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## **THE BANK MANAGER**

THE NOVELS OF  
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

*The Bank Manager*  
*The Gallows of Chance*  
*The Ex-Detective*  
*Jeremiah and the Princess*  
*Murder at Monte Carlo*  
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*The Illustrious Prince*



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# THE BANK MANAGER

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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**T**HE CHARACTERS IN THIS BOOK ARE  
ENTIRELY IMAGINARY AND HAVE  
NO RELATION TO ANY LIVING PERSON





THREE men were already seated in the reserved first-class compartment attached each morning to the eight-twenty train from Sandywayes to Waterloo. The other two places—it was a lavatory carriage—were as yet unoccupied. Mr. James Huitt, the bank manager, who was responsible for this innovation of what with mild humour they called the “Club Car” and felt himself in a kind of way the master of ceremonies with regard to it, drew out his watch and studied it with a frown. He himself never varied the time of his arrival at the station by a single minute and he hated unpunctuality. In his person, his speech and his attire he was the very prototype of the man of precise habits. His gold-rimmed spectacles only partially concealed a pair of shrewd and calculating eyes. His correctly-shaped features lacked all expression. He was forty-four years old and he might easily have been mistaken for thirty-four or fifty-four. He had been for years sub-manager and was now manager of the Aldwych Branch of the great banking firm of Bartons. Nine people out of ten who were interested in their fellow creatures would have correctly diagnosed his profession. The watch at which he was gazing was regulated every Monday morning, and if there was one person in the City of London who knew the correct hour it was Mr. James Huitt.

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"This time," he remarked portentously, "I fear that our friend Martin has run it a little too fine."

A robust, cheerful-looking little man whose name was Cresset—Andrew Cresset of the firm of Cresset & Hollis, corset manufacturers with offices situated in London Wall—who had only recently been promoted to a seat in this local Holy of Holies, also drew out his watch.

"Seems like it," he agreed. "We shall be off in half a minute."

Mr. Timothy Sarson, a wealthy wine merchant, a man of fine physique and bearing, lowered his newspaper. He was dressed in the old-fashioned style of the prosperous City merchant. His hat was large and of unusual shape. He wore grey side whiskers which went well enough with his healthy, almost rubicund complexion. He carried a fob and his white spats were obviously renewed every day.

"It will be the first time," he remarked in a rich and throaty voice, "that anyone of us has actually missed the train."

There was a shout and the loud honking of an automobile horn in the country lane which passed by the entrance to the station. The guard dropped the flag which he had half raised and removed the whistle from his lips. Thirty seconds later an elderly gentleman in a state of profuse perspiration was hauled into the compartment.

"Don't do you no good, Mr. Martin, to have to run for it like that," the guard warned his passenger pleasantly, as he slammed the door and concluded his signal to the engine driver.

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The train moved off. There was a little chorus of incipient chaff from the three already installed occupants of the compartment. Then a sudden silence. The bank manager broke off in the midst of a gentle admonitory remark. Mr. Timothy Sarson paused in the act of lighting a cigar, and let the match go out in his fingers. Mr. Cresset left off in the middle of a sentence and forgot to close his mouth. The three men were all gazing at the new arrival. Roland Martin was a middle-aged man in poorish condition owing to the manner of his life, but it certainly seemed as though it must have been more than a mere fifty yards sprint which was responsible for his quickly-drawn breathing, his unwholesome colour and the sweat which was streaming from his forehead. Here, without a doubt, was the bearer of tragic news. As might have been expected James Huitt was the first to ask a definite question.

“Has anything happened, Mr. Martin?” he inquired. “You have had trouble with your Crossley, perhaps? I had an idea that she was missing fire when you were kind enough to give me a lift yesterday.”

There was no coherent reply. Then the late arrival, whose voice was usually hoarse and who suffered from shortness of breath, gasped out portions of a mutilated sentence.

“No one knows then—you have not heard——”

“Heard what?” Mr. Cresset demanded.

“About—Sam Jesson.”

“What about him?” they all demanded more or less at the same time.

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Martin, notwithstanding a gurgling in his throat, got the words out somehow.

“Dead! Shot! Found in—garage this morning—cold—with a bullet through his chest—and a letter addressed to his wife by his side.”

There followed a grim and horrified silence. The social circle of Sandywayes, which included the village on the north side of the railway, the group of houses called the Oasis and the Wilderness on the south side, was a small one, and Sam Jesson was one of its prominent members. He was one of themselves—their partner at golf, at bridge, or tennis—the companion of their mild festivities. The three men seemed afflicted with a sort of dumbness of thought as well as of speech. From the dead man's very nearness to them it seemed impossible to believe in such an appalling catastrophe. The carriage in which they were seated, and which he had been largely instrumental in securing, seemed full of the echoes of his conversation. Only last night he had been issuing challenges for a four-ball match at golf. Timothy Sarson was the first to find words. He was dizzily incredulous.

“Why, Sam dined with us last night. We were not looking for him this morning because he said that he wanted a couple of hours' golf practice and wouldn't come up to town till the afternoon train. Never saw him more cheerful in my life. Martin, for God's sake, pull yourself together, man! There must be some mistake. Tell us the truth.”

Roland Martin wiped his forehead.

“It's not the sort of story one invents,” he groaned.

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“How did you find out about it?” James Huitt inquired.

“It was Edwards, my own chauffeur, who found him not half an hour ago. Went in to borrow a tin of petrol and there he was lying stiff.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Barely twenty minutes. I don’t suppose I ought to have come away, but the sergeant was there and the doctor and half the village was streaming down. I couldn’t do any good, and I don’t mind admitting that it gave me such a turn that I had one look at him and ran away!”

There was a brief awe-stricken pause.

“Sam Jesson,” the wine merchant muttered. “The last man in the world I should have thought capable of a thing like that.”

“As full of life and good spirits as anyone I ever knew,” Mr. Cresset sighed.

“But what on earth could make him commit such a ghastly offence?” Timothy Sarson demanded. “He was all right financially, wasn’t he, Huitt?”

The bank manager frowned slightly.

“Samuel Jesson,” he said, “is—or I suppose I must say was—a client of mine. Even if this terrible thing has really happened I am not in a position to discuss his affairs.”

Sarson indulged in a brief but poignant gesture. He had been known to call Mr. Huitt an old maid.

“Well, I’ll tell you all this,” he declared stubbornly. “You can say what you like—no one is going to make me believe that Sam Jesson committed suicide. He was not the type. Besides, why should he? What

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motive could he have had? He enjoyed life as well as any of us, and financially—well, he was never a gas bag, but I have heard him talk of some of his investments, and I would have changed places with him any day!”

James Huitt leaned a little forward in his place. Of the four men he was perhaps the least disturbed, but even he had gone pale and there was a glimmer of that half-awed look which comes with the fear of incomprehensible things, gleaming in his eyes behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

“No explanation has as yet been offered, I suppose, Martin, by any member of the family?”

“There was only his wife at home,” Martin reminded them all. “The sergeant has the letter. I don’t know whether he has given it to her yet—he seemed too scared to know what to do.”

Andrew Cresset spoke up suddenly like a man on the verge of hysterics.

“I hope to God it hasn’t anything to do with money,” he exclaimed fervently.

“Not likely,” Sarson scoffed. “Why, any one of us would have done our bit to help Sam Jesson round a stiff corner if he needed it.”

“I am afraid,” James Huitt pronounced, “that nowadays most of the troubles with which our friends are afflicted are concerned more or less with finance. However, the letter he left behind for his wife will probably tell us everything. Whatever his motive may have been it’s a terrible affair.”

Silence fell upon the little company. Timothy Sarson leaned back in his place and groaned heavily.

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“You have a chance to give it to us from the horse’s mouth, Huitt,” he pointed out. “No one’s going to be the worse off either. I always understood he kept a good balance——”

“If that,” Mr. Huitt interrupted deliberately, “is a prelude to questions dealing with the financial position of my client, I can only beg you to have the good taste not to pursue the subject. My lips are sealed.”

Just as a sudden wave of joy or good news brings men of kindred habits and manner of life together and opens their hearts, so tragedy with its icy grip upon the nerves sometimes produces the reverse effect. During the remainder of the journey to Waterloo the four men in the reserved carriage from Sandyways scarcely opened their lips. No one even tried to read his newspaper. They were simply afflicted by an uneasy and embarrassing indisposition for speech. The bond between them was temporarily broken. It was as though each suspected the other of some horrible crime. When they glided into the terminus, instead of the usual volley of farewell, admonitions towards good behaviour during the long day, cheerful prognostications concerning the journey home, they went their several ways in silence.



TOWARDS three o'clock in the afternoon of that same day, Mr. James Huitt, who sat in solitary splendour in a stiffly upholstered but expensively furnished private room at the back of his bank in Aldwych, received a visitor. He looked at the plain visiting card brought in by one of his clerks with a faint sense of recognition.

"Mr. Tyssen," he said reflectively. "I wonder if that is not the name of Mrs. Foulds' new lodger. Not a client, is he, Merton?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did he give you any idea of his business?"

"None at all, sir, except that he begged for a word or two alone with you on a private matter."

The bank manager shrugged his shoulders resignedly. The fact remained, however, that after eight years' experience one of the pleasures of his life was still receiving visitors. He was proud of his position of manager of an important branch of a world-famed bank. He liked impressing people and, although there were some who refused to be impressed, there were many who accepted him at his own valuation. He decided to see the caller.

"Show him in," he directed.

A young man of wholesome but somewhat ordinary appearance and indifferently dressed was in due course

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shown in. His complexion was freckled and he was—in the language of schoolboys—pug-nosed. His ears were inclined to stand out and his hair, which was of no definite colour, was ill brushed. He was over six feet in height but loosely built. There was nothing about him calculated to impress. Mr. Huitt, however, as was his custom with visitors, was stonily civil.

“Mr. Tyssen,” he said, repeating the name. “You have come to stay in the neighbourhood of Sandyways, I believe?”

“That’s right, sir,” the young man acknowledged eagerly. “I am a writer by profession, and I have been looking for a quiet spot like Sandyways for some time. I am at work on a novel.”

“Indeed.”

“Before I took to fiction,” Tyssen continued, “I was on the staff of the *Daily Reporter*. I still send them occasional contributions. In fact, it is on their business that I have come to see you this morning.”

The bank manager remained silent. He had no special affection for journalists.

“I took the liberty of sending in my private card,” the young man proceeded, “because my connection with the paper is no longer official. I am much obliged to you for seeing me, sir.”

Mr. Huitt did not at once connect the drama of the morning with the nervous youth who sat on one of the hard leather chairs twirling his hat in his hand. He nodded in somewhat puzzled fashion.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

“In the first place,” was the prompt reply, “I want

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you to be so good as to tell me, sir, whether this is the handwriting of a client of yours ? ”

Mr. Huitt adjusted his glasses, glanced at the envelope which the other had just passed across the table—casually enough at first and then more steadily. Something of the suaveness of his manner seemed to have passed. His small face had become set in more rigid lines. If one of his regular customers had been present at that moment he would not have ventured to allude to the matter of an overdraft.

“ Yes,” the bank manager acknowledged. “ I should say that there is no doubt that this is the handwriting of Mr. Samuel Jesson. How did it come into your possession ? ”

The young man ignored the question.

“ You have heard what has happened to him, I suppose ? ”

“ I heard the news in the railway carriage coming up to town,” Huitt admitted. “ He was found dead in a garage, I understand. Have you any particulars ? ”

“ I can tell you all about it, sir,” Tyssen declared. “ Mr. Jesson was found shot through the heart in the garage this morning when Mr. Martin’s chauffeur went in to borrow a tin of petrol. The police think that he must have been there the greater part of the night.”

“ The local police ? ”

“ The sergeant from the police station. A revolver with one barrel discharged was found by his side—a revolver which everyone seems to know that he possessed and which was, in fact, kept in the garage. There was also a letter to his wife.”

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“That looks bad,” Mr. Huitt sighed.

“I can tell you what was in the letter,” the caller continued eagerly. “There were only about a couple of sentences. It simply said that owing to impending financial trouble he had decided to take his own life. He asks her forgiveness and gives a few particulars as to his property.”

“There is no doubt then, about his having committed suicide?” the bank manager asked with his eyes fixed on his visitor.

“Not the slightest,” was the confident reply. “Nevertheless, Mr. Huitt, I gather that there is considerable feeling in the City upon the subject.”

“What sort of feeling?”

“Well, my late sub-editor, for instance, was a great friend of Mr. Jesson’s, and he does not for a moment believe that he was in any financial straits. We newspaper men and fiction writers, you know, sir, are always on the look-out for a story, and I can’t help wondering whether there isn’t a mystery behind this affair.”

“What sort of mystery?” Mr. Huitt inquired in his even, precise tone.

Tyssen scratched his chin. His rather uneasy eyes seemed disturbed by the steely glimmer from behind the bank manager’s spectacles.

“Whether, for instance, he was being blackmailed or anything of that sort.”

Mr. Huitt’s tone became a trifle harder.

“The object of your visit to me, Mr. Tyssen,” he said, “remains obscure.”

The young man coughed.

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“ You, sir,” he went on, “ as his banker are without a doubt able to solve the question as to whether Mr. Jesson was or was not in financial difficulties.”

“ Your apprehension is quite correct,” Mr. Huitt admitted. “ I am in a position to solve that question. And then ? ”

The young man was becoming more and more embarrassed. He took his courage into both hands, however.

“ Well, the long and the short of it is, sir,” he brought out, “ I thought you might give me a hint as to how things stood with your client. Supposing, for instance, you were in a position to tell me that his financial losses were imaginary and that he was a wealthy man, then I have the beginnings of a story for the paper and a very good background for my own novel.”

Mr. James Huitt glanced again at the card which lay upon the table.

“ Mr. Tyssen,” he said deliberately, “ I have always understood that gentlemen of your profession allowed themselves considerable latitude, but I take the liberty of telling you, sir, that I think your question addressed to me concerning the affairs of my late client is both impertinent and improper. I beg you will convey that expression of my opinion to your sub-editor.”

“ I am very sorry, sir,” the young man apologised ruefully. “ Very sorry, indeed. I didn’t mean to give any offence. We have to be up to all sorts of queer tricks in the newspaper job, you know.”

“ So it appears.”

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Tyssen rubbed his head.

"It didn't seem to me," he went on, "that there was very much harm in asking you something which the whole world will know in a day or so."

"I will take it for granted," Mr. Huitt said, "that the exigencies of your profession are responsible for your untimely visit. I will tell you as much as this, therefore. At the coroner's inquest to-morrow afternoon I shall answer publicly any questions asked me as to Mr. Jesson's financial position. Until then not a word concerning his affairs will pass my lips except to his relatives. Permit me to wish you good afternoon."

Tyssen recovered his hat which had slipped from his fingers and rose clumsily to his feet.

"Sorry if I have annoyed you, sir," he apologised once more. "I suppose there is some reason for keeping things so dark. You couldn't even give me a hint, could you?"

Mr. Huitt, who had already rung the bell, looked up at his clerk's entrance.

"Show this gentleman out, Merton," he directed.

For some minutes after the departure of his disappointed visitor the bank manager sat motionless in his chair, his eyes fixed upon the opposite wall. He was not a man given to idle thought and one could have imagined that by means of some secret gift he was looking down the long aisle of the busy clerks working on the other side, watching beyond them, perhaps, the crowd who came and went through the

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heavy swing doors. Presently, without change of expression, his fingers strayed towards the bell which he firmly pressed. Merton made prompt appearance.

"Bring me a copy," his chief instructed, "of Mr. Samuel Jesson's account with us. I shall require it absolutely up to date for the inquest to-morrow."

"Certainly, sir."

The young man hurried out. He was gone about ten minutes. When he returned, Huitt, who was certainly not given to wasting his time, was still seated in precisely the same attitude, his eyes fixed upon exactly the same spot. His clerk laid the figures before him.

"You will remember, sir," the former ventured, "that only yesterday afternoon Mr. Jesson rang up and inquired the exact state of his balance. We gave him the correct figures, but he only laughed at us. He was to have come in this morning."

"I remember perfectly," Mr. Huitt acknowledged. "In fact, I had an appointment with Mr. Jesson at eleven o'clock. A very sad affair, Merton."

"Terrible, sir."

"To lose a client in such a fashion is a great shock."

"A bit mysterious, too, sir," the young man ventured.

Mr. Huitt sighed.

"To us it may seem so, Merton," his chief assented. "Somehow or other, though, I always felt that there was something sinister about these large cash withdrawals."

"You are thinking of blackmail, sir?"

The bank manager's grave expression might have

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been taken for assent. He made no reply, however. It was not a matter for discussion with a subordinate.

At five minutes before the time for the departure of the return train that evening Mr. James Huitt, as was his almost invariable custom, took his place in the right-hand corner seat of the "Club Car" for Sandways. Mr. Timothy Sarson was already installed with a handful of evening papers. Mr. Cresset arrived a few minutes afterwards and Roland Martin, not content with his narrow escape of the morning, only entered the carriage when the train was on the point of leaving. Greetings between the four men were quite perfunctory although the strain of the morning had disappeared. They expected to see one another, and secretly, although their feelings of friendship might not have been deep, they would have been disappointed to have found anyone missing. It would have been a link broken in the chain of their daily life.

"You have heard about the inquest to-morrow, Mr. Huitt?" Timothy Sarson asked.

"I received a subpoena at the bank," was the quiet reply. "It is to be held, I gather, at the village hall at three o'clock."

"There's a great deal of curiosity in the City," Mr. Cresset remarked, "with regard to poor Sam Jesson's disclosure of financial losses."

"The City is always curious," the bank manager observed.

"I saw his brokers this morning," Cresset continued. "Poor old Burrows—he's the head of the



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firm, almost past it now, though—he couldn't make head or tail of it. Said he should have put Jesson down for a wealthy man. Certainly he has never made any losses on what he bought from them."

"Mr. Burrows would have been well advised to have refrained from commenting upon the matter until after the inquest," Mr. Huitt said stiffly.

"Can't see that it matters a bit myself between friends, you know," the other remonstrated. "When a man takes his life and admits that he has done it because he has lost money he is generally telling the truth."

"Shall you come up to town to-morrow morning, Huitt?" Roland Martin asked.

"I shall come up at the usual hour," the bank manager confided. "I have arranged with my deputy to take my place from one o'clock."

"I'll motor you up to the hall if you like," Martin suggested. "It's rather a long pull to the top of the village."

"That would be exceedingly kind of you," was the courteous acknowledgment.

"About a quarter to three at the tennis courts. The whole affair will be quite formal except for your evidence."

"So I understand," Huitt acquiesced, seeking refuge in his evening newspaper.

AT Sandywayes, as usual, the four occupants of the "Club Car" all went their separate ways. The village itself stretched irregularly up a winding hill on the left-hand side of the railway—a village in which there were still some charming old Sussex houses and one very beautiful one, Sandywayes Court, a country seat of the Earl of Milhaven, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of the county. The chief charm of the place, however, lay in the little stretch of country called the Oasis on the right-hand side. Here was an old-world common with a duck-pond at one end, a cricket ground in the middle, and lawn tennis courts at the farther extremity, the whole surrounded by a low white rail and bordered on the right-hand side by a swiftly-running stream.

Huitt, opening the gate almost opposite the station yard, crossed the sweet-smelling meadow by an almost indistinguishable footpath, unlocked a gate marked "Private" with a key attached to his chain, and passed between two privet hedges to the open space in which several tennis courts had been laid out. From the veranda of a small pavilion he returned courteously the greetings of the players, ordered a cup of tea from the woman attendant and sat down to watch. It was a very peaceful scene. Sybil Cresset and Pauline Sarson were playing against the latter's brother

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Anthony, a younger and even better-looking edition of his father, and the young man Tyssen who had been a visitor at the bank in Aldwych that afternoon. On the farther of the two courts several other people, including the local doctor—Anderson by name—and the curate of the village, Mr. Greatley, were engaged in making up a set. The latter, excusing himself for a few moments, came across and greeted the new arrival.

“I hope you think, Mr. Huitt, that we are doing right in playing this evening,” he remarked. “The Vicar had an idea that we ought, perhaps, to close the courts for the day. I ventured to suggest, however, that we do so only on the day of the funeral. Mr. Jesson was never a great enthusiast. In fact, he seldom came near the place unless his daughter happened to be staying with them.”

“I think you decided quite rightly, Mr. Greatley,” the bank manager, who was president of the club, pronounced. “If we close during the hours of the interment I think that is all that is necessary.”

“A very shocking affair,” the curate went on lugubriously. “Quite inexplicable. I saw Mrs. Jesson for a few minutes, but she was not in a fit condition to talk to anyone. There is a great deal of gossip going on in the village.”

“Of what nature?” Huitt inquired.

The curate fingered his racquet as though he had detected a weak string.

“I have only heard scraps of it,” he confided. “Everyone is waiting until after the inquest to-morrow.

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There is a sort of an idea, however, that there must have been some other cause besides the fear of poverty to induce the poor fellow to take his life. Excuse me, sir, I see that I am wanted."

He hurried off, and Mr. Huitt leaned back in his chair. From where he sat in the corner of the raised veranda the view was a very pleasant one. Beyond the tennis courts the common stretched away past the cricket ground to some pine woods which appeared to afford a shelter for several pleasantly built bungalows almost hidden from sight amongst the trees. On the right-hand side of the common was his own exceedingly pretty cottage covered with bougainvillea and wistaria. On the left-hand were most of the houses which made up the little settlement called the Oasis. There was the village police station, a creeper-covered building of ancient red brick, the post office, almost a twin building, and the rather more pretentious houses of Mr. Roland Martin, Mr. Timothy Sarson, Mr. Cresset, and the victim of last night's tragedy—Mr. Samuel Jesson. All these residences were a trifle more modern, but the architect had been kind to a very pleasant location and the creeping vines and luxuriantly filled gardens had been kinder still. A dreamy little corner of the world it seemed to Mr. Huitt as he sat there listening to the thump of the balls against the racquets and the laughing voices of the players.

"A sad thing about poor Mr. Jesson, sir," the old lady who had made him his tea remarked as she came out with the tray. "I seen him pass only yesterday morning. Cheerful as possible he seemed."

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“A very sad affair, Mrs. Harris,” the president of the lawn tennis club agreed.

“That there young gentleman as is come and is staying over yonder with Mrs. Foulds, he did seem struck all of a heap when he was told,” Mrs. Harris continued. “The young gentleman that’s playing tennis there now: a nicely-spoken person, but noseey.”

Mr. Huitt looked speculatively across at Tyssen—the young man in question. He appeared to no more advantage here in the country than in the City. He was powerfully built enough, but his flannels were ill-fitting and his tennis was nothing wonderful.

“He was interested, was he?” the bank manager remarked. “I wonder why. He has scarcely had time to get to know any of us yet. Let me see—his name is Tyssen, isn’t it?”

“Tyssen it is, sir. They do say that he is one of those that writes books and bits of things in magazines.”

“Holiday-making?”

“Maybe, sir. He is not one of those who talk much about themselves. He’s got secret ways with him, too, that I’m not altogether fond of.”

“You are a woman of observation, Mrs. Harris,” her companion remarked.

“I notice things more than most,” was the self-satisfied assent. “What I have noticed about that young man is that he seems more interested in everyone else’s business than in his own. I am a poor sleeper myself and I have seen him more than once wandering around at three or four o’clock in the morning.”

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There was a brief silence. A very close observer, however, might have remarked that so far as regarded Mr. Huitt it was not altogether a silence of indifference.

“Wandering around where?” he asked quietly.

“Well, all the houses, so to speak. Last night I saw him cross the common and walk almost to your gate. A dark night it was, too.”

“So I remember. I am wondering how you saw him.”

Mrs. Harris smiled.

“It was one of those nights with sheet lightning opening the skies pretty well all the time, sir,” she told him. “I seen him on the common. I saw him pass the cows and the next flash that came I saw him stepping over the railing just opposite your gate.”

“Well, I think this is very observant of you, Mrs. Harris,” her patron said pleasantly. “It is always useful to have someone who watches what is going on even in a quiet neighbourhood like this. However, I dare say this young man means no harm. Have you seen him wandering about the Wilderness at all?”

“I can’t say I’ve noticed him in that direction particularly,” Mrs. Harris admitted. “Not at night-time anyway. But what I say is—why not stay in his bed like a Christian at nights instead of wandering all over the place. What does he want to do it for? That’s what I ask myself.”

“Writers are supposed to have queer habits, you know, Mrs. Harris,” the bank manager reminded her, with a reassuring smile. “There’s not much mischief he can get into around here.”

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“In a way of speaking that’s true, sir,” the woman agreed, “but when things happen like that poor gentleman killing himself last night—well, then I don’t like things about that we don’t rightly understand. What’s he doing here? That’s what I ask myself. Tennis? Why, Mr. Anthony could give him three-quarters of the game and beat him left-handed. He’s not a great one for talking to the young ladies either.”

“It appears to me,” her companion warned her, lowering his tone, “that the young man is coming over this way.”

Mrs. Harris took the hint and disappeared just as Mr. Greatley, the curate, arrived with the person whom they had been discussing.

“Mr. President,” the former said, “this is Mr. Tyssen, who is spending a week or two down here. He would like to join the club as a monthly member. He met you this afternoon, it appears, but only on business.”

Mr. Huitt rose to his feet and held out his hand. The young man did the same. His fingers were very bony. So were Mr. Huitt’s. His apparently weak eyes had a hard spot in the middle. So had Mr. Huitt’s, although his glasses partially concealed it. A very close observer might have wondered whether there was not some unexpressed significance in this introduction.

“We shall be very pleased to have Mr. Tyssen as a temporary member,” the president declared. “Our standard of play is not particularly high, Mr. Tyssen. I dare say you have already discovered that.”

“Quite good enough for me,” was the modest

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reply. "I am only a rabbit myself, but I like the exercise."

"I hope that you like the neighbourhood," Huitt inquired. "I wonder how you chanced to find us out. It's very seldom that we have strangers here."

"Just accident," the young man confided. "Sheer accident. I am a curious sort of person about new places. I take a railway ticket to some place I have never heard of before and just wander round."

"You are lodging with Mrs. Foulds, I understand, at the post office?"

"For the present. I rather had my eye on one of those bungalows in the wood there."

Mr. Huitt shook his head.

"I am afraid that you would have no chance in that direction," he said. "The water supply is bad and Lord Milhaven, who owns most of the land round here, has decided not to build any more."

"There's one that doesn't seem to be occupied," Tyssen persisted.

"That one is being kept for the servants of the lady who is already in residence," Mr. Huitt explained.

"The foreign lady?"

"I am not aware of the lady's nationality," the bank manager said, resuming his seat as a hint that the conversation might be considered over.

"I can tell you what it is if you want to know," the young man observed.

"Thank you," was the stiff reply. "I am not interested."

The young man, with no further excuse to linger,



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passed on. The Reverend Greatley, who was an observant person, found himself a trifle puzzled. He could almost have fancied that in this very ordinary meeting of a village visitor with a local magnate some unanalysable disturbance had made itself felt.

TYSSEN returned from the dressing-rooms of the lawn tennis pavilion just after Mr. Huitt had taken a dignified leave of the little company. The young man glanced at the disappearing figure of the bank manager with an air of disappointment. He paused in his almost ceaseless task of rolling dark-coloured, unappetising looking tobacco into ill-shaped cigarettes, and for a moment seemed to follow him. Anthony Sarson, who was seated with Sybil Cresset and his sister, and who was really a very good-natured young man, beckoned him over.

“Our president is a little huffy to-night, Tyssen,” he said, “I should leave him alone. He hates to be questioned anyway. You have not met my sister formally, I think? Pauline, this is Mr. Tyssen who is spending his summer vacation down here.”

The Sarsons were certainly a very good-looking family. Pauline, with the flawless complexion and clear brown eyes of her father and brother, possessed on her own account the attractions of deep yellow hair and a slim but most desirable figure. She was of smaller type than her male relatives, with greater subtlety of feature and expression.

“I have heard about Mr. Tyssen,” she said, as she shook hands. “How did you come to find us out in this backwater?”

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"I wanted a perfectly quiet place," Tyssen explained.

"You have certainly succeeded in finding it," Pauline assured him. "Is Mr. Huitt an old friend of yours?"

"I saw him for the first time to speak to this afternoon," the young man confided. "I called at his bank."

Anthony Sarson grinned.

"I've been there once or twice," he told them. "Seems scarcely human when he's in that magnificent inquisitorial chamber of his. He's not a bad old sort though."

"I find him," Tyssen observed, "a little reserved."

"He is certainly not what you would call expansive," Pauline remarked. "He has very strict ideas about everything—the etiquette of tennis, the etiquette of conversation, the etiquette of life. I have never danced with him, but I could imagine that he would have a diagram on the dancing floor with the exact positions marked where he meant to place his feet."

"Bank managers," Anthony said, "have to be precise in their habits. Are you going to play again, Tyssen?"

"I should be glad to if there's room for me anywhere," the young man replied, with his eyes fixed upon Pauline. "I am rather a rabbit unfortunately."

"You had better play with Pauline," Anthony suggested, "against Sybil and me."

"If your sister will be kind enough to take me," Tyssen accepted eagerly.

"I shall like to," the young woman remarked,

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rising to her feet. "Most of the men I play with—Mr. Greatley for one, and Anthony for another—poach abominably. If you really are out of practice, Mr. Tyssen, perhaps I shall get my share of the play."

"I am not so much out of practice," Tyssen confided, as they strolled off towards the courts, "as a very indifferent player. I played cricket as a boy. Since then—well, I've not had much time."

"You write things, don't you?" she asked.

"I try," he admitted. "I started as a journalist. I want to write a novel. Just now I am studying life and character so far as I can."

"You have come to a queer place for that," she laughed.

"I suppose so," he admitted doubtfully. "Yet there are plenty of adages about the quiet places, aren't there? Unexpected things happen sometimes. For instance, the tragedy of last night!"

She sighed.

"Too dreadful. . . . Shall I serve?"

"If you please."

The set turned out to be a very interesting one. Tyssen exerted himself more than on any previous occasion although it was obvious that he had no great knowledge of the game. The four drank lemonade in the porch afterwards. Pauline was smiling quietly to herself as she listened to her partner's rather clumsy compliments on her prowess.

"Shall I tell you one thing I have noticed about you, Mr. Tyssen?" she said.

"If you please," he begged.

"You play, at any rate, with more energy when our

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president is not here. Is he by any chance a *bête noire* of yours ? ”

Tyssen frowned slightly. He was already rolling one of his innumerable cigarettes, and the process seemed to demand more concentration than usual.

“ No,” he replied. “ I don’t know that I have any feelings concerning Mr. Huitt—as a man. As a type he interests me rather.”

“ A bijou Robot type I would call him,” Pauline remarked, smiling. “ I cannot imagine anyone ever making him act upon impulse, saying or doing an incorrect thing. I should love to hear him swear just once.”

“ You never will,” Anthony assured her. “ He is encased in the invisible armour of an invincible propriety.”

“ He ought to have married,” Sybil Cresset observed. “ Marriage might have made a human being of him.”

“ Considering Mr. Huitt for the first time as a human being,” Anthony meditated, “ one cannot help wondering what effect he would have had upon any ordinary woman who became his wife and what his children would have been like ! ”

“ There is one position in life,” Tyssen said, “ which I imagine he fills to perfection, and that is the position of a bank manager.”

“ That’s what the dad says,” Anthony remarked. “ He has him over to dinner sometimes and dad isn’t himself until the evening’s over. Then he lights a pipe, has a whisky and soda, and looks around at the rest of us. ‘ Anyway,’ he declares apologetically, ‘ he

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may not be the man for a sociable evening but he's the man to leave your money with.' ”

“ That,” Tyssen admitted, “ is a great deal. It is something to be able to trust your financial advisers.”

“ How poor old Jesson must have worried him,” Anthony went on. “ So unaccountable, you know, getting rid of all those large sums of money. I can almost hear his prim, grave questions.”

“ I'm sure he would hate to part with it,” Pauline observed. “ By-the-by, Mr. Tyssen, there's something for your book. A man who has to part with large sums of money like that suddenly and without explanation and then commits suicide ! ”

Tyssen pulled his hat a little lower over his forehead. Although the evening was passing the sun was still hot.

“ I suppose there might be a mystery in it,” he meditated. “ Probably a very sordid one. I wonder whether Mr. Huitt has any idea about it really.”

“ I wonder,” Pauline echoed.

“ You called him just now a bijou Robot man,” Tyssen remarked. “ Queer, but that's exactly how he appeared to me when I was shown into his sanctum.”

“ Are you going to bank with him ? ” Anthony asked carelessly.

“ I may,” the young man replied. “ I am not quite sure whether he may not consider my affairs too small, however. Seven o'clock,” he went on, listening to the chime of a distant church clock. “ I must go. Mrs. Foulds has all the virtues but she has also the vice of punctuality.”

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Tyssen took his leave, a little ungainly in his movements and his farewell speech. They watched him on his way towards the gate.

"Seems a queer sort of fellow," Anthony Sarson observed. "I can't exactly place him."

"Eton and Oxford wouldn't, I suppose," his sister said, smiling.

"He seems rather dreadful at first, I thought," Sybil Cresset remarked. "Afterwards one wonders."

"One wonders," Pauline said, "because he changes so much. I'll tell you a discovery I've made concerning that young man. I'm rather interested in him. After all it may be I who will write the novel!"

Anthony Sarson filled his pipe with leisurely fingers.

"Out with it, Pauline," he begged.

"Mr. Tyssen," she said deliberately, "is not the same person when Mr. Huitt is about. To me it seems just as though he were acting a part at times. When he was alone with us he was quite natural and though, of course, he's shy and in a way uncouth, there is much more of the man about him. Directly Mr. Huitt is within speaking distance he is a changed being."

"I dare say you are right," Anthony observed indifferently. "I think it is only decent to be civil to a stranger, but the young man doesn't appeal to me very much. Has anyone seen 'the beautiful lady' to-day?"

Sybil indulged in a little grimace.

"If you are going to rave about your divinity again," she pronounced with the faintest touch of

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acerbity in her tone, "I may as well go home. No, I have not seen her."

"I saw a glimmer of white in the distance," Pauline confided. "If you want something to dream about, Tony, I believe she is wearing white to-day!"

"She would look marvellous in anything," the young man declared. "We ought to have talked to Tyssen about her. If he's really idiot enough to think he can write a novel, there is the perfect heroine."

Sybil rose to her feet with a pout.

"After the attentions you have paid me during the last few weeks, Anthony——" she began.

He patted her hand.

"Serious attentions, my dear Sybil, I assure you," he said. "Madame is a creature of one's dreams. One cannot imagine her coming to life. You, on the other hand, are the girl I am going to offer to take to the dance at Godalming to-morrow night."

"You are forgiven," Sybil declared. "Are you sure that Pauline doesn't want to go?"

Pauline shook her head.

"I have not the least inclination," she said. "Anthony dances far too well for me to find it any pleasure."

"First time I've heard it put like that," the young man murmured.

"A sister's attitude," Pauline pronounced, "is always different. To me you represent monotony. You play tennis far too well, I cannot bear to see you play cricket—it seems such hard luck upon the poor fellows who have to bowl to you or at whom you bowl—and your dancing is just the same, absolutely perfect."



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Every step anticipated. Never a mistake in that guiding finger. One might worship it in someone else. In a brother it is monotonous."

Sybil smiled as they all rose to their feet. She was a very pretty girl and Anthony was her idea of perfection.

"I really think," she declared, as they moved off together, "that Mr. Tyssen is the type of man Pauline is looking for!"

THE proceedings at the inquest on the following afternoon moved for the first half-hour or so along the well recognised lines. The body of Samuel Jesson was duly identified, the doctor's evidence indicating suicide was reluctantly given and the deceased's letter to his wife, found lying on the floor of the garage by the side of his limp fingers, was duly read in court. Its contents were brief but pitiful.

*My dear Hester [the dead man had written],*

*I pray your forgiveness for what I am about to do. I have made a great mistake with regard to my money affairs and I must pay for it. Alone you will be quite well enough off. Some years ago, before I ever dreamed of this trouble, I insured my life with a company whose policies did not contain a suicide clause. I scarcely noticed it at the time, but I am thankful enough now.*

*Forgive me, dear, and thank you a thousand times for the many years of happiness we have had together.*

*Sam.*

There was a little rustle of sympathy in court after the reading of the letter. One of the jurymen stood up.

"I should like to ask a question if you please, Mr. Coroner," he said.

"I shall be glad to reply to it if possible," was the courteous response.

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“ I should like to ask whether any effort has yet been made to investigate the financial affairs of the deceased? My idea is that their condition was not nearly serious enough to account for suicide.”

The coroner looked over his spectacles at the questioner.

“ The evidence of the next witness, sir,” he announced, “ will answer your question.”

Mr. James Huitt was called and stepped at once into the box. It would be unfair, perhaps, to say that he was prepared to enjoy the importance of his position, but his attitude towards the whole affair was certainly one of gentle patronage. He had the air of a man who knows what is expected of him, and is determined not to disappoint. He wore a black morning coat of formal pattern and a black bow tie. In the witness box, calm and detached, he looked the very prototype of the self-respecting, earnest professional man. The coroner bowed to him as he took his place. Mr. Huitt returned the greeting.

“ Your name, I believe, is James Huitt? ” the former asked.

“ James Huitt is my name, sir.”

“ You are manager of the Aldwych branch of Barton’s Bank? ”

“ That is so, sir.”

“ The deceased’s banking account came under your care in the natural course of affairs? ”

“ Precisely.”

“ You are the deceased’s executor, I believe? ”

“ Unless a later will has been executed of which I have no knowledge.”

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“The account was well kept?”

“Until the last three months it was a model account.”

There was a rustle of interest in the court. Everyone felt that elucidation was coming.

“Tell us briefly, Mr. Huitt, the change which took place in Mr. Jesson’s account during the last three months.”

“The deceased has withdrawn large sums of money and, from having a considerable credit balance, he applied to me only last week for an overdraft. With your permission, Mr. Coroner, I should like to enlarge for a few moments upon this point.”

“By all means,” the coroner conceded. “The court is very desirous of obtaining all the information which you can give us.”

“During the last six or seven years,” Mr. Huitt confided, and, although he seemed to speak in a very low tone and in a voice without volume, every word of what he said was clearly heard in the court, “the last six or seven years Mr. Jesson’s account has been a model one. He kept a balance of between one and seven thousand pounds, upon which we allowed him a trifle of interest. The idea of an overdraft was abhorrent to him. I imagine that, although he had an excellent business, it was not capable of any great development, and he would not have known how to use the money. We had also in safe keeping some thirty thousand pounds worth of excellent stocks and bonds. About two months ago the change began. Mr. Jesson asked to see me and was shown at once into my room as a valued client. He made out a cheque in

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my presence for four thousand pounds. At his request I procured the money myself and he buttoned up the notes in his pocket-book. I remember the occasion because I ventured upon some chaffing remark to the effect that I hoped he was not betting too much. He failed to reply in his usual light-hearted way. Three times within the last month Mr. Jesson has called, has insisted upon seeing me personally and has drawn out in large notes practically the whole of his available balance. A fortnight ago he began to sell his stocks and shares and invest in bearer bonds. Ten thousand pounds worth of these he took away when he called to see me last week. He sounded me then as to an overdraft."

"And what was your reply?" the coroner asked.

"I did not precisely refuse, but I took the opportunity of talking to Mr. Jesson as his executor and as a friend. Without wishing to seem curious, I asked him the reason for these large withdrawals of cash and for the change of his excellent securities into bearer bonds. I asked him, too, as was within my province as a bank manager, for what reason he required an overdraft, and I told him that my directors would insist upon it that I saw his last balance-sheet."

"And his reply?"

"I regret to say that, although I spoke as tactfully as possible and although I have always considered Mr. Jesson as a friend, he told me practically to mind my own business, it was his own money he was getting rid of, and as for the overdraft, he could get it elsewhere if not with me. I expostulated but without result. Mr. Jesson left me in a temper, and I expected at any

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moment to be served with a notice of the withdrawal of his account.”

“Can you remember the date of this interview?”

“Last Thursday week.”

The coroner stroked his chin. There was much that was incomprehensible, even in the clear statement of this admirable witness.

“Tell me, Mr. Huitt,” he asked, “did you form any conclusion yourself as to the reason of this extraordinary change in your client?”

“I am afraid I must confess that I did, sir.”

“The Court is bound to ask you what it was, Mr. Huitt. You see, we have to rely a great deal upon you. You are the only one with whom Mr. Jesson appears to have discussed the change in the state of his affairs. Even to his wife, we gather, he was cheerful to the end.”

Mr. Huitt was silent for a moment. He seemed graver than ever. Finally he answered the coroner’s question.

“My experience in such matters, sir, is practically nil, but I came to the conclusion—I could think of no other explanation—that Mr. Jesson was being blackmailed in some new and mysterious fashion.”

The coroner inclined his head gravely.

“Thank you, Mr. Huitt,” he said. “We need not trouble you any further.”

Half an hour later the obvious thing happened. The verdict of the jury was unanimous. Mr. Samuel Jesson had committed suicide whilst temporarily insane.

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A triumphant egress that of Mr. James Huitt. He was the man of the moment. He had supplied the crowded court with the thrill it had been hoping for. Acquaintances tried to detain him in the passage and in the corridor, but he shook his head and passed on. One, however, thicker skinned than the others, blocked his final exit into the street. It was Mr. Tyssen !

“ If you had told me that story last night, Mr. Huitt,” the young man said reproachfully, “ it would not have done anyone a bit of harm and it would have done me a lot of good if ever I want to go back to ‘ the shop.’ ”

“ It is not my mission in life,” Mr. Huitt rejoined coldly, “ to do you good at ‘ the shop ’—whatever that may mean. With your permission I should like to pass.”

