

The
MOVING
FINGER

Natalie Sumner Lincoln

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MOVING
FINGER ***

The
MOVING FINGER

By NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN



The Moving Finger

I Spy

The Nameless Man

C. O. D.

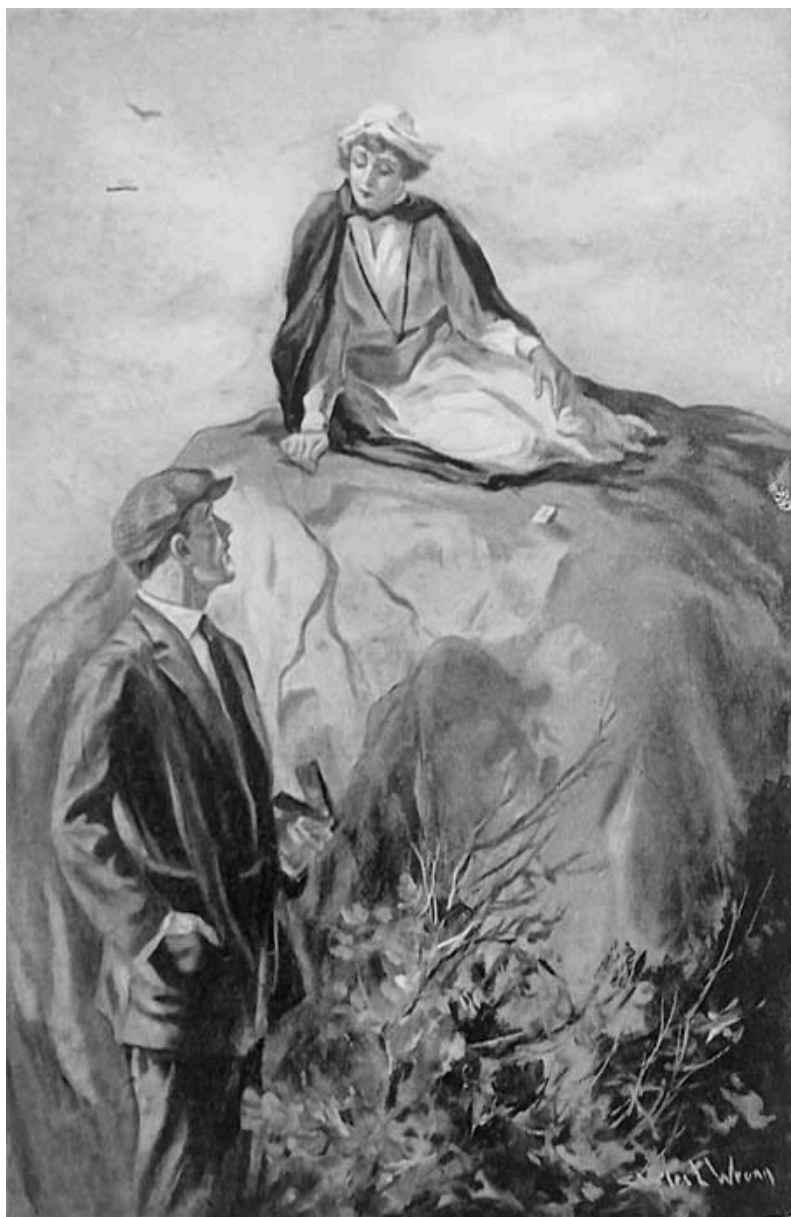
The Official Chaperon

The Man Inside

The Lost Despatch

The Trevor Case

D. APPLETON & COMPANY, NEW YORK



“Object—matrimony,” he retorted.

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The **MOVING FINGER**

BY
NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN

AUTHOR OF "THE NAMELESS MAN," "I SPY," "C. O. D.,"
"THE LOST DESPATCH," "THE TREVOR CASE," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES L. WRENN

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
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1918

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TO

MR. AND MRS. THOMAS E. NEWBOLD

THIS YARN IS SPUN WITH INFINITE AFFECTION

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THE MOVING FINGER

CHAPTER I

VISIONS

THE swish of starched skirts caused the man in the bed to roll slowly over, and for the first time patient and nurse regarded each other. The silence grew protracted.

“Well?” The man’s tone was husky and the short interrogation was almost lost among the pillows. He made a second attempt, and this time his voice carried across the room. “What—what do you want?”

The nurse’s eyes, pupils dilated, shifted from his white face to the glass in her outstretched hand, and the familiar sight of the medicine and her starched uniform drove away her temporary loss of composure.

“Here is your medicine,” she announced, and at the sound of her low, *traînante* voice the patient clutched the bedclothes spasmodically. He made no effort to take the glass.

“Put it on the table,” he directed and, reading correctly the look that crept into her eyes, his voice rose again harshly. “Put it down, I say—”

A rap at the closed hall door partly drowned his words, and without replying Nurse Deane placed the glass on the table by the bed, and a second later was looking out into the hall. She drew back at sight of a tall man standing somewhat away from the entrance to the room, then thinking better of her hesitancy she stepped into the hall and drew the door shut behind her.

“What is it, Mr. Wyndham?” she inquired.

“I came up to ask if there is anything I can do for you?” Hugh Wyndham moved over to her side, and Nurse Deane’s preoccupation prevented her becoming conscious of his scrutiny. “I think Noyes exceeded matters when he asked you to undertake the care of another patient.”

Vera Deane’s face lighted with one of her rare smiles. “Oh, no,” she protested. “We nurses are always glad to assist in emergencies. Dr. Noyes came in to see Mr. Porter and he explained that one of your aunt’s dinner guests had been taken ill, and requested me to make him comfortable for the night.”

“Still, with all you have to do for poor Craig it’s putting too much on you,” objected Wyndham. “Let me telephone into Washington for another night

nurse, or, better still, call Nurse Hall.”

Vera laid a detaining hand on his arm. “Mrs. Hall was ill herself when she went off duty; she needs her night’s rest,” she said earnestly. “I assure you that I am quite capable of taking care of two patients.”

“It wasn’t that,” Hugh paused and reddened uncomfortably, started to speak, then, thinking better of his first impulse, added lamely, “I never doubted your ability, but—but—you’ve been under such a strain with Craig—”

“Mr. Porter is improving,” interrupted Vera swiftly. “And as my new patient is not seriously ill—”

“True,” Wyndham agreed, slightly relieved. “Just an attack of vertigo—Noyes and I got him to bed without calling you.” He did not think it necessary to add that he had stopped the surgeon sending for her. “Noyes said you need only look in once or twice during the night and see that he is all right.” A thought occurred to him, and he added hastily: “Perhaps I can sit up with him—”

“That will hardly be necessary.” Vera’s tone of decision was unmistakable. “I thank you for the offer,” raising grave eyes to his. Wyndham bowed somewhat stiffly and moved away. “Just a moment, Mr. Wyndham; what is the name of my new patient?”

Wyndham’s glance was a mixture of doubt and admiration.

“He is Bruce Brainard, a well-known civil engineer,” he said slowly, halting by the head of the winding staircase. He looked thoughtfully over the banisters before again addressing her. “Brainard is just back from South America. I had no idea my aunt and Millicent knew him so well, why”—in a sudden burst of confidence—“Brainard gave me to understand before dinner that he and Millicent were engaged. Let me know if I can assist you, Miss Deane. Good night,” and barely waiting to hear her mumbled reply he plunged down the stairs.

Vera Deane’s return to the sick room was noiseless. She found her patient lying on his side, apparently asleep, one arm shielding his face and leaving exposed his tousled iron-gray hair. Vera glanced at the empty medicine glass on the table by the bed, and a relieved sigh escaped her; evidently Bruce Brainard had obeyed Dr. Noyes’ instructions and swallowed the dose prepared for him.

Making no unnecessary sound Vera arranged the room for the night, screening the window so that a draught would not blow directly on Brainard; lighted a

night light and, placing a small silver bell on the bed-table within easy reach of the patient, she turned out the acetylene gas jet and glided from the room.

Entering the bedroom next to that occupied by Bruce Brainard Vera smoothed the sheets for Craig Porter, lying motionless on his back, and made the paralytic comfortable with fresh, cool pillows; then taking a chair somewhat removed from the bed, she shaded her eyes from the feeble rays of the night light and was soon buried in her own thoughts. Dr. Noyes had made a professional call on Craig Porter earlier in the evening, and he had forbidden Mrs. Porter or her daughter going to the sick room after six o'clock.

As the night wore on sounds reached Vera of the departure of guests, and first light then heavy footsteps passing back and forth in the hall indicated that Mrs. Porter and her household were retiring for the night. At last all noise ceased, and Vera, lost in memories of the past, forgot the flight of time.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock"—Bruce Brainard's dulled wits tried to count the strokes, but unavailingly; he had lost all track of time. He was only conscious of eyes glaring down at him. He dared not look up, and for long minutes lay in agony, bathed in profuse perspiration. His eyelids seemed weighed down with lead, but he could not keep his cramped position much longer, and in desperation his eyes flew open as he writhed nearer the bed-table. His breath came in easier gasps as he became aware that the large bedroom was empty, and he passed a feverish, shaking hand across his wet forehead. Pshaw! his imagination was running away with him. But was it?

Again he glimpsed eyes gazing at him from a corner of the room—eyes moving steadily nearer and nearer until even the surrounding darkness failed to hide their expression. A sob broke from Brainard, and his hand groped for the bell, only to fall palsied by his side.

Dawn was breaking and the faint, fresh breeze of early morning parted the curtains before a window and disclosed to an inquisitive snow robin a figure bending over a stationary washstand. Quickly the skilled fingers made a paste of raw starch and, spreading it gently over the stained linen, let it stand for a moment, then rinsed it in cold water. With great patience the operation was repeated until at last the linen, once more spotless, was laid across an improvised ironing-board, and an electric iron soon smoothed out each crease and wrinkle. Leaving every article in its accustomed place, the worker paused for an instant, then stole from the bathroom and through the silent house.

CHAPTER II

TRAGEDY

“RAT-A-TAT! Rat-a-tat-tat!”

The imperative summons on his bedroom door roused Hugh Wyndham. It seemed but a moment since he had fallen asleep, and he listened in uncomprehending surprise to the repeated drummings, which grew in volume and rapidity. His hesitancy was but momentary, however, and springing out of bed he seized a bathrobe, unlocked the door and jerked it open with such precipitancy that Vera Deane’s clenched fist expended its force on empty air instead of on the wooden panel. Her livid face changed the words on Wyndham’s lips.

“What’s happened?” he demanded. “Craig isn’t—?”

“No—no—not Mr. Porter”—in spite of every effort to remain calm Vera was on the point of fainting. Totally unconscious of her action she laid her hand in Wyndham’s, and his firm clasp brought a touch of comfort. “It’s B—Mr. Brainard. Come!” And turning, she sped down the hall, her rubber-heeled slippers making no more sound on the thick carpet than Wyndham’s bare feet. She paused before a partly opened door and, resting against the wall, her strength deserting her, she signed to her companion to enter the bedroom.

Without wasting words Wyndham dashed by the nurse and reached the foot of the bed; but there he stopped, and a horrified exclamation broke from him. Bruce Brainard lay on the once spotless white linen in a pool of blood which had flowed from a frightful gash across his throat.

Wyndham passed a shaking hand before his eyes and turned blindly toward the door and collided with Vera.

“Don’t come in,” he muttered hoarsely. “It’s no spectacle for a woman.” And as she drew back into the hall again he burst out almost violently: “God! Brainard can’t be dead, really dead?” He glared at her. “Why didn’t you go for Noyes instead of me? He’d know what to do.”

Vera shook her head. “Mr. Brainard was lifeless when I found him”—her voice gained steadiness as her years of training in city hospitals and still grimmer experiences in the American Hospital Corps abroad came to her aid,

and she grew the more composed of the two. "I went first to summon Dr. Noyes—but his room was empty."

"Empty!" echoed Wyndham dazedly. "At this hour?" and his glance roved about the hall, taking in the still burning acetylene gas jet at the far end of the hall, its artificial rays hardly showing in the increasing daylight. How could the household remain asleep with that ghastly tragedy so close at hand? He shuddered and turned half appealingly to Vera. "What's to be done?"

"The coroner—"

"To be sure, the coroner"—Wyndham snatched at the suggestion. "Do you know his name?"

"No," Vera shook her head, "but I can ask 'Central.' I presume the coroner lives in Alexandria."

"Yes, yes." Wyndham was in a fever of unrest, chafing one hand over the other. "Then will you call him? I'll wait here until you return."

Vera did not at once move down the hall. "Had I not better awaken Mrs. Porter?" she asked.

"No, no," Wyndham spoke with more show of authority. "I will break the news to my aunt when you get back. The telephone is in the library. Go there."

He was doubtful if she heard his parting injunction for, hurrying to the stairway, she paused and moved as if to enter Mrs. Porter's boudoir, the door of which stood ajar; then apparently thinking better of her evident intention, she went noiselessly downstairs and Wyndham, listening intently, detected the faint sound made by the closing of a door on the floor below. Not until then did he relax his tense attitude.

Stepping back into Brainard's bedroom he closed the door softly and stood contemplating his surroundings, his eyes darting here and there until each detail of the large handsomely furnished bedroom was indelibly fixed in his mind.

There was no sign of a struggle having taken place; the two high-backed chairs and the lounge stood in their accustomed places; the quaint Colonial dresser near the window, the highboy against the farther wall, and the bed-table were undisturbed. Only the bed with its motionless burden was tossed and tumbled.

Wyndham hastily averted his eyes, but not before he had seen the opened razor lying on the sheet to the left of Brainard and just beyond the grasp of the stiffened fingers. Drawing in his breath with a hissing noise, Wyndham retreated to his post outside the door and waited with ever increasing impatience for the return of Vera Deane.

The noise of the opening and shutting of a door which had reached Wyndham, contrary to his deductions, had been made not by the one giving into the library, but by the front door. Vera Deane all but staggered out on the portico and leaned against one of the columns. The cold bracing air was a tonic in itself, and she drank it down in deep gulps, while her gaze strayed over the sloping lawn and the hills in the background, then across to where the Potomac River wound its slow way between the Virginia and Maryland shores. The day promised to be fair, and through the clear atmosphere she could dimly distinguish the distant Washington Monument and the spires of the National Capital snugly ensconced among the rolling uplands of Maryland.

The quaint atmosphere of a bygone age which enveloped the old Virginia homestead had appealed to Vera from the first moment of her arrival, and she had grown to love the large rambling country house whose hospitality, like its name, "Dewdrop Inn," had descended from generation to generation. Mrs. Lawrence Porter had elected to spend the winter there instead of opening her Washington residence.

Three months had passed since Vera had been engaged to attend Craig Porter; three months of peace and tranquillity, except for the duties of the sick room; three months in which she had regained physical strength and mental rest, and now—

Abruptly turning her back upon the view Vera re-entered the front hall and made her way down its spacious length until she came to the door she sought. A draught of cold air blew upon her as she stepped over the threshold, and with a slight exclamation of surprise she crossed the library to one of the long French windows which stood partly open. It gave upon a side portico and, stepping outside, she looked up and down the pathway which circled the house. No one was in sight, and slightly perplexed she drew back, closed the window, and walked over to the telephone instrument which stood on a small table near by. Her feeling of wonderment grew as she touched the receiver—it was still warm from the pressure of a moist hand.

Vera paused in the act of lifting the receiver from its hook and glanced keenly about the library; apparently she was alone in the room, but which member of the household had preceded her at the telephone?

The old “grandfather” clock in one corner of the library was just chiming a quarter of six when a sleepy “Central” answered her call. It took several minutes to make the operator understand that she wished to speak to the coroner at Alexandria, and there was still further delay before the “Central” announced: “There’s your party.”

Coroner Black stopped Vera’s explanations with an ejaculation, and his excited intonation betrayed the interest her statement aroused.

“I can’t get over for an hour or two,” he called. “You say you have no physician—let me see! Ah, yes! Send for Beverly Thorne; he’s a justice of the peace as well as a physician. Tell him to take charge until I come;” and click went his receiver on the hook.

Vera looked dubiously at the telephone as she hung up the receiver. Pshaw! It was no time for indecision—what if an ancient feud did exist between the Thornes and the Porters, as testified by the “spite wall” erected by a dead and gone Porter to obstruct the river view from “Thornedale”? In the presence of sudden death State laws had to be obeyed, and such things as the conventions, aye, and feuds, must be brushed aside. Only two days before, when motoring with Mrs. Porter, that stately dame had indicated the entrance to “Thornedale” with a solemn inclination of her head and the statement that its present owner, Dr. Beverly Thorne, would never be received at her house. But Coroner Black desired his immediate presence there that morning! In spite of all she had been through, a ghost of a smile touched Vera’s lovely eyes as she laid aside the telephone directory and again called “Central.”

Five seconds, ten seconds passed before the operator, more awake, reported that there was no response to her repeated rings.

“Keep it up,” directed Vera, and waited in ever growing irritation.

“Well?” came a masculine voice over the wires. “What is it?”

“I wish to speak to Dr. Beverly Thorne.”

“This is Dr. Thorne at the telephone—speak louder, please.”

Vera leaned nearer the instrument. “Mr. Bruce Brainard has died suddenly while visiting Mrs. Lawrence Porter. Kindly come at once to Dewdrop Inn.”

No response; and Vera, with rising color, was about to repeat her request more peremptorily when Thorne spoke.

“Did Mr. Brainard die without medical attendance?” he asked.

It was Vera’s turn to hesitate. “I found him dead with his throat cut,” she stated, and the huskiness of her voice blurred the words so that she had to repeat them. This time she was not kept waiting for a reply.

“I will be right over,” shouted Thorne.



“Yes, I heard,” Millicent could hardly articulate.

As Vera rose from the telephone stand a sound to her left caused her to wheel in that direction. Leaning for support against a revolving bookcase stood Millicent Porter, and her waxen pallor brought a startled cry to Vera’s lips.

“Yes, I heard.” Millicent could hardly articulate, and her glance strayed hopelessly about the room. “I—I must go to mother.”

“Surely.” Vera laid a soothing hand on her shoulder. “But first take a sip of this,” and she poured out a glass of cognac from the decanter left in the room after the dinner the night before. She had almost to force the stimulant down the girl’s throat, then, placing her arm about her waist, she half supported her out of the room and up the staircase.

As they came into view Hugh Wyndham left his post by Brainard’s door and darted toward them. Millicent waved him back and shrank from his proffered hand.

“Not now, dear Hugh,” she stammered, reading the compassion in his fine dark eyes. “I must see mother—and alone.” With the false strength induced by the cognac she freed herself gently from Vera’s encircling arm and, entering her mother’s bedroom, closed the door behind her.

Wyndham and Vera regarded each other in silence. “Better so,” he muttered. “I confess I dreaded breaking the news to Aunt Margaret.” The gong in the front hall rang loudly and he started. “Who’s coming here at this hour?” he questioned, turning to descend the stairs.

“It is probably Dr. Thorne, the justice of the peace,” volunteered Vera, taking a reluctant step toward Brainard’s bedroom. “He said he would run right over.”

“Run over!” echoed Wyndham blankly. “Thorne? You surely don’t mean Beverly Thorne?”

“Yes.”

Wyndham missed a step and recovered his balance with difficulty just as a sleepy, half-dressed footman appeared in the hall below hastening to the front door. Wyndham continued to gaze at Vera as if not crediting the evidence of his ears. From below came the murmur of voices, then a man stepped past the bewildered servant and approached the staircase. Then only did Wyndham recover his customary poise.

“This way, Dr. Thorne,” he called softly, and waited while the newcomer handed his overcoat and hat to the footman and joined him on the stairs. Vera, an interested spectator, watched the two men greet each other stiffly, then turning she led the way into Brainard’s bedroom.

Neither man guessed the effort it cost Vera to keep her eyes turned on the dead man as with a tremor now and then in her voice she recounted how she had entered the bedroom to see her patient and had made the ghastly discovery.

"I then notified Mr. Wyndham," she concluded.

"Did you visit your patient during the night?" questioned Thorne, never taking his eyes from the beautiful woman facing him.

"Yes, doctor, at half past one o'clock. Mr. Brainard was fast asleep."

"And the remainder of the night—"

"I spent with my other patient, Mr. Craig Porter." Vera moved restlessly. "If you do not require my assistance, doctor, I will return to Mr. Porter," and barely waiting for Thorne's affirmative nod, she slipped away, and resumed her seat in the adjoining bedroom halfway between the window and Craig Porter's bedside.

From that vantage point she had an unobstructed view of the shapely head and broad shoulders of the young athlete whose prowess in college sports had gained a name for him even before his valor in the aviation corps of the French army had heralded him far and near. He had been taken from under his shattered *aéroplane* six months before in a supposedly dying condition, but modern science had wrought its miracle and snatched him from the grave to bring him back to his native land a hopeless paralytic, unable to move hand or foot.

As she listened to Craig Porter's regular breathing Vera permitted her thoughts to turn to Beverly Thorne; his quiet, self-possessed manner, his finely molded mouth and chin and expressive gray eyes, had all impressed her favorably, but how account for his lack of interest in Bruce Brainard—he had never once glanced toward the bed while she was recounting her discovery of the tragedy. Why had he looked only at her so persistently?

Had Vera been able to see through lath and plaster, her views would have undergone a change. Working with a skill and deftness that aroused Wyndham's reluctant admiration, Beverly Thorne made a thorough examination of the body and the bed, taking care not to disarrange anything. Each piece of furniture and the articles on tables, dresser, and mantel received his attention, even the curtains before the window were scrutinized.

"Has anyone besides you and Miss Deane been in this room since the discovery of the tragedy?" asked Thorne, breaking his long silence.

“No.”

“When was Mr. Brainard taken ill?”

“During dinner last night. Dr. Noyes said it would be unwise for him to return to Washington, so Mrs. Porter suggested that he stay here all night, and I loaned him a pair of pajamas,” Wyndham, talking in short, jerky sentences, felt Thorne’s eyes boring into him.

“I should like to see Dr. Noyes,” began Thorne. “Where—”

“I’ll get him,” Wyndham broke in, hastening to the door; he disappeared out of the room just as Thorne picked up the razor and holding it between thumb and forefinger examined it with deep interest.

However, Wyndham was destined to forget his errand for, as he sped down the hall, a door opened and his aunt confronted him.

“Wait, Hugh.” Mrs. Porter held up an imperative hand. “Millicent has told me of poor Bruce’s tragic death, and Murray,” indicating the footman standing behind her, “informs me that Dr. Beverly Thorne has had the effrontery to force his way into this house—and at such a time.”

She spoke louder than customary under the stress of indignation, and her words reached Beverly Thorne as he appeared in the hall. He never paused in his rapid stride until he joined the little group, and his eyes did not fall before the angry woman’s gaze.

“It is only at such a time as this that I would think of intruding,” he said. “Kindly remember, madam, that I am here in my official capacity only. Before I sign a death certificate, an inquest must decide whether your guest, Bruce Brainard, committed suicide—or was murdered.”

CHAPTER III

TESTIMONY

THE day nurse, Mrs. Christine Hall, the severe lines of her face showing more plainly in the strong afternoon light and her forehead puckered in a frown, watched from the bedroom window the parking of automobiles on the lawn before "Dewdrop Inn," with an ear attentively cocked to catch any sound from the bed where Craig Porter lay looking at the opposite wall with expressionless eyes. The mud-incrusted automobiles were little varied in shape or make, and the men who climbed out of them were mostly of middle age, and the seriousness of their manner as they greeted each other, or stood in groups chatting with late comers, impressed Nurse Hall. As the last one disappeared up the steps of the portico and out of her line of vision, she left the window and hurried to a closed door, but before she could turn the knob the door opened and Vera Deane stepped into the bedroom.

"I was just going to call you," exclaimed Nurse Hall. "The men seem all to have arrived."

Vera consulted her wrist watch. "The inquest was called for two o'clock; they are prompt."

"To the minute," agreed her companion. "Are you going downstairs immediately?"

"No, not until sent for." Vera turned and wandered restlessly about the room, taking care, however, that her footfall made no sound which might disturb Craig Porter. She stopped in the shadow of a large wing chair and regarded the motionless figure on the bed long and intently. When she looked away she found Nurse Hall at her side.

"Does he always stare straight before him?" she asked, almost below her breath.

"Yes." Nurse Hall shuddered. "Always that same fixed stare. You can bless your stars that you have him at night when he is generally asleep. Sometimes he gives me the creeps."

"Does he never speak?"

"No, never, and I don't believe he ever will; the muscles of his throat are paralyzed. But you need not whisper"—raising her voice. "He doesn't understand a word we say."

"But our talking may annoy him." The older woman colored; she was sensitive about her voice, never having been able to conquer its shrill quality, and she did not take kindly to any criticism of her conduct of a sick room, especially from a younger and more inexperienced nurse. Vera laid a quiet hand on her arm. "Forgive the suggestion, but I cannot rid myself of the belief that often those we think unconscious hear and understand more than we imagine."

"Tut, my dear, not in this case. Mr. Porter understands nothing said to him, even by his mother; and it's been that way from the first," Nurse Hall added, seating herself in the armchair. "I was here when they brought him back from Europe, and I must say that Dr. Noyes has worked wonders—"

Vera was not listening—voices in the hall and the sound of advancing footsteps came to them through the half-open door.

"Have you been notified to attend the inquest?" she asked. Her question passed unheeded until Nurse Hall, raising a very red face from the exertion of stooping, had tied her shoestrings.

"No, I don't have to go down," she answered, puffing slightly. "I slept soundly all last night. It is too bad your rest has to be disturbed this afternoon; if you wish"—a sidelong glance accompanied the words—"I will continue on duty until midnight and give you an opportunity to make up lost sleep."

"I don't believe I could sleep now, thanks all the same. You forget I found the—the body," and a shudder which she could not suppress shook Vera. "I see it whenever I close my eyes."

"You poor thing!" Her companion patted her arm sympathetically. "We'll sleep better and feel differently after the inquest and they remove the body. Someone is stopping at the door."

Not waiting for the low rap that sounded a second later, Vera had sped to open the door, and she found Murray, the footman, standing in the hall.

"You are wanted, miss, in the library," he said, and without a backward glance Vera closed the bedroom door and followed the servant down the staircase.

Two men, strangers to her, were lounging in the square entrance hall near the front door, and at her approach they turned and watched her until the

portières, which divided the hall, hid her tall, graceful figure from their sight. Vera paused an instant before opening the library door, then, taking a deep breath, she stepped inside the room.

Grouped about the long center table were six men, while an elderly man occupied a chair near at hand, and the eighth man in the room sat before a side table taking notes. The elderly man, whose authoritative air rightly led Vera to conclude that he was Coroner Black, was on his feet instantly on catching sight of the new witness, and pulled forward a chair for her.

“Miss Deane?” he questioned, and she bowed a silent response. “Then sit here, madam, after McPherson administers the oath,” and at his words the man at the small table stepped forward, Bible in hand.

The homelike appearance of the library and the comfortably seated men, some with up-tilted chairs and sprawling legs, robbed the inquest of its legal atmosphere, but as Vera repeated the oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!” she became conscious of the concentrated regard of her companions, and her back stiffened as she seated herself bolt upright in the chair evidently set aside for the witnesses. She faced the windows, and the afternoon sunshine, like kindly fingers, touched her quaint snow-white cap, and gave a tint of red to her waving, curly hair, as her hazel eyes were calmly lifted to encounter the coroner’s penetrating gaze.

“Are you a native of Washington City, Miss Deane?” he asked, first giving Deputy Coroner McPherson time to resume his seat and prepare to take notes.

“I was born in Washington twenty-six years ago,” was the quiet reply.

“Have you resided continuously in Washington?”

“No, sir, not after the death of my parents,” replied Vera. “I went West, then later studied to be a trained nurse at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating from there four years ago.”

“How long have you been attending Mr. Craig Porter?”

“A little over three months.”

“And what do your duties comprise?”

“I am night nurse.” Her concise reply won an approving nod from one of the jurors.

“Were you summoned to nurse Mr. Bruce Brainard when he became ill last night?”

“I was, sir.”

“Then did you spend the night by his bedside?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not?”

The question shot from the coroner, and Vera’s fingers tightened their grip on the arm of her chair, but her voice was not raised or ruffled as she answered slowly:

“Mr. Brainard’s condition was so improved after taking the medicine prescribed by Dr. Noyes that he did not require my attendance, and I therefore returned to my customary duties in Mr. Porter’s bedroom.”

“Do the bedrooms occupied by Mr. Porter and Mr. Brainard adjoin each other?” inquired Coroner Black.

“They do, sir, but there is no communicating door between them.”

“Ah! Then to enter Mr. Brainard’s bedroom from Mr. Porter’s you had to go into the main hall and from there into Mr. Brainard’s bedroom?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then while with Mr. Porter you were cut off by a solid wall from all communication with your other patient?” questioned the coroner, intently studying a rough sketch of the interior of the house which he held in his hand.

“Not entirely,” explained Vera quickly. “There is a transom between the two rooms which remains open, and I would have heard instantly if Mr. Brainard had called me.”

“Did he call you?” asked the coroner eagerly, and his face fell at her monosyllabic “No.”

“Did you hear any noise in Mr. Brainard’s bedroom during the night?” he began, after a pause.

“Not a sound, sir.”

“Did you go in to see how he was during the night?”

“Yes, once, about half past one. Judging from his regular breathing that Mr. Brainard was sleeping I tiptoed out of the room without approaching his bed, and resumed my watch in the next room.”

“Was there any light in Mr. Brainard’s room?”

“Yes, I placed a night light on the bed-stand.”

“Did the candle give sufficient light for you to see Mr. Brainard’s position in bed?” questioned Coroner Black.

“Yes, sir; he lay on his left side with his face turned toward the door,” answered Vera. “His face was somewhat in shadow as his back was turned to the bed-table on which the night light stood, but I could see that his eyes were closed.”

“Was he lying in the same position when you found him dead the next morning?”

“No.” Vera whitened as the scene of the tragedy flashed before her mental vision. “Mr. B-Brainard then lay on his back staring straight up at the ceiling, his head twisted to one side. Oh!” and one hand flew upward covering her eyes. “I can never forget the expression of his face—the look of fear—of agony. Gentlemen”—her hand dropping to her side, while she steadied herself with determined effort—“he must have suffered horribly—before he died.”

“And you, awake in the next room, heard no sound?” Coroner Black repeated his former question with quiet persistence.

“I heard no sound,” responded Vera mechanically. “Absolutely no sound.”

A pause followed as Coroner Black fumbled among the papers lying on the table. When he removed his hand his fingers clutched a razor.

“Have you seen this razor before?” he inquired, offering it to her.

Vera shrank back. “I saw a razor lying on the bed beside Mr. Brainard. I did not pick it up or examine it closely.”

“You mean that you cannot identify this as the razor which you saw lying on Mr. Brainard’s bed this morning?”

“Yes,” and there was a change in her tone, too subtle to be detected by the coroner. She hurried on before he could ask another question: “On discovering Mr. Brainard’s condition this morning I went for Dr. Noyes, and as he was not in his room, I hastened to get Mr. Hugh Wyndham.”

“How do you know that Dr. Noyes was not in his room?” demanded Coroner Black.

Vera looked at him in surprise. “When I received no response to my repeated raps, I turned the handle of the door and entered his bedroom—it was empty.”

“Did you meet anyone in the hall on your way to summon Dr. Noyes and Mr. Wyndham?”

“No, sir, no one.”

Coroner Black rose. “I think that is all, Miss Deane; no, stay, there is one other point—were you sent for when Mr. Brainard was taken ill at the dinner table?”

“No. I was not aware of his illness until Dr. Noyes informed me that he and Mr. Wyndham had assisted a guest, who was suffering from vertigo, into the spare bedroom, and directed me to administer a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia, and to make him comfortable for the night, and then to return to Mr. Porter.”

Coroner Black referred to his notes before again addressing her.

“Did you observe where Mr. Brainard’s clothes had been placed?” he asked.

Vera wrinkled her pretty forehead in thought. “I believe they were lying on the sofa, but I cannot swear to it,” she replied.

“Do you recall seeing the clothes this morning?”

“I do not, sir,” was her prompt reply. “My whole attention was absorbed by the—the figure on the bed. I was too—too terrified to observe anything else in the room.”

Coroner Black stared at her intently; her repose of manner and air of efficiency were at variance with her words. Judging from appearances she seemed the last person to lose her head in an emergency.

“That is all,” he announced, and covered his abruptness with an old-fashioned bow as he preceded her to the door. “I thank you, Miss Deane.”

With a slight inclination of her head to the jurors Vera slipped out of the room and made haste toward the staircase, but not before she heard Coroner Black’s low-toned command to the footman to enter the library.

The well-trained servant stood while the oath was being administered to him, then subsided into the seat indicated and waited patiently for the coroner to address him.

“State your full name and occupation,” directed the latter, examining the footman’s intelligent face, somber livery, and general air of respectability.

“Murray, sir, John Murray,” and the Scotch burr was unmistakable. “I’ve been second man to Mrs. Porter, sir, for going on seven years.”

“Did you admit Mr. Brainard when he arrived here last night?”

“I did, sir.”

“Did he have a bag or suitcase with him?”

“No, sir.”

“Did you assist Dr. Noyes and Mr. Wyndham in conducting Mr. Brainard to his bedroom after his attack of illness in the dining-room?”

“No, sir; he could walk with the assistance of the other gentlemen.”

There was silence as Coroner Black referred to his notebook, and his manner grew stern when he turned back to the witness.

“The butler, Selby, has testified you mentioned to the servants that you went to the assistance of Mr. Brainard when he was taken ill. Did you make such a statement?”

“I did, sir; and it is true—I assisted Mr. Brainard when he had his first attack, sir.”

“Ah, when was that?” and the coroner looked at him with quickened interest.

“Just after him and Miss Millicent had had words in the garden beyond,” indicating the windows and the portico. “I was in here arranging the liqueurs and cigars, sir, when I heard a scream through the partly open window, and I ran out and found Miss Millicent cowering against one of the big pillars and saying: ‘No, no!’ between her sobs.” He stopped abruptly. “I beg your pardon for talking so much.”

“Go on,” commanded Black. “Tell us everything.” The jurors and the deputy coroner were hanging on the footman’s words.

“Miss Millicent bolted by me into the house, and I was just turning to follow her when Mr. Brainard appeared out of the darkness—Miss Millicent had been standing where the light from the library fell on her,” he explained. “Mr. Brainard staggered toward me, and before I could reach him, he fell.” Murray cleared his throat and eyed each one of his expectant hearers; he enjoyed the sensation his testimony was producing.

“Well, what then?” prompted Coroner Black.

"I picked up Mr. Brainard; no easy matter, sir, for he was a dead weight"—the footman was not to be hurried—"and I carried him in here, sir, plumped him down in that chair and gave him a drink of cognac."

"What appeared to be the matter with him?"

"He said he was dizzy like, and that everything swam before him," explained Murray, with careful attention to detail. "He was very red in the face and shook all over; but the cognac brought him around after a bit, and, asking me to say nothing of his little upset, he went on into the drawing-room."

"Was he in evening clothes?" The foreman of the jury spoke for the first time and looked somewhat alarmed at the sound of his own voice.

"Surely, sir; it was shortly before dinner was announced. Mr. Brainard motored out and reached here about half past six."

"When was dinner served?" inquired Black.

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"Humph!" The coroner jotted down the figures in his notebook. "Was Mr. Brainard a frequent caller here?"

"He was, sir, last year, but not recently, sir." The footman paused thoughtfully, and then added: "Not since Dr. Noyes has been here."

Coroner Black wheeled on him sharply. "What do you mean by that remark?"

"Nothing, sir." Murray's eyes opened in astonishment. "I was only trying to place the last time I'd seen Mr. Brainard here. My master, Mr. Craig Porter, and Dr. Noyes reached home early in October; yes, sir, Mr. Brainard hasn't been here since then, I'm sure."

The coroner considered the footman in silence for several seconds.

"When did you last see Dr. Noyes?" he asked finally.

"About midnight, sir. I went up to his room to ask if I could do anything for him. Part of my duties is valeting for Mr. Hugh and Mr. Craig, and the gentlemen staying in the house," he added, reading the unspoken question on the coroner's lips.

"How did Dr. Noyes appear?" inquired Black.

"Appear?" Murray reflected for a moment. "I can't answer that, sir, for I didn't really see him; the door was opened only a little way, and I just caught a glimpse of him as he stood before his chiffonier stropping his razor."

The coroner and Dr. McPherson exchanged glances.

“Wasn’t that an unusual hour for such an occupation?” asked the former.

“Quite so, sir; but it was this way, sir”—Murray’s words tumbled over each other in his haste—“the doctor had shaved just before dinner, and I hadn’t had time to put away his things, and last night when I apologized for leaving his chiffonier in such disorder, sir, and offered to come in and straighten up, he told me it was midnight and to go to bed, that he had already cleaned the razor and put the mug away.”

Coroner Black reached forward and picked up the razor he had shown Vera Deane.

“Does this razor belong to Dr. Noyes?” he asked.

A dead silence prevailed as Murray took the razor and examined the open blade with its reddish stains. He shook his head.

“No, sir, it is not Dr. Noyes’ razor.”

CHAPTER IV

MORE TESTIMONY

CORONER BLACK took the razor from the footman and laid it carefully back on the table.

“You are excused,” he announced, and, as Murray rose with alacrity, he added, “Inform Mrs. Porter that we will be obliged by her presence here.”

“Yes, sir; certainly, sir,” and Murray backed from the room, but before going upstairs to find Mrs. Porter he bolted into the pantry and mopped his white face which was damp with perspiration, then, refreshing himself with a glass of port, he went on his belated errand.

Inside the library the jurors whispered to one another, and at a muttered request the foreman picked up the razor, passed it to his neighbor, and each man at the table in turn examined the stained blade and handle with absorbed interest, while the coroner and McPherson compared notes in an undertone. The opening of the hall door brought them all to attention, and Mrs. Porter’s entrance was greeted by a lengthened silence.

Hardly deigning to listen to Coroner Black’s explanation of the formalities to be gone through, she laid a bejeweled hand on the Bible presented to her by McPherson, and repeated the oath in an expressionless monotone.

“Pray be seated, madam,” and Coroner Black pointed to the chair by which she was standing. “We will not detain you long,” and in rapid succession he asked her her full name and length of residence in that vicinity.

“I have spent the summer months here ever since inheriting the property from my husband’s uncle,” she said, in answer to the latter question. “This is the first winter that we have kept the house open, but Dr. Noyes deemed it inadvisable to move my son again, and so—” An expressive gesture completed the sentence.

“How long has Dr. Noyes been in attendance upon your son?” asked Black.

“He accompanied Craig home from the hospital in France.” Real feeling betrayed itself in Mrs. Porter’s metallic tones. “My son owes his life to his skill and his untiring attention. We shall miss him now that he has returned to England.”

“Ah, then you think Dr. Noyes is on his way back to the front again?” Black was watching her closely as he toyed with his pencil.

“Certainly. Where else would he go?” glancing disdainfully at him. “No Englishman nowadays lingers behind when his leave of absence is over.”

“But my dear madam, would Dr. Noyes depart so abruptly—without bidding you good-by; without the formality of notifying even the nurses in charge of your son that he would not be back?” asked Black incredulously.

“Dr. Noyes had been expecting a summons home for over ten days,” explained Mrs. Porter, in a tone sometimes used to quiet a petulant child, and Black colored. “He had arranged to have the cable telephoned out to him; his bag stood packed, and whatever good-bys he had to say were said to my daughter and myself yesterday.”

“At what hour did this cable reach Dr. Noyes?” demanded Black.

“I presume during the night. He said that he would remain in the library on the chance of a telephone message coming for him,” was her glib reply.

Black eyed her sharply. “Who is to attend your son in Dr. Noyes’ absence?” he asked, but if he hoped to trap Mrs. Porter he was disappointed. Her answer was prompt.

“Dr. Washburn of Alexandria. Dr. Noyes called him in consultation, and all arrangements were made last week to take over the case.”

Coroner Black considered a moment before again addressing her, and Mrs. Porter permitted her gaze to wander about, noting inwardly the disarrangement of the usually orderly room, and she turned back to the jurors with a distinct air of disapproval. Coroner Black’s next question caused her to catch her breath sharply.

