

*First published . . . 1948*

# Murder by Mathematics

by

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THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THIS BOOK  
CONFORMS TO THE  
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARD

MADE IN ENGLAND

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

## CHAPTER I

THE maid knocked on the bedroom door and entered without waiting for a reply. She switched on a bedside lamp and set down a silver tray with a cup of China tea and a pile of letters. Then she drew back the chintz curtains.

"Good morning, sir," she said, pausing for a moment and looking down at the stirring mound of bedclothes.

First, the top of a slightly bald head appeared; next, like a fat snail emerging cautiously from its shell, a round, fleshy, full-blooded face; finally, a torso covered by a yellow silk pyjama coat. The face was split by a mighty yawn, and a pair of arms were stretched so that the sleeves fell back disclosing the hairy skin. The yawn, which occurred every morning at eight o'clock precisely, was always too much for Vera. It had an infectious, gargantuan relish and her mouth watered and opened involuntarily as Sir Clifford Casey sat up in bed and regarded her as though he had never seen her in his life before. But he was always agreeable, his eyes invariably had a hopeful expression, in the presence of a pretty woman. He gave a watery blink and smiled.

"Good morning, Vera."

"There are two parcels downstairs, sir. Do you want me to bring them up?"

"They can wait." He glanced at the window. "It seems very dark."

"It's foggy, sir."

He nodded, surveyed her slim, neat figure, and then dug his knuckles in his eyes; and while he was yawning again she hurried out to take another cup of tea and letters into the next room, which was occupied by Lady Casey. Vera had never been specially instructed on

priorities; somehow it seemed natural to wake Sir Clifford first.

He could hardly be considered fully conscious until he had drunk his tea. His body ached with still unsatisfied sleepiness; as often as not his head also ached and his tongue was furred and swollen. His facial muscles might give the appearance of a smile, but he usually woke up in a bad temper. He gazed round the small but luxurious room with distaste. Either it seemed too hot or too cold. This morning it seemed suffocating and he noticed that he had forgotten to open the window.

Putting down the empty cup he picked up his correspondence. Four of the letters were not worth opening. At least a dozen were addressed to Professor Sir Clifford Casey, F.R.S., c/o British Broadcasting Company. Not such a large fan-mail as usual; but although he affected to despise it, he read such letters avidly in secret. As for the rest, there were two invitations to lecture, a long letter from Pasadena about his forthcoming American trip, a letter from his publishers imploring him to return the proofs of his new book, a request from a former member of his staff at the University of Westminster who was applying for a post in South Africa, and a letter from his son.

The last was brief but evidently unwelcome. Sir Clifford's face went even redder than usual. It was the sort of communication that made him aware of the unsatisfactory report about his blood pressure. He crumpled it into a ball and hurled it across the room.

Charles, his only son, was a bitter disappointment. It seemed to him an outrage that Sir Clifford Casey, a man of international fame, a maker of modern thought (as every blurb described him), should have an idiot for a son. Worse even than an idiot—a waster and a scoundrel. When his first wife was alive the worst of Charles's misdeeds had been hidden from him. Indeed, it was only after her death that Sir Clifford had discovered how much money she had poured out on the boy. Fortunately she had had the good sense not to leave him anything in her will.

She had been a very wealthy woman, and by skilful investment Sir Clifford had increased her fortune. He had had nothing but his brains when he married her; but as his banking friends so often assured him, in a sense he had wasted his gifts by not going into the city. Speculating on the Stock Exchange was one of his chief relaxations, and it proved to be highly profitable.

Ethel had given him a free hand with her money, and he practically doubled it. Because she felt it was more than safe with him, she left all she possessed unreservedly to him when she died. It was, of course, understood between them that he would do his best for Charles; but to have given Charles capital to play with would have been fatal.

Charles had been sent down from Oxford and very nearly cashiered from the Army. After a series of most disreputable adventures and a very brief attempt to earn a livelihood as the representative of an air charter company, he had settled to a parasitical existence. He was always well-dressed, and most nights he could be seen with fashionable-looking women at the more expensive West End hotels or clubs. Where he got the money from was a mystery, though it seemed probable that the women he entertained paid for the privilege.

It was the sort of situation that might have been ended, before the war, by sending him to Kenya. Now, however, this was not such a practicable solution. And Charles did not want to be banished to Kenya. He had made a fairly accurate computation of his nuisance value. Whenever his creditors became too pressing or the bank refused to honour one of the cheques that he wrote with such an easy flourish, he applied to his father. He could dance quite safely on the brink of a precipice because he knew that when he fell over there was a net stretched out to catch him. Sir Clifford swore and raved; but he always paid.

"After all," Charles would say blithely, "it isn't *your* money. Mother left my share to you so that you could act as banker."

This was so nearly true that Sir Clifford became

apoplectic. He hated his son; and he was aware that deep down in his heart Charles also hated him. Charles had never approved of his marriage to Eunice. The fact that Sir Clifford had married again, within a year of his wife's death, provided Charles with an easy taunt whenever he lost his temper.

Eunice hadn't the slightest resemblance to Ethel. Twenty-seven years ago, Sir Clifford had no money but considerable charm, and he married the plain, commonplace daughter of a Bradford manufacturer. Within three years his wife had inherited her father's fortune.

From that moment Sir Clifford never looked back. He was one of the pioneers of atomic physics. He was one of the first to design a satisfactory Betatron. In those small and rigorously exclusive circles where international reputations are made, he won well-deserved recognition by a paper, published by the Cambridge Philosophical Society under the formidable title *Extension of the Matrix Operators of Dirac and Pauli*.

Then, however, things began to go wrong. In austere, academic backwaters professorial heads were shaken sadly at the mention of Casey's name. The brilliant promise had not been fulfilled. Instead of continuing to write papers that were intelligible only to the initiated, Sir Clifford began to write books for the general public. His books were not exactly easy reading, but their sales were astounding. *The Mystery of the Atom*, for example, found almost as many readers as, in an earlier period, *The Mystery of the Red Barn*.

To Sir Clifford this was incontrovertible evidence of human progress. To some of his colleagues, however, it seemed a sign of his own deterioration. If they raised their eyebrows at his first best-seller, they rent their academic gowns at what followed. They remonstrated with him. He was dealt with severely in the columns of *Nature*. A Cambridge professor wrote a book which tore him to shreds, but it was couched in such incomprehensible language that the popular faith remained unshaken.

If the ordinary, intelligent layman were asked in a

quiz to name some of the greatest living scientists he would undoubtedly have put Casey near the top of the list. Indeed, to most people the word "Atom" would instantly stimulate "Casey" as a response.

When atomic bombs came into the news he was besieged by reporters. He shrewdly refused to give any interviews, but he wrote a number of articles for £100 each. He accepted a contract for a weekly science column in a national newspaper at £2,000 a year.

The sneers of some of his colleagues were dismissed by him as being due to jealousy. He made a rule early in his career which he followed inflexibly, and which was responsible for much of his success. He never replied to criticism.

His success was beyond question. He had a gift for clear, simple writing, and he had discovered a vast public with a hunger to read about things that they could not possibly understand. In his books on the atom, the universe, the relations between science and religion, he gave such readers the comforting illusion that they really did know what he was talking about. He would coin some vivid phrase and it would even become the text for sermons.

Why, his fellow scientists would ask, did he do it? He made a great deal of money by his writings, but he did not need money. The only possible answer was that he enjoyed the limelight. He liked to enter a crowded hall and to feel every head turn as his name was whispered in bated breath. He liked to talk at the microphone and know that millions of people were hanging on every word. He liked to open a newspaper and see his name in print, and to look at his bookshelf and gaze at a row of his works in American, French, German, Dutch and Swedish editions. That was fame, and he breathed it in like incense.

To the millions he was just plain Casey, the greatest living authority on the atom, a man to whom the most complex of mathematical mysteries were child's play, an awe-inspiring and almost superhuman figure. At Westminster University, where he was head of the



mathematical department, he was regarded by students as "the Prof"; but the warm sea of popularity in which he bathed came to a dead stop inside those walls. He was not liked by the students and his own staff utterly detested him. Yet again, in his own house, in Hill Street, Mayfair, he was "Sir Clifford"—and there he had to wrestle with problems even more intractable than the atom.

In a sense there were three personalities, each with a different name; there were Casey, the Professor and Sir Clifford. Every morning when he crawled from underneath the bedclothes he had the difficult task of adjusting these various personalities. Perhaps that was why he often lingered over his tea and even smoked a cigarette before he rose. If the morning postbag provided—as it did now that he had received a letter from his son—unwelcome news for Sir Clifford, he switched over to his rôle as professor; and when that, too, was disagreeable, as it often was, he swelled out his chest and contemplated his fame.

He had never outgrown a childish craving for popularity. His first wife had worshipped him and shut her eyes to all his human weaknesses. His second wife was very different. She had no illusions about him. She had married him, as he realized now that it was too late, largely for his money and position. She shared his passion for publicity and had herself been on the stage. She had done well in repertory, but somehow she had just missed achieving her ambitions in the West End. After some mortifying failures and a moderate success on the films, she divorced her husband, who annoyed her by getting a big Hollywood contract, and married Sir Clifford.

At thirty-four she was still beautiful, still able to torture her husband's vanity by surrounding herself with admirers. She was not (he believed) actually unfaithful to him, any more than he was physically unfaithful to her. Neither of them could resist the foolish adoration which they so frequently and effortlessly aroused. Sir Clifford had reached the age when he liked to indulge

in sentimental make-believe, and danger seemed to add spice to it. The result was that when Casey provoked too much hero-worship, Sir Clifford had to be dragged out of a self-made tangle by the Professor. It was all very complicated . . . and yet so simple.

"Another day!" he sighed, as he swung his legs out of bed and stared, first at the crumpled letter he had flung across the room and then at the door leading into his wife's bedroom. "Why do I have all these worries? Why *should* I?" he soliloquized.

A famous man like himself, he thought, putting on a flamboyant purple dressing-gown, should be protected from personal irritations. He should be shielded from all cares so that his mind was free to dwell on the sort of problems that really mattered. After all, the profoundest ideas of which any human being was capable circulated in his brain. His wife ought to see to it . . . yes, confound it, that was a wife's job. She should keep the outside world at a distance, minister to his bodily comforts, refresh him, stimulate him, and yet never intrude unless he summoned her.

The Orientals managed this side of life better. No son in the East would dare to disobey his father. No wife would venture to contradict her husband. As Nanda had told him . . . Nanda, that exquisite creature who had just started on a post-graduate course. She was the daughter of a Bombay merchant and she looked so lovely in her blue sari that he had caught himself staring at her and wondering. . . . But how could you be responsible for your thoughts? The devil of it was that she was so conspicuous. You couldn't walk down the street with her without attracting attention. And, in any case, even that was difficult, for a cousin brought her to the University each morning and called for her every night.

"And he looks," thought Sir Clifford, smiling wryly, "as though he'd knife any man who took an interest in her. There are certain drawbacks about the Oriental point of view."

He was chuckling as he entered the bathroom. Merely by conjuring up a picture of that girl student from India



he had put himself in a better humour. A few minutes later he basked in gloriously hot water and allowed his imagination free rein. Never in his life, he told himself, had he seen a human being of such flawless beauty. Her skin was scarcely darker than that of a Spanish girl; her eyes had such a lustre, such magnetism, that he felt like a boy again when they looked at them. Whenever she entered the room it seemed to be subtly pervaded by an exotic perfume. There was a hint of mystery, of unexplored ranges of sensation. . . .

He suddenly laughed aloud and leaned forward to pull the plug of the bath. He was intelligent enough to be able to laugh at himself. He could see this dubious side of himself, which so few people suspected, with disconcerting objectivity. He saw quite clearly the middle-aged philanderer—the Epicurean as he usually preferred to call that aspect of himself—who liked good living, who was a connoisseur of wine, and whose wandering eye ever sought out the prettiest woman in the room. But he had long given up trying to reform the old reprobate. He did no real harm, after all; the risk to the reputation of the eminent Professor kept the rascal within bounds. He merely peeped libidiously, from time to time, out of the corner of the Professor's brown eyes. It was that grinning satyr, of course, who had arranged the second marriage to Eunice Caryl. . . .

Sir Clifford's smile died as he thought again of Eunice. He frowned as he towelled himself vigorously. He frowned all the time he shaved, and swore when he cut himself. Finally, he inserted his dentures, dusted his face with talcum powder and brushed his hair.

But as he went into the dressing-room, although his mind was uneasy his body glowed with physical well-being and his mouth was sweetened by an antiseptic gargle. He selected a dark blue suit from his extensive wardrobe, a soft collar and a very gay necktie. He aimed at an effect half-way between the scientist and the literary man. One thing his second marriage had undoubtedly done; it had brightened his clothes.

"I certainly don't *feel* fifty-three," he reflected, as

he admired himself in a long glass; "and I don't think I look it, either."

He crossed the landing and halted abruptly as he saw a tray on the table outside his wife's room. Vera had removed it, but for some reason she had not taken it straight downstairs. And beside the cup and saucer were some scraps of paper. A letter had evidently been torn into tiny pieces and sent away for immediate destruction.

Sir Clifford thought quickly and then acted on an impulse. One theme that ran like a thread through all his books was the importance of intuition. It had led to many acrimonious disputes and he had been accused by his more materialistic colleagues of encouraging mysticism. He yielded to an intuition now; but there was nothing very mystical about it.

Breathing hard, feeling like a shoplifter who might at any moment be detected, he darted into his bedroom, the torn letter held in a trembling hand. He dropped the fragments on the small table and sat down on the bed. Before trying to piece them together he lit a cigarette.

The breakfast gong sounded, but he ignored it. Daylight had come, but he did not switch off the lamp. The gong went a second time, but he continued to arrange the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. At last they were in order and could be read.

#### MY DARLING,

It's over a week since I saw you and I can't go on like this any longer. I know how you feel—that it's madness, that it's dangerous, that we must stop before it is too late. But we've gone too far to draw back now. I can't bear to think of what you have to endure from Humpty. I suddenly realize how it is possible to hate another man so much that you wish him dead. Don't worry though—I shan't murder him. There's no need, because if ever he makes trouble I've got a very good way of shutting him up. I've found out something that puts him just where I want him. But I've got to see you and tell you about it. I'll be waiting at the usual place to-morrow for lunch, and if you don't turn up I'll

ring you. Don't worry, darling—there's nothing more to fear from Humpty.

With all my love,  
Yours ever,  
JUMBO.

Sir Clifford drew a deep breath. He had never been so astonished in all his life. What staggered him, significantly enough, was not the fact that his wife had received a love-letter, not even that it contained a threat to himself, but the positively outrageous appellation that had been attached to him.

"Humpty!" he repeated. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the King's horses . . . Yes, I see. It is instructive to see ourselves as others see us."

He flattered himself that he was the life and soul of any sort of party, that he could crack donnish jokes at high table or be Rabelaisian over the nuts and wine. He imparted vitality to every gathering he joined. He was no dry-as-dust mathematician. He gave the lie to the literary legend of the bloodless, inhuman scientist, sawdust from the neck upwards as Carlyle once said of John Stuart Mill. He was a man of the world, debonair, urbane, with a rapier-like wit, a gaiety of spirit, an invincible optimism that might indeed have caused the irreverent to compare him with Dr. Pangloss.

Suddenly the door opened. Boiling like a kettle, Sir Clifford saw his wife stop abruptly on the threshold between the communicating rooms. She looked momentarily unsubstantial in pink satin negligée, trimmed with white swansdown. Her pale, silver-gilt hair fell in coils to a gleaming shoulder. Her small, light-blue eyes were wide open and her lips half parted. She was striking, he thought grimly, a decidedly theatrical attitude.

"Aren't you ever going down to breakfast?" she began.

"I was delayed," he replied, looking down at the letter.

She ran forward and stopped immediately in front of

him, clenching her white hands and looking up at him with blazing eyes.

"You cad! You utter beast!"

She was so furious that his own anger evaporated. For a moment he thought she was going to strike him. He realized instinctively that it would make her even madder if he refused to take the thing seriously.

"Lawson seems to be making a prize ass of himself. You really shouldn't encourage him, my dear."

"How dare you!" she gasped. "How dare you read my letters and spy on me like this. All I can say is that it serves you right."

"It's going to be difficult," he sighed. "I know Lawson is hoping for promotion, but how can I keep a man in my department who is infatuated with my own wife?"

"You can't sack him. Cliff! You'd have to admit——"

"My dear child," he broke in protestingly, "Humpty isn't so crude as all that. What a headline it would make—Humpty and Jumbo!" And he chuckled disagreeably.

"He's crazy about me," she went on, with a reckless toss of her head. "But what of it? Lots of men are crazy about me. If you weren't prepared for that you should have married someone as plain as a pudding—someone like your first wife!"

"I sometimes wish," he murmured, "that I'd married someone with a modicum of intelligence. You are still beautiful, Eunice, but at thirty-four it's an all-time job to stay like it. And Lawson is only twenty-nine—so do you really think you are being quite fair to him?"

"I find twenty-nine more interesting than fifty-four——" she flashed.

"Fifty-three," he corrected. "But apart from the disparity in age, Lawson is far too intellectual to find you a perfect life-companion. In some ways he is quite brilliant, and I'm afraid if he saw very much of you he'd soon be bored."

"Not so bored as I am with you," she retorted. "I



may not be intellectual but I'm not a fool. I can see right through you, Cliff, and it isn't a pretty sight. Most people look up to you as the great man, but if they could see you behind the scenes they'd realize what a humbug you are. Yes, a humbug and a fraud. You've done nothing since you came into money except write pot-boilers——"

"Is that what Jumbo told you? Because you'd never have thought of it yourself."

"It's what all your colleagues say behind your back. They despise you for playing to the gallery. You do it because of your insane conceit—the same sickening vanity that makes you get sentimental with every pretty woman you meet. You want to make a conquest—a fresh one every day—but when you've made it you don't know what to do about it. You are incapable of having a real love-affair. The very idea would terrify you. All you want is to hear yourself talk and perhaps hold hands in the dark like a schoolboy. Because that's the real truth about you—and nobody knows it better than I do. Despite your brains you've never grown up."

Sir Clifford kept control of himself. Slowly and deliberately he lit a cigarette.

"Ingenious," he acknowledged. "Lawson, I believe, is something of an amateur psychologist, and I must congratulate him on his line of approach. I take it he proposes to teach you what a *real* love-affair would be like?"

"I suppose that's the sort of construction you naturally would put upon his letter. Well, you are wrong. I've told him not to be silly—you can read that for yourself. I can't help it," she added, "if he won't take 'no' for an answer."

"I suppose you know that he hasn't a penny to bless himself with?"

"That should convince you," she said scornfully, "that it's not a very serious affair."

"You are merely sorry for him!"

"I'd be sorry for anyone who had to work under you. Instead of looking after your department you spend your

time being the famous scientist. All the hard work is done by Shouksmith, and I know how disgracefully you've treated him. The whole staff loathes the sight of you. They know how completely bogus you are."

"You seem remarkably well informed about my department," he said dryly, gathering up the letter and putting it in his pocket. "I suppose it should be a relief to know that I'm more likely to be blackmailed than murdered."

"Where are you going?" she cried, a gleam of fear in her eyes as he walked to the top of the stairs.

"I'm going down to breakfast," he answered, smiling at her.

He knew, as he descended the stairs, that she could barely restrain herself from running after him. He could picture her leaning over the banisters, staring down at the bald top of his head with hatred mingled with anxiety. Because he had kept so cool she was badly frightened.

"It will do her good," he reflected, entering the breakfast-room.

Nevertheless, he was not so calm inwardly as he looked, and although he opened *The Times* as nonchalantly as ever, his mind was incapable of following the printed words. A new crisis at U.N.O., fresh rioting in Calcutta, a grave warning about more food shortages made no impression on him. These things were part of the bustling, teeming, external world; they came and went, just as one day was fine and the next raining. All that mattered was the disturbance in his private, interior world.

For he knew now, more certainly than at any time before, that his marriage was a failure. Eunice was too beautiful, too passionate, too self-centred ever to settle down. She had long been straining at the leash and some day it must snap.

He himself was no longer in love with her, though she could still exert some of her old fascination over him. But he was not in love with her in the sense that she was the changeless object of his affection. He sought perpetual change; without it life seemed to be frozen and



meaningless. He was incapable of those violent passions that were usually associated with love. He wanted to play on the shifting surface and not plunge deep.

On the other hand, he had a horror of appearing to fail at anything he touched. The prospect of a scandal, involving his wife and a younger member of his own staff, was quite intolerable. She knew—and that was the real strength of her position—that he would never provoke an open scandal.

As he crunched his toast he wondered how best to deal with this intensely disagreeable situation. Should he confront Lawson and tell him what he had found out? Or should he act more stealthily? And what, for that matter, had Lawson himself found out that made him so confident that he held the whip hand? Surely it wasn't possible that he discovered . . . No, no, that was out of the question, he decided, banishing a thought that for a moment made him sweat.

He drank his coffee, folded *The Times*, and went into the hall to put on an overcoat. Wearing a wide-brimmed black felt hat (indefinably Bohemian) and a perfectly cut, dark blue, double-breasted overcoat with a crimson scarf relieved by white spots, and with a tightly rolled umbrella in his gloved hand, he stepped into the raw murkiness of the January morning.

His opportunities for taking physical exercise were restricted to this morning walk to the College and an occasional game of golf on Sundays. He walked briskly, with his head high in the air, an expression of benevolent superiority, and a mind that struggled to free itself from its worries like a fly caught on a sticky paper.

What gnawed at him more painfully than jealousy, in the purely sexual sense, was the consciousness that he was not universally popular. He had a naïve and insatiable hunger to be admired. He was capable of stopping outside a bookshop and gazing at copies of his own books in the window. He never missed a chance of listening to a recording of his own voice on the wireless—a voice so deep, so melodious, so persuasive that it enchanted him.

But it was exasperating to find that that thrilling voice had no power over his son or his wife. And as for the members of his staff . . . surely they ought to be proud to be associated with him? That they were not, disclosed a deeper, subtler problem. What they thought was plain enough from Eunice's remark about his pot-boilers—a phrase she could have picked up only from Lawson.

By steadily refusing to reply to any criticism he had shut his eyes to the fact that in purely academic circles his prestige had steadily dropped, but in his heart he knew quite well what had happened. If only he could be admired by his peers and still remain a popular idol, he wouldn't mind so much what Eunice thought about him. The biggest flaw in his scheme of things was that he had done no serious scientific work for years, and at fifty-three it was generally supposed that a scientist was well past his prime. Indeed, there was a common belief that no really new contribution was likely to be made in such an abstruse field as atomic physics by a man over thirty. Lawson was twenty-nine . . . and suddenly, as he emerged from Green Park, he felt a gust of fury go over him, a blind hatred of Lawson.

He stood on the pavement and gazed at the massive building in Portland stone looming out of the fog. Not all the windows were lighted. Out of term the humming life of the University was greatly diminished. Most of the staff, of course, came as usual, and so did research students. There was plenty of work to be done and Sir Clifford was one of those who regarded ordinary students as a necessary but unrelieved evil.

He caught his breath as he looked across at the wing, jutting out on the east side of the building. That was the mathematics department, which was in his charge. And how—he suddenly faced it frankly—the men who worked there would all like to see him deposed. They were jealous of him and so they tried to dismiss him as a mere scientific journalist, a back-number incapable now of adding to the sum of human knowledge.

A curiously furtive look entered his eyes as he looked around at the figures appearing and vanishing in the

fog. Then he smiled so crookedly and cunningly that he would have been horrified if he could have seen his expression in a glass.

"I'll show them!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER II

SIR CLIFFORD nodded cheerfully to the day porter who sat beside a telephone switchboard in a sort of glass box.

"Good morning, Dobbins."

"Good morning, sir."

He entered a lift, pressed the button for the second floor, and a few moments later stepped out. He closed the gates carefully and watched the lift rise. As it did so, the shaft on the second floor was seen to be merely protected by a piece of rope. The window was nailed up and the landing was almost in darkness. Clicking his tongue in disapproval Sir Clifford switched on the light.

"Confoundedly dangerous," he said to himself. "One of these days some absent-minded idiot will fall down the lift shaft."

The major war damage to the University buildings had been repaired, but here and there one still came across scars that had been temporarily patched and appeared to have been forgotten. Making a mental note to raise the matter again, Sir Clifford entered his office. The steam heating was pleasant after the rawness outside. He removed his hat with a flourish, and smiled at a thin woman in the early forties who sat in front of an old-fashioned typewriter.

"Good morning, Miss Jarrold."

"Good morning, Professor—if you can call it a 'good' morning."

"I don't dislike fog," he said, pulling off his heavy overcoat and inserting a hanger. "It's eccentric of me, and I know that while I'm enjoying the interesting æsthetic effects my less fortunate colleagues are struggling in crowded trains, worrying themselves sick because they will be late. But life," he added, with a sigh, "is always unfair. Nothing, I'm afraid, can alter the basic inequalities."



"Dr. Lawson came in to see you just now. Professor Shouksmith hasn't arrived yet."

"What did Lawson want?"

"He wanted to discuss the new time-table. He seems to think it is too heavy."

"Extraordinary young man," Sir Clifford murmured, half to himself, as he sat down at his desk. "At his age no time-table could be too heavy for me. If I wasn't working I was bored. I suppose that that's what kept me out of mischief."

Miss Jarrold looked as though she hadn't heard this aside. She changed the subject tactfully.

"Messrs. Cromwell and Benchley rang up about a new computing machine. They would be very pleased to arrange a demonstration to suit your convenience."

"I don't doubt it, Miss Jarrold. Anything else?"

"I've opened your letters and filled out your engagement list. The Rector wishes to see you at eleven o'clock, and the Secretary of the College is worrying about those estimates—"

"I'll speak to him at once. I can't possibly give him the final programme until next Monday." And with an air of brisk efficiency Sir Clifford picked up the telephone.

For the next hour he gave an admirable performance as head of a thriving department. Six people came in to see him, and every conversation was interrupted at least once by a telephone call. But he was enjoying himself hugely.

Then a young, pallid man, wearing rimless spectacles, entered rather timidly and gave a start when Sir Clifford blew his nose with the sound of a trumpet before battle.

"Good morning, Dennis," beamed Sir Clifford, thrusting his handkerchief up his sleeve. "What can I do for you?"

Dennis hesitated and ran his finger round the inside of his collar. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. These signs of nervousness were well understood by Sir Clifford; he knew what Dennis wanted to say and why he found it so difficult.

"What's the trouble, Dennis? Have you applied for a new job? Because if so, anything I can do . . ."

"No, sir." Dennis looked even more startled. "It's not that at all. But I was talking to Dr. Lawson—"

"Yes?" urged Sir Clifford, less amiably.

"And he seemed to think that there wasn't much chance of my being kept on. He advised me to ask you for a definite answer. I mean—you see it's rather important to me. I think you know I recently got married."

Sir Clifford looked down at his well-manicured fingernails and frowned.

"How old are you, Dennis?"

"Twenty-three."

"Wasn't it just a little rash to get married while you only held a temporary appointment?"

"I suppose it was," Dennis admitted, though it was plain that he resented the question.

"Is your wife in a job?"

"No—at least she's leaving one. She's going to have a baby."

Sir Clifford sighed heavily and shook his head.

"You are putting me in an abominably difficult position, Dennis. I ask you, is it fair to take a temporary post, well knowing the conditions that are attached to it, and then turn round and complain that it's not permanent?"

"I'm not complaining," Dennis said, stiffening slightly. "I'm merely asking you where I stand."

"You were appointed as an assistant lecturer. We continually make such appointments, and it is made very clear in advance that promotion to the permanent teaching staff is not automatic. Nor does failure to be asked to remain imply the slightest criticism of your work. I am quite satisfied with your work and I shall give you the warmest recommendation for any suitable post that you apply for. Actually, you won't have much trouble in getting a job. If I might make a suggestion, I know at least two government departments who are looking out for statisticians."

"But that isn't the sort of job I want," protested Dennis.

"We can't get everything we want—with a wife and family into the bargain. I will be quite frank with you, Dennis. I don't think you are cut out for an academic career. Moreover, it is not a life I would recommend many to take up. It is full of discouragements and the rewards are meagre. Unless you pursue that bubble, Fame," Sir Clifford added, with heavy facetiousness, "you will be much better off as a civil servant. Fame is too elusive to be reached if you are pushing a perambulator, and in any case as a bureaucrat you will be one of our new masters."

Dennis went even whiter. For a moment there was a glint of anger in his eyes. He stood silent for a minute, then turned and left the room, slamming the door behind him so violently that Sir Clifford stared in astonishment.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "What an extraordinary young man. One moment he is speechless with nervousness and the next moment—upon my soul, I thought he was going to attack me."

"He's set his heart on an academic career," said Miss Jarrold non-committally.

"And I suppose he blames me for shattering his life ambition, and now he is rushing off to tell everyone what a heartless brute I am." Sir Clifford shook his head sadly. "No doubt the outside world imagines that I spend my time dealing with problems of pure mathematics. Alas, I wish that were true. I've a still more unpleasant job to do before the morning is out."

"You won't have time to see Miss Carter before your interview with the Rector."

"No, I suppose not." Sir Clifford glanced at the gold watch on his wrist. "I might as well go across now."

He made his way through corridor after corridor, dimmed with fog but luxuriously warm. Coming out of the physics lecture theatre was a plump man with a double chin impaled on the points of a butterfly collar.

He greeted Sir Clifford so affably that the latter paused in relief that someone in this vast building seemed to like him.

"I say, Casey, those shares you told me about are doing well. They are up again this morning."

"Shares? Oh, yes, I advised you to buy Davenports. Hang on a bit longer, Gorman. They haven't reached their ceiling yet."

"How do you manage to know so much about these things?"

Sir Clifford smiled gratefully at the compliment. "It's a hobby of mine. How much did you buy?"

"Well, I only had a couple of hundred to play with. I almost wish I'd plunged more heavily, but I can't afford to lose, as you know."

"Listen," said Sir Clifford earnestly, gripping Professor Gorman's arm. "Put everything you can raise into Davenports. Beg, borrow or steal, but hold on until I give you the word. You'll very nearly double your capital—and, as you know, you'll have no income tax to pay on the profit."

He passed on, but the incident cheered him. His colleagues might scoff at his philosophical theories, but they respected his knowledge of the Stock Exchange. Humming to himself he knocked on the door of the Rector's room and entered.

Sir Gregory Belcher was sitting at a flat desk in a spacious room hung with portraits of distinguished predecessors. Opposite him was a small head of Cicero.

He was a tall, thin, hatchet-faced man with greying eyebrows that stood out in tufts, as coarse as horsehair. His stork-like neck was only half covered by an incredibly high collar. At first glance he looked like an apparition in a distorting mirror. His extreme emaciation gave an impression of austerity, but this was removed when he spoke. He greeted Sir Clifford warmly, clutching his hand with such skeleton-like fingers that they almost threatened to cut the flesh. But his face lit up with a smile of welcome so hearty that a stranger might suppose it to be genuine. That smile and that

hand-clasp had carried him through many difficult situations.

"One thing I'm bound to say," the Rector declared, in tones that rang with sincerity, "I seldom get any headaches from the maths department."

"I only wish," replied Sir Clifford, in heartfelt tones, "that I could say the same."

Then they got down to it. They discussed the general lines of development that were being planned before touching on purely staff problems. It seemed almost trivial to raise such a question as the future of Miss Carter.

"I intended, in any case, to give her a friendly hint of my intentions to-day, but now that I am here I might as well mention that I find it impossible to fit her in with the new arrangements. It's rather a difficult situation because her research work is excellent. But she simply cannot lecture. Her inability to lecture throws an unfair burden on the rest of the staff, and if we are to carry out this new programme we shall be working at top pressure, as you realize."

"I do realize it," said the Rector, nodding gravely. "What about young Dennis? Would he take her place?"

"I'm afraid not. He's a conscientious boy and I've no complaints, but I cannot bring myself to put him on the permanent staff. I don't really feel he has it in him—the weight and the originality I mean—to succeed in an academic career. The trouble is that he wants to stay."

"He knew the conditions when he came," the Rector commented disapprovingly.

"Also, he has just got married and I understand that his wife is expecting a baby. I don't know how you feel, Rector, but in my view a young man with domestic and financial worries is unlikely to do justice to himself—or to us."

"I fully agree with you." And the tufted eyebrows twitched in approval.

"I have a man in mind—a Jesus' man. I am some-

times accused of undue partiality for my old college, but perhaps you are the last person to blame me for that."

The Rector smiled; he was Balliol.

"A fault I find it easy to forgive," he remarked smoothly.

"And while we are on this subject, there's the question of Lawson. Staff changes are a most disagreeable topic. One side of me is always anxious to leave things as they are. But as you know, the number of students has greatly increased and the demand for mathematicians is such that I have suggested a very considerable reorganization to deal with it. I feel that we must not only maintain our standards but surpass them."

"What's wrong with Lawson?" asked the Rector bluntly.

"I have no particular complaint about his work. He is popular with the students and he is unsparing of his time. I'm not sure, however, that his influence is always good——"

"In what sense?"

"His political views are very extreme. I never discuss them with him for he regards me as a trusted Tory." Sir Clifford smiled deprecatingly. "I am the last person to condemn a man for his opinions. But Lawson is an iconoclast—a professional debunker, so to speak. He is temperamentally agin' the government—agin' any government, including myself."

"You dislike each other—is that it?"

"I'm afraid that is an understatement. I've done my utmost to get on with Lawson and even invited him to my house. But his attitude remains hostile and even—I am bound to say—insolent. He does his best to make the rest of the staff discontented and he is not above stirring up the students against me. I quite despair of altering his attitude and my only hope is that some inducement may be found to cause him to transfer to another university."

The Rector frowned at Cicero. At last he nodded his head slowly.



"There is only one solution to incompatibility," he said at last. "It's a pity, but one man can't be allowed to set a whole department by the ears. How about Shouksmith? What is your candid opinion of him?"

"He works very hard," said Sir Clifford cautiously. "When I go he will expect to take my place."

"You are not thinking——" began the Rector in alarm.

"Not at present," Sir Clifford reassured him, feeling grateful for that show of anxiety. "I have no intention, of course, of remaining until retiring age. I don't need to and I would like, more than anything, to give up all this administrative work. Though, contrary to the opinion of some people, I have not allowed it to smother me. I have just concluded a piece of research which would certainly enable me to retire, if I felt disposed, with suitable laurels."

"This is most interesting," said the Rector, leaning back. "Can't you tell me some more about it?"

"I would rather not at present. But as I was saying . . . Shouksmith is a good fellow. In favourable circumstances he might have made a name for himself. I'm afraid he has had money troubles, and to augment his income he has had to take to examining and even evening classes. The result is that he has squandered his abilities and become rather disillusioned."

"I can't honestly say that he's quite the type I'd like to see in such a position. I always felt that if he'd remained a Reader, that would have been about his mark."

"I don't wish to be disloyal to him," said Sir Clifford virtuously.

"That's the last thing anyone could accuse you of. But frankly, Casey, there are too many people in this university who just do their jobs ploddingly and conscientiously, but who are in no sense outstanding. I think that every man who holds a professorship should have a record of important and original work. I disagree totally with the principle of time promotion."

"So do I," said Sir Clifford, with fervour.

After a brief and desultory conversation he shook hands. He winced at that skeleton grip, but he left the room feeling quite pleased with himself. Long experience had taught him never to bestow high praise on a subordinate. He was satisfied that he had driven at least one nail in Lawson's coffin.

\* \* \* \* \*

The interview with Miss Carter was not so difficult as he had feared. Sitting in the Benares Restaurant, he mentioned it to the girl he had taken out to lunch.

He had had some difficulty in persuading her to come and he had to use the full weight of his position to overawe her. Why he should take so much trouble was obscure even to him. He certainly didn't expect the sort of developments that most people would assume. The curious part was that he didn't really want that sort of thing. What, then, was it all about? Why did he take risks when there was nothing to gain?

He looked across the table in the alcove in which they were sitting at the strange, lovely face opposite him. Nanda Gochapali—an impossible name, though it seemed to bewitch him like a magical *mantra*—still looked slightly uneasy. She wore a sari of amber silk edged with rich brocade. She had just told him that she had brought eighteen saris to London with her. She had hesitated, at first, between native and European clothes; but she looked dreadful, so she said, in Western clothes. Her colouring, her carriage, her whole personality was alien to her present environment, and she felt as though she were dressed-up and acting a part when she put on a Paris frock.

She spoke English flawlessly, and her voice had a trace of huskiness that Sir Clifford found enchanting. She had a remarkably clear brain and a natural flair for mathematics. She belonged to the new India that was rising out of a morass of ignorance and superstition and she was fired with an ambition to take part in its renaissance. Yet he was conscious at times that they did not really speak the same language. She had been

rather shocked when he suggested that she should lunch with him. One moment she seemed ultra-modern, and the next positively Victorian. The mixture baffled and fascinated him.

Her family, he gathered, were politically advanced, but in other respects rigidly conventional. They watched over her as zealously as though she were a hothouse flower that must not be exposed to the outer air. And yet it was possible that they were wise. She was devastatingly beautiful.

What neither they, nor Nanda herself, were capable of understanding was his own attitude. They couldn't grasp that he was content merely to sit opposite her. Or at the very most, in certain exceptional circumstances, he would like to hold her gently in his arms, to inhale the fragrance of her beauty, to snatch . . . yes, he might as well be frank with himself, he would very much like to kiss her.

But how Eunice would laugh! How incredulous everyone would be! So few people had any appreciation of the nuances of life. They jumped at crude and obvious conclusions. Their minds were too coarse to allow for the subtleties of the imagination. To him, a lunch like this was an adventure, all the more exhilarating because Nanda seemed to feel that she was being very daring and that there really was an element of danger in it.

"Poor Miss Carter!" she sighed. "I'm awfully sorry for her."

"So am I," he said, looking distressed. "But how can I keep a lecturer who can't lecture?"

"Will she find another job?"

"I wouldn't get rid of her if I thought there was the slightest difficulty. These staff problems are the bane of my life. I'm often tempted to throw my hand in and settle down to pure research."

"You are wasting your time on such things," said Nanda seriously. "You get no opportunity to do what really matters."

"But before long," he remarked, with a gleam in his eyes, "I shall surprise you all. I am preparing a

paper for the Royal Society which will burst like a bomb-shell in that august assembly. I'm not played out yet, Nanda."

She looked at him with such eagerness that a physical thrill ran down his spine.

"A new piece of research?"

He nodded.

"The solution of a problem that has baffled mathematicians for centuries. Everything else I've written may well be forgotten, but I think I can truthfully say that this will secure me a corner in the temple of fame. And," he added, stirring his coffee, "I can honestly say that that is the only kind of immortality I ask for."

"What is the subject of this paper?"

"I will explain it to you if you care to come along to my room to-morrow night. At seven o'clock we can listen-in to a recording of my latest B.B.C. talk. That will only last twenty minutes, and afterwards—I will let you into my secret."

"But seven o'clock is so late!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"Does it matter? Tell your cousin you are working late. He can call for you at eight—or even eight-thirty."

She looked unnecessarily worried, he thought. A faint flush appeared on the porcelain smoothness of her cheeks.

"My cousin is difficult," she muttered. "He doesn't understand. He means well but he—he has a different tradition, you see."

"But you've worked late before. You are not a schoolgirl, Nanda, you are a woman. Though you are such a beautiful woman that perhaps I can understand your cousin's point of view better than you think."

"I wish sometimes that I weren't beautiful. I even wish I were a man—for then I would be free."

"My dear child, that is sheer blasphemy!" he protested. "There isn't beauty enough to spare in this workaday world. I like talking to you because you think so clearly and you have such original ideas. But

I also like looking at you, and if you never opened your lips I could still be quite happy to sit opposite you."

"Please," she begged, "don't pay me such compliments. I don't like it."

Sir Clifford smiled apologetically, though for a moment he felt rather damped and slightly irritated.

"Shall we leave it then? I shall be in my room to-morrow night. If you care to come along you can have a glass of quite passable sherry and listen to the broadcast. But if you prefer to go back with your cousin, you must do so."

"Now you are angry with me!" she said in distress.

He shook his head. "No, Nanda, that would be impossible," he said, impulsively patting the hand that lay limply on the table.

