THE MAN AT THE CARLTON

BY

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The Man at the Carlton

CHAPTER I

I

There was a man named Harry Stone (also called Harry the Valet), who was a detective until they found him out, which was about three months after he had entered the C.I.D. of a police force in Rhodesia. He might have been prosecuted, but at that time this particular police force was not at all anxious to expose the dishonesty of its officers, so that when he got away by the night mail to Cape Town they took no trouble to call him back.

Harry went south with about three hundred ill-gotten pounds in the hope of meeting Lew Daney, who was a good trooper and a great, if unfortunate, artist. But Lew was gone, had been gone a very long time, was indeed at that moment organising and carrying into effect a series of raids more picturesque than his essay against the National Bank of Johannesburg, and considerably better organised.

Harry broke back again to Rhodesia by the Beira route, and through the Massi-Kassi to Salisbury, which was a misfortune for him, for Captain Timothy Jordan, Chief of the Rhodesian C.I.D., did him the honour of making a personal call on him at his hotel.

"You are registered as Harrison, but your name is Stone. By the way, how is your friend Lew Daney?"

"I don't know who you mean," said Harry the Valet.

"Tiger" Tim Jordan smiled.

"Be that as it may," he said, "the train leaves for Portuguese territory in two hours. Take it!"

The mystified Harry did not argue. He was mystified because he had never come across Tiger Tim Jordan, though he had heard of that dynamic young man and knew most of the legends concerning him by heart.

Tiger, being rather a wealthy man, could afford to be conscientious. He made a very careful study of the photographs of undesirables that came his way, and made a point of meeting all the mail trains in, and superintending the departure of all the mail trains out, most of which contained somebody he had no desire should further pollute the fair air of Southern Rhodesia, and Harry's photograph had gone to Salisbury in the ordinary way of business.

At Beira Mr. Stone boarded an East Coast boat that plied between Durban and Greenock. He had tried most things once or twice, but there had been several happenings in London that made it desirable that the ex-detective should seek a port of entry not under the direct scrutiny of Scotland Yard, which though it was extraordinarily busy at that time, could spare a few officers to watch incoming liners and give a hearty welcome to returned wanderers who would rather have been spared the reception.

A few days after Harry had hired a respectable lodging in Glasgow, Chief Constable Cowley of Scotland Yard called a conference of his chief inspectors.

"This is the second big hold-up in three weeks," he said. "It is the same crowd working, and it has only failed to get away with big money by sheer bad luck."

He was referring to the scientific busting of the Northern Counties Bank. A night watchman and a patrolling police-cyclist had been shot down in cold blood, and a vault had been opened. The robbers had got little or nothing for their pains. A big block of currency had been moved the day before, "on information received."

"One of the crowd squealed," said Cowley. "It couldn't have been for the reward, for he never claimed it--I suppose it was a case of needle. With the information the police had, it was criminal that they let the gang slip."

The Northern Counties Bank crime was followed immediately by the Mersey Trust affair, which involved two hundred thousand pounds' worth of bar gold.

"The most beautifully organised job I've ever known," said Cowley, with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur. "Everything perfectly arranged. If the purser of the Ilenic hadn't been putty-headed and delayed the delivery of the gold for an hour because he'd mislaid the documents, they'd have had it!"

"I gather, sir," said Chief Inspector Pherson, who was ponderous even when he was not sarcastic, "that you have read the accounts in the daily Press?"

Cowley rubbed the back of his head irritably.

"Naturally," he said.

Scotland Yard was annoyed, for none of the local police forces had so much as consulted headquarters.

"Why Scotland Yard?" asked the Chief Constable of Blankshire. "Haven't I a C.I.D. of my own? What nonsense!"

He was a military chief constable, a C.B.E. and a D.S.O.

Cowley said that he had more esprit de corps than prenez garde, which was probably a prejudiced view.

Chief Constables of counties are not compelled to call in Scotland Yard. Scotland Yard must not interfere with local police administrations. Their advice was not sought either in the case of the Northern Counties or the Mersey business. As the Chief Constable of Northshire said:

"If we can't do this job ourselves we ought to be boiled. We've got our own C.I.D., and I'm all for trusting the Man on the Spot. I remember some years ago when I was commanding a brigade in Poona..."

The five men who sat around the big table at Scotland Yard, examining local maps and such data as had been unofficially collected, had never been to Poona, and none was likely to command any brigade, unless it were a fire brigade.

"Number three is coming," said Cowley. "This in my opinion is a series; there are signs of long preparation and the most careful planning. Who is the artist?"

The "artist" was Lew Daney, and nobody thought of him because at the moment he was unknown to the police force, though there was an ex-detective who knew him rather well.

On the day that Harry Stone decided that, Scotland held nothing for him but incredulous business men--he was working a gold mine swindle--the third coup was thrown, and succeeded.

The Lower Clyde Bank had its palatial premises in the City of Glasgow. Between the hours of 9 p.m. on a foggy Thursday night and 4 a.m. on an even foggier Friday morning. No. 2 vault was opened and cleared. It contained about a hundred and twelve thousand pounds in English currency, but, what was more important, the vault held the sum of ten million reichsmarks deposited by the Chemical Bank of Dusseldorf, being their contribution under their working arrangement with the North British Chemical Trust. It was made up of ten thousand notes of a thousand marks, and was contained in two steel boxes, each containing five thousand notes in packages of a thousand.

There were two night watchmen, McCall and Erskine. They had disappeared. It was their failure to repeat the hourly signal to police headquarters which had brought the police to the bank.

Not until three hours later were they found in a lift which had been stopped between two floors, the mechanism of the elevator having been put out of

action by the smashing of the selector bar. They were both dead--shot at close quarters.

Only one man could have given evidence that would have been of the slightest value to the police. Harry Stone had had the good luck that evening to find a well-to-do-Scotsman, in whom from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. the fires of romance burned brightly. He had listened breathlessly to the story Harry told of the hidden gold mine that lay in the folds of the Magalies Berge (from which nothing more golden than tobacco had ever come), and he had taken Harry home to his handsome flat, and Harry had drawn maps--for Harry was a man of education, spoke three languages and could draw an unlimited number of maps if it paid him to do so. His plans embellished his story so convincingly that he almost had the cheque in his pocket. Being an artist, he did not rush things, said "good night" to his host at three o'clock in the morning and walked home.

He saw a big car snailing by the sidewalk; it stopped and he passed it by. Then, walking quickly towards him, he saw a man and caught one glimpse of his face out of the corner of his eye, Somebody he knew--who was it? He walked half a dozen paces and then turned. The first man had been joined by another, carrying a bag. A third came running across the street. They all seemed to disappear into the car together as the machine turned and sped swiftly away.

Lew Daney! He had had a moustache when Harry knew him. He whistled. Lew had done a bust! It was not healthy to be around the scene of any of Lew's exploits. He had a gun and was not averse to using it. Harry had no desire to be pulled in by the police and questioned about one of Lew's more lurid adventures.

He was relieved to reach his home. He read all about the crime in the early editions of the evening newspapers next day, and was staggered by the haul. He was as staggered by the attitude of his prospective financier, for the well-to-do Scotsman, who had been so sympathetic and so enthusiastic about that secret mine in the folds of the Magalies Berge, was strangely sane and sober and sceptical in the cold forenoon, and had no disposition to sign a cheque or to do anything save have Harry thrown out of his office.

Mr. Stone went south. There was a way of making money out of his knowledge. He did not dream of going to the bank, or to the police, or to any unprofitable source of reward. Lew Daney's haul had been a big one; he would cut in on it. But first he must find Lew Daney, and that would be a business demanding the greatest patience.

II

Harry the Valet had been established in London for a fortnight when Mary Grier came from Scotland with a third-class return ticket, a pound for expenses, a small notebook in which to keep a very careful account of how the pound was spent, and three cheques, for different amounts, to settle a claim which had been made on Mr. Awkwright by a firm of outside brokers.

"You can tell him you're my niece and that I'm not right in my head," Mr. Awkwright had said with the greatest calmness.

"He's a swindler, anyway--all these outside brokers are--and if he thinks that there's no chance of getting the lot he'll take what he can get in settlement. Don't produce the cheque until he agrees to settle, and beat him down to the lowest one if you can."

Mary had settled these accounts before. It was an ugly and unpleasant business, but jobs are not easy to get, and, generally speaking, Mr. Awkwright was a good employer.

Three hours after she arrived in London she interviewed the broker. He held her hand in quite a fatherly way and tried to kiss her. She came from the office a little flushed, rather breathless, but with a receipt for a hundred pounds in full settlement of a debt of four hundred, and she did not even have to lie; Mr. Awkwright's pathetic letter supplied the necessary invention.

Mary thought neither less nor more of men because of an experience which was not unusual. She had that sort of pale prettiness which seems very lovely to some men. She was slim and neat of figure, could walk and stand well, had a flair for dressing inexpensively and gave a four-guinea costume the illusion of Savile Row tailoring.

She was a little annoyed, but she did not feel "soiled." Men had tried to kiss her before, men of all ages and conditions. Mr. Awkwright's occasional guests, for example; they used to come upon her in the library, close the door with the greatest carelessness, and slip their arms absent-mindedly round her shoulders.

And they were respectable men, including a London solicitor.

Only one had ever treated her with complete respect.

She hated this debt settling that Mr. Awkwright practised in his extreme meanness, but she was growing more and more philosophical.

She went back to the little temperance hotel in Bloomsbury where she had taken her lodging, to get the letter she had brought over from Scotland. In

the reading-room she found a copy of a morning newspaper, and studied the shipping list.

The Carnarvon Castle was due that morning, and probably had already arrived. Mr. Awkwright had given her a list of four hotels where his nephew would be likely to stay. They were all very expensive. His nephew, said Mr. Awkwright sourly, invariably chose hotels which he could not afford. By luck she tried the Carlton first, and saved herself several unnecessary twopences.

Captain Timothy Jordan had arrived. Could she speak to him? A little delay, and then:

"Hallo!" said a not-unpleasant voice. "Is that you, Colonel?"

Mary Grier smiled. "No, I am a mere private," she said. "Is that Captain Timothy Jordan? I am Mr. Awkwright's secretary."

"Oh Lord, Uncle Benjamin's? Where are you speaking from?"

She told him.

"I knew it wasn't Scotland," said the voice. "Is he in town?"

Mary explained that Mr. Awkwright was at that moment at Clench House.

"I have a letter for you. Captain Jordan. Mr. Awkwright told me to see you and find out when we could expect you in Scotland."

"In a few days," was the reply. "And when may I expect you at the Carlton? You are Miss Grier, aren't you? You are 'rather attractive and a great expense.' I am quoting my sainted uncle, who has written about you. Come and lunch."

She hesitated. She was very anxious to see this nephew of her employer. Mr. Awkwright had spoken very freely on, the subject of ungrateful relations.

"I am not sure that I have the time," she said. "It might be very embarrassing."

"If you come down don't forget to ask for Timothy Jordan; there are two of the great Jordan clan in this hotel--ask for Timothy and refuse all substitutes!"

"Timothy Jordan," she repeated, and heard a little sound behind her.

She turned and saw a man standing in the corridor, his back to her, evidently waiting to take his turn at the one telephone which the hotel possessed. She could not see his face. A derby hat was at the back of his

head; the collar of his overcoat was turned up. When later she passed him, he manoeuvred so that he still presented a back view to her.

Harry Stone was more surprised than alarmed to hear his enemy was in London. After all, Tim Jordan might be a great man in Southern Rhodesia, but he was just a man on the side-walk in the Haymarket. Still, there might be certain unpleasantnesses if he were recognised, particularly as Harry had that morning located the one man in the world he wanted to meet, and that man's name was Money; pounds to spend, dollars and francs to gamble with at Monte Carlo, marks to keep him in luxury in the Tyrol.

He waited till Mary disappeared, then he went to the 'phone and gave a number. It was some time before the man he asked for came to the instrument.

"It's Harry Stone speaking," he said in a low voice. "Could I see you some place tonight?"

There was a long silence. The man at the other end did not ask unnecessary questions. "Sure," he said. "How are you, Harry?"

"Fine," said Harry glibly. "I cleaned up a bit of money before I left the Cape. I am leaving for Australia next week and I'd like to have a chat with you before I go."

"Where are you speaking from?"--after another long pause.

Harry gave the name of the hotel and the telephone number, Lew Daney considered this.

"Pack all your things and clear out of there tonight. I will put you up. You can send your things to a railway cloak-room. You know London?"

"Pretty well," said Harry.

"Meet me at ten tonight at Hampstead. Go past the Spaniards about two hundred yards towards Highgate. I will be waiting for you on the sidewalk."

Harry Stone hung up the receiver, very satisfied with the beginning of his adventure. He had considered a long time before he adopted this method of approach. Lew was not the kind of man to come upon suddenly; he was a killer, and though he was not named in the flaming reward bill as the murderer of the two night-watchmen, there was a reward of five thousand pounds on his head.

Harry packed his suitcase that evening, carefully oiled and loaded a snub-nosed revolver, and went out. As he passed through the hall, he saw the pretty girl he had seen that morning. She was evidently leaving the hotel, for

her box was packed and waiting. He was interested in her: she was a friend of Tiger Tim's. He wondered how near a friend. He would like to get better acquainted with her--it would be a great joke to get back on Tiger through his girl.

He deposited his suitcase at King's Cross Station and went by Tube to Hampstead. He would have to be careful. If Lew knew he had been recognised outside the bank...but this was London, not South Africa.

He reached the rendezvous and found himself alone. It was a miserable night; a drizzle of sleet was falling and the asphalt pavement was slippery. He glanced at the illuminated dial of his watch; it was five minutes to ten. Would Lew double-cross him? That was not Lew's way.

Two cars passed, moving swiftly, and then a third came crawling along by the side of the pavement. Harry Stone took the revolver from his pocket and slipped it up his sleeve. The car stopped opposite to where he stood--an American saloon.

"Is that you, Harry?"

It was Lew's voice.

"Step inside."

He opened the door and sank down on the seat by the side of a former confederate and one who had shared a cell at Pretoria Central in the days when the prison was a little overcrowded.

"I knew your voice the moment I heard it."

Lew sent the car forward at a moderate pace.

"Doing well, are you. Harry? Made a big clean up?"

"About twenty thousand--" began Harry.

"You are a liar," said the other calmly. "I know you! If you had made twenty thousand you would have bought the Ritz. You wouldn't be staying in a punk hotel in Bloomsbury. Did you leave your bag at the station?...Good!"

Harry the Valet, a quick worker, began his tale.

"I thought I would like to have a chat with you," he said. "I've got a big scheme that wants a little money. You are quite right, I am broke--and I thought perhaps you might be able to stake me. The boys told me you've done pretty well."

He heard a low chuckle from the man at the wheel.

"Which boys? There are no boys in London who know anything about me, Harry. You know I have done well. And how well!"

"Only what I've been told--" began Harry.

"You know just what you've seen! I recognised you that night in Glasgow, boy. You are out after the five thousand pounds' reward, or do you want bigger money than that?"

Harry said nothing.

"We'll go to my place at Barnet and have a little chat," Lew went on. "I am a sensible man, Harry. I don't kick at trouble when it comes along, and you are trouble. And I have never been a greedy man. I have got six hundred thousand pounds--all in currency, and all where I can put my hand on it, so the question of splitting with you won't trouble me any. There is enough for you and me and the rest of the crowd. They are out of the country, by the way, and they don't know as much as you. They don't even know I am Lew Daney."

"Where have you cached the stuff?" asked Stone boldly.

It was a question which invited a lie or an offensive rebuff, but Lew Daney told him the amazing truth. He described the location of the treasury place with the greatest frankness and in the greatest detail. So clear was the description that he might have drawn a plan of the spot. Harry listened incredulously, and it only dawned upon him that the man was speaking the truth when he realised that he had nothing to gain by lying.

After all, he need not have kept the appointment.

They were in the open country now. The car was moving at a leisurely gait. Suddenly Lew switched off the headlamps and ran on his sidelights. "I don't want to attract too much attention," he said. "We'll be getting on the new road in a minute, and there's a cop at the crossing."

They passed the policeman and moved smoothly along the concrete surface of the wide road, always keeping close to the kerb.

A little light suddenly glowed in the dashboard immediately opposite to where Harry was sitting.

"Do you mind?" asked the other coldly. "I want to keep you illuminated. I don't suppose you've been such a fool as to come out without a gun."

Harry looked down; one of Lew's hands was on the driving wheel; the other rested on his lap, holding the butt of a long-barrelled automatic, and the muzzle covered the passenger.

"You'll be surprised to know I have told you the truth. And you won't be surprised to know that I told you the truth because I am going to make it impossible for you to tell the truth to anybody else! There is no cut for you, Harry. You are going to be what I would describe as another of London's undiscovered murder mysteries. Been looking for me, haven't you? I've been looking for you! I have got your record--squealer! You have squealed in prison and out."

He glanced at the driving mirror at his right hand. There were no lights in sight behind him, none before.

Five minutes later a big car, bound for Cambridge, passed a car stationary by the side of the road. Nearby was a broad stretch of water. The car was there for half an hour, and during that time the one man interested was extremely busy.

Near the margin of the lake were a number of pleasure boats, lying keel uppermost on the bank. To launch one was not a very difficult business. To paddle it out two hundred yards from the shore with the aid of a floorboard was not so easy, especially since a very heavy burden lay in the stern. The hardest job of all was to pull the boat ashore and restore it to its keel uppermost position.

The rower came back to the car, and was relieved to find no cyclist policeman standing by its side. He wiped his wet face with a scented silk handkerchief--Lew Daney had always been something of a dandy--and, sitting down at the driving wheel, he turned the car northward and went on into the night.

III

Tim Jordan made a call at Scotland Yard which proved to be a waste of time. That morning he had collected all the back numbers of newspapers he could secure, and had made a careful study of the Lower Clyde Bank murders, and he had a theory.

It was his misfortune to meet an "office man" who was not particularly interested in crime except in so far as it appeared in a statistical record. "I'm afraid, Captain Jordan, I can give you no information. The Chief Constable went back to Glasgow yesterday."

"Have you a record of Lew Daney?" urged Jordan. "I know just how you feel, having an interfering outsider butting into your business, but if this isn't one of Lew Daney's jobs I'm a Dutchman! He is wanted in Johannesburg for a similar, crime--without murder--and the methods are identical."

The office man sighed. "Yes, yes...I'm sure. Write his name down, will you? I'll put through an inquiry to the Records Department."

Altogether a disappointing morning.

Somebody saw Tim come impetuously through the swing doors of the Carlton, and go up the broad stairs three at a time.

Captain Jordan was in no especial hurry; no life and death appointment awaited him; he was, in point of fact, on his way to change his shoes.

"That," said the observer to his companion, "is the Tiger Man!"

"How very dramatic! Is he in a circus or something?" asked the bored young lady who was with him.

He explained Captain Timothy Jordan's peculiar position.

"He's a policeman in Rhodesia. The natives say that he walks like one and hunts like one...a terribly clever fellow...Did I ever tell you the story of the storekeeper who was murdered at Manandalas?"

He was an African millionaire, a person of some consequence; she forced a hypocritical interest and listened.

Tim Jordan was changing. He had landed less than thirty hours before, had an appointment with his tailor, his banker, his solicitor, a dinner engagement with his old colonel, and supper with a man and his wife whom he had met on the boat.

He wished it was with the girl whose voice he had heard on the telephone. He was annoyed with her for leaving his uncle's letter without presenting herself for inspection. Yet he was very happy to be in London, and sang at the top of his voice, which was not a good one. In the midst of his vocal adventures came the page boy.

"Jelf! Who's Jelf?"

He frowned down at the slip of paper that was put before him, and then remembered.

"Shoot him up, will you?"

Jelf came, an undersized man, rather furtive, and just as respectful as anybody would be who wanted a job.

"Who told you I needed a chauffeur?"

The little man wriggled uncomfortably.

"I used to work for Mr. Van Tyl, and I heard you were coming to England, sir, and thought you might like to use this car of mine. She can do eighty."

"Mr. Van Tyl?"

Tim knew twenty South African Van Tyls, and none of them well.

"He knows you, sir, and he said you were coming from Africa, and that you liked a fast car."

"How did you know when I would arrive?" asked Tim.

"I got your name from the shipping company."

Captain Jordan laughed.

"All right," he said. "You deserve something for your enterprise. Let's see that old car of yours. Have it here"--he looked up at the ceiling--"at seven o'clock on Wednesday. Do you know Scotland?"

"Very well, sir," said the man eagerly.

"Well, I'm leaving at six in the morning, and if your car is up to the description, I will hire you. Why did you shave off your moustache?"

The man was startled.

"I--I beg your pardon, sir?" he stammered.

"You had a moustache until quite recently. You shaved it off. You've fingered it twice since you've been here. Have you always worn glasses?"

"Always, sir." said the man, "but my sight's very good."

Tim looked at him for a long time, considering.

"All right. You're probably a crook, but that doesn't matter. Why do you fellows imagine that you can disguise yourselves by ringing the changes on your upper lips?"

"I'm not a crook, sir," began the man. "I've got a character--

"I am sure you have," interrupted Tim. "Bring the machine at the time I said."

Later in the day he saw it and approved.

He came back from his dinner party that night a little disappointed, for people one meets on board usually lose seventy-five per cent. of their glamour when they are met on dry land, and the dinner had been a bore.

"There's a lady waiting to see you, sir."

"A lady?" he said, and then a thought struck him. "A Miss Grier?"

"No, sir, a Mrs. Smith."

He looked past Tim, and the woman who had been sitting in the lounge rose and came towards them. She was tall, good-looking, handsomely dressed. He judged her to be somewhere about the thirties.

"Do you want to see me?" he asked.

She nodded, looked at the porter who stood by, and then:

"Could I see you in your room?" she asked in a low voice.

It was a pleasant voice, deep and rich. Tim hesitated. A man didn't see strange women in is private sitting-room at eleven o'clock at night.

"I don't want to be seen talking to you," she said. "It is very important".

He smiled. "All right. You will lose your reputation. Come along!"

They went up by elevator. He opened the door and ushered her in. It was she who closed the door he had left ajar.

"You are Captain Jordan of the Rhodesian C.I.D., aren't you? My name is Lydia Daney."

He stared at her.

"Lew Daney's wife?"

She nodded.

"The wife of the man who did the Glasgow job," she said coolly. "I thought you'd like to know that."

IV

Tim Jordan stared at the woman.

"The devil you are! It was Daney, then?"

She nodded.

"He's in London somewhere. I'm trying to find him. Do you mind if I smoke?"

She took a jewelled cigarette case from her bag, opened it, and Tim supplied her with a light.

"I am the legal, wedded wife of Lew Daney," she said. "It may surprise you that he has ever done anything legal in his life--but it's the fact."

"Why do you come to me?" he asked bluntly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I knew you were in London. Lew has often spoken about you. As a matter of fact, he spoke today."

"He's in town?"

She nodded.

"He was. And a Miss Grier was in town--a Miss Mary Grier." She spoke slowly.

He remembered now...the girl on the telephone.

"She came from Scotland."

Mrs. Daney blew a ring of smoke to the ceiling, and did not take her eyes off it until it broke.

"She is secretary to an old gentleman in Scotland, and the romance of Lew's young life."

There was a touch of acid in the last phrase.

"And that's the reason for the squeal?" he asked.

She nodded slowly.

"That's the reason for the squeal," she repeated. "I've stood a great deal from Lew. He's been pretty generous about money, though I've had my hard times. But when a man is cool enough to tell his wife that he's in love with another woman, and makes her a cash offer for a divorce--that's how

respectable Lew is getting--the question of money fades out, Captain Jordan."

"The girl came down to see him--?"

She shook her head. "No. If you believe Lew--and he's the world's worst liar, though now and again he tells the truth out of sheer malice--she doesn't even know the stir she's created in his young heart. She's met him--somewhere. A case of love at first sight--and he's fifty if he's a day!"

"Has she been in Africa?"

She shook her head.

"Get that idea out of your head, that Lew is an African worker. He went to the Cape when things were too hot for him. He has been planning big things in this country for years. Africa was an interlude. He wasn't there a year. And he was in love before he went; he told me that. And he means it, Captain Jordan. He's got a way of talking when he means things that you can't mistake if you know him."

She finished her cigarette--it was one of those Russian things that are half mouthpiece--threw it into the fireplace and took another.

"I'm not going to give you the history of my life, but there are many reasons why Lew should play square with me, and I have decided that he had better go."

"To the scaffold, in fact?" said Tim grimly.

She nodded.

"To the scaffold, in fact," she repeated. "It doesn't sound that I'm sane, but I feel very cold-blooded about it."

She rose, still smoking, and paced up and down the room.

"Do you know a man called Stone?"

"Harry the Valet?" Tim nodded.

"He's in London--I hope."

"Who are the other members of the gang?" interrupted Tim.

Her gesture was expressive of her indifference. "I don't know. I never questioned him about them. He shifts his workers--never stays long with the same crowd." She threw the second cigarette, unfinished, into the fire.

"That's all," she said. "You can go to Scotland Yard with the information, but if you send them to me, I'll make them look foolish. From what I've heard, you like a little hunt of your own. Well, you've got a chance. I may change my mind tomorrow and tell Lew I've told you, in which case you will be well advised to keep under cover. I shall probably be dead, but there's no reason why you should be."

"Thank you for those cheering words," said Tim, and led her to the door.

He sat up for two hours, thinking the matter over. There was very little he could take to Scotland Yard; he did not even know where the woman was to be found. The whole story might be a lie; he was the more inclined to view it critically because it confirmed his own theories.

The early hours of the morning brought Jelf and his fast car. Tim looked it over, and for the second time approved. He climbed into the driver's seat.

"Do you know the road from Glasgow to Kinross?"

"Like a book, sir. I've taken parties up there in the summer--

"All right, let's go," said Timothy Jordan. And then: "Do you know Clench House, by any chance?"

The man shook his head.

"I've got an idea it's near Rumble Bridge, sir, but I'm not sure. There's a lot of big houses in that country, and some of the best aristocracy live there."

"The person I'm week-ending with is not an aristocrat--not by a darned sight," said Tim Jordan grimly.

V

They called the place Clench House because, by repute, Ben Clench was visible from the little hill behind. It lay between Kinross and Glasgow and had several histories. There had been a castle here; you saw the footings of it in the firs a quarter of a mile north of the house itself. Archaeologists had varying theories. Local historians who prepared guidebooks for the use of the unlettered Southerner allowed their imagination the fullest rein, and brought Bannockburn into it.

It was a big, ugly building behind a stone wall, gaunt-faced, depressing, and made lop-sided by a monstrous garage which had once been a chapel by all accounts.

It boasted its own private graveyard. There were huge mounds beyond the orchard and a solid-looking mausoleum of granite, bearing a Gaelic inscription, which the weather of centuries had effaced.

Mr. Awkwright never ceased to complain of the place. He was a thin, complaining old man, lined of face, very rich, very mean, and he hated Scotland. He hated England as intensely; France came into the category of unpopular countries, as did Holland, Egypt, Monte Carlo and Italy.

He had never lived anywhere else. He had in his youth married a Miss Brodie, and through her claimed Scottish descent, wore the Brodie tartan (without any title to the distinction), ate porridge with a wry face, would have attended church if there had been a church of his persuasion to attend, and compromised with family prayers twice daily.

He found it difficult to keep servants, but not so difficult to keep Mary Grier, who was his secretary. Young ladies, and pretty young ladies of education, with no visible means of support, are easier to find than cooks. And Mary was held by a bond more enduring than a contract. She did not leave Mr. Awkwright's service for the same reason that a convict did not leave a prison. She had been sentenced to service. Perhaps for life.

Stocker did not come to prayers, because he was in the house but not of the household. He was one of the permanencies that Mr. Awkwright had taken over with his lease. He could not discharge him without discharging himself from his residence, which he had hired furnished at a ridiculously low figure from the London agents of Mr. Ledbetter, the absentee owner.

Mr. Ledbetter spent most of his time in warmer climates. He was, said Stocker the butler (quite unnecessarily), a great traveller. Stocker was a big man, on the fat side, with a large, fat face and blue, unintelligent eyes. He had been, he said, with Mr. Ledbetter since he was so high. He said most of these things to Mr. Awkwright's pretty secretary.

Mary smiled.

"Your knowledge is extensive and peculiar, Stocker," she said.

He nodded gloomily.

"There's very few people in the world I don't know, miss, including crowned 'eads. I've spent me life making studies of human beings, though I don't call Mr. Awkwright a human being."

Mary was taking tea in the big, chilly drawing-room alone.

Mr. Awkwright had gone into Glasgow to consult his harassed stockbroker. He was a petty punter, speculating in margins to infinitesimal sums. In addition he was interested in the sport of thoroughbred horse-racing, and had complicated bets with a Glasgow bookmaker, never losing more than a few shillings a day, and more often winning.

He used to spend his evenings after family prayers working out the form of horses that were due to run the next day, his calculations being supplemented by private information, for he received on an average six private wires or special letters from gentlemen who, for a small consideration, conveyed the cream of stable intelligence to a select list of clients. There was little that happened in the racing world which he did not know.

This was one of his illusions.

Mary remembered something she had heard in the bus driving back from the station.

"Stocker!" She called him back as he was leaving the room. "Is Mr. Ledbetter a philanthropist?"

He frowned.

"A what, miss?"

"Does he give things away?"

Stocker smiled.

'No, miss, he's a very careful man, is Mr. Ledbetter."

"Then how is it that Mr. Awkwright can hire Clench House for such a ridiculously low figure?"

Stocker came slowly back.

"He's particular, miss. He'd sooner take a low figure from an old gentleman like Mr. Awkwright than a big figure from some of these harum-scarum young people who come up for season and turn a house into a bear garden. Who's that young gentleman coming today, miss?"

Mary got up with a feeling of guilt.

"Oh, Captain Jordan. I promised to see to his room--

"It is all ready, miss. From Africa, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's Mr. Awkwright's nephew."

"In the Army, eh?" said Stocker. He rubbed his hand across his massive chin musingly. "It's funny, but soldiering never appealed to me, miss. I had a young brother, in the Grenadier Guards, but he deserted."

The girl shook her head.

"No, he's in the police--the South African Police. He's a sort of Commissioner."

"Fancy!" said Stocker.

It was a favourite expression of his, and stood for amazement.

"Fancy, miss! In the police, eh? I'll bet that's a good job. I've never been to Africa. A young cousin of mine named 'Erbert Smith got a job in a tea field or whatever they call it--

"Plantation," she suggested.

He nodded.

"Fancy being in the police. I'll bet he's a clever gentleman?"

Mary wasn't quite sure about this. There were moments when Tim Jordan was the most brilliant of Mr. Awkwright's nephews; there were times when he was a spendthrift and a wastrel. It depended very much upon the mood the old man was in when he discussed him, and the amount of money Tim required to meet his mess bills and the etceteras of his existence.

She gathered from Mr. Awkwright that he was a sort of favoured pensioner, a dependent whose extravagance was leading his devoted uncle to ruin. She was to learn later that Mr. Awkwright was officially the guardian of the young man of twenty-eight, the executor of his father's will, and, until he was thirty, his paymaster. It was one of those eccentric wills that elderly men make, and Tim Jordan had submitted to the indignity with exemplary patience.

Mary discovered this within an hour of knowing him. He came in a mud-spattered speed car as she was going up to dress for dinner.

Mr. Awkwright telephoned subsequently that he would not be home that night, and gave specific instructions as to the attitude she should adopt towards the visitor.

"There's no need to sit up late; he's quite capable of looking after himself. And you're not to discuss my affairs, Mary. You understand?"

She sighed. "Yes, I understand," she said.

"And don't answer any questions he puts to you about yourself."

Mary listened meekly, and went back to the dining-hall, where the young man was smoking his first after-dinner cigarette.

"May I ask you as a special favour not to let Mr. Awkwright know that you have told me the story of your gallant exploits?" she asked.

He smiled delightedly.

"Is that how it struck you? I suppose I am a boastful person. And I thought I was going to be so bored at this horrible place."

He was a personable young man; the hair at his temples was slightly grey (he had told her all about the lioness that came on him through his bungalow window). His skin was brown and clear; his eyes were bright with laughter. Tim Jordan found life a most amusing business. "When I saw this mausoleum," he went on, "my heart sank! And then out of the yawning mouth of the tomb, came light! I am going to stay here three months."

"You are going when you said you'd go--on Saturday," she said. "May I impress you again that I am one of the servants of the house, and the last instruction I received from Mr. Awkwright was that in no circumstances was I to indulge in any familiarity. So far you've been very, very good."

He lit another cigarette and looked up at the raftered ceiling.

"It's rather like living in the parish hall, isn't it? What a devil of a place to spend your life! I suppose you get it cheap? Uncle Ben must be worth a million pounds--don't look so incredulous; he's enormously rich. And I'm the only one who doesn't care two hoots where he leaves the money. Have you met any of his wife's relations? They're ghastly! She was a Brodie--has he told you that? Have you ever seen him dance the Highland Fling? He can be most abominably Scottish. All these Southern people who claim the Highlands as their home get that way. They have pipers who walk around the table--has he got a piper?"

Mary shook her head.

"He wouldn't pay him. But I'll bet he has bagpipe selections on the gramophone!"

He was the sort of man you knew at once or never knew. When he arrived he had taken her by the hand, kissed her, very coolly, claiming her as a cousin, and had done things which in other men would have been intolerable.

He looked over his shoulder at the watchful Stocker.

"Are you looking after my chauffeur?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Stocker. "His room is ready, but I haven't seen him. After he put the car away he went down to the village." Tim Jordan favoured him with a delightful smile.

"Then," he said, "you can put yourself away, my friend! If I want any more coffee, I'll ring for it."

Stocker retired.

"I can't abide servants who stand behind me," explained Tim. "Ever since a certain day in Umtali--but I'm boasting again. Now tell me all that my dear relative has said about me."

"There is such a thing as loyalty to one's employer," she said, and he chuckled at this.

"Don't let a little thing like that stand in your way. He's a rum old bird. I suppose he's told you that I am a poor relation? He generally does. Be respectful to me--I'm very rich--perhaps not as rich as the late Mr. Croesus, but reasonably wealthy."

"When are you going back to Africa?" she asked.

"Never," was his reply. "I've left the service. I haven't broken it to Uncle Ben, but he'll know in good time. I've got a flat in London, and I'm going to live the life of a young man about town. I went to Scotland Yard today and tried to persuade them to take me on as a commissioner. They put me straight away into the refrigerator, and I haven't thawed since."

He looked at her coldly. "By the way, do you know a man called Daney?"

He thought she hadn't heard the question, and repeated it. She was staring blankly at the panelled wall. "No, I have never heard of him," she said steadily.

"That's curious, because--"

He stopped, got up and moved noiselessly to the door. With a quick movement he pulled it open, Stocker was standing there.

"I was just coming in, sir--" he began.

"Just stay out," said Tim. He was thoughtful after that, but with little inducement went on to speak about himself. "I want to settle down to the real business of life, which is finding bad men and discovering why they're bad."

"In other words, you want to be a detective? How fascinating!"

"Don't be sarcastic," he warned her. "I have been very successful in Africa. My reputation stands at a premium. I have all the qualities of a good police officer--

"Do they include modesty?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No; modesty is a stupid affectation."

"Quite a lot of people suffer from it," she suggested.

He smiled, "Not me!"

