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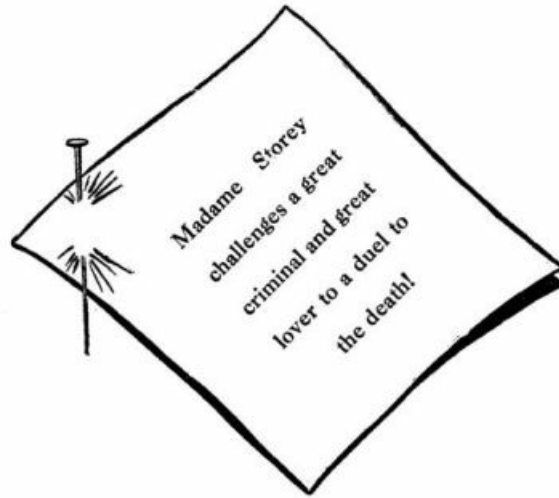
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**THE DOCTOR
WHO HELD HANDS**

A Madame Storey Novel

BY HULBERT FOOTNER



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THE DOCTOR WHO HELD HANDS

I.

The long envelope inclosed something crisp and firm that immediately suggested bank notes. Madame Storey has taught me to notice such things. The messenger who brought it required a receipt in her own hand. After I had handed him his receipt and returned to my employer's room, I saw the bills scattered on her desk: five smooth, fresh, orange-backed engravings direct from the Federal Reserve Bank, the prettiest pictures on earth. They were thousand-dollar bills, the first I had ever seen. Those five scraps of paper were equivalent to a trip around the world, a high-powered car, or any delightful folly that one might dream about. To me it was a lot of money.

Mme. Storey was reading the letter which had accompanied it. Seeing me goggle at the money, she said airily: "That's only our retaining fee, Bella. There is ten times as much in this case, if we can pull it off. Besides an unlimited expense account."

I waited in no little eagerness to hear more. When she had finished the letter she handed it over without comment, and taking a cigarette, leaned back in her chair and puffed a cloud of smoke thoughtfully toward the ceiling. From this I gathered that we were likely to take the case. I read:

DEAR MADAME STOREY:

I am sending you \$5,000 in the hope of enlisting your services in a cause which is not only very near my heart but would, if prosecuted to a successful conclusion, confer a benefit on the entire community. I wish, for reasons which will be apparent to you as you read, to remain anonymous in the affair. Therefore I send the money in cash. The truth is, I cannot bear to expose my wounds to the public gaze. In brief, here is my proposition. I will pay you \$50,000 if you can put Dr. Jacmer Touchon behind prison bars. In addition, you may draw on me without reserve for all legitimate expenses in connection with the case. The Duane National Bank will act as my disbursing agent. This scoundrel calls himself a "psycho-synthetist" or "soul-builder" and seeks his victims among well-to-do women. Psycho-synthesis, examined coldly, appears to be a blend of all the fakes one ever heard of, but the doctor is an extraordinarily plausible and persuasive practitioner. He appears to possess a really superior mind, which renders him, of course, all the more dangerous.

I can describe to you his *modus operandi* in one case, but can furnish no proof without exposing my identity. It is up to you to get the proof. One who was dear to me consulted Dr. Touchon in respect to an unfortunate mental condition. He told her that her trouble arose from harbouring evil thoughts, and that if she would relieve herself of such thoughts he could undertake a cure. Well, I suppose everyone harbours some evil thoughts. If one keeps them to one's self they can do no harm. But none would like to see them broadcasted. This person told her thoughts, believing that she was confiding them solely to the doctor's private ear.

For several weeks she regularly visited his office for consultations. His fee was \$100 for half an hour's treatment. This figures out rather handsomely for a day's work, you will agree, but still the greedy doctor was not satisfied. His patient finally began to suspect he was a fraud, and she ceased going to his office. Some little time afterward he sent for her to come to him and told her in seeming distress that a part of his records had been stolen from him, including the record of her case. This was the first she knew there was a record of it. He excused himself by saying it was necessary for him to have a record to study, and confessed that while she was confiding her thoughts to him, there had been a clerk concealed within hearing who had taken it all down. Observe the man's fiendish cleverness. He told her that he felt it his duty to let her know that the record had been stolen, but that she need not be under the slightest apprehension concerning it because there was nothing on the card to identify it as her case to anybody but himself.

This was all bunkum, of course. Within a short time the unfortunate woman received a communication ostensibly

from another quarter, demanding a large sum of money if she wished to keep her confessions out of print. She paid. She went on paying until she died. Before she died she told me the whole story and the wicked thoughts were not so wicked after all. That is the pity of it. The scoundrel had worked on a nervous woman's fears. There is no doubt but that worry over this affair hastened her end.

There, my dear Madame Storey, is your case. I have restrained myself as far as possible, because I don't want to inflict my private feelings on you. I wish that I might come out into the open, so that we could work together, but I could not bear it, if even so much as a hint of what I have been through should become public property. You may acknowledge this letter through the bank. You will learn there that your financial support is assured. If you don't want the case you will hand them back the money, but I trust that will not happen. For if you won't take it, I fear there will be nothing for me to do but to go out and shoot the scoundrel.

Pray accept my felicitations for the good work you have done in other directions. I always find you on the side of the right.

Yours sincerely,
AN ADMIRER.

The contents of this letter inspired me with a vague disquiet. "I hate blackmail cases," I said involuntarily. "It's like digging in pitch."

"Oh, quite," said Mme. Storey. "But you must admit this has intriguing possibilities."

"We have plenty of other work," I said.

"Yes," she said, "but we could take this on quite easily. Barney Craigin is convicted and sentenced. The decks are cleared of that mess."

"And now you're considering dumping a worse mess upon them," I said.

"Well, that's our job," she said, laughing; "cleaning up messes."

I sighed. I saw she was going to take it. I had a strong premonition of evil but it would have been useless to speak of it. I reread the letter. "One who was dear to me," I quoted musingly.

"Wife is suggested," said Mme. Storey.

"We could look up the wives of rich men who have died lately," I said.

"Oh," said my mistress, "if I find the facts as stated, and if the money is all right, I'm not going to bother with trying to explode the anonymity of our client. His reasons for wishing to keep himself in the dark are perfectly natural."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, going over the letter. "To make believe that his records were stolen, then to have the demand for blackmail seem to come from another source! What infernal cleverness!"

"Ah! we would be up against a very superior antagonist here!" said Mme. Storey. "One hears about Dr. Jacmer Touchon on every side. He seems to be the inventor of psycho-synthesis. It is the latest craze. Psychoanalysis is becoming a little *demode*, you understand; everybody who has the price has been psychoanalyzed by this time, and Dr. Touchon catches them on the rebound by going psychoanalysis one better. 'Soul-building!' Who could resist it? The phrase was an inspiration. He must be coining money! ... But I never suspected that blackmailing was a by-product of the institution. He really ought to have stopped with psycho-synthesis."

She arose and began to pace the long room with very bright eyes. "Years ago I used to know Jacmer Touchon," she went on. "He was professor of psychology in my university. He had written several books on the subject which I as a

budding psychologist was bound to read. Very good books, too. In fact, he had an international reputation. Unfortunately he began to take too warm a personal interest in one of his students who shall be nameless. In fact, there was a scene and I was forced to cut his lectures, much as I enjoyed them. Later he resigned his chair and I heard no more of him. Now he turns up as a psycho-syntheticist. I suppose he found that the big rewards were never for pure science and so turned crooked. What a strange turn of fortune. Bella, this man was my master in psychology. I foresee that we are going to have the fight of our lives!"

Alas! I am not cast in the heroic mould like my beautiful mistress, and I was filled with a wretched anxiety. By an exceptionally brilliant piece of work she had just succeeded in convicting the notorious Barney Craigin of murder. She was at the very summit of her fame. She had everything to lose and nothing to gain by embarking on such an adventure.

"Hadn't you better call up the bank first?" I suggested drily.

"To be sure!" she said, returning to her desk, and taking down the receiver.

To make a long story short the Duane National confirmed the contents of our letter. The sum of one hundred thousand dollars had been put in the hands of the bank to be paid to Mme. Storey's order upon the submission of vouchers of expenses. The bank claimed not to know the name of their client. The business had been effected through an attorney who likewise claimed to be ignorant of his principal's identity. However, the president of the bank (an acquaintance of my employer's) assured her that the money was there. An officer of the bank was to pass on the correctness of the vouchers.

"That appears to be all right," said Mme. Storey. "You may notify your client—I assume you have the means of doing so—that I will take the case."

When she had hung up I asked, somewhat stiffly I suspect: "What will be your first move?"

"Obviously," she said with a provoking smile, "you must go to Dr. Touchon as a prospective patient. He's a neighbour of ours. His place is in the Westmoreland apartments, cater-cornered across the square."

My heart sank. "But you know," I said helplessly, "I have no natural talent for impersonation."

"You may have no natural talent," she retorted, "but you have brains, which is more important. I can't go myself because he knows me, and there is no other woman I could trust on so important and so difficult an assignment."

I continued to make feeble objections, but she went on as if the matter were settled: "You must be provided with an absolutely watertight character. And you must have a story to tell that will bear the closest examination. Naturally, the doctor will have you looked up before he commits himself to anything.... I have it!" she cried in elation. "You shall masquerade as Mrs. Sylvanus Ensor, that poor woman who comes to me for treatments. She will give her permission. Her husband is a prosperous manufacturer of Detroit and she's supposed to be travelling in Europe while she remains quietly in New York under my care. Such a story would bear investigation as far as Dr. Touchon wanted to go. He would be delighted to get such a patient.... I'll make you up to resemble Mrs. Ensor as far as I am able."

"She looks like a walking corpse!" I objected.

Mme. Storey laughed at my expression of offended vanity. "So much the better!" she said. "A fit subject for the psycho-syntheticist!"

2.

This Mrs. Ensor was an unfortunate woman who believed that she had promptings to kill her husband. Hers was one of those obscure borderline cases; she was not mad, she only thought she was. Having tried everything else, she had come to New York to put herself in Mme. Storey's hands for psychological treatments. She already seemed better. She

lived very quietly with her maid in a small hotel near our office and came in three mornings a week for treatments. Meanwhile, in order to save the feelings of her family, it had been given out at home that she was travelling in Europe.

As all this was exactly what I needed, I took over her history, her character, and her symptoms entire. It saved a lot of invention. She very willingly gave her permission. Mme. Storey, a past mistress in the art of make-up, experimented in making me resemble her. Mrs. Ensor was in her early thirties but looked ten or twelve years older. She had a strange, dead-leaf complexion with circles almost black under her eyes. It was perfectly easy for me to assume her harassed and tormented air, because, goodness knows! I felt just like that at the prospect of bearding the terrible Dr. Touchon in his den. Mrs. Ensor, who was wealthy, dressed in a very smart, plain style that made an odd contrast with her haggard face. All in all, it was a rather conspicuous make-up, but Mme. Storey considered that there was safety in its very boldness.

On the third day my clothes came home from the makers. I went to Mme. Storey's house to dress and make up. I had a smart tailored ensemble of black messaline with coat to match, and a close-fitting black hat that completely covered my red hair. In a mirror I was absolutely unrecognizable to myself. It made me shiver to see myself looking so exactly like what I was supposed to be: the smart woman of the world who had everything to live for, but who, poor soul, had lost her grip on life. It was just the thing to make a fake doctor's mouth water.

Mme. Storey lent me her Grace to play the part of my maid. When our smart luggage was packed (it all bore the labels of expensive foreign hotels) we drove to the Vandermeer Hotel and engaged an expensive suite; registering as Mrs. Sylvanus Ensor and maid, Detroit. I called up Dr. Touchon's office and was given an appointment for the following morning.

The Westmoreland was the first of the great apartment houses to be built on Gramercy Park. It is old now but has managed to maintain its supremacy amongst the new buildings. Its air of old-fashioned magnificence was well calculated to inspire confidence in those who sought the doctor's advice. He had the ground-floor apartment on the corner. It must have comprised twelve or fourteen rooms. His door was opened by a gentle old man with an innocent and disarming smile. Again the doctor showed his astuteness in choosing such a one for his servant. I was shown into a small reception room. I gather that there were several such waiting rooms, so that the patients need never meet.

In due course the old servant returned to say that the doctor was ready to see me. I followed him with a fast-beating heart. The consultation room was an immense and lofty chamber with a row of tall windows looking out on the Park. It had dark crimson walls covered with fine paintings in elaborate frames, superb Oriental rugs, and a quantity of heavy carved furniture. The subtle psychological effect to be conveyed by this conservative splendour was that the doctor had been established at the head of his profession for a long time past.

The instant I caught sight of the master of the room I recognized his unique power and my heart failed me. How was I to cope with such a man? There was nothing of the greasy and overeager charlatan about Jacmer Touchon. His professional manner was first class. He waited for me in cool dignity, bowed with assurance, and waved me to a seat. A handsome, stalwart, dark man in the prime of his vigour—if anything he was too handsome; there was a certain luscious Oriental quality in his fleshly features and full, beaming dark eye. I suppose many women like that. Perhaps it was not of the Orient so much as the Renaissance; cruel, clever, and sensual; one saw him in one's mind decked out superbly in doublet and hose at the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

All the other doctors I have ever consulted took care to seat their patients facing the light, but Dr. Touchon's method was the reverse. The important thing was that you should see *him*, you understand. When he sat down with the light from the windows falling in his eyes, I received an impression of power that made me feel weak. I can scarcely describe those strange eyes. They seemed to burn with changing flames. They were so dark in colour one could scarcely tell where pupil ended and iris began. Suddenly I perceived that the pupil was widely distended, almost filling the iris. Was it that which gave him his look of insane power? At a later moment I noticed that the pupil had contracted until it was not much larger than a pinhead. It struck a feeling of dread into me. I struggled hard against my feeling of weakness.

"You wish to consult me?" he asked in a velvety voice. It had a hypnotic quality that went with the eyes.

I nodded silently.

"It is only fair to tell you," he said, "that my fee for the first consultation is five hundred dollars; one hundred for subsequent treatments."

"I am prepared to pay it," I murmured.

"Did your physician send you to me?" he asked. (What superb effrontery!)

"No," I said, "a friend recommended you to me; a Mrs. Wilkinson of Detroit."

"I don't seem to remember the name," he said with cold courtesy.

I shivered internally under his look of suspicion. "She was not a patient of yours," I said hurriedly; "it was a friend of hers who was benefited by your treatments. I don't know the friend's name."

Apparently he was satisfied. "How much have you been told about my methods?" he asked.

"Scarcely anything," I said; "only that it was a sort of improved psychoanalysis."

He raised his hand with a look of pretended horror. What an actor the man was! Though I *knew* he was acting, he was able to prevail upon me. "Oh, no, no!" he said. "There is no relation between psychoanalysis and psycho-synthesis; they are the exact opposites of one another. Psychoanalysis, with its emphasis upon the basest impulses of human nature, destroys the soul! Fortunately it is rapidly becoming discredited." Here he quoted a lot of impressive-sounding authorities. "Whereas psycho-synthesis" (his voice became tender when he spoke the word) "builds the soul and makes it strong! Do not be misled by the similarity of terms, my dear lady; there is the same difference between the two methods as there is between the words 'destructive' and 'constructive'!"

When I write it down it sounds hollow enough. I can give you no idea of how convincingly it came out in his mellow and velvety voice. He was so utterly sure of his power over women!

"You are giving me hope," I murmured.

"What is your particular trouble?" he asked sympathetically.

"I am going mad!" I said in Mrs. Ensor's husky, despairing tones. "At least I think I am. That is worse than actually going mad. For mad people, they say, are happy!"

He nodded understandingly. "What makes you think you are not normal?"

"Half the time I don't know what I'm doing!" I cried in seeming despair. I had rehearsed this over and over. "I suddenly come to and find myself in a place without the least recollection of how I got there."

"What is it that fills your mind to the exclusion of your surroundings?"

"Terrible, terrible things," I murmured, hanging my head.

"Look at me, Mrs. Ensor," he purred. "Lose yourself in my eyes. Yield yourself freely. Let everything come out!"

Plain terror filled me. How could I lose myself in him and at the same time keep my wits about me? For the first time I realized the full difficulty of the part I had to play. And I had to look forward to playing it over and over. I had to lead him on through psycho-synthesis to blackmail. "I can't! I can't!" I murmured.

"How else can I cure you?" he said gently. And then in a soft, peremptory tone: "*Look at me!*"

It had to be done. Slowly I raised my eyes to his. It was a dreadful experience. Dark lightnings seemed to shoot through and through me, blotting everything out, striking down my personality. Secretly, while I allowed my eyes to submit to his, I was resisting him with all my might. It was like a creeping paralysis. I could feel the fine drops of sweat springing out on my face. The advantage was all with him. Eyes, when you probe into them as deeply as that, cannot lie.

He knew I was resisting him still.

"Relax! ... Relax! ... Relax!" he purred.

I sighed deeply to persuade him that I was obeying. In order to help resist the terrible desire to let everything go at the command of those eyes, I fixed my mind on nursery rhymes, repeating them over and over. "How can I go through with this for twenty visits?" I thought in despair.

"What are these terrible things that torment you?" he asked softly.

I used the question as an excuse to cover my face with my hands. "Something urges me to kill my husband," I murmured, as I had heard Mrs. Ensor do. "Yet I love him, too. This temptation is always with me. I have no peace!"

Now I can read eyes, too, and astute as he was, I saw between my fingers a certain complacency appear in his eyes when I said this. He thought he was going to find an easy victim in me. "Poor lady! Poor lady!" he murmured sympathetically; then, very casually: "Have you any reason to make away with him?"

"None whatever!" I wailed. "He is the best of husbands!"

"You are not being quite frank with me now," he said reproachfully. "You must have some reason, or think that you have."

"No reason except that he is so good to me," I said. I had got this from Mrs. Ensor also. I was very thankful I had this ready-made case to draw on, for I was sure I would never have been able to make anything up that would have withstood the scrutiny of those terrible eyes. "It is his very goodness which drives me wild," I added.

"That feeling is perfectly understandable to a psychologist," he said with a judicial air. "To use a slang phrase, you have got yourself in wrong, Mrs. Ensor. It is this wrongness in you that is outraged by your husband's rightness. With your coöperation I will remove the wrongness, and you will be as happy as ever you were."

"Oh, if you could!" I said, clasping my hands. "You might ask me anything! ... anything!"

"But mind, I said with your coöperation," he warned me. "I am a surgeon of souls. You must bare your soul to me before I can operate."

This was exactly in line with what we had been told respecting his methods; everything was going well so far. I even had a little feeling of triumph that, clever as he was, I was fooling him successfully. I started telling him the wicked thoughts I had so carefully rehearsed, and he listened attentively. On my right hand as I sat with my back to the windows there was an arched opening closed with handsome tapestry portières. Behind those portières I made no doubt there was a clerk taking down everything I said. But though things seemed to be going all right, I was still terrified. Dr. Touchon leaned toward me across the corner of his desk, his dark eyes mantling with flame and growing dull again. It was like making friends with a boa constrictor. Repeated shudders went through me. It was well that I was supposed to be half crazy.

He asked me innumerable questions dealing with the relations between my supposed husband and myself. I had to think fast in order to answer them readily. Finally he asked carelessly:

"What sort of razor does your husband shave with, Mrs. Ensor?"

I gaped at him. "A—a safety razor," I stammered.

"That is very important," he said oracularly. "How often does he shave?"

A horrible suspicion occurred to me that this ridiculous question was a trap, and I seemed to fall through space. "What has that got to do——" I started to say.

He shut me off with a peremptory wag of his hand. "Please answer the question," he said. "If I stopped to explain my reasons for everything we should never get anywhere."

The absurd question stumped me. Never having had any brothers, I am not familiar with the domestic habits of men. "I—I never noticed," I stammered.

He passed right on to something else and I could not be sure if any damage had been done. I still had that horrible sinking feeling. I would not give up. I went on confessing to the most outrageous thoughts. I wept and raved and accused myself, just as I had heard Mrs. Ensor do. He listened with every outward appearance of sympathy, but deep in his eyes I imagined that I saw a flicker of cold, amused contempt. It suggested that he was enjoying the spectacle of the genuine terror that was lending so much effect to my pretended ravings. But I could not be sure. I felt as helpless as a wave flinging itself against a cliff. Finally, with a glance at his little desk clock, he remarked deprecatingly:

"I am sorry, but there is another patient waiting."

"When shall I come again?" I faltered.

"It will not be necessary for you to come again," he said in a voice of perfect courtesy—but now he no longer troubled to hide the amused contempt in his eyes. "There is nothing the matter with you, Mrs. Ensor. Go home to your husband and tell him you feel like killing him. It will clear the air!"

He was jeering at me! I had failed! Tears of bitter mortification sprang to my eyes. It was such a little thing to have tripped one up! And after all the mental agony I had been through in order to bring myself up to the sticking point! I fumbled blindly with my pocketbook, supposing that I should have to pay him, anyhow.

"Put up your purse," he said with a wave of his hand. "I only accept pay from those whom I am able to aid." He bowed me out with indescribable courteous insolence. "So nice to have seen you, Mrs. Ensor. We've had a nice talk, anyhow. Be sure to look me up when you are next in town. Good-morning. Good-morning."

I became aware of the fact that the old servant had entered and was shepherding me out of the room. Jacmer Touchon's final smile and wave of the hand was truly devilish. Ah! I could have shot him for it. My eyes were overflowing now with tears of bitter, bitter chagrin. I had failed! What was I to say to my employer?

The old man observed my distress. "Don't grieve, miss," he murmured. "All is bound to come right if your case is in the doctor's hands."

I stared at him in an astonishment that checked my tears. But his sympathy was perfectly genuine. The old man actually believed in the scoundrel for whom he worked. Well, the world is full of innocent souls! I perceived that this was exactly the sort of person Jacmer Touchon would choose to have about him. It would be good for business!

3.

I quickly realized that the situation implied something more serious than my personal humiliation. If Jacmer Touchon's suspicions had been actively aroused, he would certainly have me followed when I left his place. It would have been fatal to allow him to discover who I was. Grace and I were forced to travel all the way out to Indiana on one limited train, and back on another in order to shake off possible espionage.

I pass over the painful interview with my employer that took place on my return. With her customary kindness she made light of my failure.

"It was really my fault, Bella," she said. "I asked the impossible of you. There is one thing that cannot be camouflaged and that is common sense. Anybody who looked in your eyes could see you were no fool."

I took what comfort I could from that.

"Moreover, I underrated our friend the doctor," she went on drily. "I had forgotten his personal charms—until I was reminded yesterday."

"Where did you see him?" I eagerly asked.

"Oh, I picked him up out in the square," she said airily; "I was giving Giannino an airing."

Giannino is Mme. Storey's black ape, a little beast I have not much love for. He is one of her pet vanities. I must confess that the ugly little creature makes an extremely effective foil as he sits in the crook of her arm in his green jacket and cap trimmed with tiny golden bells.

"Picked him up!" I said, aghast.

"Giannino was only an excuse," she said—there was a touch of grimness in her humour; "the truth is, I went out especially to renew my acquaintance with the doctor. Like many another precious scoundrel he has his little softnesses. He comes into the square every day with a pocketful of crumbs to feed the birds."

"All pretense!" I said indignantly.

"Very likely!"

"What happened?" I asked eagerly.

"I was sitting on a bench," she said, "and Giannino was standing up, facing me, pulling on his chain and arguing with me. Along comes Dr. Touchon—very handsome man, eh, Bella?"

I shivered at the recollection of those good looks.

"He stood there smiling at Giannino and me," she went on, "and we smiled back—but Giannino's smile was hardly friendly. In fact, he showed his teeth at the doctor."

"His instinct was sound there," I said.

"How human!" said the doctor. 'Oh, quite!' I said; 'he is trying to persuade me to unhook the chain so he can climb into the elm tree, and I won't do it because the last time he climbed a tree I had to hire a man to bring him down. He bit the man and I had to pay damages besides.' The doctor laughed heartily and persuaded me to give Giannino another chance. So I released him; he climbed into the tree and the doctor sat down beside me. He had recognized me by this time."

"What did you talk about?" I asked.

"We exchanged compliments," she said with her somewhat grim smile. "I told the doctor that his books on psychology still occupied the first place in my library and he told me how interested he had been in following my recent career by means of the newspapers. In short, we laid the foundation of a beautiful friendship."

"But how can you keep it up—under the circumstances?"

"I can keep it up as long as he can," she replied enigmatically. "He's coming here to call some day soon," she added.

"Good heavens!" I said agitatedly. "Suppose he identifies me as his caller of the other day?"

"I cannot see that it will make much difference if he does," said Mme. Storey with the utmost coolness. "Clever as he is, he must soon find out that we are after him, if he does not know it already. I am counting on it. If I read him aright it would exactly suit his sardonic humour to come here and make believe to be friends while he twitted us with subtle insolence. So be it. It would exactly suit my humour to have him here where I can watch him. He may prove to be a little

too clever for his own good. Something tells me that we shall get him in the end through his overconfidence in his own powers. Meanwhile, it will be excellent comedy."

I looked at her in dismay. It will be *terrible* comedy, I thought. Mme. Storey's eyes were bright and her lips firm. I knew that look. She and Jacmer Touchon would be worthily matched; the contest between them would be like the play of finely tempered rapiers. But unfortunately I had not the spirit to appreciate it. I had to confess to myself that I belonged to a lower order of beings. I wondered how I should ever be able to live through such dangerous scenes.

Mme. Storey picks up her operators in the unlikeliest places. For her chief helper in this case she chose a young man whom I shall call Basil Thorne. He was one of the best known of our younger character actors, a delightful fellow, attractive, clever, and humorous. He jumped at Mme. Storey's offer partly because of the spice of adventure he saw in the affair, and partly because he was out of engagement. He had long been an admirer of my employer, devoted, hopeless, and whimsical. His reports now began to come in. I shall quote from the most significant of them.

In order to explain certain references in his reports, I should state that Gramercy Park, on which our offices faced, and also the luxurious apartment of Jacmer Touchon, is not a park in the usual sense of the word but only a small city square. It is the last of the private squares; that is to say, it is surrounded by an iron fence with locked gates. The people who live upon the park have keys, and none others are admitted. Our offices were on the south side and Dr. Touchon's place on the east.

Report Number 3

... My Scotty, McGillicuddy, gives me a good excuse to be seen walking around outside the railings at all hours. I have done miles to-day. McGillicuddy enjoys it. When we become tired I go inside the park and sit down, but always within sight of the entrance to the Westmoreland. J. T. comes into the park every afternoon and feeds the birds ostentatiously. He also tries to get the kids to gather around him so that he can tell them a story *à la* patriarch, but the little beggars know their onions. Won't go within fifty yards of him. I have scraped a passing acquaintance with J. T. I shan't attempt to carry it any further. My object was merely to get an opportunity to tell him I was an actor out of work, in order to account for my endless loafing around the park. But nobody ever seems to take a suspicion of happy-go-lucky me. My smile is my fortune. It never occurs to anybody that a man can smile and smile and be a detective still.

.

Among the various people who enter and leave the Westmoreland, one can generally pick out J. T.'s patients from their style: rich, fat, and discontented. I have succeeded in identifying three of his patients, and will get the names of others from time to time. These three are all the wives of prominent men: Mrs. George J. Julian, Mrs. Joseph Marine, Mrs. Carter Treves.

BASIL.

Report Number 7

At last I am able to report a bit of real progress. Last night as I was watching J. T.'s windows from the pavement outside, the lights of his living room were switched off, switched on, and switched off again. I thought nothing of this at the time. It was just as if somebody had forgotten something in leaving the room, and had switched on the lights again. But to-night the same thing happened again at about the same time, and after the lights were off I noticed that one of the blinds of the room was drawn up. Only one, mark. So I got the notion that some kind of signalling was going on.

The sills of the windows were about four feet above my head as I stood on the sidewalk, and I could see nothing from there. Nor could I see anything from the park. This was about eleven o'clock, and there was no one in that part of

the park. I climbed a tree to get sufficient elevation to see over the fence and into J. T.'s room. You can imagine my excitement when I saw the blink of a tiny light deep in J. T.'s room. It was so small it took me several minutes to pick it up, but you could see it plain once you knew it was there. Flashes long and short, evidently sending a message according to code. I don't know the Morse code, but they would scarcely risk that anyway. It was probably a code of their own.

It took me a long time to pick up the answering signal, but I got it at last. It came from a third-story window on the west side of the park. The whole business is very ingeniously contrived. Both signals must be sent from far back in the room, and so directed that they can only be seen in the windows for which they are intended. From the fact that the windows are on different levels, I figure that J. T. must send his while sitting on the floor, while his friend across the park sends back from a stepladder. To-morrow night I will take notebook and pencil, and try to put it down in dots and dashes. With your cleverness perhaps you can decode it.

I have marked the window from which the answering signals were sent, and to-morrow morning I will investigate what is behind it.

BASIL.

Report Number 8

The window with which J. T. was exchanging signals last night is in the third floor of one of the fine old dwellings on the west side of the park which have been converted into furnished apartments. In the letter box the name of the occupant of the third-floor front is given as Francis Fay. In making inquiries at the house I learned that the second-floor front was vacant and I promptly engaged it. I took it under my own name. The fact that I am somewhat well known will help me in my present work. From my windows I will scarcely be able to intercept messages from J. T.'s window, but if I have luck I shall make friends with Fay.

I have already passed him on the stairs. He is a small man in his early thirties, well set up and active. He has thin brown hair, and I suspect is bald on his pate. He has thin lips which suggest a hawk's beak, a long thin nose, and gray eyes that are both wary and piercing. A cagey lad! It is not going to be easy to make up to him. Even in our accidental meeting on the stairs he threw me a dirty look of suspicion. I shall not make any overtures in his direction until a real opportunity presents itself. He is very well dressed in a conservative style. He moves with energy and resolution. Has a sour expression. I hear him working the typewriter overhead. Apparently he sticks around the house most of the day.

BASIL.

Report Number 9

I sat in my tree last night. As well as I could I put down the messages that passed between the two windows in dots and dashes. I had to keep my eyes fastened on the flashes, and let the pencil travel where it would. The result is pretty wild looking. I hope you can make something of it.

This morning while I was in my new rooms I heard Fay go out. I could hear the maid at work in his rooms overhead, and I faked an excuse to go up and speak to her. Thus I got a look at Fay's rooms. There was nothing in them except the furnishings supplied by the landlord; no books, papers, photographs, or knickknacks visible that might furnish information about the tenant. There was a desk with a drop leaf standing innocently open and empty; however, I noticed that a new and efficient lock had been put on the drawers. One thing that caught my eye was a large copper fire extinguisher standing just inside the door. These articles are not supplied by the house and its presence suggests that Fay has something there that he guards carefully. The maid told me that Mr. Fay lived alone and had very little company. Two young men call on him sometimes in the evenings, she said. Always the same two.

At tea time this afternoon, while I was sitting in the park, I saw Fay come out of the house and hail a taxi. I had Pete in his taxi waiting on the north side in case of just such a contingency. Fay had to travel all around the park in order to get

headed uptown, and I was ready for him when he started up Lexington Avenue. I gave Pete the word to follow. Fay had himself driven to the Madagascar Hotel and, dismissing his cab, went in. I found him in the long corridor at the rear where all the dates are made, talking with a woman. I could not approach them close or Fay would certainly have spotted me, so I can only give you what I was able to observe at a distance.

It was perfectly clear to me what was the nature of that interview; but unfortunately my observations would hardly be received as evidence in court. The woman was about fifty years old, very smartly dressed, fat, unhealthy looking, and peevish. She's the kind you see dancing in the night clubs until they turn black in the face. In short, the very type of J. T.'s patients. There's a certain something that distinguishes them all, but it's hard to describe; a suggestion of having a minor screw loose; of not being able quite to catch on; of not belonging. Fay's manner toward this lady was cold, courteous, and hard boiled, while she was flabby and agitated. They talked for some time. He gradually wore her down. Finally something passed from her to him that I am sure was a roll of bills, but I did not see it. This pretty well establishes Fay as the head of the blackmailing end.

When they parted I followed the lady home. I have established that she is Mrs. Elmer Sartain of No. — East Sixty-seventh Street. I'm afraid this won't be of much service to you, for you could certainly never get so terrified and weak willed a person to come into court and testify against Fay or J. T.

BASIL.

Report Number 12

I inclose some more of the messages which I took down as well as I could in the park last night.

After I came in I was sitting in my rooms listening to Fay moving about overhead and threshing my brains for some way of getting acquainted with him naturally, when suddenly I thought of that big fire extinguisher, and a fool stunt suggested itself to me. Fortunately it worked. Its very wildness was in its favour.

I set the portières in my apartment alight, and then went out in the hall and yelled "Fire!" I got plenty of action. Fay, who evidently has a dread of fire, came cascading down the stairs with his big extinguisher, and the other tenants appeared from everywhere. Fay had the fire out in a jiffy, and it was not necessary to put in an alarm. There's nothing like the excitement of a fire to establish a fellow feeling. After the other tenants had gone back to bed, Fay lingered on to smoke and chin. I all but fell on his neck in my gratitude, of course, and exerted all the charm for which I am famous (!!!). I think it took, but Lord! he's a ticklish customer; suffers from a complex of some kind that makes him think everybody is trying to get at him. I pose for just what I am, an actor out of work. Saves a lot of lying. Apparently he has a great respect for the stage and is flattered by the idea of having a more or less well-known actor for a friend. He has seen me in several of my parts and so he never dreams that I might be something else at the moment. We made a date to dine together to-night. All goes well.

BASIL.

4.

We were waiting for Dr. Jacmer Touchon to come to tea. Our offices, I should explain, occupied part of the parlour floor of a magnificent old dwelling which once housed a president of the United States in his retirement. You enter through a hall room which I share with the office boy. Mme. Storey's room is the former drawing room of the President, a long and lofty chamber with a row of casements looking out on the park. Its present aspect is that of the sala in an old Italian castle. I was seated in a corner of this room, somewhat nervously occupying myself with the typewriter, since my employer wished me to be present throughout the doctor's stay.

I noticed that Mme. Storey had condescended to dress especially for the tea party. She was wearing one of the clinging robes designed for her by Fortuny. They have no relation to the fashion of the moment, but they suit her long slim figure admirably; moreover, they are in keeping with the wonderful room. You might say that the whole room was designed as a frame for Madame in a Fortuny gown. These dresses are made of clipped velvet dyed by a special process in blending colours, some flamelike, some opaline; this particular one I remember was in different shades of shimmering green. While Mme. Storey waited for her guest the suspicion of an ironic smile clung about her lips. My mistress is the least vindictive of women but I am certain that she looked forward with pleasure to destroying this scoundrel. I begged her not to introduce me to the doctor, not to bring me into the party as she always does, but to allow me to go on working quietly in my corner. Otherwise I did not see how I could support the ordeal. In my plain working dress and natural complexion, and with my red head bent over the typewriter, I thought there would be little danger of his recognizing me.

When the boy announced him I forced myself to look up, because to have kept my head down at that moment would certainly have looked suspicious, I cannot convey the impression of evil that I received as he entered. I would as lief have seen a cobra erect itself and spread its hood. Yet he was a handsome, smiling gentleman and most beautifully dressed. He wore the formal morning coat, slightly out of fashion now, but displaying to advantage his trim waist and broad shoulders. The sobriety of his dress threw into strong relief his high-coloured sensual face, and full, beaming, insolent dark eyes. The only touch of foppery about him was his sleek hair, which he wore rather long and brushed straight back with just the hint of a wave in it. It was that which made him a little too good-looking.

He kissed Mme. Storey's hand with all the grace of an old-world cavalier. Me, he appeared not to see. I tapped the keys at random, while I watched through my lashes and listened. Dangerous he might be, but Mme. Storey was no less so. I have never seen her so alluring. She blandished him like a lovely cat, her eyes shooting sparks sideways. She exulted in the consciousness of her own power. God help the man she set out to fascinate. Only once or twice in my life have I seen her exert herself thus. It was always with the aim of destroying her victim. She used to complain ruefully that she couldn't fascinate anybody she really liked.

She led him around, showing him the Italian primitives, the ancient faience, the carved furniture. He looked at her more than at the art objects, and she was well aware of it. I couldn't hear what he said but it didn't matter. He was full of assured talk and laughter; no doubt all the proper things to say about art were at his tongue's tip. However, when she led him back to the front of the room for tea he dropped his guard for a second and I saw his eyes fasten on her back with a look of resentful pain. He was touched. Round one to Mme. Storey, I thought. Yet I was wretchedly anxious, too. At such a moment the wickedness of the man showed nakedly. Of what avail all her cleverness, I asked myself, against the arbitrament of violence?

Tea was served on the old black table my mistress uses for a desk. This brought them close to my corner. Fortunately for my peace of mind, Mme. Storey waved Dr. Touchon to a seat where his back was toward me. He was so near I could have reached out and touched him. Up to this time he had not appeared to look at me.

"Where is my little friend Nino?" he asked.

"In his box in the next room," said Mme. Storey. "Nino is never invited to tea because he steals the lighted cigarettes if they are put down for a moment, and retires to the top of a picture frame to smoke them."

Dr. Touchon laughed pleasantly. "But surely it's worth the loss of a cigarette or two to witness so comical an exhibition of depravity," he said.

"Yes," said Mme. Storey drily, "but they always make him sick."

Through their lightest talk ran an ominous note. Apparently both delighted in this element of danger but it made me shiver. Dr. Touchon engaged in endless approaches to throw his baleful personality over her like a loop but always she cunningly withdrew, just in time. I could not see his face but I could imagine the play that he was making with his extraordinary eyes. I observed that my employer never quite met them. It was part of her game, of course, to make believe to be a little afraid of him at this stage. There was an obstinate dimple pressed into her cheek. Obviously she was having a first-rate time.

"And so you still read my poor little books!" he said. "How far the pupil has outstripped the master!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," she said. "I'm sure you make ever so much more money than I do."

"Oh, I make plenty of money," he admitted coolly, "and through the practise of the most shameless quackery. I wouldn't think of concealing it from an initiate like yourself. We're both in the same boat. We seek pure knowledge for the love of it and practise humbug to make money."

It made me indignant to hear him seek to link himself to my employer in that fashion. She merely smiled and let him make what he would of it.

"I have followed your cases as well as I could in the newspapers," he went on, "but they are reported so badly very often the essential thing is omitted. However, one begins to grasp your style. Brilliant bravura work. One can see you fooling all these ninnies with your tongue in your cheek. How astute of you to choose a field where all the other performers are so stupid!"

Listening to this sort of thing, I got madder and madder. He was trying to make out that Mme. Storey was a faker just like himself!

"Ah, I see that nobody can fool you," she murmured with an intoxicating side glance.

He hitched his chair a little closer. "I have learned a lot since the days when I wrote those immature books," he said. "You should let me give you a lesson now."

"Oh, do!" she said. "I should love it!"

He glanced over his shoulder at me. I don't think he saw me really, this was just a hint to Mme. Storey that they could have a better time if I was sent out of the room. She ignored it, of course.

"It was inevitable that you and I should come together again," he went on in a low, vibrant voice. "We have climbed to the same height above the generality of mankind. We can look down on their folly with a smile. We have risen above their silly notions of right and wrong. We can look in the face of the sun and dare to be ourselves. We have discovered the great secret——"

"Which one?" asked Mme. Storey drily; "there are so many!"

"The knowledge that a strong will is a law only to itself!"

You can imagine the effect of this devilish doctrine poured into the ears of an emotional woman in that vibrating voice, accompanied by the play of those magnetic eyes. Fortunately in Mme. Storey he had firmer stuff to deal with. She merely said with a bland smile:

"Yes, it's comfortable, isn't it, to reach the point where your conscience no longer troubles you."

He didn't know she was laughing at him but I did.

He said: "The drawback of being able to see into things a little deeper than your neighbours is that it renders you lonesome. You cannot find release except in the company of another free soul. I am sure you must have felt that lonesomeness."

"Oh, I have! I have!" said Mme. Storey.

He flung another annoyed glance in my direction. But as he saw there was no chance of getting rid of me, he had to go on anyway. "Then you can understand the happiness that I find in your company," he said very low. "With you I can be myself; I even let myself go; I can say whatever comes into my head without fear of being misunderstood.... And besides, you are so very beautiful!"

It was a grim kind of philandering. Touchon had no doubt resolved in advance upon the subjugation of my mistress, but I was hoping that his feelings were beginning to betray him. It would be a perfect example of poetic justice to see him fall helplessly in love with her. He stayed for two hours and all that time she kept him in play. She encouraged him without surrendering anything. At the end he could not have known where he stood. It must have been a baffling experience for so masterful a man.

When he arose to go his back was turned to her for a moment, and the real hatefulness of the man appeared for a flash in his sensual face. Then his eyes fell on me and clung there. My head went a little lower over my machine; I could *feel* him staring at me and my heart began to beat thickly with fear.

He paused beside me and said in his purring voice: "I see that your secretary uses the Peerless typewriter. Do you find that the most efficient?"

Since the question was directly addressed to me I had to look up. His eyes bored into mine—then he smiled with the most devilish malignity. He had recognized me! The evil expressed in his eyes made my senses reel in confusion, and for a second I was unable to answer the meaningless question. Mme. Storey spoke up.

"Oh, Miss Brickley inherited that machine from her predecessor. She's had no choice in the matter."

"I see you have a very clever secretary," he said softly, a world of meaning in his voice. Then the two of them passed away toward the door, leaving me in a state of semi-collapse. I hope I did not show it.

Mme. Storey came back into the room smiling.

"He found me out!" I said despairingly.

"What of it?" she said, helping herself to a fresh cigarette.

"But if he knows that you are on his trail," I said, "how can you hope to continue this game of leading him on?"

"Well, I don't know," she said, smiling at her cigarette. "I fancy that the complexity of the situation will appeal to him. He has a subtle mind. And then, too, though he knows now that I set out to get him, he may still not despair of mastering me in the end. He has an overweening confidence in his powers."

"Oh, I wish I could persuade you to let him go!" I said imploringly. "It is too dangerous! You have established yourself at the very top of your profession. The world is at your feet. Why risk everything?"

"Do you really think he is cleverer than I am?" she asked with a touch of pique.

"No, indeed," I said, "a dozen times this afternoon you made a fool of him to his face. But what good will that do? He is an utterly ruthless man. He doesn't care what he does. The moment he is satisfied we are really dangerous to him he will blot us out."

"I have it in mind," she said coolly. "But he is a coward. Nearly everybody is in one respect or another, and his cowardice takes the form of fear of consequences. He cherishes his body so fondly that he would hate to see it go to the electric chair. He will never shoot us down, my Bella. When he sees us getting the better of him he will lay the most elaborate plot to put us out of the way without danger to himself. Well, such a plot takes time to formulate and to carry out, and if we keep our wits about us we ought easily to frustrate it."

I was not convinced, but I saw that it was useless to protest further. My employer was enamoured of danger.

