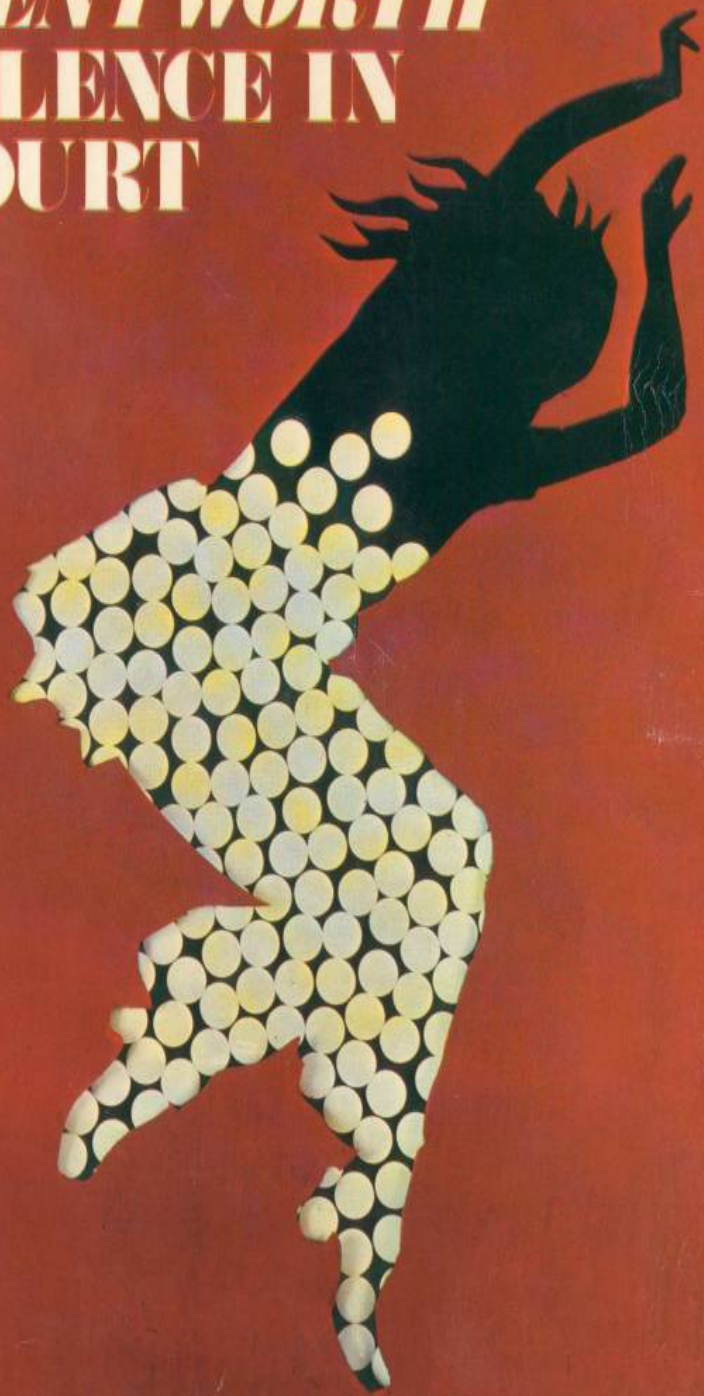


**PATRICIA
WENTWORTH
SILENCE IN
COURT**

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Title: Silence in Court

Date of first publication: 1946

Author: Patricia Wentworth [Dora Amy Elles] (1878-1961)

Date first posted: Jan. 2, 2017

Date last updated: Jan. 2, 2017

Faded Page eBook #20170102

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

By the same author

THE CASE IS CLOSED
LONESOME ROAD
MISS SILVER COMES TO STAY
MISS SILVER INTERVENES
LADIES BANE
THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE
THE CHINESE SHAWL

PATRICIA WENTWORTH

Silence in Court

First published in the United Kingdom by
Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1946

Silence in Court

I

She was so rigidly controlled as she came into the dock that she wasn't Carey Silence any more, or a girl, or young, but just a will to walk straight and seemly, to hold a proud head high, to bar sight and hearing against all these people who had come to see her tried for her life. There was a moment when the grip she had of herself wavered giddily. Long ago when she was a child she had been taken up the winding stair of a castle and brought suddenly out upon the open top of the keep to see a river diamond-bright like a twisted thread among tiny fields a long way down, roofs like the roofs of a toy village, a clockwork car small as a beetle in the dust. A frightful giddiness had rushed in upon her then, because all the things she had ever known were gone away to little specks, and she was wrenched from them to this horrible height. The day had ended in complete disgrace because she had thrown herself down flat upon her face and refused to move.

Out of all the things that had ever happened to her this moment came back now—not in words, scarcely even in a picture, but with the memory of that sick moment when all familiar things had dwindled to a vanishing point. She beat it off. There was enough strength in her for that. The wardress who had come into the dock with her touched her on the shoulder and told her to sit down. She sat holding her hands in her lap and looking straight before her. After a moment or two it was not so bad. The worst of it was coming out into the dock and feeling all those eyes upon her as if she had been stripped naked and set there to be looked at. Well, they were looking. She held herself against them. The giddy moment was over, she could go on holding now.

She drew a long, steady breath, and then the wardress touched her again and she stood up whilst the Clerk read the indictment. The words went by her—odd cumbersome words, as out of date and curiously impressive as the crimson of the Judge's robes and the harsh iron-grey of his eighteenth-century wig. He had a little alert face like a squirrel, with bitten-in lips and small bright eyes. She found that she wasn't attending to the words. They went by, and she knew it all so well. That is to say, she knew the meaning, but the words were cumbersome and difficult. They set forth that on the sixteenth day of November Honoria Maquisten had died of an

overdose of a sleeping-draught, and that the said overdose had been feloniously administered by the accused with intent to cause the death of the said Honoria Maquisten.

The indictment was over. She sat down again.

Sir Wilbury Fossett, counsel for the Crown, rose to open the case. She saw him get to his feet, large, bland, unhurried, and a wave of fear came over her. It was like seeing someone stand up to shoot at you—someone quite calm and at his ease, quite terribly practised in the weapon he was going to use. Her heart thudded hard against her side, and she lost what he was saying. Then, as she steadied again, Cousin Honoria's name came through.

“The accused is a relative of the deceased Mrs. Maquisten. She is the granddaughter of a cousin who was her greatest friend when they were girls together. Death robbed Mrs. Maquisten of her friend, and circumstances separated her from that friend's daughter. A long estrangement ensued. Then one day Mrs. Maquisten saw in the papers that a young girl had been involved in a railway accident due to enemy action. This girl's name attracted her attention. She rang up the hospital, made inquiries, and discovered that Miss Carey Silence was indeed the granddaughter of her cousin and early friend. A correspondence followed, and when it transpired that Miss Silence had been ordered a three months' rest, Mrs. Maquisten wrote and offered her a home. This offer was gratefully accepted. On November 2nd, therefore, the accused entered Mrs. Maquisten's household. . . .”

II

Emerging from Maitland Road into Maitland Square, Carey Silence looked first to her left and then to her right to see how the numbers ran. Over the top of her head the voice of Mr. Jefferson Stewart said,

“It’s on the left, if you’re not too independent to have me say so.”

Carey tilted her chin and looked up at him. The look was a challenging one. If Jeff Stewart thought he was going to come it over her just because he had managed to find out when she was coming and turn up to meet the train looking about seven feet high and trying to be dictatorial about a taxi, he had got to be shown. Right there in the station yard she had got down to showing him. If she couldn’t afford a taxi or didn’t choose to afford one, that was her own private affair; it had nothing to do with Jeff Stewart. She was perfectly able to carry her suit-case. And wasn’t there a tube station not more than a quarter of a mile from Maitland Square? If she couldn’t walk a quarter of a mile it wasn’t much good her coming out of hospital, was it? At which point Jeff had laughed, a very interfering sort of laugh, picked up the suit-case with his left hand, taken her by the elbow with his right, and remarked peaceably, “O.K. —you win.” As this was the first sign he had ever shown of a tractable disposition, she concluded that it was the right way to handle him. Firmness—that’s what he needed, and that’s what he was going to get. She looked up and said,

“How do you know which side the house is?”

He appeared pained.

“Well now, what do you take me for? Your being Mrs. Maquisten’s cousin and my being your cousin, that practically makes me a cousin of all the Maquisten lot. Looked at like that——”

“Who’s looking at it like that?”

“I was. And I was getting all ready to fix it so you were too.”

Standing at the left-hand corner of Maitland Square, Carey tapped the pavement with her foot.

“Now, Jeff Stewart——”

“All right, all right.” There was a lazy smile in his eyes and his voice was lazy too. “If your Aunt Flora marrying my Uncle Jonathan Stewart down in Richmond doesn’t make me your cousin, what does?”

Carey tapped again.

“Nothing.”

Mr. Stewart took no notice.

“So of course I went right away and got acquainted with Mrs. Maquisten.”

“You didn’t!”

His smile broadened.

“Very unbelieving sort of disposition you’ve got. Why, I was calling her Cousin Honoria inside of the first ten minutes. She’s got a much more logical sort of mind than you have. The minute I got down to explaining about Aunt Flora writing you to say I was coming over on lease-lend business and you were to be a nice affectionate cousin to me, she got interested right away and said you were coming to stay with her—which I knew, but thought perhaps better not say so. There she was, saying I must look upon them all as cousins and come and see you whenever I liked.”

Carey’s colour had risen.

“I don’t believe a word of it!”

“All right honey, you just wait and see.”

“And you’re not to call me honey.”

He looked disappointed.

“Not?”

“Certainly not.”

“Why not?”

An awful feeling that inside of five minutes this large American might be calling her honey in front of old Cousin Honoria whom she had never seen in her life prompted her to blandishment, a good deal against the grain. She lifted the long dark lashes which made the blue of her eyes seem even darker than it really was and said,

“*Jeff*——”

“All right, honey.”

Inside herself Carey was angry, but she also wanted to laugh. The laughter and the anger shook together in her voice. She repeated his name.

“*Jeff!*”

He responded with gratifying meekness.

“What do I call you?”

“Carey.”

“Sounds sort of cold. But it’s just like you say, so long as I don’t forget.”

She began to walk briskly along the left-hand side of the Square. The first house was 35, the next one 33. She said in what she hoped was a repressive tone,

“You mustn’t forget.”

Over her head Jeff Stewart’s agreeable voice remarked,

“I’m liable to—I’ve a very poor memory.”

He got no answer to this. Carey was counting the houses. If she let him make her laugh, it would be all up—she’d never be able to manage him again. But why she

should want to laugh when she was furious with him was more aggravating than words could say. It was particularly enraging to notice that he was carrying her suitcase as if it weighed about four ounces, whereas when she tried to lift it herself it appeared to be filled with lead. That was the worst of men, they were so odiously, infuriatingly strong.

Jeff said, "You needn't count the houses—I'll tell you when we come to it. Wouldn't you like the lowdown on the family before we get there? You don't know any of them, do you?"

She looked up, a little startled.

"Is there anyone besides Cousin Honoria? She didn't say."

"Well then, see how useful I'm going to be. Anyone else? I'll say so!"

"Who?"—a little anxiously.

"Well, Cousin Honoria—now don't interrupt and say you know, because if you haven't seen her you don't. Is she the Queen of Sheba! I wouldn't like you to think I was exaggerating, so I'll just say she'd have had Solomon guessing and leave it at that. Then there's her nephew, Dennis Harland—a couple of years younger than me, I should say—R.A.F.—got smashed up flying, and they're trying to put him together again—not so bad now—gets about with a crutch. He's there between treatments, getting home comforts. Amusing chap. But you'd better not find him too amusing. A bit of a lad, as you say over here."

Carey lifted her lashes again.

"Thank you, grandpapa!"

Jeff Stewart continued without taking any notice of this.

"Robert Maquisten is another nephew. He doesn't exactly live in the house, but he's there a lot. He's in business. Then there's a niece called Nora Hull with a husband in the Middle East. She drives for some general or other. Pretty little thing—lots to say for herself—knows all about everything. And another niece, on the Maquisten side, Honor King—sort of girl you wonder if she's anywhere at all when she isn't there, but they say she packs parcels for prisoners of war. And then a rather controlled kind of a nurse—Magda Brayle."

"How do you mean, controlled?"

Jeff Stewart considered.

"Kind of starchy," he said. "Kind of 'I'm a nurse, and don't you forget it!' Kind of 'Here's your nice medicine—drink it up!' But Cousin Honoria keeps her end up."

Carey laughed.

"You seem to have found out quite a lot in one visit, Jeff," she said.

"Who said it was one visit. I went and called there at tea-time on Sunday. I

lunched there on Tuesday, and dined on Thursday to meet Robert and Nora. You didn't believe me, but you just wait and see—they're practically my folks. Here we are."

The house rose up before them, grey and large. Maitland Square had been lucky. There were gaps amongst the houses in Maitland Street, but the Square had escaped without damage. No. 13 had all its windows. Four shallow steps led up to the front door. A stone canopy overhead was chipped, but only slightly. The door had been painted black. The ornate brass knocker which had once adorned it had passed into salvage. Vaguely its outline could be traced upon the dimmed surface of the paint. The number 13 displayed above in white paint replaced the brass figures, which had also gone.

Jeff Stewart said, "Well, here we are."

Carey walked up the four steps under the shadow of the porch and rang the bell.

III

A plump, fresh-faced girl of seventeen took Carey up to the first floor and along a passage, where she knocked upon an imposing mahogany door. A deep voice said "Come in!" The door was thrown open. The girl said "Miss Silence, if you please, madam," and Carey walked in.

The room was large, and lighted by two long windows opening upon a wrought-iron balcony. It contained a great deal of furniture, as much as any ordinary drawing-room, and Honoria Maquisten in bed. Actually it was only the bed that Carey saw in that first moment—the bed and Cousin Honoria. It stood opposite the door against the blank wall between the fireplace and the farther window, and it was immensely large. Four silver columns rose to support a canopy from which depended heavy curtains of emerald and silver brocade. A coverlet of the same material concealed the bed-clothes.

Honoria Maquisten sat up straight against a heaped mass of green, violet, and blue pillows, with a shimmering silver wrap about her shoulders. Sitting there, she looked as if she must be immensely tall—her stiff, narrow shoulders were so high above the level of the bed, whilst the piled-up curls of a flaring copper wig raised this impression of height to the fantastic.

As she advanced Carey had time to be angry with Jeff Stewart. What was the good of saying that Cousin Honoria was like the Queen of Sheba and leaving it at that? The Queen of Sheba didn't wear a vermilion wig dressed about a foot high in several thousand curls. She might, of course, have worn diamond earrings and more rings than you could really believe in, and it was quite likely that she dripped with pearls. Cousin Honoria was wearing five rows, and they were so large that you couldn't believe that they hadn't come from Woolworth's.

She reached the side of the bed and put out a hand to meet the long, thin one which was extended to her. It felt bony and hard in hers, and the rings ran into her. Some of them had slipped round, and the faceted gems pressed into her flesh with their little sharp points. She had come up on the inner side of the bed because Cousin Honoria was a little nearer to that side. The hand gripped and held her there with the light on her face. A pair of brilliant hazel eyes under plucked and darkened eyebrows looked her through and through. Not a muscle of the face moved. The long, thin features, the rather wide mouth, the chin a little over-weighted by the rest of the face—all were without expression. The carefully tinted skin, the carefully smoothed-out wrinkles, the brilliant scarlet lips, gave a blank effect. Only the eyes were lively, eager, and penetrating.

After a moment Honoria Maquisten said in her deep voice,
“Take off your hat.”

Carey put up her free hand and pulled it off. Her head with its shining black hair came into view. There were two or three soft curls above the brow, and some more at the side and back, but the whole effect was neat, and trim, and shining. The black hair contrasted pleasantly with a naturally white skin and dark blue eyes well shaded with lashes of the same colour as the hair. With startling suddenness Mrs. Maquisten’s face ceased to be a blank. The cheeks puckered, the wide mouth trembled. Tears rushed to the eyes, and the deep voice said,

“Oh, my dear—you are so like Julia!”

You don’t really think of your grandmother by her Christian name. Carey said, “Julia?” and thought too late that it would have been better to say nothing at all.

Still holding her hand and pressing a diamond ring into it, Mrs. Maquisten said,

“My dear, dear Julia—your grandmother.” She brought her other hand into action and patted Carey. “My first cousin, you know, but we were just like sisters. She died too young. It must be fifty years ago, but I haven’t forgotten her, and I never shall. But your mother married Arbuthnot Silence, and we didn’t get on at all. A most opinionated man, though of course he was your father, so we won’t say any more about him, and it’s a long time ago. How old are you?”

“I am twenty-two, Cousin Honoria.”

The hazel eyes took on a tragic look.

“Julia died when she was twenty. And nobody told me that you were like her. It’s like seeing her again after all these years. Why didn’t they call you Julia?”

Carey felt very glad that they had not. Cousin Honoria was trying to make her feel like a ghost. She resisted with all her might. Julia was dead. She wasn’t Julia’s ghost, she was Carey Silence with her own life to live. She held tight on to that and said,

“I don’t know.”

Honoria Maquisten let go of her hand and pulled herself up a little higher against her pillows. The wide mouth broke into a smile.

“It doesn’t mean anything to you, does it? But it’s a great pleasure to me, so you mustn’t mind. I won’t bother you about it. And you mustn’t mind being like Julia, because she was very pretty and everyone loved her. And that’s all we’ll say about her now, because I want to talk about you. Are you quite strong again?”

“Oh, yes.”

“But they won’t pass you for any of the services?”

“No. They said to come back in three months.”

“Yes, I remember you said so in one of your letters. You certainly ought not to rough it until you are quite strong. You won’t want to talk about the experience.”

“I didn’t really know much about it. Mr. Andrews was going down to his constituency, and I was with him—I was his secretary, you know. And then the sirens sounded and the train stopped, and there was some firing. Mr. Andrews called out, and I think he pulled me down off the seat, so I suppose he saved my life. And the next thing I knew I was in hospital all bandaged up, and they told me he was dead. He was such a dear old thing. I loved working for him.”

“But you don’t want to go on being a secretary?”

Carey flushed.

“I thought I might try for a temporary post——”

Mrs. Maquisten said, “Stuff and rubbish!” Then she burst out laughing. “Come—I’m not in the least what you expected, am I?”

Carey laughed too.

“I don’t know what I expected.”

The hazel eyes danced, lighting up the long, thin face.

“Not me anyhow! A nice old lady, sitting by the fire in a shawl, with silver hair—portrait of a grandmother. No, a great-aunt—I never had any brats. Lord—how I hate white hair! Mine’s been red all my life, and red it’s going to stay. No, it isn’t a wig, though I expect you think it is. I’ve always had a good head of hair, and it’s nobody’s business where the colour comes from.”

There was something infectious about the rollicking vigour with which she spoke. Carey let herself go and said in a laughing voice,

“I don’t suppose it is. But you wouldn’t mind anyhow, would you?”

Mrs. Maquisten was delighted.

“No, I shouldn’t—I never have and I never shall. You know, you said that just the way Julia used to say things. I’m glad you’ve got her spirit. I don’t like meek little mice. Wait till you meet my niece Honor—the spit and image of a white mouse with pink eyes! Honor King—James’s niece, not mine, I’m thankful to say, but they named her for me, which annoyed me very much when I saw how she was going to turn out. My step-brother called a girl after me too—Nora Hull. She lives here—you’ll meet her presently. She’s a pretty little piece, so my side of the family comes the best out of it.” She quirked up the thin plucked eyebrows. “Honor—Nora—bit of a joke, isn’t it?”

Carey thought the less she said the better. She let herself laugh.

Quite abruptly Mrs. Maquisten was as grave as a judge. She folded her right hand over her left and looked down at the glittering rings—diamond half-hoop,

diamond solitaire, emerald and diamond cluster, emerald half-hoop with winking diamond points, emerald and diamond marquise covering the forefinger from the second joint to the knuckle. She frowned at the brightness and the colour and said deep and low,

“Not so much of a joke if you let yourself think about it. How many babies do you suppose would have been named after me if I’d had a few of my own?”

“I don’t know, Cousin Honoria.”

The wide mouth twitched into a sudden smile.

“Nor do I, but I can guess. Sprats to catch a whale, my dear—that’s what those Honoria’s are. And Dennis Harland is Dennis Honorius!” She gave an abrupt laugh. “I’ll do him the justice to say he’s horribly ashamed of it. Sprats, my dear—sprats. But the whale isn’t caught yet. Oh, lord!” The laughter shook her. “I’m thin to be a whale, aren’t I? That’s where metaphors trip you up. A thin old jewelled whale bedizened with silver, and everyone hopefully throwing sprats!” She stopped suddenly, stared, and said, “Why don’t you laugh?”

“I didn’t like it.”

“No sprats of your own?”

The colour flew, scarlet to the roots of Carey’s hair. Her eyes blazed. She stamped her foot and said,

“No!”

Mrs. Maquisten said “Temper,” in an indulgent voice. She put out a glittering hand. “Sorry, my dear—I just wanted to see how you’d react. I’m a horrid old woman—don’t take any notice of me. I expect you’d like to see your room. It’s another floor up.”

She picked up a little ivory bell-push on a long green flex and pressed it. A bell rang sharply quite near by, and before it had stopped ringing a door which Carey had not noticed opened quite close to the head of the bed and a nurse came in. She was very stiffly starched just as Jeff had said, but she moved without any sound at all.

“Nurse Brayle,” said Honoria Maquisten carelessly. “My cousin, Carey Silence.”

Carey found herself wondering what Nurse Brayle would look like without all the whiteness and the starch. She had never seen anyone whose clothes were so much a part of her. She could not picture the head without its cap, or the neck without its collar, the trim severe figure in anything except uniform. Regular features, grey eyes, a glimpse of dark brown hair. First, foremost, and all the time you would think of Magda Brayle as a nurse. She didn’t seem even to have any age. Twenty-five—thirty—thirty-five—uniform has no age. Magda—curious name——

Mrs. Maquisten used it now.

“Magda, just take Carey up to her room, and then come back and get me ready for tea.” She turned to Carey. “Come down when you hear the bell. Tea will be in here.” Her eyes sparkled maliciously. “You must, I am sure, be looking forward to meeting your cousins.”

IV

Magda Brayle took Carey up to a pleasant small room on the next floor. The windows looked out to the back and showed lines of brick wall running down from all the other houses to what looked like an old-fashioned mews. The plot belonging to No. 13 was larger than any of the others, being a wide rectangle, with paved work, ornamental conifers, stone seats of a classic pattern, and a fountain where a marble boy struggled with three athletic dolphins. Inside, the room had a comfortable absence of grandeur. Carey didn't feel as if she could have borne any more brocade and silver. The walls were painted cream, curtains and chair-covers of shiny chintz patterned with oyster shells and blue ribbons, the carpet of natural wool. There were blue cushions and a blue eiderdown.

She said, "How pretty! But one ought to be about sixteen——"

If she expected any human response, she didn't get it, either to the words or to the tentative smile which had gone with them. Nurse Brayle informed her that there was a bathroom next door, and that tea would be ready in about a quarter of an hour. As she turned to go, Carey tried again. There must be something under all that starch.

"I didn't know that Cousin Honoria was ill. She didn't say anything about it in her letters. Is she in bed all the time?"

"Oh, no."

Nurse Brayle did not interrupt her progress towards the door. As soon as she had spoken she went out and down the stair without making the very slightest sound. Carey relieved her feelings by shutting the door rather briskly.

When she came downstairs again the door of Mrs. Maquisten's room stood open. A young man with a crutch under his arm was just going in, whilst from behind, with flying steps, came a little creature in a green and plum-coloured uniform. Carey got the impression of something as rounded and graceful as a kitten—fluffy short hair in negligent bright curls, wide brown eyes, and carnation colour. She came up with a rush, slipped a hand inside Carey's arm, and said, "I'm Nora Hull. We'll both get black marks if we're late for tea. She hates it." And with that they were over the threshold together.

At the first glance the room seemed to be full of people. Mrs. Maquisten had left her bed, and sat in state beside the fire in a large brocaded chair. The silver wrap had been discarded for a long robe of emerald velvet trimmed with fur. The rings, the pearls, the earrings caught the light from a great crystal chandelier. The green and silver curtains had been drawn and the room closed in. The effect was one of light,

brightness, and colour, and, over all, the dominant red of Cousin Honoria's hair.

The young man with the crutch had reached her chair and was standing beside her. On the other side of the hearth behind a massive tea equipage was the authentic white mouse of Mrs. Maquisten's description—a little pale creature with hair of a washed-out flaxen and eyes of a washed-out blue. She was childishly small, but she had no look of youth. She was pouring out tea from a bulging silver teapot which looked much too heavy for her, and when Carey came up and was introduced her hand shook and some of the tea went over the edge of the tray to stain a lacy cloth.

The large hand of Mr. Jefferson Stewart came over the slight shoulder and took hold of the teapot.

"You know, that's much too heavy for you," he said. "Now I'm the world's best tea-pourer. You let me take this on."

Honor King said "How do you do?" to Carey in a small, distracted voice and shot a nervous glance at her Aunt Honoria. She got a sarcastic one in reply.

"He can certainly do it a great deal better than you do—that doesn't set a very high standard."

Jeff Stewart was pouring out tea in the grand manner.

"You know, Cousin Honoria, this is a very interesting experience for me. Those yarns about the Victorian woman being so weak and delicate that she hardly ever came out of a swoon—I'll be in a position to go home and tell them that they're all bally-hoo. Apart from having families of a dozen or so, which they must have had to want a teapot this size, they'd need to have real good muscle to handle it."

"You might give a lecture on the subject," said Honoria Maquisten drily.

The young man with the crutch came over and took a chair by Carey.

"He's giving one," he said. And then, "Nobody's introducing us, but I'm Dennis Harland."

Magda Brayle was handing round the cups. She gave one to Carey now.

Dennis said, "You'll have to take saccharine—Mrs. Deeping keeps all the sugar to make jam with. When I'm eating the jam I think it's worth it; but when I'm drinking the tea I'm not so sure." He had a pleasant voice, and so much charm that it didn't really matter what he said. You had the warm, delightful feeling that in talking to you he had achieved a life ambition. The hazel eyes which were so like Cousin Honoria's were bright with interest and admiration. The voice, whatever words it used, was saying all the time, "I love to talk to you."

When she looked back afterwards Carey had the strongest impression of intimacy with all these people. It wasn't that she felt at home with them, or comfortable, or happy in her mind, for she did not. There were moments when she

felt most bleakly strange. There were moments when she had the lost dog feeling and could, with shame be it said, have wept upon Jeff Stewart's solid tweed shoulder. But there were also moments when a terrifying sense of intimacy touched her. There was the moment when Nora called across the sofa in her light, high voice, "How did you get on at the hospital, Den? Weren't you to see some bigwig or other this morning? What did he say?"

Dennis shrugged and flung her one brief sentence.

"The usual rubbish."

Curiously, and entirely, the charm was all gone. He looked dry and cold.

Nora again: "He doesn't want to take the foot off, does he?"

"Why should he?"

Nora went on talking about people who had had a foot off and people who hadn't had a foot off, and how wonderful artificial legs were and what a lot you could do with one.

Dennis Harland didn't appear to be listening. He began to tell Carey a story which might have been funny, only she couldn't attend to it.

It was a little after this that he looked across her to Honor King and said, dropping his voice,

"So the boy friend's back."

She looked under her pale lashes and then down at her folded hands.

"I don't know what you mean, Dennis."

"No, of course you don't. Nasty rough place, the Army—I don't suppose he liked it a bit. For the matter of that, I don't suppose they liked him either. How did they get rid of him?"

Honor said nothing. Her eyelids and the tip of her nose had turned quite pink. She really was dreadfully like a white mouse, but you can't stand by and see the poor little wretch tormented. Carey was casting about for something to say, when Nora came by and stood for a moment with her empty cup in her hand. She laughed and said to Honor in a light, contemptuous voice,

"Why don't you scratch his eyes out? What's it all about?"

To which Dennis responded darkly,

"Too, too Ernest. But hush—we are observed. To be continued in our next."

From the other side of the hearth Honoria Maquisten's dominating voice:

"What are you whispering about? You haven't got a ha'porth of manners among you. Jeff Stewart, come over here and talk to me! Honor, get back to the tea-tray! I suppose you can lift the teapot now that it's nearly empty. And, Nora, *you* go and get out of that uniform as soon as you've finished—it swears at every single thing in

the room! And when you've got back into civilized clothes again you'd better sit down and write to your husband!"

Nora's colour brightened dangerously, making her look so much like a little girl in a rage that Carey caught her breath. If she had really been six years old she might have thrown that empty cup at Cousin Honoria. But you don't throw cups at twenty-six. At least Carey hoped not, but for one of those revealing moments she wasn't any too sure.

As Jeff Stewart crossed over and Honor slipped back into her place, Dennis said in his agreeable low-pitched voice,

"Don't let your angry passions rise, or tears of temper fill your eyes." Upon which Nora banged down her cup and ran out of the room.

"Pepperpot—isn't she? It goes with our disastrous hair. Ginger in the hair—pepper in the temper. And if you want the lid to blow right off, you can tell her that Aunt Honoria's hair is the one legacy that she can be absolutely sure about. On second thoughts, perhaps you'd better not do anything of the sort. I'm saving it up for a really serious row."

Carey looked at him curiously. He had the same peaty brown eyes as Nora, and the same bright chestnut hair. She laughed and said,

"But it isn't red."

"Ssh—not a word! The idea that it goes down awfully well, and we study to please. I've often advised Honor to try a good strong henna shampoo and see what it would do for her." He had raised his voice sufficiently to allow this kind remark to reach the tea-table, where it was received with a sniff.

Carey said in a quick whisper,

"Why are you so unkind to her?"

Dennis burst out laughing.

"Honor, my precious, she wants to know why we're not being nice to you."

Carey felt a most unregenerate desire to smack his face. After giving him a look which made this quite plain, she took her cup over to the tray and bent down with it in her hand.

"Is he always such a frightful tease?" she said in an easy, laughing voice.

Honor gave another small sniff. The tip of her nose was pink and shiny. The heavy teapot shook as she lifted it. When she had put it down again and added milk to Carey's cup she lifted her reddened eyelids and colourless lashes for a moment. They fell again immediately.

Carey went back to her seat disquieted. It wasn't possible that you could be disliked like that, right away in about five minutes, by a white mouse of a creature

whom you'd never even thought of harming. She told herself that she must have imagined the cold repulsion in that pale lifted glance, but all through Dennis Harland's talk it kept coming back to her, and every time she liked it less. She found herself asking abruptly,

"Is Nora your sister? I haven't quite placed you all yet."

He said, "No—we're all cousins. Aunt Honoria's papa married again and had a son and daughter—very annoying for Aunt Honoria. The daughter had Nora, and the son had me. Both of them piously bestowed their half-sister's name upon their brats. You see, grandpapa hadn't any money to leave—at least not as much as you'd really notice. But Aunt Honoria's mother was a most impressive heiress, so of course Honoria married Maquisten and about half a million more. Our darling Honor comes in on the Maquisten side. Her mamma was Uncle James's sister—a great deal younger of course. She ran away with a chemist's assistant or something and got cut off without a sixpence. So here we are, a loving, united, hopeful family."

Mrs. Maquisten's voice broke in on a threatening note.

"What are you stuffing Carey up with? I won't have it! Do you hear?"

He turned towards her, laughing and blowing her a kiss.

"Darling, I was telling her what dutiful nieces and nephews we are. Of course she hasn't met Robert yet. That's something for her to live for."

As if the name had been his cue, Robert Maquisten opened the door and came in—a thickset man of middle height, dark, with the complexion which comes from a sedentary life. He had a forceful, businesslike air, and the manner of a man who is very much at home. He kissed his aunt, took the chair which Jeff Stewart had vacated, without appearing to notice him, and gave a nod and a casual "Hullo!" to the rest of the party. Introduced to Carey, he dismissed her with a quick uninterested glance. For Magda Brayle who brought him a cup of tea he had no glance at all. In a voice that dominated the conversation he made two remarks about the weather and three about the war, after which he disposed of his tea in rapid gulps and addressed Honoria Maquisten.

"I really came to have a word with you, if you can spare me the time."

The tone was not quite so deferential as the words. Mrs. Maquisten's eyes sparkled in appreciation of this. There was mockery in her voice as she said,

"How very—businesslike!"

"Well, I want to talk to you about business, Aunt Honoria."

"Mine, or yours, Robert?"

"Well——" he looked down the room—"I don't know that I'm prepared to go into that in a crowd."

Mrs. Maquisten lifted her voice after the manner of a toastmaster at a banquet.

“My lords, ladies, and gentlemen, pray silence for Mr. Robert Maquisten!” At the sight of his stiffening face she broke into laughter. “All right, Bob, all right!” Her hands went out with a flash of all the rings. “Shoo, children—I’ve had enough of you!”

As they came out into the corridor, Jeff Stewart put a hand on Carey's arm.

"I've got to go—I'm meeting a man about a gun, and I'm dining out after that. But you're lunching with me to-morrow."

"Who told you that?"

"I'm telling you. I'll call for you at twelve, and we'll go shopping."

"I haven't anything to shop."

He sounded pained.

"But I have, honey."

She tapped her foot on the carpet.

"You're not to call me honey!"

"Sorry, darling—I forgot."

The tap was repeated with energy.

"Or darling."

"All right, honey."

"Jeff Stewart!"

Dark blue sparkling eyes met lazy grey ones.

"All right, all right, let's start all over again. I call for you at twelve, and you come and help me choose a Christmas present."

"People aren't giving presents."

"I'm giving this one, and I'm liable to fall down over it if you don't come along and help. Maybe I won't keep it for Christmas. I'll get it first, and then we'll see. So there we are. Third time lucky. I'll be round at twelve."

She let him go on, and went up to her room, where she unpacked her things. She wondered about Honor, about Nora, about Dennis. She liked Dennis. She thought he was an easy person to like—too easy? She thought that perhaps a lot of girls had liked him too easily. She thought, "He's horribly afraid about losing his leg." It was horrible of Nora to talk about it like that. She didn't mean it of course—Nora never would mean anything. But she had her sore spot too. It was when Cousin Honoria told her to write to her husband that she had looked as if she might be going to throw a cup at her. She wondered about that.

And she wondered about Honor, whose eyelids and nose had turned pink when Dennis teased her, and who had looked at Carey with pale dislike. She seemed a most unlikely person to be having a love affair, but of course you never could tell. The teasing meant nothing at all if it didn't mean that. And the man had been in the Army and come out of it again. And either his name or his nature was Ernest. She

thought it was his name.

She began to think about going out with Jeff tomorrow. He was frightfully impudent and out of hand, and he would have to be shown. But he hadn't got any secret sorrows, and he hadn't taken a fancy to her because she was like her grandmother. She felt as if it might be rather a relief to get away from No. 13 for a little.

She took herself to task about this. She had only just come—she hadn't had time to settle down. The first day in a house full of strangers always had a world-without-end kind of feeling. She put the last of her things away, and told herself firmly how very, very lucky she was to have a roof over her head and a comfortable room, and a kind Cousin Honoria, because if it were not for these blessings, she would be in the really horrid position of having no more than three pounds to cover the three months during which she had been ordered not to work. Looked at in this way—and it was the only proper way to look at it—No. 13 Maitland Square was very definitely a Haven of Refuge. She must clamp on to that like mad. Suppose she had been coming out of hospital with three pounds in her pocket and nowhere to go. . . . She could get a job all right, but she wasn't sure about being able to keep it. She got so dreadfully tired. That was what was the matter with her now—she was tired. She lay down on the bed and pulled the blue eiderdown up to her chin. Rather to her own surprise, she fell asleep.

She woke with no idea what time dinner was, scrambled into a dark blue house-gown, and went down, to find the rosy-cheeked girl just about to beat upon a gong. At its first notes Honor appeared, and then more slowly, from the stairs, Dennis Harland. He was in evening dress, but Honor had not changed. Carey couldn't help thinking that if she had tried she couldn't have found anything less becoming to wear than that brief, tight dress of stone-coloured wool.

Down the stairs Nora came running. She was bareheaded, and the copper curls shone. Under a dark fur coat a dress with bright metallic threads in it shone too. Dennis said,

“Always in a hurry—aren't you? Who is it tonight?”

“Oh, Jack——”

“Rather a lot of Jack just now?”

Half way to the door Nora whirled round, her colour high.

“If you're thinking of making mischief——”

Standing there leaning upon his crutch, he gave her the most charming smile in the world.

“Darling, you shock me. And what will our cousin Carey think?”

Nora laughed, a musical laugh with a beat of anger in it.

“I suppose she’ll think that anyone who isn’t dead and buried would like to get out of this old tomb of a house sometimes, and that I don’t much care who I go with—Jack, Reggie, Alan—what’s the odds?”

Dennis laughed too.

“Oh, quite. Have a nice time, darling. Explanations are a mistake, don’t you think? Sparkling indifference is so much more convincing.”

Then, when the door had banged after her, he turned to Carey.

“Come along and dine. I’m afraid I can’t offer you an arm.”

They came into a room all bleached oak and vermilion leather, with a bowl of bright glass fruits in the middle of the table. Carey thought, “It’s like a room on the stage, startling and attractive for once, but imagine sitting down to breakfast in it for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year!” Quite frankly, imagination boggled. Anyhow, since they were there, she was thankful to feel that her own deep sapphire blue didn’t go too badly with all that scarlet and buff.

As they sat down, Magda Brayle slipped into the room and took her seat at the foot of the table, leaving Carey and Honor facing one another at the sides. How she managed to move and sit down without a single rustle was very surprising. She was there as a piece of furniture is there, and as little seemed to be expected of her. As far as Honor and Dennis were concerned, she might not have been there at all. When Carey spoke to her she certainly answered, but in words as few and flat as if she had been an automaton with just such words to say. Having said them, she ate her soup, her fish, her savoury, without interest and more as a matter of business than of appetite. The others continued to ignore her.

Carey discovered that she was hungry, and that Cousin Honoria had a cook who made war-time food taste like a beautiful dream.

Over the fish Dennis surveyed the drab figure on his left.

“Honor, my sweet, does that distressing garment indicate that you are going out to-night? Am I right in supposing that you are doing a flick?” He turned to Carey. “She’s a fan. Vicarious crime, love, and adventure—lots of it, piping hot.”

Honor said in a small, obstinate voice,

“Plenty of people like films besides me. You don’t say things like that to them. Why shouldn’t I go to the pictures if I like? If you want to know, I’m meeting Daphne.”

His eyebrows went up as high as they would go.

“Daphne?”

Honor looked down at her plate.

“That’s what I said.”

“I know, I know. Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive! The first step on the downward path! Most confusing to the moral sense to say Daphne when you mean Ernest—no saying what it may lead to——” He broke off as the service door opened to admit the plump young maid. “Molly, is there any beer in the house?”

“Mrs. Deeping’s very sorry, Mr. Dennis, but we’ve run out, and they promised it faithful, but it hasn’t come.”

“All right—curse Hitler! I’ll have water—a drink only meant for fishes.” He addressed Carey. “Which would you rather—drink water all your life, or have to eat marge instead of butter?”

“I drink water anyhow.”

“Hence the schoolgirl complexion!”

It brightened.

Molly took away the plates, and the meal went on. As soon as it was over Honor disappeared. Dennis led the way to what he called the Study, a quite pleasant and not at all exotic room, with comfortable chairs, a log fire, book-lined walls, a wireless cabinet, and a piano.

“Why haven’t we met before? Where have you been hidden? One of Aunt Honoria’s feuds?”

Carey nodded.

“Something like that. She loved my grandmother, and she wanted to adopt my mother. When my grandfather wouldn’t hear of it, there was a split. After my mother married they met once or twice, but Cousin Honoria didn’t get on with my father—not at all. Then my mother died—a motor accident—and it was the same thing over again. She wanted to adopt me, and there was a simply tearing row. My father went off abroad—he wrote, you know—and left me with his sister. And then he died, and she died just as I was leaving school. She’d been living on an annuity, and there was only just enough money to see me through a secretarial course. And then my old headmistress got me a job with Mr. Andrews, who was an M.P. and an old friend of hers. He was a pet, and so was his wife in a way, and I stayed there until the other day. He was killed when they machine-gunned the train we were in, and Cousin Honoria saw my name in the papers and wrote to the hospital and asked me to come and stay with her. I’m not supposed to take a job for three months.”

“A very nice succinct autobiography. But you’ve left nearly all of it out. No love-life?”

“Absolutely none.”

“Then it won’t sell.”

Molly came in with the coffee, and he went on talking about autobiographies and what made them sell until she had gone out of the room. Then he laughed and said,

“I wonder what *Candid Confessions* by Honor would be like. Why are women with white eyelashes born liars? I’ll say that for Nora, she doesn’t tell lies—at least not often enough to notice. But Honor——” He sketched a circle with his cigarette, and a spark fell, going out as it touched the carpet.

“She’s frightened. Why do you frighten her?”

The brown eyes looked at her, a curious straight look.

“What’s she got to be frightened about? No more than the rest of us. She can’t take it, that’s all. No guts, like the *Elle*-maids. As far as I remember, they were very like our darling Honor. They had fair hair, they looked like women until you got behind them, and then there wasn’t anything inside them—no back, no innards—nothing but a façade. Norse mythology. I think our Honor is an *Elle*-maid.”

“You shouldn’t torment her.”

“Why not? It amuses me. I must have something to amuse me. If I couldn’t quarrel with Nora and stick an occasional pin into Honor, I’d go raving. Besides, you know, this Ernest affair is about the limit.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

He flung the stub of his cigarette into the fire.

“What’s wrong! Ever hear of the respected Aylwin? No, you wouldn’t, but he’s Aunt Honoria’s solicitor, and a kind of family connection into the bargain. One of those firms where everyone has died off, but the names are kept embalmed like a lot of mummies—Weston, Weston, Montague, and Aylwin. Well, he’s Aylwin, and about twice a month when Aunt Honoria changes her will he comes along and gives her a lot of good advice which she doesn’t take.”

Carey looked up, she didn’t quite know why. Their eyes met.

“Why does she change her will?”

He was smiling, but the smile did not reach his eyes.

“Because it amuses her. She’s been doing it for years—she does it all the time. Robert, Honor, Nora, and I—we’re all on our promotion. If she’s annoyed she does a little juggling with her will—five thousand off Nora and on to me—ten thousand off me and on to our respectable Robert—twenty thousand off Honor and perhaps, who knows, on to you.”

“*Dennis!*”

He laughed at her indignant tone.