“Were your daughter and Mr. Bruce Brainard engaged to be married?” he asked.

“I question your right to ask that,” she retorted. “My family affairs had nothing to do with Mr. Brainard’s shocking suicide.”

“We are the best judges of that, madam,” replied Black quietly. “It is our duty to expedite this inquiry, and to do so we must know whether or not Mr. Brainard was on friendly terms with each member of this household on the night of his death—”

"He was, sir, otherwise he would not have been my guest," broke in Mrs. Porter.

"Did you invite him to spend the night, or only to dine with you?"

"I simply asked him to dinner." She paused, then added: "He was taken ill at the dinner table, and my nephew, Mr. Wyndham, and Dr. Noyes helped him upstairs and put him to bed in one of the spare bedrooms. Dr. Noyes said that Mr. Brainard was in no condition to motor in to Washington last night."

"When did you last see Mr. Brainard?"

"When he left the dining-room."

Black looked at her attentively and noted the flush which had mounted to her pale cheeks during their colloquy.

"I must remind you, madam," he commenced, and his manner was serious, "that you have not answered my question regarding the relationship existing between your daughter and Mr. Brainard."

"They were friends," curtly.

"Nothing more?" persisted the coroner.

Mrs. Porter regarded him with no friendly eye, then apparently thinking better of her brusqueness, answered more courteously:

"Mr. Brainard admired my daughter greatly, and paid her the compliment of asking my consent to their marriage."

"Did you give your consent?" prompted Black as she stopped.

"He was to have had my answer this morning."

"Oh!" The coroner gazed blankly at Mrs. Porter, failing utterly to appreciate her stately beauty and quietly gowned, modish figure. She was a remarkably well preserved woman, on whose face time had left few wrinkles, and she looked much younger than she was. Several seconds elapsed before Black again addressed her.

"Did your daughter reciprocate Mr. Brainard's affection?"

"My daughter would not have accepted his attention had she not liked and admired him," she responded evasively, and Black lost all patience.

"Kindly give a direct answer to my question," he exclaimed harshly. "Were your daughter and Mr. Brainard engaged?"

"I believe there was an understanding to that effect," she admitted sullenly. "But until I gave my consent"—a shrug completed the sentence, and Black instantly asked:

"Why did you withhold your consent, madam?"

"You are laboring under a mistaken idea," replied Mrs. Porter coldly. "My consent was only asked yesterday, and I very properly told Mr. Brainard that I needed a night in which to think it over."

The coroner stroked his chin as he contemplated Mrs. Porter, then observing the jurors' air of interest, asked more briskly: "When did you make Mr. Brainard's acquaintance?"

"About a year ago, and until he went to South America he was a frequent visitor at my house." Mrs. Porter glanced involuntarily at the clock as it chimed the hour, and the coroner rose.

"Please give me the names of your dinner guests," he said, picking up a pencil and drawing a pad toward him.

"Captain and Mrs. Mark Willert, Miss Margaret Spencer, my daughter Millicent, my nephew, Mr. Hugh Wyndham, Dr. Noyes, Mr. Brainard—let me see, that makes eight," checking them off on her finger. "I have a few intimate friends in to dinner every week on Millicent's account. I do not want her brother's distressing illness to cast too great a shadow on my daughter's young life."

"Is your son improving?"

"Yes, thank God!" Mrs. Porter's eyes shone with a softer light and her voice shook. "Dr. Noyes and time will work wonders in his condition. I"—she paused and steadied her voice—"I have every confidence in Dr. Noyes."

Coroner Black bowed. "We will not keep you longer, madam; but before you leave kindly examine this razor and tell us if you can identify it."

"I will look at it, certainly." It took her a second or two to disentangle her lorgnette chain from a tassel on her gown, then raising her glasses she stared at the blood-stained article. "To the best of my knowledge I have not seen it before," she announced, rising, and at a sign from the coroner retreated toward the hall door, hardly responding to the foreman's curt nod.

Bidding her a courteous good afternoon, Coroner Black opened the door and waited for her to pass into the hall, then stepped after her in time to see her pause and draw back into an alcove as Dr. Beverly Thorne approached them.

If Dr. Thorne observed the latent air of hostility and discourtesy in her bearing there was no indication of it in his unruffled manner as he greeted the coroner.

“Sorry to be late, Black,” he said. “But an important case—” as he spoke he removed his overcoat and handed it and his hat to the attentive footman. “Do you wish me to testify now?”

“No. I want you here in your capacity of ‘J. P.,’” responded the coroner. “In other words, look, listen and—note.” The last word was added as he held the library door ajar before throwing it wide open. “Murray, request Mr. Hugh Wyndham to come to the library.”

Thorne exchanged a low-toned word with McPherson and several of the jurors before slipping into a large wing chair which partly concealed his presence. Hugh Wyndham had evidently been awaiting the summons, for he followed hard upon the heels of the footman and stepped briskly into the library. The preliminaries were quickly gone through with, and Wyndham, while waiting for the coroner to question him, occupied his time in inspecting his companions, and his eyes contracted slightly at sight of Beverly Thorne, who sat gazing idly at the log fire which blazed in the stone fireplace, and added greatly to the picturesqueness and comfort of the well proportioned room.

“State your full name and occupation, Mr. Wyndham,” requested the coroner, resuming his seat.

“Hugh Wyndham, stock broker, just now not connected with any firm,” he added by way of explanation. “Since the failure in November of the banking house of Mullen Company with which I was connected I have been residing with my aunt, Mrs. Lawrence Porter.”

“Were you and Mr. Brainard old friends, Mr. Wyndham?”

“We have known each other for over a year, but were acquaintances rather than friends,” replied Wyndham, flicking a white thread from his coat sleeve.

Black shot a questioning look at him. “Do I understand that you were not friends?” he asked.

“Oh, we were friendly enough on the few occasions that we met, but our professions gave us very few opportunities to become better acquainted.”

“What was Mr. Brainard’s occupation?”

“He was a mining engineer.”

The coroner leaned over and consulted Dr. McPherson's notes, then, sitting back in his chair, asked: "Did Mr. Brainard complain of feeling ill before dinner last night?"

"No, except to tell Captain Willert and myself that the climate in South America had played the devil with him."

"Were you present at the dinner table when he was taken ill last night?"

"Yes. Dr. Noyes said that he was suffering from vertigo, and Mrs. Porter suggested that we take him upstairs and put him to bed."

Again Coroner Black referred to McPherson's notes before asking another question.

"Did Mr. Brainard have any suitcase or luggage with him?" he inquired.

"No. I loaned him a pair of my pyjamas."

"When did you last see Mr. Brainard alive?"

"I left him in bed, apparently better, and followed Dr. Noyes downstairs."

"Leaving no one with the sick man?" asked Black swiftly.

"Yes, Miss Deane," responded Wyndham. "Dr. Noyes sent her to look after Brainard. Miss Deane said that she would be within call if he needed assistance during the night." He hesitated, and then added, "I volunteered to sit up with Brainard, but she said that it was not necessary."

"Were you disturbed by noises during the night?"

"No." Wyndham shifted his position, and one foot tapped the floor incessantly. "I am a heavy sleeper and my room is some distance from that occupied by Brainard."

"You were asleep when Miss Deane rapped at your door this morning?"

"Yes."

"You accompanied her to Mr. Brainard's bedroom?"

"I did."

"Describe the condition in which you found Mr. Brainard and his bedroom," directed Black, polishing his eyeglasses, and replacing them to scrutinize the witness more closely.

"I found Brainard lying on his back on the right side of his bed." Wyndham stopped and moistened his lips. "His throat was cut and the wound had bled

profusely.”

“Did you find any weapon in the room?”

“An open blood-stained razor was lying on the bed beside Brainard.”

“Did you touch it?”

“No.”

“Mr. Wyndham,” Coroner Black spoke slowly, evidently weighing his words, “did you loan a razor as well as a pair of pyjamas to Mr. Brainard?”

“I did not,” came the instant and emphatic denial.

“Then, if you did not give him the razor, how did Mr. Brainard secure possession of the razor which you saw on his bed?” asked Black. “You, and other witnesses, have testified that Mr. Brainard brought no luggage with him and did not come prepared to spend the night.”

“I have puzzled over his possessing a razor,” agreed Wyndham. “Then it occurred to me that perhaps he brought it with him from town intending to commit suicide on the way home.”

“An ingenious theory,” acknowledged Black. “But why should Mr. Brainard plan to commit suicide when his engagement to a beautiful and wealthy girl was about to be announced?”

“Mr. Brainard’s ill health may have unbalanced his mind.”

“Did Mr. Brainard show symptoms of insanity last night?” asked Black quietly.

“N-no.” Wyndham thought a minute, then glanced at the coroner. “The attack of vertigo”—he began and stopped as Coroner Black smiled and shook his head.

“Mr. Wyndham”—Black turned abruptly and produced the razor—“have you seen this before?”

Wyndham took it from him gingerly. “It resembles the one I saw lying on the bed close by Brainard’s left hand,” he said at last.

“It is the same one,” announced Black shortly. “Had you ever seen this razor before finding it on Brainard’s bed this morning?”

“No.” Wyndham examined it with care and then held up the razor so that all could see it. “It evidently belongs to a set, one to be used every day in the week—this particular razor is marked Monday—”

"And today is Tuesday," commented the foreman of the jury. The juror nearest him nudged him to be quiet, and the coroner resumed his examination.

"To your knowledge, Mr. Wyndham, does anyone in this household own a set of razors such as you describe?" he demanded.

"No." Wyndham's monosyllable rang out emphatically and his eyes met the coroner's squarely. "Personally, I use an ordinary razor. Can I send for it?"

"Certainly," and the coroner turned to McPherson, who rose.

"You will find my razor in the top drawer of my bureau; Murray, the footman, will show you my room," explained Wyndham. "At the same time Murray can get the razor belonging to my cousin, Craig Porter. The footman shaves him," he supplemented, "using a Gillett safety razor."

"The footman is waiting in the hall," added Coroner Black, and, barely waiting for the closing of the library door behind McPherson, he asked: "Was Mr. Brainard left-handed?"

"I don't think so." Wyndham considered the question. "No, I am sure that he was not. Once or twice I have played billiards with him, and I would certainly have observed any such peculiarity."

A sudden movement on the part of Beverly Thorne brought the coroner's attention to him.

"Do you care to question the witness, doctor?" he inquired and, as Thorne nodded, he explained hurriedly to Wyndham, whose brow had darkened ominously: "Dr. Thorne is a justice of the peace and is here to assist in this investigation at my request," with quiet emphasis on the last words, and Wyndham thought better of hot-tempered objections. Thorne rose and approached the center table before speaking.

"Mr. Wyndham," he began, "did you telephone into town that Mr. Brainard was ill and would spend the night in this house?"

"No," answered Wyndham, and his tone was of the curtest.

"To your knowledge did anyone else in this house telephone Brainard's condition to friends in Washington?"

"I did not hear of it if they did."

"Then no one, outside this household, knew that Brainard was spending the night here?"

Wyndham moved impatiently. "You forget Mrs. Porter had other dinner guests last night," he said stiffly. "They knew of his illness and his presence here."

"True," broke in the coroner. "Mrs. Porter has already furnished me with their names, and—" But before he could add more Thorne interposed with a question.

"How about Brainard's chauffeur?"

"He had none, but drove his own car," responded Wyndham.

"Is that still here?"

"I believe so. Sims, Mrs. Porter's chauffeur, reported it was in the garage this morning."

At that moment the door opened to admit McPherson, who advanced somewhat short of breath from hurrying, and laid an ordinary razor and a Gillett "safety" on the center table.

"The first razor I found in Mr. Wyndham's bureau," he announced. "The second was handed to me by Miss Deane." He stopped to resume his seat, then continued more slowly: "The nurse showed me where Mr. Porter's shaving things are kept in the bathroom between his bedroom and that occupied by the nurses."

"Thanks, McPherson." Coroner Black replaced the blood-stained razor on the table beside the others. "You are excused, Mr. Wyndham."

Wyndham bowed and stepped past Thorne; at the door he hesitated, but, catching Thorne's eyes, he turned and left the room without speaking.

"McPherson, will you take the stand?" directed Black, and the deputy coroner sat down in the chair reserved for the witnesses, after first having the oath administered to him. "You performed the autopsy on Mr. Brainard?" asked Black a few seconds later.

"I did." McPherson displayed an anatomical chart, and used his pencil as an indicator while he continued: "I found an incipient tumor of the brain. Brainard's attacks of vertigo were due to that." The deputy coroner raised his voice as his pencil traveled down the chart and rested on the throat. "The wound was on the lower part of Brainard's neck and the carotid artery was severed. He bled to death."

"Was the wound self-inflicted, doctor?" questioned Thorne, taking the chart and examining it closely before passing it over to the juror nearest him.

McPherson shook his head at Thorne's question. "I do not believe the wound was self-inflicted," he said, "for the wound commences under the right ear and extends toward the left; whereas, in the case of suicide the cut would have been made just the reverse."

McPherson's words were listened to with deep attention, and in the silence that followed Thorne grew conscious of the loud ticking of the clock.

"Then in your opinion, McPherson," commented Coroner Black, "Bruce Brainard was murdered?"

"Yes," answered the deputy coroner. "The nature of the wound proves conclusively that it could not have been suicide."

"Unless," broke in Thorne, "unless Brainard was left-handed."

"That point can be easily settled," snapped the coroner. "That's all, McPherson, thank you;" and as the doctor left the witness chair he added, "Kindly ask Detective Mitchell to step here."

It was growing darker in the room and Thorne walked over to the windows and pushed back the long curtains and pulled up the Holland shades. The sunshine had almost totally disappeared, and the gray of late afternoon alone lighted the room. Thorne moved over to one of the lamps which were dotted about, and was busy lighting it when Detective Mitchell followed McPherson back into the room.

"Have you discovered which servants own razors in this house, Mitchell?" asked the coroner, after the new witness had answered other questions.

"Yes, sir." Mitchell took two razors from his pocket. "I have them each ticketed; this one belongs to the footman, Murray, and this to the butler, Selby."

The coroner accepted the two razors and compared them with the blood-stained one on the table, then he passed all three to the jurors.

"They are not in the least alike," he said thoughtfully. "Did you examine Dr. Noyes' bedroom, Mitchell?"

"I did," answered the detective. "The bed had evidently been slept in, as the sheets and blankets were tumbled about, but all the doctor's clothes were packed in his steamer trunk."

"Was his trunk locked?"

“No, sir.” Mitchell paused. “I examined its contents, but I could not find any razor or stop.”

“Were his overcoat and hat in his closet?”

“No, nor downstairs in the coat closet,” was Mitchell’s prompt response. “I questioned all the servants and Mrs. Porter, and they say that Dr. Noyes owned a large grip with his initials—it is missing, and I conclude that he has taken it with him, for Murray declares that some underclothes and one suit of clothes are missing.”

“I see.” Coroner Black frowned, then glanced toward Thorne, and the latter addressed the detective.

“Have you found any trace of burglars breaking into the house last night, Mitchell?”

“No. And I examined the ground about this house very thoroughly, as well as every window catch and keyhole; none have been tampered with. The servants declare they were securely locked last night, and found in the same condition this morning.”

Thorne laid aside the pencil he had been twisting about in his fingers and pointed to the blood-stained razor.

“Did you find finger marks on this razor?”

“No, none.” Mitchell looked glum. “We tested every article in Mr. Brainard’s bedroom and could not find a trace of finger prints.”

Thorne turned back to Coroner Black. “I have no further questions to ask the witness,” and the coroner dismissed Mitchell.

“As you go out, Mitchell,” he added, “please send word to Miss Millicent Porter that I would like to see her here.”

By the time the hall door again opened every lamp the room boasted was lit, and Millicent Porter paused just within the library to accustom herself to the sudden glare. Thorne and the jurors noted the lines of care on her white face and the dark circles under her eyes, and as Thorne approached her he muttered under his breath, in subdued admiration, “What an exquisite child!” She seemed little more in her simple dark dress, and her beauty was of the ethereal type.

“We won’t keep you here very long, Miss Porter.” Coroner Black bustled forward and, snatching up a cushion from the sofa, placed it in the witness

chair. "You will be more comfortable so." She smiled her thanks, looking up at him timidly. "Now, if you will rise for a second Dr. McPherson will—there," soothingly, observing her startled expression. "Just repeat the oath after McPherson and place your hand on the Bible—so. Now sit right here. Kindly tell the jurors your full name—"

"Millicent Porter."

"And how long have you known Mr. Brainard, Miss Porter?"

"A little over a year." She spoke with an effort and several of the jurors hitched their chairs nearer so as not to miss a word she said.

"And when did you become engaged to him?" inquired Coroner Black.

Millicent flushed scarlet. "I—I—" she stumbled badly. "We were—it was—" Then in an indignant rush, "My private affairs do not concern you; I decline to answer impertinent questions."

Coroner Black bowed and adjusted his eyeglasses, and to the disappointment of a number of the jurors he did not press the point.

"Why did you and Mr. Brainard quarrel last night?" he asked.

"Quarrel?" Millicent stared at him, then laughed a bit unsteadily. "Mr. Brainard and I quarrel—what nonsense! Who put such an idea in your head, sir?"

"Your footman, Murray, has testified that he overheard you exclaim, 'No! No!' on the portico there," pointing to the long windows. "And after you had dashed by him into the house Murray found Mr. Brainard lying overcome on the ground."

Millicent never removed her eyes from the coroner; she seemed drinking in his words, half unable to believe them.

"Murray saw us?" she stammered, half to herself. "I had no idea others were about." Abruptly she checked her hasty speech, and her determined chin set in obstinate lines. "Apparently you know everything that transpired last night. Then why question me?" she demanded.

"We do not know everything," replied Coroner Black patiently. "For instance, we do not know who murdered Bruce Brainard."

His words struck home. She reeled in her seat, and but for Thorne's supporting arm would have fallen to the floor.

“Murdered!” she gasped. “Murdered? You must be mistaken.”

“Unfortunately, Miss Porter, the medical evidence proves conclusively that it was murder and not suicide. Now,” continued Black, eyeing her watchfully, “we want your aid in tracking the murderer—”

“I know nothing—*nothing*!” she burst in passionately. “I never saw Mr. Brainard again after he went upstairs; I slept soundly all last night, and heard nothing.”

“Even if you know nothing about the happenings last night, perhaps you can still tell us something which may prove a clue,” began Black, and his manner grew more earnest. “Did Mr. Brainard ever tell you that he had enemies?”

“No.”

“Did he ever mention that his life had been threatened?” persisted Black.

“No.” Millicent was white to the lips, and she held out her hands pleadingly. “Indeed, gentlemen, I cannot help you—why ask me questions that I cannot answer?”

The big, raw-boned foreman of the jury met her eyes and moved awkwardly, but before he could think what to say Coroner Black again addressed her.

“There are certain formalities to be gone through, Miss Porter.” As he spoke he walked over to the center table and picked up the blood-stained razor, holding it directly under the rays of the nearest lamp. “Kindly look at this razor and tell us if you know to whom it belongs.”

If the razor had been Medusa’s head it could have held no more deadly fascination for Millicent. She sat as if carved from stone. Coroner Black repeated his question once, and then again—still no response.

Beverly Thorne broke the tense stillness.

“Did Dr. Noyes bid you good-by before departing, Miss Porter?” he asked.

Galvanized into action, Millicent sprang from her seat, and, before anyone guessed her intention or any hand could stay her, she dashed from the library.

Coroner Black made a hasty step toward the door, but Thorne detained him.

“Suppose you sum up the case to the jury,” he suggested, and resumed his seat.

CHAPTER V

DOROTHY DEANE, "SOCIETY EDITOR"

"GOOD AFTERNOON, Mr. Williams." The managing editor of the Washington *Tribune* twisted about in his revolving-chair, and his frown changed into a smile of welcome at sight of his society editor standing in the doorway, a roll of soiled copy clutched in one hand, while a much blue-penciled daily newspaper dangled from the other.

"Come in, Miss Deane," he said, pointing toward a chair by his desk. "How are you feeling today after last night's gayety at the White House?"

"Rather wintry, thank you." A twinkle in Dorothy Deane's eyes belied her serious expression. "Your compositors spoiled my beauty sleep."

"What's their latest offense?"

"This—" She spread the morning newspaper before him, and pointed to a paragraph in the middle of the second column, beneath the sub-heading: "Beauty at the White House." The sentence read: "Mrs. Anson Smith, wife of Senator-elect Smith, wore a handsome string of pearls."

"Beauty unadorned," quoted the managing editor dryly. "Your description would fit nine out of ten women of the ultra-smart set of today."

"But it is not my description," retorted Dorothy hotly. "Here's my copy, perfectly legible," displaying it. "The compositors simply did not set up the remainder of the sentence. If you could have heard Mr. Smith's language to me on the telephone this morning—"

"The irate husband, eh!" Williams laughed unsympathetically. "Mrs. Smith must have had a gown made especially for the occasion—"

"She did, and sent me a full description of it yesterday—"

"And it did not get published—ah, take it from me, Miss Deane, *that's* where the shoe pinched."

"Possibly; but that doesn't excuse the blunder in the composing-room or the stupidity of the men on the copy desk," declared Dorothy. "I have to stand for their mistakes."

Williams frowned, then smiled. "They will read your copy more carefully in the future, I promise you," he said. "I never saw you angry before, Miss Deane; now you look like the picture I have of you."

"Picture?" Dorothy's blue eyes opened to their widest extent. "*You* have a picture of me?"

"Your emphasis is not very flattering," responded Williams, chuckling. "Our staff photographer snapped you and your sister one day last autumn, and I found the boys were going to run the picture in a Sunday supplement to surprise you. I didn't think you'd like it, so took it away from them." As he spoke he opened a drawer of his desk and, tumbling its contents about, finally pulled out a photograph. "I meant to have given it to you before."

"Thanks," and Dorothy glanced at the photograph with interest as she took it.

"What were you two squabbling about?" demanded Williams, staring at the photograph. "Your sister looks a veritable Lady Macbeth."

"Oh, she doesn't approve of my spendthrift ways," answered Dorothy lightly. "Vera says I never will learn by experience," and an involuntary sigh escaped her.

"It's a shame she lectured you in public," grumbled Williams, whose friendly interest in Dorothy's career had already smoothed many rough places.

"Oh, I don't know—couldn't find a more convenient place than the steps of the Emergency Hospital to receive the *coup de grâce*," laughed Dorothy. "And Vera doesn't mean half she says."

"By the way, didn't you once tell me that your sister was nursing Craig Porter at their country place in Virginia?"

"Yes, she is."

Williams gazed at her with quickened interest. "Seen the afternoon papers?" he asked.

"No, I haven't had time." The imperative ring of the telephone interrupted her, and Williams, waving an impatient hand in farewell, jerked the desk telephone toward him.

Still holding her photograph, but leaving her copy and the morning paper behind on the desk, Dorothy closed the door of the private office, made her way through the city room, borrowed an afternoon newspaper from several lying on the city editor's desk, and disappeared into the small room set aside

for her exclusive use. She was some minutes placing her hat, coat, and handbag on their accustomed peg, then ensconcing herself before her desk she sorted her mail; that done, she picked up the photograph given her by the managing editor and studied it more closely.

The photograph was, like many an unposed snapshot, a good likeness; too good, she thought, noting her sister's determined expression and her own rebellious countenance. For all her jesting with the managing editor, the conversation she and Vera had had that autumn afternoon lingered in her memory with a bitter flavor; remarks had been made which neither could forget.

Dorothy turned over the photograph and read with a wry smile the "legend" pasted there:

Two members of famous family adopt professions—Left to right, Miss Vera and Miss Dorothy Deane, daughters of the late distinguished jurist, Stephen Deane, Chief Justice of the District Court of Appeals, desert the ballroom and pink teas for professional life. Miss Vera Deane is a graduate trained nurse, while her younger sister has found her *métier* as a journalist, and ably conducts the society section of the *Morning Tribune*.

Tossing aside the photograph, Dorothy picked up the afternoon newspaper and was about to turn to the society page when she stopped, her attention arrested by a display heading:

BRUCE BRAINARD A SUICIDE

KILLS HIMSELF AT PORTER HOMESTEAD

The lines beneath were meager as to details, but Dorothy absorbed the printed words a dozen times before their whole meaning dawned upon her. At the end she drew a long, long breath. Bruce Brainard! His very name conjured up scenes she had prayed to forget; and now he was dead, a suicide. She raised her hands to her throbbing temples and burst into uncontrollable, hysterical laughter. Truly the Fates had a perverted sense of humor—to bring Bruce Brainard, Vera, and Hugh Wyndham together for a final meeting! Suddenly her laughter changed to tears, and noiseless sobs shook and racked her slender body until she sank back in her chair exhausted with emotion. She was regaining some hold on her customary composure when the insistent clamor of her desk telephone effectually aroused her.

“Hello! Yes,” she called into the instrument, steadying her voice. “Society editor, yes; no, we don’t take engagements over the ’phone— No, we can’t break the rule; sorry, but you will have to send it in signed, or bring the news in person. Good-by,” and she rang off.

Her right hand instinctively sought her assignment book; the telephone message had brought her back to the everyday routine; she could not permit her thoughts to wander afield; but first there was one thing she must do, and she again turned to the telephone. It was some minutes before she got the toll station, and there she met disappointment—the telephone at the Porter homestead had been temporarily disconnected; she could not talk to her sister.

But why had not Vera telephoned her? The question worried her as she turned the pages of her book, searching for the entries falling on that date. Then she recalled that, after her talk with the indignant Mr. Anson Smith that morning, she had covered her ears with the bedclothes and gone comfortably to sleep, letting the telephone ring itself out. The fact that she had been up all night “covering” the White House entertainment and had crawled into bed at twenty minutes past five in the morning did not, at the moment, seem an adequate excuse for having neglected the telephone—she had deliberately but unintentionally cut herself off from communication with Vera, and bitter tears came to her eyes at the thought. Vera might be needing her at that very moment! The thought was not quieting, and she had reached for her hat when again the telephone broke the silence.

“What is it?” she demanded, and her voice sounded shrill even in her own ears.

“Society editor,” came a woman’s voice over the wire. “Please look in the Congressional Directory and tell me if Mr. John Graham is still a representative.”

“What state is he from?” questioned Dorothy.

“I don’t recollect,” was the reply, and with a subdued, “Wait a moment,” Dorothy set down the receiver and feverishly turned the pages of the Congressional Directory until she reached the index and ran down the list of names. “There’s no John Graham in the book,” she shouted into the telephone a second later.

“Sure you have the last edition? Thanks.”

Dorothy put back the receiver with a relieved sigh. A glance at her wrist watch showed her that it was already a quarter of five—and the foreman was waiting

for early copy. There was no time to hunt up Vera, and with her nerves on edge she turned to her list of assignments and telephoned to first one hostess and then another, getting dinner and lunch lists until she had a formidable number before her. But one hostess remained uncalled, and with renewed zeal she resorted to the telephone again.

“This is Miss Deane, society editor, *Morning Tribune*,” she explained. “I will be greatly obliged if you will give the names of your dinner guests tonight for tomorrow’s paper.”

“I give dinners to my friends, not for the newspapers,” came the frigid reply, and Dorothy heard the bang of the telephone receiver at the other end of the wire.

“Waugh!” she exclaimed aloud, turning back to her typewriter. “So Mrs. Purse thinks she has arrived—and last year she was sending in her own dinner lists to the newspapers, as well as the names of guests at entertainments to which she was invited.”

Dorothy’s skilled fingers flew over the typewriter as her active brain put in fitting phrases the information she had secured over the telephone, and later, in some instances, she rewrote the important social events chronicled in the evening newspapers. She had almost completed her task when the door opened and the office boy ushered in a much-talked-about divorcée whose career had provided entertainment for staid Washingtonians.

Dorothy was a favorite of hers and she greeted her warmly. “No, I can’t sit and gossip,” she announced, standing by the partly open door. “I only came to bring you this data about our dramatic club,” laying a folded manuscript on the desk perilously near the paste pot. “Dress it up in your own style, Dorothy. I congratulate you on your society column; it’s the best in town.”

“Indeed,” and Dorothy flushed with pleasure. “I did not think you would ever bother to read it.”

“I always read the social news to keep track of the entertainments to which I am not bidden given by women who owe me invitations.” A faint hardness crept into her voice, and was gone instantly as she bade Dorothy a cordial good-by and departed.

Rewriting the dramatic club article proved more of a task than Dorothy had bargained for; thoughts of Vera, of Bruce Brainard, and last—of Hugh Wyndham, projected themselves before the typed words, and in desperation she seized the scissors and, shortening the manuscript, she pasted the

remainder on her copy paper. She was busy marking her copy when the telephone bell called her back to the instrument.

“Good evening, Miss Deane,” said a soft, purring voice, which Dorothy instantly recognized as belonging to a well-known society belle, who had seen more seasons than she was willing to admit. “For particular reasons I am anxious to attend the breakfast tomorrow which the Japanese Ambassador is giving. Can’t you use your influence to get me an invitation?”

“But I have no influence in that quarter,” protested Dorothy. “The invitations are strictly limited to members of the Cabinet and their wives.”

“Oh! Don’t you know any way by which I can procure an invitation?”

“I see no way for you to be eligible for an invitation unless you can marry the Attorney General, the only bachelor in the Cabinet circle, before ten o’clock,” retorted Dorothy, her sense of fun getting the better of discretion. A faint “Oh!” preceded the hanging up of the opposite receiver, and Dorothy went back to her work. But she was again doomed to interruption, and this time she answered the telephone with a wrathful, “Well, what is it?”

“Mrs. Marvin, Dorothy,” sounded a cheerful voice. “I want you to take down this list of patronesses for our charity ball. Get your pencil—there are one hundred names.”

“Oh, Mrs. Marvin!” gasped Dorothy. “Can’t you send them into the office? I’ll pay the messenger.”

“I haven’t time to write them out,” declared Mrs. Marvin firmly, and Dorothy jabbed her pencil with vicious force into the pad as she started to take down the names. “Hello, don’t ring off,” called Mrs. Marvin at the end of five minutes. “Remember, Dorothy, those names must appear in tomorrow’s paper, and be sure and give us an excellent send-off; it’s for charity, you know.”

“Yes, yes, good-by,” and, dropping the receiver, Dorothy rubbed her aching ear and stiff arm.

“Taking one consideration with another, with another,
A policeman’s life is not a happy one—”

chanted a voice from the door, and, glancing up, Dorothy saw one of the reporters watching her. “Cheer up, Miss Deane,” he said, advancing farther into the room. “You haven’t been standing on the ‘sacred soil’ of Virginia for hours in a biting east wind, watching a front door for news. I’m frozen inside and out,” blowing on his hands as he spoke. “But, oh, it’s a big story—”

At the mention of Virginia, Dorothy had glanced at him eagerly, but the question burning her lips was checked by the telephone's loud call.

"Do answer it for me," she begged, sitting down at her typewriter. "Say I'm busy," in frenzied desperation; "say I'm dead!" And paying no further attention to her companion she commenced her story about the charity ball. Tom Seaton's voice interrupted her.

"The lady wants to know if she can give a dance on January 20th without butting in on a dozen parties that night," he explained, hugging the receiver against his chest.

Dorothy hunted up the date in her assignment book, and slammed it shut with vigor.

"Tell her there are only seven dinners scheduled so far for that night," she directed, and in the moment's respite she copied off the names of the charity ball patronesses. She had completed her task when Seaton replaced the telephone, and straddled the only other chair in the room.

Usually Dorothy did not encourage loiterers, and had sometimes given offense by her abrupt refusal to stand around and gossip; but she was never too busy to listen to a hard-luck story, and her ready sympathy for human frailty had gained her a warm place in the regard of her happy-go-lucky co-workers on the paper.

"Have you been out to the Porter homestead?" she inquired, handing her mass of corrected copy to a begrimed messenger from the composing-room who appeared at that instant.

"I have; and I can't speak highly of the hospitable instincts of the owners of Dewdrop Inn," answered Seaton. "This little 'dewdrop' was positively congealed while waiting for the inquest to adjourn."

"An inquest!" echoed Dorothy. "Did they hold it so soon?"

"They did, and never had the decency to let us in. Every paper was represented, and we had to cool our heels until the coroner came out and announced—"

"Miss Deane"—the office boy poked his head inside the door—"the 'boss' wants ye."

"In a minute." Dorothy rose and turned breathlessly to Seaton. "What did the coroner announce?"

“He said that evidence, brought out at the inquest, proved conclusively that Bruce Brainard was murdered, and—”

Murdered! Dorothy stared at him aghast. Dimly she realized that he was still speaking, but his words were meaningless. Bruce Brainard murdered—and under the same roof with her sister, Vera—and Hugh Wyndham! Something snapped inside her brain; she felt herself going, and threw out her hands hopelessly—

“Hully gee! Help, boys!” roared Seaton, bending over her. “She’s fainted.”

CHAPTER VI

THE WALL BETWEEN

VERA DEANE scanned the handsomely appointed dinner table and its vacant places with mixed feelings, and Murray, hovering solicitously behind her chair, answered her unspoken thought.

"Mrs. Porter and Miss Millicent are taking dinner in their boudoir," he explained. "Selby is serving them, and Mrs. Porter gave most particular orders that you should have a good dinner, Miss Deane."

"I don't believe I can eat," protested Vera, declining bread and butter. "I have no appetite tonight."

"Just try this soup, miss," coaxed Murray. "It's one of cook's specialties. And you know, miss," added Murray artfully, setting the plate with its smoking contents before her, "what with one thing and another, they've given you no rest today, and Dr. Noyes always said humans must eat to keep their machinery going."

"Quite true," smiled Vera. Murray was a favorite of hers, and his extreme loquaciousness often amused her. The footman was too well trained to overstep the gulf lying between their positions; he had been told off to wait upon the nurses and assist them in their care of Craig Porter on the latter's arrival from France, and, having a natural aptitude for caring for the sick, they found him extremely useful.

Vera had not been slow in discovering Murray's one hobby, a hobby which, seven years before, had almost cost him his place, Mrs. Porter not having taken kindly to his lugubrious countenance and depressed manner when waiting upon the table. She expressed her feelings to his former employer, a friend of long standing, who responded impressively: "My dear, Murray's an excellent servant, with one little weakness—his health. The more certain he is that he suffers from a mortal disease, the more enjoyment he gets out of life. Just ask him now and then, 'Murray, how are you feeling?' and he will be your slave."

Mrs. Porter had promptly followed the advice, and whenever she found the footman looking preternaturally solemn had cheered him immensely by inquiring for his health. Both Nurse Hall and Vera Deane had quickly

discovered his hobby, and the younger nurse had advanced in his esteem by listening patiently to descriptions of every new symptom his fancy conjured up. The fact that he failed lamentably in the proper use of medical and anatomical terms never disturbed him—his last confidence to Dr. Noyes having been that he was suffering from inflammation of the semicolon.

Vera found Murray's opinion of the excellence of the soup justified, and ate the remainder of the dinner with more zest than she had imagined possible an hour before. The relief of being alone was an additional fillip to her jaded nerves. Upon being excused from the inquest that afternoon she had gone at once to the branch telephone in Mrs. Porter's boudoir, only to find that the instrument had been disconnected and that she could not communicate with her sister Dorothy. She had then returned to Craig Porter's bedroom, and in trying to satisfy Mrs. Hall's insatiable curiosity as to what had transpired at the inquest she had had no time to herself before dinner was announced.

"No coffee tonight, Murray," she said, pushing back her chair. "I am going upstairs to Mr. Porter, so that Mrs. Hall can have her dinner immediately."

"Mrs. Hall had tea earlier in the afternoon," was Murray's unexpected response. "She told me that Mrs. Porter had given her permission to spend the night in Washington."

"Oh!" Vera's expression was blank. "Is Mrs. Porter sending her into town?"

"No, miss; Mr. Hugh took the car just after the inquest adjourned and hasn't returned yet. I hear tell"—Murray paused, dessert dish in hand—"that Mrs. Hall arranged with one of the 'tects to have a taxi sent out from the city for her." And without more ado he disappeared into the pantry.

Vera was a trifle out of breath when she entered Craig Porter's bedroom. Mrs. Hall, chart in hand, was standing by the mahogany desk, and her face cleared at sight of Vera.

"Why didn't you let me know you wished to go off duty a little earlier?" asked Vera reproachfully. "I would have hurried back—"

"Because I knew it would rest you to have your dinner in peace and quiet. I have arranged Mr. Porter for the night and given him his nourishment. All you have to do is to follow the doctor's directions; they are pinned to the chart."

"Of course I will follow the doctor's orders," responded Vera, much offended by her companion's manner as well as her words, "I will obey instructions as I have done heretofore."

Mrs. Hall looked at her oddly, a look which Vera missed as she crossed the room to arrange the window blinds.

“Are you nervous about staying up alone next to that—?” asked Mrs. Hall, and a turn of her head indicated the room occupied by Bruce Brainard the night before.

“Not in the least,” answered Vera; she was having some difficulty in closing the heavy outside blinds and her voice was somewhat muffled. She jerked her head inside the room again and closed the window. “There is a motor car coming up the drive—it looks like a taxi.”

“It’s probably for me.” And Mrs. Hall disappeared into the dressing-room which connected Craig Porter’s bedroom and the room which she and Vera shared.

Left to herself Vera went thoughtfully over to the desk. She was still writing when Mrs. Hall reappeared, bag in hand.

“Will you please mail this letter for me in the city?” asked Vera. “I won’t be a moment finishing it.”

“You’ll find blotting-paper in the lower desk drawer,” announced Mrs. Hall, stopping to button her heavy coat up about her throat. “It wastes time blowing on the ink.” Vera reddened. “If it is only a note to your sister, why not give me a verbal message?”

Vera’s color deepened. “I prefer to write,” she answered stiffly.

“As you wish; I only made the suggestion to save time,” and Mrs. Hall glanced significantly at the clock.

Vera’s hot temper got the upper hand. “On second thought, I’ll not detain you longer,” she said, and her long, slender fingers made mince-meat of the letter she had been writing. With a mumbled “good night,” Mrs. Hall left the room, and, turning, Vera stared contemplatively at the door. What had come over her companion? It was not like Mrs. Hall to be so cantankerous.

Vera spent the next hour in performing her accustomed duties, and when she finally took her seat near the shaded night light she was conscious of utter weariness, a weariness more akin to mental exhaustion than she had known in many months—the day’s horrors were telling upon her, and her mental state was reacting upon her physical strength. A footstep outside the partly open hall door caused her to hasten across the room as Murray appeared, tray in hand.

"Cook sent some broth tonight as well as the sandwiches," he said, lowering his voice as he tiptoed into the room and placed the tray on a side table. "She thought you would like to have something hot in the early morning, and I put the broth in the thermos bottle."

"That was very kind and thoughtful of you both," exclaimed Vera gratefully. "Please thank cook for me."

"Yes, miss." Murray tiptoed over to the bed and looked at Craig Porter, who lay with his eyes closed, his face matching the sheets in whiteness. The almost imperceptible rise and fall of his chest was the only indication that life still lingered in the palsied body. Shaking his head, Murray retreated to the hall door.

"I'm thinking the young master's health will have a setback, now Dr. Noyes has gone," he said sorrowfully. "And he was improving so finely."

"We are keeping up the same treatment," replied Vera. "Good night, Murray, and thank you."

Pausing only long enough to see if her patient required attention, Vera returned to her chair, and in its comfortable, upholstered depths her tired muscles relaxed, and she half lay, half sat at ease and surveyed her surroundings. The room and its furnishings were well worth a second look, but an attraction which Vera was powerless to conquer drew her eyes to the transom in the wall separating the room she sat in and the one which had harbored the grim tragedy of the night before.

In her excited state of mind she half expected to see the same faint light appear through the transom which had shone there twenty-odd hours before, but the darkness in the next room was unrelieved. However, even the patch of darkness gave full play to her morbid fancies, and with a shudder she turned her head away—to find Mrs. Porter standing by her side. Too startled to move she gazed in amazement at her employer.

"I slipped in through your bedroom so as not to disturb Craig," explained Mrs. Porter, in a subdued tone. "The other door lets in so much light from the hall when opened. I have something to say to you—"

"Yes, Mrs. Porter." Vera was on her feet. "Will you sit here, or shall we—"

"Is Craig asleep?"

