Flat 2

By
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1. A SHOT IN THE NIGHT

A shot rang out sharply, and Captain Hurley Brown did not need the direction of the sound to guide him to Robert Weldrake's door. He had tried to intercept the white-faced boy, who had brushed him aside and entered his room, slamming the door and locking it.

Hurley Brown had seen that expression on a man's face before, and that man, too—just such another promising young officer as Robert Weldrake—had worn it on his return from the last of several interviews with Emil Louba. A shot had followed on that occasion also. Lingering outside, uneasy, smoking cigarette after cigarette, unable to seek his own quarters with the memory of that stricken-face before him, he was debating whether to insist on the boy opening his door to him when the shot stabbed the silence and sent him tearing up the half-dozen shallow stairs to the locked door.

There was no answer to his knock, and he scarcely waited for any, Putting his shoulder to the door, he had already forced it inwards, straining at the lock, when McElvie, Weldrake's batman, and two officers joined them; and their combined efforts burst the lock, sending them staggering a few paces into the room.

There was little need to raise him. They saw at a glance that Robert Weldrake was dead. The room was still full of an acrid smell, his stiffening fingers clutched at his service revolver.

'That damned Louba!' muttered Brown, the first to break the silence, and more than one of his companions spat out vicious curses.

'If somebody would shoot him. Malta'd be a lot cleaner,' declared McElvie wrathfully. Nobody disagreed with him. That Louba was the cause of the tragedy was accepted without debate. It was not an isolated case.

Hurley Brown hated Louba. He had seen too many men ruined by him and his kind. He had determined to drive him out of Malta, and had already taken steps to interest the military authorities in the evil influence his establishment exercised over the men stationed on the island.

He had seen the disaster towards which Robert Weldrake drifted, had tried to gain his confidence, to warn him; but the boy had been too deep in to extricate himself.

When nothing more was to be done, and they left the still figure to its loneliness. Brown separated from the others and walked briskly towards Louba's establishment. As he entered the cabaret, which was a gaudy mask for the remaining and more important part of the establishment, he became aware that there was something unusual happening.

The music had ceased and general conversation had died y away. Glasses were neglected and all heads were turned in the same direction. So far as Hurley Brown could see, it appeared to be an altercation between a customer and one of the performers, a scantily dressed dancer or singer who still had one foot on the low platform at the end of the room. The man she faced was plump and voluble, dark-eyed, with a full florid face and a flamboyant style of dress.

As Brown moved towards the doorway leading to the gaming rooms, the curtains were pulled aside to admit Emil Louba, followed by a weasel-faced fellow who immediately returned to his place in the meagre orchestra which flanked the platform.

'I'm glad your man fetched you!' shouted the disturber. 'It saves me the trouble of finding you.'

'Ah, da Costa! My friend da Costa!' remarked Louba, with a purring suavity.

'Your ruin I'll be!' roared da Costa, approaching him. He was small beside the big broad-shouldered Louba, and quivered with a fresh access of rage as the other looked down on him, a smile beneath the black sweeping moustache. 'Again you have done it!—when will you be content? Do you think I am to be crossed by you everywhere I turn?'

'All is fair in love and business, my dear da Costa—surely you know that! We can be trade rivals and yet remain the best of friends. But we interrupt the entertainment.'

He took da Costa's arm in a grip that was savage, despite the smile still on his face, and tried to draw him out of sight and hearing of the gaping crowd.

'I mean to interrupt it!' cried da Costa, dragging himself free. 'That girl is under contract to me—I pay her a salary three times what she is worth—I trained her—she owes everything to me—'

'It's a lie!' screamed the woman. 'I'm perfectly free to go where I like, and—'

'And the lady prefers Malta to Tripoli,' exclaimed Louba. 'That is all there is about it.'

'It is not all nor nearly all what you have done to me!' exploded da Costa. 'Whenever I am in a good place, you come and set up in opposition or you take my performers away, or—'

'Or in other ways prove myself the better man,' assented Louba. 'Business is a ver' good game, da Costa, if you know how to play it. Come, now, and leave these good people to their entertainment.' His fingers sank into da Costa's plump arm, and be dragged him a step or two towards the curtained doorway.

'You ungrateful hussy, you shall come back to Tripoli, or you shall pay for your breach of contract and for all the while I kept and trained you, before you earned one penny,' threatened da Costa, tearing his arm free from Louba's grasp and springing towards the woman, shaking his fists in her face.

She was more than equal to his abuse, screaming and gesticulating, defying him in scraps of half a dozen languages, until Louba interfered.

'Go up there and get on with your work,' he commanded, taking her by the shoulders and bundling her back on to the platform.

He made a sign to the musicians, and also to two waiters.

As though there had been no interruption, the woman and the orchestra burst forth together, she spreading a smile over her shrewish features, and proceeding to twist and turn with great vigour. The waiters seized da Costa and ran him down the length of the room and out into the street, where they scuffled with him for some time on the steps, preventing his re-entrance.

Louba bowed to the company, the overhead lights glistened on his smooth black hair.

'A t'ousand pardons,' he murmured. 'One cannot have the best establishment of its kind without rivals!'

He was about to leave by the way he had come, when Hurley Brown approached him.

'Nor without retribution, I hope,' added Brown.

'Why, Captain Hurley Brown!' Louba bowed with mocking exaggeration. 'I take this very kind of you, Captain. It is not often I have the pleasure of seeing you here, although...your young friend, Lieutenant Weldrake, is a frequent visitor.'

'He will not be in the future,' came the grim reply.

'No?' Louba laughed softly. 'Well, we shall see! I t'ink you have tried to keep him away before, but...unless my memory is ver' bad, without much success. Eh?'

'I shall succeed this time. I promise you.'

'That is so? Well'—he shrugged his shoulders—'so long as he settles up like a gentleman before he go, I will not complain. He is leaving us?'

'He has already left us. And you will leave us soon. You will leave us, Louba, if I have to tie a brick round your neck and drop you in the middle of the sea.'

'What do you mean by saying he has left us? He has not settled his obligations to me yet. It is not much more than an hour ago since I had to remind him of all that stuff about British officers and gentlemen.'

'Louba,' said Hurley Brown, very softly, 'I really don't know how I keep my hands off you!'

'Perhaps it is because you know I should have you t'rown out if you raised a finger to me, dear friend.'

'You—!' His arm was caught as he raised it.

'You will really not gain anything by violence,' said Louba. 'And it would be very unbecoming. Eh? Tell me what you mean by saying that boy has gone.'

'He's just been murdered.'

'Murdered? By whom?'

'By you, Louba.'

'Oh—oh, I see,' said Louba after a moment. 'So that is it. And what do you

want here, then?'

'Just to tell you that if you are not driven out of Malta by the authorities, I'll kick you out myself, and I'll kick you out of any place I find you in. We have met elsewhere, Louba, and the longer you live the viler you become.'

'What nonsense! You mean the longer I live the more fools I meet —naturally. As for your aut'orities just that to them!' He snapped his fingers. 'I am not to be held responsible for every young fool who is incapable of taking care of himself. If you want to kick anybody, go and kick them. I assure you, it is ver' good sport. Captain Brown. I have tried it,' he grinned.

'One day,' said Hurley Brown, 'you will try it once too often.'

A sneer twisted Louba's coarse features. 'If that is a threat,' he returned, 'it makes me laugh. I am Emil Louba. I go my way, trampling or stepping over whatever is in my path. It is for others to choose whether I trample or step over. But I do not turn aside.'

With a muttered exclamation. Hurley Brown swung away from the man, and strode through the throng, who were now loudly applauding the panting and smiling performer.

He had known no good purpose could be served by going to the place, but indignation had sent him there. It was outrageous to think of Weldrake lying dead on his narrow bed, whilst Emil Louba pursued his brazen course unharmed.

A violent voice broke on his ears from across the narrow street.

'I'll make you pay yet! I'll make you pay if I wait twenty years!' It was da Costa, shaking his fists in the direction of Louba's place, dishevelled and still breathless from the effects of rage and his tussle with the waiters.

2. THE LITTLE MAN WHO CAUSED A RIOT

It was not a pleasant task to meet Robert Weldrake's father whhe arrived in Malta.

The dead boy had been popular both with the men and his brother- officers, and some satisfaction was felt when it was known that his father was expected. McElvie voiced the general wish when he said that he hoped Mr. Weldrake, senior, was a hefty fellow handy with his fists, who was coming with the express purpose of interviewing Emil Louba.

'And there's no other reason why he should come,' observed McElvie

hopefully. 'He doesn't wear any uniform, and he can jolly well give Louba what for!'

Nevertheless, the task of greeting him and giving him details of his boy's death was not a coveted one, and Hurley Brown undertook it with misgivings.

He looked for a tall resolute man, an old and stronger edition of Robert Weldrake, and was amazed when his gaze fell on the small shrinking figure of Mr. Weldrake. If general indignation had reigned before, it was intensified by the pathetic little man upon whom the blow had fallen. It was obvious that his boy had been his world, his death a devastating shock.

He uttered no complaints, asked for no sympathy; he was touchingly grateful for the kindness shown him, tremblingly eager for any and every story, however trivial, anyone could tell him of his son. He sat in the boy's quarters alone for hours together, touching his belongings, reading his last note. He went to the grave every day, a small solitary figure.

Sympathy for Robert Weldrake was transferred to his father, and the very sight of the forlorn little man acted as fuel to the rage which burned against Louba.

It was da Costa who stirred the fire to a blaze. Meeting Weldrake one night, wandering aimlessly after his fashion, he stopped him, and pointed out Louba's place.

'That is where your son got his death-blow,' he said. 'That's where many another has been ruined. That is where Emil Louba is growing rich by ruining men and driving them to suicide.'

Weldrake's thin face turned in the direction of the red lights which illuminated the outside of the building and he nodded slowly.

Da Costa had sown the seed, and he was not surprised when Weldrake continued his quick nervous walk, going straight towards Louba's. He had been to all the places that his son had frequented, except to Louba's.

Da Costa knew the treatment he would receive from Louba, and ran to the barracks.

'Your little man has gone to Louba! Likely Louba will hoist him on the platform and make him dance for them!'

It was enough.

The soldiers outdistanced him, but he arrived in time to see Weldrake being led away with a cut on his face, looking dazed and shaken.

Inside was pandemonium. The orchestra was playing wildly in an apparent effort to drown the disturbance. People were standing on tables, others protesting shrilly, whilst in the centre were waiters and a dancing- girl trying

to keep back excited and angry soldiers.

'We will see Louba!' came the insistent shout.

'Louba had nothing to do with it!' cried the girl. 'He never saw him. He sent down word he wouldn't see him. He was busy.'

'Yes, busy spinning the wheel upstairs and ruining as many more as he can!'

'He gave orders for him to be thrown out!'

'He didn't! It was the little man who wouldn't understand and wouldn't go.'

'We put him out gently at first.'

'He would come back.'

'Where's Louba?'

The babble was at its height when Louba appeared.

'Really, Gentlemen, really!' The oil of his manner fell on flames.

More soldiers were crowding into the place. Da Costa, jumping up and down to get a view, missed the beginning of it, only he knew that his hopes were being realised. Louba refused to be intimidated, and refused to restrain his mockery. It was when he drawled out that there was a great deal of fuss over a degenerate young fool who had not even honesty enough to pay his debts of honour that the first blow was struck. Louba returned it instantly. His bullies sprang into the fray; the soldiers welcomed them.

'We'll smash everything in the place!'

The threat was taken up with enthusiasm, and sealed by a loud crash, as a bottle of wine splintered against a long mirror.

Joyous hands snatched up every bottle within reach, trays and chairs in lieu of better missiles, and a deafening crash of glass announced the breaking of every mirror in the garish place.

Women screamed and ran, and some of their escorts also chose the better part of valour.

People came running in from the street, adding to the confusion.

'Upstairs, boys, and throw his paraphernalia out of the window!'

'Grab his winnings and send 'em out with the tide!'

The gamblers upstairs objected to the invasion of the wreckers, knowing nothing of the meaning of it, and the tumult did not diminish.

Da Costa, rejoicing, leapt over the performers' platform, gaining the tiny dressing-room at the back. This was deserted.

There were several candles on the high bench which served as a dressing table. Flimsy dresses hung on the walls: muslin draped the looking-glass. Da Costa soon had a blaze there.

Going out into the hall again, which was deserted except for the crowd clustering and struggling about the entrance leading to the stairs, striving to join the throng upstairs, or endeavouring to find out what it was all about, he flung a shower of lighted matches over the floor, where pools of fiery spirits lay soaking into the carpet amid the litter of broken bottles which had contained them.

The flames leapt along the group, and were climbing up to the inflammable decorations suspended from the roof before a scream called attention to them.

No one attempted to put them out. It was 'safety first'.

Da Costa was one of the first to reach the street and to run to a safe distance. From there he watched the deep blue of the sky take on an ominous glow, and gradually lighten to a spreading rose colour that flickered, alternately dull and fierce, whilst the flames of the burning building leapt into view.

It was not late and the streets were full of people, asking what was on fire. Officers and military police hastened down, summoned by news of the riot.

Hurley Brown hurried by with an anxious face. It was one thing to have Louba's house sacked and burned, another for soldiers to suffer for it.

Da Costa, aching for someone with whom to rejoice, seized on Weldrake, when his small figure appeared in sight.

'It's Louba's,' he announced, exulting. 'It's Louba's place that's on fire!'

The sky was lit up with an angry crimson that glowed and sank in the breeze; the surrounding buildings stood out in beautiful and uncanny distinctness.

As the crimson became sullen, screened by black smoke, Hurley Brown returned, and paused beside Weldrake. Only da Costa chattered.

Men drifted back to the barracks and Louba, coatless, for he had taken it off to wrap round his face as he fought his way to the streets, strode up to them with a threatening air,

'T'ere will be something to pay for this, Captain Hurley Brown!' he exclaimed. 'We'll see what those military aut'orities you spoke of will say to this!'

'If you have any sense, Louba, you will just sail away and say nothing about it,' put in da Costa. 'If you start them asking questions they may ask a great deal more than you'll like.'

'What, you? You've had a hand in this, da Costa! I know; Eulalie saw you

there.'

'Does she want to come back to Tripoli?' jeered da Costa.

'Perhaps she will—and I, too! Hear that? I drove you out of Port Said, and I'll drive you out of Tripoli.'

'Don't you threaten me, Louba! I'm more than a match for you! You've done me some injuries in the past, but I'll make you regret it,' cried da Costa, truculently, transported with triumph.

'I never regret anything,' returned Louba insolently, and turned from him. 'If you think this will drive me from Malta, Captain Hurley Brown, you will live to discover your mistake.'

'It did not need this, Louba. I have said you'll go, and you will go,' said Brown. 'Tonight is only another addition to the harm you've done —the men implicated in this business are only a few more added to the number of those who've suffered through you.'

'And I'll see they do suffer,' muttered Louba, between his teeth. 'I'll make them sorry they ever lifted a hand against me.'

'The only thing they had to be sorry for,' ejaculated da Costa, 'is that you weren't burned along with your house.'

Louba turned his baleful eyes upon him. 'Very well, very well,' he said. 'Time is before me.'

'Time and Nemesis,' added Hurley Brown.

'Time and me!' boasted da Costa.

'I take you,' sneered Louba. 'I take you both—and as many more as you like to bring.'

Weldrake remained silent, looking from the defiant Louba to the two who hated him. Captain Hurley Brown, grim with mouth hard-set and da Costa, alive with unrestrained passion.

Weldrake slipped away.

An hour later, whilst Hurley Brown made anxious inquiries about him, he was kneeling in the dark beside his boy's grave.

'It's all right, Robert,' he was whispering reassuringly. 'You'll be avenged. I'll see to it. I'll never forget. I won't stay home until he's paid...I know it will be all right. You'll be avenged, Robert...'

3. THE WOMAN WHO ESCAPED

The room looked little like that of a flat in the West End of London.

Oriental tapestries and embroidered silks, emblazoned with every hue, were strewn about, cushions of exotic design in pro-fusion. A gold hookah stood near a wide settee, its pale-blue smoke mingling with that from the perfumed cigarette which the girl smoked, seated amongst the cushions, her feet on a carved footstool.

In a high slender brazier of bronze burned pungent spices, and the only illumination came from a grotesquely carved bronze lantern suspended by chains, from which a pale-green light spread eerily, shining on the polished black head of the man beside the hookah. His Western clothes were covered by an embroidered robe, and to the girl whose dreams of the East were realised by the bizarre effects about her, the dim light, the scent of the smoke and the spices, he was a figure of rich romance.

His imperfect English was in itself an added charm.

'But you seem to know somet'ing of Cairo already,' he remarked.

'No. Just a little that Jimmy told me. He used to tell me interesting things once.'

'But is interesting no longer?' inquired Louba.

She frowned.

'He soon became more talkative about crime and police work out there, than Cairo and Baghdad themselves. Don't let's talk about him. When I'm here, I want to forget I'm in England: I want to forget humdrum places and ordinary people and live in a beautiful dream.'

'You are ver' good to say I make beautiful dreams for you. You do not now regret our meetings? You are not now troubled by the little inconveniences they entail?'

'I don't care for anything so long as I escape for an hour to a new wonderful world.'

'But it is great pity you should have to escape to it,' he observed. 'Would it not be so much more wonderful if you lived there all the time? If your East was not conjured out of a few Eastern hangings and carvings, bound by four walls, but you stood in the secret heart of it, steeped in the soul of its age-old mystery...'

'Oh, don't—you make me so envious, and miserable. Because I shall never see it, and I want to more than anything in the world.'

'And why not, Kate? It is only the shackles of that humdrum society which you dislike that holds you back. If only—'

'Who's that?' she broke in, her lips parted fearfully, the cigarette held far from her as though she prepared to cast it aside hastily.

He turned his head at the sound of the bell.

'I do not expect anyone,' he said. 'Miller will see to it.'

But Miller, his man, opened the door to two visitors whom he dared not take upon himself to send away. He begged them to wait whilst he took their names.

'Who is it?' called Louba, as the man knocked on the locked door.

The girl leapt to her feet in terror when the names were given. 'Daddy! Oh, get me out! Get me out! Which way can I go?'

She seized her coat and hat, flinging them on in trembling haste.

'You cannot go by the service passage now. There's only the window. Perhaps I'd better not see them,' said Louba.

'Oh, you must! Otherwise he might suspect. How can I get out by the window?'

'Down the fire escape. I'll release the ladder, but when you get to the bottom of it, the alarm will ring. You must run round by the back of the house quickly, before anyone can see you. Don't be frightened. You will get away safely.'

He had unlatched the window, and was tugging furiously to open it. It withstood all his efforts. He went to the door, outside which Miller waited.

'What's the matter with the confounded window, Miller?' he cried.

'The screws, sir, the screws at the bottom!'

Louba switched on the light and returned to the window, where the girl stooped agitatedly to assist, half sobbing as she fumbled vainly at the small tightened screws.

'He can't suspect it's you,' said Louba, as he tore his fingers and cursed inwardly in his endeavours to loosen the screws. 'I'd better send them away.'

'No, no!' The girl was in a panic. 'He's seen us exchange a private word or two occasionally—I'm always afraid he'll guess. I must get away if we break the window!'

At last he had the screws out, and the window dragged open.

Without a word and possessed only by her guilty desire to escape, she fled

through the window and down the fire escape, jumping the last few steps in a frenzy of fright as the burglar-alarm clanged harshly and sent her fleeing into the misty darkness.

'Show them in!' called Louba to Miller, unlocking the door. Hastily he collected a few of the tapestries and cushions and threw them through the doorway into his bedroom, slamming the door shut and wrapping a handkerchief about his torn finger before he went forward to meet his guests.

'Pray pardon me that I keep you waiting, dear friends,' he apologised. 'I had fallen asleep and was far away in the land of dreams. But you bring me a ver' pleasant awakening.'

His visitors had doubts and, despite Louba's efforts, it plain that they felt themselves intruders and were anxious to take their leave.

After a very short while they rose to go. He accompanied them to the door himself, still talking vivaciously, and expressing his regret that they could not be persuaded to stay longer.

It was after the door had closed on them that the suavity vanished from his face and was replaced by a scowl.

'Miller!'

'Yes, sir,' said the man, appearing in response to the peremptory call.

'What is the meaning of that window being stuck fast as if it was never to be opened this side eternity? I have broken my nails and torn my skin trying to open it. Why was it screwed down?'

'There's always been screws there, sir, at night-time. With the fire escape outside, it's safer.'

'Need you hammer them in so that I must needs root up the whole building to get them out?' demanded Louba, still visibly irritated and flurried by the contretemps.

'I only screwed 'em right as I always do, sir, particularly on a misty night. You may be glad of those screws some day,' he added, with a feeble attempt at lightness; but if he sought to dispel the gloom, he failed dismally.

'What do you mean by that?' exclaimed Louba suspiciously.

'Nothing, sir,' replied the man innocently. 'I only meant they do keep the burglars out, don't they?'

Louba uttered an impatient exclamation, and went back into the disordered room.

He glanced at the window, even went close and peered out until he could see

the faint outline of the fire escape. It certainly would be easy for anyone to enter that way, but for the burglar-alarm connected with the ladder.

He pulled the curtains close across, and returned to the centre of the room, where he stood, biting a finger.

He was a much-hated man. There were people...

Bah!

He shook his shoulders scornfully.

Who dare touch Louba?

4. THE GIRL WHO RAN AWAY

Not many days after her escape from Louba's flat, the same girl stood talking in a low voice to a man in white overalls. The man held a test-tube in his hand, and a broad patch of purple lay across his heavy and unprepossessing face, thrown by a lingering ray of sun slanting through the violet panes of the window.

He kept his eyes on the tube, as though prepared for interruption and desirous of appearing engrossed in his work. The girl herself only leaned inside the door, whispering hastily.

'If you understand, you'd better go now,' he said, without turning his head. 'We don't want to be seen talking together.'

'No. I'm afraid he's seen us before.' She swung round, and started as she met the grave kindly eyes of the one man she least desired to find her there. 'Why, Daddy...I didn't hear you. I just looked in the laboratory to see if you were here,' she stammered. 'Won't you come and have some tea before you start work?'

'Yes, Kate. I came to see if you were going to give me any. I was afraid you were out.' He spoke a few words to his assistant, then walked with the girl to the living-rooms.

'I used to think you didn't care for Berry,' he observed, a short while afterwards, as he sat drinking tea.

'Well, I didn't at first,' she replied. '...But I think it was only his manner I misunderstood.'

'That might well be. He had a great deal to learn there; though he's a good worker...a bit irregular in his hours lately, and...'

He wrinkled up his forehead, pursing his lips dubiously.

He said no more to the girl, but he had growing doubts of the integrity of his assistant, Mr. Charles Berry. Valuable equipment had disappeared from the laboratory since Berry's coming.

The girl rose early the next morning and wrote a letter which she put in her handbag. Going out, she met the housekeeper.

'Why, Miss Kate, you're never going out so early?' exclaimed the woman. 'Before breakfast?'

'Yes, I am. I'm going to Covent Garden to buy some flowers, and then I'm meeting a friend. Perhaps I shall stay out to lunch, too,' she replied, hastening to the door.

'Well, she does do some strange things,' soliloquised the woman, as she watched Kate out of sight.

The letter which the girl had written was delivered at the house the following morning and the envelope bore the Dover postmark.

Charles Berry did not come to work on the day that Kate left, nor was he seen at his employer's house again.

Inquiries elicited no news of him, but the girl whose dislike of him had been succeeded by civility and hurried conferences was steeping her romantic soul in the East which had for so long filled her dreams, and it was Louba who sat beside her, looking down on the flat-roofed town, with its maze of narrow streets, its medley of colour and costume, scorching under the midday sun. Beyond the town lay a dust-hued plain over which a faint line marked the slow progress of a camel caravan.

'Oh, I can't believe it—I can't believe it's real, even yet!' Kate ejaculated.

'It is very real,' he answered, with deep satisfaction. 'You have left stagnation behind, and are just beginning to live. I knew we should be in the East together, one day.'

'How could you know? I—'

'Because I wished to bring you here, and I always get what I want. I meant to take you away from that fellow...and I have done so.'

'Jimmy?'

'Yes.' His teeth showed viciously as he spoke the word.

'Why, Emil, you say it as if you hate him.'

He laughed softly. 'No. It is not worth my while to hate those who cross me. It

is sufficient that I always get the better of them.'

'But Jimmy has never done you any injury?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Jimmy, as you call him, does not exist. Let us talk of some-t'ing else.'

They went down into the bazaar towards sundown where she revelled in the sights and sounds and smells, all equally delightful to her infatuated imagination. Even the filthy beggars, in their nondescript tatters of clothing, were powerless to offend her. Were they not truly of the East?

The bargaining, the frequent pretence of breaking off negotiations, the raised hands and protestations when Louba made an offer for the things which caught his or his companion's fancy, all captivated her. It was the Eastern method of buying and selling, and as such it was delightful.

She resented the intrusion of anything English, and therefore viewed with hostile eyes the obviously English man who tugged furtively at her sleeve when Louba had disappeared within the low dark opening leading to the inside stores of the vendor whose varied goods she was examining.

'Excuse me, but is it all right with you?' asked the man, in a manner at once timid and eager. 'You seem to be without friends here...with Louba. This is a long way from England, and—'

'It is a long way, but I don't think that a sufficient excuse for impertinence,' returned Kate, flushing. 'I don't know you.'

'No; but you see I know Louba, and you don't look as if you do.'

'I know him well enough to be content with his...friendship, without requiring the advice of a stranger,' she said, moving away.

She was the more angry because of that burning flush on her face, the keen sense of her position, according to Western ideas, brought back to her by this reminder of home, and all the conventions she had overthrown. She told herself it was like being wakened from the exotic joys of a gorgeous dream by the sound of a suburban milkman.

'Yes, I know I'm a stranger,' said the mild voice. 'And I don't ask you to trust or confide in me, only I would suggest to you that you go back home. Whatever your home is like and whatever awaits your return, leave Louba, my dear, and go back before you lose heart, and while life still seems worth another effort.'

Before she could find any reply his mild eyes glanced past her and he darted backwards, out of sight round a pile of carpets and mats, up one of the narrow alleyways running from the main thoroughfare of the bazaar.

It was Louba who had frightened him away. He had come to the doorway and

stood beside the youth who was in charge of the place, and he was looking at a customer who strode away through the meandering throng with something held close under his arm, and a suggestion of tremendous haste in his step.

'Somet'ing interesting about that,' observed Louba, as he rejoined Kate. 'A tawdry t'ing, of no value, yet he has given a ridiculous price for it and made off as if he were afraid they would take it from him. Look at the boy!'

The boy, otherwise the proprietor's son, was rubbing his hands gleefully as he watched the tall form of his late customer disappear. A moment later, he was telling the tale of his good bargain to his father who, blear-eyed and soiled, listened with an indifference that quickly changed to anger.

'What, he offered that for it, and you let him have it for double the price?' he cried, according to Louba's quick translation to Kate. 'He offered that?—in the beginning?—and you let him have it for double, dolt!'

'But, that was a dozen times more than it was worth!'

'How do you know that, fool? Would he have offered six times its value at the first if it were only worth what we thought? Fool, dolt! He so anxious to get it that he—! Oh, why was I cursed with such a son!'

Leaving the old man to his lamentations, Louba and Kate resumed their walk.

'What was it?' asked Kate.

'Just a casket stitched over with beads and stuck with coloured glass.' His eyes were narrowed. If there was anything to be gained, he disliked another than himself to be the gainer. 'M'm. I should much like to know the meaning of that.'

Kate was less gay on the homeward journey than she had been when they set out. Though she recalled it with anger and resentment, yet the episode with the little Englishman had dimmed the brightness of her romance.

The sun was sinking as they climbed the low hill; looking back, the town appeared flat and drab. She drew closer to Louba.

'I do hate those little insignificant men,' she said, and he pressed her arm against his side. She did not tell him that she was expressing her dislike of another, not her admiration of himself.

She listened with even more than her usual avidity to his extravagant compliments and conceits, clinging the more passionately to her romance because of the chill touch of reality which had approached it.

Though she was smiling when they reached the walled-in garden of the house on the hill, she halted with a sudden start as the figure of Charles Berry loomed before them. She shrank against Louba, glimpsing the hate in the

man's eyes, though he raised them to her for but a moment. If she had tried to forget her aversion for him, he had not forgotten her former slights.

Her new-found smile froze. She shivered.

'Let's go in,' she said to Louba. 'I'm cold.'

5. THE BEADED CASKET

'My dear Kate, not'ing will give me greater pleasure than to relieve you of my short-comings. I beg you not to distress yourself about them any more.'

She looked up at him dully, inured to the sneer on his lips, the oily mockery of his voice. Even the insulting glance, the open contempt in his bold eyes, had long since ceased to make her wince.

Only she waited with parted lips to know the meaning of his last words, apprehensive of fresh indignities. The light banter of his tone, his good spirits, boded her no good, following-upon his brutally unconcealed weariness of her, his coarse ill-humours; particularly upon his anger of only an hour ago.

'I have had the misfortune to be unable to please you for some time past,' he went on, and made an airy gesture. 'It pains me! But I hope I shall always put a lady's happiness before my own.' He lit a cigar carefully, throwing the match out into the dim garden. There was no light in the room except that which came through the long open windows. She had fled away from the garish lighted rooms, where Louba pursued his old methods of enriching himself at other people's expense, to the small private room at the back of the house, sitting there until the light faded and the summer night closed in.

'You were not when you made me look on just now, while you cheated that young American,' she said.

'We will not speak of that, my dear Kate,' he rejoined, an ominous note in his voice. 'Your behaviour was...indiscreet, and might have been disastrous, but for my own quick wits. We will not go into details at all; I t'ink it better not. It is sufficient that you are not even of use to me in my business. If I had asked you to dance in the cabaret, you might have suggested it was a great departure from your habits, but I have done no more than to ask you to preside at the tables, and look pretty.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'It may no longer be your fault if you do not look pretty, but t'ere seems no reason why you should not look pleasant.'

'Well?' she asked. She knew all this was mere preliminary.

'I have decided that as I can no longer make you happy, I had better pass you over to one who may.'

'Pass me...!' She half rose from her seat, her white face clear in the gloom. He put up his hand.

'Do not do me the injustice of misunderstanding, Kate. It is a husband I am speaking of, and I will myself see you safely married.'

She put her hand up to her throat, but could not speak.

'Such an old friend, too—Mr. Charles Berry. Is he not?' asked Louba smoothly.

'Marry Charles Berry?' she gasped. 'Never as long as I live!'

'Oh, yes you will, my dear Kate. You certainly will. I say it.'

'I will not!'

'And I doing my best for you, as your guardian!' he ejaculated reproachfully. 'How could I ever go back to England again, if I knew I had left you here unprotected! Really, do you t'ink I have no conscience?'

He was thoroughly enjoying himself but, before he could continue, the door behind them opened, showing a lighted passage and a brilliant and crowded room beyond, before it was quickly closed upon the newcomer.

'Louba, are you there?' asked a hoarse breathless voice.

'Yes. Who is it?'

'Vacilesco. Will you hide something for me?—just until I have thrown them off.'

He stopped, listening. Hurried feet could be heard thudding down the passage from the great lighted room. 'They followed me in! They were too close. Hide this—you shall have your share, Louba!'

As the door behind him was flung open, he sprang away from it, thrust something into Louba's outstretched hands, jumped over the low sill of the window and ran across the dark garden towards the narrow lane running at the bottom. Louba thrust the object behind the nearest cushion, before he spoke to the intruders. 'What is this? Who are you?'

He moved to the switch and put the light on. Turning her head, Kate beheld three men of villainous aspect, panting like the man they pursued.

'Someone came in here—he's got stolen property. Have you seen him?'

'He's just entered with the same delightful unceremoniousness as yourselves, gentlemen. You pushed him away from the J door as you came in.'

Louba pointed down the garden, and without waiting for more they leapt forward, and were lost in the darkness.

'Stay here and see no one touches that!' ordered Louba, before she went after the men. Vacilesco had promised him a share, but he had never cared for the sharing system.

The others had jumped over the low wall into the lane, but Louba, careful of his immaculate clothes, stayed to open the wooden door. He followed the sound of the steps over the rough path leading along the backs of the gardens. He could hear the men's feet slipping over the stones.

A little farther along there was a high wall and on the opposite side one or two trees stretched their arms across the narrow path, shutting out the light.

It was at this point that the pursuers came up with their quarry, making a desperate effort to do so. Louba stood still, his keen eyes and ears taking in the struggling mass of figures, the scuffling of feet, the murmur of voices; then a choked sound, a smothered scream, and unbroken silence.

In case they came back the same way, he stepped softly over to the blackness under the tallest tree—standing on the little hillock surrounding it.

He could guess what they were doing over there by the high wall. He could even hear a few whispered curses and queries as their search proved futile.

After a while they moved into the middle of the path, where he could distinguish their three figures against the paler sky. They hesitated, evidently debating amongst themselves, after which they took to their heels and ran off in the opposite direction to Louba's house.

He waited for a minute or two, then crossed over to the prone figure they had left, stooped and touched him carefully. With a light step he returned to his house.

Kate was sitting where he had left her. He looked at his fingers and gleaming shirt-front when he came into the light. They were spotless.

'What has happened?' she asked quickly, roused by the significant inspection.

'I'm afraid they've stabbed Vacilesco, but it has noting to do with us. You understand?' he asked threateningly. 'We know not'ing.'

'You have what they were after.'

'I have not'ing. He left not'ing here. Do not make any mistake about that, my dear Kate. I shall be very annoyed if you do. Have you looked at it?' he queried, stepping to the cushion behind which he had concealed Vacilesco's abandoned treasure.

She shook her head.

He closed the windows and pulled the curtains across before he examined his booty.

It was a casket, covered with beads of all colours, worked in a crude but effective design, having imitation jewels in the centre of the largest pattern. He opened it eagerly, and paused in disappointment at the sight of its empty interior.

'It seems Vacilesco made off with it too late,' he remarked. '...Yet it was not locked. He would surely look inside.'

The casket was lined with white kid, but the bottom was encrusted with beads and coloured glass like the outside. Examining it both inside and outside, Louba gave a grunt of hopefulness, and began running his fingers over the bottom of the inside. He was rewarded by finding the spring which released the false bottom.

An exclamation of pleasure was followed quickly by one of anger, as he saw that the space beneath was quite empty.

He regarded the basket with a scowl for a moment or two before he conquered his chagrin, and shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, it is Vacilesco who has paid for it,' he observed. 'Not I.'

'Will you go on with what you were saying?' asked Kate. 'What do you mean by saying I am to marry Charles Berry?'

'Just that. We part company, you and I, but I will see you married to him first. Flat 2, Braymore House, London, where you have spent such pleasant hours is still mine, and I shall shortly return. For reasons which you will readily guess, it is convenient for me to have you Mrs. Charles Berry.'

'But you can't mean this! It's too bad even for you!' she burst out.

'Bad? The ingratitude! My dear Kate, just think how I might have left you! Why...' He paused with his eyes on the casket, which apparently put her and her affairs out of his thoughts. 'Now I remember!' he exclaimed. 'I have seen this t'ing before. Yes! It was at—'

'I don't want to hear about it!' she cried. 'Will you keep to the subject?'

'Oh, but this was at a time which you would like to hear about,' he mocked. 'A time of tender memories! Do you not remember once, in those precious early days, someone gave an incredible price for a worthless casket? It was once when we were in the bazaar—'

'Oh, don't!' She made a gesture of intolerable pain.

He laughed. 'I said they were tender memories! What a pity such times do not last for ever.'