“It would be more than that if anyone blew the gaff about Ernest Hood, and

Honor knows it. That's why she creeps about going pink round the nose. Because, you know, Ernest is the respected Aylwin's clerk, and Aunt Honoria would just about die in a fit if she thought he would dare look the same side of the street as Uncle James's niece. He used to come here with papers for Aunt Honoria to sign, and I suppose Honor chucked herself at his head. Then he got called up for the Army, and we hoped we'd seen the last of him. But he's back again—flat feet, or fallen arches or something. Perhaps they just couldn't swallow him. I'm sure I don't blame them."

"What's wrong about him?"

Dennis was lighting a cigarette. He drew at it, flung the match into the fire, and said,

"Everything. He's like the sort of things you turn up under a stone—definitely sub-human."

"Why does Honor——"

"She wants to get married, and I should think Ernest is the only person who has ever shown the slightest sign of asking her. He won't commit himself unless he's sure about the money, and that's just what nobody can be sure about."

Carey sat up rather straight. She was pale. Her skin looked very white between the deep blue of her dress and the shining black of her hair. Her eyes matched the dress, and her lashes matched the hair. She said,

"Why are you telling me all this?"

Dennis smiled his very charming smile.

"Perhaps because you're easy to look at, perhaps because there's a natural bond of sympathy between us. Or I might be warning you off the grass, or inviting you to join the expectant throng."

"Why should you?"

He blew out a little cloud of smoke. It tinged the air between them.

"Well, my own idea has always been that we ought to have a gentleman's agreement, just among the family. If we agreed to share and share alike, whatever the will said, we should know exactly where we were and cut out this uncertainty which is playing the devil with us all. You see, we've been brought up too close to money to do without it, and none of us have twopence-half-penny of our own except Robert—and show me anyone in business who doesn't want more, especially these days. Then take Nora. Her husband hasn't got a bean—if he gets killed she'll have about two hundred a year. Aunt Honoria has brought her up to spend double that on her clothes. Say he comes home—they'll have nothing but his Army pension unless Aunt Honoria plays up. Take Honor. She's thirty-two and she's

never been trained for anything. She hasn't the nerve, or the health, or the guts to earn her living. And she's all set to marry Ernest, who wouldn't look at her if she got herself cut out of Aunt Honoria's will." He let his hand with a cigarette between the first and second fingers fall upon his knee and watched the smoke go up, his eyes curiously intent. "Take me. She's always given me an allowance. When you've always had a thing, it's not so easy to do without it. I'm a crock. They don't know whether they're going to take my foot off, or whether that will be the end of it if they do." He laughed a little, and Carey bit her lip suddenly and sharply—the sound jarred her so much. "See?" he said. "A kind of family pool would put us all on velvet, because there's really enough for everyone. I wouldn't at all mind letting you in on it. In fact, it's the only rational thing to do, because it's on the cards that she might take an absolutely devastating fancy to you and leave you—well, not the lot, but an uncomfortably large slice. You see, she's in the mood for something of the sort, poor old pet. Her friend Mrs. Gwent has just died—a terrifying female, but they were at school together and they'd kept it up like mad ever since. Well, now she's gone, and you are Julia's granddaughter—she was talking to me about her last night, all keyed-up. Don't you see it's quite likely that slice might come your way?"

Carey frowned.

"You're talking nonsense, but it isn't the sort of nonsense I like. I wish you'd stop."

He drew at his cigarette, his eyes warm and smiling.

"The unpalatable truth, my dear. The only thing that makes this kind of thing endurable is frankness. Unfortunately my beautiful idea of a pool won't work because, for one thing, Robert wouldn't play. He thinks far too much of himself to admit that Aunt Honoria could possibly fail to leave most of Uncle James's money to the only male Maquisten, to say nothing of his personal merits—and he's not in the least modest about those either. And secondly, the rest of us most unfortunately don't trust each other. We don't trust Robert either as a matter of fact, and he certainly wouldn't trust us. So we're back where we started, all sitting round with our tongues hanging out, and Aunt Honoria switching legacies whenever she hadn't got anything else to do. To start a new metaphor, it's exactly like a game of musical chairs—some day the music will stop and somebody won't have anything to sit down on." He threw away the end of his cigarette, pitched another log on to the fire, and limped over to the piano. "Moral song," he said. "Prepare to be edified."

His fingers ran up and down the keys rapidly and easily. He had a brilliant touch, and when he began to sing, a melodious baritone voice. As the piano stood, he could play, sing, and look at Carey all at the same time.

“Once upon a time, as I believe.
Very long ago? Yes, very long ago.
Adam lived, and loved, and married Eve.
Oh, so very, very long ago.
Here’s the book well thumbed for us to read in.
How much wiser we should be than they.
Yet to-day
Young Adam lives, and loves, and loses Eden
In just the same old pre-diluvial way.

Once upon a time, as I’ve been told,
Very long ago? Yes, very long ago.
Midas lived who had the touch of gold.
Oh, so very, very long ago.
Here’s the tale still told for him who listens.
How much wiser all of us should be.
Yet you see
We still believe that all is gold that glistens
And find ourselves as asinine as he.”

He looked at her, laughing, over the last chords.

She said, “Who wrote that?”

“I did.”

“It’s clever. You’re good—aren’t you?”

He twisted round on the piano-stool and fished out his cigarette-case.

“Thank you! I have thought of retiring upon street singing if I’m unlucky enough to be odd man out when Aunt Honoria packs up.”

VI

As Carey went upstairs to bed, the door of Mrs. Maquisten's room opened and a little elderly woman in a black stuff dress came out. She had a small wrinkled face, grey hair brushed smooth and twisted into a tight knot behind, and little sunken eyes. Something about the way her head poked forward and the silent way she moved put Carey in mind of a lizard.

"Mrs. Maquisten would like to speak to you."

Carey went back with her, was shown in, and was aware of the door closing behind her without any sound at all. It was a relief to hear Cousin Honoria's voice bidding her come and say good-night. She went over to the bed as she had done on her arrival.

A mild transformation had taken place. The silken cushions were now green linen pillows. There were still a great many of them. The brocaded coverlet had been replaced by a thin spread embroidered in wool with little bright bunches of flowers. A hem-stitched green sheet was turned down over it. Cousin Honoria's rings, earrings, and pearls lay in a heap on the table beside the bed, and a lace cap covered the red curls. One of the thin hands came out, looking quite undressed without its diamonds.

"Well, my dear, what sort of an evening have you had?"

"Very nice, thank you."

"Get on all right with my young people?"

"Oh, yes."

To her relief, Mrs. Maquisten did not pursue this. She said,

"I told Ellen I wanted to see you. Thank God, she does what she's told—at least in that sort of way. Nurses don't. They tell you you won't sleep or something like that and begin to be soothing. But Ellen's been my maid for long enough to do what she's told. Thirty-five years—it's a long time. And I've got my own bell that rings in her room, so I'm not quite at any nurse's mercy yet." She screwed round in bed, made a schoolgirl grimace at the door in the wall. "So you may put that in your pipe and smoke it, Magda Brayle!" She turned back, to see Carey laughing. "You've got to keep your end up with a nurse or she'll down you. I'm not ready to be downed—not yet anyhow. There—be off to your bed! And if anyone isn't nice to you, put them in their place. You've as much right here as the rest of them, and you can say I said so."

Carey went upstairs soberly. She was so tired that she fell asleep at once, but something followed her into her sleep and cast a shadow there which never quite

became a dream. Only in the shadow something moved and someone wept—in-
audibly, bitterly, dreadfully. She woke to a dark morning and Molly bringing her a
cup of tea.

Jeff Stewart fetched her at twelve. She was surprised and a little bit shocked to
find herself so glad to see him, because what he wanted was to be taken down a peg
or two. It is very difficult to take people down when they can see with their own
eyes that you're as pleased as Punch. For a moment she thought that Jeff was going
to kiss her, but she got a rather frozen look into her eye just in time and he thought
better of it, but she could see right away that she was going to have trouble. Before
they were out of the Square he was asking her what she thought would be the right
sort of Christmas present for a girl if you were going to marry her but hadn't broken
it to her yet. The bother about Jeff was that he made her angry—at least she
supposed he did—but he also made her want to laugh. Something about his
impudent, lazy voice and his impudent, lazy eyes. And of course quite too fatal to
laugh. She said in a nicely detached voice,

“Well, I don't know—it would depend on the man, and on the girl.”

She heard him laugh.

“Helpful—aren't you! What about a fur coat?”

Carey chilled the voice down.

“You can't give a girl a fur coat unless you're engaged to her—at least not the
sort of girl——”

“I've made a break—I told you I was liable to. The fur coat's out. Pity, because
I've got the coupons for it and all. How much engaged do we have to be?”

“Wedding-present engaged.”

“Well, that's where it gets difficult. I suppose you'd say I'd got that far, but she
hadn't. Of course the coupons will keep. What sort of fur do you think would be
best?”

“That would depend on the girl.”

“Well, take a blonde—people generally do take them, don't they?”

Carey said sedately, “Fair girls are very lucky about furs. They can wear all the
kinds that make you look like a fiend if you're dark.”

“As?”

“Squirrel, mole—sable, only practically nobody can afford it—I can't see who
does.”

“I've got quite a lot of money. Didn't you know?” Mr. Stewart's slight drawl had
become more pronounced. “And my blonde is the platinum sort—practically albino,
except of course she hasn't got pink eyes.”

“Then she’ll look hideous in anything. The less you spend the better.”

There was a pause, after which he said mournfully,

“I could always change her. It’s a pity I don’t like them dark. Of course I could compromise and look out for something half and half—say dark hair and blue eyes. What do you think about that?”

“I don’t have to think about it. It isn’t my business—is it?”

He said, “It might be.” He slipped his hand inside her arm and began to laugh. “Carey—let me give you a coat.”

“Certainly not!”

“But I want to very badly.”

“That has nothing to do with it.”

“But it might have—you said so yourself. You said I could give a girl a fur coat for a wedding present.”

Carey’s colour burned.

“I’m not having a wedding.”

“You might think about having one, and then we could go and choose the coat.”

She detached herself.

“Now, Jeff Stewart——”

He looked at her solicitously.

“You didn’t finish that. Couldn’t you think of anything to say?”

He got an ominously sparkling glance.

“Plenty, but you’d better not make me say it. Now, are you going to talk sense, or do I turn round and go home?”

“I talk sense. Here’s a first instalment. Have you taken a vow of celibacy or anything like that?”

“Of course I haven’t!”

“Then would you like to think about marrying me?”

Carey stood still, jerked up her chin, and directed a repressive glance at him. It didn’t seem to get there. She produced a reinforcement of words.

“I’m not considering marrying anyone. And if you think I’m going to be proposed to in the street, well, I’m not!”

“But I don’t ever see you alone except in the street,” he said in a reasonable voice. “You don’t want me to propose to you in front of Cousin Honoria and all the rest of them, do you?”

Carey stamped on a very hard pavement. Pins and needles ran up her leg, but the moral effect was good.

“I don’t want you to propose to me at all!”

“But I have proposed to you. You don’t want me to take it back, do you?”

“I think I’m going home.”

He took her by the elbow.

“All right, all right—don’t get mad. We’ll call it off. What about putting the fur coat in cold storage and getting down to buying a handbag—what we call a purse. Could you use one?”

They walked on again. Looking down at the bag which, like herself, had been damaged by enemy action and, unlike herself, would never be the same again, she had a horrid suspicion that all this talk of blondes, weddings, and fur coats, was so much Machiavellian overstatement in order to undermine her resistance to being given an expensive handbag.

Whilst she was considering retaliatory measures Jeff’s voice began again overhead.

“You know, you’ve got this proposal business all wrong. I’ve been reading a lot since I came over—what you might call sound escapist literature, all about how people lived before they started having European wars—late nineteenth and early twentieth-century stuff. When the girls in those books were proposed to they appreciated it—no jibbing and saying they were going home. Even if they were going to come back with the offer of being a sister to the fellow they did it as kindly as they could. There were some nice blushes and a lot of pretty remarks about its being an honour and they would always remember it and hand it down as a sort of an heirloom.”

The corners of Carey’s mouth began to twitch. A lazy downward-glancing eye may have perceived this. The voice overhead continued.

“I won’t say you didn’t blush. Maybe you did the best you could, but it didn’t look right to me. It could easily have been mistaken for just ordinary temper. These girls I was talking about, they had a kind of melting look with it. Some of them got their eyes brimming over, and a tear or two trickling down over the blushes.”

A wave of laughter broke through Carey’s guard. It wasn’t any good being angry, and she wanted to enjoy herself.

She said, “Oh, Jeff—you *fool!*” and heard him chuckle.

They bought a bag, they lunched, they went to a show. They quarrelled once or twice, and found it an exhilarating adventure. There were no dull moments. No shadow of things to come lay across their path.

VII

Jeff Stewart was out of town for the next few days. As a result Carey was a good deal thrown with Dennis. Quite frankly, she enjoyed this very much. He was a charming companion. His eyes said flattering things, but his tongue only amusing ones. She could relax and be entertained without having to worry about his taking several ells where she wasn't prepared to part with more than half an inch. It was nice to be admired without being, so to speak, under any obligation. Jeff had to be staved off all the time and kept in his place, with a constant back and forth struggle going on as to just what that place should be. It was very exhausting, and what made it worse was that deep down underneath she didn't really know how serious he was. He had that lazy way of saying things which made them sound as if he was amused, and that lazy way of looking which might be waiting to catch you out. Sometimes she wanted to get behind what he sounded and looked like, and sometimes she didn't. Because there might be just a teasing cousinly fondness, or. . . . She never pursued the alternative very far, but there had been times when a picture came up in her mind of a lion she had seen as a child—a big drowsy beast blinking lazily, a placid handsome creature half asleep. And then the rattle of a stick in the hand of an adventurous boy—jab, rattle, jab—and before the keeper could interfere, an enormous weight and energy of rage hurled with a deafening roar against the bars.

Dennis would certainly never hurl or roar. It was very reposeful to be sure of that. He liked her, he thought her easy to look at, and he flirted with reassuring dexterity. No one who hadn't had plenty of practice could possibly do it so well. And it was being awfully good for him.

On the third day Honoria Maquisten sent for her solicitor and was closeted with him for a long time.

The audience terminated, tea was taken in, and in its wake the family assembled by command—Robert Maquisten rather chafed and on his dignity, Nora mutinous, Honor more like a white mouse than ever, Carey and Dennis to bring up the rear.

As they neared the threshold, he whispered.

“Grand disinheriting scene—I don't mind betting you that's what we're in for. Robes of state, and all the diamonds. She always lumps them on when she's going to cut anyone out of her will.”

Nora looked back over her shoulder to make a face and say,

“That brocade she's wearing was eight pounds a yard—she told me so herself. I'd be a dream in it.”

Dennis said, “You'd better keep awake, darling, and well on the toes in case this

is going to be one of those ‘Fly, all is discovered’ events.”

She whisked round too quickly to betray a change of expression and tugged at Robert’s arm.

“Hi, Bob—what’s your fancy? Have you got a crime up your sleeve? It would be rather funny if we all had, and gave ourselves away.”

He sent her a repressive look which she seemed to find exhilarating.

From behind her Dennis said softly,

“Think up a good one, Honor darling.”

And then they were all trooping up and saying how do you do to Mr. Aylwin. Carey saw a stout man with a rugged face and sandy hair mixed with grey. He looked at her with interest as he shook hands.

“Julia’s granddaughter,” said the deep voice, introducing her.

“Just so. I am afraid I don’t remember her.”

“No—you would only be ten years old when she died.” She turned to Carey. “Mr. Aylwin is a connection of yours as well as of mine. My great-aunt, Harriet Harland, became his grandfather’s second wife.” Her bright, penetrating glance moved on, resting in turn upon Robert, Dennis, Nora, Honor, and Magda Brayle, who had come in from the other side. “I wish to tell you all in front of Mr. Aylwin that I have added Carey’s name to the beneficiaries under my will. I don’t wish anyone to say that it was done in a hole-and-corner way, or as a result of undue influence, or in weakness of intellect. If anyone has any doubt about my being of sound mind, I’ll trouble them to say so now, and not go raising hares and blackening my reputation and their own after I’m gone. There are plenty of you here, so there are plenty of witnesses. If any of you have got anything to say, you can say it.”

It was the most uncomfortable moment of Carey’s life. Her colour burned and died, leaving her distressed and pale. She murmured something which sounded like “Please, Cousin Honoria——” but the words were drowned by Dennis’s laughter. He blew his aunt a kiss and said,

“Darling, how too dramatic! You do brighten things up, don’t you? Not a dull moment!”

Mr. Aylwin gave him a look between tolerance and reproof, and turned to say something in a low voice. Beyond the fact that it began with “My dear Honoria,” no one but herself was any the wiser. She made very much the same face as Nora had made at Dennis and sketched a gesture which set all her rings making rainbows. Her voice mimicked his.

“My dear Mark! Sit down and have your tea. Magda, bring a cup of tea for Mr. Aylwin. Nora, it’s your turn to pour out. It’s just as well—at least you won’t drop

the teapot if I shock you, and Honor probably would. Well now, isn't anyone going to speak? Remember, here's your opportunity. If you don't take it, there won't be anything doing afterwards—Mark will see to that.”

Mr. Aylwin's sandy eyebrows rose, but he made no further protest. Having known Honoria Maquisten intimately for forty years, he was only too well aware of the fact that opposition merely spurred her. If she meant to have a scene, a scene she would have. He took his cup of tea from Magda, sat down, and surveyed the baited family. Of them all, Robert showed the most temper, and the most control. He glowered, but he had himself in hand. He was older than the others—mature—a man with a business of his own. Honoria shouldn't—no, she really shouldn't.

It was quite plain that Honoria was enjoying herself. The red curls quivered and the diamonds flashed.

“Nobody got anything to say? What unanimity! Well then, if you're all quite satisfied you can say so. You've all got tongues. . . . Robert?”

He certainly had himself very well in hand. His voice couldn't have been bettered as he said,

“Isn't this all a little unnecessary, Aunt Honoria? What you do with your property is entirely your own affair. I hope you don't think that any of us would question that.”

Mrs. Maquisten bent a look of smiling malice upon him. If she had looked like Nora a moment before, she now bore a startling resemblance to Dennis.

“My dear Bob, that is a pious platitude. Did you really expect to get by with it? What I am asking all of you, and at the moment you in particular, is whether you are satisfied? Or not?”

His brows drew together.

“I couldn't possibly answer a question like that.”

“And why not?”

He managed to smile.

“You have a perfect right to leave anything to anybody. That satisfies me, and I think it ought to satisfy you.”

She nodded and said,

“Ingenious! You're a good man of business. . . . Nora?”

Nora held the heavy teapot poised. Her eyes were as bright and hard as Honoria Maquisten's own.

“What do you want me to say—that you're all there and on the spot? I've never heard anybody doubt it.”

The eyes met in a glance that held and challenged like a meeting of blades.

Dermis said, “Honours easy!”

Mrs. Maquisten nodded.

“Honor?”

Honor looked down, twisted bony fingers in her lap.

“Nothing to say? Swallowed your tongue?”

“There isn’t anything to say.” The words came in a shrinking whisper.

“Meaning you’re kind enough to agree that I can do what I like with my own?”

“Yes.”

“Dennis?”

“Darling, need you ask?”

She said drily, “I don’t know that I need, but I do.”

He got up out of his chair, went over to her, and stood there leaning on his crutch.

“You know, you are plagiarizing horribly. We seem to have wandered into King Lear, and I suppose I’m Cordelia. I’ve always thought her the world’s prize mutt, so I’ll give a completely original reading of the part. In fact, darling, I think you’re the cat’s whiskers, and anything you do is O.K. by me. With which virginal remarks I make my bow—or I would if I wasn’t on a crutch—and invite the audience to applaud.”

Mr. Aylwin promptly clapped his hands.

“And now,” he said, “don’t you think, Honoria, that the curtain might come down? Theatrical performances during meals are a little hard on the digestion, and as you know, I am a passionate admirer of Mrs. Deeping’s scones.”

VIII

Nora whirled out of the house and was seen no more. This time apparently it was Alan, not Jack, who was her escort. She passed Dennis and Carey on the stairs and flung out the information with zest. Then she opened her fur coat and pointed triumphantly to a large glittering emerald and diamond crescent.

“How’s that for richness?”

Dennis whistled.

“How did you get away with it?”

She put out the tip of a pointed red tongue at him.

“She gave it to me just now—sent Ellen to get me and pressed it into my hand. Aha!”

Dennis lifted an eyebrow.

“Everyone will think it’s Woolworth, or if they don’t you’ll be garotted on the way home.”

She said, “Pouf!” and flicked two fingers at Carey. “It’s worth masses more than the one she gave you, but you’ll probably get the rubies. Competition in armaments! I wonder what Honor got. She was going in as I came out. Poor old Den—you can’t even wear a diamond ring! Bye-bye—have a nice time!”

Honor came creeping down after them, followed by Magda Brayle. As they came into the dining-room, Carey had a momentary impulse towards laughter. Honor in that hideous beige frock, the last colour on earth, she ought ever to put anywhere near her, and, fastening the neck, one of those frightful Victorian brooches like a gold pudding with stones stuck in it for plums! The stones were red, and possibly valuable. Rubies? Difficult to tell in all that gold, but she didn’t think so. Probably carbuncles, in which case not valuable at all. All that really mattered was that Honor was obviously as pleased as Punch. She fingered the horrid thing, and was determined that everyone should notice it. Perhaps the stones were really rubies. Perhaps she only thought they were. Perhaps she was just pleased at having a present. The impulse to laughter died. It was pathetic to see anyone so pleased with a heavy, ugly thing like that.

Dennis looked at it and enquired candidly,

“Your share of the loot?”

“Aunt Honoria gave it to me just now.”

“Mrs. Maquisten is very generous,” said Magda Brayle.

Dennis laughed.

“She’s very clever—little sops all round to keep us from hating Carey. I don’t

know about Robert, but I got a cheque—quite a nice fat cheque. Carey and I are dining out and doing a show on the strength of it to-morrow.”

Honor looked under her pale eyelashes at Magda.

“You didn’t get anything? But of course you’re not one of the family.”

It was a bald statement of fact without apparent malice. Carey wondered. Could you be so inept as that without meaning anything? She thought she preferred Honor silent, though it got on your nerves a bit.

If Magda’s feelings were hurt, she did not allow it to appear.

“Mrs. Maquisten is always very kind,” she said.

Carey thought her colour rose a little. Perhaps it was this faint flush that made her suddenly realize that Magda’s looks had possibilities. Her features were good. A little darkening of the eyebrows, a touch of lipstick, some colour in the cheeks, would do wonders for her. She wanted colour. All that starchy whiteness, so becoming to most women, just blotted her out. Colour, and the play of expression—if she had these, she would be a very pretty woman.

“A penny for your thoughts,” said Dennis.

Carey blushed, and was laughed at.

Honor disappeared after dinner. Carey and Dennis spent a companionable evening. They had reached the stage of intimacy at which you talk if you want to, and sit silent if you have nothing to say or if what you would like to say is not ready to put into words. She discovered that he sang charmingly to the guitar.

“Pity Aunt Honoria doesn’t like music, or I might be able to sing my way into being residuary legatee.”

Carey sat up straight.

“Don’t any of you ever talk or think of anything but Cousin Honoria’s will?”

He smiled affably.

“Oh, sometimes—just to fill in odd moments.”

“Because it’s frightfully bad for you, and frightfully boring.”

He twanged a soft descending arpeggio.

“Boring? Oh, no, darling—we’re passionately interested. It’s the golden link that binds us.”

“That’s what I mean. It’s horrid, and it’s dull.”

He shook his head.

“Not dull, my sweet. It combines a really good gamble with the excitement of the chase. There’s only one thing that offers a bigger thrill, and that is making love. Combine the three, and you have the perfect situation.”

Carey looked at him with an odd little smile.

“You do like talking nonsense, don’t you?”

“That’s not nonsense—it’s a profession of faith. And I’m one of those rare people who translates faith into works.”

“I suppose you know what you’re talking about. I don’t.”

“You will, darling. I’m leading tactfully up to the fact that now you are an heiress I shall probably make love to you.”

Carey’s chin lifted.

“How kind!”

“Yes, isn’t it? I’m a little handicapped, but I can still put one foot forward, and the wounded hero stunt is said to go down well. If I were to come over faint, would you go down on your knees beside me?”

“No, I shouldn’t. I should call Magda.”

“A heart of stone! I must think again.”

“I’d much rather you went on singing.”

Rather to her surprise, he complied, and after a little put down the guitar and took up a book. But when Carey got up to say good-night he reached for his crutch and limped to the door with her. She thought he was going to open it, but he stood there, looking at her and smiling.

“Pleasant dreams.”

“Thank you.”

“About me.”

“I see quite a lot of you in the day.”

His eyes held a spark of malice.

“There are several answers to that—but perhaps better not. Kiss me good-night?”

“Certainly not!”

“I shouldn’t have asked, should I? What’s a girl to say? Be brave—it’s quite painless!”

His hand came down on her shoulder, steadying him. You can’t step back and let a cripple fall. Carey didn’t know whether she wanted to step back or not. She ought to have known—she didn’t. She was pulled up close and kissed. It was rather disquieting, but not at all unpleasant. She gave a little laugh, and was kissed again.

“Dennis—I’m not a crutch!”

“All right—all over.” He let go of her. “Going on well?” He stepped back from the door as he spoke and opened it.

Carey stood and tried to look severe.

“It wasn’t fair!”

“Wasn’t it?”

Something in his teasing look brought the colour flaming to her cheeks. She said, “You know it wasn’t!” and ran out of the room.

His voice followed her, pleasant and cousinly for anyone to hear.

“Good-night, darling!”

IX

It was in the evening that Honoria Maquisten gave her the brooch. Carey had changed when she came in, and proceeded by order to the bedroom, where Cousin Honoria sat in state by the fire robed in silver tissue hemmed with fur, diamonds in her ears and at her throat, diamonds on the long, thin fingers. None of the jewels were the same as she had worn yesterday. Carey blinked at the splendour, and felt herself very sober in her blue woollen house-gown. She sat obediently on a chair placed for her by Ellen, who then retired, noiseless and lizard-like. She seemed scarcely to open the door or to close it again, but since she was there one minute and gone the next, it was reasonable to suppose that she had done both.

With a feeling of discomfort it came to Carey that she had never been in a house where people made so little noise. Cousin Honoria's deep voice and the jarring tap of Dennis' crutch stood out against a curiously muffled background. Of course curtains and carpets being so thick had something to do with it. No, not something—everything. And then she remembered Nora calling the house a tomb the night before and flinging out of it with a banged door to break the silence.

Honoria Maquisten put a hand in a fur-trimmed pocket and held it out with something on the palm.

“That's a hideous garment you've got on—as much like a dressing-gown as makes no difference. All the clothes are hideous nowadays, but at any rate it's long. I can't get used to things above the knee in the evening. And I won't say the colour doesn't suit you. I suppose you matched your eyes. You'd better have this to cheer it up. I took a fancy to it in a second-hand shop and bought it to give to Julia on her twenty-first birthday a week before she died. It's been put away for fifty years. I'd like you to have it.”

Carey lifted the brooch from the thin, dry palm. Her feelings were rather mixed. The word tomb cropped up again—it was like being given something out of a tomb. But it was very kind, and she had never had such a pretty brooch. Pleasure came to the top and stayed there. She put the brooch against the blue stuff of her dress, and saw how the colour deepened the big pale sapphire set round with small rose-diamond points.

“It's lovely, Cousin Honoria.”

Mrs. Maquisten nodded.

“It looks nice on your frock and on you, but it isn't worth twopence—the sapphire is too pale. It's just pretty—that's all. I suppose you'd rather have diamonds?” The sharp eyes were lively and searching under quizzical brows.

Carey shook her head.

“Oh, no, I wouldn’t.”

“Why?”

“Well, what’s the good of diamonds when you’ve got your living to earn?”

Honor Maquisten fingered her necklace.

“Do you mean to say you wouldn’t say thank you for this?”

Carey met her look with a laughing one.

“What would I do with it? I couldn’t wear it.”

“You could sell it.” The voice was dry and cold.

Carey flushed to the roots of her hair.

“*Please, Cousin Honor*——”

There was a rainbow flash as a hand came out and patted her.

“There, child—I’d no business to tease you. Put on the brooch and give me a kiss.”

Nora was at dinner, vivid and ornamental in emerald green.

“Got to match Aunt Honor’s room,” she explained. “I don’t see why she should have it all her own way, and it might stir her up to give me an odd emerald or two. She’s got oodles of them.”

When Magda did not appear, Carey asked where she was, and was answered by Dennis.

“Evening out. Only one of our rays of sunshine tonight. Honor darling, be twice as sparkling as usual, won’t you. We don’t want our new cousin to think us dull.” His eyes came back to Carey and dwelt, sparkling, upon the sapphire brooch. “Where did you get the gewgaw?” Then, without waiting for an answer, “Elementary, my dear Watson. Aunt Honor has begun to part—the thick end of the wedge.”

Carey said, “It belonged to my grandmother.”

“Meaning that Aunt Honor didn’t give it to you—or that she did, but it used to belong to your grandmother?”

“It used to belong to my grandmother.”

“A little disingenuous of you, darling.”

“Well, it isn’t your business,” said Nora.

Honor’s hand had gone up to the neck of her dress. There was no brooch there. She said nothing. Her hand dropped into her lap again.

Carey laughed, partly because Honor gave her the creeps, and partly because she didn’t see why Dennis should have it all his own way.

He shook his head at her reprovingly, his eyes bright and malicious.

“To-morrow it will probably be diamonds which didn’t belong to your

grandmother but were bought by Uncle James out of money made from armaments in the last war. And then perhaps it will be cheques—or the famous rubies. . . . Darling, don't tell me you don't know about the rubies! Too, too unnaturally innocent of you! They're marvellous, and it's been the tragedy of Aunt Honoria's life that she's never had the nerve to wear them. The hair, you know. She won't leave them to Nora for the same reason, and I seem to remember her saying something rather biting to Honor about what she would look like in them. Do you remember what it was, my sweet?"

Honor kept her eyes on her plate and did not speak.

Nora said, "Come off it, Den!"

He caught Carey's frowning gaze and laughed.

"I've had serious thoughts of swearing to marry a black-haired wench to see if that would bring down the scales on my side. What are your views about rubies?"

"I haven't got any."

"Just as well, because the original Latin proverb about woman being variable was composed with a prophetic eye upon Aunt Honoria. Diamonds today, rubies tomorrow, and nothing the next day. She'll probably leave the whole caboodle to Robert just because he's got plenty without."

It would have given Carey the greatest pleasure to throw something at him—the salt cellar, a full glass of water—but she restrained herself. She looked past Honor, who was eating fish a crumb at a time after the manner of Amina in the Arabian Nights, and said scornfully,

"I can't think why you bother about it. You'd all be much more comfortable if you didn't."

Jeff Stewart was kept busy out of London. He wrote most days, and sometimes twice—funny scraps, not real letters at all. One was just, “Honey, I wish I was back.” Some of the others weren’t much longer, but there was one which affected her oddly—a long, serious letter all about his job, the sort of letter he might have written to another man. It gave Carey a queer jolted feeling, she couldn’t for the life of her tell why. It might have been because the letter was dead serious and she wasn’t prepared to take him seriously yet.

Meanwhile she was having the pleasantest time of her life. Cousin Honoria was affectionate, Nora friendly, and Dennis the best of escorts. He kept his word and made love to her in the most agreeable manner. It was impossible to believe him serious, so her conscience did not bother her at all. He amused himself and her, and when Jeff came back it would be very, very good for both of them. The days of the second week slipped by.

She had been at No. 13 for just a fortnight when Honoria Maquisten showed her the rubies. It was quite a performance, and it did not begin until she was satisfied that Magda Brayle was out of the way. She had two hours off in the afternoon, and sometimes, at her own request or by Mrs. Maquisten’s decree, the time was shifted. Once a week she went off duty at six and took the evening out. On November 15th Mrs. Maquisten sent her out at half-past five, telling her not to come back for a couple of hours, and presently she sent Carey to see whether she was gone. After which she reached up to the head of her bed and pressed the bell which rang in Ellen’s room across the passage.

Then the performance began. Ellen was sent to rummage at the back of a drawer and bring out a curious inlaid box. It was quite small, about five inches by four, with different coloured woods inlaid to make a pattern. Mrs. Maquisten gave it to Carey with a curt “Open it!” But there wasn’t any opening. She turned it over and over, but it wasn’t like any box she had ever seen, and there wasn’t an opening anywhere. She looked up from it to find herself being laughed at.

“I can’t open it, Cousin Honoria.”

“No? I didn’t think you could. Give it to Ellen.”

Carey held it out, but there was no answering movement from the woman beside her. Ellen stood with her hands together, huge knuckles prominent, nails cut down to the quick, fingers not reddened but bloodless, the forefinger very much pricked. She poked her head forward like a tortoise coming out of its shell and said,

“I can’t open it either.”

Mrs. Maquisten turned a mocking look on her.

“Can’t you really?”

The small, cold eyes met sparkling hazel ones.

“You know very well I can’t open it.”

“So I do,” said Honoria Maquisten. “Well, give it to me!” She took the box, and with one of her rapid movements twisted it, and parted her hands again with a piece of the box in each. A little brass key fell between them upon the green coverlet. “There you are, Ellen—open the safe!” She turned to Carey. “You’re privileged, my dear. Of course they all know I’ve got a safe somewhere in my room. At least I suppose they do, but they don’t know where it is, and they’ve never seen it open. No one ever has except Ellen.”

Carey felt dreadfully uncomfortable.

“But Cousin Honoria——”

“Don’t be a goose, my dear! If I choose to trust you it’s my own affair—you needn’t let on to the others.”

Ellen stood there hostile, the key in her hand.

“It’s Mr. Robert you should trust, or Mr. Dennis,” she said—“not those that haven’t been in the house no more than a fortnight. All right, you needn’t look at me like that—I know my place! If everyone did, it would be all the better, but there’s some that don’t and never will.”

Honoria Maquisten said incisively,

“That’s quite enough, Ellen. Get on with it!”

The grumbling continued, but almost inaudibly. Carey could see the old woman’s lips moving as she turned away and went round to the far side of the bed. When she passed out of sight behind the green and silver curtain, Mrs. Maquisten put out a hand and slid it back, but it went no farther than to admit a view of Ellen’s black dress and the knob of hair at the back of her head.

“The safe,” said Mrs. Maquisten, “is there in the wall. A bit of the panelling slips away. I’ll show you how it works some day when I’m up.” She dropped her voice to an exasperated murmur. “Ellen’s a jealous old pig. Don’t take any notice. I’ll put it across her when I’ve got her alone.”

There was the click of a turning key and a swishing sound as if a door had fallen back against the brocade of the curtain. The little brass rings up under the canopy tinkled. Ellen’s head came round the pleated folds, mouth puckered up, eyes cold and bright among disapproving wrinkles.

“What were you wanting?”

“I want the rubies. You know that perfectly well.”

“And how was I to know when you never said a word?”

Mrs. Maquisten laughed.

“Didn’t I? Well then, I say it now. Rubies, Ellen—rubies for Miss Carey!”

Ellen’s eyelids came half down over her eyes. Through the slits something looked out, as malevolent as a snake.

Carey kept her feet firmly where they were, but she would have liked to step back—even with the width of the great bed between them she would have liked to step back. She wasn’t going to, of course, but wanting to do it made her angry. What did it matter to her how the cross old tortoise looked?

The cross old tortoise turned away, but slowly—slowly. Carey felt a little cold, a little sick. She was reminded horribly of the way a reptile moves. Once, by a pond, she had seen a snake asleep and watched it wake like that with a slow, sluggish motion, the head first and then the coils, until suddenly it was gone, like the lash of a whip, like water running. And then she had to laugh at herself. Tortoise or snake, she couldn’t see Ellen running.

Honorina Maquisten patted her hand.

“They’re pretty. You’ll like them,” she said.

Carey had a blank moment before she remembered that they were waiting to see the rubies. And then Ellen was setting faded red morocco cases out—a very large case, two round ones, and a lot of others, all with C.M. upon the lids in Gothic letters from which the gold had almost vanished. Mrs. Maquisten pressed the spring, threw back the lid of the largest case, and displayed a Victorian necklace with a design of diamond bows and fleurs-de-lis with half a dozen enormous rubies embedded in the pattern. She gazed at them with a passionate admiration which Carey felt quite unable to share. The rubies were a lovely colour, and the diamonds made rainbows about them, but what in a modern world could you do with a thing which must be almost as hard and heavy to wear as a drawing-room fender?

“Lovely stones—aren’t they? They belonged to James’s mother. The old man paid a fortune for them. She was a good-looking woman—dark, with a fine bust. Nobody’s got anything to prop a necklace up on now. People knew how to show off their jewels in the eighties. I’ve never worn them, you know, because of my hair, but I’ve wanted to, even though I knew I’d be a figure of fun if I did.” A ruminating, confidential tone came into her voice. “It’s a funny thing, but I don’t believe there’s a red-haired woman breathing who doesn’t hanker after wearing crimson and pink. It’s a regular craving, and I’ve never given way to it like some of them do, but oh, how I’ve wanted to—you’d never believe it! And the rubies are the worst temptation of all. I’d almost have dyed my hair to wear them, but I believe James

would have divorced me. I used to plan dresses to wear them with—ruby velvet with a yard of train, dead plain and just the colour of the stones.”

Carey couldn't help it. She said, “Oh, Cousin Honoria!” And all at once Honoria Maquisten was grinning at her like a schoolboy.

“Sets your teeth on edge, doesn't it? Well, it ought to set mine, but it don't.”

She opened the two round cases and showed matching bracelets nearly two inches wide, alternate bows and fleurs-de-lis with rubies set between; Carey had to put them on. They looked garish but rather exciting against the sapphire blue of her dress.

“You girls can't be bothered to show your arms in the evening now—nothing but long sleeves. Skinny elbows and bony wrists that won't bear showing—that's about the size of it.”

Carey laughed, and handed the bracelets back.

A corsage ornament came next, three square rubies entangled in more diamond bows; a couple of brooches, one with a design of fleurs-de-lis, the other an enormous bow draped round a ruby; three rings, solitaire, half-loop, and marquise; and, the one thing Carey really liked, a charming slender necklet with single diamonds and three diamond-circled rubies.

“Pretty, isn't it? Put it on and look at yourself in the glass. The big necklace makes into a tiara, and when she wore it that way she used this light necklet. Of course it ought to be on your neck and not over a stuff dress, but put it on.”

The diamond chain sparkled against the blue, the rubies hung down low. The effect was ridiculous but rather charming—Carey's hair so black and shining, her skin so white, the eyes that matched her dress, her mouth that repeated the colour of the rubies.

She came back to the bed, pleased and smiling. Honoria Maquisten smiled too.

“I'm leaving them to you, Carey.”

“Oh, no!”

“Oh, yes, my dear.”

All this time Ellen had been standing on the other side of the bed, her hands folded at her waist, her face without expression, her eyes hooded. She opened them now, poked her head forward, and said,

“Miss Carey's in the right of it.”

Mrs. Maquisten reproved her in a perfunctory manner which bespoke long practice.

“Hold your tongue, Ellen!”

Ellen pursed her lips and repeated the remark.

“Miss Carey’s in the right of it. Mrs. Maquisten’s they were, and it’s to Mr. Robert’s wife they did ought to go.”

Carey lifted the necklet over her head and dropped it on the bed. Honoria Maquisten took no notice of it or of her. She did not turn her head in Ellen’s direction, but she addressed her indifferently.

“Mr. Robert hasn’t got a wife.”

Ellen tossed her head.

“That’s not to say he won’t never have one, is it?”

Mrs. Maquisten laughed.

“And it’s not to say I’d want to give her my rubies if he had. Perhaps I shouldn’t like her.”

“Then you should let Miss Honor have them. They come from Maquistens, and you didn’t ought to leave them out of the family.”

Carey said, “*Please*, Cousin Honoria——” and saw a flare of temper send up danger signals to burn in Honoria Maquisten’s cheeks. Curiously enough, the colour made her look old, accentuating the cheek-bones, giving the effect of patchy make-up. In a voice edged with anger she said,

“Keep quiet, both of you! When I want advice I’ll ask for it; and when I want a sermon, Ellen, I’ll tell you. Put the things away and be done with it!”

Then, as Ellen went round to the safe again, she caught at Carey’s hand and held it against her cheek for a moment.

“Proud, obstinate creature.”

Carey nodded. She had to bite her lip to keep back a smile. All at once it beat her.

Honoria Maquisten smiled too, and said in mock reproof,

“Pride goes before a fall, Carey.”

XI

November 16th was like any other November day—a dark reluctant morning, a touch of fog in the heavy air, the disintegrating damp and cold which mark the slow decay of autumn. There was nothing to single it out. Yet it was a day whose shadow was to stretch a long, long way. No one in the house would ever see the date again without an inward shudder and recoil. It began pleasantly enough. Nora went off gaily to drive her general. Honor departed to pack parcels, and as Dennis remarked, that cleared the air. And presently, after some time spent with Cousin Honoria, Carey and he went out to lunch together.

It is from lunch-time onwards that the shadow begins to fall across the day, darkening and confusing its happenings. Some points emerge beyond dispute. Molly James, passing through the hall, saw a letter lying on the mat just inside the front door, the metal cage originally in use having been given in for salvage. She picked it up, saw that it had no stamp, and that it was addressed to Mrs. Maquisten. She went upstairs with it, knocked at the bedroom door, and took it in. She puts the time at between a quarter and half past two. On her way back to the door Mrs. Maquisten called her with a dreadful voice. In all the times she had to tell her story Molly never varied from this word—Mrs. Maquisten's voice was dreadful, and she looked dreadful too. She asked if either of her nieces was in, and Molly said that they were not. Then she asked for Mr. Harland, and Molly said he was out to lunch. Last of all she asked for Miss Carey, and Molly said she was out too. Then Mrs. Maquisten said, "Tell her to come to me the minute she comes in," and Molly said, "Yes, ma'am," and got herself out of the room as quick as she could go. She told Mrs. Deeping not once but many times that she was glad to be the other side of the door—"And somebody's going to catch it—you see if they don't. I wouldn't be Miss Carey."

Carey came home at a quarter to three. She wore a blue coat with a faint over-check of green and black buttoned right up to her chin, and a small tilted blue hat with a bright green quill. Her eyes shone and her cheeks glowed. Lunch had been very amusing. Dennis had been very amusing. Life was very amusing. She ran up the steps of No. 13 and let herself in with the latchkey which Cousin Honoria had given her. She was humming a tune. And then Molly was telling her that she was wanted at once, and she stopped humming and ran upstairs, a little disquieted, a little dashed from her morning brightness.