Vera moved over to the bed and bent over her patient, then returned.

"Yes, he is still slumbering," she announced.

"Then I will sit here." Mrs. Porter pulled forward a companion chair to the one Vera had vacated. "If we speak low our voices cannot disturb Craig in this large room. How is he tonight?"

Vera hesitated, and Mrs. Porter, her eyes sharpened by love, saw it even in the dim night light, and one hand went to her heart.

"I really think Mr. Porter is the same," answered Vera hastily. "I see—no change."

A heavy sigh broke from Mrs. Porter. "Why couldn't Alan Noyes have stayed?" she moaned. "Why such mad haste? I would have paid him any price—done anything, in and out of reason, to insure my boy having his skilled medical attendance. And now—"

Never before had Vera seen Mrs. Porter's composure shaken, and as she looked at her grief-stricken face a compassion and understanding of the woman she had deemed all-worldly moved her. Impulsively she extended her hands in ready sympathy, and Mrs. Porter clasped them eagerly.

"Don't borrow trouble, dear Mrs. Porter," she entreated. "Dr. Washburn stands very high in the profession—"

"But he can't come." Mrs. Porter dashed tears from her eyes. "He has just sent word that he is ill with pleurisy, and recommends that I send for Dr. Beverly Thorne."

"What?" Vera studied her intently. "Will you follow Dr. Washburn's advice?"

"And send for Beverly Thorne?" with bitter emphasis. "I wouldn't have that man attend a sick cat! Oh, why didn't I close this house and go back to the city?"

Vera was discreetly silent. Mrs. Porter had carried her point of wintering in the country against the, at first, outspoken indignation of Millicent and the veiled opposition of Hugh Wyndham; but that was hardly the moment to remind Mrs. Porter that by having her own way she had herself to thank for their isolated position. Mrs. Porter continued her remarks, heedless of Vera's silence. "And poor Millicent is cut off from young companionship just at the moment when she needs her friends. By the way"—bending eagerly forward—"can't your sister come and stay with Millicent?"

"Dorothy—stay here?" Vera half rose, her eyes dilating.

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Porter. "The two girls were chums at boarding-school, even if they haven't seen much of each other for several years, and I

imagine you know Hugh's opinion of Dorothy—" Vera nodded dumbly. "I've always been very fond of Dorothy, and I can't understand, Vera, why you permitted her to go into newspaper work," in reproachful accents.

"Dorothy is old enough now to judge for herself," said Vera wearily. "She selected newspaper work for various reasons, and I must say," with quick pride, "Dorothy has done well in that profession."

"I know she has, and I admire her for it." Mrs. Porter spoke warmly, and Vera colored with pleasure. "Do put your clever wits to work, Vera, and arrange it so that Dorothy can get leave from her office and spend a week here at the least. Her cheerful society will do Millicent good. I wish, my dear, that I could see more of you," and Mrs. Porter impulsively kissed her. "But you sleep all day and work all night, and I sleep all night." She rose abruptly. "I must go back to Millicent; the child is grieving her heart out." She made a hesitating step toward the door leading into Vera's bedroom. "Did you mention in your testimony at the inquest this afternoon that you saw Millicent down in the library when you went to telephone to the coroner?"

"No." Vera caught the look of relief which lighted Mrs. Porter's eyes for a brief instant, then the older woman continued on her way to the door, but she stopped again on its threshold.

"Do you know what became of the key to the next room after they removed Mr. Brainard's body to the morgue in Alexandria?" she asked.

"No, I was asleep at that hour." Vera came nearer. "Is the bedroom locked?"

"Yes. I suppose the police—" Mrs. Porter's voice trailed off, then she added, "Good night," and was gone.

Vera went thoughtfully over to the bedside and, seeing that Craig Porter still slept, she moved over to the desk and, picking up a pad and pencil, tried to reduce her ideas to writing. The words repeated to her by Mrs. Hall, who had been told the jury's verdict by the coroner, recurred to her:

"We find that Bruce Brainard came to his death while spending the night at the residence of Mrs. Lawrence Porter, between the hours of two and five in the morning of January 8th, from the severing of the carotid artery in his throat, and from the nature of the wound and other evidence produced here we find that he was foully murdered by a party or parties unknown."

"By a party *unknown*," Vera murmured, dashing her pencil through the words she had scrawled on her pad. "But how long will the 'party' remain

‘unknown’ — Merciful God! If there was only someone I could turn to!” and she wrung her hands as she gazed despairingly at the desk calendar.

A low tap at the hall door aroused her and, hastening across the room, she looked into the hall. Murray was standing by the door.

“Your sister is out on the portico, miss,” he announced in a low voice.

“Dorothy — here — at this hour?” Vera looked at the footman in amazement.

“It isn’t so very late, miss, not yet eleven,” explained Murray. “I asked Miss Dorothy in, but she said she didn’t wish to disturb anyone; only wanted a word with you.”

Vera viewed the footman in silence, then came to a sudden decision. “Very well, I will go downstairs. You remain with Mr. Porter, Murray, until I return.”

“Yes, miss.” And Murray, waiting respectfully for her to step into the hall, entered the bedroom and closed the door.

On reaching the front hall Vera paused long enough to slip on Millicent Porter’s sport coat which was hanging from the hat stand, and, putting up the latch, she walked out on the portico, and stopped abruptly on finding herself alone. A low hail from a taxi standing a slight distance down the driveway caused her to look in that direction, and she saw Dorothy’s face at its window. A second more and she stood by the taxi door, held invitingly open by Dorothy.

“Are you mad, Dorothy?” she demanded, keeping her voice lowered in spite of her anger. “To come out here at this hour of the night!”

“It’s perfectly all right,” retorted Dorothy. “William, our old coachman, brought me out in his taxi,” pointing to a man in chauffeur’s livery who stood some little distance away. “Did you think I could stay away, Vera, when I heard—”

“What have you heard?” The question shot from Vera.

“That you found Bruce with his throat cut—” Dorothy drew in her breath sharply. “I never dreamed he would kill himself—”

“The coroner’s jury called it murder,” said Vera dully.

“Whom do they suspect?” gasped Dorothy.

“I imagine Dr. Noyes.”

“Dr. Noyes!” in profound astonishment. “Why?”

“Chiefly because of his sudden departure without bidding anyone good-by.”

“But—but—the motive? Heavens! Did *he* know Bruce?” And Vera leaned forward from the taxi, so that the moonlight fell full on her face.

“He met him last night,” with dry emphasis, and Dorothy moved restlessly. “Listen, Dorothy, I can stay but a moment longer. If you should be questioned, remember that at the inquest I did not mention that I had ever seen Bruce Brainard before last night, and that I have not confided to anyone in the Porter house that I ever heard of him before.”

“But—but—Hugh knows.”

“Hugh Wyndham!” Vera clutched the door of the car for support. “Did you tell him tonight?”

“No, I haven’t seen him for over a week. I—” But Vera did not give her time to finish her sentence.

“Dorothy, were you so foolish—my God! you didn’t mention *names* to Hugh?”

Her sister nodded dumbly.

From one of the leafless trees far down the lawn an owl hooted derisively as a light footstep crunched the gravel just behind Vera, and she swung quickly about. The front door of the house was wide open and a stream of light illuminated the portico.

Millicent Porter, approaching nearer, recognized Vera and her sister, and darted to the side of the car with a glad cry of welcome.

“Dorothy, you’ve come!” she exclaimed, seizing her hands. “I told Hugh not to return without you.”

Dorothy glanced in speechless surprise from Vera to Millicent, then back, almost pleadingly, to her sister. Vera’s face was set and stern.

“Yes, Millicent,” she said quietly. “Dorothy has come to spend the ni—” she stumbled in her speech—“several days,” she amended.

CHAPTER VII

AT THORNEDALE LODGE

A ROW of beautiful trees ran the length of Thornedale Lodge, facing the entrance on the south. They had been planted generations before, and, no allowance made for their increase in height and circumference, towering above the old house, they were landmarks for miles around. Their branches touched the galleries and windows, and in summer their foliage shut out much light and sunshine, but Beverly Thorne scoffed at the idea of dampness and refused to cut down the trees, as his father had refused before him. The stars in their constellation were not more fixed than the customs which had obtained in the old Virginia home.

Beverly Thorne crossed the lawn and entered his house, and an anxious-faced negro butler, grown gray in service, came forward to meet him.

“Yo’ breakfas’ am served, sah,” he announced, and his soft drawling voice contained a note of reproach. “I done looked ober de whole house fo’ yo’, an’ de things am gettin’ cold.”

“Sorry, Cato.” Thorne preceded the old servant into the dining-room, but instead of approaching the table he stopped before a window overlooking the sloping ground and a distant view of the Porter homestead, Dewdrop Inn. “See that man, Cato, loitering near the lodge gate?” he asked, and Cato peered over his shoulder. “Send Julius to him. Wait,” as Cato moved away. “Tell Julius to say that Dr. Thorne presents his compliments and asks Detective Mitchell to come here and have a cup of coffee with him.”

“Yessir.” And Cato went to execute the errand, while Thorne waited until he saw the small negro boy who assisted Cato in tending the grounds cross the back lawn, then turned away from the window.

Walking over to the table he picked up a folded newspaper by his plate and used it as a shield as he drew a photograph from his inside coat pocket. The picture was irregular in shape and small in size, and had evidently been cut from a group photograph, for the two figures on either side of Vera Deane had been partly decapitated by scissors. Vera and her companions were in their nurses’ costume and carried diplomas. It was an excellent likeness of Vera, her pose was natural and her fresh young beauty and fearless eyes claimed the

attention of the most casual. Thorne knew every light and shade in the photograph.

“To think she threw away her happiness, her career, for—” he muttered, and his hand clenched in impotent wrath, then, becoming aware of the negro butler’s return, he replaced the photograph in his pocket, and soon became absorbed in the newspaper. Cato, considerably annoyed by the prospect of further delay in serving breakfast, arranged another place at the table with more alacrity than his rheumatic joints usually permitted. He had no more than finished when Detective Mitchell appeared in the side door, ushered in by the grinning boy. Throwing down his paper, Thorne greeted the detective heartily.

“Very good of you to share my breakfast,” he said, pouring out a steaming cup of coffee as Mitchell took possession of the chair pulled out for him by Cato.

“You are the good Samaritan, doctor,” declared Mitchell, rubbing his chilled hands. “The Porter place gets the full force of the wind; you are more sheltered here,” glancing out of the diamond-paned windows, and then back again at his host and the cosy dining-room with its blazing logs in the large stone fireplace at the farther end.

The somewhat shabby old furniture, the wide sideboard on which stood quaint glass candelabra and heavy cut-glass decanters and dishes of the generous proportions of former decades, a table in the window littered with magazines and books, and near at hand a mahogany stand equipped with a smoking outfit, all seemed to blend with the low time-stained oak beams and wainscoted walls. No curtains hung in the windows, and the winter sunshine streamed in, betraying here and there in cracks and crannies small accumulations of dust which Cato’s old eyes had passed unseen.

Thorne observed which way his guest’s attention was straying and smiled, well pleased; he was proud of the historic old house. “This is one of the pleasantest rooms,” he said, pushing the toast rack near the detective. “Try some toast; it’s hot.”

“Thanks.” Mitchell enjoyed his breakfast for a few minutes in silence. “Is this house older than the Porter mansion?”

“Same age; in fact my great-great-grandfather built them both,” answered Thorne. “But this was only a hunting lodge, while the Porter homestead was a mansion house, and is pure Georgian in architecture.”

"It's the best-looking house in this country," affirmed Mitchell enthusiastically. "Pity to have a gruesome crime committed inside its old walls."

"You are sure it was a crime?" asked Thorne, stirring his coffee and then sipping it gingerly. "A murder?"

Mitchell stared at him in surprise. "Of course I'm sure that it was a murder. Didn't the medical evidence prove that the wound could not have been self-inflicted?"

"The deputy coroner gave that as his belief, with one reservation—the wound could have been self-inflicted if Bruce Brainard was left-handed."

"Which he wasn't," declared Mitchell positively. "I have questioned all who knew Brainard, and they swear he was right-handed. So there you are, doctor, with a case of proven murder."

Thorne laid down a fresh piece of toast untasted on his plate. "I take exception to Deputy Coroner McPherson's theory that the wound from its appearance could not have been self-inflicted," he announced slowly. "Any surgeon will tell you that it is next to impossible to tell with any degree of accuracy at exactly which point the razor first entered the flesh. Brainard might have gashed himself by holding the razor in his right hand with the full intention of committing suicide, and opened the carotid artery. In that way he could have inflicted just such a wound as killed him."

Mitchell moved impatiently. "Why didn't you mention that at the inquest?" he grumbled.

"Because I was not called as a witness."

The detective ruminated silently for some moments, casting frequent glances at his host.

"Well, perhaps an expert can tear the medical evidence to pieces at the trial, but there's one point you overlook, doctor," he argued. "But if it was suicide, where did Brainard get the razor? Everyone admits, including Mrs. Porter, that he had not expected to spend the night, and he did not bring a pair of pyjamas; only had the clothes on his back, a dress suit. Mr. Wyndham admitted in the presence of the coroner yesterday that Mr. Brainard did not see his overcoat after he was taken ill, and Murray, the footman, states that it hung in the coat closet until I took it down to examine it." Mitchell paused and added impressively: "I'll stake my reputation that Brainard had no razor

when he was put to bed, therefore he could not have committed suicide. He was murdered by someone inside the house.”

“No one in the Porter household admits having seen that razor before,” was Thorne’s only comment.

“Sure, they ain’t going to give each other away.”

Thorne straightened up and looked at the detective. “Do you mean to imply a conspiracy?”

“No, not a conspiracy to *kill* Brainard,” Mitchell hastened to explain. “Only an endeavor on the part of Mrs. Porter and her daughter, Millicent, to shield the guilty man.”

Thorne reached over and rang the small silver bell, then replaced it on the table. “More coffee, Cato,” he directed, and turned again to Mitchell as the servant disappeared with the pot. “And who is the guilty man?”

“Frankly, I’m not quite sure,” admitted Mitchell, grinning. “But as there are only two men in the house, not counting the butler, footman, chauffeur, and two gardeners, I hardly anticipate difficulty in narrowing the hunt down to one.”

“And the two men are —”

“Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham.”

Thorne opened his cigar-case and offered it to Mitchell, then helped himself and placed a box of matches on an ash-tray conveniently before his guest.

“Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham,” he repeated thoughtfully. “Mitchell, you have overlooked a member of the family in your list.”

“You mean — ?” The detective looked puzzled.

“Craig Porter.”

Mitchell laughed outright. “Have you seen him?”

“No.”

“Why, doctor, he’s paralyzed, can’t move hand or foot.” Mitchell puffed contentedly at his cigar. “I was in his bedroom yesterday afternoon and got a good look at him while I was chatting with Mrs. Hall, the other nurse. I don’t think Porter will live very long, poor devil,” he added. “Fine-looking chap; must have been some athlete, from all accounts.”

“Yes,” agreed Thorne, moving his plate aside to make room for the fresh pot of coffee which Cato brought in at that moment. “Let me give you a hot cup, Mitchell; there, that’s better. What were you going to ask me?” observing that his companion hesitated.

“Can you give me any pointers about this Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham?” asked Mitchell. “They are your next-door neighbors, so to speak.”

“And I never crossed their threshold until yesterday,” responded Thorne dryly. “A family feud of long standing, Mitchell, and if I were the devil with horns, Mrs. Porter couldn’t regard me with more horror.” A boyish smile touched his stern lips and his gray eyes twinkled.

Mitchell glanced at him speculatively. There was little of the student in Thorne’s appearance; his bronzed cheeks and throat spoke of out-of-doors, and his well-cut riding-clothes showed his tall, wiry figure to advantage. The faint crow’s feet under his eyes and the slight graying of his black hair at the temples gave an impression of a not too easy path in life, and Mitchell decided in his own mind that his host was between thirty-six and thirty-eight years of age.

“While I never talked to Mrs. Porter until yesterday, Mitchell,” continued Thorne, laying down the stub of his cigar, “I’ve had a slight acquaintance with Wyndham, and one not calculated to make me popular with him.”

“How’s that, doctor?”

“Oh, in my capacity of justice of the peace I’ve had to fine him for speeding,” responded Thorne. “I believe Noyes was with him on one of these occasions, but he stayed out in the motor car.”

“I wonder whose motor Noyes used to leave the Porters’ early yesterday morning,” mused Mitchell. “Pshaw! there’s little use in speculating along that line. We’ve proved his alibi was true.”

“Indeed? You mean—”

“That a cipher cablegram was telephoned out to him from New York yesterday morning between two and three, and if Mrs. Porter’s testimony is to be relied on—and I see no reason to doubt it now—Noyes must have made straight for New York and is aboard the S. S. *St. Louis*, of the American Line. She sailed for Liverpool, and I’ve wirelessly out, but haven’t received an answer from the ship.”

“So that clears Noyes,” commented Thorne.

“Yes, I suppose it does,” but Mitchell’s tone was doubtful. “It doesn’t explain Miss Millicent Porter’s curious behavior at the inquest. Judging by her manner and her testimony, she *believes* Noyes guilty.”

“Miss Porter was in a very hysterical state, hardly accountable for her actions.” Thorne paused and examined his nicotine-stained fingers with interest. “Have you unearthed any evidence against Hugh Wyndham?”

“Well”—Mitchell hesitated, and shot a sidelong glance at his host—“nothing tangible against him—but if we eliminate Noyes it’s got to be Wyndham.”

Before answering, Thorne refilled his coffee-cup. “Wyndham—or an outsider,” he said.

“Not a chance of the latter.” Mitchell spoke with absolute confidence. “I’ve examined every lock and bolt on the doors and windows; not one is broken or out of order, and both the butler and footman declare all windows and doors were locked on the ground floor yesterday morning as usual. Take it from me, doctor, no one broke into that house to murder Brainard. No one except the dinner guests and Mrs. Porter’s household knew Brainard was spending the night there. I tell you,” emphasizing his words by striking the table with his clenched fist, “it was an inside job.”

“It would seem so,” acknowledged Thorne, who had listened closely to Mitchell’s statement. “Were you at the Porters’ last night, Mitchell?”

“No, I had to go in to Washington, but I left Pope there, and I returned early this morning and sent Pope in to Alexandria to get some breakfast and bring me my share. He’s never appeared.” Mitchell smiled ruefully. “But for you, doctor, I’d have fared badly. I greatly appreciate your hot breakfast,” he added, as he rose somewhat awkwardly and pushed back his chair.

Thorne was slower in rising from the table than his guest.

“Make this house your headquarters, Mitchell, while investigating Brainard’s murder,” he suggested hospitably. “The nearest road-house is five miles away. Should you require a meal—a telephone—a quiet moment—come here.”

The detective looked gratified. “Mighty thoughtful of you, sir,” he said. “And I accept. The Porter house is out of the beaten track, and frankly—” He paused as they reached the large hall which did duty also as a living-room; at least such was the impression gained by Mitchell as he glanced inquiringly around, for the negro boy had taken him into the dining-room through a short

passage leading from a side door, and he had not seen the front of the house before.

The staircase in the hall was partly concealed by the stone fireplace and huge chimney about which it was built; deep window seats, comfortable lounging-chairs, a few tables, tiger skins, and other fur rugs, added to the hall's homelike, comfortable appearance, while guns, moose and deer heads and other hunting trophies hung on the walls.

Suddenly Mitchell became conscious of his prolonged silence and that Thorne was waiting courteously for him to continue his remark.

"Frankly," he commenced again, "I think the mystery will be solved and the murderer apprehended within forty-eight hours. And in that case, doctor, I'll not trespass long on your hospitality."

"Come over whenever you care to," exclaimed Thorne. "I'll tell Cato to make you comfortable if I am not here."

"Thanks." Mitchell turned up the collar of his overcoat as Thorne opened the front door, and stood hesitating on the threshold. "Say, doctor," he suddenly burst out, "you were the first outside the Porter family to see Brainard yesterday morning—what struck you most forcibly about the affair?"

Thorne considered the question. "The composure of Nurse Deane," he said finally. "The young woman who *said* she was the first to discover the crime."

Mitchell stared at him open-mouthed. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It is an unheard of thing for a first-class trained nurse to sleep at her post." Thorne spoke slowly, carefully. "And the transom between the two bedrooms was open."

"But it is over Craig Porter's bed," objected Mitchell. "And Nurse Deane couldn't have looked through the transom without climbing up on his bed."

"I grant you she could not have looked through the transom," answered Thorne. "But she could *hear*. The slightest sound becomes 'noise' at dead of night."

Mitchell's eyes grew bigger and bigger. "Then you think—"

"That Nurse Deane both heard the murder committed and investigated it long before she went to summon Hugh Wyndham—and in that interval she had time to partially recover from shock and exert her self-control which, for a girl of her years, appears little short of marvelous."

There was a brief silence which Mitchell broke.

“You’ve given me a new viewpoint,” he said. “So you think Nurse Deane is an accessory after the fact?”

“Possibly—through sympathy.”

Mitchell whistled. “Not to say affection, eh, doctor?” But Thorne was looking through the open door and failed to catch Mitchell’s suggestive wink. Mitchell moved briskly across the paved walk which led from the front door to the box-hedged garden in front of the house. “I’ll let you know what the third degree brings forth, doctor,” he called over his shoulder and hurried up the walk.

CHAPTER VIII

MANY INVENTIONS

DOROTHY DEANE laid aside the muffler she had been pretending to knit and stared intently at Millicent who lay stretched out on the lounge in Mrs. Porter's pretty boudoir. Millicent was certainly asleep at last, but Dorothy waited several more minutes before rising cautiously and stretching her stiff muscles. It seemed hours since she had breakfasted. Taking care not to awaken the sleeper, Dorothy left the room and, after debating her future actions, she finally went in search of Murray. She found the footman polishing the silver service in the pantry.

"Miss Millicent wishes to know, Murray, if Mr. Wyndham has returned," she said, letting the swing door close behind her.

"No, Miss Dorothy, not yet." Murray dropped his chamois and straightened to an upright position, and a sudden sharp crick in his back resulting caused an involuntary groan to burst from him. Dorothy looked at him sympathetically.

"Why not use Sloane's liniment?" she asked.

Murray shook his head and eyed her dismally. "I'll just have to endure it, miss—if it isn't rheumatism it's something else."

"Try a liver pill," suggested Dorothy. She was aware of Murray's peculiarities, and, if discussing medicine and illness would put him in a good humor, she was willing to go any length; Murray alone could supply her with certain information. Her suggestion, however, was unfortunate.

Murray favored her with a withering glance. "It's not my liver that gives me an ache in every bone, it's gripe," he announced. "I'm wishing I had one of them ante-bellum cartridges."

"Had what?" Dorothy looked at him in honest amazement.

"Ante-bellum cartridges," he repeated. "The same as Dr. Noyes gave you, Miss Dorothy, when you came down with cold and fever in Christmas week."

"Oh!" Dorothy's piquant face dimpled into a smile, hastily suppressed; discretion prevailed in spite of her love of fun. It was wiser not to tell Murray that he should have said "antifebrin capsules"; she was there to wheedle, not to instruct. "Oh, Murray, I do hope you haven't gripe—it's so contagious."

“Yes, miss.” But Murray did not look downcast at the idea. “We’d be a whole hospital then, a regular hospital.” His face lengthened. “But we’ve no doctor in the house, now Dr. Noyes has gone.”

“Oh, well, there’s one in the neighborhood; in fact, just across the fields—Dr. Thorne.”

Murray shook his head dubiously. “I’m thinking I wouldn’t like him,” he said thoughtfully. “They say he’s over-hasty at cutting people up.”

Dorothy laughed, then became serious. “I believe he has made a specialty of surgery.” She turned as if to go. “By the way, Murray, did Mr. Wyndham mention when he would be back?”

“No, miss, he didn’t.” Murray, turning about to replace a dish on the shelf, smiled discreetly. “I’m thinking, miss, that Mr. Hugh intended to tell Mrs. Porter when he would be back when that ’tec, Mr. Mitchell, stepped out of the door I was holding open for Mrs. Porter, and Mr. Hugh called to her to expect him when she saw him, and the car started off with a rush. He was here this morning.”

“Who—Mr. Hugh?” Dorothy turned like a flash.

“No, no, miss, the ’tec, Mitchell. I hear tell as how he’s the man in charge here; tall, light-haired, looks as if he didn’t belong anywhere, ’cause he’s so busy concealing he’s looking everywhere.”

“I know the man you mean.” Dorothy laid her hand on the swing door. “Miss Millicent and I watched him pacing up and down the carriage drive before breakfast, and saw him go toward Dr. Thorne’s house. Has he been here since? Oh!” She stepped back, startled, as a face appeared at the pantry window, and a second later a finger tapped gently on the pane.

“Speaking of the devil”—muttered Murray, walking past Dorothy and throwing open the window. “What do you want to scare the lady for?” he demanded wrathfully.

“I beg your pardon.” Mitchell lifted his hat and regarded Dorothy solemnly. “I was under the impression she had seen me standing here a moment ago. Please tell Nurse Deane, Murray, that I wish to see her.”

Dorothy, who had drawn back until she stood partly hidden by the wall of the pantry from Mitchell’s penetrating gaze, grew paler as she heard the detective’s request, and the quick droop of her eyelids hid a look of sudden terror. Before the footman could reply she stepped forward to the window.

“My sister is off duty this morning,” she said. “She is still asleep in her bedroom. Can I take your message to her?”

Mitchell considered rapidly before replying. “May I have a few words with you?”

“Surely. Will you not come into the house? It is rather chilly standing by an open window.”

“Walk around to the front door, sir, and I’ll show you into the drawing-room,” directed Murray, removing his apron and closing the window. “Mrs. Porter is in the library,” he added, and hastened to open the swing door.

With a word of thanks Dorothy walked slowly through the dining-room and down the hall, permitting the footman to reach the front door and usher Detective Mitchell into the drawing-room before she entered. She bowed courteously to Mitchell and signed to him to take a chair near the sofa on which she deposited herself with careful regard to having her back turned to the windows and the detective facing the light. She waited for him to open the conversation.

“You came here last night, Miss Deane.” It seemed more a simple statement of fact than a question, and Dorothy treated it as such and made no reply. Mitchell moved his chair nearer the sofa before asking, “Did I understand you to say that your sister was resting this morning—or ill?”

Dorothy started; ill, why should the detective imagine Vera was ill?

“She is resting,” she responded. “Your ignorance of nurses’ hours of duty proves a clean bill of health, Mr. Mitchell. Night nurses must sleep in the daytime, especially when the day nurse is late in reporting for duty.”

“But Mrs. Hall has been back for some time,” persisted Mitchell. “And it is now nearly one o’clock. Are you quite sure that your sister is still asleep? I am under the impression that I saw her in the upper hall talking to Miss Porter fifteen minutes ago.”

Dorothy considered the detective in silence. What had aroused his sudden interest in Vera?

“If you will give me your message,” she said, “I will go upstairs and see if my sister is awake.”

“Thank you,” replied Mitchell. “But I must see your sister—”

“When?”

“Now.” Hearing a step behind him, Mitchell spun around as Murray stopped by the back of his chair.

“Mrs. Porter desires you to step into the library, sir,” he announced. “You also, Miss Dorothy,” and, wondering why her presence was required, Dorothy followed the detective into the library.

A disorderly pile of newspapers lay on the center table in front of Mrs. Porter, whose air of displeasure and heightened color Dorothy rightly attributed to the display type which heralded the news accounts of the mysterious death of Bruce Brainard.

“Upon my word,” Mrs. Porter’s gold lorgnette performed an incessant tattoo on the table. “The unbridled license of the press of today! And your paper, Dorothy, is most sensational,” addressing her directly. “How could you permit it?”

“But, dear Mrs. Porter, I’m only society editor—I have no authority except over my particular section of the paper,” protested Dorothy. “I am deeply sorry if—if the article offends you.”

“It not only offends—it’s offensive!” fumed Mrs. Porter. “I spoke hastily, Dorothy; I admit you are in no way to blame, but I’ll place the matter in my lawyer’s hands, and the owners of the paper shall smart for hinting that we are a band of murderers.”

“Surely it does not go as far as that?” ejaculated Mitchell.

“It implies it.” Mrs. Porter favored him with an angry look. “I see the article gives you, Mr. Mitchell, as authority for the statement that Dr. Noyes is being sought by the police. How dare you insinuate that he may be guilty? I gave his reason for his abrupt departure at the inquest; the jurors did not hold him in any way responsible for the crime or bring a verdict against him.”

“You must not believe everything you read in the newspapers,” remarked Mitchell, meeting her irate glare with unruffled good nature. “My precise statement to the newspaper men implied nothing against Dr. Noyes. The reporters simply picked him as the first possible ‘suspect.’”

“Kindly disabuse their minds of any such idea. Dr. Noyes, besides his professional ability, is a man of high character and proven courage. He would not stoop to murder,” declared Mrs. Porter hotly. “Besides, there is no possible motive for his killing Bruce Brainard—they never even met before Monday night.” Mitchell remained discreetly silent, and, after watching him

in growing resentment, Mrs. Porter announced vehemently: "Mr. Brainard committed suicide. In ascribing his death to murder, the police err."

"What leads you to believe he committed suicide?" demanded Mitchell.

"His morbid tendencies, his—" She stopped abruptly. "He must have been suffering from mental aberration."

"All suicides are temporarily insane," agreed Mitchell. "Otherwise they would not kill themselves; but, Mrs. Porter, in Brainard's case the medical evidence went to prove that the wound in his throat could not have been self-inflicted."

"Fiddle-de-dee! I don't place any reliance on that deputy coroner's testimony." Mrs. Porter indulged in a most undignified sniff. "Was Dr. Beverly Thorne present at the autopsy?"

"No." Mitchell moved nearer the center table. Mrs. Porter's altered manner at the mention of Beverly Thorne's name had not escaped the detective's attention. Apparently Mrs. Porter was far from loving her neighbor like herself. The family feud, whatever it was about originally, would not be permitted to die out in her day and generation. Mitchell dropped his voice to a confidential pitch: "Come, Mrs. Porter, if you will tell me what you have in mind—" Mrs. Porter's frigid smile stopped him.

"I can hardly do that and remain impersonal—and polite," she remarked, and Dorothy, watching them both, smothered a keen desire to laugh. "It is my unalterable opinion that Bruce Brainard, in a fit of temporary insanity, killed himself," added Mrs. Porter.

"Ah, indeed! And where did he procure the razor?"

"That is for you to find out." Mrs. Porter rose. "Do that and you will—"

"Identify the murderer," substituted Mitchell, with a provoking smile; in the heat of argument she might let slip whatever she hoped to conceal.

"No, prove my theory correct," Mrs. Porter retorted, rising and walking toward the door. She desired the interview closed. "Have you the key to Mr. Brainard's bedroom?"

"Yes, Mrs. Porter."

"Then kindly return it to me." And she extended her hand. "The room must be cleaned and put in order."

"Not yet," retorted Mitchell. "It was to prevent anything being touched in the room that I locked the door. After the mystery is solved, Mrs. Porter, I shall be

most happy to return the key.”

Mrs. Porter elevated her eyebrows as she looked at Dorothy and murmured in an audible aside, “Clothed in a little brief authority;” then, addressing Mitchell, who was following them to the door, “Mr. Mitchell, in the absence of my nephew, Mr. Wyndham, I must remind you that I cannot permit you or your assistants to intrude upon the privacy of my family.”

“Except in the line of duty, madam.” Mitchell’s tone matched hers. “This case must be thoroughly investigated, no matter who is involved. Miss Deane, kindly inform your sister that I must see her at the earliest possible moment.”

“She will see you when she is disengaged, and not before,” retorted Mrs. Porter, wrath getting the better of her judgment, and laying an imperious hand on Dorothy’s arm she conducted her from the room.

Mitchell turned back and paced up and down the library for over five minutes, then paused in front of the telephone stand. “So the old lady is hostile,” he muttered, turning the leaves of the telephone directory. “And Pope isn’t back yet—” He ran his finger down the list of names and at last found the one he sought. Hitching the telephone nearer he repeated a number into the mouthpiece, and a second later was talking with Beverly Thorne.

“What, doctor, you don’t wish to come here again!” ejaculated the detective, as Thorne refused his first request. “Now, don’t let that fool feud interfere with your helping me, doctor. I assure you you can be of the greatest assistance, and as justice of the peace I think there is no other course open to you. Yes, I want you right away—you’ll come? I shan’t forget it, doctor. I’ll meet you at the door.” And with a satisfied smile the detective hung up the receiver and went in search of Murray.

Mitchell, twenty minutes later, stood twirling his thumbs in the front hall; his growing impatience was finally rewarded by the ringing of the front bell, and before the butler could get down the hall he had opened the door and was welcoming Thorne.

“We’ll go upstairs, doctor,” said Mitchell, after Thorne had surrendered his hat and overcoat to Selby, and stood waiting the detective’s pleasure. “Selby, ask Miss Vera Deane to join us at once—”

“I am here,” cut in a voice from the stair landing, and Vera stepped into view. Her eyes traveled past the detective and rested on Beverly Thorne with an intentness which held his own gaze. Totally oblivious of Mitchell and the butler they continued to stare at each other. Suddenly the carmine crept up

Vera's white cheeks, and she turned to Mitchell, almost with an air of relief. "What is it you wish?"

"A few minutes' chat with you," answered the detective, mounting the stairs. "Suppose we go into Mr. Brainard's bedroom. Will you lead the way?" waiting courteously on the landing, but there was an appreciable pause before Vera complied with his request, and it was a silent procession of three which the butler saw disappear upstairs.

Mitchell was the first to speak as they gathered about the bedroom door. "Nice dainty little watch charm to carry about with me," he said, holding up a massive brass key which measured at least six inches in length, with a ward in proportion. "Did you lock Mr. Brainard's door, Miss Deane, on Monday night when you returned to your other patient?"

"No, I left the door unlocked, but closed." Vera spoke with an effort. "As you see, Mr. Mitchell, the old lock turns with difficulty, and I feared the noise it makes"—a protesting squeak from the interior of the lock as Mitchell turned the key illustrated her meaning—"would disturb Mr. Brainard."

"It needs oiling, that's a fact." Mitchell flung open the unlocked door. "Come right in," he said, and stalked ahead of them.

Vera paused on the threshold and half turned as if to go back, but Thorne's figure blocked the doorway. Slowly, with marked reluctance, she advanced into the bedroom, and at a sign from Mitchell, who was watching her every movement, Thorne closed the door, his expression inscrutable.

"Look about, Miss Deane," directed Mitchell, sitting down and drawing out his notebook. "I want you to study each article in the room and tell us if it is just where it stood at the time you discovered Brainard had been murdered. Sit down, if you wish," indicating a chair near him.

"Thanks, I prefer to stand." Vera eyed the two men, then did as she was bidden, but as she looked about the bedroom she was considering the motive underlying the detective's request. What did he hope to learn from her? How dared he make her a stalking horse, and in the presence of Beverly Thorne! The thought bred hot resentment, but the red blood flaming her cheeks receded as quickly as it had come at sight of a figure stretched out in the bed under the blood-stained sheets and blankets. A slight scream escaped her and she recoiled.

"It is only a dummy," explained Mitchell hastily, laying a soothing hand on her arm. She shrank from his touch.

"I realize it now," said Vera, moistening her dry lips with the tip of her tongue. "I had not expected to find it there."

"Do you see any changes in the room, Miss Deane?" asked Mitchell, as she lapsed into silence.

Vera, who had been gazing at the figure in the bed as if hypnotized, turned mechanically about and inspected the bedroom. The window curtains had been drawn back and the shades raised, and the room was flooded with light. Catching a glimpse of herself in the huge antique mirror above the mantelpiece as she turned her back to the bed, Vera was startled to see how white and drawn her reflection appeared in its clear depths, and surreptitiously rubbed her cheeks to restore their color.

"I see nothing changed on the mantel," she said, and the sound of her calm voice reassured her; she had not lost her grip, no matter what the mirror told her. "But"—she wrinkled her brow in thought as her eyes fell on a chair on which were flung a suit of clothes and some underclothing—"Mr. Brainard's dress suit was laid neatly on the sofa over there, and his underclothes there also."

"Did you place them there?" asked Mitchell, jotting down her remarks.

"No, they were there when I came into the bedroom Monday night."

"Did they appear mussed or rumpled the next morning, Miss Deane, as if Brainard had risen in the night and searched the pockets?" inquired Thorne, breaking his long silence. He had followed the detective's questions and Vera's replies with the closest attention, while his eyes never left her. It seemed almost as if he could not look elsewhere, and but for Vera's absorption she could not have failed to note his intent regard.

Vera hesitated before answering his question. "I think the clothes had not been touched," she said. "My impression is that they lay exactly where Mr. Brainard placed them before retiring."

"Do you think Mr. Brainard, a sick man, placed the clothes on the sofa, and not Wyndham or Noyes?"

"You must get that information from either of those men," replied Vera wearily. "I was not present when Mr. Brainard was put to bed."

"But you can inform us, Miss Deane, if Dr. Noyes ordered an opiate administered to Brainard," broke in Mitchell, and Thorne looked sharply at him. What was he driving at?

"No, Dr. Noyes did not order an opiate." Vera moved restlessly. "I gave Mr. Brainard a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia as directed, and that was all."

Mitchell rose and stepped into the center of the bedroom and pointed to the transom. It was an oblong opening in the thick wall, forming the top, apparently, of what had formerly been a door jamb; the communicating doorway, judging from appearances, having been bricked up years before. The glass partition of the transom, secured at the bottom to the woodwork by hinges, hung down into the bedroom occupied by Craig Porter from chains fastened to the upper woodwork of the transom, and was barely visible from where Vera and Thorne stood in Brainard's bedroom. The glass partition, when closed, was held in place by a catch lock at the top.

"Look at that, Miss Deane," exclaimed Mitchell harshly. "The transom is almost entirely open. Do you still maintain that you heard no sound during the night in this bedroom?"

"I heard no sound which indicated murder was being committed in this room," Vera protested vehemently. "I tell you I heard nothing," observing Mitchell's air of skepticism. "To prove to you that all sound does not carry into the next bedroom, one of you go in there, and I will steal from the hall into this room and over to the bed, and the one who remains can tell what takes place in this room."

"A good idea." Mitchell walked briskly toward the door. "You watch, doctor," and he stood aside for Vera to step past him into the hall, then followed her outside and closed the door securely behind him.

Barely waiting for their departure, Thorne moved over to the chair on which lay Brainard's clothes, and hurriedly searched the few pockets of the dress suit, only to find them empty. Evidently the police had taken charge of whatever had been in them. He was just turning away when the door opened without a sound and Vera, her white linen skirt slightly drawn up, slipped into the room and with stealthy tread crept toward the bed.

Thorne watched her, fascinated by her unconscious grace and her air of grim determination. He instinctively realized that the test she had suggested was repugnant to her high-strung, sensitive nature, and only his strong will conquered his intense desire to end the scene. As close as he was to her he heard no sound; but for the evidence of his eyes he could have sworn that he was alone in the room. He saw her turn to approach the head of the bed, falter, and draw back, and was by her side instantly. She looked at him half dazed,

and but for his steadying hand would have measured her length on the ground. He read the agony in her eyes and responded to the unconscious appeal.

“Come back, Mitchell,” he called, and while he pitched his voice as low as possible its carrying qualities reached the detective in Craig Porter’s bedroom, and he hurried into the next room in time to see Thorne offer Vera his silver flask.

“No, I don’t need it,” she insisted, pushing his hand away. “It was but a momentary weakness. I have had very little sleep for the past forty-eight hours, and am unstrung. If you have no further questions to ask me, Mr. Mitchell, I will return to my room.”

Before replying Mitchell looked at Thorne. “Did she do as she said she would?” he asked. “I heard nothing in the next room until you called me.”

“Yes. Frankly, had I not seen Miss Deane open the door and enter this room I would have thought myself alone,” responded Thorne.

“The carpet is thick.” Mitchell leaned down and passed his hand over it. “It would deaden any sound of footsteps. You are sure that you heard no talking in here Monday night, Miss Deane?”

“I have already said that I did not,” retorted Vera, and she made no attempt to keep the bitterness she was feeling out of her voice. “It seems very hard to convince you, Mr. Mitchell, that I am not a liar.”

