

FICTION

Carolyn Wells

The Mystery Girl



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FICTION

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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THE MYSTERY GIRL

BY
CAROLYN WELLS
Author of "Vicky Van," "Raspberry Jam," & c.



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1922

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PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

TO
HUBER GRAY BUEHLER
A GRAVE AND REVEREND SEIGNEUR WHO
POSSESSES THE ADDED GRACE OF A RARE
TASTE IN MYSTERY STORIES

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THE MYSTERY GIRL

CHAPTER I A PRESIDENT-ELECT

Quite aside from its natural characteristics, there is an atmosphere about a college town, especially a New England college town, that is unmistakable. It is not so much actively intellectual as passively aware of and satisfied with its own intellectuality.

The beautiful little town of Corinth was no exception; from its tree-shaded village green to the white-columned homes on its outskirts it fairly radiated a satisfied sense of its own superiority.

Not that the people were smug or self-conceited. They merely accepted the fact that the University of Corinth was among the best in the country and that all true Corinthians were both proud and worthy of it.

The village itself was a gem of well-kept streets, roads and houses, and all New England could scarce show a better groomed settlement.

In a way, the students, of course, owned the place, yet there were many families whose claim to prominence lay in another direction.

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However, Corinth was by all counts, a college town, and gloried in it.

The University had just passed through the throes and thrills of one of its own presidential elections.

The contest of the candidates had been long, and at last the strife had become bitter. Two factions strove for supremacy, one, the conservative side, adhering to old traditions, the other, the modern spirit, preferring new conditions and progressive enterprise.

Hard waged and hard won, the battle had resulted at last in the election of John Waring, the candidate of the followers of the old school.

Waring was not an old foggy, nor yet a hide-bound or narrow-minded back number. But he did put mental attainment ahead of physical prowess, and he did hold by certain old-fashioned principles and methods, which he and his constituents felt to be the backbone of the old and honored institution.

Wherefore, though his election was an accomplished fact, John Waring had made enemies that seemed likely never to be placated.

But Waring's innate serenity and acquired poise were not disturbed by adverse criticism, he was a man with an eye

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single to his duty as he saw it. And he accepted the position of responsibility and trust, simply and sincerely with a determination to make his name honored among the list of presidents.

Inauguration, however, would not take place until June, and the months from February on would give him time to accustom himself to his new duties, and to learn much from the retiring president.

Yet it must not be thought that John Waring was unpopular. On the contrary, he was respected and liked by everybody in Corinth. Even the rival faction conceded his ability, his sterling character and his personal charm. And their chagrin and disappointment at his election was far more because of their desire for the other candidate's innovations than of any dislike for John Waring as a man.

Of course, there were some who candidly expressed their disapproval of the new president, but, so far, no real opposition was made, and it was hoped there would be none.

Now, whether because of the exigencies of his new position, or merely because of the irresistible charms of Mrs. Bates, Waring expected to make the lady his wife before his inauguration.

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"And a good thing," his neighbor, Mrs. Adams, observed. "John Waring ought to've been somebody's good-looking husband long ago, but a bachelor president of Corinth is out of all reason! Who'd stand by his side at the receptions, I'd like to know?"

For certain public receptions were dearly loved by the citizens of Corinth, and Mrs. Adams was one of the most reception-loving of all.

As in all college towns, there were various and sundry boarding houses, inns and hotels of all grades, but the boarding house of Mrs. Adams was, without a dissenting voice, acclaimed the most desirable and most homelike.

The good lady's husband, though known as "Old Salt," was by no means a seafaring man, nor had he ever been. Instead, he was a leaf on a branch of the Saltonstall family tree, and the irreverent abbreviation had been given him long ago, and had stuck.

"Yes, indeed," Mrs. Adams asserted, "we've never had a bachelor president of Corinth and I hope we never will. Mrs. Bates is a nice sweet-spoken lady, a widow of four years standing, and I do say she's just the one for Doctor Waring's wife. She has dignity, and yet she's mighty human."

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Emily Bates was human. Not very tall, a little inclined to plumpness, with fair hair and laughing blue eyes, she was of a cozy, home-loving sort, and her innate good nature and ready tact were unailing.

At first she had resisted John Waring's appeal, but he persisted, until she found she really liked the big, wholesome

man, and without much difficulty learned to love him.

Waring was distinguished-looking rather than handsome. Tall and well-made, he had a decided air of reserve which he rarely broke through, but which, Emily Bates discovered, could give way to confidences showing depths of sweetness and charm.

The two were happily matched. Waring was forty-two and Mrs. Bates half a dozen years younger. But both seemed younger than their years, and retained their earlier tastes and enthusiasms.

Also both were bound up, heart and soul, in the welfare of the University. Mrs. Bates' first husband had been one of its prominent professors and its history and traditions were known and loved by the cheery little lady.

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Perhaps the only person in Corinth who was not pleased at the approaching nuptials of John Waring and Emily Bates was Mrs. Peyton, Waring's present housekeeper. For it meant the loss of her position, which she had faithfully filled for ten years or more. And this meant the loss of a good and satisfactory home, not only for herself, but for her daughter Helen, a girl of eighteen, who lived there also.

Not yet had Waring told his housekeeper that she was to be dethroned but she knew the notice would come,—knew, too, that it was delayed only because of John Waring's disinclination to say or do anything unwelcome to another. And Mrs. Peyton had been his sister's school friend and had served him well and faithfully. Yet she must go, for the incoming mistress needed no other housekeeper for the establishment than her own efficient, capable self.

It was a very cold February afternoon, and Mrs. Peyton was serving tea in the cheerful living-room. Emily Bates was present; an indulgence she seldom allowed herself, for she was punctilious regarding conventions, and Corinth people, after all, were critical. Though, to be sure, there was no harm in her taking tea in the home so soon to be her own.

The two women were outwardly most courteous, and if there was an underlying hostility it was not observable on the part of either.

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"I came today," Emily Bates said, as she took her tea cup from the Japanese butler who offered it, "because I want to tell you, John, of some rumors I heard in the town. They say there is trouble brewing for you."

"Trouble brewing is such a picturesque phrase," Waring said, smiling idly, as he stirred his tea. "One immediately visions Macbeth's witches, and their trouble brew."

"You needn't laugh," Emily flashed an affectionate smile toward him, "when the phrase is used it often means something."

"Something vague and indefinite," suggested Gordon Lockwood, who was Waring's secretary, and was as one of

the family.

"Not necessarily," Mrs. Bates returned; "more likely something definite, though perhaps not very alarming."

"Such as what?" asked Waring, "and from what direction? Will the freshmen make me an apple-pie bed, or will the seniors haze me, do you think?"

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"Be serious, John," Mrs. Bates begged. "I tell you there is a movement on foot to stir up dissension. I heard they would contest the election."

"Oh, they can't do that," Lockwood stated; "nor would anybody try. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Bates. I'm sure we know all that's going on,—and I can't think there's any 'trouble brewing' for Doctor Waring."

"I've heard it, too," vouchsafed Mrs. Peyton. "It's not anything definite, but there are rumors and hints, and where there's smoke, there's bound to be fire. I wish you'd at least look into it, Doctor."

"Yes," agreed Emily Bates, "do look into it, John."

"But how can I?" Waring smiled. "I can't go from door to door, saying 'I've come to investigate a rumor,' can I?"

"Oh, don't be absurd!" Mrs. Bates' plump little hands fluttered in protest and then fell quietly to rest in her lap. "You men are so tactless! Now, Mrs. Peyton or I could find out all about it, without any one knowing we were making inquiry."

"Why don't you, then?" asked Waring, and Mrs. Peyton gave a pleased smile as the guest bracketed their names.

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"I will, if you say so." Emily spoke gravely. "That is what I wanted to ask you. I didn't like to take up the matter with any one unless you directly approved."

"Oh, go ahead,—I see no harm in it."

"But, Doctor Waring," put in Lockwood, "is it wise? I fear that if Mrs. Bates takes up this matter she may get in deeper than she means or expects to, and—well, you can't tell what might turn up."

"That's so, Emily. As matters stand, you'd best be careful."

"Oh, John, how vacillating you are! First, you say go ahead, and then you say stop! I don't mind your changing your opinions, but I do resent your paying so little attention to the matter. You toss it aside without thought."

"Doctor Waring thinks very quickly," said Mrs. Peyton, and Emily gave her a slight stare.

It was hard for the housekeeper to realize that she must inevitably lose her place in his household, and the thought made her a little assertive while she still had opportunity.

"Yes, I know it," was the reply Emily gave, and went on, addressing herself to the two men.

"Persuade him, Mr. Lockwood. Not of his duty, he never misapprehends that, but of the necessity of looking on this matter as a duty."

"What a pleader you are, Emily," and Waring gave her an admiring bow; "I am almost persuaded that my very life is in danger!"

"Oh, you won't be good!" The blue eyes twinkled but the rosy little mouth took on a mutinous pout. "Well, I warn you, if you don't look out for yourself, I'm going to look out for you! And that, as Mr. Lockwood hints, may get you into trouble!"

"What a contradictory little person it is! In an effort to get me out of trouble, you admit you will probably get me into trouble. Well, well, if this is during our betrothal days, what will you do after we are married?"

"Oh, then you'll obey me implicitly," and the expressive hands indicated with a wide sweep, total subjection.

"You'll find him not absolutely easy to manage," Mrs. Peyton declared, and though Emily Bates said no word, she gave a look of superior managing power that brought the housekeeper's thin lips together in a resentful straight line.

This byplay was unnoticed by large-minded John Waring, but it amused Lockwood, who was an observer of human nature.

Unostentatiously, he watched Mrs. Peyton, as she turned her attention to the tea tray, and noted the air of importance with which she continued her duties as hostess.

"Bring hot toast, Ito," she said to the well-trained and deferential Japanese. "And a few more lemon slices,—I see another guest coming."

She smiled out through the window, and a moment later a breezy young chap came into the room.

"Hello, folkses," he cried; "Hello, Aunt Emily."

He gave Mrs. Bates an audible kiss on her pretty cheek and bowed with boyish good humor to Mrs. Peyton.

"How do you do, Uncle Doctor?" and "How goes it, Lock?" he went on, as he threw himself, a little sprawlingly into an easy chair. "And here's the fair Helen of Troy."

He jumped up as Helen Peyton came into the room. "Why, Pinky," she said, "when did you come?"

"Just now, my girl, as you noted from your oriel lattice,—and came running down to bask in the sunshine of my smiles."

"Behave yourself, Pinky," admonished his aunt, as she noted Helen's quick blush and realized the saucy boy had told the

truth.

Pinckney Payne, college freshman, and nephew of Emily Bates, was very fond of Doctor Waring, his English teacher, and as also fond, in his boyish way, of his aunt. But he was no respecter of authority, and, now that his aunt was to be the wife of his favorite professor, also the President-elect of the college, he assumed an absolute familiarity with the whole household.

His nickname was not only an abbreviation, but was descriptive of his exuberant health and invariably red cheeks. For the rest, he was just a rollicking, care-free boy, ring leader in college fun, often punished, but bobbing up serenely again, ready for more mischief.

Helen Peyton adored the irrepressible Pinky, and though he liked her, it was no more than he felt for many others and not so much as he had for a few.

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"Tea, Mrs. Peyton? Oh, yes, indeed, thank you. Yes, two lemon and three sugar. And toasts,--and cakes,--oh, what good ones! What a tuck! Alma Mater doesn't feed us like this! I say, Aunt Emily, after you are married, may I come to tea every day? And bring the fellows?"

"I'll answer that,--you may," said John Waring.

"And I'll revise the answer,--you may, with reservations," Mrs. Bates supplemented. "Now, Pinky, you're a dear and a sweet, but you can't annex this house and all its affairs, just because it's going to be my home."

"Don't want to, Auntie. I only want you to annex me. You'll keep the same cook we have at present, won't you?"

He looked solicitously at her, over a large slice of toast and jam he was devouring.

"Maybe and maybe not," Mrs. Peyton spoke up. "Cooks are not always anxious to be kept."

"At any rate, we'll have a cook, Pinky, of some sort," his aunt assured him, and the boy turned to tease Helen Peyton, who was quite willing to be teased.

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"I saw your beau today, Helen," he said.

"Which one?" she asked placidly.

"Is there a crowd? Well, I mean the Tyler person. Him as hangs out at Old Salt's. And, by the way, Uncle President,--yes, I am a bit previous on both counts, but you'll soon have the honor of being both President and my uncle,--by the way, I say, Bob Tyler says there's something in the wind."

"A straw to show which way it blows, perhaps," Waring said.

"Perhaps, sir. But it's blowing. Tyler says there's a movement on foot to make things hot for you if you take the Presidential chair with your present intentions."

"My intentions?"

"Yes, sir; about athletics, and sports in general."

"And what are my so-called intentions?"

"They say, you mean to cut out sport--"

"Oh, Pinckney, you know better than that!"

"Well, Doctor Waring, some seem to think that's what you have in mind. If you'd declare your intentions now,--"

"Look here, Pinky, don't you think I've enough on my mind in the matter of marrying your aunt, without bringing in other matters till that's settled."

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"Going to be married soon, Uncle Doc?"

"We are. As soon as your aunt will select a pleasant day for the ceremony. Then, that attended to, I can devote my mind and energies to this other subject. And meanwhile, my boy, if you hear talk about it, don't make any assertions,--rather, try to hush up the subject."

"I see,--I see,--and I will, Doctor Waring. You don't want to bother with those things till you're a settled down married man! I know just how you feel about it. Important business, this getting married,--I daresay, sir."

"It is,--and so much so, that I'm going to take the bride-elect off right now, for a little private confab. You must understand that we have much to arrange."

"Run along,--bless you, my children!" Pinky waved a teacup and a sandwich beneficently toward the pair, as they left the room and went off in the direction of the Doctor's study.

The house was a large one, with a fine front portico upheld by six enormous fluted columns.

One of the most beautiful of New England doorways led into a wide hall. To the right of this was the drawing-room, not so often used and not so well liked as the more cozy living-room, to the left as one entered, and where the tea-drinking group now sat.

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Behind these two rooms and hall, ran a cross hall, with an outer door at the end back of the living-room and a deep and wide window seat at the other end, behind the drawing-room.

Further back, beyond the cross hall, on the living-room side, was the dining-room, and beside it, back of the drawing-room was the Doctor's study. This was the gem of the whole house. The floor had been sunken to give greater ceiling height, for the room was very large, and of fine proportions. It opened on to the cross hall with wide double doors, and a flight of six or seven steps descended to its rug covered floor.

Opposite the double doors was the great fireplace with high over-mantel of carved stone. Each side of the mantel were

windows, high and not large. The main daylight came through a great window on the right of the entrance and also from a long French window that opened like doors on the same side.

This French window, giving on a small porch, and the door that opened into the cross hall of the house were the only doors in the great room, save those on cupboards and bookcases.

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On the other side of the room, opposite the French window was a row of four small windows looking into the dining-room. But these were high, and could not be seen through by people on the sunken floor of the study.

The whole room was done in Circassian walnut, and represented the ideal abode of a man of letters. The fireside was flanked with two facing davenports, the wide window seat was piled with cushions. The French window-doors were suitably curtained and the high windows were of truly beautiful stained glass.

The spacious table desk was in the middle of the room, and bookcases, both portable and built in, lined the walls. There were a few good busts and valuable pictures, and the whole effect was one of dignity and repose rather than of elaborate grandeur.

The room was renowned, and all Corinth spoke of it with pride. The students felt it a great occasion that brought them within its walls and the faculty loved nothing better than a session therein.

Casual guests were rarely entertained in the study. Only especial visitors or those worthy of its classic atmosphere found welcome there. Mrs. Peyton or Helen were not expected to use it, and Mrs. Bates had already declared she should respect it as the sanctum of Doctor Waring alone.

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The two made their way to the window seat, and as he arranged the soft cushions for her, Waring said, "Don't, Emily, ever feel shut out of this room. As I live now, I've not welcomed the Peytons in here, but my wife is a different proposition."

"I still feel an awe of the place, John, but I may get used to it. Anyway, I'll try, and I do appreciate your willingness to have me in here. Then if you want to be alone, you must put me out."

"I'll probably do that, sometimes, dear, for I have to spend many hours alone. You know, I'm not taking the presidency lightly."

"I know it, you conscientious dear. But, on the other hand, don't be too serious about it. You're just the man for the place, just the character for a College President, and if you try too hard to improve or reconstruct yourself, you'll probably spoil your present perfection."

"Well nothing would spoil *your* present perfection, my Emily.

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I am too greatly blest,--to have the great honor from the college,--and you, too!"

"Are you happy, John? All happy?"

Waring's deep blue eyes fastened themselves on her face. His brown hair showed only a little gray at the temples, his fine face was not touched deeply by Time's lines, and his clear, wholesome skin glowed with health.

If there was an instant's hesitation before his reply came, it was none the less hearty and sincere. "Yes, my darling, all happy. And you?"

"I am happy, if you are," she returned. "But I can never be happy if there is a shadow of any sort on your heart. Is there, John? Tell me, truly."

"You mean regarding this trouble that I hear is brewing for me?"

"Not only that; I mean in any direction."

"Trouble, Emily! With you in my arms! No,--a thousand times no! Trouble and I are strangers,--so long as I have you!"

CHAPTER II MISS MYSTERY ARRIVES

Anyone who has arrived at the railroad station of a New England village, after dark on a very cold winter night, the train late, no one to meet him, and no place engaged for board and lodging, will know the desolation of such a situation.

New England's small railroad stations are much alike, the crowds that alight from the trains are much alike, the people waiting on the platform for the arriving travelers are much alike, but there came into Corinth one night a passenger who was not at all like the fellow passengers on that belated train. It was a train from New York, due in Corinth at five-forty, but owing to the extreme cold weather, and various untoward freezings occasioned thereby, the delays were many and long and the train drew into the station shortly after seven o'clock.

Tired, hungry and impatient, the travelers crowded out of the train and stamped through the snow to the vehicles awaiting them, or footed it to their nearby homes.

The passenger who was unlike the others stepped down from the car platform, and holding her small suitcase firmly, crossed the track and entered the station waiting room. She went to the ticket window but found there no attendant. Impatiently she tapped her little foot on the old board floor but no one appeared.

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"Agent," she called out, rapping with her knuckles on the window shelf, "Agent,--where are you?"

"Who's there? What d'y' want?" growled a surly voice, and a head appeared at the ticket window.

"I want somebody to look after me! I'm alone, and I want a porter, and I want a conveyance and I want some information."

"Oh, you do! Well, I can't supply porters nor yet conveyances; but information I may be able to give you."

"Very well then," and a pair of big, dark eyes seemed to pierce his very brain. "Then tell me where I can find the best accommodations in Corinth."

The now roused agent looked more interestedly at the inquirer.

He saw a mere slip of a girl, young, slender, and very alert of manner. Her dark, grave little face was oval, and her eyes had a strange uncanny way of roving quickly about, and coming suddenly back, greatly disconcerting the stolid ticket agent.

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This agent was not unused to girls,--a college town is often invaded by hordes of smart young women, pretty girls and gay hoydens. Many Junes he had sold tickets or given information to hundreds of feminine inquirers but none had ever seemed quite like this one.

"Best accommodations?" he repeated stupidly.

"You heard me, then! About when do you propose to reply?"

Still he gazed at her in silence, running over in his mind the various boarding houses, and finding none he thought she'd like.

"There's a rule of the Railroad Company that questions must be answered the same day they're asked," she said, witheringly, and picking up her suitcase she started for the door, feeling that any one she might find would know more than this dummy.

"Wait,--oh, I say, miss, wait a minute."

"I did," she said coolly, proceeding to the door.

"But,--oh, hold on,--try Old Salt Adams,--you couldn't do better."

"Where is it?" she deigned to pause a moment, and he replied quickly:

"He's right outside,--hurry up out,--you can catch him!"

Here was something she could understand, and she hurried up out, just in time to see an old man with long white beard jump into his sleigh and begin to tuck fur robes about him.

"He sprang to his sleigh,--to his team gave a whistle,--" she quoted to herself, and then cried out, "Hey, there, Santa Claus, give me a lift?"

"You engaged for our house?" the man called back, and as she shook her head, he gathered up his reins.

"Can't take any one not engaged," he called back, "Giddap!"

"Wait,--wait! I command you!" The sharp, clear young voice rang out through the cold winter air, and Old Saltonstall Adams paused to listen.

"Ho, ho," he chuckled, "you command me, do you? Now, I haven't been commanded for something like fifty years."

"Oh, don't stop to fuss," the girl exclaimed, angrily. "Don't you see I'm cold, hungry and very uncomfortable? You have a boarding house,--I want board,--now, you take me in. Do you hear?"

"Sure I hear, but, miss, we've only so many rooms and they're all occupied or engaged."

"Some are engaged, but as yet unoccupied?" The dark eyes

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challenged him, and Adams mumbled,--"Well, that's about it."

"Very well, I will occupy one until the engager comes along. Let me get in. No, I can manage my suitcase myself. You get my trunk,--here's the check. Or will you send for that tomorrow?"

"Why wait? Might's well get it now--if so be you're bound to bide. 'Fraid to wait in the sleigh alone?"

"I'm afraid of nothing," was the disdainful answer, and the girl pulled the fur robes up around her as she sat in the middle of the back seat.

Shortly, old Salt returned with the trunk on his shoulder, and put it in the front with himself, and they started.

"Don't try to talk," he called back to her, as the horses began a rapid trot. "I can't hear you against this wind."

"I've no intention of talking," the girl replied, but the man couldn't hear her. The wind blew fiercely. It was snowing a little, and the drifts sent feathery clouds through the air. The trees, coated with ice from a recent sleet storm, broke off crackling bits of ice as they passed. The girl looked about, at first curiously, and then timidly, as if frightened by what she saw.

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It was not a long ride, and they stopped before a large house, showing comfortably lighted windows and a broad front door that swung open even as the girl was getting down from the sleigh.

"For the land sake!" exclaimed a brisk feminine voice, "this ain't Letty! Who in the earth have you got here?"

"I don't know," Old Salt Adams replied, truthfully. "Take her along, mother, and give her a night's lodging."

"But where is Letty? Didn't she come?"

"Now can't you see she didn't come? Do you s'pose I left her at the station? Or dumped her out along the road? No--since you will have it, she didn't come. She *didn't* come!"

Old Salt drove on toward the barns, and Mrs. Adams bade the girl go into the house.

The landlady followed, and as she saw the strange guest she gazed at her in frank curiosity.

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"You want a room, I s'pose," she began. "But, I'm sorry to say we haven't one vacant--"

"Oh, I'll take Letty's. She didn't come, you see, so I can take her room for tonight."

"Letty wouldn't like that."

"But I would. And I'm here and Letty isn't. Shall we go right up?"

Picking up her small suitcase, the girl started and then stepped back for the woman to lead the way.

"Not quite so fast--*if* you please. What is your name?"

As the landlady's tone changed to a sterner inflection, the girl likewise grew dignified.

"My name is Anita Austin," she said, coldly. "I came here because I was told it was the best house in Corinth."

"Where are you from?"

"New York City."

"What address?"

"Plaza Hotel."

By this time the strange dark eyes had done their work. A steady glance from Anita Austin seemed to compel all the world to do her bidding. At any rate, Mrs. Adams took the suitcase, and without a further word conducted the stranger upstairs.

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She took her into an attractive bedroom, presumably made ready for the absent Letty.

"This will do," Miss Austin said, calmly. "Will you send me up a tray of supper? I don't want much, and I prefer not to come down to dinner."

"Land sake, dinner's over long ago. You want some tea, 'n' bread, 'n' butter, 'n' preserves, 'n' cake?"

"Yes, thank you, that sounds good. Send it in half an hour."

To her guest Mrs. Adams showed merely a face of acquiescence, but once outside the door, and released from the spell of those eerie eyes, she remarked to herself, "For the land sake!" with great emphasis.

"Well, what do you know about that!" Old Salt Adams cried, when, after she had started him on his supper, his wife related the episode.

"I can't make her out," Mrs. Adams said, thoughtfully. "But I don't like her. And I won't keep her. Tomorrow, you take her over to Belton's."

"Just as you say. But I thought her kinda interesting looking. You can't say she isn't that."

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"Maybe so, to some folks. Not to me. And Letty'll come tomorrow, so that girl'll have to get out of the room."

Meanwhile "that girl" was eagerly peering out of her window.

She tried to discern which were the lights of the college buildings, but through the still lightly falling snow, she could see but little, and after a time, she gave up the effort. She

drew her head back into the room just as a tap at the door announced her supper.

"Thank you," she said to the maid who brought it. "Set it on that stand, please. It looks very nice."

And then, sitting comfortably in an easy chair, robed in warm dressing gown and slippers, Miss Anita Austin devoted a pleasant half hour to the simple but thoroughly satisfactory meal.

This finished, she wrote some letters. Not many, indeed, but few as they were, the midnight hour struck before she sealed the last envelope and wrote the last address.

Then, prepared for bed, she again looked from the window, and gazed long into the night.

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"Corinth," she whispered, "Oh, Corinth, what do you hold for me? What fortune or misfortune will you bring me? What fortune or misfortune shall I bring to others? Oh, Justice, Justice, what crimes are committed in thy name!"

The next morning Anita appeared in the dining-room at the breakfast hour.

Mrs. Adams scanned her sharply, and looked a little disapprovingly at the short, scant skirt and slim, silken legs of her new boarder.

Anita, her dark eyes scanning her hostess with equal sharpness, seemed to express an equal disapproval of the country-cut gingham and huge white apron.

Not at all obtuse, Mrs. Adams sensed this, and her tone was a little more deferential than she had at first intended to make it.

"Will you sit here, please, Miss Austin?" she indicated a chair next herself.

"No, thank you, I'll sit by my friend," and the girl slipped into a vacant chair next Saltonstall Adams.

Old Salt gave a furtive glance at his wife, and suppressed a chuckle at her surprise.

"This is Mr. Tyler's place," he said to the usurper, "but I expect he'll let you have it this once."

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"I mean to have it all the time," and Anita nodded gravely at her host.

"All the time is this one meal only," crisply put in Mrs. Adams. "I'm sorry, Miss Austin, but we can't keep you here. I have no vacant room."

The entrance of some other people gave Anita a chance to speak in an undertone to Mr. Adams, and she said;

"You'll let me stay till Letty comes, won't you? I suppose you are boss in your own house."

As a matter of fact almost any phrase would have described the man better than "boss in his own house," but the idea tickled his sense of irony, and he chuckled as he replied, "You bet I am! Here you stay--as long as you want to."

"You're my friend, then?" and an appealing glance was shot at him from beneath long, curling lashes, that proved the complete undoing of Saltonstall Adams.

"To the death!" he whispered, in mock dramatic manner.

Anita gave a shiver. "What a way to put it!" she cried. "I mean to live forever, sir!"

"Doubtless," Old Salt returned, placidly. "You're a freak--aren't you?"

[39]

"That isn't a very pretty way of expressing it, but I suppose I am," and a mutinous look passed over the strange little face.

In repose, the face was oval, serene, and regular of feature. But when the girl smiled or spoke or frowned, changes took place, and the mobile countenance grew soft with laughter or hard with scorn.

And scorn was plainly visible when, a moment later, Adams introduced Robert Tyler, a fellow boarder, to Miss Austin.

She gave him first a conventional glance, then, as he dropped into the chair next hers, and said,

"Only too glad to give up my place to a peach," she turned on him a flashing glance, that, as he expressed it afterward, "wiped him off the face of the earth."

Nor could he reinstate himself in her good graces. He tried a penitent attitude, bravado, jocularly and indifference, but one and all failed to engage her interest or even attention. She answered his remarks with calm, curt speeches that left him baffled and uncertain whether he wanted to bow down and worship her, or wring her neck.

Old Salt Adams took this all in, his amusement giving way to curiosity and then to wonder. Who was this person, who looked like a young, very young girl, yet who had all the mental powers of an experienced woman? What was she and what her calling?

[40]

The other boarders appeared, those nearest Anita were introduced, and most of them considered her merely a pretty, new guest. Her manners were irreproachable, her demeanor quiet and graceful, yet as Adams covertly watched her, he felt as if he were watching an inactive volcano.

The meal over, he detained her a moment in the dining-room.

"Why are you here, Miss Austin?" he said, courteously; "what is your errand in Corinth?"

"I am an artist," she said, looking at him with her mysterious intent gaze. "Or, perhaps I should say an art student. I've been told that there are beautiful bits of winter scenery

available for subjects here, and I want to sketch. Please, Mr. Adams, let me stay here until Letty comes."

A sudden twinkle in her eye startled the old man, and he said quickly, "How do you know she isn't coming?"

That, in turn, surprised Anita, but she only smiled, and replied, "I saw a telegram handed to Mrs. Adams at breakfast--and then she looked thoughtfully at me, and--oh, well, I just sort of knew it was to say Letty couldn't come."

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"You witch! You uncanny thing! If I should take you over to Salem, they'd burn you!"

"I'll ride over on a broomstick some day, and see if they will," she returned, gleefully.

And then along came Nemesis, in the person of the landlady.

"I'm sorry, Miss Austin," she began, but the girl interrupted her.

"Please, Mrs. Adams," she said, pleadingly, "don't say any thing to make me sorry, too! Now, you want to say you haven't any room for me--but that isn't true; so you don't know what to say to get rid of me. But--why do you want to get rid of me?"

Esther Adams looked at the girl and that look was her undoing.

Such a pathetic face, such pleading eyes, such a wistful curved mouth, the landlady couldn't resist, and against her will, against her better judgment, she said, "Well, then, stay, you poor little thing. But you must tell me more about yourself. I don't know who you are."

"I don't know, myself," the strange girl returned. "Do we, any of us know who we are? We go through this world, strangers to each other--don't we? And also, strangers to ourselves." Her eyes took on a faraway, mystical look. "If I find out who I am, I'll let you know."

[42]

Then a dazzling smile broke over her face, they heard a musical ripple of laughter, and she was gone.

They heard her steps, as she ran upstairs to her room, and the two Adamses looked at each other.

"Daffy," said Mrs. Adams. "A little touched, poor child. I believe she has run away from home or from her keepers. We'll hear the truth soon. They'll be looking for her."

"Perhaps," said her husband, doubtfully. "But that isn't the way I size her up. She's nobody's fool, that girl. Wish you'd seen her give Bob Tyler his comeuppance!"

"What'd she say?"

"'Twasn't what she said, so much as the look she gave him! He almost went through the floor. Well, she says she's a painter of scenery and landscapes. Let her stay a few days,

till I size her up."

"You size her up!" returned his wife, with good-natured contempt. "If she smiles on you or gives you a bit of taffy-talk, you'll size her up for an angel! I'm not so sure she isn't quite the opposite!"

[43]

Meanwhile the subject of their discussion was arraying herself for a walk. Equipped with storm boots and fur coat, she set out to inspect Corinth. A jaunty fur cap, with one long, red quill feather gave her still more the appearance of an elf or gnome, and many of the Adams house boarders watched the little figure as she set forth to brave the icy streets.

Apparently she had no fixed plan of procedure, for at each corner, she looked about, and chose her course at random. The snow had ceased during the night, and it was very cold, with a clear sunshiny frostiness in the air that made the olive cheeks red and glowing.

Reaching a bridge, she paused and stood looking over the slight railing into the frozen ravine below.

Long she stood, until passers-by began to stare at her. She was unaware of this, absorbed in her thoughts and oblivious to all about her.

Pinckney Payne, coming along, saw her, and, as he would have expressed it, fell for her at once.

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"Don't do it, sister!" he said, pausing beside her. "Don't end your young life on this glorious day! Suicide is a mess, at best. Take my advice and cut it out!"

She turned, ready to freeze him with a glance more icy even than the landscape, but his frank, roguish smile disarmed her.

"Freshman?" she said, patronizingly, but it didn't abash him.

"Yep. Pinckney Payne, if you must know. Commonly called Pinky."

"I don't wonder," and she noticed his red cheeks. "Well, now that you're properly introduced, tell me some of the buildings. What's that one?"

"Dormitories. And that," pointing, "is the church."

"Really! And that beautiful colonnade one?"

"That's Doctor Waring's home. Him as is going to be next Prexy."

"And that? And that?"

He replied to all her questions, and kept his eyes fastened on her bewitching face. Never had Pinky seen a girl just like this. She looked so young, so merry, and yet her restless, roving eyes seemed full of hidden fire and tempestuous excitement.

[45]

"Where you from?" he said, abruptly. "Where you staying?"

"At Mrs. Adams," she returned, "is it a good house?"

"Best in town. Awful hard to get into. Always full up. Relative of hers?"

"No, just a boarder. I chanced to get a room some one else engaged and couldn't use."

"You're lucky. Met Bob Tyler?"

"Yes."

"You don't like him! I see that. Met Gordon Lockwood?"

"No; who's he?"

"He's Doctor Waring's secretary, but he's mighty worthwhile on his own account. I say, may I come to see you?"

"Thank you, no. I'm not receiving callers--yet."

"Well, you will be soon--because I'm coming. I say my aunt lives next door to Adams'. May I bring her to call on you?"

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"Not yet, please. I'm not settled."

"Soon's you say the word, then. My aunt is Mrs. Bates, and she's a love. She's going to marry Doctor Waring--so you see we're the right sort of people."

"There are no right sort of people," said the girl, and, turning, she walked away.

[47]

CHAPTER III THIRTEEN BUTTONS

Apparently Miss Austin's statement that there were no right sort of people was her own belief, for she made no friends at the Adams house. Nor was this the fault of her fellow-boarders. They were more than willing to be friendly, but their overtures were invariably ignored.

Not rudely, for Miss Austin seemed to be a girl of culture and her manners were correct, but, as one persistent matron expressed it, "you can't get anywhere with her."

She talked to no one at the table, merely answering a direct question if put to her. She retained the seat next Old Salt, seeming to rely on him to protect her from the advances of the others. Not that she needed protection, exactly, for Miss Anita Austin was evidently quite able to take care of herself.

But she was a mystery--and mysteries provoke inquiry.

The house was not a large one, and the two-score boarders, though they would have denied an imputation of curiosity, were exceedingly interested in learning the facts about Miss Mystery, as they had come to call her.

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Mrs. Adams was one of the most eager of all to know the truth, but, as he did on rare occasions, Old Salt Adams had set down his foot that the girl was not to be annoyed.

"I don't know who she is or where she hails from," he told his wife, "but as long as she stays here, she's not to be pestered by a lot of gossiping old hens. When she does anything you don't like, send her away; but so long's she's under my roof, she's got to be let alone."

And let alone she was--not so much because of Adams' dictum as because "pestering" did little good.

The girl had a disconcerting way of looking an inquisitor straight in the eyes, and then, with a monosyllabic reply, turning and walking off as if the other did not exist.

"Why," said Miss Bascom, aggrievedly relating her experience, "I just said, politely, 'Are you from New York or where, Miss Austin?' and she turned those big, black eyes on me, and said, 'Where.' Then she turned her back and looked out of the window, as if she had wiped me off the face of the earth!"

[49]

"She's too young to act like that," opined Mrs. Welby.

"Oh, she isn't so terribly young," Miss Bascom returned. "She's too experienced to be so very young."

"How do you know she's experienced? What makes you say

that?"

"Why," Miss Bascom hesitated for words, "she's--sort of sophisticated--you can see that from her looks. I mean when anything is discussed at the table, she doesn't say a word, but you can tell from her face that she knows all about it--I mean a matter of general interest, don't you know. I don't mean local matters."

"She's an intelligent girl, I know, but that doesn't make her out old. I don't believe she's twenty."

"Oh, she is! Why, she's twenty-five or twenty-seven!"

"Never in the world! I'm going to ask her."

"Ask her!" Miss Bascom laughed. "You'll get well snubbed if you do."

But this prophecy only served to egg Mrs. Welby on, and she took the first occasion to carry out her promise.

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She met Anita in the hall, as the girl was about to go out, and smilingly detained her.

"Why so aloof, my dear," she said, playfully. "You rarely give us a chance to entertain you."

As Mrs. Welby was between Anita and the door, the girl was forced to pause. She looked the older woman over, with an appraising glance that was not rude, but merely disinterested.

"No?" she said, with a curious rising inflection, that somehow seemed meant to close the incident.

But Mrs. Welby was not so easily baffled.

"No," she repeated, smilingly. "And we want to know you better. You're too young and too pretty not to be a general favorite amongst us. How old are you, my dear child?"

"Just a hundred," and Miss Austin's dark eyes were so grave, and seemed to hold such a world of wisdom and experience that Mrs. Welby almost jumped.

Too amazed to reply, she even let the girl get past her, and out of the street door, before she recovered her poise.

"She's uncanny," Mrs. Welby declared, when telling Miss Bascom of the interview. "I give you my word, when she said that, she looked a hundred!"

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"Looked a hundred! What do you mean?"