'I was not regretting the times,' she rejoined bitterly. 'I was thinking of a man who warned me...whose advice I despised...that day...' She turned her face away from his cruel eyes.

'That day? I cannot remember anyone who could give you advice; but it does not matter. I must go back to my guests—well, my victims, if you like it better.' His gaze wandered again to the casket. 'I will keep it in memory of you, dear Kate...a memento of our very charming idyll.'

He turned to the door to throw one last gibe. 'You, of course, will need no reminder! I flatter myself to that extent.'

He laughed again, and the door closed behind him.

6. THE MAN WHO WAITED

'Don't you know me, Miller?'

The years had not dealt kindly with Mr. Charles Berry, but Miller had no difficulty in recognising him. He had once been reprimanded by Louba, as a result of endeavouring to satisfy his natural curiosity concerning Berry's visits to the flat and the quality of his relations with Louba; so that he had a personal reason for remembering him. 'How are you, Miller?' went on Berry affably, extending his hand.

'Oh, fair. How's things?' returned Miller. Berry had not formerly been very cordial with him, but it was evident that he wished now to be amiable.

They were outside Braymore House, one cold, damp evening.

'Just got back to England,' said Berry. 'Going anywhere particular?'

'I'm taking some letters down to Mr. Louba at the Elect Club.'

'Oh, so he's there?'

'Yes. Do you want to see him?'

'That's what I've come to England for. He's not treating me as he ought, and if he doesn't make a change, I think of making it unpleasant for him—I say, come and have one, can't you? I should like a talk to you. Not in a particular hurry, are you?'

'Not for five minutes or so.'

They walked side by side, a moist wind in their faces.

'How is Mr. Louba not treating you properly?' asked Miller, seeing Berry inclined to be communicative.

'Well—he's not paying me all he owes me. How do you think he is for money? Anything gone wrong?'

'Why?'

'Do you know anything?'

They regarded each other uncertainly.

'Look here,' said Berry. 'We may as well be frank with each other. Perhaps it'll help us both. He's behindhand in his payments to me, and I'm wondering if he's getting short of cash. How's he with you?'

'Well,' said Miller. 'My wage is behind too.'

'Oh.' Mr. Berry became thoughtful. Turning his head, he drew Miller's attention to a little man who was following at their heels. 'Who's that fellow?' he asked. 'I seem to have seen him often, but I don't remember where.'

'I don't know. I've seen him hanging about this neighbourhood: but he looks harmless enough.'

They went into the nearest saloon bar, and it was when they were seated together at a table with glasses before them, that Berry decided to take Miller yet more into his confidence.

'The truth is,' he said, 'I've already seen Louba.'

'What, since your return?'

'Yes. You were out. And he told me that he was broke, and that he was clearing out of the country with as much money as he could get together.'

Miller whistled. 'That's lively! What about my wages?'

'I thought it was just a bluff, to avoid paying me, but if it's true, it's pretty dismal, isn't it?'

'Rotten,' responded Miller gloomily.

'If it's true, he'll take every cent he can lay hands on, and you and I'll never see a penny of our money.'

Miller's countenance expressed a wrathful agreement.

'He's a bad lot is Louba,' said Berry.

'I can believe it,' nodded Miller. 'If I thought he was really going to do me—'

Berry laughed.

'He'll not treat you any better than anybody else, you can rely on that, Miller,' he said, and came to an abrupt halt.

The little man they had seen in the street had entered the place after them, and had seated himself at a table near by He blinked guilelessly at Berry's rude stare.

'See that man?' muttered Berry. 'Come in to have a lemonade,' he scoffed, not doubting the man's harmlessness, yet somehow rendered uneasy by his proximity.

'After all the years I've served him!' exclaimed Miller, his mind still on Louba and his own grievance. 'But I've had my suspicions.'

'What's made you suspicious?'

'I know his companies aren't doing any too well, and he's had to pay out a good bit; and I saw something only a couple of days ago that made me open my eyes, but he's always doing something odd, and I couldn't be sure it meant a get-away.'

'What did you see?' asked Berry eagerly.

'A passport made out in another name, but with his photograph on it.'

'Then it's true. He's going to run.' Berry drained his glass and slapped it on the table. 'And we're left in the soup! Married?'

'I'm going to be.'

'Nice little wedding-present for you—absconding employer. Have another.'

They had two others, and Miller, usually an abstemious man, began to feel himself a disgracefully used person.

'All these years I've been with him!' he ejaculated.

'Earned a nice fat wedding-present, if any man has,' sympathised Berry.

'And the wages he owes me!'

'Mean rogue. Might have paid you, at least.'

Berry was well content with Miller's condition of mind, when he was again irritated by the little man at his elbow, who was undisguisedly listening to what portions of the conversation reached his ears.

'Excuse me,' said Berry loudly. 'Are we saying anything to interest you, sir?'

'I beg your pardon,' said the little man. 'I couldn't help hearing that you were speaking of Mr. Louba.'

'Friend of yours?'

'No. But I'm very interested in him.'

'Really? A lot of people are.'

'Yes. I'm particularly interested in him just now.'

'Oh, why?'

The little man brought his glass of lemonade and seated himself at their table.

'Why,' he explained. 'I find that da Costa has a flat above his in Braymore House.'

'Yes, he has,' said Miller. 'But he's not a friend of Mr. Louba's'.'

'Oh, no, I wouldn't call him that,' returned the little man. 'That is why I'm very hopeful just now. He said if he waited twenty years...and it isn't twenty years yet.'

'Don't seem much to be hopeful about, if you're talking about Mr. Louba,' said Miller dejectedly.

'What do you know about Louba?' queried Berry.

'Oh, nothing much,' replied the little man gently. 'I met him years ago...a long while. Only I've never lost faith—particularly in da Costa. They've quarrelled again since then: rivals, you know, and da Costa doesn't forget.'

'Well, what's it all about, anyway?' demanded Berry, impatient to continue his manipulation of Miller's grievances.

The little man looked at him blankly.

'Any special business with us?' asked Berry rudely.

'Oh, no, thank you. Pardon me for interrupting you. I'm always interested in anything concerning Louba. It helps me along. Not that I ever lose faith,' he said, getting to his feet. 'Faith is a great thing, gentlemen. I've been living on it for years now. Keeps me cheerful when otherwise I should die—but I'm always cheerful. I have faith. And I wait.'

He drank his lemonade, made a little bow, and went out. Berry tapped his forehead.

'Well, now, look here. Miller,' he said. 'Louba's treating us both badly, and he's a rogue, anyhow. Why should we let him grab all the money he can and clear off with it?

'How can we stop him?'

'We can't stop him from clearing off, but we can go shares in his plunder.'

'He'll see to that! Whoever goes short, you can be sure he'll have enough to live in luxury. Trust him.'

'If we're fools enough to let him. You're in the house with him, Miller.'

Miller put down his glass so hastily that some of its contents splashed over on to the marble-topped table.

'What if I am? D'you take me for a thief?'

'I shouldn't be sitting here talking to you if you were,' replied Berry, with a slightly overdone haughtiness.

'Then what's my being in the house got to do with it?'

'Well, you can see that whoever benefits by the money he manages to collect, it won't be him. Why, I'd rather send the whole lot to a hospital, and go without my own arrears, than that scoundrel should have it,' declared Berry virtuously. 'To take money from him, who only uses it for other people's ruin, is no different from taking a loaded revolver from a man who'd only use it for murder! There's stealing, and there's taking, Miller, and I tell you I'd think nothing of taking cash from a scoundrel like Louba!'

'H'mph, that's all right in theory,' rejoined Miller. 'I'm with you. But when it comes to practice...' He shook his head. 'I'm not going to take the chance of explaining the difference between stealing and taking to a judge and jury!'

'If you're willing to make it easy, I'll run the actual risk,' promised Berry. 'If you can keep your eyes skinned, see when a large sum comes in, and let me know, between us we can fix it. I'll do the actual taking, if you'll help and cover me. And we'll go fifty-fifty, just as if you ran an equal risk. Now, what do you say to that?'

For some time, Miller had not much to say. He was not inclined to discuss the project seriously: but he continued to drink, and his face grew darker as his wrongs grew bigger.

Charles Berry did not lose patience, and continued to call for fresh drinks.

7. BERYL MARTIN

'What is it, Mr. Louba?'

'If you will honour me...just for ten minutes, Miss Martin. T'ere is somet'ing important I have to say to you.'

Beryl Martin moved across to a window recess of the room they were in, away

from the crowded table.

'You are not playing tonight?' he murmured.

She shook her head. Her face was anxious.

'Mr. Louba, I wish you'd tell me just how much I owe you. I must stop playing. I shall never win back what I lost, and I must make some definite arrangements to get out of debt. You've always said it wasn't very much, and put me off, but I want you to let me have a clear statement. I've been crazy to go on as I've done, and I'm just coming to my senses.'

'It is on this subject I wish to talk to you,' he replied. 'But we cannot do so here. Come to where we can talk quietly.'

After a moment's hesitation, she followed him out of the room to a small apartment on the ground floor, looking out on to the drive at the side of the house.

They were in Sir Harry Marshley's house, but Louba always appeared very much at home there.

'Believe me, I am ver' reluctant to mention such a matter to you. Miss Martin,' said Louba. 'And if I t'ought it would distress you, I would rather bear any loss myself t'an speak of it...but I have other hopes.'

She drew back before the look in his bold eyes.

'Of course, I don't expect you to bear any loss, Mr. Louba,' she responded hastily. 'I think you hold all the IOUs I have signed?'

'I believe I do,' he purred.

'Then will you tell me how much they amount to?'

'Fifty t'ousand pounds.'

'What?'

She rose from her seat with an expression of incredulity on her face.

'It can't be!...fifty thousand...!' she gasped, the colour draining from her cheeks.

He watched her as she sank back into the chair, overwhelmed, her eyes dilated, fixed on his as though imploring him to contradict himself.

'Is it possible?' she exclaimed at last.

'It is so. I will show you the IOUs if you wish. But I beg you I not to distress yourself.'

'But I—I haven't that much money in the world! And my mother has only

enough to live on in comfort. Besides, she's an invalid—I daren't let her know I've gambled away so much. It would kill her.'

'I t'ink that very likely,' he agreed. 'But why tell her?'

'Are you sure there's no mistake?' she asked desperately.

'I am ver' sure.'

He took out a bundle of IOUs bearing her signature, and passed them to her.

'I'd no idea I was signing for such large amounts!' she ejaculated, and handed them back to him. 'And you want payment?

That is what you wanted to see me about?'

'Dear lady, t'ey would all have been burned, but for the unfortunate conditions of my own affairs,' he returned. 'But I have myself suffered heavy losses, and I am compelled to call in all that is due to me.'

'You mean you cannot wait?'

'I fear I cannot. I am leaving London very shortly, and I need money to settle my obligations before I go.'

'Of course, it's your right. I'm sorry I haven't settled up before, but I—I—'

She caught her trembling lip between her teeth.

'T'ere is no hurry for one or two days,' he said smoothly.

'I really don't know how I can pay you!' she exclaimed desperately. 'I mean in a few days. I—'

'Oh, you can, quite easily,' he replied, drawing a chair up close to hers. 'You can pay me a hundred times over—if you will.'

'How?' she said, withdrawing herself as far from him as the arm of her chair permitted, the anxiety over her financial position temporarily receding before the tide of aversion, of creeping distrust and fear, which his changed manner evoked.

He tried to take her hand, but she pulled it away from him.

'T'ere are treasures greater t'an money,' he said. 'T'ere are those between whom and ourselves t'ere can be no debt, no mine or t'ine. If you were my wife, ten t'ousand times fifty t'ousand pounds were but a little ting to give you pleasure! And I would soon be rich again, Beryl. With you by my side, t'ere is not'ing I could not do—you need not fear I would take you to poverty. Out of England, t'ere are still—'

'But I'm engaged—you know it, surely!' she cried, and held out her left hand.

His lips curled as he looked at the ring.

'T'at poor fool! I will soon teach you to forget him.'

'I don't wish to forget him, Mr. Louba. I'm going to marry him.'

'I t'ink not,' he rejoined confidently.

'But I certainly am. Also, it has nothing to do with this business.'

'It has everyt'ing. I have told you: if you are to become my wife, of course your debts are mine, and I will burn the IOUs on our wedding-day —which will be at once, before I leave London. But you persist in marrying this Leamington fellow why, his wife-to-be is not'ing to me, naturally, and I expect to be paid, and promptly. As you say you have not money enough to pay them, tomorrow morning I will come to see your mother—'

'Oh, no, nor She couldn't bear a shock like that!'

'Well,' he said coarsely, 'in your bereavement perhaps you will be glad to let me comfort you.'

She turned her head sharply aside, her instinctive, subconscious dislike of him waking to a sudden outraged repulsion.

Almost immediately she started back in her chair.

'Oh, who's that?' she cried.

'Where?' He looked round quickly.

'The window. Someone had his face pressed against the glass, It looked horrible.'

He rose and crossed swiftly to the window, peering out.

'T'ere is no one that I can see,' he commented.

'He went when he saw me looking at him.' She had recovered from her fright. 'Perhaps one of the staff, or someone who'd been to deliver something to the kitchen, and looked in at the gap in the curtains. It startled me, that's all. Faces always look so horrible pressed against a window.'

'Yes, that is so.' He was unlatching the window. 'But all the same, I do not like people who look through windows.'

The cold air blew in as he lifted the sash and leaned out. Beryl shivered, and drew her coat closer, for she had been on the point of leaving when Louba had addressed her.

'I do not see anyone,' he said, withdrawing himself from the outer air and pulling the window down. 'What was he like?'

'I couldn't see. His face was pressed against the glass.'

He drew the curtains together, taking care that there was no gap between them.

'Had he a full moustache and a high-coloured face?—eh?'

'I don't think so. But I really couldn't see.'

'T'at is a pity. I like to know who is interested in my movements,' he observed, frowning a little.

There was a slight pause. For a moment he seemed to have forgotten her, pulling at his moustache, immersed in other thoughts.

It was Beryl who resumed the interrupted conversation. 'You can surely give me a day or two?' she asked.

'No. I go to your mother tomorrow morning. Also, why a day or two? Where would you get the money from?'

'I...might get it,' she murmured.

'You are t'inking of Leamington. He is a young man, ambitious, just climbed to success. Do you t'ink of showing your love for him by ruining him? You don't suppose he could find fifty t'ousand pounds without breaking himself and mortgaging his future, do you?'

She bent her face to one clenched fist.

'No...you're right. I couldn't cripple him at the beginning of his life, like that...even if he could find the money,' she muttered.

'And why should you? Do you t'ink I could not make you happier than he could?—such an ordinary young man! There are a hundred t'ousand in England alone like him! You will look back and laugh at the time when you dreamed of marrying such as he.'

He had taken hold of her hands, bending his dark face to hers, though she turned her head aside to avoid it.

'If I seem cruel, Beryl, it is only to be kind,' he whispered. 'I will make such happiness for you...'

'If you meant that, you wouldn't press me now!' she exclaimed. 'If you can do without the money if I marry you, you can do without it for a while if I don't.'

'I can do without the money, Beryl, but I cannot do without you!'

'You must!' she cried, dragging her hands free. 'You must, because I cannot think of marrying you.'

'Then,' he said coolly, 'I cannot t'ink of allowing you further time for payment.'

'And you pretend you want to make me happy!'

'You, I t'ink, profess to love your mother. Yet you will not save her from what may prove a fatal shock.' She sat staring at the pattern on the carpet, trying to keep her lips steady. 'And you profess to care for Alan Leamington,' he went on. '...But you will contemplate making him a victim, at the very outset of his career, of your foolish gambling.'

'I had no idea I owed anything like that!' she exclaimed. 'I never dreamed I couldn't pay.'

'That merely showed a greater folly, does it not, Beryl?'

She set her lips struggling for composure.

'So t'ere are two of us,' he observed. 'Only I am not quite so great a culprit as you, for if I am inconsiderate, it is out of regard for you, but if you kill your mother and ruin this man it is solely out of regard for yourself. After all, it is your own folly; should you not pay?'

'Yes,' she said, very low, standing up. 'I should pay. And I will.'

She put up her hand to keep him off, as he made an exultant step forward, and he caught and kissed it ardently.

'Believe me, it is a payment that shall bring in ver' great interest,' he said. 'I promise you. I t'ink we will not burn these IOUs, for one day they shall be ver' precious to you...One day when you know the happiness to which they have led you.'

She made no reply, only released her hand and fastened the collar of her coat.

'I must go now,' she said. 'It's late.'

8. THE GIRL WHO HAD LOST

With such patience as a young man could command, Alan Leamington waited for the girl to come down. The vestibule of Lady Marshley's big house was crowded with the last of the departing guests. But still neither Beryl nor the other members of the bridge party made an appearance.

Sir Harry strolled out of the ballroom, a bald, wizened man with a habitual leer.

'Hullo, Leamington, not gone yet? Had a good time?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Why don't you play? Her ladyship tells me that you never go into the card-room. Beryl's playing—she's a great girl.'

Alan checked the words that came to his lips, and then he remarked: 'I can't afford the stakes your friends play for, and Beryl can't either. I love bridge, but bridge at a pound a point is ruinous.'

Sir Harry wrinkled up his red nose in a sneer. 'I think Beryl is the best judge,' he said. 'She has money of her own. Her father left her a fortune, my dear fellow.'

'He left her very little,' said Alan warmly, and Sir Harry shrugged his thin shoulders.

'May I suggest that, as Beryl is engaged—or supposed to be engaged—to you, nobody is more competent to give her advice than yourself?' he asked sarcastically. 'It is hardly likely, if you cannot persuade her to stop playing, that I can succeed.'

Men and women were drifting down the broad stairs, Alan watched them, but Beryl was not there. She came last of all, and with her was a tall, burly man who was talking to her with some show of confidence which brought an angry flush to the young man's cheek.

They stopped at the foot of the stairs, the big man talking in a low voice. Alan saw the girl nod, and then she came hurriedly across to him.

'I'm sorry you waited,' she said quickly. 'I could quite well have gone home by myself.'

He thought she was looking very white and weary, and he did not speak to her until she was seated by him in his car.

'Beryl, dear, I'm worried,' he said.

'Are you, Alan? Of course you are.'

'It's this damned card-playing, my dear. I've no right what-ever to lecture you, and I don't want to. But you know the Marshleys. Their place is nothing but a gambling-den, and the dances they give are only a blind for the big game upstairs. People say that Louba is behind them. Five years ago, Marshley was in the bankruptcy court, and then suddenly he blossoms forth as the owner of this huge establishment, gives parties, has cars of his own and, of course, gets the very clientele that he wants. It isn't only bridge they play.'

'I know that,' she said.

He took her hand in his, but she withdrew it gently.

'Alan, I want to tell you something—take this.'

Now he felt something in his palm, something round and hard. Before his fingers touched the diamond, he knew it was her engagement-ring.

'Beryl!'

'I'm sorry—truly sorry. But I'm going to marry Emil Louba. No, no, don't ask me why—Alan dear—please.'

He sat stunned, incapable of thinking.

'That—beast!' he said at fist. 'You're mad, Beryl! Do you owe him money?'

She did not reply.

'You shan't do it! By God, I'll kill him first! That's why you've been shepherded to that hell hole! Louba wanted you—wanted to ruin you. And now that he's cheated you, he gives you the alternative of marrying or paying.'

'There's Mother to consider,' she said in a low voice, so low that he scarcely heard her. 'I've been a fool—oh, such a fool, Alan! Oh Lord!'

She covered her face with her hands and burst into a fit of passionate sobbing, and he could only sit silent and helpless, listening to the grief of the girl for whose sake he would have sacrificed life and soul.

Presently she sat up and dried her eyes. I'm tired,' she said weakly. 'Don't talk about it any more, Alan. These things have happened before, and they'll happen again. No, no, don't kiss me—see me tomorrow when I'm sane, and we're both sane.'

He helped her out of the car and walked with her to the door of the little house in Edwards Square, where she, lived, with her invalid mother.

'Good night, Alan,' she said, and kissed him.

She had slipped from his arms and closed the door in his face before he realised that she was gone. For a moment he stood staring at the door, and then he turned and walked slowly back to the car, and in his heart was murder.

Braymore House was a block of flats facing Regent's Park and backing onto Clive Street. It had six storeys, and each floor constituted a suite.

Alan knew the place, and, as a successful and brilliant architect, he had been interested in the erection of this most expensive block of residential flats in London. Almost the first task Alan had had when he entered the office of an architect, was to, prepare quantities for its foundations.

A red-brick building, disfigured from the aesthetic standpoint by the fire escape which had been erected after completion to satisfy municipal requirements, it offered a darkened facade, with the exception of one broad band of light on the second floor.

That, he knew, was Louba's flat. He hoped to arrive before the Levantine. To reach him now was impossible, for the great rosewood doors of the entrance hall would be closed, as also would be the staff door at the back. He glanced up at the fire escape. And then, after a moment's reflection, he walked through the gates into the garden in which Braymore House stood and, taking a side path, he reached the stiffly extended iron ladder that led to the fire escape landing above. Heavy counterweights held it horizontally. He remembered that there was an automatic alarm attached to the ladder in case it was pulled down by enterprising burglars. His reconnaissance completed, he went back to the car.

Tomorrow he would see the place in daylight. He was interested to discover where the wire of the alarm was fixed. A thin fog was drifting from Regent's Park when he reached his own flat in Gate Gardens. So much the better, he thought.

9. THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Well pleased, Louba returned to Braymore House.

He had never thought to pay so high a price as marriage for any woman, but Beryl Martin, so different from the foolish women who had at different times been fascinated by his unwholesome attractions, was worth it—even apart from the money she would bring with her.

'I shall not need you any more. Miller,' he said cheerfully, as he came into his flat, and passed on to where a light supper stood in readiness.

He lit a cigar, and stood on the hearth, smoking and contemplating his position with complacency. His finances had received a nasty jog, but he was pulling through.

He sat down at the table and began to eat.

His back was to the windows, and after a while he had a sense of uneasiness. He turned his head once or twice but he was sure the windows must be closed. Miller always shut them before he came in.

With a frown he recalled Beryl's assertion that she had seen a face pressed to the window in Sir Harry Marshley's house.

He heard Miller close his bedroom door; as he pushed the tray away from him and lit a second cigar, Louba became conscious of the silence...and something else. Cursing himself for his fancifulness, he got up impatiently and went to the window behind him, pushing the silken curtain aside to assure himself that

the window was closed.

He recoiled with a guttural exclamation, then flung the curtains aside and dragged out the man who was hidden behind them.

'Da Costa!'

'Well?' demanded da Costa, his hand going suggestively to his hip pocket.

The years which had passed since he had pursued his star performer to Malta had set some white amongst his wavy mop of hair, his cheeks hung down beneath the baggy dark eyes, his figure was a little heavier, but otherwise he was as vigorous as ever, and little changed. His mouth pouted red and moist beneath the full, untrained moustache.

'Ver' well, ver' well!' exclaimed Louba, making a motion for him to leave his weapon where it was. 'I will merely ask what you are doing in my house?'

'I was just waiting until you'd gone to bed, Louba.'

'And what then?' queried Louba, with a sharpness that made da Costa laugh.

'Don't be frightened. I wasn't coming in to murder you,' he said.

'I see. Merely to steal?'

'No. Just to unfasten the window and go home. You see, Miller came in and fastened it before I could get out, and then you came in. So, as I am so fond of your society, I was waiting till you had gone to bed.'

'You do your stealing when I am not near? Yes, I can imagine you are not a ver' daring thief.'

Da Costa stepped up to him threateningly.

'You'll do that once too often,' he warned. 'That sneer of yours, Louba, will cost you dear.'

'I shall never have more to pay than I can well afford. When I caught you lurking about outside the window a week ago, you denied that you had any intention of entering...you were merely taking the air, I believe.'

'Neither had I any intention of entering. I always come in when the window is open and you are out,' replied da Costa insolently.

'So you do come in? You pretended to go away, to shut your flat up, after I had spoken to you, simply to put me off my guard?'

Da Costa shrugged his shoulders. 'I have business in your apartments, and you interrupt it when you are sniffing at my doings like a suspicious dog,' he said.

Louba snatched at his arm and swung him round until his face was in the full

light.

'You have got what you came for?' he snarled. 'That is why you are so bold, and in such high spirits?'

'If I have, you will never find it,' laughed da Costa.

Louba shook him. 'Tell me what you have taken! Tell me!'

'Let go!'

There was a quick struggle before da Costa stood back, panting, eyes and cheeks blazing.

'Do that again, Louba,' he bit out from between his sharp white teeth, 'and I will settle my account with you at last, and finally.'

'Are you going to give up what you have taken from me?'

'Are you going to give up what you have taken from me at different times these many years past?' demanded da Costa, and suddenly smiled. 'Yes,' he added softly, 'you are!'

Louba eyed him darkly, his eyes narrowed till they were mere slits. 'You will not leave this room until you have given up what you have taken,' he said.

'I will do so if you can find it, my dear Louba,' assented da Costa cheerfully. 'Come: play no tricks and you shall search me.'

Smiling tantalisingly, he lifted his arms, leaving his pockets invitingly uncovered.

Suspiciously, and after a moment's indecision, Louba went through his pockets, da Costa enjoying his discomfiture. He looked down at his feet.

'Oh, certainly,' said da Costa. 'Look in my shoe. It is no inconvenience as they are only slippers. And I might have a nice layer of notes there, mightn't I?' He kicked them off. 'We live in such pleasant proximity that I do not need to overdress before I come to visit you.'

Louba watched him put his slippers on again.

'Well,' he remarked. 'After your little joke, perhaps now you will tell me what is the real meaning of your presence here?'

'No, I don't feel inclined to tell you any more,' rejoined da Costa, stepping to the window where he stooped to remove the screws with an ease that spoke of former acquaintanceship with them.

'Then I will see if you will be more communicative to me police.'

'Bah! Do you think to frighten me with that?' asked da Costa, in disgust, and

he pulled open the window.

'You either explain, or I give you in charge,' threatened Louba savagely, making a spring at da Costa who was propelled forward until only the rail of the fire escape outside prevented him from falling head first into the gardens below.

Louba leapt after him, forcing him round until he was leaning backwards over the rail, with Louba's fingers at his throat.

'Now, what have you taken?' muttered Louba. 'Tell me what you have taken or I'll throw you over.' He forced da Costa's head back till the man's thick neck swelled.

'I can't...if you strangle me,' choked da Costa.

'Well, now,' said Louba, relaxing his grip a little.

'I haven't taken anything. You've seen for yourself.'

'What were you doing there, then?'

'I came to look for something.'

'Oh, you did! And what is it you seek?'

Da Costa had improved his position by slow degrees, and now gave Louba a blow which sent him crashing backwards into the room behind him, where he reeled heavily against a writing-table in the centre of the room, and fell to the floor, striking his head against a chair.

'The next time you lay hands on me, Louba,' said da Costa, leaning inside the room, a little breathless, 'will be the last time you'll lay hands on anything. Mark that.'

Louba was struggling to his feet.

'You accursed son of a—'

'And if I haven't got what I came for,' interrupted da Costa, 'I know now where to look for it—and you needn't put any more screws on the window...because I don't need to come in again,' he added.

'I won't—because I'll see that you are in charge of the police by tomorrow morning,' rejoined Louba, reaching for the telephone.

'Oh, send for the police,' mocked da Costa. 'It's your word against mine, that's all. And if I chose to admit I'd been here, chose to admit I'm going to take something from you...I don't think you'd like the police to call upon you to account for your possession of that something, Louba. Think about it. Good-night.' He ran up the iron steps with his slippered feet and disappeared through

the window of one of his own rooms.

Louba put back the receiver. There was more than one of his possessions for which he would have been unwilling to account.

His brows met as he looked about him, trying to guess what it was that da Costa coveted.

He picked up one thing after another, weighing it in his hand, turning it over, searching for hidden value.

Going to a recess in a far corner, he came to a carved brass chest which he had not opened for a long time: it was full of curios of relatively little value, of which he had wearied and thrust out of sight.

He began to lift them out of the chest. He noticed they were in great disorder, but he could not be sure whether this was the result of da Costa's search. One small image with a weight disproportionate to its size he carried hopefully to the table, but a very little chipping with a knife scraped the top layer of gold-tinted metal away, and revealed the lead beneath which accounted for its weight.

Baffled, he returned to the chest, but only one or two things remained there. Reaching down to seize something that sparkled, he brought up the beaded casket that had fallen into his hands in a darkened room in Bucarest. Releasing the spring in the false bottom, he gazed at the empty space beneath. A slow smile curved his lips. Was it possible? Did da Costa really think the thing could remain in his hands without discovering the simple secret of it? Did those who knew of the treasure it had apparently once contained still believe it lay hidden there?

He did not know, but he could not miss the chance of a sardonic joke.

He replaced the curios in the chest, and on the top he set the beaded casket. Below the false bottom lay a slip of paper on which he had written a note to da Costa.

'With compliments. If I had only known what it was you desired, I beg you to believe I would have asked your acceptance of so small a token of my regard.'

'He was quite right,' muttered Louba, as he went into his bedroom. '...No need to secure the window if that is all he wants!'

10. THE MAN WHO CUT THE ALARM

Alan Leamington rose the next morning undecided whether to go to see Beryl

or not.

If she kept to her resolution to marry Louba, he would rather not see her. She might only weaken his own resolve to save her at any cost. Yet she had asked him to go when they were both sane: perhaps it would be she whose determination would weaken. Sober thought might have forced her to reconsider her decision.

Hoping desperately, he went to her home, and found her waiting to receive him alone.

'I shouldn't have asked you to come,' she said, as her eyes fell on his white face. 'It would have been better to end it last night. Indeed, it is ended,' she added, sinking dejectedly into a chair.

'Oh, no,' he returned. 'It is very far from ended, Beryl.'

'Alan, you must believe me. I am going to marry Louba, so it is all at an end between us.'

'That may be so—that our engagement is ended. But you are certainly not going to marry that man.'

She glanced at him apprehensively.

'Alan, you're not going to make it—difficult?' she asked, substituting the last word for one more significant.

'I'm going to make it impossible. Nothing will induce me to stand aside and let you marry Louba. You don't know what he is.'

'Don't tell me. I'm going to marry him, whatever he is.'

'It's because you owe him money, isn't it?' She set her lips. 'Well, you needn't answer. I can guess. Yet...couldn't you have come to me, Beryl?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'There's no reason why you should pay my debts.'

'Isn't there? I thought there was the best of all reasons,' he said reproachfully.

'The best of all reasons why I should consider you,' she amended.

'Is it considering me to turn me down for that brute?'

'It is...it really is. You may not believe it now, but...' She twisted her handkerchief between her hands.

'I don't, Beryl. Won't you tell me what you owe? Believe me, however much it is—it would be less than I may have to pay for your freedom!'

'Alan! What are you thinking of doing?'

'Just anything that's necessary to save you from Louba—anything, Beryl!'

'No!' She laid her hand urgently on his sleeve. 'Alan, I'm not trying to ruin your life...I'm not trying to visit my follies on you or Mother...you won't surely make—make—'

'Your sacrifice futile? So you are sacrificing yourself? You admit it? And you think the loss of you is less than the loss of everything I have?'

'I don't think you could pay it even if I let you! And if you could, it would cripple you; you'd never recover. Then there's Mother—you know how careful I have to be...and he wouldn't wait, not a day. Besides, it's too late now. I've promised.'

'Promised!—a man you know to be so vile that he'll force you into marriage by holding your debts over your head! Whatever else you don't know about him, you know that, and yet, you'll marry him!'

'I'm doing what I think is best, Alan. I'm responsible for the situation, and I'm trying to bear the consequences,' she replied, her voice shaking despite her efforts to control it.

'And that's your last word?' he asked. 'We finish?'

'Yes,' she answered faintly. 'You'll forget, Alan...in a little while, and you'll be happy with someone else. It's better for you to be hurt now, with time to recover and make a new life, than to be ruined without a chance of recovery.'

He laughed harshly. 'It doesn't much matter what happens to me, Beryl, so long as I save you from that creature, but you're not going to marry him. If you won't put a stop to it, I will.'

'Alan, what are you going to do?' she cried, following him as he went to the door. 'You're not going to him? It wouldn't be any use. I'm sure he wouldn't listen to you for a moment.'

'So am I. He'd like to see me on my knees to him; he'd gloat over prayers for mercy, if I were fool enough to make them. I know that, Beryl. You need not think I shall waste time talking to him.'

'Then what can you do? Alan!' She gasped, her frightened eyes on his white face. 'You wouldn't—you wouldn't—'

'I'd kill him!' he cried fiercely. 'And I will. Rather than have you marry that unclean beast, I'll see him dead!'

He strode out of the room, leaving her with her hand to her mouth, breathing quickly, trying to repress the sobs that struggled into her throat. She ran to the

window, and saw his set face as he passed. Rushing out of the room, she put on a hat and coat quickly, snatched up a pair of gloves, and let herself out of the house, hurrying in the direction taken by Alan Leamington.

She increased her speed almost to a run as she saw him approaching Braymore House.

'Alan,' she gasped, laying her hand on his arm. 'Don't go—you mustn't. I shall come with you, if you do.'

'Don't be afraid,' he said bitterly. 'He's safe for the present. 'Look!'

With a nod of his head, he indicated a taxi which was passing, and she saw the dark, coarse features of Emil Louba, as he studied a morning paper.

'Shall I get you a taxi?' asked Leamington.

'No. I'll walk. Are you coming back with me...as far as the door?'

'No, thank you. I have business...this way.'

'You're still going to Braymore House?'

'I have business there. Hadn't you better be getting back? Louba has doubtless gone to visit his fiancee.'

'Oh, Alan...' He pressed her arm contritely.

'Forgive me, Beryl. I know you're doing what you think is right. Go now. We can only both of us act as we think right. There's nothing more to be said.'

He lifted his hat and stood with it in his hand until she turned and walked away.

Continuing his way to Braymore House, he entered the building and addressed the hall porter with an assumption of ease and cheerfulness.

'Good morning! You're still here, then?' he remarked, smiling.

'Why, yes, I—well, it's Mr. Leamington!' exclaimed the man,

'You remember me? Yet it's some time now since I assisted to build this block.'

'Yes, time's getting on, sir.'
'And you haven't had a fire, for all they insisted on spoiling the building by adding a fire escape,' he observed.
'No, fortunately, we haven't,' laughed the man. 'I dare say it is a shame, from an architect's point of view: yet a fire escape's a nice handy thing on occasions, sir.'
'You're quite right, and this one, I remember, is very well arranged. That's really why I've called. I'm putting one in a new building I'm engaged on, and I want to know how the wiring's done. Can you show me?'

'Certainly, sir. You know how it works as a burglar-alarm, don't you?'
'Yes, I know the alarm rings when anyone pulls down the ladder to reach the first fire escape landing. Can you show me where the wire of the alarm is fixed?'
'Come with me, sir.'
The porter was proud to be consulted by the rising young architect, eager to explain all he knew, ready to do anything to oblige.
'And I suppose it's in perfect order, the alarm?' asked Leamington.
'Oh, yes. I test it every week, of course.'
'Would it make a commotion if you tested it now? Don't do it if it would be inconvenient, only—'
'It's no trouble, sir. So long as I just give the warning—if you don't mind waiting.'
'No. It's awfully good of you.'
He took a pair of steel-cutters out of his pocket, and waited tensely for the alarm to ring. It seemed a long wait, and there was moisture under his hair when at last the bell clanged. He started, waited rigidly for a moment or two to make sure the man was not going to repeat the test, then quickly he snapped the wire in two, and thrust the cutters into his pocket.
'Yes, acts beautifully. I shall certainly install this system,' he said hurriedly, when the man returned. 'Any of the old tenants here?'