Since Honoria Maquisten did not live to give any account of the interview which followed, it rests upon what Carey said about it afterwards, and upon what Magda

Brayle overheard. What is not in dispute is that Mrs. Maquisten was in a state of excitement and anger, and that she ordered Carey to ring up Mr. Aylwin and command his immediate attendance with a view to altering her will. That Carey demurred is certain. The loud, deep voice was raised and the command repeated. There is really no difficulty in believing that Magda, in the bathroom beyond the communicating door, could hear not only that command but a good deal more. In the end Carey rang up Mr. Aylwin's office, to be told that he was out of town for a couple of days. With the receiver still at her ear, she turned to repeat the information. She met blazing eyes and an imperious look.

"Ask where he is! He must come back!"

The telephone muttered. Carey turned again.

"They say he's in Scotland. He won't be back till late to-morrow night."

Honorita Maquisten beat with her hand upon the bed.

"You think you can get me to put it off, do you? But you can't—nobody can! Who are you talking to? Ask for the managing clerk, Mr. Hood! Tell him to come round at once! At once, I say! And he's to bring my last will with him—the one I signed the other day!"

The message delivered, Carey turned again.

"That was Mr. Hood speaking. He says he will come round as soon as he can, but your will is in the safe and Mr. Aylwin has the keys."

All this conversation could be heard in the office, and is not in dispute. Carey rang off, and after a little went up to her room to take off her things. It was then about ten past three.

Ernest Hood arrived, and was shown up to Mrs. Maquisten's room at half past three. He remained for about half an hour.

At half past four Nora Hull ran in for a cup of tea, leaving her car outside. She was in a hurry as she had to take General Ferguson out of town and they both hoped to be back in reasonable time for dinner—"He's just round the corner seeing another brass hat, and I'm to pick him up in twenty minutes, so you'll have to fly, Molly." To which Molly replied that tea was just going in to Mrs. Maquisten's room, and that Mrs. Maquisten wanted to see either Mrs. Hull or Miss Honor, whichever came in first—"And I was to say it was very particular."

Twenty minutes later Nora banged out of the house again. She had certainly drunk at least one cup of tea, but neither she nor Mrs. Maquisten had eaten anything.

Carey had a cup of tea in the study, and found it bitter to her taste. She heard Nora's noisy departure—"Gosh, I'll be late!"—and the slam of the door, and a little

later on a much quieter opening of the same door, and Molly, evidently on the watch—"Oh, Miss Honor, will you please go up to Mrs. Maquisten at once."

She heard these things because she had set the door ajar to listen for Dennis. But it was not till six o'clock that Dennis came home.

Carey had meant to go out to him, but when the moment came she couldn't do it. She had waited too long, the shadow lay too heavy on her. She was tired, and cold, and frightened. She heard him cross the hall with his limping step, and then the slow tap of his crutch moving from step to step as he went up the stairs.

It was nearly half past six before he came down again.

"Well, well——" he said, and then he let himself down into his chair with a twisted smile. He got his foot up on to the leg-rest, dropped his crutch on the floor, and said, "Some shemozzle! You look battered, darling. We don't take them as seriously as that, you know. She'll calm down."

"Is she any better?"

He laughed.

"Not noticeably. What did she say to you?"

Carey pressed her hands together.

"She sent for me. Molly said she had a letter, but I don't know what was in it, or who it was from. When I got there she was all worked up. She said she had been deceived, and that was the one thing she never could forgive, and I was to ring up Mr. Aylwin and tell him to come round at once because she was going to alter her will. I tried to soothe her down and get her to wait, but she simply wouldn't listen. I was afraid she would make herself ill, so I did it. But Mr. Aylwin is in Scotland, so then she said she would have Mr. Hood, and he came round and was there a long time—at least it seemed like a long time."

"Have you seen her since?"

"No. Nora came in and had tea with her. And then Honor, and she saw her too. That was after Nora went out again. What did she say to you just now?"

"The same as she said to you—someone had deceived her, and she was going to put it across them. Theme with variations. All very temperamental and not at all what the doctor would order. And right in the middle of it Magda had to come in and say of course she couldn't take her evening, Mrs. Maquisten was so upset. And then the fur did begin to fly. She told Magda just where she got off—said Ellen had put her to bed for thirty-five years and she supposed she could do it again, and if there was another word about it, Magda could take herself off for keeps. I think she'd have loved to knock up a row, but Magda stayed perfectly calm—the triple shield of starch. It emerged that she thought Aunt Honoria ought to have a sleeping-

draught after all the excitement, and she thought she ought to be in to give it to her. She doesn't like taking anything, but if she gets too excited she's supposed to take these tablets—only she can't swallow them, or she thinks she can't, which comes to the same thing, so they have to be melted down, and she takes them in coffee, with a dash of brandy to take away the taste. Well, I said, 'Look here, you're making no end of a song and dance about this. What's wrong with your putting the stuff ready and Ellen can give it to her?' I could see Aunt Honoria was mad keen to get Magda out of the way. She's working up for a major family scene and she wants a free hand and no eavesdropping." He paused, shifted his position, grimacing as if the movement jarred him, and said sharply, "Did she tell you who she was cutting off with a shilling?"

"No, she didn't."

"No hint—nothing to guess on?"

"No."

"Nor she did to me—just raged and said they'd be sorry they'd ever been born."

"Did she say *they*?"

"Yes. But not meant plural—meant to avoid saying he or she. At least that's the way I took it. And you'll see she won't say anything to the others either—not to whoever it is, or anyone. She'll just leave us all to simmer, searching our consciences and shaking in our shoes, wondering which of our sins has found us out, and then she'll stage a grand scene of repudiation." He laughed a little. "She's deep. I wouldn't put it past her to be fishing for a confession. Rattle people enough, and they do confess, you know. And wouldn't it be meat and drink to her if we trooped up one by one and each got a different confession off our chests——" He broke off abruptly and asked, "When will Aylwin be back?"

"To-morrow night."

"Then I should think she'd wait for him. But I don't know—she's feeling very fierce, and there's nothing she hates like waiting. She told me Ernest Hood had gone away with the draft of her new will, and he was to get it all ship-shape and bring it back tomorrow for her to sign. That looks as if she wasn't going to wait. Of course she might sign the will and keep the terms up her sleeve until she could get Aylwin round to assist at the execution of the criminal. She likes a good full house when she puts on one of her acts."

Carey said, "Do you mean she's done it before?"

He burst out laughing.

"My innocent child! Of course she's done it before, and of course she'll do it

again, dozens of times! But it all depends on just what the criminal has done this time, and that is what only the criminal knows. You see, Aunt Honoria goes up in the air with such energy that you can't tell whether the thing that has touched her off is dynamite, or a harmless household match. Up to now it has always been much ado about nothing and no harm done—the legacy that came out goes back and harmony reigns. But there's always the chance of some real live dynamite. You never know, do you?"

XII

Nora rushed in again, and dined without changing. Honor came down looking scared, and whenever Molly was out of the room, and sometimes when she was in it, they went on talking about Mrs. Maquisten and the approaching family scene. Carey said as little as possible, and Honor more or less confined herself to saying at intervals how dreadful it was, but Dennis and Nora carried on a brisk and uninhibited interchange of views as to the identity of the culprit and the nature of the crime.

“She didn’t give you any clue? Honor, my sweet, bring the great mind to bear on what the Aunt said to you.”

Honor drooped and said, “Oh, no, it was dreadful.”

“How do you mean, dreadful?” Dennis said through a mouthful of fish.

But it was Honor who choked.

“She was so angry.”

“I expect she still is,” said Nora cheerfully. “What did she say?”

Honor took a small sip of water.

“She said she had been deceived.”

“And you wouldn’t deceive anyone for worlds, darling!” said Dennis. “None of us would—would we? But go on—was there any clue as to who had been deceiving her this time?”

“Oh, no—there wasn’t.”

“Did she say anything to you, Nora?”

“Only the same piece everyone else got—no clue. I plump for Robert.”

Everyone brightened. Dennis said,

“What do you suppose he’s done?”

“Embezzled. It’s always the frightfully respectable people who embezzle. And the letter was to tell Aunt Honoria about it.”

“Who wrote it?”

“Ask Aunt Honoria!”

Dennis leaned both elbows on the table.

“I call that a rotten guess. I say it’s bigamy.”

“*Robert?*”

“It’s always the most unlikely people who are bigamists.”

To everyone’s surprise Honor lifted her light lashes and said in a wavering whisper,

“Perhaps it’s Fifth Column——”

Dennis's lips twisted.

"Oh, no—you must draw the line somewhere. My family pride draws it quite firmly at Fifth Column."

Nora began to sing in a pretty, light voice:

"But family pride must be denied
And set aside and mortified
And mor-or-or-or-ortified."

Dennis said, "Shut up! You haven't got the tune right anyway. And she'd have been a lot worse if it had been anything like that. No, it will be some paltry trifle like bigamy, barratry, or mayhem."

Still in that quavering whisper, Honor said,

"What are they?"

"Bigamy, darling, is marrying two wives at one time. I haven't an idea what the others are, but they sound good."

Honor looked as if she was going to cry.

"They sound dreadful," she said, and took another sip of water whilst Molly removed the fish.

Downstairs in the kitchen she told Mrs. Deeping, "They're carrying on something chronic, just as if it was all a joke—him and Miss Nora. I'll say that for Miss Carey, she don't join in. And Miss Honor, she sits there and doesn't eat anything you can call eating—just a pick here and a pick there, and pushing it about on her plate."

Mrs. Deeping looked as severe as her plump, good-natured face allowed.

"You get this pudding up whilst it's hot, and don't go passing remarks about what you hear in the dining-room to anyone else but me! Miss Honor's been timid from a child, and Mr. Dennis he didn't ought to tease her the way he does. But there—he've got his troubles like the rest of us. When I hear that crutch of his and think how he used to go tearing up the stairs four steps at a time—wild as hawks he and Miss Nora was, and that full of spirits you couldn't hold them—it's all I can do not to cry. So if he can get a bit of fun out of anything I'm not the one to grudge it, and it's none of your business."

"No, Mrs. Deeping," said Molly with her eyes as round as saucers.

When she put the pudding down in front of Dennis he began to ask her about the letter.

"It came by hand?"

"I don't know."

“Well, was there a stamp on it?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Dennis.”

“How was it addressed?”

“Mrs. Maquisten.”

“Nothing else?”

“No, Mr. Dennis.”

“Then it must have come by hand. Did you see anyone coming up to the door or going away?”

“Oh, no. It was lying just inside on the mat—put in through the letter slit.”

“You don’t know how long it had been there?”

“No, Mr. Dennis.”

“Molly, think! Did you know the writing?”

She stood there looking confused, shaking her head.

“Was it like any writing you have seen before on a letter to Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Dennis.”

“Would you know it again?”

Molly brightened.

“Oh, yes! It was ever so straight up and down, and as clear as print.”

Whilst he helped the pudding, and before Molly was out of the room, he and Nora were hard at it discussing handwritings and the possible authorship of the letter.

“You see, if we know who wrote it—a dirty dog if ever there was one, and I hope someone plays the same trick on him or her—we can make a pretty good guess at which of us is for it, and we can be thinking up an extenuating circumstance or so. Darling”—he turned to Carey—“you were the first to see her after the blow. Are you quite sure she didn’t say anything about the letter?”

“No, she didn’t, Dennis.”

“Did you see it?”

She shook her head.

“No.”

“Where was she—in bed?”

Carey said, “Yes.” She had a picture in her mind of Honoria Maquisten sitting up very straight, with a deep colour of anger in her face, and eyes that went through and through you. Her own colour failed, leaving her noticeably white.

“I expect she’d got it tucked under her pillow,” said Nora. “She won’t get rid of it, because she’s got to bring it out when she starts throwing aspersions.”

She and Dennis continued to discuss the letter with zest.

Suddenly Honor looked up again and said,

“Perhaps Ellen knows——”

Dennis turned his charming smile upon her.

“Clever, aren’t you, my sweet? Of course none of us would think about that! But she doesn’t know any more than the rest of us. You see, I asked her.”

“But I’ll tell you who will know,” said Nora, “and that’s Ernest Hood. Let’s ring him up and ask him.”

“Too late—he’ll have gone home hours ago. Besides she needn’t have told him. As a matter of fact I don’t believe she has.”

“Then how could he draw up a new will?”

“Quite easily. She could make him put down all the legacies and leave the names to be filled in afterwards when she signed.”

Nora stared, her eyes quite round like a kitten’s. “What made you think of that, Den?”

“Just something she said. . . . No, I can’t remember what it was—in fact it wasn’t anything, and that’s why I can’t remember it. I just got the impression that she was keeping everything under her hat until the last moment, and then we were all going to get a surprise. Besides she’s done it before.”

It was at this point that Molly came in and said in an alarmed voice that Mrs. Maquisten was ringing her bell, and please would they all go up.

Nora sprang from her chair.

“Gosh—I’ll have to change! She’ll massacre me if I show up in uniform. Honor, she hates that thing you’ve got on worse than poison. Better come up too. Put on the blue she gave you. It won’t take you a second, and it’s no good asking for trouble. Carey, go on up like an angel and hold the fort.”

With profound reluctance Carey went. Going slowly up the stairs, she heard Dennis’s voice from the hall, reassuringly casual.

“She won’t eat you—and I’ll be up in no time.”

All the same, the reassurance had rather ebbed away before she came to knock on the bedroom door. She bit her lip, and felt a light dew damp her temples and the palms of her hands.

She opened the door and went in. It was somehow a relief that Ellen was there, and that Cousin Honoria was out of bed sitting up in her chair beside the fire. She wore a wrap that Carey had not seen before—multi-coloured brocade on a gold and silver ground, very magnificent. She wore the pearls, and, amongst all her diamonds, a brooch with a black pearl at the centre, and a ring with a black pearl between two enormous brilliants. The picture served to dim the other picture which she had carried about with her since the afternoon—Cousin Honoria sitting up in her

bed with that terrible flush on her face. It had gone now. She was speaking to Ellen when Carey came in. Ellen tossed her head and said in her muttering way,

“Here’s the first of them, and if you ask me, you’d be better laying in your bed and quieting yourself down.”

Mrs. Maquisten’s eyebrows rose.

“I don’t remember asking you, Ellen.” And then suddenly she clenched her fist and brought it down with a bang on the arm of the chair. “You’ll hold your tongue, and you’ll do what you’re told! And so will the rest of them while I’ve got breath in my body!”

Carey had a shrinking thought. “Queen Elizabeth—that’s who she’s like—when she was old—the long face, and the red hair, and all those jewels.”

Ellen passed her and went out of the room, but a little later it opened again to admit Honor, her lank fair hair ruffled by the haste with which she had pulled the blue dress over it, the dress itself awry, hitched up so that it showed a finger’s breadth of washed-out petticoat. Dennis came next, the tap of his crutch sounding along the passage. And two or three minutes later, Nora, freshly lipsticked, freshly powdered, her copper curls shining. She wore her emerald dress, the emerald and diamond brooch pinned carefully on.

After her outburst Mrs. Maquisten had been calmer. The flush had faded from her face. The clenched hands were relaxed.

Molly brought in the coffee tray and set it down on the table which Ellen had put ready. Honor slipped nervously into her place behind it, and was grateful that Dennis, leaning against the mantelpiece and looking down into the fire, should to some extent screen her from Aunt Honoria. For once he was quite silent, his eyes fixed on the glowing coal. Nobody spoke. Nora hovered for a moment and then walked up to the tray and stood there. Carey was left sitting a good deal nearer the presence than she would have chosen. Honoria Maquisten set a steady gaze upon her, shifting it to Nora, to Honor, to Dennis. The silence went on.

In the end it was Dennis who broke it, straightening up and coming over to drop down into his usual chair.

“Well, darling,” he said, “here we all are. Are you going to scold us?”

The tension relaxed. Honor began to pour out the coffee, her hand no more unsteady than usual.

Mrs. Maquisten said, “No—not tonight.” The ring had gone out of her voice. It sounded flat and tired. After a moment she said the words again—“Not tonight.”

Nora looked round over her shoulder.

“Coffee, Aunt Honoria?”

Mrs. Maquisten appeared to rouse herself.

“Yes, I’ll have a cup. I’ve to take some wretched sleeping-draught or other, I believe, but that’s no reason why I shouldn’t have a decent cup of coffee as well.”

Honor, usually dumb, chose this moment to produce a remark.

“Oh, but won’t it keep you awake?”

The deep voice recovered its tone. The eyebrows rose.

“I should have thought that was my affair, not yours, Honor.”

Carey thought, “How frightful! How long is she going to keep us here? How completely senseless Honor is!”

From where she stood beside the tray Nora turned and said,

“How will you have it, Aunt Honoria—black—white—saccharine—sugar?”

Mrs. Maquisten tapped her knee, impatient fingers beating out an impatient measure and all the rings flashing.

“I said a decent cup of coffee.”

Nora smiled ingratiatingly.

“Meaning?”

“Milk and sugar and a dash of brandy. But I’ll have the sleeping-draught first, and then the other to take away the taste. Magda has left it all ready. You’d better ring for Ellen.”

When Ellen came in it was perfectly plain that she was in her most forbidding temper. Since the afternoon she had changed out of her woollen dress into a tight funereal garment of black artificial silk fastened at the neck with a horrible brooch containing plaits of human hair. Having shut the door a little more loudly than was necessary, she crossed the room to stand at Mrs. Maquisten’s side without taking the slightest notice of anyone else.

Honoria Maquisten continued to tap out that impatient tune.

“I’ll have my sleeping-draught. Nurse left it ready, didn’t she? I’ll have it now, whilst the coffee is hot.”

Ellen poked her head.

“I don’t hold with sleeping-draughts. I’ll bring you a nice hop pillow. Good enough to make anyone sleep, that is—and a heap better for you.”

At the familiar grumble Mrs. Maquisten relaxed. Ellen was an insubordinate old wretch who wanted putting in her place. After thirty-five years the game was still being played, and honours were just about easy. No satisfaction in quarrelling with people who flattened out. Ellen was cross and Ellen was tiresome, but Ellen was faithful, and above all Ellen wasn’t afraid of her. The old spark leapt to her eyes.

“A nice hop pillow—that’s what you want.”

“When I do I’ll tell you.”

“And my grandmother, she said to put in a bunch of all the other ’erbs you could lay hands on, and that’s the way I always done mine.”

“I want my sleeping-draught. You know where it is—on the bathroom shelf.”

“How should I know? I don’t hold with sleeping-draughts! And my grandmother said, ‘You dry them all together three days between Midsummer and Lammas and stuff your pillow good and full, and it’ll last you years.’”

Mrs. Maquisten burst out laughing.

“Ellen—you old wretch! I wouldn’t be seen dead in the same bed with your hop pillow! And I want my sleeping-draught before the coffee gets cold.”

“Then someone else can get it for you, for I don’t hold with it! There’s Miss Nora that runs up and down the stairs like a mad thing, and it isn’t what a young married woman ought to do. And there’s Miss Carey that you’ve been so taken up with. Let one of them fetch it if you’re set on taking it! I’m not giving you any sleeping-draughts—not tonight nor any other time! What’s that nurse for if it isn’t to do her work? And whose work is it, giving sleeping-draughts and suchlike? It wasn’t what I was engaged for!”

“Ah——” said Honoria Maquisten. It was not so much a word as a long-drawn sigh. “I didn’t need them then, did I?”

They might have been alone. Ellen’s face twitched. She said in a softer tone,

“You take and have the hop pillow, my dear.”

The intimate moment passed, slipping away like water. Honoria Maquisten was laughing again.

“You and your hop pillow! Be off with you, you old villain! I’ll be giving you notice one of these days. Carey—go and get me the medicine-glass off the bathroom shelf!”

Carey was glad enough to go. The sooner the sleeping-draught was taken, the sooner this horrible evening would be over.

As she opened the connecting door and switched on the light she could hear Ellen’s grumbling voice going away down the room behind her, dwindling to a mutter, ceasing at the sound of the closing door.

The bathroom, which lay between Cousin Honoria’s bedroom and the one occupied by Magda Brayle, connected with each. There was also a door to the passage. With the exception of these doors, which were painted to match, the walls were covered with pale green tiles with a pattern of storks and water-lilies let in among them. There was a green bath, and a green hand-basin with a shelf over it. And right in the middle a medicine-glass rather more than half full of cloudy water.

Carey picked up the glass and came back into the room, clicking out the light and shutting the door behind her. Mrs. Andrews had been fussy about lights, so that she was very well trained.

“There’s a flask on the table by my bed,” Honoria Maquisten called over her shoulder. “Bring it here! I’ll put in the brandy myself for a change—Magda scrimps it. And now take the glass over to Honor, and see that she puts in a lump of sugar as well as the coffee and milk! And bring a spoon!”

A feeling of relief began to spread. The party was nearly over, and nobody had been shot to pieces.

Carey took the glass over to the table and returned with it again. Honoria Maquisten stirred it, put in as much brandy as there was room for, stirred it again, and drank it off. Then she handed the glass to Carey and told her to put it back on the shelf—“Magda can wash it when she comes in. It’s her job.”

But Carey waited to wash the glass. That was one of the things that came out afterwards.

When she came back Mrs. Maquisten was sipping her decent cup of coffee with enjoyment. Nora was saying something, but whatever it was it never got finished, for Mrs. Maquisten suddenly rested her cup and saucer on her knee and said harshly and directly,

“That is enough about that! You are all here now, and I wish to speak to you. You can sit down, Nora. Carey, come round where I can see you! Honor, stop fidgeting!”

Dennis turned his smile upon her.

“What am I to do, darling?”

Their eyes met—hazel eyes, so very much alike, dominant anger in hers, something that resisted and would always resist in his, with a smile to cover it.

She said in what for her was a low tone, “Be quiet, Dennis.” Then, raising it, “I want to speak to you.”

But she did not speak at once. She let an unendurable silence fall. Honor had been fiddling with a coffee-spoon. She still held it between her fingers, but without any movement. Her eyes were fixed upon it. Nobody moved. The silence went on.

At long last Honoria Maquisten broke it. She said,

“You will all be here to-morrow at a quarter to two—here, in this room. I accept no excuse from anyone.” She turned her eyes on Nora. “It will come into your lunch hour. If necessary, you will plead very urgent private affairs.” Her look travelled on, touching them all. “I have told Robert that he is to be here. Hood will be bringing me the draft of my new will. I shall have something to say to you all before I sign it. I

have made a good many wills, but this one is final. I shall fill in the names and certain details tomorrow and sign the draft. I do not feel inclined to wait for Mr. Aylwin's return. He might be delayed, and neither he nor anyone else will turn me from what is my decided purpose. And now you may go! Nora—ring for Molly to come and take away the tray, and go and tell Ellen to come and put me to bed!" She lifted her coffee-cup and drank what remained in it at a draught. "Put this back on the tray, Carey! And now all of you go! I am tired."

They trooped out.

At the door Carey turned and looked back. She saw Honoria Maquisten sitting up straight in her many-coloured brocade with its gleams of silver and gold and her diamonds flashing. The overhead light shone down on the piled red hair with its elaborate curls, on the long white face, the scarlet patch high up on either cheek, the proud, set mouth, the brilliant tired eyes.

Dennis had turned too. He blew a kiss and called, "Sleep well, darling!"

The door was shut.

XIII

Magda Brayle came in at half past ten. Carey heard the click of the front door lock and turned to look. She was on her way up to bed, and she was very tired. She turned on the fourth step and saw Magda come in. That is to say she knew it must be Magda because she had just used her latchkey and come in with an air of being quite at home, but if she had seen her anywhere else it would never have occurred to her that they had met before. Magda was a neat starched outline, a set of colourless features, an apron and a cap. This was a very smart young woman in a fur coat which at any rate looked expensive, sheer silk stockings, and high-heeled shoes, her hair curled up in a pouf above her brow, pearl studs in her ears, eyebrows and lashes darkened, and plenty of bright lipstick. It was quite astonishing how different she looked. Carey found herself staring, and made haste to speak.

“I’m just going up to bed. I hope you’ve had a nice time.”

Magda hurried past her with a brief “Oh, quite,” but turned a little higher up to enquire over her shoulder,

“Did she take her sleeping-draught?”

“Oh, yes.”

One foot on the next step, Magda said,

“When?”

“Oh, about a quarter to nine. Yes, it must have been, because we got downstairs again in time for the nine o’clock news.”

“You were all there?”

“Yes, we had our coffee with her, but we were down again before nine.”

“Then she’ll be off. I’ll just look in and make sure.” And with that she ran up the rest of the way.

Carey followed slowly. It seemed a long way up tonight. She was tired, and troubled in her mind. She was very tired.

According to what she said afterwards, Magda Brayle turned out of the corridor into her own bedroom, switched on the light, and threw down her coat and bag upon the bed. She then went through the connecting door into the bathroom, where she carefully removed all traces of make-up. Would Mrs. Maquisten be wild if she saw them, or wouldn’t she? With her face clean and colourless again, she opened the door into the bedroom and stood there listening. She heard the sound of regular breathing and closed the door again. The used medicine-glass had been washed clean. It stood turned up side down in the middle of the shelf. She returned to her own room and went to bed.

Carey lay in the dark and was haunted by a tune. This happened to her when she was over-tired. Sometimes it was one kind of a tune, and sometimes another. Tonight it was a faint, ghostly echo of Paul Robeson singing “A long ways from home”.

Just that one phrase going on endlessly, over, and over, and over again—“a long ways from home”.

XIV

She woke up to Molly in the room—putting down her tea, drawing the curtains, and crying. Carey's perfectly blank mind received the impression that Molly was doing all these things at one and the same time. It was like the way things happen in a dream, telescoped and a little distorted, so that even before she was really awake the day had a tinge of nightmare.

She woke up suddenly and said, "What is it?"

Molly turned from the rattling curtain-rings. Beyond her the dark grey morning looked in.

"Oh, Miss Carey—Mrs. Maquisten—she's dead! Isn't it dreadful?"

Carey said, "Oh, *no!*" The words shook, and the world into which she had come shook with them. She couldn't imagine that world without its centre.

But Molly was pouring it all out, excited, sobbing, important.

"Nurse went in and found her. Ellen, she come up with the tea same as she always does. She took it in and put it down and drew the curtains, and Mrs. Maquisten never woke up. And Ellen goes through the bathroom and knocks on Nurse's door. I was in there doing the bath, and Nurse, she says, 'What is it?' and she opens the door—dressed all but her cap she was. And Ellen says, 'She's sleeping very sound. I never known her not be awake when her tea comes. And she was early last night too—short of ten o'clock when I put out her light and come away. That's what comes of sleeping-draughts. Give me a nice hop pillow!' she says. 'And if her tea's cold when she wakes, it won't be my fault', she says. And Nurse, she goes straight through, and she comes back again and she says, 'Oh, Ellen—she's gone!'"

Carey dressed and came down to a house that had changed overnight—everyone with that same feeling of having got up very early to catch a train, only there wasn't any train to catch—action suddenly arrested, left at a loose end, without purpose. And back of it all, that something which slows the footsteps, lowers the voice, and hints at things to come.

When Dr. Adams had come and gone the hint became a threat. Four people in the study looking at one another. Dennis repeated the words which had struck three of them silent.

"He won't sign the certificate."

They were all looking at him now—Nora in her uniform, a little pale, a little shocked; Honor rather more of a wet rag than usual; Carey very white indeed against the shining blackness of her hair.

It was Nora who said, "Why?"

"He's not satisfied. He thinks she's had an overdose. He says he feels obliged to notify the police."

He stood there leaning on his crutch, no expression in his voice, no expression in his face. And this absence changed him quite beyond belief. Without the lively play of humour, the light come and go of fancy, feeling, sarcasm and the rest, he was no longer Dennis but somebody else—a stranger who had shaved carelessly, who looked cold and rather ill, and who spoke in a leaden voice which neither rose nor fell.

Nora gave herself a little jerk and said,

"Nonsense! He's a fussy old woman. Aunt Honoria liked him because he ate out of her hand and only ordered her to do what she wanted——" Then, breaking off suddenly, "*The police? Den, he can't!*"

"I'm afraid he can. In fact he probably has by now. If he doesn't see his way to signing the certificate there's nothing else for it—there'll have to be an inquest."

Honor made a faint bleating sound of protest. Nora stared, her round kitten eyes quite blank, the colour in them as clear as the brown in a peaty pool.

"Gosh—how she'd hate it!" she said. And then, "Well, I must be off—brass hats won't wait." She touched him lightly as she went by to the door, two fingers just flicking his sleeve. "Cheer up, Den—I expect it's a mare's-nest. I'll be back some time."

She went out, and the others envied her. The darkest part of the shadow had obviously not touched her yet. Dr. Adams was an old fuss, the inquest something which Aunt Honoria would have hated, and she was sorry about Den being worried. They fought as they had fought in the nursery they had shared at the top of this very house, but under the scratches and the rough and tumble there was the old strong, authentic brother-and-sister tie, unnoticed when things go smoothly, but tough enough to take a strain when it comes.

From that point the day began to darken into nightmare—a police inspector asking questions, and, after the post mortem, his return and the taking of statements from everyone in the house. Because Dr. Adams wasn't an old fuss—he was right. Honoria Maquisten had died in the night because she had had about three times the number of tablets she ought to have taken, and nobody who knew her could believe that she would have committed suicide.

Since there could be no question of accident, there came in the word which was to stay with them through all the hours and days and weeks to come—the word Murder. One of the old words coming down out of remote dark ages—used, and

used, and over used, but never without its secret, dreadful thrill. Because, however casually spoken, however hackneyed, its syllables by their own black magic can still call up the ghosts of all the crimes which sweep in pale or red or black procession across the underworld of history. When it is spoken in a house, that house is linked with the haunted houses of all time. The shadow which has grown old since Cain comes there and broods upon it.

This house no longer belonged to those who lived in it. It belonged for all present purposes to the law, whose servants came and went, and transacted their business in the family rooms, interviewing everyone, taking statements. Most of these interviews took place in the study, leaving to the family a choice between the dining-room, where there was no place to sit except at the table as if perpetually waiting for a meal, and the big drawing-room with its chandeliers tied up in bags and its yellow satin furniture shrouded in dust-sheets.

In the study Chief Inspector McGillivray interviewed Magda Brayle. A large man with a bright blue eye and hair which must have been fiery when he was young. It was mellowed now and streaked with grey, but his moustache betrayed him. For the rest, he had high, flushed cheek-bones, a blunt nose, a blunter tongue, and the accents of his native land—the fine rolling r’s which have slipped from southern speech, and the fine broad vowels which do justice to a well constructed sentence. A diffident young man who never uttered sat by and wrote rapidly in shorthand. His name presently emerged as Dowling—a negligible person, deriving his sole importance from the fact that he too served the law.

“Now, Nurrse,”—McGillivray rolled several r’s—“you can tell me in yer own worrds just what happened, so far as ye know it, from a quarter past two yesterrday afternoon.”

Magda had an upright chair. She sat up straight against its straight back, cap, collar and apron immaculately white and stiff, features sedately composed, voice professionally cool.

“I was in the bathroom, with the door into Mrs. Maquisten’s bedroom a little ajar.”

“What were ye doing there?”

A shade of surprise came into her voice.

“I was washing out some handkerchiefs. I heard Molly come in and say, ‘There’s a letter’, and I heard Mrs. Maquisten call her back.”

“How?”

“Very angrily. I knew at once that something was wrong. I was wondering whether to go in, when she asked for Miss King or Mrs. Hull. When Molly said they were both out she asked for Mr. Harland, and then for Miss Silence. They had gone out to lunch together, and she said that whoever came in first was to come up to her at once.”

“Now, Nurrse—was there any difference in the way she said those names?”

“I don’t think so. She was too angry to make any difference.”

“And who came in firrst?”

“Miss Silence—at about a quarter to three.”

“And were ye still washing handkerchiefs?”

His eye was bright upon her but she showed no discomposure.

“I thought it best to be where I could go to her if she needed me. It wasn’t good for her to be excited.”

“And the door would still be a wee bit open?”

Magda said, “Yes.”

“Well, what did ye hear?”

Magda settled herself with a prim crackling of starch.

“Well, I couldn’t hear everything, you know, Inspector, and particularly I couldn’t hear all Miss Silence said because she kept her voice quite low—not just at first, because I heard her say, ‘What is it, Cousin Honoria?’ And Mrs. Maquisten said, ‘Come here, Carey,’ quite loud, but after that she began to whisper.”

“Meaning Miss Silence, or Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Mrs. Maquisten. But it wasn’t just an ordinary whisper—she sounded as if she was choking with rage. And I couldn’t be sure what she said, but it was something about being deceived—and Miss Silence saying, ‘Please, Cousin Honoria,’ and that sort of thing, trying to soothe her down. And the next thing I really heard was Mrs. Maquisten, very angry indeed, saying Miss Silence was to ring up Mr. Aylwin at once, and he was to come round and bring her will because she was going to alter it. Mr. Aylwin is her solicitor, and some sort of a relation as well. She’s made quite a lot of wills since I’ve been here—she’s always changing them.”

“And what did Miss Silence say?”

“She kept on trying to soothe her, which was quite the wrong way with Mrs. Maquisten. She’d had her own way all her life, and it wasn’t any good trying to stop her—I could have told Miss Silence that. She only made her a great deal worse. She said, ‘Ring him up and say he’s to come round at once and bring my will—the last one.’ Miss Silence said, ‘But, Cousin Honoria——’ and Mrs. Maquisten fairly raged at her. She said she’d been deceived, and deceit was what she wouldn’t put up with and wouldn’t forgive, and Mr. Aylwin must come round at once, because she was going to alter her will.”

McGillivray made the Scottish sound which is usually written “Imphm.”

“And was it Miss Silence she was accusing of deceit?”

“I couldn’t say, I’m sure.”

“From the way the conversation went, it might have been Miss Silence?”

“I suppose it might. She was so angry you couldn’t tell.”

“Ye couldn’t tell whether the anger was directed against Miss Silence?”

“Well, I wouldn’t like to say. Mrs. Maquisten had a very violent temper. She went on saying she had been deceived, and Miss Silence was to ring up Mr. Aylwin. And Miss Silence kept trying to put her off, which I didn’t think at all wise of her, because the more she tried to stop her, the more excited Mrs. Maquisten got.”

“Imphm. Miss Silence tried to stop her sending for Mr. Aylwin—ye’re definite

about that?"

"Oh, yes. And I was just thinking that I should have to go in, when Mrs. Maquisten shouted out in a tremendous voice, 'I won't put up with deceit, and I won't put up with disobedience, Carey! Either you ring Mr. Aylwin up at once, or I send for Magda to do it! You needn't think you can stop me, and you needn't think you can make me change my mind!' Then Miss Silence rang up, and Mr. Aylwin was in Scotland, so Mrs. Maquisten said Mr. Hood, his managing clerk, was to come. And he came round at half past three and was with her for more than half an hour."

"Imphm. And was the door still that wee bit open whilst Mr. Hood was there?"

Magda's calm was unruffled.

"No. She sent me out to change her library book, and she told me to shut the door."

"Mr. Hood was there at the time?"

"Yes."

"And when ye came back?"

"He was still there, but he went away soon afterwards."

"And the door was still shut?"

"Yes."

"And after Mr. Hood was gone?"

"I went in to her, but she didn't say anything. Mrs. Hull had tea with her, and afterwards Miss King came home, and she saw her too. I didn't hear anything that passed between them. Mr. Harland came home last about six o'clock and stayed about half an hour. But they weren't talking all the time—I mean they weren't alone, because I thought I had better go in and say that of course I shouldn't be taking my evening off as Mrs. Maquisten was so upset. But she was very angry about that, so in the end I thought it best to give way. You see, that old maid of hers would be there, and as Mr. Harland said, there was no reason why Ellen shouldn't give her her sleeping-draught if I put it all ready."

"Was she in the habit of taking a sleeping-draught?"

"Oh, no. But Dr. Adams thought it advisable if she had been over-excited, so I thought I would leave it all ready. The tablets had to be dissolved for her."

"How many?"

"Just one as a rule, but if she didn't get off by eleven or so, I would give her another."

"Then it was one tablet ye dissolved and left for her?"

"Yes."

"And then ye went out? What time would that be?"

Magda took a moment.

“I think about seven o’clock. Mr. Harland was with her till half past six, and then I had to change.”

“And what time was it when ye came in?”

“Half past ten. I passed Miss Silence on the stairs.”

“Did ye go in to Mrs. Maquisten at all?”

“I went into my own room, and through the bathroom to listen at the bedroom door. I could tell by her breathing that she was asleep, so I shut the door and came away. I didn’t go in. The medicine-glass had been washed and put back on the bathroom shelf. I went to bed. Next morning at half past seven Ellen Bridling came in and said she had taken up Mrs. Maquisten’s tea as usual, but she didn’t seem to wake up. So I went in in a hurry and found her dead.”

“Imphm. Now about this medicine-glass, Nurrse. Ye dissolved one tablet?”

“Yes—one.”

“In how much water?”

“About a third of the glass. She took it filled up with coffee and a dash of brandy.”

“And ye left it where?”

“In the bathroom, on the shelf over the wash-basin.”

He leaned forward, reddish-grey eyebrows drawn together over bright blue eyes.

“And where did ye leave the tablets?”

“In the glass-fronted cupboard over the shelf.”

“Would this be the bottle?”

The small flat bottle lay on the table between them. The top left-hand corner of the label had been torn off. The bottle was nearly empty. Magda looked at it.

“Yes—that’s the one.”

“Take it up in yer hand! Take a look at it! Did ye notice the number of tablets when ye took out the one ye dissolved?”

Magda picked up the bottle and turned it over. There were only three tablets in it. She said without any expression in her voice,

“There were certainly more than that.”

“Could ye say how many more?”

She said steadily, “I tilted out three on my hand and took one of them. There were quite a few left in the bottle—there must have been eight or nine altogether.”

“Sure of that, Nurrse?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Ye’d swear to it?”

Magda said, “Yes.”

“Imphm. . . . There’s just one thing more. Ye didn’t happen to wipe the bottle when ye put it away?”

“No—why should I?”

“I can’t tell ye that. But somebody wiped it—clean as a whistle. Not a fingermark on it. Sure it wasn’t you?”

Magda looked at him coldly,

“Quite sure.”

The sharp blue look dwelt on her for a minute before he let her go. Left alone, he transferred it to the bottle lying there on the blotting-pad. After a moment he once more repeated the old Scotch word,

“Imphm.”

McGillivray went on with his interviewing.

He saw Robert Maquisten, correct, concerned, a little stiff, a little with the air of having to remind himself that these questions about family affairs were put with the voice of authority, and that it behoved him as a good citizen to answer them.

Actually, he seemed to have very little to contribute. He had dropped in to see his aunt at tea-time on Sunday the 15th. His cousins were there, and Miss Silence. There was no sign of friction or strain. He went away soon after five o'clock. That was the last time he saw Mrs. Maquisten alive. He did not visit the house at all on Monday the 16th. Mr. Harland rang up at about nine o'clock on Tuesday morning and informed him that their aunt had died in her sleep. Questioned as to Mrs. Maquisten's propensity for altering her will, he replied that no one in the family took it very seriously. There was a touch of dignity in his manner as he added that they were all convinced of her affection and her desire to benefit them.

"Any alterations or readjustments that she may have made from time to time were not, I think, taken seriously by any of us."

McGillivray asked whether he was aware of the provisions of the latest will. There was no hesitation about the reply.

"Not in detail. I believe Mr. Aylwin and I are executors. She has not, as far as I know, made any change in that for some years now. I know that she wished to make a bequest to Miss Silence, and I suppose that she has done so."

"Do ye know the amount of the bequest?"

"No, but it would be substantial. My aunt was warm-hearted and impulsive, and she had taken a great fancy to Miss Silence."

McGillivray let him go.

He saw Dennis Harland, Nora Hull, Honor King, and Carey Silence—in that order. Each assured him separately that Mrs. Maquisten had given no clue as to the authorship of the letter she had received or the identity of the person whom that letter accused. All agreed that she was in great anger and disturbance of mind. All admitted to knowing that they were legatees under a will executed only a week before.

He took each of them through his or her movements during the afternoon and evening of the 16th.

Mr. Harland lunched out in company with Miss Silence, returned at 6 o'clock, had half an hour with Mrs. Maquisten, and an hour in the study with Miss Silence. At half past seven he went to his room to change, coming down to the study again at 8

o'clock. Dinner was a little late, as they waited for Mrs. Hull. After dinner, at Mrs. Maquisten's request, they went up to have coffee in her room, Mrs. Hull and Miss King going up to their bedrooms first and Mr. Harland visiting the cloakroom. Miss Silence was the first to reach Mrs. Maquisten's room, where she found the coffee-tray set and Ellen Bridling in attendance.

Mrs. Hull, who had been out driving for General Ferguson, came in at half past four, spent twenty minutes with her aunt, during which time they both had tea, and then went out again to drive the General to an engagement in the country, returning at eight o'clock, when she went in to dinner with the rest of the party. On receiving Mrs. Maquisten's summons she decided to change, as her aunt greatly disliked seeing her in uniform. She told Miss King that she had better change also, and the two of them went upstairs together. Their bedrooms are next door to each other. They went up together, but Miss King was ready first and came down alone.

Miss King came back from packing parcels for prisoners of war at about a quarter past five. She was told that Mrs. Maquisten wished to see her and went straight up to her room. She was there a much shorter time than any of the others, her own account being that she found her aunt angry and excited, and that she got away as soon as she could. Mrs. Maquisten did not say why she was angry, only vague things about being deceived and altering her will. After she left her aunt she went up to her own room and stayed there until just before dinner. Ellen Bridling was with her from half past seven to eight o'clock. After dinner she went upstairs with Mrs. Hull to change her dress, the latter having pointed out that their aunt greatly disliked the one she was wearing. Their bedrooms are next door to each other. She was ready first, so came down alone. Ellen Bridling was on the landing. They walked along the corridor together.

Miss Silence lunched with Mr. Harland and returned home at a quarter to three. Her account of her interview with Mrs. Maquisten does not differ materially from that given by Nurse Brayle. She, however, denies emphatically that Mrs. Maquisten accused her of deceit. She admits that her cousin was very angry, but says that this anger was caused by her reluctance to ring up Mr. Aylwin. She explains this reluctance by saying that Mrs. Maquisten was very much excited, that she thought this excitement was bad for her, and she hoped that with a little more time for reflection the whole thing might blow over. She asseverates that she had no idea as to the identity of the person who was to be cut out of the will. On leaving the bedroom she went up to her room to take off her outdoor things, and afterwards to the study, where she remained until half past seven, Mr. Harland being there with her from half past six onwards. At half past seven she went to her room to change. She

dined with the others, left the table after Mrs. Hull and Miss King, and preceded Mr. Harland to Mrs. Maquisten's room.

