanted particularly to see you about was Severn. Have you any idea where he is? I cannot help feeling that Selim used the marriage for his own profit!"

"He did," said Salter. "Selim represented to Mr Severn that the woman was dead, and Severn married again, and, I believe, had children. Once he was safely married Selim held his bigamy and the illegitimacy of his children over his head, and extracted from him enormous sums of money. The contract you found was a fake. Selim never paid my friend a penny. He merely cancelled an old obligation—that to which the woman refers in her statement—and substituted one more onerous. And as the years went on his cupidity found new methods of extortion. You see, Doctor, I am being frank with you. I did know more about Severn's concerns than I have stated."

"I never doubted that," smiled Andy.

"And you, young lady—you also are nearing the end of the great chase. You have not come through this past month without losing something."

"And finding something too, Mr Salter," she said.

He looked at Andy, and from him to the girl. "That is true, I hope," he said quietly. "Your little ghost—was it laid?" She nodded. "And your—Andy's? I suppose he has adopted all our ghosts; taken them on to his own broad shoulders? May you soon conjure up and destroy the last!"

To the accompaniment of this good wish they left him.

Andy slept through the afternoon, and, as soon as it was dark, he began his vigil in the long, empty room. The night passed without any interruption to his quiet. Soon after daybreak, as he was looking through the front window across the dusky Green, he saw Stella come out from the house, carrying something in her hand, and drew back to cover. She made straight for the house, and, to his amazement, knocked. He opened the door for her.

"I've brought you over some coffee and sandwiches, Andrew," she said. "Poor dear, you must be very tired."

"How did you know I was staying here?"

"Oh, I guessed that. When you didn't come last night I was pretty certain you were on ghost duty."

"You queer girl! And I purposely did not tell you."

"And seeing me come into the house in the early morning, you suspected the worst?" She pinched his ear. "You heard nothing and saw nothing, I suppose?"

"Nothing," said Andy. She glanced along the gloomy passage and shook her head.

"I don't think I should like to be a detective," she said. "Andy, aren't you ever afraid?"

"Often," said Andy, "when I think of the kind of home I'm going to give you—"

"Let's talk about it," said Stella, and they sat down in the haunted room until the sun came in at the windows, and talked of houses and flats and the high cost of furnishing.

At eleven o'clock Andy, bearing no signs of his sleepless night, presented himself at the Great Metropolitan Hotel. There were yet one or two points that wanted clearing up. "Mrs Crafton-Bonsor has gone, sir," said the clerk.

"Gone?" said Andy in surprise. "When did she go?"

"Yesterday afternoon, sir. She and Professor Bellingham went together."

"Has she taken her baggage?"

"All of it, sir."

"Do you know where it has gone?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. She said she was going to the sea for a few days."

It was a set-back for Andy. He called at 73 Castle Street in the hope of finding Scottie. He found, instead, the embarrassed Mr Martin.

"No, Doctor, Scottie hasn't been here for three days."

"And he didn't give you any instructions about running this den of thieves?" asked Andy.

"No, sir," said Martin. There was a complacency about his tone that told Andy that he was lying.

No useful purpose could be served by cross-examining one whose respect for the truth was conspicuously minus at any time, and Andy returned to Beverley Green and to bed.

At nine o'clock he let himself into the Merrivan house. During the day Johnston had placed an armchair in the room. It was a comfortable armchair, and Andy found himself nodding.

"This won't do," he said to himself, and walking to the front window, opened it to let in the cool air.

Beverley Church struck one o'clock, and still there was no sign of the visitor. He had removed the bolt from the back window, being sure that that was the way the stranger had entered, when Johnston had seen him at the window.

Two o'clock and Andy's chin was on his breast, and his mind was filled with confused thoughts of Stella and Mrs Crafton-Bonsor.

And then he heard a sound, and was wide awake in an instant. Looking towards the back window, he saw a dark figure against the faint light. The electric current had been restored at his request during the day, and he moved stealthily to the switch. The man outside was gently raising the lower sash. Higher and higher it came, and then Andy heard the soft pad of feet striking the floor. Still he did not turn on the light, but waited, and then:

"Get up and face me, Abraham Selim, you dog!" The voice rang out thunderously in that empty room. "Get up!" it called again, and Andy turned on the light. Standing with his back to the open window was a man in a yellow dressing-gown, and in his extended hand, pointing straight at his invisible enemy, was a long-barrelled revolver.

Salter! Boyd Salter! Andy gave a gasp. Then it was Boyd Salter, that cool, languid man who had fenced with him so skilfully, so surely!

His eyes were wide open, fixed, vacant. He was asleep. Andrew had known that when he heard the slurred, harsh voice. "Take that, you damned villain!"

The figure hissed the word, and there was a click. And then he saw Salter's head incline towards the floor. He was looking down upon the spot where Merrivan had been found, then slowly he went on his knees and his groping palms touched the body that he saw. And all the time he was talking to himself; little sobbing sounds of hateful gratification escaped him.