He chatted for quite five minutes, long enough to divert the man's attention from the wire to which his queries had directed it, and walked back with him to the main entrance, after slipping a welcome contribution into his band.

'Good day. I'm much obliged to you.'

'Good day, sir. No trouble, I'm sure.'

The man watched him out of sight.

11. THE MAN WHO TOOK WHAT HE WANTED

Stretching his well-polished shoes to the blaze of the smoking-room fire, Hurley Brown looked thoughtfully at the little flames which edged a nugget of new coal that the waiter had added.

'Your views are fundamentally immoral, Louba. I am using the word immoral in the larger sense—that your sense of right and wrong has departed from normal standards.'

Emil Louba chuckled. His big, broad-shouldered figure, heavy build and

coarse features formed a contrast to his companion.

His hair was as thick, as black and glossy, his moustache as large and sweeping as when he and Hurley Brown had first met years ago, and the decorum of a London club had laid no restraint upon their conversation. Louba never ceased to take pleasure in the circumstance which permitted him to belong to the same club as the man who had once shown such contempt for him, nor in the fact that their mutual friendship for Dr. John Warden bound Hurley Brown to a civility very different from his former demeanour towards Louba.

'That is a point of view,' replied Louba, puffing serenely. 'T'rough life I have had only one code, eh? To get what I want, to deny myself nodding. Is that right or wrong, eh? For me it is right. I am myself; the world revo've about me once in twenty-four hours. I am the god of my universe, answerable to myself. I have ruined men because that was the only way to become rich. I desire riches; to get that money it is necessary to hurt. So I hurt. You see, my dear Hurley Brown?'

'I see,' said Captain Hurley Brown, without conviction.

'Over there, writing so industriously, is our friend Warden. 'He is a kind man, has never ruined anyone, and he is poor. But suppose you and I were run over by a bus. Would his hand tremble when he cut off our legs? No! He is trained to disregard suffering. Tomorrow if I stole a watch, or broke into a house or stole, would you t'ink twice before you arrested me? No, you would send me to the scaffol' and never worry. That is the trained mind.'

It was Saturday afternoon on a foggy December day, and the smoking- room of the Elect Club was deserted save for the two who sprawled before the fire and Dr. John Warden, who had been detained in London over an operation. Presently the doctor sealed the letter he was writing and, handing it to a club servant for posting, strolled across to the two, filling his pipe as he came.

'I wish you had been here before. Warden; this fellow has been expounding his philosophy.'

'Which, of course, was rather distasteful,' said the doctor with a smile. 'I've never quite known whether Louba is as bad as he says he is, or whether his views are designed to shock.'

'It would take a whole lot to shock me,' responded Hurley Brown drily. 'I graduated in a shocking school, and even Scotland Yard has taught me little in the way of horrors.'

Again Louba chuckled. 'Yet I could tell you things—I made my money in the Levant, as I think you know,' he said daringly, with a side- glance at Brown's

unmoved countenance. 'Yes—I could tell you t'ings.'

'Well, don't,' said the doctor comfortably. 'Tell us something pretty. I've been living in an atmosphere of anaesthetics and antiseptics for three hours, and I want to be soothed.'

Louba made a wry face.

'That is horrible,' he said with a shudder, 'and I am reminded of the pain I had, Doctor. Just here.' He touched a part of his huge frame, just above the waistline. 'Some day you must come and see me, yet I am scairt! I fear doctors. If I have anyt'ing that is very bad I do not want to know it; if it is not bad, you may tell me, eh?'

Dr. Warden laughed softly. 'I'll see you today. I want to fill in the time. I expect all that is the matter with you is over-feeding and lack of exercise. In London for the week-end, Brown?'

Hurley Brown nodded. 'We are clearing up the Berkeley Square jewel robbery, and I expect to make an arrest tonight. An ingenious crime. The man who committed it—but you've read the newspaper story?'

Mr. Louba looked at his watch and rose slowly. 'Crime to me is as interesting as operations,' he said. 'Perhaps tonight you could come. Doctor?'

'Any time—any time before dinner preferably, because I've an engagement to dine here.'

'At seven—is that too late?'

'No, at seven. You are still living at Braymore House? Good! I'll come along and see you.'

When the big man had gone. Hurley Brown turned to the doctor with a look of fierce distaste on his thin, tanned face. 'I don't like Louba, John!'

'Don't you?' asked the doctor lazily. 'He is probably over-painted. Some men delight in exaggerating their wickedness. Louba is one of them. I have never made a study of his peculiar complex, but I should say that he is no worse than men of his type. He is immensely rich and immensely Eastern. His mother was a Turkish woman, he told me once, his father a Maltese who was the result of an alliance between a Greek and a woman of Smyrna.'

'How long have you known him?' asked Brown after a long silence.

'Eh?' The doctor was dozing. 'Who, Louba? Oh, years and years. There's nothing really the matter with him. In some ways I like him. He was very helpful once. I shall never forget his kindness at that critical period of my life.'

He closed his eyes and dozed again, and Hurley Brown returned to his

contemplation of the blazing coal and to his thoughts that centred about the Berkeley Square burglary.

'Louba is going to be married.'

The doctor blinked himself awake. He was on the sunny side of sixty, when intellectual men doze easily. 'What's that? Married—Louba?'

'Yes, he is marrying Beryl Martin, that very pretty girl.'

'Is he? Good gracious, I never thought of Louba as a marrying man!' The doctor struggled to a sitting position and adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses. 'And Beryl Martin—I thought she was engaged to that admirable young man, Leamington. Dear, dear!'

'So I thought. Apparently the engagement is broken off. She is marrying Louba by special licence on Wednesday, and they are going off to Paris for their honeymoon.'

The doctor pulled thoughtfully at his chin. 'Strange,' he said. 'I never thought that Louba would ever marry.'

12. THE MAN IN THE FLAT

At six o'clock, Dr. Warden reached his rooms in Devonshire Street and changed. He had arranged to meet an old professional friend for dinner, and he had forgotten his appointment with Louba until he was half- way down the stairs. He returned for his stethoscope and slipped it into his overcoat pocket.

Louba! No, he had never struck Dr. Warden as a marrying man. He rather liked Louba, with his magnificent vices and his queer accent and overpowering method of shouting down opposition.

The fog was thinner in the neighbourhood of Braymore House, a fact which the liveried hall porter remarked upon.

'You're Dr. Warden, aren't you, sir?' he asked.

'Yes,' smiled the doctor. 'You have a good memory for faces.'

'I ought to have,' replied the man. 'I've been here since the house was built. There was a gentleman came in this morning that I remembered, though I hadn't seen him since Braymore was in the hands of the painters —Mr. Leamington. He used to be a sort of assistant to the architect, though he has a business of his own now.'

'Mr. Leamington!' The doctor was interested. 'What did he want?'

'Just came to have a look round, sir,' answered the man. 'He said he was building a new block of flats and wanted to know how the wiring was done. I showed him. Would you like me to take you up?'

The doctor shook his head. He had worked the automatic elevator before. The door of Flat 2 was a little way along a windowed corridor, and at the pressure of his finger on the bell the door was opened.

'Dr. Warden, sir? Come in, sir.'

The gaunt-faced valet recognised him instantly. To the doctor's surprise he was wearing his overcoat, and Miller's first words explained this circumstance.

'It's my night off, and Mr. Louba said I could go, but I knew you were coming. Doctor, and besides, I wanted to wait until the gentleman had gone.'

'Has Mr. Louba a visitor?'

Miller's eyebrows rose. 'A visitor—can't you hear them?'

The doctor had already heard, though between the hall and Louba's sitting-room were a pair of heavy doors and a curtain.

The words were indistinguishable, but Louba's roar and the hoarse voice of his visitor could be heard distinctly.

'They've been going at it hammer and tongs for a quarter of an hour,' said Miller. He frowned at the ancient face of the hall clock. 'Doctor, would you mind waiting here? I can show you into the dining room, if you like—only—'

'Don't trouble,' said the doctor good-humouredly. 'I'll wait. Are you going out?'

'I've got my young lady waiting for me,' said Miller urgently. 'I can't keep her hanging about on a night like this. I'll arrange to meet her later. I shan't be more than a quarter of an hour.'

It was then three minutes past seven, and the doctor's engagement was for half past.

'Hark at 'em!' said Miller in an awe-stricken whisper. The voices of the quarrelling men had risen. The doctor heard the words: 'She'll do what I want!' It was Louba speaking.

'You can go, Miller, but please don't keep me waiting longer than a quarter of an hour.'

The gratified Miller slipped out and was back again in exactly fourteen minutes. He found the doctor sitting under a lamp, reading. The sound of the quarrelling men had ceased.

'I wish you would tell Mr. Louba that I can't wait any longer,' he said, folding

up his paper. 'I'm sure the visitor must have gone, for I haven't heard anybody raving for five minutes.'

Miller took off his overcoat and tidied his hair with his hand before he departed. Dr. Warden heard him knocking and rose expectantly. Presently Miller came back.

'He won't answer, sir,' he said. 'He's like that sometimes—sort of too sulky to curse. Will you try, sir?'

Dr. Warden gave an impatient cluck and followed the man to the folding doors. He turned the handle; the doors were locked. 'Louba!' he called.

There was no answer.

'He's in his bedroom—it leads out of the library,' suggested Miller. 'But I don't think he'll see you. He's terrible sometimes. I've known him to smash up the furniture when something put him out. At other times he'll sit in his bedroom and won't have anybody near him.'

'I didn't hear the visitor go,' said the doctor.

'Wait a minute, sir.' Miller ran along the passage towards the kitchen; a narrower passage ended in a door that was ajar. Facing him was a flight of stone stairs, the tradesmen's entrance to the flats. 'He must have gone that way. He came that way, and I thought it funny.'

'What sort of man was he?'

'A flashy-looking fellow, about thirty-five, very sporty-looking —he seemed to me a bit drunk. I didn't see him very well because the light in the service hall wasn't burning. But as soon as Mr. Louba heard him, he came out and told him to come in.'

The doctor fingered the stethoscope in his overcoat pocket. 'If he asks for me, I'll come in after eleven,' he said. 'You must phone a message that he wants me to the Elect Club.'

Going back to the club he found a message waiting for him, but not from Louba. His guest had contracted a chill and, with many regrets, had cancelled the engagement. Hurley Brown looked up as the doctor came into the dining-room. 'Hasn't your man turned up?' he asked. 'Sit with me. I'm bored. How's Louba?'

Warden smiled. 'Louba, according to the faithful Miller, is sulking. When I arrived, our friend from the Levant was engaged in a row with somebody or other, and he couldn't or wouldn't see me.'

They finished dinner and returned to the smoking-room. They were the only occupants, the doctor and his pipe, Hurley Brown with a cigarette between his

thin lips. No word was spoken for fully an hour after they had settled down; and it was Brown who broke the silence.

'When I was stationed in Malta, Louba was the moneylender who had half the mess in his grip,' he said.

'Oh? You're rather obsessed with Louba today.'

'I am,' said the other grimly. 'It makes me sick to see him in my club—a member. And to think that he's going to marry Alan's girl!'

He felt the pressure of the doctor's shoe on his and looked up. Alan Leamington had just come into the room.

The first thing that the doctor noticed was the man's deathly pallor. He seemed to be oblivious of their presence, but crossed to the reference bookshelves which covered one wall of the room and, taking down a book, turned the pages hastily. He found what he wanted after a while and went out. Hurley Brown rose and, crossing the room, examined the book. It was a time-table.

'I wonder where Alan is going?' he asked as he came back to the doctor.

At nine-thirty Hurley Brown went out. He was going to Scotland Yard.

'I'll drive over to Louba. Perhaps he's recovering from his fit of temper,' said Dr. Warden, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and they went out together.

Again Warden went up to the second floor, and this time the porter went with him and left him pressing the bell of No. 2.

After a while, the elevator bell rang. Looking at the indicator, the porter went up to the third floor. The patient doctor was still standing at the door as the elevator passed. There was nobody at the grille on the third floor, and the porter brought the elevator down.

'Did you ring, sir?'

'No; I think it was somebody above. I don't think I'll wait any longer. I've just remembered that Miller is out,' said Dr. Warden.

'He'd have gone down the tradesmen's stairs, sir,' said the porter. 'I never see them going in and coming out. This is the only block of flats where the tradesmen have a different entrance.'

The doctor looked at his watch. 'A quarter to ten,' he said. 'Your clock appears to have stopped.'

The porter glanced round. 'Yes, it went wrong this afternoon.'

Dr. Warden waited for a minute on the doorstep and went out into the fog; as he walked along to the waiting taxi, a man passed him. The dimly diffused

rays of a street lamp showed his face for the fraction of a second. It was Alan Leamington!

The doctor stopped and looked round. There was no doubt whatever. He was wearing the grey overcoat he had worn when he came to the club.

John Warden was panic-stricken as a thought struck him. This man must hate Louba. Why was he there? Suppose, with a desire for revenge against the man who had taken Beryl Martin from him, he found his way into the flat? It was a fairly improbable supposition. He took a step in the direction the man had gone, but Alan was out of sight. A coincidence probably, thought the doctor, and lit his pipe.

When he got back to the club. Hurley Brown was sitting before the fire.

'There's a message for you. It arrived just before I came in,' said Hurley.

As he spoke, the smoking-room waiter brought a slip of paper on a salver. The doctor adjusted his glasses and read: 'Mr. Louba would like to see Dr. Warden at eleven o'clock tomorrow.'

'That's strange!' The doctor read the message aloud. 'He must have been telephoning to me a few minutes after I left Braymore House.'

'Damn him!' said Hurley Brown with such vehemence that the doctor was startled. He made no comment, however, and in a few minutes the commissioner was talking shop. His man had been arrested and the raid which he had planned on a small house in Lambeth had been carried out satisfactorily.

Seemingly reluctant to face the foggy night, they lingered before the cheerful blaze of the fire. At a quarter past eleven the doctor jumped up. 'Come along. Brown, we're keeping the club servants awake when they ought to be sleeping.'

They were being helped into their overcoats when the telephone on the hall steward's desk rang violently.

'For me?' asked the doctor, as he hurried into the glass-walled box.

'Is that you, Doctor?' It was Miller's voice. 'Will you come at once, please?' Miller's voice was charged with terror, and Warden could almost hear the chattering of the man's teeth.

'What's wrong?' he asked.

'The tenants of the flat below, sir, they've come up to say that blood is dripping through their ceiling from Mr. Louba's bedroom.'

13. THE WATCHERS

As the gloomy winter day darkened to its close, Beryl Martin's fears increased. What had been Leamington's business at Braymore House she could not conceive; only, with the memory of his face before her, she could not rid herself of the suspicion that he had been to look at the building in the daytime with a view to finding the best means of entering it at dark.

Pulling the curtain aside, and peering out into the fog, she realised what a perfect night it was for him to carry out such a desperate enterprise, and she wandered from room to room in a state of uncontrollable agitation, answering her mother's questions distractedly.

At last, when suspense became intolerable, when it transformed fears into certainties, until in her mind she could almost see him entering the flat and confronting Louba, she put on her outdoor clothes and let herself out into the street, almost running towards Braymore House, as though he were at that moment gaming entrance and she might be too late to prevent him.

When she arrived outside Louba's flat, she was breathless. The various windows in the building showed blurred through the mist. It was easy for her to loiter without being observed, but equally easy for Leamington to pass her without her knowledge.

If only she knew exactly which window was Louba's, she thought, she could at least fix her eyes on it, and see if anyone entered that way.

Once there, she realised the futility of her presence, the unlikelihood of being so fortunate as to take him in the act and win him to reason. It was also both too early and too late for Louba to be at home. Almost certainly, if Alan were coming, he would come in the night, probably long after Louba's return from his evening diversion.

Yet she could not tear herself away.

Whenever footsteps came by, she pretended to be walking past, but always she returned to the spot from which she believed she could see Louba's windows.

She gave a suppressed cry as a hand fell on her arm.

'Oh!—who is it?' she gasped, trembling, and breathed more easily as she realised that it was not a policeman who had touched her.

'You must be cold. You've been waiting a long time,' said a mild voice at her elbow, and she saw that it was a little man, with a thin, gentle face, who addressed her.

'How do you know?' she exclaimed.

'Because I'm waiting too,' he replied.

Waiting?—for what?'

'Just to see what goes on. It's Louba's windows you're watching, isn't it?'

'How—no...I'm not watching any. I'm...I'm just walking by,' she said, and began to move away from him. Who could he be? Could he possibly be connected with the police, and waiting to trap Alan? She condemned the thought as absurd, yet her anxiety was increased.

She walked rapidly round the block of buildings, and came again to the place where the little man had addressed her.

No one was in sight. She leaned against the railing surrounding the gardens. She wondered if she could warn Louba to keep away from his flat during the remainder of his stay in England, and dismissed the idea at once. That would only implicate Alan, and she wanted to save him.

'Those are Louba's windows,' said the same mild voice, and there came the same touch on her arm.

'Why are you here?' she asked. 'You say you're waiting to see what happens. What do you expect to happen?'

'Oh, I don't know, but I've felt in very good spirits lately. It's been a long wait, but I feel it's nearly over now.'

'How long have you been waiting?'

'Oh, many years...many years.'

'Years? I mean how long have you been waiting outside here?'

'Oh, nearly ever since dark.'

'And have you seen anyone go in?' she asked breathlessly.

'You mean by the window?' He smiled. 'The window's been used, certainly. It has on other occasions too. I remember, years ago—'

'Who has gone in by the window?'

'A man...a man I have great hopes of...He's come out too, and I'm not quite sure—'

'How long ago? How long since he came out?'

'Oh, a long while ago.' He looked at her attentively, as she hesitated between relief and dread. 'It wasn't the one you think,' he added.

'What do you mean? How do you know?' she exclaimed.

'Aren't you the young lady Louba is forcing to marry him?'

'What...you...' She paused in amaze.

'I was looking through the window last night,' he said quietly. 'I didn't hear a word, but I knew just what passed. I saw your faces. I saw the papers he showed you...I know Louba very well,' he finished, with a kind of contented pride.

She drew away from him. 'Who are you?' she asked.

'My name's Weldrake. I'm nobody in particular...only I had a son once. He wasn't like me: he was a big, fine fellow. He—'

'And you look through windows?' she remarked with faint contempt.

'Yes,' he answered thoughtfully. 'I suppose it sounds very bad. It would once, I know. But that's a long time ago. You see when you're living on hope, as I have done, you must have an occasional—'

'What are you hoping for?' she interrupted.

'I promised my boy he'd be avenged. I promised I wouldn't stay at home until he was, and it's a long time we've waited, now. And every year adds to Louba's enemies. It can't be long, now. You mustn't worry. Delay your marriage with him only a little while, and you'll be free of him. Indeed, it may be that tomorrow morning...'

Though he looked mild enough, his smile frightened her with his confidential manner; there seemed to her something uncanny about him. And what did he know or suspect about Alan?

'I don't want to be free,' she said. 'I'm here now only because I'm anxious about him.'

'Yes. You were engaged to that young man you drove home with last night, and you're afraid he'll kill Louba.'

'No, I never thought of such a thing!' she cried. 'I don't know what you mean...nor why you're waiting here. I think you'd better go away before the police want to know why you're loitering about.'

For all she tried to make her voice brave, she was shaking as she walked away.

She dared not return to the same place, and so she walked across the road, gazing up at the chinks of light from Louba's windows with eyes that longed to pierce the walls and see what was actually taking place within them.

If she had been able to do so, she would have seen that which would have made blindness appear preferable.

Emil Louba lay dead on his bed, the marks of a violent death upon him, and beside the bed, gazing down at him, stood Alan Leamington.

He had sworn to kill Louba, rather than permit Beryl to marry him, but now that the deed was done there was horror in his face as he looked down on the hideous remains of the man he had hated.

He stepped backwards towards the window, almost as though he contemplated flight, but restrained himself by an effort. The man had deserved his death, anyway. Beryl was saved from him. He would complete his business.

He passed into the next room, and listened intently. He put his ear against the locked door, but there came no sound to alarm him.

He crossed back to the writing-table, and feverishly began to search the drawers. He found no trace of the IOUs, and his ears straining for every sound, he abandoned the search and went back to the bedroom. With scarcely a glance at the stark figure on the bed, he hurried past it and descended the fire escape, the bottom landing of which was now connected with the ground by the ladder which he had noiselessly pulled down.

The fog was thicker than it had been when Beryl left her home, and combined with the darkness to make it necessary to grope his way from the foot of the ladder to the gate. It was his outstretched hand which came in contact with another person, and as he recoiled Beryl stifled a scream.

'Who is it!' he exclaimed.

'Alan!'

'You, Beryl? Come away quickly!' He seized her hand and hurried with her to the street and away from the building. 'What are you doing here, Beryl?' he asked.

'I was going to go in...to Louba...I couldn't bear it any longer.'

'You were going to Louba?'

'Yes. It seemed the only way. I've seen someone waiting about, and I was going to tell him...a little man it was.'

'You were going to Louba at this time of night?'

'I didn't know whether you were there, or had been, or were coming...I couldn't go home until I knew. So I made up my mind to go and see, and if Louba was there, I could say I'd seen that man waiting outside, and warn him. Is he there?—Louba? Is he in?'

'Yes...he's in.'

'And you've seen him? Alan, you've quarrelled with him?—you've...' She

dared not ask more plainly for the news she dreaded.

'You must go home, Beryl. And don't tell anyone you've been here. Did anyone see you come out?'

'I don't know. I think not. But tell me what you've done, Alan.' There was a sob of terror in her voice as she clung to his coat. 'Please tell me. I must know, Alan!'

'I've done nothing. Now go home, Beryl. I want to think things out.'

'You say Louba's there. Something must have happened between you.'

'Beryl, I couldn't find any IOUs of yours. How much were they for? He did hold them? You saw them yourself?'

'Yes. Fifty thousand pounds. He had them with him at Sir Harry Marshley's last night.'

'And he didn't destroy them after you'd promised to marry him?'

'Not until we were married. He said he was going to give them to me then. Oh, don't worry about them or me! It's you, Alan. Tell me what's happened?'

'I don't suppose it matters if they're found, so far as you're concerned. Nobody could accuse you...and he has no heirs that I know of...' Yet he looked back at Braymore House as though contemplating going back for another search.

'How could you look for the things if he was there?...Unless...' The words froze on her lips. Her teeth were chattering.

'Go home, Beryl, go home!' he implored, urging her in the direction of Edwards Square. 'And know nothing about to-night! You didn't come here, you didn't see me...go home quickly, and forget you came out.'

'I can't, Alan, unless I know...'

'Beryl,' he said, bending his face to hers. 'I've seen Louba...but I swear I've done him no harm. Don't ask me any questions. Just believe that, and go home.'

She believed him thankfully, almost collapsing in the unutterable relief. She did not want to ask any more questions about his visit to Louba; she was more than content to clutch at his assurance and shun anything which might shake it.

'Then won't you walk home with me?' she asked.

'No, Beryl. Please excuse me.'

'Why are you going to wait about here?'

'I'm not. I've a friend to meet, that's all.'

He almost ran away from her, disappearing so suddenly in the fog that the agitation of his voice seemed still trembling on the air when the sound of his footsteps had died away.

He forced himself to a walk, presently, and jumped round nervously as light small feet sounded behind him. He drew back against the wall, waiting for the steps to pass, instead they paused beside him.

'How is Louba?' came in an eager whisper.

'What the...what do you mean?' he growled, peering into the face before him.

'I'm so interested in Louba,' murmured the gentle voice. 'I saw you go in...and come out. I'm glad you've sent the young lady home. It wouldn't do for her to be mixed up in it.'

'In what?' snapped Leamington.

'Why...did you say anything had happened to Louba?' he inquired.

'No, I didn't!'

'Of course, you're quite right to say nothing about it,' agreed the little man amiably.

There was a tightness in Leamington's throat, but he forced himself to fight. 'You're making some mistake,' he said. 'I don't know anyone of the name you mentioned, and I've not been in anywhere.'

'No, of course not,' rejoined the other, in an agreement that, to Alan's overwrought nerves, held more of menace than the most stinging contradiction. 'But get away now. Don't stay round here. Get away as quickly as you can.'

'Why should I get away? What are you talking about?' Alan's Voice rose as his self-control fled.

'Hush! He murdered my boy, and I always knew he'd pay. I never lost faith...no, not for a moment all these years. You can't commit murder and go to your grave unpunished. Murder will not be washed out even in this world. I've waited. I've followed him a long way, but—I think I can go home at last!' he said, with a smile that, in its happiness, was ghastly at that moment to Alan Leamington.

Panic took him. He wanted to get away from this little man,

14. THE BURNER OF LETTERS

In a few words Dr. Warden conveyed the gist of the message to the waiting commissioner, and Hurley Brown went out into the night to find a taxi.

In spite of the thickness of the fog, they reached Braymore House in less than ten minutes and found two policemen in the hall, talking to the hall porter and the pallid, shivering Miller.

'Thank heaven you've come. Doctor!' quavered the man. 'I tried to get into Mr. Louba's room, but it was locked. I sent for these policemen.'

'You did right,' said Hurley Brown soothingly. 'One of you men had better come up; the other remain below. I'm Assistant Commissioner Hurley Brown of Scotland Yard.'

On the way up in the elevator they got some sort of a story from Miller. He had been out with his fiancee and had returned at eleven o'clock. He noticed nothing unusual except that his master's doors were still closed, and he was on his way to the bedroom, when the hall porter had arrived accompanied by the valet from the flat below. There and then he had telephoned. He knew nothing more.

'What time did you return to the flat?' asked Hurley Brown.

'At half past ten, sir, exactly. The half-hour was chiming on the clock as I came in the door.'

'At nine-fifty he was certainly alive. At ten-thirty you heard no sound. A quarter of an hour later the tenants of the flat below see the crimson stains on the ceiling. That would take at least ten minutes to soak through,' said Brown, as they entered the hall.

'Perhaps it isn't blood after all. Perhaps he upset some red ink,' suggested the doctor. 'Is there any ink in his bedroom?'

'Yes, sir. There's a bottle in the writing-table there.'

'Let's hope for the best,' said Brown.

They tried the double doors of the library without success.

'Get an axe,' ordered Brown, and in a few minutes a police-man had returned with a large fire axe and was attacking the panels. At the second blow the panel was smashed, and Hurley Brown put in his hand and felt for the key.

'There's no key there,' he said. 'Smash the lock.'

A rain of blows by the stalwart policeman, and the door sagged inwards. They looked into a large, luxuriously furnished room; deep settees stood against two of the walls, and the floor was covered by a magnificent Turkish carpet that must have cost a fortune. In the centre of the room was an ormolu writing-

table, on which stood a telephone. Near the shallow bay windows, which were hidden by silken curtains, was a small writing-bureau. They looked around, and there was no sign of Louba.

'What's that, sir?'

The policeman pointed. It was a silk dressing-gown flung over the back of a chair. Brown took it up and immediately uttered an exclamation and looked at his hands, for the front and sleeves were wet with crimson stains.

'Don't touch that,' he said and laid it down again on the chair. 'And be careful, Doctor—there's more crimson on the floor.'

In one wall was a large and beautifully designed fireplace. The grate was empty, save for a scrap of black ashes. At the left of the fireplace was a door which Miller pointed out with trembling fingers.

'There's the bedroom; there, sir,' he said fearfully.

Hurley Brown threw open the door and walked in. The lights were burning, and on an ornate bed lay all that was mortal of Emil Louba. There was no need for the doctor to look very closely. The man's head was terribly battered.

'The window is open,' said Hurley Brown. 'Where does that lead to?' He crossed the room and looked out. 'A fire escape here,' he said. 'Constable, go down to your friend in the hall and tell him to make a careful search of the garden. This explains the absence of the key from the door; the man who committed the murder escaped that way—with the key in his pocket.'

He took up the receiver and called Scotland Yard.

When his conversation was finished, he returned to the bedroom.

'I've sent for one of our best men, Inspector Trainor. It's a case that I've no wish to touch myself. I was prejudiced against Louba, and I want somebody who'll put a little more heart into the search than I can. You didn't see anybody when you came here the last time, did you, Doctor?'

Dr. Warden remembered the face in the fog, but shook his head. 'I saw nobody except the hall porter,' he said.

'How long has he been dead?'

The doctor was standing beside the bed, looking thoughtfully down at the wreck. 'He's been dead an hour—probably less than that,' he said. 'He was struck by something very heavy.'

'I haven't attempted to make a search of the room, but I dare say we shall find it,' said Brown.

They had not far to look. On the writing-table stood a big silver candlestick, so

placed that it seemed certain that there were originally two. Its fellow was found in the dining-room and, from its battered and stained condition, it was evidently the weapon which had been used.

Soon afterwards, Inspector Trainor arrived and immediately took charge of affairs. He went from room to room, nosing like a well-trained dog, inspected every article of furniture, drew back the silk curtains, and went out of the window down the fire escape in the dark.

'Nothing there,' he reported, when he returned. He contemplated the body, biting his lip. 'He wasn't killed on that bed,' he said. 'There's a trail of crimson leading from the sitting-room. Somebody carried him in there. That somebody must have been a fairly strong man. Another curious fact—I don't know whether you've noticed it, sir—is that he's not wearing his collar and tie; they're in the sitting-room in the waste- basket.'

'I hadn't noticed that,' said Brown shortly.

The telephone is rather important, sir,' said Trainor. 'It should be covered with finger-prints. Who was the last to handle it?'

'I'm afraid I was the culprit,' said Hurley Brown. 'Why?'

'Because, after he was murdered, the telephone must have been moved from the table. The cord comes across the room and it would be in the way of the man who was carrying the body. He was killed to the right of the desk—that is, the right looking towards the door, and left looking towards the window. The carpet is covered with crimson stains, and the trail of crimson is between the desk and the window, but it doesn't appear on the telephone line.'

'That seems sound reasoning,' said the doctor, nodding approvingly. 'But why was the dressing-gown taken off?'

Trainor did not reply; he was gazing at a brass chest, its luxuriant carving gleaming out of a recess. It was closed, but on the floor beside it lay a piece of tapestry and an Oriental robs of lilac silk, embroidered heavily in gold and purple.

'What are these?' he asked Miller. 'What are they doing on the floor? Do you know?'

'No, sir,' replied Miller. 'The tapestry goes over the top of the chest, and I think the robe used to be inside, but I don't know. It's a long time since I've seen him wear it, or since I looked in the chest.'

'It's kept locked?' asked Trainor, trying in vain to lift the heavy lid. 'Where's the lock?'

'There isn't one. It opens with a spring. See.' He pressed his fingers on the

largest of a bunch of grapes projecting out of the carving at each side, and raised the lid. Inside was a medley of curios mixed up with a length of tapestry and a piece of rich embroidery. 'Those used to be on the top!' exclaimed Miller. 'I've never noticed those other things before. They must have been under the stuff.'

'And the robe? You're sure the robe used to be inside?'

Well, it has been. I haven't seen it lately. The tapestry I know was on the outside. He sometimes put his coffee there, and it was to save marking the brass. You see, it's plain and polished on the top and soon scratches.'

'And you don't know positively what was in the chest?' asked Hurley Brown.

'No, sir. I've seen some of these things before, but I couldn't tell if anything was missing.'

'That's a pity,' murmured Trainor, as he turned the curios over. 'Some of these appear to be fairly valuable. If it was a case of theft, and we knew the missing articles...h'm.'

He prowled about the room.

'Had he taken his dressing-gown off in order to put on this robe?' asked Dr. Warden.

'That's something to be considered when we try to reconstruct the crime,' returned Trainor, and turned his attention to the little bureau near the window.

'What do you make of this, sir?' he asked. 'Don't touch it,' he added quickly. 'There may be some sort of fingerprint there.'

It was a sheet of Louba's embossed notepaper, and on it was written a single letter—the letter P.

'Whoever wrote that was interrupted,' said Trainor. 'And look how shaky it is.'

'What's your theory?' asked Brown.

But Trainor was not prepared to offer any theory.

'It might be that he had sat down to write some message after the man's death, and lost his nerve. That it was written after is proved by the agitation in that letter.'

'Could Louba have written it himself?'

It was Dr. Warden that answered. 'Absolutely impossible,' he said emphatically. 'Death was very nearly instantaneous; it was humanly impossible that he could have walked to the bureau.'

Trainor was searching the writing-table for the second time and pulled up the

writing-chair.

'He was sitting here, apparently wearing his dressing-gown, which is quite plausible, for it's a chilly night and he had no fire.'

'Which reminds me that I saw something in the grate when I came in,' said Brown, and Trainor went in search.

'It's almost intact,' he said exultantly. 'Where's the man? Can we take these firebars out?'

For answer Miller lifted the silver grid of the grate, and then gingerly and with the utmost caution the inspector inserted the thin edge of a sheet of paper under the burnt ashes and carried them intact to the table. Against the dull black of the burnt paper the lighter sheen of the letters showed clearly.

'It can be read without photography,' said Trainor. 'But somebody has torn off a corner, unless it's dropped off in the grate.'

He went back to make an inspection.

'No, it's all there. The corner has been torn off—probably the address.'

'The address?' repeated Hurley Brown absently. 'You mean of the writer?'

'Yes, sir. Will you scribble it down, sir, as I read it?' asked Trainor, bending over the carbonised sheet. 'There is no address and no prefix.'

'"Only you have power to save me. You know what my life is with —" Somebody whose name I can't read. "And you know what you owe me. Emil, you know—"

'The signature is...'—he screwed his head round to get a better view—'it looks like a K, or it may be an R or a B. I'd give a lot of money to have that address.'

15. THE WOMAN WITH THE GLOVES

Trainor had opened his lips to speak when—'Clang, clang.' Both men looked up and the room reverberated with the deep-toned thud of a bell.

'What was that?' asked Hurley Brown quickly.

'The alarm, sir!' gasped Miller, pointing through the open door to the bedroom window.

'Clang, clang! went the bell again.

'The alarm? What do you mean?'

'It's fixed to the fire escape, sir, so that if anybody pulls down the lower ladder, the tenants are warned.' Trainor ran into the bedroom, sprang out on to the iron balcony, and peered down. He saw a figure dimly, a crouching figure moving up the ladder, and without a second's hesitation he ran down to meet the intruder.

At that moment, the man turned and jumped. Trainor heard the thud of his feet as he struck the ground. Before he could reach the bottom, the visitor had gone.

'It's curious the bell didn't go when I went down before,' he said. 'I suppose it's connected with the balance ladder at the bottom. I went down that too.'

The solution to this mystery came a few seconds later with the arrival of the hall porter.

'I happened to be looking round my office a few minutes ago, sir, to see if I could find anything to help you gentlemen and I discovered that the wire connecting the fire escape alarm had been cut.'

'And now you've joined the pieces together?' nodded Trainor.

'I thought I'd better in view of all the circumstances,' replied the porter. 'But how it was cut is a mystery to me. Except when Mr. Leamington sent me up to test the fire bell, I haven't been out of sight of my box.'

'That settles that,' said Brown with a sigh. 'Of course it was cut when Trainor went down before, and it must have been fastened just about the time the stranger made his appearance. I don't think we need wait, Doctor. We'll leave the case, with Trainor. Will you phone the divisional surgeon, Inspector?'

'He's sick,' said the officer. 'We've asked them to get Dr. Lane of the Paddington Division. He's out on a case, but as soon as he returns, he'll come here. I shall keep Miller under observation, I suppose, sir?' he asked in a lower voice, and Hurley Brown nodded.

