

WHITE FACE

EDGAR WALLACE

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WHITE FACE

By
EDGAR WALLACE



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DEDICATED
TO MY DEAR FRIEND
GEORGE DORAN

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All the characters represented in this book are purely imaginary

MICHAEL QUIGLEY had a fair working knowledge of perverse humanity, having acquaintance with burglars, the better class of confidence man, professional forgers, long firm operators, swindlers, ingenious and naïve, bank workers, bucket-shop keepers and pickpockets. He did not know White Face because nobody knew him, but that was a pleasure deferred. Sooner or later, the lone operator would make a mistake and come within the purview of a crime reporter.

Michael knew almost everybody at Scotland Yard and addressed chief constables by their first names. He had spent week-ends with Dumont, the hangman, and had helped him through an attack of delirium tremens. He had in his room signed photographs of *ci-devant* royalties, heavy-weight champions and leading ladies. He knew just how normal and abnormal people would behave in almost any circumstances. But personal experience failed him in the case of Janice Harman, although he had heard of such cases.

He could understand why a girl with no responsibilities (since she was an orphan) and three thousand pounds a year should want to do something useful in life and should choose to become a nurse in an East End clinic; other girls had allowed their enthusiasm for humanity to lead them into similar vocations, and Janice only differed from the majority in that she had not wearied of her philanthropy.

She was very lovely, though he could never analyse the qualities which made for loveliness. She had amazingly dear eyes and a mouth that was red and sensitive—perhaps it was the quality of her skin. He was never sure—the only thing he was certain about was that he could look at her for hours and wanted to look at her for ever.

The one quality in her which made him wriggle uncomfortably was her cursed motherliness. He could never bridge the gulf which separated her from his twenty-seven years.

She was twenty-three and, as she often told him, a woman of twenty-three was at least twenty years older than a man of the same age. But twenty-three can be motherly or cruel. One night she told him something that struck all the colour out of life. It was the night they went to supper at the Howdah Club—the night of Michael's pay-day.

He knew, of course, about her romantic correspondent. Had sneered at him, raved at him, grown wearily amused about it all. The correspondence started in

the most innocent fashion. One day a letter had come to Janice's flat in Bury Street, asking if she would be kind enough to place the writer in touch with his old nurse, who had fallen on evil times. This was a few months after she had begun her work in Dr. Marford's clinic and one of the newspapers had found a good story in the "rich young society woman" who had given her life to good works. The letter was written from South Africa and enclosed five pounds, which the writer begged her to hand to his old nurse if she found her, or to the funds of the clinic if she did not.

"How do you know this fellow isn't working a confidence trick on you?" demanded Michael.

"Don't be stupid," said Janice scornfully. "Because you are a wretched crime reporter you think that the world is made up of criminals."

"And I'm right," said Michael.

That the unknown stranger had arrived in England Michael did not know until ten days later. She called him up, asked him to take her to supper: she had some important things to tell him.

"You're one of the oldest friends I have, Michael," she said, speaking rather breathlessly. "And I feel that I ought to tell you."

He listened, stunned.

She might have seen how pale his face was, but she purposely did not look at him, fixing her eyes on the dancing couples on the floor.

"I want you to meet him—you may not think he is wonderful, but I've always known . . . from his letters, I mean . . . he has lived a terrible life in the wilds of Africa; I'll be terribly sorry to leave dear Dr. Marford . . . I shall have to tell him, of course. . . ."

She was incoherent, a little hysterical.

"Let me get this right, Janice. I'll try to forget that I love you and that I was only waiting until I got my salary raised before I told you." His voice was very steady, so unemotional that there was every encouragement to look at him. Nevertheless she kept her eyes steadily averted.

"This isn't unusual—I have heard of such cases. A girl starts a correspondence with a man she has never seen. The correspondence grows more intimate, more friendly. She weaves around him a net of romance. And then she meets him and is either—disillusioned, or else falls for him. I've heard of happy marriages which started that way—I've heard of others. I can't believe it is true—but obviously it is, and I don't exactly know what to do or say."

It was at this moment that he missed something from her hand—a long oval-shaped ruby ring that she had worn since he had first known her.

Instantly she knew what he was looking for and dropped her hand out of sight.

“Where is your ring?” he asked bluntly.

She had gone very red: the question was almost unnecessary.

“I’ve—— I don’t see what it has to do with you?”

He drew a long breath.

“Nothing has to do with me—but I’m curious. An exchange of love tokens?”

He was very tactless to-night.

“It was my ring and I refuse to be cross-examined by a—by somebody who hasn’t any right. You’re being horrible.”

“Am I?” He nodded slowly. “I suppose I am, and I know I’ve no right to be horrid or anything else. I won’t ask you to show me what you got in exchange. A bead necklace perhaps——”

She started at this chance shot.

“How did you know? I mean, it is very valuable.”

He looked long and earnestly at the girl.

“I want to vet this fellow, Janice.”

She saw his face now and was in a panic—not on his behalf, but on her own.

“Vet—I don’t know what you mean?”

He tried, with a smile, to minimise the offensiveness of what he had to say.

“Well, make inquiries about him. You vet a horse before you buy him——”

“I’m not buying him—he is a rich man—well, he has two farms.” Her manner was cold. There was a touch of resentment in her voice. “Vet him! You’ll find he is a criminal, of course; if you can’t find this, your fertile imagination will invent something. Perhaps he is White Face! He is one of your specialities, isn’t he?”

He groaned miserably. Yet here was an opportunity to escape from a maddening topic.

“He is not an invention; he’s a fact. Ask Gasso.”

Gasso, the slim *maître d’hôtel*, was near the table. Mike beckoned him.

“Ah! That White Face! Where is your so-called police? My poor friend Bussini has his restaurant ruined by the fellow.”

It was to Bussini’s restaurant that White Face had come in the early hours of a morning and, stepping to the side of Miss Angelo Hillingcote, had relieved

her of six thousand pounds worth of jewels before the dancers realised that the man in the white mask, who had appeared from nowhere, was not a guest in fancy dress. It was all over in a second or two and he was gone. A policeman at the corner of Leicester Square saw a man fly past on a motor-cycle. The cycle had been seen on the Embankment going eastward. It was the third and most spectacular appearance of White Face in the West End of London.

“My patrons are nervous—who is not?” Gasso apparently shared their nervousness. “Fortunately they are refined people——” He stopped suddenly and stared at the entrance of the room. “She should not come!” he almost shrieked and darted forward to meet an unwanted guest.

This was a blonde lady who called herself Dolly de Val. It was found for her by an imaginative film agent, who thought—and rightly—that it sounded more pretentious than Annie Gootch, which name she had borne in the days of her poverty. She was not a good actress, because she could never quite remember all that the producer told her, and more often than not she was the only girl in the front line who kicked with her right leg when she should have kicked with her left. And frequently she was not in the line at all.

But there were quite a lot of people who found her attractive, and in the course of the years she became very rich, and packed a considerable amount of her fortune into platinum settings, so that in all the fashionable night clubs of London she was known as “Diamond Dolly.”

Managers of such clubs and fashionable cabaret restaurants grew a little nervous after the Hillingcote affair, and when Dolly booked a supper table they rang up Scotland Yard and Superintendent Mason, who was in control of “C” area, but had an executive post at head-quarters, would delegate a couple of detectives arrayed like festive gentlemen, but looking remarkably like detectives, to the club or restaurant honoured by her dazzling display, and these were generally to be found lounging in the vestibule or drinking surreptitious glasses of beer in the manager’s office.

But sometimes Dolly did not notify her intentions beforehand. And she would glitter into the club surrounded by handsome young men, and a hasty table would be wedged impossibly on the packed floor and waiters would lay the table with extraordinary enthusiasm, conveying the impression the while that this was a favoured position for a table.

She came this night unheralded into the Howdah Club and Gasso, who was Latin and entirely without self-control, threw up his hands to the ceiling, stiff with cupids, and said things in Italian which sounded very romantic to people who only understood English.

“No room—don’t be stupid, Gasso! Of course there’s room. Anywhere

will do, won't it, boys?"

So they put a table near the door, and Dolly sat and ordered *consommé Julienne*, chicken *à la Maryland*.

"I don't like you to see here, madam," said Gasso fearfully, "with so much beautiful jewellery. . . . Miss 'Illingcote—ah, what a disaster! This fellow with the white face——"

"Oh, shut up, Gasso!" Dolly snapped. "And, after that, we'll have *coupe Jacques* and coffee . . ."

The Russian dancers had taken the floor and had made their exit after the third encore, when——

"Bail up—you!"

Dolly, who had seen the faces of her escort suddenly blanch, half turned in her chair.

The man in the doorway wore a long black coat that reached to his heels, his face was covered by a white cloth in which two eye-holes had been cut.

He carried an automatic in his gloved hand, with the other, which was bare, he reached out.

There was a "snick"—the long diamond chain about Dolly's neck parted. She stood frozen with fear and saw the glittering thing vanish into his pocket.

Men had risen from the tables, women were screaming, the band stood ludicrously grouped.

"After him!" yelled a voice.

But the man in the white mask was gone and the cowering footmen, who had bolted on his entrance, came out from cover.

"Don't move—I'll get you out in a minute." Mike's voice was urgent, but she heard him like one in a dream. "I'll take you home; I must get through to my paper. If you faint, I'll be rough with you!"

"I'm not going to faint," she quavered.

He got her out before the police came, and found a cab.

"It was dreadful; who is he?"

"I don't know," he answered shortly. Then—"What's this romantic lover's name—you've never told me?"

Her nerves were on edge; she needed the stimulant of righteous anger to recover her poise and here was an excuse.

Mike Quigley listened unmoved to her tirade.

"A good looker, I'll bet; not a gaunt-faced, tow-haired brute like me," he said savagely. "O God, what a fool you are, Janice! I'm going to meet him.

Where is he staying?"

"You'll not meet him." She could have wept. "And I won't tell you where he is staying. I hope I never see you again!"

She declined the hand he offered to assist her out of the cab; did not answer his "good night."

Mr. Quigley went raging back to Fleet Street, and all the vicious things he wrote about White Face he meant for the handsome and romantic stranger from South Africa.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER II

A SLOVENLY description of Janice Harman would be that she was the product of her generation. She had inherited the eternal qualities of womanhood as she enjoyed a freedom of development which was unknown in the formal age when guardians were restrictive and gloomy figures looming behind the young and beautiful heiress.

Janice had attained independence almost unconsciously; had her own banking account when she was seventeen, and left behind the tangibilities of discipline when she passed from the tutelage of the venerable head mistress of her school.

A bachelor uncle was the only relative she had possessed. In a spasmodic and jolly way he was interested in his niece, made her a lavish allowance, sent her beautiful and useless presents at Christmas and on her birthday, which he invariably remembered a month after. When he was killed in a motor accident (the three chorus girls who were driving with him escaped with a shaking) she found herself a comparatively rich young woman.

He had appointed as trustee a friend whose sole claim to his confidence lay in the fact that he was the best judge of hunters in England, and was one of the few men who could drink half a dozen glasses of port blindfolded and unerringly distinguish the vintage of each.

Janice left school with an exalted code of values and certain ideals which she religiously maintained. She had in her bedroom a framed portrait of the Prince of Wales, and she took the Sacrament on Christmas mornings.

At eighteen all men were heroes or dreadful; at nineteen she recognised a middle class which were neither heroic nor unspeakable. At twenty the high lights had receded and some of the duller tones were taking shape and perspective.

Donald Bateman belonged to the old regime of idealism. In his handsome

face and athletic figure she recaptured some of the enthusiasm of the classroom. He was Romance and Adventure, the living receptacle in which were stored all the desirable virtues of the perfect man. His modesty—he no more than inferred his excellent qualities—his robust personality, his good humour, his childish views about money, his naïveté, were all adorable. He accepted her judgments and estimates of people and events, giving to her a sense of superiority which was very delightful.

In one respect he pleased her: he did not embarrass her more than once. He never forgot that their acquaintance was of the slightest, and the word “love” had never been uttered. The second time they had met he had kissed her, and she was ridiculously uncomfortable. He must have seen this, for he did not repeat the experiment. But they talked of marriage and their home and the wonders of South Africa; she could even discuss in a prim way the problem of children’s education. A breezy figure of a man, delightfully boyish.

She was taking afternoon duty at the clinic and had been worrying about him all the morning—he had been a little depressed when she had seen him last.

“Did your money come?” she asked, with a smile.

He took out his pocket-book and drew forth two crisp notes. She saw they were each for a hundred pounds.

“It arrived this morning. I drew out these in case of emergency—I hate being without money when I’m in London. Angel, if the money hadn’t turned up, I should have been borrowing from you this morning, and then what would you have thought of me?”

She smiled again. Men were so silly about money. Michael, for instance. She had wanted him to have a little car, and he had been almost churlish when she offered to help him.

He sat down and lit a cigarette, blowing a cloud of smoke to the ceiling.

“Did you enjoy your dinner?”

She made a little face.

“Not very much.”

“He’s a reporter, isn’t he? I know a reporter on the *Cape Times*—quite a good chap——”

“It wasn’t Michael who made the dinner a failure,” she intervened loyally. “It was a man who came into the club with a white mask.”

“Oh!” He raised his eyebrows. “The Howdah Club—White Face? I’ve been reading about it in this morning’s papers. I wish I’d been there. What is happening to the men in this country that they allow a fellow like that to get

away with it? If I'd been within reach of him one of us would have been on the floor. The trouble with you people in England is that you're scared of firearms. I know from my own experience . . .”

He told a story of a prospector's camp in Rhodesia; it was a story which did not place him in an unfavourable light.

He sat facing the window, and during the narrative she had time to scrutinise him—not critically, but with indiscriminate approval. He was older than she had thought; forty, perhaps. There were little lines round his eyes, and harder ones near his mouth. That he had led a difficult and a dangerous life, she knew. One cannot starve and thirst in the desert of the Kalahari, or lie alone racked with fever on the banks of the Tuli River, or find oneself unarmed and deserted by carriers in the lion country west of Massikassi, and present an unlined and boyish face to the world. He still bore beneath his chin the long scar which a leopard's claw had left.

“Living in Africa nowadays is like living in Bond Street,” he sighed. “All the old mystery has departed. I don't believe there's a lion left between Salisbury and Bulawayo. In the old days you used to find them lying in the middle of the road . . .”

She could listen to him for hours, but, as she explained, there was work to do.

“I'll come down and bring you home—where is it?” he asked.

She explained the exact location of Tidal Basin.

“Dr. Marford—what sort of a man is he?”

“He's a darling,” said Janice enthusiastically.

“We'll have him out at the Cape.” He echoed her enthusiasm. “It's very easy. There's an extraordinary amount of work to be done, especially with the coloured children. If I can buy that farm next to mine, we might turn the farm building into a sort of convalescent home. It's one of those big, rambling Dutch houses and, as I've rather a nice house of my own, I shouldn't have use for the other.”

She laughed at this.

“You're suffering from land hunger, Donald,” she said. “I shall have to write and get particulars of this desirable property!”

He frowned.

“Have you any friends at the Cape?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“I know a boy there—he was a Rhodes scholar—but I haven't written to him since he left England.”

“H’m!” He was rather serious now. “When strangers come into the property market they soak ’em! Let me give you a word of advice: never try to buy land in South Africa through an agent—half of ’em are robbers, the other half an incompetent lot. One thing is certain, that the property at Paarl—that is where my farm is—will double itself in value in a couple of years. They are running a new railway through—it passes at the end of my land—and that will make an immense difference. If I had a lot of money to invest I should put every cent of it in land.”

He explained, however, that the Cape Dutch, who were the largest landowners in the country, were a suspicious folk who never did business with an Englishman, except to the latter’s disadvantage.

He took out the two hundred pound notes and looked at them again, rustling them affectionately.

“Why don’t you put it back in the bank?” she asked.

“Because I like the feel of it,” he said gaily. “These English notes are so clean-looking.”

He returned the case to his pocket, and suddenly caught her by both arms. She saw a light in his eyes which she had never seen before. She was breathless and a little frightened.

“How long are we going to wait?” he asked in a low voice. “I can get a special licence; we can be married and on the Continent in two days.”

She disengaged herself; discovered, to her amazement, that she was trembling, and that the prospect of an immediate marriage filled her with a sense of consternation.

“That is impossible,” she said breathlessly. “I’ve ever such a lot of work to do, and I’ve got to finish up my work at the clinic. And, Donald, you said you didn’t want to be married for months.”

He smiled down at her.

“I can wait months or years,” he said lightly, “but I can’t wait for my lunch. Come along!”

She had only half an hour to give to him, but he promised to meet her and take her to dinner that night. The prospect did not arouse in her any sense of pleasurable anticipation. She told herself she loved him. He was everything that she would have him be. But marriage—immediate marriage? She shook her head.

“What are you shaking your head about?” he asked.

They were at Bussini’s, and, as it was before one o’clock, the restaurant was empty save for themselves.

"I was just thinking," she said.

"About my farm?" He was looking at her searchingly. "No? About me?"

And then suddenly she asked:

"What is your bank, Donald?"

He was completely surprised at the question.

"My bank? Well, the Standard Bank—not exactly the Standard Bank, but a bank that is affiliated with it. Why do you ask?"

She had a good and benevolent reason for putting the question, but this she was not prepared to reveal.

"I will tell you later," she said, and when she saw that she had worried him she was on the point of making her revelation. "It's really nothing, Donald."

He drove down with her to Tidal Basin, but refused the offer of her car to take him back, his excuse being that he felt nervous of the London traffic. She was secretly glad that there was some feature of London life of which he stood in awe.

Mr. Donald Bateman came back to town in a taxi and spent the afternoon in the City office of a tourist agency, examining Continental routes. He would like to have stayed in London; but then, he would like to have stayed in so many places from which expediency had dragged him. There was Inez. She had grown into quite a beautiful woman. He had seen her, though she was not aware of the fact. It was curious how women developed. He remembered her—rather sharp-featured, a gawk of a girl who had bored him utterly. In what way would Janice grow? For the moment she was very delectable, though she had qualities which exasperated him. Perfect women, he decided, were difficult to find.

When he had caught her by the shoulders that morning and looked down into her eyes, he had expected some other reaction than that fit of shivering. She had shown her alarm too clearly for him to carry the matter any further. It must be marriage, of course. But marriage was rather dangerous in a country like this. That reporter friend of hers? He hated reporters; they were a prying, unscrupulous lot. And crime reporters were the worst.

He began to feel uncomfortable, and turned with relief to a contemplation of the physical perfection of Inez. From Inez his mind strayed to other women. What had become of Lorna, for example? Tommy had found her, probably, and forgiven everything. Tommy was always a weak-willed sap. But Inez! . . .

He and Janice dined together that night, and most resolutely he chose the Howdah Club. Already the outrage had had effect upon the attendance: the dining-room was half empty, and Gasso stalked up and down, a picture of gloom.

“This has ruined me, young miss,” he said brokenly. “You were here last night with the newspaper gentleman. People will not come unless they have no jewels. And I particularly desire jewelled people here, but not jewelled as Miss Dolly!”

“I hope he comes to-night,” said Donald with a quiet smile.

“You ’ope so, eh?” asked the agitated Gasso. “You desire me to be thrown into the street with only my shirt on my back? That is good for business!”

Janice was laughing, but she succeeded in pacifying the outraged *maître d’hôtel*.

“It certainly is empty, but I don’t suppose we shall see our white-faced gentleman,” said Donald. “It’s rather like old times. I remember when I was in Australia there was a gang which held up a bank—they wore white masks, too. They got away with some money, by Jove! Ever heard of the Furses? They were brothers—the cleverest hold-up men in Australia.”

“Perhaps this is one of them,” she said thoughtlessly.

“Eh?”

She could have sworn he was frightened at that moment. Something she saw in his eyes. It was absurd, of course, for Donald Bateman was afraid of nothing.

“I shouldn’t think so,” he said.

Half-way through dinner, when they were discussing some amiable nothing, he dropped his knife and fork on the plate. Again she saw that frightened look intensified. He was staring at somebody, and she followed the direction of his eyes.

A man had come in. He must have been nearly sixty, was slim, dandified, rather fussy. He had a small party with him, and they were surrounded by waiters. Curiously enough, she knew him: curious, because she had made his acquaintance in a slum.

“Who—who is that?” His voice was strained. “That man there, with the girls? Do you—do you know him?”

“That is Dr. Rudd,” she said.

“Rudd!”

“He’s the police surgeon of our division—I’ve often seen him. In fact, he once came to the clinic. Quite an unpleasant man—he had nothing at all nice to say about our work.”

“Dr. Rudd!”

The colour was coming back to his face. He had gone pale! She was astounded.

“Do you know him?” she asked in surprise.

He smiled with difficulty.

“No, he reminds me of somebody—an old friend of mine in—er—Rhodesia.”

She noticed that when on their way out he passed the doctor’s group Donald was patting his face with a handkerchief as though he were healing a scratch.

“Are you hurt?” she asked.

“A little neuralgia.” He laughed cheerily. “That is the penalty one pays for sleeping out night after night in the rain.”

He told her a story of a rainfall in Northern Rhodesia that had lasted four weeks on end.

“And all that time,” he said, “I had not so much as a tent.”

She left him at the door of the flat in Bury Street, and he was frankly disappointed, for he had expected to be asked up to her apartment. There was consolation on the way back to the hotel, certain anticipations of an interview he had arranged for the morrow. It was not with Janice.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER III

IN his rare moments of leisure Dr. Marford was wont to stand in his surgery, behind the red calico curtains which were stretched across the big window level with the bridge of his thin, aristocratic nose, and muse, a little sourly, upon Tidal Basin, its people and its future.

He had material for speculation on those summer evenings, when the light of the brazen day still persisted in the western skies, and when every dive and tenement spilt the things that were so decently hidden in the cold days and nights of winter. On such nights the sweltering heat forced into the open the strangest beings, creatures which even the oldest inhabitants could not remember having seen before and the most hardened could hardly wish to see again.

The red calico curtain was strung across the window of the large room which was his surgery. It had been a boot store and a confectioner’s parlour. Loucilensky, of infamous memory, had housed his “club” in it and found the side door which led to the little yard a convenient exit for his squalid patrons.

It was a derelict property when Dr. Marford came to found his practice here. All Tidal Basin knew that the doctor was so poor that he had painted, distempered and scrubbed the place from top to bottom with his own hands.

He had probably sewn his own curtains, had certainly collected from the Caledonian Market, where you may furnish a house for a few pounds, such domestic equipment as was necessary for his well-being. Tidal Basin, which favoured those cinemas which featured pictures of high life, had despised him for his poverty. A consumptive plumber had fixed the huge sink, which was an unsightly feature of one corner of the surgery, and had received, in return, free treatment and medicine until he went the dingy way of all consumptive plumbers.

Tidal Basin had known and still knew Dr. Marford as the “penny doctor.” They knew him better as the “baby doctor,” for, after he had been in Tidal Basin a year, by some miracle he succeeded in founding a free clinic, where he gave ray treatment to children. He must have had influential friends, for on top of his other activities he founded a small convalescent home at the seaside.

His work was his obsession, and not a penny of the money which came to him went to his own advantage. The drab surgery remained as shabby as it had always been—a very dreary place compared with the spick and span little palace of white enamel and glass where the children of Tidal Basin were made acquainted with artificial sunlight and the beneficent quality of strange rays.

He saw Janice Harman pass the window and went to open the door to her. It was not true that this preoccupied man was hardly aware of her loveliness. He used to sit at his desk and think about her for hours on end. What strange dreams came to disorder the tidiness of his methodical mind was known only to Dr. Marford; and now, when she told him awkwardly, a little disjointedly, of her future plans, he showed no evidence of the sudden desolation and despair that crushed him.

(“The oddest people fall in love with Janice,” said her best friend.)

“Oh!” he said, and bit his thin lip thoughtfully. “That is very unfortunate—for the clinic. What does Mr. Quigley say to all this?”

Hitherto he had felt an unreasonable antipathy to the young reporter, who had been a too frequent visitor to the clinic, and had written too much and too enthusiastically about Dr. Marford’s ventures to please a man who shrank instinctively from publicity.

“Mr. Quigley has no right to raise any objections whatever.” There was a note of defiance in her voice. “He is a very good friend—or was.”

There was an embarrassing pause.

“But isn’t any longer,” said Dr. Marford gently.

He experienced an inexplicable sense of kinship with Michael Quigley.

Her native loyalty made her modify her attitude.

“I like Michael—he is extraordinarily nice, but very domineering. He was

awfully good to me the other night, and I was a beast to him. I was in the Howdah Club when that dreadful man came.”

He turned an inquiring face to her.

“Which dreadful man?”

“The robber—White Face.”

He nodded.

“Yes, I know. I read the newspapers. I was talking to Sergeant Elk about him. There is a theory that he lives in this neighbourhood, a theory for which I am afraid your young friend is responsible. Are you wise?”

He asked the question suddenly.

“About—my marriage? Is any girl wise, Dr. Marford? Suppose I’d met this man every day of my life for years, should I know him—I mean, as one knows one’s husband? Men always put on their best appearance for women, and unless one lives in the same house with them it is impossible to be absolutely sure.”

Marford nodded, fondling his bony chin.

There was a long silence, which he broke.

“I shall be sorry to lose you; you have been a most enthusiastic helper.”

Now she came to a delicate stage of the interview—delicate because she knew how sensitive he was on the point.

“I’d like to give the Institute a little present,” she said jerkily. “A thousand pounds——”

He raised his hand; his expression was genuinely pained.

“No, no, no; I couldn’t hear of it. You asked me once before if I would. No, I am satisfied that I have not paid you for the help you have given us. That is your splendid contribution to the clinic.”

She knew he would be adamant on this point and had already decided that if he refused her gift it should take the form of an anonymous donation on her wedding day. Michael, in one of his more cynical moods, had once accused her of being theatrical, and the charge was so ridiculous that she had laughed. Yet there is a touch of theatricality in every sentimentalist, and Janice Harman was not without that weakness.

Unexpectedly the doctor put out his thin hand and took hers.

“I hope you will be happy,” he said, and this was at once a benediction and a dismissal.

She crossed the road at Endley Street. At the corner stood a tall, good-looking man, with greying hair at his temples. To her surprise he was talking to a woman, talking confidentially it seemed. Presently the woman walked

away and he came, smiling, to meet the girl.

“What a ghastly place, darling! I am so happy you’re leaving it.”

“Who was that woman you were speaking to?” she asked curiously.

He laughed—she loved that laugh of his.

“Woman? Oh, yes.” He looked round and nodded towards a slim figure walking ahead of them on the opposite side of the road. “It was rather odd—she thought I was her brother, and when she saw she’d made a mistake she was a little embarrassed. Rather a pretty girl.”

Her car was in a near-by garage—in the early days she had driven up to the clinic, which was at the far end of Endley Street, but the doctor had advised her against the practice—advice well justified, for in a week everything that was movable in the car had been stolen by the parents of the children she cared for.

She seated herself at the wheel, a radiant figure of youth, he thought, more beautiful than even he in his wildest imaginings had dreamed. The car came down the slope of the road; she saw the shabby figure of the doctor watching them, and waved her hand to him.

“Who was that?” he asked carelessly.

“That was Dr. Marford.”

“Your boss, eh? I’d like to have had a look at him. He’s a big noise around here, isn’t he?”

She laughed at this.

“There isn’t a tinier murmur in Tidal Basin,” she said. “But he’s marvellous! I sometimes think he starves himself to keep his clinic going.”

She rhapsodised all the way through the City. In Cranbourn Street they were held up by a traffic block. By this time he had gained command of the conversation and the excellences of Dr. Marford were relegated to a second place. He was talking of South Africa and his two farms, one in the wilds of Rhodesia, the other amidst the beauties of Paarl. He liked talking of the Paarl property.

“It’s going to be terribly slow for you, though there is some sort of social life at the Cape. I’m pretty well known——”

“There’s somebody who knows you,” she laughed.

He turned his head quickly, but could distinguish amongst the hurrying throng on the sidewalk no familiar face.

“Where?” he asked.

“There—that dark man.” She looked back. “He is standing by the hosiers.”

He looked round and frowned.

“Oh, yes, I know him—not very well, though; I got the better of him in a business deal, and he hasn’t forgiven me.” He uttered an exclamation. “Darling, I can’t take you to the theatre to-night: I’ve just remembered. Will you forgive me?”

She was too happy, too completely under the fascination of this exalted adventure, to resent the missed engagement. This good-looking stranger who had come from the blue, whose name she could hardly use without an unaccountable sense of shyness, was Romance—the fulfilment of vague and delightful dreams. He was still outside the realms of reality.

She had known him for ten days; it seemed that it was a lifetime. Once or twice during the journey she was on the point of telling him of the surprise she had for him. He was a great home-lover; his self-confessed sin was that he coveted his neighbour’s land. There was a farm adjoining his at Paarl that had come into the market, could be had for a mere £8,000. He waxed enthusiastic on the advantage of having this additional property—vineyards and orange groves, new pastures for his cattle.

He returned to the subject as the car was crossing Piccadilly Circus.

“You’ve made me ambitious, you angel,” he said. “I’m a poor farmer and can’t lay my hands on a fortune, so the farm will have to go.”

Again she was nearly telling him. She had a friend in Cape Town, a young lawyer, a Rhodes scholar, whom she had met at Oxford. That very morning she had wired to him, asking him to buy the property.

He parted from her at the door of her flat in Bury Street, and her chauffeur, who was waiting, drove him to his modest hotel. At parting:

“I hate the thought of losing that farm—if I could cable four thousand pounds to-morrow morning I could clinch the bargain.”

She smiled demurely and went up to her room to daydream of green slopes and high, sun-baked mountains where the little baboons chatter all day and night.

At ten o’clock that night, when she was undressing for bed, came a cablegram which left her white and shaking. It was in one sense remarkable that the first person she thought of to help her in her necessity was Michael Quigley; but when she reached for the telephone with a trembling hand it was to learn that Michael had left the office on a hurry call. She looked at the clock; it was by then half-past ten. She changed her mind about going to bed and began to dress quickly.

AFTER JANICE had left, Dr. Marford walked slowly to that corner of the surgery where his drugs were stocked and began to dispense the medicines he had prescribed in the course of the day. This was generally his afternoon task, but he had spent most of the day at the clinic.

He wearied of the task very soon and went to his desk. There was a heap of papers to go through—the accounts from the clinic showed a heavy deficit. The place ate money: there was always new apparatus to buy, new equipment to furnish. The daily report from the convalescent home in Eastbourne, which maintained the progress of a dozen small hooligans of Tidal Basin, was as cheerless; but it brought no sense of depression to Dr. Marford. He grudged nothing to these ventures of his—neither time nor exertion.

He was expecting a remittance almost any day. There was a man in Antwerp who sent him money regularly, and another in Birmingham—he pushed the papers aside, looked at his watch and went out by the side door into the yard.

It was a fairly large yard. At one end was the big shed in which old Gregory Wicks kept his taxicab, paying a small weekly rent.

Old Gregory Wicks had been a famous driver even in the days of the festive hansom. And always he had housed his horses and his resplendent cab in Tidal Basin, where he was born and where he hoped to end his days. In his advanced middle age came the taxicab. Gregory refused to regard motor vehicles as new-fangled crazes that would soon go out of fashion. He was one of the first to sit at a driving wheel at a motor school and solve the mysteries of clutches and gears. He found his lameness no obstacle in obtaining a cabdriver's licence—he limped from a thirty-year-old injury to his ankle.

Always he was a night bird; even in the horse cab period he went clop-clopping along Piccadilly in the early hours of the morning, picking up swells from the clubs and driving them unimaginable distances to their country houses. And when the taxi came he continued his nocturnal wanderings. A silent, taciturn man, who never stood on a rank or invited the confidence of his brother drivers, he was known locally and abroad for his rigid honesty. It was he who restored to a certain Austrian baron a million kroners in hard paper cash, left in the cab by the Herr Baron in a moment of temporary aberration caused by a quarrel with a lady friend. Old Gregory had returned thousands of pounds' worth of goods left by absent-minded riders. In the police books he was marked "Reliable; honest; very excellent record."

You could see him and his cab on certain nights prowling along Regent Street, his long, white hair hanging over the collar of his coat, his fierce white moustache bristling from his pink, emaciated face, choosing his fares with a nice discrimination. He had no respect for any man save one. In his more than

seventy-year-old arms he packed a punch that was disconcerting to the punchee.

The doctor unfastened a door and passed through into Gallows Court. That narrow and unsavoury passage was alive with children—bare-legged, unwashed and happy. Nobody offered the doctor a friendly greeting. The frowsy men and women lounging in the doorways or at the upstairs windows favoured him with incurious glances. He was part of the bricks and mortar and mud of the place, one with the brick wall which separated his yard from this human sty. He belonged there, had a right in Gallows Court, and, that being so, might pass without notice or comment.

The last house in the court was No. 9; smaller than the others; the windows were clean, and even the lower one, which was heavily shuttered, had a strip of chintz curtain. He knocked at the door—three short quick raps, a pause and a fourth. This signal had been agreed as between himself and old man Wicks; for Gregory had been annoyed by runaway knocks and by the appearance on his doorstep of unwelcome visitors. He knew the regular hour at which the milkman called and the baker, and could cope with them. Whosoever else knocked at the door during the daytime received no answer. Marford heard the shuffle of feet on uncarpeted stairs and the door was opened.

“Come in, doctor.” Gregory’s voice was loud and hearty. He had been a shouter all his life, and age had not diminished the volume of his tone. “Don’t make a row; I expect the lodger’s asleep,” he said as he closed the door with a slam.

“He must be a very good sleeper if you don’t wake him, you noisy old man!” said Marford, with his quiet smile.

Gregory guffawed all the way up the stairs, opened the door of his room and the doctor passed in.

“How are you?”

“Fit as a flea, except this other little trouble, and I’m not going to mention that. I’m doing fine, doctor. Sit down. Where’s a chair? Here we are! What I owe to you, doctor! If the people in Tidal Basin knew what you’ve done for me——”

“Yes, yes,” said Marford good-humouredly. “Now let me have a look at you.”

He turned the old man’s face to the light and made a careful examination.

“You’re no better and no worse. If anything you’re a little better, I should think. I’ll test your heart.”

“My heart!” said the other scornfully. “I’ve got the heart of a lion! There was an Irish family moved in here and the woman wanted to borrow a

saucepan, and when I told her just what I thought of people who borrow saucepans, along came her husband—a new fellow, full of brag and bluster! I gave him one smack in the jaw and that was his finish!”

“You shouldn’t do it, Gregory. It was a stupid thing to do. I heard about it from one of my other patients.”

The old man was chuckling gleefully.

“I needn’t have done it at all,” he said. “Any of the boys round here would have put him out if I’d said the word. I dare say the lodger would, but of course I wouldn’t have wakened him up.”

“Is he here to-day?”

Gregory shook his head.

“The Lord knows! I never hear him come in or go out, except sometimes. I’ve never known a quieter fellow. Reformed, eh, doctor? I’ll bet you I know who reformed him! You’d never dream”—he lowered his voice—“that he was a man who’d spent half his life in stir——”

“You’re giving him a chance,” said Marford.

He was going, when the old man called him back.

“Doctor, I want to tell you something. I made my will to-day—not exactly a will, but I wrote down what I wanted doing with my money.”

