



A prankish mystery by the author of  
*The Glorious Pool and The Bishop's Jaegers*

**Thorne Smith**

# **DID SHE FALL?**



**Complete &  
Unabridged**



# Did She Fall?

**By Thorne Smith**

Death's First Selection  
Silent Watchers  
Daniel And Barney  
Dan's Last Try  
The Searching Blade  
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Reunion

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Marcus L. Rowland, January 2010

## **Did She Fall?**

**By Thorne Smith**

# I. DEATH'S FIRST SELECTION

SOMETIMES a well-executed murder clears the air. This observation is in no sense suggestively advanced. But the fact is that in virtually all groups, communities, and gatherings of human beings there are certain members who would be far, far better out of the way . . . persons whose speedy absence would result in more actual good than would their continued presence.

It is even doubtful if the introduction of reason, which immediately suggests all sorts of inhibitions, would produce any permanently ameliorating results.

More than one poor mortal has decorated a rope end, sat fleetingly but finally in a hot chair, or moldered for life in a cell, whose single act of violence has really benefited society or some part of it. The worst that can be said of him is that he has set it a questionable example. Of course life could not continue to muddle along under a regime of murder at random, a system of salutary but unsolicited removals. This cannot be for the simple reason that almost every one of us during the course of his or her life deserves to be murdered at least once. . . .

The fact remains, however, that murder is not always just that--murder. Sometimes it is murder and more, such as the manifestation of inherent decency. Murder is not always so simple and explicable as a mere bash on the head, a knife in the neck, a shot from a gun, or a dose of poison. Nor can its germ always be easily isolated. Sometimes its motives are so remote and yet so urgent, so involved yet so delicately balanced, that it becomes the height of futility to expect twelve other potential but as yet uninitiated murderers to sit justly in judgment.

Impossible.

The situation--society itself--should first be judged before the murderer is even placed on trial. And a situation, an atmosphere, a hidden conflict involving the lives and happiness of human beings, is frequently as difficult to grasp as smoke . . . as dangerous to handle as dynamite.

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So it well may be that in this particular situation things had got themselves so involved, so out of hand, that the death of someone was inevitable--that the sudden removal of some human obstruction was the only happy way out.

Yet, if so, it certainly seemed the least inevitable possibility in the world that that someone was destined to be so fair a creature as Emily-Jane Seabrook.

Most certainly no one seeing this young woman swinging her shapely legs over the smooth turf of the Coastal Golf Club would have suspected that even then the shadow of Death was settling round her feet, and that the eyes of Death were watching her intently as she teed off at the first hole. On this fair morning it would have been hard to convince any one of her many friends and followers that within the brief span of thirteen hours the warm life would go shatteringly to fragments in the ruins of her highly desirable young body.

Who could have predicted such an ending for Emily-Jane? Who could have desired for her such a hideous fate? Had she not everything to live for, this girl, this child of fortune? Perhaps--perhaps; but also other persons had a little living to do for themselves, and perhaps this idea had not even occurred to Emily-Jane Seabrook. She would distribute happiness on all sides --up to a point, a point

where the distribution interfered with the life of Emily-Jane.

This is a bad way to be.

Sometimes, but not always, does one get quite away with it. And in the case of Emily-Jane that quite made all the difference between her living and her dying. It made a lot of difference to Emily-Jane, and profoundly influenced the lives of several human beings. Of course, this was not new to Emily-Jane. She had always influenced human lives, but she would have never given her own to do so. The idea had never entered her competent little mind. Far from it. Her competent little mind was too firmly fixed on her body. It was a fine body. But, after all, the finest body can be broken most unattractively.

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At the famous old Crewe mansion that night the engagement of Barney Crewe and Emily-Jane was to be announced. This did not matter much. The engagement had been known from the early days of the summer--exactly two weeks after Barney had met Emily-Jane for the first time.

What did matter, however, was the party. Masks and everything, the everything principally consisting of well-filled bottles and punch bowls. High revelry in honor of Emily-Jane, and perfectly promoted by that same efficient young woman. She did so enjoy seeing young people have a good time.

Barney, himself, would have been considered no mean catch for any other girl save Emily-Jane. In this event Barney was the lucky man. This, in spite of the fact that he was young, wealthy, interesting enough, and a painter who worked with such utter disregard of his medium that already he had won some degree of recognition among the more eccentric artists who created with fine but futile frenzy, yet

who totally lacked the impish irrelevance that Barney brought to even his most abominable work.

What good, then, could result from the death of this fine girl? Who could be her enemy? Who could wish this apparently healthy-minded, stimulating, care-free creature anything but health, happiness, and success? To murder her would be an act of wanton vandalism. Brutal passion or jealousy could be the only possible motives for stopping her triumphal progress through life.

So thought the world after the event. Of course, no one could have thought it before. Yet several persons were thinking things right now.

Her light-hearted laughter floated back to the ears of Barney's elder brother Daniel, who from his easy chair on the club-house veranda was following her every move. And Daniel Crewe in turn was being watched from a pair of dark, intense eyes set deep in the head of Scott Munson. This man's intuitive suspicion of impending events had been keenly alert for the past six weeks of his stay with the two brothers. It was more than ever alert today.

Yet there was nothing occult about Scott Munson. Hard facts, a deep insight, and close observation ruled his judgment. He had watched human beings in conflict for many years of his life, and in this present situation he recognized all the elements of serious trouble.

Occasionally his eyes would shift to the girl on the golf-course, then return unobtrusively to the face and the hands of the man whose thoughts he was trying to read. Hands meant much to Scott Munson. Daniel Crewe was his friend, his good companion and, at present, his greatest problem. A problem that filled him with a keen sense of trouble and regret. All unconscious of the interest of these two motionless figures on the veranda--and a third, had it only been known--Emily-Jane tucked her arm under that of her partner and

hurried him down the green slopes of the fairway.

Lane Holt looked down at her with admiring but frankly unwholesome eyes. He made a remark in a quick low voice, and the girl did not look at all displeased.

"Why, Lane," she said, "what a thing to say!"

"But it would be, wouldn't it?" replied Lane. "Perhaps," she answered. "And a great deal more dangerous."

"That would add spice and relish, my dear."

"Listen, statuesque slave of your senses, you must bear in that evil mind of yours that up here in my new environment you are not supposed to know me one-hundredth part as well as you do—even less than that." Her laughter was not quite so innocent as she added: "You're playing golf with me this morning merely as a favor to my beloved Barney, who is doing bad things with his brushes."

"Damn Barney," exclaimed Holt. "Damn him always and eternally."

"Why damn Barney as much as all that? He does deserve considerable damning at times, but not such a generous portion."

"Why the devil do you want to fling yourself away on him?"

"Oh that!" said Emily-Jane carelessly. "Why not? He fills all the requirements. He's dumb, rich, and idealistic—head over heels." She paused a moment and looked enigmatically at her companion, then added: "And I'm clever, Lane my buck, but not quite so rich. Cheer up, life isn't over yet, not by a long sight it isn't."

But in this Emily-Jane with all her youthful confidence was slightly in error, to put it mildly. Her life, had she but realized it, was almost

over. The best or the worst part of it already lay behind. Little lay ahead save a crash, a moment of agony--and liberating darkness.

"Unscrupulous woman," murmured Lane Holt, slipping his hand up her arm.

"Nice woman," retorted Emily-Jane. "An exceptionally charming girl."

She was just that. An exceptionally charming girl in many of the essentials. Beautifully built and alluringly poised. Hair of the sleek golden quality. It reflected light in yellow bars which slid attractively when she moved her head, so bobbed as effectively to show its shape. One felt like taking Emily-Jane's head between one's hands and holding it, feeling the smooth, fresh cheeks and looking into the large, blue, disarmingly innocent eyes. In the depth of those eyes lurked something slightly disturbing and exciting. Her face though small was broad. It ended in a surprisingly sharp little chin, lending to her a delightful impression of helplessness. Hers was that peculiar quality of innocence that subtly invited enlightenment. Her body, which at times could look so frail, was sinuous, swift with life and motion. Her torso moved with the endless variety of charm of a trained dancer. One could easily believe that Emily-Jane was completely unconscious of the effect she created when on the beach or dancingfloor. She might have been. Grace, strength, and freedom characterized her every movement. She was tireless, resilient, yet possessed of an abiding languor, an altogether captivating promise of eventual capitulation.

Beyond doubt Emily-Jane had many things to live for, the most important of which were her senses and herself, but few realized this, for Emily-Jane had already lived and acquired wisdom if not merit.

Lane Holt knew and understood her. Seven years ago in the propinquity of a college town their interests had coincided. Emily-

Jane had graced a school for young ladies at that time. Although Holt had been in his senior year at the college the discrepancy in years and educational progress had made no difference in their mutual attraction. It was of a biological nature which was simple if not pure. They had belonged to a select little group of, let us say for the sake of charity, high-spirited boys and girls who loved fun.

It was at this time and with these companions that Emily-Jane received the fundamentals of an exceedingly liberal education. It was at this time, likewise, that she had perfected the art of concealing an essentially vicious nature behind a refreshingly healthy and admirable exterior. A no mean art to master although it has a diversity of minor devotees.

At college, too, Lane Holt had come to know Daniel Crewe. Barney being several classes lower had known Holt only distantly yet devotedly, as underclassmen should and will, although the reason is rather obscure to appreciate in most cases.

The friendship between Daniel and Holt had been based on a mutual appreciation of literature and a bent for investigation which had carried them along on many an impossible intellectual exploration.

About Lane Holt there had been an atmosphere of romance and intrigue. His dark brooding silences, his splendid, careless carriage, his indifference to public opinion, and his quick brain marked him out from his fellows. In short, he had been a selfish poseur with an eye open for easy opportunity. Daniel had known and liked him. Even envied him a little. They had never been companions. Toward the close of their final year they had entirely lost track of each other without even being aware of the fact.

A few weeks ago they had met for the first time since those days. Since that meeting Holt, like Scott Munson and Emily-Jane, had

become permanent if casual fixtures at the Crewe's hospitable establishment. There were others there, too, who also became involved in the timely obliteration of Emily-Jane.

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Far out on the links now the girl was saying to her partner in that lilting voice of hers: "And tonight, my fervid devastator, you must be more careful than you were in that last hollow."

"You are losing your old fondness for taking chances. The approach of prosperity. What, my girl?"

"My life has been composed of taking chances," she replied. "I love to take them, but also I detest being foolhardy except when I know I'm safe. There's a difference, a vast difference."

"Wisdom in wickedness," suggested Holt. "Makes wickedness a virtue," added Emily-Jane. "Safety first, then," agreed Holt, "but keep your eyes on that Scott Munson chap and also on big brother. Both have a restless, inquiring air about them."

"I can easily dispose of Daniel," she observed. "In fact, I have done so quite effectively already. But Munson is a different matter altogether."

"I'm told he's a sort of super-finder-out-of-things. Too intelligent to be human. Is he?"

"All of that and more," she replied. "Last year he was drafted to sit on some silly old national crime commission. He played the active part. He's done things in this state--they're called big. The governor and district attorney and all the powers that be just eat out of his bloodless hand and like it. He's been resting up here with the brothers all summer on the strength of past relations in parts

unknown."

"I hope he continues to rest and does nothing more than that," said Holt fervently.

If Munson had heeded this pious hope, Holt's life might have been radically different.

"For some reason," said Emily-Jane, "I'd like to break his resistance down and then torture him. Drive him mad. I can see it and feel it. God!"

Emily-Jane permitted very few persons to look upon the expression then on her face. It was hot, voracious, strangely cruel. Her teeth were a trifle bared.

And she was such a nice girl was Emily-Jane. Good company and all that. A real sport.

At that moment even Lane Holt was just a wee bit skeptical. He had his doubts about Emily-Jane--his fears, also.

## II. SILENT WATCHERS

BACK on the club-house veranda Daniel Crewe was staring at the place where he had last seen the girl and her partner. All he now saw was an exceedingly exasperated fat man brutally assaulting a small white object that so far had successfully escaped any serious injury. The fat man was one of the club's richest members, so he could well afford to be both exceedingly fat and exasperated. It was nothing much to see. And it is to be doubted if Daniel actually witnessed the titanic conflict, which is just as well, because the sight would have given him, at that moment, but scant relief from his thoughts.

His long, thin, tanned countenance was of a peculiarly friendly cast in spite of the trouble that now lay on it. There was a haunting suggestion of a misunderstood horse. A sort of protective expression had crept about his eyes, which were of an undecided gray. For a large, long, and apparently self-reliant man there was something unexpectedly speculative about Daniel Crewe, a sense of eternal sadness. It was as if the shadow of regret had settled lightly upon him, never to leave him altogether happy and at peace again. Life does such things to people regardless of their material circumstances.

Daniel was thinking now of his brother, thinking with more desperation and bafflement than he cared to admit to himself. Yet even as he thought, he little suspected that in a short while now Death would be sending its impulses through his strong arms and that only a few short hours separated him from tragedy, stark and ugly.

Interwoven in the thoughts of his brother were nagging thoughts of others—friends who held a place in his loyalty and confidence.

There was Sam Stoughten, for instance. He had never been long separated from Sam even after having had four years of him as roommate at college. And then there was Sam's wife Sue. A good girl, Sue, sensitive as the devil beneath her apparent stolidity.

And how about June Lansing? Daniel loved June. Recently she had informed him that they were engaged. Daniel had not answered back. He knew June. They must be engaged if she said so.

He thought of these three oddly lovable individuals, then included himself and his brother. They were all involved, all a part of the picture. They were all actively engaged in the conflict that was taking place in his mind.

"Here we are," he thought, "the five of us—all at the mercy of one girl, our happiness, our hopes, every damn thing."

His eyes grew narrow, and there was a sudden hardening round his jaws. Scott Munson, silently watching, remarked this and pondered after his fashion.

But chiefly Daniel's thoughts were with his brother Barney. Barney was a creature who deserved the serious thought of someone, and it was not the boy's fault.

From the first this young man had always got the tough breaks. At birth he had lost his mother and thereby won his father's unreasonable antipathy, one might almost say active antagonism. The old man had resented Barney. Dan had been the favorite. Nothing too good for the first and successfully born. And Dan had hated it. The harder the old man had ridden Barney the stronger was Dan pulled to his brother. A strange nature, Dan's. What made it harder for him was his youthful realization that at heart his father was a good person and that perhaps somewhere hidden within his

stubborn old heart was a sort of lonesome love for his younger son.

Whatever it was, Barney from the outset had never got what he wanted. At every turn the old man had thwarted him, trampled on his small aspirations as a child, opposed them when the boy had grown to manhood. It had only been through the active intervention of Dan that Barney had been given his chance to paint. Even then it had been a source of sporadic friction and ridicule.

Then the old man had died. After that life had taken on a different color for Barney--a friendlier warmth. The bulk of the estate had gone to Daniel. To Barney had been allotted the magnificent income of five thousand two hundred dollars per annum. Even unto the end--a typical gesture.

Promptly and without questioning his brother, Daniel had set about readjusting matters so that the valuable estate was equally divided even to the joint ownership of their picturesque old summer home on the Connecticut side of Long Island Sound.

In the simplicity of his soul Barney had been well satisfied with the original arrangement. He was pleased with his one hundred dollars a week--enthusiastic about it. No need now to swallow his pride and to wait for whatever small bits of change that might come his way. The experiences of his youth had left their traces.

"Now I'll never have to work much," he had confided to Daniel. "Just paint all the time, all the damntime. Travel perhaps. But of course I'll live here with you, keep on living here just as always . . . it's a nice old place . . . that is if you want me. When you get married I'll paint a portrait of your wife. For nothing," he added magnificently.

"Thanks," said Daniel. "That will be great. Yes, you'd better keep on living right where you are. It would be safer. We're used to you round

here. Just sit down quietly somewhere and paint all the damn time."

"And travel perhaps," added Barney.

So that was all settled.

Then Daniel had gone about making Barney a rich young man and had understood perfectly when Barney had failed to be impressed with his newly acquired wealth. As a matter of fact, the whole strange business had made young Barney a little more than upset. He had not returned to his usual abnormal self until he had made an elaborate and illegal will in which he beautifully left all his earthly goods to Daniel, not omitting his paintings. They received special mention. For some reason rather vague in his own mind Barney seemed to believe that this will of his relieved him of all further interest in and responsibility for his fortune. He was now left free to paint all the damn time when not benignly contemplating his brother as his prospective heir.

These brothers, each in his own way, were strangely dependent on each other. Yet that did not prevent them from seeing clearly each other's imperfections. For example, Barney could never quite forget how stupid Daniel had been about breeding foxes. Barney had made the suggestion after having read about fox-breeding in some Sunday supplement. It had resulted in one of those idiotic exchanges both enjoyed.

"And why in God's name should we breed foxes?" Daniel demanded.

"We'd have more foxes then." This with patience from Barney.

"What do we want with more foxes?" persisted the other.

"But we haven't any foxes at all yet," replied Barney, keeping a

strong hold on himself.

"Yes, yes, I know, but suppose we had some foxes?"

"Well, we'd just have more, that's all. We'd have more foxes. Isn't that enough for you?"

"Too damned much," scoffed Daniel. "What would we do with all these foxes knocking about all over the place? I ask you that."

"We could sell them. Earn a good profit," suggested Barney, who had not thought the idea quite through.

"And take the bread out of some other fox-breeder's mouth," countered Daniel.

"Why bread?" asked Barney mildly.

"Why not bread?" returned Daniel. "Don't fox-breeders eat bread like the rest of us?"

"I don't know," said Barney stoutly. "I never met a fox-breeder. How did bread get into this argument anyway?"

"I don't know, but let's not go on about foxes any more," pleaded Daniel.

"All right," replied Barney, getting pretty well tired of foxes himself. "But we could give them away to our friends for Christmas or just any old time for that matter."

"Who wants a fox?" asked Daniel.

"I don't know who wants a fox right off," cried Barney. "I don't go round asking people if they want foxes. Let's forget there ever was a

fox. Sorry now I brought up the subject, sorry I even mentioned the name of fox. Thought it would be a thing to do, that's all."

"Yes," grinned Daniel cynically, "a hell of a thing to do. You just stick to your painting, Barney. Why not paint yourself a couple of foxes and then breed 'em?"

Too full for words Barney went about his ways. He might yet breed foxes just to spite his brother. And in his dream he pictured the whole countryside swarming with foxes until at last they were trampled under foot.

Daniel was convinced, perhaps justly, that his brother needed the protection of a stronger mind. If not, why did the boy persist in painting red apples sky-blue and in giving to his nudes the unpalatable hue of a very old and dead fish?

"Because I see 'em that way," the exasperated Barney had once explained under the fire of rude criticism.

"Well, it's a terrible way to see anything," observed Daniel, and added color blindness to his brother's other deficiencies.

An aunt, Miss Matty Evans, often had to listen to this sort of stuff, and although she was mildly amused she wondered how men could be such fools.

"You two should go on the vaudeville circuit when you get to arguing," she once remarked. "People are crazy enough to pay money to listen to that kind of nonsense."

Until the appearance of Emily-Jane at the beginning of the summer the world had been a good place for the two brothers\_

At the thought of this girl and her potentialities for harm, Daniel's

hands gripped the arms of his chair, gripped and held fast. The man who sat quietly watching him over the rim of his newspaper was quick to note this involuntary action. He wondered what he could do for Daniel--how he could force himself into his thoughts.

"What can I do?" Daniel was thinking. "Something must be done. How can I prevent that young idiot from going through with it? What can I tell him? She's got me all tied up--cold."

As his eyes stared unseeingly across the green expanse of the golf-course these questions went jabbing through his mind steadily, unceasingly like a physical pain. Scott Munson, observing the conflict, felt a growing excitement within himself, something undefinable yet filled with imminent danger. About Daniel as he sat there brooding there was an atmosphere of fatefulness, as if already he was on his way to some final yet inevitable act that would forever cut him off from old familiar ties.

Scott Munson sensed this and divined the source of Daniel's trouble. He had watched his friend looking at Emily-Jane when that golden young slip had teed off at the first hole and he knew that although she was now no longer there Daniel was still seeing her in his mind's eye. And Munson knew that to Daniel this girl stood for everything that was undesirable in life, everything that was disastrous.

Munson knew this much from his power of concentrated observation helped by his knowledge of Daniel. But there were many other things that Munson did not know, but which he would very much have liked to know.

For instance, he did not know that seven years past, when at college, Daniel had had intimate relations with Emily-Jane and that recently, even in the face of her approaching marriage with his brother, the girl had attempted to renew those relations. This was one thing that

Munson did not know--one single scrap of concrete knowledge which might have done much to alter circumstances.

Nor did Munson know anything about the "Hush! Hush! Club," an esoteric little organization that festered during Daniel's later period at college and created no end of salacious speculation among certain members of the student body. The celebrations and rituals of this group were never mentioned nor could they be mentioned for the obvious reason that expulsion and disgrace would have descended swiftly upon its members. And even members of such little circles do not court this kind of public recognition.

And innocent Emily-Jane had been its high priestess and inspiration.

Into the inner circles of this group of girls and boys Emily-Jane had conducted Sam Stoughten. There she had dominated him physically, and Sam had gone through a very bad time of it before Daniel had succeeded in conducting him back for a breath of fresh air. But in doing so Daniel had momentarily come under the sway of Emily-Jane, who, to do her credit, appears to have been a specialist in her particular line.

Another thing Scott did not know was about the letters.

Sam had killed a classmate, killed him because of Emily-Jane. True enough, Sam had not meant to kill the boy. It had been one of those situations in which the loser died as the result of a fair fight. The authorities had never been able to trace the supposed murderer, but Sam had been silly enough and heart-broken enough to pour the whole story into a letter to Emily-Jane. In this letter written in a moment of self-loathing Sam shouldered the responsibility for the boy's death. In the hands of a district attorney, it would be an extremely convincing confession.

Then there were other letters. Lots of them. Poor Sam had poured out on paper the ravings of a temporarily diseased mind, and Emily-Jane was in possession of the collected filth. Also she had a few rather revealing letters from Dan. More important still, Emily-Jane had told Daniel that unless he played hands off, those letters would find their way into the hands of Sue and June. Daniel knew that this was no idle threat. Emily-Jane was quite reckless enough to pull down the whole house of cards and involve them all in the crash. She had more strings to her bow than one.

Taken altogether it was a pretty situation. The happiness of more than one person was tangled up in it. In striking at one, Emily-Jane could injure them all—Sam, Sue, Barney, June and Daniel. She held all the cards and was playing them with the skill of an experienced player. But this is sometimes dangerous. It certainly was so in the case of Emily-Jane.

Finally, Scott Munson was not aware of the fact that through a window of the club-house at that very minute the amiable face of Sam Stoughten was also turned toward the links whereon Emily-Jane was sporting with Lane Holt. It would have given Munson more unpleasant food for mental consumption had he been able to see the expression lurking behind Sam's horn-rimmed glasses.

For Sam those letters existed like some tangible defilement, some deadly, unclean threat. When he encountered Emily-Jane at the home of the brothers the weight of the ages again settled down on his sturdy shoulders. He longed to remove from the face of the earth this girl who was planning such an unfair enterprise as to marry Barney.

He did not blame her for the past. Sam took, as he should, full responsibility on himself for his own conduct. But to strike through him and through Daniel at others . . . well, yes, murder was not so

bad after all in certain situations.

Then, there was Lane Holt. A chance encounter after years had led Daniel to invite the man to visit him--an idle invitation and a ready but graceful acceptance.

That did it. Lane Holt was among them. He, too, was a part of the picture. Quite an important part. He was on the side of Emily-Jane. He had a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Daniel more than suspected that he was taking full advantage of it right under the eyes of poor color-blind Barney.

It had all come about through the unfortunate over-sight of allowing Barney at large unaccompanied. But who could have forecast the result? As a rule Barney never paid personal attention to women. In the abstract he had vague, fanciful ideas about them. In the flesh he loved to look at them when pleasing. But no one for a moment suspected he would drive home with one of them from the Coastal Golf Club and keep her there for lunch, later in the dusk of a summer's evening driving off with her again. Only Emily-Jane could turn a trick like that. And Emily-Jane had done it.

Scott Munson had been present when Barney had introduced Emily-Jane to Daniel. From that moment on Munson had been aware of gathering forces, electricity in the air. And when, finally, Emily-Jane had landed the idealistic Barney and established herself as a part of the household under the skeptical chaperonage of Miss Matty Evans, Munson had known that things were all wrong with Daniel and that the situation was not going to improve until Emily-Jane was removed. Just how this was to be accomplished Munson failed to see. However, what he did see was that Emily-Jane in some peculiar way known only to herself had a strong hold on Daniel and that Daniel was unsuccessfully striving to break it.

Sitting there on the veranda, Munson felt that the situation, whatever it was, was rapidly coming to a climax that the climax was at hand, right there among them all.

Munson looked as much like a detective as a detective will ever look like one. He had been a detective, actively and successfully. The government knew his work. But Munson was more of the scholar, more of the student. He was a living curiosity directed by intelligence and a power of observation that almost approached divination. He could feel a situation, anticipate a coming conflict. As a lecturer in criminology and psychological detection he had been much in demand among colleges that went in for that sort of thing. He had two passions--the study of human conduct, and travel, the latter running a poor second. When actively engaged on a case he was absolutely ruthless, attacking the minds of those he suspected with devilish ingenuity. He had, perhaps, his own private opinions about murder and other allied indulgences, but these were so clearly separate from his professional attitude that not even his best friend could count on the slightest latitude or show of grace.

And that is what troubled Munson all the more in this present situation. He feared for Daniel, and would willingly have sacrificed his own career to prevent disaster--to save his friend from the danger he felt was present. But once Daniel committed himself to a certain unlawful course of conduct, once he, for example, took a human life, Munson would be arrayed against him and would give Daniel no more quarter than he would have given any other individual who had placed himself beyond the pale of the law. Before the event, Scott Munson was human; after--well, he followed his own convictions, for which perhaps no one can blame him--much.

His large, dark, intense eyes; his sharp, determined features; his straight black hair, slightly streaked with gray, his slim, alert body, well poised and competent--all these characteristics of Scott Munson

created an impression of a man not easily deflected from his course. About him at times there was something uncomfortably subtle, something Satanic. One felt that within him dwelt some hidden source of power waiting to be released. No doubt this impression was created because of the man's abnormal interest in the mental processes of virtually everyone with whom he came in contact. People were never quite stupid to Munson. He never grew bored with the most banal individual, for the reason that he was completely engrossed in trying to sound and chart the substrata thought currents tunneling the mind of the person under observation. Many women hated him instinctively. More men would have done so, perhaps, were it not for the fact that even today men have a greater opportunity to live their dreams, to turn their currents of thought into active expression. Had Scott Munson suddenly found himself in a world of normal, well-adjusted, standardized minds he would willingly have exchanged his bodily comforts for all the torments of hell.

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Eyes on the links, watching--three pairs strong. And even as they watched the object of their vigil came lightly across the green accompanied by her debonair partner.

At the sight of the two approaching the club-house with their open display of intimacy and understanding, a low sound of impotent anger involuntarily escaped Daniel's lips, and he rose quickly from his chair. Munson followed his example, and in silence the two men walked down the veranda and stood together at its edge. Only Sam Stoughten did not move at the girl's approach. He remained motionless at the window, his eyes alone moving, but their expression never changed. The sharp, concealed hatred never left them. It lived and darted there behind his slightly tinted horn-rimmed glasses.

Daniel stood gazing out at the quiet surface of the Sound upon whose blue waters, about three miles out, a group of fair green islands lay sprinkled in picturesque disorder, their shores rimmed in collars of cream-white sand. There was an expression of hopelessness in Daniel's brooding eyes. June Lansing's image was floating through his thoughts. She was mingling with bad company, for desperation was bringing to the surface in his mind a resolve it had long restrained.

Unexpectedly, a hand fell upon his shoulder. He swung round with a sharp start. Between himself and Scott Munson stood Holt.

"Will either of you gentlemen do me the favor of a flask?" he asked. "It was plenty hot out there. We cut our game short."

"Don't swing a flask," said Daniel shortly. "I'm going home."

He strode off down the veranda, knocking against a chair. Holt's gaze followed the retreating figure, and the man who stood for a moment quietly but intently regarding Holt read in his eyes a mixture of malice, envy, and scorn, which is never a pretty thing to see.

"Half a minute," said Scott, and doubled back of the club-house.

"Damn cads," muttered Holt. He hated their guts. He wished to God they were well out of the way. Mr. Holt was quite sincere about this. For Daniel his emotion was mixed with sordid envy, for Munson with wholesome fear. To him Barney did not matter. The boy was growing a full set of horns even before he had a wife. That was funny in a way-funny to Lane Holt. He sought out Emily-Jane to tell her about it. The girl laughed merrily. It was pleasant to hear such laughter.

Munson, standing by Dan's roadster, watched him thoughtfully as he approached.

"Well?" said Daniel, regarding Munson with a sort of rebellious interrogation in his eyes.

Although they had been sitting with each other practically all morning on the veranda of the club, this was the first word that had passed between them. The gift of silence is vouchsafed only to those who are either content with their thoughts or unhappily occupied with them.

"Well?" replied Munson, also with a rising inflection.

Daniel experienced a stab of nerves as Munson remained quietly looking at him. "What do you mean by well, Scott?" he asked.

"What did you mean?" replied Munson.

Daniel laughed uneasily. "Nothing much, I expect," he replied. "Just wondering what you wanted--how you got here."

"No, you didn't, Daniel," replied Munson seriously. "You meant, what was I thinking you were thinking. If you want to know, Dan, I've been thinking a damn sight more than I care to. I'd like to feel free to let your thoughts alone. I mean that, Dan, for you of all men. What's on your mind? What's burning you up? Hadn't you better come across with me? Let's face the trouble together. You know I can help at times. At least you won't feel so confounded lonesome. Come on, Dan, old boy."

Slowly Daniel climbed into his car. He appeared not to have heard his old friend. How tired and strangely remote he felt . . . old for his thirty years. When at last he spoke he did not look at Munson, but continued to stare vacantly ahead over the arc of the steering wheel.

"Scott," he said, "there's only one person can help now and she--"

mean, that person won't help. That person who could help, who could so easily help, only wants to hurt, to injure and destroy. I know that." He drummed nervously on the wheel with the tips of his long brown fingers. "Yet something's got to be done," he added as if to himself. "Something . . . what?"

"Maybe together we could dope that something out," suggested Munson.

Then Daniel turned and asked Munson a strange question, one that troubled his friend's thoughts considerably throughout the tragic days to follow. "Tell me, Scott," he began, as if he were inwardly puzzling over a certain problem, "tell me this. A man purchases deliberately a number of high-powered guns, arranges his business affairs, and, let us say, travels all the way to Africa at no small trouble and expense. Well, once there this man proceeds to organize and equip a small army of carriers and what-nots. Then, after several weeks of crouching, stalking, and false-dealing in general, he brings down a fine, great elephant or a tiger--animals that are minding their own affairs, keeping to their own land, and living according to their own savage code. What would you call that man, Scott? What would the world call him?"

"Why, don't be childish, Dan !" laughed Munson. At the worst he's nothing more than a fanatical hunter, a waster of time, money, and animal life. Why?"

Daniel nodded appreciatively. "Just so," he went on, "but the idea of it has always puzzled me somewhat. I know I'm a bit childish about wantonly killing things --always have been." He hesitated a moment, then continued: "And suppose that same chap removes from the face of the earth a person who wrecks and strikes at one's very being--one's so-called soul, a person far more deliberately cruel and dangerous to society than the most treacherous beast or reptile that

lurks in the jungle, a creature who is not only evil but also one who can create evil in others--what, Scott, would you call that person?"

There was fever in Daniel's eyes as he turned and confronted his friend.

"I see what you're driving at, Dan," slowly replied Munson, "and I can't say that in a manner of speaking I don't sympathize with your point of view. But again you're all wrong. You can't trifle with human life--"

"How about human hearts and souls?" snapped Daniel.

"As things stand today the law fails to take them strictly into consideration," said Munson, "although they play a part. But, by and large, it has a hard enough time dealing with the body. There are no doubt soul-murderers or heart-murderers or mind-murderers, but as a rule they escape unpunished in this world. Daniel, the man you spoke of, no matter what the circumstances, is in this world a murderer, and there's no getting away from that. We're living in this world, you see. Remember that, Dan, remember that."

Again Daniel nodded agreement. "I guess you're right at that, Scott," he said with a twisted smile. "No doubt about it. But, after all, it does seem sort of goofy, doesn't it? Damn goofy I'd call it, if you ask me. Murderer--a nice, bright, homelike word, that!" He paused and smiled at Munson, and this time his smile was natural and friendly. "Just like some of the crazy discussions we used to have back at college. Thanks, Scott. See you soon. You're lunching at the club, I suppose?"

Without waiting for an answer he set his car in motion.

### III. DANIEL AND BARNEY

FOR a moment Scott Munson stood poised in the driveway watching the gliding roadster until it raced round a curve, then, going swiftly through a rear door of the club-house, he reached the veranda just in time to see Emily-Jane Seabrook signal Daniel to stop. For a moment it looked to Munson as if Daniel were going to disobey the summons of the gracefully fluttering hand, but slowly the car slackened speed and came to a reluctant stop.

At that moment Munson became aware of a figure standing beside him, and turned to inspect the tense body and clenched hands of Sam Stoughten. Munson's eyes swept to the other's face and lingered there fascinated by what he saw written on the tight lips, the grim jaw, and the chin aggressively out-thrust. And behind the lenses of the glasses Scott caught a glimpse of the fires of hell itself. Stoughten stood there thus for a moment, his guard of reserve down, then his body relaxed as if defeated, the chin dropped, the hands swung helplessly, and the man turned back to the club-house.

In this brief flash of self-revelation Sam had furnished Scott Munson with still more food for thought. And Munson's first thought was that Emily-Jane had more than one seeming friend who did not wish her any too well.

"Half a mo'," cried that young lady, as she ran down the steps and gaily approached her prospective brother-in-law, now waiting sullenly behind the wheel of his car.

Munson saw that much, but what he did not see, nor did anyone else for that matter, was the swift change of expression that took possession of Emily-Jane's features the exact moment she felt sure she was free from the observation of others.

No more of the frank-eyed Emily-Jane. Gone--vanished! Here was a new creature, a thing ridden by a hot venomous fury. Laughing Emily-Jane had become a hard-voiced, blazing young devil, something a trifle subhuman. At first she had nothing to say but much to look, then gradually an unpleasant smile re-arranged the lines of her lips.

"Don't do that again, Daniel," she said evenly. "You wanted to make a fool of me in front of the whole damn club. Well, don't do it, Daniel. Don't do it, my ex-slave."

She laughed, as Daniel's face darkened. And had she but known it each ringing note was doing a terrible thing to her.

"Wipe that look off your face, Daniel," she went on softly. "Look like you used to, or have you forgotten how?"

"Yes," said Daniel at last. "It didn't make sufficient impression, but you seem to remember."

"You're going to live to regret that, Daniel," she said, leaving a pause of ice between each word.

"I doubt that," replied Daniel, looking at her strangely. "But what do you want? I'm waiting."

"Tell your brother I'm lunching at the club," she said, "and explain to him in words of one syllable about tonight. You're going to make the formal announcement and drink to our happiness. You'll like that, won't you, Daniel? You're the head of the family, you know, such as it is. That's about all for now," she went on, after a short pause during which she had been enjoying the effect of her words. "That's about all except that I suggest you stop treating Lane Holt as if he didn't belong. He's a particular friend of mine. I'm fond, of Lane. Very. And, Daniel dear, you might as well make up your mind to be a good boy

right now. We'll be better friends that way . . . much better friends. If you don't behave" --once more she paused and looked at him consideringly-- "if you don't, Daniel, I'll kick over the whole damn apple cart. You have more to lose than I, you and your precious friends. And the harm that I can do can never be undone. Remember that, Daniel. Now you may go."

Her silvery laughter fell pleasantly on the soft quiet air and brought a responsive smile to the lips of several sentimental dowagers clucking round their daughters on the veranda. Emily-Jane was always passing happiness along.

She had just passed great quantities of it to Daniel, but there was little suggestion of a smile on his lips as he sent his car, like a whirring curse, down the sweeping driveway of the Coastal Country Club.

Emily-Jane's short talk with Daniel had done her small good. If she had not been altogether popular with him before, she was far less now. As he went brooding over the country road on his way homeward, Daniel Crewe swore both darkly and deeply in his heart that for once in her life Emily-Jane was not going to have anything like her way. She would never defeat him. He knew this now. And he also knew why she would never defeat him. But this knowledge, instead of bringing to him the relief one would expect, filled him with a sort of dull horror. He experienced a desire not to be alone with himself, and at the same time felt a strong inclination to lie down somewhere and hide like an animal--not like a man.

Already he felt the world withdrawing a little from him. Already he stood aside as if he were another person and criticized the determination that was solidifying in his mind. He had a strange feeling that within his very being he was utterances not lost on the ears of two men who were standing a little apart from the group. Its

effect was to cause the cowering and protecting a stranger, a furtive, stealthy stranger with whom he must become friendly so that he should no longer fear his promptings.

This furtive stranger was assuring him in no equivocal language that he had been a damn fool to ask Scott Munson those revealing questions just now. That had been a decidedly false step. Daniel must be more careful. There must be no more false steps. From now on he must avoid arousing the slightest suspicion. Tonight, for instance, tonight of all nights, he must convince the world that he admired and respected his brother's future wife. He must go through with it successfully. A man can do anything if he tries. Another thing, he must attempt to erase all traces of suspicion that might lie in the mind of his friend Scott Munson. No. Better leave Scott alone. Let that conversation pass. The harm had already been done.

Daniel stopped the car at the side of the road and wiped his forehead. Why was he sweating so? He held up his hands before his eyes and looked at them intently. Then for a long minute he studied his features in the driver's mirror. Any change? No. None that he could see. Quite the same old Daniel. A trifle pale perhaps. Still, there was that unaccustomed sensation of trembling, of trembling inwardly. Better take a drink, suggested the stranger, and Daniel, acting on this never unwelcome suggestion, drew a silver flask from the side pocket of the roadster and helped himself.

As he did so a car, filled with acquaintances, flashed by, some of its occupants being just human enough to look back, as if to make sure of having seen something unusual.

"Strange thing for Dan Crewe to be doing," said a man named Jackson. "Never saw Daniel drinking all alone before. Must have needed it badly. Had to stop his car and pull up at the roadside. The thirsty devil couldn't wait till he reached home."

But Daniel had not heeded the passing of the car. His nerves had ceased jumping. Yes, he would go home now and make one last effort. He would try his luck with Barney.

If he only could. If he only could. At the thought of possible success his world came back a little. Daniel almost prayed.

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Back on the club-house veranda Emily-Jane was chatting spiritedly with young and old alike. That was one of her many charms. She always found time to be gracious to the mothers and fathers of her friends.

"If only the other young people would try to be more like her," was a general observation.

"Dan's such a lovable old bear," she was saying, "but such a goose. He's so fussy and nervous about tonight that he looks for all the world like an undertaker trying to sympathize with a corpse."

Prophetic utterances not lost on the ears of two men who were standing a little apart from the group. Its effect was to cause the color momentarily to withdraw from Sam Stoughten's ruddy face. He turned abruptly away and sought a secluded chair. Scott Munson idly moved in his direction.

"Yes," continued Emily-Jane, "the poor man's elected to make the formal announcement, and he doesn't seem to have the vaguest idea how to go about it. He'll probably begin with, 'Come, all ye. Come, all ye. The honorable judge is now sitting!'"

Amid general laughter she escaped from the circle and flashed down the veranda. As she passed Sam Stoughten's chair she paused

lightly--tauntingly.

"Hello there, Sambo," she said. "All alone and sullen. Where's black-eyed Susan?"

"Why, haven't you seen her?" asked Stoughten in a casually bitter tone. "Why not write to her? You admit yourself you're good with letters."

"Perhaps some day I'll take your advice, Sambo," she replied.

"Then you'd better be quick," said Stoughten. "Meaning what?" asked Emily-Jane.

Stoughten did not answer.

"Don't be a fool, Sambo," said the girl, after a moment of thoughtful silence. "And don't try to frighten me. Admit you're licked and behave yourself. Good-by, Sambo, dear."

She passed lightly on down the veranda.

Presently Scott Munson moved quietly from the shadow of an alcove near the water-cooler and, seating himself by Stoughten, deliberately lighted a cigarette.

"Smoke, Sam?" he asked, extending his case.

The hand that selected a cigarette trembled slightly. "Thanks," said Sam, but for several minutes he made no attempt to light the cigarette.

\* \*

Daniel found his brother contentedly at work in the dining-room, the

last place in the world any normal painter would select for his efforts. The room was almost dark, the curtains being drawn, but Barney seemed to be either unaware of the lack of light or indifferent to it. Today he was engaged in seeing the most uncompromisingly yellow bananas in shades of girlish pink. On the table at his elbow was a bowl of fruit, pieces of which he had already partly eaten as if to make sure that his subjects were authentic. It would have been a pity to waste so much talent on stuffed fruit. Daniel stood looking down at the painting over his brother's shoulder.

"Even the specks are wrong," he observed at last, with a note of the old bantering challenge in his voice.

"Don't take them too much to heart," replied his brother, without troubling to look up. "They're my specks, after all. I see 'em that way, so they are that way. Go paint some specks of your own. I'll match my specks against yours, speck for speck, catch as catch can."

"Oh, all right," said Daniel. "It's a wonder to me you can paint any specks at all in this light."

He sat down at the long table and stretched his arms wearily across its deep, glowing surface.

"I've decided to accustom myself to painting in entire darkness," announced Barney. "I may even start a new school of painting. It will be altogether intellectual, uninfluenced by externals, dependent on neither color nor form. Just pure thought--the brain transferred to canvas."

"Yours transferred to canvas would leave it quite unspoiled," observed Daniel.

"In that there would be some deep significance," said his brother.

"When you paint in the dark," asked Daniel, not in the least interested, "how will you know what you're painting?"

"It is better not to sometimes," replied Barney soberly. "Far, far better. But the real answer is, you won't know."

"Not even when you've finished?" asked Daniel.

"Probably not," said Barney, "because in my proposed school all pictures will be not only painted in darkness but also hung in darkness. One will be expected to view them in pitch blackness and to criticize accordingly. Too many critics of pictures are influenced by what they see rather than by what they don't see. That is a great mistake. Now in my school every artist will enjoy an equal advantage—complete invisibility. Of course there will be trained guides to lead people about. I've thought it all out."

"To me," said Daniel, "it's about the most reasonable idea you ever had."

"Thanks," replied Barney. "Where's the girl?"

"She told me to tell you she was staying to lunch at the club with the rest of the gang," said Daniel, then added mendaciously, "She thought it would save a lot of fuss and bother in view of the doings tonight."

"There's a brain for you," Barney remarked admiringly. "Thinks of everything and everyone. Well, it won't be long now. I beat you to it, Dan, old son. And there's a damn fine girl just dying to marry you. Why don't you do something about June, Dan? Let's all get married together. We'll be tagged so we won't get mixed up, as they always do at least once or twice in all good Franco-American farces."

Daniel was beginning to feel his nerves quivering again. This was due to a sharp realization that perhaps never again would he and his brother be able to talk thus together. He rose and sought the sideboard where he poured himself a drink. Then he came back to the table.

"I say, Barney," he began, and there was that in his voice that made Barney stop daubing and look up at his brother anxiously. "Listen here, Barney," Daniel began again, "I'm not at all sure about tonight. Do you feel you're doing the wisest thing? After all, you two have known each other less than a couple of months at the most. What I mean is, old man, you're pretty damn happy as you are--we've been happy together. We can keep on being happy--traveling and all that sort of thing. No end of possibilities. I'm not going to get married for a long, long time. Why not wait a while longer with me? There's a lot of things we can enjoy together. Don't let's go through with the formal announcement which actually is an open invitation to your wedding. Why, Barney, kid, in only a couple of weeks you'll be a married man! What then? Let's clear out. Let's do any-thing. Call it off, will you . . . or . . . or . . . wait a little longer. Just wait and see what happens. Give me a chance, Barney. We'll go right away. Just think--"

He broke off with the nauseating knowledge of failure. Barney's face had fallen. The boy was amazed. Not unlike a too trusting pup that had been smitten suddenly by a cat that had led him to expect better things, he now looked up at his brother. Daniel's gaze was filled with a deep entreaty. Then he looked away. Instinctively his eyes sought the shadows.

"Get yourself another drink, old boy," said Barney in a quiet voice. "I know how you feel, but of course you're all wrong about everything. My being married will make no difference at all. We can go on living just the same as ever and do all the things we've planned. I know how you feel. I'd feel the same. Don't you think I haven't thought about it

myself? I have--lots. And of course you must marry June. The four of us will have one hell of a high time."

"Guess you're right, Barney," said Daniel, but there was no conviction in his voice.

"Cheer up," Barney said, and laughed light-heartedly. "Of course I'm right. I'm always right about everything. You've got to admit that. And anyway the cakes and everything are all ordered. Aunt Matty would have a horrible fit. She'd die, perhaps, or bust with a deafening report."

Daniel nodded slowly and smiled. The Furies seemed to be jiggling grotesquely on his grave. Reason was reeling drunkenly to bed. A crazy parachute was dragging him over a cliff. He would let go soon. Then the drop . . .

"No," he remarked. "I guess it would never do, especially now that the cakes have been ordered, and all that about Aunt Matty. No, Barney, we mustn't let her bust with a deafening report."