'I don't think he has anything to do with the murder, but you can watch him. Ask him to account for his movements last night.'

Trainor did more than this; he secured from the quivering Miller a good description of the visitor who had come that night by the servants' entrance; and the Sunday morning papers, which carried the story of the crime printed also the following notice:

'Police wish to interview a man who may be able to help them with their inquiries. The man answers to the name of Charlie, he is about 32 years old, 5' 6" in height, of slim build with a slight stoop. He has a dark complexion and a harsh voice. When last seen he was wearing a fawn overcoat over a brown suit.'

Inspector Trainor was joined at three o'clock in the morning by a subordinate. At five o'clock came a weary divisional surgeon who made an examination of the two rooms and gave orders for the body to be removed to the district mortuary. Leaving a policeman in charge, Trainor, who had been busy throughout the night sorting such of the dead man's papers as he could find, drove to 903 Edwards Square and knocked. He had not long to wait; presently the door opened, and a girl's voice questioned him.

'Is that Miss Martin?'

'Yes,' said Beryl.

'I'm an inspector of police, and I should like to speak to you.'

He thought he saw the figure sway slightly.

'Come in,' she said.

She turned on the light in the hall, and he saw that she wore a dressing-gown. Evidently she had just risen; yet she must have been wide awake when he knocked. The celerity with which she answered the knock on the door, her general appearance of wakefulness, supported his theory.

'I'm afraid I have bad news for you. Miss Martin,' he said, when she had led him into the small dining-room.

'Is it about Mr. Louba?' she asked quickly.

He nodded. 'He's dead,' replied the detective quietly. 'Murdered,'

'Murdered!' She got up from the chair which she had drawn to the table and stood staring down wildly at him.

'Dead!' she repeated. Her hand went up to her throat. 'Oh no!'

'I'm sorry to say it is true. When did you see Mr. Louba last? I understand you are engaged to him?'

She did not answer at first; but seemed dazed and paralysed by the news. 'Dead! Are you sure?' she asked hollowly. 'Yes, I am engaged to Mr. Louba—I was, I mean.'

'Are these yours?'

He took from his pocket a small bundle of papers and laid them on the table. She nodded. 'They are IOUs for a very large sum of money. Miss Martin. Will you tell me how they came into Mr. Louba's possession?'

She tried to speak, but failed. He saw a water jug and glass on the sideboard and poured her a drink.

'They represent money I lost at bridge, and which Mr. Louba settled for me,'

she said.

'Was that before you were engaged?' She nodded again. 'And then, in consequence of his kindness to you, did you accept him when he asked you to marry him?' asked Trainor.

'Yes, I think something like that happened.'

'When did it happen, Miss Martin?'

Her trembling hand raised the glass again to her lips. 'Last night.'

'You were engaged to somebody else before?'

'No, I wasn't.' Her voice was grim and defiant.

'I have an idea that you were engaged to Mr. Leamington?'

'We are friends—very near friends,' she said. 'But we were not—we were not engaged.'

'When did you become engaged to Mr. Louba?'

'Last night,' she said desperately. 'I've told you—'

'When was your friendship with Mr. Leamington broken off?'

'It isn't broken off. I—I am still friends.'

'When did you see Mr. Leamington last?'

Another long pause. 'Last night, also,' she said. 'He drove me home.'

'Did Mr. Leamington know that you were going to be married to Mr. Louba?'

'Yes.'

'Did it come as a surprise to him?'

Beryl Martin looked round helplessly, as though for some way of escape from this persistent cross-examination.

'Yes, he was surprised,' she answered.

Did you tell him why you had become engaged to Mr. Louba? I mean about the notes of hand?' He tapped the bundle before him.

'I don't know,' she answered quickly. 'I don't know.'

'And did Mr. Leamington take the news very kindly?'

'Yes, he understood.'

'He understood that you were marrying Mr. Louba because you owed him money? Did he say anything against Mr. Louba?'

'Not a word,' she answered immediately.

'Think again. Miss Martin.' Trainer's piercing eyes never left her face. 'A young man is very fond of you, is engaged to you; suddenly, to his surprise, the engagement is broken off because, as you explained to him, you have got into debt with a man probably twice your age, who is going to marry you and wipe off the debt. Is it reasonable to expect me to believe that a man like Mr. Alan Leamington would accept that statement calmly and without expressing some desire to punish the man who has played, what I may call, a dirty trick? When did you see Mr. Leamington last?' he repeated.

'You asked me that before,' she flamed. 'Why should you come and ask me about Mr. Leamington?'

'Did you see him tonight?'

'No,' was the reply. 'No, I swear I didn't see him tonight.'

'How long have you been in the house?'

'Since ten o'clock.'

'Are you sure?' he asked gently. 'The constable on duty at the corner of the street says that you came back much later.'

'It might have been later,' she confessed. 'But I cannot see why my movements should interest you.'

'Where were you this evening, Miss Martin?'

'I went to the theatre—to the Apollo.'

'Alone?'

'Yes. I often go alone.'

The detective rose and slowly pocketed the pack of IOUs.

'Don't you think it would be wiser and better for all concerned, if you would tell me just what you know about tonight's murder?'

'I know nothing. I'd no idea that such a dreadful thing had happened until you came.'

'And yet you were waiting for me to come?' said Trainor, and his tone was an accusation.

'I didn't expect anyone to come,' she said. Her distress was pitiful to see.

'Suppose I tell you'—Trainor spoke deliberately—'that you were seen in the neighbourhood of Braymore House between the hours of ten and eleven?'

It was the sheerest bluff on Trainer's part but he had succeeded when he

invented the mythical constable who saw her come home at a later hour than she had confessed. And if things were as he believed, nothing was more likely than that she should have been in the neighbourhood of Braymore House.

Her reply startled him.

'You saw me? Why did I go? Oh, why did I go?'

'You went because you thought Mr. Louba was in danger of his life from Alan Leamington. And you wanted to be there when Alan Leamington came. Isn't that true?'

She assented mutely.

'And he did come?'

'No,' she answered. By a tremendous effort of will she had recovered something of her lost nerve. 'He did not come. I waited until one o'clock, and then I returned home.'

She met his eyes unfalteringly.

'There is nothing more I can ask you,' be said, making to-wards the door. 'But I'm afraid I shall have to see you again—perhaps often. Miss Martin.' There was a menace in his tone which the girl understood perfectly.

He strolled round the hall, looking from side to side in his quick, absorbing way. Suddenly his hand closed over the small ivory handle of an umbrella in the stand. He drew it out.

'Is this yours?'

'Yes,' she said in surprise.

'Did you have it with you tonight?'

Yes,' she answered, after a second's hesitation.

The hall was dark when you came in, was it not?' he asked. She nodded, wondering what was coming next. 'Will you show me the gloves you wore?'

'They're in the drawer of the hall-stand.' She nodded in the direction. 'I took them off when I came in—they were old ones that I sometimes wear, when I'm in a hurry. I've got into the habit of putting them into that drawer.'

He pulled open the drawer took out the gloves and slowly opened them out. And as he looked she fell back against the wall, for the gloves were streaked with dried crimson. And when he took his hand from the top of the umbrella, she saw that the ivory setting was also stained.

'Very curious,' said Inspector Trainor softly. 'If you don't mind, I'll keep these articles.'

She did not answer him, but stood, stunned with grief and apprehension, long after he had left her.

16. THE MAN WHO WAS SUSPECTED

Near Regent's Park there is a double block of flats known as Gate Gardens. Each block has its own door, which is kept locked at night although each of the tenants has a key. Inspector Trainor obtained these particulars from a policeman in the neighbourhood, and went back to Scotland Yard to report. He found Hurley Brown in his office and to him he related the result of his search.

'Of one thing I'm certain, sir,' said the inspector. 'Miss Martin didn't know that the murder had been committed until I told her.'

'How do you account for the crimson stains?' asked Brown,

'She'd been in contact with the murderer, and neither he nor she was aware that there was blood on his coat, probably on his sleeve. The stains, you see, are on the palm of the hand; a woman might lay her hand on a sleeve and, as she was wearing gloves, she would not be aware of the fact. You notice that only the right-hand glove is really stained; the red marks on the left hand have obviously come from the other when they were folded together. I may need a warrant for the arrest of Alan Leamington.'

The commissioner bit his lip thoughtfully.

'Not at this stage, of course. You may detain him, if he's still in London,' he said.

'As to that I have my doubts,' said Trainor, shaking his head.

'When are you seeing Leamington?'

'As soon as I can get into the flat,' replied the other.

The commissioner thought. 'Perhaps it would be wiser to leave the matter till later,' he said 'An hour or so makes no difference.'

Trainor demurred. 'An hour would make a lot of difference if he's left London. It may mean his getting abroad before we catch him.'

As it happened, there was no need for apprehension on this score. At eight o'clock Inspector Trainor, accompanied by Hurley Brown, made a call at Gate Gardens. The doors were open, and the attendants were cleaning the steps as the two detectives walked up to the third floor and knocked.

An elderly woman, who was evidently Leamington's cleaner, opened the door

to them. 'Is Mr. Leamington in?'

'Yes, sir,' she said, to Trainer's surprise. 'I've just taken him in a cup of tea. He's not out of bed.'

'He's expecting us,' said Trainor and, pushing past the indignant lady, made his way along the passage.

The third door on the left was ajar, he pushed it open, and saw a figure sitting up in bed, his head on his hands.

Alan heard the sound of footsteps and looked up. 'You want to see me, Brown?'

'Inspector Trainor warts to ask you some questions, Leamington,' said Hurley Brown quietly.

Trainor was looking round the room and presently saw what he was seeking It was a shirt thrown over the back of a chair.

He picked it up, examined the cuff, and without a word offered it for his superior's inspection. The rim of the cuff was soiled by a dark- red stain.

'Where's your overcoat, Leamington?' he asked.

Alan nodded to the door, behind which hung a dressing-gown and an overcoat. Trainor took down the overcoat and turned the sleeves to the light. On the right were two big, dull-brown patches. The front of the coat was splashed with the same stains.

'Leamington,' he said, 'I don't think it is necessary to make any very long explanation of what I'm going to do.'

'I don't think it is,' said Alan. He was clasping his knees, his tired eyes fixed curiously upon the detective.

'I shall hold you, Leamington, for the wilful murder of Emil Louba, on the night of the third of December, between the hours of ten o'clock and ten forty-five. At ten o'clock Mr. Louba telephoned to the Elect Club. At ten forty-five he was dead.'

Not a muscle of Leamington's face moved.

'I didn't kill him,' he said at last. 'And if he telephoned at ten o'clock, then a miracle has happened. I broke into his flat, and I intended to kill him, but he was already dead.'

'At what time?'

'At nine o'clock—an hour before he telephoned,' said Alan Leamington. 'Louba was dead at nine o'clock, dead before Dr. Warden arrived for the

second time. I saw the doctor come on both occasions, because I was watching the house. The second time I'm sure he saw me. Did he tell you?'

Hurley Brown shook his head.

'I'm sure he saw me—the good old fellow probably didn't want to get me into trouble. I'm going to explain the whys and wherefores of my action.'

'Miss Martin knows,' interrupted Trainor.

'I don't know why you mention Miss Martin,' said Alan coolly. 'You're not going to implicate all my friends in my adventure, are you?'

'She was with you last night after the murder was committed, Alan,' said Hurley Brown quietly. 'You'll have to give us the straight story. Your life may hang on it.'

The man in the bed got up and pulled on his dressing-gown before he replied. All the while his forehead was wrinkled in thought. He paced up and down the room, his hands behind him, and then he sat down on the bed.

'I'll take your word. Did Miss Martin tell you anything about her engagement to Louba? She did? Well, you know that. When I heard it, I wanted to kill him. I know the kind of brute he is, or was: he was foul. I'm acquainted with a man who's engaged in rescue work, and he and his friends have been trying to trap Louba for years. The police know that side of his character of course?'

Trainor nodded.

I went to Braymore House the night I learned the news; that was the night I learned the news. I intended coldly and deliberately to kill him, but a night's sleep suggested a better plan. Louba had in his possession a number of IOUs which Miss Martin had foolishly signed. How much they represented she did not guess. She redeemed some, but Louba had pretended that they did not amount to a great deal. I'm perfectly sure that the game played at Sir Harry Marshley's was not bridge at all, but baccarat, and that Louba held the bank; otherwise the IOUs wouldn't all have been in his possession. The other night he broke to her the news that she owed him fifty thousand pounds and that he was pressed for money. She was horrified. All along she had an uneasy feeling that she owed more than she thought she did. My own theory is that three-quarters of the papers he showed her were forged. They were written in pencil, and a forgery is easier to make in pencil than in ink.

'Miss Martin has a mother, an invalid with a weak heart. Confronted with the alternative of being sued by Louba, or sparing her mother the shame and humiliation by marrying Louba, she chose the more unselfish course. I had threatened to kill him; and she took my threat so seriously that she, too, watched Braymore House, but she didn't see me go in. Yesterday morning I

called at the Braymore and, having discovered which was the wire connecting the alarm, I cut it in the porter's absence. Last night I threw a rope over the ladder, pulled it down, and mounted cautiously. To my surprise, though it was a foggy night, the window was open and the lights were on. And the first thing I saw was Louba's body lying on the bed. My first impulse was to turn and fly, but I remembered Beryl's IOUs and stepped into the room.'

'The window was open?' asked Brown. 'Miller says it was closed and bolted, and that it was impossible to open it from outside.'

'It was wide open,' said Alan. 'To cut a long story short, I stepped in and walked to the bed. I thought he wasn't quite dead and I felt his heart. It was then that I got the stains on my coat. He was dead, though, and I went into his sitting-room. I could hear no sound, though I listened at the door, which was locked.'

'Was there a key in the lock?'

'No; that struck me as strange. I began to search the drawers of the writing-table, but I found nothing, and then I began to get scared and made my way back to the street. It was then that I saw Beryl—Miss Martin. She was terribly afraid for me. I wasn't in a condition to reassure her at first, but at last I did make her believe that I hadn't harmed Louba, although I'd admitted I'd seen him, and then I got away from her before she could ask me any more questions. I wanted to be alone and work things out. I knew that suspicion would fall on me. The cut wire, the threat I'd made—'

'Why did you come to the club? Warden and I saw you,' said Brown.

'Where were you? I didn't notice. I was looking up the Continental timetables, in case I was detected in the act of burglary and had to bolt. That's what worries me now. To bolt meant to confess my guilt. My duty was to go to the nearest policeman and tell him what I had seen, or to take the hall porter into my confidence. I waited for hours trying to make up my mind. I saw the doctor and nearly spoke to him—I wish I had —and then I saw the policemen come, and you and Warden followed. I was desperate. I wanted to know what was happening, what you were all saying, who you suspected and, like a fool, I went into the garden again. I saw somebody come down and go up again, and then a policeman passed so close to where I was hidden that I could have touched him. Presently I crept out and pulled down the ladder. It was a lunatic thing for me to do, but the sound of the policeman's footsteps going away encouraged me. I was hardly on the first landing before somebody came down the ladder, and I jumped. That's the whole of my story.'

'You saw nobody else come from the direction of the fire escape?'

'Nobody.'

'When you were in the flat, did you look in the dining- room—that is, the other room which opens from the library where the murder was committed?'

'No.'

Hurley Brown strolled across to the window and looked out.

'Did you see the paper—a written sheet with one letter —the letter P—on it?' he asked without turning round.

Alan shook his head. 'No, I saw nothing except two overturned chairs and a little pile of letters on the floor near the table. I thought at first they were Beryl's IOUs, but they were letters from a woman complaining, as far as I could see, about her husband.'

'Letters!' Brown and his subordinate spoke together.

'Are you sure, Mr. Leamington?' asked Trainer. 'I found no letters. How were they signed?'

'K,' replied the other. 'They were from an address in Turkey, a cafe in Istanbul. I can't remember the name. For the most part they were written on very cheap paper.'

Trainor was puzzled. He had not found the letters, and there had been no overturned chairs.

'If your story is true,' he said, 'the murderer was still in the flat. You must have disturbed him when he was looking for something. Your story will have to be tested, Mr. Leamington, and I warn you that, on your unsupported evidence, you will find it difficult to convince a jury.'

'He convinces me,' said Hurley Brown, and the inspector's jaw dropped.

'I'm afraid that isn't sufficient, sir,' he said a little stiffly, and Hurley Brown laughed, which was unusual in him.

'I'll accept Mr. Leamington's parole, and I will take all responsibility for his safe custody,' he said. 'Trainor, I brought you into this case because you're the straightest and cleverest man I know, and I should be the last to put obstacles in your way, or cheapen your authority. It's because I have a theory about this business that I want Leamington to remain at liberty for the present. I particularly wish to do nothing until I've had Dr. Warden's view. He heard voices in the room and heard Louba say "She must do it" or something of that sort. Warden is the one man who can help us now. You remember the second time he went to Louba's flat he heard the bell ring on the third floor. The porter brought the elevator up, but there was nobody there. To my mind, that is important. The flat above was occupied by Bennett da Costa, who was a competitor of Louba's in the Levant. I discovered this fact this morning. Da

Costa is away, or is supposed to be away, in the South of France. The flat is empty. If the murderer of Louba could go down the fire escape, he could also go up. There is a possibility that the man who committed the murder was waiting all the time on the floor above.'

'And ringing the bell for the lift?' asked Trainor drily.

'That may have been an accident. The person concerned might have come from the door, peered down the elevator shaft and touched the bell by chance. The ring was a very short one.'

There came a knock at the door, and Leamington heard his housekeeper's voice. 'Dr. Warden to see you, sir.'

Alan looked at the two men, and Hurley Brown nodded. 'Tell him to come in,' he said.

The doctor was frankly astounded to see Alan Leamington's visitors. 'So you've found him, eh? I hoped you wouldn't, Brown.'

Alan gripped the doctor's hand warmly. 'It was good of you not to tell Brown you saw me,' he said.

'I didn't,' replied Dr. Warden calmly. 'If anybody says I saw you they were mistaken. As a matter of fact,' he went on inconsistently, 'I came round to ask what the mischief you were doing in the region of Braymore House, but I presume that question has been put to you.'

In a few words Alan repeated his story, and the doctor's kindly face grew graver as Alan proceeded.

'No, I had a distinct recollection that no furniture was overturned,' he said.

'Do you remember the elevator bell ringing?' asked Brown, and the doctor assented. 'Did you hear anybody on the landing above?'

Dr. Warden hesitated.

'I won't swear that I heard them,' he said. 'The porter's words suggested that there was somebody on the third floor. I have the impression that there was. What are you doing with Alan?'

'I'm not arresting him,' was the reply. 'We must take away those articles of clothing which are stained with blood, that is an elementary precaution.'

'Thank heavens!' said the relieved doctor.

His thankfulness was premature.

17. THE MAN WHO WAS ARRESTED

Beryl had only just come downstairs when she was told that a gentleman wished to see her. She turned her head aside with a helpless, hunted gesture, almost as though she contemplated flight.

She had slept, after Trainor's visit to her, but it had been a sleep haunted by horrible dreams in which blood predominated, and she had risen with a blinding headache.

Recalling her conversation with Alan on the previous night, she was still convinced that he had spoken the truth when he denied that he had harmed Louba, but she knew that he must have been aware that Louba was dead, that it was what he had seen, not what he had done, which had unnerved him. She knew well enough, however, that others could not be expected to have the same faith in his word as she had, and her heart turned to water when she was informed of a visitor. Trainor had said he would have to see her again.

She was thankful her mother did not leave her room in the mornings, as she walked up and down for a minute or two, trying to compose herself, to summon up courage to face her inquisitor and lie boldly for Alan's life.

There was a patch of colour on her haggard cheeks as she opened the door of the room where she expected to find the inspector.

To her amazement, she saw instead a neat little man who blinked at her timidly.

'Why...why...you're the man I saw last night!' she exclaimed, and although the sight of him brought a fresh fear to her, she had to admit that in ordinary circumstances nothing could be more innocuous than his appearance.

'Yes, Miss Martin,' he said, with a little bow. 'And may I congratulate you? You won't have to marry Louba now.' He was beaming at her, his whole face irradiated. 'This is a happy morning!'

Shocking though it seemed to rejoice over another's death, she herself would have agreed if Louba's death meant no danger to Alan Leamington. Now she only resented his congratulations because of their mockery. Better to be Louba's wife a thousand times over than to see Alan Leamington pay for her freedom with his life.

'You must excuse me,' she said. 'It is not a happy morning for me. I am in great trouble. If you have any business...'

'Yes, of course. You are afraid for that young man, Mr. Leamington.'

'Indeed, I am not! Why should I be afraid for him?'

'Why, because Louba's been murdered and as he was there last night—'

'He was not!' she interrupted fiercely. 'He was nowhere near the place!'

He smiled. 'You are quite right to shield him,' he said...But I'm afraid they know he was there.'

'They? Who?'

The police. I think they went to arrest him this morning.'

'What do you say?' she asked, scarcely above a whisper. 'Why do you say that?'

'I saw them go; Inspector Trainer, Captain Hurley Brown, and afterwards—'

'Oh, sit down—won't you!' she gasped, as she stumbled into the seat nearest to her. 'Did you say you saw them go?'

'Yes, quite early. But they didn't arrest him.'

'You're sure?' she asked eagerly.

'Yes, but that's what I've come about. They've only spared him for the present because I think he's a friend of Hurley Brown's but, my dear, that'll never stand. There's no friendship above duty in the police service, not for the highest. They have their duty to do, even against their friends. And what I wanted to say to you was—'

She was taking heart again. 'They've not arrested him, of course, because his answers have satisfied them,' she interrupted. 'He had nothing to do with Mr. Louba's death, and he's proved it.'

'His word can't prove it in a court of law, my dear. I heard them talking as they went away. Dr. Warden was with them then.'

'You know Dr. Warden, too?'

'I know everybody, I think, who has had any dealings with Louba,' he returned blandly.

'Well, go on. What did you hear?'

'They've found bloodstains on him, and he's admitted he was in the flat after Louba was killed. They believe his story, but...' he shook his head. 'Get him away, my dear,' he whispered. 'Get him away!'

She felt a mounting sense of fear. 'If there was need for him to go, they would have advised him to do so,' she declared half-heartedly.

'No, they couldn't do that. They're honest men. They may delay his arrest in the hope of fresh evidence rising to clear him, but that's the most they can do.

Don't wait till it's too late. Miss Martin. You can't bring him back to life. If you believe him innocent, all the more reason why he should run no risk of being found guilty.'

'To run away would instantly brand him guilty.'

'Only until he's proved innocent—as you say he will be. And if he never is proved innocent, better for you to be happy with him in some place out of reach than for him to be hanged.'

'Don't!' She looked at him almost angrily. 'How can you use such a horrible word?'

'Well, he will be, you know, if he's found guilty. And it would be a pity. Louba was a bad man. It would be a great shame if anyone had to suffer for his death.'

'He couldn't escape if he would, I don't suppose,' she murmured. 'As soon as it was known he'd gone, they'd watch the airports and the trains and boats.'

'He can come to my place,' said the little man eagerly. 'I've got a little flat at Balham right at the top of the building. I could keep him there without anyone knowing, and he could go on the roof to take the air after dark. I think he could get out of the country today if he went at once; but if he doesn't like to risk it, then I believe I could keep him safely at my place. I look after myself. There's rows and rows of little flats, and we don't know the people we live by.'

She looked at him suspiciously. 'Why should you be so solicitous about him?' she asked. 'Why take the risk of harbouring him?'

'Because I shouldn't like him to suffer for having...for being judged guilty of Louba's death. Louba isn't worth it. Who-ever killed him was a public benefactor, and I'd like to help him.'

'Then Alan Leamington has no claim on your gratitude she retorted, 'for he didn't kill Louba!'

'Then I'm more anxious than ever to save another person from being a victim of that bad man. Won't you go to him and persuade him to run away? If you don't go at once, it'll be too late. Regretting it all your life afterwards won't undo it.'

No it would not. She did not need reminding of that. She wished above all things to see Alan Leamington beyond all reach of danger, and hesitated only because she knew that flight might prove more disastrous for him than to stay and face it.

'I'll go and see him, at any rate,' she said at last, rising.

'That's right,' he said, getting up with a pleased expression. 'And shall I leave

my address just in case he doesn't intend to leave the country?'

'Well, you...can, thank you,' she returned dubiously, and took the slip of paper he gave her.

'You won't lose any time, will you?' he asked. 'It's not wise, my dear. Good morning, and I hope you'll induce him to go. And I shall always be happy to be of service. Good morning.'

He bowed and withdrew.

She went along to where Leamington lived, and found him sitting and gazing moodily at his feet as they lay stretched out before him.

'What's wrong?' he exclaimed, as he stood up hastily at her entrance.

'Alan, you saw Louba dead—murdered—last night. You actually got blood on your clothes—I got some on my gloves by touching you. And you've told them this?' she cried.

'I've told them everything,' he said. 'I didn't kill Louba, and it's better to tell the truth. I'm so sorry, Beryl, that I brought you into it, and so grateful to you for —'

'Oh, don't mind me! I want you to go away, Alan. Your friends may believe you, but others won't without proof. If they don't find the real murderer, it'll be you who will suffer. It's too risky, Alan. Go while you can, then if your innocence isn't proved...at least you'll have your life and your friends left.'

'I can't go. I'm on parole.'

'Oh, Alan!' Her desire for him to escape increased tenfold when she knew it to be impossible. 'Your life may depend on it...and that little man said he would shelter you if you were afraid to risk leaving the country.'

'What little man?' he asked sharply.

'The one I told you about last night: he was outside the flat. He's been to see me this morning.'

'Who is he? He spoke to me last night. I believe he knew Louba was dead. Why did he offer to shelter me?'

'He doesn't want anyone to suffer for Louba's death. He doesn't think he was worth it.'

'Is that his sole reason? Did he give you his address?'

'Yes. Will you go there?'

'I must stay here, where they can find me. But it may be of interest to the police.'

'Oh, you don't think he could have done it?'

'I don't know. I know only that I didn't, and that he seems to be mixed up in it. If he's innocent, it will do him no harm to answer a few questions.'

'But even if he's innocent he'll get into trouble for offering you shelter.'

'There's no need to mention that he did so. I'll send it to Hurley Brown himself, and he'll see the man quietly and find out something about him without harming him, if he's really all right. You didn't ask him what he knew?'

'It's not easy to get a definite answer from him, not where Louba's concerned.'

'Have you the address with you?'

'Oh, I haven't! I remember I put it down somewhere. I meant to put it in my bag before I came to see you but I forgot it. It'll be where I left it. I'll go and get it. You can't come with me?'

'There's no reason why I shouldn't. I'll leave word with Mrs. Sitwell where I'm going, in case they want me.'

They were leaving the house together when a taxi drew up at the kerb and Trainor and a plainclothes man got out.

'Sorry, Mr. Leamington,' said Trainor, 'but I have to arrest you on suspicion of having murdered Emil Louba.'

'But—but—'stammered Alan, his colour fading. 'Captain Hurley Brown said —'

'I'm sorry,' said Trainor, motioning him to enter the taxi. 'But there are higher authorities than Hurley Brown!'

'Very well,' said Alan, and turned to Beryl. 'Don't worry, Beryl, I know it will be cleared up. Don't forget to find out what that little man knows. If he was outside the place, he may have seen the real murderer.'

'What's that?' asked Trainor.

'A man both Miss Martin and I saw outside Braymore House last night. Miss Martin has his address.'

She nodded—then suddenly pointed to the next corner. 'There he is!' she exclaimed. 'He's gone!'

The plainclothes man gave chase, but returned in a few minutes. The little man had totally disappeared.

'Do you suspect he knows something of the crime?' asked Trainor.

'No. I don't suggest it for a moment. Only he was there: he saw me go in, so he may have seen someone else.'

'Can you telephone me his address, Miss Martin?'

'Yes. I'll do that as soon as I get home,' she answered, and stood biting her quivering lips as the taxi drove away.

A visit to the tiny flat at Balham, however, revealed nothing. It was locked up and its tenant did not return, though his arrival was awaited with some interest. A search of its three small rooms proved equally disappointing. There was nothing to say who he was or what he was. Inquiries elicited no more than that he was a quiet little gentleman, prompt in payments, and had occupied the flat for a good portion of the year during a lengthy period.

'How did you meet him, Miss Martin?' asked Trainor, paying her a call on the evening of Alan's arrest.

'He came here this morning and said he'd be glad to help Alan in any way,' she said.

'Did he specify the help?' inquired Trainor. She was getting used to cross-examinations.

'No,' she answered, untruthfully.

'Did he make any excuse for offering the services of a stranger?'

'He thought it a pity Louba's death should cause suffering to innocent people.'

'He didn't like Louba?'

'He didn't say that. He was a very harmless little man, Mr. Trainor. I don't think it's humanly possible that he had a hand in it. Mr. Louba could have eaten him.'

'If he was outside, he might have been keeping guard while an accomplice was inside.'

'Well, he didn't attempt to warn anybody while I was there. On the contrary, he talked to me, and appeared in no hurry for me to go.'

'Why did he bolt, when you pointed him out this morning?'

'Perhaps,' she replied, with a trace of bitterness, 'when he saw one innocent man arrested, he thought no one who had been within a mile of the place was safe.'

'Well,' said Trainor, as he rose to go, 'it's because Mr. Leamington was nearer than a mile that we cannot afford to lose any chance of a further clue.'

'I know,' she admitted, 'I know how black it must appear against him...to

others...'

Trainor did not contradict her. The case certainly did appear black against Alan Leamington. He himself would have been the last to deny it.

18. THINGS THAT MILLER FORGOT

To facilitate his work, Inspector Trainor had taken up his headquarters at Flat 2. Leading from the passage were three small rooms, one of which was occupied by Miller, the other two being empty. Louba had no guest-room. His own big bed-room, running from the front to the back of the house, could be divided by folding doors if necessary, and in the second half there was a folding bed which had the appearance of a wardrobe.

Trainor had one of the rooms made habitable and spent two nights in the house of death, measuring, examining, calculating, reconstructing. He had gone over every inch of the carpet with a magnifying glass, and wherever there was the semblance of a finger-print the mark was brought up and photographed.

On the Sunday afternoon following Alan's arrest, he was sitting in Louba's carved writing-chair, sorting and reading papers that had been found in the desk, when his assistant returned from police headquarters with a bundle of photographs which had been taken of the room and enlargements of such special articles as called for closer examination.

'Did they find anything on the half-sheet of notepaper—the one with the letter P?' was the first question he asked, as the officer put down the bundle on the table.

'A moisture print, very faint, of a glove tip—here it is.' He took out a photograph, and pointed. 'The bottom left-hand corner. That is obviously a glove—and a leather glove, you can just detect the grain of it. He must have held down the paper with the left hand when he was writing.'

Trainor shook his head. 'Of course, that is perfectly useless except to prove that the murderer wore gloves, and on a night like Saturday, it would be remarkable if he didn't. Anything else?'

'It looks as if the writer's pen ran dry for a line or two,' said the officer. 'It was easy to trace because he pressed heavily, but the words written are indecipherable. The only two that look like words are "tun" or "tin", and "mica". They are very clear in the photograph, but the words that go on before, or follow, are impossible to read.'

The inspector examined the photographs in silence. 'The paper may have been

written on earlier in the day. I never thought to ask Miller that.'

He pressed a bell on the table and the man appeared.

'No, sir, there was no sheet of notepaper on the desk that afternoon. Mr. Louba told me in the morning always to keep paper and envelopes in the bureau, and he complained that there was none there. I opened a new packet of stationery and filled the racks about half an hour before Mr. Louba returned from his club. Until Charlie came I was in and out of the library half a dozen times.'

'Well, that disposes of P,' he said. 'Brass chest?'

The sergeant produced a second photograph and a third.

'Finger-prints on the spring, Miller's—'

'Yes, that was very careless of me to let him touch it,' interjected Trainor.

'But elsewhere distinct finger-prints of another. Look.'

Trainor examined the photographs with keen interest.

'That's so. No gloves. But would they be Louba's?' He put the photographs aside. 'We'll see to that later. Candlesticks?'

The sergeant produced two more photographs.

'No print except Mr, Hurley Brown's—he found the weapon, I understand.'

Presently the inspector rose to his feet.

'Sit down where I am, Sergeant,' he said. 'I have an idea that Louba was sitting when he was attacked, and that the person who struck him was sitting or standing near the bureau. Obviously the blow was an unexpected one.'

He stood by the little bureau.

'Keep your head turned away—look at the fireplace. Can you see me?'

'Well—I can just see your hand reaching for the candlestick. But I'm expecting it. No, sir, I can't see you now.' Inspector Trainor replaced the candlestick he had lifted from the table.

'Louba wasn't expecting the blow; it came from this side of the library.' He opened the door of the dining-room. 'From here, probably. Most men sit slightly sideways at a table; very few sit square. His face would be turned towards the fireplace. Keep in that position, Sergeant.'

The detective tip-toed across the carpet. Suddenly he dropped his hand on his subordinate's shoulder, and the man started.

'Didn't hear me, eh? Let's have Miller in.'

Miller entered the room almost before Trainer's finger had left the bell-button.

'Miller, was this door locked on the night of the murder?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'From the kitchen and service lobby there are two doors into the dining-room. Were they locked?'

'I don't think so. But nobody could have got in that way unless they passed Dr. Warden.'

'Or came through the staff entrance,' said Trainor significantly. 'For example, it was quite possible that you might have returned without anyone hearing you. That was the way you went out.'

Miller shifted and looked uneasy.

'I didn't come back—the second time I went out, I mean,' he said resentfully. 'I went to see my young lady.'

Trainor, who had returned to the chair at the writing-table, eyed him with a cold and speculative eye.

'Who is this young lady—what's her name and address?'

Miller hesitated.

'Miss Mary Cardew, she works at one hundred and ninety-six Brierly Gardens,' he said. 'She'll be very uncomfortable if she's asked questions.'

'You may be more uncomfortable if she doesn't answer them to my satisfaction.'

Miss Cardew proved to be a very pretty girl of such obvious honesty that Trainor knew before he spoke to her—the interview took place in a neat kitchen in Brierly Gardens—that he would meet with no evasion here. She had been waiting for her fiance not a dozen yards from Braymore House. He had asked her to meet him at nine o'clock.

'How long was he with you?'

'Not more than a minute,' said the girl. I was naturally annoyed at being kept waiting, but Mr. Miller was so upset that that didn't last.'

'Only a minute—you are sure?'

'A minute or two—not longer. He was in a hurry to get back.'

The detective bit his lip. 'When he came to you at nine o'clock was he upset or just usual?'

'He was a bit upset. He told me that Mr. Louba was getting more and more trying to live with, and he asked me if I was ready to get married in a month.

He's bought a boarding-house at Bath, and we were going to manage it between us.'

Trainor went back to Braymore House to test a new theory.

Again Miller was interrogated.

'You were gone fifteen minutes; you were with Miss Cardew, at the most, five of those fifteen minutes. It would take you another three minutes to get to her and return. How do you account for the missing seven?'

'I met the valet who lives on the first floor and had a talk with him.'

'What did you talk about?'

'About a gentleman we both knew.'

The answer was so vague that Trainor was prepared to find that the man was inventing. Again, however, he was confounded. The valet confirmed the story.

Miller had saved money in the fourteen years he had been with Louba. People who called to see the financier had tipped him heavily, and his salary had been a generous one. Without hesitation he produced his bank books, and Trainor examined them. There was a substantial balance, and no big sum had been paid in at any one time. The steady inflow of small sums was marked.