"Just that. Her eyes seemed to hold all there is of knowledge, yes--and of evil--"

"Evil! My goodness!" Miss Bascom rolled this suggestion like a sweet morsel under her tongue.

"Oh--I don't say there's anything wrong about the girl--"

"Well! If her eyes showed depths of evil, I should say there *was* something wrong!"

The episode was repeated from one to another of the exclusive *clientele* of the Adams house, until, by exaggeration and imagination it grew into quite a respectable arraignment of Miss Mystery, and branded her as a doubtful character if not a dangerous one.

Before Miss Austin had been in the house a week, she had definitely settled her status from her own point of view.

Uniformly correct and courteous of manner, she rarely spoke, save when necessary. It was as if she had declared, "I will not talk. If this be mystery, make the most of it."

Old Salt, apparently, backed her up in this determination, and allowed her to sit next him at table, without addressing her at all.

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More, he often took it upon himself to answer a remark or question meant for her and for this he sometimes received a fleeting glance, or a ghost of a smile of approval and appreciation.

But all this was superficial. The Adamses, between themselves, decided that Miss Austin was more deeply mysterious than was shown by her disinclination to make friends. They concluded she was transacting important business of some sort, and that her sketching of the winter scenery, which she did every clear day, was merely a blind.

Though Mrs. Adams resented this, and urged her husband to send the girl packing, Old Salt demurred.

"She's done no harm as yet," he said. "She's a mystery, but not a wrong one, 's far's I can make out. Let her alone, mother. I've got my eye on her."

"I've got my two eyes on her, and I can see more'n you can. Why, Salt, that girl don't hardly sleep at all. Night after night, she sits up looking out of the window, over toward the college buildings--"

"How do you know?"

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"I go and listen at her door," Mrs. Adams admitted, without embarrassment. "I want to know what she's up to."

"You can't see her."

"No, but I hear her moving around restlessly, and putting the window up and down--and Miss Bascom--her room's cornerways on the ell, she says she sees her looking out the window late at night 'most every night."

"Miss Bascom's a meddling old maid, and I'd put her out of this house before I would the little girl."

"Of course *you* would! You're all set up because she makes so much of you--"

"Oh, come now, Esther, you can't say that child makes much of me! I wish she would. I've taken a fancy to her."

"Yes, because she's pretty--in a gipsy, witch-like fashion. What men see in a pair of big black eyes, and a dark, sallow face, I don't know!"

"Not sallow," Old Salt said, reflectively; "olive, rather--but not sallow."

"Oh you!" exclaimed Mrs. Adams, and with that cryptic remark the subject was dropped.

[54]

Gordon Lockwood, secretary of John Waring, had a room at the Adams house. But as he took no meals there save his breakfasts, and as he ate those early, he had not yet met Anita Austin.

But one Saturday morning, he chanced to be late, and the two sat at table together.

An astute reader of humanity, Lockwood at once became interested in the girl, and realized that to win her attention he must not be eager or insistent.

He spoke only one or two of the merest commonplaces, until almost at the close of the meal, he said:

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Austin? If you would care to hear any of the College lectures, I can arrange it."

"Who are the speakers?"

She turned her eyes fully upon him, and Gordon Lockwood marveled at their depth and beauty.

"Tonight," he replied, "Doctor Waring is to lecture on Egyptian Archaeology. Are you interested in that?"

"Yes," she said, "very much so. I'd like to go."

"You certainly may, then. Just use this card."

[55]

He took a card from his pocket, scribbled a line across it, and gave it to her. Without another word, he finished his breakfast, and with a mere courteous bow, he left the room.

Miss Austin's face took on a more scrutible look than ever.

The card still in her hand, she went up to her room. Unheeding the maid, who was at her duties there, the girl threw herself into a big chair and sat staring at the card.

"The Egyptian Temples," she said to herself, "Doctor John Waring."

The maid looked at her curiously as she murmured the words half aloud, but Miss Austin paid no heed.

"Go on with your work, Nora, don't mind me," she said, at last, as the chambermaid paused inquiringly in front of her. "I don't mind your being here until you finish what you have to

do. And I wish you'd bring me a Corinth paper, please? There is one, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Twice a week."

Nora disappeared and returned with a paper.

"Mr. Adams says you may have this to keep. It's the newest one."

The girl took it and turned to find the College announcements. The Egyptian Lecture was mentioned, and in another column was a short article regarding Doctor Waring and a picture of him.

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Long the girl looked at the picture, and when the maid, her tasks completed, left the room, she noticed Miss Austin still staring at the fine face of the President-elect of the University of Corinth.

After a time, she reached for a pair of scissors, and cut out the portrait and the article which it illustrated.

She put the clipping in a portfolio, which she then locked in her trunk, and the picture she placed on her dresser.

That night she went to the lecture. She went alone, for Gordon Lockwood did not reappear and no one else knew of her going.

"Shall I have a key, or will you be up?" she asked of Mrs. Adams, as she left the house.

"Oh, we'll be up." The round, shrewd eyes looked at her kindly. "You're lucky to get a ticket. Doctor Waring's lectures are crowded."

"Good night," said Miss Austin, and went away.

The lecture room was partly filled when she arrived, and her ticket entitled her to a seat near the front.

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Being seated, she fell into a brown study, or, at least, sat motionless and apparently in deep thought.

Gordon Lockwood, already there, saw her come in, and after she was in her place, he quietly arose and went across the room, taking a seat directly behind her.

Of this she was quite unaware, and the student of human nature gave himself up to a scrutiny of the stranger.

He saw a little head, its mass of dark, almost black hair surmounted by a small turban shaped hat, of taupe colored velvet, with a curly ostrich tip nestling over one ear.

Not that her ears were visible, for Miss Austin was smartly groomed and her whole effect modish.

She had removed her coat, which she held in her lap. Her frock was taupe colored, of a soft woolen material, ornamented with many small buttons. These tiny buttons

formed two rows down her back, from either shoulder to the waist line, and they also formed a border round the sailor collar.

They were, perhaps, Lockwood decided, little balls, rather than buttons, and he idly counted them as he sat watching her.

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He hoped she would turn her head a trifle, but she sat as motionless as a human being may.

He marveled at her stillness, and impatiently waited for the lecture to begin that he might note her interest.

At last Doctor Waring appeared on the platform, and as the applause resounded all over the room, Lockwood was almost startled to observe Miss Austin's actions.

She clasped her hands together as if she had received a sudden shock. She--if it hadn't seemed too absurd,--he would have said that she trembled. At any rate she was a little agitated, and it was with an effort that she preserved her calm. No one else noticed her, and Lockwood would not have done so, save for his close watching.

Throughout the lecture, Miss Austin's gaze seemed never to leave the face of the speaker, and Lockwood marveled that Waring himself was not drawn to notice her.

But Waring's calm gaze, though it traveled over the audience, never rested definitely on any one face, and Lockwood concluded he recognized nobody.

"Miss Mystery!" Gordon Lockwood said to himself. "I wonder who and what you are. Probably a complex nature, psychic and imaginative. You think it interesting to come up here and pretend to be a mystery. But you're too young and too innocent to be--I'm not so sure of the innocent, though,--and as to youth,--well, I don't believe you're much older than you look any way. And you're confoundedly pretty--beautiful, rather. You've too much in your face to call it merely pretty. I've never seen such possibilities of character. You're either a deep one or your looks belie you."

[59]

Lockwood heard no word of the lecture, nor did he wish to; he had helped in the writing of it, and almost knew it by heart anyway. But he was really intrigued by this mysterious girl, and he determined to get to know her.

He had been told, of course, of the futile attempts of the other boarders to make friends with her, but he had faith in his own attractiveness and in his methods of procedure.

Pinky Payne, too, had told of the interview he had on the bridge. His account of the girl's beauty and charm had first roused Lockwood's interest, and now he was making a study of the whole situation.

Idly he counted the buttons again. There were thirteen across the collar. The vertical rows he could not be sure of as the back of the seat cut off their view.

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"Thirteen," he mused; "an unlucky number. And the poor child looks unlucky. There's a sadness in her eyes that must mean something. Yet there's more than sadness,--there's a hint of cruelty,--a possibility of desperate deeds."

And then Lockwood laughed at himself. To romance thus about a girl to whom he had not said half a dozen sentences in his life! Yet he knew he was not mistaken. All that he had read in Anita Austin's face, he was sure was there. He knew physiognomy, and rarely, if ever, was mistaken in his reading thereof.

After the lecture was over, Miss Austin went home as quickly as possible.

Lockwood would have liked to escort her, but he had to remain to report to Doctor Waring, who might have some orders for him.

There were none, however, and after a short interview with his employer, Gordon Lockwood went home.

As he went softly upstairs to his room in the Adams house, he passed the door of what he knew to be Miss Austin's room. He fancied he heard a stifled sob come from behind that closed door, and instinctively paused to listen a moment.

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Yes, he was not mistaken. Another sob followed, quickly suppressed, but he could have no doubt the girl was crying.

For a moment Lockwood was tempted to go back and ask Mrs. Adams to come and tap at the girl's door.

Then he realized that it was not his affair. If the girl was in sorrow or if she wanted to cry for any reason, it was not his place to send someone to intrude upon her. He went on to his own room, but he sat up for a long time thinking over the strange young woman in the house.

He remembered that she had paid undeviating attention to the lecture, quite evidently following the speaker with attention and interest. He remembered every detail of her appearance, her pretty dark hair showing beneath her little velvet toque,--the absurd buttons on the back of her frock.

"That will do, Gordon, old man," he told himself at last. Better let her alone. She's a siren all right, but you know nothing about her, and you've no reason to try to learn more.

[62]

And then he heard voices in the hall. Low of tone, but angry of inflection.

"She threw it away!" Miss Austin was saying; "I tell you she threw it away!"

"There, there," came Mrs. Adams' placating voice, "what if she did? It was only a newspaper scrap. She didn't know it was of any value."

"But I want it! Nora has no business to throw away my

things! She had no reason to touch it; it was on the dresser--standing up against the mirror frame. What do you suppose she did with it?"

"Never mind it tonight. Tomorrow we will ask her. She's gone to bed."

"But I'm afraid she destroyed it!"

"Probably she did. Don't take on so. What paper was it?"

"The Corinth Gazette."

"The new one?"

"I don't know. The one she brought me this afternoon."

"Well, if she has thrown it away, you can get another copy. What was in it that you want so much?"

"Oh,--nothing special."

"Yes, it was." Mrs. Adams' curiosity was aroused now. "Come, tell me what it was."

[63]

"Well, it was only a picture of Doctor Waring, the man who lectured tonight."

"Such a fuss about that! My goodness! Why, you can get a picture of him anywhere."

"But I want it now."

An obstinate note rang in the young voice. Perhaps Miss Austin spoke louder than she meant to, but at any rate, Lockwood heard most of the conversation, and he now opened his door, and said:

"May I offer a photograph? Would you care to have this, Miss Austin?"

The girl looked at him with a white, angry face.

"How dare you!" she cried; "how dare you eavesdrop and listen to a conversation not meant for your ears? Don't speak to me!"

She drew up her slender figure and looked like a wrathful pixie defying a giant. For Lockwood was a big man, and loomed far above the slight, dainty figure of Miss Mystery.

He smiled good-naturedly as he said, "Now don't get wrathful. I don't mean any harm. But you wanted a picture of Doctor Waring, and I've several of them. You see, I'm his secretary."

"Oh,--are you! His private secretary?"

"Yes--his confidential one,--though he has few confidences. He's a public man and his life is an open book."

[64]

"Oh, it is!" The girl had recovered her poise, and with it her ability to be sarcastic. "Known to all men, I suppose?"

"Known to all men," repeated Lockwood, thinking far more of the girl he was speaking to than of what he was saying.

For, again he had fallen under the spell of her strange personality. He watched her, fascinated, as she reached out for the picture and almost snatched at it in her eagerness.

Mrs. Adams yawned behind her plump hand.

"Now you've got your picture, go to bed, child," she said with a kind, motherly smile. "I'll come in and unhook you, shall I?"

Obediently, and without a word of good night to Lockwood, Anita turned and went into her room, followed by Mrs. Adams. The good lady offered no disinterested service. She wanted to know why Miss Austin wanted that picture so much. But she didn't find out. After being of such help as she could, the landlady found herself pleasantly but definitely dismissed. Outside the door, however, she turned and reopened it. Miss Mystery, unnoticing the intruder, was covering the photograph with many and passionate kisses.

CHAPTER IV A BROKEN TEACUP

"I'll tell her you're here, but I'm noways sure she'll see you."

Mrs. Adams stood, her hand on the doorknob, as she looked doubtfully at Emily Bates and her nephew.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Bates, in astonishment, and Pinky echoed, "Why not, Mrs. Adams?"

"She's queer." Mrs. Adams came back into the room, closed the door, and spoke softly. "That's what she is, Mrs. Bates, queer. I can't make her out. She's been here more'n a week now, and I do say she gets queerer every day. Won't make friends with anybody,--won't speak at all at the table,--never comes and sits with us of an afternoon or evening,--just keeps to herself. Now, that ain't natural for a young girl."

"How old is she?"

"Nobody knows. She looks like nineteen or twenty, but she has the ways of a woman of forty,--as far's having her own way's concerned. Then again, she'll pet the cat or smile up at Mr. Adams like a child. I can't make her out at all. The boarders are all fearfully curious--that's one reason I take her part. They're a snoopy lot, and I make them let her alone."

[66]

"You like her, then?"

"You can't help liking her,--yet she is exasperating. You ask her a question, and she stares at you and walks off. Not really rude,--but just as if you weren't there! Well, I'll tell her you're here, anyway."

It was only by his extraordinary powers of persuasion that Pinky Payne had won his aunt's consent to make this call, and, being Sunday afternoon, the recognized at-home day in Corinth, they had gone to the Adams house unannounced, and asked for Miss Austin.

Upstairs, Mrs. Adams tapped at the girl's door.

It was opened slowly,--it would seem, grudgingly,--and Anita looked out inquiringly.

"Callers for you, Miss Austin," the landlady said, cheerily.

"For me? I know no one."

"Oh, now, you come on down. It's Mrs. Bates, and her nephew, Pinky Payne. They're our best people--"

"What makes you think I want to see your best people?"

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"I don't say you do, but they want to see you,--and--oh, pshaw, now, be a little sociable. It won't hurt you."

"Please say to Mrs. Bates that I have no desire to form new acquaintances, and I beg to be excused from appearing."

"But do you know who she is? She's the lady that's going to marry Doctor Waring, the new President. And Pinckney Payne, her cousin, is a mighty nice boy."

Mrs. Adams thought she detected an expression of wavering on the girl's face, and she followed up her advantage.

"Yes, he's an awfully nice chap and just about your age, I should judge."

"I'll go down," said Miss Austin, briefly, and Mrs. Adams indulged in a sly smile of satisfaction.

"It's Pinky that fetched her," she thought to herself. "Young folks are young folks, the world over."

Triumphantly, Mrs. Adams ushered Anita into the small parlor.

"Mrs. Bates," she said, "and Mr. Payne,--Miss Austin."

Then she left them, for Esther Adams had strict notions of her duties as a boarding-house landlady.

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"Mrs. Bates?" Anita said, going to her and taking her hand.

"Yes, Miss Austin,--I am very glad to know you."

But the words ceased suddenly as Emily Bates looked into the girl's eyes. Such a depth of sorrow was there, such unmistakable tragedy and a hint of fear. What could it all mean? Surely this was a strange girl.

"We have never met before, have we?" Mrs. Bates said,--almost involuntarily, for the girl's gaze was too intent to be given to a stranger.

"No," Anita said, recovering her poise steadily but slowly,--"not that I remember."

"We have," burst forth the irrepressible Pinky. "I say, Miss Austin, please realize that I'm here as well as my more celebrated aunt! Don't you remember the morning I met you on the bridge,--and you were just about to throw yourself over the parapet?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't," and a delightful smile lighted the dark little face. The lips were very scarlet, but it was unmistakably Nature's own red, and as they parted over even and pearly teeth, the smile transformed Miss Austin into a real beauty.

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It disappeared quickly, however, and Pinky Payne thenceforward made it his earnest endeavor to bring it back as often as possible.

"Of course you weren't," agreed Mrs. Bates, "don't pay any attention to that foolish boy."

"I'm a very nice boy, if I am foolish," Pinky declared, but

Miss Austin vaguely ignored him, and kept her intent gaze fixed on Emily Bates.

"We thought perhaps you would go with us over to Doctor Waring's for tea," Mrs. Bates said, after an interval of aimless chat. "It would, I am sure be a pleasant experience for you. Wouldn't you like it?"

"Doctor Waring's?" repeated Anita, her voice low and tense, as if the idea was of more importance than it seemed.

"Yes; I may take you, for the Doctor is my fiance,--we are to be married next month."

"No!" cried the girl, with such a sharp intonation that Mrs. Bates was startled.

"Sure they are," put in Pinky, anxious to cover up any eccentricity on the part of this girl in whom he took an increasing interest. "They're as blissful as two young turtle-doves. Come on, Miss Austin, let's go over there. It's a duck of a house to go to, and jolly good people there. The view from the study window is worth going miles to see. You're an artist,--yes?"

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"I sketch some," was the brief reply.

"All right; if you can find a prettier spot to sketch on this terrestrial globe than the picture by the Waring study window, I'll buy it for you! Toddle up and get your hat."

His gay good nature was infectious and Anita smiled again as she went for her hat and coat.

The walk was but a short one, and when they entered the Waring home they found a cheery group having tea in the pleasant living room.

Doctor Waring was not present and Mrs. Peyton was pouring tea, while Helen and Robert Tyler served it. The capable Ito had always Sunday afternoon for his holiday, and while Nogi, the Japanese second man, was willing enough, his training was incomplete, and his blunders frequent. He was a new servant, and though old Ito had hopes of educating him, Mrs. Peyton was doubtful about it. However, she thought, soon the responsibilities of the Waring menage would be hers no longer, and she resolved to get along with the inexperienced Nogi while she remained.

Mrs. Peyton was very regretful at the coming change of affairs.

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She had looked upon John Waring as a confirmed bachelor, and had not expected he would ever marry. Now, she declared, he was marrying only because he thought it wiser for a College President to have a wife as a part of his domestic outfit.

Helen disagreed with her mother about this. She said Doctor Waring had begun to take a personal interest in the attractive Mrs. Bates before he had any idea of becoming President of

the University.

But it didn't matter. The wedding was imminent, and Mrs. Peyton had received due notice that her services would be no longer needed.

It was a blow to her, and it had made her depressed and disconsolate. Also, a little resentful, even spiteful toward Emily Bates.

The housekeeper greeted Miss Austin with a cold smile, and then disregarded her utterly.

Helen was frankly curious, and met the newcomer with full intention of finding out all about her.

For Helen Peyton had heard of Miss Mystery from her friend and admirer, Robert Tyler, who, however, did not report that the girl had snubbed him more than once.

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One or two other guests were present and, having been told of Mrs. Bates' arrival Doctor Waring and his secretary came from the study and joined the others at tea.

With a welcoming smile, John Waring greeted his fiancée, and then Mrs. Bates turned to the girl she had brought.

"Miss Austin," she said, "let me present Doctor Waring. John,--Miss Anita Austin."

At that very moment Helen Peyton offered Waring a cup of tea, and he was in the act of taking it from her hand when Mrs. Bates made the introduction.

The cup and saucer fell to the floor with a crash, and those nearest saw the Doctor's face blanch suddenly white, and his hand clench on a nearby chair.

But with a sudden, desperate effort he pulled himself together, and gave a little laugh, as he directed Nogi to remove the wrecked teacup.

"Pick up the four corners, and carry it all off at once," he ordered, pointing to the small rug on which the cup had fallen, and Nogi, a little clumsily, obeyed.

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"Pardon the awkwardness, Miss Austin," he said, turning to smile at the girl, but even as he did so, his voice trembled, and he turned hastily away.

"What is it, John?" asked Emily Bates, going to his side. "Are you ill?"

"No,--no, dear; it's--it's all right. That foolish teacup upset my nerves. I'll go off by myself for a few moments."

Somewhat abruptly, he left the room and went back to his study.

Listening intently, Mrs. Bates heard him lock the door on the inside.

"I'm sorry," she said, turning to Anita, "but I know you'll forgive Doctor Waring. He is under so much strain at present, and a foolish accident, like the broken teacup, is enough to give him a nervous shock."

"I know," said the girl, sympathetically. "He must be very busy and absorbed."

She spoke, as she often did, in a perfunctory way, as if not interested in what she was saying. Her glance wandered and she bit her red lower lip, as if nervous herself. Yet she was exceedingly quiet and calm of demeanor, and her graceful attitudes betokened only a courteous if disinterested guest.

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Gordon Lockwood immediately followed his chief and tapped at the locked study door.

"All right, Lockwood," Waring recognized the knock. "I don't want you now. I'll reappear shortly. Go back to the tea room."

Willingly, Lockwood went back, hoping to have a chance for conversation with Miss Mystery.

She was chatting gayly with Helen Peyton, Pinky and Mrs. Tyler.

To Lockwood's surprise, Miss Austin was really gay and merry and quite held her own in the chaff and repartee.

Yet as Lockwood noted her more closely, his quick perception told him her gayety was forced.

The secretary's ability to read human nature was almost uncanny, and he truly believed the girl was making merry only by reason of her firm determination to do so.

Why? He wondered.

Gordon Lockwood was a rare type of man. He was possessed of the most impassive face, the most immobile countenance imaginable. He never allowed himself to show the slightest excitement or even interest. This habit, acquired purposely at first, had grown upon him until it was second nature. He would not admit anything could move him, could stir his poise or disturb his equanimity. He heard the most gratifying or the most exasperating news with equal attention and equal lack of surprise or enthusiasm.

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Yet, though this may sound unattractive, so great was Lockwood's personality, so responsive and receptive his real nature beneath his outer calm, that all who really knew him liked him and trusted him.

Waring depended on him in every respect. He was more than a secretary to his employer. He was counselor and friend as well.

And Waring appreciated this, and rated Lockwood high in his esteem and affection.

Of course, with his insight, Gordon Lockwood could not be blind to the fact that both Mrs. Peyton and her daughter

would be pleased if he could fall a victim to the charms of the fair Helen. Nor could he evade the conviction that Mrs. Peyton herself had entertained hopes of becoming mistress of the Waring home, until the advent of Emily Bates had spoiled her chances.

But these things were merely self-evident facts, and affected in no way the two men concerned.

The Peytons were treated with pleasant regard for both, and that ended the matter so far as they were concerned.

The subject had never been alluded to by Waring or Lockwood, but each understood, and when the Doctor's marriage took place, that would automatically end the Peytons' incumbency.

And now, Gordon Lockwood smiled patronizingly at himself, as he was forced to admit an unreasonable, inexplicable interest in a slip of a girl with a dark, eerie little face and a manner grave and gay to extremes.

For Anita was positively laughing at some foolishness of Pinky Payne's. Still, Lockwood concluded, watching her narrowly, yet unobserved, she was laughing immoderately. She was laughing for some reason other than merriment. It verged on hysterical, he decided, and wondered why.

He joined the group of young people, and in his quiet but effective way, he said:

"You've had enough foolery for the moment, Miss Austin,-- come and talk to me."

And to the girl's amazement, he took her hand and led her to a davenport on the other side of the room.

"There," he said, as he arranged a pillow or two, "is that right?"

"Yes," she said, and lapsed into silence.

She sat, looking off into vacancy, and Lockwood studied her. Then he said, softly:

"It's too bad, isn't it?"

"Yes," Anita sighed, and then suddenly; "what do you mean? What's too bad?"

"Whatever it is that troubles you." The deep blue eyes met her own, but there was no sign of response or acquiescence on the girl's face.

"Good-by," she said, rising quickly, "I must go."

"Oh, no,--don't go," cried Pinky, overhearing. "Why, you've only just come."

"Yes, I must go," said Miss Mystery, decidedly. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Bates, and thank you for bringing me. Good afternoon, Mrs. Peyton."

Including all the others in a general bow of farewell, the strange girl went to the front door, and paused for the attendant Nogi to open it.

Door-tending the assistant butler understood, and he punctiliously waited until Miss Austin had buttoned her gloves and had given an adjusting pat to her veil, after a fleeting glance in the hall mirror.

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Then he opened the door with an obsequious air, and closed it behind her departing figure.

But it was immediately flung open again by Pinky Payne, who ran through it and after the girl.

"Wait a minute, Miss Austin. How fast you walk! I'm going home with you."

"Please not," she said, indifferently, scarcely glancing at him.

"Yep. Gotta. Getting near dusk, and you might be kidnapped. Needn't talk if you don't want to."

"I never want to talk!" was the surprising and crisply spoken retort.

"Well, didn't I say you needn't! Don't get wrathful--don't 'ee, don't 'ee--now,--as my old Scotch nurse used to say."

But Miss Mystery gave him no look, although she allowed him to fall into step beside her, and the two walked rapidly along.

"How'd you like the looks of the Doctor?" Pinky asked, hoping to induce conversation.

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"I scarcely saw him."

"Oh, you saw him,--though you had small chance to get to know him. Perfect old brick, but a little on edge of late. Approaching matrimony, I suppose. Did you notice his ruby stickpin?"

"Yes; it didn't seem to suit him at all."

"No; he's a conservative dresser. But that pin,--it's a famous gem,--was given him by his own class,--I mean his graduating class, but long after they graduated, and he had to promise to wear it once a week, so he usually gets into it on Sundays. It's a corking stone!"

"Yes," said Miss Austin.

On reaching the Adams house, the girl said a quick good-by, and Pinky Payne found himself at liberty to go in and see the other members of the household, or to go home, for Miss Austin disappeared into the hall and up the staircase with the rapidity of a dissolving view.

Young Payne turned away and strolled slowly back to the Waring home, wondering what it was about the disagreeable young woman that made him pay any attention to her at all.

He found her the topic of discussion when he arrived.

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"Of all rude people," Mrs. Peyton declared, "she was certainly the worst!"

"She was!" Helen agreed. "I couldn't make her out at all. And I don't call her pretty, either."

"I do," observed Emily Bates. "I call her very pretty,--and possessed of great charm."

"Charm!" scoffed Helen; "I can't see it."

"She isn't rude," Pinky defended the absent. "I'm sure, Mrs. Peyton, she made her adieux most politely. Why should she have stayed longer? She didn't know any of us,--and, perhaps she doesn't like any of us."

"That's it," Gordon Lockwood stated. "She doesn't like us,--I'm sure of that. Well, why should she, if she doesn't want to?"

"Why shouldn't she?" countered Tyler. "She's so terribly superior,--I can't bear her. She acts as if she owned the earth, yet nobody knows who she is, or anything about her."

"Are we entitled to?" asked Lockwood. "Why should we inquire into her identity or history further than she chooses to enlighten us?"

"Where is Miss Austin?" asked Doctor Waring, returning, quite composed and calm.

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"She went home," informed Mrs. Bates. "Are you all right, John?"

"Oh, yes, dear. I wasn't ill, or anything like that. The awkward accident touched my nerves, and I wanted to run away and hide."

He smiled whimsically, looking like a naughty schoolboy, and Emily Bates took his hand and drew him down to a seat beside her.

"What made you drop it, John?" she said, with a direct look into his eyes.

He hesitated a moment, and his own glance wandered, then he said, "I don't know, Emily; I suppose it was a sudden physical contraction of the muscles of my hand--and I couldn't control it."

Mrs. Bates didn't look satisfied, but she did not pursue the subject. Then the discussion of Anita was resumed.

"How did you like her looks, Doctor Waring?" Helen Peyton asked.

"I scarcely saw her," was the quiet reply. "Did you all admire her?"

"Some of us did." Mrs. Bates answered; "I do, for one. Did

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you ever see her before, John?"

Doctor Waring stared at the question.

"Never," he declared. "How could I have done so?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Mrs. Bates laughed. "I just had a sort of an impression--"

"No, dear, I never saw the girl before in my life," Waring reasserted.

"And you need never want to see her again," Robert Tyler informed him. "She's sulky, silly and supercilious. She's a mystery, they say, but I say she merely wants to be thought a mystery to make a little sensation. I can't abide that sort."

Helen Peyton heard this with undisguised satisfaction, for she had quite enough girls in her life to be jealous and envious of, without adding another to the list. Also, she especially wanted to retain the admiration of Robert Tyler, and was glad to know it was not newly endangered.

"Miss Austin is very beautiful," Gordon Lockwood declared, in his usual way of summing up a discussion and announcing his own opinion as final. "Also, she is a mystery. I live in the same boarding house--"

"So do I," put in Tyler, "and she snubs us both."

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"She hasn't snubbed me," said Lockwood, simply.

"Never mind, Oscar, she will!" returned Tyler, and then laughed immoderately at his own would-be wit.

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CHAPTER V THE TRAGEDY

That same Sunday evening the Waring household dined alone. Oftener than not there were guests, but tonight there were only the two Peytons, Lockwood and John Waring himself.

Ito, the butler, had holiday Sunday afternoon and evening, and Nogi, the second and less experienced man, was trying his best to satisfy the exactions of Mrs. Peyton as to his service at table.

Helen Peyton was in a talkative mood and commented volubly on the caller of the afternoon, Miss Austin.

She met little response, for her mother was absorbed in the training of the Japanese, and the two men seemed indisposed to pursue the subject.

"Don't you think she's odd looking?" Helen asked, of Doctor Waring.

"Odd looking," he repeated; "I don't know. I didn't notice her especially. She seemed to me a rather distinguished type."

"Distinguished is the word," agreed Lockwood. "What about the lecture tomorrow night, Doctor? Will Fessenden take care of it?"

"No; I must lecture myself tomorrow night. I'm sorry, for I'm busy with that book revision. However, I'll look up some data this evening, and I shall be ready for it."

"Of course you will," laughed Mrs. Peyton. "You were never caught unready for anything!"

"But it means some work," Waring added, as he rose from the table.

He went into the study, followed by Lockwood, whose experience made him aware of what books his chief would need, and he began at once to take them from the shelves.

"Right," Waring said, looking over the armful of volumes Lockwood placed on the desk and seating himself in the swivel chair.

"Bring me Marcus Aurelius, too, please, and Martial."

"The classic touch," Lockwood smiled.

"Yes, it adds dignity, if one is a bit shy of material," Waring admitted, good-naturedly. "That's all, Lockwood. You may go, if you like."

"No, sir. I'll stay until eleven or so. I'm pretty busy with the

reports, and, too, some one may call whom I can take care of."

"Good chap you are, Lockwood. I appreciate it. Very well, then, don't bother me unless absolutely necessary."

The secretary left the room and closed the study door behind him.

This door gave on to the end of the cross hall, and the hall ended then, in a roomy window seat, and also held a book rack and table; altogether a comfortable and useful nook, frequently occupied by Gordon Lockwood. The window looked out on the beautiful lake view, as did the great study window, and it also commanded a view of the highroad on which stood, not far away, the Adams boarding-house.

Lockwood lodged there, as being more convenient, but most of his waking hours were spent in his employer's home. A perfect secretary he had proved himself to be, for his prescience amounted almost to clairvoyance, and his imperturbability was exceedingly useful in keeping troublesome people or things away from John Waring.

So, he determined to stay on guard, lest a chance caller should come to disturb the Doctor at his work.

But Lockwood's own work was somewhat neglected. Try as he would to concentrate upon it, he could not entirely dismiss from his mind a certain mysterious little face, whose meaning eluded him. For once, Gordon Lockwood, reader of faces, was baffled. He couldn't classify the girl who was both rude and charming, both cruel and pathetic.

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For cruelty was what this expert read in the knowing eyes and firm little mouth of Miss Mystery. And because of this indubitable element in her nature, he deemed her pathetic. Which shows how much she interested him.

At any rate he thought about her while his work waited. And, then, he thought of other things--for he had troubles of his own, had this supercilious young man. And troubles which galled him the more, that they were sordid--money troubles, in fact. His whole nature revolted at the mere thought of mercenary considerations, but if one is short of funds one must recognize the condition, distasteful though it be.

At nine-thirty, Nogi came with a tray bearing water and glasses. Under the watchful eye of Mrs. Peyton the Japanese tapped at the study door and, in response to the master's bidding, went in with his tray. He left it punctiliously on the table directed, and with his characteristic bow, departed again.

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At ten-thirty, Mrs. Peyton and Helen went upstairs to their rooms, the housekeeper having given Nogi strict and definite instructions, which included his remaining on duty until the master should also retire.

And the night wore on.

A clear, cold night, with a late-rising moon, past the full, but still with its great yellow disk nearly round.

It shone down on what seemed like fairyland, for the sleet storm that had covered the trees with a coating of ice, and had fringed eaves and fences with icicles, had ceased, and left the glittering landscape frozen and sparkling in the still, cold air.

And when, some hours later, the sun rose on the same chill scene its rays made no perceptible impression on the cold and the mercury stayed down at its lowest winter record.

And so even the stolid Japanese Ito, shivered, and his yellow teeth chattered as he knocked at Mrs. Peyton's door in the early dawn of Monday morning.

"What is it?" she cried, springing from her bed to unbolt her door.

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"Grave news, madam," and the Oriental bowed before her.

"What has happened? Tell me, Ito."

"I am not sure, madam--but, the master--"

"Yes, what about Doctor Waring?"

"He is--he is asleep in his study."

"Asleep in his study! Ito, what do you mean?"

"That, madam. His bed is unslept in. His room door ajar. I looked in the study--through from the dining-room--he is there by his desk--"

"Asleep, Ito--you said asleep!"

"Yes--madam--but--I do not know. And Nogi--he is gone."

"Gone! Where to?"

"That also, I do not know. Will madam come and look?"

"No; I will not! I know something has happened! I knew something would happen! Ito, he is not asleep--he is--"

"Don't say it, madam. We do not know."

"Find out! Go in and speak to him."

"But the door is locked. I tried it."

"Locked! The study door locked, and Doctor Waring still in there? How do you know?"

"I peeped from the dining-room window--and I could see him, leaning down on his desk."

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"From the dining-room window! What do you mean?"

"The small little inside windows. Madam knows?"

The study had been added to the Waring house after the house had been built for some years. Wherefore, the dining-room, previously with a lake view from its windows, was cut off from that view. But, the windows, three small, square ones, remained, and so, looked into the new study.

However, the study, a higher ceiling being desired, had its floor sunken six feet or more, which brought the windows far too high to see through from the study side, but one could look through them from the dining-room. The original sashes had been replaced by beautiful stained glass, opaque save for a few tiny transparent bits through which a persistent and curious-minded person might discern some parts of the study.

The stained glass sashes were immovable, and were there more as a decoration than for utility's sake.

And it was through these peepholes that Ito had discovered the presence of Doctor Waring in his study at the unusual hour of seven o'clock in the morning.

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The Japanese, true to his tribal instinct, showed no agitation, and his calm demeanor helped to soothe Mrs. Peyton. But as she hastily dressed herself, she decided upon her course of action.

Her first impulse was to call her daughter, but she concluded not to disturb the girl. Instead, she telephoned to Gordon Lockwood, and asked him to come over as soon as he possibly could.

Old Salt took the message, and transmitted it to the secretary.

"What's the matter over there?" asked Lockwood.

"Don't know. Mrs. Peyton seemed all on edge, 's far's I could judge from her voice--but she only said for you to come over."

"All right, I'll go as soon as I can get dressed."

Once out of doors, Lockwood couldn't fail to be impressed with the beauty of the morning landscape. One of the most beautiful bits of New England scenery, it was newly lovely in its sheath of ice.

Lockwood's hasty steps crunched through the crusted snow, and he hurried over to the Waring house.

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Ito opened the door for him and Mrs. Peyton met him in the hall.

"Something has happened to Doctor Waring," she said at once; "he stayed in the study all night."

"Why? What do you mean?" asked the secretary.

"Just that. His room door is still open, and his bed hasn't been slept in. Also, Ito says he can see him in the study, through the dining-room window. I--I haven't looked--"

"Why don't you go in?"

"The study door is locked."

"Locked! And Doctor Waring still in there?"

"Yes; I think he must have had a stroke--or, something--"

"Nonsense! He's just asleep. He's overworked of late, anyway."

"Well, I'm glad you're here." And Mrs. Peyton looked relieved. "You see about it, Mr. Lockwood, won't you?"

The secretary went first to the study door. He rapped, and then he tried the door, and then rapped again, very loudly. But no response came, and Lockwood returned to the dining-room.

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"Can you see through that glass?" he asked in surprise, noting the thick, leaded mosaic of pieces.

"Yes, sir, through this corner," Ito directed him, and, peering through, Lockwood discerned the figure of John Waring. He sat at his desk, his body fallen slightly forward, and his head drooped on his breast.

"Sound asleep," said Lockwood, but his tone carried no conviction.

Mrs. Peyton well knew the man's disinclination to show any emotion, and in spite of his calm, she was almost certain he shared her own belief that John Waring was not merely asleep.