Of the women mentioned in Basil Thorne's reports as patients of Dr. Touchon's, one, Mrs. George J. Julian, was a friend of Mme. Storey's. The family was a prominent one; both money and position were hers but they hadn't done her much good. A more complete fool it would have been difficult to find. We had her in to tea at the office one afternoon.

She was an enormously stout blonde woman wearing a girlish little slip of a dress that barely covered her elephantine knees. It was not hard to get her to talk—the difficulty was all the other way. She was still completely under the spell of the wily doctor.

"Dr. Touchon!" she cried. "He's marvellous! You *must* consult him, Rosika."

"But there's nothing the matter with me," said Mme. Storey.

"Oh, he's not one of the ordinary doctors that treat illnesses," said Mrs. Julian with scorn. "He builds the soul! You do not pretend, do you, that your soul is in no need of strengthening?"

"Oh, no," said Mme. Storey, "my soul is pitifully weak in the knees."

"Precisely," said Mrs. Julian impressively. "Like all of us. Then consult Touchon. He is the soul specialist."

"Who sent you to him?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Mrs. Elmer Sartain," answered Mrs. Julian.

(This lady had also been mentioned in Basil Thorne's reports, you may remember.)

"Is she still his patient?" asked Mme. Storey idly.

"No," Mrs. Julian was forced to admit, "Ada Sartain has turned against him. She says terrible things about him now. But it's quite understandable. The fact about her, poor soul, is that she *has* no soul. Well, Dr. Touchon does not claim to be God. If you have no soul he can't provide you with one. He told me that himself. He can only work with what you have."

"Oh, quite," said Mme. Storey. "How does he get hold of it?"

"Don't scoff!" said Mrs. Julian solemnly. "This is serious."

"I'm not scoffing," protested Mme. Storey. "I'm really interested."

"You sit down beside him," said Mrs. Julian. "Oh, what a *handsome* man, my dear, and *so* magnetic! He takes your hand and tells you to look in his eyes. Oh! it is a wonderful experience! A strange exhilaration fills you! I would go every day if he'd take me, but I can't get more than three appointments a week. You lose yourself and your soul comes right out of you!"

"Then what does he do with it?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Of course I spoke figuratively," said Mrs. Julian. "It is not your soul that comes out of you really, but the evil which burdens it. What cramps the soul and binds us to earth are evil thoughts. That is what I get rid of in Dr. Touchon's office."

"But what evil thoughts have you, Edna?" asked Mme. Storey, smiling. ("You great baby!" she might have added.)

Mrs. Julian opened her china blue eyes very wide. "Oh, my dear, I never dreamed ... I never dreamed what wickedness lay in the bottom of my heart until Touchon drew it out. I am astonished by the things I hear myself tell him! Terrible things! I could not breathe them to anybody else in the world but Dr. Touchon. And that's not like telling them to anybody; he is so remote, so far above one! As he said, 'Mrs. Julian, all this is nothing to me. It is for your own sake that it must come out!'"

"Hm!" said Mme. Storey somewhat grimly.

"And after you have unburdened yourself of evil," Mrs. Julian went on, "he gives you a pure and strengthening thought to carry away with you. Oh, it is precious!"

"What, for instance?" asked Mme. Storey curiously.

"Well, this morning as I was leaving, he said: 'Mrs. Julian, your soul is like a little lark, rising and singing; rising to the gates of heaven and singing!' Isn't that beautiful, Rosika? Singing at the gates of heaven!"

"Oh, quite!" said Mme. Storey; "but not original with Touchon."

"I feel as light as air when I leave," said Mrs. Julian. "I do not walk, I float; I soar; I feel so *clean* inside."

"It's better than a Turkish bath," murmured Mme. Storey.

"Oh, Rosika! you pretend to be so cynical!"

5.

Meanwhile Basil Thorne was mailing us his reports every day. He was making rapid progress in winning the confidence of Dr. Touchon's right-hand man Fay. Basil could have charmed anybody. It was evident that the doctor and his lieutenant never met. This was a point in our favour. If they had held casual conversations Fay might very likely have mentioned his new friend and the doctor, who was much the more astute, might have smelled a rat; as it was, Fay only reported what seemed to be of importance to his chief.

From time to time Basil inclosed the flashlight messages that he intercepted. Owing to the way in which they were taken down they were, naturally, very imperfect; but Mme. Storey, who cannot resist anything in the nature of a cryptogram or a code, puzzled over them until light began to appear. She used as her starting point the comparative frequency with which the different letters of the alphabet are used. She established first one letter then another, until the messages finally yielded up their secret. They afforded further presumptive evidence of the doctor's blackmailing operations but were of no direct use to us. By this time we knew the names and addresses of several women that the doctor was blackmailing, but it seemed so hopeless to get them to testify we did not even try.

I subjoin several of the code messages merely as a curiosity.

F. F. to J. T.

37 has not come across.

J. T. to F. F.

Am mailing report of 37. Apply pressure by quoting from Racy Bits.

F. F. to J. T. (some days later)

No results 37.

J. T. to F. F.

Insert veiled paragraph in Chatter.

This *Chatter* was a society weekly of more than doubtful reputation. We bought a copy of the next number and had not much difficulty in identifying the following paragraph as referring to the mysterious 37.

A certain wealthy matron who lives not a thousand miles from the Plaza has, it appears, been making some embarrassing confidences to a psychoanalyst. A *very* diverting story of her case has been offered to *Chatter* which would not, of course, handle it under any circumstances. Others may not be so particular, and it is hoped that the lady in question or her husband will take this hint, and get busy in the matter. A word to the wise!

A few days later Basil inclosed this message:

F. F. to J. T.

37 has come across.

This little incident filled me with indignant astonishment. It showed me what may be behind such insinuating and amusing paragraphs, which one reads thoughtlessly. Touchon didn't have to pay for it, of course. It was right in *Chatter's* line. It seemed as if all the bad angels were on the doctor's side. Apparently he couldn't lose.

There was one pair of intercepted messages that proved to be of considerable value to us as will be seen.

F. F. to J. T.

Deposited twenty-two hundred to-day, making seventeen thousand for the week. I ought to get more out of this.

J. T. to F. F.

I'm tired of your demands. Four times during the past six months I've increased your percentage. How much further do you expect it to go? if you think you can do better for yourself, take it all. I'm ready to quit any time.

There was no answer to this, Basil said. When Mme. Storey read it she smiled, and dictated certain instructions for Basil.

I will now go on with Basil's regular reports.

Report Number 26

I was smoking and chinning with Fay in his rooms for an hour last night, and I took occasion to put your instructions

into effect. I led the talk around to psychoanalysis, in which he displayed an immediate interest. I mentioned in a casual way that I'd heard some of those fellows made fabulous sums. "Why not?" says Fay, "if they're clever enough to get by with it?" "Sure, why not?" says I; "I wish to heaven I was a psychoanalyst instead of a boneless ham." "I expect what they make is exaggerated," said Fay—the poor fool thought he was drawing me out. "There was one name mentioned," I said, "a foreign-sounding name like too-bright or too-shiny—I can't quite recall it." "Touchon?" says he. "Sure, that's it," I says; "they say Touchon has banked upward of two millions in the last couple of years." "Who says so?" asked Fay sharply. "Oh, it was just gossip at the club," I said. I saw his face grow pinched and hard with resentment. After a moment he said with a forced laugh: "Oh, well, it's nothing to me!"

Later I went out in the park and intercepted a couple of messages which I inclose. You notice that Fay says nothing to his boss about what I told him. I believe it is rankling deep.

.

BASIL.

Report Number 29

Last night, notwithstanding all his caution and self-control, Fay's bitterness burst out of him in his talk with me. He didn't mention any names at all. Simply said he was working for a guy who let him do all the work while he hogged the profits. Went on like this for an hour. Apparently he thinks himself quite as good a man as his boss and is sore to the bone at the treatment he is getting. You can be sure that I sympathized with him up to the hilt. Told him not to stand for it, etc., etc.

When I asked him in a friendly way what his business was, he said: "Accountant to a prominent professional man." I thought that was pretty neat.

BASIL.

Report Number 30

Francis Fay has a craze to hear about the doings of well-known people. The fact that I number a good many of them among my friends is what constitutes my attraction for him. He is willing to let me talk by the hour about my prominent acquaintances. Therefore it was perfectly easy last night to let fall the name of Mme. Storey as one of my friends, according to your instructions. At the sound of that name he lowered his eyes and I could feel the whole man grow tense with interest. Evidently he has learned through his master that you are one to be feared. I chattered along. "She never talks about her cases," I said, "but I've got a drag with Bella Brickley, her secretary, and she tells me things. Here's a funny coincidence," I said, "at present Mme. Storey is after that guy we were talking about the other night, Jacmer Touchon, the fake doctor, who has made such a pile. It seems he isn't satisfied with his so-called treatments but he also blackmails his victims."

You can imagine what a vital interest this bit of gossip had for Fay. He turned pale and for a moment he couldn't trust himself to speak. Then he said offhand: "Does she expect to get him?" "Sure," I said, "Mme. Storey never failed to get anybody that she went after. She knows all the details of his crooked operations." Here, in the most innocent manner, I put in some of the evidence I had collected myself. "She's had his go-between followed," I said. "All she's waiting for is to bring one of the victims to the point of testifying." I let it go at that.

Fay said nothing to his master about all this when he signalled to him later, so I figure that he is meditating treachery.

BASIL.

Report Number 32

According to instructions I said to Fay last night, mixing it up with other things, of course, and not making any point of it: "Bella Brickley told me Madame was ready to proceed against that Touchon guy. She has decided to go ahead without trying to get one of his victims to testify." Fay looked greenish when he heard this. After a moment he said: "She ought to square the go-between you were telling about and get him to testify for her." "Sure!" I said enthusiastically, "I bet she'd give something pretty to get hold of him!" Then I went on to other matters, but I could see that the idea was sticking in his mind like a burr. Unless I miss my guess you'll hear from him in less than twenty-four hours.

BASIL.

And we did! Basil's report came in the morning mail and we had not much more than read it when the telephone rang. A man's voice, strange to me, asked for Mme. Storey. The voice had that peculiar quietness which suggests a strong effort of control and I guessed that this was our man. I handed over the instrument to my mistress, and ran into my office to listen in.

He was at that moment saying: "No, you don't know who I am. I can't tell you over the telephone; it's too risky. I've got very important information for you, and I want to know if you'll protect me."

"Well, you know," said Mme. Storey mildly, "if it's incriminating I'm not the district attorney."

"That's all right," he said. "I know you can do pretty much what you want with the district attorney's office or anybody else. Will you protect me?"

"I'll say this," said Mme. Storey; "if your information proves to be valuable to me, I'll do everything in my power to protect you.

"That's good enough," he said. "When can I see you?"

"At eleven o'clock."

"I'll be there."

6.

This looked like the end of the case but as it proved it was only the beginning. At ten minutes to eleven Dr. Touchon himself entered our outer office. I was dumbfounded at the sight of him. It seemed like the unluckiest accident in the world. It did not occur to me then that it might not be an accident at all. He smiled at the sight of my dismayed face.

"I wonder if I could see Mme. Storey for a moment," he said with the greatest politeness—but his eyes were alight with triumphant mockery.

I recovered myself. I had to think quickly because, for anything I knew, Fay might be already coming up the stairs. "Why, certainly," I said, with a cordiality no less than his own. I immediately opened the door to my mistress's room saying: "Dr. Touchon is here."

She understood my manoeuvre. "Well!" she said, rising with the greatest pleasure, apparently, "this is unexpected!"

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting," he said deprecatingly.

"Never too busy to see you!"

I lingered for a moment, at a loss what to do. I had positive instructions from Mme. Storey to stay in her room whenever the doctor was there, so I had to leave it to the boy to get Fay out of the way. He's a smart boy, but of course he knew nothing about the situation. I thought of leaving a brief note for Fay telling him that Dr. Touchon had called unexpectedly, but Basil had given us so many instances of the man's suspicious nature I dared not. It seemed to me that he would instantly make up his mind that Mme. Storey and Touchon were in cahoots somehow and we should never see him again. So I depended on the simplest expedient—how could I have foreseen what was going to happen? I said to the boy:

"We are expecting a man here at eleven. We don't know his name. Just ask him if he is the person who is expected at eleven. If he says yes, tell him Mme. Storey has had an unexpected caller, and ask him to come back in an hour. He is not to wait, but to come back in an hour."

As I entered the big room Dr. Touchon was saying: "When I was here the other day I saw a copy of Barnard's book on behaviourism lying on your desk. I wanted to consult it this morning and I found that my copy was gone—I am writing an article on the subject. I thought it would be quicker to walk around the square and borrow yours than to send to a bookstore. Besides, it gave me an excuse to wish you good-morning."

"You needed no excuse," said Mme. Storey. "I am delighted to be of service." She pushed the book toward him.

Without sitting down he opened it at a certain page and borrowed a sheet of paper to make some notes. This was all a stage play, of course. While he affected to study the book and to scribble down his notes, I could have sworn that his ears were stretched for sounds from the outer room. It was then that I realized his coming was no accident. Had he warning of what Fay meant to do? I saw an ugly scene looming ahead and my heart began to beat fast.

Mme. Storey appeared to be perfectly serene. She perceived the necessity for detaining him. "Well, now that you're here," she said, "stop awhile and talk. I received a wonderful stimulus from our last talk."

He flung up his hands in feigned helplessness. "How can I resist such an invitation!" He sat down and accepted a cigarette from the big silver box. "But when a man is commanded to talk," he went on laughingly, "it has the effect of drying him right up. I cannot talk. I can only sit and admire!"

"You disappoint me," said Mme. Storey. "That is just the conventional line. One expects something better from you. Nietzsche would not have said it."

"Nietzsche was a great philosopher," said Dr. Touchon with an ardent glance, "but he left something to be desired as a man."

At a moment of extreme tension such light talk seems to give it an even more deadly edge. I wondered how they could keep it up. I was trembling inwardly. While they continued to spar with each other with smiles and glances that seemed to express so much more than the words they uttered, I sat down and made believe to go to work. Dr. Touchon on this occasion was sitting at Mme. Storey's right, that is to say between her desk and the door, and I could see his face when I looked up.

It is necessary for me to say something here about the arrangement of our offices. I have already explained that our outer office was a sort of hall room on the parlour floor of the old mansion, while Mme. Storey's room was the former drawing room. Adjoining her room at the back we had a third room that was used for a variety of purposes: Mme. Storey dressed there when she had need to, and there was a cot bed if one of us had to sleep at the office. We called it the middle room because it was in the middle of the house. It had a door on the main hall but it was kept double locked and bolted. There was an ordinary door from Mme. Storey's room into the middle room, and in front of it hung an antique tapestry.

Mme. Storey's big table was at the other end of the long room, with my little desk beside it. Since the windows were at our back we were both facing the tapestry-covered doorway. While I was making believe to work, and Mme.

Storey was parrying Dr. Touchon's fulsome compliments, I happened to look up, and I saw the tapestry move. Somebody was behind it. A nausea of fear attacked me. The room behind that curtain had a locked window and a locked door. How could anyone have come there? My second thought was, what a mark Mme. Storey was making with the windows at her back. Not to speak of me.

But I managed to curb the mounting hysteria. Glancing over my shoulder I caught my mistress's eyes. In her quiet look I read that she had seen the curtain move, too. Her quietness imposed the like on me. She seemed to say: If we are in deadly peril we can best avert it by appearing to be unconscious. Any abrupt move would be fatal.... I glanced at Dr. Touchon also. Consummate actor though he was I saw that he, too, knew there was somebody behind the curtain.

The whole dreadful scene was played out in the space of a breath or two, but those few seconds seemed to linger forever. Dr. Touchon with an altered smile finished what he was saying:

"To say that thinking injures a man's capacity for living and loving is utter nonsense."

"Oh, quite!" drawled Mme. Storey with inimitable irony.

Then I heard voices in the outer office; voices slightly raised. As a matter of fact, the suspicious Fay resented being turned away. A moment later he strode into the room. Who could have foreseen such a thing? I recognized him at once from Basil's description: bald head, long sharp nose, cunning expression. I forgot the man behind the curtain.

"You told me to come here at eleven o'clock," he said angrily to Mme. Storey, "and now..." Suddenly he perceived Dr. Touchon, and all his breath was called in in mortal fear. He stared at his master as if he saw Satan himself. His face turned a greenish hue. He was incapable of speaking. Dr. Touchon on his part was frowning at the wretched creature in indignant astonishment, as if he was beholding him for the first time—a marvellous piece of acting.

So we all hung for a second, then from behind the curtain came a cry of "Judas!" followed by a shot. Fay pitched head first to the floor and lay without moving. One knew that he was dead.

That was a terrible moment. I heard the sound of my own scream without knowing that I had uttered it. I heard Mme. Storey take her breath sharply; she blamed herself for Fay's death. As in a dream I saw Dr. Touchon's great parade of anger and courage—rushing to Mme. Storey's defense, you understand. Ah! I have worse to tell! Touchon whipped out an automatic and started firing at the curtain, three or four shots. With an awful groan another body fell into the room dragging down the curtain in its fall—a comely lad with yellow hair.

7.

A spell of horror lay upon us.

"How awful!" cried Dr. Touchon, "that you should have been subjected to this!"

There was a smugness, a complacency about him that in the presence of death was unspeakably revolting. His pretended solicitude for my employer was ridiculous. Tall, pale, and stony as Nemesis there was nothing of woman's weakness in her. She avoided looking at him that the deadly scorn in her eyes might not tell him that we knew all.

He probably felt the unspoken accusation for he began to swell and to brag a little. "It is lucky that I happened to be here. That young wretch would have turned his gun on you next."

"I think not," said Mme. Storey.

Touchon ran from one body to the other. "Who can they be!" he cried.

"This," said Mme. Storey, indicating the body of Fay, "is, I assume, the man who called me up this morning and told me that he had important information to give me. He did not tell me the nature of it. I told him to come at eleven o'clock."

I saw a glitter of satisfaction appear in Touchon's eye. He believed that Mme. Storey was playing directly into his hand.

My mistress proceeded to the body of the younger man. "I have no idea who this one is," she said, "but his motive was revealed in his cry." She opened the door into the middle room. "I see," she added grimly, "how he got in."

Following her into the middle room we saw that the wooden false work in front of the old fireplace had been moved to one side. Mme. Storey, stooping, looked up the chimney. "He took up some of the bricks in the hearth of the room overhead," she said, "and in that manner broke into the flue connected with this fireplace." She examined the wooden false work. "He has been in and out through here many times during the past weeks. Stupid of us not to have noticed that the woodwork had been tampered with, Bella."

"Who would ever have thought of such a thing!" I murmured.

"A thief!" exclaimed Dr. Touchon, affecting an air of wonderment.

"No, a spy," said Mme. Storey drily.

"How lucky that we put all our papers in the safe every night!" I exclaimed. "He could not have seen anything!"

We returned to Mme. Storey's room. Eddy the office boy stood just within the door, pale and shaking with terror. "I know who that one is," he said, pointing to the body of the younger man. "He rented the one-room apartment over the middle room. Went by the name of Mr. Carson. I have seen him going out mornings."

By this time a mob of people, attracted by the shots, were pushing into our offices. It is strange how a tragedy opens all doors. However, Dr. Touchon, with his superbly masterful air, ordered them out, and kept them out by standing guard at the outer door. One by one several policemen arrived. The first was McBrierley, who stands on post at the Fourth Avenue corner. He was well acquainted with Mme. Storey, of course. When he saw the two bodies lying on the floor of her office he froze in astonishment.

"Good God, Madam," he cried, "a murder, a double murder right in your office! What a sensation this will make!"

Dr. Touchon briefly explained what had happened. He took the attitude, of course, that he had been defending Mme. Storey. She made no comment.

McBrierley couldn't get over it. He turned to Mme. Storey as people instinctively do, saying: "What shall I do, Madam?"

"This is a headquarters case," she said crisply. "Telephone! Telephone!"

While we were waiting for the men from headquarters, Mme. Storey stood gravely looking down upon the body of the younger man. "Nothing must be touched until the police come," she said, "but we can at least make our deductions." She pointed to some microscopic flecks of white on the dead man's cravat. "Cocaine," she said succinctly; "he took a shot to nerve himself up to this deed. Apparently his hand shook. The condition of his skin shows that he was not yet an addict. Only a beginner. Ah! poor lad, the tedium of an accountant's life was insupportable to young blood. Crime was his only recourse——"

"What makes you think he was an accountant?" asked Dr. Touchon sharply.

Mme. Storey pointed to the dead man's hands. "Observe," she said, "the nail of the index finger on each hand. It is a little run down on one side. This is from tapping the keys of a machine."

"A typewriter?"

"No," said Mme. Storey thoughtfully. "Persons who expect to make their living by typewriting must be expert enough to use all four fingers. I fancy that this young man operated an adding machine. I have observed that only the forefingers are customarily used.... He must have worked for a large concern," she went on, "since the degree to which his nails are worn suggests that he did nothing else but work the adding machine. Only a large concern would keep a man at that exclusively, a bank, say, or an insurance company."

Dr. Touchon listened to this with a polite smile but I could see that he was profoundly impressed.

Out of the young man's waistcoat pocket stuck the edge of a piece of paper. Mme. Storey drew it out and a second piece came with it. "No harm to look at these," she said, "if we put them back as we found them." They proved to be two short pieces of the strips that are customarily run through adding machines. "You see," she said, showing them. On the slips were printed apparently meaningless rows of figures—but not meaningless to my mistress. But for the moment she put them back. "The police, of course, will take the original evidence."

"But surely, above all others, this is your case," Dr. Touchon suggested slyly.

"Not necessarily," said Mme. Storey coolly. "Why shouldn't I let the police do the work? I'm entitled to protection as well as any taxpayer."

I thought the doctor looked a little nonplussed. He made no answer.

Mme. Storey was still studying the body. Out of the breast pocket stuck a row of pencils and pens. She looked over the pencils. "Bella," she said, "we had a letter from a Mr. Matlock a few weeks ago. It was written on the note paper of the North American Insurance Company. See if you can find it in the file."

I did her bidding, wondering greatly what could be in her mind. When I fetched her the letter she held it up to the light. "I thought so," she murmured in satisfaction. Turning to Dr. Touchon she added: "You will find that this young man worked in the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company."

I am accustomed to these feats of deduction on the part of my mistress but to a stranger they are startling. She herself does not set much store by it, since she believes that the intuitive processes are more valuable than the strictly logical. Dr. Touchon stared at her without speaking. He pulled at his upper lip to conceal the fact that his mouth was dropping open with astonishment.

"But—but——" he began to stammer; then he attempted to carry it off with a laugh. "Oh, I say, this is miraculous."

"Not in the least," said Mme. Storey. "The pencils in this young man's pocket are all stamped with a Maltese cross in addition to the maker's name. I happened to remember that the Maltese cross is the emblem of the North American Insurance Company. All their supplies are marked with it. I sent for the letterhead to verify my recollection. The paper, you see, is watermarked with the Maltese cross. It would be the cashier's department that required so large a battery of adding machines."

There was a veiled sneer in Dr. Touchon's congratulations.

"Let us verify it," said Mme. Storey calmly. "Dr. Touchon, please call up the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company, and without telling him what has happened describe this young man, and ask if such a one works there and is absent from his work."

He hesitated, not wanting to leave her alone with the body, but he could hardly refuse so natural a request. He had to go into the outer room to use the phone since the extension was not connected.

"Bella," said Mme. Storey as soon as he was out of sight, "copy down the numbers on those two slips of paper and return them to the young man's pocket." She followed Dr. Touchon into the outer room to allay his suspicions while I did her bidding.

A moment later the inspector in charge of the detective bureau arrived with several of his men. Mme. Storey brought

him to the bodies. If it had been our friend Inspector Rumsey this story would have pursued a very different course, but there had lately been a change in the administration and Rumsey, the honest and efficient policeman, had been relegated to the wilds of Bushwick. His successor was Inspector Creery, a political policeman. Need I say more? Creery was a burly, red-faced man with a stupid, irascible blue eye. Having already been hauled over the coals in the press for inefficiency, it was inevitable that he should hate my mistress. She was the idol of the press.

Creery started asking a lot of questions tending to show that this tragedy in her office reflected very seriously on Mme. Storey. He was so stupid it was more ridiculous than dangerous. My mistress merely smiled and smoked cigarettes. She answered all his silly questions punctiliously but volunteered none of her own conclusions.

Creery in his stupid manner was trying to infer that Mme. Storey knew who the blond young man was. Beyond the two slips of paper there was nothing on the body that might furnish a clue to his identity, and they meant nothing to the inspector. When he put the question to her direct, she answered calmly: "I am trying to find out for you. Dr. Touchon is telephoning now."

Dr. Touchon entered the room. He said: "The chief clerk of the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company says yes, he has such a man working for him. His name is Arthur Sims. He was called out of the office by telephone about ten this morning."

"Well, there you are, Inspector," said Mme. Storey blandly.

It was remarkable to see how Touchon and Creery seemed to smell each other out. Without a word being exchanged they cemented an alliance. The bond that united them was a common desire to see Mme. Storey discredited in the eyes of the public. They sought to hide their alliance from the others in the room and Dr. Touchon continued to play the part of Mme. Storey's defender and upholder, but I could see clearly that hereafter we would always find Touchon and Creery working shoulder to shoulder.

8.

Within an hour the first printed account of the affair were on the street. It created a profound sensation. "Mysterious double shooting in the private office of the great criminologist!" That was enough to start it off. From the beginning the newspapers not unnaturally took the attitude that this crime was a direct challenge to Mme. Storey from the powers of the underworld, and that it was up to her to make a swift and brilliant reply. It was tacitly assumed that the police would display their usual incompetence. Consequently there was a good deal of disappointment when Mme. Storey refused to accept any responsibility and put the solution of the crime squarely up to the police.

Her attitude was perfectly logical and correct, but the public is never logical, of course. It was disappointed when its favourite refused to perform for its benefit, and a tinge of resentment began to creep into the newspaper columns. Inspector Creery (undoubtedly advised by Touchon) took advantage of this feeling to appropriate the credit for her brilliant piece of deduction. In one of the late afternoon editions I read:

"Inspector Creery in an interview described how, furnished only with a couple of scraps of paper inscribed with some meaningless figures, and a common lead pencil, he built up the fact that the murderer was employed by the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Co. This proved to be correct," etc., etc.

In my indignation upon reading this my hand instinctively reached for the telephone. I intended to call up the office of the sheet in which I read this and nail the lie. But Mme. Storey stopped me.

"We are not going to engage in any controversy with Creery," she said firmly. "That would immediately reduce us to his level. It would suit him far too well."

"But how can I let him steal the credit that belongs to you!" I protested with tears of vexation in my eyes.

"Oh pshaw!" said Mme. Storey, shrugging it off, "we can perform such 'feats' every day in our lives, while Creery will never pull off another. Let him enjoy his moment of applause. He will have all the further to fall."

This interview of Creery's had the effect of bringing the police into the running, and after it appeared, all the papers took the attitude that there was a race going on between Mme. Storey and the Detective Bureau to solve the mystery. First honours to Inspector Creery who had established the identity of the killer. Next, who was the victim, whom Arthur Sims had branded as Judas and shot dead? Why was he a Judas and what was he doing in Mme. Storey's office?

"What a mine we could spring if we told what we knew about Fay!" I said longingly.

"It would be prematurely sprung," said Mme. Storey drily. "We could not possibly convict Dr. Touchon of blackmail with the evidence we have. Especially since Fay is gone. You must be patient."

In subsequent interviews next day Creery fed the press with tantalizing scraps of information that kept the reading public on its toes. The victim's name was Francis Fay. He lived at such and such a number Gramercy Park. Until a year before he had been an employee of the North American Insurance Company (where he had no doubt made the acquaintance of Arthur Sims) and had presumably led a respectable life. But of late he had become an associate of thugs and blacklegs, and had gone into the business of dealing in cocaine and other drugs. In all this it was evident that a smarter mind than Creery's was prompting him at every turn. No explanation was yet forthcoming of why Fay had gone to Mme. Storey's office.

"They'll have a hard time explaining *that*!" I said bitterly.

"Nevertheless they will explain it," said Mme. Storey.

"And will you let them get away with it?"

She merely smiled provokingly.

Further particulars were forthcoming about Arthur Sims. He was the son of a respectable merchant in Leonia, New Jersey, a commuters' town. He was a good-looking, lively lad who seemed to have the faculty of inspiring a deep affection in his associates. Everybody called him "Blondy." He was engaged to a nice girl in Leonia, and neither she nor anybody else had the least suspicion that he was mixed up in wrongdoing of any sort. His parents were crushed. Under pressure they were forced to admit that Arthur had spent a good many nights in town lately. There was the same old heartbreaking suggestion of the effect of evil company. The janitor of the house on Gramercy Park identified Arthur Sims as a frequent visitor to Francis Fay.

"Funny that the janitor shouldn't mention the lad who came with Blondy," commented Mme. Storey. "It looks as if that fact had been deliberately suppressed." With her faculty for picking out the one essential point in a complicated situation she added: "That lad is our mark, Bella. Fay and Sims are dead but he, so far as we know, is still alive and able to testify."

An ironical note was supplied to the situation when the police got hold of Basil Thorne with a view to finding out what he knew about Fay. Basil, with an air of open-eyed innocence, succeeded in telling them very little.

I should state that Dr. Touchon was receiving great credit in the press for his promptness in shooting the murderer. There was never any move to prosecute him, of course.

When we were left alone in our office, Mme. Storey had me bring her the numbers that I had copied down from the slips found in Blondy's pocket. She glanced at the first one and said instantly:

"This is a note to Blondy from one of his companions in the cashier's department. It reads: 'To-night as usual.'"

Accustomed as I am to my mistress's intuitive flights, I confess that I stared at her incredulously. This seemed

fantastic.

"It's the simplest form of cryptogram," she went on, "the only novelty being that it was written on the adding machine. No doubt the two friends communicated regularly in that manner while their boss supposed that they were busy totting up their figures.... Look! each row of figures represents a letter of the alphabet according to its number. A row of naughts signifies a space. It's as simple as reading print if, as it happens in my case, the numerical order of the letters is fixed in your mind." Mme. Storey set down the proper letters opposite the numbers, and the slip looked thus:

(t)	20.00
(o)	15.00
(n)	14.00
(i)	9.00
(g)	7.00
(h)	8.00
(t)	20.00
	00.00
(a)	1.00
(s)	19.00
	00.00
(u)	21.00
(s)	19.00
(u)	21.00
(a)	1.00
(l)	12.00

Over the short slip Mme. Storey knitted her brows. "This looks like nonsense," she said. "Can you make anything out of it?"

(o)	15.00
(r)	18.00
(c)	3.00
(h)	8.00
	00.00
(a)	1.00
(g)	7.00
(g)	7.00
(a)	1.00

"Orch is short for Orchard," I said at random.

"Good!" she cried. "You've hit it. Orchard is a telephone central. This is a telephone number. In this case the last four numbers stand for themselves. It becomes Orchard 1771. Put that away until we need it."

While Inspector Creery was performing in the newspapers, the reporters did not neglect us. The majority of these clever and amusing young fellows were Mme. Storey's devoted admirers. Well, she had furnished them with plenty of good copy in the past. They came to her now, imploring her to take some action and not let this brute Creery get away with murder, as they put it.

As young Crosskill of the *Sphere* said: "The public loves a contest, and it doesn't matter what anybody may tell them, they are bound to look on this as a race between you and Creery to see who can solve the murder. We're only servants of the public and we've got to play up to their notions. When you appear to be letting Creery make all the running like this, you are breaking the hearts of your friends on the press. Why don't you come out and crush him with a single phrase, as you know so well how to do?"

Mme. Storey smiled and remained obdurate, "A murder was committed in my office," she said. "It is up to the police to solve it like any other murder. I am not a public official. I have no business in this case. Nobody has engaged me to investigate it. And I am certainly not going to appoint myself."

Crosskill shook his head ruefully. "You are perfectly right," he said, "but that will never go down with the public. They don't think things out. Whatever you may say they look on you as a kind of public character. They feel that you belong to them, and they expect you to put on your usual good show. It's the penalty you have to pay for all the publicity you've received in the past. Now Creery has earned the name of being a nit-wit, and if you let him put one over on you it will deal a terrible blow to your prestige."

"I am sorry to disappoint my friends," said Mme. Storey, still smiling, "but I have nothing to say on the case except to express the hope that the police will clear it up completely."

Crosskill went away waving his hands.

After this I knew it was useless for me to say anything, but I could not conceal my feelings. I am prouder of Mme. Storey's success than if it had been my own. I am as greedy as a miser of her popularity and I watch how it waxes and wanes with an anxious heart. I knew what a hazardous position every popular favourite stands in, because the public is always ready to tear down and trample on what it has itself set up. Already I could see the little sneers appearing in the press; and the suggestions of the envious that the great Mme. Storey was not so much, after all.

The tears sprang to my eyes, and the sight of them aroused a spice of irritation in my good-natured mistress. "Now, Bella, you at least ought to have more sense," she said. "You can see the position that Touchon has manoeuvred us into. He means to 'solve' this case, working through Creery. Well, if he can bring us into it his triumph will be twice as great. The only part for us to play is that of a dignified aloofness."

"How can he solve it, when he was behind it all?" I said.

"I don't know," she said frankly, "but he will. This man has a cleverer brain than any I have ever been opposed to."

"And are you going to let him do what he wants?" I said rebelliously.

"Not precisely," she answered with a dry smile. "Have a little patience, my dear. Touchon doesn't know it, but he is playing directly into my hand. It would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, to make a charge of blackmail stick; the man is too clever, and none of his victims would ever have testified against him... But now I shall get him for murder."

9.

Mme. Storey was not as idle in the case as she made believe to be. The police erected every possible obstacle in her path, such as intimidating the witnesses and posting a patrolman at the door of our office, but she serenely circumvented them. We both got a good deal of amusement out of watching the spectacle of Inspector Creery at this time. Dr. Touchon was clever enough to conceal the leading strings, consequently the inspector thought that he had suddenly been endowed with remarkable cleverness and his complacency was laughable. In the public humiliation of Mme. Storey he saw the opportunity of his lifetime. The foretaste of such a triumph was sweet to the man who had been rated for his stupidity.

The ostensible purpose of the policeman at our door was to afford us "protection," but in reality he had been put there to report to his master the names of any of the witnesses who might come to see Mme. Storey. Well, she let them have their witnesses—all except one. When she has picked out the main lead of a case nothing can tempt her into a side issue. The only man she wanted to question was the chief clerk of the cashier's department in the North American Insurance Company. His name was Greenlees. She called him up on the telephone. When he learned to whom he was speaking he became painfully embarrassed. "That's all right," said Mme. Storey easily. "I know you have received a hint to keep away from me; and I know these fellows can make it very unpleasant for you when their hints are disregarded. But you wouldn't have any objection to talking to me, would you, if it was kept from the knowledge of the police?"

"No, indeed," he said eagerly.

"Then come to the Hotel Vandermeer when you leave your office. Go right up to room 1214 without sending up your name and you will find me and my secretary waiting for you."

This was an expedient that my employer had adopted before when she wished to meet somebody without attracting attention.

Mr. Greenlees was a gentlemanly little man with the punctilious and subdued air of the long-trusted clerk. Being called into conference with Mme. Storey was a great event in his life. A little colour had come into his pale cheeks and his voice trembled slightly. His gentleness and modesty appealed to my mistress and she laid herself out to make friends. In two minutes he was hers, body and soul.

"There is only one thing I want to find out from you, Mr. Greenlees," she said. "Who was Arthur Sims's special pal in your office?"

"There was no special one that I can recall," he said. "Arthur, or 'Blondy' as they called him, was a popular boy. There were six or seven of the lads who formed a little group. I can give you their names——"

"Never mind that," said Mme. Storey. "I doubt if it would be any of these. I think he must have kept his friendship with this one a secret from the others because they corresponded with each other in cipher by means of the adding machines."

"The adding machines!" said Mr. Greenlees, astonished. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well, neither did I," said my mistress, smiling. "But with this lead can't you identify the man I am looking for?"

The chief clerk slowly shook his head. "Haven't any idea," he said.

"Well, let us see if we can't get at it by a process of elimination. I assume that most of the clerks in your department are careless, happy-go-lucky lads, as transparent as window glass. Now is there one who is not like that? One who looks as if he might have a secret?"

"There is Jack Coler," said Mr. Greenlees promptly.

"What about him?"

"A handsome, capable-looking fellow," said Mr. Greenlees. "Looks as if he could keep things to himself. He's older than the others; about twenty-seven, I should say. Sometimes I find myself wondering that such a one should be content with so small a job. I strongly mistrusted him when he first came. A fellow with such a bold and independent eye usually gives me a lot of trouble. But I'm obliged to say I've had no trouble with Jack."

"Hm!" said Mme. Storey; "sounds promising. Have you ever noticed anything between him and Blondy?"

"Can't say I have, Madame."

"Well, let's get back to the morning Blondy was called away from the office. You answered the 'phone, I believe. What was the message?"

"A man asked if he could speak to Arthur Sims. Apologized for calling him during business hours, but said it was very important."

"Did you notice anything particular about the voice?"

"Well, yes, Madame. It was an important kind of voice: crisp, distinct, well educated."

Mme. Storey smiled. "Would you recognize it if you heard it again?"

Mr. Greenlees hesitated. "Not if I heard the man speak, Madame; the 'phone alters a voice so. But if I heard the same voice over the 'phone again, I'm pretty sure I'd recognize it."

"Good! I will put you to the test at the first opportunity. Did you observe Blondy when he got the message?"

"Yes, Madame, the 'phone was right on my desk."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything but 'Very well,' or 'All right,' or something of that sort. But when he hung up he was very much agitated; pale; trembling. I thought that natural enough because he told me his mother had been taken sick and he had to go home. I told him to go, of course."

"And then?"

"He said he would finish listing the checks he had on his machine. He was so long about it that I said: 'Sims, hadn't you better go along?' and he muttered that he'd made a mistake and had to do it over."

"He would then be writing to his pal to tell him what had happened," said Mme. Storey. "Their method of communication was somewhat cumbrous. It would take him some time. Then what?"

"Why he went, as I thought, home," said Mr. Greenlees.

"Did he speak to any of the other lads?"

"No."

"Did one of them leave the room at the same time?"

"No."

"Hm!" said Mme. Storey. "How could he have got that note to his pal?"

"Why—why——" said Mr. Greenlees with widening eyes—"it has just come to me. It was Jack Coler's job to make the rounds and collect the listed checks. He would pick up anything that was lying on Blondy's machine."

"Excellent!" said Mme. Storey. "It was probably that which had suggested the means of communication to them. Jack Coler looks like our man. Describe him to me, please."

"About five foot nine or ten," said Mr. Greenlees; "strong and set up like an athlete. Weight 175, I should say. Very handsome in the face, with a bold plume of black hair, black eyes, and dark red, close-shut lips. Pale skin slightly yellowish, but healthy looking. A cool customer; has very little to say around the office. Has a triangular scar on his right cheek bone about three quarters of an inch across. Gives him a dangerous look."

"An excellent description," said Mme. Storey. "I wish we could always get as good. That will be all now, Mr. Greenlees. Thank you very much."

The little man was much confused by her praises.

"To-morrow morning," Mme. Storey went on, "I'll send a man to your office to pick this fellow up. One can see that he will be a ticklish subject to handle. Can you describe the position of his machine?"

"Nothing easier," said Mr. Greenlees. "There are four rows of adding machines facing me as I sit at my desk, and Jack Coler's is the first one in the first row starting from the left."

"Good!" said Mme. Storey. "While my man is transacting his imaginary business with you, he can be stowing Jack Coler's face away in his memory and you need pay no attention."

It was Crider that we sent to the Insurance Company's offices next morning, one of our best men. In a few minutes he was back again with a glum face. "Bird's flown," he said succinctly. "Never showed up this morning. Sent no word."

"Then he is certainly our man," said Mme. Storey.

"Mr. Greenlees gave me a photograph of him," Crider went on. "Seems the whole force had its photograph taken a while back. I cut Scarface out of it. The head is small but clear."

Mme. Storey and I looked with interest at the photograph. Mr. Greenlees had not exaggerated his clerk's good looks. A straight-nosed young man with a level gaze and firm lips, he was a cool and dangerous customer. How came such a one to be listing checks on an adding machine, one wondered. But that was only a cover for darker operations, no doubt.

"They furnished me with the home address he gave," Crider went on, "but that is undoubtedly a fake. So I got the chief clerk to make inquiries among the other employees to try to establish which way Scarface went when he left the office. Mr. Greenlees is to call me here."

Word presently came over the telephone that Jack Coler was known to use the Seventh Avenue subway, and had been seen to get on and off at the Ninety-first Street station.

Starting at the subway station, Crider traced the daily route of his man step by step along Broadway by means of a newsdealer, a barber, and a policeman on fixed post. It sounds like a remarkable performance, but it must be remembered that Scarface was a young man whom people were apt to remember. Crider found his lodging in an apartment house on West Eighty-ninth Street, but there he struck a snag in an adoring landlady who refused all information about her lodger. However, a hall boy told Crider that Scarface had removed his luggage in a taxi at half-past five the previous evening. He was driven to Grand Central Station.

At the station Crider learned through a baggage porter that Scarface had taken the Western express at six. He had a ticket for Chicago. Crider then got Mme. Storey's Chicago representative on the long-distance wire, furnished him with the description, and told him to meet the train. This man subsequently reported that he had picked up Scarface without difficulty. Scarface loafed around the city for a few hours, called on a girl, and took the train back to New York. The Chicago man was instructed to get a line on the girl. We had both stations watched on the arrival of the train, but our man was not on it then. He had evidently been cute enough to get off somewhere up the line and come in on a local. For the time being we lost his trail completely.

Mme. Storey took it philosophically. "He will bob up again," she said. "If my reasoning is correct Scarface, through the deaths of Fay and Blondy, has become Touchon's principal agent. He cannot keep out of this."

It will be observed that the nickname so carelessly bestowed by Crider instantly stuck. "Scarface" suited our dangerous young friend.

10.

Meanwhile Jacmer Touchon, taking the attitude that the tragedy in our office had drawn us all closer together, became more and more assiduous in his attentions to my mistress. It suited her plans to encourage him and he fell into the habit of calling at our office at all hours. He had us to dinner at his apartment and Mme. Storey reciprocated by having him at her place. When they began to go around together after office hours, she stipulated that I must always make one of the party. "Oh, Bella goes everywhere with me," she said carelessly. This was not true, but he had to take it or leave it. With me she was perfectly frank as to her reasons.

"As long as you are present he is forced to confine his gallantry to general terms," she said, "and I can handle him very well. If we were ever alone together he would become personal and then I am afraid I should be tempted to box his ears."

It was a very strange situation because of course Touchon knew that we knew the official version of the crime was a tissue of fabrications. He knew, notwithstanding what Mme. Storey might say in the newspapers, that we were working hard on the case and hoped to bring the murder home to him. Yet it suited his sardonic humour to pose as Mme. Storey's saviour and her ardent admirer who hoped to become something closer. All the shifts, evasions, and posings that were entailed exercised his ingenuity to the full, and he enjoyed himself. Mme. Storey enjoyed it somewhat less, I fancy, but she was amply able to meet him on that ground when there was something to be gained by it.