All these four persons give the same description of what happened after they had assembled in Mrs. Maquisten's room. Ellen was rung for and told to fetch the sleeping-draught. She is a privileged person, and she was in a bad temper. She refused, saying she didn't hold with sleeping-draughts and offering a hop pillow instead. She finally said, "Why don't you ask Miss Carey or Miss Nora?" (Mrs. Hull), whereupon Mrs. Maquisten sent Carey Silence for the draught and Ellen left the room. Mr. Harland, Mrs. Hull, and Miss King agree that Miss Silence went through the communicating door into the bathroom and came back without any delay at all. They say, and Miss Silence agrees, that the medicine-glass she brought back with her was more than half full. Nurse Brayle affirms that she dissolved one tablet and left the glass not more than one third full. Something, then, had been added to it. Mrs. Maquisten directed Miss Silence to take the glass to Miss King to be filled up with coffee, milk and sugar. She then added a dash of brandy herself from a flask brought to her by Miss Silence from the table beside her bed. After drinking the mixture she asked for and drank a cup of coffee with milk, sugar and a dash of brandy in it. She then informed her relatives that she expected them all to attend upon her next day at a quarter to two, when Mr. Hood would be bringing her the draft of her new will. She informed them that she would have something to say to them before she signed it, that this will was to be final, and that she intended to fill in the names and certain details upon the draft, and to sign it without waiting for Mr. Aylwin's return, adding that neither he nor anyone else would turn her from her purpose. She then dismissed them, telling Mrs. Hull to send Ellen in to put her to bed.

Since the post mortem revealed that at least five or six tablets were administered, these must have been added between seven o'clock, when Nurse Brayle went out leaving the mixture on the bathroom shelf, and the time, approximately 8.45, when Miss Silence fetched it. During this period Mr. Harland and Miss Silence separated and went to their respective rooms—7.30 to 8. Miss King was in her room between 7 and 8. Mrs. Hull did not come home till 8 o'clock. Any one of the first three could have walked along the corridor, entered the bathroom, and added tablets to the mixture, but according to Ellen Bridling the time during which this could have taken place must be considerably narrowed down. She states that from seven o'clock onwards she sat with her door open, and that no one could have come along the passage without being seen or heard by her, until half past seven, when she went in to see if Mrs. Maquisten wanted anything, and then

went upstairs to have a word with Miss King. They were together in Miss King's bedroom until the dinner-bell rang, when she came back to her own room and Miss King went on down to the dining-room. Later on, when Miss King had gone up to change after dinner, Ellen states that when she herself came out of Mrs. Maquisten's room she walked to the end of the corridor and there heard Miss King call out to Mrs. Hull, "I'm going down, Nora." After which she saw Miss King come downstairs and, waiting, walked back with her as far as her own room. She saw Miss King go into Mrs. Maquisten's room. From this it seems that Miss King had no possible opportunity of tampering with the sleeping-draught.

The times when the draught might have been tampered with by one of the relations are now narrowed to two periods, one between 7.30 and 8 o'clock, and the other, very short indeed, round about 8.40 to 8.45, after the party in the dining-room had broken up. As regards the first period, either Mr. Harland or Miss Silence could have reached the bathroom and added something to the draught. As regards the second short period, Miss Silence, Mr. Harland, and Mrs. Hull could have done so.

McGillivray frowned at his notes. For certain reasons he considered the second period the more likely time of the two. Until those four young people met round the dinner-table they would not have been certain that Mrs. Maquisten had not told one of them who it was she was about to cut out of her will. But Molly's evidence made it clear that the subject had been discussed with lively interest at dinner. If the proposed alteration of the will provided the motive for the crime, it seemed improbable that the draught would have been actually tampered with unless the guilty person had some reasonable assurance that he would not immediately be suspected. He considered that a fair conclusion. But this second period was very short to admit of the abstracting and dissolving of the tablets. It could have been done, but he found it difficult to believe that it had been done. No, no, the crime had been thought out beforehand—perhaps some hours beforehand—and the tablets abstracted and dissolved during that first period between 7.30 and 8 o'clock, and added to the draught during the second period when those four people had left the dinner-table and were arriving one by one in Mrs. Maquisten's bedroom, Miss Silence first. She could have had the mixture ready, perhaps in the bathroom cupboard. She had ample time to slip in and tip the dissolved tablets into the mixture left by Nurse Brayle. There was actually a second medicine glass in the cupboard which could have been used, washed, and put back again. It showed no fingerprints, but nowadays everybody knew enough to avoid leaving fingerprints. The glass from which the draught had been taken showed no fingerprints except those of Miss

Silence, but since she admittedly washed it and put it away, this cannot be considered as evidence against her. All the same, she had a very good opportunity of tampering with the draught.

So had Mr. Harland. But on other grounds he does not seem so likely. He was apparently on easier and more affectionate terms with his aunt that evening than any of the other three. And then, he had to use a crutch. Mrs. Maquisten and Miss Silence were in the next room. He would have had to risk being heard in the bathroom.

Mrs. Hull was not in the house during the first period. Miss King accompanied her when she went upstairs after dinner, but was ready first and came down alone. Ellen Bridling was then on the landing. Mr. Harland was a minute or two behind Miss King, and Mrs. Hull a minute or two behind him. She would have had to be as quick as lightning, and she would be taking an extraordinary risk.

Miss King had no opportunity of tampering with the glass. Ellen Bridling's statement clears her.

McGillivray continued to frown at his notes. When a considerable time had elapsed he said,

“Imphm.”

Timetable drawn up by McGillivray

2.15 (approx.)—Molly takes letter to Mrs. Maquisten.

2.45—Carey Silence returns.

2.45 to 3.5 (approx.)—with Mrs. Maquisten. Aylwin's office rung up.

3.5 to 3.30—Carey Silence to her room. Later to study.

3.30 to 4.0.—Hood, Aylwin's head clerk, with Mrs. Maquisten.

4.30 to 4.50—Mrs. Hull with Mrs. Maquisten.

5.15 to 5.25 (approx.)—Honor King with Mrs. Maquisten.

6.0 to 6.30—Harland with Mrs. Maquisten.

6.30 to 7.30—Harland and Silence together in study.

7.0—Nurse Brayle goes out, leaving sleeping-draught on bathroom shelf.

7.0 to 7.30—King in own room. Ellen in own room, immediately opposite Mrs. Maquisten's, with door wide open. Harland and Silence in study. Mrs. Hull out.

7.30 to 8.0—Harland own room. Silence own room. King own room. Ellen with King. Hull out.

8.0 (approx.)—Hull returns.

8.5 to 8.37 (approx.)—Harland, Silence, King, Hull at dinner.

8.37—Hull and King to change. Silence to Mrs. M. Ellen there.

8.40—Ellen to landing. Sees King come down.

8.43 to 8.45—King, Harland, and Hull to Mrs. M. at short intervals in that order.

8.45—Molly brings up coffee. Silence sent for sleeping-draught.

XVII

“Mr. Hood to see you, sir.”

McGillivray looked up and saw a slight, pale person with smooth dark hair receding from the temples. The chin receded a little too. The born underling, but no doubt efficient at his job—painstaking. Beneath a composed manner McGillivray thought him nervous. He said,

“Sit down, Mr. Hood. Mr. Aylwin is not back yet I suppose?”

Mr. Hood sat down.

“No, he is not back. But he is on his way—I am expecting him at the office tomorrow.”

McGillivray leaned back in his chair.

“Ah, well, ye can be more use to us than he can, I expect. Perhaps ye’d be so good as to give me the substance of what passed between yerself and Mrs. Maquisten on the afternoon of the sixteenth.”

Mr. Hood looked apprehensive.

“Really, Inspector, I’m not sure—communications from a client——” His voice petered out.

McGillivray fixed him with a bright blue eye.

“Now, Mr. Hood—yer scruples do ye credit, but this is a murder case.”

Ernest Hood started.

“Inspector!”

“Ay—there’s no doubt about it. Murder or suicide—it would be one of the two, and there’s nothing to suggest that it would be suicide. No—murder is what it is, and that being the case, ye can see for yerself that the interview ye had with the deceased is of the very firrst importance. Somewhere between 2.15 and 2.30 she received a letter which put her in a great state of anger. At 2.45 she was telling Miss Silence that she had been deceived, and that she meant to cut somebody out of her will. At approximately 3 o’clock Miss Silence was ringing up your office, and between 3.30 and after 4 o’clock ye were closeted with Mrs. Maquisten. No doubt ye were receiving her instructions with regard to the proposed alteration in her will?”

Mr. Hood looked embarrassed. He said,

“Well—yes——” And then, “I hardly know if I ought——”

“I think ye’ll just have to.”

Mr. Hood ran a finger round inside his collar.

“Well, if you say so, Inspector——” He cleared his throat. “I would prefer to see Mr. Aylwin first.”

McGillivray had no doubt of it. He said easily,

“Ah, well, we can’t always be doing what we prefer. How did ye find Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Oh, very angry, Inspector.” Mr. Hood had the air of shrinking from the recollection. “She really had a very violent temper, but I don’t think I ever saw her so much put out before.”

“What did she say?”

Mr. Hood considered.

“Well, she said a great deal. I couldn’t undertake to repeat her exact words. She was angry because Mr. Aylwin was away—and very angry because he had taken the key of the safe so that it was not possible for me to bring her latest will along with me. She had only made it the week before, but she wanted to have it destroyed without the least delay.”

“Did she often make a new will, Mr. Hood?”

“Oh, yes, she was always making them. Or if it wasn’t a new will it would be a codicil—a little on to one legacy and a little off another—just, as you might say, shifting the money round, but nothing that really made very much of a change, if you know what I mean. And in the next will she’d generally put it back where it was before.”

“Imphm. . . . And the will she made last week—the one that’s locked up in the safe—would that be just the same as all the others?”

As the talk proceeded, Mr. Hood’s manner had become tinged with importance. Now he hesitated again.

“Well, I hardly know—but perhaps—no, I wouldn’t say that. You see, Miss Silence came into it.”

“Perhaps ye’ll be so good as to explain.”

Mr. Hood explained.

“There was no mention of Miss Silence in any of the previous wills. I believe there had been a family quarrel, but when Miss Silence came here on a visit—about a fortnight ago—Mrs. Maquisten took a very great fancy to her.” He continued to hesitate. “It’s very difficult indeed, Inspector—but I suppose there’s no harm in my telling you—because of course the terms of the will won’t be any secret now—I mean Mr. Aylwin will be acquainting the family with them.”

“Imphm. Ye had better continue.”

Mr. Hood cleared his throat.

“Oh, well, I suppose—in the circumstances——As a matter of fact under that last will—the one that will be operative now—Miss Silence comes in for a very

considerable legacy.”

“And what would ye call very considerable?”

Mr. Hood gazed at him solemnly and said,

“Fifty thousand pounds.”

A very faint whistle escaped McGillivray.

“There was also a bequest of jewelry—a very valuable set of rubies and diamonds worth, I believe, about ten thousand pounds.”

“All this on a week’s acquaintance?”

“Mrs. Maquisten was, I believe, very much attached to Miss Silence’s grandmother. Miss Silence resembles her. Mrs. Maquisten remarked on the likeness several times in my presence whilst her instructions for these bequests were being taken.”

McGillivray plunged into thought. Emerging presently, he addressed the waiting Mr. Hood.

“To come back to yer interview with the deceased on the Monday afternoon. Did she say anything to indicate that she intended to revoke any particular bequest?”

Mr. Hood got out a handkerchief and wiped his brow.

“Really, Inspector, it’s very difficult—I hardly know what to say——”

“Ye can give me a plain answer. It will save my time and yours.”

The handkerchief was rolled between nervous hands.

“With every desire to be of assistance, it is very difficult for me—very delicate—but I will do my best. Mrs. Maquisten made it quite clear that she wished to make a new will. The one she had made only the week before was to be destroyed.”

“She gave ye instructions about the new will?”

“In a way——”

“What d’ye mean by that?”

Hood hesitated.

“Well, she had a list of her securities and of her jewels. She made a division of them into four main parts, but she did not attach any names to the bequests. She told me the names would be filled in next day. She had in her hand the draft copy of her last will.”

“How did she get it?” said McGillivray sharply.

Mr. Hood looked surprised.

“Oh, she could walk if she wanted to—enough to get about the room. Or her maid might have brought it to her. She has been with her a long time, I believe.”

“Well, go on. She had the draft—what were ye going to say about it?”

Mr. Hood looked very unhappy.

“Well, I suppose I had better tell you. She said that all the minor legacies were to stand—servants, charities, small bequests to friends—but the big legacies, the ones to the near relatives, were to be divided into four portions instead of into five as in the last will.”

“Imphm—and who would the five be?”

“Under the last will Mr. Robert Maquisten, Mrs. Hull, Miss King, Mr. Harland, and Miss Silence.”

“So that one of those five was to be dropped. But she didn’t say which?”

“No, she didn’t say which.”

Ever so faintly Mr. Hood laid a stress on the word “say”. It might have been by a nervous inadvertence or by an equally nervous intent.

McGillivray took him up sharply.

“I think ye know something, Mr. Hood, and I’ll thank ye to tell me what it is.”

The beaded brow was mopped again.

“She didn’t name any names, but there was something she said——”

“Ye’d best let me have it.”

“It was when she was saying that she had been deceived.”

“She said that she had been deceived?”

“She kept on saying it. She was very angry and very much upset, and she said, ‘But I ought to have known—it wasn’t for want of being warned. Ellen warned me, but I didn’t take any notice’—that’s the old maid, Inspector. So I said, trying to calm her down, ‘Well, it’s not too late, Mrs. Maquisten,’ and she said, ‘Old friends are best. Ellen’s faithful—she warned me. Up with the rocket and down with the stick,’ she said. I thought that was a queer thing for her to say, and I suppose I looked surprised, because she said, ‘That’ll never happen to you, will it? You’re one of the steady-going ones. How would you like to be a rocket? A stranger for a week, an heiress for a week, and then down with the stick and a stranger again.’ Well, Inspector, you can’t help your thoughts—and what was I to think?”

“And what did ye think?” enquired McGillivray.

For once Mr. Hood was blunt.

“I thought she was talking about Miss Silence.”

XVIII

Ellen came into the room in her black afternoon dress with a star-shaped brooch of Whitby jet at the throat. Her small, sunk eyes were rimmed with red, her skin very yellow, lifeless, and wrinkled. She came in slowly, her head with its neatly banded hair poked forward, her hands with their bony knuckles clutched together at her waist. When offered a chair she sat down upon the edge of it and sniffed.

“I won’t have to keep ye long, Miss Bridling.”

There was a gleam of anger in the small, sunk eyes.

“Mrs. Bridling is what I’ve had from everyone in this house for thirty-five years, if it wasn’t for the family.”

McGillivray contrived a smile.

“Brevet rank?” he said. “Well, we’ll not quarrel about that, Mrs. Bridling.”

Ellen was not placated. She gave him her hooded stare.

“And if it’s any more questions, why weren’t they all asked at once, when the other young man wrote everything down and I put my name to it?”

“Ah well, Mrs. Bridling, there’s things that come up afterwards—ye must see that for yerself. And it’s not everyone that’s been as long in the family as ye’ve been—there wouldn’t be much going on that ye wouldn’t know about.”

Ellen sat stiff.

“Thirty-five years—ah well, it’s a long time. Ye’d be more like a friend than a servant—a confidential friend. I wouldn’t wonder if Mrs. Maquisten didn’t tell ye things she wouldn’t name to the family.”

Ellen pressed her lips together—thin lips from which the blood had receded, leaving them dark.

“And I wouldn’t wonder if she didn’t listen a good bit more to what ye said than she did to the family.”

There was a spark in the hooded eyes.

“She wasn’t one to listen, Mrs. Maquisten wasn’t!”

“Better if she had been?”

The lips tightened, deepening the lines about them. Then they opened.

“It’s what I said to her myself—no later than that last day I said it—‘Better if you’d have listened to those as have served you faithful and not let yourself get imposed upon by them you don’t know nothing about—creeping in, and sucking up, and pushing those on one side that’s been like your own children!’”

“Meaning Miss Silence?” said McGillivray.

Ellen stared.

“And who else should I mean? Coming in where she wasn’t wanted, and my poor dear making the fuss of the world over her, with Carey this and Carey that, and, ‘I’m leaving her the rubies, Ellen’. Putting ideas into her head, that’s what I called it. I don’t know how I kept myself! Only Sunday afternoon she made me open the safe and get them out—put the necklace on her so that she could go and look in the glass! And I thought to myself then, ‘Well, pride goes before a fall, Miss Carey Silence’. And if Mrs. Maquisten didn’t take the very words out of my mouth before they got there!”

“And what made her do that?”

Ellen sniffed.

“Called her a proud, obstinate creature in a laughing sort of way, and then came out with those very words—‘Pride goes before a fall.’ And I thought, ‘There’s many a true word spoken in jest.’”

McGillivray sat looking at her.

“Ye’ve no great love for Miss Silence,” he said at last.

Ellen sat up a little more stiffly, her shoulders squared, her hands at her waist. Only her head still had its forward poke. She said in a bitter voice,

“She come in as a stranger and she was loved like a child. And look what come of it!”

“And what did come of it in your opeenion, Mrs. Bridling?”

He got one gleam, and then the eyes were hooded again.

“It’s not for me to say.”

He came back at her hard and quick.

“Meaning that ye think it was Miss Silence put yer mistress to sleep. Why?”

The eyelids came up with a jerk. Bright anger looked out.

“Is there anyone else who’d have done it? Tell me that! Is there anyone else who had everything to lose if my poor dear went on living? Don’t you know it was Miss Carey who was going to come out of her will?”

“Can ye substantiate that?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Did she tell ye it was Miss Silence she was cutting out? If she did, why did ye not say so before? I have yer signed statement here, and it says, ‘She was very angry, and talked about being deceived, but she didn’t mention any names. I didn’t ask her any questions, because I’d enough to do as it was to get her quieted down.’ That’s what ye said.”

The angry, bright regard did not waver.

“The young man asked me did she mention any names, and I told him the truth.

You don't need names when you've been as long with anyone as what I have. I knew what she meant, and so would anyone else with any sense in them."

"What did she say?"

"She said I'd warned her and she did ought to have listened to me." Two filmy tears obscured the anger. One of the gnarled hands went groping to a pocket and came back with a large old-fashioned handkerchief neatly folded. There was a dabbing of the eyes, a resonant sniff. Ellen choked, swallowed, and went on. "And if she had she'd been alive now, my poor dear, but I wasn't to know that then. 'But you were right, Ellen, and I did ought to have listened,' she said, and she cried." She choked again.

"Imphm. . . . And ye took it she was meaning Miss Carey Silence. Why?"

Ellen unfolded the handkerchief and blew her nose vehemently.

"It was Miss Carey that I'd been warning her about, and it was Miss Carey that was in both our minds."

"Imphm. But ye see, Mrs. Bridling, it's possible that while ye had Miss Carey Silence in mind, Mrs. Maquisten might have been thinking of quite a different pairson."

Ellen gave a sniff of contempt.

"Well then, she wasn't! The first I went in to her after she'd had the letter she said to me, as angry a you please, 'Well, Ellen, you were right, and I suppose I shall never hear the last of it,' she said, and, 'Thank God, I had a friend that told me the truth before it was too late.' She'd the letter in her hand, but she didn't tell me who it was from—only thank God she'd got a friend that wasn't afraid to tell her the truth."

"Ye didn't think she might be meaning yerself?"

"No. It was the person who had written her the letter she meant. She had it in her hand. And then she said, 'Those that go up quick can come down quick. And I'll not be deceived a second time,' she said. 'I'll make a new will, and then we'll see who's going to laugh on the wrong side of their mouth.' And she took hold of me by my hand, and she said, 'You warned me, and I did ought to have listened, Ellen', and the tears running down her face, my poor dear. So I took and said, 'Don't you fret, my dear, for she isn't worth it. Put her away out of your will and out of your mind, and we'll all be the same as what we were before.'"

"When was this?" said McGillivray.

Ellen stared.

"It was after the nurse went out," she said in an offended voice.

McGillivray glanced down at the time-table on his blotting-pad.

"She went out at seven. Seven to seven-thirty ye were in yer room with the

door open. Seven-thirty to eight ye were with Miss King.”

Ellen went on staring in that offended way.

“Do you think I’d leave her and never look in? Why, the first thing after the nurse was gone I stepped across.”

“Then ye were not in yer room between seven and seven-thirty.”

“I was there all the time I wasn’t with Mrs. Maquisten. And if you’re thinking of anyone getting into the bathroom, they couldn’t have done it, because I was in and out with the door open, getting her a glass of water and a sponge to dab her eyes after she’d been crying.”

“How long would ye be there?”

“I couldn’t say.”

“Ten minutes?”

“Maybe.”

“Not longer than that?”

Ellen gave herself a jerk.

“Not so long,” she said in a grumblin’ voice. “I don’t keep looking at clocks, but it wasn’t so long as ten minutes. She said what I told you, and she cried, poor dear. And I got her a sponge and a glass of water, and I come away to let her get quieted down. And when I looked in at half past seven, like I told you, she didn’t say a word—only to shake her head when I told her I was going up to Miss Honor, and did she want anything?”

“And when did ye see Mrs. Maquisten again?”

“I got her up and into her chair for her dinner after Miss Honor went down. But we didn’t say anything more about it, neither of us. I didn’t want to upset her, and she didn’t want to be upset, with the family coming up to coffee, so we didn’t say nothing. Nor we didn’t when I put her to bed—only she took hold of my hand tight and said, ‘You won’t ever leave me, Ellen, will you?’ And that was the last thing she ever said to me.”

McGillivray leaned back in his chair. He might have been thinking about Ellen, or he might not. When the silence had lasted quite a long time he said in an absent-minded voice,

“Ye were with Miss King between seven-thirty and eight.” Then, with a sudden sharpness, “Why?”

Ellen produced that offended stare.

“There was a dress Mrs. Maquisten give her, it wanted the hem taking up.”

“Was she going to wear it?”

“I got it done all but a matter of inches, but she wouldn’t wait, not after she

heard Mrs. Hull come in, so I finished it and left it on her bed, and she come up and put it on after dinner was over.”

McGillivray produced a smile which sat rather oddly upon a mouth whose ordinary expression was grim.

“Ye have a particular fondness for Miss Honor King, no doubt.”

Ellen gave that jerk again.

“Her!” she said. “And who’s been telling you that?”

“Oh, no one, no one—I just thought of it for myself. And ye said ye were altering her dress——”

He got a look which showed him how very little Mrs. Bridling thought of the police. She said in her grumbling way, “What’s that got to do with being fond of anyone? Miss Honor, to be sure! Find me anyone that’s fond of her, in the house or out of it! A poor winnicking child she was—nothing wrong with her, and nothing right—whooping-cough twice as long as anyone else, and all the other things to match. A poor thing she was to start with, and a poor thing she’ll be all her days. Miss Honor indeed!”

McGillivray had seldom heard so much resentment in a human voice, and he was prepared to stake his professional reputation that it was genuine. If she didn’t dislike Honor King she despised her. Any idea that Ellen had lent herself to fabricating an alibi faded from his mind. He knew resentment and contempt when he encountered them. You don’t perjure yourself to provide an alibi for someone you despise and dislike. Honor King was definitely out of it.

He changed the subject abruptly.

“Just one thing more, Mrs. Bridling. I suppose Mrs. Maquisten will have provided for ye?”

Ellen’s bony fingers tightened upon the handkerchief. She looked at him defiantly.

“And what are you trying to make out of that? Haven’t I been with her for thirty-five years? What would you think of her if she hadn’t provided for me?”

“Did she tell ye the amount of the provision?”

Ellen sniffed fiercely.

“No, she didn’t!”

McGillivray let her go.

“Den!” Nora came running up behind him and put a hand on his arm.

“What is it?”

“I want to talk to you. That policeman is in the study—he’s got Ellen there—I want to talk to you. Come to the drawing-room!”

The big room was cold and gloomy to a degree—blinds drawn down, chandeliers in linen bags, dust-sheets covering the furniture, a smell of soot and mould. Nora made a face.

“It’s frightful in here, but there are people all over the place.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“A heart-to-heart?”

She nodded vehemently.

“Yes. Den, it’s frightful—that man’s got Ellen in there, and God knows what she’s saying!”

They were standing quite close to the door. He moved nearer to it now and switched on one of the corner lights. Under it he could see that Nora was frightened. Her naturally vivid colour was all gone, leaving her reddened lips too bright and rather ghastly. He said,

“What has she been saying to you?”

The round eyes became rounder. She said in a childish whisper,

“She says it was Carey that Aunt Honoria was going to cut out of her will.”

Dennis didn’t say anything at all. He began to look as if he was cold. He didn’t say anything.

Nora’s round brown eyes were brimming. They were exactly the colour of water in a peaty pool.

“Den, that’s what she said—and now she’s saying it to him.”

“When did she say it to you?”

“Just now, whilst he was talking to Ernest. And then he sent for her, and I know she’s telling him. She’ll be glad to—she hates Carey.”

“She’s jealous. I don’t believe she knows a thing. Don’t you remember, you suggested at dinner on Monday night that Ellen might know who was for it, and I said she didn’t, because I’d asked her.”

“I know. I told her that, and she said Aunt Honoria had told her not to say anything so of course she didn’t, but now she was dead it was different and she’d be bound to tell what she knew. Den, it’s horrible! Carey couldn’t!”

Dennis had a frozen look. He said,

“We don’t know her very well, do we?”

“Den!”

“What did Ellen say?”

“That Aunt Honoria had talked to her about it and said it was Carey—‘as near as makes no difference’.”

“What did she mean by that?”

“She said, ‘Oh, we didn’t name no names, but it was Miss Carey she meant.’ Den, that’s what frightens me, because if she was making it up out of jealousy and spite she wouldn’t go and boggle at the name—she’d say right out that Aunt Honoria had told her it was Carey.”

“I don’t know——”

“Oh, she would—I’m sure she would.”

“She might want to leave herself a loophole, in case it came out that it was someone else.”

“Do you think she’d be clever enough for that? She’s just an ignorant, spiteful old thing, but she’s been here donkey’s years, and she did love Aunt Honoria.”

Dennis stood quite silent for a moment. Then he said,

“You’d better know—Ernest Hood says the same thing.”

Nora drew in her breath.

“Oh, Den—he doesn’t!”

Dennis frowned.

“He does. I met him coming out of the study, and he blattered out the whole thing—said he hoped he’d done right, and he didn’t know what Mr. Aylwin would say, but the Chief Inspector had put great pressure on him, and as it was a murder case he hardly liked—and so forth and so on. You know his style.”

Nora gave a small sharp cry.

“*Murder?* Oh, Den!”

Dennis nodded.

“Doesn’t sound too good, does it? But that’s what it is—someone murdered Aunt Honoria to stop her altering her will. *Cui bono?* Who profits—in case you’ve forgotten your Latin.”

“Den—don’t!”

He turned towards the door, fumbling with his crutch.

“If I don’t dot the i’s and cross the t’s, the Chief Inspector will.”

Nora began to cry, her eyes wide open and the tears running down over her cheeks.

“Den, she wouldn’t—not Carey—she *couldn’t*! I thought you were fond of her.

Aren't you?"

He had got the door open. He looked back at her and said, his mouth awry,
“Damnable—isn't it, darling?”

His crutch went tapping away down the corridor. Nora sat down on the nearest chair and cried for quite a long time.

When McGillivray was through with Ellen he had Dennis Harland in.

"I'm sorry to trouble ye. There are just one or two points——"

Dennis got himself into a chair and stretched out a leg. All the contours of his face had sharpened. There was a flush upon his cheeks. His eyes were tired and bright. He said,

"It's no trouble." His voice was flat. McGillivray thought he looked as if he had a temperature. He said,

"It's very obliging of ye. It would be about Mrs. Maquisten's maid, Ellen Bridling. She appears to have been very devoted to her."

"Oh, yes."

"Ye'll have known her a long time?"

"Ever since I can remember. My aunt brought us all up."

"When ye say *all*, ye'll be meaning——?"

"My cousins Mrs. Hull and Miss King, and myself."

"Not Mr. Robert Maquisten or Miss Silence?"

"No."

"And Mrs. Bridling would no doubt be very much attached to all three of ye?"

Dennis's smile broke out and changed his face.

"I don't think she's the least attached to any of us."

"Not to Miss King?"

The smile became a dry laugh.

"Good lord, no! She hates children, and she loathed having us here. I may say that we reciprocated and did our best to give her good and sufficient cause. She doesn't love any of us, but if there's one she dislikes more than the others, it's Honor."

"But she was attached to Mrs. Maquisten?"

"Undoubtedly. She's a sour old crab, but she loved my aunt—I'm quite sure about that."

"Impm. And Mrs. Maquisten will have made some provision for her no doubt?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ye know that for a fact?"

Dennis looked a little surprised.

"Well, yes, I do. My aunt was not at all a secretive person. She enjoyed making wills, and she enjoyed talking about what was in them. Ellen was to have an annuity

of three pounds a week.”

“Would she be cognizant of that?”

“I suppose so.”

“Did Mrs. Maquisten vary the amount from time to time?”

“Oh, no, she didn’t do that sort of thing with the staff. Mrs. Deeping was to have two pounds a week, and Ellen three. That was in all the wills. It was just the family legacies she liked having fun and games with. And if you’re thinking would it have been worth Ellen’s while to poison Aunt Honoria, well, it wouldn’t. She got two pounds a week and a fiver at Christmas, and with board and lodging thrown in and a present here and there—well, you can add it up for yourself. She wouldn’t want to come down to a bedsitting room after bossing it round this house for thirty-five years, quite apart from the fact that in her own vinegar way she really did love my aunt.”

McGillivray thought, “This is a very intelligent young man—and that will be a pleasant change.” Aloud he said,

“Imphm. Would ye say she was truthful?”

“I don’t know that I ever thought about it one way or the other.”

“Would ye say that she’d give an accurate account of a conversation?”

“She has been giving you an account of a conversation?”

“Imphm—with Mrs. Maquisten. Would it be accurate?”

Dennis sat looking straight in front of him. In the end he said,

“I can’t answer that.”

“With regard to this particular conversation, maybe not. But ye can tell me whether she is a pairson who would repeat a conversation accurately in a general way.”

“I think so.”

McGillivray nodded.

“The less education a pairson has, the more accurately they will repeat—that is my experience. There’s a sense of drama which education appears to eleeminate. Ye’ll find it in children. They’ll not just tell ye a thing—they’ll act it for ye. It conveys a very veevid impression. Imphm.”

Dennis took a moment. Then he said,

“What impression did Ellen give you?”

“A very veevid one, Mr. Harland.”

“What did she say?”

Looking at him straight and full, McGillivray said,

“She affirmed that it was Miss Silence whose name was to be cut out of Mrs.

Maquisten's will.”

Dennis had known that it was coming—he had braced himself to hear it said. But there is something about the spoken word which exceeds anticipation. There was in this case the stern warning note in McGillivray's voice.

He did not wince, but effort drove the flush from his cheeks. He sat there grey and rigid. And then without warning the door opened and Carey came in.

A little across the threshold, she saw McGillivray, checked, and took a half step back. He said,

“Come in, Miss Silence. There's something I would like to ask ye. Come in and sit down.”

Carey advanced slowly. She was very pale. Unlike Nora, she had used no lipstick. Her black hair made her look paler still. Her eyes between the shading lashes seemed almost as dark. As she came she looked at Dennis. McGillivray saw her draw a quick breath. Then she sat down and transferred her gaze to him.

“What is it?”

“Just a question as to a matter of fact,” said McGillivray. “Have ye a banking account, Miss Silence?”

Her lips just parted to say “No.”

“An account in the Post Office savings bank?”

She shook her head.

“Am I to understand that ye have no financial assets?”

She said in a tired, gentle voice,

“I hadn't any money except what I brought with me and five pounds that Cousin Honoria gave me.”

“And how much did ye bring with ye?”

“Thirty shillings.”

“Then yer total assets would be six pound ten?”

Dennis Harland said quickly, “For that matter, we're all in the same boat. We've none of us got anything you could call private means except Robert. If they chuck me out of the Air Force, I suppose I shall have a wound pension. Nora's husband has nothing but his pay—if he's killed she'll get about two hundred a year. Honor hasn't got a halfpenny. My aunt has been extremely generous to us all.”

McGillivray looked at him tolerantly. After a moment he nodded and turned back to Carey.

“Ye're not so long out of hospital?”

“About a fortnight.”

“And ye were advised to take a rest. For how long?”

“Three months.”

Dennis broke in.

“There would be no question of my cousin going to work until she was fit, whatever happened.”

“Would she know that?” said McGillivray. His voice was deep and stern. Without waiting for an answer he pushed back his chair and got up—a big man, loosely built, rather portentous. “Ah well,” he said, “I’ll be back.”

He passed them, went out of the room, and shut the door.

Carey got up too, but it seemed as if the movement had been instinctive, for when she was up she just stood there, doing nothing, saying nothing. She saw Dennis take hold of his crutch and get up too. So there they were, facing one another, quite close together, and not a word to say. It was strange and desolating. They looked at one another, and had nothing to say. She thought how grey he was.

And then suddenly the flush was in his cheeks again, his eyes bright as coals. He said,

“Why did you do it?”

Carey stared at him, her face stupid with the shock—no intelligence, no protest—just a blank.

He leaned a little forward, dropping his voice.

“Why did you? You didn’t have to. We’d have looked after you—I’d have looked after you. You might have known.”

She said almost inaudibly, “I don’t know what you mean.”

They stood staring at each other. When he saw that she was about to speak he turned abruptly and went limping out of the room.

Jeff Stewart came back next day. He arrived on the doorstep of No. 13 at the same time as a thickset elderly man with a heavy, serious face and greying hair which had once been red. As they stood together and waited for the door to open, Jeff wondered who his companion might be. Not so many people would be calling before noon at a house where the mistress lay dead, and it wanted twenty minutes or so of twelve o'clock. His mind was full of Carey, whom he hadn't seen for ten days, but he couldn't help wondering who was calling with him. Family? Lawyer? Or a combination of the two? Family lawyer—yes, that would be it.

As the thought went through his mind, Mark Aylwin's frown deepened. He pressed the bell again. Almost before his hand had time to drop, the door swung in, showing Molly, her face so swollen with crying as to be almost unrecognizable. When she saw them both she began to cry again, as noisy and uncontrolled as if she had been half her age. Remembering that this was Thursday, and that Mrs. Maquisten had been dead since Monday night, Jeff wondered whether she had been crying like this all the time, and why. He got a kind of horror quite suddenly.

And then Mr. Aylwin was saying, sternly but not unkindly,

"Now, Molly, control yourself. You mustn't add to the trouble."

She gave a convulsive sob.

"Oh, *sir!*"

Jeff turned.

"I expect your business will be with the family. I've just come to see Miss Silence." He turned back again. "Where is she, Molly? Will you let her know?"

There was a fresh storm of sobs.

Mr. Aylwin said, "I think we had better go to the study." He took Molly by the shoulder and shook her. "Stop crying at once! And tell Mr. Dennis we're here."

But the opening of the study door showed Dennis Harland at the writing-table. There was a sheet of paper before him and a pen in his hand. The nib was dry and the sheet blank. He had still that grey, cold look.

Mr. Aylwin went across to him.

"My dear boy—no, don't get up. I can't tell you how sorry I am. And that I should have been away—most, most unfortunate." He moved aside to draw up a chair, leaving Jeff Stewart looking down at Dennis and feeling the horror rise in him.

"I won't butt in. I expect you have business. I'll just say how sorry I am and go up and see Carey."

A muscle twitched in Dennis's cheek.

“Mr. Aylwin is my aunt’s legal adviser. I don’t think you’ve met him.”

“No.” He made a half turn and held out a hand. “How do you do, sir? I’m Jefferson Stewart. I’m some kind of a cousin of Carey’s, and I’m over from the States on Lease-Lend business. I’m very sorry to hear about this. Cousin Honoria was very good to me. Well, you’ll be wanting to talk to Dennis. I’ll go up and see Carey.”

Dennis said in a curious expressionless voice,

“You can’t.”

“Why can’t I?”

“Because she isn’t here.”

Jeff stared at him.

“Why isn’t she here?”

“Because she’s been arrested.” He sounded tired. That was all—just rather flat and tired.

The words appeared to produce a numbing effect. Jeff went on staring.

“They’ve arrested *Carey*? What for?”

“For poisoning Aunt Honoria.”

He went back a pace.

“But it’s nonsense!”

“I’m afraid not. She did it.”

“If you’d got two legs, I’d wring your neck for that,” said Jefferson Stewart softly.

Dennis met the dangerous spark in his eyes.

“You’d be saving me a lot of trouble.”

Mr. Aylwin interposed.

“This is a shock to you, Mr. Stewart. It’s been a shock to everyone. I’ve been away in Scotland, and I’ve only just got back. I can imagine that you don’t find it very easy to believe. It has obviously been a very great shock to Dennis. I must ask you to remember his state of health. Recriminations will not help Carey Silence. I suggest that you sit down and listen to what Dennis has to say. I have myself seen Chief Inspector McGillivray this morning. I have also seen my head clerk, Mr. Hood. I’m afraid there is a very strong case against your cousin.”

Jeff Stewart made no attempt to sit down. He loomed up in the middle of the room, and dominated it with that bright dangerous gleam in his eye and the soft drawl of his voice.

“What case?” he said.

Aylwin told him, putting the unbelievable accusation into brief, methodical words.

The penniless girl, not too sure of her health or her ability to earn her living, a fortune just within her grasp, the prospect of ease and plenty. Then something—nobody knew what—coming up out of the past to wreck it all, and the temptation to save herself and be secure.

When he had done, Jeff Stewart said,

“If Carey wanted money, there was mine. I’ve plenty. We were going to be married. There’s no motive.”

“That will be for the defence.” Aylwin did not look at him. “The case is strong enough, even if the jury believe what you have just said. Two witnesses identify her with the person Mrs. Maquisten would have cut out of her will if she had lived over Monday night.”

Jeff turned away from him.

“You think she did it, Dennis? Why?”

The muscle twitched again.

“She knew about the sleeping-draught—I came down and told her. If I hadn’t done that I could have said she couldn’t have known Aunt Honoria was going to take anything. But she did know. She knew Magda was going out, and that the draught was going to be left for Ellen to give her. I came down and told her the whole thing myself. She had only to walk into the bathroom and put the extra tablets in.”

“Are you going to tell them that?”

“They haven’t asked me yet.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

Dennis looked away, looked down, stared at the blotting-pad and the blank sheet that lay there. He said,

“She did it.”

When Carey looked back she could see all the things which led up to her arrest. They were quite clear and distinct. One followed upon the other, inexorably, logically. But she stopped short always before the actual moment. It was like the step between life and death. Up to one particular moment you were alive; after that moment you were what people called dead—somewhere else. But would you remember the actual step between these two states? She didn't think you would. Up to one particular moment and one particular day she was one of millions of other people who had their troubles and their difficulties, but who were free and who could look to the law for protection. Then, with a sudden jarring shock, she had passed a barrier which irrevocably divided her from all these people into a state where the law no longer existed to protect, but to restrain, to punish, and to kill. She could not force her mind to the moment of transition.

Memory took up again on the other side of it. Moments passed—minutes, hours, days, weeks—with a dragging slowness, but somehow outside time. Because in time its divisions are related, linked with the past and with the future. But to Carey there was only Now—a present which imprisoned her more surely than her body was imprisoned. Now it was Monday, now Tuesday. Now it was December, now January. It didn't matter what they called it, it was Now.

There were interruptions—days on which for a brief space the outside world of time broke in. There was the day when she was told that her solicitor was waiting to see her, and when she said she hadn't got a solicitor the wardress said firmly of course she had, someone would see to that, and she must come along and talk to him.

Mr. Mordaunt, sitting at one end of a long, bare table, had his first sight of his client as the wardress brought her in, indicated a chair at the other end, and withdrew out of earshot to keep an eye upon her charge through a glass panel in the upper part of the door. He thought Miss Carey Silence very young, very pale. If he knew anything about it—and having been a warden all through the blitz, he was not without experience—she was suffering badly from shock.

He was about to address her, when she lifted a pair of very beautiful dark blue eyes and said,

“I'm so sorry—I don't know your name.”

Mr. Mordaunt began to explain himself, but he had not got beyond the name of his firm, when she spoke again.

“I haven't got any money.”

“You haven’t got to trouble about that, Miss Silence.”

“I have only six pound ten, and that wouldn’t be enough.”

Shock—that was what made people talk like that, straight out of whatever it was they had on their minds. It destroyed the ordinary inhibitions, and they just came out with whatever they were thinking. Could be useful, or precious awkward. Suppose she started to tell him that she’d done it—people in a state of shock will tell you anything. He began to talk in a hurry.

“Miss Silence, will you listen to me. I can’t stay very long, and there are a number of things I want to say, but before I say any of them let me assure you that you do not have to trouble about the money side of this. If, as we hope, we are able to bring this off, you will yourself have ample means.”

She interrupted quite gently.

“But if you don’t bring me off——”

Her eyes were fixed steadily upon his face. He found it a little disconcerting. He said,

“I should have said at once that a member of your family is making himself responsible.”

“Dennis?”

“Mr. Harland? Well, no.”

She echoed the last word.

“No—Dennis thinks I did it.”

Mr. Mordaunt made haste to block this uninviting path.

“It is not Mr. Harland. It is Mr. Stewart—Mr. Jefferson Stewart.”

Her lids wavered and fell. She leaned back. Very slowly a faint colour stained that very white skin. Very slowly it ebbed again. All through the interview that followed she was quiet, gentle, lifeless.

Mr. Mordaunt went away and told Mr. Jefferson Stewart that if she went into court that way they might as well throw in their hand.

“There’s a stiff case against her. We shall try and shake their witnesses of course, but in the long run the witness who matters most in a murder case is always the accused. And a young girl’s got a pull. She’s got her youth, she’s got her looks. If she makes a good impression she’ll get the benefit of the doubt—and we ought to be able to contrive a useful doubt or two. Then she can take advantage of it. But not if she goes into court like this. They’ll take one look at her and make sure she did it.”

Jeff Stewart, standing up tall against the mantelpiece, looked down on him and said,

“Is that what you did?”

Mr. Mordaunt rubbed a jutting chin. Rather thick horn-rimmed lenses concealed the expression of his eyes.

“Well, no, Mr. Stewart. But then I had a reason, and if you’re going to expect reason from a jury——”

“What reason had you?”

“Well, I don’t mind telling you. When she came in I thought she looked crushed, and I thought very likely it was remorse—and that’s what the jury’s going to think if she doesn’t pull up out of it. But I didn’t go on thinking it, and for the reason that when she began to talk I could see the state she was in, and it was shock. I’ve seen too many people like it not to know. She just said everything that was in her mind like a child of five, and at first I was afraid of what she might be going to say. And then I wasn’t, because there wasn’t anything that mattered. If there had been it would have come out, the way she was. That’s my belief, and I feel pretty sure about it. I don’t think she did it, because if she had she’d have come out with it. We’ve got to rouse her up. She’s got to fight.”

Mr. Stewart nodded.