“Have you got a lot, Gregory?” asked the other good-humouredly.

“More than you think.” There was a significance in the old man’s voice. “A lot more! It’s not money that makes me do what I’m doing—it’s pride—swank!”

To most men who had known him for years, Gregory Wicks was a taciturn and uncommunicative man. Marford was one of the few who knew him. He often thought that this loquacity which Gregory displayed at home was his natural reaction to the hours of silence on the box. Night after night for nearly half a century this old cabman had placed himself under a vow of silence. Once he explained why, and the reason was so inadequate that Marford, who was not easily amused, laughed in spite of himself. Gregory had in a talkative moment allowed a client—he always called his fares “clients”—to wish a counterfeit half-crown upon him. It was a lesson never to be forgotten.

The doctor often came in to chat with the old man, to hear stories of dead and forgotten celebrities whose names were famous in the eighties and the late seventies. As he was leaving, Gregory referred again to his lodger.

“It was a good idea putting up that shutter to keep out the noise, though personally there’s nothing that would stop me sleeping. I sometimes wish he’d be a bit more lively——”

“And come up and have a little chat with you at times?” suggested Marford.

Gregory almost shuddered.

“Not that! I don’t want to chat with anybody, especially strangers. I chat with you because you’ve been God’s-brother-Bill to me, to use a vulgar expression. I don’t say I’d have starved, because I shouldn’t have done. But I’d have lost something that I’d rather die than lose.”

He came down to the door and stood looking out after the doctor, even when Marford was out of sight. The noisy children did not gibe at him, and none of these frowzy ones hurled their inevitable and unprintable jests in his direction. A wandering policeman they would have covered with derision. Only the doctor and Gregory Wicks escaped their grimy humour; the latter because of that ready fist of his, the doctor—well, you never know when the doctor will be called in, and if he’s got a grudge against you who knows what he’ll slip into your medicine? Or suppose he had to use the knife, eh? Nice so-and-so fool you’d look, lying under chloroform with your inn’ards at his mercy! Fear was a governing factor of life in Gallows Court.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER V

THAT he had no other friends was good and sufficient reason why Mr. Elk should drop in at odd minutes to discuss with Dr. Marford the criminal tendencies and depravities of that section of the British Empire which lies between the northern end of Victoria Dock Road and the smelly drabness of Silvertown.

Elk called on the evening Janice Harman took her farewell, and found Dr. Marford’s melancholy eyes fixed upon the dreary pageant of Endley Street. They were working overtime in the shipyard, which was almost opposite his surgery, and the din of mechanical riveters would go on during the night. Dr. Marford was so accustomed to this noise that it was hardly noticeable. The sound of drunken songsters, the pandemonium which accompanied amateur pugilism, the shrill din of children playing in the streets—hereabouts they played till midnight—the rumbling of heavy lorries on the way to the Eastern Trading Company’s yard which went on day and night never disturbed his sleep.

“If I was sure this was hell”—Mr. Elk nodded his own gloomy face towards the thoroughfare—“I’d get religion. Not that I don’t say my prayers every night—I do. I pray for the Divisional Inspector, the Area Inspector, the Big Five and the Chief Commissioner; I pray for the Examining Board and all

other members of the criminal classes.”

The ghost of a smile illuminated the thin face of Dr. Marford. He was a man of thirty-five who looked older. Spare of build, his greying hair was thin on the top. He wore absurd little side-whiskers half-way down his cheek, and gold-rimmed spectacles, one lens of which was usually cracked.

For a long time they stood in silence behind the calico curtains, attracting no attention from the passers-by, for there was no light in the surgery.

“My idea of hell,” said Elk again.

Dr. Marford laughed softly.

“With its own particular devil, by all accounts,” he said.

Detective-Sergeant Elk permitted himself to guffaw.

“*That* bunk! Listen, these people believe anything. Funny thing, they don’t read, so they couldn’t have got the idea out of books. It’s one of the—what do you call the word—um—damn it! I’ve got it on the end of my tongue. . . .”

“Legends?”

“That’s it—it’s like the Russians passing through England with the snow on their boots. Everybody’s met the man who saw ’em, but *you* never meet him. Every time there’s a murder nobody can explain, *you* see it in the newspaper bills: ‘The Devil of Tidal Basin,’ an’ even after you’ve pinched the murderer an’ all the earth knows that he never *heard* of Tidal Basin, or thinks it’s a patent washbowl, they still hang on to the idea. These newspapers! Next summer you’ll have joy-wagons full of American trippers comin’ here. Limehouse has had it, why shouldn’t we?”

A bright young newspaper man had invented the Devil of the Basin. It was the general opinion in Tidal Basin that he wasn’t any too bright either.

“There is a devil—hundreds of ’em! The waterside crowd wouldn’t think twice of putting me out. They tried one night—Dan Salligan. The flowers I sent to the man when he was in hospital is nobody’s business.”

Dr. Marford moved uncomfortably.

“I’m afraid I helped that legend to grow. The reporter saw me and very—er—indiscreetly, I told him of the patient who used to come to me—he hasn’t been for months, by the way—always came at midnight with his face covered with a mask. It wasn’t good to see—the face, I mean. Explosion in a steel works.”

Elk was interested.

“Where does he live?”

The doctor shook his head.

“I don’t know. The reporter tried to find out but couldn’t. He always paid

me in gold—a pound a visit, which is forty times more than I get from my regulars.”

Mr. Elk was not impressed. His eyes were fixed upon the squalling larrikins in the roadway.

“Weeds!” he said, and the doctor laughed softly.

“Those ugly little boys are probably great political leaders of the future, or literary geniuses. Tidal Basin may be stiff with mute, inglorious Miltons,” he said.

Sergeant Elk of the Criminal Investigation Department made a noise that expressed his contempt.

“Nine-tenths of that crowd will pass through the hands of me and my successors,” he said drearily, “and all your electric rays won’t stop um! And such of them as don’t finish in Dartmoor will end their days in the workhouse. Why they call it a workhouse, God knows. I have never known anybody to work in a workhouse except the staff. You know Mrs. Weston?” he asked suddenly. “A pretty woman. She’s got the only respectable apartment in the Basin. All Ritzy—I went up there when some kids broke her windows. She’s not much good.”

“If she’s not much good,” said Marford, and again that ghost of a smile came and went, “if she’s not much good, I probably know her. If she’s the kind of woman who doesn’t pay her doctor’s bills, I certainly know her. Why do you ask?”

Elk took a cigar from his pocket and bit off the end. It was obviously a good cigar. He had hoarded it so long that it had irregular fringes of leaf. He lit it with great deliberation and puffed enjoyably.

“She was saying that she knew you,” he said, fully two minutes after the question had been asked. “Naturally I said a good word for you.”

“Say a few good words for the clinic,” said the doctor.

“I’m always doing it,” said Sergeant Elk complacently. “You’re wasting your time and other people’s money, but I do it. That’s a pretty nurse you’ve got—Miss Harman. Quigley the reporter’s all gooey about her.”

“Yes,” said Dr. Marford quietly.

He rose and pulled down the blind, went to a cupboard, took out a whisky bottle, a siphon and two glasses, and looked inquiringly at the detective.

“I’m off duty,” said Elk, “if a detective is ever off duty.”

He pulled up a chair to the writing-table. The doctor was already in his worn leather chair.

“Ever read detective stories?” asked Elk.

Dr. Marford shook his head.

At that moment the telephone rang. He took up the instrument, listened for a while, asked a few questions, and put down the receiver.

“That’s why I don’t read detective or any other kind of stories,” he said. “The population of Tidal Basin increases at a terrific rate, but not so rapidly as some people expect.”

He jotted a note down on a little pad.

“That’s a come-at-once call, but I don’t suppose they will require my attention till three o’clock to-morrow morning. Why detective stories?”

Sergeant Elk sipped at his whisky. He was not a man to be rushed into explanation.

“Because,” he said eventually, “I’d like some of these clever Mikes to take my patrol for a couple of months. I saw an American crook play up in the West End the other night. It was all about who-did-it. First of all they introduced you to about twenty characters, told you where they were born and who their fathers were, and what money they wanted and who they were in love with—you couldn’t help knowing that the fellow who did the murder was the red-nosed waiter. But that’s not police work, Dr. Marford. We’re not introduced to the characters in the story; we don’t know one. All we’ve got in a murder case is the dead man. What he is, who his relations are, where he came from, what was his private business—we’ve got to work all that out. We make inquiries here, there and everywhere, digging into slums, asking questions of people who’ve got something to hide.”

“Something to hide?” repeated the doctor.

Elk nodded.

“Everybody’s got something to hide. Suppose you were a married man _____”

“Which I am not,” interrupted Marford.

“We’ve got to suppose that,” insisted Elk. “Your wife is abroad. You take a girl into the country . . .”

The doctor made faint noises of protest.

“We’re supposin’ all this,” conceded Elk. “Such things have happened. And in the morning you look out of your window an’ see a feller cut another feller’s throat. You are a doctor and cannot afford to get your name into the papers. Are you going to the police and tell them what you saw? And are you going to stand up in court and tell them what you were doing out of town and the name of the lady you were with, and take the chance of it getting into all the papers? Or are you going to say nothing? Of course you are! That happens

every day. In a murder case everybody has got something to hide, and that's why it's harder to get the truth about murder than any other kind of crime. Murder is a spot-light. You've got to take the stand and face a defending counsel who's out to prove that you're the sort of fellow that no decent jurywoman could ask to meet her young daughter."

The detective sucked at his cigar for a long time in silence. Then he asked:

"Bit of a mystery, this woman Lorna Weston?"

The doctor's tired eyes surveyed him thoughtfully.

"I suppose so. They're all mysteries to me. I can't remember their names. God, what names they've got! Like the patterns of a dull wallpaper—one running into the other. Jackson, Johnson, Thompson, Beckett, Dockett, Duckett, Roon, Doon, Boon . . . eh? And some without any names at all. I attended a young woman for three months—she was just 'the young woman upstairs,' or 'Miss What's-her-name.' Her landlady didn't know it. She was a waitress working nobody knew where. If she had died I couldn't have certified her. I called her Miss Smith—had to put some sort of name on the books. What does Mrs. Weston do for a living?"

Mr. Elk made a little grimace.

"Well, you know, she's . . . well, she goes West every night all dolled up."

The doctor nodded.

"There are lots of 'em—a whole colony. Why do they live in this hell shoot? I suppose it's cheap. And their earnings are not what they were. One girl told me—but you can't believe 'em."

He sighed heavily and sighed again.

"You can't believe anybody."

Elk got up, drained his glass and reached for his hat.

"She wanted to know if you were an easy man to get on with. I got an idea she's a dope-getter. I don't know why, but I've just got that idea. There was a doctor in Silvertown who made a fortune out of it: he spent over a thousand on his defence when I got him to the Old Bailey. . . ."

The doctor went out with him, and they arrived at the street door at an opportune moment.

The earlier sound of the battle had come to them in a confused hubbub of sound as they passed through the disinfected passage. As Marford opened the door he saw two men fighting, surrounded by a crowd. It was a fair fight, both men being well matched in point of physique and equally drunk. But they were too close to the granite kerb of the sidewalk. One of the combatants went down suddenly, and the grey, dusty kerbstone went red.

“Here—you!”

Elk made a grab at the victor and swung him round. The policemen came running and plunged through the crowd.

“Take this man.”

Elk handed over his dazed prisoner and shouldered his way through the tightly packed knot of people that surrounded the man on the kerb.

“Get him inside the doctor’s shop. Lift him. . . .”

They carried the limp thing into the surgery and Dr. Marford made a brief examination whilst Mr. Elk hustled the bearers into the street.

“Well?” he asked when he came back. “Hospital case, isn’t it?”

Marford was fixing an enormous pad of gauze and cottonwool to the head of the white-faced man.

“Yes. Do you mind ringing the ambulance? Two shillings’ worth of surgical dressings and I don’t get a cent for it. You can’t sue their relations—they need the money for a swell funeral. Everybody has to go into black, and that costs money.”

Elk screwed up his lips painfully.

“Is he booked?” he asked, looking at the figure with the awed curiosity which the living have for the dead.

“I should think so: compound fracture of the occiput. Get him to the London and they may do something. It costs me ten shillings a week just for surgical dressings. I’ll tell you something, and you can arrest me. If I get ’em alone, I go through their pockets and take the cost of the dressing. But usually they’ve got some howling women with ’em who won’t leave ’em. ‘When pain and anguish wring the brow,’ eh?”

The ambulance came noisily and the patient was taken away.

It was an incident not worth remembering—except for two shillings’ worth of dressing that would never be liquidated.

The doctor closed the door upon Mr. Elk, and went back to his books and his thoughts. Two inconvenient new lives were coming to Tidal Basin. The district nurses would call him in good time. Inconvenient . . . the children of an unemployable labourer and a father who was resting in one of His Majesty’s prisons.

As to this Lorna Weston. . . .

He knew her, of course. She often passed the surgery on her way to the provisions store next door, and once or twice she had come in to see him. A pretty woman, though her mouth was a trifle hard and straight. He never confessed to Elk that he knew anybody. Elk was a detective and respected no

confidences.

There was a phone call from Elk. The fighter had died on admission to hospital. The doctor was not surprised. An inquest, of course.

“We shall want you as a witness,” said Elk’s voice. “He’s a dock labourer from Poplar—a man named Stephens.”

“How thrilling!” said the doctor, hung up the receiver and went back to his book—the intrigues of Louis’s court, the scheming Polignacs and the profitable machinations of Madame de Lamballe.

He heard the shrill call of the door-bell, looked plaintively round, finally rose and went to the door. The night had come down blackly; the pavement outside was glistening: you do not hear the rain falling in the East End.

“Are you Dr. Marford?”

The woman who stood in the doorway exhaled the faint fragrance of some peculiarly delicate perfume. Her voice, thin for the moment with anxiety, had the quality of culture. She was a stranger; he had never heard that voice before.

“Yes. Will you come in?”

The surgery had no other light than the reading-lamp on the desk. He felt that she would have had it this way.

She wore a leather motoring coat and a little tight-fitting hat. She unfastened the coat hurriedly as though she were hot or had some difficulty in breathing. Under the coat she wore a neat blue costume. From some vague clue, he thought she was American. A lady undoubtedly, having no association with Tidal Basin, unless she was a passenger on the Moroccan boat which sailed with the tide from Shrimp Wharf.

“Is he—is he dead?” she asked jerkily, and in her dark eyes he read an unconquerable fear.

“Is who dead?”

He was puzzled; searched his mind rapidly for patients *in extremis* and could find none but old Sully, the marine store dealer, who had been dying for eighteen months.

“The man—he was brought here . . . after the fight. A policeman told me . . . they were fighting in the street and he was brought here.”

She stood, her hands clasped, her thin body bent forward towards him, breathless.

“A man? . . . Oh, yes; he’s dead, I’m afraid.”

Dr. Marford was for the moment bewildered. How could she be interested in the fate of one Stephens, dock labourer, of Poplar?

“Oh, my God!”

She whispered the words, dropped for a second. Dr. Marford's arm went round her and assisted her to a chair.

"Oh, my God!" she said again and began to cry.

He looked at her helplessly, not knowing for whom he could frame a defence—for the dead or the living.

"It was a fair fight as far as one could see," he said awkwardly. "The man fell . . . hit his head on the sharp edge of the kerb . . ."

"I begged him not to go near him," she said a little wildly. "I begged him! When he telephoned to say he was on his track and had traced him here. . . . I came by cab. . . . I implored him to come back."

All this and more came incoherently. Dr. Marford had to guess what she said. Some of the words were drowned in sobs. He went to his medicine shelf and took down a bottle labelled "Ap. Am. Arm.," poured a little into a medicine glass and added water.

"You drink this and tell me all about it," he said authoritatively.

She told him more than she would have told her confessor. Sorrow, remorse, the crushing tragedy of fear removed all inhibitions. The doctor listened, looking down at her, twiddling the stem of the medicine glass in his fingers.

Presently he spoke.

"This man Stephens was a dock labourer—a heavy fellow, six feet tall at least. A fair-haired man. The other man was a young fellow of twenty something. I only saw him for a second when he was in the hands of the police. He had a light, almost a white, moustache——"

She stared up at him.

"Fair . . . a young man . . ."

Dr. Marford held the glass out to her.

"Drink this; you're hysterical. I hate telling you so."

But she pushed the glass aside.

"Stephens—are you sure? Two, well, two ordinary men? . . ."

"Two labourers—both drunk. It's not unusual in this neighbourhood. We have an average of two fights a night. On Saturday nights—six. It's a dull place and they have to do something."

The colour was coming back to her face. She hesitated, reached for the glass, swallowed its contents and made a wry face.

"Sal volatile . . . beastly!"

She wiped her lips with a handkerchief she took from her bag and rose

unsteadily to her feet.

“I’m sorry, doctor. I’ve been a nuisance. I suppose if I offered to pay you for your time you’d be offended.”

“I charge ten cents for a consultation,” he said gravely, and she smiled.

“How accommodating you are! You think I am American? I am, of course, though I’ve lived in England since—oh, for a long time. Thank you, doctor. Have I talked a lot of nonsense, and, if I have, will you forget it?”

Dr. Marford’s thin face was in the shadow: he was standing between her and the lamp.

“I won’t promise that; but I will not repeat it,” he said.

She did not give him her name: he was wholly incurious. When he offered to walk with her until she found a cab, she declined his escort. He stood in the drizzling rain and watched her out of sight.

Police-Constable Hartford came from the direction she had taken and stopped to speak.

“They say that Stephens is dead. Well, if they will drink, they must expect trouble. I’ve never regretted taking the pledge myself—I’ll be Chief Templar in our lodge this summer if Gawd spares me. I sent a young lady; she was makin’ inquiries about Stephens. I didn’t know he was gone or I’d have told her.”

“Thank you, for not telling her,” said Marford.

He was shy of P.C. Hartford, who was notoriously loquacious and charged with strange long words.

He locked the door and went back to his book, but the corruptions and permutations of Madame de Lamballe interested him no more.

Pulling up the surgery blind, he looked out into the deserted street. There was some sort of movement in progress under the shadow of the wall which encircles the premises of the Eastern Trading Company.

He saw a man and a woman talking. There was light enough from the street standard to reveal this much. The man was in evening dress, which was curious. The white splash of his shirt front was plainly visible. Even waiters do not wear their uniform in Tidal Basin.

Dr. Marford went out and opened the street door as the man and the woman walked in opposite directions. Then he saw the third of the trio. He was moving towards the man in evening dress, following him quickly. The doctor saw the first man stop and turn. There was an exchange of words and a scuffle. The man in dress clothes went down like a log, the second bent over him and went on quickly and disappeared under the railway arch which crosses

Endley Street, opposite the Eastern Company's main gateway.

Dr. Marford watched, fascinated, was on the point of crossing to see what had happened to the inanimate heap on the pavement, when the man got up and lit a cigarette.

The clock struck ten.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER VI

LOUIS LANDOR looked down at the hateful thing he had struck to the earth. He lay very still and the hate in Landor's heart was replaced by a sudden horror. He glanced across the road. Immediately opposite was a doctor's surgery—a red light burned dimly from a bracket-lamp before the house to advertise the profession of its occupant. He saw the door was open and somebody was standing there. Should he go for help? The idea came and went. His own safety was in question. He hurried along in the shadow of the high wall and had reached the railway arch, when right ahead of him appeared the shadowy figure of a policeman, and the policeman was coming his way. He looked round for some way of escape. There were two great gates on his right and in one a small wicket door. In his panic he pushed the door and it yielded. By some miracle it had been left unfastened. In a second he was inside, felt for the bolt and pushed it home. The policeman passed without being conscious of his presence.

P.C. Hartford was at that moment composing a little speech which he intended to deliver at the next lodge meeting, where matters of very considerable interest were to be discussed. His thoughts being so centred, it was not unlikely that he should miss seeing the fugitive.

A certain Harry Lamborn, who was by trade a general larcenist, and who at that moment was standing in the shelter of a deeply-recessed door on the opposite side of the road, had less excuse, except that his eye was on the approaching copper and that he had little interest in ordinary civilians. That night he had certain plans connected with No. 7 warehouse of the Eastern Trading Company, and he was waiting for P.C. Hartford to reach the end of his beat and return before he put them into operation.

He watched the constable's leisurely stride, drew back still farther into the recess which afforded him freedom from observation and protection from the falling rain, and transferred a collapsible jemmy from one pocket to another for greater comfort.

Hartford could not help seeing the man in evening dress. He stood squarely

in the middle of the sidewalk, wiping the mud from his black overcoat. Instantly Hartford descended from the daïs of Vice-Templar and became a human police constable.

“Had a fall, sir?” he asked cheerfully.

The man turned a good-looking face to the officer and smiled. Yet he was not wholly amused, for his hands were trembling violently and the whiteness of his lips was in odd contrast to his sunburnt face. And when he spoke he was so breathless that the words came in gasps. Rain had been falling; there was a brown, muddy patch on his overcoat. He looked backward, the way he had come, and seemed relieved when he saw nobody.

“Have I had a fall?” he repeated. “Well, I think I have.”

He looked past the constable.

“Did you see the man?”

Police-Constable Hartford looked back along the deserted stretch of pavement.

“Which man?” he asked, and the other seemed surprised.

“He went your way; he must have passed you.”

Hartford shook his head.

“No, sir, nobody’s passed me.”

The white-lipped man was sceptical.

“Did he do anything?” asked Hartford.

“Did he do anything?” The stranger had a trick of repeating questions and tinging them with contempt. “He punched me in the jaw, if that’s anything. I played possum.” His face twisted in a smile. “Scared him—I hope.”

He gave a certain emphasis to the last words. Police-Constable Hartford surveyed him with greater interest.

“Would you like to charge the man?” he asked.

The other was fixing his white silk neck-cloth and shook his head.

“Do you think you could find him if I charged him?” he asked sarcastically. “No; let him go.”

“A stranger to you, sir?”

P.C. Hartford had not handled a case for a month and was loath to let his fingers slide off the smooth edge of this.

“No; I know him.”

“There’s a bad crowd about here,” began Hartford. “A drunken, dissipated _____”

“I know him, I tell you.” The stranger was impatient.

He dived his hand into an inside pocket, took out a silver case and opened it. P.C. Hartford stood by while the man lit his cigarette, and noticed that the hand which held the patent lighter was shaking.

“Here’s a drink for you.”

Hartford bridled, and waved aside the proffered coin.

“I neither touch, taste nor ’andle,” he said virtuously, and stood ready to pass on his majestic way.

The stranger unbuttoned his coat and felt in his waistcoat pocket.

“Lost anything?”

“Nothing,” said the other with satisfaction.

He blew a cloud of smoke, nodded, and they separated.

The man in evening dress came slowly to where a granite-paved roadway bisected the path before the gates of the Eastern Trading Company. The thief in the covered doorway saw him take his cigarette from his mouth, drop it on the pavement and put his foot upon it. And then, suddenly and without warning, he saw the white-faced man stagger; his knees gave from under him and he went down with a crash to the sidewalk.

Lamborn was an opportunist—saw here a gift from heaven in the shape of a drunken swell; looked left and right, and crossed the road with stealthy footsteps. He did not see Hartford moving towards him in the shadow of the wall. Lamborn flicked open the coat of the stricken man, dived in his hand and found a note-case. His fingers hooked to a watch-guard; he pulled both out with a simultaneous jerk and then saw the running policeman. To be arrested on suspicion is one thing; to be found in possession of stolen property is another. Lamborn’s hand jerked up to the high wall which surrounded the company’s yard, and he turned to fly. Half a dozen paces he took, and then the hand of the law fell on him, and the familiar “Here, you!” came hatefully to his ears. He struggled impotently. Mr. Lamborn had never learned the first lesson of criminality, which is to go quietly.

Hartford thrust him against the wall, and then saw somebody crossing the road, and remembered the man lying under the lamp-post as he recognised the figure.

“Doctor—that gentleman’s hurt. Will you have a look at him?”

Dr. Marford had seen the stranger fall and stooped gingerly by his side.

“Keep quiet, will yer?” said Hartford indignantly to his struggling prisoner.

His whistle sounded shrilly in the night. There were moments when even Lamborn grew intelligent.

“All right, it’s a cop,” he said sullenly, and ceased to struggle.

It was at that moment that the policeman heard an exclamation from the stooping, peering doctor.

“Constable—this man is dead—stabbed!”

He held up his hands for the policeman’s inspection. In the light of the standard Hartford saw they were red with blood.

Elk, who was at the end of the street keeping a spieling house under observation, heard the whistle and came flying towards the sound. Every kennel in Tidal Basin heard it and was drawn. Men and women forfeited their night’s rest rather than lose the thrill of experience; when they heard it was no less than murder they purred gratefully that their enterprise was rewarded. They came trickling out like rats from their burrows. There was a crowd almost before the uniformed police arrived to control it.

When Elk came back from ’phoning the divisional surgeon the doctor was washing his hands in a bucket of water that the policeman had brought for him.

“Mason’s at the station; he’s coming along.”

“Here, Elk, what’s the idea of holding me?”

Lamborn’s voice was pained and hurt. He stood, a wretchedly garbed figure of uncouth manhood, between two towering policemen, but his spirit was beyond suppression.

“I’ve done nothing, have I? This rozzer pinched me——”

“Shut up,” said Elk, not unkindly. “Mr. Mason will be along in a minute.”

Lamborn groaned.

“Him!” he almost howled. “Sympathetic Mason, what a night for a party!”

Chief Detective Inspector Mason was visiting his area that night, and was in the police station when the call was put through. He came in the long, powerful police tender with a host of detectives, and a testy and elderly police surgeon. Dr. Rudd was a police surgeon because it offered him the maximum interest for the minimum of labour. He was a bachelor, with an assured income from investments, but he liked the authority which his position gave him; liked to see policemen touching their helmets to him as he passed them on the street; was impressed by the support he received from magistrates when he declared as having been drunk influential people who brought their own doctors from Harley Street to prove that they suffered from nothing more vicious than shell-shock.

He knew Dr. Marford slightly, and favoured him with a cold nod; resented his being in the case at all, for the penny doctor was one of the poor relations of the profession, not the kind of man one would call into a consultation, supposing Dr. Rudd called in anybody.

He made a careful examination of the still figure.

“Dead, of course,” he said.

He gave the impression that, had he arrived a little earlier, the tragedy might have been averted.

“There is a knife wound,” began Marford, “which penetrated——”

“Yes, yes,” said Dr. Rudd impatiently. “Of course. Naturally.”

He looked at Mr. Mason.

“Dead,” he said. “I will make an examination. Obviously a knife wound. Death was probably instantaneous.”

He looked at Marford.

“Were you here when it happened?”

“Soon after,” said Marford; “a minute after—probably less than that.”

“Ah, then,” said Dr. Rudd, his hands in his pockets, his legs apart, “you’ll be able to tell us something——”

Mason intervened. He was a bald man, with a humorous eye and a deep, unctuous voice.

“Yes, yes, we’ll see all about that, doctor.”

He showed no resentment at this attempt to usurp his function; was almost jovial in the face of an impertinence which was not an unusual experience when Dr. Rudd was in a case.

“We’ll see all about that. Doctor——?”

“Marford.”

“Doctor Marford, you were here when the murder was committed or soon after: you’ll be able to tell us something, I’m sure. But now naturally you’re a little upset.”

Marford smiled and shook his head.

“There’s nothing I can tell you, Mr. Mason, except that I saw the man fall.”

“I’m detaining this man, sir.” It was Hartford, stiffly saluting, more important than a Chief Commissioner on his first case.

Mason bent down over the body and let the powerful rays of his hand-lamp pry into ugly places.

“Where is the knife?” he asked. “We want to look after that.”

“There is no knife,” said Elk, with gloomy satisfaction.

“Excuse me, sir.” P.C. Hartford, unrebuffed, stood regimentally stiff: accuser, prosecutor and expositor all in one. “I’ve got a man here detained in custody.”

Mason became aware of his humble subordinate, took him in from the rose on the crest of his helmet to the toes of his large, polished boots.

“He should be at the police station,” he said gently.

It was Elk who explained.

“I kept the man here, sir, till you arrived.”

Mr. Mason put his little finger in his ear and twiddled it impatiently.

“All right,” he said. “It’s a pleasure to know that everything is being done in strict accordance with the rules of procedure. You seem to have a nice bunch of highly intelligent police officers in your division, Inspector.”

He addressed Divisional Inspector Bray, who accompanied him; but Bray had no sense of humour, and was entirely oblivious of sarcasm.

“They’re a pretty useful lot,” he said complacently.

Mr. Mason looked at the body at his feet, and thence to the man held between the two policemen, and back to the body again.

“No knife. . . . You might search the body, will you, Elk? Help him, will you, Shale? Thank you.”

He peered round at the crowd, and there were a few who, desiring at the moment to escape his scrutiny, melted quietly into the darkness.

At any rate he had seemed oblivious of the presence of Dr. Marford, who was silent in an atmosphere charged with hostility to penny doctors. Suddenly Elk lugged something from beneath the body.

“Here you are, sir.”

It was a knife-sheath, and at the moment was not pleasant to handle. Mr. Mason found an old envelope in his pocket and took it carefully.

“Is the knife there?”

“No.”

Bray had joined the search party and was emphatic on the point. They had moved the body slightly.

“No knife.” Mason looked up at the high wall. “It might have been thrown over there,” he mused.

“Excuse me, sir.” Constable Hartford froze to attention.

“Wait,” said Mason. “Now tell me, doctor, what did you see?”

He addressed Marford, who, brought suddenly into the ambit of publicity, stammered and was ill at ease.

“I came out of my surgery”—he pointed awkwardly—“that place with the red light. I—er—heard two men fighting—I thought I heard a little altercation before then—and I went in and got my hat and mackintosh—”

“So you’d have a better view of the fight, eh, doctor?” Mason smiled blandly.

Marford could return the smile now.

“Not exactly,” he said. “Fights are not a novelty in this particular neighbourhood. I was going out to see a case—a maternity case. When I came out I heard the commotion. The policeman was arresting a man when I came over——”

“Wait,” said Mason sharply. “You saw two men fighting—could you distinguish them?”

“Not plainly,” Marford shook his head, “although they were opposite my surgery.”

“Very handy for them,” said Mason. “Was one of them this man?”

Marford could not swear. He was rather inclined to think it was. He was certain one of them was in evening dress.

“You don’t know him?”

Marford shook his head again.

“I should think he’s a stranger in this neighbourhood; I’ve never seen him here before. When I saw him lying on the ground I thought that it was a resumption of the fight I had witnessed.”

Mr. Mason whistled softly, fixing his eyes just under the doctor’s chin. Marford thought his collar was awry and put up his hand, but that was a practice of Mr. Mason, who was sometimes called “Sympathetic Mason.”

“Hartford.” He beckoned the constable forward. “What did you see?”

P.C. Hartford saluted.

“Sir,” said the constable punctiliously, “I had seen the deceased——”

A look of weariness passed across the face of Mr. Mason. He was not sympathetic with loquacious constables.

“Yes, yes, my boy, but you’re not in court now, you know. You needn’t call him ‘the deceased.’ I don’t mind what you call him. You saw him before he fell?”

P.C. Hartford saluted again.

“Yes, sir, I saw him. He stopped me when I was passing and asked me if I’d met a man he’d had an argument with. I said ‘No.’ ”

“Did he describe the man?”

“No, sir,” said Hartford.

“He said nothing else?”

Hartford thought for a long time, and then repeated, as best he could

remember, all that the white-faced man had said.

“You didn’t meet his assailant—I mean, you weren’t dreaming about the beer you were going to have for supper?”

P.C. Hartford was prepared with an indignant repudiation, but swallowed it.

“No, sir. A few minutes later, when I came back this way, I saw him lying under the lamp, and I saw another man walking away and I stopped him. Then I saw the doctor coming across. By this time I’d arrested Lamborn, who tried to run away.”

“Oh, no!” said Mason, pained.

Mr. Lamborn grew voluble. He was running for a doctor, he protested.

“The man was on the ground before you touched him: is that what you’re suggesting?” asked Mason.

The prisoner not only suggested but swore to this fact. He had a witness, a woman who carried a can in her hand. She might have preferred to remain anonymous, but that natural sense of justice which is the possession of poor and innocent people overcame her modesty. She was haled forward into the clear circle. She was a respectable woman. She had seen the man fall, had been a witness of Lamborn going across to him. If she had any private views as to the motive for his attentions she wisely restrained them.

Mason looked at her thoughtfully.

“What is in that can?” he asked.

There was a lid to the can. All her inclinations were against satisfying his curiosity, but she had a respect for the law and told the truth.

“Beer.”

Mason seemed oblivious of the dead man behind him, of the thief in custody, and of the very existence of secret murderers who stalked their prey on the highway.

“Beer—that’s funny.” A clock chimed half-past ten. “Why are you carrying beer about the street at half-past ten, Mrs.—”

Her name was Albert. She had no explanation for the beer, except, she explained tremulously, that she was taking it home. There was a sympathetic murmur in the crowd. An anonymous revolutionary said “Leave the woman alone!” There are always voices that offer the same advice to policemen in all parts of the world in similar circumstances.

P.C. Hartford was desperate. He had something to say—something vital, a solution which would sweep aside all the cobwebs of mystery which surrounded the pitiful heap lying under the electric light standard and yielding

very little to the busy men who were searching it.

“I wanted to say, sir, that I saw this man throwing something over the wall.”

Mason looked at the wall, as though he expected it to give confirmation of this statement.

“Lamborn, you mean?” He glanced keenly at the thief and jerked his head significantly. “Take him away,” he said; “I’ll see him at the station.”

Mr. Lamborn went between two policemen, hurling back sanguinary defiance. There is something of a terrier in the habitual crook: he stands up to punishment most gallantly.

“I’ll see you at the station, too, ma’am,” said Mason.

Mrs. Albert nearly dropped her can in her agitation. She was a married woman with four children, and had never entered a police station in her life.

“It’s never too late to learn,” said Mason sympathetically.

Another ambulance came, one of the baser kind, hand-pushed, and then a police car, with photographers, cheerful finger-print experts and men of the Identification Bureau. Wilful murder lost its romance and passed into its business stage.

“Just plain murder,” said Mason to his subordinates as he moved towards his car. “One or two queer features about it, though.”

And then through the crowd came a woman. He thought she was a girl, but in the cruel light of the arc lamp saw that she had left girlhood a long way behind her. She was white-faced, wide-eyed, a ghost of a woman; her trembling lips parted, for the moment inarticulate. She stared from one to the other. Dr. Marford, from the shadows, watched her curiously; knew her for Lorna Weston, a lady of uncertain profession.

“Is it—he?”

Her voice, starting as a croak, ended in a wail.

“Who are you?” Mason stood squarely before her.

“I’m—I live around here.” She spoke spasmodically; every sentence seemed an effort. “He came to see me to-night, and I warned him . . . of the danger. You see, I—I know my husband. He’s a devil! I somehow know it.”

“Your husband killed this man, eh?”

She tried to push past him, but he held her back with some difficulty, for fear had given this frail body the strength of a man.

“Steady, steady, my girl. It may not be your friend at all. What’s his name?”

“Donald——” She checked herself. “May I see him? . . . I’ll tell you.”