This girl puzzled him. He thought that he had known her from the moment he had met her, as she, he guessed, knew him. But every hour in her society brought a new question-mark against his judgment. Behind her self-possession and poise he had imagined the respectable capability of the trained private secretary, but there was something more than that. She was--he pondered an exact description. "Deep" was one word, but it carried too sinister a meaning. She gave him an impression which, as a police officer, was not unfamiliar, that she was living one life and concealing another. Only, she was successful, and his earlier "clients" had failed miserably to sustain the deception.

He was an adept in the art of cross-examination.

"Yes, I have a family--a mother and a sister."

"In Scotland?"

She regarded him carefully. "No, not in Scotland. They have a house outside of London. Mother is an invalid. I saw her when I was in town."

Her lips pressed tightly together when she had finished. He knew that she had told him just as much about herself as she intended. Then suddenly, as she leaned across the table to strike a match for him, he saw something...

"That was a pretty bad cut," he said. She drew her hand back quickly and pulled down her sleeve. The scar ran from a few inches above her wrist to somewhere out of sight. He saw her face go red and white. "Yes--I cut it," she said breathlessly. "A knife slipped when I was...cutting bread. Have you any more questions?"

"I'm sorry," he said, and really was. The pink came back to her cheeks and she smiled. "Mr. Awkwright told me not to answer any questions," she said with a touch of her old flippancy. She looked at the solemn-faced clock on the mantelshelf. "I'm going to bed soon. Will you look after your chauffeur?"

"Tell me one thing," he said as she rose. "Why do you bury yourself with my fossilised relative? There must be lots of jobs--

"I suppose there are," she interrupted.

She went to the door and came back. "Do you know Mr. Awkwright very well?" she asked.

He had to confess that he had only met the old man three times in his life.

"No--practically I know nothing about him, except that he was married twice and had a child who died. I know that he's as mean as a stage, miser--"

She stopped him. "There is a lot about him that is rather wonderful," she said.

Mary went to bed soon after ten o'clock. Captain Jordan's room was three from her own, and she was falling to sleep when she heard his light footsteps pass quickly along the corridor, and the soft thud of his door as it closed. She dropped into sleep and woke again, it seemed instantly, though hours had passed.

She sat up in bed, her heart beating quickly. Something had wakened her, something that had made a bad dream which she could not remember.

She listened; there was no sound. It must have been imagination, she thought, and, recovering her breath, she slid down into the bed again. The window was slightly open; it was misty outside, and above the mist the moon was shining. She could see smoky wisps of fog coming slowly through the open casement, and was half inclined to get up and close the window. And then--

She heard distinctly a noise at her door, a confused, scrambling noise. "Who is there?" she asked.

She heard it again--not a tap, a sort of scratch and a groan.

Springing out of bed, she switched on the light, ran to the door and pulled it open. As she did so, a man fell almost into her arms.

She saw his face in the half-light, ghastly white. And then she saw, under the hand that was clasping his throat, the blood welling, and screamed.

She tried to hold him up, but he went sliding through her arms to the floor. She heard a quick patter of feet in the corridor outside, and Tim Jordan came in. He went down on his knee by the side of the man.

"How odd!" he said, in his quick, staccato way. "Jelf...my chauffeur!"

The man was fully dressed; his boots were wet and muddy.

"Can we get a doctor?" she faltered.

He shook his head.

At that moment the man opened his eyes; his gaze wandered for a while from one to the other. Finally it rested on the horrified girl. His lips parted.

"He did it!" he whispered. "The man we saved you from!"

Tim saw her wilt and caught her as she fell. He carried her out of the room and gave her into the charge of one of the women servants. When he got back to Jelf the man was dead.

Stocker, in shirt and trousers, came running in from his room below. From him Jordan borrowed an electric torch and followed the trail of blood, which ran the length of the corridor.

The trail stopped at a little door deeply recessed in the wall.

The door was unlocked and led to a private stairway, and eventually into the stable yard at the back of the house. Jordan went back to his room, dressed quickly, and followed the blood trail. It passed through an open gateway into the garden, and here it was lost in the wet soil.

Something glittered in the light of his lamp. Stooping, he picked it up. It was a small gold cigarette case, and it was open. Inside was an inscription: "To Lew, from his wife."

VI

Examining the case carefully by the light of the lantern he carried, Tim saw that one of the inner linings was loose, and inserted the point of his knife. It came back, a thin gold leaf that was hinged. Inside there were half a dozen sets of figures which he could not distinguish in the lining. At the bottom of the case was a word, "treasure." All the writing was beautifully engraved.

He fastened back the false side of the case, slipped it into his pocket and returned to the house to make a more careful examination. The figures were now obvious, in all about twelve lines.

Stocker arrived with hot coffee in time to see Tim drop the case into his pocket.

"Did you find anything, sir?" he asked. "What a terrible thing to have happened!"

"Where is Miss Grier?" asked Tim.

"She's gone into a spare room. One of the maids told me she was dressing. Did you know the man, sir?"

There was a note of anxiety in his voice for which the tragedy of the evening might have accounted.

"I've never seen him before I engaged him a couple of days ago," said Tim.

Stocker scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I suppose he didn't by any chance make any kind of statement?" he suggested rather than asked.

"None."

"The girl who was outside the door thought she heard him speaking," insisted Stocker.

"Which girl?"

"The servant girl--the first one to get down."

"He said something which was quite indistinguishable," said Tim. Was he mistaken, or did he hear a little sigh from the stout man, and see in his eyes evidence of his relief?

"Poor Mr. Awkwright will be in a sad state when be hears about this," he said. "He doesn't like unpleasantness, and I wouldn't be surprised if this sent him to bed for a week."

"How long has Mr. Awkwright been living here?"

Stacker looked up at the raftered ceiling.

"Off and on for about four years. He took the place, went away for six months and came back again. Why, sir?"

Tim did not satisfy his curiosity. He nodded a dismissal, but Stacker lingered on; "Excuse me asking, sir, but you were the first person on the spot when this thing happened--could you tell me whether Miss Mary had her door unlocked?"

Tim stared at him.

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering," said Stacker.

He looked past Tim and made a movement forward.

"Can I get anything for you, miss?"

"Nothing, thank you, Stacker."

Mary Grier had come into the room, very cool, very self-possessed, and, if you could forget the pallor of her face, quite unmoved by her awful experience.

She sat down on the opposite side of the refectory table where Tim was sitting, took a cigarette from the little silver box by her elbow, and lit it. The hand that held the match did not tremble, Tim noticed.

"Yes, I think I will have some coffee, Stocker," she said.

Tim waited till the man was gone.

"You knew Jelf?"

She shook her head. "I don't remember him," she said. "I don't think that I have ever consciously seen him."

"What did he mean when he talked about the person from whom he rescued you?"

She blew a spiral of smoke across the table.

"He meant just what he said," was her quiet reply. "About three years ago I was attacked by a man, on the Kinross road. I think he was drunk." She held out her arm and bared it. "He had a knife." She touched the long

cicatrice gently. "I told you I did this by accident, but it wasn't true. I hadn't the least desire to recall a very unhappy incident. If those two men hadn't been near I should have been killed, I think."

"And one of them was Jelf?" he said, in surprise.

"I don't know," she answered, and spoke truly. "It was nearly dark. The man who picked me up and brought me back to the house was--was the only one I really saw."

"Who was the man who attacked you?"

She looked down at the glowing end of her cigarette.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. He was a stranger."

"Did you inform the police?" he asked.

There was a moment's hesitation. "No; I didn't want to get my name in the newspapers. But I should have been much happier than I am."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"It didn't strike me that you were particularly unhappy."

"Neither am I," she smiled.

"And it was the same man tonight who killed Jelf--?" began Tim.

"For God's sake don't talk about it, Captain Jordan!" she said.

Her voice broke, and he saw now something of the terror which that mask of hers hid.

"I don't want to talk about it--I won't talk about it! And if you ask me questions I'll go out of the room."

He stretched out his hand and caught hers. "Then I'm not going to ask questions," he said.

Stocker came in at that moment and served the coffee, and there was silence until he had taken his departure.

"He was very anxious to know whether your door was locked."

She nodded. "I know; he's very keen about that--my locking my door."

"Why?" he asked.

She lit another cigarette; this time her hand was trembling.

"It's horrible--horrible!" she said in a low voice. "Have the police come yet?"

"They won't be very long," he said. "They were on their way soon after I telephoned them."

She looked up at him quickly, and was about to speak, but apparently changed her mind.

"You were going to say--?"

She shook her head hesitantly, and looked at him again--a long, searching scrutiny.

"I suppose you'll think that what I'm going to ask you is rather extraordinary...you're a police officer and you won't understand...No, I won't ask you!"

"I think you'd better," said Tim quietly. "When the police come you want me not to repeat what the man said--Jelf, I mean."

Her eyes opened a little wider.

"How did you know that?" she gasped, and he laughed.

"My well-known instinct. And, anyway, it would be awkward for you if I repeated what a man said in his delirium. Perhaps some day you'll take me into your confidence."

Again she opened her lips to speak, but closed them firmly again. Then, after a pause: "Perhaps I will," she said.

One thing struck him as being curious: she made no further reference to Mr. Awkwright or to the effect this dreadful happening might have upon him. Awkwright was an elderly man; even a few years ago he had seemed decrepit; and such a shock might have the most serious consequences..

If the truth be told, Tim Jordan was in some awe of this old man, who had never shown him the least affection or friendship. Indeed, he had not concealed from his ward that he regarded his "guardianship" as one of the trials of his life.

Tim knew little about him, except that he was a secretive, suspicious man, who had odd and petty recreations--he had been a small gambler all his life. Yet he was a careful-living man, and a shrewd investor when real investments had to be made.

The police arrived as Mary was finishing her third cigarette, and there was an unpleasant hour during which she answered questions which seemed

irrelevant (quite a number of them were), and reconstructed, for the enlightenment of the officers, the tragedy she had witnessed.

Jelf's body went away with the police. The doctor who came with them described the wound as having been caused by a knife used with considerable strength. The murderer must have come upon his victim from behind and stabbed him before Jelf had a chance of putting up a defence. There were no marks either on his hands or on any other part of his body.

Tim went to the door to see the last police car go, and then returned to the dining-room to find Mary lying across the table with her head on her arms, half asleep. He packed her off to bed, sending one of the maids with her, went up to his own room, had a bath, and was back in the dining-hall by five.

"No, thank you, sir," said Stocker when it was suggested he should go to bed too. "I sleep very little, and it's past five o'clock. These servants will be fit for nothing, and I had better wait up and look after things. May I suggest that you take a few hours--"

"Certainly you may," said Tim cheerfully, "and as I've given you permission I shan't return the rude answer which would otherwise be inevitable! No; as soon as it gets light, I'm going out to look round."

CHAPTER 2

I

It proved to be a misty morning, but he had no difficulty in following the trail he had traced overnight. One thing was certain: Jelf knew the house. He had found the private way in to the main floor, which he must have opened with one of the two skeleton keys that were found in his pocket when his clothes were searched.

Another discovery was that Jelf had in his possession some five hundred pounds in bank-notes, so there seemed no pressing reason why he should have accepted the job of chauffeur.

Near to where he had found the cigarette case Tim discovered a blood-stained silk handkerchief, and remembered that the "chauffeur" had had this rather conspicuously displayed in his top left-hand pocket. Here might be an explanation of the discovery of the gold case. The man had pulled out the handkerchief and pulled the case with it. It had contained three or four cigarettes, but no other clue than the engraved figures.

He could find no trail beyond the road, but, walking fifty yards, he came to a chained wicket gate which led into the cemetery. A very low wall surrounded this, and after searching up and down in a vain effort to pick up the trail, Tim jumped over the wall and wandered through the weed-grown patch amidst the mounds and crumbling stones that stood to the glory of departed generations.

He had heard about the mausoleum, and had seen it from a distance. It was a granite hut with a stone roof. How old it was he could not guess. On one side was an effaced inscription crudely cut and wholly indecipherable. The doors, however, had been more recently fitted. They were about five feet high and two and a half feet wide, and were of gunmetal. There was a brief inscription in raised letters:

"THOS. BRODIE, ESQ. AGED 70. UNIVERSALLY RESPECTED."

On the arched top of the door was a smaller inscription;

"THESE DOORS WERE ERECTED BY THE GRANDSONS OF THOS. BRODIE IN 1925, AS A MARK. OF THEIR RESPECT FOR THE MEMORY OF A GOOD MAN AND A GREAT BENEFACTOR."

The end of the tomb where the bronzed doors were was that which faced inward from the road. It must have been a family tomb; generations of Brodies must have been buried there. Tim began to understand the peculiar attraction of this gaunt house for Mr. Awkwright, a Brodie by marriage.

A high wall separated the graveyard from the grounds about the house, and, save for the wicket and the free-and-easy method of jumping the wall, there seemed to be no other entrance.

He was walking away when something attracted his attention, and, stooping, he picked up three sodden cigarettes. They were made by a London tobacconist and were not of a kind that can be usually bought at any tobacconist's shop. Moreover, they had this interest for Tim, that they were exact fellows of the cigarettes he had found in Jelf's case. They lay together as if they had been deliberately thrown down. None of them had been lit, and on each of the three he detected the little depression made by the elastic band which bisected one half of the cigarette case.

Jelf had dropped them there; he had been in the churchyard on the previous night.

Tim began a search for bloodstains, and walked the whole length of the wall, scrutinising every stone, without success.

As he walked slowly back to the house a girl came through the mist to meet him. It was Mary Grier.

"Of course I didn't go to bed!" she said scornfully. And then, in a more serious tone: "Did you find anything?"

"Nothing," he said, "except these."

He showed her the cigarettes and told her of the case he had found. She made no comment.

"You haven't found any--anybody, have you? I mean, there is no trace of the murderer?" she asked anxiously.

"No; he got away. The police are investigating in every village. It's too early for them to report, but I should imagine they'd find him."

"I hope they won't find him," she said in a low voice, and was turning away when he caught her by the arm.

"Why do you say that, Mary?"

She forced a smile.

"I don't know...hysteria, I suppose! Or possibly I have a criminal mind--I once stole seventy pounds! Don't smile--I did--seventy pounds in bank-notes out of a steel box. I was desperate--you don't know how desperate I was!"

She was overwrought, so near to hysteria that her emotion might be mistaken for the real thing; and he knew she was telling the truth. Once she had stolen seventy pounds, and the knowledge of this was an obsession. It had to be blurted out now, when her nerves were on edge and she was near to breaking point.

"You stole seventy pounds, did you?" he chuckled. "That's nothing--I once stole a thousand! We're fellow criminals, Mary, and neither of us has been found out--"

"I was." The words came jerkily. "Almost as soon as it was stolen...and there was no escape for me. I wasn't even called upon to lie."

She was breathing quickly, and when he took her arm he found she was shaking.

"Let's walk," he said authoritatively, and as she went by his side obediently, "I told you to sleep, and you didn't, and that is why you're jumpy. It is a fine morning--let us eat something!"

Nearing the house, she told him more calmly that she had telephoned the news to Mr, Awkwright, and that he was returning at once.

"I don't think I'll have any breakfast," she said. "It's very early....I really will try to sleep."

He left her at the foot of the broad stairs that led out of the cold, gloomy hall.

"I think the young lady's very wise."

Tim turned with a start; he had not seen Stocker in the shadows.

"Oh, you do, do you?" he said, and his tone was not of the friendliest. "Where did you spring from?"

"I came in after you, sir. You've been to our churchyard."

"How do you know?" asked Tim sharply.

He could not have been seen from the house for the mist was still thick.

"I followed Miss Mary when she went out, and I saw you," said Stocker coolly.

"Why did you follow her?"

The stout man smiled.

"After what happened in the night, sir, I didn't think it was very safe for the young lady to be wandering about a lonely road by herself, and I took the liberty of going after her."

There was no reply to this, Tim felt.

"Were you here some years ago, when Miss Grier was attacked on the road by a man?"

Stocker nodded.

"Yes, sir, I have always been here during the tenancy of Mr, Awkwright. I remember it very well, sir. I gave the young lady first-aid."

"Did they ever find the man who did it?"

"I can't remember," said Stocker, with a beaming smile, "but I rather imagine he escaped."

"Mr. Awkwright gave you orders to look after her, eh?"

"No, sir, Mr. Awkwright has never expressed a view on the matter."

At seven o'clock came Mr. Awkwright himself, a pallid, trembling old man with a harsh voice, eyes that glared suspiciously from Tim to the watchful Stocker, and a manner that was constitutionally antagonistic to all humanity.

"What's all this, what's all this?" He spoke rapidly and with unexpected vigour. "Bringing a chauffeur here, Jordan, and getting him murdered...in my house! What's the meaning of it? It wasn't necessary for you to come here at all: I wrote to you and told you it wasn't necessary. You could have seen my lawyers in town. If you hadn't come this wouldn't have happened. Where is Miss Grier?"

"She's lying down, sir," said Stocker.

"Get her--I want her; I have some very important letters to write."

"And she has some very important sleep to get," said Tim coolly. "Dictate 'em to me. I write a fairish kind of shorthand."

The old man scowled at him, hesitated, and then: "Come into my study," he said.

Tim followed him along the corridor into the untidy room.

Its only title to the description the old man gave of it was that here he studied the form of thoroughbred racehorses.

Tim was puzzled. Benjamin Awkwright was acting; he was certain of it from the moment the old man had come into the house and begun snapping his questions and comments. Why was he acting? What had he to conceal? All this bullying, hectoring manner of his was put on for the occasion; the real Mr. Awkwright was betrayed by the white face, the quivering hands, and the pathetic droop of his mouth.

"Sit down, Jordan," said the old man, and dropped into his own comfortable desk chair with a groan. "I'm sorry this thing has happened, but it can't be helped. I suppose you've no idea who killed your man?"

"None," said Tim.

"Did it happen in the house?"

Tim shook his head.

"No; on the road. It seems a senseless sort of murder. I haven't told the police, but before he died Jelf said that he had been stabbed by the same man who attacked Miss Grier."

"What?"

Old Awkwright came to his feet, glaring at the young man.

The colour of his face had become suddenly livid. In his wide-open eyes was a horror he could not conceal.

"That's a lie!" he quavered. "She didn't tell me that--and she would have told me!"

As suddenly as he rose he collapsed over the desk. Tim thought he had fainted, but he waved away all offers of assistance.

"I'm all right," he mumbled. "Indigestion....Sit down, sit down, Jordan."

He seemed to have shrunk. His face, entirely colourless, appeared even more shrivelled.

"Tell me all about it. Don't mind me, Jordan. I'm rather upset this morning. At my age...being called out of bed with this dreadful news."

Tim Jordan told the story briefly, and the old man listened without interruption.

"You know nothing about this man Jelf?" he quavered at the finish of Tim's narrative. "Who he was, where he came from? Why did you engage the man? Why did you bring him here? It's the sort of thing you've done all your life. You haven't considered me in the least...thoughtless, selfish!"

He was working himself up to a fury, but behind his anger was fear, an anguish of mind which he could not conceal. Tim recognised, too, the antagonism that the old man had always shown to him.

"I wish to God I'd never seen you or heard of you!" he went on violently. "Why did your father burden me with your affairs? I'm going to put an end to it. My lawyers will settle with you!"

Tim was staggered by his vehemence, though he could understand that his guardian was temporarily knocked over by the dreadful thing which had happened in his house.

The old mouth drooped even more pathetically.

"I hate this country, I hate this house. God hasn't been good to me! Life has been a curse to me..."

Tim made his escape, and the broken old man did not notice he had gone.

He strolled out into the garden, if garden it could be called, walked along the front of the house, and came to the big door of the chapel garage. It was detached from the house, a high-walled building with mullioned windows that once had held priceless specimens of stained glass. The structure was a very old one; the granite walls had weathered and in places were covered with ivy.

He walked all round the building and came back to the big door, where to his surprise he found Stocker.

"A queer old place, sir." Stocker beamed at him. "It goes back to the twelfth century, so they say. There used to be a castle here...." He became descriptive.

"What is inside?" asked Tim, stopping the flow of garbled history.

Stocker put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a key and, thrusting it into the lock, turned it and pulled open one of the leaves of the two doors. Tim walked in. He had expected to find an untidy litter of old tyres, petrol tins and spare parts, but the interior of the garage was in a remarkable state of orderliness.

There were two cars--a big roadster, covered by a waterproof sheet, and a smaller machine--and a powerful-looking farm tractor on caterpillar wheels.

"Where is Jelf's machine?" he asked.

"He took it to the village, sir, Mr. Ledbetter is rather particular about strange cars being garaged here. We once had a fire, or nearly had a fire, as the result of a chauffeur's carelessness."

"Whose car is that?" Tim pointed to the big roadster under the cover.

"Mr. Ledbetter's, sir. He does a lot of motoring when he's at home. The smaller one belongs to Mr. Awkwright."

"And the tractor?"

Stocker smiled.

"That is ours, sir. We intended farming some land--we have got about a hundred acres--and Mr. Ledbetter purchased the tractor, and then changed his mind."

Tim examined the powerful machine carelessly. Behind the driver's seat, and hanging to the back of the car, was a coil of steel rope. The machine had done very little work: there was no sign of clay or mud on the caterpillar; and he questioned the butler.

"No, sir, it has never been on the field. I wanted Mr. Ledbetter to sell it, but he's rather peculiar; he never sells things he has purchased. In fact, he has refused a very large offer for the house--much more than it's worth. I notice you're looking at the padlock and chain. That is another of Mr. Ledbetter's peculiarities. He doesn't like things used until he has decided how they can be used."

"So that if you wanted to take the tractor out you couldn't?"

"We never wish to take the tractor out--I know nothing of agriculture."

Tim came out of the garage, apparently unimpressed. Unless Mr. Ledbetter had been in the house very recently, Stocker was lying; for on the solid stone floor there was a distinct mark of a track which had been recently made.

Tim Jordan had hoped to leave Clench House a few days after his arrival, but the death of Jelf involved an inquiry, at which he had to give evidence.

He saw very little of Mary the first day. The three of them dined together almost in silence, Mr. Awkwright glowering at the girl every time she attempted to make conversation. After dinner he took her away to his study, and Tim gave up hope of seeing her again that night; but just as he was thinking of going to bed she returned, looking very tired. Looking at her closely, he saw that she had been crying. She might have used all manner of methods to hide the fact, but they did not deceive him.

She had something to say to him; he realised that she had come back for that purpose when she moved her position from the end of the table and sat opposite to him.

"Captain Jordan, Mr. Awkwright says that the inquiry will be ended, as far as you're concerned, the day after tomorrow, Are you going back to London?"

"Yes," he said, in surprise, "but I thought I should be here a week."

She shook her head. "Mr. Awkwright thinks that it can be arranged for your evidence to be taken."

"Does he want to get rid of me?" he asked bluntly.

"Don't you want to go?" she countered. "You ought to be very happy! If I could only--" She stopped suddenly.

"If you could only go? Why don't you?"

She drew a quick breath. "Don't be absurd. Why should I want to go?"

She took out of the little bag which lay before her a slip of paper. "When you get back to London will you have your solicitors see Mr. Awkwright's and arrange the transfer of your money? He is very anxious to--" She hesitated for a word.

"Get rid of me?" he suggested, and she smiled faintly.

"Something like that."

She looked at him for a long time.

"Are you going to tell me?" he asked gently, and she started.

"Tell you what? There is nothing to tell."

"There's a lot to tell," he said; "but at the moment you feel you can't, eh?"

She rose abruptly. "I wish you'd go back to London," she said. "I'm serious. You can't do any good here, and I feel your presence is worrying Mr. Awkwright."

"Worrying you?" he asked.

There was a little pause.

"Yes"--almost defiantly. "It does worry me a little."

"But why?"

She either could not or would not answer this.

"Are you expecting another murder?"

It was a stupid question to put--a little cruel. The effect upon her was remarkable. Her face went whiter than it had been.

"How can you say that?" she asked, and, turning quickly, almost ran out of the room.

Tim Jordan was puzzled. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he had suddenly turned over a stone and seen all manner, of strange, creeping things that the imagination of man had never conceived.

What was the girl doing in all this? Who was the man who had once wounded her? Stacker could tell, but he recognised the futility of questioning the butler. It would be better, perhaps, to follow her advice and take his belongings to the nearest inn, for he realised that it was not so desirable that he should return to London as it was that he should leave the house.

The inquiry would take two or three days, but he would be able to contribute very little to the sum of information which the police had, and already they were in possession of the vital facts..

That night when he went to bed he locked the door, which was an unusual proceeding on his part. But there was no interruption to his slumbers. When he woke the sun was shining through his window, and, dressing, he went downstairs and out through the garden on to the road.

On the previous afternoon he had handed over to the police the gold cigarette case, but he had only done this after he had been into the village, discovered a photographer, and had the inscription carefully photographed. He had made no mention of the cigarettes he had found in the graveyard; they were his own private clue. He had made up his mind to work independently of the official investigators, but was still in some dilemma as to where and how he should start.

He examined the enlarged print he had secured, but found no inspiration there. When he came back to the house after his walk, Stocker had laid a solitary breakfast on the long refectory table. That stout man was very cheerful.

"Have you found anything, sir?"

It irritated Tim that the man should assume he was in search of information.

"Why should I find anything?"

"I thought you were unusually interested in the case, sir. Naturally, being a police officer, you would be interested. My own opinion is that the murder was committed by a tramp. There have been some pretty bad characters about here lately."

"That's fairly obvious, isn't it?" said Tim dryly. "One of them was a murderer. Did you know Jelf?"

"Jelf? You mean the unfortunate man? No, sir, I have never seen him before. In fact, I didn't see him at all. He spoke to one of the kitchen-maids, and took his car down to the village before I could see him."

"You didn't by any chance go into the village?"

"No, sir."

Tim smiled.

"If I told you that you were seen a few hundred yards from here just after dark, quarrelling with Jelf, what would you say? You were seen by two people. I think it is only fair to tell you that that is the information which the police have and which they communicated to me last night."

Stocker was in no sense perturbed.

"Was that the fellow?" he said coolly. "I certainly did have a slight disagreement with a man I met quite by accident. He was rather drunk. I thought he was a local. So that was Mr. Jelf!"

Visibly he was not put out by the news, but Tim detected a sort of tightening-up of his caution. There was an indefinable change both in his attitude and in his speech. He still preserved the appearance of carelessness. Actually, Tim saw, he was alert, with all his defences set against surprise.

"It only shows you how perfectly innocent people can be implicated," he said. "The man knocked against me as I was walking back to the house--I invariably take a little constitutional before turning in. I tried to avoid him, but he was intent upon picking a quarrel. I admit he annoyed me. I probably said things to him which in the circumstances I now regret. Eventually he went on his way, and I returned to the house. So that was Jelf!" he repeated for the third time. "I had never connected him with the unfortunate man who was murdered."

"What time was this?" asked Jordan.

Stocker looked up at the ceiling.

"It must have been nearly eleven o'clock. It was just after you had gone to bed," he said.

When the police came later they interrogated Stocker, and seemed satisfied with the explanation he offered. It had some support from other information they had received. Jelf had spent the evening at a little public-house, where he drank, spirits and was indeed inclined to be quarrelsome.

The day was a particularly dull one for Tiger Tim Jordan.

He lunched alone and did not see Mary Grier until late in the afternoon. She spent most of the day behind the closed door of Mr. Awkwright's study. Apparently he was a man who had a great deal of business, for Tim heard a typewriter going every time he paced past the study window in the hope of catching a glimpse of her.

The Chief Constable came with the police, and Tim was told there would be no objection made if he left, providing he was prepared to return to give evidence at the adjourned inquest.

Jelf had given him a London address, which his employer had passed on to Scotland Yard, but here they drew blank. It was a little furnished room in South London, which the man had not occupied for a week. A search of his few belongings gave no other clue to his identity.

Tim was coming away from the telephone in the hall when he saw the girl. She was hurrying towards the foot of the stairs, and was apparently not particularly anxious to see him, for she would have passed on with a nod, but he stood squarely in her way.

"When am I going to see you?" he asked.

"I don't know; I am rather busy."

She was looking very tired, and he had not the heart to force his company upon her, but returned to the solitude of the drawing-room. He had not been there very long when Stocker came in.

"There's a 'phone message for you, sir."

"Is it the police?"

"No, I don't think so, sir. The lady wouldn't tell me her name."

"A lady?"

He got up quickly and went out into the hall. Somebody asked him in a low voice if he was Captain Jordan, and when he replied in the affirmative: "Can I see you?"

"Who is it?" he asked. The voice was familiar, but for the moment he could not place it.

"Mrs. Daney. Could you come along the Glasgow road? You'll find my car waiting for you. I think I have something very interesting to tell you."

He hesitated.

"All right," he said at last, 'I'll be with you. How far must I go before I meet you?"

"Not far," said the voice, and there came the click of the receiver as she hung up.

Jelf's car was in the hands of the police, but the garage proprietors, realising Jordan's predicament, had offered to hire him a car whenever he wanted one. He telephoned them, and in ten minutes a car was at the door. He had to go five miles, and on the outskirts of a little village he came upon a big coupe drawn up on the verge of the road. He stopped his own machine, got out and walked the fifty yards which separated them.

Mrs. Daney sat at the wheel. Even in the hard light of day she was a pretty woman, though she was much older than he had thought at their first meeting.

She opened the door.

"Come inside," she said.

She glanced back through the window at the back of the hood. "Your chauffeur will wait?"

He nodded.

"A man has been murdered here--a man called Jelf, isn't it? Do you know him? His real name is Jaffrey."

"How do you know?" he asked quickly.

"Because I have seen him." Her voice was perfectly calm. "It was rather beastly, but the police let me see him. I told them I might be able to identify him. Walter Jaffrey. He was one of my husband's gang. He was in the Mersey job. Lew quarrelled with him. Jaffrey couldn't go straight and Lew

fired him. He used to be in charge of the get-away car. I warned Lew against him."

"Why have you come up here?" he asked bluntly.

"I am rather anxious to meet Lew," she said. "I want to give him one more chance. I knew that where Mary Grier was. Lew would be."

"Are you suggesting that your husband killed this man?"

She smiled contemptuously and shook her head. "Ask Mary Grier who killed him. She knows!"

CHAPTER 3

I

"Do you really hate her as much as that?" he asked.

She looked at him for a while and then laughed. "I don't hate anybody very much--except Lew, and I couldn't tell you why I hated him without giving you material for your reminiscences that you wouldn't be able to use--not if they were published by a respectable newspaper."

She leaned forward, touched a spring in the dashboard, and a little panel dropped. Behind he saw cigarettes in a deep crystal receptacle. Evidently this lady smoked incessantly, for her store was a large one. She took a cigarette, lit it and snapped back the panel, Tim stretched out his hand.

"I'm sorry." She touched the spring again. "Help yourself."

"May I take two?"

"Twenty-two if you wish. They're not the ordinary brand, so don't look at them so critically. They cost quite a lot of money. Lew is rather lavish in these matters."

He put one in his cigarette case and lit the other. They were exactly the same brand as he had found in the graveyard and in the case he had picked up on the road.

"I'm going through with this business of Lew," she went on; "not really because I'm jealous, but because he's humiliated me. I tried to kill him once, but the gun misfired. When you meet him he'll tell you all about it."

He was looking at her with interest. She was pretty, a little hard, immensely sophisticated; her eyes had the colour and the hardness of sapphires. She was expensively dressed, and paid for it; she had a perfect figure. The car in which they sat was a Phantom Rolls of the newest type. On one ungloved hand sparkled a blue diamond which he calculated at ten carats, and worth 2,000. Suddenly; "How much do you know?" she asked.

"About what?'

"About Mary Grier. By the way, is she pretty?"

"Haven't you seen her?" he asked, in surprise.

She shook her head.

"I am not really curious about her. Is she pretty?"

"Yes," he said, with enthusiasm, and she laughed softly.

"Do you know a lot about her?"

"No--practically nothing."

"You're Tiger Tim Jordan, aren't you? Lew used to be very interested in you; he heard a lot about you in Africa, and avoided you. I'm not so sure he ever came into your country." She looked at him with calm, amused eyes. "You're in love with her--how amusing! You and Lew in love with the same woman!"

She leaned back in the cushioned seat and laughed softly.

"I'm glad," she said. "That will give you a little zest--forgive me if I talk somewhat pedantically. I had a University education, and English was my long suit. I'm almost tempted to tell you, but on the whole I think I'd better leave you to make your own discoveries--perhaps you'll get more fun out of it!"

Then suddenly her calm, insolent tone changed to one of great earnestness.

"Have you any idea at all why Jelf came up here? You brought him up as your chauffeur, but I gather from what I read in the Glasgow newspapers that you knew nothing about this man. His name is--well, I've told you that. Why did he want to come to Clench House? That is worrying me a little bit."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he wouldn't have come to Clench House if he thought Lew was within a hundred miles--but it wasn't Lew who killed him. Lew shoots; that's his weakness--a quick draw and a straight shot. He never uses a knife. It must be the other man."

"Which other man?" asked Tim.

She did not speak for a while; she was staring straight through the windscreen, oblivious of his presence.

"I'm going to Glasgow," she said suddenly, and gave him the name of her hotel. "Will you get me on the wire if anything happens?"

When she looked at him he was smiling.

"You're amused?"

"Very," he said. "Perhaps you will explain why I should go to any trouble to keep you posted--you, who are the wife of a man wanted for murder and robbery?"

"Perhaps you will explain," she mimicked, "why I am taking all this trouble to keep you informed and to save your life? You can take the smile off your face, because I'm serious. I'll tell you. I came to you in London in a fit of pique. I was hating Lew, and I wanted to get even with him. I had heard a lot about you, but I had no idea you were so"--she hesitated for a word--"nice, shall I say? I'm rather an impulsive person: I like people or loathe them the first time I meet them. I rather like you."

Those blue eyes of hers looked straight at him. There was a queer little smile on the hard mouth.

"So I killed two birds with one stone."

"I being the second bird?"

"Exactly," she said.

She leaned across and pushed open the door.

"Now you can go."

As he moved she stooped and caught him by the arm.

"You can kiss me if you like," she said.

He chuckled.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

He got down on to the road and slammed the door.

"Scared?" she mocked.

"Frightened to death," said Tim. "On you go to Glasgow before you turn my head!"

She waved her hand to him.

"Good-bye, Sir Galahad!"

He stood in the roadway, watching the car until it was a speck on the long stretch of road. Then he went back to his hired car, and he was a very thoughtful man.

It was a new experience to him. Women had betrayed their men before, but betrayed them in a fit of screaming rage. That kind of squeal was part of a policeman's day's work. But he had never before come upon the cold-blooded betrayer, the woman who, calculating all the consequences, and in no fit of anger, but coolly and deliberately, planned to send her man to the

scaffold. His offence must have been very great. Yet jealousy could not wholly explain her attitude.

There was only one possible explanation, namely, that she was working in conjunction with the man she professed to hate, and was using that pretext to get into Tim Jordan's confidence.

He knew little of Lew Daney, except that he was a brilliant workman. It would be unusual for a man of his type to draw attention to and cast suspicion upon himself in connection with so serious a crime as the killing of Jelf.

When he returned to the house he put a trunk call through to London, and found Chief Constable Cowley, whom he knew slightly. To him he stated most of the facts of the case.

"The Jelf murder? No, we haven't been called in. We've had his finger-prints down here and identified him. He's a man named Jaffrey; he had two convictions and was a clever cracksman."

"Do you know Lew Daney?" asked Tim..

He heard a gasp of surprise.