"I merely mentioned the cakes in passing," grinned Barney, now thoroughly satisfied that everything was once more as he wanted it to be. "They're fairly good at that." He extracted one from his pocket and popped it into his mouth. "Fairly good but lamentably small. Crisp ! Have one. Besides we love each other."

Daniel picked up the soiled-looking object his brother had tossed across the table and, after removing several adhering threads and a family gathering of tobacco crumbs, followed Barney's inelegant example.

"There's paint on it," he said.

"I know," agreed -Barney. "There's paint on all of them. Just slightly

though."

"You're going to have a swell time of it tonight," said Daniel, "if you don't make yourself sick on a lot of truck beforehand. I'd better speak to Aunt Matty about you."

"No, don't," put in Barney hastily. "Leave her entirely alone. She's been watching me all morning as it is. And speaking of cakes, do you remember, Dan, when we were boys and I'd be locked in the room, how you used to put cakes and stuff in an old shoe and I'd pull it up to the window with a string? Well, ever since then I've never been able to enjoy an honestly acquired piece of cake. To be thoroughly enjoyable it must be pilfered."

He paused and looked back on the past. Something in that old dark room seemed to evoke memories. He was secretly a little frightened himself about the party that night, and was unconsciously seeking escape in memories of the days when he and Daniel had been boys together.

"You know, Dan," he went on wisely, "I don't think father would have been half as hard-boiled if mother had been alive. He must have missed her like the devil. . . mother . . . not having her and all. Just a couple of damn disorderly sons. I can, see things better now."

From a sense of loyalty, a sensitive understanding of Daniel's position, Barney always included him in the hard treatment he himself had received. It was almost as if he were trying to justify his father and at the same time to let Daniel know that he understood. Then, again, it made his childhood seem a little less unshared.

"You got all the raw deals, Barney," said Daniel, not trusting himself to look at his brother, the closest creature to him in all God's world. "All the tough breaks were yours, but the old man really wasn't like

that--not really."

The room had grown quiet now. Daniel was standing at one of the windows. He had parted the curtains slightly and was looking out on the lawn. Then his gaze lifted, and he was looking out across the lawn to the far-away water-rimmed edge of the sky. And he felt himself out there amidst a vast silence and peace. He was alone out there between the sea and the sky. He was alone and resting, his problem forever solved.

What was he going to do about it? He shivered a little. Only too well he knew. He turned back to the room.

He stood contemplating the small, firm, and strangely lined face of his brother. Suddenly it came over him that this would be in all likelihood the last time he would ever see him so completely happy again. He wanted to retain that memory . . . to fix it in his mind.

"You're sure about tonight, then, kid?" he asked diffidently.

"Sure, Daniel, dead sure," said Barney.

"All right then," said Daniel. "I think I'll go and dig up June. She might do a little something about food. Get back to your leprous painting, Barney. Do your specks."

But Barney did not return at once to his painting. He remained seated at the table running his fingers through the fine straw-colored hair that gave the appearance of straying casually about his head. From a nut-brown face, prematurely old yet hauntingly attractive, a pair of large, speculative eyes, touched with the wisdom of a child, stared into the darkness. He was re-painting the years of his childhood in entirely fresh colors. He sat quite still, all hunched up and untidy, like an ancient gnome greedily poised above a bowl of

fruit.

Dan had been strange just now, he felt. There had been something different about him. He had suggested a person who was going away for a long time to some shut-off place.

And Barney wondered why. Perhaps because of to-night, he decided. Daniel was all wrong. He would get over that.

# IV. DAN'S LAST TRY

WHEN Daniel left his brother he felt as if he carried with him his own as well as Emily-Jane's death warrant. More than that, he felt as if he were holding in his hand the broken bits of happiness of several lives.

Like a cornered animal seeking refuge, yet knowing there was no refuge, he stood in a state of growing panic on the long, rambling front veranda of the old house. He craved yet feared the comfort of June Lansing's presence.

Far away on the other side of the Sound he could see a few scraps of white jutting up from the water like jagged teeth. A few miles out lay three islands, bare rocks sprawled out on the surface of the water like dragons resting momentarily in their slow progress seaward.

Daniel knew all of those rocks intimately, their lobster-pots and the ashes of abandoned fires, their old tin cans and remains of rotted fish--unpleasant items, perhaps, until one became used to them, until they became familiar features and loved.

Thinking of those early days of exploration with the ambitious but unsteady Barney, Daniel moved restlessly across the wide tree-studded lawn until he came to the edge of the high bluff that dropped sharply to the smooth white beach below. To the right of him twisted the Cliff Path leading to High Rock Point. At this place the bluff came to its climax--assumed the proportions of a full-fledged cliff, at the base of which lay a broken floor of rocks. There were pleasant hollows in these rocks Daniel recalled. Some were always filled with water a little warmer than the sea. Some were filled with drifting sand. Altogether an attractive haunt for children, lovers, and straying artists. To descend the cliff was no easy matter, but could be

achieved by the willing of spirit and bodily activity. Most reasonably minded persons found their way to this watery retreat by way of the beach. Up from the rocks reared the bitten face of the cliff to the summit of High Rock Point, a conservative but adequate name. And from the summit of High Rock Point grew sea-loving old pine trees, scrub brush, and wiry bushes.

High Rock Point was useful as well as ornamental. It served as a place to walk to, to linger at and leave behind. It was a landmark. Local residents were proud of it, as if that mattered a rap to the cliff. However people spoke well of High Rock Point and successfully managed to keep from falling off it, which was something.

Several homes lay between the Crewes' house and the cliffs. Daniel could see their chimneys and gables now pointing through the green of the trees. He turned and looked back at his own home. Like its owner the old structure was friendly, brown, and rambling. It was a place of many large cool rooms and of many windows looking on the sea. Those in the rear gave view to an orchard that drifted away until stopped by the woods which bordered the marshes. A broad, irregular veranda virtually ran round the house and invited rest and contentment at any hour of the day. One could follow the breeze on that veranda as well as dodge the sun. On it opened at unexpected places little doors as well as large ones, and innumerable mysterious passageways invited exploration. On the ground floor no room appeared to be on a level with another one. In this house one was forever either stepping down into a room or up out of one. A large hall extended from sea view to orchard, the doors to this hall forming the frames of two charming pictures--the greens and browns and blossomings of an old orchard at the one end, while at the other, the blue reaches of the Sound glimpsed through a park of trees.

It was a house to live in, and Daniel had lived in it nearly all the years of his life. Now as he considered its familiar lines he had a feeling

that the old place had about done with him, that their long term of companionship was just about at an end.

"Oh, well," thought Daniel, "might as well look up June. She's in for a tough time, too."

\* \*

June Lansing watched him coming toward her across the lawn. There was something radically wrong with this man, she decided. There had been something wrong with him for weeks. Of late he had seemed to be afraid to touch her. An invisible obstacle seemed to have raised itself between them. Yet it was not quite that. The obstacle was there for Daniel alone. He seemed to be exerting some inner restraint on himself. It was a hard thing to puzzle out, yet she could not help feeling the presence of some alien and inimical influence. Daniel had changed, there was no doubting that, no pretending it away.

Ever since the arrival of Emily-Jane, Dan had begun to freeze a little, as if the life within him were chilled. He had more and more taken refuge in his own thoughts, guarding them instead of sharing them as at one time he had done so generously. Intuitively June associated with the dazzling appearance of Emily-Jane the alteration of Daniel's attitude, not only to herself but also to the world in general.

Now she watched the long, lounging figure out of troubled eyes and wondered much behind her placid countenance. She felt that this lover of hers owed it to their mutual confidence to let her help him. At least she could listen to his worries, or whatever it was that was plaguing his usually sanguine mind. She had always heard that a good woman can help a man. Yet here she had a perfectly good man who would not let her help him. June wanted to be with Daniel in whatever he was going through. Not for a moment did she suspect

his loyalty. Dan was all right as far as that was concerned. It was something else, but what?

June Lansing was a loosely connected, sprawling creature, a big girl with big bones, but shapely withal. Unlike many of her sisters her well-developed bosom was no better developed than her brain. Above her ruggedly handsome face, sprinkled with a shower of freckles, lay interesting masses of flame-colored hair. She possessed a large humorous mouth capable of twisting itself into all sorts of eloquently expressive shapes. Her nose was fine but not small and her eyes, reflecting golden-brown--the shade of a proper ale--were flecked with little speckles, and were entirely her own. No other woman had eyes quite like those of June Lansing with their funny yellow specks.

Leggily ranging back in her deck chair on the lawn, she now looked quietly up at Daniel standing above her. For a moment neither spoke, then Daniel found an aimless-sounding "Hello," which he offered her.

"Is that the way? Is that the way?" she remonstrated. "Can't you manage something a little better than that?"

"How are you, June?" he asked woodenly.

"So well," she said, "I do so well that if you don't come out of your trance and give me a kiss I won't forget in a hurry I'll get up and give you such a sock with this chair that you'll go sound instead of half asleep."

Then Daniel knelt down beside her and gave her a kiss that she was destined not to forget in a long, long time, if ever. Into it went all of his love and longing for this woman, his pent-up misery and desperation. It was almost as if he were trying to lose himself in that kiss, to hide

himself in her. When he rose she looked at him with pleased surprise behind which lay a shade of fear.

"Better and better," she said at last. "One would think you'd been deprived of a woman's kisses for years and years, and yet all the time you've had me. You should call more often, Dan. I like your visits."

"I'm an accommodating sort of cuss," he replied, striving to appear cheerful, "but exclusive, as you doubtless know."

"I know nothing of the kind," she answered. "For instance, where have you, been all morning and why not at my side?"

"Been at the club most of the time," he told her. "Sat out eighteen holes with Scott, then came home and badgered Barney. We had a talk or something approaching one. Since then I've been looking for you."

"And I've been under your nose all the time."

"I don't like the way you put things," he objected. "I don't want you under my nose. Rather have you under my foot. It sounds more magnificent than nose."

"Now don't try to talk to me as you would to Barney," she said. "It's beyond my dim comprehension how you two lunatics ever manage to exchange thought. You seem to go strolling casually round the fringes of an intelligent conversation, then suddenly abandoning hope, seek out the nearest by-path to inanity. Is it that you feel obligated to amuse each other, or befuddle each other? He told me this morning that he suspected you were a mental case, but I told him you were merely growing."

"I'm growing, sure enough," said Daniel. "I'm growing old at a terrific

speed, but Barney doesn't amuse me any more, June. He's got me worried, that boy has."

"And you've got me no less worried," she replied seriously. "You should let Scott Munson plumb into your mind and let in a couple of gallons of daylight or let out a flood of darkness. Just what is your guilty secret, Daniel Crewe? Out with it, man--out with it! Something is wrong with you, all wrong, worried, and unhappy. Don't think for a second I haven't known. Why don't you give me a chance? I want to help. You know--kind of keep in touch with current events."

She stopped and her eyes opened wide as she saw the color slowly drain away beneath his tan and noticed that for the first time since she had known him his eyes refused to meet hers.

"Guilty secret?" he repeated, laughing a trifle tin-steadily. "Guilty, June? Why, I have no guilty secret. And as for Scott Munson, I haven't joined the criminal class . . . yet. Not yet. Not yet. Not--"

He stopped suddenly when he realized he was needlessly repeating that crazy phrase. There was a tightness about his throat and a hot, empty sensation at the pit of his stomach. So it was already apparent, his guilt. He was branded before the deed. Good God! And Munson had seen it, too. Even Barney had looked at him queerly. He found a handkerchief and applied it to his forehead.

"Hot, isn't it?" he said, but June did not answer. "Or is it?" he added lamely.

"Look at me, Daniel," commanded June.

She said no more but strove to hold him with her golden-brown eyes. She seemed to be trying to draw from his brain the trouble that was there, for now she realized that there was something seriously wrong

with Daniel, something that threatened their happiness. "Go on, Dan," she said at length. "Tell me."

"No, June, really," he replied, endeavoring to drive off the suspicions he feared were forming in her thoughts. "Honestly, old thing, there's nothing. What could there be? It's just Barney. I'm worried about him--about Barney and this girl. Barney's an awful kid, after all, while Emily-Jane--well, she's quite a catch, I suppose, isn't she?" He broke off lamely and looked hopefully at June.

"Is she?" asked that young lady. "Is she, Dan? What do you think, yourself?"

"Of course she's wonderful and all that," he replied. "I know everyone's strong for her, but for some reason I don't quite fancy seeing Barney attached to such a luminary, if you get what I mean."

"Perfectly," said June, dryly. "And a little more. I get that you think Emily-Jane is a lovely girl, but--you'd do anything in the world to get rid of her."

She stopped suddenly and looked searchingly at Daniel, who in turn was looking at her with the fascination of horror. Deep in his eyes she saw something--what was it? What was it she saw there? It was furtive and dangerously driven, an expression she had never seen in the eyes of any man. And it was because she knew and loved this man so well, was so close to him in thought as well as emotion, that the terrible idea had come to her. From where did it come?

"You'd do anything to get rid of her," she repeated slowly and as if to herself. "Anything in the world." Her hands flew out and gripped him by the shoulders. She held him roughly. He could feel the strength of her fingers through his coat. "Oh, Dan, Dan!" she said.

"What--what do you mean, June?" he faltered. "What do you see?"

She gave him a push and laughed. It sounded a trifle strained. "A touch of sun," she said. "Daniel, I believe you'd love to see Barney married to a younger edition of Aunt Matty?"

Daniel's smile was a little more natural this time. "He could do a lot worse," he admitted. "The two of them get along quite happily together what with her constant recriminations and preoccupation with food. A younger edition of Aunt Matty is just what Barney needs."

June Lansing did not seem to be listening. Her eyes were leveled on the water. What was she thinking? What suspicion had suddenly come into her mind? June's silence was making him nervous.

"Dan," she asked at last, her voice steady, casual, only slightly interested, "did you ever know Emily-Jane when you were at college?"

"Never knew her . . . met her . . . danced with her . . . that sort of thing . . . heard of her, of course," Daniel succeeded in jerking out, with a fairly convincing assumption of indifference.

"And what did you hear?" she continued.

"Oh, just the usual thing. Nothing that mattered one way or the other."

"Delightfully vague and uninforming," murmured June. "Tell me, Dan, did Sam Stoughten also know her?"

"No, I don't think so. Why?" replied Daniel quickly, "What made you ask that, June?"

"Nothing in particular," said June easily, "but a good many things in

general. A few weeks ago I saw them together when they had every reason to believe they were unobserved. Sam looked as if he were being confronted by a ghost, and a most unpleasant ghost, at that. But you know how Sam is with women," she continued on a note of reassurance. "He's never entirely comfortable except when Sue's around."

"Exactly," agreed Daniel. "Sam never was much of a ladies' man. He's a faithful old soul. Loyal to a fault, poor devil. Next to Barney--"

"Why 'poor devil'?" interrupted June.

"I don't know," said Daniel. "Just thinking back, I suppose. He lost out a lot in college, but he never envied his friends."

"And tonight you announce the glad tidings," observed June for no apparent reason.

"Yes," said Dan. "That's just it--the glad tidings. If you ask me it's all a lot of nonsense. Everyone knows they're engaged already. It's just an excuse to throw a party, as I look at it. And this stuff about switching off the lights for a minute just before the announcement--why that? All damn rot."

"That," said June, "was not Emily-Jane's idea. It came from some member of the club crowd. A group of her admirers are going to present her with the most gorgeous Japanese kimono you ever dreamed about."

"That well may be," replied Daniel. "I never dreamed about a Japanese kimono."

"Well you will when you see this one," went on June. "When the lights flash on, there it will be presto--all spread out on the table. Emily-Jane has many friends. Are you one of them, Daniel?"

"Of course," said Daniel, striving to put a hearty note into his voice. "Of course, June. You know that as well as I do. She's all right. It's just about Barney, that's all. Emily-Jane shouldn't marry Barney. She shouldn't do it. Of all the men in the world, why did she have to pick out him? I've nothing against the girl. Nothing."

Silence once more fell between them. Both were occupied with thoughts too delicate or dangerous to be expressed. Furtively June was studying the tense, drawn face of the man she loved. A feeling of tenderness so poignant it was painful to bear came over her for him sitting there alone with all his lies and trouble.

"Come here, Daniel," she said, and held out her arms to him. "Come here and put your head down on this businesslike bosom of mine. It was made for just such a head as yours, big, empty, and, oh, so dumb."

Then Daniel knelt down beside her and his head was on her breast. On the green of the lawn and the blue of the open sky his eyes closed wearily. What had beauty to do with him? And he rested there. It was a moment of drifting peace. Perhaps the last one he would ever know. From her body came comfort and a sense of things, of life and what had been. How tired he was. How damned uselessly tired. Was there a chance that even now he could find another way out?

"Some day," he said in a low voice, "some day, June, things will be all jake, won't they? We'll be all right, what? All of us? I'm worried, June, that's all. It's hell to have a damn fool brother."

"I know, I know," she answered. "I know, Dan."

His weakness was so unlike him it struck her like a physical hurt. At

that moment she would have done anything--given herself to him--just to have eased his mind. Anything to have kept him from thinking. Somehow she was going through with it. Even in the dark she would not leave Daniel alone.

This resolution formed she lifted his head and kissed him on both eyes.

"Hit the deck, sailor," she said. "Let's go and drag some food from Aunt Matty. She reluctantly hinted that there might be some sandwiches and tea for luncheon. You need food."

\* \*

Daniel had eaten and gone to his room, which held a corner position in the right wing of the house, if the rambling old dwelling could be said to have anything so conventional as wings. All the windows were filled with trees and with the Sound. The one at the side gave a long view of the Cliff Path and a glimpse of the orchard. Across the hall from him was Lane Holt's room, while directly next to his own was the room occupied by Emily-Jane.

Daniel was standing now at the side window. He was idly contemplating the stout old limb of a tree. For him that limb had friendly associations. Ever since he could remember it had been trying to get in through the window as if curious to see what the room looked like inside. Many times as a boy he had climbed out along that inquisitive old branch and thus reached the ground. He had taught Barney to make use of this convenient exit, but only after several hairbreadth escapes. Barney had always climbed with too much confidence. He had proceeded as if he expected something always to be where he was, and when that something failed him Barney came to grief.

Daniel turned from the window and his thoughts. Restlessly he paced the room. Every now and then he turned his head as if looking for something. Suddenly, he stopped dead still in his tracks. His chin went up, and he stood there waiting, thinking rapidly. Then he took a quick glance at his watch and left the room. The hall was empty. Taking a key from his pocket he let himself into the room next to his and quickly closed the door. Slowly his eyes traveled round the room. Now where would a person hide a packet of letters? Surely it would be under lock and key. Her trunk was locked. Hopeless. His long hands slid searchingly between the clothes in the bureau drawers. He turned to the suitcase and opened it. The letters couldn't be here. They weren't. He ran to the closet and flung open its door. Another bag. Daniel snatched it out and opened it. Quick, delving fingers. Nothing. Nothing! Goddamn ! They must be in the trunk and that was locked. If he could only find those letters there still might be another way out. Once more he began to search the room.

On the bureau stood an antique box fashioned to resemble a row of books. Emily-Jane had brought it with her. It was a fairly common specimen. Daniel had seen them before, but to Emily-Jane it had probably seemed an exceedingly secretive hiding place. He slid back the base of the box and pressed the center volume. In a moment the thing was open. No letters of Sam's, but three of his own and two addressed to him by Emily-Jane. Years ago she had cleverly regained possession of her own letters. He took them all and slipped them into an inside vest pocket.

Light feet falling in the hall outside. Coming closer. Daniel turned calmly and faced the door. He was leaning against the side of the open window when she entered.

"I've been waiting for you," he lied effectively. "Come in and shut the door. Lock it."

Emily-Jane without a word did just that. Her eyes swept the room and discovered that nothing had been disturbed. Daniel had been careful. He had even taken the precaution of substituting a few business letters for those that had been in the box.

It was as well he had done so. Still without speaking she crossed the room to the bureau. Her hands idly shook the box, then she turned back satisfied. Peeling off her jersey, she stood before him half nude, a silken band across her breasts.

"Well, Daniel," she said. "You've got yourself into this mess. Now get yourself out of it. My brain is quicker than yours, and Barney is at the foot of the stairs. If I call for Lane Holt he'll swear to anything. He's in his room now. Let's talk business. What's the bright idea?"

She searched for a cigarette, found one, lighted it, and seated herself on the bed. Daniel turned to the window to conceal the murder that blazed from his eyes. When he faced the girl once more he had regained his composure.

"Emily-Jane," he said, "I've come in here to ask you to call it off. You have a chance now to do a good thing, a kind thing. Do it, won't you? I'm licked. Give me Sam's letters and chuck Barney. Let me look after him."

"That would listen better from the bed," she replied coolly. "Come over here and sit down." Obediently he seated himself beside her. She flung a careless arm round his neck and blew a cloud of smoke in his face. "Now kiss me," she said.

"Will you give me those letters, Emily-Jane?"

"No."

"It's as much for your sake as ours I am asking."

"That's a lie, Daniel, dear."

"Money?" he suggested huskily. "For a great deal of money, Emily-Jane, will you?"

"No, you fool. I'll get money and more. I can get all yours and his too if I want it. No, Daniel, I'm incorruptible. I'm far above money."

"Oh, for God's sake, Emily-Jane," he pleaded, "don't go through with it. Give me those letters and lay off of Barney. Won't you, won't you, Emily-Jane?"

It was not an agreeable sight to see this big, hulking creature pleading thus with the girl. He had swallowed his pride. He was willing to go down on his knees to her.

"No," she said. "I won't."

Then Daniel did go down on his knees before the girl.

"Those letters," he said in a voice so low she could scarcely hear him. "I ask you now here on my knees to give them to me and to give up Barney. Think, Emily-Jane, think. You've got the chance now. Won't you take it? Please. I ask you."

For answer she tossed away her cigarette and crushed his face against her breast. Then she suddenly released him and sprang up, laughing tauntingly.

"Get up from there," she jeered. "You're making a tragic ass of yourself. Come over here and help me off with my shoes."

She sank into a deep chair and extended her neat, slim legs. With lowered head as if stunned, Daniel got slowly off his knees. He felt

heavy and dead as he turned to the door and fumbled with the key. A few swift strides brought her beside him, and he stood there a moment looking down at her in a dull, abstracted manner. Even now the voice of his pleading would not be stilled.

"No?" he said. "Won't you?"

As he opened the door she once more threw one bare arm round his shoulder. Then she laughed softly.

"Gosh, you're a glutton for punishment, Dan," she said. "Sorry you have to leave so soon. Call again."

The door closed on her mocking voice. Daniel was in the hall. He turned with hands hanging and came in contact with a figure that was standing perfectly still --frozen. The figure swayed slightly.

"Dan?" his name came in a whisper. "Dan?"

He took June's arms in his hands just above the elbows. In the dim light of the hall he stooped and peered into her face. Then he shook his head slowly. Neither spoke. Again he peered down at her and shook his head. Releasing his hold on her arms he walked quietly down the hall and entered his room. The door closed.

Alone in the hall June Lansing stood looking at the door to Emily-Jane's room. All the warmth had gone out of her ale-golden eyes. They were cold spots now, cold, hard, and bright. Then she, too, walked quietly down the hall, entered her room and closed the door.

From the shadow of an alcove used for trunks, Betty, the maid, emerged and went thoughtfully about her appointed tasks. It took all sorts of people to make the world, thought she, but here indeed was a pretty kettle of fish.



# V. THE SEARCHING BLADE

SOMETHING was going to happen that night. Already things were going on, secret things in that old house. Scott Munson, slipping into his black robe, felt it in his bones. What was he going to do about it? How head this off? That well-known ounce of prevention--where could he find it? Should he keep his eye on Daniel or concentrate on Sam Stoughten? Should he divide his attention between the two? From his knowledge of men both had reached a dangerous pitch of desperation. Or would it be better to watch Emily-Jane, the object on which that desperation centered--the source of it?

To work on a case before it had actually broken was a new experience to Scott Munson. He sat down in a chair by the open window and looked out at the dark night. Perhaps he had read his characters wrong this time. Perhaps he had read into them meanings that were not there. Munson had no particular fondness for Emily-Jane. In fact, he considered her a beautiful but unpleasant little hypocrite, but surely she was not capable of creating all the strain and concealed animosity that were disturbing the atmosphere like a palpable thing. On the other hand why wasn't she? In the forty years of his life he had seen the most insignificant women accomplish disasters far out of proportion to their individual importance.

That little byplay about letters between Emily-Jane and Sam Stoughten on the club-house veranda--what, if anything, was the meaning of that? Now was the time for someone to come out into the open and to speak a piece in no uncertain words. But the trouble was people seldom spoke at the right time and always at the wrong.

Scott Munson felt that if Daniel would only tell him what was on his mind matters could be straightened out. Daniel, he feared, no less than Sam Stoughten and everyone else involved, was exaggerating

the seriousness of some situation to the proportions of a tragedy. If properly staged and directed it might well be turned into a farce, or at least brought to the level of plausibility. People did not react that way, however, under certain given circumstances. The situation itself had taken control, and the actors were merely following directions bereft of reason and volition.

Well, if things must be they must, he supposed. Perhaps it was written and could not be deleted. If people perversely insisted on making a hash of their lives there was little that he could do to stop them. Then a wave of human emotion for a moment smothered the cool, impersonal logic of Scott Munson. These people were his friends, and this old house itself was too homelike and friendly to be the scene of some stupid but irreparable tragedy. But damn it all, why were his thoughts constantly dwelling on tragedy even before a tragedy had occurred? There was a feeling in the air, or was he just giving rein to his imagination? That was not like him. Some mischief must be afoot.

He rose, dropped the black hood over his head, and left the room. In the hall he saw Sam Stoughten entering Daniel's room. Sam was robed but not hooded. The expression on his ruddy, homely face was anything but festive.

"The uniform of the evening seems highly appropriate," mused Scott as he passed down the hall. "I'd give a lot to hear the conversation between those two gentlemen."

He paused, then shook his head, and swiftly descended the stairs.

\* \*

Sam sat down on Daniel's bed and looked at him. There was a mute inquiry in his mild blue eyes, an expression suggestive of a decent-

spirited dog, one that wanted something very badly but was too considerate to ask for it outright. Daniel turned from the mirror and regarded the slightly upturned face. Then he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I found mine, Sam--only mine."

"No," repeated Sam as if trying to puzzle out the exact meaning of the word. "Glad you found yours, though."

Neither spoke again. Daniel turned back to the mirror and brushed a hand across his face. Ten years seemed to have been added to his face since he had left Emily-Jane's room. He was trying to brush them away. It was fortunate they were wearing hoods. . . . All men would look alike tonight.

Sam rose from the bed and stood with idly swinging arms.

"Doesn't matter," he said. "I just dropped in to ask. Be getting back to Sue now. She'll be waiting. You're looking tired, Dan."

"Oh, I'm all right," said the other. "Have a drink?"

"Yes," said Sam.

Daniel swung up a bottle from the floor beside the bureau, and they drank the whisky neat. Their eyes met as they put down their glasses. A lifetime of associations mutually shared passed between them.

"I tried," said Daniel. "She caught me at it, but I don't think she suspected. They must be locked in her trunk. Couldn't go that."

"That girl's a devil, Daniel."

"She's not so good, Sam."

"And she's got the two of us, not to mention young Barney."

"Wish she were a man, Sambo."

"Don't see where that makes a hell of a lot of difference." There was a new note of hardness in Sam Stoughten's voice. "After a woman has passed a certain limit she has no sex."

Their eyes met searchingly, but not frankly, then looked away. Daniel turned back to the mirror for no reason at all. He was tired of his face.

"We were damn fools, Daniel," went on Stoughten, in a voice that seemed to be summarizing the past before writing finis. "But I was the damnedest. It was all my fault, old man. I dragged you in."

"Shut up," said Daniel, reaching for the bottle. "Have a drink."

"I had one."

"Have two."

They drank neat again and larger.

"Somehow it doesn't make me feel so good," observed Sam in gentle complaint. "I used to love to get drunk."

Daniel grinned. "And you did, Sam. You did. As a lord--as a whole houseful of lords, in fact."

"Not going to get drunk tonight," announced Sam. "Must keep a clear head."

"Why?" asked Daniel curiously.

"The occasion calls for it," said Sam. "One should keep a clear head tonight."

"You're not going to make some sort of a damn fool of yourself, are you, Sam?"

Once more their eyes studied each other.

"I've stopped making a damn fool of myself," said Sam deliberately. "I might make myself something else, Dan, but not a damn fool."

Dan was across the room and had seized Sam's thick wrists. Sam refused to look up. He stood there stolidly.

"Look at me, Sam," commanded Daniel. "This is my show. Understand that. My show entirely. You go back to Sue and stick by her. That's your show, your job. Stick by Sue."

"And let us all drift to hell, I suppose," said Sam. "Misery loves company," replied Daniel.

"There should be one member less," said Sam. Daniel released his grip. Sam looked up and laughed a little recklessly. "I don't know what we're talking about, Dan," he said, "but don't worry. Everything's going to be all right. Watch and see."

"I shall," said Dan grimly.

At the door Sam paused and looked back. "And, Dan," he added, "I want to thank you for all you've done in the past and for what you just tried to do."

"Remember," called Daniel as the door was slowly closing, "don't be a damn fool, Sam."

"Not a chance," came Sam's voice.

\* \*

A pair of slim provocative legs flashed clown the hall. Emily-Jane seemed all legs. There was a skirt, a suggestion of a skirt. Some sort of momentarily interrupting flare of flounce, after which Emily-Jane continued once more somewhere in the region where the vertebrae either end or begin their business of being a spine, and up swept the beautiful back of Emily-Jane to her pert little neck and sleek golden, hair. She was every bit as good in front--or nearly.

Emily-Jane intended to show the world just how lucky a man Barney really was. It looked as if she would experience little difficulty in establishing her point. She was supposed to be something along the general lines of a ballet dancer.

The legs carried what remained of her to June Lansing's door, upon which she tapped lightly, then entered unbidden.

June looked up from the brilliant buckle she was attaching to her pump. Emily-Jane failed to detect the slightest sign of welcome in June's eyes, but a little thing like that meant nothing to Emily-Jane.

"I thought we'd go down together," she remarked. "How do I do?"

"Perfectly, as usual," said June. "You know that even better than I."

"Well, I'm glad you think so just the same," replied the other.

"Emily-Jane," said June, having affixed the buckle and disappeared into some sort of milkmaid's costume, "Emily-Jane, you don't give a damn what I think, and you know it."

"Certainly, I know it, but it's much pleasanter to pretend," came the

cool response of Emily-Jane. "We're slated to be sisters-in-law, you know. Don't you think we'll make a happy family?"

"No," said June, with equal candor, "I don't. For some reason Daniel hates you, and you have some sort of a hold on him. I don't know what it's all about, but I do know that things aren't right. The best I can do is to suspect that you are playing poor Barney for a gull. What is all this between you and Dan? Why doesn't someone speak? I feel as if I were playing blind man's buff with an electric fan. What was he doing in your room today?"

Emily-Jane smiled wisely.

"All men are creatures of impulse," she answered. "Daniel is no exception. For the intimate details I refer you to him."

"That doesn't gall me at all, Emily-Jane," June replied easily. "He was in your room for something, but you were the last thing in the world he wanted. I know that. What I don't know is just what is behind it all. That's what I want you to tell me."

"Once more I refer you to Daniel," said Emily-Jane.

"Do you think I'd be asking you if I hadn't already asked him?" replied June. "He won't say a word and he's worried gray about something. What is it, Emily-Jane? Help me out in this, and I'll try to make a go of things. It's a business proposition."

"One which I neither need nor care to accept," said Emily-Jane. "I'll make a go of things without your help. Apart from that I don't know what you're talking about. Are you nearly ready to go down?"

There was an ominous expression in the eyes that met those of Emily-Jane. "You're going to marry Barney?" asked June.

"Certainly," replied Emily-Jane.

"And nothing is going to stop you?"

"Not a thing that I can see."

"Then God help you is all I can say," said June. "Something tells me it won't ever come off."

"Then God help all of you," replied Emily-Jane. "You'll need Him."

"I say that, too," answered June. "I'm ready now. Let's go."

Together they left the room, Emily-Jane triumphant. Seeing them together it would have been difficult to detect that they were not the best of friends.

At the head of the stairs they masked and descended hand in hand. A lovely picture they made. In June's loose clasp Emily-Jane's hand lay unresponsive.

\* \*

Bodies caught and swayed in a flood of music. Beautiful women, beautifully bare, disturbingly perfumed. Laughing couples along the rambling veranda, thirsty ones around the punch bowl. All the men in black dominoes and hoods. The hoods were easily lifted. Tonight the old house was seeing a bit of life. It was stepping out. Being gay for Barney.

"What do you think of me?" Emily-Jane asked that rather dazed young man.

Barney surveyed her from head to foot. "One doesn't have to think about you," he observed. "One knows at a glance. You're all there."

Degas should be with us."

"Who is he?" she asked quickly. "Do I know him?"

"Apparently not," said Barney. "Neither do I."

"Don't be a fool, Barney," Emily-Jane told him. "With me at any rate."

"Pardon me," he replied. "Shall we indulge in a partial assault?"

Barney failed to notice the swift glance she cast about her as if seeking relief. Where the devil was Lane? No thrill in dancing with this crazy creature who was constantly making uncomfortable observations--the more uncomfortable because there was always a grain of truth in them in spite of their ambiguity.

The fact of the matter was that hardly a dozen guests had arrived before Barney began to wonder when everybody was going home. He did not hold with this party. It was too big and noisy. One never could find anyone who was not going somewhere or doing something. Everybody was so busy, so heady. He wondered if the swirling couples were happy, or if they just imagined they were having a good time. Perhaps they were, but damned if he could see it. And he was still young. What was wrong with him? Why was he not like these other perspiring and persistent young men who were constantly clutching at someone and making such a business of having a good time? He did like to dance with Emily-Jane though. She was different. She was heavenly.

"All right, then," she said, reluctantly yielding to the situation. "Come on. Let's try."

"Let's not try," objected Barney. "Let's damn well do it."

They were in the midst of things now, twisting, swaying, jerking,

gliding, doing all manner of surprising and inexplicable movements. It was all very odd, people disporting themselves in such a way. But he did enjoy dancing with Emily-Jane. She made it a point to see that he liked it, and Barney was only human. Emily-Jane's body was pleasant to hold, particularly when in motion. She could cling without interfering, and before the dance was over he had begun to think he really knew how. But that was the last dance he had with her that night.

Lane Holt was on hand to claim the next one. Then Emily-Jane really did dance. Lane was worth it. He knew his stuff. Tall, graceful, perfectly poised, he carried her smoothly over the floor and away from the bemused Barney.

"I've been invited to join a party," said Lane, "after this show is over."

"Oh, you have?" answered Emily-Jane. "Going?"

"Why not?" he replied. "You're being so damned discreet."

"We might take a walk," she observed, "after the household has dug in. Can't tell what I will do after I've had a few more glasses of that punch."

"Under those circumstances the party's off," said

Lane, his arm tightening round her supple body. "Easy there, Lane," breathed Emily-Jane. "Turn those lips away. This isn't an exhibition dance. Be nice. Be nice."

"I'll be nice" said Holt. "Let's try the veranda."

"Punch first," she answered. "It's a warm night."

"You shouldn't mind it," replied Holt, sweeping her trim body with

caressing eyes.

And so the dance went on. Barney at loose ends wandered purposelessly about, looking speculatively at hooded figures and wondering which one was Dan.

\* \*

It was Emily-Jane who found him. He was sitting in his room by the window, looking out into the dark, moist night. His hood was off and his head rested wearily back against the chair. From below came the strains of the orchestra. Voices floated up from the lawn.

Emily-Jane entered quietly and stood looking at him for a few seconds before he became aware of her presence.

"Snap out of it, Dan," she said. "It's time now to go down and welcome me to your family."

No more pleading from Daniel. He realized the futility of trying to move this girl.

"You're going through with it then?" was all he said.

"Right now. Pronto," replied Emily-Jane.

He walked toward the door, but she did not move. She stood in his way, her young body tense. He looked down at her and her lips parted. An invitation lay in her eyes.

"Dan," she said, her voice low and commanding. "Look, Dan. Here I am. Don't be such a prig."

"Prig?" he replied hoarsely. "I wonder what you'd call a cheat."

She moved out of his way and they left the room. Thus did Emily-Jane lead her sacrifice to the slaughter.

The dancing floor was now sprinkled with tables. Everywhere food was in evidence. Also Aunt Matty. Hoods were off and mouths open. Barney was eating sandwiches with relief. It was something to do. Daniel without a word dragged him away from a fresh supply and lined him up against the heavy portières that cut off the library from the main reception room.

"Don't forget the lights," excitedly whispered a charming young thing in hardly enough to describe.

"I had," smiled Daniel, looking down kindly at the lively little upturned face. "Run along, baby, and get ready to do your stuff."

"It'll be on a table right in front of you, Dan," she said worshipfully.

"Very good," replied Daniel, nodding approvingly.

Then he sought Sam Stoughten, who was looking anything but happy at the side of his wife Sue. She was overheated but still game. They were not passionately fond of dancing, these two. With them a little was almost more than enough. Where all the new steps came from, and why, was an unsolved puzzle to them.

"Sam," said Daniel, "will you go into the library and switch off the lights when you hear a high treble and probably inarticulate voice make a noise in your direction?"

Sam disappeared into the other room.

"He's been the very devil tonight," complained Sue.

"He's teething, perhaps," smiled Daniel, and went in search of

Barney, who, having grown tired of standing by himself, had drifted away to see what the salad was all about. This time Emily-Jane accompanied them back to the curtain, round which was the only cleared space in the room. Daniel had taken up his position on the left of the fair creature. Barney had tacked himself on her right. This was all very strange, he decided. All very uncalled for.

Scott Munson, his eyes fixed on the group, stood poised alertly as if trying to fix the situation in his mind.

"Friends," began Daniel unexpectedly, and at the sound of his voice the room grew quiet, "I suppose it's no use trying to keep it a secret any longer. Emily-Jane, here, has for some unaccountable reason consented to marry this brother of mine. Hence all the rejoicing. Let's drink what we can grab and wish them happiness and a long life."

"Lights out, Sam," cried a high treble voice. "Lights out."

As the lights flashed out Daniel's ankle turned slightly on an uneven spot on the floor. He lurched against Emily-Jane, who lurched against Barney.

"What the hell?" said Barney. "Is this a free for all?"

"Not yet, Sambo," called the little voice through the darkness. "Only a minute now."

"Oh, my God!" muttered Daniel suddenly.

"What is it, Dan?" called Barney. "Where are you, old man?"

Daniel did not answer.

"Dan! Dan!" cried his brother.

"Shut up, kid. Stand by," Daniel's words came in a whisper.

Emily-Jane ran her hand up Daniel's arm. There was a sharp cry in the darkness.

"For God's sake put on those lights," a man's voice called.

"We're ready now, Sambo," came the high treble. "You can turn on the lights."

"Right," came the voice of Stoughten, and the room was promptly flooded with diffused radiance.

Scott Munson took a quick step forward, blotting Emily-Jane from view of the others, and with a pocket handkerchief wiped the blood from Emily-Jane's hand.

"Say nothing," he muttered. "Go and admire that damn kimono."

He looked into the library. Sam was turning away from the switch. "Sam," he said quietly, "one moment."

Sam came to him quickly.

"Walk upstairs with Daniel, will you?" Munson said. "Take Barney with you."

The three men left the room. Then Scott Munson, taking advantage of the general interest aroused by the kimono, walked back of the curtain and carefully withdrew a long knife. There was blood upon the blade. Holding it so as not to smudge the hilt, he walked through the library, entered the hall and ran quickly upstairs.

Below in the reception room Emily-Jane was strutting magnificently in her gorgeous Japanese kimono.



# VI. DEATH TAKES STEPS

MUNSON paused a moment before Daniel's door and listened. Two persons were speaking, but he could hardly distinguish between their voices. He knew that one was Daniel's, but which? Then suddenly for the first time he realized the remarkable similarity in the voices of the erstwhile roommates, Sam Stoughten and Daniel Crewe. During their four years at college one of them had either consciously or unconsciously taken on the vocal expression and mannerisms of the other.

"Soft pedal that stuff," Daniel was saying, as Munson entered without knocking. "After all, you did make a damn fool of yourself, but things could have been worse."

Appearing not to have caught the full significance of what Daniel had just said, Munson swiftly crossed the room. Opening one of the smaller drawers in the bureau, he unconcernedly tossed out its contents. Collars and handkerchiefs, incontinently bereft of their accustomed shelter, found themselves on the floor.

"I say," cried Barney, sitting on the bed by his brother, "Daniel here has just been wounded, perhaps mortally, and you barge in and start a rough house. Why that?"

Munson merely smiled somewhat grimly and holding up the knife, still wet with blood, deliberately dropped it in the deflowered drawer, locking it and pocketing the key. Both Daniel and Stoughten watched him moodily from the bed.

Maintaining a preoccupied silence, Munson turned and keenly inspected Daniel, noting the drawn lines in his pale face. Sam had risen and was attempting to remove his wounded friend's garments.

Barney was doing futile things with his hands. Munson seemed to be totally unimpressed by the fact that Daniel had just been stabbed, an attempt made on his life.

"Just where did he get it?" he demanded shortly.

"In the arm, Scott," said Daniel apologetically. "At least I think so. Feels more or less that way."

Still Munson did not move.

"You should know if anyone," he remarked. "Do you realize that I did my best to prevent all this? And do you further realize that the Scott Munson you have known is now gone? From now on I am out to get someone anyone who attempts to arrange matters through a stupid and, I say, cruel recourse to bloodshed and brutality. I gave you all a chance, and you've treated me like a damn fool. I'm not a nice man."

Sam Stoughten flinched at his words. Barney only looked slightly amazed. But Daniel regarded him out of stolid, indifferent eyes.

"In the meantime you're going to let me bleed to death so you'll have a nice little murder on your hands to solve," he answered bitterly.

"Oh, you won't die quite yet," said Munson, "although that stab was intended to murder . . . someone. And that someone was not necessarily you, Daniel."

He crossed the room quickly, and brushing Barney aside, ran his hand along the sleeve of Daniel's domino. Looking at his fingers he found them red with blood.

"A nice piece of work," he observed in a cold, impersonal voice. "Well conceived, but poorly executed. And it would be the left arm. Tell me one thing. After the lights went out did you move at all from

your places?"

"We all seemed to lurch," replied Barney innocently. "Not much, but I know we lurched."

"That explains the mistake," said Munson, addressing his remark to Sam.

Stoughten turned red and refused to meet his eyes.

"Well, Sam," continued Munson, "let's do our best to correct the error. Snap to it! If Dr. Manning is not too drunk by this time get him up here. If he is, telephone to Woods at the village. Use the phone in the pantry and don't shout. Barney, do something else with your hands. Sit on them. Put them in your pockets. Go over by the window and take a chair. Try to think exactly what happened after the lights went out. And, Sam," added Munson, "I want June Lansing. Send her here quietly, but quickly."

He had already stripped off Daniel's domino, coat, and vest. With a pair of nail scissors, snatched from the bureau, he deftly cut away the crimson sleeve and laid the wound bare. Casting one dismayed glance at the wound, from which the blood was freely welling, Stoughten hastened from the room, but not before he heard Munson remark, "Suppose it had found your back, Daniel, where would you be now?"

Munson found a towel and twisted it tightly round Daniel's arm. "Faint?" he asked in a slightly kinder voice.

"A trifle light, Scott," admitted Daniel. He hesitated a moment, then continued with an appealing glance at the impassive face of Munson; "I suppose you couldn't forget all this, Scott? For old times' sake couldn't you let it drop?"

Munson looked at him thoughtfully. "Dan," he said, "you're not talking to a friend now, but to one whose offer of help you deliberately rejected. But maybe I could let it drop officially if this is the worst--the end."

Hearing the word "end," Barney turned from the window and looked tragically at the pair on the bed. "My God, Scott," he faltered, "what's all this talk about the end? Is Dan really in a bad way?"

"You should be locked up, Barney," replied Munson gravely. "Locked up or deported."

"But I had no hand in the affair," protested Barney.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Munson rejoined sarcastically. "I was sure you had."

"Don't let him kid you, Barney," advised his brother weakly.

"Then you know who did do it." Munson's easy voice had grown suddenly hard.

Barney looked startled.

"Lay off Barney," said Daniel. "He's not in on this. None of us knows a thing about it. It was too damn dark. You know that yourself."

"I think I know who did it," came amazingly from Barney.

"Who?" inquired Munson.

"For God's sake, Barney!" frantically interrupted Daniel.

"I'm fairly sure I can explain the whole thing," went on the unheeding Barney, in a tone of complacency. "Aunt Matty did it. It was just a piece of carelessness. You know Aunt Matty always has a knife in

her hand, always slashing at things. Well, she just passed by in the dark and happened to slash poor Daniel by mistake. That's all."

"And who had she intended to slash?" demanded Munson, showing no signs of astonishment.

"Who?" exclaimed Barney. "Why, no one, ofcourse. A loaf of bread, or some sort of dead animal such as a ham, or chicken, or even a paté de foies. The sandwiches were running low. I know that sad fact myself."

"You would, Barney, you would," said Daniel, grinning in spite of his growing weakness. "Stick to that story, boy. It's a slick solution. What do you think, Scott?"

In Munson's eyes there was a hint of good-natured disgust. "It all depends on what Aunt Matty thinks," he observed dryly, and added, "after I have talked with her."

"Oh, Aunt Matty will agree to anything," said Barney cheerfully, as he rose from his chair and started for the door.

Munson smiled in spite of himself at this piece of effrontery.