But Mr. Mason must proceed methodically, in the way of his kind, consolidating the foundations of fact.

“This is what you say, that this man came to visit you to-night, and you warned him against your husband. Now, is your husband living in this area?”

She looked at him blankly. He realised that her mind was not upon his questions and repeated it.

“Yes,” she said. There was a certain defiance in her voice.

“Where does your husband live? What’s his name?”

She was moving from side to side, and stopped once to look under his arm at the still thing on the ground.

“Let me see him,” she pleaded. “I shan’t faint . . . it may not be he. I’m sure it’s not he. Let me see him!” Her voice was a whine now.

Mr. Mason nodded to Elk, and Elk took her by the arm and led her to where the man lay, half in and half out of the circle of light. She looked down, speechless; opened her lips but could say nothing. And then:

“Donald . . . he did it! The swine! The murderer!”

She stopped speaking. Elk felt her sagging away from him and caught her round the waist. The Tidal Basin crowd watched the drama. It was well worth the loss of a night’s sleep.

Mason looked round, caught Marford’s eye and beckoned him forward.

“Do you mind taking this woman to the station? I think it’s only a faint.”

Dr. Marford protested wearily. He and a policeman carried the woman to a closed police car and they drove off. Outside a chemist’s shop at the end of Basin Street, Marford stopped the car and sent the constable to ring the night bell; but the restorative he secured did not bring the woman back to consciousness. She was still silent when he got her to the station.

Mr. Mason, waiting for the return of the car, delivered himself of certain observations.

“There’s murder plain and murder coloured,” he said to the patient Inspector Bray. “This is murder plain. No music, no fireworks, no lady’s boudoir, nothing sexy. A man stabbed to death under three pairs of eyes and nobody saw the murderer. No knife, no motive, no clue, no name of the dear departed.”

“The woman,” began Bray, “talked about a devil——”

“Let’s keep religion out of it,” said Mason wearily. “Who was the man that threw the knife, and how did he get it back again? That’s the mystery that’s beating me.”

QUIGLEY, crime man of the *Post-Courier* and arch-inventor of devils, telephoned through to his newspaper:

“The devil of Tidal Basin is again abroad. This slinking and sinister shadow passed unseen through deserted Endley Street and left a dead man sprawling upon the sidewalk, stabbed to the heart. Whence he came, whither he went, none knows. Under the eyes of three independent witnesses, including Mrs. Albert, the wife of the night watchman at the Eastern Trading Company, Dr. Warley” (names were Quigley’s weak point), “a highly respected medical practitioner, and Police-Constable Hartford, an innocent pedestrian was seen to stagger and fall. When the horrified spectators reached his side they were dumbfounded to see that he was stabbed. The identity of the murdered man has not yet been established. Who was this stranger in evening dress, wandering in the purlieu of Tidal Basin? What ruthless hand destroyed him, and in what mysterious manner did the unseen murderer make his escape? These are the questions which Central Detective Mason has to solve. Mason, one of the Big Five, was fortunately in the neighbourhood, and immediately took charge of the case. A man has been detained, but is he the devil of Tidal Basin?”

(“Cut out all that devil stuff,” said the night editor as he handed the copy to a sub. “It’s been overworked.”)

Elk came to the police station and into the inspector’s room, where Mason was sitting, ten minutes after his chief arrived. He laid two articles on the table before the great man.

“That night watchman takes a lot of waking. By the way, he’s the husband of Mrs. Albert—”

“The woman with the beer?”

Elk nodded.

“I found these in the yard—obviously Lamborn threw them over when he saw the policeman.”

He enumerated his finds.

“Notebook and watch; glass broken, watch stopped at ten p.m. Swiss made, and has the name of a Melbourne jeweller on the face.”

Mason examined the watch.

“Careful,” warned Elk. “There’s a smudgy thumb-print on the back.”

Mason shifted his chair a little, and invited Elk by a gesture to draw

another up to his side.

“What else?” he asked.

Elk took from an inside pocket a quantity of loose paper money and put it on the table. The pocket-case, which also contained a memorandum book, he opened, and extracted two new bank-notes, each for a hundred pounds. On their backs was the stamp of the Maida Vale branch of the Midland Bank; it was a round rubber stamp, and in the centre was a date line.

“Issued yesterday.”

“If he’d got an account there——” began Elk.

Mason shook his head.

“He hadn’t. You don’t draw hundred-pound notes out of your own account and carry them about with you. You draw them out because you want to send them away. You couldn’t change a hundred-pound note in London without running the risk of being arrested. No, these notes were drawn from somebody else’s account and given to him. Which means that he hasn’t a banking account of his own or they’d have been paid in. Therefore he’s not in trade, or he’d have a banking account.”

Elk sniffed.

“Sounds like the well-known Shylock Holmes to me,” he said.

He was a contemporary of Mason’s who had missed promotion, and his sarcasms were licensed.

“What else?” asked Mason.

“Visiting-cards—any number of them.”

Elk took them out and laid them on the table. Mason examined them carefully. There were addresses in Birmingham and Leicester and London, but a large proportion of them were the visiting-cards of people who had a permanent address in South Africa.

“All the same colour,” he said. “They’ve all been collected within a couple of months. That means he’s been a sea voyage lately—it’s extraordinary how people give away their cards to perfect strangers when they’re taking an ocean trip.”

He looked at the backs of one or two of them: there were pencilled notes. One said: “£10,000 a year”; another: “Made a lot of money in Namaqualand Diamonds; staying Ritz, London.”

Mason smiled.

“I’ll give you two guesses as to what his trade is.”

He picked up a third card; this time the inscription on the back was in ink: “Cheque stopped; Adam & Sills.”

"I'll give you one guess now. He's a crook and a card-sharp. Adam & Sills are the lawyers who do the barking for these kind of birds. That places him. Now we'll find his name. Get on to the Yard, tell 'em to call every hotel, big and small, in the West End, and find if a man has arrived there from abroad. Say that his first name is Donald. You'll find out where he came from——"

"Cape Town," said Elk.

Mason nodded.

"I expected that. How do you know?"

"His boots are new; they've got a tag to them, 'Cleghorn, Adderley Street.'"

"Then make it South Africa," said Mason.

Elk was half-way across the room when Mason shouted him back.

"Ask the bureau to give you the name, private address and telephone number of the manager of the Maida Vale branch of the Midland Bank. Wait a minute, don't rush me—tell the bureau to get on to the manager and find if he remembers on whose account two notes for a hundred pounds"—he scribbled down the numbers on a slip of paper and handed them to Elk—"were issued, and, if possible, to whom they were issued. I've got an idea we shan't discover that."

When Elk returned, Mr. Mason was sitting, chin in hand, his heavy, round face more than ordinarily blank.

"I'll see Lamborn," he said.

Mr. Lamborn was brought from the detention-room, voluble and truculent.

"If there's a law in this country——" he began.

"There isn't," said Mr. Mason genially. "You've broken 'em all. Sit down, Harry."

Mr. Lamborn looked at him suspiciously.

"You goin' to be sympathetic?" he asked.

The glamour of legend surrounded Mr. Mason. He was indeed a sympathetic man, and under the genial influence of his understanding and sympathetic heart many wrongdoers had, with misguided confidence, told him much more than they ever intended to tell, a fact which they had bitterly regretted when they stood before a jury and heard their frankness exploited with disastrous effect.

Mason beamed.

"I can't be wicked with you fellows—naturally I can't." His voice was at its most unctuous. "Life's a bit difficult for all of us, and I know just how hard it is for some of you birds to get an honest living."

"I dessay," said Lamborn icily.

"You never do any harm, Harry"—Mr. Mason laid his hand upon the other's knee and patted it softly—"by telling the police all you know. It isn't much, because, if you knew enough to come in out of the rain, you wouldn't be thieving for a living. But this is a case of murder."

"Nobody says I did it," said Lamborn quickly.

"Nobody says so at the moment," agreed Mr. Mason pleasantly; "but you never can tell what stories get around. You know Tidal Basin, Harry—they'd swear your life away for a slice of pineapple. Now let's be perfectly open and above-board."

He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the other with fatherly benevolence.

"The constable saw you go over to this man and put your hand in his pocket, take out a pocket-book and possibly a watch. When you were detected you threw them over the wall, where they have since been found by Detective-Sergeant Elk. Isn't that so, Elk?"

"I know nothing about 'em," said Lamborn loudly, and Mr. Mason shook his head with a sad smile.

"You saw this fellow fall and you thought he was soused. You went over and you dipped him for his clock and pack."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," said Mr. Lamborn rapidly. "I've never heard such expressions in me life."

"Let me put it in plain English," said Mason gently. "You put your hand in his pocket, took out his pocket-case and his watch."

"That," said Lamborn emphatically, "is a damn dirty lie!"

Mr. Mason sighed, and looked at Elk despairingly.

"What can you do with 'em?" he asked.

"I don't want none of your sympathy," said the ungracious Lamborn. "There's too many people in stir through listening to your smarming. I see the gentleman fall and I went over to render him assistance."

"Medical assistance, I'm sure," murmured Mason, "you being an M.D. of Dartmoor and having learnt first aid at Wormwood Scrubs. Now come across, Harry. You can save me a lot of trouble by telling the truth."

"I——" began Lamborn.

"Wait a moment." The reservoir of Mr. Mason's urbanity was running low and his voice was a little sharper. "If you'll tell me the truth I'll undertake not to charge you. I shall hold you as a Crown witness——"

"Look here, Mr. Mason," said Lamborn hotly, "what sort of a can do you

think I am? I've been treated disgraceful since I've been at this station. They stripped me naked and took all me clothes away. They haven't even a sense of decency! Give me these old duds to put on. And why did they take me clothes away? To frame up evidence by puttin' stuff in me pocket—I know the police!”

Mason sighed, and when he spoke it was very deliberately and offensively.

“If you had a little more brains you'd be half-witted,” he said. “That's not an original remark, but it applies. There are men twice as sane as you living in padded cells. You poor, ignorant gutter scum, don't you understand that your clothes were taken away to see if there was any blood on them, and that your dirty hands were examined for the same reason? And don't you realise that a man of my rank wouldn't trouble even to spit at you if he hadn't a very good reason? I don't want you for murder—get that into your sawdust. I don't even want you for robbery. I want you to tell me the truth: did you, or did you not, dip this man when he was lying on the ground? And if you tell me the truth I'll offer no charge against you. Let me tell you this.” He leaned forward and tapped the other's knee with a heavy knuckle. “You won't be able to understand it, but I'm doing my duty when I tell you. The whole of this case may swing upon whether you make a voluntary statement that you took this man's pocket-case out of his pocket—the watch doesn't matter—whilst he was lying on the ground, or that you did not.”

“I didn't,” said Lamborn loudly. “I defy you to prove it!”

The chief inspector groaned.

“Take him away before I forget myself,” he said simply.

Elk gripped the arm of his prisoner and marched him to the desk.

“You fool,” he said *en route*, “why didn't you speak?”

Lamborn snorted.

“Why didn't I speak?” he demanded scornfully. “Blimey, look what I'm getting for saying nothin'!”

A minute later he was charged before an apathetic station sergeant, and went noisily to the cells.

Elk came back to his chief with information that had come through whilst the charge was in progress.

“The two notes were issued on the account of Mr. Louis Landor, of Teign Court, Maida Vale. Landor is either an American or has lived in America. He's an engineer, a fairly rich man, and drew out another three thousand pounds this morning—he's going abroad.”

“*Bon voyage* to him,” said Mason, in a cynical humour. “Going abroad, is

he?”

He gazed at the knife-sheath lying on a sheet of paper before him, and pointed with his little finger to ornate initials engraved on a small gold plate.

“L. L.—they may stand for Leonard Lowe; on the other hand, they may stand for Louis Landor.”

“Who’s Leonard Lowe?” asked Elk, momentarily dense.

“There is no such person,” said the superintendent patiently. “Listen, Elk—living in Tidal Basin hasn’t sharpened your wits, has it? I’ll be moving you to the West End soon—‘C’ Division. You’ll shine amongst that batch of suckers.”

He got up from the table and walked heavily through the charge-room to the little apartment which the police matron used as a duty-room. On the plain truckle bed lay Lorna Weston; her face was pale, her lips colourless.

“She might be dead,” said Mason.

Dr. Marford sighed, took out his cheap American watch and looked at it.

“So might be quite a large number of my patients,” he said listlessly. “I don’t know whether you’re interested in the phenomena of life and death, Mr. Mason—my own interest is strictly professional—but at this moment there is a lady waiting for me——”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Mason good-humouredly. “We forget nothing. I’ve arranged for your district nurse to phone you through to the station. We’ll have to do something with this woman.”

He looked dubiously down at the still figure on the bed, moved slightly the blanket that covered her and felt her hand.

“She’s a dope?” he asked.

Dr. Marford nodded.

“I found a hypodermic in her bag,” he said.

“Rudd thinks she should be taken away to a hospital or infirmary.”

Marford assented reluctantly. Here was the inevitable key witness, and he was loath to leave her out of his sight.

Rudd came bustling in importantly.

“I’ve fixed a bed at the infirmary,” he said. “Of course they told me they had no accommodation, but as soon as I mentioned my name——” He smiled jovially at Marford. “Now if it had been you, my dear fellow——”

“I shouldn’t have asked. I should simply have taken the case there and they’d have had to find a bed for her,” said Marford.

Dr. Rudd was a little ruffled.

“Yes, yes; but that is hardly the way, is it? I mean, there are certain professional—um—courtesies to be observed. The resident surgeon is a friend of mine, as it happens—Grennett; he was with me at Guy’s.”

He dropped Marford as being unworthy of his confidence, and addressed the superintendent.

“I’m getting the ambulance down right away.”

“Have you seen the man again?” asked Mason.

“The man?” Dr. Rudd frowned. “Oh, you mean the dead man? Yes. Your Mr. Elk was there, searching him. I made one or two observations which I think may be useful to you, superintendent. For instance, there’s a bruise on the left cheek.”

Mason nodded.

“Yes, he was fighting. Dr. Marford saw that.”

Rudd was called away at that moment, and hustled out with an apology. The very apology was offensive to Mr. Mason, for it inferred that investigations were momentarily suspended until the police surgeon returned.

The woman on the bed showed no sign of life. The doctor, at Mason’s request, exhibited two tiny punctures on the left arm.

“Recently made,” he explained, “but there’s no evidence that she’s an addict. I can find no other punctures, for example, and the mere fact that the shot has had such an extraordinarily deadening effect upon her rather suggests that she’s a novice.”

He lifted the arm and dropped it; it fell lifelessly.

“When will she recover consciousness?”

Marford shook his head.

“I don’t know. At present she’s not in a state where I could recommend giving restoratives, but I’ll leave that to the infirmary people. The resident surgeon is a personal friend of Dr. Rudd’s and is therefore in all probability a man of genius.”

The eyes of the two men met. Mr. Mason did not attempt to disguise his own amusement.

“Fine,” he said. And then: “Have you ever been in a murder case before?”

The doctor’s lips twitched with the hint of a smile.

“Manslaughter—this evening,” he said. “No, I have not been called in professionally. Not one doctor in eight thousand ever attends a murder case in the whole course of his practice—not if he’s wise,” he added.

Mason became suddenly interested in this shabby figure with the pained eyes and the thin, starved face.

“You find living not particularly pleasant in this neighbourhood, doctor? Couldn’t you work your clinic somewhere more salubrious?”

Marford shrugged.

“It’s all one to me,” he said. “My own wants are very few and they are satisfied. The clinic must be where it is wanted. For myself, I do not crave for the society of intellectual men, because intellectual men bore me.”

“And you’ve no theory about this murder?”

Mason’s good-humoured eyes were smiling again.

The doctor did not answer immediately; he bit his lip and looked thoughtfully past the superintendent.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “To my mind, this case is obviously a case of revenge. He was not murdered for profit, he was deliberately assassinated to right some wrong probably committed years before. And it was not in the larger sense premeditated: the murder was committed on the spur of the moment as opportunity offered.”

Mason stared at him.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I think it.” Marford was smiling. “Unless you believe that this man was definitely lured to this spot with the object of killing him, and that a most elaborate scheme was formed for enticing him into this neighbourhood, you must believe that it was unpremeditated.”

Superintendent Mason, fists on hips, legs wide apart, peered at Marford.

“You’re not one of these amateur detectives I’ve been reading about, doctor?” he challenged. “The sort of man who’s going to make the police look foolish in chapter thirty-nine and take all the credit for the discovery?”

Then unexpectedly he clapped his hand on Marford’s bony shoulder.

“You talk sense, anyway, and every doctor doesn’t talk that. I could name you one, but you’d probably report me to the British Medical Association. You’re quite right—your theory is my theory.”

And then, suddenly:

“Do you exclude the possibility that Lamborn may have knifed him?”

“Entirely,” said the other emphatically, and Mason nodded.

“I might tell you”—he dropped his voice confidentially—“that that is the ground plan of Dr. Rudd’s theory.”

“He has another,” said Marford. “I wonder he hasn’t told you.”

MASON looked down at the woman again. She had not moved, so far as the eye could see had not even breathed, since she came in.

“She’s got it locked up there.” He touched the white forehead lightly. “No, it’s an ordinary police case, doctor. Everything looks mysterious until somebody squeals, and then the case is so easy that even a poor old gentleman from Scotland Yard could work it out.”

He frowned at the woman.

“All right, shoot her into hospital,” he said brusquely, and returned to his room.

It was Inspector Bray’s room really; a cupboard of a place, with a table and chair, a last year’s almanac on the wall, two volumes of the *Police Code*, a telephone list a foot long—and three reprints of popular fiction. They were decently hidden from view by the *Police Code*, and Mr. Mason took one down to the table and opened it.

A taste for thrilling fiction is not phenomenal in a detective officer. With this particular story Mr. Mason was well acquainted, and he turned the leaves casually and disparagingly. Here was a murder the like of which never came the way of the average police officer. There were beautiful ladies involved, ladies who had their own Rolls-Royces and lived in exotic apartments; gentlemen who dressed for dinner every night—even the detectives did that. Here murder had a colour and a fragrance; it was set in scenes of beauty, in half-timbered country houses, with lawns that sloped down to a quiet river; in Park Lane mansions, where nothing less than a footman in resplendent uniform could find the dead body of his master lying by the side of a broken Sèvres vase. High politics came into the story; ministers of state were suspected; powerful cars sped seaward to where the steam cutter was waiting to carry its murderous owner to his floating den of vice.

Mr. Mason shook his head, scratched his cheek and closed the book, and returned to his own murder, to the drabness of Tidal Basin, with its innumerable side streets and greasy pavements, jerry-built houses all of a plan, where three families lived in a space inadequate for a Park Lane bath-room. Silent Tidal Basin, with its swing bridges over the narrow entrance to docks, and its cold electric standards revealing ugliness even on the darkest night. People were living and dying here; one death more or less surely made no difference. But because a man who was a card-sharp, probably a blackguard, had met his just end, there were lights burning in all sorts of odd rooms at Scotland Yard, men searching records, a printing press working at feverish speed, police cyclists flying to the ends of the area carrying the wet sheets

which described the dead man, and in ten thousand streets and squares policemen were reading, by the light of their electric lamps, the description of a man unknown, killed by one known even less.

The machinery was working; the wheels and pistons whirled and thundered—purposeless, it would seem, save to entertain the tall men on their lonely beats with first-hand news of tragedy.

Mason got up and walked out to the entrance of the station. A dim blue light painted his bronzed cheek a sickly hue. The street was deserted. Rain was falling steadily; every window of every house that faced the station was black and menacing.

Why he shivered he did not know. He was too serious a police officer to be influenced by atmosphere. And yet the unfriendliness of this area, all its possibilities of evil, penetrated his armour of indifference.

A queer, boozy lot of people. . . . A thought struck him, and he slapped the palm of his hand. There were three C.I.D. men in the charge-room; he called them and gave them instructions.

“Take a couple of guns,” he said. “You may need them.”

After he had seen them depart, he sent an urgent phone message to Scotland Yard. Then he went across to where Dr. Marford was standing, talking to the station clerk.

“What about this man with the white mask? You know everything that happens in this pitch. Is it a yarn, or is there any foundation for it? There used to be a man up west—had some sort of accident that upset his features—he used to wear that kind of thing.”

The doctor nodded slowly.

“I think that is the man I have met,” he said.

“You’ve met him?” asked Mason in surprise.

“Yes. Why he wore the mask I have never been able to understand, because there was really very little wrong with his face, except a large red scar. He wasn’t exactly good to look at—but you can say that of a lot of people who don’t wear masks. I’ve seen thousands looking worse.”

Mason scowled and pursed his lips.

“I remember the West End man. I see that some of the newspapers are recalling the fact that he was seen years ago. If I remember rightly, he lived in a top flat in Jermyn Street. He had permission from the Commissioner to go out with this thing on his face. I haven’t seen him for years, but I remember him well. What was his name—West something—not Weston?”

The doctor shrugged.

“I never knew his name. He came to me about three years ago and asked for ray treatment. He was stupidly sensitive and only came after he had fixed the interview up by telephone. He’s been several times since, round about midnight, and he invariably pays me a pound.”

Mason thought for a while, then went to the telephone and called a central police station off Regent Street. The sergeant in charge remembered the man at once, but was not sure of his name.

“He hasn’t been seen round the West End for years,” he said. “The Yard has been arguing about him—wondering if he was White Face.”

“Was his name Weston?” suggested Mason, but the sergeant was without information.

Mason came back to the doctor.

“Does this man live in the neighbourhood?”

But here Dr. Marford could tell him nothing. The first time he had met his queer patient he had undoubtedly lived in the region of Piccadilly; thereafter he had only appeared at irregular intervals.

“Do you think he’s our devil?” asked Mason bluntly, and the lean man chuckled.

“Devil! It’s queer how normal people attribute devilry to any man or woman who is afflicted—the hunchback and the misshapen, the cross-eyed and the lame. You’re almost mediæval, Mr. Mason.”

He could say very little that might assist the police, except that he no longer received warning when the man with the mask made his appearance. Invariably he came through the little yard that ran by the side of the surgery into the passage which Dr. Marford’s patients used when they queued up for their medicine.

“I never have the side door locked—I mean the door that goes into the yard.” Marford explained that he was a very heavy sleeper, and it was not unusual for his clients to come right into the house to wake him, and the first intimation of their needs was a knock on his bedroom door.

“I’ve nothing to lose except a few instruments and a few bottles of poison; and to do these fellows justice, I’ve never had a thing stolen from me since I’ve been in the neighbourhood. I treat these people like friends, and so long as they’re reasonably wholesome I don’t mind their wandering about the house.”

Mr. Mason made a little grimace.

“How can you live here? You’re a gentleman, you have education. How can you meet them every day, listen to their miseries, see their dirt—ugh!”

Dr. Marford sighed and looked at his watch.

“If that child’s normal he’s born,” he said, and at that moment the sergeant called him across to the telephone at the desk.

The child had been normal and had made his appearance into the world without the doctor’s assistance. The male parent, a careful man, was already disputing the right of the doctor to any fee. Dr. Marford had had previous experience of a similar character, and knew that for the fact that the baby arrived before the doctor came the mother would claim and receive the fullest credit.

“Half fee, as usual,” he told the district nurse and hung up the receiver.

“I used to charge half fees, but double visiting fees if I was called in afterwards. That didn’t work, because the mother was usually dead before they risked the expense of calling me in. The economy of these people is excessive.”

The ambulance was ready. He and Rudd saw the woman placed in charge of a uniformed nurse, and Sergeant Elk appointed a detective officer to accompany the patient to the infirmary.

Elk was silent, and his eyes were preternaturally bright when he lounged into the inspector’s room.

“This is a case which ought to get me promotion,” he said, a shameless thing to say in the presence of a man who expected most of the kudos. “Here I’ve been working for years, and this is the first real mystery I’ve struck. More like a book than a police case. Quigley’s nosing round the neighbourhood—I shouldn’t be surprised if he didn’t turn in a new devil. It’s a good story for him.”

Mr. Mason indicated a chair.

“Sit down, my poor fellow,” he said with spurious sympathy. “What are the features of this murder which have separated it from an ordinary case of knifing?”

Elk’s long arm went out, and he pointed in a direction which Mr. Mason, not wholly acquainted with the geography of the station, decided was the matron’s room.

“She’s it!” said Elk. His voice shook. “What happened to-night, Mr. Mason? An unknown man has a fight with another unknown man, who bolts. The first fellow walks along and meets a police officer and tells him all about it. He’s alive and well; obviously he’s not stabbed; yet within a few seconds after the officer moves on, this fellow drops in his track like a man shot. A cheap crook comes over and dips him, and is seen by Hartford, who tackles the man. They then discover that the fellow on the ground is stabbed. Nobody saw the blow struck. Yet there he is dead—knifed, and the knife’s well away and

can't be found."

Mason leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"End of the first reel; the second reel will follow immediately," he murmured, but Elk was undisturbed. That bright light in his eye was now a steely glitter. He was agitated as he had never been seen before in all the years of his service.

"Out of nowhere comes Mrs. Weston. She'd warned this man he was going to be killed. She wants to be sure that it is him."

"He," murmured Mason gently.

"Never mind about grammar." Elk was frankly insubordinate in his vehemence. "She takes a look at the man on the ground and drops."

He laid his hand almost violently upon the superintendent's arm and shook it.

"I was watching her. I knew the woman, though I didn't recognise her at first. She drops—and what do we find? She's a needler—a dope. Does that mean anything to you, sir?"

"I'm glad you said 'sir,' " said Mason. "I was wondering how I'd bring you back to a sense of discipline. Yes, it means a lot to me. Now I'm going to ask you a question: does the can of beer which Mrs. Albert was carrying mean anything to you, and does that can of beer associate itself in your active and intelligent mind with the disappearance of Mr. Louis Landor—if that's the name of the man who fought with the dead one?"

Elk was frankly bewildered.

"You're trying to pull my leg."

"Heaven forbid!" said the patient Mason. "Bring in Mrs. Albert. She's waited long enough to get three kinds of panic—I want her to have the kind where she'll tell the truth."

Mrs. Albert came, a rather pale woman, sensible of her disgraceful surroundings, conscious, too, of her responsibility for four children, only three of which, Mason learned, were yet born. She still clutched in her hand the tell-tale can of beer. The liquid was now flat and uninviting, and some of it had spilt in her agitation, so that she brought with her to the inspector's room a faint aroma of synthetic hops. She was quivering, more or less speechless. Mason gave her no opportunity for recovering her self-possession or her volubility.

"Sorry I've had to keep you so long, Mrs. Albert," he said. "Your husband's the night watchman at the Eastern Trading Company, isn't he?"

She nodded mutely.

“The Eastern Trading Company do not allow their night watchman to have beer?”

Mrs. Albert found her voice.

“No, sir,” she piped. “The last night watchman got the sack for drinking when he was on duty.”

“Exactly,” said Mason, at his most brusque. “But your husband likes a drop of beer, and it’s fairly easy to pass the beer through the wicket gate, isn’t it?”

She could only blink at him pathetically.

“And he’s in the habit of leaving the wicket gate undone every night about eleven o’clock, and you’re in the habit of putting that can inside the gate?”

Her pathos grew. She could only suspect a base informer, and was undecided as to which of her five neighbours had filled that despicable rôle.

She was not unpretty, Mason noticed in his critical way, despite the three children—or four, if her worst fears were realised.

The superintendent turned to his subordinate.

“There’s the connection,” he said, “and that is where Mr. Louis Landor went—through the wicket gate. Oh, you needn’t bother: I’ve sent some men to search the yard. But if I am any judge, Mr. Landor has gone. I’ve already circulated his description.”

Mrs. Albert, the wife of the night watchman, drooped guiltily in her chair, her agonised dark eyes fixed on Mr. Mason. Here was tragedy for her, more poignant than the death of unknown men struck down by unseen forces; the tragedy of a husband dismissed from the only job he had held in five years, of the resumption of that daily struggle for life, of aimless wanderings for employment on his part—she could always go out as a hired help for a few shillings a day.

“He’ll get the sack,” she managed to breathe.

Mason looked at her and shook his head.

“I’m not reporting to the Eastern Trading Company, though you might have helped a little bit if you hadn’t hidden up the truth when I asked you about the beer. I blame myself for not realising that you had something to hide, and what it was. It might have made a big difference.”

“You’re not reporting it, mister?” she asked tremulously, and was on the verge of tears. “I’ve had a very hard time. That poor woman could tell you how hard it was: she used to live with me till she came into money.”

“Which poor woman is this?” asked Mason quickly.

“Mrs. Weston.”

She had lost some of her fear in the face of his interest.

“She lodged with you?”

Elk had left the room. Mason motioned her to the chair which the sergeant had vacated and which was nearer to him.

“Come along and let’s hear all about it,” he said genially.

A bald man, with a round, amused face and a ready smile, removed all her natural suspicions.

“Oh, yes, sir, she used to lodge with me, till she got this money.”

“Where did she get the money from?”

“Gawd knows,” said Mrs. Albert piously. “I never ask questions. She paid me all that she owed me, that’s all I know. I’ve been wondering, sir”—she leaned forward confidentially—“was it her husband or her young man who was killed?”

“Her young man was killed,” said Mason without hesitation. “You knew them?”

She shook her head.

“You knew the husband, at any rate?”

“I’ve seen photographs of him in her room. They were taken in Australia—her and the two. When I say I’ve seen them,” she corrected herself, “I was just going to take a look at ’em when she come in the room and snatched the frame out of my hand—which was funny, because it had always been on the mantelshelf before, but I never took any notice of it till she said one day it was her husband and a great friend. It was on the following day I took up the picture to have a look.”

“And she snatched it out of your hand? How long ago was this?”

She thought.

“Two years last July.”

Mason nodded.

“And soon after that she came into money, almost immediately after?”

Mrs. Albert was not surprised at his perspicuity. She had the impression that she had given him that information.

“Yes, sir, she left me the next day, or two days after. I haven’t spoken to her since. She lives in the grand part of Tidal Basin now. I always say that when people are well off——”

“I’m perfectly sure I can guess what you always say.” He was not unkind but he was very firm. “Now, what sort of a frame would this be in—leather?”

Yes, she thought rather that it was leather—or wood, covered with leather.

“I know she put it in her box because I saw her do it—a little black box she

used to keep under her bed.”

He questioned her and cross-checked her answers, eliminating in the process all possibility that her narrative might be embroidered by imagination. Into the lives of the poor comes no other romance than that of their own creation.

He grew suddenly vague; she could not understand the questions he put to her. They seemed to have no foundation in reason. And then suddenly he touched a high note of romance. Had she ever seen a man with a piece of white cloth on his face? She shuddered pleasurably.

“The Devil. . . I’ve heard of him, but never seen him, thank God! It was him that done it—everybody was saying so in the crowd.”

“Have you ever seen him?”

She shook her head vigorously.

“No, an’ I don’t want to in my state. But I know people who have . . . in the middle of the night.”

“When they’ve been dreaming,” suggested Mason, but she would not have this.

The Devil was a possession of Tidal Basin; not willingly would she surrender the legend. When he showed into the charge-room a woman made tearfully grateful by the knowledge that she could go to her home and her three children; Marford was waiting to say good night. Dr. Rudd had already left.

“If you want me to-night, I shall be at my surgery. I hope I may be allowed to sleep.”

Mason had three things he wished to do at the same time—three errands on which he could trust nobody but himself. He decided to perform his first task single-handed and call back for Elk to assist him with the second.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER IX

MICHAEL QUIGLEY was coming up the steps of the police station as Mason appeared in the doorway.

“Carrion,” said Mason pleasantly, “the body has been removed.”

“Who is it, Mason?”

Mr. Mason shook his head.

“There was once,” he said jovially, “a medical student who was asked how many teeth Adam was born with, and he replied, very properly, ‘God knows.’”

“Unknown, eh? A swell, they tell me?”

“He’s well dressed,” said Mason in his noncommittal way. “Go along and have a look at him. You know all the toughs in the West End.”

Michael shook his head.

“That can wait. What is this murder—a little joke of White Face?”

“Why White Face?” demanded Mason. “Listen, Quigley, you’ve got a bug in your brain. White Face doesn’t belong to Tidal Basin any more than your devil.”

“He’s been seen here,” insisted the reporter, and Mason sighed.

“A man who wore a lump of lint over his face has been seen here. Dr. Marford, in a weak-minded moment, told you. You’d see the same in the neighbourhood of any hospital.”

Michael Quigley was unusually silent.

“Oh . . . where are you going?”

No other reporter dared ask such a question, but Mason knew this young man rather well.

“You’ll get me hung, Michael, but I’ll let you come along with me. I’m going to see a green door and have a little independent search. Your encouragement and help will be welcome. How is Miss Harman?”

Mike almost showed his teeth.

“You can collect gossip, even if you can’t collect murderers!” he snarled. “Miss Harman is a very good friend of mine who is going to marry somebody else.”

“I congratulate her,” said Mason as they stepped out toward Endley Street. “It must be a terribly unromantic life being married to a reporter.”

“There is no question of my being married to anybody,” said Michael savagely, “and you’re getting under my skin, Mason.”

“Fine,” said Mason. “Some day I’ll go shooting elephants.”

They trudged side by side, cold anger in the heart of one and an idea that was growing into shape in the mind of Mr. Mason. He whistled softly as he walked under the high wall of the Eastern Trading Company.

“Do you mind,” asked Michael with sour politeness, “choosing some other tune than the Wedding March?”

“Was I whistling that?” asked the other in surprise. “Ever noticed how like a funeral march it is? Change the time and you’re there.”

It was a beast of a night; a wind had risen, with the cold of the Eastern steppes.

“Policemen and reporters,” said Mason, “get their living out of other

people's misfortunes. Has that ever struck you? Here they are!"

The "they" were three men walking abreast towards them. They slackened their pace when Mason came into view and halted to receive them.

"We've found nothing and nobody," said the senior. "We searched the yard, but there wasn't a sign of a man, though there were plenty of places where he could have hidden."

"And the wicket gate?"

"That was ajar," replied the detective. "Albert, the night watchman, swore that it hadn't been opened. It's against the rules to open the wicket gate unless there's a fire."

"Maybe there was a fire," suggested Mason. "It's a good night for a fire. All right, you can come along with me."

They had only a few yards to go before they came to the place where the pavement, the private yard road and the railway arch formed a triangle.

"This is where the body was found?" suggested Michael, and Mason indicated the spot.

He was still whistling when he walked to the green-painted wicket door and pushed. It was locked now. If he'd only thought of trying that door—but if there *had* been a man behind it he would have had the sense to have shot in the bolts. He must have been hiding in there when Elk was searching the yard for the pocket-case and watch. But if Mrs. Albert had talked——

He confided his woes to Michael, a safe and sure recipient, for Michael Quigley knew just what not to print.

"You get that sort of thing in all these cases," said Michael philosophically. "And you expect it, anyway. Nobody tells the truth, because there's some twiddling little thing to hide that may bring discredit upon them. Personally, I can't understand their mentality."

His eyes roved over the pavement.

"You searched the gutter, I suppose? There's a distinct slope to this sidewalk."

Mason looked inquiringly at one of the detectives, but nobody could tell him anything except that the traps where storm water runs had been emptied and the mud at the bottom carefully searched, without anything of value being found.

Michael straddled the gutter, and, pulling up his sleeve, ran his fingers through the slowly moving water, groping. . . .