As a result of this conversation another and very different one took place a couple of days later. Just what Jeff Stewart did to bring it about is neither here nor there. He had some good friends, a persuasive tongue, and a considerable latent force of perseverance upon which to draw. In the end he found himself sitting where Mordaunt had sat some forty-eight hours before, looking down the length of the same bare table at Carey Silence, only this time the wardress stood inside the door and could certainly hear everything they said. His mind registered that and put it away. It didn’t matter at all. What mattered was that Carey should want to live and be ready to fight for her life. If anything he could do or say would subserve this end, the whole of London might listen in for all he cared. He was, in sober fact, prepared to tell the world and Carey Silence how much he loved her.

He greeted her across the long, cold distance with the same informal nod, the same half lazy smile, the same “Hullo, Carey!” as if they had parted yesterday and were meeting again to-morrow.

Carey didn’t speak at all. She sat down, she laid her hands in her lap, she looked in his direction, but he might have been a table or a chair, or he might not have been there at all. Something in him was appalled at her remoteness. She seemed to be already withdrawn beyond his reach. But he meant to reach her. He leaned over the table.

“Now look here, honey, we’ve got to talk. And you’ve got to listen. You’re not listening. You’ve got to wake right up and listen.”

She did look at him then, but it was with an effort. Her eyes focussed slowly.

He said, "That's better. Now you keep listening to me, because I shan't be able to come again for quite a while. I've got to go back to the States and make a report, but I'll be over again before the case comes on. Have you got that? Well now, Mr. Mordaunt will look after everything for you. He is said to be the best man we could get—Mr. Aylwin recommended him. He sees to the preparation of the defence, and he briefs counsel to defend you in court. We don't do it that way in the States, but that's the way it's managed over here. Well, he's briefing Hugo Vane. He'll be your counsel—counsel for the defence. You'll be having a conference with him presently, but Mordaunt fixes all that. In fact Mordaunt fixes everything—you don't have to bother. Have you got that?"

"I don't have to bother——"

"That's right—Mordaunt takes care of everything. There's just one thing you've got to do, honey."

"What?"

Well, he had her attention for what it was worth. He had a moment of wondering how much it was worth. She looked like a sleep-walker. His mind shied violently away from Lady Macbeth. He spoke in a hurry.

"You've got to help him."

"How?"

"Honey, you've got to wake up! Where have you got to? You're in some kind of a dream. There isn't any fight in you. You've got to wake up and fight! What's come to you?"

She looked faintly startled.

"I'm so tired, Jeff—I think it's that. The doctor came to see me this morning. He says they let me out of hospital too soon. He's going to send me to bed again. He's very kind."

He felt a certain relief. She did look desperately tired. If she was in a sick ward she'd be taken care of. He said,

"That's fine. You rest all you can, and then you get ready to fight. Promise?"

"I'll try, Jeff."

"I want to tell you why you've got to try. You're feeling weak and tired, and you've had a shock, but there's a lot of life left for both of us, honey, and I'm never going to believe that you haven't got the guts to put up a fight, because it isn't just your life, it's mine. If you throw your life away you're throwing mine after it as far as its being any use to me goes. Let's get down to brass tacks. Everything in my life that matters depends on whether you're going to fight this or not. I reckon I'm looking at

it from a very selfish point of view, but if I have to go on living without you for the next fifty years—and as a family we run well into the nineties—there won't be one minute of all that time that I won't know I've missed what we're meant to get out of life, and that I won't feel you let me down because you hadn't got the guts to fight. As I said, it's my point of view, but there are times when you've got to put your point of view, and this is one of them. The first time I saw you I knew that I was going to marry you. I don't mean to say that I fell head over ears in love with you at first sight, but I knew I was going to, and I did. That sort of thing doesn't happen in just that sort of way unless there's something pretty strong between two people. I don't think it's all on my side either. Things don't happen that way—not with the kind of feeling I've got about you. So we've got something to fight for.”

When he began to speak she was looking at him, but as he went on she leaned forward over the table and put up her hands to cover her face. When he had finished and she looked up again her eyes were wet.

“Jeff——”

“Yes?”

“Don't mind so much.”

He smiled at her.

“It's no good—the mischief's done. It's up to you. What about it?”

“I'll try.”

The court was crowded. Carey looked down on a sea of heads, a sea of faces. Most of them were looking at her. She had that moment of feeling that she had been stripped and set there for them to see. She turned giddy, but she held herself quiet and straight. Whatever happened, she mustn't shrink, or let them see that she felt naked there. She had come to an inner strength that held her up. When things were so bad that they couldn't be any worse, something came to you—some courage, some control.

She looked over the heads of all the people and rested her eyes upon the judge—the crimson of his robes, the grey horsehair of his wig, the little brown wrinkled face that reminded her of a squirrel.

She stood up for the indictment, and then they gave her a chair again. Sir Wilbury Fossett made his opening speech, which was rather like the day of judgment, because it set out all the things which had happened in that November fortnight, and instead of being innocent they were sinister—things she had forgotten, things that didn't mean anything at all, things it would be quite easy to explain if they would let her speak. He was building them up into the case against Carey Silence. All his skill, all his experience, his big handsome presence, his fine voice, his bland and easy manner, were being used for just one end—to prove that Carey Silence had done murder.

After a little she stopped looking at the judge. She looked down instead at her own folded hands. They were bare, and they looked very white against the black of her skirt. Nora had sent her the coat and skirt to wear, with an odd impulsive note—"Better wear black. It always goes down well. This is with my love. I've hardly worn it. I look a fiend in mourning, and nobody wears it now, but it will be better for you. And I *don't* believe you did it. Nora."

She went on looking down at her hands. Sir Wilbury stopped speaking.

All through the evidence of arrest, the medical evidence, the formal admission of Honoria Maquisten's will, she sat like that.

A police witness deposed to examining the bottle which had contained the sleeping-tablets. The bottle was produced in court. It contained three white pellets. Witness testified to finding it in the small glass-fronted cupboard in the bathroom adjoining Mrs. Maquisten's room, and to testing it for fingerprints. There were no fingerprints. The bottle contained three tablets.

When the court rose for lunch Mr. Mordaunt had a word of encouragement for Jefferson Stewart, back again from the States and looking as if he was short of

sleep.

“Not a bad start, you know. That black thing suits her. No harm her keeping her eyes down—looks modest. Made me a bit uneasy, the way she kept looking at the judge to start with. I don’t suppose she knew she was doing it. Well, he got a good view of her eyes, and you can’t say they’re not worth looking at. There’s something about them too. Kind of tragic innocence. Daresay it didn’t do any harm. Even judges are human.” He chuckled. “Very human, some of them. Strange, but true.”

Molly James was the first witness after lunch. Scarlet and very nearly inaudible, she testified to finding a letter on the front door mat at between a quarter and half past two and taking it up to Mrs. Maquisten. There was no stamp on it. It must have been left by hand. She thought she had seen the writing before. It was all straight up and down. But she couldn’t say whose it was. Oh, no, she couldn’t. And Mrs. Maquisten was angry, and called her back and asked for the young ladies and for Mr. Harland, but they were out, and she said to send them up as soon as they came in, whichever one come first.

Marten Lanthony, Sir Wilbury Fossett’s junior, had been shepherding her along. He asked,

“And who did come first, Miss James?”

With a loud sob Molly said,

“Miss Carey.”

A tall, thin young man who was junior counsel for the defence stood up and said in a pleasant conversational voice,

“Please don’t cry, Miss James. I just want to ask you whether Mrs. Maquisten said anything more about Miss Silence.”

Molly gulped and stared. She thought him a very nice gentleman, especially when he gave her an encouraging smile and went on quite informally.

“Try and remember, will you. She asked you if any of the young ladies were in. Did she put it just like that, or did she ask for them separately?”

Molly blinked.

“She asked for Miss Honor—Miss King, that is. And then she asked for Miss Nora—Mrs. Hull. And then she asked for Mr. Dennis and Miss Carey—and they was all out.”

“What did Mrs. Maquisten say when you told her Miss King was out?”

“She was angry.”

“And when you told her Mrs. Hull was out?”

“She was angry, sir.”

“And when you told her Mr. Harland and Miss Silence were out?”

“She was angry.”

“Was she angry in just the same way as when you told her that the others were out?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“And after that did she say anything more about Miss Silence?”

“No, sir, she didn’t. She just told me to send them up to her as soon as they come in, whichever one come first.”

“Thank you, Miss James.”

Molly stepped down, a little regretful now that it was over. She wouldn’t have minded going on answering the nice young gentleman’s questions—called her Miss James and ever so pleasant.

“Call Magda Brayle!”

A neat, upright figure in nurse’s dress stepping up into the witness-box, taking the oath in a clear, unhurried voice. Carey lifted her eyes for a moment. Magda hadn’t changed a bit. It seemed as if everybody must have changed, but Magda hadn’t. She was prompt and audible in her replies. She knew just what she had to say and she said it. She might have been answering questions about a patient’s temperature.

At about 2.15 on the afternoon of Monday, November 16th, she was in the bathroom adjoining Mrs. Maquisten’s bedroom. The communicating door was ajar. She heard Molly James come in and say, “There’s a letter,” and a little after that she heard Mrs. Maquisten call her back. Her voice was very angry. She asked for Miss King and Mrs. Hull. When Molly said they were out she asked for Mr. Harland and Miss Silence. When Molly told her they were out too she said to send up the first one that came in.

Sir Wilbury asked in the fine voice which could make any question seem more important than it was,

“And who was the first to come in?”

“Miss Silence—about half an hour later.”

“Were you still in the bathroom with the door ajar?”

“Yes.”

“Did you hear what was said?”

“I couldn’t hear much of what Miss Silence said. I could hear what Mrs. Maquisten said because she was speaking in a loud, angry voice, except at the beginning, when she seemed as if she was choking with anger.”

“Will you tell us what you heard.”

“Miss Silence came in and said, ‘What is it, Cousin Honoria?’ And that was

where Mrs. Maquisten began to choke. I heard her say something about being deceived, and I heard Miss Silence say, ‘*Please, Cousin Honoria*——’ and things like that, as if she was trying to soothe her down. Mrs. Maquisten was getting angrier all the time. Her voice got loud again. I heard her tell Miss Silence that she was to ring up her solicitor and tell him to come round at once, and to bring her will, because she was going to alter it.”

“Did Miss Silence appear to be willing to do this?”

“Oh, no—she kept trying to soothe her. In the end Mrs. Maquisten was fairly raging. She said, ‘I’ve been deceived, and deceit is what I won’t put up with!’ A little later on she said that again—‘I won’t put up with deceit, and I won’t put up with disobedience, Carey. Either you ring Mr. Aylwin up at once, or I send for Magda to do it. You needn’t think you can stop me, and you needn’t think you can get me to change my mind!’ Then Miss Silence rang up. I heard her give the message. Then she said, ‘Cousin Honoria, Mr. Aylwin is in Scotland. He may be away for a day or two.’ And Mrs. Maquisten said, ‘Tell Hood he’s to come—Mr. Hood, the head clerk! Say you must speak to him!’”

“You need not go any farther than that—Mr. Hood will tell us what was said. Did anything more pass between Miss Silence and Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Not very much. Mrs. Maquisten said, ‘I’ll have to rest. You’d better go. It isn’t good for me to be angry like this,’ and Miss Silence said, ‘I’m so sorry, Cousin Honoria.’”

Carey lifted her eyes again. She remembered saying that. She remembered Cousin Honoria with the flush fading from her face and the lines of fatigue cut deep. She saw herself going out of the room and shutting the door behind her. The whole scene came up as vividly as a dream. The things that had happened since were blotted out.

Magda went on giving her evidence—about being sent out of the way when Mr. Hood arrived—about the sleeping-draught—about Mrs. Maquisten’s insistence that she should take her evening off—about what Mr. Harland had said.

“Mr. Harland was present when this was under discussion?”

“Yes. Mrs. Maquisten became very much excited, so Mr. Harland suggested that I should do what she wished. It wasn’t at all good for her to be excited. He suggested leaving the sleeping-draught ready for her maid Ellen Bridling to give her.”

A lot of questions about the sleeping-draught. . . . Yes, it was the one Mrs. Maquisten was in the habit of taking. . . . No, she didn’t take it very often—sometimes not for weeks at a time. She only had one tablet as a rule, but if she was not asleep by eleven, Dr. Adams said she could have a second one. The tablets had

to be dissolved because she couldn't swallow anything like a pill—she was nervous and said it made her choke. The tablets dissolved quite easily in hot water—they didn't take more than a minute or two to dissolve.

“And how many tablets did you dissolve on the evening of November 16th?”

“One.”

“Are you sure of that, Miss Brayle?”

“Positive.”

There seemed to be no end to the questions about the tablets. Magda answered them all with the same unruffled calm. She had tipped three out into her hand and dissolved one of them in a third of a medicine-glass of hot water. . . . Yes, that was the glass. She had left it standing on the shelf above the wash-basin in the bathroom. When she had put back the spare tablets there must have been eight or nine left in the bottle. She did not count them, but there would be about that number. When Chief Detective Inspector McGillivray showed her the bottle after Mrs. Maquisten's death there were only three tablets in it. He asked her whether she had wiped the bottle, and she said no.

“And did you wipe the bottle, Miss Brayle?”

A faint surprised tinge in Magda's voice.

“Oh, no.”

“Can you account for the fact that no fingerprints were found upon it?”

“No, I can't.”

“Your hands were bare when you handled it?”

“Oh, yes.”

“You did not take hold of it with a towel, or a handkerchief, or anything of that sort?”

“Oh, no. I took the bottle up in my right hand and shook the tablets out into my left. I put the bottle down whilst I dropped one tablet into the glass. Then I picked it up again, tipped the spare tablets back, and put it away in the cupboard.”

Questions as to who might have known where the tablets were kept. Questions designed to elicit the fact that the cupboard was used as a medicine-cupboard—that anyone in the house could have known this—that the cupboard was in any case the first and most obvious place in which to look.

Sir Wilbury gathered up his gown with a characteristic gesture.

“Do you know of any occasion when Miss Silence came into Mrs. Maquisten's bathroom?”

“Yes.”

“When was that?”

“On the Monday morning.”

“The morning of Monday, November 16th?”

“Yes.”

“Will you describe what happened.”

“I had been dusting the cupboard shelves. I had all the bottles out and was beginning to put them back, when Miss Silence came through from the bedroom and said Mrs. Maquisten wanted her smelling-salts. I gave them to her, and she went back again.”

“She could have seen what you were doing?”

“Oh, yes. She took a good look and said, ‘What a lot of bottles!’”

Again Carey remembered very sharply. All those bottles. And she had been sorry for Cousin Honoria. . . .

Well, they were finished with the tablets at last. Magda was telling how she had gone out and come home, how she had stood at the connecting door and listened, how she had undressed and gone to bed. Then, in the morning, Ellen coming in frightened because her mistress hadn’t waked when she drew the curtains back, and Magda going through to find Honoria Maquisten dead.

Sir Wilbury had finished with his witness. He sat down. Counsel for the defence rose to cross-examine. Carey found herself looking at him with strained attention.

After Sir Wilbury’s massive build and handsome presence, Hugo Vane looked like a schoolboy who had somehow reached middle age without growing up. He must have been a cheerful, chubby child with a tendency to bulge. His brown eyes twinkled. His cheeks were round and rosy. The tendency to bulge was perhaps a little more marked. Seen through a diminishing-glass and at a little distance, he might have been a schoolboy still, dressed up in wig and gown. When he began to speak his voice had the same youthful quality. It had none of the vibrations, the range of tone, which Sir Wilbury could command. It was just a fresh, pleasant voice. Speaking to Jeff Stewart, Mr. Mordaunt had commended it. “Makes everything sound easy. Keeps the jury feeling how bright they are. Pleases them.”

In this agreeable voice he now put a number of questions to Magda Brayle. She had been in the bathroom during Mrs. Maquisten’s interview with Miss Silence? Washing handkerchiefs, wasn’t she? How long did that take? She had been washing them half an hour before, when Molly James brought up that letter? Very troublesome handkerchiefs to wash, weren’t they? And the door was ajar all the time?

Under his skilful management Nurse Brayle began to look like a very deliberate eavesdropper.

“You were in the habit of listening to Mrs. Maquisten’s private conversations?”

“Certainly not!”

“But you did a good deal of listening on that Monday afternoon.”

“I had to consider Mrs. Maquisten’s health. It wasn’t at all good for her to be excited.”

“Mrs. Maquisten was excited?”

“She was very much excited.”

“Sufficiently so to make you nervous as to the effect of this excitement upon her health?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Now, Miss Brayle—what were the relations between Mrs. Maquisten and Miss Silence? I am not asking you about this particular afternoon, but about the preceding fortnight.”

“Mrs. Maquisten had taken a great fancy to Miss Silence. She was very fond of her.”

“She showed her a good deal of affection?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And what about Miss Silence—did she return this affection?”

“She seemed to.”

“They were on terms of mutual affection?”

“It looked as if they were.”

“Now, Miss Brayle—during this conversation, part of which you overheard, you have said that Mrs. Maquisten was very much excited, and you have said that excitement was bad for her health. Would not anyone who was fond of her have done what they could to calm this excitement?”

“I suppose so.”

“You have said in your evidence that Miss Silence did, in fact, use every endeavour to soothe and calm her cousin. That is so, is it not?”

“Yes.” There was a little pause before the word.

“I put it to you that during the whole of this interview all that Miss Silence said and did was compatible with an affectionate desire to calm and soothe a state of excitement which was obviously not at all good for an invalid. Yes or no, Miss Brayle.”

For the first time a slight flush came to Magda’s face. She said,

“Yes.”

“Now, to go back to the beginning of this conversation which you overheard. Miss Silence came in and said, ‘What is it, Cousin Honoria?’ and Mrs. Maquisten

said something about being deceived. I should like to get that a little clearer if we can. Can you give us her exact words?"

"I don't know that I can. She was choking with anger. It was something about being deceived."

"Was it 'I have been deceived'?"

"Yes—something like that."

"Miss Brayle, I am very anxious to get this clear. Did Mrs. Maquisten use these words, 'I have been deceived'? Please think very carefully before you answer. Did she say, 'I have been deceived'?"

"Yes, she did."

"Will you swear that she said those words?"

"Yes."

"She didn't say, 'You have deceived me, Carey'?"

"I didn't hear her say that."

"But you heard her say, 'I have been deceived'?"

"Yes."

Mr. Mordaunt was in good spirits at the end of the day. Hugo Vane had not been able to shake Magda Brayle as to the number of tablets in the bottle, but Mr. Mordaunt considered that he had got home on the jury with the impression that Nurse Brayle was a deliberate eavesdropper, and that she had a definite bias against Carey Silence.

“Nine of them men. Men don’t like a woman running another woman down, especially when there doesn’t seem to be any reason for it—looks like spite. I don’t think they liked it. Don’t think they cottoned to Miss Magda Brayle. What’s at the back of it? Why has she got her knife into Miss Silence? She has, you know. I’d like to know why.”

Jeff Stewart raised his eyebrows.

“Just plain jealousy, I should say. Mrs. Maquisten didn’t like her, and did like Carey.”

Mr. Mordaunt pricked up his ears.

“Oh—Mrs. Maquisten didn’t like her?”

“No one liked her much.”

“Why did she keep her?”

Jeff shrugged.

“Don’t make too much of it. I don’t say she disliked her, or that any of them did. Magda just didn’t mix. A bit of a cold fish, I should say, and they were a friendly crowd.” His face darkened as he added, “They were very friendly to me.”

“But not to Miss Brayle?”

“Magda wasn’t friendly. But I don’t mind betting she’d resent their being friendly to Carey, and she’d resent Mrs. Maquisten making a lot of her and giving her things.”

Mr. Mordaunt nodded, then looked slyly sideways.

“When you said they were such a friendly lot—were you including Miss King?”

Jeff’s smile felt stiff these days. He had the feeling himself that it must creak. He said,

“Oh, Honor King doesn’t count.”

They went on talking about the case, and all the time his heart and mind cried out to Carey. She hadn’t looked at him once all through the long, difficult day. She had looked at the judge. She had looked every now and again at Sir Wilbury, at Hugo Vane, at Magda Brayle, but for the most part she had looked down at the bare hands lying in her lap. She had not looked once at the jury, and she had never

looked at him.

He found her changed. The dazed air had gone. She was pale, but she no longer seemed as if she might slip away at any moment into a swoon. She seemed stronger. Her eyes when she lifted them were a clear, deep blue. She didn't look ill any more. She didn't even look as if she were under a heavy strain. She was quiet and withdrawn. He felt an uprush of confidence and hope, because it didn't seem possible to him that twelve ordinary, normal people could be made to believe that Carey would harm anyone.

He began to think about the jury—not as a jury, but as individuals. Three of them were women. A rather hatchet-faced spinster with a militant eye and the air of having sat diligently on committees since the beginning of the century. Well, you never knew how it would take that sort. Some of them were all for a fellow woman—some of them weren't. He found her unpredictable. The little faded blonde was much easier. He knew her kind—line of least resistance—slide and let slide. God! To think of Carey's life in those inefficient hands! The third woman cheered him a good bit. She looked the sort of stout, comfortable person who has brought up a family and made a good job of it. Her heavy face was set in lines of kindness and commonsense. Of the men, the foreman had a handsome, forcible face. Mordaunt supplied the information that he was a builder and contractor. He looked as if he would be fond of his own way. He probably had a meek, adoring wife, and children whom he ruled with benevolent despotism. For the rest, there was a little rabbit of a man with a twitching nose, a bovine man with an air of impenetrable stupidity, a man with a long neck and an abnormally active Adam's apple, a rather wild-looking person with red hair and a swivel eye, a man with retired government servant stamped all over him, a man with a ginger moustache, a man with a beard, and a man with a bald head. There they were all day today, and there they would be all day tomorrow, making up their minds whether Carey was to live or die.

And there wasn't anything he could do.

“Call Ernest Hood!”

As Mr. Hood stepped up into the box and took the oath, Carey was thinking that you could get used to anything. Today was not so dreadful as yesterday. She knew what the court was going to look like before she came into it. The judge was a familiar figure, Sir Wilbury no longer an ogre of her imagination, but a big, good-looking man with a fine voice. She looked for the first time at the jury, and found them reassuringly commonplace—the kind of people you saw in a cinema or in church, just everyday men and women. The nightmare sense of distortion lessened. The scene became just a court of law, a place where people were trying to bring the truth to light. She turned her head a little, and met Jeff Stewart’s look. Across the crowded court it said, “Carey, I’m here. Carey, I love you.” Her colour rose, her eyes dazzled. She had to look away.

Under the guidance of Sir Wilbury, Ernest Hood was explaining himself. He was Mr. Aylwin’s head clerk. The firm was Aylwin and Clutterbuck, but Mr. Clutterbuck had retired. All Mrs. Maquisten’s affairs went through their hands. At about 3 o’clock on the afternoon of Monday November 16th he was called to the telephone. Miss Silence said that Mrs. Maquisten wished him to come round to 13, Maitland Square immediately, and to bring with him the will which she had executed about a week previously.

“Was this the will which has been proved and admitted in evidence?”

“Yes.”

“Is Miss Silence a beneficiary under this will?”

“She is.”

“To what extent?”

“Fifty thousand pounds, and jewellery which has been valued for probate at ten thousand.”

“Did you go round to Maitland Square?”

“Yes, I got there about half past three.”

“Did you take the will with you?”

“No—it was locked in the safe. Mr. Aylwin was in Scotland, and he had the key.”

“Will you describe your interview with Mrs. Maquisten?”

Mr. Hood passed a hand over his dark receding hair. Since it was already as smooth as Brylcream and brushing could make it, the movement may be taken to have been a nervous one. His light hazel eyes were fixed on Sir Wilbury’s face. His

manner was one of zealous attention. When he spoke his voice was weak and throaty. He coughed once or twice as if to clear it and murmured an excuse. But when he really got going he was quite audible. Like everyone else who saw Honoria Maquisten that afternoon, he described her as being very angry, very excited.

“She began the interview by asking if I had brought the will, and when I said ‘No,’ she was in a great state of anger about Mr. Aylwin being away and having taken the key of the safe. I had told Miss Silence on the telephone that I should not be able to bring the will, and I heard her pass the information on, but Mrs. Maquisten behaved as if she had expected me to bring the will—she was really quite abusive.”

“Did she give any explanation of why she wished to make a new will?”

“Yes—she said over and over again and with great emphasis that she had been deceived, and that no one need imagine that she could be deceived with impunity. She said, ‘If you had brought the will as I desired you, I would have had you burn it so that I might be sure it would be out of harm’s way.’ I said that Mr. Aylwin would be back in a day or two, and she said, ‘Anything may happen in a day or two’, and that she would dictate a new will now and sign it to-morrow—she would dictate the provisions now, and I was to have the will ready to sign at a quarter to two next day. She said, ‘I’ll have them all there. They shall all hear what I’ve got to say, and they shall all know my reasons for what I’m going to do. I’ll have everything out in front of them.’ Then she told me to take her instructions for the new will. She had a copy of the old one in her hands. She dictated a good part of the will from that. Bequests to charities and legacies to the staff were unchanged.”

“Can you indicate the nature of the changes she did propose to make?”

“Yes. In the previous will the bulk of the estate was divided more or less equally between five legatees. The jewellery was also divided between these legatees, though not in equal proportions.”

“Who were these five legatees?”

“They were Mr. Robert Maquisten, Mr. Dennis Harland, Mrs. Nora Hull, Miss Honor King, and Miss Carey Silence.”

“How were these people related to Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Mr. Robert Maquisten and Miss King are the nephew and niece of Mrs. Maquisten’s husband, the late Mr. James Maquisten. Mr. Harland and Miss Hull are her own nephew and niece. Miss Silence is the granddaughter of a first cousin.”

“But in the will admitted to probate her share is an equal one?”

“Her money share is an equal one. As far as the jewellery went, she was to receive by far the most valuable portion.”

“That is under this old will—the will admitted to probate. What disposition of her property did Mrs. Maquisten propose in the instructions you took down on the afternoon of November 16th?”

Mr. Hood swallowed, cleared his throat, and said,

“She instructed me that the division of her property and of the jewellery would fall into four portions, not five as in the previous will.”

“What did you understand by that?”

Mr. Hood gazed at him earnestly and replied,

“I understood that she was cutting somebody out of her will.”

Sir Wilbury picked up his gown with a swish.

“And pray, what form did her instructions take?”

Mr. Hood looked very unhappy.

“She dictated provisions for bequests dividing her property into four, with blanks left for the insertion of the names of the legatees. I don’t know if I make myself clear.”

“You mean that the amounts of the legacies were to be filled in, but the names of the legatees were to be left blank?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And when were these blanks to be filled in?”

“Next day, at a quarter to two. She said she would fill them in in the presence of the legatees, and then affix her signature to the will. She told me to arrange for two witnesses, whom she named, to be in attendance.”

Sir Wilbury raised his voice a little.

“Mrs. Maquisten named two persons who were to witness her signature. Did she name the person she was cutting out of her will?”

“No one was named.” There was a quite perceptible stress upon the verb.

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Hood?”

“I mean that I knew who it was”—a shade of defiance in the tone, a jerky emphasis.

“Will you tell us how you could know that.”

“Mrs. Maquisten made it quite clear.”

“Will you tell us what she said.”

Mr. Hood gulped and cleared his throat.

“She said she had been deceived, and that she ought to have known, because Ellen had warned her.”

“That is Ellen Bridling, her maid?”

“Yes. She said, ‘Ellen warned me, but I didn’t take any notice.’ I said, ‘Well, it’s

not too late, Mrs. Maquisten,' and she said, 'Old friends are best. Ellen's faithful—she warned me. Up with the rocket and down with the stick was what she said, but I wouldn't listen.' Then she said that I was one of the steady-going ones, and it wouldn't ever happen to me. And she asked me, 'How would you like to be a rocket? A stranger for a week, an heiress for a week, and then down with the stick and a stranger again.' Well, I couldn't help knowing who she meant."

"Were those words applicable to one of the five legatees in the will which has been admitted to probate?"

"Yes."

"To which of them?"

"To Miss Silence."

"In what respect?"

"She was a stranger when she came to the house. After she had been there a week Mrs. Maquisten made a will under which she benefited very considerably, and in another week Mrs. Maquisten was altering her will again and cutting somebody out."

"Will you repeat the exact words used by Mrs. Maquisten?"

Mr. Hood repeated them.

"She said, 'A stranger for a week, an heiress for a week, and then down with the stick and a stranger again.'"

Sir Wilbury's voice was low and impressive.

"Was there any doubt in your mind as to the identity of the person referred to in these words?"

Ernest Hood achieved a certain firmness of tone as he replied.

"None whatever."

Hugo Vane rose to cross-examine. It was said of him that he never looked so affable as when he had a difficult job in hand. He looked very affable now. Mr. Hood, using a discreet navy-and-white handkerchief which toned perfectly with a neat serge suit, was the recipient of a sunny smile.

“Now, Mr. Hood, let us see if we can’t get all this a little clearer. This interview of yours with Mrs. Maquisten—how long did it last?”

“About half an hour.”

“It didn’t take you all that time to write down the instructions for the new will, I take it. There was some conversation as well?”

“Oh, yes.”

“A good deal of conversation?”

“Well, yes.”

“A good deal of rather excited conversation?”

“On Mrs. Maquisten’s side.”

“Yes—you said she was excited. And angry?”

“Very angry—very much upset.”

“Well now, you have testified to some remarks about a rocket and a stick, following on a statement by Mrs. Maquisten to the effect that she had been deceived. At what period of the interview were these remarks made—at the beginning, in the middle, or towards the end?”

“Quite early on.”

“I see. And at what period of the interview was Mrs. Maquisten at her angriest and most excitable? Would that be when you first went in?”

“I suppose so.”

An expression of surprise passed over Hugo Vane’s ingenuous face.

“You suppose so, Mr. Hood? Is your memory as bad as all that? You surely do not wish us to infer that your recollection of this important interview is such a hazy one! I see that I shall have to refresh your memory. In your examination-in-chief you stated that you found Mrs. Maquisten very angry, very excitable—that she was in great anger about Mr. Aylwin being away, and that she was really quite abusive. You must surely be able to remember whether her anger and excitement increased or diminished from this point!”

“It increased while she was talking about being deceived. Afterwards, when I was taking her instructions, she was more under control.”

“Then it was immediately after the ‘great state of anger’, when she was ‘really

quite abusive', that with a further increase of excitement and anger she spoke of being deceived and made the remarks which you have quoted about the rocket and the stick?"

"Yes."

"Before she began to give you any instructions about her will?"

"Yes."

"She said she had been deceived—that Ellen Bridling had warned her, but she hadn't taken any notice?"

"Yes."

"She quoted a proverb about going up with a rocket and coming down with a stick?"

"Yes."

"She asked you how you would like to be a rocket?"

A murmur of laughter went through the court. Mr. Hood's handkerchief came out. He swallowed and said,

"Yes."

"All these things were said whilst Mrs. Maquisten was still more excited, still more angry than she had been when you described her as being 'in a great state of anger' and 'really quite abusive'?"

Mr. Hood passed the handkerchief over his forehead. He said,

"She was angry."

"Come, Mr. Hood—you are not answering my question. Is this another case of faulty recollection? This is a very important interview, you know. I am afraid I must go on until we get the matter quite clear. Let me help that memory of yours. You have just stated on oath that the great state of anger and excitement in which you found Mrs. Maquisten when you described her as 'really quite abusive' had increased whilst she was talking about being deceived. You don't wish to go back on that, do you?"

"No—of course not."

"Then you agree that those remarks about being deceived, about Ellen Bridling's warning, about the rocket and the stick, the question to yourself as to how you would like to be a rocket, were all made, and the question put, during the time when Mrs. Maquisten was in a state of uncontrolled excitement and anger?"

"I didn't say that."

"Dear me, Mr. Hood—that memory of yours! I am afraid I must quote your own words to you again. After telling us that Mrs. Maquisten's excitement increased whilst she was talking about being deceived, you said, 'Afterwards, when I was

taking her instructions, she was more under control.' If words have any meaning at all, those words imply a previous lack of control. I suppose you will agree to that? Yes or no, please."

Looking very unhappy, Mr. Hood said, "Yes."

"Well then, perhaps you will now answer my previous question. Do you agree that those remarks about being deceived, about Ellen Bridling's warning, about the rocket and the stick, the question to yourself as to how you would like to be a rocket, were all made, and the question put, during the time when Mrs. Maquisten was in a state of uncontrolled excitement and anger?"

Mr. Hood, looking still more unhappy, swallowed and said,

"Yes."

Hugo Vane gave him a buoyant smile.

"There! Now we've got that cleared up—Mrs. Maquisten was in a state of uncontrollable excitement when she made those remarks. One would almost have guessed as much, because they are really very disjointed, are they not? That asking you how you would like to be a rocket, for instance. It is all much easier to understand now that you have told us of the state Mrs. Maquisten was in—isn't it, Mr. Hood?"

"Yes."

"In a state of excitement such as you have described, remarks are apt to be disconnected?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Maquisten's remarks on this occasion were disconnected?"

"Some of them."

"I put it to you, Mr. Hood, that these remarks about being deceived, about having been warned, about rockets and strangers, did not come out all in one piece."

"No."

"They came out in bits and pieces, spoken under great excitement? Yes or no, Mr. Hood."

Mr. Hood swallowed again and said, "Yes."

"Now, Mr. Hood, I want you to understand that I am not impugning your good faith in any way—I wouldn't do that for the world—but when Mrs. Maquisten in her state of excitement made this disjointed remark about someone having been a stranger for a week, you assumed that she was referring to Miss Silence, did you not?"

"Yes, I did."

"But then you have rather a literal mind, haven't you? The language of metaphor

does not really appeal to you, does it? I suppose you know what a metaphor is?"

"Yes, of course."

"Will you tell us what you understand by that term?"

Mr. Hood's brow became furrowed. A light perspiration broke upon it.

"Everyone knows what it means. I don't know that I can put it into words."

"Perhaps I can help you. The dictionary defines it as 'the application of a name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable.' Thus, in her use of the word stranger, is it not perfectly possible that Mrs. Maquisten may have intended not the literal meaning of a person previously unknown to her, but the very common metaphorical meaning of a person from whom she was estranged? That is quite possible, is it not?"

"Yes—it's possible." Mr. Hood's voice dwelt gloomily on the last word.

"In this sense, the words 'a stranger for a week' could easily signify an estrangement during that period from any of the legatees?"

"I suppose so."

"Mrs. Maquisten was already employing the language of metaphor when she spoke of going up with the rocket and coming down with the stick, was she not?"

"Oh, yes." Mr. Hood's tone was one of relief.

"And when she asked you how you would like to be a rocket—you did not understand her to be speaking literally then?"

"Of course not."

Hugo Vane repeated the words with cheerful zest.

"Of course not! She was using the language of metaphor. Let us take another of these disjointed sentences—'An heiress for a week, and then a stranger again'. Are you quite sure that the word was heiress, not heir?"

"Yes, I am quite sure."

"The will executed a week before November 16th contained the names of three female beneficiaries, each of whom might properly be described as an heiress, might she not?"

"I suppose so."

"Each one of the three could, then, have been alluded to by Mrs. Maquisten as 'an heiress for a week'?"

"I don't know."

"Come, come, Mr. Hood—you are not doing yourself justice. I will try to put my question more simply. If the will executed a week before constituted each of these ladies an heiress, then any one of the three might have been described by Mrs. Maquisten as an heiress for a week. That is so, is it not?"

“Yes.”

“And to conclude our clearing up. The final remark, ‘and then a stranger again’, could certainly apply to a more permanent estrangement than the one already alluded to as having lasted for a week?”

“I didn’t think of it that way.”

“Oh, no—you had already made up your mind that Miss Silence was referred to, had you not?”

“Yes, I had.”

“You had made up your mind that it was Miss Silence who was to be cut out of the will. So that until this moment it hadn’t occurred to you that Mrs. Maquisten’s words might have quite a different meaning, had it?”

“No.”

“It is curious how a preconceived idea will prevent one from seeing anything else. Perhaps it would be helpful to discover how you came by this idea. Did it, for instance, occur to you when Miss Silence was ringing you up?”

“It may have passed through my mind.”

“Ah—it may have passed through your mind. Not quite an accurate description, I fear, because, unfortunately, it appears to have remained there. Did it not occur to you at the time, and has it not occurred to you since, that Mrs. Maquisten would not have employed Miss Silence to ring up her solicitor and empowered her to transmit a number of highly confidential messages if they had not been on good terms?”

“No.”

“Well, Mr. Hood, I think I needn’t keep you much longer. I have just one more question, and there is nothing at all difficult about it.” He bent an encouraging smile upon the witness-box. “During the whole of the interview that you had with her on the afternoon of Monday, November 16th, did Mrs. Maquisten at any time mention the name of Miss Carey Silence?”

Mr. Hood cleared his throat for the last time and said,

“No.”

The court adjourned for lunch. When it reassembled Nora Hull was called. Carey watched her come up into the witness-box, and thought how pretty she looked, and more like a kitten than ever in a grey fur coat and a little fur cap on her red-brown hair, her eyes very round and bright. She took the oath, and as she lifted her head she looked across the court, met Carey's eyes, and smiled at her. It was a very warm, spontaneous, and heartening thing.

Mr. Lanthony, junior for the Crown, took her through the scene on the afternoon of November the 9th, a week before Honoria Maquisten's death, when she announced to the assembled family that she had added the name of Carey Silence to the beneficiaries under her will. Nora came through it trippingly, giving her answers in a pretty, clear voice with every word plainly audible.

"Will you tell us who was present, Mrs. Hull?"

"Mr. Aylwin, my cousins Robert Maquisten, Dennis Harland, Honor King, Carey Silence, myself. And Magda Brayle."

"Mrs. Maquisten presented Miss Silence to you and your cousins as a co-beneficiary?"

"Yes."

"Was that all she said on this occasion?"

"Oh, no—she asked each of us separately whether we had any objection, or doubt about her being of a sound mind, because if we had, she would rather we said it straight out in front of Mr. Aylwin."

"And had anyone anything to say?"

Nora's smile flashed out.

"We certainly had not."

"Did the announcement surprise you?"

"Oh dear, no. We all knew that my aunt was very fond of Carey."

"On such a short acquaintance? It was only a week, wasn't it?"

Nora lifted her very pretty chin and said with emphasis,

"She was very fond of her."

"Now, Mrs. Hull, to come down to the events of November 16th. What time did you get home that afternoon?"

"I got in at half past four."

"Will you tell us what happened?"

"Molly told me that my aunt wanted to see me as soon as I came in. I said I'd rushed in for a cup of tea and would have to go out again—and she said she had just

taken tea up and there was a second cup on the tray, so I went up to my aunt's room."

"How did you find her?"

"Very angry."

"With whom?"

The smile came out again.

"Oh, with all of us—for not being there when we were wanted. She wanted someone to rage at, and there wasn't anybody there."

"Did she speak of no other cause for her anger?"

"Oh, yes. She said someone had been deceiving her, but I really didn't take a lot of notice."

"Did she tell you she was going to alter her will?"

"Oh, yes. But she was always doing that—we really didn't take any notice of it."

"When you say *we*, do you mean yourself and the cousins who were accustomed to Mrs. Maquisten's ways?"

"I mean all of us—Carey as well. We all knew that Aunt Honoria always altered her will if anything put her out."

"You mean that Miss Silence knew of this idiosyncrasy because she had been told about it. She could not know about it by experience—could she?"

The clear, pretty voice was very clear indeed as Nora said,

"She knew about it."

"By hearsay only?"

"It was a regular family joke."

For the first time the voice faltered, because the joke had turned to tragedy and brought them here. Whatever happened, nothing would ever be the same again.

"How long were you with Mrs. Maquisten?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Did you have tea with her?"

"Oh, yes. I got her soothed down a bit, and I had a cup and she had a cup, and then I had to rush."

"Did she say anything more about being deceived?"

"No. I'd got her fairly soothed, and I think she wanted her tea."

She was taken through her movements from 8 o'clock, when she re-entered the house.

"You dined with your cousins?"

"Yes, with Dennis, Honor, and Carey."

"Was Mrs. Maquisten's intention to alter her will discussed among you?"

“Of course it was.”

“Were you asked whether Mrs. Maquisten had told you who had deceived her?”

“Oh, yes. We all said she hadn’t.”

“The question was generally discussed?”

“Oh, yes. She hadn’t told any of us.”

“No one admitted to having been told—that is what you mean, isn’t it?”

“I mean she hadn’t told anyone.”

“Mrs. Hull, if you think, you will see that you can only answer for yourself. So far as the others are concerned, all you can say is that no one admitted to knowing who it was that was to be cut out of Mrs. Maquisten’s will. That is so, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“No one did admit to this knowledge?”

“No.”

“After dinner did you all go to Mrs. Maquisten’s room for coffee?”

“Yes.”

“Will you describe the order in which you went.”

“My cousin Honor King and I went up first because we were going to change. Carey came up after us. Honor and I were talking until she went down. Our rooms are next door to each other. She was ready first. By the time I got down the other three were there.”

A giddy feeling came over Carey. Her mind swung back. The scene opened before her, small and bright like a picture seen in a camera—Cousin Honoria’s room—the coffee-table set—Ellen grumbling and talking about hop pillows—and Carey Silence in a blue dress getting up and going through to the bathroom to get a sleeping-draught. Step by step, as Nora’s voice went on, she saw it all happen again. She was coming back from the bathroom with the glass in her hand, and it was more than half full. She saw herself take it over to Honor at the coffee-table. She saw the milk, the coffee, the two lumps of sugar go in, leaving about a third of an inch of space at the top of the glass. She saw herself go back to Cousin Honoria and fetch the brandy flask from beside the bed. The mingled smell of coffee and cognac came up to her again on the heated air of the room. She saw Honoria Maquisten put the glass to her lips and drink. She heard her say, “And now I’ll have a decent cup of coffee.”

All their faces very bright, clear, and alive. Cousin Honoria alive—enjoying her coffee, enjoying keeping them guessing. The fire burning with a clear, hot flame. The smell of the brandy coming up on the heated air.

It was very hot. There was a dampness breaking out on her palms, on her temples. The air in the court thickened and swirled about her, it filled with little bright sparks. Nora's voice receded. She thought, "If I faint, it will be as bad as a confession. If I faint now, they're bound to think I did it. I mustn't—I mustn't, mustn't, *mustn't*." She drove her nails hard into her sweating palms. She fought the faintness back with all the strength she had. Gradually the air cleared, the mist was gone, the voices had come back out of the distance again.

Hugo Vane was cross-examining Nora.

"Will you take your mind back to the afternoon of November 9th—the occasion when Mrs. Maquisten announced her intention to benefit Miss Silence. You said the announcement did not surprise you."

"No, it didn't."

"Because of Mrs. Maquisten's affection for Miss Silence?"

Nora repeated what she had said before.

"She was very fond of her."

"And as far as your observation went, this affection was mutual?"