"Wait!" he commanded sharply. "The ordinary criminal, the low-down type is merely immoral. He's not such a difficult problem. But you people of some pretense to social standing are totally unmoral. You are the hardest class with which to deal. You band together and stick. Now, there has been an attempted murder here. If that knife had found its mark one of you three standing there in the dark against that curtain would now be dead. Quite bloodily extinguished. And," he added slowly, "it's by no means certain which one of you it would have been. That isn't a nice thought to carry round with you, is it?" Without waiting for an answer he went on : "So please sit down,

Barney, and do try not to complicate matters any more than they are. You might actually be helping to kill the thing you most love. There's a potential murderer at large among us, tonight, and there may be more than one."

Barney sat down promptly with a look of horrified amazement on his face. "The devil there is," he said.

"Yes," replied Munson. "Where the deuce is Manning?"

The door opened, and Manning, followed by June Lansing and Sam Stoughten, came into the room. Manning was by no means too drunk, but contained just the right quantity of liquor to lend inspiration to his hand. He was a man of some forty odd years, dapper, handsome, and possessed of a head of remarkably white hair. An unfailing attraction. Men could trust Manning, but not women, so they did and seemed to enjoy it. Manning, also. His practice had been so punctuated with scandals that he had practically abandoned the practice the better to apply himself to the scandals. A good doctor when he could be located. Independently rich.

"Sam had the devil of a time finding me," he announced, "and when he did . . . well . . ." The doctor left his sentence eloquently unfinished.

Going up to Daniel he rapidly examined the wound.

"Clean enough," he remarked, "but, Dan, my boy, you're going to have one hell of a fine arm for several weeks. All the way through. A good jab, that. Required strength." Turning to Munson, he added, "I thought something was up."

"You called for the light?" asked the latter.

"Yes," replied Manning. "Thought I detected a certain note in Daniel's voice. Made me nervous. Hand me my bag, Stoughten."

"Notice anything?" went on Munson.

"Altogether too dark. Not a cat." Manning was busy with Daniel's arm.

"It was an accident, doc," said Daniel significantly. "A piece of sheer carelessness. Aunt Matty just happened to have a knife in her hand and--"

"I understand perfectly," said Manning. "Those things happen every day, but" -- and here he gave Daniel a look of comprehension -- "Aunt Matty should not be allowed to play with knives."

"It's a habit," proclaimed Barney. "A menace. One must keep dodging her all the time. A very careless and near-sighted woman, and has been so from birth."

"Your nerves are shot to pieces, Dan," said the doctor, stepping back and critically regarding his handiwork. "Here," he went on, "I'm going to leave you a bottle of these. Take two in a half a glass of water in about half an hour. I always carry them to parties in case some woman gets laughing or crying or cursing too much. Nice girls we have with us these days." With one of his rapid changes he turned to Barney and said : "Just slip down the back way with this bag and get it into my car as quietly as you can."

A few minutes later the astute Barney had dragged Aunt Matty into the privacy of the pantry.

"You just stabbed Daniel in the arm," he informed her. "It was when the lights went out. Then you stabbed him with a long knife through the curtain. All a mistake, you understand. No hard feeling, no fits of passion."

"I'd rather have done it in a rage than through sheer carelessness," complained Aunt Matty. "Then I wouldn't have seemed such a fool."

"Well, just say anything you like," urged Barney. "Bayonet practice, for instance."

"Or merely a girlish whim," suggested Aunt Matty. "Is he really bad?"

"Not at all," Barney assured her. "He's just stabbed. That's all."

"Anything short of murder you can blame on me," she said. "I'm too old for things to make much difference now one way or the other, but I draw the line at murder for some quaint reason."

As Barney hurried away the old lady looked pensively at the gently swinging door. "There's something wrong going on in this house," she thought to herself, "but I can't put my finger on it, although I feel I'm getting hot."

Back in the room Barney assumed an unnatural and unconvincing air of briskness. "Got safely through the lines, Dr. Manning," he announced, "without anyone seeing me."

"Except Aunt Matty," remarked Munson.

"How did you know that?" asked Barney, and was outraged when everyone laughed.

"All out now," commanded Manning, "except June Lansing. Ever put a man to bed, June?"

"Yes," she assented calmly. "Often." "Who?" demanded Daniel.

"Father," smiled June. "At times mother would have nothing to do with him."

Munson unlocked the bureau drawer and gingerly withdrew the knife. At the sight of the stained blade an inimical presence seemed to have entered the room. All pretense of light-heartedness died out. The little group looked serious and defensive. Scott Munson was no longer one of them, but to this attitude he appeared entirely indifferent. He confronted Barney and pointed with one long finger to the hilt of the knife.

"Aunt Matty's," he remarked unsmilingly. "Her finger-prints. Don't mind if I just make sure? Hand me one of those glasses, Sam. I'd like a bit of a night-cap."

Realizing how suspicious it would appear not to comply with Munson's request, Stoughten obeyed. Scott Munson watched him closely, noting the exact position of his fingers. Then he poured himself adrink. With the glass in one hand and the knife in the other, he turned to the door. Then he halted and looked at Barney. That dismayed young man, as if fascinated, followed the direction of Munson's eyes and obediently opened the door for him. With a curt good night, Munson left the room.

"That is what I call a real cheery exit," remarked Manning.

"It's his way," replied Daniel. "When he's once started he turns into a torturer. Seems to check his heart until called for. May I have a shot, doctor? I'm damn well tired now."

"Haven't the heart to refuse."

"Pour out the drinks, Sam," said Daniel.

"Come, cheer up everybody," suggested Barney, trying to be helpful. "The worst is yet to come."

Both Daniel and Stoughten looked at him with hostile eyes.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" he asked nervously. "Why the devil is everyone so subdued and jumpy? Feel like going down and getting foaming drunk myself."

"Do," urged Daniel smoothly. "Get good and drunk, and then go to bed. It wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Sweet advice from a brother," retorted Barney. "Come along, Sam, and get me drunk."

Stoughten finished his drink and followed Barney from the room. At the door Barney looked back. "Too bad it wasn't your throat," he said.

"On your way, baby," called Daniel. "Outside."

\* \*

For the past half-hour Daniel had been sleeping quietly. June attributed his restful slumber to the tablets she had given him. Had she but known it, the contents of the glass now lay; on the floor in a neat little pool between the wall and the bed. Daniel had no idea of indulging in sleeping potions that night. There was still a thing to do.

Munson came quietly into the room and stood looking down at the sleeping man's averted face.

"You gave him the tablets?" he asked.

"Half an hour ago," said June.

"Then he's through for the night," he remarked in a tone of relief.

He departed as noiselessly as he had entered and sought the privacy of his own room. Yes, Daniel was through for the night, he reflected. This little stabbing incident had perhaps settled many problems. He was content it had been no worse. Lighting a cigarette, he sat down in a comfortable chair. Sam Stoughten had tried and failed. Apparently in addition to her other gifts Emily-Jane also possessed a charmed life. Munson wondered if she suspected the intended destination of that long searching blade or whose hand had held the knife. Stoughten would now be afraid to act further. Munson held the evidence against him. The finger-prints on the knife were identical to those on the glass. He had assured himself of that. Both exhibits were now locked up in a safe place. Scott Munson relaxed and enjoyed his cigarette.

\* \*

June Lansing rose quietly and picked up Daniel's vest, which had slipped to the floor from the arm of a chair. On the matting beneath the vest lay a scattering of letters. Without hesitation she opened one of the letters and began to read. Perhaps this letter might help her to discover what all the trouble was about. It was no time to stand on ceremony. As she read a slow red flush gradually mounted to her face. Seating herself, she glanced at Daniel and returned once more to the letter.

At the end of half an hour she rose slowly, slipped the letters into Daniel's pocket and mechanically hung up the garment in the closet. The last lingering traces of girlhood seemed to have left her face. For a long time she stood looking down at the man she loved, whose secret she now held, whose problem she understood. A wave of sympathy for him went out from her. He was momentarily free from his burden. Peace after weeks of heart-eating worry was with him. Peace and helplessness. For tonight, at least, he was safe. But Daniel, she knew, would never let Barney marry Emily-Jane.

The orchestra was playing "Home, Sweet Home." Its strains drifted up to the listening girl. She glanced at her wrist-watch . . . two-thirty. The close of Emily-Jane's dance, a huge personal triumph and a greedily received display. Emily-Jane must be quite well satisfied. Pleased with herself, in fact. At the thought of the girl, June's face became hard and set. In her eyes lay a frozen light, impersonal, cold, inscrutable. There was something about her at that moment that suggested the aloof, unapproachable magnificence of a statue of justice. Something huge and unalterable.

Once more she looked down at the sleeping man, stretched out one hand, hesitated and withdrew it.

Then she turned slowly, very slowly away from the bed. And she left the room.

\* \*

Daniel was at the door listening.

Just outside in the hall Barney was bidding good night to Emily-Jane.

"I love you, Emily-Jane," Barney was saying, in a pathetically inadequate voice considering the depth of his emotions. "To me you are the most beautiful damn creature in the world."

Emily-Jane laughed softly, a trifle impatiently, the listening man thought. "Be a good boy, Barney," he heard her say. "Trot off to bed and go to sleep. I must run down now and see some of the gang off. You're not so good at that."

A moment later, when Barney thrust his head in at his brother's door, Daniel was back in bed. Satisfied he was safely asleep, Barney's head was withdrawn, and the door closed softly.

Daniel, in spite of his wounded arm, slipped into his domino. To hell with the pain. A drink, must have a drink. He found the bottle and drank. Then he went to the window and waited, looking out over the night.

A late moon, like an overripe cantaloup badly damaged in shipment, was rising over the Cliff Path. Daniel regarded it without either interest or appreciation.

Presently he saw two figures detach themselves from the shadows and pass down the path in the direction of High Point Rock. One figure was unmistakable. Its slim legs flashed out from the kimono. An attractive effect in the moonlight. Still Daniel waited. At the end of ten minutes he rose from his crouching position and went to another window, climbed carefully through it and seized the limb of the old tree. Already his wound was open and bleeding. Along his, left arm ran a moist, burning sensation. Daniel was indifferent to it. Indifferent now to everything. Once on the ground, he sought the protection of the trees and moved through the darkness in a direction parallel with the Cliff Path but more protected from observation.

But Daniel was not the only nocturnal stalker on that particular night; there were others, and Death was guiding their feet.

\* \*

From behind a thicket of wind-worried bushes Daniel listened and watched. He saw Emily-Jane drink from a small container that flashed in the sad moonlight and he heard her reckless laughter as she returned it to her companion. Blood was now trickling from Dan's fingers, but he was unconscious of it. The night wind was cool on his forehead, and from the base of High Point Rock the sea spread on and on to God knows where. How pleasant it was to be there and to

smell the scent of the salt mingling with that of the shrubs and earth still moist from yesterday's rain. For a moment Dan was once more a child with little Barney. They were looking for berries and birds' nests, and Daniel did most of the finding. At the thought of Barney his eyes returned to the figures standing on the edge of the great rock.

They had become merged now. They were one. And Lane Holt's triumphant laughter smote his ears. It was hateful to hear--unbearable. Then Daniel heard Emily-Jane speaking, unabashed and unafraid. "No, Lane, no," she was saying, "he doesn't matter in the least. It will make no difference, my man. You are my man, aren't you, Lane? My unholy, unfaithful lover?"

And Holt: "That last crack, honey, goes two ways."

"In what else is the joy of life?" came the voice of Emily-Jane.

And that was the last word she ever uttered.

Breaking from the bushes Daniel slipped between them. Hot with drink, Emily-Jane flung herself upon the intruder. Daniel had her by the naked shoulder with his one good hand. His bloody hand smashed into the face of Holt. It was not a fist, just a red mangled flail. From the bushes another black figure came at the group. Its gaze was directed not at the swaying figures, but rather on the ground at the edge of the rock. Still violently holding Emily-Jane, Daniel turned to Holt. The man was no longer there. He was slinking along the Cliff Path, peering back over his shoulder. Then he vanished from view. The other black figure, sobbing quietly to itself, backed into the bushes. With a strange sensation of sudden release, Daniel turned back to Emily-Jane. She, too, had vanished.

And Daniel stood alone, peering down into the blackness where lay the great broken rocks upon which he and Barney had played in

bygone years.

A lone, black figure in the dwindling moonlight, high up against an unresponsive sky . . . peering, peering, peering down to where a shattered figure lay all unheedful of the low nervous mouthings of the surf.

# VII. DOWN THERE

HOW he succeeded in reaching the foot of the cliff Daniel never remembered. For a short time his mind was blank, numb, incapable of recording external impressions. He wanted to know. He wanted to be sure. With his own eyes he wanted to see his terrible handiwork lying there in the darkness.

And as he staggered, bruised and aching, among the broken rocks, he found her, the shattered mass once known as Emily-Jane. Then, there alone in the darkness he knelt by the body of the girl and laid a hand on her upturned face. A bloody end of the bandage fell against her cheek. He was forgetful of his own danger. His only desire was to be alone with his victim . . . to brood there beside her in the damp and dark.

Sea waves washing and sea mist rising. A solitary figure crouched over the twisted body of a dead girl. Far, far away, over there somewhere in a dump of black trees, an old, weary moon, once as glorious as Emily-Jane, was going out, its pale face merely a memory of brighter nights gone by. And above all, the great black cliff, a threatening, watching mass of bitter stone.

God ! What had he done? Put a period to an evil life. Yes, but perhaps even the most distorted life had rights of its own. Gone now his assurance of rectitude. Gone now the desperate courage that had seen him through the act. He was merely Daniel now, Daniel alone and afraid.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the shadows at the base of the cliff, he could see more distinctly the distorted figure of Emily-Jane. Her bare legs lay sprawled and twisted, lending to the nearly nude body a suggestion of obscenity. One arm was crushed unnaturally beneath

the naked back, and Daniel saw with dilated eyes how frightfully the skull had been smashed. There was a black stain around the hair.

This thing he had done. This ruin he had created.

With back-drawing hands he did what he could for the grotesque body of the girl he had hated so intensely in life. Now that she was incapable of further evil, now that she was helpless, no longer an object of envy and admiration, his former loathing was gone. He straightened the outflung limbs and removed the arm from beneath the shattered back. It was a rough job, but at the end Emily-Jane looked a little more as she would have preferred to look when found. She was now not quite so defenseless.

Then Daniel did a strange thing for this age of rationalism. Moved by some unknown chord in his nature, he lifted up his hands to the dripping blackness and offered a numbed, formless prayer. He prayed for himself and for Barney. He prayed blindly, voicelessly, for all mankind and even for Christ himself, who must suffer along with man. Then he rose and left the rocks and walked through the sand. Emily-Jane lay behind him, beyond all good and evil.

He had done the thing he had planned. She was dead, and now Barney must suffer. The boy would suffer. Perhaps, if he ever found out he would come to hate the brother who had eternally sacrificed the peace of his soul to save him from inevitable sorrow and humiliation.

Daniel was mortally weak. The long beach stretched ahead of him. Beneath his feet the sand resisted his fumbling tread. If only June were there to help him on. Then silently out of the darkness, like black wings from the sea, fear came to Daniel. Panic-fear, blind and selfish, the fear of death, the fear of detection, and of the consequences of detection.

Like a wild, hunted thing he stopped and sought to penetrate the night with his terror-stricken eyes. A bloody, trembling hand smeared his lips. His head moved grotesquely from side to side, and slowly, as if reluctantly, he sank lower and lower until he found himself crouching in the sand like some hateful beast.

The body on the rocks whose blood he had splashed, was it following him silently down the beach? Hideous dead eyes that cared not for darkness. Reaching hands that plucked. And laughter ! God ! The laughter of the revengeful, maddened dead. He rose and lurched for-ward. But what lay before him? Discovery, capture, and death set by the clock. Not sudden death, but death that sits and waits with you and studies your face with assured but averted eyes. Yet, anything was better than this awful beach and the body on the rocks.

Daniel shambled onward, his red bandage slipping down his arm and trailing from his sleeve.

Would Barney ever know the deaths his brother died for him that night? Dazedly Daniel wondered if his own soul lay behind him, shattered upon the rocks with Emily-Jane.

"Peace, God, peace. For a moment let me forget." Daniel staggered and fell. The sand gave rest to his body, but God did not speak.

\* \*

From a sound sleep Scott Munson suddenly awoke. He wondered why. What had called him? Looking at his watch, he placed the hour at three-thirty. Pitch-black outside. A silent house. Munson knew that for some good reason he was awake. Then he became aware of the reason. Through the open window a mist was driving in from the sea. His hair and face were wet.

Something else, however, had happened to claim his activity. Within the last few hours some new misfortune had come to the old house. Scott Munson felt this vaguely, as a person awaking suddenly in a dark room sometimes feels the presence of a stranger, unseen but close at hand.

He snapped a cigarette into action and tightened the belt of his smoking jacket. Yet even now, as he stood smoking reflectively before his door, Scott Munson was not sure of the exact nature of the trouble nor what line to take.

"Just smouse round a bit," he decided, "is the best I can do at present."

With this somewhat vague line of action in mind he opened the door he had been looking at as if for some helpful suggestion, and stepped out into the dim light of the silent hall.

From the head of the stairs he discovered Sam Stoughten on the point of making the ascent.

"Things are looking up," was Munson's thought as he studied Stoughten's white face.

Sam looked as if he had just been tossed in a blanket by all the fiends in hell. The expression of strain and horror round his eyes particularly interested Munson, who was studying him intently behind a mask of genial surprise. Also, he noted that the longer he maintained that genial mask, the more Sam's hand trembled on the banister below. So Munson maintained the mask and quietly took note until at last he feared his poor victim would fall in a swoon or else become an idiot, in either of which cases he would lose his usefulness for Munson.

"Well," he said, as Sam was actually about to collapse, "why don't you come on up? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

It was an unfortunate way to open a conversation with Sam that night.

"Ghost?" croaked Sam, promptly sitting down on the stairs with his back to Munson. "Ghost? I don't understand. Don't let's talk. It's much too late."

"Never too late for ghosts," observed Munson heartily. "Especially for new ghosts."

He had the satisfaction of seeing Sam's broad back give a violent lurch. Also, he observed that to the lurching back clung several wet leaves.

"Well, if you don't want to talk with me about ghosts," he continued, "why don't you come upstairs?"

"Haven't made up my mind," Sam had the wit to reply. "I've been drinking and I'm a little worried about seeing Sue."

"Sporting of you to admit it," said Munson. "Where have you been holding your revels?"

"In there," declared Sam, pointing to the dining-room. "Alone. Heavily. That's why I'm this way. Goofy."

"I hate to stand here talking to your back," observed Munson, "so I think I'll skip down and talk to your face until you've made up your mind."

"Oh, I'm coming right up," declared Sam, rising as promptly as he had sat down. "Don't trouble yourself about me."

But it was much too late. Munson had literally skipped down and seized Sam by the arm with a friendly but firm grasp.

"Too drunk to talk," objected Sam, making a pretense of reaching for the stairs with a wavering foot.

"Not sure," said Munson. "Let me smell your breath."

Sam drew back as if the very idea revolted him to the marrow.

"I was merely considering your wife," explained Munson. "Come in, and show me where dwelleth this drink."

Attempting a crablike mode of progress, Sam allowed himself to be forcibly conducted to the dining-room where Munson gently eased him into a chair.

"Now, Sam," he said cheerfully, "we'll both have a slight nip. Where is the stuff?"

Receiving no reply, he searched busily round the room, then returned to the despondent Sam and stood looking reproachfully down at him.

"Why, Sam," he said, "there isn't a dram in the place."

"Drank it all," replied Sam moodily.

"What did you do with the bottle?"

"Threw it away."

"Where, Sam?"

Sam was staggered. "Through the window," he said at last.

"Which window?"

"That one," replied Sam with a sweep of his arm that included all the windows in the room.

"You lush," proclaimed Munson admiringly. "It's terrible," admitted Sam.

"And where did all those leaves come from, sticking to your back?" suddenly demanded Munson.

Sam began to think he was really drunk. "Fell into a plant," he offered.

"What plant, Sam?" Munson's voice went on. "There isn't a plant in the room."

"Threw it away, too," said Sam with decision.

"That was rather rough," observed Munson. "Just where did you throw it, Sam?"

Oh, God, would this devil never cease?

"Through the same window," said Sam in a whisper. "Sure you didn't carry it out?" continued Munson. "Certain," replied Sam.

"Then why the mud on your shoes? Look at them." Sam refused to look. "Mud from the plant," he announced triumphantly. "I was watering it. Felt sorry for the thing."

"And then you thoughtfully wiped up all traces of mud from the floor," said Munson approvingly. "That was nice of you, Sam."

"The least I could do," modestly replied Sam. "Too bad you split your

domino while doing it," observed Munson sympathetically.

"Doesn't matter," said Sam. "Sue'll mend it."

"Well, I wouldn't tell her the same pack of lies you've told me," said Munson, his voice losing its easy banter and taking on a keen edge of irony. "I wouldn't do that, Sam, because it will only make matters worse. Make you look er--guilty, Sam, if you get what I mean. As a matter of fact, it's none of my damn business . . . yet. You'd better go to bed, old man, and don't worry about staggering."

Sam raised an ashen face to Munson. His eyes were filled with fever. Tragedy lay therein, and looking at him Munson felt a twinge of pity. His heart was heavy, for to some extent, Sam's lies had confirmed his worst suspicions.

Without attempting an answer, Sam rose slowly and left the room. He climbed the stairs and made his way directly to Daniel's room. He opened the door and looked in. Daniel's bed was empty. "Christ !" muttered Sam helplessly. "Oh, Christ, he's done for!"

He sought his own room and sat down in the dark to wait. His door was slightly open to permit him to see the hall. Sue, the complete sleeper, continued her gentle tribute to one of her favorite occupations. Sam sat and waited.

\* \*

Alone in the dining-room, Munson wandered about restlessly. He was deeply disturbed now. Sam's conduct had sharpened the edge of his fear. As he passed the door to the pantry he stopped and peered through the glass. Suddenly he realized that there was a light in the kitchen. Why the light? More smousing.

Quietly he passed through the pantry, and standing in the dark,

looked into the kitchen. No luck this time. It was only June Lansing sitting by the stove. With her usual composure she was sipping a cup of tea. The teapot stood on a nearby table.

Tea was a good idea. Why not some tea?

"May I have a cup, too?" he asked, entering the kitchen noiselessly.

For a moment June looked at him unseeingly as if still caught in the web of her thoughts. Then she shook herself slightly and smiled. "You're just in time," she replied. "The tea is in the full flavor of its youth."

Munson drew up a chair and accepted the proffered cup. "How's your patient?" he asked.

"Dreamless," said June. "A perfect patient."

"A strange happening," suggested Munson.

"It's one of those things that is better left untouched," she replied, looking at him frankly. "Like a hot coal," she added.

"But don't you think attempted murder demands some investigation?" he asked.

"I prefer to regard it in the light of an accident," said June enigmatically. "And accidents don't count."

For the first time he noticed that one of her slippers was missing. Interesting. June, following the direction of his gaze, smiled and extended her stockinged foot; at the same time withdrawing the other.

"Corns," she announced briefly.

Munson smiled in turn. "These modern shoes," he remarked. "Inventions of the devil."

"They certainly play the devil with one's feet," agreed June.

"June," said Munson after a meditative silence, "I'm worried. I've the strangest feeling something has happened."

"Something always does," she replied.

"But not something terrible," said Munson. "What is it all about?"

For a moment or so she considered him thoughtfully, and Munson felt that he detected an unfamiliar expression in her eyes and a new maturity about her face. She was somehow different. "I've noticed it, too, Scott," she replied at last. "I've felt things going on and remarked changes in people, but no one takes me into his confidence. I have my suspicions, and, Scott, I believe they're the same as yours."

"Emily-Jane?" said Munson.

June nodded.

"There's more to that young lady than meets the eye," observed Munson.

"Not much if you saw her tonight," said June with a smile.

"Daniel is out of luck about something," said Munson. "I'd do anything to help him, June."

"So would I," the girl replied. "And you know that, Scott."

"I do," he said, then added, "Damn that girl."

"I guess she's pretty well damned herself already," said June, "but I doubt if she knows it."

"That's what makes me afraid," said Munson, and the two of them sat regarding each other with thoughtful eyes.

\* \*

When Daniel rose from the sand he had driven off his unreasoning, brutish panic. Fear was still with him, had been added to his other emotions, but it was the fear of the intelligent man calculating and weighing the chances of escaping the consequences of a rash and terrible deed.

His arm had not become stiff for the reason that he had given it no opportunity, but it ached and burned so intensely that he felt he was carrying a flame at his side. Stubbornly refusing to think of anything save ways and means of getting back to his room undetected, he plodded on down the beach and, circling the embankment, made his way into the security of the trees. He had decided to return to his room by the same way he had left it, regardless of the damage the exertion might do to his arm. Quietly he moved through the darkness, swaying as he went, like a drunkard trying to escape observation. He little realized that his brain was not functioning with its customary accuracy. It was skipping the essential details.

\* \*

Munson, poised at the head of the stairs, drew back quickly. Someone was coming out of Emily-Jane's room, and the person was not Emily-Jane. The watching man waited with indrawn breath as the door slowly opened. Lane Holt, after a quick look along the hall, slid through the partly opened door which he quickly locked behind him. Carrying the key in his hand he tip-toed to his room.

"If the door had been locked from the inside after his guilty exit, I could see some sense in the business," thought Scott Munson. "As it is, I am greatly perplexed--deeply interested."

From the darkness of his doorway Sam Stoughten was watching Munson. When he saw him approach Daniel's room, his heart sank and his brain began to work at top speed. Anything to help Dan. He slipped from his room and locked himself in the nearby bath-room, where he waited. It was merely a chance, a futile attempt, perhaps, but it might give Daniel time or an alibi.

Munson looked into Daniel's room and found the bed empty. Odd. How could that be? Perhaps the effects of the drug had worn off. Perhaps-- He closed the door and walked down the hall to the bathroom. The door was locked.

"Dan," he called in a low voice.

"Yes, Scott," came Daniel's voice.

"What the devil are you doing out of bed?"

"Don't ask foolish questions," came the reply.

"How do you feel . . . how's the arm?"

"Both doing well, thank you. Want to come in and have a nice little chat?"

"No," said Munson, slightly nettled. "But you'd better get back to bed as quickly as possible."

"I never linger, Scott," came the voice. "Good night, old man."

Munson continued on to his room, where he sat down to consider

things. He went over the scanty gleanings of the night, but some disturbing thought kept cutting across his reflections. Why, damn it all, he had it. Their voices sounded alike, remarkably so. And the similarity could be made almost perfect if deliberately attempted. What a fool he had been. Well, he deserved it. Only a short time ago he had rather shamefully made a fool of Sam. He had even decided from Sam's futile attempts to lie that he really was a bit of a fool. Evidently not.

Munson rose swiftly and returned to the bathroom. It was unoccupied. Sam had returned to his own room after having waited a little more than a reasonable length of time. He did not know whether or not his effort had been of help to Daniel, but he hoped for the best.

When Munson opened Daniel's door he experienced an odd conflict of emotions. He was both disgusted and relieved to find him back in bed. But as his eyes strayed to the open window, the feeling of relief vanished.

On the white woodwork of the sill was the mark of a bloody hand--four dark red fingers and the lower part of the palm. The missing section failed to show on the darker wood of the sill proper.

Sam had done his best, but his best had not been good enough.

# VIII. THE BODY ON THE ROCKS

THROUGH the slanting rays of a new sun that promised great things if given time, Pete Clark, occasional fisherman and confirmed seeker of solitude and rest, gently nosed his odorous old boat against the small beach just under High Point Rock. Pete had no reason in particular for this enterprising landing. As a matter of fact, Pete never had any reason for doing any of the things he did. Therefore he was a happy man. Realizing that his boat had found its way to a rather pleasant haven, Pete considered the advisability of entrusting his valuable person to the shore. It seemed the logical thing to do, and Pete did it, but not because it was logical.

In the course of his purposeless amblings, his speculative eye dwelt on a small bright object lying near by in the sand. Inasmuch as this object was actually near by, to be exact, no farther from Pete than three paces, this excellent navigator decided to pick it up. This he did, and after examining it with purely esthetic enjoyment slipped it into a trustworthy pocket, wondering as he did so just what the hell it was. As to wonder was to worry, that is for Pete, he gave it up and continued his snaillike tour of inspection.

Suddenly, that is if the arresting of so slow a progress could be called sudden, Pete stopped. His long arms froze to the seams of his trousers, and his eyes became glued to the mass of shelving, broken rocks. Altogether Pete was a most unpicturesque object. But Pete had one saving feature, developed from long gazings on distant horizons. Pete had good eyes, keen though disarmingly vague and mild. He was now using those eyes as he had never used them in all the years of their looking.

What he saw was the body of a girl, most improperly clad, lying on the rocks. And Pete's eyesight told him that the body would never

move again of its own volition. But Pete moved. He moved by slow stages as if fascinated, until at last he found himself standing over the body of the dead girl.

And so it was Pete Clark, of humble calling and few demands, who first found all that remained of the beautiful and highly admired Emily-Jane.

Just what was the nature of the thoughts that passed through the mind of Pete on that bright, fair morning, as he stood with the lonely sea as a background and contemplated the broken body of the beautiful girl, is not recorded, but awe was written on his seamed and sun-dyed face. Some minutes passed before the practical side of Pete's nature asserted itself. Then it was that he began dimly to realize the fact that he knew this girl, for Pete was by way of being a local character, well received in the highest as well as the more modest kitchens. This girl was none other than Miss Emily-Jane Seabrook, Mr. Barney's young lady.

Once this fact had become firmly fixed in the bemused brain of Pete Clark, his movements thereafter were merely automatic. With meticulous solicitude he beached his pride and joy, and after eying the results of his efforts with approval, departed down the beach at a pace which for Mr. Peter Clark was a trifle above terrific.

Thus it came about that at six o'clock Pete presented himself for the first time at the front door of the Crewe Mansion and commanded the infuriated maid to summon Mr. Barney with the utmost expedition. He intimated darkly that all was far from well. Dubiously and ungraciously the maid departed, and in a surprisingly short time for Barney he appeared on the scene and hurried to the door where Pete was unhappily lurking.

"Come in, Pete," called Barney. "What's all this about bad news ?

Anything wrong at home? How about a drink?"

As Pete stood listening to Barney and remembering him as a tumbling cub, his heart grew heavier and heavier and his tongue seemed turned to stone. Casual-minded as he was, Pete instinctively sensed the tragic irony of the situation. Young Barney offering him the sympathy that he himself soon would be needing.

"Mr. Barney," he began, and halted.

"Yes, Pete, what is it?" asked Barney, reading the trouble in his old friend's face. "Is it as bad as all that?"

"Fraid it is, Mr. Barney," said Pete. "It's worse. Your young lady, sir, is lying at the base of High Point Rock and--"

Barney just looked at him with a question, a plea in his eyes. Just looked at him and waited.

"Yes," said Pete. "Yes, Mr. Barney, she is."

Barney stiffened as if a current of electricity had been suddenly shot through his body. Then slowly he began to sway. Pete was able to stand it no longer. He took young Barney in his arms.

"Boy, boy," he muttered, "come over here and sit down. We'll get Mr. Dan for you. He'll take care of you now."

"Yes, Pete, get Dan," said Barney, forgetting his brother's wound. "I think I'd like to have Dan."

\* \*

There it was! The knock! The fateful sound for which he had been waiting throughout all the years of his life, it seemed . . . waiting and

preparing. During the early hours of the morning he had risen and cut away as much as he could of the red, frayed bandage. With his right hand he had encased his arm in a clean towel, pinned it somehow, and let it go at that. Now he was ready for the summons.

The knocking continued with increasing urgency. Weakly he rolled from his bed and went to the door. "Yes," he called. "What is it?"

"Oh, Mr. Dan," came the voice of Dora, one of the maids, "Mr. Barney wants you bad. An awful thing has happened. He's downstairs."

"Tell him I'll be with him." Daniel's voice was choked.

Barney wanted him. God Almighty, what irony! Barney wanted him. And he must face Barney with the accusing truth in his heart. He had brought this sorrow to his own brother by slaying the thing he loved. Thank God, the sincerity of his sympathy for Barney would help to carry him through the ordeal.

Daniel was an ill man, weak from fatigue and the loss of blood. The terrible strain of all that he had gone through already had ravaged his face. Devitalizing fever was burning in his veins. He realized that his arm was now in a dangerous condition. In spite of all this, some reserve of power, some force of pride lay within him and gave him strength--the strength that kills its possessor. But far above all other factors was his affection for his brother. The knowledge that Barney needed him at this moment urged him on.

He struggled into his dressing-gown. With one hand on the edge of the bureau he steadied himself and threw back his shoulders, his head well up, then like a man about to take a perilous plunge he made for the door. It was surprisingly opened for him by Scott Munson, fully clad and alert. For a brief moment their eyes met and

Daniel's threw back a challenge. Then Munson's gaze shifted to the blood marks on the white surface of the window ledge. Daniel, following his gaze, received a shock so numbing that it left him outwardly frozen. Its effect was not apparent, He merely grinned back at Munson.

"No time for hound work, Scott," he said. "Barney needs me."

Munson bowed. He had asked for the slur and got it.

"Sure you can stand it, Dan?" he asked.

"I have to stand it, Scott."

"All right. Come on."

Together they walked down the hall and descended the stairs, Daniel displaying no sign of weakness. Barney was sitting on a long bench in the hall, and Pete Clark, silently protective, was standing by. At the sound of his brother's familiar tread, Barney raised his face, and slowly his chin and lips began to quiver until at last a gasp broke from him. He gripped the bench with both hands and dropped his head. Why was he such a baby? Daniel would know he wasn't a baby and would tell the others so. It was all right now. Daniel had come. Daniel's arms were about him and he hid his face in his brother's robe.

"Go ahead, kid," Dan was saying. "Go ahead, Barney. Do as you damn well please. Look, boy, look at me. See, I'm crying, too."

And, in truth, Daniel was crying. Tears were running down his haggard cheeks, although he made no sound. Daniel was crying inwardly for the grief of his brother. Barney looked up at Daniel as if for confirmation. With a slender finger he touched one of the tears on his brother's face.

"Don't, Dan," he whispered. "Don't feel so sad." He hesitated, then added in a voice of incredulity, "She's gone, Dan, she's . . . oh, Dan, she's dead." Then Barney broke, and the terrible sobs of a man wrenched themselves from his breast.

"That's the boy, Barney," Daniel murmured, holding his shaking brother and swaying gently. "Just like long ago, Barney, when things went wrong. But they always came right, didn't they? And they'll come right now."

They were alone, each with a racked heart, and the years fell away. Once more they were boys together, sharing each other's woes. But this time it was the elder brother who needed the greater comforting. And just as in those other days, a sea breeze passed down the hall and found its way to the old, drifting orchard.

"Don't you mind, Barney. Don't you mind."

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Munson slapped the telephone back on its fork and sat back in his chair, regarding the squat instrument gloomily.

"God damn everything," he said quite slowly and distinctly, "including myself."

His arrangements had been made. The district attorney, summoned from his bed at that early hour, had agreed to put him in complete charge of the case. The district attorney at that early hour would have agreed to anything--anything at all if he were only allowed speedily to return to bed.

"Play no favorites, Scott," he had said, "and call on the local authorities."

And when Munson had told him where to go, the district attorney had yawned. Two more telephone conversations had set the machinery in motion.

This was the first case in his career that Munson had approached with dread. He had insisted on taking it because he knew that things would be even worse if outsiders were let loose in that old, friendly house. Yet he roundly damned everything, including himself. His hands came down with a snap on the mahogany arms of his chair. He rose briskly and went to the open window of the library.

"Pete Clark," he called.

Pete sped down the veranda at the rate of at least twelve miles an hour.

"Did you find the gardener, Griggs?"

"I did, sir, and I sent him to stand by the body."

"Thank you, Pete. Do you mind standing by here for a short time?"

"Well, sir, if I could sit--"

"Certainly, Pete. Sit, collapse, or contort, but just stick around."

"Thank you, Mr. Munson."

"I thank you."

Munson left the library and stood waiting in the hall. He had invited the household, exclusive of the servants, to confer with him immediately in the library. He now watched its various members descend the stairs and enter that pleasant room. There was a

method in what he did. It interested him to note the manner in which each person looked at him as he or she passed by.

Sam Stoughten's expression had been that of a rather anxious shamefaced boy whose sins had only partially found him out. His wife's had been merely that of a very much worried wife who wished everything would settle down again so that she could deal properly with her fool of a husband. Lane Holt's had been that of a man who hides his fear behind a swagger. Aunt Matty's had been merely one businesslike question-mark-- "What's happened to our house, Scott?" June Lansing's had been thoughtful and searching. Daniel's expression had been that of a man so weary he no longer cared much. In Barney's eyes Scott read the greatest trouble. Grief had left them a trifle wild and a trifle brooding. They were not the eyes of a sane man. He had been the only one who had looked at Munson and not seen him. Barney was turning in, trying to puzzle something out, to catch a lost impression or to map out some little plan of his own.

"You don't have to go through all this, Barney," Munson had told him, placing a kindly but restraining hand on his shoulder.

"But I must go in," Barney had replied, and moved on with lowered head. "I might help you, Scott," he had tossed back.

Munson entered the library and confronted the little group.

"I'm nervous," he said, "and worried. I guess we all are. I won't keep you long here because we have a harder task ahead. Here, then, is the situation." He addressed himself to Daniel. "You can have me handle the case, for I have full authority already, or you can entrust yourselves to the usual agents of the law--the law which at present I represent. It is for you to decide whether you prefer me among you or some other equally distasteful person or persons. If--"

"Stay here and do your worst, Scott," interrupted Daniel. "You can't help it. In a way you're doing us all a kindness, even if it hurts."

"Thanks, Dan," replied Munson. "You always were a sport."

"See here!" Holt was on his feet, mouthing aggressively. "What's all this about, anyway? You don't know that a crime has been committed. What right have you to assume so? It's the most irregular way of carrying on I've ever encountered."

"A crime has been committed." Barney's voice came startlingly from a corner.

"Holt, in some respects, is justified in what he says," continued Munson calmly. "My methods are somewhat unofficial, but they have a few saving virtues. They are quiet. They are intelligent. They are absolutely uninfluenced by self-interest or any desire to win official recognition. And that means a lot. As to the question of a crime having been committed, I think that most of us present will agree with me when I say a crime has been committed and that that crime is murder. Anyway, I am already in possession of certain information conclusive enough to convince me. And by the way, Holt" -- Munson stepped across the room and stood over the lounging figure -- "may I ask for that key?"

Holt's face grew white. He sprang to his feet. "You damned spy!" he cried.

Munson smiled pleasantly. "Please don't keep us waiting," he said. "We have other things to do."

There was the sound of an automobile stopping at the front entrance. Munson, looking through the window, saw several local constables alighting from a disreputable machine. Lane Holt, turning round, also

saw them.

"Would you like to be searched?" asked Munson. "You see the law is already in operation." Munson's manner suddenly changed. He leaned forward and held the man with his eyes, eyes stinging with fury. "Hurry up," he said in a low voice. "I want that key."

Holt reeled back as if struck by a snake. His expression registered both fear and surprise. Was the man confronting him Scott Munson? God, no. He was a demon--hate in the body of man.

"I'm waiting. I'm waiting," thrilled Munson's voice.

Holt's fingers fumbled in his watch pocket and withdrew a key which he extended to Munson with a shrinking hand as if in mortal fear of coming in contact with him. When Munson accepted the key it seemed as if every person in the room breathed easier.

"And did you get what you were after?" he inquired sarcastically.

"No," came hoarsely from Holt.

"If you had," went on Munson in an even, venomous voice, "I'd have got that too. Now, listen, Holt. Even before this investigation has got well under way you've made yourself liable to arrest for attempted theft. Sit down now and think that over. You called me a spy. Of course I'm a spy. At present that's my one occupation, and I hate it. But it doesn't take much of a spy to find out what you've been doing ever since you accepted the hospitality of Daniel and Barney Crewe."

Munson paused and turned to face the others in the room. His eyes seemed to hold everybody in a spell like some bad dream.

"I'm a spy," he announced. "Anyone who ever finds out anything is, in

one sense or another, a spy has to be a spy. That's one reason why I asked all of you here. To me you are all suspects, and as suspects you naturally come under my espionage. I will play no favorites, nor will I shirk the most unpleasant duty. I ask you not to regard me as your friend any longer, but merely as a man out to get the truth, to exonerate the innocent and to confront the guilty. Quite a speech, isn't it?" He paused, then hastened on: "Quite a speech, yes, but the situation must be made clear. It must be understood. If the guilty person can beat me, I for one won't blame him. Let him do it. I'd escape the consequences of a murder myself if I could. So, I say, go to it and escape if and when you can. I'm here to do a mean job that does not appeal at all to me, but I'm going to do it, and I'm going to show no mercy. And to be entirely frank with you all, the only persons in this room who have nothing to hide are Aunt Matty and young Barney over there. You are all against me and I'm against you all. But just the same that fact does not prevent me from liking you all and from wishing that things were different." He paused and turned to Holt. "Sit down!" he snapped. "I'll talk to you later."

Then he walked to his former position and half sat on a long table laden with books, magazines, papers, lamps, and ash trays--an untidy, comfortable table. Everyone present was amazed at the sudden urbanity of the man. He favored them all with a bland smile.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I made a mistake when I told you I liked you all. Personally, I never could bear the sight of Lane Holt, but just because of my feelings about him he will receive, if anything, more careful treatment than anyone else."

He walked over to a window and looked out as if expecting something. Then he once more returned to his former place and looked thoughtfully at each one of the group in turn.

"There is a murderer present," he said quietly, and the effect of that

simple statement was horrible, almost beyond endurance. "A murderer," he repeated as if to himself, "and he may be my friend. Funny. And even if I catch him I shall always regard him as my friend."

Abruptly he ceased speaking and, turning his back on his listeners, idly sorted the magazines on the table. For a full minute the room was submerged in a brooding silence. Barney, who had been growing gradually more excited throughout the course of Munson's talk, now began to tremble slightly. Daniel, watching him with solicitous eyes, was about to go to him when he was arrested by the sound of Holt's voice.

"What right have you to say that a murderer is present ?" he demanded. "What proof ?"

Without troubling to turn, Munson answered: "That's my business, Holt."

"No, it isn't, Scott," came the excited voice of Barney, at the sound of which both Daniel and Munson started forward. "No, it isn't. It's my business. I know the murderer now. I've just figured it out. He always hated her . . . he didn't want me to marry her . . . didn't want me to marry Emily-Jane! There he is! Look at him ! There is the murderer."

Barney's voice broke in hysteria and he pointed wildly at Daniel, who stood still with his hands hanging helplessly beside him. On his face there was an expression of profound sorrow as he said in a low, pleading voice, "Barney, kid. Oh, Barney, Barney, Barney."

And Barney laughed crazily, his trembling arm still extended toward Daniel.

"I tell you my own brother murdered Emily-Jane," he cried in a loud

voice. "Look at him. Look at him. Doesn't he look like a murderer? He killed her as sure as God."

And Daniel still stood there like a man crucified, his tired, tragic eyes striving to reach the heart of his brother. It was not what Barney said that mattered, but that his brother for whom he had gone through several cycles of hell with many more to come should have turned on him at this moment--that was the final affliction.

"Barney, old man, Barney," his voice called to his brother. "Come here, kid. Forget it. Don't be like that."

No one will ever know whether or not Barney was answering that call when he took two steps forward, then crumpled to the floor.

In an instant Daniel had gathered him up in his arms and carried him to a sofa. The pain caused by this action caused him to stagger back against Scott Munson.

"Get a doctor, Scott," he said.

"He's already here," replied Munson. "See, he's taking care of Barney. It was only a nervous outburst, Daniel. Don't mind that. He knows you're his best friend."

He led Daniel to the pantry and made him sit down. Then he handed him a drink. Leaving him for a moment, he returned with Manning.

"My God, Dan," said the doctor, "you shouldn't have lifted your brother like that. Here, let me look at that arm."

Then, carrying on a rapid-fire conversation, he dressed and bandaged Daniel's arm, after which he took a drink himself and gave one to his patient.

Daniel, feeling his strength returning, followed Manning back to the library where Munson still held the group together. Barney, revived, had gone to his room under the care of Aunt Matty.

"Does he still believe?" Daniel asked as Scott Munson joined them.

"He's not right yet," said Munson, "but you mustn't mind him. All sensitive, high-strung temperaments are like that when overwrought."

"Then you're not going to arrest me?" asked Daniel, with a broken grin.

"Not on that kind of evidence, Dan," replied Munson. "Barney's ravings are not relevant." He looked Daniel squarely in the face and said: "We are all going to the rocks now. Are you strong enough to come? I had to talk myself hoarse this morning, waiting for that damn fool Manning. Of course we could have moved her before, but I've blocked off the entire point from cliff top to the beach. It's essential that I should see things for myself. Would you like to see her?"

It was a challenge that Daniel feared not to accept.

Back down to the beach again. Daniel recalled all the terrors of only a few short hours ago. This time he was accompanied by nearly all of the actors in the drama. Thank God, Barney was not among them. Daniel could never have stood that. Those stretcher-bearers, two stalwart fishermen, they were to bring Emily-Jane home. And he must look at her in full daylight under the watchful eye of Munson. Was that why they all were there? Munson, the torturer, always got his way. Well, he, Daniel, would fool him this time. He had used up all his emotions of any kind. He was as dead as Emily-Jane so far as caring was concerned.

He was walking with Manning now, and the doctor was helping him

along. "Munson's a brute," said Manning. "You should never have done this."