"We must get to him," Lockwood said, after a moment's pause. "Can you get through one of these windows, Ito, and unbolt the door?"

"No, sir; these windows do not open at all."

"Not open? Why not?"

Save to remark the beauty of their color and design, Lockwood had never before noticed the windows, especially, and was genuinely surprised to discover that they could not be opened at all.

"Of what use are they?" he mused, aloud; "They give very little light."

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"They were outside windows before the study was built," Mrs. Peyton told him, "and when the stained glass was put in, it was merely for decoration and the panes were not made movable."

"Well, we must get in," said Lockwood, almost impatiently. "How shall we do it? You, Ito, must know how."

"No, sir, there is no way. Unless, the long window is unfastened."

The long French window--really a double door--was on the other side of the study, exactly opposite the useless high windows that gave into the dining-room.

To reach it one must go out and around the house.

"It is very bad snow--" Ito shrugged.

"You heathen!" Lockwood exclaimed, scornfully, and himself dashed out at the front door and around to the side of the house.

Mrs. Peyton started to follow, but the secretary bade her go back lest she take cold.

He reached the French window only to find it locked on the inside. He could not see in through its curtained panes, and impulsively he raised his foot and kicked through the glass at a point high enough to allow of his putting in a hand and turning back the latch.

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He went into the room, and after the briefest glance at the man by the desk he went on and unbolted the door to the hall.

Helen had joined her mother and Ito, and the three stood cowering on the threshold.

"He is dead," Gordon Lockwood said, in a calm, unemotional way. "But not by a stroke--he has killed himself."

"How do you know?" Mrs. Peyton cried, her eyes staring and her face white.

"Go away, Helen," Lockwood said; "go back into the living-room, and stay away."

And willingly the girl obeyed.

"Come in, Mrs. Peyton," Lockwood went on. "You must see him, though it will shock you. See, the flow of blood is dreadful. He stabbed or shot himself."

Conquering her aversion to the sight, Mrs. Peyton, from a sense of duty, drew nearer, and as Lockwood had said, the condition of the body was terrible indeed.

Wounded, apparently in the side of the head, Waring had fallen forward in such a way that the actual wound was concealed, but the fact was only too apparent that he had bled to death. The blotter on the desk and many of the furnishings were crimsoned and there was a large and dark stain on the rug.

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"He is positively dead," said Lockwood, in cool, even tone, "so I advise that we do not touch the body but send at once for Doctor Greenfield. He will know best what to do."

"Oh, you cold-blooded wretch!" Mrs. Peyton burst forth, uncontrollably. "Have you no feelings whatever? You stand there like a wooden image, when the best man in the world lies dead before you! And you, Ito!" She turned on the awe-

struck butler. "You're another of those impassive, unnatural creatures! Oh, I hate you both!"

The housekeeper ran from the room, and was soon closeted with her daughter, who, at least showed agitation and grief at the tragedy that had occurred.

The two she had called impassive, stood regarding one another.

"Who did it, Master?" inquired the Japanese, calmly.

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"Who did it!" Lockwood stared at him. "Why, he did it himself, Ito."

Otherwise immovable, the Oriental shook his head in dissension, but Lockwood was already at the telephone, and heeded him not.

Doctor Greenfield consented to come over at once, and Lockwood going to the living room, advised the Peytons to have breakfast, as there was a terrible ordeal ahead of them.

"I'll have some coffee with you, if I may," he went on. "Brace up, Helen, it's pretty awful for you, but you must try to be a brave girl."

A grateful glance thanked him for the kindness, and Lockwood returned quickly to the study.

"What are you doing?" he said sternly, as he saw Ito bending over the dead man.

"Nothing, sir," and the butler straightened up quickly and stood at attention.

"Leave the room, and do not return here without permission. Serve breakfast to the ladies. Where is Nogi?"

"He is gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"That I do not know. Last night he was here. Now he is gone. I know no more."

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"You don't know anything. Get out."

"Yes, sir."

Left to himself, Gordon Lockwood gazed thoughtfully about the room. He did not confine his attention to the bent figure of his late employer, nor even to the desk or its nearby surroundings. He wandered about looking at the windows, the floor, the furniture.

One chair, standing rather near the desk, he looked at intently. An expression of bewilderment came into his face, followed by a look of dismay.

Then, after a cautious almost furtive glance about him, he passed his hand quickly over the plush back of the chair,

rubbing it hard, with a scrubbing motion.

Then he looked about the room even more eagerly and carefully, and finally sat down in the same plush chair, to await the Doctor's arrival.

Helen Peyton came timidly to the door to ask him to come to breakfast.

"No, Helen," he answered. "My place is here until the Doctor comes. Eat your breakfast, child, and try to throw off your distress. It will do you no good to brood over it. You can be of real help if you keep brave and calm, but it will be quite otherwise if you get hysterical."

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He did not see the adoring glance she gave him, nor did he realize how much effect his words had on her subsequent behavior. For Helen Peyton was suffering from shocked nerves, and only Lockwood's advice would have been heeded by her.

She returned to the dining room, saying, quietly, "Gordon will come after a while. Let us eat our breakfast, mother, and try to be brave and strong."

It was not more than fifteen minutes later that Lockwood joined them.

He took his seat at the table and as he shook out his breakfast napkin he said,

"Doctor Greenfield is there now. He says Doctor Waring was stabbed not shot. He says the instrument was round and pointed--not flat, like a knife."

"Who did it?" asked Helen, wide-eyed.

"It must have been suicide, Helen, for, as you know, the room was locked. How could any one get in or out?"

"But how absurd to think of Doctor Waring killing himself!"
The girl looked more amazed than ever.

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"He never killed himself," stated Mrs. Peyton. "Why, you know that man had everything to live for! Just about to be married, just about to be President of the College--full of life and enthusiasm--suicide! Nonsense!"

"I'm only telling you what the doctor said. And you know yourselves, the room was all locked up."

"Yes, that's so. Ito, leave the room!"

Mrs. Peyton spoke sharply to the butler, who was quite evidently drinking in the conversation.

"He must not hear all we say," she observed after the butler had disappeared.

"What's this about Nogi being gone?" asked Lockwood, suddenly.

"Yes, he's gone," Mrs. Peyton said, "and I can't understand it. I didn't think he'd stay, he didn't like the duties at all--you know he's just learning to be a butler--but queer he went off like that. His wages are due for three weeks."

"He'll be back, then," surmised Lockwood. "Now, what shall we do first? The faculty must be notified of this tragedy and also, Mrs. Bates must be told. Which of you two will go and tell Mrs. Bates about it?"

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"You go, Helen," said her mother after a moment's thought. "I ought to be here to look after the house, and anyway, dear, you can do it wisely and gently. Mrs. Bates likes you, and after all, it can be soon told."

"Oh, I can't!" cried Helen, dismayed at the thought of the awful errand.

"Yes, you can," and Lockwood looked at her with a firm kindness. "You want to be of help, don't you Helen? Well, here's one thing you can do that will be of great assistance to your mother and to me. For on us two must fall most of the sad duties of this day."

"But what can I say? What can I tell her?"

"Just tell her the facts as far as you know them yourself. She will guess from your own agitation that something has happened. And then you will tell her, as gently as you can. Be a true woman, Helen, and remember that though your news must break her heart, yet she'd far rather hear it from you than from some less sympathetic messenger."

"I'll do it," said Helen, struggling bravely to keep her tears back.

"That's a good girl. Run right along, now, for ill news flies fast, and rumors may get to her before you reach there."

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"Now about that Nogi," Lockwood said, thoughtfully. "Call Ito back, please, Mrs. Peyton."

"When did you see Nogi last?" the secretary asked of the butler.

"When I came home last night, sir. Sunday is my holiday. I returned about ten, and as I found Nogi with his duties all properly done, and at his post, I went to bed. I found this morning that he had not been in his bed at all. His clothes are gone, and all his belongings. I think he will not come back."

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CHAPTER VI AN INCREDIBLE CASE

When Lockwood returned to the study, he found the Medical Examiner and Doctor Greenfield in consultation.

The Examiner was a large, pompous-looking man, with an air of authority. He looked at Gordon Lockwood from beneath his heavy brows, and demanded, "What do you know of this?"

The younger man resented the tone but he knew the question was justified, and so he replied, respectfully:

"Nothing more than you can see for yourself, sir. I broke in at that glass door, being unable to get in any other way, and I found Doctor Waring--as you see him now."

"There was some other way, though, to get in and out," Examiner Marsh stated.

"Positively not," Lockwood repeated.

"Don't contradict me! I tell you there must have been--for this man was murdered."

"Impossible, sir," and Lockwood's eyes met the Examiner's with a gaze fully as calm and insistent as his own.

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"Very well, then, how came he by his death?"

"I am not the Examiner," the Secretary said, and he folded his arms and leaned against the corner of the great mantelpiece; "but since you ask me, I will repeat that there was no way of ingress into this room last night, and that necessarily, the case is a suicide."

"Just so; and, granting that, will you suggest what may have become of the weapon that was used?"

"What was the weapon?" Lockwood asked, not so disturbed by the question as the Examiner had expected him to be.

"That is what puzzles me," returned Doctor Marsh. "As you can clearly see the wound was inflicted with a sharp instrument. The man was stabbed just below his right ear. The jugular vein was pierced, and he bled to death. A plexus of nerves was pierced also, and this fact doubtless rendered the victim unconscious at once--I mean as soon as the stab wound was made, though he may have been alive for a few minutes thereafter."

Gordon Lockwood gazed imperturbably at the speaker. He had always prided himself on his unshakable calm, and now he exhibited its full possibilities. It annoyed Doctor Marsh, who was accustomed to having his statements accepted

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without question. He took a sudden dislike to this calm young man, who presumed to differ from his deductions.

"I must say," observed the mild-mannered Doctor Greenfield, "I knew Doctor Waring very well, and he was surely the last person I would expect to kill himself. Especially at the present time--when he was looking forward to high honors in the College and also expected to marry a charming lady."

"That isn't the point," exclaimed Doctor Marsh, impatiently. "The point is, if he killed himself, where is the weapon?"

"I admit it isn't in view--and I admit that seems strange," Lockwood agreed, "but it may yet be discovered, while a way of getting into a locked room cannot be found."

"All of which is out of your jurisdiction, young man," and Marsh looked at him severely. "The police will be here soon, and I've no doubt they will learn the truth, whatever it may be. What instrument do you deduce, Doctor Greenfield?"

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"That's hard to say," replied Greenfield, slowly. "You see the aperture it made is a perfectly round hole. Now, most daggers or poniards are flat-bladed. I'm not sure a real weapon is ever round. The hole is much too large to have been made by a hatpin--it is as big as a--a--"

"Slate pencil," suggested the Examiner.

"Yes, or a trifle larger--but not so large as a lead-pencil."

"A lead-pencil could hardly accomplish the deed," Marsh mused. "A slate-pencil might have--but that is a most unusual weapon."

"How about a bill-file?" asked Doctor Greenfield. "I knew of a man killed with one."

"Yes, but where is the bill-file?" asked Marsh. "There's one on the desk, to be sure, but it is full of papers, and shows no sign of having been used for a criminal purpose. If, as Mr. Lockwood insists, this is a suicide case, the victim positively could not have cleaned that file and restored the papers after stabbing himself!"

"He most certainly could not have done that!" declared Doctor Greenfield.

Marsh examined the file carefully. It was an ordinary affair consisting of a steel spike on a bronze standard. It would without doubt make an efficacious implement of murder, but it was difficult to believe it had been used in that way. For the bills and memoranda it contained were, to all appearance, just as they had been thrust on the sharp point--and surely, had they been removed and replaced, they would have shown traces of such moving.

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"Anyway," Doctor Greenfield said, after another examination, "the hole in the side of Waring's neck seems to me to have been made with an instrument slightly larger than that file. Surely, there are round stiletos, are there not?"

"Yes, there are," said Lockwood, "I have seen them."

"Where?" demanded the Examiner, suddenly turning on him.

"Why--I don't know." For once, the Secretary's calm was a trifle shaken. "I should say in museums--or in private collections, perhaps."

"Are you familiar with so many private collections of strange weapons that you can't remember where you have seen a round-shaped blade?"

Examiner Marsh stared hard at him and Lockwood became taciturn again.

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"Exactly that," he conceded. "I have sometime, somewhere, seen a round-bladed stiletto--but I cannot remember where."

"Better brush up your memory," Marsh told him, and then the police arrived.

The local police of Corinth were rather proud of themselves as a whole, and they had reason to be. Under a worthwhile chief the men had been well trained, and were alert, energetic and capable.

Detective Morton, who took this matter in charge, went straight to work in a most business-like way.

He examined the body of John Waring, not as the medical men had done, but merely to find possible clues to the manner of his death.

"What's this ring on his forehead?" he asked, looking at the dead man's face.

"I don't know--that struck me as queer," said Greenfield. "What is it, Doctor Marsh?"

The Examiner peered through his glasses.

"I can't make that out, myself," he confessed, frankly.

Morton looked more closely.

There was a red circle on Waring's forehead, that looked as if it had been put there of some purpose.

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A perfect circle it was, about two inches in diameter, and it was red and sunken into the flesh, as if it might have been done with a branding iron.

"Not a very hot one, though," Morton remarked, after suggesting this, "but surely somebody did it. I'll say it's the sign or seal of the murderer himself. For a dead man couldn't do it, and there's no sense in assuming that Doctor Waring branded himself before committing suicide. Was it done before or after death?" he asked of the two doctors present.

"Before, I should say," Doctor Greenfield opined.

"Yes," concurred Marsh, "but not long before. I'm not sure it

is a brand--such a mark could have been made with, say, a small cup or tumbler."

"But what reason is there in that?" exclaimed Morton. "Even a lunatic murderer wouldn't mark his victim by means of a tumbler rim."

Absorbedly, he picked up a tumbler from the water tray, and fitted it to the red mark on Waring's forehead.

"It doesn't fit exactly," he said, "but it does almost."

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"Rubbish!" said Gordon Lockwood, in his superior way. "Why would any one mark Doctor Waring's face with a tumbler?"

"Yet it has been marked," Morton looked at the secretary sharply. "Can you suggest any explanation--however difficult of belief?"

"No," Lockwood said. "Unless he fell over on some round thing as he died."

"There's nothing here," said Morton, scanning the furnishings of the desk. "The inkstand is closed--and it's a smaller round, anyway. There's no one of these desk fittings that could possibly have made that mark. Therefore, since it was made before death, it must have been done by the murderer."

"Or by the suicide," Lockwood insisted firmly.

Morton, looking at the secretary, decided to keep an eye on this cool chap, who must have some reason for repeating his opinion of suicide.

"Now," the detective said, briskly, "to get to business, I must make inquiries of the family--the household. Suppose I see them in some other room--"

"Yes," agreed Lockwood, with what seemed to Morton suspicious eagerness. Why should the secretary be so obviously pleased to leave the study--though, to be sure, it was a grewsome place just now.

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"Wait a minute," Morton said, "how about robbery? Has anything been missed?"

Lockwood looked surprised.

"I never thought to look," he said; "assuming suicide, of course robbery didn't occur to me." He looked round the room. "Nothing seems to be missing."

"Stay on guard, Higby," the detective said to a policeman, and then asked the secretary where he could interview the housekeeper and the servants.

Lockwood took Morton to the living-room, and there they found Mrs. Bates as well as the two Peytons.

Though her eyes showed traces of tears, Emily Bates was

composed and met the detective with an appealing face.

"Do find the murderer!" she cried; "I don't care how much that room was locked up, I know John Waring never killed himself! Why would he do it? Did ever a man have so much to live for? He couldn't have taken his life!"

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"I'm inclined to agree with you, Mrs. Bates," Morton told her, "yet you must see the difficulties in the way of a murder theory. I'm told the room was inaccessible. Is not that right, Mrs. Peyton?"

Flustered at the sudden question the housekeeper wrung her hands and burst into tears. "Oh, don't ask me," she wailed, "I don't know anything about it!"

"Nothing indicative, perhaps," and Morton spoke more gently, "but at least, tell me all you do know. When did you see Doctor Waring last?"

"At the supper table, last evening."

"Not after supper at all?"

"No; that is, I didn't *see* him. I am training a new servant, and I watched him as he took a tray of water pitcher and glasses into the study, but I didn't look in, nor did I see the doctor."

"Did you hear him?"

"I don't think I heard him speak. I heard a paper rustle, and I knew he was there."

"The servant came right out again?"

"Yes; my attention was all on him. I told him exactly what to do during the evening."

"What were those instructions?"

"To attend to his dining-room duties, putting away the supper dishes and that, and then to stay about, on duty, until Doctor Waring left his study and went to bed."

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"This servant had done these things before?"

"Not these things. He arrived but a few days ago, and Ito the butler, attended to the Doctor. But Sunday afternoon and evening Ito has off, so I began to train Nogi."

"And this Nogi has disappeared?"

"Yes; he is not to be found this morning. Nor has his bed been disturbed."

"Then we may take it he left in the night or early morning. Now the doctors judge that Doctor Waring died about midnight. We must therefore admit the possibility of a connection between the Jap's disappearance and the Doctor's death."

At this suggestion, Gordon Lockwood looked interested.

Whereas he had preserved a stony calm, his face now showed deep attention to the detective's words and he nodded his head in agreement.

"You think so, too, Mr. Lockwood?" Morton asked, in that sudden and often disconcerting way of his.

"I don't say I think so," the secretary returned, quietly, "but I do admit a possibility."

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"It would seem so," Mrs. Peyton put in, "if Nogi could have got into the study. But he couldn't. You know it was locked--impossible, Mr. Lockwood?"

"Yes," Gordon returned. "I heard Doctor Waring lock his door."

"When was that?" asked the detective, sharply.

"I should say about ten o'clock."

"Where were you, then?"

"Sitting in the window nook outside the study door."

"Could you not, then, hear anything that went on in the study?"

"Probably not. The walls and door are thick--they were made so for the doctor's sake--he desired absolute privacy, and freedom from interruption or overhearing. No, I could not know what was taking place in that room--if anything was, at that time."

"At what time did you last see the doctor?"

"After supper I went with him to the study. I looked after his wants, getting him a number of books from the shelves, and selecting from his files such notes or manuscript as he asked for. Those are my duties as secretary."

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"And then?"

"Then he practically dismissed me, saying I might leave for the night. But I remained in the hall window until eleven o'clock."

"Why did you do this?"

"Out of consideration for my employer. He was exceedingly busy and if a caller came, I could probably attend to his wants and spare the doctor an interruption."

"Did any one call?"

"No one."

"Yet you remained until eleven?"

"Yes; I was doing some work of my own, and it was later than I thought, when I decided to go home."

"And you spoke to the Doctor before leaving?"

"As is my custom, I tapped lightly at the door and said good-night. This is my rule, when he is busy, and if he makes no response, or merely murmurs good-night, I know there are no further orders till morning, and I go home."

"Did he respond to your rap last night?"

"I--I cannot say. I heard him murmur a good-night but if he did, it was so low as to be almost inaudible. I thought nothing of it. Since he did not call out. 'Come in, Lockwood,' as he does when he wants me, I paid little attention to the matter."

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"And you reached home--when?"

"Something after eleven. It's but a few steps over to the Adams house, where I live."

"Now," summed up the detective, "here's the case. You, Mr. Lockwood, are not sure Doctor Waring responded to your good-night. You did not see or hear him when Nogi took in the water tray?"

"No; I did not."

"Mrs. Peyton did not see him then, either--though she imagined she heard a paper rustle. Nogi is gone--he cannot be questioned. So, Mr. Lockwood, the last person whom we know definitely to have seen John Waring alive, is yourself when, as you say, you left him at about--er--what time?"

"About half-past eight or nine," said Lockwood, carelessly.

"Yes; you left him and sat in the hall window. Now, we have no positive evidence that he was alive after that."

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"What!" Lockwood stared at him.

"No positive evidence, I say. Nogi went in, but no one knows what Nogi saw in there."

"Come now, Detective Morton," Lockwood said, coldly, "you're romancing. Do you suppose for a minute, that if there had been anything wrong with Doctor Waring when Nogi went in with the water, that he would not have raised an alarm?"

"I suppose that might have easily have been the case. The Japanese are afraid of death. Their one idea is to flee from it. If that Japanese servant had seen his master dead, he would have decamped, just as he did do."

"But Nogi was here when I went home. He handed me my overcoat and hat, quite with his usual calm demeanor."

"You must remember, Mr. Lockwood, we have only your word for that."

Gordon Lockwood looked at the detective.

"I will not pretend to misunderstand your meaning," he said, slowly and with hauteur. "Nor shall I say a word, at present,

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in self defence. Your implication is so absurd, so really ridiculous, there is nothing to be said."

"That's right," and Morton nodded. "Don't say anything until you get counsel. Now, Mrs. Bates--I'm mighty sorry to bother you--but I must ask you a few questions. And if I size you up right, you'll be glad to tell anything you can to help discover the truth. That so?"

"Yes," she returned, "yes--of course, Mr. Morton. But I can't let you seem to suspect Mr. Lockwood of wrong-doing without a protest! Doctor Waring's secretary is most loyal and devoted--of that I am sure."

"Never mind that side of it just now. Tell me this, Mrs. Bates. Who will benefit financially by Doctor Waring's death? To whom is his fortune willed? I take it you must know, as you expected soon to marry him."

"But I don't know," Emily Bates said, a little indignantly. "Nor do I see how it can help you to solve the mystery to get such information as that. You don't suppose anybody killed him for his money, do you?"

"What other motive could there be, Mrs. Bates? Had he enemies?"

"No; well, that is, I suppose he had some acquaintances who were disappointed at his election to the College Presidency. But I'd hardly call them enemies."

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"Why not? Why wouldn't they be enemies? It's my impression that election was hotly contested."

"It was," Mrs. Peyton broke in. "It was, Mr. Morton, and if Doctor Waring was murdered--which I can't see how he was--some of that other faction did it."

"But that's absurd," Gordon Lockwood protested; "there was disappointment among the other faction at the result of the election, but it's incredible that they should kill Doctor Waring for that reason!"

"The whole case is incredible," Morton returned. "What is it, Higby, what have you found?"

"The doctor," Higby said, coming into the living room, "they have just noticed that although there is a pinhole in Doctor Waring's tie, there is no stickpin there. Did he wear one?"

"Of course he did," Mrs. Bates cried. "He had on his ruby pin yesterday."

"He did so," echoed Mrs. Peyton. "That ruby pin was worth an immense sum of money! That's why he was killed, then, robbery!"

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"He certainly wore that pin last night," said Lockwood. "Are you sure it's missing? Hasn't it dropped to the floor?"

"Can't find it," returned Higby, and then all the men went back to the study.

"Anything else missing?" asked Morton, who was deeply chagrined that he hadn't noticed the pin was gone himself.

"How about money, Mr. Lockwood?" said Doctor Marsh.
"Any gone, that you can notice?"

With an uncertain motion, Gordon Lockwood pulled open a small drawer of the desk.

"Yes," he said, "there was five hundred dollars in cash here last night--and now it is not here."

"Better dismiss the suicide theory," said Detective Morton, with a quick look at the secretary.

CHAPTER VII THE VOLUME OF MARTIAL

The Medical Examiner, Doctor Marsh, the Detective Morton, and the Secretary of the late John Waring, Gordon Lockwood, looked at one another.

Without any words having been spoken that might indicate a lack of harmony, there yet was a hint of discord in their attitudes.

Doctor Marsh was sure the case was a suicide.

"You'll find the stiletto somewhere," he shrugged, when held upon that point. "To find the weapon is not my business--but when a man is dead in a locked room, and dead from a wound that could have been self-administered, I can't see a murder situation."

"Nor I," said Lockwood. "Has the waste-basket been searched for the thing that killed him?"

Acting quickly on his own suggestion, Gordon Lockwood dived beneath the great desk.

Like a flash, Morton was after him, and though the detective was not sure, he thought he saw the secretary grasp a bit of crumpled paper and stuff it in his pocket. [122]

"Now, look here, I'll make that search," Morton exclaimed, and almost snatched the waste-basket from the other's grasp.

"Very well," and Lockwood put his hands in his pockets and stood looking on, as Morton fumbled with the scraps.

He emptied the basket on the floor, but there were only a few torn envelopes and memoranda, which were soon proved to be of no indicative value to the searchers.

"I'll save the stuff, anyway," Morton declared, getting a newspaper and wrapping in it the few bits of waste paper.

"Did you take a paper from this basket and put it in your pocket?" the detective suddenly demanded.

Lockwood, without moving, gave Morton a cold stare that was more negative than any words could be, and was, moreover, exceedingly disconcerting.

"Look here, Mr. Morton," he said, "if you suspect me of killing my employer, come out and say so. I know, in story-books, the first one to be suspected is the confidential secretary. So, accuse me, and get it over with." [123]

The very impassivity of Lockwood's face seemed to put him far beyond and above suspicion, and the detective, hastily mumbled,

"Not at all, Mr. Lockwood, not at all. But you don't seem real frank, now, and you must know how important it is that we get all the first hand information we can."

"Of course, and I'm ready to tell all I know. Go on and ask questions."

"Well, then, what do you surmise has become of that five hundred dollars and that ruby stickpin? Doesn't their disappearance rather argue against suicide?"

Lockwood meditated. "Not necessarily. If they have been stolen--"

"Stolen! Of course they've been stolen, since they aren't here! I don't see any safe."

"No, Doctor Waring had no safe. There has been little or no robbery in Corinth, and Doctor Waring rarely kept much money about."

"Five hundred dollars is quite a sum."

"That was for housekeeping purposes. Whenever necessary, I drew for him from the bank that amount, and he kept it in that drawer until it was used up. He always gave Mrs. Peyton cash to pay the servants and some other matters as well as her own salary. His tradesman's bills were paid by check."

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"Was the money in bills?"

"I invariably brought it to him in the same denominations. Two hundred in five dollar bills, two hundred in ones, and a hundred in silver coins."

"In paper rolls?"

"Yes; it may have been injudicious to keep so large a sum in his desk drawer, but he always did. Though, to be sure, he often paid out a great deal of it at once. Sometimes he would cash checks for some one or give some to the poor."

"Drawer never locked?"

"Always locked. But both the Doctor and I carried a key. He was not so suspicious of me as you are, Mr. Morton." The speaker gave his cold smile.

"And as to the ruby pin, Mr. Lockwood?" Morton went on. "Are you willing we should search your effects?"

Lockwood started and for a moment he almost lost his equipoise.

"I am not willing," he said, after an instant's pause, "but if you say it is necessary, I suppose I shall have to submit."

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Morton looked at him uneasily. He had no appearance of a criminal, he looked too proud and haughty to be a culprit, yet might that not be sheer bravado?

Discontinuing the conversation, Morton turned his attention to the table in the window in the hall where the secretary so often sat.

He examined the appurtenances, for the table was furnished almost like a desk, and he picked up a silver penholder.

It was round and smooth and without chasing or marking of any sort, save for the initials G. L.

"This yours?" he asked, and Lockwood nodded assent.

"I ask you, Doctor Marsh," Morton turned to the Examiner, "whether that wound which is in Doctor Waring's neck could have been made with this penholder."

Startled, Marsh took the implement and carefully scrutinized it. Of usual length, it was tapering and ended in a point. The circumference at the larger end was just about the circumference of the wound in question.

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"I must say it could be possible," Marsh replied, his eyes alternately on the penholder and on the dead man. "Yes, it is exactly the size."

"And it is strong enough and sharp enough, and it is round," summed up Morton. "Now, Mr. Lockwood, I make no accusation. I'm no novice, and I know there's a possibility that this might have been the weapon used, and yet it might not have been used by you. But I will say, that I have much to say to you yet, and I advise you not to try to leave town."

"I've no intention of leaving town or of trying to do so," Lockwood asserted, "but," he went on, "would you mind telling me, if I killed the man I was devoted to, how I left the room locked behind me?"

"Those locked rooms bore me," said Morton, "I've read lots of detective stories founded on that plot. Invariably the locked room proves to be vulnerable at some point. I haven't finished examining the doors and windows myself as yet."

"Proceed with your examinations, then," said Lockwood; "if you can find a secret or concealed entrance, it's more than I can do."

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"More than you will do, perhaps, but not necessarily more than you can do."

"Don't forget that vanished Japanese," prompted Marsh. "I've small faith in Orientals, and if there is a way to get in and out secretly, I'd question the Jap before I would Mr. Lockwood here."

"So should I," declared the impassive secretary himself. "And another thing don't forget, Morton, after the Private Secretary, the next person to be suspected is the butler--that is in fiction, which I gather you take as your manual of procedure."

Lockwood's sarcasm drove Morton frantic, but he was too

wise to show his annoyance.

"I shall neglect no possible suspect," he said, with dignity.

And then two men came from the police, who said they were photographers and desired to take some pictures, at the Chief's orders.

Lockwood left them, and went to the living-room where the household and a few neighbors were assembled.

"I'm glad to get out of that detective atmosphere," he said, relaxing in an easy chair. "It's bad enough to have the man dead, without seeing and hearing those cold-blooded police bungling over their 'clues' and 'evidences.'"

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"Tell me a little of the circumstances," asked Mrs. Bates, who was present. "I can bear it from you, Gordon, and I must know."

"Apparently, Doctor Waring was sitting at his desk, reading," Lockwood began, with a faraway look, as if trying to reconstruct the scene. "He must have been reading Martial--for the volume was open on the desk--and the pages were blood-stained."

Mrs. Bates gave a little cry, and shuddered, but Lockwood went unmovably on.

"There were other books about, some open, some closed, but Martial was nearest his hand--quite as if he were reading up to the last moment."

"When the murderer came!" Mrs. Bates breathed softly, her eyes wide with horror.

"It couldn't have been murder," Lockwood said, in a positive way, "you see, Mrs. Bates, it just couldn't have been. That Morton detective is trying to trump up a way the assassin could have entered that locked room--but he can't find any way. I know he can't. So it must have been suicide. Much as we dislike to admit it, it is the only possible theory."

"But they say there was robbery," Mrs. Peyton put in. "The ruby pin is gone and the money from the drawer."

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"But, perhaps," Gordon said, "they were taken by a robber who did not also murder his victim. Nogi, now--"

"Of course!" cried Helen Peyton, quickly; "I see it! I never could abide Nogi, with his stealthy ways. He stole the things, and then he ran away, and later, Doctor Waring killed himself!"

"Because of the robbery!" exclaimed Emily Bates.

"Oh, no!" Lockwood returned. "Certainly not for that. Indeed, the motive is the greatest mystery of all. We could perhaps imagine a motive for murder--whether it was robbery, or some brute of 'the other faction' or some old enemy of whom we know nothing. But for suicide, though I am sure it was that, I can think of no motive whatever."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Bates. "I knew him better than any of you, and I know--I know for a certainty, that he was a happy man. That he looked forward eagerly to his marriage with me, that he was happy in the thought of his Presidency--that he hadn't a real trouble in the world."

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"The other faction," began Mrs. Peyton.

"No," said Mrs. Bates, firmly. "He knew he was doing his duty, upholding the principles and tradition of his College, and the other faction did not worry him. He was too big-minded, too broad-visioned to allow that to trouble him."

"I think you're quite right, Mrs. Bates," Lockwood agreed; "but granting it was suicide, what do you think was the cause?"

"That's just it," she declared; "I don't think it was suicide, I know it couldn't have been. He was too happy, too good, too fine, to do such a thing, even if he had had a reason. And then, what did he do it with?"

"Morton imagines a secret entrance of some sort," said Lockwood. "If there is one, the robber could have come in afterward, and could have carried off the weapon--"

"Hush, Gordon," said Mrs. Bates, sternly. "That's too absurd! If it had been suicide--which it wasn't--why under heaven would a burglar coming in later, take away the weapon?"

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"To save himself," said Lockwood, shortly. "So he wouldn't be suspected of the greater crime."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Peyton, irately; "I never heard such rubbish! And, in the first place, there's no secret entrance to the study. I haven't swept and dusted and vacuum-cleaned that place all these years without knowing that! Yes, and had the room redecorated and refloored, and--Oh, I know every inch of it! There's no possible chance of a secret entrance. Who built it and when and why? Not Doctor Waring. His life's always been an open book. Never has he had any secret errands, any callers whom I didn't know, any matters on which he was silent or uncommunicative. Until his engagement to Mrs. Bates, he hadn't a ripple in his quiet life, and that he told me about as soon as it occurred."

Mrs. Peyton looked squarely at Doctor Waring's fiancée, as if to imply a complete knowledge of the courtship, as well as an intimate knowledge of the Doctor's life.

"That's true," Lockwood said. "He was a man without secrets. He was always willing I should open his mail, and there was never a letter that I did not know about."

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Yet even as he spoke, the man remembered the crumpled paper he had taken from the waste basket, and he felt it in his pocket, though he made no sign.

"Oh, people, is my aunt here?"

It was Pinky Payne, who, all excitement, came running in.

"I've just heard, and I want to see Aunt Emily."

"Here I am, dear. Come here, my boy," and she drew him down beside her on the sofa.

"What do they say, Pinky? What's the talk in town?" Lockwood asked.

"Oh, the place is in a turmoil. There are the wildest reports. Some say it's a--a--that he killed himself, you know, and some say--he didn't. Which was it?"

The boy's lip quivered as he looked about at the silent people.

"Tell him, Gordon," begged Mrs. Bates, and Lockwood told the principal details of the mystery.

"Never a suicide! never!" Pinckney Payne declared. "I know Doc Waring too well for that. Suicide means a coward--and he was never that! No, Aunt Emily, it was murder. Oh, how terrible," and the boy almost lost control of himself. "You were at the bottom of it, Auntie. I'm sure it was either one of those men you refused when you took up with Doc Waring."

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"Why, Pinckney! How dreadful of you! Don't say such a thing!"

"But I know it. If you'd heard Jim Haskell and Philip Leonard talk--I felt sure they meant to kill Doctor Waring."

"Pinky, I forbid you--"

"But it's true, Auntie. And if it's true, you want them shown up, don't you, whichever one it was?"

"Hush, Pinky--hush!"

"Yes, shut up, Pink," Lockwood spoke sternly. "What you suggest is highly improbable, but even if there's suspicion of such a thing, don't babble about it. That's the detective's work."

"Yes--and who's your detective? Old blind-as-a-bat Morton, I'll bet, who can't see a hole through a ladder! I'll show him now--"

"Pinky, I beg of you, hush," said his Aunt, losing her self-control.

"There, Auntie, dear, don't cry. I didn't mean to worry you, but something must be done--"

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"Something will be done, Pinky," Lockwood assured him. "But I tell you right now, if you try to stick your inexperienced finger in this pie, you'll make trouble for us all--from your aunt down. Now, behave yourself. Try to be a man, not a foolish boy."

"That's what I'm doing! And I don't propose to lie down on

the job, either. I tell you, Gordon. I know a lot about detective work--"

"Cut it out, Pink," said Helen, and her words seemed to have an effect on the irrepressible youth. "To read detective stories is one thing--to solve a real, live mystery is quite another."

"That's right, Helen," and Lockwood nodded approval. "Many a person thinks he has a bit of detective instinct, when all he has is curiosity and imagination."

Helen, pleased at this appreciation went on to lay down the law for Pinckney Payne.

She was interrupted by the entrance of Morton who wanted to learn more of the departed Japanese, Nogi.

"What other servants are there?" he asked Mrs. Peyton.

"Only the two Japanese," she replied. "They do all the cooking and serving at table; all the cleaning of the house; and the rest, my daughter and myself attend to."

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"There is a chauffeur?"

"Yes, but the garage is a few blocks away, and the chauffeur lives at home."

"You had Nogi but a short time?"

"Only a few days."

"He came well recommended?"

"He had very fine written recommendations, but from people I did not know, and too far away to inquire of. I took him on trial."

"He seemed honest and faithful?"

"He seemed so--but he was silent and moody--a man one could scarcely understand."

"Can you imagine his killing his master--granting the opportunity?"

Mrs. Peyton considered. "I can imagine it," she said, "but I shouldn't like to say I would suspect him of it. He was soft-footed, and went about with a sort of stealthy manner, but I'm not prepared to say he was wrong in any way."

"Call in Ito, the other one."

Ito came, and stood stolidly by. His impassive demeanor was not unlike that of Gordon Lockwood. Waring had sometimes remarked this in a chaffing way to his secretary.

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"You knew this Nogi?" asked Morton.

"Only since he came here," answered the butler, in perfect English.

"You liked him?"

"Neither yes nor no. He knew little of his duties, but he was willing to learn. He was respectful to me, and friendly enough. I had no reason to dislike him."

Morton didn't seem to get anywhere with this man.

"Well, what do you think of his character?" he said. "Would you say he was capable of killing his employer?"

"All men are capable of crime," said the Jap, in a low, even voice, "but he could not kill Doctor Waring and go away leaving the study locked on the inside."

"Why did he go away, then?"

"That I do not know. It may be he tired of the place here."