Thorne, who had been staring at the bed-table, looked up quickly.

“Did you see a razor lying on this table when you arranged the night light for Brainard, Miss Deane?” he asked.

“No.” Vera sighed; would they never cease questioning her? “That brass bell, the glass night light, empty medicine glass, and water caraffe were the only articles on the table.”

Mitchell went over to the foot of the bed. “Just whereabouts on the bed did you see the razor yesterday morning?” he asked.

Vera, who stood with her back almost touching the bed, turned reluctantly around. It was a high four-post bedstead and required a short flight of steps to mount into it, but some vandal had shortened the four beautifully carved posts to half their height and the canopy had also been removed.

The figure lay huddled face down, for which Vera was deeply grateful. Even in its dark hair she visualized the tortured features of Bruce Brainard, and she

turned with a shudder to point to a spot on the bed just below the sleeve of the pyjamas which clothed the figure.

“The razor lay there,” she announced positively.

“Thanks.” Mitchell closed and pocketed his notebook. “Now, one more question, Miss Deane, and then we will let you off. At what time yesterday morning did you go to summon Dr. Noyes?”

“To be exact, at twenty minutes of six.”

“And what hour was it when you first discovered the murder?”

Vera stared at him dazedly, then her trembling hand clutched the bedclothes for support, but as her fingers closed over the sleeve of the pyjamas they encountered bone and muscle. With senses reeling she half collapsed in Thorne’s arms as the figure rolled over and disclosed Murray’s agitated countenance.

“H-he m-made m-me do it, miss,” the footman stuttered, pointing an accusing finger at Mitchell. “Said he wanted to play a trick on Dr. Thorne; but if I’d dreamed he wanted to scare you, miss, I’d never have agreed, never. And I’ve been lying here in agony, miss, afraid to speak because I might scare you to death, and hoping you’d leave the room without knowing about me. If Mrs. Porter ever hears!” Murray gazed despairingly at them. “She wouldn’t have minded me making a fool of Dr. Thorne. Oh, Miss Deane, don’t look at me like that!” and his voice shook with feeling.

“It’s all right,” gasped Vera, standing shakily erect; Murray’s jumbled explanation had given her time to recover her poise. She turned to Detective Mitchell, her eyes blazing with indignation. “The farce is ended, sir, and my answer to your last question is the same—I found Mr. Brainard lying here with his throat cut at twenty minutes of six. Good afternoon.” And she left the three men contemplating each other.

CHAPTER IX IN THE ATTIC

THE high wind sweeping around the Porter mansion in ever increasing volume found an echo under the eaves, and the attic in consequence resounded with dismal noises. Much of the space under the sloping roof had been given up to the storage of trunks and old furniture, but on the side facing the Potomac River wooden partitions divided that part of the attic into rooms for servants.

The south wall of the attic was lined with pine book shelves which ran up to the wooden rafters. There old Judge Erastus Porter had stored his extensive law library, and there his great-niece, little Millicent Porter, had made her playhouse when she visited him. The nook used in childhood had retained its affection in Millicent's maturer years and, the trunks forming an effectual barricade, she had converted it into a cozy corner, placed pretty curtains in the dormer window, a rug on the bare boards, wheeled an easy-chair, a highboy, and a flat-top desk into their respective places, and, last but not least, a large barrel stood near at hand filled with out-of-print books and a paper edition of Scott's novels. Mrs. Porter on her first tour of inspection of the attic had remonstrated against the barrel, stating that it spoiled the really handsome pieces of furniture which Millicent had converted to her own use, but her daughter insisted that the barrel added a touch of picturesqueness, and that she still enjoyed munching an apple and reading "Ivanhoe," a statement that drew the strictured comment from Mrs. Porter that Millicent had inherited all her father's peculiarities, after which she was left in peace and possession.

Bundled up in a sweater, Millicent sat cross-legged before a small brass-bound, hair-covered trunk, another companion of her childhood, for she had first learned to print by copying the initials of her great-great-grandfather outlined in brass tacks on the trunk lid. The trunk still held a number of childish treasures, as well as cotillion favors, invitations, photographs, and a bundle of manuscripts. But contrary to custom, Millicent made no attempt to look at the neatly typewritten sheets; instead she sat contemplating the open trunk, her head cocked on one side as if listening.

Finally convinced that all she heard was the moaning of the wind under the eaves, she lifted out the tray, and, pushing aside some silks and laces,

removed the false bottom of the trunk and took from it a ledger. Propping the book against the side of the trunk she turned its pages until she came to an entry which made her pause:

Dined with Mrs. Seymour. Bruce Brainard took me out to dinner. He was very agreeable.

And apparently from the frequency with which his name appeared in her “memory book,” Bruce Brainard continued to be “agreeable.” Millicent turned page after page, and for the first time read between the lines of her stylish penmanship what her mother, with the far-sighted eyes of experience, had interpreted plainly. Flattered by the attentions of a polished man of the world, years older than herself, Millicent had mistaken admiration for interest and liking for love. Brainard’s courtship of the debutante had been ardent, and what she termed an engagement and her mother “an understanding” had followed. Brainard had pleaded for an early wedding, but business had called him away to Brazil, and on Millicent’s advice, who knew her mother’s whims and fancies, he had postponed asking Mrs. Porter’s consent to their engagement until his return.

Millicent read on and on in her ledger; accounts of parties gave place to comments about her brother, Craig, then he absorbed the entire space allotted to each day, and the progress of his trip home was duly recorded, and the items:

October 5th—Thank God, Craig is home again, but, oh, what a wreck! It’s agony to see him lying in bed unable to move hand or foot, unable to speak, unable to recognize us. But he’s *home*, not lying in an unknown grave somewhere in Europe. I’ve just met Dr. Alan Noyes, who accompanied Craig to this country, and to whose skill Craig owes his slender hold on life. The doctor is painfully shy.

October 7th—Saw more of Dr. Noyes today; he improves on acquaintance. Mother says he is not shy, only reticent.

Millicent did not linger over the next few entries, but paused and scanned the words:

October 15th—Vera Deane has replaced the night nurse for Craig. She reminds me so of Dorothy, yet they are not a bit alike. Persuaded Dr. Noyes to talk about his experiences in the field hospitals abroad. Must write Bruce tonight without fail.

Millicent skipped several pages, then came the entry:

December 15th—I had no idea Alan Noyes had such a temper; we quarreled most awfully. He announced his creed is never to forget a friend and never to forgive an enemy. Well, I can be stubborn, too.

Millicent sighed drearily and jumped to the date:

December 24th—Alan Noyes has been exceptionally nice today. Our quarrel has blown over. I wish I had told him about Bruce when we first met.

A tear rolled down Millicent's white cheek and splashed upon the paper, then suddenly she bowed her head and gave way to the grief consuming her. The minutes lengthened, and at last she sat up and dried her eyes. The outburst had brought physical relief, for during the past twenty-four hours she had fought off every inclination to allow her feelings sway, had suppressed all sign of emotion, and had refused to discuss Bruce Brainard's mysterious death, even with her mother.



“Who’s there?” she called, as heavy steps approached.

Mrs. Porter had hoped that Millicent’s unnatural calm would give way when unburdening herself to her old chum, Dorothy Deane, and she had made opportunities to leave the girls together. But she was not aware that Dorothy had shown an equal desire to avoid the topic of the tragedy, and Millicent found to her secret relief that she was not urged to confidences which she

might later bitterly regret. But that afternoon she had felt the need of being by herself, and had fled upstairs, hoping her mother would not think of looking for her in the attic.

Millicent pulled a chair close to her side and was on the point of rising from her cramped position before the trunk when she heard someone coming up the uncarpeted stairs. She slammed the ledger shut and thrust it among the silks and laces in the trunk, and, pulling out a vanity box, commenced powdering her nose and removing all traces of recent tears.

“Who’s there?” she called, as heavy steps approached.

“Me, Miss Millicent.”

“Oh, Murray!” Her tone spoke her relief. “Have you brought the coffee and sandwiches I told Selby to order for me?”

“Yes, miss.” And the footman emerged from behind the highboy which, with a Japanese screen, partly blocked the view of the cozy corner from the rest of the attic.

“Just put the tray on my desk,” directed Millicent. “Has mother gone out?”

“Yes, miss; she took Miss Dorothy in to Washington.” Murray moved several of the desk ornaments to make room for the tray. “These ladies called just now, Miss Millicent, but I said you were out.” And he handed her a number of visiting-cards.

She barely glanced at the names before tossing the cards aside. “I am thankful you did, Murray; make my excuses to callers for the next week. I can see no one.”

“Very good, miss.” But Murray lingered, a troubled look in his eyes. “The ’tec, Mitchell, left word that he’d be back this evening, miss, and that he’s got to see you.”

“Oh, he has?” Millicent’s eyes sparkled with anger. “Inform Mr. Mitchell that I decline to see him.”

“Yes, miss,” and Murray smiled broadly. “Shall I throw him out, miss?”

“Heavens, no!” exclaimed Millicent. “You might get in serious trouble with the law. He has, I suppose,” bitterly, “the right to hang about the scene of a crime—detectives are sanctioned human vultures.”

“He is, miss; a regular troublesome, meddlesome busybody, getting innocent people into trouble,” responded Murray feelingly. “He thinks he’s so bright

with his ideas—I'll idea him." And the footman, forgetting his customary respectful attitude in his indignation, doubled up his fists suggestively. "How is Miss Deane feeling, miss?"

"Who, Miss Vera? She is at last getting some rest; be sure, Murray, and tell mother and Miss Dorothy not to disturb her when they return."

"Certainly, miss." The footman turned to leave. "Anything else I can get you, miss?"

"Not a thing, thank you." But as Murray stepped around the highboy she asked: "Any telegrams or telephones?"

"No telegrams, miss; but the telephone is going every instant, 'most all of them are reporters."

"Don't give out any information, Murray," she cautioned.

"Certainly not, miss." And he hurried away.

Millicent waited until she heard the door at the foot of the attic stairs close, then bent over the trunk and again took out the ledger and carefully tore out a handful of pages. Before replacing the ledger in its hiding-place she felt about under the false bottom until convinced that the article she sought was still there, after which she put back the ledger and the false bottom, rearranged the silks and laces, put in the tray, and locked the trunk.

"If you are not going to drink your coffee, I will," announced a voice to her left, and a man stepped out from behind the Japanese screen. A low cry escaped Millicent, and her hands closed spasmodically over the pages torn from her ledger.

"Hugh!" she gasped. "Where—where have you been?"

"In town." Wyndham stopped by the tray and, picking up the plate of sandwiches, handed it to Millicent. She shook her head. "No?" he queried; "then I'll eat your share." He poured out a cup of coffee and drank it clear, almost at a gulp. "That's delicious," he declared. "I had no idea I was so cold and hungry. Can't I help you get up?"

But Millicent declined his proffered assistance, and rose somewhat clumsily, both hands engaged in pressing the torn sheets into the smallest possible compass.

"Where have you been, Hugh?" she asked again.

“Sitting on a trunk behind that screen waiting for Murray to go downstairs,” he responded, refilling his cup.

“Then you came up to the attic just after he did?”

“In his wake, so to speak.” He shot a questioning look at her. “Everyone appears to be out this afternoon.”

“Yes.” Millicent carefully turned her back to the dormer window and sat down on the arm of her easy-chair. “You haven’t answered my question, Hugh—where have you been ever since the inquest?”

“At the club.” Wyndham helped himself to another sandwich. “Awfully sorry I couldn’t get in touch with Dorothy Deane and deliver your message. I was sorry to disappoint you.”

“But I wasn’t disappointed. She received the message in time and came last night.”

Wyndham seemed to have some difficulty swallowing his coffee.

“Is she still here?” he inquired as soon as he could speak.

“Yes. Mother insisted that she could run her social column from here as well as from her boarding-house. Most of the social news is gathered over the telephone,” explained Millicent vaguely. “And mother promised to motor in to the office every afternoon and bring her out again in the evening.”

Wyndham set his coffee-cup back on its saucer with small regard for its perishable qualities.

“I might have known that she would come,” he said, half to himself; then louder: “Intimate friends don’t have to be told when they are needed.”

“Dorothy has so much tact—”

“Discussing me?” And Dorothy Deane appeared at Wyndham’s elbow. There was a distinct pause as she recognized Millicent’s companion, and her cheeks, rosy from her long motor ride in the wind, paled. “Oh!” she ejaculated, with an attempt at lightness which deceived but one of her hearers. “The wanderer has returned.”

“Yes—returned to you,” was Wyndham’s quiet rejoinder, and his eyes never left her. “It was very careless of you, Dorothy, not to leave word at the office that you were coming out here last night.”

“If I had mentioned it the managing editor would have insisted that I cover”—she stopped and colored painfully—“new developments for the paper.”

Wyndham transferred his attention to his cousin. “New developments,” he repeated. “Have there been any since I left last night?”

His question did not receive an immediate reply, for Millicent had not paid strict attention to their conversation, being absorbed in secreting the sheets torn from her diary inside her gown.

“Nothing new,” she responded dully. “The detectives are still looking for clues, and under that pretense poking their noses into everyone’s concerns.”

“Let them. Who cares?” But Wyndham did not look so care-free as his words implied. “Brainard’s death is a seven days’ wonder in Washington, Millicent; so be prepared for all sorts of sensational stories. Our friends will talk themselves to a standstill after a time.”

“I suppose sensational stories are to be expected,” admitted Millicent, and she moved restlessly away from her chair. “But what are Bruce’s friends doing?”

Wyndham looked at her quickly. “I don’t understand you—”

“I mean what steps are Bruce’s friends taking to trace the—the murderer?”

Wyndham took a newspaper from his pocket and unfolded it.

“Brainard’s brother has offered a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest of the criminal,” he stated, pointing to an article in the paper.

Dorothy broke the silence with an impatient stamp of her foot. “The fool!” she exclaimed. “He’d better have waited until it’s proven beyond doubt that it was a murder and not a suicide.”

The newspaper crinkled in Millicent’s hand as she took it, and Wyndham, his eyes roving about the cozy corner, stated quietly:

“The police have found that Brainard never shaved himself, but went every morning to a barber shop just below his apartment house. Apparently he never owned a razor, and the police seem to think that evidence precludes all possibility of suicide.”

“I don’t see why,” protested Millicent, looking up from the paper. “If Bruce contemplated suicide he could have purchased a razor.”

“True, but investigation proves that he did not buy a razor at any of the dealers handling them in Washington, or at a pawnshop. I must admit the

police have been very thorough in their search,” acknowledged Wyndham. “It’s all in the evening papers.” He stopped for a moment, then added steadily, “I think, no matter how terrible we find the idea, that we must accept the theory that Brainard was murdered.”

Millicent caught her breath. “I don’t agree with you,” she retorted obstinately. “Are we meekly to consider ourselves murderers just because Bruce never, apparently, owned a razor?”

“You are right,” declared Dorothy, but her manner, to Wyndham’s watchful eyes, indicated that she was clutching at a straw rather than announcing her convictions. “Some friend might have loaned him a razor— Heavens! what’s that?”

A loud hail sounded up the staircase. “Millicent! Millicent!” and they recognized Mrs. Porter’s angry accents. “Why in the world are you staying in that cold attic? Come down at once.”

“Yes, mother.” Millicent started for the staircase, casting an appealing look at Dorothy as she passed her, and in mute response the latter turned to follow, but at the top of the stairs Wyndham laid a detaining hand on her shoulder.

“Wait,” he entreated, and as he met her wistful, frightened glance he repressed with difficulty the emotion that threatened to master him. “Dorothy, never forget I have your interests at heart to the exclusion of all else.”

“Hush!” She raised a trembling hand to his lips, and seizing it he pressed it against his cheeks.

“Dear, how cold you are!” he murmured fondly, caressing her hand.

“Hush!” she reiterated. “Hugh, you must not—this is not the time—”

“It is,” with obstinate fervor. “You cannot have forgotten—”

“Forgotten?” Dorothy started as if stung. “Would to heaven I could!”

“Then you understand?” She looked at him dumbly. “You are sure you understand?”

Through a mist of tears Dorothy studied him, and as she met his imploring gaze a wave of tenderness sent her other hand to meet his eager clasp; then horror of herself, of her thoughts, checked her wild longing to throw herself into his arms, and she drew back.

“It is because I understand,” she said, steadying her voice with an effort, “that I shall never cease to reproach myself—”

“Stop!” Wyndham held up an imperative hand. “You must not reproach yourself. Bruce Brainard deserved what he got. I tell you he did—” noting her expression. “It was justifiable homicide.”

CHAPTER X

THE BLACK-EDGED CARD

THE hall clock was just striking three on Thursday afternoon when Murray stopped before the room occupied jointly by Mrs. Hall and Vera and rapped smartly on the closed door. It was opened by Vera.

"You are wanted at the telephone, miss," the footman announced, and she stepped into the hall.

"Who wants me, Murray?"

"The party wouldn't give his name."

"Oh!" Vera's footsteps lagged. "Did you recognize the voice?"

"No, miss. Shouldn't wonder if it's another 'tec," he added gloomily. Two whole days had passed and Mrs. Porter had not inquired for his state of health, and even Vera had failed him as a confidante for his latest symptoms; truly his world was out of joint. "I asked him for his message and he said he had to speak to you personally."

A second "Oh!" slipped from Vera, then she went downstairs in thoughtful silence and was proceeding toward the library when Murray, of whose presence she had grown oblivious, addressed her.

"I hopes, miss, you don't hold yesterday's doings in Mr. Brainard's room against me," he said earnestly. "I feel very badly about it—very."

"I realize that you were not to blame," answered Vera. "But the others—" Her small hand clenched. "I'd rather forget the scene, Murray; some day, perhaps, I'll get square with those men for the fright they gave me."

"I hope you will, miss." Murray threw open the library door. "I'm wishing Mrs. Porter would give orders not to admit them. Me and Selby are waiting our chance." And he smiled significantly.

"Perhaps she will." And Vera glanced earnestly at the footman. "You are not looking very well today, Murray; have you tried that tonic Dr. Noyes advised?"

The footman brightened. "I have, miss, but it don't agree with me, and the neuralgia's getting worse."

“That’s too bad. Come upstairs later and I will give you a tube of *Baume Analgésique Bengué*.” As the French name tripped off her tongue Murray regarded her with respectful admiration.

“It sounds great, miss; I’d like to use it, thank you.” And he departed for his pantry, his manner almost cheerful.

Left to herself Vera closed the library door and approached the telephone with some hesitancy; she could think of no friend who would have a reason for not giving his name to the footman and concluded Murray was right in imagining the “party” to be a detective. Her interview with Mitchell the day before was still fresh in her mind and she resented the idea of further impertinence. It occurred to her, as she toyed with the receiver, that it was a simple matter to ring off if she found it was Mitchell at the other end of the wire; then a thought stayed her—suppose it was Dr. Beverly Thorne waiting to speak to her? Her expression hardened, and her voice sounded clear and cold as she called into the mouthpiece:

“Well?”

An unknown voice replied: “Is this Nurse Vera Deane?”

Vera’s expression altered. “Yes, what is it?”

“This is Police Headquarters,” went on the voice crisply, and Vera started. “Inspector North speaking. Have you lost anything, Miss Deane?”

“I? No.”

“Are you sure you have not lost your handbag?”

“My handbag!” Vera’s raised accents testified to her astonishment. “No, certainly not.”

“Quite sure, Miss Deane?” insisted the inspector.

“Yes; but as a matter of form I’ll run upstairs and look. Hold the telephone, please.” And Vera dashed up to her room and unlocked her trunk; there lay her handbag, and pulling it open she found its contents intact.

She was out of breath when she again reached the telephone, and had to pause a second before speaking to the inspector.

“My handbag is upstairs, safe and sound,” she called.

“Thank you.” The inspector cleared his voice. “I called you up, Miss Deane, because we found a handbag in a Mt. Pleasant car yesterday afternoon

containing your visiting-card, and we located you through the Central Directory for Graduate Nurses.”

“My visiting-card?” echoed Vera, astonished. “Are you sure it was mine?”

“Oh, yes, Miss Deane, your name is engraved in full on a black-edged card. Good afternoon.” And he rang off.

A black-edged visiting-card? Vera sat clinging to the telephone receiver in bewilderment—it had been fully five years since she had had a black-edged visiting-card! Suddenly her ear detected the click of a receiver being hung up, and the faintness of the sound aroused her. Who had been listening in on the branch telephone in Mrs. Porter’s boudoir?

Vera went straight to the boudoir, but before she reached it Millicent walking down the hall paused in the act of entering her own room and called her name softly.

“Mother is lying down,” she said as Vera drew nearer. “Dorothy and I have just left the boudoir. Come and join us in my room.” And she held out her hand with a little affectionate gesture which was characteristic of her. Vera smiled, and under sudden impulse kissed her; there was something very winsome about Millicent, mere child as she was.

“Thanks, Millicent, I’ll come and sit with you later; but first I must take my ‘constitutional’—I haven’t had a walk for several days, and I need the fresh air.”

Millicent stroked her cheek with tender fingers. “Perhaps the wind will put color there,” she said. “You are not getting proper rest, Vera; for your pallor and heavy eyes tell the story.”

Vera shook her head in dissent. “I only need fresh air; don’t let that foolish sister of mine put ideas into your head.” She stopped abruptly as Hugh Wyndham stepped out of his aunt’s bedroom and joined them.

“Good afternoon, Miss Deane,” he commenced cordially, but she returned his greeting so perfunctorily that Millicent’s eyes opened wide in surprise, and, reddening, Wyndham turned to his cousin. “Are you going to motor in to Washington with us, Millicent? Better come; you don’t have to leave the car or talk to anyone,” guessing the cause of her hesitancy.

“True—” but still Millicent paused.

“I think you had better go,” put in Vera quietly, and barely glancing at Wyndham she went to her own room.

Wyndham smiled reassuringly as he caught Millicent's puzzled frown. "Vera's nerves are on edge," he said. "I quite understand her seeming rudeness."

"Well, I don't," confessed Millicent. "Dorothy has a much sweeter disposition than her sister, and on her account I overlook Vera's occasional tempers. Go and get the limousine, Hugh; Dorothy and I will be ready in ten minutes."

However, it was less than the prescribed ten minutes when Millicent and Dorothy stood waiting in the lower hall for the arrival of the car, and the latter, going into the library to collect some notes she had left there, encountered her sister on her way out of the side entrance to Dewdrop Inn.

"I wish you were going with us, Vera," she exclaimed impulsively. "Do come, there's plenty of room in the limousine."

"Not today, dear." And Vera tempered the refusal with a kiss. She glanced at the yellow copy paper Dorothy was busy stuffing inside her muff. "Did you use the telephone in Mrs. Porter's boudoir about fifteen minutes ago?"

Dorothy shook her head. "No, but Mrs. Porter and then Hugh tried to get Central." Her sister's reference to the boudoir recalled a recent conversation, and she added briskly: "Vera, why are you so stand-offish with the Porters? They are fond of you, yet you never spend any time with them, and I think they feel it."

Vera drew back from Dorothy's detaining clasp. "I am here in my professional capacity, Dorothy, and I don't wish to intrude upon them," she said gently. "Better that they think me 'stand-offish' than say I take advantage of 'auld lang syne' and push myself forward."

"What nonsense! I declare, Vera, you are downright provoking, not to say morbid," protested Dorothy. "It's the result of never getting away from the atmosphere of the sick room. I don't see how you stand it; the mere sight of suffering drives me wild, and to think of poor Craig Porter, whom I used to dance with, lying there inert—I just could not go to his room today when Mrs. Porter asked me to do so," she wound up. "His changed appearance would break me down completely. How can you watch him night after night?"

"You and Craig were great friends, whereas I never knew him in those days." Vera lowered her voice. "Let me see, did you first meet him when we were in mourning?"

"No, before that, when Millicent and I were at Catonsville together. We were great chums." And she smiled, then winked away a sudden rush of tears. "Poor Craig!"

“Don’t call him ‘poor’—he is rich in accomplishment,” rapped out Vera. “Think what he has done for the Allies; get Mrs. Porter to tell you of the honors paid Craig by the gallant Frenchmen, and never call him poor again.”

“I wasn’t alluding to his past, but his present,” explained Dorothy, somewhat startled by the gleam in her sister’s eyes. “I understand he can’t utter a sound or move a muscle.”

“He can’t.” She paused as Millicent’s voice echoed down the hall. “Go, dear, they are calling you.”

But Dorothy lingered. “Have you any errands I can attend to for you in town?”

“N-no—wait.” Vera spoke hurriedly as steps approached. “See if you can find my package of visiting-cards—”

“I told you months ago, Vera, that you hadn’t any left,” interrupted Dorothy.

“Perhaps you can find an old one, even if it’s black-edged, in my desk—”

Dorothy shook her head violently. “I can’t; I looked there at Christmas and could not find any kind of a card. Coming right away, Murray,” as the footman appeared. “Do you wish me to order some cards struck off?”

“Yes,” called Vera. “Pay for it with the money I gave you yesterday.” And Dorothy disappeared with Murray in attendance.

Vera waited until convinced that the limousine must have driven off, then, tossing the blue cape with its small picturesque red cross about her shoulders, she opened the side door and, skirting the back of the house, walked swiftly past the garage. Passing down a lane she crossed a field and went up a path leading to the “side hill,” as that part of the Porter plantation was called.

The cold and wind of the preceding day had abated, and Vera took deep breaths of the delicious, invigorating air, as, deserting the path, she made her way among the trees and dead underbrush to a clearing high up on the hillside, which, except from above, was invisible from the path she had quitted some moments before. A huge mica rock, known locally as Diamond Rock, occupied most of the clearing, and Vera exclaimed with pleasure as she caught the rainbow effects produced by the winter sunshine on its surface. Stepping in clefts in the rock she slowly mounted to the top and made herself comfortable. Once settled on her perch, she turned her attention to the panoramic view of the Potomac River far below her and the surrounding countryside.

But she barely saw the landscape, her thoughts being concentrated upon the Porter limousine and its occupants. Too late she regretted that she had not accompanied Millicent and Dorothy to Washington. But when her sister had asked her, a feeling of abhorrence had swept over her at the prospect of being inclosed in a small space and listening to their chatter. Her desire to be out in the open and by herself had gained the mastery; for an hour at least she could wrestle with her problems and decide on the future. She resolutely determined to put all thought of the past out of her mind, but it was a greater task than she had imagined—the past would not bury its dead!

Great drops of perspiration beaded her forehead as incidents of the past three days rose before her: her first glimpse of Bruce Brainard in bed Monday night—the tragedy—the inquest—the detectives—Vera plucked at her handkerchief and pressed it against her forehead and her cheeks, rubbing the latter vigorously. She must not think of the past; the future concerned her more intimately.

She must decide on a course of action before Detective Mitchell devised other methods to trap her, and remembrance of the scene in Brainard's bedroom twenty-four hours before brought a hot flush of resentment in its train. She would square accounts with the detective before many days had passed, and her pretty teeth met with a determined snap. What troubled her was Beverly Thorne. She wished that she might dismiss him from her mind; then shivered involuntarily as she grudgingly admitted to herself that she feared his quick intelligence, his ever-searching eyes and cynical smile. It was an evil fate that had thrown him across her path. As the thought crossed her mind, she saw someone moving in and out among the trees to her right. The newcomer was making his way down the hillside, and she watched him idly.

The man kept a zigzag course and she was unable to get a good look at his face as, with cap pulled down over his forehead and the collar of his Norfolk jacket turned up, he seemed intently scanning the ground, pausing now and then to watch a switch which he carried loosely before him in both hands. Suddenly he stopped and, facing in her direction looked up long and earnestly into the bare branches of a tall tree. Vera's breath forsook her as she recognized Beverly Thorne. Had she conjured him to appear?

After testing a lower branch of the tree with his weight Thorne transferred his attention to the cleft stick in his hand and strode onward. He was within a few yards of Vera before he discovered her presence. There followed a momentary hesitation on his part, then he advanced to the rock and bowed gravely.

“You have caught me trespassing,” he began. “What is the forfeit?”

Vera pointed in the direction he had come where a wire fence could be seen in the distance; she knew that placards placed at intervals announced: “No trespassing under penalty of the law.”

“As a ‘J. P.’ you must be aware of the penalty exacted for trespass,” she answered, preparing to rise.

He noticed her movement, and raised his hand. “Don’t let me drive you away,” he begged, appreciating to the full the charming picture she made perched on the rainbow-hued rock, her blue cape and its red cross in striking contrast to the dull colors of the woods. “I am going.”

His announcement, however, while it had the effect of inducing Vera to remain where she was, proved a mere figure of speech, as he did not move from his place by the rock. At the end of a long silence Vera could not restrain her impatience, and he caught the antagonism she strove but faintly to conceal.

“Miss Deane”—Thorne skirted the rock and came closer to her—“I am afraid you harbor resentment against me. I assure you that I had no hand in the trick played on you by Detective Mitchell yesterday.”

“Your presence with the detective in the spare bedroom leads me to think otherwise,” she replied coldly.

“I can explain,” he began, but her raised hand stayed him.

“Why attempt an explanation, doctor?” she asked, and her disdain showed so plainly that he colored with indignation.

“Because I desire to set myself right in your eyes,” he answered.

“With what object?”

His eyes did not fall before the challenge in hers, while a warm, sunny smile lightened the severe lines of his stubborn chin and determined mouth.

“Object—matrimony,” he retorted, and she detected the twinkle in his eyes and the faint mockery discernible in his voice. Her resolve was instantly taken; she would meet him on the ground he had chosen—woman’s wit against man’s intelligence was a game old when Methuselah was young. She rose and dropped Thorne a half courtesy, balancing herself on the rock with graceful ease.

“On so short an acquaintance your jest is flattering, but ill-timed.” She paused, then added, “I thank you—and decline.”

“Wait.” He laid down the switch of witch-hazel and drew nearer. “Our acquaintance is not so short; it commenced six years ago in New York.”

Vera stared at him intently. “I fail to recollect,” she began, and paused uncertainly.

Instead of answering verbally he took out his leather wallet and, searching among its contents, finally produced a black-edged visiting-card. On the reverse side were traced the words:

February 14—In grateful remembrance.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. PORTER GROWS INQUISITIVE

A SILENCE followed, so heavy as to be felt, then Vera took the black-edged card and, reversing it, read the engraved name. A rush of memories obliterated the bleak countryside. In its place she saw a busy city street, a swaying figure, a cry for help, the later clang of the emergency ambulance—and the last agonizing parting from her beloved mother. She had been conscious of the aid rendered by the skilful hospital interne, but her mother had focused her attention to the exclusion of all else. After the funeral she had sent a present with her card “In grateful remembrance” to the city hospital authorities, asking them to see that it reached the surgeon who had attended her mother.

A sudden rush of tears almost blinded Vera, and the card fluttered to the rock unheeded.

“Dr. Thorne”—her voice was not fully under control and a quiver crept into it—“I did not know—I had no idea—” She stammered and broke down.

“Don’t.” Thorne swung himself up on the rock beside her and gazed at her with contrition. “Please don’t cry.”

But the injunction was hardly needed, for Vera pulled herself together, and except for a few tears which she winked violently away, she had herself in hand again as she faced him.

“The card—” she commenced, but he did not allow her to finish the sentence.

“The card,” he echoed, stooping to pick it up, “would never have been shown you except that I knew of no other way to break down your unfriendly attitude to me. Please,” coloring warmly under his tan, “never allude to it again.”

Vera looked at him long and steadily. She saw a well-set-up figure with the unmistakable air of good breeding; her eyes traveled slowly up to his face, and paused there, meeting the steady gaze of the somewhat quizzical gray eyes. His hair, slightly silvered at the temples, had a wave in it which suggested that under due provocation it might curl rather attractively, without altering the somewhat grave air of the professional man. Vera held out her hand. “Let me have the card?” she asked.

But instead of complying with her request he slipped the card into his vest pocket. "I've carried it so long," he said softly, drawing closer. "Don't deprive me of the card." And as Vera caught the wistful appeal in his eyes a hitherto unknown shyness overpowered her, and she stood tongue-tied. Thorne's next words, however, brought her back to her surroundings with a jump. "Good heavens, Miss Deane!" he exclaimed as he caught a full view of her face and noted the dark shadows under her eyes and her hectic flush. "You must take care of yourself or you will be ill in bed."

"All I need is sleep," protested Vera, but Thorne shook his head in dissent.

"Consult your physician," he advised, a trifle sternly. "With your training you should know better than to trifle with your health. You are on the point of a nervous breakdown."

Vera smiled. "You exaggerate," she said, with an attempt to speak lightly. "I do not need medical attendance. The fresh air this afternoon has done me good, and now," moving forward to the edge of the rock, "I must return and catch a few hours' sleep before going on duty."

Without a word, but with his jaw set at an obstinate angle, Thorne scrambled down the rock, then turned back to assist Vera, only to find her at his elbow. She smiled up at him, slightly breathless from her exertions. Her face was dangerously close, and as Thorne looked deep into her lovely eyes his pulse lost a beat, then raced on. Hardly conscious of his action he clasped her hand in his.

"Vera—Miss Deane," he stammered, and his voice shook with feeling. "What madness led you to become so entangled in Bruce Brainard's murder?"

Vera drew back as if struck, and jerked her hand free. "*You* are mad!" she retorted vehemently. "I am in no way concerned in the tragedy."

There was an instant's pause, then Thorne picked up his witch-hazel stick and stood aside, balancing it in his fingers. With a slight inclination of her head Vera turned to leave him, but she had gone but a few steps when he overtook her.

"I seem always to give offense," he said despairingly. "I'm an unlucky devil; never could express myself properly where I feel the most. Just now, Miss Deane, I only meant—" A pause followed as he sought the word he wanted. Vera's sidelong glance convinced her that he appeared as perturbed as his speech implied. "I only meant to offer my services."

"As a physician?"

He flushed at her tone. "Yes, should you require medical attendance."

"Thank you." Vera stole another look at him under lowered lids, but his air of detached, friendly interest baffled her. What motive had inspired his burst of passion a scant five minutes before? Vera's eyes closed as if in pain, and there danced before her mental vision the words: "February 14—In grateful remembrance." Was Thorne sincere in his proffer of friendship or was he still antagonistic to her and trading upon a woman's sentiment to mask his true feelings? Pshaw! It was only fair to suspend judgment. It was the least that she could do in view of Thorne's past kindness—but why had he pocketed the card so hastily? Vera opened her eyes to find Thorne anxiously regarding her. With perceptible hesitancy she took up the conversation where she had left off. "Perhaps when you call to see Mr. Porter I will get you to prescribe for me."

"I am at your service." Thorne bowed courteously. "May I accompany you as far as the lane?"

"Certainly." And keeping step as much as the trees permitted they finally reached the path and walked briskly down it. Vera, who had been thinking intently, was the first to break the silence. "Have you studied law as well as medicine, doctor?" she asked. "And is that why they made you justice of the peace?"

"Not entirely," he responded, as he opened the gate of the lane. "I have a smattering of the law, and a passion for criminal investigation."

"Indeed?" Vera was unable to repress a start, and she quickly covered her agitation by pointing to the cleft switch which Thorne still carried balanced lightly in both hands. The switch, apparently of its own volition, had assumed a perpendicular position. "Why are you carrying that twig?"

"Looking for water; I want to sink an artesian well, and this little wand points the way in my investigation."

"Oh! But you cannot hope to build the well on Mrs. Porter's property."

Thorne laughed heartily. "Hardly; Mrs. Porter would never give me permission to do so."

"Then why waste time trespassing on her property?"

Again Thorne laughed, but a shadow lurked in his eyes as he glanced keenly at his questioner. "Frankly, I have two investigations under way," he

acknowledged. "One to locate a spring, and the other to discover who murdered Bruce Brainard."

Vera's back was toward the setting sun, and her face was in shadow. "If you spend your time looking for wells you will not solve the mystery of Mr. Brainard's death," she said with slow emphasis.

"I'm not so sure of that." Thorne spun the cleft stick about in his fingers. "Are we not told that truth lies at the bottom of a well? Good-by." And lifting his cap he vaulted the fence which separated his property from the Porter estate and disappeared behind some barns.

Vera did not at once resume her walk to the house, and when she did so her usually light footstep was dragging and her expression more troubled.

"Has Miss Millicent returned, Murray?" she asked on entering the butler's pantry a few minutes later.

"No, miss." And Vera went wearily into the deserted library.

The rooms, with shades and curtains partly drawn and the fire on the hearth reduced to smoldering embers, was not conducive to cheerfulness, and Vera shivered as she threw herself down on the wide leather couch and pillowed her head on one of its numerous cushions.

"I wish I'd gone to Washington with Dorothy," she muttered, snuggling down under the warm folds of a carriage robe she had brought from the coat closet. "I could have stood their chatter better than—" Her thoughts supplied the name her lips did not utter, and Mrs. Porter, gliding noiselessly into the library, never dreamed that Beverly Thorne's domineering personality was keeping her beautiful nurse from peaceful slumber.

Mrs. Porter, her hands full of papers, went directly to the fireplace. Poking the embers into a feeble blaze, she squatted down on a footstool and placed the letters she carried one by one into the flames. Vera, lying with eyes closed, and buried in her own thoughts, did not become aware of her presence until the clang of a fire iron which Mrs. Porter inadvertently let slip aroused her. A certain furtiveness in Mrs. Porter's movements checked Vera's impulse to address her, and she watched her employer in a growing quandary. Should she let Mrs. Porter know that she was not alone in the room, or was she already aware of her, Vera's, presence? It was highly probable that the latter was the case, as Mrs. Porter had to pass near the lounge to get to the fireplace, and Vera resolutely closed her eyes and did her best to drop off to sleep.

Mrs. Porter, with painstaking care, opened each letter and scanned it intently before depositing it in the fire. Her features looked pinched and worn in the ruddy glow from the burning paper. She faltered as her busy fingers came at last to a handful of twisted papers, and it took her some moments to smooth out the torn sheets and place each separately on the red-hot embers. The last sheet followed its predecessor before the first had been quite consumed, and Mrs. Porter shuddered as the sheet, like some tortured body, twisted about, then stiffened, and the words it bore showed in bold relief:

Tuesday morning—Saw Alan. God help us both.

A flame shot upward across the sheet, and the scorching trail left no record in the ashes on the hearth.

Mrs. Porter poked among the embers until convinced that each scrap of paper had been burned, then rising stiffly she gazed uneasily about the library, letting her eyes finally rest on Vera. She studied the girl's perfect profile with appraising keenness before seating herself in front of the center table and picking up her pen. But the words she sought to put on paper would not come, and she threw down her pen with a pettish exclamation; the continued silence in the room was getting on her nerves.

"Vera!" she called shrilly. "Wake up."

Even before she had finished speaking Vera was on her feet, and a second more was standing by the older woman's side, laying a soothing hand on her trembling fingers.

"What is it, Mrs. Porter?" she asked. "What can I do for you?"

"Talk to me." Mrs. Porter patted the chair next to hers and Vera sank into it. "I must have some diversion or I shall go mad!" And the gleam in her eyes lent color to her words. "Gossip with me."

"About what—politics?" mentioning the topic farthest from her thoughts; she was too nervously inclined to discuss personal matters.

"Politics?" repeated Mrs. Porter. "You'll find no argument there, Vera; I've lived too long in Washington not to float with the tide—mine are always Administration politics. But"—with a sudden sharp glance at her companion under lowered lids—"I am always interested in the tattle-tales of Cupid. Your sister Dorothy and my nephew Hugh don't seem to be as good friends as formerly; what has estranged them?"

Vera's fingers closed tightly over the arm of her chair and her answer was slow in coming. "Oh, they have frequent bickerings." She shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps the present tiff is more serious—for the moment."

Mrs. Porter looked relieved. "I hope you are right, for I have quite set my heart on that being a match. Do you know," in a sudden burst of confidence very foreign to her usually reserved nature, "I was beginning to fear that Bruce Brainard's horrible death might have been at the bottom of the estrangement."

"Oh, Mrs. Porter!" Vera's shocked expression drew instant explanation and Mrs. Porter, in her excitement, failed to observe Vera's growing agitation.

"The atmosphere of this place since the tragedy distorts every action, every idea!" she began incoherently. "I do my utmost to forget it, but I can think of nothing else. And you found Bruce dead on Tuesday morning—only forty-eight hours ago!"