A turbaned Indian brought the bill and Sir Clifford tipped him generously. The restaurant was crowded and he did not notice a dark-skinned man in the far corner who watched them intently. In Regent Street he hailed a taxi.

"I will drop you outside the University," he said, as he followed Nanda into the taxi. "Then I must carry on as I have a call to make."

Conversation lapsed during the journey. Nanda seemed sunk in her own inscrutable thoughts and Sir Clifford wished that he hadn't eaten so much curry. He slipped a soda-mint surreptitiously into his mouth.

Before giving fresh instructions to the driver, he waited until Nanda had alighted and was out of earshot. He settled back again in the corner with a preoccupied expression and was driven to a small, shabby-looking bookshop off Charing Cross Road. Before entering he stopped through force of habit and looked in the window for his own books, but none were displayed.

Inside there were wooden bookcases reaching to the ceiling, filled with second-hand volumes that no one, he thought, would ever want to buy. As far as could be told at a quick glance the entire stock was rubbish.

A man stepped out of a cubby-hole at the back. He was about thirty-five, and he had unkempt hair

and a smirking expression. "Come into the office, Sir Clifford," he said, in a cultured voice that contrasted with his disreputable appearance. "If you hadn't called to-day I should have looked you up."

"I said I would call to-day," said Sir Clifford coldly, as he entered the tiny room. He was waved to a dusty chair, but he preferred to stand. He was very much on his dignity now, but the grand manner made little impression on Mr. Luck, who continued to grin disagreeably.

"I've brought along the Leibniz," Sir Clifford said, pulling a battered-looking book out of his pocket with some difficulty. "As I told you, I have obtained an expert opinion. I am advised that this is not a first edition of the *Nouveaux Essais*."

He handed the book back, and Mr. Luck examined it carefully, as though he wished to make sure that no substitution had been effected.

"Nevertheless," continued Sir Clifford, "it is a rare copy, even if it is not a genuine first edition. I am prepared to offer you ten pounds for it."

Mr. Luck reached for a packet of cigarettes on the shelf.

"Have one, Professor?" he invited.

"No, thank you," said Sir Clifford distantly.

"Let me tell you something about myself," continued Mr. Luck, unabashed. "Before the war I was a schoolmaster. I taught maths at one of the smaller public schools, so perhaps there can be a certain bond of understanding between us. But I ran into a spot of trouble and my schoolmastering came to an abrupt end. I was down and out when war came and I joined the Army. To cut a long story short—"

"But is any of this story necessary?" protested Sir Clifford. "I quite fail to see why you should expect me to be interested in your personal affairs."

"You'll see presently, Professor. As I was saying, after serving in North Africa and Italy, I was posted to Germany. I found myself in Hamburg. You can hardly, perhaps, imagine the extraordinary conditions.



For a packet of cigarettes you could get almost anything. If you knew what you wanted you could make a small fortune. Old country houses had been ransacked and the collections of years were thrown into the Black Market. I knew a lot about books, and few other people did, so I used my special knowledge to pick up bargains. Books, I might add, were much easier to get through the customs than most other things. If you try to bring in jewellery or watches you are bound to get caught. I'm interested in photography—in fact, it's quite a hobby of mine—but I didn't bother with cameras. I concentrated on books, letters and old manuscripts. I got three letters by Goethe, a first edition of *Wilhelm Meister*, and a quantity of other stuff which I sold when I came back. I set myself up in business on the proceeds."

"I'm very glad you were so successful," said Sir Clifford dryly. "But you were unlucky over the Leibniz. I've made you a very generous offer for it."

Mr. Luck blew a smoke-ring and suddenly his manner changed. His eyes perceptibly hardened.

"I've given you a piece of my biography, Professor, for two reasons. I want to convince you that I'm not a fool and that I've had too many hard knocks to be over-scrupulous. I'm in need of money now and I propose to ask you for five hundred pounds."

Sir Clifford stared at him in amazement.

"Are you mad?" he gasped.

"No, but I think I'm letting you off lightly. However, I'll be satisfied with five hundred pounds in cash—in pound notes."

"You must be out of your mind. Even a genuine Leibniz wouldn't be worth a tenth of that sum."

"I'm not talking about Leibniz, and you know it," said Mr. Luck grimly.

"Then is this some attempt at blackmail? Because if it is," Sir Clifford retorted, "you've come to the wrong man. I'll fight you to the last ditch. My name—"

"Won't be worth much after I've finished with it. Remember what I said a few minutes ago. Think over my exact words carefully and weigh them, because they

were deliberately chosen. Morally, you may call it blackmail, but legally I can't be touched."

A customer entered the shop and Mr. Luck threw up his hands helplessly.

"This isn't a good place to talk. If you'd like to make an appointment where you can hand over the money, I'll meet you anywhere that's convenient. But don't try any funny stuff—detectives hiding in the cupboard or that sort of thing. What's your answer?"

Sir Clifford's face was congested with blood. He spluttered and almost choked, yet for several minutes he did not move. He was thinking very deeply.

"You'd better come along to the University between six and seven to-morrow night. You can then explain what you mean by this outrageous suggestion. I fail completely to understand why you think I should pay you five hundred pounds."

"Do you?" Mr. Luck asked, with a menacing chuckle. "Yet you are willing to keep a date with me. Remember this—if you don't bring the money I'll put up the price. So good afternoon, Professor—good afternoon to you!"

He bowed Sir Clifford ironically back into the shop where a man stood thumbing a copy of the *Religio Medici*.

## CHAPTER III

NIGEL LAWSON approached the familiar narrow house in Hill Street and pressed the bell. It was a raw, foggy afternoon and the temperature had not risen above freezing-point all day. The pavements were covered with a hard coating of ice and the roads were dangerous. Indeed, poor Shouksmith had arrived with his arm in a sling, having slipped while running for his train at Chislehurst.

That minor accident had very nearly upset Nigel's plan to take the afternoon off. Shouksmith had intended to go home again after lunch, but Nigel (rather shamefacedly) had prevailed upon him to remain. It was selfish, he knew, but he was desperate. Yesterday, Eunice had failed to appear for lunch; she had been out when he called later, and to-day he felt that at all costs he must track her down. She couldn't evade him indefinitely.

"Is Lady Casey at home?" he asked, when the maid answered his ring.

"Will you come in, sir?" said Vera, looking at him interestedly. "I'll see."

He stood in the hall, a big, yellow-haired man, six feet one in his socks, broad-shouldered, athletic. He still played rugby and was a champion high diver. He would have been a very good boxer if he had kept it up, but he hadn't put on gloves for years.

His history was somewhat remarkable. The son of a Liverpool docker he had won scholarship after scholarship and after some highly important hush-hush work during the war he had become a lecturer at Westminster University. In one sense success had come to him easily; he never had the slightest difficulty, for example, in passing examinations. He even enjoyed them. To pit his brains against the cunning of the examiner seemed to him an exhilarating form of intellectual sport. He

entered every such test with perfect confidence that he would emerge with honours. There was an arrogance about him which, perhaps, was a compensation for his humble origin; and there was the ruthlessness of a man who knew that he must sink or swim, who had been forced to battle against heavy odds.

He rather despised men who had had an easy time of it. His early background, the poverty, the squalor, the scenes of degradation and drunkenness, had left an ineffaceable mark. It was because he could not forget those things, because they filled him with anger, that he took such an interest in politics. The passionate conviction that science could be used to make an end of poverty, brought him sharply up against those who, like Casey, believed that science was merely an academic pastime. They would have been in violent, temperamental opposition to each other even if Nigel had not met Casey's wife.

Eunice, however, brought the sort of complication that no one who knew Nigel would have predicted. He had reached the age of twenty-nine without bothering much about women. It was not so much that he had lacked the inclination, but he had never been able to find the time—or the money. He worked off his physical energy in sport; the rest of his waking life he spent in the world of abstract ideas. His capacity for work was prodigious; and to keep abreast of the rapid developments in his own subject, to teach and to do original research left him no leisure for emotional experiences. He had spurned all such temptations as furiously as St. Anthony drove away the alluring visions that came to him in the desert. The sort of woman who would not interfere with his career—Miss Carter for example—held no attraction for him; and deep down, he was afraid of the havoc the other sort would cause.

He lived with the Shouksmiths at Chislehurst. What had started as a temporary arrangement had drifted into a permanency. The Shouksmiths were a childless couple, but heavy demands had been made on them by impecunious relatives all through their married life.

Harold Shouksmith had come from a lower middle-class family, and like Nigel he had been dependent on scholarships. This, together with a detestation of Casey, was a strong link between them. Olive Shouksmith was slightly superior to her husband, in a social sense, but her ambitions were thwarted by the drain on their income. She was as extravagant as she dared to be and she made her husband's life bitter by her complaints. Not the least of her grievances was that, in order to make ends meet—or, more correctly, to run a car—she had had to take in a lodger, namely, Nigel.

Nigel had a horror of turning into another Harold Shouksmith—disappointed, embittered, wasting himself on routine and comparative trivialities. Harold could have done brilliantly, no one who knew him well could deny that; but an early marriage to the wrong type of woman had stultified his unusual abilities.

Life with the Shouksmiths had made Nigel start back from the mere idea of marriage as though from an abyss. The fact that in the same house was a man with whom he could talk and find help and understanding, made it easy to return most evenings. If he had lived less comfortably he might have been driven to seek distraction.

And so he settled down to a quiet, industrious, celibate existence which was undisturbed until he was invited by Casey to a cocktail-party, and the drinks and Eunice went to his head. He recovered from the cocktails, but not from Eunice. He fell suddenly and madly in love with her.

He knew that it was quite insane. He had to agree with her when she kept telling him so. But he could no more help it than a man with a fever could voluntarily reduce his temperature. Nothing remotely resembling it had ever happened to him before. It was as though he had been waiting all his life for an experience like this, and now that it had come he had to accept it. He was lashed on by his arrogance—perhaps by a lurking inferiority complex which demanded that he should conquer the new and more glittering world that he had now entered, just as he had gone on making conquests

in the academic world. All other women he had encountered seemed ordinary and dull compared with Eunice. The mad longing that filled him to reduce this proud and beautiful woman to submission was as imperious as the craving of a drug-addict.

Where would it lead him? Again and again he tormented himself with that question, but neither his will nor his intelligence seemed to control him. He seemed to be driven by some blind automatism. He had not really wanted to come to the house to-day, but he was unable to stop himself.

"I'm a fool," he groaned inwardly, as he waited for the maid to return. "I didn't want this sort of thing to start. I only wish . . ."

The maid returned. Her ladyship was in the lounge. Still in his overcoat, gripping the brim of his hat, Nigel strode down the carpeted passage.

Eunice was standing by a blazing fire with one hand resting on the mantelpiece. The large, richly furnished room was filled with the jaundiced gloom of a certain type of London fog. But the firelight gleamed softly on one side of Eunice's pale green frock, lighting her neck and face as she turned towards the door. It was a more studied movement than Nigel realized. Nor was she unaware that the subdued lighting erased the faint lines under her eyes and gave her an appearance of youth and nebulous loveliness.

The rebuke that Nigel expected did not come. She did not draw back when he blundered towards her. His big, clumsy feet (which had earned him the pet-name of Jumbo) thumped on the thick carpet. Then, almost incredulously, he found himself holding her in his arms. He was always astonished by her slenderness and fragility—and by the soft tenderness of her lips, sweeter than anything in the world.

"Darling!" he said chokingly.

"Jumbo, my dear, what *am* I to do about you?" she sighed, smoothing back a lock of hair that had fallen across his forehead.

"Come away with me. Let me take you——"



"Where?" she asked, drawing back her head and looking at him steadily.

"I don't know," he groaned. "That's the devil of it."

"Sit down, Jumbo. We won't be able to talk for long because I'm expecting some people to tea, though you can stay if you like."

"Good Lord, why must you have people to tea to-day?" he cried reproachfully.

"For one thing I asked them a week ago. And for another—do you think this house is the best place for me to meet you in?"

"But I wrote to you. I waited for you yesterday lunch-time at the Miramar. You didn't turn up, so I came here—and again I was told you were out."

"I always have a lot of engagements," she said. "Every day is the same."

"What sort of people do you meet?" he demanded jealously. "I suppose all of them are reeking with money."

"My dear Jumbo, is it a man's own fault that he's rich?"

"No, it's the fault of this rotten social system. If I had my way——" He broke off and suddenly gave a mirthless smile. "Sorry, darling, I'm thumping on the old tub again," he said contritely. "Of course I don't blame individuals for being rich. I wish to goodness I had some money myself."

"So that you could run away with me?" she asked half teasingly.

"Yes, so that I could make you take me seriously."

"If that's what you think, I can't be much good," she pointed out.

"You are conditioned to a certain standard of living. It is far above anything I can offer you, I'm afraid."

She gazed at him thoughtfully. He looked so big, so rugged, so virile, and yet there was such desperation in his eyes that she felt a queer ache. It was not, as she sometimes liked to pretend, an almost maternal yearning.

"I like you, Jumbo—terribly," she confessed. "I

wish I didn't like you so much. I wish I could do something for you."

"It's not for want of asking," he said, with a return of his bitterness.

"You see, Jumbo," she went on earnestly, "you've been bottled up for years. I'm a silly, empty-headed nobody compared with you. You are marvellously clever, even Humpty has to admit it. But although you know all about stars and atoms and things like that, you are hopelessly ignorant about real life. You are one-sided. The other part of you has never developed. If only you had some experience of other women——"

"What chance have I had to acquire any?" he asked harshly.

"Very little, Jumbo, I quite agree. Now if you'd been a Frenchman you'd have kept a mistress and got all this out of your system. You wouldn't be suddenly caught unawares, as though a mine had exploded underneath you. To wake up suddenly at twenty-nine must be devastating."

"I follow the argument, of course," he said caustically. "I suppose it's equally true that if you had been a Frenchwoman you'd take a lover."

She smiled at the thrust and for a minute she didn't speak. The gulf between them seemed stealthily to widen.

"He'd be a man of some experience, I hope. He wouldn't come blundering in to see me just before a tea-party. He wouldn't send letters for my husband to read——"

"Humpty read that letter?" Nigel cried, jerking his head up in dismay.

"Yes, he picked up the torn fragments and pieced them together. He's like that—very painstaking."

"The old swine!" Nigel exclaimed, gritting his teeth. "Well, I'll tell you something about him now. I was talking to one of our research students a few days ago—a young man who knows far too much about the seamy side of life—and he swore to me that he saw Humpty coming out of a place in Hannon Street. It's a bookshop

kept by a man called Luck, who is apparently a notorious character in the worst kind of night-clubs. It appears that Luck has some very strange clients indeed, and that above the shop is a room—"

"But this is nonsense, Jumbo," broke in Eunice. She looked at him incredulously and then burst out laughing. "I know the sort of place you mean. I know what that district is like, and I expect I've met people in my theatrical days like Luck. But if you know how scared Humpty is behind all his bluster . . . you see, darling, he too is one-sided. I sometimes wonder if all really brilliant men are the same. Which is a little hard on women."

"All right," conceded Nigel, after a pause, "he went in to buy a book. But what about the affair he is having with Nanda?"

"I don't believe it's much of an affair. I know him, darling, and you don't. Anyway, who is Nanda?"

"Nanda Gochapali is a research student. She is the daughter of a wealthy businessman in Bombay. She is a highly intelligent girl and ravishingly beautiful. I can't describe her. She makes one think of the Song of Solomon. I prefer blondes myself, but I don't think there's any doubt that Humpty has been knocked sideways. He's always hovering around her, and to-day he took her to lunch. He was seen to leave and bring her back in a taxi."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Eunice, looking amused and holding out a gold cigarette-box. "The maths department could beat a Dorcas Guild for gossip. Do I understand that this bewitching student is really an Indian—coloured?"

"She's an Indian right enough, though her skin is not very dark. I'll tell you something else our intelligence branch has found out. She's going to Humpty's room to-night to listen to a recording of his broadcast. And he has bought a bottle of sherry, presumably for the occasion."

Eunice looked as though she didn't know whether to laugh again or merely stare in astonishment. In a sense

she was so indifferent to her husband that she was incapable of ordinary jealousy. But he was capable of making her furious with him, and at the prospect of getting her own back her eyes narrowed.

"He was such a beast yesterday that I'd like to teach him—I'd like to make him curl up," she muttered, raising her cigarette to her lips.

"He'd certainly curl up if you dropped in during the broadcast," Nigel said grimly.

"There's nothing in it, of course. I wish there was." She blew a thin stream of smoke. "If only I could catch him out in earnest I could be free, but he'd never give me the chance. I suppose he'll just moon at this girl and drink a glass of sherry. He'll hold her hands and feel that he's living dangerously."

"You hate him, don't you!"

"I despise him," she said, in a vibrant voice. "Of course I know he is a brilliant scientist—"

"But that's just what he isn't. He's just as phoney as a scientist as he seems to be in his love-affairs. He never imposes on an academic audience, I assure you. We know what a humbug he is, from start to finish. All he succeeds in doing is to get himself talked about."

Eunice shrugged her shoulders. She wasn't interested in that aspect; she was thinking very intently about to-night.

"Suppose you were free," Nigel continued. "Would there be any chance for me?"

"Don't let's go into all that again, Jumbo. Why can't you find some nice suitable girl and get rid of all these inhibitions? You are far too nice and far too intelligent to spoil your life by some crazy infatuation. I've tried not to hurt you—"

"You needn't spare me, Eunice. Half of me agrees with you. My own mind, as it were, is more scathing than you will ever be. But the other half . . . that's the curse of it, darling. Why are we made like this?"

"You ought to know, Jumbo—you are a scientist!"

"Oh, I know the scientific answer. But knowing doesn't make any difference to the way I feel. Towards

Casey, for example." He clenched his hands. "We all loathe him, but I feel a different sort of hate. It isn't rational and I've never felt it towards any other human being. There are times, when I look at that red, smug face, when I can hardly control myself. I want to hit him."

"You'd get the sack," she said quickly. "You'd be finished."

"It's madness," he muttered. "I know I mustn't give way to it. But he isn't fit to live, and under a decent social system he'd be liquidated."

"Does that mean the gas chamber?" She smiled up at Nigel's tortured face. "You don't mean half the things you say, Jumbo. You wouldn't hurt a fly, really, you are much too kind-hearted."

"I believe," he said, speaking with deliberation, "I'd murder Casey if I thought I could get away with it. Lots of people would commit murder if they weren't practically certain they'd be found out."

The ringing of a bell in the distance broke a curious, uneasy tension. For a moment Eunice had been startled by Nigel's earnestness. She had instinctively put the same question to herself. If, by merely pressing a button, she could annihilate her husband with perfect safety, would she do it?

"That will be the first guest arriving," she said, wrenching her thoughts away from such bizarre channels. "If you are going to stay you must hang up your hat and coat. I can't have you behaving like a barbarian."

"I won't stay, Eunice. It isn't in my line, and anyhow I've got a lot of work to do."

"Will you be seeing Humpty?" she asked anxiously.

"Don't worry, darling. I shall behave myself."

He reached the door none too soon. Outside he passed a well-groomed man who seemed almost certainly one of Eunice's theatrical friends. Friends? Well, it was natural that she should like her own kind. She was quite right when she had called him a barbarian.

A barbarian! He walked towards Berkeley Square

in long, angry strides. Nothing had been achieved by seeing Eunice again. His brain was still seething like a maelstrom. She had told him, as gently as possible, that he was behaving like a fool, but he had known that already.

To cut her out of his life, however, was impossible if he had to meet Casey every day, knowing that Eunice belonged to him. The energy of his unsatisfied hunger for her was suddenly converted into a hard, cold hatred of Casey. Nor did there seem to be any way of coming to grips with his enemy, for Eunice was probably right—although Casey *appeared* to play into their hands, he was much too astute to do so in reality. As well try to hold an eel—for Casey was just as slippery, just as slimy.

When he reached the maths department he went first into the research laboratory. A dozen students were working with computing machines. Dennis was bending over one of them, explaining something. Nanda sat at her desk, intent on some calculation. . . .

He withdrew and went upstairs to Shouksmith's room. He passed Casey's door and heard that hateful, pompous voice talking on the telephone. Shouksmith was drinking a cup of tea with a small, undistinguished-looking woman with mouse-coloured hair.

"Just in time, Nigel. You can take Millfield's tea, as he doesn't seem to be coming."

"Where is he?"

"With the great man," said Miss Carter, with such bitterness that she suddenly seemed to realize that she had betrayed her feelings and went quite red.

Professor Shouksmith was a very ordinary-looking man. He was a type very common on a suburban train, morning and evening, bound for the city in bowler hat, black coat, stiff white collar and striped trousers. The casual observer would not know, of course, that his clothes were chosen by his wife, who thought that a professor of mathematics should be at least as well turned out as his neighbours on the Stock Exchange. Left to himself, it is to be feared that Shouksmith would have



been careless of his appearance. But he was drilled into pressing his trousers and brushing his clothes, and every morning his wife went through his pockets personally to see that they did not bulge in an unsightly manner and that he had a clean handkerchief.

It would be more true perhaps to say that he was resigned than that he was good-natured about it. At the age of forty-two he had been long convinced that domestic peace was worth any price. He had an anæmic, jaded face, and his grey eyes peered intelligently and rather cynically through a pair of thick lenses. No one—not even his wife—had ever known him raise his voice in anger or show the slightest demonstrativeness. He practised understatement to such a degree that it was difficult to imagine any situation, even the resignation of Casey, that would stimulate a show of enthusiasm. Sometimes his right eyebrow would go up; sometimes a smile would hover on his bloodless lips; sometimes the way he would deliberately knock out his pipe would seem significant. He was, however, quite popular with the rest of the staff. He did most of Casey's work for him, and he did it well. He was thoroughly dependable, and so, stood out in contrast to his mercurial chief.

To-day his right hand rested in a black sling. Miss Carter, who had acquired a rudimentary knowledge of first-aid during the war, had insisted that the proper treatment for a sprain was rest; and although he had asked hopefully if that meant that he could go home, she assured him that it was not necessary.

"Miss Carter insists that I go to the dinner to-night," he said, looking at Nigel with a mock-lugubrious expression. "I was hoping I could escape."

"I'll fix your tie for you," Nigel said.

"I thought you were a friend of mine, Nigel?" Shouksmith shook his head sadly. "This idea of Belcher's shouldn't be encouraged. The dinner is bad enough, but to have to dress for the blessed thing is too much."

"You'll enjoy it, I expect. Who else will be there?" asked Miss Carter.

"The Dean, somebody from Harvard and an Oxford archæologist called Hill—Asmun Hill."

"The name rings a bell of some sort," said Nigel, frowning in an effort to remember.

"I believe Hill is quite an amusing chap. He's been mixed up in one or two murder cases, so perhaps the conversation will be less dreary than usual."

"In what way has he been 'mixed-up'? Not as the chief suspect I hope?"

"I think he rather fancies himself as an amateur sleuth. He's got friends at Scotland Yard and it's a sort of hobby I believe."

"It seems a pity we can't provide him with a suitable corpse," retorted Nigel grimly.

"It does," agreed Shouksmith, picking up his pipe and trying to fill it. "All the same, this get-together idea of Belcher's is not up my street at all. Ever since he's been here he's been trying to inject some social life that doesn't really belong to a university like this. It's no use making all these new rules for the refectory and common-room and trying to turn us into a bad imitation of Oxford."

"I suppose," said Nigel sourly, "it's because they are both Oxford men that he's so thick with Casey."

"What is the idea of these dinners?" asked Miss Carter, rather obviously trying to get them away from the familiar disagreeable subject.

"Once a month," explained Shouksmith, "Belcher gives a bachelor dinner-party, because he thinks that the professors of Westminster should meet professors of other universities who happen to be in town. No doubt the idea is to broaden our minds and prevent us from getting into a rut. Belcher has no great opinion of any of us, with the possible exception—"

The door was flung open and they all looked up, as a man of about thirty-five, but so fat that he looked older, burst into the room.

"What do you think?" Millfield cried, gasping for breath. "He'd forgotten all about it—clean forgotten that he'd promised to write. Now, of course,

it's too late. Someone else has got the job I applied for!"

"Forgot!" echoed Miss Carter. Then, with a burst of sympathy: "Never mind, Bill, you probably wouldn't have liked Liverpool."

"Of course I'd have liked it, quite apart from the leg-up. Even Timbuktu would be paradise compared with this place. But what can you say of a man who admits that he just forgot!"

"I can think of things one could say," muttered Nigel.

"It's curious," said Shouksmith reflectively, "but exactly the same thing happened to me some years ago. If Casey had written the blurb he promised I wouldn't be here now—though whether I'd really be better off I don't know. I console myself with the reflection that chance plays a very big part in life."

"That's all very well," retorted Nigel, "but the head of a department ought not to leave the staff at the mercy of chance. Casey is completely uninterested in our personal welfare. I don't think any of us has the least prospect of promotion. Casey would always prefer to bring in an outsider—and the trouble is that he's got Belcher in his pocket. I'd just like to know what poison he dropped in the Rector's ear yesterday morning."

"From one or two remarks I've heard since," said Shouksmith, "I've an idea he was pretty complimentary about you, Nigel. But it's no use our getting worked up about all this. We know what Casey is like, and there it is—we can't alter it."

"Did you feel so philosophical about him when he let you down?" demanded Millfield. "Your whole career might have been different. And all because that blown-up bag of egotism couldn't think of anything . . ."

"It's a long time ago," interrupted Shouksmith, with a sigh. "I was bitter at the time, but the way things are turning out makes it impossible to get excited about old grievances. Perhaps you, too, will strike lucky, Millfield."

"Lucky?" Millfield echoed in surprise. "Why, what has happened to you?"

Shouksmith gave a faint smile and leaned back. He no longer looked cynical and disillusioned.

"I've just completed a piece of research that will cause Casey more annoyance than anything else I can imagine. When I first mentioned to him what I was doing he laughed in my face. He told me I was wasting my time, pursuing a chimera, looking for the Philosophers' Stone. I can hardly blame him for being incredulous, because better men than I have tackled this problem and broken their heads on it. I never expected to solve it, but by some miracle I have succeeded."

"What is the problem?" asked Nigel, in astonishment.

"Beyond telling you that it is concerned with the theory of numbers I don't propose to say any more—for the present. I deliberately refrained from showing my work to Casey because—well, I may be doing him an injustice, but I don't trust him."

"You mean he'd pinch it!" Nigel cried. "By heaven, he would, too. That's just the sort of rotten trick he'd play. He'd pretend that it was his own idea, and he'd probably get away with it, if it was just your word against his."

"I thought it best to avoid the possibility of any acrimonious disputes of that kind. I am sending my paper to the London Mathematical Society—and then we shall see!"

"Congratulations, Shouksmith," said Millfield warmly. "Quite apart from scoring off Casey I'm honestly glad, for your own sake. It's about time you had a break."

"Casey will be green with jealousy," breathed Miss Carter ecstatically. "In his own department, too! It couldn't be harder for him to bear!"

The door opened and Casey himself entered. For a moment he stopped, somewhat disconcerted to find so many people in the room, but he quickly recovered himself.

"Am I interrupting a tea-party?" he asked breezily.

"I'll look back later," Nigel said, ignoring Casey

and looking straight at Shouksmith. "I'll help you to change."

"Of course!" Casey exclaimed heartily. "You are going to the dinner to-night. I enjoyed last month's dinner. I must say I think it's an excellent idea. I'm all for extending the social life of the University. We are too inclined to arrive in the morning and go home at night just as though we were working in a Whitehall office."

This was received in chilly silence. Nigel, Millfield and Miss Carter left the room without another word. Even Casey was conscious of an atmosphere and for a moment he frowned, then he eyed Shouksmith quizzically. The Professor was leaning back, smoking his pipe and gazing through the window with an even more detached air than usual.

"I suppose I'm unpopular because I've sacked Miss Carter," Casey murmured. "But how could I keep her? I explained the whole situation to Belcher and he thoroughly agrees with me."

"I don't think you've treated Millfield too well," said Shouksmith.

"I know—it was a pure oversight." Casey bit his lip in vexation. "I'll see he doesn't suffer for it, though. I'll put matters right at the earliest opportunity."

Shouksmith disdained to answer.

"We must go into all these staff problems next week," Casey continued. "I really looked in about something quite different." He paused and gave a little chuckle. "I've come to make an unusual request. Have you got such a thing in your office as a corkscrew?"

Shouksmith opened a drawer in his desk without the slightest change of expression.

"Curiously enough, I have," he said.



#### CHAPTER IV

MR. LUCK closed the door of his shop and drew the bolts across. He switched out the light and went up a narrow staircase to a room on the first floor. A red-haired girl was sprawled across a divan, a long cigarette-holder between her teeth. She had kicked off her shoes and one of her stockings was badly laddered. The mascara on her eyelashes was smudged, her fingers were stained with nicotine and the nails had been carelessly varnished.

She was a slut, thought Luck, as he stared down at her. She was pretty and she had a warm, animal vitality, but about the house she was incorrigibly lazy. The room looked untidy, with a fox fur hanging from the back of a chair, the tablecloth rumpled, some dirty cups on a tray and cigarette ash on the floor. The harsh glare from a reading-lamp, the parchment shade of which had been knocked back, fell mercilessly on the divan. Luck crossed the room and adjusted it. He stood for a minute with his back to the gas fire, and the girl sat up.

"I could do with a drink," she said.

"I'm sure you could," he remarked, looking at her rather coldly. However, he opened a cupboard and took out some glasses. "What would you like?"

"Gin and It."

He mixed the drink and handed it to her with such an air of abstraction that she swung her legs over the edge of the divan and stared at him. She pulled down her dress, but it couldn't be made to reach her knees.

"What's wrong, Frank?" she asked plaintively.

"Nothing," he replied, pouring himself a large brandy. "Cheerio."

"Cheerio." She raised her glass. "I wish you wouldn't drink brandy all the time. Lately you never touch anything else——"

"Are you concerned," he broke in ironically, "about my moral welfare?"

"No, but it's so expensive," she retorted.

"Don't worry, I'm on a good thing. I've struck a gold-mine, in fact. I hope to have my first dig to-night."

"Is it safe?" she asked, looking across at him anxiously. "Because I'd rather you left it than took any more risks."

"It's as safe as anything worth while is likely to be. I have an interview, shortly, with a man who has a great deal of money and is terrified of the slightest breath of scandal. His name is almost a household word and he simply dare not let it be tarnished. And that, my dear Crista, is how I should define a gold-mine."

Luck laughed, finished his drink at a gulp and poured out another. Crista, however, still looked worried.

"What have you got against him? If it's the usual thing . . . Oh, you can't risk that again, not after last time, when you got beaten up."

"I got beaten up," he said, scowling at the recollection, "because for once I was careless. But even then I got my money in the end."

"You'll get yourself murdered one of these days!" she exclaimed.

"I don't think so. When you live largely on your wits you can't expect to avoid risk or keep your popularity. What is absolutely essential is to think out something fresh each time. It's no use repeating the same trick mechanically. You've got to study your pigeon—find out his special weakness—use psychology. The trouble with most people who try this game is that they are unintelligent."

Crista sighed and held out an empty glass.

"Give me another drink. I guess I need it. Then tell me where I come into all this."

"You don't come in," he said, with a grin. "The thing's over and done with. All I have to do now is to collect the money."

"But when . . .? I don't remember anything hap-

pening. What's all the mystery about? Why can't you come out with it?"

"Because you wouldn't understand this sort of racket. Your ideas are too crude, Crista. The wealthy provincial up in town for a spree is more your line. This is a shade too subtle for you."

"There's such a thing," said Crista darkly, "as being too clever."

"But it's even worse to be too stupid, Crista." He filled her glass and handed it to her; then he raised his own. "Here's to brains!"

Despite her pleading he refused to give her any details about the money-making scheme of which he seemed to feel such confidence. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was six o'clock, then he put on an overcoat, waved cheerfully and yet a little contemptuously to Crista, and went out. He left by the back entrance, and as he was in such good time he decided to make the journey on foot. When he was feeling as pleased with himself as this he enjoyed walking.

"To think that the old windbag fell for it," he mused. "Stepped straight into my parlour and closed the door against himself. I took a big chance, of course, but it came off—just as I calculated, down to the tiniest detail. Indeed, it seems almost too good to be true."

Suddenly Luck's face became less amiable.

"If there's a catch—but I don't see how there *could* be. He wouldn't dare to bring in the police. I haven't threatened him, but he took the hint when I said that my hobby was photography. I remember how he gave a start and then looked at me very hard. He knew what I was driving at well enough. He wouldn't have made an appointment otherwise."

Meanwhile, travelling by Tube, an Indian, wearing a fawn overcoat and a light trilby hat, was also on his way to Westminster University. He was a youngish man, with a round, fleshy face, rather mauve lips and eyes as dark and velvety as a pansy. He fidgeted a good deal. Occasionally his lips moved, as though talking to himself, but the words he used were not likely to be

understood by his fellow-passengers. They sounded like imprecations.

And at the same time, Eunice was going painstakingly through drawers in her husband's bedroom. At last she found what she wanted—a bunch of keys. She straightened and drew a breath of relief.

"Shall I or shan't I?" she thought. "If I do, he'll try to get his own back. He promised me a new mink coat, and he's petty enough . . . or will he *dare* make more trouble? If I make him look a complete and utter fool he won't forgive me, but he'll lose whatever sort of authority he fancies he's got."

Slowly she walked back to her own room. She had just obtained a key that would give her access to the mathematics section without having to pass the porter. She could slip into the building without being noticed, and the chances were against her meeting anyone on the way to Casey's room. She had been eager to find that key, but now that she had it she was not so sure that she wanted to use it.

She had a sudden, fantastic feeling that she was holding the key to Bluebeard's Chamber.

That, of course, was the wildest nonsense. By no stretch of imagination could Clifford be likened to Bluebeard. Innocent though the victims he lured into his room might be, fascinating though they might be, he would not cut them up; the very most he would do to the dusky beauty he had enticed to-night was to steal a kiss. Few people would believe it, perhaps, but she *knew* that was all he wanted. It was comedy rather than tragedy; but Eunice, whatever her faults, was downright. She thought that there was something nasty about this sort of sentimentality.

Allied with it—for there was some mysterious connection—was a kind of cruelty. If Clifford were humiliated he would be as spiteful as a cat, for at times there was something feline about him. He would take it out of her indirectly. He would take it out of Nigel. He half-believed that she was in love with Nigel.

She realized that she wasn't. There was only one man

she had ever been in love with. She hadn't seen him for years, but she had seen him to-day. She had lied to Nigel about having a tea-party, knowing that it was the only way she could get rid of him. The man who had come to see her was James Upward, whom she had known since her repertory days. They had drifted apart, and she had never thought that there was any possibility that they would come together again. To her amazement he told her that he, too, wanted to go back . . . to try and recapture the spring-like quality of the first love-affair she had ever had.

Was it possible to go back? Would they find that the years between had changed them, so that they were virtually strangers to one another? She didn't want to think so. She had felt like a girl again when he had come into the room. She wanted to dance, sing and burst into tears. Yet she was realistic enough to know that an awful disillusionment might await them both. She was frightened. . . .

The very violence of the passion she felt made her afraid. To feel like this was to be young again . . . it was to feel as poor Nigel felt towards her, that the world was well lost for love. But it wasn't quite true; for she knew now that there were other things. And she dreaded what she might start by seeing Jim again, or by openly humiliating the man she had married.

She looked down at the key and gave a shiver. It was like a symbol. It might give her power, and perhaps ultimately freedom . . . for who could tell what might happen if they abandoned all pretence and frankly hated one another?

The only thing of which she was absolutely certain was not that she loved James Upward but that she hated Clifford Casey. The hot anger that swept over her, the sense of extreme repulsion that followed, the feeling that she was caught in a trap and had to fight her way out, could be expressed by one word only . . . hate.

"I'll go," she decided.

Some time later, from Casey's room at the University strange sounds were issuing. As Nigel stood outside



the door he listened in astonishment; then he hurried on to tell Shouksmith the news. He found the Professor sitting at a typewriter, doing his best to finish a letter with one finger.

"I say, there's an awful row going on in Casey's room. I don't know who is with him, but they are calling each other every name under the sun."

"Are you surprised?" Shouksmith asked, looking up.

"Well, no—but I suppose you've no idea who is in there?"

"None whatever."

"It isn't Millfield. He's meeting me in the staff-room presently. We are going to listen to the broadcast. We both want some good, clean fun to cheer us up."

"What's the subject?" asked Shouksmith, looking mildly amused.

"The view-point of an atom.' So it ought to be good," said Nigel scornfully. He was about to turn back to the door when he paused. "Couldn't you dictate to me? I don't see how you can possibly manage that machine."

"I'm doing remarkably well," said Shouksmith, looking pleased with himself. "I've only got one more letter to write, then I must change. Will you come along in about twenty minutes or so and help me with the finishing touches?"

"Right, I'll be back at about ten to seven. What time have you to be there?"

"Seven o'clock. Fortunately I don't have to leave the building, so perhaps you'll post these letters for me on the way home? They won't go to-night, but I'm sure to forget them otherwise."

Nigel left the Professor to his laborious typing, but he did not go straight to the staff-room. When he arrived he found Millfield and Dennis listening to a wireless play. There was so much shouting that he pressed his hands to his ears.

"Turn that thing down!" he implored; and as Millfield did so he suddenly gave a gasp and struck the table as though an idea had just occurred to him. "By gad!

I believe it was the wireless after all. You see"—to his bewildered colleagues—"I was passing Casey's room and I thought I heard a most awful row. But now it begins to look as though what I really heard was the wireless."

"You should be more scientific in your deductions," Millfield remarked banteringly.

"I suppose," said Dennis, "the old man was tuning in for his star performance. How he loves listening to his own voice!"

"In the right company."

"By the way, where's Elsie?" asked Millfield.

"Wandering about somewhere," Dennis replied. "She said she was going to join us. I thought we might all go out and have food afterwards. I rang up my wife—though I didn't tell her what we were celebrating."

"Good idea," Nigel said, just as Elsie Carter came into the room. Her usually lustreless eyes were actually sparkling and she looked, Nigel thought, almost kittenish.

"What do you think?" she began eagerly. "Nanda has gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed several voices at once.

"Yes, someone came and fetched her. So Casey won't have his little *tête-à-tête* after all!"

"That must have been her cousin. He probably padlocks her door every night and puts a eunuch on guard!"

"Casey," said Nigel exultantly, "doesn't know yet. He's trying out the wireless and waiting in blissful expectation."

"After this," commented Millfield dryly, "it's to be hoped that he takes the hint. Or he'll be hamstrung by her bodyguard."

They were all delighted by the news. They sat talking until Nigel sprang up guiltily. "Poor old Shouksmith! I nearly forgot. I won't be long."

When he entered Shouksmith's room, full of apologies, he found that the Professor had very nearly managed to dress himself.

"Braces, shoe-laces, then my tie!" said Shouksmith,

wriggling in front of a small mirror. "I loathe this job at the best of times. Confound Belcher for insisting that we should change!"

"If you hadn't stood in for me this afternoon you could have got out of it," muttered Nigel remorsefully.

"My wife wouldn't have approved, though. She thinks, like Belcher, that I need more social life." He smiled, as Nigel fastened his braces. "Of a strictly improving kind, of course! But all I can say is that, thank heaven it's a stag-party!"

"Belcher is a snob!"

"Undoubtedly, my dear fellow. That's how he got where he is—by keeping in with the best people. Why don't you try it?"

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," said Nigel, with such unconscious bitterness that Shouksmith looked down at him in surprise, as he knelt to fasten the shoe-laces.

"My dear chap, I don't quite like you doing this for me. It seems so menial, somehow."

"I don't mind doing it for *you*," Nigel said.

At last the Professor was ready. He was led down the corridor by Nigel like a lamb to the slaughter. Nigel returned to the staff-room to find that the broadcast had begun. Casey's hateful voice boomed at him.

"... Perhaps you are wondering at the title of my talk. It seems nonsense to suggest that an atom has a point of view. But everything that can be said about the atom is nonsense. When we peep inside it we look into a world stranger even than Alice found when she stepped through the looking-glass. We find particles moving like planets round a miniature sun; and yet when they jump from one orbit to another they do so without covering the distance between. They have many of the qualities of the magician, and if you protest that magicians do not really exist, I must inform you of the astonishing fact that atoms don't *really* exist. And if you bring as a witness a survivor of Hiroshima, all I can say . . ."