'H'm!' said Trainor when he had finished reading.

Miller's anxious eyes never left Trainor's all the time the examination was in progress, and when the last book came back to him he was visibly relieved.

'They've arrested Mr. Leamington, sir?' he said. Trainor nodded. 'I don't see how he could have done it, Mr. Trainor.'

'He was in this room last night by his own admission,' said Trainor, and the man's eyebrows rose.

'In here? How did he get in?'

'Through the window; it was forced from the outside.'

Even as he spoke, the detective knew that the most careful scrutiny had failed to reveal any sign of forcing.

Miller shook his head vigorously.

'It couldn't be done,' he said. 'I told the sergeant last night, didn't I?' He appealed to the third man. 'The windows were screwed—two hand screws that are fixed to the bottom sash.'

Trainor uttered an exclamation of impatience. 'You didn't tell me that, Sergeant. I saw the catch on the lower sash and that was easy to force.'

Miller led the way to the bedroom and, kneeling down, pointed to two small holes in the frame, one at each side. Trainor switched on a torch and played the light on to the frame. The holes were very small and might easily escape observation, especially as he had taken it for granted that the catch on the window was the only fastening.

'I fixed them myself, just before Mr. Louba came in, as I always did,' explained Miller. 'At least, I always close the windows before he comes in, but I don't put the screws in except before he comes in here at night, only that day I put them in earlier than usual—while he was having his bath, just before Charlie came in. It looked like being a foggy night, so I gave an extra turn, because those are the kind of nights that burglars get busy.'

A search of the room failed to reveal anything in the shape of screws, until Trainer pulled off the sheet that hid the crimson-stained bed. And there, in the middle of the silk bed cover were the screws.

'They must have been under the body,' said Trainor. 'I wasn't here when it was moved. Didn't you see these, Sergeant?'

'No, sir; the wires were short-circuited just before we took him away, and we had to do the work by candlelight.'

The inspector carried the screws to the other room and laid them on a sheet of writing-paper. They were very thin, little more than bodkins, and at one end was a brass thumb-piece.

'We'll get no prints from these,' he said. 'Did you wear gloves, Miller, when you went out last night?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Bring them to me.'

The gloves were of a coarse-grained leather.

'It would be very difficult for anyone to locate the screws, except someone well acquainted with the details of the flat, wouldn't it?'

'Yes, they aren't easy to see,' admitted the other. 'Mr. Louba used to forget. Some years ago there was a bit of trouble over them. Mr. Louba wanted to get someone out of the flat quickly, and I'd screwed the things so tightly that he couldn't unfasten them. It was another such night as last night.'

'A woman?'

'Yes, sir, one of his friends called. I forget who it was exactly, and he wanted to get her out.'

Miller did not remember any particulars except that Louba had broken his skin

turning the screws. The girl he had not seen. She was very young, and a very dear friend of Mr. Louba. She had her own key, and usually came when Miller was out; Louba used to let her out himself through the service passage.

'She's the only one I remember that he ever took trouble over. He used to get out all his silks and carvings for her to see. I always knew when she was coming, because he'd have this foreign junk lying about. I think she was interested in the East. That was the last time she ever came, to my knowledge —the night he couldn't open the window. There was a big fuss because the alarm sounded, but Mr. Louba must have told her to go round the back of the house, because the porter never saw her.'

'Did Mr. Louba have many lady friends?'

'A few,' replied Miller laconically.

Mr Trainor was handling the screws gingerly. 'Would Charlie know about these?' he asked.

'Maybe. I have an idea that he's been here before, and in my mind I've connected him with the story I've just told you. It's funny I should do that, because I don't remember him very well.'

'The things you can't remember would fill a good-sized book-shelf,' said the irritated Trainor.

19. CHARLIE AND KATE

Many millions that morning read with interest and pleasurable thrills the story of the Louba murder. One man read it, his face grey with fear, his hands shaking.

Mr. Charles Berry was an ill-favoured man of thirty-five. All that was written in his face was bad. The low forehead, the straight, heavy chin, the broad nose, told one story. Shaggy black brows that met above eyes that were a little too small for his broad face confirmed all that the other features hinted.

He sat huddled up in a small arm-chair on the top floor of Wilderbaun Temperance Hotel, biting aimlessly at his nails, a newspaper outspread before him.

'Called "Charlie",' he muttered. Then, rising, he staggered across the room and kicked open a door. 'Louba's dead!' he whispered huskily.

A woman was sitting by the window, her folded arms on the broad ledge. She was pretty in a faded way, in spite of the powder, which lay thick upon her

face, and the exaggerated scarlet of her lips. She turned her deep-set eyes upon the uncouth figure in the doorway.

'You're lying, I expect,' she said. 'If he's dead, I hope he's in hell.'

Bounding into the room, he gripped her arm, jerking her to her feet.

'You hope that, do you?' He blubbered his rage. Then he struck her across the face with his open hand, and she did not wince. 'He's our living, blast you! What are you going to do now, you ugly jade? They won't pay you a thousand lei a week to sing at the Bojida—and a thousand lei are not worth five cents anyway.'

'I'll work,' she said.

'Like nothing you will! Look here—read that.'

He slammed the paper into her hand and stood glaring down at her as she read.

'That's you! Did you kill him?' she asked.

Uttering a bestial cry he caught her by the throat and shook her until her eyes closed, and she lay heavy in his hands.

'Ask me that again, you fool! Ask it again, and I'll show what I'll do. I'll poison you. Charlie Berry hasn't forgotten his old trade.'

'I wish to goodness you'd given me a pound of any poison,' she said, holding on to the foot-board of the bed. 'I don't know how I've lived through all these years. And there's no escape now that he's dead.'

'There's no escape!' he declared. 'And no escape for me either. Didn't I marry you? Didn't I pick you up when you were dirt and make a respectable woman of you?'

'I wish you hadn't,' she said, going back to her chair by the window.

He glowered at her. 'Now's your chance, if you want to earn your living,' he sneered. 'If you want to escape, go back and tell a certain person what you are and what you've been!'

'You know that I can't—you know that you'd die of fright if I did,' she said with a shrug. 'I'm bound to you. Nothing on earth can part us.'

He had picked up the paper and was reading again. 'The police will be nosing for me all over London, and he had your letters which they'll find.' For a second a gleam of hope shone in the woman's eyes. 'He showed 'em to me,' Berry went on. 'Chucked 'em in my face. Said I hadn't tamed you—laughed at me. I only got the money by begging for it. He said you'd got to go back to Turkey.'

'I'll not go,' she said with some spirit. 'You can kill me, but I'll not go. If there was the spirit of a man in you, you wouldn't send me back to that horror of a life.'

Charles Berry picked his teeth meditatively. Some of his courage was returning. 'It's lucky I got the money,' he said.

'But we'll have to skip. Half the people in this hotel will recognise me.'

'Where can we go?'

To Deptford. There's a man there I know; he'll let me have a couple of rooms. We ought to have gone direct—as I told you we were.'

'When are you going?' she asked suspiciously.

'Now. The early trains to the north run up till eleven o'clock, and I told the old woman that I'd only be staying a couple of days. Pack that grip.'

He left her to struggle with their meagre belongings and went back to his newspaper. He wished he hadn't. As he read again the brief details of the crime he grew ashen at the thought of his own peril.

His wife came into the room carrying a suitcase that was too heavy for her. She was dressed for going out, and over her face she wore a thick mesh veil.

A cab took them first to the Great Northern Station. From here he travelled by underground to Farringdon Street and changed again into a New Cross train. Little Kirk Street, in which his new lodgings were situated, had at one time been a very sedate thoroughfare, patronised by the middle class of the early nineteenth century. Now it was given over to the poor. As many as five families were huddled in these gaunt houses. The unpainted doors were almost invariably open night and day.

'Here's the place.' Berry paused before the only door that was closed, and knocked. After some time it was opened, and an unshaven man in a tattered jacket stood squarely in the doorway.

'Hello, Charlie. What have you been after?'

He had a newspaper in his hand and tapped it significantly with a grimy paw.

'Let us in. I'll tell you all about it,' pleaded Berry, and the man stood aside reluctantly and let them pass.

'You'll have to stay in or out,' he grumbled, 'you and your woman. I can't have any trouble.'

He took the suitcase from the girl's aching hand, and she was grateful as she followed him up the stairs. There was only one room, but it was lofty, if dilapidated.

Berry left her alone while he conferred with his host, and she looked out on the sordid grime of the rubbish heaps without a pang. Istanbul at its worst was a paradise to this, but the ugliness of the Turkish capital made a blacker outlook, for it lay in the hearts of evil men.

She had ceased to be sorry for herself. She was twenty-seven. She felt a hundred sometimes. If—she was past the time of 'ifs'. Presently she heard the footsteps of her husband on the stairs, and he came in and locked the door behind him. If his face had been grey that morning, it was white now. He was shaking in every limb, and the paper he held in his hand rustled noisily.

'Who d'ye think is in charge of this case, Kate?' In his terror he could treat her almost humanly.

'The Louba murder?'

'Oh, my lord, why did I come back to London?' he moaned. 'Why did I? I could have lived abroad and made a living. What did you bring me back for, you cursed dancing-girl, you cafe woman!' he shrieked, and came at her with clawing hands.

Before the fury of the onslaught she shrank back, but he did not touch her. His hands fell to his sides and he stood there panting.

'Who's in charge of the case?' she asked.

'Hurley Brown—that's who! Hurley Brown!'

For a moment she looked at him uncomprehendingly. Then, with a little sob, she put up her arms to cover her eyes. Only for a space she stood swaying, and then she fell to the floor and lay there, her face in the crook of her arm, crying.

20. MILLER HAS A THEORY

For a Londoner, Dr. Warden was an early riser. He had a large consulting practice, and he was a conscientious worker. He had finished his early breakfast and was skimming the news columns devoted to the murder. He was profoundly glad to observe that his name had not been introduced. The reporters had fastened on to the divisional surgeon, and although it would be necessary at the inquest that his evidence should be given, he was very grateful for the respite, for he did not like giving interviews to reporters.

When the maid announced the visitor, he was making some tests in his laboratory.

'Show him in, Mary.'

It was Miller.

'Good morning. Miller. This is a very bad business. I'm extremely sorry for you. I suppose you're under suspicion. Everyone is in a case like this, so don't be alarmed,' he added, as he saw the consternation in the man's face. 'Is there any later news?'

'No, sir, except that the police have traced this Charlie to a hotel, but he was gone when they arrived.'

'I read that,' said the doctor. 'He's believed to be in London still.'

'Doctor,' Miller hesitated. 'Do you mind if I tell you something? Do you remember when I went out to see my young lady to put off the appointment?'

'Yes,' said the doctor. 'You were gone a quarter of an hour. Time enough, had you so wished,' he added jocularly, 'to have mounted the fire escape.'

'For pity's sake don't put that idea into their heads,' said the man nervously.

Dr. Warden laughed. 'I was only joking—perhaps a joke in questionable taste? Well, what of it?'

Miller drew a long breath. 'Well, sir, do you know that the house was being watched?'

'I hear that a man called Weldrake was seen there, a man nobody knows, and who can't be found now,' returned the doctor.

'No, not him, sir. Somebody we do know.'

The doctor frowned. 'Do you mean Mr. Leamington? Did you see him?'

'No, sir, not Mr. Leamington, but the last gentleman in the world I expected to see—Mr. Hurley Brown.'

'What!'

'Mr. Hurley Brown. I saw him distinctly.'

'But it's impossible, Miller. Mr. Hurley Brown was dining at my club when I reached there, and I went straight back.'

'I don't care, sir,' said the man doggedly. 'It was Mister, or Captain, as they call him, Hurley Brown. He was standing inside the gate of Braymore House as I went out.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, sir. I was talking to the valet in the flat below—the man who came up about the blood dripping from the ceiling—and he said he saw a man who must have been Mr. Brown standing at the gate as Charlie came in. The valet

got a better view of Charlie than I did.'

'Why do the police call him "Charlie?"'

'That's what poor Mr. Louba called him in my hearing. "Come in Charlie," he said. I told Inspector Trainor that. Brown stood watching Charlie go up the pavement to the back of the flats, according to the valet, and then he turned away again before the valet saw his face. And it's my opinion, sir'—Miller's haggard face was twitching with excitement, as he produced his great theory—'it's my opinion, sir, putting two and two together, that if anybody knows who really committed this murder, it's Mr. Hurley Brown!'

Dr. Warden stared speechlessly at the man.

'That's what I think, Doctor—that Mr. Hurley Brown knows more about this murder—'

'How dare you!' thundered the doctor, his face red with anger. 'How dare you breathe such a suspicion. Mr. Hurley Brown! A commissioner of police! It's monstrous! You might as well accuse me—at least I was in the flat alone for a quarter of an hour. Mr. Brown indeed!'

'I'm very sorry. Doctor,' said the man humbly. 'I didn't mean any harm. Only he was there all yesterday looking for something. He had the place turned upside down.'

'Of course he did. It's his duty. Miller. What else could he do but turn the place upside down, as you describe it, in a search for clues?'

Miller hung his head, crestfallen.

Still Miller lingered, though it seemed that the business which brought him was at an end.

'All sorts of people used to come to see Mr. Louba,' he said.

'Like who?'

'Sir Harry Marshley for one, and Lady Marshley. And when I come to think it over, I'm certain that this man Charlie used to visit him a lot. I can't exactly place him, but there was some-thing very familiar about the way he walked.'

The doctor shot a swift glance at Miller.

'I've an idea that there is something at the back of your mind that you want to tell me,' he said. 'I think you'd better tell me—or, better still, tell the police.'

But at the mention of the police, Miller's nervousness became more apparent and, with a muttered apology for coming, he hurried off.

21. THE TRAILER OF CHARLIE

The doctor returned to his tests, and when they were finished, he took off the white gown he wore and went down to his consulting-room. In the middle of the morning he had a phone message from Brown, and learned the latest developments.

He lunched that day at the club. Hurley Brown was not there, but he heard from one of the servants that Alan Leamington had been brought up before the Bow Street magistrate on a charge of murder, and had been remanded. His afternoon was free, and after lunch he drove to Edwards Square. His foot was on the step of 903 when the door opened, and Sir Harry Marshley came out; and on Sir Harry's unpleasant face was a look of settled gloom.

'Good morning. Doctor,' he growled. 'I hope you'll be more successful in dealing with that young lady than I've been. Baser ingratitude I have never met!'

Dr. Warden knew the baronet slightly. At one time he had been a patient of his.

'I wasn't aware that Miss Martin had any particular reason for being grateful to you, Sir Harry,' he said drily. 'And I am curious to learn why you think she has been ungrateful.'

'I asked her to keep my name out of the case, and she refused point- blank,' said Sir Harry bitterly. 'I said to her "for your mother's sake."'

'I'm sure your consideration for her mother was appreciated,' said the doctor. 'What has happened to you, Marshley?'

The red-faced man shrugged. 'I'm ruined,' he said gloomily. 'The police raided the place last night, and that would be bad enough in all circumstances; but when you consider, my dear boy, that the source of supply is dried up, you can understand just how I'm feeling.'

'Louba ran you, did he?'

'Of course he ran me,' said the other, in disgust that such a question should be asked. 'You don't expect that I've got money to throw about on big houses and expensive staffs? My poor dear wife is in a terrible condition; she hasn't stopped crying since last night. It's an awful blow to me.'

He strutted out to the taxi that was waiting for him, and Dr. Warden knocked at the door. The girl who showed him in told him that Miss Martin was not seeing visitors, but the doctor sent in his name, and in a few minutes Beryl came in. She was looking tired and pale, but very calm.

'I've told Mother everything,' she said, 'and if I'd only had the sense to tell her before, I could have saved myself many heartaches. You weren't in court?'

'No,' said the doctor. 'Were you?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'It was only a formal hearing—evidence of arrest. Of course, Alan didn't kill him, and the story he told was absolutely true.'

'I am sure of that,' said John Warden quickly. 'I have come now...' he hesitated before he went on, 'to ask you if I can give you any assistance. Happily Alan has plenty of money for his defence, and I understand that he has retained Sir Carthew Barnet. But you?'

She smiled faintly.

'We have money, Doctor, thank you, and it's good of you to ask. If I have to pay those IOUs, which I think I'm morally bound to pay eventually, we shall, of course, be ruined; but for the moment there's no danger that we shall suffer financially.'

'Did Louba ever take you into his confidence? Did he ever tell you anything about his past life?'

'Only once,' she said after a moment's thought. 'I didn't know him very well. A month ago I was almost a complete stranger to him.'

'Did he ever speak about anybody we know?'

She looked at him quickly and nodded.

'Yes, he said there was a man in London who hated him—the only man who'd ever got the better of him. Those were his very words. I don't know all the details of the story, but I gather that Mr. Louba was a moneylender many years ago, and he was responsible for a boy getting into such serious trouble that he shot himself. The boy was a soldier and somebody in his regiment set to work and almost ruined Mr. Louba—had him turned off the island. I remember that, though he never told me what island it was.'

'It was the island of Malta,' said the doctor thoughtfully. 'Did he mention the name of this man who hated him?'

She averted her eyes. 'I'd rather not tell you that. Doctor,' she said. 'It wouldn't be fair at this moment.'

'Was it Hurley Brown?' Her eyes came back to him. 'I'm asking you this in the deepest confidence,' he said. 'And I assure you that I shall never repeat any word of what you say.'

'It was Mr. Hurley Brown,' she answered. 'But it was many years ago —long before Mr. Brown entered the police service.'

'He was in the Malaysian police service soon after the occurrence,' corrected the doctor. 'He gave that up and came back to England, intending to farm. Something happened, and he rejoined the police service, and eventually he was transferred to Scotland Yard to fill a vacancy.'

'That's all Mr. Louba told me,' said the girl. 'Except what pleasure it gave him to sit in the same club-room with Mr. Hurley Brown, knowing, as he did, that Hurley Brown loathed him. Doctor, do you think there is any real danger of Alan being convicted?'

Dr. Warden pinched his long upper lip, and his grey eyes surveyed the girl kindly.

'I do not think he'll be convicted,' he said. 'There are so many factors to be considered. It has been proved now, to the satisfaction of the police, that it was impossible he could have opened the window into Louba's bedroom from the outside. The only possible way it could have been opened was by cutting the glass, or by having a confederate in the flat. The glass wasn't cut. The two thumbscrews which fastened the window were found under Louba's body, so they must have been put there before Louba was laid on the bed. The screws weren't forced, they were taken out deliberately by someone inside. Therefore, Alan's story holds together; and there is the added advantage that he has made a very full and candid statement of the part he played. There is no doubt whatever that he found the window open. Louba would not have opened it himself, because it was a cold raw night. Alan's story is true. He was, of course, a madman to make the attempt. I was afraid he might go into the flat—I saw him that night, you know.'

'Who committed the murder, Doctor?' asked Beryl quietly. Dr. Warden was silent. 'Do you suspect somebody?'

'I more than suspect,' he answered.

He saw Hurley Brown for a few minutes that afternoon at the club, but there was little fresh to tell,

'Trainor is satisfied that Leamington is innocent,' said Brown. 'No, I didn't persuade him; he arrived at that conclusion without assistance. In fact he might have come earlier if I hadn't been so prejudiced in Alan's favour.'

'Have you found your Charlie?'

Brown shook his head.

'If the cursed fog hadn't come down on me, I should have had him that night,' he said.

Dr. Warden frowned.

'So it is true what Miller says; you were trailing Charlie! Why?'

'I'm not prepared to tell you that. Warden,' said the other. 'It's perfectly true that I picked him up shortly after I left the club on Saturday afternoon. I saw him quite close at hand and recognised him as somebody—'He paused again.

'Who?' asked the doctor patiently.

'I won't tell you that. At any rate, I followed him, because I was anxious to learn where he was living. I saw him go into Braymore House, and I picked him up when he came out. But the fog beat me; I found myself following the wrong man, and since then he's disappeared. What did Miller say?'

'He recognised you,' said the doctor, 'and his suspicions were confirmed by the valet of the flat below. I think you'd better leave this purely detective work to your staff, Brown. It isn't your job to trail villainy in the fog.'

Hurley Brown made no answer. It was not yet the moment to speak. He returned to his office to find Trainor waiting for him. The attitude of his subordinate had undergone an almost imperceptible change. There was something in Trainor's manner which, if it did not annoy, certainly did not please him. Did the detective know that he had been in the vicinity of Braymore House on the night of the murder? It was a disturbing thought.

'I've had a portable arc light put into the flat, sir,' he reported. 'I borrowed it from a studio. We've had no daylight since the murder, and the lights in the flat are useless.'

'Have you found anything?'

'A whole lot. There are bloodstains in the hall—just a few; but what is more remarkable is that the murderer left by the main hall door, not by the fire escape, or by the servants' door. There's a smear on the inside panel which I'm certain is blood. In the bathroom I found slight traces on a towel that had been used. This is very important. Miller, if he can be relied upon, put clean towels there after Louba had taken a bath that evening.

The first thing I looked for were the towels, but the only one I saw had certainly never been used. They were kept in a small cupboard and when we looked through it we found the used towel neatly folded and put away under half a dozen others. It was still wet.'

'The case becomes more and more baffling,' said Brown. 'What of Miller?'

Here Trainor was emphatic.

'Miller may well be in it. My own theory is that the murder was committed between seven and nine. Dr. Warden says that there was a sudden silence which was so abrupt that he couldn't help noticing. He was reading in the hall,

and the silence made him look up and listen. After that he heard no further sound of voices. He didn't hear Charlie leave the flat. What is more likely than that Charlie went out by the fire escape? If he'd left that way, and Louba was alive, the window would be shut by Louba, who had a fear of chills. If Louba were dead, and Charlie and a confederate were the murderers, then obviously they would be in so great a hurry that they left the window open, and in any circumstances Charlie couldn't have fastened the window behind him.'

'But Miller could, if he were the confederate,' said the other quickly.

'But he didn't! That's the odd thing. Miller could have been in the murder easily. He could have gone out and seen this girl, returned, helped kill Louba, and let out his companion. But in that case—'

'In that case he'd have left the window open in order to divert suspicion from himself,' interrupted Brown. 'It's the very thing he would have done. There was somebody in the flat after the doctor left—that's clear.'

'Miller was there for ten minutes,' said the police officer.

'If you eliminate Miller and regard him as an innocent factor, you have still to explain the bloodstains in the hall, which obviously couldn't have got there while the doctor was waiting, or while Miller was still in the flat. The smears on the panel have been wiped off by somebody —probably the murderer. It looks almost as though an attempt had been made to carry the body out of the front door. I think this must have happened between seven-thirty and eight. Miller has satisfactorily accounted for his movements from the moment he left the flat until ten- thirty, when he returned. Yet Miller is not wholly eliminated. The murder might have been committed in that ten minutes he was alone with Louba. There is a way into the library through the kitchen and the dining-room. All the other doors were locked, and the one that leads from Louba's bedroom to the hall was bolted on the inside and never opened. There is one confusion of timing which could be cleared up. Did anybody see Charlie leave Braymore House?'

It was a challenge. Trainor was watching him closely, waiting for the answer, well knowing that Hurley Brown himself had seen Charlie depart. Miller had told him that.

'Who should see him?' he asked coolly. 'Do you know anybody who did?'

Trainor considered for a moment.

'No, sir,' he replied.

At seven o'clock that night Trainor was standing with his back to the fire in his little office, going over and over the clues he had found; fitting together the pieces of the puzzle that had been set him for solution.

Hurley Brown had left Scotland Yard, leaving a message that he would be at his club if he was wanted. At six o'clock the detective had called up his chief to find that he had not yet arrived at his club.

Hurley Brown? Trainor frowned. It was quite understandable that Brown wanted to keep out of the case. It was patent, from the inquiries he had made, that Hurley Brown had his own private feud against Louba. But murder—that was impossible!

He sat down, took up a note-book and pencil, and once again set down everything connected with the case, every hypothesis already suggested, every likely and unlikely person who might by any reasoning or guesswork be held responsible for the crime.

Suddenly his pencil poised in mid-air.

Da Costa! What had Hurley Brown said about da Costa?—an old rival of Louba's; and living in the flat above him. It certainly was convenient for him that he happened to be away at the time of the murder.

Was he away?

There was no reason for supposing he was not, excepting—who rang that elevator-bell on the occasion of Dr. Warden's second visit to the flat on the night of Louba's death?

22. THE MAN WHO HAD DISAPPEARED

An inconspicuous little figure, he waited his opportunity; then, when the hall porter was out of sight, and the floor of the elevator disappeared in its ascent, he slipped in out of the murky daylight, and ran up the stairs.

Though it was morning, the lights were on; but they were low- powered, and it was gloomy and full of shadows on the stairs.

He reached da Costa's flat without being observed, and rang the bell. His ear to the door, he listened intently; he took a sealed envelope out of his pocket, slipping it underneath the door, as though afraid it might be overlooked in the letter-box.

After waiting some time, as if in anticipation of an immediate answer, he went lightly down the stairs again, and emerged into the street, where his small figure soon passed out of sight.

He returned at dusk, using the same precautions against being observed, and again made his way to da Costa's flat, where he rang. There being no reply, he

slipped another letter under the door, and waited. Still there was nothing but silence from within.

He took out of his pocket a flat tin of sardines, which he pushed through the letter-box; after it he thrust bread, butter and cheese, made into flat packets small enough to go through the letter-slit; then he ran down the stairs again, and disappeared like a shadow when the porter's back was turned.

He went early the next morning, the gloomy weather favouring him, although he was adept at remaining unobserved if he particularly wished to do so. Coming out, this time by way of the servants' entrance, he met Miller, who was returning from Dr. Warden's. Occupied with the inauspicious fashion in which his suggestion regarding Hurley Brown had been received. Miller paid no attention to the little man who slipped unobtrusively by if him in the gloomy doorway.

Weldrake took a bus to a corner near to Sir Harry Marshley's home, and went to call on Sir Harry. He had a little difficulty in seeing him, and was not admitted until he had sent word that his business was connected with present circumstances.

'What the devil do you mean?' demanded Sir Harry as he entered the room where the little man waited. Fresh from his unprofitable interview with Beryl Martin, harassed by the position in which he found himself, Marshley was in anything but a good temper. 'Present circumstances? What circumstances?'

'Emil Louba's death,' returned the little man mildly.

'Well, what's it got to do with me?'

'I thought it would be a considerable loss to you,' remarked Weldrake.

'Confound that young woman!' exclaimed Sir Harry unchivalrously. 'Has she blazoned my name abroad already? Why couldn't she keep that young man of hers in order?—then Louba wouldn't have been murdered, and I shouldn't have been—'He stopped his tirade. 'Well, what do you want?' he asked.

'I was wondering if you weren't sorry that you refused Mr. da Costa the other night?'

'If I wasn't what?'

'Yes. Didn't he come here to offer to finance you in place of Louba?'

Sir Harry glared at him: the little man blinked amiably.

'Who says he came?' he demanded at last.

'I saw him.'

'When?'

'The night Louba was killed.'

A lot of people came here that night. What d'you mean by saying he made an offer to me?'

'I saw him talking to you. It was in that little room looking on to the drive, and I saw you both through the window. He's been taking over a lot of Louba's interests, so...I guessed that was what he wanted with you.'

'Oh, you saw us through the window, did you? And what were you doing there at all?'

'Just wandering around.'

'Oh, you were, were you? Do you usually wander around looking in at other people's windows?'

'If they're connected with Louba. I was very interested in Louba,' replied Weldrake agreeably.

'Well, I'm hanged!'

Sir Harry stuck his hands in his pockets, and with his feet wide apart, gazed at his visitor in something approaching stupefaction.

'Of course, it was perhaps quite natural that you should have treated da Costa as you did,' went on Weldrake. 'Probably he wasn't very tactful, and, of course, he was a stranger to you: I could see you were very angry. Still—'

'Has da Costa, if that's his name, sent you to me?'

'Oh, no, no!' cried the little man hastily. 'I've come entirely en my own initiative.'

'What about?' asked Sir Harry bluntly.

'Well, I thought that now Louba is dead and you find yourself in need of fresh backing, you might like to reconsider your answer to da Costa.'

Sir Harry glared again, but refrained his indignation. After all, he was in need of a backer, and if this fellow da Costa was able to replace Louba, he certainly regretted his treatment of him.

'And what if I do?' he asked.

'In that case, as some apology for threatening to throw him out of the window for his insolence—I could hear you say that, because you raised your voice,' he explained pleasantly, 'I thought you might be willing to do him a service.'

'What kind of a service?' asked Sir Harry suspiciously.

'I was thinking...that if he needed a hiding-place...'

'A hiding-place!' Sir Harry paused with his mouth wide open. 'Good heavens! It was after he came to see me and told me I should soon be without Louba's support that Louba was killed!'

'Or do you think it was before?'

'Whichever it was, he made the offer knowing that Louba could no longer—'

'Be of service to you. Wasn't it thoughtful of him to see that you didn't suffer?'

'Do you know for a fact that he had anything to do with the murder?'

'Oh, no, indeed! But long ago he was unfriendly with Louba, and I just thought it might be awkward for him if he couldn't prove where he was at the time of the murder. But if you cared to say he was with you, that would make him very grateful. I feel sure he would be willing to overlook any brusqueness in your manner...when you threatened to kick him out of the window.'

'And you say he wants a hiding-place?'

'Oh, no, indeed.'

'You've seen him, though?'

'No, indeed. I've pushed letters under his door, but I can't say whether he's received them.'

'You know where he lives?'

'Yes, he is supposed to be away—perhaps he is. Only it occurred to me that if he were not away, he might fear to be suspected, and be glad to come here for a day or so until he can get away.'

'Are the police looking for him?'

'Not that I know of.'

'And what's your part in it all?' queried Sir Harry.

'Just that of a looker-on. I thought that if I could tell him there was a fresh place waiting for him, in case he wanted it, he might answer my letters and be pleased to accept your hospitality.'

'Why not yours?' asked Sir Harry rudely.

'The police are watching my flat. I'm staying at a boarding-house at Finsbury Park.'

'The police want you, do they?'

'Not because I've done anything really wrong,' the little man hastened to assure him. 'But I offered to shelter young Mr. Leamington, as I was afraid they'd arrest him.'

Sir Harry grunted, and stared at him hard. 'You're very good, wanting to assist everybody,' he sneered.

'I'm always willing to be of service,' said Weldrake modestly.

There was silence, whilst Sir Harry marched up and down the room. His visitor sat on the edge of his chair, his feet and knees placed neatly together, his air one of infinite patience and calm content.

'Who is da Costa?' asked Sir Harry, at length.

'He has been many things: you may suppose him another Louba, with the worst wickedness left out.'

'Is he rich?'

'He has ups and downs like most men who...er...lead adventurous lives. At present, I believe he is in good fortune. There is no reason why he should have offered to finance you, if he couldn't do it.'

There followed another silence. 'Possibly he doesn't want to come here,' observed Weldrake.

'That was only my own idea. I think he might get straight out of the flat and away, if he would. Of course, he mayn't be there.

But in certain positions you want all the support you can get, and I was thinking that, just in the event of his being questioned, if you could say he was here at the time the murder was committed...and perhaps had stayed here since...he'd certainly be grateful.'

'No doubt.'

'Supposing he does happen to be at home, and decides I am a friend, could I tell him that you agree to this?'

Sir Harry had made up his mind. 'Until I know whether he's guilty or innocent of this terrible crime,' he replied unctuously, 'of course I cannot think of associating myself with him in any way. But if I am convinced of his innocence...'

'I'm sure he'll convince you,' murmured the little man.

'Then, naturally, I shall be only too anxious to do what I can for a man in an awkward position. And in any case, perhaps I did treat him discourteously when he came to see me...'

'Oh, quite, quite!' agreed Weldrake. 'He'll understand perfectly.'

He rose. 'Thank you very much. Sir Harry, I needn't keep you any longer.'

'And—er—when...what are you going to do now?'

'See if I cannot persuade him I am a friend, and then assure him that any assistance he may require, and which it is in your power to supply, you will be pleased to do so, and that you distinctly remember he was with you at the time of the murder, so far as we can guess.'

'Always providing he is innocent,' added Sir Harry.

'Oh, of course. He must assure you of his innocence,' rejoined Weldrake. 'I'm sure there will be no difficulty over that. Good day.'

The little man bowed himself out and trotted down the road with the gait of a man who had brought his business to a satisfactory conclusion.

23. THE MAN ON THE STAIRS

Trainor decided to follow up the suggestion thrown out by Hurley Brown, though he had little faith in it. Neither did he believe that Brown himself suspected da Costa, for he had not once referred to him since that first brief mention of his name.

It was certainly a coincidence that da Costa was a past rival and a present neighbour of Louba's but, for all that was known to the contrary, they might well have made up their differences long ago. Such as they were not particular whom they associated with, providing it suited their plans. If they had quarrelled in the past, it was equally probable that self- interest had brought them together since, so that there was nothing sinister in their proximity to each other: and if there had been, would not Louba have been the first to suspect and take warning?

There was also no doubt at Braymore House that da Costa was away from home, and that he had gone away some time before the day of the murder.

Still, da Costa definitely eliminated from the list of suspects narrowed the circle if it did nothing else.

He went straight from his office to Flat 2.

'Sergeant, I haven't got a search-warrant,' he informed his assistant, 'but we won't stand on ceremony. I want to get into the flat above.'

'How do we get in, sir?'

'Mr. Hurley Brown said the flat was empty. Don't know whether there's a pass-key, but as it's late, we'll try the windows,'

They went out on to the fire escape, and ascended to the next landing.

The curtains of da Costa's windows were closely drawn, and the windows could not be opened. Pressing his face against the glass of one of them and squinting upwards, where the ray from his torch shone, the sergeant declared that there was a bolt securing it.

'We'll go up the stairs.' said Trainor. 'I believe I can manage that lock on the flat door.'

They descended to Flat 2, and passed through. As they came out of the door, the sound of the lift-attendant's voice came from above them.

'Hi—hi, sir! Do you want anybody?'

Following upon it came the sound of light running footsteps, and as Trainor stationed himself at the bottom of the next flight, Weldrake ran into his arms.

He leapt aside and would have continued his head-long course, had not Trainor held him firmly.

'Don't go,' he said. 'We should like to say good evening before you go.'

'Really, I'm in a hurry,' declared the little man.

'I should be sorry to detain you...Mr. da Costa.' Yet he spoke the name uncertainly. It was hard to believe this was such a man as da Costa,

'Indeed, you've made a mistake, sir,' said Weldrake eagerly. 'I assure you I am not Mr. da Costa. I beg you not to keep me. I—I have a train to catch.'

As he spoke, the elevator came to a standstill.

'Who is this?' asked Trainor of the attendant.

'I don't know, sir. I called out to him, because I've seen him two or three times slipping up and down, and he never uses the lift and slips by so quickly...rather odd, it seemed to me.'

'It isn't Mr. da Costa?'

'Oh, no, sir! He's a big man, with black eyes and a high colour. Foreign-looking.'

'Ever seen this gentleman with him?'

'No. Never seen him before to my knowledge, except just the last day or two.'

Trainor turned to Weldrake. 'I must ask you to come inside for a minute or two. I am in charge of the Louba case, and I am interested in all callers at Braymore House.'

'I'm not a caller, I assure you! It's quite a mistake. It's such a dark and misty night, and I mistook the building for another.

'Mistook it several times, then,' remarked the lift attendant.

The little man looked at the stairs leading to the street as though contemplating a flying leap down them, but his arm was held securely, and three pairs of watchful eyes were on him. 'Very well,' he said, going towards the door of the flat. 'But-you are quite mistaken.'