For me it was a continual ordeal. I was terrified of them both. Seeing them smiling in each other's faces with such apparent frankness, indulging in good-natured banter, playing the old, old game of elegant philandering, and knowing as I did that each determined nature was bent upon the destruction of the other, the strain was fearful. Touchon was ceaselessly seeking to charm my mistress with his basilisk eyes, while hers skated lightly away, but always conveying an intimation that they might yet succumb. She did it so well that sometimes I thought it was real and became sick with anxiety on her account. Touchon was undoubtedly, in a manner of speaking, "in love" with my mistress, but woe betide the woman on whom his fancy rested!

Still his effrontery puzzled me. I remember saying to Mme. Storey: "I don't see what he can expect to gain by his love-making. How can he ever hope to prevail over you when he knows that you know what a black-hearted wretch he is?"

She shrugged. "That's the kind of man he is. He believes in the power of evil. In his philosophy what he calls love has nothing to do with decency. He looks forward to the day when he shall say to me: 'I am a thief and a blackmailer and a murderer, but you cannot resist me. I am your master. Come!' To him that would be the supreme triumph."

I shivered.

On one occasion Dr. Touchon asked us to dine with him at Guillaume's, the smart place of the moment. We met at his apartment for cocktails. He had a blond young man for me whose name was Shaler, I think; but it doesn't signify. In the beginning I looked at him with interest, thinking he might be another of the doctor's agents that we had not heard of. But as we were powdering our noses, preparatory to setting forth, Mme. Storey shook her head at the suggestion.

"You will notice," said she, "that Touchon never publicly acknowledges his crooked associates. He surrounds himself with blameless characters."

And so it proved. Mr. Shaler, who spoke in a flute-like voice, was the American equivalent of the gigolo, but less attractive than his European brethren who bear themselves with a certain swagger. This one was tame, a mere cake-eater, who kept the tail of his eye on Dr. Touchon throughout and accommodated himself to his patron's every mood. He has nothing to do with the story, so I shall not have much to say about him. One thing, he could dance. It was pleasant to yield one's self to the music and imagine that a real man was guiding you.

As it always is at the dinner hour, the foyer of Guillaume's was densely crowded with people waiting for friends and so on. I fancy that many persons hang about at that time, hoping they may be seen, and afterward sneak out to dine at a cheaper place. As we slowly threaded our way through, I got a shock as if I had touched a live wire, for there, not two yards from me, looking over the heads of several persons, stood Scarface, slim and elegant in evening dress.

I recognized him instantly from the photograph. He was handsomer than I had expected, and reckless as Lucifer. He had not even taken the trouble to paint out the white scar on his cheek bone, as he might easily have done. He was as pale as paper, and his eyes there among all those fatuous, grinning faces were blazing with hate or rage. He was not looking at me or at Mme. Storey but at Dr. Touchon. I could not understand it at all. In a moment we had passed him. Touchon (who was speaking to the maitre d'hôtel) did not see him, but Mme. Storey did. She made an excuse for us to retire into the dressing room.

"Scarface here!" I gasped.

"Yes, isn't it awkward?" she said coolly. "Just at a moment when I can't handle him. I'm going to call up Crider." She already had the telephone in her hand.

"Did you see the way he was glaring at Dr. Touchon?" I said helplessly. "I don't understand."

"He looks as if he intended spoiling the doctor's game," she said enigmatically; "not that I care about that, but incidentally it would spoil mine." She got her man on the wire. "Crider," she said softly into the transmitter, "put on evening clothes and come to Guillaume's restaurant quick. Scarface is in the foyer. Watch him close. Watch him very close. He looks as if he were preparing to attack J. T. That would not suit me at all. I can't explain further now."

Somewhat dizzily I followed my employer back to our friends. We saw no more of Scarface then. He did not come into the restaurant.

The dinner, I am sure, was perfect: escargots, sole, supreme of guinea hen; all served with the marvellous sauces for which Guillaume's is famous. But it might as well have been corned beef and cabbage for me. The *ne plus ultra* of restaurants was wasted on me that night. I was haunted by the recollection of that blazing white face in the lobby. There was certainly murder in Scarface's eyes, but somehow this was murder with a difference. I confess my heart went out to him. There was a self-forgetful quality in his rage. I knew, of course, that the affair was not over. *It was waiting for us outside*. How could one eat? After three or four courses had dragged along my nerves were in shreds.

Between courses we danced, and throughout the meal men and women alike looked at my employer wistfully as they always do, and whispered to each other about her.

"Rosika," said Dr. Touchon (It had come to that!), "I read in the satisfied eyes of those who look at you that the beholders feel they have had their money's worth even in dining in the same room with you. Consider then my happiness in sitting at the same table."

"Hear! Hear!" said Mr. Shaler (or whatever his name was), with a fatuous smile that cheapened the compliment unutterably. Dr. Touchon flashed a poisonous look at him through his lashes and the young man became pale and silent.

"I hope it's true," said Mme. Storey calmly. "One likes to give pleasure."

"It is your air of high assurance that contents them," Dr. Touchon went on. "It is as it ought to be. In the general levelling process that has been going on since the war that air has almost disappeared. Nowadays our princesses seem to feel they must vie in silliness with our public entertainers. Only the efficient secretaries have dignity."

This last with a smile in my direction. I was incapable of rising to it, but Mme. Storey did. "Strange," she murmured wickedly, "how one loves flattery and distrusts the flatterer."

"Ungrateful!" said Dr. Touchon, slightly taken aback.

"Oh, quite!" she said. "Human beings are good at it."

"Is it flattery to state a self-evident fact?" he demanded.

"The truth or falsity of the statement does not constitute flattery," said Mme. Storey; "it is the end designed. One strokes a cat to make it purr."

"Alas!" said Dr. Touchon, "your purring has rather a satirical sound."

"The satire is directed at myself, dear friend," she said, "because, you see, I am purring."

"I should not have known it," he said drily.

Had my mind been at ease I should have enjoyed it. Badinage is rapidly becoming a lost art. If you do not believe

me, listen to the talk at the adjoining tables the next time you dine out. Under the present circumstances, though, their pleasant fooling had a nightmarish effect for me. Real passion was waiting outside. I wondered if Crider had come.

Finally we arose to go. My heart set up a thumping that almost suffocated me. Mme. Storey and Dr. Touchon went first while the blond youth walked at my side making agreeable conversation to keep me in face while I ran the gantlet of the staring eyes. I could never tell you what he said. The foyer was empty now and I had a moment's respite while the gentlemen got their hats and coats.

As we crossed the pavement Scarface suddenly reappeared. I knew that a man with such a look would never be put off. He was holding his hand significantly in his side pocket. The sickening horror of those moments in Mme. Storey's office when I had seen two men killed came winging back. Then I saw that Crider was close behind him; Crider, thin faced, wary, and utterly dependable, and I took courage. A cab drew up under the awning. Mme. Storey got in. As I followed her I heard a shout behind me:

"Now I've got you, you murderer! Turn around and take it in the face!"

As I dropped into my seat, Scarface was in the act of rushing forward, gun in hand. Quick as he was Crider was quicker. He flung his arms around Scarface, pinning his arms at his sides. The gun went off, pointing harmlessly downward. Scarface struggled furiously, but Crider had him as in a vise. At the sound of the shot a wild panic took place in the street. People fought to get back into the restaurant. Others ran away yelling for the police. What became of Shaler I never knew. Dr. Touchon stood by the taxi door utterly unmanned. Standing so close to death his *savoir faire* deserted him. He was shaking like a leaf. He didn't know what to do.

"Get in! Get in!" said Mme. Storey sharply. "Let's get away from here." She had her own reasons for not wanting a general disclosure just then.

He obeyed blindly. Our chauffeur let in his clutch with a jerk, and we sprang into motion. A policeman passed us, running toward the scene. Looking through the rear window I saw Scarface break from Crider's arms and start running pell-mell in the other direction. Crider and the policeman took after him. Then all passed out of sight.

Dr. Touchon's readiness of wit began to return. "How dreadful!" he gasped. "You must have *another* enemy."

"I was in the cab," said Mme. Storey drily. "You were the one that was commanded to turn around."

"But what does it mean!" he cried in pretended dismay. "I haven't an enemy in the world that I am aware of."

"I expect he was mad," said my mistress with a shade of irony. "He looked utterly wild."

Touchon seized at the suggestion. "That must have been it! He was mad!"

There was no question of any further diversions that night. Dr. Touchon took us to Mme. Storey's door and then drove off home. After so lamentable a collapse in the face of danger he knew that his pretensions to mastery must appear somewhat ridiculous—for a while, anyway.

Since she had been going around with Dr. Touchon Mme. Storey had taken me into her house to stay. The real reason for this appeared a little later. As soon as we were alone I said:

"What does it all mean? If Scarface is Dr. Touchon's principal agent why did he shoot at him?"

"Think it over," said Mme. Storey with that provoking smile of hers. "You know from Basil Thorne's reports that Touchon never meets his agents. Presumably he and Fay were acquainted, but Fay directed the other men for Touchon. It is a fair inference that Scarface has never laid eyes on his boss. It is certain Scarface doesn't know that his boss and the famous Dr. Jacmer Touchon are one and the same. But Scarface reads the newspapers like everybody else. He read that it was Dr. Touchon who shot Blondy. Suppose that Scarface was very strongly attached to Blondy. We know that Blondy inspired such affection. How natural that Scarface should try to avenge the death of his pal."

I stared at her with hanging mouth. "But—but," I said, "this case is like one of those Japanese boxes. When you lift the cover there is only another box inside! How will it all end?"

"Oh, as to this particular box," she said, smiling, "I think we can depend upon it that Scarface's boss will now call him off from the pursuit of Dr. Touchon."

11.

About an hour after Mme. Storey and I returned to her house, Crider came. "Scarface got clear away from the police," he said.

"Good!" said Mme. Storey. "It would have been awkward to have him jailed just now."

"That's what I thought," said Crider. "So I let him go. Even though it meant losing him myself. I had to decide quickly."

"He's not the sort of young man who hides his light under a bushel," said my mistress. "We'll find him again."

Crider, self-contained and poker-faced as he always is, was clearly impressed by his experience. "This lad is not just the ordinary mean crook," he said. "Wait till I tell you about him. While he was struggling in my arms he was crying: 'He killed my Pal! He killed my pal!' He was not thinking about himself at all."

"Well, one does not exactly hate him for trying to kill Touchon," said Mme. Storey drily.

"When I saw the cop coming," said Crider, "I said to Scarface: 'Beat it, kid, beat it!' hoping that it might count in my favour if we ever met again. Of course I had to make it appear as if Scarface had burst away from me by main strength, and when he started running I took after him, side by side with the cop. Scarface darted around the corner into Fifty-third Street. He couldn't hope to make the long block down to Lexington with an armed cop behind him, so he ran into a doorway. It was one of a row of old walk-up flats that are still standing in that street. Such houses always have a door on the roof, and you can cross over and come down through another house. The cop posted me outside, ordering me to watch the doorways and grab Scarface if he ran out. Then he ran in after him.

"There were a few people ran up, but I don't think any of them had seen the attempted shooting around the corner. Anyhow, in a minute Scarface came walking out of the doorway he had gone in as cool as you please. In his evening clothes and fine overcoat, he didn't look like one who might be wanted by the police. 'What's the matter here?' he said. The men on the sidewalk just gaped at him. Then he saw me and his hand slid into the side pocket of his coat. But I grinned at him and called out: 'Come on, Bob, we're late.' He grinned back, and the two of us started walking up the street together.

"We met two more cops running down from Park Avenue. They stopped us and asked what was the matter. 'I don't know,' I said. 'Somebody said there was a shooting in front of Guillaume's, and the fellow ran in this house with a cop after him, but I haven't seen anything.' One cop ran into the house while the other stayed outside. Scarface and I walked on. Those two cops got a good hard look in my face. I hope it won't make trouble for me later."

"There will be no complainant in this case," remarked Mme. Storey. "It will soon be dropped."

"At the Park Avenue corner we got a taxi," Crider continued. "I said: 'Where to, fellow?' He said: 'Know any place around here where I can buy you a drink? Shooting sure is thirsty work!' We laughed. He certainly is one cool hand. Well, I took him to a speakeasy down in Thirty-seventh Street. I thought it would be a cinch for me if we could get drinking together. But I mistook my man. He was willing to drink but the more he drunk the closer mouthed he got.

"But we got real friendly. I liked that guy. He was a new type to me. Had ideas. I noticed he had a book in his

pocket. Something new for a killer to go about with a gun in one pocket and a book in the other. I asked him what it was and he showed it to me. A book of the French language. He said he had a mind to travel and he reckoned he'd be helpless without the lingo. 'Travelling's expensive,' said I. 'Oh, hell, I can always pick up what coin I need,' said he.

"I took the line that I was a hard-working fellow who was a bit fed up with a respectable life and hankering for more excitement. That gave me an opening to ask him questions. He only answered those that were convenient. He didn't give me any real information but plenty of good advice. 'Keep away from it, fellow,' he said, 'you couldn't stand the gaff. A crook has to work harder nowadays than a railway navvy.' 'But he has more of a run for his money' said I. 'Nothing to it!' said he, 'crime is organized like the oil trust. The lads are driven until they crack under the strain. Then they take to the happy dust, and good-night!'

"You seem to stand up under it all right,' I said. He grinned. He had a grand conceit of himself, that lad. 'Me?' he said, 'I'm a special case. I've got a nerve of iron. I don't need any snow courage. I'm not organized, either. I play my own hand. It needs guts. I went into it with my eyes wide open. I don't kid myself. I don't give a damn for my life. I'm ready to go whenever the flag drops. Do you get that, fellow? Are you willing to put up your life on the flip of a coin?' I shook my head. 'All right,' he said, 'you're a squarehead, kid, but you'd best stick to your job!'"

Mme. Storey's eyes sparkled through her lashes as she listened. "This young man rather appeals to me," she drawled.

"Of course I got nothing out of him," Crider went on. "He had eyes all round his head. When he got up to go I tried to get him to make a date to meet me there again but he shook his head. 'A man like me can't afford to make friends,' he said. Then he said: 'If you're on the square with me, fellow, as you make out, you'll sit here for five minutes and let me make a clean getaway.' Well, when he put it like that what could I do? I had to let him go."

"Why, of course," murmured Mme. Storey. "We're not bloodhounds."

Crider was relieved. "And so," he concluded, "I made an interesting acquaintance, but in the end I was no forrader than in the beginning."

"That's all right," said Mme. Storey, "we had better go out of business if we can't lay our hands again on such a conspicuous young man. He must have plenty of friends; there must be a lot of women in love with him. He must amuse himself in company. What we've got to do is to find out where he and Blondy spent their evenings. Apparently they had a date on the night of the day Blondy was killed."

While the three of us were talking it over, our Chicago man called us up in respect to the girl that Scarface had called on out there. I took down his report. She went by the name of Maud Heddle, he said, and was from New York. He had not attempted to approach the girl herself, he said, but had palled up with one of her friends and got the information concerning her. Maud had come to Chicago to take the job of hostess in a little night club. The police had raided it and she was broke when Scarface found her. On the day after Scarface's visit she told her friends that a fellow from New York had offered her the job of running a very select little club there. A new idea: she said, very exclusive. She was going East to take the job just as soon as her friend sent her the fare.

Mme. Storey smiled when I laid this information before her. "Every little bit helps," she said. She pondered for a moment or two. "Bella," she said, "what was that telephone number we found in Blondy's pocket?"

"Orchard 1771."

"Let's take a chance on it," she said, reaching for the 'phone. She gave the number, and we listened curiously to see what would happen.

"Hello!" said Mme. Storey. "Is Mr. Jones there? ... Mr. Alfred Jones ... You don't know him? Who is this?" ... A broad smile overspread her face as the answer came over the wire. "Oh, sorry," she said. "I have the wrong number." She hung up. "The Cobra Club," she said to us. "That name sounds like Scarface."

I snatched up the telephone book but no Cobra Club was listed there.

"A private 'phone, of course," said Mme. Storey. "Oh, well, if one has a friend in the telephone company one can always get the addresses of such 'phones."

She deliberated for a moment, tracing an imaginary figure on her desk blotter, then said: "We'll give Basil Thorne the job of getting himself elected to the Cobra Club. It's just in his line; a well-known actor; a sport; and an amusing fellow; he'll be an ornament to the membership."

12.

This brings me to the seventh day after the murder. During these days, of course, the case had never ceased reverberating in the press. Dr. Touchon, who was evidently behind the press campaign, saw to it that just enough new matter was fed to the public each day to keep its interest at fever heat. To us it was perfectly obvious what was going on. Touchon would plant his little bits of "evidence" and then suggest offhand to the fatuous Creery that he look in such and such a place. Creery would thereupon find what Touchon intended he should find and be perfectly charmed with his own perspicacity.

It was good comedy when you were in the know but a little hard to watch in silence, especially since Creery, when he was interviewed by the press, always hinted that Mme. Storey's disinterestedness was a bluff. He as good as said that he knew we were working tooth and nail to solve the case but added that he would beat us out in the end. "I will put these amateurs where they belong," he would say darkly.

Following the fracas in front of Guillaume's Mme. Storey had remarked with her usual acumen that Dr. Touchon would now make a bold play to intimidate us and to remove from our minds (and incidentally from his own) the recollection of his pusillanimity before Scarface's gun. Sure enough next morning Dr. Touchon and Inspector Creery drove up to our office in one of the Police Department limousines, followed by a perfect mob of reporters in taxi-cabs. These had evidently received a tip at Headquarters that something important was about to break. All came crowding into our outer office.

Creery made believe to be wroth with the reporters. He was a clumsy dissimulator. "You fellows wait outside!" he roared at them. "I got private business to talk over with Mme. Storey.... Whenever I leave my office," he went on to us, "they scent news and come tagging after. What can I do? I can't forbid 'em the streets. The streets are free."

"That's all right," said Mme. Storey, smiling, "they are friends of mine. Sit down, gentlemen—as many of you as can find seats."

Dr. Touchon, Inspector Creery, Mme. Storey, and I proceeded into her room. Both men were beaming with satisfaction but there all resemblance ceased. Dr. Touchon's smile was as smooth as cream. His attitude took it for granted that Mme. Storey would be as much delighted to receive the news as he was to bring it. Yet under this parade of smoothness and warmth and friendship there was an insolent glitter in his strange eyes. And he intended that we should see it. Take warning that I am about to deal you a mortal blow, they seemed to say, and that I mean to deal you others until I crush you or you submit!

On the other hand, Inspector Creery could not pretend to hide his coarse triumph. He did most of the talking while Touchon watched him with directing eyes like a parent, and a contemptuous half smile. "See me put the old dog through his tricks!" he seemed to be saying. Creery, all unconscious, continually glanced at Touchon for support and applause. One was reminded of a ventriloquist giving a performance with his dummy. Creery said, rubbing his red hands together:

"Well, ma'am, I've solved the murder."

"Splendid!" said Mme. Storey.

"I said I'd do it and I did!" boasted Creery. "I'm a kind of a bulldog in my nature. When I get a grip of an idea I never leave it go. From the first I said it was you that this fellow Sims or Blondy was tryin' to get, and I stuck to it till I proved it. Why, Blondy had been layin' for you for weeks, hadn't he? And the other fellow Fay on'y turned up that day."

"Then why hadn't Blondy shot me long before?" asked Mme. Storey mildly.

Creery impatiently waved this away. "I can't tell you that. Maybe he lost his nerve. But I can prove it was you he was layin' for."

"Well!" said Mme. Storey as if she was learning something. "And I thought all the time that Blondy was only spying on me. Sneaking in while we were out to learn what he could about my affairs."

"Nothing to it!" said Creery. "You can take it from me, ma'am. I've been chasin' crooks for thirty-five years!"

"You ought to know them," murmured Mme. Storey.

"I ought to know them and I do know them," said Creery, glaring around. "From the first I said that Blondy had been hired to croak you and that Fay was his pal. Fay had made up his mind to rat on him, thought he could get more out of it by warnin' you, I reckon, and that's why he come here. Blondy surprised him here and shot him. He would have turned his gun on you then if the doctor hadn't been so quick. It was as clear as daylight to me. All I had to do was to prove it and I have proved it."

"Congratulations, Inspector," said Mme. Storey sweetly.

He wasn't bright enough to perceive her irony but it affected him subconsciously like little barbs. "Yeah, congratulations!" he said, turning redder than his wont. "You'll all have to hand it to the professional now; to the stuffed bluecoat, as they called me."

"I never called you such a thing, Inspector," said Mme. Storey with a shocked air.

"Maybe not, maybe not," he said, nodding with heavy significance, "but I noticed where the newspaper fellers got most of their ideas."

Here Dr. Touchon, feeling perhaps that his puppet was becoming a little too crude in his manifestations, said good-humouredly: "Don't keep Mme. Storey in suspense, Inspector."

"Sure! Sure!" said Creery with a grin of perfect comprehension in the direction of his friend. He took a paper from his pocket. "Cast your eye over that, ma'am," he said with a sneer. "There's the result of a little *real* sleuthing!"

Mme. Storey took it. It was a single sheet of plain paper, letter size, typewritten, and having several signatures at the bottom, and a notary's seal. While she was reading it I noticed that Touchon's eyes were fixed on her face in fiery intensity. The man was hungry to read some sign there that his blow was telling.

However, he was disappointed. No muscle of Mme. Storey's face changed. When she was finished she said in exactly the same tone of pleasant irony: "Good work, Inspector!" handed the paper to me, and took a cigarette.

I read:

I, Barney Craigin, being under sentence of death, do wish to clear my soul of a crime that was not carried out as planned by me, but two men met their deaths through it. This is how it was. I would never have been convicted of murder if it had not been for the work of Mme. Storey. That woman never let up on me. All through my trial I brooded on it. It preyed on my mind and when I saw that my conviction was certain it seemed to me that I could die happy if I could only send her before me.

But there was no way I could get at her, locked up as I was. When I was in the Tombs during my trial, there was another prisoner used to pass me a shot of snow once in a while to keep up my nerve. Me and him used to talk when we could and I told him how crazy I was to get back at the woman who had hounded me. He said if I had money enough it might be fixed through the fellow that gave him the coke. I said I had a thousand dollars for the purpose.

A couple of days later this fellow Francis Fay came to see me in the Tombs. He made out he was my cousin. We talked through the grating but we couldn't come to no agreement. He said: "How do I know you got the thousand?" And I said: "You go to my wife and she'll show it to you. She'll tell you that it's yours whenever I give her the word. She thinks it's for the purposes of my defense." He went to her and she showed him the money, and a couple of days later he came to see me again.

"How you going to do it?" I asks him. "Hell!" he said, "I ain't going to do it. I don't want to land here alongside you, bo! I got a kid working for me that will do it. Name of Blondy. One of these well-brought-up kids whose head is turned by crime. He thinks it will make a man of him to pull off a murder." But still Fay and me couldn't come to no agreement. Fay said if he did the job me and my wife would just give him the laugh. He wanted his pay in advance. "Nothing doing!" I says. "If you got your pay in advance, you wouldn't give me the laugh, I suppose. Nothing doing!"

So we argued it back and forth. Fay said he had looked over Mme. Storey's premises and there was a vacant room over her offices that he could hire, and send the kid down through the chimney by removing a few bricks at night. This sounded pretty good to me. Finally I told my wife to give him half the money. The days passed, and he told me how the kid had hired the room and so on, and finally how Blondy had succeeded in getting into Mme. Storey's place. Then Fay refused to go any further without the balance of the money.

"How do I know you're not stalling me?" I says, and the next time he come, he brought me some envelopes addressed to Mme. Storey with the postmarks and all, to prove that the kid had been in her office. The kid got them out of her wastebasket, he said. This looked like pretty good proof, but I never trusted Fay. I got a friend of mine to shadow him. I won't give the name of this friend because I don't want to incriminate him.

My friend found out where Fay lived on Gramercy Park, and found out about Blondy, too, and where he worked. He found for a fact that Blondy had taken the room over Mme. Storey's offices. My friend found out a lot by chumming up with the hall boy in Fay's house. The hall boy would listen in on the 'phone and tell my friend who Fay talked to. So this sounded all right and I told my wife to give Fay the other five hundred.

Well, it seems just as soon as Fay got my money he opened negotiations with Mme. Storey to see what he could get by selling me out to her. The hall boy called up my friend and told him that Fay had been talking to Mme. Storey and had made a date to go to her office in a couple of hours. My friend then called up Blondy and told him to watch his step. Blondy cursed Fay and told my friend he would get Fay and Mme. Storey, too.

The rest of it was all in the newspapers. Seems Blondy hid himself in Mme. Storey's office and got Fay when he came. And a caller who happened to be there named Dr. Touchon, he got Blondy.

This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

(Signed) BARNEY CRAIGIN.

A notary's affidavit completed the document. I handed it back to my mistress without comment. I confess it made me feel sick. I could foresee so clearly what a complete triumph it would be for Creery (and Touchon!) in the press. Touchon would at the one stroke make Mme. Storey look small and triumphantly clear himself of any complicity in the crime. It is bitter to see the evil doer prevail like this!

Creery said with a leer: "Being as you had an interest in the case, I thought it only right to show you this before handing it to the press."

"How considerate of you," said Mme. Storey with her delicate irony. "Let's have the boys in now. This will be a

fine story for them." She herself opened the door and beckoned to the waiting reporters.

Creery was considerably taken aback by this move. I noticed that Touchon, too, rubbed his lip; a sure sign that he was annoyed. My mistress stole a part of their thunder by making the announcement herself. The reporters came streaming in: young Crosskill of the *Sphere*, Forbes Jackson, Whitwell, and all the others whom we knew. Their wary eyes travelled from one to another of us, not knowing what to expect but ready for anything.

Mme. Storey's face was apparently alight with satisfaction. "Good news, boys!" she cried. "The whole miserable business is cleaned up and finished. Inspector Creery has secured a confession. Read it, Inspector, read it!"

The inspector coughed and fumbled with the paper. It deprived him of some of his expected triumph thus to be commanded by my mistress. However, he read the confession. The newspapermen—or at least those of them who were our friends—listened with interested but glum faces. Quick witted as they were, they missed none of its implications. They did not relish what they had to write about this case.

Mme. Storey continued to carry it off with perfect aplomb. The irony was there for anybody who was sensitive enough to hear it. "Heartiest congratulations, Inspector. I cannot tell you what a load this lifts from my mind. Now I can get to work again." She approached Touchon, and the quality of her voice changed. "As for you, my friend, it now appears beyond a shadow of a doubt that I owe my life to you. What can I say? Let the future prove my gratitude!"

This could be taken two ways, of course. Touchon listened to it with a seemingly deprecatory smile and a gratified devil lurking in his eyes.

When we got them all out of the room the false animation faded out of my mistress's face, leaving it grim. "Well, Bella," she said, "what did you think of the 'confession'?"

"It is damnable!" I cried, with the tears of chagrin springing to my eyes. "It is so plausible it almost shook me, though I know that every word of it is a lie!"

"Ah, that was the Touchon touch," she said. "Touchon wrote that confession. The poor wretch in the death house hasn't got the imagination." She took a turn up and down the room. "Bella," she cried, "that man is as clever as Satan! To choose a condemned murderer with three days more to live and persuade him to take the crime upon himself, who else would ever have thought of such a thing! Ah! I hope he had to pay dear for it! With Fay and Blondy both dead, and Craigin to die in three days, how can we disprove that document?"

I could only shake my head.

"Yet you can see what the result will be if we don't disprove it?"

"Professional ruin for you," I said.

"Nothing less than that," she said grimly. "Unless I can come back, and quickly, too, with a still more brilliant counterstroke."

"Can you do it?" I asked eagerly.

She raised her shoulders and spread out her hands. Her face was an inscrutable mask. "Time will tell," she said.

13.

"Bella," said Mme. Storey to me, "if you were Dr. Touchon what would you expect me to do when I first heard Craigin's pretended confession?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Wouldn't you expect me to rush up to Sing Sing to try to get Craigin to retract his lies?"

"Well, I suppose I would," I said.

"Then let's do that very thing," she said. "We shall not get Craigin to retract," she added grimly, "but at least we'll convince Touchon we're running true to form, and we may pick up a bit of information. As to the price Touchon paid for this confession, say, and how the money passed."

Upon consulting a time table, we found we should make better time on the round trip by motor. Fifteen minutes after Touchon and Inspector Creery had left our office we were on the way and an hour later we were in the warden's office of the prison. I expect we were followed. At any rate, all our movements at this time were promptly reported to Touchon. We had met the warden before in the way of business and had every confidence in him. He was a discreet man. You could talk to him freely without the fear that it would presently be all over the place.

Mme. Storey explained the situation briefly and he took us to the death house where Craigin was confined. Of that calamitous place I shall say nothing. I only hope that it may be abolished before I die. How unspeakably dreadful is the situation of a condemned man, who, as is usually the case nowadays, goes into the death house, comes out again, and goes back again, according to the status of his case on appeal?

We came to a halt in front of Craigin's cell. I was astonished at the alteration in the man. During his trial he had had the aspect of a trapped rat, mean, furtive, terrified, ready to snatch at any desperate lie to aid himself. All that had passed. He was not, even now, one of the comelier specimens of humanity; but he had quieted down; a certain serenity had come into his face; his glance had a remote quality as of one who already regarded himself as cut off from life.

"Well, Craigin," said Mme. Storey, "I hope you bear me no ill will?"

"No, indeed, Madame Storey," he said unhesitatingly. "All that is past. I have confessed. My mind is easy."

"So I see," she said, "and I'm glad of it. That being so, I shouldn't think you'd want to leave that lying confession behind you, Craigin."

He hesitated, gazing at her in his curious, detached way. No shame appeared in his face. If he had experienced a change of heart, as it seemed, I couldn't understand why he didn't show shame upon being reminded of his lies. He seemed to be borne up by some inward strength. "I don't care to say anything about that," he said slowly.

"You know and I know that it's all a pack of lies," said Mme. Storey persuasively. "How do you reconcile that with an easy mind? In three days you're going to leave for a place where there's no coming back again, Craigin. Wouldn't you go happier if you left a clean slate behind you? You know what you are doing, of course, in signing that confession. You are enabling a murderer to go scot-free and to continue his crimes. A worse man than you ever were. What do you want to take on his load for?"

He showed uneasiness then; hung his head; hesitated. Mme. Storey gave him his own time. Finally he said to the warden:

"What time is it, sir?"

The warden, somewhat surprised, told him: "Quarter to twelve."

"Give me an hour," said Craigin to Mme. Storey. "In an hour I may have something to say about this."

This aroused my indignation. "You can't expect Mme. Storey to hang around the prison awaiting your pleasure," I said indignantly. My mistress laid her hand on my arm.

Craigin looked at me as if he saw straight through me and beyond. "She is the great Mme. Storey and I am only a

condemned prisoner," he said. "But I'm going to die in three days. What do I care for such differences now?"

I felt justly rebuked.

"That's all right, Craigin," said my mistress. "I will wait in the warden's office until you are ready to speak to me."

However, as we were turning away an attendant came along the corridor with a telegram which he handed to the warden.

"This is for you, Craigin," said the warden, opening it. "It is from your wife." He read out: "'Can't come to-day, but all right.'"

Upon hearing these words Craigin drew a long breath and his back stiffened. A faint colour relieved the pallor of his hollow cheeks. He looked at us with a kind of indifference; it was the look of a man who has passed beyond all petty human concerns. "There is no need for you to wait, Mme. Storey," he said. "I have nothing to say. My confession stands."

My mistress and the prisoner exchanged a look. His eyes never faltered. He had the aspect, not of a confessed murderer, but of a martyr going to his death gladly. How strange are the manifestations of the human spirit! Mme. Storey saw that it would be quite useless to attempt to argue with him.

"Very well, Craigin," she said quietly. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mme. Storey," he said. "Good luck!"

This was a farewell in good earnest. I found myself trembling as I left the dreadful place.

Back in the office the warden said: "Surely you are mistaken in believing that his confession was fabricated, Mme. Storey. If ever a man was telling the truth he seemed to be."

"Then how is his hesitation to be explained?" I said.

"That's easy," said Mme. Storey. "He didn't know if the price had been paid over. Evidently the telegram from his wife informed him that it had."

"To lie so coolly with death only three days off! I can't understand such a man!" I cried.

"I can," said Mme. Storey. "Craigin's one redeeming feature throughout his trial was his affection for his wife and child. He has no money—the thousand dollars mentioned in the confession was pure myth; and he worried ceaselessly about what would become of them when he was gone. Put yourself in his place. Suppose someone came to you promising to make your family independent for life if you signed a certain paper. Wouldn't you sign it gladly? Isn't it natural to put your duty to your own flesh and blood above your duty to abstract truth? Wouldn't you face death serenely if you knew that in so doing you provided for your dear ones far better than you could have hoped to do in life?"

"Maybe so, maybe so," said the warden uneasily.

"When did the confession first appear?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Yesterday morning Mr. Duross, his lawyer, came to me after seeing Craigin. He said he'd had a tip from the police that Craigin had guilty knowledge of certain matters not connected with the crime he was convicted of. Mr. Duross said he had taxed Craigin with these things and Craigin had expressed a wish to make full confession in order to ease his mind."

"As far as Duross is concerned that is undoubtedly true," said Mme. Storey. "These things have been going on behind his back."

"So we had Craigin down to my office," the warden went on. "He dictated the confession to my stenographer, signed it, and swore to it before a notary. Mr. Duross carried it away with him. For the police, I understood."

"Yes, for the police," said Mme. Storey with a dry smile. "Nevertheless," she continued, "that confession was undoubtedly taught to the prisoner by rote beforehand."

"How could that be?" said the warden.

"Well, what visitors has he had?"

"Nobody but Mr. Duros, his wife, and his sister."

"You are sure?"

"Positive, Madame. Nobody can visit the death house without seeing me first."

"A very great sum of money may have changed hands in this case, Warden. Every man, they say, has his price."

"That is quite true," said the warden with some bitterness, "and I take my measures accordingly. I won't say but what a letter may have been smuggled to him, but no one could visit him without my knowledge."

"He may have been approached through his wife," said Mme. Storey, "but I doubt it. She is too stupid a woman to be trusted in a matter of this kind. And his sister is quite out of the question: a pale, mousy little woman who dares not call her soul her own."

"What!" said the warden, staring at us in a very peculiar fashion.

"I said his sister was too timid a woman to have been used in this matter. She was completely overcome by the trial. Never appeared in court."

"Has he more than one sister?" asked the warden a little hoarsely.

"No, only one."

"But you are mistaken, Madame," said the Warden agitatedly, "his sister is a very tall woman, with bold, handsome features. A very striking-looking person. I took her for an actress."

Mme. Storey smiled drily. "What about her voice?"

"I didn't hear her speak. She appeared to be overcome with emotion. She came with Mrs. Craigin, who vouched for her. I knew Craigin had a sister. I suspected nothing. Good God! do you mean..."

Mme. Storey opened her bag and took out the little photograph of Scarface. "Did the sister by any chance resemble this photograph?" she asked.

The warden's eyes almost started from his head. "A man!" he cried. "Impossible!" But as he gazed at the card he began to weaken. "And yet ... and yet ... there is a certain likeness. I suppose you know what you are talking about. You always do.... Yes, I suppose I must admit that this is a photograph of the same person that posed as Craigin's sister.... I don't see how I could have been so deceived. Good heavens! what a laughing stock this will make of me in the press!" The worthy man's distress was pitiable.

"Make yourself easy, Warden," said my mistress soothingly. "There is not going to be any public exposure of the trick that has been played on you. At least not for the present. I am not going to try to disprove this document by direct methods. I could not hope to do so within the short span that remains of Craigin's life. Let the poor wretch die with a quiet mind. I shall bring out the true facts of the case through quite other channels."

He looked vastly relieved.

"Scarface again!" murmured my mistress as we drove away from the prison. "There does not seem to be much

danger of our losing this active young person. He forces himself on our attention."

14.

Only those who have been made or marred by it can fully realize the power that publicity wields in modern life. If it never happens to have blown your way you take it for granted. But the popular favourite and the ex-popular favourite know how its winds can nourish and destroy. Individuals nearly always affect to despise what they read in the newspapers but men in the mass are fatally swayed by it. The newspapers rule us. They would be as good as any other rulers if they had a corresponding sense of their responsibility, but this, with two or three shining exceptions, they sadly lack. With the run of the popular press the guiding principle is merely to climb on the band wagon; in other words, to out-praise when praise is in order and to out-decry the moment the wind changes. Our rulers are in turn the slaves of popular opinion, which blows as it listeth but always violently, knowing no gradations apparently between fulsomeness and savagery. It is all perfectly senseless, but what is a sensible person to do in the face of it?

The sinister mind of Jacmer Touchon had perceived how to turn the power of this mighty engine to his own purposes.

When Mme. Storey and I returned to town the afternoon papers were coming out with complete stories of the scene in our office that morning. The whole case had been very carefully stage-managed as I have pointed out before. No hint of the supposed culprit had ever been given to the press, while the public anticipation had been stimulated to fever heat with daily clues and false clues, hints and promises of disclosures to come. Now Craigin's confession capped this towering structure with a stunning effect of surprise. It was a first-class sensation.

The newspapers, like everything else in our exuberant country, know no half measures. They now seemed bent on making poor old Creery into as much of a prodigy as he had before been a scapegoat. It was enough to make the judicious weep. Nor did they stop here. They had to indulge in cheap sneers and fleers at my mistress. It was the first time she had ever felt the adverse wind of publicity. Some of the more unscrupulous sheets actually described how the tears of vexation had sprung to her eyes upon hearing the news; how she had "left the room in a huff," and so on. One is helpless against this sort of thing.

Representatives of these ghoulish papers were lying in wait for us at our office. Mme. Storey met them smiling. It is the only thing to do. Smiling doesn't help you with them but it saves your own self-respect. She had to submit to their impertinent questions: "Where have you been, Mme. Storey?" "To Sing Sing Prison to see Barney Craigin," she calmly replied. "Does he stand by his confession?" "Why, certainly!" she said with a look of surprise. "What did you expect?" Then the photographers. Some of them resented her smiles. "Does it make you feel so happy to take a back seat?" one asked. "Why shouldn't I be happy?" she countered. "When somebody tries to kill you it's a great satisfaction to learn that he is safe in jail." And so on.

As the hours passed the situation grew worse. Mme. Storey bore it all serenely but I was in a highly charged state of exasperation. Some of the morning papers carried editorials reflecting on my employer's abilities. Merely a form of climbing on the band wagon. As long as I live I will never be able to understand why people seemed to be glad of her downfall. I suppose it was the penalty she had to pay for having been exalted so high. An experience like this makes me cynical as regards human nature. The strangest change of all was in the character of our mail. We get a great sheaf of letters every day which are very troublesome to go over, such a large proportion of them are from idle-minded persons and cranks. Up to this time the tone of such letters was almost invariably fulsome, and now they suddenly turned scurrilous. I wish somebody would explain why that should be.

It was not long before we began to receive more serious evidences of the disfavour into which we had fallen. General Rampayne took his case away from us. It had been dragging along for months, through no fault of ours, but simply because the old warrior was incapable of telling a plain story. We were glad to be rid of him; but we were less pleased when a certain federal district attorney who had offered us an important secret-service case withdrew his offer

without explanation. There were other incidents of the sort.

Harder to bear, perhaps, was the altered demeanour of the ordinary persons with whom Mme. Storey came in contact: the elevator boys, taxi drivers, policemen, and the like, all faithful readers of the newspapers. Their looks of respectful admiration became tinged with cynicism. They had somewhat the air of those who have backed the wrong horse. Mme. Storey took it unconcernedly; I was the one who suffered. Also the thronging social invitations began to fall off. My employer was no longer quite the great catch for hostesses that she had been.

"That anyhow is an unmixed blessing," she said with her delightful smile. "It will give me more time to devote myself to dear Jacmer!"

This was Dr. Touchon's hour! Never shall I forget his entrance into our room after we had returned from Sing Sing; his air of profound sympathy with Mme. Storey; his hot indignation against her detractors—while at the same time his strange eyes were glittering with a deep satisfaction. That cruel glance of his, which had nothing whatever to do with his purring speech, said to us boldly: "All that you are suffering from is my work! Beware lest worse befall you!" How are you going to deal with a man like that? It was impossible to drag his thoughts out into the open. His tongue was ever ready with a honeyed phrase while his cynical eyes mocked you.

One of the unscrupulous sheets printed a particularly offensive story describing Mme. Storey's friendship for Inspector Rumsey, Creery's predecessor, and intimating that she had set out to discredit Creery on that account. Dr. Touchon, fulminating with anger, took himself downtown and raised a ruction in the editor's office. This was all grist for the editor's mill, of course. He ran a story describing the scene, and the incident did us incalculable harm, because if you resent a thing people always think there must be something in it—as Touchon with his devilish perspicacity had foreseen.

But who could blame him for so friendly and loyal an impulse? That was the maddening thing about him. Everything he said and did appeared to be the right thing—while he was secretly jeering at you. All the newspapers lauded him naturally as Mme. Storey's saviour and friend and supporter. They began to hint, in the way they do, that a match would probably come of it. This reduced me to a gibbering state of rage.

Dr. Touchon was in and out of our office all day, and every night he had some entertainment to propose. "You ought to go about and show yourself with that serene smile of yours," he said. "It is the only way to wear down this ridiculous campaign that is being waged against you."

Ah! what an astute psychologist he was! He had another reason for wishing Mme. Storey to be seen everywhere in his company. He knew how difficult it was in the end to get out of a thing which everybody has made up their minds must come to pass.

Meanwhile my mistress was playing a no less subtle game with him. In his company she betrayed something of the pettiness and chagrin that the newspaper credited her with. "Ah, will it ever blow over!" she cried. "When will they leave me alone! How I wish that I had never bestirred myself in the matter. I suspected from the first that Creery was laying a plot against me. I am convinced that that confession is a fake. But I wish I had let it go."

Touchon feigned to express the greatest amazement. "A plot!" he cried. "The confession a fake! Whatever do you mean?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" she cried. "Let it go! I'm sick of it! Nothing would tempt me to touch the matter!"

Touchon wagged his head in seeming concern.

I was secretly delighted with her cleverness. But after he had gone she said with a rueful smile: "He didn't believe a word of it. It is useless to lie to Touchon. Because he takes it for granted that everybody always lies. Somehow we've got to convince him that we've dropped this case, but it's not going to be easy."

Three days later Barney Craig was executed. What the newspapers called his "eleventh-hour confession" had

renewed the public interest in his case and his electrocution was made the occasion for a tremendous outpouring of sob stuff in the sensational press. It was a shame. The man met his end well and one hated to see it cheapened.