"It seems a lifetime!" confessed Vera wearily.

"And that stupid detective has done nothing," fumed Mrs. Porter. "In the face of no evidence, he still thinks Bruce was murdered."

"I don't catch your meaning." And Vera looked as puzzled as she felt.

"Why, if Bruce had been murdered there would have been some clue; whereas, the lack of evidence against anyone proves that Bruce must have committed suicide."

"Where did he get the razor?" The question almost leaped from Vera, and she bent forward in her eagerness to catch the other's answer.

"Brought it with him." But Mrs. Porter's eyes had shifted and Vera could not read their expression. "Listen, Vera, let us argue this matter out—I'm tired of beating about the bush!" Mrs. Porter's air of candor would have convinced anyone not familiar with her moods and tenses—Vera gazed at her and remained discreetly silent. "I know that every door and window in the floor and the cellar were locked, because I accompanied Hugh when he went the rounds to see that the house was securely fastened on Monday night. Even the police admit that no one broke into the house."

"Yet they contend that Bruce Brainard was murdered." Vera spoke almost without her own volition, and bit her lip until the blood came, but the words could not be recalled.

Mrs. Porter's hand flew to her heart as if to still its rapid beating. "Yes," she agreed dully, the false animation of a moment before deserting her. "Who in this household would have a motive for killing Bruce?"

Her question met with no response, and as the pause lengthened they avoided looking at each other; twice Mrs. Porter tried to speak, but her voice failed her, and she rose uncertainly to her feet. Vera sat as if carved from marble, and even the opening of the library door failed to draw her attention.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Porter," said Mrs. Hall, advancing toward the desk. "I think you had better send for a physician for Mr. Craig."

"Craig! Is he worse?" Mrs. Porter turned imploring eyes on the day nurse.

"I don't like his symptoms," replied Mrs. Hall, noncommittally. "And I dare not take the responsibility of treating him until a physician has seen him. Please don't delay in sending for one."

By that time Vera was on her feet. "Can I be of assistance?" she asked, addressing Mrs. Hall.

"Not now; perhaps later," responded the day nurse. "Mrs. Porter, please tell me whom you desire called in, now that Dr. Noyes is no longer here, and Miss Deane can telephone for him."

Mrs. Porter turned an agonized face toward them. "No, I'll speak to Dr. Thorne myself. He has been highly recommended to me and is the nearest physician this side of Alexandria. I never expected," she added bitterly, picking up the telephone, "to ask any of his family to assist me, but Craig's need is paramount. Don't wait, Mrs. Hall." And the day nurse hastened back to her patient.

Vera was on the point of following her when Mrs. Porter signed to her to wait, and she listened with the keenest attention to the one-sided conversation on the telephone. Mrs. Porter finally hung up the receiver in a rage.

"His servant's a fool!" she declared, laying an impatient finger on the bell which connected with the servants' hall. "He doesn't know where Dr. Thorne is or when he will be back. Ah, Murray," as that worthy appeared, "go at once to Thornedale and find Dr. Thorne and bring him here," she wound up, sinking down on the couch, and a burst of tears relieved her overwrought feelings. "Oh, Craig, Craig—my dear, dear boy!"

Murray, seeing Vera spring to Mrs. Porter's side, vanished, and, being impressed with the urgency of his errand, never stopped to get his overcoat,

and in a hatless condition made his way across the fields. He was just entering the carriage drive to Thornedale when he descried the doctor coming along the highway, and he started forward to meet him. He was almost within hailing distance when a man stepped from behind a clump of bushes and called him by name.

The footman stared at the newcomer as if unable to believe his eyes.

“So it’s yourself!” he ejaculated, walking slowly around him. “And who do you wish to see, sir?”

“Miss Vera Deane, *of course*.” Both the words and the emphasis were not lost on Beverly Thorne, whose rapid approach had gone unnoticed, and he contemplated the newcomer with mixed feelings as he strode past them, Murray never even seeing him.

CHAPTER XII

DETECTIVE MITCHELL ASKS QUESTIONS

CONTRARY to Vera's idea of a "chatty" motor drive into Washington, Millicent and her two guests made the trip almost in silence. Hugh Wyndham, alone, seemed to find the silence irksome, but his efforts to force conversation met with no encouragement and he finally lapsed into silence. It was not until the limousine had crossed Long Bridge and was bowling along the asphalted streets of Washington that Millicent broke her moody silence.

"Do you wish to go direct to the *Tribune* office, Dorothy?" she asked, picking up the speaking-tube.

Dorothy consulted her wrist watch. "Perhaps I had better; it is later than I thought. If I get through my work early we can stop at Brentano's on the way home."

"Let me go there for you," suggested Wyndham. "What book do you wish?"

"No book, thanks; Vera wants me to order a hundred of her visiting-cards struck off." As she spoke Dorothy opened her handbag and taking out her purse offered a Treasury bill to Wyndham. He waved it aside.

"Pay for the cards when they are finished," he exclaimed.

"Please take it," insisted Dorothy, closing her bag with a snap. "Vera objects to charge accounts."

"If you wish me to." Wyndham pocketed the money just as the limousine drew up at the curb, and throwing aside the lap-robe he jumped out and assisted Dorothy to the sidewalk before the chauffeur could leave his seat. "Are you coming with me to Brentano's, Millicent?" he asked, seeing that his cousin made no move to leave the car.

Millicent contented herself with a nod of assent and Wyndham hastened after Dorothy who, not waiting, had already entered the office building. Wyndham's voice brought her to a stand near the elevator shaft.

"Dorothy"—he lowered his voice and drew her to one side of the corridor where there was no danger of their conversation being overheard—"I implore you not to distrust me."

"I don't, Hugh."

"Then why do you avoid me—why refuse to see me alone?" with suppressed vehemence. "Your behavior, Dorothy, hurts me cruelly."

"You are mistaken." She glanced upward, and her clear eyes did not falter in their direct gaze, while a wave of color mantled her cheeks. "I think of you—dream of you—" She checked herself as she saw the passion which lighted his eyes. "This is no place—go," as two men approached. "Don't keep Millicent waiting." And with that parting injunction she turned to greet the city editor.

"You are just in time, Miss Deane," exclaimed the city editor, as Wyndham walked away. "Mr. Reynolds," indicating his companion, "has a new lot of photographs for you to choose from for the Sunday paper. Here's the elevator." And hardly giving the outgoing passengers an opportunity to leave, the energetic city editor hustled Dorothy and the photographer into the elevator, and on arriving at their floor he accompanied them into Dorothy's office. "Have you a photograph of Millicent Porter?" he asked, taking up the prints which Reynolds laid on Dorothy's desk.

"No," was the photographer's glum response. "Mr. Wyndham called at the studio early Tuesday morning and forbade us giving copies to the press."

The city editor dropped the prints in disgust and turned to Dorothy. "Are you sure you have no picture of Miss Porter in your desk?"

"I am positive that I have not." Dorothy pulled up a chair and examined the glossy photographs. "Perhaps my predecessor used one of Miss Porter. If so, the cut will be on file with the others."

"Her name is in the card index, but the cut itself is missing," grumbled the city editor. "Wish I knew who took it. I'd fire him. We haven't had such a sensational murder as Brainard's in years, and I can't lay my hands on a single photograph of the principals involved."

"Who are chiefly involved?" Dorothy's face was screened by the large print which she was studying with interest.

"Chiefly involved?" The city editor knitted his brows. "Well, I should say all the Porter household is involved more or less, but I believe that English doctor, Noyes, who skipped out of the country so opportunely, knows a thing or two which might aid in tracing the murderer. And," he added, warming to his subject, "if I'd been on that coroner's jury I would have made Millicent Porter talk."

Dorothy smiled with her lips only, her eyes fixed steadily on the pretty woman in the photograph. "Possibly the jury found Miss Porter had nothing to say," she remarked.

"Nothing to say? A girl whose fiancé has just been murdered?" The city editor laughed loudly as if enjoying a huge joke. "Miss Deane, you're dippy."

"Perhaps; but I fail to see a reason for dragging Miss Porter further into the limelight. Why center publicity about her?"

"Because she's good material for a 'sob' story, if nothing more; but I have a hunch"—he lowered his voice to a confidential pitch—"that she is going to be the big feature of the case before the Brainard mystery is cleared up. So long," and he left the room.

Reynolds heaved a sigh of relief which was echoed by Dorothy. "Now we can get along with our work, Miss Deane; how will these photographs do for a layout of the leaders of the ultra-smart set?" placing a number of prints together; and Dorothy soon became absorbed in making her selections.

After the departure of the photographer, twenty minutes later, Dorothy wrote her directions on the back of each photograph and had just completed her task when the office boy entered and laid a "flimsy" on her desk.

"Take these photographs to the engraver and tell him I must have the cuts by tomorrow afternoon," she directed, and picked up the "flimsy." It proved to be a garbled account of Millicent Porter sent out by one of the news agencies and laid great stress upon her wealth and the social prominence of her family. Dorothy frowned as she crumpled it in her hand, then thinking better of her action she smoothed out the "flimsy" and carefully pigeonholed it.

Dorothy's thoughts were far from her work as she mechanically carried out the daily office routine. A talk with a White House usher elicited the news that the President was playing golf and might go to the theater that night; a chat with a confidential clerk in the Department of State provided her with the list of guests at a diplomatic dinner to be given that night by the Secretary of State; but her other telephone calls drew blank; and Dorothy, after looking over the meager items chronicled in the social columns of the afternoon papers, welcomed the ring of the telephone. It proved to be a long-distance call from Albany, N. Y., giving her the information that a Congressman's wife was receiving at the Governor's reception, describing the gown which she would wear, and stating that she desired to have it fully written up in the *Morning Tribune*.

Half an hour later Dorothy was correcting her typewritten copy when the door was jerked unceremoniously open, and the city editor walked in, followed by Detective Mitchell. Dorothy's heart sank at sight of the city editor's aggressive air; previous encounters had given her an inkling of his bullying disposition, and the presence of Mitchell did not look propitious.

"See here, Miss Deane, why haven't you informed me that you are visiting Millicent Porter?" demanded the city editor.

"I did not think the news would interest you." Dorothy laid down her copy and nodded coolly to the detective. "Good afternoon, Mr. Mitchell."

"Interest me?" stormed the city editor. "Here I've been trying vainly to get a line on what's doing out at the Porter mansion; every reporter refused admission, and you staying there—" He swallowed hard. "Write a fifteen-hundred-word human interest story for tomorrow's paper, get an interview if possible from Mrs. Porter and her daughter—but remember, I want a story with meat in it—and don't you come back to this office without it." And his clenched fist, descending on the desk by way of emphasis, jarred the scissors and paste pot out of their accustomed places.

Dorothy's expression changed. "I must remind you, Mr. Harding, that I am the head of my department and responsible to the managing editor only. If you desire to detail me to a special assignment you must speak to him first." There was truth in what she said, and Harding hesitated. Dorothy turned to Mitchell. "Do you wish to see me?"

Mitchell cast an amused glance at the indignant city editor whose florid complexion rivaled his red necktie in point of vivid color, then pulled forward a chair and made himself comfortable. Harding glanced about, and, finding no other chair in the small room, propped himself against the side of the desk and the wall.

"Go ahead, Mitchell," he said pugnaciously. "Tell her what you told me."

Dorothy glanced from one to the other, her calm demeanor covering a rapidly beating heart. What had the detective confided to Harding? What had he really discovered relating to Bruce Brainard's death?

Mitchell took a paper from his pocket and, reaching up, bent the portable electric lamp so that its light fell directly upon the desk and incidentally shone full in Dorothy's face. If she detected the maneuver she gave no indication of it as she leaned back in her revolving-chair and waited politely for the detective to speak.

“Miss Deane, you understand wireless?” questioned Mitchell.

“I do.”

“And Miss Millicent Porter also?”

“Yes. We were both taught wireless at the National Service School, the woman’s preparedness camp at Chevy Chase, Maryland.”

“Have you kept up wireless instruction since then?”

“Yes, we both took the commercial examination last fall.”

“And you can operate the marine wireless at the Porter mansion?”

Dorothy looked at Mitchell steadily. What was he driving at?

“Yes, we have practiced on the wireless there,” she acknowledged.

“When was the marine wireless outfit installed there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Last summer?” persisted Mitchell, annoyed by the curtness of her tone.

“Oh, no, before then.”

“Then it was not erected solely for Miss Porter’s benefit?”

“No. I believe Mr. Craig Porter had it installed before he went abroad to join the French aviation corps, and Mrs. Porter never had it taken down.”

“I see.” Mitchell stroked his chin thoughtfully. “Do you know the instrument’s sending capacity, Miss Deane?”

She thought before answering. “I believe about one hundred miles, but I am not certain. Miss Porter and I generally used the instrument to receive messages.”

“But you have sent messages?”

“Yes, occasionally.”

“To whom did you send a message last night, Miss Deane?”

Dorothy’s reply was prompt. “To no one.”

Mitchell smiled, not unkindly. “I’m afraid denial won’t do any good. I saw you and Miss Porter in the attic at the Porter mansion last night.”

“You saw us?” Dorothy’s surprise was unmistakable, and Mitchell chuckled.

“Where were you?”

"In Dr. Thorne's dining-room, the window of which overlooks that side of the Porter mansion." There was a brief pause, and then Mitchell repeated his former question. "To whom did you send a message last night?"

"I sent no wireless message last night," reiterated Dorothy.

"Oh, so it was Miss Porter." A self-satisfied smile crossed the detective's lips, and Dorothy's heart sank as she racked her brain in an effort to puzzle out the meaning of his questioning her on such a subject. What had the wireless to do with his investigation of the mystery surrounding Bruce Brainard's death? She sat forward in her chair as Mitchell commenced speaking again. "I saw you both in the attic earlier in the evening, as you did not pull down the shades. About midnight I saw one of you return, but as only a candle was burning near the window at that time, I could not be certain whether it was you or Miss Porter." He paused and looked inquiringly at Dorothy.

"You say it was about midnight? Are you quite certain, Mr. Mitchell, that you did not fall asleep and dream all this?"

"I did not," answered Mitchell shortly, ruffled by her manner of receiving his news. "In proof of it the Arlington Radio Station caught Miss Porter's message, but not the name of the person she was sending it to."

"Ah, indeed?" skeptically. "And what was the message?"

"Peace and tranquillity."

Dorothy's reception of his answer startled the detective—she burst into peal on peal of laughter.

"Excuse me," she stammered as soon as she could speak. "You were so serious and—and—" Again she laughed whole-heartedly. "You have unearthed a mare's nest, Mr. Mitchell."

Mitchell's rising color testified to his displeasure. "Kindly tell me the meaning of those three words, Miss Deane," he demanded.

"They bear the customary meaning attributed to them," retorted Dorothy, her eyes still twinkling. "The phrase you quoted is frequently used by Miss Porter and myself for practice work in sending messages."

The detective watched her in angry silence, then started to address her just as the door was pushed quietly open and Hugh Wyndham stopped on the threshold. Neither man observed him as they faced Dorothy, their backs turned to the entrance.

“Your explanation is very pat, Miss Deane,” said Mitchell. “Perhaps you can also explain what it was Miss Millicent Porter threw into an unused well late yesterday afternoon.”

Dorothy gazed silently at her questioner, then her glance traveled upward until it rested on Wyndham, and her breath forsook her. The gathering wrath in Wyndham’s eyes as he took a menacing step toward the unconscious detective acted like a douche of cold water on Dorothy’s benumbed wits.

“I can explain,” she announced, her voice quivering with subdued excitement. “Miss Porter dreads publicity. She threw a cut into the well, the only cut ever made from one of her photographs, so that her picture would not appear in a newspaper.”

“I-n-deed,” drawled Mitchell. “And where did Miss Porter get this—eh—cut?”

“I gave it to her.”

Her words brought a bellow from Harding. “What! do you mean to say you stole the cut from this office and gave it to Miss Porter?”

“I did.”

Harding pounded the desk. “Where’s your honesty?” he roared. “Where’s your loyalty to the newspaper that employs you?”

“My loyalty belongs to the paper so long as it does not conflict with my loyalty to my friends,” answered Dorothy. “As for my honesty—I have paid for the cut.”

“D-mn the money! It isn’t a question of money,” he retorted thickly. “You are fired, understand—fired!”

Dorothy was on her feet instantly. “It is the managing editor who dismisses me, Mr. Harding,” she reminded him, and turned with dignity to Mitchell. “As I must turn in my copy, Mr. Mitchell, you will have to excuse me.” And closing her roll-top desk she picked up her coat and hat and joined Wyndham in the city room, where he had preceded her. She tossed her manuscript to a copy reader, and, after exchanging a word with the foreman, left the office, Wyndham in tow.

The Porter limousine had driven off but a scant five minutes when Inspector North entered the Tribune building and went direct to the managing editor’s office, only to be told that he would not be there until after dinner. The

inspector was making for the society editor's office when he spied the city editor emerging from it.

"Hello, Harding," he hailed. "Miss Deane in?"

"No, just gone." Harding kicked a chair out of his way as a slight vent to his feelings. "Anything I can do for you, Inspector?"

"Yes. Tell me, is Miss Dorothy Deane in mourning?"

"Mourning? H—l, no! Say—" But the inspector waved a friendly farewell as he hastened toward the elevator shaft, and Harding completed his sentence with another oath.

Inspector North was more fortunate in his next call, and found the Chief of the Secret Service comfortably seated in his office in the Treasury Department.

"I don't usually bring 'lost and found' articles to you, Chief," he explained, taking a chair by the desk and drawing a leather handbag out of his overcoat pocket. "But I'm puzzled. What do you think of this?"

Chief Connor turned the bag over and over. "Good leather," he remarked. "Unmarked. Where did you get the bag?"

"It was turned in by a conductor on the Mt. Pleasant line who found it in his car. Open it, Chief."

Connor started to do so and the catch caught, then as he used more strength it flew open with such suddenness that half its contents rolled to the floor. Inspector North instantly retrieved each article.

"Is there nothing but money?" asked Connor, contemplating the Treasury notes which his companion laid on his desk.

"That's all, except this." And the inspector handed him a black-edged card. Connor read the block lettering with interest:

Miss Vera Deane

Graduate nurse

Making no further comment, Chief Connor sorted each bill in its proper denomination, and in a few minutes had several neat piles of gold and greenback certificates of varying amounts stacked in front of him. Taking up a microscope he examined each bill, testing the quality of the paper between his

fingers, and in certain instances he jotted down the check letter, series, and charter numbers.

“Has Miss Deane notified Headquarters of the loss of her bag?” he asked finally. “There is quite a tidy sum of money here—three hundred dollars.”

“So I observed,” answered Inspector North dryly. “No, Miss Deane has not notified Headquarters; on the contrary, I telephoned her of its present whereabouts, and she denied ownership of the bag.”

“Indeed!” Connor sat erect and pressed his desk buzzer, and an assistant appeared from an inner office. “Examine these bills, Neale,” he directed, and waited until the operative had disappeared with the money. “So Miss Deane denies the bag is hers. Did you tell her its contents?”

“No. I only said it contained her black-edged visiting-card.” North hesitated. “Miss Deane’s sister is society editor of the *Tribune*. I have just learned at the office that the young ladies are not now in mourning. From another source I heard that Judge Deane, their father, died about seven years ago and his wife did not long survive him. Of course it is possible that some friend of hers had one of her old visiting-cards instead of her own in the bag, especially as Miss Deane declares her bag is in her own possession at home.”

“That is a plausible theory, but—” It was Connor’s turn to hesitate, and the inspector broke the silence.

“It is strange that the real owner doesn’t claim the bag, considering that its disappearance involves the loss of three hundred dollars,” he said thoughtfully. “It’s that puzzle which has brought me to you. Few people lose such a sum of money in a street car without raising a fuss about it.”

“My dear North, the presence of the money is obviously the reason why the bag goes unclaimed,” retorted Connor, and the inspector leaned forward excitedly.

“You mean—?”

“That many of the bank notes are counterfeit. The owner of that bag will be the last to claim it. Well, Neale, what have you to report?”

The operative advanced to the desk and placed the Treasury notes again on the desk with memorandum attached.

“One hundred and seventy-five dollars of this is counterfeit.” Neale selected a ten-dollar note and showed it to Chief Connor. “This is apparently printed

from photomechanical plates and retouched with a graver. It is an exceedingly dangerous counterfeit.”

Chief Connor nodded assent as he examined the note, then looked inquiringly at his assistant. “Well, Neale?”

““Gentleman Charlie,”” was the latter’s only comment, and Chief Connor smiled.

“Exactly, Neale. Issue special warnings to all banks. ‘Gentleman Charlie’ has resumed operations.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE RED HERRING

THE front door of the Porter mansion opened with such precipitancy that Vera Deane, on the point of going upstairs, paused with one foot on the bottom step. A glimpse of Murray's usually stolid countenance, as he stood in the doorway, indicated news out of the ordinary, for his eyes were open to twice their accustomed size and his mouth was agape.

"It's you, miss!" he ejaculated in vast relief at sight of her. "The doctor wants you."

Vera changed color. Why should Beverly Thorne want her? To be sure Mrs. Porter had sent for him to attend Craig Porter, but why should he inquire for her—unless he desired to talk to her in her professional character? But he was aware that Craig Porter was attended by a day nurse, while she, Vera, did not go on duty until eight o'clock in the evening.

Vera had slight time to conjecture, for Murray was brushed aside and a tall man advanced into the hall to greet her. As he lifted his hat Vera stared at him in mute amazement, and it was not until her hand was clasped warmly that she recovered her voice.

"Dr. Noyes!" she gasped. "You have returned, after all!"

"So it seems." Alan Noyes' grim smile was brief. "A word with you, Miss Deane, before I see Mrs. Porter."

Murray, engaged in lighting one of the gas brackets, paused in his labors as a sound from outside the house reached him.

"Doctor, you and Miss Deane had better step into the drawing-room," he said, hurrying to the front door after a peek out of the window. "The limousine has just stopped outside, and Miss Millicent will be here in a minute."

His words, however, instead of hastening Noyes' footsteps toward the drawing-room caused him to loiter in the hall, then sighing heavily he accompanied Vera into the drawing-room just as Murray opened the front door.

"Miss Deane"—Noyes stepped close to her side—"what are the latest developments in the Brainard"—he hesitated—"tragedy?"

“So far as I know there are no new developments, except those published in the morning newspapers.” Vera watched him narrowly, and noticed the worn lines in his face and his harassed air. “The police appear nonplussed.”

“Have they discovered any clues?” Noyes’ anxiety was palpable, and Vera looked at him with increased earnestness.

“I am not in their confidence, doctor,” she said quietly. “If they have discovered new clues I am not aware of it.”

Noyes took a quick turn up and down the room, and thereby imperiled numerous pieces of bric-à-brac as, blindly ignoring the congested arrangement of Mrs. Porter’s choice heirlooms, he thought over Vera’s statements.

“Have they decided whether Brainard’s death was suicide or murder?” he inquired, pausing in front of her.

“I believe they consider that—that—he did not kill himself.”

Noyes listened to her halting sentence with marked impatience.

“In other words, you mean that the police believe Brainard was murdered?” She nodded assents. “I gathered that was the consensus of opinion when reading the morning newspapers. And what is your opinion, Miss Deane?”

The question was unexpected, and Vera drew back. “I am not qualified to judge,” she commenced confusedly. “From the nature of the wound—”

“You take it to be murder?”

“No, no,” with unexpected vehemence, and Noyes eyed her sharply. “A man can nick himself with a razor on either side of his throat, and no one be able to tell whether the wound was self-inflicted or done by another with intent to kill.”

The twilight had deepened, and Noyes experienced difficulty in reading Vera’s expression.

“That does not seem to be the opinion of the deputy coroner, and he performed the autopsy,” Noyes said dryly. “He affirms that the wound could not have been self-inflicted.”

“But you are a surgeon,” broke in Vera impetuously. “What did you think when you saw the wound?”

Noyes regarded her with singular intentness. "You forget that I left this house before the discovery of Brainard's death."

"True, you were to sail on the *St. Louis*"—Vera never took her eyes from him. "The steamer has sailed, but you—are here."

"A self-evident fact," impatiently. "I missed the boat."

"Oh!" The ejaculation was faint, but Noyes started and turned red.

"Enough of myself," he commenced brusquely. "How is Craig Porter?"

It was Vera's turn to redden; she had completely forgotten her patient in her astonishment at Alan Noyes' unexpected appearance. "Mrs. Hall has just informed Mrs. Porter that Craig appears to be worse, and she has sent for Dr. Beverly Thorne."

"Indeed? I wonder—" He did not complete his sentence, but fell into moody silence which Vera forbore to break. Mrs. Hall was with Craig Porter; she was not needed in the sick room for nearly three hours, and, except for dinner, her time until eight o'clock was her own. The alteration in Alan Noyes puzzled her; his pleasant reserved manner had given place to brusque inquisitiveness but indifferently masked. What had brought about the change? Speculating was idle work, and she was about to address him when he spoke.

"I have not inquired for Miss Porter; is she well?"

Vera failed to observe in the dim light the effort the question cost Noyes, but she was quick to note the formality of his query. Four days before he would have said "Millicent." A lovers' quarrel would explain his peculiar behavior and altered demeanor; but he and Millicent had been good friends, nothing more. Vera frowned in perplexity, and her reply was tinged with stiffness.

"Miss Porter appears quite well."

Noyes peered at her in the gloom in uncertainty. "Appears well," he muttered under his breath. "Has she—"

He was interrupted by the pulling back of the portières of the hall doorway, and Millicent Porter walked in, her light footfall being deadened by the heavy rugs. An exclamation, quickly stifled, escaped Noyes, and he pulled his officer's cape more closely about him, then turned and faced her.

"Why are you staying here in the dark, Vera?" she inquired. "Oh, I beg pardon," perceiving for the first time that Vera was not alone; then as her eyes grew accustomed to the dim light she recognized Alan Noyes. A wave of

emotion, instantly suppressed, shook her, and, laying one trembling hand on the nearest chair back, she waited in silence; a silence spent by Vera in glancing from one to the other, her perplexity deepening; what had arisen to estrange the surgeon and Millicent? And if they had quarreled, why had he returned to be a guest in her mother's house? Vera's expression betrayed her doubts, and Noyes, who had edged imperceptibly nearer, perceived her hesitancy.

"Good afternoon, Miss Porter," he said, and the effort to repress all emotion made his voice devoid of feeling.

"Good evening," responded Millicent with equal coolness. "It is Dr. Noyes, is it not?"

Noyes flushed hotly. "Yes, I returned, I—"

Mrs. Porter's entrance broke in on his stammered explanations. She wasted no words, but advanced with outstretched hand.

"Welcome back," she exclaimed in cordial greeting. "I could hardly believe Murray when he said you were here. Have you seen Craig?"

"Not yet, I—" Noyes brightened perceptibly at her cordiality. "I was just telling your daughter and Miss Deane that I missed my steamer and—"

"Came back here, *naturally*," put in Mrs. Porter blandly. "We would not pardon your going elsewhere, would we, Millicent?" addressing her daughter who had stepped over to the mantelpiece and was absently fingering one of the Sèvres vases.

"No, certainly not," she remarked without turning around. Mrs. Porter's eyebrows met in a frown, but whatever rejoinder she would have made was cut short by an announcement from Murray as he waited in the doorway.

"Dr. Thorne is here to see you, madam."

"Good gracious! I had forgotten." Mrs. Porter moved toward the door. "Wait for me, Dr. Noyes. I will come back at once." And she walked majestically into the hall, Murray holding aside the portières for her. He was about to release the portières when Millicent, without a glance at Noyes, who had watched her every movement, hurried into the hall. Apparently unconscious of Vera's continued presence, Noyes turned restlessly to the nearest window and looked out with unseeing eyes. Vera stared at him, in indecision, for a brief second, then left the room. But in the hall she found her way to the staircase blocked by Mrs. Porter's ample figure and paused, not liking to

brush past her, and at that instant Beverly Thorne appeared from the reception-room where Murray had ushered him on his arrival.

“Good evening.” His bow and greeting included both Mrs. Porter and Vera, then he addressed the older woman directly. “My man-servant, Cato, told me that you had telephoned for me, and I came at once.”

“Thank you.” Mrs. Porter was graciousness itself, but the smiling eyes hid intent watchfulness. “I find that the message was telephoned you prematurely; I am sorry to have troubled you—” A gesture completed the sentence.

“You mean”—Thorne advanced nearer—“that you do not require my professional services for your son?”

“Yes, doctor.” Mrs. Porter’s eyes shifted to the hat stand where Thorne’s hat and overcoat and medicine bag were lying. “It was good of you to come so promptly, but since I telephoned you my son’s regular physician has arrived, and so—”

Thorne took a step toward the hat stand, then paused. “May I ask you to give a message to Dr. Washburn—”

“Dr. Washburn is not here,” interjected Mrs. Porter hastily. “I refer to Dr. Alan Noyes, who has just returned.” She had a carrying voice and her words reached other ears than her companions’, for as she ceased speaking, Detective Mitchell emerged from the back hall, an eager light in his eyes.

“You say Dr. Noyes is here,” he exclaimed, ignoring manners in his interest. “Then I must see him at once.”

“I fail to see why,” retorted Mrs. Porter, whose violent start at sight of the detective was not lost on Thorne. “Dr. Noyes is here to attend my son, and his presence is required in the sick room.”

“I must have a word with him. I will not detain him long.” Mitchell’s insistence was not to be denied. “Where is Dr. Noyes?”

Mrs. Porter stiffened, but her angry retort I was checked by a voice behind her.

“I am here,” announced Noyes, looking out on the group from between the drawing-room portières. “Who wants me?”

“I do, Detective Mitchell of the Central Office.” Mitchell scanned the surgeon’s face with close attention. “We can’t talk here,” glancing disapprovingly about the large square hall.

"You can use the library." But the permission did not come graciously from Mrs. Porter; she never took kindly to having her plans thwarted even in trifling details. "Make your interview as brief as possible, Mr. Mitchell, as I desire to have Dr. Noyes see my son."

"I will come upstairs in a few minutes," promised Noyes, before the detective could make reply, and, stepping past Vera, who had been a silent witness of the scene, the Englishman led the way to the library. Thorne, who had picked up his hat and overcoat preparatory to leaving the house, was detained by a gesture from Mitchell.

"Come with us, doctor," he said, and after a moment's hesitancy Thorne went with them, ignoring Mrs. Porter's indignant glance and half-extended hand to stop him.

The library lamps were lighted, and the fire replenished by Murray some minutes before burned brightly on the hearth. Noyes, his manner suggesting the host rather than a guest in the house, signed to Mitchell to draw up a chair, then glanced inquiringly at Thorne, and the detective hastened to introduce them.

"This is Dr. Beverly Thorne who is assisting me in my investigation of the murder of Mr. Bruce Brainard," he said, and the two men bowed. "Now, Dr. Noyes," as Thorne took a chair near at hand, "let's be brief. Why did you leave here Tuesday morning?"

"To catch the steamer *St. Louis*—but I reached New York too late."

"Humph!" The detective eyed him searchingly. "It is not on record that you tried to catch the steamer. I had the piers and booking-offices of the steamship companies watched."

"Did you?" Noyes' raised eyebrows expressed polite surprise. "Why?"

"Because I desired certain information," tartly. "Why did you leave here without bidding Mrs. Porter good-by, or the nurses?"

"I said good night to Mrs. Porter and her daughter on Monday night—they both were aware of my plans—as for the nurses, Mrs. Hall and Miss Deane, they had my written instructions and Dr. Washburn was to take over the case in my absence."

Mitchell looked at him steadfastly. "Then you claim that your departure on Tuesday morning was not on the spur of the moment?"

"I do."

Mitchell shot an inquiring glance at Thorne, who promptly joined in the conversation.

"I understand you were expecting a cable from England," he began. And Noyes turned instantly and gave him his full attention. "Did you receive that cable?"

"Yes."

"At what hour?"

"Let me see." Noyes thought a minute. "I imagine it was about twenty minutes of three Tuesday morning when I was called on the long-distance telephone and the cable message repeated to me."

"Twenty minutes of three"—Thorne did some rapid calculating, and when he spoke again his manner was grave. "It was at that hour or thereabouts that Deputy Coroner McPherson contends Brainard was murdered. Did you hear no sound from his room?"

"No," shortly. "I spent most of the night in this library, and this old house, with its thick brick walls, is sound-proof."

"Quite true," acknowledged Thorne, and his manner showed disappointment. "Too bad, doctor; I had hoped that you might give us some light on Brainard's death, as you were up and awake practically all night on Monday."

"There was one other person up, also—Miss Deane," volunteered Noyes, and Thorne's piercing eyes bored into him. "Even she, in the next room, heard no sound—while I was down here."

"How did you know Miss Deane never detected any sound in Brainard's bedroom?" demanded Mitchell swiftly.

"I read it in the newspapers."

"That brings me to another point." Mitchell bent forward in his chair in his eagerness. "You left here early Tuesday morning, ostensibly to catch the steamer *St. Louis*, which you say you missed—then where have you been staying since then, and how did you leave this country place early Tuesday morning without anyone seeing you, and get into Washington?"

"That is my affair, Mr. Mitchell, and I question your right to quiz me on the subject." Noyes' face hardened, and there was a glint of anger in his eyes.

"Here's my authority." Mitchell displayed his badge. "I'm in charge of this case, and I consider you a material witness, and as such you are amenable to

the law.”

“You forget I am a British subject.”

“That won’t prevent my getting legal authority through the State Department, if necessary, to summon you to court when this case goes to trial,” retorted Mitchell. “Take it from me, you can’t dodge the issue.”

“I am not striving to dodge it.” Noyes spoke with angry emphasis. “Surely, gentlemen, you are not striving to fasten the crime on me?”

Thorne, watching him intently, wondered at the almost fanatical light that leaped for an instant into Noyes’ deep sunken eyes, then died out as Mitchell responded.

“I am seeking information to clear up the mystery surrounding Brainard’s death,” he said roughly. “If it involves you, so much the worse—for you.”

“Tut! No threats are necessary,” broke in Thorne. “You go too far, Mitchell,” meeting the detective’s stony glare with composure. Then he turned courteously to Noyes. “You and Miss Deane are the only ones known to have been up and about this house on Monday night, between midnight and early morning; and we are seeking to learn from every source the identity of the third person who was also up and about—”

“A third person?” Noyes looked at him, startled. “What third person do you refer to?”

“The murderer,” dryly. “The quest sifts down to you and Miss Deane, doctor; Miss Deane has cleared herself of suspicion”—with emphasis—“while you —”

“Have not.” Noyes eyed his inquisitors with sharp intentness. “Kindly state your reasons for intimating that I killed a man whom I only met for the first time on Monday evening—barely ten hours before he was found murdered in his bed.”

“It’s a bit unusual to give reasons,” said Mitchell dubiously, but a nod from Thorne reassured him, and he continued, more quickly: “You admit you were up all night Monday, doctor; you disappeared early Tuesday morning without leaving word how or where you were going; you won’t tell us where you spent the past few days; and you haven’t told us what brings you back to this house today.”

“Surely, the fact of my voluntary return clears me of all suspicion,” argued Noyes heatedly.

“Not necessarily,” retorted Thorne. “Your actions lead us to suppose one of two motives inspired you to disappear so promptly Tuesday morning before the discovery of Brainard’s murder. Don’t interrupt,” as Noyes moved restlessly. “Either you were guilty or you were seeking to protect the guilty party.” Noyes sat rigidly in his chair, his expression blank as Thorne paused and scanned him narrowly. “Now, doctor, which is it?”

Thorne’s question did not receive an immediate response, and the detective assumed a self-congratulatory air as he waited for Noyes to speak, but Thorne, never taking his eyes from the Englishman, waited with concealed anxiety for his next words. They were slow in coming; apparently Noyes was feeling his way.

“Sifted down to bed-rock, you have nothing against me except an unavoidable absence of body at the time Brainard’s murder was discovered. My so-called ‘disappearance’ was but a coincidence,” said Noyes finally, and he looked at Thorne. “I understand you are a surgeon.”

“I am.”

“Then you must be aware that cutting a man’s throat is a difficult operation.” Noyes spoke slowly, impressively. “According to the newspaper accounts which I read, Brainard’s throat was cut from right to left, and that he was found lying on the right side of the bed; therefore, if such was the case, the wound must have been inflicted by a right-handed man.”

“Do you mean to claim as your defense that you are left-handed?” demanded Mitchell.

“No, not originally left-handed.” Noyes threw back the officer’s cape which he still wore, and disclosed an empty coat sleeve pinned across his chest. “I left my right arm on a battlefield of France,” he added.

There was a long silence broken by a scream from the hall. Springing to his feet Mitchell darted through the open door and down the hall, Noyes and Thorne at his heels. All three paused at sight of Millicent Porter on the lower step of the staircase.

“My papers!” she gasped. “Someone has stolen my papers!”

Noyes’ left arm supported her as she staggered and almost fell. Thorne, standing somewhat in the background, whistled low at sight of the Englishman’s expression as he bent above Millicent.

“So—the red herring across the trail,” he muttered below his breath, and started violently at finding Vera Deane at his elbow.

CHAPTER XIV

PRO AND CON

THE dining-room at Thornedale Lodge looked particularly cozy in the soft lamplight, and old black Cato, surveying the room, could not repress a smile of subdued gratification. He considered himself “one ob de fam’ly,” and it was doubtful if even Beverly Thorne had as great an affection for his ancestral home as did the old man who in his youth had been a slave on the Thorne plantation. Year in and year out he had worked on the place, being advanced from field hand to house servant in the early days following the Civil War, and when the fortunes of the Thornes were at the lowest ebb he had worked without wages so as to help “Old Miss” educate her boy, Beverly, and keep the homestead from going under the hammer. Illiterate, kindly, faithful, Cato epitomized the spirit of the old-style darky, to whose watchful care Southern men had not feared to leave their wives and children when they went to fight with Robert Lee.

Cato had been true to every trust reposed in him. In his humble hands Mrs. Thorne had left the farming of the few acres still remaining to the once large estate, and but for his “truck garden” she would have gone without many necessities. And when Mrs. Thorne grew older and more feeble, Cato, when crops were bad, did not hesitate to do odd “chores” for neighboring farmers, receiving in return poultry or fresh vegetables which would be served to Mrs. Thorne as only Cato knew how to cook them. But even these delicacies could not prolong Mrs. Thorne’s feeble hold on life, and Cato, bottling up his own sorrow, turned to his “young marster” with the same blind devotion which had characterized his affection for Colonel and Mrs. Thorne.

It was found on reading Mrs. Thorne’s will that a small legacy left by her husband, who had pre-deceased her by twenty years, had been carefully hoarded against the day when Beverly Thorne would be old enough to go to a medical college, and true to his promise to his mother he eventually entered Johns Hopkins University, and was graduated with honors; but the spirit of adventure, inherited from some doughty ancestor, had sent him far afield. In his absence Cato had acted as caretaker of the “lodge,” and when Beverly once again entered the house he had exclaimed with delight at finding every piece of furniture, every heirloom, valued by his mother, in its accustomed

place, and showing by its excellent condition the care lavished upon it by Cato.

Cato's pleasure in the cozy appearance of the dining-room was shared by Detective Mitchell, who even forgot his impatience to see Beverly Thorne as he examined the handsome animal heads and skins hung on the walls.

"Fine trophies," he commented. "I had no idea Dr. Thorne was such a sportsman."

"He didn't kill all de critters," acknowledged Cato. "Some has been in de fam'ly a long time, far's I can remember, an' dat's consid'able far."

"So you've been in the family a long time?" Mitchell looked at him shrewdly. "Remember the Civil War?"

"Jes' like it ware yesserday," promptly. "An' seein' yo' all a-peepin' an' a-peerin' at de Porter house makes me think ob when de 'rebs' an' de 'Yanks' uster camp out hyarabouts, an' I'd wake in de mawnin' an' find de Yanks hyar an' de nex' day dey'd vamoose, an' de rebs would come an' take what was lef' ob de fence rails ter make camp-fires."

"But they couldn't run off with that stone wall toward the river," remarked Mitchell. "Pity the wall didn't extend around the whole place and you wouldn't have had so much trouble. But perhaps the wall wasn't built in those days?"