“ One word first, if you please,” the young man insisted. “ You have brought this upon yourself. You were the first to use the term ‘ blackmail ’ in court. You must have had something at the back of your mind. Now, be a little more human, sir. Give me an idea as to what you think yourself? ”

“ What I am thinking at the present moment, sir,” Mr. Huitt remarked with dignity, “ is that you are being very impertinent and that you are very much in my way.”

“ Have a heart, sir,” the other begged. “ I want to get on to this blackmail stunt. It couldn’t have been anything else to have made a man strip himself like that. Do you know anything of his past history? ”

“ If I did,” Mr. Huitt assured his questioner in cold

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exasperation, "I should not tell it to you. Constable," he added, beckoning to a burly policeman who was standing in the vicinity, "I am anxious to pass through the doorway and this young man is obstructing me."

The policeman swung round. Tyssen removed his cap with a grin.

"One up to you, Mr. Huitt," he admitted, as he strolled dolefully away.

Outside in the sunny village street Mr. Roland Martin was leaning back in the corner of his limousine smoking a cigar and waiting for the hero of the hour. He was doomed to wait still longer, however, for a thin aristocratic-looking man with tired eyes and the general appearance of indifferent health, who had lounged into the court and taken a place by the coroner about half-way through the proceedings, leaned from the driving-seat of a very powerful two-seater Rolls and intercepted the manager.

"Good afternoon, Huitt," he greeted him, nodding languidly. "I got into court just in time to hear you throw your bombshells."

The bank manager had the air of one who was really a little flattered by this notice but had *savoir faire* enough to conceal it.

"The bombs were not of my making, Lord Milhaven," he protested. "It was my duty to help the coroner as far as possible."

"Quaint idea that of blackmail," the great man of the neighbourhood meditated. "I suppose there must have been something of the sort."



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"We can, I think," Mr. Huitt observed with gentle irony, "leave the police to deal with the matter now that they have had the way pointed out to them."

"Rather well put, that," the other approved, as he paused to light a cigarette. "One can never tell these fellows anything, but initiative is certainly what they lack. They won't go out to look for crime. They wait for it to come to them. . . . Doing anything to-night, Huitt?"

"Nothing outside my ordinary routine, your lordship."

Milhaven touched the starting button of his car and signalled to his chauffeur to close the door and get in behind.

"Come up and dine," he invited. "Eight o'clock. Short coat. Her ladyship's away. I will let you off early—I know what you City grubs are."

"I shall be delighted," Mr. Huitt replied.

His lordship nodded and drove on. The bank manager stepped into the waiting limousine in full and proud consciousness of his friend Martin's almost awed astonishment.

"You seem quite pally with the great man," the latter remarked as they rumbled off.

"Lord Milhaven is always very kind," Huitt acknowledged, "although up till now I have only been invited for tennis. You must remember, Martin, that he is a director of our bank. He has, in fact, an account of his own at my branch."

"Where do you want to go to?"

"Home, if it doesn't take you out of your way," was the placid reply. "I was afraid the proceedings

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might take longer, so I arranged for my absence from the bank this afternoon. I propose to change into flannels and have a set of tennis."

Tyssen, more unprepossessing than ever in motor outfit, roared by upon his ancient but powerful Harley Davidson. Martin looked after him.

"Isn't that our new neighbour?" he inquired.

Huitt's thin lips were drawn very closely together.

"A most unpleasant young man," he pronounced.

Mr. HURTT's proficiency at the game was always a source of wonder to the members of the Oasis Lawn Tennis Club. Notwithstanding the fact that he chose to play in spectacles his timing of the ball was usually perfect. With arms like the pipe stems to which Timothy Sarson had once good-naturedly compared them, he seemed to drive upon occasions as hard as any of the younger members of the club. He never varied his serve and with him a double fault was an unknown occurrence. He admitted to being forty-four years of age, but no one had ever seen him out of breath. He played with cold and merciless precision, but without any outward evidence of enjoyment. Tyssen, who had been his unsuccessful opponent for three sets, came and sat down by his side during the service of the home-made lemonade, which was the staple beverage of the place.

"Even a coroner's inquest, Mr. Huitt," he remarked, "does not seem to upset your nerve."

"Why should it?" was the calm retort.

Tyssen rolled a cigarette with agile but yellow-stained fingers. He tore off the ends of the tobacco and lit it.

"I don't know," he reflected. "I suppose because I am trying to be a writer I have developed an undue sense of drama."

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"I would embrace some other profession, then," Mr. Huitt suggested.

"I shall have to find out first of all whether I am going to be a rotten failure at my present one or not. I may have luck. You cannot tell."

Mr. Huitt looked as though he did not care. He edged farther away from his companion and affected to be interested in a set which was being played. Tyssen, however, had no idea of being shaken off.

"There seems to me," he confided, "to be something thrilling about the thought of that poor fellow Jesson having to come to you—one of his best friends—to draw out all his money from your bank and yet not be able to offer you any explanation."

"Your imagination is too indefinite," Huitt commented dryly. "Apart from a sense of regret, which one always feels when a friend does a foolish thing, the situation made no appeal to me."

"I think it was Mr. Anthony Sarson who said the other day that you hadn't a nerve in your body," Tyssen remarked.

"Taken literally the statement was, of course, ridiculous. On the other hand, I certainly do not understand the modern use of the term 'nerves.'"

Tyssen smoked furiously for a minute or two and then threw away the tangled remains of his untidily-rolled cigarette.

"You yourself," he pointed out, "admit that poor Mr. Jesson's hurried and furtive visits to you with their sinister purpose seemed to indicate that he was being blackmailed. Isn't there something dramatic to you in that thought?"

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Tyssen turned suddenly and faced his companion with a freshly rolled cigarette between his rigid fingers. Mr. Huitt, however, continued to follow the movements of the players in the set which he was watching. He answered indifferently.

“Not in the least. Blackmail, of course, is an odious crime but in this case it is only a suggestion. Something drove Jesson to take his own life. One only wearies oneself with profitless speculations as to what it may have been. The facts are unalterable and Jesson is dead.”

“If everyone felt like you,” Tyssen reflected, “a great many crimes in the world would go unpunished.”

“Not at all,” was the frigid reply. “I am a bank manager, not a policeman. It is my affair to concentrate the whole of my brain, for what it is worth, on the day by day happenings in my bank over which I have control. I leave other people’s business alone.”

With the utmost deliberation Mr. Huitt rose to his feet and walked into the locker-room. He adjusted his racquet neatly into its press, counted the number of his tennis balls, discharged his reckoning with Mrs. Harris for one cup of tea, two slices of bread and butter and one glass of lemonade, donned his sweater, and prepared to take that little stroll along the side of the stream up to his house. Tyssen, with his sweater knotted around his neck and his freshly-rolled cigarette in his mouth, joined him.

“I am afraid I make myself rather a nuisance to you, Mr. Huitt,” he apologised awkwardly. “I can’t help it. I shall claim the privilege of my profession to hang on to you now and then.”

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“You are a guest here and, I gather, for a short time only, or I might perhaps find it possible to say to you that I am not concerned in your profession,” was Mr. Huitt’s calm response. “Furthermore, if it is these nerves, which you think every man should possess, which drive you out of your bed at night to make nocturnal expeditions all over the neighbourhood, I do not see that I am much worse off for their absence, as I have to catch the eight-twenty train every morning.”

If Tyssen was startled by his companion’s thrust he showed no signs of it.

“I always sleep badly,” he admitted. “I hope my wandering round the place does not annoy anybody.”

“It doesn’t annoy me,” Mr. Huitt answered. “Other people with more curiosity might find themselves wondering as to your object.”

“I can assure you that I am not a burglar!” Tyssen declared. “I have a perfectly legitimate reason for my night walks.”

They had reached the gate of the bank manager’s pleasant little abode. He paused for a moment with his hand upon the latch. There was obviously no intention on his part to invite his companion in.

“No, I don’t imagine that you are a burglar,” Mr. Huitt conceded. “If you wish to do inexplicable things I suppose you have the right. On the other hand this is a very small neighbourhood and by twelve o’clock we think that everyone should be asleep. I myself am not addicted to the use of firearms, but I am quite sure that if I woke at three o’clock and found a man who looked as though he might be going

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to enter my garden, whether he was suffering from nerves or sleeplessness or what, I should consider myself justified in assuming that he was there for no good purpose."

"I shall keep the other side of the stream," Tyssen observed calmly.

"You will do well."

"Good evening, Mr. Huitt."

"Good evening, sir." . . .

Mr. Huitt let himself in to his very attractive-looking abode with a latchkey, mounted the stairs, divested himself of his clothes, and without any obvious signs of enjoyment nevertheless indulged in a prolonged spray. Afterwards he performed a leisurely toilet and descended to his small library. Arrived there—it was a room of formal and not displeasing appearance—he did a singular thing for a man who was going to a country house dinner-party with the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of the County. After a few moments of impassive listening he opened first a cabinet, and then with another key he unlocked a private drawer. From that he took out a revolver and a small box of cartridges. He loaded the weapon, moved the catch with firm fingers to safety and dropped it into his hip pocket. It was just as though Mr. Huitt, the bank manager, had been in the habit of carrying a gun all his life.

Tyssen, after leaving his unsociable neighbour, crossed the stream by the wooden bridge and struck across the common towards the post office. Half-way there he paused to watch the cricket practice. There

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were two or three bowlers, several fielders and the village policeman, divested of coat and waistcoat, sloggng happily away at ball after ball of the somewhat indifferent bowling. Slowly and as though impelled by an overmastering impulse Tyssen drew nearer and nearer to the little scene. He loitered at last near the bowling crease, fielded a hard hit drive, which would have meant a walk into the country for the perspiring bowler, and returned it to him with a smile.

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” the young man said. “Young Tom, he’s fairly got his eye in to-night. Will you have a go, sir?”

Tyssen half closed his eyes. The man took his hesitation for assent and tossed him the ball.

“I’ll be glad of a rest for a minute or two,” the latter said. “Do you look out, sir, if he hits a low one. He’s some slogger, is Tom.”

“I wonder,” Tyssen asked mildly, “does he mind them rather fast?”

The other bowler, who was just tossing one up, turned to look. The young man whom he had relieved grinned.

“Not he, sir. If you are a cricketer by any chance you let him have the best you’ve got. He’ll know what to do with it. They’re trying him for the colts next season.”

Tyssen fingered the ball in his hand for a moment, felt for the seam and stepped a short distance back. They cleared out of his way.

“Want a fresh guard, Tom?” one of them called out. “This gentleman here is going to have



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a whiz at you. He wants to know if you mind 'em fast."

The policeman's grin was sufficient answer.

"He ain't round the wicket, is he?" he demanded.

"No, I'm bowling over," Tyssen said, throwing down his jersey.

He measured his paces. The field drew in with some curiosity. Somehow or other the way Tyssen had handled the ball, the way he dug his heel into the ground when he had reached a certain distance, impressed them. All the same the prevailing impulse was to smile. Their Tom was going to show the stranger something! Tyssen ran down the paces he had marked out with long, awkward strides. He ended with something that was almost like a jump. The ball flew out of his hand. There was a crash down at the net as Tom's middle stump flew out of the ground, turned over and over, and landed half a dozen yards away. Tom stood helplessly by, looking around him.

"I never see'd it," he called out.

There was a roar of laughter.

"Never see'd it!" one of the bowlers remarked to Tyssen. "He's telling the truth, too. I wouldn't have liked to have been where Tom was. Might one ask your name, sir?"

"You never heard it before," Tyssen assured him. "I used to play a little cricket, but that's all over and done with. My name's Tyssen."

"You ain't played for a county or anything of that sort?" one of the fieldsmen asked.

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“Never in my life. I have played a little abroad. Nothing to speak of.”

The elder of the two bowlers shook his head doubtfully.

“You will excuse me, sir,” he said. “I’ve seen ’em all bowl—Brearley, Larwood, Christopherson, Pougher, Geary—all on ’em. Cricket ain’t no new game to me and you ain’t no new man to cricket, sir, begging your pardon.”

The ball had come back, the stumps had been put into position. Tom, the batsman, provoked a shout of laughter by announcing that his time at the net was up. The man who had been talking to Tyssen had suddenly turned round. Anthony Sarson and his sister a little breathless, had just arrived.

“Did you see that ball, Mr. Anthony?” the groundsman asked. “And the gentleman says he ain’t no cricketer!”

“See it!” Anthony replied. “My sister and I were just going in at the gate and we stopped to watch. Where did you play, Tyssen?”

“Nowhere,” was the somewhat confused reply. “I couldn’t resist it. I just had one ball as I was passing. I don’t play at all.”

There was a moment’s silence. No one wanted to be rude but no one quite understood.

“Don’t try to kid us, Tyssen,” Anthony laughed. “I watched your run, your style, the turnover of your wrist—it’s no good telling me that you have not played first-class cricket.”

“I’m sorry. You are making a mistake,” Tyssen assured him. “I don’t want to be ungracious.”

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“Just give him one more, sir,” the groundsman begged.

Tyssen hesitated. The ball slipped round in his fingers. Again he felt for the seam.

“Shall I give you a slow one, Tom?” he called down.

“Aye, I’ll whack him,” was the confident reply. “No more of that greased lightning stuff though. My pads ain’t extra thick.”

Tyssen smiled. He stepped a couple of yards back from the wicket, swung his arm loosely round once, and with no run at all but with an extraordinarily high delivery sent the ball down the crease. The policeman, out for revenge, ran blithely forward. A full pitch. Already he could see it in the stream! He took the biggest slog he had ever taken in his life and whacked the air. The ball passed him, broke in at least a foot from the off and missed the stumps by a hair’s breadth!

“One of Mailey’s googlies!” Anthony shouted. “I never saw such a swerve!”

Tom looked back at the wicket. He was something like four yards out of his ground. He tossed away the bat.

“I’m beat,” he confessed. “I’ve had enough for to-night anyway.”

They crowded round Tyssen, but he picked up his jersey. For some reason or other he was suddenly his old awkward and sullen self. He knew in his heart that he had done a foolish thing.

“Sorry, everyone,” he said. “I’ve got to go. Thanks for letting me have a try. Good night!”

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He strode off. Anthony gripped him on the shoulder, but he wrenched himself free. He heard a voice from the other side.

"Please, Mr. Tyssen."

He looked round. It was Pauline.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I don't know what came over me. Two stupid flukes. I must go home. Mrs. Foulds never forgives me if I am late."

"Don't bother about Mrs. Foulds," Anthony enjoined. "Come along in and have something with us. You needn't change unless you want to. The old man stayed up for a City dinner, and Pauline and I are going to sit down just like this. Come along."

"I'm sorry."

"Please, Mr. Tyssen," Pauline murmured.

"Very kind of you," he accepted humbly.

“Just  
begg’

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CHAPTER VII

THE Sarson establishment was kept up with far more dignity than any other in the Oasis. A butler carved at the sideboard and handed the wine, and a second man passed the dishes. Tyssen felt desperately uncomfortable and, notwithstanding the charm of his hostess, occasionally showed it. He had fetched a change of clothes and enjoyed a wonderful bath, but unfortunately Anthony had appeared in full evening dress.

“Do forgive me, old fellow,” he begged. “Nine nights out of ten I should have worn exactly the kit you are in, but I am taking Sybil Cresset over to a dance at Godalming to-night and it didn’t seem worth while changing twice.”

Tyssen was a little relieved at the explanation.

“You’ll have to excuse me,” he said uneasily. “I don’t live exactly the sort of life you people do down here, you see. I came here for one purpose and one purpose only, and I am afraid I never think of clothes.”

“Don’t be silly,” Pauline begged him. “Flannels down here are all one requires, unless you are a gay young spark like Tony and have to go out to these dances !”

“Once in a blue moon,” Anthony grumbled. “I didn’t really want to go to this one, only Lady Amfraville caught Sybil and me together at the cricket

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match. She thought, naturally enough, that she was my sister and she insisted upon it that we both came over to her dance to-night."

"You didn't happen to mention, I suppose," Pauline said, "that you had a sister at home?"

The young man laughed self-consciously.

"I'm afraid I didn't," he admitted. "You don't appreciate my dancing. Sybil loves it. Besides, Lady Amfraville would have had to have asked you both then, and she probably would not want more than one girl. You can sit and talk cricket for half an hour with Tyssen, and when he's bored with it he can push off home."

"In that case," Tyssen found courage to say, "I shall be here when you come back."

"You don't know my sister," Anthony declared. "She has boundless enthusiasm but an inexhaustible capacity for sleep. She will probably take you out to see the stars. You will sit down on a seat and in half an hour's time she will begin to yawn, then you will light a final cigarette and disappear."

Pauline laughed softly.

"Don't listen to him, Mr. Tyssen. When anyone begins to talk about cricket I am the most alert person in the world."

"But I don't know anything about cricket," he objected.

"Don't be an idiot," Anthony said impatiently. "Remember, I was in the Oxford eleven and I am hoping to play for Sussex. I have only seen you bowl two balls, but I know perfectly well that you have bowled for one of our counties. That first one—well,

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it was not the pace only, it was the action. Come on. Out with it."

"I have never played county cricket in my life."

"Honour?"

"Honour."

"Well, I'm damned," Anthony murmured. "I should have lost a pot of money over that if we had been out anywhere. Don't tell me you've played league cricket—a hundred pounds a week and that sort of thing!"

"Never anything of the sort," he assured them. "I have played a little quiet cricket in out-of-the-way places. When I came down here, if you had asked me to play in a cricket match I should have laughed at you. I don't want to play cricket. I don't want to play any game seriously. I came here for one purpose and one purpose only and I want to carry it out."

The three of them were alone at the table. Anthony was the younger presentment of what his father might have been—a genial but an indifferent host. He was not greatly interested in his guest, who he secretly believed belonged to one of the north country cricket clubs, where the standard is extraordinarily high, and to have brought off that evening by accident two of his best efforts. Pauline, on the other hand, scarcely removed her eyes from the awkward youth by her side. Something about him fascinated her. She was perfectly certain that there were two selves here—one struggling against the other. His manners at times were atrocious. Sometimes he slipped back into an ease of speech and deportment which pointed to something very different. Like all young women of

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her age she was attracted by the unusual—the mysterious. Metaphorically speaking, from that moment she adopted their dinner guest.

“You must remember, Mr. Tyssen,” she warned him, “that these small places, into which you have found your way, are perfectly charming and restful, but they have their vices. I think the vice of Sandywayes is curiosity. If you have put all ideas of cricket and sport out of your mind and come here, as you say, for one purpose and one purpose only, tell us what it is.”

There was a brief pause. They had reached the stage of dessert and the servants had left the room. The windows were still wide open. Outside were the common, the silent tennis courts, the deserted cricket pitch, the single faint light shining across the way from Mr. Huit's cottage residence.

“I came here to be quiet,” Tyssen confided. “I want to work. I am trying to write a book. I want to study human nature—events.”

“Events!” she repeated. “Here at Sandywayes with a city of seven millions so near?”

“A city of seven million inhabitants is no academy for me,” Tyssen assured them. “Every event here is either a minor or a major tragedy. Look at Jesson's suicide.”

She shook her head.

“Don't lose your head because of one happening,” she advised him. “This is the first suicide I have ever known in my life in these parts.”

“There will be a murder very soon if I don't go,” Anthony observed, rising from his place. “Tyssen,



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you will excuse me, old fellow, won't you? Pauline will look after you and I hope she will get you to talk about your cricket? Of course, what we are all leading up to is this—in a fortnight's time we play Godalming. We have never beaten them yet, and if we could get hold of a real good surprise packet like I fancy you might turn out to be, we could give them the time of their lives! Sorry. Look after him, Pauline."

A vision of white was flitting up through the front garden. Anthony hurried off.

"Just a moment, dear," they heard him call out. "I'll have the old bus at the gate in no time."

Pauline rose to her feet.

"Will you finish your port here, Mr. Tyssen, and come and look for me in the garden?" she proposed. "I shan't be very far away."

"I would rather come with you," he answered abruptly.

"Coffee outside?"

"Marvellous."

They sat on two low chairs.

"I rather like this place," Pauline confided. "From here you can guess at what everyone of your neighbours may be doing. You can see their lights and wonder."

"Begin at the Wilderness," he begged her.

She curled up a little deeper amongst the cushions of her chair.

"Ah, you make it difficult to start with," she said. "There is one tiny light there amongst the trees. From the second bungalow, as you see, nothing.

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That tiny light is just the index of the one mystery of Sandywayes."

"The lonely lady," he murmured.

"Or 'the beautiful lady.' Everyone seems to have a different name for her."

"I know two," he said.

"I only know one—Madame de Sayal. But I have seen her, which is probably more than you have. There is really no mystery about her at all. We like to make one, but it doesn't exist. She's an artist and a very clever one. Once I passed by and she showed me one of her pictures. Most mornings she comes down here to the post office and does her own shopping. Always she looks in here and waves her hand. She has an old servant living in that bungalow which looks so deserted, but the servant speaks nothing but some strange language. I think it's Roumanian."

"She has another name," Tyssen confided.

"How do you know?"

"I am a curious person. I am here to drag out material—for my story. I notice everything. I poke my head into everyone's affairs, as Mr. Huitt told me. I lodge at the post office and there are letters which come here with coronets and even crowns on the backs of the envelopes. Letters addressed to Signora la Marquesa Sayella."

"That's the same name," Pauline observed. "The 'de' implies a title. Let's pass on to the next one."

"Will you tell me this, then?" he begged. "Why do you suppose a woman so beautiful as Madame de Sayal or Signora la Marquesa Sayella comes to a simple Sussex backwater to paint pictures?"

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“ You ask me that,” she remarked, smiling, “ as though it were difficult to answer. You are not an artist, perhaps.”

“ I am not,” he confessed frankly.

“ Well, believe me,” she assured him, “ that beauty presents itself in different types in all the odd corners of the world. This Oasis is one of the odd corners. When the sunlight comes filtering through these pine trees and touches the cornfields and melts away in those blue hills seaward, there is something about this place which I have never seen anywhere else. It is really a place to attract a great artist. There is no mystery in the coming of Madame de Sayal.”

“ I differ from you,” he said a little hardly. “ What you say may be true. People may feel like that. They may see wonderful things where the ordinary pagan like myself sees nothing. Anyhow, let’s finish with the Wilderness. Move on to the next place.”

“ Well, the only house on the other side of the Common,” she told him, “ is the cottage residence of Mr. Huitt. Mr. Huitt would be a damning member of any especially romantic locality. He was meant for the routine of life. He is one of the perfectly shaped cogs that fit in the great wheel. Figures have taken him by the throat and strangled him. He lives for figures, he has lived by figures, he will die with figures in his brain! You are—you are not cold, Mr. Tyssen?” she added, turning towards him.

He held his breath for a moment. It seemed as though he had been shaken by some queer emotion.

“ Cold?” he repeated. “ Not I? I am so interested. Go on.”

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“I am not sure,” she continued, “that there is much more to dilate upon. The station lights—they mean so little. The village lamps have gone. Ah, up there in that cutting through the woods are the lights of Sandyways Court. If one could see the other side of those windows! I wonder.”

“Do you know Lord Milhaven?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“We catch fugitive glimpses of him,” she replied. “We read paragraphs in the paper. If he meets us in the vicinity and realises that we are neighbours he bows to us in stately fashion. Our great man, Mr. Tyssen. A lover of art, a great traveller, a great hunter, a famous aviator—he has his own private aeroplane and aerodrome up near the golf club—for some short time a statesman. He always looks to me like a man who has worn out life too soon. I looked up his age the other day. He is only forty-nine, but he seems tired already.”

“I wonder who his other dinner guests are to-night?” Tyssen ventured. “I heard him invite Mr. Huitt.”

“Sure to be financiers, I should think,” Pauline replied. “Lately he has taken a fancy to that sort of thing. He thinks that the world can be saved and conditions re-established by the pooling of huge fortunes.”

Tyssen was leaning back in his chair with his arms folded, frowning in puzzled fashion.

“I wonder why, if he is such a great man, he troubles to ask a man like Huitt to dine with him?”

She looked at him in surprise.

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“Why shouldn't he?” she asked. “And what does it matter? I believe Mr. Huitt is supposed to be marvellously informed upon all financial affairs. . . . Now we swing back right across the railway line. We come to the police station. The dear old sergeant who is always complaining because he has to take Tom, the village policeman, as a tenant. No light there. Sergeant and policeman fast asleep.”

“As a matter of fact,” Tyssen corrected her, “the policeman is on duty in Sandyways.”

“And how do you know that?” she asked.

“Curiosity prompted me to find out,” he admitted.

“We move on to Mrs. Foulds's shop,” she continued. “Not a glimmer. I suppose you think you ought to be burning the night oil up there writing your novel.”

“I am very content here,” he assured her.

“Next comes the house and estate,” she went on, “of Mr. Roland Martin. No sign of Mr. Roland Martin. No sign of Mrs. Roland Martin, who, the gossips say, has deserted her husband because he drinks too much, and is living in Paris. Not a light in the place. An easy household: two maidservants and a charwoman in to help once a week: alternate Sundays holiday and alternate weekdays for the parlourmaid and cook. No parties unless Mr. Martin gets a friend in to share a bottle of whisky.”

“And next?”

“The house and estate of Mr. Andrew Cresset. Really that is a very pleasant abode and the garden is beautiful. Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Cresset are exactly what you would suppose them to be like after

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a casual glance, and Sybil is a dear girl. All the same, I wish she were not so fond of Anthony."

"Why?"

"Because," she replied, "I don't think that Anthony is very likely to settle down for a long time yet. Father was too ambitious for Anthony. Eton and Oxford are not the perfect beginnings for a young man who is supposed to take his father's place in a wine merchant's business."

"Isn't there anybody else here you could tell me about?" he asked.

She laughed.

"Really, I begin to think, Mr. Tyssen, that your own description of yourself was a just one! You *are* a very curious person."

"The first man who ever solved a picture puzzle was a curious person," Tyssen answered. "He had patience. Have you ever realised what it must be like to be passionately anxious to solve a certain problem, and to have that problem handed to you in thousands of pieces and the rod of fate held over your head while you were bidden to put them together and solve them?"

Pauline swung herself up in her chair and turned towards him.

"Whatever are you talking about, Mr. Tyssen?" she demanded.

The dramatic note had vanished. He was again a little stumbling, faintly uncouth.

"I'm hanged if I know," he admitted. "That's how I always think of my work if I think of it at all. A novel is like that. You have all the materials there

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chopped up in pieces, men and women, events, passions, details, everything that counts, and there is someone that bids you put them together and mocks at you. You make mistakes too—such rotten mistakes.”

She was round upon him like a flash.

“Such as pretending you don’t play cricket!”

“That’s nothing,” he told her. “I’ll go. I must be keeping you up.”

“You won’t do anything of the sort,” she assured him. “Groves is bringing us out cool drinks directly. I like the way you are talking to me, Mr. Tyssen. I am getting very curious about you. Go on talking about yourself now. Tell me where you were brought up, what school you went to, what profession you followed before you decided to become literary.”

He shook his head.

“I am not such a fool as to tell anyone my story,” he said. “Besides, there isn’t one to tell.”

“Where did you learn your cricket?” she persisted.

He laughed jarringly.

“Cricket,” he repeated. “You have seen me bowl two balls at a slogging yokel!”

“Quite enough, thanks. Are you going to answer my questions?”

“Some day, yes,” he declared, with a sudden change of tone and manner. “Some day I will tell you everything and ask you everything because—well, because it’s you.”

She felt her hand suddenly gripped—gripped with long passionate fingers, and then discarded.

“Good night,” he said shortly.

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“ But—but what about that drink ? ” she asked, a little breathless.

He was already almost out of sight—a dim shape, uncouth, too large in the hips, too small in the shoulder, with a characterless slouching walk. A cloud had drifted over the moon. He vanished into the darkness.



FROM the time when cocktails were served in the stately library of Sandywayes Court until the reverent offering of port at the conclusion of the dinner, Sir Julian Bott, the world-famous financier who, except for Mr. James Huitt, was Lord Milhaven's sole guest at dinner, monopolised the conversation. From first to last he spoke of money—money that had been made and lost—and his own achievements with regard to money. Lounging in a high-backed oak chair the host of the party appeared sometimes to be on the verge of boredom. He was always courteous, always ready with the right response, but he had at no time the air of a man deeply interested in his guest's conversation. Huitt sat like a sphinx, except that every now and then he made a comment, and once or twice he corrected his fellow guest's figures with regard to some undertaking. If he was not sympathetic he was at least attentive. One fancied, however, that at the back of his brain he might have had alien thoughts.

"Does not this piling up of money sometimes weary you?" Milhaven asked once.

"Does it weary anyone?" the financier replied. "It is the greatest sport in the world. Hunting wild animals, like you have done, Lord Milhaven, in Abyssinia and Mesopotamia is nothing to it. To

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bring gold out of impossible places, collect into your keeping the offerings of others, to show them good results, to double your own fortune and treble it whilst you are making the world richer—that's my idea of sport. No, my profession never wearies me. Why, think, Lord Milhaven," he went on after a moment's pause, "even you feel the pull of it. You have plenty of other interests in life, a position and possibilities which I could never have, but even you find pleasure in making money. I won't say that you have quite a City man's brain, but you have what is perhaps better sometimes—you have vision. I would trust you before some of the professionals when you took up a prospectus to decide whether the thing was right or wrong."

"You flatter me," Milhaven murmured.

Sir Julian tugged at his black moustache. He was a sallow complexioned man, a little puffy under the eyes, with a big frame and powerful shoulders. He had sprung from the middle classes, had commenced life as a country stockbroker, inaugurated a Trust with an attractive name, bought up commercial undertakings one after the other, nearly every one of which had turned out to be successful. He had weathered two periods of depression and come out unscathed. The confidence which the British public is slow to give to a financier pure and simple had become his by right.

"As a matter of fact," Milhaven went on, toying with his wineglass, "I have no head for figures at all. Huitt here is the man I reply upon, my technical adviser. He gives significance to them so far as I am concerned."

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Sir Julian nodded.

"I have often thought," he said amiably, "that our friend Huitt was worthy of a better fate than to sit enthroned in a bank manager's confessional. You should strike out for yourself, Huitt. I would give you a job to-morrow at twice what Bartons are paying you."

Mr. Huitt showed no sign of either emotion or gratitude.

"I like my position," he confided. "I like the security of it."

"A matter of disposition," Sir Julian pronounced. "I prefer a shade of risk myself, although as a matter of fact I never take it."

Milhaven smiled.

"That's where your money-making as a sport falls down then, Sir Julian," he said. "There's no sport without risk."

"Do you take risks, Lord Milhaven?" the financier asked.

"I have taken many," his host replied. "I have gone after a wounded lioness out of obstinacy. I have shot tigers in a jungle where the odds are slightly against the human. I even once invested twenty thousand pounds in Julian Bott's Trust!"

"Not a shadow of risk there," Sir Julian laughed. "Your animal business doesn't get me. As a matter of fact," he went on, his thumbs slipping with the ease of familiarity into the openings of his waistcoat, "I have finished with taking chances myself. What's the good when there are so many certainties? . . . The most wonderful port in the world, Lord Milhaven, but

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no more, thank you. Four glasses are enough for any man."

Milhaven turned his head to the servant standing behind his chair.

"Serve coffee and '68 brandy in the library," he directed, "the Laranaga cabinet and the Romeo and Juliets. Come along, my friends, we will stretch ourselves in the easy chairs in the library."

They trooped out. Sir Julian looked about him somewhat wistfully as they crossed the hall and passed into the oak-panelled room with its Gothic windows, its shelves filled with priceless books and the great open fire-place with its coat of arms cut deep into the stone.

"After all," he confessed, as he accepted an easy chair and almost reverently pinched the cigar he was offered, "there is something you others have that we fellows cannot get. We can buy it all, but it's second-hand. It isn't our own."

Milhaven shrugged his shoulders.

"The world is getting less sensitive about those things nowadays," he said. . . . "What about my Concessions, Bott? Are you going to make another million for us all? I'm beginning to need money. All these things that you admire, you know, need some keeping up."

"I was just going to speak about those Concessions," Sir Julian replied. "I don't think that I want to touch them. If you need money I can put you in the way of making a very reasonable sum on a very reasonable outlay—even Mr. Huitt here ought to be able to come a little way in with us—but not on your Concessions."

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There was no visible change in Milhaven's expression except that his eyebrows had come just a trifle closer together. His tone, when he spoke, retained altogether its note of indifference.

"What is the matter with my Concessions, Bott?" he asked. "They nearly cost me my life, I can tell you."

"They are valuable without a doubt," Sir Julian admitted, "but these great tracts of country, which include mines, oil-bearing lands and forests, they need time for development. People are in a hurry nowadays to get something for their money. Supposing I raised a million, or a couple of millions, and formed a company to take up these Concessions of yours. In a year and a half or two years' time people would begin to grumble about dividends. I should say you would not be able to show any for five years. Then there's too much oil country. Oil is bad and it's going to be worse. It's like rubber. The world is overstocked with it."

"You may be right," Milhaven agreed languidly. "On the other hand there would be no need to emphasise the oil lands. I should think the Concessions apart from them would be worth, capitalised, ten or twelve millions. I had a small army of prospectors at work and that was the most moderate estimate. You see, these are not fairy pictures, Bott. There is no Arabian Nights business about it. I have travelled from end to end of the Garsete Valley, for instance. There's not a square mile of all that territory I have not seen. It seems to me that this should affect your calculations."

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“ Perhaps,” Sir Julian observed indifferently. “ The fact of it is, though, I am pledged to another scheme. A Concession like yours is romantic, of course, and I know that it has solid value behind it, but what do Mesopotamia, Abyssinia or Arabia mean to the man who is going about now with money chinking in his pocket? I’ll tell you what I am going to do, Lord Milhaven,” he went on, leaning forward in his chair and with a brighter light in his dark eyes. “ I am going to tie up into one huge concern practically the entire wholesale provision business in London. Other people have tried and failed. I am going to succeed. I won’t bother you with figures. I will simply tell you that I am going to start within two years paying fifteen per cent. upon the shares I sell to-day in the new company, and I guarantee that we will be paying fifty per cent., or issuing bonus shares within six years. It is the scheme of my life, Lord Milhaven. I have never been able to touch these fellows. I have never been able even to get them to show me their figures until last month. When I saw them I can tell you they staggered me. I shall need every penny I can scrape together, but I shan’t need to beg for money. I shall let you off, Lord Milhaven, with ten or fifteen thousand pounds and I shall guarantee that you won’t receive a smaller dividend than ten per cent. one single year during my lifetime. I would not make that offer to anyone, but there it is.”

Milhaven smoked in silence for several moments.

“ It’s very generous of you, Sir Julian,” he observed, looking at the end of his cigar as though to assure himself that the ash was still stable. “ Very ge-

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of you indeed. In an ordinary way, though, I hate investments. If I had ten or fifteen thousand to spare I should save them for the company which will buy my Concessions. To tell you the truth I have been scraping money together to support them ever since I came into the title and returned to England."

"I would not be too sanguine about them if I were you," Sir Julian advised. "You will remember what happened to those Palestine Concessions. They have not laid down a line of railway yet or paid a penny of dividend."

"A horrible country," Milhaven groaned. "You hurt me when you compare my undertaking with that Holy Land swindle. Tell me how you like my brandy?"

"You are an epicure, Lord Milhaven," was the prompt reply. "Everything you have and everything about you is of the best. The brandy is delicious. I know very well that with the money in my hand I could never buy anything like it. By the by," Sir Julian added, turning to Mr. Huitt, "I am going into your part of the world to-morrow morning—coming to see you, in fact. Perhaps if I come at about twelve-thirty you will lunch with me afterwards?"

"You are very kind," Huitt murmured in non-committal fashion. "I make it a rule, however, never to leave the bank buildings after I arrive there in the morning. The hotel supplies me with anything I may require in my room."

"Do you good to get out for once in a while," Sir Julian remarked. "I'm coming to clean you out."

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Mr. Huitt inclined his head gravely. He showed no particular interest, but his eyes had suddenly become like points of steel.

“You have a very considerable balance with us, Sir Julian,” he observed. “We have all your Government bonds too.”

“I am coming for the lot,” Sir Julian declared, stretching himself out.

“So long as you are not leaving Barton’s——” Huitt began.

“I am not closing my account, if that’s what you mean,” Sir Julian interrupted. “I have a big deal on with Lodson’s, however, and I have to deposit as much as I can with them before Friday.”

The bank manager nodded gravely.

“Under those circumstances,” he said, “although it seems to me to be a matter for regret rather than congratulation, I shall break my usual habit. I will lunch with pleasure when our business is finished.”

“Any use asking you to join us, Lord Milhaven?” Sir Julian inquired.

Milhaven shook his head.

“Very good of you,” he regretted, “but we are short of magistrates down here for a few days and I promised to take the chair to-morrow.”

Sir Julian glanced at his watch.

“You were kind enough to say that you would have a car here for me at half-past ten,” he reminded his host. “I see it is just that now. Would you mind if I hurried away? I have enjoyed our chat very much and all the wonderful entertainment.”



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“ Always a pleasure,” Milhaven murmured, “ to have an appreciative guest.”

“ About the Concessions,” Sir John went on, as the three men strolled together towards the hall. “ I’m sorry, but you see how it is. I’ve got a better thing on.”

“ You know best, of course,” Milhaven observed. “ My Concessions took a lot of getting, but they will be just as valuable in a year or two’s time.”

“ Without a doubt,” Sir Julian agreed politely. “ Can I give you a lift, Mr. Huitt ? ”

The bank manager shook his head.

“ On these fine summer evenings,” he said, “ I prefer to walk. Thank you all the same, Sir Julian. I shall expect you at twelve-thirty to-morrow at the bank, and everything shall be done to facilitate your business.”

Sir Julian nodded and the car drove off. Lord Milhaven and Mr. Huitt remained for a moment or two on the bottom step, watching the lights flash amongst the trees in the avenue.

ANTHONY SARSON, racing his motor bicycle and sidecar through the scented darkness that night, slackened his speed as he caught sight of a small but brilliant light almost immediately ahead of him. He was on the rough by-way skirting the north end of the Wilderness, a near cut from the country house where he and Sybil Cresset had been dancing.

"What's the matter, Tony?" a sleepy voice from the sidecar demanded.

He leaned towards the girl. He could only just see the outline of the slim, white-clad body. Even her lazy eyes were partly veiled with sleep.

"Hanged if I know," he replied. "It's that light straight ahead that's bothering me. I have never seen a vehicle of any description along this lane in my life."

She sat up. They were going quite slowly now.

"It's one of those new spotlights," he continued, "fixed a little higher up than usual, I should think. My God! Here comes the searchlight," he went on, as the whole by-way was bathed in brilliant illumination. "Shade your eyes and see if you think there's any trouble, Sybil. I have to keep my head turned away."

They went on slowly. The headlight, as they approached, was turned out again as though it had fulfilled its object—to blind the oncoming intruder.

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“ It’s a huge car,” the girl announced, “ but I can’t see a soul. There’s plenty of room to get by. It seems to be pushed a quarter way into the hedge.”

Anthony jammed on his brakes. The figure of a man had loomed up out of the darkness.

“ What’s the matter ? ” the former inquired. “ Are you in any trouble there ? ”

The mysterious figure did not reply for a moment. He wore motor goggles with flaps, a peaked cap and a dark uniform which appeared to be that of the County Constabulary.

“ Have you lost your way ? ” he asked gruffly. “ I understood that this was a private road.”

“ Well, it isn’t,” Anthony explained. “ The private road doesn’t begin until you pass through the gates of the Golf Club a hundred yards farther on.”

“ But this lane only leads to the Golf Club,” the man persisted suspiciously.

“ Not at all,” Anthony objected. “ There’s a rough way through a gate to the right there to Sandyways village. You could not get your car down, but it’s all right for my machine. That’s where I’m going if you want to know.”

The motorist stepped back.

“ Get along with you then,” he enjoined shortly. “ Sorry I stopped you. I thought you must have lost your way.”

“ What are you doing up here ? ” Anthony asked with not unnatural curiosity.

“ That’s my business,” was the abrupt response.

“ Is anything the matter with your car ? I’m a bit of a mechanic.”

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“ Nothing whatever.”

Curiosity was rather a family trait of the Sarsons, and the young man possessed his full share.

“ But what are you doing on this road ? ” he persisted. “ You can’t have come from the Golf Club at this time of night, and it doesn’t lead anywhere else.”

“ You get on home and mind your own business unless you’re looking for trouble,” was the menacing retort.

“ Seems to me it’s you who are looking for that,” Anthony observed, as he remounted his bicycle.

The man drew his hand from his coat pocket into which it had stolen a moment or two previously. His gesture was threatening. Anthony was almost inclined to swear, when he recounted the episode, that he was holding something grey and ugly between his clenched fingers. Sybil called up from her seat in the sidecar.

“ Anthony, please go on,” she begged. “ It’s not our business anyway. I’m getting nervous.”

The half seen figure of the night laughed jeeringly.

“ The young lady knows something,” he remarked. “ Pass along while you have the chance, young fellow.”

Anthony pressed down his foot and started the engine.

“ Do you belong to the police ? ” he ventured.

“ Maybe I do. There are sixteen different branches of the force now, you know—flying squads and watching squads and intelligence squads. Anyway, I’m sufficiently near being a policeman to see that you get into trouble if you don’t do as you are told ! ”

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The engine began to roar and Anthony sped on. The waiting limousine was out of the radius of his own headlight and the darkness was too intense for him to see more than its outline, but he was able to satisfy himself that there was no indication of any passenger, no sign of any human being except the one who had accosted him.

“That’s a queer business,” he observed, as he got off a few minutes later to open the gate. “What do you make of it, Sybil?”

“Don’t ask me,” the girl replied. “Just get away as fast as you can, please.”

He turned obediently down the rough path which fringed the pine wood, passed the two silent and stark bungalows down to the Oasis below. When he reached the little cluster of houses he sprang from his seat and stopped his engine. Even before he helped his companion out, however, he was peering up towards the road above. There were no signs of the car, no lights, no sound.

“Well, that is a queer business,” he repeated in a puzzled tone. “What on earth do you suppose it was all about, Sybil?”