Daniel began to laugh. "Done what, doctor?" he demanded.

He knew the doctor was looking at him curiously, and he pulled himself together.

They had reached the rocks now. Munson was carefully shepherding them. Something to do with foot-prints, perhaps, or perhaps not. Somehow, June was on his other side. She was holding tight to his hand. Raise your head. Look. Don't laugh. For God's sake, don't laugh. "I did that." Should he shout it?

Yes, there was Emily-Jane. A little figure on a large rock. He knew what she looked like. He had made her so for this public exhibition. Hold tight, June.

"Jesus," muttered Manning behind them, "doesn't she look lonely?"

# IX. FROM BEACH TO CLIFF

ONCE more Emily-Jane was the center of all eyes. It almost seemed a pity that she couldn't have arisen in her ballet dress and performed one of her innocently suggestive little dances. Instead she lay there cold, picked out by an early sun as golden as her hair. As in life so in death, eyes looked at her fascinated, but this time there was a different quality in her spell.

Munson mounted the rock. For some minutes he stood looking down at the girl. Dark, lithe, and inscrutable he was. The sun splashed against his straight black hair. He stood motionless, his intense gaze photo-graphing every detail of the body and its immediate surroundings. Then, throwing back his head, he let his eyes travel slowly up the face of the cliff until they rested on the summit. There they remained fixed. He would have to go up there to the actual point of the departure of Emily-Jane from the world she had so successfully deceived. Once more he looked down at the dead girl as if trying to discover the reason for her existence.

"All right, Manning," he said, in a low voice that carried its calm tones clearly to the silent group of watchers.

Dr. Manning left Daniel's side and joined Munson on the rock.

"Manning," Munson said, "I waited for you so that you could give evidence at the inquest. I can rely on your discretion when you are discreet, and I might as well tell you now that I want the inquest to be a mere formality--wilful murder with an open field. You understand ?" He raised his dark eyes to those of the doctor.

"What a body, Munson," murmured Manning. "What a figure. Too bad. Too damn bad. Wasted. Lost. I understand."

The whole-hearted depravity of the man pleased Munson, who smiled grimly and said, "For the moment, Manning, I want your purely professional observations."

"You have them, Munson. What is it?"

"The position of that figure and certain other details," Munson continued, "tell me an interesting story. What do they tell you, Manning?"

For some time Manning's eyes roved over the body, then he looked up at Munson with puzzled eyes.

"In the first place, Munson," he said, "there's the position of the body itself. Graceful as she was in life, she just couldn't have fallen so gracefully. Impossible. She would have been all sprawled out or twisted. Somebody has fixed her. Decent of whoever it was. Then another thing, those blood smears on her face, they upset me. By rights they shouldn't be there. The face, fortunately, is uninjured. There is no reason--no way that I can see, for blood being there at all. My conclusion is that someone put those marks on her face in the dark. Probably it isn't her blood, but that of some wounded--" He gave a slight start and ended up with, "That's the way I see it."

"Thanks," said Munson. "Damned good. And that's the story I want you to tell at the inquest with the exception, with the very essential exception, of the wounded part. Now just one minute and we'll get this over. I want to let these people go back home to breakfast, if they can eat any."

Once more his eyes traveled over the little group at the foot of the rock.

"Pete," he called in a casual voice, "will you come up here for a

moment?"

For the second time that morning Pete ascended the rock, on this occasion with the dignity and deliberation of a semi-official consultant.

"Now, Pete," said Munson, with an indulgent smile, "you arrived at the Crewe house at six o'clock."

"Did I?" said Pete, quite pleased and surprised.

"Yes, Pete, you did," Munson assured him. "About how long were you on this beach altogether?"

"About an hour by the sun," replied Pete. "What I mean is, one hour from the time I landed until I called on Mr. Barney."

"So that puts you here just at about five o'clock," observed Munson. "Was the body when you found it exactly as it is now?"

"Exactly," replied Pete emphatically. "Just as she lays there now."

"Not likely that anyone else would be wandering round here before five, do you think, Manning?" asked Munson.

"Most unlikely, I should say," he replied.

"That's all," said Munson briskly. "The inquest will be held at ten o'clock tomorrow."

As Pete was on his way down, Munson called him back.

"Did you see anything else down here," he asked, "that might be helpful in clearing up this case? Any marks or objects--anything?"

And Pete honestly declared that he had not seen a thing, for he had completely forgotten the bright little object now resting in his pocket.

Alone on the rock, Munson knelt down and examined the girl's dress. Suddenly he rose and called to June Lansing. Reluctantly she left Daniel's side and mounted the rock.

"June," said Munson, still preoccupied, "would you very much mind reaching your hand down in there and see what it is? I don't like to do it myself for some reason."

"You're a terrible man, Scott," replied June, "and I mean it, but you can't help some of your finer instincts, can you?"

When she looked into his eyes she read there a deep, abiding sadness, and there was sadness in his voice, too, when he said : "June, you must believe me. This is the rottenest, the most heartbreaking task I've ever undertaken. But, June, I've got to go through with it to the end, and I must do it my way."

Without another word, June did as she was bidden. The hand she withdrew held a packet of letters. She exchanged glances with Munson, and for the first time June's eyes wavered. Silently and with a heavy heart she left the rock. When Munson rose and read with deep concentration one of the letters from the packet, Sam could not repress a gasp.

"What is it?" asked Sue, startled.

"Oh, nothing," replied Sam, when all the time he felt like ducking and setting off hell-bent down the beach. "Nothing at all except that this place is getting on my nerves."

He braced himself to receive the admonitory look that Munson was sure to bestow on him upon his completion of the beastly letter.

Fortunately for the state of Sam's morale, no such look was forthcoming. Instead, Munson looked up thoughtfully, then slipped the letter back into the packet. There was a new expression in his eyes when he glanced down at the still figure at his feet.

"Holt," he called sharply.

As Holt approached the rock it became apparent to everyone present that he was in an abject state of funk. His swagger and self-esteem were gone, and with their departure the man became a lamentably deflated creature. His feet seemed to scrape along the rocks and his eyes strained away from the body of Emily-Jane.

Munson watched him silently.

"Go on and look at her," he said harshly. "You weren't so modest when she was alive."

Lane Holt for a swift flash bared his teeth, then he looked uneasily away, his fingers nervously plucking at the flaps of his coat pockets. Munson seemed to be in no hurry. He was carefully, almost hopefully, examining the blood smears on the waxen face turned to the sky.

"What the hell do you want with me here?" Holt asked at last in a husky voice.

"Oh, yes," replied Munson. "Thanks for reminding me. Were these, by any chance, what you were looking for in Emily-Jane's room?"

He held out the packet of letters. Holt started visibly. Involuntarily his hand went out as if to seize the packet.

"Oh, no, no," he replied. "I was looking for nothing --just to see if she was in, that's all."

"No thought of a little blackmail, Holt?" asked Munson. "Sort of a complete life of crime? No?"

"I didn't do it, Munson. I didn't, you know. I--I was fond of Emily-Jane. I really was."

"That admission makes it all the more probable in view of the fact that she was soon to marry another man. Don't try to convict yourself, Holt. You don't have to."

"May I go now?" Holt's face was ghastly, his words trembled. He could feel Munson's eyes burning into him. There was no escape. No hope of escape. "Yes, go!" The words fell like a lash.

Munson turned back to his inspection of the blood smears.

"Dan," he called in an absorbed voice, "do you think you could make the grade, old man?"

"Damn him and his old mans," muttered Sam. "He's trying to hang the lot of us. Why, old Dan can hardly stand on his feet. He's been through enough for one day."

But Daniel was moving forward, moving slowly and carefully, but well under way. There was no suggestion of hesitancy about his approach, no indication of guilt or dread. At the base of the rock, Pete Clark, who had remained to see whatever was to be seen, offered to lend a helping hand.

"Thanks, Pete," said Dan. "I think I can still navigate."

He climbed the rock he had played on so often as a boy, and stood gazing down at Emily-Jane. Not many hours ago she had been dancing and trysting. Enjoying both. It seemed such a great way off. Just a few hours. Most of the guests at the affair were still sleeping.

Time had not even begun for them. How could she be so utterly dead, so completely remote from life? Why, she did not even know that life ever had been, that there was a world with golf links in it, country clubs, and dances. She was not even aware of the rock she was lying on. She was through, gone. And really it was a good thing, although even in death she still retained the power to wound and to destroy. What a fool he had been to hope otherwise. Munson had been repeating his name for some time. Why in hell couldn't he keep quiet? Daniel wanted to think.

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "What's on your mind, Scott?" His gaze was polite but abstracted. Scott was a good chap. A hard worker. At present, an awful pest.

"What do you make of these, Dan?" asked the awful pest, pointing to the blood smears on the face of Emily-Jane. "I asked Doc Manning, but I'd like to get your opinion."

Daniel's thoughts snapped back to the immediate present. "Are we conversing as equals, Scott?" he asked.

"As always, Dan," replied Munson, a little puzzled.

"That being the case," said Dan, with a smile, "my opinion is that you're an extremely apparent hypocrite and that you don't want my opinion at all. Scott, old dear, you're just plain plain, if you get what I mean. Now let's get down to cases. What do you really want? Do you want me to find the murderer of this girl here? Are you seeking my collaboration? If so, give me your confidences also. As you know, I'm a pretty sick dog at present. You can't bank on my reactions, you know, because I'm not quite myself at the moment. Out with it, Scott. Don't be a humbug."

"Daniel," said Munson, "you're too much for me. As far as I'm

concerned, your rather painful trip down here has been entirely wasted. I see now that I'll have to work on you a different way. You know me too well. I'm at a disadvantage because of that, but time will tell. Good luck. I hope you win."

"Same to you," said Daniel. "I hope you choke."

"Thanks," replied Munson with a real smile. "Can I help you down?"

"No, thanks," said Daniel. "I think I can make it, but why don't you cover her up, Scott? She's licked."

"But don't forget, Dan, she still possesses the power of death."

Daniel turned and faced him squarely. "You mean you possess the power of death," he retorted. "She's ended."

Thus, at the moment of triumph, Daniel made the mistake of emphasizing with obvious satisfaction the impotency of Emily-Jane. Munson was not the man to overlook such little slips. He dropped the sheet over the body and followed Daniel from the rock.

"We've stood about enough punishment for one morning," he said to the little group. "You'd better get back now and try to eat something. When we bring home Emily-Jane, I hope you'll keep young Barney out of the way. Don't mind the presence of some minions of the law if you happen to see them. I've had to have a few photographs taken, but I've instructed the men to leave the members of the household entirely alone. Let's try to carry on as usual. I'll join you as soon as I can, if that prospect brings you any pleasure. I hope, Dan, young Barney has come to his senses, but don't be surprised if he develops a fixed idea. It will have to wear itself out. It's tough, but the kid's had a shock." He paused and looked down the beach. "At last," he exclaimed, "here comes our honored coroner. I bet he's had his

breakfast."

Munson was back on the rock when they last saw him. With the assistance of a short stout officer he was carefully painting the outline of Emily-Jane upon the rock.

\* \*

Having settled his business with the coroner and that dignitary having departed, Munson turned to the two local officers who had come to relieve Griggs, the gardener.

One of these officers was a red man. That was the impression he gave. Red of face and hair and hand. He was short and rather stout. The other was a crushed individual. No stomach. A sad, broken sort of face, and great lengths of arms and legs--yards of them.

"Well," thought Munson, considering the pair, "this is a well-balanced team they've given me."

"What's your name?" he asked the little red officer. "Shay, sir," came the piping reply.

"And yours?" Scott turned to the other, whose sad eyes were fixed dreamily on the sea.

"Shay, sir," this one found the heart to say.

"I'm not asking to be introduced to my friend here," said Munson. "I already know his name."

The crushed officer looked even more sorrowful. "My name is Shay," he replied, as if trying to convince himself of that fact.

"Oh," suggested Scott hopefully. "Brothers, I take it."

"We hardly know each other," protested the crushed one. "He's just joined. Been an officer somewhere else."

In the face of this new complication, Munson came near to washing his hands of the case, but he rallied gamely. "What do they call you at home?" he asked the red officer.

"Tim, sir," came the prompt reply.

The crushed man seemed to be having a terrible time with himself. He gave the impression of one preparing for a long, swift flight. When Munson turned to him he spoke quickly.

"Don't ask it, Mr. Munson," he said. "It is. It always was."

They were now standing in a space where no one had been allowed to tread. The two fishermen were preparing to carry the body back to the house. Munson sat down on a rock and moodily considered the situation. Suddenly his eyes took on a new interest. About two feet away, in a patch of smooth hard sand, was an odd impression--a cluster of small pointed indentations, the whole being a little larger than a fifty cent piece.

Forgetting for a moment the stupendous problem of the two Tim Shays, he took out a notebook and made a careful sketch of the design. While doing so he noticed the mark of a man's foot near by. This he carefully measured for length and breadth. Then he put away his notebook and turned to face the situation.

"Well," he said, "I'm not blaming you fellows about the matter of names, but it does seem unfortunate. Any suggestions?"

"I've also been known as Shad," offered the crushed man.

"And they used to call me Red," contributed the other. "Red Shay," he added, with evident satisfaction. Munson beamed upon them.

"Well," he said, "you can see for yourself how simple it is. It's all settled. Now, boys, we'll have to get up the face of that cliff somehow or other."

His aids looked aghast. The man must be mad. If he started in like this, what would it be at the finish? Had the truth been vouchsafed them, they would have resigned en masse from the force.

Munson was back on the rock, superintending the removal of Emily-Jane, taking an active part in it.

"Careful, men," he told the huskies. "She's badly broken. Handle her gently."

And the great men, with hard, rough hands, handled the body of Emily-Jane with all the delicacy of a woman. Munson stood looking after them as they plodded through the sand, bringing Emily-Jane home. Then he rejoined his waiting staff.

"All set," he said briskly, and led the way to the path that twisted up the side of High Point Rock. At the foot of the path the staff halted smartly.

"They say I suffer from giddiness," confided Red to Munson.

"Well, here's your chance to show them they're all wrong," replied Munson.

"Mr. Munson," quoth Shad, "I'm a good man on a flat. None better, but going up, no--not so good."

Munson suddenly turned on them with what they later decided was

nothing less than the fires of hell in his eyes.

"Do you see this path?" he asked them in a low voice. "Do you see how steep it is--how high?"

They readily agreed that they saw all that and more.

"Well, if this path were ten miles long," continued Scott, "and twice as high, I'd make you sprint up it. Come on."

As they fell in behind him, Red confided to Shad in a whisper, "There'll be two deaths instead of one."

"Three," muttered Shad. "And he'll be the murderer."

As Munson made his way up the twisting pathway, he halted from time to time to chalk a circle round certain dark stains that occasionally appeared on the large rocks beside the way. He noted that the rocks bearing these stains were always those that would prove helpful in serving as brakes or braces for anyone descending the path. He took no pride in his discoveries. In fact they rather depressed him. Those blood smears on the face of Emily-Jane and a few dark spots on the rock had led him to expect the existence of these on the path. Once he stopped and picked from between two rocks, companionably leaning against each other, a torn piece of blood-stained lint, obviously a part of a bandage--Daniel's bandage. The trail was only too clear, yet it did not prove that Daniel had murdered Emily-Jane. Contributory evidence only. He might have been on the spot. He might have gone down the cliff after the commission of the act, and arranged her body. He might have seen the person who did kill her, but so far, Munson suddenly realized, he possessed no conclusive evidence. Daniel had the motive, and it could be proved he was at the scene of the murder, but was that quite enough? With some juries it would be if the case were properly

presented. And then Munson remembered with a sinking heart their conversation at the golf club just before Daniel had driven off--that could be used to advantage by a skilful prosecutor, but still it was not complete. Even now Daniel might be safe if only nothing new were found against him.

Munson, poised in the path, with the piece of red lint in his hand, sweated not so much from the exertion of the climb as from the temptation to pervert the truth, to juggle the facts. Not for any friend in the world would he convict an innocent person, offer up a sacrifice. And this was only too easily possible. It could be done. On the night, or rather morning, of Emily-Jane's death there was more than one person astir, and probably lurking round High Point Rock. He wiped his forehead and, after slipping the lint into an envelope, continued on his way.

Clawing up the path behind him, came the two ex. hausted Shays. When they spied the chalk marks on the rocks they became exceedingly perplexed.

"Looks to me like he's playing games," observed Red, quite seriously.

"He's just mad enough to," returned Shad. "Maybe he thinks he's showing us the way."

"That's real nice of him then," put in Red in hitbest sarcastic pipe. "As if there was a chance of ever losing this path. It would be just as hard to go back now as to keep on going up."

"Then up we go," groaned Shad. "This isn't getting us nowhere."

"No?" said Red. "Well, I'm telling you now, I'm scratching out my grave with my own two dogs."

Munson was met at the top of the path by a tall bronzed man with startlingly pale blue eyes. He was neat of appearance, well set up, and had a brisk, businesslike way about him.

"Are you Mr. Munson?" he asked.

"I was before I started up that damned path," said Scott, with a faint smile. "I'm rather less than Munson now. And you?"

The bronzed man with the pale blue eyes was indulgent enough to return Munson's smile.

"My name's Bennett, Mr. Munson," he said. "I'm from headquarters. The district attorney instructed me to hot-foot it down here to help you. Now get me right on this. He told me to help you when and if you needed me, but not to butt into your operations. In other words, I'm at your disposal. I can come and go as needed. I've been here since a quarter to seven. Found two local men guarding the point. I've been standing by up here because from all I could learn, it seemed to me that this place was important."

Munson extended his hand.

"I need someone like you," he said. "Already I've felt the need of someone with whom to compare notes --someone to talk to--someone to listen to me. This is a family affair, you know, and that makes things difficult." He paused to consider his words carefully, then added: "If I don't take you entirely into my confidence it is not through lack of trust, but merely on the grounds of expediency. Unnecessary things need not be known."

"I expect nothing, Mr. Munson," said Bennett. "I'm really not on the case. As I said before, I'm merely standing by to be used when called for . . . to go here and there when necessary."

At this moment two strained faces appeared round the edge of the rock at the head of the path. The faces were too tired even to sweat. They had merely congealed themselves into two molds of exhaustion. It looked as if for all eternity, even after eons of complete rest those faces would remain unchanged, never able to return to their former state of well-being. Bodies followed the faces, and these bodies promptly deposited themselves on the ground.

"Quite a climb," came from one of the faces, with a feeble smile.

"Compared with that path, Mt. Blanc is a hole in the ground," announced the other.

"My staff," said Munson, pointing to the prostrate figures. Then he addressed himself to the faces. "Rest up, boys," he said. "You deserve it. Rest up a few minutes, then we'll get to work. Be careful where you walk."

"Can't walk," said the redder face.

"Don't have to worry where I put my feet," said the other. "Mine stay right where they are . . . forever."

As the two men walked away, Munson's keen ear detected the sound of low but hysterical laughter. Munson, himself, was laughing a little inwardly.

"I feel sure I'll be needing your help," he remarked to Bennett. "My staff seems to be permanently damaged. Have you looked about any?"

"A little," replied Bennett, "but touched nothing. There are certain things." He did not continue.

"Yes," said Munson, taking a quick step forward and pointing to a man arguing with the two local guards barring the way to High Point Rock, "and I'll bet one of those certain things is the property of that gesticulating gentleman."

"There is a silver hip flask," suggested Bennett. "Lead me to it," said Munson. "I have an idea I know about where it is."

"We must step carefully because there are also foot-marks," observed Bennett diffidently.

Fifteen yards farther on, close to the soggy edge of the great rock, Bennett pointed to a flask lying on the bare earth. Round about the flask was a frantic scramble of footprints now rapidly drying beneath the sun that had promised so much. Munson carefully picked up the flask and examined it for initials. They were plain enough "L. H." A pleased expression came to Munson's face. Suddenly he waved the flask aloft.

"It's all right, Holt," he called. "I've found it."

With an expression of the utmost dismay, Holt stopped arguing with the guards and fixed his eyes on the flask, gleaming like an accusing brand in the sun-light.

"Will you please go, Bennett," said Munson, "and conduct that gentleman through our conscientious constabulary?"

Bennett soon returned with Holt in tow.

"Be careful how you step, Holt," warned Munson. "You might spoil some of your own footprints. By the way, which ones are yours?"

Munson looked appraisingly at Holt's feet, then pointed to a mark in the soil.

"I'll bet that one belongs to you," he said. "Of course, you were wearing dancing shoes. Put your foot in it and see how it fits."

"Damned if I will," replied Holt, his eyes on the flask. "And you haven't the authority to make me."

"You're right there," replied Munson, reluctantly. "Anyway, I don't work much from footprints unless they are practically forced upon me. Nevertheless your refusal shows a decided disinclination to cooperate with the law. Oh, is this yours?"

Holt's hand shot out to the extended flask, which Munson quickly drew back.

"I see it is," he remarked dryly. "We found it here--right on the edge of the cliff at virtually the exact spot where Emily-Jane was pushed to her death."

"Munson, I swear to God I didn't do it," said Holt in desperation. "In spite of that flask, in spite of every-thing you've got against me or may get against me, I tell you I didn't murder Emily-Jane."

"All right, Holt," said Munson, in a voice a little less bitter than he customarily used when addressing him. "Go away now and don't come back here. We'll have a little talk soon. But keep your shirt on. You're in a bad way."

The man's once jaunty shoulders sagged as he turned and retraced his steps. Munson looked after him for a moment, then sat down rather heavily on a convenient rock.

"The trouble with this case," he said, "lies in the extraordinary circumstance that I have already three perfectly good suspects, three perfectly good motives, and three convincing sets of clues. Get me?"

Bennett nodded.

"If I worked hard enough," continued Scott, "I might be able to convict any one of the three suspects, yet all three can't be guilty."

"It's a matter of choice at present," remarked Bennett.

"That's just the trouble," replied Munson. "It's a matter of choice--my own personal feelings, and I don't like that. If I followed them I'd go out and get that person who was just here, a most unpalatable character."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Bennett.

"No," said Munson, with a shake of his head, "that would be a little too low down. I may get him in the end, but something, some small, still voice keeps telling me he's not the man."

He rose and walked restlessly about, his searching eyes taking in every detail of the setting. He noted the bushes, stopped to examine certain marks barely visible in the soil, then returned to the cliff's edge and stood looking down at the confused grouping of footprints. The minutes passed unnoticed as he examined these. At length he returned to the rock and sat down.

"Had much experience with murder?" he asked suddenly.

"Some," said Bennett.

"Any good on observation?" continued Munson.

"Yes, I am," replied the other quite frankly. "I've a microscopic pair of eyes, and that's almost a fact."

"Good," said Munson. "Now I'm going to make up a little story and after I've finished I want you to help me find out if there's any foundation in fact in it." He closed his eyes and settled himself on the rock.

"It's getting damned hot," he said, "and I'm getting damned hungry and sleepy. Can't afford to be sleepy. Well, here goes. A girl and a man are standing right here near the edge of the cliff. It is three o'clock in the morning. An old slut of a moon is trying to display her vanished beauty. The man and the girl are drinking, perhaps. In those bushes over there a man is hiding. He watches and listens. And somewhere about, not

quite sure where, another man is hiding. Now one of two things happens. I don't know which. Either the couple near the edge of the cliff starts to quarrel, and the man tries and eventually succeeds in pushing her over in spite of the intervention of one of the hidden men, either that happens or the couple starts in love-making and one of the hidden men rushes out and confronts them. A fight follows and over she goes. In either case the second hidden man is a witness to the whole tragic, silly, sordid business. He sneaks away unseen and scared momentarily dumb."

Munson stopped and opened his eyes.

"Now you study these marks here, wander round through the bushes and examine the ground as well as you can under the circumstances, then tell me what you've found out. I'm either too lazy or too tired to do it myself, but already I've seen some things."

Bennett, without a word and with a display of modesty that did him credit, followed the trail of Munson's previous investigations, only he was much more thorough and fared farther afield. He even disappeared into the thicket of bushes. When he returned he set

about reading the riddle of the footprints. Munson seemed to be sleeping or thinking. Bennett was not sure which. Finally he spoke.

"Mr. Munson," he said, "you're about right, but it won't work unless we can get that eye-witness of yours to come clean."

"Oh, I know it's only a story," replied Munson. "A sort of a picture of what might have happened, that's all."

"What actually did happen, I expect," said Bennett. "Let's work backwards."

"A good idea," agreed Munson.

"Well, let's begin with this mess of footprints," went on the other. "Undoubtedly these are the girl's. High heels and all. A small, dainty foot. Now, there are two pairs of men's prints, one larger than the other. All that they actually show is that there's been considerable stamping going on. There's your scuffle part. But there's one print that gives us our lead to the bushes, assuming the guy ran in a straight line. Take the last print in--the one on the outskirts, so to speak. Feel like moving?"

"No," replied Munson, "but I will."

"Then, we'll use the center of that heel as a pointer and follow it to the bushes," said Bennett.

The two men did so and halted at the line of the bushes. It hardly required a practiced eye to see that someone had recently broken through those bushes. The interlaced twigs were snapped in several places. Some leaves had been stripped from the branches. With the facts already in hand it was not difficult to reconstruct the scene.

"Want to go inside?"

Munson did. Here they discovered ample evidence to confirm whatever suspicion the snapped twigs and stripped leaves might have aroused. A large body must have crouched here. There were not many signs of trampling, but enough to show that the thicket at this point was unlike the thicket elsewhere. Not conclusive, perhaps, but sufficiently so under the circumstances.

"Satisfied?" asked Bennett.

Munson nodded.

"Then let's go back," said the detective.

They retraced their steps and followed the bushes round a bend. Bennett stopped and pointed. "In there," he said briefly. "Same thing."

"I hadn't found that one," said Munson.

"Here's something," said Bennett, "you haven't worked into your story. It might have a bearing." This time Bennett took Munson to an isolated clump of bushes about fifteen yards from the edge of the cliff. The clump was composed of unusually high bushes. A tall person could stand beneath their branches. Even with the sun doing its best, the soil underneath the bushes remained moist. Bennett took no little pleasure in pointing out to Munson the prints of two different pairs of feet on the landward side of the clump. One pair was made by a man, the other by a woman, but the woman could not have been Emily-Jane, for these prints had been made by far less dainty shoes of an entirely different character.

"I wonder who they were," mused Munson aloud.

"Of course they might have been here earlier in the evening and then

gone away," said Bennett, dashing cold water all over his discovery.

"I know, I know," replied Munson impatiently. "But in a case of murder and with so many plausible suspects, a lead as hot as this might prove extremely helpful. . . . Not every witness of a murder is willing to come forward. It was a hot, murky, dark summer night. God knows how many couples were taking advantage of it to go the limit. You couldn't drag 'em to admit they were out in the dark, dark bushes at three o'clock in the morning. A woman would have to be fairly seething with public spirit and pro bona publico to come forward of her own free will, and, of course, the escort would hold back for fear of involving the woman." He stopped speaking and looked thoughtfully at the prints, particularly at those of the woman. He seemed to be trying to visualize the person who had stood in the shoes that had left their marks so clearly behind.

"Bennett," he said at last, "a man spends all his life taking back something whether he knows it or not. I now take back what I said awhile ago about footprints. It is perfectly true that in the past I've never got all worked up over them, but these prints here interest me strangely. They might mean so damn much--not the prints, but the persons who made them. Now, as I read these prints--I refer to the smaller ones--it strikes me they must have been made either by a woman who prefers comfort to style or by one who has occasion to be much on her feet, a servant perhaps. I don't mean one of your high-stepping, high-heeled, movie-mad girls, although she may easily be that type--Wait a minute." Munson broke off, and returned to his inspection of the prints. "Let's take up the man's prints for a change," he resumed. "What type of man left them here, do you suppose?"

Bennett studied the marks in the damp soil for several minutes. He, too, seemed to be endeavoring to give flesh and blood to the wearer of the shoes that had made them.

"For one thing," he said, "he was far from being a dandy. The wide, flat heel and the broad toe, the nail marks in the heel and the full impression of the sole, all go to convince me that those are the working shoes of a working-man--an outside man." He looked at Munson for confirmation, but Munson seemed to be miles away.

"All right," said Munson unexpectedly. "How about this : A maid still wearing her service shoes snags onto the stable man, the gardener, or some other outside male servant, and takes him for a walk. No date, no dressing-up for the occasion, no thought one way or another. They come down here and eventually stand behind this bush. Now, I say this because I happen to know just such a likely pair. There may be a dozen of them on this point of land--all sorts of combinations of those pairs, but I know one pair. I've watched them. A maid and an outside boy who possesses both the inclination and the enterprise to come prowling down here on a dark night. Perfectly innocently, I mean, that is, within all reasonable expectations. I'm going to find out-- Oh, hell," he broke off, "all this is unprofitable speculation, but interesting. You got me into it, Bennett. I already know the murderer. Of that I'm fairly certain, but I wish to God I could find another one. I rather like this murderer, you see. Understand, Bennett, my remarks are unofficial now."

"Perfectly, Mr. Munson," replied Bennett earnestly. "It's a tough situation."

"It is. It is," said Munson, walking absent-mindedly away. Presently he stopped and called back over his shoulder, "Have you had any breakfast, Bennett?"

"I could stand a cup of coffee," he replied.

"Then let's go back to the house. There are things to be done there

and I'd like to have you along."

A piping voice greeted them as they were about to leave the point. "What's to become of us?" asked the piping voice.

Munson looked upon the intrepid Shays with a sardonic grin. "My staff seems to be partially resuscitated," he said. "What's going to become of you, did you ask?"

"Yes, Mr. Munson," said Shad. "What's to become of us?"

"One hell of a lot," came the distressing reply, "if you stick around with me. Come along and I'll show you."

# X. Care Sits On Crewe House

WHEN Daniel and the rest returned from the beach, Manning, who had returned a little before the others, was waiting on the veranda. "A nice, depressing morning," he said in greeting. "Just the sort of a thing for a bright summer day. Invigorates the body and stimulates the nerves. Gives one an appetite."

He was talking at random now, popping out anything in an endeavor to make these sad-looking, harried people a little less dispirited. Among Manning's various vices was a genuine desire to see his friends happy, to open a bottle of any old thing and to help them to enjoy life. He was constantly fighting off the dread of depression. No one suspected how low-spirited he felt when alone at night he confronted himself in the mirror and thought, "Only a few more years left now and those not much good." For this reason he made it a point to be alone at night as little as possible. In this he succeeded tremendously, but no one realized more keenly than he that within a few short years he would be able to share only his memories with the charming women he had once seduced. Therefore, when he saw the party from the beach come trailing across the lawn, he, too, felt as if the bottom had dropped out of things. Getting drunk, he reflected, was no worse than getting morbid. The only trouble about it was you couldn't stay drunk indefinitely. And as soon as you got sober you became twice as morbid and no end sick. He voiced his thoughts tentatively.

"I think we should all get just a little bit drunk," he suggested.

"And play going to Jerusalem," added June.

"Or murderer, murderer, who's got the murderer," put in Sam bitterly.

"No," protested Daniel, "Scott is playing that game, and it looks as if he's going to win. How's Barney. doctor?"

"Barney's all right," replied Manning. "I've seen the best-hearted people break out like that before. When they've had a shock they turn on those closest to them. Don't worry, Dan. Something will come along and shock him back to reason."

He led June aside and looked at her seriously and with kindly comprehension.

"Listen, June," he said in a low voice. "I want you to know that I'm with the house in this affair. You know what I mean. I'm with you and Daniel and Barney, too, for that matter. A friend on the outside may prove very valuable in the near future. I'm that friend, and I want you to consider me so. Might not be so damned respectable, but I've still got a lot of influence round these parts with all kinds of people. They'll do things for me. That's all. You can count on me. Now I'm going to take charge of Daniel and put him to bed for a while. Send up some coffee and toast and" -- he considered a moment, then continued -- "yes, you'd better send up a bottle of well-selected wine. I've got to put some heart into Daniel. This thing is going to be a fight, June, and it's only just begun."

"It began a long time ago, Dr. Manning," said June. "I'm afraid that this is the last act where everybody gets carried off the stage on stretchers and things. But it's good to know we can count on you. Something keeps telling me we're not licked yet. If I thought so"-- she shrugged her shoulders-- "I'd put an end to the misery."

"How ?" asked Manning.

"I don't know right off, but I'd find a way."

"Do you think he did it, that chap, Holt?"

June followed the direction of the doctor's glance to an isolated corner of the veranda where Holt was sitting alone. Within the past few hours the man had altered shockingly. There was a crazy cast to his face. His eyes were all confused with conflicting emotions, hate and fear fighting for supremacy. June could find in her heart no pity for Lane Holt.

"I wish he had," she answered. "I wish he had."

"He damn well looks the part," said Manning. "If he goes round like that much longer he'll be slipping the noose over his own head. Come along, June. I must look after Dan."

Together they walked down the veranda and joined the group. No one appeared to be interested in breakfast, yet no one could hit on anything better to do.

Before Daniel left with the doctor, he turned to his friends. "We should get this straight, I think," he said. "Munson is not to blame. He did everything in his power to head off what has happened. I know that. Now he must go his way and we ours. I still consider him my friend, and you must admit that as a friend Scott Munson is, to say the least, a good egg."

"And as an enemy he's a pain in the neck," said Sam doggedly.

"An unhappy selection of words to express your sentiments, Sam." Daniel grinned at his friend from the doorway.

Sam looked back at Daniel and realized with a stab of impotent anger what a human wreck he was as he stood there grinning, or trying to grin. It was as much as he could do to keep the tears from starting to his eyes.

"Oh, hell," he replied a little huskily, "what do words matter any more? What do they mean? I feel like Manning. Let's all get a little drunk, and laugh a lot at nothing."

"Or cry a lot for something," surprisingly remarked Sue, who had never placed much confidence in her tongue.

One by one they drifted into the cheerful old dining-room, but Holt remained alone on the veranda. He was brooding, scheming, and fighting down his fear. Why couldn't he tell? Munson wouldn't believe him. No one would believe him, yet, by God, Daniel was guilty as hell. Holt had not seen his face, but there was no mistaking his figure, particularly that blood-wet hand. His fear was gaining ascendancy now. All the world was fear. Everything was against him. Everyone. Hopelessly he slumped forward in his chair. His thoughts were like the haze on a tropic swamp . . . fevered, poisoned, drifting.

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When Manning had finished with Daniel's arm and got him into bed, he leaned back in an easy chair and sipped his wine with pagan appreciation.

"Ah, Daniel, my boy," he said, "if we were only in Biarritz or Paris. I often think of those places."

"Somehow I'd like to be in Montreux," came rather wistfully from the bed. "You know, Manning . . . all of us . . . out of this mess . . . Barney better and everything." A moment's silence, then, "but that can't be . . . ever." The voice trailed off and finished with a decided, "Damn it all to hell !"

"It can be, Daniel." Manning's tone was tempting "Listen, Daniel, it

can be. I'm positive of that."

"How?"

"You know my damn young fool of a nephew, Lambert? Rich as all outdoors. Mother's side."

"Know him well. He's all right."

"Glad you think so. Glad somebody thinks so. I like him, myself. Drink up, Daniel. It won't hurt you." Manning was working hard to put a little enthusiasm into his patient. He was waxing enthusiastic himself as his plan took shape in his mind. "Well," he continued, "young Lambert has a yacht among many other things, a regular sea-going yacht. She's anchored in a cove near Willow Point . . . not far off. And she's ready for sea at a moment's notice. Remember that. It's a good point. Now, this damn fool nephew of mine has been just aching to take a trip round the world or to any spot between or thereon. All he's waiting for is someone to go with him. Doesn't care how many. It could be done quietly, Daniel, and if this mess, as you call it, keeps on getting messier, why, I say, let's go."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Daniel.

"The doctor's wanted," one of the maids announced in an awed voice. "They've brought the body back."

"Oh, damn !" said Manning, gulping down his wine. "It's not my job, but anything to be obliging. Think it over, Dan."

The door closed and Daniel lay there alone . . . thinking. He was too damn tired to think. He closed his eyes. . .

He must have drowsed off, for when he next opened his eyes, June was sitting by his bed. He had not heard her come in nor did he know how long she had been there. Her hand was lying on the coverlet, a strong but now pathetically listless hand, and he let his fall upon it.

"Hello, June." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

"Lo, Daniel. Any better?"

"Lots. How's Barney?"

"He's up and about. The poor kid seems to be lost."

"He doesn't come to me."

"He's thinking only of himself at present and of . . . her."

"I'd like to spank his bottom."

"Very pretty. Suppose I died. Would you go round visiting the sick and wounded?"

"If they'd been good to me, yes. I might get drunk and laugh at nothing."

"Would you mind if I died, Daniel?"

"Quite a lot. Part of me is dead already. Do you want to kill the rest?"

"No."

"Then don't die."

"But I might have to."

"Same here. I'm pretty damn close to it now."

"What do you mean?"

"What did you mean?"

Silence. A long silence, then Daniel, "Is she next door?"

"No, Dan. It's in a spare room. There is no 'she.'"

"It's just as well, June. The trouble started with her, but it hasn't ended with her."

"Are you glad she's gone?"

"Yes, glad."

"Then so am I."

"Munson thinks I did it, June."

"Scott thinks everybody did it."

"Sort of a mass attack, eh?"

"Or a series of individual assaults."

"Each pushing her nearer the brink"

"We shouldn't talk like this," said June.

"Why not? You never liked her."

"I never liked her, no. Toward the end I hated her more than anything else in life. I hated her more than the filthiest vice or the most cowardly deed."

"She deserved all that, June."

"But what about God?"

"He wouldn't have cared for her much."

"Wish it could have happened some other way . . . wish he had done it instead of--"

"He did kill her, June, if there is a God. He killed her as much as--oh, well, anybody. Don't doubt that."

"You couldn't get Scott to see it that way."

"He'd have a hell of a time catching God."

"He'd try to if he thought there was a ghost of a chance."

"June?"

"Yes, Dan."

"How'd you like to go away?"

"How go away?"

"On a yacht, a fine big yacht. All over the world. Everywhere. Away from this mess. Out of reach. New places. A new suit of thoughts."

"God, Dan, I'd love it. Could I have a new dress of thoughts?"

"Yes, dear, and a hat."

"Everything new from the skin out, Dan."

"That goes with me as long as you don't change your skin."

"Do you like my skin?"

"The little I've been able to ogle."

"We'll like each other a long time, Dan?"

"Let's do it, June."

"No matter what?"

"No matter what."

"And then we'll go away to everywhere on that yacht, won't we ?"

"If you'll slip me a kiss we will."

"All right. I'm going now." June bent over Daniel.

"Excuse me, can I come in, lady?"

"Great God, June, what's that?"

A crushed face with desperate eyes was looking in at the window. It seemed to be suspended in space and terribly aware of the fact.

"What are you doing there?" asked June. "Just what are you doing there?"

"Damned if I know, lady," spoke the face. "Risking life and limb, if you ask me, but Mr. Munson thinks I'm looking before clues."

"Are you?"

"What, me, lady? Looking? I'm just clutching Hanging on for dear

life."

"Well, you can't come in. That's that. Tell Mr. Munson so."

"Oh, lady, I can't get down. Come look how I am all scrunched up and perilous."

"You should have thought about that before you climbed up here."

"I did, lady. That was all I thought of. Couldn't think of anything else."

"Well, tell Mr. Munson you can't come in."

The face looked earthward cautiously. "Mr. Munson," it wailed, "she says I can't come in."

"Then snap on down," came the voice of Scott Munson.

"Did you hear that, lady?" asked the face. "'Snap on down,' says he. There's a fair sample for you. I'd snap like a twig if I hit the ground. Do let me come in, lady."

"Let him in, June," said Daniel. "I'm interested to see just what is attached to a face like that."

"You can come in," said June.

"I'll always remember this, lady, and you, too, sir, in the bed. I'll always remember this and be grateful. Could you give me a hand, lady? It's more for the sake of confidence. A man just can't be courageous in the position I'm in. It would be foolhardy."

June seized the outstretched hand and gave it a powerful pull. Face, body, and feet came clattering into the room.

"Lady, you saved my life," said Officer Shad as he rose from the floor.

"Bring him over here, June?"

From the left knee of the man's trousers Daniel picked a piece of red lint. Another piece clung to his elbow.

"Now an envelope and my fountain-pen, old dear." He placed the lint in the envelope and wrote :

Clues found on the body and person of one of your profession. With the compliments of Daniel Crewe.

"Take that to Mr. Munson, officer, and call again at any time."

"But not by the tree, sir. Never that tree again."

"This is the way out," said June.

"Where do I go when I leave here, lady?"

"Oh, just go wandering round, barging in anywhere. Some day we'll find your body rotting in the halls." Officer Shad slid out with a shiver.

"He spoiled a perfectly good kiss," complained June, returning to the bed.

Daniel dressed slowly and went downstairs. He was wondering what had become of Sam Stoughten. He hadn't had a talk with Sam since the thing occurred. He would like to know what Sam was thinking. Munson had those letters.

As he stepped out on the veranda his eyes fell on Barney, sitting crouched before his easel. Then Daniel transferred his gaze to the

canvas. He was shocked to attention. A great trembling emptiness took the place of all other emotions. His brother was painting the scene of the crime with the murderer on the spot. So much was apparent at once to the eye although the picture was little more than commenced. There was the Rock caught in a pale unearthly radiance, and caught in the radiance also was the vague, half-formed figure of a man in a black domino with the hood removed. The figure although hardly more than an impression looked tall and gaunt, much like his own. Its arms were upraised frantically, and the face, indistinguishable, was lifted to the hidden source of the light.

Daniel lost himself in the weird spirit of this terrible picture. Once more he was standing at the edge of the cliff with the first numbing realization of murder laying cold hands on his heart. He was alone there, sick and afraid. He had done it. He had murdered. He could feel again the flesh of the girl's bare shoulder. He could feel her slipping from him, twirling through the night to death.

Daniel's lips began to tremble. Sweat broke from his forehead. He tried to take his eyes from the canvas, but the fascination of horror held them fixed. It was as if he were calling to himself, accusing himself, demonstrating his deed before the eyes of the world. Nothing Scott Munson could do or say would have the same uncanny power as had this picture to move him, to break down his resistance and self-control and finally to cause him to confess his crime. Here was the highest refinement of torture, conceived by his own brother.

So absorbed had Daniel been in the picture that he had not noticed his brother's curious gaze fixed upon him. Barney had been noting with the insight of an artist every light and shade of emotion that passed across Daniel's face. He had been studying his brother's expressions, his open display of dread and horror, with morbidly bitter enjoyment.

"I thought you'd appreciate it," he said in a strangely hostile voice. "I am doing it for your special edification."

Daniel started, came back out of the picture, and looked at his brother. "Don't, kid," he said. "It's not like you."

Barney laughed ironically. "It's exactly like me. I am like that."

"You never hurt a soul in your life, Barney . . . before."

"No? Well, watch me from now on."

Aunt Matty had come out and was standing by Daniel. She was staring at the picture with wide eyes.

"Oh, Barney," she said, at last, "that's not nice. Why don't you paint something else--a rose or a rainbow?"

"Or a pickle or a sponge or a cabbage," suggested Barney, with a sneer. "That picture isn't intended to be nice. I prefer to paint murderers. My inspiration stands beside you."

Daniel led Aunt Matty back into the house and sat her down on a sofa in the library. The old lady, usually so game, was weeping softly.

"There, there now," murmured Daniel, putting an arm round the frail body. "Barney isn't well yet. He doesn't mean what he says. He'll come back to us. Don't take on so."

"I don't know what's come over this old house," said Aunt Matty. "It used to be a place of so much sea and sunlight, Danny. Laughter and comfort and the smell of the orchard. And you were both such good boys. All the time good. Why, you didn't ever drink much and cut up, not even after you were grown men. Good friends and happiness, and the servants all satisfied. Where's it all gone to,

Danny? Overnight, all gone."

"It will come back, Aunt Matty. We'll bring it back somehow."

Daniel lied to the old lady, but his lies had to wind their way around a sizable lump in his throat. Those days, he knew, would never return. When he thought of the days ahead his heart failed him.

"I think I could have stood anything," said Aunt Matty, "if you two boys were as you've always been. Barney's bitterness and accusations, Daniel, are breaking my heart. Why should he hold it against you?"

"He's not himself," replied Daniel, wearily. "He'll come round presently. His nerves are shot, that's all."

Aunt Matty lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. Her bright eyes snapped. "Everything started with that Emily-Jane," confided the old lady. "I wish I'd pushed her off that rock myself."

Daniel derived no little comfort from the venomous wish of Aunt Matty. "I guess you're back to normal now," he said. "Let's not worry any more, or better still, let me do all the worrying for you. I'm used to it now."

He stood up, then on a sudden impulse, bent over the bewildered and saddened old lady, and kissed her cheek. Then he left the room. Straight past Barney he walked, his eyes avoiding the easel, and across the lawn to the beach in search of Sam. He must be about somewhere.

Then Daniel saw him. He was sitting on some rocks with Sue, and both looked miserable. When he joined them, the pair appeared relieved.

"How's your arm?" asked Sam abruptly.

"Doc Manning is quite proud of it, Sam. No need to trouble about the arm at all."

"That was a strange thing," remarked Sue.

"Stranger things have happened, Sue," said Daniel.

Sam showed no interest in the strangeness of the thing.

"Tell me, Dan," continued Sue, "did Sam murder Emily-Jane?"

"Don't mind me," put in Sam. "I'm somewhere else."

"Why do you ask, Sue?"

"Because I think he acts like a murderer. He's been sitting here muttering and grunting and scowling into my face. Why, you'd think he was a couple of murderers at least."