"But there was money due him."

"Yes; that makes it hard to understand."

Morton had an uncomfortable feeling that the Japanese was scornful of him, and, worse still, that the other listeners were also.

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"You may go," he told Ito, and then, turning to Lockwood, he said, a little belligerently, "Who is in charge here? To whom do I make my report?"

The question was like a bombshell. All were silent, until Mrs. Bates said, "I suppose I am what might be called in charge. You may report to me."

"To you, ma'am?" Morton was, clearly, surprised.

"Yes; as Doctor Waring's affianced wife, and as his heir, I feel I am in authority. And also, I wish all reports made to me, as I am the one most deeply interested in learning the identity of the murderer."

"If he was murdered," supplemented Mrs. Bates.

And Mrs. Peyton broke in, "You needn't think, Mr. Morton, that there's such a thing as a secret entrance or secret passage in this house, for I know there is not."

"Yet there are other theories, other possibilities," the detective said, his air a little less important than it had been. "Suppose, now, that Nogi had robbed and murdered his master, when he carried in the water tray. Just suppose that, and suppose that, with his Japanese cunning he had devised a way to lock the door behind him--or, say, he had gone out by the glass door, and had locked that behind him."

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"How?" cried Pinckney, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Say he had previously removed a pane of glass--they are not large panes. Say, he reached through, locked the door inside--the French window, I mean--and then had put in the pane, reputtied it, and gone away."

"Gee!" cried the boy. "That could be!"

"Of course it could. And there are other ways it might have been accomplished. Now, we don't say that did happen, but what I want to know is, who is at the head of this investigation?"

"I can't feel that Mrs. Bates is," Mrs. Peyton said, a little sullenly. "She was not married yet, and therefore, as resident housekeeper, I feel rather in authority myself."

"But you say you are the heir, Mrs. Bates?" the detective inquired.

"Perhaps I ought not to have told that," Emily Bates spoke regretfully. "But Doctor Waring's lawyer will tell you, it is true I am the principal heir. It is so designated in his will, which you will find in a secret drawer in his desk."

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"You know where this drawer is?"

"I do."

"Later on, I will ask you to show us. If you are the heir, there is no further question of your authority here."

And Detective Morton left the room.

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CHAPTER VIII WHERE IS NOGI?

Twenty-four hours later Cray, the District Prosecuting Attorney, stood in the Waring study.

The body of the master had been removed, and to Cray's regret he had not seen it before the embalmer's work had removed the red ring on the forehead.

"It was a sign," he said to Morton, who was moodily listening. "A sign like that, left by the murderer, always means revenge."

"You agree to murder, then?" Morton spoke eagerly, glad to have his theory corroborated.

"What else? Look here, Morton; it's got to be either murder or suicide, hasn't it? Yes? Well, then, to which of the two do the greater number of clues point? Sum up. For suicide we have only the locked room argument. I admit I don't know how any one could get in or out of this study, but, as I say, that's the only sign of suicide. Now, for murder we have the absence of the weapon, the robbery of the money and the ruby, and sign of a circle on the dead man's forehead. Wish I'd seen that. It wasn't burnt on, for it disappeared after the embalmers took care of it."

"Oh, no, it wasn't as deep as a burn. More like an impression left by a ring of cold metal or the edge of a glass tumbler."

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"Very strange, and decidedly an important clue. For, here's the queer part. The doctors declare the mark must have been made while the man was alive--now, how can that be explained?"

"Give it up. It's too much for me. But it was too small a circle to have been made by the tumbler on the water tray. I measured it."

"I know; that's why I think it was a sign of revenge. Suppose the motive was revenge and the reason for revenge had something to do with a quarrel in which a small glass or cup figured. That's the idea, though, of course, it needn't have been a glass or cup at all, but something with a ring-like edge. Thus, there was a reason for the sign on the dead man's face."

"I see; though I never could have doped it out like that."

"Oh, I don't say it's exactly what happened, but there must have been something of the sort, for what other hypothesis fits the case at all? We can't imagine Doctor Waring branding his own forehead, and then killing himself, can we?"

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"No; and if he had, where's the branding iron--to call it that--

and where's the dagger?"

"That's right. Now, I propose to treat the matter as a murder case, and look for the criminal first, and then find out how he entered the locked room afterward."

"Pooh! those locked rooms--"

"You're 'way off, Morton, when you sneer at a 'locked room.'"

"It was locked--I mean impenetrably locked. There is no secret passage--of that I'm sure. Your ingenious idea of removing and replacing a whole pane of glass was clever, I grant, but we've seen that not a pane has been lately reputtied. They're all framed in old, dried, hard, and even painted putty."

"I know it. But some other such way might have been devised."

"Can't think of any. We've examined all the window sashes and door frame--oh, well, so far as I can see the room was absolutely unenterable. But, notwithstanding, I'm going to work on a murder basis. Because inexplicable as that seems, there are even more insurmountable difficulties in the way of the suicide theory. Now, I suppose you've had the finger print expert in?"

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"No--I haven't--not yet."

"Good Lord! What kind of a detective are you? Well, get him, and put him to work. What about footprints?"

"Inside the room?"

"Or outside, either. But inside, I suppose has been trampled by a score of people!"

"You can't get footprints on a thick rug," the discomfited Morton grumbled.

"Sometimes you can. And a polished floor will often show marks. What have you done, anyway?"

"There was enough to do, Mr. Cray," Morton flared back at him. "I have been busy every minute since I began, except for a few hours sleep."

"Over twenty-four hours since the alarm was given. You've put in at least twelve, then. What have you done?"

"A lot. I've found out, to my own satisfaction, that--if it is a murder--Gordon Lockwood knows all about it."

"You suspect him?"

"Either of the deed, or of guilty knowledge."

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"And his motive?"

"Money. That young man is over head and ears in debt."

"To whom?"

"To shops--jewelers, florists, restaurants. All the debts a gay young blade would incur."

"You amaze me, Morton. Lockwood isn't that sort."

"Isn't he? You're deceived, like every one else, by that icy calm of his. He stares haughtily, and appears above and beyond ordinary mortals, but he's deep. That's what he is, deep."

"Well, how did he do it?"

"With his penholder. A smooth, sharp silver penholder. And he took the money and the ruby."

"And how did he leave the room?"

"Don't ask me that! That's his secret. But, I've a notion he was in cahoots with that new Jap, the one that vamoosed. I theorize," Morton waxed important as he noted the Prosecutor's attention, "that the Jap had some grudge against Waring, and it was he who branded his forehead, and who contrived a way to leave the room locked behind him. Why, I read a story the other day, where a key was turned from the other side of a door by means of a slender steel bar through the key handle, and a string from the bar, leading down and under the door. Once outside, the murderer pulled the string, the bar turned the key in the lock, the bar fell to the floor and he dragged it under the door by means of the string."

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"Ingenious! but it implies a door raised from the floor."

"I know. And this one isn't. But it all goes to prove that there can be some way--some diabolically clever way to do the trick. And the Japanese are diabolically clever. And so is Lockwood. And if the two worked together they could accomplish wonders. Then Lockwood with his wooden face, could disarm suspicion. The Jap, let us say, couldn't, so Lockwood packed him off."

"Interesting--but all theory."

"To be proved or disproved, then."

"Yes, but meantime, you are losing time on more practical investigation. Let's look outside for footprints--I mean for any one coming or going from this side entrance."

"The French window? Nobody comes or goes that way in this weather; the path isn't even shoveled. That's used mostly in summer time."

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"Nevertheless," Cray opened the window door, "somebody has been here."

Morton looked out and stared hard. How had he come to neglect a matter of such importance. There were two plainly visible lines of footprints in the snow, one quite obviously coming toward the house and one going away from it.

"There's your murderer," said Cray, quietly.

"Oh, no," but Morton wriggled uneasily. "It couldn't be. No murderer is going to walk through crusted snow, to and from the scene of his crime, leaving definite footprints like those!"

"That's no argument. He might have come here with no intent of crime, and afterward, might have been so beside himself he couldn't plan safely."

"Oh, well, get what you can from them," said Morton, pettishly. "I suppose you deduce a tall man, with blue eyes and two teeth missing."

"Don't be cheap, Morton. And, on the contrary, I deduce a small man. They are small footprints, and close together. The Japanese are small men, Morton."

"Well, these prints are more than twenty-four hours old, and they're not clear enough to incriminate anybody."

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"They haven't changed an iota from the moment they were made. This cold snap has kept everything frozen solid. Look at the frost still on the panes, the icicles still on the window sashes, the ice coating still on all the trees and branches. In fact it has grown steadily colder since night before last, and until it begins to thaw we have these footprints as intact evidence. I will have them photographed."

"They are small," Morton agreed after further examination. "And as you say, too close together for an ordinary sized man. It looks like the Jap."

"Beginning to wake up, are you? You've sure been asleep at the switch, Morton."

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Cray. But I ought to have help. I've had all I could tackle, making the necessary first inquiries, and getting the facts straightened out."

"That business could have waited better than these other things. Now, there's Crimmins, the lawyer arriving. Let's interview him. But not in the study. Keep that clear."

They met Crimmins in the hall, and took him to the living room.

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The matter of the will was immediately taken up, and Mrs. Bates was asked to tell which desk drawer it was in.

Accompanied by the lawyer and the secretary, Mrs. Bates indicated the drawer, and Lockwood opened it with his key.

There were a few papers in it but no will.

Nor could further search disclose any such document.

"Who took it?" said Mrs. Bates, blankly.

But no one could answer her. The others came thronging in, Cray's urgent requests to keep out of the study being entirely ignored.

"I knew it," declared Mrs. Peyton, triumphantly. "Now, I guess you won't be so cocky, Emily Bates--you or your 'authority!'"

Mrs. Bates looked at her. "I am the heir," she said haughtily. "I assert that--but I cannot prove it until the will is found. It isn't in your possession, Mr. Crimmins?"

"No; Doctor Waring preferred to keep it himself. I cannot understand its disappearance."

"A lot of paper has been burned in this fireplace," said Helen Peyton who was poking the ashes around.

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Morton hastened to look, for it seemed to him as if everybody was stealing his thunder.

"Nothing that can be identified," he said, carelessly.

"No?" demurred Cray. "At any rate, it looks as if some legal papers were destroyed. This bit of ash is quite evidently the remainder of several sheets folded together."

But no definite knowledge could be gained outside the fact that much paper had been burned there. As no fire had been made since the discovery of the tragedy, it stood to reason the papers were burned by Doctor Waring himself or by his midnight intruder, if there were such a one.

"Well," Cray demanded of the lawyer, "if no will can be found, then who inherits the property of Doctor Waring? And is it considerable?"

"Yes; Doctor Waring had quite a fortune," Crimmins told them. "As to an heir, he has a distant cousin--a second cousin, who, I suppose would be the legal inheritor, in the absence of any will. But, I know he made a will in Mrs. Bates' favor, and it included a few minor legacies to the members of this household and some neighbors."

"I know it," Mrs. Bates said. "I'm perfectly familiar with all the bequests. But where is the will? It must be found! It can't have been burnt!"

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"We've no right to assume that those paper ashes are the will, but I confess I fear it," Crimmins announced, his face drawn with anxiety. "I should be deeply sorry, if it is so, for the cousin I speak of is a ne'er do well young man, and not at all a favorite of his late relative. His name is Maurice Trask and he lives in St. Louis. I suppose he must be notified in any case."

"Yes," said Cray, "that must be done. But, please, all go out of this room, for the finger print experts and the photographers are coming soon, and every moment you people stay here, you help to cloud or destroy possible clues."

Impressed by his sternness, they filed out and gathered in the living-room.

There they found a neighbor, Saltonstall Adams, awaiting them.

"I came over," he said, with scant preliminary greetings, "because I have something to tell. You in charge, Mr. Cray?"

"Yes, Salt, what do you know?"

"This. I was awake late, night before last--the night Doc Waring died, and I was looking out my window, and it was pretty light, with the snow and the moonlight and all, and I saw a man--a small man, creeping along sly like. And I watched him, he went along past my house down toward the railroad tracks. He had a bag with him, and a bundle beside. I wouldn't have noticed him probably, but he skulked along so and seemed so fearful that somebody'd see him."

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"Nogi?" said Gordon Lockwood, calmly, looking at the speaker.

"Don't say it was, and don't say it wasn't. But I went down to the station and the station master told me that that Jap of Waring's went off on the milk train."

"He did!" cried Morton, "what time does that train go through?"

"'Bout half past four. The fellow passed my house 'long about half past twelve, I should say--though I didn't look, and he must have waited around the station all that time till the milk train came along."

"Is the station master sure it was Nogi?" asked Mrs. Peyton, greatly excited.

"Said he was, and there's mighty few Japs in Corinth, all told."

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"Of course it was Nogi," said Lockwood, and Morton snapped him up with, "Why are you so sure?"

Lockwood treated the detective to one of his most disconcerting stares, and said,

"You, a detective, and ask such a simple question! Why, since there are but a very few Japanese in this town, and since one of them left on that milk train, and since all the rest are accounted for, and only Nogi is missing--it doesn't seem to me to require superhuman intelligence to infer that it was Nogi who took his departure."

"And who was mixed up in the murder of Doctor John Waring?" cried Morton, exasperated beyond all caution by the ironic tone of Lockwood. "And, unless you can explain some matters, sir, you may be considered mixed in the same despicable deed!"

"What matters?" Gordon Lockwood asked, but his already pale face turned a shade whiter.

"First, sir, you have a large number of unpaid bills in your possession."

The secretary's face was no longer white. The angry blood flew to it, and he fairly clenched his hands in an effort to preserve his usual calm, nor even then, could he entirely succeed.

"What if I have?" he cried, "and how do you know? You've searched my rooms!"

"Certainly," said Morton, "I warned you I should do so."

"But, in my absence!"

"The law is not always over ceremonious."

"Now, Mr. Lockwood," Cray began, "don't get excited."

Gordon Lockwood almost laughed. For him to be told not to get excited! He, who never allowed himself to be even slightly ruffled or perturbed! This would never do!

"I'm not excited, Mr. Cray," he said, and he wasn't, now, "but I am annoyed that my private papers should be searched without my knowledge. Surely I might--"

"Never mind the amenities of life, Mr. Lockwood," Cray went on; "your effects were searched on the authority of a police warrant. Now, regarding these bills--"

"I have nothing to say. A man has a right to his unpaid bills."

"But he has not a right to steal five hundred dollars in cash and a ruby pin, in order to be able to pay them!" This from Morton, and instead of replying to the detective in any way, Lockwood ignored the speech utterly, quite as if he had not heard it, and addressed Cray.

"Was anything further found to incriminate me?" he asked.

"Was there anything else to be found?" said Cray, catching at the implied suggestion.

"That's for your sleuths to say. I know of nothing."

"Well, there's your round, sharp penholder. And the fact that you had keys to all desk drawers. Also the fact that only you and the Jap are known to have been in that part of the house that night. These things were not learned from the search of your rooms; but your pecuniary embarrassment, which was discovered, all go together to make a web of circumstances that call for investigation."

"Don't beat about the bush!" exclaimed Lockwood, his lips set, and his eyes staring coldly at the District Attorney. "I'd far rather be accused definitely than have it hinted that I am responsible for this crime."

"But we haven't sufficient evidence, Mr. Lockwood, to accuse you definitely, that's why we must question you."

"Sufficient! You haven't any evidence at all!"

"Oh, we have some." With a turn of his head, Cray

summoned a man who stood at the hall door.

The man came in, and handed Cray a report.

"H'm," the attorney scanned the paper. "We find, Mr. Lockwood, fresh finger prints on the chair which stood near Doctor Waring's desk. Facing the Doctor's chair, in fact, as if some one had sat there talking to him. Did you?"

"No; I never sat down and talked to him. I was always waiting on him in the matter of bringing books or taking letters for transcription, and in any case, I either stood, or sat at my desk, never in that chair you speak of."

"This man will take the finger prints of all present," the Attorney directed, and one and all submitted to the process.

Old Salt Adams was greatly interested.

"But you can't get the prints of Friend Jap," he said. "Like's not, he'd be of more importance than all of us put together. Me, now, I can't see where I come in."

Yet, after time enough had passed to complete the processes, it was learned that the finger prints on the shiny black wood of the chair under discussion were indubitably those of Gordon Lockwood. Also, there were other prints there, slightly smaller, that Cray immediately assumed to be those of the missing Japanese.

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Lockwood looked more supercilious than usual, if that were possible.

"How can you identify the prints of a man not here?" he asked with an incredulous look.

"Supposition not identification," said Cray, gravely. "But we're narrowing these things down, and we may yet get identification."

"Get the Jap back," advised Old Salt Adams. "That's your next move, Cray. Get him, check up his finger prints and all that, and best of all get his confession. There's your work cut out for you."

"Find Doctor Waring's will," Mrs. Bates lamented. "There's your work cut out for you. I am not unduly mercenary, but when I know how anxious Doctor Waring was that I should inherit his estate, when I realize what it meant that he drew this will before our marriage, so urgent was his desire that all should be mine, you must understand that I do not willingly forego it all in favor of a distant relative, whom, Mr. Crimmins tells us, Doctor Waring did not care for at all."

"I should say not!" and Crimmins looked positive. "It will be an outrage if Mr. Trask inherits the estate already willed to Mrs. Bates. I stand ready to do all I can to see justice done in this matter."

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"But justice, as you see it, can only result from finding the will," said Cray.

"Yes," agreed Crimmins, "and the whole matter opens up a new train of thought. May not the distant cousin, this man Trask be in some way responsible for the destruction of the will and the death of the decedent?"

"It is a new way to look," Cray agreed, with a thoughtful air; "and we will look that way, you rest assured. We will at once get in touch with this cousin, you will give us his address, and learn where he was and how employed on the night of Doctor Waring's death. We still have to face the problem of an outsider's exit from a locked room, and though it seems more explicable in the case of a member of the household, yet a new suspect brings fresh conditions, and perhaps fresh evidence, which may show us where to look. At any rate, we must speedily find Mr. Maurice Trask."

CHAPTER IX A LOVE LETTER

"Look here, Esther," said old Salt to his wife, "that's a mighty curious case over at Waring's."

"How you do talk! I should think that to you and me, knowing and loving John Waring as we did, you'd have no doings with the curious part of it! As for me, I don't care who killed him. He's dead, isn't he? It can't bring him back to life to hang his murderer. And to my mind it's heathenish--all this detecting and evidencing--or whatever they call it. Whom do they suspect now? You?"

Adams looked at his wife with a mild reproach. "Woman all over! No sense of justice, no righteous indignation. Don't you know the murderer must be found and punished? That is if it was a murder."

"Of course it was! That blessed man never killed himself! And he about to marry Emily Bates--a lady, if ever there was one!"

"Well, now you listen to me, Esther, and whatever you do, don't go babbling about this. They say the Jap, who vamoosed from the Waring house, made a line of foot tracks in the snow. The snow's crusted over, you know, and those footprints are about as clear now as when they were made."

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"Huh! footprints! Corinth is full of footprints."

"Yes, but these--listen, Esther--these lead straight from the Waring house, over to this house. And back again."

"How can they?" Mrs. Adams looked mystified. "That Japanese didn't come over here."

"You can't say that he didn't. And, look here, Esther, where's Miss Austin? What's she doing?"

"Miss Austin? She's in her room. She hasn't been quite up to the mark for a day or two, and she's had her meals upstairs."

"What's the matter with her?"

"A slight cold, she says. I can't make her out, Salt. What's she doing here, anyway?"

"Don't pester her, my dear. How you and Bascom do love to pick at that girl! Why does she have to do anything?"

"It's queer, though. And I hate a mystery."

"Well, she is one--I grant you that. Have you told her about Doctor Waring? Though I daresay it wouldn't interest her."

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"And I daresay it would! Why, that girl cut his picture out of

the paper, and she did have one stuck up on her dresser, till I looked at it sort of sharp like, and she put it away."

"Poor child! Can't even have a newspaper cutting, if she wants it! You're a tyrant, Esther! Don't you ever try to boss me like that!"

The good-natured smile that passed between them, proved the unlikelihood of this, and Old Salt went on. "I wish you'd tell her, wife, about the tragedy. Seems like she ought to know."

Mrs. Adams stared at him. "I'll tell her, as a matter of course, but I don't know why you're so anxious about it."

"Good morning, Miss Austin," the good lady said, soon after, "better this morning?"

"Yes, thank you. My cold is almost entirely well."

The girl was sitting by the window, in an easy chair. She had on a Japanese dressing gown of quilted silk, embroidered with chrysanthemums, and was listlessly gazing out across the snow covered field opposite.

The Adams house was on the outskirts of the little town, and separated by a wide field from the Waring place.

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"Heard the news about Doctor Waring?" Mrs. Adams said, in a casual tone, but watching the girl closely.

"No; what is it?"

The words were simple, and the voice steady, but Miss Austin's hands clutched the arms of the chair, and her face turned perfectly white.

"Why, what ails you? You don't know the man, do you?"

"I--I heard him lecture, you know. Tell me--what is the--the news?"

"He's dead." Mrs. Adams spoke bluntly on purpose. She had felt in a vague way, that this strange person, this Miss Mystery, had more interest in Doctor Waring than she admitted, and the landlady was determined to find out.

To her own satisfaction she did find out, for the girl almost fainted. She didn't quite lose consciousness, indeed it was not so much a faint as such a desperate effort to regain her poise, that it unnerved her.

"Now, now, Miss Austin, why do you take it so hard? He was a stranger to you, wasn't he?"

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"Yes--yes, of course he was."

"Why are you so disturbed then?"

"He was such a--such a fine man--" the girl's stifled sobs impeded her speech.

"Well, somebody killed him."

At that, Miss Austin seemed turned to stone. "Killed him!" she whispered, in accent of terror.

"Yes--or else he killed himself--they don't feel sure." Mrs. Adams, once embarked on the narrative, told all she knew of the circumstances, and in the exciting recital, almost forgot to watch the effect of the tale on her listener.

But this effect was not entirely unnoted. At the partly open door, Old Salt Adams, stood, eavesdropping, but with a kindly, anxious look on his face, that boded no ill to any one.

And he noticed that the girl's attention was wandering. She was pitifully white, her face drawn and scared, and soon she exclaimed, with a burst of nervous fury, "Stop! please stop! Leave the room, won't you?"

It was not a command but an agonized entreaty. Mrs. Adams fairly jumped, and alarmed as well as offended, she rose and started for the door, only to meet her husband entering.

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"Go downstairs, Esther," he said, gravely, "I want to speak to Miss Austin myself."

Staring at one then at the other, and utterly routed by this unbelievable turn of affairs, Mrs. Adams went.

Old Salt closed the room door, and turned to the trembling girl.

"Miss Austin," he said kindly, "I like you, I want to help you--but I must ask you to explain yourself a little. The people in my house call you Miss Mystery. Why are you here? Why are you in Corinth at all?"

For a moment the girl seemed about to respond to his kindly, gentle attitude and address. Then, something stayed her, and she let her lovely face harden to a stony blankness, as she replied, "It is a bit intrusive, but I've no reason not to tell. I am an art student, and I came here to paint New England winter scenery."

"Have you done much?"

"I haven't been here quite a week yet--and I've been picking out available bits--and for two days I've had a cold."

"How did you get cold?" The voice was kind but it had a definite note, as if desirous of an accurate answer.

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Miss Mystery looked at him.

"How does any one get cold?" she said, trying to smile; "perhaps sitting in a draught--perhaps by means of a germ. It is almost well now."

"Perhaps by walking in the snow, and getting one's feet wet," Mr. Adams suggested, and the girl turned frightened eyes on him.

"Don't," she breathed; "Mr. Adams, don't!" Her voice was piteous her eyes implored him to stop torturing her.

"Why, what's the harm in my saying that?" he went on, inexorably. "You wouldn't go anywhere that you wouldn't want known--would you--Miss Mystery?"

He spoke the last two words in a meaning way, and the great dark eyes faced him with the look of a stag at bay.

Then again, by a desperate effort the girl recovered herself, and said, coldly,

"Please speak plainly, Mr. Adams. Is there a special meaning in your words?"

"There is, Miss Austin. Perhaps I have no right to ask you why--but I do ask you if you went over to Doctor Waring's house, late in the evening--night before last?"

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"Sunday night, do you mean?"

Miss Mystery controlled her voice, but her hands were clenched and her foot tapped the floor in her stifled excitement.

"Yes, Sunday night."

"No; of course I did not go over there at night. I was there in the afternoon, with Mrs. Bates and Mr. Payne."

"I know that. And you then met Doctor Waring for the first time?"

"For the first time," she spoke with downcast face.

"The first time in your life?"

"The first time in my life," but if ever a statement carried its own denial that one seemed to. The long dark lashes fell on the white cheeks. The pale lips quivered, and if Anita Austin had been uttering deepest perjury she could have shown no more convincing evidence of falsehood.

Yet old Salt looked at her benevolently. She was so young, so small, so alone--and so mysterious.

"I can't make you out," he shook his head. "But I'm for you, Miss Austin. That is," he hedged, "unless I find out something definite against you. I feel I ought to tell you, that you've enemies--yes," as the girl looked up surprised, "you've made enemies in this house. Small wonder--the way you've acted! Now, why can't you be chummy and sociable like?"

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"Chummy? Sociable? With whom?"

"With all the boarders. There's young Lockwood now--and there's young Tyler--"

"Yes, yes, I know. I will--Mr. Adams--I will try to be more sociable. Now--as to--to Doctor Waring--why did he kill

himself?"

Old Salt eyed her narrowly. "We don't know that he did," he began.

"But Mrs. Adams told me all the details"--she shuddered, "and if that room he was in was so securely locked that they had to break in, how could it be the work of--of another?"

"Well, Miss Austin, as they found a bad wound in the man's neck, just under his right ear, a wound that produced instant unconsciousness and almost instant death, and as no weapon of any sort could be found in the room, how could it have been suicide?"

"Which would you rather think it?" the strange girl asked, looking gravely at him.

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"Well, to me--I'm an old-fashioned chap--suicide always suggests cowardice, and Doc Waring was no coward, that I'll swear!"

"No, he was not--"

"How do you know?"

Miss Mystery started at the sudden question.

"I heard him lecture, you know," she returned; "and, too, I saw him in his home--Sunday afternoon--and he seemed a fine man--a fine man."

"Well, Miss Austin," Old Salt rose to go, "I'm free to confess you're a mystery to me. I consider myself a fair judge of men--yes, and of women, but when a slip of a girl like you acts so strange, I can't make it out. Now, I happen to know--"

He paused at the panic-stricken look on her face, and lamely concluded;

"Never mind--I won't tell."

With which cryptic remark he went away.

"Well, what you been saying to her?" demanded his aggrieved spouse, as the Adamses met in their own little sitting-room.

"Why, nothing," Old Salt replied, and his troubled eyes looked at her pleadingly. "I don't think she's wrong, Esther."

"Well, I do. And maybe a whole lot wrong. Why, Saltonstall, Miss Bascom says she *saw* Miss Austin traipsing across the field late Sunday night."

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"She didn't! I don't believe a word of it! She's a meddling old maid--a snooping busybody!"

"There, now, you carry on like that because you're afraid we will discover something wrong about Miss Mystery."

"Look here, Esther," Adams spoke sternly; "you remember

she's a young girl, without anybody to stand up for her, hereabouts. Now, you know what a bobbery a few words can kick up. And we don't want that poor child's name touched by a breath of idle gossip that isn't true. I don't believe Liza Bascom saw her out on Sunday night! I don't even believe she thought she did!"

"Well, I believe it. Liza Bascom's no fool--"

"She's worse, she's a knave! And she hates little Austin, and she'd say anything, true or false, to harm the girl."

"But, Salt, she says she saw Miss Austin, all in her fur coat and cap going cross lots to the Waring house Sunday evening--late."

"Can she prove it?"

"I don't know about that. But she saw her."

"How does she know it was Miss Austin? It might have been somebody who looked like her."

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"You know those footprints."

"The Jap's?"

"You can't say they're the Jap's. Miss Bascom says they're the Austin girl's."

"Esther!" Old Saltonstall Adams rose in his wrath, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself to let that girl's name get into the Waring matter at all. Even if she did go out Sunday night, if Miss Bascom did see her, you keep still about it. If that girl's wrong, it'll be discovered without our help. If she isn't, we must not be the ones to bring her into notice."

"She couldn't be--be implicated--could she, Salt?"

"No!" he thundered. "Esther, you astound me. That Bascom woman has turned your brain. She's a viper, that's what *she* is!"

He stormed out of the room, and getting into his great coat, tramped down to the village.

Gordon Lockwood was in his room. This was much to the annoyance of Callie, the impatient chambermaid, who wanted to get her work done.

Lockwood was himself impatient to get over to the Waring house, for he had much to do with the mass of incoming mail and the necessary interviews with reporters and other callers.

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Yet he tarried, in his pleasant bedroom at Mrs. Adams', his door securely locked, and his own attitude one of stupefaction.

For the hundredth time he reread the crumpled paper that he had taken from the study waste-basket under the very nose of Detective Morton.

Had that sleuth been a little more worthy of his profession he never would have allowed the bare-faced theft.

And now that Lockwood had it he scarce knew what to do with it.

And truly it was an astonishing missive.

For it read thus:

My darling Anita:

At the first glance of your brown eyes this afternoon, love was born in my heart. Life is worth living--with you in the world! And yet--

That was all. The unfinished letter had been crumpled into a ball and thrown in the basket. Had another been started--and completed? Had Anita Austin received it--and was that why she kept to her room for two days? Was she a--he hated the word! a vamp? Had she secretly become acquainted with John Waring during her presence in Corinth, and had so charmed him that he wrote to her thus? Or, had they known each other before? What a mystery!

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There was not the slightest doubt of the writing. Lockwood knew it as well as he knew his own. And on top of all the other scraps in the waste-basket it must have been the last missive the dead man wrote--or, rather the last he threw away.

This meant he had been writing it on the Sunday evening. Then, Lockwood reasoned, knowing the routine, if he had written another, which he completed and addressed, it would, in natural course, have been put with the letters for the mail, and would have been posted by Ito that next morning.

What an oversight, never to have asked Ito about that matter.

It was an inviolable custom for the butler to take all letters laid on a certain small table, and put them in the pillar box, early in the morning.

Had Ito done this? It must be inquired into.

But far more absorbing was the actual letter before him. How could it be possible that John Waring, the dignified scholar, the confirmed bachelor, should have loved this mystery girl?

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Yet, even as he formulated the question, Gordon Lockwood knew the answer. He knew that from his own point of view it would not be impossible or even difficult for any man with two eyes in his head to love that fascinating, enchanting personality.

And as he pondered, he knew that he loved her himself. Yes, had loved her almost from the moment he first saw her. Certainly from the time he sat behind her at the lecture, and counted the queer little ball fringes in the back of her dainty gown.

Those fringes! Lockwood gave a groan as a sudden thought came to him.

He jumped up, and with a determined air, set about burning the inexplicable letter that John Waring had written and thrown away.

In the empty fireplace of the old-fashioned room, Lockwood touched a match to the sheet and burned it to an ash.

Then he went over to the Waring house.

It was an hour or so later that Callie reported to Miss Bascom.

"Queer goin's on," the girl said, rolling her eyes at her eager listener, "Mr. Lockwood, now, he burnt some papers, and Miss Austin, too, she burnt some papers."

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"What's queer about that?" snapped Miss Bascom, who had hoped for something more sensational.

"Well, it's sorta strange they're both bummin' paper at the same time. And both so sly about it. Mr. Lockwood he kep' lookin' back at the fireplace as he went outa the door, and Miss Austin, she jumped like she was shot, when I come in suddenly an' found her stoopin' over the fireplace. An' too, Miss Bascom, whatever else she burnt, she burnt that picture she had of Doctor Waring."

"Did she have his picture?"

"Yep, one Mr. Lockwood guv her, after Nora carried off the one she cut out of a paper."

"What in the world did that girl want of Doctor Waring's picture?"

"I dunno, ma'am. What they call hero-worship, I guess. Just like I've got some several pictures of Harold Massinger, that man who plays Caveman in the Movies! My, but he's handsome!"

"And so Miss Austin burned a photograph of John Waring?"

"Yes, ma'am. And you know they're kinda hard to burn. Anyways, she was a kneelin' by the fireplace an' the picture was smokin' like everything."

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"'Lemme help you miss,' I says, as polite as could be--"and watcha think, she snatched back, and says, 'You lemme lone. Get outahere!' or somethin' like that. Oh, she was mad all right."

"She has a high temper, hasn't she?"

"Yes'm, there's no denyin' she has. Then again, she's sweet as pie, and nice an' gentle. She's a queer makeup, I will say."

"There, Callie, that will do; don't gossip," and Miss Bascom, sure she had learned all the maid had to tell, went downstairs

to tell it to Mrs. Adams.

The landlady seemed less receptive than usual, being still mindful of her husband's admonitions. But Miss Bascom's story of the burnt photograph roused her curiosity to highest pitch.

"There's something queer about that girl," Mrs. Adams opined, and the other more than agreed.

"Let's go up and talk to her," Miss Bascom suggested, and after a moment's hesitation, Mrs. Adams went.

The landlady tapped lightly at the door, but there was no response.

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"Go right in," the other whispered, and go in they did.

Miss Mystery lay on the couch, her eyes closed, her cheeks still wet with tears. She did not move, and after a moment's glance to assure herself the girl was sound asleep, Miss Bascom audaciously opened one of the small top drawers of the dresser.

Mrs. Adams gasped, and frantically made motions of remonstrance, but swiftly fingering among the veils and handkerchiefs, Miss Bascom drew out a large roll of bills, held by an elastic band.

Anita Austin's eyes flew open, and after one staring glance at the intrusive woman, she jumped from the couch and flew at her like a small but very active tiger.

"How dare you!" she cried, snatching the money from Miss Bascom's hand, even as that elated person was unrolling it.

And from inside the roll, down on the painted floor, fell a ruby stickpin.

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CHAPTER X WHO IS MISS MYSTERY?

Mrs. Adams fell limply into a chair, her round eyes staring in horror.

Miss Bascom had taken upon herself the role of dictator and with an accusing finger pointed at Miss Mystery she said:

"What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," replied Anita Austin, coolly, "except to insist that you leave my room."

"Leave your room, indeed! I am only too glad to! And I know where to go, too."

Miss Bascom's determined air as she strode out of the door gave a hint of her desperate intention and within five minutes she was out on the road toward the village.

Mrs. Adams, still almost speechless with surprise and dismay, looked sorrowfully at Anita. Something in the girl's face stayed the kindly words the woman meant to say, and, instead, she broke out:

"You must leave this house! What are you anyway? A thief--and a murderer?"

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"Oh! Don't!" Anita put up her hand as if to ward off a physical blow.

Then, as if the cruel words had stung her to a quickened sense of her own danger, she cried, piteously:

"Oh, Mrs. Adams, help me--protect me--won't you? I don't know what to do--I'm all alone--so alone--"

She sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

Esther Adams was uncertain what course to pursue. Should she protect this guilty girl, of whom she really knew nothing, or should she dismiss her at once from her house, in the interests of her other boarders, who must be considered?

Surely, her first duty was to the others--the people she had known so long, and who looked upon her house as a home and a safeguard.

"You must go," she said, though her voice wavered as she saw the pathetic face Anita raised to look at her.

"Oh, no! Don't send me away! Where could I go? Even the Inn people wouldn't take me!"

"Of course they wouldn't! Go home! Haven't you a home? Who are you, anyway? But I don't care who you are--you

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must get out of this house today--this morning. Do you hear?"

Meantime Miss Bascom, on her virtuous errand had trotted quickly to the office of the Prosecuting District Attorney.

There, however, she was told that Mr. Cray was over at the Waring house, and she concluded to go there. Nor did this displease her. She longed to be in the limelight, and the tale she had to tell would surely give her the right to be there.

Mrs. Peyton received her coldly, for the two were not friends.

"I came to see Mr. Cray," Miss Bascom announced, "on important business."

"Oh, very well," the housekeeper returned, "take a seat and I'll ask him to see you."

Miss Bascom waited in the living-room, secure in her knowledge of the importance of her news.

The attorney welcomed her cordially for he saw at once that she brought news of value.

And, expressed in emphatic language, and interspersed with many and unfavorable personal opinions, Liza Bascom told of the incident of finding the money and the ruby in Miss Austin's bureau drawer.

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"Astonishing!" commented Cray. "Who is she?"

"Nobody knows, that's the queer part. We call her Miss Mystery."

"Where did she come from?"

"Nobody knows. She just appeared."

"Don't the Adamses know?"

"No, they don't."

"A young girl, you say?"

"She appears to be very young--but you never can tell with those sly things. I daresay she makes herself look several years younger than she really is."

"Did she know Doctor Waring?"

"How do I know? She came over to this house late Sunday night--for I saw her--"

"Good heavens! Are you sure?"