"I can't bear it!" groaned Millfield, burying his face

in his hands. "To think he gets paid a pound a minute for this sort of tripe!"

"Shall we switch off?" asked Dennis.

"Yes, we hear enough of our master's voice," said Nigel, striding towards the radio. He turned the knob and there was a sudden silence. The power they had to stop Casey in the middle of a sentence filled them with a rich enjoyment. Suddenly, however, the silence in which they luxuriated was broken by a sound that made them look at each other in amazement.

"What was that?" faltered Miss Carter.

Nigel sprang to his feet. As he opened the door the sound was repeated—a woman's scream. He started to run, and there were pattering feet behind him. When he turned the corner he saw a woman in a fur coat standing outside the door of Casey's room, which was open. The back of her gloved hand covered her eyes, and when she removed it Nigel was in front of her.

"Eunice!" he gasped.

She looked at him in horror.

"Don't go in there! Don't . . ." As he caught her roughly by the shoulders she began to sob hysterically. "I opened the door, but the room was empty except . . . Oh, stop that radio!" she moaned. "*Stop that voice!*"

They were joined by the others. Incongruously the radio in Casey's room still boomed.

"... Materialism has been killed by these researches into the mysteries of the atom. It is now stone-dead. So far from the universe being reduced to inert matter we find some confirmation of the old, inspired guess that in a sense it is alive . . ."

Nigel looked through the open door and he glimpsed something very still and quite inert. Sir Clifford Casey had fallen forward from his chair and his face rested on the blotting-pad on his desk. The blotting-paper looked as though red ink had been spilt on it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir Gregory Belcher was trying to thaw out his guests by urging them to take more sherry; Professor Tetley,

the Dean, was protesting humorously; the visitor from Harvard, a young bearded classical scholar, was talking with American eagerness to Asmun Hill, who listened with an air of profound attention, though his mind was miles away. Asmun Hill was even younger than Professor Wilbur and certainly the only man in the room who knew how to wear dress clothes.

He had a lean, intelligent face, with rather whimsical grey eyes. In academic circles he was regarded with some disfavour—"brilliant but erratic" summed up the general verdict. Sir Gregory approved of him because his father was a peer and one day, unless death-duties became even more savage, he would become a millionaire. He was an archæologist and he spent a great deal of his time and money digging in the Middle East. He had some highly unorthodox views about Sumerian chronology and had published a paper on Babylonian mathematics that had caused a fierce controversy. As most archæologists knew very little about mathematics Asmun had had no difficulty in taking care of himself.

He liked mathematicians. He wanted to talk to Shouksmith, but the American persisted in boring him about Minoan inscriptions. To his relief Belcher brought Shouksmith forward.

"Dr. Hill," he said tactfully, "has done some interesting work on ancient mathematics." Then he spoilt it by adding: "I wish I'd asked Casey to come along. You've read his books, I expect?"

"I've tried to," said Asmun ambiguously.

"That sort of thing is beyond me," sighed the American. "At home we are so atom-conscious that I run away to hide when the word is mentioned. We have atomic cocktails, atomic cakes and even—so I'm told—atomic lipstick, though what effect that has I don't know."

"Curious how women like to be in the scientific fashion," Asmun commented. "In the old days they were content with magnetism; then came Freud and they developed sex-appeal and oomph. Now we get the atomic woman—unpredictable and shattering."

"We've both managed to remain bomb-proof," Sir Gregory chuckled. "I think I'm correct in saying that we are the only two bachelors in this party?"

There was a ripple of polite laughter, and the Dean came up and joined them, holding a brimming glass very carefully. As though fearing that the conversation might slip back into more serious channels, he said: "Tell me, Dr. Hill, do you study crime as well as sex?"

"Oh, I say!" Asmun protested. "I don't regard myself as a specialist in either."

"I thought someone told me you occasionally acted as an unofficial adviser to Scotland Yard?"

"My dear Dean, I——" Asmun broke off helplessly and to his dismay he saw that everyone was looking at him with great intentness. "I got caught up in one or two rather unpleasant affairs. Purely by accident, though. It just happened that I was on the spot when . . ."

A manservant came up to the Rector and whispered something. Sir Gregory looked annoyed and begged to be excused as he was wanted on the telephone. Asmun was still trying to wriggle out of discussing the criminal cases in which he had been fortuitously involved, and which had gained for him the sort of notoriety that he detested, when the Rector returned. Somehow Sir Gregory looked even gaunter and taller and his face was very white.

"I've just had a shock, gentlemen," he said gravely, and the room suddenly became hushed. "You will have to forgive me if I leave you, but I've just been told that Professor Casey has been found dead in his room."

"Dead!" someone echoed incredulously.

"In his room!"

"It's a terrible tragedy," continued Sir Gregory, in a trembling voice. "The police have already been informed——"

"Why the police?" cried the Dean, in astonishment.

"I'm afraid—in fact, according to the message I've just received there seems no doubt about it—Casey has been *murdered*."



## CHAPTER V

FORTUNATELY there were few people left in the University, but the news spread like wild-fire and horrified research students rushed out of the laboratories and the library and hurried towards the mathematics section. The Rector had posted various members of the staff at strategic points in the corridors to keep off mere sight-seers. As the Dean firmly refused to enter the dead man's room, Sir Gregory appealed to Asmun Hill.

"You have some experience of these dreadful things. Would you mind coming with me?"

Asmun had no choice.

They had encountered a yellow-haired, athletic-looking man assisting a woman along the passage to the staff-room. She wore a fur coat, and although her handkerchief was pressed to her face Sir Gregory recognized her.

"Lady Casey!" he exclaimed. "This grows even more appalling. I've only just heard——"

She did not take the slightest notice of him. She leaned heavily on Nigel's arm, and Nigel looked at the Rector significantly. They passed on.

"I suppose," groaned Sir Gregory, "the police will be here at any moment. As we must obviously not touch anything, do you really think it's necessary to see the—er, body?"

"It's because nothing must be touched that someone in authority ought to be in the room," Asmun said firmly.

Sir Gregory blanched. He halted on the threshold of the room, looked at Asmun entreatingly, then braced his shoulders and entered.

It was not a pretty sight. Casey had been sitting at his desk when he was struck down. Someone must have approached him from behind and hit him on the back of the head with terrible force.

Behind him was a table on which there was a bottle of sherry, two glasses, a bowl of potato crisps and a box of cigarettes. If his assailant had been known to him it would have been an easy matter to make some excuse for going up to the table. Casey could then have been attacked before he had any suspicion of the man's real intentions.

"I suppose he is dead?" asked the Rector, withdrawing his gaze and looking very sick.

"I'm afraid so."

"But what could the motive have been? What conceivable object could there be? There was nothing valuable in this room—at least, I presume not."

"The murderer didn't bring his own weapon. Do you notice it, lying beside the chair?"

Sir Gregory looked down at the circular metal object on the floor and he gave a fresh start of amazement.

"A gyroscope!" he exclaimed. "But it may merely have fallen—or perhaps Casey snatched it up to defend himself with."

"I think not. It is blood-stained."

"It is all so shocking I can't think clearly. I not only respected Casey as a colleague, I valued him as a friend. This is a personal blow to me, Hill, as well as a loss to science—to the whole community in fact." Sir Gregory gave the impression of a man who was speaking in a desperate endeavour to adjust himself to a situation that was wellnigh incredible. Before he could say anything more, however, there was a slight commotion outside and four men entered the room unceremoniously. The police had certainly been prompt.

A plump, heavy-jowled man, with a white moustache, walked straight up to the body, and while he was making a brief examination, Inspector Maltby introduced himself. He wore a black overcoat and black and white silk scarf and looked conventional and inconspicuously correct. He was clean shaven, with a ruddy complexion, and now, owing to the cold outside, the tip of his nose glowed brightly. A competent, dogged, well-mannered man, one would say, whom nothing either surprised or

daunted. After speaking to Sir Gregory, Maltby turned to Asmun Hill, and instantly his eyes widened in recognition.

"I'm very glad to meet you again, sir," he said, with a rather ambiguous smile. "Last time we met I was on holiday in Devonshire."

"My dear fellow," gasped Asmun, "you are the very last man I expected——"

"And you spoiled my holiday by insisting that a murder had been committed. Well, sir," he added, glancing at the body, "I shan't need so much persuading this time."

"It's murder all right," said Asmun despondently. "But I can't tell you a thing about it. I was invited to dinner by Sir Gregory Belcher and we were suddenly informed of this ghastly discovery. Beyond what you see I know absolutely nothing."

Maltby nodded and glanced at the police surgeon.

"Can you tell me anything, doc?"

"Only that death was practically instantaneous. I don't think it could have happened much more than half an hour ago."

One of the Inspector's assistants picked up the gyroscope that was lying on the floor. He used a handkerchief to hold it.

"This looks like the weapon, sir."

"Do you agree, doc?"

"It might well have been. What on earth is that thing?"

Asmun Hill explained: "It's a gyroscope, doctor. There are several others lying about in the room. It's a sort of top that spins at any angle. You must have played with one when you were a kid."

"But what's the real object of it?" asked Maltby.

"It illustrates some rather important principles. It's quite a common 'prop' for mathematical demonstrations. But as you will notice, the metal makes it heavy and that ring gives an easy grip. It could be used as an elaborate but very formidable knuckle-duster."

"I see," muttered Maltby. "You'd grasp the ring

and lash out. I suppose you'd aim your blow in a horizontal line, not downwards like a club?"

"Yes, you'd punch with it, so to speak. Though the injuries will probably show how it was used."

"It's rather an important point because it would give us an idea about the height of whoever used it. Who found the body?"

"I think Lady Casey did. Anyhow, she's here."

Maltby nodded and turned to Sir Gregory. "No one must leave the building, sir. Superintendent Burrell is on his way and he'll probably want to question a number of people himself. I wonder, sir, if you would mind arranging for a room in which we can conduct some preliminary interrogations while I finish up in here?"

"Certainly, Inspector," said the Rector, recovering some of his aloofness. "I think Professor Shouksmith's room would be the most convenient. Whom do you propose to interview?"

"Everybody who could have spoken to the dead man during the past half-hour, sir."

"But that means everybody in the building. It will take you most of the night!" protested the Rector. "Surely the only persons who might throw any light on this horrible affair are those who were in this wing?"

"In most cases, sir, I'll just take down the names. We can check up their movements later."

"Heavens above, you don't suspect anyone working here of being the murderer?" cried the Rector distractedly.

"So far, sir, I know nothing at all of the circumstances. I've deliberately put off asking questions. As soon as we've taken our photographs I'll have the body removed. By then the Superintendent should have arrived and we'll be able to get at the facts. It would be very helpful, sir, if you could put everyone concerned at ease about the interrogation. All we shall concern ourselves with immediately is whether a stranger was seen going into this room. The evidence of the doorkeeper should be particularly important."

Maltby spoke soothingly and Sir Gregory seemed

mollified. He was glad enough of an excuse to get out of the room. As he turned towards the door he glanced over his shoulder to see if Asmun were following, but already the Inspector had put his hand detainingly on Asmun's arm.

"I'd like a few words with you alone, sir," he pleaded.

"But, my dear Maltby, I know no more about this than you do!"

"You know a lot more about a university set-up than I. This sort of place," he added confidentially, "gives me an inferiority complex. I don't understand professors and so on—they scare the life out of me. I was just as terrified of you, sir, until I got to know you better."

"Maltby, you are incorrigible!" Asmun exclaimed, looking at him reproachfully. "However, I don't suppose that this is likely to prove a very mystifying affair. It looks as though it must be an outside job and I shouldn't be surprised to learn that Casey carried enough in his wallet to tempt an ordinary thief."

"I've no doubt it'll turn out to be a very straightforward case," said Maltby blandly. "I certainly hope so. I wouldn't like to have to try and trip up one of these scientific johnnies."

The door was closed firmly behind Sir Gregory, and Maltby drew a breath of relief. The Rector had an intimidating personality, even when he was at such a disadvantage.

"Now, sir, we'll get the photography over first. Then I'd like you to help me to make an inventory of what the room contains. There may be books or papers or apparatus here of considerable value—I just wouldn't know!"

Asmun felt that it was useless to make any further protest. He had begun the evening with what promised to be an entertaining dinner-party, but now he found himself caught up in the sort of situation which had overtaken him time and time again. Somehow he had offended the high gods and he was pursued by malevolent Erinyes. He loathed everything connected with crime except the purely intellectual puzzle, and that admittedly

fascinated him. If, indeed, Casey had not been hit on the head by some sneak-thief, he knew that nothing could save him from becoming absorbed in the mystery. If, for example, Casey had been deliberately murdered by some member of the staff, it would constitute a challenge that he could not ignore. For a murder by a mathematician ought to be a very subtle business, if it were premeditated. Or if the actual murder had been done by someone else, and a mathematician had intervened to confuse the trail, there would be brains behind it—and no wonder Maltby felt a little uneasy.

On the whole, if one of the staff were involved, it seemed a shade more probable that he had acted as an accessory rather than as principal. The qualities that made a good mathematician were not those that made a successful murderer. It would be easier to imagine an engineer or a chemist planning violent action than a mathematician. The training and mental habits of the latter—vigorously as he might deny it—were theoretical rather than practical. Such generalizations were, of course, somewhat dangerous, but in any case he felt that he would require exceptionally strong evidence before he could believe that the actual blow had been struck by someone on the staff of the University.

Meanwhile there was precious little evidence of any kind. The fact that the weapon used was a gyroscope suggested that the murderer had picked up the first thing that came to hand; and that was more consistent with loss of temper in a quarrel than premeditation. But the position of the body did not fit in very well with such an interpretation.

Casey had been sitting at his desk when he was struck from behind. If he had been engaged in a quarrel, surely he would have turned when the man moved behind him? Surely his chair would have been shifted or he would have fallen differently? It was not a swivel chair, which could have been easily swung round, and it still fitted close to the desk. Unless the body had been deliberately arranged, it looked as though Casey had had no suspicion that he was in danger. There was a tele-



phone close beside him, and if a total stranger had entered the room and threatened him he could easily have lifted the receiver even if he had no chance to speak.

There was a leather brief-case on the desk with a smooth surface that would retain fingerprints if it had been touched. For that matter the metal ring of the gyroscope would show prints, unless it had been held in a covered hand—which, again, was hardly consistent with an impulsive act. Asmun watched the police as they dusted every likely surface with powder, while the camera-man prepared his flash. Then he blinked several times as the room was filled with dazzling light and wisps of smoke curled towards the ceiling.

The body was photographed from a number of angles. Last time Casey had been photographed he had almost certainly been given a complimentary sitting by some West End firm that wished to retain the copyright. He was the sort of man who enjoyed publicity, from all accounts. Well, he would get plenty of it now, for if there was a genuine mystery about his death it would be a very big case indeed. "Murder of Famous Mathematician." . . . Asmun saw the headlines as he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again he gave a faint shiver. They were placing the body on a stretcher. They had some difficulty in making it lie straight. In death, as in life, Casey was awkward and intractable—a stubborn individualist, Asmun reflected grimly, to the very last. The body was covered with a sheet and carried out, but the gruesome traces remained. Maltby handed the blood-stained blotting-pad carefully to another detective. Then, after making an entry in a note-book, he placed the brief-case and gyroscope side by side.

He stared thoughtfully at the bottle of sherry on the table and then waved his hand. "Take that along, too, with the glasses, though they don't appear to have been used. Now we'll look at the desk."

At that moment a heavily built man wearing a dark, double-breasted overcoat came into the room as though he owned it, ignoring a constable who came smartly to

attention. He removed his hat, disclosing a round head with tightly plastered, iron-grey hair. He greeted Maltby brusquely and stopped to stare at Asmun Hill in surprise.

"Dr. Hill—Superintendent Burrell," said the Inspector hastily. "Dr. Hill was dining with the Rector and he is being most helpful. I shall never forget the assistance he gave me in the Grant case. Indeed, if it hadn't been for him——"

"That blood-group case down in Devonshire! I remember now." Burrell turned to Asmun with a faintly ironical glint in his eyes. "If it hadn't been for you, Professor, the criminal would have hanged, if I recollect rightly."

"If it hadn't been for Dr. Hill we'd never have known that a murder had been committed," said Maltby.

Burrell chuckled. He was blunt, but there was no malice in him.

"I'm always willing to listen to advice. But I'm sure you will realize, Dr. Hill, that London is different from Devonshire. We have to follow a routine——"

"Don't worry about that," broke in Asmun. "If Maltby has given you the impression that I want to butt in on your investigations, put it clean out of your mind. The less I have to do with this horrid business the better I shall be pleased. I'm in this room at the moment on entirely false pretences."

For a moment Burrell seemed puzzled. He was not accustomed to the sort of outsider who didn't want to meddle.

"The point is," said Maltby urgently, "that Dr. Hill knows some of the people concerned. He understands university life. And technical points—the gyroscope, for example. I'm completely out of my depths. I'm hoping he'll help us to clear up several little puzzles."

"By all means," said Burrell heartily. "All I was saying——"

"I know what's in your mind, Superintendent," said Asmun, with a smile, "and I quite agree with you. There's not much room for the amateur nowadays, per-

haps even less in your job than mine. So may I be excused?"

"Don't go until we've been through the desk," implored Maltby.

"In a few words," said the Superintendent, "what is the position?"

"Sir Clifford Casey was found sitting at his desk with his head bashed in. He was chief of the mathematics department, which takes up the whole of this wing. He's a very well-known public man and I understand that he has a considerable private fortune. He was found, I believe, by his wife."

"And she's still here?" asked Burrell, sucking a toothpick.

"Yes, she's waiting with several members of the staff who also happened to be in the building. I thought you'd prefer to question them yourself, and in any case I had to clear up in this room."

"What's everybody doing in the place so late at night?"

"That's not very unusual," put in Asmun helpfully. "Research work goes on out of term—indeed, the students are generally looked upon as rather a nuisance."

"But I thought this was the mathematics department? Surely there aren't any discoveries to be made in mathematics?"

Asmun repressed a smile as he wondered what poor Casey would have said to that.

"Actually there's quite as much research to be done in mathematics as any other subject. From what I've seen of mathematicians they are very unlike the popular picture sometimes presented. They fight over their theories with a passion—and sometimes, I fear, with a jealousy—that would astonish you."

Burrell frowned in perplexity. He had, in the course of his varied career, investigated crimes in very unusual environments. He had known white-slavers, drug-traffickers, test-pilots, deep-sea divers, lion-tamers and clowns; but he had never had any previous experience of mathematicians.

"I don't see how you can argue about mathematics," he persisted sceptically. "And even if you could, I can't imagine it ending in blows."

"We know nothing yet about the circumstances," interposed Maltby. "I was just about to send off the weapon we found—which, as you see, has blood-stains on it. And there's this brief-case, which contained some excellent prints. It may be that the fingerprints will settle the whole thing."

Burrell grunted and took a careful look at the gyroscope. The purpose of it baffled him, but like Maltby he now felt that he was in a strange, new world.

"It's really a toy," he protested, as Asmun showed him how it worked.

"It's a mathematical instrument. Unlike a chemist, a mathematician can't reach out for a bottle of poison. And he can't impale a man on a mathematical point or brain him with a square root. His choice of apparatus is limited——"

"You've already started to spin some fanciful theory," retorted Burrell. "What I want is facts. Now this brief-case, for example—why is it empty?"

"Possibly Casey removed the contents and put them in his desk," suggested Maltby.

"Did he? Or did the murderer empty it? We'd better go over the desk, though I don't suppose we shall learn much."

For the next ten minutes they ran through the letters and documents in the pigeon-holes, but the results were not very illuminating. The drawers were filled with books, transactions of various learned societies, proofs, lecture notes, carbon copies of manuscripts and oddments. There were two large albums of press-cuttings, pasted in with loving care.

"He seems to have been quite a famous man," said Burrell, looking impressed.

"Look at this!" exclaimed Maltby, holding out a graph of certain operations on the Stock Exchange. "He seems to have gone in quite a bit for the other sort of speculation—and made money out of that, too!"

Burrell, who dabbled in a small way himself, pounced on the graph.

"That's valuable, you know," he muttered, after a long pause. "He seems to have worked out a system of his own—and a jolly good one, by the look of things. I'd like to study that graph at leisure."

"I'm afraid it doesn't help us much at the moment, though."

"No," admitted Burrell, with a sigh. "It would be more to the point if we could find a packet of love-letters or something that would show that he led a double life. Failing that, it looks like being a hum-drum affair. If he was attacked and robbed, we aren't likely to find evidence of what was stolen—because naturally it isn't here!" He smiled sourly and pushed back the sliding cover of a well-drawer that had been hidden by the blotting-pad. "Hullo, what's this?"

The sliding panel had no sort of mechanism. Indeed, if it were necessary to take care of any papers, the safest plan would have been to put them in one of the drawers fitted with a lock. The momentary throb of anticipation was followed by disappointment as the well was found to be empty, apart from a thin, Manilla folder containing what looked like an article on mathematics and some typewritten notes.

"Drawn blank, I'm afraid. It's just technical stuff."

"May I see?" ventured Asmun.

He opened the folder, frowned thoughtfully at the typewritten sheets, then suddenly caught his breath so sharply that Maltby looked up in interest. Asmun Hill was not a man who showed his feelings easily. However much he seethed inwardly, he was capable of maintaining a witty banter. He had that donnish habit—which exasperated so many people—of refusing, if he could possibly help it, to treat important subjects very solemnly. He was utterly lacking in that moral earnestness with which those who had been brought up on Matthew Arnold considered the hall-mark of culture. He believed that, generally speaking, seriousness was a private virtue but a social bore.

For once, however, Asmun could not hide his feelings. His eyes widened and he opened his mouth in surprise as he read the heading of an article in almost copper-plate calligraphy. The blood rushed to his face and his hands were trembling. "A Proof of Fermat's Last Theorem," he read, again and again, as though he could hardly believe his senses.

"Quick!" he cried to the bewildered Maltby. "Let me see something in Casey's handwriting. Any specimen will do."

"What's wrong?" demanded Burrell, as the Inspector spun round, grabbed a note-book and held it out.

"I've never seen such atrocious handwriting in my life. I can't make out a single sentence," Maltby protested.

Asmun compared a page of the note-book with the article he had been studying. He shook his head wonderingly.

"This wasn't written by Casey," he muttered.

"What's the mystery?" Burrell burst out. "Will you, or won't you, tell us what you are talking about?"

Asmun looked at him with such annoyance that the Superintendent went red and then, to his own surprise, he suddenly felt rather small. For, young and debonair as the man in front of him still seemed, he was no longer a dilettante who could be ignored. He seemed, suddenly, to have acquired some indefinable authority.

"I don't suppose this has anything to do with Casey's death," Asmun said curtly. "It's immeasurably more important."

"More important?"

"If it is what it claims to be, it is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this discovery. You don't understand of course——"

"You are telling me!" said Burrell, with heavy sarcasm. "Can you give me any idea of the practical consequences of this discovery?"

"There are none whatever. That is what is so delightful about so much of mathematics."

"Then it's not practical—and yet it is of world-



shattering importance! It means more to you than the discovery of Casey's murderer!" cried Burrell incredulously.

"Very much more. However——"

Burrell held out his hand; and rather reluctantly, as though passing over something precious and yet fragile, Asmun gave him the folder. He watched Burrell paw the pages and give an impatient snort.

"We'll have to find out how this folder came to be in Casey's desk, of course, whether it has any bearing on the crime or not. I think we'd better go along now and question a few people."

"Don't you think," asked Maltby, "that since we are so hopelessly out of our depths it would be a good idea if Dr. Hill were present during the interrogation?"

"I've no objection," said Burrell dryly. "But I don't think Dr. Hill is particularly interested in the murder now."

Asmun didn't seem to hear. He was staring at the desk, lost in thought, and he gave a faint start as Maltby touched his arm. Burrell had already reached the door, so Maltby whispered: "You mustn't mind the Super, sir. He's a good sort really, but he hates these cases that are out of the ordinary run."

"What makes you think that this is out of the ordinary?" Asmun asked, drawing his hand across his forehead as though he had been a hundred miles away.

"Just a hunch," said Maltby. "But a very strong one," he added unhappily.

## CHAPTER VI

**I**N the staff-room sat the Rector, Professor Shouksmith, Dennis, Millfield, Lawson, Miss Carter, Eunice and Dobbins, the day porter. The Rector had sent Professor Wilbur away with the Dean. They might as well have dinner, he thought, but it was clearly his duty to remain. He supposed that he could have insisted on being present at the police interrogation, and perhaps it would have been more consistent with his dignity than remaining with the staff. On the other hand, someone had to look after Lady Casey, and he was the only one who could claim social intimacy with the Caseys.

Sir Clifford had entertained lavishly, and on suitable occasions he had invited members of the staff, but none of them knew him really well. How could they? There could be no real friendship, the Rector believed, between people with very different incomes. That was not a snobbish judgment but a plain matter of fact. Sir Clifford was not a snob, but he recognized—as indeed, everyone must—that it was embarrassing to everyone concerned to entertain people who found it impossible to return the entertainment on a similar scale. Between men, perhaps, such matters could be adjusted without much difficulty, but women complicated the situation. It seemed regrettable, sometimes, that there was no rule of celibacy in the academic world. The idea of a priesthood of knowledge attracted him powerfully.

He saw himself, in imagination, as a benevolent autocrat, presiding like a medieval abbot over a monastery of learning. There would be a good table and excellent talk; and as little contact as possible with the outside world. A university would then be an island of culture in an ocean of philistinism. High salaries would not be needed if its members did not marry. Indeed, if such a community had plenty of endowments, a rule of individual poverty would not be a bad thing. But no

such dream was possible if you had to come to terms with women.

What on earth, he wondered, could have induced Casey to marry the woman now sitting opposite him? He couldn't imagine any interest that they ever had in common. An ex-actress was surely the last type of woman to become the wife of a scholar, a philosopher, a man whose intellect grappled with the profoundest problems of the universe. The Rector himself had no aptitude for mathematics and he envied those who had been initiated into its mysteries. He was a sufficiently good Platonist to regard mathematicians—provided they were gentlemen—with something approaching reverence.

"When are they going to start the third degree?" someone asked, with such coarse levity that Sir Gregory looked up and bristled. He transfixed Nigel with eyes of ice.

"That sort of remark is not exactly in the best of taste, Lawson."

Nigel shrugged his shoulders.

"Nor is murder. And obviously we are all under suspicion."

Sir Gregory gasped. "How can you possibly say anything so outrageous! I should have thought that at least you would consider Lady Casey's feelings in these appalling circumstances." He turned to Eunice apologetically. "I am sorry, Lady Casey. We are all a little unstrung. It has been a terrible shock—indeed, I still can't seem to believe it."

Eunice had been sitting as though benumbed. The shadows under her eyes might have been caused by a night's sleeplessness. Now she stirred slightly.

"I suppose," she began, "that the police must think that one of us——" She broke off, clenching her right hand, and after throwing an angry glance at Nigel, Sir Gregory spoke to her soothingly.

"The police are not fools, Lady Casey. They know quite well that no one here would be capable of such an outrage. They believe that someone entered the building either to commit a serious robbery or just to

pilfer. They propose to question everyone inside the University walls so that they can track down any suspicious stranger who may have been seen. That is the sole purpose of this interrogation."

"I must say," remarked Millfield, "I don't see how they expect to track the man down even if he *was* seen."

"They have to begin somewhere. Naturally they would like to begin with a description of the murderer. How else would you propose to set about such an inquiry?"

"I don't think we can teach them their job," observed Shouksmith. "On the other hand, I don't suppose they'll tell any of us what they really think."

"They won't start thinking, I should hope," said Millfield, "until they collect a bit more evidence. Presumably they'll take our fingerprints."

"They will do nothing of the kind," retorted the Rector, looking indignant again. "I never left my rooms. It would be fantastic——"

"But some of us were quite near Casey's room. We'll have to establish an alibi," Millfield persisted.

"My dear Millfield," Shouksmith chided gently, "you mustn't suppose that the police in real life behave as they do in those thrillers you are always devouring."

"We shall see," Millfield said, subsiding in his chair. "It will be very interesting."

"Quite amusing," Nigel almost snarled, "if you've got an alibi. But suppose you haven't? And suppose the police don't obligingly leave us alone to hunt for some mythical stranger? Suppose they decide that one of us is guilty?"

"Lawson!" the Rector exclaimed wrathfully.

"We've got to face that possibility. It wouldn't take a minute to slip into Casey's room and bang him over the head. Almost anybody sitting here *could* have done it—that's how it must look to a policeman, surely."

"But nobody here has any motive!" the Rector protested. "What you are saying would be incredible even to the most stupid policeman; and it is nonsense to take up this contemptuous attitude towards Scotland Yard."

The Inspector in charge struck me as an extremely capable man. It hasn't even crossed his mind that such a dastardly crime could have been perpetrated by one of Casey's colleagues. We were devoted to him, he was a true friend . . ."

Abruptly Sir Gregory stopped. Nobody knew whether he had suddenly remembered the awkward fact that Casey had recently quarrelled with more than one of his colleagues, or whether he had been disturbed by the realization that not every person in the room was a member of Casey's staff. Before the conversation could take a still more unfortunate turn a constable opened the door.

"Will Lady Casey come this way, please?"

Eunice gave a start; she rose swiftly to her feet and went out of the room without looking either to left or right. Millfield waited until the door had closed, then grinned at Miss Carter: "It's like a dentist's waiting-room," he commented, "except that there aren't any picture papers."

Superintendent Burrell sat at Shouksmith's desk, with Maltby on his right and Asmun Hill some distance away on his left, as though deliberately emphasizing the unofficial nature of their association. A shorthand writer sat at a table by the window and there was a policeman at the door. As soon as Eunice entered, Burrell rose politely. He even smiled in an unsuccessful attempt to put her at her ease.

"Please sit down, Lady Casey. We shan't keep you many moments. You were the first to discover this tragedy and so it is necessary to ask a few questions, as you will appreciate. Would you care to smoke?"

Eunice sat on the chair placed in front of the desk and reached towards the cigarette-case that Burrell held out. Maltby promptly got up and flicked a petrol lighter.

"It is a terrible experience for you," Burrell went on sympathetically. "We have our duty to do, but we shall make it as short as possible. Another day, perhaps, you will allow me to see you again."

Eunice crossed her knees and loosened the collar of

her coat. The light in that austere room was not kind, but she adjusted herself to it, and to her unusual audience, as though she were back on the stage. She was playing the part of a beautiful but serious-minded woman who had been crushed by a cruel and unexpected blow. As she answered Burrell's preliminary questions she pitched her voice so low that it was barely audible.

She gave her age truthfully as thirty-four, and her candour made a good impression on Burrell. She said that she had been married for three years.

"Happily? I must ask, I'm afraid."

"Yes," she whispered. "They were the happiest years of my life."

Her control was superb. Her underlip quivered and her lovely eyes filled with tears, but somehow she did not break down.

"Perhaps it's not strictly relevant—but had you been married before?"

"I divorced my first husband on the outbreak of war—when he went to Hollywood."

That, also, made a decidedly favourable impression. A very convenient moment, thought Burrell grimly, for a man of military age to leave the country.

"Now, Lady Casey, to come to the unfortunate events of to-night. What time did you arrive here?"

"About seven o'clock, possibly a few minutes before."

"Was your husband expecting you?"

"Yes, he had asked me to come along. I wanted to hear his broadcast talk, and whenever it is a recording I like to listen with him—a rather sentimental idea, I'm afraid. It may not sound very convincing to you—"

"On the contrary," broke in Burrell, looking surprised, and just a little hurt, "it is perfectly natural and understandable. Your husband was a very famous man and you had every reason to be proud of him. I suppose, when you came here, you just walked straight in? The porter knows you by sight?"

"I usually enter by the side door if it is late. My husband has a key."



Burrell nodded, as though this, too, were the most natural thing in the world.

"And this side door was locked when you arrived?"  
"Yes."

"That hardly helps us, I'm afraid," said Burrell wryly. "No doubt a number of people have keys. We'll have to look into that matter," he added, with a glance at Maltby, who nodded. "You entered, then, at about seven o'clock, and went straight to your husband's room?"

Eunice hesitated. Her hands were screwing her gloves into a ball. Finally, dropping her voice: "No, I didn't go straight to the office. I slipped into another room when I saw someone approaching whom I didn't want to meet."

"Fair enough," said Burrell encouragingly. "Who was this person and where did you see him?"

"He was coming down the corridor that leads into the main building. He . . . I suppose I've got to answer?" she pleaded helplessly. "I'm sure it can have no connection with my husband's death. I couldn't bear to think that a chance remark of mine might lead to some—some wrong construction."

"We have perfectly open minds, Lady Casey. No innocent person is likely to suffer from the truth. There will be time enough to build up constructions when we have all the facts before us. So who was it that you recognized?"

"Charles—Charles Casey," she said in a low voice.

"A relation of your husband's?"

"His son—by his first marriage."

Out of deference, perhaps, to the social importance of the beautiful woman whom he was questioning, Burrell had kept his toothpick in his hand, rubbing it between his fingers. Now he could restrain himself no longer and he chewed it meditatively, with evident relief.

"How old is Charles Casey?" he asked.

"Twenty-three—or perhaps twenty-four; I'm not quite sure."

"Does he live with you?"

"No."

"Occupation?"

These questions were deliberately put. When a statement was made with difficulty and had some emotional content Burrell believed that it was sound psychology to ask about something quite ordinary and so allow his victim to recover and feel at ease again. But the mention of Charles Casey's occupation had the opposite effect.

"The last I heard was that Charles had a job with some air charter company. He—he doesn't take very kindly to work. He's quite a nice boy," added Eunice anxiously, "and I don't want you to be prejudiced against him, as he hasn't really got down to things yet."

Burrell nodded. "Now I want you to be perfectly frank with me. It'll be better for Charles in the long run. I want you to say truthfully whether or no Charles was on good terms with his father."

Eunice sighed wearily. How could she tell a downright lie? That this question flashed through her mind was plain from her expression.

"I can't say that they were on very good terms. But you mustn't think—"

"My dear Lady Casey," interrupted Burrell patiently, "I shan't even begin to think about this case until I've gathered in all the immediately available evidence. We don't jump at every obvious conclusion, I assure you. I shouldn't hold my job for five minutes if I did that. I suppose this is the usual story—the son a bit extravagant and the father trying to pull the reins?"

"Well, yes—it really does amount to that, I suppose," admitted Eunice, looking slightly relieved.

"Though now, will it be so necessary? I mean will Charles benefit in the financial sense?"

"He hasn't been formally disinherited, if that's what you mean. But I don't know the contents of the will."

"We can go into that later," said Burrell reassuringly, "if it seems necessary, which is unlikely. I dare say that sometimes Sir Clifford threatened to disinherit him, just to pull him up short?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer. It never happened to my knowledge."

"Is Charles married?"

"No."

"Where does he live?"

"Cadogan Mews, Number 7."

"Why didn't you want to meet him?"

"Why?" Once more a look of fear seemed to enter those hyacinth eyes. "I don't know—I mean there was no real reason. I just didn't want a long talk with him. I was afraid he'd pour out his troubles and try and get me to use my influence with his father to let him have some money. He looked so strained that I thought instantly he'd been trying to get money and failed."

"You recognized the look," remarked Burrell, with a smile. "Anyhow, he was going in the opposite direction to you? He meant to leave, I suppose, by the exit to the main university buildings?"

"I suppose so."

"After he had passed, you went to your husband's room. Could you describe your actions?"

"I didn't meet anybody. When I reached the door I heard the radio, so I was utterly unprepared for—for what I found. I opened the door, took a few steps forward, and then I saw . . ." With a quick dramatic gesture she covered her face with her hands. A minute later she managed to recover enough composure to continue. "I saw that he was dead, but with his voice still coming from the radio, so typical of him . . . it was peculiarly horrible. I flew out into the passage. I suppose I must have screamed. I didn't know what I was doing. Then I saw Dr. Lawson running towards me and I shouted something about turning off the radio."

Burrell seemed satisfied and he turned to Maltby. "I don't suppose you've any questions to put?"

"Just one thing, Lady Casey," said the Inspector mildly. "There was some sherry and two glasses on the table. That indicates that your husband was expecting you, I take it?"

"But I've already said he was expecting me. We were to go out to dinner afterwards. It was all arranged."

"We quite understand," Burrell said. "There's nothing to worry about, Lady Casey. You've given a very clear account of your movements, and I don't suppose we shall need to trouble you again. I'd like to thank you for being so helpful. Be assured," he added as she rose, "we shall do our utmost to bring whoever was responsible for this brutal crime to justice. We don't often fail."

She gave him a wan but grateful smile and made her way slowly out of the room. As soon as she was gone, Burrell leaned back, with an air of satisfaction.

"Ring up at once and get Charles Casey brought here—if he can be found," he said to Maltby. And while the Inspector dialled the Yard, Burrell turned to Asmun Hill, who was still studying the folder on his knee. "Well, Professor, what do you think of Lady Casey?"

"A remarkably beautiful woman," Asmun answered, tearing himself away from the perusal of the documents with obvious reluctance.

"I wonder why she threw up her stage career and married an old fogey like Casey. You wouldn't think she was the type—unless she did it purely for money."

"She's not a type," said Asmun. "She's very highly individual. I'd rather like to meet her again."

"Oh, you would, would you!" exclaimed Burrell, with a laugh that made Asmun wince. "Well, we must get on. We've a lot of ground to cover. We'll have Dr. Lawson next."

Nigel came into the room with such a belligerent air that the Superintendent took an instant dislike to him. Eunice had called for the velvet glove, but there seemed no need for being too gentle with this big, blond, aggressive-looking man.

"What is your position in this department, Dr. Lawson?"

"Under-cook and general bottle-washer, but not—emphatically not—boot-licker. That is why my official

status is lecturer—and why it may not even be that for long.”

Burrell looked at him in astonishment. Then his tone became severe.

“I shall be obliged if you confine yourself to answering my questions. What exactly is a lecturer?”

“Almost the lowest form of academic life. An assistant lecturer is worse, and you’ll meet one if you call Dennis. The rung above lecturer is reader—at least it is in this outfit. Millfield, whom I left in the waiting-room, is a reader. Then comes professor—Shouksmith in this case. Finally, there is the Grand Panjandrum himself. You’ve already met him, and that’s why you are here.”

For a wild moment Burrell thought that Dr. Lawson must be drunk. Even Asmun had stopped reading and looked up in surprise. Then, just in time, he recalled the first rule of interrogation—never stop a witness from talking, provided he has been duly cautioned.

“You knew Professor Casey well, I suppose?”

“Too well!” Nigel laughed bitterly. “I’m not going to beat about the bush. Casey and I loathed each other. You’d soon find that out, if you ask a few questions, so you might as well get it straight from me. He was, I think, manoeuvring to get me the sack. Or, at least, to force me to resign, which comes to the same thing.”

“Have you any proof of that allegation?” asked Burrell, marvelling at this candour.

“Not what *we’d* call proof. It’s a pure hypothesis.” Nigel grinned, as though at some secret joke. “As a piece of induction I consider it partially verified. Deductively—well, if you knew Casey you could deduce every kind of human rottenness. The man was a prince of charlatans. There was no humbuggery too mean for him to descend to. In other words, not even crocodile tears will be shed in the crematorium.”

Burrell nearly swallowed his toothpick. He felt that he really couldn’t allow this to go on.

“I must remind you of the seriousness of what you

are saying,” he began stiffly. “Professor Casey has been murdered—”

“What astounds me is that nobody murdered him before. But don’t worry, I didn’t do the job myself. I have a cast-iron alibi, otherwise I wouldn’t be talking like this. You ought to know, with all your experience, that the suspicious bloke is the one who keeps his mouth shut—for the very good reason that he is afraid to open it.”

“As a matter of interest,” said Burrell, as though trying to enter into the spirit of this extraordinary conversation, “what do you consider a cast-iron alibi?”

“Well, it’s a very unscientific phrase, of course. Cast-iron is by no means unbreakable. But I’ll tell you my movements at the crucial period. That is what you want to know, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Dr. Lawson, that is what I want to know.”

“At half-past six I went along to Casey’s room. I intended to have things out with him. I was prepared for a first-class row. But when I got there I heard voices—angry voices. Somebody else seemed to be having a row with him, which didn’t surprise me very much. So I went away.”