"First shot!" he cried exultantly. "What's this?"

Mason took it in his hand. It looked like a button or a tiny brown electric

light bulb. One of the detectives put his light upon the find as it lay in Mason's hand.

"It looks to me like a capsule," said Michael, turning it over curiously.

It was indeed a tiny capsule of thin glass, containing something the colour of which was indistinguishable.

"I seem to know the shape, too. Now where the devil have I seen those before?"

"It can go to the police analyst, anyway," said Mason, and put it carefully in his pocket. "Mike, you're lucky: try again."

Michael's wet hand went through the water, but he could find nothing. And then he saw what hundreds of pairs of eyes, focused on that strip of pavement, had not seen. It lay poised upon the sharp edge of the kerb, as if it had been carefully placed there, though it must have rolled and fallen into its position through no other agent than the force of gravity. The long stone hung over the kerb: the platinum circle was so dulled with rain that it was indistinguishable from the granite on which it rested.

He picked it up, his heart thumping painfully.

"What is this?"

Mason took it from his unwilling hand.

"A ring! To think those poor, blind bats—a ruby ring! I suppose the ruby's an imitation, but it looks ruby."

Michael Quigley said nothing. The men were swaying blurs of shadow; he found a difficulty in breathing. Something in his attitude must have attracted Mason's attention, for he looked at him sharply.

"What's the matter with you? God Almighty, you look like a dead man! It was stooping down that did it—the blood rushing to your head, eh?"

Michael knew Mason well enough to realise that Superintendent Mason was advancing an excuse for the benefit of the other detectives, and this was confirmed when he sent them left and right groping vainly through the gutters for some new clue. Then it was, he took Michael's arm.

"Son," he said kindly, "you've seen that ring before, haven't you?"

Michael shook his head.

"What's the use of telling me a lie?" Mason's voice was reproachful and hurt.

"I don't remember seeing it before," said Michael harshly. It did not sound like his voice speaking.

"Hiding up?" said Mason gently. "What's the use? Somebody's bound to come along and blow it all. You were saying only a minute ago how silly it

was to keep things from the police—twiddling little things that don't count. And you couldn't understand their mentality. Are you understanding their mentality any better?"

"I've never seen that ring before."

It required a mighty effort on his part for Michael to make this statement. Mr. Mason was by nature a sceptic and not easily convinced.

"You've seen it before and you know whom it belongs to. Listen, Michael! I'm not going to be sympathetic with you and I'm not going to try any of the monkey tricks that I use with half-witted criminals. You'll save yourself a lot of trouble and somebody else more, if you take me into your confidence. It doesn't mean that the person who owns that ring is going to be pinched, or that they're booked for pads of publicity—you know me too well for that. Hiding up, as you say, is one of the curses of the business."

Michael had recovered himself by now.

"You'll be pinching me for the murder in a minute," he said lightly. "No, I don't know that stone at all. I was a little dizzy from trying to do stunts in the gutter with my head between my legs. Try it yourself and see what effect it has on you."

Mason looked at him for a long time, then at the ring.

"A lady's ring, I should say." He tried it on his little finger. "And a little finger ring. It doesn't go any farther than the top of mine. That will mean publicity," he said carelessly. "I don't want to say anything against you newspaper men, Michael, but you certainly spread yourselves on a mysterious clue like this, and I shouldn't be surprised to find a portrait of the young lady _____"

He stopped suddenly.

"Not Miss Harman?"

"No," said Michael loudly.

"Liar," retorted Mr. Mason. "It's Miss Harman's ring! And you knew it the moment you saw it!"

He looked at the jewel for a while, then put it into his pocket.

"This man who was murdered was a South African?" asked Mike.

Mason nodded.

"Had he come recently from South Africa?"

"We don't know, but we guess within the last week or two."

"What is his name?"

"We don't even know that, except that it's Donald."

His jaw dropped; his large protruding eyes opened to their widest extent.

“Whom is Miss Harman going to marry?” he asked.

“An Irishman named Feeney,” said Michael mendaciously. “No, as a matter of fact, Mason, she’s marrying me. But I’ve had a little tiff with her. Can I see the body?”

“Let’s go together and make an evening of it,” said Mason, and linked arms with him.

Their gruesome errand lasted only a few minutes and left Michael more puzzled than ever. Puzzled and terribly distressed. There was no question at all that the man who had dropped that ring, whether it was the dead man or the murderer, was the romantic lover. He must find out the truth at all costs.

He left Mason at the police station and ran out, almost knocking down a girl who was hesitating at the foot of the station steps.

“Michael . . . Michael!” she gasped, and clutched him by the arm. “They told me you were here. I had to see you. . . . Oh, Michael, I’ve been a fool and I do want help terribly badly!”

He looked at her with momentary suspicion.

“How long have you been here, Janice?” he asked.

“I’ve just arrived. There’s my car.” She pointed to its dim lights. The shoulders of her skin coat were wet with rain. “Could we go anywhere? I want to speak to you. There’s been a murder, hasn’t there?”

He nodded.

“How dreadful! But I’m glad I knew where I could find you. There always seem to be murders here,” she shuddered. “And I’ve been murdered, too, Michael. All my vanity, all my pride—if it’s true. And I feel that you are the only person that can bring them to life again. Where can we go?”

He hesitated. He had supplied the needs of the last edition; there was nothing more for him to write to-night, though his work was by no means done. He went back to the car. She was in so pitiable a condition that he took the wheel from her hand and drove her to Bury Street. He had never been in her flat before, so that he was a stranger to the maid who opened the door.

Janice led the way to the pretty little drawing-room and closed the door.

“Take your coat off,” he commanded before she started speaking. “Your shoes and your stockings are all wet—go and change them.”

She went meekly, and returned in a few minutes with a dressing-gown wrapped round her, and cowered down in a low arm-chair before an electric radiator.

“Here’s the cablegram I had.”

She handed him a folded paper without looking up.

“Wait! Before you read it I want to tell you. He said he had a farm in Paarl and he was very anxious to buy an adjoining property . . . and I was buying it for him and cabled out to Van Zyl, that awfully nice boy I spoke to you about, and told him to buy it. That is his answer.”

He opened the telegram. It was a long message.

The property you mention is not at Paarl but in Constantia adjoining the convict prison. It is not and never has been for sale. Donald Bateman, whom you mention as proprietor, is unknown as landowner either here or in Rhodesia. My friend Public Prosecutor is afraid man you mention is Donald Bateman, who served nine months imprisonment at Constantia for land frauds; tall, rather good-looking man, long scar under his chin, grey eyes. He left by “Balmoral Castle” five weeks ago en route England. His frauds take shape of persuading people advance money buy property and decamping with deposit. Please forgive if this little melodramatic. Always anxious serve. Carl.

He folded the telegram and looked at her oddly.

And then he said in a strange voice:

“The scar under the chin. It’s curious, that’s the first thing I noticed.”

She turned and looked up at him, startled.

“You haven’t seen him? You told me you hadn’t. When did you see him?”

Michael licked his dry lips. Donald Bateman! So that was his name! He walked across to her and laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

“My dear, how perfectly rotten for you!” he said huskily. “Isn’t it?”

“Do you think that is true? That he is—what Carl says he is?”

“Yes,” he said. “You gave him the ring, didn’t you?”

She made an impatient little gesture.

“That was nothing; it had no value except a sentimental one—which made it rather appropriate,” she added bitterly.

There was something he had to ask, something so difficult that he could hardly frame the words.

“There are no complications, are there?”

She looked up at him wonderingly.

“Complications? What do you mean, Michael?”

She saw that he avoided her gaze.

“Well, I mean, you aren’t married already . . . secretly married, you know?”

It can be done in two or three days.”

She shook her head.

“Why should I? Of course not.”

He fetched a long sigh of relief.

“Thank the Lord for that!” he said. “Are you very fond of him? Not too fond, are you, Janice?”

“No. I’ve been a mad schoolgirl, haven’t I? I’ve been realising it all the evening, that I didn’t—love him. I wonder if you’ll believe it. . . . I haven’t even kissed him—ugh!”

He patted her shoulder gently.

“Naturally my pride is hurt, but I haven’t crashed so utterly as I should if I—well, if this thing had gone on before I found it out. You’ll never laugh at me, will you, Michael?”

She put up her hand and laid it on that which rested on her shoulder.

“No, I shan’t laugh at you.”

She sat gazing into the glowing electric fire, and then:

“Why did you ask about the ring?”

He made the plunge.

“Because I’ve been lying about it to Mason—Superintendent Mason of Scotland Yard.”

She was up on her feet instantly, her eyes wide with alarm.

“Scotland Yard! Have they got the ring? Have they arrested him? Michael, what is it?” She gripped his arm. “You’re hiding something—what is it?”

“I’ve been hiding something—yes. I’ve been hiding from Mason the fact that the ring was yours. It was found in Endley Street. I picked it up myself, near the place where the body of a murdered man was found.”

“A murdered man was found in Endley Street.” She repeated the words slowly. “That was the case you were on. . . . Who was it? Not Donald Bateman?”

He nodded.

“O God, how awful!”

He thought she was going to faint, but when he reached out to catch her she pushed him back.

“He was stabbed by some person unknown,” said Michael. “I—I’ve seen him. That’s how I knew about the scar.”

She was very still and white but she showed no other signs of distress.

“What was he doing there?” she asked. “He didn’t know the

neighbourhood; he told me to-day he'd never been there before in his life. Nobody knows who did it?"

He shook his head.

"Nobody. When I saw the ring I recognised it at once. Like a fool I gave myself away, and Mason, who's as sharp as a packet of needles, knew that I was lying when I told him I had never seen it before. He may advertise the ring to-morrow unless I tell him."

"Then tell him," she said instantly. "Dead! It's unbelievable!"

She sat down in the chair again, her face in her hands. He thought she was on the verge of a breakdown, but when she raised her face to him her eyes were tearless.

"You had better go back, my dear. I shan't do anything stupid—but I'm afraid I shan't sleep. Will you come early in the morning and let me know what has been discovered? I intended going to see Dr. Marford to-morrow and ask him to let me come back to the clinic, but I don't think I can for a day or two."

"I don't want to leave you like this," he said, but she smiled faintly.

"You're talking as if I were a mid-Victorian heroine," she said. "No, my dear, you go. I'd like to be alone for a little while."

And then, to his great embarrassment, she raised his hand and kissed it.

"I'm being motherly," she said.

If there were no tears in her eyes, pain was there. He thought it wise of him to leave at once, and he went back to Tidal Basin to find the streets alive with police, for two important things had happened; two new phases of the drama had been enacted in his absence.

A FRAMED photograph is not a difficult object to find, and black boxes in which ladies keep their treasures deposited beneath their beds are far from becoming rarities. Mr. Mason would have liked to have Elk with him, but the gaunt sergeant had gone on to join Bray. A watch was being kept on the block in which Louis Landor's apartments were situated. Bray had telephoned through that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Landor was yet at home. Evidently something was wrong here, for the servant, who had returned and was awaiting admission, told Bray that she had been sent out earlier in the day, that there had been some sort of trouble between a couple that were hitherto happily married. She had been told she need not return until late. Bray had found her waiting

disconsolately outside the flat, and had persuaded her to spend the night with a sister who lived in the neighbourhood.

“One thing she told me,” said Bray over the wire; “the flat is packed with South African curios. If this girl’s story is true, there are two knives similar to the one with which the murder was committed—they hang on a belt in the hall. She described the sheath exactly, and said they both had the initials of Landor, and that he got them as prizes in South America, where he lived for some years.”

“Hang on,” were Mason’s instructions. “Elk’s gone up to join you. Report to me here or at Scotland Yard. I am making a search on my own.”

He had on his desk the contents of Mrs. Weston’s bag, including the worn hypodermic case that Dr. Marford had produced. The case puzzled him, because it was old and the little syringe had evidently been used many times. And yet Marford had given it as his opinion that the woman was not an addict and that it was only the second time that the needle had been used.

There were a few letters, a bill or two from a West End milliner. Evidently Lorna Weston, in spite of the poverty-stricken neighbourhood in which she lived, spared no expense in the adornment of her person. He found two five-pound notes, half a dozen Treasury bills, a little silver and a bunch of keys, and it was with these keys that, in company with Sergeant Shale, he made his way to the mystery woman’s apartments.

What Mrs. Albert had described as “the grand part of Tidal Basin,” consisted of two or three streets of well-built villas. There were several shops here, and it was over one of these, a large grocery store, that Mrs. Weston had her apartments, which were approached by a side door and a short passage. From this ran a flight of rather steep steps to a landing above.

The place was fitted with electric light and had, he saw, a telephone of its own. He climbed the stairs and was staggered to find that the landing had been painted and decorated in the West End style. Parchment-covered walls, white metal wall-brackets and soft-shaded lamps gave the approach to the apartment the appearance of luxury.

The front room was the parlour, and was tastefully furnished, and this was the case with the other rooms, including an expensively fitted kitchenette.

Mr. Mason was essentially a man of the world. He knew that this style of living was consistent with the earnings of no profession, reputable or otherwise. Either Mrs. Weston had a private income of her own or else——

He remembered that the woman at the police station had spoken of her coming into a lot of money. That might be an explanation. But why did she choose this ghastly neighbourhood in which to live?

There was a small writing-table in the drawing-room, but a search of this—the drawers were unlocked—revealed nothing that was in any way satisfactory to the searcher. It was in the bedroom that he and his assistant decided to make their most careful scrutiny. This was the room next to the drawing-room and the last to be visited. As soon as he switched on the lights, Mason realised that something unusual had happened. The drawers of the dressing-table had been pulled out, the plate-glass door of the wardrobe stood wide open. On the floor was a medley of garments and wearing apparel, and amidst them Mason saw the corner of a black box. He went quickly to this. It had been locked, but somebody had broken open the lid. Scattered about the floor were oddments and papers. There was no framed photograph. What he did see was a small cardboard cylinder. He picked it up and squinted through it; it was empty.

The cylinder interested him, because he knew it was the kind in which marriage certificates were kept; and, however unhappy a marriage might be, that little slip of paper is one with which no woman parts willingly.

“Get the men in and we’ll dust the place for finger-prints,” he said.

He had hardly spoken the words before he saw lying on the bed a pair of white cotton gloves. The intruder had taken no risks. He examined them carefully, but they told him nothing except that they were white cotton gloves which had been carefully washed, probably by their user.

When had the burglar come, and how had he secured admission? The door below had not been forced; only the black box, which, he guessed, had been in the bottom drawer of the bureau when it was found, for nothing in this drawer had been disturbed, and there was a space which such a box might have occupied.

Of clues by which he could judge the time, there was none.

“There’s somebody knocking on the door down below,” said Shale. “Shall I see who it is?”

“No, wait; I’ll go.”

Mason went quickly down the stairs and opened the door. A woman was standing there with a shawl over her head to protect her from the rain. She looked dubiously at Mason standing in the light, and edged farther back. It struck him that she was ready to run.

“Is everything all right?” she asked nervously.

“Everything is all wrong,” said Mason. And then, recognising her timidity and guessing the reason; “Don’t worry—I’m a police officer.”

He saw she was relieved.

“I’m the caretaker of the house opposite; the lady is away in the country; and I was wondering whether I ought to go to the police or not.”

“Then you saw somebody go into this flat to-night?” asked Mason quickly.

“I saw them come out,” she said. “I wouldn’t even have taken notice of that if it hadn’t been for the white thing——”

“What white thing? You mean, it was somebody with a white mask?” Mason snapped the question at her.

“I won’t swear to who it was, but I will swear that he had white on his face. I saw it as plain as can be in the light of the street lamp. I’ve had toothache all night and I’ve been sitting in our front parlour——”

He cut short her narrative.

“When did you see this somebody come out?” he asked.

It was less than a quarter of an hour ago. She had also seen him and Shale enter and, believing that they were police officers, she had ventured to come over and knock at the door. He questioned her closely as to how the burglar had been dressed, and the description was a familiar one: the long coat that reached to the heels, the black felt hat and the white mask. He learned one characteristic which had never before been noticed: the man limped painfully. She was very sure of this. He came in no car and went away walking, and had disappeared round the corner of the block, in the direction opposite to that which the two detectives had followed on their way to the flat.

Shale came down and took a shorthand note of her statement, and then the two men returned to the flat and made an even more careful scrutiny in the hope that White Face might have left something else behind than his gloves.

“I don’t even know that these won’t tell us something.”

Mason put the gloves carefully into a paper bag and slipped them into his pocket.

“Then it’s true, White Face *is* an institution here.”

“They all think so,” said Shale. “The little thieves round here glorify him!”

Mason returned to the station, a very much baffled man. He had two pieces of evidence, and these he had locked away in the station safe. He took out the ring and the capsule and brought them into the inspector’s room. The garrulous Rudd would be able to tell him something about this. He opened the door and called to the station sergeant.

“I suppose Dr. Rudd will be in bed by now?”

“No, sir; he rang me up a quarter of an hour ago. He said he was coming round to offer rather a startling theory. Those were his words—‘rather a startling theory.’ ”

Mason groaned.

“It’ll be startling all right! Get him on the ’phone and ask him if he’ll step

round. Don't mention the theory. I want him to identify a medicine."

He examined the ring through a magnifying-glass, but there was nothing that could tell him a twentieth of what Michael Quigley could have told.

"That Quigley knows something," grumbled Mason. "I nearly had it out of him, too."

"What could he know, sir?" asked Shale.

"He knows who owns that ring," nodded Mason.

The station sergeant opened the door and looked in.

"Dr. Rudd went out five minutes ago on his way, sir," he said, "and there's a message for you from the Yard."

It was from the Information Bureau. The mysterious Donald had been located.

"His name is Donald Bateman," said the reporting detective. "He arrived from South Africa three weeks ago and is staying at the Little Norfolk Hotel, Norfolk Street. The description tallies with the description you sent us, Mr. Mason."

"He's not in the hotel now by any chance?"

"No, sir, he went out this evening, wearing a dinner jacket, and said he wouldn't be back till midnight. He hasn't been seen since. He has a scar under his chin—that corresponds with your description, too—and he's about the same height as the murdered man."

"Pass his name to the Identification Bureau," said Mason, "see if we have any record of him and—don't go away, my lad—post a man in the hotel. If Mr. Donald Bateman doesn't return by seven o'clock to-morrow morning have his trunks removed to Cannon Row Police Station and held until I come and search them."

He hung up the receiver.

"Donald Bateman, eh? That's something to go on. Mr. Bray hasn't rung up?"

"No, sir."

Mason strolled back to the inspector's room and resumed his examination of the ring and the capsule.

"Yes, Michael knows all about the ring or I'm a Dutchman. The young devil nearly fainted when he found it."

"Where could the ring and the capsule have come from?" asked Shale.

"Where else could they have come from than out of Donald Bateman's pocket? You've heard all the witnesses examined: they agree that when Bateman fell he put his hand in his waistcoat pocket and tried to get something

out. He probably got both these things in his hand; they rolled down the sidewalk into the gutter, and they wouldn't have been found then but for Michael. I'll say that of the kid, he's got good instincts."

He looked at his watch.

"How far does the doctor live from here?"

"Not four minutes' walk," said Shale, who had been sent to fetch the divisional surgeon when the murder was reported.

"Then he ought to be here by now. Ring him again."

But Dr. Rudd's housekeeper insisted that he had left ten minutes before.

"Go out and see if you can find him."

Mason was suddenly serious. He mistrusted the doctor's theories; he mistrusted more his garrulity. A man who talks all the time and whose topics are limited in number must inevitably say something which the police would rather he did not say. He hoped he had not met a friend on the way.

In a little under ten minutes Shale came back. He had been as far as the doctor's house but had seen no sign of Rudd. It was a comparatively short and straightforward walk.

"He may be with Dr. Marford. Ring him."

But Marford could offer no explanation, except that he had been in his surgery and that Rudd had passed, tapping on the big surgery window to say good night.

"And frightened me out of my skin," complained Dr. Marford. "I hadn't the slightest idea who it was until I went up and looked behind the blinds."

The distance from the doctor's surgery to the police station was less than two hundred yards, but there was another way, through Gallows Court, an unwholesome short cut, by which the distance could be cut off some fifty yards. As nobody ever went into Gallows Court, except those lost souls who dragged out their dreary existence there, it was presumable that Rudd had taken the longest route.

The lower end of Gallows Court ran out through a tunnel-shaped opening flush with and a few yards north of Dr. Marford's side door. In the days when drunken sailormen from the docks and wharves were as common as lamp-posts, Gallows Court was a place of picturesque infamy. It was no longer picturesque.

A Chinaman had a tiny lodging-house there in which he housed an incredible number of his fellow countrymen. Four or five Italian families lived in another house, and other families less easy to describe dwelt in the others. It was said that the police went down Gallows Court in pairs. That is not true.

They never went at all, and only with the greatest circumspection when *bona fide* cries of “Murder!” called for their attention.

Dr. Marford was one of the few people who went down that lane day or night voluntarily and suffered no harm. Did he wish, he could tell hair-raising stories of what he had seen and heard in that malodorous thoroughfare, but he was from choice a poor raconteur.

“I shouldn’t think Rudd would go down there,” he said in answer to the superintendent’s inquiry. “At any rate, if you have any doubt I’ll go myself.”

Half an hour passed, and at a quarter to two Mason gathered all his reserves and sent them on a search. A telephone call brought swift police launches to the water front, to the distress of the local gang that was illicitly breaking cargo when the boats arrived. But there was no sign of Rudd or message from him. Momentarily he had vanished from the face of the earth.

This was the situation as Michael Quigley found it when he arrived on the scene. He sought an interview with the superintendent and told him frankly, as Janice had directed him to tell, the story of the ring. Mr. Mason listened wearily.

“Hiding up!” he wailed. “What good did it do? Why couldn’t you tell me right away—not that it would have made any difference, except that I should have known the name earlier. Yes, that’s his name, Donald Bateman. We’re getting warmer—hallo, doctor!”

It was Marford, who had come for news of his colleague.

“None. He’s probably discovered that the murderer was an Irishman and he’s gone off by the night boat to Ireland to get local colour. Sit down, doctor, and have some coffee.”

He pushed a steaming cup towards Marford, who took it and sipped painfully.

“Where he’s gone I don’t know, and don’t care.” Mason yawned. “I’m a weary man, and I did hope this murder was coming out nicely. If Mr. Louis Landor would only come home like a good lad, we ought to have all the threads in our hands by the morning. But if Mr. Louis Landor has taken his passport and his three thousand pounds in a private aeroplane to the Continent, then this is going to be one of those well-known unravelled mysteries of London that reporters write about when they’re too old for ordinary work.”

The doctor finished his coffee and went soon after. His second case was due.

Mason walked with him to the door.

“Any more theories?”

“Yes, I’ve got, not a theory, but an absolute conviction now,” said Marford quietly. “But for the trifling detail that I’m not in a position to supply the evidence, I think I could tell you the murderer.”

Mason nodded.

“I wonder if you are thinking of the same person, doctor?”

Marford smiled.

“For his sake, I hope not.”

“Which means that you’re not going to give us the benefit of your logic and deductions?”

“I’m a doctor, not a detective,” said the other.

Mason came back to the charge-room fire and warmed his hands.

“No message from Bray or Elk?”

He glanced at the clock; it was a quarter-past two. He began to have his doubts whether Mr. Louis Landor would ever return to his flat.

Accompanied by the reporter, he strolled out in the direction of Gallows Alley. The rain had ceased, but the wind still blew fitfully.

“And if you’re writing about this place,” he said, “don’t fall into an error common to all cub reporters: that Gallows Alley stands on the site of Execution Dock. It doesn’t. It was named after a man called Gallers, who owns a lot of property about here, and if, instead of putting up his silly clinics, the doctor would get his rich pals to buy this area and clear away the slums, he’d be doing the world a service—and the police.”

The entry of Gallows Court looked dark and formidable. Within a few yards were the gates of the doctor’s yard. It was a small courtyard, at one end of which was a shed, which he hired out to the famous Gregory Wicks, a veteran owner of a taxicab. It was in another way a most useful assembling place for the doctor, who dispensed his own medicines. Almost any evening could be seen a queue of poorly-dressed men and women lined up, waiting their turn to enter the narrow passage that flanked the surgery and receive through a small hatch from the doctor’s hands the medicine he had ordered and dispensed.

“It’s more like the waiting-room of a hospital than a private surgery,” explained Michael.

Mason grunted.

“Why keep ’em alive?” he asked in despair.

A wall divided Gallows Court from the doctor’s yard, the houses in that by-pass being built on one side of the court only.

Mason looked up and down, and again felt that unaccountable sensation of

menace.

The road was a black canyon, and the starry arc lamps emphasised the desolation. A street of tombs; black, ugly, shoddy tombs, nailed and glued and cheaply cemented together. The dingy window-glass hardly returned the reflection of the lights; no chimney smoked, no window glowed humanly. Up Gallows Court, where the door panels had been used for firewood, men and women slept in the open, huddled up in the deep recesses of doorways, slept through the rain and the souging wind, old sacks drawn over their knees and shoulders.

As Mason and his companion picked a way over the slippery cobbles, a voice in the darkness chanted—the voice of a woman husky with sleep:

“I spy a copper with a shinin’ collar;
If he touches me I’ll holler—P’lice!”

He never ceased to wonder how it was they could see in the dark.

“They’re rats,” said Mike, answering his unspoken thought.

A chuckle of sly laughter came to them.

“They never sleep,” said Mason in despair. “It was the same in my time. Day and night you could go through Gallows Court and there would be somebody watching you.”

He wheeled suddenly and called a name. From a dark entry slunk a figure, which might have been man or woman.

“Thought it was you,” said Mason.

(Who it was, or who he thought it was, Michael never learnt.)

“How are things?”

“Bad, Mr. Mason, very bad.” It was the whining voice of an old man.

“Have you seen Dr. Rudd to-night?”

Again came that eerie peal of laughter from invisible depths.

“He’s the coppers’ man, ain’t he—Rudd? No, Mr. Mason, we ain’t seen him. Nobody comes down ’ere. Afraid of wakin’ people up, they are!”

The chuckles came now like the rustle of a wind.

Mason stopped before No. 9. A man was sitting on the step, his back to the door, a bibulous man who slept noisily. An old hearth-rug was drawn over his knees and on top some belated wag of Gallows Court had balanced an empty tomato can.

“If it doesn’t fall and wake him, old man Wicks will give him a shock if he finds him there!” said Mason.

“Uncanny, isn’t it?” he said when they had emerged from the court. “They

talk about Chinamen in the East End of London. Lord! they're the only decent people they've got in Gallows Court, and old Gregory."

"I wonder what they do for a living?"

"I should hate to know," said Mason.

They came back by the way they had entered.

"I'm giving Bray another house, and then I'm going up to the Yard."

"I'll drive you, if you like. There's nothing more to be got here."

The shadowy figure they had seen emerged from the opening, holding an old overcoat about his throat.

"White Face has been around to-night, they say, Mr. Mason."

"Do they, indeed?" said Mason politely.

"You don't treat us right, Mr. Mason. You come down 'ere an' expect us to 'nose' for you, and everybody in the court knows we're 'nosing.' If you treated us right and did the proper thing, you'd hear something. What's the matter with old Gregory, hey? That's something you don't know—and nobody else knows. What's the matter with Gregory?"

And with this cryptic remark he vanished.

"He's mad—genuinely mad. No, I don't know his name, but he's mad in a sane way. What in hell does he mean about Gregory?"

Mike could not answer. He knew old Gregory—everybody in London knew the man who housed his cab in Dr. Marford's yard and lived alone in the one decent house in Gallows Court.

"I'd give a lot to know what that crazy man knew about him—what he was driving at."

Mason was disturbed, irritable. A detective officer has an instinct for sincerity—it is two-thirds of his mental equipment, and the demented denizen of the court was not rambling. To speak ill, or hint suspicion, against Gregory Wicks was a kind of treason.

"Rum lot of devils," he said, and shrugged off his uneasiness.

THE telephone bell had been ringing at frequent intervals in the Landors' flat; the waiting detectives could hear it in the street: there must have been a half-open window somewhere through which the sound could come.

"It's Mason getting rattled, I should think," said Elk fretfully. "Why I came here I don't know. Madness! I get like that sometimes—just go dippy and do

silly things.”

“You came here,” said Inspector Bray heavily, “because you were told to come by your superior officer.”

Elk groaned.

“The trouble with you, Billy, is that you’ve no sense of unimportance,” he said helplessly.

“That doesn’t sound very respectful,” said Mr. Bray severely.

He wanted to be very severe indeed, but you never knew with Elk. At any moment he might force you into bringing him before the Chief Constable, and invariably when he was brought before the Chief Constable he demonstrated that he and the Chief Constable were the only people in the world who took a sensible view of the circumstances.

“How many men have you posted?” he asked. “I don’t want to give either of these two people a chance of slipping us.”

“I’ve posted none,” said Sergeant Elk, almost brightly. “My superior officer has posted three, and takes all the responsibility. I ventured to suggest a different posting, but I was told to mind my own so-and-so business.”

“I said nothing of the sort,” said Bray hotly.

“You meant it,” was Elk’s retort.

Bray looked anxiously up and down. He was not terribly happy, working under Mason. Very few detective officers were. And he was out of his own division, which was all wrong. Moreover, Mason was very unforgiving when his subordinates fell into error, and this was a murder case, where no excuses would be accepted. On the whole, it was better to conciliate his sergeant, who was notoriously a favourite of the superintendent.

He stared up and down the road uncomfortably.

“If I’ve been a little short-tempered with you, Elk, I’m sorry,” he said almost affectionately. “I’m so distracted with this business. Where did you say I ought to post a man?”

“In the back courtyard,” said Elk promptly. “There’s a reachable fire escape up which any healthy man or woman could climb, or vice versa.”

Elk was on the point of withdrawing a perfectly useless patrol at the far end of the street, when a taxicab turned the corner, stopped before the main door of the apartment and a woman got out. They were watching from the corner of a front garden on the opposite side of the road.

“That looks like the lady, eh? What do you think, Elk?”

“That’s madam,” said Elk. “And I’ve seen her before somewhere.”

She had paid the taxi and it drove slowly away. The watchers still waited.

As Inez Landor put the key in the front door they saw her turn her head and look anxiously round. She could see nobody. Her imagination had pictured the road packed with police officers. She hurried up to the first floor, unlocked her own door and went into the flat.

There was a small hand-lamp on the table, working from a dry battery, and it was this she switched on. There were four letters in the letter-box. She did not even trouble to take them out, but, taking the lamp in her hand, she went softly to the bedroom door, which opened from the hall, and looked in. Her heart sank when she saw that her husband had not returned. What should she do? What could she do? With a deep sigh, she took off her leather coat and hat and went into the bedroom, leaving the door open.

There had been a murder in the East End; she had seen the late edition bills and heard somebody speaking about it at supper—not that she ate supper, but usually, when she and her husband were both out, she arranged to meet Louis at Elford's. He had not appeared. She had waited till the restaurant closed, and had then gone on to a fashionable all-night coffee-house, where they went when he was very late. He was not there either. The time of waiting seemed an eternity. In despair she had gone home, not daring to buy the midnight sheets which were being sold on the street for fear. . . .

She shivered. She wondered whether that nice doctor would say anything; the man with the gentle voice, who had been so sympathetic and who had given her sal volatile. How stupid she had been to mistake a fight between two labourers! Perhaps that was what the newspapers called murder.

She had told him so much—things she would not have told to her mother if she were living. There was hardly a step she had taken that day which she did not now bitterly regret. It was worse than folly—sheer madness, to go in search of Louis. Suppose something had happened—a fight; she dared not imagine worse. She had broadcast his motives through London.

Inez Landor drew on her dressing-gown and walked up and down the dark room, striving to settle her mind to calmness. She had had four deliriously happy years, years of dream-building. That flimsy fabric had been shivered to nothingness.

She thought she heard a sound, a step in the hall, and, opening the door, she listened. There it was again, a faint creak. There was a loose board near the hall door. She had always intended having that board replaced.

“Is that you, Louis?” she whispered.

There was no answer. She could hear the solemn ticking of the hall clock, and the far-away whirr of a motor-car passing the end of the road.

“Louis—is that you?” she raised her voice.

She must have been mistaken, then, for no answer came. She left the door ajar, and, going to the window, pulled aside the curtains carefully and looked out. A futile act, for this window looked upon the wall at the back of the building.

And then she heard a faint knock. The silence in the flat was so deep that it re-echoed through the hall. She tiptoed into the hall and listened. The knock was repeated, and she crept to the door.

“Who is there?” she asked in a low voice.

“Louis.”

Her heart was beating furiously. She turned the handle and admitted him, closing the door behind him.

“Put on the light, darling.”

His voice was strained and old-sounding. It was the voice of a man who had been running and had not recovered his breath.

“Sitting in the dark? Turn on the lights.”

“Wait!”

There was a window in the tiny lobby which could be seen from the street. She pulled down the blind and drew the thick curtains across and closed her own door before she switched the light in the hall. Save for the blue bruise under one eye, his face was colourless. Inez Landor stared at her husband with growing terror.

“What has happened?”

He shook his head. It was at once a gesture of impatience and weariness.

“Nothing very much. I have had a ghastly time. Inez, will you get me a glass of water?”

“Shall I get you some wine?”

He shook his head.

“No, darling, water.”

She was gone for a few minutes; when she returned he was looking at the knife and belt that hung on the wall. It was one of many souvenirs he had collected in his travels—a broad leather belt with big brass bosses, from which hung a knife in a gaily ornamented sheath. Before this day it had meant no more than the saddle, the lasso, the spears and the strange Aztec relics that covered the wall.

“We’ve got to get rid of that somehow,” he said.

“The knife?”

“Yes, this.”

He tapped the empty frog where a second knife had been.

She did not ask him why; but what hope there was left in her heart, flickered and died. For a little while neither spoke. There were questions she wanted to ask him which her tongue refused to frame. She could only make the most trite and commonplace remarks.

“I thought I heard you in the flat a few minutes ago,” she said. “You haven’t been in before?”

“No.”

“Why did you knock?” she asked, suddenly remembering.

He licked his lips.

“I lost my key. I don’t know where—somewhere.”

He drank the remainder of the water and put the glass on the top of a little desk which stood against the wall.

“I could have sworn I heard the door close a few minutes ago,” she said. “I came out and called you. I heard somebody walking in the hall.”

He smiled and his arm went round her shoulders.

“Your nerve is going. Have you been waiting here in the dark?”

She shook her head. Should she tell him? It was not the moment for half-confidences.

“No, I have been out looking for you.”

She caught his arm.

“Louis, you didn’t fight? You didn’t—do anything?”

Louis Landor did not answer immediately.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Let us go into the sitting-room.”

But she pushed him back into the chair where he was sitting.

“No, no, stay here. None of these lights shows from the street.”

He looked at her sharply.

“What do you mean—none of these lights shows from the street? Is anybody outside watching?”

“I’m not sure,” she said. “I think so. Before I left the restaurant I telephoned here in the hope that you had returned. I thought the maid was here, and didn’t realise that she couldn’t get in. I knew she’d gone to her sister’s and I called her up. Louis”—her lips quivered—“the police have been here.”

And when he did not speak she knew——

“Has anything happened?”

Louis Landor ran his fingers through his long black hair.