"Do murderers go on like that, Sue?"

"Well, they couldn't behave any worse."

"Then, Sam did it. The mystery is solved."

"I hope they catch him and hang him good," said Sue. "Then perhaps he'll come to his senses."

"It might be just the thing he needs, a good old-fashioned hanging."

"Ha, ha,"--the sound startled Daniel--"you're an amusing couple, you two. A regular pair of Neros, playing the fiddle while Rome burns. Munson will have us all hung if we don't slip him some arsenic mighty quick."

"What did I tell you?" said Sue. "Those are the words of the worst type of murderer--a poisoner, no less."

For some time three pairs of moody, trouble-touched eyes did their best to discourage the glinting surf playfully belaboring the sand, then as if at some unspoken command, the owners of the eyes arose without expectation and, mounting the bluff, filed across the lawn to the house. Sue went on ahead, but Sam and Daniel were stopped by Munson.

"Thanks for your assistance, Daniel," said Munson, tapping the envelope containing the lint strands plucked from the body of Officer Shad, "but I hardly feel like using these. Your action has tied my hands."

"Stow that stuff, Scott," replied Daniel good-naturedly. "You probably think you've got enough dope without them. You'll use them if you think they'll help you. My advice is to keep them, old man. You'll need everything you can get to convict an innocent man. However, it has been done."

Munson's eyes snapped. "Thanks not my game, Daniel," he said. "And you know it."

"Nobody seems to be running true to form these days, Scott," remarked Daniel.

Bennett appeared at the corner of the house and approached them.

"Bennett, I want you to meet two of our best suspects," said Scott, and he introduced them.

"We're neck and neck," said Daniel, "vying for the honors."

"Well, I hope you both lose," said Bennett, with evident sincerity as

he shook hands. "I never heard of a murderer before voluntarily contributing evidence."

"It's my kind heart, Bennett," said Daniel. "I like to see everybody happy."

As Daniel and Sam walked away Bennett's eyes followed them. "A cool customer," he remarked, referring to Daniel.

"So damn cool," replied Munson, "I expect him to crack at any moment now."

Just before they reached the veranda Sam halted Daniel. "Sorry as hell about that arm, Dan," he said rapidly. "I must have miscalculated. Daniel, I was desperate."

"We won't talk about that, Sam," replied Daniel, "but isn't it one devil of a mess?"

Barney was still painting, and in spite of every effort of will Daniel could not prevent himself from lingering over the picture. The old feeling gradually crept back, the old horror.

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The inquest was over. Both procedure and verdict had gone according to Munson's carefully laid plans. He had succeeded in protecting the family, sparing Barney's feelings, and saving the reputation of the dead girl. At the same time he had got exactly what he wanted, a clear field.

The proceedings had attracted a little well-bred interest. About a dozen members of the Coastal Golf Club had motored over, more to pay their respects and to offer decently restrained condolences than to attend the inquest itself. Unalloyed astonishment seemed to be the

prevailing mood. The thing was simply impossible. There must be some mistake. Then they had motored back; cocktail time was perilously close at hand. Daniel had been glad to see the last of them. Manning had proved helpful without appearing to be so. He had encouraged speedy departures and warded off embarrassing questions.

One small creature composed entirely of eyes and legs did nothing else but look at Barney. He had scarcely been aware of her gaze. Her name was Sally Brent. Before the advent of Emily-Jane she had secretly entertained certain vaguely defined hopes. They were all about some day. She and Barney had—oh, well, there had always been Barney. Where was Barney now? He seemed to be lost in some utterly remote region behind his brooding eyes. Little Sally smiled gamely and allowed old Brent to drive her home. Just the same, she felt sure that, given the right opportunity, she could have brought a little comfort to her erstwhile playmate and companion. And any female from the age of eight, obsessed with this fine fancy, is a constant source of danger to the object of her solicitude.

It was twilight now. Barney was sitting at his easel. All afternoon he had sat there, working away with crazy concentration. The painting on the large canvas was gradually beginning to take on depth and definition. Whatever genius Barney had was going into its creation. His feelings for the bizarre found expression here in a weird atmospheric treatment. It was as much a painting of a mood as it was of a place or person.

Several yards away Daniel was standing, his eyes burning into the picture. Although Barney was aware of his brother's presence, he calmly continued with his brush. To Daniel there seemed to be something inevitable in the slow, unhesitating progress of the picture. It was like the sure-footed approach of Doom, dreadfully unhurried and confident. It was like a threat withheld until the time was ripe to

strike. It was the face, the vague, cloudy, indistinguishable face of the figure that struck terror to Daniel's soul. It was his face. Daniel knew it. It had to be his face. He could see it. He could see himself staring into the damp, murky night, filled with the skimmed, sick drippings of a dying moon.

Unconsciously Daniel's face had taken on the same expression it had worn at the time of the murder. His features were tortured and drawn, his neck cords taut, his body strained and rigid. All unknowingly, Daniel stood there, a self-confessed murderer.

Scott Munson, appearing in the doorway, arrested his step, and took in the scene. From Daniel his eyes moved to the canvas, then back again to the agonized face. Munson received the impression that some terrible force, some impelling emotion, was goading Daniel against his will to offer himself as a model. Then a sigh escaped Daniel's lips and his body relaxed. He passed a hand across his eyes and moved away like a man who had just gone through some exhausting physical test. Then he saw Munson for the first time and turned away. Barney's bitter eyes looked mockingly into his. Helplessly he turned from side to side. He was trembling now, trembling inwardly. Every nerve in his body was lashing him with little nagging stings. In the back of his mind some dim glimmer of intelligence kept urging him to pull in, for the moment of danger was at hand. He breathed deeply and threw back his shoulders. His head went up. But he did not trust his tongue to speak. Silently he passed Munson and went upstairs to his room.

Munson walked over to Barney and looked sorrowfully into his eyes.

"No," he said. "You shouldn't do that. Daniel's always been damn good to you. Some day soon, Barney, I'm going to hurt you badly if only to bring you back to Dan."

He was thinking of five letters his searching hand had encountered tucked in a vest hanging under a number of other garments in a dark corner of Daniel's closet.

The net was being drawn closer round Daniel. Munson was morally convinced that he had committed the crime. He knew that with the evidence he had already in hand he could make him pay the extreme penalty. Yet there had been other people out that night, people with both motives and opportunity. An altogether new theory of the murder was forming itself in his mind. He would hold his hand for a while. . . .

And all that night in Daniel's room the light was kept burning. Whenever he turned it out the shadows of Barney and Emily-Jane kept flitting through the room.

Thank God she had not screamed.

# **XI. Eyes That Looked On Murder**

SCOTT MUNSON was on a spot that interested him strangely. It was a lone narrow ledge about three feet wide, jutting out from High Point Rock four feet from its summit. Officers Shad and Red, flat on their respective stomachs, were following Munson's movements with eyes filled with alarm. Vicariously they were dying a thousand deaths as their chief, apparently indifferent to his unenviable position, twisted his way round the uneven face of the cliff. In some places the ledge narrowed to the width of a foot. When Munson approached these perilous crossings, the Shays automatically closed their eyes, and with indrawn breath listened acutely for the crash which to them was now merely a matter of moments.

"With all the places on this neck of land to investigate," observed Red, "he would pick out this one."

"I thought I'd pass out when he tried to lure us down there," commented his colleague.

"My resignation was trembling on the tip of my tongue," replied Red.

"He's mad," said Shad mildly, but with conviction.

"Mad Munson," amplified the redder Shay, who had a flair for rugged names.

This was Scott's third visit to the ledge, his third minute, inch by inch inspection. He had nothing to go on, nothing but his imagination, a memory that constantly eluded recapture, and a wild unsubstantial theory. And he had found nothing to justify his efforts. In one spot, which just so happened to be the right one, the moss had been disturbed. There were certain indentations. Along the ledge he found

other similar marks, but these were so faint and undefined that he feared their discovery was due more to hope than to their actual presence. Nevertheless, this ledge and its possibilities fascinated him. It formed an essential part of this wild theory which in turn was based on nothing more definite than an unwarranted suspicion.

His staff watched him return from the ledge with mingled emotions. It had enjoyed being horrified and at the same time it was relieved to find their leader still among them.

"From now on," said Munson, brushing the earth from his hands, "your business will be to watch. Got guns?"

"We have," replied Shad. "Mine seems awful heavy."

"Bear up under your burden," said Munson, "and keep your eyes open. No one is to leave the grounds without my permission."

It struck both Shad and his associate, who were at heart good-natured, sociably inclined spirits, that this new duty was going to be highly uncongenial. It presented so many opportunities for unpleasantness and friction, strained relations and mean looks. However, they accepted their new assignment with a fortitude worthy of the profession they so gracefully adorned.

On leaving the point, Munson spoke to the local guard.

"Bronson," he said, "you can go home now, and stay there if they'll let you. Tell them at the lockup. Mr. Munson suggested you take a couple of days off. Make sure that your chief hears you. I've finished with this place now. It's open to the public."

"Thank you, sir," said Bronson, smiling broadly upon the Shays. "I'll carry out your instructions to the letter."

"A couple of days off," muttered Red, as he followed Munson along the Cliff Path. "Did you hear that? What do we get? Nothing but dangerous and disagreeable duty."

"After he's through with us," said Shad, "I'm going to put in for a life pension."

"If you have any life left to pension," amended his brother officer.

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"Now," said Munson to himself, "it's high time I did the conventional thing. I am satisfied about her feet. They could easily have been the feet I'm looking for."

He found old Griggs in the orchard, doing helpful things to a peach tree.

"Griggs," he said, coming at once to the point, "was your helper out on the night of the murder or the accident or whatever it was?"

"He was, sir," replied Griggs. "I've been waiting for this, Mr. Munson. He was out late, and he hasn't been the same lad since. Got something on his mind, but I'd stake my life he had no hand in it."

"Certainly not," agreed Munson heartily, experiencing a strange sensation. Did he really want to hear the boy's story? He had to hear it. Nothing left for him to do. "What's his name, Griggs? I want to see him. Will you get him for me?"

"His name's Tom," said Griggs, as he went in search of his assistant.

Munson knew Tom although Tom was not aware of that fact. To put it accurately, Munson did not actually know the boy, but he knew the

most important thing about him and that had to do with Betty, the maid. Tom was in love with this healthy wench, and very much in love at that. He was a boy with bangs, Tom. A boy with freckles and bangs. Good blue eyes that made up for everything, including a slight stoop and a pronounced tendency to stammer.

"Tom," said Munson, leading the boy aside, "there's no trouble in this for you unless you fail to tell the exact truth. Stick to that and I'm your friend. It's all very simple and easy. All you have to do is to answer my questions. Here's the first one. Why were you and Betty out so late on the night of the accident?"

"T-t-t--" Tom swallowed and began things afresh. "T-t-t't weren't no accident, Mr. Munson." His words fell out in fragments.

With one question Munson had covered a lot of ground. But Tom, willing as he was to talk, was handicapped by nature. Munson did not like to listen to him. It made him feel spasmodic. He considered the situation a moment, then looked about the orchard. Far down toward the salt marshes were a bench and an old battered wicker rocking-chair. A pleasant, secluded, unassuming retreat. There he would hear the story.

"Listen, Tom," he said. "We all ought to be in on this, you, Betty, and I. It's important. Now just run up to the house and bring Betty back to me. I'll meet you down there." He pointed to the bench.

Betty, her vital young eyes bright although her cheeks had lost some of their color, showed no reluctance to talk once she was assured that the state of her virtue was not under investigation, that it was, in fact, taken for granted.

"We were out late, Mr. Munson," she admitted readily enough, "because the party didn't break up until half past two, and I was

helping to serve."

Munson, sitting, insecurely in the rain-warped wicker chair, nodded and continued to think. Might as well skip a lot of ground, he decided. Why lead up to it by dramatic stages? Get the worst over at once--the confirmation of his suspicions, of his convictions, by eye-witnesses. Then he would do what had to be done, and the case would be over. Over, yes, but not before he had had a talk with young Barney and brought him back to poor Dan. His brother would need him now.

"Then you actually stood under those high bushes?" he asked.

"We did, sir," replied Betty, and Tom nodded. "We were afraid of being seen and misunderstood."

"Go on, Betty," said Munson in a low voice.

Betty settled herself on the bench and cast Tom a look of importance as if she suspected the poor boy of not understanding what it was all about. It was a look that meant, "What I saw you saw and there's no two ways about it." Tom seemed to understand.

"It was late," began Betty, "and I was so hot from running here and there that I wanted to cool off before going to bed. Tom took me down to the Rock. We started out right away, about half past two. Well, we got there all right and the moon was just rising. Not much of a moon, though."

"Meet anyone on the way?"

"Not a soul," replied Betty. "We walked to the edge of the Rock and stood looking out awhile, looking and talking and wondering sort of. Then we walked round the point to get a view of the marshes. Terribly mysterious they looked in the moonlight. When we came

back we were scared stiff to see Miss Emily-Jane and that man Holt-  
-"

"Wait a minute, Betty," Munson broke in. He had detected a note of anger in the girl's voice. "You don't seem to like Mr. Holt. Why?"

"He hasn't let me alone since the first day he arrived," replied Betty. "Doesn't ever seem to get wise to himself. He just can't believe I won't fall for him."

Tom shifted restlessly on the bench and muttered some brief, private observation about a dog.

"Well, you saw them standing there," said Munson. "Then what, Betty?"

"We didn't want to pass them," she continued, "so we stopped behind those high bushes. They were having a long argument, and drinking. He was urging her to give up Mr. Barney and go away with him. She just laughed. Then, suddenly, his arms went out and he grabbed her. They were swaying there on the edge of the cliff.

"At that moment there was a thrashing in the bushes, and out comes a black figure with a hood on its head. It rushed over to Holt and tried to drag him away. Then out pops another black figure and starts for the scramble, but it stops, this figure does. Stops sudden, just like it saw something unexpected. From where we stood, looking round the edge of the bushes, we could see plain enough, but we didn't see what that second figure saw. All we saw was the first figure slashing at that man Holt, trying to get him away from the girl, and Holt pushing with all his might. He swung round suddenly, and Miss Emily-Jane went over the edge of the cliff."

"Did she scream?" asked Munson.

"She made no sound."

"Funny, that," thought Munson, "if she saw it coming." Aloud he asked, "Did you recognize either of the hooded figures, Betty? Think well. It doesn't mean anything, but I'd just like to get an idea."

Apparently this question was not to Betty's liking.

She looked everywhere but into Munson's dark, steady eyes, which never left her face.

"It can do no harm, Betty," he said quietly, "and it might help me a lot."

Betty considered. "It's just a guess," she said, "so you can't hold it against me, and if it will help, I'll tell. The figure that tried to save Miss Emily-Jane was just about the size of Mr. Dan. The one that scuttled back into the bushes was heavy like Mr. Stoughten. That's the best I can do."

"And after that, Betty?"

"Holt split off through the darkness," the girl went on, "and left the tall black figure standing alone on the rock. And it stripped off its hood, Mr. Munson"--here Betty's voice took an an overtone of awe and she hesitated a moment--"and it was Mr. Dan. I lied about that. It was Mr. Dan and I saw his face. It was terrible, so full of pain and suffering it was. Just like he was being nailed to some invisible cross. He just stood there all the while on the rock, then he left the rock and went down into the darkness below."

"By the pathway, you mean?"

"Yes, Mr. Munson."

The three of them sat in silence awhile, each one picturing the scene, then Munson spoke. "And after that, Betty?"

"We waited about ten minutes and went home."

"Did you meet anybody on the way, or see anybody about the house?"

"Only Miss June. She was just coming out of the pantry. Said she was having a cup of tea for herself. Had one shoe off. Said her feet hurt her."

"And was that what you saw, Tom?"

Betty's glance seemed to set off some mechanism in Tom's anatomy which in turn started his head nodding in violent agreement.

"All except the Miss June part," corrected Betty, "Tom sleeps in one of the outhouses with the men. It's the same house where you've lodged those two queer officers that keep following you about."

Munson smiled. "And why didn't you tell me about this before?" he asked.

"We were both afraid we might lose our places," replied Betty. "We like it here together and all. It didn't seem to matter much about Miss Emily-Jane. I didn't like her."

"But suppose we should have convicted an innocent man? What would you have done then?"

"I'd have snitched long before that," the girl explained.

"And in the meantime you were perfectly willing to let me work my head off looking for the murderer?"

"We decided it would give you something to do. We were interested to see if you'd guess right. Did you?"

Once more Munson smiled, this time in spite of his irritation. "I don't guess," he said. "I have to know."

"What are you going to do, Mr. Munson? Do you mind telling?"

"This," said Munson. "I'm going to let you go now with the strict understanding that you'll say nothing. You've really placed yourselves within the reach of the law by withholding this information. You'll have to make up for it now. When I'm ready I'll let you know and then I want you to repeat your story before Mr. Holt and probably in the presence of Sergeant Bennett. Will you do that for me?"

They readily agreed and departed almost on tiptoe, like sobered children. Munson remained where he was. He was lost in thought. He was very much afraid that Betty's story wouldn't quite wash. It was true enough as far as it went. She believed she had seen what she had told him, but unconsciously she had been biased in her vision.

As a result she had presented Lane Holt in the light shed by her own opinion of him. She had seen him as the murderer and Daniel as the hero rushing to the rescue. No, it wouldn't wash; at least, Munson was not so sure. Her narrative of the actual killing had been too confused. Either one of them might have pushed the girl off, in spite of the fact that Betty claimed Holt had deliberately tried to do so, while Daniel had done just the opposite and attempted to save Emily-Jane. After all, Betty's story might go with a jury, particularly when corroborated by the enslaved Tom. Strong evidence, if properly rehearsed and presented. Why not go ahead with it? Lane Holt was no good. What was his life worth compared with Daniel's or Sam's? Munson was sorely tempted. It would be so very easy with the clues he had in hand, and the situation would be saved. Certainly

of the three Holt acted the guiltiest. Well, all he could do was to put Betty's story to the test, to confront Lane Holt with it and to study his reactions. In the face of such overwhelming direct evidence he might, if he were guilty, break down and confess.

Rising from his chair, he walked slowly back to the house through the old orchard. He skirted the side of the house and came out on the lawn. He wondered if Emily-Jane's body had been sent away yet, and seeing June Lansing sitting alone under the shade of a tree, he strolled over and asked her.

"Yes," said June calmly. "Emily-Jane has seen the last of Crewe House. A most unbereaved-looking old lady arrived while you were off somewhere, and carried her back to Ohio. Strange thing, that. Never even knew she came from Ohio. Somehow she didn't act as if she had come from there."

"Did you receive the old lady, or Aunt Matty?"

"The pair of us did. She was an odd old thing. Some sort of an aunt or other. She didn't seem to know what it was all about or to care a rap. Just duty. She was doing it."

"Say anything about Emily-Jane?"

"Hardly knew her, she said. Emily-Jane rarely came home. Couldn't drag her back except for a few weeks at a time."

"How did Barney act?"

"He didn't act. Just kept on painting. He's mad." June lit another cigarette. "He's funny. The body was taken out the back way, so he didn't even see it leave. Anyway he hasn't been interested in Emily-Jane's body since the life went out of it. Looked at it once, then

hurried away. For him Emily-Jane had ceased to exist. The body didn't matter. And all he said when he looked at her was, 'And back of all that beauty--' He never finished his sentence." June tossed her cigarette away and lit another one. "Wish it was all over," she said. "Our Emily-Jane left a lot of trouble behind. She ran true to form to the last, Scott."

"You're smoking too much, June," said Munson. "I've been noticing it of late."

He rose and walked away. June's ale-colored eyes with their little speckles dwelt on him thoughtfully. She held out one hand and watched it. The fingers trembled slightly.

"Guess he's right," she said to herself. "My nerves are going, too."

Munson started for his room. On his way up he met Aunt Matty, who had evidently sought refuge in trifles, for she was fussing about a lost domino, one that had never been worn.

"There were six of them," she was telling Betty, who gave the impression of being only mildly interested, "and now there are only five. The new one's gone."

The old lady managed to cram so much tragedy into this last statement that Munson smiled as he mounted the stairs. Then suddenly he stopped, his foot half raised for the next step. Where was that lost domino, he wondered. That was it. Was that domino actually lost or-- A great shouting somewhere outside interrupted this interesting line of thought. Munson ran down the stairs and out to the veranda.

At the far end of the lawn, the end nearest the road, he made out a long pair of legs frantically raised aloft. Upon approaching these legs

he discovered they were joined to the attenuated trunk of Officer Shad. Clutched in the officer's arms as if it were a pearl of great price, was the head of Lane Holt. On the fringe of this grotesque struggle, Officer Red was capering excitedly, revolver in hand.

"You hold him, and I'll shoot him," he was shouting for the benefit of the prostrate Shay.

"For God's sake, don't shoot," cried Shad. "Things are bad enough as they are. This devil's trying to bite my ear clean off my head."

Munson silently enjoyed the scene until he saw Officer Red take deliberate aim at the beautifully exposed though earnestly animated rear section of Mr. Lane Holt. It was an irresistible target. Munson appreciated the fact, but felt called upon to intervene.

"Sorry, Red," he remarked. "I'd like to take a try myself, but the situation doesn't justify it, I'm afraid. Put your gun away." Then he addressed Officer Shad. "Let him up, Shad," he said. "You have done well."

Shad seemed to think so himself, as he released the head and arose from the scene of battle.

"He was trying to do a bunk," he announced, pointing to a partially strangled Holt. "We told him to stop, but he wouldn't. So," concluded Shad with modest satisfaction, "we stopped him."

"How about it, Holt?" asked Munson.

"They're crazy as hell," exclaimed Holt. "I was mooning about down here after Emily-Jane had gone--I'd seen the last of her going down the road--and I wasn't paying much attention to anything, when all of a sudden these two lunatics rushed out from behind a bush and told me to stop. Naturally I told them to go to hell, and kept on walking.

Then without word of warning they jumped on my back and down I went. Ever since then I've just been trying to get up. That's all."

"He damn well near bit my ear off," said Officer Shad, applying a tender hand to the left side of his long head.

"You would have been well avenged if Mr. Munson hadn't stopped me," said Officer Red.

"There seems to have been a general misunderstanding," Munson observed, "but I must admit you boys did well. I'm proud of you. Carry on."

Taking Holt by the arm he led him back across the lawn.

"Holt," he said, "if you feel up to it, I'd like to have you meet me in the little study at the far end of the house in about half an hour." He looked at his watch. "It's eleven-thirty now and luncheon is not until one. Think you can make it?"

The man shrugged his drooping shoulders rather hopelessly.

"Oh, hell, what does it matter anyway?" he said in a flat voice. "I'll be there. . . . Might as well get it over. I don't care a damn now one way or another but I suggest you have a little talk with your good friend Daniel."

He broke away from Munson and went into the house. Munson found Bennett, who had just returned from making inquiries at the neighboring houses in an endeavor to ascertain if any of the servants had been near High Point Rock on the night of the murder. He had had no luck. When Munson told him his story his eyes lighted up.

"Then that settles everything," he said. "We'll drill a confession out of his hide and I'll take him to the lockup right off. You've got the case on

ice, Mr. Munson."

But Scott only smiled wearily as he turned toward the house. "I'm not so sure, Bennett," he said. "Sometimes you can't depend on the accuracy of eye-witnesses even."

"But their story would convince any jury."

"Yes," replied Scott, "and that's what irks me."

## XII. DEATH COMES INDOORS

DANIEL'S study was like a happy thought on a dull day. It was an unexpected relief. At the extreme left end of the house, it was approached by way of a long crazy corridor that ambled past a series of pleasant rooms, each of which invited the passer to enter and linger awhile. It was not so much a study as it was a retreat--an escape from boredom when life turned drab. Here there were books and comfortable chairs and the smell of tobacco. Its front windows gave to the lawn and the broad sweep of the Sound; those at the side commanded a view of the orchard with the glinting streams of the salt marshes caught in the arms of the trees. From the study a door led directly to the veranda where it curved round the house, and here there were several easy chairs. It was like a private deck on an ocean liner, an essential part of the whole, yet cut off and remote.

It was by way of the veranda door that Munson and Bennett now entered. The room seemed lost to the world, so still and tranquil it was. And Daniel was a part of its stillness. At one of the side windows he was standing in an attitude of tense immobility. Deep in thought, he stood with his sunken eyes brooding out over the salt marshes where the sluggish streams twisted through the reeds. On his face was an expression of utter weariness and defeat. His was the face of a man who was very much alone with himself.

The two men were in the room before he turned from the window. He regarded them in silence for a moment; then an expression of resignation came into his eyes.

"Well, gentlemen," he said in a quiet voice, "I suppose you want me?"

"Why should we want you, Dan?" asked Munson quickly.

"For murder," he replied in level tones. "That's all you want anyone for these days, Scott."

"Well, this time, Daniel, we're not after you, but your room. Mr. Lane Holt has promised to meet us here for a chatty half-hour. I've a feeling he's got an interesting story to tell. I've the same feeling about you and Sam, and I've promised myself the pleasure of listening to those stories within the next few days."

Daniel slightly inclined his head. "I shall try to make mine as interesting as possible and as unenlightening."

Munson smiled rather sadly. "Things have gone far beyond that, Daniel," he said. "We'll have to have a showdown soon. You know I can't keep stalling on the job forever."

Holt entered the room by way of the corridor. Daniel faced him squarely. Their eyes met, and those of Holt were filled with an insane hatred. He looked upon Daniel as the cause of all the misery through which he had passed, the nights and days of cold, pursuing fear. But for Daniel, Emily-Jane would be alive today, and he, Holt, would be safe . . . and happy.

His lips bared his white, even teeth as he uttered one word, "Murderer!"

On the silence of the room the word fell jarringly, accusingly. Daniel received it with an expressionless face. He seemed to be considering the man before him as if he were some microscopic specimen. Presently he spoke. His voice was quiet and well controlled.

"I'm beginning to wonder about that," he said, and walked to the veranda door where he stopped and looked back. "Holt," he

continued, "you don't deserve to live, and I've a strange feeling that you won't live much longer." He grinned and passed through the door. His tall figure could be seen stalking across the lawn.

"What the devil did he mean by that?" asked Holt nervously.

"Nothing good for you," said Sergeant Bennett, with a grim smile. "I wouldn't be alone with him if I were in your place."

Munson was looking worried. Just what had Daniel meant, anyway? His remark had made Scott feel jumpy. He shrugged his shoulders. Probably Daniel had only wanted to throw a scare into Holt. Well, Holt was scared enough as it was. No need to paint the lily. He turned to the rather pitiful object of his thoughts and studied his fear-haunted, feverish eyes with their thinly veiled depths of hate. His scrutiny convinced him that Holt's mind was sick, that the man had already departed from the rational ways of thinking and was keeping to the tracks merely through fear and force of habit. A thin ray of pity momentarily touched Munson. Perhaps, after all, Emily-Jane's going out had left an empty place in the life of this creature who stood dejectedly before him, as rotten as he was.

"Sit down," he said in a kindly voice, for he realized that Lane Holt was about to be subjected to a test that would tax the strongest nerves, and he had grave doubts regarding the man's ability to stand it.

Holt, without speaking, slumped lethargically into an easy chair and kept his eyes on the floor. The kindly tone affected by Munson had increased rather than diminished his fear. It was suggestive of a bountiful meal just previous to execution. Munson could afford to be kindly only when things were going his way. Holt entertained the morbid impression that the two men were looking at him as if he were already dead. He moved uneasily in his chair. His gaze strayed

over the floor--anywhere but up.

"Well," he said at last, irritably, "did you get me here just to look at me? Let's get this over."

"All right, Bennett," said Munson. "You can bring Betty and Tom here now. You'll find them at the back of the house."

Bennett was not long in returning with the maid and her lumbering but obedient slave. Munson saw them comfortably seated and made them feel at ease. The expression of fear deepened in Holt's eyes. He had given the pair one quick glance, but had refused to meet Betty's accusing gaze.

"Now, Betty," said Munson in an easy voice, "all you have to do is to sit there and tell your story just as if you were telling it to someone in no way concerned with the case. Understand? Make everything clear, but be sure about your details, and don't for the love of Pete imagine things. Just stick to what you know, what you actually heard and saw."

The girl had her story clearly briefed in her mind by this time, and she told it with a simple conviction that left no room for doubting her sincerity. As her participation in the events of the night unfolded, Holt's eyes gradually crept up from the floor until they rested on Betty's full red lips as if held there by some terrible attraction. Occasionally Munson interrupted the story to ask Holt a question.

"Did you quarrel, Holt, while you were standing there near the edge of the cliff?"

"No," came Holt's unsteady voice, "we didn't quarrel at all. At first we argued a little, but after a while we gave that up."

"All right, Betty, go on."

And Betty went on to the ghastly climax, which seemed more ghastly still because of the stark simplicity with which she narrated it. Holt was on his feet, his face working and lips dry. There was a kind of hopeless desperation in his eyes. He spoke like a man who had no expectation of being believed, yet his words were urgent, pleading.

"She's wrong," he said. "They didn't see that. The whole thing was confused. How could she tell what happened? Right up to the end of her story she sticks to the facts, except about our quarreling. Then at the most important part she deliberately reverses what actually happened. It doesn't make sense. What reason had I for killing Emily-Jane? I tell you I was fond of her in my way, and she was fond of me. I had nothing to fear from her. You have Sam Stoughten's letters. There's a motive for you, stronger than any you can pin on me."

"But you wanted those letters, Holt," Munson quietly reminded him.

"Oh, hell, yes!" cried Holt. "Perhaps I did, but that was after the thing had happened. I only thought of them then. I'm a rotter, if you want to have it that way, but I didn't murder Emily-Jane."

"Then you mean you won't confess?" asked Ben-nett. "You're going through with it? What's the sense, man, in the face of all this evidence--two eyewitnesses, your flask at the scene of the crime, your actions after the crime, and your admitted relationship with the dead girl? Why drag out the misery, Holt? It will come to the same thing in the end."

Munson had remained silent. He preferred to let Bennett try his hand. He was more convinced than ever that Lane Holt was innocent, yet he could not brush aside the testimony of two obviously sincere eyewitnesses. Everything was unsatisfactory about this case.

Munson heartily wished he was out of it. Holt turned to him.

"Are you going to arrest me on that?" he asked.

Munson considered while Bennett watched him eagerly. "I don't know," he said at last. "I'm not sure, but stick around, Holt. We might be wanting you at any minute."

Holt started to say something, then gave it up as if the effort were too hopeless. His whole being was dipped in a clinging hatred of Daniel Crewe. Everyone was on Daniel's side. If he could only get back at Daniel. If he could only pin the guilt on him. Holt felt that he would willingly sacrifice anything for that. He left the room unsteadily, holding on to the frame of the door for support. In the library he sat down at Daniel's great desk and thought. With the hounds of fear rushing across his brain he found that he could still think clearly and to some purpose. Gradually an evil smile twisted his white lips. "They'll have to believe that," he said to himself. "There will be no getting round it."

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Daniel found June in her favorite chair on the lawn. She was doing nothing, absolutely nothing. Her thoughts were adrift in space. And although her expression was calm and composed, Daniel felt that her spirit was tense and waiting. He could not account for this feeling. Yet he knew that June was passing through her own little private hell and that he was responsible. The realization of this was almost more than he could bear. How could he confess when she was fighting silently with the truth in her heart? What was Holt saying to Munson back there in the study? Was he telling what he knew, and would Scott Munson believe him?

June looked up and smiled. "There's a chair," she said, pointing to

one with her foot. "Drag it over here and fold up your great length in it."

"Munson has collared Holt," said Daniel, doing as he was bidden. "They've got him in there now."

"I'd like to hear his story, Dan."

"So would I, and then again I wouldn't."

She turned in her chair and looked at him in a way that was unusual for her. Her eyes were so tender and unhappy . . . they were lonely, those eyes of June's. Daniel felt himself powerless to help her.

"You have nothing to fear, Daniel," she told him. "Don't mind what lies Holt may tell. Munson will deal with him."

"Do you believe that, June?"

"Yes, Dan. Stick it out."

"Together we'll see it through."

"We'll see it through and farther."

"How about our yacht?"

"Is there such a thing?"

"Yes, June. It's a swell yacht."

"Manning?"

"Through Manning."

She pondered awhile in silence, then, "Well, keep the yacht in mind,

Dan." Her voice broke and she turned her head away. "Although it may be only a crazy hunch."

His hand was gripping hers. "Come back and fight, June," he pleaded.

"Half a minute, old dear. I'll fight."

"And you know ?"

Her head sank on her breast. "Dan," she whispered, "I've always known."

"Sorry, June." His voice was dead.

She turned on him fiercely. "Then don't be sorry. I'm only sorry for you."

"And me for you, dear."

A long silence, then June, "We'll make the grade somehow."

"In our yacht?"

"Sure," she smiled. "That yacht's gotten the best of you."

"I've always been fond of the sea, June, you know."

She was holding everything back now. Her teeth were set, and her hands gripped the arms of her chair. "I know, Dan. I like it, too."

"All the world and places," he murmured, his eyes on the broad blue Sound. "Clear of this dismal damn mess."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk. Your old face looks so worn."

And he rested his head on her shoulder, but he wasn't very comfortable. Neither was June.

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Since the death of Emily-Jane, meals at Crewe House had been rather sketchy affairs. Attendance had been unreliable. For a long time now Aunt Matty hadn't known what the world was ever coming to. And no matter how often and thoroughly she washed her hands of everything she was still very much involved.

At luncheon both Holt and Daniel were absent, which, according to Aunt Matty, made it a pretty state of affairs. The head of the house not sitting down at his own table, and his own blood brother gnawing away like a dog and saying never a word.

"But what's the use of being head of the house unless you can do as you please?" asked June.

Aunt Matty cast her an indignant look. "There isn't any head to this house," she pronounced, "and still less tail."

Sue Stoughten laughed so earnestly over this that Aunt Matty thought she had really been funny. The old lady felt much better.

Munson endeavored to lead Sam into the ways of speech, but Sam, suspecting a trap, was sparing of his words. Bennett, who had stayed for luncheon at Munson's invitation, gave an admirable demonstration of well-controlled but effective eating. Barney, as Aunt Matty had put it, just gnawed away in stubborn silence.

Then came the shot--the sound of a shot.

White faces lifted and forks suspended. For what were they waiting? No one seemed to know. They were held there because all their

instincts told them urgently that they did not want to know. There had been enough of tragedy—enough of death. Keep out of it. Don't know. Don't try to find out.

Bennett, however, wanted to know and intended to find out. The sound of the shot had hardly died away before he was out of the dining-room and up the stairs. For only a moment he paused, then ran down the hall to an open door. Daniel was standing in it, a piece of paper crushed in his hand.

"Come back in here with me, Mr. Crewe," said Bennett in a quietly commanding voice, as he brushed past Daniel and entered the room. Daniel, like a person in a hypnotic condition, turned and followed the detective. Below at the foot of the stairs, Scott Munson sarcastically excused himself as he passed between Officers Shad and Red, each politely insisting that the other ascend first.

Bennett stood in the middle of the room and took in the situation. At a large table Lane Holt sat. He was sprawled out and his head was flung back and he was dead. In his right hand he held a pen, and in his left temple there was a hole made by a bullet fired at close range.

Munson was there now. Mechanically he felt the man's heart. It would never again harbor hate or fear.

"Well, he's out of the case," said Munson, looking regretfully down at the grotesque figure. "This leaves us about half-way up a tree."

For a moment he looked about him, then he deliberately placed a chair against the wall where he commanded a full view of the room, and sat down.

"Sit down, Daniel," he said, his voice sounding tired and strained. "Bennett, go to the door and ask those two faces please to withdraw.

They confuse me. Tell one of them to telephone the coroner and tell him to bring a doctor. Then come back here and stand by my chair. I want you to see with me."

When Bennett had dispatched the stunned Shays he returned to Munson's chair and once more looked about the room.

"Take notes," said Munson. "I want you to remember everything. Daniel, you say, was just leaving the room when you reached the door. He had a piece of crumpled paper in his hand. Put that down. Now just make brief notes as I go along. Pen in dead man's right hand. Wound in left temple fired at close range. Handkerchief on floor at left side. Ink bottle open. Service revolver at far end of room under window. Probably thrown there by murderer. Is it your gun, Daniel?" His eyes met Daniel's and Daniel nodded. "Go on with the notes, Bennett," said Munson. "Service revolver the admitted property of Daniel Crewe. Now draw a line." Munson looked up. "All right, Daniel," he said, then added, "Get this, Bennett."

"My story's so simple," replied Daniel, "it sounds foolish."

"Tell it," said Munson.

"I was in my room." Daniel spoke in a detached, matter-of-fact voice. "Lane Holt called me. His words were : 'Daniel, please come here.' He sounded urgent. I got up from the bed and walked across the hall. There was a shot. As I opened the door I thought I heard something scraping across the floor. I entered the room but saw nothing moving. Holt was as he is now. I went to him and saw he was dead. Then I saw what he had been writing and I took the sheet of paper, hoping to get away with it. Bennett stopped me at the door. And"-- Daniel smiled sardonically--"that's all."

"Bring me the paper, Bennett."

Daniel relinquished his hold on the paper. It dropped into Bennett's outstretched hand. He brought it over to Munson, who smoothed it out and read:

Dear Munson :

I am going to hand you this statement to read, because whenever I try to tell you the truth I can see you don't believe me and then I lose my nerve.

Everything that Betty said was true. I agree in every detail with two exceptions. We did not quarrel. I did not touch Emily-Jane. Daniel Crewe deliberately murdered her, and if you want to find out the facts I dare you to grill Sam Stoughten. At the same time ask him who did the stabbing.

If you're so damned honest think this over. Daniel Crewe is the murd

At the point where the statement broke off there was a small splash of ink. The lower part of the letter was smeared where the writing had not yet dried.

"Are you ready to go, Daniel?" Munson's voice was toneless.

"I didn't do it, Scott."

"It's better to be arrested for this murder than the other one." There seemed to be some hidden significance in Scott's words.

Daniel left the room with Bennett. Munson sank back in his chair. When Judson, the coroner, arrived with the doctor he was still sitting in the same position.

"Another killing, Judson," he said. "I'd like to hold the inquest at four tomorrow. Let me see." He looked at his watch. "That will give me a

little less than twenty-seven hours."

"It looks like a fairly simple case," Judson observed after he had heard the details. "I'm sorry as hell for Daniel Crewe. He's a fine lad." He paused and looked round the room, then said in a puzzled voice, "I wonder what the devil's got into this old house anyway?"

"You tell me," said Munson.

\* \*

"I didn't do it, June." Daniel spoke rapidly while Bennett stood by. He admired Daniel Crewe.

"Can you prove it, Dan?" June's face was deathly pale, but her voice was as calm as ever and her eyes held no hint of fear.

Daniel shook his head and grinned from complete frustration. "It's silly," he said. "It's so damned pat. Why, it couldn't look more convincing if I'd dragged him into the dining-room and strangled him before your eyes."

"What does Scott think?"

"What can he think?" Daniel hesitated, remembering Munson's words. "He acted sort of funny, though," he added. "Seemed to have something on his mind."

"It's all right," said June.

"Think so?" said Daniel.

"It's all right," she repeated, and kissed him. Then she turned to Bennett and smiled, "Take him away, officer."

Daniel stepped into the waiting car and was driven down the road. June stood there waving to him until the trees dosed over the car.

Barney at his easel watched his brother depart. Save for a slight tightening round the lips his expression did not change.

June sank into a chair and let the tears chase each other down her freckled cheeks. Barney tried to pretend he did not notice her. He began to fidget fretfully on his stool. Finally he put down his brushes and looked at her uncomfortably.

"Don't do that," he commanded explosively. "What are you doing?"

"I'm crying, you young fool. Crying like hell." "Why?"

"They've arrested Daniel."

"Good. Why?"

"They claim he shot Lane Holt."

"What's he doing, anyway--making a hobby of it?"

"Barney, I could kill you."

"Wish you would, June." Barney's voice was sufficiently bitter. He regarded June speculatively for a moment. "Did he do him in?" he asked.

"Holt's dead," she replied.

"Good," said Barney, with undisguised satisfaction. June smiled in spite of her tears. "You have no soul, Barney."

For the remainder of the day Barney was unable to paint. He passed

most of the time sitting on his brother's bed.

Only June Lansing knew where he was. She left him entirely alone.

# XIII. OBVIOUSLY MURDER

SOMETHING scraping across the floor. Something scraping across the floor. Now what in hell did he mean by that?"

Munson, as he wandered about the room, was entertaining himself with the mumblings of his own voice.

"Scraping, scraping, scraping," he continued under his breath. "What was scraping? Didn't sound like a lie. Didn't work in anywhere."

Once more he returned to his chair and sat down. Why was he so convinced that Daniel had not shot Lane Holt? All the facts cried out against him. Less than three-quarters of an hour before the man was found shot through the head, Daniel had told him he did not deserve to live and had predicted his speedy death. "I have a strange feeling that you won't live much longer"-- those were the exact words he had used. Now, here was Holt dead, obviously murdered.

Then, there was the gun. Munson cast the revolver a disgusted glance. He knew what marks were on that gun--Daniel's finger-prints. Munson would see about that later. But why had he tossed it over there by the window? Damn fool thing to do. And the bullet the doctor had extracted from Lane Holt's brain had been shot from Daniel's revolver. All the pieces fitted together perfectly. And Daniel had been caught with an incriminating statement written by the dead man crushed in his hand.

Judson had put it conservatively when he observed that the case looked fairly simple. It was altogether too simple. Either that, or Daniel, convinced that any moment he would be charged with the murder of Emily-Jane, had decided to make a clean sweep of things.

Munson got up and walked over to the table. He seated himself where Holt had sat, and leveled his eyes on the revolver on the floor twelve feet away, near the window directly in front of him. Munson noticed that the window was about two inches open from the bottom. This fact did not impress him at the moment. He closed his eyes and let the stillness of the room settle round him. He was not thinking now. His brain was merely receiving impressions. Over there on the bed lay a dead man. And just before he had become such a dead man something had happened to his mind. Munson could feel once more the crazy eyes of Lane Holt furtively looking at him. Yes, undoubtedly, the man had been mentally unbalanced, morally and mentally warped through a conflict of fear and hate. Made melancholy, perhaps, from brooding over the death of Emily-Jane. What did this mean? How could he work it in, use it to help Daniel?

Munson took Holt's statement from his pocket and smoothed it out on the desk. For some minutes he studied the writing. There was something peculiar about that writing, a mechanical difference rather than an expression of the writer's personality. Well, he'd have to see about that, too. And there was that handkerchief on the floor at the left side of the chair. Subconsciously Munson was laying the foundation of his investigations. Suspicions, impressions and questions were lying fallow in his mind. For the time being he had completely dismissed all consideration of the first murder. That would have to wait, although the motive for the murder of Lane Holt must have sprung from that of Emily-Jane. The two were inseparably linked, results of the same situation.

Leaving the table, he walked over to the bed and drew down the sheet. There was Lane Holt, the once jaunty and debonair lover of Emily-Jane. Shot in the left temple at close range. Why the left temple? Why not? Well, for one thing it was the side nearest the door. Yet because of that very fact it was the most awkward side to approach. Daniel would have been forced to squeeze himself in

between the open door and the table. Much easier to go round the other way, much easier and more natural. But Munson was not greatly interested in the bullet hole in Lane Holt's head. His eyes were intently studying every detail of the man's hands now lying curled and useless on the spread. Munson bent over and scrutinized those hands. "An immaculate devil," he thought as his eyes dwelt on the meticulously manicured nails. Then, carefully taking the dead man's wrists he raised the hands and inspected each finger in turn.

Gradually, yet with increasing momentum, a grin, a grin of almost beatific proportions, broke the severe lines of Scott Munson's lips. Then the grin, having achieved its triumphant climax, suddenly collapsed. Munson recovered the figure and turned away.

"Oh, hell," he reflected, and a look of discouragement settled on his face. "What's the good in getting him off one murder charge if only to bring another one against him?" Still, the other charge would be more difficult to prove than this one. Here everything was all set up. Just waiting for some jury to pounce upon. The murder of Emily-Jane was a great deal more complicated. There were other persons involved. No, he would have to get Daniel out of this scrape no matter what might happen in the future. Very easy to say, but how was he going to do it?

In the kitchen the Shays were hovering over a belated meal. They felt somewhat despised and rejected, having been so summarily dismissed from the scene of the crime. Their appetites remained unimpaired.

"And to think," remarked Officer Shad impressively, arresting the upward progress of a skilfully laden fork, "just to think that only a few short hours ago I was locked in a desperate struggle with him. My ear will bear the marks of his teeth to its grave."

"Well, the back of him just escaped bearing the marks of my bullet to its grave," observed Officer Red. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Munson it 'ud have gone in plop. I had a dead bead on it."

"A dangerous case, this," said Officer Shad. "I wonder who goes next? Looks to me like a sort of a general killing off."

"They call it the process of elimination," came sententiously from Red. "They go on and on and on, until only one is left, and then he gets all the money."

"Whose money?"

"All the money there is."

"In what?"

"All the money there is in the will." Officer Red was quite convinced about this. "There's always a will in cases like these, and that naturally leads to elimination."

"Naturally," agreed Shad.

"Now, the way I figure this case out, that guy Holt must have been a collateral cousin. Get me?" Officer Red fixed his companion with a politely skeptical gaze.

"He certainly was mean," once more agreed Shad. "The way he went after my ear."

"And being a collateral cousin he comes in under the will," continued Red. "And that starts all this bumping off business. They're all after the money, and"-- he lowered his voice--"the old lady bears watching. From the way she bustles us about and keeps shoosing us out of the house you can tell she doesn't want us around. No, sir.