“Without opening the door?”

Nigel nodded. “Without opening the door. If I’d done so I’d have found him alone. I realized, when I entered the staff-room, that what I’d heard must have been the wireless. There was a play on and people were calling each other names. However, it was too late, then, to go back.”

“Why?”

“Because I hadn’t gone straight to the staff-room. I stopped to have a few words with Shouksmith. He’d hurt his arm—crashed on the ice trying to catch a train at Chislehurst. He was dining with the Rector at seven and he asked if I’d help him to get togged up. He was trying to finish a letter, under the already mentioned difficulties, so I went along to the staff-room and promised to be back when he was ready to change.”

“Did you notice the time?”



"Yes. If I passed Casey's door at six-thirty I must have entered Shouksmith's room about a minute later. I suppose I was in the staff-room at six thirty-five. The wireless was on and there was a fearful lot of shouting. I recall somebody crying out, 'You swine—you will be sorry for this,' so you can easily check up on the time. Then it dawned on me that I'd been fooled. But I'd promised to attend to old Shouksmith at ten to seven, so I didn't go back."

"Did you stay in the staff-room until ten to seven?"

"Thereabouts—a shade longer, I think. Anyhow, when I got back Shouksmith was struggling to dress himself. We had to hustle because he was due at the Rector's at seven. He must have been a few minutes late. I walked down the corridor with him and entered the staff-room again. We sat listening to the radio for about five minutes, but we couldn't bear it any longer. It was queer balderdash. So we switched off—and at that moment I heard someone scream."

Burrell looked very thoughtful. At last he said good-humouredly: "It is a moderate alibi, but not perfect. If we hadn't some reason to believe that another person had entered Casey's room after six-thirty it could be argued that you had invented the story of the wireless."

"Who entered?" asked Nigel, suddenly sobered.

"You will learn in due course. But it is, perhaps, fortunate for you that someone did—in view of the antagonism towards Casey that you have expressed."

"But suppose, for the sake of argument, I'd been the murderer—when Lady Casey found the body the radio was full on."

"Come, come, Dr. Lawson," said Burrell, with a smile. "That's too easy. If you'd committed the murder you could have turned the radio on yourself before leaving the room."

"Of course!" exclaimed Nigel, slapping his knee in vexation. "I hadn't thought of that—it's too obvious, I suppose."

"Let's hope that the murderer has also overlooked some point of detail equally obvious. They usually do,

Dr. Lawson. However, unless Inspector Maltby has some questions, I don't think we shall need you any more to-night."

Maltby removed his pipe from his mouth.

"There's just one little matter I'd like you to confirm. Did you have any conversation with Lady Casey after you'd led her from the room?"

Until now Nigel had been aggressive and defiant. He had spoken with a callousness that, since he wasn't drunk, seemed probably due to a form of nervousness. His attitude had had the unreality of hysteria. He seemed—at least to Asmun Hill, who had been watching him attentively—to be over-compensating for some hidden insecurity.

At the mention of Lady Casey his attitude changed. His muscles became rigid and he replied with a brevity that contrasted with his previous loquacity.

"She was very overwrought," he said, avoiding Maltby's eyes.

"Did she mention that she had had an appointment with her husband?"

"No—I mean yes. She did mention it."

"That's all, thank you," said Maltby pleasantly.

Nigel rose, then he abruptly wheeled towards the Superintendent.

"One thing I forgot. We were all joking in the staff-room about some rumour that one of the girl students was going to Casey's room for the broadcast. He'd borrowed a corkscrew—you can imagine what would be said!"

"What was the name of this girl?"

"Nanda Gochapali."

"I beg your pardon?" Burrell stammered.

"She's an Indian—a research student. We were only joking, however. There was nothing in it. Nanda Gochapali was called for as usual by her cousin and it is clear enough now that Casey was expecting his wife."

"Thank you once again, Dr. Lawson," said the Superintendent. "You can go home now if you wish to do so."

But as soon as the door had closed behind Lawson, Burrell flung away his toothpick and looked in almost comical helplessness from Asmun to Maltby. "Do you think anyone in this bunch is likely to tell me the *truth*?" he demanded.

No answer was forthcoming and he consulted the list of names on the paper in front of him.

"Dobbins next, and if he tries any shuffling I'll flay him. I wonder," Burrell added, as the constable left, "if our people have had any luck with Charles Casey?"

## CHAPTER VII

CLAUDE DOBBINS was a shrunken, colourless man with a drooping moustache and an air of profound and incurable melancholy. He had obviously been overwhelmed by the events of the night. He entered the room and sat down despondently on the edge of the chair. To find Professor Shouksmith's room full of policemen, drove home more vividly even than the sight of the draped object on a stretcher, the cataclysmic nature of the thing that had happened.

Murder! He gulped as the word kept ringing in his ears. It wasn't a nightmare. Professor Casey had been found with his head battered in. Casey . . . who always had a cheery greeting for him and on occasions tipped him handsomely. Anything he could do to help the police to find the culprit he would do gladly. And his evidence was important . . . indeed, despite his gloom, he swelled slightly as he savoured this new sensation of being important.

"Claude Dobbins?"

"That's right, sir. I live at 22 Bath Place, Pimlico. I've been a porter here for eight years and never have I had anything go wrong before. Why, even during the blitz——"

"Answer my questions, Dobbins, and I want the truth, do you understand? Anyone who conceals the truth is in danger of becoming an accessory."

"You'll get the truth from me, sir," said Dobbins grimly.

"What time do you come off duty?"

"Seven o'clock, sir."

"Now then, Dobbins, think very carefully," said Burrell sternly. "A lot may depend on your memory. Did anyone call on Professor Casey between six and seven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. A Mr. Luck."



This was not the answer that the Superintendent had been expecting. For a moment he looked at Dobbins in surprise, then he gave a groan and flopped back in the chair. Here was yet a fresh complication.

"Who is Mr. Luck?" he forced himself to ask.

"That I can't answer, sir. But he called once before—it must be about a fortnight ago. I know he came late because I was just going off duty, but the Professor was expecting him."

"Why should you remember the incident? Professor Casey, I suppose, had many callers."

"Oh, yes, people were always coming to see him. A very popular man, Sir Clifford. But I suppose it was the name that stuck in my mind. I was checking my football pool at the time, and when a man came in with a name like that I felt quite superstitious about it. I thought, so to speak, that for once luck had come my way—it hadn't though." And Dobbins sighed deeply and shook his head.

"Then you know nothing about Mr. Luck except his name? You've no idea of the nature of his business?"

"No, sir," said Dobbins, looking a trifle injured. "How would I know that?"

"What time did Mr. Luck call to-night?"

"It must have been about five and twenty past six. I remember because when the Professor said he was to come back in a quarter of an hour I looked at my watch."

"Did Mr. Luck wait?"

"No, he said he'd take a stroll. He looked very annoyed and was muttering to himself when he went away. But the Professor was engaged, so he couldn't possibly see him."

"Do you know who was with the Professor?"

"Nobody had called for him, sir. I expect he was with someone from inside, but I don't really know."

"Did Mr. Luck come back?"

"Yes, he was a minute or two longer than the quarter of an hour. And my word, he was angry then. When the Professor wouldn't see him he fairly let rip. I think

he'd have rushed upstairs if I hadn't stopped him. I had to come out of my box to make sure he went off."

"But that seems extraordinary. Professor Casey asked him to come back in a quarter of an hour, and when he came back he was told to go away again!"

"I thought at the time it was queer," Dobbins admitted. "But it was no business of mine. When I rang through Sir Clifford said, 'I can't see anyone to-night,' and banged down the receiver. As I said to Mr. Luck——"

"Never mind what you said to him," Burrell interrupted testily. "Did the Professor sound normal or upset?"

"I thought he sounded upset, sir. Not a bit like when I first rang him up, though even then he wasn't quite his usual self. It's funny how you can tell. When you are used to hearing a man on the 'phone you can almost see his expression as he's talking."

"How did you picture his expression?"

"Exasperated, sir. As though somebody was behind him and he was in a mad hurry. He had something on his mind and he was telling Mr. Luck to go to blazes—though, of course, he didn't actually say that."

"And Mr. Luck went to blazes?"

"In the end he went home. I saw him go, and he couldn't have slipped upstairs without my noticing. But he argued a lot—the Indian passed us while he was arguing."

"What Indian?"

"The Indian who fetched Miss Gochapali. He comes for her every night."

"They left together, then, while you were talking to Mr. Luck?"

"That's correct, sir. But it happens every night."

"What time did the Indian arrive?"

"He came before Mr. Luck. About five minutes earlier, I should say."

"That means he came at six-twenty and left just after six-forty. So he was inside for twenty minutes."

"Miss Gochapali keeps him waiting quite often."

Though I don't know why—she hasn't got any hat to put on. She's a real Indian, you know, and she wears her native clothes. She's a pretty girl, in her way, but I'm told she's never allowed out by herself."

Burrell selected a fresh toothpick. For several minutes he didn't speak, but he gave the impression of thinking very hard.

"Did the Professor have any other visitors?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?" Burrell urged.

"Positive."

"Would it be possible for anyone to enter the wing without your seeing them?"

Dobbins stroked his dejected moustache as he considered how to answer. He decided to be truthful. "I might have my back turned, sir. I might be answering the 'phone or even, just for a minute, looking at the headlines of the evening paper. It isn't so much my job to stop people as to help them find their way, if you follow. There's bound to be a lot of strangers going to and fro, but I've got a good memory for faces and I reckon I can tell whether a man's a suspicious character or no. It's a gift with me, sir, a kind of second sight as you might say."

"Second sight is what I need," groaned Burrell. "However, I see what you are driving at. You couldn't possibly swear that no stranger could have passed while your attention was otherwise engaged?"

"I couldn't swear to it," agreed Dobbins, with careful emphasis.

"Would you recognize Professor Casey's son? Have you ever seen him?"

"I know him by sight—he's often called here to see his father. But he didn't come to-night. At least, I didn't notice him, and he usually asks me if the Professor is in."

Burrell nodded wearily. "All right, Dobbins, you may go now. You've added to the confusion beautifully. Oh, before you leave . . . how many people are waiting to be questioned?"

"The Rector has taken Lady Casey home and I heard Dr. Lawson wish everyone good night. So that leaves Professor Shouksmith, Dr. Millfield, Mr. Dennis and Miss Carter."

"Thanks, Dobbins." And as he left Burrell scratched his name off the list. "We'll have Dr. Millfield next."

Millfield came in looking very subdued. He had spent the time while waiting by trying to recollect all his movements between six and seven o'clock.

"Frankly, Superintendent," he began, lighting a cigarette, "I couldn't do it. Both Dennis and I have been trying to account for every minute of our time and we made a rather curious discovery."

"Discovery?" echoed Burrell hopefully.

"There are blanks. You would imagine that anyone could account for what he did during the past hour. If I were asked about my movements a week ago, or even yesterday, there would be some excuse for vagueness. But an hour ago! It should be the easiest thing in the world to draw up a chronological table. I don't know whether I'm peculiar or not, but I can't do it—neither can Dennis."

"You are not peculiar," replied Burrell, with a wintry smile.

"It is a most extraordinary thing," Millfield continued. "Whenever I fix my position I can't give the precise time. I don't suffer from loss of memory, and yet it is as though I did. I suppose the answer is that we only notice what is significant. Loss of memory about what doesn't seem important is perfectly normal."

"Why should you be so anxious to supply every detail of your movements?"

Millfield shrugged his shoulders. "Lawson said that that was the sort of information you wanted. It's like going before a board, I suppose. One asks the man who has just been interviewed what sort of questions are being put."

Burrell gave a grunt that was almost a laugh, though it conveyed irritation rather than humour.

"It begins to look as though anybody in this building

might have slipped into Casey's room. If the murder was premeditated it would not take many minutes. A single blow would stun Casey, and one or two further blows would make sure that he wouldn't wake up. So long as the murderer didn't have to waste time looking for something, I'm afraid alibis aren't much use. Far fetched as it seems, even the Rector can't be excluded if we merely consider the time angle. So I find myself thrown back more and more on the problem of motive. Can you think of any reason why Casey should have been murdered?"

"No," answered Millfield decisively.

"Would you describe him as a popular man?"

"He was popular in one sense," said Millfield cautiously. "I mean his books have a big public and he was besieged with requests to lecture. But in the University—no, I shouldn't call him popular."

"Why not?"

"His other sort of popularity made it impossible. He was so busy writing and lecturing that the poor devil just couldn't find time to do his purely administrative work. I had a few words with him myself yesterday. He'd promised to recommend me for another job, but he clean forgot about it."

"And you lost the job?"

"Yes," said Millfield, frowning hard. "I was furious with him, but I would no more think of murdering him than Miss Carter would——"

"Had she, too, a grievance against him?"

"She's been sacked. I suppose in theory she ought not to complain. She is a lecturer, but she can no more deliver a lecture than fly. On the other hand, she is so good at her other work that we all felt that she should have been allowed to remain. I'm quite sure that Shouksmith would have kept her on, but although he did the chores for Casey, he wasn't able to take any real decisions."

"I see," mused Burrell. "How did you know that Casey had invited one of the students to have sherry in his room?"

The question was so unexpected that Millfield sat up with a jerk. Even Maltby nearly dropped his pipe. This, he supposed, was one of the Super's famous intuitions. It was a shot in the dark—but to Maltby's surprise it scored a bull's-eye.

"Miss Carter mentioned it to me," said Millfield.

"It's just a point of detail," Burrell explained, in a more affable tone. "I'm trying to tie everything up. Unless you can fill those blank patches in your memory I won't trouble you any more, Dr. Millfield."

And Millfield rose, looking quite relieved that he had got off so lightly. Indeed, the interview had been so short that he had not finished his cigarette.

Dennis entered a few minutes afterwards and he was asked nothing about his movements. The careful timetable he also had struggled to compose was not needed.

"I suppose you know that I quarrelled with Casey?" he blurted out, when the Superintendent asked him to give his candid opinion of his chief.

"Yes," lied Burrell cheerfully. "But I hope you are not letting it worry you? Everyone, at some time or other, seems to have quarrelled with him. I gather that his faults were due to absent-mindedness rather than malice."

"They weren't due to malice," said Dennis. "He didn't care tuppence about any of us. A man has got to matter to you before you can hate him."

"Equally, I presume, nobody *really* hated Casey?"

"Not—not in the sense that one would want to kill him. All the same," added Dennis, tightening his lip, "I rather doubt if many people will be genuinely sorry that he's dead."

"These grievances and jealousies among members of the staff occur in all walks of life," Burrell said sententiously. "But I must confess that I thought they might be less apparent among mathematicians. I've always pictured them as aloof, rather forbidding types, with none of the ordinary passions and weaknesses."

Dennis, who had been fidgeting nervously, suddenly laughed. He couldn't help it.



"We are just like other people, Superintendent. Human, all-too-human, I'm afraid!"

"Another illusion gone west!" Burrell toyed with his toothpick. "Will you give me very briefly your own version of your difference with Casey?"

"It was simply a question of whether I should join the permanent staff or not. I've got no legal right to expect it. I was taken on as a temporary, and as Casey quite rightly pointed out I entered into the engagement with my eyes open."

"Does this mean you will be thrown out of a job?"

"No, I shall easily find a job of sorts. I can earn more money as a statistician. But that is not really the sort of job I want."

"You don't want more money?"

"I *need* more money, rather badly as I've just got married. So I want it in that sense. But money doesn't mean everything to me."

"You are an idealist, Mr. Dennis," said the Superintendent, smiling at him.

"Oh, no—it's merely that I like the academic life," Dennis protested, suddenly looking embarrassed.

Burrell could think of no more questions to ask him. He rather liked Dennis and his expression showed it. "I'll see Miss Carter next, and I shan't keep her long. The people I most want to see," he added, "aren't in the waiting-room—which is what one would expect, I suppose."

Maltby made no comment. He did not approve of rushing through interviews because you felt instinctively that it was a waste of time. He decided, privately, to try and fill in the gaps left by Burrell's intuitive methods to-morrow. Both he and Burrell, however, glanced up in surprise when a small, nondescript woman entered, for there was nothing in Miss Carter's appearance to suggest that she had brains enough for mathematical research. She looked like a rather timid country governess.

"Sit down, Miss Carter," said Burrell, in a puzzled but quite amiable tone. He followed his routine technique and offered her a cigarette and was almost surprised

when she accepted. "I'm going to be very brief, because I don't think there is much you can tell us. You didn't see Casey between six and seven o'clock I suppose?"

Miss Carter shook her head.

"No," she said, in a clear and precise tone which somehow contradicted her bodily timorousness.

"Where were you most of that period?"

"Let me think." She frowned. "I was in the library until about six-fifteen. Then I came down to see a research student. I went along to the staff-room and must have entered just after Dr. Lawson. Unfortunately I can't give you the exact times. I never thought, naturally, that they would be important."

"Naturally," murmured Burrell sympathetically. "They don't matter very much, unless you happened to see anything that may have some bearing on the crime."

"I didn't see anything unusual."

"How did you know that one of the students was going along to Casey's room to listen to his broadcast?"

"You mean Miss Gochapali!" Miss Carter gave a faint start and then smiled. "She told me earlier in the day. She was worried about it, poor girl. . . ."

"Why was she worried?" pressed Burrell, as Miss Carter seemed to hesitate.

"She's an Indian, you know. And her people are very strict. She's always met at night by her cousin. She was afraid that if her cousin got to know, there would be some sort of trouble."

"For her or Casey?"

"Oh, I'm not sure. I don't think she meant anything serious. But it's difficult for us to see that point of view. It's what we would call mid-Victorian, I suppose—only more so."

"I appreciate that, Miss Carter. Still, I'd like to get this quite straight. Was there anything in Casey's attitude or relationship to her to which a reasonable person might object?"

"Good gracious, no! He wasn't like that at all."

"Then there was no question of a scandal arising?"  
 "Definitely not, Superintendent." She paused.  
 "We used to joke about it, I'm afraid, but none of us ever took the thing seriously. Casey had an eye for a pretty girl, but all he wanted was a sort of verbal flirtation, if you follow."

"Yes, I think I follow you. Still, it's somewhat unusual, surely, for a professor to invite a girl student to his room and regale her with sherry?"

"He was an unusual man. And in any case she didn't go. She must have changed her mind. She wasn't in the lab when I looked in, and someone told me she had gone home."

"You don't know whether she called on Casey to tell him that she had changed her mind?"

"I don't know that—she can tell you herself, no doubt."

"You mustn't think I attach much importance to this incident, Miss Carter. I merely have to follow up everyone's movements as a matter of routine," said Burrell, almost suavely.

"Of course."

"I'm obliged to you for being so helpful. And especially for not displaying the slightest bias. You've been very fair to Casey in view of the way he has treated you personally."

"I didn't bear him any ill-will," said Miss Carter, a trifle primly. "I don't suppose any of us could truthfully say that we liked him, but personal likes and dislikes have nothing to do with it."

"I wish all witnesses were like you, Miss Carter."

This barefaced flattery took Maltby's breath away. For a moment the colourless, desiccated-looking woman seemed to come to life under it. A flush mounted her sallow cheeks and she leaned back as though waiting for more; but already Burrell had turned to the policeman on the door.

"Call Professor Shouksmith," he said. "That will be the last."

Miss Carter left as unobtrusively as she had entered

and Burrell gazed after her, wondering what sort of woman could shut herself up in a university and spend her life doing mathematics. In an earlier age, he supposed, she would have chosen a convent, but all the same, plain and devitalized as she seemed to the eye, when she spoke she was spirited and independent.

"Good evening, Superintendent. I was wondering when I'd be called."

Burrell gazed curiously at the pale, bespectacled man who had entered and who spoke with a touch of querulousness. Here was a type, he reflected, that corresponded better than any of the others to his preconceived idea of a mathematician.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting so long, Professor," Burrell replied apologetically. "Please take a seat and I promise that I won't waste much more of your time. You were Casey's assistant, I gather? And I suppose you will succeed him as head of the department?"

"You've no right to suppose that," said Shouksmith dryly. "A new appointment will be made, but it's quite likely that a successor will be brought in from outside."

"Then your promotion is not automatic?"

"Certainly not."

"How long have you been on the staff?"

"Nineteen years."

"So your whole career has been spent in the University of Westminster?"

"Yes."

"You knew Casey intimately, I presume?"

"I knew as much about him in his professional capacity as anyone could, but I am quite unable to speak about his other activities."

"He was a man of wide—er, interests?"

"He led a very full social life. He lectured, wrote books and was also interested in city matters."

"And his recreations?" inquired Burrell smoothly.

"He played golf."

"Quite so." Burrell nodded sagely. "Tell me,

Professor, did you see him between the hours of six and seven to-night?"

"No."

"Were you in your room all that time?"

"Yes."

"You dressed for dinner in your room?"

"Yes—with Dr. Lawson's assistance."

"Would there be anything of value in Casey's room that would attract a thief? Any rare books or documents or instruments?"

Shouksmith considered. "I know of nothing in particular. Casey was a wealthy man and he collected first editions. It is not impossible that there would be books of some value, though I doubt if an ordinary thief would know enough to distinguish them."

"That's an interesting point," said Burrell musingly. "We may not, however, be dealing with an ordinary thief."

A new train of thought seemed to be opened up, and before the Superintendent could decide the best way of pursuing it Asmun Hill leaned forward.

"Did you know, Professor, that Casey was engaged on an important line of research?" he asked politely.

"No," replied Shouksmith, in such a sceptical tone that Burrell, who felt a momentary resentment at the interruption, suddenly stared at him hard.

"You think it unlikely?" Asmun ventured.

"Frankly, I do. It is not that he lacked the ability, but he had no time for serious work. His writing and his social life made it impossible for him even to do the administrative jobs of the department."

"And yet I was assured by the Rector that such was the case. Casey apparently told the Rector that he had made a very important discovery indeed and that he regarded it as the culmination of his life's work."

Shouksmith did not show surprise easily, but now his eyes grew bigger behind the thick lenses. His general attitude, however, remained one of incredulity.

"What kind of discovery?" he asked.

"The Rector didn't know. Casey was very mysterious

about it, but so confident that the Rector was impressed. What point would there be in trying to bluff in such a quarter?"

"None at all," said Shouksmith. "But I should have expected that if Casey had something like that up his sleeve he would have dropped a hint to me."

"Would you say, on the face of it, that it is unlikely for a man of fifty-three to make an important discovery in mathematics?"

"On the face of it, yes. A *really* important discovery is usually the foundation of a man's career, not the climax. Science is a young man's game nowadays, though there are exceptions. Many people, for example, would regard me as too old to do any creative work——"

"How old are you?" interrupted Burrell.

"Forty-two."

"And are you still doing creative work?" asked Asmun interestedly.

Shouksmith hesitated with the self-consciousness of a man invited to blow his own trumpet; then he shrugged his shoulders, half impatiently.

"I've probably got as good a claim as Casey to having done something worth while. I'm shortly publishing a paper which will cause a flutter in mathematical circles, though of course it will mean nothing to the outside world."

"Is it too much to ask the subject of your paper?"

"I don't make a secret of my work. All my colleagues know about it, and I'm thankful to say that they are genuinely pleased with my success. It won't mean much to you, of course, but in brief what I have done is to solve a puzzle which has tested the ingenuity of mathematicians for a very long time."

He leaned back, pressing his shoulders against the bars of the chair and gazing at the wall opposite, as though suddenly the room went dim and he was alone in the glow of his private triumph. There could be no doubt that what he had accomplished meant far more to him than he cared to show. He had no fear of being eclipsed by whatever Casey had done. It was obvious that he



didn't really believe that Casey's research could amount to very much.

Burrell, who was shrewd, thought: "There was professional jealousy between the two men. Shouksmith had the better brain, but Casey all the airs and graces. Shouksmith probably wishes Casey could have lived long enough to see himself beaten at the post."

"Did you show Casey your paper?" asked Asmun, after a thoughtful pause.

"I've not shown anyone the actual paper, but I told Casey about it. He didn't really believe I'd succeeded—for which I can hardly blame him. Hundreds of people have tried their hands at this conundrum, but some snag has always been discovered."

"I'm only an amateur," said Asmun modestly, "and I couldn't see any snag myself. I take it that you are referring to this proof of Fermat's Theorem?"

He held out the folder he had been nursing, and Shouksmith rose to take it, looking very astonished indeed.

"Where did you find it?" he began, half bewildered and half indignant.

"In Casey's desk."

"What!" Shouksmith gasped. "But it's impossible. I never gave it to him."

"Actually it was found by Superintendent Burrell. At first we supposed it was Casey's own work, but later I identified your handwriting."

Looking utterly dumbfounded Shouksmith opened the folder. He picked up a typewritten sheet and suddenly his colourless face went pink. He made a choking noise like a man who had had the wind knocked out of him.

"This typewriting isn't mine," he said, holding it up with a trembling hand. "I don't know who started typing these notes, but whoever did was copying the substance of my paper."

All at once Burrell grasped the significance of what was happening. He looked swiftly from Asmun to Shouksmith.

"Let me get this straight, Professor. That file con-

tains a paper which you regard as an important discovery—a paper you had written yourself. Am I right?"

"It's the paper I was telling you about. I was going to send it to the London Mathematical Society. But these notes—"

"Would they be the sort of notes made by someone who had secretly borrowed your paper and wished to copy out your discovery?"

"But it's unthinkable!" Shouksmith cried hoarsely. "You are suggesting that Casey was trying to steal my work, and I can't believe it!"

"I don't say Casey himself tried to do so, but whoever removed that folder from your desk and started making notes might have done so. Isn't it possible that Casey discovered the theft and—" Burrell paused significantly—"and that was why he was killed?"

"But who could have done such a thing?" protested Shouksmith, in dismay. "No one but a mathematician, and if we rule out Casey that leaves the other members of the staff. I tell you it is fantastic!"

"Did you keep your file locked up?"

"No," said Shouksmith, still looking aghast. "It was in a drawer in my desk. I never thought . . . I still can't imagine . . ."

"It was in a drawer in your desk," Burrell persisted. "Anyone who knew of its existence could have walked in and taken it. Now suppose someone decided to steal your idea and palm it off as his own. How would you prove that you'd thought of it first?"

Shouksmith threw up his hands helplessly.

"I couldn't prove it. It would be a case of my word against his."

"Suppose, for the sake of argument, it was your word against Casey's. Which do you think would be taken?"

Shouksmith licked his lips. For a minute he seemed to have lost his power of speech. Then he nodded his head slowly and a look of horrified comprehension dawned in his eyes.

"Casey's, of course—of course," he added, with sudden bitterness.

Burrell straightened. His mind seemed made up. He had the air of a man who, after floundering in a dark tunnel, suddenly saw a ray of light.

"That's all I propose to ask you to-night, Professor. We've stumbled upon a new line of inquiry, but I've no opinion yet as to whether it has any bearing on Casey's death. I won't keep you any longer, but I'll be obliged if you will say nothing at present about your paper. And I strongly advise you," he added, almost genially, "to put it somewhere safe, under lock and key."

## CHAPTER VIII

WEARING a brilliant dressing-gown, Asmun Hill lay almost flat on his back in a deep arm-chair by the fire, buried in newspapers. Smoke drifted lazily towards the ceiling as though the mound were smouldering. Very faintly the radio was playing Hindemith's Organ Sonata No. 2.

Bright, winter sunlight streamed through the window and a milk-cart rattled along the street. The room was light, extremely comfortable and outrageously untidy. The remains of coffee and toast were on a tray beside the armchair.

The door opened and a manservant entered. He was a powerful, broad-shouldered man. The heavy pouches under his eyes and the steady mournfulness of his expression gave him the appearance of a bloodhound. He looked like a thug who had been compelled to retire from business owing to incurable melancholy.

"Have you finished breakfast, sir?" he asked respectfully.

"Hullo, Joab—yes, you can clear."

"I gather, sir, that you didn't have a very satisfying dinner last night," said Joab, picking up the tray.

"I didn't have any dinner at all. That's why I plundered the kitchen and demolished what was left of the chicken. I was ravenous, Joab, by the time I got back, which must have been midnight."

"A most unfortunate evening, sir. I—I read the papers."

"It was not unfortunate for everybody, Joab, not by a long chalk. Most of the obituaries read as though Casey himself wrote them. You don't want to believe a word of it. Sir Clifford Casey was a much-hated man."

"And yet, sir," said Joab gravely, "as my late employer, the Earl of St. Jermyn, used to say, *de mortuis*—"



"Spare me, Joab!" Asmun begged. "Whenever I hear that miserable tag I want to scream. The only time one has a chance of learning the truth, and of repeating it without risk of a libel action, is when a man is dead. And when a man has been murdered the truth happens to be important."

Joab eyed his employer thoughtfully.

"Were you able to give the police any assistance, sir?"

"Not much, I'm glad to say. But they'll be after me again soon. I'm expecting a visit this morning, because they are completely out of their depths." Asmun threw away his cigarette and lit another. "It's a most extraordinary affair. I don't want to touch it, and yet it fascinates me. There are at least half a dozen solutions that fit equally well. Everyone concerned loathed Casey, and anyone could have done the horrid deed."

"Then you'll take part in the investigations, sir," said Joab confidently. "I've heard you talk like this before."

"I realize it's no use struggling," Asmun sighed. "I'm convinced that Casey deserved all he got. He himself was guilty of the most heinous crime that any scientist can commit. It's infinitely worse than cheating at cards or forging a cheque, and yet legally there's no penalty for it. The only possible punishment, short of murdering him, would have been to expose him. If the truth had come out we should have had a scandal without parallel. His name would have stunk in the nostrils of all decent men." Asmun stood up, kicking some of the newspapers aside. "I feel strongly, Joab. I can tolerate most things, but for me this is the sin that cannot be forgiven. And I feel more like congratulating Casey's murderer than handing him over to the hangman."

Joab looked worried.

"Have you formed any idea of the identity of the murderer, sir?"

"I'd be prepared to hit quite heavily on it, though I realize I may be wrong. I need a good deal more

evidence before I shall mention my suspicions. And, as you know, I don't have much luck as a punter."

"Nor do I, sir, but if I can bring off a double once a year I'm satisfied. Will you be staying in town long, sir?"

"Not if I can help it. I'm trying to fix up this Armenian expedition, but the Turkish Government are being awkward. If only I could clear that business up I'd go back to Oxford, whatever Scotland Yard say."

"The Duchess will be in town next week—"

"Then I must get out of it," broke in Asmun energetically. "I know my sister, and I refuse to be caught up in any social nonsense. If I get within a hundred miles of her she starts arranging a suitable marriage for me."

"I suppose, sir, it will come to it one day."

"I suppose so," said Asmun grimly. "But I shall go down fighting."

The ghost of a smile touched Joab's lugubrious features as he left the room. Asmun, however, was not smiling; he had thrust his hand in his pocket and brought out a bundle of notes, hastily scribbled. They were his first impressions after listening to the various witnesses last night—all the queries and conjectures that had passed through his mind, but which he had kept to himself. He frowned at them and suddenly threw them on the fire. The paper blazed and as it turned to ash he felt a relief go over him.

Casey's death had been so violent and unexpected that it had torn open the privacies of many people associated with him. The interiors of their lives were suddenly exposed to the public gaze and it all seemed beastly and cruel. For what man or woman had no secrets to hide? Every one of those interviewed last night had been struggling painfully to readjust the mask that he or she wore before the world. Casey alone had been unable to cover the ugliness of his real self. The mask of the suave, popular, society idol, of the famous man spoken of with bated breath, lay beside that sprawling corpse and could not be replaced.

A character, thought Asmun, for the psycho-analyst rather than the dissecting slab. An autopsy on his brain would reveal little that one did not already know. But if one could see into the mind of the man, with its incredible blend of humbug and genuine ability, its astuteness and adolescent sentimentality, its *bonhomie* and ruthlessness . . . would it not be possible to read his fate like a horoscope? If the qualities that drove a man to murder existed potentially, like the oak of the acorn, did not the qualities which made a man the victim of murder?

It was an intriguing possibility—that the victim, because of what he was, drew down his own doom. The least different twist in his character might mean that his fate would be different. In other words he attracted the attention of the man who killed him because he, and he alone, was capable of attracting that sort of attention. If you knew enough about the victim you would know that he ran the risk of being murdered, to put it no more strongly. You would be able to predict his friends and his enemies and the sort of intrigues in which he would engage—with all their dangers. So the first essential, in order to find out who had murdered Casey, was to gather every possible bit of information about Casey himself; which was the very opposite to the police method of obtaining information first about others.

Asmun started to pace slowly up and down, his brows drawn in thought. He had put forward this theory before and been scoffed at. Maltby, for example, declared that the proper procedure was to study the characters of all who might have had any motive to commit a murder. But in any case, it was easier to discover the truth about one man than several, especially if the man was dead and so unable to obstruct the inquiry or resort to disguises.

"Well," decided Asmun, looking through the window at Mount Street, "we shall see. Quite likely we are burrowing into the mountain from opposite sides, in which case we ought to meet in the middle."

Then his eyes twinkled and he leaned forward. For

he saw a black, saloon car stop outside. A stocky man, wearing a bowler hat, got out and mounted the steps importantly.

There was no escape. With a sigh, Asmun gathered up the newspapers and dumped them on a chair. He poked the fire, and as he straightened up the door opened and Joab announced Inspector Maltby.

"Good morning, sir," Maltby began affably. "I was passing, so I thought I'd drop in for a chat if you weren't too busy."

"My dear fellow, sit down; delighted to see you," Asmun said affably.

"I want to thank you, first of all, for the help you gave us last night——"

"Rot! I hardly opened my mouth," Asmun protested.

"The Superintendent was prejudiced against you at first, which is only natural I suppose. But he was very impressed by the end of the evening. If it hadn't been for you we shouldn't have had the foggiest idea what that mathematical stuff was about. We'd have missed the whole point of it."

"There were plenty of better qualified people on the spot who could have put you wise. Anyhow, is it important?"

"They weren't impartial witnesses," said Maltby firmly. "As for being important—well, I haven't made up my mind yet. A good deal has happened since I saw you. I thought you might like to hear the latest developments."

Asmun dropped into the chair opposite Maltby and eyed him keenly for a moment. The square, rugged face was like a solid rock of English common sense. Patient, plodding, honest and unassuming, Maltby had none of the vices and most of the virtues of his profession. He had something more; for Asmun remembered how resolutely, in his spare time, Maltby tried to educate himself. He had diligently read "the hundred best books" and had taught himself a good deal of French and some Latin. He had tried manfully to keep abreast of the

latest developments in science, and the sort of stuff that Casey wrote ought to have been right up his street.

"We've put in some pretty hard work," Maltby began, as he filled his pipe. "The Super didn't go home until half-past three this morning and he was at his desk again at nine. He's a terror when he gets started, but I like him. You mustn't mind his manner, sir. He's brusque with everybody and I'm afraid it's told against him."

"I don't think he handed out any rough treatment last night. Indeed——"

"Not at the University, but you should have seen him afterwards, sir. He showed his teeth to Charles Casey—and also to Gochapali."

"So you found Casey?"

"We located him at the Orange Club. Ever heard of it, sir?"

"I'm not well up in night-clubs," said Asmun, shaking his head regretfully. "But I gather it's not the sort of place where one would entertain one's mother-in-law?"

"Or even one's wife," said Maltby, with a chuckle. "No, it's one of the worst of the expensive sort. But the amazing thing was that the detective who found Charles stumbled across another missing witness purely by accident at the same club."

"The Indian?"

"No, this man Luck. He was there quite independently, I believe. He frequents places like the Orange regularly. We've nothing definite against him because he's always been too clever for us. He's a very bad hat indeed, but I'd better deal with Charles first. We found him dining with Becky Claire. You've heard of her, I expect?"

"I'm ashamed to say I haven't."

"She's been in the newspapers quite a lot. She comes of a very good family, but they can do nothing with her. She drinks like a fish, and when she's got no money she helps herself to anything lying around. Her people have tried everything, and at last they seem to have washed their hands of her. But she is—or was—extraordinarily

beautiful. And it seems that Charles Casey is crazy about her."

"Rather an embarrassing son for such a distinguished father," remarked Asmun.

"Charles and Becky are birds of a feather. Why two young people should turn out like that, after a good upbringing and education, I can't fathom. I suppose there's a rottenness in them and nothing can be done about it. I mention Becky merely to illustrate how low Charles has fallen—and how extravagant he is."

"Then he hasn't much money of his own?"

"Not a bean. He was very frank last night. He admitted that he was on bad terms with his father. His grievance seems to be that most of Casey's money came from his first wife, and Casey refused to let him have any of it."

"Didn't she leave Charles anything?"

"Not legally. But Charles thinks that morally his father was merely a trustee and ought to fork out whenever necessary. I think Charles is quite sincere in that belief and it rather looks as though Casey had been harsh. The two seem to have disliked each other intensely, quite apart from this dispute about money."

"Was Charles fond of his mother?"

"Very. In fact that seemed to be the one redeeming feature about him."

Asmun nodded meditatively. "He probably hated his father for marrying again. Did you ever read Freud?"

"I once tried, but it was too much for me," said Maltby truthfully. "But if it would help me to solve this infernal puzzle I'd have another shot."

Asmun smiled affectionately. "I shouldn't bother. What time did Charles call on his father? Or does he deny having done so?"

"He denied it at first, then Burrell showed his trump. He told him he'd been seen by Eunice. I've never seen a witness look more taken aback or more angry. He seemed to forget what it meant to himself to be caught out in such a lie. He jumped up, trembling with rage,



and then he looked triumphant. 'So it was that trollop! Then, a bit late, he realized what he had admitted. He couldn't draw back and he had to go on. He said that he had called on his father to ask for money. He hadn't notified him when he would call and he dodged past the porter in case his father should send down a message that he was engaged. When Charles entered the room he found his father dead.'

"Did he notice the time?"

"Five minutes to seven. He was so horrified, he said, that his one thought was to get away before anyone saw him. He was brutally frank. He said it was so obvious that his father was dead that it didn't occur to him to ring for a doctor. In view of his bad relations with his father, and the surreptitious way he had entered the building, he decided that the safest plan would be to let someone else make the discovery."

"Reasonable enough, in the circumstances. So he didn't touch a thing? He walked out—little knowing that Eunice was approaching the room and would spot him?"

"We only have her word that she was approaching the room and not leaving it," said Maltby significantly.

"That's true," Asmun admitted, looking at the Inspector in appreciation. "But you are inclined to believe Charles?"

"He mentioned one item that I think most people would have kept quiet about, if they had a guilty conscience. He volunteered the information that he had turned on the wireless."

"In heaven's name, *why?*" cried Asmun in amazement.

"He said he was so scared someone would go into the room before he got out of the building that the impulse came to him to switch on the wireless. Anyone passing would then think that Casey was engaged—because there was a radio play on and it sounded like ordinary conversation from the corridor. Anyhow, he says he had to do *something* and that made him feel just a little safer."

Asmun smoked ruminatingly.

"How does this fit with Lawson's story that the wireless was on when he passed the door?"

"It fits in beautifully. The Super was thorough enough to get a check on the wireless play. At the time when Lawson heard a violent quarrel there was really a love scene. So we may take it that Lawson was wrong—he didn't hear the wireless, and it wasn't switched on until much later, probably at six fifty-five, by Charles. What Lawson must have heard was the row between Casey and Gochapali."

"The picture grows, my dear Maltby. You've got more dramatic sense than I should have suspected. So the mysterious oriental now enters. He went to Casey, I presume, to protest at his highly ambiguous interest in the lovely Nanda?"

"There's nothing very mysterious about Gochapali. He was perfectly open. He said he told Casey that his conduct was disgraceful and ought to be exposed. If any further suggestions were made to Nanda he would protest to the Rector of the University. Having given Casey a piece of his mind he took Nanda home."

"And passed Mr. Luck on the way out." Asmun leaned back, joining his hands behind his head. "Who, then, is Mr. Luck? Because although he never gained admission I feel that he has an important place in this puzzle."

"Luck is a bookseller. There was a book in Casey's room bearing the imprint of his Hannon Street shop. He declares that Casey wanted to see him about some first editions. These had been delivered and Casey was going to pay for them, and that was the reason for his visit."

"An unusual way of doing business, isn't it?"

"So we suggested," Maltby said dryly. "Luck replied that there was some argument about the price—and also about the authenticity of the books. We couldn't get too rough with him, because we've no evidence that he saw Casey last night."