“I don’t know—yes—I do know, but I’m not sure how far I was involved. When I went out after him I lost sight of him, but I had an idea I should find him somewhere in the West End, and I was right.”

“You spoke to him?”

He shook his head.

“No, he was in a car with a girl—a very pretty girl; some poor little fool who has fallen for him. She’s a nurse who works for Marford.”

He saw her mouth open wide in amazement.

“For Marford—not Dr. Marford?”

“How the devil did you know that?” he asked, astonished. “Yes, he’s got a clinic in the East End. I’m going to see her to-morrow and tell her the truth about Mr. Donald Bateman. I followed them in a cab to Bury Street and then back to his hotel. I wanted the chance of seeing him alone without making any kind of scandal, but he never gave me the chance. Naturally I did not want to send my name up to his room, so I waited till he came out. There wasn’t the ghost of a chance of seeing him: he went to a little restaurant which was crowded with people, but I knew that if I was patient I should pick him up and settle our little matter definitely. He lingered over his dinner and I have an idea that he was waiting for somebody. She came eventually—rather a pretty woman. She wasn’t in evening dress and her voice was rather common. When he went out of the restaurant I followed, keeping at a distance. I think he’d recognised me this afternoon. Naturally, she complicated matters: I had to wait till he dropped her. After dinner they drove away from the restaurant. I was in the gallery upstairs and could see everything that was happening. I took a taxi and followed them—they drove to a very poor neighbourhood—Tidal Basin, they call it, I think. There she went into a flat with him—it was over a shop. It was then that I telephoned to you. Darling, you didn’t follow me?”

She nodded dejectedly.

“I had an uncomfortable feeling you might. You were mad!”

“I know. Go on,” she said. “What happened then?”

He asked for another glass of water and she brought it for him.

“He came out alone, and I followed him to a street which has a long wall on one side. I was just going up to him when I saw the woman run across the road. She spoke to him for a little time and then they parted. It was my opportunity. There was nobody in sight and I came up to him——”

“He had the knife?” she interrupted, and he smiled wryly.

“I gave him no chance to use it.”

She had seen the bruise on his face but had not the courage to ask him how

he came by it. It seemed so unimportant in view of the other terrific possibility.

“—Yes, I hit him. He went down like a log. I got scared. I saw somebody standing in the doorway—a doctor’s place—it must have been Marford. I ran. And then I saw a policeman walking towards me. At the place where I stopped there was a big gate which had a wicket door. By some miracle it was unlocked. I got through and bolted the door. I was in a narrow yard which surrounded the warehouse. The police came and searched it but I hid behind some packing cases.”

“The police?” she gasped. “Searched it. Is Donald——?”

He nodded.

“Not dead?” she wailed.

He nodded again.

“The police have been here?”

“Yes. They’ve been questioning the maid. I don’t know what she has told them.”

He got up and walked to the little desk and felt in his pocket.

“I’ve lost my keys.”

She took a little leather case from her bag and handed it to him. He opened one of the drawers and took out a thick packet of papers.

“I suppose very few people keep three thousand pounds in the entrance hall of their flat!” His voice was now almost normal. “Whatever happens, we’ll get out of the country to-morrow. If anything goes wrong with me, you take the money and get away.”

She clutched at his sleeve frantically.

“What can happen to you, Louis? You didn’t kill him—the knife!”

He disengaged her hand almost roughly.

“I don’t know whether I killed him. Now listen,” he said. “You’ve got to be terribly sensible about this. Even if this blackguard told everything, they can’t hurt you. But I don’t want you to suffer the ignominy of an inquiry—the police court and that filth.”

Her senses were unnaturally keen. She heard a sound.

“There’s somebody coming up the stairs,” she whispered. “Go into the bedroom—go quickly!”

He hesitated, but she pushed him towards the room and ran rather than walked to the door and listened. She could hear soft, whispering voices. Switching on the table lamp, she found a book and opened it with trembling hands. There was a little sewing table in the spare room and she brought this out and had placed it near when the first thunderous knock sounded. She took

one glimpse at herself in the hall mirror, used her pocket puff swiftly and opened the door.

Two men were standing there: two tall, grim-looking figures of fate.

“Who is it?” she asked.

It was an agonised effort to control her voice, but she succeeded.

“My name is Bray—Detective-Inspector Bray, Criminal Investigation Department,” he said formally. “This is Detective-Sergeant Elk.”

“Good evening, Mrs. Landor.”

It was characteristic of Elk that he took complete charge of the proceedings from that moment. He had the affability of a man supremely confident of himself.

“Come in,” she said.

“All right, Mrs. Landor, I’ll shut the door,” said Elk.

They walked into the hall. She noticed that neither of the men removed his hat.

She made one effort to appear unconcerned, tried to infuse a little gaiety into her voice.

“I should have known you were detectives. I’ve seen so many in cinemas and I know detectives never take their hats off,” she smiled.

Mr. Bray would have taken this as a reproach. Elk was apparently amused, but supplied an explanation.

“A detective who takes his hat off, Mrs. Landor,” he said, “is a detective with one hand! In other words, the other hand is occupied when he may want to use two.”

“I hope you won’t even want to use one,” she said. “Will you sit down? Is it about Joan?”

It was cruelly unfair to make this implied libel on an honest and decent servant, but she could not afford to be nice.

“Don’t make a noise, will you?” she added. “My husband is asleep.”

“He got asleep very quickly, Mrs. Landor,” said Bray. “He only came in a few minutes ago.”

She forced a smile.

“A few minutes ago! How absurd! He’s been in bed since ten.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Landor, did another man come into this flat?”

She shook her head.

“Do you ever have burglars coming up the fire escape?” he asked, eyeing her quickly.

She laughed at this.

“I don’t even know which way burglars come, but I never use the fire escape myself! I hope I never shall!”

Elk paid tribute to the sally with a smile.

“We’d like to see your husband,” he said after a moment’s consideration. “Which is his room? Is that it?” He pointed to a door near the hall.

She had seated herself at the table where the open book was lying, her hands folded on her lap that they might not testify to her agitation. She rose now.

“No—that is the maid’s room. My room is here, but I can’t have him disturbed. He’s not very well,” she said. “He’s had a fall.”

“Too bad,” said Elk. “Which is his room?”

She did not answer but walked across to the bedroom door and knocked.

“Louis, there are some people who want to see you.”

He came in immediately. He was without coat and collar, but it needed no experienced observer to realise that he had been interrupted rather in the process of taking off his clothes than of dressing.

“Were you getting up, darling?” she asked quickly.

Elk shook his head reprovingly.

“I’d rather you didn’t suggest anything to him, Mrs. Landor. You may suggest the wrong things. That is a friendly tip.”

Louis looked from one to the other. He had heard Inez say “detectives” under her breath, but he did not need that explanation. Inspector Bray made one effort to control the inquiry.

“I’ve reason to believe that you know a man who was staying at the Little Norfolk Hotel in Norfolk Street, Strand, and calling himself Donald Bateman.”

“No,” said Inez quickly.

“I’m asking your husband,” said Bray sharply. “Well, Mr. Landor?”

Louis shrugged.

“I have no personal acquaintance with anybody named Donald Bateman.”

It was here that Elk resumed charge of the examination and his superior assented.

“We don’t want to know whether you’re personally acquainted with him, Mr. Landor. That’s entirely beside the question. Have you ever heard of, or have you in any way been associated with, a man called Donald Bateman, who arrived from South Africa in the last few weeks? Before you answer, I wish to tell you that Inspector Bray and I are investigating the circumstances under

which this man met his death in Endley Street, Tidal Basin, at ten o'clock last night."

"He's dead?" said Louis. "How did he die?"

"By a knife wound," said Bray.

He saw the woman sway on her feet.

"I know nothing about it," said Louis Landor. "I have never used a knife against any man."

Elk's eyes were roving the curios on the wall. He took a step closer, and lifting the belt from the nail, laid it on the table.

"What is this supposed to be?" He tapped the knife.

"It's a knife I brought back from South America," said Louis immediately. "I had a ranch there."

"Is it yours?"

Louis nodded.

"There were two in this belt," he said. "Where is the other?"

"We lost it." Inez spoke quickly. "Louis lost it. We haven't had it for quite a long time—we've never had it in this house."

Elk ran his finger along the belt.

"There's dust here. There ought to be dust inside this empty frog," he said. "If the story is true and there has been no knife here for a long time, the inside would be thick with dust. On the other hand, if your story isn't true, there was a knife here to-day——"

He rubbed the inside of the leather and showed his finger practically speckless.

"I dusted it myself this morning," said Inez, and Elk smiled at her admiringly.

"Mrs. Landor!" he said in reproach.

"Well, I've got to tell the truth," she said desperately. "You want the truth, don't you?"

She was on the verge of hysteria, near to the breaking-point which would leave her morally and physically shattered.

"You're not entitled to draw inferences without my offering some explanation. God Almighty! Haven't I suffered enough through that man!"

"Which man?" asked Bray sharply.

She was silent.

"Which man, Mrs. Landor?"

Louis Landor at any rate had recovered his self-possession.

“My wife isn’t quite herself to-night,” he said. “I have been out rather late and she got rather worried about me.”

“Now what’s the use of making a mystery of something that’s perfectly clear?” asked Elk.

He was almost sad as he contemplated the futility of unnecessary evasion.

“Your wife knew Donald Bateman?”

Louis did not answer.

“I’m going to be perfectly frank with you. I told you we were inquiring into the murder of this man. That is our duty as police officers. We’re not asking you or your wife or anybody else who is the murderer of Donald Bateman. Understand that right, Mr. Landor. The only person we want is the murderer of this man! The people we don’t want are those who didn’t murder him, even though they know something about him. If either or both of you are responsible, Mr. Bray, my chief and the whole damned crowd of us at Scotland Yard will work night and day to bring you to the Old Bailey! That’s treating you square. If you’re not guilty, we’ll do all we can to clear you. The only thing you can give us for the moment is the truth.”

“We’ve told the truth,” said Inez breathlessly.

“No, you haven’t.” Elk shook his head. “I didn’t quite expect you would. The truth in every case like this is hidden under a heap of rubbishy lies. What are you hiding up, Mrs. Landor? It all comes down to that. You’re hiding something and your husband’s hiding something, that maybe doesn’t matter ten loud hoots.”

“I’m hiding nothing,” she said.

“You knew Donald Bateman?”

“I don’t remember him,” she said quickly.

“You knew Donald Bateman.” Elk was infinitely patient, and when she shook her head he put his hand slowly into his inside pocket. “Well, I don’t want to give you an unpleasant experience, Mrs. Landor, but I’ve a photograph of this man—a flashlight picture taken after his death.”

She reeled back, her hands out-thrust.

“I won’t look at it! I won’t! It’s beastly . . . you’re not allowed to show me things like that . . . I won’t see it!”

Louis’s arm was round her, his cheek was against hers. He said something to her in an undertone, something which momentarily calmed her. Then he stretched out his hand to the detective.

“Perhaps I could identify this man,” he said. “I know most of my wife’s friends.”

Elk took from his pocket an envelope, and from this drew a positive that was still damp. It was not a pretty picture, but the hand which held the photograph did not tremble.

“Yes, my wife knew this man ten years ago, when she was a girl of seventeen,” said Louis.

“When did you last see him?” asked Bray.

Louis Landor thought.

“A few years ago.”

“He only arrived in England last week,” said Bray coldly.

“He may have come to England every year, for all you know,” said Louis with a faint smile. “No, I saw his photograph.”

“What did he call himself in those days, Mrs. Landor?”

She was more composed now, her voice under control.

“I knew him as Donald. He was just—an acquaintance.”

She heard Elk’s murmured expostulation.

“Surely, Mrs. Landor, you’re not telling us the gospel truth, are you?” he asked. “Just now you told us you’d ‘suffered enough from this man.’ You can’t suffer very deeply through any man whose name you couldn’t remember except as Donald.”

She did not answer.

“Can you, Mrs. Landor? You’re not going to tell us? He was a very close friend, wasn’t he?”

She drew a long breath.

“I suppose he was. It’s not a thing I want to talk about——”

“Inez! I’m not going to allow these people to think——”

Elk interrupted him.

“Never mind what we think, Mr. Landor. Nothing’s going to shock us—not me, at any rate. You knew this man before you met your husband, I suppose, or was it after?”

“It was before,” she replied.

“Was he anything—to you?”

Elk found difficulty in putting the matter delicately. He saw the man’s face go red and white.

“You’re being damned offensive, aren’t you?” Louis was glowering at him.

Elk shook his head wearily.

“That’s just what I’m not being. A man has been murdered to-night, Landor—and I’m anxious to put the murderer under lock and key, and it’s only possible to put him under lock and key by asking all sorts of innocent people offensive questions. And when you come to think of it, there’s nothing quite so offensive as stabbing a man to the heart and leaving him stiff on the paving-stones of Tidal Basin. It’s a lousy place to die. Personally, I should be very much offended if it happened to me, and I’d regard any questions similar to those I am asking as being in the nature of a bouquet—in comparison. Did you know Donald Bateman was in town?” He addressed Inez.

“No,” she answered.

Bray interjected impatiently.

“Do you mean to tell us you didn’t know that he was in London three or four days ago?”

“No!” Her tone was defiant.

“Mrs. Landor,” said Elk, “you’ve been very unhappy this last day or two; your servant told us all about it. Servants will talk, and they love a little domestic tragedy.”

“I’ve not been well,” she said.

“Is it because you’ve seen Donald Bateman, the man from whom you suffered?”

“No,” she replied.

“Nor you?” asked Bray.

“No,” answered Louis.

“To-night, for instance?” suggested Elk. “You haven’t seen Donald Bateman or the man so described?”

“No,” said Louis.

“Have you been in the neighbourhood of Tidal Basin to-night?” asked Elk. “Before you answer that, I must caution you to be very careful how you reply.”

“No.”

Elk took a slip of paper from his pocket.

“I’m going to ask you a question, Landor, which I’d like you to consider before you answer. In the pocket of the man known as Donald Bateman were found two one-hundred-pound notes, indicator number 33/O 11878 and 33/O 11879. They were new notes, recently issued from the Maida Vale Branch of the Midland Bank. Can you tell me anything about these bank-notes?”

He was silent.

“Can you, Mrs. Landor?”

“I don’t know anything about the numbers of bank-notes——” she began desperately.

“That’s not what we’re asking,” said Bray sternly. “Have you given or sent to any person during the past week two bank-notes each for a hundred pounds?”

“They come from my account,” said Louis quietly. “I suppose I’d better tell the truth. We did know Donald Bateman was back in London. He wrote to us and said he was in great distress, and asked me for the loan of two hundred pounds.”

“I see,” nodded Bray. “You sent them to his address in Norfolk Street by letter post?”

Louis nodded.

“Did he acknowledge receipt of the money?”

“No,” said Louis.

“He didn’t even call to thank you?”

“No,” said Inez.

She spoke a little too quickly.

“You’re not going to tell us the truth, either of you.” Elk’s voice was rather sad. “Not the truth about this man or this money or your visit to Tidal Basin. You’ve a bruise on your face—been fighting?”

“No, I hit it against a cupboard door.”

“Your wife said you fell down,” said Elk drearily, “but it doesn’t matter. Why do you keep these knives here?” He picked up the belt and dangled it in his hand.

“Why does he keep these saddles on the wall?” asked Inez impatiently. “Be reasonable, please. They are prizes he got at a rodeo in the Argentine.”

“For what?” asked Bray.

“It was a knife-throwing competition——” began Louis, and stopped.

“Hiding up!” groaned Elk. “Get your coat on, Landor!”

Inez Landor darted to him and caught him frantically by the arm.

“You’re not going to take him away?”

“I’m taking you both away,” said Elk cheerfully, “but only to Scotland Yard. You’ll have to see Mr. Mason, but you needn’t worry. He’s a very sympathetic man—even more sympathetic than Mr. Bray.”

There was a touch of malignity in this thrust which Bray did not observe.

She did not go into the bedroom with her husband; her own coat was lying on the back of a chair. She had quite forgotten that fact—saw now the

absurdity of the reading-lamp, the sewing and the book whilst this raincoat of hers testified mutely to her wanderings.

Louis came back in a very short space of time and helped her into the leather jacket.

“It’s all right, we’ve got a police car downstairs; you needn’t bother about a taxi,” said Bray, in answer to his inquiry.

He was a little huffy, being conscious that whatever result had been achieved brought him little personal kudos.

“I shan’t want you to come with me, Elk,” he said shortly. “You can help shove these people into the car and then you can come back and search the flat. Would you like to see the warrant?” he asked.

Louis shook his head.

“There’s nothing in the flat that I object to your seeing,” he said, and pointed to the little escritoire. “There’s about three thousand pounds in that drawer, and railway tickets. I was leaving the country to-morrow with my wife. Give Mr.——”

“Elk’s my name.”

“Give Mr. Elk the keys, Inez.”

Without a word she handed the case to Elk.

As they walked through the door of the flat Bray put out his hand and switched off the light. He was a domesticated man with a taste for economy, and he acted instinctively.

“Save your light, Mrs. Landor,” he apologised for his action.

The door closed and the sound of their movement grew fainter to the listening man who stood behind the locked door of the maid’s room. He came out noiselessly, a dark figure, a black felt hat pulled down over his eyes, his face hidden behind a white mask.

Quickly he went to the desk, took something out of his pocket; there was the sound of breaking wood and the drawer slid out. A small pocket torch revealed what he sought, and he thrust money, passport and tickets into his pocket. He had hardly done so before he heard the detective returning, and moved swiftly towards the door. He was standing in its shadow when it opened. Elk’s back was towards him when he heard a slight sound, and turned quickly. Not quickly enough. For the fraction of a second he glimpsed the white-faced thing, and then something struck him and he went down like a log.

White Face stooped, dragged the inanimate figure a little way from the door so that it would open, and a second later had slipped out of the flat, leaving the door ajar.

He ran up one flight of stairs, passed through an open window and went swiftly down a narrow iron stairway which brought him to the courtyard. There was no guard here, as he knew.

Ten minutes later one of the detectives waiting outside the house went upstairs to proffer his assistance to Elk. He heard a groan and, pushing the door open, found the sergeant in his least amiable mood.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER XI

SUPERINTENDENT MASON boasted that he could sleep anywhere at any time. He certainly needed a considerable amount of rousing when the police car reached Scotland Yard.

As for Michael Quigley, he had never felt less sleepy in his life, and the coffee which was brought to the superintendent's room was as a stimulant quite unnecessary. It brought Mr. Mason to irritable life.

His complaint was that, at whatever hour of the day or night he arrived at Scotland Yard, he was certain to find some official document waiting for his attention. There were half a dozen minutes warningly inscribed and heavily sealed.

"They can wait till the morning."

He examined the two or three telephone messages that were on his desk, but they told him nothing new. There was no news from Bray. It was a quarter of an hour later that Elk and his superior had their interview with the Landors.

Michael looked at his watch. It was too late to go to bed. He wanted to see Janice early in the morning.

"You can call back and I'll tell you anything that's going," said Mason. "About that ring, Michael: I'm afraid we shall have to have a little talk with the young lady. I'll make it as pleasant as possible. Maybe you can arrange for us to meet—I don't want to bring her down to the Yard, because that would rattle her."

Michael was grateful for this concession. Ever since he had told Mason the truth about the ring, a dull little shadow of worry had rested in his mind.

"You're a pretty nice man for a policeman, Mason."

"I'm a pretty nice man for any kind of job," said the superintendent.

Michael strolled out on to the Embankment and up through Northumberland Avenue. He had reached Trafalgar Square and was standing at the corner of the Strand, wondering whether it would be sensible to go home and snatch a few hours' sleep, or whether to call at his club, which was open

till four o'clock, when a taxicab went rapidly past him in the direction of the Admiralty gate. Midnight taxicabs either crawl or fly, and this one was moving quickly—not so swift, however, that he did not glimpse a familiar figure sitting on the box, a pipe clenched between his teeth. If he had been moving more slowly Michael would have hailed old Gregory Wicks.

“Did you want a cab, Mr. Quigley?”

It was a policeman by his side; Michael was fairly well known to this division.

“No, thank you.”

“I thought you were trying to stop that driver. They take liberties, those fellows.”

Michael laughed.

“That was an old friend of mine. I suppose you know him—old Gregory Wicks?”

“Gregory, eh?” The policeman was a middle-aged man who knew his West End extremely well. “The old fellow’s getting about again. I hadn’t seen him for months till I saw him the other night sleeping on his box at the corner of Orange Street. He lost a good fare that night. I wanted him to take Mr. Gasso down to Scotland Yard to make a statement—I was in that case,” he added a little proudly.

Chance policemen encountered in the middle of the night can be very talkative, and Michael was in no mood for conversation. But the mention of Gasso arrested his attention.

“You were in what case?”

“The Howdah case. You know, the night they held up Miss What’s-her-name—Duval or something, and pinched her diamond chain. Naturally my name hasn’t been mentioned because the case has never been into court, but I was on point duty near the Howdah Club when the robbery occurred. If anybody had screamed, or I’d heard ’em scream, I’d have been on the spot in a second. It only shows you what chances you miss because people won’t behave sensibly.”

Michael gathered that behaving sensibly was synonymous with screaming violently.

“Old Gregory was about here that night, was he?”

“He had his cab about fifty yards from the club. He never joins a rank, and, knowing him, we aren’t very strict. If he can find a nice quiet corner to have his snooze we never disturb him.”

Old Gregory! Then in a flash Michael remembered the mysterious words

of the nondescript of Gallows Court: "What was the matter with Gregory?"

Here was a new angle to many problems. He made a quick decision. Calling a more leisurely taxi, he drove off to Tidal Basin. Gallows Court had something to tell, and since Gallows Court never slept it might be more instructive in the middle of the night than in the broad and hateful light of day.

Shale arrived at Scotland Yard simultaneously with the telephoned news that Bray was on his way accompanied by the two people he had been sent to seek. Mr. Mason leaned back in his chair and rubbed his hands. He was relieved. To find suspects quietly was more desirable than telling all the world they were wanted; for a suspect, having gained much undesirable publicity, very often proves to be perfectly innocent. Questions are asked in Parliament, and there have been cases where payment has had to be made as compensation for the wounded feelings of someone called urgently to police investigations.

Parliament had been playing too interfering a part with the police force lately. A new Commissioner had come and was taking credit for all the reforms his subordinates had forced upon his predecessor. The Home Office had issued new instructions which, if they were faithfully carried out, would prevent the police from asking vital questions. Every step that the crank and the busybody could devise to interfere with the administration of justice had assumed official shape.

Superintendent Mason knew the regulations by heart. One had to know them to evade them. Like every other high official of Scotland Yard, he lived at the mercy of stupid policemen and the perjury of some eminent man's light o' love. But the risk did not sit heavily upon him.

Wender, of the Identification Bureau, was ready to see him, and he sent Shale to bring that long-suffering man, with his data.

Wender was a small, stout gentleman with a tiny white moustache, and the huge horn-rimmed spectacles he wore did not add any measure of wisdom to his face, but rather emphasised its placidity. He arrived with a bundle of documents under his arm and a short briar pipe between his teeth. He was wearing a smoking-jacket, for he had been at a theatre when he was called to make a personal examination of the few clues which had been acquired in the case.

"Come in, Charlie," said Mason. "It's good to see somebody looking cheerful at this hour of the morning."

"I'm always cheerful because I'm always right," said Wender, pulling up a chair and sitting down.

"Why the fancy dress?" asked Shale, who was Wender's brother-in-law, and could therefore be flippant with his superior.

“Theatre,” said his relative briefly.

He was indeed an equable and happy man at all hours of the day and night. Nothing disturbed him. He was, too, something more than an authority upon finger-prints. The range of his information was astounding.

“Before we start discussing whorls, islands and circles,” said Mason, as he took from his pocket the capsule and laid it on the blotting-pad, “what is this?”

Wender took it up and turned it over between his fingers.

“I don’t know—butyl ammonal, I should think. I’ve seen it done up in capsules like that. Where did you find it?”

Mason told him.

“I’m not sure, of course,” said Wender, “not having a nose that can smell through a glass case, but it’s that colour. Now, what else did you want to know?”

“Is there any record of the Landors?” asked Mason.

Mr. Wender shook his head.

“None whatever. That doesn’t mean we haven’t got a record under another name. It’s a curious circumstance”—he smiled brightly—“that criminals occasionally give themselves names that they weren’t born with. I took this particular job on myself,” he explained, “because my night man is about as useful as a performing flea.” He laid the documents on the table. “There you are.”

“Have you got the finger-prints of the dead man?”

The identification man sorted them out.

“Yes. Who took them?”

“I did,” admitted Shale.

“They were of no use to me—the first lot, I mean. I had to send down and get another lot. You young officers are still rather hazy as to how to take a print.”

Mason examined the cards with their black smudges. They meant nothing to him.

“Is he known?”

“Is he known!” scoffed Wender. He sorted out another document. “Donald Arthur Bateman, *alias* Donald Arthur, *alias* Donald Mackintosh. He’s got more *aliases* than a film star.”

Mason frowned heavily.

“Donald Arthur Bateman? I know that name. Why, I had him at the London Sessions for housebreaking.”

“Fraud,” corrected the other. “Twelve months hard labour, 1919.”

Mason nodded.

“That’s right—fraud. He swindled Sir Somebody Something out of three thousand pounds—a land deal. That was his speciality. And then he was up again at the Old Bailey——”

“Acquitted,” said Wender. “The prosecutor had something to hide up and was too ill to give evidence. There’s a conviction here at the Exeter Assizes—eighteen months, the Teignmouth blackmail case. You won’t remember that: it was in the hands of the locals; they didn’t call in the Yard.”

“Then he went abroad.”

“And died there! Semi-officially!” said Wender.

Mason read the note.

“Reported dead in Perth, Western Australia, in 1923. Doubtful. Believed to have gone to South Africa. He’s dead enough now,” he added.

He brooded over the card.

“Blackmail, fraud, fraud, blackmail . . . he was versatile. Married, of course . . . dozens of times, I should think. Went to Australia; concerned with the brothers Walter and Thomas Furse in holding up the Woomarra branch of the South Australian Bank. Offered King’s evidence . . . accepted; no prosecution. Walter Furse eight years penal servitude, Thomas Furse three years. Walter an habitual criminal; Thomas, who had only arrived in Victoria from England a month before his conviction, released after two years.”

He read it aloud.

“That’s our Tommy,” said Shale. “You remember the woman said, ‘Tommy did it?’”

But Mason was reading the “confidential.” It was written in minute type and he had recourse to his reading glass.

“‘During their imprisonment,’ he read, “‘Bateman disappeared, taking with him the young wife of Thomas.’” He looked up. “That’s Lorna. ‘Walter Furse died in prison in 1925.’ Tommy’s the murderer, Lorna’s his wife, Bateman’s the murdered man. It’s as clear as daylight. There’s the motive!”

“What do we know about Tommy? Have you any Australian records?”

Mr. Wender had laid three paper-covered books on the table. He selected one of these.

“In this office we have everything that opens and shuts,” he boasted. “Here you are: ‘Strictly confidential. Record of persons convicted of felony in the State of Victoria, 1922. Published by authority’——”

“Never mind about the authority,” said Mason patiently.

The identification man turned over the leaves rapidly, murmuring the names that appeared at the head of each column.

“‘Farrow, Felton, Ferguson, Furse’—here you are: ‘Walter Furse, see volume 6, page 13.’”

He pushed the book to Mason. This collection was more interesting than most Government Blue Books, for the record of every man was in the form of a short and readable biography.

Thomas Furse. This man was educated in England by his brother; was probably unaware of his brother’s illegal occupation when he came to the Colony. Furse was certainly an assumed name (see W. Furse, Vol. 8, p. 7), and there is a possibility that he was educated under his own name by his brother and with his brother’s money, though he adopted the name of Furse when he came to the Colony. He married Lorna Weston——

Mason stopped reading to look up.

He married Lorna Weston, whom he met on the voyage out to Australia. She disappeared after his conviction. Thomas released . . .

He read on in silence, and presently closed the book.

“The identity of these people is now positively established,” he said. “The motive is here for anyone who can read. Thomas goes to Australia; within a month or two he is caught for this hold-up and gets two years. Donald Arthur Bateman turns King’s evidence and disappears with Lorna. Thomas comes back to England and in some way meets Donald last night. Now the only question is: is Thomas Furse another name for Louis Landor? That’s what we’ve got to find out. If it is, then we have the case in a nutshell.”

There were one or two other documents, and he turned them over.

“What’s this?” he asked.

It was a large photograph of a thumb-print.

“That was on the back of the watch,” said Wender. “Harry Lamborn, as plain as a visiting-card. Five convictions——”

“I know all about him,” interrupted Mason.

“A fine print,” said Wender ecstatically.

“You ought to have it framed, Charlie,” said Mason in his more complimentary mood. “I shan’t want you any more.”

“Then I’ll toddle home to bed.” Mr. Wender stretched himself and yawned. “If I haven’t brought somebody to the gallows my evening has been wasted.”

“You’ll get the usual medal and star,” said Mason.

“I know,” said the other sardonically; “and when I put my expense account in—a cab from the Lyceum to Scotland Yard—they’ll tell me I ought to have taken a ’bus!”

He had left when Bray came importantly into the room.

“I’ve got those people.”

“Eh?” Mason looked up. He was reading again the account of Thomas Furse. No age was given, which was rather annoying, but he could put a beam cable inquiry through to Melbourne and find an answer waiting for him when he came back to the office.

“You’ve got those people, have you? Did you search the flat?”

“I left Elk to do that.”

Mason nodded.

“What are they hiding up?”

“That’s what I don’t quite know. I should have found out, but unfortunately Elk is a little difficult. I don’t want to complain, chief, but I’m placed in an awkward position when a subordinate takes a case out of my hands and starts investigating and cross-questioning, taking no more notice of me than if I were the paper on the wall!”

“He does it with me,” Mason smiled broadly. “Why shouldn’t he do it with you? As a matter of fact, you oughtn’t to complain. These darned regulations about questioning prisoners are so framed that it’s good to have some other officer responsible for breaking them—you can always pass the kick on to him. Shoot ’em in, Bray.”

He laughed quietly to himself after Bray had left. Elk was incorrigible, but Elk was invaluable. There was some odd kink in his mind which prevented his passing the educational test which would raise him to the dignity of inspector. For the fourth time Mason determined to beard the Commissioners and demand promotion for his erratic subordinate.

He rose to his feet when the door opened and Inez came in ahead of her husband. She was more composed than he had expected, not quite so white. He went across the room to shake hands with her, an unusual and unexpected greeting which momentarily took her aback.

“I’m terribly sorry to bring you out in the middle of the night, Mrs. Landor.” His voice was at its most sympathetic. “If it had been any less serious case I wouldn’t have bothered either you or your husband; but here we are, all of us up and doing when we want to be in bed, in the sacred name of justice, as the poet says.”

He personally placed a chair for her. Shale put a chair for Mr. Landor.

“I hope we’ve not alarmed you—that was worrying me.” His voice betrayed an almost tender solicitude. “But, as I say, in a case of this character it very often happens that decent citizens are put to inconvenience.”

It was Louis Landor who answered.

“I’m not at all worried, but it is rather unpleasant for my wife.”

“Naturally,” agreed Mason understandingly.

He sat down and pulled his chair a little nearer to the desk, looking up at Bray.

“Now what has Mr. Landor told you?”

Bray took out a notebook. He had kept his charges at Scotland Yard for a quarter of an hour while he had jotted down with fair accuracy the gist of the statements which they had made to him.

“Mrs. Landor knew the murdered man, and Mr. Landor knew him also slightly,” he read. “The two notes for a hundred pounds found in the pocket were given to the deceased by Mr. Landor, who says it was in the nature of a loan. This statement was made after Mr. Landor had said that he did not know Donald Bateman.”

Mason nodded.

“Subsequently he admitted he did?”

“Yes. He also said he’d never been in Tidal Basin. Mrs. Landor said that the murdered man was a very intimate friend of hers many years ago, but she hasn’t seen him since. She has been married five years, was the widow of a man named John Smith. In the flat I found a belt with a place for two knives. One of the knives I found.” He put it on the table. “The other was missing.”

Mason took up the knife and pulled it from his sheath, looked at the little gold plate with the initials.

“L. L.—those are your initials?”

Landor nodded.

“Where did the other knife go?”

Bray supplied the answer from his notes.

“Mrs. Landor said it was lost. Both knives were presented to her husband at a rodeo competition in Central America for his skill in knife-throwing.” He closed his book with a snap. “That is all the statement they made.”

Mason’s face was very serious.

“You agree that that was what you said to-night to Inspector Bray?” and, when they answered in the affirmative: “Would you like to amplify or correct

that statement in any way?"

"No," said Louis.

"I'd like to point out, sir," interrupted Bray, "that he has a bruise on his face. He said he knocked it against the door; Mrs. Landor said he got it as the result of a fall."

"Would you like to make a statement of any kind?" asked Mason.

Louis Landor drew a quick breath.

"No, I don't think so."

"Have you any objection if I ask you a few questions?"

Landor hesitated.

"No." The word seemed forced from him.

"Or your wife?"

Inez shook her head.

"I'll make it as easy as I can. I realise it is very trying for you. Have you ever been to Australia?"

To his surprise, Landor replied instantly.

"Yes, many years ago. I made a voyage round the world with my father, I was very young at the time."

"Did you ever meet there or at any other place a man named Donald Arthur Bateman who, I happen to know, was an ex-convict?"

He shook his head.

"You say you have never been to Tidal Basin? If I tell you that you were recognised as having been seen in the vicinity of Endley Street fighting with Bateman, would you deny it?"

It was a bluff on Mason's part, but it came off.

"I shouldn't deny it—no."

Mason beamed.

"That's sensible! There's no need to hide anything." He was his solicitous self again. "Now just forget the statement you made to Mr. Bray and we'll forget it, too," he smiled. "You're hiding something. To save you or your wife from some imaginary danger you're implicating yourself further and further in the crime of wilful murder. Now, what are you afraid of?"

Louis Landor avoided his eyes.

"You're probably hiding something that doesn't matter two hoots. What does matter"—he emphasised every sentence with a tap of his finger on the pad—"is that I have sufficient evidence to charge you with murder. You were in Tidal Basin; a knife similar to this—I have the sheath—was used in the

murder of Bateman, and you have been paying, or have paid, money to the dead man which is traceable to your banking account. Now, why?"

Bray asserted himself.

"You're not going to stick to the story that you did it as an act of kindness——" he began, and then he caught Mason's eye, and saw there no encouragement to intervene.

"You were being blackmailed: isn't that the truth?"

"Yes, that's the truth." It was Inez who spoke. "That is the truth! I can tell you that."

Mr. Mason's nods were not ordinary nods: they were an inclination of head not unlike the reverent obeisance before the statue of a heathen deity.

"Exactly. The murdered man knew that you or your wife had committed some offence, whether against the law——" he paused expectantly.

"I'm not prepared to say," said Louis quickly.

"You're prepared to go in the dock on a charge of wilful murder, and your wife is prepared to let you. Is that what I understand?"

She was shaking her head, momentarily inarticulate.

"Very well, then. You were being blackmailed."

"Yes." It came faintly from Inez.