She's afraid of us. And did you ever notice how she keeps peering into things like she was looking for something? The will. That's what she's after, mark my words."

He leaned back in his chair with a complacent expression on his face, which, if anything, was a few shades redder due to the exertion caused by eating and talking at the same time.

"I wonder where that will is?" mused Officer Shad. "It would be a feather in our caps if we could find it."

"Then keep your eye on the old dame," said the master mind of the pair, "and look in places whenever they let us in the house."

"It must be a mighty valuable will," said Officer Shad, "what with two killings and one stabbing already."

Further elucidation of the case was interrupted by the appearance of Dora. This superior and comely domestic eyed the pair with a look of disgust that bordered almost on loathing.

"Mr. Munson wants you two," she said. "He's up in the room with the corpe."

"The what?" from Officer Red incredulously. "I said it," snapped the girl. "The corpe."

"No, no, my dear," said the officer gently. "It's not corpe. The word is corpse."

"And," put in Officer Shad admonishingly, "you certainly should get to know that word with nothing else but corpses knocking about here."

"I wish you were knocking about with them," retorted Dora, as the officers marched from the room.

Munson was back in his chair when the Shays answered his summons.

"The grounds are unguarded, sir," announced Shad. "Well, you can give the grounds a rest for a while," said Munson. "No one is trying to get away now. I have more important work for you to do."

Uneasy glances passed between the officers.

"Yes," continued Munson, "I want you to watch me."

"You mean," Shad's voice was uncertain, "to see that they don't do you in?"

"Among other things," replied Munson gravely, "but just now I want Shad to make a circle round that gun down there. Don't touch it."

Shad walked down to the gun, then gingerly circled round it, carefully placing his long feet the one in front of the other. Munson watched him abstractedly. Presently he asked, "Now what, may I ask, do you think you're doing, Shad?"

Shad looked up from his delicate task. "Making a circle around the gun," he replied. "Like you said."

"Not like I said at all," snapped Munson. "Here, take this piece of chalk and draw a circle round the thing."

"A perfect circle?" asked the officer, "or just rough?"

Munson looked at the crouching Shad a long time. No one will ever know what thoughts were passing through his mind, what violent impulses he was controlling. At last he rose wearily and walked down the room. With a piece of white chalk he carefully marked the

position of the revolver, then thrusting a long pencil into its barrel he carried it back to his chair. Shad looked at Red with eloquently elevated eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, then stood up and idly watched his chief.

Scott Munson was humming under his breath. Still humming he raised his eyes and looked so pensively upon the Shays that those two worthies began to shift about uncomfortably. "Come here, boys," he said pleasantly. "I want you to see what I see in case my testimony requires corroboration."

The officers allowed themselves to draw near. "Do you see the trigger guard on this revolver?" asked Munson.

"We do," vouchsafed Shad, hoping thereby to reinstate himself in the good graces of his chief.

"And do you see a small piece of thin, strong thread attached to it?" Munson could not keep an element of excitement from his voice.

"We do." This time they spoke in unison.

"Well," continued Munson, "what do you think it's there for?"

A heavy silence, at last broken by Officer Shad.

"Maybe," he said, "there's two revolvers just alike in the house and they tied that thread on to one of them so they could tell them apart like they do with tooth-brushes."

"And you, Red. What's your conjecture?"

"I conject," replied Red brightly, "that the gun was hung on the wall somewhere."

"Thank you both," said Munson dryly. "You stay here until I return, and don't go monkeying round with that body on the bed."

Both officers hastily disclaimed any intention of so doing. As a matter of fact, since entering the room they had sedulously avoided even glancing at the sheet-covered body. They would have preferred not to have been left alone with it.

When Munson returned he had established the fact that the butt of the revolver bore three clear finger-prints made by Daniel. He had compared them with a set already in his possession. He wondered moodily how he was going to be able to laugh that off.

"Now for a look at the corpse," he said briskly. "Come over here, boys."

The boys approached the bed, but it was plain to see that their hearts were not in their feet. Munson pulled down the sheet.

"I want you to pay particular attention to the hands," he said.

Munson raised the hands so abruptly that the officers started back nervously.

"Did you want us to sniff them?" asked Officer Red.

"That will hardly be necessary now," replied Munson. "Just look at them. You observe that the two fingers next to the thumb on the left hand are slightly smeared with ink, don't you?"

Yes, they observed that.

"Well, remember it," said Munson. "Now, Shad, go over there by the table at the left-hand side of the chair and draw a circle round that handkerchief on the floor. Don't cut up any more capers."

This time Shad did splendidly.

"Now come with me," said Munson. Followed by his staff, he left the room and locked the door. He hurried downstairs to the library and called up Manning on the telephone. Dr. Manning was on the point of leaving for the club, an attractive feminine voice informed Munson. She would get him. She did.

"Now, what is it?" came Manning's voice.

"Have you heard our latest joke?" asked Munson.

"Oh, it's you, Munson," the speaker at the other end of the line replied. "Thought I recognized your voice. No, I haven't heard a damn thing. Just got up. A swell night. What is it?"

"Lane Holt was shot to death in his room at about one o'clock today. Daniel has been detained at the village lockup pending the inquest. It will be held at four tomorrow afternoon." Munson spoke tersely.

A series of "Good Gods" dropped heedlessly by the horrified doctor had accompanied Munson's information. Now that Munson had ceased speaking, Manning had the field to himself. He proceeded to take advantage of it. Finally he drew breath and asked, "But did he really do it, Scott?"

"They have an absolutely water-tight case against him unless I can break it between now and the inquest. You've got to help me."

"Anything. What do you want?"

"Did you ever play golf with Lane Holt?"

Manning's answer to that and several following questions ended with

: "I'll be on the dot tomorrow to testify to that effect. Any reporters yet?"

"Thanks for reminding me," replied Scott. "I have just the boys for them. Good-by, Manning." He snapped the instrument down and favored his staff with a broad grin. "I've a wonderful assignment for you," he said.

Suspicion sullied the eyes of the officers.

"Yes," continued Munson. "A wonderful assignment. You go out there on the lawn and keep your eyes open for newspaper men. Don't let them near the house. They don't wear badges on their sleeves or cards in their hat bands. They look very much like anyone else when they're sober, but they don't know the meaning of truth the way you and I understand it, and they'll lie you into a cocked hat if you give them a chance. They'll even go so far as to adopt disguises just to get themselves into the place. Now, I rely on you boys to stop all that. We've had trouble enough already. The women are in on this, too. Go out and protect them."

"Oh, we know how to handle those birds," began Officer Red. "I remember once--"

"March!" interrupted Munson, and the boys left the room.

Munson went to the window. He had caught a glimpse of June Lansing on the veranda. There she was, all sprawled out in a chair, the whole rangy body of her. And she was looking comfortably miserable. Munson was aware of June's penchant for lolling away the hours doing nothing or as little as possible and enjoying herself hugely. Now, however, she did not look as if she were greatly enjoying her slothful repose.

Her eyes were open, those funny eyes of hers, but they did not see, or were not conscious of seeing. All receptivity to life and the movements of life seemed to have passed from them. Blankly and flatly they gazed at nothing.

Munson stepped through the French window and quietly approached her. "June," he asked, "do you happen to know where Daniel kept his revolver?"

June did not stir. She was beyond being startled. "I haven't the slightest idea, Scott?" she replied coldly.

"June," said Munson. "Look at me."

The girl raised her eyes to his.

"I'm working for Daniel in this."

"Do you mean that, Scott?"

"I'm the only one left to do it, and I'm going to get him off. He'll be a free man tomorrow."

"Oh, Scott, are you sure?" She was not much at giving a public demonstration of her feeling, but in this instance she was unable to keep the depth of her anxiety from showing itself in her voice.

"Unless my mind has gone all bad," replied Scott, "I'm fairly sure I'll be able to throw a large-sized monkey-wrench into the works."

"But things look pretty bad for him, don't they?"

"Couldn't look worse," was Munson's frank reply. "That's what gives me hope. There's such a thing as looking too damn guilty."

"He always keeps his revolver in the right-hand top drawer of the library desk," said June. "It was there only yesterday. I saw him handling the ugly thing and I made him put it away. Daniel is in no frame of mind to be handling dangerous weapons."

"Did anyone else see him handling that revolver?" Munson asked quickly.

"No," replied June. "That is, no one paid any special attention to him. Lane Holt passed the door on his way upstairs. He just glanced in and kept on going."

"You'd swear to that?"

"Most certainly. Why not? It's a fact."

"Thanks, June," said Munson cheerfully. "You've done me a world of good. Also Daniel."

He returned to the desk in the library and sat down at it. For a long time he surveyed the smooth dark surface before him. There were the leather-tipped blotter, the scissors, and the paper-knife. Several books stood at one end, at the other a roll of blue-prints. Daniel was forever planning the building of something or other and not doing it. And there were the pens. Yes, there were the pens—three of them straying at random across the desk. Those pens. Munson became very still as he looked at them. There was something wrong about those pens. What was it? They looked lost and out of place. He never recalled having seen them that way before, or had he? Damned if he was sure. He reached out a hand and delicately felt the surface of the desk beyond the edge of the blotting paper. Something heavy had rested there once. There were faint scratches. He could feel them and he could see them. He closed his eyes and thought about the desk to the exclusion of everything else. There

should be an inkstand. There always had been an inkstand, one with a place for the pens. Funny thing--with his eyes closed he could see it perfectly. There it was. A long flat slab of bronze pierced by two wells. And the base of the stand was grooved to accommodate three pens, to be specific, the three pens now lying in disorder on the desk.

Munson rose quickly and left the room. Betty was in the kitchen drinking tea, but at his request she willingly put down her cup and followed him to the library.

"Betty," he said, "you take care of this room. I see you messing about here every day."

"Yes, sir," replied Betty. "Not exactly messing, Mr. Munson."

"Of course not. Far from it." Munson laughed with agreeable hypocrisy. "Just my way of putting it. Now where's the inkstand, Betty?"

Betty looked at the desk in surprise, then her expression changed to one of indignation. She eyed the desk accusingly.

"Why, it's gone, Mr. Munson," she said. "It isn't there. And it was there this morning."

"You know that?"

"I know it, sir."

Munson remained silent, then he turned and paced the length of the room and back. If Lane Holt had taken Daniel's revolver he might have also taken the inkstand, but there was no proof that he had taken either. And what did he want with the inkstand? There was a bottle of ink in his room. Munson stopped in front of Betty.

"Where were you around one o'clock today?" he asked her.

"Standing out there in the hall," replied Betty, pointing to a spot just outside the wide door.

"See anything of Lane Holt?"

"I certainly did, sir. From the time I told what Tom and me had seen down at the Rock before him in Mr. Dan's study I kept looking out for that man. His eyes had scared me proper. So when I saw him coming out of this room, I just eased myself out of his way."

"Where did he go after he left this room?"

"He went right on upstairs."

"Was he carrying anything, Betty? Think hard."

"No, sir. He had his handkerchief in his hand." "Was it a large handkerchief, did you happen to notice?"

"Yes, sir, now that you come to mention it, I remember how it hung down."

"Do you think he could have been using it to cover something he was carrying?"

Betty gave a quick cry of triumph. "That's it, Mr. Munson," she said. "I should have known it right off."

"Why?"

"Because his arm hung flat to his side like it was glued there."

Munson's smile of gratification was swiftly changed to one of consternation at the sudden sound of revolvers being discharged at top speed.

"Oh, mother!" cried Betty, flinging her arms round Munson. "We'll all be murdered now."

Munson disentangled himself from the throttling embrace of the girl and rushed out to the veranda just in time to see a black-clad figure disappearing down the road at great bounds. Its arms were waving wildly in the air. In the general direction of this industrious figure, Officers Shad and Red were merrily discharging their revolvers. Munson lost no time in reaching the scene of action.

"Now please tell me," he said in a tired voice, "just what in God's name is the meaning of this maddened fusillade?"

"A reporter," said Red briefly, eyeing his smoking weapon with approval.

"Did he say he was a reporter?"

"He did not," put in Shad with a sardonic laugh. "That's the funny part about it. He said he was a preacher. And damned if he wasn't disguised like one. White collar and all. Kept insisting on seeing Aunt Matty. Said that with all the sorrow that's visited the house he thought he'd drop over and have a little talk with her. But he didn't fool us. Not for a minute."

At this point Officer Red laughed cynically. "No," he said, "he didn't get away with it. We told him to beat it, and then we pulled our guns and banged away."

"Did you swear at him, perhaps?" Munson's voice was almost timid as he put the question.

"Did we swear?" repeated Shad, and rolled his eyes at his brother-in-arms. "Did we swear? Mr. Munson, you should have heard us. We used every bad word we could think of. He'll never come back here any more."

Munson's hand sought his forehead. "Oh," he said, and, "Oh!"

"Anything wrong?" asked Officer Red solicitously.

"No, certainly not," replied Munson. "Everything's splendid--dandy." He let his eyes rest on his staff. "Did this man happen to mention any name?" he asked.

"Sure," said Red promptly. "He called himself the Reverend Williams. Horace Williams in full."

Horace seemed to strike some responsive chord in both of the officers, for at the very mention of the name they started in laughing, and continued for some time with ever-increasing volume.

The Rev. Mr. Horace Williams. That was the name of the particular man of God Aunt Matty had been hoping would call. Munson remembered it distinctly. She had been expecting him to tell her just what the world was coming to, and now, no doubt, the Rev. Mr. Williams was wondering about that himself.

"Did we do all right, Mr. Munson?" asked Officer Shad, wiping the tears and sweat from his long, lugubrious face.

"Quite all right," said Munson weakly, "but don't mention the fact up at the house that you scared the Rev. Mr. Horace Williams out of ten years' growth. It might get to Aunt Matty's ears."

"Then it was a real preacher?" asked Red, his eyes wide.

"I'm very much afraid it was," Munson smiled faintly.

"Gord," breathed Officer Shad. "And all those words we used."

# **XIV. How One Life Went Out**

MUNSON explained everything, but already everyone's nerves were so finely edged that his words did little to dispel the tension gripping the various members of the household.

Aunt Matty retired flutteringly to her room. Sam, Sue, and June sat in a silent group at the far end of the veranda. Without Daniel they seemed to be lost. They missed his cynical voice and his rather grim banter. All of them were thinking of him sitting alone and worried in the hot, unclean village lockup.

"How's he going to sleep tonight?" asked June of no one in particular. "He's much too long."

"Probably won't sleep at all," replied Sam. "He'll have lots of things to think about."

"Too many things," said June.

"We all have," said Sam. "Wish I could stop."

"I've stopped," announced Sue. "I can't think any more even when I want to. My brain has crumbled."

"He must have done it, June," Sam's voice was low, "but damn if I can see why."

"There were plenty of good reasons for killing Lane Holt," answered June in a dead voice. "I could have done it myself."

Sam nodded his head slowly, then his eyes met those of June for one swift glance. The girl's gaze dropped to the large solitaire sparkling on her engagement finger. Daniel's last gift. She wondered

if it would ever mean anything now. "I felt like that myself," said Sam, "but I'm always too late it seems."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Sue.

"Oh, nothing much," he answered. "Only, if Lane Holt had to be killed I'd rather have done it than Dan."

"Do you enjoy murdering people?" asked his wife, slightly raising her eyebrows. "Must you go sticking your great nose into every murder? And are you anxious to make a widow out of your own wife, or would you prefer to see me dead at your feet, the victim of your own hand?"

This was a long speech for Sue, and not a very pleasant one under the circumstances. Sam smiled conciliatingly upon her.

"No, Sue," he said, "but I can't bear the thought of Dan sitting alone down there tonight. He's done a lot for me--gone through hell and all."

"Isn't there any hope?" asked Sue. "What do you think, June?"

"There's some hope, Sue."

"What?"

"Scott Munson. He's for Dan in this."

"If he is," put in Sam, "it's because he has other plans for Dan. That guy's going to hang us all, and he doesn't need Lane Holt to help him do it, either."

"If you keep on being so cheerful and optimistic, Sam," said his wife, "I'm going to start in screaming and pulling my hair out by the roots."

"Even that would be a relief," remarked June.

They sat in silence as the shadows of the trees lengthened and dusk came quietly over the water and gathered round them. The old house was silent now, and in his room Lane Holt was silent, too. But there was no peace. The horror of murder and the fear of death and separation hung on the air. It would soon be night now--black night for Daniel.

\* \*

Scott Munson was still thinking about scraping--something scraping across the floor. But that was only one of his perplexities. He was also thinking of ink-stands, threads tied to revolvers, ink-stained fingers, dropped handkerchiefs, and left-handed golf players. They were all a part of the same thought. And occasionally across these thoughts bounded the disconcertingly active figure of the Rev. Mr. Horace Williams earnestly retreating down the road. An unfortunate occurrence.

One after another Munson eliminated the various units composing the structure of his thought, until only the bronze inkstand remained, that and the sound of scraping. Suddenly he sat forward in his chair as if listening, then gradually his body relaxed.

"Oh, what an abysmal, rank, noisome novice I have turned out to be," he told himself. "It has to be there. By all the laws of man and God it can't be anywhere else. And I should have known it. It was my job to know."

He rose from his chair and casually collected his staff. The Shays were only too willing to be collected. They had grown weary of looking out for reporters, and were ready to do something else now--any old thing. The Shays were fond of change. Routine palled on their vibrant, sensitive natures.

"Come with me," said Munson.

"What's up, chief?" asked Officer Red.

"We're going to look for an inkstand," he answered.

The staff exchanged significant glances. What a silly occupation for three full-grown men. This Munson was mad indeed.

Munson led them across the lawn and round the house until they stood directly beneath the side window of the room in which Lane Holt lay dead. Here there was a brick-faced shaft running down against the side of the house about five feet below the surface of the lawn. A boarded-up window was set into the shaft. It opened up into the cellar and was obviously used at one time for purposes of ventilation, but as that section of the cellar was now no longer used neither shaft nor window had any particular reason for existing.

In the rapidly fading light Munson peered down into the shaft and saw that it was half filled with several seasons' accumulation of dead leaves, a direct reflection on the executive ability of Griggs and the enterprise of Tom, his invaluable assistant.

"Couldn't have been better suited to his purpose if he had dug the hole himself," soliloquized Munson, as he inspected the shaft. "How dumb I've been! It's a plain case of galloping senility."

His inspection finished, he turned to the Shays and considered their unlovely figures.

"I imagine you're better designed for shaft work, Shad," he said. "Red would fill it up and wouldn't be able to bend. So just get down in there and don't come out until you bring an inkstand with you."

"It's a nasty-looking place," observed the officer fastidiously. "Might

be more than inkstands down there."

"Well," said Munson, "if you find a body or anything else interesting bring it along, too. In you go, my man."

And in went Shad, his hearty disapproval of the entire procedure eloquently marked on his face.

"Now grope around in that rubbish and produce an inkstand," commanded Munson.

"With my bare hands?" asked Shad in a tone of incredulity.

"I don't care if you grope with your teeth, so longas I get my inkstand," replied Munson. "Make it snappy."

"Well, of all the things," murmured Shad, as he shrinkingly bent to his task.

His groping was soon over. Virtually the first object his hand encountered was the heavy bronze inkstand, partially covered with leaves.

"Here it is," he exclaimed with infinite relief, as he passed the stand up to Munson, who received it with a glow of triumph.

Round the bronze slab was tied a long piece of string on the free end of which was attached a strand of strong, thin thread.

"That pretty well settles it," said Munson, winding the string round the inkstand. "Our day's work is done. You two had better go back to the kitchen and rustle up some grub."

This suggestion, the officers later agreed, was the only reasonable one they had ever heard Munson make. As they were about to follow

it, Red stopped, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"Might I ask what you wanted with that old chunk of metal, Mr. Munson?" he asked.

"Nothing much," replied Munson carelessly. "Just to keep an innocent man from being charged with murder and eventually going to the chair."

With a half-frightened look at the object now safely tucked in the crook of Munson's arm, the officers tip-toed through the darkness on the most cheerful mission of a long and trying day.

\* \*

The inquest into the death of Lane Holt occasioned a wider show of interest than had the one caused by the shocking departure of Emily-Jane. And this hardly seemed fair. Certainly Emily-Jane would have held it against Holt had she been in a position to do so. However, it was not altogether Holt's fault. He had not planned the inquest. The knowledge that Daniel Crewe was being detained pending the verdict of the jury had spread rapidly. The local inhabitants refused to consider the possibility of his guilt, and they attended the inquest for the sole purpose of showing that fact no matter what nonsense the coroner's jury might be led to believe.

When Daniel appeared in the company of Dr. Manning, a low murmur of voices ran through the long library. Heads were thrust in at the French windows and sympathetic eyes followed the progress. Without any effort on his part Daniel had made himself a popular figure in the community. The loyalty of the two brothers and their life together at the old Crewe home had long been a subject of interest in many homes. The two of them were much a part of the place, very closely associated with the life of the countryside.

Tall and haggard, Daniel sat between June and Manning. He had not slept and his eyes were sunken, but they looked on Coroner Judson with interested composure, in which there was no suggestion of the anxiety he felt. He had thought the long night through and still was unable to see how he was going to clear himself of the murder of Lane Holt. There was not a scrap of evidence in his favor. Fate had stacked the cards skilfully against him. For some odd reason his position reminded him of "The Case of Sergeant Grischa." It was so hopeless and at the same time so useless--so tragically inane.

At the back of the room Barney at the last moment slid into a seat and found himself dangerously within the influence of the large eyes of one small Sally Brent. Today, however, she contented herself with regarding the crumpled, untidy figure furtively. After the exchange of quick, shy smiles, both pretended the other had gone away. They were not successful at this.

Scott Munson had placed himself strategically the better to be able to confer with Coroner Judson, whose methods of procedure were inclined to be informal and rather absent-minded.

After Dr. Wood had finished giving his professional testimony, establishing the fact that Lane Holt had died as the result of a bullet from a revolver fired at close range, Judson asked : "Would it have been possible, Dr. Wood, for the deceased to have done it himself?"

"Easily possible," replied the doctor, "but for two exceptions : the bullet entered the left temple and the revolver was found lying at least twelve feet from the body. Inasmuch as the deceased died instantly he could hardly have so disposed of the gun. Furthermore, a right-handed man would not have shot himself in the left temple."

Dr. Wood stepped down and was followed by Sergeant Bennett

whose story of the shooting was brief but devastating to Daniel. A little after one o'clock in the afternoon while at luncheon he had heard the shot. He had reached the scene so quickly that Daniel Crewe had been unable to escape from the room. This had obviously been his intention, for he, Bennett, had stopped him at the door. Bennett had found in Daniel's hand an accusing statement written by the dead man. The statement had not been finished.

"Is this the statement, sergeant?" asked the coroner, extending the crumpled sheet of paper.

"It is, sir."

The statement was then read to the jury, and at its conclusion a look of sorrow and consternation settled on many faces in the room. The case was now wide open. Scott Munson was evidently ready for a show-down. Daniel felt the walls growing higher and higher around him and above him. Soon he would be completely shut off and bricked in, yet he gave no indication of the hopelessness he was feeling.

"Sergeant Bennett," asked the coroner, "did you ever hear Daniel Crewe say anything that would lead you to believe he had designs on the life of the deceased?"

Only for a moment did Bennett hesitate, then he answered clearly : "I did, sir. Within an hour of Holt's death and in the presence of one other witness Daniel Crewe told Holt that he didn't deserve to live and that he doubted if he would live very much longer."

A feeling of even greater discouragement ran through the room.

"Are you convinced, Bennett, that no one else could have been with the deceased at the time of his death?" came the voice of the

coroner.

"We were all at luncheon together," replied Bennett. "The servants have been accounted for."

"And you are equally certain the deceased could not have taken his own life?" continued Judson.

"I see no way he could have done it, sir." Bennett spoke with quiet conviction.

"And you say Daniel Crewe admitted ownership of the revolver from which the bullet was fired?"

Many of the spectators felt like shouting or running away, so logically, so inevitably, was the coroner leading up to the only conclusion that could be drawn. Manning gripped Daniel's right arm. "Hold hard, old sport," he whispered. "They don't know the half of it yet." Daniel grinned appreciatively. June Lansing was white and rigid. Her eyes dwelt pleadingly on Scott Munson, who appeared to be entirely unmoved by Bennett's evidence.

"He did," said Bennett. "Mr. Crewe admitted ownership of the revolver from which the bullet was fired."

"That will be about all, Sergeant Bennett," said the coroner, looking a trifle discouraged himself. "Now I'd like to have Betty Harrison come forward."

Betty faced the coroner and his gentlemen of the jury without the flicker of an eye. She was there to do her best. She was determined to do her best. Nothing could induce her to change the mind she had already so completely made up. Betty was going to lie like the very devil, and she did not much care who knew it. She was going to lie and keep on lying. To her it seemed the only honest thing left to do.

Guilty or not guilty, Mr. Daniel was right whatever he did -- right in the eyes of God as well as her own, which to Betty's way of thinking, was equally if not more important.

Mr. Judson considered his notes for a moment. It was his duty to make the motive for the murder clear to the jury. This, thought Judson regretfully, was only too easy to do.

"One moment, Betty," he said. "I want Sergeant Bennett back here for one more question." Betty was given a near-by seat. Bennett took the chair by the coroner's table.

"Bennett," asked the coroner, "did you hear the deceased accuse Daniel Crewe of the murder of Miss Seabrook?"

"I did," replied Bennett. "Holt accused Mr. Crewe of the murder of Miss Seabrook. There were three witnesses present. You have the names, Mr. Judson."

"All right, Bennett," said the coroner. "Come on back, Betty." When the girl was seated he continued, "Did you hear the deceased accuse Mr. Daniel of the murder?"

"I'm not the one to put words into a dead man's mouth," answered Betty virtuously.

"But Sergeant Bennett was present at the same time, Betty, and he says he heard the accusation," the coroner observed mildly.

"Then let him put words into a dead man's mouth," conceded Betty. "I won't."

It was a relief to laugh a little. The spectators took advantage of the opportunity. Mr. Judson looked perturbed.

"How far were you sitting from the deceased, Betty?" he asked.

"As far as I could," came Betty's prompt response, "but not far enough to miss a single word he said."

"Then you didn't hear him accuse Mr. Daniel of murder ?" persisted the coroner.

"I did not," replied Betty, and settled herself in her chair as if she were prepared to fight it out on that line until the Day of Doom.

Mr. Judson shrugged his shoulders and with baffled eyes looked out over the room. "She says she didn't hear him," he remarked to no one in particular. "Didn't hear him."

"He couldn't have said it," cut in Betty, "because I saw him commit the murder with my own two--"

"That will do, Betty," Mr. Judson almost shouted. "You go right away now. Thomas Shanks."

As Thomas Shanks passed the indomitable girl, she deliberately stopped and transfixed him with her eyes. The boy nodded violently and lumbered to the chair.

"Tom," began the coroner in a kindly voice, "did you hear the deceased accuse Mr. Daniel of murder ?"

"N-n-no," chattered Tom, then after reorganizing himself, continued, "N-n-no."

"Are you stammering now, Tom ?" asked Judson, "or just trying to be emphatic?"

"I-I-I--" Tom was embarking on the choppy seas of speech when the

coroner interrupted him.

"Let's do it this way, Tom," he suggested. "You just nod up and down for yes"—here Judson demonstrated and Tom's head solemnly followed his example—"and sidewise for no." Again the dumb show was repeated. "Good," said the coroner. "Now. Did you hear the deceased—you know what the deceased means, Tom?" Tom shook his head. Judson reached in his pocket and produced a large handkerchief. He, too, seemed to be going through the process of reorganization. "Well, in this case, Tom," he explained with admirable gentleness, "it means Lane Holt. Did you hear him accuse Mr. Daniel of murder? Up and down, yes, Tom. Side-wise, no. Remember."

Betty had half risen from her chair. She was glaring at Tom and industriously shaking her pretty head. As if responding to some dynamic cheer leader Tom followed her example. With a satisfied smile she sank back in her chair, and the coroner instructed Tom to step down as speedily as possible.

"Mr. Daniel Crewe," called Judson, and the room became hushed as Daniel took the chair.

"Now, Mr. Crewe," said the coroner with a marked display of deference, "would you mind giving us your version of the death of Mr. Lane Holt?"

"Certainly not," replied Daniel, smiling at the coroner, and when he had finished his story even his best friends found it difficult to place any great faith in it. Yet Daniel had apparently spoken with the utmost candor and had attempted neither to evade nor to stress any particular point. The jury looked unimpressed, and Mr. Judson gave the impression of an exceedingly dismayed man performing an unpleasant duty.

"Then you admit," he said, when Daniel had finished, "that you appropriated the statement which the deceased was writing at the time he met his death and which specifically accused you of the murder of Miss Seabrook?"

"There's no good in denying it," replied Daniel, with engaging frankness. "It was both an unwise and unethical thing to do, but in the confusion of the moment my brain acted instinctively. The self-protection idea, you know. I was convinced that Lane Holt was not responsible for his actions at the time of his death, and I saw no reason for his written ravings to get into the hands of those who might attach undue importance to them. Frankly, I hardly realized the paper was in my hand, when Sergeant Bennett stopped me at the door."

Daniel left the witness chair much worse off than when he had seated himself in it. There seemed to be no hope left. It was obvious to all now that the jury had no choice in the matter. It would have to return a verdict of murder, naming Daniel Crewe. In the back of the room little Sally Brent was weeping silently into her scarf. She had no handkerchief. She never had. Barney was looking at her uneasily and wishing she would go away. There was a pause in the proceedings while Scott Munson conferred with the coroner. Presently Judson turned to the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want you to give your undivided attention to some evidence about to be presented by the next few witnesses. Mr. Munson will please take the chair."

"At the moment," Munson told the jury, "I want to stress only two points and the first one is: the pen with which the deceased was writing was found in his right hand, yet there were ink smears on the two fingers nearest the thumb on his left hand. The second point is

that the deceased died as a result of a bullet entering his left temple."

"Mr. Munson," inquired the coroner, "whose finger-prints did you find on the revolver that killed Lane Holt?"

"Those of Daniel Crewe," said Munson calmly. "Dr. Manning, please."

Munson relinquished his seat to Manning, who included the entire room in his benign smile. He was attired as meticulously as if he were going to some delicate and difficult tryst at which a successful seduction might turn on the set of the shoulders of his coat or the stripe in his silk shirt. Even the bud in his lapel had been thoughtfully selected.

"Dr. Manning," asked the coroner, "did you ever play golf with the deceased?"

"I did, sir," answered Manning. "He told me the first time I played with him that he was left-handed."

"And did you ever play bridge with the deceased?" continued the coroner.

"I did, sir. He held his cards with his right hand and played them with the left, which is just the reverse of the manner in which right-handed people play."

"Did you ever see the deceased write?" asked the coroner.

"On several occasions, sir," replied Manning, "and on each occasion he wrote with his left hand. He was signing his name to chits at the club."

"Then, in your opinion, the deceased was left-handed?" inquired the coroner.

"Beyond any question of doubt," said Manning. "Thank you, Dr. Manning."

"Thank you, sir."

"Miss June Lansing, please."

When June had calmly seated herself, Judson turned to her and asked, "Miss Lansing, when was the last time you saw the revolver that killed the deceased?"

"Yesterday," replied June. "Mr. Daniel Crewe had it in his hand. He was examining it in the library and I asked him to put it away."

"Did he do so?"

"He put it in the upper right-hand drawer of his desk in the library."

"Did anyone else witness him do so?"

"Mr. Holt was passing the door at the time. I remember he looked in."

"Thank you, Miss Lansing. Miss Betty Harrison, please."

Betty, formulating a lot of new lies to be used if and when necessary, took the chair.

"Betty," asked the coroner, "when did you notice the disappearance of an object from Mr. Crewe's desk?"

This seemed fair enough to Betty, so she answered truthfully. "Yesterday afternoon," she replied. "Might have been about three.

Mr. Munson called my attention to it."

"Was the object on the desk in the morning previous to the death of Mr. Lane Holt?"

"Yes, sir. I saw it there myself."

"And is this the object, Betty?" The coroner tapped the bronze inkstand with his pencil.

"It is, sir, but it didn't have that string around it then."

"Betty, do you recall when you last saw the deceased alive?"

"It was just before luncheon yesterday, Mr. Judson. He was coming out of the library and he went upstairs."

"Did he have anything in his hand?"

"His handkerchief, sir."

"Did he give you the impression of concealing some heavy object beneath the handkerchief?"

"He did, sir."

"What gave you that impression?"

"The way his arm hung by his side. It didn't move natural-like. Looked weighted down."

"Sure about all this, Betty?"

"I'm sure," said Betty, and the coroner excused her with a feeling of no little relief. "Officer Shay," he called.

Two figures proceeded majestically down the room.

They took their time about it, to enable everyone to have a good opportunity to gaze upon them. When they brought up against the coroner's table the taller of the two figures uttered one pithy word, "Which?"

"Which what?" asked Mr. Judson, looking up from his notes.

"Which one?" explained Shad.

Munson leaned over the table and spoke in a low tone to the bewildered official. "The one known as Shad," he said.

"But I know all about it, too," protested Red. "Don't you want me?"

"No," said the coroner.

"Not at all?"

"No. Never."

Officer Red, heavy with disappointment, turned away from the table, while the lucky Shad seated himself in the coveted chair and crossed his long legs. He gave the appearance of a man both ready and willing to discuss at length any topic the coroner might care to bring up.

"Officer Shad—I mean, Officer Shay," asked Judson, "when did you find this object?"

"Well, it's a funny thing, Mr. Judson," began Officer Shad in a slow, reminiscent manner. "It's a funny thing about--"

"It isn't a funny thing," snapped the coroner. "It's an extremely serious

thing. Answer my question."

Shad looked terribly hurt. "About dusk, sir," he answered. "It was yesterday."

"Where did you find it?"

"In a shaft, sir, directly beneath the deceased's window."

"The window facing his table?" asked the coroner. "The same, sir."

"Was this string attached to it then?"

"It was, sir."

"And the revolver, Shay," continued Judson, "was this strand of thread wound round its trigger guard when you first saw it?"

"It was, sir."

"That's all, Shay. Thank you."

It wasn't much, thought Shad, but at least it was better than nothing. Munson returned to the chair.

"Go on, Munson," said the coroner, "explain it your way."

Munson turned to the jury. "It has been proved," he said, "that the deceased was left-handed in spite of the fact that the pen was found in his right hand. It has been shown that he had a knowledge of the whereabouts of Daniel Crewe's revolver. It is known that just before his death he was seen leaving the library carrying his handkerchief in his hand. Betty Harrison has testified that she gained the impression he was concealing some heavy object under the hand-kerchief. This heavy inkstand that vanished from the library was later found in a

shaft directly below the window facing the desk in Lane Holt's room. This long string was attached to the inkstand. At its free end there is a strand of thin but strong thread. The same kind of thread is wound round the trigger guard of the revolver. On the floor at the left-hand side of the chair in which the deceased was sitting at the time of his death his handkerchief was found. The fingers usually employed in writing by the deceased were smeared slightly with ink--but they were on his left hand. These statements are all facts. Oh, yes" -- Munson paused and thought for a moment, then continued -- "The window facing the table in the room occupied by the deceased was about two inches open from the bottom at the time of his death. Now, gentle-men, with these facts clearly in mind I will show you exactly how Lane Holt met his death if you will accompany me to the room he occupied."

When the jury and several members of the press were assembled in the dead man's room, Munson sat down at the table and with a new strand of thread joined the free end of the string to the trigger guard of the revolver. Making sure that the other end of the string was securely attached to the inkstand, he raised the window and carefully lowered the stand over the shaft directly below. He then pulled the window down within two inches of the sash. pulled the string made taut by the weight of the inkstand, he returned to the table and placed his handkerchief round the butt of the now unloaded revolver. He sat down at the table and, after a little manipulation with the handkerchief, placed the revolver against his left temple.

"Remember," he remarked, "Lane Holt was left-handed, which I am not. He did this much better, much easier."

Then he picked up the pen in his right hand, pulled the trigger of the revolver and relaxed his grip. The handkerchief fluttered to the floor, and the revolver, pulled by the weight of the heavy inkstand, went scraping across the matting until it reached the window, where the

thread snapped, allowing the gun to fall back to the floor.

"A nutty idea, wasn't it?" Munson's voice broke the silence that followed this simple but convincing demonstration of how Lane Holt had died. "Well, over there on the bed lies all that is left of the crazy brain that figured it all out -- but," Munson added, "he didn't quite get away with it, his last dirty trick."

With an odd smile he rose and went to the door. "I wonder," he said, pausing, "who first told us not to speak ill of the dead?"

# XV. MUNSON SITS ALONE

GOOD-BY, Barney." Sally Brent extended a timid hand. "Silly, isn't it? We haven't even said hello... and now it's good-by."

The inquest was over, and people were flocking around them on the veranda. Barney was completely dazed. He was experiencing a high state of uselessness. He had to do something about this girl's hand, but instead of doing anything he contented himself by peering at the small, outstretched palm as if it were some novel specimen of fish.

"It's a hand, Barney," said Sally solemnly. "You're supposed to shake it."

Barney knew all about shaking hands, but it struck him as being rather foolish to be shaking Sally's. Sally was always around somewhere if he wanted her. Nevertheless, he permitted himself to be inveigled into accepting the proffered fingers.

"I'm glad about Daniel," Sally went on, hoping she might at last hear the sound of Barney's voice.

Barney stiffened. His expression, the girl thought, had suddenly grown a little bitter. "There are too many people," he complained. "I don't like all these people. How's your motorboat?"

One might have thought he was inquiring about an ailing aunt or mother. However, Sally's motorboat deserved a certain amount of respectful solicitude. It was one of the fastest on the Sound, and with little Sally at the wheel one of the maddest.

"Swell," replied Sally. "Come over and take a ride with me soon."

"Perhaps," said Barney vaguely. "One of these days."

"Well, good-by, then, Barney." Sally's eyes were at their brightest.

"So long, Sally."

The small creature turned away. Well, that was a start, at any rate. Not much, but a start. It would have to do for now. Barney was still woefully confused. She would have to wait until he was a little more like himself. Sally was quite willing to wait. Fundamentally she was a sensible girl. Most women are, when it comes to getting what they want. And Sally knew what she wanted. Also she knew how to set about getting it.

Barney looked after her as she threaded her pert little way neatly down the veranda. That was Sally Brent. Barney decided he did not dislike the girl. Rather a nice little thing. No brain, but harmless. Then he turned and regarded everybody reproachfully. "Please hurry away from here," was clearly expressed in his eyes. And when at last the house had relapsed into its accustomed tranquillity, he hurried indoors and returned with his easel. In front of this he crouched, his eyes caressing the canvas. Presently he began to paint as if prompted by some inner voice.

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When Scott Munson left the room after demonstrating the method and manner of Lane Holt's death, he did not return to the library. At the moment of triumph he was in a bitter mood. There was still another murder to be solved, and this time he would not be on the side of his friend Daniel Crewe. He would be out to get Daniel, and Munson felt that the time was drawing near. A moment of freedom again, then darkness and despair. What a tough break. What a miserable situation.

He moved to one of the French windows and looked into the library. There was Manning, the libidinous old fool, looking as if he'd just swallowed the canary. What was he smirking at, anyway? Munson idly shifted his gaze. Oh, yes, that was it. Not a bad leg either. One could depend on Manning's good taste in these matters. The jury was back now. There could be only one verdict. Evidently so thought the jury for, without any further taking of testimony, it attributed the death of Lane Holt to a self-inflicted wound from a bullet entering the brain through the left temple.

As Daniel's friends gathered round him, extending hands and offering congratulations, Munson witnessed the scene ironically. He wondered what Daniel was thinking deep down in his heart. These good people believed that everything was over now, everything but the shouting, when in reality everything was just beginning. And there was Sam Stoughten, suspect number two. Sam was not looking so cheerful as the occasion might seem to warrant. As a matter of fact, Sam was relieved but feeling far from hilarious. "If that devil Munson is as clever as all that," he was thinking to himself, "what chance have we got against him? He'll have us all strung up before the end of the week." He did not bother Daniel at the moment, but picked his way to the veranda, where to his ill-concealed disgust he encountered the object of his thoughts. Munson favored Sam with a long, deep, and penetrating scrutiny, under the intensity of which his depression became even more depressed.

"Been getting drunk lately?" asked Munson.

"Chuck it, Scott," said Sam. "Don't crow. You turned a neat trick this time. Things looked bad for Daniel."

"Looked?" replied Munson.

To Sam's relief he was joined by his wife, June, and Daniel. June

Lansing was the happiest one of the group. Scott found himself wondering about that.

"Scott Munson," she said, "you're a wizard. I feel almost as if you'd saved Dan's life."

"Dan saved his own life this time," replied Munson, looking unsmilingly at Daniel. "I hope he'll be as successful in the future."

"Thanks," said Daniel dryly. "I'll do my damndest, Scott."

"I'm afraid you'll need it," responded Munson. He was actually angry with Daniel for having placed him in the position in which he found himself. If Daniel hadn't been so hopelessly pig-headed, everything might have been different. And Munson had given him every chance, practically begged him for his confidence.

June did not relish the element of grimness underlying the exchange of remarks between the two men. "How do you mean Daniel saved himself?" she asked Munson.

"He told me he heard something scraping across the floor," replied Munson. "That piece of gratuitous information kept turning up in my mind. I was continually hearing that scraping. If I hadn't been so dumb I'd have figured out the whole thing the moment I saw the strand of thread attached to the revolver. What puzzled me was that Daniel didn't mention hearing a bump when the revolver fell back to the floor. You must have heard a bump, Dan."

"I heard it," said Dan, "but at the time I didn't think it important. It was just by good luck I happened to mention the scraping."

"Well, you scraped yourself out with your ears this time," observed Munson sardonically, as he turned from the group. "And," he added, looking back, "you've gotten to know what the inside of a cell looks

like."

"I can't get over the feeling that he's a mean man," said Sam Stoughten. "A wise-cracking snake in the grass."

After dinner that evening Munson sat alone. For his cogitations he had selected a secluded section of the veranda. When daylight came, a large collection of stubs from methodically and occasionally irritably smoked cigarettes could be seen sprinkling the lawn in the neighborhood of the chair in which Munson had sat.

Scott realized with a sinking sensation that the time for a final showdown was at hand. Yet some nebulous, vaguely revealed idea at the back of his mind was warning him to go slow. It was like a voice urging him to take one more look before he leaped finally and irrevocably.

Lane Holt was eliminated. That was flat. And the elimination of Lane Holt immediately suggested a simple, attractive, and highly dishonorable way out of an appalling situation, one that might eventually prove to be even more appalling than Munson cared to admit to himself.

Lane Holt was out of the way, but Tom and Betty remained behind to damn his name eternally. The story of these two eye-witnesses was made ready to hand for Scott Munson's purposes, should he be weak enough to take the easy way out of his difficulties. However, Scott Munson was not so constituted. He had said he was going to go through with this case regardless of whom it affected. He had given his word to the district attorney he would play no favorites. But stronger than any promptings of honor, any considerations of friendship or professional achievement, was a grim element in his spiritual as well as intellectual composition that forced him to go through with a job once he had tackled it. Consequences did not

count. If the true solution of a certain problem would have resulted in the destruction of the human race, Munson would have been an extremely uncomfortable person to have around. In spite of the restraining influence of common sense and kindness, his strongest instincts would have driven him at that problem even though its solution involved his own elimination together with the remainder of less inquisitive mankind.

Munson had never attached much importance to Lane Holt's part in the tragedy of Emily-Jane. He had never credited the man with sufficient emotional drive to enable him to commit the act. The murder of Emily-Jane had been no easy task. It had been, as a matter of fact, far more difficult psychologically, far more opposed to a man's natural instincts, than a murder done in the heat of passion. The cowardly element involved in her murder must have been recognized and overcome by the person contemplating the deed. The murder, when considered apart from the circumstances surrounding it and the motives leading up to it, was of a particularly cruel and brutal nature. Just the right kind of murder for such a creature as Emily-Jane.

Nor did Munson place any great reliance in the obviously biased story of Betty Harrison. Up to a certain point the girl had remained veracious, but at the critical moment her natural honesty had cracked under the strain of her loyalty to Daniel and her ill will against Lane Holt. Her vision had become considerably impaired. Tom Shanks, her slave, was hopeless. He saw through the eyes of Betty and thought with Betty's brain.

Although Scott Munson was morally certain that Daniel had murdered Emily-Jane, he found it more difficult to eliminate Sam Stoughten from his thoughts. Sam had already to his credit one attempted murder. Beyond any question of doubt it had been his hand that had driven the knife through the curtain and into Daniel's

arm on the night of the dance. Sam had intended that knife to put a very definite and speedy end to the triumphal but ruthless progress of Emily-Jane. He had been alone and unobserved in the dining-room with immediate access to a diversity of knives. He had had control of the light switches. He had a clear mental picture of the group of three and of Emily-Jane's exact position in that group. A long-bladed dinner knife had been used. Sam's forger-prints had been found on its handle.

Sam had motives enough and more to energize his hand. His loyalty to Daniel was not the least of them. That motive was, perhaps, even stronger than any personal consideration. Stoughten was Daniel's confidant. Better than anyone else he had known what dark, unhappy thoughts were troubling his friend's mind. So strong was his affection for Daniel he had proved himself capable of attempting murder himself rather than to let Daniel become involved. He knew that his old roommate was snared in the net so skilfully cast by Emily-Jane. Sam further knew that Daniel would never let her marry Barney. Step by step Sam had seen the situation mounting to a climax. He had been on the inside all along. He had shared Daniel's thoughts and had been aware of his unsuccessful attempts to persuade Emily-Jane to give up Barney.