"Yet you don't trust him?"

"Trust him! Luck's one of the smoothest black-

guards I've ever met in my life. He's a highly educated man and once held a good position. But he went off the rails some years ago and has been living on his wits ever since. He specializes in the subtler kinds of blackmail. He deals in rare books right enough, and some of them are genuine, though how he got possession of them is another matter. Others are the sort of books that some men will pay a big price for and keep in a locked drawer."

"Charming fellow, evidently," observed Asmun. "I've a good mind to look him up."

"I wish you would, sir," said Maltby earnestly. "I don't know much about first editions and I'd like your opinion as to whether there was anything phoney about Luck's dealings with Casey. We can't find anything wrong with his story so far. And even if he managed to enter the building unseen—which would have been possible, because Charles managed it—why on earth should he murder Casey? There's some sense in a blackmailer being murdered, but it would be lunacy for a blackmailer to murder his victim."

"I'll certainly call on Luck," Asmun promised. "But to return to Charles—what would he gain by the death of his father?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing." Maltby shook his head in despair. "If it weren't for that we'd have detained him, even if we didn't arrest him. So long as his father was alive he could screw an occasional cheque out of the old man. It was getting more difficult, but it wasn't utterly impossible. But now that Casey is dead I don't think Charles will get a penny out of Eunice. They hate each other like poison."

"So Charles doesn't benefit from the will?"

"He's not mentioned in it. Practically the whole estate goes to Eunice. Something in the neighbourhood of a quarter of a million."

Asmun whistled softly.

"That makes one think, Maltby. It's a big reward for a single blow."

"It certainly does make one think. There are a lot

of muddling details in the case, but I think that's because we are looking at a close-up. When you stand back you can see things in better proportion. For example, Casey seems to have been unpopular with his staff. There was a whole network of office intrigue and petty jealousy, but none of that seems to me particularly surprising or important. Similarly, Casey's crush on this Indian student, though it reveals something about his character, was a storm in a teacup. Gochapali *could* have hit him, in a fit of rage, but I don't believe that's the answer. As for that mathematical discovery—it seems plain enough now that Casey stole the thing from Shouksmith. He was going to palm that discovery off as his own. I don't quite follow the psychology—"

"Oh, the psychology is easy enough," broke in Asmun. "Casey was taken seriously by the general public but not by his fellow scientists. That was a very sore point. If he could produce a proof of Fermat's Theorem, his fellow scientists would have to revise their opinion of him very drastically. It mattered, Maltby, it mattered to him tremendously. If he could have brought that off I should say it would have ended all his sense of frustration."

"But I don't see how he could have looked poor Shouksmith in the face. Why, if I'd been Shouksmith, and someone had done a trick like that to me . . ." Maltby stopped abruptly and removed his pipe from his mouth. There was an expression of incredulity on his face. "Good Lord, suppose—but I *can't* believe it!"

"You mean Shouksmith himself might have discovered what Casey had done and hit him on the head, as he richly deserved. I don't think that will do, however. For one thing, if Shouksmith had discovered it at that stage he could have denounced Casey and utterly ruined him. There would be no need to murder him. The humiliation of such an exposure would be worse punishment. And for another thing—Shouksmith would have removed the papers from Casey's desk."

"Yes, of course," agreed Maltby, drawing a deep breath. "I mentioned it because it suddenly came into

my head. Do you mind my thinking aloud like this? I find it very helpful."

"Carry on, by all means. Though I might add that we don't *know* that Casey pinched Shouksmith's discovery. Casey may have found that someone else had pinched it; and that 'someone else' might have clouted him."

"Yes," agreed Maltby uneasily, "but don't let's make it too complicated yet. Don't let's forget that Eunice will inherit a quarter of a million pounds. Compared with a fact like that everything else fades into insignificance. And Eunice found the body!"

"A gyroscope is not the sort of weapon I'd expect a woman to use," Asmun protested, but with such a lack of conviction that Maltby gave a smile.

"She told us one lie, remember. She said she had an appointment with Casey at seven o'clock—that the sherry was for her and that they were going out to dinner after. That was a calculated lie, because we now know quite well that the sherry was for Nanda Gochapali. And Casey was hardly likely to invite his wife as well. Why should she have lied?"

"For that matter, if she'd murdered him why didn't she slip quietly away like Charles? Why did she call attention to herself by screaming?"

"Her nerve might have broken. It's a point to you, however, and I admit it. But there's one piece of evidence you don't know about. In Casey's pocket we found a letter, torn up in small pieces. It might have been the letter of a lover to Eunice, and I have a copy of it." Maltby drew out his wallet and began to read from a typewritten sheet: "My darling, it's over a week since I saw you and I can't go on like this any longer. I know how you feel—that it's madness, that it's dangerous, that we must stop before it is too late. But we've gone too far to draw back now. I can't bear to think what you have to endure from Humpty. I suddenly realize how it is possible to hate another man so much that you wish him dead. Don't worry though—I shan't murder him. There's no need, because if ever he makes trouble I've

got a very good way of shutting him up. I've found out something that puts him just where I want him. But I've got to see you and tell you about it. I'll be waiting at the usual place to-morrow for lunch and if you don't turn up I'll ring you. Don't worry, darling—there's nothing more to fear from Humpty—With all my love, yours ever, Jumbo."

As Maltby returned the letter to his wallet Asmun's expression became grave. It was as though he suddenly realized that he was not taking part in a charade but in the grimmest of all quests. Over and over again in his mind he heard the old nursery jingle:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.  
All the King's horses and all the King's men  
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.*

He bent down and threw a log on the fire, then he shivered as though a cold draught had struck him.

"Who is Jumbo?" he asked at last.

"That's what we are anxious to know. The Super has gone down to see Eunice this morning."

"It's a queer letter," Asmun muttered. "Once again there's the hint of blackmail. I expect Mr. Luck would have liked to have a few letters like that."

"Perhaps he had some."

"What does it convey to you, Maltby? How does it explain why Eunice decided to pay a visit to her husband at seven o'clock last night?"

"It suggests, I think, that her tears were of the glycerine variety. She'd been an actress, remember. The letter shows that she was having a pretty hectic love-affair. And to be found out meant the risk of divorce and the loss of all the money that would come to her on Casey's death. I'm not accusing her of murdering him, I merely say she had a powerful motive and easy opportunity."

"That letter is valueless," said Asmun, suddenly standing up. "It would be torn to ribbons if ever it were read in court—and so would you be for building



anything on it. There's not the slightest evidence that it's addressed to Eunice or that 'Humpty' stands for Casey. The fact that it was found in Casey's pocket proves nothing at all."

Maltby gasped and looked into Asmun's reproving eyes in almost comical dismay.

"But who else——" he stammered.

"I don't know and that's not the point. You've no earthly right to assume on the strength of that letter that Eunice is unfaithful to her husband. She may have been, but we've no evidence, and if you try any short cuts in a case of this sort you'll come a cropper." Asmun relented and pulled off his dressing-gown. "If I go along to the Yard with you now, will you be able to give me the details of the books that Luck claims he sold to Casey?"

"Certainly," said Maltby eagerly. "Are you going to see Luck?"

"I'd like to see Eunice also, if Burrell has no objection. I'd very much like to have a look at Casey's bookshelves."

"The Super won't mind, he'll be only too delighted. The book angle is a bit beyond us. Is there anything you expect to find?"

Asmun shook his head.

"Nothing about the murderer. I'm leaving him to the police," said Asmun, with an ironical smile. "The man who baffles me at the moment is Casey. Anyone at once so popular and detested, so successful and so frustrated, so eminent and so unscrupulous, so brilliant and so stupid is a fascinating study. I feel I can't hope to know much about the murderer until I know more about the victim."

"Your old theory! I remember arguing it out with you on the edge of Dartmoor."

"But I was right," said Asmun, squeezing the Inspector's arm. "You've got to admit I was right. Will you excuse me while I fetch my coat?"

## CHAPTER IX

"GOOD morning, Mr. Hill," greeted Burrell cheerfully. "You've come just in time."

Asmun looked at the Superintendent in some surprise at the warmth of this welcome. Burrell was sitting at a desk in the corner of a small room which overlooked the Embankment. He looked none the worse for having been up most of the night. His eyes were bright and sparkling and his hair was gummed down so tightly that it looked like a wig.

"I got rather stuck," Burrell continued, rubbing his hands breezily, "when I was writing up my report about that mathematical theory. I'd be glad if you'd vet it for me. And perhaps you can tell me another thing—is there any hard cash to be gained by such a discovery?"

"I rather fancy that a German prize was offered before the war," replied Asmun. "Something like one hundred thousand marks, I believe. But it wouldn't be worth anything now."

"Would it put a man in the running for the Nobel Prize, or anything like that?"

Asmun shrugged his shoulders.

"You miss the point, I'm afraid. In the first place a money prize wouldn't tempt a wealthy man like Casey, and in the second place the real reward can't be measured in financial terms."

"More idealism, eh? But I'm not altogether sure that I believe——"

"There's nothing necessarily idealistic about it," Asmun said shortly. "Money isn't the only thing men go after. Power and fame are at least as important."

"But they lead to money. If a man makes a big discovery he'll almost certainly be offered a better-paid job. And there were several people on Casey's staff looking for better jobs." Burrell took a toothpick from his waistcoat pocket. "I'm not convinced that Casey

stole that discovery. I think it's equally likely that he merely found out it had been stolen. He'd come across a first-class scandal, in my opinion, and he was killed before he could take any action."

"That's perfectly possible, of course——"

"Anyhow, I'm going to act on that assumption. The only way to test it is to collect gossip from the staff. There are just three people—Lawson, Millfield and Miss Carter, and if any one of them had been working on the lines of that discovery there's bound to be some evidence. They must have got out books on the subject or left papers dealing with it lying about. Do you follow me?"

"It's an idea, certainly," admitted Asmun.

"We rather jumped to conclusions," continued Burrell. "There's even another alternative; for example, someone with a grievance against Casey might have *planted* Shouksmith's paper in his desk. The idea would be to discredit Casey, to take a rather subtle form of revenge. We are dealing with subtle people, Dr. Hill, and by thunder, we are also dealing with people up to the neck in grievances!"

Asmun's irritation left him. Although Burrell charged at his problems like a bull at a gate he had a good deal of astuteness. What he suggested was a perfectly possible state of affairs.

"So what we want to know is the sort of research, if any, that Casey was engaged on," resumed the Superintendent. "And also the kind of work that the rest of the staff were doing. Frankly, neither I nor Maltby can hope to find that out. We could have all the evidence staring us in the face and yet be too ignorant to see its relevance. Can I rely on you to help us?"

"So you are calling in the amateur!" Asmun smiled.

"No, Dr. Hill, I'm calling in the expert, which is another pair of shoes. And to be quite blunt—I don't believe this had any connection with the murder. It has to be investigated, because I'm a thorough man, but things have moved fast since last night. Even you, Maltby"—he glanced exultantly at the Inspector—"are hopelessly out-of-date."

He picked up a telephone and said: "Bring Casey in now."

"Casey!" the Inspector exclaimed, taking a stride forward.

"Yes, Maltby," said Burrell, replacing the receiver. "He was all packed and ready to leave London. He was stopped as soon as he entered his car."

"You don't mean you've arrested him?"

"I'm just about to do so."

The door opened and a detective came in, carrying a suit-case and preceded by a young man in a somewhat effeminately cut, double-breasted lounge suit. Charles Casey bore only a slight resemblance to his father. He was too good-looking, with fair wavy hair and a sunburn acquired by ultra-violet rays. It was in vain that he tried to look indignant; his lips were pale and he had a nervous twitch.

"Now, Mr. Casey," began Burrell, with dangerous pleasantness, "why did you try to leave London though you were warned not to do so?"

"Why the devil shouldn't I?" retorted Charles. "You've got no right to make me stay here."

"Come now, we were trying to be as considerate as possible. We could have detained you, as you well know, but I deliberately allowed you to go after you had promised not to leave town."

"I was free to do as I pleased," Charles snapped. "Either a man is arrested or he's free."

"It isn't quite so simple as that in a murder case."

"But you don't suppose I killed the old man? He was dead when I found him—as I told you—and the doctor ought to be able to say how long he'd been dead."

"He hadn't been dead long. However, where were you and Miss Claire going?"

"I'd booked rooms at the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne. It was all perfectly above board. If I'd been trying to run away I wouldn't have booked a room in my own name."

Burrell made a gesture towards the suit-case and the detective opened it. To Maltby's astonishment he drew



out ten bundles of pound notes, each secured by a rubber band, and placed them on the desk in front of Burrell.

"Is this your money, Mr. Casey?"

"Yes," Charles said, catching his breath.

"Each of these bundles contains fifty pounds, which makes a total of five hundred. Was this to cover your expenses at Eastbourne?"

"Why not?"

"Where did you get these notes from?"

"That's my affair," retorted Charles. "It was a business transaction which I don't choose to talk about."

"I'm afraid you'll have to talk about it," said Burrell grimly.

"All right—I won it at gambling. But I'm not telling you where I played. I don't give the addresses of my friends to the police."

"Just as well, perhaps, Mr. Casey. You refuse to say anything further?"

"Absolutely," answered Charles defiantly.

"You are perfectly within your rights. But I have to point out to you that the serial numbers of some of those notes were taken when they were drawn from the bank. They were drawn out yesterday morning by your father."

Charles stiffened, but he remained obstinately silent.

"The whole five hundred was drawn out by your father and placed in a leather brief-case—in the same case that was found on his desk beside his body. It was examined for fingerprints and several clear sets were obtained. They have been identified as yours."

"Are you accusing me of robbing my father, as well as murdering him?" asked Charles indignantly.

"You will be charged with stealing five hundred pounds from your father. In the circumstances I advise you not to make a statement until you have seen a solicitor."

Charles looked very shaken, despite his braggadocio.

"Very clever," he sneered. "You are going to hold me on this trumped-up charge while you manufacture the evidence that I murdered him. But you won't

succeed, because I had nothing to gain. If you want to know who stood to gain, who really hated him, I'll tell you——"

"That'll do," broke in Burrell curtly. "Take him away."

Charles was bundled out of the room so quickly that he hadn't a chance to protest. For a moment his muffled shouting was heard in the passage outside.

"You pulled a fast one on me, Super," said Maltby, staring ruefully at the pile of money on the desk after the door had been closed.

"I'm afraid it's a blind alley," Burrell sighed. "However, I had to arrest the young fool. When he comes to his senses he'll probably admit that he entered his father's room, found him dead, saw all that money beside him and decided to bolt with it. I wish I could believe that it solved our main problem, but I'm afraid it doesn't."

"But why should Casey draw out five hundred pounds and take it to his office?"

"It's a poser!"

"Blackmail!" exclaimed Maltby. "The whole case reeks of blackmail. Why, even that letter we pieced together mentioned some discovery that could be used to threaten Casey. And there's the visit of Luck—but why in tarnation did Casey refuse to see him?"

"That also puzzles me," admitted Burrell. "We know for a fact that Luck is a blackmailer. We know that Luck had an appointment with Casey and that the latter had brought with him five hundred pounds in cash. The conclusion that it was hush money seems irresistible. But why did Casey change his mind and refuse to pay it over?"

"He agreed to see him at first. He must have been talking to Gochapali when Luck arrived. He told him to come back in a quarter of an hour." Maltby suddenly struck the desk with the palm of his hand. "How's this? Suppose the blackmail was somehow connected with Nanda? Suppose, during the row with Gochapali, Casey realized that the Indian knew what he was trying

to keep hidden? If the secret was out there was no longer any reason to pay, so he told Luck to clear off."

"Since we are indulging in guesswork," ventured Asmun, "may I make another suggestion? It is possible, you know, that Casey didn't change his mind—that he never refused to see Luck."

"But we've got the evidence of Dobbins. You don't suggest that the porter is lying?"

"Dobbins may have been mistaken, though. Indeed, he said that Casey did not sound himself—that his voice was strange and agitated. Suppose it wasn't Casey who replied?"

"Then who do you think it was?"

"The murderer."

There was a sudden silence. Burrell stared at Asmun in astonishment and Maltby chewed his pipe thoughtfully.

"I know," continued Asmun apologetically, "that's not a very welcome idea because at the back of your mind you don't think the murderer was a man—"

"I've never said so," broke in Burrell, bristling. "We can't exclude Eunice, naturally—but there may have been a man as well. As you say, we are just guessing."

"But it's legitimate guesswork. We must frame a hypothesis and test it. Have you a sort of time-table? Because if I'm right we know that the murderer was in Casey's room when Luck returned."

"I've got a rough draft," muttered Burrell, opening his drawer. "Take a look at it. But remember that those times haven't all been checked. Somebody may be lying."

"We can take it for granted that the murderer at least is lying," remarked Asmun, as Burrell handed him a typewritten sheet. The main events between six and seven o'clock were set out in chronological order as follows:

- 18.00 hours. Luck leaves bookshop in Hannon Street.
- 18.05 .. Vera, the Caseys' maid, answers the 'phone when Charles asks for his father.
- 18.20 .. Gochapali arrives at the University.

- 18.25 hours. Gochapali sees Casey.
- 18.30 " Lawson overhears Gochapali and Casey quarrelling.
- 18.30 " Eunice leaves home.
- 18.31 " Lawson enters Shouksmith's room.
- 18.35 " Lawson leaves Shouksmith and goes to staff-room.
- 18.42 " Luck returns and Casey refuses to see him.
- " Gochapali and Nanda leave.
- 18.52 " Lawson leaves staff-room and goes to help Shouksmith get dressed.
- 18.55 " Charles enters the building.
- 18.57 " Shouksmith and Lawson leave room together.
- 18.58 " Eunice enters the building.
- 19.00 " Charles leaves, after being seen by Eunice.
- 19.05 " Eunice discovers the body and summons help.
- 19.10 " Rector informed of murder.

After studying it critically Asmun turned again to Burrell.

"Nothing here about Millfield or Dennis or Miss Carter," he remarked. "Have you ruled them out?"

"By no means," replied Burrell, looking aggrieved. "I'm having a plan made of the mathematics wing. I shall fix everyone's position by means of a pin. I've tried that method before and it's a useful trick. I have a man now checking up on everybody's movements—and I don't think you can say I've let grass grow under my feet," he added.

"No, Super, you've been a volcano of activity," said Asmun hastily. "However, if we take this time-table provisionally, it's clear that the murder must have occurred after the time that Lawson passed Casey's door and before Luck reappeared—in other words, between eighteen thirty and eighteen forty-two. Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Burrell hesitantly. "If it was the murderer, and not Casey, who spoke to Dobbins at eighteen-forty-two, the reason must have been that Casey was already dead."

"So we have to narrow down our account of movements to those twelve minutes. That is a simplification, I think. It rules out the Indian—and it looks as though we may ignore Luck, as a suspect."

"It doesn't rule out Eunice, though. She could have got down in time by a taxi. And she needn't have come

alone. She could have brought someone with her, and they could both have entered the side door without being seen."

"Why invent another character?" objected Asmun. "That's not playing the game."

"I don't need to invent one. There's Jumbo to be fitted into the picture. Suppose they came together, determined to have a show-down? Casey was at his most objectionable and one of them—it might have been the man—lost his temper and hit him. Then the 'phone rang and Dobbins said that someone had an appointment with Casey. He imitated Casey's voice, as best he could, and Luck went away, fuming with rage."

"It's as good a theory as any other—at present," Asmun admitted, rather to Burrell's surprise. "We shan't make any further progress until we discover the real reason why Eunice went to her husband's room."

"If she weren't shielding someone she'd tell us. But I'll get the truth out of her," Burrell vowed.

"Good luck to you, Super," said Asmun, with a sudden heartiness that had a trace of mockery. "*Magna est veritas* and so on. Can you let me have a list of those books that Luck said that Casey was buying from him?"

"Here you are, sir. Though I don't for a moment believe that that was their real business. There are four books—the titles are on that card. I don't feel like trying to pronounce them."

"Thanks, Super," said Asmun, smiling as he pocketed the card. "As you say, it smells of good red herring, but one never knows. Good day to you."

"Where are you going?" cried Maltby, turning to him in dismay.

"Lunch," said Asmun firmly. "I'm not missing any more meals if I can help it."

Asmun walked along the Embankment to the Savoy, which seemed the nearest reasonable place in which to eat. He was glad that Maltby hadn't offered to accompany him. He wanted to be alone so that he could sort out his ideas.

He knew now that there could be no turning back. He was in the thing too deep and he must see it through. Moreover, his attitude was undergoing a stealthy change. As a mere spectator he had felt no overwhelming obligation to take sides. He had always believed, for example, that he was entitled to please himself whether he helped an escaped convict or even a murderer to evade the law. His sympathies, to start with, were always with the fox.

But insensibly they were changing. There were features in this case that hardened him despite himself. For suppose Casey were not the only one to die? Suppose—next time in self-defence—the murderer struck again? Or suppose, which came to the same thing, an innocent person were arrested and was in danger of being hanged?

It might well be, despite the glowing obituaries in the Press, that Casey was no great loss. But to blot him out of existence, to strike him down for sheer personal gain . . . No, that could not be tolerated.

He handed in his hat and coat and went to the cocktail bar. He looked around rather nervously, in case he might be recognized, and he wilted visibly when he saw a tall man, with a monocle, who waved a glass at him. He signalled back that he was not alone and the danger of lurching with the most boring person of his acquaintance passed. Then he entered the dining-room and was greeted warmly by the head waiter. He was taken to a small table in the far corner, and he sat down and gave his mind to the wine list.

He had an excellent lunch with a bottle of Margaux '18, a light, soft wine that put him in a good humour. He felt a large tolerance towards the world, even towards Scotland Yard. They were remarkably efficient, he reflected. The speed with which the great machine had operated was remarkable. Nor was there any other way conceivable of collecting the necessary facts. Fingerprints, photographs, alibis—all these were sorted out as though by a computing machine. Motives, however, were another question.

There was no machine for analysing human motives,



nor would there ever be unless Asmun's whole philosophy was mistaken. But there were rules of reasoning, there was a technique of logic . . . and that was where the police were apt to go wrong. Burrell, he was convinced, would not act until he had built up a powerful case. But Burrell's own mind was made up, however much he might deny it. Burrell believed, on the strength of an experience that must be respected, that Casey was murdered for profit—for the quarter of a million that he had left.

A quarter of a million was a lot of money. Many a murder had been committed for less—for less even than the £500 that had tempted Charles. And if, in addition to a quarter of a million pounds, there was freedom to be won . . .

Asmun glanced up with a subconscious awareness that someone was staring at him. He looked across at a table against the wall and saw a pretty, platinum blonde suddenly drop her champagne glass. It slipped from a small hand that glittered with diamonds and was smashed. A startled waiter rushed up to collect the pieces, and with a sense of shock Asmun recognized the beautiful if somewhat unreal face of Eunice Casey.

She looked at him, for a moment, in dismay, then she gave a ghastly smile of recognition. Asmun smiled back and bowed slightly. He noticed that she was with a well-dressed, good-looking, rather prosperous man, possibly a few years her senior.

"Well, well," he reflected, "this grows interesting."

He decided to take his coffee in the lounge and await developments. He hadn't to wait long. Presently Eunice and her escort came towards him and he rose politely. She had recovered her self-possession by this time.

"May we join you, Dr. Hill?" she asked irresistibly. "I should like you to meet an old friend of mine—Mr. Upward."

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Lady Casey," said Asmun, as they sat down. He ordered a liqueur for Eunice and a brandy for Upward and himself. Cigarettes

were handed round, and after some idle talk Eunice suddenly faced him earnestly.

"I was going to call you, Dr. Hill. I need your advice badly."

"What can I do for you?"

She looked at him searchingly, but it was impossible to penetrate his bland mask.

"You were present when I was questioned last night. I was told that you sometimes help the police—that you—"

"Who has been telling tales about me?" he interrupted, smiling at her.

"It was the general talk while we were waiting. The Rector told me about you when he took me home. In fact it was he who suggested I should come and see you."

Asmun was pretty sure that this was a lie. However, he waited patiently until she came to the point.

"I'm frightened," she said, and as he looked at her he was satisfied that now, at least, she was speaking the truth. Her hands were trembling and he suspected that her face was white underneath the make-up.

"Why?" he asked quietly.

"Because . . . I'm being followed," she said jerkily. "When I caught sight of you just now I had a crazy idea that you, too, had been following me. Then I remembered that you weren't officially connected with the police, but my nerves . . . after last night, what could you expect?"

"You think the police are shadowing you?"

"I know they are!" she exclaimed vehemently. "And they've been to my house, questioning the servants. They are anxious to know what time I left home last night. They don't believe what I told them."

"What time did you leave home?"

"Six-thirty, and that's true. You believe me, don't you? But I—I met Jim, and I didn't tell them because it's so bad for him to have his name mixed up in a case like this. Jim's on the stage," she added, in explanation. "We are very old friends—we were in repertory together in my early days."

"Not so long ago, surely?" said Asmun gallantly.

"Fifteen years," she said, with a touch of bitterness. "We completely lost touch with each other. I've been twice married, as you know. Then—a few weeks ago—Jim and I ran across each other again."

"So you walked to the University with Jim. Did he go inside?"

"No!" she exclaimed, once more a look of fear dilating her eyes. "He waited outside for me, and as I didn't come he went home. He knew nothing of what had happened. And . . . we didn't walk as a matter of fact. We took a taxi."

"Rather foolish not to tell this to the police, don't you think? After all, it's harmless enough, though it doesn't look so good when you try to hide it."

James Upward, who had been listening uneasily, intervened: "You've got to remember Eunice's state of mind, Dr. Hill. I wish to goodness she'd mentioned I was with her. But as she didn't, it's going to be difficult to say so now."

"My advice——" Asmun began, but Eunice wouldn't let him continue.

"The point is that we were seen. That awful book-seller, Luck, called on me this morning. He wanted money to hold his tongue."

"You didn't give him any, I hope?"

"I put him off. I said I would see him again. Apparently he had a date with Clifford, but at the last minute he was put off. Luck was furious and he hung about before trying again. That's how he came to see us and afterwards—he put two and two together."

"And made five," said Upward angrily. "He swore he saw me enter the building."

"What time was this?"

"I'm not sure—he swears it was about twenty to seven, though I don't think it can have been so early."

"The exact time is rather important," said Asmun. "However, the taxi-driver may be able to fix it."

"But he mustn't be brought in! You see——"

"To be quite frank," said Upward, twisting uncom-

fortably, "I did enter the building. Eunice and I were having a bit of an argument. It seemed senseless to stand talking on the pavement."

"I was going to have things out with my husband," said Eunice. "I'd been meaning to for a long time, and last night I felt I'd reached the end of my tether. Jim came with me to give me moral courage and afterwards—he was taking me out to dinner."

Asmun looked so grave that Eunice's panic rushed back. She leaned forward, clasping her hands together tightly.

"I swear I knew nothing about the murder. It's just a horrible coincidence. But I can't expect the police to believe that—so it's impossible to tell them now."

"You are in a jam, I'm afraid, and it's no use blinking the fact. What do you expect me to do?"

"I don't know," said Eunice wretchedly. "I thought perhaps you were in the confidence of the police and knew whether . . . well, whom they suspected."

"They haven't got so far as that," said Asmun. "But they arrested Charles this morning."

"Arrested Charles!" she gasped, her eyes widening. "Then they believe——"

"For theft, not murder. It rather looks as though friend Luck was also trying to squeeze some money out of your husband. Anyhow, the money was in his office and Charles made off with it."

"The fool!" cried Eunice, almost incredulously. "Why, he must be mad!"

"Have you the slightest idea why Luck should blackmail your husband?"

"I can't imagine why!"

"I'd rather like to see Mr. Luck," said Asmun, after a pause. "Now here's an idea. Ring him up and tell him to come along to your house to-night. I'll be there and I'll do the talking. How's that?"

"But suppose he turns nasty! Suppose he goes to the police——"

"He'll turn very nasty, but I rather think he'll give the police a wide berth. Don't worry about him. You

can leave him safely to me. And oh, by the way"—Asmun stood up and threw out the question quite casually—"who is Jumbo?"

"I don't know what you mean," stammered Eunice, turning pale again.

"I was rather afraid you wouldn't," he said regretfully. "I'll see you to-night—make it six o'clock."

## CHAPTER X

ASMUN arrived punctually, and Eunice took him into Casey's study. "Will you want me to be present?" she asked anxiously.

To her evident relief he told her that it would not be necessary.

"I thought this would be the best room and also—I wanted to show you something. When Luck called to see me he left three books behind. There was something queer about it."

"Queer?" asked Asmun sharply.

"I didn't notice that he had any books with him, but when he'd gone I found them on a shelf. I'm certain they weren't there before and Vera bears me out. I saw him in the lounge and Vera had just finished dusting."

"Then it couldn't have been an accident?"

"I don't see how it was possible. He wasn't sitting anywhere near the shelf. He was left alone for a few minutes before I came down to see him, and I can only think that he deliberately placed the books on the shelf. But it doesn't seem to make sense."

"I should have thought he'd be more likely to pinch books than give them away by stealth. May I see them?"

"They are on the desk behind you."

Asmun turned and picked up the three mouldy-looking volumes that Luck had so mysteriously deposited. He was not sufficiently a bibliophile to vouch for their genuineness, but they certainly looked like first editions. There were Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, published in Dublin, 1710, Leibniz's *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement Humain*, published by Erich Raspe, 1765, and Voltaire's *Candide*, 1759—this last was probably quite valuable.

"Curiouser and curiouser," he murmured. "The man is a philanthropist in disguise!"



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"Curiouser and curiouser," he murmured. "The man is a philanthropist in disguise!"

"Very heavily disguised," said Eunice bitterly.

"Would you mind, terribly, if I potted about in this room after I've disposed of Luck? There's no better clue to a man's character than his desk and bookshelves. I don't really know what I'm looking for, but I've got an idea that I may find something quite important among all this junk."

"By all means," said Eunice, without hesitating. "Clifford spent a lot of time in this room. He did all his writing here. In fact he sometimes had meals brought in to him."

"Then you don't mind if I look through his papers?"

"Good gracious, no! But I don't think you'll find any secrets. He would never destroy manuscripts or notes, but he was very careful," she added, with a gleam in her eyes, "about his personal correspondence."

"Do you think he had any dark secrets?"

"No," she said contemptuously, "only a few rather shabby ones. He never had the courage to run amok."

"Did he want to?"

Eunice shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"I think *you* could have understood him, but that policeman wouldn't. He liked to play at being a Don Juan. If there were men only in the room he was as flat as spent soda-water. Let a pretty woman enter, and even if she stayed at the back he would brighten up instantly. Women—especially if they were young—were necessary to him. They gave him vitality. But all he wanted was for them to sit at his feet—not on his knee. Have I made myself clear?"

Asmun laughed delightedly.

"You couldn't have expressed it better. I know that type exactly. Always getting into ambiguous situations and having to use superhuman ingenuity to get out. Yet enjoying the excitement of it. Wanting to be taken for a Casanova, but always able to produce a perfect alibi!"

"You talk almost as though you'd met him!" she exclaimed.

"I'm beginning to feel that I have. The only thing

that puzzles me is why a lovely woman like you, with the world at her feet, should have married him."

Eunice flushed, and in the soft light of the reading-lamp Asmun did not feel that he had shamelessly exaggerated. She was an exquisite creature, her features as flawlessly cut as a rare cameo. She had a beautiful body, with a ripe voluptuousness.

"My first marriage was for romantic reasons," she said slowly. "It wasn't a success. Does that answer you?"

"Partly—but why *Casey*?"

"A chance meeting . . . a sudden realization that I'd never get where I wanted to on the stage . . . and then my common sense telling me that I'd be a fool to turn down such a good contract. I wonder if you've ever had to worry about security?"

"No," admitted Asmun, "not in the financial sense."

"Then you can't understand. You probably despise me."

"I don't despise you, far from it. You are a very attractive and very intelligent woman. I don't accept the picture you paint of yourself as a gold-digger, and Casey as the sugar daddy."

Eunice looked at him steadily.

"You are a dangerous man, Asmun Hill. You make people talk too much. As a matter of fact"—her eyes were shadowed, reminiscently—"I may as well admit that I was overawed by Clifford's brains. And although he was so learned, he seemed a man of the world, too. I mean he could talk about little things, he would notice a new dress, he quite liked dancing—he wasn't dried up, like so many professors. It was some time before I discovered that although he was big in some ways, he was unbelievably petty in others. A woman likes to be admired, you know—and that, I suppose, was the real clash, because he was as feminine as any woman. He just wanted to be adored—by as many women as possible."

"And the supply of incense ran out!"

"Yes," she said, obviously pleased to meet such

comprehension. "He was like a spoilt child if people didn't admire him. He refused to listen. He would never admit the existence of criticism. That was why he was so jealous—if I as much as looked at another man he took it as criticism of himself. He always had to come first. He had the most fantastic opinion of himself."

"But he had some reason to be jealous," Asmun said gently. "I don't think you'll deny that."

"You probably won't believe me, but I swear to you I've never been unfaithful to him."

"You had a lot to lose," Asmun murmured. "As much as you've now gained—a quarter of a million, I understand."

Eunice gave a sudden start. For a moment her liking for Asmun changed to anger; then it turned back to uneasiness and a new respect.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Suppose someone wanted to marry you. Unless he were very wealthy indeed he would also have a lot to gain. At least, that's the conclusion the official mind will come to——"

"Do you mean they will suspect Jim? But it's crazy!" she protested. "He couldn't possibly have done it. He never went near that room."

"Why did he enter the building at all?"

"Because—oh, don't you see that he knew there'd be a row and he was worried about me? I meant to catch Clifford out—to punish him——"

"For having discovered that letter from Jumbo?"

"I don't know anything about that letter," she said tensely. "I told the Superintendent that I'd never seen it before. It wasn't addressed to me."

"Are you in love with Upward?"

"I don't know," she said, in a low tone.

"Are you in love with anyone else?"

"No!" she exclaimed emphatically.

"You won't be frank with me, but I'm going to be very frank with you. If you are shielding someone you are putting yourself in a very bad spot. The police know you lied to them——"

"But all I said was that my husband was expecting me. I didn't want any stupid scandal about Nanda—I couldn't expect them to believe there was nothing in it. The only man I was shielding," she added desperately, "was Clifford!"

"How did you know he had invited Nanda to his room?"

The question seemed to take Eunice by surprise. She blinked and swallowed and fingered the pearls at her throat. She started to speak but checked herself and suddenly looked at Asmun so piteously that he felt sorry for her. It was such an obvious question and yet she seemed, all at once, like a woman staring down at an abyss that had yawned at her feet.

Before she could make any coherent answer the bell rang and she drew a breath of relief.

"That'll be Luck," she whispered. "I've given orders that he's to be brought straight to the study, so I'll leave you now."

Asmun nodded. As she went out he sighed deeply and lit another cigarette. He seemed lost in abstraction when Frank Luck stepped jauntily into the room.

"Where's Lady Casey?" Luck began truculently. "I have an appointment with her."

Asmun looked at him coldly as though he were some noxious insect.

"She has asked me to act for her. My name is Asmun Hill and I am assisting the police in their investigations."

Luck seemed momentarily startled, then his expression assumed a disagreeable craftiness. He dropped his hat on a chair and measured Asmun with a careful glance, as though he were some new kind of adversary.

"She was going to pay me for some books that Sir Clifford bought."

"These?" queried Asmun, picking up the three volumes from the desk and holding them so that Luck could read the titles.

"That's right—very valuable books, too. They are all first editions."

"You left them this morning, I gather."



"No, I didn't," said Luck warmly. "Sir Clifford took those books from my shop personally. He asked me to call for the money last night."

"How much did he agree to pay?"

"Five hundred pounds," said Luck, without batting an eyelid.

Asmun suddenly laughed. He couldn't help himself. The audacity of Mr. Luck took his breath away. And the childish simplicity of it . . . *O sancta simplicitas!*

"They are worth it," Luck said angrily. "Sir Clifford was a collector and he was very anxious to have those books. They are perfectly genuine."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," said Asmun, still apparently amused. "I was admiring your technique, Mr. Luck. To avoid any suggestion of blackmail you staged what looked like a straightforward business deal. The only flaw was the absence of the books themselves, but you thought that if you left them in the house no one would notice. There are so many books here that three more would attract no attention. Unfortunately you overlooked Vera's zeal with the feather duster."

"If you want to call the deal off, give me back my books," said Luck, glowering.

"You don't object to being called a blackmailer?"

"You can call me what you like. If I tell the police what I know, Lady Casey's got some awkward questions to answer. I saw her——"

"Just a minute. How do you know that the police aren't aware of what you saw?"

"Because of what I overheard them say before they questioned me. Lady Casey was supposed to arrive at five to seven. I saw her before I went back for the second time—at twenty to seven. Casey was alive then because he answered the 'phone. And what's more, Lady Casey didn't enter the building alone."

"What do you imply, Mr. Luck?"

"I don't imply anything. All I say is that she was in the building a quarter of an hour before she said she arrived. I don't say she murdered him, but if she saw something and is keeping quiet, she's an accessory."

"It hasn't occurred to you that the taxi-driver might have been interviewed?"

"No, it hasn't," said Luck defiantly.

"Or that since you knew that the side door was open you yourself could easily have entered the building unobserved?"

Luck jerked up his head indignantly, then he gave an unpleasant grin.

"You can't put anything over on me. I didn't have any reason to murder the old boy. On the contrary—he owed me money for some books. And I might have sold some more to him if he'd lived."

"A pretty euphemism, Mr. Luck. What you really mean is that you might have continued to blackmail him."

"Those are your words, not mine. However, I didn't come here to be questioned. The boot is on the other foot. If you don't want to do business with me——"

"There's no great hurry. We are coming to the business. You see, I *know* the precious secret that you'd discovered, but what baffles me is how you found out."

"Wise guy, aren't you!" Luck scoffed.

"And there's no need," continued Asmun severely, "to give a third-rate imitation of a Chicago gangster. That line of talk doesn't flow naturally from a former teacher of mathematics at a public school."

Luck half-closed his eyes. He gave a good impersonation of a man who was grimly amused.

"Are you turning to blackmail yourself, Mr. Hill?"

"I know just a little about mathematics and rather more about human nature. That's why I find this problem so intriguing. Somehow you discovered that Casey had produced a phoney proof of Fermat's Theorem."

"There was nothing phoney about it——" Luck stopped in the middle of a sentence and scowled as he realized the trap into which he had fallen. He thrust out his chin doggedly and waited.

"So you saw the thing!" Asmun exclaimed. "And you knew enough to realize it was the genuine article."

Really, Luck, you are wasting your talents as a cheap crook. A man with your intelligence should be able to do better for himself."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Luck sarcastically.

"But how did you twig that Casey had stolen the proof from Professor Shouksmith?"

Luck's face remained wooden. As he remained obstinately silent, Asmun continued: "Once you'd found out that Casey was trying to palm off another man's discovery as his own you acted with commendable promptitude. You threatened to expose him unless he paid you five hundred pounds. To cover up the transaction you pretended you were selling him first editions. Well, here they are—you can scarcely expect Lady Casey to be interested in them."

He held out the three volumes, and after a moment's hesitation Luck took them ungraciously.

"Is that your last word?" he demanded.

"Definitely."

"Well, it isn't mine," said Luck darkly. "You think you've been damned clever, but we'll see."

"I might add," Asmun said, as Luck picked up his hat, "that the police have found the money. It was stolen from Casey's office—but not by the murderer. Nothing so simple, unfortunately. Good night."

"Good night," Luck snarled, pausing by the door. "We'll meet again though."

"At Phillipi!" exclaimed Asmun cheerfully.

The door closed and Asmun's smile suddenly vanished. He threw himself into an armchair and lay back with his eyes shut until the cigarette he was holding burned his fingers. He opened his eyes reluctantly and threw it in the fire.

"If only," he muttered aloud, "I could see how he had worked it!"

He felt like a man who had just witnessed a rabbit being brought out of a hat. He knew that it was a conjuring trick, but he couldn't for the life of him imagine how it had been done. Unless . . .

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, quivering like a hound

that has picked up the scent. There was a look of simple amazement on his face as all at once he saw the light.