"Lew Daney? Is he back in England? The last we heard of him he was in South Africa. I know Lew all right," added the Chief Constable grimly. "By the way, did you meet him in South Africa?" And, when Tim answered in the negative: "Or his wife? A pretty girl."

"Yes, I've met her," said Tim dryly.

"Then keep her well away from you!" said Cowley. "Or you're going to be involved in something more serious than a divorce case. She's got a playful habit of betraying her husband for six months in the year and being terribly penitent about it for the other six. And the people she betrays him to are usually very sorry for themselves."

He gave a brief description of Mrs. Daney which was not particularly flattering to her private character.

Tim went up to his room to write in the newest details of the case. It was his practice to keep a sort of case-book; in this he would enter the most minute details in connection with any crime which interested him, even though he might not himself be engaged in its investigation.

Mrs. Daney baffled him. But she brought contact with the unknown, and in this case the unknown was her own private life and her peculiar association with the mysterious Lew Daney.

He had intended to ask Scotland Yard to furnish him with a photograph of the man and further details about his life, but this omission did not make a great deal of difference, for not only were Scotland Yard without the photograph and particulars he required, but they themselves had spent many years of fruitless inquiry to secure the data.

Happening to glance out of the window as he was blotting the last page of his notes, he saw Mary Grier walking alone in the garden. He was turning from the window when he thought lie saw something move behind a high box hedge at the other end of the garden. He looked carefully, and presently saw a thin spiral of smoke come up. He was downstairs in a few seconds, and in the garden. Mary was out of sight from where he stood, but the box hedge was within a dozen yards, and crossing quickly and noiselessly, he came round the corner....

It was Stocker. From the corner of his mouth drooped a long cigar; his hands were thrust unprofessionally into his pockets, and on his large face was a deep frown. He started as Tim came into sight, took his hands out of his pockets and removed his cigar.

"Having a little smoke before dinner, sir," he said good-humouredly.

"And keeping an eye on Miss Grier?" suggested Tim.

The man nodded. "And keeping an eye on Miss Grier," he repeated. "I don't like the young lady to be out of the house alone when night's coming on."

"Is this Mr. Awkwright's idea?" asked Tim.

The butler shook his head. "No, sir, it's my idea. May I smoke?"

Tim nodded, and Stocker returned the cigar to the corner of his mouth.

"I'm a pretty good watcher," he said. "I ought to have been a detective."

"We shall have to make you one," said Tim, catching his humour, but Stocker shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir. I'm too honest to join the police."

"You're talking like an old lag," said Tim, and Stocker beamed.

"That's good--so I am. If I was a detective," he went on, "I'd spend my life doing good. Fancy me saying that, sir! What I meant was, I'd give a tip to people who were doing the wrong thing."

"You had much better pinch them," said Tim, amused.

"Do you think so, sir? I doubt it. What I was thinking of at the moment was law-abiding people--police officers and what not."

"You'd give me advice, would you? And what would it be?"

Stocker took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at the ash critically and returned the stub to between his teeth.

"I'd advise them to be very careful of the kind of yarns they hear. Because a lady drives a big Rolls-Royce she isn't necessarily a--lady! The particular female I have in my mind, sir, is about as safe as a wild-cat."

"You followed me this afternoon, did you?"

"Fancy your guessing that!"

His face was a mask; but for the twinkle in his eyes one might not have suspected his sarcasm.

"In a sense I did follow you. I was on the luggage grid of the car you hired, and a very uncomfortable ride it was!"

"Why did you follow me?" asked Tim quietly.

Stacker's eyebrows went up, and he sighed.

"A breath of fresh air does nobody any harm. I took the liberty, sir, of stealing a ride."

"You know the lady, do you?"

"By reputation," said Stocker. "Excuse me, sir, but I'll just go and see what the young lady is doing."

"I'll save you the trouble," said Tim.

He found the girl at the far end of the garden. The evening was chilly; she wore a heavy cloth coat, and apparently resented his intrusion into her solitary meditations, for she gave him no encouragement to stay, and, after an abortive attempt to make conversation, announced her intention of returning to the house.

He fell in by her side.

"Why are you so infernally unfriendly?" he asked.

"Am I? I don't intend to be."

"What is really the trouble?" he demanded. "Is it the--man?"

She looked at him quickly.

"Which man?"

It was not the moment to seek her confidence.

"Any man," he said recklessly. "Me, Stocker, Awkwright--"

She smiled faintly.

"Poor Stocker! Does he come into it?"

He tried to detain her in the hall, but she made an excuse and went up to her room, and he prepared for another evening if loneliness, and was agreeably surprised, when he came down lo dinner, to find Mr. Awkwright sitting at the head of the table, with the girl on his right. Mr. Awkwright was morose, a little snappy, but before the dinner was halfway through he had thawed a little, and condescended to speak about his hobby; for he made no secret of his strange weakness.

Tim was amazed to learn how much this old man knew about horses and jockeys, the peculiarities of trainers, the eccentricities of certain well-known thoroughbreds. From where Tim sat he commanded a view of two doors, one leading to the hall, the other into the servery; and throughout the meal he had an opportunity of watching the butler.

Stocker, in his duty moments, was a highly trained servant. He had all the benevolence of the old family retainer, and conveyed a sense of comforting efficiency. Once or twice Tim tried to catch his eye, but failed. Stocker's stolid gaze was always fixed elsewhere, though Tim could have sworn that the man had been watching him.

He had set the finger-bowls and plates, and put the fruit on the table, and was turning away when Mr. Awkwright called him.

"Stocker, who was that strange man in the burial field this evening?"

Stocker came round quickly.

"I didn't see any strange man. What was he like?" he asked sharply.

It was so unlike his usual tone that the girl looked up at him in surprise. Instantly he regained his old manner.

"One of the detectives, I expect, sir."

"There have been no detectives here this afternoon," said the girl.

"Or Captain Jordan."

"Rubbish!" said the old man impatiently. "Don't you think I should know Captain Jordan if I saw him? This man came in a small car, got out near the gate and jumped over the wall. He was near the big tomb."

Stocker's eyebrows met in a frown.

"How long was he there, sir?"

"Not five minutes. He went back to the car and drove on past the house. I saw him from the bay of my window."

"Tall?"

"Yes, he was tall. I thought it was the fellow who was staying with you last autumn--your friend from London."

Tim saw the girl's head jerk up and her anxious eyes meet Stocker's.

"You didn't see the car by any chance, did you, sir?" asked Stocker. "Was it a two-seater?"

The old man nodded impatiently.

"I suppose it was."

Stocker was no longer smiling. Throughout the rest of the meal there was no evidence of his mechanical geniality. His face was tense; behind those dark eyes he was doing some rapid thinking, Tim decided. Who was the mysterious visitor of the butler's in whom Mary was more than ordinarily interested?

Clench House was beginning to get on his nerves; but even as he situation grew more and more confused, so grew his determination to stay and see the thing through.

They came to coffee. Mr. Awkwright became almost garrulous as he pursued his favourite topic. As for Mary, she said not a word, but sat very upright, her hands on her lap, her eyes seldom raised from the table. Once or twice Tim noticed the old man's eyes stray to her, and there was in his expression a hint of anxiety.

Tim had asked for some more coffee, and the butler was placing a clean cup for him, when there was a commotion in the hall outside, a hubbub of noise, dominated by one harsh, strident voice.

Stocker was on the side of the table farthest from the door. He had to make a complete circuit before he reached it.

Swiftly he moved, but not fast enough. The door flung open, and there staggered in a tall, gaunt woman. Her face was flushed, her speech was thick. She stood with her hands on her hips, scowling at the company.

"Well, here you are!" she almost shouted. "And here I am. Don't come near me, Stocker, or I'll break your face!"

Her voice was harsh; there was a suggestion of Cockney in it. From her physique Tim supposed that she was quite capable of carrying her threat into effect, and indeed, when Stocker gripped her by the arm, she wrenched herself free and struck him a blow o0n the chest that sent him backwards.

Mary, pale as death, had risen and faced the woman, her hands behind her gripping the edge of the table. Old Awkwright was standing, bent forward, his lined face working.

"You didn't expect to see me, did you? I've come to tell you I'm finished! I'm going back to London by tonight's train! It's a dog's life I'm living! You, young woman, do your own dirty work, d'ye hear? I've had enough of it. I'm going--"

At that moment Stocker leapt at her, grasped her by the shoulder with a powerful grip, and with his other big hand covered her mouth. He lifted her as though she were a child, half carried, half flung her from the room, and slammed the door behind them. Tim heard the muffled screams of the virago and made for the door, but suddenly his arm was caught.

"Don't go--please don't go! Stay here!"

Mary was clinging to him; her pitiful face was the colour of chalk.

"Help Mr. Awkwright."

The old man had sunk down into his chair and was lying across the table, his head on his arm. Tim thought he had collapsed, but at the girl's words he raised his face and turned it slowly in the direction of the closed door. The noise outside had subsided, but Stocker did not come back.

"A drunken pensioner of mine," said the old man, in a high, shaky voice. "Now, Mary, I think we will have family prayers. I don't think my nephew has assisted at our homely little service...."

CHAPTER 4

I

IT was in the study that these three strangely different people knelt at their most unreal devotions. To Tim it seemed like an odd sort of dream.

The girl followed him into the hall at the conclusion.

"Thank you for being so nice," she said under her breath.

"Are you going to tell me?" he asked in the same tone.

She shook her head.

"Is there any especial reason why you should keep other people's secrets?"

"It's my secret," she answered. "Come into the dining-room. The maids will have cleared away, and we can smoke."

"And talk?" he suggested.

"And talk," she nodded, "but we will keep to safe subjects."

He could only admire the amazing grip she had on herself. The colour had come back to her cheeks; she could laugh at some little jest of his as though she had not a care in the world. "You're wonderful."

"Am I?" The red lips curled. "I'm glad I'm wonderful to somebody. You'll carry a curious memory of us back to Africa, Captain Jordan."

"My name is Tim," he suggested.

"Tim? Yes; it is more familiar than most names, isn't it? But you will try to think well of us?"

"I'm not going back to Africa. As a matter of fact, I am taking a suite at the Carlton and I'm staying there until London bores me. When London bores me I'm coming to Clench House."

She shook her head.

"Oh, yes, I am," he went on. "There is a real mystery here--probably half a dozen."

She smiled at this.

"Every day brings a new one?"

"Almost," he said.

She spoke prophetically, for after she had gone he went up to his room, to make an important discovery. The window was wide open. When he switched on the light he saw that every drawer in the bureau had been pulled out and the contents thrown on the bed. His suitcase had been broken open, though there was no necessity, but the thief had probably thought it was locked.

He rang the bell, and when the maid eventually came--the service at Clench House was not very good--he sent for Stocker.

"I think Mr. Stocker is away, sir," said the little Scottish maid who answered the summons, "but I'll see."

A few minutes after she left Stocker came in. He was a little dishevelled; his white shirt front was crumpled and stained, and there was a scratch on his face which he had treated with iodine within the last few minutes.

Evidently he expected to be questioned about the woman, for he began: "She's a drunken--"

And then his eyes fell upon the disorder. "What's this, sir?"

"That's what I want to know. It must have happened when we were at dinner."

Stocker went to the window and looked down.

"There's a ladder here," he said. "Have you lost anything?"

"I can't tell you yet." Tim was looking round the room, and after a while he missed something. It was his notebook.

"Is there anything valuable in it?" asked Stocker anxiously.

"Nothing. Just an account of this Jelf business."

The butler opened the doors of the long wardrobe, looked under the bed, and, showing a surprising agility, got through the window and descended the ladder to the ground.

"Do you want a light?"

"I've got one, sir."

The beam of an electric lamp played on the ground. Tim saw him cross the lawn, following some trail. After a while he came back and ascended to the room.

"He was looking for something. It wasn't an ordinary ladder larceny. Do you notice all your pockets are turned inside out? Are you sure you've missed nothing else?"

Tim shook his head.

"What's this?"

Stocker picked up a newspaper cutting from the dressing-table, read it, and passed it without a word to Captain Jordan.

"The only clue the murderer left was a gold cigarette case, inscribed 'To Lew from his wife.' It was found by a visitor who happened to be staying with Mr. Awkwright."

"Did you find a cigarette case?" demanded Stacker.

"Yes; I handed it to the police."

"'To Lew from his wife,'" repeated Stocker, and pursed his lips. "That's queer!"

"Do you know him?" asked Tim.

Stocker did not answer.

"Your name wasn't mentioned. He wouldn't come here. I'll take my oath he hasn't been in the house before. Let's try the other rooms." Then, as a thought struck him: "Did you leave a light on when you came to dinner?"

Tim nodded.

"Oh, that explains it! Of course, he knew you were the visitor by your suitcases. Excuse me, sir."

He went down to the domestic quarters. Tim met him in the hall. "One of the maids says that a man asked her who was staying at the house. She didn't know your name, but she told him you were Mr. Awkwright's nephew. That must have been while we were out this afternoon, Captain Jordan. What was the cigarette case like?"

Tim described it. It was evidently not unfamiliar to Stocker, for, when the description was finished: "That sounds like it," he said.

"Let me put it to you fairly and squarely, Stocker: do you know Lew Daney?"

"There are very few people I don't know," said Stocker, with his broadest smile, "and there are fewer people that I ever talk about."

"Stocker, have you any idea, who the man was who ransacked my room?"

"Not the least idea in the world--and for once in my life I am telling the truth," said Stocker.

At eleven o'clock that night the house was silent, and Tim, who had read all the Scottish newspapers and a month-old illustrated journal, went up to bed, and never felt less like sleeping. He did not undress, but, drawing the heavy curtains, he switched on the light and lay on the bed. The maids had tidied his room, repacked his belongings, and Stocker had even provided a spare suitcase to replace the one which had been destroyed.

London and the Carlton were very attractive prospects to him at that moment. He wanted to get away from this dull, grim place of death, and if it were not for Mary...

He swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat up with a grin. He was not an impressionable man. Women had come into and gone from his life without leaving any very definite impressions. Some of them had been beautiful; most of them interesting; but none had had quite the same effect on him as this secretary of Uncle Benjamin's.

It was a strange life she was living; but weren't there thousands and tens of thousands of girls similarly circumstanced, who were living in greater discomfort of mind and body? Service meant--service, with all its attendant discomforts and humiliations, and Mary Grier, he told himself, was in no different position from that of any other girl who depended for her livelihood upon the caprices of a crotchety employer.

He heard the hall clock strike the half-hour, and was even wider awake than he had been when he came upstairs. Slipping into his shoes, he took a small, flat electric torch from the top of the bureau, pulled on an overcoat and a hat, and, going softly out of the room, lit his way down the stairs to the main door. To his surprise, it was neither locked nor barred, though Mary had told him that this was one of the most rigid of Mr. Awkwright's rules.

He opened the door, went out and closed it behind him. It was a bright night, rather chilly; the sky was clear and full of stars. At the back of the house from the road he could see no lights. It would be rather awkward, he realised, if Stocker came down and locked and barred the door in his absence. It would mean either that he would have to arouse the household or spend the night in the open. The latter experience, however, would have no terrors for him. He did not feel in the least tired, and when he had lit his pipe he had a feeling of contentment which he had not experienced since he had come to Clench House.

He strode along the road, passing the house on the right. He saw the grey gleam of granite where the old churchyard was; beyond that on the right ran a thin plantation of trees, separated from the road by a shallow ditch. It was, he had gathered from the girl, part of Mr. Awkwright's demesne. It seemed much more dense by night that it had by day.

About a hundred yards from the stone wall of the yard a narrow cart-track ran from the road through the wood to the low hills beyond.

He took his flash-lamp from his pocket and sent the light along the lane. There was nobody in sight. Acting on an impulse, he turned off and followed the track through the wood.

It ran straight for a hundred yards to where the trees finished, then turned left. Beyond lay a stretch of land which at some remote time must have been under cultivation, for he could see where the ancient furrows ran.

No sound broke the stillness except the screech of a distant owl. He put his light on the field and startled a hare that had been crouching in the furrow at his approach. For a little time it lay quivering, its big, dark eyes staring at the light, and then, with an odd sound, turned and leapt into the darkness.

He came back to the cart track, and had turned again into the wood when at the other end of the lane he saw two dim lights show, and heard the purring of a motor-car. He stood, waiting. The lights disappeared; in their place shone the red tail-lamp of a machine that was backing towards him.

It might be a police car, he thought, for just now the county police were very active, though there seemed no reason why they should park so far from the house. Then the red light went out and he heard a door close softly.

By the time he came up to the car its occupant had gone. It bore a London number and was a coupe of an expensive make.

The machine was covered with dust, and there was mud on the wheels. He put his lamp inside, but found nothing that gave him the least clue to the identity of the owner.

He hurried to the road; the driver had vanished. Walking back, he examined the machine again. Evidently it was not a police car. He looked at the speedometer and found that it had registered twelve thousand miles, though there was nothing to indicate the extent of its more recent journey.

This was only a minor piece in the jig-saw puzzle of Clench House. The bigger piece might be that drunken woman who had come into the house that night, and had been so unceremoniously ejected by Stocker; though for the moment the most baffling of all things was Mary Grier herself.

What was the mystery of that cut on her arm? Where had she met Jelf before? Who was the "other man" who had killed the chauffeur? Then it struck him that the other man might have been this very mysterious driver who had arrived in the dead of night and hidden his car in the wood.

He quickened his pace; as he did so he heard the whirr of a motor-car engine coming from the grounds of the house. Keeping close to the wall, he moved forward cautiously. Then he heard a voice; it was Mr. Awkwright's.

"Wrap yourself up well, my dear. Have you got a rug, Stocker?"

"Yes, sir," said Stacker's voice.

The motor-car door slammed, and through the open gate of the drive came the big car which he had seen in the garage.

Stocker was at the wheel, a cigar between his teeth. He could not distinguish either Mary Grier or the old man. The car swung round and passed him, its speed increasing. For a moment he was tempted to run back to where the stranger's car was parked, and follow, but changed his mind.

Stocker, Mr. Awkwright and Mary Grier--where was the mysterious fourth?

He went down the drive, keeping to the untidy grass verge, and, turning a corner, came into view of the gaunt garage.

Near at hand was the flight of stone steps up which the dying Jelf had staggered. He went up cautiously; the door at the head was locked.

There was another car, he remembered, a smaller one, which the girl drove. He might take the liberty of following, so far as he could follow, the people who were making this strange excursion at such an hour. The garage doors would be locked, he thought, but there was just a chance that Stocker had omitted this precaution. He felt at the big door, and was surprised when it yielded to his tug.

As he opened it he saw, for the fraction of a second, a gleam of light inside. It showed only for the briefest space of time.

Somebody was in there, and that somebody knew he was at the door. He threw the door open wider and, torch in hand, slipped inside.

"Is anybody there?" he called. "I'm Captain Jordan--"

He heard an exclamation and switched on the lamp. The beam caught the lower part of a pair of striped trousers. Before he could raise the torch it was struck from his hand, and his assailant made a rush for the door. Tim leapt at him and got him by the collar. At that moment the man struck at him,

and by a lucky chance caught him under the jaw. Tim Jordan staggered back, but before he could recover himself his assailant had gone and the door was slammed behind him.

Tim pushed at the door, but it was immovable. With the aid of a match he found the torch he had dropped. Luckily the bulb had not broken. He examined the door to discover how the lock was manipulated. There was no knob he could turn, no method by which the door could be opened from the inside.

His situation, however, was not especially serious, for he guessed that in a very short time Stocker would come back with the old man and Mary.

With the aid of his light he made a brief inspection, and the first thing he saw was a heavy overcoat lying across the smaller car, evidently left by the intruder. His second discovery came a little later; the heavy padlock attached to the chain which held the tractor immovable lay on the ground. Either the stranger had a key, or the lock had been picked.

In one corner of the garage was an extending ladder, which he had noticed before, possibly used for cleaning the windows.

He planted this against the wall and, mounting, succeeded in unfastening one of the windows. Returning to the floor of the garage, he took up the coat and, carrying it up the ladder, threw it from the window, through which he managed to wriggle.

Luckily for his peace of mind, he had noticed that the chapel was entirely surrounded by a broad garden bed, and he dropped on to the soft earth without mishap.

The coat could wait; he threw it over a bush and went in pursuit of the burglar. As he reached the road he saw the car come out of the lane and drive off the way Stocker had gone.

He was cursing himself now that he had not obeyed the impulse he had had to put the machine out of action until he had satisfied himself as to who was the owner.

Whilst he was looking he saw the tail-light swerve violently to the right and then to the left, and the car finally stopped.

Tim Jordan was something of a runner; he sprinted towards the machine and had covered half the distance which separated him from his quarry when he saw a flicker of light and there came back to him the crash of a shot. In another second the car moved on.

No bullet had come back; it was not at his pursuer that the man had fired. Tim dropped to a walk, and presently came up to where the car had stopped, for he saw the erratic tracks of its wheels. There was nobody in sight, and, puzzled, he turned back.

He was nearing the end of the graveyard when he saw somebody moving in the shadow of the wood, and sent his light in the direction. The sight he saw was so unexpected, so startling, that he nearly dropped the torch. The figure was that of a tall man, white-faced, haggard, a fringe of beard on his chin. He wore only a pair of trousers and a dark shirt. His hair was dishevelled. Two dark eyes glared at Tim.

"Hallo, who are you?"

"Put that light out--put it out!" screamed the man, "Damn you--!"

Tim saw the glitter of steel as the man struck, and flung himself aside only just in time. Before he could recover himself the man with the knife had darted into the wood.

Tim leapt the low ditch and went after him. And then his light went out. To follow an armed man through a dark wood was taking too great a chance. Hastily he unscrewed the head of his torch and gave a twist to the bulb, but no light came.

To return to the house for another lantern seemed a futile thing to do, yet it was the only course he could follow. He got back on to the road and, keeping to the centre, ran to Clench House. The front door was unfastened. He went in, switching on the light as he darted up the stairs to his room, and a few minutes later was racing back to the wood, this time with a gun in his pocket. As he had expected, his search proved fruitless. The midnight assassin had disappeared.

Tim Jordan could reconstruct the scene he had witnessed.

The unknown burglar had found himself confronted on the road by this weird figure, had swerved to avoid him and had been forced to stop. He had been attacked by the wild man, and had shot in self-defence. On one point Tim was now certain: the bearded man was the murderer of Jelf.

Returning to the house, he recovered the coat and took it up to his room. It was a heavy camel-hair coat, well worn. In the inside pocket he found a tailor's label, and, reading this, he gasped. It gave the name of the tailor, and underneath in marking ink: "L. Daney, Esq., 703, Jermyn Street."

CHAPTER 5

HE went carefully through the pockets. There was a pair of stained leather gloves in one, and in the other a carton of cigarettes, half filled, and a box of wooden matches. The inside pocket produced a more important clue: he found a folded paper and a small pocket-book. He opened the paper and whistled. It was a page torn from his case-book--the page on which he had copied out the inscription on Lew Daney's gold cigarette case.

So this intruder was the man who had entered his room on the previous night and searched his belongings for something--and what that something was he now knew. It was the case.

He opened the pocket-book, which was almost empty, and took out its contents one by one. The first thing his finger touched was a key of remarkable thinness. It was distinguished from every other key he had seen by the fact that the thumb-piece was of black enamel. It was obviously the key to a safety lock. There was a card on which was written: "Mary Grier, Clench House, 14th October, 1929."

The most interesting discovery, however, was a Press cutting, which was the third and only other object in the case. The printing seemed familiar. He looked at the back of it, and saw that, as he had already decided, it was a cutting from the Hue and Cry, the official police organ. It was just a slip, evidently one of many names which had appeared in a column of print.

"Wanted for fraud: Harry Stone, alias Hector Winter, alias Harry Levere, known also as Harry the Valet. Information should be given to the Chief Constable at Scotland Yard or should be laid at any police station. Description--"

The paper had been cut here, but this was not the remarkable feature of the cutting, for written across, in flowing script, were the words: "Dead 23rd March."

Harry the Valet! And then he remembered the man who had had that name in South Africa, the fraudulent policeman whom he had run out of the country. It might not have been the same man; it is a very common nickname, and he could himself recall at least three famous Harrys who because of their profession had been nicknamed "the Valet."

So Harry the Valet was dead! Why was the owner of this pocket-book so definite as to the date? Why, indeed, had he troubled to carry around with him this Press cutting?

He returned the articles to the pocket-book and locked it away in his drawer. As he did so he heard the sound of car wheels, and, switching out

his light, he drew back the heavy curtains and looked through the window. Two dim lights showed at the entrance to the drive; they passed slowly out of sight towards the garage. He replaced the curtains, put on the light again, and, going out into the dark corridor, found the switch and illuminated the passage.

He was standing in the lighted hall when Mary came in, followed by Mr. Awkwright; she stopped stock-still at the sight of him. She was pale, hollow-eyed, and she regarded him with a look of mute hopelessness that went straight to his heart.

Mr. Awkwright closed the door behind him, took off his heavy wrap slowly, and never once did his eyes leave Tim Jordan's face.

"We've been for a drive," he said loudly. "We often go for a drive at night--eh. Miss Grier?...Gets the cobwebs out of your head."

His voice was high and squeaky; he looked pathetically old.

"Thought you were in bed, Jordan," he went on, and, with a nod, walked past Tim and up the stairs.

Mary Grier did not move. She waited till the old man was out of sight.

"Why aren't you in bed?" she asked in a low voice. "Have you been out?"

He nodded.

"You were the man standing in the drive? I saw you as we passed."

"I was not the man standing in the drive; I was, as a matter of fact, standing outside the drive," he said. "What is the trouble, Mary?"

"Nothing."

She put one foot on the stairs and stood in that attitude for a second.

"Come into the dining-room," she said. "Stocker will be back soon; he will make some coffee."

He followed her into the dining-room, waited until she had turned on the lights, then went in after her. She closed the door.

"Did you follow us?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"What were you doing out?"

"I also wanted a little fresh air," said Tim coolly. And then, more seriously: "Doesn't this place get on your nerves, Mary? It's getting on mine."

"I've ceased to have any nerves." Her voice was almost brusque. "Don't worry about me--go back to London."

He laughed. "Almost that sounds like a warning."

"It is," she said, her lips pressed tightly together.

"Is there any danger--if you will allow me to be melodramatic?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, but I think it's over for the time being."

She heard Stocker's step in the hall, and went out and spoke to him. As she was walking back to the table, Tim asked: "Do you know your neighbours very well?"

She stopped.

"Not very well. Why?"

"I thought I saw one of them tonight," he said, "a particularly unpleasant gentleman with a little beard. Quite young, I should imagine."

She stared at him.

"Did he speak to you?" It was obviously an effort for her to ask the question.

"He had a knife," said Tim.

She said nothing for a moment, and then: "Really?"

Walking to the table, she pulled out a chair and sat down.

The hand that reached for a cigarette did not tremble. He marvelled at her iron nerve, for, if there was one thing more certain than another, it was that she was under a strain which was almost at breaking point.

"You meet odd people in Scotland," she said. "Who was he?"

He looked at her for a long time, and then, slowly: "He was the man who killed Jelf, I think."

She lifted her eyes to his quickly. "In that case I suppose you will tell the police?"

"I'm wondering--you once stole seventy pounds, didn't you?"

She nodded.

"I thought it was a little joke when you told me the first time, but I realise that you were speaking the truth. You stole it from Uncle Benjamin?"

She nodded again.

"It was for a good cause," she said.

Behind the cynical flippancy of the comment was hysteria, a long-suppressed nerve-storm which would burst forth at any moment and on the least provocation. Yet her eyes were unclouded, her poise serene. She was very much mistress of herself, to all appearance.

"Now I think you'll have to go back to London," she said.

Her voice was just a little shaky.

"I'm afraid I must."

He took his eyes from her, let them wander about the room, to give her the opportunity of renewing control.

"I'll go back to the Carlton. They've offered me rather a nice suite, and just now I am rather weakening for luxury. I couldn't sleep very well--that's why I went out."

He must lie convincingly, or he would have a shivering, quivering, sobbing woman on his hands, and the thought was terrifying.

"The beds are excellent and the air is grand, but the absence of the fauna of my native land is getting on my nerves."

"Leopards," she asked, "or tigers?"

"Leopards."

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. Her lower lip was trembling, and he could understand that that night there must have been placed upon her an additional and an intolerable burden.

"Let us keep the conversation above the level of petty larceny," he said.

Stacker came in with a glass of water, which he placed before the girl. She drank eagerly; the hand that lifted the glass shook, but neither he nor Stocker made any comment. Did Stocker see it at all? He was watching Tim all the time, and in his gaze there was a new suspicion, that was tinctured with menace.

"All right, Stocker," she gasped, and put down the glass.

"Bring Mr.--Captain Jordan his coffee. Do you mind drinking it alone? I'm going to bed."

She got up from the table and without a word of farewell walked out. Stocker stood, watching.

"All right, Stocker," said Tim, but the man made no move.

"Excuse me, sir."

Tim looked up.

"Were you in the garage tonight by any chance?"

Tim nodded.

"Yes, I was in the garage."

"Did you open the door?"

"No, it was open. I went in and the door shut behind me."

"It was open, eh?" Stocker fingered his big chin thoughtfully. "Might I be allowed to ask, sir, who opened it?"

"I should like to know. I have a rough idea, but I'm not certain. There was a man in there when I arrived. I saw his lantern, and went in after him. But he got away before I could pinch him."

Those suspicious eyes of Stocker were searching his. "Do you know who he was, sir?"

Tim shook his head. "No. You're very interested?"

"Naturally, sir. I'm in charge of the whole of this house, and responsible to Mr. Ledbetter for any losses," said Stocker suavely. "You didn't see the man?"

"No, but I think I can tell you who he was." Tim was watching him now as closely as he had been watched. "A man named Lew Daney."

Not a muscle of the butler's face moved. "Lew Daney--I didn't know he was in Scotland."

"You know him?"

A little inclination of Stocker's head was his answer. "By reputation. He's a bad character from all accounts. Why do you think it was Mr. Daney?"

Tim gulped down his coffee and got up from the table. "Come upstairs," he said.

The butler followed him to his room and Tim switched on the light. "He left that overcoat behind."

Stocker just looked at it, but made no attempt to examine the garment. The impression Tim received was that he had recognised it immediately.

"I'm going to tell you something, Stocker."

The young man sat down on the bed, and motioned the butler to a chair, an invitation which he ignored.

"There's something odd about this house, and you know how odd it is. I know nothing about your Mr. Ledbetter, but I suppose he has a representative in London--

"Messrs. Kean, Colfax, Mortimer & Greene, of Lincoln's Inn Fields," said Stocker instantly, "if you will excuse the interruption."

"Daney has been here before, and somebody else has been here--the man who stabbed Miss Grier, and whom you know; a white-faced man with a little beard. I am a policeman, Stocker, and I'm naturally suspicious of most people, and I'll tell you frankly I'm suspicious of you. I don't believe the story you told, that you only quarrelled with Jelf because he was tight. I believe you know who committed that murder. It was our white-faced friend with a beard, wasn't it?"

Stocker shrugged his shoulders. "When I tell you I don't know, sir, I mean that. I may have my suspicions, as you have--was there anything in the pockets?"

He was looking at the overcoat. For a second Tim hesitated, then, getting up, he unlocked the drawer, took out the pocket case and shook the contents on the table.

"May I look, sir?"

Oddly enough, he did not pick up the key first, as Tim expected him to do. He looked at the card, and then at the cutting. "Harry the Valet," he repeated.

"Harry Stone. Do you know him?"

He shook his head.

"No, sir, I don't know him, though I have an idea I've heard about him."

He turned the cutting over. "He's dead. Do you know that writing--is it Lew Daney's?"

Stacker did not reply; he carefully replaced the three articles in the pocket case and pushed it along the table, away from him. "I don't know anything about Mr. Daney's handwriting," he said.

His voice was strained; there was a curious look in his eyes which Tim had not seen before. The suspicion was gone; in that look of his was a hardness which wholly transformed his face.

"I have not spoken yet to the police," said Tim, "because I'm rather tempted to take up this case unofficially. I come up to Clench House to stay a few days with Mr. Awkwright. A man comes to me in London and offers himself as chauffeur, and produces a car, which we have since discovered was not his own, but had been hired from a London garage. On the night of his arrival he avoids you. Later you are seen quarrelling with him, and much later he is murdered."

"By me?" asked Stocker dryly.

"I'm not suggesting that. I'm willing to believe that you knew nothing about the murder, though the police may take a different view. You knew Jelf, of course. His name was Jaffrey. He was an associate of Lew Daney, and for some time a member of his gang."

Stocker smiled grimly. "It sounds as if Mrs. Daney had been talking."

"Did you know she was up here?" asked Tim Jordan quickly.

The man nodded. "Oh, yes, I knew she was up here, sir. I think I told you before that I took the liberty of riding out on your luggage grid. A very dangerous woman, if I may be allowed to say so, and one I should avoid if I were you. Captain Jordan."

He stretched out his hand towards the pocket case, but changed his mind; and then, with a brusque nod, walked out of the room.

For an hour Tim sat on his bed, trying to piece together five little scraps of mystery, one of which was the seventy-pounds theft of Mary Grier which had turned her from a paid secretary into the slave of Benjamin Awkwright. For that was the explanation of it all. This old man had her under his thumb, and could command her obedience in most things.

He undressed slowly and went to bed. It was an odd pathological condition of his that he could sleep and yet remain awake. There was one sense of his which he called his secretary bird; that strange little bird that keeps watch over the sleeping crocodile and arouses him in moments of danger. Though

he was fast asleep, he knew that the door had opened and who it was that had come in. Yet he did not move till Mary Grier shook him gently by the shoulder, and then he was wide awake.

"I'm sorry," she said breathlessly, "but I'm afraid...there's somebody in the grounds...outside my window."

He was out of bed in an instant. Pulling on his dressing-gown, he went to the window and looked out. There was nobody in sight.

"Are you sure--" he began.

The words were hardly uttered before he saw a figure cross the drive and disappear into the gloom.

"I couldn't sleep. I was looking out of the window," she whispered, "and then I saw him. He was walking on the grass."

"Is it anybody you know?" She shook her head. "Stocker?"

"No, no, it wasn't Stocker. A taller man."

"Which way was he going?" She pointed. "Towards the garage? Then he's just come back. Listen!"

They heard the faint pulsation of a motor-car and the whine of an engine, growing less and less audible.

"He's awa'," said Tim.

They were standing together by the window when suddenly she clutched his arm.

"Look, look!"

Another figure had appeared, moving erratically towards the house; somebody who swayed from side to side as though he were drunk. He staggered forward, his hand on his head, and then Tim recognised him, and went racing down the stairs and, pulling open the front door, caught the man by the arm and led him inside.

It was Stocker, though he was difficult to recognise under the mask of blood which covered his face.

"All right," he muttered, and collapsed into a chair.

Tim saw that attached to the man's wrist was a long leather thong, and at the end of that a revolver. His clothes were grimy and covered with sand and mud where he had fallen.

Mary flew upstairs, came back with a bowl of water and a towel, and together they bathed the wound. Tim made a quick examination and could find no evidence of fracture, but the cut extended for four inches and had an ugly appearance.

CHAPTER 6

IT was Mary who telephoned for the doctor, who came half an hour later, stitched and dressed the wound, and confirmed Tim's diagnosis. Whilst he was doing this, with the assistance of a maid whom Mary had wakened, she went to the door to wait for Tim, who had gone out to make an investigation. He came back with certain interesting items of news.