“I have no idea,” she told him, as she took his hand and alighted. “I only know that I was getting frightened. The man was an inspector or something, wasn’t he?”

“I thought so at first,” Anthony replied. “He seemed to be wearing some sort of uniform. What on earth was he doing up there, though? No chauffeur and apparently no passengers. Where on earth could he have come from?”

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“He might have come from London if he was a member of the Golf Club and happened to have his key,” the girl suggested.

“It isn’t very likely, and even if he had, what was he doing half hidden in the hedge with all his lights out? One thing is quite certain—he didn’t want to be seen.”

Sybil was a little bored with it all. In another moment she expected a parental summons from one of the windows above.

“I’m too sleepy to guess any more, Tony,” she confessed. “Take me to the door—there’s a dear. These bushes make me feel shivery.”

Anthony, being a young man with the requisite amount of gallantry, and knowing very well what was expected of him, did as he was bidden and lingered for the proper length of time in the shadow of the laurel bushes. When finally Sybil had used her latchkey and disappeared, he closed the gate and returned to his motor bicycle. He wheeled it cautiously into the garage of his own house, and afterwards retraced his steps as far as the white railings which bordered the common, and looked long and searchingly up towards the pine woods. There was still not a light anywhere to be seen, not a sign of anyone stirring. He strolled down the lane, keeping on the fringe of the turf which bordered the common, so that his footsteps should not be heard, and looked longingly at the blank windows of the police station. Not a sign of light there. He looked at both windows of the post office where Tyssen was staying. Both were equally blank and unresponsive. He stood in

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the middle of the lane and deliberated. What was there to tell anyone if he called them up? The car, notwithstanding its unusual position and its suggestion of secrecy, was on a more or less public road where it had a perfect right to be. If he called the sergeant out of bed and took him up with him, the chauffeur, in the face of authority, might offer a perfectly reasonable solution of his presence, and the sergeant would crawl back into bed cursing the curiosity of people who went about at this hour of the night. If anything was to be done, he decided, he must do it alone. He had a moment's ugly recollection of something which might have been in the hand of the man who had accosted him, a recollection which brought him a fresh instinct of hesitation. In the end, however, his spirit of enterprise prevailed. He stole back to the garage, helped himself to the shorter and thicker of the two walking sticks which he kept there, slipped an electric torch into his pocket and started out on his brief adventure.

The first part of it was easy enough, for, although the darkness remained intense, he knew his way too well to make a mistake. He reached the pine woods and slackened his pace, walking almost on tiptoe, for here he was within hearing of the scene of his adventure. The car, he decided, must still be there, or he would have heard it start. Before him, only a few yards away, were the two bungalows. Here he came to a sudden standstill. The farther one, which was occupied by the servant of Madame de Sayal, was dark and silent, but from the nearer one there was a faint chink of light where the curtains failed to meet. This

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was the bungalow in which all Sandywayes was interested—the home of the unknown lady. Anthony Sarson stood, mute and motionless, out of the possible sight of any human being so long as he remained where he was in the shadow of the thickly growing pine trees. His eyes were fixed upon that thin pencil of light between the curtains in the living room of the bungalow. He concentrated every nervous effort of which he was capable upon the task of listening, closing his eyes and turning his head first in one direction, then another. Not a sound. The far-away rumble of a train seemed to make even more intense the stillness close at hand. He opened his eyes. The thread of light from the window had become, he fancied, a shade wider. He watched it eagerly. The necessity for action of some sort was beginning to oppress him. He felt inclined to tiptoe his way to the window, stoop down and play the complete eavesdropper. Why not? What was there to be ashamed of? Why should there be a light in a lonely dwelling like this at three o'clock in the morning within a hundred yards of the spot where he had encountered that mysterious motor car? He made up his mind for action quite suddenly. He stole across the carpet of pine needles, into which the soles of his dancing shoes sunk noiselessly. He leaned towards the crack of light and peered in. Nothing. Just a segment of a room. He drew back with a little gasp. Something impelled him to turn his head towards the steep ascent which led to the by-way. The trees grew less thickly there. There was a glimmer of wan light like the opening of a cave. He strained his eyes until



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they ached. As the seconds passed he knew that he was right : absolutely motionless, the dark figure of a man was standing barely thirty feet away ! Face and figure were alike invisible. It was just a shape—scarcely more—yet in those breathless few seconds of strained watching the figure gave Anthony the impression that he too was standing there as a sentinel—watching. Very slowly he abandoned his crouching attitude. Flattening himself against the wall he raised himself to his full height, he gripped his stick in his right hand. Before he could move, however, other strange things had happened. The chink of light faded into darkness, the door behind him was noiselessly opened, a white arm stole out into the blackness and his hand was gripped. He heard a soft voice in his ear.

“ Don’t speak. Come.”

He was drawn through the open door into a well of darkness. Behind him he heard the door close, shut with a spring lock. He could hear soft and rapid breathing close at hand, caught a breath of unfamiliar but strangely delicate perfume.

“ Stay where you are,” the voice whispered.  
“ Don’t move till I tell you.”

THE voice came to Anthony again. Its owner was a little farther away now.

“What were you doing up against my window?”

“I was trying to see in,” Anthony replied. “There was a chink between the curtains.”

She drew them both tightly together. He fancied from the sound of her footsteps that she was examining the curtains at the other windows. In time she was apparently satisfied. A soft light broke out in the room. Anthony saw her for the first time. Her face was as marble white as the gown in which she was wrapped—a soft filmy affair of lace and chiffon fastened around her with a girdle. In her eyes was fear.

“Why did you want to see into my room?” she asked. “Speak quietly, please.”

“There was a strange car in the by-way when I came home half an hour ago,” he said. “I fancied that there must be something wrong. I came back again to see.”

“You live down in what they call the Oasis?”

“Yes.”

“Well, did you find anything wrong?”

“There’s a man standing about thirty feet away just outside the wood,” he confided. “I was just going to speak to him when you drew me in.”

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A shivering little moan seemed to come trembling from her lips.

“And the car?” she murmured.

“I do not know,” he answered. “I have not been as far as that yet. I was attracted by the light in your room.”

“Who was in the car when you passed it?”

“No one, so far as I could see. There was a chauffeur or a police official standing with it.”

“Do you think anyone can see a light now?”

“I should think not,” he answered, examining the curtains. “Tell me, had you any visitors to-night?”

“Is that any concern of yours?”

“I suppose it isn’t,” he admitted. “Still, this is a very quiet corner of the world. Unusual happenings seldom come our way.”

“Really? Yet I am told that a man committed suicide in one of your sacred houses there only a few days ago.”

“That’s true,” he acknowledged. “Such a thing has never happened before.”

She walked the length of the room and back again. She was carrying in her hand a fragment of fine cambric crumpled into a ball.

“To-night,” she confided, “I am afraid. There is something about I don’t understand. What is your name?”

“Anthony Sarson.”

“I know,” she said. “You live near the post office and you have a pretty sister. Do you often come out looking for adventures at this hour of the morning?”

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“Never—upon my honour,” he assured her. “I came home late from a dance at Godalming. It was the car which intrigued me. I came up to see what it meant.”

“Yes. And then?”

He realised that she was in a terribly nervous state.

“Don’t you remember? I told you,” he said gently, “that I saw a light in your window and I looked in. It was a mean thing to do, perhaps, but it was simply because I meant to help anyone who was in trouble. Then I saw that motionless figure quite close, then your arm came out and drew me in and here I am.”

“I was afraid,” she confessed. “I had seen that figure too.”

“I cannot imagine,” he said, “why you live up here alone, if you are at all nervous.”

“I have a servant in the next bungalow. I am not really alone. I have been in more dangerous places.”

“I think,” he went on, after a moment’s pause, “that you had better let me go. I will see what that man is doing about the place and try to get to the bottom of the mystery of the car.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “I suppose you had better go. You cannot stay here. Will you take my advice?”

“If it is good,” he answered, smiling.

“Don’t go any higher up,” she begged. “Go down the way you came.”

“But I want to find out about that man who is hanging round,” he pointed out. “He may come and annoy you. I should like to find out if the car is still there too.”

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She came a little closer to him. He saw her more clearly than before. She had the appearance of one who had been suffering from a great strain. There were dark rims under her eyes. Every now and then she seemed out of breath.

“Take my advice,” she implored. “Do not meddle with things you do not understand. I wish I could keep you here until it is light, but I dare not. Wait! Take a drink before you go.”

She motioned him towards a small table by the side of the wall. There was a decanter of whisky and a decanter of brandy and three glasses. He gave a little start as he moved towards it. Two of the glasses had been used. Two bottles of soda water had been opened.

“Will you help yourself, please,” she invited. “Help yourself and then you must go. You can do nothing for me. I do not wish you to come to any harm.”

“You are very kind.”

He poured himself out some whisky and opened the remaining bottle of soda water.

“Can’t I give you something?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Nothing, thank you. Do you mind drinking quickly and going?”

He smiled.

“I promise you I will drink quickly,” he said. “I was thirsty before I left Godalming.”

He kept his word and set down the glass empty. Once more he looked towards the two empty tumblers. She came to his side and laid her fingers upon his arm.

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“ I drew you in here,” she said, “ because I was afraid that you might come to harm, and I never like innocent people to suffer. Promise me something. Anything you have noticed to-night or seen you will keep to yourself—you will never speak of? ”

“ I promise certainly.”

“ If you have a suspicion,” she went on feverishly, “ that I have had a visitor, you will forget it? ”

“ I will forget it.”

“ Then go now, please,” she pleaded. “ Look—take this.”

She picked up a small revolver from a table close at hand.

“ I hope you will not need it,” she said, “ but you might. It would be safer to have it at any rate.”

He looked at the weapon curiously. It was a very up-to-date affair, loaded in five chambers. He touched the sixth and looked at her. She pushed him away.

“ Never mind,” she begged. “ No questions, please. I give you that for your protection. Never bring it back. I never want to see it again.”

He slipped it into his pocket. She led him towards the door. It opened noiselessly.

“ Straight home,” she insisted. “ Leave the hill alone.”

“ Very well,” he answered. “ I promise.”

The door closed behind him almost at once. The darkness seemed, if possible, to have become more intense. He groped his way for a yard or two, ran into a tree and swore softly to himself. Then came the shock. He had no warning. He heard no sound.

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There was not the slightest indication of any living person, only a thunderous blow at the back of his head, so overwhelming that his tongue was palsied. Not a cry came from his lips. The earth sank beneath his feet. He was unconscious even before he collapsed upon the bed of pine needles.

CHIEF amongst Anthony Sarson's confused emotions in struggling back to consciousness was his ecstatic appreciation of the luxury of his immediate surroundings. His thoughts, at present uncontrolled, flitted backwards and forwards. He seemed to feel again the cataclysmic blow which had transported him into a world of oblivion, but, side-by-side with that, triumphing even over his insistent headache, was a sense of intense comfort. He was lying underneath a silken coverlet upon the outside of the softest bed he had ever known. The bandage around his head was deftly and comfortably fastened and as cold as ice. There was ministrations there, too, for his other senses. Upon the wall immediately in front of him was an exquisite silver point etching upon which his eyes rested with joy. The few pieces of furniture in the room, feminine though they were, were beautifully shaped and designed. Through the open window came a pleasantly fresh breeze and the strong odour of the pines. By the side of the bed stood a pitcher of water, a tumbler and a small silver gong. Leaning against the latter was a pencilled message upon a square card.

*Ring the gong when you are awake.*

He turned on his side and obeyed instructions.



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The silvery sound had scarcely died away before the door was opened and the lady of the bungalow came in. She moved at once to the bedside. She was wearing an artist's smock over her morning gown, and the agony of the night seemed to have passed. There was a note of pleasant interest in her inquiry.

"You are feeling better?"

"Yes," he answered. "What happened to me?"

She raised her eyebrows.

"I suppose," she sighed, "just what I was trying to save you from when I drew you into the bungalow. Anyhow, I heard footsteps and the sound of a dull thud. I used my torch then boldly, and when I saw you there lying on the ground I put on my coat and went out. I found you very heavy and had to telephone over to the other bungalow for my servant. I could see that you had received a blow on the head and I did what I could to bandage that. If you had not recovered consciousness in a few minutes I was going to telephone for the doctor."

"I'm all right now," he said slowly. "I'm afraid I've been an awful nuisance. I tried to keep my word to you too."

"You saw nothing of the man who struck you?"

The young man's face darkened.

"I wish to God I had!"

She meditated.

"Your last night's expedition," she observed, "appears to have been remarkably ineffective."

"It was," he admitted. "It might have been worse, though, so far as I am concerned. I might have lain out there all night, I suppose, but for you."

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“I really ought to have left you there,” she murmured.

He struggled up into a sitting posture and his hand went quickly to the back of his head. The pain was still acute.

“You could not have done that,” he assured her. “You are much too kind-hearted.”

The lady laughed. She laughed in a strange intriguing sort of fashion, but still with all the elements of humour.

“One travels and one learns,” she observed. “I have been called many things—not always kind-hearted! Are you well enough to go home before there is a fuss made about you?”

“I don’t want to go in the least,” he protested, struggling to his feet, “but I suppose I’d better. I shall go and have a word or two with my friend the sergeant of police.”

“You will do nothing of the sort.”

He looked at her in surprise. The worst of it was that, except for the joy of regarding an exquisite piece of human statuary, it was of no use looking at her. There was very seldom the slightest expression in her face. It was so at the present moment.

“I have saved you,” she reminded him quietly, “a considerable amount of discomfort, if not worse. I did my best last night, when I offered you the shelter of my bungalow, to save you altogether. You owe me perhaps some gratitude.”

“I am deeply grateful,” he told her.

“It is for you to prove that.”

“In what manner?” he begged eagerly.

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“Cannot you understand that I do not wish my name associated with any gossip in this small neighbourhood?” she said. “I do not wish my name, for instance, to appear in the paper or for the police to be making inquiries around my bungalow in search of your assailant. I should prefer you either to keep silent about your hurt, which let me warn you in your own interest would be much wiser, or, if you speak of it at all, say that you fell and hit the back of your head against a gate.”

He reflected for a few moments.

“And the car?” he asked. “Am I to keep silent about that too?”

“You can mention having seen it on your return home from Godalming,” she told him. “Of your second visit up here you should say nothing.”

“All right,” he promised. “But how am I to get back home with this bandage round my head?”

“I am going to take it off,” she confided. “There is no wound whatever. It was simply a blow which might have produced concussion.”

“Very easily, I should think,” he said, tapping it tentatively.

“Do you feel well enough to go now?” she asked him. “It is a quiet time. All your friends down below are lunching. I should prefer that you were not seen leaving my bungalow. You must say that you lay out in the wood all night.”

“I won’t forget.”

“Stay where you are for a minute,” she enjoined.

She disappeared and a moment or two later he heard what sounded like the tinkling of ice in a shaker.

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She reappeared with a small tumbler filled with some frothing yellow liquid and a biscuit which she carried in her fingers.

“Drink this,” she directed. “Take a mouthful of the biscuit too.”

The monotony of her tone once more impressed itself upon him. Her action, too, seemed unlike any ordinary gesture of hospitality. He felt that she was offering him this wonderful concoction simply that he might be able to take his departure with credit. Nevertheless, he drained the contents of the tumbler to the last drop and he felt the warmth and vigour of it in his blood.

“That was the most wonderful drink I ever had,” he declared.

She opened the door and stood on the threshold for a moment, looking down the valley. In the soft and lambent sunshine the pleasant little group of houses with the smoke from their chimneys curling upwards, the yellow cornfield on the right and the flower-starred meadows on the left, the blue hills in the far distance, it seemed a different world from that of the night before. The throb and mystery of it were gone.

“So far as one can tell,” she announced, turning round, “this is the moment for your departure. Remember, wherever you lay through the night it was not here, and whoever took care of your head it was not I. I impress this upon you because you may find out later that other strange things have happened, and I do not wish to seem connected with them in any way.”

“I shall keep my promise,” he assured her, lingering

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for a moment. "I cannot tell you how grateful I am. Will you shake hands with me?"

She offered him a beautifully shaped, cool hand—long, delicate fingers without the disfigurements of the new manicure. He held it unresistingly in his. It was exactly the hand-clasp he might have expected. There was nothing of pulsating life in the fingers. The pressure of his own was unreturned although apparently unresented.

"May I come and see you again?" he begged.

"Yes," she replied with unexpected promptness. "I should like you to come and see me this evening between nine and ten, when I shall be sitting out here under the pines. I should like you to tell me then whether your explanations have been accepted. There are a few other questions, too, which perhaps I may ask."

"Between nine and ten this evening," he repeated.

"Not later."

Her hand gently impelled his shoulders. He passed, staggering a little, out into the sunlight and, already mindful only to do her will, he made his way hastily from the proximity of the bungalow into the footpath. The sunlight and the strength of the mixture which he had drunk rendered him for a moment almost giddy. He made his way carefully downwards. With every breath of fresh air he seemed to feel stronger. Then at the bend he came to an abrupt standstill. He passed his arm round the trunk of a pine tree and leaned against it. His eyes were turned eagerly downwards. Disturbance seemed to be once more abroad in the Oasis. Before the creeper-covered

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police station two cars were standing. A small knot of people were talking excitedly in the middle of the road. Anthony, as he recommenced his descent, remembered with a sinking heart his own peculiar condition, his crumpled evening clothes and his wildly ruffled hair. There was no means of escape, however, for already he had been discovered. When he came into clearer sight he became at once the cynosure of wondering eyes. Someone ran into the police station. Tom, the village constable, stepped out. He stared at Anthony as though he had been a ghost, and called back over his shoulder. The sergeant emerged from the doorway, gave one look at the approaching figure and hurried to meet him. Anthony, now really giddy with the hot sun blazing upon his head, slackened his speed and paused, holding on to the white railings. Tyssen, who seemed to have appeared from nowhere, stood by his side.

“Where on earth have you sprung from in that condition?” he asked.

“Looks as though you had been out all night, Mr. Anthony,” the sergeant observed with a frown.

“I’ll tell you what there is to tell when I have changed and had a bath,” Anthony promised him. “What’s the trouble here?”

“Haven’t you heard?” Tyssen asked quickly, as he leaned eagerly towards the dishevelled young man.

“I’ve not heard a thing,” Anthony replied. “So far as I am concerned, to cut a long story short, after I had brought Miss Cresset home early this morning I had a fancy to make my way back to the by-road. There was a car there when I passed, and I was curious

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about it. Well, you know how dark it was. I slipped, fell backwards and hit my head against the gate. I must have been lying there unconscious for four or five hours."

The sergeant was silent. His eyes, however, were taking careful note of the young man's disordered attire and pallid face.

"Meet anyone up there?" he asked.

"Not a soul. What's wrong?"

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing to take note of. Why?"

"They found a dead man this morning in the wood close to the by-way," the sergeant recounted. "His body is lying there in the police station now."

"My God!"

Anthony was giddy once more. The heat, the pain in his head, the horror of the news he had heard confused him. Just in time Tyssen gripped him by the arm.

"Brace up, man," he enjoined. "The doctor is in there. He'd better have a look at you. You may have hurt your head."

"I shall be all right as soon as I can have a drink and get out of the sun," Anthony assured them. "Who is the dead man? Was it—an accident?"

The sergeant shook his head gravely.

"Worse than that, sir, by all appearance," he replied. "He's got a revolver bullet straight through the heart—in just the same place as poor Mr. Jesson."

A little sobbing breath found its way through Anthony's tense lips. He gripped at Tyssen's shoulder for support.

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“ Who was he ? Did he belong here ? ”

The sergeant shook his head again.

“ Not to my knowledge. There’s not one of us has ever seen him before.”

Anthony pulled himself together with a great effort.

“ I’ll go and change my clothes and get something,” he announced, staggering across to the open gate of his house. “ I’ll come straight into the police station as soon as I pull myself together a bit.”

The domestic staff of The Haven were all gathered together in the back premises discussing the startling event of the night, so that Anthony was able to open the door, climb the stairs and reach the bath-room unobserved. As he flung his coat on to the floor a metallic sound attracted his dazed attention. He picked up the coat and thrust his hand into the pocket. Very slowly he drew out a hard object he found there and held it in his hand, gazing at it blankly. He glanced furtively towards the bath-room door to be sure it was locked. He turned the thing over. Then he remembered. It was the revolver with one barrel discharged, which the lady of the bungalow had thrust upon him !



ANTHONY, leaving the house half an hour later to report at the police station, was annoyed to find Tyssen seated under the cedar tree in the garden, talking to Pauline. The latter sprang up with a brief exclamation as her brother approached.

"Tony!" she cried. "My dear Tony! Is it true that you have only just come home? What on earth happened?"

"I'll tell you later," was the somewhat curt reply.

"But Tony," she persisted, "Sybil says that you brought her home all right at about two o'clock. You must have gone out afterwards."

"Of course I did," he assented irritably. "I can't stop to talk now. They're waiting for me in the police station."

"That's quite true," Tyssen chimed in. "I shouldn't keep them waiting any longer if I were you, Mr. Sarson. I'll come in with you if I may."

Anthony's reply was not over gracious. Somehow or other, Tyssen, this morning, exasperated him.

"Scooping up more material for the book?" he asked, as he pushed open the gate.

Tyssen threw away his cigarette and began to roll another.

"Can't you see," he began eagerly, "it is all wonderful material for me? The trouble is that no

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one can identify this fellow. You are about our last hope."

"Am I?" Anthony rejoined curtly. "Well, you have not much to live for then. If none of the others here know him by sight I'm not likely to. See you later."

Anthony's attempt to dispense with his companion was, however, unsuccessful.

"The sergeant says he doesn't mind my hanging round," the latter explained. "I want to have one more look at the body. It helps one to work up the thrills."

Anthony made no further protest. The sergeant himself opened the door and led the way into the back room. A mattress had been laid upon the floor and the blinds drawn. The body of the dead man was covered with a sheet which the sergeant, with clumsy but reverent fingers, drew carefully away.

"One shot straight through the heart," he pointed out. "A shot fired at close quarters, the doctor seems to think. Ever seen him before, sir?"

Anthony shook his head.

"Thank God I have not," he exclaimed in a tone of relief. "He's nothing to do with these parts, that's certain."

The face of the dead man was not a pleasant sight to look upon. Though many hours must have passed since the tragedy, the hall-mark of a shuddering fear seemed to linger upon his features. He was inclined to be stout and heavy in build, and with something rather Jewish in his appearance. A small black moustache covered his upper lip, his hair and eyebrows

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were of the same colour. His studs were very beautiful pearls, his linen of the finest, and his evening clothes, Anthony saw at once, had been fashioned by a much better tailor than his own. In a bowl by the side were the articles which had been taken from his pockets—a platinum cigarette case with a lighter to match, keys attached to a gold chain, and a pocket-book amply filled, but containing nothing else but bank-notes.

“Have you searched everywhere for visiting cards?” Anthony inquired. “There might be a flap to the pocket-book.”

The sergeant smiled a trifle superciliously. This young gentleman, whom he had known since he was a boy, was all very well in his way—a fine tennis player and cricketer, with a much respected parent—but the idea of being cross-examined by him on the niceties of his own profession seemed somewhat absurd.

“There was no visiting card in the pocket-book,” he announced, “nor in any of his other pockets. There are over a hundred pounds worth of notes, though, and his jewellery is valuable. Whoever did him in didn’t do it for robbery.”

“Where was the body found?” Anthony asked, his heart sinking even as he was framing the question.

“Up in the Wilderness just beyond the bungalows, about a couple of yards in the wood from the by-way.”

“The doctor has seen him, of course?”

The sergeant nodded patiently.

“The doctor has been here twice and has examined him thoroughly. Thinks he must have been dead at least six hours when the body was brought in. He’s

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'ch an ambulance t take the body to the mortuary at Guðfálmi o.'

"Who found him?"

"Two caddies going down to the Golf Club along the by-way. They saw his white shirt gleaming behind a clump of bracken. One of them came squealing down here and the other stayed in charge."

"Is anyone guarding the place where the body was found?" Anthony enquired.

"That's the first question I asked."

Both men swung round. Tyssen was standing behind them, his fascinated eyes fixed upon the dead body.

"The first question I asked, wasn't it, Sergeant?" he repeated in a rasping tone. "I said that they had better telephone to Scotland Yard and that, until someone arrived, the place should be guarded. They might find the weapon. The best clue of all, that would be."

"Mr. Tyssen," the sergeant protested firmly, "I have allowed you a good many privileges, but we do not need to be told our business—especially by story writers. I was just about to tell Mr. Sarson that Inspector Penny of Scotland Yard is on his way down now and should arrive at any moment. Until he comes the constable from the village is guarding the spot where we found the body."

"Wonderful," Tyssen declared unctuously. "You seem to think of everything, Sergeant. I wonder whether there are any initials on the handkerchief."

"There was no handkerchief," the sergeant growled.

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"Now, isn't that a strange thing," he  
claimed. "A man turning out like that, some distance  
away from home I should think as no one can identify  
him, without a handkerchief."

The sergeant turned his back upon the young man.

"We were rather hoping, sir," he said to Anthony,  
dropping his voice, "that as you were up that way  
most of the night, you might have seen or heard some-  
thing."

"I heard nothing whatever until I recovered con-  
sciousness a few minutes before I came down here,"  
Anthony declared. "And as to seeing—well, it was the  
darkest night I ever remember. It was because of the  
darkness that I got the fall climbing over the gate."

"What gate might that be, sir?"

"The gate leading from the top of the path into  
the by-way," Anthony explained. "You know where  
I mean—just at the edge of the wood."

The sergeant stroked his stubbly brown moustache.  
An uneasy look had crept into his face.

"That's odd, sir," he remarked. "You must have  
been within twenty yards of the spot where the body  
was found."

"It's a coincidence, of course," Anthony agreed,  
"but as I was unconscious from the moment my head  
struck the ground till I got up and staggered down  
here I wasn't likely to see or hear much!"

From outside came the hoot of an automobile.  
The sergeant glanced through the windows.

"It's a police car," he announced in a tone of  
relief. "Penny from Scotland Yard. I shall hand  
this business over to him."

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Inspector Penny was a short, rubicund looking person, resembling more a country farmer than a detective. He shook hands with the sergeant and was briefly introduced to the two young men. Then he stepped over and looked down at the body.

“Recognise him?” the sergeant asked eagerly.

“To the best of my knowledge I never saw him before in my life,” Penny replied. “A City gentleman, I should think, by the look of him. Extravagant too. Fond of a bit of show. Well, well. He got it from someone who knew how to shoot. . . . Now, Sergeant, I will hear from you in your other room, if you please, everything that you can tell me about the case. Then I shall be glad to receive statements from anyone with whom you think I ought to talk.”

“You two gentlemen won’t be far away, I suppose,” the sergeant observed. “Not that we are likely to want you, Mr. Tyssen. It’s Mr. Sarson that the Inspector would probably like to have a little conversation with,” he added, with a faint note of impending trouble in his tone.

“I shall be at home,” Anthony announced. “I am just beginning to realise that I have had no breakfast and no lunch.”

Inspector Penny glanced at him keenly. For a good-looking young athlete Anthony was certainly not appearing at his best.

“I should hate to keep any man from his food,” he remarked cheerfully. “You get along to your lunch, sir. The sergeant and I will have plenty to talk about.”

The two young men left the shaded and melancholy

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apartment and stepped out into the brilliant sunshine. As soon as the door was closed Penny turned to the sergeant.

“Who is the young man?” he demanded. “The good-looking one I mean.”

“Name of Sarson,” the sergeant replied. “Popular young fellow—son of Mr. Timothy Sarson, one of the principal residents here.”

“Any connection with this affair?”

“Couldn’t have, I should say, sir,” was the sergeant’s dubious reply. “All the same, as you will discover by questioning him, he has been out all night. Didn’t get back till half an hour ago in his evening clothes.”

“Have Tom watch his house,” the Inspector ordered quickly. “If he leaves it tell him to let me know. You are too near the railway station for my fancy here.”

Outside the police station the tiny garden was crowded with masses of homely but sweet smelling flowers. Anthony, pausing on the tiled way, drew in several long breaths and shivered as he thought of the unwholesome atmosphere in the apartment which they had just left.

“See you later, Tyssen,” he said, as he started forward. “I am going to get some lunch.”

“You wouldn’t like a gin and bitters at the ‘Rose and Crown’ first?” Tyssen asked with awkward eagerness. “To tell you the truth, there are one or two more questions I should like to ask you while the whole thing is fresh in my mind.”

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“No, I’m hanged if I would,” Anthony replied irritably. “It’s bad enough having to answer questions from the police without amateurs like you butting in.”

Tyssen pushed back his mop of hair in worried fashion.

“I say, that’s too bad,” he complained. “Couldn’t you try to remember, Mr. Sarson, that we all have our absorbing interest in life and my story writing is a passion with me. All this material—being actually in touch with detectives and the dead body and someone who has been out all night close to where the murder was committed. It’s wonderful! It’s giving me just the atmosphere I want.”

Then Anthony Sarson, for a well-behaved young man with whom manners were rather a point, became very rude.

“I don’t care a damn about your atmosphere,” he said savagely, “and if you ask me any more questions about last night I shall punch your head!”

Tyssen showed no resentment at his late companion’s violence. It seemed indeed to have left him entirely unaffected. His yellow stained fingers flashed through their task of rolling a fresh cigarette, which a few seconds later was alight in his mouth. He hunched his shoulders, thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and made his way towards the post office.



AFTER luncheon and a pipe the elasticity of healthy youth reasserted itself and Anthony Sarson felt a different man. He knocked at the door of the police station and was promptly admitted. The sergeant showed him into the front room where Inspector Penny was seated before the table and Dr. Anderson, the local medical man, was standing upon the hearth-rug looking a little worried.

“What about this fall of yours last night, Anthony?” he asked. “I don’t like to hear of young fellows of your age being unconscious for four or five hours. Where did it happen?”

“Just at the top of the by-way. I see you are smoking, Inspector. Mind a pipe?”

“Not in the least,” was the hearty response. “This is all quite informal. The doctor, by the by, was saying he would like to have a look at your head.”

Anthony Sarson, who was well over six feet, stooped down. The doctor’s fingers ran carefully, but with lithe active touch, over the top and the back of his head. The result seemed to leave him puzzled.

“Mind coming a little nearer to the window?” he asked.

Anthony did as he was requested. The doctor adjusted an eye-glass and examined him more closely.

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“ Well, you are wonderful, young man,” he pronounced. “ There is no skin broken, no bruise, no sign of any injury whatever.”

“ I’ve still got a headache.”

The doctor nodded.

“ You ought to have more than a headache. I cannot imagine how you came to fall on your head with force enough to make you unconscious and yet get over it the way you seem to have done. You realise, of course, that it could not have been the bar of the gate ? ”

“ I believe it was the road,” Anthony confided. “ So far as I can recollect my impressions at all it seems to me that I fell on the road head first.”

“ That is the most reasonable theory,” the doctor observed dryly. “ But, as I said before, you are a very lucky young man. When the Inspector has asked you any questions he wishes to I should like you to take me up to the spot where it happened.”

Anthony scowled.

“ It seems to me it’s making a fuss over nothing. I slipped and fell down on the back of my head. I can show you the spot, of course, but I’m not going through the performance again for your benefit.”

“ I shan’t ask you for a complete reconstruction,” the doctor promised curtly.

“ You must remember, Mr. Sarson,” the Inspector told him good-humouredly, “ that you are a great disappointment to us. You must have been within a few yards of this murder, if it was a murder, and yet a fine strong young fellow like you goes and falls down and remains unconscious all that time, so that

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you heard nothing of what was going on. Very disappointing.”

“Well, I couldn’t help it. No fun for me, I can assure you,” Anthony replied, unpleasantly conscious of a sense of vague hostility.

“Tell us about the motor-car,” the Inspector continued.

“Well, that’s a very simple matter and quite straightforward,” Anthony explained. “I was going home on my motor bicycle from Godalming, and one of those new spotlights flashed on me from right up by the side of the hedge. I slackened speed, and directly afterwards there was a blinding blaze of light from a very powerful headlamp. I stopped then, and a man came up and spoke to me. Seemed to be in a sort of uniform. It might have been a chauffeur’s, but it looked more like that of a police inspector. He asked me what I was doing up there—seemed to resent my presence—and warned me off. It’s my impression, although I could never swear to that, that when he discovered how curious I was about the car and didn’t show much sign of moving, he brought out a revolver. It looked like it, but it was a filthy dark night and I couldn’t say for certain.”

“I see,” murmured the Inspector. “Then you rode off home and, not feeling satisfied about the car, you climbed the hill again and met with this accident?”

“Precisely.”

The Inspector had the air of an unhappy man. He leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at Anthony.

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“ You were alone, of course, on this night ride from Godalming, I think it was you said ? ”

“ Nothing of the sort. I had Miss Cresset—the young lady who lives in the next house here—with me.”

“ What ! At that time of night ? ”

“ Why not ? We had been over to a dance at Lady Amfraville’s at Godalming Hall. You can find out all about that if you want to. If it hadn’t been that Miss Cresset was so frightened I think that I should have tried to satisfy my curiosity about the motor car the first time.”

The Inspector was a different man. He smiled as though he had just heard delightful news. He turned towards the sergeant reproachfully.

“ That’s quite right, sir,” the latter admitted. “ Sorry if I forgot to mention it. I remember now Mr. Sarson did say that the young lady was with him, and I even saw them starting off together earlier in the evening.”

“ Capital ! Could we have a word with the young lady ? ”

“ Why not ? ” Anthony replied. “ I’m sure she will come with pleasure if you send in for her, but she can’t tell you any more than I have done.”

The Inspector smiled in curious fashion.

“ Perhaps not. But two people telling the same story are better than one, you know, Mr. Sarson. Have you seen Miss Cresset this morning ? ”

“ Not yet. I was going in to see her when you have finished with me.”

“ Better and better,” the Inspector applauded.

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“The young lady was in some sort of sidecar, I suppose?”

“It’s a very good sort of sidecar. Best type going. She was half asleep when the light woke her in the lane.”

The sergeant slipped out. Inspector Penny’s manner became more and more friendly.

“Do you happen to know any of the tenants of the bungalows in the Wilderness, Mr. Sarson?” he asked confidentially.

“I just know Madame de Sayal very slightly. She let it be known when she came that she wished to be left alone, so I do not think that anyone called.”

“Rather unusual, that, eh?”

“I believe she is supposed to be rather an exceptional person,” Anthony replied. “One sees her painting every day and I think that she has written books too.”

“A foreign lady?”

“I should imagine so. She speaks English quite perfectly but with a slight accent.”

“There were no signs of life about her bungalow either time when you passed, I suppose?”

“None at all.”

“And the other bungalows?”

“One is occupied by her servant, and the other is not finished.”

“Not much that way,” the Inspector observed. “This motor car of yours seems to be the apex of the mystery, Mr. Sarson. It is a pity that you could not describe it a little more closely.”

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“That’s not my fault,” Anthony pointed out. “It was pitch dark the whole of the time.”

The sergeant reappeared, ushering in Sybil Cresset. She nodded to Anthony and the doctor and acknowledged the Inspector’s salute.

“What’s all this terrible business?” she asked. “Is it true that they found a dead man up on the by-way? I told you, Tony, that that car was not there for any good.”

“Then you, too, saw the car, Miss Cresset?” the Inspector inquired.

“I saw it as well as one could see anything on such a night. It was as big as a small omnibus. The chauffeur, or whoever it was who spoke to us, was horrid.”

“Can you describe him?”

She shook her head.

“I never even caught a glimpse of his face. He wore a funny peaked cap, and when Tony asked if he were a policeman he said that he might be because there were sixteen different sorts now, anyway!”

“He was not inclined to be sociable, I gather?”

“Sociable!” Sybil exclaimed scornfully. “He acted as though we had no right in that part of the world at all and as though he hated us. I was only too thankful to get away.”

“I dare say,” the Inspector reflected, “that Mr. Sarson here rather hurried off realising that you were nervous.”

“I am sure of it,” she agreed. “I am not a curious person and the man frightened me.”

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“ You didn’t know, of course, that Mr. Sarson was going back again ? ”

“ I certainly did not, but it’s just like him. . . . Tell me, they are all saying that they found a dead man in the woods. Do you think that the presence of the car there had anything to do with it ? ”

“ We are inclined to be of that opinion,” the Inspector affirmed. “ Nothing more that you can tell us, I suppose, Miss Cresset ? ”

“ Nothing at all.”

“ What times does your father return from the City ? ”

“ Just before six. He was not anywhere about, though.”

“ Quite so,” the Inspector conceded, “ but our first task is to establish the identity of the man. We have set them to work up at Scotland Yard already and we have had a photographer in, but it would be a great help if any of you local people could recognise him. That’s why I am asking all the residents here to have a look at the body before we move it to the mortuary.”

The girl shivered as she rose to her feet.

“ Are you coming, Tony ? ” she asked.

“ I have to go up the hill with the doctor first. I’ll come as soon as I’m free,” he promised.

Dr. Leonard Anderson was a very average type of the country practitioner who had succeeded in building up an excellent practice by a reasonable amount of skill and a larger amount of tact. He examined the gate at the top of the by-way and kicked the ground

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on the other side of it with the heel of his shoe. Then he turned to his companion.

“ I won’t ask you to go through your little performance again, but you might show me how you began, Anthony.”

The young man shook his head dubiously.

“ I know that I reached this spot,” he reflected. “ I was very eager to see whether the car was still there in the bend. Whether I tried to vault the whole affair as I generally do, or whether I put one foot on that slippery bar, I cannot remember. I only know that I came down on my head somewhere the other side. I felt terribly giddy and in great pain. I started to try and retrace my steps, but I crumpled up, and when I opened my eyes this morning I was in the meadow the other side there—must have gone crashing through the hedge.”

The doctor made another tour of inspection. When he came back he lit a cigarette and leaned over the gate by his companion’s side.

“ Anthony,” he demanded, “ as man to man—you are telling me the truth ? ”

“ Of course I am,” was the sullen reply. “ Why shouldn’t I ? ”

“ Might be trying to shield somebody, you know.”

“ Rubbish ! ”

“ Do you happen to know that very beautiful woman, Madame de Sayal, ‘ the lady of the bungalow ’ they call her ? ”

“ I have spoken to her once in my life.”

“ A very beautiful woman, eh ? ”



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“ She may be. What the devil concern is it of yours or mine ? ”

“ We will leave it at that,” was the somewhat dry response. “ Sometimes in life one has to edit the truth. If the necessity is there it has to be faced. I will get it over for you if I can, but I tell you frankly that your story of your temporary absence from the world early this morning is one of the thinnest things I ever heard.”

The two men descended the hill together. Anthony Sarson felt curiously tongue-tied and scarcely a word passed between them. Just before they reached the police station they met Tyssen.

“ Well ? ” the latter asked eagerly. “ Is it all explained ? ”

“ Mind your own business, young fellow,” Anthony enjoined. “ What the devil concern is it of yours anyway ? ”

“ But, my dear Sarson,” Tyssen expostulated, “ this is the chance of my lifetime for picking up a few real live impressions. I have been talking to the Inspector and I can tell you he seemed quite impressed by some of my suggestions.”

“ He would,” Sarson murmured satirically.

“ No one else seemed to have thought of it,” Tyssen went on, “ but this business works out just according to the lines the American gangsters have established. You know what they do ? They take a man out for an automobile ride, shoot him in a lonely place and leave him. That’s just about the way the thing may have worked out last night.”

“ Wonderful ! ” Sarson scoffed.

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“What I have not been able to understand yet is this,” Tyssen went on. “Did he show you, Doctor, how it was possible for him to fall down, climbing over that gate, and remain unconscious for five or six hours?”

“He showed me the exact spot,” was the curt reply, “and the thing itself is more than possible.”

“If you are going to make an infernal nuisance of yourself like this, Tyssen,” Sarson warned him, “just because you are writing some damned idiocy you call a novel, I will show you how possible it is to remain unconscious perhaps for more than five hours! You have a nice easy jaw to hit. Keep it out of my way.”

Tyssen seemed mildly surprised, perhaps a little hurt. He stopped short.

“I think I shall go up and look at the gate,” he confided. “I might be able to make some helpful suggestions. There is nothing else to be done, anyway, till the five-fifty arrives.”

“You can go to hell if you want to,” was Anthony Sarson’s savage retort.

“God bless my soul!” Mr. Roland Martin exclaimed, as the train jolted into Sandywayes station and he let down the window of the “Club Car.” “Here’s the sergeant to meet us. I hope there’s no fresh trouble.”

The sergeant approached and saluted. The gloom upon his inexpressive face foretold ill news.

“Any of the other gentlemen with you, Mr. Martin?” he inquired.

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“ We’re all here. Nothing wrong, I hope ? ”

There descended Mr. Cresset, Mr. Timothy Sarson and, last of all, Mr. James Huitt carrying his usual dispatch box and with *The Times* under his arm.

“ Gentlemen, one and all,” the sergeant announced, “ I am sorry to trouble you, but it is in the name of the law. You are required to call in at the police station before you go home.”

“ Not a serious matter, I hope ? ” Mr. Martin asked anxiously.

“ I wouldn’t like to say that,” was the guarded reply. “ The fact is, gentlemen, that the body of a man was found in the Wilderness this morning. Inspector Penny from Scotland Yard has the matter in hand, and before we can get very far in our inquiries it is necessary to have the body identified. What you are asked to do, therefore, is to come as far as the police station and see if you can help. If not, the body will be sent to the mortuary at Godalming tomorrow for the inquest.”

Mr. James Huitt, allegorically speaking, pricked up his ears at the word inquest. The probabilities of his being required as a witness at this one, however, seemed too remote for exultation.

“ Is there any appearance, Sergeant,” Mr. Cresset demanded, “ of the man having died from unnatural causes ? ”

“ It does strike one that way, sir,” the sergeant replied, “ him having a revolver bullet through the middle of his shirt front.”

“ My God ! Another suicide ? ” Timothy Sarson groaned.