His widow added to the excitement by announcing that she would sell her effects at auction on the following day. Whether this was the result of sheer callousness on her part or deep calculation I don't know; in either case the auction was a scandalous success. It must have been, proportionally, one of the most successful auctions ever held in the greater city, for every poor stick she owned fetched ten times its value.

Mme. Storey and I had not intended to trouble the unfortunate woman at this time but as long as she was inviting attention to herself we thought we might as well attend the auction. It took place in one of those wretched little wooden houses that are run up hundreds at a time in outlying sections of Brooklyn. They are built to last about as long as the instalments run. As soon as your house is paid for you need a new one. Craigin's payments were far in arrears, we had learned, and the house was reverting to the builders.

A great crowd swayed and pushed in front of the house. The auctioneer brought his wares out on the front porch in order to reach a bigger audience. Even so not a quarter of the people could get within sound of his voice. Behind him the widow could be seen moving about, highly self-conscious and not ill pleased at her conspicuousness. Well, some women are like that. As the different objects were put up the people literally fought to get at them. It was a strange scene.

Mme. Storey was not interested in the sale. She saw a group of the woman's neighbours looking on somewhat sourly from the porch of the house next door and manoeuvred until she had secured places for herself and me immediately below them where we could overhear their talk. A stout woman saying in a voice of great bitterness:

"There she goes! You wouldn't catch her lookin' over this way. And after the way I befriended that woman! Didn't I keep her kid for her day after day when she was attendin' the trial, and sat up with her evenings when she come home weepin'! Many's the night I cooked her supper or neither of them would 'a' had a bite!... And look what I get for it! Three days ago she turns proud and won't speak to me no more. Now she's movin' away and won't tell none of her friends where she's goin'. There's gratitood for yeh!"

"That's all right," put in a shriller voice, "I found out where's she's goin'. When they carried the cat and the canary over last night, I sent my Alfred to follow where they went. They never noticed him. She's took a flat in an elegant new garden apartment with six rooms and a sun parlour. What do you know about that? It's 163 Locust Avenue. When Alfred told me the number I went and looked at it meself and asked around a little. It's all furnished complete with new suites from a department store. None of your instalment stuff. She's changed her name, too, calls herself Mrs. Daly over there."

"Well, that's natural," said a mild voice. "She don't want to be reminded every day that her husband went to the chair."

"I'll tell you what it means," said still another voice, "Mame Craigin has got herself another fella already. I seen him myself on Monday night sneakin' in there, and her husband in the death house at time. I knocked against him and got a good look. A dandy-lookin' fella he was, like a movie star, Wicked lookin' like Bill Hart. I'd know him anywhere again. Had a scar on his right cheek bone...."

Mme. Storey looked at me with a smile in her eyes. Her lips shaped the words: "Our old friend again!"

"He was carryin' a little satchel," the gossip went on; "I reckon in the new flat he'll hang up his hat for keeps."

"Aw, shucks," said the fat woman, who seemed to have more knowledge of the world than the others, "I seen that fella. I was watchin' through the crack of the blind. A fella like that ain't goin' to look twice at a bag of bones like Mame Craigin. A fella like that can take his pick. You'd find him on the great white way, nights. I bet he was one of Barney Craigin's crooked pals. I always said they didn't find all the loot from that murder. Six-room flat and a sun parlour! Huh!"

They travelled endlessly back and forth over the same ground. When we were satisfied that nothing new was forthcoming we edged out of the crowd and taxied to 163 Locust Avenue. It was indeed quite a fine home for one in Mrs. Craigin's station. There was a little business centre springing up near by and Mme. Storey spotted a bank.

"Let's ask in there," she said.

Though we were *persona non grata* to the present police officials we still had our old police cards. I showed mine, since my name is unknown to fame, and the young bank manager willingly answered our questions.

"A woman named Mrs. Daly has lately moved into the neighbourhood," said Mme. Storey. "Has she opened an account with you?"

"Yes."

"What did she deposit?"

"Some liberty bond coupons. They're the same as cash, of course. I'll look up the amount."

"Don't trouble yourself. Did she hire a safe-deposit vault?"

"Yes. The attendant told me she had quite a bunch of securities."

"Much obliged," said Mme. Storey; "that's all I wanted to know."

"Is there anything wrong about the woman?" he asked anxiously.

"No, indeed," said Mme. Storey, "she's amply able to pay her way."

We bowed ourselves out. "Strong presumptive evidence," said Mme. Storey. "It will all come in useful later."

"I wish we could get a look in that safe-deposit box," I said.

"Wouldn't do us a bit of good," said Mme. Storey cheerfully. "Non-registered liberty bonds and other negotiable securities are impossible to trace. Besides, we don't want to deprive the poor woman of her nest egg. She's not our mark."

15.

Here are some extracts from Basil Thorne's reports of this time. The address of the Cobra Club as listed in the private records of the telephone company was 3 Wood Street.

Report Number 41

Last night I dressed up in old clothes and went downtown to make a preliminary reconnaissance of my scene of operations. Wood Street, I found, was an insignificant thoroughfare starting at Delancey Street and running north for three or four blocks. It is a very poor quarter with the exception of Delancey Street, which has become one of the main streets of the East Side. Delancey is lined with flashy shops, restaurants, picture theatres, etc., and a number of pretentious apartment houses have been built there, where the East Side merchants take up their quarters after they have made money.

One of these newer apartment houses stands on the corner of Delancey and Wood streets, and number three Wood Street abuts against the back of it. It is an old-fashioned dwelling house which has somehow been left standing among all the tenement houses, with the steep-pitched roof and the big chimneys familiar to old New York. It had a neglected look and not a spark of light escaped through any of the windows. The street was too deserted for me to hang about much but I passed through it a number of times, and stood for a while at the busy Delancey Street corner watching the house.

Nobody entered or left it all the time I was there, though I remained until past two o'clock, when even Delancey Street was quieting down for the night. I'll take a look at it by daylight to-morrow.

BASIL.

Report Number 42

Number three Wood Street has all the earmarks of a long-deserted house. The windows are thick with dust, the outer doors of the vestibule locked fast, and the steps littered with dirt as if they had not been swept in months. The windows are shuttered on the inside and you cannot see into any of the rooms. Yet there cannot be any mistake as to the house. It is the best bit of camouflage I have seen.

I dropped into the corner drug store obliquely opposite for a soda and a pack of cigarettes. "That's a funny old house," I said to the proprietor as I lighted up. "Not many of them left nowadays. Isn't it used for anything?" "Nope," he said. "It belongs to Manny Low. He owns the big apartment next to it and lets the old house stand idle just to protect his light in the rear. That's the highest priced apartment on the lower East Side." This explanation may have satisfied the honest druggist but it didn't satisfy me. Real estate in New York City is not allowed to lie idle.

"Manny has a lot of property hereabouts," my informant volunteered. "He runs the Elite Theatre adjoining the apartment house on Delancey Street and a lot of houses in Middlesex Street." When I learned this I felt as if I was becoming "warm," as the children say. Everybody has heard of Manny Low. He is one of the rich men of the East Side and is said to be hand-in-glove with ward politicians, police, gangsters, and all the elements of that picturesque quarter. Just the one who might be "angel" of the Cobra Club.

I strolled about trying to figure out other ways of getting into the old house apart from the front door, which was obviously never used. Since practically all the property surrounding it was owned by the same man, it ought not have been difficult to arrange. The street floor of the apartment house is occupied by a large restaurant, moderate in price, but quite stylish as things go on the East Side. It is open all night. Perhaps the members of the Cobra Club enter their premises through the restaurant.

Next door on Delancey Street is the theatre. All theatres must by law be surrounded by an alleyway. Perhaps this alley communicated with the back yard of the Cobra Club. The street ends of this alley were closed in with iron gates. I noticed that they were locked, though that is against the law. Possibly the club members enter through the theatre. Finally in Middlesex Street, the next street running parallel with Wood, there was an old tenement house, with a rear tenement standing in its back yard. The rear house abuts against the back yard of number three Wood Street. Perhaps there is a way in here. It will take further observations on my part to establish these things.

BASIL.

Report Number 44

The Elite Theatre is a very old house, once a temple of the legitimate drama but now renovated and given over to pictures. As a relic of its former state it still has a mezzanine balcony with a row of boxes all the way around. Since I had learned nothing from a seat on the orchestra floor the night before, last night I took a friend to keep me in countenance and engaged one of these boxes on the left-hand side of the theatre near the stage.

Before the performance was over I had satisfied myself that I had discovered one way into the Cobra Club. While we sat there at least fifteen people passed down the passage behind our box, yet there were only two boxes between us and the stage, and one of them was empty. These people descended an emergency stairway at the end of the passage and so gained the alleyway. They have another way to get out, I suppose, because the theatre closes at midnight and the patrons of the Cobra Club must stay later than that.

Afterward my friend and I had a bite of supper in the restaurant next door. This place has an additional room in the basement but it was closed at this hour. A sign at the head of the stairs so informed you. Yet while we were sitting there two parties of people went down the stairs. When we got up I took a squint down the stairs and saw that there was a door on the landing halfway down marked "Emergency Exit." This door is invisible from the main restaurant. It gives on the alley surrounding the theatre. So there is entrance number two.

I sent my friend home, and turning up my collar and pulling down my hat brim I prowled back and forth through Middlesex Street. I saw people entering the tenement house at number four who certainly did not live in such a place, though they were trying to make themselves look as tough as possible. This house backs up against number three Wood Street.

That makes three ways in. It's the most elaborate layout I ever met with. It hardly seems necessary, since it is certainly not too difficult to square the police under the present régime; but my guess is that the patrons of the place really enjoy all this pussyfooting. I judge that most of the patrons or members are uptown sports, but I noticed that each party was under the guidance of a genuine East Sider.

Now that I have found the different ways in, the next thing is to get myself inside.

BASIL.

Report Number 47

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I had the luck last night to recognize one of the men who entered the tenement house at number 4 Middlesex Street. It was young Ronald Waddon, son of the president of the steel cable trust. One meets him in all the flash joints around town, a perfect ass who has achieved a sort of distinction owing to the wads of money he tosses around. I loathe him, still we are supposed to be "friends." He ought to provide a stepping-stone into the Cobra Club.

BASIL.

Report Number 49

Last night I had the luck to meet Ronald Waddon by chance in the Palais Royale. He was slightly tight and I made out to be tighter; in two minutes we were as thick as thieves. I cut him out from the party he was with and we discussed spending the balance of the evening together. "Gosh! I'm sick of all the places I know," I said. "Isn't there something new in town? You're always the first to be in on a thing." And so on, and so on; ending up with: "What's this Cobra Club I hear fellows talking about? Take me there."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" he said, shocked. "Why not," I said, "aren't you a member?" "Sure, I'm a member," he said with an air of pride, "but you can't take guests to the Cobra Club. No one but members are admitted. You're not even supposed to talk about it to outsiders. Who told you about it?" "I don't know," I said vaguely, "I hear fellows talking. It must be a hot joint."

The Cobra Club being out of the question we went to a speakeasy in Fiftieth Street. Notwithstanding Waddon's qualms about talking, I had no difficulty in pumping him respecting the club and collected some quaint information concerning it. The scheme is to provide a place where the gilded sports from uptown can hobnob with crooks. The great attraction of the place is that famous criminals like Gyp the Dope, Monk Eyster, the Pinny-Dropper, and Little Stobey hang out there. Apparently Ronny Waddon and his like are willing to part with any amount of money for the sake of shaking hands with this crew and calling them their friends. It's a queer world!

Famous ladies, too. Nan Stokes and Cora Hamann, both of whom have been tried for murder, are to be found there.

Besides many others. A funny thing is apparently that the greatest decorum prevails. No rough stuff is permitted, Ronny says; everybody's got to behave like ladies and gentlemen. Evidently some very wise bird is behind this joint. The ostensible manager is a young fellow known to Ronny only as Jack. Ronny boasts of his friendship with him. Jack is a handsome fellow, he says, and a cool hand. Keeps order in the place with a glance of his eye. Has a scar on his cheek which gives him a wicked look. The hostess is called Maud Heddle. She's a newcomer.

Food and drinks are served and there is dancing. A more potent attraction is the roulette wheel upstairs. Ronny says the game is absolutely on the level, and the house takes no more than the customary percentage. But I don't know if he's capable of judging. You can depend on everything you get in the place, he says. Champagne is fifty dollars a bottle but it's the real thing. There are two classes of members, regular and associate. The fellows from uptown are the associate members, and they put up the dough, I take it. No associate member is allowed to enter the clubhouse except under the guidance of a regular, who meets him outside. No associate member is permitted to attend the club more than once a week. Good psychology in this when you think it over.

I made out that all this made me crazy to belong. I begged Ronny to try to get me in. "I don't know," he said dubiously; "can you stand the gaff? It's five hundred initiation and you're expected to spend a couple of hundred every time you go there." This put me in rather a quandary. I know that you stand ready to put up whatever may be necessary, but the point is everybody knows I'm only an actor with nothing but my pay. Wouldn't it arouse suspicion if I produced such a lot of money to blow in at the place? Naturally, prospective members would be subjected to a sharp scrutiny. I leave it to you to decide. I didn't tell Ronny positively one way or another if I could stand it.

Meanwhile, isn't it the neatest scheme for peeling gilded youth that has yet come to light? And all conducted so respectably! Evidently they expect to make it last.

BASIL.

16.

It was from the lightheaded Mrs. George J. Julian that we first heard of an important change in the situation that was pending. Mrs. Julian, whose income is said to amount to half a million a year, would have been very much astonished to learn that she was acting as one of our operatives. As a matter of fact, she made a good one; she was so perfectly silly no one would ever have thought of suspecting her. Yet Mme. Storey had gleaned considerable information from her chatter. Since we had had reason to suspect we were watched and followed, Mme. Storey had discouraged her visits to the office. They met at the fashionable Patrons Club at tea time. I was not present at this particular interview but my mistress gave me an inimitable report of it later.

"Oh, Rosika, what do you think!" cried Mrs. Julian, "my darling doctor is retiring from practice!"

"Which one?" said Mme. Storey. "You have so many darlings, Edna."

"No, no, you are quite wrong," she said. "I have given them all up for one. And now he is failing me! I mean darling Jacmer Touchon, my psycho-synthetist, my soul-builder. What will my poor soul do now?"

"Oh, it will find another healer."

"Cynic!" said Mrs. Julian. "You pretend that you have no soul. I tell you that Jacmer Touchon is the greatest man of this age and you merely smile."

"That is only my way," said Mme. Storey. "I quite agree that Jacmer Touchon is a remarkable man.... And so he is giving up practice?"

"Yes. Isn't it heartbreaking? As I went to keep my appointment this morning I met a weeping woman coming out. She was completely overcome and she didn't care who saw it. 'The worst has happened!' she said to me tragically as we passed in the hall. So I had an intimation of what was coming. The old manservant was at the point of tears also.

"The master looked graver than usual," Mrs. Julian went on. I wish I could convey a just idea of her style. Luscious is the word for it. If you heard that sticky voice in the dark you would know that it belonged to a blonde about forty-eight years old, weight one hundred and eighty, who carried a Pekingese wherever she went. Her voice always sounded as if she were squashing a very large bonbon.

"The master looked graver than usual," she went on. "Whenever I see him like that with the sorrow of the whole world in his eyes I am reminded of Buddha.... Did I tell you that a little circle of us were taking up Buddha quite seriously? It is so pure! ... Though of course he's not so fat. He has really an elegant figure, don't you think?"

"Who?" asked Mme. Storey. "Buddha?"

Mrs. Julian never perceives it when you are poking fun at her. "Darling Jacmer Touchon," she said, undisturbed. "I had not the courage to ask him what was the matter, and we proceeded with our usual conference. Ah! how sweet and rare it was to-day. It was never quite like that before. The shadow of eternal things brooded over it. All the dross in me was burned away. As he held my hand and his wonderful eyes invited my soul, I could feel it expanding and expanding and expanding..."

"Good heavens!" said Mme. Storey in mock alarm.

"Yes, indeed, my dear, it's exactly like that, you cannot contain it all."

"Where do you put it?"

"You float away on the ether!" said Mrs. Julian, thrusting out her fat arms. "... And at the end he said with infinite sadness: 'This is the last time, Mrs. Julian. I am retiring from practice.'"

"What did you say?" asked Mme. Storey.

"I was incapable of speaking. I wept."

"And then?"

"He explained his reasons for retiring. He said: 'The drain of these continual conferences has exhausted me, dear Mrs. Julian. I require rest.' That took all the wind out of my sails. It had never occurred to me before that all the strength of soul and uplift I received from our conferences must have come from somewhere. It came out of his soul, of course, and naturally he was exhausted. I confess that it made me angry to think of some of the utterly inane women who I know go to him and steal his soul power without its doing them a bit of good really. Vampires, that's what they are."

"Then what did you say?" prompted Mme. Storey.

"Well, my dear, I confess I was selfish. I said: 'You must save yourself, dear doctor. Cut down your conferences. Dismiss a lot of these silly women that you can't do any real good to and save yourself for the few who really matter. Let them all go,' I said, 'and only take me. Do not thrust me into outer darkness again, dear doctor, but continue to lift me up and inspire me. Thank goodness I am amply provided with this world's goods,' I said. 'I will pay you whatever you like.'"

"And what did he say?"

"Ah, my dear, I hurt his feelings with my impulsive offer. 'Dear Mrs. Julian,' he said with a world of sadness in his voice, 'money never meant anything to me. If I can do my little bit toward alleviating the unhappiness of mankind I am amply repaid!' Wasn't that beautiful?"

"Beautiful!" said Mme. Storey.

"I asked him what his plans were," Mrs. Julian went on, "and he said he hadn't any. 'I am just a solitary chip adrift on the river of life!' he said. I asked him why he had never married and he said it was because he had always felt that he belonged to his patients. 'But now if you are letting your patients go?' I said. He merely smiled.... My dear! I believe he means to get married. He received me in a small room to-day. His place is being done over. And if one can believe the newspapers you are the lucky woman! What a fate to be married to Jacmer Touchon!"

"Quite!" said Mme. Storey drily. "However, congratulations are not yet in order, dear. Nothing is settled."

17.

On the morning of the day following this talk with Mrs. Julian, Dr. Touchon called Mme. Storey on the telephone. I switched the call to her desk and then listened in, as she had instructed me to do.

"Beautiful Rosika," he said in his exotic fashion, "how does your effulgence do to-day?"

"Nicely, thanks," she said with a little crinkle of mockery in her voice.

"Is that confounded red-headed Bella listening in?" he said.

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Please tell her to keep off."

There was a pause, then Mme. Storey's voice saying sweetly: "All right, I've told her. Fire away!"

"If she's still listening," he said, "let her take warning that she will hear no good of herself. I am tired of having her around."

I smiled without humour into the transmitter. I entirely reciprocated his feelings.

"Rosika," he went on, making his voice warm and persuasive, "won't you dine with me alone to-night? It's rather a special occasion."

"That question has already been settled, Jacmer."

"But how ridiculous it is for a woman of your position and assurance to set such a store by propriety."

"It is not propriety but prudence," she said slyly; "I am a little afraid of you, Jacmer."

"How flattering!" he breathed.

"I think you might make love to me."

"I might," he admitted. "Even so, hasn't anybody ever made love to you?"

"Nobody like you." I could picture the smile that accompanied this, half mocking, half alluring.

"But seriously, Rosika," he pleaded.

"Seriously, Jacmer," she retorted, "it must be both of us or neither."

"Oh, very well," he said with a sigh of resignation. "My place to-night at seven."

"What is the special occasion?"

"You'll see when you get there."

"Shall it be *en grande toilette*?"

"Whatever you wear becomes you, Rosika."

They hung up and I hastened into the next room. My mistress was in the act of helping herself to a cigarette with a thoughtful half smile. "This is no ordinary party," I said agitatedly. "Is it safe for you to go?"

"Oh, you misread the situation, Bella," she said, smiling broadly. "He doesn't want to kill me, he wants to marry me. When he learns that he cannot marry me he will try to kill me, but there is no need to let matters go as far as that to-night. That is why I am taking you."

I shivered.

"Nothing will happen to-night that need alarm you," she went on more seriously, seeing that I was genuinely upset. "This is the inevitable next act of the comedy. Having allowed us to feel his power to destroy, Touchon must now convince us of his power to charm. Take it from me, to-night is to mark the feast of lotuses. Having shown us, as he supposes, that he could do whatever he liked and get away with it in spite of us, Touchon will now, or I miss my guess, forswear all evil with a superb gesture and devote himself henceforward to a life of love and homage. In other words, he's taking his profits while the market is good."

"It will make it harder to catch him," I said.

"I had given up all expectation of getting him for blackmail," she said. "But if I live I'll convict him of murder."

"What line must we take to-night?" I said.

"Oh," she said, smiling again, "I think we might let it appear that we are willing to let the dead past bury its dead. It's essential we should persuade him that we're tired of fighting him."

It amused my mistress to make the most elaborate preparations for this dinner. She studied me with as much attention as if I was to be presented at court, and finally brought out a dress of her own of magenta and silver that she said I must wear. I shuddered at the thought of magenta with my red hair, but she said it would be right, and it was right, a little queer perhaps, but vastly effective. Grace, her maid, took it up and fitted it within half an hour.

Mme. Storey wore a dark red velvet dress designed for her by Canneton. It was just a plain straight slip hanging from her shoulders by two points, but oh! so subtly fashioned! With her dark hair in a loose twist and a short string of her famous pearls—no other ornament—she looked superbly simple and simply superb. Ignorant people would expect the dark red and the magenta dress to clash, but when she put an arm around me in front of the mirror I saw that they created a subtle harmony. We set each other off wonderfully. Of course I am not beautiful but I did look well that night.

It was evident the moment Dr. Touchon's door was opened to us that great preparations were afoot. His delightful old servant Boker had disappeared and his place taken by a spruce and supercilious young sprig evidently fresh from the most expensive agency in town. We were led into one of the little waiting rooms to take off our things, but what a change in it. It had been entirely done over and now revealed itself as a modish boudoir in rose and French gray. Mme. Storey smiled wickedly when she saw it.

"This is worse than I expected!" she said.

On the threshold of the principal room we stopped short with cries of astonishment. A marvellous transformation had taken place. The scene that met our eyes was like fairyland. In place of the dark, heavy furnishings one received a

delicious impression of colour and gaiety; great tropical ferns drooping their pale green fronds; masses of flowers; perfect music. An army of decorators must have been at work because we had been in that room less than a week before. In the centre of it Dr. Touchon awaited us in his miraculously cut evening clothes with velvet lapels. The Oriental nature of the man could not resist this touch. But I must say he made a figure of true elegance. His glowing face was wreathed in smiles. He looked less devilish than usual. Like a boy he was delighted with his own contrivances. What a strange mixture!

"You like it? You like it?" he said eagerly.

"It is perfectly lovely!" cried Mme. Storey. "I am stunned. What does it all mean, Jacmer?"

"Merely a gesture to signify a new departure in my life," he said with a wave of the hand.

"What new departure?"

"Later! Later!" he said. "Tell me how you like it first."

While they talked I used my eyes to take in the details. Every vestige of heavy respectability had been swept away. As in all of the older apartments all the principal rooms had been laid out en suite. There were two of these rooms facing the Park and two more on the side street, all communicating through arched openings ordinarily closed with curtains. The archway between the two front rooms was filled with a screen of immense ferns and behind it a string quartette was playing Mozart. From the quality of the music it must have been one of the famous quartettes. We did not meet the performers.

The walls were uniformly painted a warm delicate gray to make a background for many ultra-modern paintings very high in colour, abstract as to form, but extremely well chosen. There were bits of modern sculpture, too, amusing, strange, but full of meaning. The simple and original furniture was evidently from the atelier of a modern craftsman. Only the masses of flowers were not modern—but come to think of it, they *were* modern, for such gigantic blooms, pink roses, delphiniums, and snapdragons were never known to our grandmothers.

Dinner was announced and Dr. Touchon led us through what he called his library into the dining room. There was a little round table banked with pink roses and forget-me-nots, lighted by four tall candles and set out with exquisite glass and silver. But why go on with the catalogue? You do not need to be told that the food was worthy to be set before Lucullus, and that there was a whole list of wines, smuggled at God knows what expense into the country: Johannisberger, Burgundy, Champagne, Tokay, etc. Lovely it all was, done in perfect taste; it excited me and it afflicted me with a kind of horror, too. It was only too strongly reminiscent of the old tales wherein the devil seeks to ruin man by spreading luxury before him. Our handsome, debonair, dark-skinned host was well fitted to the part. The very perfection with which everything was carried off filled me with a fresh terror of the man.

I hated to open the little shagreen-covered case that lay beside my plate, but Mme. Storey looked inside hers with cries of pleasure and I had to do likewise. Mine was a little bracelet of exquisite workmanship set with alternate stones of pale blue and pale green, ultramarines and chrysoberyls. Mme. Storey's was of emeralds. I should have liked to have flung mine at that smiling devil's head, but my mistress with a glance warned me that we must accept this little evil for the sake of a greater good. I made noises of pleasure and gratitude which fortunately passed unnoticed, since Dr. Touchon was hanging on Mme. Storey's lips. I privately resolved to sell my bracelet at the first opportunity and donate the proceeds to charity.

Such magnificent entertainments are generally given for a brilliant company, but this was tendered to Mme. Storey alone, for of course I did not count. Thus Dr. Touchon sought to impress himself upon her. One must admit that there was something magnificent in the gesture when he could even toss a valuable bauble to the humble secretary of the desired one. He hated me as much as I hated him. One might have felt a little sorry for him if he had been genuinely in love but he was incapable of such a feeling. His idea of winning a woman was to crush her under the weight of his own personality, to reduce her to something less than a shadow of himself.

There was not much conversation during the meal, the music was too good. It came to us slightly softened through

the two intervening rooms: delicate old airs by Mozart, Gluck, Handel. Evidently Dr. Touchon's taste for the modern did not extend to music. Besides the quartette there was an exquisite high soprano. Among other things she sang Tosti's "L'Aprile," a song which catches at my heart. I looked at Touchon with a fresh resentment because I didn't want to be moved by anything which came from him. Indeed my feelings were very mixed. I shall never cease to regret that such a beautiful entertainment should have been provided by one whom I hated and feared.

With coffee, cigarettes, and liqueurs we, or rather they, fell into talk. I played the part of the humble gooseberry. The music had stopped. Dr. Touchon fixed his burning eyes on Mme. Storey (he had the kind of glance which seizes on you) and said:

"You asked me what the occasion signalizes; it is this: I have abandoned my practice."

"Good heavens!" cried Mme. Storey in simulated surprise. "Your patients will be broken-hearted!"

"Ah! do not chaff me," he said with a wave of the hand, "I have never tried to hide from you that it was all humbug. They asked me for humbug and I gave it to them. It was not a very serious crime because if I had not taken them they would have fallen into the hands of much more sinister practitioners. (I marvelled when I heard him say this.) But it has been getting on my conscience. Or, if you wish to put it more cynically, say that I have made enough money to stop. I confess I deliberately set out to levy tribute on a society swollen with riches and stupidity. Well, I have levied it, and now they can go hang. Hereafter I shall devote myself to the pursuit of beauty."

From his look upon my mistress it was not difficult to guess what he meant.

"You astonish me beyond words!" cried Mme. Storey. "How will you occupy yourself all day long?"

"Beauty shall command me," he said with a meaning smile.

Mme. Storey blandly ignored it. "This is the veritable Chartreuse," she said, sipping. "I didn't think there was any left."

"Don't you approve of my move?" he said, a little taken aback.

"Oh, by all means," she said. "You're much too clever a man to be called a soul-builder."

He affected a certain confusion. "I confess I blush at 'soul-builder'" he said, "but that was what brought the money in. I preferred to call myself psycho-synthetist, but the fools didn't know what it meant.... However, away with all!" he cried. "I'll give you a toast." He stood and raised his glass. "To beauty which is man's desire! the stimulus of his ambition, the goal of his hopes, the crown of his life! Who cares about immortality while beauty walks the earth!"

"To beauty, yes," said Mme. Storey, smiling, "but my conception is a little different from yours." She raised her glass. "To beauty—the unattainable!" she murmured, and let it go at that.

The dining room had a French window opening on a tiny balcony only about four feet above the level of the sidewalk. It was a mild fall night and the window was slightly ajar. Mme. Storey called attention to it as we rose from the table.

"How easy for a thief to watch from the balcony and slip in when your servants left the room," she said.

"You are right," said Dr. Touchon, locking it. "I am the least suspicious of men!"

On the way back to the drawing room he asked her again what she thought of it all. "I am struck dumb!" said Mme. Storey. "It is perfect. I only have one criticism to make. I missed the friendly face of your old servant at the door."

"Oh, Boker," he said carelessly, "I haven't discharged him, but I thought he wasn't fine enough for to-night. I put him in the pantry."

"Perhaps his feelings are hurt," said Mme. Storey. "Have him in for a moment. Let him bring me some more coffee."

"Beauty commands!" murmured Dr. Touchon, pressing the bell.

In due course the old man came in carrying the coffee on a salver and wearing a pleased smile.

"Wonderful changes here, Boker," said Mme. Storey, helping herself to sugar.

"Yes, ma'am! Yes, ma'am!"

"But one doesn't forget old friends."

He went out speechless with pleasure. By this intimation of her wishes, Mme. Storey saved his job for him. She had perceived that the gentle old figure, no longer a necessary part of the camouflage of the soul-builder's establishment, would certainly be discarded.

Next followed the main event of the evening to which everything that had gone before had merely been preparatory. "Rosika," said Dr. Touchon impressively, "I do not know if you have remarked it but I have the sort of nature that dotes on symbols. I cannot feel that I have really broken with the past unless I go through with a little ceremony typifying the act. That is what I have asked you here to witness."

"Good heavens, Jacmer!" said Mme. Storey in mock alarm. "Whatever do you mean?"

"You will see," he said; "it is very simple." He removed the painted screen from in front of the fireplace. "I hope you will not be discommoded by a little fire. It will only be of paper."

Opening a safe concealed in the base of a carved table, he took from it a tray containing perhaps two hundred large thin cards which were closely covered with typewriting. Carrying it to the fireplace, he knelt down and crumpling up the first card set it alight and dropped it in the grate.

"These are the case records of my patients," he said; "these cards set forth all the perilous confidences that they poured into my ear."

His back was turned toward us and Mme. Storey glanced at me. Outwardly her face was perfectly expressionless, but deep in her eye gleamed a spark. She wanted to share with me her artistic appreciation of Touchon's matchless effrontery.

One by one Touchon crumpled the cards and dropped them in the grate, letting each one catch from the blaze before he dropped another. He turned halfway around so he could watch what he was doing on the one hand and observe how Mme. Storey was taking it on the other.

"Dangerous stuff!" he said, addressing the crumpled balls as he fed them to the flames; "they look so harmless, mere ink stains on clean paper; matter-of-fact typewriting like statistics of animal husbandry, or the decline of the infant mortality rate, but really more dangerous than nitroglycerine! The secret thoughts of men and women! The evil that they store in their souls. There is matter here to wreck a hundred powerful and conspicuous families. And see! I give it to the fire. A little puff of flame and it is rendered harmless forever. So small a fire to destroy so terrible a potency for evil. Fire cleanses all! Great is fire!"

It is so difficult to convey in words the infernal *double entendre* of Dr. Touchon's "ceremony." If you could have seen him! There he knelt slowly feeding his sacrificial fire and intoning a devout litany, and all the time his devilish, mocking eyes fixed on my mistress's face were telling quite a different story.

"Wouldn't you like to read what is on these cards!" his eyes said. "Watch me feed this precious evidence to the flames while you are helpless! From the beginning you have been helpless against me. You knew I was a blackmailer but with all your cleverness you couldn't catch me. Before your very eyes I committed murder and you couldn't bring it home to me. Instead of that I covered you publicly with ridicule. Now, having made my pile, I renounce crime, and still you are

helpless. I burn the evidence and you will never catch me. In me you have met your master!"

Such was the inner meaning of Jacmer Touchon's ceremony.

When the last crumpled ball was dropped on the fire he stood up. "Finis!" he said impressively.

"Oh, Jacmer!" murmured Mme. Storey, as if profoundly impressed. But I who knew her so well could see from the flicker at the corner of her lip that she was thinking: "I am not so sure that this is the end!"

18.

A little later in the evening Dr. Touchon's efforts to entertain us appeared to slacken. You know what I mean; a gentle hint. When a sensitive person perceives it he says instinctively: "Well, I must be going"; and that was in fact what Mme. Storey said. Our host made only perfunctory attempts to detain us. Finally he said:

"I'll ride home with you in the cab."

"That will be nice," said my mistress.

Ordinarily she would have protested against such a thing and it was this which first gave me the idea that something was in the wind.

When we retired into the little pink boudoir for our wraps she said softly: "Bella, he is meditating another murder."

"Oh, good heavens!" I said, turning faint. "Is it us?"

"No, silly," she said with an indulgent smile. "Think it out. Follow this symbolism of Touchon's through. He is cutting himself off from his former life. Well, what is the human link that still binds him to his past?"

"Scarface!" I gasped.

"Precisely. Scarface knows too much. While he lives Touchon is not safe. Francis Fay went, Blondy went, now Scarface's time has come. To hire some body to do it would only create a new danger. Touchon will cut the last link with his own hand. He says he loves symbols and ceremonies and it's true; for that reason I am convinced that he means to carry this ceremony to its logical conclusion to-night. He is anxious to get rid of us now. I believe he has an appointment to meet Scarface later. He will shoot him on sight. When Touchon knelt in front of the fire I saw the outline of a gun in his hip pocket. He never carried a gun in his evening clothes before. He has a use for it to-night."

"Oh, what can we do to prevent it!" I groaned.

"We will do what we can," she said grimly. "Keep your eyes open and act promptly when you get your cue."

As we were leaving the room I started to call her attention to the fact that she was leaving her beaded bag on the dressing table. She held up her hand with a smile.

The Westmoreland shared a cab stand and starter with the apartment next door. Dr. Touchon, who did not maintain a car of his own, always used these taxis. As we were seating ourselves in one of them, Mme. Storey said suddenly:

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I've forgotten my bag. It's got our latchkey in it. I left it on the dressing table."

"I'll get it," said Dr. Touchon politely.

The moment he was out of earshot Mme. Storey shoved back the front glass of the taxi. "Man!" she said in a spirited voice to the chauffeur, "you look white! Are you game to do me a favour without asking any questions?"

Trust the appeal of those flashing eyes! He grinned delightedly. "Sure, lady! As far as you like!"

"Listen," she said swiftly, "you're taking me home, and then you'll be bringing the doctor back here, or perhaps some place else. When you turn into Lexington Avenue after having left my door I want you to stop for three or four minutes as if you had engine trouble. It is just to give me time to pick you up in another cab."

"I get ya," said the driver laconically.

In a flash Mme. Storey was out of the cab and approaching the cab behind. "I want to engage you to come to number — East Sixty-third Street," she said to the driver. "Double fare. Let this first cab drop me there before you show yourself in the street. As soon as he turns the corner you drive up to the door."

Like the first driver this one said with a grin: "I get ya, lady."

As Mme. Storey returned to me I said anxiously: "Touchon will learn from them what you have done."

"No matter," she said serenely. "He's bound to find out anyhow that we've blocked his game."

When Dr. Touchon came down the steps carrying the beaded bag Mme. Storey and I were seated demurely side by side on the back seat of the taxi and the driver looking straight ahead with an expression of utter vacancy.

What they talked about during the drive home I never could tell. My head was whirling. Mme. Storey invited Dr. Touchon to come in but he excused himself on the score of the lateness of the hour. The cab started down the street with the engine backfiring, and Mme. Storey and I exchanged a smile. The chauffeur had advanced his spark in order to prepare the way for a little "engine trouble."

As the house door closed behind us, Mme. Storey said swiftly: "Quick, Bella, call up the Cobra Club. If Scarface is there warn him in the most forcible words at your command not to keep any appointment he may have made outside to-night but to remain in the club." She ran upstairs.

I got my number without delay but alas! it was only to be told that Jack wasn't there; wouldn't be there that night.

Mme. Storey came running downstairs again. She saw in a glance that I had had no luck with my call. She had a tweed cape for herself and an old raincoat for me, felt hats, and stouter shoes. We put these things on and went outside again. Not more than two or three minutes had elapsed. The second cab was at the curb.

In Lexington Avenue we found the first cab headed downtown drawn up at the sidewalk, while the driver made believe to be tinkering with his engine. We took a turn around the block. As we approached the second time, the first cab started down Lexington Avenue and we followed at a discreet distance. It led us back to the Westmoreland, where Dr. Touchon paid his man and went in.

"I thought so," murmured Mme. Storey. "He wouldn't let anybody who knew him drive him to the meeting place. He'll allow his servants to think he has gone to bed and then he'll come out again."

"But the hall boy would see him come out," I said, "and the cab starter."

"I fancy he will use the little balcony on the side street," said my employer drily. "If I mistake not he has used it before."

We posted our cab to wait in Lexington Avenue not more than a hundred yards from the Westmoreland, but out of sight around the corner. Mme. Storey and I concealed ourselves in the areaway of one of the old houses facing the north side of the square. It would have been awkward if anybody had come out of the basement door. But at that hour all was as quiet as the grave in our respectable quarter. Peeping over the edge of the steps we watched Dr. Touchon's little

balcony, which was perhaps fifty yards away.

Sure enough, in less than half an hour we saw a figure climb over the rail and drop as quietly as a shadow on the pavement. He started walking briskly east toward Third Avenue. We hastened back to our car. We could not follow him through that street because it was a one-way street. There was no policeman to have stopped us but Touchon would certainly have taken the alarm if he had seen a cab coming the wrong way. So we went through Twenty-second Street and down Third Avenue. In Third Avenue we met him walking up. We went on for a block, turned around, and came back. He had then turned into Twenty-third Street, walking west. At the Lexington Avenue corner he boarded a street car bound uptown.

"Clever!" said Mme. Storey. "He doesn't trust taxis."

We followed the street car, keeping a whole block behind. We could watch all who alighted from the car. Touchon got off at Fifty-ninth Street, and walked west. At the Plaza he turned into Central Park. We dismissed our cab and followed him on foot.

After following the main east drive for a short distance Touchon turned into the footpath which descends a little hill and crosses the bridge over the neck of the lake. The area which lies across the lake is one of the least frequented in all the park. After we had left the east drive we saw nobody.

"He has chosen his spot well," murmured Mme. Storey.

Repeated shivers went through my body. I would have given all I possessed to be away from there. My mistress, guessing what I was going through, caught hold of my hand, pressing it firmly, and drew me along.

Touchon was a good way ahead of us and we only caught sight of him at intervals as he passed under a lamp. The lamps along the footpaths do not give much light. Suddenly, in advance of Touchon, we made out a solitary figure sitting on a bench. Mme. Storey caught her breath sharply.

"Ah! Come on!" she said. "He may shoot before we can get there!"

We broke into a run. Just as Touchon was coming to the bench, Mme. Storey uttered a loud, silly-sounding laugh. The ruse was successful. Touchon looked over his shoulder sharply and, putting his head down, walked on past the bench without stopping.

In a moment or two we reached the bench. There was a lamp post about seventy-five feet away. The man sitting on the bench kept his head down as if desirous of avoiding notice but we could see that he had a slim, athletic figure, instinct with grace. Not the least doubt but that this was our man. Mme. Storey dropped on the bench beside him, laughing, and pulled me down beside her.

"Gee! what a chase they give us!" she said in a common street voice.

I could now see Scarface's handsome profile outlined against the street lamp. It was evident that he was scowling in annoyance.

"Say, fella," said Mme. Storey with coarse impudence, "if two fellas comes after us, you'll stand by us, won't yeh?"

Scarface got up without speaking and walked away in the direction that we had come.

"Aah! Go chase yerself, then!" Mme. Storey called after him.

In two or three minutes Dr. Touchon came back from the other direction. His hat was pulled down, his coat collar turned up; it would have been difficult to recognize him had we not known it was he. His feelings could not have been pleasant when he saw two women sitting on the bench where he expected to find Scarface. He had gone to a lot of trouble to arrange that appointment. I thought he would pass on but to my horror Mme. Storey cried in her own natural voice:

"Jacmer! What are *you* doing here!"

What a hideous shock it must have given him! I could see the man's whole figure sag and waver in a sickening uncertainty. For a moment he made as if to walk on unhearing. But aware that that would make him appear even more ridiculous he stopped with a simulated start of surprise and turned toward us.

"Rosika! What does this mean! I thought ... I thought..." There was a gone, flat quality in the resonant voice. It caused a sweet feeling of triumph to steal through me. It was worth all the terror I had felt to see the superman so shaken.

"You thought you had just put us to bed," Mme. Storey cried, finishing his sentence for him. "The truth of the matter is you gave us too much to drink, Jacmer. Sleep was out of the question and Bella said: 'Let's take a walk in the park before we turn in.'"

"Same here, same here," he said lamely. "I felt I needed a walk... Well, now, let me take you home again."

As we left the bench we met Scarface walking toward it. Neither side paid any attention to the other.

19.

Dr. Touchon had to make believe to accept our explanation that we had simply come into Central Park for a mouthful of fresh air before retiring. It was not an implausible explanation, for after all our driving downtown and back again the spot in the park where he came upon us was less than ten minutes' walk from Mme. Storey's house in East Sixty-third Street. That he really believed us we never for a moment supposed; he was too old a bird to be caught with such chaff. In fact, Mme. Storey did not wish him to believe us.

During the short drive home he administered a gentle scolding to my mistress. "It's close on two o'clock," he said. "It was rash beyond words for you to venture out at such an hour, Rosika. A woman like you! And especially to seek out such a solitary spot."

"There is no reason why a woman should not go anywhere at any time," said Mme. Storey, "provided she is not afraid."

"Ah! I know your courage," he said tenderly, "but of what avail would that be against superior strength if you were attacked?"

"Oh, I am always armed," she said carelessly.

His usual assurance was gone. Indeed his voice became almost plaintive as he expostulated with my employer. The man had had a horrid shock. He dared not speak of it, but one could *feel* the grinding anxiety of his mind to find out how we had come to surprise him in such a spot and how much we knew.

When he left us I asked Mme. Storey why she had called out to him in the park. "We could have got away without ever being recognized," I said.

"No doubt," she said, "but I had to show my hand in order to save Scarface's life. If Touchon had not recognized us he would have come back after we had gone and shot Scarface; or if we had succeeded in blocking his game to-night he would have made another appointment for to-morrow night; but now we have him guessing; he dares not shoot Scarface until he finds out how much we know."

"He will question the two cabmen who stand at his door."

"Naturally. And from them he will learn how we followed him to the park. But that won't tell him all. He still won't

know if we knew what he was up to, or if we just followed him on a chance.... I shouldn't like to be in Jacmer's shoes to-night. The grand ceremony had an ugly kickback."

"Thank heaven, we got under his skin for once!" I said viciously.

"Under his skin!" said Mme. Storey. "We have applied an irritant that will keep him writhing on his bed for many a night to come! ... You see," she added drily, "I wanted to insinuate the idea into his mind that he might have further need of Scarface; that there might be a couple more murders to be pulled off before he could afford to step on his chief agent."