"For some reason or other Stocker decided to spend the night in the garage. He had the sense to realise, which I hadn't, that this fellow would come back for his overcoat. I found a Windsor chair and a couple of cigar-ends. Stocker had evidently had some difficulty in keeping awake, and may have been asleep when the man came in."

She looked at him, bewildered.

"Came back for his coat? Who?". Briefly he told her of his adventure earlier in the evening. "But who was it?"

"Lew Daney," he said, and she was silent. "Do you know him?"

This time she accepted the challenge. "Yes, I know him," she said quietly. "He was the man who rescued me when I was--when I was attacked. He and Jelf were together, and I would have been killed if it hadn't been for him."

"Have you seen him since?" asked Tim.

She nodded.

"Yes, once in London. I was doing some business for Mr. Awkwright, and he sent me some flowers. Then he called me up on the telephone and asked me if I would meet him and go to a theatre with him. I didn't. But that night, when I was returning to the hotel, he met me outside."

Tim hesitated to put the question that was on his lips. He had no right whatever to ask her, but--

"Did he ever make love to you, Mary?" he blurted, and she looked at him in amazement.

"No--how absurd! He is ever so much older than I. He was very nice, very kind:"

"Would you recognise him again?"

"No," she said quickly. "He saved my life, and I owe him something. Identify him, you mean? No, I wouldn't do it! I've heard since that he was--a bad character, and I was terribly sorry for him."

"A murderer," said Tim quietly, and she nodded.

"Yes, I know. And yet I wouldn't identify him. I suppose it's the criminal in me."

"You've got that seventy pounds' obsession!"

She gave him a wry smile. "I shall never be allowed to forget it," she said bitterly. "Even you--"

And then he did something that he had not had any intention of doing: he slipped his arm around her and drew her to him. For a moment she lay against him, her eyes half closed, her breath coming quickly. Her cheek was against his chin, and his lips were seeking hers when she wrenched herself free of his arm and fell back against the wall.

"No, no. Please don't do that...it isn't really fair."

The doctor made a timely appearance. Tim saw him to the door, locked it upon him, and returned to find that Mary had gone.

In his little sitting-room Stocker half reclined on his bed, very much awake. The man had a grim sense of humour.

"Excuse me, sir, but there used to be a Latin saying about 'Who shall watch the watcher?'" he said.

"There still is," said Tim. "Did you recognise the man who hit you?"

Stocker grinned unpleasantly.

"No, sir, I didn't see him. If I had, he'd have been dead. I must have dozed off, for the first thing I remember was somebody stumbling over my legs. I was in the garage all night."

"Lew Daney, by any chance?" suggested Tim, pulling up a chair to the bed.

"Maybe," said the other. "He didn't leave his card."

Tim lit a cigarette for the man and one for himself. "I nearly did a dirty trick on you tonight, Stocker. While you were half conscious I almost took your finger-prints--but a latent sense of duty prevented me taking advantage."

"I'll save you all the trouble, sir," said Stocker. He blew a, spiral of smoke. "I've been inside twice, but not in the last fifteen years. Once for burglary, once for fraud. You'd have found out that Stocker was my real name."

"Does Mr. Ledbetter know?"

Stocker smiled.

"Oh, yes, sir, he knows. I told him everything when he engaged me. Yes, sir, I'm an old lag--you knew that when you saw me. There are lots of us in the country, doing honest work."

"How long have you been in charge of this house?"

"About eight years," said Stocker, "which is eight years out of my life that I can't afford."

"Did you know Jelf?"

Mr. Stocker became very frank.

"Yes, I knew him. But you're speaking as a man and not as a police officer, are you. Captain Jordan? If you talk that way I'll tell you a lot."

"That's the way I'm talking," said Tim.

"Jelf and I were in jail together. He didn't know that I was here. He'd never been anywhere near Clench House before. And I'm telling you this straight, Captain Jordan: I know Lew Daney. He was very good to me many years ago, and I knew that Jelf was a member of his gang. Lew worked three-handed on the Glasgow job. One of the men was shot by the night-watchman--the police don't know that, because Lew took the gun away with him. They didn't think it was serious, and the fellow was able to walk into the car that Lew had waiting, and get away with the crowd--but he died a quarter of an hour later. That's what Jelf said. Then he quarrelled with Lew over something, and Lew bounced him out with a couple of thousand pounds for his trouble. Jelf was always a bit nosy, and he wanted more information than Lew would give him--that's what Jelf told me."

"You're in it too, aren't you? You were the third man?"

Stocker smiled.

"Me, sir? Bless you, no! I'm out of that sort of game. But I hear most of the things that are going. Mr. Ledbetter is one of the best employers a man could have. He gives me no trouble; I have the run of the place, and I make a few pounds on the side, so why bother about going crooked? This place is a little home from home for a man like me. I'm telling you all this--"

"Because you're a very quick thinker," said Tim, "and you're not quite sure in your mind whether I did get your finger-prints. I should learn all these things you are now telling me from the Record Department at Scotland Yard."

The man chuckled, and winced and put up his hand to his bandaged head.

"I'd give something to get that fellow."

"Was it Daney?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen Daney for years, and, anyway, I couldn't have seen him tonight. And, besides, Daney wouldn't frighten Miss Grier--"

He stopped, like a man who realised that he had said a little too much.

"Why wouldn't he?"

Stocker was silent for a while.

"Well, apparently, sir, he saved this young lady from being stabbed. He and Jelf were up in this neighbourhood, by a coincidence--"

"There are too many coincidences about this business," said Tim.

Stocker looked at him thoughtfully. "There are a few," he said. "And now, if you don't mind, sir, I'll try to go to sleep."

"Did you have instructions from Daney to look after Miss Grier?"

"I've not seen Daney for years, sir," said Stocker, and turning over on his side, ostentatiously closed his eyes.

Whatever plans Tim might have had were disturbed in the morning, when a telegram reached him from his London solicitors, asking him to call. He drove into Glasgow and took the night mail to London. At the Carlton he found a respectable pile of correspondence awaiting him, but he ignored this until he had seen his lawyer.

That gentleman detained him for an hour, and at the end of that time informed him that he would be required in London on the next day and probably on the day after.

"We've looked through your affairs. Mr. Awkwright has kept them in excellent order. You're a comparatively rich man. Captain Jordan."

"I can't be too rich," said Tim. "Just now I'm thinking in terms of a nice house in Brook Street, with sunken bathrooms and beautifully effeminate decorations."

"I'm afraid you'll have to stick to the Carlton for a year or two," said the lawyer.

"Do you know anybody at Scotland Yard?" asked Tim suddenly.

The solicitor knew a number of people, including, by great fortune, the Chief Constable. Tim left with a letter of introduction to Mr. Cowley, and found that great man disengaged.

Cowley was stout, red-faced, lethargic. Nobody would judge from his appearance that he was the cleverest crook-catcher in England. He spoke slowly, drank beer in large quantities, and never seemed to be doing any work in particular.

"Glad to meet you, Captain Jordan. I'm afraid we treated you rather rudely the first time you came to the Yard, but we keep a special department to deal with amateur detectives, and the thick-headed man who saw you had no idea that you were a 'regular.' Jelf? Yes, we've got his record, and Lew Daney's."

He pressed a bell, and, to the attendant who came: "Go up to the Records Department and get these particulars."

He scribbled a few words on a sheet of paper, and after the man had gone: "We've not been called in to the Clench House affair, and I doubt if we shall be. It looks a queer mix-up. Jelf worked with Daney, and I'm pretty sure was in the Glasgow job, which means that Daney is somewhere in the neighbourhood. Have you met his wife?"

Tim said he had, and the big man chuckled.

"That woman's squeals have kept my secretary more busy than any other human being in the world. Unfortunately, she never squeals at the right moment. It's when Lew has disappeared, and she thinks he's gone philandering on the Continent, that she's most talkative, and she's never told me anything worth two cents."

Briefly he sketched the life of Daney; a man of education, a skilled artificer, who had worked for three years in a Wolverhampton safe factory, and knew more about locks and the picking of them than any man in the world.

"They say he could make a safe or a strong-room single-handed if he was left to it."

"Is he an engraver?"

Cowley nodded.

"That's his hobby. Some of the pictures he's done are worth money. He's an all-round clever fellow, is Lew. And I'll tell you something, Captain Jordan: that man isn't a hundred miles from Clench House."

"What does he look like?" asked Tim.

"I'll tell you when the documents come down."

Curiously enough, the dossier which the messenger brought did not add very much to his knowledge. There was no photograph, and the fact that the man had not been through the hands of the police robbed the data of much of its value. The description of him was vague, and might fit almost every other man one met in the street.

"The only thing I can tell you about him that is not here is that he's very rich," said Cowley. "In fact, I should think he's one of the few crooks in the world who has made thieving pay. He was out of the country for a year, in South Africa, but you know that. Queer you didn't meet him."

Cowley came with him down the stairs to the portals of the Yard, those doors that are never closed day or night.

"We have only a watching interest," he said. "Even in the Glasgow robbery case we haven't been consulted. But if Daney was the man, and he's in this Jelf affair of yours you want to go slow. He's the only recognised gunman who operates in this country. He's as clever as a monkey, and as dangerous as the devil! Unless you've some particular interest, I should lay off Mr. Daney--and keep away from his wife!"

CHAPTER 7

TIM remembered this injunction with a smile when he got back to the Carlton and went through his letters; for the second he opened was from that lady. She had apparently a flat in Penson Court, an expensive block near the Green Park, and the letter was a brief but urgent invitation to call on her at the earliest possible moment. The letter had been written on the day he arrived in London.

Either Mrs. Daney was kept well informed as to his movements, or she was a good guesser. In spite of the injunction of the police chief he decided to satisfy his curiosity, and after lunch he made his call.

His taxi was stopped half-way up Lower Regent Street by the traffic, stopped again in Piccadilly Circus and yet again in Piccadilly at the end of Bond Street. He was looking idly through the window when he saw a car, one of many, turn from Bond Street into Piccadilly.

It was moving slowly, and he glanced without curiosity at the interior. What he saw made him sit bolt upright. He recognised the woman instantly. It was the drunken lady he had seen at Clench House; but now she was fairly well dressed, possibly sober, and certainly cheerful, for she was laughing heartily at some jest of the young man who was sitting at her side, that same young man with the pale face and the straggling beard, but now well dressed and with a smile upon his intelligent face.

He turned his head in Tim's direction and their eyes met.

There was no sign of recognition, and the car passed on. Tim glanced back though the tiny window behind the cab, and knew that it would be useless to attempt to overtake this strange couple. He was staggered and baffled. He could not have made a mistake; he never forgot faces, and that this was the drunken virago who had invaded Clench House, and that the man was the wild creature who had stabbed at him with a knife on the road outside, was beyond any doubt.

One thing he saw, that the car had travelled a long way. The colour of the body was indistinguishable in its grey covering of dust. He was more than a little perturbed by the time he reached Penson Court. Mrs. Daney lived in one of the most expensive suites, he noted, for the lift stopped on the second floor. He followed the uniformed page down a softly carpeted corridor to a mahogany door, which opened almost immediately the page pressed the bell. A neatly liveried girl led him into the drawing-room, furnished in the modern style, sparsely but luxuriously.

"I will tell madam you are here, sir," said the maid.

"You don't even know who I am," smiled Tim.

The girl nodded. "You're Captain Jordan. Madam has been expecting you since this morning."

"Madam" came in almost immediately. She was wearing a dove-grey negligee, and though grey is not a colour usually affected by women over thirty, it had the effect of softening certain hard lines of her face which Tim had dispassionately recorded on their last meeting.

"Sit down, Jordan." She waved her hand to a settee. "I was afraid you hadn't come back from Scotland. How did you leave your Mary? Don't be cross--I'm really not as jealous of the girl as I was. I've been rather unkind about Lew. When I'm feeling sore with him I don't mind what lies I tell. He's been such a darling to me that I'm wicked to treat him as I do."

Tim listened and did not attempt to hide his amusement. This was the Mrs. Daney for whom Cowley had prepared him; a penitent Mrs. Daney. A curious woman, quite unreal to him.

"We're going abroad. I've sent him a wire."

"Do you know where he is?"

"I sent the wire," she repeated.

And then a light dawned on him.

"Of course, in the agony column!"

She was a little disconcerted.

"Well--yes. When Lew and I have a tiff, and he goes away, and I don't know where he is, I send him a message through the papers. But don't look for it, Mr. Smarty, because Lew and I have a code, and he knows just where to meet me, and you wouldn't find out in a thousand years, whether it was at Boulogne or Constantinople! And tomorrow there'll be a message for me, saying 'O.K., I'll join you.' You needn't look for that either."

She paced up and down the room, one elbow on the palm of her hand, a long, gold-tipped cigarette between her white fingers.

"The first time I saw you I fell for you," she said calmly, "but now you don't mean any more to me than the paper on the wall! I'm telling you this in case you came here with any funny ideas."

"I'm full of funny ideas," said Tim, "but they don't go in the direction of making love to you. I'm going to the police--"

"You've just come from there," she said. "You were at Scotland Yard this morning. I was driving along the Embankment and saw you come out."

"Do you know where your husband is at this moment?"

She shook her head.

"He was in Scotland a few days ago--he left his overcoat in my charge. When you see him you might tell him."

She frowned. "His overcoat? Where did you find it?"

He realised he might be acting very rashly, but he told her. When he came to the part where he described the attack on Stocker, she gasped.

"Lew wouldn't do that. Why should he?" she said quickly. "He wouldn't beat up Stocker--don't ask me any damned silly questions--of course he wouldn't! Something's gone wrong up there. Stocker told you nothing, of course? He wouldn't. It must have been the lunatic--he lives about five miles away. Have you found his house? It's a little cottage up on the hills. The woods lunatic--I mean the man who tried to murder the Grier girl. Lew saved her life, and that's how he got soft on her."

"The mad man is in London," said Tim. "I've just seen him, with a woman."

"In London? Where?"

"To be exact, in Piccadilly. The woman--"

"She's his keeper, Mrs. Smits. They don't count, anyway." Her eyes narrowed. "You're sweet on that girl, aren't you, Jordan? You'd better watch out!"

He laughed. "Since I've been back in this country I've done nothing else but watch out," he said. "And whom am I to watch out for--Lew Daney or the crazy gentleman?"

"Both," she said. "I wonder what you've done to Lew? Did you ever pinch him in South Africa?"

He shook his head.

"I never saw him."

"He went out with a girl from one of the theatres," she said. "I tried my best to get him arrested at Cape Town, but I'm glad I didn't. That's Lew's weakness. He's mad about Mary Grier--it least, he was. They don't last more than six months for Lew, is a rule. He's a devil! How long are you going to be in London?"

He told her.

"I'll get on the wire to you tomorrow morning. No, I'm not an American, but I was in New York for two years in the Follies chorus. That's where I met, Lew. I'll 'phone you and tell you if everything is all right."

"By which you mean if Lew is ruined and you are taking your jaunt abroad," said Tim. "Now what I would call right is if he were safe inside Cannon Row police station."

She smiled contemptuously. "That kind of man doesn't go into police stations," she said.

Her whole mood had changed; he left her a very depressed and worried woman, and half expected that she would call him in the course of the day. But he did not hear from her until the next morning, when a 'phone call got him out of bed at seven o'clock.

"I've heard nothing." Her voice was shrill and agitated. "There's not a line in the papers--he's never done that before."

Why she troubled to 'phone him he could not imagine. Possibly she would have found it as difficult to supply an explanation. Mrs. Daney's nerves were on edge.

"Will you come and see me this afternoon?" she asked. "Or I will come to the Carlton?"

Before he could answer she had hung up on him. He got out of bed and rang for his morning tea. It was an early hour to be awake in London, where he had no business at all, and nothing to fill some of the long and irksome hours which separated him from Mary Grier.

He was finishing his breakfast when the telephone bell rang again.

"Trunk call from Scotland," said the exchange.

He waited. It was Mary; he recognised her voice.

"Is that you, Captain Jordan? Is it possible for you to come immediately? Can you fly here?"

"What's happened?" he asked quickly.

He could hear her rapid breathing, and then: "Mr. Awkwright has disappeared," she said.

An hour later a taxi aeroplane went up from Stag Lane and headed north. It came down at Catterick to renew its supplies before continuing its journey.

Tim reached the aerodrome soon after two o'clock, and found the girl waiting for him in her little car. As they drove the ten miles which separated them from Clench House she told the bare facts.

She had left Mr. Awkwright working in his study. He had recovered a little from the distress into which the murder had thrown him and had returned to his favourite occupation. The book of form he had been reading, and certain obscure calculations worked out on a sheet of paper, were lying on his desk when Stocker went in. Stocker, finding the old man's room untenanted and the bed untouched, had gone in search of his employer.

The lights were burning in the study. The windows were closed and bolted when he entered the room. In addition to the book and the papers on the desk there was a small revolver, which the old man invariably brought out when he was working alone.

Mr. Awkwright had a swing chair which tilted backwards to an alarming angle. This was found overturned on the floor, but there was no other sign of disorder. Stocker, making a quick search of the room, discovered one thing missing. Every night before he retired to bed, or to whatever was his occupation, he left a small, square electric hand-torch at the old man's elbow, to enable him to find his way up to bed in case the lights were switched oft. The lantern was missing.

He had gone immediately and roused Mary, and together they had made a search of the grounds. It had been raining over-night, and the gravel path and drive had been laid economically upon a clayey subsoil, which left marks of feet on its putty-like surface. There was no trace of Mr. Awkwright's footprints. He had been wearing slippers. In one corner of the room was the pair of snow-shoes which he wore whenever he went out. These had been untouched.

"Have you sent for the police?" asked Tim.

She shook her head. "No. He's got a habit of going away rather suddenly and without any warning."

For the first time Tim learned of Mr. Awkwright's racing weakness. He would often go overnight to Ayr.

"But there are no races at Ayr," insisted Tim.

She was terribly pale and worried. He had never seen her quite so agitated.

"I nearly telephoned to the superintendent, but I was afraid of making Mr. Awkwright look foolish."

He followed her into the study. She had left the room as she had found it. Mary pointed out the absence of the lantern; more significant, the fact that the lights were found burning when Stocker entered the room. Old Awkwright was economical to the point of meanness.

Tim examined the desk. There was a book of form, and he had no difficulty in recognising the character of the calculations.

"Did you hear any noise at all in the night?"

She hesitated. "Yes, but then I am always hearing noises in this place."

"What did it sound like?"

"It sounded like somebody falling. My room is immediately under the study."

Stocker had kept very much in the background since Tim's arrival. He was a very agitated man when he came into Captain Jordan's presence.

"I know nothing except what the young lady has told you. The chair was overturned where you see it now."

"Were you in bed?" asked Tim.

Stocker shook his head. "No; the pain of my wound kept me awake. I was. sitting in my pantry till three o'clock."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

Tim made a circuit of the house but again failed to detect any signs of footprints, until he was near the garage, when he saw a set which were obviously Stocker's. When he taxed him with having been there since overnight, the butler admitted that he had made a little investigation on his own.

"I walked on the grass," he said, when he was asked why his footsteps had not shown. "I'll tell you this. Captain Jordan: I'm taking no more risks with the bird who gave me this!" He touched his bandaged forehead gingerly.

"Do you think the same man took away Mr. Awkwright?"

Stocker did not immediately reply. "I can only tell you this much," he said. "Whoever beat me up and kidnapped the old gentleman, it was not Lew Daney!"

His voice was vehement; there was in his tone a tense note of excitement.

"Why are you so sure?" asked Tim.

Stocker looked past him. "Because," he said slowly, "Lew Daney is my brother--didn't his wife tell you that?"

CHAPTER 8

TIM stared at him.

"Your brother?" he said incredulously.

Stocker nodded. "Dane Stocker--that's his name. They called him Daney when he was a kid, and that's why he's known as Daney now. You probably realise, Captain Jordan, that the man who saved Miss Grier was Daney. He was up here on a visit at the time, he and Jelf--no, I'm not pretending I don't know Jelf."

"When did you see your brother last?"

Stocker looked at him steadily. "I'm not going to tell you that. After all, he is my brother and it's not my job to put him away."

"In the last two months?" suggested Tim.

The man shook his head. "I've got no information to give you, Captain Jordan, but I'm idling you this again, that Daney wouldn't hurt a hair of old Awkwright's head. It was only for the sake of the young lady. Daney is a killer. If you ever get him he'll go for the nine o'clock walk. He's the only real killer in this country."

He said this with a certain amount of pride, which sounded odd to Tim Jordan's ears.

"I don't mind telling you, the first idea I had when Jelf was killed was that Daney had come up after him, for he was a squealer who had tried to double-cross him. They were in the Glasgow job together, and he wasn't satisfied with his share. Not that he ever got his share," he said with satisfaction.

"Did you get yours?" asked Tim bluntly.

Stocker smiled. "I wasn't in on that, Captain Jordan. I think I told you I'm running straight. Ever since I've been in Mr. Ledbetter's employ I've kept my hands from picking and stealing."

He said this with an unctuousness which Tim had noticed before.

He telephoned to the police, and they came over and conducted a thorough search of the house. Mary explained the peculiar habits of her employer, and they seemed inclined to accept her suggestion that Mr. Awkwright had made one of his eccentric journeys. He had left once before in the middle of the night, and had been away for six days, she told them.

"When are you going back to London?" she asked, after the police had gone.

"Do you want me to go?"

She shook her head. "No--I want you to stay. There's something dreadful happening in this house. Captain Jordan--well, Tim, if you like. I dread every night coming. And Stocker is worried, too; he jumps at every sound."

Stocker was indeed behaving in rather an extraordinary fashion. They saw very little of him that day; one of the women servants said he was sleeping in his room.

At dusk there arrived from Glasgow a small covered motor-van, which was backed into the garage. Tim witnessed its arrival by accident; he was returning from a long walk, and saw the van being housed under the eyes, of Stocker. It was brand-new from the makers' hands, and Stocker explained that it had been on order for a month.

"We had one but it was smashed up," he said.

Tim said nothing, but later got on the 'phone to the car agent who had supplied the machine, and learned that it came out of stock and had been purchased on the previous day by Stocker, who had paid cash on delivery.

He made the van an excuse for going into the garage, and noticed that a corner of the tailboard was broken off--the manufacturer's driver had not calculated on a brick projection inside the garage, a sort of internal pier, with which he had come into collision. Stocker took the damage very philosophically.

"If you worried about careless chauffeurs they'd break your heart," he said.

He saw Tim looking at the tractor.

"That puzzles you, don't it, sir? Mr. Ledbetter is like that. He buys all sorts of odd machines and then sells them. There was a time when I had about six cars in here, none of which he ever used. We were going to farm the land, but nothing came of it."

"You've got the chain on the wheels, I see?"

"Yes, sir." Stocker did not look at him. "I can't understand why that fellow took it off the other night. Probably he was going to pinch it, but you couldn't very well sell a tractor."

"What's that?" asked Tim.

He pointed to the raftered roof. For the first time he had seen the big hook that was attached to one of the beams near the end of the garage.

"I've never known what that's for, sir," said Stocker. "They say that in olden times they used to use this old chapel for hanging people. Maybe that was why they fixed the hook."

Nothing happened that night. It rained heavily, and Tim suspected, without being sure, that Stocker had spent the night patrolling outside the house, for there were the marks of muddy feet on the carpet in the hall.

A depressing day followed, broken only by the arrival of a police inspector, who came to discover whether anything further had been heard of Mr. Awkwright.

Tim and the girl were sitting at lunch. They were being waited on by one of the maids. Stocker was lying down; he sent a message that he wasn't feeling very well. It was a gloomy meal. Mary was unusually silent. The atmosphere of the place was beginning to get on Tim Jordan's nerves.

"I think I'm going to take you up to London," he said suddenly.

"Why? I couldn't possibly go until I heard from Mr. Awkwright, and I don't want to go to London."

He was surprised at her vehemence.

"It's preferable to Clench House on a day like this," he said.

She shook her head. "I must stay until--" She stopped. "Do you think anything serious has happened to Mr. Awkwright?"

Before he could reply, Stock er made an unexpected appearance. He motioned the maid out of the room.

"I've just heard from Mr. Awkwright," he said. "He wants you, Miss, and Captain Jordan to meet him at St. Enoch's Hotel."

"He telephoned?" asked Tim, in surprise and relief.

"Yes, sir. There's no doubt it was he. He said he'd be there at five o'clock, waiting for you in the vestibule."

Tim heard the girl's sigh. "Thank God!" she said softly.

He drove her into Glasgow, and at five o'clock they were waiting in the hall of St. Enoch's, The reception clerk had not heard of Mr. Awkwright; certainly he was not staying in the place, but this did not surprise Mary. Mr.

Awkwright invariably chose the cheapest lodgings, and made use of hotels, and incidentally their stationery, when he wanted to make an appointment.

They waited for an hour, but there was no sign of Awkwright; and at half-past six Tim drove the girl back to Clench House through a blinding rainstorm.

There was only one servant in the house--the cook. She explained that Stocker had given the rest of the servants a half-holiday. They looked at one another, Tim and the girl.

"Where is Mr. Stocker?" he asked.

The cook did not know; she thought he might be in his room.

Tim found the butler's room locked. There was no reply to his knocking, and after some time he found a key that opened it. The room was untenanted. The drawers had been pulled out from the bureau and had been emptied. There were signs that Stocker had cleared out all his belongings in a hurry.

"That is why he wanted us to go into Glasgow--to give him a clear field," he said.

He went out of the house to the garage. The door was unlocked. He switched on the one light which the building boasted, and examined the interior. The new van had gone, but what struck Tim as remarkable was the fact that the tractor, which had stood against the farthest wall, was now near the entrance. The chain which had fastened the wheels lay on the ground. There was evidence that the tractor had been used that afternoon.

Something on the floor attracted his attention. He found an electric torch in the house and examined the stain. It was blood--three little patches, the size of half-crowns.

He made another discovery: in one corner of the garage was a japanned tin box, which had been opened. It contained a number of medicines, and was obviously one of those first-aid cases which are kept in most households. Two bandages must have been taken out and used, for he found the blue papers in which they were wrapped screwed up into a ball near where the case was. Iodine had been used--the bottle lay on the floor, broken.

He went back to Mary and told her what he had found. She was as mystified as he.

"That crack on his head was healed," said Tim thoughtfully. "He may have hit himself again, but that would hardly account for the bloodstains on the floor."

A little later he had information about Mr. Stocker's erratic movements. The cook had a small boy, who had seen Stacker make several journeys to the graveyard. That the boy had been a witness was due to the fact that he was in disgrace with his mother, and had gone out of the house to avoid chastisement, and had taken refuge from the rain in a small shed which commanded a limited view of the old tomb.

Tim had the youth in and questioned him, but he could give no other information than that he had seen Stocker disappear into the graveyard, and in each case his visit had lasted about ten minutes. The last time he went in he had carried a coil of rope on his arm, but he had not brought it back.

The boy had one other important item of information to offer: he had heard the rumble and roar of the tractor being moved, and twice had heard a backfire.

Tim got on to the police, and was able to trace the movements of the van. It had been seen passing through a small village, and had been followed by a coupe moving as slowly.

"It is all very odd," said Tim. "The coupe worries me; that rather looks like our mysterious friend. The police wanted to know whether they should circulate a description of the van, but I don't think that we can do that. Stocker has every right to take out his employer's property, and I don't feel like barging into his affairs until I know a little more. Anyway, my dear, you can lock your door tonight, and whether you like London or not you go there tomorrow night."

He was up at dawn and made his way to the graveyard. The secret of that grisly place was the granite mausoleum with its new inscription. He examined the gunmetal slab carefully, tried to force it backward, but it was as solid as its granite surround.

He was turning away when something in one of the "0's" attracted his attention. It was a narrow slit about half an inch long, and not more than a sixteenth of an inch in width. He opened a penknife and thrust the blade inside. And then its significance flashed on him, and he raced back to the house, returning with the thin key he had found in the overcoat pocket.

It fitted perfectly, and turned with a click, but nothing else happened. He pressed his shoulder against the slab, but it was as immovable as ever.

Then by accident his finger-tips rested on one of the letters--the "T" in the first word. It sank inward until it was flush with the gunmetal surround. He tried the next letter, but it did not yield. One by one he pressed every letter. In the second word the "R" yielded to his touch. "Treasure!" That was the

code word, and was made up of one letter from each word on the inscription. As the last yielded to his pressure he heard a click, and, pushing at the slab, it swung back.

Before him was a narrow flight of stairs leading down out of sight. He closed the door, went back to the house to' procure a torch, and, returning, continued his investigations.

He was careful not to close the bronze door behind him, putting a piece of wood to prevent it fastening, though this, he found, was unnecessary, for at the back of the slab was a small steel handle which enabled the door to be opened from the inside.

Down, down he went. He counted thirty steps before he came to the rocky bottom.

He was in a big, vaulted chamber. Along each side ran three tiers of stone shelves. There was no mistaking their grisly character, though at some remote period the ancient dead must have been taken away. At the far end of the chamber was a rusty iron grille, which was ajar. Beyond this was a high, narrow passage, which he followed. It seemed interminable in length. He guessed he had travelled over a hundred yards when it turned abruptly to the left and then to the right again. Again it went straight, again terminated in an iron-barred door which was open.

He was now in a big vault. Flashing his lamp up, he saw, a long way above him, what must be, he decided, the stone flags of the garage. One in particular held his attention, for it seemed to be hinged at the end and to form a trap. The edges of the stone were bevelled, and he could form some idea of the thickness of the garage floor.

The vault was not entirely empty. There were two long boxes, fastened by staples. He opened one of these, and saw something wrapped in oiled paper. This he removed, revealing a small American machine-gun. Beneath this lay another. There were about six in the vault and, piled up against the wall, some twenty boxes of ammunition. In another box he found a number of spare ammunition trays.

Flashing his lamp along the floor, he saw definite marks where square boxes had stood until recently, and now he began to understand the secret which Clench House held.

He measured roughly the size of the boxes, and was puzzled. How could they have got the machine-guns here, and the vanished boxes? The passage was much too narrow; it was humanly impossible to carry objects of that size and shape through those narrow passages.

But the mystery of Clench House was a mystery no more, and the identity of Mr. Ledbetter was revealed. This was Daney's house, which he had furnished, and let at a ridiculous figure to any respectable tenant, leaving Stocker in charge to guard the treasure that was hidden in this vault, and to stop inquiries that a curious or suspicious constabulary might make as to the identity of Mr. Ledbetter.

At the far end of the vault was another iron grille, and a broader passage, which ran for a dozen yards before that also turned abruptly to the left. And here he came upon a curious discovery: running by the side of the wall was a flight of stone steps, unguarded by rails. They ran up to the misty darkness above, and terminated somewhere near the roof.

He was about to mount when his foot touched something, and, looking down, he saw an electric torch. The lens was smashed and the japanned casing was broken. It looked as if it had fallen from a height.

Awkwright's! He recognised the lamp from the description the girl had given to him. Carefully he made a search of the floor. There was a dark stain near the foot of the stairs; another group of stains level with the fourteenth step.

Cautiously he mounted, a nervy business, for the absence of a rail and the worn character of the steps made this movement a little dangerous. The treads became more even as he reached the higher level. They terminated in a stone platform.

On his left was a rough wooden panel, attached to which were two powerful springs. He tugged at this and felt it give. Exerting all his strength, he gave a jerk and it flew open, almost knocking him from his precarious foothold.

Tim stepped through the hole and found himself in Mr. Awkwright's study.

CHAPTER 9

HE was hardly in the room before the door opened and Mary Grier came in. She stopped, aghast, at the sight of him.

"Where on earth did you come from--" she began, and then her eyes fell upon the open panel, and she gasped. "How did you find that?"

She came quickly to the dark opening, and would have stepped through, but he stopped her. "Stay where you are--it's a little dangerous," he said.

He tried to close the panel and tugged. At first he thought it was fastened, but he was to discover that the operation of the spring which held it in its place when it was closed was sudden and a little dangerous; for as he tugged for the second time the panel closed with a crash, and he had only time to pull away his hand.

He pressed the panel, but not until he jerked at it with his shoulder did it fly open.

"That is what happened to Benjamin Awkwright," he said quietly. "He must have tilted back in his chair and fallen against the panel. It opened, and he must have taken the lantern to investigate. I found it at the bottom of the stairs."

She could only stare at him.

"Have you found him?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said, and explained the result of his investigations.

"My theory is that he got down the stairs, passed through the passage and up into the mausoleum. I should imagine it's quite possible to open the door from the inside," but I haven't attempted to prove this."

"But where would he have gone?" she asked.

Here Tim Jordan could offer no suggestion.

They went into the garage together, and he began a careful search of the floor. Presently he found what he expected--an iron ring set in one of the end flags. He had not seen this before, because the position of the tractor had hidden it. Searching in the cab of the tractor, he pulled out a long steel rope, a little thicker than piano wire, and attached to this a steel block and tackle. He took the ladder that stood in one corner of the garage, and, setting it against the wall, mounted it, carrying the block, which he slipped

into the big hook he had seen attached to the rafters above. Descending, he moved the ladder away and, starting up the tractor, drove it slowly backward until it was within a few feet of the wall.

Getting down, he attached one end of the wire cable to the tractor's coupling, and the hook at the other end to the ring in the stone floor. Slowly he started the tractor forward. The wire came taut, and the stone trap rose slowly until it was held in position by the next flagstone.

He came back to the black hole and stared down.

"That is the treasure house," he said, "and that is the way the goods were lowered by Daney, and taken out by his brother, Mr. Stocker."

"His brother?" she said incredulously.

"So he told me, and I've no reason to doubt it. I shouldn't imagine that Daney would trust anybody short of a brother."

The tractor served, in fact, as the motive power for a crane that lifted this slab, which otherwise it was impossible to move, and enabled them to get heavy things into and out of the vault.

"Stacker could not have known of the steps from the study, or he wouldn't have gone out of doors into the graveyard every time he wanted to get into the vault. One thing that puzzles me is why he bothered to carry a coil of rope. Single-handed, it must have been a very heavy job."

"What was in there?" she asked.

Tim smiled.

"The gold of the Indies," he said. "Something over a quarter of a million pounds, mostly in German money."

She looked at him, open-mouthed.

"The money that was stolen from the bank?" she gasped.

"And more besides," he said. "There have been quite a number of robberies in which Daney has been concerned, but we've only heard of the spectacular ones. This man is probably the most dangerous criminal they've ever had in this country, or in England, and the machine-guns are rather significant. Daney is a big man in his line of business, and probably will be bigger. We shall see the gangs come to England yet, unless he is caught."

She shook her head helplessly.

"I don't understand it. I met him once--he was most kind--"

"And very much in love with you," said Tim quietly.

She looked at him, frowning.

"Are you serious--in love with me? But how stupid! I only saw him once."

"I have reason to believe that he is very much in love with you, Mary, and I think you ought to know that. It is no offence to be in love with you--that I can say in all sincerity. On the contrary, it is the easiest thing I know."

He stood on the edge of the open trap and looked down.

"We'll not close it. The police must be informed, and I'm afraid Clench House is going to be untenable for you. You'll have to come to London with me."

She half shook her head.

"I don't want to go to London--not now."

"Why not now?"

"I mean, until Mr. Awkwright is found," she said quickly.

Mr. Awkwright was found for her within a few minutes.

They were met half-way back to the house by one of the maids.