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“That ain’t a certainty, either, sir,” the sergeant said cautiously. “Inspector Penny he’s not taking much stock in that theory. For one thing there’s been no weapon found up till now. After a man’s shot himself through the middle in an open space he has not got what you might call much chance of hiding the weapon.”

“I wonder Anthony didn’t come up to the station,” his father observed.

The sergeant coughed.

“I dare say the Inspector might have been wanting him, sir. He will have his own story to tell you, Mr. Sarson, without a doubt, but as a matter of fact he went out again last night after he had brought the young lady home, and he didn’t turn up again till past midday, still in his dress clothes. Gave us all a bit of a twist, that did.”

“My God!” Timothy Sarson exclaimed. “I saw the motor bicycle in the garage so I thought he was sleeping late. Do you mean to say that he went out again last night?”

“Must have done,” the sergeant agreed. “He came home half stupid just before one o’clock. Seems he had had a fall, on the top, climbing a gate. You will hear the whole story, gentlemen. It’s no good my answering you piecemeal.”

The sergeant adopted an aloof air, but Mr. James Huitt had a question to ask.

“Are there any indications, Sergeant, as to the social position of this unfortunate person?”

“A gentleman like one of yourselves. Slap up evening clothes he was dressed in, with real pearl

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studs and pretty well a hundred pounds in his pocket-book. He was a gentleman all right."

"Then someone or other," the bank manager prophesied, "will soon be able to identify him. It's these tramps and small tradesmen who take to crime and wander a long way from home, sometimes in an old rattletrap of a stolen motor-car, that puzzle the police."

They had arrived at the police station. Inspector Penny was standing in the doorway to receive them. The sergeant ran over the names of his companions.

"These gentlemen, Inspector," he announced, "with the people you have already questioned, comprise the whole of the dwellers in the Oasis."

Inspector Penny smiled cheerfully.

"That helps us very much," he said. "Now, gentlemen, may I ask you to step this way with me into the back room. It will be a godsend indeed if one of you is able to identify the dead man."

They passed in to what was really the kitchen of the cottage, an apartment which seemed already to have caught the odour of death. The body of the dead man still remained stretched out there, appalling in its sheer ugliness, in its typification of a mad and terrifying departure into eternity.

"The nurse is coming in," the sergeant confided, in a low hoarse tone, "as soon as the gentlemen have had their look."

Mr. James Huitt was the first to speak. He cast only one glance at the pallid face with its twisted lips and expression of paralysed fear.

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“ Dear me,” he exclaimed. “ Certainly, Inspector, I can tell you who this is.”

They gave way on either side. They listened with bated breath.

“ I dined with this gentleman last night at Lord Milhaven’s,” Huitt continued. “ He left for London just before I did. His name is Bott, Sir Julian Bott, a very famous financier in the City.”

ANTHONY SARSON and his sister that afternoon were on their way to the Tennis Club when Inspector Penny issued from the police station. He saluted them and, with a slightly apologetic air, drew Anthony on one side.

“ Might I ask, Mr. Sarson,” he ventured, “ how you are passing the afternoon ? ”

Anthony looked at him in surprise.

“ Why, we are going to play tennis,” he said, pointing to the Club.

“ And afterwards ? ”

“ Afterwards I might go for a stroll.”

“ Cut out the stroll, if you please. I want you within touch for the next hour or so.”

Anthony frowned as he looked down at his questioner.

“ What on earth for ? ” he asked.

The smile had faded from Inspector Penny’s face. He seemed suddenly very much in earnest.

“ Mr. Sarson,” he said, “ if I chose to do it I should be perfectly justified in arresting you on suspicion of being concerned in last night’s murder.”

Anthony’s hand went suddenly to the back of his head. He felt a return of his giddiness. It scarcely seemed possible that he had heard aright. He stared down at his companion—impressive looking enough now in his sombre uniform and grave expression.

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Pauline was still strolling on towards the tennis court. Directly overhead a lark was singing and a short distance away was the purr of the mowing machine on the cricket pitch. There were no other sounds except the humming of the bees in the police station garden. The Inspector's last words seemed to be still in his ears.

"Arrest me?" he repeated. "You're not in earnest, Inspector?"

"Indeed I am," the other replied. "I don't do it because I don't believe that you are guilty, but, on the other hand, you must do everything you are told. I don't want you out of my sight till I give the word. That will do for the present, Mr. Sarson."

"Wait one moment," Anthony begged. "There's no objection, I presume, to my calling on anyone living in the Oasis so long as I don't go out of it?"

"No," the Inspector conceded. "I must warn you, though, that you may be followed. . . ."

"What did he want?" Pauline asked, as Anthony rejoined her.

"Wanted to know how my head was?"

"You must have tied yourself up in an awful knot," she remarked, "to have fallen against the gate or on the road like that."

"So the doctor seemed to think."

Tyssen came strolling across the court to meet them. Pauline glanced deprecatingly at his flannel trousers which were too short and his sweater which was too long.

"Well?" Anthony inquired. "What are the



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prospects of the great work now that the murdered man is discovered to be a millionaire ? ”

Tyssen smiled nervously.

“ I’m rather changing my scheme,” he confided. “ I have had a thoroughly original idea. You are in it, Mr. Sarson, and I think it’s going to help me immensely. You have suddenly become a villain ! ”

“ How the mischief dare you make me a villain ? ” Anthony demanded.

“ It works out wonderfully,” Tyssen assured him. “ When you came down with Miss Cresset last night from the top you had seen something you did not mention to anyone. That was why you went back again after you had put your motor bicycle away. You probably took a revolver with you—everyone has a revolver in their garage nowadays—you went back to the mysterious car, you had a dispute with this man who wanted to force his way into the bungalow, he biffed you on the head and you were just in time to shoot him.”

“ So I am to be the murderer, am I ? ” Anthony asked.

“ I think that’s terrible of you, Mr. Tyssen,” Pauline said reproachfully. “ After that nice long talk we had in the garden the other night. You said such pleasant things about Anthony then, and now you want to make a villain out of him ! ”

“ But don’t you see how it all works in ? ” Tyssen pointed out with a grin. “ Up till now you are rather by way of being a hero. A thrill of surprise like that is the making of a story. People like their heroes turned into villains and their villains into heroes.”

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"I don't think you know much about writing stories, anyway," Anthony declared irritably. "I cannot think why you waste your time about it. Studying people for purposes of fiction is all very well, but with you it seems to mean poking your nose all the time into other people's affairs."

"Anthony, dear," Pauline remonstrated. "It's not so bad as all that."

"What harm do I do?" Tyssen asked deprecatingly. "As to poking my nose into other people's affairs, it simply happens that I am out to study still life, and people all seem determined to stir up the waters." "If you publish a book and I recognise myself," Anthony threatened, "I'll beat you into a jelly."

"Thank you," Tyssen replied with a twitch of the lips. "I shall be abroad when it's published."

"You'll come back some day," Anthony affirmed, "and then you'll pay for it."

"What about some tennis?" Pauline suggested hurriedly. "Sybil will be here directly."

"Mr. Huitt has just arrived," Tyssen announced. "He doesn't seem to like playing with me very much, but he was willing to take me on against you two."

"Better than doing nothing," Anthony agreed. "It will just pass the time till Sybil comes."

"I expect they will beat us," Pauline remarked, rising to her feet. "Mr. Huitt is so terribly accurate. I believe he would wear anyone down."

"He's much stronger than he seems, too," Tyssen observed. "I saw him make a forearm drive yesterday, when he thought no one was noticing, that would have passed at Wimbledon."

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Mr. Huitt appeared round the corner, ready for the fray. He carried a neat string bag in which reposed six balls which had apparently been carefully scrubbed, and each one of which bore his initials. His racquet was reverently withdrawn from its press.

"If the match is agreeable to you, Miss Sarson," he began, "our young friend, the pseudo-novelist, and I will take you and your brother on."

"You will beat us," Pauline prophesied. "Either Tony's head is still bad or he has something on his mind. For once in his life he is almost bad-tempered."

"Well, I ask you," Anthony appealed to them their way down to the court, "wouldn't you let me go though you had something on your mind? The Inspector over there"—moving his head towards the police station—"never takes his eyes off me. Just because I was out late and came home with a bashed head I seem to have become an X.Y.Z. bottom-class criminal!"

"You go to extremes, Mr. Sarson, if you will forgive my saying so," Huitt declared. "I have had some experience of the police over various embezzlement cases with which my branch of the bank has been concerned, and I have formed a very high idea of their capacity. The only thing is—they work for safety. They are compelled to do so. The law says every man is innocent until he has been proved guilty, but the police axiom is that every man may be guilty until he has been proved innocent. If you are quite ready, Miss Pauline, I see that you are taking the right hand court—serve."

Inspector Penny, with his principal quarry well out

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of the way, mounted the hill for the third time during the day and spent half an hour apparently mooning about. He re-examined the spot where the mysterious car had without a doubt encroached upon the hedge. He re-examined the gate where Anthony's fall was supposed to have taken place, and he walked in a leisurely semicircle around the spot where the body had been found. Finally he presented himself at the bungalow, the door of which was quickly opened in response to his knock. The Inspector saluted and announced himself.

"I must ask you to pardon my intrusion, madame," he said, presenting his card. "I am Inspector Penny of Scotland Yard."

She opened the door a little wider.

"Do come in, if you please," she invited. "I suppose you have come about this terrible affair. They found a body, didn't they, quite close to my house?"

The Inspector followed his guide into the very charming salon. Although he was not able to fully appreciate the beauty of the various *objets d'art* by which he was surrounded he felt instinctively that he was in the presence of a genuine artist.

"Tell me the latest news, Inspector," she begged. "My only servant is a Roumanian who speaks no English, so I hear nothing. Do you think that Sir Julian committed suicide?"

"That is a possibility," the Inspector confessed. "At present, however, we are inclined to deal with it as though it were a case of murder."

She shivered.

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“Murder,” she repeated. “In a quiet neighbourhood like this? It seems almost incredible, doesn’t it?”

His eyes were engaged in the futile task of searching for any change in her expression.

“What on earth was he doing up here in this part of the world at all?” she asked.

“He was dining at Lord Milhaven’s in the neighbourhood,” the Inspector told her, “and it appeared that he was going home in a hired car as his own had met with an accident during the afternoon. No one at the Court, however, seems to know from what garage it was hired or by whom, and Lord Milhaven’s butler, who saw him off, took no notice of the car or of the chauffeur. Why, on their way back to London, they passed at the back of the Wilderness here no one can tell. Lord Milhaven, however, has suggested a possible reason for it. Sir Julian was a member of the Golf Club and would have keys to the gates. He may have thought that a nearer way. As to why he should have stopped the car and got out here, at present we know nothing. I should like to ask you, madame, whether you were acquainted with Sir Julian Bott?”

“I have been trying to remember,” Madame de Sayal confided. “I am not quite sure. If I have ever met him our acquaintance is of the slightest.”

“You don’t think it is at all possible that he might have been on his way to call on you when he was shot?”

“Absolutely and entirely impossible,” she answered. “Not a soul knows that I am here, and certainly I should not be likely to receive a caller at that hour of the night.”

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"Just so," the Inspector murmured. "You heard no noise at all, I presume?"

"None. I slept quite soundly."

"You didn't hear a motor-car?"

"Certainly not."

"Or the sound of a shot?"

"I heard nothing."

He sighed.

"That doesn't seem very hopeful," he remarked.

"By the by, do you happen to be acquainted with a young man living down in the Oasis of the name of Anthony Sarson?"

She reflected for a moment.

"I believe that is the young man," she acknowledged, "with whom I have a sort of bowing acquaintance. I should not say that I know him, however, or any of these other people here. I say good morning sometimes if I pass them in the lanes. They seem to expect it."

"Sociable folk country people as a rule," the Inspector murmured. "This young man Anthony Sarson, though, he's different. He was at a public school and he's just down from the university. One gathers that he has been seen round this bungalow several times."

"Possibly," she admitted. "The land is not enclosed in any way at present."

"I have found an idea," the Inspector went on, "amidst several observant people, that the young man's wanderings in this locality might have been due to your residence here."

"That is quite possible," she acknowledged. "It

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lends a pleasant little touch of romance to the situation at any rate.”

“Supposing,” the Inspector continued—“you see, we policemen sometimes have to draw upon our imagination and try a fancy reconstruction—supposing the young man was wandering about here last night and saw Sir Julian Bott approaching your bungalow it is quite possible that he might have been angry and the two men have quarrelled. You see the possibilities, even the probabilities, are so easy. You are, if you will permit me to say so in a professional sort of way, a very beautiful woman. Around the beautiful women of the world there has always centred tragedy.”

Madame de Sayal laughed softly and apparently with real amusement.

“A brave cast, Mr. Inspector,” she said, “but an idea born and developed in your imagination only. I have spoken to the young man once. He is without interest for me or I for him. I tell you this to save you wasting your time. As for Sir Julian Bott, I know no more what he was doing near my bungalow than you do, but I can assure you that he was not killed for love of me.”

The Inspector smiled happily.

“Now we are getting on, madame,” he declared. “You are treating me with admirable candour and you are making my task easy. Now that I know which theories I can reject I may turn to new ones.”

“If you leave me out of your fancies altogether,” Madame observed, “you will stand a better chance of arriving at a solution.”

The Inspector stroked his chin thoughtfully.

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“Madame,” he begged, “please bear with me as well as you can. I am up against a problem, and when in my profession two extraordinary circumstances present themselves which are linked up together, you can understand that one is bound to seem pertinacious. First of all Sir Julian Bott is discovered shot through the heart within forty feet of your bungalow. There is no side road near. The natural premise is that he was on his way to visit you.”

“An extraordinary coincidence,” she admitted.

“Now for the next one, madame,” he continued. “One reads of you in Paris, and if there are great dinners or festivities on hand there is always the name of Madame. At Monte Carlo she is there continually dining with Royalty. At Biarritz she is hunting with the Duke. At Rome she is the guest of one of the great families and present at all the assemblies. Is it not a little hard for a comparatively ignorant person like myself, might it not be called also a curious coincidence, that Madame comes to simplicity like this to paint a few pictures?”

Madame’s fingers stole into a lacquer cigarette box by her side. She lit a cigarette and began to smoke.

“You see, Inspector,” she pointed out, “you are one of those people who are deceived by the newspapers. You learn only of one side of my activities. That is where you are apt to form wrong conclusions. I possess a farm-house between Rome and Leghorn compared to which these rooms are palatial. I have stone floors, open loggias, village-made furniture, yet I dwell there in great content in the season of the wild



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flowers. Then there is a little hunting box which belongs to me in Hungary wilder still, perched on the edge of a precipice miles from any form of luxury, where one can eat and drink only what the land affords. In Paris—but why should I go on? There are two instances—and this. Believe me, I am a person of simple tastes. There is nothing extraordinary in my being here.”

The Inspector had suddenly become a more serious person. His face was furrowed with thought.

“Madame,” he admitted, “you are right. There is nothing extraordinary in a woman of your catholic tastes being here. What I find extraordinary, having a problem to solve, is this: that within forty paces of your dwelling a man who arrived in a motor-car was found murdered last night without your having heard a shot or the passing of the car. Where was he coming? Where was he going? Upon what mission was he bent? And side by side with this, the young man who has been mooning about your bungalow at odd times during the last few weeks, spent last night, according to his own story, within a few yards of your house and staggered down this morning with a cock-and-bull story of having slipped while climbing a gate. Through all these different happenings Madame apparently slept.”

Madame rose to her feet. The Inspector followed suit.

“It is the smell of the pines and a clear conscience which kept me asleep through all these excitements,” she confided. “Some people fill a silk bag with the needles, you know, Inspector, and keep it on their

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**pillow. If ever you suffer from insomnia you should try it."**

**"A spring mattress and a clear conscience and I need no opiates," the Inspector remarked, as he took his leave.**

ANTHONY SARSON had once more the idea, as he climbed the hill and passed out of sight amongst the pine trees, that he was wandering into some mysteriously enchanted land full of exciting but sinister influences. There was nothing that night, however, in the appearance of the bungalow or of the woman whom he had come to visit to encourage such ideas. The windows were flung wide open as though to invite the light evening breeze, and Madame de Sayal was stretched at her ease outside, a wisp of green and white, in a *chaise longue* with a book by her side and coffee and cigarettes at her elbow. She welcomed her visitor with a smile, simply lowering her book and pointing to the chair by her side.

“Come and sit down,” she invited. “Will you have some coffee? There are cigarettes there. Tell me all the news.”

“There is plenty for this quiet neighbourhood,” he assured her. “Yes, some coffee, please, and a cigarette if I may.”

She served him herself, pushed him over some cigarettes and carefully marking her book—it was an Italian life of one of the masters of the Renaissance—she leaned back to listen.

“In the first place you know that they have identified the dead man?”

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“ Yes, I have heard that.”

“ There will be a terrible sensation, of course,” he went on, keeping his eyes fixed upon her. “ Julian Bott was one of those men whom the newspapers always call ‘ Emperors of Finance.’ He was at the back of at least a dozen big companies and supposed to be a multi-millionaire.”

“ Yes, I have heard of Julian Bott,” she admitted. “ I suppose most people have. I may even have met him. Of that I am not sure. Has anyone evolved any theory as to why he came to be lying dead within a few yards of my bungalow ? ”

“ If the police have theories,” Anthony replied, “ they are not talking about them. The Scotland Yard man who is down here—an Inspector Penny—seems to like to work only through the telephone and through a haze of bluff. The sergeant is stupefied. Tom, our village constable, can do nothing but gasp. I ought to warn you, perhaps, that the first train from London to-morrow will probably bring down half a dozen newspaper men and photographers.”

“ I can easily see that the place will become intolerable,” Madame de Sayal observed. “ You have been discreet ? ”

She turned her eyes and looked at him. Their cold questioning light in a way repelled him, but the little shiver which he felt was one of tangled emotions. This was the sort of woman, without a doubt, who might tamper with the wills of men.

“ I have stuck to the same story,” he told her. “ No one absolutely believes me. The doctor has been up

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and examined the place where I told him that I fell, but although he is a pal I am afraid that he was incredulous. I wish you would tell me something."

"Well?"

"Who did hit me on the back of the head because I came a little too near your bungalow? Was it the man who was standing at the corner a moment before? Who was it, anyhow?"

"How should I know?" she asked listlessly. "Anyhow it was I who took care of you afterwards."

"You were a Good Samaritan," he admitted, "but I should like to find the person at the other end of the enterprise."

"Are you in any sort of trouble through this affair?" she asked.

"I believe," he replied, "that there are a good many people up in the village and even round here who believe that I murdered Julian Bott."

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Fancy your murdering anyone anyway!" she exclaimed. "Why, you would only have to stand up in the dock and any jury would send you home to your parents! I never saw anyone more like the golden-haired cherub at the top of his class in the Sunday school and less like a criminal! Besides, why on earth should they associate you with the affair?"

"Well, for one thing I didn't return home all night," he pointed out, "and came back with what they all look upon as a somewhat thin story. The only inhabited house up in this direction is yours. You are reputed to be something of an enchantress—everyone

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calls you 'la belle incognito,' you know, and tosh like that—and finally there is no one else in the running. If I didn't kill him who did?"

"Why is it so certain that he did not kill himself?" she asked.

"Because," he explained, and this time he kept his eyes fixed upon hers, "they have not found the weapon. A man cannot shoot himself through the heart and throw a revolver a long distance away afterwards."

"I'm sorry if you are likely to get into trouble," she observed thoughtfully. "Still, you must remember this. If you had told them the other story—the truth as it happened—that you had received a knock-out blow in the darkness from someone whom you had never seen, and were unconscious for five or six hours afterwards, that would have been just as incredible."

"I suppose it would have been," he admitted.

There was a brief silence. He was nerving himself to ask her a question. He got it off his chest at last.

"Did you know," he asked, "that one barrel of the revolver you lent me had been recently fired?"

"Not recently," she objected. "I believe that I did test it when I first came here. I have always kept it loaded. My maid, as I expect you know, lives in the next bungalow, but she is elderly and would be perfectly useless in the event of an alarm."

"Why did you lend it me?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"I thought it was a natural sort of protection. Where is it now, by the way?"

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"It is locked up at the present moment in a drawer in my room," he confided. "If by any chance our friend Inspector Penny knew where it was I should spend the night in the county police station!"

"What made you lock it up?" she inquired.

"Impulse," he answered. "It was in my jacket pocket. Anyone might have seen it when I got down to the village and heard about the murder. I don't know whether I should have been any better off if I had produced it at once. I expect I should. Anyhow I didn't."

"Why didn't you?" she reiterated.

"I suppose because I was afraid that it might get you into trouble," he admitted reluctantly.

She laughed contemptuously.

"You don't suppose I murdered Julian Bott, do you?"

"I don't know whether you did or not," he replied.

"Other people might have thought so. Someone did murder him, you know. They have not found the revolver, and this one—well, there's one cartridge missing."

"That's true," she assented.

His words seemed to have opened up a fresh field of thought. She leaned a little further back in her chair. There was just sufficient light in that half-way period between the passing of the afterglow of the sunset and the rising of the moon for him to marvel at the calm but exquisite placidity of her face. There was not a trace of anxiety, a foretaste of trouble to be detected anywhere in her expression. Her beautiful eyes were filled with a merely speculative light.

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“So far,” she remarked, “it seems as though the police have found out nothing. Do they not even know how or why the great Sir Julian Bott should have come at all to this corner of the country?”

“Oh, they have found out about that,” he told her. “Sir Julian, it seems, was dining with Lord Milhaven, who lives at Sandywayes Court, the other side of the railway line. He went home in a hired car as the magneto of his Rolls went wrong.”

“What about the chauffeur of the hired car?”

“They can’t find him. They can’t find out what garage he came from. Sir Julian seems to have telephoned himself. They are bound to find him before long, however. Every garage is being questioned and there is a B.B.C. inquiry out to-night.”

“Is there any road back to London from here?” she asked.

“No direct way. It seems that Sir Julian, however, is a member of the swagger Golf Club close to here and has access to their private road. It’s quite a reasonable thing that he may have tried to reach the main road to London from up here.”

“When is the inquest?”

“To-morrow morning. But it will only be a formal affair. The police are asking for an adjournment.”

“Why?”

“Because neither the chauffeur who drove Sir Julian nor the weapon have been found.”

“Why have you not brought back the revolver I lent to you?” she asked.

“I was not sure that you would want to have it,” he replied quietly.



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There was a brief silence. Suddenly Anthony rose to his feet. That short period of deceptive lights had scarcely passed, but he felt almost convinced that he saw someone moving in the shelter of the trees.

"If you will excuse me for a moment, Madame de Sayal," he begged, "I believe that there is someone there trying to listen to our conversation."

She turned her head indifferently. Anthony strode off towards the suspected spot. Almost as he did so a figure emerged and came towards them. It was Tyssen in his shabby grey trousers and dark blazer. He was wearing rubber-soled shoes and he had a generally furtive appearance.

"Hello, Sarson," he observed uneasily. "I thought that was you. I wish you would introduce me to Madame de Sayal. I was just wondering whether I dare stop and ask her one or two questions."

"I do not think she would care to know you," Anthony replied promptly, "and I cannot see what the mischief you are doing skulking about behind those trees."

"My dear fellow, don't use such unpleasant expressions," Tyssen enjoined, all the time edging his way a little nearer to the spot where Madame de Sayal was seated. "I was just following out a few speculations of my own. I was wondering, to tell you the truth, how far a man, after he had fired a bullet into his own heart, could throw the weapon with which he did it, afterwards. I don't fancy he could have reached very far."

"I am not interested in your speculations," Anthony said shortly. "If you cannot take a hint, Tyssen, I

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will speak plainly. Get out of here. I am sure Madame de Sayal does not want to talk to you."

"Who is this strange person?" the former interposed.

Tyssen eagerly availed himself of the opportunity.

"Madame," he said, "my name is Tyssen. I am exceedingly glad to make your acquaintance. Mr. Sarson is very much down upon me lately because of my interest in local affairs. I believe that you would understand the situation much better."

"What situation are you talking about?" she asked, having firmly refused to notice the young man's outstretched hand.

"Why, it's like this," Tyssen explained. "I'm a sort of a writer. I have had one or two stories accepted for detective magazines and I am at work now upon a much more ambitious effort. I am writing a mystery story with a murder in it. That is why anything unusual in life attracts me. I have found this place a little Paradise. In fact, now I hope to finish my book before I leave. Drama such as last night's I should never have dared to hope for."

"You seem to me to be a very quaint person," Madame de Sayal observed, "and I certainly do not see how it is going to help you to write your book to skulk round my bungalow as you were doing."

"I beg your forgiveness," Tyssen said eagerly. "These few yards fascinate me. The spot where Julian Bott's body was found, for instance. Your bungalow because it is the nearest house. This lane down which Mr. Sarson staggered at one o'clock

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to-day, having slept out somewhere or other. It's all material for me."

She looked at him coolly. His appearance was certainly not in his favour. His freckled complexion, his eager ingenuous looking eyes of watery blue, the awkwardness of his figure, the fact that every single article of his attire was as ill-chosen as possible.

"Who is your extraordinary friend, Mr. Sarson?" she asked. "Please tell him to go away. I am not interested in his books, and I think it is very rude and impertinent of anyone to come wandering around in this fashion."

"Do you hear that, Tyssen?" Sarson said firmly. "Be off at once. I don't know where you were brought up, but you ought to know better than to come and butt in upon strangers like this. Down the hill, if you please."

Tyssen showed no sign of resentment.

"I think you folks might be a little more sympathetic to a man with a hobby," he grumbled. "However, I don't wish to intrude. I dare say I shall know more about the facts than you will by the end of the week."

He shambled off. Madame de Sayal's eyes followed him for a short distance.

"What a terrible person," she remarked in a tone of disgust. "Was he really trying to listen to us?"

"I believe so," Anthony assented, resuming his seat. "The fellow is an intolerable nuisance. He writes page after page every day of some tripe which he calls his novel, and he is always hanging about,

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trying to get ideas as to how the detective and sergeant work and how they collect facts.”

“ I have never read a novel of crime,” Madame de Sayal reflected, “ but I have often wondered what sort of people write them.”

“MR. TYSSEN.”

“Miss Sarson?”

“Do you know that you are earning the reputation in this neighbourhood of being an exceedingly mysterious person?”

He paused in the act of rolling his cigarette and turned towards her. There was a somewhat indefinite smile upon his lips.

“Why?”

Pauline hesitated for a moment. They were seated in lounge chairs under the cedar tree, and Pauline had been wondering just how angry Anthony would be when he came down from the hill and found her companion there.

“Well, for one thing,” she said, “those two balls you bowled the other evening.”

“I thought they were only a mystery to Tom, the policeman,” he remarked, completing his cigarette and lighting it.

“They have made you a mystery to Anthony,” she confided. “He declares that he has seen all the best googly bowlers and that the one you sent down had a bigger swerve in the air than any of them. He doesn’t believe that you’re an unknown cricketer and he doesn’t believe that your name is Tyssen!”

“Does he suggest any reason,” the young man

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asked, " why I should be masquerading here under a false name ? "

" None at all," she replied. " He is curious. So am I."

" I can't say I'm sorry to hear that," he declared cheerfully.

" Why ? "

" I'd like you to be interested in me anyhow, anyway. I'd like you to be as interested in me as I am in you."

" Perhaps I should be," she said softly, " if only you would take me into your confidence, Mr. Tyssen. Tell me all about yourself."

" There is nothing interesting to tell," he assured her.

" Do you mean that ? "

" Yes."

Mr. Timothy Sarson, very large and picturesque looking in his soft-fronted evening shirt and drooping tie, stood on the threshold of the french windows momentarily blotting out the lamplight.

" Anthony back yet, Pauline ? " he inquired.

" Not yet, father."

The latter looked with secret disapproval at the young man by his daughter's side. He had no fancy for the youth of the period who did not trouble to change their attire in the evening. On the other hand the young man's swift rising to his feet was a mark in his favour.

" Why don't you ask Mr. Tyssen to have a whisky and soda, Pauline ? " he suggested.

" I am a bad hostess," she confessed. " Won't you

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help yourself, Mr. Tyssen? You'll find everything on the sideboard."

"Thank you very much."

Mr. Timothy Sarson stood on one side to make room for the young man. He led him to the sideboard and himself poured out the whisky with generous hand.

"Pre-War, it won't hurt you," he said. "Soda water at your elbow. Seen anything of Anthony this evening?"

"I left him only a short time ago."

"Was he up at the Wilderness?"

"Yes, sir. He was calling on Madame de Sayal."

Mr. Sarson frowned.

"I wish to goodness he'd keep away from the woman," he exclaimed irritably. "There's gossip enough as it is. Were you there too, then?"

"I looked in," Tyssen admitted.

"Another of the beautiful lady's victims?"

"Not I," was the emphatic reply. "I was there to see if I could pick up any information about last night."

"That's all very well for a story writer like you," Mr. Sarson grumbled. "Besides, you were in your bed last night. I wonder Anthony hasn't the sense to see that it's the stupidest thing he can do to go playing about up there with all this gossip going round."

Tyssen remained silent. Mr. Sarson refilled his own glass with scant notice of the soda water.

"You've heard what they're saying, of course?" he asked.

"I hear everything," Tyssen confessed. "I am afraid I'm rather a gossip myself when there's anything of this sort about."

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“ Well, I wish to goodness you'd tell Anthony what a damned silly thing he's doing hanging about after that woman,” his host growled. “ He's out all night the night of the murder, and comes back with an idiotic story which I'll swear our friend Inspector Penny doesn't believe for one. That fellow Julian Bott is found shot within a few yards of the woman's house, and yet he must go up there again spending the evening with her. The lad's crazy.”

“ It seems injudicious,” Tyssen observed. “ On the other hand it wouldn't be easy for anyone who knows Anthony to believe that he had anything to do with it.”

“ There's no sentiment about these damned policemen,” Mr. Sarson pointed out. “ I know for a fact that Penny is having Anthony watched. The last place he ought to go near is the bungalow.”

“ So long as there is no direct evidence,” Tyssen observed, “ I don't suppose that it matters very much.”

The young man edged away towards the open window, and Mr. Sarson picked up his *Times*. Pauline welcomed her visitor back. She was a very attractive looking young woman in her cool white frock lying back in the tangled moonlight.

“ Father's worried, isn't he ? ” she asked, as he resumed his seat.

“ Seems so,” he admitted. “ I don't think myself it's very wise of your brother to be up there. Madame de Sayal is bound to be a suspected person for a short time.”

“ Is there any mystery about her really, I wonder ? ” Pauline speculated.



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"She has a foreign name and a foreign title," her companion observed. "They fit in well for my story."

"When are you going to read me some of it?" she asked.

"Not until I get it into better shape than it is at present," he replied. "I'm beginning to see my way through. When I've found the proper ending—yes, I promise you shall be the second to hear it."

"Why not the first?" she pouted.

His lips parted in a quaint smile.

"The first has been promised for some time," he confided. "It is a different sort of affair, that, altogether."

"How thrilling! Will there be any real persons in it?"

"Most of them," he replied. "I am taking my characters from life."

They heard Anthony's swinging footsteps coming up the drive. He came nearer and recognised Tyssen with a scowl. Pauline intervened quickly.

"Tony," she suggested, "why don't you speak to Mr. Tyssen now about the Godalming match?"

Anthony paused and strolled towards them.

"What about turning out for us on Thursday, Tyssen?" he asked. "A day match. Godalming aren't a bad side and they're coming over here."

"Thank you very much," was the somewhat vague reply. "I'm not playing cricket this season."

Anthony frowned.

"If you're spending the summer here," he said, "wouldn't it be just as well to give the villagers a

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leg up? You needn't be afraid of it being too bumble puppy. Godalming have a couple of good bowlers and I'm playing myself. The cricket may not be quite up to your class, but it's good enough for a day match at any rate."

"Oh, but that isn't it at all," Tyssen protested. "I just don't want to play cricket this season, and that's all there is about it."

Anthony turned on his heel. He was not in the best of humours.

"Well, I call it very unsporting," he declared.

Pauline's own annoyance vanished as she realised her companion's distress.

"You're not angry with me, too, Miss Sarson?" the latter asked humbly.

"Well, in a way, if Anthony's right and you really are a cricketer, I don't think it's very kind of you," she said. "Tony's always taken an interest in the cricket here, and this year he and Tom are the only two who are any good at all."

"When did Mr. Sarson say the match was?"

"Thursday. They make quite a fête day of it here. Lord Milhaven sends down a wonderful lunch, a marquee, and his servants, and all that sort of thing. He used to play himself until the last few years."

"He doesn't turn out at all now, does he?"

"I've never seen him."

Tyssen passed one hand through his untidy mop of hair, then he commenced to rapidly roll a cigarette.

"What time do they generally draw stumps?" he asked.

She turned her head and looked at him wonderingly.

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“ I’ve no idea. What difference does that make ? ”

He evaded the question. It struck Pauline that he was looking extraordinarily uncomfortable.

“ Really,” she continued, “ you are becoming more of a mystery than ever. Why all this fuss about a simple cricket match ? ”

“ Because I’m a silly idiot,” he answered. “ If your brother still wants me to——”

“ It’s I who want you to now,” she interrupted, smiling at him.

“ All right,” he consented. “ I’ll play. I think I’d do pretty well anything you asked me,” he added.

She laughed as she rose to her feet. For a moment she took his arm, and she was startled to see the transformation in him. He seemed suddenly to become a person of more dignity. She forgot his shabby clothes and irritating mannerisms. With the metamorphosis came a larger measure of caution on her part.

“ I must go in now,” she said quietly. “ Good night ! I’m glad you’re playing.”

Anthony, entering the house, had avoided a meeting with his father. He was filled with a sudden desire to examine once more the revolver which he had hidden away. He mounted the stairs and entered his dressing-room. He stood there listening, to be sure there was no one around, then he secured the door and, with a key which he drew from his pocket, unlocked the drawer where he had left the revolver. He lifted the little pile of shirts under which he had placed it. Then the shock came ! He could have

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sworn to the exact spot where he had left the gun. There was no sign of it anywhere. He flung the shirts out on to the floor, emptied the whole contents of the drawer. It took him scarcely a minute to realise the bald, horrible truth. Someone had been there before him. The revolver was gone !

MR. HUITT'S presence in the "Club Car" at Sandways station on the following morning excited some surprise amongst his fellow passengers.

"Hello, Huitt!" Roland Martin exclaimed. "What are you doing here? I thought the inquest was this morning."

The bank manager explained the matter in his usual precise fashion.

"The inquest is purely a formal affair," he confided. "I was subpoenaed, but as Lord Milhaven has also identified the body the coroner has been good enough to excuse me. Lord Milhaven's identification is amply sufficient and no other evidence is to be called. The police are asking for an adjournment for a week."

"Why do they want an adjournment?" Mr. Cresset demanded, his nervous fingers playing with his grey moustache. "It all seems simple enough."

"Shows you haven't been much interested if you think that," Roland Martin declared. "I understand that as yet they haven't even traced the hired motor-car or the chauffeur whom Sir Julian rang up for. That leaves them without the slightest evidence as to how he came to be in the Wilderness at all. I haven't heard that the weapon's been discovered either, and I should think that when they go

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thoroughly into the matter they will have to call Madame de Sayal."

"Madame de Sayal," Timothy Sarson pointed out, "declares that she heard neither the car nor the sound of a shot. Seems odd when you think how near the whole affair was to the bungalow. I should say that they'd certainly have to call her."

"Then they have no evidence yet as to the state of his mind and how he stood financially," Martin proceeded. "If I were one of the jury I should want to know from his host, Lord Milhaven, and our friend Huitt here, how he behaved at dinner-time, and I should certainly want some evidence as to the state of his affairs. Suicide may not be the popular theory, but it has to be taken into account. What is your opinion, Mr. Huitt, as to the financial position of Julian Bott's various companies?"

"I make it a rule," the bank manager replied, "not to form opinions unless I have absolute facts to go on. Even then I generally keep them to myself unless it's a matter of advising a client. Still, I think we can all go so far as to say that there will be a very uneasy market to-day. A great financier like Bott, practically in the prime of life, cannot disappear suddenly from the head of his affairs without leaving a repercussion behind."

"A man usually has pretty grave reasons for committing suicide," Timothy Sarson observed.

"I don't want to be a sensationalist," Roland Martin declared, "but I don't believe it was suicide at all. I believe that Sir Julian Bott was murdered."

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The thrill of the word had its usual mysterious effect. Everyone looked towards the speaker.

“First of all,” Martin argued, “the police have abandoned all search for the weapon—in the immediate locality at any rate. No one can shoot himself through the heart and swallow the weapon. Then, what on earth was he doing up in the Wilderness? It’s ridiculous to suppose that he didn’t go there of his own free will. There must have been plenty of people about in the Wilderness when he was driven through. I should suggest that he was a friend of Madame de Sayal’s and that he was shot on his way to call upon her.”

“What do you think, Huitt?” Timothy Sarson asked anxiously.

“I think,” the bank manager pronounced, “that such matters are very much better not discussed until the police have had an opportunity of completing their inquiries.”

“That’s all very well academically, but one can’t help discussing this particular one,” Mr. Cresset objected. “If it was a case of murder, as you believe, then there’s nothing for us holders of Julian Bott’s stock to worry about. If it was suicide we may be face to face with something sensational in the way of crashes. As a bank manager, Huitt, you must know what this means to your clients—after all we have been through, too.”

“You were actually at the dinner the other night, weren’t you, Huitt?” Roland Martin inquired.

“Lord Milhaven was kind enough to invite me,” was the modest reply. “I fancy that they were

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anxious to have the opinion of a person in my position as regards the marketing of a great amalgamation scheme which Sir Julian had on hand. They said 'opinion',' Mr. Huitt continued, with a thin smile at the corners of his lips, "but I think I know what they meant. They wanted to influence the investing public through men in my position who are naturally being consulted all the time."

"In plain words," Martin asked, "what do you think of the Julian Bott stock, the Windsor Trust, and all the rest of it?"

"If you really want any information," Huitt replied stiffly, "drop in at the bank any time you like, Mr. Martin."

"I must say I rather approve of Huitt's point of view," Mr. Cresset intervened. "There is too much gabble in public places all the time about these sort of things."

"Let's drop them—for the morning, at any rate," Timothy Sarson suggested. "Tell us what port his lordship gave you. He's got some '87 he bought from me that must want drinking and some '84 that would be getting a little thin."

"He did us better than that," Huitt confided. "He gave us Dow's 1870."

There was an almost reverent expression on Timothy Sarson's face.

"You were lucky fellows," he declared. "That came to him with the house. His grandfather must have laid that down."

Mr. Cresset, who cared nothing about wine, broke into the conversation.



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“I say, what do you fellows think about this man who’s been sent down from Scotland Yard—Inspector Penny?” he asked.

“I have had no opportunity of judging the man’s capacity,” Mr. Huitt observed.

“I should think he’s sound,” Timothy Sarson remarked. “I happen to know that he’s convinced it’s a case of suicide.”

“I hear he was up at Madame de Sayal’s putting her through it,” Roland Martin announced. “Her ladyship wouldn’t think much of that. She’s as stand-off as they make ’em. The last person in the world for a fellow like Penny to get on with.”

Timothy Sarson shook open his paper.

“Well,” he said with an air of finality, “Julian Bott’s suicide is an affair which we can consider outside our own orbit, even though it happened so close at hand. He didn’t belong to our little circle and he was practically a stranger to all of us. It was simply coming so soon after poor Jesson’s affair that gave us a bit of a shock. Now I hope we’ve finished, and that we are going back to our quiet days. I used to think sometimes coming down from town that we were fortunate enough to live in one of the quietest and most retired spots on God’s earth. Just lately everything seems wrong. You can read about suicides in the newspapers all right and sometimes almost enjoy a good murder, but I’m damned if I like the shadow of crime, the cold ghastliness of it, on my own doorstep.”

Mr. Huitt nodded approval.

“Your sentiments, Sarson, are entirely mine,” he

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pronounced. "That is why I like to keep silent so far as possible when these distressing matters are referred to. I must confess that I have no taste for horrors. I like our quiet lives at the Oasis, our tennis during the summer evenings and on Saturday afternoons, our gardens and an occasional friendly chat with a neighbour. It is my idea of a complete existence for a man whose working hours are spent in the City. I agree with Mr. Sarson. I hope the fates will now leave us undisturbed. Before I take up my paper again," Mr. Huitt concluded, after a momentary pause, "it occurs to me that I may have seemed a little churlish in refusing to give advice upon a matter concerning which I naturally have special information. I will not enter into details but I may say this : I am a strong opponent of one-man finance. I do not believe in a whole string of companies and a Trust being under the dictatorship, as it were, of one man. The opportunities for what I should call bogus finance are too pronounced. You will observe that I am avoiding answering direct queries as to Sir Julian's financial position. My opinion, however, as to the conditions under which he worked is at your service."

"Damn' well expressed, too," Mr. Timothy Sarson declared. "We've had heaps of examples in the past of a man trying to carry too much on his own shoulders. If there's any market I'm going to sell the few Windsor Trust shares I own."

Roland Martin laid down his newspaper and glanced out of the window. There was no denying the fact that they were being badly jolted. Apparently the brakes had been put on suddenly and the train

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came to a standstill in a station, the name of which was almost unknown to them. Martin let down the window.

“Hellsby Halt !” he exclaimed.

“I know where it is,” Mr. Sarson observed, “but I never knew a train to stop here before.”

A funny little station-master came running officiously down the platform. He arrived outside the “Club Car.”

“Any gentleman here of the name of Mr. Timothy Sarson ?” he demanded.

The wine merchant leaned forward.

“That,” he announced, “is my name.”

The station-master paused to wipe the sweat from his forehead.

“Will you kindly come along with me, sir ?” he begged. “Quick as possible. I’ve had to flag the train by reason of a message from Sandywayes. If you’d be kind enough to hurry, sir, and might I ask you whether it’s the truth that you’re a director of the company ?”