He was reconstructing the crime—not for the first time. Night after night Salter had come down from his bed and had gone over and over every incident of the murder. It was queer to see him searching a desk that was not there, and unlocking a safe that had been removed, but Andrew watched him, fascinated, as he struck a match and set light, as he thought, to a heap of papers he had placed on the hearth. Then he stopped. It was at the spot where the letter had been found. "You won't send any more letters, Merrivan, damn you! No more letters put under doors. That letter was for me, wasn't it?" He turned to where he thought the body was lying. "For me?" His gaze suddenly shifted. He seemed to

be picking up something. "I must take the girl's scarf," he muttered. "Poor Stella! This fiend will not hurt you. I'll take it." He put his hand into his pocket as though he were placing something there. "If they find it they'll think that you were here when I shot him."

Andrew gasped. Now it was as clear as light to him. Abraham Selim and Merrivan were one and the same person, and the threatening letter which he had thought had been received by Merrivan had really been written by him. That was it! Merrivan was going out that night to leave the letter at the Hall; had written it, folded it, and had no time to address an envelope before doom appeared to him.

Salter was moving slowly round the room. A few seconds later and he had passed through the window. He closed it behind him, but Andrew was out in the garden in a few seconds, trailing the sleep-walker as with stealthy strides he passed into the orchard, and then:

"Stand out of my way, damn you!" It was Salter's voice, and again came the click of the pistol. So that was how Sweeny died? Sweeny was there. He had probably discovered the identity of Selim, and was watching the house that night. It was so simple now. Merrivan had blackmailed Salter. But who was Severn—Severn, the husband of Hilda Masters?

He followed the walker under the trees of the orchard and out through a gate in the hedge. Salter was on his own estate now, and moved with that curious, deliberate stride which is the sleep-walker's own. Still keeping him in sight, Andrew followed. The man kept to a path that led to Spring Covert, then turned off abruptly to the left, crossing the grassland that would lead him directly to Beverley Hall.

He had hardly taken a dozen paces when out of the grass cane a flash of flame, there was a deafening explosion, and Salter stumbled forward and fell. Andy was at his side in a second, but the figure was motionless.

He flashed his lamp and shouted for help, and a voice almost at once answered him. It proved to be the gamekeeper he had met before, Madding.

"What's wrong, sir?" said Madding when he had recognised Andy. "You must have tripped over one of those alarm guns. We have put several in the park to trap the poachers. My God!" he gasped. "That's Mr Salter!"

They turned the stricken man on his back; Andy pulled open the pyjamas and listened for a minute to Salter's breast.

"I am afraid he's dead," he said.

"Dead?" said the other, awestricken. "There was no shot in the gun."

"It woke him, and I think the shock must have killed him, and, on the whole, Madding, I think it as well that he died that way."

# Chapter 32

"The last ghost is laid." Andy came into the Nelsons' sitting-room and sank wearily into a chair.

"What is the last, dear?" Stella seated herself on an arm of the chair and laid her hand on his head.

"That's the last." Andy took a newspaper cutting from his pocket and gave it into her hands. "I found that in Salter's safe. Oh yes, the boy has taken it very well. They expected such an end. They knew that he had been sleep-walking by the mud they found on the legs of his pyjamas, and they had a guard outside his door. But the old Hall has half a dozen secret stairways, and he got away every time. What do you think of that?"

She read the cutting again. It was from The Times of 1889:

In accordance with the conditions of the late Mr Philip Boyd Salter's will, Mr John Severn, his nephew, who is his uncle's sole heir, will assume the name and style of John Boyd Salter. A statutory declaration to this effect appears in our legal advertisement columns of today's date.

"That is the story," said Andy. "Severn was Boyd Salter all the time; if I had had the sense to look up the will of his uncle I should have known a month ago. He died a happy man. For years he has lived under the shadow of his guilt, and with the knowledge that, if Merrivan spoke his son would have no title to the estate, which cannot be left to anybody but legal heirs. And when I brought him the statement of Hilda Masters—she married Scottie, by the way, the day before they left—a statement which proved the legality of his marriage with the mother of his son, do you remember how I told you he seemed to grow twenty years younger?

"It puzzled me when he said that the biggest ghost had been laid, but he spoke the truth. That was the greatest terror. To save his boy from disgrace he killed Merrivan or Selim. To save him he got into Wilmot's

house dressed as a gamekeeper and stole and burnt the marriage certificate."

"How did he know it was there?"

"Downer revealed it in that shocking article he wrote about us."

"What happens to Selim's fortune—it goes to Arthur Wilmot?"

Andy shook his head. "It goes to swell the wealth of Mrs Professor Bellingham," he said. "It is rather tragic, isn't it?"

She laughed and slipped her arm about his neck. "Andy, aren't I a ghost, too? You're not going away until you lay my unquiet spirit, are you?"

"You're a shameless woman," said Andy. "You always were." There was a happy little interregnum of silence.

"Scottie is clever," she said suddenly.

"Clever? Well, yes, I suppose he is. Why do you say that?"

"Look how quickly Scottie got—the marriage licence—"

A week later Mr Downer heard the news. He neither grieved nor did he rejoice. He was a man of business, and weddings and murders had one value. Getting the Megaphone on the wire, he was put through to the City editor.

"See Macleod's married that Nelson girl. I can give you a column of real good inside stuff about that engagement. Sure I can get a picture of her. She'd do anything for me. Two columns? All right!"

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