The telephone had been ringing. Some police officer wanted to get into touch with Tim Jordan. It was the superintendent.

"Is that you, Captain Jordan? We've found Awkwright. He's in the hospital mortuary at Hamilton."

Tim was silent tor a moment.

"How did he get there?"

"A doctor in Hamilton heard a ring at his bell. When he went to the door he found the old gentleman lying in the porch of his house. He was still alive, but was obviously near to his end--he had a fractured skull. Some attempt had been made to bandage him."

"What time was this?"

"Late in the afternoon--just before dark. It had been raining all day, and there was a heavy ground mist, and nobody seems to have seen the old man. He could not possibly have walked to the doctor's place, but must have been left there by somebody."

"I think I understand," said Tim after a moment's thought. "Will you come over? I have made one or two interesting discoveries which I think the Glasgow police may like to know."

He told him briefly what he had found.

"There's no doubt in my mind that this is Daney's head-quarters and that all the loot from Glasgow was brought here. It's now on its way south, and I'll be able to give you a description of the van that carried it, and of the man who's driving it."

Within two hours a long line of cars was standing before Clench House, and in the dining-room the chief of the Glasgow and the county detective forces were checking their information.

Nobody knew Daney, but in response to an urgent 'phone call to Scotland Yard, Chief Constable Cowley was sending an officer by aeroplane with all the data and information in his possession, and had already issued warnings to the chief constables of England.

The interrogation of Mary Grier was a brief one. She could give them little information that they had not already. Tim saved her the gruesome task of identifying the dead man by driving to Hamilton, and attending the first preliminary inquiry, which was hardly opened, and evidence of identification taken, before it was adjourned.

The doctor in whose house the old man had been found was a very helpful man. He insisted upon driving Tim back to Clench House, and offered him the use of his car, a powerful roadster.

"If you're going to London you'll be doing me a service," he said. "I'm going there next week by train--I hate long journeys on the road."

Tim had almost decided to go by train himself, but the offer of the car decided him. Dawn was breaking the next morning when he knocked at Mary's door, and an hour later, after breakfast, they started out for their long run.

He wanted to know her better; perhaps he wanted her to know him. It may have been that the prospect of the long companionship which a road journey would involve was the deciding factor. They sped through the morning mist into bright sunlight, and for the first hour of the journey neither spoke.

It was Tim's intention to do the trip in one day, and the car gave every hope of his succeeding.

Except for monosyllabic answers, Mary Grier did not speak until long after the border was passed. They had emerged from a grimy town in Lancashire,

and had again reached the open country, and air that was free from smoke, when she said; "You're a relation of Mr. Awkwright's. Do you know whether he left a will?"

Tim shook his head.

"So far from being a relation, I am not even remotely connected with him. My father was a friend of his, that is all. Was he a very rich man?"

"I think so," she said. "He must have left a will."

Then, after a long pause: "It is going to be terribly difficult, even if he did."

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

But she offered no explanation.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"Is it absolutely necessary that you should go on working?" he asked, and, to his surprise, she answered that it was not. "Have you an income of your own?"

She hesitated. "I think so."

"Did Mr. Awkwright promise to leave you any money?"

She nodded. "Yes, he said he would leave me a hundred thousand pounds," she said simply, and he stared at her.

"Good Lord! A hundred thousand pounds!"

"He said so."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say "Why?" but he refrained.

Soon afterwards they stopped for the second time since they had set off, and after Tim had superintended the refilling of the tank, he went into the dining-room of the little inn, where she was drinking tea and making a half-hearted attempt to eat a sandwich.

"I'm going to say something that is intensely selfish," he said, as he settled down to a much more substantial meal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I hope, if he has left you that hundred thousand pounds, you won't settle down into being one of those wealthy spinsters who litter the hotels of Europe."

She smiled faintly.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because I know somebody who loves you," he said, and she turned her eyes away from his quickly.

He reached out and took her hand, but she drew it away.

"I don't want you to say that." She was a little breathless. "Life is terribly difficult for me now...don't make it harder."

"Drink up your tea," he said steadily. "I'm finished. I am a brute to talk to you like this."

Their progress after this was not so smooth. Engine trouble developed near Crewe, the engine missing on two cylinders, and they crawled into Grantham as it was getting dark.

"I should have taken the Holyhead road," confessed Tim, "but that wouldn't have helped the engine any!"

He handed the car over to mechanics, and after dinner he and the girl strolled out into the streets of Grantham, and, for want of something better, turned into a cinema. It was half-past ten when they came out, after a rather dull evening, and they walked slowly back to the hotel.

"Do you think Daney did this?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Killed Mr. Awkwright? No. I've no doubt at all what happened. He went down those infernal stairs, missed his step and fell. Stocker found him when he was removing the treasure, and out of sheer humanity took him on the van to the nearest doctor. You remember I told you about the bandages that were missing from the first-aid case? That also explains the coil of rope. It was partly to bring the old man up from the vault, and partly to enable Stocker to pull him dear of the trap before he put the tractor into reverse."

She sighed heavily.

"There's a curse upon Clench House."

"Yes," said Tim, "and its name is Daney--Daney, who has never hesitated to kill. And though he is innocent as far as poor Mr. Awkwright is concerned,

and, I believe, as far as Jelf is concerned, the money in that vault has been responsible for both deaths. Jelf came up with me for the purpose--"

They had been walking in the road. Suddenly Tim gripped her arm and dragged her to the sidewalk. A car without lights came flashing past. Tim turned, and as it came into the circle of light thrown by a street lamp, he recognised it.

"It's the van!" he cried. "Stacker's van!"

As he spoke, another car went past--Daney's coupe, white with dust, but unmistakable.

CHAPTER 10

LIKE a trailing shadow went Lew Daney's car behind the van. In a few seconds both had passed out of sight, and Tim recovered from the amazement which had momentarily paralysed him.

A cab was passing; he called it, and they drove to the nearest police office. Only a subordinate official was in charge, and he apparently had had no warning about the van; but whilst Tim was explaining the chief of the detectives came in, and in a few words Tim told him what he had seen.

"We had the warning late this afternoon. By some mistake it wasn't sent on to us," said the inspector. "I'll get all the surrounding towns on the wire--can you describe the car again?"

Tim dictated a short description of the van and the car following.

"They will be easy to pick up on the Great North Road," said the inspector. "The only difficulty is to get in touch with the patrols."

Two hours later Tim left the girl in the sitting-room he had engaged, and went back to the police station, to learn that nothing had been seen of either the van or the coupe.

"They've probably left the main road. I'll call you, Captain Jordan, if anything turns up."

It was past midnight when Tim went back to the hotel, to find the girl dozing before the fire that had been lit in the sitting-room, for the night was a cold one. He told her the news and sent her off to bed, and in spite of the lateness of the hour got through on the telephone to Scotland Yard.

He was fortunate to find Cowley in his office, and the Chief Constable listened without comment until Tim had finished.

"We have no effective check on them until they enter the London area, and that ought to be somewhere about daybreak if they keep straight on. I'll have a check barricade at all the main entries. I should think they would come in from the Essex side. You didn't see the man in the car?"

"Daney? No," said Tim. "If I did I shouldn't have recognised him. I only saw him once."

He had said good night and was putting down the receiver when Cowley called him back.

"By the way, the Scottish police say there were originally three cases of machine-guns, and one of these must be in the van--they photographed the

cellar floor, and the negative shows the place where the third case stood. It is exactly the same size as the others."

"That's interesting--and yet Stocker doesn't seem that kind of man, although he is Daney's brother."

"Daney's grandmother!" came the contemptuous reply. "Daney never had a brother. If he told you that, it was a desperate invention to keep suspicion from him. Stocker is one of the three men who robbed the Glasgow bank. He was custodian of the treasure, and Daney's right hand man. It looks as though they've all been double-crossing one another, and Stocker's got away with the stuff. I wouldn't be in his place if that was Daney's car following him."

When Tim returned to the sitting-room Mary Grier, who had been making preparations for departure, had gone. He went to the door of her room and tapped good night, then went to his own bed.

The strain of the day's driving and the excitement of the evening had left him wide awake. He was no more capable of sleeping than he was of writing poetry. He spent two hours falling into light dozes, and every time he woke and looked at the clock the hands seemed to have scarcely moved.

He got up at half-past three, lit the fire in his bedroom and, drawing up a chair, sat down and tried to read. Just before he fell asleep he thought he heard a light footstep pass the door, but, coming awake again and not hearing it repeated, decided he had been dreaming. He woke, stiff and cold, when the chambermaid brought him his hot water and morning tea, and he was not in the best of moods when he met Mary in the private sitting-room.

She, on the contrary, looked as fresh and was as bright as he had ever known her. She indicated the letter on the table. "You've had an early caller," she said.

He picked up the letter. It had been delivered by hand; the address was pen-printed and so was the letter inside. It began abruptly without any formal address; 'Keep your nose out of other people's business, Jordan, or you may lose it. "You're on a holiday--enjoy it, and don't mix business with pleasure.--L. D."

He looked at the letter in amazement. "Was it here when you came in?"

Mary nodded. He rang the bell, and when the waiter came he was to have a fresh shock.

"It must have been delivered in the night, sir. The chamber-maid found it on the table when she came to clean the room and put it on the mantelpiece. I returned it to the table when I laid it."

Tim took a pencil from his pocket and scraped the fine dust of the lead on the paper, carefully rubbing it across the surface with a piece of cotton-wool. There was no trace of fingerprints; the envelope was destitute of any kind of clue as to the identity of the writer.

"Lew Daney, I presume. Then he must have come back. But how on earth did he know I was here?"

They speculated throughout breakfast on the happening, and then Tim went down to get out his car. It was in one of twelve lock-up garages, and he had seen it safely housed overnight when it had returned from the mechanics' hands. It was in the lock-up which immediately faced the stable-yard and the arched entrance into the street. He inserted the key, turned it and pulled open the door, then stood for a minute, stock-still.

His car had gone, and in its place was the mud-spattered coupe he had seen chasing the van through the streets of Grantham.

"Well, I'm damned!"

The garage keeper was gaping at the machine.

"That's not yours, sir."

"It certainly isn't mine," said Tim grimly. "Do you mind telephoning--no, I'll do it myself. Help me get this car out."

They pulled the coupe into the cobbled yard. Tim pulled open the door and began a careful examination. The first remarkable object he saw was a big, irregular stain on the beige-covered cushion. He felt it gingerly with the tips of his fingers. It had, however, not been recently made. Oil, or--. It wasn't oil, he could swear; but that it was blood seemed too melodramatic an explanation.

Leaving the man in charge of the machine, with instructions not to allow anybody to approach it, he went into the hotel, briefly explained the situation to the girl, and telephoned through to police headquarters. Then he returned to the abandoned coupe.

The only thing that distressed him about the theft of his car was that it was not his own. The garage keeper had called his night man, who frankly admitted he had slept between one and five, and had heard nothing. The ancient gates of the yard were never closed.

The only information of any value came from a barmaid at the inn, who slept above the archway, and who had spent a wakeful night owing to toothache. She had heard a car go in at about a quarter to three, and soon afterwards another car go out of the yard. She had not thought this was unusual, for

motorists had a habit of arriving at Grantham at all hours of the day and night. She was perfectly certain she had heard one car go in before the other went out.

Tim examined the coupe. There was precious little room inside for any big packages, but it was obvious that something heavy had been stored, for the dashboard was scratched, a window had been broken, and the leather of the hood showed two deep depressions, as though the corner of a box had rested against it.

So Daney was not travelling light. Were the two men working with one object, and was there another treasure house in Scotland that Daney had cleared at the same time as his assistant?

At the back of the seat was a carry-all, and in this he made an important discovery: a round ammunition tray, fully loaded, and obviously part of one of the automatic rifles. In transferring the contents of the coupe to Tim's car Mr. Daney had evidently overlooked this. In the circumstances, Chief Constable Cowley's warning was not without its value.

By the time he had finished his examination the police had arrived, but they contributed nothing to the sum of the discoveries. No policeman on night duty had reported seeing the car, though it was quite possible, Tim thought, that, since they had not expected to see the car again in Grantham, they had taken very little notice of the machines that had passed them before dawn.

Why had Daney troubled to come back and change the car? The mechanics applied a test to the coupe, but could find nothing wrong with it: the engine was running smoothly, and the petrol tank was three-parts full.

"I think the explanation of that is simple," said the inspector. "He knew the police would be looking for this particular car, and they wouldn't be looking for a car like yours. And I should imagine that that explains the note. He didn't know that you were here until he opened the first garage--a child could pick the lock with a hairpin--and found it was yours. By the way, how did he know that? Did you leave anything in the car?"

Tim thought, and remembered that he had left an empty suitcase which had his name painted on it.

"That explains that," said the inspector; "though he needn't have taken that trouble, for your name is chalked up in the entrance hall of the hotel--and the number of your room."

He went in to make inquiries without very much doubt that his solution was correct.

"There is no night porter; the night garage man does that work, and he was admittedly asleep. Daney broke in to get food: the larder was burgled, and he took away a couple of loaves of bread, a ham and some bottles of beer. I expect he's finding it difficult to feed himself. He must have seen your name on the slate, and wrote his letter--which, by the way, is on hotel notepaper. You're lucky that he left it in the sitting-room and didn't pay you a personal visit."

"He's a bit lucky, too," said Tim, showing his teeth.

Then he had told the full story to the troubled girl: "I'll have to hire a car," said Tim. "I think after all this I'll buy one of my own!"

Hiring presented no difficulty, though the machine he secured was not good enough to take them to London. He decided to push on immediately to Stamford; but again the march of events came across his path and arrested all progress.

The car he hired was an ancient specimen of the noisiest type of American machine, but it went fast and was fairly comfortable, and he was reconciled to the distressing noises it made before they were clear of Grantham.

It was nearly nine o'clock on a fine morning, sunny when the car mounted to the crest of hill roads, patchily misty in the dips.

How far would Daney have got? He made a calculation that the man had had nearly four hours' start, quite sufficient to get him to London--if the car did not fail him, and if he followed the direct road. Once in London, it would be almost impossible to trace him.

Mary Grier had gone back to the silence of the previous morning, and scarcely spoke. She sat stiffly in one corner of the car, pondering that insoluble problem of hers, a problem that was now more acute than ever it had been before.

They had climbed a hill, and were coming down on the other side when Tim saw ahead, standing in the middle of the road-way, a man with his arms outstretched, signalling the car to stop. He slipped from his pocket an automatic, and dropped the hand that held it between his closed knees. The car slowed and the man came up, and Tim saw that he was a harmless farm labourer, and, putting up the safety catch, dropped the gun back into his pocket.

He was a man in a state of excitement; his face was red, his eyes wide. He babbled something at the chauffeur, and then Tim opened the door of the limousine, and got out.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"There's an accident up there." The man pointed ahead. He was breathless with running. "I seen it as I was coming down Parks Hill towards quarry. I happened to look over quarry, and I seen this van--smashed right through the wood railings--I always said there'd be a bad accident there."

"When did this happen?" asked Tim.

The man thought it was quite recently, there was still smoke coming up from the wreckage.

A van! Tim motioned the man into the seat by the driver and ordered the car on. It went down the dip and up another rise, and when the man signalled back the car stopped. Tim saw the gap in the wooden fence. Beyond that was a gently shelving slope which ended with a railing, again broken. Tim looked down. Fifty yards below, on the weed-grown stones of a disused quarry, lay the wreckage of Stocker's car.

Mary would have followed him, but he ordered her back to the car. Making a wide circuit, he descended a rough flight of steps carved in the quarry floor. Yes, it was Stocker's van and--

Then he saw. Stocker had been thrown clear of the wreck. He lay apart, on his back, his arms outstretched, and on his face was a quizzical smile. No victim of a motor-car accident this: he had been shot twice through the head at close quarters, and must have been dead long before the car left the road and hurtled to destruction down the quarry face.

CHAPTER 11

EVERY pocket in the man's clothes had been turned inside out. There was no need to conduct a search: the man who had killed him had been thorough in that respect.

Tim climbed back to where he had left the car, and drove on to the nearest village to report his find. The van was quite empty: he made sure of that before he left. None of the boxes that it carried was to be found in the wreckage. Tim would have been surprised if they had been.

When they got to Peterborough: "I think a train is indicated," said Tim. "Our journey is a little too exciting, and there is a fast London express in a quarter of an hour."

She had been shocked when she learned of the murder, and had sat for the remainder of the journey frozen stiff with horror. Now for the first time she spoke of it.

"He was shot--you're sure of that? Not--" she hesitated.

"Not stabbed--no. Why do you always think it was he?" he asked quietly.

She started.

"Who?" The colour came and went in her face.

"The man who wounded you--who killed Jelf."

She went white again. "I--I didn't think it was he," she stammered. "It couldn't have been....He hated Stocker, who struck him once."

Then, in an instant, in that odd way of hers, she recovered from her panic. "I'm being hysterical, and I'm half asleep," she said. "I think the train is the best suggestion you've made for many days!"

They had taken their seats, and the guard's whistle had blown, when a man moved swiftly along the platform, past their carriage window. Tim, more interested in the morning newspaper which he had just purchased, was conscious that his fellow passenger had looked at him hard for a second. By the time he could turn his eyes in the direction of the stranger he had gone.

"Who the devil was that?" he asked.

She looked up from her paper.

"Who the devil was who?"

"That man who passed."

She shook her head.

"I didn't see anybody."

"I didn't see him--I felt him. And yet in an absent-minded way I must have seen him. He had a brown check coat."

The train started at that moment, and Tim returned to his paper. The man in the check coat came to his mind once or twice on the journey. When they were a little way outside of London, he strolled through the train, but failed to see anything that looked like a check coat.

London brought a situation of some delicacy. Mary Grier had her mother and her sister living there, and when he put his proposal to her he expected it to be turned down without hesitation. To his surprise, and after a moment's thought, she nodded.

"Yes, I'll stay at the Carlton. I think--I hope I can afford it. I don't want to stay with mother. She's a darling, and so is Anne, my sister, and I'd sooner be with them than--almost anybody. But that is where--" She hesitated again--"if anybody wanted me they would expect to find me."

"The 'anybody' being--?" suggested Tim, but she ignored the question.

"The Carlton is so eminently plutocratic that nobody will dream of looking for me there. It won't be necessary to notify--" She stopped short. "Yes, of course, poor Mr. Awkwright's lawyers must know. But I'll call on them; I've brought all his papers down."

He saw her comfortably installed in a room on the same floor as that on which his own suite was, and drove to Scotland Yard to find Chief Constable Cowley in conference. The moment his name was sent in, Cowley came out to escort him to the board.

"You're the very man we wanted to see. Your car has been found, by the way, abandoned three miles south of Newark, quite unharmed, though it seems to be missing on two cylinders."

"It always has been," said Tim unjustly. "Have you found Daney?"

Cowley shook his head. "At the present moment we are trying to fix a date with his wife, but this has been made a little difficult by the fact that she packed all her belongings--she hired the flat furnished, by the way--and disappeared suddenly this morning, which can only mean that she's got a rendezvous with Lew Daney."

Tim went back to the hotel, and in the solitude of his sitting-room worked out the possibilities of the situation. He had dealt with many crimes, but

they had not been town crimes. He was in a new atmosphere, in a new world, and he was fascinated not only by the problems which Clench House and its mysteries presented, but also by that element of personal danger which he sensed rather than recognised.

If he had only met Lew Daney in the flesh, matters would have been simplified. Here was a man who might be the greatest criminal of his time: an organiser brilliant in methods and ruthless in action. Somewhere in England were bolt-holes to which he could go at the first hint of warning, and Mrs. Daney had already joined him in one of them. Obviously, to trace the woman was the first step.

CHAPTER 12

THE lady who called herself Mrs. Daney had as much right to that name as to any other she had adopted. "Gill" Daney was a lady who had lived expensively all her life. To Tim Jordan she had been unusual. He had never quite met her type, but her own circle accepted her as the normal product of her opportunities. They knew her and her antecedents; they were aware that all her life she had been collecting expensive jewellery, that she knew to a penny the value of diamonds, could judge them, and price them unerringly. And on diamonds she had very early on set her faith. Big diamonds, saleable ones; jewellery with a minimum of setting and a maximum of stone. She had perhaps the most valuable collection of any woman of her class.

She liked Daney; she was a little frightened of him, too, but found a secret pride that she had established over him an ascendency which had been more permanent than was the case with any other woman.

Once she had feared him, and had run away in a blind panic after one of her spasmodic betrayals. But he had forgiven her, and she felt more secure than ever.

That she had not heard from the man, not even through the columns of the Press--their usual method of communication in these circumstances--less alarmed than annoyed her.

On the night that Stocker came to his end she had a telegram. It was very brief.

'Be at Severn tomorrow afternoon. Urgent.'

The telegram was unsigned; there was no need for signature.

She knew Severn, had spent a happy month there, where she was known as Mrs. Colton, the wife of an Indian engineer. It was a delightful little cottage between Amersham and Beaconsfield, in the loveliest part of Bucks. It might have been a model house, if details of its construction had ever been published, for Lew had designed it himself so that it might be run without servants. It had every electrical appliance, and he had spent a considerable sum of money in bringing the cable from the main supply. He maintained no staff, the garden being kept in order by contract with a neighbouring florist, and the only caller was the postman who brought the inevitable circulars, and the tradespeople who came vainly in search of orders.

This house held important secrets in the steel safe embedded in the wall of the principal bedroom, for Lew had one weakness: he was a great writer of memoranda, had had dreams, if the final burst came and luck went against

him, of publishing an autobiography which would startle the world and entitle him to a foremost place in modern criminal records.

It was that vanity which is part of the equipment of all important criminals. He kept on his person notes which would have been fatal to him had he been captured.

The night he had met Harry the Valet and revealed to him the secret of Clench House and its treasure, playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse, and showing him a promised land before a bullet extinguished all hope of attaining to its joys, had been one of the peculiar expressions of this egoistic criminal.

To Mrs. Daney's credit, she had never shown the least curiosity concerning Lew's private affairs. She was only concerned with that aspect of them which directly and immediately affected her; his prosperity, his success, the amount of reward that accrued from his adventures, all these things were important because they meant money and additions to the jewels which she kept at her bank.

She was fond of Lew, sometimes absurdly jealous of him. That was the human side of her. She also ate and drank. She never troubled her head about her own future; that lay in the strong-room of the bank. The possibility of Lew being captured and sent down for a long term of imprisonment meant very little. It would be an occasion for an emotional display. But such a possibility interested her only in so far as it involved her own safety and comfort. She had her vanities, too. She disliked Tim Jordan intensely.

She went by train, not to Amersham or Beaconsfield, but to Watford. There she hired a taxi and drove to the house. The cabman brought her two suitcases to the door, and she waited mi the doorstep until he had gone before she opened the door and went in.

The ventilation of the house was so perfect that although it had been untenanted for eight months, there was no smell of mustiness. There was very little dust. In half an hour this domesticated woman had put the place in order, and had found time to visit the garage, which ran the length of the house and could be approached either from the front or from the rear.

Lew's big emergency Spanz looked as speckless as on the day he had left it. In the pocket of that car were two envelopes, and in each envelope was a passport made out in different names. Business letters addressed to the owner; all that was necessary to establish Lew's identity if the need came about for a sudden getaway.

She closed and locked the dust-proof doors from the inside and went back into the house through the little door which communicated with the kitchen. She believed, though she did not know for sure, that Lew had two other places like this, one on the Scottish border; and one in Somerset. He had spoken of them casually, but had not told her their location, and she had asked no questions, which was one of her charms for Lew Daney.

She knew nothing of the car pit, except that it existed, or the false bottom of it and what might lie underneath hidden from view. Lew thought of everything, and, though she was not aware of the fact, he had chosen this particular site because from its flat roof it commanded a view of four roads.

She spent the afternoon burning the accumulation of mail which lay, a great heap, in the passage under the letter slit.

She was not a great reader, except of a certain type of newspaper which gave her, as she put it pithily, "all the dirt."

Lew had not said what time he would come, and she took no trouble to prepare for him. She got for herself a meal from the innumerable tins and jars which stocked the underground larder, and which even included fresh bread that had been in the house for at least nine months. She cleared this away, put the dishes in the electric washer and settled down to her tapestry work.

It was ten o'clock when she heard a car stop before the house, turn slowly in through the open gates and stop before the garage. She switched out the light and looked past the edge of the blind. The door of the garage was opened and the car moved in. She went to the private door into the kitchen to receive her husband, but he did not come that way. She heard his foot on the doorstep and, running through the dark passage, opened the door.

"Come in, honey," she said.

And then a hand gripped her by the throat and silenced the scream.

"I'm going to give you something to tell Jordan about," said a menacing voice, and for the first time in her life the fear of death came upon the woman and she sagged suddenly in his arms.

CHAPTER 13

TIM JORDAN had one of the dullest nights he had ever spent in London. Mary went to bed early with a headache, and he was reluctant to leave the hotel. He had seen very little of her. She had spent most of the afternoon with Mr. Awkwright's solicitors, and if she had learnt anything about the will of that eccentric man she did not communicate it to Tim.

Early next morning the solicitor called again, and she went out with him. He read carefully every account he could gather of the Stocker murder, but no new clues had come to light. One theory, pur forward by a Midland paper, caught his attention: "It is possible that the murderer hid the proceeds of the robbery before he abandoned the car. There seems little doubt that he made his way back to London by train."

Tim remembered the man in the check coat, and wondered whether his vague suspicions were not justified. Nothing had been heard of Mrs. Daney, and the news from Scotland Yard was blank and uninspiring.

He came back to his room about eleven o'clock and tried to write a few of the twenty letters he should have written. There was urgent need, as well as opportunity, for the African mail left on the following day. But for some reason he could not concentrate his mind upon his work. He had that irritating sense of being an outsider in the game which he loved best.

Scotland Yard was a wonderful institution. He would have been a super-philosopher if, standing at a distance from Scotland Yard, he could admire its operations, in a detached way--detached that he could be annoyed where apparently it had failed obviously.

He did not realise that Scotland Yard is the master of London and the servant of the provinces; that it cannot move outside of its own area without invitation. He knew nothing of the jealousies which existed, or, it would be fairer to say, the espirit de corps of local bodies which had such faith in their own powers of detection that the calling-in of Scotland Yard seemed an unnecessary gesture, not particularly flattering to themselves.

He emptied a box of matches on to the circular table, and slid them out in odd little diagrams to represent the march of events. Here were Clench House and the chauffeur who had died so suddenly and so senselessly. Here was Stocker, amiable, in urbane butler and caretaker for an absent owner. A most plausible figure; not even Tim had suspected him of being the real custodian of stolen loot hidden in a house which was immune from suspicion because of its tenant.

Here was the mysterious young man with the little beard, who fled across the country-side, knife in hand, hacking and stabbing. Here was Mrs. Daney

(it took four matches to make Mrs. Daney), an incredible person, ready to betray her husband to the scaffold on the most absurd suspicion. Here was old Awkwright, dead, of something that might have been an accident but was as likely to be murder.

He put three matches shaped like a gallows; that was Daney.

Far away from its contamination, with six matches he made a star--and there was only one star in all the human firmament for Tim. And she, he hoped, was sleeping quietly, three rooms down the corridor. She was perhaps the most mysterious of all; the heiress to a hundred thousand pounds, if old Awkwright had not changed his mind; a girl with no time for loving; sane, practical and very human. And very lovely.

Lew Daney now...he enlarged the scaffold and added a match for a rope, artistically arranged the falling trap and put a figure on it. Now, Lew Daney--

The telephone-bell tinkled and he stretched out and reached for the instrument. It was the voice of the operator.

"There's an urgent toll call for you. Captain Jordan. Will you take it?"

"Shoot it along," he said.

There was a click, and then the line broke a word in half....

"Jordan? Is that you, Captain Jordan?"

"That's me. It's Mrs. Daney, isn't it?"

"For God's sake come at once...a little cottage called 'Severn,' between Beaconsfield and Amersham...."

Behind her voice, and booming through it, came a succession of irregular thuds; the sound of somebody hammering on a door. With her last words he heard a crash.

"Captain Jordan!" she screamed. "Help...it's.--"

The word she was trying to say was strangled in her throat.

He heard the receiver fall and crash against the wall, then somebody replaced it, but until the hook dropped under its weight he heard the gurgling screams of this choked woman.

Chief Constable Cowley had given him his private telephone number, and he was on to him in a few minutes, and told him the story.

"We can do nothing officially, but I'll send you a man and a squad car. After all, we want Daney as much as anybody, and I'll take the chance of a snub. Don't waste time--he'll be at the door of the Carlton almost as soon as you're there."

Tim hung up, and, flying into his bedroom, pulled on a heavy pair of shoes, and taking from a drawer an automatic, put it into his pocket.

Was it "Seven" or "Severn" she had said?...Beaconsfield would be the nearest point, he discovered when he made a quick examination of the map, realising at the end of it that he was wasting his time, for the police would know.

He found a small torch, pulled on an old hat and raced down the stairs. True to Cowley's promise, he was hardly at the swing door of the hotel before the squad car pulled up. There was a man in the driver's seat and another behind, who pushed open the door for him, and introduced himself as Sergeant Wheeler.

"I've located this place--'Severn,' isn't it, Captain Jordan?"

He switched on the light, and with extraordinary dexterity manipulated a folding map.

"It's an Ordnance map, and the house is marked...here it is." He pointed. "I couldn't find out the owner, and hadn't time to telephone. It's the sort of place that Daney would use as a holt-hole."

"The Chief Constable has been talking to you, has he?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I have been looking for Mrs. Daney all day. You're sure it was she?"

"Absolutely certain," said Tim emphatically.

Wheeler whistled musically to himself for some time. "They've always quarrelled like a cat and a dog. Once we nearly caught him in consequence." Then, without warning: "Do you know a man called Harry the Valet?"

"I know him, yes. He came into my view in South Africa."

Wheeler nodded.

"The Chief Constable was telling me something about that, Captain. We've got an inquiry about him."

"What has he been doing?" asked Tim, only mildly interested.

"Nothing," was the surprising reply. "It's a lawyer's inquiry. His great-uncle has died in Australia and left him about three hundred thousand pounds. But he's not been seen since the day Miss--what's her name? The young lady that was with you at the Carlton, in suite 907?"

Tim laughed. "You mean Miss Grier?"

"That's right--the day she was in London. He was staying at the same hotel as the young lady. He went away that night and has not been seen since. We had the good luck to find a man who had worked with him in one or two swindles, and he supplied us with a list of places where we could very likely pick him up, but we've drawn blank so far."

"That's not very astonishing, is it?"

The sergeant whistled again.

"It is, really. When we know our man we always get him. Undiscovered crimes are committed by people we don't know. That's the case against us in a nutshell. As a rule Harry isn't very difficult to find. He runs a gold-brick agency; his long suit is the super-confidence trick, and, generally speaking, the provincial police help us more with this type of crime than with any other. But since the night he left the hotel in Bloomsbury where the young lady was staying, he has vanished."

They were flying through Acton in an amazingly short space of time after having left the Carlton.

"Aren't you taking a bit of a risk," asked Tim, "tackling this man single-handed?"

"Who--Daney? Bless your heart, he won't be there! Didn't you tell the Chief over the 'phone that the woman gave away the location of the place? He must have heard that. No, the only chance we've got is of finding that he's left something behind in a hurry which will give him away. You've also got to remember that the whole thing may be a hoax. We may be barging into somebody else's house who has never heard of Daney. That lady friend of his isn't above putting us on a blind; besides which, we're not entirely alone," he chuckled and looked backward.

Following his example, Tim saw a car within fifty yards of theirs and travelling at as high a speed.

"We've got four men there, and you'll be surprised to learn, knowing the pacific character of the English police, that they've got guns. There are quite a number of things about the English police that would surprise you if you knew," he added a little maliciously.

Scotland Yard is always on its defence, always anticipating criticism which, more often than not, is never offered.

Before they reached Beaconsfield they struck right. The driver evidently knew the country as well as he knew London. Up and down hills they flew, through tiny sleeping villages, once through a quaint old-world town with its ancient town hall set upon pillars.

"Amersham," said Wheeler briefly.

The driver shouted something over his shoulder.

"We've come too far. We're taking a short cut left."

They seemed to make a complete circuit of the town and struck another long, hilly road. Ten minutes later the car slowed and stopped before a neat gateway set between flanking yew hedges.

"Here we are," said Wheeler, jumping out. "'Severn'."

He went quickly up the gravel walk to the main door. The house was in darkness. The second car had come up and disgorged three or four men, who, without instructions, made their way left and right until the house was surrounded.

"There's nobody here," said Wheeler.

He pressed the bell and heard the faint tinkle of it.

"Let's try the garage."

The garage door was closed. He flashed his lamp on the gravelled drive, but it was non-informative. Picking up a stone, lie threw it at what he judged to be the main bedroom window.

It broke the glass with a crash, but no indignant voice demanded an explanation.

Wheeler brought a small leather case from his car, and taking three pieces from its interior, screwed them together.

"We'll do a little burgling. It's one of the things that make us unpopular."

Tim pointed to the porch.

"If you'll give me a leg-up I think I can get through that window," he said. "It may be easier."

Wheeler stooped and offered his knees and his clasped hands and in another instant Tim was on the flat porch top, feeling inside to loosen the catch of the window, which was ajar.

He was in a bare, unfurnished room. By the light of his torch he found the electric switch and flooded the room with light.

He stepped out on to the dark landing. There was no sound in the house. To his left was the doorway of the principal bedroom.

The first thing he saw was a woman's hat lying in the middle of the floor. Again he found the switch and illuminated the room. There were signs here of a struggle. The bed and mattress were thrown on the floor; in the fireplace he found a woman's shoe with a broken strap. Somebody had made a desperate resistance here. Then he saw the overturned telephone, and, looking back at the door, he saw that the lock was smashed.

It was to this room that the woman had fled and sent her warning; into this room her assailant had followed her.

"There's a lot of the gorilla in Daney," said Wheeler, viewing the mute evidence of the struggle. "Turn over that pillow, Johnson. Any sign of blood? No? All right, give it a thorough search."

He raced down the narrow stairs into the hall below, and ran from room to room. Tim went on his own to search the kitchen, and came back almost immediately.

"There's an iron door leading into the garage," he said.

"That's been left open. There's an old car there that seems to have done a lot of travelling. Evidently there was another one, but that's gone."

They examined the fastening of the garage doors and flung them open, but found no new clue. Where was the woman' They searched the house from garret to coal-cellar, and then began a patient search of the garden and its one outhouse, but there was no sign of Mrs. Daney.

"Stocker could tell us something if he was alive," said Tim, "and one of the things he could tell us is how many of these bolt-holes Lew Daney has, furnished ready for a quick get away. How many Clench Houses are therein England, tenanted by unsuspecting people, who do not realise that literally they're living over a volcano?"

Wheeler nodded. "That's Cowley's theory, too," he said. "Mr. Awkwright, from what I've heard--excuse me if he was a relative of yours--was rather mean, and there's a chance that Daney may have got the old man to take some other house at a dirt-cheap price--a house near London. Can you suggest

anybody who might know the old gentleman's private business--Miss Grier, for example?"

Then Tim remembered that Mary had once mentioned to him that Mr. Awkwright rented a little property near London, to which, however, he very seldom went. It had been over a dull dinner one night, when he had been trying to make conversation; he had asked her idly how Mr. Awkwright had managed about maintaining a household staff. She had told him that Stocker went with him sometimes. That could only mean one thing--that the house was Daney's. It couldn't have been "Severn"; she had spoken of it as "a dreary old place," and that description did not fit.