Those who had met him only at cocktail-parties, or who knew him merely as an entertaining conversationalist, would have been surprised if they could have seen him then. There was no longer a whimsical twinkle in his smoke-grey eyes, no longer humorous banter lurking in the corners of his thin but sensitive lips. He was not an intellectual playboy now; he was as much in deadly earnest as when he sat in his own study, a pyramid of theory poised on a difficult interpretation of cuneiform.

He made no parade of his scientific training, but it was there when he wanted it. It prevented him from slipping into obvious fallacies, or jumping at conclusions for which there was no evidence. It helped to show him the direction in which he must look.

As he gazed round the room, at the crowded bookshelves, he realized how often Casey himself must have sat in this very chair, looking at the same things—that bust of himself, for example, modelled by a Czech sculptor. Asmun could almost feel as though he himself were Casey, as though their mental processes were the same.

This room had scarcely known the Casey that Eunice had married and come to detest. Here, Casey was a different man—torn by conflicts, no doubt, but by different conflicts. For here he did his thinking and his writing, here he pursued those ambitions that were stronger even than the love of women. And how much more powerful they were than most people supposed! He was consumed by a passion to dominate by sheer intellect as well as by charm. The room testified to it, the bust, the photographs, the collected works of Clifford Casey, the album of press cuttings on the desk. . . .

Asmun went across to the desk and sat down. He opened the album and stared at the reviews so carefully and lovingly pasted inside. As he turned over the pages he was struck by certain omissions. The opinions of

the *Isle of Man Gazette* and the *Allahabad Advertiser* had been preserved, but not the reviews in *Nature* or *Mind*. In other words any hostile criticism was banished.

Well, that made up a consistent picture. What was not outwardly evident was the furious and unquenchable determination to impress an audience of his peers. His philosophizing was dismissed with a pitying smile by all those who knew what he was talking about. It was useless for him to try to win their favour by writing the sort of popular moonshine that gained him such a wide circle of admirers. His only hope was to return to the dry technical fields that he had for so long neglected. And surely if he had been attempting any solid work there would be evidence of it in this room.

Asmun began to open drawers. He looked carefully through old manuscripts and notes. There were pages of jottings, for Casey was incapable of thinking *in vacuo*; whenever he had a problem to work out he took a pen in his hand.

It was fascinating and a little uncanny to look at those notes by a man now dead and to follow the workings of his nimble yet superficial mind. Indeed, the more Asmun read the more convinced he became that Casey was no longer capable of tackling the problem that Shouksmith had solved. And not only was he now incapable, but there was not the least evidence that he had ever attempted it.

Under a wad of papers Asmun found a diary, with a page for every day of the past year. He started to read it through, though he hated the job; it seemed like listening at a keyhole. For Casey was frank in his comments.

Dined with Lord Saloman. He praised my last book highly. He said I was the most important of living philosophers.

Had tea with Mary. She thinks I can't do wrong. A sweet kid—but I must be careful. Miss Carter is a dangerous gossip. Invited to Pasadena. Accepted.

Had trouble with Elsie Carter again. She's tongue-tied in public but quite the reverse in private. She'll have to go.

Lecture at the Royal Institution. A big crowd and Jagger congratulated me afterwards. I value his opinion.

Started new book. Dealing with immortality on the lines of Leibniz's monads. This was Martin's suggestion, but the pundits won't like it.

Trouble with Eunice again. Warned her. Invited to Egypt by University of Cairo. Accepted. Leibniz. Incredible.

Luck's bookshop at six. Eureka!

Nanda for lunch. Very scared. Lent her my last book.

Lawson makes more trouble. In league with Shouksmith obviously. Must see Rector about new staff. Changes inevitable now.

Tell Nanda the news. Very thrilled and impressed. See Luck again. Refuse to see Charles. Question of money.

Decision finally taken. Drop hint to Rector. Shouksmith more than usually difficult. Must ask him to dinner. Broadcast recording. Draw out money.

None of the entries was particularly illuminating. Indeed, it was not easy to see why some of them had been made at all. Yet they fitted into the pattern of Casey's personality—the incurable and grotesque egotist, feeding on flattery, sentimentally pursuing women, ruthlessly suppressing his staff, planning still another book, this time a proof that Clifford Casey would live for ever!

But of the more modest task of proving Fermat's Theorem there was not a trace. There was not a scrap of evidence in the diary that Casey had been working independently on any mathematical problem, which seemed to dispose of Burrell's idea that he had been trying to gain credit for something quite different. Indeed, it was unthinkable, in view of the sort of entries he considered worth making, that if he had been doing any serious work at all he would not have mentioned it.

Asmun closed the diary and for several minutes he stared thoughtfully at the desk. If Casey had not been working on the theorem and if he had announced that he had made an important discovery, how did he propose to carry off such an imposture? Shouksmith, after all, was not utterly negligible. He was known, in a restricted circle, and he was personally respected. Apparently he was hard up, but surely he wouldn't consent to be bought out. It was psychologically impossible. To sell his solution of Fermat's Theorem would be like selling his own child.



So there was only one alternative. Bizarre as it seemed, Asmun found himself driven back by cold logic to the conclusion that had come to him earlier, in a lightning flash. Casey had . . .

Suddenly a clock chimed. He looked up in blank astonishment to see that it was eight o'clock. He had been in the study for an hour and a half; but what was more amazing than the way in which time had flown, was the fact that Eunice had not returned. Why hadn't she come back to inquire what success he had had with Luck?

He stood up and ran his fingers wonderingly through his hair. Something must be wrong or she would have come to him. He walked across the room and looked up and down the deserted hall, then he walked towards the lounge. The door was slightly ajar and he could hear voices. A man was speaking, and he sounded tense and excited.

"You thought . . . darling, this is the best news I've ever heard in my life. You don't know what a load it takes off my mind. You thought it was *me*."

"What else could I think?" Eunice sounded near breaking-point. "You had access to him—you had every reason. You were crazy enough. . . . Oh, it's been ghastly!"

"And is that why you never told the reason why you went there?"

"Of course it is! How could I let them think that we weren't happily married. They'd have suspected me at once."

"Suspected *you*!"

"Haven't you got any sense at all, Jumbo?" she cried, in exasperation. "Or do you think I was merely lying for your sake? It was obvious that if they found out you'd written that insane letter to me they'd suspect both of us. We were there, in the building anyhow. . . . Can't you realize how their minds would work?"

"I never thought of it in that way. You see, I've been tortured by the idea that it really might have been you!"

"You thought I killed him?" she stammered incredulously.

"I've been through hell, Eunice. I thought he was horrible to you and you suddenly lost your temper and hit him with that gyroscope. You didn't mean to kill him. I pictured it as a brainstorm, but now—don't you see? . . . now I realize you thought that *I'd* done it, so obviously *you* couldn't have done it."

Eunice started to laugh hysterically and then to sob. "Go away, go away, don't touch me!" she cried, between her sobs. "I hate you! I wish I'd never set eyes on you!"

Asmun decided to delay no longer. He walked straight into the room and a glance revealed Eunice sitting on the divan, her handkerchief pressed to her lips, rocking to and fro, while Nigel Lawson stood over her helplessly. He swung round as he heard Asmun and bunched his fists angrily.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Don't be a fool, Lawson," Asmun snapped back. He strode up to Eunice. "Pull yourself together. You are in a tough spot and hysterics won't get you out."

Eunice straightened as though a spring had been released. She gaped at him.

"So this is Jumbo!" said Asmun, grimly indicating Nigel.

"What are you going to do?" stammered Eunice, jumping up in terror.

"Since you don't choose to tell me the truth, I'm going to do nothing more. Matters must now take their course," he said curtly.

"But you won't tell the police. . . . Oh, you can't . . ." she entreated.

"If you don't tell them yourself to-morrow I shall certainly tell them. Meanwhile I've settled with Mr. Luck. What he'll do next I've no idea—but it won't matter if you yourself tell the police everything."

"I resent the way you are speaking," began Nigel, stepping forward aggressively.

"Oh, what can ail thee, Knight-at-Arms?" Asmun

murmured gently. "You know that poem, I expect. It is as hackneyed as it is lovely. I used to wonder what it meant, but now I think I know. Good night."

And he went out.

## CHAPTER XI

"SO that's the dusky beauty," Asmun murmured, as he stood in the doorway of a large room where a number of people were working computing machines. "Would you like to speak to her?" asked Miss Carter helpfully.

"I'd like a few words if it could be managed."

Elsie Carter walked swiftly across to the girl wearing a tangerine sari and whispered in her ear. Nanda gave a start, but she rose obediently. She was introduced to Asmun in the corridor and they entered an empty lecture-room.

"Dr. Hill is helping the police," explained Miss Carter impressively. "He wants to ask you some questions."

"But you are not obliged to answer," said Asmun hastily. "Though I'm not going to ask anything very difficult."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't tell you anything I know," replied Nanda. "I've already been questioned by an inspector——"

"That'll be Maltby," said Asmun genially. "You must stop me if I go over the same ground. But what I really want to talk about is mathematics."

Nanda's large, dark eyes grew wider. They were extraordinarily intelligent, and Asmun could not help contrasting her with the drab woman beside him.

"All I really want to know," he went on, "is whether Casey ever mentioned to you that he had made an important discovery?"

"Yes," answered Nanda, nodding her head slowly. "He spoke of it when I lunched with him the day before his death."

"Did you gather what sort of discovery it was?"

"No—he said he'd tell me more about it when next we met."

"And you never did meet again!"



Her long, dark lashes fell. She was breathing quickly as though out of nervousness.

"I told the Inspector why we didn't meet. My cousin disapproved—but I assure you that he knew nothing about Professor Casey's death."

"I'm leaving that angle to the police. You waited outside the room, I suppose, while Casey and your cousin were talking?"

"I waited on the landing, but I can't tell you how long. I was upset and I didn't notice the time. I never thought it would be important."

"It isn't, particularly, so don't worry about it. Did anyone come upstairs while you were on the landing?"

"No," she said emphatically.

"Could you see the corridor from where you stood?"

"Part of it. I remember Dr. Lawson came along. I thought he was going to the lift, but he seemed to change his mind and went back."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't think so. He seemed very abstracted."

"Until that lunch-time, had Casey ever mentioned that he was doing any important work?"

"No." Her thick black eyebrows suddenly came together in a frown of perplexity. "I had no idea he was doing research. I thought he was too busy with his writing and lecturing for anything like that."

"Did he seem excited about it?"

"In one sense he did, though at the time I felt he was just telling me to make me curious enough to—to go and see him."

"What were your feelings towards him?"

"That's not very easy to answer," said Nanda, biting her lip. "He was a very great man and I respected him. I felt flattered that he should like to talk to me. But there was another side of him . . . it's awfully difficult to explain," she added in distress.

"You needn't try," said Asmun, with a sympathetic smile. "We know all about that other side. I won't trouble you any more, Miss Gochapali."

She didn't attempt to hide her relief. After a quick

glance at Miss Carter, who had been watching her critically, she turned and glided out of the room.

"I don't think I altogether trust her," said Elsie, folding her hands primly. "Though I can never make up my mind about Indians. I haven't any colour prejudice, but they do seem so different from ourselves. I suppose it's the result of environment."

"She's very alluring," commented Asmun.

"Is she?" Elsie asked, with elaborate casualness.

"I never know what a man means by that sort of remark."

"What he means is all too simple, I'm afraid." Asmun sighed and held out his cigarette-case. "Casey, I gather, was an extremely susceptible man."

"He was peculiar where women were concerned." And Elsie spoke with such emphasis that she blew out the flame of the lighter that Asmun held to her cigarette. He struck it again.

"One would have thought," he said conversationally, "that he'd have been satisfied with a comparatively young and certainly charming wife."

"Do you think she's 'alluring,' too?" Elsie looked at him, he felt, rather disdainfully. "You are catholic in your tastes, Dr. Hill."

"I must say I fail to see why he should go running round after students when he's got a wife like Eunice. He must have caused her a lot of worry."

"Not so much as she caused him if the truth were told. It simply defeats me what men see in that sort of woman—an empty-headed, painted doll!" she almost spat.

"She seems to have a way with mathematicians," Asmun murmured.

"What do you mean?"

"Lawson, for example. Or am I repeating idle gossip?"

"Where can you possibly have picked up such gossip?" she demanded indignantly.

"Oh, I keep my ears to the ground. I must say, from what I've seen of Lawson I don't find it difficult to believe. He's an unstable type——"

"You are wrong," broke in Elsie earnestly, "dead wrong. Nigel's a brilliant man. If you knew the uphill fight he's had, you'd change your opinion of him. His father was a docker and he's done everything by scholarships. He's a tremendous worker and it's only lately he's taken any real interest in social life. Just because he isn't used to it I think it has gone a little to his head. But at heart he's sound enough—he's really a wonderful man."

A patch of colour showed on her dull cheeks, but she was so intent in correcting Asmun's impression that she hardly seemed aware that her enthusiasm had carried her away. For a moment Asmun eyed her speculatively. He had been surprised to learn that she was not yet thirty. At a superficial glance she might have been almost any age—indeed, he doubted if she would look very different when she was forty.

Curious, he reflected, that she should be able to speak up for herself (or for Nigel Lawson) and yet get stage-fright when she addressed a crowd of students. But evidently it would be a mistake to assume that she had no emotional life.

"I suppose," he said, deliberately provoking her, "now that Eunice is free, Lawson could solve all his problems. He wouldn't have to worry any more about money—which is a good thing if you want to do serious work."

"Do you mean that—that he might marry Lady Casey?" Elsie looked at him incredulously. "Why, it's utterly ridiculous to suggest such a thing. She was playing with him like a cat with a mouse. She's that awful sort of woman with nothing to do except surround herself with admirers and set them at logger-heads."

"Come, now, you can't possibly know all this, Miss Carter!"

"I've no proof, of course." She shrugged her shoulders. "But I've noticed the change in Nigel recently. I know he has been terribly unhappy. We all noticed it, but there was nothing that any of us could do. Nigel seemed to have such a brilliant future ahead

of him, but Casey's been working against him, poisoning the Rector's mind, suggesting that he had a bad influence on the students."

"Have you any theories about the murder?" asked Asmun abruptly.

"I don't know what sort of evidence the police have got, but psychologically——"

"Yes?" he encouraged, as she hesitated.

"I can only say that Lady Casey certainly had a better motive than anyone else. And she had the opportunity."

"But not, surely, with a gyroscope! What bothers me is the weapon," said Asmun, with an apparent burst of candour. "I doubt if a layman would realize its hideous potentialities. I should be surprised if anyone unaccustomed to handling a gyroscope would know the right way to use it—to lunge forward, forexample, like a boxer."

"A boxer!" Elsie echoed, turning pale.

"That sort of movement—a punch with a mailed fist—would come natural to anyone who had done some boxing. But do you honestly think that a woman could have made such a neat and efficient job of it?"

"Speaking as a woman, I don't see why not," said Elsie stoutly. "We are scarcely such helpless creatures as some men like to think."

"That's true enough, of course," Asmun acknowledged. "Besides, all this is the flimsiest speculation."

"Of course it is," she said, in relief. She glanced at her watch. "Would you care to have a cup of tea before you go, Dr. Hill?"

She took him along to the staff-room, where Millfield and Dennis were drinking tea with Shouksmith. Asmun was given a ready welcome. As soon as he sat down he was plied with questions. It was assumed that he had inside information about the Yard's activities.

"I really can't tell you much," he said, balancing a cup on his knee and looking apologetic. "By the way, where is Lawson?"

"At Scotland Yard," said Shouksmith, in a slightly worried tone. "They suddenly sent for him."

"But surely they don't suspect Nigel!" cried Elsie, in dismay.

"They are crazy if they do," retorted Dennis. "I had more reason than Nigel for bumping the old man off."

"So had I, for that matter," added Millfield.

"I don't think they suspect him of the murder," said Shouksmith, "but I was afraid he'd make trouble for himself when he lied. Sooner or later the police were bound to find out that Lady Casey hadn't really got an appointment with her husband."

"And Nigel supported her story," breathed Elsie. "Oh, what a fool!"

"He thought he was doing the chivalrous thing by shielding her," said Millfield. "But if he'd only stopped to think he'd have seen it was lunacy. Everybody knows that Casey didn't produce that bottle of sherry for his wife."

"Do you know what attitude the police take up towards Lady Casey?" asked Shouksmith, looking straight at Asmun.

"As a matter of routine she's suspect number one," he answered. "Which is natural enough since she found the body and gains very considerably."

"But what about Casey's son!" Dennis protested.

"He doesn't get a penny. It was very much in his interest to keep his father alive."

"And what about the theft of my theorem?" asked Shouksmith.

"I don't think the significance of that has penetrated the official skull. It just seems a bit of academic nonsense."

Shouksmith nodded grimly.

"I don't expect them to appreciate its importance, of course. And I must admit I can't see how it links up with the murder. I've tried hard, but I'm hanged if I can think of any possible connection."

"We are all in the same boat there. All the same, I have a strong suspicion that the *real* story hasn't come out yet."

There was a sudden silence. At last Elsie Carter gave a faint shiver and said: "Have you any idea what to look for?"

"I've a hazy sort of notion, but all I can tell you is that the man who could throw most light on the matter is a bookseller called Luck."

"Luck!" exclaimed Shouksmith. "He was here this morning."

"What did he want?" asked Asmun quickly.

"He had the impudence to ask for a book in Casey's room. He said it hadn't been paid for and that it was valuable. I told him, of course, that the room was sealed and that he must address all his inquiries to the Superintendent in charge of the investigations."

"I don't think he much likes dealing with the police."

"A most unpleasant man," said Shouksmith. "I wouldn't trust him an inch. I can't imagine why Casey ever had any dealings with him."

"If we knew that we might have the key to the whole mystery. However," said Asmun, rising to his feet, "I expect the police will make him talk before they are through. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be going."

He returned to his flat to find Joab waiting for him anxiously. Twice within the past hour Scotland Yard had rung up for him.

"They want you to ring as soon as you arrive, sir, and ask for Inspector Maltby."

Asmun nodded, but he didn't go near the telephone.

"I've had tea," was all he said.

He entered his study and shut the door firmly. Going up to the radio-gramophone he considered for a few moments and finally decided on Bartok. No ordinary harmonies could match his present mood. He sat down in a big chair beside the fire and closed his eyes, and the room seemed filled with the fiddling of the damned.

Point by point he went through the whole case. He had a prodigious memory and he had no difficulty whatever in recalling the time-table that Burrell had prepared and the evidence that everyone who had been interviewed



had given. Step by step he tested the theory he had formed.

There were difficulties. There was an alibi to be broken down. And there was tangible proof yet to be obtained . . . proof that might well have been destroyed. In which case, although he might solve the mystery to his own satisfaction there would be no evidence that could be produced in court.

He realized now that he had done a very dangerous thing; he had given a veiled warning to the murderer that might lead him to betray himself or—as Asmun hoped—might drive him to cheat the hangman. Assuming, of course, that he was right. . . .

"I *must* be," he muttered, opening his eyes. "The only question is whether the hint I dropped was too oblique. If so—I suppose I ought to tell the police. Though I'd rather it didn't come to court. I loathe that side of it. And if I thought they wouldn't arrest the wrong person . . ."

Presently Joab knocked on the door and entered, wearing a reproachful expression.

"Inspector Maltby is on the 'phone again, sir."

Asmun didn't move. For a moment Joab was afraid he hadn't heard and was about to repeat the message. But Asmun slowly rose and made his way without a word to the telephone.

Maltby asked him if he could come over at once. "Things have been happening," he said. "I think the case is as good as settled."

"I'll come straight away," Asmun promised.

It did not take him many minutes to drive to Whitehall. He arrived at six o'clock and was promptly taken up to the Superintendent's room. When he entered he found Maltby leaning over Burrell's shoulder, looking at a diagram in which a number of coloured pins were stuck.

"Glad to have got hold of you, sir," said Maltby, beaming with pleasure. "You've helped us such a lot that I thought you ought to hear how things have turned out."

Burrell glanced up from his chart. He was inordinately proud of it.

"Nearly everything is buttoned up," he said. "We are having a conference presently to decide whether to make one arrest or two."

"Eunice and Lawson, I suppose," said Asmun quietly. "Why should you say that?"

Asmun shrugged his shoulders. "It's the obvious choice. I take it that Eunice called on you to-day and amended her story? I advised her to do so—though I might have hesitated if I'd thought she was running her neck into a rope."

Burrell eyed him queerly.

"We'd have known that she lied anyhow. The date Casey made with Nanda didn't fit in with the story of an appointment with his wife. Also we got the driver of the taxi who took her to the University, and that proved she'd lied about the time of her arrival."

"She told you all this freely?"

"She was anxious to talk. She even admitted the truth about the Jumbo letter. Maltby, however, had already identified it from Lawson's handwriting, so she hadn't much choice."

"But she didn't arrive alone——"

"We know all about Upward. She's playing him up for all she's worth just to prove that she couldn't have been acting in collusion with Lawson. But in my opinion Lawson was her real boy friend, even if she's thrown him overboard now."

"I understand you sent for him?"

"Yes, and we put him through the hoop. We discovered what that threat in his letter meant. He said, you will remember, that he'd found out something about Casey. Well, it was nothing to do with mathematics. He'd got it into his head that Casey was using a room above Luck's shop for his assignations."

"Grotesque!" Asmun cried indignantly.

"Why should it be? Perhaps you don't know the sort of man Luck is——"

"I still say it is utterly preposterous and incredible."

I've insisted all along that we'd make a prize howler if we neglected to study Casey's character. I think at last I understand the man and I'm absolutely positive that he'd never do such a thing."

Burrell smiled tolerantly.

"What you don't know, of course, is that Luck admitted it. As soon as Lawson told us what he suspected, Maltby dashed over to see Luck. He made it clear, I think, that we'd stand no nonsense from him, and Luck came clean."

"Do you mean that he pretended that that was what his association with Casey had been?"

"He said so in as many words. Isn't that the case, Inspector?"

"I was a bit rough with him," answered Maltby. "But I practically promised that we wouldn't go into any question of blackmail if he told us all he knew. After all, it really hasn't anything to do with the murder."

"Nor, I suppose, has the fact that Luck was formerly a teacher of mathematics!"

Maltby looked injured. "I raised the question of the theft—I hinted at it, rather—but I'm satisfied it didn't ring a bell. It is, of course, conceivable, that Luck had an additional reason for blackmailing Casey. But we've no proof of it, and I can't see that it's very relevant."

"Carry on, then," said Asmun, restraining himself with difficulty. "You accused Lawson of writing a love-letter to Eunice and pretending that she had an appointment with her husband. What else?"

"The rest is explained by this chart," said Burrell, pointing to the coloured pins. "We agreed that Casey was dead when Luck came back and Dobbins rang up Casey. If that is so and the murderer answered the 'phone, he must have been a *man*. Now here is Lawson"—picking up a red pin—"and he leaves Shouksmith's room at eighteen thirty-five. On his own admission he didn't go straight to the staff-room. Again on his admission he had tried to see Casey before but had found

him engaged—actually with the Indian. So what more natural than that he should walk along the corridor and see if he was still engaged? I don't think he was. I think Lawson went into Casey's room, and he had hardly been there a minute when Eunice entered."

"Pure conjecture!" retorted Asmun scathingly. "And she must have found a pretty swift taxi if she left her house at six-thirty."

"But did she? We have only her word for it. The maid, Vera, confirmed the time, but when she was pressed she admitted that she hadn't looked at a clock. A mistake of five minutes would be easy to make and is all we need. So I'm going to assume she was in the room."

"In the name of heaven, why should she enter it before seven o'clock if her object was to catch her husband out with Nanda?"

"That's a weightier objection, I must admit. I think, however, she intended to park herself in one of the empty rooms opposite her husband's. She intended, I imagine, to wait there until Nanda arrived. But as she started to walk up the long corridor, she saw the Indian come out of her husband's room, and she probably saw Nanda run forward to meet him. Realizing that somehow Casey's game had been spoiled and that she'd come on a fool's errand, she darted into one of the empty rooms to think things over. Then Lawson came up the corridor and entered her husband's room. Fearing that there was going to be a row she hurried across—"

"Strange anxiety for a murderess!" exclaimed Asmun scornfully.

"Confronted with both Eunice and Lawson," Burrell continued equably, "Casey lost his temper. He probably said something extremely disagreeable. Lawson—and we know how hot-blooded he is—lost all control of himself. He snatched up the gyroscope and struck him."

"And then?"

"They were both panic-stricken. To their horror the 'phone rang and Lawson answered it, imitating Casey's voice. Then he rushed Eunice out of the office into the

room opposite and told her to wait for a quarter of an hour before pretending to make the discovery. It was agreed that she should say she had a date with her husband. Meanwhile, to provide an alibi for himself he hurried back to the staff-room. Everyone there was listening to a play and no special notice was taken of him. He was so distraught, however, that he was late going back to help Shouksmith to dress—a point of detail, perhaps, but of some interest to the psychologist. He must have wondered why Eunice delayed her act for so long. Perhaps he thought that her nerve had failed and she had gone home, though that would have been risky. The real reason for the delay, of course, was that Charles Casey appeared on the scene. From her hiding-place Eunice saw him go into the room. She must have been frozen with terror. How could she explain her presence if Charles raised the alarm? To her enormous relief, however, Charles did not raise the alarm. Unknown to her he had found a bag stuffed with easily negotiable money—pound notes. He was frightened, but he was desperately in need of money. The death of his father meant that his emergency supplies were cut off at the source. So Charles pocketed the money and beat it. You know what happened afterwards, and although I won't pretend that everything occurred exactly as I've said, I don't think it's a bad reconstruction. Can you find any serious fault with it?"

Asmun slowly lit a cigarette. Instead of replying to Burrell he turned to Maltby.

"Do you believe this fairy tale?" he asked, almost reproachfully.

"I think it is substantially correct," said Maltby. "We are dealing with circumstantial evidence, but I'm satisfied they were both in this thing together. And I fancy that Lawson struck the actual blow. He's an athletic man—rugger and boxing, chiefly. But as you saw for yourself he's emotionally haywire."

"I don't envy you if that's the best story you can take into court!"

"It won't do as it stands," Burrell said. "But the

impression I got this afternoon—and Maltby agrees with me—is that Lawson will confess. When it dawned on him that Eunice could be arrested as accessory, he seemed very nearly on the point of doing so, and I don't think he'll need much pressure."

"He's quixotic enough," muttered Asmun. "He'd take the full blame if he thought it would let Eunice out. What would you say if I told you I overheard him tell Eunice that for a dreadful moment he believed she was guilty?"

"What!" gasped Burrell, suddenly gripping the desk and leaning forward.

"Something wrong somewhere with your reconstruction. That's a detail, however. You've missed the real point of the murder. It was no impulsive act, Super. Nor was Casey killed for his money. This crime was planned in cold blood and every detail cunningly worked out. It was timed so that we'd all be sent off on a wild-goose chase. There's a mind behind this business. I admit that chance has been kind to the murderer, but even so he foresaw the trap into which you'd fall. He's worked with devilish ingenuity, and his motive——"

"Go on!" challenged Burrell, half rising from his chair. "What was the motive, according to you?"

"That was what Luck *ought* to have told you but didn't. Before you commit yourself, will you agree to put Luck through his paces again? Do you know enough about him to turn the heat on so that he'll speak the truth?"

"But what is it you expect him to tell us?"

"The real reason why he was blackmailing Casey," answered Asmun.

Burrell was impressed, despite himself. He was disturbed, too, by the fact that Maltby, whose judgment he respected, was plainly uneasy. He looked at his watch. In half an hour he was due for a conference with the Assistant Commissioner.

"Very well, fetch Luck again—no, that'll take too long. Go along and see him, Maltby. If he's holding



out, give it to him hot and strong. Arrest him if he won't talk. We've got quite enough against him to justify it." Burrell looked resentfully at Asmun. "Does that satisfy you?"

"Perfectly," said Asmun, frankly surprised.

He drove Maltby to the little shop off Hannon Street. When they stepped from the door the interior was in darkness, and as Maltby was looking for a bell he noticed that the blinds of the glass door were not drawn. His policeman's instinct was aroused and although he scarcely expected any result he tried the handle. The door opened and he looked back at Asmun in bewilderment.

"Rum thing," he remarked. "We'd better take a peep inside."

He switched on the light. The shop itself seemed quite normal. At the end, however, was a door, and when he opened that door he suddenly drew back involuntarily.

A man was lying face downwards on the floor in a pool of blood. He was horribly still and the back of his skull had been battered in.

Maltby knelt down and turned the body over. In death the leering face of Frank Luck looked even more repellent than in life. There was no sign of any weapon, but lying beside the body was a small gleaming object. Maltby picked it up carefully and suddenly caught his breath.

## CHAPTER XII

EUNICE was frightened. She was huddled in a big chair, her blue eyes fixed on the fire as though fascinated by the gruesome pictures she saw in the burning coals. She was so desperate that for a moment she even wished that the man who stood with his back to her, mixing a drink, was Clifford. If only she could put back the clock and bring this hideous phantasmagoria to an end!

For a brief while she had frankly enjoyed the relief of being free. She no longer heard that smooth, hateful voice in her ears, no longer saw those sneering, sensual eyes watching her, no longer had to lie and cheat and act . . . act, so often, with a brilliance that would have made her name on the stage. In one sense, admittedly, Clifford had had almost as few illusions about her as she had about him. But there were still times when she had to throw dust in his eyes, when in order to lead a life of her own she had to smother his suspicions of her.

She would never know what he had really thought of her attitude towards Nigel. He had discovered Nigel's attitude towards her, and that was enough for him. It diverted his gaze completely from Jim, though that was purely accidental. She wasn't cold-blooded enough to use poor Nigel as a smoke-screen. No, she wasn't cold-blooded!

Jim Upward turned from the table on which a number of bottles stood. He came towards her slowly, holding a full glass.

"There, my pet, drink that and you'll feel better."

There was a faintly proprietorial note in his voice, but it didn't irritate her. She had loathed Clifford's bland assumption that he owned her—that he still owned even the jewels that he bought her. But Jim was so different. The past that was dead—the eager, stage-struck girl, who

dreamed such impossible dreams—had belonged to him; and now it almost came to life again.

Why hadn't they stayed together? None of this would have happened then. But Jim hadn't wanted to settle down. Nor, at the time, had she. When you were young you were afraid of missing something—and then, suddenly, you realized what in spite of all your anxiety you had missed.

She gazed, almost wonderingly, at the man who sat down opposite her. He was wearing a dinner-jacket and he looked prosperous and self-assured. He had put on weight and he had collected some lines under his eyes. He was still good-looking, and although his mouth was sometimes a trifle cynical, he was still as kind essentially, still as generous as ever. He was neither rich nor embarrassingly successful, but he had done well at the sort of things she knew how to value, and that was why she could feel so proud of him.

He had changed, of course; but so had she. He was mature, and that was what Clifford, with all his brains, had never become. To be with Jim was to be with an adult; but she couldn't help feeling a pang of jealousy when she thought of the other women who had passed in and out of his life.

"Why did you never marry?" she asked him suddenly.

He considered the question and then smiled—that slightly cynical smile that used to make her heart turn over.

"It's so expensive," he answered, "getting divorced."

"And yet you want to marry now?"

"You are a wealthy woman, darling!"

"Suppose I weren't?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That would be a pity—but I'd still want to marry you."

She felt an almost physical thrill go through her. She didn't want him to make the usual, sentimental responses; it was enough that although his lips were smiling the eyes regarding her were serious. The lyrical rapture of the old days could not be recaptured. They had found it in a tacit understanding.

"It would have been a mistake," she said slowly, "to have tried to settle down. We'd both have made a mess of our lives—and we couldn't have started all over again, like this."

"You've got to try everything once, Eunice."

"I've tried marriage twice—and now I'm rash enough to contemplate it a third time!"

"Third time lucky!" He smiled and sipped his whisky. "I think it will be."

"It's *got* to be. I couldn't bear anything to go wrong between us. You seem to be all I have now to hold on to—to believe in."

"Got over your crush on Nigel?"

"It was never anything really," she said, flushing. "I was bored and also I was mad with Clifford. It was so many years since I'd met anyone as naïve and yet . . . I don't quite know how to put it. It's difficult for a woman to resist sheer adoration."

"Why did you resist, then?"

"You are being deliberately horrid," she pouted. "If I hadn't suddenly met you again perhaps I'd have been foolish enough to . . . Oh, but what a ghastly blunder it would have been! I'd have been landed with that crazy boy, and Clifford would have had the chance he was waiting for."

"Would he have divorced you?"

"He'd have liked to—if he could have done so without being made to look too much of a fool himself."

Jim was thoughtful for a minute. Then he asked: "How did Nigel take his dismissal?"

"Pretty badly, I'm afraid. I had lunch with him to-day and I was a little beast. I had to be or he wouldn't have taken 'No' for an answer. I just told him the blunt truth about himself."

"No man likes to hear that," murmured Jim.

"I hurt him, but he may be glad one day. I hit very hard, but he had to know. I told him that he was all tied up inside and that he must stop living like a monk. Almost any woman would do——"

"And you actually told him so!"



"I had to make him hate me," she said pleadingly. "There wasn't any other way. And half the trouble I find myself in is due to that insane letter he wrote."

"Careless work not to destroy it," Jim chided.

"But I did! In the ordinary way Vera would have taken the tray downstairs. It was sheer mischance that Cook happened to call her, so that she left it on the landing just as Clifford came out of the bathroom."

"All the same, my precious, you should have guarded against accidents. I should have thought you had more practice in the gentle art of deception."

"I acted without thinking. But if there had *really* been anything between Nigel and me, I'd have been more cautious. It proves how utterly innocent it was."

"And is that the conclusion your husband drew?"

"I don't think, honestly, that he took it too seriously, though he pretended to because he enjoyed his little triumph. What upset him most, I think, was to learn that we called him Humpty!"

Jim laughed and got up to mix another whisky and soda. "The wording was a bit steep, though. That remark about all you'd been to each other, and the still more unfortunate mention of murder——"

"But how do you know?" she cried in bewilderment.

"You never saw the letter."

"The police showed it to me," he replied, sitting down again. "I suppose they wanted to test my reactions. They wanted to make up their minds which of us had most to gain by removing your husband."

Eunice looked at him in dismay.

"Then they suspected you, too!" she said hoarsely.

"Not very seriously, I think. My impression is that they believed Nigel to be their man, though they were stumped for proof."

"But if they suspect Nigel they must also suspect me! I'm certain they do. They think we were in it together," she cried.

"I shouldn't worry," he said soothingly. "Nigel will talk if he thinks you are in the slightest danger."

"What do you mean by 'talk'? You don't think he's guilty?"

"Who else could be?"

"But—no, darling!" she gasped, as a violent shudder ran over her. "No, he can't be! They mustn't think that—it's too horrible!"

"It's horrible, of course, because fundamentally he's a decent enough bloke. It must have been manslaughter rather than murder. He must have lost his head and hit out. I don't suppose he meant to kill the old man."

"Then if it's manslaughter—they won't hang him!" she exclaimed, jerking up her head.

"That depends. I was speaking morally rather than legally. If they can get the details worked out he's undoubtedly in a tight spot."

"Oh, why was I mad enough to go there that night!" she breathed. "Why did I ever listen to Nigel!"

She went rigid as there was a knock on the door and Vera entered, looking rather red. "Inspector Maltby wishes to see you, milady." And almost before Eunice could reply, Maltby himself strode into the room. Eunice was on her feet in a flash, her hand pressed to her breast as though she had been shot. Jim also stood up, frowning in annoyance rather than alarm at the intrusion.

"I'm sorry to be a nuisance," began Maltby, pleasantly enough to disarm most people, "but I've found something which I think belongs to you. Will you please tell me if you can identify it?"

He dived into his pocket and brought out a gold cigarette-case, which he handed to her. Somehow Eunice managed to control herself. She stared down at the gold case and then struggled to speak casually.

"Yes, it's mine, Inspector. I mislaid it several days ago. Where did you find it?"

"Have you no idea when you last used it?" Maltby inquired.

Eunice frowned for a moment, then her brow seemed to clear.

"I took it with me to the University. Yes, of course, I remember sitting in the staff-room waiting to be called."

I was smoking . . . and I suppose I must have left it there."

"It would be quite a natural thing to do," agreed Maltby. "But we didn't find it in the University. We found it in the shop of a bookseller called Luck."

"But how on earth did it get there?" cried Eunice, this time in apparently genuine bewilderment.

"That's what we'd very much like to know. It was on the floor, beside Luck's dead body. He'd been murdered."

There was a sudden, unnatural stillness. Eunice seemed to stop breathing. She looked at Maltby in horror as her lips went bloodless under the paint.

"Murdered!" she echoed, at last.

"I went along to interview him about an hour ago. The shop was in darkness but the door was unlocked. When I entered I found him lying in a tiny office at the back. There was a safe in the room and it was open, but although it contained a considerable amount of money nothing appeared to have been taken. There was no weapon, no clue of any kind—except a cigarette-case bearing your monogram."

"But you don't think I know anything about it?" she cried shrilly.

"Come now, Lady Casey," Maltby protested, "we don't take everything at its face value. But you will appreciate that we were bound to make inquiries about your cigarette-case."

"I've never been in Luck's bookshop in my life. I can't imagine how . . . unless someone deliberately put it there. Or unless Luck himself stole it. He was here last night."

"I know about that visit. Dr. Hill told me."

"It's possible I left the case in my husband's study." She seemed to be fighting a wave of hysteria and her eagerness was forced. "That's the most likely explanation. Luck was a horrible man. He'd be quite capable of stealing it."

"With Dr. Hill watching him?" Maltby looked sceptical. "Besides, you say you remember taking it

to the University. You were rather upset, and you might easily have left it on your chair."

"I remember handing it to Nigel," she panted. "He'd run out of cigarettes. But he—yes, I'm sure he gave it back to me," she added frantically, as though she saw where that might lead. "Besides, if the thing were planted it could only have been done by—"

"By whom?" asked Maltby, as she stiffened.

"By someone who hated me," she said, in a sobbing voice. "Someone who wanted it to look as though I'd done the murder."

"Then Lawson hardly fills the bill," replied Maltby, almost regretfully. "However, we'll get to the bottom of it, no doubt. But as a matter of form I must ask you about your movements this evening."

It was Jim who replied. "We were both at the pictures, Inspector. We went to the Odeon in Leicester Square and came out about a quarter to seven. Then we got a taxi back here."

"I see. Well, that seems to cover it. I must ask you to give me back the cigarette-case, if you don't mind. Thank you. I suppose you'll be going to the funeral to-morrow?"

"Yes," Eunice said chokingly.

"The inquest is at ten o'clock, but you need not attend. The proceedings will be purely formal as we are asking for an adjournment. I won't keep you any longer now and I'm sorry to have had to bother you."

He withdrew politely, but not before he saw the look that Eunice gave Upward—a mingling of bewilderment, entreaty and terror. Marvelling at what seemed to him the revolting callousness of a woman who could go to the cinema with her lover on the eve of her husband's funeral he got into the police car waiting outside.

"Chislehurst," he told the driver.

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Nigel Lawson was sitting in Shouksmith's study, on the ground floor of a detached house on the corner of Marigold Avenue, Chislehurst. Mrs. Shouksmith was



getting dinner ready, banging the pots and pans so noisily that it was very evident that she was in no mood to be trifled with. Yet another maid had given her notice and she was more appalled than ever at the ingratitude of the lower orders. The more they got, she told herself, the more they wanted. But it was the same everywhere. What with points and coupons and queues, life had become intolerable.

Everything was topsy-turvy. There seemed to be more shortages in peace than during the war. She had seen a rag and bone man, only that morning, driving a donkey and cart and smoking a cigar; whereas her husband could barely afford to smoke a pipe after he had paid the income tax. And she had to take in lodgers. At her time of life, too—the wife of a University professor had to make beds, scrub floors and do the cooking for a lodger.

"I won't stand it!" she exclaimed, glaring round the kitchen. "I won't put up with it. Nigel must go."

Then she opened the oven door and gave a cry of dismay. The gas pressure was so low that the weekly joint, for which she had stood in a blizzard, had not even begun to sizzle.

"I can't go on like this," she wailed. "We must get out of England. Harold must find a job in Australia or South Africa—somewhere away from all this Communism—if he doesn't get Casey's job. But surely they can't continue to overlook him. Surely for once he can stand up for himself!"