When they stood in the library: 'Is your name by any chance Weldrake?' inquired Trainor, with more warmth and hope in his tone than when he had guessed his name before.

'Yes...yes, it is,' admitted the little man, 'But you know there's really no reason why you should want me. I did nothing but offer shelter to a young man...I thought unjustly accused, and in danger of a terrible death.'

From the beginning he had held one of his arms awkwardly, and endeavoured to evade observation with it, but now it was quite clear that under his overcoat he held an ungainly object of some sort. Trainor took no notice of it for the moment.

'Oh, so that was why you went to see Miss Martin, was it?'

'He wasn't arrested at that time, you must remember.'

'No. Why did you run away when we did arrest him?'

'What further use could I be?'

'Was it because you knew I was anxious to hear why you were outside the building on the night of the murder?'

'I was only looking on. I assure you I harmed nobody, and I had nothing to do with the murder.'

'Lookers-on see most of the game. You can possibly give us some very valuable information.'

'No, indeed,' declared Weldrake hastily,

'For instance,' said Trainor, 'what are you hiding under your arm?'

The man's thin sensitive face deepened to a troubled pink: he was obviously distressed.

'I'm not hiding it,' he protested. 'I'm carrying it there...so I shan't lose it.'

'Something valuable?'

'No, not very valuable. But it's not very well wrapped up.'

'May I see it?'

'I'd rather you didn't.'

'Where did you get it from?'

'I—I bought it...before I came here.'

'And it's not very well wrapped up? We will find you some paper and string so that you can carry it more easily—Miller!'

'Oh, don't trouble,' implored Weldrake. 'I can really carry it quite easily tied up as it is.' He made a step to the door. 'If you want to question me about that night—though I have nothing at all to tell you—I'll come tomorrow morning: or I'll tell you where I'm staying and you can come to me.'

His feverish desire to be gone would have been plain to the dullest.

'Mr. Weldrake, I must trouble you for that parcel,' said Trainer, in a tone not to be ignored.

There was a pause, the little man's face pathetic in its crestfallen distress.

Slowly he pushed his coat aside, and drew out a bulky newspaper parcel. Still more slowly he handed it over.

Trainor unwrapped it, and gazed a little nonplussed at the gaudy beaded casket he uncovered.

'Call Miller,' he said.

He was doubtful whether this thing could have been amongst the curios in the brass chest, not alone because it had no artistic value, but because, if one article alone had been stolen, it would surely be one of greater value than the others.

'Have you seen this before, Miller?' he inquired when the man entered.

'Yes, I have, sir! I remember it quite well,' responded Miller instantly. 'It never stood about anywhere—it was always in the chest, but I've seen it more than once, and I couldn't mistake it. It's such an odd thing, especially for Mr. Louba to have.'

'Why didn't you tell me this was missing, then, if you're sure it was always in the chest?'

The man looked uncomfortable. 'I didn't think of it till I set eyes on it again,' he replied, rather sulkily.

'But you've no doubt now?'

'No. I'm positive that used to be in the brass chest.'

'Can you say how long ago?' interposed Weldrake. 'Mr. Louba sold it a good while ago. I bought it tonight at a second-hand curio shop.'

'Where?'

'In Wardour Street.'

'We can go to all the shops in Wardour Street,' advised Trainor, and Weldrake glanced aside troublously.

'You don't remember where you last saw it, Miller?' asked Trainor.

'No, sir. I don't.' He was looking intently at Weldrake, and gradually his eyes widened. 'But I can tell you where I last saw this little man,' he said.

'Oh! You've seen him before?' exclaimed Trainor, and Weldrake's expression confirmed Miller's statement.

'Yes. I saw him on the Wednesday before Mr. Louba was murdered. He followed me into a public-house, me and...me and a friend,' he went on hastily, his hands twitching, as he saw the pit into which he had almost precipitated himself. 'He sat down at our table and talked very odd...very odd indeed.'
'About what?'
'Da Costa, And something about waiting twenty years. But she wasn't very clear. To tell you the truth, I thought he was a bit dotty, the way he was talking,' confessed Miller.
'What was he waiting twenty years for?'
'Well, I took it to get back on Louba, but I won't say he said so. That's only what I thought he meant by talking about waiting twenty years.'
'Is that all you can remember?'
Miller was sore at the number of times his memory had received unfavourable comment. 'That's all there was to remember,' he rejoined. 'He only spoke half a dozen words to us, because we didn't know him, and weren't interested.'
Trainor turned his gaze on Weldrake. 'Anything to say?' he queried.
'I only meant to say that a bad man like Louba would be bound to come to a violent end,' explained Weldrake.
'And you were waiting for it?'
'Yes. Just waiting, you know.'
'I see.'
Trainor studied him in vain: there was nothing to be seen but a gentle, perturbed little man anxious to go.
'When did you last see da Costa?' he inquired.
'Oh...before he went away.'
'Have you been up to his flat now?'
'Yes. I thought he might have come back. But he hasn't.'
'Why were you going to see him?'
'I...wondered if he might like to buy this casket.'

'Where did you get it from? Did you get it out of this room?'

'I did not. I give you my word I've never been in this room in my life before.'

Trainor eyed him with a baffled air.

'Well,' he said. 'I hope for your sake you can prove that!'

24. THE MAN UNDER THE SEAT

It was the next morning that Dr. Warden called at Flat 2 to have a word with Trainor. He was anxious to know if Miller had repeated to the detective his theory regarding Hurley Brown, and what significance Trainor put on it. He had every faith in Brown himself, but he knew that his action in trailing the man called Charlie looked peculiar in face of his refusal to explain his motives, or even admit to his subordinate that he had done so.

The doctor found Trainor just on the point of going up to da Costa's flat.

'I was going last night, but I had a little interruption, so I contented myself with putting a watch on both exits,' he explained. 'Not that I think anyone's there now, but I want to know if my little man has been living there, which appears probable.'

'What little man is this? The missing one?' asked Warden.

'Yes.' Trainor related what had happened. 'I suppose you never saw or heard Louba speak of a casket like this, did you?' he asked, when he concluded.

'Can't remember. But surely it would be a very strange thing for a man to avoid your visits to his own flat by coming to live right on top of you, wouldn't it?'

'Well, it would, but he's a curious little fellow altogether. There might still be something he wants here: we don't know. Couldn't get anything more out of him last night, excepting that he bought the thing in a shop in Wardour Street?'

'May I come up with you?'

'Yes, come along, Doctor. We'll see what we can find I've inquired, and I find that there's no pass-key, so I shall have to force the lock'

Leaving his assistant to see that no one descended by way of the fire escape, Trainor led the way upstairs and rang the bell of da Costa's flat. There was no reply, nor any sound from within.

It did not take long to force the lock and the latch but, when they pressed against the door, it gave only a little at the top corner.

'Bolted!' ejaculated Trainor. 'Bolted inside!'

In some excitement, they descended the stairs and went through Louba's fiat, dispatching the sergeant to guard da Costa's door. Mounting to the next landing, Trainor smashed the glass of one of the windows and pulled back the small bolt which secured it.

After admitting the sergeant by the main door, and stationing him within sight of the door and of one of the windows from which the escape could be reached, Trainor requested Dr. Warden to remain in the dining- room, which they had entered by the broken window. He himself began a search which promised to be short.

'For I can't have far to look,' he commented 'So get ready for a dash All entrances bolted on the inside speaks for itself. And see' —he pointed to the table—'by the freshness of the crumbs, quite a recent meal.'

Quite plainly a single individual had, not long ago, had an untidy meal. Trainor put his hands round the coffee-pot.

'Not quite cold,' he exclaimed, unable to keep the jubilation out of his voice. 'Switch on all the lights.'

The day was dark enough to need it.

He passed into the bedroom, which was similarly situated to that in which Louba had been found.

'Bed been slept in,' he called out, and opened a large wardrobe carefully He looked under the bed.

Crossing over to the smaller bedrooms, he found no one there: he went into the tiny kitchen, where there were dirty plates, and an empty sardine tin. He came softly out, and the sergeant pointed to a large cupboard which might or might not have its inner space taken up by shelves. In any case, it seemed the last possible hiding-place. Trainor nodded, and they went forward to open it.

In the dining-room he had overlooked a wide, deep Chesterfield set against the wall in the darkest corner of the room. If he had known da Costa, he would still more certainly have over-looked it. Yet, notwithstanding his bulk, da Costa had squeezed himself beneath it. What is more, he had a hat clutched tightly under an arm. Though he had been too panic-stricken to think of withdrawing the bolt on the window before he concealed himself—thus making it appear a little less certain that the flat was occupied, he had remembered that haste in a hatless man without an overcoat on a winter's day was ruinous for a fugitive.

If he escaped, he was desperately anxious to take a hat with him.

After gazing round the room for a while, the doctor turned toward the window, staring musingly out at the deepening fog.

Da Costa wasted no time. He wriggled out, gained his feet and, his eyes fixed on the doctor's back, he put his hat on, pulling it down securely, then sprang for the window.

Dr. Warden gave a startled shout, reeled as da Costa pushed him aside, but recovered quickly enough to catch the end of the runaway's coat, losing his hold and almost his balance, the next second, as he stumbled over the upturned corner of a rug da Costa had kicked up in his flight.

Trainor and his assistant responded instantly to the call, arriving in time to see da Costa disappearing through the window while the doctor, regaining his balance, was almost overturned as they came in collision with him in their dash for the window.

By the time they had disentangled themselves and got out of the window, da Costa had reached the lower landing and released the ladder, which he descended with astonishing agility.

The alarm rang, as they came to the windows of Flat 2, and Miller rushed out.

'Get out of the way!' roared Trainor, flinging him aside, straight into the sergeant's path, who also thrust him aside, so that he lurched against Trainor again. 'Confound you all!' cried Trainor, as he gained the ladder and almost slid down it.

At the bottom he was clutched tightly by a breathless hall porter.

'Let go, you ass!' shouted Trainor, tearing himself free.

'Beg pardon, but somebody's rung the alarm,' panted the man.

'We didn't hear!' ejaculated Trainor, with bludgeon-like sarcasm, as he dashed to the gates.

They ran in different directions, the sergeant blew his whistle strenuously, but the fog was kind to fugitives.

Da Costa, passing a policeman when the sergeant's whistle sounded, stood still to listen with great fortitude.

'Seen anything?—anyone running?' asked the policeman, as he prepared to respond to the call.

'No. Not up that way.'

The policeman dashed on.

'One would think this infernal weather was especially commissioned by the

murderer and all his accomplices!' declared Trainor angrily when he returned to the flat. 'You saw him?'

'No. I scarcely got a glimpse of him. I suppose it was stupid to stand with my back to the room, but I was guarding the window and it seemed natural to keep my eyes on it; and, of course I'd not the slightest notion he was in the room,' returned Warden.

'No, of course. If he'd been anywhere else, you'd have heard us shout a warning. If Miller hadn't got in the way, we'd have caught him.'

'I suppose the alarm fetched Miller out.'

'Oh, yes: that was the trouble. We were all so anxious to catch him that we got in each other's way.'

'Did you see him?'

'I saw his back—stout man, round, soft; no overcoat. He'd got a hat on too! To think he's been here all the while!'

'You think he's the man? Yet how could he get into Louba's place from the outside any more than anyone else when the window was closed?'

'Don't know,' said Trainor shortly; but he was wondering if Miller had really impeded their chase of da Costa as innocently as he had seemed to have done: for the fact remained that, if the murderer had had an accomplice inside the flat, that accomplice could be no other than Miller.

Swallowing his chagrin, Trainor resumed his examination of the place, and one of the things he examined was the letter-box. There were no letters in it, but his finger-tips did not encounter an entirely smooth surface when he ran them over the bottom to be sure no letter lay flat there. He brought his hands out with the fingers held together.

'Crumbs!' he said, dropping them into the palm of his hand.

'He's been getting food through the letter-box, you think?' asked Dr. Warden.

'Looks like it. But why the letter-box?'

Miller had entered by the window, and was looking about him curiously.

'That little man knows about this,' said Trainor. 'At any rate, we've got him safe.'

'Have you been down to see him this morning?'

'No, I'm going now.' He turned to Miller. 'They've not come back?'

'No, sir. They'll never catch him on a day like this,' answered Miller.

'We might, if you hadn't got in the way.'

'Well, sir, and if I'd stayed indoors and never come out to stop whoever was using the escape, you'd have had something to say,' protested Miller. 'If it had been someone coming up from the bottom, I'd have caught him all right. How was I to know he was coming out of the very place you were in? Besides, I'd have gone after him then, only you both nearly threw me downstairs.' He had a distinctly aggrieved air.

'He's quite right,' said Dr. Warden.

'I'm not blaming you. Miller,' said Trainor. 'Only it is exasperating to lose him in this way.'

'Yes, it must be,' agreed Miller, and looked about him again. 'So this is where he's been living all the time!' he muttered.

'Who?' snapped Trainor.

'Why, the murderer, of course,' returned Miller, and the detective turned away with a disappointed look.

Dr. Warden was regarding Miller curiously.

25. THE MAN WHO FOLLOWED LOUBA

From his participation in the frustrated capture of da Costa, Dr. Warden went along to his club, where presently Hurley Brown joined him. Brown's face was moody, his manner that of a man engrossed with anxious speculation. Warden attracted his attention, and he came over slowly.

'I'm afraid you've had no luck,' said Dr. Warden. '...In your self- imposed task.'

Hurley Brown made no reply: only his lips tightened a little.

'Well, you're not the only man who's been defeated by the fog,' the doctor went on consolingly. 'Trainor is dancing with annoyance.'

'Why?' Brown looked up sharply.

'I've been helping in a bit of house-breaking and how not to give chase. Trainer's been in da Costa's flat this morning, and someone—da Costa, he believes—escaped.'

'And was it da Costa?' asked Brown quickly.

'I don't know him.'

'Was he anybody you knew?'

'Certainly not that I am aware of,' returned Warden, regarding him in some surprise.

Hurley Brown avoided his glance.

'And he got away?'

'Yes. Trainor hopes to get further information from a man he took last night.'

'Took where?'

'In Braymore House, coming down from the direction of da Costa's flat and carrying something which they believe to have been taken out of the brass chest.'

'I haven't heard of this. Who's the man?'

'A man called Weldrake, a man Miss Martin and Leamington both saw outside the place on the night of the murder.'

'Not Charlie?'

'No, no.'

Brown pinched his lip.

'Weldrake, did you say?' he asked. 'I once knew someone of that name a long time ago, but it can't be the same. Trainer's got a statement from him?'

'Not very much. He's gone down now to see what more he can get out of him.'

'I'll go down and see him.'

He was turning away when Warden spoke again. 'This Weldrake you knew...I suppose he wasn't acquainted with Louba?'

Brown looked somewhat startled, as though the thought had only just occurred to him.

'Well, he was,' he answered slowly. 'It was really through Louba that I met him.'

'And had he any cause to dislike Louba?'

'He'd plenty of cause,' replied Brown reluctantly.

There was a moment's silence.

'Could he possibly have done it, do you think?' asked Warden.

'No! It's preposterous! If he'd been inclined to violence, he would certainly have done it at the time. Good heavens, no,' be exclaimed, as memory of the little pathetic figure he had known came back to him. 'He was lamblike.'

'Then shall you say nothing about what motives he had?'

'If it's him, perhaps I'd better not recognise him,' came the troubled reply. '...And yet I don't know. That might only make trouble for us both. It's very awkward.' He brushed aside misgivings. 'Oh, I'm sure they can't suspect him, if it does happen to be the man I know. I don't suppose for a moment it can be the same man, but if it is he'll be able to explain everything satisfactorily.'

He left the club and went out into the yellow murk of the street, where the lights burned as though it were after eleven O'clock at night instead of that hour in the morning.

He arrived in time to find Trainer taking a statement from Weldrake, and one glance at the forlorn little man renewed his conviction of the absurdity of suspecting him of any participation in the crime. His uneasiness regarding his knowledge of Weldrake's cause for enmity with Louba was dissipated by the little man's instant recognition of him, doing away with any necessity for him to decide upon what degree of discretion to practise; and he was relieved. Trainor was not meeting with universal frankness in this inquiry, and he knew himself to be one of the culprits.

'Captain Hurley Brown knows me,' declared Weldrake. 'He will tell you that I am a perfectly respectable person. You remember me, Captain?'

'Certainly,' said Brown, shaking hands with him, and turned to Trainor. 'This is the father of a friend and brother officer of mine, who died several years ago.'

'And you have met him since?' inquired Trainor.

'Oh, no,' said Weldrake, 'but I've not turned to crime since then.'

'You know why we are detaining this gentleman?' observed Trainor.

'Yes,' said Brown. 'I've just seen Warden. But can you explain, Mr. Weldrake?'

'I've given my word that I had no hand in the murder, and I don't know who committed it,' he replied.

'You told us da Costa was away: yet we found him there this morning,' said Trainor.

'And did he tell you I knew he was there?' queried Weldrake.

Trainor did not at once reply, and Brown saw his difficulty.

'I think if you told Mr. Weldrake everything,' he said, 'he would be equally frank. I'm sure you've nothing to conceal, Mr. Weldrake, and in that case it is best to speak out.'

Trainor himself judged that the man might be loth to speak out of consideration for another.

'Da Costa told us nothing,' he said. 'He got away. He's still at large.'

Weldrake's satisfaction was unconcealed. Even Brown beheld it with surprise.

'Now will you tell us all you know?' asked Trainor.

'Yes, I will,' responded the little man readily. 'You know I offered to shelter Mr. Leamington, because, if he'd killed Louba, I didn't think he deserved to hang for it. I knew that da Costa lived above Louba, and had quarrelled with him...years ago. I didn't know, but just in case he had had a hand in it, I wanted to be of service if I could and so, as I couldn't help Leamington any more, I went to da Costa's flat. He didn't open to me the first once or twice I went, though I left a letter each time, reminding him when we'd met; and I also left some food there, as I thought he might need it. Last night, he opened the door to me. He assured me he knew nothing at all about the murder, but as he'd pretended to be away when he wasn't, he was afraid of being suspected, and hadn't dared to go out. What he was most worried about was the casket, which he'd bought from Louba the very day of the murder, not very long, it couldn't have been, before that man you're looking for—Charlie—came. But Miller didn't see him—he came down the escape, and Louba let him out that way, and fastened the window after him.'

'That's a good way to buy curios,' remarked Trainor derisively.

'He'd been seeing Louba that way often,' said Weldrake. 'He'd had private dealings with him, was taking over some of his business interests, and Louba didn't want anyone to hear he was disposing of them.'

'And was that tawdry bead thing one of the interests?'

'No. It was something Louba didn't know the value of, and da Costa had had difficulty in getting it without arousing Louba's suspicions.'

'And what is the value of that bead-and-glass affair?'

'I don't know. He didn't tell me. He only asked me if I would take it away and keep it for him, as he was afraid it would look suspicious if it was found on him.'

'And you wanted to help him because you thought it might be he who had murdered Louba?'

'Yes,' replied Weldrake, with a candour that slightly nonplussed his hearers.

'You wanted Louba to be murdered?'

'Yes.'

Trainor gasped. 'Why?' he managed to say.

'Because he murdered my boy.'

'Nobody who thoroughly knew Louba,' interposed Hurley Brown, 'could pretend to think that he got anything but his deserts.'

'Perhaps not,' assented Trainor, 'but that's a slightly different thing from hoping and wishing for it and helping it along.'

'I never did anything to help it along,' said Weldrake. 'I just waited.'

'And wished?'

'Yes.'

'What were you doing outside Braymore House that night?'

'I often watched, especially since I knew da Costa lived above him. I also knew that Miss Martin had broken off her engagement with that young man, Mr. Leamington, on account of Louba, and I was outside the house that night when he went and examined the fire escape. That was the night before the murder. He went there again the next morning, and the porter sounded the fire bell. So I went early that night and waited a long time. It was then I spoke to Miss Martin.'

'And what did you see?'

'I saw Mr. Leamington go in and come out. And I saw you all there after the crime was discovered.'

'You saw no one else enter?'

'No one.'

'You didn't see that man Charlie get away?'

'No.'

'You yourself didn't enter?

'No.'

'You live in London only a part of each year, we were informed at Balham. Where do you spend the rest of the year?'

'Where Louba is,' was the quiet answer. 'I'm only in London when he is.'

'What?' exclaimed Brown. 'You mean—'

'Ever since my boy was murdered I've followed him about. I promised Robert I wouldn't go home until he was avenged. So I followed Louba.'

'Everywhere?' cried Brown.

'Almost everywhere. I never missed him for long.'

There were questions which Hurley Brown wanted to ask. Trainor waited for

him to put them, but they were obviously questions he preferred to restrain, although it was plain he did not find it easy to do so. Trainor's face darkened a little as he glanced at his superior; the gulf between them was not lessened.

'So you've been following Louba about for years, waiting and wishing for him to be murdered, but you ask us to believe that you had no hand in it?' asked Trainor.

'Yes.'

'And you don't know where da Costa has gone?'

'No, I don't.'

'This is the truth?'

'I have told you the truth, indeed.' He looked appealingly at Brown. 'Will they let me go now?' he asked. 'I want to go home and rest. I couldn't stay there before, but now Louba's dead...'

'It seems a pity you didn't go before,' commented Trainor grimly.

'I felt I owed help to whoever had killed him.'

'Because you wanted him dead and were grateful to anyone who had done it?'

'Yes,' said the little man.

Trainor looked at Brown.

Was the little man very simple or very subtle?

26. THE MAN WITHOUT AN OVERCOAT

About himself, his circumstances and his doings, Trainor found Weldrake communicative and exact. Inquiries refuted nothing, and it was after verifying several of his statements that the detective called upon Beryl Martin.

'I'm not going to say anything about a certain reticence on your part, Miss Martin,' he observed, 'as I think I understand the reason for it, but I do hope that you'll now deal candidly with me.'

'What—what have I kept from you?' stammered Beryl.

'You didn't tell me that Weldrake had offered to shelter Mr. Alan Leamington; that that was why you had his address.'

Beryl flushed. 'No. Because...I know, of course, it's punishable to shelter criminals or those wanted on suspicion, and I...you couldn't expect me to wish

to get him into trouble for having offered help to Mr. Leamington.'

'No. But how can we find out the truth if nobody tells it to us? Did you know that this man regarded Louba as his son's murderer, and has followed him about for years hoping to see him killed?'

'No, indeed,' exclaimed Beryl, startled. '...And yet...'

'Yes, Miss Martin?'

'Well, I do remember now that he talked wildly that night...I thought he was a little mad.'

'And don't you think he might be, on this point, at any rate? And that, if he's mad, he might attempt and carry out a deed of which nobody would ordinarily judge him capable?'

'Oh, do you think he killed Louba? You can't!'

'We don't know who killed him. He was struck from behind and had no time to defend himself—we know that. Whether this man, even in his homicidal madness, could possibly drag Louba to his bed where we found him, is not easy to determine. Madmen have a strength of their own; or there was da Costa. He might have assisted and taken the casket he wanted as payment.'

'Do you really suggest—'

'Not at all. I'm only trying to convince you that even this man may be the guilty party, and in that case, concealing what you know of him would be a serious matter for Mr. Leamington, apart from any other point of view.'

'It was only his offer to help Alan,' she murmured guiltily.

'Which in itself may be a clue. His desire for no one to suffer for the crime would be very natural if he himself was guilty. Now may I rely on you to tell me all you know, and trust to my discretion to get nobody into trouble except those who really deserve it?'

'You may, Mr. Trainor,' she replied earnestly.

'Then tell me all you know of the man, please.'

'On the night before Louba's murder, he looked in at the window at Sir Harry Marshley's house.'

'Yes, he told me that.'

'Then he met me outside Braymore House.' She told him what she could remember of Weldrake's conversation, both on that night and when he called upon her the following morning.

'Since I pointed him out to you, when you arrested Alan, I've only seen him

once, and that was yesterday morning. I saw him coming out of Sir Harry Marshley's house.'

'This man Weldrake?'

'Yes.'

'Was he a visitor there?'

'I've never seen him. And, if so, why look through the window?'

'Besides, he wouldn't go openly where Louba was,' mused Trainor. 'He really came out of the house? He hadn't merely made an inquiry at the door?'

'He came out. I believe he'd seen Sir Harry, because he was standing at one of the windows and watched him go—Sir Harry watched this man, I mean, interestedly.'

'And Weldrake?'

'He looked very pleased.'

That was enough for Trainor. He went at once to see Sir Harry Marshley.

'I suppose you've come about my poor friend Louba,' said Sir Harry, flipping the detective's card between his fingers. 'Very sad—very sad. Great friend of mine. Great loss to me.'

Trainor had believed the last statement until Sir Harry said it, but now he attended warily.

'We're trying to find a little man who knew a great deal about Louba's movements,' he said, 'and I understand he visited you yesterday morning.'

'Visited me? What sort of a man?'

'Called Weldrake.'

Sir Harry shook his head.

'Never saw anyone of that name,' he said. 'Never saw anyone at all yesterday morning, as a matter of fact. Too upset.'

'Upset?'

'That young woman, Miss Martin, trying to bring my name into the case. Don't talk about it. It annoys me, and my poor wife is prostrate. No,' he went on, rubbing his hands over the fire, 'you've been misinformed. What did you think he came for?'

'I came to ask you. Sir Harry,' returned Trainor.

'Don't know him,' declared Sir Harry. 'Tell you anything I knew. Who said he came to see me?'

'He did.' The misstatement failed, for it only put Sir Harry on his guard.

'What do you say? Then he's a confounded liar, sir! I don't know the man: never saw him. What's his object, eh? Thought you were looking for him too,' he added wrathfully.

'Well, we were, till last night.'

Sir Harry turned upon his visitor with an air of majestic outrage.

'You mean to say you believe I know something about this matter, and you've come here to try to trap me into some imprudent statement?' he demanded. 'Confound your impudence, sir!'

Trainor put up his hand.

'You're far too hasty. Sir Harry,' he admonished. 'I have just come from Miss Martin, who concealed several things from me, first to shield Alan Leamington, next to avoid getting this man Weldrake into trouble: not because she herself had anything to do with the murder, but because she was so assured that they had not. It was quite possible that you, too, might have concealed anything you knew of this man out of pure good nature.'

'Ah...well...um. There's something in that,' admitted Sir Harry, appeased. 'But I don't know anything about him. What did he say he came to see me about?'

'As a matter of fact, he didn't mention your name, Sir Harry. He refused to tell us he'd been to see a man called da Costa, until he knew we'd driven da Costa out of his retreat; and so, I repeat, it was just possible that you would practise the same consideration towards him.'

'Very unpleasant methods you have, all the same,' replied Sir Harry haughtily. 'Did you say da Costa had been brought into this?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'I know his name. What had he to do with it?'

'We don't know,' returned Trainor, rising. 'We were clever enough to lose him this morning.'

'And he's at large, you mean?'

'So far. Did you ever hear Louba speak of him?—ever hear him say anything about da Costa living so near to him?'

'Never a word,' replied Sir Harry. 'You don't think he's the man who did it?'

Trainor shrugged his shoulders.

'We're getting tired of thinking,' he said.

He left the house divided between distrust of Sir Harry Marshley's denials, and the possibility of Beryl having mistaken the house from which Weldrake had emerged. He remembered the state of the weather, and how easy it would be to mistake the door from which he came, for Sir Harry's house was only semi-detached. He would first hear what Weldrake himself had to say about it.

It was now five o'clock in the evening, and the fog was thicker than ever. People passed like shadows.

Uncertain which way to turn, whether to cross over for a bus or make his way to the nearest underground station, he paused and looked about him for a moment.

A bulky figure went by, blurred in the mist, but the outline of the massive back caught his eye. It was a man without an overcoat. There were doubtless many without overcoats, even on such a day, but he was not running any risks. He followed quietly.

It was a big, stout man, of a soft, round fatness: not the kind to scorn warmth and comfort; not the kind to be out on a bitter cold, foggy day without an overcoat. Pressed back against the wall, Trainor watched the man halt before Sir Harry Marshley's house, look up hesitatingly, then walk on. He dared not draw close enough to see more than the misty outline of him, but he kept that in view, and when he saw the man halt again, he slipped back quickly under the shadow of the wall, retreating before the returning figure. After a glance into the surrounding mist, the man passed within the wooden gates, and a moment later Trainor could see him blotting out the haze of light which came from behind the glass door.

He slipped inside the gates and hid amongst the rhododendron bushes which lay between the street wall and the edge of the drive, which curved round the front of the house and up one side of it to the garage at the back.

The man he watched did not wait for any answer to his ring at the bell, but after putting his hand up to the letter-box he made haste down the steps and out through the gates again.

Trainor followed him down the road to the first turning, and round to the back of Sir Harry Marshley's house. Here was a stone-paved alley, upon which the backs of two rows of houses opened. He had now no doubt that he had found da Costa, but he was determined not to be too hasty this time, and it was as easy to remain unseen in the darkness and fog as it was for da Costa to feel perfectly safe from observation.

Outside one of the wooden doors were two shrubs in tubs, placed one at each side, and Trainor stood by one of these as he watched da Costa pace nervously back and forth.

In a few minutes a man's figure came out of Sir Harry Marshley's door, and stood there, peering about. Hesitatingly, da Costa approached, and halted: Sir Harry came the rest of the way, and they met.

Trainor watched them confer for only a few seconds before Sir Harry led his visitor hurriedly into the drive. Following after them past the lighted windows of the kitchens to the side of the house, he was in time to see them climb through the window of an unlighted room—the same, though he did not then know it, through which Weldrake had peered in at Beryl and Louba, and also at the previous meeting of da Costa and Sir Harry.

He went on down the drive to the front entrance, his blood tingling, feeling that at last he was on the way towards solving the mystery of Louba's death.

27. THE MAN WHO HAD BOASTED

Even as he halted in the open gateway, considering how to obtain assistance without himself leaving the house, two tall schoolboys passed close by him, the badges on their caps making a faint glitter in the gloom.

'Hallo, there!' he said quickly, and they halted at once: then retraced their steps. He could see their faces as they bent towards him.

'I want one of you to go to the other end of this drive, and out into the alley-way at the back, to let nobody pass out from this house without coming to tell me instantly; and I want the other to go straight on to the police-station—you know it? About five or seven minutes' walk—and take this note.' He was scribbling in his pocket-book as he spoke. 'If you meet a policeman on the way, bring him back and don't trouble to go to the station. Will you do this?'

They would. They accepted it rather as if it were part of their ordinary day's work, separating to their individual tasks with quiet and dispatch.

Immensely relieved and pleased, Trainor waited among the rhododendron bushes, taking an occasional look at the window behind which Sir Harry entertained his guest; it was now lighted but the curtains were tightly drawn, and only the narrowest chink of light was visible.

In twelve minutes exactly the boy returned with two policemen, all three of them breathing hard, having come from the station at a quick pace.

Sir Harry, having arranged for da Costa to go down at once to his week-end bungalow at Shoreham, was consulting a time-table when Trainor rang the bell.

'I'll give you an overcoat and a few things in a suitcase,' he said. 'But I won't risk bringing it downstairs, I'll drop it out of the window to you. It will drop softly amongst the bushes near the wall.'

He lifted his head. There was the murmur of voices from outside the door.

'No need to announce me, thank you,' said Trainor, flinging open the door. 'I'll explain to Sir Harry why I've come back.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said the maid. 'This gentleman...wouldn't allow me...I couldn't stop him...' She faltered to silence, looking with anxious eyes from her employer to the detective.

'So anxious to see you, Mr. da Costa,' said Trainor, and nodded to the maid. 'Not your fault,' he said, and closed the door on her.

Da Costa's usually full florid face was haggard and sallow; the flesh on it shook with undisguised fear as he rose to face the detective. His coarse mouth opened and shut, but he was deprived of speech. For all his bulk, he was a pitiable object.

Sir Harry Marshley's jaw dropped for a moment, but he recovered himself with a swiftness Trainor could not but admire.

'Ah, Mr. Trainor, it's providential you've come back!' he exclaimed. 'I was just going to send for you. This, I think, is the gentleman you require. He assures me he is innocent, and I entirely believe him; but of course, knowing you wanted him, I had no option but to give notice that he was here.'

'Oh, of course not!' mocked Trainor, not troubling to conceal his contempt. Looking at da Costa, he could almost pity him. 'All the same,' he said maliciously, 'I don't know whether to ask you to come to the station with us.'

'What, I?' gasped Sir Harry. 'I assure you I had no idea—'

'What do you say, Mr. da Costa?' asked Trainor.

Da Costa's reply was a forlorn dash for the window.

'I've two men outside,' cried Trainor, 'watching each end of the drive.'

With something like a sob, da Costa dropped into a chair, wringing his hands.

'I swear I didn't do it!—I swear I know nothing about it!' he declared.

'Well, we're only too anxious to hear all you have to tell us, Mr. da Costa,' said Trainor. 'Will you come along?' He frowned at Sir Harry. 'I really am afraid I must ask you to come too, Sir Harry. You'll admit there are one or two things which require explanation.'

'My dear man, I tell you I knew nothing until he turned up just now! He didn't

even send his name in. Until he was admitted I—'

'I saw him drop a note through the letter-box and wait for you at the back,' interrupted Trainor curtly. 'I saw you bring him in by the window.' He pointed to the railway guide. 'You are now looking up a train for him.'

'Oh, my idiotic good nature!' groaned Sir Harry, looking as though he would have torn his hair but for the lack of it. 'My good fellow, sit down and listen to what he has to say. You'll see I know nothing about it —you can't drag me off to the station!'

'Well,' said Trainor, seating himself. 'Let me hear what you have to say first.'

'I never heard of Mr. da Costa until he came to offer me financial assistance in place of Mr. Louba's. I was naturally indignant at such an offer from a stranger, and I ordered him out. Then that little man came and asked me if I would shelter Mr. da Costa, supposing he needed a hiding- place. I said certainly not—well, certainly not unless I was entirely convinced of his innocence-Now tonight Mr. da Costa came and so convinced me that, although I meant to inform you in the event of—'

'That is understood,' broke in Trainer. 'When did he offer you financial assistance?'

'At the very time Louba was being murdered,' exclaimed da Costa.

'Do you know the time? We don't.'

'Well, on that evening. I was not near Braymore House from six o'clock until very late.'

'Were you here all that time?'

'No. If I had been I'd not have concealed myself. It was because I was alone all the evening, except for my interview with Sir Harry, that I was afraid.'

'Why were you afraid?'

'Because I'd pretended to be out of London, and because I'd quarrelled with Louba in the past, and had a flat immediately above his. You see, I was right to fear; you do suspect me.'

'Why did you pretend to be away?'

'I was taking over a lot of Louba's interests, and I didn't want him to know. That was why I offered to back Sir Harry, because I knew Louba could not do so for long.'

'Why not?'

'Because he was ruined, and making arrangements to get out of the country.'

'Wouldn't Louba have been glad to dispose of all he could to you?'

'At a price—a big price. He has always overreached me.'

'That is why you hated him?'

'I never hated him enough to kill him.'

'Have you ever threatened him?'

Da Costa looked about him distractedly. His boasts had come home to roost. 'No more than he threatened me, and meant it less,' he said at last. 'If I ever threatened, it was just in the moment's anger. I am not a violent man, and if I had meant bodily harm to Louba I shouldn't have done it here; I should have done it years ago in rougher places we have been in.'

'Are you the man of whom Weldrake had great hopes?'

He started.

'That little man has not accused me?' he asked in some excitement. 'Why, years ago it was he who caused Louba's place to be fired. If I used threats at that time, they were only on his account. He placed too great significance upon what I said. Others made threats at that time too: Captain Hurley Brown, for instance.'