Vividly it came to him that she had shivered when she mentioned the London habitation of Mr. Awkwright's, and had changed the subject very quickly.

"Miss Grier will be able to tell us a lot, I think," he said.

"Get her on the 'phone," suggested Wheeler, but Tim hesitated.

"It seems a shame to wake her up," he said, and Wheeler smiled grimly.

"It seems a greater shame to let Daney go. Evidently he's taken a straight road for his bolt, and I'd like to know what that road is, because, unless I'm very much mistaken, we shall find the body of Mrs. Daney lying on the side of it!"

Tim got through to the exchange, cut short the cold demand as to why he had left his receiver off, and had himself put on to the Carlton. The telephone operators there had received distinct orders that no message should go through to the girl. She had given these instructions herself after she had gone to her room.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wake her up; it's rather important," said Tim, and gave his name.

He waited for a long time.

"There's no reply from 907," the operator said at last.

"Ring again," ordered Tim. "Or, better still, put me through to the porter."

The porter was more informative.

"Miss Grier, sir? She went out half an hour after you left. A young gentleman and a lady called for her.

"She went out?" repeated Tim incredulously. "What were the names of the people who called?"

"Mr. Awkwright," came the staggering reply. "A young gentleman with a little beard."

Tim nearly dropped the receiver in the shock. "Did she say she was coming back?"

"No, sir, she said nothing. She took a suitcase with her. They drove away in a Daimler. The young lady didn't seem to want to go: she stood on the pavement outside for a long time, talking. It was the other lady who made her go."

Tim's face was very white when he turned to the detective and repeated the conversation. Wheeler listened in silence, then: "I think the best place for both of us is in London, Captain Jordan," he said quietly.

Tim came back to the Carlton with a heavy heart. The porter could only repeat what he had already told him. Tim went up to the girl's room and had a quick look round. Evidently she had been sleeping, for the bedclothes were disordered. She had dressed in a hurry and, what was more, had packed in a greater hurry. When he reached his own room there was one item of comfort. He found, thrust under the door, a letter scribbled in her own hand.

'I've got to go away' (it ran). 'I hope I may come back in a few days, but if I don't I want you to forget that we ever met. My mother's address is 7, Selwyn Avenue, on the North Circular Road. I tell you this because I know you will be kind to them if the necessity arises.'

It was signed "Mary," and underneath; "love you very dearly."

He read the letter through again and again without grasping its purport. There was a knock at the door, and Wheeler came in.

"You promised me a drink," he said. He was a fresh-faced man, absurdly young for his rank, and was that new type of detective that carries with him the flavour of a public school education. "Is that a letter from Miss Grier?"

Unmindful of the postscript, Tim handed it to him, and Wheeler read it, twisting his tiny moustache.

"I think it is about time we did something drastic," he said.

CHAPTER 14

THROUGHOUT the night the flying squad went from garage to garage, looking for a grey Daimler. It was not a search, as Wheeler pointed out, that was entirely free from danger, for admittedly Tim Jordan knew practically nothing about the girl and her private associations. There was neither crime nor sin in Mary's friends calling late at night, demanding that she should accept their hospitality in preference to an hotel, especially when she was in the dubious position of being the guest of a young man with whom she had been acquainted for only a very short space of time.

The search, however, went on, but without success. Wheeler's first impression was that it had been a hired car, but the colour of the machine precluded that. It was a much smaller car than those which are usually hired, and this should have made it much easier to detect, because a Daimler, with its characteristic radiator, can be recognised even by the tyro.

If Tim was gratified he was also a little puzzled by the energy if the police in a case which, they admitted, was not regarded as important. Wheeler enlightened him.

"By this time every garage in London knows we are looking for a grey Daimler--and so we are. But we're also checking up on every machine that might be Daney's. On the face of it it's almost impossible to believe that he would be such a fool as to trust to a garage. But odd accidents happen in our business, and it is the unlikely which always occurs."

Tim had given a very complete description of the pale young man with a beard and his hard-faced woman companion. He had no case against the man, unless he was prepared to make laborious depositions concerning the attack upon him near Clench House; and even then the law would require certain corroboration which he could not offer.

Obviously, the hotel porter had been wrong. The young man had announced himself as a friend of Mr, Awkwright's, or had in some way used the name of Awkwright to persuade the girl to come down. When he considered this he had to confess that there must have been a very much stronger inducement to make the girl leave the hotel that night and write such a letter as she had.

Early the next morning he made a call upon Mary Grier's mother. She lived in a small house near the North Circular Road, a pretty woman who obviously had tremendous faith in her daughter.

"Mary tells me very little of her business," she said, "but she is so capable that I never worry about her. She's been terribly good to us. In fact, Captain Jordan, without her I don't know what we should have done. Ever since she was sixteen she's been supporting myself and her sister."

The house was simply but pleasantly furnished. In the drawing-room Tim saw a picture of the girl--the first he had seen--and the sight of it gave him a little pang.

Driving back to the hotel, he opened the newspaper which he had brought with him and at which he had not even glanced.

In the middle of the front page he read an interesting set of headlines:

DO YOU KNOW HARRY THE VALET?

EX-CROOK INHERITS HUGE FORTUNE BUT CANNOT BE FOUND

POLICE SEARCH FOR HEIR

"Harry Stone, alias Harry the Valet, is well known to the colonial, continental and English police. It is a dangerous thing to say, because Harry the Valet has inherited a very large fortune from a great-uncle--one of those convenient uncles who go to Australia, amass fortunes and die, leaving them in unexpected directions.

"But the truth about Harry the Valet and his deplorable antecedents must be told, because it is the only way he can be traced. For Harry the Valet is, by reason of his peculiar profession, both shy and retiring.

"Our Glasgow correspondent says he is well known in that city, where he was trying to sell a gold-mine to a simple but unconfiding Scotsman, and in consequence a charge was made against him and a warrant obtained--a warrant which has not yet been executed. He was in London a few weeks ago, and the name of the hotel where he was staying is known to the police. But suddenly, and as if by magic, he vanished as from the face of the earth.

"Late last night the police recovered a suitcase which he left at a railway cloakroom on the night of his disappearance. It has never since been claimed, and as the case contains such articles as a traveller would certainly require, it is supposed that he has not left England.

"Will Harry please communicate either with the police (who, although they are not ready to forgive his offences, yet will help him towards a substantial fortune), or to Messrs. Dothing, Dothing & Cleep, of 111, Austin Friars."

Tim smiled as he read, though he was in no laughing mood.

He had met Harry once and knew him by reputation. It would not be long before he made his appearance, risk whatever term of imprisonment was due to him for his known and unpunished misdeeds, and would, he imagined, spend a few riotous years dissipating his patrimony.

He had been back in his hotel a few minutes when the bell-boy knocked at his sitting-room door.

"A lady and a gentleman to see you, Captain Jordan," he said.

"What name? Did they send up their card?"

"No, sir; they said they particularly wanted you to see them on a matter of very urgent business."

Tim thought a moment. "Show them up," he said. "You can tell them before they come that if they've anything to sell I'm not in the market!"

He had many callers, men, and women too, who wished to interest him in a dozen and one schemes. That little world which hovers between the honest and dishonest, and expresses itself in high-flown and impossible schemes, had sent several representatives to him since his return. They interested him, and added to his store of knowledge. He was beginning to realise how little he knew about his fellow-creatures, and especially those fellow-creatures whose task it was to relieve mankind of its superfluous wealth.

He was scribbling a note in his diary when the door opened and they came in.

"Sit down, will you?" he said.

He heard the door close and then looked up, and instantly was on his feet. The smiling young man with the beard, who stood on the other side of the table, he knew instantly, and as readily recognised the woman, whom he had once seen, her arm akimbo, standing in the doorway of the dining-room at Clench House, drunken and defiant.

"Good morning, Captain Jordan." The young man's voice was silky, suave, the voice of a man of refinement and education. "We meet in rather more pleasant circumstances than on the last occasion."

Tim had recovered his self-possession, and was eyeing the young man steadily.

"The last occasion being--?"

"On the road outside Clench House. I'm afraid I was rather rattled. In fact, I don't mind telling you I was in a blue funk."

"Were you in a blue funk when you met Jelf, the chauffeur?"

The young man glanced at the woman; he was still smiling. "Jelf, the chauffeur, Martha? Who is this?"

"He never met Jelf," said the woman harshly. "Be careful what you're saying, mister."

The bearded youth nodded. "I think I am inclined to agree with dear Martha," he said. "Be careful what you're saying, mister." He chuckled softly. "May I sit down? Thank you." He drew up a chair and sat. The woman remained standing, nor did he suggest that she should take a chair. "You know me, of course?"

Tim shook his head. "By sight, yes. I haven't the slightest idea who you are."

"My name is Awkwright--William Awkwright. You knew my father."

Tim could only stare at him. "Awkwright! I didn't know Mr. Awkwright had a son."

Still smiling, Willie Awkwright turned to the woman.

"I am correct, am I not, Martha? The late Mr. Benjamin Awkwright was my father?" She nodded, and he addressed himself again to Tim. "It's a wise child, you know....Yes, I am afraid I am the last of that ancient line. In me is the blood of the Brodies, the Awkwrights and other noble and historic families."

Again he turned for confirmation.

"I am right, am I not, Martha?"

"Of course you're right, Willie!" she said loudly. "I've got birth certificates and everything to prove it. We're going to see the lawyers this morning to fix up about the old gentleman's property. I didn't want Willie to come and see you, but he says you've got some money invested in Mr. Awkwright's affairs.'"

"No," said Tim, "I have no money invested in Mr. Awkwright's affairs, whatever they may be. But you rather stagger me. Why have I never heard of you?"

Willie Awkwright looked inquiringly at the woman. "Why has he never heard of me, Martha?"

"Because the old devil hated his own son--that's why. His own flesh and blood--"

"You came here last night," said Tim, "and induced Miss Grier to go away with you. I suppose you know that the police are searching for her?"

"Let 'em search!" said the woman loudly. "Yes, we did come and she went away, and, what's more, she's staying away. A nice state of affairs, a married woman staying at an hotel with a young gentleman--"

"A married woman?" gasped Tim.

Willie Awkwright smiled.

"Mary Grier is my wife--didn't you know that?" he asked.

CHAPTER 15

TIM sat down quickly. His mind was in confusion. Through all the indignation, doubt and dismay there stood the horrible realisation that Awkwright was speaking the truth.

"Yes, we're married," said Awkwright. Again that mysterious smile of his. "She is not what I would describe as a good wife; in fact, Captain Jordan, she's a very bad wife. She has no respect for me. She hates me, and once"--he looked at the woman--"Shall I tell him, Martha?"

"No," she said quickly.

"I think I'd better." His voice was very gentle. "Once she tried to poison me. That is a revelation to you, Captain Jordan?"

Tim's eyes narrowed. "Tried to poison you, did she?" His voice was sympathetic, and the woman looked at him with sudden suspicion. "Did you ever train dogs to follow you round?"

The young man stared at him. "Why, yes; how did you know that?" he said eagerly. "Two black dogs--"

"Willie!" The woman's voice was harsh and menacing. "Don't tell him any more. You were a fool to come here."

But he was not listening to her. "Two dogs--black dogs. Horrible things, that slunk behind trees, and, when you went back for them, disappeared. She trained them--I always said it was she. I'm delighted to meet somebody who has seen through her."

"What about wireless?" asked Tim gently.

"Yes, yes, she used that." His voice was shaking; those eyes of his no longer smiled. "At night, when you weren't suspecting her...she would send the rays right through you. Isn't it marvellous, Martha? He knows."

She was by his side now, towering over him, her pale blue eyes fixed balefully on Tim. "Why are you exciting him?" she asked. "He's very delicate. You ought to know that. He lived in the Argentine for years."

A light dawned on Tim. "The Argentine! Of course; that was where he learned to use a knife--"

"The natives taught me," interrupted the young man proudly. "They call the knife--"

"Shut up, will you!" snarled the woman. "Don't you see he's stringing you?"

"I'm going to string you some more," said Tim. "Where is Miss Grier?"

"Mrs. Awkwright," said the woman.

"I don't care whether you call her Miss Grier or Mrs. Awkwright--where is she? I'm going back with you to get her."

"Oh, you are, are you?" The woman's jaw was set. "What right have you to come between husband and wife, young man?"

"I've every right to come between a girl and a maniac," said Tim. He was sorry for his brutality, for the young man's face puckered in a grimace of pain. "I'm sorry, but I mean just what I say. This boy has got persecution mania. He's as mad as a coot."

"He's as sane as I am!" howled the woman. "Absolutely as sane as you and me--a damned sight saner than you!"

Tim nodded slowly. "I see. Of course, there would be rather a difficulty in the matter of his inheriting his father's money, wouldn't there? You're both a little unfortunate, you and Harry the Valet. I'll tell you what I'll do, Mrs.--"

"Never mind about my name," said the woman.

"I'll call you Mrs. Martha. That's one of your names, at any rate. I'll strike a bargain with you. Let me go back with you and collect Miss Grier, and I'll not make myself unpleasant when the question of this boy's sanity comes up for discussion. I gather that you want your share of the loot, and although it's criminal in me I'll put no obstacles in your way."

"He's trying to take my wife, Martha." Willie Awkwright had become suddenly agitated. "You're not going to allow him to do that, are you? After all, I was legally married to her, and she's promised to stay at the flat if I don't--"

"Will you shut up!" The ferocity in her tone silenced the youth. "Have you got another room?"

Tim walked to his bedroom and opened it. She went in, locked the outer door, put the key in her pocket, examined the windows, and, returning, beckoned the young man in. "You stay here, Willie, until I have had a talk with Mr. Jordan," she said.

He went obediently, and she closed the door on him.

"Now, mister, I'm going to talk to you plainly. The old man made Mary Grier marry Willie. He thought it might bring him back to sanity. He's been that

way since he was a kid, and I've been looking after him. She would never have done it, but she'd made a fool of herself--"

"Stole seventy pounds," said Tim quietly.

She opened her eyes at this. "Has she told you?"

"No--go on."

"They were married before a Scottish parson, but on the way back from the church he went all wrong, and Mr. Awkwright and I had our work cut out to save the girl from death. She's never lived with him since, except that now and again she has seen him. The sight of her pacifies him. He really is very fond of her. Now there's a lot of money coming from the old man," she said with brutal frankness; "and when you said I wanted my share, you were right. I've lived in hell with this young man for the past eight years, and I'm entitled to some more reward than I'm getting."

"Where is Miss Grier?" asked Tim.

"Mrs. Awkwright," corrected the other. "You can't alter that until they're divorced. And let me tell you this, young man: if they put this boy into an asylum she'll never be divorced. You know what the laws are. And if you've got any ideas of marrying her, you'd better get them out of your mind. I've been an attendant on weak-minded people all my life, and he'll live till he's eighty. There is only one chance for you, and that's why I thought it was a good idea to come and see you, though at first I was all against it. Give the boy a chance of getting his money--I'll fix the divorce for you. You said just now if I'd let the girl come back you'd do this--would you?"

Tim shook his head.

"It sounded easy then. What you ask me to do is to conspire with you to break the law."

He paced up and down the room, his hands thrust in his pockets, his chin on his breast. It was a terrible temptation. Whether he broke the law or not, Mary Grier must be saved from this horror which was hanging over her. He asked the woman a blunt question, and she shook her head.

"They've never been alone together. I wouldn't take that risk."

"Where are you staying?"

Martha showed her uneven teeth in a smile. "Don't be funny."

"But I shall know before the will is proved."

"Lots of things may happen before the will is proved," she said significantly, and he recognised the threat. She was looking at him thoughtfully. "I'll tell you something, Captain Jordan," she said slowly. "The divorce won't be any difficulty at all. He WAS married before he married Miss Grier--to a half-breed girl outside of Buenos Aires. Married by a priest. I could prove that; you'd have to search the Argentine, and you'd never get deuce without me."

"What happened to the girl?"

The woman smiled cryptically.

"She's alive," she said. "Anyway, she was alive when Willie married Miss Grier. Just alive."

As he continued his restless pacing he saw the woman cast an anxious eye at the door behind which the young man was, and she dropped her head in a listening attitude.

"It was he who stabbed her, I presume?"

She nodded. "The old man never liked the boy to be far from him. After he came back from the Argentine his father always managed to get a little cottage near where he was staying--we had a cottage in the woods near Clench House."

"And where are you now?" asked Tim again.

She shook her head. "It's no use trying to tap me, Captain Jordan. I tell you, I've had enough of this job of mine. It's getting on my nerves. Twice he's made an attempt to kill me, and that sort of thing isn't funny!"

"What is your plan?" he asked.

"To get probate--that's the word, isn't it? And as soon as that's arranged, and he's given me what he ought to give me to hand over the share that Miss Grier's entitled to, and have him put into an institution."

"That's pretty cold-blooded," said Tim. "What is Miss Grier entitled to?"

"A quarter of the property. The old man promised her that after Willie had attacked her. He'd have killed her, too, only for a man named Daney, and another man who happened to be in the neighbourhood. I don't know what they were doing in the woods, prowling about at that time of night, but it was a good thing for Mary Grier that they were there, or he'd have killed her."

"Give me twenty-four hours to think this over," said Tim, "and promise me in the meantime--"

"You can trust me. And you might tell those police pals of yours that there's no need to watch me or make any inquiries about the Daimler. It belongs to Willie. And they needn't try to trail me home, either, because the place I go to from the lawyers won't be the place I'm staying."

"Can you take a message for Miss Grier?"

She hesitated. "Yes, if you'll tell her nothing that I've told you about the earlier wife."

He scribbled a hasty note to the girl, sealed it and handed it to the woman. She went to the door, called Willie, and he came out, still with that bright smile of his.

"You've been to Africa, haven't you, Jordan? A nice place, Africa--"

"Say good-bye to Captain Jordan."

The woman went to the door and opened it.

"Did they ever show you anything like this in Africa?"

Tim saw his hand go up like lightning; something whizzed past his head; he heard a thud behind him, and, turning, saw a knife quivering in the wall. The young man at the door was convulsed with silent laughter.

"Don't be frightened. If I had wanted to kill you I couldn't have failed."

He walked across the room, jerked the knife from the wall and slipped it into some hidden sheath. In another second this extraordinary pair had gone, and Tim was standing, looking at the broken plaster, and wondering whether Mr. Willie Awkwright really did try to miss him.

CHAPTER 16

TIM had a problem to which no ready solution offered. His training and character made the acceptance of the woman's suggestion impossible. But here was the stark fact: Mary Grier was bigamously married to a man who was undoubtedly a murderer and as undoubtedly a dangerous maniac. He had seen the look in the young man's eyes and had instantly diagnosed his disorder aright.

So that was old Awkwright's secret, the explanation of those mysterious midnight trips which had followed the arrival of the drunken Martha at Clench House.

Mary, in desperation, had once stolen seventy pounds, an act of madness for which she had paid heavily. This was the price this mean old man had exacted for her obedience. He had deliberately sacrificed her cold-bloodedly and handed her over to his unbalanced son, well knowing what the consequences might be.

Tim's heart went cold. He hated this old man, dead though he was. His duty was plain: it was to notify the authorities that the legatee under Awkwright's will was unfit to administer the estate. But to do that whilst Mary was still in the power of the man and his keeper was to expose her to a danger he dared not think upon.

Of one thing he was certain: the grey car would be under observation, and there was just a chance that the girl might be traced. He got on to Cowley, and reported as much of the conversation as he dared.

"I know they've been to see you," said Cowley, and he was not surprised. "One of my men is on the track of the car, and has just 'phoned through that it is in Lincoln's Inn. They're calling on a lawyer."

"I particularly want to know where they're living," said Tim.

"You particularly want to know where Miss Grier is," said Cowley dryly. "There'll be no difficulty about that."

But he was too optimistic. At four o'clock that afternoon the grey car was collected by a chauffeur and driven to a West End garage--Willie Awkwright and the woman had left the building by another door, and had gone away in a taxicab.

CHAPTER 17

IN every county, in almost every town, the visitor will be pointed out a building, completed or uncompleted, which is known locally as somebody's "Folly." Mr. Jennings's Folly, which is perpetuated on the country side of New Barnet, concerned a builder who had amassed a large and convenient fortune by building small and inconvenient houses.

It had occurred to Mr. Jennings one bright day that what was needed more than any other type of building was the country flat. He argued that flat-dwellers were of a race apart and were lonely and miserable when they were put into houses. He had conceived the idea of raising in the very heart of the loneliest part of New Barnet, and in a more or less inaccessible spot, his country flats.

They differed from no other kind of flat except in their location. Originally there had been a restaurant, and the owner of the flats had provided the service. But unfortunately nobody wanted to live in them. The rents were too high; the location was not particularly brilliant; and when, on the death of the eccentric Mr. Jennings, they came into the market, they were purchased for a song by a gentleman who furnished the lower floor flat, had one self-contained suite converted into a garage, and had built two drives, so that he might approach the building from two directions. He spent almost as much money on his improvements as he spent on the whole of the building; but he was a far-seeing man. It was necessary that some of the four suites that were left should be occupied.

Stocker had once mentioned casually to Mr. Awkwright that there was "a regular bargain in the way of furnished London flats," and Mr. Awkwright had fallen, for he needed not so much a place for himself as an isolated habitation for that son of his, from the thought of whom he was so constantly seeking escape.

There were never any other boarders: the remainder of the flats were locked up and never opened. Applicants who desired the privilege of viewing a possible habitation found a small notice, telling them to apply to a local house-agent, who told them automatically that the flats were let.

To Lew Daney this place had always been "Nine." It had been one of the chain of escape depots that he had established before he began his Merseyside operation.

The flat which had been engaged by old Awkwright--who had only once seen the place--was in reality two small suites which had been converted into one. Mary had occupied the largest room in the combined flat since her arrival. She had in reality command of the whole section of the suite, for Martha and her charge lived in the other wing.

She had spent a heart-breaking day, vainly attempting to forget ugly and exquisite facts which returned again and again to her mind, and which could never be wholly excluded, for they hovered behind her thoughts, however humdrum they might be.

It was late in the afternoon when Martha tapped at the door, and she drew the bolt and admitted her.

"He's asleep," said the woman. "Thank God it doesn't take much to tire him! Here's a letter for you."

She took it out of her bag and Mary looked at it wonderingly.

"Who is it from?" she asked.

"From the man at the Carlton."

"Captain Jordan?"

Martha nodded.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, we've seen him."

"Did Willie see him too? But you ought not to have done that. He knows all about--"

"He knows much more now," said Martha grimly. "I had to tell him a few things."

The girl turned white.

"That I was--that I was married to him?"

Martha shrugged her broad shoulders.

"Why not?" she asked coolly. "There's nothing terrible about being married, is there? Anyway, I had to stop this young fellow-me-lad. He had had the description of the Daimler broadcast, and I was pulled up three times on my way to town. Thank God it's registered at the garage and not at this address! He's in love with you--I suppose you know that?"

The colour had come back to the girl's face.

"Yes, I hope he is," she said, and Martha sneered.

"A nice thing for a married woman to say! Don't let him know." She jerked her head towards the door.

"Was he--quiet?" asked Mary.

"Yes, he was quiet enough at the lawyer's. I was scared he wouldn't be. But he did his knife trick with Jordan--and I'd searched him carefully before he came out. He's as artful as a monkey."

"Was Captain Jordan hurt?" she asked quickly.

"Don't be a fool! I've seen the will; the old boy left you nothing."

"Didn't he?" Mary Grier was indifferent.

"The will merely said that it was his wish that his son should settle the sum of a hundred thousand pounds on his wife as soon as the estate was settled. It's funny how the old man would never admit that Willie was incapable of looking after his affairs."

Mary Grier walked to the window and stared across the bleak fields and then down into the little paved courtyard at the back of the building. It was raining. She saw a man in a heavy water-proof cross the concrete yard, disappear into a small outhouse, and come back with a bucket of coal. She saw him only for second before he vanished out of sight.

"Who lives downstairs?" she asked.

Martha's eyebrows rose.

"Is there anybody living downstairs? There's always been a flat furnished, but I've never seen anybody there. Who was it?"

She went to the window and, pushing it up, leaned out.

"I told you I heard his car come in last night," said Mary.

"Perhaps it's your friend Daney." Martha was looking at her with malicious interest. "You seem to attract 'em, my dear--madmen and crooks! His wife was broadcasting that he was in love with you. I'll go down and find out if you like. I've seen the man."

"How do you know his wife was broadcasting this silly story?" demanded the girl.

"Stocker told me. Have you seen him lately?"

"He's dead," said Mary.

The woman's jaw dropped.

"Dead?" she said incredulously; and briefly Mary Grier told her what had happened on the Great North Road.

The hard-faced woman was shaken. It was clear how her mind ran when she said quickly: "He didn't have anything to do with it. He was with me all the time, and he never uses firearms. I knew Stocker was a crook, but I didn't know what kind. So that was it--Daney's headquarters! That explains a lot of things. I always suspected something was wrong. Willie got away the night they robbed the Lower Clyde Bank, and I was searching for him in the woods till sunup, and I saw the big car come from the direction of Glasgow and turn into Clench House, and wondered what was wrong."

She peered out of the window again.

"It might be him," she said. "I hope Willie doesn't see him. Daney hit him that night he went for you, and Willie never forgets things like that. He was talking about him the other day."

"Talking about whom the other day?" Willie Awkwright stood in the doorway. "I heard you, Martha. Willie never forgets....That fellow hit me in the jaw, the brute! Is he here?"

That animal instinct of his helped him where reason would have failed. He crossed quickly to the window and looked out.

"There's a man living downstairs. Is that Daney? I wish it were!" The eyes sparkled. "Daney?.. A terrible fellow....I read about him in the newspapers. He has killed people--uses firearms. Do you remember, Martha? Here!" He touched his jaw tenderly as though he still felt the effects of that old blow.

"You go back to your room, Willie. I thought you were sleeping."

"I can't sleep. There's a woman screaming somewhere in the house, and she frightened me."

Martha looked at him sharply. Like so many "naturals," his senses were amazingly acute. His hearing was almost microphonic; his eyesight was such that he could distinguish objects which were beyond the view of normal-sighted people.

"A woman screaming? Don't be silly. There's no woman in the house except Mary and me."

Willie looked at the girl slyly.

"You haven't been screaming, darling?"

He reached out his hand to take hers, but she drew back.

"There never was a wife so unkind as you," he said, with gentle reproach; "and I'm so fond of you."

His hand fell upon her arm, and he smiled as she hastily put it behind her. Then suddenly he began to speak in Spanish, a trick of his, and the woman answered him haltingly in the same language. Whatever she said persuaded him to go back to bed.

Martha was gone a quarter of an hour, and when she returned: "Did you hear any screaming?" she asked.

Mary shook her head.

"None," she said. "I think it is his imagination."

"He's got wonderful hearing," insisted Martha. "Every time Big Ben strikes he hears it."

She was not satisfied, and later that night descended to the ground floor and knocked at the door of the occupied flat.

There was no answer. She pressed the bell; apparently it had been disconnected, for no sound came to her. Still dissatisfied, she went out of the block and walked round it. She could not, however, see any sign of light, and returned to Mary to report the negative result of her investigations. Even as she was speaking she heard the sound of a door closing.

"That was somebody came out of the downstairs flat," she said, and, running through to the front room, looked down into the forecourt. A car was standing in front of the dilapidated railings. She saw the figure of a man pass swiftly into its interior. It moved off quietly and was soon lost to view.

"I wonder if it is Daney, and I wonder if there is a woman," said Martha thoughtfully.

CHAPTER 18

CAPTAIN TIM JORDAN had bought a small English car that day, and had spent a fruitless afternoon in the company of Sergeant Wheeler, making calls. He must have visited every block of residential flats on the north side of London, without, however, gaining the slightest clue to Mary Grier's hiding-place.

He came back down Finchley Road and turned into Avenue Road, a very weary man. The car that was running ahead of him set its own pace. As they turned out of the park through Clarence Gate, the driver of the car he followed put his hand through the window and signalled a stop.

Tim had already noticed the machine, a powerful Spanz, and now he noticed something else. The arm that came through the window was covered with a brown check sleeve. He said nothing to Wheeler, who had asked him to drop him at the corner of Baker Street--he lived thereabouts--but when the sergeant had left him he accelerated and went in pursuit of the Spanz. Hundreds of people must wear brown check overcoats, and yet, when he had seen that coat at Newark out of the corner of his eye, he had remarked upon it as being unusual; and that this was the same coat he could swear.

The Spanz turned right into Oxford Street and into Hyde Park. At Hyde Park Corner it made the circle and moved through Pimlico, Tim on its tail. They came eventually to the Great West Road. Tim wondered why he could not have reached this thoroughfare through the North Circular. At the end of the first section of the road the machine turned on to the Bath Road. It was nearly eleven o'clock when it passed through Slough, and, skirting the Trading Estate, turned up the narrow lane towards Burnham.

Tim was now at a more respectful distance. He could hardly lose sight of the machine, and there was no need to keep so close. He kept its tail light in sight as it sped through Bourne End and over the railway crossing towards Maidenhead. Again it turned abruptly, and went back in a circle the way it had come, reaching the hill road and turning again towards Woburn.

Then, mysteriously, it disappeared. Tim reached a stretch of straight road, but there was no car in sight. He stopped his car short of the railway, for the gates were closed against him, and he was held up here five minutes. He had scarcely crossed the railway before he decided that he would turn back on his tracks.

He sent the car round, and flashed on his headlamps to facilitate the operation. One ray caught something that threw a bright reflection. It was something that was hidden by a fence and a clump of bushes. Stopping the car, he got out and went on foot to investigate It was the Spanz. Its radiator was still hot. It had been backed up a side lane and in through the drive of

an empty house, or, if not an empty house, a house whose occupants were at that moment asleep. There was no sign of its driver.

Making his way back to his own car, he switched off the lights and, opening a gate which led to a field, he backed the machine behind a tree. The man must return to his car, and he sat down and waited.

The mysterious behaviour of the driver might have a perfectly natural explanation. He might be making a furtive call on somebody who did not desire publicity.

Tim sat on the gate and waited. Half an hour, an hour passed, and then he heard the swish-swish of footsteps on the gravel sidewalk, and, slipping down to the ground, drew into the shadows. A man passed him and disappeared behind the fence where the Spanz was. Presently Tim heard the purr of its engine, and ran across the road just as the big car came jerking out.

"Hallo! Can I help you?"

A reflected dashboard light caught the man's face. He could see Tim plainly enough. For a second their eyes met.

"No, thank you," said the driver gruffly, turned his head aside, and swung the big car back towards the railway crossing.

He was hardly over the level-crossing before the gates closed.

Tim hesitated, walked slowly to his car and started it up. He was at that moment a very thoughtful man.

His four wheels were on the road, and he was considering whether he should turn left or right, when he heard the shrill blast of a whistle, and then another, and putting his car in the direction of the sound, he came upon a policeman, who was standing on the sidewalk, whistle in mouth.

"Go over to the telephone exchange and get the station, will you, sir, and tell them that the Cookham Bank has been robbed."

Tim did as he was requested, and returned to find that the officer was reinforced by two others. He introduced himself, but learned no more than they knew, which was that a window of the bank had been forced. The thief, in making his escape, had touched an alarm, which was still ringing when they reached the bank: a tiny, square building, standing, quite isolated, on the corner of a field. It was the loneliest and smallest bank Tim ever remembered seeing.

The manager had heard the alarm, and joined them while they were still speculating as to the extent of the bank's loss.

He reassured them on that point very quickly.

"There is less than five hundred pounds in the bank," he said, and I doubt if they've got that. Only a big gang with an up-to-date kit could open the vault, and it wouldn't be worth their while."

"A man was seen leaving the back of the bank premises," said one of the policemen, and turned to Tim. "He didn't pass you, did he?"

Tim was saved from the necessity of answering by the bank manager opening the door. They followed him in, and found that the burglar, whose method had been on the primitive side, had done no more than wrench open a few desk drawers. He had left evidence of his presence in a paying-in slip taken from me of the racks. Across the back he had written in pencil:

"What a poverty-stricken bank! I've wasted my time." It was signed "L.D."

"Why he came at all is a puzzle to me," said the manager.

It was no puzzle to Tim. He made a few inquiries, offered his own evidence, which was that he had passed a car moving in the opposite direction--a car he was able to describe--and drove the manager back to his house.

"We've never had a burglary before--what made Lew Daney come to a place like Cookham?"

"You've heard of Lew Daney, have you?"

"Oh, yes, we've heard of him. We've been warned about him. All the banks know Lew Daney. He chose the wrong day. If he'd opened the vault tomorrow he could have got away with five or six thousand pounds. There are some big building operations going on here, and we cash the wages cheques. He must have been disturbed, for he made no attempt to get into the vault."

This was another of the bank manager's theories.

Tim said nothing. He had his own views, which he was not prepared at the moment to expose. He was beginning to see light, he decided, as he came at his leisure towards the Bath Road. He was following the Burnham route, and had reached the foot of Hedsor Hill when a car swept down from the narrow lane on the left, passed behind him, and, as he changed down his gear, came abreast. It was the Spanz. He had no sooner recognised it than three pencils of flame leapt from the driver's scat, a bullet smashed the glass

of the windscreen, and another passed under his chin and ripped his collar from his throat.

Involuntarily Tim turned the steering wheel to the left, and stopped with a crash of glass as his radiator plunged into the steep bank. The Spanz was going all out, and vanished round the bend of the hill.

The bank robber had been waiting for him all this time, waiting patiently, and had nearly been rewarded. It was the nearest thing to a Chicago gang attack that had ever been seen in England.

Tim's knees were a little unsteady when he got out of the car to examine the damage to the radiator. Fortunately it was little: the near-side lamp had been smashed and the radiator had been bent, but when he started the engine he found it was undamaged.

He crawled up the hill, avoided Burnham and followed the straight track that led him to the Bath Road. At Slough he stopped and made inquiries. A big Spanz had been seen and its number taken for exceeding the town limit.

"It was doing seventy if it was doing anything," said the inspector on duty, "and that's a bit thick even in the middle of the night, for there is always a lot of traffic on the Bath Road and a fool trick like that might have caused a bad accident."

There was no necessity to jot down the number of the car: Tim had already made a note of it. When he reached London he took the liberty of calling up Cowley, who was in bed, and explaining very fully what he had seen.

"Daney's wife is now the key of the situation," he said. "She may be dead. On the other hand, if she's alive she'll probably be more sincerely willing to squeal than ever she's been before." The Chief thought for a long time. "Meet me at eleven o'clock tomorrow at Scotland Yard," he said. "Don't go out of the hotel until eight o'clock tomorrow, by which time I'll arrange to have you shadowed. The Spanz will be a clue to tracing him, but if he's any brain in his nut he'll abandon that car tonight."

Here the Chief spoke prophetically: the big car was picked up on the Thames Embankment, within a hundred yards of Scotland Yard, at four o'clock that morning; and in the mean-time its owner had been busy.

He was a man of infinite resource; he was, moreover, blessed with an imagination, and on the previous day he had had one of the most terrifying experiences of his career. Tim did not know this; it was one of the things that Scotland Yard knew but did not tell.

A man had walked into the London agents of a German bank and had offered fifty thousand-mark notes, requesting their equivalent in English

money. But every bank in England was mi the look-out for thousand-mark notes, and their owner was automatically suspect. The proceeds of the robbery of the Lower Clyde Bank had been mainly in notes of this denomination.