Munson recalled that brief passage at arms between Emily-Jane and Sam Stoughten on the veranda of the club-house. That conversation had dealt with letters--Sam's letters to Emily-Jane. The existence of those letters alone constituted sufficient motive for murder. As long as that slim packet remained in possession of Emily-Jane there would not be a care-free minute in Sam Stoughten's life. And Sam had not been in his room at the time of the murder. He had been out in the night and had lied most uneffectually about his movements.

Scott Munson realized that he could present such a strong case against Stoughten to any jury that a conviction of first degree murder

would result on the first ballot.

Yet, in spite of this, in spite of all the damning evidence Munson could so easily produce, he knew in his heart that Sam Stoughten had not murdered Emily-Jane. But he was also equally certain that Sam had been present at the time of the murder, that he had been close at hand and witnessed the whole thing. Sam had been the figure that had backed into the bushes. Munson was sure of this, and he was no less sure that within a few days now he would force Sam to say what he had seen.

With Sam out of it there remained only Daniel, and several times since the murder he had tacitly admitted his guilt. There was hardly anything left for him to do. The trail he had left behind him could have been picked up and followed by the veriest novice. Daniel had gone out of his way to supply an abundance of clues. His motive for murdering Emily-Jane had been even stronger than Sam's. And ever since the murder Daniel had conducted himself like a man whose soul had been forfeited to the devil. Previous to the death of Emily-Jane, Scott Munson had clearly seen murder in Daniel's eyes. After her death, Munson had seen in the eyes of his friend the tortured conscience of a man who had taken a human life against all his natural instincts; for no matter how strongly convinced of the rightness of his act Daniel might have been intellectually, it was plain to Scott Munson that his being cried out against it.

Once more Munson saw Daniel standing rigid and horror bound before that accusing picture being painted by Barney. There stood a murderer if Munson had even seen one. An open confession of his guilt was stamped on his drawn face.

Daniel Crewe a murderer! Munson rose abruptly and in the darkness paced the veranda. Murder with premeditation, and yet when viewed in a certain light Daniel's mad act had been about the greatest

sacrifice one man can make for another. It had been a sacrifice greater than death itself, for even if Daniel escaped the chair he would carry his guilt in his heart with him through life. And the awful memory of that night on High Point Rock would always linger in his eyes and dwell deep in his thoughts. There would be nights when Emily-Jane would return to Daniel to taunt and torture him, and Daniel in his dreams would become a murderer again.

Pacing there in the darkness, Munson realized all this, and he understood the subtle ramifications of this so-called crime. What a rotten hand for life to have dealt to a decent player like Dan.

The cigarette Munson tossed aside was one of those most irritably smoked. It had been a thoroughly unsatisfactory cigarette. Munson stopped pacing long enough to contemplate its tiny light glowing in the grass. He was well rid of that cigarette. He continued down the veranda to the far end. When he returned to his chair he found it occupied by a dark, motionless figure.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

"Stoughten," came the quiet reply. "Didn't know I had taken your chair, Munson. I wanted to be alone to think."

"Well, you've a devil of a lot to think about, Sam," said Munson. "I wouldn't care to be entertained by the thoughts that are passing through your mind at this moment."

"Nor I by yours," rejoined Stoughten. "Draw up a chair and sit down, Scott."

Munson found a chair for himself, and for some minutes the two men sat smoking in silence.

"Well," asked Sam at last. "who did it, Munson?"

"Either you did it or Dan," replied Scott bluntly.

"Any particular preference?" Sam inquired.

"I'm playing no favorites," said Munson. "The both of you look guilty as hell to me."

"Scott"--Sam's voice was serious--"suppose I should tell you that Daniel had no hand in the affair. Suppose I could convince you that I was present at the time of the murder. Suppose I could prove to your entire satisfaction that, although he may have intended to murder Emily-Jane, he did not actually do it. Would you, under those circumstances, lay off of Dan?"

"You'd have some damn tall proving to do, Sam," replied Munson, "and if you did succeed in convincing me, I'd have only one choice left."

"And that choice?" Sam had lowered his voice. "To arrest you on a charge of murder," said Munson.

Sam stiffened slightly in his chair. When he spoke again it was almost as if he were speaking to himself.

"It would be the better choice, at that," he remarked, "but perhaps there doesn't need to be any arrest at all. I saw the whole affair and I'm not at all sure that the death of Emily-Jane wasn't purely accidental." Suddenly he came to life and regarded Munson triumphantly. "I think I've got you, Scott," he continued slowly. "No matter which way you move I think I've got you blocked. Both Betty and Tom are ready to swear themselves blue in the face that Lane Holt did it. Now, I am the only other eye-witness and I can do either one of two things--swear that Emily-Jane's death was due to an

accident, or substantiate the evidence of Betty and Tom. In either case you'd be left high and dry."

"You seem to have overlooked, Sam," replied Munson quietly, "several small but important details. Earlier in the evening an attempt was made on the life of Emily-Jane, who later was found dead. I happen to know the person who made that first attempt. As for motive I have some letters. And just to give you a little surplus food for thought, I'm not at all sure that I may not be able to unearth still another eye-witness."

Sam sank back hopelessly in his chair, his inspiration drained. For a minute he had been foolish enough to believe he had discovered a way out of the difficulty for both Daniel and himself. He saw now that there was no way out.

"What are you going to do with those letters, Scott?" he asked.

"We'll talk about them," replied Munson, rising from his chair, "when you are a little more willing to talk . . . sensibly."

He left Sam sitting despondently in his chair and went directly to his room. Here he produced his note-book and thoughtfully studied the little design he had copied from the sand. Just what was he trying to prove and how was he going to set about doing it at this late date? He closed the book and slipped it back into his pocket.

"Another eye-witness," he said to himself, "or the whole truth from Sam. Must get one or the other, and I might need both."

# XVI. The Inevitable Draws Nearer

DANIEL and June were idling along the Cliff Path. They had little to say to each other. There was little that required saying. Both were smoking nervously. Daniel was scarring the toes of his boots by kicking stones from the path. He was conscientious about it. Apparently his idea was to leave no stone unturned. June was impartially slashing at weeds and wild flowers with a thin stick. It made a swishing sound that was satisfying to the ear. A serious, industrious pair they made . . . and miserable.

Ahead of them High Point Rock rose against the sky. Neither June nor Daniel turned to look in that direction. Instinctively their gaze avoided the spot from which Emily-Jane had dropped out of life. Daniel halted and leveled his eyes on the waters of the Sound. June came and stood beside him.

"It would be that way," remarked Daniel.

"The old trail, the old trail, the trail that is always new!" she murmured. "I'd like to take it, Dan."

"All the world and places," replied Daniel. "Gad, if we could only make it!"

She took his hand, which was hanging impotently at his side. "Trust me, Dan," she said. "I'll get you by."

He made no reply other than giving her hand a friendly squeeze.

"Wish Barney would give up that damn picture," he said presently. "It's got on my nerves terribly for some reason. Feel as if I wouldn't be able to stand it much longer."

"Poor old mule-faced Dan"--June's voice was sympathetic--"you've been having a pretty tough time of late. For your sake I hope things look up a bit."

"For the both of us," he said, his eyes still straining out across the water.

As if by common consent they turned and started to retrace their steps. Neither of them had any desire to stand on High Point Rock. Then they stopped. Scott Munson was swinging along the path. When he drew up in front of them they noticed that his dark eyes were unusually sharp and searching.

"Came along," he said in a friendly voice, taking Daniel by his uninjured arm. "I want you both to help me out with a little idea of mine."

"More wizardry, Scott?" June inquired.

"No," said Munson briefly. "Merely the application of common sense to a given set of circumstances."

He was leading them in the direction of High Point Rock. Daniel moved with reluctance. His nerve seemed to have deserted him. The old inner trembling had re-turned. He felt that he would not be responsible for his actions if he set foot on that spot again. Little beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He tried to force himself forward, but his feet dragged.

"It's hot," he said, stopping and fumbling for his handkerchief. "We were just going home, Scott."

"Well, this won't take you long," replied Munson easily. "And I really do need your help."

Daniel allowed himself to be led along. Under Munson's hand his arm quivered slightly. June said nothing. She was furtively regarding Munson, and there was a strange probing expression in her eyes. It was as if she were endeavoring to read the man's mind, to anticipate his next move.

"You're getting lazy, Dan," she remarked. "The walk will do you good--stretch those long legs of yours."

They were on the cliff now, and Munson was directing their steps toward the exact spot on which Daniel had stood when Emily-Jane had gone twisting down into the black void opening up at his feet. They had reached the place. Daniel stood rooted to it. He felt that at any moment he would point to the bushes and explain to Munson exactly where he had hidden while watching Holt and Emily-Jane. The temptation was well-nigh irresistible. It would be a relief to get the whole thing off his chest, to be done with it and to know the worst rather than to be expecting it with every intake of his breath. The idea grew in fascination. It was as much as he could do to prevent himself from raising his arm and pointing to the bushes. Scott Munson's face would make an interesting study. Daniel wondered what he would say, how he would look.

Munson was examining the ground with the professional interest of a stage manager. He had no eyes for either Daniel or June, and Daniel was just as well pleased. By this time Daniel's state of agitation was only too apparent in his face. So greatly was he affected by the spot that he felt again the hot moist trickle of blood running down his left arm from the knife wound. All his previous sensations returned to him. He was unable to ward them off.

Scott Munson was speaking. His voice seemed distant and indistinct. "Now, June," he was saying, placing the girl at the edge of the cliff, "you stand right here and hold that position. As I figure it out

that's where Emily-Jane must have stood."

June's face was colorless. Her eyes had taken on a hard, defiant expression. She looked steadily at Munson.

"You're showing us a good time, Scott," she said. "You wouldn't like me to jump off, would you?"

Apparently too preoccupied to answer, Munson turned to Daniel. "Stand close to June," said Munson. "and put your hand on her arm or her shoulder."

Stiffly, automatically, Daniel did as he was bidden. Munson stepped back a few paces and studied the pair.

"Yes," he said, as if to himself, "that's just about how it must have been. Now please hold it, both of you, until I give the word." He hurried away, and June found herself alone with Daniel, looking into his fixed, staring eyes. But Daniel did not seem to see her. Emily-Jane was standing there between them. Daniel could feel her presence.

Suddenly June screamed piercingly. She flung her arms round Daniel and for a moment they swayed at the edge of the cliff over which a hand had slid noiselessly and seized her by the ankle. A moment of cold terror. Then Daniel broke the spell, and dragged June back, breaking the clutch of the hand. Almost immediately Munson was with them. Solicitous apologies to June, to which she did not listen. She was leaning against Daniel's breast. Her head was on his shoulder. Little shudders ran through her body. She was very still. Daniel's lips were twisted in a white grin. His eyes, tired and sunken, never left Munson's face

"Scott," he said, with a calmness that held a note of finality, "you

excelled yourself this time. My congratulations and contempt."

Munson was equally calm as he returned Daniel's gaze. "I am sorry you feel that way about it," he replied. He was angry with himself and the world in general. "Emily-Jane must have had an even more trying experience."

"Emily-Jane deserved it. June has done nothing." Daniel's voice was harsh.

Suddenly Munson smiled and took a hesitating step toward them. He looked old and tired. "Forgive me, both of you," he said, his low voice holding a note of warmth. "I couldn't keep myself from making the experiment. It was devilish of me, I realize now, but I wanted to find out if it could have been done that way, and now I know that it could."

June released herself from Daniel's arms and turned to Munson with lips that were trying to smile.

"You're a devil, Scott," she told him, "a devil straight from hell, but I think I understand. You're forgiven."

"They don't come any gamer than you, June," said Munson.

June's eyes were resting on Daniel, who was standing by lost in thought. This business couldn't go on much longer. He would have to confess. June uttered a little cry.

A stream of blood was running freely down his hand and dripping to the ground from his fingers.

"Strip off that coat," said Munson, and stepped quickly to Daniel's side. As he stanchd the flow of blood with a clean white handkerchief, his gaze strayed over the water. "Evidently," he said

rather bitterly, although his lips were smiling, "the gods don't expect a man in my shoes to be much of a human being."

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When Munson returned to Crewe House he addressed himself to the Shays.

"It is more important than ever, he told them, that no one leave these grounds. You don't have to worry about the back of the house, because in that direction escape is effectually cut off by the marshes. A person would be a damn fool to risk the quagmires and quicksand there. And you don't have to watch the Cliff Path. Nobody is going to jump off High Point Rock, or at least I don't think so. If they do"--he shrugged his shoulders--"we're saved a lot of trouble and unpleasantness. Just keep your eye on the road and the gardens at the east end of the house, and for God's sake don't pull your guns unless you are damn well sure you can't carry on without them. As a matter of fact, I don't think anyone is going to try to get away, but we can't afford to take any chances. We're just about ready now to put the handles on this case."

"Did you notice he said 'we'?" asked Officer Shad, as Munson strode across the lawn and descended the steps to the beach.

"That's as it should be," replied Officer Red, "considering what we've been through."

Munson laid hands on the first canoe he could find and unceremoniously dragged it across the sand to the water's edge. He shoved off from the beach with a dexterity bred of experience and soon was paddling easily over the gently marcelled surface of the Sound.

Scott Munson was not at all pleased with the events of the morning and the part he had played in them. He had succeeded in throwing June Lansing, usually so hard-boiled and imperturbable, into a state of white terror, and he had been instrumental in opening the wound in Daniel's arm. Funny thing about that wound. It was almost as if it had opened itself under the influence of auto-suggestion. Yet in spite of these contretemps, as regrettable as they were, Munson had proved to his own satisfaction that Emily-June could have been thrown off her balance by a hand tugging at her ankle from the ledge. To this extent the theory he had been holding in reserve was not so wild, not so impossible of practical application. He was now following up that theory--not hopefully, but with characteristic thoroughness.

About a mile and a half ahead of him, three low rocky islands lay somnolently in the water washing against them. Munson was bound for these islands, upon one of which he had good reason to believe Pete Clark was reclining in Olympian isolation. Munson skirted the outer island and found it unadorned by the picturesque person of his quarry. Neither had Pete Clark selected the second island for his philosophic re-pose, but upon the third and last rocky retreat there lay Pete Clark. He was resting easily. Beneath his head a gunny-sack, redolent of fish at their worst, had been nicely adjusted at exactly the desired angle, enabling the recumbent figure to view both sea and sky with the minimum of bodily effort and fatigue. Hard by on the rocks, within easy reach of the most languid hand, rested a battered tin box. Pete regarded with disapproval the method employed by some deep thinkers of conducting their meditations on an empty stomach. And from the position of the sun, Pete was seriously considering the advisability of disturbing himself to the extent of appeasing his appetite. He sighed and considered the box out of the corner of his eyes.

When Munson scrambled over the rocks and stood above him, Pete evinced no surprise. Maybe Munson would do something about the

midday meal, open the box and distribute its contents, or something.

"Hello, Mr. Munson," said Pete. "What brings you to this God-forsaken place?"

"You do," replied Munson, sitting down beside him. "You do, Pete."

The occasional fisherman looked a little disturbed. "And what can I do for you, Mr. Munson?" he asked.

"Nothing violent," Munson hastened to assure him. "Just a little help, that's all."

He looked so long at Pete's feet that their owner, as if for the first time in his life, became aware of their presence. He, too, regarded his feet with mild interest not unmixed with a little surprise. Those were his feet, those large, still objects down there. Well, they would never be able to say he had not spared them as much as possible. As far as use was concerned they were virtually new.

"Are these the same shoes you were wearing when you found the body of Miss Seabrook on the rocks?" asked Munson.

"I always wear the same shoes," answered Pete with deliberation, "except when I go barefooted."

"A good idea," said Munson approvingly. "'Makes everything so much simpler. I thought they were the same shoes because they've been in my mind a good deal lately."

Pete Clark permitted himself a momentary glow of pride. He even went so far as to wiggle his feet almost playfully.

"The way it must have been," continued Munson, as much for his own benefit as his listener's, "was that you were walking along the beach

just before you discovered the body of the girl lying on the rocks. And you weren't thinking much, Pete, about anything in particular. You were just sort of grazing along. Then your eyes must have been attracted by some small bright object lying in the sand. After considering the pros and cons of the situation you no doubt decided that the object was sufficiently interesting to justify your picking it up. And you did pick that object up, Pete. You picked it up, examined it, slipped it into your pocket and forgot all about it. Am I right?"

"Where were you hiding?" demanded Pete.

"Under the bedclothes in my room," replied Munson. "I was still sleeping, but it just had to be that way. I read the whole story in the sand, Pete."

"Well I'm not cockeyed myself when it comes to seeing things along beaches," said Clark, "but you're a damned sight more seeing than me. That's just exactly the way it was. I saw the bright little gadget sparkling there in the sand. I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket. When you asked me if I had seen or found anything, I'd clean forgotten about it."

"And where is that bright little object now?" inquired Munson.

Pete thought for some time. Presently his contorted features relaxed, and his natural face, looking a little overworked, once more reappeared. "Last time I saw it," he said, "one of the kids was playing with it."

"Didn't know you had any children, Pete. Congratulations."

Pete accepted the felicitation rather cynically, Munson thought. "Oh, yes, I've got children right enough," he replied. "Several sets of them."

"Where do they live?" asked Munson.

"Different places," was Pete's evasive reply. "Round about. Might run into one of them most anywhere."

"Oh, it's that way," said Munson. "I see." "Yes, it's that way," admitted Pete.

"And where does the child who was playing with that gadget live?"

"At home," said Pete. "My regular home. She's official."

"That's nice," replied Munson. "Suppose you take me there." He produced several crumpled bills, which Pete regarded without any great show of interest. "Some for you and some for her," Munson added.

"Got to eat first," Pete replied. "You eaten?"

"Not yet," said Munson. "Lost my appetite this morning."

"Well, try one of these," the other suggested, as he opened the battered tin box and fingered out a handful of sandwiches, a suspicious-looking chunk of cheese, and two pitifully bruised peaches.

Munson gladly accepted the provender Pete allotted him with scrupulous fairness, and together they made a silent but satisfactory meal.

"Usually sleep after eating," Pete observed tentatively, when the last gulp of food had ceased to distend his throat. "How about you, Mr. Munson?"

"Usually, Pete, but nothing doing today. Got a lot of trouble on my

hands. No time for sleep now." Munson helped Pete to rise, helped him to launch his boat, and virtually lifted him into it. After this he shoved off in his canoe and followed Pete's leisurely progress landward.

The Clarks had a marsh exposure. A small, unlovely frame building housed an indeterminate number of them. Mrs. Clark gave the appearance of a woman who did as well as she could for herself and for any-one else who happened to be around at the time of doing. She showed no surprise at the unexpected return of her husband. She was neither elated nor depressed. He was there. She accepted the situation.

After a lame introduction Pete led Munson off to search for the child last seen playing with the gadget. She was found, and her name turned out to be May. She was playing with a new gadget now and she had no idea where the other one could be unless it had worked its way into the depth of a towering pile of oyster-shells to which she pointed with a languor characteristic of her sire. Munson regarded the pile and thirsted for his staff. The Shays would have been invaluable at this moment, but the Shays were otherwise engaged. The pile was up to Munson. After subsidizing both May and her father and intimating the probability of a suitable reward upon the successful conclusion of their joint efforts, Munson removed his coat, and the three of them became intimately involved with oyster-shells.

At the end of two painful hours, hours that always lingered in the mind of Pete Clark, the searchers among the shells were no nearer success, but much nearer total exhaustion.

"Never knew I owned so many shells," said Pete at last, in an effort to look on the bright side of things.

"Well, you certainly own a lot, pa," replied his daughter, not without

satisfaction.

"If you ask my opinion," announced Munson, his fatigue-drawn face appearing over the rim of the pile, "you own exactly one too many shells, Pete."

Mrs. Clark issued from the back door and stood for a while contemplating the activities of the searching party. "What do you all want to be doing that for?" she asked.

"It's a gadget, mother," said Pete. "A bright little gadget with stones and all. May claims she lost it here or hereabouts."

"Oh, that !" exclaimed the lady, with a depreciating wave of her right hand. "Why didn't you say so before? I picked it up and tucked it away in my bureau drawer. You should of asked."

Slowly Munson's face once more rose above the shells. It was a sad face and a weary one. For a while he looked at May, then shifted his gaze to Pete. Finally he raised his eyes to the sky as if seeking strength and refuge in prayer. Apparently he derived some benefit from this, for when he spoke his voice was calm.

"She's right," he said. "I guess we should have asked."

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Barney's easel was standing in the hall. A single lamp above it shed a soft glow over the canvas. Before the picture Daniel was standing, and in his hand he held a knife. The ship's clock in the library had just sounded two bells--an hour past midnight. The silence in the old house was almost liquid. Like a stream it moved through the hall. From the beach came the slow, low, methodical break and wash of the surf. The sound rose and fell painfully in the back of Daniel's mind.

And his face was like a mask of pain. The experience of the morning on the cliffs had left its traces there. Then to come home to this--this reproduction of horror. There it stood waiting for a few swift brush strokes--ten minutes' work--to reveal his crime to the world, to perpetuate it.

Daniel's eyes clouded as he raised the knife. It would be like cutting a part out of his own life, destroying something of himself. If he did it he might sleep. But he could not do it. His hand was powerless to strike. The picture was not completed. A low gasp escaped from his lips as the knife dropped to the floor. He turned away.

Scott Munson did not pause as he slowly descended the stairs. Across the silence their eyes met--a wordless exchange of mutual regret and understanding.

"You'd better get back to bed, Daniel," said Munson quietly. "You need some sleep."

"All right, Scott," said Daniel. "I'll try again. If I don't get some sleep soon, something is going to crack."

He passed Munson and continued on up the stairs.

Gradually he merged into the darkness that lay on the upper hall. A low "good night" drifted down to Munson.

"Good night, Daniel," he called back softly.

Daniel let himself into June's room and lay down beside her on the top of the light coverings. Her arms drew him to her.

"Keep on fighting, Daniel," she whispered. "We mustn't give up now."

Gradually Daniel's inner trembling ceased, and presently he slept, but June remained awake, her wide eyes looking up into the darkness that lay upon them.

# XVII. THE LOST DOMINO

WHEN Daniel had mounted into the darkness of the upper hall, Munson approached Barney's painting and stood regarding it with decidedly disapproving eyes. He realized that in a sense this painting was an ally of his, but he could not bring himself to consider it with any measure of appreciation. Young Barney should not be doing a thing like that. One inquisitor in the house was quite sufficient. He would have to have that little talk with Barney. High time he was given the low-down on the situation. Daniel might deserve to be smitten down by the impersonal hand of the law, but certainly not by his brother. Standing before the painting, Munson decided that Barney was due for a shock--a flock of shocks, in fact.

He turned from the picture and let his gaze wander round the long wide hall. Something was on his mind, something that had given him a shock. The wild theory he had been holding in reserve was gradually taking the sharp, definite outlines of a conviction. And that conviction was in some way associated with the kitchen and a nocturnal cup of tea. Aunt Matty had never found the lost domino. Neither had Scott Munson, although, unknown to Aunt Matty, he had added to her plaintively peering eyes the best efforts of his own.

Entering the dining-room on noiseless feet, he crossed over to the pantry door and glanced through its small leaded window. One glance was enough to attract and to hold his attention. He thrust his hands comfortably into his pockets and settled back on his heels like a man prepared to stay where he was for some time to come. There was a puzzled expression in his eyes and his lips barely betrayed the suggestion of a smile.

What he saw was nothing less than the Shays in united action. The light was burning in the kitchen and beneath its sharp radiance

Officers Shad and Red were moving about contortedly. From their singularly unsuccessful efforts to walk on tiptoe Munson concluded their lives heretofore must have been open books, unsullied by deception. As if in atonement for an occasional collision with a chair or a table, Officer Red applied one finger permanently to his lips. Munson gained the impression that his stout, rubicund assistant entertained the hope of impressing the inanimate objects that seemed to bestrew his path with the urgent need of the utmost silence and secrecy. It was too much to ask of any kitchen furniture, and finally when Officer Shad, in stooping over, brought that part of his body which was opposite his head but at a slightly higher elevation smartly against the pointed corner of a table, the result was disastrous. Both Shad and the table vied with each other in making the air hideous with sound. A plate crashed to the floor, and Red became much redder. But as far as Shad was concerned, he was standing in a vast silence in which only pain existed, pain and outraged dignity.

"What did you want to do that for ?" demanded Red in a low voice.

"Just to see how it would feel," replied Shad, his usually mild eyes blinking with hostility. "You should try it. It's a lot of fun."

"I know," said Red, "but there's no need to make such a noise about it . . . breaking plates and everything."

Shad laughed dramatically. "Did you ever bring yours up against the sharp point of a table?" he inquired softly. For a moment his gaze dwelt on a rather self-assertive section of his colleague's body, then once more he indulged in unpleasant laughter. "But it wouldn't hurt yours," he added with brutal frankness. "Yours is too damn fat."

Officer Red Shay did not exactly toss his head, but the dignity of his bearing eloquently expressed the fact that his mind was bent on

higher if not larger things, and that there were some subjects he positively declined to discuss. Once more the search commenced, and the mildly diverted Munson found himself wondering what motive, if any, animated the activities of his staff. His curiosity grew to the proportions of a definite need to know. The Shays were stealthily peering into pots and pans, table drawers, and closets. Officer Red even went so far as to sound the walls with a delicate finger. This last was too much for Munson. He quietly opened the pantry door and, remaining in the unlighted pantry as he had done once before on the night of the murder of Emily-Jane, spoke to his staff from the darkness.

"Would you kindly try to tell me," he asked in a quiet voice, "what the devil you two imagine you're doing?"

The unexpectedness of this disembodied question completely demoralized the officers. Motionless they remained in exactly the same position they had been in when the voice smote their ears. They poised frozenly as if playing a tragically earnest adaptation of "still waters, no more moving." Only their eyes moved and they were very busy as they darted about the room in quest of the owner of the voice. When Munson emerged into the light of the kitchen the tableau disintegrated with twin sighs of profound relief.

"You gave us such a start, Mr. Munson," Officer Red was honest enough to admit.

"Sorry, Red," replied Munson, "but you haven't answered my question."

"I don't rightly remember it, sir," said Officer Red.

"Well, what's the meaning of all this grotesque mincing about this kitchen like a couple of trick conspirators?" Munson demanded.

"What do you hope to find here?"

"We were looking for it," said Shad in a low voice.

"It?" repeated Munson. "What?"

"The will," announced Officer Shad.

"What will and whose?" Scott Munson was becoming more and more perplexed.

"The will that's at the bottom of all this trouble," explained Officer Red. "It was my idea, the will."

"Oh, I see," said Munson, sitting down at the table and critically examining his finger-nails. "And it's not here, perhaps?" He eyed his staff sadly.

"No, Mr. Munson," replied Officer Shad. "It's not here."

Munson drummed on the table with the nails he had been recently inspecting.

"I hate to discourage initiative," he said at last, "but in spite of my best efforts I can't disabuse my mind of the belief that you two are about the biggest damn fools I've ever had the good fortune--mind me, I say, good fortune--to meet. Still, I may be wrong. Possibly there are two bigger damn fools somewhere hidden in an obscure crevice of this earth. If that is so I hope they stay there."

He rose from the table and switched the light on in the pantry. Aunt Matty was a hoarding housekeeper.

The pantry was filled with earthenware jars and tin boxes. It was a storeroom of pleasant surprises. In the past it had never failed to

whet Barney's curiosity and to stimulate his cupidity. There were many shelves and cupboards. Munson looked about him with interest. This was the only room in the house he had not searched. He had looked for that missing domino from attic to cellar. He had been through all the outhouses, and now he knew that if it was still in existence it must be somewhere in the room in which he stood. Well, he would give the boys a little encouragement, he decided. After his last remarks to them they deserved to be encouraged. He called them into the pantry.

"Now, I'm going to give you something to look for," he promised them. "If your heads are so set on finding missing property, just swarm over this room and bring me back a domino."

Blank amazement greeted his request.

"Doesn't look much like a place where they'd hide games," said Officer Shad skeptically, glancing at the shelves and cupboards.

"Perhaps he wants a piece of sugar," suggested Officer Red.

"No," said Scott. "And I don't mean a domino either in the strict usage of the word. What I want is a large, floppy, black garment with a hood on it. If you want to save yourself a lot of unnecessary exertion, which I suspect you do, I suggest you look through those lower cupboards first. Take the one in the extreme corner."

Officer Shad, remembering the painful if ludicrous injury inflicted on his person by the table, squatted with surprising compactness, and opened the door to the cupboard. "Nothing in here," he announced, "except a lot of old stone jars. Seem empty to me."

"How big are those stone jars, Shad?" asked Munson with sudden interest.

"A matter of some two feet, I'd say," the officer replied.

"Will you yank the one out that seems hardest to get at?"

Shad inspected the jars with a calculating eye. "They're all hard to get at," he concluded.

"But I said the hardest." Munson's voice was sharper now.

With a grunt of utter weariness Shad thrust in a long arm and after a great deal of noise, succeeded in dragging forth a jar which obviously from his efforts must have been the hardest to get at.

"Now lift off the top," said Munson.

Shad obeyed, and Munson bent down quickly.

"Now pull it out," he continued, and there was no elation in his voice. It sounded rather flat and tired.

When Shad had drawn the crumpled black garment from the jar, he extended it to Munson. "You knew it was there all the time," said Shad in an injured voice.

"No, I didn't," Scott hastily disclaimed. "Honestly, Shad, I didn't. I just doped it out that the thing had to be there, or somewhere else close by."

"Well, now that you've got it," inquired Officer Red sarcastically, "what are you going to do with it?"

"Put those jars back exactly as you found them," said Munson, "and keep this little incident strictly to yourselves. Don't ask foolish questions, Red, but go upstairs and park yourself in the hall. Watch all the doors. At the end of two hours come down and wake up Shad.

He'll be making revolting noises on the couch in the library. We should have someone outside by rights, but I don't think the people involved in this case are going to try to make a getaway. Snap to it."

The Shays' idea of snapping at that hour of the night was rather a languid stroll. Before the pantry door closed on them they glanced back at Munson.

"What's he doing?" asked Red in a whisper. "Kissing it?"

"Looks more like his nose," said Shad. "Perhaps he has a cold."

Munson carried the domino to the kitchen and sat down. Again he sniffed at the neck band to which still clung a faint trace of scent, illusive, almost indefinable.

Then he let the domino drop to his knees and sat staring straight ahead of him.

\* \*

"Bennett," said Munson on the following morning, when that crisp, self-confident officer put in an appearance, "it's good to get you back. My staff is becoming almost too diverting."

Bennett smiled appreciatively. "Have they been shooting up the countryside again?" he asked.

"No," replied Munson. "Looking for lost wills this time." He paused and passed a hand impatiently across his eyes. He had hardly slept at all that night. "Perhaps I wrong the Shays," he resumed. "When I come to consider it, they've been the only bright spot in this whole tragic business. You know, Bennett, whenever I have any dealings with those two broken reeds of the law I get the same feeling of bewilderment and unreality that poor Alice must have experienced at

the mad tea-party. If they were just a little bit better I'd see that they were damn well fired from the force, but they're so dumb, so incredibly useless, I'm afraid to cast them adrift in this world of frenzied competition."

Munson little realized as he spoke that despite his humane sentiments the Shays were destined soon to be cast very much adrift indeed.

The two men were walking round the west side of the house. They came to the orchard and continued on in the direction of the salt marshes.

"Yes," said Munson slowly, in response to a question from his companion, "the case is about over as far as our end of it is concerned. Nothing remains to be done now save, perhaps, the most heart-breaking task that ever confronted a man. I'm such a coward, Bennett, that I'm tempted to clear out and let you take charge from here. I feel like an undertaker for broken souls."

"If I can help to make things any easier, Mr. Munson," replied Bennett, "I'm at your disposal, although I don't like this business so much myself. They're all nice people," he added, with a backward jerk of his head in the direction of the house.

"Thanks, Bennett," said Munson. "I'll let you know. Let's go over there and have a little talk with Betty. That girl, I suspect, is a mine of information if you can only make her forget to tell lies."

Betty was sitting on the same bench at the end of the orchard where she had first told her story of the murder of Emily-Jane. As Munson and Bennett, apparently engaged in casual conversation, strolled past the bench, Munson stopped, and with an arresting hand on the officer's arm, looked at the girl with a friendly grin.

"Isn't that so, Betty?" he asked, hoping to arouse her curiosity.

"Isn't what so, Mr. Munson?" asked Betty innocently, rising to the bait.

"Well, Mr. Bennett here was just saying," Munson explained, absent-mindedly sitting down beside Betty, "Officer Bennett was just saying that it's a downright shame so much fuss and worry should be made over the death of Miss Emily-Jane."

For the peace of mind of one Thomas Shanks, it was fortunate he was not present to witness the look of warm approval with which Betty favored Bennett, who upon receiving it immediately felt compensated for the remark Munson had so callously put into his mouth.

"And he's about right, too," replied Betty feelingly. "All the trouble started the moment she set foot in the house. Before that this place was one of the happiest spots in all the world. You know that yourself, Mr. Munson."

The girl's words seemed to be stabbing the man who sat beside her. For a moment he forgot what he had come there for--the problem that was uppermost in his mind. He was thinking of life at Crewe House before the advent of Emily-Jane. He was thinking of the ideal understanding and comradeship that had bound the two brothers so closely together. He was thinking of the plans the three of them had made during the long, lazy summer hours. There was going to be a breakfast in Paris on a certain specified morning, followed by a flight over the Channel and several weeks in London. After that they had planned a walking trip in which ale had largely figured. Barney had insisted on making it a slouching trip, and from that had rapidly retrograded until the trip had become a "barely moving tour of some small and preferably level area of England." Scott recalled his words. Where was all that now? Barney had ceased to be absurd. Old

friendships weresplit and embittered. The breakfast in Paris had been shot to hell. Murder and suicide had come to spend the summer. There was no getting rid of them.

"Yes, Betty," Munson replied. "That's just about the way of it. This place here was one of the happiest and fairest spots on God's green earth. Bennett, it would have done your heart good just to have been about for a while. There was something so damned restful and decent about the place and the people in it. I was a tired man when I first came here, but after a couple of days I wasn't tired any more, and now"--he hesitated a moment--"well, now I'm tired again, tired as hell."

"You can thank that girl for that," said Betty, sticking to her original theme. "If she had never come here everything would be right now just like it had been before."

"Did you feel like that all along, Betty?" asked Munson.

"I certainly did," she replied. "Miss Emily-Jane never pulled the wool over my eyes, not for one second she didn't."

"Nor mine," said Munson.

"But she fooled most everybody else," the girl continued. "And she did it right in front of their eyes. It didn't take me long to see what kind she was--always pawing the men-folks with her hands and laughing up into their silly eyes, and poor easy-going Mr. Barney thinking she was just grand. It's a good thing for him she's gone. Why, the very afternoon of the party she--" Betty broke off suddenly and failed to complete her sentence. "I'd better be getting back to the house," she said. "They'll be hollering for me up there."

"Yes, I imagine you noticed a lot, Betty," thoughtfully observed Scott

Munson, rising lazily from the bench. "A girl like you with eyes in her head sees a great deal more than people give her credit for. Isn't that so?"

Betty laughed knowingly. "I saw a whole lot more than Miss Emily-Jane ever wanted me to see," she replied. "I know for certain she tried to make a go for Mr. Daniel. I saw her try it with my own two eyes."

"But she was out of luck there," said Munson encouragingly. "What did Mr. Daniel do, Betty? Did he give her the cold shoulder?"

"He did that," Betty stoutly declared. "And she gave him the bare shoulder. I was standing in one of the alcoves and I saw the whole thing. I saw Mr. Dan pulling himself away from her. He was trying to get out of her room and she was holding him back with her naked arm. I'll never forget the look on his face. It was awful. And she laughed and asked him to call again."

"When did that happen?" asked Munson casually.

"Only a few hours before she was standing up before all the world, publicly engaging herself to Mr. Dan's own blood brother," she announced triumphantly.

"It was a good thing no one else saw it," said Munson. "Mr. Barney, for instance, or Miss June."

"It made no difference," answered Betty.

"Then someone else did see it?"

"Miss June saw the whole thing," Betty announced.

"I'd like to have heard what she said to Mr. Dan." Munson's laugh as

he made this observation was just a trifle off key.

"She didn't say a word, Mr. Munson, not a word. She and Mr. Dan just stood there looking at each other, and I remember he kept shaking his head slowly from side to side."

"Then what happened, Betty?"

"Nothing happened," replied Betty. "Mr. Dan just went on to his room, and Miss June stood looking at Miss Emily-Jane's door with the strangest expression in her eyes. She just stood there staring at that door, and then she went to her room. I wouldn't want anybody to look at me the way she looked at that door."

As the two men walked back through the orchard, Munson turned to Bennett.

"Had Betty realized what she was saying," remarked Munson, "she would rather have had her tongue cut out than to have said it."

But Bennett did not answer. He was thinking over what Betty had just told them, and he did not envy Munson his successful solution of the murder.

# XVIII. THE BREAKING POINT

SAM STOUGHTEN was sweating. Munson was sweating him. It was a cool evening. A fresh breeze fingered the curtains at the open windows and searched through the room. Yet Sam's pale face in the lamp-light glistened with perspiration. Scott Munson, sitting idly in front of him, resembled some weird, sinister visitant from outer darkness. All his life-forces seemed to be concentrated in his eyes. Relaxed in his chair, he sat without moving. All power and energy had deserted his body and streamed upward to his eyes and to the brain behind those eyes.

For three hours now this thing had been going on. Munson patient and probing, bitter at times, mocking, cruel and unscrupulous. Then, suddenly, bewilderingly, another Munson--subtle, kind, almost sympathetic. Sam was unable to understand it. These swift changes confused him, upset the unstable balance of his already weary mind. For three miasmal hours the very core of his being had been alternately lashed and bullied by the tongue and eyes of this man who sat so untiringly before him. But Sam had not yet been broken. Stubborn, rebellious, and deathly sick, his stomach nauseated and his brain a ball of aching lead, he still stuck to his guns. He would not tell. No human being would ever torture from his lips the story of the murder of Emily-Jane. He no longer had the power to force his eyes to meet those of his inquisitor. However, he could still resist him. No agony of mind or body could make him speak, no fear of punishment nor hope of escape.

Sam sat with lowered head. He was like a spent and blinded bull unable to shake off his tormentor. His limp, moist hands were too spiritless now to grip the arms of his chair. And all the time he was conscious of Munson's eyes watching him. A desire to drive the light

forever from those eyes took possession of him. It would have to be something sharp--something thin and sharp and long enough to reach into the brain. Sam would be able to face him then . . . to look into his sightless eyes and laugh.

Munson was speaking now. That voice, always that voice, going on and on and on. Would Munson never grow weary of the sound of his own voice? Would he never stop asking the same monotonous questions, repeating them over and over? Would he never realize all his trickery was lost on Sam? He should know by this time that Sam had no intention of answering his damn questions. Why didn't he let up and give a fellow a chance to rest, to gather his scattered wits and to think things out?

"Sam," came the calm voice, "in your heart you know that you're going to talk before you leave this room. Why not get it over?"

"Go to hell, Munson." Sam spoke with lowered head. He would not meet those eyes.

"Sam, think."

"Go to hell, Munson."

"Sam!"

"Go to hell, Munson. Go to hell. Go to hell. Go to hell."

Munson cast the lowered head a covert glance of admiration, then his face hardened. "You've asked for it, Sam," he said.

From an inside coat pocket he produced a thin packet of letters. Selecting a letter, he opened it and began to read. At Munson's first words a sensation of suffocation washed over the huddled figure. His body stiffened in the chair, and his hot eyes, filled with shame and

self-loathing, darted from side to side as if seeking some means of escape. Scott Munson's voice was quiet and unhurried. Sam shrank from the words. The girl was dead now. Why had she left her past behind her to confront the living? Why had she not carried it down into the oblivion of the grave? Surely, she could want no more of him.

Munson had finished the letter and now was opening another one. Sam could see from beneath his brows the man's long, slim fingers sliding into the envelope. They moved with calculated deliberateness. Like snakes, thought Sam, those fingers. Then Munson's voice again, but the words were Sam's words and the thoughts were his. Poisoned memories winging about his ears, beating their way into his brain. And Munson's voice, steadily sounding on, stripping Sam of the last shred of self-esteem as it picked its way fastidiously through filth.

Sam buried his head in his arms and tried not to hear. To drown out the words he kept repeating under his breath, "Go to hell. Go to hell. Go to hell," but Munson's voice went on, the words still drilled in Sam's ears and festered in his brain. Then the reading ceased and Sam heard the faint rustle of paper. He waited. Would it all begin again? Yes, Munson was opening another letter. Sam's endurance snapped.

"Damn your soul to hell," he said, getting to his feet and confronting Munson. "Must you do that, Munson—keep hitting a guy below the belt?"

Munson considered him coldly. "Any worse than trying to stab a girl from behind a curtain?" he asked, and continued on with the reading.

"Stop," pleaded Sam. "For God's sake. Don't do it, Scott."

But Munson's voice kept implacably on until he had read the letter

through. Then he carefully replaced the letter in the packet, slipped it into his inside pocket and sat looking up at Sam with an inscrutable expression in his eyes. Sam sank back in his chair. For a blessed moment the room was still, then Munson began to speak.

"You wrote those letters, Sam," he said, "and later you made a cowardly attempt to stab in the back the girl to whom they were written. You did that, Sam. I have the knife with your finger-prints on it. You had the motive and the opportunity. And there's the letter about the kid in college. I can see pretty clearly what happened. but it might not be so clear to a jury. I could charge you right now with attempted murder if not something a damn sight more serious. Now listen, Sam." Munson leaned forward in his chair and forced the other's attention. "Have you any idea what that would mean? It would mean that those letters would pass into the hands of some jury. Your own defense would read them--Sue. Reporters would read them, mouth over them, chuckle over them, parts of those letters would find their way into every paper in this country. Millions of eyes would be looking--reading your letters, Sam. In railway trains commuters would be passing remarks back and forth about them. 'Hot stuff, Bill!' 'Say, listen to this.' Your name and Emily-Jane's would be forever linked, and Sue's life pretty much smeared. Get me, Sam? That's just a part of the picture. I'm not laying it on thick either. You're intelligent enough to know that. And all because you stupidly refuse to speak. Think it over, Sam. Your silence is helping no one, protecting no one. Just the opposite. It's doing a hell of a lot of harm." He reached in his pocket and brought out the letters. "Sam," he went on in a matter-of-fact voice, "I'll give you these letters if you will tell me what I want to know. What do you say to that?"

This time the silence lasted several minutes. Once Sam reached blindly for the letters, then slowly withdrew his hand. God, how he wanted to do it ! The picture that Munson had partially painted danced before his eyes. He could hear people talking, whispering,

and chuckling obscenely, as they read the papers in public places. Munson was not playing fair. He had no right to place a man in such a position. Then Sam thought of Sue. He saw her hurt, bewildered face. At this thought his anger surged within him, and he faced his enemy.

"Go to hell, Munson," he said, stedfastly keeping his eyes off the extended packet of letters. "You can disgrace me, arrest me, and do any damn thing you please, but you can't lick me. Keep your damn letters."

He covered his face with his hands and tried to muffle the choking sound's which in spite of his efforts broke from his lips. Munson rose slowly from his chair and stood looking down at the stooped figure. For the first time in his life he felt himself defeated. Yet, as he stood there looking at Sam, a strange expression came to his eyes--a mixture of approval and regret.

"All right, Sam," he said, his voice sounding unexpectedly natural and sincere. "I'll give you these letters anyway. You've earned them, but I'm very much afraid you're sending your best friend to inevitable death . . . and it's not so nice to die, Sam."

He tossed the packet to the floor between Sam's feet and, crossing the room, quietly closed the door be-hind him. For a few seconds Sam looked uncomprehendingly at the letters. What was that Munson had just said? Something about death--death and Daniel "it's not nice to die." And he, Sam, was sending his own friend to his death. Munson had sounded in earnest. No tricks this time. Suddenly Sam seized the letters and hurried down the room. In the hall he met Sue. She was just coming up to bed.

"What did Scott want with you?" she asked, half fearful and half suspicious.

"Nothing much," lied Sam, cupping the letters in his hand as well as he could. "He just loves to hear himself talk. Did you happen to see where he went?"

"He's in his lair," she said, then placing a hand on his arm, added a trifle timidly: "You're not looking at all well, Sam. I hope you'll manage to get yourself back to a non-lying basis soon. She paused and looked into her husband's eyes. They seemed so world-weary and harassed. "Tell him to go away, Sam," she added, and in spite of himself Sam smiled.

"That's just what I've been doing," he replied. "All night long I've been telling him. I even named the place."

Munson was standing at the window with his back to the door when Sam burst into the room without stopping even to knock. The man at the window swung about sharply, then stood facing his visitor, a question in his eyes. They studied each other silently. Sam seemed to have nothing to say.

"Well?" inquired Munson. "Aren't the letters all there?"

"You can have them back, Scott," said Sam huskily, and he extended the letters. "If they'll help Dan you can have them."

"They won't help Daniel," said Munson. "You're the only one who can do that... and you refuse. For that I now tell you to go to hell."

He deliberately turned his back on Sam and continued to stare out of the window.

"Listen," went on the voice behind him. "I'll tell now. What you said about Dan . . . got me . . . I won't hold out any more. Listen, Scott, do you want to hear?"