"What had you done? Had you murdered somebody? Robbed somebody?" His jaw dropped. Into his eyes came a look of intense amusement which was particularly out of place. "I know! You had committed bigamy!"

"No," said Louis.

"This man Bateman was your husband." His forefinger pointed to her. "He was alive when you married your present husband. Isn't that the truth?"

"I thought he was dead." Her voice was very low, but he heard every word. "I was sure of it. I had the newspaper cutting. He told me when I saw him that he circulated the story because he wanted the police off his track for some crime he had committed in England. I swear I didn't know."

Again Mason leaned back in his chair, and his thumbs went into the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Even Scotland Yard didn't know, Mrs. Landor. I've got it here." He tapped the pile of documents at his elbow. "Reported dead in Australia. Good God! What a thing to worry about—bigamy! That's hardly an offence—you ought to get something out of the poor-box for that! And that's what you've been hiding up? When did you see him last?"

The eyes of the husband and wife met, and Louis nodded.

“To-day,” said the woman.

“You heard he was in London four days ago,” interrupted Bray. “Your servant said you’d been distressed for four days.”

She hesitated.

“You can answer that,” said Mason, and his permission would have been a rebuff to any other man but Mr. Bray.

“He wrote—I couldn’t believe he was alive.”

Bateman knew they were well off; suggested she should pay him money, threatening to publish the story of her bigamy. He arrived from South Africa penniless, having met some sharper crooks on the boat, who had taken what little money he had had when he embarked. But he had excellent prospects, he told her.

“Yes,” said Mason dryly, “I know her name.”

He settled himself deeper in his chair and clasped his hands before him. He knew he was now coming to the really delicate part of his investigations.

“He called at your house—when?”

“To-day,” she said.

“Did he call yesterday—for the money?”

She shook her head.

“No, that was posted.”

“Then what did he call about to-day? To thank you?”

She did not answer.

“Your husband was out?”

She was looking straight at the wall ahead of her; he saw her lips quivering.

“Was he—affectionate?”

Bray was nearest to her, and caught her before she slid to the floor.

“All right, get some water.”

There was a water bottle on the mantelpiece. Shale poured out a glassful. Presently her eyes opened and her husband lifted her into the arm-chair which Bray pushed forward.

“You needn’t ask her anything more,” Landor said. “I can tell you everything.”

“I think you can,” said Mason. “What time did you arrive at the flat yesterday—after this man had seen your wife?”

“Immediately after. I passed him on the stairs, but didn’t know who he was.”

“And yet you recognised him in the photograph?”

“I’ve seen him since: I’ve admitted that, or practically admitted it, when I said I was in Tidal Basin.”

“You found your wife very upset? She told you what it was all about?”

He nodded.

“And you went after him?”

“Yes,” defiantly.

“With a knife similar to this?”

Inez Landor came up to her feet at this, her hand on the table.

“That’s a lie! He didn’t go after him with a knife,” she said passionately. “Donald took the knife—he took it from me. I’ll tell you the truth. I tried to kill him. I snatched the knife from the wall. I hated him! For all the years I had with him, for all that I suffered when he was out of prison, for my baby who died because of his beastliness!”

There was a silence. Mason could hear her quick breathing.

“He took the knife from you?”

“Yes. He said he’d keep it as a souvenir, and took the sheath and put it in his pocket. You know what he wanted, don’t you? He wanted me to live with him again.” Her voice rose. Mason had come round to the side of his desk and took her arm in his big hand and literally pushed her back into the chair.

“Gently, Mrs. Landor. Don’t get rattled. You’re doing fine.”

He looked round to Louis.

“You followed this man to Tidal Basin and fought with him. Did you know he had the knife in his pocket?”

“I didn’t know anything about it till my wife told me on the telephone. I didn’t see the knife or use it.”

“Why did you run away?” asked Mason.

Again Louis paused before he answered.

“I thought I’d killed him . . . my wife begged me not to touch him. He had some sort of heart disease.”

Mason nodded many times.

“And carried butyl ammonal in his pocket?”

“Yes,” said Inez eagerly, “a little thing he crushed in a handkerchief and inhaled. He always carried that.”

Mason began to walk slowly up and down the room, his hands in his pockets.

“You bolted, and found a door open in the gate of the Eastern Trading

Company. I call it the beer door: you won't understand why, and I can't explain. And that's all you know about it?"

"As God is my judge," said Landor.

"You never threw a knife or used a knife?"

"I'll swear I never did."

"Did you hear all the commotion when we were outside the gate?"

Louis shook his head.

"No, I was trying to find a way out of the yard. I didn't come back to that gate again for an hour. I was hiding part of the time and——"

"And how did——"

Mason got so far when the door was flung violently open. Mason stared in amazement at the man who stood there. It was Elk, part of his face hidden in white bandages. He stood at the door, supporting himself by the lintel, and glared with a certain malignity at his immediate superior.

"For the love of Allah, what has happened?"

"Don't touch me," snarled Elk, as Bray made a motion to assist him. "I don't want anybody with a higher rank than sergeant to help me!"

He glared down at Inez.

"Did you hear anybody come into your flat before your husband returned?"

"I thought I did," she said.

"How right you were! He was there, in the maid's room, waiting for me when I came back, and coshed me. He couldn't have got in without a key."

"Where are your keys?" asked Mason, and Louis started.

"I lost them . . . I lost them in the fight. I didn't miss them until I was on my way back there, and then I found the broken end of the chain—look."

He showed it: a gold chain dangling by the side of his trousers.

Elk staggered across to where Louis was standing and tapped him heavily on the chest.

"There's a desk in your hall," he said slowly. "Did you keep anything valuable in the top drawer—money?"

Louis stared at him.

"Stop hiding up, will you?" snapped Mason. "What was in that top drawer?"

"Money, passports and tickets," said Louis Landor huskily. "I was clearing out to-morrow and taking my wife away from this man."

"How much money?" demanded Elk.

“About three thousand pounds.”

Elk laughed mirthlessly.

“There’s about nothing now! It’s gone! The drawer was broken open and the money taken. I’ll tell you something more, Mason.” His outrageous familiarity passed unnoticed. “The fellow that coshed me was White Face! I’m not romancing——”

Mason interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

“Of course it was White Face. It could be nobody else but White Face. I’ve known that all along,” he said.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER XIII

MICHAEL QUIGLEY had never been alone through Gallows Court by day or night. He stood hesitant at the entrance and experienced a qualm of uneasiness which was foreign to him. He looked up and down the street vainly for a policeman, and rather wished he had detained the taxi-driver. Yet Gallows Court differed from no other noisome thoroughfare; there were thousands of them in every great city, none more mysterious or sinister than the other. Two hundred years ago, when bravoes lurked in these dens, there might be another tale to tell; but here was the twentieth century; a highly organised police force, housing societies and sanitary inspectors prying into the darkest places without hurt to themselves. Not in the early hours of the morning, said a warning voice. But they would be asleep now.

It was one of Mr. Mason’s figures of speech that the inmates of the court never slept. But he was rather prone to exaggeration. Mike looked up at the façade of Dr. Marford’s surgery. The windows of the top room were open. This was evidently his sleeping-room—he had had a faint hope that the doctor would still be about. Summoning his resolution, he walked into the dark entry. There was no sign or sound of life. Every window in the court was black.

Either the storm or some human piece of mischief had extinguished the gas-lamp at the far end of the court. Groping his way along, feeling at the wall, he presently touched the door which gave into the doctor’s yard. It was fastened, and he went on a little farther. Then suddenly he stopped, with his heart in his mouth. He had heard a groan, a deep, a painful groan that ended in a long-drawn “Oh-h!”

Where had it come from? He looked around fearfully, but could see nothing. And then he heard the groan again. It seemed to come from somewhere near him. He waited, determined to locate the sound, but it was not

repeated. Instead came a soft cackle of laughter which made every hair on his head stand up. And then a hoarse voice spoke.

“Go on, Mr. Reporter, nobody’s going to hurt ya!”

He recognised the speaker, though he could not see him. It was the crazy man who had followed Mason and him into the street.

“Rats, ain’t we? Eyes like rats,” he said. “I heard ya! I hear everything!”

Michael edged towards the voice, and then saw an indistinguishable black mass huddled against the wall.

“I know where ya going!” The crazy unknown spoke in a thick whisper. “Ya going to see what’s wrong with old Gregory—clever! Cleverer than Mason. Here!” An invisible hand clutched his overcoat. Michael had to use all his self-control to prevent wrenching himself free. “I’ll tell you something.” The whisper grew more confidential. “They ain’t found Rudd—the police doctor. They’re out on the river with their drags, raking up the old mud, but they ain’t found him.”

The unseen creature laughed till he broke into a fit of coughing.

“All the busies and all the coppers in Tidal Basin looking for old Rudd! Do you think he’s a good doctor—I don’t! I wouldn’t let him doctor me. Tell ’em what I say at the station, mister—have a lark with ’em! Tell ’em he’s under a barge!”

Then the detaining claws released their grip.

“Blue Face is asleep down there on old Gregory’s doorstep. Blue Face—not White Face.”

Again the long gurgle of laughter that ended in a paroxysm of coughing. Michael drew himself away and went on till he came to No. 9. The sleeper he had seen sat hunched up on the doorstep of Gregory Wicks, the can still balanced on his knees. His arms were folded, his head bent forward. He was snoring regularly.

Michael did not dare go back the way he had come. He went out of the lower end of the court, came round the block and found the crazy man leaning against the wall of the entry.

“Old Gregory’s back—been back a quarter of an hour. An old man like him oughtn’t to drive taxicabs—and I’m the only man that knows why he oughtn’t! Dr. Marford knows, but he’s not the feller that goes snouting on his patients.”

“Snouting” meant “nosing,” and “nosing” meant “informing.” Dr. Marford was credited with having been the recipient of secrets which it would have terrified his more opulent brethren even to hear.

“What’s wrong with old Gregory Wicks? That’s what I’m asking ya?”

And then, without warning, the crazy man turned abruptly and ran noiselessly through the dark entry. He must have been either in stockinged or bare feet, for he made no sound, but moved with uncanny silence. He might have been the wraith of all that was ugly and wicked in the court.

But he had told Michael one thing he wanted to know. Gregory had returned, had been back a quarter of an hour. Michael walked slowly to the police station and interviewed the sergeant.

“No, we haven’t found Dr. Rudd. The river police are searching. There’s a chance he may have gone up west. He’s got a flat near Langham Place, and he may turn up there later. Mr. Mason is on his way here, if you want to see him.”

“Why is he coming back?” asked Michael in surprise, but the station sergeant could or would give him no information on this point.

Michael was relieved: he wished for no better news, for he was desperately anxious to see the superintendent.

“Personally, I’m not worried about Rudd.” The station sergeant could drop all ceremonious titles with a sympathetic and understanding audience. “He’s a funny old chap—I don’t know how old he is, but he’s young compared with Methusaleh. If a man’s got money, he oughtn’t to be messing about in this neighbourhood.”

“Has he got money?”

“Whips of it,” said the sergeant. “An old lady, one of his patients, died and left him a packet! If he’d been a better doctor she might have been living now,” he added libellously.

He patted back a yawn.

“Yes, he’s got tons of money. He owns a flat in the West End of London. Some of the Special Branch fellers from Scotland Yard tell me they often see him in the night clubs. Thank God, a man’s never too old to be silly!”

Michael, who knew the area well, had never seriously considered Dr. Rudd as an individual. There are some characters who fail utterly to inspire the least interest in themselves. They are figures—men or women occupying set places, who have no other than the existence which is visible to their casual acquaintances. Whether they eat or drink, have home lives or private predilections, is hardly worth speculating upon. It is almost surprising to discover that they play bridge or have the gift of distinguishing between Château Lafitte and Imperial Tokay. Whatever they do that is human appears as an amazing phenomenon.

He brought Dr. Rudd out of the background of his mind and tried to examine him as an entity, but he was either too tired or too bored to give this

shadowy figure significance.

Mason came with Bray and Shale, and the superintendent was in his most rollicking mood. You might have thought he had risen from a long and refreshing sleep; he greeted Michael jovially.

But the news which the station sergeant gave him wiped the smile from his face.

“What?” he said. “Rudd hasn’t turned up?”

He had quite forgotten Dr. Rudd, for, like Michael, he found that elusive personality difficult to place. He did not speak for a long time, but stood in front of the fire, warming his hands.

“I’m not as worried about him as I should be,” he said. “He’s a queer bird, and gets me on the raw quicker than any man I know, though I hope I’ve never shown it. I can’t feel that he’s anything to worry about.”

“I’ll tell you something to worry about, if you’ll give me a few minutes,” said Michael, and the superintendent looked at him sharply.

“That sounds to me like a threat. All right. Can we have your room, Bray?”

Bray looked a little sour that he was not invited to the conference. He disliked these crime reporters, and made no disguise of his antipathy. And crime reporters disliked him and maliciously spelt his name wrong if they mentioned it at all.

Behind the closed door of the inspector’s room Michael revealed all his suspicions, and Mr. Mason listened, making very few comments.

“I’ve had that idea in my mind, too,” he said. “I’m not kidding you, Mike, or trying to jump in and take credit for your brain’s work. But old Gregory Wicks is as straight as a die. I’ve known him since I was a boy. I was born in this neighbourhood, but don’t want you to tell anybody this. Gregory’s got the finest record of any cabman in London—the amount of property that fellow’s restored to the rightful owners runs into five figures.”

“He limps, doesn’t he?” asked Michael, and Mason’s brows knitted.

“Yes, he limps,” he said slowly. “He was thrown from the seat of a cab years ago. Of course he limps,” he went on thoughtfully. “Now, why on earth did I forget that?”

“You told me that the man who was seen coming out of Mrs. Weston’s flat also limped?”

Mason nodded.

“Yes; I hadn’t connected the two people. But Gregory Wicks!” He laughed. “The idea’s ridiculous! The old boy is seventy-six if he’s a day, and he’s the most rumbustiously straight man I know.”

“That crazy fellow in the court asked you to find out what’s wrong with him, didn’t he?” asked Michael quietly.

Mason rubbed his bald head.

“There are too many crazy people giving me theories,” he said pointedly. “No, I don’t mean you, Michael.”

“What about asking the doctor?”

“Marford? Must I tell him I’ve pulled him out of bed to confirm what a lunatic has said about one of his patients? And would he tell? That’s the one thing you can’t compel a doctor to do unless you get him into the witness stand, and even then the Medical Association raise a hullabaloo if a lawyer goes a little too far.”

“Wake him up on some other excuse,” suggested Michael. “After all, he may be able to help us with Rudd.”

Mr. Mason thrust his hands more deeply into his pockets and rattled his loose change irritably.

“He certainly limped, if the woman witness was telling the truth. And now I come to remember it, White Face has always been a limper. That was one of the first descriptions circulated. He used to ride a motor-cycle, you remember—that rather knocks your idea on the head.”

“Motor-cyclists have been seen coming from the scene of a robbery, but nobody could swear that those particular cyclists were the robbers,” said Michael. “The motor-cycle theory is one that everybody has jumped to, that after he did his dirty work he made his getaway on a pop-pop! When you come to think of it, motor-bikes are the most conspicuous things in London after a certain hour. Isn’t it more likely that he made his grand exit on the box of a taxicab?”

“Or,” said Mason, “is it more likely that a man with a fifty-year record for honesty, a man with a bit of money put by, with no relations or friends, no vices, a man who never goes out, has never done a dishonest thing in his life, should suddenly turn crook? And listen, Michael! You’ve been a witness to a White Face raid and you’ve read about the others. What has invariably happened? He’s come into the restaurant and he’s said two words—what are those words?”

“‘Bail up,’” said Michael.

Mason nodded vehemently.

“Exactly—‘bail up’! It was an expression of the old Australian bushrangers. It’s still used by the hold-up men in Australia. Gregory’s never been out of London in his life, except to drive a drunken fare into the country. The only knowledge he has of the word ‘bail’ is that it’s something to do with

getting a man out of a police station after he's pinched. I'll tell you who White Face is—Tommy Furse."

"And who in hell is Tommy Furse?" asked Michael, in surprise.

"You shall have the story when it's properly cooked—at present the oven is just heating up."

He got up quickly from his chair.

"I'll call the doctor and tell him I want to come round and see him. Or Bray can do it."

He opened the door, shouted for the inspector, and when he came gave him instructions.

"Tell him I'm very worried about Dr. Rudd and I would like to consult him."

"As a matter of fact," he added, when Bray had gone, "I'm not feeling too happy about Rudd, though what Dr. Marford can tell me I don't know."

"May I come?"

"You can come, but you'd better stay outside. I can't very well introduce you into an official inquiry."

"Anyway, he doesn't like me very much," said Michael, with a recollection of Dr. Marford's former coldness.

When the superintendent reached the surgery he found Dr. Marford dressed. He had not been to bed that night, had only returned from a patient a few minutes before the 'phone message came through.

"A boy or a girl?" asked Mr. Mason blandly.

"In this event it was both," said the doctor.

He very much disliked discussing his cases, as Bray, who knew him better than Mason, was well aware.

"I'm not worried at all about Dr. Rudd. I didn't like to say so before, for fear you might think I was saying something disparaging of him. By the way, I called in at the infirmary to see that woman, but as she seemed to be sleeping the house surgeon thought I'd better not see her."

"Mrs. Weston?"

Marford nodded.

"When will she be fit to make a statement?"

"To-morrow—this morning, I should think."

He took a whisky bottle from a cupboard and put it with a siphon on the table.

"This is all I can offer you. I keep it exclusively for my visitors. Personally,

I never drink after ten o'clock in the evening."

He had no suggestions to offer with regard to Rudd.

"He'll turn up," he said confidentially, "and I prophesy that he'll turn up with a headache and be quite incapable of transacting any kind of business for a day or two."

"What on earth do you think he's done?" asked Mason, and the doctor smiled.

"I would rather not say."

"You'd rather not say things about quite a lot of people, doctor."

Mason helped himself to some whisky and splashed in soda.

"They tell me you could hang half Gallows Court and send the other half to prison for the term of their natural lives?"

"If I could, I should do it," said Marford. "Believe me, I have no sympathy with that ghastly crowd——"

"Except Gregory Wicks?" suggested Mason, and a shadow passed over the doctor's face.

"Except Gregory Wicks," he said slowly.

"Gregory Wicks," began Bray, "is one of the nicest people living in this area——"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure the doctor will agree," said Mason. "But why not Gregory Wicks?"

"For many reasons," replied Marford. "He's a good fellow——"

"What is the matter with him? You attend him, don't you?"

Dr. Marford smiled faintly.

"I attend a good many people, but I never say what is the matter with them, even to entertain eminent police officers."

"There's something the matter with him, isn't there?" insisted Mason, and Marford nodded.

"Anno Domini! You can't get to the age of seventy-six without running a little threadbare. There are worn spots in men of that age, certain weaknesses, peculiar mental and physical failings which no doctor can patch. It's amazing to me that he can do what he does at his age. I've never seen him really sick or sorry—he has certainly got the loudest voice in Tidal Basin; and I can testify, for I attended the victim, that he can still deliver a blow that would knock out the average pugilist. Why are you interested?"

He stepped back from Mason and surveyed him with a troubled face.

"Do you know, Mr. Mason," he said slowly, "I've got an instinctive idea

that you've come here not to talk about Mr. Rudd but to talk about this old taxi-driver. There is a half-witted man who lives in the court, whose name I forget—he used to be a shoeblick—who has an obsession about Gregory. Every time I go into the court he catches my arm and asks me what is wrong with Gregory Wicks—I wonder if he's been asking you the same thing?"

Mason was momentarily embarrassed. It did not add to his self-esteem that he should have been detected acting as a lunatic's mouthpiece.

"Well, yes," he said, and laughed awkwardly. "I've heard the man—in fact, he's asked me the same question. But of course I shouldn't be stupid enough to come round in the middle of the night to pass on a crazy inquiry. I'm interested in the old boy."

The doctor was behind his desk, leaning down on his outstretched arms, looking terribly tired. Mason found himself being thankful that he had not been born in so favourable a position that his parents could afford to educate him as a doctor.

"You'll have to ask the old man in the morning. I'm very sorry; I'd like to oblige you, Mr. Mason. It isn't entirely a question of professional secrecy—I certainly wouldn't let that stand in my way with a police officer who was investigating a very serious crime—though what poor old Gregory's got to do with it I can't imagine. But I owe Gregory something more than perfunctory loyalty. He's by way of being a crony of mine, and I'm afraid you'll have to ask him yourself to-morrow."

"He has something the matter with his face, hasn't he?"

Marford hesitated.

"Yes," he said; "you could describe it that way."

And then he raised his eyes slowly to Mason.

"You will not suggest"—his lips twitched—"that the old man is your White Face?"

"I'm suggesting nothing of the sort," said Mason hastily and reproachfully. "Of course I'm not! I'm merely curious. That crazy fellow's got on my nerves—I'll admit it. Certainly, I'll ask Gregory himself in the morning. I'd ask him to-night if it wasn't for disturbing that soused mackerel who's been sleeping on Gregory's doorstep ever since midnight."

"Is it a very red-nosed man?" asked Bray, interested. "If it is, he's often there. I've seen him myself. I very often go through Gallows Court alone—more or less alone. A drunken-looking man with a red nose——"

"I haven't inspected his nose," said Mason icily. "It probably went red through sticking it into other people's investigations."

“Very likely,” said Mr. Bray, and Shale could only marvel at his clouded intelligence.

“Do you believe every man who wears a lint mask is a criminal?” Marford asked quietly. “Of course you don’t: you’re too sensible. Any more than you believe that all Chinamen are wicked. I ask you this”—he spoke very slowly—“because the man of whom you spoke earlier this evening is coming”—he looked at his watch—“in less than ten minutes.”

“White Face?” said Mason in amazement.

“He telephoned me just before you came.”

“Tell me, Dr. Marford”—Bray could not be repressed—“how is this White Face man dressed when you see him?”

Marford considered a moment.

“He usually wears a very long coat reaching almost to his heels, and a soft dark hat.”

“Black?” asked Bray eagerly.

“It may be. I’ve never really noticed.”

“Why is he coming this morning?” asked Mason.

“He said he would have come earlier in the night, but the streets were full of policemen. I’m telling you what he told me. It doesn’t sound too good of any man that he’s afraid of the police. But anyone super-sensitive as this fellow is, might very easily shrink from being seen.”

“He telephoned you from where?”

“I’m not sure. It certainly wasn’t our local exchange, because the calls we get through on the local exchange are always indicated by continuous ringing, and these signals came at intervals.”

He walked to the big window, drew aside the blind and looked out.

“There’s somebody out there,” he said. “Is it a police officer? No, it isn’t, I see. It’s the reporter, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Ask him to come in.”

Mason nodded to his subordinate, and Sergeant Shale went out to admit the reporter.

“If I could stop you getting a big beat I would, Michael, but this matter isn’t entirely in my hands. You’ll probably have to use your well-known discretion—I think I can trust you to keep out of your paper just what I want you to keep out.”

“The idea being?” asked Michael.

“White Face,” said Mr. Bray, and coughed when he caught his superior’s chilly eye.

“As that active and discreet officer said, it’s somebody with a white face; a man who’s been seen in this neighbourhood, and probably in other neighbourhoods—I think you met him at the Howdah Club. And he’s due here almost at once. I don’t suppose he wants to see a lot of people here”—he addressed Marford—“but you realise I’ll have to ask him to give an account of himself.”

The doctor, who was arranging an instrument that looked like a huge aluminium funnel, nodded his agreement.

“As a matter of fact, he’s very shy, but if I am to betray anybody in the interests of justice I might as well betray him. It isn’t very admirable and I can’t say that I’m very proud of myself.”

He brought the lamp nearer to his desk and turned the switch, and Mason saw a circle of green light appear on the floor. The shadows which the other lights cast ran through the circle redly. Marford turned off the lamp and explained that the current came, not from the main electric supply, but from an accumulator.

“I warn you,” he said, “that this man may refuse to enter the surgery. It took me a long while to persuade him the last time he was here.”

“Which way does he come?”

“Through the yard and up the passage to that door.” He pointed to the door near the medicine cupboard. “He gives me a signal—two long rings and two short ones; that was my own arrangement on account of his incurable shyness. I shall never get him in if he sees any of you.”

Mason tried the door; it was locked. The telephone bell rang at a moment when all nerves were tense. Marford sat on the desk and took up the instrument.

“. . . Yes, he’s here,” he said. “It is Dr. Marford speaking. . . . Better, is she? I’m glad of that. . . . Certainly.”

He handed the instrument to Mason.

“The woman Weston is quite conscious and wants to come to the station to see you.”

Mason listened, giving monosyllabic interruptions. He put up the receiver and looked very thoughtful.

“She wants to come to the station. It was Elk—I thought I recognised the voice. I wonder if I could get him here in time,” said Mason thoughtfully. “He’d be very much interested to meet White Face—he’s met him once this

evening.”

“There may be time——” began Marford.

A bell in the room rang shrilly and long, rang again, then came two short rings. The men looked at one another.

“That is your White Face, is it?”

Mason’s voice was husky. His hand dropped mechanically to his pocket, and Bray was satisfied now: the rumour that Mason always carried a gun was true.

Michael Quigley, a silent participator, felt a little shiver run down his spine as Mason made a gesture to his two subordinates.

“Behind those curtains, you two fellows. Michael, you’d better go out into the front hall. I’ll get behind the desk if you don’t mind.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Marford, as he took a key from his pocket.

“Let him in, that’s all. I’ll see that he doesn’t get out again,” said Mason. “You can help us by shutting and locking the door on him.”

Marford nodded. He turned the key and pulled open the door slowly. Watching him from the cover of the desk, Mason saw him smile.

“Good evening,” he said. “Won’t you come in?”

He went a little out of sight and they heard the rumble of a voice saying something which was indistinguishable. It might have been a voice that spoke behind a muffling mask.

“My dear fellow,” they heard Marford say, “I have never promised you that I can be absolutely alone, but you have nothing to fear—come along.”

He disappeared from view into the passage and Mason held his breath. Then suddenly the door slammed; there was the sound of a bolt being drawn, and in another second:

“Help!” It was Marford’s voice. “Mason . . . Mason! For God’s sake!”

Then came an unearthly scream that turned the hearers’ blood cold.

Mason was on his feet instantly. He was half-way to the door when the lights of the room went out. From the passage came the faint sound of a struggle.

“Bray! Go to the front door, quick! Go with him, Shale!”

They came to the front door to find it was locked from the inside and did not yield to their frantic tugging. Mason remembered that the doctor had told him he kept that part of the premises which contained the surgery locked and double-locked, and that he invariably used the back door himself.

They stumbled back through the darkness, and as Mason picked up a chair and sent it smashing at the panel, a ray from Bray's torch glittered on the lamp.

"This works."

He fumbled for the switch and found it, and the ghostly green circle appeared on the floor. It gave them enough light to work by. Within a few moments two panels were gone. Bray, the taller, reached through, found the bolt and drew it. There was another at the bottom, and it was some minutes before the third panel was broken and enabled them to reach this.

Bray was the first in the passage. It was empty. The door at the end stood wide open. He ran out into the yard—there was nobody in sight.

"There's blood here," he said. "I can't see Marford. Can you bring the lamp out?"

Shale examined the flex: there was enough to carry the ray lamp into the corridor. It revealed nothing except patches of something red and shining on the floor and walls. The doctor and his assailant had vanished.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER XIV

To the man in the yard outside came the sound of splintering panels. White Face had no need to crank up his machine: the taxi engine was running softly. He pulled open the two gates and took a look inside the cab. On the floor was a huddled figure.

"Doctor," said White Face pleasantly, "I'm afraid I shall have to take you for an uncomfortable journey."

He could have left him behind for the detectives to find, but it was most undesirable that this medical practitioner should tell his experience; for he had seen White Face without his mask.

The car ran swiftly into the street. As he passed he thought he could hear somebody trying to get out of the front door. He passed a policeman on the corner of the street; the man shouted out to him, "Good night, Gregory." White Face smiled to himself.

The hands which gripped the wheel were wet and stained with the red liquid which he had poured from a bottle on to the floor and walls of the passage. He hoped it would look like blood, would at least throw his pursuers off the track until the morning.

He hadn't too much time. Mentally he calculated how long it would take Mason to telephone a description of the cab to Scotland Yard, and just how much longer time would be wasted whilst the description was being circulated

through London. He gave himself a good half-hour, providing he kept to the outskirts. So he made his way northward, and in half an hour had reached the outskirts of Epping Forest. It was certain that the Yard would telephone to the outlying stations the number of the cab, and that made it imperative that he should keep to the secondary roads and avoid those key points where the Essex police patrols could establish a barrage.

With any luck he could reach the little farm undetected. It lay between Epping and Chelmsford, not a long journey if he had dared the direct route.

He came at last to a place where an uninviting country lane ran off at right angles to the road, and turned his car down this. He had to move with the greatest caution, for he had extinguished his lamps. The road was uneven, but not quite so bad as the cart track into which he guided the taxi. Here he had to move very carefully. The only thing that concerned him was whether the noise of the car in low gear would attract the attention of some inquisitive policeman, but apparently it had not.

Without any knowledge of the time, he could make a rough guess—thought it must be four o'clock. There was no sign of dawn in the sky.

He came at last to an old barn, which was built by the side of a squat and shapeless building, and, stopping the cab without stopping the engine, he got down, opened the cab door and, lifting out the unconscious doctor, laid him on the grass. Then he backed the machine into the barn and, closing the big gate of it, went back to open the door of the house. This done, he returned to the place where he had left the doctor and half carried, half dragged him into the passage.

Except for a few ugly, dilapidated articles which the previous owner had not thought it worth while to move, the house was unfurnished. There was a dingy carpet running the length of the hall, and in the room to where White Face carried his burden, an old sofa to which he hoisted the doctor. He stood for some time looking at his prisoner.

“It was a great mistake for you to try to set the police on me, and I hope no harm comes to you,” he said.

Lately White Face had acquired the habit of talking aloud.

He finished his examination of the unconscious man, then went out to the barn, and presently came back with a small bottle of champagne and a box of biscuits: emergency rations which he kept in a box under the cab seat.

The taxi was of no more use to him. He must make his way across country to Harwich by another means. And those means were ready to his hand. He had compiled from week to week, with scrupulous care, a list of motor excursions out of London. There was one leaving in the morning from Forest

Gate to Felixstowe, and he had already decided that this was the route he would take. He would not be noticed in an excursion crowd.

The doctor was a difficulty. Almost he wished he had not brought him; but he was too dangerous to leave.

White Face drank his wine out of an old cup he found in the kitchen, poured out another cup and took it back to where he had left his charge. Placing the lamp which he carried on the table, and by the side of this the cup, White Face sat on the edge of the bed and waited. Presently he saw the doctor's eyes flicker; they opened, looked wonderingly round the room and fixed themselves finally upon the man who was sitting on the bed.

"Where is this place?" he spoke huskily.

"This place is a little farm near Romford," said the other calmly. "And may I tell you what your friend Mason has already guessed—that I am White Face."

The doctor looked at him incredulously.

"You?"

The man nodded.

"Weird, isn't it? But I think you guessed it yourself and were prepared to tell your friends of Scotland Yard. I am not going to chloroform you or drug you again or do any of the things which I might do. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you will go to sleep soon and will sleep for a very long time; and when you wake up you will find your way to the nearest police station. If you drive a car, I must tell you there is a taxi in the barn—I invariably use a taxi. My landlord—he laughed at the word—"was Mr. Gregory Wicks. I invariably use a taxi—Gregory Wicks's taxi. That may or may not convey something to you, but I rather fancy your mind is incapable of grasping important essentials."

The doctor was staring at him.

"Turn on your side," commanded White Face, and was obeyed instantly. "Close your eyes."

He waited a few minutes until the drugged man was asleep, and then he went out, taking the lamp with him. He made another journey to the garage, brought in a suitcase and laid out such toilet articles as he required.

MASON had found the governing light switch and brought on all the lights in Marford's house. Bray, who had searched the yard, came back with his report.

“There’s blood everywhere,” he said. “Look at that!” He pointed to an uneven smudge near the door. “They carried him out this way.”

“Is there any other way he could have been carried out?” snapped Mason.

In the courtyard the gates were wide open, and so were the doors of the empty garage. Gregory Wicks’s taxicab had gone. When they came out to the street they had heard the faint, dying whine of it as it sped westwards.

“They’ve got him in the cab,” said Bray incoherently. “There must have been two or three of them.”

“Why not four or five?” snarled Mason. “Or six or seven?”

“I only want to say,” began the aggrieved inspector, “that one man couldn’t have outed him and lifted him. I’d better call up assistance.”

The police whistle was half-way to his mouth when Mason knocked it out of his hand.

“What’s the matter with the telephone?” he asked fiercely. “I want to know who’s awake in this neighbourhood, and I don’t want any excuse for their being awake, either! Call every man you can lay your hands on. The reserves will be in by now.”

When Bray had gone, the superintendent made a quick search of the yard. There was an open pit surrounded by a low fencing. He struck a match, drew his own lamp from his pocket and cast the rays down. A long way below the surface of the ground he saw the glint of water. A well. How deep was it? There was something there, too, something that looked like a sack.

And then he heard a voice behind him.

“Found the well?”

He looked round; it was Elk, a ghostly figure, with his white-bandaged head.

“Did you know there was a well here?”

“Yes, the winch is above your head—handle on the wall.”

Looking up, Mason saw an iron bracket.

“Something down there?” asked Elk, and peered curiously. “Gregory’s cab’s gone, of course. I guessed something was happening and came round.”

The two men went up to the empty garage and made a search. There was nothing there except a few tools, a spare tyre or two and a dozen tins of petrol. They picked up the blood trail in the garage. Mason looked at these ominous stains and shook his head.

“All my ideas have gone west,” he said in despair.

“Mine have stayed strictly put, working for the good of humanity,” said Elk. “White Face, wasn’t it? And he’s kidnapped the doctor—that fellow’s got

a nerve!”

They heard Michael’s step and looked round.

“Well, are you going to interview Gregory?” he asked.

“Gregory—I presume he’s with his cab.”

“Let’s see,” said Michael.

They discovered that the door leading into Gallows Court was fastened with a spring lock and offered no difficulty. Elk examined this door carefully and grunted.

“As full of clues as a milkshop,” he said.

They walked quickly down the court and came to the doorway of No. 9. The sleeper still snored; the tin remained balanced on his knee.

“Whoever put that tin there were helping the police a lot,” said Mason. “It’d break their hearts to know it, but it’s a fact.”

He knocked heavily at the door, but there was no answer. After a little while he knocked again; there was still no reply.

“He must have gone out.”

Michael shook his head emphatically.

“How could he go in or out with that man sitting there? He must have moved him.”

The sleeper was now aroused; the tin fell noisily from his knee as he stood up, groaning, and Bray recognised him as a famous local tippler. He had been there, he said, since about—he didn’t know the time; he thought it was about half an hour after the public-houses had closed. He could not remember anybody passing, either going in or out. Mason knocked again.

Gallows Court was alive now—alive with dark shapes that had melted out of the walls, silent things that just looked and gave no evidence of their humanness. Curious watchers, eager to see somebody, something happen. If they had chatted amongst themselves Michael could have borne their presence, but they were terribly silent, edging nearer and nearer.

Then suddenly the upper window of No. 9 was raised creakily.