Meanwhile, subconsciously aware of his wife's agitation and consciously thankful that she had kept out of the room, Shouksmith sat as close as possible to an almost expiring gas fire and listened to the young man who faced him, chain-smoking cigarettes. It was a pleasant room, full of books arranged with scrupulous care. Unlike Nigel, Shouksmith was neat and methodical. To him a muddle was as distracting as a noise, and he detested noise. The only firmness he ever displayed in his own home was on the subject of radio.

For more than half an hour, now, he had sat, scarcely

speaking, while Nigel unburdened himself. Everything came out, and Shouksmith was dismayed at the madness of Nigel's infatuation for Eunice. It had been even worse than he supposed. What a fool, he thought, a woman could make of a man!

A woman had certainly made a fool of Shouksmith, and although it had been many years ago the effects still bit like acid into his life. Ellen ought to have married a business man. She wouldn't be always complaining if they had an income of, say, £2,000 a year and bought a week-end cottage in the country. She was socially minded, but she was bored by academic people—her husband's "cronies," as she called them. She liked "ordinary" people; and by that she meant the sort of people, like several of her neighbours, who were either something in the city or senior officers in the services. She, herself, had an uncle who was an admiral and she never tired of talking about him.

There was something to be said, Shouksmith reflected grimly, for being infatuated with a woman whom you couldn't possibly make the mistake of marrying. Unless, of course, you got mixed up in some lamentable business as Nigel had, and out of sheer quixotry, put yourself in the wrong with the police. For there could be no doubt that they suspected Nigel, and he had made matters worse by his general attitude.

Shouksmith was not the bloodless, almost inhuman pedant that many people supposed. He was a disillusioned and embittered man, but he was perceptive and he would put himself out to help the very few people for whom he had a warm regard. He had always liked Nigel, and lately he had watched in dismay the change that had come over him.

Nigel had passed through the sort of emotional crisis that ought to have come years earlier. It wouldn't have mattered so much at twenty, but it was more serious at twenty-nine.

However, he seemed at last to be fighting his way out of the fog. The discovery that there was another man, that Eunice didn't wish to see him again, that she had



never had any deep feeling for him, had brought him to his senses. He had never met anyone like Eunice before, and because she had occasionally allowed him to make love to her he had naïvely supposed that it was a *grand passion*. Nor would he let himself doubt it. It had to be true, because he couldn't have borne it to be proved false.

He had listened in horror to what she had told him about Casey. His blood boiled and he wanted to rescue her, as though she were a princess locked up by an ogre in a tower. That, as he told Shouksmith, was what Asmun Hill had instantly spotted when he fired a quotation from Keats at him.

*I saw pale Kings and Princes, too,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
They cried—"La Belle Dame Sans Merci  
Hath thee in thrall."*

At last the spell was broken. He had had lunch with her and she told him the brutal truth. Instead of being grateful to him, for having lied to help her, she could think of nothing but the letter he had written, which Casey had found, and which the police had discovered in Casey's pocket. At the time she had smiled at it, but now she blistered him with abuse. How dared he write her such a letter! How dared he imply that they had been lovers! She supposed that he had written it because of the kick it gave him!

"You scientists are all the same!" she stormed. "You are half-baked and under-sexed. You just talk—words, words, words! Your only idea of making love is to start an argument about making love. Do you really have the audacity, the simplicity to expect that now I'm free I'll marry *you*?"

She gave a laugh that struck him like a whip. It still rang in his ears, merciless, appalling and yet . . . as he recovered from the shock of it he was glad. For there was no return. That way madness lay; and he knew that it *had* been madness.

How far Eunice had done it deliberately to cure him

he didn't know, but as he poured out the whole story to Shouksmith the latter felt that he was on the road to being cured.

"It's funny how sex gets a man," Nigel wound up. "It's like an obsession—day and night you can't think of anything else. You do your work automatically. The telephone rings and you hear that voice; or the post brings you a letter and you recognize that handwriting. You are in a maze of feverish excitement. It's as though you are doped and the tiniest thing starts your heart hammering and you can't stop it. Your brain doesn't count." Nigel crushed out a cigarette. "And yet you really know you are being a ruddy fool. I suppose," he added grimly, "it's the biological urge, the life-force, the jolly old Libido. In the old days they called it the Devil."

Shouksmith gave a faint sigh of satisfaction. "Perhaps the Devil is the best description, after all."

"Perhaps it is," said Nigel, with a harsh laugh. "Anyhow, I feel better for talking. Hope I haven't bored you."

For several minutes Shouksmith was silent. He stared broodingly at the dim fire. Then he looked up.

"Let's forget your psychological troubles for the moment, Nigel. I've been wanting to talk to you about the other angle. It concerns all of us, you know."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Nigel slowly.

"It's obvious enough if you try to look at it objectively. You must make the effort, old man. I've been looking at it very objectively indeed. Every one of us—you and I, Millfield, Dennis and Miss Carter—is theoretically under suspicion. What the police think I don't know, but they come along every day and still find fresh questions to ask."

"But you are out of it. Your arm——"

"My dear fellow," said Shouksmith grimly, "if anything that makes me an object of suspicion. I shouldn't be surprised if they'd photographed the pavement on which I slipped. And anyhow, my left hand is quite capable of holding a gyroscope."

"But you hadn't time. You typed those letters and then half dressed yourself. You can't mean that the police have been seriously bothering you?"

"Not bothering me, exactly, just doing the job they are paid for. And quite right, too. Because in my opinion their time-table proves nothing. As we can't say precisely when Casey was killed, any of us might have slipped into his room. And it was almost certainly someone he knew. He didn't trouble to move from his desk when the murderer went behind him. So it was someone he didn't suspect had any evil intent."

"But it must have been someone with a strong motive," objected Nigel.

"And how are we to measure motive? It's just because it can't be done that psychology is not a genuine science. When the psychologist can make use of mathematics in dealing with individuals as well as groups he'll be worth listening to. Mathematics is the only language——"

"Damn mathematics!" broke in Nigel impatiently. "We can form some idea of the relative strength of possible motives. We can say that although Miss Carter, for example, loathed Casey and had been sacked by him, she hadn't got any reason to kill him."

"I wonder," mused Shouksmith cautiously. "Not, mind you, that I seriously think she could be guilty, but in theory even Miss Carter can't be dismissed out of hand—any more than Millfield or Dennis, or even the Rector. But I'm very glad to hear you say, 'Damn mathematics,' because I'm coming to the conclusion that largely owing to Dr. Hill we've all been led up the garden path."

"I don't quite follow," said Nigel, frowning.

"I've no doubt that Asmun Hill is an excellent archæologist, and he may even be a very good amateur detective, but I fear that his zeal as an amateur mathematician has led him somewhat astray. I myself am partly to blame. When my paper was found in Casey's desk I was so taken by surprise that I didn't think very clearly, I'm afraid. I rather jumped to the conclusion

that Casey had stolen it, because I couldn't think how else he had got hold of it."

"Don't you think so now?" asked Nigel, in astonishment.

Shouksmith shook his head. "My dear man, look at the situation objectively. I had found the proof of Fermat's Theorem. Unless Casey intended to murder me—which is absurd—is it conceivable that he could have believed that he would get away with such a barefaced fraud? How did he know that I hadn't told anyone? As a matter of fact I was on the point of announcing my discovery before I published it. I couldn't have kept it to myself much longer. The only reason I had done so was that I could hardly believe my good fortune—I thought there must be some catch in it—that I'd made a slip, like so many others who have tackled the thing. Now, I grant that to a policeman it would seem quite plausible that one mathematician should steal another's work and gain the credit—credible, if unusual. But when you try to visualize the enormous difficulties—when you think of the sort of action I would have taken if Casey had attempted anything so outrageous—I ask you, Nigel, as a colleague, as a mathematician, can you believe it?"

Nigel rubbed his chin in perplexity.

"It takes a lot of swallowing, certainly. But you've got to remember that Casey was boasting about some earth-shaking discovery he'd made——"

"Frankly, I can't even imagine what he meant by that. He may merely have been boasting. But I just can't believe he seriously expected to ride away with Fermat. And I think personally that the explanation of his death must be sought elsewhere."

"Where, then?"

Shouksmith hesitated. Before he could reply there was a prolonged, muffled sound of a bell ringing. He frowned, and again before he could speak the door was flung open by Mrs. Shouksmith. She was wearing an apron and holding a long wooden spoon.

"Isn't anyone going to answer the door?" she demanded.

"I'm sorry, my dear," said Shouksmith, getting up with alacrity and looking rather abashed. Nigel had an impression that he was secretly relieved, that he had not particularly wanted to state definitely who he himself suspected.

But could there be any doubt about what he thought? What he had already said showed the direction of his reasoning—and it was clear, too, that he was not alone. He was turning to the original view of the police, the obvious view that Casey had been murdered by Eunice, so that she could get his money and be free.

"Blockheads!" Nigel muttered, glaring at the carpet, then he looked up and his scalp prickled as he saw Inspector Maltby coming towards him. He sprang up and was about to offer some sarcastic greeting, but Maltby's expression checked him.

"There has been another murder," said Maltby, in his grimmest tones. "Luck, the bookseller, has been found dead in his shop. His skull was battered in."

Shouksmith gave a cry of horror but Nigel did not speak. He did not even move.

"I suppose neither of you gentlemen can throw any light on this affair?"

"What possible light do you expect us to throw?" retorted Nigel, recovering his speech. "And why do you suppose it has got any connection with Casey's death?"

Maltby drew out a cigarette-case and handed it to Nigel, who snatched at it at first and then, as the blood ebbed from his face, he nearly dropped it, as though it were red hot.

"Have you ever seen that thing before, Dr. Lawson?"

"It belongs to Lady Casey! Of course I've seen it—but what the devil has it got to do with Luck?" cried Nigel belligerently.

"It was found on the floor—beside the dead man."

"But . . . what are you driving at?" Nigel demanded. "What the hell are you trying to suggest?"

"I suggest nothing. I merely seek information. How that cigarette-case came to be lying beside the murdered man I don't know. But it had a beautiful set of fingerprints—and they've been identified."

"Whose are they?" asked Nigel, turning even paler.

"Yours."



## CHAPTER XIII

IT was past midnight and Burrell looked up wearily from his desk as a tray with cups of tea was brought into his room. The desk and the table beside it were covered with exhibits. Maltby had gone out to fetch some photographs which were being developed from the negatives found in Luck's safe.

"Have some tea, Dr. Hill. Sorry we've nothing stronger."

"Thanks," said Asmun, putting down the file he had been examining. "This is the second night I've missed my dinner. If this goes on I'm resigning!"

"If this goes on I'll probably have no option!" Burrell shook his head unhappily. "I'm running round in a circle. But since I keep coming back to the starting-point, surely to goodness I must be right. It's one or other of 'em."

"Earlier this evening you said it was both."

"I know I did," Burrell groaned. "But that can't be maintained now. This infernal cigarette-case!"

"What do you make of it?"

"Let's consider the two possibilities," Burrell continued, stirring his tea. "Take Eunice first. She had ample motive for killing her husband. She'd inherit a quarter of a million and she was sick of him, as we know. Also she *could* have done it. She was on the spot. She was in that building much longer than she said when we first questioned her. She didn't tell us the real reason why she went there. She is a liar and a woman of no moral character. We've built up a very strong case against her; and we know, too, that Luck had threatened her that he would tell us something that would make the case even stronger. He was blackmailing her—at least he was trying to, as you yourself know."

"But she came clean," objected Asmun. "Why

should she fear Luck once she'd come to you and corrected her former statements?"

"That's the difficulty. I'm not trying to minimize it. The only possible suggestion I can offer is that Luck knew even more than he disclosed to you. It is conceivable that he followed her into the building."

"There wasn't time. He was talking to the porter a few minutes after she entered."

"But what did he do after he'd been told that Casey wouldn't see him? He says he went straight home, but we've only his word for it. His curiosity might have got the better of him and he might have returned to the side entrance. He might have decided to see Casey anyhow—and perhaps he did see him. Perhaps he opened the door of Casey's room and came face to face with the murderer—or murderess."

"It is possible, of course," Asmun conceded, sipping his tea.

"She'd have had to get rid of Luck then. Her alibi—a cinema round the corner—is quite worthless. Though if she'd really been with Upward that brings him into it also."

"Why are you averse to bringing Upward in? For that matter, he went to the University with her. It looks as though he expects to marry her—which is more than Lawson had any right to expect for himself. Upward, I should say, is very much the gainer by Casey's death."

"That makes the cigarette-case an accident," said Burrell, inserting his toothpick. "That means she dropped it—that she'd never mislaid it. But if she'd been using it, how do you account for such a clear set of Lawson's fingerprints?"

"I wouldn't care to hang a man on fingerprint evidence."

"Nor would I. But we've got to try and explain it. I feel that either that cigarette-case was dropped accidentally by the owner, or it was deliberately planted by someone who knew that we suspected Eunice. It was left there to clinch matters, so to speak."

"I'm inclined to agree," said Asmun, after a pause.

"Very well, then," continued Burrell, more eagerly, "look at it from Lawson's angle. He had just as much physical opportunity to murder Casey as Eunice. He had a very strong motive—that letter we found in Casey's pocket proves it. And as for Luck—if we keep our assumption that Luck knew the identity of the murderer, Lawson had a sufficient reason to silence him. Now don't," said Burrell, waving his finger, "tell me that in that case Luck ought to have blackmailed Lawson rather than Eunice. It's not much use blackmailing a man who hasn't a penny to bless himself with."

"Do you really think that Lawson would have deliberately tried to frame a woman with whom he was so madly infatuated?"

"Yes," said Burrell, leaning back. "We are not dealing with a nice character, remember. Murderers aren't nice people. We are dealing with a man who was so desperate to free Eunice that he killed her husband. Then, what did he discover? It was all in vain. She wouldn't have him. She turned to somebody else and flaunted this other man in his face. He hated her when he found she'd chiselled on him. If he could have done it safely, he would probably have treated her as he did her husband. But he had another account to settle. And it dawned on him that he could fix Luck and get even with Eunice at the same time. More than that, if he framed Eunice he could also make himself safe, because he knew how we regarded him. He is a highly intelligent man——"

"He wouldn't need to possess unusual intelligence to realize that he was under suspicion," interrupted Asmun. "However, I grant that he might well have reacted as you say. 'Hell holds no fury,' etc., can't only be applied to women. How do you think Lawson acquired the cigarette-case?"

"Surely we can accept Eunice's story. She said she left it in the staff-room—that she distinctly remembers handing it to Lawson. Then she forgot about it. He kept it at first because, as you may have noticed, men

like to keep little personal things belonging to a woman—handkerchiefs, gloves, cigarette-lighters. There's a name for it, isn't there?"

"Fetishism," responded Asmun. "Oh, it's plausible enough! And you think Lawson could have visited the shop in the time?"

"Easily, my dear man. The murder must have been committed shortly before six. Lawson says he left the University at five and had tea at the Corner House, Coventry Street. We shall try to check up on that, but I doubt if anyone will remember him. Anyhow, it would have been simple enough to go from Coventry Street to Hannon Street and still catch the six-fifteen from Charing Cross. We know from Shouksmith that he was definitely on that train."

"The only difficulty I see," said Asmun thoughtfully, "is that you've no trace of any fingerprints except those on the cigarette-case. If Lawson wore gloves when he laid Luck out, it's a little surprising, to say the least of it, that he should remove those gloves when he planted the cigarette-case. That would be asking for trouble—and as you remark, he is a highly intelligent man."

Burrell narrowed his eyes. He seemed to be thinking hard.

"That's a point that's going to be brought up at to-morrow's conference, and I hadn't overlooked it. If we can find a way round it we'll have to arrest Lawson."

"I appreciate the compliment of being treated as a sort of *advocatus diaboli*," said Asmun, with a smile. "In other words I realize that in telling me your theories you are trying it out on the dog. No, please"—he held up his hand—"don't protest. I quite like it. But there's still another little snag. Why was the door of Luck's safe open?"

"There are several reasons one could think of," said Burrell—plainly trying to think of them as he spoke. Then he gave a start. "By thunder, you don't think that the cigarette-case came out of the safe? But I can't see the point of it."

"Nor can I. You've already suggested what Luck

might have held against Lawson. What we still haven't fathomed—and that's why Maltby and I went along to see Luck—is why Casey was being blackmailed at all."

"Does it really matter now?" protested Burrell.

"It not only matters—it's the very pith and marrow of our whole problem. Until we know that, Luck remains an enigma."

"Maltby will be back any moment and he may have found something." Burrell looked at Asmun uneasily. "If that cigarette-case was planted, it *must* have been by someone who hated Eunice," he went on. "Because to frame her conclusively would let Lawson out."

"Someone who hated Eunice and liked Lawson—well enough to put the rope round her neck, even if she was innocent!" said Asmun softly. "Is that a fair description of the murderer?"

"It applies to Lawson himself, but when I think of the other people involved, not one of them seems to answer to it."

"I wonder!" Asmun murmured, but before he could continue Maltby came into the room carrying a sheaf of photographic prints.

"Here we are at last," he said breezily. "You can see for yourself what little games Luck was up to. Whoever put paid to a swine like that deserves a medal. He must have had a camera rigged up in that room over the shop. Crista was indispensable, of course. Just look at this muck."

"Nothing about Casey?" cried Burrell, unable to conceal his anxiety.

"Not a darned thing."

"But perhaps it was removed. Perhaps that was why the safe was open. Yet who would want to remove it?" He snatched at the prints disgustedly. "We are chasing our own tails again. This is the most demented case I've ever handled. And yet"—he swept the photographs aside—"it can't be fundamentally different from any other murder. There's got to be a motive big enough to hit you in the eye unless it's the work of a lunatic."

You may not be justified in making an arrest, but you know—damn it, you always *know*."

Maltby selected one of the prints and handed it to Asmun. "Does that mean anything to you, sir?"

It was very different from the other prints, which plainly told their unsavoury story. It was a page of symbols, executed in an unusual sort of handwriting.

Asmun studied it intently. He was watched by two pairs of hungry eyes. His expression did not change when he looked up.

"I'll need expert opinion on this," he said quietly.

"May I take it away?"

"That's impossible——" Then Burrell checked himself. "Still, I suppose it doesn't matter. It's just a print. Has it got anything to do with those mathematics you found in Casey's desk?"

"I'd like to show it to a mathematician before I answer. I'm only an amateur you know."

"But even if it has," objected Maltby, "I don't see that it can have any bearing on Luck's death. The negative was in an open safe. If the murderer had been looking for that sort of thing, he'd have taken all the negatives to make sure. What would be the sense of murdering Luck and leaving that thing behind?"

Burrell ran his fingers across his hair, and it was one of the rare occasions on which anyone had seen it ruffled.

"We must put our trust in routine inquiries, that's all," he said despondently. "Somebody might have seen the murderer entering the shop. We are combing the neighbourhood."

"May I make a suggestion?" ventured Asmun.

"We can do with as many as you think up!"

"It might be helpful if we could try a little experiment. Let's ignore the second affair, for the moment. We agreed, I think, that the crucial period for Casey's death could be narrowed to about twelve minutes. Now suppose we go along to the University to-morrow and ask everyone concerned to repeat their movements during that short period. We may not learn anything new, but at least we'll clear our own minds. There have been



several contradictory stories and I feel we are unnecessarily confused."

"Confused is putting it mildly! When you say everyone—do you include Eunice?"

"It would be better, certainly, if she could come. If Nanda is there we need not bother with her cousin. There's no one else—except the staff. One of your men could go through Luck's movements."

"What about Casey?" asked Maltby.

"I'll sit in Casey's room. And, of course—I nearly forgot—someone must take Charles's place. If you have watchers posted along the corridors we shall at least see who can have observed who—and when it would have been safe for the murderer to act. We can't expect to gain more than purely negative information, of course."

"I've got enough negative information to lose me my job!" exclaimed Burrell. "I don't much like this sort of thing, but for once I'll bite."

"I think," said Maltby, suddenly looking very relieved, "Dr. Hill has something up his sleeve. I've met him before."

"Perhaps you've solved the problem by intuition?" asked Burrell sarcastically.

"Not the moral problem." Asmun sighed. "But I really must go now," he added briskly. "I'll ring you up about to-morrow's arrangements. There's just a chance that it may help us."

"We'll take that chance," Maltby replied, beaming at him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Asmun glanced at his watch as he entered his flat. It was ten minutes to one. Yet the whole evening seemed to have gone in a flash.

"What a night!" he muttered, switching on the light in his study and noticing, with satisfaction, that Joab had left some sandwiches, with a choice between a thermos-flask of coffee and a whisky decanter. Asmun examined the sandwiches and saw that they were smoked salmon. Incredible man, Joab! Then he poured him-

self some whisky and sank into the luxury of his favourite chair.

He ate and drank—and drank again. His nerves were humming like telegraph wires. It was not the slightest use going to bed yet. Deep down in his mind was this nagging problem; and as he had told Burrell it was a moral problem.

What should he do? He believed that he knew the identity of the murderer. It was unlikely that there would be any fresh clues. The bits and pieces of the jigsaw puzzle had been assembled, and they made a picture.

It was open to the police to make that same picture. Given time, he supposed, they would come to it. They would have done so before if the circumstances had been more ordinary. But they could consult experts, and they would arrive at the truth. So why should he hurry the process? Why not leave things to the ponderous and merciless machinery that had been set in motion?

He didn't think there was much danger now of a mistake being made. There were too many safeguards, too many wily and experienced people to be consulted. Burrell and Maltby did the donkey work, but their findings were submitted to collective thinking. The results were sifted and analysed by astute men who knew exactly what constituted legal evidence.

And that, of course, was the difficulty. A case had to be prepared that would stand up to a gruelling test in court. You couldn't hang someone because he had a motive for murder. You had to show some tangible proof that he had committed the crime. So far as Luck was concerned, there was a chance that the murderer had been seen leaving or entering the shop; there was even a chance that the "blunt instrument," as it was called in police jargon, might be found. The police surgeon believed that a hammer had been used.

It would be easy enough to carry a small hammer in your pocket. Perhaps the handle had been cut for convenience. Then, while the victim was bending over the safe, possibly, he could be struck on the back of the head.

A single blow would stun him; actually a number of blows had been rained down to make sure.

And then came the still more diabolical part. Evidence was planted to incriminate another person. The murderer had been a shade too clever, however. The plan had miscarried. Better to have left things as they were.

To feel sympathy with a murderer who had deliberately tried to send an innocent person to the gallows was impossible. And yet, looking back, Asmun could see how, step by step, the whole horrible process unfolded. The murderer had been driven by remorseless logic from which there was no escape. Luck had to be removed, or the truth might have come out. Eunice had to be incriminated. . . .

It was no false sentimentality that made Asmun hesitate. What he hoped was that the murderer would realize that the game was up and cheat the hangman. It would be better that way. There was no sense, surely, in a long, public trial, which would unearth secrets that were better left buried.

Asmun had already dropped one warning, but to his dismay the result had been very different from what he had foreseen. He now felt that morally he was responsible for Luck's death. Taking fright at Asmun's hint, but realizing that the police were on the wrong track, the murderer struck a second time—trying desperately to confirm the police in their mistake.

"Well, I suppose Luck is no loss to the community," Asmun reflected. "But I'm giving the murderer one more chance. Either we'll get a confession, or else—"

He rose and glanced at the bookshelf opposite him. He would have to read himself to sleep, after all this. He hesitated and then pulled out a slim volume of Petronius. "And so," he murmured, "to bed."

The next morning he went to the funeral at St. Chrysostom's, which was within easy walking distance. The church was packed and there were dense crowds outside. The coffin, covered with wreaths, rested on a bier, facing the altar steps and on a level with Eunice and the family mourners. Eunice had come down the aisle, rest-

ing on the arm of Casey's brother, a country solicitor. Privately he detested her. He was proud of his brother's fame, but he had been appalled by his second marriage. None of this, however, showed on his solemn features. Nor did the appropriate mask of grief which Eunice put on show what she was really thinking as she knelt down on a hassock and bowed her head helplessly.

The Rector and most of the members of the University staff were present. There was a large gathering of scientists from all over the country, together with representatives of varied learned bodies—the Royal Society, the Aristotelian Society, and others. The service was conducted by an Anglican bishop who had gained a certain notoriety for the daring of his views. He had corresponded a lot with Casey, and when he was in town they sometimes lunched together at the Athenæum.

Nigel was there, looking for once subdued, but rather sulky. Elsie Carter sat next to him—and a close observer would have noticed that she took more notice of Nigel than the proceedings. She found the place in the prayer book for him and thrust it in his hands.

Behind them sat Professor and Mrs. Shouksmith—the latter quite at home in Church, though her husband fumbled absent-mindedly and had to be nudged when to stand up or kneel. Millfield sat next to them, fidgety and unaccountably nervous. He was immediately behind Nanda, whose dainty head was swathed in a purple, gold-edged sari. She sat as motionless as an idol in a native temple, her eyes big and glistening and tragic. Dennis had arrived late and was at the back.

Asmun had some difficulty in taking his eyes from Nanda. When at length he managed to do so it was to look for Upward—but apparently James Upward had decided to remain away. Which was, perhaps, only tactful.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery . . ."

The Bishop had a deep, resonant voice. Asmun closed his eyes and gave himself up to enjoyment of the lovely, Elizabethan cadences. Casey had been a preposterous



and yet brilliant man. If only he had been content to use his acute mind for the advancement of learning, there would have been no jarring unreality in all this homage. But he had committed a sin that to Asmun, as a scientist, seemed to put him beyond the pale. He had sinned against truth. He had cheated. He was like a doctor who had broken the Hippocratic oath.

His other weaknesses hardly seemed to matter now that he lay in that long wooden chest, soon to go into a freshly dug pit. His curious sensuality merely seemed absurd. His spitefulness and malice rose out of his over-weening vanity. He had an insatiable thirst for admiration. And it was that pride, that *hybris* that had brought him low.

"Call no man happy until he is dead," as the Greeks never tired of saying. But Casey had never been a happy man. There were moments, with bursts of applause ringing in his ears, when he seemed to taste the rich satisfaction that he was for ever seeking, but always there was some discordant note. He might be a hero to a million readers of his books, but he was no hero to his wife or to those in daily association with him. Some of his bitterest critics were present now . . . but even they could not guess what a monstrous thing he had attempted in order to put an end to their sniping. He had tried to palm off as his own the discovery of another man.

"For so thou didst ordain when thou createdst us, saying, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'; wherefore all we who go down into the grave make our song unto thee, sighing and saying, 'Give rest, O Christ, to thy servants with thy saints, where sorrow and sighing are no more, neither pain, but life everlasting.'"

When Asmun opened his eyes the organ was playing. He stood up as the bearers took their places beside the coffin. He glanced across at Eunice who was sobbing almost hysterically. She wasn't acting this time, he decided; she was dreading what was to come next.

The doors were thrown open. Slowly Sir Clifford Casey was carried through into the street where a huge

crowd had collected. Many of them, gaping with morbid curiosity, had never heard of Casey, for they did not belong to book clubs or listen to the Third Programme. All they knew was that he had been murdered.

Struggling to break through to the other side of the road Asmun was bumped against Shouksmith. There were apologies and Asmun was introduced to Mrs. Shouksmith, whose eyes sparkled when she learned who he was.

"I wanted to see you—though any mathematician would do," Asmun said, as an impulse suddenly seized him. "Could you both come along to my place, in Mount Street and take a glass of sherry? I want an expert opinion, Professor."

They seemed very glad to get away from the jostling crowds. Obviously Shouksmith couldn't think what to do with his wife until lunch-time.

"I can't bear funerals," Shouksmith confessed. "I loathe people in the mass. I'm one of the last of the individualists."

"Rather a selfish thing to be," complained Mrs. Shouksmith. "I sometimes wonder if you think even two is a crowd—or you'd take me out more often."

"I hope," said Asmun, with a laugh, "you don't only get taken out on an occasion like this."

He led them, by a short cut, to Mount Street. He felt he had made an important capture. It was true, of course, almost any mathematician would do; and he had to be too sure of his ground to trust his own judgment.

As they entered he apologized again to Mrs. Shouksmith. He hoped she wouldn't be bored, but there was a technical matter on which he wanted her husband's advice.

"I'm used to this sort of thing," she said, with a smile of resignation. And suddenly, although he had summed her up at a glance, he felt quite sorry for her. He mixed her a gin and Dubonnet, but Shouksmith begged to be excused.

"No objection in principle," he said, "but I don't work well on alcohol. By the way, what's this game the police are playing at this afternoon?"



"Is it true," Mrs. Shouksmith asked, almost choking over her drink, "that they suspect Dr. Lawson? They came to our house last night. It was a terrible experience for me. And besides, how could anyone *possibly* think that such a nice boy as Nigel could do anything so awful. I lay awake most of the night thinking about it. I even began to wonder if it could be true. The idea that we might have been living with a . . . Oh, I can't even bear to say it, Dr. Hill!"

Shouksmith looked at his wife impotently, but he, too, had a strained expression.

"Nigel's lived with us for two years," he said. "We are naturally very fond of him."

"You know, of course, why he quarrelled with Casey?" Asmun asked.

"It seems to be common knowledge by now," said Shouksmith briefly.

"What did he feel—after the Inspector's visit last night? You needn't tell me, of course, if you think it would be betraying a confidence."

"He went out for a walk," put in Mrs. Shouksmith. "He said he wanted to think things over. He wouldn't touch his dinner, though I'd spent all the evening getting it ready. You see," she added, "we've lost our maid."

"Too bad," murmured Asmun sympathetically. Then he stood up. "Would you mind if I took your husband away for a few minutes? I want to show him something."

Mrs. Shouksmith was very comfortable with her gin and Dubonnet and she didn't mind in the least. She thought that Asmun Hill was charming.

When he reached the study Asmun turned to Shouksmith gravely.

"This is a bad business. Lawson hasn't been exactly helpful, as you know. But if I'm right—and you can best judge that—I've found something that may help him. It may change the whole appearance of the case."

"What have you found?" asked Shouksmith, no longer attempting to hide his curiosity.

"Here it is." Asmun opened a drawer and took out

a print. "This was developed from a negative found in Luck's safe. I've a shrewd idea what it means, but I want your opinion as an authority."

Shouksmith moved nearer the window to get the benefit of the light. He studied the print for a few moments and suddenly his jaw dropped. Normally he was not a demonstrative man, but now he looked utterly astounded.

"This is incredible! I—upon my soul, Hill, I don't know what to make of it! I can't imagine what it means unless the whole thing is a forgery."

"We'll have to get further expert opinion on that, of course. There's a question of handwriting. But assume that it is genuine—is it going to help us?"

"I'm blessed if I can see how," said Shouksmith, peering again at the print through his thick lenses. "I'm completely baffled. This is almost a copy of my own paper, but I'm prepared to swear that Casey never wrote this. Unless—"

He broke off as Joab opened the door, and Asmun swung round so furiously that Joab blinked.

"Scotland Yard on the 'phone again, sir. They say it's urgent."

"Will you excuse me a moment, Shouksmith?" Asmun mastered his feelings with difficulty and went out to the telephone in the hall. "Hullo?" he snapped.

"Maltby speaking, sir. We've got hold of a witness who may have seen the murderer. It's a woman, and she was standing in a doorway opposite the shop. I'd like to call this afternoon's show off and have an identification test instead."

"No, don't do that," Asmun paused. "Bring her along, too."

He hung up the receiver in the middle of Maltby's protests.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE Rector looked at Asmun rather frigidly. "I don't like it," he said. "I don't see the necessity. However, if the police think it will help them I suppose I have no choice."

"I think it may help a little," Asmun ventured. "If you feel strongly, however, it could be stopped."

"It's not that I mind the staff taking part in this exercise, if one may call it so, but it's really too much to bring Lady Casey here. On the very day of the funeral she's expected to go through—confound it, the whole thing is disgusting. It's American!"

"She's not compelled to come," Asmun emphasized. "I called on her earlier this afternoon and she's actually very eager to try this experiment. Nobody has more reason to get at the truth than Lady Casey."

"You mean—the police suspected her?" cried the Rector incredulously.

"I think I've put that idea out of their heads. Though the murderer undoubtedly wanted suspicion to fall on her."

"Then have the police any idea who the murderer can be?"

"I think they'll have a better idea before the afternoon is out. They've a second string to their bow. Someone was seen leaving Luck's shop after the lights went out—presumably after he had been murdered. Not, I'm afraid, what the police would call a satisfactory witness, and she only caught a glimpse of the possible murderer. But it's better than nothing. Anyhow, she's coming here."

"Coming here!"

"I don't think they'd risk an arrest on her evidence alone. That's why it's so important to check everyone's movements. We've got to find out how the thing was

worked—because it was infernally clever. We were all set off on a wild-goose chase."

The Rector's eyebrows came together in a straight line.

"You seem to be very much in the confidence of the police. Tell me—is any member of the staff involved in this? Or mustn't I ask yet?"

"I'd rather you asked the Inspector," said Asmun, looking embarrassed. "Though I don't suppose you'd be terribly surprised at his answer."

"This is ghastly!" the Rector exclaimed. "If it's the man I'm thinking of, he's admittedly unstable, but murder—and a double murder at that—why, it seems unthinkable!"

"There have been a good many shocks in this grisly affair. When the lid is suddenly blown off people's lives I suppose that's inevitable. Casey himself provided some surprises."

"You don't think that story about the Indian student will come out?" asked the Rector quickly.

"I don't think so."

"But what was the motive behind it all? What possible connection can there be between the death of Casey and the murder of an obscure bookseller?"

"I think, at least, I can answer that question. The obscure bookseller was a very nasty piece of work indeed. He made a livelihood by trading in other people's secrets. He had found out—in fact he had photographic evidence—that Casey was about to do something peculiarly disgraceful. He was about to claim as his own a discovery that someone else had made."

The Rector gave Asmun a piercing look.

"You mean that mathematical paper. I don't know, of course, what evidence the police have, but frankly I'll need a lot of convincing. Apart from whether Casey was capable of such an action, I don't see what chance he had of succeeding. The police can't be expected to know much about academic life, but you at least understand how things are done. Do you honestly believe that such an attempt could succeed?"

"I do," said Asmun simply. "I need not remind you about the story of Leibniz and Newton."

The Rector gave a slight start. He could remember only the hazy outlines of that famous scandal, but it was enough to make him think very hard.

"It didn't happen, though," he said at last. "Leibniz didn't really steal Newton's Calculus. They discovered it independently."

"Newton believed he was guilty. It's true that we think otherwise to-day. But in the present case I'm satisfied that we can quite definitely rule out the possibility that two men independently discovered the proof of Fermat's Theorem."

The gravity with which Asmun spoke was an impressive contrast to his usual light-hearted manner. He rose to his feet, glancing at the electric clock on the mantelpiece.

"I'm afraid I must go now, Rector. They'll be expecting me in the maths department. Are you coming across to join us?"

"No, I am not," said the Rector firmly. "I dislike the whole thing. But I suppose I'll be informed if this so-called experiment yields any results?"

"You'll be informed immediately."

"You haven't been particularly informative so far," the Rector remarked, leaning back and relaxing slightly. "I am reminded of Laotzu's saying, 'Those who tell do not know, and those who know do not tell.'"

Asmun smiled, despite himself, but he made no protest.

"All I can say," concluded the Rector dryly, "is that the police are fortunate in having your assistance. I'm quite sure that left to themselves, they would never have looked for enlightenment to a three-hundred-year-old squabble between mathematicians."

Asmun made his way reluctantly through a maze of corridors to the main building. It was fortunate, he reflected, that there were no students. But he dreaded the ordeal that now had to be faced. He would have liked to slip unobtrusively out by a side door and leave the grim task to Maltby and Burrell.

They were waiting for the signal to pounce. They were quite right to complain that this charade was no longer necessary. If the woman they had picked up could identify the murderer they could make the arrest and work out the details afterwards. They wouldn't understand what it was all about—but did they need to at this stage?

They had spread their net. They had used their vast resources. They had interviewed scores of people, checked up alibis and taken fingerprints. That was the orthodox and quite proper way to go to work. They had been patient, too, and despite appearance they had not made any gross blunders. The only man they had arrested was Charles; and he could consider himself lucky, because it was now obvious that both murders had been committed by one man, and Charles couldn't have been responsible for the second crime.

Asmun sighed, and as he turned the corner he caught sight of Maltby, standing in the middle of a wide passage, talking to Miss Carter. Maltby beckoned to him and he quickened his pace.

"We'll soon have to start," the Inspector said. "The Super will be along a little later. I think most people are here——"

"All the staff are," said Elsie Carter, more animated than usual.

"Here's Lady Casey!" Maltby turned and hurried towards Eunice. Asmun could see the woman beside him stiffen like a cat.

"I suppose," said Elsie, *sotto voce*. "I'll have to be polite."

The cauldron was simmering. Soon it would begin to bubble. Eunice advanced, pale, lovely and dignified. She wore a superb mink coat, and a wide-meshed veil took ten years off her age. The contrast between this beautiful, perfectly dressed woman of the world and the drab, sullen-looking mathematics tutor was between two utterly different worlds. Even Maltby was conscious of it, and he felt sorry for Miss Carter; he didn't approve of Eunice at all.



"We've met before, to-day," said Eunice, smiling softly at Asmun as he clicked his heels—for Eunice was the sort of woman who brought men instinctively to attention. If she had cared to ride in a bus, she would always be certain of a seat; whereas Elsie seldom rode in anything else and usually had to stand.

"At the funeral?" inquired Maltby.

"No, I called—to borrow a book," Asmun explained.

"You know Miss Carter, I expect?"

"My husband often spoke of you," said Eunice, almost wistfully and quite unperturbed by Elsie's Medusa-like stare.

"Let's join the others," said Maltby, with a touch of impatience. Then he remembered. "Where's Mr. Upward?"

"He's waiting outside in the car. I thought if we joined him we could make our entrance—just as we did before." She turned to Asmun. "It reminds me of a rehearsal—and yet this is so terribly different, so real!" she added, with a shiver.

"A melodrama, I'm afraid. Six characters in search of a murderer!"

They entered the staff-room and Asmun's eyes fell on Lawson, who suddenly stopped talking to Millfield and looked up.

"I've applied for a job in Cairo——" he had been saying.

"Cairo!" exclaimed Asmun, with enthusiasm. "You lucky blighter! It's got the world's best climate. Perhaps we'll meet some day, when all this is forgotten and I go back to Egypt again."

The attempt to break the tension was not successful. Nigel glared at Asmun and then looked Eunice full in the face. His lips went white as they curved in a bitter smile. He said nothing, but there was infinite contempt in his expression.

"Now then, we haven't much time to waste," began Maltby, consulting his watch. "It's twenty-past three. Your cousin, I think, arrived at twenty-past six?" glancing at Nanda.

"Yes," she said breathlessly.

"All right, for three we can read six; it comes to the same thing. Now the object of this demonstration is to see who can be positively excluded. You won't misunderstand me, I'm sure, when I say that I'm starting on the assumption that any one of you here could have gone to Casey's room in the crucial period. But actually your movements may show that some of you would have met or been seen. Isn't that the idea, sir?" looking across at Asmun.

"Yes, that's roughly the idea. We want to try and fix the time of Casey's death—within limits, anyhow. Shall we synchronize our watches? Because every minute counts."

Rather self-consciously they adjusted their watches. Asmun glanced at Maltby and nodded. "Right," he said. "I'll sit in Casey's room."

He was thankful for the brief escape. There had been something in the atmosphere of the staff-room that he didn't like, though he couldn't define it. He opened the door of Casey's room and noted with approval Maltby's thoroughness. Even the bottle of sherry had been placed on the side table. The gyroscope rested on the ledge of a bookcase, with glass doors, immediately behind the desk. As far as possible the room was exactly as it had been on the night of the murder.

Asmun sat down at the desk. He had no sooner done so than Nanda came in. She closed the door and looked very shaken.

"This is revolting!" she exclaimed, clenching her hands; then she gave a jerk as the telephone rang.

"Hullo? No, I'm engaged at the moment. Ask Mr. Luck to call round in a quarter of an hour."

Asmun replaced the receiver. "That was Dobbins, and we will suppose it to be six twenty-five. We will suppose that you are your cousin. You ought to be abusing me. Is your cousin an excitable man?"

"Very—and they really did quarrel."

"You say that from where you were standing you saw Lawson walk past this door and return?"