"Oh, but 'twas. Ole Judge Porter, him dat was de gran'son ob de fust owner ob Dewdrop Inn, he had dat wall set dar ter cut off de ribber view, 'caise he hated de Thornes."

"But why?"

"'Caise his gran'mother jilted Colonel Thorne jes' de day befo' de weddin', to marry his gran'daddy."

"Do you mean to say seriously that that dead and gone romance is at the bottom of the present-day feud between the Thornes and the Porters?"

"I 'spect it are." Cato crossed the room and adjusted a rug to his taste. "Ain't nebber heard nuffin' else."

"And on the strength of that Mrs. Porter refuses to receive Dr. Thorne as a guest in her house," Mitchell laughed. "It doesn't seem possible in these enlightened days that people will nurse a grievance nearly a hundred years old. And apparently Mrs. Porter intends passing the feud to the next

generation, and keeping her daughter and Dr. Thorne at loggerheads.” Mitchell jingled the keys in his pocket. “It has all the atmosphere of a Montague and Capulet affair—except for the lack of romance.”

Old Cato scratched his bald head and the little tufts of wool still remaining, in perplexity.

“Dar’s a Montagu livin’ ’bout five miles from hyar, but I ain’t never heard tell ob no Capulets in de neighborhood. Was yo’ a-referrin’ to de Richard Montagu fam’ly?”

“No, no—only to an old play,” explained Mitchell, and seeing Cato’s mystified air, added, “It would have been like the play had Dr. Thorne and Miss Millicent Porter fallen in love and the families opposed the match; that is what I meant.”

“Yessir.” Cato brightened. “Dat was what Ole Miss uster wonder ’bout, when little Miss Milly uster slip ober hyar and eat hot gingerbread.”

Mitchell’s scrutiny was not noticed by Cato as he replaced articles on the mantelpiece. “Am I mistaken—is there a romance between Dr. Thorne and Miss Porter?” he asked.

“I doan know what yo’ mean by romance,” grumbled Cato. “Marse Beverly am mos’ twelve years older than Miss Milly; dey knowed each odder when chillen, an’ Marse Beverly made her whistles an’ things, an’ fo’ fear de old Judge Porter would fo’bid Miss Milly comin’ hyar to see Ole Miss we nebber tole no one.”

Cato had an attentive listener as he ambled on who forbore to hurry him. “Has the friendship between Miss Porter and Dr. Thorne kept up?” he inquired finally.

Cato’s face altered. “No, an’ I didn’t ’spect such treatment of Marse Beverly from Miss Milly,” he grumbled. “Now Marse Beverly’s back she ain’t never troubled ter recognize him on de road—an’ she set a store by his mother—I cain’t un’erstand these hyar women folk!”

“You are not alone in that,” answered Mitchell. “The police are puzzled by the behavior of Mrs. Porter and her daughter.”

“So I heard tell.” Cato’s tone was short; too late he repented of his garrulous confidences. In the pleasure of hearing his own voice he had forgotten that Mitchell was a detective. “I ’spects Marse Beverly won’t be back ’til nearly midnight; had yo’ better wait?”

"Surely, there's no hurry." And in proof of his words Mitchell selected a comfortable chair. "Where did you say your master had gone?"

"Didn't I tell yo' he'd gone to Washington?" Cato's manner waxed impatient, and Mitchell hastened to quiet him.

"So you did," he agreed. "But it seems to me that he ought to be back by now."

"Yo' cain't tell how dese hyar cyars is gwine ter run; sometimes Marse Beverly gets hyar right smart on time, an' ag'in he don't." Cato lugged out of his pocket an old-fashioned silver timepiece, rivaling a turnip in size, and his most prized possession. It had been the gift of Mrs. Thorne from among her heirlooms, and bore the inscription, "To our most trusted friend, Cato." The negro regarded the face of the watch solemnly as he counted off the time. "Most ten o'clock," he pronounced. "An' dar's Marse Beverly now," as the resounding bang of the front door echoed through the house. "I'll jes' tell him yo' am hyar."

But Cato's rheumatic limbs did not permit of rapid motion, and Thorne was halfway up the stairs before the negro's hail reached him.

"Mister Mitchell am hyar," announced Cato.

"Here?" Thorne paused. "Where?"

"In de dinin'-room, sah," stepping aside as Thorne descended the staircase and crossed the living-room. "He's been a-waitin' some time."

Thorne quickened his footsteps. "Hello, Mitchell, I'm very glad you had the patience to wait for me," he exclaimed on reaching the dining-room. "Cato, bring some Scotch and vichy. Make yourself comfortable, Mitchell."

"I've been doing that," laughed Mitchell. "Cato made me feel quite at home."

"Good." Thorne moved over to the dining-table as Cato, returning, placed a tray with siphon and bottle of Scotch whisky before him. "Say when—"

"Enough." Mitchell took the tall glass extended to him and filled it with vichy. "What are you Virginians going to do when your state goes 'bone dry'?"

"Endure it with other evils," dryly. "I wish the legislators would remember, before passing such stringent laws, that we are not all 'self-starters,' and dry dinners can be very dull."

"You speak feelingly. Was that your experience at dinner tonight?" asked Mitchell, observing that Thorne wore a dress suit.

“Yes.” Thorne pushed two chairs near the fireplace and produced a cigar box and ash trays. “What are the latest developments across the way?”

“Nothing later than the scene with Noyes this afternoon,” replied Mitchell. “Where’s that Englishman been hiding since the discovery of Brainard’s murder?”

Thorne did not speak until after lighting his cigar. “Are you quite sure that Noyes was hiding?”

“He must have been, for we sent out a general call to police headquarters throughout the country to look for him, and no trace of him has been reported. Also, doctor, no one has reported seeing him leave the Porter house Tuesday morning. How did he get to Washington? Where did he take the train for New York?”

Thorne stared thoughtfully at his highball and twirled the glass about several times before speaking.

“I don’t know that this has any bearing on the case,” he said. “But one of my patients told me today that an old country place in Maryland just across the river has been bought by an Englishman named Galbraith—my patient has seen Dr. Noyes and Galbraith motoring together and—Galbraith owns a motor power boat.”

“Oh!” Mitchell produced his memorandum book and made an entry in it. “I believe you’ve hit the trail, doctor,” he exclaimed a moment later. “I didn’t see Dr. Noyes again as, after reviving Miss Porter from her fainting spell, he went up to Craig Porter’s room, and Murray told me an hour ago that the doctor was still in the sick room and could not be called away.”

“I wish”—Thorne paused to knock the ash from his cigar—“I wish Dr. Noyes had delayed his return just one hour.”

“Why?”

“Because”—Thorne picked his words with care—“because I was called in by Mrs. Porter to attend her son, and I would have liked to have the case.”

Mitchell looked at him amusedly. “What, do you desire to pour coals of fire on Mrs. Porter’s head by curing her son, or”—his eyes twinkling as he scanned Thorne, whose air of distinction was enhanced by his well-cut evening clothes—“do you wish to have your hereditary enemy at your mercy?”

“Perhaps.” Thorne’s firm mouth relaxed into a warm, bright smile, which cloaked his abrupt change of subject. “Do you think that Noyes is implicated in Brainard’s murder?”

“I do and I don’t.” Mitchell settled back in his chair and crossed his legs. “First and foremost is his disappearance on Tuesday morning before the murder was discovered—”

“Before the murder was generally known,” put in Thorne, and Mitchell considered the suggestion gravely.

“Perhaps so,” he admitted, “but I don’t quite catch your drift,” looking inquisitively at Thorne who, however, remained silent, and Mitchell continued: “Noyes’ disappearance after the murder, his refusal to tell me where he spent the past few days, and why he has now returned to the Porter house all point to a desire for secrecy; and secrecy would indicate that he has some knowledge of the crime—if he is not the criminal himself.”

“The latter supposition I think you can dismiss,” remarked Thorne. “It was physically impossible for a one-armed man to cut Brainard’s throat.”

Mitchell did not answer at once, then pulled his chair closer to Thorne. “Were you aware until this afternoon in the Porter library that Noyes had lost his right arm?”

“No. I had never seen Noyes before.”

“But others who testified at the inquest had seen Noyes—why did they not mention that he had only one arm? Surely a rare enough condition to have made sufficient impression on his friends and the servants for them to have commented upon it at the inquest,” argued Mitchell. “In subsequent conversations, Mrs. Porter, the nurses, Miss Porter, never alluded to his having lost an arm. Why was that?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.” Thorne knitted his brows in thought. “It’s highly probable that they never imagined Noyes could be suspected of murdering Brainard, or they would have mentioned it to prove that he could not have killed him.”

“I don’t agree with your reasoning,” snapped Mitchell. “The loss of his arm was bound to have come up when the coroner was questioning the witnesses about the razor; any one of the servants even might casually have mentioned his infirmity. No, doctor, they didn’t allude to it because they were accustomed to his using *a false arm and hand*.”

"Upon my word!" Thorne sat back and contemplated the detective in surprise. "That's an ingenious theory."

"I'm sure I'm right," went on Mitchell, showing more than his usual animation as he warmed to the subject. "I was about to question Murray when Miss Dorothy Deane appeared and ordered me off the place—a message from Mrs. Porter, she said, and as Murray looked as if he was ready to back up his employer's orders, I retreated—until tomorrow. Now, doctor, you are aware of the ingenious steel and wooden limbs invented to take the place of arms and legs; they are marvels of mechanical skill, and one-armed surgeons using a false arm and hand have been known to perform the most delicate operations." Thorne nodded agreement. "Well, why couldn't Noyes have, with the aid of a false hand, cut Brainard's throat?"

"It is within possibility," admitted Thorne. "But the motive for the crime?"

The detective chuckled grimly. "In moments of stress or excitement men give themselves away. Did you observe Noyes' expression when Miss Porter fainted? You did; then there's the answer to your question."

"You mean—" Thorne tossed away his cigar stub. "You mean Noyes is in love with Millicent Porter?"

"I do," emphatically. "There's your motive, doctor—jealousy. Now, consider all the facts," catching sight of Thorne's dubious expression. "Miss Porter's engagement to Brainard was to be announced on Tuesday, but it leaked out at the dinner Monday night. Noyes may have had no idea that she was engaged to another man, and the news awakened a desire to be revenged on Brainard. It is possible that Miss Porter encouraged Noyes' attentions, and he lived in a fool's paradise. It's said, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' Well, my profession has taught me that men evince the same strong dislike to such treatment—and such motives frequently lead to murder."

"You are building up a specious case against Noyes," remarked Thorne. "But whether your conclusions rest on a firm foundation remains to be seen. Frankly, I was prepossessed in Noyes' favor this afternoon; he is a man evidently of deep feeling, and, judging by appearances, living under great strain." Thorne spoke more slowly. "Noyes is not the type of man to commit cold-blooded murder."

"Tut, doctor, murder is not confined to a type!" retorted Mitchell. "If it were we would have an easy time detecting criminals. And they don't go around labeled 'criminals' in real life any more than they do in fiction. It's generally

the least suspected person who is guilty in everyday life, and the clues are to be found in the victim's past."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Thorne. "Why not inquire into Brainard's past?"

"Jones has that in charge and I'm expecting a report daily," answered Mitchell. "I've learned everything there is to know concerning Brainard in Washington. He stood well in his profession, had some private means, and was counted a good fellow at the club, and was a great 'dinner man.'"

"The latter means nothing," commented Thorne cynically. "A suit of respectable evening clothes often covers a family skeleton in Washington society."

"In this instance I haven't heard the bones rattle," laughed Mitchell. "But it may be—" he paused abruptly. "That Deane girl bothers me."

Thorne's hand, outstretched to grasp his glass tumbler, remained poised in air. "She need not trouble you," he said, taking up the glass. "I've thought over our former conversation about her, Mitchell, very carefully, and have come to the conclusion that I was wrong." His gray eyes held his companion's gaze as his clear, resonant voice continued: "I believe that Miss Deane was not in Craig Porter's bedroom when Brainard was murdered in the room next to his."

"Where was she then?"

"Perhaps in her own bedroom or downstairs."

"Then why doesn't she say so?"

"Because by admitting that she left her patient she would lay herself open to dismissal for neglecting her professional duty."

Mitchell smiled skeptically. "Better be dismissed as an incompetent nurse than be charged with murder. But you jump to conclusions, doctor. I did not allude to Miss Vera Deane a moment ago, but to her sister, Dorothy."

"Dorothy!"

"Yes," continued Mitchell. "I went to the *Tribune* office this afternoon, and she had the effrontery to tell me that the article Miss Porter threw into the unused well on the side hill was nothing but a 'cut' of her photograph."

"Have you investigated the matter?"

“Sure. That old farmer, Montagu, told me of seeing Miss Porter drop something in the well yesterday; but I haven’t had time to examine the well today.”

Thorne rose and, walking over to the table in the window, pulled open its drawer. “Here’s the cut,” he announced, taking out a square piece of metal caked with mud. “Montagu also told me, and I searched the well this afternoon with his aid.”

Mitchell took the cut and gingerly turned it over. “So Dorothy Deane told the truth,” he muttered, “and got ‘fired’ for it.” And as Thorne glanced up in surprise he briefly recounted the scene in the newspaper office. At its conclusion he rose. “I’m glad to have had this talk with you, doctor.”

“Don’t go,” protested Thorne. “I can easily put you up for the night.”

“Thanks, but I must relieve Pope who is keeping his eye on the Porter house. Let me know if you see anyone up in the attic at the Porters’ tonight sending wireless messages.”

“All right, I will.” Thorne accompanied the detective into the living-room and assisted him into his overcoat. “Drop in tomorrow, Mitchell; I’m always glad to see you,” he said cordially.

“I’ll come, doctor; good night,” and Mitchell strode through the doorway and up the brick walk.

Thorne watched him out of sight, then closed the hall door and returned to the dining-room. He stopped to pull down the window shades, first taking an exhaustive look at the Porter mansion, whose dark windows showed indistinctly in the pale moonlight. Thorne next turned his attention to the neglected cut of Millicent Porter. Barely glancing at it, he flung it back in the drawer and walked over to the table and poured out another highball.

“To Vera!” he said aloud, holding up the glass, then lowered it without tasting its contents, while his eyes contracted with sudden pain. “Bah!” he ejaculated, and, replacing the glass on the tray, he stepped to the door and looked into the dark pantry.

“Cato,” he called, removing his coat, “Cato!”

CHAPTER XV

EDGED TOOLS

THE moonlight penetrated but feebly through the one small opening which did duty for a window of the lean-to, and its interior was a mass of shadows. Suddenly that point of light was obliterated as a dark cloth was pulled across the opening. There was a prolonged wait before the same fingers switched on an electric lamp supplied with current from a powerful dry battery, but the light was so arranged that it fell directly upon a table on which stood a photographer's outfit. A man, his face in shadow from a huge green eye-shade which he wore low on his brow, removed his hand from the electric switch. Taking up a piece of bond paper he felt its texture, and holding it up to the light he examined with minute attention the red and blue silk fiber running through the paper.

Laying down the paper he took out his wallet and drew out some money, and holding the spurious bill and the genuine bank note against the light he compared them closely, then a smile of triumph crossed his tightly compressed lips. It was next to impossible to distinguish between the two notes. Greatly elated, he straightened his weary back and looked about his workshop.

The cabin, for such it was, though to the casual observer it looked like only a lean-to of logs against the hillside, had but the one room which was fairly large, but owing to the numerous benches and tables and other articles it appeared smaller than it really was. At one side stood a printing-press, a metal rolling-machine, planchette cutting-machine, pump, two oil stoves, a plating outfit, and a double Turner torch, while a series of shelves held paints, oils, acids, brushes, and chemicals. Dumped in one corner were a lathe, a melting-pot, brazier, crucible and ladles, and on a nearby bench were scales, copper and zinc plates, dies, and molds.

The counterfeiter replaced the genuine money in his wallet and returned the latter to his pocket, then he moved over to a small safe and placed a handful of spurious bank notes inside it. He stood for a moment staring at the closed door of the safe, but he was in too excited a frame of mind to remain long idle, and walking over to a small cabinet he pulled out first one drawer and then another, arranging engraver's tools and other delicate instruments with

deft fingers. After that task was completed he turned his attention to the stone chimney and fireplace at the back of the cabin and banked the smoldering embers with ashes. Finally convinced that there was no danger of fire he drew out from the background large screens and arranged them in front of the homogeneous contents of the room. The screens were cleverly painted to resemble the bare walls of a log cabin, and once in position they caused the optical illusion, should any passer-by look through the window, of a deserted and empty cabin.

The counterfeiter, first concealing his green eye-shade behind one of the screens, switched off the electric light, and moving over to the window drew back the black cloth and concealed its presence by tucking it in a crevice in the log wall. A second later he was outside the cabin, and the faint click of the spring lock as he closed the door assured him that the latch had caught. He was inspecting the lock which chemicals had made old and dilapidated in appearance when a shadow obscured the moonlight shining on the door. The counterfeiter's hand closed over the butt of a revolver inside his overcoat pocket, but before he caught sight of the newcomer a subdued but familiar voice reassured him, and his chilled blood coursed through his veins.

"I'se late, but I'se hyar, sah."

"So I see, Cato, but come out of the moonlight." And he pulled the old servant into the shelter of the woods. "What news?"

"Ain't none," tersely; the climb up the hillside had been both steep and hard, and the old negro was short of breath. The stillness remained unbroken for several minutes except for the hoot of a screech owl, at which the negro jumped nervously, then seeing that his companion had started down the hillside he made what speed he could after him. They were skirting the hedge which marked the southern boundary of Thornedale when a hand was laid on Cato's shoulder.

"Go home, Cato," directed the counterfeiter. "Don't wait for me tonight, I'll be along presently."

"Yessir," promised Cato, peering cautiously at him. "Yo' am sure—" An impatient nod checked Cato, and he thankfully withdrew, making his way to Thornedale with infinite caution. The counterfeiter watched him until he was lost from sight in the grove of trees about the house, then turned his attention to the Porter mansion. But his wary progress in that direction was checked by the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps, and he had but time to sink down

behind the friendly hedge when a figure loomed ahead silhouetted against the skyline in the moonlight.

“Eleven, twelve,” chimed the hall clock, and the sound carried through the open door of Craig Porter’s bedroom to Dr. Alan Noyes sitting by the paralytic’s bedside. Noyes looked up and rose as Vera Deane came over to the bed.

“Mr. Porter responds quickly to medicine,” he said, keeping his voice low-pitched. “And he has at last fallen asleep. I think we may safely believe that his relapse of this afternoon was but temporary.”

“Thank God for that—his poor mother!” Vera spoke with deep feeling. “I am afraid she will be our next patient, doctor.”

Noyes looked grave. “Mrs. Porter has had a trying year; anxiety for her son, Monday’s tragedy—” His gesture was eloquent. “Try and humor her as much as you can, Miss Deane; her frayed nerves won’t stand opposition.” He took an undecided step across the room. “Mr. Porter is so much improved that I will go and lie down. Call me at once should Mr. Porter awaken and any alarming symptoms appear.”

“Very well, doctor.” Vera’s eyes strayed from his haggard face to his empty coat sleeve, and with difficulty she controlled all evidence of curiosity. Before he reached the door she again spoke to him: “Are you occupying your same room?” she asked.

Noyes looked his impatience. “Yes, I am,” he said, and his manner was far from gracious. “Good night, Miss Deane.”

“Good night, sir,” and Vera closed the hall door.

Everything had been arranged in the sick room for the night, and Vera selected a chair farthest from the night light and near her patient, and prepared for a long vigil. But while she continued to gaze steadily at Craig Porter, every sense alive to catch his need of careful nursing, she could not center her thoughts on her patient.

Slowly she reviewed the happenings of the day—her meeting with Beverly Thorne; his possession of the black-edged card. Was it mere chance, Fate or Fury which had entwined their paths? Could she place dependence upon

Thorne? Her heart beat more swiftly and a vivid blush dyed her cheeks as recollection rose of the message his eyes conveyed as they stood together at Diamond Rock barely eight hours before. Pshaw! she was not impressionable, like Dorothy and Millicent—and experience had taught her something of man’s duplicity.

Vera blinked violently, and leaned over to smooth out an infinitesimal wrinkle from the white sheet. Craig Porter had not awakened, and she forced thoughts of Beverly Thorne out of her mind and instead endeavored to recall her scene with Mrs. Porter in the library. As she remembered the expression in the older woman’s eyes when she had asked, “Who in this household would have a motive for killing Bruce Brainard?” Vera turned cold. Why had she not obliged Mrs. Porter to give a direct answer to her own question—at least she would have had her suspicions either confirmed or denied; any alternative would have been preferable to the intolerable suspense she was enduring.

She passed a hand before her eyes, and her thoughts took a new trend. What had brought Alan Noyes back to the Porters’ when he— The opening of the hall door abruptly terminated her troubled reflections, and she rose as Mrs. Porter entered the room.

Without speaking Mrs. Porter tiptoed over to the bed and gazed long and earnestly at her son.

“Is he really asleep?” she whispered.

“Yes, Mrs. Porter. Won’t you take my chair?” placing it for her.

Mrs. Porter seated herself, drawing Vera down to sit on the arm in order that she might speak confidentially and not raise her voice.

“I can do nothing with Millicent,” she said wearily. “Arguments, commands, are of no avail; she will not go to bed, will not even slip on her wrapper and lie down on the lounge. She declares that she cannot sleep, that she must have ‘air, air.’” Mrs. Porter pushed her hair off her forehead. “She even threatens to go for a walk.”

“At this hour?”

“Yes. I thought of sending for your sister to quiet her, but concluded to come for you. Your nursing experience can decide if she needs a sedative.”

“Shall I call Dr. Noyes to attend her?”

“No.” Mrs. Porter’s mouth closed obstinately. “Except that her manner is a trifle wild and her cheeks unduly flushed, Millicent seems rational. You have

great influence with her, Vera; go and quiet her.”

“But I cannot leave your son.”

“Yes, you can; I will stay here until you return.” Mrs. Porter spoke authoritatively and Vera hesitated, Noyes’ caution of the moment before recurring to her; he had told her that Mrs. Porter should be humored, and there was nothing for her to do but obey his instructions. She looked again at Craig Porter, whose closed eyes and regular breathing indicated that his sleep was uninterrupted. If Millicent did require medical attendance she could summon Dr. Noyes and Mrs. Hall, and return to her regular duties. A thought occurred to her, and she turned back to Mrs. Porter.

“Would you like me to call Mrs. Hall?”

“Mercy, no!” Mrs. Porter frowned; she objected to suggestions, no matter how well meant they were. “Go at once, Vera, I do not like to leave Millicent alone for any length of time. She is sitting in the boudoir.”

With a last look at her patient, Vera left the room and sought the boudoir; it was empty. She went at once to Millicent’s bedroom and, her gentle tap getting no response, she opened the door and went in. Millicent was not there, and, somewhat perplexed, Vera looked into the communicating dressing-room and from there passed into her sister’s bedroom. Dorothy was lying asleep on the bed, her gas-light turned low, but as Vera bent over her she saw traces of recent tears on her pale cheeks and forbore to wake her.

Returning to the hall she stood debating as to whether to report to Mrs. Porter or continue her search for Millicent on the first floor. She decided to go back to Mrs. Porter, but as she paused in front of the door of Craig Porter’s bedroom a faint noise caused her to look hastily down the hall just as Millicent emerged from the attic stairs and disappeared down the back staircase. The acetylene lights at either end of the long hall were burning dimly, as Mrs. Porter deemed it unsafe to keep the house in darkness, and Vera saw that Millicent was enveloped in some sort of a cloak.

Considerably perturbed, Vera hesitated, but only for a moment; then she sped after Millicent. Mrs. Porter was on guard in the sick room, and she had sent her to look after her daughter. If Millicent, in a moment of delirium perhaps, attempted to walk abroad at that hour of the night she must be reasoned with and stopped.

Vera’s disturbed ideas took form as she dashed downstairs, the sound of her approach deadened by her rubber-soled shoes. She was halfway down the

circular staircase when she saw Millicent fumbling with the lock, by aid of the moonlight streaming through the fanlight over the side door. The clang of the night chain when Millicent unhooked it drowned Vera's low-voiced call, and, snatching up a small bundle which she had placed on a console, Millicent darted out into the night. Her foot turned just as she was about to descend the few steps leading to the graveled path, and only her outflung hand saved her from a nasty fall. Recovering herself and never glancing behind her, she hastened up the path, being careful, however, to tread only on the turf.

Vera, unmindful of the chill wind and her coatless condition, paused only long enough to close the door, then hurried after Millicent. She had taken but a few steps beyond the house when her foot struck against something which whizzed ahead of her, and she caught the glint of moonlight on metal. Catching up with the small object, she stooped over and picked it up. It was a razor.

Vera's heart beat with suffocating rapidity as she tore ahead. What fresh tragedy was impending? To her dismay she saw Millicent was gaining ground. What use to call—no one was near—and she needed every ounce of breath to overtake the flying figure. Millicent kept a fairly straight course, then, darting among a clump of laurel bushes, disappeared from view, but only for a moment, as Vera, circling the bushes, caught sight of her cutting across fields toward Thornedale, but instead of continuing her approach to the low, rambling hunting lodge, she doubled on her tracks and half slid down a steep embankment.

Vera, hampered by her unfamiliarity with the ground, was some minutes later in reaching the top of the embankment, and she halted abruptly on seeing Millicent, no sign of her recent haste discernible, seated at the bottom of the embankment, apparently resting at her ease. Shifting clouds temporarily obscured the moon, and Vera waited expectantly before attempting the descent, dropping to her knees behind a cluster of shrubs as she decided to call and ask Millicent to wait for her. But her intentions received a check as a figure turned the corner of the winding highway, and a voice addressed Millicent.

"Who is here?" The next instant an electric pocket torch played across her face, then flickered out as Hugh Wyndham exclaimed in deep astonishment, "Millicent!"

His cousin threw out her hand as if to ward off the censure she felt coming.

“The house was stifling, Hugh,” she explained hurriedly. “I simply had to come out,” rising. “I’ll walk back with you. My head feels better already.”

Wyndham gazed at her in undisguised concern. “I wish I had known—” he began, and broke off. “Come, Millicent.” And slipping his arm inside hers, he led her with gentle determination in the direction of her house. Vera, greatly relieved at having Wyndham take charge of his cousin, was about to rise from her cramped position and follow them, when the razor, which she still clutched, slipped from her grasp and slid down the embankment. Instinctively she reached for it, lost her balance and went plunging down to the roadway. In an instant she was on her feet, the razor once again in hand, and she started forward but, confused by her tumble, she did not realize that she was headed in the wrong direction until she had taken several steps.



“Hush!” he whispered. “No noise. Look — —”

As she paused she became aware that someone was approaching swiftly down the road, and suddenly awakening to the fact that Millicent and Wyndham were out of sight in the opposite direction, and that it must be long after

midnight, she made a few hesitating steps toward a hedge and stopped irresolutely; there was no reason why she should run away. She held up the razor and the sight of the burnished steel in the light from the moon, which had come from behind the obscuring clouds, reassured her. She was not without protection, but a sudden doubt assailed her; how was she to account for the possession of the razor? Millicent might have dropped it in her flight from the house—but why had Millicent carried a razor—it was a toilet article not usually possessed by women. Could it be that Millicent was striving to get rid of the razor surreptitiously? The police were still searching for the set of razors from which had been taken the razor used to kill Bruce Brainard—

Vera's arm was raised to fling the razor far from her when a hand was clapped over her mouth and she was pulled down in the shadow of the hedge bordering the road. Her startled eyes looked straight at Beverly Thorne.

"Hush!" he whispered. "No noise. Look!"

And following his pointing finger Vera saw a man run across the opposite field, vault the fence and hurry down the road. He was entirely out of sight before Thorne removed his hand from Vera's shoulder, and, rising, he helped her up.

"Come," he said, and in silence accompanied her to the Porter mansion.

Vera, her ideas too chaotic for utterance, detained him at the side door. "Who was the man we saw run up the road?" she asked. "His figure looked familiar, but I did not get a clear view of his face."

"It was Detective Mitchell," responded Thorne softly, lifting his cap. "Good night."

Not until she was safely inside the Porter mansion did Vera remember the razor—she gazed blankly at her empty hands. Had she dropped the razor in her excitement or—had Beverly Thorne taken it from her?

CHAPTER XVI

HARE AND HOUNDS

WYNDHAM, taking no precautions to walk lightly, tramped down the hall oblivious of the bright sunshine which streamed through the windows, whistling dismally below his breath. As he came abreast of his cousin's bedroom the door, which stood partly ajar, was opened fully and Mrs. Hall stepped into the corridor, a finger to her lip. Wyndham halted abruptly.

"Is anything the matter?" he questioned, alarmed by her manner.

"Miss Porter has been given a sedative," she said, closing the bedroom door softly. "The slightest noise—your whistling—"

"Oh, I beg pardon," in deep contrition. "I was not aware—is she seriously ill?"

"A trifle feverish." Mrs. Hall glanced at him doubtfully, looked away, then bowed and laid her hand on the knob of the bedroom door, but Wyndham, quick to catch her expression, checked her by an imperative gesture.

"You wish to ask me something?"

All hesitancy vanished as Mrs. Hall met his steadfast regard and came unconsciously under the influence of his friendly smile. "Your cousin," she began, "your cousin in her delirium begged me to find out if she had hidden them safely."

Wyndham stared at her. "Hidden what?"

"She never said, but repeated over and over that she wished me to go and see if she had hidden them safely." Mrs. Hall moved nearer, and lowered her voice. "I trust Miss Porter will be normal when she awakens. I had to use physical strength to prevent her from going out to see 'if she had hidden them safely.'"

Wyndham failed to catch her furtive glance as he stood considering her words. He roused himself with an effort. "I have no idea to what my cousin alludes," he said, and his glance sharpened. "How is your other patient this morning?"

"Mr. Porter is about the same." Mrs. Hall grew grave. "Dr. Noyes is with him until Miss Deane awakens from her nap. She has volunteered to do double

duty.”

“I see; let me know if I can be of assistance in taking care of Craig,” said Wyndham, and, bowing, he went downstairs.

Mrs. Hall did not at once re-enter Millicent’s bedroom, but when she did her expression was not pleasant.

Wyndham was not noted for patience at any time, and when he strode into the dining-room his manner showed his frame of mind. He had a vanishing view of the butler, Selby, carrying a tray upstairs, but Murray’s non-appearance after he had repeatedly rung the bell added to his irritation. Jerking back his chair he pushed open the swing door.

“Murray!” he roared, and his voice carried through the pantry and into the kitchen beyond.

“Coming, sir, coming,” and the footman followed his words with such precipitancy that he almost collided with Wyndham. “Beg pardon, sir, for keeping you waiting, but cook felt fainty-like, and I was just helpin’ the maids give her some pneumonia.”

“Too bad!” Wyndham, concealing a smile, resumed his seat. “I hope she feels better.”

“Yes, sir, thank you. Your breakfast is being kept warm for you; shall I bring it in?”

A nod sufficed in answer as Wyndham spied the morning newspaper, and paying no further attention to the footman he turned sheet after sheet with feverish haste. With little to feed upon, excitement about the Brainard murder had abated, and the column devoted to it had been relegated to the third page. The reporter assigned to the case had evidently had difficulty in finding a new angle in handling the mystery, and had devoted his energies to concocting an ingenious résumé. But one paragraph near the bottom of the column riveted Wyndham’s attention.

Detective Mitchell, when interviewed last night, confirmed the report that events in the career of Bruce Brainard before he came to Washington were being investigated, and a thorough search made into the dead man’s private affairs. Brainard was a self-made man, and while a student at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, N. Y., he spent his summer vacations working as private secretary to the Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington. Brainard afterward made a name for

himself in his profession, and was one of the recognized high-salaried consulting engineers of this country.

All efforts to establish the ownership of the razor used to kill Brainard have been unproductive of result. The detectives claim the razor is one of a set, but where and by whom the other razors of the set have been hidden in the Porter homestead is a mystery.

"Deviled kidney, sir," prompted Murray, presenting a piping hot dish, and Wyndham, with a thoughtful air, laid down the newspaper and commenced his breakfast.

"Where is Mrs. Porter?" he inquired presently.

"Breakfasting upstairs, sir." Murray, who had brought in a fresh supply of coffee, hastened to fill Wyndham's empty cup. "Selby is serving her and Miss Dorothy in the boudoir. Have another muffin, sir?"

As Wyndham attacked his third muffin with unabated appetite, Dorothy Deane strolled into the dining-room, and he rose to place a chair for her, his face brightening at her entrance.

"It was very unkind of you not to wait and have breakfast with me," he said reproachfully, as she declined Murray's offer of a cup of hot coffee.

"Mrs. Porter asked me to stay with her. I only ran down thinking that Vera might be getting her breakfast."

Wyndham looked as hurt as he felt. "I am sorry—" he said stiffly.

Impulsively Dorothy extended her hand and he clasped it eagerly, and Murray, his solemn countenance relieved by a sympathetic smile, discreetly vanished.

"Don't," she pleaded brokenly, "don't find fault with me. I—I can't stand it from you."

Wyndham saw that her eyes were brimming with tears. The next instant she was in his arms, and as he caught the passionate light in her eyes his heart swelled with thanksgiving, the irresistible force of love had conquered the constraint growing between them. But his moment of rejoicing was short lived as, regaining some semblance of composure, she quietly unclasped his hands and rose.

"We are both mad, Hugh," she said, with a pitiful attempt at a smile. "Under existing circumstances we cannot be married."

“Why not?” hotly, with honest worship in his eyes. “I see no barrier, except of your imagining.”

She recoiled. “Hush, Hugh! I cannot discuss it—it’s too near, too dreadful—” She covered her eyes and so missed the look he shot at her.

Without a word he turned and paced agitatedly up and down the room, coming at last to a full stop beside her. “Very well, if you wish it I will not allude to past events.” His voice was so changed that she looked at him in quick alarm. “But you must understand, Dorothy, that your love is to me more than all the world; that I have never ceased to love you.”

She moved impulsively toward him, then checked herself, her eyes downcast; she dared not look at him or her resolution would have given way.

“Finish your breakfast,” she said in a voice which quivered in spite of her endeavor to keep it calm; she was very near to tears. “Are you going to Washington this morning?”

“No.” He accepted her effort to make the conversation impersonal with marked displeasure, then, thinking better of his ungracious monosyllable, he added hastily, “Is there anything I can do for you in town?”

“There is nothing, thanks,” she said drearily, and looked past him through one of the windows in time to see Dr. Alan Noyes walking swiftly along the path which circled the house. Dorothy watched Noyes out of sight, then turned back to Wyndham, her eyes dark with wonder.

“Hugh,” she almost whispered her words, and he bent eagerly nearer, “why has Alan Noyes discontinued wearing his false arm?”

He did not reply at once, and she remarked his silence, but before she could repeat her question he addressed her.

“I cannot imagine,” he admitted. “It is a move likely to turn suspicion toward him, and it will not lessen the conviction that he is perhaps responsible for Brainard’s murder.”

“Why?”

“Because without the arm he could not have committed the crime; therefore, if he is guilty the first thing he would do would be to get rid of the arm—if innocent he would have continued to use it.”

“But his motive?” Dorothy frowned in perplexity. “The only person he might protect by such a subterfuge never murdered Bruce Brainard.”

Wyndham studied her intently as he drew a degree closer. "Are you so very positive you know who really is guilty?" he questioned, with peculiar intonation; the look she flashed at him was her only answer, for Mrs. Porter's entrance put an effectual end to the tête-à-tête.

"Good morning, Hugh," she said, returning her nephew's kiss with warmth. Pad and pencil in hand, she was on her way to make her weekly inventory of household supplies, a habit clung to as year succeeded year, and never delegated to the most trusted servant. She seldom permitted circumstances to alter the daily routine. "Dorothy, will you be here all day?"

"Yes, Mrs. Porter; this is my day off from the *Tribune*."

With a relieved air Mrs. Porter walked toward the pantry. "Will you stay upstairs with Millicent, Dorothy, until I return?" she asked. "Mrs. Hall is still with her, but—" Mrs. Porter let the swing door close and beckoned her nephew and Dorothy to come nearer. "I am dissatisfied with Mrs. Hall," she went on in an undertone. "In the last week her manner to me is totally altered —"

"Perhaps she resents your fondness for Vera," suggested Wyndham, as Dorothy made no remark. "Professional jealousy may account for any peculiarity of manner."

"That is possible," acknowledged Mrs. Porter. "She is an excellent nurse, and until lately has been eminently satisfactory. I shall be greatly obliged, Dorothy, if you will go at once to Millicent and stay with her until I return." And, not waiting for an answer, she entered the pantry. Wyndham accompanied Dorothy into the hall and strove by an appealing gesture to detain her for a few more words.

"I really can't stop," she protested, as he imprisoned her hand. "Mrs. Porter is frightened about Millicent—and yet, Mrs. Hall told me it was only a feverish cold, and that while she was running a temperature, she was not seriously ill. What induced Millicent to go for a walk in the grounds after midnight?" Getting no response, she added nervously, "What was her object?"

"Her object?" Wyndham's thoughts turned reluctantly from Dorothy to what she was saying. "Oh, Millicent told me the house was stuffy and that she had a headache and needed air."

"Is that all?" Dorothy's relief was manifest. "She came into my room on her return and awoke me. When I questioned her as to where she had been her manner was so mysterious that I concluded she was hiding something."

“Hiding something?” repeated Wyndham mechanically, as Mrs. Hall’s words recurred to him; Millicent in delirium stated that she had “hidden something”—could that something be the extra razors which the enterprising reporter in the morning newspaper hinted were secreted somewhere about the Porter homestead? The thought was startling.

In his preoccupation Wyndham hardly noticed that Dorothy had freed her hand and run up the staircase. He stared in front of him in deep thought for several minutes, then, his decision taken, he picked up his cane and hat and went outdoors.

Wyndham was totally unconscious of the beauty of the morning as he strode along, retracing the path by which he and Millicent had returned after their meeting at the foot of the embankment early that morning. Upon reaching the highway he kept to the public road, and as he approached the embankment he saw a man, at some distance beyond the point for which he was aiming, emerge from a break in the hedge separating Thornedale from the public road, and walk rapidly toward the embankment. Drawing closer to the newcomer Wyndham recognized Beverly Thorne and instinctively quickened his pace, and the two men arrived simultaneously at the embankment.

With a curt bob of his head and a mumbled “Good morning,” Wyndham made as if to continue his walk down the road, but turning his head quickly he saw Thorne had stopped and was carelessly swinging his riding crop up and down and thereby creating havoc in the creeping myrtle which covered the space between the road and the embankment.

Wyndham wheeled about and was by Thorne’s side in an instant. Suppose the surgeon inadvertently chanced upon Millicent’s hiding-place—for that his theory was right Wyndham had come to believe in his walk to the embankment. How Millicent had ever acquired possession of the razors could be investigated later; at the moment it was his business to prevent others, particularly Thorne, who must be familiar with that section of his land, from stumbling upon any evidence which might incriminate—

“Have a cigarette, Thorne,” he said, hastily producing his silver case. “Great day, isn’t it?”

Thorne eyed him in surprise, then, concealing a faint hesitancy, accepted a cigarette and also a proffered match. “Much obliged,” he said politely. “How is your cousin, Mr. Porter, this morning?”

“Better, much better.” Wyndham was watching his companion narrowly; he had only exchanged a few words with him on the few occasions they had met. “My aunt appreciated your coming so promptly in response to her message, and we were both sorry to put you to the trouble—”

“It was no trouble,” replied Thorne brusquely; sensitive as he was to his neighbors’ dislike of him, he was quick to resent what he construed to be a touch of patronage in Wyndham’s manner.

An awkward pause followed as each man waited for the other to walk on. Wyndham was a poor hand at manufacturing small talk; he did not care to discuss with anyone whom Mrs. Porter disliked intensely the happenings of the week, yet Bruce Brainard’s murder and its attendant mystery were uppermost in his mind, and he could think of nothing else to speak about. Thorne, watching him closely, embarrassed him still further by remaining obstinately silent. They could not stand by the roadside contemplating each other for the remainder of the morning, but Wyndham was determined not to leave until Thorne did.

“Suppose we sit down,” suggested Thorne finally. “We might as well be comfortable while enjoying good cigarettes.” And he threw himself on the ground and lolled back against the embankment.