"Oh, don't!" I murmured with a horrible inward quaking.

She laughed at my fears.

In the morning we began to perceive the consequences of the shock that Dr. Touchon had received. On our way to the office we found ourselves followed by another car. This car hung around Gramercy Park all day, always within sight of our door. Other men loafed inside the park watching our door and our windows, and there were more spies in taxicabs that came and went. Whenever we went out, either walking or by any sort of conveyance, we were picked up and followed until we returned again. It was demoralizing to the nerves.

"He must know that we can see we are being watched," I said angrily. "What does he expect to gain from it?"

"He hopes to make his espionage so perfect," said Mme. Storey, "that even though we know we are being spied upon we can't escape it.... It suits me very well," she added with a smile. "The closer the better!"

She immediately began to prepare her counter measures—as usual in the most unexpected direction. She instructed her two maids Grace and Amanda to make friends with the maids in the house on Sixty-second Street whose back yard abutted on her back yard.

A sheet blown over the fence and its subsequent recovery afforded the means of breaking the ice. There were two maids in that house, and very soon the quartette became firm friends. It appeared that the family living in the Sixty-second Street house was travelling and the maids were alone in the house. They slept on the top floor. They arose at seven in the morning. Grace, instructed by Mme. Storey, reported that the door from the kitchen into the yard was locked by an old-fashioned bolt which after being shot into place turned and caught in a groove so that it could not be pushed back. The door from the front basement hall into the areaway was locked at night by a Yale lock, a chain, and a big key.

Mme. Storey in seeming kindness of heart—such kindness was habitual to her, so this display of it did not excite suspicion—suggested that the girls use stepladders in visiting each other back and forth over the fence and thus save a trip around the block. Each house provided a ladder. She stipulated with feigned sternness that the ladders must be carried into the respective houses every night in order not to provide a convenience for sneak thieves.

As a further step in her plans Crider was instructed to purchase a taxicab and to obtain a license to drive it, also a suitable outfit.

Meanwhile our relations with Dr. Touchon continued unchanged. I think he may have been a little nervous as to his reception when he called on the second morning after the meeting in the park, but he did not show it; he had recovered his face marvellously.

"Good-morning, Rosika," he said fondly. "The freshness of the dawn lies on your eyelids." He sought to command her with his glance.

"Does it?" said Mme. Storey innocently. "I use Rouget's 'Les Sylphides' powder."

She allowed her eyes to fall under his glance, then raised them—a little flutteringly. Touchon was intoxicated by the glance. His confidence increased.

They took cigarettes. "Look, Jacmer," said Mme. Storey, turning her chair and pointing through the window.

"Somebody is having me followed again."

"This is outrageous!" he cried, springing up. "I suppose the friends of Barney Craigin are getting up another demonstration against you."

"No, these are not crooks," she said, "these are flatfeet."

"Flatfeet?"

"Detectives, innocent! Highly respectable sleuths. One always knows them by their childlike efforts to avoid calling attention to themselves."

"But who would dare to set them after you?"

"That I can't say. By doing a little counter sleuthing I have discovered that they are from the Horgan agency, the largest in town—and the most unscrupulous."

"This is infamous, Rosika. I will find out who has hired them. Just leave it to me.... If the annoyance persists you must lodge a complaint with the police."

"Oh, I don't like to do that," said Mme. Storey, "after the hateful way in which Creery has acted."

"Then I will speak to Creery myself. You must be protected."

Behind his back Mme. Storey and I exchanged a glance. We had to share our appreciation of this rare bit of comedy.

"I came to ask if you and Miss Brickley would dine with me to-night," said Touchon. "I have seats for the opening of the new edition of the 'Scandals.'"

"We should be charmed!" cried Mme. Storey. "I was unable to get seats."

"Ah, you should always leave that sort of thing to me," said Touchon.

And so the comedy proceeded.

20.

I must interrupt the main thread of my tale for a moment in order to tell how we secured our first bit of direct evidence against Jacmer Touchon.

The Storey Murder Case, as the newspapers had always called it, though Mme. Storey was neither the murdered person nor the murderer, was now a closed chapter in the press. It had been settled to everybody's satisfaction and forgotten. Only poor Blondy's father and mother presumably nursed their grief and shame in obscurity. If Fay had left any relatives they were never known. Thus to have the case forgotten had the effect of freeing our hands. It was a relief not to have the reporters camping on our doorstep.

On the other hand, though the case was no longer talked about, the injurious effect of the dénouement engineered by Touchon persisted. There was no use trying to deny from ourselves that Mme. Storey's prestige had received a serious blow. Her popularity had declined. Her opinion was no longer sought on every question under the sun; her slightest actions had ceased to be Front Page Stuff. She herself accepted the situation philosophically. "It's a comfort to have the spotlight turned the other way," she said; "one can relax and indulge one's natural impulses." But for me it was a bad time. I never ceased to rage at every evidence of neglect that was offered to my employer, then at the very height of her

powers.

New business was very slow in offering but the unexpected resurgence of an old case gave my employer a chance to stage a little comeback. Her real aim, I need hardly say, was very different from that which appeared on the surface. I refer to the case of Lear Caybourn. That intrepid young adventurer was caught running a cargo of arms into Guatemala. Mme. Storey set herself the task of saving his life and succeeded in the end though everything was against her.

It was not an important case but she made it one through the judicious use of publicity. Many columns of publicity were prepared in our office and most of it got across because it was so well done. It was always Lear Caybourn who was featured; Mme. Storey kept herself in the background. As I say, she saved the young man's life and incidentally she made him serve an end of her own. Her real object at this time was to persuade Jacmer Touchon that she was occupied with the case of Lear Caybourn to the exclusion of everything else. She talked about him in Touchon's presence until Touchon conceived a furious jealousy of the young fellow whom none of us was ever to see.

How far Touchon was deceived I could not say. Not completely deceived because he never removed his watch upon our movements, still it must have had the effect of partly lulling his suspicions. The detectives followed us wherever we went. Their reports to their master could not have contained much of interest, for at this time we never went anywhere during the day except to and from the office, while at night we were nearly always in Touchon's company. One might hazard a guess that he spent a great deal of money to very little purpose; however, that was his lookout.

Under cover of the Caybourn case Mme. Storey and I were always hard at work on what we called "our" case. There was no longer any attempt to intimidate the witnesses and we kept up connection with that nice little Mr. Greenlees, the chief clerk in the cashier's department of the Insurance Company. Mme. Storey talked with him once or twice over the telephone, and once, before Touchon had us so closely watched, she had him out to lunch.

One morning Dr. Touchon was talking to my mistress on the telephone about some arrangements for the evening. Mme. Storey expressed a wish to see a certain play and Dr. Touchon said he would try to get seats. "I will call you up again in a few minutes," he said.

"Oh, make it noon," said Mme. Storey. "I have to go out directly."

"Very well, at noon," he said.

She hung up with a smile. "Bella," she said, "see if you can get Mr. Greenlees on the wire."

She made an appointment with him to come to our office at quarter to twelve.

The gentlemanly little chief clerk was prompt to keep it. He was highly flattered by the summons. It was the first time he had been in Mme. Storey's office and he looked around him wonderingly. My employer talked of indifferent matters to put him at his ease. Finally she said:

"There's a man going to call me up at twelve o'clock, and I want you to listen in."

He nodded, full of excitement.

Suddenly my employer said to me with a sly smile: "Bella, we have a canny customer to deal with. His suspicions are easily aroused. Suppose he takes it into his head to call in person?"

My heart sank. It would be only too much like Touchon.

"Let us ask Mr. Greenlees to wait in the middle room in order to be on the safe side," she said. "And unlock the door into the hall."

It was done.

At twelve o'clock I was working in the outer room when sure enough the door opened and Dr. Touchon entered,

urbane and purring like a handsome male cat. But there was a sharp point of inquiry in the bottom of his false eyes. His suspicions *were* aroused. Possibly one of his watchers in the park had told him that Mme. Storey had not been out. It was a fair assumption that these men did not know Mr. Greenlees; in fact, they could not have been sure that he was a visitor to our office, since there were many other tenants in the building.

I greeted Dr. Touchon pleasantly but not *too* pleasantly; Mme. Storey herself had said that it would look more natural if I maintained a certain stiffness of attitude toward him and this was a great relief to me. "Come right in!" I said, opening the door into Mme. Storey's room. I noticed that his eyes swept a covert glance around it. He would have liked to open the door into the middle room, too. I lingered, wondering how my employer would handle the situation. She is a perpetual surprise to me, like a good play.

"Well, Jacmer," she said, "this is unexpected."

"I haven't seen you for twelve hours," he said in his fondest manner. "My eyes needed the refreshment."

"How ridiculous!" she said with an alluring sidelong glance.

"I have the seats," he said. "Ninth row centre; the best in the house."

"Lovely!" she said, but with a reservation in her tone that forced him to ask:

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I know I'm unreasonable," she said, "but we'll be so conspicuous. One is so tired of being stared at. It quite spoils my fun. Would it be asking too much of you to change them for seats in the first row of the dress circle? One can see and hear perfectly up there and we wouldn't meet a soul that knew us."

"Certainly, if you wish it," he said with rather a sour face.

"Bella will get the theatre on the 'phone for you."

This was my cue. I knew exactly what I had to do. I returned to my office, closing the door after me. Touchon as I went cheered up a little, seeing that he was to be left alone with my mistress.

The moment I got the call and switched it into Mme. Storey's room, I ran for the middle room through the hall. Seizing Mr. Greenlees by the hand, I yanked him back with me. "The moment he hangs up, run back for your hiding place," I whispered, "and lock the door softly behind you."

The little man was both terrified and delighted by his dramatic moment. I put him at the 'phone in my room. As he listened his face paled and his eyes started with excitement. Then he hung up and scampered swiftly back through the hall. I closed the hall door. Almost immediately the door from Mme. Storey's room opened and Touchon cast a sharp glance around my room. I was busy at a filing case. His face was a study. He knew very well that some sort of game was being put over on him but he was helpless. We had him in a box.

He did not linger long. I would be willing to bet a hundred dollars that he tried the door of the middle room as he went down the hall. If he did he gained nothing by it.

As soon as he was gone we had Mr. Greenlees in from the middle room. He was still pale with excitement.

"You listened at the 'phone?" said Mme. Storey.

He nodded.

"Have you ever heard that voice before?"

"Yes, Madame. That is the voice of the man who called up Blondy on the day he was killed."

"Good!" I cried involuntarily. "Then we have him!"

"Not quite," said Mme. Storey with a provoking smile. "Mr. Greenlees can only recognize the voice over a telephone. How can we bring the telephone into court?"

My face fell.

"However, every little bit helps," she said cheerfully.

Mr. Greenlees remained to lunch with us in our office in order to keep Touchon's watchers guessing.

21.

I must go back in my story for a few days in order to bring Basil Thorne's activities up to date. As a matter of fact, he had struck a serious snag in his efforts to get into the Cobra Club.

"As I told you," he wrote to Mme. Storey, "when I was talking with my gilded young friend Ronny Waddon, I left the question of my joining the Cobra Club in the air. Word has now been conveyed to me through Ronny that I am not eligible for election. Since I am neither a crook nor a millionaire but only a poor actor this is perhaps to be expected. Indeed they made no bones about it. As Ronny put it to me with his sublime condescension (they say he has two thousand a week spending money), 'You know, old man, only extremely well-to-do fellows can *afford* to join.' So that's that. What am I to do?"

Upon receipt of this letter Mme. Storey, after debating with herself awhile, called up Asa Van Benthuisen and made an appointment to see him at his office an hour later. This was before Dr. Touchon had us so closely invested. Mr. Van Benthuisen, as everybody knows, is chairman of the board of the Metropolis National Bank, and a member of that small inner circle of bankers who are supposed to control our destinies. Whether that be so or not he is a man of vast wealth whose name has become a household word. He is a delightful old gentleman, wise, humorous, and humane. For a long time he has taken the keenest interest in Mme. Storey's career and on more than one occasion has assisted her by the exercise of his unique power.

I was not present at her interview with the multi-millionaire, but upon her return to our office she repeated what had taken place.

"Mr. Van Benthuisen," she said, "I hear rumours that you have a daughter, Inez, who is about to come out in society but nothing seems to be known about her for certain."

"It is quite true," he said, smiling. "I try to keep the children out of the glare of publicity as long as possible but Inez is straining at the leash. This winter I suppose I must let her have her fling."

"Where is she now?"

"Let me see, where are people now?" he asked.

"At Virginia Hot Springs or White Sulphur."

"Well, wherever it is, she's there."

"Do you expect her home soon?"

"Not until the opera season opens in November."

"One more question: are you acquainted with the Waddons? Waddon is the president of the steel cable trust."

"Not socially, if that is what you mean," said Mr. Van Benthuisen carelessly. The Van Benthuisens are of the old Knickerbocker stock. "They are newcomers in New York, I believe. I suppose I have met Waddon at public luncheons or dinners, but I do not remember him."

"Then it is fairly certain that your daughter has not met Ronald Waddon the son?"

"I am quite sure that she hasn't," said Mr. Van Benthuisen calmly. "So far, we have been able to choose her acquaintance.... I seem to have heard somewhere that the young man is an unlicked cub."

"Quite," said Mme. Storey drily.

"If I may be permitted a slang phrase, what are you getting at?" asked Mr. Van Benthuisen curiously.

"I came to ask you," said Mme. Storey, "for your permission to masquerade as your daughter for a short while."

"Well!" he said, laughing heartily. "You can always surprise one! I am sure you would never have made so peculiar a request unless you had a good reason."

Mme. Storey gave him a brief résumé of our case. He was a man who was accustomed to keeping secrets, of course.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "What things go on nowadays! The newspapers astonish one but the unpublished stories are simply amazing!"

"You see," said Mme. Storey, "anyone who may meet me as your daughter will learn in the end that it was all a hoax, so there will be nothing to embarrass Miss Van Benthuisen later."

"You have my permission," he said, "for what that is worth. On one condition. That you promise to tell me the whole story as it develops. Inez herself would be only too pleased with the idea."

"What does she look like?" asked Mme. Storey.

He showed her a photograph.

"A photograph tells one so little."

"Well, she's tall and slender like you," he said, "with blond hair and dark eyes."

"What is her present style of dressing her hair?"

"The skinned-cat effect," he said drily.

"I see, a boyish bob," said Mme. Storey, laughing.

As soon as Mme. Storey had finished relating this to me she dictated a letter to Basil Thorne.

Keep up the connection with Ronny Waddon. Express the deepest chagrin at being turned down by the Cobra Club and keep returning to the subject. Suggest that while it is true you are only a poor actor you have a rich backer who is willing to put up any amount in order to be shown the sights of the town. Make a great secret of this, and only consent after long pressure to tell your friend's name. It is Miss Inez Van Benthuisen, eldest daughter of Asa Van Benthuisen. She is determined to have her little fling before she is presented to society this winter. She is eighteen years old and very beautiful. (Mme. Storey winked at me.) Her family does not inquire too closely into her movements as long as she is accompanied by her pal Emily Beekman, an older girl who sort of keeps an eye on the giddy Inez. Suggest that Inez will

put up for all three of you at the Cobra Club. She has fifty thousand a year spending money. This is not as much as Ronny himself is reputed to have but will be sufficient I fancy to tempt the promoters of the organization. I don't want to arouse suspicion by naming too high a figure. In a day or so you may invite Ronny to a little party with you and Inez and Emily. I will send you word when I am ready.

My perturbation grew and grew as I set this down in my notebook. "I shall never be able to get away with it!" I cried when she had finished.

"Of course you will!" said Mme. Storey. "You are a better actress than you think. We will give you a part that will fit like a glove."

When the letter was dispatched, Mme. Storey said casually, pulling down the corners of her mouth as she does when she is disposed to tease me: "Bella, are you willing to give your hair for our case?"

"My hair!" I stammered. "I—I suppose so, if it is necessary."

She laughed. "Then telephone to Emil Witmer, the wig maker, and ask him to come here as soon as possible."

This Emil Witmer was a famous man in his way, learned in hair. He could sketch for you the hirsute style of any great man in history at any given stage in his career. Since historical dramas have gone out of fashion the poor man has had rather hard sledding. He had done work on several occasions for Mme. Storey. By the irony of fate Emil had no hair of his own save the narrowest of fringes around the base of his skull.

"Emil," said Mme. Storey when he came, "look at my head, and look at my secretary's head. I want you to make wigs for us that exactly resemble our present heads of hair. They must not be wiggy-looking wigs but must be able to stand scrutiny by night or day. Can you do it?"

"Certainly, Madame, since you both wear long hair."

"When they are ready," Mme. Storey went on, "you must come here and cut my hair and my secretary's; a modish boy bob for each of us. My hair you must bleach or dye to a beautiful golden colour and Bella's ... I think you may leave Bella's red. It will be very smart."

"But suppose we were to meet *him*," I murmured.

"Oh, if we meet him we are out of luck," said Mme. Storey. "No disguise on earth would deceive those sharp eyes. However, there's little chance of it. We are going among those who do not know us."

Emil Witmer took the measurements of our heads, together with samples of our hair, and departed.

He was accustomed to rush orders from the theatrical profession and in two days he was back with the wigs. They were marvellously made. The hair-cutting and dyeing operations then took place in the middle room. The boyish hair cut created an astonishing transformation in my employer: made her look like a mere girl. I looked like a freak. Afterward we put on our wigs and looked just the same as before. It was a curious bit of hocus-pocus.

By this time the incident in Central Park had taken place and our every movement was watched. However, Mme. Storey, as I have described, had already taken steps to circumvent our spies. She now sent word to Basil as follows:

All is ready. Let the party be arranged for to-morrow night. Crider will drive us about in his cab. Arrange with him where he is to pick you up and arrange with Ronny Waddon where we are to find him later. Let it be an inconspicuous place the first night, until we are more at home in our rôles. We should have about half an hour with you first to talk things over and to rehearse a bit. All our parties will have to be late parties. You and Crider are to be waiting for us in

front of number — East Sixty-second Street at one o'clock.

22.

On the night of our first expedition Jacmer Touchon was giving a musical party in his apartment. It was one of the first engagements in a social campaign that he had instituted as a part of his new life. From among his former patients he had chosen women of position and influence for his sponsors (presumably those who had not been blackmailed) and had launched himself with *éclat*. The arrangements at his parties, the music, the flowers, the eats and drinks, were perfect; the host a model of urbanity and charm; they were wonderful parties—if you were insensitive to the sinister suggestion that underlay all.

There was no real pleasure at these gatherings—at least not for me. How could there be; how could you let yourself go in the all-pervasive presence of that strange man who, while he displayed the most agreeable qualities, ceaselessly watched and calculated and strove to bring every soul under the dominion of his will? You could not forget Touchon for a moment. Those hard, wicked, commanding eyes were everywhere at once, seeking out your inmost thoughts, prostrating you in spite of yourself until you felt weak and helpless under their dark glare.

It angered me to see everybody fall for him. Nobody present could see through his pretenses except myself and Mme. Storey. By the sheer power of his egotism he imposed his own idea of himself upon all. Like a hypnotist to his subjects he seemed to say: "I am the handsomest, the cleverest, the most charming man in New York"; and they, poor fools, took him at his word; following him about with admiring looks and smiles; lauding him among themselves in the corners. Most people, it seems to me, *ask* to be enslaved.

Mrs. George J. Julian, blonde, fat, breathless, and groaning with rapture, supplied one of the most vociferous elements of the chorus. "Oh, my dear, isn't Jacmer wonderful! Never, I think, has a single individual been endowed with such a combination of rich gifts. Such a handsome wretch and so brainy! He is certainly the man of the hour! What a privilege it is to be admitted to the friendship of such a man; to sit at his feet, as it were, receiving wisdom!" The picture she called up of herself sitting at Jacmer's feet was a comic one.

This social *sortie* was a part of Touchon's larger campaign to subdue Mme. Storey to his will. He knew, of course, how unthinking people (and that includes almost everybody!) seeing them together would be certain to say: "What a marvellous pair they would make! Both so handsome, so clever, so distinguished! If ever two persons were intended for each other," etc., etc. Out of the thoughts of the beholders Touchon hoped to create in the end an entity too strong to be broken. He was a very subtle psychologist.

As is always the case nowadays the party was so late in getting under way that it bade fair to last of the night. As midnight approached Mme. Storey and I began to feel like Cinderella, wondering how on earth we should get away. If we insisted Touchon's suspicions were certain to be aroused. Finally at quarter to one it could no longer be put off. She drew our host a little aside.

"Jacmer, it has been a lovely party but I am dropping with sleep. As you know we have come home with the milk every morning for a week."

"But, Rosika," he objected in real or simulated dismay, "you are my star attraction; you are the only excuse for this party. If you go it will be like Hamlet without the Prince."

"I have a hard day before me. The Caybourn case has reached a crisis."

"Confound Lear Caybourn!" he said, scowling. "Why do you trouble yourself over such an insignificant affair? There's nothing in it.... I hate to see you dabbling in this sordid business of crime," he added, lowering his voice. "Why not give it up altogether—and live!"

"Not yet," she said with a smile, into which he might read anything that he chose.

As she remained firm, though polite, he was obliged to submit. "Very well," he said, "I'll take you home."

Mme. Storey energetically protested, but he insisted. "I will be back in fifteen minutes," he said; "no one will miss me."

So he drove home in the cab with us, purring in my employer's ear the whole way. It was a strange kind of love-making. I shuddered at him. As we turned into our street I saw a taxi standing in front of one of the dark houses where no taxi had any call to be, and farther along, a figure skulking in the shadow of the stoop opposite our house. These were the spies of this precious lover. I entered the house first and as he bent to kiss her hand I heard him murmur:

"Dream of me!"

What a ghastly farce!

Mme. Storey and I ran upstairs. Her maid Grace roused herself sleepily from a sofa where she had been waiting for us. We pulled off our wigs and burst out laughing at the sight of each other's cropped heads. But there was no time to be lost. It was already one o'clock and the boys, no doubt, waiting for us in Sixty-second Street. Mme. Storey insisted on making me up as well as herself. My dress was waiting for me, a marvellous creation of paddy green, very long waisted with a bouffant skirt, short in front and long behind.

When I was ready I could scarcely face myself in the mirror. It seemed to me that I looked terrible, then I never have any notion of how I look. Mme. Storey appeared to be pleased. "Smart as paint!" she said.

Meanwhile, she was applying herself to her own make-up. She is a past mistress of that art. When she turned around I simply gaped at the effect of youthfulness she had achieved. No colour in her face except on the lips, but a pale wash of bistre to go with her dark eyes and golden hair. The faintest of shadows applied to the cheeks and temples thinned her face and produced that touching effect of girlishness. It would not have passed muster by day but under artificial light it was perfect. Her dress was a scanty rag of changeable pink taffeta very cunningly and amusingly draped, and finished with an immense ragged bow of the same material on one hip. It had a rakish effect of being slung on anyhow. Her long slender legs were nothing less than poetic.

During the dressing operations Mme. Storey gave a part of her mind to the task of coaching me. "The pal that a rich girl carries around with her," she said, "is certain to be a sort of echo and satellite. When she's older as you are supposed to be she may appear to exercise a sort of restraining influence, but there's nothing to it really. So you will be quite safe in saying: 'Oh, Inez!' admonishingly to all my extravagances, while you go ahead and encourage me with subservient smiles. When in doubt, flatter me. They always do."

When all was ready we left the house by the back door, carrying the stepladder between us. We placed it against the back fence. We had to sit on top of the fence like two cats while we drew the ladder up and let it down on the other side. If anybody had happened to look out of one of the commanding windows they would have seen an odd sight, but there was little danger of that at such an hour.

Mme. Storey was armed with a little kit containing a tiny flashlight, a thin chisel, and a peculiar-looking instrument that resembled one of those clips for taking off the top of an egg. Grace had told her that the kitchen door of our neighbours' house was of the same construction as our own back door, so she knew how to set to work upon it. It had glass panes, and by turning the flash sideways we could see the end of the bolt inside. With her chisel she opened a split in the edge of the door frame and, holding it open with the chisel, inserted her thin pliers and, catching hold of the bolt, turned it and worked it back. The operation sounds simple but it took considerable time.

My association with Mme. Storey has drawn me into many strange situations but this was the first time I had gone in for actual housebreaking. My heart was pounding like a mallet in my breast. I was sick with apprehension. On the other hand, my mistress chuckled like a little girl.

"An old burglar taught me this stunt," she whispered. "He's in Sing Sing, poor fellow."

Finally the door swung in. Closing and bolting it behind us, we tiptoed across the unknown kitchen with the aid of the flash. A clock ticked companionably on the dresser. A door creaked as we passed through and my heart missed a beat. We made our way through the basement hall to the door leading to the areaway. It was an old-fashioned high-stoop house. The multifold fastenings of the door gave us no trouble from the inside, of course. We fastened back the spring lock and locked the door from the outside, carrying the big key with us so that the unconscious girls upstairs might not be exposed to possible marauders.

What a relief it was to find Crider and his cab standing at the curb. Basil Thorne was inside. "Thank God!" he said. "I thought something had happened."

23.

The rendezvous was appointed, Basil told us, at Texas Bill's, one of the innumerable little speakeasies hidden in the old dwellings of Greenwich Village. We climbed two flights of stairs and Basil tapped in a peculiar way on a door. When it was opened the scene that met our eyes was scarcely one of revelry. We saw a big bare room set about with tables and chairs, leaving a tiny open space in the middle for dancing. Young men and women lounged limply in the chairs or spread themselves on the tables, smoking endless cigarettes, staring listlessly, and saying nothing. A man seated in a chair tipped back against the wall, his heels cocked on the rungs, was crooning a blues song, accompanying himself on a ukulele made out of a cigar box. Through an open door we saw a poker game going on in the front room in perfect silence.

It was my first visit to a Village resort. I was impressed by the extreme youthfulness of the patrons. The lads affected an artistic carelessness but the girls were as smart as mannequins. Inez and I were not at all out of place in our finery. They all seemed to have a sad way of taking their pleasure. Texas Bill himself let us in. There was nothing wild about him but his name: a slender young man with thin, aristocratic face, drooping moustache, and beautiful manners.

Inez put on her new character with the opening of the door. Sailing in like a yacht in a fresh breeze, she cried: "Hello, everybody! Gosh! it's as cheerful as a funeral here!"

"Oh, Inez!" I said admonishingly.

A buxom girl across the room roused herself a little resentfully. "Suits us," she said. "Who the hell are you?"

"Miss Inez Van Benthuysen," said Texas Bill with a flourish.

A loud laugh greeted this announcement and all the patrons roused themselves, anticipating further fun. "Welcome to our midst, Inez," said the buxom girl ironically. "Me, I'm Mary Astor; and my boy friend is Algernon Vanderbilt."

"Any relation to the hotels?" asked Inez.

"No, the what-the-hells," said the girl.

"Nice people, too," said Inez.

She seemed to get the tone of the place by intuition. I rather enjoyed the lunatic freedom of manners myself, though I couldn't quite let myself go. "Oh, Inez!" was my note.

"Have a drink with me, Mary," said Inez. "Texas," she called, "ask everybody what they're drinking."

Cries came from every side. "Good head, Inez! Now you're talking!"

"Ware the gin," whispered Basil. "It's got ether in it. That's what makes them all so dopey toward the end of the

evening."

"Good heavens!" murmured Inez. "How do they stand it!"

"Oh, they're young," said Basil.

It was a comfort to have Basil along. He had an ugly, clever face and an irresistible grin. Though he seemed to be utterly crack-brained, one observed that he always kept his wits about him.

We found Ronny Waddon in a corner sleeping with his head on a table. When he was roused up he proved to be a tall, gangly, blond young man, rather ashen cheeked, and inclined to be red about the eyes. He was the sort who has to be sent to a sanitarium at intervals but never learns anything by it. He was a little surly upon being awakened, but the magic name of Van Benthuisen aroused him. It was rather piteous to see the exhausted young creature whipping himself up to the game as it was played at Texas Bill's.

"By golly, Inez!" he said, holding her hand, "I never thought you would be like this. You don't have to have money, girl. You're a beauty!"

"Thanks, Ronny," she drawled, "you're a good fellow, but I can't return the compliment."

"I know I'm not handsome," he said with a footless grin, "but I'm awful wicked, girl."

As the four of us sat around the table sipping etherized gin, I would have defied anybody to guess we were not what we appeared to be: irresponsible scions of the rich and their hangers-on engaged in tracking pleasure to its lair. We had the advantage in having the real thing with us in the person of Ronny. From the first he made me uneasy. There was something slack-twisted and unreliable about him, and I suspected he would get us into trouble. I could see that the same thought was in Basil's wise and wary eyes.

"Aw, Inez, it's a darn shame you're so rich," said Ronny. "I suppose anybody who married you would have to lead a respectable life."

"Not at all," she said. "It's only the very rich who can afford to be disreputable."

"Then I'll marry you," said Ronny. "Darned if I won't! And we'll send out our kids in solid gold perambulators just to show that we despise the stuff."

"I'll put your name down," said Inez calmly. "There are several ahead of you."

"Who are they?" he demanded jealously.

"The list is not ready for publication."

"Bet I can drink any one of them under the table."

"I wouldn't put it past you."

"Look, here's a stunt. Let's give a party for all the applicants for Miss Inez Van Benthuisen's hand, and award the prize to the one who can hold the most liquor. Gee! Wouldn't the papers like to get hold of it!"

"I want a husband, not a tank," said Inez.

A sudden animation had returned to the company. One was struck by their high average of good looks and intelligence. It seemed a pity. These were real Villagers. By day no doubt they worked for a miserable pittance at one of the arts, or eked out a living in some quaint fashion. All had a slightly wild look, due to the poisonous stuff they were drinking. Boys and girls were on a footing of perfect equality. Indeed they were scarcely to be distinguished from each other save by their dress. One wondered if they didn't miss a good deal by their excessive matter-of-factness.

The phonograph was started, eked out by an accompaniment on the ukulele, and everybody stood up to dance. Small as the space was it did not seem unduly crowded because, according to the style of dancing that prevailed at Texas Bill's, the couples stood almost perfectly still in one spot and conversed. One didn't know whether it was the small floor which had necessitated this style, or the style which had permitted the space to be so circumscribed. Inez and Ronny danced together, while Basil and I remained sitting at the table.

On ordinary nights, Basil said, everybody's money would be spent by this time and they would be drifting home. There was little chance of their going now with two such spenders as Inez and Ronny present. Inez, having tasted of the stuff, did not offer to buy any more of it, but Ronny treated the crowd again and again. I was very thankful upon tasting my gin to find that it was only water. The wise Basil had arranged that for Inez and me with a word to Texas Bill. A bacchanalian tone began to come into the fun-making, harmless enough in itself, but it had explosive possibilities. Ronny was the dangerous factor. There was an ugly streak in him.

"I ought not to have come here," Basil murmured anxiously to me. "But what was I to do? If I had picked out a better regulated place there was always the danger of meeting somebody we knew."

A tall, stalwart young fellow began to cast sheep's eyes in Inez's direction. His girl upbraided him angrily, then began to weep noisily. Nobody paid the slightest attention to her. The young fellow came and sat down near us. To do him justice there was an honest quality in his glance which suggested that it was Inez's fine eyes which had won him rather than the magic of her name. Finally he asked her to dance.

"Nothing doing, fellow," said Ronny brusquely. "Inez is engaged to me for this evening and every other. I'm going to marry her."

"If you are Inez doesn't know it," she said good-humouredly.

The stalwart youth cast a look of scorn on the slack-twisted one. "I'm not asking you but her," he said.

"Well, I'm answering," said Ronny truculently. "Get that?"

"Will you dance with me, Inez?" said the tall youth.

"No," she said coolly, "I won't dance with anybody else to-night. I'm tired."

Ronny laughed unpleasantly and, getting up, said carelessly: "Come on, Inez."

"You heard what I said," she said coolly. "I'm not dancing."

Ronny dropped back in his chair, scowling.

The tall youth, still sitting close by, did not laugh at his discomfiture, but studied him reflectively.

"Funny what money does to a man," he said, addressing nobody in particular.

"Yah!" said Ronny, "you let my money buy you drinks quick enough."

"Sure," said the other, undisturbed, "you ought to be glad that a gentleman is willing to drink with you."

Ronny snarled, searching in his mind for a rejoinder. Basil got up quickly and went to the tall youth. "Look here," he said soothingly, "this is a good party, we don't want any trouble.... We've got to take care of her," he added in a lower tone, indicating Inez.

"Sure," said the other amicably. "You're a good fellow, but you ought to be more particular in the company you keep." They shook hands at length, and the young fellow went back to his girl.

She was a pretty, fluffy little thing who looked quite adorable in her tears. It occurred to me that whatever pretenses they might make, girls were still girls and boys boys. I quite distinctly heard him say to her without irritation: "For God's

sake turn off the tap, Evie. You know you're my girl and always will be. But that don't mean I'm not to look at a star if one shines on me in passing." Then he turned up her chin and kissed her lips. Nobody minded, of course.

Ronny sat glowering and nursing his rage. After a few minutes had passed, Basil, with the idea of throwing oil on the troubled waters, said: "Come on, let's go. I know a place ..."

"No, I'm damned if I'm going to let any Villager run me out of a place," cried Ronny. Before any of us could stop him, he jumped up and flung his glass across the room at the young man's head.

He did not hit him, of course, but the act supplied the spark that the explosion waited on. Pandemonium resulted. Everybody sprang up at once shouting or screaming according to sex, overturning their chairs. It seemed as if every man in the place was spoiling for a fight and most of the girls. But it was not as one-sided as you might think. A number of the men rushed at Ronny, but an equal number, moved by some instinct of fair play, sprang to his defense. The tall young man was one of these. Texas led them, as crazy for a fight as any, though it ruined him.

"I won't have any fellow beaten up in my joint!" he cried.

But it immediately became perfectly indiscriminate. To fight was the thing, and nobody cared whom he hit. There were half a dozen fights going on simultaneously. It came so quickly I did not have time to be frightened. I remember looking on quite interested. The racket was simply indescribable; shouting, cursing, screaming; tables overturned with appalling crashes; glasses shattering on the floor. Basil Thorne was the only man in the room who did not fight. His whole thought was of Inez and me. The three of us drew off, trying to edge around the walls to the door.

The weapons were fists, bottles—and finger nails. It looked more dangerous than it was. Some blood flowed and one or two prostrate figures were to be seen, knocked out either by blows or by the fumes of etherized gin. I suspect the contestants fell down oftener than they were knocked down. I had a passing glimpse of the buxom girl wedged between the four legs of a capsized chair, kicking furiously and unable to extricate herself. It was just a brief nightmare of convulsed faces and brandishing fists, and then one of the less warlike girls, thinking to stop it, switched off the lights. But not a bit of it. It was bright moonlight outside. After a brief pause the row continued undiminished. Plenty of light to fight by.

It sounds like a simple matter to cross a room to the door, but we were forced back half a dozen times by the crazy rushes back and forth. The fighting was all split up. Many a private score was settled, no doubt. There was a lot more going on in the front room that we could not see. We had no idea what had become of Ronny and did not greatly care. He deserved whatever might befall him. Basil had his hands full fending off the lurching figures from Inez. Inez's eyes, I had seen, were very bright and there was a curious smile fixed on her face. Basil was in despair lest she be mauled inadvertently, but she murmured coolly:

"I'm not made of glass."

As Basil was about to lay his hand on the doorknob we heard a heavy tramping on the stairs. "The police!" he murmured in dismay, and instead of opening the door he shot the bolt upon it. An instant later the handle was tried. There was an ominous pounding on the panels. Nightsticks. The sound had not the slightest effect on the uproar within the two rooms. "The window," Basil whispered to us; "I saw a fire escape."

We climbed through the window onto the spidery iron platform. How strange it was to see all the back windows thrown up and figures hanging out. There were cries of: "There they go! There they go!" And imprecations directed at our heads. It was most unjust. We hadn't done anything. We crept down the shaky ladder; first Basil, then Inez, then I. It landed us on another spidery platform with an open window blocked by a large woman in a nightgown.

"You can't come in! You can't come in!" she screamed. "It's a nice thing if decent folks can't be allowed to have their sleep."

There we had to crouch within about a foot of her vituperation, while Basil lowered the final length of the ladder into the yard. It seemed to be the sight of our fine clothes which angered her more than anything. "Trappings of sin!" she called them.

"You are quite right, Aunty," said Inez confidentially. "It is not the proper thing to wear while fire-escaping."

"No aunt of yours!" screamed the woman.

As we went down the last ladder she shouted vociferously for the police. "They are escaping by the back!" she cried. Consequently when we set foot in the yard we walked into the arms of a patrolman. "Just in time, friends," he said humorously. "I have 'phoned for the wagon." Derisive jeers were directed at us from all the surrounding windows. I could not have believed that people would be so inhuman.

As our policeman marched us through the hallway of the house into the street my heart was in my boots thinking of the "wagon," the court room, the story in the papers next day. All our careful plans ruined. Jacmer Touchon might never know just why we had undertaken this masquerade but I could see him secretly triumphing over us while he made believe to condole.

The policeman lined us up by the curb. "Stand there beside me," he said. Other officers were now bringing down batches of prisoners by the stairs. Everybody was in an uproarious humour; laughing, singing, cutting up. Apparently in Greenwich Village a ride in the wagon is regarded as the end of a perfect day. Even the policemen were jocular and good-humoured. Everybody was having a good time but me. I am old-fashioned enough to consider it a disgrace to be arrested. I felt slightly ill.

Across the street I saw our cab standing against the curb with Crider at the wheel. I noticed that the door on our side was unfastened. This was a signal to us that he was ready for a rescue if we desired it. The patrol wagon came rushing through the street with a great clanging of its gong, bringing a lot more people in its train, and waking up what householders had not already been roused. It backed smartly up to the curb and our policeman, always friendly, said:

"Let them load all the other guys in first. It's better air near the door."

They started "loading them in." As I said we were standing by the curb with our policeman on the outside of us. Behind us was the crowd looking on, and in front of us the roisterers, moving up slowly toward the tail of the wagon. Many of them hailed Inez boisterously, but none by name. Suddenly one lad, a good deal the worse for wear, missed the step in mounting and rolled in the gutter. Our policeman took a step forward to help the man on the other side pull him out from under the step. It left an opening to the roadway. Basil touched Inez's arm and Inez touched mine. We unconcernedly stepped down from the curb and started across the road without haste. The people behind must have known we were escaping but evidently they thought the joke was too good to spoil. Nobody made a sound. I never knew if Basil fixed that policeman. He refused to tell me.

When we reached our cab there was a yell from across the street. We flung ourselves in and Crider stepped on the gas. I was still on the running board when we started and Basil in the street. We hauled him aboard. Fortunately there was no other car near but the patrol wagon and that had half its load aboard. One policeman added to the excitement by firing his gun in the air. The crowd stampeded after us on foot but we turned the corner and were safe. We turned another corner and lost them all.

After having turned half a dozen corners we straightened out in Third Avenue and sped northward. The beating of my heart quieted down. Mme. Storey said calmly: "I suppose we will have to abandon this car. They have no doubt taken the number."

Crider spoke through the front window. "No, Madam. As soon as I saw there was going to be trouble, I smeared the license plate with grease and dirt. They couldn't read it."

"Good!" she said.

"What a rotten piece of luck!" groaned Basil.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mme. Storey serenely. "Of course, if Inez Van Benthuysen's name is mentioned in the newspapers her father will disown us and we'll have to begin all over. But everybody's identity is pretty well protected in these cases. It is not likely to come out."

"Even if it doesn't come out in the newspapers think how it will be gossiped around town," said Basil. "Every person there will act as a centre from which gossip will radiate."

"So much the better," said Mme. Storey. "If the gossip reaches the ears of the Cobra Club promoters it will recommend us as desirable members."

Crider put us down in front of the house on Sixty-second Street. We let ourselves in with our key and, creeping through the strange house, issued out into the yard. Bolting the door behind us took time and skill on Mme. Storey's part. When the chisel was pulled out the split in the door partly closed of itself and Mme. Storey rubbed dirt in the crack to render it less conspicuous. Over the back fence we went as we had come and carried the ladder into the house with us. I breathed a mighty sigh of relief. What a night! What a night!

Mme. Storey laughed. "I loved it," she said. "What a burden it is to be respectable!"

Meanwhile Crider, who could not have been recognized, had been sent away to change his clothes and attend the night court to learn the disposition of the cases. He was given money to pay the fines of those who lacked the wherewithal.

"That is only fair," said Mme. Storey, "since we brought the trouble upon them."

Two hours later he called us up to say that everybody had been let off with a fine except Texas Bill, who was held for trial. The case was not likely to attract much attention in the newspapers. Miss Inez Van Benthuysen's name had not been mentioned.

So far so good. What followed was less satisfactory. Ronny Waddon's father had been present at the proceedings. His son was represented as being responsible for the whole affair. He paid his son's fine and carried him off instantly to Dr. Briggs's Sanitarium in Westchester County. This was a place Ronny would not be likely to escape from for a while. It made us all feel blue—not that we cared about Ronny's incarceration, but he provided our only approach to the Cobra Club.

However, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. On the next day but one Basil received a letter that he instantly repeated over the telephone to Mme. Storey in great elation.

DEAR MR. THORNE:

Mr. Ronny Waddon mentioned a couple of days ago that you and two lady friends were desirous of joining the Cobra Club of which he is a member. Mr. Waddon, I understand, has gone out of town for a considerable stay so he cannot introduce you, but the committee has taken action in your case and desires me to say that you and two friends may be elected as associate members immediately upon receipt of the customary initiation fee, which Mr. Waddon informed you of.

I have learned with regret of the annoyance that you and your friends were subjected to by the police last night and beg to point out that nothing of the sort could happen in the Cobra Club. There you can enjoy yourself in own way without interference.

Yours truly,
JOHN DOE, *Sec'y.*

"Send him a check," said Mme. Storey.

An "associate" member of the Cobra Club desiring to visit the clubhouse notified Mr. John Doe the secretary over the 'phone. John Doe, I gathered, stood for anybody who might be around the clubhouse at the time. Mr. Doe appointed a place for the "associate" to meet a "regular" member, who would then conduct the former to the clubhouse. Our own instructions had been to take the last table on the right-hand side of Lober's restaurant at the corner of Delancey and Wood streets (we would find the table reserved for us) and await our conductor.

There we sat, Inez, Basil, and I. While we waited we toyed with Welsh rabbits which none of us could eat. A feeling of thick excitement filled me. We had spent so much thought and pains in seeking to enter the Cobra Club and now realization was at hand. It was half-past two in the morning, and Inez and I (in our other incarnations) had been to the theatre and had supped with Jacmer Touchon. Afterward we had escaped from the house in the usual way. I might say that we made up for the sleep we lost during these forays by retiring into the middle room of our offices during the day, where we stretched out on sofa and cot while we were supposed to be working on the case of Lear Caybourn. Fortunately Touchon's spies could not see beyond the door.