Tall and imposing in dress and stature, Mr. Timothy Sarson stepped out on to the miserable little plank platform, on which he certainly presented a singularly inappropriate appearance. The station-master breathed a sigh of relief. If ever there was a man who by appearance and manner seemed worthy of being a director of the Great Southern Railway Company, here indeed he stood.

“There’s a young gent on a motor-bicycle, sir. He’s beat the train and a rare state of sweat and dust he’s in. Will you kindly speak to him and get back

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into your seat? A doing like this has never happened before, and I'm feared that I may have done wrong. This way, sir."

There was not even a shed attached to the bare planks at Hellsby Halt. Leaning against the paling by which he had clambered from the road was a tall, uncouth-looking man, disfigured by motoring accoutrements. Nevertheless, Timothy Sarson recognised him.

"Mr. Tyssen!" he exclaimed. "How on earth did you get here? What do you want?"

"A message from Anthony, sir," the young man pronounced, with the air of one who has only during the last few seconds recovered his breath. "He thought you ought to know. He was just off to Lewes—going to play cricket for the Gentlemen of Sussex against the M.C.C. when that fellow Penny came along."

"He stopped him?" Mr. Sarson gasped.

"He did indeed, sir," Tyssen assented. "He warned Anthony that until further notice he was not to cross the railway line."

"My God!" Mr. Sarson murmured. "My son! Tell me, Tyssen. Speak out! Do you think they really believe that Anthony killed Sir Julian Bott?"

"I wouldn't go as far as that," the young man replied, "but one has got to be brutal about this—there's no one else so likely. You know what the police are. They don't want to make an arrest too soon. On the other hand, they don't want to let anyone they suspect out of their sight. I've a bit of experience of this, sir, from my story-writing. If Anthony had been a regular criminal they'd have

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framed something up on him and put him where he was safe for a week or so. They can't do that on Mr. Anthony, but they've put tabs on him, and if he won't stay where he's put they'll risk the arrest."

"What am I to do?" Timothy Sarson asked helplessly.

"He told me to try and catch you and let you know the situation. He didn't want to use the telephone there. What he thought was that you might get a good lawyer on to the job."

"Anything else?"

"Simply he wanted me to let you know. Er—it was Miss Pauline, too, who was anxious for you to be told at once."

"You are very kind," the other declared. "I will send a lawyer down. I will return myself by the early train. Try and reassure Anthony. Unless I am very much deceived he need have no fear."

Tyssen lifted his goggles. His was not a prepossessing face, but at least it was an honest one.

"Mr. Sarson," he said, "your son has been a little indiscreet. No worse than that, believe me. We'll see that he doesn't suffer for it."

The little station-master absolutely dragged his passenger away and pushed him into the railway carriage. The guard, who had been waving his flag furiously, blew his whistle. The train started. Tyssen depressed the starting lever and, with a volume of foul smoke from the exhaust, and a hideous noise, started on his return journey.

“MR. TIMOTHY SARSON to see Mr. Huitt. Urgent!”

The bank manager glanced at the scrawl on the slip of paper which had just been brought in, and sighed. It was three o'clock on that very busy afternoon when every bank in London was concerning itself with the affairs of the Windsor Trust and the Julian Bott companies, and Mr. Huitt had also affairs of his own to attend to. Nevertheless the announcement was one which he could not ignore.

“You can show Mr. Sarson in at once,” he directed.

Mr. Timothy Sarson followed close upon his announcement. The change in him during the last few days was pathetic. A healthy upstanding man, fifty-eight or fifty-nine years old, he had been almost a first-class athlete in his youth, was still a low handicap golfer, a highly esteemed shot and, when he chose to play, Mr. Huitt's equal at tennis. At the moment, however, he looked like a broken-down man. Not only were there new lines of distress in his fresh-complexioned face, but he had a dazed appearance as though he had just received some utterly incomprehensible shock.

“Sit down, Sarson,” the bank manager invited. “Now tell me all about this wild telephoning. You have been down home, of course?”

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Mr. Sarson accepted a chair into which he sank a little wearily.

"It's all quite true," he confided. "They've actually warned Anthony not to leave the neighbourhood. It's that fellow Penny's doing."

"Do you know what sort of evidence they have?" Mr. Huitt inquired. "It all sounds to me quite absurd."

Timothy Sarson began his story drearily.

"They seem to have found out, by nosing around, that Anthony used to go mooning up at night sometimes outside that woman Madame de Sayal's grounds, but no one has actually seen him with her, and he assures me that up till the last forty-eight hours he has never exchanged more than a sentence with her. The trouble of it is that he stayed out all that wretched night, came back in his dress clothes at one o'clock in the broad sunlight, and told some asinine story about having fallen from a gate and having been unconscious for several hours."

"I've heard about that," Mr. Huitt murmured. "It did seem a little improbable."

"No one in their senses would believe such a thing," Sarson went on dejectedly. "Even the little doctor, who is a personal friend, declared that Tony's story as to how he came by his concussion is almost impossible. Then there's something else about a revolver which they haven't mentioned, but which Anthony told me about, which is a perfectly rotten business."

"Have you seen Anthony yourself?"

"I took Temperly down by the eleven-thirty. I left him there with Anthony."

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“ Well, then, there’s nothing more to be done for the present,” Huitt declared decisively. “ You’ve done the only thing that could be done—put Anthony into the hands of a first-class lawyer. So long as he tells him the truth he ought to get out of it all right. If you’re going back by the usual train we might have a little further talk on the way down.”

“ Yes, I suppose I shall go home,” Timothy Sarson groaned. “ There’s nothing more I can do up here. . . . By the by, Huitt, I didn’t come in on banking business, but your folks outside are not over smart to-day. You will have to get after them.”

“ What is wrong ? ” the bank manager asked, with a slight contraction of the lips.

“ I saw Mr. Plumer standing at his desk as I came in, and I asked him to tell me the amount of my balance. He came back in a few moments and told me—where’s that piece of paper ? ”—Mr. Sarson went on feeling in his waistcoat pocket—“ Here it is—six hundred and seventy-two pounds, eighteen shillings.”

Mr. Huitt looked gravely astonished.

“ That, I happen to know, is a very serious error, Mr. Sarson,” he said. “ I glanced at your account myself only the day before yesterday, and the size of your balance, with the bank rate at its present figure, rather appalled me.”

“ I knew that it was quite a large one,” Mr. Sarson admitted. “ We have a great deal of wine coming in with sight drafts attached to the bills of lading, a situation for which my cashier always makes full provision.”

Mr. Huitt rose to his feet.



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“ If you do not mind waiting for five minutes,” he invited, “ I will put this matter right at once.”

He handed his visitor the morning paper and left the room. Sarson, too nervous to remain for long in one position, moved restlessly about in his chair. He glanced at the clock—a very fine, dignified affair with the name of a famous maker on the dial, a clock which was fully in keeping with its austere but seemly surroundings. Only three minutes gone. He rose to his feet and began to walk up and down the apartment. He stopped to look at two very beautiful prints which hung on the colour-washed walls, he read and verified the date upon two separate calendars. He walked up and down again once more, his feet sinking noiselessly into the heavily piled carpet. He reached his chair, but he did not at once sit down. He found himself studying with absurd but unreasonable interest the various impedimenta upon the bank manager’s desk. It was indeed a model of neatness. There was scarcely a single document or letter visible. Three baskets labelled “ Letters for Personal Attention,” “ Departmental Letters ” and “ Letters for Consideration ” were fairly well filled, and the contents of each kept tidy and in good order by heavy paper weights. Upon the spotless blotter in front of the bank manager’s empty chair was one object and one object only—a photograph turned upside down and secured in its place by a further paper weight. Mr. Timothy Sarson glanced drearily at the clock. It seemed incredible that only five minutes had passed since he had been left alone. Once more his eyes wandered over the various objects distributed on that

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faultlessly tidy table. They rested on the photograph and remained there. An absurd inclination suddenly took possession of the unnerved man. He wanted to lean over, remove the paper weight and look at the photograph ! The idea of Mr. Huitt, whose lack of human weaknesses seemed to his neighbours to have reduced him to a complete and perfect piece of mechanism, having a photograph upon his table at all seemed ridiculous. What sort of a photograph was it ? The picture of a woman ? Timothy Sarson, for the first time during the day, smiled. The idea was a trifle too ridiculous. A photograph of himself ? Why ? In guarded personal conversation Mr. Huitt had frequently declared that he had no living relatives or close connections of any sort. Whose photograph then was he likely to possess ? For twelve years he had lived his simple tabulated life in touch all the time with the members of the " Club Car " and his few other neighbours in the Oasis, a perfectly attuned piece of human machinery. Of human feelings, as they are generally understood, Mr. Huitt had never given any indication. His judgments upon all matters were readily accepted because they were not only so accurate but because they were obviously unbiased by any personal prejudices. That he should like anyone well enough to care to have a photograph of them seemed to Sarson an idea little short of ludicrous. He found himself leaning further over the table. The inclination to look at that photograph was becoming irresistible. The meanness of schoolboy days was returning to the elderly wine merchant. He deliberately listened. The only sounds to be heard inside

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the building were the tapping of many typewriters and a faint murmur of distant voices. Mr. Sarson yielded to that irresistible inclination. He leaned over, removed the paper weight, lifted the photograph and looked at it. . . . He looked at it and he looked at it again. Slowly his full red lips parted, his eyes became almost fixed in their stare. He seemed incapable of replacing it. He felt that he must go on looking. He failed to hear the door open behind him. It was the sound of Mr. Huit's thin, but this time portentous voice which brought him to himself.

“When you have quite satisfied your curiosity, Mr. Sarson, perhaps you would not mind replacing that picture.”

MR. TIMOTHY SARSON did as he was bid and collapsed into his chair with the feeling that he had made an utter fool of himself. The bank manager continued his quiet progress towards his accustomed place. He took up the photograph and laid it once more face downwards upon his blotter, replaced the paper weight and consulted a slip of paper which he was carrying.

“The figures which were handed to you were entirely erroneous, Mr. Sarson,” he announced. “Your balance three minutes ago was twenty-nine thousand, four hundred and seventy-two pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence, subject to a few days’ interest which at the moment we are not able to determine owing to uncertainty as regards the bank rate.”

“Thank you very much,” his client mumbled.

“My assistant cashier,” the bank manager continued, “begged me to present to you his most abject apologies for the figures he gave to Mr. Plumer. You and I are not subject to these human weaknesses,” Huitt went on, with something that was very much like the suggestion of a sneer in his tone, “but as an excuse, if it can be accepted as an excuse, the man explained that he has been sitting up all night with his wife, who is suffering from one of the usual feminine

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ailments, and he confused you for one moment with a Mr. Harwood, a builder and contractor, who is not unlike you in person. The figures he handed you were Mr. Harwood's. I am entirely in your hands in this matter, Mr. Sarson. If you consider that an error, which was quite inexcusable and which may have caused you a few minutes' anxiety, can be expiated only by dismissal, my clerk shall receive a month's notice to-day. If, on the other hand, you are content to accept his explanation of the unfortunate incident——”

“For God's sake, don't go on like that, man!” Sarson broke in, with a note of unusual and unexpected passion in his tone. “God help me, why should I want the young fellow to get the sack—especially if he is in trouble at home? A perfectly natural mistake, Huitt. I don't care a bit. I accept the young man's apologies.”

“You are very kind, and I am sure he will be most grateful,” Mr. Huitt said. “He is, as a matter of fact, an employee whom we think well of. You, too, Sarson,” his friend went on, looking at him keenly through those oval shaped spectacles, “are in what might be called trouble at home. You are, without a doubt, unnerved. Nevertheless, I am curious. Do you mind telling me exactly what induced you to examine a private belonging of my own lying in security upon my desk?”

“Oh, for heaven's sake, don't be so formal!” Timothy Sarson, who was at most times the acme of formality himself, burst out. “Can't you understand? I scarcely know what I am doing. I walked round

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this room while you were outside, like a caged tiger. I glared at the clocks, I looked at your prints, I admired your neatness, I drank in the atmosphere of this severe, orthodox spider's parlour and then I saw that photograph. I could not think what in hell you were doing with a photograph. I looked at it again, and the next thing I knew I was holding it up and you came in. Now, let's deal with the matter from a different point of view."

"Let us deal with the matter from a different point of view," Huitt repeated with crisp exactitude. "Are you inviting me to a conference upon my belongings?"

"If you don't want me to make a scene and smash all your beautiful furniture, throw your neatly arranged baskets around the place and end in a lunatic asylum," Timothy Sarson almost shouted, "talk to me as man to man. That's the photograph of the woman who probably holds my son's life in her hands," he went on, pointing towards it with shaking forefinger. "What the hell are you doing with it? Have you any influence over her? Do you know anything about her? Just remember we have been neighbours and in a way friends for a great many years, and it is my only son whom they are threatening with jail and perhaps worse—because of that woman! It is she who knows how to put an end to this ridiculous story. If you are on such terms with her secretly as to possess her photograph, for heaven's sake talk to me like a human being and drop that bank manager's, copy-book, minced-up-words attitude!"

"Sarson," the bank manager said, "believe me, I sympathise with you."

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“ You don’t look as though you did,” Sarson growled. “ You don’t act as though you did.”

“ You are utterly overwrought,” the other continued. “ I forgive your having tampered with my belongings. Think no more about it. This photograph has been sent to me because, during the last week, Madame de Sayal has applied to the headquarters of my bank, requesting them to transfer her balances from various continental centres so that she may deal with them here. She mentioned that this would be the most convenient branch of the bank for her to visit. Formalities,” Mr. Huitt went on, without a moment’s pause, “ with regard to foreign clients require that we should possess two photographs for occasional comparison with their passports. This is one of the two sent me down from head-quarters.”

Timothy Sarson had the air of a man whose little burst of suspicion was being cleanly cut away by the scissors of common sense. The bank manager’s freely proffered explanation was utterly convincing.

“ I’m sorry, Huitt,” he apologised. “ That’s all right, of course. I will only pray you to remember that I have been asking myself fiercely, ever since I left my boy, what sort of a woman this might be. Whether she would play the game and tell the truth if it was necessary, or play the game and tell a lie to save a boy’s life if it had to be. I’m sorry. As to why I looked at the damn thing at all, I have no explanation. I felt just as much like taking all those tidy letters out of their baskets and tearing them to pieces. I had to do something.”

“ We will forget the whole incident, Sarson,” the

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the combination with great care, then returned to his study and touched the bell.

“ I will deal now with anyone who is waiting,” he announced to the clerk. “ Let them come in order of arrival, please.”

Mr. James Huitt—reserved, polished, an accurate study of automatic life—dealt with the further business of the day.



MR. JAMES HUITT, having adjusted the angle of his deck chair in a retired corner of his country garden, settled himself down with a sigh of relief to an hour of relaxation. On a table by his side was his coffee cup, *The Times* and a small portable wireless, its wings invitingly opened. Everything connected with his comfort had been carefully thought out. He had changed the formal costume of the day for a pair of grey flannel trousers, a soft shirt and linen coat. From the particular part of the garden in which he sat he had a pleasant view of the common in front, the two deserted tennis courts and the cricket ground, where one or two of the villagers were still practising. His neighbours' houses seemed all a little desolate. It was as though the whole population of the place was still brooding under the shadow of the tragedy which had happened in their midst. Mr. Huitt, however, was a philosopher. He was not at all inclined towards an abnegation of the pleasures offered by this beautiful summer evening. In his carefully tended and exceedingly picturesque garden he was free from the annoyance of dust from motor-cars, for the village was half a mile away on the other side of the railway line, and the grass-grown track which passed his front gate led nowhere, but simply lost itself in the common before it reached the Wilderness. There was scarcely a

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ound to be heard but the voices of the cricketers and the song of a belated blackbird. There were pleasanter things than sounds, however. There was the perfume from a huge shrub of lilac near which Mr. Huitt's chair had been cunningly placed. The mingled odours of a bed of mignonette growing amongst roses on the other side of the path lay sweetly upon the breathless air. If any man needed peace and contentment in sylvan surroundings, here indeed they were to be found. Mr. Huitt, after the labours of the day, which certainly had not been without their anxieties, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying this fact.

A stout, grey-haired old lady emerged from the back premises, an empty tray in her hand. She relieved her master of his coffee cup. He picked up a tablet which hung from a belt around her ample waist and wrote upon it a few clear but admonitory words :

*“ The coffee must be stronger to-morrow.”*

His housekeeper glanced at the message and nodded her promise. She was the deafest woman in the county, for which reason she suited her employer who disapproved of all casual conversation. With her departure he leaned back and gave himself up once more to the pleasures of solitary meditation. . . .

The click of the garden gate came as a surprise to him. He glanced up to find that his caller was the young man Tyssen. Routine was so much a part of Mr. Huitt's life that he frowned very slightly at the occurrence. Evening visits without a special invitation were not usual in the neighbourhood, not at any

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rate so far as he was concerned. He remained, however, unperturbed.

“Draw up a chair, Mr. Tyssen,” he invited. “Have you come in to listen to my radio?”

Tyssen shook his head. His evening toilet seemed to have consisted merely in the substitution of a flannel collar and a tie for his usual negligé tennis shirt. He brought up a chair and sank into it with a little groan.

“Not particularly,” he replied. “As a matter of fact I rather hate the things. I strolled over to have a chat with you because everyone on the other side of the common seems to have gone crazy over this damned business.”

“You are referring——” Mr. Huitt began politely.

“Why, to this placing young Sarson under observation,” Tyssen interrupted in his rasping voice. “Whether he had anything to do with the thing or not, it must be a nasty affair to have a policeman always on your heels.”

“I should think it doubtful,” Mr. Huitt observed, “whether they will ever be able to collect strong enough evidence to justify an arrest.”

“Hard to say,” Tyssen said, lounging back in his chair. “There are some ugly points in the story, of course. I am all upset about it myself. It doesn’t work in with the scheme for the novel I am writing. Young Sarson is not the right type for a criminal.”

“A very pleasant and attractive young fellow I have always considered him,” Mr. Huitt remarked. “The police probably know more than we do, but

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there is certainly nothing on the surface to connect him with such an atrocious crime."

"What about this Julian Bott affair, Mr. Huitt?" Tyssen continued. "Is there much gossip in the City?"

"I never listen to gossip, financial or otherwise," was the stiff reply.

Tyssen's hands went deeper into his trousers pockets.

"Come on!" he exclaimed banteringly. "You know what I mean, sir! Here a word and there a word. All through the day you must be meeting people. Are the Bott companies sound? Was Sir Julian in any financial difficulties which might have led him to wander off into a strange place and shoot himself? That's what we are all wanting to know. It's a very important matter for young Sarson, too. If it can be shown that Bott was in difficulties I should say it is a fifty-to-one better chance on a suicide verdict."

"As regards the position of his companies," Mr. Huitt declared, "the evening papers will tell you more than I can. The shares in most of them seem to have fallen somewhat heavily."

"Didn't bank with you, did he?" Tyssen inquired, with apparent artlessness.

"That is scarcely your business."

Tyssen stretched himself out, his hands still deep in the pockets of his shabby and ill-shaped trousers.

"Of course I'm sorry for young Sarson," he remarked, without any signs of resentment, "but I am inclined to think that there have been goings-on with the beautiful lady up at the bungalow."

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“That is rather a dangerous statement,” Mr. Huitt said coldly. “Have you any evidence which entitles you to go so far?”

Tyssen, as though with reluctance, withdrew his hands from his pockets and began to roll a cigarette.

“Yes,” he answered. “I happened to barge in upon them last night and they seemed to me to be pretty thick.”

“What were you doing up there?”

“Just having a general look round. I wanted to see how far it was from the spot where they found Julian Bott’s body to the bungalow, for one thing. These details do not interest you, perhaps, Mr. Huitt, but you must remember that to the novelist they are matters of intense importance. I came to a few conclusions during the short time I was up there, and I would bet anything I’m right. I would lay odds that it was not the first time young Sarson had had a cup of coffee with Madame de Sayal.”

“You may be right,” Mr. Huitt said with increasing coldness. “The general impression seems to be otherwise.”

“That’s because they’re all fond of the young man round here and they don’t want to believe anything against him,” Tyssen pointed out. “Madame may be all right—I’m not saying anything against her—but she doesn’t look to me to be the sort to bury herself in a place like this without a little society now and then—male society that is to say.”

The young man lit the loosely rolled cigarette he had prepared and blew out a large cloud of smoke. His companion drew his chair a few inches away.

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He disliked the smell of strong tobacco almost as much as he disliked his uninvited visitor.

“In my opinion,” he said, “speculation on these matters, while they are still *sub judice*, is profitless. It may also do harm in creating prejudices one way or the other.”

Tyssen chuckled.

“I like to talk about what interests me,” he confided. “I’ll tell you another thing, too, Mr. Huitt. It is astonishing how often you can pick up interesting ideas from people in conversation, and fit them in like a crossword puzzle, until you find out all there is to be found out about a case. I am beginning to put two and two together concerning this young man Anthony Sarson, and I bet you if ever he is arrested and the thing comes on for trial I shall know as much about it as anybody.”

“I am surprised,” Mr. Huitt pronounced, “that you cannot find a more profitable way of passing your time.”

“A writer has to do it,” the young man expounded. “You have to worm your way into the motives before you can understand a crime—find out the reason for it, and if you can go far enough back you are always stumbling against facts that are evidence for or against the accused.”

“*Chacun à son goût*,” remarked Mr. Huitt, who knew a little French.

Tyssen yawned and changed the conversation.

“I wonder,” he remarked, his hands clasped behind the back of his head, “that you are not sometimes inclined to be nervous over on this side of the common

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quite by yourself as it were. I understand that you have only a deaf housekeeper on the premises."

"I don't suffer from nerves," the other confided. "There is no one who would be better off for committing a crime upon my person, and, as regards suicide, I can assure you that I have no tendencies in that direction."

Tyssen became mysterious. He leant with an air of caution towards his dapper host, and, although it might have seemed that no two men in the county were so completely alone, he lowered his voice.

"Mr. Huitt," he asked, "are you quite convinced in your own mind that Sam Jesson did commit suicide?"

The bank manager appeared puzzled. He looked across at his visitor thoughtfully.

"I have never felt any doubt whatever upon the matter," he confessed. "The letter he left behind him and the state of his financial affairs seemed to be quite sufficient explanation."

"On the face of it, yes," Tyssen admitted. "On the face of it certainly yes, but I don't know. This seems to be a queer sort of a place. There is a great deal of talk going on even to-day about Mr. Jesson, and the sergeant admits that they have had a detective down here once or twice making inquiries."

"I should fancy," Mr. Huitt said in his precise tone, "that the sergeant has been allowing his imagination to run away with him. . . . If you care to listen to the London news, Mr. Tyssen, please be silent."

There was a familiar sound from the radio, then the announcer's voice—clear and vibrant :

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*“ Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is London speaking. I am about to give you the weather report for England and the British Isles. The probabilities are that the present conditions will continue, but a depression is reported off the west coast of Ireland. . . .”*

The voice droned on, but Mr. Tyssen had ceased to listen. With a half-made cigarette in his fingers and his mouth wide open he was staring with intense concentration at his companion. Mr. Huitt was listening to the possibilities of further depressions over Ireland with the air of one who accepts such tidings with equanimity, but Tyssen, who did not give one the impression of being an observant man, was vastly intrigued by the sudden change which had transformed his host's whole expression for a few seconds during the prosaic rendering of the announcer's second sentence. For a single moment his face seemed to Tyssen to be the face of another man—a man of subtler intelligence, a man whose eyes were gleaming through his gold-rimmed spectacles into a larger life. Almost, he fancied, that he could see his host's puny muscles tighten under his neat clothes. Tyssen, although he had shown no signs of being a person of imagination, saw things which made him think suddenly of a bird of prey listening to the far-off call of his intended victim. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. The whole thing, without a doubt, had been imaginary. The bank manager, with the air of one who possessed a small radio and was rather proud of the fact, was listening with intelligent apprehension to the usual digest of the day's uninteresting events.



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“ One of the most wonderful discoveries of the day,” its owner declared portentously, as he turned off the switch of the radio. “ The possession of one of these instruments keeps one in touch with the larger events of the world even in a quiet spot like this. For the music which follows I have no fancy. I have also—you will excuse me—some letters to write.”

Tyssen rose to his feet. He was not a sensitive person, but he understood that he had been dismissed. Silence had fallen around them with the coming of the deeper twilight. The lights in the opposite houses had one by one appeared. A bat darted and shivered about their heads. Mr. Tyssen was not a shy man.

“ You did not hear anything in that weather announcement that missed me, did you, Mr. Huitt ? ” he asked.

His neighbour looked at him as though puzzled.

“ Not that I know of. Why do you ask me such a question ? ”

“ I don't know,” the other evaded. “ You seemed to me to give a queer sort of start when the announcer was telling us about those probable depressions. My fancy perhaps.”

“ Your fancy without a doubt,” Mr. Huitt agreed. “ I have been a little thoughtful this evening, perhaps. The position of a bank manager, Mr. Tyssen, is very much envied by some people, but I can assure you that it carries with it a great deal of responsibility. There are some issues of foreign bonds just now and a considerable amount of uncertainty about the bank rate which makes even our day by day work difficult.”

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“Just so,” Tyssen sympathised, without enthusiasm.  
“I must be getting on. Good night, sir.”  
“Good night.”

Tyssen took his leave, closing the gate with care. He crossed the stream by the little bridge and made his way thoughtfully across the common. Behind him the bank manager sat in his chair until his thin form seemed to melt into the darkness.

HALF-WAY across the common Tyssen quickened his pace. When he vaulted the white palings into the road on the farther side his movements had become altogether more brisk. Arrived at his temporary abode, he made his way at once into the post office, opened the door of the telephone box and spoke for a few minutes with the operator. When he emerged Mrs. Foulds was busy closing the shop.

"Will you be long with the telephone, sir?" she inquired. "I'm just closing up."

"I've put a call through to London," Tyssen replied. "It shouldn't be more than five minutes."

"Then you won't mind," she asked, "if I shut up the shop? You can come out through the kitchen to your room."

"Quite all right," he agreed.

"That telephone's been a rare curse to-day," Mrs. Foulds went on, as she drew the bolt of the shop door. "The instrument in the police station has gone wrong, and Inspector Penny, he's been using mine ever since seven o'clock."

"No fresh calamities, I hope?" Tyssen asked.

"Takes me all my time to look after my own business," Mrs. Foulds replied. "I never listen to what goes on around me."

"Quite right, Mrs. Foulds," her lodger approved.

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“ We should probably all do our own jobs better if we never meddled with other people’s. Inspector in his usual good temper ? ”

“ Fussy, sir. Very fussy,” Mrs. Foulds confided. “ I did hear him say that he’d a car coming and he’d be up in town to-night. There’s your call, sir.”

Tyssen stepped into the obscurity of the box.

“ Seven—two—one—nine, Embankment,” a voice greeted him.

“ Tyssen speaking,” the young man announced. “ I have a job for you. I want the name, address and dossier of the announcer from the B.B.C. London Regional number seven. Ring me up at ten o’clock.”

“ O.K.”

Tyssen closed the door and lounged into the kitchen.

“ I’m going into The Haven, Mrs. Foulds,” he told her. “ I’m expecting a telephone call at ten o’clock. If it comes before I get back, please send for me.”

“ Will you be wanting anything more to-night, Mr. Tyssen ? ”

“ Nothing at all, thank you,” he replied. “ Don’t lock the door into the shop in case you’ve gone to bed when I come for my call.”

“ Very good, sir.”

Pauline was seated in her accustomed place under the cedar tree. She motioned to Tyssen to take the chair by her side.

“ Where’s your brother ? ” he asked.

“ Strolling about with Sybil somewhere,” she

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replied. "They may be in the billiard-room. Do you want him?"

Tyssen shook his head.

"I'd rather talk to you," he confided.

"How is the novel getting on?"

"Not well," he answered gloomily. "I'm stuck."

"Plot gone wrong?"

"No, the plot's all right. I shall never change the plot. It's the people who are all behaving in such a queer fashion."

She laughed softly.

"I love to hear you talk about your characters as though they were all living people," she remarked.

"Mine are," he told her a little grimly. "Sometimes I think I'm hard at work fashioning a Frankenstein and one day I shall wake up and find myself devoured!"

"You're terribly in earnest to-night."

He glanced up for her permission and began to roll one of his abominable cigarettes.

"I'm not sure," he told her, "that my story isn't growing too big for me. There was only one character in it when I commenced work. No one else counted. The story was to be a study of one man's villainy—a man hidden in a quiet place like this where no one would think of looking for him. Then by degrees—the story grew."

"Tell me the plot," she begged.

"You shall hear the whole story very soon," he promised her. "It seems to be getting towards the crisis."

"You're worrying too much about your work," she

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said. "Why didn't you do like Anthony—go down to the nets and have a little practice? The match is on Thursday, you know."

"Practice never helped me even when I used to play now and then," he sighed. "If ever I did make a run or two it was at the beginning of the season. Don't expect too much of me in the cricket line, Miss Sarson, will you?"

"Anthony does," she assured him, smiling. "He's terribly curious about you."

"Nothing to be curious about," Tyssen declared. "I'm one of the most ordinary people in the world. I lived for a few years in a queer sort of place where there wasn't much to do except play cricket. Let's talk about something else. Did you happen to know Mr. Jesson?"

"Of course I did," she replied. "How could I live here and not know him?"

"Did you notice whether, during the last week or two before he committed suicide, he was terribly depressed?"

"What an extraordinary question!" she exclaimed. "I never saw Mr. Jesson depressed in my life. He was the cheeriest little man here."

Tyssen lit his cigarette and smoked furiously.

"That's quaint, isn't it?" he remarked. "A man with the shadow of death over him. Cheerful, eh?"

"There was not a single person," she declared, "whom I would have thought less likely to have committed suicide. Everything he did he enjoyed. Sometimes I can't believe it even now. If it wasn't for the letter——"

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“ Ah, that letter,” he interrupted eagerly. “ I want to bring that letter into my story. Didn’t I hear something about the envelope being lost ? ”

“ The envelope wasn’t of any particular consequence, I suppose,” she replied, “ but the sergeant got into a lot of trouble about it. It was mislaid somewhere in the police station. I don’t see what use that is for your story though.”

“ It was just an idea I had,” he remarked.

“ I wish you’d leave the story alone for a time and try and think of some way of helping Anthony,” she complained almost pettishly.

He leaned over and touched her hand with a clumsy gesture of sympathy.

“ Miss Sarson,” he begged, “ don’t you worry too much about Anthony. They can’t do anything without more evidence than they’ve got. They think something will turn up. It won’t. I have made sure of that.”

“ What do you mean ? ” she asked.

They were alone in the garden, but he dropped his voice.

“ Anthony was never meant for any of this secret business,” he said. “ I mean that he has no gift for concealment. I was one of the first to see him after he had come down the hill that terrible morning, and I saw something in his pocket which it was a good thing Inspector Penny never saw ! ”

“ How did you come to see it ? ”

“ My prying habits, I suppose,” he confided. “ Anyhow, I knew at once that if it was found upon him he was in for a great deal of trouble at least, and

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I actually burgled your house not long afterwards and took the prize away with me.”

“What was the prize?”

He looked around once more. There was no doubt whatever that they were alone.

“A revolver with one barrel fired,” he answered gravely.

She was momentarily aghast.

“You don’t think—you don’t believe that he had used it?”

“If I had thought that,” Tyssen answered, “although he is your brother, Miss Pauline, I should have left him to his fate.”

It seemed to her that there was something new about her companion’s tone, a larger measure of confidence. He had risen to his feet, however, before she could ask him the questions which thronged into her brain.

“Say good night to your brother for me,” he enjoined. “I have a telephone message to attend to.”

She looked up at him earnestly.

“Mr. Tyssen——” she began.

He made no reply. Standing waiting for her further speech he seemed to have lost something of his ungainliness. He was almost an imposing figure in the semi-darkness.

“Will you tell me all about yourself some day?” she asked.

“There is very little to tell, but I will,” he promised.

The telephone bell was ringing as he made his



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way by the side door into the shop. He took off the receiver.

“Tyssen,” he announced briefly.

“Seven—two—one—nine—Embankment speaking. The announcer to-night from London Regional, number seven, was Patrick Fanshaw, known at the B.B.C. as Major Flower.”

“Dossier?” Tyssen demanded.

“Nothing known against him at present, but he has been seen with undesirable associates.”

“That all?” Tyssen asked.

“Everything. Good night.”

“Good night.”

DR. ANDERSON descended from his car soon after eight o'clock the following morning, pushed open the door of the post office and general store, and greeted Mrs. Foulds cheerily. The latter was already behind the counter, engaged in her usual morning task of—as she expressed it—setting things out proper.

“Glad to see that you're not the invalid, Mrs. Foulds,” the doctor remarked.

“No, it ain't me,” Mrs. Foulds admitted, dropping her voice a little. “Truth to tell, doctor, it's my lodger. I'm beginning to think he's a bit queer in the head.”

“What's wrong with him?”

“Maybe it's all this writing that he does,” she went on, “and him not being able to sleep at nights may have something to do with it.”

“How do you know he doesn't sleep at nights?” the doctor inquired curiously.

Mrs. Foulds nodded in mysterious fashion. She took a step or two sideways and closed the door leading into the private premises.

“I know,” she confided, as she came back, “because sometimes his bed looks as though it hadn't been slept in at all. Admits it himself, he does. Why, one night last month—and there weren't no moon—it was pretty well pitch dark—I seen him on the palings

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there, sitting and smoking those queer cigarettes of his for the best part of two hours. What do you think of that ? ”

“ Not particularly healthy,” the doctor admitted. “ Was it about him you telephoned ? ”

“ That’s right, sir,” the postmistress assented. “ At seven o’clock this morning Carrie Foulds—which is my sister-in-law’s child—came over from the village as usual to light the fire and do a few odd jobs—me not being quite so young as I used to be. I heard Mr. Tyssen’s voice talking to her, and Carrie came and said as soon as I was up would I put my head in his room. That I did as soon as I had my gown on, and I could see at once that there was something the matter with him. He’d got a basin of water by the side of the bed covered up with a towel, and his face was a funny sort of colour. ‘ Mrs. Foulds,’ he said, ‘ I ain’t feeling quite the thing this morning and I’d like you to telephone for Dr. Anderson.’ ”

“ Did he say what was the matter with him ? ” the doctor asked.

“ Not one word. Afterwards I did step up to see if he’d like a cup of tea. He didn’t seem to want me in the room at all, so out I came. He’s a queer body, doctor, he is. He gives no trouble and he pays regular and liberal, but he’s queer in his habits. It’s perhaps all that writing. Enough to turn anyone’s brain I should think. I know days that I make out the few accounts that I’ve got in my ledger I generally have a headache for hours afterwards.”

“ I had better step up and see the young man,” the doctor suggested.

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“It’s not upstairs, sir. It’s this way,” Mrs. Foulds explained, opening the door which led to the back premises. “He’s changed his bedroom for the downstairs room. It makes no difference to me, and if he wants to go messing about at night he can slip out of the house without disturbing anyone.”

She threw open the door of the room leading from her parlour, closed it again after her visitor had entered, and returned to the shop. The doctor looked curiously at his prospective patient as he crossed to the bedside.

“What’s the trouble, Mr. Tyssen?” he asked, with professional cheerfulness.

“We’ll go into that directly,” the young man answered, trying to brush back the untidy mat of fair hair from his face. “First of all I want to ask you something. It is a question of etiquette.”

“Fire away.”

“Supposing I have something the matter—a hurt—nothing catching or anything of that sort, but just a hurt that came by accident—if I ask you to treat me for it do you have to tell anyone what’s wrong with me?”

“Certainly not,” was the prompt reply. “If you had an infectious disease that’s a different affair. I should have to inform the proper authorities at once. If it is an ordinary ailment that presents no danger to anyone else, then, of course, if you say you don’t want it mentioned it shall not be. As a matter of fact a doctor does not talk about his patients’ ailments.”

“Well, then, come along and have a look at my

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leg," the young man invited, throwing off the bed-clothes. "I will tell you at once what happened. I was fooling with a gun last night—I don't understand much about firearms—and it went off."

The doctor made a brief examination, during which he remained silent. When he had finished he stood away and looked at his patient thoughtfully.

"You have quite an unpleasant wound," he announced, "and you still have some shot in your leg. Your bed, too, is in a horrible state. You've lost a lot of blood. What time did this happen?"

"About three o'clock this morning."

"And what the devil," the doctor asked, "were you doing playing with a gun at three o'clock this morning?"

Tyssen looked at him severely.

"I sent for you to patch me up, not to ask me questions. You can see for yourself what has to be done. I can pay for treatment—I am not short of money—but I want you to understand before you start doing a thing for me, that you've got to keep your mouth shut. Never mind why. Do everything you can for me and I will be thankful, and I will pay your bill the moment you give it to me. But—I don't want a soul outside this room to know what's wrong."

The doctor whistled softly to himself. It flashed into his mind that drama of a strange sort was spreading in this little backwater of country life.

"The thing is going to be difficult, Mr. Tyssen," he warned him. "For instance, I must dress your wound and at once. I shall want hot water, towels, lint, and of course these sheets will have to be got rid

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of. How am I going to arrange all that for you without your Mrs. Foulds knowing? ”

“ If you have to tell that gossiping old busybody,” Tyssen said, “ I would rather put on my macintosh and find my way somehow or other to the nearest hospital.”

The doctor felt his pulse and frowned.

“ I will do my best for you, Tyssen,” he promised soothingly, “ but one thing is certain—your leg has to be dressed at once. Sit up in bed and lean forward like this,” he begged, catching hold of him.

But Tyssen had fainted, and for the next quarter of an hour or so the possibilities of his ever finishing his mystery novel were slim.

Some two hours later Dr. Anderson drew a sigh of relief, packed his bag and threw open the window.

“ All serene, eh? ” Tyssen asked weakly.

“ All serene,” the doctor assured him. “ I don’t mind telling you that you’re a lucky young man. It is not everyone who can play with firearms and get a discharge of shot into his leg which penetrates less than a quarter of an inch below the surface. If it was not that one shot got you in a particular place you would have escaped very lightly. I gather you don’t want the affair talked about.”

“ I have tried to make that clear,” Tyssen replied.

“ At the same time,” the other went on, “ I cannot allow you to think so little of my intelligence as to expect me to believe your story. If you had been handling a gun yourself it would have been an absolute impossibility for your present wound to have occur

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And another thing—at such close quarters the shot would not have spread, and you would probably have been dead from blood poisoning by now, because you would have had one terrible hole instead of a few little scratches. All the same,” he concluded, “it is a different thing knowing the truth and talking about it. I shan’t say a word about your accident.”

“Good man.”

“You’ll have to deal with your landlady yourself. She’s half crazy with curiosity already.”

“Leave her to me,” Tyssen enjoined. “I will try to keep her mouth shut. How long will it be before I am able to go about as usual?”

“With a stick in three or four days I should think.”

“What is your fee for this morning?”

“How much can you afford to pay? I don’t want to rob you. I’ve done some good work.”

“Tell me what you would charge if I were Mr. Timothy Sarson, say.”

“Five guineas.”

“Then, listen to me,” the young man begged earnestly. “You have your car outside?”

“Well?”

“Help me to get into some clothes—I don’t need to pack anything—I have a few things in London. Take me to a railway station—not Sandywayes—where I can get a train to London, or motor me up if you can spare the time and, look here, give me my pocket-book. Thanks. Three five pound notes. Fifteen pounds if you’ll take me all the way. What about  
?”

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“ It’s a damned good fee,” the doctor acknowledged.  
“ Are you in earnest ? ”

“ I’m very much in earnest. I want to clear out of this place for three or four days. I’m coming back again for the cricket match. I shall tell Mrs. Foulds, or you can, that I have to go to a London hospital for a couple of days to have my leg examined.”

The doctor reflected for a moment.

“ Look here, young fellow,” he said, “ you’ve not been doing anything against the law, I hope ? You’re not a burglar in disguise or anything of that sort ? ”

“ Word of honour, I’m not,” Tyssen assured him.  
“ To my knowledge I’ve never broken the law in my life.”

“ I’m on then,” the doctor told him. “ I have a little business up there, and I will take you all the way to London. Come along and I will help you into your clothes. . . . ”

Ten minutes later Mrs. Foulds was surprised to see her lodger and the doctor, the former leaning upon a stick, pass down the paved way outside the window and enter the motor-car. The doctor came back to the shop.

“ Not much wrong with the young man, Mrs. Foulds,” he confided. “ He has a sprained leg and I am not too sure about one of the valves of his heart. He smokes too many of those filthy cigarettes. I am just going to run him up to a specialist to have him looked over. He will be back in a day or two, and wants to keep on his room.”

“ Well, I never ! ” Mrs. Foulds exclaimed, forgetting for the moment that she was making a very



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profitable sale of muslin from an old stock. "You think that he will be able to come back all right, doctor?"

"Perfectly certain that he will," was the emphatic reply. "There is nothing serious the matter with him."

"Had I better come out and say good morning to him, sir?" she asked anxiously.

"Not on your life," the doctor answered. "You'll make him think he's really ill, which he isn't. A sprained leg and a little trouble with the breathing. Nothing more serious."

With which slight perversion of the truth, Dr. Anderson certainly earned his fifteen pounds and Mr. Tyssen made his temporary departure from the Oasis with dignity.

In the "Club Car" that morning Timothy Sarson, who was looking worn and ill, asked a question.

"Do you know, Huitt," he inquired, "whether Lord Milhaven preserves any game on our side of the railway?"

"Not to my knowledge," Mr. Huitt replied. "The Golf Links have taken up all the spare land and there are certainly no covers anywhere near."

"Queer thing," Sarson observed. "Early this morning—I think it must have been about three—I had both my windows open and I could have sworn that I heard the sound of a gun from somewhere up by the Wilderness. No one but a gamekeeper would be likely to use a gun at that hour."

"Or a poacher," Martin suggested.

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Mr. Timothy Sarson jumped at the idea.