"Well, it was fairly light, with the moon, and the snow all over the ground, you know, and I saw her, all wrapped up in her fur coat, sneaking away from the house--"

"How late?"

"Oh--after everybody had gone upstairs and the lights were

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all out at the Adamses."

"You saw her come back?"

"No; I didn't think much about it at the time--she's a crazy piece anyway--and--"

"What do you mean by a crazy piece?"

"Why, she's queer--not like other folks. She won't have anything to do with any of us over there--"

"That doesn't make her out crazy."

Miss Bascom shrugged impatiently. "I don't mean insane or demented. I only mean sly and secretive. She never speaks to anybody at the table--and though she makes eyes at Gordon Lockwood, she snubs Mr. Tyler, who is just as good a young man. They both admire her--anybody can see that, but she treats them like the dust under her feet."

"Not an adventuress, then?"

"I don't know. But I do know she's a thief--or how did she get that money and the ruby?"

"Perhaps Doctor Waring gave them to her?"

"Then she is a wrong one! Why should he give a strange girl such things?"

"If he was in love with her--"

"Now, look here, Mr. Cray, do try to show ordinary common sense! Doctor Waring was about to marry Mrs. Bates, a sweet, dear woman, of suitable age. Is he going to have a little flibbertigibbet coming to see him late at night, for any romantic reasons?"

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Cray hesitated to speak his mind, but he ruminated that he had heard of such things, in the course of his life. Miss Bascom, he thought was an unsophisticated old maid, but there was certainly a new condition to be investigated, and the case of Miss Anita Austin must be carefully considered.

"Now, Miss Bascom," he said, diplomatically, "I'll have to ask you to keep this whole matter quiet for a time. You must see that we can't work successfully if we take the whole town into our confidence. Or even this entire household."

"Don't you try to bamboozle me, Stephen Cray! I know your sort. You want to keep this matter quiet because you want to get that girl off scotfree! I know you men! Just because she has a pair of big, dark eyes and a slim little shape you are ready to hide her guilt and let her off easy. I won't have it! That girl stole those things, or else she got them from poor John Waring in a way no decent woman would--"

"What are you talking about, Liza Bascom?"

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Mrs. Peyton appeared in the doorway, and though she asked the question, it was fairly evident that she knew the answer,

and had been listening.

"Yes," she went on, "I've been listening at the door, and I'm glad I did. First of all, I won't have Doctor Waring's name traduced, and next, if there's a girl implicated in the matter, the whole truth about her has got to come out! I know the girl, she was here Sunday afternoon, and a more brazen-faced, bold-mannered chit, I never want to see!"

"She was here?" asked the bewildered Cray. "You know her?"

"I know all I want to know of her," Mrs. Peyton declared. "Yes, she was here--came over with Emily Bates and Pinky. Wouldn't condescend to be really one of us, but just acted offish and seemed to me about half-witted."

"Don't be silly," put in Miss Bascom. "That's the last thing to say of her! Whatever that girl may be she's got all her wits about her! I can see that for myself."

"Was Doctor Waring present when Miss Austin was here?" asked Cray, thinking hard.

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"Yes," replied Mrs. Peyton, "and that's a strange thing. When he first saw her--unexpectedly, you know--he dropped his teacup."

"Because of the meeting?" asked Cray.

"I don't know," Mrs. Peyton said. "He declared afterward he had never seen the girl before--but--oh--I can't believe she came back here that night!"

"Of course she didn't," Cray said. "How could she get in, unless someone admitted her."

"There's the French window in the study," Mrs. Peyton suggested, uncertainly. "Doctor Waring could have let her in that way--"

"Well, he didn't!" Miss Bascom declared. "Land! I've known John Waring all my life, and he's not the kind of man that had anything to do with flirtatious young women."

Of a truth, Liza Bascom had known Waring for many years and had spent a number of them in desperate efforts to persuade him to renounce bachelorhood in her favor.

Yet her words carried little weight with Attorney Cray, who fancied that he knew men better than the insistent spinster possibly could.

"Miss Bascom," he said, after further thought, "and Mrs. Peyton, too, I'm going to ask you--I'm going to instruct you to keep this matter quiet until after the funeral of Doctor Waring. That occurs tomorrow, and I want a day or so to look into this thing quietly. We would gain nothing by rushing matters. I will see Miss Austin, of course, and rest assured, if she is guilty of any wrong doing, she shall not escape. But it is a serious matter to accuse a suspect without

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giving any chance for explanation--"

"There's no explanation of that ruby pin and all that money, that is not incriminating to that girl!" Miss Bascom exclaimed.

"Nevertheless, I am in authority, and I forbid you to discuss the connection of Miss Austin with the case at all."

Cray knew how to impress belligerent women, and he even added a hint of their making trouble for themselves unless they obeyed his explicit command.

He returned to the study, where Gordon Lockwood was going over the morning's mail.

The secretary was a busy man, for his late employer had had a number of diversified interests and every mail brought letters, catalogues, circulars and newspapers that required careful attention. John Waring had been a collector of rare books, and other curios, and was interested in several literary enterprises.

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To many of these correspondents Lockwood could merely send a statement of the Doctor's death. But others involved careful and wise judgment, and Lockwood conscientiously discharged his duties.

The study had been put in order, and all traces of the tragedy had been removed. The books that had been on the desk, including the blood-stained copy of Martial, Lockwood had, after consideration, restored to their places on the shelves.

Although it gave him a thrill of horror, Lockwood had nerved himself to appropriate Waring's desk, for it meant far greater convenience in his work.

He sat there as Cray entered, and raised his impassive face to note the attorney's excitement.

"By Jove, Lockwood," Cray, exclaimed, as he closed the door behind him, "there's a new way to look, which seems to promise to straighten out a lot of things. Do you know that little piece over at your boarding house, named Austin?"

"I know her slightly. What about her?"

From Lockwood's voice no one would suspect that his heart was pounding desperately.

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"Well, she was here late Sunday night! What do you know about that?"

"I don't know anything about it," returned Lockwood, coldly, "and I don't believe it. For if she had been here I should have known about it. I was here myself, just outside the study door, until eleven. You don't mean later than that, do you?"

"Dunno. The Bascom spinster tells the story--"

"Then don't bank on it. With all due deference to Miss Bascom, I know she is not always a reliable source of

information."

"But she says she saw the girl coming over here late that night--"

"She didn't! It's not true! What under the heavens would she have come for?"

"What does any girl visit a man for?" Cray gave an unpleasant wink, and Lockwood with difficulty controlled an insane desire to spring at his throat. "And, beside, she is even now in possession of the missing five hundred dollars and the ruby pin."

"I don't believe it!"

"See here, Mr. Lockwood, it doesn't matter to anybody whether you believe these things or not. Miss Austin has the valuables, and I'm going over there now to inquire how she got them. Also, it just occurs to me that those small footprints leading across the field, are directed toward the Adams house, and may have been made by a woman as likely as by our hypothetical small-footed man."

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"Those are Nogi's footprints."

"How do you know?"

"Common sense. Even if Miss Austin did come over here for any reason she would have come by the street, not across the snowy field."

"Apparently she chose the field. So I'm going to ask her why."

"All right, Cray, but you must admit you're illogical, inconsequent and inconsistent. You think I killed Doctor Waring, because I have a sharp, round penholder, and owe some large bills. Then, because a gossiping old maid comes over here and babbles, you fly off at a tangent and accuse an unprotected girl of absurd and unbelievable crime."

"Oho! Interested in the siren yourself, eh?"

"No; I'm not--if you mean Miss Austin. That is, not personally."

Few men could have told this lie with such a convincing manner but Lockwood's phlegmatic calm stood him now in good stead, and his air of obvious indifference carried conviction.

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"But," he went on, "I am sorry for her. It's nobody's business who or what she is, yet those women over at the Adams house are one and all possessed to find out something against her. I only want to advise you, Cray, if you talk to anybody over there, get Old Salt himself. He's more fair minded than his wife or the other women."

"Men are apt to be--where a pretty girl is concerned," said Cray, drily, and Lockwood ground his teeth in rage, as the Attorney went away.

His demand to see Miss Austin was listened to by Old Salt Adams, who had seen him coming and opened the door for him.

"Well, Cray," said the old man, as he ushered him into the sitting room and shut the door. "I know what you're after--and I just want to say, go slow. That's all--go slow."

"All right, Salt. Will you send Miss Austin down here--also, I must interview her alone."

"Yes--I understand. But don't be led away now, by circumstantial evidence. You know yourself, it isn't always dependable."

"Go along, Salt, don't try to teach me my business. Have you talked to the girl?"

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"Not a word. My wife has, but she didn't learn much."

Adams went away, and in a few moments Anita Austin came into the room.

A first glance showed Cray's experienced eye that the girl was what he called a siren.

Her oval, olive face was sad and sweet. The pale cheeks were not touched up with artificial color, and the scarlet lips were, even to his close scrutiny, also devoid of applied art. She wore a smart little gown of black taffeta, with crisp, chic frills of finely plaited white organdie.

Whether this was meant as mourning wear or not, Cray could not determine.

The frock was fashionably short, showing thin silk stockings and black suede ties.

But Miss Mystery seemed wholly unconscious of her clothes, and her great dark eyes were full of wondering inquiry as she looked at the attorney, and then a little diffidently offered a greeting hand.

The little brown paw touched Cray's with a pathetic, hopeful clasp, and he looked up quickly to find himself looking into a pair of hopeful eyes, that, without a word, expressed confidence and trust.

He shrugged his shoulders a trifle and secretly admonished himself to keep a tight rein on his sympathy.

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Then relinquishing the lingering hand, he sat down opposite the chair she had chosen to occupy.

"Miss Austin," he began, and paused, for the first time in his life uncertain what tack to take.

"Yes," she said, as the pause grew longer, and her soft, cultured voice helped him not at all.

How could he say to this lovely small person that he suspected her of wrong doing?

"Go on, Mr. Cray," she directed him, meantime looking at him with eyes full of a haunting fear, "what is it?"

Cray had a sudden, insane feeling that he would give all he was worth for the pleasure of removing that look of fear, then commanding himself to behave, he said,

"I am sorry, Miss Austin, but I must ask you some unpleasant questions."

"That's what I'm here for," she said, with the ghost of a smile on her curved red lips, and, smoothing down her taffeta lap, she demurely clasped her sensitive little hands and waited.

Those hands bothered Cray. Though they lay quietly, he felt that at his speech they would flutter in anxiety--even in fear, and he was loath to disturb them.

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Because of this hesitancy, he plunged in more abruptly than he meant to do.

"Where do you come from, Miss Austin?"

"New York City," she said, a brighter look coming to her face, as if she thought the ordeal would not be so terrible after all.

"What address there?"

"One West Sixty-seventh Street."

"You told some one else the Hotel Plaza."

"Yes; I have lived at both addresses. Why?"

The "why" was disconcerting. After all, Cray thought, he was not a census taker.

He gave up getting past history, and said, briefly,

"Were you at Doctor Waring's house Sunday evening?"

"Not evening," she returned, looking thoughtful. "I was there Sunday afternoon."

"And went back again, late in the evening--to see Doctor Waring, in his study."

"Why do you say that?" she asked quietly, but a small red spot showed on either olive cheek.

"Because I must. How well do you--did you know the Doctor?"

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"Know Doctor Waring? Not at all. I never saw him in my life until I came here to Corinth."

"You are sure of that?"

"Almost sure--oh, why, yes--that is, I am quite sure."

"Yet you went over there Sunday evening, and came back to this house in possession of Doctor Waring's valuable pin, and a large sum of money."

"Oh, no, Mr. Cray, I didn't do any such thing!"

"Then can you explain your possession of those articles?"

"You mean, I suppose the roll of bills that Miss Bascom put into my top bureau drawer?"

"Miss Bascom put in the drawer!"

"Yes--that is, she must have done so, or--how else could they have been found there? You know yourself, now, don't you, Mr. Cray, that I'm not a burglar--or a bandit or a sneak thief? You know I never went in to Doctor Waring's study and took those things! So, as I say, isn't it the only plausible theory, that Miss Bascom, who found the valuables so readily, first put them there herself?"

CHAPTER XI THE SPINSTER'S EVIDENCE

"That matter can easily be settled," Cray said, and going to the door he asked Mrs. Adams to send Miss Bascom to them.

With an important air the spinster entered the room.

Holding herself very erect and even drawing aside her skirts as she passed Miss Austin, she took a seat on the other side of the room.

"Now, Miss Bascom," Cray began at once, "what made you think of looking in this lady's bureau drawer for that money?"

"I didn't look for it, Mr. Cray. I merely felt that she had done wrong and I thought perhaps some evidence would be hidden away in her room. And a top drawer is the place a woman oftenest hides things."

Cray gave a short laugh. "Rather clever of you, I admit. But Miss Austin says she did not put that money there, herself--that it was a plant."

"A plant?" Miss Bascom looked puzzled at the word.

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"Yes; she thinks some in-disposed person put it there to implicate her, falsely."

"Oh, I see. Well, Mr. Cray, let her say who did it, and who could have got that money to do it with."

The hard old face took on a look that was almost malignant in its accusation, and little Anita Austin gave a low cry as she saw it, and hid her face in her hands.

"Take her away," she moaned, "oh, take that woman away."

"You hear her," Miss Bascom went on, unrelentingly. "Now, Mr. Cray, I'm a bit of a detective myself, and while you've been down here talking to Miss Mystery, I've been searching her room more carefully, and I've found a few more things, of which I should like to tell you."

Cray was nonplused. His sympathies were all with the poor little girl, who, clinging to the arms of her chair, seemed about to go to pieces, nervously, but was bravely holding on to herself. Yet, if the Bascom woman was telling the truth, he must beware of the "poor little girl."

"I'm not sure you're within your rights, Miss Bascom," he began, but he was interrupted with:

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"Rights! Indeed, the rights of this matter are above your jurisdiction! The blood of John Waring calls from the

ground! I am the instrument of justice that has been chosen by an over-ruling Providence to discover the criminal. She sits before you! That girl--that mysterious wicked girl is both thief and murderess!"

"Oh, no!" Anita cried, putting up her arm as if to ward off a physical blow.

Then she suddenly became quiet--almost rigid in her composure.

"That is a grave accusation, Miss Bascom," she said, "you must prove it or retract it."

Cray stared at the girl in astonishment. Her agonized cry had been human, feminine, natural--but this sudden change to stony calm, to icy hauteur was amazing--and, to his mind, incriminating.

Miss Bascom, however, was in no way daunted.

"Prove it I will!" she said, sternly. "In another drawer, Mr. Cray, I found the rolls of silver coin--exactly one hundred dollars worth--that we have been told were in the desk with the roll of bills. The ruby pin, you know about. And so, these thefts are proved. Now, as to the murder--I admit, it seems impossible that a girl should commit the awful crime--but I do say that I have found the weapon, with which it was done, hidden in Miss Austin's room."

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Again that short, low cry--more like a hurt animal than a human being. And then, Anita Austin, the girl of mystery fell back into the depths of her chair, and closed her eyes.

"You needn't faint--or pretend to," admonished Miss Bascom, brutally; "you're caught red-handed, and you know it, and you may as well give up."

"I didn't--I didn't--" came in low moans, but the girl's bravery had deserted her. Limp and despairing, she turned her great eyes toward Cray for help.

With an effort, he looked away from her pleading face, and said:

"What is the weapon? Where did you find it?"

"It is a stiletto--an embroidery stiletto--and I found it tucked down in the crevice between the back and seat of a stuffed chair in Miss Austin's room. Did you put it there?"

She turned on the girl and fired the question at her with intentional suddenness, and though Anita uttered a scared, "No," it was a palpable untruth.

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"She did," Miss Bascom went on. "You can see for yourself, Mr. Cray, she is lying."

"But even if she is, Miss Bascom, I must ask you to cease torturing her! I can't stand for such cruelty!"

Cray's manhood revolted at the methods of the older woman

who was causing such anguish to the poor child she accused.

"You are not a legal inquisitor, Miss Bascom," he went on; "it is for me to establish the truth or falsity of your suspicions."

"Yes, you! You're like all the other men! If a girl is pretty and alluring, you would believe her statement that white is black!"

"I believe no statements that cannot be proved to my satisfaction. Miss Austin, do you own an embroidery stiletto?"

"Yes," was the hesitating answer, and the dark eyes swept him a beseeching glance that made Miss Bascom fairly snort with scorn.

"Where is it?"

"I--I fear I must admit that it is just where Miss Bascom says it is--unless she has removed it. Tell me, Mr. Cray," and Miss Mystery suddenly resumed her most independent air, "must I submit to this? I thought accused people were entitled to a--oh, you know, counsel--a lawyer, or somebody to take care of them."

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"Wait, Miss Austin. You're not accused yet--that is, not by legal authority."

"Oh, am I not? Then--" and she gave Miss Bascom a glance of unutterable scorn, "I have nothing to say."

"Nothing to say!" the spinster almost shrieked. "Nothing to say! Of course she hasn't! She kills a man, takes his valuables, and then declares she has nothing to say."

"Now, now, Miss Bascom, be careful! Why did you put your stiletto in such a place, Miss Austin?"

"I don't know."

The dark eyes gave him a gaze of childlike innocence, and Cray couldn't decide whether he was looking at a deep-dyed criminal or a helpless victim of unjust suspicion.

"And where did you get the money and the ruby pin?"

"I don't know--I mean I don't know how they got in my room. This lady says she found them there--that's all I know about them."

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An indifferent shrug of the slim shoulders seemed to imply that was all Miss Mystery cared, either, and Cray asked:

"Then, if the valuables--the pin and the money are not yours, you are, of course, ready to relinquish possession of them."

"Of course I am not! Since I am accused of stealing them, I propose to retain possession until that accusation is proved or disproved! Perhaps Miss Bascom wishes to take them

herself."

"You know, Miss Austin," Mr. Cray spoke very gravely, "you are making a mistake in treating this matter flippantly. You are in danger--real danger, and you must be careful what you say. Do you want a lawyer?"

"I don't know," the girl suddenly looked helpless. "Do you think I ought to have one?"

"Have you funds?"

"Yes. I am not a rich girl--but, neither am I poor. However, I think I shall ask advice of some one before I decide upon any course."

"Of whom? Perhaps no one can advise you better than I can."

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"What is your advice, Mr. Cray?"

The sweet face looked at him hopefully, the curved red lips quivered a little as the speaker added, "I am very alone."

Again Miss Bascom sniffed. Unattractive, herself, she resented with a sort of angry jealousy the appealing effect this girl had on men. She knew intuitively that Cray would sympathize with and pity the lonely girl.

"My advice is, Miss Austin, first, that you dispel this mystery that seems to surround you. Tell frankly who you are, what is your errand in Corinth, how you came into possession of Doctor Waring's ruby, and why you hid your stiletto, if it is merely one of your sewing implements."

Miss Mystery hesitated a moment, and then said, quietly:

"Your advice is good, Mr. Cray. But, unfortunately, I cannot follow it. However, I am willing to state, upon oath, that I did not kill Doctor Waring with that stiletto."

"I'm afraid your oath will be doubted," Miss Bascom intervened sharply. "And, too, Mr. Cray, even if this girl did not strike the fatal blow, she well knows who did! She is in league with the Japanese, Nogi. That I am sure of!"

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"Nogi!" exclaimed Anita.

"Yes, Nogi," Miss Bascom went on, positively. "You came here only a day or two after he did. You have a Japanese kimono, and several Japanese ornaments adorn your room. You went to the Waring house that night, Nogi let you in and out, and though the Japanese doubtless committed the murder, you stole the money and the ruby, and then, your partner in crime departed for parts unknown."

Miss Bascom sat back in her chair with a look of triumph on her plain, gaunt face.

Clearly, she was rejoiced at her denunciation of the girl before her, and pleased at the irrefutable theory she had promulgated.

"And how did Miss Austin or the Jap, either, leave the room locked on the inside?" propounded Cray, his own opinions already swayed by the arraignment.

"That," said Miss Bascom, with an air of finality, "I can't explain definitely, but I am sure it was an example of Japanese jugglery. When you remember the tales of how the Japanese can do seemingly impossible tricks, can swallow swords and get out of locked handcuffs, it is quite within the realm of possibility that one could lock a door behind him, and give it the appearance of having been locked from the inside."

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Now, Cray had already concluded that the door had been cleverly locked by some one, but he hadn't before thought of the cleverness of the Japanese.

He rose almost abruptly, and said, "I must look into some of these matters. Miss Austin, you need not attempt to leave town, for you will not be able to do so."

"I most certainly shall not attempt to leave--as you express it--if I am asked not to. But, I may say, that when I am entirely at liberty to do so, I propose to go away from Corinth."

Her dignity gave no effect of a person afraid or alarmed for her own safety, merely a courteous recognition of Cray's attitude and a frank statement of her own intentions.

Miss Bascom sniffed and said:

"Don't worry, Mr. Cray. I'll see to it, that this young woman does not succeed in evading justice, if she tries to do so."

At which Miss Mystery gave her a smile that was so patronizing, even amused, that the spinster was more irate than ever.

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"And, now, Miss Austin," the attorney said, "I'll take your finger prints, please, as they may be useful in proving what you did not do."

He smiled a little as the girl readily enough gave her consent to the procedure.

"And," he went on, more gravely, "I will ask you for one of your shoes--one that you wore on Sunday."

Surprised into a glance of dismay, Miss Mystery rose without a word and went upstairs for the shoe.

She returned with the dainty, pretty thing, and merely observed, "I'd like to have it back, when you are through with it."

Putting the shoe in his overcoat pocket, Cray went away.

"Miss Bascom," Anita said, turning to her enemy, "may you never want a friend as much as I do now."

"The nerve of her!" Liza Bascom muttered to herself, as Miss Mystery went upstairs to her own room.

"There's a very deep mystery here!" Cray soliloquized, as he returned to the Waring house. "But I'm getting light on it."

Cray was far from lacking in ingenuity, and he proceeded at once to compare the finger prints he had of Anita Austin with the prints on the small black-framed chair that had been found drawn up to the desk chair of John Waring.

They were identical and Cray mused over the fact.

"That girl was here that night," he decided; "there's no gainsaying that." He called the butler to him.

"Ito," he began, "did you let in any one late Sunday night--after you came home?"

"No, sir," the imperturbable Jap declared, thinking the question foolish, as all the inquirers knew the details of his Sunday evening movements.

"Do you remember seeing this chair, Monday morning?"

"Distinctly. I saw Mr. Lockwood smoothing its back."

"Smoothing its back! What do you mean?"

"I looked through from the dining-room window, to see if Mr. Lockwood was coming to breakfast, and I perceived him carefully smoothing the plush of the little chair, sir."

Cray meditated. Here was a point of evidence. Lockwood was not the sort to absent-mindedly paw over a chair back. He was doing it on purpose. For what reason? What reason could be, save to erase some evidence?

Cray examined the chair. It had a frame of shiny black wood, while seat and back were covered with a dark plush of a fine soft quality.

Cray drew his fingers across the back. They left a distinct trail of furrows in the fabric.

Ito, watching, nodded his head, gravely.

"Not finger-prints," Cray said to himself--"but, maybe finger-marks. Whose?"

"You surely saw this, Ito?"

"Yes, sir; and Miss Peyton also saw. She was then in the doorway, asking Mr. Lockwood to come to breakfast."

Cray went in search of Helen and put the question to her suddenly.

"What was Gordon Lockwood doing, when you went to call him to breakfast, Monday morning?"

"He was--I don't remember."

"Speak the truth--or it may be mean trouble for you and him, too."

"He was--he seemed to be dusting off a chair."

"With a duster?"

"No; just passing over it with his hand."

"That isn't dusting it."

"Well, I don't know what you call it! Perhaps he was merely pushing the chair into place."

"It isn't his custom to push the study furniture into place. He was erasing indicative marks on that plush chair back--that's what he was doing."

"Absurd!" Helen cried; "what marks could there be?"

"I don't know. Come and let us see."

Cray took Helen to the study, and asked her to sit in the chair.

"Lean back," he directed. "Now, get up."

The girl obeyed, and there was plainly seen on the plush the faint but unmistakable imprint of the beaded design that adorned the back of the frock she wore.

"I told you so!" Cray said, in triumph. "That plush registers every impress, and when Lockwood rubbed it smooth it was to erase a damaging bit of testimony."

"Rather far-fetched, Mr. Cray," said Gordon Lockwood himself, who had come in and had heard and seen the latter part of the detective's investigation.

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"Not so very, Mr. Lockwood, when you learn that the finger prints on the chair frame are your own and those of a certain young person who is already under suspicion."

Gordon Lockwood, as always under a sudden stress, became even more impassive, and his eyes glittered as he faced the attorney.

"Don't be too absurd, Mr. Cray," he advised, coldly. "I suppose you mean Miss Austin--I prefer to have no veiled allusions. But the finding of her finger prints on a chair in this room, and mine also, does not seem to me to be in any way evidence of crime."

"No?" Cray gave him scorn for scorn. "Perhaps then, you can explain Miss Austin's presence here that night."

"I don't know that she was here--and I most certainly could not explain any of her movements. But I do deny your right to assume her guilty from her presence."

"Ah, you tacitly admit her presence, then. Indeed, one can scarcely doubt it, when it is shown that this little shoe of hers," he took it from his pocket, "exactly fits the prints that cross the field of snow between here and the Adams house."

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"To measure footprints--after all this time!" and Lockwood's lip curled.

"The prints are exactly as they were made, Mr. Lockwood. The unchanging cold weather has kept them intact. I tried this shoe, and the prints are unmistakable. Moreover, the short stride is just the measure of the natural steps of Miss Austin. The footprints lead from the Adams house over here and back again. The returning prints occasionally overlap the ones that came this way, showing that the trip away from this house was made latest. Miss Austin was seen to come over in this direction--well, none but a half-wit would be blind to the inevitable conclusions!"

"None but a half-wit would read into this evidence what you pretend to see," retorted Lockwood, almost losing his calm.

"That's my business," Cray said, sharply: "now, Mr. Lockwood, why did you smooth off that chair back? Careful, now, two witnesses saw you do it."

"I'm not denying it"--Lockwood smiled in a bored, superior way, "but if I did it, I was--and am unconscious of it. One often touches a piece of furniture in passing with no thought of doing so."

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"That won't go down. Both the butler and Miss Peyton saw you definitely and deliberately rub over the back of that chair. Why did you do it?"

Cray was inexorable.

But the impassive secretary merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't answer you, Mr. Cray. I can only repeat it must have been an unconscious act on my part, and it has no sinister significance. I may have been merely pushing the chair out of my way, you know."

"Look here, Mr. Lockwood, you are a man of honor. Do you, upon oath, declare that you did not purposely smooth that chairback, for the reason that it showed some incriminating impress?"

"I am not under oath. I have stated that I did not do what you accuse me of, and I have nothing further to say on the subject."

Lockwood drew himself up and leaned with folded arms against the mantelpiece.

Cray dropped the subject, but his snapping eyes and compressed lips seemed to show he had not finally dismissed it.

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"At what time," he said, abruptly, "did Doctor Waring lock his study door?"

"About ten o'clock," the secretary replied.

"And you heard nothing from the room after that? No sound of voices? Nobody coming in at the French window?"

"No," replied Lockwood.

"Then we are forced to the conclusion that whoever entered did so very quietly, that it was with the knowledge and permission of Doctor Waring himself, that the visitor was the person whose footprints lead straight to the door, and whose finger prints are on the chair that stood near the Doctor's own chair. We are borne out in this view by the fact that the same person now possesses the money and the ruby pin which we know Doctor Waring had in his room with him, and we know that the person is here in Corinth for unexplained reasons, and is, in fact, so peculiar that she is known as-- Miss Mystery. Just why, Mr. Lockwood, are you arguing against these obvious inferences, and why do you undertake to free from suspicion one against whom everything is so definitely black?"

"Because," Lockwood spoke very quietly, but his jaw was set in a stubborn way, "the lady you call Miss Mystery, is a young and defenseless girl, without, so far as I know, a friend in this town. It is unfair to accuse her on the strength of this fantastic story and it is unfair to condemn her unheard."

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"Not unheard," said the attorney, "but what she says only incriminates her more deeply."

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CHAPTER XII MAURICE TRASK, HEIR

The funeral services of John Waring were solemn and impressive. No reference was made to the manner of his taking-off, save to call it mysterious, and the encomiums heaped upon him by the clergy and the college faculty were as sincere as they were well-deserved.

There were two members of the great audience who were looked at with curiosity by many.

One of these was Miss Mystery, the girl who, it was vaguely rumored was in some way connected with the tragedy.

To look at her, this seemed impossible, for a sweeter face or a gentler manner could scarce be imagined.

Anita Austin sat near the front, on one of the side aisles. She wore a gown of taupe-colored duvetyn, and a velvet toque of the same color. Her olive face was pale, and now and then her small white teeth bit into her scarlet lower lip, as if she were keeping her self-control only by determined effort.

A close observer might note that she paid no heed to the utterance of the able men who gave tribute to John Waring's character, but her troubled eyes rested on the flower-covered casket, and the rising tears overflowed as she stifled an occasional sob.

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And then, fairly clenching her hands in a determination to show no emotion, this strange girl would straighten up, and stare blankly ahead of her as if in utter oblivion of the scene.

Directly behind her was Helen Peyton, who had chosen that place with the intention of watching Miss Mystery. Mrs. Peyton was by her daughter's side, but her whole attention was on the funeral services, and she thought of little else.

Not far off was Gordon Lockwood, and with him were Mrs. Bates and her nephew, Pinckney Payne. Of this trio only the secretary let his gaze wander now and then to the sad little face that was rapidly becoming the dearest thing in life to him. As the church filled, and the flower-scented atmosphere grew oppressive, Miss Austin let her coat fall from her shoulders, and Lockwood noted with a start that she wore the same gown she had worn to the lecture at which he first saw her. Again he counted the queer little buttons that edged the sailor collar. He shook his head, and a great feeling of compassion filled his heart.

"Poor child," he said to himself, "what does it all mean?"

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The other magnet for strangers' eyes was Maurice Trask, the relative of John Waring, who had come from his home in St. Louis, to take possession of his inheritance.

For, in the absence of any will, he had proved himself the next of kin, and had gladly, even eagerly, taken the reins of government of the affairs and home of the dead man.

He was the son of John Waring's cousin, and though the two men had never met, the credentials and records brought by Maurice Trask left no possible doubt as to his heirship.

Trask was not prepossessing of appearance, though he was well-mannered and moderately well-dressed. His lack was that of sophistication, and he seemed ignorant of the finer conventions of life. He was what is known as a self-made man, and men of home manufacture require some sterling qualities to start with if they are to turn out a satisfactory product.

These qualities Trask didn't have, and a first glance at the sharp-featured face gave an impression of greed and shrewdness.

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There was also a slight air of bravado, which was quite evidently caused by an uneasy feeling of inferiority. He seemed to say, "I am as good as you are," because his conviction of that fact needed some such assertion to bolster it up.

In his seat as chief mourner, he was decorum itself. His black garb was very black, and if it betrayed a provincial cut or fit, such an effect was more in keeping with the man than correct apparel would have been.

His grief might have seemed a trifle ostentatious to one who remembered he had never seen his cousin, but on the whole Maurice Trask was accepted by those whose curiosity led to criticism, as a satisfactory heir to the Waring estate.

Nor was this an inconsiderable matter, for John Waring, beside his profession, had written several successful books, and possessed in all a goodly fortune.

Moreover, there was no mystery about Trask. His life was an open book, the lawyers had said; his family tree was of correct record and his claim to the estate clear and true.

While as to that minx, Miss Mystery, nobody knew or could find out where she came from, what she was doing in Corinth, or who she was, anyway. Clearly she was mixed up with Doctor Waring in some unconventional way--that is, if the reports were true that she visited him in his study without the knowledge of his household. No shadow of blame was attached to John Waring for this--although it would seem that the man was old and wise enough to ward off an attack from such a small vampire.

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"That's what she is," Helen Peyton concluded, to herself, as she mused on the girl who sat in front of her. "She just plain vamped poor Doctor Waring--and she got into the study--and, now, I can prove it!"

After the funeral, the chief mourners went back to the Waring home to discuss matters. Mrs. Peyton had tea served

in the living-room, for all who came, and many neighbors, drawn by curiosity, accepted her hospitality.

Trask, rubbing his hands involuntarily, slipped easily into his new role of host, and rather overdid his part.

"Yes," he would say, "yes, yes. I learned from the addresses how fine a man my cousin was--yes, yes, a noble character. Now, I can't expect to take his place in your community all at once--but I'll get there! I'll get there! And you'll all help me, won't you?" he beamed on them. "Yes, yes, you'll all help me to become one of the first citizens of Corinth--one of the first citizens of your lovely, tree-decked town. Yes, yes."

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Plate and cup in hand, he moved around among his guests, a little awkwardly but full of amiability and good cheer. His sentiment was quite evidently, "the king is dead; long live the king," and he wanted to get settled on his throne at once.

But the cousin of John Waring had another side to him.

This was shown when, later on, he met a few people in the study.

Cray was there, by invitation, and Morton also. Lockwood and the two Peytons.

"Just a few words at the outset," Trask began, and he was noticeably more at ease in this executive session than he had been in the social atmosphere.

"I want to maintain this household, for a time at least, as I find it. I shall be glad, Mrs. Peyton, if you will continue to keep house for me, and I should like you, Mr. Lockwood, to remain as secretary, if you are willing. There is, of course, much to be done in settling the estate, and your knowledge would be invaluable. Also, if you will, Mrs. Peyton, I'd like you to engage servants--or keep the ones you have. In fact, please look after the house matters entirely. For, here is what I want to do first. Find the man who killed my cousin. I never shall feel right in taking and using his home and his money unless I do everything in my power to discover his murderer."

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"It may be a case of suicide," suggested Attorney Cray, who was narrowly watching the speaker.

"No-sir-ee! First place, as near as I can figure it out, my cousin was not the man to take his own life. Also, he was on the eve of taking a fine position as College President--also he was about to marry a beautiful lady. Why worry? And too--and this is to me the strongest argument against the suicide theory--I've read lots of detective stories--you needn't sniff, Mr. Cray, those stories are often founded on fact--and many of them hinge on the mystery of a sealed room. Often a book starts out with a situation just like this; man found dead. Room locked up. No weapon about. Murder or suicide? And, listen here; invariably the solution is murder. Yes, sir--invariably! Why? 'Cause suicide is a mighty scarce article. You don't find Human Nature putting an end to itself very often. That is, not worthwhile Human Nature. Your suicides

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are weak men, down and outers, ignorant, half-baked chaps. Not fine, upstanding men such as John Waring was. You know that, Mr. Cray?"

"Yes," the attorney nodded. "That's certainly so, Mr. Trask. And, anyway, if you're going to make investigations, you have to start on the theory of murder."

"Just that exactly," Trask agreed. "Then if we run up against proof--actual proof of suicide, why then, we know where we're at."

Lockwood looked at Trask and listened to him with interest. He was a new type to the secretary, who with all his knowledge of characterization couldn't quite place him.

At first, Lockwood had felt an instinctive dislike, the newcomer had been so patently pleased with his inheritance, and so evidently insincere in his mourning. But this sensible, straightforward insistence on avenging his cousin's murder--if it were murder--raised Trask in Lockwood's estimation, and he concluded to remain as secretary, for a time, at least.

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"You have the case in charge, Mr. Cray," Trask went on, "and I want you to push it--push it, sir. Get help if you want--get some hifalutin detective, if that's the proper caper--but, get results. Results, that's what I'm after! Here's my idea. Get busy, and do all you can as quick as you can. Don't dawdle. Put things through. And then--if you can't find the criminal, after due effort, then, we'll give up the hunt. That's my idea. Do all you can--and then quit."

"Very well, Mr. Trask," Cray replied; "I understand, and I'll do as you say. When you have the time to devote to it, I'll give you a history of the case."

"The time is now, Mr. Cray. And your history must be put in a nutshell. The circumstances of John Waring's death, I know. Also, I know whom I suspect as the murderer. So tell me your decisions to date."

"I fear we have made no decision, Mr. Trask. As a matter of fact the evidence to date points in a most painful direction."

"What! You're deterred from justice because evidence points in a painful direction! My stars, Cray! is that the way you detect in New England!"

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"But evidence may be false, and it is unwise to accuse without certainty--"

"I have some certain evidence," said Helen Peyton, and all turned to look at the girl, who spoke hesitatingly and in a low tone.

"Yes, I wouldn't tell it--but--I think I ought to. I just found it out today."

"Of course you must tell it, Miss Peyton," Trask said, dictatorially. "Out with it!"

"Well," Helen spoke to Cray, "you know Mr. Lockwood rubbed off some marks from this chair the morning after--after we found Doctor Waring."

"Yes, they were without doubt indicative marks. What do you know about them?" Cray looked at her earnestly, for he had great interest in that act of the secretary's.