Lober's was a perfectly undistinguished restaurant. On the lower East Side it was considered quite stylish. Even at half-past two it was fairly well filled. In some quarters of New York people never seem to go to bed. We started when a diminutive figure slipped noiselessly into the fourth seat at our table. It was our first intimation of his coming. He said:

"Howdy, folks! No need to mention your names. Me, I'm Chiglick. (So it sounded to me as he said it. Later I found that it was properly Chick Glick.) Pleased to meet yah."

In appearance he was the typical gangster that has so often been described in the press; at the same time insignificant and formidable. He was darkly good-looking in his diminutive way, of Jewish or Italian extraction, and very well dressed. The only thing tough about him was his manner of speaking. He cultivated a perfectly wooden face and spoke through a little hole in one corner of his mouth, without changing a muscle. There was something inhuman in the way he watched you, like an animal from behind the bars.

"What-ho, Chiglick!" cried Inez in her giddy style. "How do you know that we are your birds?"

It never fazed him. "That's all right, lady," he said coolly. "We have given you the once-over wit'out your knowin' it. We know who you are."

("You think you do!" I thought.)

"Oh, call me Inez," she said.

"In the club I will," he said, "but outside you gotta be careful. The waiters and all in this place, they're good people, but you don't know who all may eat here.... It's all for youse folks," he went on in what he intended for an ingratiating manner; "youse and the ot'er members. We're all a time watchin' out to make the club safe and comfortable for youse all."

"I like your style, Chiglick," said Inez. "You look bad. How many men have you bumped off in your time?"

"Oh, Inez!" I said.

He was undoubtedly flattered but no muscle of his wooden face changed. "Cut all that, lady," he said with a gesture. He gesticulated from the wrist only. "Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. The guys who make a boast of it...!" He gave us a truly horrible imitation of a man strapped in a chair. "Pzz!" he said, and spiralled upward with his forefinger. One saw a little wraith of blue smoke ascending.

I shivered.

"When you're ready, folks," suggested Chiglick.

"Let's go!" said Inez. "I'm dying for a real drink."

"Me and Emily, we'll start first," he said. "Give us a coupla minutes and follow. Makes it less conspicuous-like. Go through the door on the stairway that is marked 'Emergency Exit.'"

Chiglick and I arose. There was a stairway at the back of the restaurant leading to a lower room not used at this hour. We started down; on the landing Chiglick opened the door he had spoken of and I found myself in a narrow alley. For a moment my heart failed me. Suppose he intends to cut my throat! I thought. However, he only lighted a cigarette and, leaning negligently against the wall, conversed quite amicably through the hole in the corner of his mouth. The bright, inhuman eyes watched me.

"The same guy owns the teaytre on one side and the apartment house on the other, and the clubhouse in the back," he said. "Makes it convenient-like. He keeps the gate of the alley locked so nobody can trouble us that way. We're fixed real snug in the club. All the neighbours t'inks it's a vacant house."

Inez and Basil joined us and Chiglick led the way to the back of the alley. It was bounded here by a high board fence. He knocked on the fence and a section of it noiselessly swung back (just as in the story of Ali Baba!), admitting us into a back yard. There was a doorkeeper attending the fence, who closed it as soon as we had passed through. It was a common, dirty back yard littered with tin cans and other rubbish. I did not like the look of it at all. Chiglick said:

"We don't fix it up none because it would attrac' attention from the folks whose windows look down on it. Wait till you get inside."

He led the way into a dark passage that was no more reassuring than the yard. What a place for a murder! I kept thinking. Suppose the whole thing was a plot! Not until we had gone through two doors was there any light. This revealed another length of passage, another door. All the doors were armed with mighty bolts and bars. Seeing me eye them, Chiglick said:

"Them's to give us time to make a getaway over the roofs if they should bust in from the rear."

The third door admitted us startlingly into light, colour, luxury. We found ourselves in a charming, low-ceiled reception room with shaded lights, easy chairs, a coal fire burning in a grate. There were smiling attendants to take our wraps. It was the most startling transformation I have ever experienced in my life. From that sordid back yard to this!

Chiglick grinned. "This allus gets 'em," he said. "Some class, eh?"

We went upstairs. A long restaurant decorated after the best modern manner, very plain. It had the look that smart places have anywhere in the world. There was a good-size dancing floor with little tables all around, an orchestra on a dais at one end, playing seductive dance music. To come upon such a retreat hidden within the shell of the dilapidated old building in one of the poorest quarters of the town gave one a curious thrill of pleasure. Truly, I thought, the promoters of the Cobra Club had builded well.

The place was not full; only two or three couples dancing in a rapt style, and a few more sitting at the tables with their heads close. Inez cast an eager glance around but the face she sought was not there.

"These are the lovers," said Chiglick with the slight flattening of his lips that served him for a grin. "Ev'body else is upstairs at the tables now. The bank closes at four-thirty and then they come down for supper. You gotta be out before daylight.... You was sayin' you wanted to order," he added suggestively.

We sat down at a table and a magnum of champagne was brought; excellent champagne. Chiglick drank the lion's share of it. For so desperate a character he showed a curious fondness for the light and frivolous wine. It had not the slightest visible effect on him. He continued to talk in his wooden fashion out of the corner of his mouth. He was friendly but we never had the illusion that we were sharing his real thoughts. He watched us.

"That guy yonder at the table with the dame in yellow," he said; "I mean the short-necked guy; that's Monk Eyster. He's the best-known crook in New York."

"Monk Eyster!" said Inez, opening her eyes wide.

"He killed Stollmeyer the gambler," Chiglick continued offhand. "He was tried twice for it but the jury hung each time and the D. A. got tired of it. Monk is gettin' too old for the game now. He travels on his reputation."

As the man in question was obviously under thirty, one got a startling impression of the swiftness of the underworld's pace.

"Him dancin' wit' the bit of fluff wi' the fan," Chiglick went on, "that's the Pinny-Dropper. He's the comin' man. The gel is a millionaire from up-town. She's nuts on the Pinny-Dropper."

"How did he get such a funny moniker?" asked Inez.

"Well you see he got his start by droppin' little gels on the way to the store with the money in their hands."

"I see," said Inez drily; "and he's still knockin' 'em down."

Chiglick forgot himself long enough to give a real grin. "Say, you're pretty bright for a gel," he said admiringly.... "Of course that's a long time ago," he went on. "The Pinny-Dropper's got his own gang now. They settle strikes or anythin' you want to hire them for."

"I get you," said Inez.

"Yeah, it's good business," said Chiglick. "Little Stobey, he's got a gang, too. He's upstairs now. Each gang has got half a dozen known murders to its credit and there's a lot of jealousy between them. They're alla time layin' for each o'er, but the Pinny-Dropper and Little Stobey, they gotta leave that outside when they come here."

"Tell us what your claims to fame are, Chiglick," said Inez.

"Oh, I ain't in the same class with them stars," he said, grinning. "At that I'm just as well satisfied. It's inconvenient to be too well known." For the briefest instant his guard was lowered, and one had a glimpse of naked, insensate savagery. He made you think of one of the tiny savages of the tropics with their poisoned darts.

"Quite!" said Inez.

When the wine was finished Chiglick said: "I suppose you want to meet them famous guys. They all do. Come on, and I'll give you an introduction."

"All in good time," said Inez. "Let's take a whirl at the tables before they close."

We climbed the stairs to another long room reaching from the front windows to the back. Here there was plenty of life.

"Private card rooms on the third floor," said Chiglick grinning. "No limit but the sky."

The room was well filled but not crowded. The ease and spaciousness more than anything else gave testimony to the costliness of the place. There were luxurious settees around the walls with little tables for drinks. Gambling is thirsty work. It was gambling in earnest, and there was little sound but the clinking of counters and the rattle of the rolling ivory ball. A very smart crowd naturally: men in evening dress; women in gay dancing frocks. There was also the other element: sinister little men like Chiglick. Not a young crowd. Since nobody was allowed to bring guests it followed that all the "associates" were persons of means. Here and there the eye picked out a blooming youth or a girl with unnaturally bright eyes. Gambling plays havoc with women. The majority of faces showed the marks of hard living. Well, they had naturally travelled a long way down the broad and flowery path before making the Cobra Club.

There were several games going on but, as always, the roulette wheel in the middle of its long green table was the centre of attraction. It is the most insidious vice yet invented by man for his own undoing. There were a couple of thin,

dark, inhuman croupiers who looked as if they might have been imported direct from Monte Carlo. Croupiers seem to belong to a race apart. Perhaps when they are off duty they are like other men. The crowd pressed around the table, those in front sitting, those behind looking over their shoulders. One saw the usual types of expression: the laughing careless; the elaborately unconcerned; the feverishly intent—or all the usual expressions except one: the haggard desperate was absent from the Cobra Club.

Chiglick offered a possible explanation of it. "Folks who come here can afford to pay for their fun."

It took a good deal longer for Inez and me to search among the faces in this room. We finally exchanged a glance of disappointment. Scarface was not present.

"Who runs this place?" Inez asked Chiglick carelessly.

"Jack."

"Jack who?"

"Jack is all he goes by."

"Which is he?"

"He ain't here. Got a private party upstairs to-night."

We found places at the roulette table. Inez staked Chiglick. Since it was with the money of our rich client that we were playing it was of small moment to us whether we lost or won, consequently, as was inevitable, we all won. It was wildly exhilarating. I forgot my fears of the place. It seemed like no time at all before we heard the croupier saying:

"The bank is closing, ladies and gentlemen; play is over."

There was a rush to cash in the counters. Inez and I handed ours over to the two men with us while we sat down on a settee facing the stairs and Inez delicately freshened her make-up. She was by long odds the handsomest and most distinguished looking woman present, and as they drifted toward the stairs everybody glanced at her out of the corners of their eyes. I expect that word of our identity had already been circulated. It was a strange procession that filed past us; clubman, grande dame, gangster, and thug.

The men returned to us with their hands full of money. "Let's go down and get a table," said Chiglick with a gleam in his black eyes, anticipatory of more champagne.

"Oh, I couldn't," said Inez with a gesture of distaste. "I have already had two suppers since dinner."

Chiglick's face fell.

Inez was deliberately spinning out the operation of touching up her complexion. She knew, of course, what an alluring picture she made, cocking her head on one side to look in the tiny glass and dabbing the little pad to her cheeks. The nature of these operations focused attention on her beauty. It was not by accident that she had chosen that particular settee. The stairs from above came down just in front of it. A door opened above and we heard voices.

"Basil," drawled Inez, "take Chiglick down to the bar and buy him a bottle of champagne. Emily and I will follow directly."

They disappeared.

A gay little party came sauntering down the stairs. First two pretty girls, then two negligible men, then a third girl prettier than the other two, a blonde of the luscious, melting sort. Scarface had certainly picked the best there was in the club—before Inez came. The third girl, as I learned directly, was Maud Heddle, the "hostess" of the dancing floor. She turned and called: "Jack!" and my pulses quickened. Finally Scarface appeared. Scarface at last! It was like the entrance

of the principal person in a play. All our patient planning had been designed to bring about this moment.

It was not of course the white-faced, blazing-eyed young man I had seen on that memorable night at Guillaume's. Now his face was a little flushed with wine and bore a smile of scornful good humour. From the way Maud Huddle looked back and up it was clear she was in love with him and I didn't blame her. He was sinfully handsome. I don't know why a look of scorn should be so effective with the opposite sex. Scorn in itself is not a pretty quality. But there is no arguing against it. Where do we get our notions of personal beauty from anyway? Just a little difference in the arrangement of the features and what a difference it makes! Scarface was as beautiful as a young animal in its natural state.

I looked at Inez. When Scarface was halfway down she lowered the little mirror and caught his eye. He stopped dead and the smile faded out of his face. I had the feeling that something important was taking place. He looked dangerous to our sex then. Had his glance been directed toward me I should have quailed under it. But Inez smiled slightly. It was a challenge Scarface was never the one to refuse. He came to us, allowing his party to go on downstairs. Close to, I saw that his appearance of slenderness was illusory. His shoulders were both broad and thick.

"You are Miss Van Benthuisen," he said. "I know everybody else in the place.... And Miss Beekman," he added with a slight bow in my direction. I was only an afterthought.

"But I don't know you," said Inez.

"Oh, call me Jack," he said carelessly. "I run this show."

"No, I shall call you Scarface," she said. "Jack is anybody's label."

He showed his white teeth, not at all ill pleased, and swaggered a little. A beautiful creature must do it. "You're the handsomest girl I've ever seen," he said coolly. "Why didn't they tell me?"

If he expected to confound her with his terrible directness he was disappointed. Inez laughed delightedly. "Bless me! what am I to say to that?" she said. "Yes, sir, and thank you kindly."

There was no answering smile in him. He continued to gaze at her. There was so much genuine fire in his glance one would not have thought to term it rude. He sat down beside her.

"Your friends are waiting for you," she reminded him.

"Oh, they can amuse each other," he said carelessly. "I'm not going to bother with anybody else after having seen you."

"You do go direct to a thing, don't you?" she murmured ironically.

"You can't razz me that way," he said, undisturbed, "because it's true."

There was some more talk—I might have been a cushion at the other end of the settee for all the attention they paid to me—and then he said bluntly:

"I don't believe you're a fashionable flapper."

My heart contracted sharply.

"Why?" asked Inez, smiling.

"You've got too much sense."

"Oh, the younger set is going in for sense," she said airily. "There's nothing else left for us.... Besides, you've only been talking to me for five minutes. How do you know that I've got sense?"

"I can see it in your eye," he said darkly.

"Well, what does it matter what I am?" she said coolly.

"It matters a whole lot," he said. "I have to be careful whom I let in here. There is nothing so dangerous as common sense. A few words of common sense spoken at the wrong moment might ruin my graft here."

He was only half in earnest, of course, but his words made me feel a little ill with anxiety.

Inez laughed like a peal of silver bells. "You're a nice man!" she said with a directness equal to his. "I like you fine. At first I thought you were only handsome!"

He rubbed his lip, not quite sure how to take this. "You haven't satisfied me yet as to your identity," he pointed out.

"Well, don't throw me out this minute," she said, "and I'll soon prove to you that I am what I say I am."

I wondered how she was going to prove this.

A few minutes later he took her hand and held it. "Come and dance," he murmured, his eyes full of slumbrous fire.

She repossessed herself of her hand. "Not when you look at me like that," she said coolly.

It was a blow to his self-love. His eyebrows ran up indignantly. "I look as I feel," he said stiffly.

"Sure," said Inez. "That's your privilege—also mine," she added.

As this conversation grew more intimate I became exceedingly uncomfortable. I didn't know whether to go or stay. However, there is a perfect understanding between my mistress and myself upon these matters, and as she gave me no hint to go I reckoned she meant me to stay.

Meanwhile, they were staring haughtily at each other, each contending for the mastery. I think both must have realized at the same moment that it was not to be had that way, for they smiled simultaneously and the tension was released.

"You're a Tartar, Inez," he murmured.

"Well, so are you," she said.

"Anyhow, come dance with me," he said cajolingly. "I'll behave."

"You have no intention of behaving," she said coolly. "As soon as you got me on the floor you would start hugging me and I'd be helpless unless I wished to make a scene."

He laughed outright. "You're no flapper," he said.

"Oh, we start early nowadays," she said quickly.

At this point Maud Heddle arose into view on the stairs. "Oh!" she said when she saw what she saw. Her face was a study. "Aren't you coming, Jack dear?"

"In a minute," he said grimly.

She hesitated a little pitifully.

"I'll be down in a few minutes," he said with a hard, peremptory stare, and the girl faded out of sight.

Inez smiled mockingly. He got the implication and, direct as he was, his thought had to come right out:

"You're right," he said defiantly, "a man only respects what opposes him. I can't help it. I didn't make man's nature."

"Thanks for the hint," said Inez drily.

"Come on and dance," he asked for the third time.

"No," she said firmly, "you and I have got to come to an understanding first."

"Oh, Lord!" he said with affected disgust, "I never thought you were the talking kind. You're too pretty!"

"You've got a lot to learn about me," she said drily. "Listen! You said you were struck with me to-night. Well, I was struck with you, too; immensely so. Your good looks; your directness. Especially your directness. That gets me where I live. I can be direct myself. Maybe you don't care for directness in a woman. Well, if you don't like it, you'll have to lump it. This is what I want to say. You and I could be wonderful pals if you desire it. I desire it very much, so it's up to you. But right away you want to develop an affair; to hold hands; to dance close; to kiss, I suppose. Not for me! Look me in the eye and you'll see that I mean it. This is not just an attempt to lead you on further by denying you in the beginning. I mean it now, and I mean it forever. There can't be anything of that sort between us...."

He interrupted her to ask sullenly: "Why not? Is there somebody ahead of me?"

"That's none of your business," she said quickly. "And anyhow it hasn't got anything to do with it. If our acquaintance continues you will see for yourself that there couldn't be anything of that sort, and when you do get it through your head I don't want to have to bear your reproaches. That's why I am speaking now. So there can be no misunderstanding later on. It's perfectly ridiculous because we've only known each other for half an hour but you asked for it. So, is it to be pals? It's up to you."

There was a silence. As before, they gazed at each other, silently struggling for mastery. Inez's brow was clear and firm, the young man's scowling. It must have been a bitter pill for the handsome fellow's pride to swallow. Very likely it was the first time he had ever been rebuffed by a woman. At the same time I was marvelling at my employer's cleverness. In the best sense she was dealing with him openly and honourably yet without showing her hand.

In the end he acknowledged defeat in the handsomest manner. "All right," he said bluntly; "pals it is. You're a marvellous girl. God knows how it will turn out for me but I promise you you will never hear any reproaches."

They shook hands on it.

"Come on, let's dance!" said Inez.

As they turned to go downstairs I heard him say: "Just the same you're no flapper."

"You must meet my father," said Inez coolly. "He will furnish you with the date of my birth."

I gasped inwardly. Did she mean it? But of course she did. How characteristic of her!

25.

When Mme. Storey and I met at the breakfast table next morning she looked frankly pale and fagged. Well, we had only had about an hour and a half's sleep and the night had been very wearing. There was something more than mere weariness in her face, however; a hint of discontent or resentment that one never saw there. Like a stupid fool I never guessed the reason for it.

For myself, I was thoroughly out of temper. I had not had even the hour and a half's forgetfulness, what with

worrying over the hole we were in. It seemed to me that a young man of Scarface's explosive capacity was simply not possible to handle. We had had another scene with him upon leaving the club. He had insisted upon seeing "Inez" home, and it was only with the exercise of the greatest adroitness that we had put him off. It was really the astute Basil who had saved the day by making believe to pick a quarrel with him.

Scarface had yielded on condition that we promised to return the following night. When Inez referred to the rules of the club he had said: "Damn the rules! I made them, and I guess I can break them if I want." So we were going again the coming night. I did not see how we could get through with it. I foresaw disaster.

I suppose my thoughts showed in my face, for Mme. Storey presently said: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said.

She looked distinctly annoyed with me. It occurred to me that I was acting rather pettishly, so I said: "I don't like the situation we're in, but it does no good to talk about it."

"Well, I don't like it, either," said Mme. Storey, "One can't foresee everything."

Even then I did not understand. "Scarface..." I began.

She took me up quickly. "I'm not going to hurt Scarface. I only want to reach Touchon through him. I can even reconcile it with my conscience to let Scarface get clear away in the end."

"That's not what I meant," I said. "Is it fair?"

"Fair!" she said. "You heard the compact I made with him."

"Such compacts are only made to be broken," I said.

"Not when the woman means what she says. He saw that I meant it. And if he didn't he soon will."

"Even so," I insisted, "is it fair play to..."

"There's no such thing as fair play between the sexes," she burst out. "Nobody expects such a thing. Do you suppose that Scarface has treated women fairly?"

"Not for a moment," I said, "but..."

"You mean," she said, interrupting, "that he is falling in love with me in spite of the compact—or even because of the compact. What you are trying to say is that if I keep him at arm's length he will end by conceiving a tremendous passion for me, the real thing, which is talked about so much and so seldom occurs."

"Yes, that's what I mean," I said.

"Well I don't need to be told it," she said with a curious bitterness. "Anybody could see that there was a fire in the man.... But what of it? It won't do him any harm. People don't die of unrequited passion except in novels, and even novelists don't suggest that men die of it. It may even do him good. He's been spoiled by women. It will help strike a balance for all the suffering he has inflicted on women."

"It's not his fault that women are fools," I said.

"Well, really," she said, "I didn't expect Scarface to find such a champion in you!"

"I can't help but feel sorry..." I began.

"Oh, Bella, don't make it any harder for me," she said with a sudden softening in her voice. "It's too late to turn back now.... I am not made of wood!"

And then I understood! It was but rarely that my employer gave me such a glimpse into her feelings. You may be sure that I made haste to hold my tongue on the subject.

After breakfast we went down to the office, followed as always by Touchon's sleuths. What a dance Mme. Storey led those estimable men! By this time we knew most of them by sight and it used to tickle her to strike up conversations with them, merely for the purpose of observing their embarrassment. On this particular morning it was her humour to take the subway downtown. She lingered on the platform studying the magazines on the news stand until a train was about to start. Then she darted for it and we were edified by the sight of a fat detective clawing his way frantically into the car just as the doors were closing.

"That was a near thing," said Mme. Storey to him blandly.

He mumbled something in his throat.

"Haven't I seen you before somewhere?" she asked innocently.

The detective made believe to see a friend down the car and moved hastily away.

At ten o'clock Mme. Storey called up Asa Van Benthuisen. He said he would be charmed to see her at any time before twelve.

"I'd like you to come with me this time," she said to me. "I want him to become accustomed to you."

"Then you are determined to carry through this mad scheme?" I said.

"Well, let us see what he says to it," she answered, smiling.

We took a taxicab down to the Equitable Building, followed, of course. We led our trackers to the offices of Greene and Greene. Touchon and everybody else knows that General Greene is Mme. Storey's lawyer. What Touchon didn't know was that there was a rear door to the suite to enable the General to escape importunate clients. We went out through this and gained the Metropolis Building which is near by. There, in the exquisite suite of offices allocated to the chairman of the board, we found the great man, lapped in the smiles and the eager services of his highly paid employees.

"Well, here is an undeserved pleasure!" he cried. "And Miss Brickley, too! Delighted to see you both."

Asa Van Benthuisen is a big man in every sense of the word. He has a head like a buffalo upon an immense swollen torso which nevertheless has dignity. An expression of great sweetness and wisdom animates his enormous countenance.

"Well," said Mme. Storey, "when you gave me your permission to masquerade as your daughter you stipulated that I must tell you everything that happened. That's what I have come for."

He pushed the cigarettes toward her. "Shoot!" he said.

She proceeded to give him a highly diverting account of our experiences the night before. He was entranced with the story. At intervals he slapped his vast thigh and exclaimed softly: "Ah, that's the real thing! That's real!"

When she had finished her tale Mme. Storey asked him cunningly: "Why do you keep referring to it as 'the real thing'?"

"Well, my dear," he said somewhat wistfully, "here you see me in my grandeur; full of years, honours, riches; greatly respected as they say, and greatly envied I have no doubt. But all this cuts me off from life. I love life. It is my passion. It makes me sad to be removed from it. Sometimes I seem to myself like a toad sitting on a bag of gold. How gladly I'd give it all to be young again and close to life!"

"Well," said Mme. Storey, "that emboldens me to make another request."

"What's that?" he asked eagerly.

"This young man Scarface suspected me from the first," she said. "I think my make-up got across with him all right but he insisted that I was too wise for eighteen years old. So I said half jokingly that he must meet my father and ask him how old I was.... Will you stand for that?"

"Ha! Will I stand for it?" cried Mr. Van Benthuisen. "Do you mean will I play the rôle of your papa, my dear? I should be proud to do so. I will stand for it on both feet!"

"Ah, thank you!" cried Mme. Storey. "That will solve so many problems."

"It will be an amusing experience for me," said Mr. Van Benthuisen.

"How will we arrange it?" said Mme. Storey. "It is bound to be difficult, for I am followed everywhere."

"How about asking the young man to dinner at my house?" he suggested. "At our house, I mean." He corrected himself with a smile. "Wouldn't that help to convince him of your identity?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Mme. Storey. "Better than anything. But I should never have ventured to propose such a thing."

"It will be all right," he said; "the old lady would be scandalized, of course, but she is safe in Hot Springs, or wherever she is. You do not want to waste any time, I take it. Make it to-morrow night."

"How can I ever thank you sufficiently!" she cried.

"Pooh!" he said, "the shoe is on the other foot, my dear. I shall be eternally grateful to you for the experience.... There is one thing I would like," he added, "provided it suits your plans."

"What is that?"

"Let him bring a few of his friends. Make it a party. That amusing little gunman, what is his extraordinary name? Jigamarig?"

"Chiglick."

"Chiglick. And one or two of the girls."

"But, Mr. Van Benthuisen," objected Mme. Storey, "your house is full of priceless art treasures. And these people are, after all..."

"Scarface seems to have great influence over them," he said. "Put it up to him. If he is prepared to guarantee his friends, I'm satisfied."

"I'll do it!"

"In any case," added Mr. Van Benthuisen, "I'd be well content to lose a bauble or two for the sake of the experience."

26.

Scarface had besought Inez to come to dinner at the Cobra Club on the second night. They could then spend the evening together before the place filled up, he said. This for obvious reasons it was impossible for her to do; but she had promised to come to supper with him. There was no engagement with Touchon this night. The Cobra Club opened for

business at eleven o'clock and it was customary for people to drive down there direct from the theatre. For the first hour or two the restaurant and dance floor was the centre of attraction. People then drifted upstairs to the tables.

We went to the theatre by our two selves this night in order to persuade our spies that our day was fully occupied. When we got home Grace reported that the light in the servants' bedroom of the Sixty-second Street house had already been out for an hour, so after changing our make-up we immediately set out. Crider drove us downtown. He was instructed to be waiting at the corner of Delancey Street and the Bowery at four o'clock. This was at some distance from the club. We met Chiglick outside the Elite Theatre and he steered us through the mezzanine balcony into the alley, and so to the clubhouse. One felt the same lawless thrill in penetrating to the secret stronghold of pleasure. Come to think of it, these precautions must have been instituted principally for the fun the members got out of it. The police could hardly have been ignorant of the existence of the place.

Scarface was waiting for us in the reception room. His manner was quite changed. He made no attempt to charm Inez to-night. He was entirely comradely. Apparently he had made up his mind to accept the compact at face value. I believe he thought he was cured of his infatuation. If so he was sadly mistaken, for it had only given place to a far deeper and stronger feeling. You could see that by the way his eyes started at the sound of her voice; by the whole softening of the man in her presence. It made my heart ache a little. I don't know why, for I had no call to feel compassionate on that young bravo's account. At any rate, my fears quieted down, for if he didn't know what was the matter with him I thought we should have the less trouble in handling him. He was as startlingly candid as ever. It was his greatest attraction.

He coolly dismissed Chiglick and led the way upstairs. As we passed through the restaurant dancing was in full swing. Maud Heddle happened to be standing near the stairs. At the sight of Inez her lip trembled and she quickly turned her back. Inez would not stand for that. She put an arm around the girl and kissed her delicious curved cheek. Maud wiggled her shoulders petulantly.

"Don't be silly, Maud," Inez murmured. "You and I are going to be friends!"

Scarface led the way on upstairs. In a charming room on the third floor a little table was set for four. Flowers, silver, crystal, everything was perfect. Where had Scarface learned it all? Champagne was cooling in buckets of ice; and on a sideboard one glimpsed caviare, truffles in aspic, *pâté de Toulouse*, etc., in trays of ice. Scarface, rubbing his lip, was watching Inez out of the corners of his eyes to see how she took it.

"Lovely!" she cried. "Only it's so far away from the dancing."

"I'm not going to dance with you," he said coolly. "It would only be an aggravation. If you want to dance with Basil you'll have to toddle downstairs."

I thought Inez looked just a *little* put out at being taken so literally at her word.

Basil was the fourth at the table, of course. In looking back over what I have written, I see that I have made Basil play a very minor part in these affairs. That was his own fault because he deliberately kept himself in the background. But with his wise eye and good-humoured grin he was a tower of strength to us. He never lost his head. At a critical moment he was always right there. We should never have been able to get along without him.

"I must say you do yourselves pretty well in the Cobra Club," remarked Inez, nibbling a truffle.

"That's why I run the joint," said Scarface carelessly. "I'm willing to take all this trouble so I can have these things for myself. I was born with luxurious tastes and no means of satisfying them. It must be A1 or nothing for me. I can starve all right, but I won't put up with second-rate things. Well, in order to get the first rate, I had to make other people pay for it."

"There must be a bit of profit in it, too," suggested Inez.

He shook his head. "No. I'm in the hands of Manny Low, who owns this house. It's the house that makes the club. And furthermore, we have to have the protection that Manny can furnish. He takes the profits of the tables and the initiation fees. I get what the people spend here, which just about meets running expenses. I could make something if I

wanted to trim here and there. Nobody would notice the difference. But it wouldn't suit me at all. This place must be run as if it were my private house and I never had to give a thought to money. That's the only way I can get any fun out of it. Manny thinks I'm a fool and God knows I think he is with his fifty millions and his inferiority complex. So there you are. Every man hugs his own folly ... I have to depend on outside sources for my spending money," he went on with a scornful smile. "I have a patron who pays me five hundred dollars a week."

"What for?" asked Inez coolly.

"Doing what I am told," he retorted.

"I shouldn't have thought your stubborn nature could brook it."

"My patron is no piker," said Scarface. "He's a big man. I can serve him without any sacrifice of self-respect."

Inez was too wise to ask him any more questions. In any case it was not necessary. With Scarface's invincible candour, everything was bound to come out.

"You want to know what I do for my five hundred a week?" he went on. "Well, I never yet sailed under false pretenses and I'm not going to begin with you, Inez. Not if we're going to be pals. My patron retains me for whatever crooked work he may want done. I'm a crook and everybody knows it."

"And you glory in it," she murmured.

"Not glory in it," he objected, "but I face it. I deliberately turned crooked. My eyes are opened. I know what I'm doing."

"That's a pose, just like the pose of being good," she said scornfully.

"Maybe it is," he said, undisturbed, "but it has this advantage. It enables me to speak from the chest. I am not obliged to snuffle."

At another time he said scornfully: "I take what I want where I find it!"

In spite of myself a sound of compunction escaped me upon hearing such an outrageous sentiment aired. He turned to me grinning good-naturedly. "That shocks li'l Em'ly," he said teasingly. "It needn't, Em. All men are the same in their desires, only most are afraid to avow them like me. When I look around me and see that men's goodness, so called, is nothing in the world but fear of consequences, it gives me a disgust of my kind. Men have erected a whole structure of morals on fear. I won't subscribe to it.

"I have a good understanding," he went on. "I read. I comprehend something of the nature of things. I see that modern society is founded upon injustice. It is nothing in the world but savagery with a veneer of hypocrisy. I prefer my savagery straight. I repudiate such a society. I refuse to be bound by its laws. I go my own way. If they are too strong for me, well, down I go. But nobody will ever hear me whimper."

I confess that I was a little carried off my feet by this bold declaration of faith. The speaker was so good-looking and his dark eyes flashed so compellingly. There was a bright aura of evil about his handsome head. One could conceive of losing one's soul for such a Lucifer. It was Inez who recalled me to common sense by saying slyly:

"That is what is called rationalizing one's desires. Men, contemptible though they may be, have had the wit to analyze the process in themselves."

"It may be," he said coolly; then a flash of suspicion narrowed his eyes. "Hey, kid, what do you know about such things, at your age?" he demanded sharply.

"Oh, I hear my old man prating," she retorted lightly.

"I have my own code," Scarface presently went on. "I stick to that."

"Let's hear it," said Inez, frankly curious.

He shook his head. "I never talk about it," he said. "If I did it would sound too pious. I leave piety to the churchgoers."

When the table was cleared a game of vingt et un was proposed. But the talk was too interesting. The cards were allowed to lie on the table unheeded. We lolled about the room smoking and disputing. Who would have expected to find a philosophical discussion in the Cobra Club? Scarface held the floor for the most part. What an extraordinary fellow he was! I leave it to others to judge him.

Later, business on the dancing floor having slacked off I suppose, Maud Heddle appeared at the door of the room, glancing timidly at Scarface for permission to remain. She had no pride where he was concerned. He did not send her away. It was curious how, being denied Inez, he turned back in his half-contemptuous way to Maud.

"Come on in, kid," he said, holding out an arm.

He made room on a little sofa beside him and she sat, dropping her head on his shoulder. He flung a careless arm around her and went on talking. Maud, apparently, was contented with these crumbs of affection. Most of the talk was beyond her comprehension and she did not trouble about it.

"Your old man must be quite a lad," Scarface said to Inez.

"He wants to meet you," said Inez coolly.

"Hey?" said Scarface.

"Will you come up to dinner at our house to-morrow night?" she said demurely.

"Who, me?" For once we saw Scarface out of countenance.

"That's what I said."

"But would it be square to the old boy to introduce me as..."

"Oh, I've told him all about you," she said coolly.

"The hell you have!" said Scarface. "Does he know that you come here?"

"Certainly. He lets me go wherever I please, provided Emily is with me. We have an agreement that I shall not disgrace the family name. It's his idea that girls as well as boys should see everything as a part of their education. My mother has a different idea but she's out of town at present."

"Well," said Scarface with an admiring glance, "judging from the results, I should say there was something in his idea."

"Thanks, Scarface," said Inez, dimpling. "And will you come?"

"Will I come? With bells on!"

"My father thought it would be nice if you brought a few of your friends," Inez continued. "He wants Maud and Chiglick."

"Will you go, Chicken?" asked Scarface, lifting the girl's chin.

She nodded. "If you go," she said.

"And say three more," said Inez, "to make up an even ten at the table. Picturesque characters."

"Monk Eyster," said Scarface. "He's so tough he'd turn Sheffield steel. And Cora Hamann; she's a dumbbell but you can't help laughing at her. And lastly Daisy Darling because she's easy to look at."

Scarface unhesitatingly guaranteed the good behaviour of the guests. "I'll talk to them before we start," he said significantly.

"Then it's settled," said Inez. "To-morrow at seven. You know where we live?"

"I reckon we can find the house," said Scarface drily.

The giving of this invitation had the expected psychological effect of quieting Scarface's doubts. His eyes no longer narrowed at Inez. When she got off anything wise beyond her supposed years he ascribed it to her unusual upbringing. "Your old man must be quite a lad!" he would exclaim at intervals. All through the evening Inez, with the most *dégagé* manner in the world, was subtly playing him. Finally he began to give us details of his recent actions. You can imagine with what a breathless interest I listened. This was what we had been working so hard for.

"This fellow I work for," said Scarface; "it's quite romantic; I've done a good few jobs for him and taken a pot of his money but I've never laid eyes on him."

"Why, how can that be?" asked Inez with an incredulous air. "How did you establish relations with him in the beginning?"

"Through a third party," said Scarface mysteriously, "a crook I had known before. This third party, he knew the boss, of course, but the boss didn't want to meet me. Thought it might establish a link in case of trouble. That was natural. When I first went to work for him eight months ago it was stipulated that I must take a job as accountant, listing checks on an adding machine all day. This was to establish an alibi as a respectable young clerk and all. It was hell for a free spirit like me but the money looked good to me so I put up with it.

"In the same big company where I went to work there was another young accountant who was also an agent of the boss's and we became pals. I can't tell you his name, it's too well known now." (Scarface's hard eyes softened when he came to this part.) "He was a wonderful fellow. Absolutely different from me. A little fellow with an easy-going, fun-loving nature. He depended on me. I felt right from the first that we were intended to be pals. There was something about that kid you couldn't resist. He was a universal favourite. We shared everything. I could trust him like myself. In fact, he was the only real pal I ever had."

Maud raised her head from his shoulder jealously. "How about me?" she murmured.

"Oh, you're my sweetheart," he said carelessly. "That's something else again."

"Go on about your pal," murmured Inez.

"He worked at an adding machine also," said Scarface, "and we fixed a scheme to communicate with each other by lists of numbers. Do you get the idea? We wrote notes to each other on the adding machines. Nobody ever got onto it. It was my job to go around and collect the lists of checks. In that way I could drop a note on B—on my pal's machine" (the name Blondy almost escaped Scarface here) "and collect his note to me. Manny Low was running this place then and my pal and I used to come here nights. But he didn't live to see me as manager here." Scarface lowered his head and fell silent.

"My pal is gone," he said, presently rousing himself, "and so is the other fellow I told you about. That leaves me as the boss's right-hand man. Still we've never met. Funny thing; once he called me up and said he wanted to have a look at me. Said he would feel more like trusting a man when he'd seen him. So we made a date to meet on a certain bench in Central Park late that night. But while I was waiting for him two street girls came along and tried to make up to me. Damned awkward at such a moment." (I carefully avoided looking at Inez at this juncture.)

"When they were talking to me a man came by that I supposed was the boss," Scarface continued. "He didn't stop. I had to get up and walk away in order to shake the females. When I came back I met them walking with the same man. I couldn't get a look at his face. I supposed that he was leading them away from the meeting place and I went back there. I waited an hour but he didn't come. Those darn girls had queered the meeting. Next day he called me up and said that the incident had convinced him it was too dangerous for us to try to meet. So I haven't seen him yet. I wouldn't know how to reach him but he can always call me up here. I am here every night at six-thirty to receive a call.

"He's a wonderful man!" Scarface went on with a sober enthusiasm. "Clever as Satan! It's marvellous how he can foretell by psychology what people are going to do. Of course I don't know all the ins and outs of his game. He's a crook on a grand scale. His operations must run into the millions from the way he scatters money about. I wish I could tell you about one stunt that I helped him to pull off. Unbelievably clever. But if I said a word you'd know all. It was a famous case. It cost my boss fifty thousand dollars to buy a piece of fake evidence that he wanted and he paid it without turning a hair. I delivered the sum myself in the form of unregistered Liberty bonds.

"But how were they delivered to you if you never saw him?" asked Inez.

"By messenger."

"The one I'm most interested in is your pal," said Inez. "What happened to him?"

Scarface's face turned stony. A curious triangular furrow was etched on his forehead. "He was shot," he said brusquely. "And the man who shot him I have marked for my own. I almost got him once already, but a bystander in the street grabbed hold of me. After that the boss called me off. I was not to indulge my private vendetta until after he had pulled off his big stunt," he said. "After that I could do what I liked."

"So there is a big stunt in prospect?" said Inez.

"Yes," said Scarface. "I'm waiting orders."

That was all then. The thing that impressed me most about Scarface's disclosures was the extraordinary way in which the facts were bearing out my mistress's previous deductions.

As we drove home in the cab, silent and weary, Mme. Storey roused herself to say: "Well, Bella, we are beginning to see daylight at last."

"But all that Scarface told us we knew already," I said. "How will you clinch it?"

"When I confront Jacmer Touchon with Scarface our work will be done."

27.

During office hours Mme. Storey and I used to take turns in sleeping in the middle room. We dared not both be down at the same time, for there was always the chance that Jacmer Touchon might drop in, and of course we made it a point to be perfectly open with him, to give him the freedom of the place. To have kept him waiting would instantly have aroused his suspicions. This neighbourly intimacy that he cultivated, this dropping in at odd hours, was part of his general scheme for enveloping us completely. That and our frequent lunches and dinners together; the many evenings we spent in company; that and the spies that dogged us everywhere. He must have known that we knew they were his spies. He didn't care if we did know it. He wished us to feel his power. These spies were never referred to nowadays between him and Mme. Storey.

To me Touchon was like one of those suffocating nightmare shapes that you cannot see around nor measure; he was like the great Boyg who, as Peer Gynt fought it, always receded, and in receding ever encompassed the hero more

closely. He got so on my nerves I could have screamed at the sight of him. I could not altogether hide my feelings, nor did I try, for it had been agreed on in the beginning between Mme. Storey and me that it was no part of our scheme for me to appear to love Touchon. Well, as he saw that he was bearing harder on me he became always more fulsomely friendly in manner. That was how he took his pleasure. Whenever the thought of him came into my head I would fall to trembling with hatred.

During the morning following our second visit to the Cobra Club he came sauntering into the outer office with his mocking eyes and his hateful smile of pretended friendship. "Well, Bella!" he said, then checked himself in seeming concern. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said.

"You look a little jaded, my dear. You are not your usual blooming self this morning."

A sharp feeling of anxiety attacked me. One always looked for a double meaning in Touchon's words. Had he discovered our nightly expeditions? But I reflected that he could not possibly look so sure of himself if he had. This was merely his usual persiflage. "I was not aware of it," I said.

"You must take care of yourself," he said solicitously.

"I do," said I.

"Is Mme. Storey disengaged?" he asked.

"There's no one with her," I said carelessly. "Go right in." I knew that the door into the middle room was locked.

He passed into her room and I pounded the typewriter to work off my venom. He turned around saying:

"There's no one here."

"Then she's in the middle room," I said, rising. "I'll call her." I went through her room and knocked at the door at the end.

Instantly she answered clearly: "What is it?" One never caught her napping.

"Dr. Touchon is here," I said.

"Oh! I'll be right out," she said.

Almost instantly she appeared, dusting her hands. There was real dust on them, too, also a convincing smudge on her cheek. "Morning, Jacmer!" she said. "Don't look at me!"

"But that's what I came for!" he interjected.

"... I have been digging into some old records," she said.

"What records?" he asked, assuming the privileged curiosity of an old friend.

She sat down at her desk and set about repairing the damage to her complexion. I defied even Jacmer Touchon to guess that she had just been awakened from a sound sleep. "The Melanie Soupert case, if you must know," she said carelessly. "Bella and I have been discussing writing up some of those old cases for publication."

This was the first I had heard of such a thing. She was improvising as she went along.

"Oh, you shouldn't do that," he said with pretended earnestness.

"Why not?"

"It would be *infra dig*," he said. "It would look as if you had realized that your vogue had passed and had made up your mind to cash in on what you could."

"Perhaps you are right," she said with a submissive air.

Touchon looked at me in an ugly way. His eyes conveyed a peremptory command to leave the room. I made believe not to get it. I had him there because his pretended friendliness gave me an excuse for remaining. He could not tell me to get out without coming out of character.

Mme. Storey pulled the cigarette box toward her and helped herself. "Anything special?" she asked idly.

"No," he said. "Since I gave up my practice I am often at a loose end. And as I knew you weren't very busy either I just fluffed across."

Touchon's experiments with slang did not become him very well. Like many another gentleman of forty odd who brushes his hair straight back for a good reason, he wished to appear very much up to the minute. Good heavens! how I hated that man! In a way the feeling was a Godsend. It bore me up. I was not nearly so crushed in his presence as I had been in the beginning.

Mme. Storey half turned her chair and looked out of the window, letting the light quite frankly reveal the weary hollows in her face.

"You are not looking your best, Rosika," he said with a genuine concern, which was nevertheless entirely selfish. He looked on her beauty as belonging to him and his proprietorship was alarmed by anything which threatened to mar it.

"I'm tired," she said.