Wyndham reluctantly followed suit. He was in a fever of impatience to test out his theory; had Millicent really secreted the razors in the old place in which as a child she had hidden her toys? He could not start his investigations until it pleased Thorne to depart.

Three minutes, five minutes passed, and Wyndham regarded the wireless apparatus on the Porter house in glum silence, determined not to speak first, but a sudden rustling of the myrtle leaves by his side attracted his attention and he discovered Thorne running his riding crop in and out among the myrtle. Wyndham’s slight grip on self-control vanished utterly, and, disdaining subterfuge, he slipped his walking stick under the leaves and instantly the two pieces of wood knocked together and clung, almost like rapiers feeling the strength of opponents before making a deadly thrust. Suddenly the frail cane snapped and Wyndham withdrew the bit he still held.

“Sorry,” said Thorne coolly. “Let me look for the other end of your stick.”

“Don’t bother.” Wyndham’s utterance was husky with anger. “The loss of the stick is no matter, but—” He stopped short as Detective Mitchell came up to

them; both he and Thorne had been too intent upon watching each other to notice his approach.

Mitchell's sense of humor was highly entertained by the tableau before him; for Thorne and Wyndham both looked heated and displeased in spite of their efforts to maintain an attitude of calm indifference. The detective could understand their quarreling, but why they sat by the roadside, resting lazily back against an embankment at some distance from each other, and each presenting the appearance of having used physical exertion, was beyond him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, looking from one to the other.

"Smoking," responded Wyndham; he did not relish the detective's presence. "Have one?" extending his depleted case, and Mitchell accepted a cigarette. He took his time lighting it, while covertly watching the two men, and his interest deepened as he saw Thorne's hands moving apparently aimlessly through the myrtle leaves. A look at Wyndham showed him doing the same thing.

"What are you searching for, Mr. Wyndham?" he asked.

"I dropped my last match," was the reply, and Wyndham leaned to one side and felt about the ground.

"Here's my box—catch!" Thorne, taking it from his pocket, tossed it to Wyndham. The match box fell squarely before Wyndham, and he picked it up with a word of thanks and relit his cigarette, then returned the box, and gave his full attention to Mitchell.

"What news this morning, Mitchell?" he inquired.

Mitchell took his own time in answering as he puffed smoke rings with a contented air.

"Commonwealth Attorney Wood has issued a warrant for Dr. Alan Noyes, and the sheriff has just gone to serve it."

"What!" Wyndham was on his feet instantly, his face white and startled. "It is a monstrous miscarriage of justice. Noyes is no more guilty of Brainard's death than you are, Mitchell."

"He will have ample opportunity to prove his innocence," replied Mitchell. "The preliminary hearing will be held before Judge Ball this morning."

"On what do you base such an accusation?" demanded Wyndham, for the moment forgetting to keep up his espionage of Thorne.

"I cannot disclose details," Mitchell's chin looked aggressive. "Dr. Noyes may give bond in answer to the warrant, and waive examination until the next term of court."

"Give bond!" Wyndham started. "By Jove! I had better return home; Noyes will need me to go on his bond. See you later, Mitchell," and he stepped back into the road, then hesitated, his glance traveling to Thorne who sat gazing straight ahead of him. He was leaving Thorne in possession of the embankment.

Mitchell was about to call to Wyndham to wait for him when he suddenly recollected a message intrusted to his care.

"Your old servant, Cato, is looking for you, Dr. Thorne; and he asked me to tell you if we met that Philadelphia wants you on the long-distance telephone."

Thorne was on his feet instantly. "Why didn't you tell me that at once?" he began heatedly, then forgetting all else he hurried back to Thorndale. A second later Mitchell was alone, for, not pausing to exchange further remarks, Wyndham was beating a quick retreat to the Porter mansion. Mitchell smiled grimly.

"There's not much love lost between Thorne and Wyndham," he muttered. "Therefore it's surprising that they sat here in positions which would seem to indicate amicable conversation. And what were they striving to find in this neighborhood without the other's knowledge?" Mitchell scratched his head in his perplexity. "And why did they leave me here?" He considered the question, then brightened. "It's because I'm a stranger in this locality and they imagine I won't know what to look for."

Mitchell made certain that Thorne had really returned to his home, then facing about he saw Wyndham moving swiftly across fields toward the Porter mansion. Losing no further time he knelt down and felt about under the myrtle leaves near where Thorne and Wyndham had sat. But his search only produced dirty hands, and mumbling an uncomplimentary adjective about the two men, Mitchell moved a few steps down the road to where the roadside, skirting the embankment, widened and hollowed out. The creeping myrtle grew there in profusion, and Mitchell stooped down every other second, as he moved slowly along, to feel about the ground. At the last attempt his hand encountered cold iron, and he dropped down on his knees and, drawing aside the leaves and vines, saw an old cannon lying on its side in the hollow. It was small and of obsolete pattern. It had sunk partly into the ground and was not

visible unless searched for, as the myrtle leaves made an effective screen. The detective studied the cannon for several minutes, then an idea occurred to him and he plunged his hand down its muzzle. His fingers closed on a bundle, and dragging it forth he unfolded a large silk handkerchief—a glittering array of razors confronted him.

Mitchell squatted down and examined his prize—it was a razor set of finest steel. He paused to count each razor.

“Only five here,” he said aloud. “Each razor bears the day of the week,” looking at the tiny lettering on the back of the blade. “‘Friday’ is missing and”—turning them over—“‘Monday.’”

Laying down the set of razors, Mitchell drew from his pocket the razor found on the bed near Brainard’s dead body. It bore the inscription “Monday,” and by its make and shape was the missing razor from the set. Mitchell looked at it as if hypnotized.

“Which one, Thorne or Wyndham, secreted these razors in the cannon?” he said. “They were both searching for something on this spot. Am I running with the hare as well as with the hounds?”

CHAPTER XVII

VERA RECEIVES A LETTER

AFTER leaving Detective Mitchell, Wyndham's walk increased into a run as soon as he turned a curve in the road, but before reaching Dewdrop Inn he slackened his pace and it was with bowed head and slow step that he entered the house. Entirely ignoring Murray's efforts to help him off with his overcoat, he brushed by the footman and entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Porter's voice, raised in angry expostulation, drowned the sound of his approach, and he stood almost at the sheriff's elbow before that official became aware of his presence. Sheriff Nichols, who had met him several times at the county court house, greeted him cordially.

"How are you, Mr. Wyndham?" he said, relieved by having someone besides an irate woman to argue with. "I'm trying to explain to Mrs. Porter that Dr. Noyes must come along with me, and she won't listen to reason, nohow."

"Reason? What reason is there in arresting an innocent man?" fumed Mrs. Porter. "Besides," a gleam of hope lighting her eyes, "Dr. Noyes is not a citizen of the United States, but an Englishman."

"Well, ma'am, that doesn't give him the right to come over here and murder law-abiding citizens," retorted the sheriff bluntly. "No, he's amenable to the law."

"I have not claimed otherwise," exclaimed Noyes; he had been standing somewhat in the background. Moving forward he laid a persuasive hand on Mrs. Porter's arm. "Do not worry; I can prove my innocence when brought to trial."

"But to subject you to such treatment!" wailed Mrs. Porter, her composure showing signs of giving way under the stress of her feelings. "And Craig—what of him? Is my son to die because you insist on taking his physician to jail?" addressing the harassed sheriff.

"Law, ma'am, there're plenty good American doctors." But the sheriff's well-meant suggestion brought no consolation.

"They don't understand Craig's case. Secondly," frigidly, "I don't place any faith in country doctors."

“Call in Bev. Thorne, he only came back recently from city practice, and”—brightening—“he’s just across lots; ’most as handy as having him in the house.”

Mrs. Porter’s face was a study. “I shall never permit Dr. Thorne to treat my son,” she announced, in her excitement utterly forgetting that she had sent for Thorne the night before. “He is personally distasteful to me, and I have no confidence in his ability. I tell you, sheriff, by taking away Dr. Noyes you will be directly responsible for my son’s death.”

The sheriff moved uneasily. “Duty’s duty, ma’am,” he mumbled. “And,” suddenly suspicious, “I heard as how Mr. Craig was a great deal better.”

“He was”—Mrs. Porter wrung her hands, and the anguish in her eyes stirred a responsive chord in the sheriff’s breast; he had lost a son—“but Craig has had a relapse. Oh, my God! Why did Bruce Brainard ever come to this house!”

“Hush, aunt!” Wyndham shook her elbow slightly, and as she met his warning gaze she pulled herself together. “I will go bail for Dr. Noyes, sheriff; and he will stay with us until the next term of court.”

Sheriff Nichols looked dubious. “Well, come along with us to the court,” he directed. “I reckon perhaps the judge will accept your bond; but it’s sure to be a pretty stiff one.”

“I will sign the bond also,” put in Mrs. Porter swiftly. “I beg of you, sheriff, to hurry through the legal formalities and permit Dr. Noyes to return.”

“Sure I will, if the judge permits.” The sheriff backed toward the door. “Come along, doctor, and get your grip, we might as well tote it with us; save a return trip in case the judge decides against the bond.” He turned to bow to Mrs. Porter and walked into the hall.

Noyes led the way upstairs and paused outside his door. “Will you lend me your suitcase, Wyndham?” he asked. “I didn’t bring mine back with me yesterday.”

“Certainly.” And Wyndham hurried down the hall as Noyes and Sheriff Nichols entered the former’s bedroom. It was a large bright room, and as the surgeon moved backward and forward between his bureau and his bed carrying underclothes piece by piece the sheriff took in his surroundings in a comprehensive glance, then walked over to the bureau and pushed Noyes gently to one side.

"Sit over there, son," he explained. "A man with one arm ain't got no business trying to sort clothes." And without losing further time, he smoothed out the garments and arranged them in a neat pile. In replacing several suits of pajamas, the sheriff disarranged the large sheet of white paper which covered the bottom of the drawer, and disclosed a photograph lying concealed under it. Nichols did not require a second glance to recognize Millicent Porter; he had seen her too often riding about the countryside, or motoring, to be mistaken. A flip of his finger, and the photograph lay face down, but no writing was on the reverse of the cardboard. The sheriff smoothed the white paper back into place, then rose and faced Noyes, who sat gazing drearily out of the window. His utter indifference upon the announcement of his arrest and his subsequent silence puzzled the sheriff; he was more accustomed to noisy protestations of innocence, or quarreling; a willing prisoner was a new sensation.

Wyndham's return with a suitcase put a stop to his cogitations, and, hardly waiting for the bag to be opened, Sheriff Nichols gathered together such toilet articles and clothing as he thought Noyes might need, and slammed them inside.

"There, that's done. All ready, doctor?" And he pocketed the key of the suitcase.

Noyes roused himself. "Quite ready," he said automatically, but once in the hall his manner altered; he darted a look toward Millicent's closed door, then resolutely turned to the sheriff. "I must see Mr. Craig Porter, and leave directions with his nurse."

"All right, I'll come, too." And the sheriff, utterly blind to the sudden furious glare Noyes shot at him, followed the latter into the paralytic's bedroom, and shut the door in Wyndham's face.

At their entrance Vera Deane looked up from a chart on which she was writing and rose, wonderment showing at sight of the sheriff's stocky figure; then suppressing her surprise she waited for Noyes to speak.

"Miss Deane, this is the sheriff," he announced curtly, making no attempt to lower his tone; and Sheriff Nichols frowned reprovingly as he gazed at Craig Porter; a loud voice in the room with that motionless figure seemed discordant. Nichols sighed involuntarily as he studied the changes in Craig; the latter's almost fatal injury had made a total wreck of splendid manhood.

"And to think I uster take him hunting when he was a shaver," he said, below his breath. "And I'm hale and hearty and he's bedridden; and he's twenty

years my junior. It don't seem right, Craig; but you were always wishing to climb the tallest tree and ride the worst hoss, and see what ambition's done for you." He met Vera's eye and shook his head mournfully as he said aloud, "It don't seem fair to talk to Craig when he can't answer back."

Noyes laid down the chart and faced the sheriff. "Kindly say nothing to the patient, Sheriff Nichols. The slightest noise may do injury."

"Then why are you talking so loud?" grumbled Nichols, reddening under the reproof. "There ain't no use hollering my name all around. Ready? I can't wait much longer."

"In just a minute," and Noyes went over to the bedside. The sheriff, stepping back to make room for him, transferred his regard to Vera. He had been aware of her sudden start on hearing who he was, but he learned nothing from his scrutiny, for Vera's usually mobile face was expressionless as she waited for the surgeon's instructions.

"Keep up the same treatment, Miss Deane," directed Noyes. "I may be back in an hour, or not for several days. Come, sheriff," and they filed from the room, Nichols' glance lighting for an instant on the large open transom over Craig Porter's bed, but his last look was for Vera who stood with head half averted, watching her patient.

The shutting of the door roused Vera from her contemplation and she went busily about her duties, and when at last she sat down the room was in apple-pie order. There was little she could do for Craig, except rearrange pillows and adjust sheets, and while Craig could not by sign or word make known his wants, she had the knack of making her patients comfortable. But Vera was not left long to her own reflections, for a tap at the door was followed by Murray's entrance.

"Here is the bouillon, Miss Deane," he said, placing the tray on a stand. "And I brought an additional pint of milk. Shall I put it in the refrigerator?"

"Yes, thanks." And Vera hastened to place a screen so that the wind would not blow on Craig as the footman opened the lower section of the window and stepped out on the little gallery where stood the small ice-box in which were kept supplies for the sick room.

Murray was some seconds in arranging the bottles to his satisfaction, and Vera relished the cool wind as it fanned her hot cheeks. She longed to be out-of-doors, but with Millicent ill she felt that it was but right to relieve Mrs. Hall so that the day nurse could attend the latest case. She, personally, did not

require a great amount of sleep, and the events of the night before had effectually deprived her of peaceful slumber during the two hours she had lain down earlier in the morning. She felt that she could not rest until the mystery of the razor was explained, and yet how could she get an explanation from Millicent as to how the razor came into her possession, when she was too ill to be interviewed?

She had the alternative of asking Beverly Thorne if he had taken the razor from her as they knelt in the shelter of the hedge waiting for Detective Mitchell to depart. But at the idea Vera's heart beat with uncomfortable haste. Among her chaotic experiences following her pursuit of Millicent one incident was indelibly impressed upon her memory—Thorne's impassioned whisper, "Vera, my love, my love!" as they crouched by the hedge, had not only reached her ears but found response in her heart.

"Have you heard the news, miss?" asked Murray, after carefully closing the window, and Vera, on the point of replacing the screen in its corner, paused and eyed him sharply.

"What news?"

"Dr. Noyes has been took."

"Took?"

"Arrested, miss; the perlice has him, at least, the sheriff." Murray scratched his head. "They both puts him in jail, leastways that's what Mr. Hugh said just now before they went off in the motor."

The footman's comments, however, fell on deaf ears. Alan Noyes arrested? Vera clung to the screen, her knees trembling under her.

"Why did the sheriff arrest him?" she demanded, in barely more than a whisper.

"He thinks the doctor killed Mr. Brainard." Murray reached forward to catch her as she swayed toward him. "Did I tell you too sudden, miss? Will you have a drink?"

Vera breathed deeply. "No, no," she protested. "I—Dr. Noyes said that he might be back, but I did not understand." She stopped to gain control over her shaking voice. "Who will attend Mr. Craig now?"

"I don't know, miss." Murray, like Vera, kept his voice lowered, and, standing on the other side of the screen, neither was aware of a movement in the other

part of the room. "It don't seem right, miss, when the doctor returned to attend Mr. Craig, that he should be taken away just when Mr. Craig needs him."

"Hush!" Vera held up a warning finger; her quick ears had caught the faint sound which accompanies the cautious closing of a door. Gliding from behind the screen she crossed the room and, peeping into the hall, was just in time to see the door of Millicent's bedroom close. She stared thoughtfully at the mahogany door. It was not the sound made by Millicent's door which had disturbed her; someone had opened Craig Porter's door and been in his bedroom while she and the footman stood talking behind the screen. Why had the person not announced his or her presence?

Vera turned back into the sick room and found Murray regarding Craig Porter sorrowfully. He was about to speak when he caught her gesture enjoining silence, and without a word tiptoed from the room.

Several minutes elapsed before Vera moved over to the lunch tray and drank the bouillon almost at a gulp. As she set down the cup her eyes fell on a letter addressed to her lying on the tray. The envelope bore the words "Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia" in the left-hand corner, and Vera almost snatched it up. Before she had more than torn off the envelope a rap sounded on the door, and still clutching the unread letter she went to answer it and discovered Dorothy standing in the hall.

"I can't come in." Dorothy drew back and her low, strained voice seemed a counterpart of the haggard lines in her white face. "Do you know, Vera, that they have arrested Alan Noyes for the murder of Bruce?"

"I have just heard it." Vera glanced cautiously up and down the hall; apparently they had it to themselves. She pulled the bedroom door almost shut behind her. "Where is Hugh Wyndham?"

"Gone with Alan Noyes and the sheriff to the court house." Dorothy laid a steady hand against the wall; she was trembling from head to foot. "Mrs. Porter said Hugh would arrange for Alan's release on bail. Vera," lifting pleading, anguished eyes to her sister, "are you going to speak?"

A heavy tread on the stairs reached them, and without word or sign Vera retreated into the bedroom, leaving her sister's question unanswered. With the door once safely closed she stopped and regarded Craig Porter, then going over to the desk she took up the chart and, glancing at her watch, registered the time and made the entry:

"Patient renews plucking at bedclothes."

Putting down the chart she took up the letter from the telephone company, and smoothing out the sheet read the typewritten lines. It was from the branch manager of the company:

In response to your request for information regarding the telephone call received by Central from the Porter mansion at 5.55 A.M. on Tuesday of this week, would say that Central reports that Dr. Beverly Thorne's residence was called for, the speaker being a woman.

Very truly yours—

“The speaker being a woman—” Vera dropped the letter as if it burned her fingers. Only one woman was in the library besides herself at 5.55 A.M. Tuesday morning—and that woman was Millicent Porter.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COUNTERFEIT BANK NOTE

WYNDHAM turned his roadster into the river road and, seeing no vehicle approaching along the straight stretch ahead of him, pressed the accelerator and his car raced homeward. He had found Alan Noyes, his only companion, morose to a degree of rudeness, and had forbore to address him after leaving the county court house. The hearing before Judge Ball had been a tedious affair, and the arranging of bail hampered by red tape, and it was long after the luncheon hour when Noyes was finally permitted to return to Dewdrop Inn with Wyndham.

They had traversed a third of the distance homeward along the river road when Noyes touched Wyndham and signed to him to stop. Somewhat surprised, Wyndham drew the car to one side and slowed down as Noyes bent forward and fumbled with the catch of the door.

"I'll walk home from here," he said, springing out of the car. He reddened as he turned back to hold out his hand to Wyndham. "You've been awfully good, old chap; I shan't forget it, but just now I must be by myself"—he hesitated—"a walk will do me good; see you later."

Wyndham wrung his hand. "You've been through a lot; just walk off steam, but don't get lost in the woods." He started the car forward, but before rounding the next curve he looked back and was surprised to see Noyes still standing where he had left him, looking from the bluff down the valley. The ground toward the river dipped abruptly at that point and Wyndham, stopping his car, rose in his seat and gazed in the direction Noyes was facing. His only reward was an excellent view of the river and the peaceful countryside, and he was about to drop back in his seat and proceed homeward when he saw Noyes turn, cross the road, and disappear up the hillside. He had been gone but a minute when Wyndham, looking again toward the river, was surprised to see a figure standing near the river bank. The man was too far away for Wyndham to see who he was. The next instant he, too, had disappeared, and Wyndham, after a moment's indecision, resumed his place behind the steering wheel and started for home; he was not Noyes' keeper, and if the detectives wished to trail Noyes while he was out on bail, it was the Englishman's responsibility and not his.

Reaching a crossroad Wyndham hesitated, then turning his car into the highway which skirted Thornedale, he continued along it until opposite the embankment where he had encountered Millicent Porter the night before and Beverly Thorne that morning. He stopped the car and, going over to the roadside, walked along it. The crushed and bedraggled condition of the creeping myrtle vines a little further on attracted his attention, and bending down he thrust his hand along until he touched the muzzle of the old cannon. Bending still farther downward he ran his hand inside the cannon and withdrew it a second later—empty.

“Could I have been wrong?” he muttered. “Millicent used to hide her toys and candy there—what more likely than that she thought of the old cannon if she wished to hide—” He broke off to stare moodily at the ground. Someone besides himself had examined the cannon since he had last been there; otherwise he would have noticed the torn vines that morning. And that man could have been none other than Beverly Thorne; he also knew of the cannon—had he, too, gone away empty-handed?

Wyndham was in no pleasant humor when he stopped at the garage and, turning over his car to the chauffeur, he went at once to the house. Instead of finding his aunt in the library as he had hoped, a stranger rose at his entrance and bowed politely.

“Is this Mr. Wyndham?”

“Yes.” Wyndham’s manner was not overly cordial; it was not customary to admit strangers to the library; they were usually shown into the reception-room. “Have you called to see my aunt, Mrs. Porter?”

“No, sir, I came to see you.” The stranger took out his card case. “I gave my card to the butler and he asked me to wait in here. I am Sam Anthony, of the United States Secret Service,” displaying his badge as he presented his card to Wyndham.

Wyndham barely glanced at the engraved pasteboard; his manner had thawed perceptibly. “Sit down, Mr. Anthony,” he said, dragging forward a chair. “I’m sorry to have kept you waiting. What can I do for you?”

“If you will answer a few questions.” Anthony resumed his seat. “Were you in Brentano’s bookstore yesterday afternoon?”

“I was.”

“You ordered some visiting-cards for Miss Vera Deane?”

"I did." Wyndham's surprise at the question was apparent.

"And paid for the cards with a ten-dollar Treasury bill?"

"Yes," responded Wyndham, and his manner had grown alert. "What then?"

"The bill was an exceedingly dangerous counterfeit."

"What!" Wyndham sat bolt upright. "Are you sure?"

"Positive." Anthony took out his bill-folder and selected a gold bank note. "It's a wonder," he added, feeling it tenderly. "Never would have aroused suspicion at the bank but that Chief Connor warned them only today to be on the lookout for such a note."

"Let me see it." And Wyndham carried the bank bill to the light, turning his back squarely upon the Secret Service agent as he faced the window. When he looked up from examining the bill he started slightly at finding Anthony standing at his elbow.

"I would never have suspected the bill," he said, handing it back. "It looks absolutely genuine."

Anthony nodded. "It's the work of a genius," he admitted. "Who gave you the bill, Mr. Wyndham?"

"Let me see." Wyndham half closed his eyes in thought, and under lowered lids observed the Secret Service agent. Anthony cloaked his ability under a sleepy manner and sleek appearance, and with him patience was more than a virtue; it was a profession. Dogged perseverance had won hard-earned promotion for him. He waited in silence for Wyndham to continue his remarks. "Why do you ask where I got the note?" the latter demanded, and his tone was crisp.

"Because we must trace it; and it will help materially if you can tell me where you procured the bill."

"In that case"—Wyndham returned to his chair, but remained standing, one hand on the back of it—"the bank note was given me by Miss Dorothy Deane."

"The trained nurse?"

"No, her sister." Wyndham looked closely at Anthony. "You know the Misses Deane?"

"Never had the pleasure of meeting them." Anthony sank down in his seat. "Are they both here?"

"Yes."

"Then can I see Miss Dorothy Deane?"

"I am afraid not, as she is with my cousin, Miss Porter, who is ill in bed." Wyndham pushed his chair aside. "I will go and ask Miss Deane what she knows about the Treasury bill."

"Good."

"I'll be back in a second." Wyndham hastened to the door and, not waiting for a response, hurried upstairs and went at once to his aunt's boudoir. To his delight he found Dorothy sitting there alone.

"Hugh!" Dorothy sprang to her feet. "You have news?" studying his face. "What is it, dear?"

"Nothing alarming," taking her hand in a firm, reassuring clasp. "You recall giving me a ten-dollar bank bill to pay for the visiting-cards I ordered at Brentano's for Vera—"

"Yes, perfectly," she said. "What of it?"

"Where did you get the money?"

"From Vera. Why?" Her surprise growing at the continued questioning.

Mrs. Porter's doorknob rattled as a hand grasped it on the other side of the closed door, and Wyndham retreated into the hall.

"Tell you later," he called, closing the door, but before doing so he caught the sound of Mrs. Porter's voice raised in querulous questioning.

Wyndham went immediately to Craig Porter's bedroom, and Vera answered his soft rap on the door. He signed to her to step into the hall, and she did so with evident reluctance.

"Dorothy wishes to know where the ten-dollar bank note came from which you gave her on Thursday," he began stiffly. He both felt and resented Vera's altered attitude toward him. "My question is not prompted by idle curiosity," he explained before she could speak. "I will explain later; just now I am in a hurry."

Vera eyed him distrustfully. "It is hardly a question of any importance; Millicent cashed a check for me in Washington the first of the week, Monday

to be exact—”

“Where did she cash the check?”

“At her bank I suppose,” coldly. “My check was good—”

“Oh, yes; it was nothing of that kind,” in embarrassment. “I’ll tell you all about it bye and bye.” And he hastened downstairs, leaving Vera staring after him in bewilderment.

Wyndham found the Secret Service agent waiting for him at the foot of the staircase, his overcoat over his arm and hat in hand.

“I didn’t meet with much luck, Mr. Anthony,” he said. “The trail of the counterfeiter doubles back to Washington.”

“Ah! Miss Dorothy Deane had it given to her there?”

“No; her sister, Miss Vera Deane, gave her the bill.” Wyndham came down the remaining steps to assist Anthony on with his overcoat.

“Then Miss Vera Deane owned the bank note?” Anthony buttoned his coat with exactitude. “And where did Miss Vera Deane secure the note?”

“My cousin, Miss Millicent Porter, cashed Miss Deane’s check on Monday and gave her the money.”

Anthony regarded Wyndham in silence before putting another question. “Where did your cousin cash the check?”

“At her bank,” mentioning a well-known establishment. “So you see, you will have to commence your investigations in Washington.”

“It would seem so,” acknowledged Anthony, pausing on the portico as Wyndham stood in the front doorway. “I am greatly obliged for your courtesy. Good afternoon.” And hardly waiting to hear Wyndham’s hearty assurance of renewed assistance if he required aid, Anthony ran down the portico steps and walked toward the entrance of the grounds.

On reaching the lodge gates he signaled a waiting taxi, but as he was about to enter and be driven back to Washington, an idea occurred to him, and he curtly told the chauffeur to wait, then turning to the lodgekeeper’s wife inquired the way to Thornedale.

“The next property, sor; you enter beyond,” called the Irishwoman, pointing down the road to where a dilapidated gate hung on one hinge, and, nodding his thanks, Anthony hastened to Thornedale.

In spite of its obvious need of repair the Secret Service agent was impressed by the appearance of the old hunting lodge, with its rambling wings, upper gallery, and gabled roof. The old place was picturesque in its winter setting, and Anthony wondered at its air of emptiness. The blinds in only a few of the rooms were drawn up, and the house appeared deserted.

After repeated rings Anthony finally heard the chain being lowered, and the door opened several inches to permit Cato's black face to appear in the crack.

"Dr. Thorne am out," he volunteered, before Anthony could state his errand, and made as if to shut the door, but the Secret Service agent's foot blocked his effort.

"I'll wait for the doctor," he said, holding out a visiting-card, which Cato took, and, putting on a pair of horn spectacles, regarded solemnly. The spectacles had been purchased from an itinerant merchant, but he could not read, with or without the glasses; they were only for the elegance which Cato thought went with his position in the family.

"Is yo' come to see Marse Beverly professionally?" he asked, bringing out the last word with a flourish.

"Yes," responded Anthony quickly, and Cato's manner thawed.

"Step right in, suh," he said, throwing wide the door. "Dar's a gen'man awaitin' a'ready. Ef yo' jes' make yo'self com'foble," wheeling forward a large chair. "De doctor'll be 'long d'reckly. Dar he is now," as the portières were pulled back from the entrance to the dining-room. "No, it ain't, nuther," he added, catching a glimpse of the newcomer. "It's Mister Mitchell. Is yo' tired ob waitin', suh?" as the detective walked into the living-room.

"Didn't I hear Dr. Thorne arrive?" asked Mitchell, looking about, and at sight of Anthony he whistled in surprise. "You here? Anything wrong?"

"Feeling feverish," returned Anthony, with a warning glance toward Cato, who was shuffling toward the staircase. "I called to see Dr. Thorne professionally."

"Is that so?" Mitchell selected a chair near the fireplace. "I wasn't aware that Dr. Thorne ever had office practice."

The remark was overheard by Cato, and he turned with a reproving air to Mitchell.

"Deed he do, an' right smart patients come hyar from de city, too," warming to his subject as he saw Mitchell's skeptical air. "Dat 'er' gen'man what was

murdered at de Porters' was hyar to consult wid him on Monday evenin'."

"He was!" Mitchell nearly fell out of his chair, and recovering from his astonishment regarded the negro intently. "Why haven't you spoken of it before?"

"'Cause I doan talk 'bout my marster's affairs," with offended dignity. "But I wants you to unnerstan', Mr. Detective Man, dat my marster has de quality hyar same as always."

"Sure, he does," agreed Mitchell heartily. "But I've never seen an office in this house, and was not aware that Dr. Thorne kept regular office hours."

"He do." Cato looked somewhat mollified. "De office is out dat away," jerking his thumb toward one of the wings. "I'll get some kindlin' wood an' start de fire fo' yo' gen'men; it's gettin' colder."

It was not until his hobbling footsteps had entirely died away that Mitchell turned to the Secret Service agent.

"What brings you here, Anthony?" he questioned rapidly. "Surely not the need for medical advice; you look as sound as a dollar."

Anthony grinned cheerfully. "I have a clean bill of health," he said. "My ailment was a polite fiction invented for the benefit of the old negro. The Chief told me that you were on the Brainard murder case, and Headquarters said you were apt to be found here, so—I came."

"What interest has the Chief in the Brainard murder?" demanded Mitchell, his professional jealousy aroused. "Why has he sent you here?"

A subdued bumping and labored breathing announced the approach of Cato, and Mitchell's question remained unanswered as the old servant shuffled over to the fireplace and proceeded to build a fire on the bed of ashes. Anthony studied him for some little time in silence, then becoming aware that Cato, while pretending to be absorbed in his work, was covertly watching them, he turned and addressed Mitchell.

"I've heard that Dr. Thorne is a wonder at diagnosing a case—that he has marvelous instinct—"

Cato faced about in wrath, one hand poised in air clutched a piece of kindling. "What yo' mean by sayin' my marster's got *instinct*?" he retorted. "He ain't got no instinct—he's got *insense*."

Anthony retreated out of reach of the kindling wood. "Everyone tells me that Dr. Thorne is a fine physician," he hastened to say. "I was complimenting him."

"Was yo'?" Cato looked doubtful. "Then I ax yo' pardon." He placed the last piece of kindling on the hearth and throwing on several logs paused to see them catch, and again hobbled from the room. Mitchell waited a minute, then tiptoed to the door leading to the kitchen and made sure that Cato had really disappeared. Finally convinced that Cato was not within earshot, he turned to his companion.

"You haven't answered my question. Why is the Secret Service interested in Bruce Brainard's murder?"

"It isn't interested in the murder, that I am aware of," replied Anthony, moving his chair closer to Mitchell. "I was sent here to trace a counterfeit Treasury note presented in payment at Brentano's store by Hugh Wyndham, and he tells me that the bank note was received by Miss Millicent Porter when cashing a check at her bank."

"Humph! it must have been a marvelous counterfeit to get by a bank teller," commented Mitchell. "So you had your trip here for nothing?"

"I am not so sure of that." Anthony lowered his voice. "Wyndham told me that the bank note was first given him by Miss Dorothy Deane; she states that she received it from her sister, Vera Deane, and the latter declares that she got it from Miss Millicent Porter, who cashed her check in Washington on Monday morning."

"Well, that's straight enough," exclaimed Mitchell impatiently. "Better question the bank officials, Anthony."

"I will—later. Just now I want a little information about the Deane girls. Have you been in touch with them while investigating the Brainard murder? I ask," he added slowly, "because a bag containing some counterfeit money was found on a street car. In the handbag was a visiting-card bearing Vera Deane's name. Taking that in consideration with Wyndham's statement that Miss Deane's sister had given him the counterfeit bill—it looks fishy."

Mitchell smiled skeptically. "Come, come, you don't think those two former society girls made a counterfeit bill which would deceive a bank teller? Why, Anthony, it takes years to perfect a good counterfeit."

"I know it," grumbled Anthony. "I don't suspect them of being the actual counterfeiters, but they may be affiliated with him, possibly innocently, and

be putting money in circulation without being aware of the deception.”

“That’s an ingenious theory,” acknowledged Mitchell.

“Can you tell me who the Deane girls go with?” asked Anthony. “You’ve been watching the Porter house ever since the discovery of Brainard’s murder.”

“They haven’t been going with anyone in particular,” grumbled Mitchell, not altogether liking the other’s tone. “Vera Deane, the nurse, stays close indoors, and Dorothy Deane is mostly with Millicent Porter and Hugh Wyndham. They haven’t seen any outsiders since I’ve been here. I’ve always thought, however, that Vera Deane knows more than she will admit about Brainard’s murder, but so far she has been too slick for me to catch her tripping.”

“When is Miss Deane off duty?”

Mitchell looked at his watch. “She should be at leisure now.”

“Excellent.” Anthony rose. “I’ll return and ask to see her. Come with me—?”

“I can’t.” Mitchell eyed his companion sharply; in spite of rivalry they had always been friends, and he badly wanted advice. “Did you hear Cato blurt out that Bruce Brainard was in this house on Monday evening? It must have been before he went to dine at the Porters’, because he never left that house alive.”

“Well, what if he did come here before going to the Porters’?” Anthony stared at the detective. “What’s there in that to get excited about?”

“Why hasn’t Thorne ever spoken of knowing Brainard? Why has he never alluded to Brainard’s visit on Monday?” Mitchell’s excitement, until then bottled up, rose to fever heat. “Thorne and I have discussed every phase of the murder, and he has never once said that he even knew Brainard by sight. I don’t understand such conduct, unless—”

“Go slow,” cautioned Anthony hastily. “Just because the doctor doesn’t take the world into his confidence about his numerous patients doesn’t mean that he is a murderer.”

“Wait,” urged Mitchell. “Brainard’s throat was cut with a razor which no one in the Porter household can identify—or will identify,” he supplemented. “The razor belonged to a set. This morning I found five razors, the mates to the one on Brainard’s bed, hidden in the muzzle of an old cannon on this place, and I am convinced Beverly Thorne knew they were in the cannon.”

“Did you see him place them there?”

"No, of course not," reddening angrily. "I am waiting here to question Thorne. He hasn't been here since early this morning, according to that old idiot, Cato. And it was this morning that I found Thorne and Wyndham sitting together near the cannon." Mitchell came to a full stop as a new idea dawned upon him. "By gracious! I wonder if Wyndham knew Thorne had secreted the razors in the cannon?"

"Ask him," suggested Anthony and rose impatiently. "I've got to be going. Don't do too much guesswork, Mitchell; remember, you must find a motive for murder. What motive would Dr. Thorne have for killing Brace Brainard?"

The detective flushed. "What motive would Vera Deane have for planting counterfeit money?" he growled. "Don't go *too* slow, Anthony, or your counterfeiter will escape."

"I'm not worrying." Anthony smiled provokingly as he reached for his hat. "Chief Connor has sent a dozen men over here. He believes in following a hot trail, and I reckon we'll get 'Gentleman Charlie.' See you shortly." And he left Mitchell sitting by the fire.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIRST SHOT

MURRAY gave Mrs. Porter's message to the chauffeur, and then took the vacant seat in the roadster.

"Just drop me at the house," he directed as the car left the garage. "And, remember, Jones, Mrs. Porter says you must bring out a new nurse from the hospital; that you are not to return without one. Here's the letter to the Washington doctor."

"Whose place is the new nurse to take?" inquired the chauffeur, slipping the note in his pocket. "Miss Deane's or Mrs. Hall's?"

"Mrs. Porter didn't mention, but I hope it is Mrs. Hall who is to go, she's always complaining about the help."

Jones nodded sympathetically. "Cook told me she was forever finding fault with the food; says cook discriminates between her and Miss Deane—now, there's a lady for you, and a good-looker!" in a burst of enthusiasm. "Catch her poking her nose in the garage the way Mrs. Hall does. I came mighty near telling Mrs. Hall what I thought about her when I caught her fooling 'round yesterday; said she wanted to see Mr. Brainard's car, and I told her the police had taken it away to return to the company from which Mr. Brainard rented it."

"Hey! you ain't going in the right direction," objected Murray, as the chauffeur turned the car into the highway instead of taking the drive which circled the house.

"Sorry"—putting on the brake—"I clean forgot." Murray swung himself to the ground as the chauffeur added: "Who's that waving to us?" catching sight of a man running toward them.

"I don't know," replied Murray, and delayed his return to the house as the man came nearer. "Why, it's the caller who waited to see Mr. Hugh this afternoon, name of Anthony."

"What's he so excited about?" asked Jones, but before Murray could hazard a guess the Secret Service agent had reached the car.

"Which one of you can show me the way to Elm Ridge?" he demanded, displaying a roll of money.

"I can't." Jones suddenly recollected his errand. "Mrs. Porter has ordered me to drive to Washington." He eyed with regret the bank note which Anthony peeled from the roll. "Go ahead, Murray," he urged, "take the gentleman where he wants to go. You ain't needed at the house until six o'clock."

Murray wavered. The tip was a big one which Anthony held tantalizingly in view, and Mrs. Porter had told him that tea was not to be served that afternoon; as Jones said, he could be absent for an hour. Anthony read his expression and thrust the money into his palm.

"Take me to Elm Ridge and back by a short cut and I'll double the amount," he said.

Murray's hesitation vanished, and with a wave of his hand to Jones, who had already started down the highway, he set out across the fields, the Secret Service agent at his elbow. They were in the heart of the woods which skirted the southern boundary of the Porter and Thorne estates, and were climbing the ridge when a man, catching sight of them, advanced to meet Anthony.

"So Smoot reached you," he exclaimed in relief. "I wasn't quite sure whether you'd be at Thornedale or the Porters'. Did he tell you—"

"Yes," shutting off his assistant's loquacity. "Where are the boys?"

"Farther up; they sent me here to meet you," keeping step with Anthony as Murray dropped a little behind. "An old darky went by some little time ago, but I lost track of him."

Anthony turned and signed to Murray to join them. "Take us the shortest way to the top of the ridge," he ordered, and the footman once again led them up the steep incline.

They were almost at the top of the ridge when Anthony, stopping to get his breath after a rapid spurt over the roughest of the climb, glanced to their left where the ground dipped into a ravine, and saw a man crouching behind a tree. Without rising, the latter signaled to the Secret Service agent, and Anthony, bidding Murray and his assistant come with him, hurried forward, and quickly reached the side of the crouching sentinel.

"What is it, Boyd?" he asked, lowering his voice cautiously.

For answer the man pointed down the ravine and across a clearing to a log cabin which abutted the hillside.

"We've trailed him there," he said, "and are only waiting for a signal to close in. Hark! was that a whistle?" Murray, to whom the question was addressed, shook his head; he had not had such strenuous exercise in years, and perspiration streamed down his face.

"I don't hear a thing," he muttered. The excitement of the others was contagious, and under its influence the footman forgot class distinction and nudged Anthony to get his attention. "Who are you and what are you after?"

Anthony, never removing his eyes from the cabin, displayed his badge. "We are trailing a dangerous counterfeiter," he explained. "You'd better go home, you may get hurt." Not waiting to see if his advice was followed, he beckoned to Boyd and his assistant. "Come ahead; we'll rush the cabin."

The men started down the ravine simultaneously, leaving Murray standing by the tree. The footman fidgeted for a second and glanced backward—the Secret Service agent's advice was sound; his place was at the Porter mansion; it was not his business to assist in arresting malefactors. Murray glanced again at the men hastening toward the log cabin, and throwing reason to the far winds, he tore down the ravine, and caught up with them at the edge of the clearing.