"They were the marks made by the buttons on the back of the dress Miss Austin wore today."

For a moment Gordon Lockwood's calm almost deserted him. It was but a fleeting instant, yet Cray's sharp eyes caught the look of utter dismay that crossed the impassive face of the secretary. Immediately the usual hauteur returned and the grave eyes met Cray's without a tremor.

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"How do you know?" Cray was all alertness.

"I sat behind her at the funeral. She took off her coat and I couldn't help noticing a certain arrangement of buttons. It struck me, because I noticed the marks on the chair back, and they were just the same design."

"Absurd," Lockwood said, quietly, but with a deep scorn in his tone. "As if you could identify the trimming on a lady's gown!"

"But I did," Helen persisted, spurred by Lockwood's manner. "I noticed it on the chair, a clear pattern of the trimming of the collar, and two rows down the back. And then I saw Mr. Lockwood rub it off of the chairback with utmost care. And today, when I saw Miss Austin's dress, I recognized it at once. She was here that night--Mr. Lockwood knew it--and he erased the marks--"

"Helen, don't be too ridiculous!" Lockwood spoke now in a soft drawl, that made Helen flush with anger.

"I'm not ridiculous! Am I, Mr. Cray? It's evidence, isn't it? It proves that girl was here--doesn't it? And Gordon did rub it off--Ito saw him too, and I saw him. He was rubbing the chair when I came to call him to breakfast--he can't deny it!"

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"I do deny it," Lockwood said, quietly. "Miss Peyton is excited and doesn't remember accurately."

"Nothing of the sort!" blazed Helen. "It's all true. Gordon won't admit it because--"

"Helen, hush!" Gordon's look stopped her at once. "Don't say things you'll regret."

"But I don't regret them," put in Cray. "All this is important. Mr. Lockwood, do you deny obliterating these marks in question?"

"Of course I do," Lockwood smiled slightly. "If I was moving the chair or touching it, when Miss Peyton came to call me to breakfast I don't remember it. At any rate, it was with no intention of removing evidence."

Gordon Lockwood told these falsehoods with as calm an air as he would have shown in making truthful statements. He was not only deeply in love with Anita Austin, but he did not and would not believe her guilty of crime, or of any connection with a crime. Wherefore, he was ready and willing to tell any number of lies to save or shield her.

And from his manner none could guess he was saying other than absolute truth.

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"But look here," spoke up Maurice Trask. "This won't do, you know. Are you people accusing a girl of Doctor Waring's murder? A *girl!*!"

"Not accusation yet," Cray told him, "but we want to know more about the young lady in question. In fact, she's been dubbed Miss Mystery, because so little is known about her."

"Miss Mystery, eh? And she came here to see the Doctor the night he died?"

"She did not!" Lockwood asserted, calmly. "Had she done so, I should have known it."

"Of course you would," Trask looked at him shrewdly. "Of course. But the impress of her clothing was left on the chairback? Is that it?"

"That's it," said Helen, sharply. "And when forty-seven other things prove her presence here that evening, I don't know why Mr. Lockwood so positively denies it. He must have a deep interest in the young lady!"

Helen's spitefulness was undisguised, and her mother looked pained and regretful. Both these women had hoped that Gordon Lockwood's affections might turn toward Helen, and the older one realized that such speeches as this would in no way further their plans.

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But Helen was thoroughly jealous of Miss Mystery, for more reasons than one, and she let her unbridled tongue expose her feelings.

Cray knew all this, and therefore took Helen's statements with a grain of salt. And yet, he soliloquized, she would scarcely make up that rigmarole of the dress trimming. He fancied it was true. And why shouldn't it be? The evidence of Anita Austin's presence in John Waring's study that fatal night was far too strong to be ignored. Moreover, the girl's possession of the money and the ruby pin had yet to be satisfactorily explained. It was unthinkable that anyone should have stolen these things and "planted" them in Miss Austin's bureau drawer!

"I'd like to see this young woman," said Trask, suddenly.

"I'm going over to see her now, come along," invited Cray, who was a little impressed by the perspicuity of this stranger.

"I'm going, too," declared Helen Peyton, and as Lockwood couldn't keep away, they all went over to the Adams house.

In the cosy sitting-room they congregated, and Mrs. Adams went upstairs to summon Anita.

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She found the room locked. When, in response to a repeated summons, the door was opened, Mrs. Adams faced a tearful, sad-faced girl, who asked indifferently what was wanted.

"You'll have to come down stairs," the landlady said; "Mr. Cray is there, and--and some others. They want to see you."

"I won't go down. I don't want to see anybody."

"I guess you'll have to." Mrs. Adams spoke a little crisply. "It's a--a summons. You've got to come."

"Oh." Miss Austin's manner changed. "Well, I will, then. Wait till I bathe my face."

Mrs. Adams came in, closed the door and waited. She felt sorry for Miss Mystery, but she also felt suspicious of her. Perhaps the mystery would now be cleared up.

The good woman was about to speak kindly to her strange boarder but as she watched, she lost the desire to help her.

For, to Mrs. Adams' primitive notions, the girl was doing dreadful things.

Having bathed her tear-stained face, Miss Mystery proceeded to powder it lightly, and, horror of horrors, she added the merest flick of rouge to her pale cheeks. And not content with such baseness she stooped to further degradation and touched her pale lips with some heathenish contraption that made them just a little redder!

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No, Mrs. Adams had no sympathy for a girl who would do such awful things, and she waited in a grim and stony silence.

Then Miss Mystery fluffed out her pretty dark hair a little more over her ears, settled her sailor collar, with its row of tiny buttons for trimming, and with a critical glance at her shoes, signified her readiness to go down stairs.

Still in disapproving silence, Mrs. Adams marched by her side, and they went together to face the visitors.

The attitude of the girl as she entered the room was a triumph of perfection.

Her beauty, which usually needed no artificial aid, was striking, and her large dark eyes rested on each in turn with an air of innocent wonder, quickly followed by a pathetic, beseeching little smile that touched the heart of several auditors, even though they deemed it disingenuous.

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Maurice Trask, shrewd and calculating, sized her up, as he would have expressed it.

And his sizing up was decidedly complimentary. So much so, in fact, that he almost concluded to take her part against all comers.

"I'm for her," he said to himself, "and yet," he added, to the same confidant, "she's nobody's fool! That girl knows what she's about--and by jingo, if she wanted to kill a man, she could kill him! I'll say she could!"

It was Miss Austin's dress that caught every one's eye. Not a person present, among the visitors, but wanted to say, "turn around--oh, do!"

But the girl sank into a low chair beside Saltonstall Adams and quietly awaited developments.

"May I present Mr. Trask," Cray said, a little awkwardly, for it was not easy to be casual under the glance of those pathetic eyes.

Anita bowed courteously if coldly, and then there was an embarrassing silence.

"Well," Trask remarked, at last, "you people are not very talkative, guess I'll take the helm myself. Miss Austin, will you be good enough to get up and turn around?"

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The request was so simply made, that, almost without thinking of its strangeness, Anita did exactly as she was asked.

Sure enough, there were two rows of buttons down the back of her bodice, and another row across the sailor collar.

At a nod from Trask she sat down again, and then the storm broke.

"I told you so!" cried Helen Peyton. "That's the very dress that made the marks on that chair back! Dare you deny, Miss Austin, that you were in Doctor Waring's study that night he died?"

The dark eyes of Miss Mystery opened wide in horror. She seemed fairly paralyzed with fright, and glanced wildly from one face to another.

Maurice Trask's showed only frank admiration. He looked at the girl as if he had never before seen any one so attractive.

Gordon Lockwood's face betrayed no emotion of any sort. Had he been indifferent to Miss Mystery instead of loving her, as he did, he could have shown no less expressive countenance.

And all the others present showed definite and decided suspicion, scorn and hatred.

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Except one. Old Salt looked kindly at the agitated girl. He even held out a protective hand, and with a gentle inflection, said:

"Tell the truth, dear child. *Did* you know Doctor Waring?"

Slowly Miss Mystery's eyes traveled round the room. Looking at each face in turn, her own expression became more and more hard and stubborn. Then, seeing the

kindness on the face of Old Salt, she broke down utterly and sobbed out. "Oh, he's dead--he's dead! what shall I do?"

CHAPTER XIII THE TRUESDELL EYEBROWS

Maurice Trask looked at Miss Mystery with rapidly growing interest and curiosity. She seemed so young and helpless and she was so pretty and so pathetic that he immediately decided she could not be mixed up in any wrong-doing. He also decided, for he was a man of quick conclusions, that this was the girl for him. Having his new fortune, he wanted a wife to help him enjoy it, and where could he find a more utterly desirable girl than Miss Austin?

Straightforwardly he asked:

"Did Doctor Waring make love to you? Did you love him?"

The others looked aghast at these suggestions, and then Mrs. Adams said,

"Yes, she did! I saw her one night, kissing Doctor Waring's picture."

Cray turned on Anita.

"Did you love that man?" he asked, sternly. "If you did, you surely didn't kill him."

"Of course she didn't kill him," Old Salt put in. "Impossible to imagine such a thing! Speak up, little girl. Why did you kiss the picture of a man you had never seen?"

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Several of those listening waited breathlessly for a response.

Gordon Lockwood, for one, could scarce control his impatience to hear the answer. For, only too well he remembered the letter he had found in the Doctor's wastebasket. The words were graven in his brain.

Darling Anita: At the first glance of your brown eyes love was born in my heart. Life is worth living--with you in the world.

If love at first sight had been born in the man's heart, must it not have found response in the girl's? Or, even if not, could she have killed a man who felt thus toward her? Truly she was a mystery. For, the very fact that Waring had fallen in love with her, made possible, even plausible, her clandestine visit to him, and her possession of the money and jewel.

Could it be that the pretty little thing was merely a sly adventuress? That she cajoled Waring into giving her the valuables, and then--

No, Gordon Lockwood could not and would not believe any evil of the girl he loved. Even though she should admit her love for Waring, he would not lose faith in her.

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"Answer me," Cray demanded. "Answer this direct question directly. Did you love Doctor Waring?"

Almost like one hypnotized, Miss Mystery gave a helpless glance at her inquisitor and murmured a low, almost inaudible "yes."

"Then why did you kill him?" Cray stormed at her.

"I--I didn't."

"You were there, in his study the night he--he died."

"N--no, I wasn't."

"You were! It's been proved. You went over from this house, across the snow field, and you went in the study and you sat on the plush chair, near the desk. Didn't you?"

The great dark eyes seemed unable to tear themselves from Cray's face, and again the half-breathed whisper was, "yes."

"I protest!" said Trask. "That girl shall not be tortured. Whether she's guilty or not, she's entitled to fairer treatment. You can't make her say those things that may be used against her! Quit it, Cray. I forbid it."

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"That's right, Cray," Lockwood said, quietly. "You've no right to bait Miss Austin--you make her admit things through sheer fright."

And it was true. Miss Mystery was trembling, and her face was white, save for the delicate flush on her cheeks and lips that she had placed there herself.

Her great eyes, beneath their heavy dark brows flew from one face to another, and she did not fail to notice the fact that every man in the room, Cray perhaps excepted, was in sympathy with her, while every woman was against her.

This must have comforted her, for she looked about, a faint smile dawning in her eyes.

"Is that true?" she said, "may I be excused from this questioning until I can get counsel? I don't know what to say--myself--"

Her pretty distress and helplessness again appealed to the masculine sympathy, and, realizing this, she ignored the other sex.

A puzzled expression crossed the face of Maurice Trask.

"Who in the world can she be?" he thought. "That last flash of those eyes, as she drew her heavy eyebrows into a straight line surely reminded me of somebody. By heavens! the Truesdell brows!"

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Again he scanned the oval little face. He shook his head in uncertainty, but again declared to himself, "The Truesdell eyebrows!"

"Now look here, all of you," Old Saltonstall Adams said, "I don't believe this child is guilty of anything really wrong. If she caught the fancy of Doctor Waring, it may seem pretty awful to us old fogies, but a pretty girl like Miss Austin can't help charming the menfolks. I don't want to discuss that, but I do say that it's no crime to go to see a man in the evening, and too, she may have had some errand we know nothing about. Did Doctor Waring give you that money of his own free will, Miss Austin?"

"Yes," said Anita, involuntarily, and then bit her lip as she added, "I told you he didn't give it to me."

"There, there, don't say any more, you only contradict yourself. I had no business to ask that. Now, Mr. Cray, from now on, I take Miss Austin under my personal care. I'll be responsible for her appearance when you want her. And," he looked at his wife, "Mrs. Adams will back me up. She too will shelter and care for Miss Austin--"

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"Unless she is proved guilty," Esther Adams broke in. "In that case--"

"Wait until she is," Old Salt said, in his calm way. "I don't guarantee her innocence--I only want to prevent injustice to her. Have you funds to engage a lawyer, Miss Austin?"

Again that frightened look made the girl seem anything but innocent.

"Would I have to tell a lawyer--everything?" she asked.

"Yes, yes--to be sure," Trask broke in. "But what of that? I'll bet you've nothing to tell him incriminating to yourself. You exaggerate your connection with this matter. I'll bet you were there that night on some perfectly innocent errand--at least so far as Doctor Waring's death is concerned."

"Oh, I was!" Anita said, and then, as quickly, "But I wasn't there at night--it was in the afternoon."

Lockwood groaned in spirit. Everything this girl said made her more of a prevaricator, even though she might be innocent of crime. Surely she was mixed up in the matter, and must know who gave the fatal stab--if she didn't do it herself. If only Nogi could be found. He, of course, was implicated.

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"I'll get a lawyer for you, if you'll let me, Miss Austin," Lockwood said, unable to resist his impulse to help her.

"I am a lawyer," said Maurice Trask, "I here and now offer my services to Miss Austin. If you'll accept, my dear young lady, I promise to use my best efforts to do all that can be done for you."

"But do I have to tell you--" again Anita began, perplexedly--her brows straight.

Trask gazed at her fixedly, and then he said, "That will be between us. You will decide when we talk things over, what to tell me and what not."

He spoke as to a fractious child, and his voice was kind and helpful even though his inflections were not cultured.

Lockwood looked at him uneasily. Might not this man's kindness and assistance to the distressed girl lead her to feel such gratitude that it would be no hard matter for Trask to win more than gratitude? Lockwood was nervously sensitive to the interest Trask took in Anita, and well knew his state of mind toward the little beauty.

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And, instead of being lessened by the trend of suspicion toward Anita, Lockwood's own infatuation deepened with every glance he allowed himself at the lovely face.

The countenance of Miss Mystery was ever changing. Now, she was a wistful-eyed child, and in a flash she was an inscrutable young woman--only to change the next instant to a wrongly accused and innocent martyr.

Anyway, Lockwood told himself, he meant to win her, and if Trask stood in his way, Trask must be set aside, that was all. An indomitable will ought to be able to conquer the intents of a self-made, unattractive man of Trask's type. And, too, a love like his own, surging more fully every moment must appeal to the girl, once he could get a chance to declare it.

Lockwood was by no means a conceited man, but he had a true sense of value and he knew that he was a fitter mate for Miss Mystery than Trask, if the girl could know them both.

"I know a lawyer," Lockwood began, "here in Corinth. Might he not be a better man for you, Miss Austin, than a stranger in the town?"

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"Just why?" Trask said, his eyes coldly scanning Lockwood's face.

"Because he would have known Doctor Waring, and--and all the circumstances," Lockwood concluded a little lamely.

"Not much of an argument," Trask dismissed the suggestion. "Also, I promise not to cost the lady as much as any other counsel would."

This speech was accompanied by an admiring glance that was so nearly a smirk that Lockwood with difficulty kept his hands off Trask's throat.

Mrs. Peyton, who with Helen had sat almost wordless through the whole session, now rose to go.

"Come, Helen," she said, "we are of no use here, and I'd rather take you away."

Her implication that the presence of Miss Mystery was contaminating was too plain to be mistaken, and mother and daughter left the room.

"Well," Cray said, "I've pretty much made up my mind in this matter. I make no arrest now, since you're going to be responsible, Mr. Adams, for Miss Austin's presence when

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desired. But, I think I see it all. I think I can reconstruct the whole case, and I think there will be decided developments very soon."

"You do," was Trask's response to this speech, and as one by one all present rose to go, Trask remained, and asked that he might see Miss Austin alone.

"Guess I'll stand by," said Old Salt, and something in the grim but kindly old face made Trask give tacit consent.

Straightforwardly the man set about his inquiries.

"Now, first of all, Miss Austin," Trask said, "where is your home?"

An obstinate look came into her eyes, and she hesitated a moment. Then, with a sudden change of expression, she said, "Indianapolis."

"Address?"

"Six-twenty-seven Jackson Street."

Trask's eyebrows went up at this, and he gave her a searching look, but Miss Mystery showed no embarrassment.

"Sure of the number?" he said, "I know Indianapolis pretty well."

"I'm sure," was the cool reply, and Trask went on.

"Know Doctor Waring before you came here?"

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"No."

"Never saw him before?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"You didn't kill him?"

Anita only shook her head slowly, but Trask did not press her for a verbal answer.

"Yet you were there that night. Now, it's useless to deny it, for the prints of those doodads on the back of that very frock you have on now were on the plush back of the chair you sat in. Young Lockwood smoothed them away--Lord knows why! He must suspect you, I should say, and tried to shield you that way."

"Could he?" asked Miss Mystery, hopefully.

"Could he shield you? No, my child, he couldn't, but I can. You just trust yourself to me, and you'll have no trouble, no trouble at all. You've got Mr. Saltonstall, here, and me for friends. Something tells me you won't need anybody else. We'll pull you through, eh, Old Salt?"

Though accustomed to the nickname from the townspeople, Mr. Adams didn't relish it from this stranger, and he merely

said, "I'm Miss Austin's friend, be sure of that."

"So'm I," Trask declared. "Now, little lady, you needn't tell all you know, but some things you must tell me. Anybody among your relatives named Truesdell?"

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Only a quick eye could have caught a fleeting look of dismay on her face, as Anita promptly responded, "No--not that I know of."

"Falsehood number one," said Trask to himself. "What the deuce is she up to?"

But aloud, he only said,

"All right. Now, why did you come to Corinth?"

"To sketch," said Anita glibly, and smiling at him. "I'm an artist, you see--I paint water-colors."

"Yes--I see. Now, just why did you hide that stiletto of yours?"

"I was frightened. I was afraid they would think I killed Doctor Waring."

"Why did you fear that?"

"Oh, I don't know." She was almost flippant now. "Those detectives are so queer, they're likely to suspect anybody. And they said the weapon used was a round, sharp instrument, so--so I hid the thing."

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"You didn't use that to kill him?"

"Oh, no!"

"What did you use?"

"I didn't kill him."

"Who did?"

"I think he killed himself."

"Mr. Adams," Trask turned to the old man, "please leave us two alone for a few moments. I ask you as a personal favor."

Without a word Old Salt left the room.

"Now, look here, Miss Austin," Trask said, in a determined tone, "I know you killed that man as well as I know you're here. Also, I know why. Or, at least, I don't know exactly why, but I have knowledge that will lead straight to a revelation of the whole affair. I know you are related to the Truesdells--though perhaps you don't know that yourself. Now, here's my proposition. I'm a lawyer, and I'm known as a shrewd one. Many a time I've made black appear white--and I can do it in your case. But--if you'll marry me, I'll get you off. Wait a minute--don't speak yet. I'm not bad-looking, I'm kind-hearted and, by my cousin's death, I'm a rich man. You may not love me yet--but I'll guarantee I can win your affection. I fell in

love with you, the very minute I saw you and I want you for my wife. You needn't marry me now--wait as long as you say--but give me your promise, and I'll clear you of all suspicion in this terrible affair. On the other hand--"

There was a pause, and then Anita said:

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"On the other hand?"

"I shall tell what I know about you--and, well, you know yourself what chance you will have then of getting off scotfree!"

"A threat?" and Miss Mystery flung up her proud little head.

"No; don't misunderstand. Not a threat. But I admit, a bribe. Marry me, and I'll free you. Say no--and I don't have to do a thing. The law will do it all. You simpleton! Do you suppose you can keep your secret once the law really begins to hound you? Cray is only just opening his eyes to your connections with the case. Lockwood has realized that you must be guilty, though he's trying hard not to believe it. Old Salt only befriends you because you're helpless and pretty--not because he thinks you're innocent--any more than his wife does. The two Peytons hate you--for reasons of their own--probably because you snared Lockwood away from the lovely Helen. But none of those things will matter if you take up with my offer. I'll carry you through with flying colors. You'll be not only freed from suspicion but eulogized and beloved by all who know you, and as my wife, you'll have a proud and enviable position."

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Miss Mystery gave the speaker a look that not only took him in from head to foot but seemed to penetrate his very soul, and in a quiet, even tone, she said:

"Rather than marry you--I would face the electric chair."

The scorn in her voice, even more than the scathing words themselves, enraged Trask.

"Oh," he said, with ill-repressed fury, "you would, would you? Have your own way, then, Miss Mystery--and soon your mystery will be known and you may have your desire, and--face the electric chair!"

The girl rose, and stood, waiting.

"Go," she said, without glance or gesture.

And in a white heat of anger, Trask went.

"Now, dearie," Mrs. Adams said, coming in, "I don't want you to tell me anything. My husband bids me befriend you--and I will, so long as your case is uncertain. But if you're proved to be guilty, I--"

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"Oh, don't fail me," and Miss Mystery threw herself into the other's arms. "I am so lonely and so friendless--"

"Why are you? Where's your folks?"

Then Miss Mystery drew herself up, with a forlorn little attempt at dignity, and said, "I'd like to go to my room now, please."

Upstairs she went, slowly, and as she neared her own room Lockwood met her in the hall.

"Count me your friend," he said, simply, and held out his hand.

"I will," she replied, putting her little hand in his, and then, with one deep glance, each knew of the other's love.

Lockwood's was written plain on his face, and his eyes, usually so calm and cold, were lighted with the intensity of his passion.

This Anita read, and her own response was quick and involuntary.

Perhaps it was a rebound from the awful proposals of Maurice Trask; perhaps it was a heart finding its mate--perhaps, remembering Miss Mystery's ways, it was mere coquetry, but the glances were exchanged and they knew.

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Anita went on to her room, and throwing herself into a chair, sat long in thought.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself over and over again. "What can I do? If only I hadn't taken the money--and the pin. Why did I do it? And he said Truesdell! How did he know? My eyebrows, I suppose. That awful man! And he'll tell--oh, yes, he'll surely tell--and that will poison Gordon's mind against me--oh, was anybody ever in such trouble as I?"

A tap at her door announced the maid with a note.

Alone again, Anita read it. It was from Lockwood and begged an interview.

"Please let me see you alone," it said; "I don't know how best to manage it. Will you go for a walk with me now? There's time for a short stroll before dark."

Hurriedly Anita flung on hat and coat, and opened her door.

Lockwood was on the stair.

"Going out?" he said, casually, "may I walk with you?"

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"Please do," said Anita, and they started out together.

"I'm sorry enough to do anything that seems clandestine," said Lockwood as they walked, "but that feline lady, Miss Bascom, is watching your every move, and I can't let her get anything to criticise you for."

A grateful look rewarded him, and then Gordon went on: "Tell me, did I read your eyes aright? Do you, can you care to know how I love you? How I have loved you from the moment I first saw you. Do you care, Anita? May I love

you?"

"But you don't know me," she said, in a soft little voice.
"And you do know dreadful things about me."

"I don't care for any of those things. If they're dreadful, they're not true."

"Yes--they are true--some of them. And there are more dreadful things to know--that you don't even suspect--Gordon."

The last word, spoken in the lowest, tenderest of voices, completed Lockwood's infatuation. Had she not said that, he might have been deterred by her statements, but that softly-breathed name, stirred his pulses, and in the deepening dusk he found her hand and said:

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"Anita, I want you--I love you--none of these things count. I know you are in no way guiltily connected with this crime--if you are mixed up with it, it is through force of circumstances, and anyway, I don't care who or what you are--I love you, I believe in you and I want you."

"But it's all so dreadful--and I can't tell--"

"Don't tell anything you don't want to--"

"But that man will tell. That terrible Trask man."

Lockwood didn't waver in his fealty or loyalty but it was a blow to learn that Trask knew something of Anita's secrets.

"I don't care," he said, firmly, "I love you."

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CHAPTER XIV A PROPOSAL

Maurice Trask took up his reins of government with a firm hand. He left all housekeeping and domestic matters to Mrs. Peyton, but the business affairs of Doctor Waring, he concluded to clean up as rapidly as possible.

"It's astonishing," he said to Lockwood, "what a lot of varied interests my cousin had. This morning's mail brings all sorts of things from Rare Book Catalogues to Mining Prospectuses. By the way, I think I shall have an auction of his rare books. Such things don't interest me, and I believe they have a big money value."

"Some of them have," Lockwood returned, indifferently.

He could not bring himself to like his new employer, but as he had agreed to stay with him for a time, he did his best to meet requirements.

"Take this lot, now," and Trask indicated a bookcase full of old volumes of the classics. "They mean nothing to me--I can't read Latin or Greek, and wouldn't if I could. My good heavens! Look at this one!"

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Trask had taken down the volume that had been on Doctor Waring's desk the night of his death. As he flipped over the pages, two were stuck together, and the ghastly red stains showed only too clearly that they were the spilled blood of the dying man.

"Ugh!" he said, holding out the volume to Lockwood, "burn that up. How could anyone have put it back on the shelf? Never let me see it again!"

The secretary took it, noting that it was a copy of Martial, to which Doctor Waring had been greatly attached. Indeed, it had, to Lockwood's knowledge, been lying on the Doctor's desk for a week or more before his death.

Laying the stained volume aside in his own desk, Lockwood proceeded to assist in the examination of the books.

He was not at all surprised to find Trask discarding the ones he would have retained and keeping the most worthless--though there was little that could really be called trash in the Waring library.

"Where are the story books?" the new owner grumbled. "No detective stories? No spicy novels? No joke-books?"

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"Doctor Waring was serious-minded," Lockwood reminded him. "He cared little for lighter reading. He was a scholar."

"He sure was--to judge from these old dry-as-dust tomes.

But, I'll fire a lot of the poky old stuff, and so make room for more entertaining books. You see, Lockwood, I hope--and I expect to get me a wife before long."

Gordon's heart seemed to contract, for he divined what was coming.

"Yeppy, that's so. Little Old Maurice wants a wife--and--who do you suppose has caught my fancy?"

"Who?" was the mechanical response.

"Why, none other than the little Miss Mystery. Oh, yes, I know she is under a cloud--but I can get her off--I'm a bird of a lawyer, you know--and we'll fix up all that. Then, I'll elevate that little nonentity to the elevated position of the missus of Maurice Trask. Hey, my boy, how's that?"

Had Lockwood's calm not been habitual with him, he could scarcely have maintained it through this scene. As it was, he was a boiling, seething furnace inside him, but his judgment told him that any exhibition of surprise or annoyance would only irritate the other man without doing any good.

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Moreover, if Trask were really a shrewd lawyer, and if he knew something that would make any trouble for Anita--and she had hinted that he did--then, Lockwood argued, he must keep friendly with Trask, at least until he found out more of the matter.

So he said, lightly, "Has the lady agreed?"

"Well--not yet; but--I say, Lockwood, you're hit in that same direction, eh?"

"I admire Miss Austin very much, yes."

"Well--you keep off--do you hear?"

"I hear," said Lockwood, in his imperturbable way, but when Trask looked up and caught the cold stare of his secretary, he dropped the subject and returned to the books.

Since Doctor Waring's death, Lockwood had formed the habit of going back to the Adams house for his luncheon. This, of course, in the hope of seeing something of Anita, and also, because his new employer preferred it that way.

At luncheon, Trask took occasion to eulogize Miss Austin.

Helen Peyton stood it as long as she could, and then broke out with: "I don't see what you can find to admire in that thin, sallow little thing! And, beside, she is a wicked girl. I think she killed Doctor Waring, but even if she didn't, she came over here to see him, secretly, late at night, and if that isn't wrong-doing, I don't know what is! But just because she puts up a helpless bluff, all the men fall for her!"

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"Jealous, Miss Peyton?" and Trask looked at her shrewdly.

"No," Helen tossed her head. "I've no reason to be. That girl is nothing to me, and the sooner she gets out of Corinth the

better. If the police will let her go!"

"Now then, Miss Peyton," Trask began, in his most emphatic manner, "and Mrs. Peyton, too, once for all, I will hear no word against Miss Austin in my house. Put any meaning you like into that, but remember it. One word against Anita Austin, and the speaker of it goes out of my door never to return. Am I clear?"

"Clear? Yes; but I can tell you--"

"Hush, Helen," said her mother. "We want to stay here, don't we? Well, then, as Mr. Trask is evidently much in earnest, I insist that you obey his wishes--as I shall."

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"That's right, Mrs. Peyton. And if your daughter forgets my hints I trust to you to keep her reminded. That's all about that."

In this fashion Maurice Trask settled every question that arose. His word was law, and he spoke no unnecessary words.

The servants could obey or leave. The housekeeper had been told the same, and the secretary understood it, too.

Returning to the library after luncheon, Trask sat at the desk in deep thought.

"Got to get the girl," he told himself. "Plenty to hold over her head--but she's skittish, that's plain to be seen. Also, she's in love with Lockwood. Got to get him out of town. Nothing doing while he's around. Now, how? Morton hinted of his being deeply in debt. If so, he's got some past history, guess I can get something on him--got to, whether I can or not. H'm. Wonder if the little girl did do the sticking. Hard to believe it, and yet that kid's got it in her. She sure has! And she's a Truesdell all right. Nobody ever had those beetling brows, almost joining above those dark eyes, in that level line--why, if she's a Truesdell--! Good Lord, I've got to marry her! I'll have to scare her into it! Now, Maurice, my boy, get in some of your finest work."

Clapping on his hat, he started for the Adams house.

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As luck would have it, he met Anita and his secretary walking toward him.

"Playing truant?" he called out gaily to Lockwood.

"I'm just on my way to your house," Gordon returned, coldly.

"You too, Miss Mystery?" and Trask gave her a wide smile.

"No; I'm going to the post-office."

"Ah, I see. Then, on your way, Lockwood--and I'll step along with Miss Austin."

There was no good way out of this arrangement, so it obtained, and Trask fell into step with the girl, as Lockwood turned off toward the Waring house.

"Now, my dear young lady," Trask began, unheeding her look of aversion, "you may as well understand me first as last. I've got the whip hand--or, as that isn't a very graceful expression, let us say, I hold the trumps. I know all about you, you see. I know why you went to the doctor's library that night, and--I know what happened there."

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"You don't," said Anita, coolly. "You're bluffing, and I know it."

"No, I'm not bluffing--not entirely, anyway. True, there are some things I don't know yet, but--I soon will! Don't think you can keep anything from me! I'm going to take a week for investigation. Also, to give you your chance. If I find out what I fully expect to find out I shall make it all public--how will you like that?"

A great fear showed in Anita's eyes, and she murmured, brokenly:

"Don't--oh, Mr. Trask, don't!"

"Hah! Scared, are you? I thought you'd be! Now, you know my price. You marry me--promise to marry me, that is, and I'll get you through this thing with bells on. No shadow of suspicion shall remain attached to you--or, to any one you care for."

"I heard you were not going to rest until you learned who killed Doctor Waring," Anita temporized.

"Yes, yes; but that was before I saw you. Now, I don't care if you have killed half the people in Corinth, I want you all the same. You've bewitched me. You, a silly little slip of a girl, with no particular claim to beauty, except your big, mournful eyes, and your peach of a mouth! I'll bring the smiles to that sad little face. Oh, Anita, I'm not a brute, and I do love you so. Give up your foolish fancy for Lockwood, for it is only a passing attraction. And he hasn't any money, and he's deeply in debt, and oh, I'm a thousand times a better catch!"

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"If you knew how you damaged your cause by talking like that--" the girl began, her eyes cold with scorn.

"Then I won't talk like that," Trask said, humbly. "Only take me, Anita, and you can make me over to suit yourself. I'll do whatever you say. I'll read the books you want me to, I'll get cultured and refined--and all that."

Anita almost laughed. "You are so funny," she said.

But this was a little too much for Trask's self-love.

"Funny, am I?" he stormed. "Funny! You'll see how funny I am when I tell the police why you killed that man! You'll see if I'm funny when I refuse the evidence that might help you out. When I keep still instead of speakin' out in meetin'! You look here, Anita Austin, I hold you in the hollow of my hand, and don't you forget it! You've got a deep dark secret--and though I don't know quite all of it--I'll know it soon. What M. Trask sets out to find out, he finds out. See? Now, do you

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want to tell me who you are--or not? Want to tell me who your father was? Your mother was a Truesdell--I'll bet on that!"

Miss Mystery's face fell. Abject despair was written on every line of it. She glanced at Trask, and his own determined expression showed her that she could hope for nothing from him save on his own terms.

And those terms were too hard for her. Just aware of loving Lockwood, just learning to know what love meant and how sweet it could be, just realizing, too, the awfulness of her own position, the dire necessity for secrecy, the terrible result of Trask's revelations, should they be made, altogether Miss Mystery faced a dangerous crisis.

"You say you'll give me a week?" she said, at last, grasping at a hope of reprieve.

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Trask looked at her with curiosity.

"What good'll that do you? Better put yourself under my protection at once. Every day you lose is that much nearer discovery."

"All right, I'll dare it! They won't--won't condemn me, anyhow."

"Ho, ho. Banking on your sex to save you! Well, honestly, I don't really think they'd send a pretty girl like you to the chair, but a trial would convict you in the eyes of the world, even if twelve men were too soft-hearted to see you electrocuted. And there'd be imprisonment--"

"Oh, hush! Mr. Trask, have you no pity?"

"Plenty for the girl that is to be my wife. None for any other. And especially none for a girl who scorns me and throws me over for my own secretary. I'm a red-blooded man, I am, and you can't play fast and loose with me and get away with it!"

"I don't mean to play fast and loose with you, if by that you mean changing my mind. But, I do ask for a few days to think it over. That's not unreasonable, is it?"

Miss Mystery's little smile was cajoling, and Trask couldn't resist it.

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"All right," he said, as he looked hungrily at her bewitching face, "take a coupla days, then. But, only on condition that you don't let Lockwood make love to you. Promise me that for the forty-eight hours, you won't see that man alone."

"How can I promise that?"

"You'll have to, whether you can or not."

"All right, I promise."

He looked at her sternly.

"And you'll keep that promise, or you'll be sorry! I haven't

much opinion of your promises, you're not the sort to keep faith. But, remember I'm a power. Maurice Trask can do whatever he sets out to do. And if you forget that, you're mighty apt to regret it."

"I gave you a promise," Anita said, looking at him coldly, "and I fully intend to keep it. It's not such a very hard one to keep."

Her lip curled, and though he guessed the tumult in her heart, there was no sign of it on her face.

Trask accompanied her to the postoffice, and then, bidding him a careless good afternoon, Anita went into a large drygoods shop and he made no attempt to follow her.

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He would have been interested, however, had he noted her proceedings. For she went straight to a telephone booth, and called up the Waring house. It answered and when she asked to be connected with Mr. Lockwood, the butler gave the connection without question.

"Gordon?" came the soft little voice. "This is Anita."

And then she told him quickly but fully all that had passed between her and Trask.

"So you see," she concluded, "I do want these two days to think things out, and I mustn't see you alone, for he's sure to know of it."

"All right," Lockwood said, "We'll do our courting over the telephone. Let me see, I'll go down town this evening and telephone you--"

"No, that won't do. I can't talk to you in the Adams front hall! Here's a better plan. Tomorrow, when Mr. Trask goes out, you call me up there, and I'll go out to a pay station and call you up where you are now. And the day after tomorrow the time will be up."

"Yes, and what are you going to do then?"

"I don't know," said the girl, her voice suddenly losing its brightness. "I'm going to think it out. Good-by."

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"Oh, wait a minute. I'll see you at dinner, shan't I?"

"Oh, yes; and this evening, I suppose, but only with others present."

And after a few more words Anita left the booth and walked slowly home.

When Trask returned to his library he said to Lockwood, "Get busy on those old books at once, will you? I want the shelves cleared for some of my own books that I've sent for."

"Very well," returned the secretary, thinking of the probable difference between the expected books and those they would replace.

"Do you mind, Mr Trask, if I take a few of these old ones myself? I'll pay you whatever price a first class dealer sets on them."

"Oh, take what you want, without pay. I'm in a good humor today, Lockwood, better take advantage of it. Help yourself from the shelves."

"Thank you, I'll not impose on your kindness and generosity."

Nor did he, but among the few volumes he chose was the crimson stained copy of Martial's Epigrams.

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Distasteful though it was, Lockwood looked at the book with a feeling of reverence and opened the volume at the page that had last held the interest of its owner's scholarly mind.