By degrees Mme. Storey had entirely changed her method of dealing with Touchon. She perceived that he did not desire her to fall in love with him. He wished to break her will. For him the supreme joy would lie in possessing a woman who was secretly terrified of him. Consequently she had suggested by her manner that she was no longer able to keep up the laughing duel of the sexes that she had herself provoked. She now allowed a hint of strain to appear in her; she had become more subdued in his company, sometimes unexpectedly submissive. Her eyes would fall on him, when she was apparently off her guard, with a look of reproach or resentment. It was a consummate piece of acting. It reassured Touchon more than the reports of his detectives. He had become supremely confident.

"You are not happy, Rosika," he murmured fondly. "This useless struggle to win in the face of adverse conditions! Why do you allow it to wear you out?"

"I don't know," she said listlessly.

"Then give it up," he said persuasively. "Give up this unfeminine desire to shine in the eyes of the public. What a barren satisfaction even when you succeed! Give it up and rest content to be just what God intended you to be."

"What's that?"

"The most charming woman in the world!"

"Oh, Jacmer!" she said pettishly.

"Your career has enslaved you thus far," he said. "What a pity! What a pity! The time has come now for you to make a bold stroke for freedom. Close up shop here. Go away. Let life have its way with you!"

"But what would Bella do?" she said.

There was no hint of irony in her voice, but I knew it was there. My mistress and I shared these comedies in spirit, though we could not allow our appreciation to appear outwardly.

Touchon looked at me. His glance said: "Bella can go to hell for aught I care!" but his lips murmured fondly: "Bella is so desperately clever and efficient she could place herself elsewhere without the slightest difficulty if she wished to do so. Or if she would like a long vacation, too, I should be charmed to place the means at her disposal."

"Thanks, I can pay for my own vacations," I said.

He laughed indulgently. "Bella is incorrigibly independent!" he said lightly. I wish I could give you all the implications of this speech. "Bella is a plain woman," his contemptuous glance said; "it's a good thing for her that she's able to take care of herself."

"I have just learned that Commodore Barrow's yacht the *Maraquipe* is offered for charter," he presently went on. "The last word in luxury. What would you say to a cruise among the West Indies, Rosika? To sail away on your own ship when the winter sets in and leave all worries and troubles with the frost and bitter winds behind. The sea down there is not like our gray sea: it lies in pools of liquid cobalt inside the reefs. And the bold mountains springing from the sea are painted with an incredible green. But the nights, that is the most wonderful part; the tropic nights are as soft as velvet with tenderer stars than ours."

"One would naturally avoid the routes of the tourist ships," he went on. "There are countless lovely islands that are never visited: St. Martin's, Barbuda, Saba, St. Eustacia. Dream islands! Think of visiting them at your own sweet will in the most perfect of yachts. Of course it would be scandalously expensive, but what is money for? One only lives once and that is my idea of living greatly!"

There was a hypnotic quality in the man's voice, a promise of peace, forgetfulness, infinite luxury. If Mme. Storey had really been the harassed and vacillating woman that he supposed, she must have yielded to it. There was no mention of himself in this Elysium, you will notice, but of course he loomed in the picture like a portent.

"What do you say, Rosika?"

"I'll think it over," she murmured.

He took a more peremptory tone. "That's what you always say. That gets you nowhere. The *Maraquipe* will be snapped up as soon as it is generally known that she is offered. You must decide now—or let me decide for you."

"Don't press me, Jacmer," she said nervously. "Don't press me. I must have time to think."

He lowered his eyes to hide his satisfaction. He was well pleased with the way things were going. "I must press you," he said. "You are merely drifting. And if you are incapable of deciding I will decide for you."

"Give me a week," she said with a desperate air. "In a week I will let you know."

His eyes blazed on her, full of greedy triumph.

"Very well," he said, "a week. Meanwhile I will take an option on the *Maraquipe*."

She said nothing.

He presently arose to go, feeling, I suppose, that he had better be content with his gain for that day. "How about dining to-night?" he said.

"Not to-night, thanks, Jacmer," said Mme. Storey.

"Have you something on?" he asked sharply.

"No," she said, "I'm just tired. I'm going home to get into something loose and just as soon as I have swallowed my dinner I'm going to bed."

"That will be the best thing for you," he purred. He took her hand. He did not kiss it nowadays, but pressed it

fondly. "I'll trot over sometime to-morrow to see how you are."

When he had gone neither Mme. Storey nor I made any reference to what had taken place. What was there to say? We both realized the frightful danger that attended upon the part she was playing and it would have done no good to confess our fears to each other.

28.

Mme. Storey's house on East Sixty-third Street that I have referred to so many times was not a house at all but half a house. It was an apartment on two floors of a small converted dwelling; what the French call a *maisonnette*. Her friend the famous Mrs. Lysaght occupied the two floors above. Mme. Storey's apartment is arranged in a convenient and novel fashion. The kitchen is alongside the front door and has a wicket opening on the entry like the concierge's window in France. The dining room overlooks the back yard, which has been set out like a little formal garden; the living room is over the dining room, and Mme. Storey's bedroom is in front. The servants of both households sleep on the top floor. Since there was no guest room a cot had been placed for me in Mme. Storey's room during my stay in the house.

Some anxious planning was involved in getting us out of the house on the night of Mr. Van Benthuisen's dinner. The problem was solved when Grace brought Mme. Storey a key to the front door of the house on Sixty-second Street that she had quietly filched from its nail in the hall. The rest was easy. The two servants from that house were invited to sup with our servants and while they were all enjoying themselves in the kitchen Mme. Storey and I, having dressed ourselves for our parts, quietly slipped out of the back of the house and over the back fence by the ladders which the girls had left in place. At this season it was perfectly dark at half-past six. We entered the kitchen door which they had left unlocked, and ascending to the first story, after having made sure that our key fitted the front door, we blithely let ourselves out and boarded Crider's cab, which was waiting.

Everybody in New York knows the Van Benthuisen palace. It is a huge brick pile in one of the Avenue's choicest corners, with a *porte-cochère* on the side street. It was built in the day when turrets were in fashion and millionaires' windows were about six feet wide. Thus it looks a little old-fashioned now but still magnificent. The lofty, pillared hall running through the house and filled in at the back with rare tropical plants made me sigh with pleasure. In its spaciousness and emptiness it represented real luxury as distinguished from the spurious sort that anybody can have in great hotels and steamships.

Mr. Van Benthuisen was waiting for us in the library, a colossus in evening dress with a grin of anticipation lighting his heavy face, and a cigar about a foot long sticking from between his lips. Basil was already in the house. We immediately went into anxious consultation.

"We should have been here earlier in order to talk things over and rehearse a bit," said Mme. Storey, "but it was impossible to get out before dark.... First, how about the servants? That is our greatest danger."

"I have taken my measures," said Mr. Van Benthuisen, beaming. "The only servants of my own who are in the house are the housekeeper, my valet, and a couple of maids. These will not appear during the evening. They know nothing except that I am entertaining friends at dinner. All the servants you will see have been supplied by the chef who cooked the dinner. It is the famous Alphonse Duprat and it ought to be good. His men know nothing about my family affairs, of course."

"Then there is yourself," she said, admonishing him affectionately; "this is a huge joke to you but you will please remember that a tremendous result hangs upon it, and that the least slip of the tongue on your part may ruin me."

"Trust me, my dear," he said serenely. "I have not sat in on business conferences for forty years without being able to play a part with an open brow and a grinning countenance.... I always address you as my dear. That will come quite naturally."

"But remember that Bella is not Miss Brickley but Miss Beekman, Emily Beekman. You know her very well. She is almost an inmate of the house."

"Emily! Emily! Emily!" he chanted, wagging his forefinger at me. "I know you very well."

We had to laugh. His jocularitas was good for us all. It helped to ease the strain.

"How about photographs of the real Inez?" asked Mme. Storey.

"All removed," he said.

"We ought to have some photographs of me to put about, but there was not time enough to have them made.... Remember," she warned him, "it is admitted that you are a liberal-minded parent but you must not forget to admonish me if I go too far."

"Shall I send you to bed?" he asked.

"Be serious! ... Take me for a stroll through the rooms so that I may be familiar with the plan of my own house."

Promptly at seven the rest of the guests arrived. Through the drawing-room door I had a glimpse of them huddling together in the hall, frankly intimidated. Well, they had reason to be. "Van Benthuisen" is a name to conjure with in New York. Asa Van Benthuisen looms like a great mythical figure in the minds of all children who have been brought up there.

Presently they were ushered into the drawing room where we waited, still keeping close together as if for mutual protection. There are two drawing rooms, each fifty feet long and stretching across the Avenue front of the house. They are among the most wonderful rooms in the world on account of the treasures they contain. Mme. Storey had assumed the character of Inez like another skin. She was clinging to her "father's" arm, looking up in his face with a smile of filial affection. He was just a little taller than she. The millionaire shook hands with his guests.

Even the bold Scarface was a little out of countenance. His proud spirit hated to acknowledge it, consequently he looked savage. The classical furrow was etched on his forehead. The old man looked at him with the frank pleasure of a connoisseur in humanity. "Here is a man!" his eyes seemed to say, "whatever he may be." Chiglick and Maud Heddle I have already described. Daisy Darling had been chosen merely because she was a delicious thing to look at. No more need be said about her. Monk Eyster and Cora Hamann were to supply picturesqueness to the party—and they did. I shall let them speak for themselves directly.

Mr. Van Benthuisen's cocktails broke the ice—and still more did the millionaire's friendly grin. His guests were astonished to find him so human and approachable. He beamed on them with a peculiar understanding and sympathy. One might almost have said that he envied them. Thieves and worse they might be, but they were closer to life than he. Such was his notion. Mr. Van Benthuisen was a bit of a romanticist. One could see that he had determined to forgo all moral considerations and meet these people on the plane of their common humanity. In such an encouraging atmosphere Scarface and his friends blossomed like flowers in the sun.

Dinner was announced and we went straggling across the hall and through the library. Mr. Van Benthuisen led the way with Maud hanging to one arm and Daisy to the other, Chiglick scampering around the group, trying to get a word to the millionaire's ear. Scarface and Inez followed, then Monk Eyster and I with Basil and Cora bringing up the rear. Monk looked more sheepish than wolfish in his hired evening suit. He had not found his tongue yet.

I heard Scarface murmur to Inez as he glanced down the noble hall: "I understand now what a fool I was that first night."

A little twinge of pain moved her lips. He didn't know her well enough to have marked it. "The big house hasn't got anything to do with it," she said quickly.

"Not the four walls and the roof," he said, "nor all the gimcracks that fill it. It's ... it's..." he struggled to find expression, "it's the things you feel here and can't give a name to."

Inez said nothing.

"Your father is a better man than me," he said grudgingly. This was a tremendous admission from the conceited Scarface. "He has used them and mastered them," he said bitterly, "and I can only tell them to go to hell.... They'll soon get me."

"Oh, no!" murmured Inez with a catch in her breath. There was no acting about this.

In the dining room we were seated at a round table small enough to permit of general conversation. A butler officiated at the sideboard and three footmen served. I could see Scarface taking everything in out of the corners of his eyes with an expression of bitter appreciation. "This is the real thing!" he seemed to be saying. Mr. Van Benthuisen and Inez faced each other across the board with affectionate smiles. It was "Daughter" from him and "Dad" from her. Good comedy. Inez had Scarface on her right, Basil on her left; while the old man was flanked by the two pretty girls. Next to Daisy Darling came Chiglick, then me, with Scarface on my left. Cora Hamann and Monk were across the table from me.

Mr. Van Benthuisen revealed in his jocular comment that he had been told all about the Cobra Club.

"Why don't you belong, sir?" asked Scarface.

"Good God!" cried the millionaire in mock horror. "I'm a bank clerk. If I were seen in such a place I'd lose my job!"

The conversation soon became entirely unconstrained. I am sure that elegant room had never heard the like, nor ever will again. The servants, of course, had been instructed to fill the glasses as quickly as they were emptied. This was a new experience for most of the guests, and some of them, I fancy, tried to see how far the game could be carried. But the sound and mellow wines did them no harm. The worst that could be said was that they became a little silly.

Inez's eyes were very bright. She contrived to simulate the look of utter irresponsibility that is characteristic of the very young nowadays. One would have said there was not a care in her cropped blonde head. It was her note to be a little shocking.

"Inez, you've had enough wine," said Mr. Van Benthuisen.

"Oh, don't be tiresome, Dad."

"If you are not careful I will send you to bed, young woman."

"Then the party will have to go to bed with me."

"Inez, behave!"

Oh, excellent comedy!

While she appeared utterly giddy she kept the reins of the conversation in her own hands. It was she who brought out the foibles of the guests in order to amuse the old man. "Scarface, tell Dad how you and your pal used to correspond on the adding machine," she would say. Or "Chiglick, tell about that time when you locked the cashier of the bank in his vault and then they had to employ you to blow the vault open because the president had forgotten the combination."

It was Chiglick, I think, who made the hit of the evening, spitting his amazing tales out of the corner of his mouth with an utter lack of expression. But Monk and Cora got the biggest laugh.

Monk Eyster was one of the most desperate crooks New York ever produced. Everybody knows his history. At this time he had begun to turn soft. As Chiglick put it, he was living on his rep. He preferred to tell of his past exploits rather than perform new ones. The job at the Cobra Club satisfied him very well. Cora Hamann's only claim to distinction was that she had been tried three times for her life. She had finally won acquittal. She was such an utter fool she was as funny as a comic opera. She was a blonde who had been handsome in a common way but she had no instinct for dress. Used to put on everything but the kitchen stove, Chiglick said. Her trials had created a tremendous sensation in their day and she

still looked upon herself as the heroine of the hour. Monk and Cora were continually at loggerheads respecting the relative importance of their trials.

"When I took the stand at my third trial," said Cora, "there wasn't a dry eye in the court room. The fluttering of the handkerchiefs was compared to a snowstorm."

"Somebody must 'a' peeled a onion," muttered Chiglick in my ear.

"Even the reporters cried," Cora went on. "As one of them put it, their ink was mixed with tears."

"Aah!" said Monk, "reporters always writes with pencils."

"Not at my trial," said Cora with a superior smile.

Old Mr. Van Benthuisen's fat sides shook with silent laughter.

"There were forty-nine reporters at my third trial," said Cora proudly. "It was the largest number ever gathered in a court room."

"Come off," said Monk, "there were fifty-three at mine, besides the special writers who couldn't get inside the rail."

"How do you know there were that many?" asked Cora.

"I counted 'em. Didn't have nothin' else to do all day."

"My trial created more excitement than any which had ever been held," said Cora. "The papers said so."

"They said that about mine, too," said Monk. "And mine come after yours!"

"Every morning before court I held a perfect reception in the Tombs," said Cora. "Clergymen and clubwomen and artistes and litterateurs. Only people of influence were allowed in."

"You can have your clergymen," said Monk, grinning. "You should 'a' seen the pretty girls that come to my cell. And the letters I got!"

"Mash notes!" said Cora scornfully. "I got plenty of those, too. Thousands. I tossed them aside unread."

"Ain't you regretted it since?" asked Monk slyly. Cora disdained to answer. "All over the country the people remained in the streets throughout the night waiting for the verdict," she went on.

"While the jury slept," put in Monk.

"No! No!" said Cora. "They were deliberating throughout the long watches of the night with drawn faces and sleepless eyes. Life and death were in the balance. The scenes in the court room when the verdict was brought in beggared all description. There was not a dry eye..."

"Wait a minute, Cora," interrupted Chiglick with pretended concern. "You said that before. You mean 'every eye was wet.'"

"Every eye was wet," Cora repeated seriously. The rest of the story was lost in our laughter. Cora looked surprised, and that made us laugh afresh.

It was noticeable that neither Monk nor Cora ever referred in any way to the circumstances which had occasioned these trials.

Just before we left the table the laugh was turned against Chiglick. Mr. Van Benthuisen had made a complete conquest of the little gangster. Chiglick's bright, inhuman eyes scarcely ever left the banker's face. He leaned forward in

front of Daisy, saying hoarsely:

"Chief, if you ever got any li'l' job you want done just call on me."

"A job?" said Mr. Benthuisen agreeably. "What sort of job, Chiglick?"

"Anythin' a-tall! Anythin' a-tall!" said Chiglick very earnestly. "That's the point."

Still Mr. Van Benthuisen did not comprehend. "You want me to give you a job?" he said. "In my office?"

A most comical look of horror overspread Chiglick's face. "Oh, God, Chief, not workin'!" he cried.

Laughter engulfed us again.

After dinner the guests were conducted on a tour of the house. But Mr. Van Benthuisen soon grew tired of this. Made him feel like the conductor of a sight-seeing bus, he said, and sent them away to explore on their own account. When they'd had enough they were to come back to the library for drinks and smokes. The group broke up and the different parts wandered about at their own sweet will. How quaint it was to come upon Cora and Monk who, having made up their differences, were seriously discussing the artistic merits of the Cézannes, the Renoirs, and the Gauguins in the picture gallery!

Or to see Chiglick in the library with a Benvenuto Cellini cup, the chief treasure in all the house, in his hands, following the delicate chasing with his nervous, cigarette-stained fingers—light fingers if there ever were any. Mr. Van Benthuisen did not appear to be alarmed. He merely explained to Chiglick that the gold in the little cup was worth perhaps a couple of hundred dollars, whereas the workmanship rendered its value beyond all computation. Chiglick put it down with an awed air. As a matter of fact, not the smallest among Mr. Van Benthuisen's treasures was discovered to be missing next day.

In crossing the hall I caught a glimpse of Inez and Scarface seated half hidden under the bank of greenery at the end. They did not see me. From their serious faces it was evident that something important was going on. I scarcely knew what to do. From the first in this case my employer had enjoined that I was to be present at all interviews, in order, I suppose, that I might be able to testify if required. Perhaps she desired me to listen now, and had had no opportunity to warn me. I decided to eavesdrop. If it was something that I was not supposed to hear I could always hold my tongue about it. I am good at that.

By going down the side of the hall out of range of their vision and approaching from the other side of the greenery, it was quite easy to get close enough to hear. Inez and Scarface were seated on the base of a little marble fountain among the greenery, leaning forward with elbows on knees. The fountain was backed with great ferns which hid me completely.

As I came within hearing Inez was saying: "But why? Why? As long as my father is willing?"

Scarface answered: "I hate to see you there among the gamblers and the shady women and the crooks. You are too good for it. What good does it do you when you have all this? This suits you."

"I want to see life," she said.

"That's childish," he said scornfully. "Like playing in the mud."

"I won't promise not to come again," she said.

"Oh, you have every right to come," he said bitterly. "We have taken your fee."

"That isn't it," she said; "the fee is nothing. But I have a right to my freedom as well as you. To go where I choose and see what I choose."

"Free!" he said with a bitter laugh. "Me! That's all you know! ... Your father is the only free man," he went on. "He

has money. That is freedom."

"He doesn't think so," she murmured.

"Oh, well, nobody is satisfied," he said.

There was a silence.

"There's another reason I don't want you to come any more," he burst out again in a low, passionate voice. "I don't want to see you any more..."

"Oh!" she interjected in a hurt voice.

"... The fact is, I can't stand it! There's nothing in this pal business. Like offering a hungry man husks. And anything else is, as you said, impossible.... I don't want to see you any more!" he cried. "It breaks me all up. It spoils my aim. I don't know where I am."

"It's your life that you are dissatisfied with," she said. "Why not change it?"

"What's the alternative?" he asked bitterly. "I suppose your father would give me a job if I asked him. Stool warmer. Oh, God! No! I've had a taste of it. I must play a bigger part than that, straight or crooked. No! I've chosen my line and I'll stick to it. You have unsettled me for the moment but at heart I am still myself. I can't change my spots!"

Another silence.

"Inez," he said in a tenderer voice, "I want to tell you all about myself: to fill in the places I left blank the other night."

"No! No!" she said sharply. "Not if it is dangerous to you."

"But that's the very reason," he said. "I would like to feel that my life was in your hands. There's a curious satisfaction in it."

"No! I don't want to hear it!"

"But I'm going to tell you. Listen; the man I work for is known to me as Mr. Caspar. That's not his real name, of course. I don't know what his main graft is because I was never employed on it. That was Fay's job. Francis Fay. That recalls something to you, eh? The Storey murder cases. And my pal's name was Arthur Sims. Everybody called him Blondy. Get this straight. Mme. Storey is after my boss. It's a fight to a finish. I am helping him with it. He means to crush the woman and drive her out of business or..." He paused significantly.

"Oh, Scarface, you wouldn't..." Inez's firm voice faltered.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"A woman?"

"She plays a man's part," he said harshly. "She deserves to be treated as a man. She's a detective. Her business is to send crooks to prison. Do you know what that means? I do. I've been there. I'm a crook. She's my enemy. I will wipe her out if I get a chance."

There was another silence. I was petrified with terror at what I had heard. I could not guess what my employer's feelings might be. It was Scarface himself who furnished a clue.

"That makes you turn from me," he said sombrely. "That's all right, I expected it. This romantic attitude that you and your father have about crooks is comic. You need to get your eyes opened. And you and I need to keep away from each other."

Another silence, then evidently she made a move to get up, for he said in a sharp whisper: "Ah! don't go! ... Five minutes more. Let me tell you the rest..."

She protested.

"I must tell you... The first round in this fight went to Mme. Storey, for she tempted Fay to betray his master. But the boss found it out in the nick of time and sent Blondy to Mme. Storey's office to shoot Fay when he appeared there. The boss never takes any chances. He had paid the hall boy where Fay lived to report to him all the calls that Fay sent and received. Blondy as he left the office wrote me a note on the adding machine, telling me what his orders were. It was a kind of good-bye because he suspected he might get taken. The getaway was not clear. But he was dead game. He should not have been in this business at all. He wasn't hard like me. He went to Mme. Storey's office, and he shot Fay. But as ill luck would have it that damned Touchon happened to be there with a gun in his pocket and he shot my pal. I'll get him later. I have promised it to myself.

"Mme. Storey thought she had my boss then but he was too clever for her. He sent me to Sing Sing disguised as a woman to talk to Barney Craigin, the convicted murderer, and persuade him to write a confession that he had hired Fay and Blondy to get Mme. Storey. Craigin had his own reasons for bearing her a grudge, you see. The way it worked out was all in the papers. Cost my boss fifty thousand dollars to support Mrs. Craigin for life. But it cleared up the whole matter with the police and tied Mme. Storey up in knots. She's helpless. I'm waiting now for his next move against her. In all the world only you and me and the boss know the truth about this matter."

"I wish you hadn't told me!" she murmured. "I wish you hadn't told me!"

"Inez," he said in a low, moved voice, "if this is the last time I'm going to see you..." He spoke so low I could catch no more—but I didn't want to hear it. My cheeks were burning. This was not a matter of any public concern. I softly stole away from my hiding place.

The party broke up early because the guests had to be on hand for the after-theatre rush at the Cobra Club. They all, except Scarface, begged Inez to accompany them down there, but she refused. After they had driven away Mr. Van Benthuisen voted the evening a complete success as far as he was concerned. He was still chuckling at his recollections.

"Haven't enjoyed myself so much in years," he said. "I hope you gained your object by it."

"I won Scarface's complete confidence," Mme. Storey said—however, she looked anything but triumphant.

We got away as soon as we could. When we were alone together I told my employer how much I had overheard. "I didn't know whether or not you wished me to listen," I said.

"It doesn't matter," she said with a shrug.

"With Basil Thorne's evidence of the relations between Touchon and Fay, taken with these disclosures of Scarface," I said eagerly, "you have a pretty complete case."

"I can't use what Scarface told me," she said with a painful gesture. "Not after the way I got it."

29.

Shortly after we had arrived at the office next morning, Jacmer Touchon came in. At a glance he looked much the same as usual, nevertheless my instincts immediately took alarm. There was the hint of a strain in his grin; his warm complexion had a slightly mottled aspect, such as might have been due to violent emotion—rage, fear. My heart failed

me. Had anything betrayed us to him?

"Well, Bella," he said with that offensive grin fixed in his face. "Did you have a nice quiet night?"

By that I knew he had discovered something. "Perfect!" I said. "I feel like a new woman!"

He laughed unpleasantly. "Is Rosika in her room?" he asked.

"Go right in," I said. Mme. Storey, having had a full night's rest, did not require to lie down this morning.

I followed him in. My mistress was seated at her big table smoking, holding her head on one side to keep the smoke out of her eyes. She was reading her mail. "Morning, Jacmer," she said. "Sit down." By a hint of wariness that appeared in her eyes I knew that she saw the same thing I had.

The hand with which he helped himself to a cigarette trembled slightly. But what a marvellous hold he had upon himself. The man must have been a seething furnace inside. What had happened? I cast back over all our movements the night before for some explanation. Certainly we had not been followed to Mr. Van Benthuisen's or back again. I could have sworn to it.

"You feel better this morning?" he asked politely.

"Much."

"Ah!" He could not quite hide the sneer.... "I have taken an option on the *Maraquipe*," he went on.

"That's nice," she said noncommittally.

His eyes leaped up. "Then you have decided to come?"

"I have decided nothing," she said. "You gave me a week."

"Then why is it 'nice'?"

"Oh, merely because you seem to wish to go."

"But you know this is all planned for you."

"Please, Jacmer, not all over again," she said. "In a week—"

"But you seemed so much stronger after your rest," he said with a hateful smile.

Mme. Storey did not reply. She had an extraordinarily difficult part to play. If the man had really discovered anything it was not only useless, it was ridiculous to try to keep up further pretenses. Finally she asked with a level look:

"What is the matter, Jacmer? You are changed since yesterday."

He leaned a little toward her. I could not see into his face, but I knew what that slight thrust forward meant. It was habitual with him. He was uncovering the full blaze of his extraordinary eyes on her. She quickly lowered her eyes. Nothing was said. Presently he got up and walked a few paces toward the fireplace. He affected to study a piece of old faience that hung there. This intimated that the man was in a shocking state of uncertainty. The suggestion rejoiced my very soul.

He came back and faced me with a hard, contemptuous stare. "Bella," he said, "I have private matters to talk over with Mme. Storey. Please leave the room."

My heart leaped into my throat. I looked at my mistress. She nodded slightly. Her face was pale and composed. She had decided not to stoop to any further pretenses with Touchon. I walked out of the room in a turmoil of emotions, terror,

anxiety for her, curiosity—and relief. Yes, I confess I was coward enough to be glad my presence was not required at that scene.

I closed the door after me and hastily slipped on the headpiece of the dictaphone. Mme. Storey I knew would turn it on if she wished me to hear what transpired. How chagrined I should have felt if she had not turned it on. But she did. I immediately heard Touchon's voice over the wire. The dictaphone instrument is affixed to the under side of my desk where it could not possibly be seen unless you were to get down on hands and knees. The transmitter is sunk under the top of Mme. Storey's table.

All the while I was threshing my brains to discover what could have aroused his suspicions. As a matter of fact, we never did learn for certain how much he knew. The probable explanation was that he had questioned Mme. Storey's intention of going to bed immediately after dinner and had sent one of his men into her house to reconnoitre, and so had discovered our absence. As we were presently to learn, Touchon possessed a key to Mme. Storey's house.

After some words of no particular moment had passed between them I heard Touchon say in a new voice: "Rosika, I have come for you."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked quickly.

"Anything you like," he answered. "Marriage? It would seem as if two people like you and I could afford to smile at the conventions, nevertheless, if marriage means anything to you, I am agreeable."

Safely hidden in my own room though I was, his boldness affected me so strongly that I had difficulty in getting my breath.

"I should not insist on marriage, Jacmer," Mme. Storey replied. Even over the wire I could distinguish the dryness of her tone.

"Good!" he said. "Then get your hat and let's go. I'm sick of this shilly-shallying. I intend to cut you off with one stroke from all your entanglements. You belong to me now. Bella can close up here after you have gone."

"But where are we going?"

"Anywhere you like. Let's go and take a look at the *Maraquipe*. She's ready for sea. Let's live aboard her. Nowhere else could we find such privacy."

"I am not going with you," she said in an ordinary voice.

"You have gone too far!" he cried with a confident laugh, "You can't draw back now. You're mine, Rosika, mine!"

"By what right?" she asked.

"Anything you like," he said carelessly. "The right of my will!"

There was a brief silence. I could picture how his eyes were seeking to command her. But she must have smiled. A smile, of course, instantly rendered his pretensions ridiculous. The sight of it put him in such a fury that his voice became almost inarticulate.

"So! So! You have changed, too, since yesterday, eh? All those little falterings and hesitations and appealing glances, just to lead me on, eh? You have been fooling me!"

"Well, what did you expect?" she asked. And then I am certain she smiled.

"Just the same, you are mine!" he cried. "With all your cleverness you are only a woman and I'm a man. You cannot resist me! Look at me! Look at me!"

"You are being ridiculous now," she said.

"Look at me!" he repeated furiously. "I command you! Look at me and tell me what you see!"

"Very well," she said crisply. "I see that you are not nearly so sure of yourself as you pretend to be. Something has happened which has forced your hand."

"Where did you spend last evening?" he demanded.

"That is my affair."

"I demand an answer."

"You may continue to do so."

My mind was a good bit relieved by this. He did not know where we had been. Touchon was rapidly becoming demoralized by passion.

"By God! Rosika, you can't defy me like this!" he cried. "No woman, nor no man, either, ever defied me and got away with it! You had better yield while you can. With me, a dazzling future lies before you. Against me, oblivion! My will tolerates no opposition. What opposes me I destroy. Do you understand? I destroy it!"

"You have shown me what you can do," she said, "and I am not impressed."

"By God! I'll have you, anyway," he cried in a changed voice.

"Keep away from me," she said sharply.

"I'll have you!"

"Keep back!"

I flung the headpiece on the desk and banged the door open. Though I was half paralyzed with fear I had some dim notion of saving my mistress. However, she was well able to take care of herself. The open door surprised a dramatic tableau. Mme. Storey had risen and pulled out the drawer of her table. Her right hand lay in the drawer and the muzzle of her gun was sticking over the edge of the table in Touchon's direction. Touchon hung half over the table, his hands up and flexed just as he had reached over to seize my employer. He was staring at the muzzle of the gun just as if a venomous snake had raised its head in the drawer.

At the sound of the door Mme. Storey let the gun drop and leaning against the drawer closed it. Touchon's arms fell. He struggled to recover his countenance.

"Leave the room!" he said to me furiously.

"You may stay, Bella," my employer said coolly. "Dr. Touchon has finished what he had to say."

There was a silence. For the last time his terrible eyes sought to break down her resistance. On this occasion she fairly stared him out. His face turned black with rage and the veins stood out startlingly on his forehead. He started to speak but checked himself, realizing, I suppose, the danger of saying something that might ruin him. The man looked as if he were about to burst with venom. Casting a truly murderous glance on my mistress—in which I was included—he turned and ran from the room, shaking his arms in a strange paroxysm of rage.

At the slam of the outer door my mistress experienced a sort of collapse. Dropping in her chair, she covered her face with her hands. Strong shudders went through her frame. After all, one does not overcome a Jacmer Touchon every day.

"What a beast! What a beast!" she murmured.

I ran to her and put my arms around her, though I was no better off than she. We trembled together.

"I couldn't stave it off any longer," she said. "Now we must look for the worst."

"Telephone for Crider, for Basil Thorne," I said. "You must have protection here."

The urgency of my fears recalled her to herself. She laughed, albeit somewhat shakily. "Oh, Touchon won't do anything crude," she said. "He will always protect his own skin. The fact that he lost his head this morning will make him even more prudent. He must have time to mature and execute his plot. We still have a few more hours to live, my Bella."

"Don't joke about it," I said with a shiver.

"I must get in touch with Scarface before he does," she said.

"But if Touchon knows now that we are in the habit of stealing out of the house, how can we get down there?" I said.

"There are always ways to circumvent spies," she said serenely. "Half-past six is his usual hour for calling up Scarface," she went on, "but of course he may be doing it now." She reached for the 'phone and gave the Cobra Club number.

There was no answer.

"Well, if we can't get them, Touchon can't," she said cheerfully.

We called up at half-hour intervals during the day, always with the same result. No answer. Finally about two o'clock we heard Maud Heddle's voice on the wire. I was listening in.

"This is Inez," said my mistress. "Is Scarface there?"

"Hello, Inez!" said Maud. There was no longer any resentment there. "He hasn't come downstairs yet."

"Perhaps he won't mind being waked up. It's quite important."

"Oh, it's time he was up," said Maud. "I'll send for him."

In a few minutes we heard Scarface's lazy, deep voice. "'Lo, Inez." Let him repudiate her all he liked, the voice was warm and eager. I could picture the handsome, tousled black head at the 'phone.

"Scarface," she said, "I want to come down there."

"Well, you know what I said about that," he growled.

"But this is different. I don't want to come when the crowd is there. I want to come early when there is nobody, so I can talk to you."

There was a silence. One could almost feel the poor lad struggling with himself. There could be but one issue to such a struggle. "Well, all right," he said. "When? Before dinner?"

"As soon as it is dark. That will be a few minutes after six. Will you have Chiglick waiting for me in the lobby of the Elite Theatre?"

"Righto."

Soon after Mme. Storey had talked to Scarface on the telephone, we closed up the office and took a taxi to her house. Our fat spy followed close in another cab. How sick we were of seeing his stupid red face! I expressed myself on the subject with some heat but Mme. Storey only smiled unconcernedly.

"As long as we can see him we know where he is," she said.

At her house we gathered together everything necessary for our make-up in the parts of Inez and Emily and issued forth again, this time on foot, carrying our little bags. Our spy followed us west through Sixty-third Street in his taxi driven at a snail's pace. There was not another person in sight in those quiet blocks.

At the Park Avenue corner there was a handsome traffic policeman who was an old acquaintance of Mme. Storey's. She beckoned him to the sidewalk. Like every other manly man he was not proof against that radiant smile. The cab had stopped about fifty yards behind us, waiting to see which way we would turn.

"Mr. McGuire," said Mme. Storey, "there's a man in that taxicab who is following me. It is rather annoying."

"I'll soon settle him!" said McGuire, taking a long stride in the direction of the cab. We followed.

Our fat friend tumbled out of the cab and started running pell-mell down the street. He was not built on racing lines. It was too comical a sight, and all three of us burst out laughing. McGuire was taking after him but Mme. Storey said:

"Let him go. He is not worth leaving your post for."

The taxi driver awaited the policeman, pale with anxiety. In response to McGuire's questions he protested that his fare had picked him up in the ordinary way and that he knew nothing about him or his business.

"I think you're lying," said McGuire grimly.

"Oh, perhaps he is telling the truth," said Mme. Storey serenely. "As long as his fare has run away I will engage him." She climbed in. "Take me to the Grand Central Station, driver." She leaned forward with a parting smile. "Thank you very much, Mr. McGuire."

We left the handsome bluecoat chuckling delightedly on the curb. I was laughing, too. It was so neat and simple a trick to run poor flatfoot away and then commandeer his cab. The chauffeur would tell him later where he had driven us, but that would do him no good. From the Grand Central you can go anywhere.

We took the shuttle train on the subway over to Times Square and from there drove to the Madagascar Hotel where we engaged a room. We dressed and made up at our leisure, and when the time came left the hotel by a side door and had ourselves driven down to the neighbourhood of Delancey Street. By this time it was dark. Chiglick was waiting for us in the lobby of the theatre and steered us as usual into the clubhouse. As we passed through the lower hall Mme. Storey called my attention with a glance to the unattended telephone switchboard and I began to perceive her plan.

It was the custom at the Cobra Club for the staff to dine shortly before the place opened for business at seven o'clock, consequently we found them eating. Scarface, Maud Heddle, Monk, Cora, and others were seated about a big table, while the various attendants and lesser fry were at other tables down the room. Mme. Storey surveyed them with a glint of satisfaction in her eye. Every person in the clubhouse was accounted for except the guard at the gate in the back yard and the cooks in the kitchen. There were several waiters moving about in attendance on the tables. They did not use the main stairway but a service stair at the back of the building.

Scarface leaped up with lighted eyes when Inez appeared. The poor lad was further gone than he realized. Curiously enough, Maud Heddle no longer seemed to be jealous. Being at ease in her mind respecting Inez's intentions toward her young man, I suppose she thought his romantic attachment would do him no harm. Well, that is the way women are. We were invited to partake of their meal but Inez did not wish to become involved in that manner. She declined, saying:

"Emily and I can only stay a few minutes."

Scarface led her to a small table near by where they could talk in private. Cocktails were brought them. I sat down with the others; consequently I could not hear what was said at the little table. However, I knew the line that Inez meant to take. She was making believe that Scarface's disclosure of his murderous intentions toward Mme. Storey had kept her awake all night and that she felt it her duty as a friend to remonstrate with him. It was only an excuse, of course. She had no expectation of diverting him from his aim. Scarface had gone too far to draw back now. Loyalty to his "boss" was a kind of fetish with him.

There was a rattle of talk at my table; Cora and Monk bickering as usual, and Chiglick confiding the details of some outrageous crime to me out of the corner of his mouth that was nearest my ear. But I had little heart to listen to any of that. I was sitting at the side of the big table and I could watch Scarface. The changing expression of his handsome face was eloquent of what was going on at that table; his hungry gaze at Inez; his sullenness and the obstinate shaking of his head. Once I heard him say with a kind of hard despair:

"This does no good. I can't lead your life. We've got to cut it out."

Across the room near the head of the stairs there was a telephone booth. While the staff were at dinner it was connected with the exchange through the switchboard in the hall below. The door of the booth stood open. When we had been in the place for ten minutes or so the bell rang. The sound caused my heart to beat fast. Scarface immediately got up.

"That will be for me," he said. "The boss always calls up at this hour. Wait for me."

But Inez arose, too. "You will be talking some time," she said; "and Emily and I really must go."

His face fell. For the moment he forgot all about his telephone call. "But I'll see you again?" he said breathlessly.

"I'll call you up to-morrow," said Inez. "We'll talk about it then."

He went into the telephone booth while Inez and I said good-bye to the others. Chiglick got up to accompany us—none too willingly, because his dinner had just been brought.

"Oh, that isn't necessary," said Inez. "Fritz is in the yard to open the gate for us and all we have to do in the alley is to open the door into the restaurant and walk in."

So Chiglick, relieved, sat down to his dinner and Inez and I went downstairs alone. At the foot she whispered:

"Listen in at the switchboard. I'll go back and keep them engaged with some excuse. If you hear me laugh leave the board quickly."

By this time my heart was beating like a trip hammer and my hands were trembling so that I could scarcely pick up the headpiece. I could not slip it over my head because of the necessity of keeping one ear open for a possible signal from my mistress. I held one of the receivers to my ear and let the other hang. When I heard Touchon's voice over the wire it turned me a little giddy. Fortunately there was a pad and pencil lying on the switchboard, and I automatically started to take down what I heard. The familiar act of writing shorthand steadied my nerves.

When I started to take down my notes Touchon was saying: "... Number — East Sixty-third Street. It's an old, high-stoop dwelling that has been altered into an English basement and converted into two duplex apartments. Our friend occupies the two lower floors."

"I get you," said Scarface.

"There's only the one entrance," Touchon went on, "and I have a key to it. I will mail it to you to-night to the address you know of, together with floor plans. The party must be pulled off on Monday night. That will give you forty-eight hours to get ready for it. On that night our friend and her secretary are attending the Franklin Theatre to see the first

performance of 'What's in a Name?' They will get home about eleven-fifteen—or later if they go to supper." Touchon hesitated. "Er ... there's a tocsin in the hall just inside the entrance door," he added. He was referring to our burglar alarm, of course. Scarface got it, for I heard a dry chuckle from his end of the wire.

"It is turned on every night after all are in the house," Touchon went on, "so you must pay your call before that. I recommend the hour of half-past ten. The servants will then be in bed. Their rooms are on the top floor, three flights up, so they will not interfere with your tête-à-tête with the mistress. You can make yourself comfortable in the house until they get home. I'm sure I need say no more. The secretary sleeps on a cot bed in her mistress's room. All this will be shown on the plan.... You will be leaving them both a little gift."

Touchon spoke this last sentence in a purr of infinite evil suggestiveness and a strong shudder went through my frame. I was listening to the plotting of my own murder!

A silence followed, then Touchon asked sharply: "Do you get me?"

"Sure, I get you perfectly," answered Scarface in a drawling voice that was at once lazy and hard.

"Well, then?"

"I'm sorry, boss," drawled Scarface, "but I can't attend this party. It would have to be pulled off in some other style."

At hearing this my heart leaped with pleasure. So after all Scarface had a good heart, or else it had been softened by his passion for Inez. However, my pleasure was not long-lived, as you will see.

"I am the one to decide how it shall be pulled off," said Touchon angrily. "What's the matter with you? Have you lost your nerve?"

"I reckon not," drawled Scarface.

"Maybe your feelings have changed toward our friend?"

"Not at all," said Scarface coolly, "she's just as much my friend as ever she was, and you know how much that is. I think she ought to get just what you propose to hand her.... But this kind of bedroom party don't suit my style, that's all. I know what I can do. I couldn't carry this thing through—er—*à la sang-froid*, as the French would say." (I supposed that he meant "in cold blood.")

"You've got to do it," said Touchon haughtily. "You've had your orders."

There was a brief silence, then Scarface's voice came over the wire hard as flint, yet with a regretful sound in it: "Boss, you've been a good friend to me and I hate to say this. You've never taken that tone to me, and it don't go down, see? The only answer to that is, I'm damned if I will!"

There was a longer silence here. I could picture Touchon struggling with his rage and Scarface coolly standing by his guns. Truly, the irresistible Touchon was coming up against a series of immovable objects to-day; one could almost have felt sorry for him. Finally the purring voice sounded over the wire again and I knew that he had backed down—as of course he had to.

"Well, can you get somebody to take your place at the party?"

"Sure!" said Scarface cheerfully—it was like a dash of cold water on me. "There's a fellow in my crowd down here. The coolest hand in New York. Just the man!" (I knew by intuition that he was referring to Chiglick.) "He gets five hundred dollars for an engagement, a thousand for two, of course."

"Very well," said Touchon coolly; "I will send you the money with the other things. Pay him twenty per cent, in advance and the balance ... afterward. But do not meet him afterward, of course. We will soon know from outside sources if he has given an artistic performance. Arrange with him in advance some place where you can send the balance

of his pay. See that he is carefully instructed in his part. It is nothing to me, of course, if anything in the house sticks to his fingers, but you had better warn him if it does he will only be putting a rope around his neck—and perhaps yours, too."

"I will take care of that," said Scarface drily.

"This show is bound to create quite a furore in town," Touchon went on—and I could see the cruel grin on his face, "I know you would hate to be let in for anything of that sort, and I suggest that you take a little trip down to Venezuela to attend to some business for me until the applause dies down."

"Suits me," said Scarface.