“ I saw a couple of cock pheasants running up into the Wilderness only two nights ago,” he confided. “ Why shouldn’t it have been a poacher who shot Sir Julian, eh ? ”

Martin shook his head dolefully.

“ Poachers don’t carry revolvers,” he reminded the little company.

MR. JAMES HUITT, austere and dignified, having that air of intense concentration the possession of which was perhaps his most effective quality, pushed the baskets of letters away from him and turned to the waiting clerk.

"I am prepared to receive callers now, Merton," he said, "in the order of their arrival. Who is first?"

The clerk glanced at a list in his hand.

"A Mr. Tyssen, sir," he announced.

If Huitt was surprised he showed no signs of any such emotion.

"On bank business?" he inquired.

"Presumably so, sir."

"You can show him in."

Tyssen, leaning upon a stick, was ushered into the sanctum. In a decently cut and well-brushed blue serge suit he presented a slightly more respectable appearance than at Sandywayes, but there remained something uncouth about his movements and bearing. Huitt extended his bony fingers and motioned his visitor to a chair :

"Good morning, Mr. Tyssen," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Tyssen sank into the indicated chair.

"How is Sandywayes?" he inquired.

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“As usual, I believe. Have you left your room permanently?”

“Not I,” Tyssen replied. “Had a little trouble with my leg and I’m up to get some massage. Anthony Sarson still at large?”

Huitt coughed.

“You must forgive my reminding you, Mr. Tyssen,” he said, “that I am not here to gossip. Please state your business.”

“I wish to transfer my account from Williams’s in the City to you,” Tyssen explained. “I seldom go into the City.”

“We should be very pleased to accept your business,” the bank manager conceded, “providing, of course, that the conditions we are able to offer are agreeable to you, that your references are satisfactory and that your account is of such a size that it would be worth our while to handle it.”

“My references,” Tyssen replied, “would be Williams’s Bank and Kennerley Mumford & Co., Solicitors of Lincoln’s Inn.”

Huitt knew the name quite well, but he made a point of taking it down. Once more he was assailed by a vague illogical suspicion. It seemed strange to imagine a firm of solicitors of such standing acting for this curious young man.

“I have a balance of a thousand pounds, Mr. Huitt,” the latter continued. “I seldom draw below that. I have also some securities to deposit with you. Apart from that I have money paid in every month from a business that belonged to my father.”

“Yours, I gather,” Mr. Huitt remarked, “is purely

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sonal account, then. You do not wish for any banking facilities in the shape of an overdraft or the discounting of bills or anything of that sort?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the young man grinned. "I've no business. I've got enough to live on as it is and I expect to be earning a bit more as soon as I sell my novel."

"I see nothing to prevent our accepting your account," Huitt said graciously. "I will take up your references, and if you will call next time you are passing we will complete the business."

He touched the bell in front of him. Automatically the clerk secretary appeared. Automatically Tyssen was shown out. Automatically the next client was ushered in. Business was conducted like that when Mr. Huitt had anything to do with it, which was probably the reason why he was considered at headquarters the doyen of Barton's staff.

Tyssen made two other calls of more or less importance. He wound up in the small grill-room and bar of a fashionable West End restaurant. The hour being still early the place was half empty. Tyssen made his way to an easy chair set in a distant corner. A middle-aged man of florid appearance rose to meet him. There was a questioning expression upon his face to which Tyssen replied with a slight nod. They sat down together. Tyssen summoned the barman.

"A whisky and soda, if you please," the man who had been in possession ordered.

"And a dry Martini for me," Tyssen directed.

He began to roll a cigarette with his usual dark-

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coloured tobacco, a proceeding which his neighbour regarded with something like disgust.

“Won’t you try one of mine?” he invited, offering a platinum and gold case. “Bateman’s. They’re quite decent.”

Tyssen shook his head.

“I always make my own,” he confided. “You are Major Flower, I suppose?”

“That’s right,” the other agreed. “You apparently know all about me.”

“I do,” Tyssen assented. “Are you going to answer my questions?”

“I am—on one condition.”

“Condition?”

“The condition of absolute secrecy. You know my history, Mr. Tyssen. I can’t afford to lose my job. I don’t suppose I should ever get another.”

“My friends and I are not chatterboxes,” Tyssen assured him. “You need not have the slightest anxiety. We are just as anxious as you are for you to hold your post. Question number one.”

“Go ahead.”

“At odd times during your weather announcement,” Tyssen began, “you vary it very slightly. That is to say that several million people who may be listening-in receive a message which probably interests about half a dozen of them.”

“That’s right,” Major Flower assented.

“Who sends you word when you are to make the change?”

“I don’t know,” was the firm response. “The word to be changed comes in a sealed envelope. It must

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be someone of intelligence because the word has always the same significance, and not one of the people at head-quarters has ever made any remark."

"Who made the arrangement with you for the substitution of words?"

Major Flower groaned.

"Have I got to answer that question?"

"Absolutely."

"Lord Milhaven. He lent me money when I was down and out and he got me this job."

"Do you know, amongst these few millions of listeners-in, who the people are who receive your message?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," the Major declared, with obvious truth.

"Do you know its significance?"

"I've never even tried to guess at it. I imagine the few people who are interested have a code."

"I should like that code," Tyssen said.

"Lord Milhaven is the only person who could give it to you," Major Flower pointed out, "and you mustn't dream of asking him. He'd know I'd been talking."

"Another drink?"

"Whisky and soda, please."

"I haven't got much out of you yet," Tyssen reflected. "Whose idea was this secret method of communication?"

"Milhaven's," was the prompt reply. "Before he got me the job he was interested in this broadcasting work."

Tyssen leaned a little closer to his companion.

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"You got your bank-note?" he whispered.  
"Would you like another?"

Major Flower laughed scornfully.

"Is there anything in the world a man needs at my time of life worse than money?" he demanded.

"Tell me anything else that has occurred to you with regard to this business. If it's worth anything I'll pay for it."

Flower sipped his whisky and soda.

"There have never been more than seven changes," he said slowly. "I wondered sometimes whether they didn't represent the days of the week."

Tyssen reflected for a few moments.

"It's an idea," he admitted. "It's too small a compass for a real cipher. Your change of words would be noticed."

"Seven words are all I've changed at any time. There are three other words I could use instead of 'depression,' three instead of 'visibility,' and for the seventh I used 'British Islands' instead of 'British Isles.'"

Tyssen smoked furiously for several moments.

"You have never seen a piece of paper, Major Flower," he asked, "with the days of the week in order and their code word attached?"

"Never."

"Do you ever visit Milhaven's house?"

"At odd times when he's alone."

"If you should ever come across that key," Tyssen said softly, "I would double that last note. If you should come across it within a fortnight I'd treble it."

Flower's fingers, which were holding a briquet to



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his cigarette, trembled. He gave one the impression of a man who was consumed by some inward fear. His shoulders gave a little nervous twitch as though he were shivering. He straightened his tie with an unsteady hand.

“Do you know what sort of a man Milhaven is?” he asked, dropping his voice.

“I know scarcely anything about him,” Tyssen confessed. “All that I do know is that I believe him to be the friend and associate of one of the world’s worst criminals.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” the Major muttered, and there was a smouldering fear behind his watery eyes. “Look here, give me another whisky and soda, sir. I’ve just been thinking. Supposing Milhaven would get to know about this, supposing he were to walk in and find us talking——”

Tyssen ordered the whisky and soda and grinned reassurance.

“It wouldn’t matter,” he said. “He wouldn’t know me from Adam.”

“I’m glad of that at any rate,” Flower declared. “You don’t know what sort of a man Milhaven is. I’ve been out in the East with him. I’ve been in China. We went into an opium-running scheme there long before he had any idea he was going to be the Earl of Milhaven. Those Chinese were cruel enough. They were nothing to Milhaven! I’ve seen him kill men just for disobeying a single order. I’ve seen him deal out torture, stand by while men were done to death. I watch him now sometimes—the cold, dignified aristocrat—and if it wasn’t for this”——

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he clutched the glass containing his whisky and soda —“ I should have hysterics.”

Tyssen ordered another drink for himself and laughed boisterously.

“ Well, we’re not in China now, thank goodness,” he reminded his companion. “ England isn’t the country where one can break the law with impunity. Milhaven here will have to behave like the rest of us.”

Flower wiped his eyes.

“ That he’ll never do,” he muttered. “ Milhaven may play at being deputy lord-lieutenant, chairman of a board of magistrates, director of banks and orator in the House of Lords—he may play the game and love doing it, but he’s the same man—he’ll never change. I want money like hell. I’ll get the code if I have any luck, but if he knows I’m a dead man. Tyssen, I don’t know who you are. You don’t look English somehow. Seems to me you’re looking for trouble if you’re up against Milhaven.”

“ If I am I can take care of myself,” Tyssen said cheerfully. “ By the by, did you happen to know that fellow Julian Bott ? ”

Flower rose to his feet, but the question seemed somehow or other to have steadied him.

“ Yes, I know him,” he said, and his voice was certainly not the clear and flute-like utterance of the B.B.C. announcer. “ You’ll excuse me, Mr. Tyssen, I’m going. You know where to find me. I know where to find you.”

“ About this fellow Bott——” Tyssen began.

Flower picked up his stick and gloves, he adjusted

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his Homburg hat at a slight angle. For some unexplained reason he seemed to have recovered himself and his poise. He looked every inch the retired officer as he nodded his good afternoon to the barman.

“ I knew Bott,” were his farewell words to Tyssen, “ and if Milhaven were to walk in here at the present moment, if he were to have the slightest idea of what we’ve been talking about, I should be where Bott is by this time to-morrow. Good day, Charles ! Good day, Mr. Tyssen ! ”

The Major took his leave with a slight but not unbecoming swagger.

SIR CHARLES TEMPERLEY, the famous lawyer, and Timothy Sarson were left alone at the table at The Haven over their luncheon port. Pauline had wandered off at the familiar signal, and Anthony had gone over to Godalming to play cricket. Timothy Sarson, spending a day at his country home, was dressed in tweeds without his customary formality. Before his guest he held himself with his usual dignity, but he seemed to have aged within the last fortnight.

“I am glad,” Sir Charles said, “to have had a talk with the young man, Sarson, but I am sorry to find him so obstinate.”

“The whole situation,” Timothy Sarson declared, “is intolerable. Anthony, my boy, has to go into the police station and ask permission of the sergeant to go six miles to play in a cricket match, and the sergeant has to telephone to the police there to keep him under observation! It isn’t as though Anthony were a loose-living lad. Just down from Oxford with a splendid record, an excellent degree, a famous athlete. Why, the whole affair is maddening!”

Sir Charles crossed his legs and sipped his wine.

“My dear Sarson,” he pointed out, “you must remember that a great deal of this is the young man’s own fault. An amazing murder is committed within a quarter of a mile of your own house and within

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thirty yards of the house of a very beautiful woman who is, at any rate, an acquaintance of your boy's. He spends the night God knows where—the night of the murder, I mean—comes back in his dress clothes at midday with a most improbable story, and becomes an object of marked suspicion to the police. From the point of view of the man in the street he is, without a doubt, the probable killer of Sir Julian Bott. But for his excellent character and one small missing link in the evidence he would be awaiting his trial now."

"What do you mean by a missing link in the evidence?" Sarson demanded.

The lawyer coughed.

"Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned that," he admitted, "but you know I have been interesting myself in this matter because I consider myself a family friend."

"That's very good of you," Timothy Sarson declared gratefully.

"I have been to Scotland Yard," the lawyer continued, "and I have interviewed Penny, the man who has the case in hand. What keeps them from arresting Anthony is the fact that the weapon has not been found. Now, two of the loiterers outside, when your son arrived in a flustered state that morning, testified that they had seen the shape of a weapon of some sort or another in your son's jacket pocket, and Tom, the policeman, although he tried to go back upon it, thought he had seen the glint of metal. That is why the search for the weapon is still being continued. That is another reason, too, why your son is shadowed nearly all the time. The police want to

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find that revolver. If they find it anywhere in any place which your son frequents or has visited, Anthony is for it. That is what I meant to impress upon you, Sarson."

"I know nothing about the revolver," Sarson declared stolidly.

"I have questioned your son about it," Sir Charles went on. "He won't say a word. But, frankly, he gave me the impression that the revolver has been or was in his possession. You must try what you can do, Sarson. Remember, I've come over here in the middle of a busy day to talk to him and you must join with me in making him realise how serious this matter is. If he tells the truth at the last moment, even if it lets him out, it will never come with the same weight."

"He comes of obstinate stock," his father sighed grimly.

"But you must make him understand," the lawyer persisted, "that he is not treating his family or his friends fairly. The Crown are already hard at work collecting their evidence, and if they succeed in one more small point it will be pretty difficult for Anthony to commence his defence. About this woman now, the woman of the bungalow. Have you any idea as to her attitude? Is she disposed to be friendly towards your son? Or is she the sort of woman who would accept the chivalrous sacrifice of a lad to protect herself?"

"One might find out," Sarson muttered. "I have never spoken a word to her in my life. She visits nowhere and keeps aloof from everybody."

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The lawyer glanced at his watch.

"I must catch this train back to town," he said. "I cannot say more about this matter than I have said. What I do want you to realise is the seriousness of it. You and Anthony must now act for yourselves."

"I will do what I can," Sarson promised. . . .

The lawyer returned to town, his conscience more at ease, although he had wasted half a day in the cause of friendship. Timothy Sarson accepted a carefully brushed hat from his servant, selected an ash stick and a pair of dogskin gloves and mounted the rough pathway which led to the Wilderness. There was no sign of life about the bungalow as he threaded his way through the pine trees. He tried the front door and found it locked. He walked boldly to the french windows. The room into which he looked showed signs of recent occupation but was empty. He stepped back and looked around him once more. Someone was coming at last. Winding her way in and out of the trees Madame de Sayal, whose easel he could now see in the distance, was making her way towards him.

"What are you doing, hammering at my bungalow?" she asked pleasantly enough, as soon as she got within speaking distance.

He took off his hat and greeted her with an old-fashioned bow.

"I was trying to find out whether you were at home," he replied.

"What do you want with me?"

"I want to ask you a few questions, Madame. Perhaps you can spare me some moments of your time."

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She raised her eyebrows, but her reply was courteous enough. Timothy Sarson was too much in earnest to care, but he realised her charm as well as her aloofness.

“My name is Sarson,” he announced. “I live down in the Oasis there. It is my son who is suspected by the police of having murdered Julian Bott.”

“That is very sad,” she murmured.

He looked at her wonderingly. His ear had detected the faint satire in her tone.

“Yes, it is sad enough,” he agreed. “It may be sad enough for others when the truth comes out! I am the lad’s father, and I am seeking to discover the truth about that night. Don’t you think, madame, it is time that your story was told?”

“Why should I have a story?” she asked. “I read myself to sleep as usual. I heard nothing—not even the shot which killed poor Sir Julian.”

“Is it true that my boy used to wander round your bungalow sometimes, in the hope of getting a word with you?”

“How should I know?” she answered. “I did not come here to make acquaintances. I came here to paint. Read the art supplement of *The Times* this morning, or *The Connoisseur* last month, and you will find out what I am doing. I take no notice of the people who come and go.”

“Was Sir Julian Bott an acquaintance of yours?”

She looked at him out of her wide-open beautiful eyes with their strange lights.

“My good man,” she protested, “who gave you the right to question me about my friends?”



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“There are others who will ask if you don’t answer me,” he pointed out. “You know, I suppose, that if my son is charged you will be subpoenaed as a witness. You will have to go into the witness box.”

“It will not distress me,” she answered. “Concerning that night I have nothing to tell you or anybody else.”

He felt suddenly helpless. A slow hatred of this woman was taking possession of him. He hated the beauty of her, the glassy imperturbability. This was the woman who might send his boy Tony to the gallows! He could imagine her doing it without a tremor. Was there no new way of approaching her? He felt his muscles stiffen. Women like her had been taken by the throat before now. Perhaps she saw the fire in his eyes, for she stepped a little backwards.

“I have nothing more to say to you,” she told him. “I must return now to my painting or the light will have changed.”

Dimly he began to wonder whether there was a complex about this business of murder in his family. Supposing Anthony really had killed the man who might have been coming to make stealthy love to this woman—killed him out of fierce jealousy. Hate is what he must have felt—hate slowly mastering his senses, numbing his fear, steeling his heart to any sense of pity. Well, he was feeling something that way himself. Her beauty had no effect upon him. If it came to that he could kill her without a qualm. His tone changed. He was no longer half pleading, half expostulating. His voice had become more composed, colder but more poignant. His eyes had cleared.

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He met the woman's without shrinking and he seemed to swell in stature as he stood there.

"Madame," he said, "I make no further appeal to your heart, to your sympathies, or to your sense of justice. I appeal instead solely to your instinct for living. If my son is put upon his trial I shall hear the evidence. I shall know what might have saved him. This is not a threat. These are plain common-sense words. If my son is found guilty of the murder of Julian Bott, then I shall know who might have saved him and I shall kill you!"

She laughed cheerily. A very musical sound it was, ringing out upon the drowsy silence.

"Melodrama in the sunshine," she scoffed. "Really, Mr. Timothy Sarson, I am surprised at you."

He looked at her once before he turned away and left her. The laugh died away abruptly. She watched him descend the hill. It was some time before she returned to her neglected picture.

MR. JAMES HUITT, during that half-hour's pause which he usually allowed himself between dealing with the bank correspondence and interviewing clients, launched his thunderbolt upon the City of London. He asked for the town house of Lord Brent in Grosvenor Street, and as soon as he was connected spoke into the mouth-piece with his usual precise and formal distinctness.

"This," he announced, "is Mr. James Huitt speaking, manager of the Aldwych Branch of Barton's Bank. I should be glad, if possible, to have a word with Lord Brent."

"His lordship seldom speaks upon the telephone," was the somewhat curt reply. "I am Hassall, his private secretary. You can give me any message."

"The matter," Mr. Huitt continued, "is too important to be dealt with in messages. I think that his lordship had best break his rule for once, Mr. Hassall. If you cannot induce him to speak to me, I will telephone to Lord Milhaven, one of our directors who will take over the business. In that case, however, there will be a certain measure of delay, which is inadvisable."

The secretary climbed down.

"Hold the line, if you please," he begged.

In a few moments a gruff and somewhat impatient voice was heard at the other end of the connection.

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“ Brent speaking. I am told that you have something important to say to me, Mr. Huitt.”

“ I am afraid that it is not only important but very serious, your lordship,” the bank manager confided. “ I have just read your speech addressed to the shareholders of Freehold Lands Limited, of which the late Sir Julian Bott was managing director.”

“ Well ? ”

“ In reply to a shareholder who asked a question concerning the nature of the securities quoted amongst the assets of the company, you gave a list of foreign bearer bonds deposited, you said, at the Aldwych Branch of Barton’s Bank.”

“ Quite right. Well ? ”

“ I fear that there is a grave error here. Every one of the bonds specifically mentioned has been withdrawn by Sir Julian Bott during the last two months.”

There was a sound which might have been a gasp at the other end of the wire.

“ Withdrawn by Sir Julian in person ? ”

“ In person,” the bank manager repeated emphatically. “ Sir Julian was in my office, the room I am in now, a fortnight ago and practically cleared us out. I offered to have the bonds transferred to any other bank he wished, or to realise upon them at the morning’s quotation, but he preferred to take them away himself.”

There was a brief silence. Then Brent’s voice again. A very disturbed and anxious voice it was now.

“ He signed for them in the usual way, I suppose ? ”

“ Naturally.”

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“ I shall be round to see you, Mr. Huitt, in a few minutes with my secretary.”

Lord Brent duly arrived. So did Hassall his secretary. So did a hastily summoned auditor. All that remained to them was to face the very terrible truth. There were any quantity of receipts in Sir Julian Bott's firm, unmistakable handwriting, but there was little left in the safe deposits of the bank of any negotiable value. Then the *débâcle* commenced. Lord Brent telephoned to Sir Rudolph Bold, chairman of another of the Julian Bott companies. The same situation was discovered there at a different bank, except that in this case the securities, instead of being taken away personally, had been transferred to Barton's Bank. By three o'clock there was a heavy slump in the Julian Bott companies, by late afternoon it had become a panic. Despite his usual custom, Mr. Huitt was compelled to join in the spasmodic torrent of conversation in the “ Club Car ” on the way home.

“ Every company always has to have a trustee who can sign for the deposit or withdrawal of bonds at any bank,” he explained to Mr. Cresset. “ Sir Julian was by way of being a great autocrat. He maintained unusual power in all his companies. So far as figures went he was the largest shareholder, and as he was reputedly by far the richest man, I suppose it did not occur to anyone to object.”

“ But what has become of the money ? ” Cresset demanded.

Huitt smiled faintly.

“ I am making no statements,” he replied, “ but

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I am suggesting to you that it is quite possible that Sir Julian has been withdrawing bonds belonging to his various companies for a long time to assist him with his Stock Exchange speculations. That seems all the more possible because there was a certain curious secrecy about his methods. For instance, he always had the bonds brought into my room, signed for them there, and made a point of leaving by the side exit which is just outside the door of my sanctum. Of course he has had his successes, but from the day we learned of his dealings on the Stock Exchange I have not recommended any of my clients to invest in the Julian Bott companies."

Timothy Sarson leaned forward from his corner. There was a light of smouldering eagerness in his eyes.

"There is only one good thing which may come out of this catastrophe," he said. "Won't it seem much more reasonable now to the public and to the police to accept the theory that Sir Julian committed suicide?"

"That is the only satisfactory feature of the situation," Huitt agreed. "He kept his own counsel very well, but he must have known for weeks what was likely to happen, and I think there is no harm in telling you now what naturally I had to keep to myself until these present disclosures were made. The object of the dinner party at Sandywayes Court, at which I assisted, was simply an attempt on Sir Julian Bott's part to arrange for a large loan from Barton's Bank. Fortunately both Lord Milhaven and I had the same idea on the matter. Sir Julian left us that night in a very depressed state."

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"God bless my soul, this is wonderful!" Cresset exclaimed.

"I should say it was," Martin put in. "So long as the motive was lacking it was hard to believe that a middle-aged man like Sir Julian, of brilliant capacity and apparently great wealth, should have desired to take his own life. The motive is now supplied. Of course he committed suicide."

Timothy Sarson had a moment of weakness. He wiped his forehead. There were tears in his eyes. Cresset leaned over and patted him on the shoulder.

"Something of this sort was bound to happen, Sarson," he said emphatically. "Not a soul ever believed that the boy did it."

"Mind you," Timothy Sarson said portentously, "the mystery about this affair isn't cleared up yet. That woman up at the bungalow, the woman with the silken voice and poisonous eyes, where does she come in if Julian Bott committed suicide? I'll swear she was holding Anthony to some sort of promise."

Cresset glanced at his friend for a moment anxiously. There was a curious expression on Timothy's Sarson face.

"All that you want is the boy cleared."

"That is an eventuality," Mr. Huitt declared, "which is now practically assured. The adjourned inquest is to be held next Thursday, and upon the evidence which will be available then the verdict will certainly be one of suicide. Both Lord Milhaven and I myself will be able to testify that Sir Julian started on his homeward drive in a state of great agitation."

"One in the eye for Penny," Cresset chuckled.

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Mr. James Huitt breathed a sigh of relief as he passed along between the privet hedges, opened the green wicket gate and entered the select and sheltered seclusion of the Sandyways Oasis Lawn Tennis Club. An air of gentle leisure pervaded the place. The Juggernaut of the world of finance, thumping out its victims, seemed far enough away. The new-comer was treated with the respect due to the president of the club. Mrs. Harris, in her spotless white apron, smiled a welcome from the door of the little shanty which served as a pavilion. Sybil Cresset, with the doctor and Tyssen all seated on one of the benches, waved their hands. A table was arranged for his cup of tea and a wicker chair dragged out. He exchanged greetings with everybody.

“Do I make a four?” he asked.

“Tyssen can’t play,” the doctor announced. “He has a sprained leg and he is saving himself for the cricket. I will play you a single if you give me fifteen, or I will play alone if you take Miss Cresset and play you level.”

“If Miss Cresset will honour me,” Huitt acceded, with a little bow.

“I think you men would have a better game by yourselves,” she suggested doubtfully.

“A pleasanter one if you will join us,” Mr. Huitt assured her. “Before we begin, perhaps you will allow me to tell you some news—disastrous enough, I am afraid, to a great many people, but news which is likely to bring great relief to our small community.”

“About Anthony?” Sybil cried breathlessly.

“It concerns Mr. Anthony Sarson indirectly,” the



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bank manager assented. "It has transpired to-day that Sir Julian Bott, far from having died a millionaire, has been speculating most improperly with monies belonging to the various companies which he controls. The news has come like a thunderclap upon the City and the shares of all his companies are collapsing. The suggestion of suicide, therefore, which was at first scouted, has now become a definite probability."

There was a chorus of relief. Sybil turned away to hide her tears. Huitt was besieged with questions.

"You will be able to read all about it when you get your evening papers," he reminded them, "but there's no doubt about the fact. I happen to have been one of the first to discover what had been going on."

Tyssen's interest seemed almost feverish.

"Tell us how?" he begged.

"It was very simple," the bank manager explained. "In *The Times* this morning I read that the chairman of one of his companies—Lord Brent—had given to a shareholder a list of various bearer bonds which were comprised amongst its assets. As I happened to have handed those bonds myself to Sir Julian in exchange for his signature some week or two ago, I felt obliged to telephone to his lordship and tell him the facts. Enquiries made at the head-quarters of other banks elicited the fact that he had been doing the same thing elsewhere. I fear we may take it that Sir Julian was faced, not only with bankruptcy, but with fraudulent bankruptcy."

"Are there any figures yet?" Tyssen asked eagerly.

"None," Mr. Huitt replied. "It will probably take some little time to secure them all. . . ."

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The game began. The girl played with skill but absentmindedly, the doctor with energy but with little science, the bank manager with deadly precision and almost unerring accuracy. He and his partner won the set six-two and the following one six-three. Tyssen watched them from his place, blowing out occasionally great clouds of tobacco smoke, fingering his nails, his general air distraught. When the sets were over, the lemonade had been drunk and everyone was ready to depart he hobbled after Huitt.

“ I was hoping to see you this evening, sir,” he said. “ May I walk as far as your gate ? ”

The other acquiesced courteously. The matter of Tyssen’s account had been arranged during the last few days, his references having proved entirely satisfactory, and he was now a client of the bank.

“ This Julian Bott affair,” he began, “ it may help young Mr. Sarson, and I’m sure I hope it will. It supplies a motive, and that’s something, and the doctor’s a great friend of Anthony’s fortunately.”

“ Why ‘ fortunately ’ ? ” Mr. Huitt asked.

“ Well, you know,” Tyssen went on, “ that tragedy is going to be one of the principal events in my book, and I went into things pretty carefully. I even got the doctor to draw me a diagram of the course the bullet took. It would have been necessary for Sir Julian to have had a very long arm and a very supple wrist to have fired that shot himself. As a matter of fact he had short arms.”

Mr. Huitt frowned.

“ The firing of the shot himself was at any rate a possibility,” he said. “ Beyond that we need not go.”

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“What about the absence of any weapon?”

“Those affairs belong to the police,” Mr. Huitt declared. “The disappearance of the weapon is strange. It may still be found. There are often puzzling elements in the most simple of crimes.”

“This one,” Tyssen observed, “is made up of puzzles. What about the hired car in which Sir Julian was riding, and the surly chauffeur whom Anthony Sarson and Miss Cresset saw in the lane? The police admit they have combed the county for that car without success.”

“Really,” Mr. Huitt said stiffly, “one would think that you wanted the young man convicted.”

Tyssen turned towards his companion with an aggrieved stare in his blue eyes.

“I say,” he remonstrated, “you shouldn’t say that even in joke, sir. I am only intensely interested in the working out of this thing,” he continued, “because of my novel. Everyone knows that perfectly well. I thought you might have some ideas on the subject which would have been useful to me. That’s all. Good night.”

“Good night, Mr. Tyssen.”

Tyssen took his leave somewhat ungraciously. Huitt, lingering by his gate, watched the receding figure with mixed feelings. A new client was always a desirable acquisition, and the young man’s account appeared to be of more importance than he had imagined, but somehow or other—perhaps because of his own neatness and dignity of deportment—he had a curious dislike to the thought of seeing Tyssen’s unkempt and unprepossessing personality about the

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bank at all hours. Furthermore, behind that definite dislike of an unattractive personality Huitt, although he would not have confessed to the possession of either presentiments or instincts, had an absolutely undefinable feeling with regard to this young man. It was not enough to say that he disliked him. At the root of that dislike there was at times a definite though utterly illogical sense of apprehension.

The hours of twilight and the longer ones of night took the Oasis under their shelter. Mr. James Huitt, after listening to his wireless and smoking his evening cigarette, made himself a lemon squash, disrobed at ten o'clock, folded up his clothes neatly, turned out his light at ten-thirty and slept as a man with a clear conscience should sleep until daylight. . . . Up at the bungalow Madame de Sayal dined lightly but elegantly at nine o'clock, sat out amongst the shadows with closed eyes, breathing in the strong scent of the pines, until midnight, when she, too, stole indoors, lazily undressed, smoked a last cigarette and slipped into the exquisite luxury of her scented sheets and French bed. . . . Timothy Sarson, after a whisky drinking contest with his neighbour Martin, staggered upstairs and passed the night in groaning and fitful slumber. . . . Tyssen, after half an hour in the garden with Pauline, a Paradise of which he was rather gruffly dispossessed by Anthony's arrival home, crept out into the darkness of the common and sat for an hour or more on one of the seats, his chin drooping upon his folded arms, his eyes always peering into the wall of darkness by which he was surrounded. Finally

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he too hobbled into his room. . . . Mr. Cresset, who had gone to bed at ten o'clock, care-free and happy after a profitable day in the City, slept without once waking, and in the room above him Sybil cried herself to sleep, although her tears were partly of relief.

Up above them all, at the top of the broad avenue hewn hundreds of years ago through the Sandywayes woods, in the state bedchamber of Sandywayes Court, Milhaven, who had been entertaining the Lord Lieutenant of the county and a few other notabilities at dinner, also slept peacefully like a child.

SUNDAY was a day on which Mr. James Huitt thoroughly conformed to type. He spent it in the same fashion as probably some thousands of other bank managers in the British Isles. He rose an hour later, that is to say at eight-thirty instead of seven-thirty, he loitered for another quarter of an hour over his breakfast and he dawdled in the garden until ten o'clock smoking, during that time, the one extra cigarette which he permitted himself. Afterwards he mounted to his room and, to the foundations of an already somewhat elaborate costume, he added a collar of severe shape, a dark grey tie, a black vest and morning coat. He also spent a few minutes brushing a silk hat, after which, at half-past ten, he started for church. He sat in a somewhat prominent seat, and in his capacity of Vicar's Warden, he handed round the plate to the scanty congregation. After the service he had a few minutes' parochial talk with the vicar in the vestry, then strolled down the hill, passed through the swing gates to the other side of the level crossing, skirted the hedge which bordered the tennis courts and made his way homewards, to be assailed, as he opened the gate, by the pleasant smell of cooking. Arrived there, he opened the chiffonier which stood in his dining-room, produced a bottle of sherry, poured himself out exactly one glassful, and, seating himself

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in the garden in a well-chosen spot, consumed it in a series of deliberate sips. His next move was to his dressing-room where he arrayed himself in tennis flannels. Five minutes after he had descended the gong rang for his midday repast. He carved the smallest possible joint of beef with great precision, helped himself to the vegetables which his house-keeper, owing to her infirmity, had left upon the table, poured himself out a second glass of sherry, and in due course completed a moderate but excellent lunch. The meal concluded, he sought out the Sunday papers which had arrived during his absence at church, arranged some cushions upon his wicker chair, and spread himself out behind a screen of lilac trees to read, and finally, it must be confessed, to indulge in half an hour's doze. At four o'clock, racquet in hand, he made his way to the tennis club. Amongst the small crowd of young people he noticed, with as much surprise as he ever permitted himself to show, a tall fair young man who had just arrived with Tyssen. The young man in question at once approached the president.

"This is quite a surprise, Mr. Plumer," the latter said amiably, as he shook hands. "Have you come to these parts to live?"

"No such luck, sir," the young man replied. "It would be too far out for me. I am spending the week-end with Mr. Tyssen."

"With Mr. Tyssen?" Huitt repeated.

"The new account at the bank, sir," the young man reminded him. "You brought Mr. Tyssen in yourself."

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The mask fell over the bank manager's face.

"Were you acquainted with Mr. Tyssen before he became a client?"

"I never saw him before in my life, sir," the young cashier replied. "He is in and out of the bank a good deal, though, and he has made himself very friendly with all of us. On Friday we spoke of the heat and he asked me if I would like to spend the week-end down here as his guest. I had nothing to do, and as he was a client I thought it as well to come."

"Quite right," Mr. Huitt approved. "Quite right. By the by, I wonder, are you an expert tennis player?"

"I play whenever I get the chance, sir."

"Do you know anything about the care of turf?" Mr. Huitt speculated, looking up at his companion.

"I am on the lawns committee at our club, sir, but I'm afraid I'm not much of a practical gardener," the latter admitted.

"Come with me," Mr. Huitt begged. "I would like you to examine a little trouble we are having on our spare court. I will not detain Mr. Plumer a moment," the bank manager continued amiably, turning towards the little group of players. "I just want his advice upon a small matter."

The young man, considerably flattered, followed his chief to the spare lawn. The latter became very eloquent upon the subject of some coarsened grass and small weeds, indicating them with his toe and the end of his tennis racquet. His companion ventured to suggest a weedkiller of mild but effective quality supplied by a great nurseryman, and Huitt took note of



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its name. As they started back again he laid his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"By the by, Mr. Plumer," he said, "I am perfectly certain that it is unnecessary to mention this to you, but in this small neighbourhood we naturally learn something of our neighbour's idiosyncrasies. Your present host, for instance, has the reputation of being an extraordinarily curious person. I have heard complaints that he is like an old woman prying into other people's business the whole of the time."

"I can quite believe it, sir," the young man remarked with a broad smile.

"It is unnecessary to warn you, I am sure," Mr. Huitt continued, and this time the casualness of his tone had given place to a certain steely quality, "that officials of the bank must on no account answer questions as to the workings of their departments. You, for instance, in the securities branch, you would not think of satisfying anyone's curiosity as to the methods of handling your business."

The young man hesitated for a moment.

"Of course, sir," he answered, "I should not think of answering any questions of the slightest importance. I have noticed that peculiarity you speak of concerning Mr. Tyssen. He explains it, however, by the fact that he is writing a book in which there is a mystery connected with a bank. He has asked one or two quite ordinary questions about our routine."

"Quite so, quite so," Mr. Huitt murmured. "I feel sure we can rely upon your discretion. I thought, however, that I had better warn you of our friend's weakness. If I were you I would keep him off the

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subject. One question leads to another, you know. You understand, I'm sure."

"Quite, sir," the young man replied. "I am very glad you mentioned it. Mr. Tyssen generally seems to come in at a quiet time, and if we're not busy he likes to chat for a while."

"Always be civil to a client," the bank manager enjoined with a valedictory nod. "Now we'll go and see what sort of set we can make up for you."

Mr. Huitt played for some time with his usual skill and success, thereby surprising very much his junior associate at the bank. Afterwards he ordered tea and joined Mr. Timothy Sarson who, looking very spick and span in a white linen suit, had just made his appearance.

"I trust that Anthony is feeling happier these days," Mr. Huitt remarked as he stirred his tea.

Timothy Sarson nodded.

"Yes, it's a great relief to him, of course," he acknowledged. "All the same he's a damned fool, Huitt, and I say it again—Sunday or no Sunday—he's a damned fool! He's been shielding that woman, and for two pins I'd go up and wring her neck."

"I doubt," the manager said dryly, "whether that would be of any practical assistance. If I were you I should just let the matter fizzle out. People will soon forget all about it."

"You have not a son," Timothy Sarson commented shortly.

"I cannot conceive any circumstances which would alter my opinion," was the chilly reply. "I shall propose myself now for another set."

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He rose to his feet. The young man Plumer came hurrying up to offer his place. Timothy Sarson greeted him in friendly fashion.

"Why, it's the young man who takes care of my bonds!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "How are you, young fellow? I didn't know you came down into these parts."

Plumer, pleased to be recognised by an important client, accepted the proffered hand.

"I'm down for the week-end, staying with a friend here, sir," he confided. "Very pleasant little corner of the world it seems to be."

"It was all right once," Sarson observed with a sigh. "Just now we seem to be going in for upheavals. Enjoying your tennis?"

"Very much, sir, thank you."

"That's good. Well, you take good care of my scraps of paper for me. Thirty thousand pounds' worth of them, pretty well, you've got, and you needn't be afraid that I'm going to do the Sir Julian on you!"

The young man opened his lips impulsively. There was a puzzled expression upon his fair, boyish face. Precisely at that moment he met his chief's steadfast glance. There was something very poignant indeed in the gleam of those eyes even behind their concealing glasses.

"On Sundays," he stammered, "I shouldn't know a bond if I were to see one. Yesterday I was on the spot and to-morrow I shall be on the spot again."

"Good lad," Mr. Timothy Sarson said with a smile. "I'll bet you won't do your work any

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worse to-morrow for a day out in the country like this.”

The young man walked off towards the court with his chief.

“ I wonder,” he remarked, “ if Mr. Sarson——”

“ Keep your wondering until you get to Aldwych, Mr. Plumer,” his chief advised. “ We all have to be very tactful with Mr. Sarson just now. He has had a great deal upon his mind lately.”

A smile broke across the young man’s face.

“ Why, of course,” he exclaimed, “ what an idiot I was not to remember ! ”

A MONDAY morning visit to the manager's private office was not always accepted as an agreeable enterprise by any one of the staff of clerks attached to Bartons Bank. Plumer received a summons with anything but delight, especially when he remembered a certain vague uneasiness which had troubled him during the previous day.

"Any idea what I am wanted for?" he asked the cashier who had summoned him.

"Can't imagine. Lord Milhaven is there, too. Perhaps they're going to start a new branch somewhere and want to offer you the managership!"

Plumer indulged in a little grimace as he straightened his tie in front of the mirror and stepped out to face the ordeal.

"A directorship more likely," he observed.

He was possessed of rather keen apprehensions, and he could not rid himself of the idea that, for some reason or other, his appearance at the Oasis on the preceding day had been looked upon with a certain amount of disfavour by his chief. The latter's reception of him, however, was quite in his usual fashion.

"This is the young man I was speaking of, your lordship. Maurice Plumer, his name is. He has been with us for five years, and so far as I know has given

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complete satisfaction. Plumer, this is one of our directors, Lord Milhaven, come to see if we can help him out of a slight difficulty.”

Milhaven nodded to the young man in kindly fashion.

“How old are you?” he asked.

“Twenty-five, sir.”

Milhaven looked the young man over in a thoughtful but pleasant manner.

“I think Plumer might suit our purposes very well,” he said, “if the matter can be arranged.”

The bank manager turned towards his employee.

“As I have just told you,” he said, “Lord Milhaven is a director of our bank and takes a great interest in our staff. Our West End branch does not altogether please him just now. He is of opinion that the wrong class of young man has been drafted into it. You would have no objection, I suppose, if we exchanged you—that is to say if you gave up your place here and we gave you a similar post in our Bond Street branch?”

“Certainly not, sir,” the young man replied, with much relief. “I should be glad to go wherever you think I would be most useful.”

“In a sense,” his chief confided, “it will be promotion for you. The scale of pay is a trifle higher, and there are more opportunities for the display of individuality.”

“I suppose I am like everyone else, sir,” Plumer remarked with a smile. “I very much prefer the West End to the City.”

“In that case,” Huitt instructed him, “you will

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kindly present yourself to Mr. Holderness, the manager, at Number 37A, New Bond Street, to-morrow morning at nine-thirty. There is no particular work upon which you are engaged at the moment, I suppose, which cannot be taken over ? ”

“ Nothing out of the ordinary routine, sir.”

“ It may interest you to know,” the bank manager continued, “ that your behaviour yesterday afternoon, Mr. Plumer, has induced me to select you for this preferment. You showed yourself possessed of that rather rare quality—tact. You probably realised the fact that Mr. Timothy Sarson, since his son’s trouble, has been a very difficult person to deal with. I will not say that he has lost his mental balance altogether, but he is certainly in rather a queer state. One of our clients, Lord Milhaven,” he went on, turning to his visitor, “ who persists in talking about some securities he had with us, although he took them out of our keeping and disposed of them, I suppose, some time ago.”

Milhaven nodded carelessly.

“ I know the man you mean,” he remarked. “ Very fine old-fashioned wine business he has, I believe. My uncle used to deal with him. By the by, isn’t he the father of the nice-looking youth whom people are talking about in connection with poor Bott’s affair ? ”

Mr. Huitt assented.

“ He certainly behaved rather foolishly at the time, but none of us who knew him fairly well looked upon him as a possible assassin. That will do, Plumer. We need not keep you any longer.”

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The young man took his leave, receiving a pleasant farewell nod from Milhaven.

"That went off all right, I think," the latter remarked, lighting a cigarette.

"I am perfectly satisfied," Mr. Huitt affirmed. "Of course, any direct intercourse between our clients and a young man like Plumer is the one weak point in our scheme."

"You seem to have avoided trouble up till now," Milhaven observed.

"We have been fortunate," Huitt admitted.

"Any more disturbances in the Oasis?"

"None that I know of," was the placid reply. "There is one inquisitive young man down there who is asking for trouble. He has had a charge of number six shot in the calf of his leg within the last few days, but that doesn't seem to have been enough for him."

"Queer little corner of the world, that Oasis," Milhaven reflected, lounging back in his chair and watching the smoke from his cigarette curl upwards towards the ceiling. "How did you ever happen to find it out?"

"Entirely by chance some twenty years ago," the bank manager replied. "I used to take a train from one of the London termini every Sunday and then walk. It was on one of my excursions that I came across this place."