'Hurley Brown!' Trainer's mouth tightened. 'Well, tell us what your connection with Weldrake has been.'

'I had forgotten I ever met him until he dropped notes through my letter-box, and then some food; and I needed the food. Then he told me he believed Sir Harry Marshley might help me if I didn't think I could get straight away, so I came here now, after you drove me out this morning.'

'Where were you on the night of the murder?'

'Just walking about. As I was supposed to be away, I could only come out in the evenings to buy my food for the next day and to take the air. I didn't eat or buy anything anywhere where I was known, because of pretending to be out of Town.'

'Where did you get the casket which you gave to Weldrake?'

Da Costa wiped the back of his neck with his handkerchief.

'I bought it from Louba,' he said, 'but I had no proof, and that's what made me afraid of being found with it.'

Trainor allowed a second or two to go by in silence.

'You're only making things worse by not telling the truth,' he advised him. 'You've just said it was to deceive Louba that you pretended to go away: now

you ask us to believe you've been buying caskets from him.'

'That was...that was before I pretended to go away.'

'You told Weldrake it was on the day he was murdered.'

'No! I never did. It was some weeks before.'

Trainor rose. 'There's no use in staying to tax your imagination,' he said. 'We'd better go.'

'No! Only listen! I'll tell you everything—everything!' cried da Costa, and as he appeared to imagine that confession might save him from arrest, Trainor thought it well not to undeceive him.

'Well, let it be everything,' he said, sitting down again. 'Nothing but the truth will serve you, believe me.'

'Oh, that accursed murderer, whoever he was!' exclaimed da Costa, clenching his plump hands. '...To bring this trouble on me! These terrible days and nights! I hope I see him hanged high!'

There was an air of sincerity about the outburst that impressed Trainor.

'Had you any object in taking a flat above Louba's?' he asked.

'Yes. I wanted to get that casket.'

'To steal it?'

'Well, I knew he wouldn't sell it if he guessed I wanted it. He'd have guessed it was more than it appeared to be. So I did intend to take it from him. It wasn't his. He himself stole it from another. But in the end he gave it to me. Yes, he did. This is the note I found in it.'

He took out of his pocket the mocking lines which Louba had written after his last interview with da Costa, and which he had enclosed in the concealed space in the casket.

'Begin at the beginning,' said Trainor.

'Well, I admit I used to go into his flat whenever I got the chance. He never would have the windows open when he was in, and his man used to air the rooms while he was out. It was then I slipped in to search. Once Louba found me outside the window, and accused me of intending to enter. It was after that I pretended to go away. I could only stay a little while each time, and I had to leave things undisturbed, for though I knew Louba would never dare give me in charge, I didn't want to put him on his guard. So it was some time before I found where he kept the casket. I had searched everywhere before I found out how to open the brass chest in the library. Then I saw a robe and other things of the kind on the top, and I had only just uncovered the things that lay

beneath when I had to conceal myself from Miller, who came in to close the windows. I knew Louba would be in shortly, and I didn't want to lose it at the last, so I closed the chest and was going, when Louba returned. I hid behind the curtains, but he found me there, and I dared him to send for the police, and told him that I did want something and would get it.'

He caught the look in Trainer's eyes.

'I never had any thought of violence!' he declared. 'Only now I was sure I had located it, I knew it would be simple to slip in and take it away, because I'd been in several times.'

'Did you think Louba would take no precautions after that?'

'Well, you see he didn't,' muttered da Costa, taking heart. 'Instead, he made a gift of it to me. He evidently guessed that was what I wanted, and he wrote that note and put it under the false bottom, where he imagined I expected to find something of value.'

'How long had Louba had it?'

'Years. The man who stole it was pursued. He gave it to Louba to keep for him. He was murdered, and Louba kept it.'

'And you mean you took all this trouble on the chance that Louba had not discovered the spring in the bottom? You have only to compare the depth of the outside with that of the inside to see that there must be a space or a very solid bottom.'

Reluctantly, painfully, da Costa delivered up his secret.

'The false bottom is only a trick,' he said, 'to make thieves believe they are too late for its treasure. It is a solid gold casket, studded with jewels of immense value. The beads and glass ornaments conceal the tight kid covering which is stitched completely over it, inside and out, their rough surface hiding the carving and stones beneath.'

His attitude was one of utter dejection, as his voice died away.

'So many after it,' he lamented, 'and I paying this for success!'

Sir Harry's eyes were bulging. Trainor's were very thoughtful.

'You know we have the casket?' he inquired.

'I suppose so, if you have that man Weldrake,' was the moody reply.

'And when do you say you finally obtained it?'

'The very next day after I'd discovered how to open the chest, the day Louba was murdered. It could not have been long before he came in, because Miller

closed the window immediately I'd gone. I had to run to get out. I just let the lid of the chest drop, and I hadn't even time to put the cover on the top again; and leaned out of my window to listen, because I'd left something out of the chest, and I wondered if Miller would suspect anyone had entered. So I heard him close the window, which meant that he expected Louba.'

'And after that?'

'I went out. I came back when you were chasing someone down the fire escape. I heard you talking and learned what had happened. Then I could see that if the murderer wasn't caught, it would be taken as suspicious for me to have been concealed, as it were, in the flat above. I can see now that I ought to have explained. There was that note of Louba's to prove he'd willingly allowed me to take the casket, only I...I...'

It was easy to understand the panic which had taken him. His boasts were much bigger than his bravery.

'How did you get in and out whilst you were supposed to be in the South of France?'

'It was easy to slip in and out by the servants' entrance at night...until the murder. Then I didn't dare.'

'Well,' said Sir Harry, in the pause that followed, 'I think you can have no doubt of Mr. da Costa's innocence, nor be surprised that I believed in it.' He did not add that Mr. da Costa had not chosen to confide in him to the same convincing extent as he had been compelled to do in Trainor.

'At least, I don't think I need trouble you to accompany us, Sir Harry,' said Trainor, as he got up. 'Although we shall certainly want to refer to you about the exact time that Mr. da Costa saw you on that night.'

'Certainly, certainly, anything I can do,' he replied, with a slightly worried look at da Costa. If only he knew the exact hour of Louba's death, it would be easy to preserve this possessor of fabulous caskets for future use.

'And must I go with you?' appealed da Costa, his flabby cheeks quivering again.

'I'm afraid you must,' replied Trainor, 'but if you have spoken the truth, you need not fear further examination.'

'I'll lend you an overcoat,' volunteered Sir Harry.

He thought it quite safe, from Trainer's manner, to show friendliness to the prisoner. On the whole, he had got out of the business better than he might have done.

Trainor, indeed, was almost convinced of the truth, or substantial truth, of da

Costa's story. The man's state of collapse, his very cowardice, bore out much of it: but it did not explain Louba's death.

When, finally, he reached his own office, he had scarcely seated himself before the telephone bell rang. He picked up the receiver.

'A call for you, sir, from R. Division.'

'Put them through.'

There was a click and a voice spoke.

'Is that the officer in charge of the Louba case?'

'Yes,' said Trainor quickly.

'I am Inspector Welsh of R Division, and we have just picked up Charles Berry, the man you want to interview in connection with the Louba murder.'

'Picked him up—where?'

'On the tow-path of Deptford Creek; he was shot dead; probably it's a case of suicide, for we found—'

'Yes?' said Trainor, as the speaker paused.

'We found in his pocket a full confession that he was the man who killed Emil Louba.'

28. THE IDEA OF CHARLES BERRY

From Friday night until Tuesday morning the fog lay on London, an immovable yellow bank. It was perhaps a little thicker in the neighbourhood of Deptford than elsewhere, for the river is close at hand. It was weather which suited Mr. Berry admirably, for it offered an excuse to go out.

For the girl who shared his lot, that period was one of mental torture; and when at last he had persuaded his host that no danger would attend his going out, she was heartily glad.

Charles Berry wanted to be alone too. He wanted to be out of her sight. He hated her—he had always hated her, with her finicking ways and her superior attitude. Once, when he had been fond of her, she had treated him as dirt, and the memory of her scorn was never absent from his mind and was the spur to his hatred He had had 'chances'—he might have married that rich widow at Cintra—instead he was tied to a weakling who accepted his thrashings meekly and had no desire but to die. And now she was chained to him at a time when

freedom was vital. He cursed her as he lurched and stumbled through the fog. Hurley Brown would have him—there would be false witnesses on the stand to swear away his life. He whimpered in an excess of self-pity at the thought. And all because he had taken this woman and given her his name. He followed two men and a hurrying little boy, as they turned from the road. He could see nothing. The fog choked and blinded him, but at least he was out of her company. He felt the road descending steeply, and he asked a man who was passing where it led to.

'To the Creek tow-path,' was the startling answer.

'What's happened? I saw a lot of people going this way.'

'A woman has drowned herself; they found a letter on the bank,' was the reply. 'The police are dragging the canal for her.'

Berry trembled and nearly turned back. But something urged him on, and presently he stood, one of a small group, about two police officers and a canal man. They were throwing long grappling-irons into the dark waters of the canal.

Fascinated, he watched. If his wife would only commit suicide!...But she wouldn't have the pluck. And suppose—the idea dawned in a flash—suppose she, too, left a letter on the bank—a letter that would clear him of an charge Hurley Brown might bring against him.

His breath came more quickly as the idea took shape in his unbalanced brain. How could he persuade her to write the letter—that was the difficulty.

The police were dragging something limp and heavy to the bank, when he walked with unsteady feet to the house where he had left her. She heard his feet on the stairs and sighed wearily.

To her surprise, there was a sly smile on his face as he came into the room, and his manner was almost agreeable.

'Kate, I've been strolling through Greenwich,' he said, 'and I've been thinking. If Hurley Brown catches me, he'll fake all the evidence he wants to hang me. It doesn't matter whether I committed the murder or not, he's certain to get me good, and I'll swing, and everything about you will come out.'

He spoke so light-heartedly of 'swinging' that she, to whom the man's character was an open book, knew that he did not for one moment contemplate such a dire end to his evil life.

'As I was crossing the bridge over the canal, the police were dragging for the body of a woman,' he went on. 'She fell into the water last night and was drowned.'

The girl shivered.

'Lucky woman!' she said, and for a moment his assumption of affability was difficult to maintain.

'I daresay she is,' he said mildly, choking back something that came to his lips. 'But this is my idea. Suppose this woman was picked up, and when they searched the shore they found a written confession that she killed the old man? I've got a brain, eh, girl?'

'They would know she couldn't have committed the murder.'

'Ah, but that's where you're wrong,' said Berry sharply. 'I've been making inquiries about the girl. She has been employed at Braymore House. How's that for a coincidence, Kate?'

She looked at him, incredulously.

'It's hardly possible,' she said. 'How could you have made inquiries?'

His face puckered viciously, and mechanically his hand strolled to his belt.

'You continue asking ml these questions, my girl, and you'll know all about it,' he snapped. But again he mastered his emotions. 'I found that she was employed there—that's enough for you', he said. 'It's a chance sent down from heaven, Kate. With that confession they can never convict me, or the fellow they pinched on Sunday.'

'Have they arrested somebody?' she asked.

'Never mind who they've arrested. I'm telling you this. What do you think of it as a scheme?'

'It may be all right,' said the woman indifferently.

'My idea is to go down to the canal bank after the body is found and hand the paper to somebody and tell them to take it to the police. They wouldn't know me in the fog.'

He left her to consider this scheme and went down to his landlord.

'You're not going out again, are you?' asked the man in alarm. 'You're bound to be caught, Charlie. If you'd been alone, you might have had a chance, but having your wife with you makes it certain.'

'That's what I've been thinking,' said Berry. He spoke a little breathlessly. Face to face with the scheme in its naked and appalling brutality, he was a little frightened. It only wanted Fred's warning to nerve him. 'She's the danger. I'm sending her away to friends in the country.'

'Where? I thought you had no friends,' answered the man suspiciously.

'She's got a lot—high-class friends, too. I've been talking it over with her, and she thinks she ought to get away.'

'When is she going?'

Charles Berry licked his dry lips. 'She'll go tonight,' he said huskily, and went back to his room.

He stopped some time outside the door to compose himself for his task, and she wondered at the cause of his delay.

'I've been talking it over with Fred downstairs,' said Berry, as he shut the door behind him. 'He thinks it's a good scheme, Kate.'

He went to the mantelpiece and took down a packet of cheap notepaper, and sat down at the table. Presently he took a pen from his pocket and began to write, and she watched him curiously as, with many pauses to consider, he covered the sheet with his long, angular writing.

'Listen to this,' he said, and read.

'"I confess that I am solely responsible for Emil Louisa's death. I have been receiving money from him for years. A month ago he refused to pay me any more. On Saturday night I went to Braymore House and entered the flat by the servants' entrance. I quarrelled with Louba and struck him on the head with a silver candlestick, and I got away by means of the fire escape. I declare that nobody else was responsible for his death but me. I am now at the end. May God forgive me!"

'That last bit sounds well, doesn't it, Kate?' He leered at her, as she sat with closed eyes.

'Poor soul!' she said softly.

'Poor soul!' he sneered. 'Ain't I a poor soul too? Now copy that out.'

'I?' she said, staring at him.

'You, of course. It's a woman, ain't it? It's got to be in a woman's handwriting.'

'I won't do it,' she said. 'Do your dirty work yourself.'

'Are you going to copy that, Kate, or am I to make you sorry you were ever born? I know who you're thinking about. You're thinking about that policeman of yours.'

She made no answer, but reached out her hand and took the pen, copying the confession word by word. He waited till she had finished, folded up the paper he had written, and put it in his pocket to be destroyed at the first opportunity. 'Now, wait a bit,' he said. 'After "God forgive me", put "My husband knows nothing of this."'

'Has the woman got a husband, too?' she asked.

'All respectable women have,' said Berry. 'That's why you're respectable!' He chuckled at his joke. 'Go on! Write that: "My husband is not responsible, and I ask his forgiveness for the dreadful deed I am going to do."'

She wrote, and he took it from her and read it carefully.

'That's fine.' His voice shook as he patted her shoulder. 'You trust old Charlie; he'll see you through. Why, we'll have you back in Turkey this time next week, if I have a bit of luck.'

He was out until the evening. At six o'clock, when she was drinking a cup of tea that she had brewed on the gas ring, he came in again.

'Fog's thick outside,' he said, 'but it's not bad walking. You oughtn't to be cooped up here all the time, Kate. Come for a stroll,'

She rose wearily and took down her coat from a nail on the wall and put it on. All that afternoon he had spent in making a tour of the neighbourhood. The man was in the last stage of panic, and to him any method, however dreadful, was justified if it but ensured his own safety.

He went downstairs to his host. 'I'm taking the missus to the station,' he said in a low voice. 'You'd better not say good-bye to her because I promised her she should come back here.'

'She likes the neighbourhood, doesn't she?' sneered the man in the jersey. 'What's the game, Charlie? You're not going to do any harm to that woman? If I thought you was, I'd break your neck here and now.'

'Do any harm to her?' said the other indignantly. 'To my own wife? What do you think I am?'

The landlord stood irresolutely, sensing something of the woman's danger. 'All right,' he said. 'I won't say good-bye to her if you don't want me to. But if anything happens—'

'Listen, Fred,' said the other urgently. 'My wife's got a little trouble. It's not me they're after—it's her. That why I want to get her away.'

The other looked at him aghast. 'Do you mean to tell me that your wife murdered old Louba?' he asked.

'One of these days you'll find out,' said Berry darkly.

Fred heard the footsteps in the passage and nearly went out.

Presently the door slammed, and he sat down to think. An inspection of the room upstairs showed that the suitcase was not packed, and there was no evidence that the woman was going away on a long journey. His mind was

made up. Going out into the fog, he found a telephone booth and dialled the operator.

'Give me Greenwich Police Station, miss. I don't know the number.'

29. THE MAN IN THE FOG

As she reached down for a foothold, Kate Berry seemed to be stepping into a void.

'I don't want to go,' she said. 'This fog is awful; let's go back.'

'Come on!' hissed her companion. 'Don't fool with me! The fog is clearing. On the other side of the bridge it's quite light.'

She fell in at his side, and they walked slowly into the night.

'There's a kerb here,' he said. 'We're crossing the road. Put that in your pocket.'

'What is it?' she asked, fingering the paper.

'It's that confession,' he answered. 'We might as well get rid of it while we're out.'

The woman stopped.

'I'm not going any farther,' she said with unaccustomed resolution. 'There's a man following us; wait until he passes. I want to see somebody besides you.'

They waited. Berry straining his eyes, but nobody came.

'You're lying,' he said. 'If you don't like to be alone with me, hurry. We'll be in Greenwich High Street in five minutes.'

'I'm sure I heard footsteps,' she said, and then, when they had walked a little farther, 'Listen—somebody is following us!'

The man's nerves were on edge.

'Oh, come on!' he hissed. 'Why shouldn't there be somebody behind us? Hasn't anybody else any right to be out in the fog?'

'Let's go back,' she begged, and he laughed.

'Which way is back?' he asked. 'Don't be a fool, Kate. We're nearly at the bridge.'

Taking her by the arm he led her on. Their feet left the concrete pavement, and she felt herself walking on mud. Once she splashed into a puddle and uttered an exclamation.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

'To the canal bank. There are half a dozen policemen there searching, so you needn't be scared,' he added, and the inconsistency of his hurrying from a possible detective to a certain police posse struck her.

She stopped for the third time. 'I'm sure somebody's following us. I heard the splash of water.'

'Come here—to the side of the passage,' he whispered.

Presently they crouched up against the wooden railway sleepers that, end on, formed the boundaries of the canal path.

They heard no sound. A thought came to Berry.

'Trying to scare me, are you?' he sneered. 'You want to make me believe that somebody's following us.'

He jerked at her arm, and they went stumbling down the slope. At the place where closely set posts had been put up with a view to such a night as this, he stopped. He, too, had heard the stealthy feet.

'Wait here,' he said, and went back a few paces.

The noise had ceased when he stopped.

'It's probably the sound of water running against the barges,' he said, returning to the girl. 'This way.'

He slipped through the posts and felt for a wall on the left. He had no intention of sharing her fate.

'The canal is here,' she said suddenly, and her voice was trembling. 'I can feel the cold of it. Haven't we gone far enough?'

'Yes, it's here,' he replied. 'Come on.'

'I'll not go any farther.' She stood with her back to the wall, knowing now why he had brought her.

His hand strangled the scream in her throat.

'You've always wanted to die.' His voice was a harsh squeak. 'You've always said that you wished you were dead, and now you're going! They'll find you and your confession—do you hear me? And I'll go back to Buca and find another girl.'

She struggled, but in his grip she was helpless. His big hand covered her mouth, his strong arm held her powerless. Then through the fog he saw a shape—a shadow against a darker shadow, and he staggered back.

Pop!

It sounded like a cork being drawn.

Pop!

Charles Berry sank to his knees, swayed, and fell, sprawling across the dark tow-path. The girl, leaning against the wall, saw the two flashes that pierced the fog, and went staggering towards her unknown saviour.

'Oh, God! Thank you—thank you!'

'Kit!'

She stopped, frozen with fear, with amazement—with doubt.

She saw the hand move, and something splashed into the water,

'Kit!'

'You—you!' she gasped, and fell into the outstretched arms.

'My dear, oh, my dear!' murmured the man, and kissed the cold cheek.

30. THE COMMISSIONER WHO DISAPPEARED

It was an hour before Inspector Trainor reached Greenwich.

Any doubts as to the dead man's identity were removed after he had interviewed Fred, the landlord, and had searched the room which Charlie and his wife had occupied.

'Circulate a description of the woman and pull her in,' he ordered, as he read for the tenth time the confession which had been found in Charlie Berry's pocket. 'There's no doubt at all that this is the man's handwriting,' he said. 'The fact that it isn't signed is consistent with the state of agitation preceding suicide. But the question is—was it suicide?'

The Greenwich inspector to whom he was talking was not prepared to offer an opinion.

'The shots were fired at some distance from the man; that's clear from the wounds,' said Trainor, 'and perhaps they were fired from a pistol fitted with a silencer, for no one in the neighbourhood heard them. And there is the woman.'

Fred could give little information that was of assistance. The thickness of the night rendered it unlikely that there would be any other witnesses to the

departure of the two, and Trainor formed his own conclusion before he returned to Scotland Yard.

He was not satisfied that Berry had taken his wife out with the intention of killing her. The landlord's apprehension lacked confirmation. There was that possibility; but if that was the case, what explanation was there of the confession? It might have been forged; everything depended upon whether the thumb-print, which showed on the top left-hand corner of the sheet on which the confession was written, could be identified with that taken of the dead man. All question of this was settled within half an hour of his arrival at Scotland Yard. The thumb-prints were identical.

By this time a more serious trouble was occupying Inspector Trainor's mind. On his return to headquarters he had gone immediately to the office of his superior, to find that Hurley Brown was not there —had not been in the whole of the evening. He telephoned to the club to find it was closing for the night, and that there were no members on the premises except half a dozen who occupied the club bedrooms.

Alarmed, he called up the assistant commissioner's flat and, receiving no answer, drove round to the flat, only to find, as he was dreading, that the commissioner was not at home. Hurley Brown had come in for a quarter of an hour and had left with a suitcase. His housekeeper had seen him go and asked him whether he was returning that night. He had replied, 'It's very probable.'

'Will you ask Mr. Brown to ring me up at Scotland Yard the moment he comes in?' said the inspector, who was known to the good lady, and she promised that she would.

By this time it was nearly midnight and, searching round in his mind for another clue by which he could trace the commissioner, he thought of Dr. John Warden, and with some difficulty he persuaded the taxi-driver to take him to Devonshire Street.

No. 863 Devonshire Street was Dr. Warden's own house, although he only occupied two floors and shared the lower with another physician who did not live on the premises. After ringing for five minutes, Trainor heard a shuffle of feet in the passage, and the door was opened by the doctor himself. He had evidently just got up, for he was in his dressing- gown and pyjamas.

'Who is that?' he asked.

'It's Inspector Trainor, Doctor. I'm looking for Mr. Hurley Brown. I can find him nowhere.'

'Come in, Trainor,' said the doctor, after a moment. 'Is anything wrong?'

'I'm trying to find Mr. Hurley Brown to report a development in the Louba

case,' said Trainor, 'and it's very important that he should know tonight. I'm sorry to have disturbed you, Doctor, but it occurred to me that, as he's a friend of yours, he might be here.'

The doctor shook his head.

'It's more likely he's lost in the fog,' he said. 'As a matter of fact, he was here for an hour, which is rather extraordinary, for he hasn't called on me in the evening for months.'

'What time was this?' asked Trainor quickly.

'What's the time now?' The doctor looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'It must have been soon after ten,' he said.

'Did he seem upset at all—agitated?'

'No,' said the doctor, lifting his eyebrows. 'Why should he be?'

'Because—I don't know. I'm worried over this case. Dr. Warden. I wish to goodness I wasn't in it.'

Briefly he told the startling news of the evening.

'Charlie shot?' asked the doctor. 'That certainly is an important development. Possibly Mr. Hurley Brown has beard of the happening and has gone to Greenwich.'

'Did he leave a suitcase here?'

'No,' said the doctor. 'He had no case when I saw him. He told me he was seeing you in the morning. You say there's a confession. How will that affect our friend Leamington?'

'I can't tell you that. Doctor,' replied the other. 'It depends upon what view the public prosecutor's department may take. It's possible that, in view of all the circumstances, they'll offer no evidence against Leamington at the next hearing, and that he'll be discharged. This man Berry was the one person who could have committed the murder, and who had all the opportunities and, moreover, who could support Leamington's statement that Emil Louba was dead at nine o'clock.'

'But how are you going to account for the voice at the telephone?' asked Doctor Warden quietly. 'At ten o'clock somebody calls me up at the club and asks me to see him tomorrow. It was Louba's voice, recognised by the club waiter.'

'It couldn't have been Louba's voice,' said the other decisively. 'Louba spoke with a broken accent, and that kind of voice is the easiest in the world to imitate. I admit that I'm baffled there, because if Charlie committed the

murder, then we must suppose that he returned after he left the flat, and that the murder was committed at a later hour, immediately before Leamington—if his story is true—arrived on the scene. This is how I fix the times, Doctor.' He ticked off the items on his fingers. 'At seven o'clock Louba is alive, and presumably at seven- fifteen he is still alive, because you heard no outcry before the return of Miller. You would at least have heard the thud of the body as it fell. At seven-thirty or thereabouts Miller goes out to speak to his girl. At nine o'clock, as near as one can judge, Leamington made his way into the flat through the open window and found Emil Louba dead. I think we may accept as a fact that, if Louba was killed by Charles Berry, it was some time between your departure and the arrival of Leamington.

'Miller, by his own admission, was in the flat for a quarter of an hour after you left. Louba is found at ten-thirty; he's lying on his bed, his collar and tie have been removed—nobody knows why, unless it was that he was in the act of undressing when he was killed; and he would hardly undress in the library, unless he was indeed going to put on that embroidered robe from the chest, and then there's no reason why he shouldn't have taken the robe into his bedroom. With the exception of the casket, which da Costa asserts he took before Louba came in—and if he didn't, but killed Louba to get it, how did he get in if the window was secured?—no money or property was stolen. And that is another remarkable circumstance, if Berry committed the murder. A bundle of letters which Leamington saw on the table are taken away, and the ashes of another letter are found in the grate, minus the address. If we believe Berry committed this murder, then he must have made three distinct visits. The first when you heard his voice quarrelling with Louba; the second between half past seven and nine, when Leamington saw the body; and the third between the time Leamington left and the arrival of Hurley Brown. We do know this, that the letters—'

He stopped suddenly and frowned.

'I suppose. Doctor,' he asked, 'you didn't notice whether there were any letters on the table, or near the table, when you came in?' The doctor shook his head. 'Was Miller with you when you entered the room? I've forgotten.'

'Yes, he showed us the way.'

'Then Miller could have taken the letters, and there need not have been a second visit.'

'When you say Miller, you mean Mr. Hurley Brown,' said the doctor, and Trainor did not deny that interpretation.

'The whole thing is very peculiar,' he said. 'I wish I could find Captain Brown, it would make a whole world of difference.'

On Tuesday morning the fog cleared up, to London's great relief. Trainor was early astir, and his first call was at Hurley Brown's flat,

'No, sir, he hasn't been back all night, and I've not heard from him,' said the housekeeper. 'I'm quite worried; with this fog and people being drowned and meeting with street accidents, it's likely that Mr. Brown is lying in hospital.'

Trainor smiled.

'I can calm your fears on that point,' he said. 'I've already inquired at every hospital.'

'Perhaps one of these criminals have got him,' said the anxious woman.

'I don't even think that,' said Trainor.

Taking a cab he drove to Devonshire Street. He had to wait some time in Dr. Warden's waiting-room, for the surgeon was examining a patient. When he was admitted, the first question the doctor asked was: 'Have you heard from Hurley Brown?'

'I'm getting worried,' said the inspector. 'The chief commissioner has been inquiring for him this morning, and the only thing we know is that Mr. Hurley Brown didn't go home all night.'

'What's your theory?' asked John Warden.

'My theory is that we shall not see him again.'

Warden was silent. He stood by the table, playing idly with a silver paper-knife, his mind concentrated on the problem.

'We're speaking in confidence,' he said at last. 'Will you allow me to say something confidentially? I promise you that I will not repeat anything that you have said; you must give me the same assurance.'

'That I will do gladly,' said Trainor. 'I'm very fond of Mr. Hurley Brown. He's given me all the chances I have ever had. He's been behind me and supported me in case after case; and once, when I made a slip, he was the man who got me out of what looked like a very bad scrape. I admit I've felt very sore with him once or twice lately, but I've been ashamed of myself afterwards. There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for him.'

'I can well believe that,' said the doctor. 'And now I will give you my confidence, Mr. Trainor. I think your doubts are justified. London will never see Hurley Brown again. Don't ask me why I have reached that conclusion. I think it is wiser never to explain one's faith.'

He took up a pipe from the table, filled it mechanically, and lit it before he spoke again. 'Have you found the woman?' he asked.

'If I find the woman, Doctor, I shall find Hurley Brown—that is my opinion,' said the detective.

The doctor puffed slowly and thoughtfully.

'Perhaps you're right,' he said. 'That is in confidence too. Sit down, Inspector.'

He began pacing the room, his hands in his pockets, his short pipe gripped in his strong teeth, a look of trouble on his usually placid face.

'I would like you to think very well of Hurley Brown,' he said. 'For he is a man for whom I have a very deep affection. He has had a great deal of sorrow in his life, which, but for his loyalty and his strong sense of honour, might have been halved—if sorrow has substance to divide.'

'Have you known him for a long time, Doctor?'

'For many years,' said Doctor Warden. 'In fact, I've known him since he was a boy.' He continued quietly: 'The most loyal heart that ever beat! I'm not prepared to tell you the story of his life, there are some parts of that which will never be told; but Hurley Brown has never to my knowledge committed a dishonourable act. I'm talking now as though he were dead, which I know he is not. Always remember. Inspector, that Hurley Brown is incapable of a dishonourable act.'

'Would you call the killing of a man a dishonourable act?' asked Trainor, and the Doctor's face flushed.

'I do not like to hear you say that. So far as I know, and I know more about him than any other living man, he has never taken life.'

Throughout that day there was not a word or sign from the missing official. The chief commissioner and his staff held a conference, and a private message was sent out to all stations instructing a search to be made, and for constables to be warned to report immediately if they saw the missing man. That evening the search order was cancelled. The chief commissioner received a letter which explained nothing, but at any rate made the situation clear.

31. MILLER

The newspapers carried the following item:

'We learn that Mr. Hurley Brown, a brilliant young assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard, has tendered his resignation to the chief commissioner on the score of ill health. This disposes of the rumour that was actively circulating in Fleet Street last night that Mr. Hurley Brown had been killed by a gang whom

he was instrumental in bringing to justice a few years ago. We understand that Mr. James B. Lettle, deputy chief constable of Birmingham, is to be invited to take the vacant appointment.'

Dr. Warden read the news when he was at breakfast, and in another part of the paper he saw a paragraph which was, in a sense, complementary to the first. It was the announcement that, in view of the confession which had been discovered in the pocket of a man found dead on the towpath of Deptford Creek, no further evidence would be offered by the police against Mr. Alan Leamington, and two other persons detained on suspicion would be released. Though the paragraph was not official, it was obviously inspired.

The closest examination of Weldrake and da Costa had not shaken the stories they finally told when confronted with the need for absolute frankness. The most exhaustive search of their effects failed to discover any traces of that blood which it was certain must plentifully have bespattered the garments of the murderer, and though the ripping off of the kid cover from the casket, and the exposure of its glittering gems, provided a sufficient motive for da Costa to have committed the crime, there was no more proof that he had done so than that Weldrake had done it, having an equal motive, and there was less proof against either than there had been against Alan Leamington.

The doctor read the paragraph again, and on his face was an expression of utter sadness. Hurley Brown had resigned—had surrendered a life's ambition and the profession which he so dearly loved. He put down his cup with a sigh and sat looking vacantly at the paper. Would the happiness which had come to him be all the compensation Hurley needed? All the future depended on that.

Warden went over the past momentous week. Every detail stood clearly in his mind. He remembered how he had smilingly expostulated with Hurley when he had spoken so savagely of Louba. He had thought Hurley a little vindictive; he himself had not hated Louba. The man was a type, big, coarse, but in some ways worthy of respect. Warden had never felt repelled by him; indeed, he had admired certain of his qualities.

As he got up from his chair, he heard the bell ring. The maid came in. 'Will you see Miller, sir?'

'Miller—Louba's man? Show him in.'

Miller entered a little nervously. 'I apologise for coming. Doctor, but, as you can guess, I've got to find another job. I want to ask you if you'll be good enough to tell me whether there is any chance for a man like me in South America?'

The doctor was startled. 'South America? It's the worst place you can go to,' he said. 'Why don't you go to the Continent? Or, why leave England at all?

There's no special reason, is there?'

Miller stirred uneasily. 'No, sir, no particular reason. The only thing is—well, after this terrible murder, people won't want to employ me.'

'I thought you were going to Bath to set up a sort of apartment- house. What's happened to change your plans, Miller?'

'Nothing, sir.' He hesitated. 'Only I should like to get out of the country. I should prefer abroad.'

'Well, take the Continent, or one of the Commonwealth countries, if you have the money.'

The doctor spoke convincingly of Canada and Australia, but he knew that the man was not convinced. After he had gone, the doctor wondered why Miller had come to him at all. It was not until he had been called to Bow Street to offer his security for the release on bail of Alan Leamington that he learned from Inspector Trainor, who was waiting for him in the street out-side, just what had happened. Louba's financial affairs had been put in the hands of accountants. The dead financier, it seemed, had kept a very complete record of all his money transactions, and it was found that, a day before his death, he had drawn a large amount from the bank in francs, and that this money was nowhere to be found in Flat 2. Moreover, Miller had been married by special licence on Monday.

'I'm looking for him to explain to me how he came to be changing a bundle of hundred-franc notes at Cook's yesterday,' said the detective, and Doctor Warden understood.

He walked up the steps into the police station. Beryl Martin came across the room with outstretched hands.

'How good of you, Doctor! Mr. Trainer thought that you wouldn't object to furnishing the necessary guarantee.'

'Why, of course not!' said John Warden heartily. 'This means the abandonment of the charge against Mr. Leamington?'

Trainor nodded. 'I think that's the idea,' he said. 'The public prosecutor wants a little more time to consider the matter, but he doesn't wish Mr. Leamington to remain under arrest a minute longer than is necessary.'

The party interviewed the magistrate in his private room, and bail was granted. Leaving the lovers to themselves, Warden drew the inspector to one side. 'Any news of Brown?'

'None; you saw the announcement. He has resigned, and this morning he sent a district messenger for his papers. He refuses to offer any further explanation

than that which he gave in his letter. He's tired, and on his doctor's orders he is giving up work. Was that your advice, Dr. Warden?'

The doctor did not answer directly. 'Although I am his friend, I was not his doctor. I don't like the responsibility of looking after my friends.'

'Have you any idea where he is?'

'I haven't seen him since I told you, nor have I received any communication from him,' said John Warden. 'Louba, I presume, left a fortune?'

The other shook his head.

'On the contrary, he was hopelessly bankrupt. The auditors say that had he not died when he did, he would have been arrested for issuing false balance sheets and obtaining money by misrepresentation. He was on the verge of ruin.'

'You really mean that?'

'Absolutely. Da Costa spoke the truth there. He owed money everywhere. Miller's wages hadn't been paid for months, and every bit of property Louba had was mortgaged up to the hilt. But this we know, that on the day of his death he drew a large sum from the bank and had it paid him in hundred-franc notes which disappeared. We know that Miller changed a packet of these notes yesterday, and we want him badly!'

With this startling news, John Warden joined the young couple. Alan was almost incoherent in his thanks.

'Trainor tells me that you've been working on my behalf ever since my arrest, Doctor. He says you interviewed the Secretary of State.'

Dr. Warden flushed. 'I couldn't stand idly by and see so gross a miscarriage of justice,' he said.

At ten o'clock that night came a ring at Dr. Warden's bell, and his housekeeper announced visitors. Thinking that it might be urgent, the doctor went down to his consulting-room.

A man was sitting on the edge of a chair, an unshaven, haggard man with misery in his eyes and with him, her hand in his, a pale, pretty girl, whom the doctor guessed was his wife. It was Miller.