"We will have to have a meeting before you go," said Touchon, "so that I can instruct you in what you have to do down there and turn over the necessary funds to you. Suppose you meet me at two o'clock Monday night—or, to be exact, Tuesday morning. By that time we will know if your friend's show has got over—I admit the possibility of a doubt to you, of course, but you must take the line with him that *he cannot fail!*"—there was an ugly suggestion in Touchon's manner of saying this. "You and I know," he coolly concluded, "that we cannot let him fail and get away with it."

"I get you," said Scarface grimly.

"Very well," said Touchon; "meet me at..."

At this moment I heard Inez's silvery laugh overhead. I hastily put down the headpiece and lifted the switch. Squeezing up my notes in my hand, I made my way to the foot of the stairs, composing my face as best I could. I was already standing there looking up impatiently, when Inez and Monk appeared at the top.

"Did you think I was lost, Emily?" she asked gaily.

"Well, I wondered..." I said, leaving the sentence in the air.

"I forgot to tell the crowd," she said, "that Dad wanted a group picture as a souvenir of the party last night. We were discussing where we would have it taken ... Monk has finished eating," she went on. "He is going to see us through the alley."

She kept up a rattle of talk with him in order to distract his attention from my strained face.

When we were safe in a taxi she asked eagerly: "Did you get the essential part of it? I gave you as much time as I dared."

"Oh, heavens, yes!" I stuttered, beginning to tremble at the mere recollection.

She put her hand over mine and I told her what I had heard. She listened with a smile and a hard, bright light in her eyes.

"Just at the moment when Touchon was making an appointment to meet Scarface," I concluded, "you gave me the signal."

"That doesn't signify," she said coolly. "If Scarface ever goes to that rendezvous it will mean that we have failed."

"It's all a blind, anyway," I said. "I mean the part about sending Scarface to Venezuela. Touchon's voice was simply purring with falsity then. If Scarface does go to keep that appointment he will never leave the spot alive."

"Of course not," said Mme. Storey, thinking about something else. Her mind was already leaping ahead to checkmate Touchon.

"How on earth could Touchon have got a key to your house?" I said.

"That's easy," she returned. "How often have I handed him the key at night to open the door for us? Perfectly simple

for him to palm a piece of wax and take an impression."

"Then why did you let him have the key?" I said, aggrieved.

"He held out his hand for it," she said with a shrug. "To have refused so natural an act would instantly have aroused his suspicions.... One can always change the lock on one's door."

"Then change it at once!" I begged her. "To-night ... before we go to bed."

But she shook her head, smiling. "It is essential that Chiglick—if it is Chiglick, should get in on Monday night when he tries his key."

I groaned.

"But why not have a couple of men waiting inside to entertain him?" she said consolingly.

31.

On the following afternoon, Sunday, Mme. Storey called up Scarface at the club. The moment he heard her voice over the wire he said:

"I must see you again!"

"Now who's taking water?" said the supposed Inez teasingly.

"I can't help it," he said. "This is really the last time. I'm leaving the country."

"Oh!" she said with a drop in her voice. She gave his hungry heart at least that crumb of comfort. "Shall I come down there?" she asked.

"No," he said sullenly. "The fact is the gang down here has heard me swear off seeing you any more and I'm ashamed they should know how weak I am. Let me meet you somewhere else.... By daylight," he added wistfully. "I have never seen you by daylight."

This was not exactly to be desired. "I'm afraid that can't be managed to-day," she said. "I have some people coming here to tea and they are certain to stay until dark. If you are going to stay around the club I'll call you up the moment they go and you can come up here."

"I have to be in the club at six-thirty to receive a telephone call," he said.

"Well, why not come up here as soon as you have finished talking? I can't ask you to dinner to-night because we are going out. But I could talk to you between seven and half past. The only difficulty is, Dad would expect Emily to be present at our talk. He considers you rather dangerous to daughters."

"He needn't be afraid," said Scarface gloomily. "You are safe from me.... I can put up with Emily if I have to. I'll come."

"All right. But wait until you get another call from me."

We then called up Mr. Van Benthuisen, who very willingly consented to have "Inez" receive Scarface in his house as planned.

Just as we were setting out from the house Mme. Storey dropped a neat little .32 automatic of blued steel in her handbag. I had seen her load it carefully with three blanks and two loaded shells. She did not then tell me what it was to be used for. Outside we found that our fat spy had given place to-day to one of a saturnine complexion, a more resolute-looking customer. However, we succeeded in shaking him in the subway by darting across the crowded platform of Grand Central from one train to another. We then proceeded to the Madagascar, where we had kept our room, suspecting that we would need it again to-day. There we changed our make-up and our clothes and taxied to the Van Benthuyzen mansion.

Mr. Van Benthuyzen introduced us to Mrs. Endicott, his housekeeper, a discreet woman who was to be taken into the secret. As we were talking together in the hall, Mme. Storey said, without thinking of the effect it would create:

"Is there any place in the house where I could shoot off a pistol without doing any damage?"

The multimillionaire's vast body heaved in a series of silent chuckles. "God bless my soul!" he said in pretended dismay. "What next!" He turned to the horrified housekeeper with an innocent air. "Mrs. Endicott, is there any place where she can indulge in a little target practice?"

"Well, there's—there's the cellar," stammered the housekeeper.

"Show her the way to it," said Mr. Van Benthuyzen. As we walked away he called after us: "I beg of you to spare my boiler. That's all."

It appeared that the engineer would be off duty during the time Scarface was in the house and there would be no one in the cellar. When we returned upstairs Mme. Storey suggested that if Mr. Van Benthuyzen and the housekeeper heard the shots, it would be quite in keeping for them to rush to the spot to inquire.

Scarface came. He and Inez sat on a vis-à-vis in one of the vast drawing rooms while I made believe to busy myself with a book near by. I read the same lines over and over without the slightest comprehension of the sense. Scarface showed no trace of awkwardness in his magnificent surroundings. I wondered what his beginnings had been. We never knew. He was gazing at Inez as if he could devour her. She avoided meeting his glance.

"I'm leaving the country to-morrow night," he said harshly. "I don't know for how long. At any rate, I'll never see you again. I'll manage to cure myself when I'm away."

"Need you curse me as you go?" she murmured.

"Oh, it's not your fault, of course," he said, looking away. "But you've done things to me. I can't help resenting it."

"You'll get over it," said Inez.

"Sure I will," he said bitterly; "but it don't help any to be told that now."

There was a silence.

"There's one thing I want to tell you," he went on in his harsh, downright voice. He spoke low, but in the stillness of the big room I could hear every word. "I'm not going to harm that woman we were talking about."

"I'm glad of that," murmured Inez.

"Not that it matters really," he said with a scornful lip, "because if she is put out I shall certainly be privy to it. But I don't mean to do it myself, if that is any good to you."

"It is, rather." She was silent, looking down at her hands.

"I've changed my mind about those things," she presently went on. "It was a mistake for me to try to interfere in your life. Each one of us has got to dree his ain weird. You had a better notion. You never tried to influence me. The thing

we've all got to do is to hew straight to our own line."

"I suppose so," said Scarface indifferently. "Not much use talking about it."

"The only thing I dislike," said Inez, "is to see you working for hire." I perceived that she had some special reason for saying this.

"Oh, that's what we all have to do, one way or another," said Scarface, shrugging.

"Not all," she said. "A few men run their own show. You are strong enough."

The suggestion made him uneasy. "Well, my boss and I will soon be through with each other," he said, seeking to turn it off.

"Are you going to see Touchon before you leave?" asked Inez unexpectedly. (So that was what she was after!)

Scarface scowled blackly. "No," he said sullenly. "The boss told me to leave him alone until we had concluded our business."

"Always the boss!" said Inez with delicate scorn. "The other was your own private affair. If you are going away for an indefinite time your resolution will gradually weaken. You'll end by submitting to the injury."

"Are you urging me to get Touchon?" he asked with a glance of strong surprise.

"Yes," she said boldly. "You owe it to yourself... Besides, Touchon richly deserves it. I've been learning something about him. He preys upon women under pretense of treating them with his psycho-synthesis. He blackmails them."

"I knew nothing about that," said Scarface indifferently. Touchon's sins against others left him cold.

"Well, it's true," said Inez. "A friend of mine is among his victims. She doesn't know that she is being fleeced, poor thing." She cunningly pressed against his sore place. "You haven't spoken of your pal lately. That was such an appealing nickname that he had ... Blondy."

Scarface rose abruptly and walked away. "Please cut that out!" he said harshly. "It makes me see red!"

"Nobody but a nice lad would ever be called that," murmured Inez.

He faced around. "What are you trying to do?" he said. "Drive me wild?"

She shrugged.

His mood changed abruptly. He came to a stand, staring at the rug under his feet. "I might do it yet!" he muttered. "After midnight to-morrow I'll be released from my promise.... If I could reach him at that hour!"

"That ought not to be difficult for one like you," she said.

He returned to her. "Who is this friend of yours who knows Touchon?" he demanded.

"Mrs. George J. Julian," said Inez. "I expect you have heard of her."

"Oh, her name is in the papers often enough.... Is she familiar with his place?"

"She ought to be. She goes there nearly every day."

"Do you think you could get from her, without her guessing what it was to be used for, a rough plan of his place, to give me an idea how to get in; how to get around inside; how to get out again?"

A hint of demureness appeared in Inez's smile. She had hooked her fish! "I'm sure I could get it for you," she answered quickly. "I'll undertake to have it in your hands sometime to-morrow."

"And perhaps you can find out at the same time what Touchon's movements will be to-morrow night," said Scarface. "That would be a help."

"I'll try to find that out, too."

Scarface sat down facing her again. There was a bright savage light in his eyes now—the same look that had been there the first time I saw him. "I could go away almost happily if *that* was done!" he said.

"Have you got the wherewithal to do it?" asked Inez.

"Sure!" he said with the utmost coolness. "I am never without that." From his hip pocket he fished out an ugly, gleaming .38 automatic.

"It's too big," said Inez, as cool as he. "A sharp eye could detect that in your pocket."

"So much the better," retorted Scarface with his hard smile. "It will make the owner of the eye more polite.... In the final outcome it's my best friend," he went on, regarding it with a kind of derisive affection. "It will not fail me.... It will be the last thing on earth that I look at!"

As the implications of this speech stole upon me all the blood around my heart seemed to turn cold. He was so handsome; so quick with life!

Inez changed colour, too, and a sharp little cry of pain was forced from her: "Oh!" She quickly recovered herself. "Many people must know that gun," she said.

"I reckon so," said Scarface carelessly. "I don't make any effort to conceal it."

"It is dangerous," she said earnestly. "With this new science—what do they call it? ballistics—they can trace the bullet right back to the gun that fired it.... Swap with me," she said persuasively.

Scarface laughed outright. "Well!" he said, "that's the first time a woman ever asked me that!" He shook his head. "I wouldn't feel at home with a new gun."

"But you can try it out first," she said eagerly. "*Please* swap with me. If I'm not going to see you any more I'd love to have something of yours to keep."

Scarface's eyes brooded on her burningly. "Huh!" he said with torment-curling lip. "That would be a funny love token; a gun!"

Inez held his glance steadily. "Not funny at all," she said. "Love and death are the only real things."

His eyes blazed up. "Ah! you would be a woman worth having!" he said. "By God! I wish ... I wish things had been different! ..." He turned away. "Sure, I'll swap guns with you," he added in an ordinary voice. "If yours will shoot straight."

Inez ran out of the room to fetch it.

Scarface cast a grim eye in my direction. "Interesting book?" he asked.

I closed it with a snap. "Of course I'm only stalling," I admitted. "But it's not my fault if I'm obliged to listen."

"It doesn't matter," he said with a bitter note of laughter. "You're a good scout, Em."

My heart ached over him. I felt ages older than he.

Inez came back with the gun in her hand. "It's not as big as yours," she said with a pretty anxiety, "but it's just as effective."

"Sure, if you put the bullet in the right place," said Scarface carelessly.

He took it, examined it with the eye of an expert, and was about to open it when Inez adroitly repossessed herself of it. "Come on down cellar and try it," she said eagerly. "The walls are thick. Nobody will know."

"Going down cellar" in a mansion like that is not so simple as it sounds. However, Inez had been shown the way. We passed through several corridors, crossed a sort of service hall without meeting anybody, and finally found the stairs. They led us down into a wide, low, whitewashed place floored with cement. It was spotlessly neat. Inez had turned a switch at the head of the stairs which flooded the cellar with light.

The house was supported on heavy brick piers. With a piece of coal Inez made a cross mark on one of them and stepping off fifteen paces, took aim and fired. The shot crashed under the vaulted roof. Her bullet flattened itself not exactly on the cross mark, but very close to it.

"Good shooting," said Scarface laconically. He took the gun and, scarcely seeming to trouble to aim, fired. The lead pellet impinged squarely on top of the first one.

"Marvellous!" cried Inez.

"The gun's all right," said Scarface carelessly.

"So is the gunner," she said admiringly.

She took the gun again to replace the spent shells, keeping up a running fire of words to distract his attention. "My father gave me this gun. He believes that every woman should know how to shoot. I used to practise shooting in the yard, but the neighbours complained. Then Dad built us a regular shooting gallery at our country house." Scarface could see her replacing the two shells, but so cunningly did she manipulate the gun that he did not see they were blanks, like the three shells already in the magazine. She handed it over to him.

"Hereafter its name is Inez Van B.," he said, pocketing it.

At the head of the stairs we met the portly millionaire rushing toward the spot with the pale-faced housekeeper in his wake. "Good God, Inez! What is the matter?" he cried.

"Why, nothing, Dad," she said, wide-eyed, "we were just trying my gun down cellar. We didn't hurt anything."

"Humph! ... Ha! ... Grr!" he grumbled. "You might at least let somebody know when you're going to unlimber your artillery."

32.

I omitted to state that Jacmer Touchon had been calling up Mme. Storey at intervals during this Sunday. I marvelled at his effrontery, but my employer was not surprised. "He would," she said drily. Grace had been instructed to tell him that the ladies were out. However, when he called up after our return from Mr. Van Benthuyzen's, Mme. Storey said she would speak to him. When she returned from the 'phone she said he had asked very humbly if he might see her. She had told him to call after dinner.

"Must we submit to it?" I said involuntarily. "What's the use now?"

"He has a very good reason for calling," she said blandly. "He wishes to lull us into security. And we for our part must appear to be lulled. We don't want him to change his plans now."

When the bell rang that announced his coming I began to tremble inwardly. To save my life I could not have helped it. Mme. Storey, seeing the signs of it in my face, became a little impatient.

"Silly Bella!" she said.

"But the man means to murder us!" I said.

"Not to-night," she said.

I resented what seemed to me such an unnatural calmness. "My flesh crawls when he comes near as if he were a gigantic spider!" I cried.

"Well, don't excite yourself with poetic images," she said with a provoking smile. "I hope it is the last time you will have to put up with him. Obviously you must remain in the room to forestall a scene like yesterday's."

There was nothing fearsome in Touchon's outer aspect, of course. On the contrary, when he entered Mme. Storey's charming 1850 drawing room, handsome, florid, perfectly turned out, anybody would have said that he adorned the room. His squared shoulders, his air of authority, suggested a pillar of society rather than a bloody-minded criminal. True, he had a humble and contrite look, but it was the look of a generous man who expects to make full amends and be forgiven. Gone was the old devilish mockery. He seemed genuinely chastened. He even apologized to me.

"Ah, Bella, if you knew what torments I have been through since yesterday morning, you would not be so stiff with me, my dear."

It was all a sham. Deep in the friendly, appealing eyes glittered a core of hatred and my flesh crawled at him still. They say that hatred endows one with a kind of clairvoyance and I believe it is true. I understood Touchon pretty well by this time. I could see that he was obtaining a strange, perverse pleasure in thus seeming to wallow in remorse, while secretly he gloated over the fact that we would be dead within thirty hours. What a horror! At the same time I reflected that he could probably see into me, too, and I was careful to keep my eyes down.

"I have come to beg forgiveness," he said to Mme. Storey, spreading out his hands. "I lost my head completely yesterday. Will I ever be able to live it down with you?"

My employer disdained to play any part with him to-night. She was merely wary and courteous. "I don't feel that I have anything to forgive you," she said good-humouredly; "you did me no injury."

This was a blow to his vanity and he visibly winced under it. However, with his infernal cleverness he instantly sought to turn it to his advantage. "Oh, that is worse than your anger would be!" he said in well-simulated dismay. "While there is anger there is hope. Please be angry with me!"

Mme. Storey merely shrugged.

He saw that he was taking the wrong line and immediately changed it. While he made his eyes imploring there was still a suggestion of sharpness in his glance. It was the perfection of acting. A great actor, of course, must keep all his wits about him even when he appears to be abandoning himself to emotion. "But I am not to be forbidden your presence?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, no," she said promptly. "You are a most entertaining companion. Why should I deprive myself of that pleasure?"

She baffled him. He cast down his eyes and rubbed his lip.

Mme. Storey did not wish to baffle him, so she added in an impulsive manner: "Oh, let's forget about it. I hate these

'situations.' I am perfectly willing to go on with you as we were before so long as you do not..." She concluded with a shrug.

"Oh, you can depend upon that," he said very earnestly. "Of course it is too much to expect that you will immediately let down your guard with me. But if you will only give me time you will see that I have mastered myself!"

My employer smiled in a friendly way and so the grim comedy went on. Neither completely deceived the other, of course, but just the same we gained our point, for Touchon never suspected that we apprehended danger at his hands.

Mme. Storey, as she often did at home, had dressed herself for the evening in a gown which, while not slavishly following the fashion of that time, still suggested the quaint period of her drawing room. She also had a large embroidery frame for crewel work that she used to toy with for no reason, I suspected, except that it was in the picture. At least the work upon the frame had progressed very little during all the time I had known her. Bringing it out now she gravely busied herself in front of the fire with her bright-coloured worsteds. The fact that she had occupation for her hands gave her a considerable advantage in her game with Touchon and he perceived it.

"Crewel work scarcely seems to suit your character," he said with the faintest hint of a sneer.

"Oh, I am a many-sided woman!" she said provokingly.

A fresh skein of worsted was required that had to be rolled in a ball before it could be used. Mme. Storey made Touchon hold it for her. Never will I forget the picture of the masterful Touchon, sitting in that most abject of positions handcuffed in a skein of wool. Mme. Storey, enjoying the joke, rolled it with the greatest deliberation. Touchon enjoyed it, too, in his way. His eyes glittered with that dark pleasure that I have spoken of. He was thinking: "To-night you queen it over me, my lady; to-morrow night you will be dead in your bed!"

Later Touchon said: "What are you and Bella doing to-morrow?"

"The usual thing," said Mme. Storey. "We will spend the day at the office."

"Must you?" he asked.

"What do you propose?" she countered.

"I wondered if you would allow me to drive you over to the Erie basin to look at the yacht *Maraquipe*."

Mme. Storey raised her palm. "That's out," she said in a tone he could not possibly mistake.

"Oh, I know, the trip," he said humbly; "but the yacht is so beautiful I thought it would give you pleasure anyway to go over her."

"That's just it," she said. "What's the use of subjecting myself to the temptation if I can't go?"

He let the subject drop. Presently he said: "Morris Duchatel is giving a recital at the Town Hall to-morrow afternoon. They say he is top hole."

"Concert tenors give me a pain," said Mme. Storey. "Especially the ones with fancy names."

He tried yet once again. "We have never been to tea at the Ribblesdale," he said. "It's the place of the moment. How about to-morrow afternoon?"

"Oh, take us some afternoon later in the week," said Mme. Storey with a clear brow. "To-morrow I have to be home early to dress."

I wondered at Touchon's persistence until I reflected that he would probably consider it advantageous, in view of what was to happen later, if he had been seen publicly with Mme. Storey on that last afternoon.

She appreciated this perfectly, of course. Presently she said slyly: "How about to-morrow night?" She knew that nothing would tempt Touchon to accompany us in the evening. "Bella and I are going to the first night of 'What's in a Name?' We could get an extra seat if you'd care to come."

"I'm so sorry," said Touchon. "I'm booked for a dinner of the Psychologists' Association to-morrow. Hideous bore."

"What time will you get away?"

"Not before midnight. I'm supposed to be one of the features of the show."

It was for a similar reason, no doubt, that Touchon asked for a glass of water by and by. Mme. Storey rang for Grace. Touchon did not perform the slightest act without calculating its effect. He wished Grace to be able to testify later that he had been received in the house to-night on a footing of intimate friendship. While Grace was in the room he fairly sparkled with amiability and good will.

When he finally got up to go a curious stillness came over him. I mean a psychical stillness, for of course the physical man continued to talk and gesticulate as usual. His eyes were fixed and glittering. He held Mme. Storey's hand longer than was necessary, drinking in her features with an extraordinary greediness. Her face was averted. Then the same to me. You would have said he loved me then. I was not deceived. He was bidding us a final farewell, you see. He was thinking: "To-morrow you will be dead! Let me fix your faces in my mind forever to feed my hate!" A poisonous emanation seemed to come from him that turned me giddy. When he took my hand such a wave of repulsion overwhelmed me that I thought I should faint. And all the time he was smiling, still expressing his contrition for what had happened yesterday, making a date to take us to tea on Tuesday afternoon!

33.

When we started out for the office next morning we discovered that the watch upon our movements had been removed. Neither the fat sleuth nor his saturnine successor was in evidence. We walked through the empty street to Park Avenue and on through the long block to Fifth, and there was no one behind us. Later we satisfied ourselves from the office windows that there was no watch upon our door.

"It is natural enough," said Mme. Storey, smoking reflectively. "Touchon does not want the detective agency drawn into the investigation that would follow upon our murder." It made me shiver to hear her speak of this event in such a matter-of-fact way. "He knows," she went on, "that the sleuths will never volunteer the information that they have been watching us for days past. It would put the agency in too bad a light, especially if they were unable to tell the police who had employed them. Touchon has called them off. Let us be thankful that our hands are freed for this day at least."

My employer would not see Scarface again. A meeting might easily have been arranged after dark but she said that good-byes were too harrowing to the feelings and there was no doubt from her expression but that she meant it. Instead, I was sent to meet Scarface in the concourse of the Pennsylvania terminal while it was still light.

"Emily's hair is not dyed," said Mme. Storey, "nor does she make up to look younger than she is. You will be safe from detection."

Of that meeting I need say little. Scarface was scarcely polite. Well, I did not blame him. His disappointment when I appeared alone was bitter. I gave him the plan of Touchon's apartment, calling his attention to the ease with which he could escape through the dining-room window; and I told him that Touchon would get home from the psychologists' dinner about midnight. Knowing his habits as we did, Mme. Storey and I had no doubt but that Touchon would go home and put himself to bed for the benefit of the servants before he started out to keep his later appointment with Scarface.

"I'll be there when he gets home," said Scarface grimly.

On the other hand, I satisfied myself from my observation of Scarface's manner that he had not looked inside the gun Inez had given him. From his talk I gathered that there had been no change in the night's arrangements.

Mme. Storey and I dined at home alone. My employer, bland and composed, ate with an excellent appetite, but my reserves were wearing thin. I could feel myself becoming waspish. I was not intended for a life of excitement.

We drove to the theatre at the usual hour in Mme. Storey's own car. Same old first-night gang, half of them coming to be seen, the other half coming to see them, and the play a secondary consideration altogether. Much self-important parading up and down the aisles and pretentious talk in the foyer. The play was an insignificant comedy. Mme. Storey followed it with attention and laughed in what I supposed were the right places; but I was on pins and needles, longing and dreading in equal degrees for the performance to end. As yet I did not clearly understand Mme. Storey's plan, though my instructions were explicit enough. It is always useless to ask her to explain herself in advance. She only smiles provokingly.

The end came at last, as all ends must, and we drove home. Then the real drama of that unforgettable night began. From in front the house was completely dark but in the dining room we found little Chiglick, handcuffed, seated in a chair and imperturbably smoking a cigarette. Basil Thorne and another man of Mme. Storey's called Stephens were watching him. A .38 revolver lay on the table.

"He gave us no trouble," said Basil. "Walked right into our arms."

As they were both nearly double the size of Chiglick this could almost have gone without saying.

"We took that from him," said Basil, nodding toward the gun.

I could see the bullets in the visible chambers, and I shuddered. One of those bullets had been intended for me!

When we came in Chiglick cast a hard, walled glance in our direction through half-closed eyes. But he half recognized us and his eyes opened suddenly. When Mme. Storey smiled at him, he knew her. For once the little desperado was shocked out of his impassivity. He leaped out of his chair—then dropped weakly back into it. The cigarette slipped through his fingers.

"Inez!" he gasped. "*You!* ... Inez! ..."

"No, Rosika, really," said Mme. Storey, lighting a cigarette.

The little gangster quickly recovered himself. Stoicism was his religion and he was ashamed of having lost it. Picking up the cigarette with his manacled hands, he stuck it flippantly in the corner of his mouth. He cunningly applied himself to flattering my employer.

"Well, you are some sleuth," he said. "I've got to hand it to you. If I had to be pinched I'm glad it was you done it."

Mme. Storey smiled.

After all, Chiglick was only human. "Does this mean the chair for me?" he asked. His attempted swagger only made him look boyish and piteous.

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that," said Mme. Storey.

He looked at her doubtfully, and from her to the gun on the table.

"Yes, I know what you came here for," said Mme. Storey, "but a miss is as good as a mile. You are not my mark."

"Is it Scarface?" he asked eagerly.

"No, it's not Scarface, either."

"Then it's Scarface's boss," he said. "And you'll get him, too."

Mme. Storey blew a cloud of smoke and surveyed the prisoner through it. "Chiglick," she said, "it's very wrong of me but I rather like you."

"It's mutual," said Chiglick with an insinuating grin.

Mme. Storey refused to be drawn. "But there isn't much I can do for you—because of that," she went on, indicating the gun. "I am bound to uphold law and order. I can't let a gunman loose on the community. If I could persuade you to give it up..."

"If you was to give me a job," said Chiglick, glancing at her out of the corners of his eyes, like a schoolboy begging a favour that he expects to have refused, "then I could go straight. I could work for you without dyin' of dry rot."

"Well, I might," said Mme. Storey. "We'll talk it over another time. Now I've got work to do.... You will come with us, now, Stephens. Bring the handcuffs."

Basil's face fell.

"I'm sorry I can't take you, Basil," she said. "It's because Scarface knows you.... As soon as we are out of the house you can turn this man over to the police. All you need charge him with for the present is unlawful entry."

There was to be no change of character to-night. We tidied up before the mirror and we were ready. We did not believe we were being followed; but there was always that possibility. It was for this reason we had driven home from the theatre and dismissed Mme. Storey's car for the night. There was even a chance that Scarface himself might be watching the house in order to satisfy himself that Chiglick was on his job. Therefore we went out the back way, taking Stephens with us. This Stephens was a nice young Englishman, very quiet and dependable.

Crider was waiting for us in Sixty-second Street with his taxi. When we drew up before the Westmoreland my heart was thumping so I thought my companions must hear it. Crider was left watching from a good vantage point outside. His particular job was to make sure that Touchon did not escape in case there was a slip-up in our plans. If Touchon left the house after having entered it, Crider was to seize him and hang onto him whatever might betide. Mme. Storey and I were well known of course to the hall servants in the Westmoreland. They saw nothing out of the way in this late call. The captain remarked pleasantly:

"Dr. Touchon has not yet come home, Madame."

"We'll wait for him," she said carelessly. "Oh, by the way," she added as with an afterthought, "don't mention to him that we are waiting." She glanced toward Stephens. "I have a little surprise for him."

Mme. Storey's smile has a compelling quality. The attendant nodded complaisantly. There was not the slightest danger of his disregarding her wish.

It was now about twenty minutes to twelve. Boker, Touchon's old servant, opened the door of the apartment to us, clad in his trousers and a dressing gown. I have already spoke of this gentle old soul. Mme. Storey and I had a real affection for him. He was very much embarrassed to be caught by ladies in such a guise, but we were privileged visitors, of course; he opened the door wide to us.

"My master will not be home until twelve o'clock," he said.

"Well, it is almost that," said Mme. Storey. "We'll wait."

We were admitted into a little, many-sided foyer with doors all around. These admitted to music room, drawing room, library, dining room, and a corridor that led to the rear rooms of the apartment. The door immediately facing the entrance door was that of the library. Boker turned on the lights and we walked in there. The old man was for retiring then but Mme. Storey detained him.

"I want to speak to you a moment, Boker."

"Allow me to dress, Madam."

"Oh, that's not necessary," she said in her large way.

Clutching his gown around him, the old man came into the room with a wondering, innocent air. I hated this part of our task.

"Boker," said my mistress gravely, "you know what my business is?"

"Why yes, Madam, somewhat."

"I am a psychologist like your master, but I am also frequently engaged in criminal investigations."

"I know," he said, nodding his head. "I read the papers."

"I am sorry to say," said Mme. Storey, "that I have come to take your master into custody."

In this she was stretching the truth a little but the old man was too simple to comprehend it. He staggered back. He was pale enough at all times but he became paler still. "What—what," he stammered. "What for?"

"Murder," said Mme. Storey.

He cried out sharply as if someone had hurt him. "Oh! ... Oh! ... I know nothing about it!"

"Of course you don't," she said kindly. "Much has gone on here that you know nothing about. He used your gentle and innocent personality to give a colour of respectability to his establishment."

"But how do I know?" he gasped.

"True," she said, "you have only my word for it. However, I must know whether or not you are going to assist me."

"You are a sweet lady," cried the distracted old man, "and a clever lady! But he has always been a good master to me, too. I must stick by him, mustn't I?"

"That's what I expected you to say," she said regretfully. "You deserve a better master.... But you see I must secure you."

The old man, with a glance of terror at us, turned for the door. Stephens, prepared for such a move, flung an arm around him and clapped his free hand over Boker's mouth, to still the inevitable cry. Boker went limp at once. He was too much terrified to struggle. We whipped off his dressing gown; handcuffed his wrists and ankles, and gagged him with a handkerchief. "Be gentle with him!" adjured Mme. Storey. Stephens picked up the frail figure bodily and, carrying him to the extreme rear of the apartment, laid him on his own bed and shut the door of his room.

Stephens had not much more than returned to the library when the door bell sounded.

"That will be Scarface," said Mme. Storey coolly. "Take off your coat, Stephens; also your collar and tie. Drop them behind something.... There is no hurry. You must not be too quick to open the door.... Now put on the dressing gown and rumple up your hair. Good! Now you can open the door. Rejoin us in this room afterward." She switched off the lights in the library.

Waiting in the darkened room we heard Stephens cross the foyer and open the front door. We heard Scarface's cool, firm voice ask:

"Is Dr. Touchon at home?"

"No," said Stephens.

"Are you expecting him soon?"

"Well, I scarcely know," said Stephens. His manner of slight suspicion was very well done.

"I am William Touchon of Cincinnati," said Scarface coolly; "his nephew. Perhaps you have heard him speak of me?"

"I can't say I have," said Stephens woodenly. "Was he expecting you to-night?"

"No," said Scarface. "This was an unexpected trip but I thought I ought to call, late as it is, because I am sailing to-morrow."

Stephens was not going to make it too difficult for him to enter, of course. He appeared to unbend. "Come in, Mr. Touchon," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am expecting my master very shortly. Please wait in the drawing room."

Stephens switched on the lights in the big room and Scarface followed him in there. We heard Stephens say politely: "Will you look at a magazine while you are waiting?"

"Thanks," said Scarface.

Stephens then left the room and allowed his footsteps to be heard dying away down the corridor. Presently he came softly back through the dining room and rejoined us.

Then we set ourselves to wait for Touchon. I had experienced so many tremors of agitation this night it seemed as if I could bear no more, yet the worst was all before me. At this moment I was so completely terrified that a desperate calmness descended on me. It has happened before. It is the courage of the weak that comes at a crisis, and I am profoundly grateful for it. I ceased to think about my fears. I became almost as calm as Mme. Storey.

The library where we were adjoined the drawing room where Scarface waited. There was a wide opening between with portières now pulled all the way across. At our backs there was a similar opening into the dining room. I watched Scarface through a tiny crack between the portière and the door frame. He was sitting not far from me with the magazine in his hands. His face was pale and fixed, with the triangular furrow deeply etched in his forehead. A bona-fide servant would never have admitted a caller in the middle of the night whose face bore such an expression. It was like a beautiful tragic mask.

He flung the magazine on a little table and stood up, looking about him coolly and sharply. The unshaded windows attracted his attention, and he went from one to another of them, pulling down the blinds. As a matter of fact, though the apartment was on the ground floor it was nevertheless too high for one to see into the rooms from the sidewalk, as we had discovered early in the game. But Scarface did not know that. Afterward he pulled out the plan of the apartment and stood in the middle of the room studying it and glancing about to get his bearings. He looked into the music room which adjoined the drawing room on the front; then he came toward the room where we were hidden.

We softly retreated through the dining room and down the corridor toward the rear of the apartment. Scarface did not turn on the lights in the other rooms but he must have had a pocket torch, for we caught the reflection of its flash. We heard him unfasten the window in the dining room which gave on the little balcony overhanging the sidewalk. This was to provide his means of escape later. He did not venture down the corridor, evidently fearing to run into the servant.

He returned to the drawing room and we three stole back into the library. Unluckily Scarface had drawn the portières all the way back in order to guard against a surprise from that side, or else to facilitate his getaway. There was still plenty of room to conceal ourselves around the corner of the opening, but the room was too bright; we could not watch Scarface and there was too great a danger that he might surprise us hidden there. We remained in the dining room unable to tell just what he was doing. These were the hardest moments of all to bear. Finally I breathed in Mme. Storey's ear:

"He didn't touch the portières into the music room. If we crossed the foyer we could watch him from in there."

"You go," she said. "Stephens and I must stay here in case one of them should attempt to escape through the dining-room window."

My factitious courage threatened to fail me at the idea of being cut off from my companions, but since I had proposed the plan I could not very well back out. I pressed my employer's hand and stole into the foyer. When I was in the middle of it I heard Touchon's key inserted in the latch of the front door. You can imagine with what swiftness I whipped into the music room. I felt as if the devil were treading on my heels.

I heard Touchon enter and close the door behind him. Immediately afterward a bell sounded somewhere in the rear of the apartment. I supposed that he was ringing for his servant. Perhaps he wished to ask why the drawing room was all lighted up. At any rate, no one came, of course. I applied my eye to a crack between the portières. I now looked down the length of the big room. Scarface was standing at the other end with his back to the fireplace and his eyes fixed on the doorway leading to the foyer. His right hand was concealed behind him, and I knew that it held the gun. His head was a little thrust forward, his expression was deadly. Inside I had a horrible feeling of caving in. Though I knew the shells in Scarface's guns were blanks it seemed too awful to allow even a sham killing to be acted out without interference.

Touchon, vigorous, florid, commanding, strode into the drawing room, having left his hat and coat in the foyer. He was close in front of me but as he turned toward Scarface I could only get a quarter view of his face from the rear. "What do you..." he began to say, when his voice suddenly failed him. He had recognized Scarface.

Scarface was walking toward him. "I guess you know who I am and what I came here for," he said with his deadly smile. He produced the gun.

Touchon's face turned greenish. His authoritative manner collapsed like a pricked balloon. Yet he stood his ground. Scarface stopped walking. He was enjoying that moment. There was a pause. Then, as Scarface started slowly to raise the gun, Touchon found his voice again.

"You can't shoot me," he said. "I am your master. I am Caspar."

The effect of those words upon Scarface was electrical. He went recoiling backward, his face clownish with dismay. The gun clattered to the floor. "That voice!" he muttered.

Touchon dove for the gun like a baseball player stealing base. Scarface was too much shaken to stop him. Touchon secured the gun and backed off, laughing in triumph, though his voice was still quivering with deathly terror. "You fool!" he cried. "I'm done with you and now you've given me an excuse to put you out of the way!"

Scarface stood there like a stick and let Touchon shoot at him. The discharge crashed through the room. Harmlessly, thank God! The sound of it brought Scarface to his senses. His face turned utterly savage. "You would, would you!" he said between his teeth. He sprang at Touchon and took him by the throat. The second discharge of the gun burned the skin of Scarface's temple but did him no further hurt.

Touchon dropped the useless gun. His hands dragged vainly at the strong hands around his throat. Scarface bore him back, back, until he fell across a carved chest. Scarface, grinning down at him horribly, planted a knee upon his breast.

"So you were Touchon all the time!" he said. "That's a good note! You had me fooled all right." He was only playing with his victim now. He released the pressure on his throat a little to let him speak.

"Let me go! Let me go!" gasped Touchon. "I swear to you I..."

"Aah!" snarled Scarface, "you sent my pal to do your dirty work and then you killed him for his pay! You are the Judas!"

"I had to! I had to!" gasped Touchon. "He would have been taken. Then we'd all have been done for. You, too!"

"You sent him there, didn't you?" demanded Scarface.

"I had no choice," gasped Touchon. "Fay was about to betray us. I had to act quickly."

"You were there yourself," said Scarface quickly, "why didn't you take care of Fay?" There was no answer from Touchon. "No!" Scarface went on, savagely baring his teeth, "you have just let it out that it's your habit to kill your men when you're through with them.... Now I'm going to kill you ... with my bare hands ... slowly..."

Touchon's head fell back over the edge of the chest. I found myself looking at his distorted face upside down and closed my eyes. The hideous tension was broken by the voice of Mme. Storey. With infinite relief I saw her enter from the other end of the room, with Stephens at her side. Stephens had a gun in his hand to guard against eventualities.

"That will do, Scarface," she said quietly. "Let the state execute him. It's more fitting."

It was the second ugly shock the young man had received within five minutes. He looked around at her, astounded, snarling—but he did not leave his prey. He half recognized her, I think; a confused look came over his face. "Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Rosika Storey."

Scarface, further shaken, looked at Stephens as if for confirmation.

"This is Mme. Storey," said Stephens. "She'll take care of Touchon for you. We have the goods on him now. A confession in the presence of three witnesses."

Scarface, in a kind of maze, slowly backed away from his victim. Touchon raised himself, holding his throat, and looked at my employer! He felt very sick. He was cured of his megalomania. In the moment of his defeat he suddenly became ordinary. I wondered what I had been afraid of. To give him credit, he accepted defeat stoically.

Meanwhile Scarface also had his scowling glance fixed on Mme. Storey. Recognition was just beginning to stir in his mind. Stephens edged around between him and the way out through the library.

Mme. Storey spoke crisply to me: "Bella, throw up one of the front windows and blow your whistle."

I obeyed her. This was a signal to bring Crider to our assistance.

Scarface recognized me. And by me he instantly knew my employer. "Inez!" he cried hoarsely. "You! ... You have betrayed me, too! ... God! what a world to be born into!" he added with unspeakable bitterness.

My employer started as if she had been flicked with a whip. I declare the tears came to her eyes. "Betrayed?" she said proudly. "What do I owe to you?"

Scarface straightened up. "Oh, nothing whatever," he said with curling lip.

"I played fair with you from the start," Mme. Storey went on, still with a hurt in her voice. It was the first time I had ever heard her condescend to defend herself. "As a woman to a man I mean, that's all that matters. Answer me! Didn't I play fair with you?"

"Oh, that way, sure!" he muttered, looking away. "But you looked me in the eye and swore you'd be my pal."

"And haven't I been?" she demanded. "Twice I've saved your life from this beast, if you want to know it."

"By Gad!" said Scarface with a sudden interest, "was it you in the park that night?"

"Bella and me."

"Gad...!" he said, amazed.

"And it was I who opened your eyes to this man," she added.

Scarface lowered his head. His heart was too sore to permit him to be quite fair but he had no more to say.

Crider joined us and the police were sent for. As Touchon's strength returned it seemed wiser to secure him. Mme. Storey told the two men to tie him up. How strange, how passing strange it was to see the great Touchon submit to it like any ordinary crook! As she wanted a private word with Scarface, she shepherded the others into the foyer.

"Scarface," she said when the three of us were left alone in the drawing room, "I don't require your evidence now in order to send Touchon to the chair. The police will be at the door directly. I will go forward to meet them and the way out through the dining-room window will be clear. Bella won't stop you."

A renewed joy in life broke in his dark face like the sun coming out. He nodded eagerly. His eyes beamed gratefully on my employer, all his injuries forgotten.

Her eyes were soft on him, too. "I'm doing what a pal can," she murmured, "and more than I ought.... I have my job to do," she went on, "but myself, I never judge anybody. My sympathies are oftener with the hunted than the hunters.... Go lead your own life as you must, Scarface, but promise me one thing for friendship's sake. No more killing."

"I promise," he said, meeting her glance. "I guess you've earned the right to tell me." Suddenly, with a beautiful, natural gesture, he caught up her hand and pressed it to his lips. "You are more wonderful than I thought," he whispered.

A moment later the police were at the door and Mme. Storey went to meet them. Scarface, with a friendly grin in my direction, quietly faded out through the library. I knew I should never see him again. What a wrench it gave my heart! He was such a beautiful young man! There is no justification for such a feeling. One simply cannot help one's self.

I pass over all the uproar induced by the coming of the police, with part of the populace in their train. The telling of our story; the incredulity, the amazement, the questioning. How chagrined Mme. Storey appeared to be when it was discovered that one of her principal witnesses had slipped away during the excitement. She scolded me for not being more careful; I was hard put to it to keep my face. Only Touchon was mum; he perceived clearly enough that his goose was cooked. Well, he accepted it like a man; after all, there was something big about him even in his fall.

He was finally carried away by the police, Crider and Stephens accompanying them as complaining witnesses. Mme. Storey and I were left in possession of the magnificent apartment. We hastened to liberate poor old Boker and to put him in charge of everything until matters were settled. Mme. Storey's last act before leaving the house was to lead me into the library. She said:

"There's something here I want to show you, Bella."

Touchon's escritoire stood beside the window. She let down the flap and pulled some papers out of a pigeonhole. They had a strangely familiar look. I recognized my own typescript. Looking closer I saw that they were actually the early vouchers I had made out for our expenses in the Touchon case. I read off: "Dinner to Dr. Touchon at Mme. Storey's apartment. Expenses of trip to Sing Sing to interview Craigin," etc., etc. I looked at my employer in astonishment.

"How did these come into Touchon's possession?" I asked.

"Honestly enough," she said. "He paid them."

My mouth hung open. For a moment I just could not take it in.

"Touchon himself was our mysterious employer," she went on gravely; "the dead wife mentioned in his letter was just a touch of artistry. The man was drunk with egotism. He found ordinary people too easy to master; life was tame, and he required a stronger dram. Well, I was largely in the public eye and he conceived the idea of provoking a test of skill with me. I suppose the fact that I had once rebuffed him still rankled in his mind; he was no doubt jealous of the success of his former pupil. It was characteristic of his demoniac humour to hit upon this scheme to ruin me and master me. One must admit there was something splendid in his effrontery. Even though he started out by describing to me what his game was, such was his overweening confidence he believed he could outwit me; and," Mme. Storey concluded drily, "he very nearly got away with it, too!"

I marvelled at the light that this cast on the lurid deeps of the human consciousness. I understood, then, why my employer, latterly, had delayed sending in our expense vouchers to the bank. "What a strange creature is man!" I murmured.

THE END

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