“Who’s that?”

It was old Gregory Wicks’s strident voice, unmistakably so.

“I want to see you, Gregory.”

“Who is it?”

“Superintendent Mason. You remember me?”

The old man cogitated.

“I don’t know no Superintendent Mason. There used to be a young feller

called Sergeant Mason a few years ago.”

“A good few, Gregory,” said Mason with a chuckle. “I’m Sergeant Mason. Come down and let us in.”

“What do you want?” asked the old man cautiously.

“I want to have a talk with you.”

The man above hesitated, but after a while he put down the window and Mason heard his feet descending the stairs. The door opened noisily.

“Come on up to my room,” he said.

There was no light in the house save the lamp which the police brought, nor in his little sitting-room.

“Come in and sit down. Here’s a chair, sergeant—superintendent, eh? Gosh! Time goes on!”

“Haven’t you got a lamp?”

The question seemed to embarrass the old man.

“Lamp? Well, yes, I’ve got a lamp somewhere. You’ll find it in the kitchen, mister. There are three of you, ain’t there? My eyes are not as good as they used to be, but I sort of heard three lots of feet on the stairs besides mine.”

It was Michael who went downstairs and found the lamp half filled with oil. He lit it, fixed the glass chimney and carried it carefully up the stairs into the room where the three men were. And then, to Mason’s surprise, he said:

“I couldn’t find your lamp anywhere, Mr. Wicks.”

This in face of the fairly bright light he carried in his hand. The old man smiled.

“What do you call that you’ve brought into the room?” he said. “Put it on the table, young man, and don’t try to take liberties with me.”

The look of chagrin in Michael’s face brought joy to Superintendent Mason’s heart.

“Now sit down, everybody. What do you want to know?”

“Have you been out to-night, Gregory?” Mason asked.

Gregory felt his scrubby chin.

“For a little while,” he said cautiously. “I always pop up to the West End. Why?”

“Does anybody else drive your cab?”

“I’ve let it out before now,” said Gregory. “I’m not so young as I was, and an owner-driver has got to live, and he can only live if he works his machine all the time.”

“Who takes your car out?”

The old man did not answer, and Mason repeated the question.

“Well . . . my lodger takes it out.”

“The man who lives downstairs?”

“That’s right, sergeant—I mean, superintendent! Bless me life, fancy you being a superintendent! I remember you getting your first stripe.”

Mason patted him gently on the knee.

“Of course you do. And I remember summoning you for using abusive language and the magistrate dismissing the charge.”

Gregory gurgled with laughter at the recollection.

“I was always a hard one to get the better of,” he said smugly.

“Where is your lodger now?”

Again the hesitation.

“Out, I suppose. He usually goes out at night. Rather a nice young feller. Very quiet. He’s about thirty-five, and he’s had a lot of trouble: that’s all I know about him.” Then, in sudden alarm: “He’s not been in trouble again?”

“Oh, that’s the kind of trouble, is it?” said Mason. “Gregory, where is your badge?”

Now, a cabman’s badge is an almost sacred thing. It is to the driver what marriage lines are to a woman. The effect of the question on the old man was extraordinary. He fidgeted in his chair and rubbed his chin.

“I’ve put it away somewhere,” he said lamely.

“Gregory, where is your badge? If you’ve been out to-night, you must have been wearing it,” said Mason. “As a matter of fact, you haven’t been out to-night; you haven’t been out any night for months. You know that, old pal.”

Again he pressed the old man’s knee affectionately, and this time his sympathy was genuine.

“You know why you haven’t been out. The doctor knows.”

“He hasn’t told?” said Gregory quickly.

“No, I’ve told myself. You knew there was a lamp came in the room because you could smell it, but you couldn’t see it, Gregory—only dimly. Isn’t that true?”

The old man shrank back.

“I’ve been a licensed cabman for fifty-five years, Mr. Mason,” he pleaded.

“I know. I hope you’ll be a licensed cabman all the days of your life. Only you mustn’t drive cabs, Gregory—when you’re blind!”

He saw the old man wince, and cursed himself for his brutality.

“I’m not exactly blind, but I can’t see very well.”

The blustering Gregory Wicks had suddenly become an oddly pathetic figure.

“My eyes are not what they were, Mr. Mason, but I never like to admit it. I’ve had my licence and badge all these years, and naturally I didn’t want to part with it; so when this young lodger of mine, who’s been in trouble and couldn’t get a licence, said he’d like to take out the cab, I—well—I lent him my badge. That’s an offence, I know, but I’m willing to take my medicine.”

“Then you’ve never seen your lodger?”

“No, I haven’t seen him; I’ve heard him. He comes in sometimes; I hear him moving about; and he pays me regularly.”

“How do you know he’s thirty-five, and a nice young man who’s going to be married?”

“I heard he was—a friend of mine told me.”

They left him bemoaning the loss of the thing which was more precious to him than any other possession—the stamped licence that had been issued every one of the fifty-five years of his active life, and which might never be issued again. Mason went downstairs and tried the door of the lower room. The lock was not difficult to pick—did not, if they had known, require picking at all, for the key of the upstairs room fitted both doors. In five minutes it swung open and Mason went in, followed by Bray, who carried the oil lamp.

There was a bed in one corner, but evidently it had not been slept in for a long time: the blankets were folded, the pillow was without cover. The floor had a large square of carpet in the centre, and that, with a table, a chair, and a square mirror over the fireplace, seemed all that the room contained, until Elk began to test the mirror, and found that it had a roughly hewn hole in the wall, large enough to take a heavy steel box.

“This will tell us something,” said Mason.

The lid opened squeakily, and he stared down into the interior at what it contained.

It was a short, stout knife, the blade stained and smeared red. Carefully he picked it out and as carefully laid it on the bare table.

“Here is the knife that killed Donald Bateman,” he said.

ONLY one man in the court had ever seen Gregory’s lodger, or would admit they had seen him. At the very hint of an inquiry the crowd that filled the court melted back into the walls again; only the crazy, nameless man remained.

“Didn’t I tell you? Didn’t I tell you?” he almost screamed when he caught sight of Mason. “You and the reporter fellow—what’s wrong with Gregory, eh? *I knew!*” He tapped his nose. “I’ll bet the doctor knew, but he wouldn’t squeak. Here!” He detained Mason. “Is it true that they got the doctor? . . . Somebody’ll be murdered if they touch him! Everybody in Gallows Court will go and find the man and bring him in here and put him down into a cellar, and put clay in his mouth and tear little bits off him till he dies!”

The awful face grinned up at the superintendent.

“In which case,” said Mason, “I shall come and do a bit of pinching myself, and somebody else will die. No, I don’t know who has taken the doctor.”

“I heard him—shouting, screaming something awful. And then the cab went out,” whispered the man. “If we’d known it was the doctor we’d have been after ’em.”

“What is this lodger like?”

The man shook his head.

“A tall feller—that’s all I know. Seen him once or twice go in and out, generally at night; but I’ve never seen him any closer than that. He didn’t sleep there—old Gregory thought he did, but he didn’t.”

This was so near to the conclusion that Mason formed that he was inclined to listen to other opinions with respect, but Shoey—as they called him—said no more.

There was one good quality about Inspector Bray: he was an excellent telephonist. Before Mason left the surgery, Scotland Yard knew all about a taxicab No. 93458—its colour, its appearance generally and the direction it had taken. And Scotland Yard knew all about the missing Dr. Marford and the chauffeur who lived with old Gregory Wicks.

That busy printing press at the Yard worked furiously to carry the news to the outermost beat, and the early workers straggling into the City saw police cyclists disregarding all speed rules.

Lorna Weston sat in the infirmary hall waiting for the ambulance which was to take her to the police station. A pallid, shaken woman, her eyes weary and heavy, she barely noticed or heard the laborious platitudes of Police Constable Hartford, who sat by her side—all the more laborious because he had decided that her condition was due to excessive indulgence in alcohol, and had set himself the task of opening her eyes to the evil that men (and women) put in their mouths to steal away their brains.

One of the policemen who came with the ambulance gave a fragmentary and generally inaccurate résumé of what had happened to Dr. Marford. P.C.

Hartford clicked his lips unhappily.

“It only shows, Mrs. Weston, what drink will do to a man,” he said. “They were probably all drinking together up at the doctor’s surgery, and naturally something happened. It’s never too late to turn. Take me: five years ago there wasn’t a man who loved a glass of beer more than myself. I used to call myself a moderate drinker, but was I? No man who drinks can be a moderate drinker. Then one day I was induced to take the pledge, and look at me to-day!”

She did not look at him. She hardly heard him. If she had looked, she would have realised that if there had been any improvement in P.C. Hartford’s appearance, he must have looked very dreadful in his moderately drinking days. But she heard nothing except a buzz of voices that had been going on all night—whispering, buzzing voices that came from another planet; and there was a little pain in her left arm which irritated her; and through all her confusion of mind and dread, formless reality which could not be reduced to any dimensions or advanced into clear perspective.

When she spoke it was mechanically to repeat:

“I want to see the Chief of Police. I must see the Chief of Police.”

She repeated this monotonously. Part of the mechanism of her reason was working; some tremendous motive power impelled a demand of which she was not conscious. She had little flashes of complete understanding; knew she was sitting on a hard form in a long and dimly-lit corridor, with bare, discoloured walls. In the next second she was sitting in an arm-chair in a small room, which was so light that it hurt her eyes; and a different lot of people were around her.

“Why did the infirmary people let her go?” asked Mason, in despair.

“I want to see the Chief of Police,” she said. “I want to make a statement.”

“So you’ve told me a dozen times, my dear,” said Mason, patting her hand. “Now wake up. You know where you are—I’m Superintendent Mason.”

She looked at him searchingly and shook her head.

“Where’s the matron?” asked Mason. “Oh, here you are, Miss Leverett. Let her lie down; give her some coffee. Where’s that damned—oh, there you are, Bray! Is there any report?”

“None, sir,” said the inspector. And then, painfully: “I don’t think I can stand much more, sir. I shall have to go to sleep. After all, I’m only human.”

“You’re not human at all”—Mason was distinctly offensive—“you’re a policeman. You haven’t been awake twenty-four hours, and you’ll certainly be awake another twenty-four; the first forty-eight hours are the worst.”

“My own belief is,” said Bray, “that this fellow drove the cab straight into

the Thames——”

“Yes, yes, I’m sure he did,” said Mason soothingly, “or into the British Museum, possibly. You might put an inquiry through.”

Inspector Bray considered this.

“I shouldn’t think they’d go to the British Museum, sir——” he began.

Mason pointed to the door. He felt that another ten minutes of Inspector Bray would reduce him to a state of imbecility.

He returned to the inspector’s room, now littered with a medley of articles which had been removed from the “lodger’s” home. There were one or two very important documents which he had found in a tin case, which had been half filled with platinum settings. Searching the box he found tweezers, awls and instruments of the jeweller’s art by the dozen. White Face had himself removed the stones from their settings—the wonder is that he had not disposed of the platinum. He must have felt himself perfectly safe under the ægis of old Gregory, whose very honesty was the lodger’s best credential.

A diligent search had been made for evidence of firearms, and as a matter of precaution, to the circulation of the description of the wanted man had been added the warning: “May carry a pistol.” But there was no proof that he carried anything of the sort. Neither cartridge nor cartridge box was found and, except for the knife, no arms whatsoever.

In the bottom of the cupboard they had unearthed a cardboard box bearing a Lyons label, which was filled with bundles of white cotton gloves, and in another part of the room half a dozen squares of twill into which eye-holes had been roughly cut. To the edge of each was fastened a strip of whalebone and a piece of elastic; the whalebone kept the mask rigid, and the elastic obviously fitted over the ears. Except for the eye-holes they might have been parts of the hangman’s ghastly equipment.

White Face was well found in all matters pertaining to dress. There were two new long black coats, obviously of foreign make, three pairs of rubber goloshes, only one pair of which had been used and, most curious of all, a dummy automatic pistol. It was the kind that is used in theatres, was made of wood, and was a lifelike representation of the real article. Until he had picked it up in his hand and had felt its lightness, Mason had been absolutely certain that it was the real thing.

In his own mind he was convinced that White Face had no other weapon and that this was the gun he carried on his unlawful occasions, the weapon which had cowed crowded restaurants and night clubs, and had reduced porters and waiters to trembling jelly.

Elk was half dozing in the room when Mason entered.

“Do you know what I think, sir?”

“You thinking, too?” growled Mason. “All right, I’ll buy it.”

“There’s one man who is going to get White Face acquitted. You can look at it any way you like, but it comes back to the same thing. You couldn’t work a conviction against him—if Lamborn sticks to his story.”

“Oh!” Mason’s face fell. “Lamborn—that’s the pickpocket. H’m!”

He pondered on the matter for a long time.

“You’re quite right, Elk,” he said at last. “In the face of what that dirty little thief has said it would be very difficult to get a verdict. When I say ‘we couldn’t,’ we mightn’t. It’s a shade of odds how the jury would take it.”

“The jury,” said Mr. Elk oracularly, “is a body or institution which gives everybody the benefit of the doubt except the police. Juries don’t think; they deliberate; juries——”

“Don’t let us get clever,” said Mason.

He went out through the charge-room (where he borrowed a key), down a passage lined on one side with yellow cell doors, and stopped before No. 9, pulled back the grating and looked in. Mr. Lamborn was lying uneasily on a plank bed, two blankets drawn up over his shoulders. He was awake, and at the movement of the grating lifted his head.

“Hallo, Lamborn! Sleeping well?”

The thief blinked at him, swung his legs clear of the plank and sat up.

“If there’s a law in this country, Mason, you’re going to get fired out of the force for this what I might call outrage!”

“Invincible soul,” said Mason admiringly.

He put the key in the lock and turned it.

“Come out and have some coffee with me?”

“Poisoned?” asked Lamborn suspiciously.

“A little strychnine—nothing serious,” said Mason.

He conducted his prisoner along the corridor, handed over the key of the cell to an amused jailer and ushered Lamborn into the little room. At the sight of Elk’s bandaged head the prisoner brightened visibly.

“Hallo! Had a coshing?” he asked. “Prayers *are* answered sometimes! I hope you’re not seriously injured, Mr. Elk?”

“He means,” interpreted Elk, “that he hopes I’m fatally injured. Sit down, you poor, cheap, butter-fingered whizzer.”

“I shouldn’t like to see you killed—flowers ain’t cheap just now.”

Lamborn sat, still smirking, and when the inevitable coffee was brought,

half filled a cup with sugar.

“Got the murderer?” he asked pleasantly.

“We’ve got you, Harry,” said Mr. Mason in the same tone, and Lamborn snorted.

“You couldn’t prove anything against me, except by the well-known perjury methods of the London police. I dare say you’ll put half a dozen of your tame noses in the box and swear me life away, but Gawd’s in his heaven!”

“Where did you learn that bit?” asked Mason curiously.

Lamborn shrugged his shoulders theatrically.

“When I’m in stir I only read poetry,” he explained. “The book lasts longer because you can’t understand it.”

He sipped noisily at his coffee, put down the cup with a clatter and leaned towards Mason.

“You haven’t got a chance of convicting me. I’ve been thinking it out in the cell.”

Mason smiled pityingly.

“The moment you start thinking, Harry, you’re lost,” he said. “It’s like putting a cow on a tight-rope. You’re not built for it. I don’t want to convict you.”

His tone changed; he was so earnest that he carried conviction even to the sceptical hearer.

“All I wanted then, and all I want now, is that you should tell the truth. Have you ever known me to take all this trouble to get a little whizzer a couple of months’ hard labour? Use your sense, Lamborn! Does a Superintendent of Scotland Yard, one of the Big Five, come down here to Tidal Basin and waste his night trying to get a conviction against a poor little hook like you? It would be like calling on the Navy to kill an earwig!”

Mr. Lamborn was impressed. The logic was irresistible. He rubbed his chin uneasily.

“Well, it does seem funny,” he said.

“Funny? It’s ludicrous! There must have been some reason why I wanted you to tell me this, and some reason why I should promise to withdraw the charge against you. You’re wide, Lamborn—as wide as any lad in this district. Use your common sense and tell me why I should take all this trouble if I hadn’t something behind it.”

Mr. Lamborn avoided his eyes.

“It does seem funny,” he said again.

“Then laugh!” growled Elk.

The man was not listening; he was frowning down at the table, obviously making up his mind. He made his decision at last.

“All right, guv’nor, it’s a bet!”

He put out his hand and Mason gripped it, and that grip was a pledge, an oath and a covenant.

“I dipped him—yes. I saw him drop and I thought he was soused. I went over and I was knocked out to find he was a swell.”

“He was lying on his side, his face away from the lamp, wasn’t he?” asked Mason.

The man nodded.

“Just tell me what you did—one moment.”

He raised his voice and called for Bray.

“Lie down there, Bray.” He pointed to the floor. “I want to reconstruct Lamborn’s petty larceny.”

Mr. Bray looked with some meaning at Elk.

“Elk can’t lie down because of his head,” said Mason irritably.

Bray went down on his knees and stretched himself, and Lamborn stood over him.

“I flicked open his coat—so. I put my hand in his inside pocket——”

“Left side or right side?” asked Mason.

“The left side. Then I hooked his clock—his watch, I mean—with my little finger—like this.”

His hands moved swiftly. There happened to be a pocket-case in Mr. Bray’s inside pocket. It also happened to contain the photograph of a very pretty girl, which fell on the floor. Bray retrieved it quickly and made a wrathful protest.

“And he’s married!” was Elk’s shocked murmur.

Bray went very red.

“All right, you can get up.”

Taking a sheet of paper out of a drawer, Mason began writing quickly. When he had finished he handed the sheet to Lamborn, who read it over and eventually affixed his sprawling signature to the statement.

“Why did you want to know, guv’nor?” he asked. “What’s my robbery got to do with the murder?”

Mason smiled.

“You’ll read all about it in one of the evening papers—I’ll try to arrange

that your photograph's published."

Elk laughed hollowly.

"What's the matter with his finger-prints?"

"But why do you want me to tell, Mr. Mason?"

Mason did not explain.

"Release this man, Bray. Mark the charge 'withdrawn.' You'll have to attend the police court to-morrow morning, but you needn't go into the dock."

"It's the only part of it he knows," said Elk *sotto voce*.

Lamborn shook hands forgivingly with the chief and with Elk.

"One thing, Harry," said Mason, and the released prisoner paused at the door. "You'll be given back all your possessions except the jemmy we found in your pocket. I didn't tell you, but I was putting a felony charge against you in the morning—'Loitering with intent.' Congratulations!"

Lamborn made a hurried exit from the police station. Until morning came he lay in his bed, puzzling to find a solution of the strange philosophy of Superintendent Mason, and could discover no answer that was consistent with his knowledge of English police methods.

LAMBORN had hardly left before the superintendent came into the charge-room hurriedly and the police reporter heard his name called.

"Michael, this young lady of yours—what was she at the clinic?"

"I believe she acted as Marford's secretary," said Michael, surprised. And then, anxiously: "You're not going to see her to-night, are you?"

Mason was undecided.

"Yes, I think I will. Somebody ought to be told about the doctor—I mean, somebody that matters. Besides, she may give us some very valuable help."

"What help could she give you?" asked Michael suspiciously.

Mason rolled his head impatiently.

"If you imagine I'm waking her up in the middle of the night on any old excuse for the sake of seeing her in her *négligé*, you're flattering me. I'm out to find all the threads that lead to and from everybody who has played a part in this crime," he said. "I want to know who were Marford's friends, who were his enemies, and I can think of nobody else who can tell me. She can, because she worked with him, and Elk's got an idea that he was sweet on her."

“Rubbish!” said Michael scornfully. “I don’t suppose he ever looked at her twice.”

“Once is enough for most men,” said Mason. “Are you going to take me up and introduce me?”

When they were huddled up under heavy rugs, for a cold wind made an open car a death trap, Michael gave expression to his fears.

“It’s going to be a terrible shock to Janice—Miss Harman.”

“Call her Janice! it sounds more friendly. Yes, I suppose it is. Marford is a fellow who got a lot of affection and sympathy without asking for it.”

“His body hasn’t been found?”

Mason shook his head.

“And it won’t be, in spite of the blood. If he’d been dead, White Face would have left him, wouldn’t he?”

It was the first encouraging statement Mason had made.

Bury Street was lifeless when the car drew up before the flat, and it was a quarter of an hour before they could arouse the porter. Mason identified himself, and the two men climbed up to the first floor.

The maid was a heavy sleeper; it was Janice who heard the bell and, getting into her dressing-gown, opened the door to them. The first person she saw was Mason, whom she did not recognise.

“Don’t be worried, Miss Harman. I have a friend of yours with me.”

And then she saw Michael and her alarm was stilled. She took them into the drawing-room, went off to wake her maid (there was something old-ladyish about Janice, Michael decided), and came back to the drawing-room to learn the reason for this visitation.

“I’m afraid I’ve got rather bad news for you, Miss Harman,” said Mason.

Invariably he adapted his tone to the subject of his speech, and he was so melancholy that she thought he could have come only on one subject, the murder of Donald Bateman.

“I know. Mr. Quigley has told me,” she said. “You want to ask me about the ring? I gave it——”

He shook his head.

“No. Dr. Marford has disappeared.”

She stared at him.

“You mean—he is not hurt?”

“I hope not,” said Mason. “I sincerely hope not.”

It was remarkable to Michael that this man, whom he had regarded as a

stout, unimaginative and fairly commonplace officer of police, could tell the story with such little offence, and suppress so much without losing any of the main facts. She listened: the news was less shocking than that of Bateman's death, but it left her with a deeper heartache, for Marford was one of the ideals which experience and disillusionment had left undisturbed.

"The trouble is, we know nothing about the doctor or any of his friends, and we don't know where to start our inquiries. You were his secretary——"

"No, not his secretary," she corrected. "I kept the accounts of the clinic, and sometimes of the convalescent home, and I was helping him to get Annerford ready—he has been trying for a year to open a tuberculosis institute for the children of Tidal Basin."

"Where is Annerford?" asked Mason, and she told him and described the work which the doctor had set himself to do.

He had planned greatly, it seemed; had, in one of the drawers of his desk, blue prints of a princely building. His appeal to the wealthy public was already typewritten, and he had discussed with her many of the details.

"Now, Miss Harman," said Mason, "you know the people of the clinic. Is there anybody there who had a grudge against the doctor, or did he have any great friend there—man or woman?"

She shook her head.

"There was an elderly nurse and one or two occasional helpers. The staff at Eastbourne consisted of a matron and a nurse. He was trying to raise money to enlarge these homes," she said; "it was always a source of distress to the doctor that the places were under-staffed, but they cost an awful lot of money."

"There was nobody at any of these places—the clinic, the home at Eastbourne or at Annerford—who was in the doctor's confidence?"

She smiled at this.

"Not at Annerford. No, I know of nobody. He had no friends." Her lip quivered. "You don't think . . . any harm has come to him?"

Mason did not reply.

"Did Bateman have any friends?" he asked.

She considered the question.

"Yes, there was a man who came over with him from South Africa, but he never mentioned his name. The only other person he seemed to know was Dr. Rudd."

Mason opened his eyes wide.

"Dr. Rudd?" he said. "Are you sure?"

She nodded. She told him the story of the dinner and Bateman's

perturbation when he had seen the doctor, resplendent in evening dress.

“That certainly beats me. Where could he have met Rudd?” said Mason. “All gay and beautiful, was he—the doctor, I mean? Yes, I knew he knocked about a little bit in the West End, but I didn’t realise—h’m!”

He looked down at the carpet for a long time, deep in thought.

“Yes,” he said suddenly. “Of course. I understand now. Naturally he didn’t want to meet Rudd.”

He looked at Michael quizzically.

“Are you going to stay to breakfast?” he asked, and Michael returned an indignant denial.

“You’d better go down to Tidal Basin and wait for me. I’m only calling at Scotland Yard to check up a few dates; I’ll be with you in an hour. I’m sending a police car back—you can use that.”

* * * * *

White Face waited patiently for daylight. He had changed his clothes, and the suit he wore now would attract no attention when he lined up at Forest Gate for his char-à-banc ticket to the coast. Once or twice he went in to see his unwilling companion, and on each occasion found the doctor sleeping peacefully.

From his pocket he took an evening paper which he had not had time to read before. There was quite a lot about White Face, of course. He was a star turn in those days. Great authors, who catered exclusively for the intelligentsia, stepped down from their high pedestals to speculate upon what one called “this amusing malefactor.” The Howdah affair was still topical. There was a revival of the “Devil of Tidal Basin”; some gross plagiarist had attempted to revitalise the myth, but it needed Michael Quigley’s skilful touch to make it live.

He dropped the paper on to the table, walked out into the open and stood listening. From far away he could hear the sound of distant motor-cars, and whilst he stood there, he saw a white magnesium rocket, probably a Verey light, flame in the air and die. So the police had put on the barrage! He knew that signal. A suspected car had been seen, and the white flare was the order to the nearest police control to stop and search it. Ingenious people, the London police, in their quiet untheatrical way. Very difficult, very dangerous to fool with. And yet they were not men of education—just common policemen who had raised themselves out of the rut, established their own little hierarchy, and attained by some extraordinary method a complete efficiency.

He did not despise them nor did he fear them. The odds against his

escaping were twenty to one—there was enough of the gambler in him to fancy his chance.

No man who was wanted, and whose photograph was procurable, had ever escaped from England. Perhaps some did, but the police never admitted the exceptions.

As he came back along the passage he heard a faint voice call from the open door of the darkened room.

“Can I have some water, please?”

He carried a glass in to the doctor, who drank it and thanked him.

“You’re in considerable danger, my friend. I hope you realise that?” said the voice from the sofa weakly.

“My dear doctor, I have been in danger for quite a long time—go to sleep, and don’t worry about me.”

He waited till he heard the doctor’s regular breathing, and then came out, closing the door softly behind him.

Danger! It had no significance for White Face. He feared nothing, literally and figuratively feared nothing. He did not regret one act of his life; regretted least of all that which had sent Donald Bateman into nothingness. Perhaps Walter would not have approved, but then Walter was weak—a daring man, but weak. White Face approved his own deed, which approval was more important than self-glorification.

Poor old Gregory! As for the doctor, he would put water and some kind of refreshment ready to his hand. In the morning he would be well enough to drive the taxi to the nearest police station.

Only one regret he had, and that he did not allow his mind to rest upon. But to give up life was an easy matter if necessity arose; with life one surrendered all aspirations.

He had finished his shaving, using cream instead of soap and water, when he heard a footstep in the passage. The doctor, then, was awake; that was unfortunate. He took one step towards the door when it opened. Mason stood there; an untidy Mason with his hat on the back of his head and his overcoat unfastened.

“I took the liberty of coming through a back window; most of them are open,” he said. “I want you, of course.”

“Naturally,” said White Face. There was no tremor in his voice. “You’ll find the doctor in the next room. I don’t think there’s very much the matter with him.”

He held out his hands, but Mason shook his head.

“Handcuffs are old-fashioned. Have you got a gun?”

White Face shook his head.

“Then we’ll step along,” said Mason politely, and guided him by the arm into the darkness outside.

Stopping to despatch his men to look after the doctor, he led his prisoner to where the police car was waiting.

“You weren’t seen, but you were heard,” he explained.

White Face laughed.

“A taxicab in low gear is a menace to the security of the criminal classes,” he said lightly.

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was a complete dearth of news when Michael Quigley reached the station. Negative reports are never sent to minor stations, and the absence of anything positive was sufficient to indicate that the search for the missing taxicab had so far been fruitless.

To kill time he wandered up and down the streets, revisited the scene of the murder, would have gone again to Gallows Court for news, if Gallows Court had not come out to meet him.

Michael was turning over the mud in the gutter with the toe of his boot when he saw the odd figure of the crazy man crossing the road. This strange apparition had one curious (and welcome) characteristic. He avoided the light, and no sooner had he come within the range of the arc lamp than he halted and half turned away from its searching beams.

“Come over here, reporter! I’ve got something to tell you.”

“You can tell me your name to start with.”

The oddity chuckled.

“I ain’t got a name. My parents forgot to give me one.” (This astounding statement, Michael discovered later, was true.) “People call me anything they like—Shoey, some of ’em, because I used to black shoes.”

“What have you got to tell me?” asked Michael.

“He took the doctor away.”

He said this in a hoarse whisper.

“Who—White Face?”

Shoey nodded violently.

“I’ve got all the rights of it now. He took him in his cab—he was layin’ there on the floor and nobody knew.”

He doubled up with silent laughter and slapped his knees in an agony of enjoyment.

“That makes me laugh! Mason don’t know! All these clever busies from Scotland Yard, and they don’t know that!”

“What are the ‘rights of it’?” asked Michael.

Sometimes, Mason had said, this strange creature was nearer to the truth than a saner man.

“Elk knows.”

The man without a name stuck a grimy forefinger into Michael’s ribs to point his remark.

“That fellow’s wider than Broad Street. Elk! I’ll bet you he knowed all the time! But he likes to keep things to hisself until he’s got ’em all cleared up. I’ve heard Bray say that—Bray’s got no more brains than a rabbit,” he added.

Somebody was walking along the sidewalk towards them.

“That’s him!” whispered the ragged object and melted across the street.

Bray was at such a distance that it seemed impossible for anybody to recognise that it was he. It appeared that he was walking off a grievance.

“As soon as this affair is over I’m going to put things straight,” he said aggressively. “Mason really shouldn’t do it! You understand, Quigley, that an officer of my rank has his position to uphold; and how can I uphold it if important inquiries are placed in the hands of subordinates? Insubordinates, I call ’em!”

“What’s Elk been doing now?”

There was no need to ask who was the offender.

“Mason is a good fellow,” Bray went on, “one of the best men in the force and one of the cutest. If you ever get a chance of dropping a hint that I said that, I’d be obliged, Quigley. You needn’t make a point of repeating the conversation, but just mention it accidentally—he takes a lot of notice of what you say. But he’s altogether wrong about Elk. Evil,” he went on poetically, “is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart——”

“Shakespeare?” murmured Michael.

“I dare say,” said Bray, who had no idea that American citizens wrote poetry. “Mason does these things thoughtlessly. I told him I was willing to cross-examine this woman as soon as she came round and was in a fit state to talk. But no, Elk must do it! Elk knows her, apparently. But I ask you, Quigley, is it necessary to know a person before you question ’em? Was I properly

introduced to Lamborn—there’s another scandal; he’s out on bail!”

To shorten the length of the grievance Michael suggested that they should walk back together to the station. They arrived at an interesting time—a hateful time for Inspector Bray, because Lorna Weston had decided to talk.

She had refused to go into the inspector’s office, and was seated in the charge-room, the bandaged Elk towering over her. Michael could see that it was not his but Bray’s presence which brought that demoniacal frown to the sergeant’s face when they appeared.

“All right, let’s have all the press in, Bray,” he said savagely. “Won’t you come into the private office, Mrs. Weston?”

“No, I won’t.” The pale-faced woman was determined on the point. “I’ll say what I want to say here.”

“All right,” said Elk grimly. And to Shale, who was the stenographer of the party: “Get your book. You’re known as Lorna Weston,” he began, “and you’re the wife of——?”

She had parted her lips to speak when Mason came in briskly; behind him came two detectives and between them walked their prisoner.

Lorna Weston came up to her feet, her eyes fixed upon the smiling man who stood between the two guards, unconcerned, perfectly at his ease, not by so much as the droop of an eye betraying consciousness of his deadly peril.

“There he is! There he is!” she shrieked, pointing at him. “The murderer! You killed him! You said you would if you ever met him, and you did it!”

Mason watched the prisoner curiously, but he made no response.

“It wasn’t for me you hated him. It wasn’t because he took me away from you—it was because of your brother who died in prison.”

The man nodded.

“It was because of that,” he said simply. “If he could be brought to life and I were free, I’d kill him again.”

“Do you hear him?” she shrieked. “My husband—Tommy Furse!”

“Call me by my real name,” said the other. “Thomas Marford! It is a pretty good name, though it has been borne by some pretty bad people.”

He turned smilingly to Mason.

“You won’t want this lady, I think? I can tell you all you wish to know, and I will clear up any point which may seem to you to be obscure.”

Michael Quigley stood petrified, unable to speak or move. Marford! This self-possessed man. . . . White Face. . . . hold-up man, murderer. . . . He must be dreaming. But no, here was the reality.

Marford, as unemotional as the crowd of detectives who stood around him,

was twiddling his watch-chain, looking half amused, half pityingly at the shivering woman who called herself his wife.

He was evidently considering something else than his own position.

“I hope Dr. Rudd will feel no ill-effects from his unhappy experience,” he said. “As I told you earlier in the morning, I don’t think he will suffer anything worse than a headache, which he can easily remedy. He has been in my garage all the night. You see,” he was almost apologetic, “Rudd had a theory, which was to me a very dangerous theory on the lips of a rather loquacious and not terribly clever man. His view, which he was developing most uncomfortably, was that there was only one person who could possibly have killed Bateman—and that was myself! He thought it was a huge joke, but it wasn’t a joke to me; and when he called in at my surgery on the way to the station to put his ideas before you, I realised at once that I was in considerable danger. I realised more than this,” he added calmly, “that my life’s work was done, that my clinic and my convalescent home and my new rest-house at Annerford—how did you find your way to Annerford Farm, by the way? But perhaps you wouldn’t like to tell me—were things of the past, and that I must save myself at all costs.”

He looked round and caught Elk’s eye and shook his head sadly.

“I had to do it, Elk. I’m terribly sorry. You’re the last man in the world I would have hurt.”

To Mason’s surprise, Elk grinned amiably.

“I don’t know anyone I’d rather take a coshing from,” he said handsomely.

“You were a dangerous man, too,” smiled Marford, “but I couldn’t give you a whisky and soda with a little shot of drug in it, as I gave to Dr. Rudd. Just enough to put him under for a few minutes. What I did then was to dope him and put him in the garage. I was afraid he had betrayed me later, when I heard him groaning. You probably heard him groaning, too; I think you mentioned the fact to me?”

He addressed the reporter, and Michael remembered the noise he had heard as he had moved through Gallows Court in the dead of the night.

“There is one other matter I’m concerned about—how is old Gregory? I’m afraid he’s taken it rather badly.”

He talked fluently enough, but with a little slur in his voice. It was the first time Mason had noticed that he had an impediment of speech which caused him to lisp a little.

“I’m rather anxious you should take my statement now.”

Mason nodded.

“I must caution you, Dr. Marford—I suppose you are a doctor, Marford?”

Marford inclined his head.

“Yes, I am qualified: lay anything to my door but the charge of being a quack! You can confirm this by a visit to my surgery, where you will find the certificates.”

“I have to warn you,” Mason went on conventionally, “that what you now say may be taken down and used at your trial.”

“That I understand,” said Marford.

He looked at his wife; she had approached more closely to him; her dark eyes were blazing with hate; the straight, white mouth was bloodless.

“You’ll hang for this, Tommy!” she breathed. “Oh, God, I’m glad—you’ll hang for it!”

“Why not?” he asked coolly, and, turning on his heels, followed Mason into the inspector’s office.

“A nice woman,” was his only comment on his wife’s outburst. “Her loyalty to her unfortunate friend is almost touching—but then, loyalty invariably is. I cannot let myself think about poor Gregory Wicks.”