"I am sure it was."

"Will you tell us how Miss Silence took the announcement that she was to benefit under Mrs. Maquisten's will. Did she appear pleased—excited?"

"No, she didn't. She got very red, and she looked dreadfully embarrassed and unhappy."

"Did she say anything?"

"She said, '*Please, Cousin Honoria—*'"

"In fact, you would agree that she behaved in a modest and sensitive manner?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hull."

With a final smile for Carey, Nora stepped down.

Her place was taken by Honor King, looking like a scared albino rabbit in her unbecoming black, with a skirt dipping behind, a fur sliding off her shoulders, and her hair in wisps under a dowdy black felt hat. She took the oath in a voice which may have been audible to the clerk, but which certainly carried no farther. No one had supposed that she would make a good witness, but as her examination proceeded and she had to be asked repeatedly to speak up, Mr. Lanthony's florid complexion was seen to deepen.

"Will you tell us, Miss King, at what time you came home on the afternoon of Monday, November 16th."

Miss King's pale lips were seen to open, but no sound emerged.

“A little louder, if you please. I am afraid the jury cannot hear you. What time did you come home? At 5.15—is that right? Did you go up and see Mrs. Maquisten when you came in?”

Honor was presumed to have said “Yes.”

“And how long were you with her? . . . Kindly raise your voice a little. Did you say ten minutes?”

The judge leaned forward.

“Really, Mr. Lanthony, this witness is very inaudible. The jury must be able to hear her own words, not merely your repetition of them.”

It was at this point that Mr. Lanthony’s colour began to deepen. He said, “Yes, m’lud,” in a respectful voice and turned a compelling eye upon the witness-box.

“Now, Miss King, there is really no need for you to be nervous. Please do your best to be audible, and tell us how you found your aunt.”

The words angry and excited had been heard so often in this connection that they were discernible in the witness’s murmured reply.

“A little louder, Miss King. Will you tell us what Mrs. Maquisten said.”

Honor’s voice came out suddenly, high and shrill.

“She said that she had been deceived.”

“Did she say who had deceived her?”

“No.”

“Was she angry with you personally?”

“No—she was just angry.”

“Yes—keep the voice up, Miss King. How long did you stay with her?”

Honor clutched at her slipping fur.

“I don’t know—a few minutes—I came away as soon as I could.”

“Why was that?”

“I thought she ought to rest.”

“What did you do after that?”

“I went up to my own room.”

“How long were you there?”

“Until eight o’clock.”

“Were you alone?”

“Ellen Bridling came up at half past seven to try on a dress she was altering for me. It was one my aunt had given me. I wanted to put it on.” The fur slipped again, was clutched again.

“Did you put the dress on?”

“Not then—it wasn’t ready. I came up after dinner with my cousin and put it on

then.”

“With Mrs. Hull? Did you go down with her?”

“No—she wasn’t ready. I went down first.”

“And did you meet anyone?”

“Ellen Bridling was on the landing. She walked with me to the door of my aunt’s room.”

A witness may have been coached, but evidence too obviously rehearsed is not to a jury’s taste. Mr. Lanthony began to wish that his witness had remained inaudible. With her voice at a strained, unnatural pitch, she sounded for all the world like a child reciting a lesson, and a halfwitted child at that. Privately, he was of the opinion that Miss Honor King should have been drowned at birth.

“When you entered Mrs. Maquisten’s room, whom did you find there?”

“My aunt and Carey Silence.”

“They were alone together?”

“Yes.”

“Come back to the moment when you left your room. Do the stairs go straight down to the landing where you saw Ellen Bridling?”

“No, there is a turn.”

“Did you see Ellen Bridling before you reached the turn?”

“Yes, I looked over the banisters and saw her.”

“She was on the landing whilst you were coming down the stairs?”

“Yes.”

“So that Miss Silence was alone with Mrs. Maquisten during the time that it took Ellen Bridling to walk along the corridor, wait on the landing whilst you came downstairs, and walk back with you to the door of Mrs. Maquisten’s room?”

The judge leaned forward again.

“Have we had any evidence that Ellen Bridling had been in Mrs. Maquisten’s room?”

“M’lud, the matter is not in dispute. Ellen Bridling will be called.”

“Is that agreeable to the defence, Mr. Vane?”

“Yes, m’lud.”

The judge leaned back again, his eyes very bright and black.

Mr. Lanthony continued.

“Will you describe what happened in Mrs. Maquisten’s room.”

Carey was forewarned. She took hold of herself and wouldn’t look back. It wasn’t so hard this time. Honor’s voice, mechanical and without inflection, deprived her words of their power to call up the past. The words were just words.

When she had testified that the glass containing the sleeping-draught was more than half full at the time that Carey brought it in, that she had herself under the eyes of her three cousins added two lumps of sugar, some coffee, and a little milk, and had afterwards seen Mrs. Maquisten put in a dash of brandy and drain the glass, Mr. Lanthony had finished with her.

He sat down thankfully, and Hugo Vane got up.

“Just a moment, Miss King—I won’t keep you. When you went into Mrs. Maquisten’s room after dinner and found Miss Silence there, just what were their relative positions? Where, for instance, was Mrs. Maquisten?”

Honor caught at her fur.

“She was in her chair.”

This was a lesson she hadn’t learned. Her voice wavered.

“And where was this chair of hers?”

“By the fire.”

“Was she facing the door as you came in?”

“Yes.”

“And where was Miss Silence?”

“Standing beside her.”

“Close beside her?”

“Yes.”

“Was she touching her?”

“Yes.”

“Will you describe what Mrs. Maquisten was doing?”

Honor’s voice sank to a murmur. Only the word “hand” emerged.

“Please try to keep your voice up, Miss King. I am afraid I must ask you to repeat that. What was Mrs. Maquisten doing?”

“She was holding Carey’s hand.”

There was a sound in the court, as if everyone there had moved a little. No one of these movements would have been audible by itself, but all together they made up a vague composite sound. Jeff Stewart took hold of the edge of the bench on which he was sitting and gripped it so hard that the mark was still across his palm half an hour later. Mr. Mordaunt looked at him and nodded, and the iron band about his heart gave way, to let him draw his breath.

From the dock Carey looked across to Honor King. There was colour in her cheeks—quick, bright colour. Her pulses drummed, because neither she, nor Mr. Mordaunt, nor anyone else had been sure what Honor would say—they hadn’t been sure. But the words had been spoken now, and nobody could take them back

—“She was holding Carey’s hand.” She looked across at Honor and thanked her with her eyes. But Honor’s eyes were down, her face pale and reluctant, her figure sagging, the fur sliding from her shoulders.

Hugo Vane went on cheerfully.

“Was Mrs. Maquisten speaking?”

“Yes.”

“Could you hear what she said?”

“No.”

“Was she looking at Miss Silence?”

“Yes.”

“In what way—with what expression?”

The fur slipped again. Honor clutched at it.

“Come, Miss King—I want an answer. Mrs. Maquisten was looking at Miss Silence, and I want to know how she was looking at her. Perhaps I can help you. Was the look an affectionate one?”

The pale lips moved. A faint sound came from them.

Hugo Vane beamed.

“Just a little louder, Miss King. I should like the jury to hear that ‘Yes’. Mrs. Maquisten was looking affectionately at Miss Silence when you came in, and holding her hand?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Miss King.”

Dennis Harland limped up into the witness-box. He leaned on a stick, but no longer used a crutch. Carey, watching him, thought he looked stronger. She wondered if he would look at her, but he kept his eyes away.

He was taken by Mr. Lanthony through his interview with Honoria Maquisten on the afternoon of November 16th. He had returned to the house at six and spent half an hour with his aunt. She was angry when he came in, but not with him. She did not say with whom she was angry. She told him she had had a letter which upset her very much. She did not tell him who the letter was from.

“What did she tell you about the contents of this letter, Mr. Harland?”

“She said, ‘I’ve had a letter that has upset me very much. You’ll know more about it to-morrow. But if anyone thinks they can deceive me, and blind me, and act a part and get away with it, they are very much mistaken, and so I mean to show them.’”

“Did you understand Mrs. Maquisten to use the words ‘they’ and ‘them’ in a plural sense?”

“No. She began the sentence with ‘anyone’. I think she said ‘they’ and ‘them’ to avoid saying ‘he’ or ‘she’. At least that’s how I took it. She just wasn’t giving anything away.”

“What else did she say, Mr. Harland?”

“Well, it was all on those lines. She said she was going to alter her will—she always did if she was annoyed with any of us—and that Hood had gone away with the draft. She said she would sign it next day. She was very worked up, and I was afraid she would make herself ill, so I did my best to soothe her. Then Miss Brayle came in and said of course she wouldn’t be taking her evening off as my aunt was so upset, and there was a flare-up about that.”

“Mrs. Maquisten wished the nurse to go?”

“She insisted. In fact she went so far as to say that if she didn’t do as she was told she could clear out altogether.”

“Was anything said about the sleeping-draught?”

“Yes—Miss Brayle said my aunt should have one. She gave this as a reason for staying in. My aunt was by this time so angry that I suggested that the sleeping-draught should be left ready, and that Ellen Bridling should bring it in and give it to her when she put her to bed.”

“Was this agreed upon?”

“Yes. It had been done before.”

“What happened after that?”

“I went down to the study.”

“Was anyone there?”

“Miss Silence was there.”

His voice was as cold as a March wind. She wasn't “Carey Silence” or “my cousin”. She supposed she might be thankful that he hadn't called her “the accused”. He hadn't looked at her once.

Mr. Lanthony was asking,

“Did you repeat to Miss Silence what had just taken place in Mrs. Maquisten's room?”

“Yes.”

“All of it?”

“Yes.”

“Did you tell her that Mrs. Maquisten was to have a sleeping-draught?”

“Yes.”

“Did you describe the method by which that sleeping-draught was prepared?”

There was a pause.

Dennis Harland said, “Yes.”

“Will you describe the method now.”

“My aunt couldn't swallow a tablet. When she took one she had it dissolved and mixed with coffee.”

“Did you describe this method to Miss Silence?”

“Yes.”

“Did you tell her that the draught with this dissolved tablet was to be left for Ellen Bridling to administer?”

“Yes.”

“Did you inform Miss Silence that Mrs. Maquisten had not told you who was to be cut out of her will?”

“Yes. She said she hadn't told her either.”

“How long were you and Miss Silence together?”

“Until half past seven, when we went up to dress for dinner.”

“What time was dinner?”

“It was late because we waited for my cousin Nora Hull. We sat down as soon as she came in, a little after eight.”

“We' being yourself, Miss Silence, Miss King, and Mrs. Hull?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Lanthony took him through the conversation at the dinner table.

“So when you rose from the table Miss Silence had been given to understand that Mrs. Maquisten had not named the person with whom she was angry?”

“Yes.”

He was asked about the order in which they went upstairs, and repeated what Nora had said.

“Who were in Mrs. Maquisten’s room when you got there?”

“Miss Silence and Honor King.”

“Will you describe what happened after that.”

“My cousin Nora Hull joined us. Molly brought in the coffee and went away. I asked my aunt if she was going to scold us, and she said, ‘No—not to-night’. Nora Hull asked her if she would have coffee. She said, ‘I’m to take some wretched sleeping-draught, I believe, but there’s no reason why I shouldn’t have a decent cup of coffee as well.’ Honor King asked if it wouldn’t keep her awake, and she said that was her affair. She said she would take the sleeping-draught first—Magda had left it all ready. She told us to ring for Ellen. But when Ellen Bridling came she was in one of her cranky moods—she’s a privileged old servant—and she tried to persuade my aunt not to take the draught. She wanted her to have a hop pillow instead. In the end she refused point-blank to get the stuff, and suggested that Nora or Miss Silence should do so.”

“Did she refuse abruptly?”

“Very abruptly. She said, ‘I’m not giving you any sleeping-draughts neither tonight nor any other night. What’s the nurse for, if it isn’t to give sleeping-draughts and suchlike? It isn’t what I was engaged for!’ Then she went out of the room, and my aunt told Miss Silence to get the sleeping-draught from the bathroom shelf.”

Carey sat there with her hands in her lap and tried not to listen, but every time he said “Miss Silence” it was like an open accusation. Nora Hull, Honor King—even Magda Brayle had her Christian name from him, but for Carey for whom his voice had been so warm and friendly, for Carey whom he had kissed, there was only that estranged “Miss Silence”. She tried not to listen, not to be made to go through that scene again. But she couldn’t escape. She couldn’t close her ears to Dennis’s voice, not warm and friendly now, but cold and strange. Once again she saw herself come in with the medicine-glass in her hand. She saw Honor add the milk, the sugar, the coffee. She saw Honoria Maquisten put in the brandy, tip up the glass, and drink.

Dennis’s voice which was the voice of a stranger went on.

“When my aunt had drunk the sleeping-draught she gave the glass to Miss Silence and told her to put it back on the shelf. Then she drank the cup of coffee which had been poured out for her and told us all to keep quiet, because there was

something she wanted to say.”

“Had Miss Silence come back?”

“Yes. My aunt told her to sit where she could see her.”

“Will you tell us what Mrs. Maquisten had to say?”

“She said we were all to be there next day at a quarter to two. She said she had told my cousin Robert Maquisten to come. She said Mr. Hood would be bringing the draft of her new will, and that she would have something to say to us all before she signed it. She said, ‘I have made a great many wills, but this one is final. I shall fill in the names and certain details tomorrow, and sign the draft.’ She added that she didn’t intend to wait for Mr. Aylwin’s return, as he might be delayed, and neither he nor anyone else would turn her from what was her decided purpose. Then she told us all to go, and to send Ellen to her. She said she was tired and wanted to go to bed.”

“Did you see Mrs. Maquisten again?”

Dennis said, “Not whilst she was alive.”

There came back to Carey the echo of his voice as he had turned at the bedroom door that night—“Sleep well, darling.” It hurt her quite unbearably. She knew suddenly that the same memory was hurting him.

Junior counsel for the defence, the tall, thin young man whose face she liked but whose name she couldn’t remember, was on his feet now. Mr. Lanthony had sat down, looking as rubicund as if he breakfasted on beef and beer and had never heard of Lord Woolton.

“Mr. Harland—you were in Mrs. Maquisten’s room for about twenty minutes on the occasion you have just described?”

“Rather less than that.”

“During that time Miss Silence was also there, except when she went to fetch the sleeping-draught and to take away the glass at Mrs. Maquisten’s request?”

“Yes.”

“How long was she absent when she went to get the draught?”

“She went into the bathroom and came straight back again.”

“There was no delay?”

“None at all.”

“Would there have been time for her to have dissolved a tablet, and to have added it to the draught in the medicine-glass?”

There was a pause. Dennis Harland said,

“Not then.”

“There was not the slightest delay?”

“No.”

“Now, Mr. Harland—during the time when you were all together in Mrs. Maquisten’s room, did you hear her address Miss Silence?”

“Yes, she told her to get the sleeping-draught—she told her to take the glass away. She said, ‘You needn’t wash it—that’s Magda’s business.’ And when Miss Silence came back she said, ‘Sit where I can see you, Carey.’”

“Mrs. Maquisten made these three requests?”

The corner of Dennis’s mouth twitched.

“They were a good deal more like orders.”

“Was that her usual manner of making requests?”

“Well—yes.”

“Her voice and manner when she addressed Miss Silence were her usual voice and manner?”

“Yes.”

“And when she said, ‘Sit where I can see you, Carey’—how did she say that? Was that an order too?”

“Oh, yes—she was giving us all our orders then.”

“And what orders did she give the rest of you?”

The lip twitched again.

“She told me to hold my tongue—Nora Hull to sit down—and Honor King to stop fidgeting.”

“Were all these orders given in the same voice—in the same manner?”

“Not quite.”

“Where did the difference occur?”

“In what she said to Miss Silence.”

“Will you tell us what this difference was.”

“She was not quite so peremptory. She never was with Miss Silence.”

“Her manner to Miss Silence was habitually softer?”

“Yes.”

“More affectionate?”

“It was affectionate.”

“And on this particular occasion, while telling Miss Silence to sit where she could see her, Mrs. Maquisten’s voice and manner were still tinged with this softness and affection?”

Dennis said, “She was very fond of her.”

“You haven’t answered my question, Mr. Harland. Was there a tinge of softness and affection when she addressed Miss Silence on this occasion?”

“I think there was.”

The words were hard and strained. They accused Carey Silence. For the first time Dennis Harland looked towards the dock, towards Carey. His eyes accused her. They said what he had said on the other side of the gulf which this had set between them—“Why did you do it?”

Carey looked back at him steadily, gravely. She wouldn't look away. She heard counsel say, “Thank you, Mr. Harland.” She saw Dennis pick up his stick and limp down out of the box.

The second day of the trial was over.

“Not too bad,” said Mr. Mordaunt cheerfully—“not too bad at all. Telfer did very well with Miss King. Lanthony was as sick as mud. The hand-holding episode got home on the jury all right—all the more because it came out so unwillingly. Odd kind of young woman that—very unattractive. No love lost between her and Miss Silence, I should say, so that bit of evidence is all the more convincing. I don’t mind saying that I was uncommon pleased to hear it, because when a witness dislikes someone it’s quite astonishing what he can contrive to forget. In this case *she*. And there’s no doubt that Miss King don’t like Miss Silence.”

Jeff Stewart agreed.

“I don’t think she likes anyone very much. I don’t think she’s ever had very much to like. I don’t think anyone’s ever liked her above a bit. And Mrs. Maquisten snubbed her pretty well to death.”

“Looks like that,” said Mr. Mordaunt with undiminished cheerfulness. “Well, we’re one up on her, and a good thing too, for we’re going to need everything we can get. Dennis Harland’s not so good, you know. He’s taken a bit of the shine off Miss King’s admission.”

That tight band was closing about Jeff’s ribs again. It made his breath come short as he said,

“How?”

“Well, he admits that Mrs. Maquisten was treating Miss Silence affectionately, and then makes it perfectly clear to the jury that in his opinion his aunt was lavishing this affection upon her murderess, and I’m afraid *that* got home too. You know, he thinks Miss Silence did it—he’s got it sticking out all over him. He hates her, and he’s got his knife into her. Pity Telfer asked him whether Miss Silence was long enough in the bathroom to have tampered with the sleeping-draught. That ‘Not then’ was very damaging. They’re out to suggest that it was done before that—when she was alone with Mrs. Maquisten, after Ellen Bridling left the room and before Miss King got down. That’s the dangerous time for Miss Silence, and for rebuttal we shall have merely her own evidence. You see, nothing would have been easier than for her to make an excuse and slip into that bathroom.”

Jeff’s face showed nothing.

“I’d have thought the time would be on the short side. Ellen went out of the room and along the passage to the landing, heard Honor King call out to Nora Hull that she was going down, waited for her, and walked back with her. It wouldn’t take very long, you know, and Carey would have had to make her excuse to go into the

bathroom, dissolve those five or six tablets, get back, and arrive at the point of having her hand held and being gazed at affectionately by the time Honor opened the door.” His drawl became very pronounced as he added, “I’d not find that so easy to believe if I were on the jury.”

Mr. Mordaunt beamed with robust good humour.

“Trust Vane to make the most of that. He’s in good form. Right on top of it with Hood. He’d something to break down there, hadn’t he? Tough bit of evidence to come up against. And it isn’t as if Hood had any possible motive. He’s not mentioned in the will—not even a trifling legacy. Bad bit of evidence, but Vane knocked it about a bit. On the whole, as I said, not a bad day.”

Ellen Bridling came into the witness-box on the morning of the third day and took the oath. She was neat and dowdy in a long black coat with a grey fur collar, and the hat which had been her best when Mr. Chamberlain flew to Munich. It was made of black velvet in a depressed-looking shape, and it had two ostrich-feather tips on the left-hand side. There had originally been a small bunch of violets too, but she had banished them in order to mourn for Honoria Maquisten.

Before taking the oath she removed her fabric gloves and put them away in a shiny black handbag. All her movements were slow, deliberate, and controlled. When she had sworn to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, she folded her gnarled, work-worn hands upon the edge of the box and waited, her head poked forward, her eyes very small and sunk under the hooded lids.

Carey began to feel cold. She knew now that Ellen had always frightened her, and she knew why. It was because this moment lay ahead of them.

Sir Wilbury Fossett rose majestic.

“Your name is Ellen Bridling? You were the late Mrs. Maquisten’s personal maid?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How long had you been with her?”

“Thirty-six years this month.”

“That is a long time. Will you tell us what terms you were on with Mrs. Maquisten.”

There was no need to tell this witness to speak up. The grating voice was not loud, but it was very distinct. There was no nervous hurry, no faltering of the tone. Every word, every syllable, was most deliberately given.

“I’d been with her a long time.”

“Were you in her confidence?”

“There were things she’d tell me, and things she’d keep to herself.”

“Did she tell you of her intention to leave some of her jewellery to Miss Silence?”

“Yes, she did.”

“What jewellery was it?”

“It was the rubies that belonged to Mr. Maquisten’s mother.”

“Did an incident in connection with these rubies take place on the afternoon of November 15th, the day before Mrs. Maquisten’s death?”

“Yes.”

“Will you tell us about it, please.”

Ellen’s hands took hold of the edge on which they were resting.

“My bell rung, and when I went in, there was Miss Silence. Mrs. Maquisten said as how she was going to show her the rubies. She told me to open the safe, and I spoke up. ‘Seeing it’s never been opened with none of the young ones there, it’s Mr. Robert you should trust,’ I said, ‘or Mr. Dennis—not those that haven’t been in the house no more than a fortnight.’ And she looks at me, and I said, ‘All right—I know my place, but there’s some that don’t and never will.’”

“And what happened after that?”

“I opened the safe.”

“You were in the habit of opening it for Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Whenever she said.”

“Did anyone else open the safe for her?”

“Not that I ever heard tell.”

“Mrs. Maquisten gave you her complete trust and confidence in this matter?”

“I’d been with her thirty-five years.”

“Will you proceed, Mrs. Bridling, and tell us what happened after you opened the safe.”

“I took out the cases and give them to Mrs. Maquisten in her bed. There was the two bracelets, and the big ornament for the front of the dress, and the rings, and the big necklace that made into a tiara, and the small necklace with the ruby drops. She had them all out on the coverlet, and Miss Silence put on the bracelets and the small necklace and went and looked at herself in the glass. Mrs. Maquisten said, ‘I’m leaving them to you, Carey,’ and I couldn’t hold myself. I said, ‘Mrs. Maquisten’s they were’—meaning her mother-in-law—‘and it’s to Mr. Robert or to Miss Honor they should go. They come from Maquistens, and you didn’t ought to leave them away.’ And Mrs. Maquisten, she tells me to hold my tongue, and I went round to the safe and started to put the things away.”

“Now, Mrs. Bridling, I’d like you to tell us what happened on the following evening, the evening of November 16th. Where were you at seven o’clock?”

“In my room.”

“Will you describe the position of your room.”

“Opposite Mrs. Maquisten’s.”

“There was a bell beside her bed which rang in your room?”

“Yes.”

“Did you know that the nurse was going out?”

“Yes. She looked in at seven with her hat on and said as how she was off, and to

give Mrs. Maquisten her sleeping-draught and get her to bed by nine o'clock. 'And keep her as quiet as you can,' she says—as if she needed to tell me that after thirty-five years! As soon as she was out of the way I up and went in, and there was my poor dear crying and saying how cruel she'd been deceived."

"Was she in bed?"

"Yes—I got her up later whilst they were at dinner. She was in bed and she'd been crying, and she said to me, 'Well, Ellen, you were right and I suppose I shall never hear the last of it,' she says, and, 'Thank God, I had a friend that told me before it was too late.' She had a letter in her hand, but she didn't tell me who it was from, only thank God she'd got a friend that wasn't afraid to tell her the truth."

"Whom did you understand her to mean?"

"The friend that wrote her the letter. She had it in her hand, but she never told me who wrote it, and I didn't ask her no questions—I wanted to get her quiet. She pushed the letter under her pillow and took hold of my hand and said I'd warned her but she wouldn't listen. 'Those that go up quick can come down quick,' she said, and, 'I'll not be deceived a second time. I'll make a new will, and then we'll see who'll laugh on the wrong side of their mouth.' And she held hold of me tight with both her hands, with the tears running down her face, my poor dear, and she said, 'You warned me, and I did ought to have listened.' And I said, 'Don't you fret, my dear, for she isn't worth it. Put her away out of your will and out of your mind, and we'll all be the same as what we were before.'"

"What did Mrs. Maquisten say to that?"

"She cried and held my hand. And I took and told her she'd make herself ill, and I went through to the bathroom and got her some water to drink, and a sponge and a towel."

"Did you notice the medicine-glass with the sleeping-draught?"

"I couldn't help but notice it. It was right in the middle of the shelf over the taps."

"Did you notice the amount of liquid in it?"

"Yes."

"How full was the glass, Mrs. Bridling?"

"Not quite half full."

"Are you sure of that?"

Ellen sniffed slightly.

"Quite sure."

"How long were you with Mrs. Maquisten?"

"Not very long—I wanted to get her quiet. I washed her face and gave her a drink, and I come away."

“What did you do after that?”

“I stayed in my room sewing with the door open. I didn’t want no one to go in and disturb Mrs. Maquisten. Come half past seven I looked in to see if she was quiet and went on up to Miss Honor with a dress I was shortening for her. I got it done about five minutes past eight, but Miss Honor had gone on down.”

“What did you do after that?”

“I went back to Mrs. Maquisten and got her up for her dinner.”

“Did you see the letter again?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Mrs. Bridling—could Mrs. Maquisten have destroyed that letter herself? No one seems to have seen it again. Could she have got out of bed and put it in the fire?”

“Oh, yes, she could get out of bed.”

“And walk?”

“Oh, yes.”

“You say you got Mrs. Maquisten up for dinner. Had you occasion to go into the bathroom again then?”

“I was to and fro.”

“Did you notice the medicine-glass with the draught?”

“I saw it.”

“Did you notice the level of the liquid in the glass?”

“It was the same. It wasn’t half full—nothing like.”

“You are sure about that?”

“Of course I’m sure!”

“How long were you with Mrs. Maquisten at this time?”

“About three quarters of an hour. I was there until Miss Silence come.”

“Until Miss Silence came up after dinner?”

“Yes.”

“Now, Mrs. Bridling—during this three quarters of an hour, did you have any more talk with Mrs. Maquisten as to why she was upset and who had upset her?”

“No.”

“She did not refer to the matter?”

Ellen’s head moved slowly in accompaniment to her “No.”

“And you did not refer to it?”

“I wanted her to keep quiet, and there was her dinner coming up, and Molly coming and going.”

“Did Mrs. Maquisten speak to Miss Silence when she came in?”

“No.”

“Or look at her?”

There was a fleeting spark in the sunken eyes. Then the lids came down again.

“No—she was speaking to me.”

“Did you hear her speak to Miss Silence before you left the room?”

“No.”

“What did you do after leaving the room?”

“I walked along the passage as far as the landing, and I listened to hear if Miss Nora or Miss Honor was coming. I heard Miss Honor call out that she was going down, and I waited for her, and we went back along the passage to the bedroom door.”

“How long did this take?”

“I didn’t hurry myself. I was in my room for a minute getting a handkerchief, and I went along slow. Then I’d waited on the landing for a bit before I heard Miss Honor call out, and I waited a bit longer for her to come down, and we’d a word or two about her dress which I’d altered. Five minutes I must have been gone, what with one thing and another. Then Miss Honor went into Mrs. Maquisten’s room, and I was in my own room across the passage.”

“Was your door open?”

“Yes.”

“Could you see anyone coming along the passage?”

Again there was that spark. The grating voice said,

“I took notice of who come along. Mr. Dennis come first—I could hear his crutch, and I looked out. I could see him all the way from the corner. Then Miss Nora come—Mrs. Hull, that is. She come flying down the stairs the way she does. I could see her all the way along the passage too. And then Molly come along with the coffee-tray, and I stepped out and opened the door for her to go in. And she come out again and went off down, and a little after that my bell rung.”

“Go on, Mrs. Bridling.”

There was a slight definite pause. Ellen’s poking head turned as if she was listening, but not to any sound in that court. Her eyes were hooded. It was as if she was listening for the voices which had died on the hot air of Honoria Maquisten’s room on that November evening—as if her eyes turned back to the scene enacted there. Her voice took a lower tone—lower, but not less audible. She said,

“I went in, and they was all there, and my dear she asked me for her sleeping-draught. She said, ‘Nurse put it ready. I’ll have it now whilst the coffee’s hot.’ And I took and told her I didn’t hold with sleeping-draughts and she’d do better with a

nice hop pillow—my grandmother made them lovely. But she only laughed at me, and we had words, and I said giving sleeping-draughts and suchlike wasn't what I'd been engaged for, and if she wanted them, there were those whose work it was, and if they was out of the way, there was Miss Nora and Miss Carey. 'Let one of them fetch it for you,' I said."

"What did Mrs. Maquisten say to that?"

"Burst out laughing and told me to be off. And she told Miss Silence to bring her the sleeping-draught."

"Did you see Mrs. Maquisten again?"

"I come back when they'd gone and I put her to bed."

"Did anything more pass between you as to what had been upsetting her?"

Ellen took her hands from the rail and opened her bag. Very deliberately she took out a clean folded handkerchief and unfolded it. She shut the bag and slipped the handle over her wrist again. Then she stood there holding the handkerchief crushed up between her hands. They shook a little, and the white linen shook too. She said,

"She didn't say nothing till she was in bed. Then she took hold of my hand, and she said, 'We've been together a long time,' and I said, 'Yes, my dear.' And she says, 'I'm very unhappy, but I'm not going to do any different because of that. It's the deceit I can't overlook,' she says. And I said, 'Nor you didn't ought to, my dear. But don't you think nothing more about it to-night—there's tomorrow to do your thinking in. You take and go to sleep, and don't you trouble yourself any more about it to-night, my dear,' I said." The tears had begun to trickle out from under those hooded lids. She stood there with them running down. The voice that had been so harsh began to break. "And she said, 'Kiss me good night, Ellen,' and I kissed her and come away."

Hugo Vane rose to cross-examine. He was for once without his customary air of buoyant good humour. He still looked like a schoolboy, but a schoolboy whose spirits were subdued in the presence of grief.

“There are just a few questions I would like to ask you, Mrs. Bridling. Let us begin with the Sunday afternoon—Sunday, November 15th, the day before Mrs. Maquisten’s death, when you opened the safe and showed Miss Silence the rubies.”

Quite slowly Ellen was wiping away the tears that had trickled down. Her hand shook a little and her eyes were red. She kept the handkerchief in her hand and turned her head towards Hugo Vane. He said,

“Mrs. Maquisten told Miss Silence in your presence that she intended to leave her the rubies?”

“Yes.”

“What did Miss Silence say? I don’t think you told us that.”

Ellen primmed her lips.

“She said, ‘Oh, no!’ and Mrs. Maquisten said ‘Oh, yes, my dear’. And I took and spoke my mind and said it was Mr. Robert Maquisten they ought to be left to, or Miss Honor. And Miss Silence, she said, ‘*Please, Cousin Honoria—*’ as if she didn’t know that was just the way to make her all the more set in what she’d planned to do.”

“I see. How long had Miss Silence known Mrs. Maquisten? How long had she been in the house?”

“No more than a fortnight.”

“You had been with Mrs. Maquisten for thirty-five years?”

Ellen put the handkerchief to her eyes again.

“Thirty-six this month, if she’d been spared.”

“You would naturally know a great deal more about her than Miss Silence would?”

“I’d know what she liked.”

“And you would know that it made her more set in her ways if she was opposed or contradicted?”

“Everyone knew that.”

“But Miss Silence had only been a fortnight in the house—she wouldn’t know Mrs. Maquisten’s ways as well as you did?”

“It’s not for me to say what she knew.”

“You didn’t like Miss Silence very much, did you?”

The eyelids rose. Out of the red-rimmed eyes there looked for a moment so sheer a gleam of hatred that it took even Hugo Vane aback. His way of showing this was to resume his smile as Ellen said loudly and distinctly,

“What call had I got to like her?”

“I am afraid it is you who have to answer the question, Mrs. Bridling, and I am afraid I must ask you to be a little more particular. You didn’t like Miss Silence, did you?”

“I hadn’t any call to like her.”

“Well then, perhaps you can tell us a little more about this dislike of yours. When did it begin?”

“So soon as I saw what she was like.”

“Do you mean as soon as she came into the house?”

“It didn’t take me long.”

“Or do you mean as soon as you saw that Mrs. Maquisten was going to be fond of her?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t like Mrs. Maquisten being fond of her, did you?”

The lids rose again. He received a full malignant stare.

“And what call had I got to like it? Look what come of it, and tell me that!”

The judge leaned forward.

“That is a very improper remark. You will confine yourself to answering questions put to you by learned counsel.”

Ellen looked back at him, as who should say, ‘I know my place’. In a respectful voice she said, ‘Yes, my lord’, and turned to face Hugo Vane.

“I should like an answer to my question, Mrs. Bridling. Did you not begin to dislike Miss Silence as soon as you saw that Mrs. Maquisten was going to be fond of her? Yes or no, please.”

“Yes.” The word came out with a certain defiant firmness.

“And the more fond of her Mrs. Maquisten became, the more you disliked her?”

“I didn’t want Mrs. Maquisten to be imposed upon.”

“You mean, don’t you, that you didn’t want Mrs. Maquisten to be fond of Miss Silence? Yes or no.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“I think you mentioned in your evidence that you had warned Mrs. Maquisten against someone. Was it against Miss Silence?”

“Yes, it was, and if she’d taken my warning——”

“That will do, Mrs. Bridling. When did you begin to warn Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Just so soon as I saw what Miss Silence was up to.”

“You mean just as soon as you saw that she was getting to be on affectionate terms with Mrs. Maquisten, don’t you? I think that is what you mean, but I would like to hear you say so. It was when you noticed the affection between them that you began your warnings, wasn’t it? Or was it even earlier than that?”

“It didn’t take me no time to see through her.”

“Mrs. Maquisten became very fond of Miss Silence in a very short time, didn’t she?”

“Yes.”

“And you began your warnings just as soon as you noticed the first beginnings of this fondness. Is that what you mean?”

“You can put it that way.”

“I’m afraid that won’t do for an answer. It is not a case of how I would put it, or how you would put it. What I want is the truth. Did you, or did you not begin to warn Mrs. Maquisten against Miss Silence as soon as you saw that they were getting fond of one another?”

Ellen’s hands tightened on the handkerchief. Her head jerked. She said with a sudden anger in her voice,

“Well then, I did! And she thanked me for it come the last!”

Hugo Vane beamed upon her.

“You lost no opportunity of trying to set Mrs. Maquisten against the young cousin of whom she was becoming so fond?”

“I kept on warning her.”

“You really had it quite on your mind, didn’t you? I daresay you thought about it a lot?”

“I couldn’t help but think about it.”

“Perhaps it even kept you awake at night?”

“Many’s the time.”

“In fact you thought about it constantly?”

“Yes, I did.”

His smile became a sympathetic one.

“It must have been very trying for you to find that Mrs. Maquisten took no notice of your warnings—that in spite of them she had made a will leaving a large sum of money to Miss Silence. I suppose you knew about that?”

“It wasn’t no secret. Everyone in the house knew about it.”

“Very trying for you? And very trying for you to get out the rubies and see Miss Silence put them on? And all the time Mrs. Maquisten getting fonder and fonder of

her cousin and not taking any notice of your warnings? You must have had them constantly on your mind?"

"I did my best, but she wouldn't listen."

"And you went on thinking about how much you disliked Miss Silence, and how much you hoped Mrs. Maquisten would stop being fond of her?"

"I hoped she'd find her out."

"Exactly! So that when you went in to Mrs. Maquisten at seven o'clock on the evening of November 16th and found her crying and saying she had been deceived, you never doubted for a moment that what you hoped for had come to pass, and that it was Miss Silence whom she thought had deceived her?"

"It was Miss Silence she meant."

"Did she say her name?"

"She didn't need to. I knew who she meant."

"Well, you thought you knew—didn't you? But then you had been thinking very constantly about Miss Silence—you had quite got her on your mind. You agreed with me just now about that."

"I knew what I knew."

Hugo Vane assumed his sunniest expression.

"Mrs. Bridling, do you know what is meant by 'wishful thinking'?"

Ellen peered suspiciously.

"It's one of those newspaper words."

A faint ripple of laughter went round the court, hushed instantly under the judge's frown.

Hugo Vane said, "Quite so," in an encouraging voice. And then, "Do you know what it means?"

"I never troubled myself."

"Well, in practice we all indulge in it sometimes, I'm afraid. It means thinking about something and wishing for it until you really believe that it is happening or going to happen. I suggest to you that you were indulging in wishful thinking when you identified Miss Silence with the person by whom Mrs. Maquisten said she had been deceived."

"I didn't think nothing about it. I knew that it was Miss Silence."

With a beaming smile Hugo Vane struck back.

"Exactly! Without stopping to think you assumed that Miss Silence was meant. That is the plain meaning of your words, isn't it? You didn't stop to think, did you? You had your preconceived idea, and that was enough for you. You didn't think, did you?"

“I didn’t have to.”

“Neither then nor at any other time during that interview? You didn’t have to think?”

He turned for a moment and directed a glance of bright good-fellowship towards the jury. At Ellen’s defiant, “No, I didn’t!” he turned back again, shaking his head.

“You didn’t think at all. Because you had already made up your mind?”

“Yes, I had.”

“So that, whatever Mrs. Maquisten said or didn’t say really made no difference, because just as soon as you heard her say that somebody had deceived her you were quite sure it was Miss Silence?”

“I knew it was Miss Silence.”

“Without thinking about it at all?”

“Yes.”

Once more the bright, good-humoured look travelled across the jury box. Once more he turned back with that slight shake of the head.

“Just one more question, Mrs. Bridling. Miss Silence’s name was never mentioned at all—neither by you nor by Mrs. Maquisten?”

“There wasn’t any need.”

“That’s not what I asked you. You will answer my question, if you please. Did Mrs. Maquisten mention Miss Carey Silence at all during that interview?”

“No.”

“Her name wasn’t mentioned at all, either by Mrs. Maquisten or by you?”

“Not by name.”

“Throughout the entire interview the name was never mentioned?”

“No.” The word came slow and reluctant from thin, sour lips.

“Now, Mrs. Bridling, we know that you have been a long time with Mrs. Maquisten—nearly thirty-six years. That is a long time. You were doubtless much attached to her. You had her interests very much at heart?”

“I done what I could.”

“To protect those interests—that is what you mean?”

She looked at him before she said, “Yes.”

“You were on the look-out to protect her from being imposed upon?”

The look became a stare.

“She was very good-hearted. There was always some that was ready to take advantage.”

“And you made it your business to protect her from those people?”

“I did my best.”

“You made it your business to warn her against such people?”

The stare became defiant.

“There wasn’t anything wrong about that!”

“Oh dear no—I’m not suggesting it—not for a moment. You warned her on a good many occasions, didn’t you?”

“When I thought she was going to be imposed upon.”

“And against a good many different people?”

“If I thought they were trying to impose upon her.”

“Quite so. How many people did you warn her against during the last year of her life, do you suppose?”

Ellen looked down at her hands and the clean linen handkerchief.

“I couldn’t say, I’m sure.”

“Let me see if I can help you. You say that people were always trying to impose on Mrs. Maquisten. Would you say that more than three or four people had tried to do this in the course of that last year?”

“I couldn’t say.”

He gave her a good-humoured smile.

“Come, Mrs. Bridling, I don’t think you’re trying. Perhaps I have put the number too low. Would it have been as many as five, or six?”

“It might have been.”

“Would it have been more than that?”

“I didn’t keep count.”

“But it might have been as many as seven, or eight, or nine?”

“I can’t say.”

His smile broadened.

“Well, I won’t press you. But you will agree that there were a good many occasions during that last year of her life when various people made what you considered attempts to impose on Mrs. Maquisten, and when you thought it was your duty to warn her?”

“Yes. I never done anything but what I considered was my duty. I’d been with her a long time.”

“So that when Miss Silence came along she was just one more person who was trying to impose, and against whom you considered it was your duty to warn Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Yes.”

“So when you went in to Mrs. Maquisten on the evening of November 16th and she said you had warned her but she wouldn’t listen, there were at least eight or nine

people she might have meant?"

"She meant Miss Silence."

"Yes—that is what you thought. Miss Silence was very much on your mind just then—you have already admitted that. But actually there were a number of other people against whom you had warned Mrs. Maquisten—you admitted that too, you know—and whilst you jumped to the conclusion that Miss Silence was meant, Mrs. Maquisten might have been referring to someone else. That is so, is it not?"

"It was Miss Silence she meant."

"I don't doubt that you thought so, Mrs. Bridling. But you have already said that no name was ever mentioned between you. I put it to you that since no name was mentioned, you and Mrs. Maquisten may very easily have been at cross purposes—she meaning one person, and you taking her to mean another."

"I knew who she meant."

"You mean that that is your opinion?"

"Yes."

"You have very strong opinions?"

"I know what I know."

"It would never enter your head to suppose that you could be mistaken?"

"No, it wouldn't."

"Not even when a fellow creature's life is at stake?"

"That's not my business."

"No—that's quite right. It is only your business to be sure that you are keeping to the facts. An opinion is not a fact, is it? Is it, Mrs. Bridling?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, I won't press you. But one of the facts in this case is your dislike for Miss Silence—isn't it? You have admitted to this dislike—haven't you?"

Ellen lifted her yellow lids and looked across the court at Carey Silence, her head poked forward, her eyes slitted and rimmed with red. The spark which looked out of them was cold and deadly. The word which Hugo Vane had used seemed suddenly an empty trifle.

Carey looked back because she would not look away, and all at once it came to her that she was safe. Ellen hated her, but she didn't hate Ellen. She knew of no reason why Ellen should hate her. It was something beyond reason. She felt a horrified recoil and pity. She looked gravely back, and heard Hugo Vane repeat his question.

"You have admitted that you disliked Miss Silence?"

Ellen turned back to him.

“I’ve no call to like her.”
The court rose for lunch.

Hugo Vane resumed his cross-examination after lunch. Ellen was questioned minutely as to her comings and goings between the bedroom and the bathroom. Question and answer followed one another like the ball across a tennis net. Carey, watching and listening, sometimes felt as if it was all a game. It didn't seem possible that her life might depend upon just what question was put, what answer was given. Ellen didn't look at her again. She stood there in her decorous old-fashioned black and gave her answers deliberately in a harsh, unmodulated voice.

For all his pressing Hugo Vane now gained little or nothing for the defence. She swore, and continued to swear, that the medicine-glass had been less than half full when she saw it last, and she put her last sight of it at twenty past eight, fixing the time by the fact that Mrs. Maquisten's tray had just come up. Less than half an hour later, when Carey Silence brought that glass through from the bathroom, three people had testified that it was three-quarters full. And during that half hour who was there to have access to the bathroom and time and opportunity to dissolve the additional tablets and add them to the mixture? Ellen declared that she had not left Mrs. Maquisten alone during the whole of that time except to step into the bathroom—when in the end she did leave her it was with Carey Silence. She swore positively that quite five minutes had gone by before Honor King joined them. It was impossible to shake her on any of these points.