"I should never have thought country walks very much in your line," Milhaven chuckled.

"They are not," the other confessed. "I took those excursions and those long walks simply as a matter of health. Health is a vital necessity for the



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successful conduct of life. Nowadays in order to preserve it I play tennis."

"And play damn' well, they tell me."

"I would not go so far as that," Huitt observed. "As a matter of fact it is the others who play so badly. Very few people in games, in any form of pleasure or business, seem to have learnt that the greatest secret of life is concentration. When I play tennis there is nothing so important to me as to deal with each ball I receive or serve in the most advantageous fashion—for my score, I mean, of course."

"I imagine," Milhaven ruminated, studying the precise little figure at the desk, "that you would have been a success in any career you had taken up."

"You are very likely right," the bank manager admitted without any trace of self-consciousness.

"Perhaps on a broader canvas your gift would not have been so manifest," Milhaven continued, as though following out his own train of thought. "Your genius is a little intensive. Your greatest talent of all, for instance, could only have been acquired by a terrific amount of patience."

"Your lordship is inclined to be discursive this morning."

"Perhaps," Milhaven acquiesced, "it is because I have to-day what a woman would call a *crise* of nerves."

The bank manager smiled slowly.

"Is that possible?"

"The very question, my dear Huitt," his visitor declared, "shows how little you understand me. I lived for many years in presentiments and fancies, I

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steered my life by instinct, not by reason. That was when I was living in the East—the Near East I should say. In Arabia and Mesopotamia.”

Huitt listened without comment to what he did not understand. There was a brief silence between the two men, during which the hooting of the motor horns, the rumbling of the heavier traffic, and all the street noises outside seemed suddenly to have become intensified. Milhaven rose to his feet. He looked wan and tired and there was something of that curious expression in his eyes which comes only to men who have lived for years in loneliness.

“We are nearing the end, my little companion in crime,” he said. “That I can apprehend just as clearly as I can hear that hideous orchestra of sound outside. It is lucky that we have already pulled down the great things.”

“Have you any specific indications of danger?” Huitt asked.

“Nothing of the sort,” his companion assured him. “Just my imaginings, that is all. I am feeling like a superstitious woman who has gazed into the crystal.”

Mr. Huitt’s chief of the staff came in for advice on an urgent matter. Milhaven prepared to depart.

“You haven’t forgotten that you are lunching with me to-day, Huitt?” he remarked carelessly, as he drew on his gloves.

Mr. Huitt smiled. The smile was quite sufficient. Anyone who had ever had dealings with him knew that Mr. Huitt forgot nothing, and least of all was he likely to forget a lunch with one of his directors.

CHURCHILL, Huitt's confidential cashier, followed his chief into his private room with a sigh of relief. The bank manager, who had only just entered, was already in his chair glancing at the various memoranda awaiting his attention.

"Anything special, Churchill?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the young man replied. "We have been trying for some time to get you on the telephone."

"Indeed?" Huitt murmured. "I have been lunching with Lord Milhaven."

"So we understood, sir, but no one seemed to know which Lord Milhaven's club was."

"Nothing very serious, I hope?" Huitt inquired tolerantly.

"It is Mr. Martin, sir. He came in the moment you went out and he has been in half a dozen times since. He will be here again in a few minutes."

Mr. Huitt felt no longer any interest in the little pile of memoranda reposing under his paper-weight. He flattered himself that there was no change in his expression, no sign of any emotion in the thin, rigid lines of his features. Nevertheless, no more disquieting news could have been offered him than this.

"What on earth can the man want?" Huitt demanded, with a faint note of stealthily imparted

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impatience in his tone. "He was here for nearly half an hour the other day—gave us no end of trouble getting that money altogether."

"I know, sir," Churchill replied. "And the trouble of it is that he seems to have forgotten all about it."

Mr. Huitt frowned.

"Forgotten?" he repeated.

"I am afraid, sir," the young man went on, "that Mr. Martin is scarcely himself to-day. He seemed a little excited the first time he came in and he has been getting worse ever since."

"In what way?"

"Well, sir, to be frank, I am afraid he has had too much to drink."

Mr. Huitt shook his head.

"Regrettable," he sighed. "Very regrettable."

"I can hear him outside again now, sir," Churchill announced. "Shall I fetch him? I am afraid he won't go away unless you have a few words with him."

"Certainly I will have a few words with him," Huitt replied. "If I find him in the condition you say, I shall be obliged to speak my mind. If there is one thing I dislike more than another, it is any evidences about the bank of insobriety on the part of our customers. Give me five minutes, Churchill. At the end of that time I shall ring my bell and you can bring him in yourself. Until then try to keep him away from anyone else. Sit with him in the small reception-room."

"Very good, sir. I think I ought to warn you that

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he disputes his balance vigorously and utterly denies that very big cash withdrawal yesterday. If he gives any trouble at all, sir, I should be inclined to have him removed by the police. He appears to me to be in a dangerous condition."

"We cannot do that, Churchill," Huitt said calmly. "Mr. Martin is, after all, an old client of the bank. I dare say I shall be able to soothe him down. Show him in here and if I ring after his arrival it will be for the receipt he gave us for the money."

"Very good, sir."

The young man hurried out. Huitt sat for a moment without moving, listening to the retreating footsteps, listening to the voices in the bank, the clicking of distant typewriters. Then, with incredible swiftness of movement, he made one or two preparations before pressing the bell. When Mr. Roland Martin blundered into the room he found the bank manager seated at his table, an immutable figure, writing rapidly.

"Mr. Martin, sir," Churchill announced.

Mr. Martin did not present a prepossessing appearance. He was untidy, unbrushed, and his linen needed attention. He had failed to remove his hat, which had reached now an almost impossible angle at the back of his head. He was scarlet of face and loud of tone.

"Look here, Huitt," he blustered. "What's the meaning of these stupid figures they keep on giving me as my balance? I have not drawn a cheque for a week and I have ninety-three thousand pounds lying here and twelve thousand pounds in War Savings

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Certificates. Are your clerks all drunk that they treat me like an idiot ? ”

Mr. Huitt laid down his pen carefully and sat upright in his chair.

“ You can leave us, Churchill,” he said. “ If I ring you will know what it is that I want.”

The young man hesitated. He was a football player himself, and to him Mr. Huitt was an impossibly unathletic figure. Everything about his visitor denoted trouble. Mr. Huitt repeated his gesture, however, and there was something about his manner which forbade hesitation. The door was closed.

“ Mr. Martin,” the bank manager began very quietly. “ I am going to speak to you as a friend and a neighbour. You have had too much to drink. You are not in a fit condition to be going out alone.”

Mr. Martin seemed staggered.

“ What the hell business is that of yours, Huitt ? ” he demanded. “ If I am upset it is not with drink—at least, not altogether. It is your fools of clerks. Can you believe it? They want to tell me that I took ninety thousand pounds out of the bank yesterday and ten thousand pounds’ worth of War Savings Certificates ! What’s the meaning of it? You know well enough I did nothing of the sort.”

“ Mr. Martin,” the other begged, “ don’t you think it would be wise if you were to remember that you are speaking to the representative of one of the wealthiest banks in the world? No one wants your bonds or your little dribblets of money.”

“ Then where are they ? ” Mr. Martin asked bluntly.

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Mr. Huitt rose to his feet. Standing up he seemed nothing more than a slim lad in figure by the side of his visitor. He pointed to a piece of mahogany furniture at the farther end of the room.

"I will tell you everything you want to know in due course," he said, "and you will find it quite satisfactory. I will not talk to you, however, while you are in this condition. Lift up the lid of that portable lavatory there, pour out some water, bathe your head and brush your hair. You had better tie your tie over again while you are about it. As soon as you are presentable I will talk to you."

The words were like icicles. The advice might have been good but the words contained no suggestion of any form of sympathy. They had their effect upon Martin, however. Muttering to himself he crossed the room, drew up the lid of the lavatory with a bang, and poured out some water. Mr. Huitt slipped over the floor with noiseless feet and did what seemed to be, under the circumstances, a somewhat foolish thing. He locked the door and returned to his place. He was seated there when his visitor, looking slightly more respectable, threw a towel away into the corner and staggered back.

"Draw your chair up to the table," Mr. Huitt invited. "First, let me tell you this. Your War Savings Certificates are, of course, being in the charge of Messrs. Barton & Company, perfectly safe."

"Then why aren't they on this list?"

"Because," Mr. Huitt explained gently, "bearer securities are kept in a different vault and are looked after by another set of clerks."

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Mr. Martin was silent for a moment. The bank manager's eyes seemed fixed upon a certain part of his waistcoat. He became so conscious of the gaze that he flicked the place impatiently with his fingers.

"What's wrong with me anyway?" Martin demanded.

"You spilt a little water over your chest. Nothing of any consequence," Mr. Huitt observed. "Now wait, please."

He opened the third and most sacred of the drawers in his writing-table—a drawer which had been fitted with a special Brahma lock and to which no one else in the world had access. As he stooped he twisted a handkerchief lightly round his hand. When he straightened himself there was no time for his visitor to do more than open his mouth. There was no time for a single cry, no time for the faintest movement. The sense of sight was the only one which seemed still active in the doomed man. He saw something very dull and ugly pointed straight at his waistcoat! Mr. Huitt's small figure seemed to be growing larger and larger. There was a glare behind those neat gold-rimmed spectacles, then there was a little stab of flame, a sound no louder than that made by a child's pop-gun, and a strange pain in Mr. Martin's heart. He uttered a little gurgling cry scarcely audible, but he felt the life passing out of his body before his lips could close again. One sobbing, queer little murmur it was, heard alone by the man who was leaning over him. He collapsed in the chair and sprawled over its side—a limp, inert mass. . . . Mr. Huitt looked at him critically and decided that all was well. He had



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seen dead men before, but no one more completely dead than Mr. Roland Martin was at that moment. His hand relaxed. He leaned over the table and pushed the weapon into Mr. Martin's pudgy ungloved hand. With his own fingers still protected by the handkerchief he pressed the fingers of the dead man around the butt, and allowed it to drop softly on to the carpeted floor. Then he dived once more into that third drawer and produced a letter addressed to himself in Mr. Roland Martin's sprawling handwriting. He laid it on the table in front of him without opening it, restored the handkerchief to his pocket, and locked up the drawer. He gave one more swift look round the room. His brain worked calmly, his pulse was perfectly steady. There seemed to be nothing which he had forgotten. He leaned over and pressed his finger firmly upon the bell. The seconds passed. There was a little dark spot of liquid of some sort oozing out through Mr. Martin's waistcoat. His jaw had sagged a little on one side. He was becoming a most unpleasant sight. Mr. Huitt's fingers once more sought the bell. There was a knock at the door and the handle turned. Then, a minute's silence. The knocking was repeated. Mr. Huitt rose to his feet.

"Wait a minute, Churchill," he called out, and his voice was noticeably unsteady. "Is the door locked?"

"Yes, sir," came a voice from the outside.

"Wait. I'm coming," Mr. Huitt said.

He crossed the room, unlocked the door and grasped Churchill by the shoulder. This was a

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different Mr. Huitt. He was shaking, and the fingers of the other hand clutched for a moment at the air.

"I am—just a trifle faint, Churchill," he murmured faintly. "I am not hurt, but—Martin——"

"Good heavens! What's happened to him, sir? Has he had a fit?" Churchill asked in a tone of alarm.

"Shot himself seated at my table," Mr. Huitt gasped. "I—I have never seen anything like that before, Churchill. I feel upset. Perhaps he's not dead. Send for a doctor and the police at once. I will sit in the easy chair. After you have sent out you might get me a glass of water. Don't touch anything," he added, as Churchill began to move towards the table. "Better leave everything for the police. There is generally an officer outside, Churchill. He will fetch the inspector."

"I don't like leaving you, sir," the young man said.

"I am quite all right," Mr. Huitt answered, subsiding into the easy chair. "Do as I tell you—quickly."

Mr. Huitt ceased to speak. For some three minutes he kept his eyes closed. When he opened them again it was with a very artistic little tremor. He sat up in his chair and took the glass of water which was being handed to him. There were already a policeman, the sub-manager, and others in the room.

"Feeling a little better, sir?" his chief-of-the-staff asked him.

"I'm quite all right," Mr. Huitt repeated. "What about Martin?"

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"I'm afraid he's done for, sir. The doctor's here already—was in the bank."

The doctor, a man of severe professional appearance, detached himself from the little group around the table.

"The gentleman is quite dead," he announced, turning to the manager. "We won't touch anything until the inspector comes."

"Fortunately it is closing time," Mr. Huitt observed, listening to the hour of three striking from the adjacent church clock. "Let someone stand out on the steps, Churchill, and bring in the inspector."

The doctor came over to Mr. Huitt's side.

"Rather a shock for you, sir, I am afraid," he said kindly. "Are you feeling better?"

"Absolutely all right, thank you," Mr. Huitt replied. "No need to bother about me. Just for a second or two I felt queer."

The doctor felt his pulse but dropped his hand in a few seconds. He looked at the little bespectacled man with respect.

"I congratulate you upon your nerve, sir," he said. "Horrible experience, though. Ah, here comes the inspector."

There was a little preliminary questioning. The inspector and doctor whispered together, then the former came over to Mr. Huitt, his book in his hand. "You were the only witness, I gather, sir. May I ask your name?"

"James Huitt."

"And your position?"

"I am the manager of the bank."

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“ Do you feel equal to telling me what happened ? ”

“ Certainly,” Mr. Huitt replied. “ Mr. Martin, who is an old client of the bank, was brought in by one of my clerks who warned me previously that he was in a state of intoxication. I could see that he had been drinking, but I tried to soothe him as well as I could because he is going through a very painful time just now on account of severe financial losses which he was very anxious to keep secret. Mr. Martin began questioning me about a large balance which he certainly possessed up to a short while ago, and I was forced to remind him that he had drawn the money out and taken it away with him only the day before yesterday. He muttered something about that being only a dream, and he was obviously in no state to discuss his affairs. I persuaded him to wash his hands and brush his hair, and I thought he was going to sit down and talk reasonably. Instead of that he threw a note addressed to me upon the table, suddenly drew a small pistol from his pocket, pressed it to his side and shot himself before I could move.”

“ Have you examined the letter addressed to you, sir ? ”

“ Not yet. It is still on my table.”

“ Have you any objection to opening it ? ” the inspector asked.

“ None at all.”

The letter was brought over. Mr. Huitt sat up in his chair, tore open the envelope, and read :

*Dear Mr. Huitt,*

*I am in a terrible state. I am losing my memory. One*

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*day I seem to know just how much I have and just what securities you are holding. Another day I have an awful feeling that I have sold all my bonds and drawn out all my balance. I dreamt last night that I was a pauper! I cannot bear it any longer. If I am sober enough I shall bring you this letter.*

*If anything is left from my estate it is to go to my wife whose address is c/o Barton's Bank, Paris.*

The signature was nothing but a scrawl. The inspector folded up the letter.

“You won't mind my having this, sir?” he asked.

“Not in the least,” Mr. Huitt conceded. “You will let me have it back after the inquest. The directors may wish to see it.”

“There are one or two further investigations I must make as a matter of form, sir,” the inspector said. “Afterwards the body will be removed to the mortuary.”

“You are in command here,” Mr. Huitt assured him. “Can I do any good by staying?”

“No good at all,” the inspector said firmly. “I should like everyone away, in fact.”

James Huitt rose to his feet.

“You might get my hat and gloves, Mr. Churchill,” he begged. “You have heard what the inspector said—send everyone out of the room.”

On his way to the door Mr. Huitt suddenly paused. On the outskirts of the two or three people still gathered round the body of the dead man was Mr. Tyssen, his neighbour from the Oasis! The bank manager frowned.

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“What’s that young man doing here?” he asked Churchill.

Churchill glanced at him over his shoulder.

“I suppose he heard the commotion and came in, sir,” he answered. “He was changing a cheque for five pounds——”

“Send him away at once. No, I’ll speak to him myself.”

Mr. Huitt crossed the room. He touched Tyssen on the shoulder.

“You have no business in here,” he said. “Be so good as to leave the room at once.”

“I’m sorry,” Tyssen stuttered. “I saw the others come hurrying in and I wanted to know what had happened.”

“Indeed! What business is it of yours?” Mr. Huitt inquired calmly.

The few officials were drifting out of the room. The doctor, the inspector, and Churchill alone remained. Mr. Huitt pointed to the door.

“The whole thing,” Tyssen pleaded, “fits in with the novel I have been writing—a mystery novel with some bank troubles in it. Can’t I have one more look?”

“You can attend the coroner’s inquest or you can read the newspapers,” Mr. Huitt said. “Your presence here is an intrusion and quite out of order. Mr. Churchill, will you please see Mr. Tyssen off the premises. Customers have no right in the bank after three o’clock.”

Tyssen turned away with reluctance.

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“ I wonder whether they are going to take fingerprints ? ” he asked wistfully.

Mr. Huitt looked across at Churchill, and Churchill understood. No customer had ever left the manager's private room with more dispatch than did Mr. Tyssen.

PAULINE, after all, resembled her brother in many ways. She was inclined to be obstinate, she liked having her own way, and she had charm enough to get it as a rule. She approached the reluctant young man with the happy air of one born to easy victories.

"Mr. Tyssen," she exclaimed, "what is this terrible news? They tell me you don't want to play this afternoon."

"It isn't that I don't want to, Miss Sarson," he answered eagerly. "The fact is my leg——"

"I was so sorry to hear about that," she interrupted. "You sprained it, didn't you. Dr. Anderson told me all about it, but he seemed to think that if you were careful you would be all right for to-day. They will let you have someone to run for you."

"That wouldn't help me any with the bowling," he pointed out, "and the bowling is what your brother is so anxious about."

"But you could bowl those terrible slows—googlies, aren't they? Come and sit down under the cedar tree. Father and Anthony are both up at the tent."

"I was going up there," he confided. "I've taken a ticket for the luncheon, but I ought not to play, Miss Sarson. I ought not, really."

She led the way into the garden and pulled out a comfortable chair for him under the cedar tree. Then



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she clapped her hands, and the butler, who had been laying the cloth for his young mistress's luncheon, hurried out through the french windows.

"Two dry Martinis," Pauline ordered. "Specially good ones, Groves."

The shaker and glasses duly appeared. Pauline raised her glass to her lips.

"This is to our victory," she said. "Come along, Mr. Tyssen. You must drink to it. Do you think we shall pull it off, Groves?"

Groves, who had been captain of the cricket club in former years, looked doubtful.

"We don't have the stuff now as we used to have, miss," he sighed. "There's young Mr. Anthony, as fine a batsman as anyone would wish for, and young Tom, too. He's only a slogger, though, and there's no one else we can rely on. Our bowling isn't what it ought to be, either, miss."

"You hear Groves's opinion," Pauline said, turning to her companion. "He knows all about it, too. I want Sandywayes to win. You must please play."

The butler refilled the glasses. Cricket was a subject upon which he was always allowed to discourse freely.

"I hadn't heard that Mr. Tyssen was a player, miss," he observed tentatively.

"Mr. Tyssen is a dark horse," Pauline confided. "Mr. Anthony and I have seen him bowl two balls and two balls only. The first one sent Tom's middle stump out of the ground a dozen yards, and it was bowled at such a pace that we never saw the way it went. The next ball swerved about a foot in the air,

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fetches Tom about six yards out of his ground and only missed the wicket by a coat of paint. A baby could have stumped him."

"Have you played in these parts before, sir?" Groves asked politely.

"Never," Tyssen answered.

Groves poured out the remainder of the cocktails. His opinion of Tyssen was tinged with a vein of snobbishness.

"Exceptional balls, those two, perhaps, sir?" he suggested.

"They probably were," Tyssen agreed.

The man departed into the house.

"I thought I should have seen your brother this morning," Tyssen remarked uneasily. "I told him yesterday, though, that I didn't think there was a chance of my being able to play."

"I know," Pauline replied. "He was coming in to see you. I sent him off with dad to see that everything was all right up at the tent. I waited for you myself instead."

He moved restlessly in his chair.

"Do play, Mr. Tyssen," she begged. "I'm frightfully anxious for Sandyways to win. If it hurts your leg I will turn sick nurse and look after it myself!"

He looked gloomily at the ground.

"It isn't altogether my leg, Miss Pauline," he confided.

"Then what on earth can it be?" she demanded.

An intense desire came upon him to tell her the real reason, but he fought against it.

"What time do they draw stumps?" he asked.

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“At half-past six,” she answered, “but if it’s too long for you, we’ll get someone else to field.”

He shook his head. His leg had healed marvellously and his stick was already unneeded.

“What time does the ‘Club Train’ get in?” he inquired.

She looked at him in surprise.

“The train dad generally comes by? Ten minutes to six.”

He hesitated.

“Miss Pauline,” he said, “I don’t want to seem stupid and ungracious. I don’t want to tell you any falsehoods about my cricket, either. I can play a bit. I have done ever since I was a boy. I didn’t want to play down here, though.”

“Why not?” she asked. “Why not—when I want you to so much?”

He sat for a moment in ruminating silence.

“I can’t explain,” he replied. “Anyway, I’ll take a risk. I’ll go and put on my flannels.”

“You’re a dear!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Mr. Tyssen, I can’t tell you how grateful I am. If your leg is worse, don’t forget, I am your nurse!”

“For—how long?” he asked.

He had risen to his feet. He looked very nervous, but no longer awkward. She laughed encouragement at him, but she was already on her way to the house.

“I shan’t be five minutes over my lunch,” she called out. “Wait for me and we’ll walk up together.”

ON the afternoon of the Sandywayes versus Godalming cricket match, in the darkened atmosphere of the court-room near London Bridge, Mr. James Huitt played a dominant part in that dreariest of all functions—a London inquest. Evidence had been given as to the excitable condition of Mr. Roland Martin on the occasion of his visit to the bank. Regretful evidence had been tendered by the dead man's medical attendant as to his patient's tendencies toward alcoholism. Mr. Huitt, when he entered the box, was invited to tell his own story in his own way.

“Mr. Martin,” he explained, “was once one of our most valued clients, but during the last few months deteriorated in many ways. He presented himself at the bank on Monday afternoon very much the worse for drink. He was under the impression that we still held a considerable balance of his, although my cashier had been most patient with him and shown him his receipts for all that he had withdrawn. I persuaded him to use my lavatory, wash his hands and face, and adjust his hair. On his way there I noticed him pause at the door which on that occasion he, without a doubt, locked. He afterwards came and sat in front of my desk and we began to talk. He asked to examine his passbook once more, and whilst

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I had turned away to reach for it he produced the weapon and shot himself.”

“No farewell speech or anything of that sort?” the coroner inquired.

“Nothing.”

“With regard to these large withdrawals of share certificates and money,” the coroner asked, “were these made in the usual way?”

“Not entirely,” Mr. Huitt replied. “That is to say, he did not draw the money across the counter. He had it brought into my private room, but that is not unusual in the case of a large transaction. He drew down to within fourteen hundred pounds on the date I have given you.”

“He did not take you into his confidence as regards this large withdrawal?” the coroner continued.

“He did not. He knew that I knew some of his recent speculations and disapproved of them.”

With a little more purely formal evidence Mr. Huitt’s examination came to an end. The coroner turned towards the jury. He found the foreman already on his feet.

“Mr. Coroner,” the latter announced, “I have received an anonymous letter requesting me in the cause of justice to ask two questions.”

The coroner frowned.

“This court,” he said, “has a great prejudice against anonymous letters.”

“Perhaps you will read it, sir,” the jurymen invited.

The letter was passed up. The coroner read it and read it again.

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"The two questions," he remarked, "seem to me to be either pointless or else to carry a certain sinister significance. You can ask them if you wish."

"The first that I am requested to ask is whether any finger-prints were taken on the revolver with which Mr. Martin was shot?"

The inspector, who was seated in the body of the court, rose at once to his feet.

"I can answer that question, sir," he said to the coroner.

"You had better answer it in the usual way," was the reply.

The inspector returned to the box and was sworn.

"Can you inform the court," the coroner asked, "whether the weapon in question was submitted to any test as regards finger-prints?"

"Yes, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Did the finger-prints correspond with any in your possession?"

"Not at the time, sir. Afterwards we took an impression of the right hand finger-prints of the deceased. We found that they corresponded."

"I see," the coroner remarked. "There were no other finger-prints upon the weapon?"

"None of any sort, sir."

The coroner waved the witness away.

"The question seems to me," he observed, looking over his eye-glasses round the court, "slightly ridiculous, but in any case it is fully answered."

"The second question concerns the handwriting of the deceased," the foreman of the jury continued, "to inquire as to whether any tests have been made as to

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the handwriting to be sure that it corresponded with that of the dead man."

The inspector rose once more in his place.

"Mr. Coroner," he said, "the police had no intention of referring to the finger-prints or the test of handwriting. The case seemed perfectly clear without them. We have never any desire to put suggestions into the minds of anyone with regard to innocent people. At the same time, we are obliged to protect ourselves. We did seek the advice of a handwriting expert and he is now in court."

"Name, please," the coroner asked.

"Mr. Adolphus Morrison."

Mr. Adolphus Morrison was called. He stepped into the witness box briskly and was sworn.

"Mr. Morrison," the coroner said, "you have studied this last letter addressed to Mr. James Huitt, the bank manager, purporting to be written by the deceased?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have had an opportunity of comparing it with other letters written by the deceased?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion as regards the authenticity of the letter in question?"

"I have not the slightest doubt, Mr. Coroner, that the letter addressed to Mr. Huitt was written by the deceased. The handwriting in every respect is precisely similar."

The coroner nodded an acknowledgment and turned towards the foreman of the jury.

"Your two questions have been answered," he said.

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“To me they appear to be entirely unnecessary, but it will perhaps be very satisfactory to you and to members of the public generally to know that the police, even when the case before them is so obvious as the present one, still explore every possibility. Are you agreed upon your verdict?”

“We are, sir. We find that the deceased, Mr. Roland Martin, committed suicide suffering from temporary insanity.”

“The verdict will be recorded,” the coroner observed.

There was a little whispering in odd corners concerning those two questions from the anonymous correspondent, but the interest excited by them died a natural death, and they did not even find their way into the press, except in the case of one prominent newspaper which quoted them as instances of the thoroughness with which the police conducted their investigations.



MR. HUITT reached Waterloo Station that afternoon at precisely eight minutes before the train for Sandways left. Two minutes to buy his evening paper, one minute to walk up the crowded platform, and at exactly his usual hour he settled down into his accustomed seat. He glanced around, a little surprised to find that he was the first arrival. Then he opened his paper. Bad news about two more of the Julian Bott companies. He glanced at the head-lines and kept the article itself for later reading. Queer that no one else had arrived yet. He opened another one of his papers, and for a moment became absorbed in the report of a company meeting. The sound of the whistle disturbed him. He looked up only to find that the train was moving out of the station. There were four empty places and, for the first time since its inauguration, Mr. Huitt was travelling homeward in the "Club Car" alone. He pulled down the window and looked eagerly but fruitlessly backwards. In due course he took up his paper and began to read the City article. All the time, however, he felt impelled to lift his eyes and look around him. There was no doubt about it—he was alone in the compartment. Timothy Sarson should have been seated diagonally opposite to him. Cresset should have been by his side. Roland Martin facing him. Roland Martin! He

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seemed suddenly to realise for the first time that Roland Martin, with his tousled mass of hair, his generally untidy appearance, his moist eyes, with all the slowly developing signs of the incipient alcoholic, would never occupy that seat again. No man viewed death more philosophically than James Huitt. Incapable of anything in the shape of heroism, he still had never known fear, but, perhaps for the first time in his life, queer forces began to work. He remembered Milhaven's forebodings, remembered that strange look in his patron's eyes. Perhaps this really was the end! His lips tightened. He was filled with scorn of himself, scorn of the momentary weakness which had crept like poison into his brain. Fancies! These things belonged to Milhaven—to other men. He had discarded them all his life as fast as they had come his way. What did it matter that he was travelling alone? He had made himself so much a creature of custom that those empty places had momentarily disturbed him. Ridiculous. . . . He read his papers steadily until the train drew up by Sandywayes platform. The station-master himself opened the carriage door.

"I have travelled down alone, you see," Mr. Huitt remarked pleasantly.

"Why, yes, sir," was the undisturbed reply. "They're all up at the cricket."

Then Mr. Huitt remembered and he smiled. That showed how much these fancies were worth! It was the annual match with Godalming. He remembered the talk about the tent and the luncheon which Lord Milhaven was to provide.

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“How are they getting on, Mr. Trent?” he asked.

“I reckon Godalming had a bit of a surprise, sir,” the station-master chuckled. “As soon as I’ve got the train into the siding I’m off up to the ground. They do say that that young man who is staying here—I’ve forgotten his name—skittled Godalming out, and he and young Mr. Sarson were hitting them up a treat. Pardon, sir,”

The station-master hurried away to finish his duties for the evening. Mr. Huitt, with his dispatch box and his umbrella in his hand, walked briskly across the meadow, down the path which skirted the deserted tennis club, and crossed the common to where apparently the whole of the village—and a good many strangers—were watching the match. Godalming were in the field and evidently a little weary of it. Anthony Sarson, wearing his Oxford cap, was leaning on his bat at the farther wicket. The other man, for the moment, Mr. Huitt failed to recognise. . . .

Play, which had been interrupted for a few minutes for refreshments, recommenced. Anthony steered the first ball skilfully through the slips for a single. Mr. Huitt still failed to recognise the figure of his partner who ran down the pitch with a lumbering, rather ungainly action. He noticed, however, that with the change of position the field spread out. Another ball was bowled. The batsman ran a little way out to meet it. There was a buzz of applause. The ball was over the railings by Mr. Sarson’s gate! The umpire’s hand was up to indicate the boundary. The batsmen ceased to run and returned in leisurely fashion to their places.

“Another boundary!” a spectator, who was seated

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at the end of the bench on which Mr. Huitt had ensconced himself, remarked. "These Godalming chaps are having the biggest surprise of their lives," he added, with a broad grin.

"Tell me how the match has gone," Mr. Huitt asked. "I have only just arrived."

"You've missed some rare sport then, sir," the man replied. "Godalming won the toss, and by the way they talked and acted I believe they thought they were in for the day. This new young gent what's staying here, no one knew anything about him, started the bowling, and in less than half an hour there were eight wickets down for twenty-two, and most of them twenty-twos were byes! Godalming were all out for forty-one—a team that hasn't made less than a hundred all the season!"

"And then?"

"Us chaps went in and made a hundred and forty," the other continued. "Godalming did better the second time, although they had a lot of luck. The young gent as was bowling in the morning hurt his leg a bit. He got seven wickets again, but Colthurst there was letting them go by and they made thirty byes. Anyway, Mr. Anthony Sarson and the young gent went in three-quarters of an hour ago with a hundred to get. You see the board, sir. They're ninety-five up already and no wickets and ten minutes to go."

"But who is this young man who has done such prodigies!" Huitt asked.

"Don't know his name, sir, but he's a corking cricketer," the man declared enthusiastically.

The bank manager leaned forward and strained

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his eyes. Tyssen had just taken guard for a new bowler and was glancing round the field. In his new position he seemed to have undergone a strange metamorphosis.

The awkwardness of his build had become strength, his face was still and set. He had the confident air and bearing of a man who is master of his job. The first ball of the new over he stepped back, and his bat seemed to flash like lightning. He cut it hard and low to the boundary. More applause. One run wanting. The next ball, hit to square leg, passed over Mr. Huitt's head. If it had come straight to him he would scarcely have noticed it. He was leaning forward in his place, his bony fingers clasped together, his head still and motionless, a strange lifeless kind of effigy amongst the crowd of applauding and happy people. Only his steel-like eyes followed the batsmen as they ran down the pitch. There was no boundary on the side to which the ball had been hit, but without any particular effort the batsmen ran four. There was a word from the captain and they turned towards the pavilion. The match was over amidst a tempest of applause. Sandywayes had won by an innings and three runs.

But, to James Huitt, the small man seated there with his dispatch box on his knees, this was no cricket match which was ended. This was the end of all things. Perhaps the tenets of his life had been wrong, he thought, as he sat there still motionless. Perhaps there were, after all, such things as presentiments and instincts. Perhaps Milhaven that morning had felt the approach of Nemesis. Perhaps that queer little

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shiver as he had found himself alone in the railway carriage, had too its place in the scheme of Fate. To think that for months he should have scoffed at that awkward-looking, loutish being, scoffed at his physique, scoffed at his apparent simplicity! His mind wandered backwards. He saw the famous cricket ground at Sydney with the low stands and heard the roar of voices. The two white-flannelled figures at the wicket! He heard the music of the ball upon the bat, the constant peals of applause. A new wonder, fresh from the school form, had come into the world. He had been a cricketer himself in those days. He rose heavily to his feet and looked around him. They were still cheering. Anthony and his companion were walking up the steps of the pavilion. Everyone was running in that direction for a final shout, perhaps for a drink. Mr. Huitt turned and walked across the common to his flower-set cottage home.

His voice was clear and distinct enough when Milhaven, the receiver in his hand, was brought to speak and then to listen.

“My dear Huitt,” the latter protested, “you know how I loathe the telephone. Why this insistence?”

“Because your lordship, as usual, was right the other morning. There is no time to get hold of the Major. I was forced to ring you up. The incredible has happened!”

“Do you mean that you have bungled?”

“No miracle of that sort,” was the steely reply.

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“ The inquest ? ”

“ Perfect. What has happened came from off the map.”

“ That will do,” Milhaven answered, still languidly.

“ I will pick you up at the by-way at eleven o'clock.”

THERE was not the slightest doubt about it that Sandywayes misbehaved that night. Anthony had pressed a five-pound note into the hand of Amos Grindley, the village tailor and captain of the team, begging fervently that not one of the eleven should go to bed thirsty. The tailor swore to fulfil his trust and kept his word. The mahogany dining-table at The Haven, enlarged by three extra leaves, was a noble sight. Four urgent notes and telephone messages had brought together more than the requisite number of guests. Timothy Sarson, in his almost Pickwickian dinner garb, his flowing black tie, his soft-fronted shirt, was as good a cellerman as he was a host. The array of dust-covered bottles in cradles and gold-foiled ones in ice pails, waiting for the feast to come, was a bewildering and magnificent sight. Amongst servants and the incoming guests alike there seemed to be a unanimous impulse towards forgetting all recent horrors and indulging in an orgy of celebration. Pauline led the limping hero of the occasion away with her down the long rose-covered pergola towards the squash court and swimming pool.

“ You are glad ? ” she whispered.

“ That depends,” he answered.

“ On what ? ”

“ On your answer to my next question.”



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“Ask it then,” she invited.

The sunburn on his cheeks after the long day seemed more intense than ever, but in contrast his eyes were bluer. He straightened himself. Pauline, who, since the afternoon, had learnt to adore his slouch and the long, magnificent stretch of his muscular arms, was even capable of admiring the cut of his Strand-built dinner clothes.

“I am a very rough Colonial with decent antecedents and enough money,” he announced. “Will you marry me?”

“Why?” she asked, with a little quiver at her lips.

For a moment he lost his poise. Then his arms went around her and he grinned.

“Because you’re the only girl I’ve ever looked at twice and because I love you,” he said.

“I’ll tell you in the summer-house,” she answered demurely.

Meanwhile cocktails were freely and happily drunk upon the lawn. Evening papers had been carefully banished, and by universal consent no mention was made of the tragedy of Roland Martin’s death—an attitude which was made somewhat easier from the fact that he had never taken the slightest interest in cricket or any other game. A pleasant touch was given to the party by the sudden arrival of Milhaven in his long racing car. He made his way in amongst the little group, with his usual lazy but delightful smile and friendly gleam in his eyes.

“I have come,” he said, as he greeted Timothy Sarson, “to offer you all my congratulations, to shake

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hands with the hero of the occasion, and, I trust," he added, "to drink one of those marvellous-looking champagne cocktails."

Timothy Sarson was flustered but dignified. He retained all the middle-class Englishman's respect for the aristocracy.

"The cocktails, Groves," he directed—quite unnecessarily because Groves was already there with the tray. "The cheese biscuits and caviare," he directed the parlourmaid—also unnecessarily, for the girl had hurried across with the tray. "Tyssen—where the mischief is Tyssen?"

Tyssen and Pauline appeared at the top of the path. They hastened forward in obedience to an imperative gesture from the latter's father.

"You played marvellous cricket, Mr. Tyssen," Lord Milhaven said, holding out his hand. "Milhaven my name is, from the Court here. If I'd known what was happening you may be sure that I'd have been on the spot sooner. As it is I have come down to drink a cocktail with you and to thank you for your valiant effort."

Tyssen unexpectedly shed his uncouthness. Drawn to his full height he seemed to tower over the visitor.

"Very kind of you, Lord Milhaven," he said. "I had a good deal of luck, but I enjoyed my knock."

"Tell me where you learnt your cricket?" Milhaven asked politely.

Tyssen shook his head.

"That's a very unimportant secret," he said. "Anyhow, I've been happy to help the village. I

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have spent some exceedingly pleasant days in the neighbourhood."

Milhaven set down his glass.

"You'll have another?" Timothy Sarson begged.

"I must have another in which to drink Mr. Tyssen's health," Milhaven replied, "and the health also of your charming daughter—Miss Pauline, isn't it?" he added, with a little bow. "It is a great regret to me that my wife's health keeps her away from this part of the country so long. It restricts me unduly to masculine society at the Court. Ah, here comes my friend Mr. Huitt. Poor fellow! We will avoid the subject before him unless he alludes to it himself, but I am afraid that he has had another of those grim hours at the coroner's court this afternoon."

Mr. Huitt, in his well-brushed dinner clothes, his glossy white shirt and neatly arranged cravat, walked across the lawn in his usual stiff and precise fashion. He shook hands with Pauline and with his host. Then he turned to Milhaven.

"It appears that whilst you and I were grubbing in the City, Huitt," the latter said, "marvellous exploits were being performed here."

"So I understand," Mr. Huitt observed, with a formal nod to Tyssen. "Congratulations, sir. I was fortunate enough to see your two last strokes. They reminded me——"

He paused. Tyssen stood as though expecting him to finish his sentence.

"Yes?"

"Of a freer school of cricket than we have here," the other concluded.

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“ I asked Mr. Tyssen,” Lord Milhaven remarked, “ where he learnt his cricket. For some reason or other he prefers to keep the matter a secret. Why not tell us, Mr. Tyssen ? ”

“ Next week, with pleasure,” the young man promised.

“ So soon as that ? ” Milhaven queried carelessly.

“ Perhaps even before.”

Groves came out to announce the service of dinner. Timothy Sarson turned to Milhaven who was finishing his cocktail.

“ If you are alone, Lord Milhaven,” he suggested, “ you would not care to squeeze in with us, I suppose ? ”

“ Nothing I should like better,” was the prompt acquiescence. “ I am absolutely alone to-night, as it happens, and I should like to see more of your friend who seems to be able to do everything with a cricket ball except swallow it. Miss Sarson will excuse my costume ? ”

“ Of course,” she answered. “ Half of us are not changed. Groves, one more place, please, on my right.”

“ I must not turn out the hero of the hour,” Milhaven begged.

Pauline smiled.

“ You won't,” she confided. “ He is sitting on my other side. Very forgiving of me, I think, considering he sent three balls into my pet corner of the garden this afternoon ! ”

“ No damage done, I hope ! ” Tyssen ventured.

“ Only to the flowers.”

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No one who was present at it ever forgot that dinner. It was one of the hottest nights of summer, but with every window open and a huge block of ice in the centre of the table the heat never seemed to be oppressive. The conversation naturally centred round cricket. Milhaven had often played for the Household Brigade, and the M.C.C. until a few years ago, and there were very few of the other guests who had not an interest in the game. Anthony told them of the two balls he had seen Tyssen bowl which were the cause of his having been bullied into playing. Milhaven listened smilingly.

“Your little strip of country down here, Mr. Sarson,” he said to his host, “is earning quite a reputation as the home of mystery, and our young friend here evidently means to be in the fashion. Here we all are—every one of us agog with curiosity to know who taught him that devilish trick of spinning the ball in the air. We want to know what great batsman he has bowled against. We want descriptions of famous cricket matches. But we hear nothing. In a few days’ time we are to know. Why in a few days’ time, Mr. Tyssen?”

Tyssen frowned. He was weary of the ungraciousness of these continued refusals, and he felt somehow or other the note of irony in Lord Milhaven’s persistence. The one man who had asked him no questions, and who seemed to feel no curiosity, was Mr. Huitt. The latter ate his dinner and drank his wine almost in silence. Occasionally he leaned slightly forward and looked down the table as though listening to Milhaven’s reminiscences, but at no time did a smile

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part his lips or a gleam of interest shine behind his spectacles. It was not until the sensation of the evening arrived that he appeared to take the slightest notice of his fellow-guests. It was Pauline who saw the intruders first. She pointed out two shadowy forms crossing the lawn.

"Who on earth are those men?" she exclaimed.

"Look like policemen," somebody observed.

"Is it the sergeant?" Timothy Sarson asked. "I told him to come in for a drink, but not at this hour."

"It's not the sergeant," Anthony declared, rising to his feet. "Hello there!" he called out, advancing to the open window. "What do you fellows want?"

The men made no reply. They paused for a moment on the threshold but afterwards crossed it. Two tall, formidable-looking officers, one apparently wearing the uniform of a sergeant and the other of an ordinary constable in the Metropolitan Police, entered.

"Sorry to have to disturb anyone," the sergeant said, saluting. "Is there a young gentleman here passing under the name of Christopher Tyssen?"

Tyssen stood up at once.

"There is," he admitted. "What do you want?"

The sergeant glanced at the paper he was carrying.

"You need not answer my question unless you like," he continued, "but we have information that your correct name is Christopher Anstruther Sandford and that you come from Sydney, New South Wales."

"Quite right," Tyssen acknowledged. "What of it?"

"It would be better, perhaps, sir," the sergeant suggested, "if you came out and spoke to us."