'I've come to give myself up. Doctor,' he said huskily. 'My wife thinks I ought. I'm one of the men who robbed Mr. Louba but, as God is my judge, I never struck a blow.'

A telephone call brought Trainor and his assistant in a quarter of an hour.

'Here's the money, Mr. Trainor,' said Miller miserably. 'I suppose I'll get imprisonment, but I'd rather have that than give my girl another minute's

worry.' Then Miller told his story.

'What I'm going to tell you, gentlemen, is gospel truth; I've told a lot of lies before, and I'm sorry. When a thing like this happens—like the murder of Mr. Louba, I mean—a man naturally gets all shaken up. I've been in Mr. Louba's service for fourteen years. I went to him when he had a little flat in Jermyn Street, before he made the money he was supposed to have when t he died. He was in London six months of the year and somewhere in the South of Europe for the-other-six months. The doctor will remember the place in Jermyn Street, because he often used to come there. After a few years Mr. Louba came home. He and a few other rich men built Braymore House and he took up his residence there permanently. It was there that I first saw Charlie Berry.

'I didn't know his name or what he did for a living, because I saw very little of him and I never met him outside. But I know that he was a frequent visitor, although he wasn't what you might call a friend of Mr. Louba. His attitude, so far as I could judge, was that of an employee rather than a friend, but Louba used to see him alone and usually showed him out himself. I think he must have told Charlie not to discuss his visits with me, because once, when I tried to pump him, Charlie told me to mind my own business, and the next day Louba called me into his sitting- room and lectured me for sticking my nose into his affairs. That stopped me being inquisitive.

'About nine or ten years ago—soon after there had been an- other row over a lady not being able to get out, owing to the fire window being bolted—I saw Charlie for the last time. I think it was the day after. He was dressed to kill and that struck me as peculiar, because Charlie was a poor dresser. In fact, I'd often noticed how shabby he looked when he came. From that day to the Wednesday before the murder I never set eyes on him. I knew a great deal more about Mr. Louba's private affairs than he guessed, especially about his financial affairs. I knew that his companies weren't doing any too well. Big demands were being made on him, and one day I found him with a whole lot of shipping-guides in front of him and saw a passport made out in the name of "Goudelas", with his photograph in it. So I began to put two and two together.

'I know, too, that every week he used to send money away to people; he told me once that they were his pensioners. He stopped sending this, and the bills at the flat began to mount up. My wages hadn't been paid for weeks, and that looked pretty odd to me. On the Wednesday before the murder I met Charlie.

He was standing outside Braymore House. It must have been about eight o'clock, and I was on my way to take some letters to Mr. Louba at the Elect Club. I didn't recognise Charlie until he spoke to me, but I knew him at once when I saw his face. He said he'd just come back from abroad, and he wanted to know where Louba was. I was feeling a bit anxious about the way things

were going, but I wanted as much information as I could get about my boss. We went off to a bar—it was there that little man Weldrake spoke to us, the time I told you about, sir, and Charlie told me that he'd heard things were going badly and that, unless Louba played the game, he was going to make trouble.

'We had several drinks, and maybe it was the booze, and maybe it was Charlie's persuasion, but when he put it up to me that we should get in first and make a haul before Louba busted up, I didn't turn down the suggestion, as I should've done. My job was to watch the gov'nor to see if he drew out any big sum of money from the bank; and that was easy, because Louba kept his cheque-book in the top right-hand drawer of his table, and it was easy to see the stubs. As soon as I learned that there was any big money in the house, I was to send a wire to Charlie at the hotel where he was staying. All that I had to say was "Florence has arrived."

'On Saturday morning, Louba went out and came back just before lunch- time. We had lunch sent up from the restaurant in the basement. At half past two he went out, and I began to make a search of his room. The first thing I found was his cheque-book. He'd drawn twelve thousand pounds, and on the stub was written "francs."

'The cheque was drawn on the account of the Mediterranean Syndicate, which was practically Louba's own private account. I began to look for the notes, and I found them at last. They were in the bureau drawer, the little bureau that stood by the window. There was no key to the drawer; it opened by pressing together two little knobs on each side of the handle. I'd found that out by accident years before. I could have taken the money then and there, but that would have meant suspicion falling on me, especially as it was likely that when Louba came back he would go straight to the bureau to see if the money was safe.

'The plan we had made was this: when Charlie had my telegram, he was to come up and see Louba. I was to let him in, and tell him where the money was. He was either to get it then, or come back later, up the fire escape. In preparation for this I was to unfasten the fire window so that he could get in. We had discussed the alarm, which doesn't ring until the lower ladder is pulled down. But in the gardens was a builder's ladder, and I told Charlie where it could be found. By this means one of the upper landings of the escape could be reached without disturbing the alarm at all. Afterwards I was to meet Charlie at the bar, where we had our drinks, and divide the stuff. That was the arrangement which I liked least of all, for I guessed that he wouldn't think twice about double-crossing me. That rattled me and made me more reckless than I should have been.

'I sent the wire, and Louba came home soon after. He was in good temper, and when I asked him if I could go out for the evening, he agreed without any argument. I'd done one really bad thing. I'd asked my fiancee —my wife now —to meet me near Braymore House, the idea being that I should have an alibi if the money was missed. It took a long time to persuade her to come, because it wasn't really her night off. However, she did.

'Half an hour before Charlie came I was in the sitting-room, and Mr. Louba was having his bath. As I expected, the moment he came in he'd gone straight to the bureau; I watched him through the door. Here was a chance that I'd never have again.

Charlie was coming, and I knew that he'd grab the lot, and that I'd see very little of my share. If I took it now I'd be on the safe side and if, after Charlie had gone, the loss was discovered, even supposing he hadn't been able to get at the money, suspicion would fall on him. I'm not making any excuses for myself. I intended thieving—in fact I did thieve.

'I opened the drawer, took out a handful of notes, and pushed them in my pocket. To make sure I shouldn't be found with the money on me, I took an envelope, stamped and addressed it to myself poste restante, went out into the corridor, dropped it down the letter chute and went back into the flat about five minutes before Charlie arrived. I let him in and told him in a whisper where the money was. Mr. Louba came out of his room —yes, sir, he was fully dressed and wearing his collar and tie. He called Charlie in, and I made preparations to get away. I was just on the point of going out when I heard the bell ring and opened the door to the doctor. I was scared sick at the sight of him. I was frantic to get out, especially as I heard Charlie and Louba quarrelling, and I didn't for one moment believe that Charlie would be able to get the money without coming back again.

'Well, what happened then you know. I got out and saw my fiancee, had a chat with the valet from downstairs and went back to the flat. After the doctor had gone I listened at the door. There was no sound, but that wasn't unusual, because Mr. Louba would stay in his room for hours without calling me. I tried the door; it was locked, but that wasn't unusual either. What did worry me was when the doctor told me he hadn't heard Charlie I go. The only explanation I could think of was that Louba had I remembered that the doctor would be waiting, and so he'd let Charlie out through the dining-room and kitchen. When I found the door of the servants' hall ajar, I guessed that I was right, though I didn't clearly remember having shut it. At ten-forty, when the blood was seen, and the doctor came with Mr. Hurley Brown, I was panic-stricken, and the first thing I did when I got into the sitting-room—it was while they were looking at the body—was to pull out the bureau drawer. It was empty.

'And that's the whole of the story, gentlemen, so far as I'm concerned. I went to the doctor to ask his advice about going to South America because I wanted to put the detectives off the scent.'

It was the doctor who comforted the weeping young wife after her man had been taken away. Warden gave her money and sent her off with his housekeeper to her mother's home, and when Miller received his six months sentence it was John Warden who personally investigated Miller's affairs to find—as he had expected—that, apart from the stolen money, he had saved a very respectable sum of his own. It would have meant a fight with the authorities to retain this but for the discovery in Charles Berry's belongings of the balance of the stolen money.

'The story hangs together completely,' said Trainor, meeting the doctor one day in Whitehall. 'Weldrake and da Costa were both released on their own recognisances, but this completely clears them and Leamington.'

'You're sure of that?' asked Warden quickly.

'Well, legally, it does. And I don't think that there can possibly be any further doubt that Charlie Berry was the murderer. The only mystery is the woman—where has she gone?'

John Warden shrugged his broad shoulders. 'Does it matter? he asked and turned the conversation. Wisely Trainor made no reference to the missing Hurley Brown.

It was autumn, and Alan Leamington was spending the first part of his honeymoon on Lake Como. It was a glorious day, and the lake was a sapphire blue. Alan sprawled lazily in the stern of a boat and watched with adoring eyes the bare-armed girl who was tugging at the oars.

'Darling, I feel all the time that I shall wake up and find myself in a cell at Bow Street,' he said.

She shuddered. 'How can you—here! What was that letter the concierge gave you before you left the hotel?'

He lugged it from his pocket. It was a stout envelope, type-written and obviously readdressed from London.

'Postmark—can't make it out. Brazilian stamp.'

He tore open the flap and took out a thick wad of paper. He read the first words and started so violently that the boat rocked.

'What's the matter?' she asked anxiously.

'Nothing. Wait, dear. I must finish this first.'

She sat silent, watching his tense face, as he read for the first time the true story of the killing of Emil Louba.

32. THE STORY

MY DEAR LEAMINGTON:

Some months ago, just before I went on my vacation, a holiday from whence I neither desired nor intended to return, you were good enough to tell me in confidence that, because of your knowledge of Emil Louba, you would not only do your best to secure the escape of the man who killed him, but that you would gladly shake him by the hand. Therefore, knowing something of your sincerity, your honesty, and having complete faith in your discretion, I write you the full story of Emil Louba's death. As to his evil life, that is beyond description.

First let me tell you something about myself. I was born in the village of Buckfast-on-the-Moor, in Devonshire. My father was a farmer, a man enjoying some local fame as a skilled veterinary surgeon, though he had not, as far as I know, qualified at any of the great veterinary colleges. My mother was a woman of Gloucestershire, and today she remains in my memory as a model and pattern for the grand dames of all times.

From Cambridge, I was admitted as a student at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. While I was there, my father and my mother died, leaving their property in equal division between myself and my younger brother, Philip, a delicate young fellow and one of the sweetest dispositions I have ever met in a man.

I loved him dearly—poor boy.

It was agreed that he should carry on the farm very much as my dear father had left it. Philip loved the outdoor life, was keenly interested in farming, and in every way the arrangement was admirable for all concerned. The farm was extensive, and under Philip's management it was even more profitable than it bad been in Father's time. My income was a handsome one, far greater than any of my contemporaries at Bart's, and I could afford to extend the period and scope of my studies.

I bought a practice in Exeter, and at the age of thirty-five was, if I may be forgiven the vanity, as popular a doctor as there was in the Cathedral city.

While I was still at my studies, Philip met a girl, fell deeply in love with her, and they were married. I confess I heard the news with some misgivings, for Philip was not a well man by any means, certainly not a man for whom I

should, had I been consulted, have prescribed the cares and worries attendant on matrimony.

Philip's wife was a girl of singular beauty. I was prepared for prettiness, but Elizabeth Warden was something more than that. Look at Beryl and then look at the average pretty woman, and you will readily understand the distinction, by no means subtle between prettiness and loveliness.

I liked her from the first and, when her baby was born, I endured almost as much mental suffering as Phil. The child was a girl, and Phil named her Kathleen after our mother. There was never a sweeter baby than my little Kate, for mine she was destined to become. When I look back and think of all that dear mite was ordained to suffer, I think, had I been gifted with prophecy and could have foreseen the future, I would have killed her as she lay smiling and gurgling in her cot.

Elizabeth never quite recovered. Kate was seven years old when her mother died. Poor Phil followed three months later, and I took charge of the orphaned girl. At this time I was disposing of my Exeter practice and had already purchased a house in Devonshire Street; for my private fortune, plus the sale of my practice, enabled me to face the somewhat precarious venture of entering London. My book on Diseases of the Nerve Centres had won me a little fame, and I had not long been established in London before I found my consulting-room continuously occupied.

Kate stayed with me until she was ten, when I sent her to an excellent preparatory school in Gloucestershire, where she was very happy and content. The farm had been sold and had realised a very respectable sum, one half of which was the private fortune to which I have referred.

The years that followed ran smoothly. When Kate was fourteen, I sent her to Cheltenham to a bigger school—perhaps the biggest and the best in England. She was perfectly happy, and although I had detected a streak of romanticism in her character, I was not greatly perturbed. Romance belongs to the young, and mysticism to the old. She loved the East and, in those delightful holidays of hers—delightful to me and, I believe, to her—she used to talk of nothing but the glories of the Orient, present and departed. The Eastern poets she had at her finger- tips; Hafiz she could quote by the yard. I was amused.

At fourteen she was pretty. At sixteen she was her mother all over again, the loveliest, dearest child that ever God sent for the adornment of the world. Most of her holidays, even her summer holidays, she spent with me in Devonshire Street.

It was on such a vacation that she met Hurley Brown, a young officer in the West Sussex Regiment, the son of an old Exeter colleague of mine, and as

good and straight a boy as ever I met or hope to meet. He was on leave from his regiment, which was stationed somewhere in Asia. At any rate, he was a lover of the Orient, and she sat entranced, listening to his descriptions, his stories of ancient Egypt, his vivid word-pictures of Eastern towns.

Though she was only sixteen, and he a man ten years her senior, he fell desperately in love with her. As for Kate, I am satisfied that her affection for him was of the kind which Desdemona gave to Othello—she loved him for the stories that he told! He said nothing to her, nor to me. He had inherited some money from his grandfather, returned to England and, as it happened that our old Buckfast farm was in the market, he bought it and settled down to the life of a gentleman farmer.

He permitted himself one extravagance, a small flat in London, and here he was to be found in those months when Kate was on her college vacation.

I began to guess things, and really it needed very little prescience to understand what was happening. Had I been called upon to give a prognosis of the case I should have said: 'Engagement in two years, marriage in three.' Kate liked him, was fond of him—the kind of motherly fondness which is the basis of all happy marriages. Once she said to me: 'I do wish Jimmy were a rajah, or a grand vizier, or something. Daddy'—she always called me that. 'He never talks about Cairo and Baghdad any more. He wants to discuss Oriental crime and police work and such boring things.'

I dropped a hint to James, and I believe he plunged at once into a course of Oriental folklore.

It was a few months before Kate came home permanently from Cheltenham that I met Emil Louba.

He was under the care of an old friend of mine for intermittent fever. Clark had to leave England for his health, and at his earnest request I took Emil Louba in hand and effected a cure. I liked the man in the same broad, impersonal way that one likes the Sahara or the Colosseum. He was big, physically and mentally. He had a sense of humour and was sufficiently Oriental to interest me mildly.

I found him a large-minded and tolerant person—except on one subject. He hated soldiers, particularly British soldiers, and especially British officers.

'They are the parasites of society,' he used to say. 'They do not'ing but spend money and borrow money, when you ask for it they send their soldiers to burn down your house!'

It so happened that Emil Louba was dining with me on the very day that Kate returned from school. I had made a mistake about the date, otherwise I should

have kept the evening free. As it was, we dined together, and Hurley Brown, to whom I had written, giving the wrong date, was not present. This is the day of all days that henceforward will be accursed in my calendar.

Louba was at his best, and at his best he was charming. Big and coarse as he was, he had the finesse and instincts of a woman, and I could see—and again, God forgive me, I was only amused—that Kate was fascinated. I was called away in the middle of the dinner to see a patient in Marylebone, and it must have been in that period, short as it was, that Louba pressed his volcanic suit and made those arrangements which brought destruction to my dear girl. When I came back I was struck by the flush on her cheek, the shining light in her eyes. What he had done, as I now know, was to arrange, with a cunning and deftness that defeated me, the first of those secret meetings which were to have so terrible a consequence.

James Hurley Brown came the next day. He had parted from Kate a child; he found her a woman. Her attitude towards him was the same and yet different. I myself noticed this, but found reasons which were, as it proved, wide of the mark. And then for poor Jimmy came the climax. He proposed and was rejected with an almost brutal decision which almost broke him.

'I'm very fond of Jimmy, she told me afterwards. 'But—well, there is a "but". Jimmy is so practical, so very much the antithesis of —well, of me and my ideals.'

At the time I suspected nothing. James went back to his farm, and the first I heard of his changed plans was when I learned from him that he had leased Tor Scar—that was the name of the place—and had accepted a commission in the Malaysian police.

Kate was grieved; I could see that, but she was also firm.

One day I met Emil Louba at the club. He was in his most genial mood and asked after Kate, as though he had not seen or heard from her since they met at dinner.

'A wonderful girl,' he said enthusiastically. 'She will make some man very happy. Is she engaged?'

Untruthfully I replied that she was practically affianced to a friend of mine, Captain Hurley Brown. I saw his face change instantly.

'Hurley Brown!' he repeated. 'Is he the Hurley Brown who was in Malta?'

I said it was very likely.

Curiously enough, I did not recall this conversation—not even when, at a later date, Jim mentioned at the club that he had a grudge against Louba for something that had happened on the island.

James came to say good-bye, and I must say Kate was cruelly indifferent, though I found her weeping after he had gone. That she loved him I am certain, but the glamour of Louba was on her, and she was a puppet in his evil hands.

One night, I met Louba's old doctor, Clark. He expressed a desire to see him, and we called at Braymore House. Miller was a little flustered to see us. He said his master was engaged, but he would take in our names. In point of fact, he did not take in our names at all, but called them through the locked door.

Louba was a long time before he admitted us. The room was in some disorder, the chairs being hung with rare and beautiful fabrics from the East. A solid gold hookah stood on the floor near the settee—at almost leaked as though we had interrupted a party.

We did not stay long, feeling that we were de trop, and made our way downstairs, to find the porter in a considerable state of agitation. Somebody had used the fire escape, and the alarm had rung. At the moment he was taking the tenants of No. 3 to their flat, and before he could bring the elevator down to the ground level the user of the fire escape had gone.

I got home and found Kate was in her room. I was glad, because I had remembered some laboratory work I had to finish without the aid of my assistant. I had engaged Charles Berry, who was a student at one of the innumerable institutions that turn out that type of man who wishes to improve himself and get on in life. He was a sharp-featured Londoner, somewhat careless of h's, very self-assured, and not particularly honest.

I was under the impression that Kate disliked him; he had been a little forward with her, called her 'Kate', and had received a snub which had left him angry and humiliated.

It is strange what value a certain type of mind gives to specialised education. A bowing acquaintance with the Materia Medica and the ability to remember the British Pharmacopoeia from Acacia to Zinziber—as it was in those days—gave him the pose of a don and the manner of a professor of chemistry. He was a good worker; however, as I say, the disappearance from time to time of valuable laboratory accessories made me doubt his probity.

He had gone when I returned. His hours were from nine to six. I was not sorry, for I wanted to be alone. Besides which he had not of late been as diligent as he should have been, going out at all sorts of odd hours. One thing I had observed was Kate's change of manner to him. She had grown polite, and once I saw them talking together in a low voice. I did not think that this was unusual at the time, but later I had reasons for attaching a special significance to such an extraordinary happening.

I usually breakfast at nine o'clock, and I came down to the dining- room ten minutes before the hour one morning to learn to my surprise that Kate had gone out. She had told the house-keeper that she was going to Covent Garden to buy some flowers, and that from there she would be meeting a friend and probably would not be back to lunch. That was not very remarkable, either, in spite of my surprise. Kate did eccentric things, and once before she had left me to breakfast alone. I was attending a conference in Birmingham that night and it was nearly eleven o'clock the following morning, when I came home. My house-keeper met me in a troubled state.

'Miss Kate hasn't been home, sir,' she said.

'Not at all?' I asked in astonishment.

'No, sir. A note came this morning for you. I think it's in her handwriting.'

I found it on my study table. It was undoubtedly from Kate, and the postmark said '10.15 Dover'.

With a sense of terrible foreboding I opened the letter and took out the closely written sheet. The letter ran:

Dear Daddy,

For a long time I have loved Charles Berry secretly, but I've never dared to tell you. I've run away with him, and we're going to be married tomorrow. Try to think well of your very loving daughter.

Kate...

When I had recovered from the shock I set to work to trace the fugitives, thinking that there would be very little difficulty, and that I should hear from Kate again. But no letter came. I employed private detectives, who had the house of Charles Berry watched, but neither I nor his mother received any news.

I put advertisements in all the English and Continental papers asking her to return and promising my complete forgiveness of the man; but there was no answer. The one man who could have helped me in that terrible time was on his way to Malaysia.

Six months afterwards I received a letter in Kate's hand-writing, just a few lines. She said she was very happy, and please would I not worry about her, and that she hoped some day to see me. The letter was posted in Vienna, and when I communicated with the Vienna police they were unable to trace her, or give me any information about her. In the years that followed I clung desperately to that one comforting belief that she was happy. I didn't see Louba, who'd been out of town on his holidays and, anyway, I should never have thought of taking him into my confidence. It was just before Kate's

second letter arrived that I told him. As a matter of fact he raised the subject himself when I saw him, by asking how she was. I told him that she was married and on the Continent—that I was not relaxing my efforts to find her. It must have been this warning which produced the letter from Kate, written, as I know now, at Louba's dictation.

I only wrote to Hurley Brown that Kate was married, mentioning the name of the man, praying that poor Jim would not remember the type of man the girl had chosen. In his letter he seemed surprised, but philosophical.

What had happened I know now. Louba had taken my darling abroad, partly to satisfy his own passion for her, and partly to avenge himself upon the man to whom he thought Kate was engaged, and with them went Charlie Berry. He was the blind, the explanation, the shield to Louba's name, and when at last Emil Louba grew tired of his new toy, it was to Charles Berry that he passed her, insisting, however, upon a marriage ceremony. They were married before the British Consul at Istanbul, Louba making them a small monthly allowance.

I am not going to speak of those terrible years when Kate became first a dancer, and then, as her agility and charm faded, a waitress in a low cafe in Turkey. To me it is amazing that she lived through the trial. The only happy feature of her martyrdom was that from the first Berry hated her. The memory of past humiliations roused in him a loathing which saved my girl such a martyrdom as would have followed had the case been different. But for the fear of Louba he would have forced her into a life of utter degradation.

Louba's remittances came regularly until towards the end of last year, and then they began to falter. There were weeks when they received nothing. Sometimes money would be sent to make up what bad been missed, but the end came when Louba wrote to say that he had been paying for years, but that he intended to pay no more, and he advised Charles Berry to exploit his wife a little more profitably than he had hitherto done.

Berry was alarmed. He was saddled with a woman for whom he had no affection, and he had so far been unsuccessful in inducing the girl to adopt the course which Louba suggested.

He packed his belongings and came by the first train to London, bringing Kate with him. At that time he did not know that Kate had been writing regularly to Louba, begging him to rescue her from this horrible life which she was living, and in the last of these she had given the Deptford address to which Berry told her they were going. Apparently he had cultivated a friendship for the man who owned the house, on one of his successful visits to England.

Kate remembered the address and, never doubting that they were going straight to Little Kirk Street, put it at the head of her letter. As it happened,

they did not go to Deptford at all, but to a Temperance Hotel, subsequently moving to the address which Kate had given.

32. THE KILLING

His object, Berry's, was to secure an assurance from Louba that the allowance would be continued or, alternatively, to get from the man a lump sum to cancel his obligations. Louba saw him and told him plainly that there was no more money to come, and that he himself was in such a position that he expected soon to be fleeing the country with what money he could lay his hands upon.

At first Berry was incredulous but, meeting the valet, Miller, who knew him, they discussed the matter, with the result which you already know.

Hurley Brown had long since returned to England and taken a position at Scotland Yard. I told him as much of the story as I knew, but he made little comment, except to suggest that probably Emil Louba knew something of the disappearance, a suggestion which I rejected instantly.

As I say, I have always liked Louba, in spite of his shortcomings and his obvious lack of breeding. We seldom discussed Kate, Jim and I, and seemed to be drifting farther and farther apart, he with his own interests and me with mine, until it came about that we were 'Hurley Brown' and 'Warden' to one another, though I have never lost my affection for him, nor had he his for me.

How inscrutable is Fate in its workings; how small are the factors which determine one's whole future, and not only one's own future but the future of those who are nearest and dearest to us! Some chance remark made by Hurley Brown at the club reminded Louba, who was present, that he had some digestive pain, and that he needed me to look over him. I fixed an appointment. I was in town for the day and had nothing to do—and a wretchedly miserable day it was—and I was glad to have some-thing to occupy my mind. I had arranged to dine with dark that evening and he did not turn up. But I am anticipating.

To say that Kate was out of my mind would not be true. She was never out of my mind; I never ceased to think of her and pray for her. She was my first thought in the morning, my last thought at night, but at the back of this long silence was her old statement that she was happy. The pain was now no more than a numbness, the wound a scar.

I remember thinking about her as I drove to Louba's flat and thinking, too, of Louba, that strange man whom Hurley Brown instinctively hated. That the

hate was returned with interest I knew. Despite Louba's wealth and influence, Jim had had him turned out of Malta. It was perfectly true, as Louba had said, that his house had been burned down shortly after Jim threatened to drive him out at all costs, and it is believed to have been burnt by the enraged soldiers whose young officer had been driven by debt to suicide.

Miller admitted me, and I could see at once that something was wrong. He later confessed that he had planned a robbery and believed that Charles Berry was at that moment committing it. He said he wanted to go out to see a girl, and that he would be back in a quarter of an hour, and I cheerfully agreed, sitting down and taking out a book I had in my pocket.

The noise from the sitting-room grew in intensity, as I sat there, and reading was impossible I put down the book, not intending to listen, and yet I could not help bearing almost every word they spoke. Suddenly I heard the snap of a key, and the door was flung open, and Louba's voice exclaimed in a passion:

'Get out and stay out! Come here again, Mr. Charles Berry, and I'll give you something to remember me by!' Charles Berry! I was on my feet in an instant.

'You'd look sick if I went to the old doctor and told him all I knew, wouldn't you?' I heard Berry say. I recognised his voice at once.

'Go and tell him! Tell him what you did! Tell him I've been keeping you and your wife for ten years! Now get out, and tell her if she writes me any more of her whining letters I'll come and take her away from you and she'll be sorry.'

I still stood petrified. For a second I was thrown off my balance and I was trembling in every limb. Then I heard Berry go out and, pulling myself together, I walked through the half-open door of the sitting-room into Louba's presence.

He looked up as I came in, and turned as white as a sheet.

'When—when did you come, Doctor?'

'I've just arrived,' I said.

'Did you hear?' he asked. 'Did you see anybody?'

'No,' I replied steadily. I was myself again, steady save for my hands which I could not keep still.

'Good!' said Louba with a sigh. 'I'd forgotten you were coming, Doctor. Will you examine me?'

'Take off your shirt,' I said mechanically and sat down at the little bureau, while he began to remove his collar and tie.

I knew the prescription I was going to give him before I had come.

Mechanically I took out a sheet of paper and started to write. I had finished part of the prescription before I saw that the pen was dry. I put it down and tried to steady my hand, as I took the stethoscope from my pocket.

Then I saw the letter. It was lying on the floor at my feet, and I stooped and picked it up. Louba's back was to me and he could not see. It was Kate's letter. I knew the handwriting, and in those dozen lines which she had written, those dozen lines of agony and appeal, I read the whole foul story of this man's wickedness.

I read it as plainly as though it had been put before me on oath in a court of justice. I knew the wiles he had employed to get her away. I knew the part he had assigned to Charles Berry and I knew, too, just the hell through which she was passing in the association of that brute.

His collar and tie were off, as I turned. I took the first thing that came to my hand. It was a heavy silver candlestick, and I struck him down. So quickly did my hand move that I struck him again before he had reached the floor, and I was satisfied in my mind that the first blow was fatal.

I looked at the candlestick. It was smeared with crimson, and I held it away from me, carried it out of the room, put it down in the dining- room and closed the door behind me. Then I went back to Emil Louba. He was dead; it wasn't necessary for me to examine him to know that. I went into his bedroom, for I had decided on my course of action in the fraction of a second.

Throwing up the window that leads to the fire escape, I put on his silk dressing-gown, pulling it right up to my throat. In opening the window I had displaced one of the two screws which lay on the ledge. I picked them up and threw them on the bed, for no other reason than to mystify whosoever came to investigate the crime. Before I did anything I tore off the address on Kate's last letter and set a match to the remainder, putting it into the grate and watching it burn. Then I lifted up the body, carried it to the bedroom, and laid it on the bed. I thought I heard a sound outside in the passage and, creeping into the hall, I listened at the door. It was then that bloodstains from the dressing-gown came against the panel.

Only four minutes of the fifteen which Miller had allotted to me had passed. Slipping off the dressing-gown, I went to the bathroom, washed my hands, dried them on a new towel and replaced it in the cupboard. Then I carefully inspected myself before a long mirror, looked down at my shoes to make sure there were no stains on them, I went out and locked the door, taking the key from the inside and putting it in my pocket.

Attached to the key was another which I guessed was the key of the flat, and this I tested on the front door. In the act of testing the key I discovered the

bloodstain and I wiped it off with my handkerchief. The handkerchief was subsequently burnt in my laboratory.

I was most careful to see that there were no stains on my cuffs; then I settled myself down to read and, remarkable to relate, I did read! I was reading when Miller came in and, after going through the farce of calling Louba at the door, I went on to the club.

What was the object of my lying, what was the object of my opening the window, you will ask? It is clear. I wished to fix the crime upon Berry, not because I feared to take the consequences but because I desired his death. As I left the flat I saw you, Alan Leamington, and I had a panic feeling that in some way you were going to blunder into this crime, and I nearly turned back to warn you. But that might have been dangerous, dangerous for us both, and I decided to go on to the club. To my great relief my friend Clark sent a message saying that he would not be able to dine with me. As a matter of fact I dined with Hurley Brown and spent most of the evening with him.

I had one great shock, and that was when I saw you come into the smoking-room and look at the time-table. So much was I worried that I decided to go back to the flat. Miller would be out; there was an excuse for my going. I could get in without any trouble, and I was particularly anxious to discover whether I had left any evidence of any presence. It's remarkable that I didn't see the unfinished prescription.

Without difficulty I got into the flat. Miller was away, and I went into the room; and then it was that I saw the remainder of Kate's letters. I should imagine that Louba had taunted Berry with this correspondence. And then I saw the telephone, and an idea occurred to me. I called up myself at the club—Louba's voice was so easy to imitate. I did this just as I lied about the hour of Louba's death, to fix the crime elsewhere. It was I who rang the elevator-bell on the third floor. The rest of the story, up to a point you know. Berry was traced, but the police arrived too late to arrest him at the hotel where he was staying. The only evidence that came to their hands was a cipher message that Miller had sent to him, to announce the arrival in the house of the money.

But I had already been on the track at Deptford. After the police had finished with me I had gone there and made independent inquiries. I was able to do this because the night was a particularly foggy one, and nobody would recognise me even if they had known me.

When, on the following day, I learned that Berry and Kate had left the hotel, I guessed where they were going, and thereafter I spent the nights watching the house. I knew Charles Berry was there, and that Kate was there too. The woman with him could be none other. Returning to Town early on Monday morning, I went into my study, to find to my amazement that Jim was waiting

for me.

'Where have you been, Doctor?' he asked quietly.

'I've been out to see a case. Brown,' I answered in my best professional manner; and then, without any preliminary, he said, 'John, you killed Emil Louba.'

33. THE END

'Why do you say that, Jim?' I asked.

'Nobody else could have killed him;' he said. 'Nobody else was alone in the flat except Miller. Nobody else had a reason for killing him —Louba took Kate away.'

'How do you know?' I asked.

'It came to me that you must have made this discovery and of course you killed him. Where is she now?'

Sitting down at my table, I filled my pipe before I replied. It was the crisis of my life, and a good surgeon is no worse for a little deliberation.

'I can't tell you,' I said. 'She's in London with Berry.'

'Berry is the man who used to be your assistant; I recognised the name immediately. Is it him?'

I nodded.

'And of course she didn't run away with him; she went away with Louba. Berry gave her the screen of his name.'

For a very long time I puffed away in silence, then I told him all I knew, all that I'd done, all that had happened.

'Oh, I wish it'd been me,' he said between his teeth. 'I wish I could have laid my hands on him before he died.'

'It's a merciful thing you didn't,' said I. 'It doesn't matter very much about me. I'm an oldish man, more or less finished with life, and I shall die quite cheerfully with the knowledge that I have rid the world of a very great villain.'

'Nobody will die,' he said briskly. 'We must find Kate and get her away. As to the man, her husband—'

By this time I had read most of the letters which Kate had written to Louba,

and which I had brought away from the flat on my second visit, and I was able to tell him something of their relationship.

'We must get her away,' said he again. 'I don't know what we can do about her husband. Of course, when he's arrested, the whole thing will come out.'

'There's no reason why he should be arrested,' said I, and I don't think that in all my life I felt quite so cheerful as I did at that moment. 'I'm going to kill him.'

His jaw dropped, and he stared at me.

'You're mad,' he said.

'I'm going to kill him,' said I, 'for all that he has done to Kate, and you must not interfere. One thing I do want, Jim, and that is a place where I can bring her, and a future for her.'

He drew a long breath. 'As to the future, you need have no fear. I shall send in my resignation.'

'Better than that,' said I; 'get passports for yourself and Kate. There's a South American boat leaving Cherbourg the day after tomorrow. Collect all the money you can and take her away. I'll join you later if I'm alive.'

We talked it out, and then I gave him a rendezvous where we could meet. I don't think even then he believed that I intended killing the man, because he said at parting: 'There'll be no necessity for you to take a risk, John. We'll just get Kate away and leave him flat.'

'To talk?' asked I, with a smile. 'To tell all he knows about the beautiful niece of Dr. Warden, to give his interpretation of the murder, to say that he knew that Hurley Brown—No, you do your part, I'll do mine.'

It couldn't be said on that day that darkness fell on London. It was more true that it never lifted. Towards evening I had taken up my station outside the house in Little Kirk Street.

I had in my pocket an automatic with a silencer, and my plan was to follow Berry when he came out of the house, go some distance with him, shoot him in the fog, and then return to the house to get Kate. But he had already made his plans; for he himself had decided to kill the girl, and had induced her to write a confession, which was afterwards found in her pocket, and of which I, of course, knew nothing. It was the original which was found on him.

I saw them come out, and followed them closely. In preparation for some such contingency I was wearing rubber-soled shoes. Nevertheless, Kate's quick ear warned her that she was being followed.

Once the man came back to look for me, but I flattened myself against the

wall, and though he was within a few paces, he didn't see me.

I pretty well guessed now—I could hear their voices plainly —what had been Charles Berry's plan, and I decreased the distance between us and stood, a silent listener, to all that followed.

Presently Berry sprang at her and tried to drag her to the water, and it was at that moment I interfered. I shot him twice. I think the first shot killed him. Kate came towards me and at the sound of my voice she knew me.

There isn't a great deal more to be said. I found Jim at the rendezvous, and I sent them off, he and my darling, while I returned to the normal life of Devonshire Street, waiting to see you at liberty before I took the first opportunity to leave England, never to return.

Some day perhaps they will lay my ashes with my father and Phil in the little churchyard at Buckfast-on-the-Moor, but until then I shall be a stranger to England.

Kate is married, a dearly happy woman. Jim—you would never suspect that the man in chapperos who is sitting opposite to me as I write was a sometime assistant commissioner of police.

There is the story, my dear Alan, for your eye and the eye of your wife alone. You were good enough to come and say good-bye to me when I went on my holiday just before your marriage. I promised you I would be back in time for the wedding, but that was a promise I did not intend keeping. I think you will understand why. Let me be remembered always by my healing—that is the vanity of an old doctor. God bless you!