The teller had asked the man very politely to wait while he went in to see the manager. When he returned the caller had vanished.

It was not a very clever thing to do, thought Scotland Yard, and guessed that Daney was getting short of ready money.

The teller's description of the man was vague. When the Big Five discussed the matter it was agreed that it might not be the super-burglar himself who had attempted to pass the notes, but some agent of his.

This happened before Tim Jordan had made his revelation 10 Mr. Cowley.

CHAPTER 19

THERE is in London a permanent section of society which is loosely described as "the underworld," but which the police, a little flippantly but accurately, talk about as "the regulars."

They are men who know intimately almost every county jail in England, and can tell you the dietary and advantages or disadvantages of each. They are larcenists, kite men, con. men and their assistants, housebreakers, burglars, professional swindlers and the higher grades of the begging-letter fraternity.

The police know them; they know the police. Between the law and the lawless is a camaraderie which it is difficult for the law-abiding citizen to understand. Yet it is upon this camaraderie that the success of the police in their restless war against crime depends. For just as out-of-work actors delight in the failure of plays which throw other men out of work, so do momentarily innocent criminals rejoice in the failure and envy the success of their more fortunate fellows.

Johnny Time was by profession a tale-teller. He had had several convictions, mainly for obtaining money on worthless cheques. He lived at honest intervals on selling in market squares and at street corners a compound which was designed to cure the severest cold in a night; and the curious thing was that his remedy was efficacious, and he might, but for the inherent laziness which is the foundation of all criminal careers, have enjoyed a comfortable and honest income as a result of his oratory.

Johnny Time operated in the north of England, mainly in Manchester. He was a newcomer to London, in the sense that Scotland Yard knew very little about him. There was a floating criminal population of which it was difficult to keep track, and though there were local C.I.D. officers who knew Johnny and his graft, his presence in London was never discussed in the higher councils of the police service.

Johnny was broke. He had come out of Strangeways Prison after eighteen months' service to the State; he had collected what money he could gather, and had shaken the dust of Lancashire from his feet. He was Cockney born and bred, and it is curious that one of his kind should have been so successful in a city which has no particular use for Londoners.

He was down and out, and had reached the indignity of booking a bed in a Rowton House, when he found his new governor. The man who stopped him as he came out of the Bunch of Grapes public-house in Tabard Street was, for the rough purpose of classification, a gentleman to Johnny Time.

He spoke well, he dressed well; he was about Johnny's own age and build; and the first impression that the ex-convict had was that he was being made the victim of police persecution--in other words, that the man who had accosted him was a detective.

A few minutes' conversation disabused Johnny of this suspicion. The "gentleman" spoke briefly and to the point. He knew Johnny's antecedents, including the letter-of-credit swindle which was the high-water mark of Johnny Time's art and, incidentally, had produced the longest sentence he had ever served.

There was a car waiting at the corner of the dark street, and he drove his new recruit clear of the town, and whilst driving slowly and along unfrequented roads he revealed himself as a man who needed a partner.

"Never mind who I am," he said, in answer to Johnny's natural inquiry. "You can call me Smith--Mr. Henry Smith. The point is, will you take the job? I'll pay you fifty quid ready to get yourself some clothes, and I'll pay you a pony a week--"

"I'll be able to give you me address in the morning," said the gratified Johnny.

"I don't want your address. I've got a little card here with six places where I can pick you up. It'll always be at the same time--eight-forty-five at night--and each place will be different. I shall want you to pass some money for me--"

"Snide?" asked Johnny dubiously.

"Don't be a fool. No, this is real money, and in big sums. I may send you to Paris and Berlin. We'll see how you go."

Bright visions began to float through Johnny's mind. The man must have been a thought-reader.

"If you double-cross me I'll find you in time, and I'll put you out. Don't make any mistake about that, Mr. Time--I'll put three bullets in your stomach, and that'll be the end of you. I'm not telling you this to frighten you; it's the friendliest thing I've done. If you go straight with me I'll make a lot of money for you--thousands--and I'll pay you after every job. If you squeak on me you'll get the same medicine as if you bolted."

Prisons are the home of great legends. The legend of Daney transcended all others. Johnny Time asked a question.

"No, I'm not Daney. I'm one of his men. He's got a dozen working--I'm Mr. Smith. Remember it, and forget it!"

Johnny had been very successful. It was a slow and laborious business, changing foreign money into English, and it was perhaps a great mistake to venture the fifty notes with the Lombard Street office of the Deutsche Bank.

"Near as a touch I got pinched. I'd better lay low for a week or two," said Johnny Time.

His employer thought the matter over. "Have you ever been to Berlin? Well, get ready to start soon," he said. "Stay at one of the best hotels. I'll send the stuff over in small packets, and as fast as you change it you send back English or American notes. You'll not get a new lot till the money returns to England."

Before he had left his employee he had changed his mind. Johnny had a new card, with new instructions as to where he was to be picked up. Those instructions were more fateful to him than he could realise.

He was paid handsomely that night, for between changing the money he had produced two works of art to the entire satisfaction of "Mr. Smith."

CHAPTER 20

JOHNNY TIME was a cautious man, but even cautious criminals can be talkative in their mysterious way. He talked mysteriously of his new employer, carried in his pocket convincing evidence of his generosity.

Just about this time a Scotland Yard man pulled in Johnny in connection with a letter-of-credit fraud which was being worked in the City. Johnny went virtuously to be examined and re-examined, conscious of his innocence. He was ready to advance his own theories as to the authorship.

At the end of the interview a third detective who was present, but who had said very little, asked him a few questions on a matter which was unpleasantly near him.

"Somebody's been trying to pass thousand-mark notes in the City," he said. "The description I have is very much like you, Johnny."

"What's a mark?" asked Johnny.

"Don't overdo it," said the detective kindly. "You know what a mark is. I'll take my oath you know what a thousand-mark note looks like. You've probably got a few in your 'sky.'"

Johnny spread out his arms invitingly. "Fan me," he said. "Go on, fan me!"

The detective did not accept the invitation. "I'm going to tell you something, Johnny. The man who's got these notes did a big job in Glasgow, and there is a reward of five thousand pounds for his arrest."

"I don't know nothing about--" began Johnny.

"I know the reward doesn't tempt you. You've got a soul above it. And what's five thousand pounds to a man paying your income tax? But it's easy to earn, you know, Johnny. You've only got to say to me 'So-and-so and so-and-so,' and the money's as good as paid into your account at the Bank of England."

Johnny was interested, but did not say so. There is honour amongst thieves, if you get the right kind of thieves. Johnny was not that kind, and had never met one that was. Outwardly he was vacant. "I've read about him now I come to think of it, Mr. Smallwood," he said. "It was in one of these penny papers. Got away with a lot of stuff, didn't they?"

"Quite a lot," said Detective Smallwood; "and they won't miss it. There isn't a bank in Europe that will take ten thousand marks from one man without asking a lot of questions. I know you're the man who tried to pass them." Johnny protested. "Anyway, we won't go into that. But if you happen to have

any information that will help us to nail him, you need never do another day's thieving. In other words, you need never work another day of your life. Think it over."

Johnny thought it over all the way back to his new lodgings.

He had all along known that his employer was one of the big mob, and that kind of man wasn't above murder. Yet it would not be difficult to catch him in his car, and, what was more important, get out of range before he started shooting. The police could block the car on four sides and bring it to a stop, and all Johnny had to do was to betray the rendezvous. £5,000 was a lot of money.

He went into a public library, but found nothing about the bank robbery. Being thorough, he made his way to Fleet Street and turned up the files of a newspaper. The busy hadn't been lying, either: the £5,000 was a real reward.

By careful searching from day to day he discovered that the man's name was Daney. They had not known that at first, apparently; it had cropped up later--quite recently, in fact.

Daney...he puzzled his brains. He didn't know anybody called Daney; but, then, he wouldn't. Only the people of his own crush were familiar to him. He did remember, however, that the last time he was in jail there was a fellow-prisoner who had spoken ecstatically of Lew Daney, had enlarged upon his magnificence.

All that night Johnny considered the matter, then took a bus to Scotland Yard, and for two hours spoke frankly both to Mr. Smallwood and to his superior. Tim Jordan was an interested listener.

"Somewhere near Barnet, is it? That's queer. I've just unearthed a block of flats called Jennings's Folly. Have you heard of them?"

Cowley shook his head.

"Every block of flats is somebody's folly. Why people don't live in houses with nice gardens is a wonder to me."

Tim said nothing, but that night he determined to put this strange and isolated habitation under observation.

It was dusk when Johnny Time came out of the Yard on to the Embankment. He stood, hesitating whether he should turn into Whitehall and get a bus homewards, or whether he should walk down to Savoy Hill and meet a friend of his who was operating in the Strand. He elected to go to Savoy Hill.

He had an engagement with Daney on the following night, but Smallwood had undertaken that he should not be again required to come to the Yard, and that the concluding arrangements should be made at a little public-house off Holborn.

Johnny Time was a happy man. The Chief Constable had delivered a long homily on what he should do with his money when he got it, to which Johnny had listened respectfully but without interest. He had his own ideas and they included a trip to Paris, a flat in Shaftesbury Avenue and innumerable pleasant adventures.

He had nearly reached the corner of Savoy Hill when a coupe came from behind him and drew up at the kerb.

"That you, Johnny?"

Mr. Time started. It was the voice of his employer.

"Hallo!" he stammered.

"Step in, will you?"

The door was flung open. Johnny faced the levelled barrel of in automatic.

"Don't shout or make a fuss or try to get away, or I'll settle you."

Johnny looked helplessly round. There was a policeman within a dozen yards, controlling the traffic at the corner of Savoy Hill; but somehow he had not the nerve to move.

"What's the idea, Mr. What's-your-name--" he began.

"Step in."

Johnny stumbled on to the step and sank on the seat by the side of the driver, breathing heavily. The man leaned across and shut the door.

"How are they all at Scotland Yard?" he said, as the car jerked forward along the Embankment.

"As a matter of fact," said Johnny, eager to establish his innocence, "I was called in over a snide case. They thought I was in it."

"I know all about that. You were there yesterday. That wasn't why you went today, Johnny. Have you got the card in your pocket?"

Johnny produced it mechanically. It was the card on which was written the week's rendezvous.

"I told you not to carry it about with you, didn't I, but to keep it at home? Why did you bring it to Scotland Yard?"

"I sort of had it," said Johnny vaguely. "Where are we going?"

"You're coming home with me for a little talk."

They drove for a long time without a word being spoken. Johnny at last delivered his thoughts and his defence.

"You don't think I've been to Scotland Yard about you, do you, guv'nor?"

"I did think so." The man at the wheel chuckled. "You went to a newspaper office yesterday--that's where I saw you. I was wondering what you were looking for, and I came up behind you. Five thousand pounds reward! Naturally I've been hanging about Scotland Yard all day. A lot of money, five thousand pounds?"

"To them that want it," said Johnny Time virtuously. "Speaking for meself, all the money in the world wouldn't make me shop a man."

"That's fine," said the other.

When they reached Barnet it was pitch dark. A high wind had blown out a gas lamp near the house. The car went down the long concrete drive which led to the cellar basement very cautiously.

Mary Grier, through the window of her darkened room, saw the faint dashboard light as the machine came into view. Then it disappeared. The drive ran behind the wall of the garden.

She knew nothing of the garage which lay under the concrete paving of the courtyard.

She was a prisoner; the door was locked on her, the windows were tightly fastened, except one, which was barred. The hard-faced Martha was out, and presumably her charge was also under lock and key.

Before she had left Martha had been very frank.

"He's in one of his bad moods today, but that will pass off by Friday. Then you've got to turn up at the lawyer's with him. As soon as he's got the stuff--
"

"The stuff?" repeated the girl.

"The money," said the woman impatiently. "We'll fix him. That'll be the end of your troubles, young lady."

A light dawned on the girl.

"I see--that is why I am here. I am to prove his sanity?"

"Something like that. If he turns up without his wife, who is mentioned in the will, his lawyers will start making inquiries, and before you know where you are the estate will be put into--" She fumbled for the word.

"Chancery?" suggested the girl.

"That's it. I've seen the lawyers today, and the questions they asked me! Do you know a man named Stone?"

The girl shook her head.

"That's another fellow with a fortune waiting for him. A regular crook. They asked me whether you knew him."

"Why should I know him?" asked the girl in astonishment.

"You were staying at the same hotel as him when you were in London. The same lawyers have got both cases and they have been making inquiries. I suppose you were the Mary Grier? Yes, I know you were." She named the hotel, and Mary nodded. "I've got to keep you locked up tonight for your own sake. He's pretty bad, but he'll do no harm. He can take all his tantrums out on himself."

For a long time Mary sat at the window. Far away was a railway line, and at intervals she saw little streaks of light pass slowly across the, country and vanish. Sometimes two trains would come from opposite directions and pass. It was her only recreation--that and the dashboard light which passed in ghostly silence to the cover of the wall.

She took off her clothes and got into her night things. She heard ten o'clock strike, and then eleven, and weary and chilled, she crept into bed.

She lay for a long time, thinking of all that had happened in the brief time Tim Jordan had come into her life. Then wearily she turned over, and, as she did so, looked at the window.

For a moment her heart stopped beating. Dimly she saw the figure of a man outlined against the window. He was standing on the narrow parapet which ran at the floor level, and he was feeling cautiously at the window-sash. Instantly she recognised him and sprang out of bed, her legs almost giving beneath her.

It was her husband.

"Go away! Please go away!" she called.

She saw him shake his head. Then without any warning his fist came through the pane and the glass scattered about her.

"It's all right." His voice was calm and reassuring. "I got bored with my room."

He was coolly and deliberately pulling the jagged ends of the glass from the sash and dropping them into the courtyard beneath. Presently he had the sash cleared, and with amazing agility wriggled through. She was dumb with horror and fear, and when he spoke to her she was speechless.

"That old devil left me all alone...great thing being thin, isn't it? You can wriggle through things. A lot of people wouldn't have dared walk along that parapet. I was nearly over once."

He walked to the door where the switch was and turned on the light. His face was deathly white, his large eyes terribly bright.

"What a place!" he said contemptuously, looking disparagingly round the room. "When we get the money you'll have a glorious home, Mary--marble, the finest silks of the Indies, wonderful Persian carpets...."

He came near to her and slipped his arm round her. She grew stiff with horror.

"How long have we been married, angel? It must be years, and I've never spent ten minutes alone with you."

He took her face in his hands--they were icy cold--turned it up to his, feasting his eyes upon her.

"You're lovely!" he breathed. "I dream about you. Did the old woman tell you?"

She had to summon to her aid all her reserves of nerve and strength. Gently she pushed him from her.

"Let's get out of this room," she said, and her voice sounded strange to her. "It's stifling here. I'm not clever enough to unlock the door," she smiled.

"You don't want to be clever, you want strength--the strength of a lion."

He examined the lock.

"The key's on the outside," he said. "She always leaves it there--afraid of losing it."

He turned and beckoned her, lowering his voice. "There's a woman in this house. I heard her scream. Have you heard her?"

She nodded. "Yes." Her voice was quavering. "I think we ought to find her, don't you?"

He looked at her for a long time. The door had gone out of his mind.

"I don't want anybody but you," he said.

Desperately she walked past him to the door. "If I had the strength I could break this," she said, and her words, as she had intended they should, led his wandering mind back to the lock.

He picked up a chair, and with two blows smashed the panel, and thrust his arm through. She heard the snap of the lock as he pushed the door open.

"There!" he said. "I could have done that in my own room, but she left me nothing. She's even got the bed screwed to the floor. A wicked old devil! Some day I'll cut her throat. It'll be rather a lark."

There was a light burning on the bare landing.

"That's my room." He pointed to a door on the opposite side.

He turned the key and threw the door wide. But she was already half-way down the first flight of stairs.

"Mary!" he called to her furiously. "Come back, you little beast! Where are you going?"

Blindly she was flying down the stairs, hardly conscious that her feet were bare and that she wore nothing but a nightdress and the dressing-gown she had snatched up when she went to the window.

"Come back!" he screamed.

She had reached the ground floor before she realised she was there. She might have escaped by the front door, but he would have overtaken her. She came down another flight into a stone-flagged passage. Along this she fled. At the end was a door which was ajar. She turned, fumbling in the darkness for the lock. Then, as he flung himself at the door, her fingers touched a bolt and she shot it home.

She was in some underground room that smelt of petrol and oil. There was a car here: she could smell the warmth of it.

Groping blindly forward, she touched its wing and its polished body. Behind the car was a heavy wooden door, the entrance to the garage. She felt for the

lock but could not find it. And all the time the madman was hammering on the door through which she had come, raving and screaming at the top of his voice.

Feeling along the wall, she discovered by accident a switch, and turned the lever. Instantly the garage was flooded with the light of an overhead lamp. She saw the knob of the patent lock, turned it and pushed, and the door moved open. Then she swung round for one last survey of the barrier which lay between her and the vengeful maniac, and saw something which froze her with horror.

Lying on the garage floor was a dead man. An old rug lay over the lower part of him; his chest and head were bare.

Through his half-closed eyes he seemed to be glaring at her, and with a scream she ran out into the open, flew up the steep incline and came to the road.

She had run half a dozen yards when somebody stepped out of the shadow of the hedge and caught her by the arm. She screamed and fought at him with all her waning strength.

"I'm not going to hurt you," said a voice, and she dropped limply into his arms, for it was Tim Jordan.

CHAPTER 21

THE first time Mary recovered consciousness she was in a car of some kind, and she was wearing a thick overcoat, the sleeves of which were much too long for her. She did not remember much of that, except that somebody's arm was round her shoulder.

That impression faded out into oblivion, and when she woke again she was in bed: a very narrow bed in a plain room with distempered walls. There was a woman in nurse's uniform who was writing on a pad which she held on her knee.

Mary lay very still; presently the door opened and Tim Jordan came in. He looked at his watch, then at the bed, but was unaware that she was conscious, until she called him. He went quickly to her side.

"You're in the Cottage Hospital," he said. "There's nothing very much wrong with you, except that you've had a pretty bad shock. How are your poor feet?"

She smiled at the incongruity of the question, and then became painfully aware that it had its reason.

"No, they're not very bad," he said; "cut a little. Do you feel strong enough to answer questions? The police are most anxious to get exact information. Did you come from Jennings's Buildings?"

She nodded.

"I think so." Her voice sounded very hoarse to her.

"Now can you tell me quickly what had happened? You've been here over an hour, and we've done nothing."

In truth there was very little that could be done, a fact which Cowley had emphasised on the 'phone.

"It boils down to this," he had said. "This girl has run away from her husband, and that is hardly a case for police investigation. If she can tell you that there was anything irregular happening in Jennings's Buildings, we can act. Even if this man is insane we've no authority to deal with him unless we find him wandering in the street."

Her head was clearer now, and she was able to tell him of her husband's visit and her own escape. An odd trick of memory had blotted out the recollection of the most grisly incident of that wild flight, and it was only when he was questioning her as to the character of the garage that she remembered and shuddered.

"Oh!" she gasped. "The dead man!"

He stared at her.

"Which dead man?"

"He was on the floor...dreadful!"

It was some time before she was calm enough to tell him.

Cowley might be sceptical as to his power to interfere between man and wife, but he had taken the precaution to detach local officers to attend at the hospital, and to these Tim told the girl's story.

"Miss Grier may, of course, be imagining all this. The nurse says she's hysterical. But I think it's worth looking into."

His car brought them back to the darkened front of Jennings's Buildings. All that the police knew about the place was that there were two families in occupation, and that one of these had occupied the lower floor in the name of Scrummit.

Tim pressed the lower bell for a long time, but received no answer. He was pushing at the bell which communicated with the upper floor when the door was pulled open wide.

"Who's there? Is that you, boy?"

Though he could not see her he knew the voice.

"Is that the woman in charge of young Mr. Awkwright?" he asked.

"That's me. Who is it?"

Her voice was strident, but there was a note of fear in it.

"It isn't Captain Jordan, is it?...Have you seen him--Mr. Awkwright? Wait a minute, I'll put on the light."

She went back into the hall for that purpose, and they followed her in. When the lights came on Tim saw that she was dressed as though she had just come in from the street. Her grotesquely youthful hat was pushed to the back of her head, and the expensive fox skin about her throat was unfastened.

"He's gone," she said, "and Miss Grier--Mrs. Awkwright. Will you come up?"

They followed her up the uncarpeted stairs.

"Look," she said when she reached the landing, and pointed to the broken door. "He must have done that--God knows what else he did. I think he must have got through the window to her. There was no sign of blood."

Her teeth were chattering; he saw that she was in a panic of fear.

"He may have fallen into the courtyard. I've been knocking at the door of the people downstairs, but I can't make them hear, and I don't know how to get into the yard."

"How long have you been back?"

"Ten minutes," she said. "I went to a theatre. He could only have got out through the window."

They made a quick search of the room. Tim saw the girl's clothes, and directed that they should be made into a bundle and taken to the hospital.

"She's there, is she?" asked Martha eagerly. "Is she hurt? Did he get her...?"

"I found her outside."

"Did you see him?"

Tim shook his head.

They passed down the stairs again. The entrance to the lower flat was on the main floor, but repeated knocking brought no answer.

"There's another door at the back," said the woman. "I think it leads to the basement."

This was also closed and bolted.

"We'll try the garage," said Tim Jordan, and they went out through the front door, found the concrete slope and eventually came to the garage doors. They were fastened with a patent lock, but one of the detectives, producing a key blank that fitted the slit, covered it with lamp-black and secured the markings of the wards.

He took it back to the house, and in an extraordinarily short time had filed a key. The first attempt failed to open the door. He returned to the house to make another filing, and on the second attempt the key turned in the lock and the big door swung open.

The garage was empty of cars; but in the centre of the floor lay something covered with a piece of sacking.

"That's the dead man," said one of the detectives quietly.

He pulled back the sacking and revealed the face. Tim Jordan gasped and stared.

Mary Grier's marriage had been violently dissolved, for the face which looked up at them was the face of Willie Awkwright.

CHAPTER 22

FOR a long time there was a deep silence in that house of death.

"There's something wrong here," said one of the detectives. "Did the young lady say it was her husband?"

Tim heaved a sigh and wiped his streaming forehead.

"It couldn't very well have been, could it?" he said. "According to Miss Grier's statement he was on the other side of that door, beating upon it, when she left the garage."

He went to the door and tried it: it was unlocked and pushing it open, he came to the narrow passage which the girl had described. Following this up, he came to yet another door, and this too was unfastened. He flashed his lamp inside and walked in. It was a kitchen.

Lew Daney's methods were almost stereotyped. His getaway was invariably from kitchen to garage.

There was nothing here except a stove and evidence of a meal cooked by an amateur: greasy plates, with the remains of eggs and bacon, a glass and an empty beer bottle were on the table. He passed through to the next room, which was a kind of servants' hall, rather dingy and untidy. From this led a flight of stairs to a small hall running parallel with the entrance passage of the house. Leading off were three rooms, all plainly furnished and all bearing evidence of recent occupation.

One room particularly interested him. The windows were shuttered; the furniture consisted of a bed, a couple of chairs and a dressing-table. On the latter he found a sprinkling of face powder and a small tube of lipstick. There was a stale fragrance of an exotic perfume in the room. It had been used by a woman, and he found further evidence of this in one of the drawers of the bureau: a pair of silk stockings tied together. These were the only articles of clothing he found. Not so much as a tooth-brush remained to betray the identity of the person who had lived here.

Turning on the lights, he and two of the detectives carried out a second and more systematic search of the room, whilst the third went to the nearest telephone box and 'phoned to Scotland Yard,

The search of the room revealed nothing except a box of automatic cartridges which was unopened, and which Tim found in the pigeon-hole of a roll-top desk in what was evidently the dining-room. He was handing these to the police when he remembered Martha, who was waiting on the floor above. He sent one of the men up to break the news to her, but the man came back with the announcement that she had disappeared...

"I've got an idea she followed us into the garage, Captain Jordan. At any rate, somebody's left the door wide open, and I'm pretty sure we closed it."

Soon after this a doctor came with an ambulance and made a brief examination of the body. Awkwright had been shot twice at close quarters--through the back. "The murderer must have come on him from behind and shot him down without warning."

Wheeler was the first of the Scotland Yard men to arrive on the spot. He was emphatic in one view, which Tim shared.

"Two men have been killed here tonight. The first of these was the man Miss Grier saw--obviously it was not her husband; he was alive when she left the garage. The two bullets that killed Awkwright were on the other side of the little door at which he was hammering--I've just found them. He was making too much noise for our friend with the gun, and was killed without mercy. Who was the man on the floor? We've got to find him."

"And the woman," suggested Tim.

"Which woman?" asked Wheeler.

"Obviously Mrs. Daney has been here, and she's been a prisoner in the shuttered room."

Wheeler examined the place.

"Anyway, she left without any kind of struggle. There's no sign of violence. The bed is made, and the chest of drawers has been emptied at leisure. She has not attempted to get away in a hurry. The lipstick is an old one, nearly finished; one of the stockings is laddered and the pair had been put aside to burn."

"Laundry marks?" suggested Tim.

Wheeler smiled.

"You don't know very much about women," he said. "Stockings are the one article they seldom send to the laundry. No, they're completely useless as a means of identification--stockings always are."

In the early hours of the next morning Wheeler interviewed the girl. She was quite recovered, and heard the news of her husband's death calmly. When he asked her a question she shook her head. "No, it was not he on the floor--how could it be?"

He suggested that her memory might be at fault, but again she shook her head, "No, I was quite sane. It was another man--I am perfectly sure of that."

She could give only a vague description of the car she had seen in the garage, but she did supply them with an important clue. She had risen very early every morning since she had been an inmate of Jennings's Buildings, and spent most of her time by the window. In the early hours of the previous morning she had seen a Rolls coupe come into view from behind the wall and disappear at the limit of her line of vision.

"A Rolls coupe?" repeated Tim thoughtfully. "There's a familiar sound to that. Who was driving?"

She had not seen the driver. She was not even certain that the car had come from the house.

"There's only one place it could have come from, and that's the garage. Did you see it return?"

"No," she said.

She supplemented this information with a more significant fact. The dickey seat of the coupe had been half open as though it were packed with baggage. It had been between six and seven in the morning when she had seen the car. It was a particularly handsome one and looked as though it were new.

Tim nodded at Wheeler.

"That is Mrs. Daney. I know the machine; I saw it in Scotland."

Wheeler made a noise of impatience.

"I wish to heaven you'd told me that, Captain Jordan. I could have put through a garage inquiry. It may not be too late now; she must have stored the machine somewhere. There aren't so many ladies' Rolls coupes knocking around that this one could be overlooked. Was the car in any kind of hurry?"

"No," said the girl.

"H'm!" said Wheeler. "That doesn't sound like a woman making her escape. It sounds more as if...You didn't see the baggage? It might have been a bundle so far as you could tell, Miss Grier?"

"It might have been anything," said the girl. "I only know the seat was half open because it spoilt the lines of the car."

A description of Martha had already been broadcast, and the early editions of the evening Press appealed to her to report to police headquarters. There was reason enough why that appeal should be ignored. Tim, working through the lawyers, learned that the young man had had a considerable

balance at his hank, and that the whole of this, amounting to about eight thousand pounds, had been drawn out on the previous day by Martha. Not a penny of this money could be discovered in the house or in the pockets of the murdered man.

More than this, only a very few of her belongings were found in the building. Evidently Martha was also prepared for a quick getaway in case her plans should miscarry.

The lawyer was informative. "She must have made a pretty penny out of her guardianship," he said. "Old Mr. Awkwright was unusually generous, and as he insisted that the young man was perfectly sane he offered no obstacles to his handling the very considerable estate which his mother had left him. Martha had good pickings, and that is probably the reason you will find it difficult to get in touch with her. I often pointed out to old Mr. Awkwright how dangerous it was to allow this boy to have a big fluid balance at the bank, but he was very touchy on the question of young man's sanity."

Tim got to the Carlton that afternoon, a very tired man. He had just come out of his bath and was closing the curtains his room before retiring when a telegram was brought up him. He had sent and received answers to a number of wires that day, and he opened it, imagining it was a reply to one he had sent. He read the message in bewilderment. It ran:

'Am returning to town tomorrow. Would like to see you.'

It was from Mrs. Daney and was dated from Paris.

CHAPTER 23

SHE came to him on the following afternoon, her cool, debonair, beautifully groomed self, and met him without embarrassment.

"I'm afraid I gave you a lot of trouble that night I 'phoned you," she drawled. She stood before the mirror in his sitting-room, examining herself critically in the glass. "The truth is, Lew is absurdly jealous, and he had discovered an old attachment of mine. And then, of course, he was very annoyed with me for talking so much to you."

Tim was regarding her, if not with admiration, at least with interest. "By Lew I presume you mean your dear husband?"

She nodded. "Naturally, he was very angry about my 'phoning you that I was at Severn, and I agree that was unpardonable. But I was terrified. He gets into the maddest rages. But we made friends that night--"

"Is that why he kept you a prisoner at Jennings's Buildings?"

She looked at him for a while without answering. "Don't be absurd. I wasn't a prisoner; I could have one whenever I wanted."

"Is that why you screamed?"

He saw her lips tighten into a straight line.

"You're imagining things," she said. "I went away of my own free will a few days ago--"

"To be exact, two days ago. You had just time to get to Paris and send me a wire. Now, Mrs. Daney, perhaps you'll tell me about the two dead men?"

"The two--dead--men?" The hand that was resting on the table trembled. "I don't understand that."

"The two dead men in the garage. One has disappeared and one has been found--young Mr. Awkwright."

Her look of blank astonishment satisfied Tim that this was news to her.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I was never at--what's the name of the place--Jennings's Buildings?"

He was staggered by her volte face, but could applaud her quick wit. There was only his word that she had ever confessed to having been at the place. Nobody had seen her there. There was no evidence whatever which could associate her with Jennings's Buildings.

"I've been travelling round the country in my car--I left Lew the day after we had our little fight. And then I went to Paris--as you say, two days ago."

Tim chuckled.

"You've got a quick mind, Mrs. Daney," he said. "You knew we could trace the hour of your arrival at Paris. You went from Jennings's Buildings. Now, who was the man?"

She looked out of the window, her face immobile.

"Tell me about it," she said. "I love horrors. Mr. Awkwright, you say? That must be young Mr. Awkwright, the mad boy. Who was the other man?"

She was eager for information, but thought it expedient to appear indifferent. The story of the two dead men had shocked her, and frightened her too. It was as clear as daylight to him that she knew nothing whatever about these deaths; that they must have occurred after she had left the place. The impression he had was that there had been obtruded into a suave scheme, in which no tragedy had a part, something that was shockingly disturbing.

"I've worried you?" he challenged her.

She shook her head slowly. "Nothing worries me, and, anyway, I don't believe you. You're a copper, too, and they lie easily."

"Why did you scream?" he asked. She ignored the question. "Did he beat you up?"

She looked round at him quickly, her eyes narrowed. "If ever I'm beaten up I won't scream, I'll kill!" she said. "I haven't exactly the temper of an angel. Who was the other man?"

"I don't know. I thought you'd help me. Was there another man there?"

She did not answer this.

"Perhaps young Awkwright killed him," she said. "That fellow's crazy. He killed Jelf--I suppose you found that out after you read it in the newspapers?"

He was watching her closely, and could see the struggle she was making to disengage her mind from the mystery of the garage. Unconsciously he helped her.

"You tell me he was jealous of a man--"

"Who--Lew? Why, of course he was jealous. An old flame of mine. I could have married him."

She was looking at the table, avoiding his eyes, and taking a tighter hold of herself, he guessed.

"Do you know Harry Stone?"

She looked up quickly.

"Harry the Valet?" She nodded. "I've met him. Why? He's an old friend of mine; he's the man that Lew's been so jealous about."

"Have you seen him in London?"

She tried to look him straight in the face, but failed.

"I've met him once or twice," she said. "I had a letter from him the other day. He's been ill. Lew got hold of the letter and raised hell about it."

"Harry the Valet's been ill, eh?"

She nodded.

"He said he's coming into a fortune, and that if he dies he's going to leave me a lot of money."

"All, perhaps?" said Tim.

Again that quick, suspicious look at him.

"I don't know about all, but quite a lot. When Lew read the letter he was mad. He thought a man wouldn't leave all that money to me unless--well, you know how people like Lew must think. I don't know what to do about it; that's why I came to see you. I think the advice of a man like you means so much."

She snapped open her bag, took out a long envelope and extracted a folded sheet of paper.

"He sent me this and asked me if I would keep it or send it to my lawyers."

Tim took the paper, looking at the woman, and she did not flinch. The document was simple: it left "all of which I may die possessed to Millicent Jane Lessford."

"Who's she?"

"I'm she," said Mrs. Daney steadily.

He looked at the document again.

"I don't find any mention of Daney."

"It doesn't happen to be my name," she answered coldly.

"A nom de mariage?"

"I don't know what that means, but I guess it's something unpleasant. Whatever it is, the answer is 'yes'."

He looked at the signature and at the names of the witnesses.

"The two charwomen who came in to clean the flat," she explained.

Mr. Stone's full name was written with a flourish. It was a characteristic signature. Tim had a memory for writing, and he had seen Stone's name signed just like that on a charge sheet--the very charge sheet which had led to Harry the Valet's dismissal from the Rhodesian Police Force.

"It almost might be his," he bantered her.

She smiled. "Oh, it's his all right, poor fellow!"

"What's the matter with him?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. Something on his mind that was worrying him."

"Then you saw him?" asked Tim quickly.

She nodded. "I saw him two days ago; that's why I went to Paris. We came back together."

"He was coming to claim his fortune, perhaps?" asked Tim dryly.

"Why should he? They want him on two charges. Until he can get those squared he's not going to walk into the hands of the police."

He waited for something else to come, but she seemed at the end of her explanations.

"So that's why you've come, to establish the fact that you've been left Harry the Valet's money in the event of something happening to him?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I mentioned that in passing. I really called to see you, sweetie."

Her eyes twinkled good-humouredly, and when she smiled Mrs. Daney was a very lovely woman.

"Get thee behind me, siren," he said pleasantly. "I don't want to give Lew any further cause for jealousy. Poor Lew!"

"What's he poor about?" she asked sharply.

"Losing such a charming and loyal wife at the very moment she is on the high road to prosperity. And now I think you'd better trot off to Scotland Yard; they want to ask you a few questions."

She gathered up her bag with a little smile.

"That doesn't worry me at all," she said. "Giving ideas to bat-headed policemen has been my occupation for years."

CHAPTER 24

SHE left Tim puzzled, and yet not completely puzzled. She did not know, then; it was impossible that she should.

He had had her record from Scotland Yard. She had never been convicted, but she had been on the verge of conviction, had even faced an Old Bailey judge ten years before, and had escaped a verdict of guilty through the sheer sentimentality of an Old Bailey jury--and sentimentality in an Old Bailey jury is the rarest of all qualities.

It is impossible in London, or in any big city, to be wholly unobserved. You may be seen but forgotten. Some slight accident, like a shining watchguard, or grey trousers combined with a green overcoat, may indelibly impress an unobservant and forgetful mind. The stimulation of interest will set memory working.