The crimson stain completely obscured the print, but Lockwood gazed long at the defaced page.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if a crack detective could get anything from this. There's that Stone, Mercer is always raving over--I suppose he's terribly expensive--yet this strange case might intrigue him--and yet--there's Anita to be considered. If it should turn the tide against her--"

Later that afternoon, Trask went out again and Lockwood seized his chance.

Calling Anita at the Adams house, he said, "Listen, dear, you needn't say anything but yes or no, and then no one will understand."

"All right," came the reply.

"I've just about come to the conclusion I'll get a clever detective and put him on the case. I mean a real detective--in fact, Fleming Stone."

"Oh, no!" Anita's voice was one of utter dismay.

"Why not?"

"I--I can't tell you this way! You said--"

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"So I did. Well, here, I'll ask questions. Don't you want me to do this?"

"No!" very emphatically.

"You'd rather I wouldn't?"

"Very much rather."

"Because you fear ill effects to yourself?"

"Yes."

"You are sure you're not overestimating the danger of that?"

"I am sure."

"Then there's no more to be said. Good-by."

Lockwood hung up the receiver, and turned around to see Trask frowning at him.

"So that's the way you and Miss Austin whip the devil around the stump!"

"That's the way," returned Lockwood, coolly.

"She promised not to see you alone--is this how she keeps the letter of her promise and breaks it in spirit?"

"Leave her out of this. I called her up, she did not call me."

"All the same. Now, I gather from the interesting talk I overheard that Miss Austin does not wish to have Fleming Stone take up this case."

"You are at liberty to gather anything you choose."

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"See here, Lockwood, you make a mistake when you try to antagonize me. I'd be a better friend to you than an enemy."

"I've no reason to want you for either." Lockwood was by no means impertinent, he merely spoke indifferently. Trask noted this, and went on, more suavely:

"Now, my dear Lockwood, what I propose to do now, is to employ Fleming Stone myself."

Lockwood was astounded. At first he was glad, for he felt sure Stone could solve the whole mystery. But, then, suppose it incriminated Anita, and though Lockwood was sure of her innocence, he was just enough so to realize that his surety was largely because of his affection for her. Suppose Stone should prove her to be the criminal!

It couldn't be--and yet--

He looked up to find Trask smiling broadly.

"You've the reputation of being of an impassive countenance, Lockwood, but to me your face is as an open book! However, it's only because you are up against a difficult problem. You want Stone to come, yet you're afraid he'll find out that Miss Austin is pretty deep in this murder mystery. But I've made up my mind, and I think you'll see that any attempt on your part to change my decision would look bad for Miss Austin."

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"You let her name alone, Trask, or I'll reason with you myself."

"Have you any real right to tell me to leave her name alone?"

"Yes, I have."

"Are you and she engaged?"

"So far as I am concerned, we are. Miss Austin prefers to wait until later to announce it, but I can answer for her to you

in confidence."

"Oh, it's in confidence, all right. Don't fear I'll breathe the news. For, you see, I've made up my mind to marry Anita Austin myself; and if Fleming Stone proves that she is a murderess, I'll marry her all the same. She'll escape punishment--what woman doesn't?"

"Then, look here," Lockwood's manner changed. "If you're going to get Stone anyway, why can't we work with each other and not at odds? Whatever else we think or feel we both want to save Miss Austin all the trouble or distress we can. Let's be friends, then, and talk things over with Stone, and then--"

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"I'm on! Then if we see things are going against her, shut him off!"

"Well, yes, if we can."

"Of course we can. I've money enough for anything--even to buy off Fleming Stone. No man's too big to be bought."

"I don't mean all this exactly as you do, but I do mean this: if Stone can solve the mystery and clear Anita, let him do it. If he finds her implicated, let it be understood by him beforehand, he is to cease investigations."

Trask thought a minute.

"That goes," he said; "I agree."

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CHAPTER XV FLEMING STONE COMES

"Terence."

"Yes, sir."

"We're off for New England."

"New England it is."

"Start this afternoon, stay a few days, maybe a week among the classic shades of Corinth."

"Corinth it is."

This somewhat laconic conversation was all that was necessary for Fleming Stone's assistant and general factotum to make preparations for the trip, achieve tickets, and arrive, with his chief, at the train gate at the proper time.

Terence McGuire, sometimes called Fibsy, because of a certain tendency to mendacity, had begun as Stone's office boy, and, by virtue of his general aptitude for detective work and his utter devotion to Stone, had become a worthwhile and much appreciated assistant. Not only did the lad look after all details of their trips as well as taking care of the offices, but many times his ingenious mind so stimulated or aided Stone's own, that more often than not they were practically colleagues.

They had a compartment to themselves at the end of the car, and they were no sooner started than Stone began to discuss the case with the boy.

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"I don't know all the details, of course," he began, "but it's a setting after my own heart."

"Then I can guess it," put in the wise Fibsy. "Man found dead in sealed room."

"You're a wizard! What made you think of that?"

"Cause that's the problem you like best, F. Stone. Wise me up some more."

"It's further interesting, because the victim is a great and good man, in fact, the President-elect of the University of Corinth."

"My! Somebody didn't want him for president? That the idea?"

"Apparently not. Nothing in the letter about that."

"Who wrote the letter?"

"The relative who inherits the whole estate."

"He do the job?"

"No reason as yet to think so. But the criminal mustn't be guessed at. The point is, the locked room."

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"How was the killing done?"

"Stabbed. No weapon found and no way to get in or out of the locked room. Fine problem."

"Yes--if we don't find a secret stairway--or, a lying servant. Such cases generally fizzle out that way."

"Fibs, you're a Boy Cassandra."

"What's that?"

Stone explained, for it was his habit to supplement McGuire's very scant education by bits of information now and then, when time served.

"But, there's a queer clause in the arrangement," Stone went on, "if we find the evidence leading in a certain direction, the chase is to cease."

"That won't do."

"Of course not, and I'll soon make that clear. But I can't think it will lead in the given direction as that implicates a young girl, and rarely indeed, have I found a criminal answering to that description."

"Tisn't usual--but, you know, F. Stone, since the war, girls are so independent and so cocky that there's no telling what they'll do. Me for the girl--as a suspect."

"Fibsy, you're a fool."

"No, sir. I don't admit it. See here, sir, if they're so 'fraid s'picion will turn to that girl, there's reason for it. Yet, as you can guess, if she didn't do it, they want her skirts entirely cleared."

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"Pretty good deduction so far. But we can't judge rationally until we know the facts."

The facts were told them, when, some hours later, they sat, alone with Maurice Trask in the room where John Waring breathed his last.

"I'm a plain man," Trask said, for he didn't care to pose unduly before an astute detective. "I've come into this estate of my cousin's--my second cousin, he was, and I started out with a firm determination to find the villain who killed him. But, there is some cause for suspicion of the young lady I expect to marry. And here's the situation. If you can solve the mystery of Doctor Waring's death, and free that girl from any taint of blame, go ahead. But if your investigation leads to her--stop it. I want to marry her just the same, whether she killed anybody or not. But if she didn't do it, I want to know

it."

"Can't you learn the truth from the young lady herself--if she is your fiancée?" asked Stone.

"Oh, she says she didn't do it, of course. But there's such an overwhelming mass of evidence--or, apparent evidence against her, that it's the deepest sort of a mystery."

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"Main facts first. Where was the body found?"

"In that desk chair, seated at his desk, as he often was evenings. Reading in a Latin book, so you see, he wasn't looking for trouble."

"Found dead in the morning? Been dead all night?"

"Yes, to both those questions. And locked in his room. Had to break in."

"And no weapon about?"

"Not a sign of any--"

"Then that cuts out all suicide idea."

"It does and it doesn't. You may as well say the locked up room cuts out all idea of a murder."

"But it must be one or the other. And isn't it more plausible to look for some way that the murderer could have gone away and left the room locked, than to think up a way that the suicide could have disposed of this weapon?"

"Yes, that's so, but I want you to investigate both possibilities. You see, if you could prove a suicide, that would free Miss Austin at once. And--if things go against her--I want you to--oh, hang it, it's hard to put into words--"

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"I'll do that," said Fibsby, "if things go against Miss Austin, you want Mr. Stone to frame up suicide, and declare it the truth."

"Exactly that," and Trask looked relieved at the thought all his cards were on the table. "I don't want Miss Austin suspected, but I do want to know if she's innocent."

"Any other suspects?" asked Stone.

"Not definite ones. There's the Japanese who absconded that same night, and of course, there's the secretary, Gordon Lockwood. I'd like to suspect him, all right, and he has a round silver penholder that just fits the wound that killed Waring. But it doesn't look like he did it, he never would have left the penholder in evidence, and he would have arranged matters to look more like a suicide. Then, too, how could he lock the door behind him?"

"That question must be answered first of all," said Stone. "I'll examine the room, of course, but after the local police and detectives have done that, I doubt if I find anything enlightening. So far as I can see, this whole affair is unique,

and I think we will find some surprising evidence and soon. Tell me more of this Miss Austin. Who is she?"

"Nobody knows. In fact, they call her Miss Mystery, because so little is known of her. She appeared here in Corinth from nowhere. She knew no one, and as she began to make acquaintances somebody brought her over here. She met Doctor Waring, and inside of twenty-four hours had so bewitched him that it would seem he had her visiting him in his study late at night. She said at first, she wasn't here, but as she left the impress of her dress trimmings on that chair-back, and as she has a ruby pin and a lot of money that were in the Doctor's possession, it looks, one might say, a bit queer."

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"Weren't the valuables planted on her?" put in Fibsy.

"That's what she says--or rather, that's one of the things she said. The girl contradicts herself continually. She says one thing one day and another the next."

"Is she pretty?" This from Fibsy.

"Pretty as the devil! And that's not so bad as a description. She has great big dark eyes, with straight black brows that almost meet. She has a jaunty little face, that can be roguish or scornful or merry or pathetic as the little rascal chooses. She has completely bowled me over, and I'd be glad to have her on any terms and whatever her past history. But, there it is. If she has a clean slate in this murder business, I want to know it."

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"And if she hasn't?"

"Then I don't want anybody else to know it. If you find, Mr. Stone, real evidence that Anita Austin killed John Waring, or if she confesses to the deed, then you whip around and prove a suicide, and I'll double your charge. You needn't do anything wrong, you know. Just sum up that all indications point to a suicide, and let it go at that. Nobody will arrest Miss Austin if you say that."

"You must be crazy, Mr. Trask," returned Stone, coldly. "I don't conduct my business on any such principles as those. I can't perjure myself to save your lady love from a just condemnation."

"You haven't seen her yet." Trask nodded his sagacious head. "Wait till you do."

"Give me all the points against her," the detective suggested.

"I will. I'd rather you knew them from me. Not that I'll color them--they're facts that speak for themselves, but other people might exaggerate them. Well, to begin with, this girl, a day or so after she arrived here was seen kissing the picture of Doctor Waring which she had cut from a newspaper. I tell you this, 'cause you'll hear it anyway, and the gossips think it shows a previous acquaintance between the two. But I hold that as girls have matinee idols and Movie heroes, this girl might easily have adored the scholarly man, though she

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had never seen him."

"It is possible," Stone agreed, "but not very probable. She denies they were acquainted?"

"Yes. Vows she never saw him until one night she went to his lecture, soon after her arrival here."

"What is she in Corinth for?"

"To sketch--she's an artist."

"Go on."

"Well, as I said, she must have come here that Sunday night, for one of the boarders at the house she lives in saw her cross the snowy field. Also, the footprints just fitted her shoes. Also, the tracks led right up on the side porch here to that long French window. And led right back again to the Adams house."

"Whew!" Fibsy exploded, "aren't you rubbing it in?"

"Well, that's what they tell me--" Trask asserted, doggedly, "and I want you to know it all, Mr. Stone, before the other people tell you a garbled version."

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"Go on."

"Then, they say, the girl left marks of her dress trimming on that chair, and Lockwood, the secretary, rubbed them off next morning, as soon as the body was discovered. We have the word of two witnesses for this episode."

"Who are the witnesses?"

"Ito, the Japanese butler, and Miss Peyton, who lives in this house."

"Go on."

"Well, then, ever since the tragedy, Miss Austin has acted queer. Queer in all sorts of ways. She is sad and desolate one minute, and saucy and independent the next. I can't make her out at all. And she is more than half in love with this Lockwood. I have to cut him out, you see. And I figure, if you prove the case against Miss Austin, and if I agree to marry her and hush up the whole matter, and make it seem a suicide--"

"You figure that she'll throw over the secretary for you," cried Fibsy, his eyes aghast at the man's plan.

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"Exactly that. You see, Mr. Stone, I don't try to deceive you. While I have a natural sorrow at my cousin's death, yet remember that I never knew him in life, and that, while I want to avenge his death in any case but one, I do not want to if it implicates Anita Austin."

"I understand," said Stone, seemingly not so shocked at the conversation as his assistant was.

"There's another queer thing," said Trask. "They tell me that when the body was found there was the impress of a ring on the forehead."

"A seal ring?"

"Oh, no. Not a finger ring, but a circle, about two inches across, a red mark, as if it had been made as a sign or symbol of some sort."

"It remained on the flesh?"

"Until the embalming process took place. That removed it. I didn't see it, but I'm told it was a clearly defined circle, quite evidently impressed with some intent."

"Sounds like a sign of a secret society," Fibsy suggested, but Stone paid no heed.

"Let's reconstruct the case," he said; "Waring sat at his desk his secretary outside in that hall?"

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"Yes; the Japanese, the other one, the one that disappeared, brought in water, and then Doctor Waring closed the door and locked it."

"Immediately?"

"I don't know that, but anyway, no one that we know of saw him again alive. Nogi is under no suspicion, for after he came out of the room, the Doctor rose and locked the door. Lockwood can't be suspected, as he heard the door locked, and couldn't get in. He *is* more or less suspected because of his penholder, but much as I should like to think him the criminal, I know he isn't."

"You're very honest, Mr. Trask."

"Yes, because I want the truth. Can you get it?"

"I think so."

"You still eliminate suicide?"

"I can't see how I can think it, with no weapon. You say that death was instantaneous--?"

"Yes; the doctors agree that it was. Positively he had no chance to hide or dispose of the instrument of death."

"And why should he? Suicides never make their death seem a murder, though often a murderer tries to simulate a suicide."

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"Yet that wasn't done in this case, or the murderer would have left the weapon."

"That may be the very point he neglected. Now, how did the murderer get out? Get busy, Fibs."

For nearly half an hour, the three men searched the room. Had there been any secret exit, or any concealed passage, it

must have been found. Fleming Stone's knowledge of architecture would not let him overlook any thing of the sort, and Fibsy's alert eyes and quick wits would have found anything out of the ordinary.

"No way out," Stone concluded, finally; "and no way of locking a door or a window after departure from the room. Looks as if the murder theory was as untenable as the other. No chance of a natural death?"

"With a round hole in his jugular vein? No, sir. The doctors here won't stand for that. Try again."

"I shall. I don't know when I've had such a baffling, intriguing case, as this appears to be at first sight. It may resolve itself into a simple problem, but I can't think so now. Even if it were the work of your Miss Austin--how did she get in and out?"

"Oh, she got in, all right. Waring let her in, at the French window. Probably that's when he locked his door. But--say she killed him--how did she get out and lock the room behind her?"

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"She couldn't. The window locks are bolts, and could not be shot from outside. For the moment I see no explanation. It is blank, utter mystery. When can I see Miss Austin?"

"Too late tonight, tomorrow morning will have to do. But she won't run away. The police won't let her."

"Yet they can't hold her."

"They are doing so. They claim she was the last one to see the victim alive--"

"Does she admit that?"

"Not she! She admits nothing. You'll get nothing out of that little Sphinx!"

"All right, then, Mr. Trask, if you've finished your tale, suppose you leave me here to ruminate over this thing, and I'll go up to my room when I wish."

Trask went off to bed, and Stone and his young assistant sat and looked at each other.

"Up against it, F. Stone?"

"I certainly am, Fibs. And yet, the thing is so absolutely impossible that there must be a solution within easy reach. It can't be suicide, with the weapon gone, and it can't be murder with the room locked up. Now, as it must be either suicide or murder, then it follows, that either the weapon isn't gone, or the room isn't locked up."

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"Wasn't, you mean."

"Yes, wasn't. But I don't yet think that any one disturbed the conditions purposely. For why would the secretary take away the weapon to make it seem a suicide--"

"He would if he did it."

"He didn't do it. Trask sees that. The man Trask is a sharp one. He sees all there is to see, and since there's practically nothing to see that solves the mystery, he sent for me. It would be a good one on me, Terence, if I have to give the thing up as unsolvable."

"That won't happen, F. Stone, but I'm free to confess, I can't see any way to look."

The next morning, Maurice Trask went over to the Adams house, and brought Miss Mystery back with him.

She came willingly enough, and the interview with the detective took place in the room of the tragedy itself.

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Stone noticed that the girl showed no horror or distaste of the scene, and even sat in the chair he placed for her, which was the same plush-covered one that had received the tell-tale imprints.

Fleming Stone regarded Miss Austin curiously. Not only was her beauty all that Trask had described it, but there was an added quality of fineness, a trace of high mentality, that naturally enough Maurice Trask quite overlooked.

At first glance, Stone's thought was--"That child commit murder? Never!" But a few moments later, he was not quite so sure of his negation.

Fibsy just sat and looked at her. He had no occasion to speak, unless addressed, so, in silence he merely let his eyes feast on the piquant face with its ever changing expressions.

After casual questions, Stone said directly, "Did you know Doctor Waring before you came to Corinth, Miss Austin?"

"No," she said, a little hesitantly; "I had heard of him, but I had never before seen him."

"How had you heard of him?"

"There was much in the papers about his election."

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"And that interested you?"

"Not specially," she said, with a sudden accession of hauteur.

And thereupon, she became a most unsatisfactory witness. She listened to Stone's questions with an absent-minded air, answered in monosyllables, or by a movement of her head. She even gave a side smile to Fibsy, which, though it amazed him, also filled him with a strange exultant joy, and made him her abject slave at once.

Stone went on, drawling out a string of unimportant questions in a monotonous voice, and at length, he said, in the same unimportant way,

"And when you saw Doctor Waring that night, was there a

red ring on his forehead?"

"No," said Miss Austin, and then, suddenly awakening to what she had done, she cried impetuously, "I mean, I don't know. I wasn't here."

Stone smiled gravely. "You were here," he said. "Now let us talk about what happened during your visit."

An interruption was caused by a tap at the closed door.

Impatiently, Trask rose and went to the door. It was Ito, bringing a telegram for Miss Austin. It had arrived at the Adams house, and had been sent over.

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Miss Mystery read it, with great difficulty controlled her agitation, as she quickly went to the blazing log fire and dropped the paper in.

"Skip over to the Telegraph office and get a copy," said Stone quietly, and Fibsy obeyed.

Then to Miss Austin's continued distress, Stone read the message aloud. It was from San Francisco, and it said:

"Better own up and tell the whole truth. I have annexed Carl." It was signed merely "A" and apparently it was of dire import to its recipient. Miss Mystery sat silent, and wide-eyed in desperation, as she looked hopelessly from one to another.

"Don't you think," said Stone, not unkindly, "that you'd better follow A's advice and make a clean breast of the whole matter?"

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CHAPTER XVI MISS MYSTERY'S TESTIMONY

Miss Mystery looked from Stone's impassive face to Fibsby's eager boyish countenance. Then she looked at Maurice Trask.

The latter showed deepest sympathy and interest but Trask also had a wary air, as if ready to interrupt any disclosures that might be damaging to the girl.

"First of all," Stone said, "who sent you that telegram from San Francisco?"

"I don't know." The calm little face was as expressionless as Stone's own, and she made her statement as straightforwardly as if it had been true.

"Miss Austin," Stone spoke severely now, "it's to your own advantage to adopt a more amenable manner. You will not help your cause by prevarication or evasion. Unless you will answer my questions truly, I must find out these things for myself. I can do it."

"If you can find out who sent that telegram, go ahead," she flared at him. "I tell you I don't know who sent it, and I don't know who 'A' is."

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"I know who she is," said Fibsby, and then Anita's quick, startled glance proved to the boy that his little ruse was successful and he had at least guessed the sex of the sender.

"A woman," the astute lad mused, "and she has annexed Carl. Maybe Carl is another name for that escaped Japanese. But it's all so far away. How can they conduct operations between here and California!"

"Miss Austin," Stone tried to win her confidence, "believe me I am most anxious to help you. Please tell me why you came over here that Sunday night. It is utterly useless to deny that you did come, now tell me why."

Anita looked baffled, but after a moment's pause, she said, "Do you think I killed Doctor Waring?"

"I know you didn't," broke in Fibsby, with enthusiasm. "Now, come across, Miss Austin, and I'll bet you F. Stone can dope out the whole game."

"I know most of the circumstances already," Stone smiled, and followed up the small advantage he had gained. "You came over here late, secretly, across the snowy field. Doctor Waring let you in?"

"Yes," Anita breathed the word, and her starry eyes never left Stone's face. She seemed almost hypnotized.

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"Then you sat down in the chair you're in now, and he locked the door--why did he do that?"

"I don't know--he didn't! Stop! You have no right to torment me like this! I have counsel--Mr. Trask here is my lawyer. Let him tell me what to do!"

Her nerves were tense, and her little fingers were continually twisting round themselves. Her face was agonized, and Stone felt as if he were guilty of utter cruelty. But he must go on.

"Mr. Trask cannot tell what he does not know," he said, coldly. "I am in authority, you must answer me. Did Doctor Waring give you the money and the ruby pin?"

"Yes, he did."

"Why?"

"As gifts. Why does any one give presents?"

"Because he loved you?"

"Yes." Anita's voice dropped to a softer tone, her eyes had a faraway look, and her sensitive little mouth quivered.

"Yet you had known him but a few days! You had never seen him before you came to Corinth?"

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"Never."

"Isn't that a strange admission? How could he become so infatuated in so short a time?"

"Have you never heard of such a thing?" the face was almost roguish now, and the dark eyes showed a hint of smile.

Stone was baffled. He gazed at this strange young person, who was either fooling him to the top of her bent or was a helpless, harassed child.

"Was Doctor Waring related to you?" he asked, with a sudden new idea.

"Oh, no. He was no relation. I tell you I never met him before I came here."

"And he gave you the valuables?"

"He did. I'll swear to that--though I have no witness to prove it."

"And you accepted them! Accepted a large sum of money and a pin set with a precious stone from a man you scarcely knew! A man engaged to be married! A man of twice your own age! You must admit this calls for explanation."

"Why does it? Hadn't he a right to give me those things if he chose?"

"Wait a minute, Miss Austin. You loved him?"

"Maybe."

"Then, if you did, do you want his name stained, his memory blotted by an act that is, to say the least, questionable?"

"But he did give them to me."

"Unless you can say more clearly why he did so I'm not sure I can believe you. Did you ask for them?"

"Oh, no!"

Her disclaimer sounded true, but Stone began to think she was a consummate little actress as well as a clever falsifier.

"Well," he said, after a short pause, "I may as well tell you, Miss Austin, that I am here to solve this mystery. That I am not at all satisfied that you are telling me the truth; that, therefore, I shall have to seek the truth elsewhere. I will tell you, too, that I don't want to implicate you, that I should much prefer to keep your name out of it all, but that you leave me no choice but to go ahead with my investigations wherever they may lead. A few more questions and you may go. What was Doctor Waring doing when you came?"

"He--he was sitting at his desk." She looked troubled at Stone's speech and seemed half inclined to be more friendly.

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"You saw him through the French window, before you came in?"

"Yes; the window has a silk curtain, but I saw him between the edge of the silk and the window sash."

"Was he reading?"

"No; there were books on the desk, but he was not reading."

"He rose and let you in?"

"Yes."

"He had sent for you?"

"No--that is, yes."

"You spoke truly the first time. He did not send for you and you came of your own accord. Was he surprised to see you?"

"He didn't say so."

"What did he say? What was his first word?"

"Why--I don't know. He said--'Anita! You!'--or something like that."

"And kissed you?"

"Yes." And then a sudden wave of crimson spread over the scared little face. It was evident she had not voluntarily made the admission. It had slipped out as her memory was busy

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with the scene.

"I won't stand it!" she cried, "I can't stand it! Mr. Trask, save me from this terrible man!"

Maurice Trask sitting near her, held out his hand, and Miss Mystery took it. It seemed to reassure her, and she said, "Remember, you're my lawyer. Don't let him question me any more. Tell him things yourself--"

"But he doesn't know things--" said Stone, gravely.

"Then let him make them up! I refuse to stand this persecution. I didn't kill that man--"

"Wait a moment, Miss Austin," Stone feared if he let her go now, he would lose his chance, "since you are admittedly the last person who is known to have seen Doctor Waring alive, you cannot avoid, or evade the strictest questioning. You were here," he spoke very gravely, "late at night. Next morning he was found dead. There are no footprints in the snow but your own. There was no other way into the room. Therefore, you are responsible for his death or--you know who is."

"Must I--must I be convicted?"

Her tone was heartbroken, her strained little face piteous in its appeal. But Stone did not believe in her. He had concluded she was entirely capable of pulling wool over her questioners' eyes, and he watched her keenly.

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"I don't say you must," he returned deliberately, "but I say you may."

"Never," declared Trask. "You know what I told you, Mr. Stone."

"And you know that I refused to accept your terms. I shall carry this matter through to the end. I do not say I think Miss Austin guilty of crime, but I do say she knows all about the death of Doctor Waring and she must be made to tell."

"Suppose I say I--he killed himself," she said, "will you believe me?"

"With your stiletto?" asked Stone, quickly.

"Y--Yes."

"And then you took the stiletto home and hid it?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To shield his memory. Suicide is a coward's act."

"Rubbish!" Fibsy exploded, unable to keep quiet any longer. "I say, Miss Mystery, you *are* a mystery! Why don't you tell what you know. It's up to you. Here you were with the victim, shortly before his death, you probably know all about what

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happened. By the way, how did you get out?"

"Out the same way I came in."

"And bolted that window-door behind you?"

"Oh--no--well, you see--"

"I see you are not to say another word, Miss Austin," Trask decreed. "I'm very sorry I asked Mr. Stone to take up this case. However, I shall take you home now, then I'll come back and I hope I can persuade Mr. Stone to discontinue his work. If I'd had any idea of these disclosures you've made, I never should have engaged his services. Come, Anita, I will take you home. Mr. Stone, await my return. I shan't be long."

The two went, and Stone, pacing up and down the long room said musingly, "All centers round that girl."

"Righto," said Fibsy, "but she didn't kill the man."

"The trouble is, Terence, your saying that doesn't make it so."

"No, but its being so makes me say it."

Gordon Lockwood came in, his face full of anxiety.

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"I'm glad to see you alone for a moment, Mr. Stone," he said.

"I saw Trask taking Miss Austin home. Now, tell me, please, can you get at the truth about that girl?"

"I haven't as yet. She's as great a mystery as the death of Doctor Waring."

"She is. But I have every faith in her. She is the victim of some delusion--"

"Delusion?"

"Yes; I mean she's under a mistaken sense of duty to somebody, or--"

"State your meaning more definitely, will you?"

"I'm not sure that I can. But I'm positive--"

"Ah, now, Mr. Lockwood," this from Fibsy, "you're positive the young lady is an angel of light, because you're head over heels in love with her. That's all right, and I don't blame you--but, take it from me, you'll prove your case quicker, better and more surely, if you investigate the secret of Miss Mystery, than if you just go around babbling about her innocence and purity."

Lockwood looked at the boy, ready to resent his impudence. But Fibsy's serious face and honest eyes carried conviction and the secretary at once took him for an ally.

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"You're right, McGuire," he said; "and, I for one am not afraid of the result of a thorough investigation of Miss Austin's affairs."

"You've reason to be, though," Stone observed. "I can't be sure, of course, but many stray hints and bits of evidence, to my mind point to Miss Austin's close connection with the whole matter."

"What is your theory as to the death, Mr. Stone," Lockwood asked. "Suicide or murder?"

"Honestly, I don't know. I'm quite ready to form an opinion when I get some real evidence. I'm through questioning Miss Austin--I shouldn't have let her go otherwise. I want next to do a lot of further questioning. And I'd very much like to get hold of that servant, Nogi."

"You think he's implicated?" Lockwood stared.

"Why else would he run away? He must be found. He is probably the key to the whole situation."

"Guilty?"

"Maybe and maybe not. If he and Miss Austin were in collusion--"

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"I beg your pardon, Mr. Stone, but I cannot have any thing said in my presence that reflects on that young lady's good name. We are engaged to be married--that is, I consider myself bound to her, and hope to win her full consent."

"But I understood--I thought, Trask--"

"Mr. Trask wants to marry her, but I hardly think his suit will succeed. The lady must decide, of course, but I have reason to hope--"

"Gee, Mr. Lockwood, 'course she'll take you," Fibsy informed him, "now, let's you and me get busy to find out Miss Mystery's mystery. You ought to know it, if you're going to marry her--and too, you can't believe there's anything that can't stand the light."

"What can it be?" Lockwood asked, helplessly. "How can a young girl like that have a real secret that so pervades and surrounds her whole life that she will give no hint of it? Who is she? What is she? Why is she here? I don't believe she came here merely to sketch in water colors."

"No," agreed Stone. "If that were all, why the mystery about her home and family? I understand she has given several contradictory statements as to where she really lives."

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"She has," assented Lockwood. "But may it not be just a twist of her humorous nature? I assure you she is roguishly inclined--"

"No; it isn't a joke," Fibsy said, frowning at the thought. "She's got a real secret, a mystery that means a whole lot to her,--and prob'ly to other people. Well, F. Stone, I guess it's up to me to go out and seek her people." He sighed deeply. "I hate to leave the seat of war, but I gotta do it. Nobody else could ever ferret out the antecedents and general family

doings of Miss Mystery but Yours Truly. And this is no idle boast. I'm going out for the goods and I'll fetch home the bacon."

He looked glum at the prospect, for it looked like no easy or simple matter that he proposed to undertake.

"You see," he went on, "that girl is stubborn--my, but she's stubborn. You'll have a handful, Mr. Lockwood. But if so be's you're willing to face the revelations, I'll go and dig 'em up."

"Where do you think you'll go, Terence?" asked Stone.

"To California, F. S., of course. Didn't that telegram come from there? All I've got to do is to find 'A' and the 'Carl' that she 'annexed' and there's your mystery of the young lady solved. But the death of the Doctor--that's another thing."

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"Do you really mean this?" Lockwood said, staring at Fibsy. "How can you find a needle in a haystack, like that?"

"I can't--but I've gotta."

"But it's so much simpler to get the information from Miss Austin herself."

"You call that simple!" Fibsy looked at him. "Well, it isn't. It's easier to go to Mars, I should say, than to get any real information out of that little scrap of waywardness."

"No, nothing can be learned from her," said Stone.

"Then, shall I be off?" asked Fibsy.

"Wait twenty-four hours, my lad, and then if we're no further along, I suppose you'll have to go. Nogi must be found."

"I'm glad Mr. Trask called you in, Mr. Stone," Lockwood said, slowly, "but I do hope you won't associate any thought of Miss Austin with the crime. She could no more commit crime than a small kitten could."

"I fancy you're right," and Stone, half absent-mindedly, "but opinions as to what people can or can't do, are of not much real use."

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"Have you a theory?"

"Yes, I have a theory, but the facts don't fit it--and it seems as if they could not be made to. Yet it's a good theory."

"You don't care to tell it to me?"

"Why, I'm willing to do so. My theory is that John Waring committed suicide, but I can't make any facts bear me out. You see, it's not only the absence of a weapon, but all absence of motive, and even of opportunity."

"Surely he had opportunity--in here alone."

"It can't be opportunity if he had no implement handy. And nothing can explain away the missing weapon, and the

locked room, on the suicide theory."

"What can explain the locked room, on a murder theory?" Lockwood asked.

"I haven't thought of anything as yet. What book was Doctor Waring reading that night?"

"There were several on his desk, but the one that was found nearest the body, the one stained with blood, is a copy of Martial's Epigrams."

"May I see it, please?"

Lockwood brought the book and Fleming Stone examined it carefully. It was not a rare or finely bound edition, it seemed more a working copy or a book for reference. It was printed in Latin.

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"He was fond of Martial?" asked Stone.

"He was a reader of all the classics. He preferred them, of course, in their original Latin or Greek. He was also a modern linguist."

Stone opened the volume to the stained page, which was numbered 87. He studied it closely.

"It's all Greek to me," he said, frowning, "even though it's Latin, but I hoped to read something on the page beside the printed text."

However, the irregularly shaped red blur gave him no clue, and he returned the book to Lockwood.

"Had the Doctor any private accounts?" the detective asked suddenly.

"Not that I know of," replied the secretary. "He was a man of singularly few secrets, and I was always at liberty to open all letters, and had free access to his desk and safe. I never knew him to hide or secrete a paper of any sort."

"No harm in looking," Stone said, and began forthwith to search the desk drawers and compartments.

The search was fruitless, until at length, a small checkbook was found.

And a curious revelation it gave them. For of its blank checks but one had been torn out, and the remaining stub gave the information that it was a check for ten thousand dollars drawn to the order of Anita Austin.

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Those who looked at it stared incredulously.

"It is dated," Stone said, "the date that Doctor Waring died."

It was. Had this too, been given to the strange young woman, whom Stone was beginning to designate to himself by the title of adventuress? Was it possible that young girl, who seemed scarce more than a child, had some how

maneuvered to get all this from a man whom she had deliberately fascinated and infatuated?

It was incredible--yet what else could be assumed?

Gordon Lockwood looked deeply distressed. His lips set in a tight line, and he said, through his clenched teeth:

"I don't care! Nothing can shake my faith in that girl! She is blameless, and only these misleading circumstances make you think otherwise, Mr. Stone."

The detective looked at him as one might regard a hopeless lunatic.

But young McGuire's face was a study.

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He looked horror-stricken and then dazed. Then he had an inspiration apparently, for he smiled broadly--only to lapse again into a profound gloom.

"If it ain't the beatin'est!" he said, at last. "Whatcha make of it, F. Stone?"

"I'm completely staggered for the moment. Fibs," the detective returned, "but these cumulative evidences of Miss Mystery's--er--acquisitive disposition, seem--I say *seem* to lead to a suspicion of her undue influence over Doctor Waring, at least, as to obtaining money."

"Oh, she didn't!" Lockwood fairly groaned. "Don't blame her! Perhaps Waring fell a victim to her beauty and grace, and perhaps he urged these gifts upon her--"

"Perhaps," Fibsy said; "perhaps he threatened to kill her if she didn't accept his checks and coin and rubies!--and maybe she had to kill him in self-defense--"

"Self-defense!" Lockwood cried, grasping at any straw. "Could it have been that?"

"No," Stone said; "be rational, man, whatever made Anita Austin kill Doctor Waring, it wasn't a case of self-defense."

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CHAPTER XVII PLANNING AN ELOPEMENT

There was some sort of telepathy or some subconscious impulse that made Anita Austin open her bedroom door in response to a light tap, although she had resolved to talk to nobody just then.

But when she saw Gordon Lockwood she was glad she had, and, without waiting for an invitation he stepped inside the room and closed the door.

He looked at her with a face full of compassion and love, but he spoke as one who must attend to an important business.

"Anita," he said, speaking very low, "the crisis has come. They have learned of the check Doctor Waring gave you that night, and it is the last straw. Stone is already, I think, convinced of your guilt, and that young chap, McGuire, will get at the bottom of everything, I'm sure."

"Check? What do you mean?" Miss Mystery said, with a blank look on her face.

"Don't equivocate with me, dear." Lockwood laid his hand gently on hers. "There's no time now to tell you of my love, as I want to tell it. Now, we can only assume that it is all told, that we are engaged, and that we are to be married at once. We are going to elope, Anita."

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"Elope!" she stared at him, but her eyes grew soft and her pale cheeks flushed. "What *do* you mean?"

"It isn't a pretty word," Gordon smiled, "but it's the only thing to do, you see. If you stay here, you'll be arrested. If you go, I go with you. So--we both go, and that makes it an elopement."

"But, Gordon--"

"But, Anita--answer me just one question--do you love me?"

"Yes," with an adorable upward glance and smile.

"More than you loved Doctor Waring?"

Their eyes met. Lockwood's usually inscrutable face was desperately eager, and his deep eyes showed smouldering passion. He held her by the shoulders, he looked steadily at her, awaiting her answer.

"Yes," she said, at last, her lovely lips quivering.

"That's all I want to know!" he whispered, triumphantly, as he kissed the scarlet lips, and drew the slender form into his embrace.

"You must know more--" she began, "and--and I can't tell you. Oh, Gordon--"

She hid her face on his broad shoulder, and he gently stroked her hair, as he said:

"Don't tell me anything now, dearest. Don't ever tell me, unless you choose. And, anyway, I know it all. I know you had never known the Doctor before, and I'll tell you how I know. I found in his scrap basket a note to you--"

"A note to me!" Fresh terror showed in the dark eyes.