With imperturbable good temper Hugo Vane shifted his ground.

"Mrs. Maquisten was not alone from the time you went to her just after eight o'clock until she took the sleeping-draught?"

"No, she wasn't."

"But she was quite alone between half past seven when you looked in to say you were going upstairs to Miss King until your return at five minutes past eight?"

"So far as I know."

"You told my learned friend that Mrs. Maquisten could get out of bed if she wanted to?"

"Yes."

"And walk?"

"Yes."

"She could have walked into the bathroom?"

"If she wanted to."

"Nurse Brayle told us that the bottle of tablets was in a glass-fronted cupboard immediately over the wash-basin. The shelf with the medicine-glass was between this

cupboard and the basin?"

"Yes."

"There was, I suppose, some glass or tumbler either in the cupboard or by the side of the wash-basin?"

"There was two tumblers."

"It would have been possible for Mrs. Maquisten to open the cupboard, reach down the bottle of tablets, dissolve some of them in one of the tumblers, and put tumbler and bottle back in the cupboard?"

"That's not for me to say."

"I am not asking you whether you think she did this. I am asking you whether she was physically capable of doing it."

Ellen continued to look blank.

"She could have walked to the basin and stood there for long enough to have done these things?"

"She could if she wanted to."

"Now, Mrs. Bridling—are you prepared to swear that Mrs. Maquisten was not in the bathroom after twenty past eight when you last noticed the depth of the liquid in the medicine-glass?"

For the first time Ellen hesitated. Her lips moved as if she were about to speak, then closed again.

Hugo Vane smiled in his most encouraging manner.

"Please take as long as you like. Ah—I see you are beginning to remember! Molly James came up with the savoury, didn't she, and saw Mrs. Maquisten returning from the bathroom? You remember that?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Maquisten was alone in the bathroom?"

"Yes. She wasn't gone any time."

"It wouldn't take very long to tip a little liquid out of a tumbler into that medicine-glass, would it? To use your own words, it would hardly take any time, would it? Thank you, Mrs. Bridling."

In re-examination Ellen, guided by Sir Wilbury Fossett, asseverated that she had never heard Mrs. Maquisten say that she wanted to die, or that she was tired of life, or anything to give rise to the slightest suspicion that she was contemplating suicide. There was a ring of conviction in the harsh voice.

"Many's the time she said to me it was a thing that passed her how anyone could do such a thing as take their life. 'I'm much too fond of mine,' she'd say, and I mean to hang on to it just so long as I can'."

With the end of the third day the case for the prosecution closed.

“Well, they’ve shot their bolt,” said Mr. Mordaunt.

Jeff Stewart did not find much comfort in this remark. He said nothing.

Mr. Mordaunt observed that Ellen Bridling was the worst type of witness to have against you—too tough to be nervous, and too stupid and opinionated to be shaken.

“And wherever she gets it from, she makes what she’s saying at any rate sound like the truth.”

Jeff turned aside.

“Do you think it struck the jury that way—do you think they believed her?”

Mr. Mordaunt continued to be cheerful.

“You can’t tell with juries,” he said. “She was vindictive—they don’t like that. She’s got her knife into the girl all right, but when you come to ask why—well, she’s got her answer, hasn’t she? She’d been thirty-five years with Mrs. Maquisten. She was fond of her—I should say she really was fond of her. When she cried it looked to me like the real thing. Of course you can’t tell, but her eyes swelled up and got red, and if she can do that to order she’s cleverer than I think. It looked genuine to me, and I’m afraid the jury thought so too. Well, once you admit that, she’s got a reason for hating Miss Silence, and she made it quite clear what the reason was. She thinks Miss Silence did it, and she stuck at nothing to make the jury think so too. Vane did his best, and I don’t say that he didn’t score a point or two, but I’m afraid that what the jury are going to remember is that someone who knew Mrs. Maquisten very well was quite sure she was speaking about Miss Silence. And unfortunately that doesn’t stand alone—Hood had the same conviction, and stuck to it just as tenaciously.”

“They’re lying!”

“Well, you know, I wouldn’t say that. To start with, what motive could they possibly have in common? If they knew each other by sight and by name it’s about as far as it would go, and if you can think of a common motive, I can’t. Mrs. Bridling had her annuity under either will, and Hood had never been down for anything. Besides, if they were lying, how easy to go a step farther and say that Miss Silence was mentioned by name. That’s what sticks in my throat, you know.”

Jeff bent a sudden frowning regard upon him.

“They might be keeping a line of retreat. Have you thought of that? There’s that letter—we don’t know who wrote it, and it doesn’t look as if we ever should, but

since someone did write it, there must be a chance somewhere that it might come out. Suppose it did—suppose someone were to come forward and say, ‘All right, I wrote that letter, and I don’t feel justified in holding my tongue about it any longer. The person I accused to Mrs. Maquisten was—well, not Carey Silence.’ It wouldn’t be a bad plan to leave yourself a get-away just in case that happened. You couldn’t be proceeded against because you had misunderstood what an angry and excited person had said, could you? Not as long as you kept clear of swearing to a name which didn’t turn out to be the right one.”

Mr. Mordaunt gazed at him with more than a shade of cynicism in his expression.

“You are suggesting a conspiracy between these two people?”

“I’m not suggesting anything. I only know that Carey hadn’t anything to do with Mrs. Maquisten’s death, and that anyone who tries to make it appear that she had is ignorant, malicious, or guilty.” The voice which delivered this was slow and drawling. The eye which observed Mr. Mordaunt’s change of countenance was compelling.

The solicitor hastened to speak.

“You knew Mrs. Maquisten. From your knowledge of her, what would you say about the accounts given by Hood and Ellen Bridling of what she is supposed to have said? Some of the expressions used were a bit unusual. Were they the sort of things Mrs. Maquisten might have said?”

There was quite a pause before he got his answer. Jeff said slowly,

“Yes—I think so.”

“All that about going up with the rocket and coming down with the stick, and ‘Those that go up quick can come down quick’? Was that the sort of thing she would be likely to say?”

There was a most unwilling “Yes”.

“Very unusual expressions for anyone to invent,” said Mr. Mordaunt drily. Then, as if to bridge an awkward gap, “Vane’s line will be suicide. He’s made that clear.”

“I don’t believe that Honoria Maquisten committed suicide. Why should she? She had a family scene all planned. Ask any of the nephews and nieces, and they’ll tell you how much she enjoyed that kind of thing. The person who wasn’t going to enjoy it was the person who was to be cut out of the new will. And it wasn’t Carey Silence.”

Mordaunt stared.

“Can you suggest who it was? Mrs. Hull—Mr. Harland—Mr. Robert Maquisten—Miss Honor King?”

“I don’t know which one of them it was, but it wasn’t Carey.”

“Robert Maquisten was never inside the house all day. Harland was on confidential terms with his aunt as late as half past six, smoothing her down about the nurse going out, so it is obvious that her anger was not against him. Also, if Ellen saw the glass less than half full as late as twenty minutes past eight, and saw him coming along on his crutch from the corner and going into the bedroom when he came up after dinner, he had no possible opportunity of tampering with it. The same applies to Honor King. She was with Mrs. Hull or under Ellen’s eye from the time they left the dinner table until she reached the bedroom. In the same way, Mrs. Hull was first with Miss King, and afterwards heard running down the stairs and seen coming along the passage.”

“By Ellen. There’s rather a lot of Ellen, isn’t there?”

“Well, she couldn’t help seeing who came along that passage, could she?”

Jeff’s jaw set grimly.

“Not if she wanted to. I could bear to know just why she wanted to.”

Carey Silence came into court on the fourth day. It was the beginning of a new week. Monday morning. The strangest Sunday of her life lay between her and the last time she had gone down these stairs from the dock. She came up them now. Sunday was behind her. Always when she looked back upon it she had a picture in her mind of grey water dreaming under a grey mist, endlessly becalmed. Because it was like that. For a timeless space everything had stopped—fear, hope, grief, past, present, and future, all muffled into calm, all hidden by that merciful mist. She slept for hours, and waked as you wake from an anæsthetic, vague and uncaring.

Everyone was very kind. She hardly knew how the time passed, but it did pass. It was Monday.

She came back into the court. As she took her accustomed place and looked across the sea of faces she had a grave little smile for Jeff and Nora. Then she sat back and listened to Hugo Vane making his opening speech for the defence. She thought it was a very good speech. She wondered what she would have thought of it if she had been in the jury box instead of in the dock. And then she wondered what the jury were thinking about. For the first time she gave them her attention. The women first. The sharp-faced spinster was sitting bolt upright with a critical eye and a slightly superior expression. The little person with the bleached fair hair and the odd flyaway hat was gazing at Sir Wilbury Fossett's profile. The stout woman with the heavy face was listening attentively. She looked kind and sensible. Carey thought, "That's what I'm thinking about her, and it doesn't matter at all. What matters terribly, *terribly*, is what she is thinking about me." The curious thing was that though these words were in her mind, she couldn't really feel that it mattered, only she was glad that the woman looked trustworthy and kind.

She came next to the foreman—good-looking, middle-aged, well set-up, with a fresh complexion and stiff fair hair that looked fairer than it really was because it was turning grey. She thought, "He might have daughters of just about my age," and she thought he would keep them in order, and that if he once made up his mind about anything he would never change it. She wondered if he had made up his mind about her. There was a little man like a white rabbit sitting next to him. His ears stuck out, his nose twitched, and he never took his eyes off Hugo Vane. She went on looking at them one by one—the man with the beard—the man with the ginger moustache which was much too big for the rest of him—the man with the shiny bald head—the man who looked as if he'd never thought about anything in his life, heavy and red in the face, with little piggy eyes—the red-haired man who appeared to have given up

having his hair cut for the duration, and who managed to keep one eye on Hugo Vane whilst the other roamed at will. There they were, all attentive, all listening, except possibly the red-faced man and the little faded blonde.

Just for a moment she was glad to be where she was, and not to be one of them, with the awful responsibility of judging whether someone was to live or die. No, not someone—Carey Silence. Even then she didn't feel anything. Only she didn't want to look at the jury any longer.

Hugo Vane finished his speech, and the first witness for the defence was called.
“Eleanor Field!”

For a startled moment Carey was back at school, with Miss Field coming into Hall to read prayers. The illusion persisted while she took the oath. In just such a manner and in just such a voice had those faraway devotional exercises been conducted, and except for the fact that she wore a coat and hat Miss Field looked just the same. Three immaculate grey curls on either side and a long grey roll at the back, thin eagle face, dark piercing eyes, upright slender figure, air of majestic authority—none of these things had changed.

When she had finished taking the oath she turned easily to Mr. Telfer, junior counsel for the defence who had risen to his feet, and awaited his first question. It was put in a suitably respectful voice, and replied to in beautifully clear tones. Carey Silence had been under her charge between the ages of fourteen and eighteen and a half, when she left to take a secretarial course. During that time her character and her influence in the school were uniformly good. Her principles and ideals were high.

“I had no hesitation in giving her an extremely warm testimonial when she was applying for the post of secretary to my old friend Mr. Andrews. She obtained the post and remained in it until Mr. Andrews' death from enemy action last August.”

“Thank you, Miss Field.”

Mr. Telfer sat down, and Mr. Lanthony rose for the Crown.

“When did Miss Silence leave your school?”

“Four years ago.”

Mr. Lanthony said, “Thank you.”

As Eleanor Field left the box, there was no one in the court who was not thinking of all the things that can happen in four years, especially in those four years which separate eighteen from twenty-two. Carey was thinking that herself. School was a world within a world. Its laws, its rules, its loyalties, its customs, and its standards, so all-important during those adolescent years, faded, receded, and were of no account when you passed into the other world outside. As she sat there in the dock she could remember being lifted to the heights of bliss by being chosen to play

in the tennis singles. She could remember the agony of her conviction that she had failed in her matric, and the pure heavenly joy of learning that she had passed with honours. In their day and in their world these things had called forth the extremity of feeling. And now they didn't matter at all. She was in the dock on a murder charge, and presently those twelve people whom she had been looking at before Miss Field was called would say whether they thought she was a murderess or not. You can come a long, long way in four years.

“Call Emmeline Andrews!”

Carey came back from her thoughts to watch Mrs. Andrews come up into the box, roundabout and dumpy, her rosy face a little paler than it used to be, but otherwise just the same. Even her clothes. That was her pre-war black coat, with the brown fur collar taken off and one of black astrakhan put on. Carey even knew where the astrakhan had come from, because every spring while she was with the Andrews, she had helped to put away the winter clothes in camphor, and right down at the bottom of the chest there had been an old-fashioned pillow muff of very good astrakhan. Well, there it was, framing Mrs. Andrews' round anxious face. And she was wearing the unbecoming three-cornered hat which she had insisted on buying last winter in spite of all that Carey could say or do—a smart, sophisticated hat that belonged to quite a different type of person. It was never straight, because it had been made to sit on a lot of piled-up curls, and Mrs. Andrews had nothing but a straight, wide parting and a little iron-grey knob behind. Carey thought, “Someone ought to have put it straight for her,” but of course there wasn't anyone to do it now.

And then Mrs. Andrews was taking the oath and gasping out replies to Mr. Telfer, who was doing his best to encourage her. It was obvious that she was going to need a great deal of encouragement. She kept on taking breath, but no matter how much she took there never seemed to be enough to support the words.

Mr. Telfer was very patient and respectful.

“Miss Silence was employed by your late husband as his secretary?”

“Yes.”

“He was a Member of Parliament?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Just a little louder, Mrs. Andrews, if you will. How long was Miss Silence in Mr. Andrews' employ?”

“Three years.”

“Was she still in his employ at the time of his death last August?”

Mrs. Andrews' round blue eyes became suffused with moisture.

“Oh, yes—she was with him.”

“The train in which they were travelling was machine-gunned by enemy aircraft?”

In a voice that was suddenly loud Mrs. Andrews pronounced an opinion. She said, “Very wicked!” and stared challengingly at Mr. Telfer, who said, “Certainly.”

Having found her voice, Mrs. Andrews continued.

“And he saved her life. He covered her with his own body and saved her life.”

Mr. Telfer looked respectfully sympathetic.

“Very gallant conduct, Mrs. Andrews. You must feel very proud of him. And now just a few questions about Miss Silence. During the three years that she was your late husband’s secretary, did she live with you?”

“Like a daughter,” said Mrs. Andrews, her voice still loud.

“Will you tell us how you found her during those three years of close relationship.”

Mrs. Andrews took her breath and expelled the words.

“A very sweet girl.”

“Had you any fault to find with her conduct?”

“Oh, no—we shouldn’t have kept her if we had. My husband was very strict indeed. I don’t mean that he was unkind—you mustn’t think that. He was the kindest of men, but he expected a very high standard of moral conduct. He was a true Christian himself, and he expected Christian principles in the home.”

“And you were both satisfied with Miss Silence?”

Mrs. Andrews took another breath.

“Sometimes a little heedless,” she said—“but of course young. She did not always remember to see that Mr. Andrews put on his scarf after an evening meeting. I know he could be very obstinate about it, but he should have been made to put it on.”

Mr. Telfer turned his pleasant smile upon the jury and found about half of them smiling too. He turned back to Mrs. Andrews.

“And was that the only complaint you had to make?”

The three-cornered hat slipped a little farther to the left as Mrs. Andrews shook her head.

“She didn’t always make him take his ovaltine when he came in. And whether he preferred tea had nothing to do with it, because it isn’t the same nourishment, and it’s no good anyone saying it is.”

Two more jurymen smiled.

“But apart from these, shall we say, venial omissions, you had no fault to find?”

“A little worldly in her dress.”

Mr. Telfer was unable to suppress a look of astonishment.

“Worldly?”

Mrs. Andrews nodded, bringing the hat forward with a jerk.

“Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain. And though a girl can’t help it if the Lord has made her good-looking, there is no need to go any farther. Hair-curlers! Face-cream! Even lipstick—until my husband put his foot down!”

Mr. Telfer began to feel as if Mrs. Andrews should have been called by the prosecution. He contrived an appealing smile.

“These things are just a fashion, are they not? You said Miss Silence was a very sweet girl.”

“Skirts up to the knees!” said Mrs. Andrews. The full tide of rosy colour had come back to her face. “And don’t talk to me about fashion, because it’s no excuse! So I told her, ‘We like you very much, my dear, and Mr. Andrews has no fault to find with your work. We are prepared to treat you like a daughter. But there must be no lipstick in this house, or cigarettes, or painted nails. And the skirt of your dress must be at least one inch below the knee, which is the least I consider decent.’ And after that we got on very well.”

Mr. Telfer hoped the jury shared his feeling that a girl who had lived for three years with Mrs. Andrews without murdering her could not reasonably be suspected of a homicidal tendency.

“And Miss Silence agreed?”

“Oh, yes.”

“That sounds as if she was both sweet-tempered and obliging. You did say that she was a very sweet girl, didn’t you?”

“I’m not making any complaint. I shouldn’t have mentioned what I did if it hadn’t been for swearing to tell the whole truth.”

Mr. Telfer persevered.

“Then once these small points were amicably settled between you, how did you find Miss Silence?”

“She was all right.”

Mr. Telfer gave it up.

As he sat down, Mr. Lanthony got to his feet.

“Just a moment, Mrs. Andrews. You found Miss Silence inclined to be thoughtless?”

Mrs. Andrews’ round blue eyes fixed themselves upon him in a look of surprise.

“Oh, no.”

“Well, you rather conveyed that idea.”

Mrs. Andrews shook her head. The hat slid.

“Certainly not. A very thoughtful girl.”

“Perhaps the word should have been ‘frivolous’.”

He received a glance of reproof.

“Neither my husband nor myself would have kept a frivolous girl in our house for three years.”

A faint smile began to play about Mr. Telfer’s lips. Mr. Lanthony ploughed on.

“But you were not altogether satisfied with her behaviour?”

“I don’t expect a young girl to be perfect. I pointed out her faults, and she corrected them. We are poor sinful creatures, but she had good Christian principles and she did her best to live up to them. None of us can say more than that. I certainly don’t set myself up to judge other people—I have faults of my own.”

Mr. Lanthony appeared staggered. He was observed to blink. But he returned to the charge.

“You say we all have faults. That is quite true. Will you tell us what faults you observed in Miss Silence.”

Mrs. Andrews gave an emphatic nod.

“When she first came to us she had been led away into following worldly fashions, but she was very good-tempered and obliging about giving them up—no sulks, no injured looks. After that we had no fault to find. She was very sweet-tempered and unselfish. We became attached to her.”

Mr. Lanthony, now a deep plum-colour, said hastily, “Thank you, Mrs. Andrews,” and sat down.

If Mr. Telfer had been anywhere except in court he would have hummed a little tune.

When the court resumed after lunch Jeff Stewart was called. When he had taken the oath he looked across to Carey and smiled.

Hugo Vane rose to examine.

“You are a citizen of the United States?”

“Yes.”

“You are in this country on government business?”

“Yes.”

“What is your connection with Miss Carey Silence?”

“Well, her father’s sister married my uncle, so I had an introduction to her when I came over in September. I found she was in hospital after being shot up in the train affair which has been mentioned, and I visited her there whenever I could. When she came to London to Mrs. Maquisten’s I got engaged to her.”

“Will you tell us something about your financial position, Mr. Stewart.”

“Well, I am a partner in a concern that has gone over to making aeroplanes. We used to handle automobiles. It is a family concern—my uncle is the other partner. It has always brought in quite a lot of money.”

“Would you call yourself a rich man?”

“I suppose I might be called that.”

“And you say you were engaged to Miss Silence?”

“I *am* engaged to her.”

The colour ran up into Carey’s face and burned there. He looked at her for a moment, and looked away again.

“Miss Silence knew of your financial position?”

Jeff Stewart nodded.

“Oh, yes, she knew.”

“How far had you got in the direction of making plans to get married?”

“Well, we had got to talking about wedding presents. I wanted to give her a mink coat.”

“You had got as far as talking about the wedding?”

“I had.”

“How soon did you propose to get married?”

“Just as soon as Miss Silence would marry me.”

“Was Miss Silence aware of this?”

“She couldn’t fail to be aware of it.”

“In these circumstances had she any reason to be anxious about her financial

position—or prospects?”

Mr. Stewart said in a very determined voice,

“She knew very well that she could count on me, and on every cent I had.”

“Thank you.”

Hugo Vane sat down.

Sir Wilbury Fossett rose.

“This engagement to Miss Silence—had it been given out?”

“No.”

“Miss Silence was under Mrs. Maquisten’s care—had she been informed that you were engaged?”

“No.”

“Had anyone been informed?”

“No—it had only just happened. I had to be out of London.”

“Oh, it had only just happened. Will you tell us when it happened.”

“I met Miss Silence when she arrived in London on the second of November, and I took her out to lunch next day. I talked to her then about getting married.”

“But you didn’t tell anyone. Are you quite sure you told Miss Silence?”

Mr. Stewart stood easily in the box. He had resumed his slight agreeable drawl. He was fighting for Carey’s life, but he knew very well that he must not talk as if he were fighting for it. He said,

“Oh, yes, I told her. We talked about wedding presents and what kind of fur coat she would let me give her.”

“And what kind of coat did Miss Silence prefer?”

“She wouldn’t say. We kind of got off the track. I was talking about getting married.”

“And what did Miss Silence say to that?”

“She seemed to think she wanted a little more time.”

“But you said you were engaged.”

“I said *I* was engaged. I am. I’m here any time she wants me. She’s known that all along.”

“So you are engaged to Miss Silence, but Miss Silence isn’t engaged to you.”

“That is entirely for Miss Silence to say.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stewart.”

Sir Wilbury Fossett sat down.

Jeff Stewart turned to leave the box. As Carey’s eyes followed him, she heard her own name called aloud.

“Call Carey Silence!”

Her heart began to beat wildly. She had a moment of dreadful panic. The wardress touched her, and she got up obediently. You learned to be obedient in prison. She went down one set of steps and up another, and stood where all those other people had stood, and took the oath as they had taken it.

“I swear by Almighty God to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

The words left a solemn feeling in her mind. Her heart-beats quieted. She looked at Hugo Vane and thought, “That’s all I’ve got to do—just tell the truth.”

And then he was asking her questions and she heard her own voice answering him, a little shakily at first, but steadying as she went on. He took her through the scenes which had been described so often.

Sunday afternoon and Cousin Honoria showing her the rubies. Hugo Vane asking, “Had Mrs. Maquisten said anything about making you a present of jewellery before this?”

“Yes—there was something about some diamonds.”

“What did you say to that?”

“I said they wouldn’t be any good to me because I couldn’t wear them.”

“And when she showed you the rubies?”

“She made me try them on, and when she said she was going to leave them to me I said, ‘Oh, *no!* And Ellen Bridling said I was right—they had belonged to old Mrs. Maquisten and they ought to go to Robert Maquisten or to Honor King. I said, ‘*Please, Cousin Honoria—*’ and she told us both to hold our tongues. Afterwards, when Ellen was putting the rubies away, she took my hand and held it against her cheek and called me a proud, obstinate creature.” Carey’s voice shook a good deal on the words.

“Did Mrs. Maquisten in fact give you any jewellery?”

“She gave me a brooch which had belonged to my grandmother.”

“Did she tell you anything about its value?”

“Yes—she said it wasn’t valuable at all. It was very pretty. She told me she picked it up in an antique shop to give to my grandmother just before she died. She said it cost about five pounds. She said she would like me to have it.”

“That was the only present of jewellery you accepted?”

“Yes.”

He took her on to the next day, November 16th. She heard herself describing how she had come back after lunching with Dennis Harland to find Cousin Honoria shaking with excitement and anger, clamouring aloud that she had been deceived, and that Mr. Aylwin must be sent for—she must alter her will.

“In all this anger and excitement did Mrs. Maquisten name the person who had deceived her?”

“No, she didn’t.”

“Did she say anything at all to make you suppose that she thought you were that person?”

“Oh, no.”

“Was she angry with you?”

“Not at first—she was just angry. Afterwards she was angry with me because I tried to persuade her to wait a little before ringing up Mr. Aylwin.”

“Why did you do that?”

“She was so dreadfully excited—I thought it must be bad for her.”

“Had you any other motive?”

Carey lifted those very dark blue eyes.

“Oh, no. I did truly think it wasn’t safe for her to be so angry.”

“That was all you thought about?”

“Yes.”

He bent his pleasant smile upon her.

“Miss Silence—where was the telephone fixture?”

“On a table by the window.”

“It has been stated in evidence that Mrs. Maquisten was perfectly able to get out of bed and walk about. Do you know why she waited for you to come in? Why did she not put through the call herself?”

“She never used the telephone.”

“Never?”

“That is what my cousins told me. She was just a little deaf, and telephoning worried her.”

He took her on through the day—what she did, what she said—the conversation at the dinner table—the order in which they went upstairs . . .

“Will you tell us what happened when you went into Mrs. Maquisten’s room.”

“Ellen Bridling was there. Cousin Honoria was up in her chair near the fire. Ellen said she ought to be in bed quieting herself down. Cousin Honoria was very angry. She hit the arm of her chair with her hand and said, ‘You’ll hold your tongue and do what you’re told! And so will the rest of them while I’ve got breath in my body!’ Ellen went away, and Cousin Honoria called me to come up close to her. She looked at me for a minute, and then she said, ‘Do I frighten you? Did I frighten you just now?’ And I said, ‘It’s bad for you, isn’t it?’ She gave a sort of nod and said, ‘Oh, I’m not dead yet.’ And then she took my hand and said, ‘It wasn’t for you. I

don't want to frighten you—you mustn't be afraid of me. I couldn't bear that—you're so like Julia.' That was my grandmother. She loved her very much. She went on talking about her until Honor came in."

"Was she still holding your hand?"

"Yes."

"Did you leave the bedroom between the time that Ellen Bridling went out and Miss King came in?"

"No."

"Did you go into the bathroom?"

"Oh, no."

On through the scene which followed.

"It was Ellen Bridling who suggested that you should fetch the sleeping-draught from the bathroom?"

"She suggested myself or Nora Hull."

"Who actually asked you to fetch it?"

"Cousin Honoria."

"Will you tell us what you did."

"I went into the bathroom, switched on the light, took the medicine-glass off the shelf over the wash-basin, switched out the light, and came back into the bedroom."

"Did you open the glass-fronted cupboard?"

"No."

"Did you touch the bottle of tablets either then or at any other time?"

"No."

"Did you then or at any other time dissolve any of those tablets or any other tablets and add them to the contents of the medicine-glass containing the sleeping-draught?"

"Oh, no!" Her voice rang clear and firm.

"Did you desire Mrs. Maquisten's death?"

"Oh, no!"

"Did you do anything to cause it?"

"Of course not. No one had ever been so good to me. I loved her." The colour came up in her face as she said the words. Her voice shook on the last of them.

Hugo Vane said, "Thank you, Miss Silence."

The court rose.

As Jeff Stewart walked away he heard light running footsteps behind him. A hand was slipped inside his arm. Nora Hull said,

“Jeff——”

He turned to look down at her, and found her bright-eyed and pale in the dusk. There was a low, lead-coloured sky, and an edgy wind at every street corner. He wanted to get away, to walk miles with the wind in his face. He wanted to have done as quickly as possible with whatever it was Nora had to say.

“Jeff—I want to talk to you.”

“I don’t think I’m fit to talk to anyone.”

She had a hold on his sleeve. Her eyes were very bright indeed.

“I want to talk to you, Jeff. Come home with me.”

He shook his head.

She went on urgently.

“You needn’t see Dennis, or Honor, or anyone except me.”

“What do you want?”

He had never seen her pale before. She was so pale that the lipstick on her mouth gave her a little the look of a clown, the contrast was so sharp. She said in a lost, unhappy voice,

“I want to talk to someone who doesn’t think she did it.”

That pricked him—that, and the little clutching hand at his sleeve. He said,

“I’ll walk back with you, but I won’t come in.”

As they walked, she went on, still in that lost voice.

“They all think she did it. That’s what frightens me so. There were two women just now when I was coming out of court—great fat women, going home to kippers or sausages for their tea—and one of them said, ‘That Mrs. Andrews she lived with three years, she didn’t have much to say for her, did she?’ And the other one said, ‘No, she didn’t. I expect if the rights of it were known, it was her wrote the letter which upset the apple-cart. I bet you she knew a thing or two about Miss Carey Silence.’”

Jeff tried to jerk his arm away, but she held on.

“Why do you tell me that sort of thing?”

Nora gave a sob.

“Because I shall burst if I can’t talk to someone—I really shall. Dennis thinks she did it, and it’s done something frightful to him, because he was in love with her. Everybody you meet thinks she did it. I’ve quarrelled with Alan about it, and with

Jack, and with Bobby. And Bill—he's thousands of miles away, and I haven't had a letter from him since Christmas. What's the good of being married if you don't get a shoulder to cry on? What's the good of a shoulder in the Middle East when you want one here? And those horrible women were just the very last straw. Only the men are just as bad. There was a horrid little wretch just behind me, and he said, 'Well, who did it if she didn't?' And that's just what everybody says. So I couldn't bear it—I had to run after you.'

He looked down at her with his frown gone.

'It's tough, isn't it?' And then, 'Mordaunt's pleased with the way she gave her evidence.'

'I thought it was marvellous. I don't see how they could listen to her and think she did it. Do you?'

'No.'

They walked on in silence for a minute or two. Then Nora said,

'Jeff, what does Mordaunt think is the worst part of the evidence against her?'

'Hood—and Ellen Bridling. Vane did his best to shake them, but Mordaunt is afraid those conversations with Cousin Honoria will be sticking in the minds of the jury—that and the fact that she obviously did mean to cut one of the main legatees out of her will, and that on the evidence the only one of them who had the opportunity of tampering with the stuff after Ellen saw it at twenty past eight was Carey. Of course someone is lying. But why? Why should Ellen lie to put it on Carey—unless she thinks it was Honor or Dennis and wants to clear them?'

Nora shook her head vigorously.

'She hates us all. She's got a hating nature. She's a poisonous old devil, but she *did* love Aunt Honoria. As far as the rest of us are concerned, she'd see us all hang. Once Aunt Honoria was gone and she'd got her legacy, why should she care? She hates Dennis because he used to imitate her when he was a schoolboy, and she isn't the sort that ever forgets. And she despises Honor. She wouldn't lift a finger for either of them.'

He gave a sort of groan.

'Well, that's Ellen. Then there's Hood. Any reason why Hood should lie?'

The hand on his arm gave a jerking pull. Nora said,

'If he thought it was Honor he might.'

'What!'

'But it couldn't be Honor—it simply couldn't. Ellen saw the stuff at twenty past eight, and it was all right then. Honor simply wasn't alone one moment after that. She couldn't have done it. And anyhow she wouldn't. She's one of the most tiresome

and irritating people who ever lived, but she wouldn't poison anyone. She's the sort that goes flop, not the sort that does something about it."

Jeff pulled his arm away. His hand came down on Nora's shoulder.

"What's that got to do with Hood? What's Honor got to do with him?"

She stared, round-eyed and a little frightened in the dusk.

"Didn't you know? It was the family joke. He'd been sucking up to her for months, ever since he got out of the Army. Den used to tease her—we all did. I thought you knew." The words came out in little rushes, too many of them and too fast.

Jeff held her.

"Do you mean there was something between them? Is that what you mean?"

She gave a shaky nod, and then hurried to explain it away.

"I don't suppose there was anything in it really. Den was rather a beast, I thought. She'd never had anyone before. Even if it was only Ernest Hood it was something. They used to go to the cinema—I expect they held hands. I don't suppose it got any farther than that. She got no end of a kick out of it. You see, if you've never had anything, a little goes a long way. She used to say she'd been out with Daphne Smyth."

"Hood was fond of her? Fond enough to perjure himself?"

The half-frightened look in Nora's eyes changed to a sparkle. She made a face and said,

"I think he was passionately fond of what he thought she was going to get from Aunt Honoria." And then the fright was back again. She was pulling at his coat and saying, "Jeff, don't look like that. They couldn't have done it—neither of them could. Do you suppose Den and I would have held our tongues and let Carey be tried if there had been the slightest, faintest chance of putting it on that awful Ernest Hood? But he simply couldn't have had anything to do with it. He went away at four o'clock, hours and hours before that damned sleeping-draught was mixed, and more than an hour before Honor came home. And he was back in the office before she left her parcel-packing place, because Den found out. And she came straight home when she left, so they didn't meet or anything. So we thought, 'What's the good of dragging her in when she couldn't possibly have anything to do with it?'"

"Did Molly and Mrs. Deeping know about Hood and Honor?"

"I expect so. I told you it was a family joke. But they wouldn't say anything unless they were asked, and of course the police didn't ask because they didn't know there was anything to ask about."

"Carey—did Carey know?"

“Of course.”

“And she didn’t say?” His voice strained on the words.

“She wouldn’t drag Honor in just for nothing at all. It was quite bad enough without that.” He felt her shoulder jerk pettishly under his hand. “Jeff we’ll collect a crowd if we go on standing here.”

The hand lifted. He swung round and began to walk again. No words for a long time—thoughts pounding in him—the blood pounding in his ears, against his temples. Just how much did it matter, all this stuff they had kept back? Would it have saved Carey? Would it have helped her? Was it too late to help her now? He didn’t know. He would have to see Mordaunt. Hood with his eye on the legacy which Honor King expected—which Honor King had now got away with. A very substantial legacy. Hood might do a good deal to get his hands on fifty thousand pounds. . . . Suppose that letter had been to tell Honoria Maquisten that Ernest Hood, her solicitor’s clerk, was making up to Honor King. Her immediate reaction might very well have been to keep that fifty thousand out of Hood’s hands for good and all by cutting Honor out of her will. If that was the case and Hood knew it, their interview on that Monday afternoon must have been a fairly sultry one. It would have pleased Honoria Maquisten to make him the instrument of his own humiliation and disappointment, and when it came to saying what had happened—well, he couldn’t possibly afford to make it public. He would lie, would suggest Carey Silence as the object of Honoria Maquisten’s anger, would just stop short of naming her outright. Because of course there was the writer of the letter to be reckoned with. He must have felt tolerably sure that the person who wrote it wouldn’t show up. And that meant he knew who the writer was. . . . That didn’t matter—not now—not here. Assume Ernest Hood had lied about his interview with Honoria Maquisten. Assume he lied when he said he thought all that about going up with the rocket and coming down with the stick referred to Carey. Because that was one of the things that had always stuck in his throat. That phrase rang true. It wasn’t only that Honoria Maquisten might have used it; he had never been able to get away from the conviction that she *had* used it. Well, so she might have done. But the rocket would have been Ernest Hood, and not Carey Silence. With the sputter and flash of an actual firework the question which had raised a laugh in court shot through his mind and illumined it—“How would you like to be a rocket, Mr. Hood?” Or perhaps what Honoria Maquisten had really said was, “How do you like being a rocket?”

...

The illumination died. His mind was dark again—quite dark. Because there was no way by which Ernest Hood could have contrived Honoria Maquisten’s death. If

all these assumptions were true, he might most ardently have desired it, but it could have got no farther than that. If she died before she could alter her will and disinherit Honor King—well, that was just his luck. If he lied afterwards to bolster up that luck, it was as far as you could push it. There simply wasn't one shred of evidence to connect him with the death itself.

Unless—— A pin-point pricked the dark. He looked down at Nora, who had been wondering if he was ever going to speak again, and said,

“Did Hood know Ellen Bridling? What sort of terms were they on?”

Her voice sounded surprised. She said quickly,

“Terms? Why, none at all, I should think. I suppose she may have seen him when he came to the house.”

“Why?”

“I—don't—know——” The words came out with a heavy weight on them, slowly and widely spaced.

Nora tilted her head to look up.

“Why, Jeff, what are you thinking of? You must be crazy! Do you think Ernest Hood came out of Aunt Honoria's room, bumped into Ellen in the passage, and said, ‘Just poison Mrs. Maquisten for me, will you’.”

He stared down at her.

“It sounds a bit sudden when you put it that way.”

Nora stamped her foot.

“It's crazy! I tell you Ellen didn't know him—not to speak of. And she loved Aunt Honoria. She was all broken up when she died. You're crazy.”

He nodded.

“I expect I am. But I don't think I'll come any farther with you. I'm going to see Mordaunt.”

After all, he couldn't see Mordaunt. He wasn't in his office, and he wasn't at his house. They were expecting him back, but they didn't know when.

He went on walking until the dusk turned to dark. By the time the last of the light was gone a cold rain was falling, and after that the wind swept the sky clear and the stars came pricking through.

He came back again to Mordaunt's house, and found him not too pleased to be pursued, but thawing into hospitality.

"Better dine with me now you're here."

"No, thanks—I didn't come for that. There's something——"

Mr. Mordaunt shook his head. He smiled, but he was determined.

"If you don't want to eat, I do. I tell you frankly I'm not talking shop until we've fed. Come through and meet my wife."

A nightmare meal, but it did him good. Everything very well cooked. Mordaunt full of pride, introducing his comfortable, placid wife as "Our chef. Didn't know how to cook a potato six months ago, and look at her now!" They had soup, meat and vegetables fried in batter, and a cheese flan. Mordaunt produced bottled beer, and they waited on themselves. Afterwards Mrs. Mordaunt would wash up.

She brought them some excellent coffee to the study and left them.

Jeff plunged into his crazy tale. When it was finished he got a shake of the head.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid. If we'd known a bit earlier, Vane might have made a pass or two at Hood when he cross-examined him, but there's nothing we can rake up now. We ought to have known of course—Miss Silence ought to have told us. You say she knew?"

"Nora says so."

Mordaunt's eyebrows went up.

"What can you do if your client won't help you? It might have been used to shake Hood's credit. It would have shown that he had a substantial interest in turning suspicion on Miss Silence. I'll have to see Vane, but I don't know that there's anything to be done about it now. But we might be able to use it if there was an appeal."

The word crashed into Jeff's mind like a stone through breaking glass. After a minute he said,

"It's as bad as that, is it?"

Mordaunt put down his coffee-cup.

"No, no, my dear fellow, I didn't mean that at all—you've taken me up all

wrong. As a matter of fact I thought she did very well today. Very important for the prisoner to make a good impression in the box. Juries are only supposed to go by the evidence, but of course they don't. Equally, of course, it's quite arguable that the way the accused gives his evidence is inseparable from the evidence itself. Commonest example—counsel always asks accused, 'Did you do it?' Fifty ways of answering that. At least fifty ways of saying, 'No, I didn't,' and quite half of them negative or damaging. I thought Miss Silence did pretty well over that. Some of them drop their eyes, drop their voices. Make it a virtual admission of guilt. She spoke up, and she looked Vane straight in the face. Of course she'll get a stiff cross-examination tomorrow."

He broke off to fill his cup again. As he set the coffee-pot down, the telephone bell rang sharply. He stretched out his hand, picked up the receiver, and inclined his ear. From where he sat Jeff Stewart heard a voice rustle in the telephone—"Is that Mr. Mordaunt? Can I speak to Mr. Mordaunt?"

"Mordaunt speaking."

The rustling began again—a woman's voice, insubstantial, bodiless, rustling on the wire with the sound of a wind-driven leaf. But he could hear what she said.

"Mr. Mordaunt, you won't know my name—it is Janet Gwent. I have just returned from the Middle East. I expected to be away a good deal longer. I have only just heard of the Maquisten trial, and I want to talk to you. Mr. Aylwin tells me you are the solicitor for the defence. You see, I have been out of England since November 17th, but on the afternoon of the 16th I left a letter for Mrs. Maquisten at 13 Maitland Square."

The receiver jerked in Mr. Mordaunt's hand. He said,

"*What!*" And then, "Do you mind saying that again?"

The voice said it again.

"I left a letter for Mrs. Maquisten at 13 Maitland Square at just after two o'clock on Monday November 16th."

Tuesday morning. Carey in the box again, but no longer under the cheerful, friendly guidance of Hugo Vane. The time she had dreaded so much that she had really never let herself think about it had come. As Sir Wilbury Fossett got up to cross-examine her she had a moment of panic in which she saw him as she had seen him on the first day of the trial—a skilled, implacable enemy, armed at every point, wholly bent on destroying her. He had every weapon, and every art in using them. She held herself against the panic by saying over and over, “I’ve only got to tell the truth.” She turned to him with a grave, attentive look which was not without dignity, and the questions began. Everything she had said and done and thought, everything she hadn’t said and done and thought, everything that the prosecution wanted to prove about those words and thoughts and actions, came at her in the questions, sometimes rapped out sharply, sometimes sliding in to take her by surprise, sometimes fired at her point-blank to terrify and break her down.

“When you came to stay with Mrs. Maquisten, what was your financial position?”

“I hadn’t very much money.”

“Indeed? Now, I wonder what you would call very much—these things are relative. Had you a banking account?”

“No.”

“No banking account. Perhaps you had money in the Post Office?”

“No.”

“In National Savings Certificates or one of the other government loans?”

“No.”

“You had no savings of any kind?”

“I didn’t get a very high salary. I’m afraid I didn’t save any of it.”

“You had no savings. What money had you when you entered Mrs. Maquisten’s household?”

Carey’s head lifted. She said in a young, proud voice,

“I had thirty shillings. Afterwards Mrs. Maquisten gave me five pounds to go shopping with. It was very kind of her.”

“And that was all the money you had?”

“That was all the money I had.” Courteous agreement in her voice, nothing more.

“Thirty shillings, and—how much had you left out of the five pounds by November 16th?”

"I had three pounds left altogether."

"Three pounds between you and destitution if you had been suddenly turned out of the house next day."

"There was no question of my being suddenly turned out of the house."

"If there had been, three pounds would not have gone very far, would it? Would it, Miss Silence?"

"I didn't have to think about that."

"Because another way out had occurred to you? Because you knew that when that next day came Mrs. Maquisten would not be there to cut you out of her will or send you out of her house?"

"No."

"Then why didn't you have to think about it?"

"Because there was no need. I didn't think of having to leave. There wasn't any quarrel."

"Mrs. Maquisten wasn't angry with you?" His voice expressed the liveliest surprise.

"Only when I didn't want to telephone to Mr. Aylwin."

"You heard Nurse Brayle's evidence?"

"Yes."

"She stated that Mrs. Maquisten was shouting at you in a great state of excitement and anger. That was the case, was it not?"

"She was excited and angry, but not with me except when I wanted to wait until she was quieter before ringing up Mr. Aylwin."

The questions went on and on. Pressure to make her admit that Honoria Maquisten's anger had been directed against Carey Silence—

"You knew that you would benefit under Mrs. Maquisten's will?"