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Pauline gripped at his sleeve. She was suddenly, to all appearance, unreasonably alarmed.

"Don't go," she begged. "Let them come in here."

"I may as well see what they want," Tyssen decided.

He made his way down the narrow space between the backs of the chairs and the wall, and stepped on to the threshold of the open window.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

The sergeant produced a very official-looking paper.

"Sorry, sir," he announced, "but we have here a warrant for your arrest."

"What for?" Tyssen demanded in genuine astonishment. "I have done nothing against the law that I know of."

"We will explain it to you later if you will come along with us," the sergeant said. "It might perhaps be less of a shock to your friends," he added in a lower tone, "if we kept the nature of the charge to ourselves."

"Don't be absurd," Tyssen scoffed. "You don't get me out of here until you tell me what that paper stands for and what you want me for."

"We want you," the sergeant confided gravely, "on the charge of having, on the night of the nineteenth of July, wilfully murdered Sir Julian Bott."

Tyssen laughed scornfully.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed.

"I must ask you to take this a little more seriously, sir," the sergeant insisted. "Here is the warrant, and it is also my duty to tell you that anything you now

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say may be used against you in evidence. You had better come quietly with us, then if you wish to make a statement the Inspector-in-charge will take it."

"Where are you taking me to?"

"Lewes Jail."

There was an instant's silence in the room, broken first by Milhaven's hasty, unformed sentence.

"Christopher Sandford—the boy wonder! Sent from school to Sydney at sixteen years old to play against Queensland—scored a double century!"

"I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!" Tyssen exclaimed. "On what grounds am I charged?"

"That is not our concern, or yours at the moment, sir," the sergeant explained patiently. "This warrant compels me to arrest you. You will only make the situation more unpleasant by protesting. The inspector at Lewes will hear all that you have to say."

Milhaven, who had risen from his place, came down the room. For once he had lost his habitual languid drawl.

"Sergeant," he intervened, "I am a magistrate for this county. Will you be so kind as to let me see the warrant?"

"Certainly, sir," the man assented.

Milhaven glanced it through and handed it back. He was looking puzzled but grave.

"The warrant is all right," he admitted. "Of course, we all know that it is ridiculous, but I am afraid you will have to go with them. Would you like anyone to come with you?"



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“Not likely,” Tyssen replied. “Unless,” he added, with rather a strained smile, “Mr. Huitt cared to come.”

Huitt’s eyes glittered for a moment behind the lenses of his spectacles.

“I could be of no possible service,” he said stiffly. “I know nothing of you or your antecedents. As a matter of fact it is somewhat of a shock to me to hear that you have ventured to open an account with my bank under an assumed name.”

“No one is allowed to accompany the prisoner,” the sergeant announced. “Will you come this way, please, sir.”

He laid his hand upon Tyssen’s shoulder. The latter looked round.

“I am awfully sorry, Miss Pauline and Mr. Sarson, but it is not my fault that I am forced to leave you like this. The whole thing is ridiculous, of course. I never saw or heard anything of Julian Bott in my life until after the murder.”

Pauline, terribly pale but quite collected, came down the room.

“Christopher,” she exclaimed, “please don’t believe for a single moment that anyone could imagine you guilty of such a horrible thing. I think they are mad.”

He held her hand.

“You will please come with us now, sir,” the sergeant insisted more sternly.

Tyssen stood for a moment with his fingers locked in Pauline’s, then he stepped through the window.

“Good night, all of you!” he called back. “See

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you to-morrow, I hope. Don't worry, Pauline. This thing will come out as right as rain."

He strode across the lawn between the sergeant and the constable. A third man, who had been loitering in the shadows, followed behind. They ushered him into a large closed car.

"Lewes Jail," the sergeant directed the uniformed chauffeur.

A COMPLETELY festive spirit could scarcely be recaptured, but the Sarson dinner party did not at once break up after its tragic interruption. Milhaven, who seemed in no hurry to depart, was anxious for information. In the absence of his young hostess, who had left the room abruptly, he moved his chair nearer to Anthony.

“Is this a bolt from the blue for all of you?” he asked, “or has the young man been under suspicion at all?”

“So far as I know,” Anthony declared, “not a soul has ever connected Tyssen with the affair. Before he came out as such a marvellous cricketer we all thought he was dotty upon writing some sort of book of adventure.”

“Has anyone seen any part of the young man’s manuscript?” Mr. Huitt asked.

No one, it appeared, had, but Pauline, who had just re-entered the room, took up the conversation.

“He had promised to read it to me within three or four days,” she announced, “and then I think he intended taking it up to a publisher. He really has been working very hard. To connect him with the murder,” she added, “is absolutely too stupid. Why, only a day afterwards he was asking me all manner of questions—who Sir Julian Bott was, whether the

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lady of the bungalow was a friend of his and all sorts of things. He thought he might work the incident into his book. I believe that he was really disappointed when the suicide theory was started."

"One more glass of the '70, Milhaven," his host begged.

"I shan't refuse it," was the prompt reply. "My '70 is not as good as yours. Wrong shipper, I suppose. Tell me, Mr. Sarson, you are a magistrate—you must see something of these fellows—is it usual to send a squad of police, presumably from Scotland Yard, to arrest a man in the country?"

"I should have thought not," Sarson replied. "Besides, Scotland Yard have had a man down here—a very decent fellow, Inspector Penny. We have reason to know all about that," he concluded grimly. "Anthony, my boy here, was shadowed for several days."

"Absurd!" Milhaven scoffed.

"Not any more absurd," Pauline said, "than imagining that Mr. Tyssen could have had anything to do with it. Why, he's a complete stranger to the neighbourhood. He came here knowing no one at all."

"The matter becomes more inexplicable every moment," Milhaven observed, as he drained his glass and drew the cigars towards him. "If it was not utterly impossible, if it had been in the days of Charles Lever, for instance, I should have wondered whether the whole affair was not a practical joke."

"Practical jokes on that scale do not exist nowadays," Timothy Sarson declared. "The British public have lost their taste for that peculiar type of humour."

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“ Costs you ten pounds, anyway, to put on a policeman’s uniform,” Anthony sighed. “ We had a bit of a rag up at Oxford just before I came down and I found that out.”

“ We must remember,” Mr. Cresset put in, “ that, after all, there is a certain degree of mystery about the young man. He has been living down here under a false name. Didn’t he play cricket of the most extraordinary type to-day, and doesn’t he refuse to tell any of us where he has played before ? ”

“ That’s quite true,” Anthony agreed. “ He’s a world batsman or a world bowler and he fields like Chapman.”

“ Anyhow he would not have played at all if it had mattered very much about his being discovered,” Pauline pointed out. “ He must have known, for instance, that Anthony would have realised at once that he was a first-class cricketer.”

“ Yes, it doesn’t seem like a guilty mystery,” Timothy Sarson observed. “ So far as his cricket is concerned I am afraid the explanation of it is that our friend is a little bit of a snob and that he was a professional.”

“ Whatever anyone may have to say against Christopher Tyssen, Sandford, or whatever his name may be,” Pauline affirmed quietly, “ I am perfectly certain that he is not a snob, and whatever he is, I am going to marry him in a month or two, so don’t say too disagreeable things.”

“ You are going to what ? ” her father exclaimed.

“ Marry him,” Pauline repeated with emphasis.

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“ Haven’t had time to tell you about it yet, dad, but he will be round to see you before long.”

“ God bless my soul ! ” Mr. Timothy Sarson muttered, brushing away from his waistcoat the cigar ash which he had dropped in his agitation. “ Queer lot our young people nowadays, Lord Milhaven. I should think you’re glad sometimes that you haven’t a family.”

“ If I could have been guaranteed a daughter like yours,” Milhaven said, with a little bow, “ I should have welcomed the affliction.”

Mr. Sarson rose suddenly to his feet.

“ There’s the sergeant out in the lane,” he pointed out. “ Let’s have him in and see if he knows anything about it.”

Anthony, who was nearer the window, stood on the threshold and beckoned to the new-comer, who promptly put in an appearance.

“ Heard the news, Sergeant ? ” Timothy Sarson asked.

“ Can’t say I have heard anything, sir,” the man replied. “ I have been up at our branch, the far end of the village, and only just come down.”

Mr. Sarson poured out a glass of port with his own hand. The sergeant took it and saluted.

“ I will be drinking this, sir,” he said, “ with your permission and with the permission of all those present ”—he suddenly recognised Milhaven and saluted again—“ to the health of young Mr. Tyssen, the young gentleman who put it across Godalming for us to-day. They have had something that will keep their mouths closed for a bit, I’m thinking, sir.”

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The sergeant drank his toast and most of the 'others joined him. His host refilled the glass.

"Have you heard what's happened to our young friend?" the latter asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, I was looking round for him," the sergeant answered. "I was told he was up here."

"He has been here. Half an hour ago he was arrested and taken away in a police car."

"What, him?" the man exclaimed. "Mr. Tyssen arrested?"

"That's so."

"What for?"

"The murder of Sir Julian Bott," Sarson told him gravely.

The sergeant put down his second glass of port untouched.

"Let me get this right, sir," he begged. "You are telling me that the police came here to-night half an hour ago and arrested Mr. Tyssen—took him away with them on the charge of having murdered Sir Julian Bott?"

"That is what happened," Anthony assented.

"Well, I'm speaking with every desire to be respectful," the sergeant declared, a grimly obstinate look in his face, "but I am taking the liberty of telling you that I don't believe it."

"Well, we're all here," Mr. Sarson pointed out. "We were all here when it happened. Ask anyone."

"Was Inspector Penny down?" the sergeant inquired.

"No," Anthony told him, "but it was an inspector

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in Scotland Yard uniform and a constable. There was another constable outside and two more in the car. They had a warrant which they showed to Lord Milhaven, and they took him away with them to Lewes Jail."

"The warrant was all right so far as it went," Milhaven observed.

The sergeant finished his wine, accepted the cigar which Anthony brought with him from the sideboard, and saluted.

"I'll be getting along, Mr. Sarson, if you will excuse me, sir," he begged. "This news has kind of given me a turn. I don't understand it nohow. In a manner of speaking it isn't understandable. I will say good evening to you all, ladies and gentlemen."

The sergeant took his leave and they heard his receding footsteps gathering speed as he went.

"An utterly British type," Milhaven remarked. "Fourteen of us here who saw what happened to poor young Tyssen, and he doesn't believe it!"

"I'll tell you all something," Sybil Cresset suddenly cried. "I have been wondering about it ever since that inspector first appeared. I have been worrying as to where I have seen that shaped cap before. Don't you remember, Anthony—the man in police uniform on the by-way the night Sir Julian Bott was killed?"

"By God, you're right!" the young man exclaimed. "Puzzled me for a moment. I thought I must have seen it in the illustrations of those new Flying Squads from Scotland Yard. It was the same cap as that man was wearing without a doubt."

"Then, if this was one of the new Scotland Yard



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squads," Mr. Cresset observed, "what was it doing up on the by-way the night of the murder? Day after day I read in the paper that all efforts to trace the automobile in which Sir Julian started on his ride to London have failed. That car cleared out secretly and Scotland Yard have been utterly unable to discover where it came from. It has never been heard of since."

"The sergeant's cap," Mr. Huitt remarked, "did not appear to me to be of an unusual type, although perhaps a little long in the peak. It might, I am sure, be easily found amongst the illustrations of chauffeurs' livery."

"All the same," Timothy Sarson pointed out obstinately, "why send one of these new squads down here to arrest one man? Nearly forty miles from London, too. I have more than once thought young Tyssen a bit of a fool, but no one in their senses would put him down for a dangerous criminal."

"He is not a criminal at all," Pauline declared. "The police are making a stupid mistake."

She rose to her feet.

"I don't suppose anyone will feel like dancing to-night," she said. "If they do we will have the gramophone out. We might walk about in the garden anyhow."

The party seemed on the point of breaking up when the sergeant made his reappearance. There was a grin upon his face and a note of triumph in his tone.

"Mr. Sarson and gentlemen, begging your pardon," he began, as he crossed the threshold, "I have been speaking on the telephone to Lewes Jail. I have

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spoken to Captain Percy himself. He says he knows nothing about any prisoner being brought in to-night—in fact, he's quite sure there is not going to be one. He has never heard of Mr. Tyssen, and a Scotland Yard arrest would mean taking the man up to London, not to Lewes."

There was an awed and breathless silence. Everyone appeared to be racking their brains for some possible solution.

"I suppose we ought to have realised that for ourselves," Milhaven said. "I'm afraid it doesn't make much difference, though, whether they have taken him to Lewes or to London. There is no getting over the fact of the arrest."

They strolled out into the garden. The evening of varied excitements was growing late. Milhaven made his courteous adieux and shot up the hill in his racing car. Mr. Huitt, too, made his sedate way home across the common, pausing for a moment or two to look up and down the worn cricket pitch. Pauline, for half an hour, wrestled with the telephone in her father's den. She endured several snubs, a good deal of incredulity and some impatience. In the end she had her way. She went back to the dining-room, where her father and a few of the guests were still gathered, a smile of triumph upon her lips, although there was a great fear in her heart.

"I have just been talking to Scotland Yard," she told them. "They know nothing of any squad of police at all operating in this neighbourhood, and they are quite sure that no warrant has been issued for Mr. Tyssen's arrest."

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Her words fell like a thunderbolt upon the little gathering.

"My God, there's something ugly about this!" her father exclaimed.

"There is something terrible," Pauline assented, with a break in her voice. "Anyhow, an inspector is on his way down here in a special car. He expects to arrive in forty minutes and he hopes that as many people as possible who were in the room will remain."

Everyone agreed eagerly to stay where they were. Pauline wandered out into the garden in search of Anthony. From the shadows of the drive she heard her name called, and paused.

"Who is that?" she asked.

A woman carrying a parcel came into sight, revealed in the little halo of light from the open hall door. It was Mrs. Foulds from the post office.

"I took the liberty of calling to you, Miss Sarson," she said. "I was not sure what I ought to do, and I thought you or your brother, being friends of the young man, might tell me."

"Friends of what young man?" Pauline asked.

"Of Mr. Tyssen, my lodger, miss."

"Go on," Pauline begged.

"Well, it was only the day before yesterday, miss, that Mr. Tyssen came to me in the shop. He was carrying this parcel that you now see under my arm, all sealed up careful like.

"'Mrs. Foulds,' he said, 'you believe I'm honest, don't you?'"

"'Yes,' I answered, knowing well that he was, for twice when I undercharged him he has pointed it out

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in the weekly bills. He plumped the parcel down on the counter.

“ ‘Mrs. Foulds,’ he went on, ‘I might get into trouble within the next few days, especially if I play in that cricket match, and one person in particular recognises me. I want you to take care of that parcel for me. Hide it somewhere in your back premises where no one is likely to go. If anything unexpected of any sort happens to me—if I disappear—if the police come after me and want to search my rooms, whatever may happen I don’t want you to give that parcel up or to admit you have got it. But,’ he said, ‘if I disappear give the parcel to either Mr. or Miss Sarson and ask them to pass it on to Scotland Yard, but be very sure that it gets into their hands safely.’ ”

“ You know that Mr. Tyssen has been taken away on a ridiculous charge ? ” Pauline asked breathlessly.

“ I heard he had been took by the police, miss, but while they was in fetching him two more of the London police came in with what they call a search warrant, and they searched his room, turning everything inside out, pulling up the boards even and smashing a cupboard to pieces. A pretty mess they made, him not being a tidy man anyway. They asked me if I had anything of his, and I hope I did right, for I told ’em ‘No.’ After they had gone I went in to see sergeant, meaning to give him the parcel, but he’s away, and Tom, he’s on his beat, and I’m that nervous with this parcel for fear they’d come back, I can’t sleep.”

“ We’ll take it,” Pauline promised. “ It shan’t leave me. I promise you that, Mrs. Foulds. And

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you have done well—much better than you can understand. I am beginning to believe that those were not policemen at all who came to search Mr. Tyssen's room. They were robbers."

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Foulds gasped. "It do seem that funny things happen here nowadays."

Pauline scarcely waited to say good night. She was back in the safety of the house, clasping the precious parcel in her arms. She made her way once more into her father's den, took one of his brace of revolvers from his gun cupboard, loaded it with skilful fingers and set the catch at safety. Then, with the parcel still clasped under one arm and the revolver in her hand, she re-entered the dining-room.

"What in God's name?" her father exclaimed as she entered.

"This is for Inspector Penny or someone whom we know to be entirely reliable," she explained, "from Christopher. Those men who took him away have searched his rooms for it, but he was clever enough just to leave it with Mrs. Foulds. I am going to take care of it until someone comes whom we know that we can trust."

It was Inspector Penny who came rushing down the Great South Road that night between the hawthorn scented hedges and across the commons fragrant with yellowing gorse. The moon rode over his head, and sweet odours of meadow flowers and country gardens floated on the serene air which his flying progress turned into a ravaging wind. Village people sat up in their beds and cursed the men who raced through their country-side with open throttles, but the men were after all on an errand of mercy. In thirty-five minutes—five minutes quicker than the fastest train had ever accomplished the distance—the police car, occupied by four black shapes, tore up the drive of The Haven. Timothy Sarson was there on the threshold to greet his visitor. In the background, with the parcel still under her arm and her revolver in her hand, sat Pauline. When she recognised Inspector Penny, who was the first to appear, she gave a little cry of joy. The new-comer strode into the room, exchanging greetings with everyone. The rubicund little man had suddenly become a different person. His speech was crisp and provocative.

“Let me speak with the young woman who telephoned me,” he begged. “She knew what was on her mind, at any rate.”

Pauline stood up, still clutching the parcel. She

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had discarded the revolver. This was Inspector Penny in the life. She was able to swear to that.

"It was I who telephoned, Inspector," she said. "Shall I tell you what has happened?"

"As quickly as possible," Penny demanded, with a new crispness in his tone. "There's danger in this stuff."

"The young man named Tyssen, whom you know quite well, Inspector," Pauline began, "has been staying down here pretending he has been writing a book, but in reality watching. He has been watching people who live round here. He must have had the idea that they were criminals—he must have come here of a set purpose. He played a part. He pretended to be awkward and stupid. He wasn't. It is my fault that he has fallen into this danger. I persuaded him to play cricket to-day. Someone who saw him play recognised him. To-night, while we were all here, a carload of men who called themselves policemen, dressed very much like your men in your Flying Squads, arrived here. They fooled us, fooled us on the most trumped up charge anyone could imagine. They arrested Mr. Tyssen on the charge of having murdered Julian Bott! They took him away with them, and God knows where he is—being tortured, I should think."

She paused for a moment, panting. Penny was too wise to ask questions. He knew that this was the truth which was being poured out before him.

"They got away with Christopher—whose real name, it seems, is Sandford," she went on, "but he fooled them! They searched his rooms and they

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found nothing. Here in this packet I have his supposed novel. That will tell you why he came down here. That will tell you the characters and the names of the people whom he was watching. Take it and, for God's sake, go after them ! ”

“ You can't give me an idea which way they went ? ” Penny begged, as he hacked at the strings of the parcel and tore it open.

“ They gave out that they were taking him to Lewes Jail, but the sergeant here has rung up and they know nothing whatever about any expected prisoner,” Pauline answered. “ I'm utterly in the dark. We all are, but I know that things have been going on around us which we don't understand and which Christopher was beginning to guess at. Read what he has written, for God's sake ! Don't waste time.”

Inspector Penny wrenched open the parcel. He stood underneath the electric light and glanced through the opening sheets. He read like a man hunted to death, hard pressed to keep his breath. Then, still holding the papers, he strode to the threshold.

“ Jarrold ! ” he called out. “ Inspector Jarrold ! ”

A shadowy figure stepped up to the window. Penny pumped out his orders in brisk staccato fashion. The figure disappeared. The Inspector came back into the room.

“ Which of you knew Tyssen best ? ” he demanded.

“ I did,” Pauline answered quietly.

“ Tell me your opinion of him.”

“ I think that he was a clever man posing as a



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fool," was the swift reply. "I think that he has discovered something he came here to discover, and that at the very last moment of all, just as he was coming to you with his information, I made him play in this cricket match, and one, at any rate, of the people he was after, recognised him. There wasn't one of us could move hand or foot. We had to watch him taken away."

Inspector Penny went on with his manuscript for a few minutes, turning over the pages with furious fingers. More than once he groaned. The time came when he threw the whole pile of papers passionately upon the table.

"Familiar faces, all of you here, I see!" he exclaimed. "Who knows James Huitt best?"

"What, the bank manager?" Timothy Sarson demanded.

"That's the man."

"No one knows him well," Timothy Sarson answered. "He dined here to-night with us all. He is a pleasant dinner companion, he has mixed with decent people, but we all of us wonder at times whether he is really alive. A Robot-like man, with his own destiny and the destiny of his friends and enemies all blocked out in front of him."

"What about the Earl of Milhaven?"

"A great gentleman," Timothy Sarson said. "He too dined here to-night."

"I can tell you a little more," Dr. Anderson put in. "He has led a wildly adventurous life. He started in Australia, and they say that he knows as much about Arabia as Colonel Lawrence. He is trying to live

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the English country life on insufficient means, but I should think it's a hell of a time for him."

"Do you mean that both these men were dining here to-night?" Inspector Penny demanded.

"They certainly were," someone assured him. "They were here when Tyssen was arrested and carried off, without a doubt. Lord Milhaven tried to dispute the warrant."

"Tyssen never opened his mouth?"

"He seemed to have nothing to say."

"I take off my hat to him," the inspector said. "He wanted his success his own way and he worked hard for it. He's won all right, but God knows what price he'll have to pay!"

He moved back to the french windows and listened. There was no sound of any returning car. He came back to his place.

"Give me a drink quick, please," he begged. "If there's any trail to follow we may have to be off on this man hunt directly. No port—whisky. Plenty of whisky and plenty of soda—a long one and I'll talk again."

He handled one of Timothy Sarson's great tumblers lovingly, drank of its contents and set it down half empty. Then he went back to the threshold of the window and listened. There was still no sound of a returning car.

"Tyssen's real name is Sandford;" he said. "Christian name's all right—Christopher Sandford. Tyssen was his mother's name. His father was a millionaire banker pretty well ruined by an embezzling cashier. His son, who had made one appearance in

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cricket with great success, was thinking of becoming a professional when gold was found on some almost forgotten land of his father's. He became suddenly wealthy and disappeared from Australia. No one knew what had become of him. These notes tell us. He came to England to find the man who had ruined and murdered his father. He went to London. He came here."

"My God!" Timothy Sarson suddenly exclaimed. "Whom was he after here?"

"One of the greatest of the world's criminals," Penny answered. "A man who has never had his finger-prints taken or stood for one moment in the dock or been under one minute's suspicion. Can you imagine—you who live here—who that man may be?"

He left the question tormenting them while he hurried over to receive the report from his returning chauffeur. When he came back his fresh-complexioned face was drawn and heavy.

"Is your little bank manager—Mr. Huitt—a man of punctual habits?"

Timothy Sarson chuckled.

"He's an automaton," he declared. "He's asleep by eleven o'clock every night. He's awakened at six. He fusses about in his little garden for one hour, and he's in the eight-twenty train, in the same seat, every day of his life."

"Well, he won't be there to-morrow," Inspector Penny declared bitterly. "You say he dined here to-night?"

"He certainly did. One glass of sherry, two glasses of port, half a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Nothing

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on God's earth could make him vary. That's his dinner party regime."

"Well, it's one o'clock now," the inspector pointed out, "and your friend, Mr. Huitt, the bank manager, who left here at ten minutes to eleven, hasn't yet reached home. Didn't you say Lord Milhaven had dined here also?"

"That's right," Timothy Sarson agreed. "He came in for a cocktail and we persuaded him to stay and dine. He left here a few minutes before Huitt."

"Well, he's not home either," Inspector Penny confided. "And where they are Christopher Sandford is—and God help him!"

CHRISTOPHER SANDFORD'S first sensation, after he had felt a hand clapped over his mouth in the back seat of the police car, was that he was lying on a rose-coloured coverlet, and that there was a strong scent of pines floating into the room through the opened window. Outside was darkness. Inside was only the light from a heavily shaded lamp. He even failed to recognise the figure leaning over him. His first question was obvious but natural.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"You are at the bungalow," Madame de Sayal said. "I should advise you not to try to move."

"The bungalow!" he repeated. "Why, we started out along the Portsmouth road."

"You did not go far that way," she replied. "Don't try to sit up."

"Why not?"

"You might be disappointed."

He made the effort and failed. He was utterly destitute of strength. The whole of the blood seemed to have been drained from his body. He tried to lift his leg and found it impossible.

"What have they been doing to me?" he demanded.

"They had to keep you quiet," she told him. "They profess not to understand such old-fashioned

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methods as tying people up. If anyone has to be kept quiet this is the latest idea."

"Who are they?"

"Not very many."

"Where's the inspector?"

"Melted into thin air," she replied. "The car lies at the bottom of the false pit of Lord Milhaven's private garage up at the Golf Club nicely covered over, and the uniforms are somewhere there, too."

"A clever stunt," he muttered.

He was suddenly aware that there was at least one other person in the room—Milhaven! No longer the genial dinner guest, but darker and more sinister than Christopher had ever seen him. Then he heard Huitt's voice—calm and definite.

"I consider this an absolutely futile waste of time," the latter said quietly. "However, since you have insisted upon it—ask him the questions."

"You have been down here for some time, Sandford, watching Mr. Huitt and myself?" Milhaven began.

"Chiefly Mr. Huitt," Christopher replied.

"You know Mr. Huitt's antecedents?"

"I do. I know them from the time he was an official scorer at the cricket ground at Sydney to the time when he escaped in a fruit boat after murdering my father and, I believe, with two other murders on his hands."

"How did you find him out over here?"

"The first thing I did after I came into money," Christopher recounted, "was to employ a very clever detective in Sydney who found out for me nearly

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everything I wanted to know. I got the proofs of Huitt's participation in the raid on the Sydney Bank, and I got a copy of the deathbed statement of the manager, indicating him as the man who shot the two clerks and my father. It was years, after all, that I searched in vain. I kept the papers, though. My detective friend died——”

“ Pardon me,” Huitt interrupted. “ I killed him.”

“ I suspected it,” Christopher went on. “ You are rather good at killing, aren't you? Your Australian friends, my father, Jesson, Julian Bott, Roland Martin——”

“ Guilty,” Huitt interrupted again. “ Is this worth while? ”

“ At last, when I was giving up hope and making up my mind to resume my own name and go back to Sydney, I spotted Huitt one evening amongst the crowd at Waterloo Station. Since then I may say that I have never lost sight of him. I have collected specimens of his handwriting, and I have got proof that he is the most expert and wonderful forger the world has ever seen. If you come to think of it there is nothing easier in the world than to turn a murder into suicide if one possesses Huitt's amazing gifts.”

“ Dear me,” Milhaven sighed. “ I thought I was the only one who had found that out. Still, I made a fortune out of his gift and you didn't ! ”

“ I have the proof,” Christopher continued, “ that Sam Jesson's letter of confession was a forgery and that Huitt, having helped himself to all his assets at the bank, murdered him in cold blood. Julian Bott refused to cub in to some scheme, the details of which

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I do not know. I do know this, though, that at the time Julian Bott was shot he was on the point of discovering that one hundred thousand pounds' worth of his securities had been appropriated by James Huitt."

"One hundred and forty thousand," Mr. Huitt murmured quietly.

"We will let it go at that for the present," Milhaven observed. "You have told us enough to convince us that you are not the foolish, inquisitive person you professed to be and that your boasted novel is all a fake. You are a very intelligent and persistent young man, Mr. Sandford, but you have been taking risks, have you not?"

"What does that matter?" Christopher answered. "I have succeeded. You and Huitt have been taking risks, too, if it goes to that."

"You have succeeded," the bank manager repeated thoughtfully. "I suppose it occurs to you, knowing my character and knowing something of Lord Milhaven too, that what you have discovered means certain and very speedy death for you. The very completeness of your success has made your death more inevitable."

The young man remained silent. A feeble dream of last night in the Sarsons' garden floated before his eyes, and he realised that he had no wish to die.

"There is a very important question still to be asked," Milhaven said. "You have told us of your discoveries. From the point of view of detective work you have done marvellously. You are to be congratulated. But—here comes the point. Have you shared your discoveries with anyone?"



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"I have not shared them with a single soul," Christopher replied. "I think there is only one person in Sandyways who does not believe me to be the goof I tried to seem."

"Discreet, very discreet," Milhaven murmured. "One further question though. Have you left any written record of your discoveries behind, likely to fall into anyone's hands?"

"Certain to, you mean," Christopher corrected him. "The so-called manuscript of my novel contains every paper and all the evidence I have spoken about. I left it behind, addressed to the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard or whoever might take his place. I left it with my landlady, Mrs. Foulds."

He saw Madame's ominous shake of the head.

"You fool!" she exclaimed.

"I suppose it was not wise to tell you," he admitted. "Anyway, you seem to have made up your minds to kill me, so I don't suppose it makes much difference."

"On the contrary," Mr. Huitt declared, "it makes a great deal of difference. Have you tried to use your limbs?"

"I can't," Christopher replied.

"You never will again," Huitt assured him. "You are suffering from the effect of a marvellous drug brought home from the East by Lord Milhaven here. In twenty-four hours you will be dead. Do you see that small bottle on the table?"

"I do."

"That," Mr. Huitt confided, "is the antidote. We have gone as far as this with several others at

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different times. The antidote has invariably brought them back to life where we have administered it. Where we have failed to do so, death has taken place at about the expiration of the period I have stated. You would scarcely expect us to spare you, Mr. Sandford, with all this stock of damaging knowledge you possess and have left behind."

"I don't see that it makes any difference," Christopher replied. "You will have one more murder on your hands. That's all. The police will know. What's the time?"

"Four o'clock in the morning," Milhaven told him.

"Well, the probabilities are," the young man went on, "that by nine o'clock or ten they will have discovered that your police car and my arrest were both frauds. My packet will then be opened, and I should say a quarter of an hour after that you will both of you feel the little tap upon your shoulders."

"If we are here," Milhaven murmured, "I should say that your estimate of time is excellent. But why should we wait for that little tap?"

Christopher felt himself trying to shrug his shoulders, but his arms refused to respond. He shivered with the mere misery of his ineptitude.

"I don't see how you can get away nowadays," he observed. "Passports, wireless, and all that sort of thing."

"We shall take our chance, of course," Milhaven said. "A difficult matter, without a doubt. The thing we have to decide before we go, and our time will be up in a quarter of an hour, is whether to give ourselves a slightly better chance by killing you first."

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“There is no question about that,” Mr. Huitt observed with a slight sneer. “You need not worry, Milhaven. I have disliked this young man for some time. It will give me a certain pleasure to take the responsibility of his departure.”

“Not quite so fast, my friend,” Milhaven begged. “I am thinking. I am not sure whether I shall consent to your killing.”

Huitt’s speech was still equable and metallic.

“My mind,” he said, “is already made up upon the point.”

“But mine is not,” Milhaven objected, with a touch of his customary drawl. “I believe you know, Huitt, that amongst my other claims to be a sportsman, I was once a very good second-class cricketer. I still thoroughly appreciate the science of the game. Now, I have never seen balls cut through the slips with more vigour and skill than by that young man with his wonderful wrists. I have never seen quicker foot work, although he had a few of your pellets in the calves. I have never seen—and this was on a village cricket ground—the ball more completely covered. Boundary after boundary and never a chance. I should like to ask you a question, Sandford. Supposing you were allowed to live, should you qualify for England or Australia?”

Christopher felt his eyes growing larger. To a man on the brink of eternity it seemed an amazing question.

“I decided last night,” he confided feebly, “to live in England.”

“There you are, you see, Huitt,” Milhaven pointed out. “I am a judge and I know what I am talking

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about. We have not a man of his age in England at the present day of anything like his class. We should be guilty of more than murder if we sent a young man like that out of the world when it might make all the difference to the next rubber."

There was a soft peal of laughter from Madame.

"Hugh," she murmured, "I still say that you are the most wonderful person in the world."

"One has one's principles," Milhaven said calmly. "Where did you put that antidote? Ah, I see it."

He was on the point of moving towards the bottle when suddenly there was a still, very quiet voice from the farther end of the room.

"Stay where you are!"

Milhaven turned around in cold anger. There was a little stab of flame, a sharp report. The bottle crashed into pieces and the liquid streamed off down to the floor. Huitt replaced the cartridge, but did not at once transfer the revolver to his pocket.

"If you can save the young man's life now for your cricket, Milhaven," he sneered, "why, do it. I am more interested in living myself. Without the antidote he will be dead in twenty-four hours—and safe."

Christopher watched the stain upon the carpet with despairing eyes.

"Is this true?" he faltered.

Neither of the other two answered him, but their looks were sufficient. It seemed to Christopher that he was experiencing a new agony in life. He tried to lift even his shoulders that he might roll out of bed and crawl towards the stain. Not a muscle of his body responded. Not a limb twitched. His breathing was

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the only thing that remained to him of life. His body was dead. He still had the gift of hearing. He heard Milhaven's voice, still and cold, filled with the suggestion of a terrible anger.

"You have forgotten yourself, Huitt. It was my will that this young man should live."

"I may seem an egoist," Huitt replied in his steely, mechanical tone, "but my own safety is more to me than the future of any sport."

"Nevertheless," Milhaven continued, "all the vital steps in the matters wherein we have been concerned have been decided by me. I do not suffer interference with my plans."

Huitt pointed to the carpet.

"Is there anything you can do about it?" he asked coldly.

Milhaven seemed to have given himself up to a fit of meditation.

"Just at present, Huitt," he acknowledged, "I fear there is nothing."

The man who had no nerves moved a little uneasily in his chair. There was a light in the eyes behind those highly polished lenses half suspicious, half inquiring. It passed, however, almost at once. No power in the world could remove that stain upon the carpet. Christopher's eyes half closed. His last conscious impression of the two men was that both were listening.

CHRISTOPHER opened his eyes to the sense of a passing world. The shaded electric light was still burning in a sheltered corner of the room, but through the chink of the curtain he could see the dull grey gleam of approaching daylight. Someone was standing over him. A pair of thin strong fingers had parted his lips. The voice of Madame de Sayal sounded in his ears.

“I hope you can understand what I am telling you,” she said, “for it may mean life or death for you. I could not wake you before. This is the other half of the antidote I have in this glass. There was too much for one bottle, so I kept what was over. You will need it all—every drop. You must not move your head, but you must be very careful to swallow. I shall pour it in quietly. Please prepare.”

His body, it seemed, had left him. He had the curious impression of remaining with his senses intact, a human being without power of movement, unutterably weak. A little stream of something fell on his tongue. He made an effort to swallow. His mouth was held open—he himself had not the power to open or close it. The liquid, whatever it might have been, was descending. He was dimly aware that he must assist its passage as well as he was able. He lost consciousness for a moment and came back

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to find the little stream of liquid was still dribbling down his throat. His dim eyes saw the bottle empty. His mouth was closed for him. She stood away from the bedside.

“If that was not too late,” she said, “you will find that you can begin to move your limbs very soon. After that you will be all right. I cannot help you further for the present.”

Another lapse into the unknown, and then a long, slow upwaking. There was sunlight now in the room, a twitter of birds outside, the rustle of wind in the trees. Memory made a shivering return to his confused brain. He knew that he had been lying there paralysed with death creeping upon him. There was something different now. Surely that was a muscle working! He drew up one leg and then the other. He moved his arms. He felt a slight tingling all over. There was feeling in his body. . . . With it all his brain cleared. He began to remember. Huitt had left him for dead. Milhaven had done his best to save his life. Together these two had gone off. His lips slowly twisted into a smile. What chance would they have? Penny would have all his papers by now. There was enough there to hang Huitt all right. Milhaven only came into most of it by inference. They would find out about him as they went on. What about Madame, who had probably saved his life? Perhaps he would be strong enough to crawl away before long. He had better be found somewhere else—where they had found Julian Bott, for instance. He closed his eyes again, but the necessity for dozing

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and sleep seemed to have passed with his returning strength. Presently Madame de Sayal reappeared. She was wearing the smock in which she painted, and she noted his changed expression with a smile.

"This is fortunate," she said. "Have you tried to move?"

"I have tried to and I can," he replied. "I believe that I could get up from the couch."

"Do not hurry," she begged. "You must not collapse here. Tell me, in these memoirs of yours, is there anything very incriminating about me?"

"Neither you nor Milhaven," he assured her. "I came to England to find Huitt. I could have gone to the police long ago, but I could see there was something going on here. I stayed and watched. I have run no risk as far as he was concerned. He will hang."

"If they catch him," she murmured.

"They must catch him," Tyssen answered. "They have only a few hours' start. How can they possibly get away?"

She smiled.

"So far as Milhaven is concerned, how could they possibly stop him?" she retorted. "In forty hours he will land in Abyssinia. No one will follow him where he is going. No one else could get into that part of the country alive."

"And Huitt?" he demanded.

She shook her head.

"I am not so sure that he will take Huitt," she replied. "I have never known a person cross Milhaven's will who had not to suffer for it. How are you feeling?"



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“ Pretty well myself again,” he assured her.

She left the room and came back with a large wine-glass filled with frothing amber liquid. He lifted his head easily of his own accord and drank feverishly. He sat up on the side of the couch.

“ If he takes Huitt with him and they do succeed in getting away, I shall follow,” he declared.

She smiled cryptically.

“ That,” she insisted, “ would be certain death. No one but Milhaven could live where he is going. Somehow or other, though,” she repeated, “ I do not think that he will take Huitt with him.”

“ Why not ? ” Christopher asked eagerly.

“ Milhaven is a great sinner,” she acknowledged, “ but he is capable of the most bizarre actions. One of those was his sudden determination to save your life. Huitt was determined that you should die, and to the best of his belief made it a certainty. I do not think that Milhaven will forgive him. I have never known him forgive anyone who disobeyed him. Can you get up ? ”

He rose stumblingly to his feet. He felt like a man recovering from a fever.

“ A breath of fresh air would do me good,” he confessed.

“ You shall have it immediately,” she told him. “ First of all I am going to the door. I want to be sure that there is no one about.”

She was gone about five minutes. When she returned she motioned him to follow her. She led him out of the back door and up the grass path to where the body of Julian Bott had been discovered.

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“If you could contrive to be found here,” she suggested.

“What about you?” he asked.

“I am going to paint,” she confided, “until my maid brings me my coffee. If you have not been taken away by then I may give you some.”

“But all this,” he said, waving his hand. “My being abducted by those bogus policemen, being brought to your bungalow and very nearly murdered?”

“It’s all part of a dream,” she answered. “They drugged you and dropped you here, just as they did Sir Julian. You know no more than that.”

“But why here?” he demanded.

She pointed to the elaborate gates which led to the famous golf club.

“Milhaven has the key to those gates,” she confided. “The land belongs to him and the converted clubhouse is his property. The aeroplane sheds are his. Several of the members rent one—the largest he keeps for himself. For that one he has a night and a day watchman. He experiments there sometimes. You know that once he was in the Air Ministry?”

“Has he a machine here?”

“He has the most perfect machine here that has yet been built,” she continued. “It is a model which has never been shown. He preferred to keep it for himself because of what might happen. The machine has been ready to start night or day for three years. He has a wonderful mind—Hugh,” she went on. “To divert attention he owns a Moth also, which he flies continually. People think he is still experimenting with the other machine. Not a soul except myself and

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Huitt and the pilots, who have worn a police uniform now and then, know what he has been keeping in that guarded shed."

"What made Milhaven take to this crooked business?" Christopher Sandford asked.

She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"For one thing he loathes poverty," she answered, "and there was no money when he inherited. For another thing he loves excitement. Huitt's skill, too, as a forger fascinated him. It was he who brought him to England and got him into the bank. . . . I am really going to work now."

"Shall you stay on here?" he asked abruptly.

"I shan't run away if that is what you mean," she said. "Why do you ask?"

Christopher looked through the trunks of the trees down to the houses of the Oasis. There were no signs of life, but thin spirals of blue smoke were beginning to curl upwards.

"Down there they used to call me the most curious person they ever knew," he observed. "They didn't know there was method in it all. I am a curious person, I confess, and there are things which went on up here which I still don't understand. Who knocked Anthony Sarson out that night?"

"One of Milhaven's men," she answered. "Strangers weren't wanted so near the by-way."

"One thing more," he begged. "Milhaven?"

"Yes?"

"And you?"

"Have you never had an idea?" she asked, with a strange little smile.

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“Not up till this moment,” he assured her.

“Of course Debrett would have told you,” she said, “but I don’t suppose you have ever looked inside it—and we were a very distant branch of the family. I was born in Florence and married to an Italian, but Milhaven is my brother. I came here hoping . . . But it was so foolish of me. One might as well hope to change the stars as to influence him.”

She suddenly held up a warning finger and stole away from him. Through the trees he saw her pass to where her easel was already arranged. He heard the chattering of a little group of caddies passing along the by-way to the golf links.

THE dignitaries of Scotland Yard were inclined to make a fuss over Christopher Sandford when, this time in a properly authenticated police car, he drove up to London to visit them. The sub-commissioner himself received them.

“Your indictment of this extraordinary fellow Huitt,” the official pronounced, after the customary greetings, “is quite a wonderful document, Mr. Sandford. You seem to have forgotten nothing. At the same time, if only you had come to us direct, the day after you had seen Huitt at Waterloo, a great deal of this later trouble would have been avoided.”

“I can see that now,” Christopher acknowledged, “but I knew that there was something going on down at the Oasis and I wanted badly to find out all about it. I thought perhaps something might have gone wrong with the Australian business—witnesses dead or something of that sort—and I had to make sure of him.”

“He very nearly made sure of you,” the sub-commissioner observed.

“Quite true. Would you let me know now what happened, please. Inspector Penny is nowhere to be found and there is nothing worth speaking of in the papers.”

“We should have been rather in the dark ourselves,” the other replied, “but fortunately one of the mechanics at the Golf Club Aerodrome has come