"Yes--don't mind. No one else ever saw it. I burned it. But it said, 'Darling Anita. Since you came into my life, life is worth living'--or something like that--"

"When--when did he write that?"

"Sometime on that fatal Sunday. I suppose after he met you in the afternoon, and before you came that evening. Remember, Sweetheart, if ever you want to tell me all about that late visit to him, do so. But, if not, I never shall ask or expect you to. But that's all in the future--our dear future, which we shall spend together--together, Anita! Are you glad?"

"Oh, so glad!" and the soft arms crept round his neck and Miss Mystery gave him a kiss that thrilled his very soul. "Will you take care of me, Gordon?"

"Take care of you, my little love! Take care of you, is it? Just give me the chance!"

"You seem to have a pretty big chance, right now," a smiling face reached up to his. "But--" she seemed suddenly to recollect something, "about a check--he didn't give me a check--"

Lockwood laid a hand over her mouth.

"Hush, dearest. Don't tell me things that aren't--aren't so. I saw the stub--a check for ten thousand dollars--made out to Anita Austin, and dated that very Sunday. Now, hush--" as she began to speak, "we've no time to talk these things over. I tell you the police are on your track. They will come here, they will arrest you--try to get that in your head. I am going to save you--first, for your own sweet sake, and also for my own."

"But, Gordon, wait a minute. Do you believe I killed John Waring?"

Lockwood looked at her.

"Don't ask me that, Anita. And, truly, I don't know whether I believe it or not. I know you have told falsehoods, I know you were there that night, I know of his letter to you, of the check and of the ruby pin and the money. But I--no, I do not know that you killed him. There are many other theories possible--there's Nogi--but, my darling, it all makes no

difference. I love you, I want you, whatever the circumstances or conditions of your life, or your deeds. I love you so, that I want you even if you are a criminal--for in that case, I want to protect and save you. Now, don't tell me you did or didn't kill the man, for--" he gave her a whimsical smile, "I couldn't believe you in either case! I've not much opinion of your veracity, and, too, it's too big a matter to talk about now. Of course I don't believe you killed him! You, my little love! And yet, the evidence is so overpowering that I--believe you did kill him! There, how's that for a platform? Now, let all those things be, and get ready to go away with me. I tell you we're going to elope and mighty quickly too. The difficulty is, to get away unseen. But it must be done. Pack a small handbag--a very small one. I'll plan our way out--and if we can make a getaway under the noses of Stone and his boy, we'll soon be all right. I've a friend who will motor us to a nearby town, where a dear old minister, who has known and loved me from boyhood, will marry us."

"Doesn't he know about--about me?"

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"My little girl, leave all the details of this thing to me. Don't bother your lovely head about it. It will be all right--trust me--if we can escape."

"Is it right for me to go? Oughtn't I stay and--what do they call it? give myself up?"

"Anita, if I didn't love you so, I'd scold you, hard! Now, you obey your future lord and master, and get ready for a hurry-up wedding, I'm sorry that you can't have bridesmaids and choir boys--but, you'll pardon me, I know, if I remind you that that isn't my fault."

Miss Mystery looked up and broke into laughter. Truly, she was a mystery! Her gayety was as spontaneous and merry as if she had never heard of crime or tragedy.

Lockwood gazed at her curiously, and then nodded his handsome head, as he said, "You'll do, Anita! You're a little bit of all right."

But in a moment her mood changed.

"Gordon, we can't," she said, slowly. "We never can get away from this house--let alone the detectives. Miss Bascom is on continual watch and Mrs. Adams--"

"I know, dear. That's it. I thought if you could manage that part, I'd see to evading the Stone faction. Can't you think up a plan?"

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"Love will find a way," she whispered, and unable to resist the inviting smile, Gordon again caught her in his arms, and held her close in an ecstasy of possession.

"You are so sweet," he murmured, with an air of saying something important. "Oh, my Little Girl, how I love you! The moment I first saw you--"

"When was that?"

"That night at--at the Doctor's lectures. I sat behind you, I changed my seat to do so--and I counted the buttons on your dear little gray frock--that was one way I discovered your presence in the study that night." He spoke gravely now. "And there was another way. I heard you talking. Yes, I heard your blessed voice--remember, I loved you then--and I heard Waring talking to you. I could make out no word--I didn't try--but now I wish I had--for it might help you."

"I wish you had, Gordon," she returned, solemnly, "it would have helped me."

"But you can tell me, dear, tell me all the conversation. Surely you trust me now." [312]

"I trust you--but--oh, as you say, there's no time. It's a long story--a dreadful story--I don't want to tell you--"

"Then you shan't. I've promised you that, you know. Not until you want to tell me, will I ask for a word of it."

"Now, here's another thing," and Anita blushed, deeply, "if we go away--as you say--what about--about money?"

Lockwood stared at her. "I have money," he said; "why do you ask that?"

"But--but the awful detective people--said you--you were terribly in debt."

"Brave little girl, to say that. I know you hated to. Well, my darling, those precious bills that those precious detectives dug up in my desk, are old bills that were owed by my father--his name was the same as mine--"

"The same as yours! How queer!"

"Oh, not a unique instance. Anyway, those bills I am paying off as I can. I'm not legally responsible for them, but I want to clear my dad's name, and all that. Now, all that can wait--while I take unto me a wife, and arrange for her comfort and convenience. But, is there--now remember, I'm not prying--is there any one whose permission you must ask to marry me?" [313]

"No, I'm twenty-one--that's of age in any state."

"Why, you aged person! I deemed you about eighteen."

"Do you mind?"

"No; you goosie! But--your mother, now?"

"Oh--my mother. She doesn't care what I do."

"And your father? Forgive me, but I have to ask."

"My father is dead."

"Then come along. Let's begin to get ready to go."

"Wait a minute--Gordon--to get married--must I--must I tell my real name?"

His eyes clouded a trifle.

"Yes, dear heart," he said, very gently, "yes, you must."

"Then I can't get married, Gordon."

Miss Mystery sat down and folded her little hands in her lap, her whole attitude that of utter despair.

"But, Sweetheart, no one need know except the minister and witnesses--"

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"And you?"

"Yes--and I--"

"Oh, I can't marry you, anyway. I can't marry anybody. I can't tell who I am! Oh, let them take me away, and let them arrest me and I hope they'll convict me--and--"

"Hush, my precious girl, hush." Lockwood took her in his arms, and let her stifle her sobs on his breast. He was bewildered. What was the truth about this strange child? For in her abandonment of grief, Anita seemed a very child, a tortured irresponsible soul, whose only haven was in the arms now around her.

"You will go with me, anyway, Anita," he said, with an air of authority. "I must take care of you. We will go, as I planned. The minister I told you of, is a great and good man, he will advise you--"

"Oh, no, I don't want to talk to a minister!"

"Yes, you do. And his wife is a dear good woman. They will take you into their hearts and home--and then we can all decide what to do. At any rate, you must get away from here. Come, now, pack your bag--and would you mind--Anita--if I ask you not to take the--the money and the ruby pin--"

"But he gave them to me! I tell you, Gordon, John Waring gave me those of his own free will--"

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"Because of his affection for you?"

"Yes; for no other reason! I will keep the pin, anyway--I will!"

"Anita, have you any idea how you puzzle me? how you torture me? Well, take what you like. Will you get ready now, and I will let you know as soon as I can, how and when we can start."

A loud rap was followed by an immediate opening of the door, and Mrs. Adams came into the room.

She stared at Lockwood, but made no comment on his presence there.

"Miss Austin," she began, "I do not wish you to stay in my house any longer. I have kept you until now, because my husband was so sorry for you, and refused to turn you out. Nor am I turning you out, but--I wish you would leave us

alone, Mr. Lockwood."

Gordon started to speak, but Anita interrupted him.

"Go, please," she said, quietly, and Lockwood obeyed.

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"I cannot blame you, Mrs. Adams," Miss Mystery said; "I daresay you have to consider your other boarders, and I thank you for your kindness and forbearance you have shown me so far."

The tears were in the big dark eyes, and even as they moved Mrs. Adams to sympathy, she also wondered if they were real. "A girl who would redden her lips would be capable of any deceit and duplicity," Esther Adams reasoned.

But she went on, calmly.

"I come now, Miss Austin, to tell you that Mr. Trask is down stairs and wants to see you. He wants you to go to his house to stay. The Peytons are there, of course, and he offers you the shelter of his roof and protection until this dreadful matter is settled up."

"Mr. Trask!" Anita looked her amazement.

"Yes; now don't be silly. You very well know he is mad about you, and he hopes to get you freed and then marry you."

"Oh, he does!" It was the old, scornful Miss Mystery who spoke. "Well, will you please tell him from me--"

"Now, don't you be too hoity-toity, miss! You're mighty lucky to have a home offered you--"

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"Yes, that's quite true. Well, Mrs. Adams, will you go down, then and say I'll be down in a moment or two. Give me time to freshen my appearance a bit."

"Yes, with paints and powders and cosmetics!" Esther Adams grumbled to herself, as she went down the stairs.

As a matter of fact she quite misjudged the girl. Very rarely did Anita resort to artificial aid of that sort, but when she so desired, she used it as she would any other personal adornment.

"She's coming down," Mrs. Adams announced, as she returned to Trask and they waited.

But when the minutes grew to a quarter of an hour, and then nearly to a half, Mrs. Adams again climbed the stairs to hasten proceedings.

This time she found the room empty.

The absence, too, of brushes and combs, the disappearance of a small suitcase, and the fact that her hat and coat were gone all pointed unmistakably to the assumption that the girl had fled.

"Well!" Mrs. Adams reported, "she's lit out, bag and

baggage."

"Gone!" exclaimed Trask in dismay.

"Well, she isn't in her room. Her trunk is locked and strapped and her suitcase is missing. Her hat and coat's gone, too, so you can make your own guess."

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But Maurice Trask didn't stay there to make his guess.

He went back home as fast as he could and told Fleming Stone the news.

"Run away, has she?" said Stone. "I rather looked for that."

"You did! And took no steps to prevent it! You're a nice detective, you are. Well, if you're so smart, where'd she go?"

"Where's Lockwood?" was Stone's laconic response.

"Lockwood!" exclaimed Trask. "Wherever he is, he hasn't run off with Anita Austin! If he has--by Jove, I'll break every bone in his body!"

"You'll have to catch him first," smiled the detective.

"I'll catch him! I'll set you to do it. And, looky here, if she's gone off with that man, you can go ahead and catch her, catch them both, and then go ahead and prove her guilty."

"Is she?"

"Is she? You bet she is! And I know it."

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"How do you know?"

"I'll tell you. I know her eyebrows!"

"So do I know her eyebrows. But they don't tell me she's a murderer."

"Well, they tell me that! It's this way. Her eyebrows, are not only heavy and dark, but they almost meet over the bridge of her nose."

"Darling nose!" put in Fibsy, who was interested in Anita but not in Trask's deductions.

"Does your knowledge of physiognomy tell you that those meeting eyebrows are a sign of a criminal?" asked Stone.

"Nothing of that sort. But they are the Truesdell brows."

"The Truesdell brows?" Stone raised his own. "Sounds like a proprietary article. Not artificial, are they?"

"Now, see here, Mr. Stone, I'm in no mood to be guyed. Those eyebrows are frequently seen in the Truesdell family. My grandfather's brother married a Truesdell."

"Your grandfather's brother married a Truesdell. And your own grandfather didn't?"

"No; I haven't those brows."

"Well, you're not entitled to them, having no Truesdell blood in your veins."

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"But that girl has."

"Indeed! Interesting, is it not?"

"Aw, come off that line o' talk, F. S.," said Fibsy, knitting his brows, which were not Truesdellian. "I'm seein' a chink o' light. The brother of your grandfather, now, Mr. Trask, he was named--?"

"Waring, of course. Henry Waring. My grandfather was James Waring."

"And this Henry Waring--he was the father of Doctor John Waring?"

As Fibsy said this, Stone sat upright, and gazed hard at Trask.

"Yes, John Waring's father was Henry, and my grandfather was Henry's brother James. That's how I'm related. And being the only one, that's why I'm the heir here. But, don't you see, Doctor Waring's mother was a Truesdell--"

"And Miss Austin is a relative of hers--a connection of the Truesdell family somehow--" exclaimed the now excited Fibsy, "and she found out about it, and came here and--"

"Yes," Trask said, "and tried to get some money from John Waring on the ground of relationship."

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"What relation could she be?"

"Maybe a niece of Doctor Waring--or a cousin. Maybe the same relation to Doctor Waring's mother that I am to his father. Then, that would explain his giving her money and the pin--and maybe she burnt the will! and then she--"

"But it complicates everything," said Stone, who was thinking quickly. "However, if Miss Austin is connected with the Truesdell family it gives us a way to look to learn her history."

"Well, learn it," said Trask, abruptly. "I'm not afraid of losing my inheritance for I'm in the direct Waring line and she can't be."

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CHAPTER XVIII MISS MYSTERY NO LONGER

Trask, helped along by Fleming Stone, investigated the family tree of the Warings. But they ran up against a blank wall. As far as they could learn Doctor Waring never had brother or sister. His mother, who was a Truesdell, had also been an only child. But of course, Miss Mystery could be of the Truesdell family, and could, as Trask observed, be the same relation to John Waring's mother that Trask was to John Waring's father. Which relation was that of second cousin.

"It gives a reason for the girl's presence here," Stone said, "and as it's the only reason we can think of, it must be followed up."

"And I'll follow it up," Trask said, "if I once get hold of that girl. Where can she be, Mr. Stone?"

"Not very far away, I think, as all the stations and routes out of town are watched. She'd have trouble to leave Corinth."

"She could get out in a motor car."

"Who'd take her?"

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"Lockwood, of course."

But just then, Gordon Lockwood came into the Waring study. His usual calm was entirely gone, his eyes wildly staring and his voice quivered as he said, "She's gone! Anita's gone!"

"Yes, I know it--I thought you went with her!" and Stone stared in turn.

"No, I didn't!" Lockwood said, quite unnecessarily. "Find her, Mr. Stone--you can, can't you?"

"I can find her," said Fibs, "if you'll tell me one thing, Mr. Lockwood, right straight out."

"What is it? I'll tell you anything. I'm afraid--"

"You're afraid she's killed herself," said Fibs, calmly. "Well you tell me this. Are you two--aw--you know--"

The boy blushed, and Stone smiled a little as he said:

"McGuire is a bit shy of romantic matters. He means are you and Miss Austin lovers?"

"We are," said Lockwood, emphatically. "She is my fiancee--"

"All right," said Fibs, "then I'll find her. She hasn't done

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anything rash, in that case."

He wagged his wise little head.

"Where is she?" Stone asked, confident that the boy could tell. He knew of Fibsy's almost clairvoyant powers of divining truth in certain situations.

"Want her here?" he asked, laconically.

"Yes."

"I'll get her."

Snatching his cap, he darted from the house, but he was closely followed by Maurice Trask. Lockwood would have stopped Trask, but Stone said:

"Let him go. This thing is coming to a crisis--Trask will help it along."

Fibsy went toward the Adams house, but stopped at the house next door to it. This was the home of Emily Bates.

Ringling that lady's doorbell, Fibsy asked to see her.

"Mrs. Bates," he said, politely, while Trask listened, "we want to see Miss Austin, please."

"Anita!" said Mrs. Bates, flurriedly; "why--she--she isn't--"

"Oh, yes, she is here," said the boy, patiently, rather than rudely. "We have to see her, you see."

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"Here I am," said Miss Mystery, coming in from the next room. "I think," she said turning to Mrs. Bates, "I think, as you advised me, I'll tell all."

"Don't tell it here!" cried Fibsy. "Please, Miss Austin--don't spill your yarn here--oh, I mean, don't--don't divulge--"

The unusual word nearly choked the excited boy, who always in moments of strong emotion lapsed into careless English, but who tried not to.

"Now, look here," Maurice Trask put in. "Here's where I take hold. Miss Austin, you have told your story to Mrs. Bates?"

"Yes," said, Anita, looking very sad, but determined.

"Then you tell it to me. I'm heir to the Waring estate, and so I have a right to know all you know about--the family."

His knowing look proved to Anita that he assumed also her right to be classed with "the family" and she looked at him in astonishment.

"You know?" she cried.

"Yes--I know," he spoke very sternly. "And I insist upon a private interview with you, before you tell your story to any one else."

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"You shall have it, then," she said, and her eyes grew grave. "Mrs. Bates, will you and Terence leave us alone for ten minutes. That will be long enough, and then, I'll go to see Mr. Stone--if necessary."

"Now, look here," Trask said, as the door closed after the others, "I know who you are."

"I don't believe it," and Miss Mystery looked at him straight from beneath the "Truesdell brows."

"Well, anyway, I know you are a Truesdell connection."

"Yes, I am. Go on."

"I don't know just what branch," he went on, a little lamely.

"But it's a branch strong enough to hold me--and also to interfere with this heirship of yours."

"Can't be. There's no Truesdell so close to John Waring as I am."

"You think so? Then listen."

As Miss Mystery told him her story, the man's face fell, he sat, almost petrified with astonishment, and when she had finished the short but amazing recital, he said:

"My heavens! What are you going to do?"

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"I don't know what to do."

"If you tell--I--"

"Of course you do."

"And if you don't tell--then John Waring's name is left unstained--"

"There is no shadow of stain on John Waring's name! What do you mean?"

"Now, look here, Miss Austin, you keep quiet about all this, will you? I'll call off those sleuths and I'll arrange to close up and cover up the whole matter. Then, you marry me--there's only a distant cousinship between us--and I'll put up the biggest memorial to Waring you ever heard of."

"Omit the clause about my marrying you," she returned, "and I may agree to your plans. I haven't quite decided what to do--and beside, Mr. Trask, who killed my--Doctor Waring?"

"Never mind who killed him. Call it suicide--it must have been anyway--"

"No--I'm not sure it was--oh, I don't know what to do."

"Time's up," called Fibsy through the closed door. "And, I say, Miss Austin, you take my tip, and come along and tell your story to F. Stone. It'll be your best bet in the long run."

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Perhaps it was the boy's speech, perhaps it was the gleam of disappointed greed that Anita saw in Trask's eyes, but she rose, with a sudden decision, and said, as she opened the door:

"That's just what I'll do. Come with me, Mrs. Bates--or, would you rather not?"

"Oh, I can't," said Emily Bates, "don't ask me, Anita, dear."

"No, you stay here. I'll come back soon."

And so Miss Mystery again walked across the snow-covered field to the Waring house, this time to remove all occasion for using her nickname.

"You found her?" said Stone, as the trio came into the study, where he and Lockwood still sat.

"Yes," said Fibly. "I just thought where would a poor, hunted kid go? And I said to myself, she'd go to the nearest and nicest lady's house she knew of. And of course, that was Mrs. Bates' and sure enough there she was. And--she's going to tell all!"

Fibly was melodramatic by nature, and his gesture indicated an important revelation.

"I am," said Anita, quietly.

She went straight to Lockwood's side, and he took her hand calmly, and led her to a seat on the wide davenport, then sat beside her.

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Her hand still in his, she told her story.

"I am of Truesdell blood," she began, "as Mr. Trask surmised. But, also, I am of Waring blood. Doctor John Waring was my father."

No one spoke. The surprise was too great. In his wildest theories, Fleming Stone had never thought of this.

Fibly's great astonishment was permeated with the quick conviction, "then she didn't kill him!"

Gordon Lockwood was conscious of a rapturous reassurance that he had no rival as a lover.

Trask, already knowing the truth, sat gloomily realizing he was not the heir.

Anita, her beautiful face sad, yet proud to acknowledge her ancestry, went on:

"This is his story. When John Waring was twenty years old, he met a young woman--an actress--who so infatuated him that he married her. They were absolutely uncongenial and unfitted for one another, and after a few weeks, they agreed to separate. There was no question of divorce, they merely preferred to live apart. He sent her money at stated intervals but he pursued his quiet, studious life, and she her life of

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gayety and sport. She was a good woman--she *is* a good woman--she is my mother."

Another silence followed this disclosure. Is, she had said--not was. And John Waring her father!

Gordon Lockwood held her hand closely. He was content to listen. Whatever she could say could not lessen his love and adoration.

"I tell you this, for her sake and--my father's also. There is no stigma to be attached to either, they were merely so utterly opposite in character and disposition that they could not live together.

"As I said, after a few weeks they separated, and--my father did not know of my birth. My mother would not let him know, lest he come back to her. She was a light-hearted, carefree girl, and while she loved me, she did not love my father. Later on--when I was about four, I think, she caused a notice of her death to be sent to my father. This was because she wanted to sever all connection, and take no chance of ever meeting him again. She was at that time a successful actress, and earned all the money she wanted. She adored me, she had no love affairs, she lived only for me and her art. Though a good actress, she was not widely renowned, and in California, where she had chosen to make her home, she was liked and respected. The climate just suited her love of ease, freedom and indolence--as a New England life of busy activity would have been impossible to her. I want you to understand my mother. She was--she is, a mere butterfly, caring only for trifles and simple gayety. Her home is charming, her personality, that of a delightful child. But her temperament is one that cannot stand responsibilities and chafes at demands. However, all that matters little. The facts are that John Waring, learning of his wife's death, devoted himself utterly to his books and his study.

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"When my mother saw in the papers he was about to marry, she was appalled. She didn't know what to do. She couldn't let him marry another woman, unaware of her existence. She couldn't raise a question of divorce for she knew that would tend to reflect unpleasantly on his past.

"And, too, at last, she was beginning to feel as if she might like to resume her position as his wife, now that he was prominent and wealthy. She told me the whole story--of which I had been utterly ignorant, and she sent me here. I was to see Doctor Waring and use my own judgment as to when and how I should tell him all this.

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"I came here, with a feeling of dislike and resentment toward a father who had been no father to me. Mother exonerated him, to be sure, but it was all such a surprise to me, that I accepted the errand in a spirit of bravado and was prepared to make trouble if necessary.

"But when I saw John Waring--when I realized that splendid man was my father--I knew that all my love, all my allegiance was his, and that my mother was as nothing to me, compared

with my wonderful father!

"Except for what Mr. Trask calls the Truesdell brows, I look exactly like my mother. Also she resumed her maiden name of Anita Austin after they separated. So you may imagine the shock when Doctor Waring first heard the name, and first saw the living image of his wife, whom, you must remember, he supposed dead.

"But I had my mission to perform--and so, I came here, that Sunday night."

The audience sat motionless. Lockwood, holding her hand, felt every tremor of her emotion as the girl told her story. Fleming Stone, realizing that he was hearing the most dramatic revelation of his career, listened avidly. Fibly, with staring eyes and open mouth, clenched his fists in enthralled interest, and Maurice Trask heard it all with ever growing conviction that he must give up his supposed inheritance.

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As Anita began to tell of that Sunday night, the situation became even more tense.

"I came to the French window, and tapped lightly. Doctor Waring let me in, and I sat by him in that plush chair.

"The conversation I had with my father I shall not detail. It is my most sacred and beloved memory. We were as one in every way. We loved each other from the first word. We proved to be alike in our tastes and pursuits. Oh, if he could have lived! I told him of my mother and myself, and he was crushed. I wanted to spare him, but what could I do? He had to know--although the knowing meant the ruining of his career. He said, at once, he could not take the Presidency of the College, with the story of his past made public, nor could he honorably suppress it. He couldn't marry Mrs. Bates--nor could he instal my mother as mistress here.

"He had done no real wrong, in making that early and ill-advised marriage, but it seemed to him a blot on his scutcheon, and an indelible one.

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"He would sit and brood over these fearful conditions, then, suddenly he would realize my existence afresh, and rejoice in it. He loved me at once and deeply--and I adored him. Never father and daughter, I am sure, crowded a lifetime of affection into such a few moments."

Bravely Anita went on, not daring to pause to think. Her hand, tightly clasped in Lockwood's, trembled, but her voice was steady, for it was her opportunity to clear her father's name, and she must neglect no slightest point.

"At last, he told me I must go away, and he would think out what he could do. He gave me the money, for he was afraid I hadn't sufficient cash with me, and he gave me the ruby pin, saying I must keep it forever as my father's first gift to me. With infinite gentleness he bade me good-by, and softly opened the glass door for me. I went away and he closed the door.

"I went home to the Adams house, making, of course, those footprints in the snow. It was a very cold night, I remember the clear shining stars, but I thought of nothing but my father--my splendid, wonderful father. And I hoped, oh, how I hoped, that some way would be found that he and I could spend our lives together. I didn't know what he would do--but I prayed to God that some way out might be found.

"The rest you know. Of the manner of my father's death, I know nothing at all. Of Nogi, I have no knowledge. I kept all this secret at first, because I hoped to shield my father's name better that way. But I think now, it's better told. I couldn't live under the weight of such a secret.

"One more word as to my mother. She has had an admirer for many years, named Carl Melrose. She has kept him at a distance, but, as you know from the telegram she sent me, she has already either married him or promised to. Also, she advised me to tell the whole truth. I have done so."

Unheeding the others, Lockwood put his arm round the exhausted girl as she fell over toward him. His wonderful calm helped her, and his gentle yet firm embrace gave her fresh courage to endure the strain.

"Thank you, Miss Austin," and Stone spoke almost reverently. "You have shown marvelous wisdom and bravery and I congratulate you on your entire procedure. You are an exceptional girl, and I am proud to know you."

This was a great deal for Fleming Stone to say, and Anita acknowledged it with a grateful glance.

Fibsy, his eyes streaming with unchecked tears, came over and knelt before her.

"Oh, Miss Austin!" he sobbed, "Oh, Miss Anita!"

Trask alone remained unmoved, and sat with folded arms and frowning face.

But little attention was paid him, and Stone said, thoughtfully:

"Our problem of the mystery of Doctor Waring's death is as great as ever."

"It is," agreed Lockwood, "but I am sure now, Mr. Stone, that it was a suicide. The motive is supplied, for I knew Doctor Waring so well, I knew the workings of his great and good mind, and I am sure that he felt there was no other course for him. I can see just how he decided that the exposure of all this would react against the reputation of the College. That the sensation and scandal that would fill the papers would harm the standing of the University of Corinth, and that--and that alone--caused his decision. I know him so well, that I can tell you that never, never would he take his life to save himself trouble or sorrow, but for others' sake--and I include Mrs. Bates--he made the sacrifice.

"I can see--and I am sure of what I say--how he realized that

the press and the public would forgive and condone a dead man, when, if he lived, the brunt of the whole matter would fall on his beloved College and on the woman he loved and respected.

"Now--as I feel sure he foresaw--such of this story as must be made public will have far less weight and prominence, than if he were alive. I know all this is so--for, I knew John Waring as few people knew him."

A grateful glance from John Waring's daughter thanked him for this tribute.

"That ten thousand dollar check?" Trask said, suddenly, for his mind was still concerned with the financial side.

"I think that must have been sent to my mother," said Anita. "She, as I told you, returned to the use of her maiden name, and during our interview, my father told me he should write her at once and send her money. I feel sure he did do so--"

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"Without doubt," Lockwood said; "and if so, the letter would have been mailed with the collection next morning. The returning voucher will show."

"Also the letter he wrote my mother will corroborate all I have told you," said Anita, and both her assertion and Gordon's, later came true.

"I felt," Anita said, by way of further explanation, "that Mrs. Bates ought to know all. So, when Mrs. Adams practically put me out of her house, and I had no wish to accept Mr. Trask's invitation to come over here, nor," she smiled affectionately at Lockwood, "could I fall in with your crazy plans--I just went next door and told Mrs. Bates all about it. She was very dear and sweet to me, and now, if you please, I will go back there. I am weary and exhausted--I cannot stand any more. But when you want me, I can be found at Mrs. Bates'. I leave all matters to be decided or settled, in the hands of Mr. Lockwood and Mr. Stone. Fibsy, dear, will you escort me home?"

With a suddenly acquired dignity, Fibsy rose, and stood by her side, and in a moment the two went away together.

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When the boy returned the others were absorbed in the discussion of the mysterious death of John Waring.

"I'm inclined to give it up," Fleming Stone said, thinking deeply.

"Don't do it, F. Stone," Fibsy said, earnestly. "It's better to find out. You never have gave up a case."

"No. Well, Fibs, which way shall we look?"

A strange embarrassment came over the boy's face, and then he said, diffidently:

"Say, gentlemen, could I be left alone in this room for a little while? I don't say I kin find out anythin'--but I do wanta try."

The lapse into careless enunciation told Stone how much in earnest his young colleague was, and he rose, saying, "You certainly may, my boy. The rest of us will have a conference in some other room, as to what part of Miss Austin's story must be made public."

Left to himself, Fibsy went at once to the bookcase that held the defaced copy of Martial, that John Waring had been reading the night he died.

Opening the volume at the blood-stained page, the unlettered boy eagerly read the lines. Tried to read them, rather, and groaned in spirit because he knew no Latin.

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Small wonder that he was nonplused, for this was all he read:

MARTIAL'S EPIGRAMS

Liber IV, Epigram XVIII

Qua vicina pluit Vipsanis porta columnis
Et madet assiduo lubricus imbre lapis,
In iugulum pueri, qui roscida tecta subibat,
Decidit hiberno praegravis unda gelu:
Cumque peregisset miseri crudelia fata,
Tabuit in calido vulnere mucro tener.
Quid non saeva sibi voluit Fortuna licere?
Aut ubi non mors est, si iugulatis aquae?

His chin in his hands, he pored over the Latin in utter despair, and rising, started for the door.

Then he paused; "I must do it myself--" he murmured: "*I must.*"

So he hunted the shelves until he found a Latin Dictionary.

He was not entirely unversed in the rudiments of the language, for Stone had directed his education at such odd hours as he could find time for study.

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And so after some hard and laborious digging, Fibsy at last gathered the gist of the Latin stanza.

His eyes shone, and he stared about the room.

"It ain't possible--" he told himself, "and yet--gee, there ain't nothing else possible!" He rose and looked out at every window, he noted carefully the catches--he paced from the desk to the small rear windows of the room, and back again.

"It's the only thing," he reiterated, "the *only* thing. Oh, gee! *what* a thing!"

He went in search of Stone, and found the three men shut in the living room and with them was Nogi.

Stone's persevering efforts, by advertisements and circulars had at last succeeded, and the impassive and non-committal Japanese was there, and quite willing to tell all he knew.

Fibsy interrupted his story.

"Go back," he directed, "to the beginning. Let me hear it all. It's O. K., F. S."

"I was attending to my dining-room duties," Nogi said, "and I had taken the water tray to the study. I was weary and hoped the master would soon retire. So, I occasionally peeped through the small window from the dining-room. I saw a lady come and make a visit, and then I saw her and I heard her go away. Then I hoped the master would go to bed. But, no--he was very busy. He wrote letters, he burned some papers, he moved about much. He was restless, disturbed. Then he sat at his desk and read his book."

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"This one?" cried Fibsy, excitedly waving the Martial.

"I think so--one like that, anyway."

"This was the one! Go on."

"Then--oh, it was strange! Then the master got up, went to the small window at the back of the room--"

"Which one?"

"The one by the big globe, and he opened it. But for a moment--"

"Did he put his hand out?" Fibsy cried.

"Yes, I suppose to see if it rained. Yes, he put his hand out for a moment, then he closed the window."

"And locked it?" asked Fibsy.

"It locks itself, with a snap catch. Then--ah, here is the strange thing! Then he went back, sat at his desk, and in a moment he fell over and the blood spurted out."

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"Didn't he stab himself?" Fibsy asked.

"I don't know. He didn't seem to do anything but scratch his ear, and over he fell! Such a sight! I was afraid, and I ran away--fast."

"All very well," said Stone, "but what became of the weapon?"

"I know," Fibsy almost screamed, in his excitement. "Oh, F. Stone--I know!"

"Well, tell us, Terence--but steady, now, my boy. Don't get too excited."

"No, sir," and the lad grew suddenly quiet. "But I know. Wait just a minute, sir. Where are the photographs of the house that the detectives took the day after?"

"I'll get them," Lockwood said, and left the room.

He returned, and Fibsy found a magnifying glass and looked carefully at certain pictures.

"It proves," he said, solemnly. "F. Stone, you have solved

your greatest case!"

It was characteristic of the boy, that although the solution was his own, his deference to Stone was sincere and un-self-conscious.

"Please," he said, "I don't know Latin, but you will find the explanation of Doctor Waring's death on that red stained page. He was reading Martial, as we know, and--" he pointed to the Epigram on the page in question, "as he read that, he found a way out."

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The grave statement was impressive, and Stone took the book.

"Shall I translate, or read the Latin aloud?" he asked the others.

"Wait a minute, I'll get a Martial in English," Lockwood said, out of consideration for Trask's possible ignorance of the dead language.

"What number is the Epigram?" he asked, returning.

Stone told him, and Lockwood found the place, and passed the English version to Stone. Aloud, the detective read this:

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TRANSLATION

Book IV, Epigram 18

On a youth killed by the fall of a piece of ice.

Just where the gate near the portico of Agrippa is always dripping with water, and the slippery pavement is wet with constant showers, a mass of water, congealed by winter's cold, fell upon the neck of a youth who was entering the damp temple, and, when it had inflicted a cruel death on the unfortunate boy, the weapon melted in the warm wound it had made. What cruelties does not Fortune permit? Or where is not death to be found, if you, the waters, turn cut-throats.

"And so you see," Fibsy broke the ensuing silence, "he decided to stab himself with an icicle, and he did. He did!" he repeated, triumphantly, "he went to that window back by the big globe and got one--and here's the proof! Look through the glass, F. S."

Stone did so, and without doubt, the fringe of icicles that hung from that particular window sash showed one missing! It was the very window that Nogi stated Waring had opened, and had put his hand out of for a moment.

Clearly, he had broken off an icicle, strong and firm on that freezing night, had returned to his chair, and inspired by the story of the youth under the portico of Agrippa, had stabbed his own jugular vein with the sharp, round point, and had

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fallen unconscious.

The icicle, melting in the wound, had disappeared, and death had followed in a moment or two.

They went to the study, and Nogi was made to imitate the movements he saw Doctor Waring make. It left no doubt of the exact facts and the mystery was solved.

"Do you suppose he meant to make it seem a murder?" asked Stone, thoughtfully.

"He did not!" defended Lockwood. "That is he did not mean to implicate anybody. He was a man amenable to sudden suggestion, and apt to follow it. I am certain the idea came to him, as he read his book, and in the impulse of the moment he rose, got the implement and did the deed. It was like him to read that book after his talk with his daughter. He often resorted to reading for a time to clear his mind for some important decision. Had he not read that very page, he would in all probability not have taken his life at that time."

"There can be no doubt of it all," said Stone. "Fibsy, the credit of the discovery is yours. You did a great piece of work."

Fibsy blushed with delight at Stone's praise, which he cared for more than anything else in life, but he said:

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"Aw, I just chanced on it. But I found out another thing! While I was workin' on that translatin' business, the telephone rang. I answered, but somebody took it on an extension, so I hung up.

"But I was waitin' quite a few minutes, and, what do you think? I happened to rest my forehead on the telephone transmitter, and--"

"The red ring!" cried Stone. "Of course!"

"Of course," Fibsy repeated. "Pokin' around for a Latin Dictionary, I passed a lookin' glass, and there on me noble forehead I saw a red ring, about two inches across. It's gone now."

"Yes," Stone said. "Without doubt, Doctor Waring was telephoning--or perhaps was answering a call and he rested his head on the instrument."

"He often did that," said Lockwood, "but I never noticed a ring left."

"In life," Stone said, "it would disappear quickly. But if it happened just before he died, rigor mortis would preserve the mark. Any way it must have been that."

The solution of the mystery, so indubitably the true one, was accepted by the police.

The matter was given as little publicity as possible, for Anita and Mrs. Bates, the two most deeply concerned both wished it so. No stigma of cowardice rested on John Waring's name,

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for all who knew him knew that his act was the deed of a martyr to circumstances and was prompted by a spirit of loyalty to his College and unwillingness to let his own misfortunes in any way redound to its disparagement.

He trusted, they felt sure, that the truth would never be discovered and that the tragedy of his death would preclude blame or censure.

Himself, he never thought of, in his unselfish life or equally unselfish death.

Trask, perforce, resigned all claim to the estate, and Anita and her mother arranged matters between themselves.

The assumption was that John Waring's will, which he burned, had been made in Mrs. Bates' favor, but on learning of his nearer heirs, he destroyed it.

"Anita Waring," Lockwood murmured softly when at last they were alone together.

"I love the name," she said, "and it is really mine."

"But it will be yours so short a time, it's scarcely worth while to use it," Gordon returned. "It will be a short time, won't it, sweetheart?"

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"Yes, indeed! I want to go away from Corinth forever. I love my father's memory, but I can't stand these scenes. I am tired of mystery in name and in deed. I just want to be--Anita Lockwood."

Whereupon Gordon lost his head entirely.

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