"Yes—but he's not a murderer," she said, her eyes momentarily flashing. "I'll never believe that."

"He's walking by now," said Asmun, looking towards the door. "He will return to Professor Shouksmith's room. At the same time, Lady Casey is on her way here in a taxi. Did Casey ever speak about her?"

"He said she didn't understand him and that he was very unhappily married."

"The usual thing!"

"But it was true," said Nanda earnestly. "I know he had his weakness, but all men are the same, up to a point. Do you think I've never suffered from that sort of thing before?"

"I think you are very loyal. However, it is time for you to go now. We can assume that Lady Casey and Mr. Upward have entered the building by a side door and have been seen by Luck. As you go past Dobbins you will see Luck. You went straight downstairs, I suppose?"

"I ran back to fetch my handbag. I suppose I ought to have said that before—but it didn't seem important."

"Did you meet anyone?"

"Miss Carter was walking down the passage, but she had her back to me. She didn't see me."

"And on your return?"

"It's curious how one remembers little things," said Nanda, frowning. "It all comes back to me. I was in a hurry and rather upset. I was afraid, too, that Casey might come out of his room. I had an impression that a door was closed, but I didn't see anyone."

"Would it be consistent with someone hastily stepping into a room to avoid being seen by you—and perhaps shutting the door harder than was intended?"

"Yes, it might have been that," said Nanda, suddenly looking frightened. "But how does it help if I didn't see anyone?"

"It helps to fill in the picture. After all, invisibility is what every murderer must aim at." He looked at his watch. "Run along now or you'll spoil the timetable."

In theory it was thirty-six minutes after six. A minute earlier Nigel had left Shouksmith's room. According to his amended account he had gone to the lavatory before joining Millfield and Dennis in the staff-room. Miss Carter was roaming about, trying to discover whether Nanda had gone home. Eunice and Upward were in the building. They had stepped into a side room and were arguing (according to Eunice) about whether to go upstairs singly or together. Eunice was afraid of meeting Nigel; but Upward apparently wanted Nigel to see them both. He felt it was time that Nigel was disillusioned. Or so he said.

Suddenly the room seemed strangely still. The minutes crawled by. In his imagination Asmun saw the door open. He entered into the rôle assigned to him so completely that he almost felt that he was Casey. He felt no surprise when he looked up. He merely said, "What do you want?" The reply was non-committal. The intruder walked past him, behind him, and suddenly there was a whistle of air. Before he could turn he felt a crushing blow on the back of the head. He fell forward, and the blow was repeated.

The murderer had only one more thing to do. It was very simple. His hands were covered and he bent over the desk. . . .

The telephone interrupted the macabre reverie. Asmun answered it. He tried to thicken his voice. "Who, do you say? Tell him I can't see anyone to-night."

Again he studied his watch. It was six forty-two. What happened afterwards was of little importance. The bloody deed was done. Eunice (unless she had lied) was out of the running—and in any case he had never seriously considered her guilty.

But others had, as he realized a little later, when he left the office and was brought to a standstill outside a room by the sound of angry voices.

"You must be mad, Nigel, to say such a thing," a woman cried hoarsely.

"I'm sane now."

"First you believed I'd killed him myself. You came

to me that night and said so—you were wild with relief when I said I'd been afraid it was you. We'd both suspected each other and then we knew that in that event we must both be innocent. Now you've gone back on all that——"

"I haven't," retorted Nigel. "But I know I'm dealing with a professional actress. That makes a hell of a difference, Eunice."

"Then you think I waited downstairs while Jim crept up—but why should you think Jim also killed Luck? Besides, when Luck was killed, we were sitting in a cinema."

"You were also together the first time," said Nigel icily.

"You've said quite enough, Lawson." That was a man's voice, vibrant with repressed anger. "I won't have you upsetting Eunice with this crazy talk——"

"You won't have it! You think you own her now, I suppose. Maybe you've thought so for quite a long time."

"Shut up! Do you want the police to hear us?"

"Do you, Upward? Now I'll tell you something. Eunice isn't making a fool of you, as she did of me. It's the other way round. You are making a fool of her. Which is poetic justice, I suppose. And yet, there was a moment—before my eyes were opened—when I seriously considered giving myself up, because I was afraid Eunice was going to be arrested."

"What opened your eyes?" demanded Upward, but Eunice intervened.

"No, please, let's end this! It's insane to start a quarrel now!"

"I'll tell you what opened my eyes. That cigarette-case you dropped. You didn't know it had my fingerprints on it—otherwise it would have been an exceedingly clever trick. But you are not a very clever man, and I regard that mistake as due to sheer clumsiness. You see, I distinctly recall borrowing that case, when we sat waiting, but I also remember giving it back. I've no doubt whatever on that point."

"But what gives you the crack-brained idea that I ever set eyes on the thing?"

"Only someone very closely associated with Eunice would have access to it. Either she dropped it or you did. I prefer to believe it was you."

"Then you accuse me of murdering both Casey and Luck—with the full knowledge of Eunice!"

"Yes, Upward, I do."

"You blasted lunatic, why——"

Asmun was aware of someone standing in front of him. Elsie Carter had come up noiselessly and she looked at him with vitriolic scorn.

"Snooping?" she hissed.

She swept into the room. Her *gaucherie* had left her. She was tingling with anger, and as she advanced on Eunice, she looked so formidable that Eunice fell back a step.

"Haven't you done enough mischief?" she demanded. Then, with a tremendous effort, she controlled herself and turned to Nigel. "Come along, Nigel, they are waiting for us."

Asmun was very much astonished. Elsie Carter had been transformed into a raging fury. Nigel, apparently, was so taken aback that he followed her meekly. Whatever else the pantomime had achieved, it had destroyed a few inhibitions.

As Asmun moved away he caught sight of Maltby. The Inspector looked relieved, he thought.

"Thank goodness that's over, sir. There's a cup of tea going in the staff-room. I want to get everybody collected there," he added in an undertone, "because the Super is due any minute now."

"And that's what you are relying on!"

"Well, we must be prepared for a disappointment. It was after dark and the street isn't well lighted. But there's a chance we'll get an identification."

"If so," said Asmun, in a tired voice, "I suppose we shan't have utterly wasted our time."

"We haven't done that," said Maltby, with an almost patronizing look. "Although I haven't worked things



out carefully, I'm pretty sure that the Super was wrong when he suggested that Eunice might have gone upstairs in time to do the job. She would almost certainly have run into either Nanda, Lawson or Miss Carter. You can see someone coming a long way off in these corridors, remember."

"What do you conclude from that?"

"I'm suspending judgment," said Maltby virtuously.

"Until Burrell arrives! You are a fraud, Maltby. You are only pretending to be scientific because you think you are on a certainty. Oh, well—let's get it over quickly."

They entered the staff-room where Casey's former secretary was pouring out cups of tea. There was a babel of chatter and a haze of tobacco smoke. After the stormy scene with Nigel, Eunice had made a remarkable recovery, though Upward was frowning. She ignored Nigel and talked to Shouksmith, who peered at her short-sightedly and kept nodding his head, like a man who wasn't listening. Millfield and Dennis were engaged in a vigorous argument, and Elsie Carter sat next to Nigel, as though she were protecting him. Neither of them spoke.

Maltby shut the door and cleared his throat.

"I'd like to thank you all for co-operating with us," he said, as the din died down. "It wasn't a very pleasant job to ask you to do, but you've helped me very considerably. You've certainly dispelled a number of wrong ideas, and prevented me from wasting my time following them up. There's just one thing I want to ask you. I've no right to compel anyone. Whoever doesn't wish to remain here is free to go, but it's a very simple request."

He paused and there was a subtle change in the atmosphere. What had been for most people an exciting and unexpectedly enjoyable game seemed to take on a sterner expectancy.

"We believe, as you know, that whoever killed Professor Casey also killed Luck. We have evidence that links the two crimes. And we also have evidence that

may lead to an identification of the murderer, for after the lights were extinguished in Luck's shop, a woman standing in a doorway opposite caught a glimpse of someone leaving. She is here and it would save a lot of trouble if you would allow her to step inside this room."

For a moment no one spoke. Eunice was staring at the Inspector and she had gone white again.

"So the murderer is in this room—one of us!" she whispered.

"That's why the door's shut," said Nigel, his voice cracking. "The whole thing is a trap!"

Elsie caught his arm and looked at him pleadingly, but before Maltby could make any disclaimer he plunged on defiantly:

"You needn't worry, I'm not going to bolt. I'm very eager to hear what this woman says. For in spite of the fingerprints you found I didn't go near Luck last night and I've everything to gain from the truth."

"Does anyone wish to leave?" Maltby asked quietly.

Again there was silence. It was like the uncanny hush that precedes an earthquake. So Maltby turned and opened the door, and the glimpse of a constable in uniform added a sinister note.

Maltby disappeared. He was away for no more than a couple of minutes, but it seemed an eternity. Elsie Carter kept a tight grip on Nigel's arm, as though she feared another outburst. Then the door opened again and there was an audible intake of breath.

Superintendent Burrell entered with Maltby, and beside him was a youngish, good-looking woman with henna-dyed hair and a heavily made-up face. She seemed nonplussed by the crowded room. These were not the sort of people that she understood and she had to adjust herself to this unfamiliar environment. Yet she seemed conscious of her importance—she even seemed to be enjoying it.

"Will everyone please sit down?" Burrell asked—and he, too, was quaking inside. His own success or failure seemed to hang in the balance.

There was a shuffling of chairs, a rattle of teacups.

Even Nigel obeyed. The little group seemed suddenly to have acquired a mass personality. Doreen Walters was confronted by a single entity with multiple faces. It quivered with an impersonal fear, a dread of the moment when this suspense would come to an abrupt end.

Asmun Hill sat in a corner watching Doreen as she scanned the circle of faces. At first she seemed perplexed and uncertain and it looked as though they were heading for a dismal anti-climax. Then she tried again, her eyes travelled round the room searchingly and all at once they stopped and shone with the light of recognition.

She gave a gasp and pointed.

## CHAPTER XV

**D**OREEN was whisked out of the room before she or anyone else could say a word. She vanished as suddenly as an illusionist's assistant and for a moment it was hard to believe that the thing had really happened. Nor did Burrell come back. He had looked so startled, so crushingly disappointed, that it almost appeared as though he couldn't bear to show his face again.

He had built high hopes on his witness. She had failed him. It was obvious to Burrell—and to everyone else—that she had made an outrageous mistake. She had pointed to the one person in the room who could not conceivably be guilty. Her memory, and the poor light were excuses, of course. But they would have been exposed ruthlessly in court—and so would her character.

"I wouldn't hang a cat on the evidence of a woman like that," someone muttered indignantly.

And now that fear had passed a general anger took its place. Resentful eyes were turned towards Maltby. Millfield had jumped to his feet and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"I was nowhere near Charing Cross Road!" he exclaimed savagely. "I never left the University until seven o'clock——"

"I can confirm that!" broke in Elsie Carter.

"Please! Please!" Maltby implored, raising his hands as though to protect himself. But before he could go on there was another interruption. A quiet voice, tinged with acerbity, said: "Don't agitate yourself, Millfield. The lady was not pointing at you but at me."

Millfield spun round in surprise and then stared down at the man sitting beside him, holding a cup and saucer with hands as steady as his voice.

It was Professor Shouksmith.

"Am I right or wrong, Inspector?" Shouksmith continued.



"You are right," said Maltby, as though the words choked him. "But please—please don't let anyone get it into his head that we took that test too seriously, because we didn't. We had no illusions about the value of that sort of witness. And I know—I know from the performance we've all been through, that the one man who could safely be ruled out was the Professor."

"Thank you," said Shouksmith coolly. "May I ask why?"

"Because of the times. Even if you had had the use of both hands it would have been difficult—but as things were you couldn't possibly have typed several letters and half dressed yourself, in the interval between Lawson's leaving your room and his return, if you had also gone to see Casey."

"I would have had to be something of a quick-change artist," agreed Shouksmith, with a bleak smile. "But I should like to feel, all the same, that there was firmer ground for an acquittal."

"There is," said Maltby. "Frankly, we considered you, but the complete absence of motive put you right at the bottom of the list. You gained nothing by Casey's death. If he'd murdered *you*, because he'd stolen your discovery, at least it would have been intelligible. But the other way round doesn't make sense. Don't you agree, Dr. Hill?" he added, appealing to Asmun.

The tension had perceptibly lessened. When Asmun spoke, however, it came back again, like the switching on of an electric current. For he shook his head.

"No, Inspector, I don't agree."

"You don't!" echoed Maltby, in genuine amazement.

"I'd prefer not to give my reasons in public. If Professor Shouksmith would care to hear them——"

"I'm quite willing that everyone in this room should hear them," broke in Shouksmith, now looking angry. "Indeed, having said so much, I insist that you go on. Do you imply that that street-walker was right and that I'm guilty of these murders?"

"I know," said Asmun, looking at him grimly, "that you murdered both Casey and Luck. What's more, you

know that I know, because I as good as told you so this morning."

Someone dropped a spoon. The sound seemed like a whole tray crashing.

Slowly Asmun rose to his feet. The deceptive good nature had gone from his face. His jaw was hard, his lips looked thin and relentless, his grey eyes seemed to blaze in their deep sockets. He glanced significantly at Maltby, who gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"I gave you the first warning earlier. At least I dropped a hint that I was on the right track. You then decided that if you were to be safe you'd have to get hold of a certain photographic negative. As you couldn't afford to pay Luck's price—and he called on you here and named his price—you decided to kill him. What I'd hoped, of course, was that you'd kill yourself."

"Carry on," said Shouksmith, his mouth twisting derisively.

"So I tried again. I gave you conclusive proof this morning that I had discovered the real motive for these crimes. Once more I hoped that you'd see that the game was up. I don't mind admitting now that the rehearsal this afternoon was mainly in order to gain time. But for some reason you've elected to try to bluff it out. But you won't succeed now, Shouksmith. You'll never leave this room a free man. I've been more merciful, perhaps, than you deserve—for you deliberately tried to fasten your crimes on Lady Casey, and that is more than I forgive."

Eunice, who had been watching Asmun in fascination, turned to Shouksmith with a cry of horror. Nigel looked blankly incredulous.

"Let me explain. I'll come to the details later, but the first thing is to clear away the useless lumber." Asmun's manner changed. He might have been lecturing about something impersonal. "When a murder happens it's like dynamite. It uncovers what would normally remain hidden. Dirt comes to the surface. And the difficulty is to decide what is relevant and what

isn't. Quite important secrets may come out, but they have no bearing on the crime itself. And so, for a time, one is inevitably deceived. What looms up as big and important at first glance, may have nothing to do with the murder, although it may be valuable in throwing light on the characters of the people involved.

"Now it is clear that Casey could have been murdered because his wife wanted to be free—or because someone else wanted her to be free." Asmun turned to Eunice half apologetically. "You must forgive me for saying this, but the truth can't be concealed. There was a suggestion, on the one hand, that Casey was entangled with a girl student; and there was stronger evidence that you were having an affair with another man. There was a letter that Casey had found and which was still in his pocket when he was killed. I'm inclined to think that if you or Lawson had killed him some attempt would have been made to recover that letter. If this had been a crime of passion that letter would have assumed first-class importance.

"The very casualness with which it was treated made me doubt its value as a clue. I think you would have burned it in the first place—that Casey himself would never have come across it—if you had taken it at all seriously."

"When are you coming to the point?" demanded Nigel.

"Sorry if this is painful, but we've got to face things now. The more I heard about Casey the more impressed I was that his own apparent infidelities were shams. To put it bluntly, he hadn't the guts for a real, flesh and blood love-affair. He neither felt passion nor inspired it. He was a middle-aged philanderer—and a revolting sentimentalist. He liked to talk about his unhappy marriage and perhaps steal a kiss. *Si vieillesse pouvait!* But I found it hard to believe that he was involved in a crime of passion. I looked hard for the passion—but I couldn't find it anywhere. There was the question of money, of course. It could have been a crime for profit. But the character——"

Maltby could keep silent no longer. He looked at Asmun in agonized appeal.

"Is all this necessary, in view of the accusation you've made?"

"Very well," said Asmun, accepting the reproof. "As I say, there was the torn letter found in Casey's pocket. When I dismissed that, I was thrown back on something much more baffling—a mathematical paper, written by Professor Shouksmith, which was found together with some typewritten notes, presumably by Casey. Shouksmith said that the paper had disappeared from his own room. He couldn't explain it. At first he declared that Casey must have stolen it, with the intention of robbing him of the credit of his discovery. Then he soft-pedalled and began to insinuate that this was a separate mystery—that it could have nothing to do with the murder. The reason for his change of tune is now obvious. He wanted to divert us from the only real clue we possessed, and he very nearly succeeded.

"Now for the benefit of those who know nothing about mathematics, let me say a word or two about this discovery. It was a very big thing indeed. Fermat was a seventeenth-century mathematician. He propounded a riddle on which the very finest intellects in the world have broken their heads for three hundred years. To have found the answer would have caused an immense sensation in the scientific world. The man who solved it would become world famous. His name would be immortal. It is a prize that cannot be computed in terms of money.

"It certainly looked as though Casey was about to claim that he had solved it. I made a careful examination of his papers and I could find no trace of any other work on which he might have been engaged to explain the jubilation he showed to Miss Gochapali—and even to the Rector himself. Having boasted to that extent, how could he turn back?

"I became quite satisfied that he was going to claim that he had proved Fermat's Theorem. There is a cryptic entry in his diary, 'Eureka!' which is what Archimedes



cried when he leapt from his bath on making his own great discovery. 'Eureka' means 'I have found it.' But what had Casey found? And how did Luck come in? If Casey were being blackmailed, here was something worth blackmailing him about. Luck had been a mathematics master, and he would know at least the value of such a discovery. But how could Luck possibly know that Casey had stolen it from Shouksmith? What possible proof could he have?

"The only proof we ourselves had was the presence of Shouksmith's paper in Casey's desk, together with some notes. Now the curious thing about those notes was that they were typewritten. But all the other notes I saw of Casey's were in handwriting. Generally speaking, a man who thinks with his pen doesn't start thinking on a typewriter. I felt that was odd.

"Still more inexplicable was how Casey meant to deal with Shouksmith. Was he going to pretend that it was an independent discovery, that he had beaten Shouksmith at the post? There is a historical parallel. Both Newton and Leibniz discovered the Calculus independently. There was a great scandal at the time and the matter was brought up before the Royal Society, because Leibniz was accused of stealing it. But Newton was in England and Leibniz on the Continent, whereas Casey and Shouksmith were in the same building, next door to each other. Besides, how could Casey be sure that Shouksmith had not mentioned his work to anyone? The first record we have of Shouksmith having mentioned it was on the day of the murder—before the murder. That is most significant.

"Both Shouksmith himself and the Rector have emphasized that such an imposture would not be practicable. Very early on I came to the same conclusion. So it amounted to this. Casey was about to announce that he had made a discovery. Shouksmith was also about to announce that he had made a discovery. Both of them had dropped hints about it almost simultaneously. The whole situation seemed contradictory and incredible. Put like that you will realize there was only one possible

inference—*neither Shouksmith nor Casey had made any discovery.*"

"But someone must have discovered something!" cried Maltby, leaning forward. "We've got it—or haven't we?"

"Casey didn't solve Fermat's problem. Nor did Shouksmith. It was Fermat himself who solved the conundrum—and it was Fermat's own solution that has been rediscovered," said Asmun quietly.

Maltby pressed his hands to his head.

"Then you mean——"

"It sounds complicated, but it is really childishly simple. In a copy of an old book, which he bought from Luck, Casey came across the original proof of Fermat's Theorem—probably as worked out by Fermat himself. He decided to palm it off as his own work. But Shouksmith spotted what he was up to and the same bright idea occurred to him."

It was as though a mine had exploded. Millfield and Dennis were staring at each other in dismayed comprehension, and Elsie Carter was staring at Nigel with a kind of fierce relief—for quite clearly Nigel was out of danger. No one dared to look at Shouksmith.

"It is well known," Asmun resumed, "that Fermat claimed to have proved his theorem. After his death someone noticed that he had scribbled in the margin of a book that he had solved the riddle, but that there wasn't room in the margin to write out the answer. Now Fermat was a very great man and a truthful one. If he had been given to idle boasting there would have been no excitement. A frantic search began for the missing proof, but it was never found—and ever since people have been trying to discover what the devil he could have meant.

"I can't pretend to tell you what happened to the missing proof. But someone must have stumbled across it nearly two hundred years ago and copied it out on a blank page in a first edition of Leibniz's *Nouveaux Essais*! Rather a coincidence that the name of Leibniz should crop up again, but at least it started an association



of ideas in my own mind which proved to be fruitful. If you ask me why the proof wasn't properly published or brought to the notice of some learned society two centuries ago, I can't answer. It is one of the unsolved mysteries of history. Perhaps the man who copied out that proof died before he could call attention to it. What he did with the original manuscript I can form no idea. It is an interesting speculation, but it doesn't concern us now. All that matters to us is that this first edition of Leibniz was buried for nearly two centuries in some German library. Perhaps no one bothered to look at it, or whoever did failed to grasp the significance of the mathematics scribbled on a fly-leaf.

"Then came the war. Germany was in an uproar. Invasion and bombing brought many treasures to light. Many of them found their way into the Black Market. Luck was in the army and he was posted to Hamburg. He knew a good deal about books, and whereas other men speculated in watches and cameras and jewels, Luck picked up a number of first editions. He found this copy of Leibniz, and he knew enough mathematics to appreciate the importance of his find. What wasn't so clear was how he could turn it to cash value. If he sent his discovery to the authorities he would have been thanked but not very greatly rewarded. He didn't feel that he could carry off the pretence that he had solved the riddle himself—and there again, it wouldn't have brought him hard cash.

"Luck had a very low view of human nature. He believed that a thing like that would be a strong temptation to a mathematician. In nine cases out of ten I think the temptation would have been resisted. Luck might well have been wrong, for example, about Casey—and even if he had been wrong he would have lost nothing. He would have shrugged his shoulders philosophically, and pocketed the value of the first edition. But he wasn't wrong. Casey swallowed the bait.

"We come, however, to a rather puzzling detail. The volume of Leibniz was not in Casey's possession when

he died. It was brought the next day to Casey's house and left behind surreptitiously. I can only offer you a surmise. What I think must have happened was something like this. Casey took away some first editions, including Leibniz, on the plea that he wanted them properly valued. He then made the discovery—hence his entry 'Eureka!' He decided to palm it off as his own work and so gain the esteem of those who pooh-poohed his popular writings. But he was nervous about it—who wouldn't be? He cut out the page on which the proof was written and returned the book to Luck, on some excuse. He really wanted to see whether Luck would notice that a page had been cut out. It was an experiment to discover *how much* Luck knew. And it was an experiment that showed that Luck knew exactly what he had done.

"Luck had photographed that page. As the price of the photograph, and presumably the negative, he asked five hundred pounds. Casey decided to pay and drew out the money. He took the money with him to his office—money stolen afterwards by his son—and so I am quite certain that he would not have sent Luck away empty-handed. I have felt throughout that it was the murderer who answered the telephone and told Luck to go away. That, of course, helps us to fix the time of the murder."

Asmun held up a photograph print. "Here is the photograph of the writing in the book before it was torn out. You can even see part of the cover. And here is the Leibniz first edition of 1765. You can see that a blank page has been removed from the end."

Maltby leaned across and seized both exhibits before anyone else could touch them. There was a shocked silence, suddenly broken by Shouksmith, who appeared ironically amused.

"So I killed Luck, because of that photo? Why, after taking so much risk, didn't I destroy the photo?"

"You thought you had," replied Asmun. "Luck gave you both a print and a negative. But being an old hand at this game he'd taken the precaution to

photograph the manuscript *twice*. What you didn't know was that he had a second negative in his safe."

"This is sheer fantasy!" Shouksmith retorted. "You haven't a particle of evidence to support it."

"Let's go back to the first murder. You, Shouksmith, did a lot of Casey's administrative jobs for him. I suppose you went into his room when he was out—and he was often out—and came across that volume of Leibniz. You were stunned when you realized what it contained. And you realized, too, that as Casey hadn't spoken of it, he meant to keep silent. The normal thing would have been for Casey to rush into your room and cry, 'Look what I've discovered! The proof of Fermat's Theorem!' He didn't and you drew the right conclusion, because you knew him pretty well.

"You'd chafed under him for many years. You'd put up with innumerable concealed insults and petty obstructions. Once, when you were more junior, you'd asked Casey to recommend you for a very good post. Characteristically, he forgot all about it. You never forgave him. You aren't hot blooded, like Lawson and Millfield. Your bitterness doesn't flare up in a violent gust of rage. You say nothing, but you screw the lid down tight and poison yourself with your own bitterness.

"In some ways you were abler than Casey. But he always stole the limelight and took the credit. You knew that latterly, at any rate, he was largely humbug, and that made it all the more intolerable. You felt you couldn't let him get away with this imposture. You had it in your power to ruin him by letting him commit himself and then exposing him. Yet how was it to be done? You hadn't a camera handy. Possibly you'd never see that volume of Leibniz again.

"So you copied out the mathematics, and while you were doing so, when you saw the proof in your own copper-plate handwriting, you were fascinated by another possibility. For suppose, instead of Casey getting away with it, *you* got away with it. All your humiliations would be wiped out. All your frustration would be ended. Even the misery of your domestic life would

be eased. You would become famous, you would have a chair offered to you—perhaps Casey's chair if he no longer occupied it. And how could it become vacant? If he died . . . yes, it would become vacant then. If he died, and in no other circumstances, could you pose as having proved Fermat's Theorem. The death of a man you had hated for years, who rode on your shoulders, who was bogus and contemptible, the killing of whom could be justified . . . gradually you found excellent grounds for justifying your terrible decision. One blow and all your troubles would be over—and the scientific world well rid of a charlatan!

"The blow was not struck impulsively. You are not that sort of man. Once you had made up your mind you worked out the details cold-bloodedly and with great skill. You even mentioned that you'd been doing research and you said darkly that you were on to something good. You chose your time carefully—the night when you were invited to a dinner and when you knew that Casey would be staying late. And to make doubly sure that whoever was suspected it would not be you, you faked an injury to your arm.

"I think that you were over-elaborate. Murderers invariably are. My first instinct, when I saw you with your arm in a sling, was to suspect you. However, you carried it through. When Lawson came into your room you pretended to be typing with one finger. Actually you had some letters already written and it must have been those that you gave him to post. He left you at six thirty-five, and when you felt the coast was clear you went along to Casey's room. Casey had got rid of the Indian and was in a bad temper. You were carrying a file and he said he couldn't deal with anything that night. You moved behind him, apparently to put the file down. You picked up the gyroscope, after wrapping your hand in the sling to avoid leaving fingerprints, and struck him. All the bitterness, all the hatred that had accumulated for years went into that blow. As he fell forward you slipped the file into the well of his desk.

"It contained what purported to be your discovery



and the notes that Casey had made on it. Those notes were typed out by yourself on a machine in Casey's room. You knew that ordinarily he thought with his pen, but you couldn't risk imitating his handwriting. It was a small discrepancy. You believed you could make it look as though he had tried to steal your discovery. If that were accepted, it wouldn't occur to anyone that you hadn't really made a discovery. You had prepared the ground before Casey's death—though not too long before—and there it was, in your writing, in Casey's desk. It looked utterly damning, and the beauty of it was that you seemed to be the victim of Casey, instead of Casey being your victim.

"It was a subtle calculation. Up to this point I could have felt a faint sympathy for you. Casey was a highly objectionable man, and Luck was even worse. But when you tried to implicate someone else—then you sank to the level of any other criminal who is only fit for the hangman."

Shouksmith jerked up his head. He opened his mouth as though to speak, but seemed to think the better of it. He dropped his eyes again and continued to contemplate the tea he was still holding, and which had gone quite cold.

"I saw Luck. I told him that Casey had stolen a mathematical discovery you had made. I knew that if my theory were correct the effect would be to send Luck along to blackmail you. He hadn't expected to hear any more about Fermat, and was reduced to trying to bluff Lady Casey into handing over some hush-money. So the next morning he called on you—and you agreed to see him in his shop that night. You had no intention of being blackmailed. Moreover, Luck's knowledge was extraordinarily dangerous to you. He had to be silenced, not merely to save you from disgrace but from a capital charge. For once it were known that you had planted those papers in Casey's desk the whole affair would be viewed in a very different light—as Luck himself well knew.

"Like so many other murderers, you showed an un-

fortunate propensity to repeat yourself. You used the same method to kill—a blow on the head. And you again planted something—in this instance a cigarette-case which Eunice left in this room, and which you picked up. It must have slipped into some inaccessible place, for when you first noticed it you must have already decided to murder Luck. That gold cigarette-case gave you another idea—you saw that you could divert suspicion still further from yourself by leaving that case beside the corpse.

"I had already emphasized to you that the chief suspect was Eunice. You thought that you would confirm such a mistake by leaving Eunice's cigarette-case with the murdered man. That was simply diabolical. It might have had the most dreadful consequences. What you didn't know, however, was that Lawson's fingerprints were on the case. Yours weren't, because when you picked it up you knew what you were going to do with it.

"You were genuinely fond of Lawson. That, at least, is something in your favour. I don't know why you detested Eunice so much, but I think it may have been because you felt she had treated Lawson badly. You felt she had played with him and might drive him to do something desperate. Also, you transferred some of your hatred of Casey to Eunice. There may have been a sexual element in it; I don't know and it doesn't greatly matter. Nor is it important to wonder now what you would have done if Lawson had been arrested on the strength of a clue which you had faked.

"It may seem paradoxical to talk about the moral problem of a murderer, but I think it would have *appeared* to you as a very serious moral problem. You had no more compunction about blotting out Casey and Luck than about rubbing out a pencil mark on a piece of paper. Years of disillusionment had driven you deeper and deeper inside yourself. Even such escape as mathematics might provide—escape into a realm of abstractions, of eternal ideas, where everything is exact, changeless and delightful—was denied to you. You



simply hadn't the time. Your leisure was taken up by marking exam papers, the most ghastly form of drudgery that can be devised for a man like you. You had no time for intellectual speculation, and that was why, although I knew that the Theory of Numbers had once been your pet subject, I found it difficult from the very start to think that you had found the answer to Fermat. With no outlet—driven frantic by the social ambitions of a nagging wife—you became psychopathic. You hadn't lost yourself, you'd lost the outside world, the warm, friendly world of good-fellowship and reciprocal relations. You wandered among nightmarish shapes of your own imagining. The stimulus and the opportunity had only to be presented and you would not hesitate to kill a man, if you thought you wouldn't be discovered—especially a man like Casey, who hardly seemed a human being to you, whom you had distorted into a paranoiac figment, and whose removal would bring, like a wave of a magic wand, the realization of your wildest dreams. You all but succeeded. You planned one of the most fiendishly clever crimes ever known. You can be sure of fame, Shouksmith—but not precisely the sort you dreamed of."

Asmun spoke with such brutality that Eunice looked at him in amazement and Nigel visibly wilted. He seemed to be trying to goad Shouksmith into saying something that would betray him. If so, he failed. Shouksmith looked at him with contemptuous indifference.

"A very good amateur performance," he said, raising the cup he was holding to his lips.

Maltby hurled himself out of his chair and Eunice screamed. For a minute there was wild confusion. The cup was torn out of Shouksmith's hand and he yelled out hoarsely: "Damn you, it's my own life!" He started to fight with a ferocity that astounded the Inspector, and so much noise was made that a constable burst into the room. He was followed by Burrell.

Shouksmith was dragged to his feet and the handcuffs were snapped on. His mouth was bleeding and he still struggled and seemed possessed of berserker fury. He

made a sudden lunge towards Asmun Hill, but Burrell grabbed him in time.

"Get him outside," Burrell panted.

Slowly, Asmun lit a cigarette. He felt no sort of triumph, although already people were crowding round him.

"I gave the poor devil his chance," he muttered dispiritedly. "It wasn't my fault that he left it too late."

\* \* \* \* \*

Some hours later Asmun was sitting thoughtfully by his fireside when Joab surprised him by announcing Lady Casey. Asmun jumped up, and before he could wipe the look of displeasure from his face Eunice herself appeared on the threshold. She ran forward swiftly, and to Joab's horror she flung her arms over Asmun's shoulders and kissed him. "I had to thank you!" she exclaimed tremulously.

Joab hastily withdrew, and Asmun blinked a little. The touch of that soft red mouth had been as light as a moth's wing, but it was not altogether unexciting, and he found himself inhaling a delicate perfume that whispered of feminine things, of soft lights, faint music, thrilling warmth and foolish words.

He steadied himself and smiled.

"Good theatre," he said approvingly. "It deserves an encore."

Eunice looked at him half anxiously. She bit her lip with teeth even whiter than the pearls hanging from her ears.

"Why do you dislike me so much, Dr. Hill?" she pleaded.

"But I don't!" he protested. "You are mixing me up with Maltby. He thinks you are a most immoral woman. And he's a bit of a Roundhead, I'm afraid."

"I've always had one firm rule—" she began.

"I know it," he interrupted hastily. "Now let me give you a really good sherry, and don't let's be too formal. If you call me 'Dr. Hill,' how can I go on calling you 'Eunice'?"

"Thank you—Asmun, then. If Inspector Maltby is a Roundhead, I regard you as a Cavalier!"

"It's the wrong side politically, but by income and temperament I lean towards it. I represent, I fear, all the worst contradictions of the modern world. You and I, Eunice, are doomed. There's no place for us. The trouble is, I can't even remain an onlooker—I keep jumping out of my ivory tower and then scrambling back again to safety."

"Nigel used to talk like that," she said reminiscently, as he handed her a sherry.

"You were rather unkind to Nigel."

"He had no sense. It's a pity," she sighed, "that Miss Carter isn't more attractive. She's madly in love with him, and he doesn't even know it."

"I'm afraid he'll never get straightened out. He's like the young man in 'Human Bondage,' like the unfortunate Hazlitt who was always becoming infatuated with the most unsuitable women, like poor George Gissing and a host of others. However, he had a very lucky escape—no, not from you, Eunice. You might have civilized him if things had been different."

"I've had a lucky escape, too," she said, with a shudder. "I can hardly believe it now—it seems like a nightmare. I might have been arrested if it hadn't been for you!"

"I doubt if you'd have been arrested, but you'd have been under an ugly cloud of suspicion for the rest of your life. What are you going to do, by the way?"

"Jim and I have talked it over and we've decided to go abroad for twelve months. We are going to South America—away from it all. Then Jim will go back to the stage and I might even do the same. That really is my life. Once you've got the theatre in your blood you can never give it up. If you try to forget it and be someone different, you are only pretending."

Asmun nodded. "So to avoid acting in private you've got to act in public!"

He had wavered in his opinion about Eunice until now,

but suddenly he decided that he liked her. She had faults in plenty, but they were very human and forgivable faults. She was, he felt, completely real. She was going back where she belonged. Jim Upward was exactly right for her. They talked the same language, they had the same virtues—generosity and a frank acceptance of themselves, for better or worse—and even the same weaknesses.

"I hope," he said, with more feeling than he usually displayed, "that you'll both be very happy."

On an impulse he asked her to stay to dinner, but she had arranged to meet Upward; and this proved to be just as well, for not long after Eunice had gone, Maltby arrived.

"I thought you'd like to know the latest," he began, beaming happily. "We've got the weapon. The Chislehurst police found a hammer, with the handle sawn in half. It was on the line just outside the station. So your guess was right. I suppose the train was too crowded for Shouksmith to have thrown it out until he was nearly home."

"Any blood on it?" asked Asmun, waving the Inspector to a chair.

"The microscope shows a little on the join. But that's not the best part. The other half of the handle has been found among a heap of rubbish at the bottom of Shouksmith's garden. He'd tried to burn it, but he was no gardener and the bonfire went out."

"And it fits?"

"It fits perfectly," said Maltby, rubbing his hands. "Doreen wasn't a good witness, and all that mathematical stuff would have foxed the average jury, but this hammer does the trick. It will hang him."

"Magnificent!" exclaimed Asmun, but something in his tone froze Maltby's smile. He accepted a glass of sherry and looked up at Asmun uneasily.

"I can't blame you, sir. But I knew what was in your mind. I quite realized that Shouksmith had only to step into the chemistry lab, and he could help himself to any poison that took his fancy. I was watching him

all the time. I had a hunch that he was holding on to that cup of cold tea for some reason."

Asmun placed a jar of tobacco beside the Inspector and lit a cigarette himself.

"Any chance of a confession?"

"Not a sign of it so far. He's just sitting tight. Refuses to open his mouth. But of course he doesn't stand an earthly now."

"You agree, I suppose, that he's mad?"

"Not legally, sir," said Maltby, like a man stating something unanswerable.

"No, not legally," Asmun admitted. "And I'm just a little glad that legally my own contribution doesn't amount to much. You've got a witness who saw the murderer leave the shop, and you've got the weapon with which the crime was committed. I could never have produced either. So the brilliant amateur is not likely to put Scotland Yard out of business."

"The Super is taking most of the credit for this," said Maltby, with a rueful smile, "and I suppose I'd do the same if I were in his place. But if it hadn't been for you, we'd never have thought of Shouksmith. That identification was very irregular, in any case, and it wouldn't have been held unless we'd understood the real motive. Nobody without your knowledge of the history of mathematics would have solved it."

"That would not have availed if I hadn't had a knowledge of the murdered man himself," remarked Asmun.

"You often say that, but I don't quite see how in the present case——"

"My dear Maltby, I wouldn't have known that mathematics entered the problem if I hadn't studied Casey. That was the job I set myself, and it gave me something as important as facts, it gave me perspective. I absorbed every bit of information about him I could get hold of, even rumour and scandal. I read his books, I touched the things he handled, I browsed over his lectures, his jottings and his diary. And I became convinced that what dominated his life was not sex but ambition. Despite appearances, I should say that he

was under-sexed. So it was fair to expect that the worst animosity he would arouse would come from the main driving force—the ego-mania that gave him that thirst to be admired, to be in the public eye, to be 'the great' man.

"He was a type, fortunately rare—a scientist who is prepared to cheat. Once I realized that he was *capable* of perpetrating a fraud in the interests of his colossal vanity, I knew that he was a ripe victim for blackmail, if a blackmailer were in the vicinity. Everything fell into place once I'd got the right perspective.

"I grant you that the people surrounding him also had to be considered very carefully—but remember that they were chosen by him. They were largely where they were because he desired it. They were the sort of people that he willed to surround himself with. If he had driven Shouksmith too far there would have been an open quarrel and they would have parted company. But for years he picked Shouksmith's brains, he practically forced him to run the department, he took advantage of Shouksmith's financial troubles, he flaunted his own success before a man who was pathologically a failure. I can imagine the sort of remarks he made every day, when they met, the maddening patronage and the hypocritical sympathy, like the drip, drip, drip of a corrosive acid. Shouksmith would go white, but he would say nothing; he would merely force a smile. And he knew that behind his back Casey talked of him with pitying contempt, dismissing him as a man who had failed to make good, who would never achieve anything and who was already a back-number.

"Inside Shouksmith's brain, if only Casey could have seen, was an inferno of frustration and despair. It was no relief when he went back to his own home, for his wife also taunted him. He sat alone, in that private hell, dreaming of some single dramatic stroke that would transform his life and put him not merely level with Casey but far ahead of him. Then the chance came . . . for chance it was, Maltby. What started the chain of causes that led up to Clifford Casey's death was the inexplicable



action of an unknown scholar in the middle of the eighteenth century, who copied out some mathematics in a book. That lighted the fuse that set off the explosion we've just seen. The tiniest accident might have prevented it. If Shouksmith had *really* slipped on the ice and hurt himself he'd be sitting at home now, marking examination papers instead of waiting to enter the condemned cell."

Maltby listened, open-mouthed. Then he gulped down his sherry and leaned back.

"I don't know that I quite agree with you," he began.

"You don't? Good. You are a bit of an amateur philosopher and I'm something of an amateur detective, so we'll try to work this out. It's really the hoary problem of human responsibility and it's much more interesting than murder. I fancy that Casey himself would have liked to join in the argument."

Asmun walked quickly to the door, while Maltby smiled at him tolerantly, rather relieved to find that his moodiness had passed and that he was back in his old fighting form.

"Are you there, Joab?" Asmun called out cheerfully.

"The Inspector will stay to dinner."

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