A shot rang out, and Anthony, slightly in the lead, faltered. But its echoes had hardly ceased to resound through the stillness when a second shot broke on their ears. With a muttered curse Anthony sprang forward and threw himself through the partly open cabin door, the other men following pellmell.

Murray, the last to enter, stood appalled as he peered over Anthony's shoulder at the tableau confronting them, then looked dumbly about the disordered cabin. Two large screens tumbled to one side, tables and chairs overturned, made a dramatic setting for the still figure lying crumpled up on the floor and the man crouching above it, a still smoking revolver held aloft. As the latter turned and faced the Secret Service operatives a strangled exclamation broke from Murray.

"Dr. Thorne!"

Thorne tossed the revolver to Anthony. "Take charge of that," he said. "Have that window opened and switch on the lights," nodding to a lamp, and Boyd turned on the current. "I must see how badly Dr. Noyes has hurt himself."

Anthony clutched the revolver, his eyes never leaving Thorne.

"Do you mean to say that Dr. Noyes shot himself?" he demanded.

"I do," calmly, and Thorne busied himself in making a superficial examination of the wound. "Fortunately the bullet did not enter a vital point; lend me your handkerchiefs." And with the assistance of Anthony he bound up the wound and rendered first aid. "Murray," addressing the agitated footman whose fingers had been all thumbs in his efforts to help restore Noyes to consciousness, "return at once to the Porters' and have Noyes' room prepared for him, but first stop at my house for surgical supplies."

"Very good, sir," and only lingering for one curious glance about the cabin, Murray departed.

"Suppose two of you take the door off its hinges," went on Thorne. "We can carry Noyes home on that." Boyd hesitated and looked at Anthony for orders. Thorne was quick to note their suspicious glances. "Who are you?" he asked, as Anthony returned from a tour of inspection.

"We are members of the United States Secret Service," and again Anthony displayed his badge. "We came here to arrest a notorious counterfeiter."

"Sorry to disappoint you," remarked Thorne dryly.

Anthony flushed scarlet. "I find enough contraband property here to convict the owner as a dangerous counterfeiter," he said. "You have not yet explained your presence, Dr. Thorne."

"My presence can be attributed to idle curiosity," was Thorne's tranquil answer as the men gathered about him. "I was passing the cabin, saw the door standing ajar, and entered. I had been here only a very few minutes when I heard a shot and tearing aside that screen," pointing to it, "saw poor Noyes fall to the floor. I had just taken the revolver from him when you entered so spectacularly."

Anthony did not miss a word of Thorne's explanation. "You claim, then, that you did not know anyone else was in the cabin until you heard the shot?"

"I mean exactly that," with emphasis. "I thought I was alone in the cabin. I haven't the faintest idea what brought Dr. Noyes, the English surgeon who is visiting the Porters," he interpolated, "to this cabin."

"He can explain that when he regains consciousness," exclaimed Anthony. "It will not take us long to carry him to the Porters', if you think it safe to move him."

"I do." And Thorne made ready to rise from his place by Noyes. "By the way, before hearing the report of Noyes' revolver, I heard a shot—who fired the

first shot?”

“That is for you to explain.” Anthony stooped under a table and picked up a revolver. With a deft turn of his wrist he opened the breech. “One chamber has been fired.”

CHAPTER XX

KA

DETECTIVE Mitchell hung up the telephone receiver and sat glaring at the instrument.

"Well, I'm d—ned!" he muttered. It was some moments before he rose and went in search of Cato, but although he hunted through the entire first floor of Thornedale and called upstairs until he was hoarse, Mitchell was unable to find the old negro, and at last gave up the search. Over an hour had elapsed since the departure of Anthony, the Secret Service agent, and still Thorne had not returned. Mitchell's impatience got the better of him, and, not troubling to leave a written message, he left the house and walked rapidly to Dewdrop Inn.

Mrs. Porter, dressed for walking, was standing in the front doorway as Mitchell came up the steps, and she greeted his appearance with a frown.

"Do you desire to see me?" she inquired. "I am just going out."

Mitchell, however, did not stand aside for her to walk past him.

"I am very sorry, madam, to detain you," he said firmly. "But it is imperative that I have a talk with you at once."

Mrs. Porter whitened under her rouge. "It is quite unnecessary to adopt that tone to me," she retorted. "I can spare you a few minutes, not more. Walk inside," and she stepped back into the hall.

Mitchell closed the front door with a bang and tossed his hat and overcoat on the hall table.

"Has Dr. Alan Noyes returned from the court house?" he asked.

"Not yet." Mrs. Porter moistened her lips nervously. "I expect him here at any moment."

"Suppose we go into the library," suggested Mitchell, seeing that she made no sign to admit him further into the house. "Then, kindly oblige me by sending for Miss Deane."

Mitchell had not troubled to lower his voice, and his words were distinctly audible to Dorothy Deane, who was sitting on the top step of the staircase. She waited until she heard Mrs. Porter and Mitchell go in the direction of the

library, then sped to Craig Porter's door and, jerking it open, she beckoned to her sister to come into the hall.

"Vera," she said in little more than a whisper, "Alan Noyes is evidently detained at the court house, and—and—Detective Mitchell is down in the library waiting to see you."

Vera stood as if turned into marble, then she drew a long, painful breath.

"Very well"—her voice was not quite steady, and she cleared her throat before continuing—"I will see Detective Mitchell at once. Where is Hugh Wyndham?"

Dorothy flinched, and her eyes fell before her sister's direct gaze. "I don't know—I can't find him anywhere about the place. Oh, Vera," coloring painfully, "must you tell *all*?"

Vera nodded. "It would have been better had I been frank in the first place," she said dully. "God knows, I acted for the best. I can't leave Craig Porter alone, Dorothy. Where is Mrs. Hall?"

"With Millicent, I suppose. I haven't seen her lately."

"Then you sit with Craig until I return." Vera pushed Dorothy gently through the doorway. "Call me if he requires medical assistance." And pulling the door shut before Dorothy could recover from her surprise, Vera squared her shoulders and walked downstairs.

Dorothy continued to stare at the closed door for some seconds, then turned her attention to Craig Porter, but his emaciated appearance was a distinct shock to her, and when she looked away her eyes were blurred with tears. Afraid to give way in the slightest degree to her emotions for fear they would master her, she walked back and forth with noiseless tread.

The minutes seemed endless, and in agony over the scene which her active imagination painted going on in the library, Dorothy at last paused before the huge mirror over the mantel and stared at herself. Dark circles under her eyes and her total lack of color told plainly of mental anguish, and with a shudder she moved away. The desk next attracted her wandering attention, and she picked up the nurse's chart and a pencil and subconsciously read the last entry in Vera's handwriting: "Patient continues plucking at clothing."

Dropping the chart she walked over to the foot of the bed and regarded Craig Porter. A great pity for him drove, for the moment, her own problems out of her mind. They had been "pals" while she was at boarding-school and he a

junior at Yale, and as memories returned of his merry disposition and gallant bearing a lump rose in her throat, and she hastily looked away.

A glance at the open transom over the head of Craig's bed sent her thoughts again to the tragedy enacted in the next room on Tuesday morning.

"Only four days ago," she murmured, and choked back a sob. Again she looked at Craig. He lay rigidly on his back, his eyes half closed, and she wondered if he could be asleep or unconscious. The only indication of life was the moving finger plucking always at the sheet drawn across his chest.

Dorothy's thoughts again reverted to Vera and Detective Mitchell. What was transpiring in the library? It was cruel to keep her in such suspense. In her extreme nervousness she drummed the pencil which she still held against the footboard of the bed, and her eyes resting still on Craig's hand, she unconsciously beat time to his slow-moving finger.

Painfully, laboriously the finger moved back a longer distance, then a shorter distance, then longer—and Dorothy's pencil beat out each stroke: — · — · —

The tap of her pencil penetrated her absent-mindedness, and Dorothy stared at Craig—what had possessed her to spell out "KA," the wireless "attention" call which precedes every transmission?

Again her eyes traveled to Craig's hand, and the moving finger in contrast to his motionless figure and expressionless face fascinated her. Again she spelled out the "attention" signal, her pencil tapping off each short or long movement of his finger. But this time the "KA" signal was followed by her initials, and the signal: · — ∙, "wait."

Dorothy, half doubting her senses, tapped off: — · — "K," the official call to "go ahead."

Craig's finger remained motionless for a longer period, then once again it spelled a message to her, and as she caught its full significance, she with difficulty checked a scream. With shaking fingers she tapped out the question:

"Who murdered Bruce Brainard?"

Breathlessly she waited for the response.

Slowly, very slowly Craig's finger checked off the answer, and Dorothy, her senses reeling, leaned far over the bed and looked into Craig's eyes. They held the light of reason. With a choking sob she sank senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

BLIND MAN'S BUFF

VERA glanced neither to the right nor to the left as she walked with firm steps toward the library, and thereby missed seeing a face peering at her from behind the folds of the portières which hung in front of the reception-room entrance. Her fixed resolve to get the interview with Detective Mitchell over and done with aided her in suppressing all sign of agitation, and her demeanor was calm and collected when she approached Mrs. Porter, who occupied her customary seat before the library table. Mitchell had planted himself at the opposite side of the table and spread several typewritten sheets before him. He did not rise on Vera's entrance.

Mrs. Porter, who sat with one eye on the door, was the first to address Vera.

"Detective Mitchell desires to question you, Vera," she said. "Sit here by me." And she touched the girl reassuringly.

Vera almost exclaimed aloud at the coldness of her fingers. "Are you having a chill, Mrs. Porter?" she asked in alarm, observing the bluish hue of her lips. "Would you like some brandy?"

"No." Mrs. Porter's tone did not encourage further solicitude. "As soon as Mr. Mitchell completes his visit I shall go for a walk. Continue your remarks, Mr. Mitchell."

Mitchell was about to comply with her injunction when Vera, who had remained standing by Mrs. Porter, spoke first.

"I have heard that Dr. Alan Noyes has been arrested for the murder of Mr. Bruce Brainard. Is that correct?"

"Yes." Mitchell, keeping his finger at a certain point in the manuscript before him, watched Vera closely.

"Then the police have acted most unjustly," exclaimed Vera vehemently. "Dr. Noyes is innocent."

"Your grounds for that assertion?"

Vera hesitated, glanced dubiously at Mrs. Porter, whose adamant expression gave her no encouragement, and then addressed Mitchell.

"I believe—" Her clear voice faltered, and she commenced again. "I believe that no murder was committed—Mr. Brainard killed himself."

Mitchell made no attempt to conceal his incredulity. "Medical evidence proves that the wound in his throat could not have been self-inflicted except by a left-handed man," he rejoined. "And reputable witnesses have proved that Bruce Brainard was *not* left-handed."

"But he was ambidextrous," retorted Vera. "He could shave himself with equal facility with either hand."

Mitchell stared at her astounded, while Mrs. Porter, hanging on her words, drew a deep, deep breath.

"Where did you learn that about Bruce Brainard?" demanded Mitchell.

Vera met the detective's accusing gaze squarely. "He told me so himself."

"What?" Mitchell leaned across the table in his eagerness. "Did Brainard tell you that he was ambidextrous on Monday night?"

"No."

"Then you had known him before Monday night?"

"I had."

Mitchell sat back in his chair and scowled at Vera.

"Why did you not mention in your testimony at the inquest on Tuesday that you had known Bruce Brainard formerly?" His manner was stern. "You gave us to understand that you had not met Brainard until sent for to attend him after dinner on Monday night."

"I was not asked the direct question as to whether we had ever met before," replied Vera. "I did not volunteer the information because—"

"Because it would have led to an investigation of your acquaintance with him," with insolent meaning, and Vera, her hot blood dancing in her veins, stepped nearer the detective, her eyes blazing with pent-up wrath.

Mrs. Porter, rising suddenly, intervened. "Stop, Mr. Mitchell; if you insult Miss Deane I shall have my servants eject you," she said, and her slow, level tones warned the detective that he must not go too far in his heckling tactics. But before he could resume questioning Vera the library door, which she had left ajar on entering, was pushed open and Mrs. Hall came into the room.

"I couldn't help overhearing what has just been said," she began, ignoring Mrs. Porter's indignant glare. "I was on my way to the pantry to get some bouillon for Miss Porter when I heard you talking." She looked meaningfully at Vera. "I've held my peace, Miss Deane, out of kindness to you; but now that Dr. Noyes is accused of killing Mr. Brainard it's time for me to tell the detectives what I know about you."

Vera gazed at her in amazement too deep for expression, while Mitchell, his eyes shining with excitement, stepped from behind the table.

"Go on, Mrs. Hall," he said encouragingly. "Tell me everything."

"I will." Mrs. Hall paused dramatically. "On Tuesday morning about four o'clock I was awakened by hearing someone moving about in the dressing-room which connects our bedroom with Mr. Porter's. I got up and looked through the partly open door and was surprised to see Miss Deane slipping on a fresh white skirt, while before her stretched over the stationary washstand was another skirt on which were bloodstains." A low cry from Mrs. Porter interrupted her, and Mrs. Hall paused, to continue more rapidly as she met Vera's indignant gaze.

"There was something secretive in Miss Deane's air that stopped my impulse to ask her what she was about, and I went at once by way of the hall to Mr. Porter's bedroom, thinking perhaps he might have had a hemorrhage; but I found him lying as usual, apparently asleep. I did not then know that Mr. Brainard was in the next bedroom. Thinking Miss Deane had had a nosebleed I went back to my room and to bed, as I had not been well the day before and needed rest. Some time later Miss Deane came in carrying a skirt in her hand. Hanging it up in the closet, she returned to Mr. Porter's bedroom."

"What happened after that?" prompted Mitchell as she stopped.

"I got out of bed and went over to the closet and examined the white skirt which Miss Deane had hung there a few minutes before. The bloodstains had been carefully removed with the aid of cornstarch, and a hot iron passed over the skirt. There is an electric iron and battery for our use in the dressing-room," she supplemented. "The white skirt bore Miss Deane's initials inside the belt."

"Why have you not told all this before?" asked Mrs. Porter, staring at Mrs. Hall with intense dislike discernible.

"I waited, hoping that Miss Deane would voluntarily explain her connection with the murder of Mr. Brainard." Mrs. Hall moved uneasily; she was not

pleased with the rôle Fate had cast for her, but a growing jealousy, fostered by envy, kept her to her determination to tell all she surmised against Vera Deane. "As Miss Deane has not done so, and is sheltering herself behind the arrest of an innocent man—"

"Stop!" commanded Mrs. Porter. "Your unsupported charges cannot involve Vera Deane in Bruce Brainard's murder."

"Ah, but they can, in view of what I already know," broke in Mitchell triumphantly. "Police Headquarters in Pittsburgh reported to me on the long-distance telephone, Miss Deane, that they had found among the court records a certificate of the marriage of Bruce Brainard and your sister, Dorothy."

Mrs. Porter collapsed in her chair in speechless astonishment and stared at Vera, whose set face was as white as her linen uniform.

"Is this true?" she gasped.

"Yes," replied Vera. "They were married just after Dorothy left boarding-school. She met Bruce while visiting the Arnolds in Chicago; it was a runaway match."

Mitchell, who had listened closely to her statement, nodded his head. "So I learned, and my assistant, who has been investigating Brainard's past career, also told me that Brainard deserted your sister two months after their elopement. He also refused to support her."

"On the contrary, my sister declined to be supported by him when she found what manner of man she had married," retorted Vera proudly. "She also refused to use his name, and never announced her marriage."

"But you knew it, and you knew what she had suffered at Brainard's hands," broke in Mitchell roughly. "Do you deny this?"

"No."

Mitchell's smile was not pleasant. "Were you also aware that your, eh, brother-in-law's engagement to Miss Millicent Porter was announced on Monday night?"

"Yes." Vera's gaze did not shift and her voice was steady. "Mr. Hugh Wyndham told me of the rumored engagement."

"Hugh!" Mrs. Porter raised her hands to her temples in bewilderment. "Did Hugh know that Dorothy was the wife of Bruce Brainard?"

“Yes.” Vera’s cold hands closed convulsively over the chair back against which she was leaning. “Dorothy was honest with him, Mrs. Porter.”

“Poor Hugh!” exclaimed Mrs. Porter, her eyes filling with tears. “He loves her devotedly.”

Mitchell moved impatiently. “Miss Deane, I want your full attention,” he announced brusquely. “You have asserted that Bruce Brainard committed suicide. Where did he get the razor?”

Vera paused; should she speak of the razor which Millicent had dropped in her flight from the house the night before? After all, had Millicent dropped it? Was it fair to involve Millicent until she had first had an opportunity to explain?

Mitchell repeated his question with more emphasis: “Where did Brainard get the razor?”

“I don’t know.”

The detective moved closer. “Your theory is good, but it doesn’t hold water,” he declared. “You recognized Bruce Brainard as your sister’s husband; you knew of his despicable conduct to your sister; you had just heard that he considered himself engaged to Miss Millicent Porter, in spite of the fact that the law courts would hold him legally married to your sister.” Vera stirred uneasily. “You had Bruce Brainard here at your mercy—and Mrs. Hall saw you, nearly two hours before you admitted discovering the murder, removing bloodstains from your dress. Oh, come, you might as well confess—and claim the leniency of the court.”

“I will claim nothing but fair play,” cried Vera hotly. “I am innocent. I did not kill Bruce Brainard, much as I loathed and despised him.”

“Then who did kill him?”

Mrs. Hall, who had drawn back as Mitchell approached Vera, was roughly pushed aside as Hugh Wyndham, making no attempt to conceal his anger, stepped in front of the detective.

“What’s going on here? What foolery are you up to, Mitchell?” he demanded. “Vera, there’s no law which compels you to answer this man’s questions.”

A clamor in the hall, which grew louder as footsteps approached, drowned Vera’s answer, and Millicent Porter, clutching Murray’s coat sleeve, burst into the room with the footman.

"There, there, miss, don't take on so," pleaded Murray, hardly noticing the others in the library in his endeavor to calm Millicent. "I told you he wasn't dead."

But Millicent was past calming and, her dressing-gown fluttering with the haste of her movements, she flung herself into her mother's arms.

"Mother!" she moaned. "Alan has tried to kill himself. Oh, you must tell the police that the razor belonged to Craig."

A startled exclamation broke from Mitchell and Mrs. Porter winced.

"How would that clear Alan Noyes?" she asked bitterly. "I presented the set to Alan on Monday morning."

"But you know he never took them, mother," pleaded Millicent, her eyes dark with terror. "I found the set in your boudoir on Tuesday morning."

"But one razor was missing—" The comment escaped Mrs. Porter unwittingly in the agitation of the moment.

"Hush! Mother, how could you?" Millicent clapped her hand on Mrs. Porter's mouth and glanced fearfully around, to encounter Mitchell's eager gaze, and shuddering she looked away.

Wyndham, who had listened to Millicent with tense eagerness, turned with such suddenness that he collided against the large leather bag which Murray was holding, having, in his excitement, forgotten to put it down. The bag, insecurely fastened, burst open and out rolled splints and bandages and a miscellaneous array of surgical instruments and a razor. Wyndham reached for it, but Mitchell jostled him to one side and picked it up.

"The razor is one of the set!" he cried. "Where did you get that bag, Murray?" clutching the footman and giving him a shake. "Answer!"

"From Dr. Thorne's office, sir," stammered Murray. "The doctor sent me back to say that Dr. Noyes had shot himself and for the nurses to prepare his room; he also told me to stop at Thornedale to get surgical dressings. The old butler didn't answer the bell, so I climbed through a window and found this bag sitting in his office. I looked in it and seeing bandages and splints brought it along just as it was."

Vera looked quickly at Mitchell and his expression gave her the key to his thoughts—good heavens! Would he try to fix the crime upon Beverly Thorne? Could it be that Thorne, like the others, had believed her guilty of Brainard's murder and had taken the razor from her so that it would not be found in her

possession and further incriminate her? If so, he had jeopardized himself to protect her. Her face flamed at the thought.

"I can explain Dr. Thorne's possession of the razor," she said clearly. "He got it from me."

"He did!" Mitchell wheeled on her. "So you admit at last that *you* had the razors."

"I admit that I picked up the razor after Millicent dropped it last night," retorted Vera.

"Millicent!" gasped Mrs. Porter.

"I thought I hid all six in the cannon," faltered Millicent, raising miserable, hunted eyes to Mitchell. "I admit I had the set—because—because—Murray, where did Dr. Noyes shoot himself?" turning desperately to the footman.

"At that lean-to near the top of Elm Ridge." Murray's eyes lighted on Mrs. Hall, who was edging her way to the door unobtrusively. "I went upstairs to find you, Mrs. Hall, to tell you they were bringing Dr. Noyes home, but I ran into Miss Millicent and she seen I was a little excited," with an apologetic glance at Mrs. Porter, who was paying scant attention to him as she strove to quiet Millicent. "She made me tell her about Dr. Noyes."

Nurse Hall, finding attention centered upon her, colored.

"I will go up and arrange the room now, that is, if I am not required here."

"You can go," directed Mitchell. "But remember, I must see you later."

"Yes, sir." And Mrs. Hall slipped away, only to return a moment later. "They are bringing Dr. Noyes in the front door, now," she announced. "And there's a gentleman asking for you, Mr. Mitchell."

Before Mitchell reached the hall door Sam Anthony, the Secret Service agent, appeared at the threshold. "Bring Dr. Noyes in here," he called over his shoulder. Then addressing Mitchell: "He's regained consciousness."

There was a surging toward the door of Mitchell, Wyndham and Murray, but they halted as two Secret Service operatives came in supporting Alan Noyes, who walked between them, Beverly Thorne's arm steadying him from behind.

Noyes stopped at sight of Mitchell, and leaned wearily against Thorne.

"I asked for you," he began. "To give myself up for the murder of Bruce Brainard."

CHAPTER XXII

“THE MOVING FINGER WRITES—”

A HEARTRENDING scream broke from Millicent, and running to Noyes she flung herself at his feet.

“Alan, you never did it!” she protested vehemently. “You know you never did it.”

“Don’t,” he pleaded, grasping her hand weakly as the men helped him to the leather lounge. Once seated, he turned to Mitchell. “Take down what I say,” he commenced. “Miss Porter and I quarreled Monday evening, just before dinner, and I threatened to kill Brainard—”

“Why?” asked Mitchell as he paused.

Noyes avoided looking at anyone in particular. “Blind fury,” he admitted faintly. “I’ve been like that from a boy, whenever I couldn’t have my own way. I had just heard that Brainard was to marry the girl I loved—” His voice shook and he broke off abruptly.

Mrs. Porter rose; she had aged perceptibly. “I tried my best to shield you, Alan—I can never forget all you have done for my son; my gratitude—” She could not control her voice and paused, then resumed, more slowly: “Millicent would not trust me, would not confide in me. Fearing her diary, in which she had been foolish enough to betray her growing affection for you, Alan, and in which she mentioned you had threatened to kill Bruce, would establish a motive for the crime if the detectives found the diary, I burned it.” She shuddered. “Remember, Alan, you had run away—”

Noyes eyed her hopelessly. “There was nothing left for me to do but to go. As soon as my bag was packed I telephoned to my cousin, Mason Galbraith, who owns an estate across the river, and he met me at the wharf with his motor boat. I spent two days with him, but I had to come back to see—” He sighed and looked significantly at Mitchell. The pain of his wound and his conflicting emotions were wearing down his strength, and he felt that he could endure no more. “That is all, I think.”

“Just a moment.” Anthony stepped forward briskly. “Kindly answer a few questions. Why did you try to kill yourself in the cabin and where did you get

your revolver?"

"I was despondent, discouraged when I left the court house, and went into a shop in Alexandria and purchased a revolver while Wyndham stayed in court to engage a lawyer."

"Had you been to the cabin before?" shooting a swift glance at him. "Were you familiar with its contents?"

"I have passed the cabin on several of my rambles through the woods, but never had been inside it. As I went by the cabin I saw the door was insecurely fastened and went in."

"Did you find Dr. Thorne in the cabin?"

"No." Beverly Thorne, who had been scrutinizing each person in the room, his gaze resting longest on Vera, who avoided looking at him, could not repress a smile as he saw Anthony's chagrin. "No one was in the cabin but myself," continued Noyes. "The stillness of the place got on my nerves, and I drew out my revolver—" He stopped and tried to withdraw his hand from Millicent's detaining clasp. "I heard someone approaching the cabin and darted behind the screen, not caring to meet anyone—then a shot startled me, and my revolver went off almost simultaneously, and my aim was poor—" His attempt at a smile was ghastly.

His companions were drinking in his words as they stood in a semicircle about the lounge on which Millicent had sunk beside Noyes. Mitchell, who was across from Thorne, saw him watching Vera, and turned his attention to her, but Anthony's next words riveted his thoughts again on Noyes.

"You say you heard a shot, Dr. Noyes?" questioned Anthony. "From which direction did the shot come?"

"From outside the cabin," promptly. "It was somewhat muffled."

"You are sure it was not fired in the cabin?"

"I am."

Anthony turned bluntly to Thorne. "I guess that lets you out of *one* charge—you didn't shoot Dr. Noyes, but—we still have to establish the identity of 'Gentleman Charlie,' the counterfeiter."

Thorne eyed the Secret Service agent in surprise mixed with amusement, but before he could reply Mitchell addressed him briskly.

"Suppose you tell me, Dr. Thorne, why Bruce Brainard stopped to see you on Monday evening before coming here, and why you never spoke of his visit."

"Brainard had an attack of vertigo on the way here, and, meeting Cato, asked to be directed to the nearest physician," replied Thorne. "So Cato brought him to me."

Millicent, who had listened to Noyes' statements in dumb agony, looked up at Thorne. "Bruce told me that he had stopped to see you, and Tuesday morning when I discovered Bruce lying in bed with his throat cut and recognized the razor, I—I—rushed to the telephone to ask you to come over, but Vera came and frightened me away before I got you."

Noyes struggled to sit up. Millicent's statement had caught him off guard.

"You discovered Brainard's murder on Tuesday morning?" he asked incredulously. "You went back to his bedroom again?"

Mitchell was the first to grasp the significance of Noyes' remark.

"What's this?" he demanded. "What do you mean to insinuate—that Miss Porter was in Bruce Brainard's bedroom on Monday night?"

"She was," responded a voice from the doorway, and Wyndham, spinning around, saw Dorothy Deane advancing into the room. She looked desperately ill and staggered rather than walked. "Millicent was seen in Bruce's bedroom by her brother Craig," Dorothy added.

Her listeners eyed her in astonishment too deep for expression. Wyndham was the first to recover himself. "Come with me, dear," he said soothingly. "You are ill, delirious."

Dorothy shook off Wyndham's detaining hand and walked over to Millicent. "Your brother saw you enter Bruce Brainard's bedroom at two o'clock on Tuesday morning, and you carried a razor."

"You lie!" Noyes' voice rang out bravely, but his agonized expression contradicted his words. "Craig Porter is a hopeless paralytic. He can neither leave his bed nor speak."

Dorothy did not shrink before his furious glare.

"True, Craig cannot speak and he cannot get out of bed," she admitted. "But he has regained the use of his first finger, and with that he signaled to me, using the Continental wireless code, that from his position in bed he can see what transpires in the next bedroom."

“How?” demanded Mitchell.

“You remember that there is a huge old-fashioned mirror facing Craig; a similar mirror hangs directly opposite in the next bedroom and through the open transom over Craig’s bed whatever transpires in the next bedroom is reflected by one mirror from the angle at which it is hung into the other.”

“Well, by—!” Mitchell stared dazedly at Dorothy. “And the bed Craig Porter occupies and the one Brainard occupied are backed against the wall which separates the two bedrooms, and both the mirrors face the beds.”

Mrs. Porter, her face ashy, looked appealingly at Dorothy. “What did Craig see on Tuesday morning?” she mumbled rather than asked.

Vera, waiting breathlessly, was dimly conscious of Wyndham’s heavy breathing.

“Craig caught a glimpse of Millicent approaching the bed, a razor clasped tightly in her raised hand, then she disappeared out of his line of vision.” Dorothy’s hands were opening and closing spasmodically; she dared not glance at Wyndham for fear of breaking down. Alan Noyes’ agony was pitiful to witness as he sat forward striving to shield Millicent who crouched by his side, his one arm about her. Dorothy’s statement held her spellbound.

“Craig said a little time elapsed,” went on Dorothy, and her voice sounded strained and harsh in the tense stillness. “Then the night light in Brainard’s bedroom was augmented by a powerful flashlight standing on the bed-table, and Craig saw the bed and Bruce lying in it with distinctness; he also saw a figure crouching by the bed, one hand groping for the razor which lay near Brainard. The next instant there was a sharp struggle and the murderer, straightening up, turned as if to listen, and faced the mirror— Don’t try to escape, Murray.”

The footman, edging toward the door, before which stood the Secret Service operative, swallowed hard and sat down.

“The game’s up,” he acknowledged insolently. “Well, which is going to claim the honor of arresting ‘Gentleman Charlie’—the Secret Service or Detective Headquarters? Don’t all speak at once, gentlemen,” and his jeering laugh awoke the others from their stupor.

CHAPTER XXIII

OUT OF THE MAZE

WITH a bound Detective Mitchell was by the footman's side; a click, and handcuffs dangled from his wrists. It seemed a useless precaution, as Murray evinced no desire to be troublesome but sat and regarded them with a sardonic grin.

"What's the charge?" he demanded, ignoring Anthony's presence at his other elbow.

"The murder of Bruce Brainard on Tuesday morning," responded the detective. "I warn you that anything you say will be used against you."

"Thanks." Murray grinned again. "Between Miss Dorothy and Mr. Craig you've got evidence enough to convict me."

Mrs. Porter, who had been gazing at the pseudo-footman in horrified amazement, found her voice.

"Do you mean to say that you killed my guest, Bruce Brainard?" she demanded.

"That is what your son claims," answered Murray.

"Why did you kill him? You had seen him at my house many times before?" Mrs. Porter sat down in the nearest chair; she was weak from nervous strain and its reaction.

"Why did I kill Bruce?" Murray cleared his throat. "We had worked together years ago at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and he was the only man living who knew something of my subsequent career." Murray's handcuffs jingled as he moved uneasily. "But Brainard never penetrated my disguise until Monday night when I assisted him into the library. He had overheard Miss Millicent's quarrel with Dr. Noyes, and it brought on some sort of an attack. I was in my shirt sleeves, and in helping him inside the library he tore my sleeve and saw a tattoo mark which he had made on my arm while we were working together. He knew my record up to ten years ago. I told him that I had reformed and was trying to live a different life; and he promised to give me a chance, but I could see by his manner that he was planning to give Mrs. Porter a tip as to my real character."

"I hardly think I would have believed him," affirmed Mrs. Porter faintly. "You have been a model servant all these years, Murray."

Murray looked gratified. "I flatter myself I played my part well, and in my leisure hours I fitted up the cabin and perfected a wonderful counterfeit."

"You did," agreed the Secret Service agent, "but you slipped up when you lost Miss Deane's bag in the street car."

Murray shifted his position to look directly at Vera who stood somewhat behind Mrs. Porter and in the shadow of a high-back chair.

"It wasn't Miss Deane's bag," he admitted. "It was one I gave Cato—" Thorne started and gazed blankly at the counterfeiter.—"Don't blame Cato, Dr. Thorne; he's a faithful old darky with a fondness for collecting money. He believed me an eccentric inventor, and I paid him well for doing errands for me, as well as pledging him a share in my 'patent rights,' and it was by his aid that I got my material to the cabin. By the way," addressing Anthony, "the first shot you heard at the cabin today was fired by one of your sentries higher up the ridge at Cato, and I suspect the old man's running yet. I was looking in that direction while you were staring at the cabin and I saw the whole thing."

"How did my card come to be in the bag, Murray?" asked Vera.

"I found it among some old papers in Brainard's overcoat. I burned the papers at the cabin, but your card was inadvertently slipped into the bag with the money Cato was taking to— That doesn't interest you," with a sidelong glance at the detective, "so I won't mention names."

Mitchell regarded him sourly for a second. "Cato can talk," he said meaningly, then turned to Vera. "Did you observe Murray's flashlight in Brainard's bedroom on Monday night, Miss Deane?"

"No." Vera moved a little forward and addressed them all. "I went some time after midnight to see how Mr. Brainard was getting on, and after my return to Craig's bedroom I sat almost with my back to the mirror and sideways to the bed in a big wing chair. I did not glance upward toward the transom but recall staring steadily at Craig, whom I could see but dimly, and all the while I thought of nothing but Bruce Brainard's treatment of my sister." Vera paused a second to steady her voice, then continued: "It seemed bitter irony that I should be nursing him. The news that he and Millicent might be engaged shocked me, and I was only waiting until the morning to tell Mrs. Porter all that I knew about Bruce." She stopped to clear her voice which had grown husky.

“At about three o’clock or a little after I went into Bruce’s room and was astounded to find the night light out. I felt my way to the bed and over to the table, found a box of matches and relit the candle.” Her eyes grew large with horror as the gruesome scene came vividly before her. “The sight of Bruce lying there dead deprived me of my voice, almost of my reason. Some minutes passed before I could pull myself together, then glancing down I saw that in searching for the matches I had brushed against the side of the bed and that my skirt was blood-stained.” Vera stumbled in her speech. “The last time I saw Bruce I told him that I hoped he would meet with a violent death—that was five years ago—and my spoken wish had been fulfilled.”

“Vera,” Dorothy approached her sister and clasped her tenderly, “don’t talk any more.”

“I must,” feverishly. “My first coherent idea after discovering that Bruce was really dead and beyond human assistance was to remove the bloodstains from my skirt; later I went to summon Dr. Noyes and found him gone. Mr. Mitchell,” turning to him, “when I realized that you and Dr. Thorne suspected that I had discovered Bruce’s murder some time before I went in search of assistance, I dared not tell you about the bloodstains, fearing you would think that I had killed him. God knows I had sufficient motive, knowing all that my sister had endured at his hands. Frankly, I believed that Hugh, knowing all this, had killed Bruce, and I tried to shield him—forgive the suspicion, Hugh —”

Without speaking, Wyndham wrung her hands warmly. “Don’t ask my pardon; I thought *you* guilty,” he confessed shamefacedly, “and from the same motive.”

Mitchell was about to speak when Millicent rose and approached Murray. She shrank slightly on meeting the counterfeiter’s eyes, but asked gently:

“Murray, I have always been kind to you. Will you not do me the justice to state that I was not in the room—that Craig was mistaken when he saw me just before you killed Bruce?”

“But you were there,” objected Murray.

“I was not,” and she stamped her foot. “I would have been aware of it, Murray.”

“No, you wouldn’t, because you were sleep-walking.” Murray’s statement brought a cry, a glad cry from Noyes.

"I caught a glimpse of you, Millicent," he broke in before the amazed girl could speak, "just as I went down to the library to wait for my telephone call. You were coming out of your mother's boudoir and I saw something glitter in your hand, but was too far away to make out in the dim hall light what you were carrying. Thinking you were going to your brother's room I went downstairs."

"How long did you remain in the library?" asked Mitchell.

"Until nearly four o'clock. Before returning to my room I went to see how Brainard was getting along, and was stupefied to find him dead." Noyes chose his words with care. "I recognized the razor as one of a set which Mrs. Porter had given me that morning. I remembered that I had left the set in her boudoir, and recalled my glimpse of Millicent, and that she was advancing toward Brainard's door; I feared that in a moment of mental aberration she had killed him. The thought was agony." Noyes almost broke down as he met Millicent's adoring eyes. "I decided that if I left the house I might be thought guilty; the razor was mine, I had threatened to kill Brainard, so I went—"

"But not before I saw you coming from Bruce's bedroom," added Millicent. "I had no idea I had been walking in my sleep, for I awoke in my bed, and being unable to sleep I got up and partly dressed, intending to go in and sit with Vera and my brother. Your expression, Alan, as you walked away from Bruce's bedroom terrified me, and gathering my courage I went there—saw Bruce—the razor—" She caught her breath—

"Recalling your threat to kill Bruce, I imagined you had carried it out," she went on, as no one spoke. "I crept back to my bedroom, horrified beyond words, and later it occurred to me that perhaps Bruce was not beyond medical aid, and I rushed downstairs to telephone Dr. Thorne—" She stopped, unable to go on. "I secured the set of razors and first hid them in an old trunk in the attic, then in the cannon—the rest you know."

Noyes, rising with some difficulty, stepped forward, and with a manner not to be denied, slipped his one arm about her waist, and led her across the room. Dorothy, standing nearest the heavy mahogany door as it slowly closed behind the pair, saw Millicent's head droop forward and her discreet ears alone caught Noyes' low whisper:

"Mine, at last!"

Silence prevailed in the library for some minutes after the departure of Millicent and her lover, then Thorne turned to Murray.

“Was Miss Millicent in the room when you killed Brainard?” he asked.

“No, she had gone out some minutes before,” answered Murray, his voice slightly strained. “I went in to see Brainard just to talk things over with him. He was lying half asleep, and when Miss Millicent appeared I was waiting in one corner of the room. Brainard must have heard her entrance, for he looked at her, half terrified and half hypnotized. Finally, after staring at him, she dropped the razor on the bed and left the room. Then I crept over to the bed, and the sight of the razor put the devil into me. I knew Brainard would squeal on me as soon as he felt well enough to think things over; he would never believe that I had reformed, and my blood boiled at the prospect of arrest and losing the results of my work at the cabin and in Mrs. Porter’s town house. I got the razor—” He shuddered, and did not complete the sentence.

Mitchell stirred uneasily and eyed Murray askance. “When you found the cabin was in the hands of the Secret Service why didn’t you clear out instead of coming back here?” he demanded.

“Because it never dawned on me that Brainard’s murder could be traced to me,” admitted Murray; dejection as well as fear had crept into his manner. “I knew you would find no incriminating papers at the cabin, and old Cato is faithful—he would not have told on me. I could not bear to run away, in itself a confession of guilt, and leave my life work behind me.”

“So much for over-confidence,” commented Mitchell dryly. “Come along, Murray.”

Murray got to his feet slowly, and his bow to the company was not without a certain dignity. “Good-by, ma’am,” he said, addressing Mrs. Porter. “You’ve always treated me well during the seven years I’ve lived with you. Tell Mr. Craig I don’t bear him malice.” And he vanished through the door as Mrs. Porter, her overwrought feelings mastering her, fainted for the first time in her life.

An hour later Dorothy, speeding through the lower hall, was intercepted by Thorne.

“Will you please tell your sister that I would like to see her for a few minutes?” he said. “I will wait in the drawing-room.”

Without wasting words, Dorothy, a mischievous smile dimpling her cheeks, hurried upstairs. As she turned from delivering Thorne’s message to Vera she encountered Hugh Wyndham, who was waiting for her in his aunt’s boudoir.

“Dorothy”—Wyndham stood tall and straight before her—“Jacob served seven years for Rachel—the desire of his heart; how long must I serve for mine?”

Dorothy’s roguish smile, so long lost in the care and turmoil of her daily life, lit her charming face as she answered:

“Just as long as it will require to get Vera’s permission. No, wait,” as Wyndham, hardly able to believe such swift capitulation, sprang toward the door. “*You* may set the date, Hugh.”

Down in the drawing-room the minutes passed on leaden feet for Thorne. Would Vera never come? He finally turned in despair and found her watching him from the doorway.

He was by her side instantly, and held out a black-edged visiting-card.

“You sent me this, Vera, as you said—‘In grateful remembrance’—for the little aid I was able to render your mother when she was stricken in the street with heart failure. Later, in Philadelphia I saw you, but was too shy to introduce myself, but I have never forgotten my first glimpse of you. I have always treasured the card and your picture, possessed by a strong conviction that we should some day meet again.

“Two months ago I heard that Bruce Brainard had eloped with a Miss Deane of Washington, and I stupidly jumped to the conclusion that it was you. It never occurred to me that it might be your sister. The thought that you were innocently involved in Brainard’s murder was torture to me, and I could not rest until the real criminal was arrested and you were entirely exonerated.

“You must know and realize how passionately I love you.” His voice was very tender, and her eyes fell before his ardent look. “I have little to offer, Vera. Is there any hope for me?”

Vera’s lovely eyes were alight with happiness as she looked up at him. “There’s more than hope,” she whispered, and the words were lost against his shoulder; then she looked bravely upward and their lips met in the first kiss of love.

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