He was sincere: Mason had no doubt of it. There was no cynicism in his tone. Whatever else he might be, Thomas Marford was not a hypocrite.

Mason offered him a glass of water, which he refused. He sat down by the side of the writing-table; his only request was that somebody should open a window, for the room was unpleasantly crowded. And then he told his story. He did not refuse a cigarette, but through most of the narrative he held it and its many successors between his fingers and only occasionally raised it to his lips.

“Are you ready?” he asked, and Sergeant Shale, who had opened a new notebook, tested his fountain pen and nodded.

“ONE always tries to find a beginning to these stories” (said Dr. Marford), “and usually one chooses to enumerate the virtues and describe the splendid domestic qualities of one’s father and mother. That I do not purpose doing, for many reasons.

“My brother and I were left orphans at an early age. I was at a preparatory school when Walter went out to Australia to try his luck. He was a decent fellow, the best brother any man could wish to have. The little money that came to us from the sale of my father’s practice—oh, yes, he was a doctor—he put in the hands of a lawyer for my education. He hadn’t been in Australia

long before he found work, and half his salary used to come to the lawyer every month.

“I don’t know what date his criminal career began, but when I was about fifteen I had a letter from him, asking me to address all future letters to ‘Walter Furse.’ He was then in Perth, Western Australia. His full name was Walter Furse Marford. Naturally, I did as I was asked, and soon after larger monthly sums came to the lawyer and were very welcome, for I had been living practically without pocket money, and my clothes were the scorn of the school.

“By this time I was at a high school, or, as they call it in England, a public school, which I shall also refrain from mentioning, because every public school boy has a sneaking pride in his school. One day the lawyer came down to see me. He asked me whether I had heard from my brother, and I told him I had not had a letter from him for four months. He told me that he was in a similar case, but that, previous to my brother’s ceasing to correspond, he had sent a thousand pounds. But all the lawyer’s letters asking how he would like this money invested had been unanswered. I was a little alarmed, naturally, because I had a very deep affection for Walter, and realised, as I had grown older, just what I owed to him. I was to go to a hospital and take up the profession of my father—it was my brother’s money which made this possible.

“The mystery of Walter’s silence was explained when I received, in a roundabout way, a letter which had been sent to a friend of his, and which was by him transmitted to me. It was written on blue paper, and when I saw on the heading the name of an Australian convict prison I nearly fainted. But it was the truth: Walter hid nothing in the letter, though in justice to him it contained no cant of repentance. He had been arrested after holding up a bank, where he and his gang had got away with nearly twenty thousand pounds. He asked me to think as well of him as I could, and said that he was telling me because he was afraid the authorities might trace me, and I should hear from some unsympathetic person the story of his fall.

“I will tell the truth. After the first shock I was not horrified at the revelation. Walter had always been an adventurous sort, and at my age I had that touch of romanticism which exaggerates certain picturesque types of crime into deeds almost worthy of a Paladin. My reaction to the blow was that I felt an increasing love for the man who had made such sacrifices and had taken such risks in order to fit his brother for membership of a noble profession.

“I exalted him above all men, and I yet do. But for the burden which my education and living imposed upon him, he could have afforded to live honestly, and I know, though he never told me, that I and I alone was responsible for his entering into the crooked path.

“The letter which I sent to him was, I am afraid, rather disjointed, and had

in it a suggestion of hero-worship, for when he was released from prison he answered me very straightly; pointed out that there was nothing admirable in what he was doing, and that he would sooner see me dead than go the way he had gone.

“I worked like the devil at the hospital, determined to justify his sacrifice, if it could be justified. From time to time he wrote me, now from Melbourne, once from Brisbane, several times from a town in New South Wales, the name of which I cannot at the moment recall. Apparently he was going straight, for there were no delays in his letters; he told me that he was thinking of buying a ‘station,’ that he had already acquired a house and a few hundred acres in the hope to extend these by the purchase of other land.

“It was in this letter that I first heard of Donald Bateman. He said that he had met a very clever crook and had nearly been caught by him in connection with a land deal, but that a mutual friend, who had been in prison with Walter, had made them known to one another, Bateman had apologised, and they were now chums.

“Bateman apparently made his money out of persuading innocent purchasers to put up a deposit on imaginary properties, but he did a little other crook work on the side, and was one of the best-informed men in Australia on one topic—the security and deposit of banks. He himself was not a bank robber, but he supplied the various gangs with exact information which enabled them to operate at a minimum risk. Usually he stood in for his corner—by which I mean——”

“I know what you mean,” said Mason.

“As soon as my final examinations were over Walter wanted me to come out to Australia and stay with him for six months, to discuss future plans. He asked me if I would mind adopting the name of Furse. He said he could arrange to get me my passport and ticket in that name. The only awkward point about this arrangement was that my examinations finished on the Friday, I was to leave for Australia on the Saturday, and I could not know the result of the exams. except by letter. I arranged, however, with the manager of the bank which carried my account to have the certificates addressed care of the bank and for him to send them on to an address which my brother had given me. I had to invent a family reason why I was calling myself Furse in Australia, and he seemed satisfied.

“The work at the hospital grew increasingly hard. The last days of the examination came, and on the Friday I handed in my final papers with a heartfelt sense of thankfulness. The results would not be known for some weeks, but I had a pretty good idea that I had passed except in one subject. As it happened, my highest marks were for the subject in which I thought I had

failed!

“The next morning, as happy as a child, I drove off to St. Pancras and Tilbury, and on the Saturday afternoon was steaming down the Channel, so excited that I hardly knew what to do with myself.

“The boat had a full complement of passengers. I was travelling second-class, because, although my brother had sent the first-class fare, I wanted to save him as much as possible, and second-class on a P. & O. steamer is extraordinarily comfortable.

“This particular ship was crowded with people, the majority of whom were bound for India and quite a number for Colombo. We dropped the Indian passengers at Port Said or Suez—I’m not sure which—and now that the dining-room was thinned out and there was space to walk about the decks, one began to take notice of one’s fellow passengers.

“I had seen Lorna Weston the day we left England, but I did not speak to her until we were passing through the Suez Canal, and then only to exchange a few words about the scenery.

“It was at Colombo, where we both went ashore, that I came to know her. She was very pretty and vivacious, and was, she told me, travelling to Australia to take a position as nursery governess. Looking back from my present age, I can see that, if I had had more experience of life, I should have known she was much too young for the job, and should have guessed, what I later knew, that she was going out in the hope of finding easy money.

“I told her very little about myself, except that I was a medical student, but for some reason or other she got it into her head that I was a wealthy young man or had wealthy relatives. She may have got this idea because I was travelling second from choice, or because I had a lot of money in my possession—I had a couple of hundred pounds in notes which I had managed to save from my allowance. I had an idiotic idea that it would please Walter if I handed him back this colossal sum, as it appeared to me, out of the money he had so generously sent me.

“If you know anything about ship travel you will understand that it takes no more than a few days for an ordinary friendship between a young man and a girl to develop into a raging passion. We were not five days out of Colombo when, if she had asked me to jump over the side of the ship, I should have obeyed. I adored her. I loved her, and she loved me. So we told each other. I’m not complaining about her, I’m not reproaching her, and I don’t want to say one single word that’s going to make life any harder for her, except that I must tell the truth to explain why she was living in Tidal Basin.

“She only loved one man in her life, and that was Bateman. I say this

without bitterness or hatred. She probably loved the worst man she has ever met or is ever destined to meet. It is not necessary for me to tell you what happened during the remainder of the voyage. I had moments of exaltation, of despair, or heroic resolve, or terrible depression. I wondered what Walter would say when I told him that at the outset of my career, before I was in a position to earn a penny, I had engaged myself to a girl who had been a perfect stranger to me when I went on board.

“He came down to the dock to meet me, and I introduced him to Lorna, but I did not tell him of my intentions until we were back in the hotel where he was staying and where he had rented a room for me. To my surprise, he took it very well.

“‘You’re a bit young, Tommy, but I’m not so sure that it’s a bad thing for you. If I had married I mightn’t have made such a fool of myself. But don’t you think you could wait for a year?’

“I told him there were imperative reasons why we should marry almost at once, and his face fell.

“‘She told you that, I suppose? She may be mistaken.’

“But I couldn’t argue the matter, and after a while Walter agreed.

“‘I’m going through a pretty bad time,’ he said. ‘I’ve been speculating on the Stock Exchange, and I’ve lost quite a lot of money racing. But things will take a turn soon, and you shall have the best wedding present that money can buy.’

“How bad was his financial position I only discovered by accident. He had sold his little property and for the moment was without occupation. His prison life had naturally brought him into contact with all sorts of undesirables, but so far he had resisted their solicitations, and had steered a straight path.

“Walter was not a strong character. Viewed dispassionately, he was a weakling, because he invariably took the easiest route. But he had the heart of a good woman, and I can’t help feeling that again it was to make some provision for me that he fell back into his old ways. In fact, I am sure of it. His wedding present to me was five hundred pounds, and it didn’t make me a bit happy, because I had read in the papers that a country bank had been stuck up the day before and a considerable sum of money had been stolen. In fact, I taxed him with it, but he laughed it off.

“It was a few days after the wedding that I made up my mind. I left Lorna at the hotel and went in search of Walter. I found him in a restaurant which was also a bar, and that was the first time I met Donald Bateman. Bateman went out, and I took this opportunity to put forward my proposal, which was no less than that I should share a little of his risk.

“‘You’re mad,’ he said, when it dawned upon him what I meant.

“I suppose I was. But if I were to analyse my motive from the standpoint of my experience, I should say I was no more than stupidly quixotic. He wouldn’t hear of it, but I insisted.

“‘You’ve been taking these risks for me all these years. You’ve suffered imprisonment. Every time you go out on one of your adventures you stand the risk of being killed. Let me take a little of it.’

“Bateman came back at that moment, and I realised he was well in Walter’s confidence. I tried to put the matter hypothetically to Bateman, without betraying myself and Walter, but it was a fairly childish effort, and he saw through it at once.

“‘Why not, Walter? It’s better than taking in any of these roustabouts—Grayling or the Dutchman? Besides, he’s a gentleman, and nobody would imagine he was a member of a gang of crooks.’

“Walter was furious, but his fury did not last long: he was, as I say, weak, though I’m not blaming him, for, if he had refused, I believe I should have gone off and stuck up a bank of my own out of sheer bravado.

“We all three went back to the hotel, and I introduced my wife to Bateman. He was a good-looking fellow in those days and terribly popular with women; the worse they were the more was the fascination he seemed to exercise. Although I was only a kid, I could see she was tremendously attracted by him, and the next day, when I went out with Walter to talk matters over with him, I came back to find that Bateman had lunched with her, and thereafter they hardly left one another. I wasn’t jealous; I’d got over my first madness and realised that I’d made a ghastly mistake.

“Naturally, I didn’t want any complications with Bateman, who I knew was married and had left his wife in England. As a matter of fact, he was married before he met and married the present Mrs. Landor—the lady who came to my surgery on the night I killed Bateman and told me, to my amazement—however, that can wait.

“Walter at last agreed that I should stand in and help him with the robbery of a country bank which carried a considerable amount of paper currency, especially during week-ends. The job was to be done ‘two-handed,’ as we say, and Bateman, of course, took no part in the actual hold-up, but was the man who spied out the land, supplied us with all particulars as to the movements and habits of the staff, and could discover, in some way I’ve never understood, almost to a pound how much cash reserve a branch office was holding.

“It was a little town about sixty-five miles from Melbourne, and Walter and I drove out overnight in a motor-car and stayed with a friend of his till

morning. Naturally I was wild with excitement, and I was all for carrying a gun. Walter wouldn't hear of this. He never carried firearms, the only pistol he used being a dummy—that was a lesson I never forgot.

“‘You're either going to murder or you're not going to murder,’ said Walter. ‘If you're going out to rob, a dummy pistol's as good as any. It's its persuasive power and its frightening power that are important.’

“He was a man of extraordinary principles, and held very strong views on criminals who used firearms.

“‘It's the job of a bank official to defend his property, and if you kill him you're a coward,’ he said. ‘It's the job of a copper to arrest you, and if you shoot at him you're a blackguard.’

“But he had no especial affection for the police; no faith in them; and before we went out, he had insisted on my having all my pockets sewn up with strong pack-thread.

“‘You only want a handkerchief, and you can carry that in your sleeve,’ he said.

“I didn't see why he took this precaution, until he explained that it was not unusual, if the police caught a prisoner, to slip a gun into his pocket in order to get him a longer sentence. I don't know whether this was true. It may be one of the yarns that crooks invent and believe in.

“We carried our dummy pistols in a belt under our waistcoats. You'll find all the particulars of the raid we made upon the branch bank, in a little scrap-book in my bedroom. It was successful. At the appointed minute we entered the bank with white masks on our faces; I held up the cashier and his assistant with my dummy pistol whilst Walter passed round the counter, pulled the safe open—it was already unfastened—and took out three bundles of notes. We were out of the town before the police had wakened up from their midday sleep.

“We came back to Melbourne by a circuitous route, and I'll swear there was nobody in the town who would have recognised us or who could have identified us in any way. That evening the Melbourne papers were full of the robbery, and announced that the Bank of Australasia were offering five thousand pounds for the arrest of the robbers, and this was supplemented by a statement issued on behalf of the Government, through the police, that a free pardon would be granted to any person, other than one of the perpetrators, or any accomplice, who might turn King's Evidence. Walter was worried about this notice. He knew Donald Bateman better than I.

“‘If he gets the reward as well as the pardon, we're cooked,’ he said, and when he put through a telephone inquiry to the newspaper office and heard that

the reward was to go to anybody, accomplice or not, he went white.

“‘Go and find your wife, Tommy,’ he said. ‘We’ve got to slip out of this town quick! There’s a boat leaving for San Francisco this afternoon. We might both go on that. I’ll see the purser and we can travel in different classes.’

“I went to the hotel, but Lorna was out; the porter told me she had gone with Mr. Bateman to the races, and I returned to Walter and told him.

“‘Maybe he won’t see the offer until after the races are over. That is our only chance,’ he said. ‘You’d better leave her a note and some money, tell her you’ll let her know where she can join you.’

“Returning to the hotel, I packed a few things and wrote the note. When I walked out of the elevator into the vestibule, the first person I saw was Big Jock Riley, Chief of the Melbourne Detective Service. I only knew him because he’d been pointed out to me as a man to avoid. I’ll say this about him—he’s dead now, poor chap!—that he was a decent fellow. I knew what was going to happen when he came towards me and took the suitcase out of my hand and gave it to another man.

“‘You’d better pay your bill, Tommy,’ he said. ‘It will save everybody a lot of bother.’

“He went with me to the cashier, and I paid the bill, and then he took me to a taxi and we drove to the police station. The first person I saw when I got in was Walter. They’d taken him soon after I had left, and I learnt that I had been followed to the hotel, and they had only waited until I had collected my kit before they arrested me. That was one of Riley’s peculiarities, that he made all crooks pay their hotel bills before he arrested them. They said that his wife owned three hotels in Melbourne, but that is probably another invention.

“The police found most of the money—not all, for Walter had planted four thousand pounds, and had paid two thousand to Bateman, which Bateman returned when he found he was going to get the five thousand reward.

“Bateman was the informer, of course. He hadn’t gone to the races: he was sitting in another room at the police office when we were brought in, and he came out to identify us. Walter said nothing; he didn’t look at him. I think he must have had a premonition that this had been his last day of freedom, he was so utterly broken and dejected. But I met Bateman’s eyes, and he knew that if ever he and I met, there would be a reckoning. Is that melodramatic? I’m afraid it is.

“There’s very little to tell about the court proceedings. The prosecution was fair, and we were sentenced, Walter to eight years and I to three. I never saw Walter after we left the cells until I was taken to the prison hospital where he was dying. He was too far gone to recognise me. Riley was there; he’d come to

see if he could get any information about the four thousand that was cached. He told me, while I was waiting to be taken back, that if I would tell him he would get me a year's remission of my sentence. I was so utterly miserable that I was on the point of telling him, but I thought better of it, and told him only half the truth.

"There was two thousand planted in one place and two thousand in another. I needn't tell you where, but one was a respectable bank. I told him the hardest, and I believe he went away and recovered it, because within a week I had my order of release. Riley never broke a promise.

"I hung around Melbourne for a month. I didn't have to look for Lorna: I knew she'd gone—you get news in prison—and that Bateman had gone with her. That didn't worry me at all. I was certain that Bateman and I would meet sooner or later. It's curious how Walter's warning always stayed with me. I have never owned a pistol in my life, and even in my most revengeful mood I never dreamt of buying one.

"The police left me alone when I came out. Riley may have suspected that there was more money to collect, but probably he wasn't bothering his head about that. I had had all my English letters sent to a certain address in Melbourne, and when I went to this place I found a dozen old bills, receipts, letters from hospital friends, and a long envelope.

"Sometimes when I was in prison I used to wonder what had been the result of those examinations, but after a time I ceased to take any interest in them. It seemed that whatever honest career I had had was finished. I should be struck off the Medical Register on conviction, and that was the end of my doctoring. I didn't realise that the Australian authorities knew nothing of 'Marford'—knew only Tommy Furse—and it was only when I opened the envelope and took out the stiff parchment certificate that the truth dawned on me. In England I was Dr. Marford, a duly and properly qualified medical man. I could begin practice at once. A new and wonderful vista was opened, for I was terribly keen on my work, and had determined to specialise in the diseases of childhood.

"I collected the two thousand, and after a reasonable interval left Australia for England, travelling third class as far as Colombo and transferring to first class from that port. It was a little too sultry in the steerage, and I could afford better accommodation. I stopped off in Egypt; I wanted to break completely all association with Australia, to snap the links of acquaintanceship formed on the ship which might extend to somebody who knew me and my record. In Cairo I presented my credentials to the British Minister, obtained a new passport in place of one which I said I'd lost, and travelled overland through Italy and Switzerland, arriving in London at the end of September.

“My intentions were to buy a small practice, and I had no sooner arrived in London than I called on an agent, who promised me very considerable help, said he had the very thing for me, but who proved to be worse than useless, submitting propositions which I could not afford to buy or country practices which I knew I could not keep. Country people are very conservative where doctors are concerned, and do not trust any medical man until he has grown a white beard or lost his eyesight.”

“I decided to build up a practice of my own in London. I had fifteen hundred pounds left of my money, and by a system of strict economy I knew I could live for five years without a patient—three years if I carried out my big plan, which was to establish a sunlight clinic for babies. I have always had a natural enthusiasm for work amongst children. I love children, and if I had not been interrupted by Donald Bateman and my wife, I should within a few years have opened a great institution, which would have cost twenty thousand pounds to build and ten thousand a year to maintain. That was my ambition.

“It is common knowledge that I opened a surgery in Endley Street and started my practice as cheaply as any practice has ever been founded. From the first I was successful in obtaining patients. They were of the cheapest kind, and required nineteen shillings back for every pound they spent, but it was interesting work, and in a burst of enthusiasm I arranged to open my first clinic at the farther end of Endley Street. I reckoned that by the practice of the strictest economy I could live on the earnings from my practice, and that the money I had so carefully hoarded could keep the clinic running for two years.

“And then one day a thunderbolt fell. A woman walked into my consulting-room. At the time I was at my desk, writing a prescription for a patient who had seen me a few minutes before. I saw her sit down without looking at her; and then, as I asked, ‘What can I do for you?’ I looked up—into the eyes of Lorna Marford, my wife!

“I had forgotten her. That is no exaggeration. Literally she had passed out of my life and out of my memory. I had half forgotten Donald Bateman. For a moment I did not recognise her, and then she smiled, and my heart felt like a piece of lead.

“‘What do you want?’ I asked.

“She was very poorly dressed and shabby-looking, and was lodging at that time with a Mrs. Albert. She was, she told me, three or four weeks behind with her rent.

“‘I want money,’ she said coolly.

“‘Isn’t there a man called Bateman?’ I asked.

“She laughed at this and made a little gesture. I knew from that that she

was still fond of him, and that he'd left her.

“‘Bateman's gone. He and I have not seen each other for over two years,’ she said.

“She told me the kind of life she had been living, how she had been forced into a slum by sheer poverty. I felt sorry for her—I find it very easy to be sorry for women. But I remembered also that she had taken her share of the blood money, and had probably helped in our betrayal. There were a lot of little happenings that I remembered afterwards in prison which gave colour to this view. And I remembered Walter, dying in a prison hospital, so friendless, so lonely, so heartbroken.

“‘You'll get no money from me,’ I said. ‘You had your share of the reward, I suppose?’

“‘I had a bit of it,’ she answered coolly. ‘Not so much as I deserved. The police would never have found your white masks but for me.’

“Her coolness took my breath away. I got up from the table and opened the door.

“‘You can go,’ I said, but she did not stir.

“‘I want a hundred pounds,’ she said. ‘I'm sick of living in poverty.’

“I could only look at her; I was speechless.

“‘Why should I give you a hundred pounds, supposing I had it?’

“‘Because,’ she answered slowly, ‘if you don't give me a hundred pounds I shall tell somebody that you are an ex-convict. And then where will you be—doctor?’

“From that day onwards she blackmailed me. Within three months I had only half the money that I had put aside for the clinic, and I had committed myself to twice as much: ordered lamps, beds, structural alterations, and had practically placed myself under an obligation to buy the premises in five years' time.

“If I could have got her to leave the neighbourhood I might have had some respite; but though I was giving her a big sum every week, and she could have lived in comfort in the West End, she insisted, when she changed her lodgings, upon taking rooms locally, and upon these she spent a sum equivalent to my yearly income.

“Why she refused to live somewhere else I did not know. It puzzled me, until one day there flashed upon me the solution. She believed that sooner or later I should meet Donald Bateman—she wanted to be on hand to watch every movement of mine, so that she might save her lover. She may have had a premonition. That phenomenon is outside the ambit of my knowledge. I am a

physiologist; mental and psychic phenomena I know nothing about.

“It seemed there was not one chance in a million that I should ever see Donald Bateman again. Suppose he came to London, what likelihood was there that he should come to such an out-of-the-way spot as Tidal Basin? And yet I had met with some odd coincidences. The very first doctor I met, when I came to the place, was Dr. Rudd—and I had heard Bateman speak of Rudd. Rudd had been prison doctor at a county jail where Bateman had served two years’ hard labour! I remembered the name and the description the moment I saw him. It is quite possible that he also saw the doctor in London, but of that I know nothing. He hated Rudd, who had been the cause of his getting extra punishment for malingering whilst he was in prison, and he often described him—unflatteringly, but, I must say, faithfully.

“The demands from the clinic increased with the growth of my ambition. I was desperately hard pressed for money. On the one hand, by the legitimate expansion of my experiment, on the other by the increasing demands from Lorna.

“I don’t know what gave me the idea; I rather think it was the pathetic distress of old Gregory Wicks when I told him that he could never take out his cab again except at the gravest risk to himself and to the community. He was nearly blind, and his misery at the idea of surrendering the licence he had held for fifty-five years touched me. I thought how useful a taxicab might be, and how easily one might make up as Gregory. One thought suggested another, and when the idea took definite shape I was thrilled by the prospect. Isn’t there a legend of an old highwayman who robbed the rich to give to the poor? That would not have amused me; but to take toll of those wealthy people who had ignored the appeals I had hectographed and posted broadcast, and use the money to extend my clinic—that was a fantastic but a fascinating thought.

“I don’t think I was ever completely happy until I began my raids. I planned everything, spent nights in the West End, observing, timing and arranging my first coup. I invented, for the benefit of Gregory Wicks, a fictitious convict who could not obtain a licence, but who was a good and careful driver. I took lodgings for him in Gregory’s house, and the old man was delighted. It is not true that he ever allowed another man to take out the cab. He is colossally vain of his own individuality, poor old fellow, and the idea that somebody would go out looking very much like him, ply for hire and keep alive the traditions of his taciturnity and his hardihood appealed to the simple man. Only one stipulation he made, and it was that his substitute should place himself under a solemn vow to return any lost property he found in the cab. He was inordinately proud of his record.

“The first raid was ridiculously simple. I took my taxicab to the vicinity of

a restaurant where smart people go to supper, and, walking boldly into the hall, I held up the room with a dummy pistol and got away with the jewels of a large, florid woman. I have no regrets. She is probably not starving, for I left on her person considerably over ten thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

"The underworld had given me its confidence. I knew a receiver in Antwerp and another in Birmingham, with whom I could place the stones, and the first coup gave me enough money to completely re-equip the clinic and to open my Eastbourne convalescent home.

"But I had reckoned without Lorna. She had read an account of the stick-up, and it so happened that, unknown to me, she had witnessed my return. She came the next morning and demanded her share. Subsequently I gave her nearly a thousand pounds. I should have hated her if I was not a philosopher. It was much easier for me to pretend she had no existence.

"The second and third raids were as successful as the first. I paid Lorna her share. She was now the talk of the neighbourhood, with her smart dresses. She paid visits to the West End in hired cars and was probably living more expensively than she had ever lived in her life.

"If I had any qualms about the work on which I was engaged, they were caused by my association with a girl who shall be nameless. I seldom spoke to her. She was largely a creature of dreams: her sweetness and her purity were all the more transcendent in contrast with the character of my wife.

"Of Bateman I had seen nothing. I had no idea that he was in England and that Lorna had met him by accident in the West End and had asked him to come down and see her. The first mention of him I had came one night when I was visited at my surgery by a lady who was under the impression that her husband had been engaged in a fight and had killed his assailant. She was hysterical, and in her hysteria she took me into her confidence, told me of a man who was blackmailing her, mentioned his name—Donald Bateman! When I heard it the room seemed to spin round. Bateman was in England—was in that very neighbourhood! Imagine the devil that took possession of me.

"She grew calm when I assured her that the two men who had been fighting were labourers from the docks, and she went away, leaving me in a kind of passive delirium. I was almost incapable of thinking reasonably. The old loathing for the informer had come back to me. I could see, as plainly as though he were before me, the pinched face of my dying brother. It came back vividly and seemed to reproach me, that I had let it pass from my mind. Yet all in me that was sane told me that it was impossible that I could do anything, that it was unlikely I should ever meet Bateman. Could I go wandering round the streets of London looking for this blackguard? I should know him, of course: he had a knife scar under his chin—a woman did that in Australia. It

had only just healed when I arrived in Melbourne.

“I was still thinking over things after Mrs. Landor had left, when I heard voices on the other side of the street. It was raining, and that had driven the crowds away and left Endley Street empty. I saw a man in evening dress, and I saw a woman run across to him. He had been to her flat, and apparently had left something behind. I knew Bateman suffered from angina pectoris, and invariably carried a phial of butyl ammonal to be used in case of emergency. Apparently he had left this behind at Lorna’s flat. I heard him thank her. And then I saw them looking across the road towards me, and knew that she had already told him who I was. He did not dream that I was as well aware of his identity!

“He sent her back; didn’t move till she was out of sight; then he began to walk on slowly, and I was preparing to follow, when I saw a man come up to him—it was Landor—heard a few words, and then saw Landor lash out and Donald Bateman fall. He was always a tricky sort of fellow, and it was a favourite dodge of his in a fight to pretend he’d been knocked out. In this way he saved himself from further punishment. It succeeded with Landor, for after a while he walked quickly away, and I lost sight of him.

“I still hesitated as to what I should do. I knew P.C. Hartford was on his beat, saw the flicker of his helmet as he passed under a distant street lamp. I could do nothing now.

“And then Bateman got up, dusted himself and began to walk the way that Hartford had come. I saw the man and the constable talking together, and Hartford came on. He didn’t come far; presently he turned round, and at that moment Donald Bateman dropped as if he’d been shot.

“I knew exactly what had happened: he had a heart attack. My professional instincts urged me forward, but at that moment a figure crossed the road and crouched over the fallen man—and Hartford had seen him. He went back, quickening his stride, and I followed. As I came along the pavement I saw something lying at my feet. It was a broken key-chain, attached to which was a bunch of keys. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. The man who was searching Bateman’s pockets was a well-known local thief named Lamborn. He, too, saw the policeman and started to run, but before he could go far Hartford had grabbed him.

“While they were struggling, I came up. Then I saw, lying by the side of the man I hated, a sheath knife. It had evidently fallen out of his pocket. I had to make my decision quickly. There he lay—the liar, the traitor, the wronger of women, the man who had killed my brother. I don’t remember taking the knife from its sheath or using it. He never moved—must have died instantly.

“The struggle between the policeman and the thief was subsiding. I slipped the red knife into my pocket. There was excuse for the blood on my hands—I was a doctor handling a murdered man. Nobody questioned me or suspected me. A policeman brought me a bucket of water to wash my hands. I didn’t regret it long. I do not regret it now. I am glad I killed him—proud I killed him!

“Then came Rudd, an imbecile theorist; but even imbecile theorists sometimes and by accident hit upon solutions with diabolical accuracy. And Elk suspected. I knew he suspected me from the first. But the real danger threatened when Lorna came on to the scene. Her woman’s instinct had told her something was wrong. She had heard that a man had been murdered, pushed her way through the crowd, and went whimpering over the man who had made her what she was, if indeed she was not born with more than her share of original sin.

“She didn’t see me in the crowd. I knew she was going to speak, and wondered how I could stop her. Fortunately, nature intervened and she fainted. I was asked to take her to the station. It was the opportunity I could have prayed for. We got her into the car and drove a little way till we came to a chemist’s shop, and I sent the policeman who accompanied me to wake up a chemist. He had hardly gone before I slipped a hypodermic syringe out of my pocket. It was one I kept loaded, and had prepared for a maternity case. The drug was working by the time the policeman came back with a restorative, which certainly would not restore her. I waited my opportunity while she was in the matron’s room, and gave her a second dose—enough, as I thought, to keep her quiet for the rest of the night. It was easy to explain her condition when I put the hypodermic syringe and its case in her bag. I would have given her a third shot, and called at the infirmary for that purpose, but the house surgeon would not allow me to see her.

“To dispose of her was one thing, to silence Rudd another. I heard he’d gone home to bed. I was amazed when he tapped at my window on his way to the station and came in with this astounding theory—astounding in him because it was true.

“‘The man (he said) must have been murdered between the time the policeman arrested Lamborn and the time I said he was stabbed.’ He was working on the same grounds as you, Mason. If Lamborn had told the truth at first your task would have been simplified. Obviously, Bateman could not have been stabbed when the little thief picked his pocket, or his pocket-book and Lamborn’s hands would have been covered with blood. That was Rudd’s theory, too. He jokingly accused me of being the murderer, and pointed out certain stains on my coat which could not have been there had I not been by

the body at the moment of killing.

“Rudd had to be silenced at all costs. I invited him to drink a glass of wine with me—he preferred whisky and soda. Getting his attention fixed on my new ray lamp, I doctored his drink. Curiously enough, he detected nothing wrong, though he had very little time to detect anything, for he was on the ground in ten seconds. I served him as I had served Lorna—carried him into the garage and left him there.

“I had to get away: I knew that was imperative. But to travel needed money, tickets, passport—things I did not possess. And then, standing near the door of the inspector’s room, I heard that Landor had a large sum of money in his flat. This was my only chance. I went home, got out the taxi and drove to a road at the back of Landor’s house. I guessed that the place was under observation, but I was desperate. Happily, there was a fire escape and up this I went.

“I had the keys of Landor’s flat—I had picked them up on the night of the fight. I had to take my chance—wasn’t even sure whether the flat was on the first or the second floor. But I had luck. Landor’s name was on a brass plate, and I opened the door and went in. I had hardly closed the door behind me when I was startled to hear a woman’s voice asking if I was Louis. I have a memory for voices, and I recognised it instantly as the lady who had called at my surgery that night. I kept quiet, fearing that at any moment she would come out and put on the lights. But she went back into her room and I crept along, looking for a hiding-place. There was a small room which, from its furnishing, was, I guessed, a maid’s room. I got into here; the key was on the inside and I turned it. Landor arrived two minutes afterwards; and then, to my embarrassment, I heard Elk and Inspector Bray. Again I was fortunate: the detectives left with the Landors and gave me a few minutes to get the money and tickets—though neither these nor the passport could have been of much use to me. They had been located for me by Landor, who had told the detectives what was in the drawer.

“I had hoped to take the money and make my getaway before Elk returned, but he came back too soon, and the life-preserver, which was the only weapon I carried, had to be employed. I can’t say how sorry I was to strike down a man whom I have always regarded as a friend.

“And there was another danger, I discovered when I got back to the surgery. Rudd was returning to consciousness. I heard him groan as I went along the yard to give him a second injection, and I wondered who else had.

“There was one chance of getting away, but when I had finished my preparations and had brought the car to the back door I was rung up from the police station with the news that Mason was on his way. I knew my last minute

of safety had arrived, and on the spur of the moment I invented the forthcoming visit of the man with the white mask. I planned it all out, sprinkled the passage with a bottle of beef extract, which would look like blood in artificial light, tested the switches and oiled the bolts outside the door, between the time the detectives left the station and arrived at the surgery.

“I still had to get out, but I had arranged that, too. There is on my desk a bell-push which rings in the passage, and which I use as a signal for the next patient to come in. I waited my opportunity and rang the bell, using the signal which I had said White Face invariably used. Thereafter it was easy; to hold an imaginary conversation with somebody in the hall was a simple matter. To slam suddenly and lock the door, pretend that I had been attacked, switch out the lights and get away in the cab, occupied a few minutes. I had already put Rudd there, since I dared not leave him behind.

“I made, as you know, for the farm-house I had bought, and which I intended turning into a home for tubercular children. Perhaps some philanthropist will carry on the good work.

“I don’t think there is anything more that I can tell you. If there is, I shall be able to supply any deficiency.”

WHITE FACE

CHAPTER XX

DR. MARFORD stretched back in his chair, a smile on his weary face.

“Tired, doctor?” said Mason.

He nodded.

“Very, very tired,” he said.

“I never knew you had a lisp before?”

The doctor ignored the question.

“Tell me, how did you find me at Annerford? Oh, I know.” He smiled. “You interviewed poor Miss Harman, and she told you that I had another institution and naturally you went there.”

Mason nodded.

“You have no questions to ask me?”

Mr. Mason considered.

“I don’t think there is anything I can ask you, doctor. You won’t tell me the names of the two fences who bought the diamonds you stole?”

Marford shook his head slowly, laughter in his eyes.

“That would be unprofessional, wouldn’t it?” he said.

“That crazy man in the court—did he know?”

“He’s a very good guesser. I sometimes think he’s psychic,” said Marford. “Every time I met him he used to give me just the oddest, understanding look.”

“I was talking about your lisp just now, doctor. I’ve never noticed it before,” said Mason again.

“I haven’t a lisp”—Dr. Marford stretched himself luxuriously in his chair—“and I haven’t any impediment of speech. But, you see, I recognise inevitabilities, and for the last hour and a half I have had in my mouth—it is now between my teeth—a little glass phial of cyanide of potassium——”

Three detectives flung themselves upon him, but it was too late. He shuddered slightly; a spasm of pain passed over his face, and he stiffened. There was no other movement.

Mason looked at him in admiration.

“Game, eh?” he said huskily. “By God, how game!”

He turned abruptly and walked across to the charge-room, and came, bare-headed, into the street, to breathe the sweet air of morning.

The day was breaking.

THE END

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[The end of *White Face* by Edgar Wallace]