"Sit down," said Munson, "and take it easy. You've fought like a fool tonight. If I were in your place I'd burn those letters up." He turned from the window and, going to the closet, produced a bottle of whisky. "Here," he continued, handing Sam a drink. "Swallow that down and give me those letters. We'll burn them now before I change my mind."

He struck a match to a bundle of newspapers in the fireplace and carefully distributed the letters among the flames. Together they watched them burn, and for the first time in weeks a feeling of freedom stirred in Sam's heart. For some reason he felt cleaner.

"Well, that little chapter in Emily-Jane's life will never be read again," Munson remarked, as he pulverized the ashes. "Let's get this over, Sam."

"God, how I hate doing this," muttered Sam. "It's going to be even worse than I thought."

"And it might be even worse than that," replied Munson, "if you don't come clean."

Sam started abruptly as if afraid to give himself any more time to think.

"You're right about the knife," he began. "I wanted to kill her. I wanted to kill her, Scott, for several reasons--for myself, for Daniel, for Barney, for all of us nearly--Sue and June. I feel that the person who did it was a public benefactor. You see she wouldn't give up, wouldn't listen to reason. That afternoon Daniel had pleaded with her in her room. He offered her a pile of money. She laughed at him. She even tried to vamp him then and there. After that I knew she was going to die. I knew it, Scott. I saw it in Daniel's eyes. But somehow I didn't want him to be the one to do it. I wanted it done, but I didn't want Dan

to do it. See what I mean?"

Munson nodded sympathetically. "A tough situation," he said, "I can see it."

"Yes," continued Sam. "It was tough. So, I decided to do it myself, and I'd have succeeded if they hadn't moved after the lights went out."

"You nearly succeeded in killing Dan," Munson observed.

"The very one I wanted to help most," Sam went on regretfully. "Scott, you might not believe me, but I'm sorry right now I didn't succeed in killing Emily-Jane that time."

"I would have had you behind the bars within fifteen minutes, and you'd never have come out alive, Sam."

"Perhaps it would have been the better way," he answered dispiritedly. "It couldn't be worse than it is now. Well, that clears up that part of it, anyway. When I went into the dining-room I had it all doped out. I knew the exact fold in the curtain. I picked up the knife from the table and switched off the lights. Then I felt for the fold and stabbed. When the signal came for the lights, I was back again at the switch."

"In the eyes of whatever God there is I dare say you're as much of a murderer, Sam, as the person who actually did succeed."

"I'm afraid I'm even worse." Sam spoke with conviction. "My motives were more selfish. When I saw Dan's arm that night, I became even more determined to go through with the thing. I thought he was out of commission, and that put it up to me. And Daniel knew I had tried to stab Emily-Jane. He told me not to be a damn fool. For the rest of the night I watched her. When she went down the Cliff Path with Lane

Holt, I followed them. Oh, I gave them plenty of time. and kept well out of the way. I was still hooded, too. When I got to High Point Rock I crouched down in some bushes and waited. I don't know how long it was--more than ten minutes, anyway. And I didn't quite know what I was going to do, but of course, the place naturally suggested one thing. By that time I was all prepared to push them both off if Holt put up a fight. Then they strolled into view and stood near the edge of the rock. They were laughing and drinking and mixing it up."

"Did you suspect anyone else's presence?" asked Munson.

"An army might have been encamped right behind me, and I wouldn't have known it. I was too busy thinking and watching and nerving myself for that short, quick dash."

Once more Munson nodded.

"Then a thing happened, Scott," Sam resumed, "that spoiled all my plans and scared me stiff for a moment. Another hooded figure broke from the bushes and made for the pair at the edge of the rock. I started to follow. Got well out in the open, then stopped in my tracks. Emily-Jane had gone over. I saw her go. So, I backed into the bushes again, feeling pretty sick."

Sam stopped as if he had finished his story and looked hopefully into Munson's hard, scornful eyes. No hope there. Sam lowered his gaze.

"Give the unimportant details, Sam," said Munson. "Those ashes in there bear witness to my good faith."

Sam gulped and the color slowly left his face. Once more his face and hands grew moist.

"What do you mean, Scott? That's just what I saw."

"You know damn well what I mean. Who was the man—that second figure?"

"Daniel." The name came with a gasp.

"Then you saw him?"

"I recognized him right off. Later I saw his face. It was after Holt ran away. I saw Dan's face. There was moonlight on it." Sam stopped and a shudder ran through his body. "He was suffering, Scott," he added simply. "Suffering there alone. It was as much as I could do to keep from going to him, but I knew he wouldn't want me then."

Munson rose from his chair and walked to the window.

"Much obliged," he said with his back to Sam. "I'm glad you got that off your chest. Then you're morally certain that Dan did it, eh? I knew all along, but I needed your story. You see, if I can get him to make a confession, I'll be able to spare the lot of you no end of scandal and publicity. It will be better for Dan in the end."

Munson stretched wearily and turned yawning from the window. Sara remained in his chair. His eyes were filled with trouble. He was breathing rapidly.

"Sam," continued Scott, "it's about time we hit the hay. It's been a devil of a strain on you, and you don't look any too damn well. But you'll sleep better tonight with a clean conscience and those letters out of the way."

Sam looked at him dully and gave a short mirthless laugh. "I'm going," he said. "Give me a drink first."

Munson poured him a drink and stood watching him as he gulped it down. The empty glass fell to the floor with a little crash. Sam sprang

to his feet and faced Munson. His eyes were in torment, pierced with utter misery.

"That isn't all, Scott," he said in a low voice. "I saw something else."

"Oh, you did," replied Munson casually. "What?"

"A hand," Sam whispered. "It slipped over the edge of the cliff and clutched Emily-Jane by the ankle."

"Was it a man's hand, Sam?"

Sam shook his head.

"Right hand or left?"

"Left, Scott."

"And was there a ring on it--a large solitaire?"

"Let me go, Scott. I've told you enough."

"You saw it?"

Sam bowed his head and walked unsteadily to the door. For a moment their eyes met, but neither man spoke. There was nothing left to say.

# XIX. THE FACE IN THE PICTURE

MUNSON stood there looking wearily at the door. It had been a fight--a tough one. Scott felt that it had been a fight. He felt it as much spiritually as he did physically. The fact that he had won brought him scant elation. To the contrary. He was now faced with a situation he would have gone a long way to avoid. God, what a case! What a mess of misdirected loyalty and idealism ! And to what good end? He shrugged his shoulders and turned from the door.

This time when he stretched his long frame and indulged in a yawn it was honestly. There was no strain for an effect. He was tired--fed up with himself and with humanity in general.

"I don't know the oriental mind," he mused, "but damn if these people aren't all Chinese to me. Still there's something terribly human about them. A generous murder. Now who in hell ever heard of a paradox like that?"

The fact that his night's work was not yet over made him feel even more weary. Longingly he eyed his bed. One of the most all around satisfactory beds in which he had ever slept. From the bed his eyes traveled to his easy chair. He felt himself longing for this source of comfort and repose. Then his gaze sought the table on which stood the bottle of whisky.

"Damn if I have to long for that," he muttered with a faint smile. "That's one thing I can do at least."

He did. He was even lavish about it, which was unusual for Scott Munson.

"Might get myself drunk for a couple of months," he reflected. "Just

stay drunk and go dotty and forget who I am. That would be one way out."

He finished his drink and left the room abruptly. No answer was forthcoming to his knock on Barney's door. He turned the knob and entered. When he switched on the lights he received a start. The wreck of a small male creature was sitting up in bed. Out of two vaguely inquiring eyes it regarded Munson. Young Barney had selected for his sleeping attire a tattered, paint-smeared smock. This, together with his casually straying hair and his lined face, gave him the appearance of an exceedingly ancient infant.

"What do you want to wear that thing to bed for?" demanded Munson in a tone of disgust.

"Couldn't find my tops and I can't stand bottoms," said Barney cryptically. "Can you stand bottoms, Scott?"

"If you are referring to pajamas," replied Munson, "it's purely a personal matter. Only God and myself know the answer."

"How about Betty?" came the surprising inquiry. "You seem to be forever chasing her about. I don't think it's nice. For a man of your--"

"And for a person who never seems to be looking at anything," cut in Munson, "you seem to be able to observe one hell of a lot. And your mind, Barney, is about as evil as your eye."

"That's the usual detective's line," replied Barney, "and it doesn't help at all about the tops. If you'll believe it, that drawer over there is just bursting with bottoms--practically new bottoms--and there's not one top among them. Aunt Matty used to supply me with tops, but she's off me now on account of that picture. Anyway, what does it matter to you whether I sleep in my bare skin or in a suit of armor?"

"You can sleep in a dress suit so far as I am concerned," replied Munson, sitting down near the bed and suddenly becoming grave. "It's about that painting of yours that I want to talk. Like Aunt Matty, I'm off you, too, Barney. I'm off you because of that damn picture and the way you're treating Daniel. Somehow it's not like you, Barney, and it's rotten. Daniel needs you now. He's always stood by you."

A strange look came into Barney's eyes, but he remained silent.

"But," continued Munson, "I'm not going to tell you why you're all wrong. You're going to find that out for yourself. Then you'll just have to believe. And it's not going to be easy, Barney. It's going to hurt like hell . . . knock down your house of cards and scatter your beautiful dreams."

Munson paused for a moment. When he resumed speaking his voice was unusually gentle.

"But I won't mind hurting you, Barney," he said, "if it will only help you to see the truth, which in this sad affair is more beautiful and more terrible than any dreams your brain will ever weave. I won't mind hurting you if it will bring you back to Daniel, who for your sake has made a sacrifice even greater than death itself. I won't mind hurting you, Barney, if it will help you to see through the maze of stupidity and despair clouding this case--to see behind it all the essential love and loyalty of the thing. I tell you frankly that during all the years of my dealings with misguided humanity I have never encountered such a poignantly sorrowful situation."

"Listen, Scott," said Barney. "I don't mind being hurt either. Most of my life I've been pretty much sat on, but I never minded before because Daniel . . . well, you see, Daniel was always around. He used to be a big help in the old days."

Barney stopped speaking and sat staring into space. Munson knew that memories were stealing back from the past. He could almost feel their presence in the room.

"You know, Scott," continued Barney in a low voice, "sometimes I watch kids and wonder if any of them are as decent as Dan must have been when he was their age. Without anyone knowing it much, he must have been a remarkable youngster . . . fearless, generous, and understanding." Barney smiled rather sheepishly at Munson and added, "He was awfully damn good to me, Scott."

"Then," said Munson, "for the sake of the old days are you willing to find out the truth now?"

"Yes, Scott, if it will help any."

"And you'll take it like a man?"

Barney slowly nodded. "I'll take my medicine," he replied with a faint smile. "I've been in a gray murk lately, but when you took Dan away that day, I received a bit of a shock. Since then I've been asking myself a few questions."

"I'm still in a gray murk," replied Munson, producing one of the letters Emily-Jane had written to Daniel and extending it to Barney. "Do you recognize that handwriting?"

Once more Barney nodded, and this time his face was white. "Emily-Jane wrote that to him," he said, as if speaking to himself. "It must have been years ago."

"It was," replied Munson. "All you heed to do is to skip through it. Then think of Daniel and the situation he was in--and he wasn't alone either. I'll be back in about ten minutes."

Barney made no answer as Munson rose and left the room. His eyes were fixed on the letter, and the hand that held it was shaking so violently that he was forced to clamp it between his knees.

When Munson returned to the room some fifteen minutes later, Barney was sitting up in bed, in the same position, but the letter had fallen from his hand. A change had come over his face. During Munson's absence young Barney had grown fast. The eyes that greeted Munson were no longer vague and visionary. They were alert, confident, and at the same time disconcertingly unfathomable. Only a slight tenseness around the corners of his mouth gave evidence of the strong control he was exerting over his emotions.

"Thanks, Scott," he said in a calm voice. "I have pictured the whole situation. Why didn't Daniel show me this before-before it happened?"

"There were other letters," Munson replied. "Sam's. She had them and she was going to use them."

"What a mess," mused Barney. "And a creature so utterly lovely . . . God's mind must have been straying." His voice trailed off into silence, and he sat there with his chin on his knees.

"But Daniel should have shown you that letter," came Munson's voice. "That would have been the sane and rational thing to do . . . only people don't do the sane and rational things. He wanted to spare you, Barney."

"He knows my old weakness, Scott," said Barney. "I'm a great dodger of facts. If I don't like a fact I alter it to suit my own ideas. If I can't alter it, I ignore it--banish it from my mind. I've never been a great hand at lifting up my voice and declaiming about the hard facts of life, its grimness, its realness, and all that jargon. From the first

time a baby falls down on its nose it begins to know about the hard facts of life and its grimness. What I've always tried to do is to ungrim life a little, and to do that successfully, one must be pretty clever at self-deception."

He paused and considered Scott Munson thoughtfully.

"I suppose you've noticed that I've never asked you any questions about this case. Apparently I've been indifferent. But I haven't. I haven't wanted to know. I've been dodging facts and making up facts--false ones--of my own. And all the time I've been painting that picture a question has been buzzing round in the back of my mind, Scott. I was afraid of the answer. I didn't want to know why Emily-Jane was out with Lane Holt at that time of night. So I just kept on painting. The more I painted the angrier I became, until finally the thing fastened on me like an obsession. I only knew that a beautiful thing had been snatched out of my life... the most beautiful thing that had ever come into it. That beauty had been denied me and I wanted to make someone else suffer. God help me. I picked on Dan. Now that I look back on it all, I can see that she never really cared for me. Little incidents stand out--things I refused to admit at the time. I couldn't talk to anyone else like this, Scott, not even to Daniel. Beauty must have made me drunk and now--oh, well, I sobered up to find a lot of facts that can be neither altered nor dismissed. I'll just have to face them, Scott, that's all. I must think about Dan. How do things stand with him?"

"Not so good, Barney," said Munson slowly.

"God. What a tragic jam," mused Barney. "There seems to be no way out and I'm responsible for it all."

"The situation was," replied Munson. "You were merely a part of it."

"I know. I know," said Barney. "That doesn't help any, Scott."

Munson rose and Barney handed him the letter. "I wish you could destroy it," he said, "but I suppose it's a bit of evidence. We must all of us lose our dreams now."

"Nothing else you want to know, Barney?" asked Munson, slipping the letter into his pocket. He was frankly puzzled by Barney's attitude, his baffling mixture of common sense and visionary ideas. He was puzzled and at the same time pleased.

"No, Scott," Barney replied. "I owe you a lot as it is. Don't tell Dan I know."

When Munson had left, Barney lay back on his pillows and looked sightlessly up at the ceiling. Presently two glistening drops gathered in his eyes and trembled there until they broke from his lashes. That was all . . . two tears for Emily-Jane, or, rather, for what Emily-Jane had meant to him.

\* \*

Several hours later he rose and, dressing about as carefully as he ever did, went quickly downstairs. All quiet in the old house. Dawn was trembling on the fringe of night. From the hall he collected his easel and painting equipment and staggered with them to his brother's study, the first room to catch the light. The noise this occasioned aroused the shadowing instincts of Officer Red. Breathing heavily, he creaked down the corridor in the wake of Barney. Between them they made the night lively with sound. To such an extent, in fact, that Officer Shad awoke and dogged the heels of Red.

Both officers stood peering into the study. Some minutes passed.

"You might as well get the hell out of here," said Barney, without troubling to turn around. "Those faces of yours behind me give me the creeps. Take them away."

Whereupon the faces, wearing a slightly injured look, were withdrawn. It didn't matter about Mr. Bar-

ney. Too bad, though. A nice young man like that going clean off his head.

While Crewe House slept Barney sat before his easel. Occasionally he rose and going out to the veranda, studied the eastern sky. And when at last the comfortable old study was filled with the light of a new day, Barney took up his brushes and began to paint with swift, sure strokes.

\* \*

Munson returned to his room and quite willingly accepted the invitation of his easy chair by the window. Barney had not proved difficult. A surprising character.

Scott had wanted to see Daniel but he did not feel up to it now.

"Come in," he called, as a knock sounded on the door.

Daniel came quietly into the room. At the sight of the thin, lined face and the eyes sunken from watching too many long nights through, Munson felt a trifle downed. He wanted to escape from the room.

"Want a drink, Dan?" he asked.

"I do," said Dan, pouring out a drink and tossing it off. "I did. Badly."

Seating himself on the bed, he looked silently at Munson. "Almost

over now?" Dan asked.

"Almost, Dan."

"What are you waiting for?"

"For the most natural thing in the world."

"Meaning what?"

"For someone to say something, Dan. I've had a talk with Sam."

"Did he say something?"

"More than enough."

Daniel rose from the bed. "Then that pretty well leaves it up to me," he remarked.

"Yes," replied Munson. "And to me, also."

Daniel walked to the door. "I'm glad it's all over, Scott. It will be--"

"I said almost over," interrupted Munson.

"Almost over," Daniel corrected himself. "Don't feel too low about it, Scott. It started out to be a rather decent summer. I'll talk to you in the morning."

"We'll have to go through with it then," replied Munson. "Sam isn't all clear yet."

He hated himself for the lie, but it was necessary to play these people against each other. And Munson knew how to play them.

The sun was well up when Daniel opened his eyes. He had slept deeply and forgotten something. What was it? Oh, hell, yes. Scott had said they would have to go through with it today. Well, here was today. Daniel was ready for it. As he rolled from his bed a thrill of excitement ran through him. No more skulking now. That was all over. He would make a confession and Scott would do the rest. And the yacht? Too bad. He tried not to think of the yacht. "Keep on fighting," June had said. To what good end that? Scott still thought that Sam was involved. His mind must be disabused. No need to make too many people suffer needlessly. There would be enough.

He bathed and dressed quickly and went downstairs. He would have liked to see Barney just then, but Barney was not to be seen. Perhaps things could be patched up, now that Daniel was going away.

He wandered about the lawn as if seeing the place for the last time. He kept telling himself that this could not be so, but deep down in his heart he knew that when he took that ride with Munson or Bennett he would never return to his old home again. Crewe House would see the last of him.

Look, trees, look! Here comes your old friend. Take a good look at him now before he goes away. He. used to climb you once. Remember? The two little boys? No more climbing now. Daniel has become a murderer. He murdered a beautiful girl, and now he, too, must die.

Daniel shivered and went down to the beach. For a while he stood idly tossing stones into the water. Not such bad sport, that. There was quite a knack in skimming stones. Better than being locked behind bars. Oh, hell !

Daniel turned from the beach and looked in at the boathouse. There were the canoes and there was Barney's crazy motorboat. Daniel recalled the first ride he had ever taken in it. It had also been his last. Only Barney knew how to make the engine work, and at times it failed even Barney.

Daniel returned to the lawn and sought his study. At the door he stopped suddenly, his eyes transfixed. Bowed and motionless Barney was sitting before the canvas, and the picture was finished. Daniel saw himself standing at the edge of the cliff and behind his head the yellow moonlight radiated like a nimbus. His arms were outspread and from his left hand blood was dripping. And the face was not the face of a murderer. All the pain of suffering humanity seemed to be centered there. Tenderness and deep regret looked out of the deep-set eyes.

The minutes passed unheeded as Daniel studied the painting and the intention of the painter. A wave of relief and thankfulness swept over Daniel. Unconsciously a deep sigh escaped his lips. Barney looked up and met the gaze of his brother. Daniel nodded silently.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I did it, Barney."

"I know, Dan. Forgive me--" and Barney knelt at his brother's feet.

Daniel put his hand on Barney's head. "I'm going to confess, Barney."

"Don't, Dan. Don't!"

In Barney's excited imagination he saw what lay ahead for Daniel . . . the trial and humiliation of it all, then the waiting alone in a cell, and finally Daniel in the chair. Good God, that couldn't be! His brother, Dan, alone and convulsed in death. His arms went up to Daniel, to

this man who had always stood for the fine things of life, the decent, generous things.

"Don't, Dan," he repeated.

Silence a moment, then "Is it all right with you, Barney?"

"Yes, Dan, and you?"

"It's always been all right with me, kid. We've had a tough break--that's all."

He stood with his hand on his brother's head, and his face was the face in the picture. His eyes were filled with pain and infinite tenderness.

# XX. ALL THE WORLD AND PLACES

IN the library June Lansing sat facing Scott Munson. Her eyes were alert and filled with expectancy. Munson's were those of a tired and none too happy man.

"June," he began, "I want to talk over this case with you. Something has to happen today. Things can't continue like this. We've been stalling long enough."

June leaned back in her chair and considered her cigarette. "Yes, Scott," she said. "What comes next?"

"Well," replied Munson hesitatingly, "I thought you might have something to say."

"And I thought that was your job, Scott," June coolly observed.

"Of course," said Munson, "but--well, I had a long talk with Sam last night and he had lots to say. Daniel is going to talk this morning. . . . You see, June, the case is about closed."

"Then why string it out, Scott?" June smiled and lighted another cigarette.

"I have some things," Munson explained. "This for example. It was hidden in the pantry, June."

He held up the black domino, which he had taken from the table.

"And then there's this buckle," he continued. "It was found in the sand near the rocks. It sort of worries me, June . . . this thing taken

together with what Sam saw that night, your hand with that solitaire on it, and no end of other stuff. Did you hold on with your right hand and pull with your left, June?"

"Yes," said June, her poise never deserting her. "It was safer. The ledge, as you know, is narrow at that point."

Munson thoughtfully studied the girl's face. She was pale but collected, and for the first time he detected an expression of pain in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, June," he said gently.

June laughed shortly and rose from the chair. For several minutes she paced the room restlessly.

"Sorry, Scott?" she repeated at last, turning suddenly and confronting Munson. "Where can you find the word? There is no word. No form of speech can express the sorrow and horror I've been carrying round in my heart. I did the thing. Let's get that straight. I did it because I couldn't let Dan do it. I took that frightful stigma on myself because Dan--Scott, Dan is too fine for a thing like that. In time I was going to let him know--let you all know, but I still had hope. I still thought we might get away somewhere. It was murder, Scott, but it wasn't such a terrible murder. I am weak enough to regret it though. Day and night it is in my eyes, in my thoughts, gnawing at my mind. But I couldn't let Dan do it . . . I couldn't let him do it. We were all mad that night."

She sank to a chair and buried her face in her hands. Little convulsive shivers ran through her body. Munson rose and, crossing over to her, placed a hand on her shoulder. For some time they remained thus in the silence of the great, dim room.

"I read one of her letters to him," she resumed, her head still in her

hands, her eyes fixed on the carpet. "Then I knew what all the trouble was about. After the dance she told me she had a date for a little walk in the moonlight."

"Why did she tell you that?"

"Because I pretended I had one, too, and she was warning me to keep away from High Point Rock. She thought I was like herself--a cheat. I think she almost liked me then. A girl like her gets lonely unless she has someone of her kind about her. I took the domino and got down to the ledge long before anyone else had started. I thought I lost that buckle somewhere along the way. All evening it had been giving me trouble, but I never knew just where it fell off. I waited on the ledge, Scott, waited a long time, and then the thing happened. Everyone who comes to High Point Rock halts at that spot or close to it at some time or other. I knew they would come and I waited. Those minutes will be with me all my life. You know the rest. Sam must have seen. In the confusion of the scuffle above my head I reached up and gripped her ankle . . . I pulled her over the edge of the cliff and she almost struck me as she fell. I heard her strike. It came to me through the darkness. Oh, God, oh, God, that sound!" She paused and looked up at Munson. "I'd beaten Dan to it," she added, "but at the peace of my own soul if I have such a thing. Is that enough, Scott?"

"Yes, June," he answered. "I'm afraid the case is closed."

"It's a God-damned lie." Daniel's words cut sharply across the silence of the room. "It's impossible--stupid."

Munson and June turned quickly to see the two brothers standing in the doorway. Daniel strode across the room and pulled June roughly to her feet. Then he took her in his arms and held her fiercely to him.

"Scott, it's a damned lot of nonsense," he said, looking at Munson over June's shoulders. "I did it and you've all along known I did. Barney--everyone knows. This girl here is out of her mind. Shut up, June"-- and Daniel shook her vigorously, then once more gathered her in his arms.

"I'm afraid June is right," replied Munson. "You see, Daniel, I can prove it."

For a moment Daniel's faculties were atrophied. He could hardly realize the fact that he was not an actual murderer. His whole world was changed by this new development. But he was not relieved. He was afraid for June. She was in danger. This, at the moment, was all he knew. June was in danger. Now he would have to fight. Barney crossed the room and placed a timid hand on June's arm. He, too, seemed bewildered.

"Then, I'm morally responsible," said Daniel. "I tried to do it, I wanted to do it, and I planned to do it. If June did do the thing it was I who drove her to it."

"I killed her because I wanted to," broke in June "No one drove me to it."

"You keep quiet," said Daniel, holding her even closer.

"Do you loathe me, Barney?" she asked.

Barney bent over and kissed a part of her nose, "I'm thinking," he whispered. "Hold tight, old girl."

"Morally responsible, yes," replied Munson, "but I can't arrest you on that. June actually did it and inasmuch as there was no conspiracy between you, June is guilty of murder in the eyes of the law. And it's the law with which we have to deal. Both you and Sam are potential

murderers. Both of you tried to murder Emily-Jane, but the fact remains that you didn't do it. You failed and now June must--"

"But, my God, Scott," cut in Daniel, "can't something be done? You're not going to arrest June for the murder of Emily-Jane?"

"What else can I do?" asked Scott, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders,

"Take me," said Daniel. "You can prove a charge against me without any trouble. I'll offer no defense."

"I'm not looking for a victim just for the fun of it," replied Munson rather bitterly.

"Listen, Scott," put in Barney, "if you'll go over there in the corner and count one hundred I'll guarantee to save everybody a lot of trouble."

For some minutes Munson paced the floor lost in thought. June raised her head and watched him.

"Keep fighting, Dan," she whispered. "We're not licked yet. I feel it."

"Wish I had a gun," muttered Barney. "I'd shoot him in the legs."

"This is what I'm going to do," said Munson, stopping in front of the little group. "I'm going to motor to New Haven and parley with the district attorney. I don't know what will come of it, but I'll try to make things as easy as I can for you, June. Daniel, you and Sam had better come along with me, so that June won't have too many allies to get her into trouble. June, I suggest that you stay on the veranda as much as possible where my staff can keep an eye on you. Consider yourself under arrest."

He left the room and hurried upstairs. The moment he was gone

Daniel turned to Barney.

"It's up to you, Barney," he said. "Get in touch with Manning and dope out a scheme with him. Mention the yacht. June shouldn't be here when we get back. Lay the staff low if necessary. And work quick, Barney. I'll delay Scott as long as I can."

"I'm thinking," replied Barney, "thinking deeply."

"Don't forget the yacht," continued Dan, hurriedly. "It's our one best bet. And get June out of the way."

"I'm still thinking," was all Barney said.

"Ready?" called Munson from the door. The Shays stood behind him. They were regarding June with sorrowful eyes.

\* \*

Barney had thought to some purpose. No sooner had the car containing Munson, Sam, and Daniel driven off than he was calling up Manning. This excellent man received the news calmly.

"From six o'clock on tomorrow morning," he told Barney, "there'll be a sea-going yacht hanging round Singing Reef. Try like hell to pick us up there. We'll be waiting--that is, the yacht will."

Barney then called up Sally Brent and made known his needs. Sally was only too willing to meet them. Barney could have her motorboat or anything else he wanted. The warmth of Barney's gratitude brought a faint flush to the cheeks of the small young lady at the other end of the wire.

Barney's next call was a New Haven number--another girl friend. Marion Wilson would be quite willing to lie for Barney. At seven

o'clock tomorrow morning she would call up and say that June had arrived in a state of nervous exhaustion. Yes, she understood perfectly. All set.

Leaving the library, Barney hurried to the beach and got his motorboat into the water. Soon he was chugging vibrantly toward the islands. As a result of this trip, Pete Clark began to move with incredible rapidity. He left the rocks and went about his affairs. Barney returned to the beach and did a surprising thing. He took a heavy sock from his pocket and packed it with sand. Later, when Pete came strolling through the orchard, Barney unobtrusively put him in possession of the sand-filled sock. Barney was still thinking. He hurried up to June's room and carefully packed two traveling bags. He included even mules and a rather seductive pajama outfit. All the bright things he put in, for in his heart he knew that even if he succeeded there still would be many sad days dawning for June.

When Barney descended to the veranda the Shays were keeping solicitous eyes on June Lansing. He procured his easel and set it up in front of one of the French windows opening into the library. Then he wandered up to the Shays. They made no protest when he offered to paint their pictures. June made this possible by agreeing to sit close by. Barney placed his subjects in the French windows and began the serious business of making the Shays immortal. He painted swiftly and honestly, and presently the Shays began to appear on the canvas. After ten minutes of steady work, he arrested his flying brush and asked the officers to elevate their chins a little more proudly. As they did so, Pete Clark silently rose up behind them and smote Officer Shad delicately but sufficiently upon the head with the sock Barney had so providentially packed with sand. Officer Red, turning to ascertain the reason for his associate's sudden collapse, received a similar blow. Pete then quietly withdrew with the sock, and Barney hurried upstairs for the bags. June was waiting in the hall to relieve him of one of these. Together they

hurried to the back of the house where Aunt Matty and Sue were waiting to say good-by. There was no time for words. It was a silent departure. June was crying softly as she hurried through the orchard. Aunt Matty was holding a conference with the servants from which they dispersed with sealed lips.

At the border of the salt marshes Barney suddenly disappeared into a hole from which June had to extricate him. The suitcase had opened and most of its intimate contents lay on the ground.

"Are you helping me to escape or am I helping you?" demanded June.

"It's sort of an entente cordiale," replied Barney, helping her to repack the bag.

At the opening of a small creek, Pete was placidly waiting for them in the flattest of flat-bottomed skiffs. June stepped in and Barney passed the bags to her.

"They'll never find her, Mr. Barney," declared Pete. "Never in the world. I'm taking her to my last resort. Have Mr. Dan down here tonight. I'll be waiting."

June said nothing as the skiff moved off. She merely looked back at Barney and bit her under lip.

When Barney had once more seated himself in the chair, the Shays were about to return to their normal state of mental obtuseness.

"What happened?" asked Officer Shad.

"Nothing," replied Barney innocently. "I thought you fell asleep."

Officer Red tenderly felt the top of his head. "No," he declared. "No. It

couldn't have been that... not just that."

\* \*

Munson on his return was not a happy man, and the Shays were even less so. On learning of the disappearance of June, Scott had immediately called up Headquarters and got in touch with Bennett.

"Get out here as fast as you can," he told him. "The Shays are hopeless."

In spite of the fact that both Shad and Red stoutly exonerated Barney, pointing out the utter impossibility of his having had anything to do with June's escape, Munson regarded that cheerful young man with suspicion and distrust.

Munson felt that the absence of June Lansing was not so serious. She would not be able to get far. All arteries of escape were being watched. It would be impossible for her to make a complete getaway. Nevertheless it was annoying. Things looked bad enough for June as they were. This little escapade was not going to help at all. Yet in his heart he did not blame her. Had he been in her place he would have done the same thing. He did not even take the trouble to make inquiries, knowing the hopelessness of trying to battle against the loyalty of Crewe House.

\* \*

At two o'clock that night Daniel used the old tree outside his window for the last time. At the edge of the salt marshes Pete Clark was patiently waiting for him. Daniel stepped into the skiff and was silently carried out across the marshes. The reeds hid the skiff, and the channel twisted between high banks. Presently they came to a small island--a mere scrap of earth surrounded by mud and stagnant

water. In the darkness, Pete miraculously guided Daniel along a narrow path. Daniel was mud to the hips.

There was a low shed in the bushes, and it was here that Daniel found June. She was fighting mosquitoes and smoking cigarettes. For a moment he held the disheveled figure in his arms, then he, too, turned his attention to the mosquitoes.

"Think we'll get away with it ?" asked June. "We have so far," replied Daniel.

"Didn't believe it was in Barney," she continued.

"You never can tell what's in Barney," said Daniel. "He's always been a bit amazing to me."

June edged closer to Daniel.

"Dan," she said rather haltingly, "do you feel anydifferently toward me now that you know I'm a--that I killed Emily-Jane?"

"How could I, June?"

"You don't feel that I'm stained sort of?"

"Far from it."

"But I do, Dan." Her sad eyes looked out into the darkness.

"We were both in it, old thing. Don't feel like that." Pete appeared with a pot of hot coffee.

At seven o'clock that morning, Barney was called to the telephone. Marion Wilson was on the wire. Munson followed Barney into the room and stood suspiciously at his elbow.

"You say she's there?" said Barney into the transmitter.

"Yes," came the mendacious reply. "In bed. Her nerves seem to have gone to pieces."

"Hell!" replied Barney. "Hold the wire, Marion." He turned to the waiting Munson. "She says that June's just drifted in and they've put her to bed." Munson took the telephone and questioned the girl closely. "Don't let her out of your sight until I get there," he told her. "I'm coming right now."

"Want me to go with you?" asked Barney. "She might need a friendly face."

"I want no one to go with me," snapped Scott. "I'm damn well sick of you all."

"Oh, I see," said Barney humbly.

When Scott had gone Barney had an extremely private interview with Aunt Matty. As a result of this little talk three rather questionable cups of coffee were expeditiously brewed. They contained most of the tablets Dr. Manning had left for Daniel on the night of the dance. Aunt Matty painted the lily by adding several drops of this and that to the mixture--strong drugs long secreted in her own private medicine chest.

A few minutes later when she offered this concoction to Bennett and the two Shays with her own fair hands, the officers of the law could hardly refuse, especially when they saw Barney and Sam Stoughten gulping down their coffee with every indication of relish.

"I guess we all need something in these sad times," the old lady said, with a deep but hypocritical sigh.

There is no getting away from the fact that the officers were most potently doped. And strange to say, Bennett was the first to go. He was found sleeping peacefully in a chair on the veranda. Officers Shad and Red speedily emulated his example. Then Barney executed his master stroke.

With the aid of Sam he carried the sleeping men to the beach and placed them comfortably as possible in his temperamental motorboat. A modest supply of food and water followed them. The remaining room was taken up with an extra supply of gasoline. These preparations completed, Barney lashed the wheel and brought the engine to life. Soon the little motorboat with its three unconscious passengers became a rapidly diminishing speck against the blue.

"Suppose the boat capsizes and the three of them drown?" asked Sam, unhelpfully. "What then?"

Barney ran a hand through his disorderly, straw-colored hair. "I don't know exactly what then," he admitted. "It would be a great pity, but nobody has anything on us."

Barney next resorted to his bicycle and pedaled rapidly to Sally Brent's sumptuous home. That young lady was ready and waiting for him.

"It's all tuned up," she announced.

"So am I," said Barney, stepping into her long, rakish-looking motorboat. "You wait here for me, Sally. I'll take a walk with you then."

"All right, Barney," said little Sally Brent. "I'll wait right here."

Barney swept out on the Sound for a few miles, then brought the boat

sharply about and followed the coast line. In the distance he saw his own home standing comfortably back among the trees. In a few minutes he rounded High Point Rock, and once more he changed the course of the boat. This time he drove for the shore, to a narrow channel opening into the salt marshes. Here among the reeds Pete with June and Daniel were waiting in the skiff. The transfer was rapidly made, Pete suitably rewarded, and the motor-boat headed for Singing Reef with June at the wheel. Daniel came aft and sat by Barney.

"Well, old fox face," he said, making an effort to be cheerful. "Why don't you come along with us?"

"No," said Barney, "I've a date to go walking with Sally, and, anyway, I have to return her boat."

"But you'll join us soon?"

"Just as soon as I've perfected a little scheme I've been working out."

"What scheme's that, Barney?"

"I'm learning how to count my chickens before they're hatched."

"How's that?" asked Daniel.

"Well," began Barney, "I'm a little reluctant to talk about it until I'm sure I'm right. You might laugh at me."

"Certainly not, Barney."

"It's really quite simple," said Barney. "The most important thing is to get to know a lot of chickens."

"Sort of gain their confidence?" Daniel suggested.

"Exactly," replied Barney, his face lighting up. "You get those chickens to place implicit trust in you. Then you stick around while they are laying their eggs, after which you stroll up quite casually and borrow the eggs."

"I think I see it all," said Daniel.

"I knew you would," replied Barney. "Well, when you've lured the eggs away from the chickens you find something or someone to throw them at--some enemy or creditor or just a casual passer-by. And there you are."

"How do you mean, there we are?" demanded Daniel.

"Just that. There you are. You can't go wrong. No eggs, no chickens. The answer is zero. It works out every time."

"Pretty tough on the hens," observed Daniel. "Don't you ever pay them back?"

"No," said Barney. "You buy 'em another rooster. After that I'm going in for bull-baiting."

"Sounds interesting. How do you do that?"

"Well, you put a worm on the end of a bull's nose," began Barney. "Then you push him off the end of a pier and the fish in snapping at the worm bite the bull on the nose."

"I should think the bull would be furious," put in Daniel.

"He is," said Barney. "And humiliated, too."

Before Barney could go on any more about the bull, they had passed

Singing Reef and were circling round a large, handsomely designed yacht with runaway-looking lines. On the stern they made out a freshly painted name.

No time for bull-baiting now. Barney took the wheel and brought the motorboat neatly alongside the yacht. Two handclasps and it was all over. Ready hands assisted June and Daniel aboard. The luggage followed.

Daniel and June were leaning over the rail as Barney sheered off.

"Good-by, Barney," called Daniel. "God bless you, boy."

"I'll follow you, Dan," called the small figure in the motorboat. "Wherever you are, I'll follow you. Just let me know."

June tried to speak, to call back a last word to Barney. Her voice broke and she held out both her hands in farewell.

The yacht got under way, and Barney turned to face a lonely sea. It had never been so lonely, he thought, so utterly bereft of life and interest. He turned his head and looked back at the rapidly vanishing yacht.

"So long, Dan," he whispered. "It won't be long. We'll get together soon."

True to her word, Sally was waiting for him in the same spot. She looked as if she had not even moved. At first she appeared as a small speck in the distance, and when Barney drew into the slip by which she stood she did not appear much larger.

For a long time they walked in silence, then presently they joined hands and Barney began to talk. Sally Brent listened with the wisdom of her sex.

When they reached Crewe House, Scott Munson was sitting on the veranda. As he watched them approach, a strange expression came into his eyes. It would have been difficult to tell at that moment the nature of his thoughts.

"Hello, Scott," said Barney.

"Out of my sight," replied Munson. "What have you done with Bennett and the Shays?"

"Don't be silly, Scott," said Barney. "Do I look as if I could do away with three able-bodied men?"

"No," admitted Scott, "but someone has."

"Perhaps they got tired of waiting for you and just went home."

"Who was responsible for that fake telephone call this morning?"

"Search me," said Barney.

"I'd like to hang you," said Scott.

\* \*

That night Barney sat on the veranda and wondered about June and Daniel. A few chairs away Munson was smoking moodily. Well on their way to the sea, June and Daniel were leaning over the rail of the flying yacht and wondering about Barney. Their thoughts must have passed on the water. Manning was not with them. He was walking across the lawn of Crewe House and approaching Barney's chair.

"May I come along when you go?" he asked, his voice sounding hushed in the darkness.

Barney placed his hand on the back of Manning's. "We'll go together," he said.

Later they were joined by Sam and Sue, but still the place seemed empty.

\* \*

The next morning Munson received a furious long-distance call from New York City.

"This is Bennett," that officer mouthed, "and I'm in New York. The Shays are with me and they're driving me mad."

"But why did you want to rush off to New York?" asked Munson, in his mildest voice.

Strange animal-like noises at the other end of the wire greeted this question.

"We didn't want to," Munson at last made out. There seemed to be tears in Bennett's voice. "We were doped and dumped into a half-witted motorboat and sent out unconscious across the Sound. When we came to we didn't know where we were. Later a Sound steamer picked us up and landed us at New York."

Munson sat back and considered the telephone. His face was a study in conflicting emotions.

"What do you think of that, Mr. Munson?" Bennett's voice demanded.

"Remarkably neat," replied Munson. "Never heard of anything quite like it."

"Ruthless, I call it," said the other. "The work of a cold-blooded

criminal."

"Who doped you, Bennett?"

"That old devil you call Aunt Matty."

"What!" Munson sat up in his chair.

"Thought you'd be surprised," came Bennett's voice. "Yes. She's the snake in the grass. Put the bracelets on her, Mr. Munson. Arrest everybody. They're all in it."

Munson's eyes reflected the hopelessness of the situation. "I'm afraid they are," he answered. "In fact, I suspect the entire neighborhood. We can't arrest all of them."

"But what are we going to do?"

"Damned if I know, Bennett. I'll admit I'm stumped. I know this, though--in the future I'm going to confine my efforts to the professionally criminal class. Amateurs are too erratic for me."

"Same here," replied Bennett earnestly. "I guess I better be getting the Shays back home."

"All right," said Munson. "Bring them along."

He hung up and sat looking at the telephone. Slowly, reluctantly, a smile gathered at the corners of his lips. This facial manifestation finally crystallized in a grin of sheer enjoyment.

"Put the three of them in a boat and sent them off on their own," he mused. "My God, what a thing to do. And the old lady's in it--up to her ears. They're all in it--more than I even suspect."

Slowly he rose from the chair.

"Well, I'm licked," he said.

# XXI. REUNION

ONE year later two small, untidy, and exceedingly incompetent-looking individuals alighted from the wrong train at the Swiss lake resort of Montreux. Many bags surrounded them, and at these they looked as if seeing them for the first time. The female member of this team proceeded to count the bags.

"I forget whether there were six or seven," she said.

"I never knew," replied Barney, then added cheerfully, "We've quite a lot at any rate."

After bumping into each other several times in their efforts to get started they finally managed to go in the same direction at the same time. One hour later they had reached the hotel that was only ten minutes' distance from their original point of departure. This was exceptionally good time for them. They considered themselves in luck.

At the hotel they at last induced someone to take them to the suite of rooms occupied by June and Daniel. Here they were warmly received. June had grown graver and more womanly. There was a suggestion of humility in her eyes and a world of understanding. Even about Daniel there lingered traces of the tragedy through which he had passed.

Barney and Sally Brent sat down very close together and looked about them.

"It's nice here," said Sally. "Nicer than Paris."

"Yes," replied Barney. "She thinks we lost a bag."

"That's all right," said Daniel comfortingly. "We'll get that for you. I can't believe you're here."

"We are," replied Barney. "We eloped."

"And we're not married yet," added Sally, as though mentioning a fact of relatively minor importance.

"What !" exclaimed Daniel. "Not married. How's that?"

"Well, you see we were awfully busy," began Barney.

"And in New York we didn't know just how to go about it," Sally helped out.

"And by that time we'd gotten started," put in her teammate.

"Started?" demanded Daniel. "How do you mean, started?"

"Everything," replied Barney simply, and Sally nodded her head.

"Why didn't you get the captain to marry you on the way over ?" Daniel inquired.

"We didn't think of it for a couple of days, then it didn't seem to us as if it would be very nice," Barney explained.

Daniel turned to June for help. She had sunk to a couch and was laughing silently but desperately. Tears were running down her face.

"Well," said Daniel, turning back to the expectant pair. "We'll have to fix that up, too. And without further delay."

Barney's face brightened. "I kept telling Sally you'd see about everything when we got here," he said. "I never was any good about

details."

"Do you call getting married a detail?" asked Daniel.

"Sure," said Barney, "compared with all the rest of it."

"Where's Manning?"

"He'll be along later. Said he had some business to transact with a baroness or something."

"A nice lot, the three of you," observed Daniel.

"Yes," replied Barney. "The three of us are all right. Munson's in Paris. He sent you this." Daniel took the hastily written note and read:

To the both of you--

After your sneaking departure Betty and Tom became so indignant that they swore out two statements and gave them to the district attorney. They seemed sufficient to satisfy him, and so the case is officially closed. He attributes June's confession to an attempt to extricate Daniel from an unfortunate set of circumstances. I can do nothing to change his mind. The law is no longer interested in either one of you, but I am. Why not join me this winter in Egypt? We could do well there.

Affectionately,

SCOTT MUNSON.

"I'll show this to you later," Daniel said to June. "Munson says everything is all right." He put the letter into his pocket and once more considered the pair. "I suppose you'd like a drink," he observed.

"Oh, yes," said Barney.

"Could I have some ice-cream ?" asked Sally. "Peach ice-cream, perhaps ?"

Daniel smiled and June looked somewhat shyly at Sally. "Do you want to come over here, Sally?" she asked.

Evidently Sally did. June took her in her arms. "Sure, kid," she said, "you can have all the ice-cream you want."

"I suppose you'd like to wash up a bit," Daniel suggested.

"Do we have to do that now ?" asked Barney.

"Oh, no," replied Daniel. "It's merely customary, that's all."

Sitting on the terrace overlooking the lake, the four of them did things about drinks and ices. Sally was extremely happy.

"I'll paint that brute of a mountain," declared Barney, waving a hand at the Dent du Midi.

"I guess it will be able to stand it," observed Daniel. "Everybody paints that."

"But not the way I'm going to paint it," said Barney. "When I've finished with that mountain it won't recognize itself."

"That," said Daniel, "is barely possible."

June's eyes were fixed on the mountain, but she was seeing High Point Rock. Barney's arrival had brought so many things back to mind. Then she smiled upon Sally Brent, who was whole-heartedly sucking a spoon.

"Do you think you'll like it here with us?" asked June.

"It's wonderful," said Sally. "We'll all stick together, June."

"And you two will damn well get married right off," put in Daniel.

"Sure," said Barney. "You fix us up."

Later, when Manning arrived, it was discovered that he had brought the baroness with him. She was charming. They were still transacting business, it seemed, the exact nature of which was never quite disclosed.

THE END