Nobody ever knows how much Scotland Yard may be interested in a case. It is customary to note, in the event of an important and picturesque murder, that the chiefs of the Yard are in consultation either on the spot or in the room overlooking the Thames Embankment, where the Chief Constable has his office. Their movements, their doings, their thoughts and words are liberally canvassed. The photographs of the heads of Scotland Yard appear in the newspapers, and when the case ends, either with the arrest of the murderer or with the failure in trace his movements, the public may well suppose that the chiefs of the Yard relapse into a sort of dozy quietude, only to be awakened by the next sensational event which stirs popular imagination.

But those conferences go on day and night; not about murderers, often about the most trivial of crimes. Investigators go forth and return with their reports; the dossier of the case grows and becomes a second dossier; and nobody outside that stately building has any knowledge or any conception of the activity which is continuing inside.

The dossier of Harry the Valet had grown considerably, and the juxtaposition of a green overcoat with grey trousers had been the basis of a great many inquiries. The clerk at the cloak-room, the housekeeper at the hotel, the busy valet who was also boots and light porter at the same establishment, all contributed their quota, but all insisted upon the grey trousers and the green coat.

The memory of a taxi-driver was roused to their recognition.

A policeman on Hampstead Heath had seen the green and the grey pass beneath a street lamp, and remembered it distinctly, although it was a long

time ago. Then one day a prisoner serving the first period of a three years' sentence at Wandsworth Prison said he would like to make a statement.

It came to Scotland Yard, and since all convicted persons are liars and will seize upon any excuse to relieve the tedium of their monotonous lives, Chief Constable Cowley read the statement, scratched his head and said something coarse. And yet--

"Look up the record. When was this man convicted, and what was the night of the burglary?" he said.

"This man" had broken into a house in the broad road leading from the Spaniards to Highgate. He had stolen a little silver and had been recaptured a week later owing to the indiscretion of a lady friend.

They brought his record, and Cowley examined it.

"He's telling the truth: it was the night that Harry disappeared," he said.

Briefly, the statement was to the effect that he was leaving the burgled premises when he saw a man standing on the sidewalk, evidently waiting for somebody. From his build he guessed he was a detective, and the moment he had seen him had dropped down out of sight behind a newly-planted box hedge. It was thinly planted, as these young hedges generally are, and through the twigs he could see the man. Presently he had seen a car move slowly up. Its lights were dim, but, low as they were, he too could identify the green coat and the grey trousers. The man had stepped into the car, which had driven slowly off. He had heard two men speaking as the car passed him, but what they had said he could not remember or had not heard.

The man who was waiting was without baggage of any kind.

It might seem remarkable that "this man" should consider it worth his while to make any statement at all upon so unimportant a happening; but it must be remembered that prisons are hotbeds of gossip, and inquiries judiciously spread within their grim walls are very productive of results.

Tim was sitting in his room at the Carlton when a 'phone, message came through from the Yard..

"Come along and see me, will you?" said Cowley. "And I'll try to induce you to take a more charitable view of Scotland Yard."

Tim protested that his view of Scotland Yard was an exalted one, but here he was exaggerating a little. He shared with all police chiefs who were not in immediate association with the Yard a good-humoured contempt for the legend of its infallibility. If the truth were told--and he was the first to admit

it--he had come to England with the idea that his experience and training would be of the utmost value to this moribund system of investigation.

His respect had not been enhanced by their prompt refusal to accept his services. He admitted this ruefully later, when he saw in the Chief Constable's office and examined the interesting data which were spread in front of him.

"I'll hand this to you," said Cowley, "that you have supplied what I would call the twist of the investigations. Now, here are Harry the Valet's movements. He left the hotel--here's the exact hour and minute--he went to a station office and left his suitcase, he made his way to Hampstead Heath and to this spot. He was here at ten thirty-seven, and was picked up by Lew Daney's coupe. At this point"--he produced a sketch map--"the car was seen by a passing motorist at eleven seven. It was standing by the side of the road."

The sketch map bore a cross, and near the cross was a little blue, irregular circle.

"There's a lake there," said Cowley. "You can hire boats, and on high days and holidays take speed-boat runs. Our car was seen later here"--he pointed with a pencil to a place on the sketch map marked C. "The driver was alone, and there was a very peculiar circumstance which will be significant to you. The driver would not have been seen near the Welwyn cross-roads but for this fact: the road was slippery; he was coming at a pretty good lick, and apparently didn't see the policeman's signal; he put on his brakes to avoid a car which was coming along the cross-roads, and did a beautiful skid that turned him round twice and left him head on to the way he was going."

"The policeman walked across to him, but before he reached the car it had moved on. The policeman swears there was one man, so something had happened to the other, and it could only happen at one place." He pointed to the cross near the lake.

"If we had had all these facts in our possession soon after it occurred, we might have got our man. But nobody wanted to find Harry the Valet, or account for his disappearance, until this inheritance turned up. And then he took a lot of tracing. What do you say to Scotland Yard now?"

"My hat is off to it," said Tim. "Have you traced him beyond?"

Cowley shook his head. "No; we're now dealing with the county police, and various county police, and unless the driver had a smash or broke his neck there would be no record of it; besides which, he had reached the Great North Road, and that is a pretty busy thoroughfare at all hours of the day and night." He folded the map and put it back in its envelope. "So Mrs.

Daney has turned up, with a duly attested will! That's interesting. That little outfit is going to want money soon."

"It has plenty. One can hardly suppose that they will dissipate--"

"They've lost every penny. We've found most of the stuff at Jennings's Buildings. We found the guns and about a hundred thousand pounds in the false bottom of the car pit at Severn. Another very considerable sum has been recovered from Clench House. That also was hidden under the stone flooring. The flag was easy to raise, and yet he did not take it away. Does that strike you as odd?"

"It would have done, but it doesn't," said, Tim cryptically. "Now, where do we go from here, Chief?"

"We've gone already," said Cowley grimly, "with grappling-irons and drags, and I have an idea we are going to find something pretty ugly."

The ugly thing was not found that day or the next. Indeed, it was not found by the police at all, but by a commotion-making speed-boat that brought something momentarily to the surface. The driver of the boat saw it before it sank again, and refused to see it any more when the police eventually brought it to the clean light of day.

CHAPTER 25

TIM JORDAN went back to the Carlton, a little staggered by the confirmation of all his suspicions. He found time to call at the nursing home whither Mary Grier had been taken, and was a little alarmed to find that she had driven out, alone as he thought, but was relieved afterwards to learn that a man from the Yard had gone with her.

Cowley came up to see him.

"Here's the end of one long road of investigation," he said. "The point is, do you think Mrs. Daney knows? Personally, I don't. Yet something pretty odd has happened in the last week, something that has got me guessing."

"Have you seen her?" asked Tim.

The Chief smiled. "You don't imagine she was living at the address she gave you, do you?" he asked, with a note of sarcasm in his voice. "No, she's around somewhere, and I'm hoping to pick her up. I wish I'd given you the power of arrest--made you a special constable or something. It's going to be rather difficult."

"More than ordinarily?" asked Tim.

Cowley nodded.

"Yes. This man flies--didn't you know that? In theory we can check up every aerodrome and every aeroplane in England. But every big field with a barn may be an aerodrome, and you can buy light aeroplanes as easily as you can buy light motor-cars--there's even a second-hand market in them! And don't forget that part of the proceeds of the robbery of the Lower Clyde Bank was a number of French notes, which are absolutely untraceable. I reckon that he must have the best part of twenty thousand pounds in real money, and with twenty thousand pounds he can do a lot. I shall be surprised if he hasn't done something already. He may have resources beyond any we know."

He explained that for years Daney had been establishing depots in Scotland and England, and that in each of these he had probably cached a considerable sum against a moment of emergency.

"They may not be gigantic sums, but they're pretty certain to be large. One of these days I'll write a short history of Daney and get kicked for describing him as a master criminal. But that is the fairest description that will ever be given him."

"Do you think he's operating a 'plane?" asked Tim.

"There's no doubt about it," said the Chief emphatically. "How did Mrs. Daney leave England, and how did she return? She could have done the journey by train and boat, though as a matter of fact the cross-Channel services are being very closely watched just now, and it's humanly impossible that she could have made the trip by sea and rail. Two of the men at Dover know her by sight; the man at Folkestone pulled her in a few years ago on suspicion of being concerned in one of Lew's more spectacular jobs--the one that drove him to South Africa. No, she could not have made the trip by train, so we may suppose that, if not in the London area, at least in the home counties, our man has a nice little jumping-off place, and that's the place we want to find."

They had tea together, and Cowley added considerably to Tim Jordan's store of knowledge concerning police methods. Before he left he uttered a warning.

"If you're a sensible man and you've any desire to live a long life and die happily, you'll keep to your hotel after sunset," he said. "There is one man he is anxious to get, and that man is you. And you know why."

The story of the gruesome find in the pond on the Circular Road had achieved no other publicity than the fact that the body of a man had been recovered from the water. The crime of the moment, and that which was fascinating evening newspaper readers, was what was known as "the garage mystery." An enterprising reporter had connected the death of young Awkwright with that of his father, and the mystery of both tragedies was being exploited at length.

Cowley got a newspaper from the elevator attendant as they were going down, and the two men stood in the hall, reading the account.

"It's nearly right," said Cowley as he handed the paper to the other. "Are you going out?"

"I'm going down to the nursing home--" began Tim.

"I can save you the trouble," said Cowley. "I've had that young lady brought to town." He smiled at the young man's visible consternation. "No, she's not under arrest or anything so dramatic, but she may have seen something at Jennings's Buildings without realising she'd seen it. If she's in a position to identify our slippery friend she is in almost as great danger as you are--307, Welbeck Street is the address, and you'll find one of my men on duty outside the house."

Mary was the sole occupant of a little sitting-room, and apparently was the healthiest young lady that had ever occupied space in a nursing home. She was, however, she admitted, still a little shaky. He thought she might be

averse to talking over her unpleasant experience, and avoided the subject until she her-self began to talk about Jennings's Buildings.

She had never seen the occupants of the lower flat, and Martha had never described them. She had heard the scream, and her description confirmed Mrs. Daney's interpretation.

"It sounded more like somebody who was angry than somebody who was frightened."

"A shrieking virago, in fact?" said Tim, and she nodded.

She was shocked rather than distressed at the death of her husband. "I think he has always been a little mad. Mr. Awkwright told me a lot about him after I had been married."

He learned something of the circumstances under which that marriage was planned and carried out.

"It was inexcusable. I did take seventy pounds. I had already asked Mr. Awkwright if he would lend me the money. Mother was in a desperate state. She had the bailiffs in her little house, and my younger sister was being sent back from school because her fees had not been paid. I don't want to say anything against Benjamin Awkwright, but I have a feeling that he deliberately tempted me. He had never left money about before, but from the moment I told him I was in such need I was constantly finding it under blotting-pads, in the open drawers of his desk, and at last, after a frantic wire from Mother, I did this awful thing.

"I was mad with anxiety. But I'd hardly got the money into an envelope before he missed it and point-blank accused me. I could only give him the money back, and then I went through four hours of hell. I saw myself being prosecuted, and Mother in the workhouse. It was in the evening of that day that he made his suggestion. He had a son who needed a wife. He told me the son was ill, and that he only wanted a companion. It was news to me that he had any children."

"Did he tell you the boy was mad?"

She shook her head.

"No, I--I found that out afterwards, on the way back from the ceremony. Mr. Awkwright said that if I married him he would get my mother out of all her trouble and give me a substantial sum--it was, as a matter of fact, about three hundred pounds--to enable her to carry on. He knew so much about Mother's circumstances that I realise now he must have read my correspondence with Mother. All letters went to his study to be included in his post-bag, and it was a very simple matter for him to open an envelope if

he, were so mean--and I'm afraid he was, terribly mean. I don't say I jumped at the offer, but I accepted it instantly. I didn't know what it meant, though, if I had stopped to think, I should have realised that a rich man wouldn't force his secretary to marry his son unless there was something very peculiar about him. That's the end of the story so far as my marriage is concerned. I was never alone with him for more than five minutes. He terrified me. Wherever Mr. Awkwright lodged he had a smaller cottage or an apartment which was occupied by his son."

It was obvious from what she told him that Stocker, who was Mr. Daney's right-hand man, knew nothing of this domestic arrangement until, in a fit of dementia, and whilst Daney, Stocker and Jelf were in the woods one night, the madman had attacked her, chasing her through the plantation, knife in hand.

It was then that Stocker came into it. Daney was notoriously an impressionable man; he had seen the girl when she lay unconscious on the ground, and had raved about her. That was his way. Probably he had exaggerated his sudden passion in order to annoy his wife.

The girl could tell him very little of the redoubtable Lew. She had seen him twice, and yet had not seen him; she had met him by chance in the dusk near Clench House. He had always been most kind and considerate, had even gone to the length of offering to pay for a divorce. Probably there was some reason for Mrs. Daney's anger with her husband.

Tim left the nursing home when he was told point-blank by the matron that he had already exceeded his permissible stay by an hour. He drove back to Jennings's Buildings, hoping to find Cowley or Wheeler there, but discovered a policeman on duty who knew him not, and offered neither encouragement nor permission to enter an area which was barred to the general public.

When be got back to the Carlton he met Cowley coming out.

"I want to see you," he said. "Come down to the Yard."

They drove along the Embankment together, and the Chief led the way up to his room. "Read this."

He took from a locked drawer a telegram. It had been handed in at Ostend, and was signed "Crimms."

"That's our man permanently stationed at Ostend," said Cowley.

Tim read: 'This morning at seven o'clock body of man found on sand dunes between Westende and Nieuport. He had been shot at close quarters and revolver was found near his hand. From papers in his pocket and letter which he left his name is apparently Harry Stone.'

"Harry the Valet?" gasped Tim.

"Harry the Valet," repeated Cowley grimly. "A providential death, eh? With Mrs. Daney holding the last will and testament of that interesting legatee! My people have been on the 'phone and had the letter transcribed. I need hardly tell you that it is addressed to Mrs. Daney."

He touched a bell, and to the attendant who came: "Ask Inspector Smith if he has got the letter found near the body on the Belgian coast."

For a moment after the man left the room they were silent.

"So that's it!" said Tim, and whistled.

"That's it," repeated Cowley. "I'm most anxious to read this letter; it hadn't come through when I left the office. By the way, have you ever heard of Johnny Time?" Tim shook his head. "He's a small forger, who has once or twice got into big gangs, but mainly confines himself to writing references and characters for chauffeurs who have none worth speaking about. I had an idea you had met him."

Then Tim remembered. "Why, of course! He was the fellow who was going to give this man away. He had made an appointment to see you--"

"Which he didn't keep," said the Chief. "Johnny Time has made many appointments with us that he hasn't kept. In fact, eighty per cent. of the informers who come here bursting with information fade out before they make their critical statement."

At this moment the attendant came back and put a sheet of typed foolscap before the Chief Constable. Cowley unfolded his glasses, fixed them on his nose and read:

"'My darling girl--" he began.

"That is our Mrs. Daney."

'I am sorry to bring so much bother upon you, but the truth is, life cannot go on without you. You are true to your husband, and for that I respect you, but this long suspense is breaking my heart. I have recently inherited a lot of money, as you know, and I have forwarded to you my one and only will, in which I leave you everything. I hope it will do more good to you than it has done to me....'

"Here follows," said the Chief, skimming the lines, "a brief, picturesque and wholly untrue story of his life, and of the police persecution which drove him to his career of crime. Do you want me to read it?"

"Not very much," said Tim.

"We shall have the original here tonight or by the early morning," said Cowley. "You'll be interested in this postscript:

"I advise you to go to Captain Tim Jordan, of the Rhodesian Police. He will give you advice, for he is an honest man, and though he treated me badly in South Africa I bear him no malice.'

"For which I thank him," said Tim.

Cowley locked away the copy in his desk.

"The stage is now set for the last interesting act," he said, "and I hope there will be no casualties."

"Are there likely to be?"

Cowley nodded.

"We're dealing now with a tremendous moment in this man's life. One death more or less is not going to worry him. He is a gunman, and he will be guided by that good old criminal motto: 'You can only be hung once.' It is dark, and I'll send a man home with you."

"It isn't at all necessary," said Tim. "I can get a cab in Whitehall."

"You'll get a cab here." Cowley pressed a bell. "And you'll wait in this office until it's ready for you. I'm taking no unnecessary risks tonight. Go back to your hotel, have a bit of dinner, and meet me at Victoria. We'll take the night boat to Ostend and clear up the one little mystery which is baffling us both."

CHAPTER 26

TIM came back to the Carlton just as the palm court was filling with diners. He went up by elevator. His room was a dozen paces along the corridor. He unlocked the sitting-room door, stepped in and automatically put out his hand for the light switch. There was a click but no light. He tried the second; again the switch turned without producing any result. Fused, probably, he thought.

There was another light switch near the door of his bedroom.

He walked across the darkened floor; his hand was raised to find the switch, when the open door on to the corridor, through which the only light in the room was coming, closed with a bang. Somebody was in the room.

Tim dropped his hand to his hip pocket, but as his fingers closed on the butt of his automatic a white line of flame stabbed the darkness. The report was thunderous and deafening. He was conscious that something had chipped off the tip of his ear, and though he had no pain he put up his hand and felt it become wet.

As his gun came out, something struck him on the cheek and sent him crashing against the wall. In a second he had recovered and grappled with the man.

He could see nothing; he was fighting blindly and savagely against an assailant who was not dependent upon his fists. With that blow against the wall his pistol had dropped from his hand, and as he struggled he felt with his feet to locate it.

Overbalancing, he fell with a crash against the fender. At that moment the man who was struggling with him shot twice blindly, and wrenching open the door of the bedroom, closed it behind him.

Tim staggered to his feet, stumbled across the room, and after a minute succeeded in opening the door. The passing sommelier saw his blood-stained face and almost dropped the dishes he was carrying.

"Get a light here, quick," said Tim.

The man dashed into the room, and by a lucky chance chose a small table-lamp which stood on Tim's desk. It was the only one from which the bulb had not been removed. The lights were intact in the bedroom, and Tim was able to take stock of the damage.

A piece had been nicked out of the top of his ear; his face was badly bruised, and he had a cut above the left temple which produced an alarming amount of blood, but was not, he saw, very serious.

A quick inquiry traced the movements of his assailant. He had been seen coming from Tim's bedroom, a gentleman in faultless evening attire, carrying a light overcoat over his arm. He wore a top-hat, and, as he went down the stairs leisurely, he lit a cigar. On the lower floor nobody had noticed him. The spectacle of a well-dressed man at the Carlton was not unusual. He had passed through the palm court into Pall Mall, and thence onwards all trace of him was lost.

A doctor dressed the two wounds and gave conventional advice; but Tim had other ideas than of going to bed and remaining quiet. He 'phoned Cowley at his home and told him what had happened.

"I expected that," said the Chief. "You were foolish to go home without one of my men. I'll see that you're not left without a--" He hesitated for a word.

"A keeper?" suggested Tim. "No, I don't think I want one. He's miles away by now."

"Don't you believe it!" warned Cowley. "He knows by now that you're alive, and that's just the thing you mustn't be for his convenience and safety."

It was no idle warning. Tim ate a hasty dinner, packed his suitcase, and, calling a cab, directed the driver to take him to Victoria. The cab circled Trafalgar Square, passed the Admiralty Arch, and was half-way up the Mall when a big car overtook them, and, coming abreast, edged them into the kerb. The taxi-driver let flow a stream of violent protest, and jammed on his brakes. As he did so, the man in the driver's seat fired four shots into the interior of the cab. Before the startled onlookers or the policeman on point duty could intervene, the big car straightened and flew along in the direction of Buckingham Palace and disappeared.

Though Tim was unhurt there was a casualty: a motor-cyclist who had been following the cab had been knocked over by the big car and was lying unconscious by the side of the road. He was not badly hurt, though his machine was smashed.

Tim would have been detained by the police, but he explained the urgent nature of his business with Cowley, and whilst he was so explaining a man pushed his way through the crowd and spoke to the constable in a low voice. He took Tim by the arm and led him aside.

"It's all right, Captain Jordan. I'm from the Yard. So was the man who was following you. He is a cyclist detective. Mr. Cowley gave orders that you were not to be let out of sight. There are half a dozen of us between the Carlton and Victoria."

It was within a few minutes of the time when the train was due to leave that Tim hurried into the station. It was not until the train was pulling out that he was able to conclude the story of his adventure.

"Our friend is not clever, but he's a good workman," said Cowley. "He's not on the train, but I shall be very much surprised if he isn't waiting for us at Ostend--or even at Dover."

When they arrived at that port, an hour and a half later, Cowley had a consultation with the Scotland Yard men who day and night watch this Channel port. Nobody answering the description of the assassin had gone on to the ship, but before it left harbour a very careful search was instituted, and the Jean van Roebuc was combed from bow to stern, to the inconvenience of many people who had retired for the night.

As the boat steamed slowly out of the harbour Cowley made a confession. "I'm scared," he said. "Have you ever been scared, Jordan? If you say you haven't you're a liar."

"What are you scared about?"

Cowley shook his head.

"I don't know. We are reaching the climax of a very big case, and the man we're trying to put in the dock is not going to worry very much about your life or mine. And, curiously enough, though I hold a pretty important position and am officially without fear, I am very conscious that I have a wife and family who may appreciate the funeral the force will give me, but will find that that isn't very much compensation for the loss of a good husband and a kind father!"

"You're joking," said Tim.

Cowley pursed his lips.

"In a sense I am. But I do think that before we get our man there is going to be very serious trouble indeed. I don't expect he'll get away with it, but he may. I have telegraphed the Chief of Police and every important coast town from Dunkirk to Ostend to look out for aeroplanes, and I happen to know that there are twenty or thirty places where a man can land in the dark. There's a pretty wide beach of firm sand, and the tide will be well out at three o'clock. If he has a confederate he can be dropped and the aeroplane flown back to England before daybreak. If he hasn't one, it would be a fairly simple matter to taxi the aeroplane into the sea."

In the chilly hours before the dawn Tim was wakened and went on deck in preparation for landing. Of the men who were gathered on the wharf side half of them were members of the Belgian detective force, and the chief of

these greeted Cowley warmly. They had worked together during the war and were old friends.

"There's nothing mysterious about this suicide," said M. Poiccart. "We cannot trace where he lived in Ostend, but he must have been here some time. We found in his pocket an old copy of the Independance Belge and a French newspaper--"

"Both of which could have been bought in London. An artistic touch, but not very convincing. You've got the revolver?"

"At the office," said the Belgian. "We have tested it, and as far as we are able to judge it is the pistol with which the suicide was committed. One chamber has been discharged. I am unable to tell you any more, my dear friend, because you particularly asked that the body should not be moved. I have left it on the dunes, and put a few police officers on duty to see that it is not interfered with. The only thing I have done is to take his finger-prints, as you requested, and you may see these at the office."

"I think I have got a facsimile set in my pocket," said Cowley.

At the central police station the finger-print card was laid on the table before the Chief Constable, and he compared this with a smaller card which he took from his pocket-book. Tim, who had some knowledge of the finger-print system, saw immediately that they were identical.

"Humph!" said Cowley. "There's no doubt about that. What a stupid fool the fellow is! Has he never heard of the finger-print system, or did he imagine he could pull off a swindle like this without the police taking the trouble to make inquiries?"

"It is not suicide?" asked the interested Poiccart.

The Chief shook his head. "No, it's just murder, and it wasn't committed in Belgium. The body has already been seen by a young lady; it was lying on the floor of a garage in Barnet."

As soon as it was daylight he drove out with two carloads of police to the place where the body lay, and made a brief inspection of the gruesome thing that was spreadeagled on the sand.

The Chief stood for a long time, looking down at the dead man, then shook his head.

"So passes poor old Johnny Time," he said. "A poor little thief who butted into the big game, and has got the worst of it. Shot at close quarters, probably in the car that took him to Jennings's Buildings. Transported by aeroplane dressed in Harry the Valet's clothing. Our friend must have made

a very careful planning of this, Jordan. You'll notice the men are about the same height." He hurried to the Belgian police chief. "Nothing has been seen of an aeroplane?"

"Nothing at all, Monsieur Cowley. We have had our patrols along the coast since three o'clock. The sound of an aeroplane was heard, flying very high, and it may of course have come down. Unfortunately, if it landed on the sands it would leave no trace, for the sea has come in since. Actually it has not been seen, and it might have been the German night mail, which passes along the coast and turns inland at Zeebrugge."

After giving directions for the disposal of the body, the men drove back to the hotel where Cowley had booked two rooms.

"The next move is with Mrs. Daney, and I wonder whether she'll take it," he said.

Later in the morning came the English newspapers by aeroplane from London, and Tim read them with interest, for at eleven o'clock on the previous night Scotland Yard had released a very full account of what had been found in the pond and all that it signified.. Cowley was on the telephone to London several times that morning, and he had many consultations with the Belgian police officials. He reported the result of his talk to Tim.

"There's no sign of this fellow in London, and the aeroplane which was heard at half-past two in the morning was not the mail. It passed over Margate a little before two, when one of the inland anti-aircraft detachment was having a searchlight practice. The machine was picked up, but dodged out of the light. It was not an official 'plane, or an air liner, and so far they haven't been able to trace its port of origin--not that that means much. There's a tremendous amount of smuggling going on now; silks in particular are coming in by the bale; and this may be one of the smuggler planes. The coast stations were warned, but there has been no report that the 'plane returned--which means, young fellow, that you're not to go walking on the dunes without a couple of Mr. Poiccart's gentlemen!"

It was when the tide went out early that afternoon that the mystery of the lost 'plane was unravelled. Fishermen reported that the tail-piece of an aeroplane had been sighted a mile and a half from shore. Here the sands slope very gradually, and at low tide there was little more than a dozen feet of water. A tug was immediately dispatched to salve the 'plane, and this did not prove as difficult as had been anticipated. It was dragged ashore partly by the tug and partly by the fishermen.

The machine was intact, except for a broken propeller, and an expert who examined it gave it as his opinion that it had probably been sent taxiing into the sea from a point immediately opposite where it was found.

A careful examination of the sands supported this view. The real clue, however, came when Tim made a careful search of the fuselage. Strapped under the seat he found a small leather case. The lock was forced open, and inside were a number of gold-mounted toilet fittings bearing a monogram.

"That's Mrs. Daney's. She must know something about flying, too. He's had a dual control fixed," said Cowley. "So they're both here!"

It was quite understandable that the small case could be overlooked in the dark. Probably Mrs. Daney had another case containing her jewels, to which she paid more especial attention.

The word flashed from town to town, from Aachen to Bruges, and the machinery of Belgian police investigation was set in motion. Somewhere in the country were two people, one of whom was a triple murderer, and the other on the face of it his accomplice. Every hotel received an immediate official notification and description of the wanted pair.

"They could, of course, dodge into Holland. It's only a car drive. But I have an idea they'll be hanging round," said Cowley. "They can't move except by car or train, and where they are at this moment they will remain--and they're in Ostend: of that I'm sure."

Knocke, the frontier port, reported that no car had passed into Holland except a number which daily made the trip from one country to the other. The French frontier patrols made a similar report. Bruges drew blank. Brussels, however, was another matter. It is a vast city, and here the process of search would necessarily be slower.

"I shall stay on another day," said Cowley. "I've wired for extradition papers and they should arrive tonight."

Tim took his constitutional before dinner along the dunes, and was amused but irritated to find that he was the centre of a small crowd of policemen, in plain clothes, but so obviously policemen that the good citizens of Ostend were under the impression he was a dangerous criminal taking an airing.

He dined with Poiccart and Cowley in the sitting-room they had engaged at the hotel. The season had not begun, only one or two hotels were open, and this, explained Poiccart, made a much simpler business to comb the town. There were, however, quite a large number of pensions, which, whilst legally they were compelled to report the arrival of any stranger, might for the

consideration which the fugitives would offer them overlook this rather important injunction.

It was eleven o'clock when the two police chiefs retired, and Tim sat down to write a letter. The hotel was silent; the only sound that came to him was the hush-hush of the incoming tide as it swept across the level sands of the plage.

His bedroom opened from the sitting-room. He was half-way through his letter when he thought he heard a sound. He rose and listened; he heard it again--the faint creak of a stealthy footstep. Noiselessly he crossed the room and turned off the lights. Then, with a gun in one hand and an electric torch in the other, he approached the door. Suddenly he swung it open and flashed on the lamp.

"Hands up!" he said, and gasped.

For a moment he did not recognise the dapper figure in mechanic's overalls who stood at the foot of the bed.

"Who are you?"

"All right," said a mocking voice. "Don't shoot, Captain. I heard you had my jewel case here, and I thought I'd come and get it."

CHAPTER 27

"Do you mind turning that torch off?" Mrs. Daney went on. "It hurts my eyes."

"I'm sorry about that," said Tim sardonically.
He backed out, the woman following, into the sitting-room.
"You can turn on the lights," he said. "If you attempt to open the door I won't be responsible for my actions."
"Don't worry," said Mrs. Daney. She walked at her leisure to the switch, and when the room was lit came back to the table and sat down. She looked rather pale; there were heavy shadows under her eyes, and though she retained her old insolence of manner she was a badly shaken woman. "Can I have a cigarette? I haven't got one. By the way, is the jewel case here?" she asked, as he handed her his case.
"It's in the hotel. You should have tried the strong-room. How did you get in?"
"Through the window," she said laconically. "You've got a balcony, and there's another balcony above, and an iron post. It's easy. In the old days, when Lew was doing small stuff, I used to help him."
"How did you pass the detectives?"
She smiled contemptuously. "Don't make me laugh! Those hams! I've been staying in the hotel all the time--that's the funny thing. You've searched every hotel in town but you haven't searched this!"
"And your boy friend?"
She did not answer; her eyes were staring past him. "He and I have been very good friends, off and on, for years. He wasn't the best of men, but there was a lot about Lew in the old days that was very wonderful. You wouldn't believe me if I told you that I was once in love with Lew--give me a light."
He struck a match and held it for her. The hand that held the cigarette was shaking.
"Romantic, eh? Just like the stuff you get in books--mush! I adored him, that's all. We've always had our fights, but they generally ended up nicely, and he was big and generous to me."
"In other words, you really were in love?" said Tim when she stopped.
Mrs. Daney nodded. "That's about the size of it: I really was in love. I didn't know how much until--well, that doesn't matter,"
"Why didn't they report you at the hotel? Are they working with you?"
She shook her head. "I have been in residence here for a fortnight off and on. I've been taking trips to Brussels and Paris, but I've kept on my room, and naturally they didn't regard me as a newcomer. I speak very good French, and that's the nationality they think I am.".
She smoked in silence, for a time. Tim's eyes wandered to the telephone, and she read his thoughts.
"You needn't call Cowley yet awhile," she said. "I want to get calmed down."
Another long pause. "Who was that man--the man on the dunes?"

"A man named Johnny Time," said Tim, and she nodded.
"I thought it was. He was a kite man, wasn't he?"
"By which you mean a forger? Yes."
"He wrote two rather nice letters which..." she caught her breath, "which came to me from Lew. I worked that out a few hours ago. Naturally I thought they were from Lew, they were so cleverly worded, and it might have been his writing. Of course, when I saw the newspapers this morning I knew all about it. He didn't know I'd seen the newspapers. That's the funny thing about him: he has lapses, and does things that Lew would never have done. That's because he snuffs the coke."
"A drug-taker, is he?" said Tim, interested.
"He was," she corrected him, as she carefully tapped the ash from her cigarette into a tray. "And when he can't sleep he takes veronal--shovelfuls of it. I told him one day he'd make a mistake, and he did. But he saved me a lot of trouble."
Tim half rose from his chair.
"Sit down," she said. "I went in to kill him after I'd read the paper, but nature had got there first."
"Where is he?" asked Tim.
He reached for the telephone.
"If you call Cowley I'll not tell you anything. My nerves are all like that!" She made an expressive gesture. "I couldn't stand Cowley at this moment. I rather like you, Tim Jordan. Give me another cigarette."
He handed her one and lit it for her.
"That's better. I suppose cigarette smoking's a kind of dope, but it's nice. I hadn't any idea that Daney was dead, but I think I know what happened. Daney was always a little scared of Harry the Valet; he had played him one or two tricks; and he knew that Harry was in London. As a matter of fact, Harry found him and rang him up. We've got to guess what happened, but I'm a pretty good guesser. Lew picked him up on Hampstead Heath, and I haven't the least doubt that Lew was going to put him amongst the memorial notices. Harry shot first."
She paused and swallowed hard; the unshed tears glistened in her eyes.
"I don't know what Lew told him, but probably the whole strength of Clench House and where the money was. He used to do things like that--he had a sort of cat and mouse complex. He's done it to me once or twice....But Harry shot first. I put that all together when I read this morning's newspaper and saw that Lew's body had been taken out of the lake. Of course, Harry went north to get the stuff. He knew the secret of the little tomb and all about the store under the garage. He must have got it from Lew's papers--apparently he stripped him before he dumped him in the water--all particulars about the various depots Lew had made throughout the country. He knew how to get into the place where the money was.
"Lew kept a diary and carried it around with him. It was one of the many fool things he did. I suppose he'd written a lot about me, so it wasn't hard to

catch me at Severn, as he did. I had a week of hell with that man before he showed me the letter from Lew, telling me that I was to keep quiet and do whatever Harry told me. Like a simp I believed it--thought Lew was hiding abroad and that Harry was acting for him. I didn't reach this stage without a lot of fight. I think Harry would have put me out if it hadn't been for his natural instincts as a gentleman."

She smiled faintly.

"Where is he?"

"I'll tell you later. I went in with a gun to get him this morning when he lay in bed, but nature and veronal had worked a little quicker. Is there anything I can clear up for you?"

"Did you know about the killing of Johnny Time?"

"No, nor of young Awkwright. I was gone by then. Harry couldn't dispose of the money. He'd got a grand scheme for leaving the stuff to me, dying off, and for me being his heiress.

"I didn't exactly know how he was going to work it--I didn't dream he'd kill some poor devil in cold blood, but that's what he did; and he killed young Awkwright because he couldn't keep quiet. The will is genuine enough--it's written in Harry's hand. You won't have any difficulty in proving that."

Tim reached for the telephone and this time she did not protest. She went on smoking, staring moodily at the wall.

"It was a bad break for Harry," she said when he had finished his conversation with Cowley. "You'll find him in one of the servants' rooms on the top floor. He spoke French, too. We've been here several times; he was supposed to be my chauffeur and courier."

"He's dead?" asked Tim.

She nodded. "You knew who he was, of course? You recognised him somewhere, I guess? That's why he was so anxious to put you out. We left England a few hours after you had gone to the Continent. He had a little aerodrome of his own--he had served in the Flying Corps in East Africa, and Lew and I did a lot of flying. It was all very awkward for Harry. He had Lew's secrets but didn't know how to work them. He knew nothing about Stocker till he came face to face with him."

Cowley came soon after, and the two men took her down to the police station and there detained her. Throughout the next day she was questioned, but did not budge from her story.

Harry the Valet was dead--really dead this time, and by an accident. There was the chemist who had supplied him with the veronal; there was ample proof that he was a drug addict; a lack of all signs of premeditation.

"I don't know what charge we can make against this woman, either here or in England," said Cowley. "She was his associate, but can prove, I think, that she acted under duress. I'm rather sorry for her."

"Sorry, are you?" said the man from the Carlton dryly. "Do you realise that Harry the Valet left something over half a million, and that the will he made

to fool the authorities still holds good, and that the person who inherits that money is the lady with whom you are sympathising?"

Tim Jordan left Belgium by the first available steam packet.

He was anxious to get back to Mary Grier. And naturally.

THE END