"Yes—she told us all."

"You knew that she proposed to alter that will—to cut out one of the legatees? Which of them?" His voice rang on the words.

"She didn't say."

"She shouted at you in her anger and excitement? She said that she had been deceived—that she was altering her will to cut the deceiver out—and in all that anger and excitement she didn't tell you who it was?"

"No—she didn't tell me."

"So you came out of her room quite happy?"

"No."

"Dear me, how surprising! You were not happy! But you wouldn't be if you

knew you were going to be cut out of a legacy of fifty thousand pounds—would you?”

“I didn’t know that.”

“You knew that Mr. Aylwin’s head clerk was on his way to take instructions for that altered will?”

“Yes.”

“And you were not at all happy?”

Carey said in a grave, quiet tone,

“I was unhappy about Cousin Honoria. I was afraid she would make herself ill.”

“That was very altruistic! You had no thoughts to spare for your own predicament?”

“There was no predicament.”

“Oh, come, Miss Silence—you are not as dull as that! If you had lost Mrs. Maquisten’s favour and your legacy, and stood in danger of being sent packing—wouldn’t that constitute a predicament?”

“There was no predicament, because none of those things were true.”

“But if they had been true, there would have been a predicament?”

“Yes.”

“If they had been true, Miss Silence—what would you have done?”

“I don’t know—I never had to think about it.”

“Will you swear that you did not think about it—that no picture came up in your mind of what you would do if you were turned out penniless? No, I am forgetting—you had three pounds.” His voice rolled on the words. “You had three pounds—you had no near relatives—and you were not strong enough to get a job. Can you swear that you did not think of these things?”

“Not after I came to Mrs. Maquisten’s.”

“Ah—you had thought about them, then! I thought so! When you were in hospital perhaps?”

“Yes.”

“You had been troubled and anxious about the future?”

“Only whilst I was ill.”

“You were still not strong during that fortnight in November?”

“I was getting stronger.”

Sir Wilbury leaned towards her, his hands on the skirts of his gown, his voice on a confidential note.

“Miss Silence—what would you have done if Mrs. Maquisten had turned you out?”

“There was no question of her turning me out.”

“But if there had been, what would you have done?”

“I suppose I should have tried to get a job.”

He repeated her words in a measured manner.

“You would have tried to get a job.” And then quick and sharp, “Then you were not going to marry Mr. Jefferson Stewart?”

She was tiring, and he had taken her by surprise. She had a sort of black-out in which she lost the connection between the two questions. She stood there, groping for it in her mind, her eyes on Sir Wilbury’s face. She looked very young and very desolate. Jeff Stewart’s heart contracted. His hands clenched. To see her like that—to be able to do nothing—nothing at all——

As the thought went through his mind, gripping it like cramp, she said, her voice still clear but a little shaken,

“This wasn’t a real case. This was something you were supposing.”

“I must ask you for an answer, Miss Silence.”

“I don’t quite know what you are asking me.”

Sir Wilbury raised his voice.

“I will repeat my question. I said, ‘Then you were not going to marry Mr. Jefferson Stewart?’”

“It is very difficult to answer a question like that. He had asked me to think about marrying him, and I was thinking about it. I can’t say what I should have done in a case which didn’t arise.”

“Miss Silence, it is the contention of the Crown that that case did arise—that you found yourself in imminent danger of being turned out of Mrs. Maquisten’s house.”

“No.”

“And that in those circumstances you did not feel that you could count upon marrying Mr. Stewart.”

“I knew that I could count upon him. I didn’t want to be hurried.”

The questions went on, and on, and on. Every word that had been spoken on that Monday afternoon and evening, every movement, pulled out and twisted. The time she had spent with Honoria Maquisten between Ellen’s going out and Honor King’s coming in. . . .

“There was plenty of time for you to go into the bathroom, wasn’t there?”

“I didn’t go into the bathroom.”

“There would have been plenty of time for you to go there, would there not?”

“I don’t think so. Mrs. Maquisten was talking to me.”

“That is what you say. If she hadn’t been talking to you, there would have been

time for you to go into the bathroom?"

"Yes."

"Time to dissolve those extra tablets and to add them to the sleeping-draught?"

She said in a sudden clear voice,

"I didn't do that."

"There would have been time for you to do it?"

"No—Mrs. Maquisten was talking to me."

He went on to the time when she had gone into the bathroom to fetch the sleeping-draught. Like a picture interminably dragged out in slow motion the scene was once again unrolled. Why had she done this, and that, and the other? Why had she washed the glass? She was getting very tired indeed. It came to her that if she hadn't been telling the truth she would have broken down long ago. It was only because she had nothing to hide that she could go on answering him.

When he sat down at last and she turned to leave the box Hugo Vane called her back.

"Just a moment, Miss Silence—I won't keep you long. Mr. Jefferson Stewart had made his position quite clear to you—his financial position?"

Her mind went back to the walk when he had teased her about a fur coat and a blonde who didn't exist.

"He said he had a lot of money."

"And his position as a suitor—he made that quite clear too?"

"Yes—he asked me to think about marrying him. I was thinking about it."

"You were considering the question of marriage with Mr. Stewart. Were you in any doubt as to the serious nature of his feelings for you?"

"No."

"You just wanted a little more time to make up your mind?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Miss Silence."

It was over. The court rose.

Jeff Stewart watched the court reassemble. People coming in, settling themselves, whispering. He felt as if he had known some of them for years. The press sitting up and taking notice, because it was possible, just barely possible, that they might get as far as the verdict before the court rose again. It wasn't very likely—speech for the Crown, speech for the defence, summing-up by the judge, and time for the jury to consider their verdict. To this Jeff could add his own knowledge that there was to be another witness for the defence, and that the evidence to be given by this witness might have a quite incalculable effect.

His eye moved on. Mark Aylwin, his face a heavy mask. Honor King, limp and untidy. She had taken off her gloves and was fidgeting with them, turning the fingers inside out and then poking them back again—black kid gloves with shiny fingers. Nora next, in her grey fur, very pale. She threw him an appealing glance as she sat down, and loosened the neck of her coat as if she needed air. Ellen Bridling was a little behind them. She kept her hands in their black thread gloves tightly folded in her lap, and she kept her eyes down.

Ernest Hood came in and took his seat, passing in front of Ellen and finding a place quite a number of seats beyond her. He looked exactly as he had done on every other day of the trial. After him Dennis Harland, walking with a stick, not looking at anyone. Then Mr. Mordaunt, with the air of having had a good lunch and being very well pleased with himself. He nodded to Jeff as he went by—a rollicking here we are on the top of the world kind of nod.

Counsel were coming in now—Sir Wilbury and Mr. Lanthony; the tall, thin Telfer; and Hugo Vane, boyish, rosy and smiling. The jury filed in, rather the worse for wear.

Carey came into the dock with the wardress at her elbow.

Then the whole court stirred into life as the judge made his entrance. The age-old formalities began. Through the silence which had hardly had time to settle a voice said,

“Call Janet Gwent!”

Jeff looked along the line of faces for the face of Ernest Hood, and found it pale beyond its usual pallor. Even as he looked he saw the sweat come out upon the forehead and the mouth fall open. He glanced quickly back along the row and saw Ellen Bridling, unmoved and unmoving, black hands in a black lap, head poked forward under the shabby black hat, eyes hooded. His look passed to Mark Aylwin. Out of the heavy mask of the face the eyes watched Ernest Hood.

Miss Gwent came up into the witness-box and took the oath. Carey looked at her and saw a big, shapeless woman with sandy hair worn very full under a plain black hat which looked too small for her. There was a lot of hair in front, and a lot more gathered up into a sort of lump behind. There was a lot of Miss Gwent altogether. She must have been five foot ten in her sensible low-heeled shoes, and she had the big bones which go with sandy hair. You couldn't say that she was stout, but she was an odd shape, and her clothes, which had obviously been bought off a peg, did nothing to help her out. She was voluminously and adequately covered, but there it ended. As she raised her head after taking the oath, Carey saw a large face with a fair, freckled skin and a wide, generous mouth, eyes almost as pale and bright as forget-me-nots, very widely spaced and set between sandy lashes and under thick sandy brows. They had a kind of steady regard. They turned upon Hugo Vane as he addressed her.

"Miss Gwent, will you tell the court when you left England."

Miss Gwent answered in rather a deep voice—a very pleasant voice.

"I left London on the evening of November 16th. I left England early next morning."

"Mention has been made in this case of a letter left by hand at 13 Maitland Square on the afternoon of November 16th. It was addressed to the late Mrs. Maquisten. Can you tell us anything about this letter?"

"Yes—it was I who left it."

There was a movement in the court.

"Did you write this letter, Miss Gwent?"

"No. It was written by my mother."

"Is your mother alive?"

"No, she died on November 1st."

"Can you tell us a little more about the letter, and why it was not delivered until more than a fortnight after your mother's death?"

"Yes—I will try. My mother was Mrs. Maquisten's oldest friend. They played together as children, they went to the same school, they married in the same year, and they had kept up their friendship ever since. It was very close and very intimate. At the end of October I was preparing to go out to the Middle East in connection with plans for feeding the children in one of the occupied countries. I am connected with a society which handles these problems, and we had been asked to send a delegate. On October 30th I came in late and found my mother very much troubled on Mrs. Maquisten's account. There was something my mother felt she ought to know, but it was of a painful nature and she was afraid it would upset her very much.

Yet she felt it her duty to bring the matter to Mrs. Maquisten's knowledge. I said, 'Well, I shouldn't do anything in a hurry.' We talked for some time, and when I said goodnight I did not know whether my mother had come to any decision. She did not speak of the matter next day, and I went down into the country to spend the week-end with friends. That was on the Saturday. Very early on Sunday morning, November 1st, I was rung up and told that my mother had had a seizure. I returned to town at once, but I was not in time to see her alive. As I was to leave by air in a fortnight's time I had a great deal of business to get through. My mother's affairs were in the hands of the solicitor employed by Mrs. Maquisten—Mr. Aylwin, a life-long friend. I told him that I should probably be away six months, and that I should have to leave everything in his hands. There was a great deal to be done. On the morning of Monday the sixteenth one of the maids came to me with a letter addressed in my mother's writing to Mrs. Maquisten——”

“When you say ‘addressed’, do you mean that it had Mrs. Maquisten's name and address upon it?”

“No, only her name.”

“Will you go on, Miss Gwent.”

“I asked the maid where she had found it, and she said it had just fallen out of the blotter on my mother's writing-table. She said my mother had been writing there on the Saturday evening before she went to bed. I realized then that my mother had taken her decision, and that one of the very last things she had done was to write this letter to her old friend. In the circumstances I felt that it must go.” She paused for a moment, and then went on in a lower voice. “It may seem foolish, but I felt reluctant to complete the address—I didn't want to add anything to what my mother had written. I was going to say goodbye to a friend not too far away from Maitland Square, and I made up my mind to leave the letter by hand. I didn't want to see anyone—I really hadn't time. I just slipped the letter in through the slit and went on to see my friend. I left London later in the afternoon, and took off from an airport early next day.”

“When did you hear of Mrs. Maquisten's death?”

“Yesterday afternoon, when I arrived in London.”

“Did you get no letters whilst you were away?”

“None that referred to Mrs. Maquisten's death. The posts were very irregular, and I was travelling about.”

“You were not away as long as you anticipated?”

“No. I was asked to come back and make a report.”

“What did you do when you learned the circumstances of Mrs. Maquisten's

death?”

“I rang up Mr. Aylwin, my solicitor, at his private house—it was after office hours—and told him that the letter which had been mentioned was written by my mother. He gave me the name and address of the solicitor for the defence and told me to get in touch with him.”

Hugo Vane altered his position. He had been leaning forward a little upon his right foot. He withdrew it now and straightened up. The effect produced by this quite simple and natural movement was that a period had been reached, but that there was something still to come. His expression for once was grave as he said,

“Miss Gwent—did you read your mother’s letter?”

Miss Janet Gwent looked scandalized.

“Of course not!”

Jeff Stewart was watching Ernest Hood. As Miss Gwent made her reply, he saw him take a long, deep breath. It occurred to him that it might be a breath of relief. If so, it came too soon. Hugo Vane was asking,

“Do you know what it was that Mrs. Gwent thought it her duty to report to her old friend?”

“Yes—she discussed the matter with me very fully.”

Ernest Hood’s mouth fell a little open. It remained like that. He took short breaths as if he had been running. Jeff looked along the row to Ellen. She hadn’t moved. He passed from that row to where Honor King was sitting. She was looking at the witness with an expression of vague surprise. He felt a certain relief.

Hugo Vane was saying, “Your mother told you what she intended to say if she decided that she must write to Mrs. Maquisten?”

“Yes.”

“Will you tell us what it was.”

Miss Gwent’s homely face took on an expression of distress. She said,

“I don’t like to—but I suppose I must.”

“I’m afraid I must ask you to do so.”

The distressed look persisted. She said,

“My mother was very fond of going to the cinema. She and I were at a film together on October 29th. Whilst the picture was showing and the lights were low two people came in and sat down in the seats immediately in front of us. They behaved like lovers. It was impossible not to notice the terms they were on.”

“Will you be a little more particular.”

The fair freckled skin took on some colour. Miss Gwent looked extremely unhappy.

“They held hands—they sat with their arms round each other—she had her head on his shoulder——”

“Did you recognise these people?”

“My mother and I both recognised them. It was very embarrassing.”

“Did they recognise you, or know that you were there?”

“Oh, no, they had no idea—it was dark when they came in. My mother and I got up and went out very soon afterwards, when the picture we had come to see was over. My mother did not say very much at the time. It was on the following evening that I found her in a great state of distress.”

“You say that you recognised these two people. Will you name them.”

Miss Gwent shut her eyes for a moment. Then she opened them and said,

“They were Honor King and Mr. Hood.”

With a gasp Honor slipped sideways against her cousin. Nora put an arm round her, looked to see if she was fainting, found that she was not, and held her up. She even administered a pinch.

“For God’s sake, Honor!”

But Honor remained a dead weight against her shoulder.

Hugo Vane went on with his questions.

“You know both these people?”

“I have known Honor King all her life. I have known Mr. Hood fifteen years.”

“Was it possible for you to have been mistaken as to the identity of the man and woman who were occupying the seats in front of you?”

“No—they were between us and the lighted screen. Besides we could not help hearing some of their conversation. He addressed her as Honor—she called him Ernest.”

“There was no possibility of a mistake?”

“None whatever.”

“You feel able to swear that it was Ernest Hood and Honor King you saw on this occasion?”

“I do.”

“Now, Miss Gwent, passing on to the conversation you had with your mother on the evening of the following day—did she acquaint you with her reasons for thinking that she ought to let Mrs. Maquisten know of the relations between Mr. Hood and Miss King?”

“Yes. I said that I thought it was their own affair, and she was very much disturbed and said no, it was a great breach of trust on Mr. Hood’s part, as he owed everything to Mrs. Maquisten and she certainly had no idea that he was making love

to her niece.”

The judge leaned forward and said,

“Mr. Vane—is this pertinent?”

Hugo Vane turned with the expression of a respectful schoolboy addressing the headmaster.

“I submit that it is, m’lud. I believe that this witness is able to throw an important light upon the relations between two of the witnesses for the Crown, and upon the evidence which they have given in this court.”

“Are you attacking the credit of these witnesses, Mr. Vane?”

“Yes, m’lud. I propose to prove that not only did an undisclosed and hitherto unsuspected relationship exist between two of the Crown’s witnesses, but that they also had a very strong motive for desiring Mrs. Maquisten’s death before she could sign a new will.”

A murmur ran through the court—sound without words, like the rustle among leaves.

“You may proceed, Mr. Vane.”

The judge sat back again. Hugo Vane turned to his witness.

“What reason did she give you for considering that Mr. Hood’s conduct was a breach of trust?”

Miss Gwent again closed her eyes.

“She told me that Mrs. Maquisten had befriended Mr. Hood’s mother—that she had given him his education and introduced him into Mr. Aylwin’s office. She said that the whole affair had been kept a profound secret even from Mr. Aylwin, but she now felt that Mrs. Maquisten was being imposed upon, and that someone besides herself should know the facts.”

“Did Mrs. Gwent impart these facts to you?”

“Yes.”

“Did she acquaint you with Mr. Hood’s parentage?”

“Yes.”

“What did she tell you?”

Miss Gwent paused, shut her eyes, took a long breath, and said,

“She told me that he was Ellen Bridling’s son.”

All over the court people stirred, moved, rustled. As if in answer to her name, Ellen got to her feet and began to push her way along the row in the direction of the door through which she had come in. Ernest Hood sat where he was, his pale face glistening, his eyes half hidden by the drooping lids. In that moment a likeness to Ellen stood out plain.

Honor King gripped Nora by the arm and sat up straight. Her eyes looked wildly round, and on a gasping breath she could be heard to say,

“Oh, no—no—no—no—*no!*”

To Carey in the dock it seemed as if everything had stopped. Ellen and Ernest Hood—mother and son! Not strangers with no possible common motive for accusing her, but so intimately linked that Honor’s fifty thousand pounds must be of equal interest to them both. Every avenue of thought was blocked by this one tremendous fact. Afterwards she knew that a birth certificate was put in as evidence, but at the time she did not know what was happening around her. It was not faintness but withdrawal. The outside things went by.

When she came back to them again, Hugo Vane was addressing the jury.

Carey did not really take it in. She listened to the words, but most of the time she didn't really take them in. The terrible tension and strain of all these endless weeks had suddenly begun to relax. She felt a loosening and a slackening of her whole being. She hadn't to hold on any more—she could let go. Phrases, sentences, whole passages, passed into her consciousness and floated there a little vaguely.

“I submit that the Crown has completely failed to make out any case at all against Miss Silence. If you believe the evidence just given by Miss Gwent, an entirely disinterested witness, it will be plain to you that the person who was to be cut out of Mrs. Maquisten's will was not Carey Silence but Honor King. Then what happens to the two witnesses who stood in this box only a day or two ago and were so positive that Mrs. Maquisten had indicated Carey Silence as the person who had deceived her, and whom she intended to disinherit? After hearing Miss Gwent's evidence, do you think that Ellen Bridling and Ernest Hood were honestly mistaken, or does it appear that they had a motive—may I go so far as to say a very strong motive—for putting this construction upon Mrs. Maquisten's words, or even perhaps for putting the words into her mouth? You will use your own judgment about this, but you will remember that the Crown has relied upon their evidence to prove that Carey Silence had a motive for wishing Mrs. Maquisten dead. But if you believe Miss Gwent—and I do not see how you can disbelieve her—it was not Carey Silence who had this motive at all. I do not accuse Miss King, but it was she who was to be cut out of Mrs. Maquisten's will, and it is Ernest Hood, the man who was making love to her behind her aunt's back, and Ernest Hood's unacknowledged mother Ellen Bridling, who stood here to accuse Miss Silence. It will at once be evident to you that these two persons had the strongest possible motive for preserving Honor King's inheritance. It is not for me to suggest what may have taken place at the interview between Mrs. Maquisten and Ernest Hood. You will remember, however, that she had just received a letter in which her old friend Mrs. Gwent informed her of the relations between Hood and her niece Miss King. Recollecting all she had done for him, is it too much to suppose that she threw his betrayal in his face and informed him of her intention to make a new will under which Miss King would not receive a penny? It is at least significant that it was during the time occupied by this interview that she secured herself against an eavesdropper by sending Nurse Brayle out of the house. What happened after this is a matter for conjecture, but one cannot help remembering that Ellen Bridling's room was only the width of the passage away from the one in which this interview was taking place. It is

possible that there was an eavesdropper after all. A number of the witnesses have described Mrs. Maquisten's voice as loud and strong. It is not for me to say whether the mother and son met when the interview was over. It is, however, significant that Ellen Bridling's first admitted contact with her mistress should not have taken place until after seven o'clock. There would therefore have been plenty of time for them to have met. But that is not my affair. What it is my duty to lay before you is just this—and you will of course have seen it for yourselves—since it was not Carey Silence who had deceived Mrs. Maquisten, and since it was not Carey Silence who was about to be disinherited, she had no possible motive for contriving the death of a kind and affectionate relative, and the whole case for the Crown collapses. . . .”

In the withdrawn places of her mind Carey had an odd childish picture of a house of cards coming fluttering down—kings and queens with their crowns—knives, like policemen with truncheons—diamonds, clubs, hearts, and spades. . . . Presently Hugo Vane's voice came through again—talking about Honor King coming into the bedroom just before Cousin Honoria asked for and took the sleeping-draught—

“Here is one of the Crown witnesses most truthfully testifying to Mrs. Maquisten's affectionate behaviour to the girl who you have been asked to believe was at that time the object of her particular resentment and anger. The prosecution's own witness has told you that Mrs. Maquisten was holding Miss Silence by the hand and looking at her with affection. You have heard Miss Silence's account of this scene. Does it not ring true? Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, doesn't all her evidence ring true? She is a young girl, and she is not in very strong health. I won't attempt to work upon your sensibilities by reminding you that her health has been impaired by enemy action. I am sure that it is not necessary for me to do so. I only mention it in order to say this—Do you think it is possible that this fragile girl should have sustained the very able and searching cross-examination of my learned friend without contradicting herself or breaking down at any point if she had been relying on anything except her complete innocence and the simple honest truth?”

Something in Carey woke up. She thought, “Yes, that's true—I couldn't have stood up to him if I hadn't been telling the truth.”

He went on speaking, but not for very long. She heard him without taking hold of what he said.

She did not really listen to Sir Wilbury Fossett, who made one of the shortest speeches of his career. Afterwards she gathered that he had contrived to say as little as possible. A profile, a voice, and a manner all in the grand style are useful properties. He used them to the full in what amounted to a strategic retirement, and

resumed his seat with dignity.

The judge summed up, using words which were now so familiar that they were like an echo already many times repeated. In his balanced phrases the case went by again. In the end it came down to what Hugo Vane had said—"If you believe the evidence of Miss Gwent, the motive alleged by the Crown does not exist."

The horse-hair wig rising in formal waves above the puckered face, the red robes, the dry incisive voice, the words it used, were all part of the old majestic processes of the law which had brought Carey Silence here to stand her trial, and was now giving her over to be weighed in a balance by the twelve tired people in the jury box.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you will now retire and consider your verdict."

Carey heard that, and made ready to get to her feet. She would have to go down these steps, and presently she would have to come up them again. She wondered how long it would take the jury to say whether they thought she was guilty or not. Sometimes a jury was out for hours. She hoped that they would not be very long.

And then quite suddenly she saw that they were not going out. The foreman was on his feet, and he was addressing the judge.

"My lord, we do not need to retire. We are agreed upon our verdict. We find the prisoner not guilty."

The wardress had taken Carey's arm and pulled her up. She stood there as white as linen and saw the court and all the people crowded there as if she were looking at them through water. Everything swam, and wavered, and floated. The scarlet of the judge's robes was like a spreading stain. She heard him say,

"Is that the verdict of you all?"

But she never heard what the foreman said in reply, because a blackness came down between her and the crowded court.

The case was over.

There was a whispering going on. She heard the voices before she could distinguish the words. She opened her eyes for a moment and shut them again. Someone let go of her wrist and got up. A strange voice said, "It's all right—just let her lie still for a bit." Then the other two voices began again, Nora's voice and Jeff's.

"After all, it's partly her own house—it was left between the four of us. And Den won't be there—he's going to his club. She'd much better come home—*really*."

Jeff said, "I don't know——"

Carey opened her eyes. She was lying on the floor. Someone had taken her hat off and put a newspaper under her head. She could feel it rustle when she moved. Nora was sitting back on her heels on one side of her, all grey and furry like a kitten. Jeff was kneeling on the other side holding her left hand. She had the feeling that he was holding it so tight that it might be difficult ever to get it back. She said a little vaguely,

"Are you talking about me?"

Nora's face crinkled up as if she was going to cry. She caught Carey's other hand and squeezed it.

"You will come home with me, won't you? Anyhow it's partly your house. You don't want to go to a beastly hotel, do you? It would be *grim*."

The floor was frightfully hard. Carey pulled on the hands that were holding hers and sat up. She felt a little swimmy but all right. She looked at Nora and said,

"Ellen——"

Nora's face screwed up again, but in a different way. The kitten might have been going to scratch or spit.

"I always knew she was a poison-toad, but not as bad as this. I don't know whether the police have arrested her or not, but they've got her, and as far as we are concerned they can keep her. She doesn't set foot in the house again. And—and Den is going to his club—you won't have to see him."

"I don't mind seeing him," said Carey.

Jeff Stewart let go of the hand he was holding. Nora pulled at the other one.

"Then you'll come home with me?"

It was Jeff who said quite bluntly, "What about Honor?"

He got a sort of lightning flash from Nora's very bright brown eyes.

"I tell you she didn't know a thing. She's a gump and a poor fish, but she didn't poison Aunt Honoria, or know that anyone else was going to. I think even the police will have the sense to see that, but they've taken her off to ask her a lot of questions.

Mr. Aylwin's gone with her so that I could come to Carey. He said they might detain her, but he thought they'd probably let her come home. But if you think she'd try and do anything to Carey you're a worse gump than she is. It's just silly!"

"Is it?" His tone was dry.

"Yes, it is! Look here, Jeff, you can't take Carey to an hotel. She's got to come home to her family, or what's it going to look like? You've got to think about that. You can come too if you like—there's lots of room. And if Carey doesn't mind meeting Den, I think he'd better stay too, because this is where the family wants to look solid."

If there was anyone in the world Jeff Stewart did not at that moment want to meet, it was Dennis Harland, but he was afflicted with a strong vein of common sense. After opening his mouth to say something quite different he felt himself constrained to observe,

"Well, I expect you're right."

Nora produced two dimples and rather an attractive gurgle.

"I'm always right, darling." Then, very briskly to Carey, "Mr. Vane and Mr. Mordaunt are waiting to see you, so I expect you'd better get up off the floor."

Carey went to bed in her old room and slept as if she would never wake again. It was afternoon, and late afternoon at that, before she came down and opened the study door. She had met no one on the stairs, but she made sure of finding somebody in the study. There was only one person there, and it was Dennis Harland. Carey stood with her hand on the door for a moment, then she came in and shut it behind her. After all, she had to meet Dennis sometime. She couldn't just go on remembering that the last thing he had said to her was "Why did you do it, Carey?"

He had his back to the door, so that he had time to say "Is that you, Nora?" before she crossed his line of vision.

She said "No" in a quiet voice and took the chair on the other side of the hearth. Now they were sitting where they had sat on the first evening, a long, long time ago. She was even wearing the same dress, and the brooch that had been Julia's which Honoria Maquisten had given her to wear with it. Julia had been dead for fifty years, but the big pale sapphire with its ring of grey rose-diamonds hadn't changed. The stuff of her dress was as soft and blue as it had been before she stood her trial for murder. Things that mattered more than a stone and a frock had perished—things which ought to have endured, but once they were gone you couldn't bring them back again. She met Dennis Harland's eyes and said,

"Why did you think I did it?"

He looked away.

"It's over—better let it go."

Carey shook her head.

"No—I want to know—I've got to know."

He gave the old slight shrug of the shoulder which she remembered.

"I don't like post-mortems myself—women love them. Have it your own way. I thought it was you because as far as I could make out it was a choice between you and me, and I knew it wasn't me. And Ellen said she saw you in the bathroom."

Carey drew a quick breath.

"When?"

"After she left you in the bedroom with Aunt Honoria. She went along the passage to the landing and stood there waiting for Honor to come down. The bathroom door was in sight, and she said you opened it and looked out."

Carey said scornfully, "She didn't say that at the trial."

"She promised she wouldn't unless she was asked point-blank."

“It wasn’t true. Why did you make her promise?”

“Because it would have hanged you.”

“Am I supposed to thank you for that?”

“I don’t think you’ve got very much to thank me for.”

Carey said, “Nor do I.”

All at once he was leaning forward, his hands between his knees.

“Do you suppose I wanted to think it was you? Do you suppose I haven’t been through hell thinking it? What do you suppose it was like? I’d loved her all my life, and I was in love with you, and I thought you had killed her to get yourself out of a jam. What did you expect me to do? Ellen swore it was you. I shut her mouth on the one thing which would certainly have hanged you.”

Carey looked at him curiously.

“Why should I look out into the passage?”

An eyebrow rose.

“To see if anyone was coming of course. You had to know if there was time for you to add the extra dope.”

“I see. And you never thought that the person who had all the time in the world to dope that draught was Ellen herself?”

Without quite knowing how it had happened, their tongues were free. The old quick give-and-take was there again. He said,

“No, I didn’t—nobody did. Stupid of us perhaps—damned stupid if you like—but, you see, we couldn’t any of us get past the positive fact that she did love Aunt Honoria.”

Carey said soberly, “She killed her.”

“Because she loved somebody else better. But then, you see, we didn’t know about that. Ernest was just Aylwin’s clerk sucking up to Honor—something to make a family joke of. I expect Ellen heard us. She didn’t love us much before, and she must have fairly hated us all before she was through. And I think that in a sort of crazy way the whole of that hatred got focussed on you. Of course she was as jealous as fury about Aunt Honoria falling for you the way she did.”

Carey gave a grave little nod.

“Why did she let you shut her mouth? She’d made up that story about my looking out into the passage—she did make it up, you know. I never went near the bathroom. Well, when she’d got that all made up and ready, why did she let you stop her? Why didn’t she come out with it at the trial?”

“I imagine because Ernest told her not to. He knows his stuff all right. I’ve thought a lot about their evidence, and I believe they stuck very closely to the truth.

That's what made it so dangerous. I believe all those conversations with Aunt Honoria were absolutely true—I don't think either of them could have invented anything so like the way she talked. But all that about the rocket and the stick and 'those that go up quick can come down quick'—well it wasn't meant for you, it was meant for Ernest. So I think he wouldn't let Ellen embark on anything which she had made up. There were to be no unnecessary lies. I am sure she was very carefully coached. Think back over their evidence. They were both careful not to swear that Aunt Honoria had mentioned you by name. I can see Ernest there. Left to herself, Ellen would have gone the whole hog, but Ernest is a cautious soul. He thinks Miss Gwent is out of the way for six months, and that means that the trial will be over and done with and out of mind before she gets to hear about it. Everyone knows what mails to the Middle East have been like, and she was going to be moving about. Besides, who was going to write? None of her own friends had ever heard of Aunt Honoria. If by any chance Mr. Aylwin were to write, nothing would be easier than for Ernest to suppress the letter. By the time Miss Gwent got back the whole thing would have been past history. But just in case it wasn't past enough and Miss Gwent ever came out with why that letter must have been one her mother wrote—well, he and Ellen would still be quite all right even if Miss Gwent knew that it was Honor who was going to be cut out of the will. They thought Aunt Honoria was talking about you—they were honestly convinced that she was—but of course she hadn't mentioned your name, and if they had made a mistake it was very regrettable, but they could only say what they thought at the time. What they didn't know was that Aunt Honoria had told Mrs. Gwent all about Ellen having a baby about thirty-five years before, and that Mrs. Gwent had passed the information on to her daughter. Miss Gwent even knew where to send Mordaunt for the birth-certificate. Aunt Honoria apparently wouldn't stand for any hankypanky about the registration. He's down as Ernest Hood Bridling all right, but he was brought up as Ernest Hood."

Carey, said quick and low,

"It's horrible."

An eyebrow jerked.

"Middling," he said drily. "I gather the police are having a headache over getting enough evidence to run him in. They've arrested Ellen, but so far there isn't a shred of evidence that she didn't do it off her own bat just to save Honor's fifty thousand for her darling son."

"Do you—think—they planned it—between them?"

"Don't you? Remember Ellen's door just opposite Aunt Honoria's and nearly always open. She knew there was an unholy row brewing because everyone in the

house knew that, and she'd know that Ernest had been sent for, because Molly had orders to bring him up as soon as he came. Don't you think she'd have been waiting to have a word with him when he came out?"

"Do you think they planned it then?"

"No, I don't. It would have been too dangerous. I don't believe he'd have risked it. I think he told her to meet him somewhere when he got away from the office, which he did at half past five. I checked up on that myself because I wanted to be sure that he couldn't have met Honor, and that was all right. He was back in the office before she left her parcels place, and she was back here before he left the office—they couldn't have met. But Ellen went out 'to the post' at twenty past five, and I don't mind betting that 'the post' was Ernest, and that she got her instructions then—she simply hadn't got the brains to work it out for herself. But she has got the most phenomenal memory. She'll repeat a long conversation and get it word-perfect, or tell some interminable story a dozen times and never vary a syllable. I've heard her doing it since I was a child." He stopped dead, and then said slowly and painfully, "That's why I believed her evidence, Carey."

The tears stung in Carey's eyes. She bit her lip and nodded.

He went on.

"I think he told her just what she was to do. Look what a careful alibi was provided for Honor. If she had been even slightly under suspicion it would have been too dangerous for Ernest to marry her. She had to be kept absolutely clear, and it was very cleverly and plausibly done."

Carey said suddenly.

"But Aunt Honoria wasn't angry with Ellen. If she knew that Ernest had been making love to Honor and she was furious with them, then why wasn't she furious with Ellen too?"

Dennis looked grim.

"That's the nastiest part of it, my dear. There's only one way of accounting for it. Ellen must have absolutely convinced Aunt Honoria that she hadn't known anything about what was going on, and that she was just as much shocked and horrified as she was herself. And once she was convinced of that, don't you see what a strong position Ellen was in? She knew from previous experience that Aunt Honoria would be given a sleeping-draught—she always had one after an upset, and this was a bad one. She knew that it was Magda's evening off, and she would know just how to make sure that Aunt Honoria would insist on Magda going out. A suggestion of eavesdropping would have done it all right, and after that everything was easy. She came away and left you alone with Aunt Honoria after dinner so as to provide time

for you to go into the bathroom and tamper with the draught, and if Honor or I had come along too soon she would have delayed us on the landing. It's all so beautifully clear now that one has the key." His tone was very bitter as he ended.

Carey looked at him.

"Dennis—don't mind so much." She saw his face change, and went on quickly, "Please—*please* don't! Let's just wipe it all out and be friends again."

"Can we?"

"I don't see why we can't."

"Don't you, darling?" It was the old light tone, but the bitterness ran underneath.

Carey said, "No, I don't. You see, I never really had any family before, and it wasn't easy to have friends of my own age when I was at the Andrews'. He was a darling, and she was very kind to me, only she took quirks about things and nearly everything shocked her."

"I can't imagine how you stood it."

"Oh, she isn't as bad as she sounds. She was having an aggravated attack of conscience in the witness-box—she gets them sometimes. But he was a lamb, and I met a lot of interesting people—only not young. And then I came here, and you were all so nice to me. And Jeff wanted me to say I would marry him, but I didn't want to be rushed. I wanted to play about a bit and not be in a hurry, and you were the very nicest playfellow."

"No more than that?"

"Now, Den, you know perfectly well you didn't want to be anything more."

"Didn't I?"

"No, you didn't," said Carey firmly. "Nor did I."

He looked right into her eyes for a moment, his own very bright and rather cynical. Then he burst out laughing.

"Are you refusing me, darling?"

Carey's colour rose.

"I don't think there was anything to refuse."

"That wouldn't matter, would it? Did you never hear of Jenny Baxter, who refused the man before he axed her?"

"Den, do be good! We can't go on playing, but I want to be friends."

His mouth twisted.

"Do you want to be a sister to me, darling?"

She laughed, but her eyes were full of tears.

"I wouldn't mind. I want to be friends, like you are with Nora. You see, I know just what it's been like for you."

“Do you? I wonder. I hope you don’t.”

Carey went on steadily.

“You loved Cousin Honoria, and you were getting to be just a little bit in love with me. Then you thought I’d killed her, and you were afraid I’d make you forget what she’d done for you and what you felt about her, so you rather piled everything up against me to make yourself do what you thought you ought to do, and the more it hurt, the more you had to do it. That’s true—isn’t it?”

He looked at her for one direct moment and said, “Yes.” Then he got up, reached for the cigarette-case lying open on the mantelpiece, and busied himself with lighting a cigarette. When he had got it going he said over his shoulder,

“Going to marry Jeff?”

Carey didn’t answer, because the door opened suddenly and Nora and Jeff came in.

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It appeared that they had met on the doorstep, and that they each had news. Nora got hers out first, throwing off her coat, her cap, her gloves, and talking all the time.

“I went to try and see Honor, and I got Chief Inspector McGillivray. He says they’ve just about finished with her for the moment and she can come home. They’ve asked her millions of questions, and I expect she’ll be in a flat spin, but thank goodness they don’t seem to be going to arrest her. I told McGillivray that he ought to have more brains than to imagine that Honor would do anything but sit down and moan if she thought she was going to be cut out of a will, and he said, ‘I’m inclined to agree with ye’. Very growly and Scotch, but with rather a twinkle in the eye. So I suppose she’ll be back any moment now—only what we’re going to do with her, I don’t know.”

Dennis gave her his charming smile.

“She will continue to be our little ray of sunshine, darling. It’s a glad prospect. Why didn’t you bring her with you?”

“McGillivray said I’d better not. He said she was hysterical, and they’d send her back with a policewoman in a taxi. He patted my shoulder and told me to run along and put a hot-water bottle in her bed. He’s rather a pet.”

The door opened again and Molly came in with the tea. As she set down the tray, Nora said easily,

“Miss Honor will be back any time now. You’d better put two hot-water bottles in her bed please, Molly.”

Molly made eyes like saucers.

“Miss Honor?”

Nora gave her casual laugh.

“Yes. And see the water’s boiling—there’s an angel.”

Molly departed, obviously bursting with curiosity. Nora began to pour out.

“Jeff’s been seeing Mark Aylwin. Oh—Mrs. Deeping’s made us peanut-butter toast! Carey, that’s for you. We have to drag it out of her by inches—or don’t I mean that? Anyhow Jeff really has got news—they’ve arrested Ernest. Go on, Jeff, tell us about it! Carey, here’s your tea and the butteriest bit of toast.”

Jeff gave her the cup and then propped himself against the mantelpiece on her side of the hearth. He said,

“Well, I went to see Mr. Aylwin for reasons of my own, and rather to my surprise he came across and told me things. Hood was arrested about an hour ago.”

Nora exclaimed, "But McGillivray never told me! I call that low!"

"The police don't tell everything they know. I was rather surprised that Aylwin did, but I thought he wanted to be friendly, and it will all be in the papers when Hood comes up before the magistrates. It seems one of Aylwin's clerks, an old fellow called Sharp, came to him this morning and said that after hearing Miss Gwent's evidence there was something he thought Aylwin ought to know. He said he hadn't thought of it as important until yesterday when he was in court for the first time, heard Miss Gwent, and saw Ellen. He said he remembered everything that happened on November 16th, both because of the case and because of Aylwin being away. He remembered Hood being sent for by Mrs. Maquisten. He says he got back to the office again at a little after half past four and quit just before half past five, leaving Sharp to close up. Just after he had gone Sharp remembered something he had meant to ask Hood. He locked up and hurried after him. Well, he saw him meet Ellen—that is to say he saw him meet a woman whom he identified yesterday as Ellen Bridling. As they were in very deep conversation, he didn't like to interrupt them and sheered off without being seen. But before he did so he had come up pretty close. There was a crowd on the pavement. The shops along there all close at half past five, and the side-walks were full of people going home. He was right up behind Hood before it got home on him that something of the nature of a private conversation was going on. People do talk like that in a crowd—I've done it myself. Well, he was just going to touch Hood on the arm and ask whatever it was he had run after him to ask, when he heard him say, 'Look here, there's nothing to worry about—I've got it all planned. You've just got to do exactly what I tell you and everything will be quite all right.' When Sharp heard that he thought he'd better not butt in. He edged away out of the crowd and down a side street. He said he never thought about any of it again until he heard Miss Gwent's evidence yesterday and recognized Ellen Bridling in court. Then it came back to him, and the more he thought about it, the less he felt he could keep it to himself. He didn't sleep all night, and by the time Aylwin went out for lunch he'd got to the point where he followed him and made a clean breast of it. Aylwin took him off to Scotland Yard, and they've collected Hood."

Carey had the giddy feeling of things sliding past her, sliding away. She shut her eyes and leaned back against the cushions of her chair. There were two cushions, one blue and one green. She put her head against the blue cushion and waited for the giddy feeling to pass. A hand came down and took away the cup and plate which had slid together in her lap. She thought it was Jeff Stewart's hand. She looked through her lashes, and was aware of him sitting on the arm of her chair, screening

her from the others. Dennis had moved round to the other side of the table. There was so much of Jeff that he made a very adequate screen. She thought, "It's nice of him—and nice not to make a fuss."

He put down the plate and cup and went on talking. They all talked, except Carey.

And then Molly opened the door and said, "Please, ma'am, Miss Honor's here," and Nora jumped up and ran out, dragging Dennis with her. Carey heard a tempestuous "I don't care what you say, Den! You've *got* to come—you've got to be nice to her for once in your life!"

They went out. The door banged.

Jeff turned round and took hold of Carey's hands.

"You're cold," he said.

His hands were very warm and strong. Carey opened her eyes and smiled.

"I'm all right, Jeff. It was just a little like being in a train—everything going past—rather quick——"

"Let it go, honey."

"You haven't called me that for a long time."

"Are you going to let me? You used to say, 'No'."

"Did I? It's such a long time ago."

"It doesn't matter how long it is as far as I'm concerned. You know that."

"Yes—you said so in court. It was a dreadfully public proposal, Jeff."

Still holding her hands, he said,

"You didn't give me any answer either then or the first time. Do I get one now?"

Her lashes came down. She said haltingly,

"I—don't know, Jeff. I don't think—I—ought to."

"Why?"

"You've been so good. I don't know what I'd have done without you——" Her voice went away into a murmur.

The very strong hands which were holding hers tightened painfully.

"If you're thinking of having me out of gratitude, honey, I'm not taking any."

Her eyes opened with a startled expression.

"I didn't say anything about having you."

"Won't you?"

She hadn't known that his voice could be so melting soft. It made her breath catch and her words stumble.

"You oughtn't—to marry—someone—who's been mixed up—in a murder."

"We've both been mixed up in it. Now we're in the clear again. I don't propose

we shall spend our lives raking over the garbage.”

“Other people will.”

He laughed.

“They’ll soon stop. Of course if you’re going to get down on your hands and knees and rake too, you can spoil your life and my life, but it would be a pretty foolish thing to do. We’ve got a good life coming.”

Carey began to feel, “Yes, we have,” but what she said was,

“Have we?”

He let go of her, laying her hands down very gently in her lap. Then he said soberly,

“If you want it that way. Do you?”

The hands had been warm. Now they began to feel cold again. When Carey lifted them they shook a little. They went out towards him with a groping movement, but he did not touch them. Instead he put his arms right round her and said,

“Going to take me, honey?”

Carey said, “Yes.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Silence in Court* by Patricia Wentworth [Dora Amy Elles]]